

Chapter 2

The structure of state and society under the Fatimids

From the beginning, the Arab conquerors settled along North Africa and down to the desert edge in sporadic groups, their tribes as a rule occupying the lower ground, whilst the older population maintained itself in the mountainous districts. Also, the Berbers tribes were spread in North Africa. In the eastern part of Ifriqiya (modern-day Tunis) the chief tribes were those of the of Hwara, Luata, Nefusa, and Zuagha; in western Ifriqiya the Nefzawa, Kutama, Awraha, and a number of Smaller tribes to the south, the chiefs tribes of central Maghreb were the Zuawa or Zouaves, Maghbrawa, and Bani Mazab, while in farther Maghreb, the Bani Wanudin, the Ghomara, the Miknas, etc.¹

Also the Kharijites had appeared in Maghreb early in the 2nd century of the Hijra and were still a living force there in the fourth century. The Idrisids, a dynasty descended from the house of al-Hasan the son of Ali, founded by Idris also ruled an independent state in farther Maghreb in the fourth century.² In Ifriqiya, the center of the Berber groups was settled at al-Qayrawan, (South of Tunis) which, though may fall short of the gigantic structure of Samarra and Cairo, nevertheless was one of the most magnificent of the religious edifices of Islam that came up during its early centuries³

¹ Op Cit, *A Short History of the Fatimid Caliphate*, Pp 53-55

² Ibid, *A Short History of the Fatimid Caliphate*, Pp 56-57 and Op Cit, *The Cambridge History of Islam*, vol 2, P 216 and Op Cit, *History of the Islamic peoples*, Pp 156-157

³ Ibid, *History of the Islamic peoples*, P 156

In addition to Arabic as a common language, the Arabs and the Berbers also had the common religion – Islam. These factors made it easier for them to live together and resort to intermarriages. Thus, with the passage of time, an Arabo-Berber population had come into existence, which inhabits even today the greater part of North Africa.⁴

The population in Bilad al-Maghreb was a mixture of various ethnic groups such as the African, Roman, Greek, and the aboriginal Berber population. Added to them were the immigrants Arabs from Khurasan. This ethnic morphology of the region had come into existence during the period of the Aghlabid rule. The Fatimid who succeeded the Aghlabids in 909 A.D inherited this ethnic composition of their subjects. The Kutama Berbers were to become the backbone of the Fatimid armies in Ifriqiyah and Egypt.⁵ The Kutama Berbers, along with the Arabicized Copts were the most dominant groups of the Fatimid army in Egypt. These Berbers though were Sunnis but they did not have any reservations in serving under an ultra-Shi'ite regime of the Fatimids. It also speaks volumes about the religious liberty that Fatimids offered to their subjects that after the collapse of the Fatimid state later, Salah-al-Din could find a substantial Sunni population in Egypt that helped him restore the Sunni faith officially.⁶

The geographers of medieval Islam, who visited the lands under the Fatimid rule, have divided the society from their own perspectives. Abu

⁴ Op Cit, *The Cambridge History of Islam*, vol 2, p 221

⁵ T. Lewicki, *Une langue romane oubliée de l'Afrique du nord observations d'un arabisant*, Rocznik orientalistyczny, XVII, Cracovie, 1953, Pp 419-426 and Op Cit, *Tarikh al-dawlah al-Fatimiah*, P 621 and Op Cit, *The Cambridge History of Islam*, vol 2, P 216 and al-Ya'kubi, Ahmad b. Abi Ya'qub b. Wadih (d 284/897), *Kitab al-Buldan*, 2ed Ed. De Goege, al-Makhtabah al-Gakhrifah al-Arabiah, 7, Leiden, 1892, Pp 214-215

⁶ Op Cit, *History of The Arabs*, P 625

Bakkar al-Hamadani in his *Kitab Mukhtasar al-Buldan* (d. after 290/902) divided the social classes into. Kings (*muluk*), Ministers (*wuzara'*), nobles (*ahl ul-yasar*), the cultured middle class (*ausaat al-haqahum bi-hum al-ta'addub*) and the rest consisting of the toiling commoners (*wa al-naas ba'adahum zaidu jafa wa sail ghatha'*).⁷ Al-Maqrizi, however, divided the society in Egypt into seven divisions: The ruling class (*ahl al-dawlah*), the rich people especially the traders (*ahl ul-yasar min ut-tujjar wa dhawi ar-rafaiyyah*), middle level traders (*al ba'ah wa hum-matawassutu al-hal min at-tujjar*), farmers and cultivators (*ahl al-falh*), the poor (*fuqara*) and the students (*tullab al-'ilm*), the artisans and craftsmen (*arbab al-sana'ah wa ashab al-mehan*), and lastly, the destitute and the needy people (*zu al-hajah wa al-maskana*)⁸

Qadi al-Nu'man (d.973), the author of *Da'a'im al-Islam* gives us a different classification of the social classes. According to him, the society was divided into five classes: first, the army (*al-Jayash*); second, the high government officials (*A'awan al-Waali*), third, the bureaucracy dealing with *Kharaj* (the land tax); fourth, the trading and business community; and fifth, the poor and destitute.⁹

In the following pages we will discuss the position of the head of the state, *al-Khalifah al-Fatimi*, the *wazirs*, the army, the state bureaucracy,

⁷ Ibn al-Faqih, Abu Bakr Ahmad b Ibrahim Al-Hamadani (d after 290/902) *Mukhtasar Kitab al-Buldan*, Leiden, 1302/1885, P 1

⁸ Al-Maqrizi, *Ighathat al-Ummah*, ed Jamal al-Din al-Shayaa, Cairo, 1957, Pp 72-73 See also and Abd al-Mun'im Sultan, *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, Dar al- Saqafah al-ilmiiyah, Cairo, 1999, P 8

⁹ Al-Nu'man bin Muhammad, al-Qadi Abu Hanifa, *Da'a'im al-Islam*, ed Asaf A A Fyzee, Cairo, 1965-1969, P 366

religious classes, traders and merchants, the artisans and the slaves (*al-Abid*) in the region of Ifriqiyah and Egypt

The Khalifa

During their North African phase (909-969), the Fatimid Caliph-Imam acted as the supreme head of the state and commander of the army. As such, he personally regulated the affairs of the state and made the major decisions like other autocratic Muslim rulers of the period.¹⁰ The Fatimid Caliphs tried to derive legitimacy for their rule, in Ifriqiyah and later in Egypt, by emphasizing their claim of being descendents of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, (the members of the family of the Prophet consisting of Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain were described by the Prophet as constituting the *ahl- al-Bait*).¹¹ Though the Sunnis all along disputed this claim, it ensured that the spiritual and temporal authority remained in the Fatimid family;¹² the reigning Fatimid Caliph from amongst his sons nominated the successor.¹³

The establishment of Fatimid caliphate was based on the concept of sanctity of the Imam and his inerrancy (*ma'asumiyyah*); even the caliphs came to believe that they were above mankind. The show of sanctity and inerrancy of the Fatimid Caliph reached its climax under Caliph al-Hakim Bi Amrillah, largely as a result of a concerted propaganda to that effect by Ali bin Ahmad Hadi (Hamza).¹⁴

¹⁰ Op Cit, *The Isma'ilis*, P 223

¹¹ Op Cit, *a Socio-Intellectual History of the Isna 'Ashari Shi'is in India*, vol 1, Pp 3-4 And see *Tarikh Alfi*, compiled by aboard of scholars in Akbar's reign, India Office Library, London Ms , Ethe 112, 4 294a

¹² Ibid, *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isna 'Ashari Shi'is in India*, Pp 38, 223

¹³ Arif Tamir, *al-Mu'izz Li Din Allah al-Fatimi*, First edition, Dar al-Afaaq al-Jadiyadah, Beirut, 1402/1982, P 17

¹⁴ Op Cit, *Tarikh ad-Dawlah al-Fatimiah* Pp 264-265 The sixth Fatimid caliph, al-Hakim bi Amr Allah, was appointed successor to the Fatimid throne, when he was eight years old. He

The Fatimid caliphs were generally referred to as *al-Khalifa al-Fatimi* and *amir al-Muminin*. However, some *khalifas* assumed additional titles. Thus we see that on the first Friday after assuming charge of the government from Abu Abdallah al-Shi'i, Ubayed Allah al-Mahdi's inserted his title *al-Mahdi bi'llah amir al-mu'minin* in the *Khutba*. Shortly afterwards, people were compelled to be present in such public services and were invited to join the caliph's religion.¹⁵ Ubayed Allah al-Mahdi designated his young son Muhammad as his successor with the title of al-Qa'im, a title by which the promised Mahdi, *al-Imam al-Muntazar* and the *Sahib al-Zaman*, was referred to. It is interesting to note that al-Mahdi had titled his son as Abu al-Qasim, the patronymic (*kunniyah*) by which the Prophet was known. It was significant because according to the shi'i tradition, the Prophet had prophesied that al-Mahdi would be from the family of Ahl al-Bayt.¹⁶ Nizar, generally known as al-Aziz, the son of al-Mu'izz, assumed the title of *al-Imam Nizar Abu Mansur al-Aziz bi-llah*.¹⁷

The Fatimid caliphs had worked out court etiquettes to impress their majesty and exalt the status of the Caliph. Thus, all subjects, high and low, while in audience of the Caliph, had to prostrate before him on the ground and kiss the Caliph's hand. Ibn Khallikan in his *Kitab Wafi'atu*

was only eleven years old when his father al-Aziz died. The explanation for the strange progressive change in Hakim is to be found largely in the influence of three men who came into his life. Hamza, Darazi and Akram Ali bin Ahmad Hadi, well known as Hamza, was a native of Zanzen in Persia. He established himself near a mosque by the Nasr gate (Bab al-Nasr) of Cairo city and began preaching that al-Hakim was an incarnation of God, and gradually he developed a following. In the course of al-Hakim's tours, Hamza came in contact with him. Op Cit, Hollister, pp 233-234 and Op Cit, *The Bohras*, P 83 and Op Cit, *A Short History of The Fatimid Caliphate*, Pp 177-178 and De Sacy, S, *Expose de la Religion des Druzes*, Paris, 1838, P 377ff

¹⁵ Op Cit, *The Shi'a of India*, P 221

¹⁶ Op Cit, *The Isma'ilis*, P 129

¹⁷ Op Cit, *A Short History of the Fatimid Caliphate*, P 115

al-A'ayan wa Anba Abna al-Zaman, tells us that when the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz ordered his sons to dismount and give al-Qa'id Jawhar the salutation of departure to conquer Egypt; this obliged all the great officers of state to dismount. Jawhar then kissed the hand of the Caliph and the hoof of his horse and mounting at his master's command ordered his force to begin the march. Al-Mu'izz also sent orders to Aflah, the governor of Barqa in Ifriqiyah to meet Jawhar and kiss his hand. Aflah it appears did not like the idea of kissing the hand and offered a gift of 100,000 dinars in lieu of it. The offer was refused and he was forced to do the hand kissing ceremonial.¹⁸ This incident shows that the Fatimid Caliph attached great significance to the court ceremonials and also asserted his authority successfully in their compliance.

The administrative set up under the Fatimid rulers was a highly centralized one. His office known as *al-khidma*, was located in his palace referred to as *dar al-mulk*. The Caliph while ruling Ifriqiyah had required only a few offices for the discharge of different administrative, financial and military tasks.¹⁹ The Fatimid caliph al-Mahdi received help and assistance from Abd-Allah ibn al-Gadeem of Bani al-Aghalab (aghalabid). He was authorized by the Caliph to supervise all the administrative departments, including the finance department. Similarly, al-Mahdi and his two successors, al-Qaim and al-Mansur entrusted the general supervisory in respect of departments dealing with the personal staff of the Caliph to Abu Ja'far, who was also to

¹⁸ Ibn Khallikan, Shams al-Din Abu al-Abbas, *Kitab Wafiatu al-A'ayan wa Anba Abna al-Zaman*, vol 1, ed Ihsan Abas, Dar al-Saqafah, Beirut, 1969-1972, Pp 337-342, & P 375 and Op Cit, *A Short History of the Fatimid Caliphate*, Pp 100-101 and Op Cit, *Tarikh ad-Dawlah al-Fatimiah*, Pp 140-142

¹⁹ Op Cit, F. Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*, P 224

oversee the work of the *diwan*.²⁰ At a later stage Jawhar, a slave of al-Mahdi was entrusted the job of looking after the finances of the kingdom as well as managing the affairs of the palace.²¹

Al-Mahdi and his three immediate successors, therefore, did not appoint any *Wazir*. The Caliph continued to be the commander-in-chief of the army and the supreme head of state administration of his *Khilafat*. The Fatimid Caliphs did discuss sometimes issues with their trusted persons, but they took the final decision themselves. We do however notice, as described above, that from the time of al-Qaim, his exalted officer Jawhar al-Siqilli discharged some duties that later came to be associated with the office of the *Wazir* but he was never formally entrusted with the office of *Wazirate*. The Caliph enjoyed a total monopoly of power.²² It was only at a later date, during the period of al-Aziz, the fifth Fatimid Caliph in Egypt that we find that a named *Wazir* Ya'qub ibn Killis was appointed for the first time. It also indicates that the position of the Fatimid Caliph had by this time become so strong that he could entrust important jobs to a *Wazir* without feeling any threat to his authority.

²⁰ Muhammad Hamdi al-Mannawi, *al-Wizara wa al-wuzara fi al-asr al-Fatimi*, Dar al-Ma'arif Bi-Misr, Cairo, 1970, Pp 34-35. Abu Ja'far al-Baghdadi "a man who would make a good *Wazir* minister. He initiated him (*akhadha 'alay-hi*), and ordered him to go back to Andalusia, saying that he would not let him go if he did not foresee great dangers, which were threatening his servants and followers. He said that he ordered him to go only because he feared for his safety. But he was to make his way to al-Qayrawqan as soon as he heard about the occupation of Ifriqiyah by the da'i of the Kutama country. This was in fact done by Abu Ja'far al-Baghdadi, and he received various rewards from al-Mahdi, al-Qa'im, and al-Mansur which only they could know" Op Cit, *Sirat Ja'far al-hajib*, P 222.

²¹ Jawhdar died on his way to the newly founded Cairo, in 363/974, Op Cit, *Kitab Zuhru'al-Ma'ani*, (text, Pp 70-71), in *The Rise of The Fatimids*, Pp 263-264.

²² Op Cit, *The Isma'ilis*, P 223.

The Wazirate

The office of *Wazirate* was the most exalted office in the state after that of the Caliph under the Fatimids ²³ We have noticed earlier that we do not find the emergence of the office of the *Wazir* during the earlier phase of Fatimid rule, which is identified with their rule in Ifriqiya. The *Wazir* appears only for the first time during the Fatimid rule over Egypt. We also find that the position and power of the *Wazir* kept on increasing steadily over the years in the Fatimid state.

During the first phase in Egypt (972-1074), the Fatimid caliphs had enjoyed absolute power. The *wazir*, a civilian, ²⁴ was the supreme most officers in the state administration that was merely to execute the orders of the caliph. The *wazir* who performed such a role in the administration has been described by the Sunni jurist and theoretician al-Mawardi (d. 450/1058) as the *Wazir al-Tanfīdh*, or a *wazir* with executive powers only. ²⁵

The first person to be addressed as *wazir* under the Fatimid rule was Ya'qub Ibn Killis, a Jew. According to al-Qalqashandi (d.821/1418) who quotes in his *Kitab Subh al-A'sha*, the *Kitab Nihayat al-Airab* of al-Nuwayri (d.733/1333) as the authority, it was Ya'qub ibn Killis (who had looked after the revenue affairs of the first two Fatimid Caliphs) ²⁶ who

²³ Bernard Lewis, *Islam From Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople Religion and Society*, B. Lewis, First Published in The U.S. and Canada 1974, First published in the United Kingdom 1976, Published by The Macmillan Press Ltd. London and Basingstoke Associated companies in New York, Dublin, Melbourne, Johannesburg and Madras, P. 203.

²⁴ Op. Cit., *The Isma'ilis*, P. 223.

²⁵ Al-Mawardi, Abu al-Hasan Ali bin Muhammad bin Habib, *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya*, Beirut, 1978, Pp. 22-29, and al-Qalqashandi, Ahmad b. Ali, *Subh al-a'sha fi sina'at al-insha*, vol. 3, Manshoorat Dar al-Kutub al-Masriah, Cairo, 1913-1917, 1963, Pp. 480-488.

²⁶ Op. Cit., *The Bohras*, P. 80.

was conferred the title of *wazīr al-ajall* (the illustrious *wazīr*) by Caliph al-Aziz in the year 368/978.²⁷ Ibn Killis served as *Wazīr* for fifteen years, and it was largely due to his administrative skills that the Fatimid Egypt enjoyed internal peace and there was a substantial increase in the revenues of the state.²⁸

During the second phase (1074-1171), from Badr al-Jamali (the *wazīr* of al-Mustansir) onwards, the Fatimid *wazīr* obtained full powers from his sovereign and became, what was called, the *wazīr al-tafwid*, or *wazīr* with delegated powers. As this later type of *wazīr* could take decisions on his own and acted independently, he was normally from the army and also acted as the commander-in-chief of the army. It is due to this that he was also referred to as *wazīr al-sayf*, or *Wazīr* of the Sword. From the time of al-Jamali's appointment in 1074 to the end of the Fatimid rule in 1171, the Fatimid *wazīrs* enjoyed absolute powers.²⁹

The tenure of Badr al-Jamali, originally an Armenian Memluk (slave), was especially associated with a grand building projects and brought about administrative control and restored the al-Mustansir caliph authority. Prosperity and peace once again returned to Egypt and the annual revenue touched a new high; it increased from twenty lakh dinars to thirty lakh dinars.³⁰ In 487/1094 the first of the great *wazīrs* among the men of the sword, Badr al-Jamali died. He was succeeded

²⁷ Op Cit, *Islam, Politics and War*, P 203 and Op Cit, *Subh al-a'sha fi sina'at al-insha*, Pp 480-488, See also *The Isma'ilis*, P 184

²⁸ The Caliph al-Aziz suspected the *wazīr* Ibn Killis of having caused him to be poisoned, as it was said that Haftakin command, had behaved scornfully towards him, and cast the *wazīr* into jail, but after a short confinement the *wazīr* was set at liberty as the caliph found that he could not dispense with his services & *A Short History of the Fatimid Caliphate*, P 120

²⁹ In the year 1074, Badr al-Jamali became *amir al-juyush* or commander of the armies and the effective head of the civil bureaucracy. But often also the head of the religious hierarchy, Op Cit, F Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*, pp 223-224

³⁰ Op Cit, *A Short History of the Fatimid Caliphate*, P 208 and Op Cit, *The Bohras*, P 94

as *wazir* by his son Abu al-Qasim Shahanshah, commonly known as al-Afdal.³¹

Afdal, also known as al-Malik al-Afdal ibn Badr al-Jamali Shahanshah, was born in 458 A.H at Acre. He was the son of Badr al-Jamali and succeeded to *wizarat* on his father's death in 487/1094³² Caliph Ma'ad al-Mustansir Billah died soon afterwards and al-Afdal appointed al-Musta'li, a child as a caliph, instead of al-Musta'li's much older brother Nizar. Nizar revolted and was defeated by al-Afdal in 1095³³ Nizar's supporters, led by Hasan-i-Sabbah, fled west, where the latter established the *Hashashin* (Assassins order). At this time Fatimid power in Palestine had been reduced by the arrival of the Seljuq Turks. In 1097 al-Afdal captured Tyre from the Seljuqs, and Jerusalem in 1098 Jerusalem, expelling its Ortoqid governor Ilghazi. The Crusaders captured Jerusalem the next year³⁴ Al-Afdal was at first unconcerned with them, assuming that they were Byzantine mercenaries and would be content with the capture of Antioch from the Seljuq Turks, also enemies of the Fatimids. When it became clear to him that the

³¹ The small boy who had been designated as his successor by al-Zahir succeeded his father in the caliphate in 14 June, A H 427, A D 1035, at the age of seven, under the name of Abu Tamim al-Mustansir Bi'llah ("the seeker of aid from God"), His reign has the distinction of being the longest of all the caliphs either in Egypt during the reign of the Fatimids. His mother, a Sudan slave, wielded supreme influence during her life. Stanley Lane-Poole, *A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages*, London, Methuen & Co., Ltd., 4th ed., 1925, Pp. 140 ff, and Op. Cit., *The Shi'a of India*, P. 239 and Op. Cit., *A Short History of the Fatimid Caliphate*, P. 208,

³² Op. Cit., *al-Wizara wa al-wuzara fi al-asr al-Fatimi* Pp. 271-272 and Ayman F. Sayid, *al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah fi Misr*, First Edition, al-Dar al-Misriyah al-Libnaniyah, 1413/1992, P. 153

³³ Ibid., *al-Wizara wa al-wuzara fi al-asr al-Fatimi*, P. 272 and Ibid., *al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah fi Misr*, Pp. 155-156

³⁴ On the invasion of Palestine by the Seljuq Turks see Op. Cit., *Kitab al-mawa'iz wa'l-l'tibar bi-dhikr al-Khitat wa'l-athar*, vol 1, Pp. 356-357. See Al-Maqrizi, Taqi al-Din Ahmad bin 'Ali, *Itti'az al-Hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*, vol 1, ed. Jamal al-Din al-Shayyal, Cairo, 1967 & vol 2 & vol 3, ed. Muhammad Hilmi, Cairo, 1971, 1973. Vol. 3, P. 27 and Ibn Taghribardi, Abu al-Mahasin Jamal al-Din b. Yusuf, *Al-Nujum al-Zahira fi Miluk Misr wa al-Qahirah*, vol. 5, ed. Dar al-Kutub, Cairo, 1929, Pp. 145, 153 and on capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders in the year 1099 A.D. And see Op. Cit., *Kitab Wafiatu al-Ayyan wa Anba Abna al-Zaman*, vol. 1, P. 179

Crusaders would not rest until they had control of the city, al-Afdal marched out from Cairo but was too late to rescue Jerusalem, which fell on July 15, 1099. On August 12, the Crusaders under the command of Godfrey of Bouillon surprised al-Afdal at the battle of 'Asqalan (Escalon) and decisively defeated him³⁵

Al-Afdal marched out every year to attack the newfound kingdom of Jerusalem and in 1105 attempted to ally with Damascus against them, but was defeated at the battle of Ramalla. Al-Afdal and his army enjoyed success only so long as no European fleet interfered, but they gradually lost control of their coastal strongholds; in 1109 Tripoli was lost despite the fleet and supplies sent by al-Afdal, and the city became the center of an important Crusader territory. In 1110 the governor of 'Asqalan (Escalon), Shams al-Khilafa, rebelled against al-Afdal with the intent of handing over the city of Jerusalem for a large price. Al-Khalifa's Berber troops assassinated him and sent his head to al-Afdal. The Crusaders later took Tyre and Acre as well, and remained in Jerusalem until the arrival of Salahuddin (Saladin) decades later.³⁶

Al-Afdal also introduced reforms in the *iqta'* system in Egypt, which remained in place until Salahuddin took over Egypt. Al-Afdal was nicknamed *Jalal al-Islam* ("Glory of Islam") and *Nasir al-Din* ("Protector of the Faith").³⁷

Ibn al-Qalanisi (d.555/1160) in his *Kitab Dayl Tarikh Diamishq* describes him as "a firm believer in the doctrines of Sunnah, upright in conduct, a lover of justice towards both troops and civil population,

³⁵Op Cit, *al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah fi Misr*, P 163

³⁶*Khitat*, vol 2, P 291 and *Al-Nujum al-Zahira fi Miluk Misr wa al-Qahirah*, vol 5, P 170

³⁷Op Cit, *al-Wizara wa al-Wuzara' fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 60 and Op Cit, *al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah fi Misr*, P 153

judicious in counsel and plan, ambitious and resolute, of penetrating knowledge and exquisite tact, of generous nature, accurate in his intuitions, and possessing a sense of justice which preserved him from wrongdoing and led him to shun all tyrannical methods”³⁸

He was murdered during Eid al-Adha in 515/1121. According to Ibn al-Qalanisi, “it was asserted that the Batinis were responsible for his assassination, but this statement was not true. On the contrary it is an empty pretence and an insubstantial calumny” It appears that the real cause was the growing boldness of the caliph al-Amir, who had succeeded al-Must’ali in 487/1101, and his resentment of al-Afdal’s control. Ibn al-Qalanisi states “all eyes wept and all hearts sorrowed for him; time did not produce his like after him, and after his loss the government fell into disrepute.” He was succeeded as *wazir* by Abu Abdallah Muhammad bin al-Emir Nuruddin Abu al-Shuja’ Fatik known as al-Ma’mun al-Bata’ihi in 515/1121.³⁹ Al-Bata’ihi died in 519 A.H. He was the last of the *wazirs* of al-Amir. The office of *wizarat* was vacant at the time of al-Amir’s death in 524/1130⁴⁰

During the caliphate of al-Hafiz, the successor of al-Amir, the office of *Wizarate* was either kept vacant or when it was filled up, the *wazirs* enjoyed the office for very short durations. The caliphal authority came to dominate over that of the *wazir* from the time of al-Hafiz and the trend was no different under his successor. Caliph al-Hafiz appointed Abu Ali Ahmad bin al-Afdal as the *wazir* in 524 A.D. He held the office

³⁸ Ibn al-Qalanisi, Abu Yu’ala Hamza bin Asad al-Tamimi, (d 555/1160), *Kitab dayl Tarikh dimashq*, ed Amadrooz, Beirut, 1908, Pp 203-204

³⁹ On murdered of al-Afdal see Op Cit, *Kitab dayl Tarikh dimashq*, P 204 and Op Cit, *Itti’az*, vol 3, Pp 60-69 and Op Cit, *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, vol 10, P 589 and Op Cit, *al-Wizara wa al-Wuzara’ fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 272 and *al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah fi Misr*, Pp 163 & 167

⁴⁰ Op Cit, *al-Wizara wa al-Wuzara’ fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, Pp 275-276

until 526 A.H. for a brief period of 14 months.⁴¹ He was succeeded by Abu al-Fath Yanis al-Armani who again held the office for just a year, from 16th Muharram 526 to 26th Zilhijja 526. We find the office again being kept vacant until 529 A.H. when Bahram al-Armani was entrusted its charge by the caliph. He held this office until 531 A H (for 2 years)⁴² Radwan al-Walkhashi succeeded to the post of the deceased in 531 A.H. and was there until 533 A.H. He was succeeded by Salim bin Masal al-Lakki as a *wazir al-tanfidi* in 531 A H. and held the post till 542 A.H., for eight years, by far the longest tenure enjoyed by any *wazir* under caliph al-Hafiz. The office of *wazir* was vacant at the time of al-Hafiz's death in 544 A.H.⁴³

During the ensuing caliphates of al-Zafar Bi-Amr Allah (544-549), al-Fa'iz Bi-Nasr Allah (549-555) and al-Adid Billah (555-567) there were ten *wazirs* in all covering the period of 23 years. Excepting Tala'i bin Ruzzik who held the *wazarat* for 7 years (six years under caliph al-Fa'iz, and continuing one year under the last caliph al-'Adid), the other nine *wazirs* enjoyed their tenure for an average of less than two years.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ibid, *al-Wizara wa al-Wuzara' fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, Pp 277

⁴² The *wazir* Abu al-Fath Yanis received the title of *amir al-ju'yush*, while the *wazir* Bahram al-Armani received the title of *sayf al-Islam taj al-muluk*, see Op Cit, *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, vol 11, P 48 and Op Cit, *al-Dawlah al-Fatimiyyah fi Misr*, Pp 253 and Ibid, *al-Wizara wa al-Wuzara' fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, Pp 277--279

⁴³ Ibid, *al-Wizara wa al-Wuzara' fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, Pp 279-280 Radwan al-Walkhashi, the First Fatimid *wazir* received the title of *al-Malik*, Op Cit, *Itti'az*, vol 3, P 161 and *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, vol 11, P 48

⁴⁴ Tala'i Ibn Ruzzik, the Armenian governor of Asyut in upper Egypt Ibn Ruzzik who had succeeded 'Abbas al-Sanhaji to the *wazirate* in 549/1154, and became the absolute master of Egypt, a position he maintained throughout the reign of al-Fa'iz. He too carried some military operations against the Crusaders, gaining victories at Ghazza and al-Khalil (hebron), in southern Palestine in 553/1158. But he failed in his endeavors to secure an alliance with Nur al-Din, which would have effectively protected Egypt against the Crusaders. He was assassinated in Ramadan 556// September 1161. The caliph al-'Adid conferred the *wazirate* on Ruzzik, the son of murder *wazir*, who soon afterwards met a similar fate. Ruzzik was killed by Shawar who assumed the *wazirate* in 558/1163. See *The Isma'ilis*, Pp 270-271 and Ibid, *al-Wizara wa al-Wuzara' fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, Pp 285-287

It is also worth noting here that excepting the last 5 *wazirs* under al-Adid Billah, most others were Armenians. Since they occupied this high position for a long time in the Fatimid state, a large population of Armenian emigrants had sprung up in the empire. Some *wazirs* like Bahram in fact encouraged the migration of the Armenians to the Fatimid state.⁴⁵ Though Bahram was a Christian, other Armenian *wazirs* had different Islamic faiths. Badr al-Jamali, was a Shi'i Imami; al-Afdal, son of Jamali held his father's faith; Ahmad bin Afdal bin Badr, was a Shi'i, Abul Fath Yanis al-Armani, was an Ismai'ili; Tala'i bin Ruzzik, was a Shi'i Imami and so was his son, Ruzzik bin Tala'i.⁴⁶

The era of the Armenian *wazirs* came to an end when the Abbasid military commanders from Damascus made their entry into Egypt during the governorship of Nur al-Din Zinki al-Malik al-'Adil (1146-1174). It was the result of an internal power struggle between the Fatimid *wazir* Shawar bin Mujir al-Sa'adi, and Dargham, an ambitious noble, in 558 A.H. Dargham killed the son of Shawar and the latter went to Damascus to seek the Abbasid help to avenge his son's killing.⁴⁷ Zinki saw an excellent opportunity in this to make an entry into Egypt. He sent a large force under the command of Asad al-Din Sherkoh along with Shawar to Egypt that defeated and killed Dargham (559 A.H.). Shawar was reinstated as the *wazir* hoping that he would be grateful to the Abbasids for their support. However, Shawar totally refuted the Abbasids once he regained his office. This prompted Zinki to take military action against Shawar. Egypt was finally conquered by the Abbasid commander Salah al-Din Ayyubi in 564/1169, who

⁴⁵ Op Cit, *The Isma'ilis*, Pp 643, 183f and Op Cit, *al-Wizara wa al-Wuzara' fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 313

⁴⁶ Ibid, *Al-Wizara wa al-Wuzara' fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, Pp 297-303

⁴⁷ Op Cit, *The Isma'ilis*, P 271 and Op Cit, *al-Wizara wa al-Wuzara' fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, Pp 278 & 288

became the *wazir* under the Fatimids and held that office for a little more than two years (564-567). He finally repudiated the Fatimid authority in 567/1171 and read the *khutba* in the name of the Abbasids, bringing to an end the Fatimid rule in Egypt.⁴⁸

The Fatimid *wazirs* had an opulent life style and enjoyed a very high standard of living. An inventory of the *wazir* Ibn Killis's wealth by Ibn al-Sayrafi (d 1141 A.D) includes jewels and paintings costing around 400,000 dinars; 4000 slaves as personal body guards and 800 slave girls. He further adds that on his death Ibn Killis left behind a debt of sixteen thousand 16,000 dinars, which were paid from the treasury of *Byat al-Mal* by the caliph al-'Aziz to the traders⁴⁹ Al- Maqrizi in his *Kitab al-Khitat* tells us that the Fatimid *wazirs* received very high salaries and enjoyed many perquisites. They were the holders of big *iqta'*.⁵⁰ Caliph al-'Aziz had given his *wazir* Ya'qub ibn Killis the *iqta'* of Egypt and Syria. It depended very much, though, on the power and position of the *wazir*.⁵¹ In addition to that, they received sometimes up to five thousand dinars per month by way of salaries for their servants and hangers on. They also received presents in cash and kind from time to time from the caliph additionally.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid, *al-Wizara wa al-Wuzara' fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 289 The last of the great *wazirs* was Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub (Saladin), who rose from that office to become a Sultan in his own right Op Cit, *Islam, Politics and War*, P 203

⁴⁹ Ibn al-Sayrafi Abu al-Qasim 'Ali b Munjib *al-Ishara ila man nal al-wizara*, ed Ayman F Sayyid, al-Dar al-misriyya al-libnaniyya, Cairo, 1990 and ed Abdallah Mukhlis, 1924, P 23 and *Tarikh al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah*, P 556 & *al-Wizara wa al-Wuzara' fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 83

⁵⁰ Op Cit, *Khitat*, vol 2, P 129 and Op Cit, *al-Wizara wa al-Wuzara' fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 83
⁵¹ Op Cit, *al-Wizara wa al-Wuzara' fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, Pp 82-84 The Fatimid success in Syria owed much to powerful Ya'qub Ibn Killis, through whose policies the complicated situation in Syria resulting from the conflicting activities of Qassam, (one of Alftakin's former assistants), the Hamdanids and the Jarrahids was finally brought under control Op Cit, *The Isma'ilis*, P 184

⁵² Op Cit, *Subh al-a'sha fi sina'at al-insha*, vol 3, Pp 521& 562 and *Khitat*, vol 2, P 129

The position and power of the *wazir* excited the cupidity of many nobles. It led at times to factional struggles amongst the nobility class. Sometimes an individual could be used power seekers as an instrument to get rid of a caliph by eliciting his help and promising to him *wazarat* in return. Such a thing seems to have been behind the murder of al-Hakim at the instance of his sister Satt al-Mulik, according to some historians⁵³

Al-Maqrizi, informs us that the Princess went to Yusuf Ibn Dawwas al-Dawla's (one of the great nobles of Egypt) house and explained to him the great dangers threatening them both. She suggested that the best thing to do would be to arrange al-Hakim's death. "You," she said, "will be made general of the armies, minister of the empire, and guardian of the young prince".⁵⁴ Yusuf agreed. The sixth Fatimid caliph, al-Hakim was murdered and his arms dropped off.⁵⁵ However, Satt al-Mulk had remained quite influential in the affairs of the Fatimid State, until her death in A.H. 415. During this period from 411-415, chief *wazir* changed in quick succession and the affairs of State could not acquire stability. Reasons for this remain obscure but these changes might have taken place on account of palace intrigues.⁵⁶

The *wazirs* under the Fatimids played a significant role in the stability and expansion of the state. They also had an impact on evolution of Isma'ili doctrine. The major expansion of the Fatimid state took place under the *wazarat* of the powerful Ibn Killis, during the caliphate of al-

⁵³The *Isma'ilis* believe that al-Hakim was not killed but disappeared and, like Christ, ascended to heaven. But this does not mean he is physically alive. Op Cit, *The Bohras*, Pp 89-90 and Op Cit, *The Shi'a of India*, Pp 235-236

⁵⁴ Op Cit, *A Short History of The Fatimid Caliphate*, P 184

⁵⁵ Ibid, P 145

⁵⁶ Op Cit, *al-Wizara wa al-Wuzara' fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, Pp 251-253&307 and Op Cit, *The Bohras*, Pp 90-91

Aziz. The regions of Hamat, Hams and Halb (Aleppo) in Syria, were conquered during this period.⁵⁷ Even the ruler of Musal in Iraq, Mukhallad accepted the Fatimid suzerainty and read the *khutba* in the name of the Fatimid caliph in the Friday prayers. Yemen also acknowledged the Fatimid sovereignty.⁵⁸

The socio-political climate during the Fatimid caliphate allowed a greater upward mobility for the talented, irrespective of their social background. We have already noticed how the Armenians came to acquire the highest position in the Fatimid bureaucracy. Some persons came from very ordinary background and became important ministers. One such was Abbas al-Sunhaji who came from al-Maghreb to Egypt with his mother. His mother married Ali bin Ishaq bin al-Salar, the *wazir* (544-548). Abbas became the *wazir* after killing al-Salar in 549.⁵⁹

***Sahib al-Bab* (Master of the Gate)**

The holders of high offices in the Fatimid state enjoyed great prestige and influence because of their access to the Caliph and his family. Thus the office of *Sahib al-Bab*, or the Master of the Gate to the Caliph's office was considered next most important office after that of the *wazir*.⁶⁰ The *Sahib al-Bab* was at the top of those who were in personal attendance on the Fatimid Caliph and he was close to the caliph and his family. He was referred to by the title of Mu'azzam (the

⁵⁷ Ibid, *al-Wizara wa al-Wuzara' fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P. 241 and Ibid, *The Bohras*, P. 81

⁵⁸ Ibid, *The Bohras*, Pp 81-82

⁵⁹ Op Cit, *Al-Wizara wa al-Wuzara' fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, Pp 285 & 312

⁶⁰ Op Cit, *Tarikh al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah*, P. 293 and Op Cit, *Islam Politics and war*, P. 203

exalted one), which is indicative of the importance of this office in the eyes of the caliph.⁶¹

Al-Qalqashandi, the author of *Kitab Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, refers to the office of *Sahib al-Bab* as *al-wazarat ul-sughra* (the little wizarat).⁶² The holder of this office was almost of the status of the deputy to the Sultan. He was in-charge of the department dealing with public grievances when there was no *wazir* of the men of the *Sayf*, or if there was the *wazir* with executive power only. If, however, there was a *wazir al-Sayf* with delegated power, then he himself presided at the inspection of grievances, and *Sahib al-Bab* was amongst those who stood at his service.⁶³ *Sahib al-Bab* sat at the *Bab al-Zahab* (the Golden Gate) in the Royal Palace. In his attendance were a number of petty officials such as *nuqaba* or ushers to assist him. He entertained personally people who came with grievances and he examined and scrutinized written petitions presented to him. He then directed them to the authorities of the relevant departments for redressal of grievances.⁶⁴ *Sahib al-Bab* was a highly paid officer; Qalqashandi mentions that he received one hundred and twenty *dinars* per month.⁶⁵

The Na'ib

The *Na'ib* referred to the deputy of the *Sahib al-Bab*, called in our time *Mihmandar*. This deputyship was a high post, held by *ahl al-qalam*

⁶¹ Abd al-Mun'im Majid, *Nuzum al-fatimiyyin wa rosoomhum fi Misr* vol 1 Cairo, 1953,1955, Pp 192-193

⁶² Op Cit, *Kitab subh al-a'asha fi sina'atu al-inhsa*, vol 3, P 479

⁶³ Op Cit, *Islam, Politics and war*, P 203

⁶⁴ Op Cit, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, vol 3, Pp 478-479 & P 522

⁶⁵ Op Cit, *Itti'az*, vol 3, P 336 and Op Cit, *al-Khitat*, vol 1, P 401 and Op Cit, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, vol 3, P 522 and Op Cit, *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, Pp 35-36

(men of the pen) The *naib* acted as deputy for the Sahib al-Bab in receiving envoys that come to Fatimid court, he went a certain distance to meet the envoys and escorted every one of them to the appropriate place and provided all their needs. He was in charge of presenting envoys before the caliph or his *wazir*, and was master of all arrangements until the completion of the envoys tasks in the Fatimid court.⁶⁶

Al-Asfahslaar (The Commander-in-Chief of Army)

The literal meaning of asfahslaar is 'chief (asfah) of the army (salaar)'. Qalqashandi says that he was all in all of the army and he had many assistants to carry out his duties.⁶⁷

The armies of the Fatimid state in Egypt consisted of three principal components: The *amirs*, who included the highest officers and sword-bearing escorts of the caliph, officers of the guard, consisting of *Ustadh* (masters) and *khasian* (eunuchs), and the different regiments carrying such names as Juyushiyah, (named after of the amir al-Juyush Badr al-Jamali) and al-Hafiziyah, (branch of Musta'lians) after caliph Hafiz; similarly regiments were known after wazirs and other high officers.⁶⁸

Qaid al-Juyush was the supreme commander of the army under who served the above-mentioned officials. Secretaries of various ranks assisted him in his work.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Op Cit, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhisa*, vol 3, P 484 and Op Cit, *Islam, Politics and War*, P 208 and Op Cit, *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 55

⁶⁷ *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhisa*, vol 3, P 479

⁶⁸ Op Cit, *History of The Arabs*, P 627 and Op Cit, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhisa*, vol 3, P 480

⁶⁹ Op Cit, *Islam Politics and War*, P 203

Hamil Madallat ul-Khalifa (Khalifa's Parasol-bearer)

It was one of the established ceremonials with the caliph that whenever he was riding, or at great ceremonies such as the procession at the New Year, a canopy was held over his head. The holder of the canopy (*madalla*) was called Hamil Madalla. Al-Qalqashandi the author of *Kitab Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa* calls him an important official as he was to stand very close to the caliph's person and held the canopy over the pious head of the caliph. He was an *amir* of a high rank and had precedence over other officers standing near the caliph's person.⁷⁰

Hamil Saif al-Khalifa (Sword-bearer of the Khalifa)

The caliph's sword was carried by an official called *Hamil Sayf al-Khalifah* or sword-bearer of the caliph whenever the caliph was in a ceremonial procession. The sword was carried in a sheath gilded with gold and precious stones. The caliphal sword bearer was also a high *amir* under the Fatimids.⁷¹ He received seventy *dinars* per month as salary.⁷²

Hamil ul-Rumh (Mace-Bearer)

Hamil ul-Rumh was one who carried the mace of the caliph. When the caliph was in a ceremonial procession and also the canopy was being held over his head, the Hamil ul-Rumh carried a mace that represented the caliph's authority. The mace was gilded with gold and profusely

⁷⁰ Op Cit, *Tarikh al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah*, P 293 and Op Cit, *Islam Politics and War*, Pp 203-204 and Ibid, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, vol 3 Pp 479-480

⁷¹ *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, vol 3, P 479, and Op Cit, *Khitat*, vol 1, P 448 and Op Cit, *Islam Politics and war*, Pp 203-204

⁷² Op Cit, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, vol 3, P 522 and Op Cit, *Khitat*, P 401

carved. The macebearer carried the mace by the side of the caliph. This was again an important office and the honour of being the macebearer went to a high *amir*. He received seventy *dinars* per month as salary.⁷³

Al-Rikabiah aw Sibyan al-Rikab al-Khas (The Stirrup Youth)

There was a body of youth that carried the weapons around the Khalifa in ceremonial processions. The holders of this office were called *Sighar Shadd ur-Ribat* (the stirrup youth). They were thus the ceremonial arms bearers of the Fatimid Khalifa. This body of people also had a hierarchy; the senior most amongst them was entrusted with special tasks and enjoyed a higher status amongst his men.⁷⁴ The monthly salary of the commander of this body (*muqadam al-rikabiah*) was 50 *dinars* whilst the monthly salary of an average member (*al-rikabiah*) ranged between 5 to 15 *dinars*.⁷⁵ The *Hakim* (governor) of Cairo was also a high-ranking officer. He was from the *ahl al-saif* (men with the sword) and he had an assigned position in the ceremonial processions. The governor of al-Fustat was lower in rank than the governor of Cairo.⁷⁶

Another very important body of officials from amongst the *ahl-al saif* was the eunuchs called *khusah* (plural of *khasi*). There were two types of eunuchs: *al-muhanakkun* (those who tied their chin) and the other *ghair muhannak* (those who did not tie the chin).

⁷³Op Cit, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhisa*, vol 3, P 522 and Op Cit, *Khitat*, vol 1, P 401

⁷⁴Op Cit, *Islam Politics and war*, P 204 and For more details see, Op Cit, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhisa*, vol 3, Pp 479-488

⁷⁵Ibid, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhisa*, vol 3, P 523

⁷⁶Op Cit, *Islam Politics and war*, P 204

The chin-tied eunuchs performed the following nine duties:

- (1) They tied the crown turban (*Taj*) around the Caliph's head that he wore at great ceremonial occasions. The winding of the Fatimid Caliph's turban crown was an intricate one turning it into an elongated shape, with a kerchief of the same colour as that of the Caliph's garments. This binding was known as the 'binding of veneration' (*ribat al-waqar wal-haibah*)⁷⁷. Thus only the turban crown winder knew how to handle it and thus this was only his prerogative.
- (2) He held the office of *Sahib al-Majlis* or the master of the (audience). Thus he was in charge of the arrangement when the caliph sat in general public audience at ceremonies. It was his duty to inform the *wazir* and the other officials that the caliph had seated on his kingly throne. The *Sahab al-Majlis* had the title of *Amin al-Mulk* (the trustee of kingship).⁷⁸
- (3) The office of *Sahib al-Risalah* or the master of correspondence was also held by him. He took the writing of the caliph to the *wazir* and others and was also sent to summon the *wazir* from his residence to the *Majlis al-Khalifah* (the caliph's council)⁷⁹.

⁷⁷ Op Cit, *Khitat*, vol 1, P 386 and Op Cit, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, vol 3, Pp 480-481 and Op Cit, *Islam Politics and war*, pp 204-205, and Op Cit, *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 39

⁷⁸ Op Cit, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, P 481 and Op Cit, *Khitat*, vol 1, P 386 and Op Cit, Bernard Lewis, *Islam Politics and war*, P 205 and Op Cit, *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 39

⁷⁹ Ibid, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, vol 3, P 481 and, *Khitat*, vol 1, P 386 and Op Cit, *al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah fi Misr*, P 266 and Op Cit, *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 39 and Op Cit, *Tarikh al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah*, P 293

- (4) He served as *Zimam al-Qusur* (the superintendent of the palaces).⁸⁰
- (5) He held the office *Sahib Bayt al-Mal* or the master of the treasury.⁸¹
- (6) The office of the *Sahib al-Daftar* or the master of the register known as the *Daftar al-Majlis* was held by him.⁸²
- (7) He held the office of the *Hamil al-Dawat* or the inkpot-bearer. It was his duty to carry the inkpot in front of the caliph while the latter was on a saddle (*Sarj*) during a ceremonial procession
- (8) The office of the *Zam al-Aqarib* or the intendancy of the kinsmen was also held by him. He was in charge of the *Sharifs* who were the kinsmen of the caliph
- (9) *Zam al-Rijal*

He held the office of the superintendent of caliph's dining table (*mawaid al-khakifa*): in charge of the caliph's food.⁸³

The second sort of offices in the personal service of the Fatimid caliph consisted of those held by persons other than eunuchs, and there are two offices amongst them:

⁸⁰ Ibid, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhisa*, vol 3, P 481 & Ibid, *Khitat*, vol 1, P 386 & *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 40

⁸¹ Op Cit, *Islam Politics and war*, P 205

⁸² Op. Cit, *al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah fi Misr*, P 260 and Ibid, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhisa*, P 481 and Op Cit, *Islam Politics and war*, P 205

⁸³ Ibid, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhisa*, P 481 and Ibid, *Islam Politics and war*, P 205 and Op Cit, *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 40

The first office was the deanship of the *Talibis* (the descendants of Abu Talib, the father of Ali), this could only be held by the elders of this community and the most distinguished amongst of the *Talibis*. He was in charge of their affairs and his duty was to spot any false claimants from their ranks. It was amongst his tasks to visit the sick of the *Talibis*, walk at their funerals, restrain transgressors amongst them, etc. The second office was *Zam al-rijal*, who kept in his custody records pertaining to the corps of men and troops in the Fatimid army, such as of the *Amiri* corps and the *Hafizi* corps, etc.⁸⁴

Ashaab al-Waza'if al-Diwaniyah (Heads of Departments at the Court)

The central administration during the reign of the Fatimid state in Egypt evolved over time. Until the *wizarat* of Badr al-Jamali, the Fatimid Caliph did not delegate his powers to any of his subordinates. It was only after the appointment of Badr al-Jamali as the *wazir* in 1047 that we find a number of Departments being carved out at the court to look after various duties and functions of the state

Diwan al-Nazar was the most important of the *diwans* (departmental heads) under the Fatimids. The Caliph's treasury was under his charge. He had the power to appoint and dismiss officials. Many grandees of the empire worked under him. His salary was the highest among the officials of all diwans; he received a monthly salary of seventy Dinars.⁸⁵ Amongst the notable *diwan al-nazar* was Abu al-

⁸⁴ Ibid, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhisa*, vol 3, Pp 480-481 and Ibid, *Islam Politics and war*, Pp 205-206

⁸⁵ Op Cit, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhisa*, vol 3, p 489-522 and *Khitat*, vol 1, Pp 401

Kharam Ibn Zakariya al-Nusrani (Christian), during the reign of the Eleventh Fatimid caliph al-Hafiz, and Abu al-Hassan 'Ali ibn Saleem al-Bawab who was killed by the *wazir* as-Salih Talaa Ibn Ruzzik in the year 1155.⁸⁶

The earliest reference to the *Diwan al-Majlis* is in the account of historians of the closing years of the 11th century. According to the accounts of the historian Ibn al-Tuwayr, the *diwan al-majlis* (department of council) was the main *diwan* among the administrative *diwans* of the Fatimid state. Its master was called *sahib diwan al-majlis*. A number of clerks looked after the administration of this Diwan. Each clerk had an independent council and was assisted by one or two officials. The *sahib diwan al-majlis* looked after the allotment of *iqta's* and other grants and kept their record⁸⁷ The administrative wing of this diwan was headed by the *sahib daftar al-majalis* who kept records of gifts received by the caliph from kings and princes. The control of the expenditures of the state was also under his charge.⁸⁸ Sometimes this office was held by the *diwan al-nazar*.

The monthly salary of the *sahib diwan al-majlis* was forty Dinars, while the *sahib al-daftar* (master of the council registry) got thirty-five Dinars and his clerk five Dinars⁸⁹ Al-Maqrizi tells us that the first person who presided over the *diwan al-Majlis* was Abu al-Tayyib Sahlawan, during the reign of the *wazir* Abu al-Kasim Shahanshah, known as al-Afdal (487-515 A.H). The clerk (*katib*) of this *wazir* and the one who signed

⁸⁶ Op Cit, *Itti'az*, vol 3, Pp 165,221

⁸⁷ Ibn al-Tuwayr, Abu Muhammad al-Murtaza Abd al-Slaam bin al-Hasan, *Nuzhat al-muqalatayn fi akhbar al-dawlatayn*, ed Ayman Fu'ad Sayyid, al-Nasharat al-Islamiya-9 Shtughart, 1992, P 75

⁸⁸ Ibid, *Nuzhat al-muqalatayn fi akhbar al-dawlatayn*, P 75

⁸⁹ Op Cit, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, vol 3, P 522

on his behalf was al-Shaikh Abu al-Fadl, known as Ibn al-Asqūf (d.1087), presided over the chancery of the *diwan al-majlis*⁹⁰

Al-Diwan al-Khass (the Department of special chancery) which oversaw the expenditure of the caliph palace and always used to be combined with *diwan al-majlis*, and hence was also called *diwane al-majlis wa al-khaas al-sa'eedyyn*⁹¹ Additionally, there were a number of branch offices also called diwans, such as *diwan al-Aqta'*, *diwan al-Jihad*, *diwan Asfal al-Ard*, *diwan al-Sa'id*, *diwan al-Ahbas*, *diwan al-Thighur* etc. These chanceries which oversaw the incoming taxes collected from all over the Fatimid state.⁹² The monthly salary and payment of the masters of those diwans was twenty Dinars, while their junior clerks and assistants used to get their salaries in between five to ten Dinars.⁹³

The central administration of the Fatimids was carried on through various departments (*diwans*) These *diwans* (departments or offices) were at times situated at the residence of the caliph.⁹⁴ The heads of these departments came from rank of *ashaab al-qalam* and were the second in rank after the men of the sword. Only the *wazir* in the Fatimid administration could be regarded as a master of the sword (soldiery) as well as master of the pen (bureaucrats)⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Op Cit, *Itti'az*, vol 3, P 39

⁹¹ S M Stern, *Fatimid decrees Original Documents from the Fatimids Chancery*, London, 1984, P 79

⁹² Op Cit, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, vol 3, Pp 490-492 and Op Cit, *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 46

⁹³ Ibid, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, P 522, and *Khitat*, vol 1, Pp 401-402 and Op Cit, *Tarikh al-Dawlah al-Fatimia*, P 292

⁹⁴ Op Cit, *The Isma'ilis*, P 224

⁹⁵ Op Cit, *Tarikh al-Dawlah al-Fatimia*, P 281 & *Nuzum al-Fatimiyyin*, Pp 108-109

Amongst the most important heads of departments in the category of *ashaab al-qalam* was the *sahib diwan al-insha* or *al-rasa'il* (chief of the state chancery). He was entrusted with the job of issuing and handling the various types of official documents including the Caliphal decrees and letters.⁹⁶ The monthly salary of the chief of the state chancery was one hundred and fifty Dinars.⁹⁷ This salary was considered to be the highest one paid to any chief of bureaucracy in the Fatimid state. Under him worked many scribes whose monthly salary was thirty Dinars.⁹⁸ This post was entrusted only to the knowledgeable people such as literatures and historians. Amongst the later Egyptian historians, who were for the most part also civil servants in Fatimid administration, mention may be made of 'Ali Ibn Munjib, known as Ibn al-Sayrafi, a prolific and versatile writer who worked in the *diwan al-insha* in Cairo from 1101 until his death in 1147. Generally the master of the chancery of the Fatimid state got the trust, reliance as well the tribute and regards of the caliphs. They could enter the *Majlis al-Khalifa* without any hindrance and were even allowed to sleep in the palace of the Caliph if need be. In his service were a number of petty officials like peons and inkpot bearers.⁹⁹ For as much as the existence of the art of writing in *diwan al-insha*, the high rank officials, staff and the scholars, of the state used to send their sons for the sake of learning and getting the art of writing and correspondence.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Op Cit, *al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah fi Misr*, P 266 and Op Cit, *The Isma'ilis*, P 224

⁹⁷ *Khitat*, vol 1, P 469 and *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, vol 3, P 522 and Op Cit, *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, Pp 41-42

⁹⁸ *Itti'az*, vol 3, P 340

⁹⁹ Op Cit, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, P 486 and Ibid, *Itti'az* Pp 337-338 and Ibid, *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 43 and Op Cit, *The Isma'ilis*, P 147

¹⁰⁰ Abu Shama, Shihab al-Din Abd-ar-rahman, *Kitab al-rawdatayn fi akhbar al-dawlatayn*, ed Muhammad Hilmi, Cairo, 1962, vol 1, part 2, Pp 487-488 and Ibid, *Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 42

The post of the *Sahib al-Qalam al-Daqq* (master of the perfect pen) was second in rank after the post of *sahib Diwan al-Insha*. His job was to teach the Caliph the art of calligraphy, instruct him in the *hadith* of the Prophet, and tell him about the deeds and words of the Pious Caliphs and such moral counsels.¹⁰¹ He received a salary of one hundred Dinars per month.¹⁰² The post of *Sahib al-Qalm al-Jalil* (master of the magnificent pen) was next in rank to *sahib al-qalam al-daqq*. It was not regarded a high post. He was in charge of preparations of summery of grievances which he was to present before the *sahib al-qalam al-daqq*.¹⁰³ Al-Maqrizi tells us that the monthly salary of this official was thirty Dinars.¹⁰⁴

Diwan al-Jaysh (the Department of the Army) was presided over by a *katib* (head clerk) and was assisted by a group of peons and clerks. His duty was to oversee and take care of the records pertaining to the army.¹⁰⁵ He particularly kept records of the troopers, maintained the register of dead and absconder troopers as well as details of their absence due to illness etc.¹⁰⁶

The master of department of the army used to have a distinctive status among the Fatimid officials, because he sat near the caliph inside of the council. al-Qalqashandi tells us that the monthly salary of *sahib diwan al-jayish* was forty Dinars.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Op Cit, *Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 43

¹⁰² Op Cit, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, vol 3, P 522

¹⁰³ *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, Pp 487-488 & *Tarikh al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah* P 281

¹⁰⁴ Op Cit, *Khitat*, vol 1, P 402

¹⁰⁵ Op Cit, *The Isma'ilis*, P 224 and Op Cit, *Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, Pp 43-44 and Op Cit, *Tarikh al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah*, P 292

¹⁰⁶ Op Cit, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, P 488 and Ibid, *The Isma'ilis*, P 224 and Op Cit, *Tarikh al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah*, P 292

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, P 522

Diwan al-Rawatib (the Department of Salaries) was part of the *diwan al-jaysh* and it maintained a list of every mercenary in the state. This *diwan* (department) was headed by a chief clerk and ten clerks were there to assist and help him. The monthly salary of assistants and subordinates ranged between five to ten Dinars, whilst the salary of the chief clerk was twenty dinars per month.¹⁰⁸

***Arbab al-Waza'if al-Diniah* (The Chiefs Religious Officials)**

Amongst important offices holders at the Caliphate court were the holders of religious offices. They included the *Qadi al-Qudat* or the chief *qadi*, the chief missionary (*Da'i al-Du'at*), the inspector of markets (*al-Muhtasib*) the custodian of the state treasury, the readers (*al-Qurra*) and the Deputy (*Na'ib*)

***Qadi al-Qudat* (The Chief Qadi)**

The administration of justice included the judiciary (*qada*), private complaints (*mazalim*), public complaints (*hisba*), and the police (*shurta*), with all these positions supposedly subsumed under the jurisdiction of the Chief Judge (*Qadi al-Qudat*). The Fatimid *qadi al-qudat* had jurisdiction over all of the provinces in general, though at the Caliph's discretion in some areas were covered under different spheres of influence. Such was the case of Palestine during the reign of al-Hakim, who excluded it from the hands of the Hanbali *qadi al-qudat* Abi al-Awwam and took it under his own charge. The army was also less

¹⁰⁸ *Khitat*, vol 1, Pp 401-402 and Op Cit, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, P 489

subject to the authority of the chief judge, being the reserve of the jurisdiction of complaints (*mazalam*), if ever held accountable.¹⁰⁹

In addition to these normal responsibilities, "the *qadi's* competence [could] be extended to include religious attributions such as leadership of prayers and administration of mosques and sanctuaries, as well as extraordinary attributions such as directorship of the mint (*dar al-darb*), inspectorate of the standard of weights and measures (*mi'yar*) and the supervision of the administration of the Treasury, *bayt al-mal*"¹¹⁰

Such conflation of judicial and fiscal duties facilitated the abuse of power by officials. The *mazalim* authority reflected the Caliph's prerogative to investigate complaints by individuals of any injustice and mal-administration by public authorities, and to redress such grievances without being bound by regular or ordinary procedure. Representatives from nearly all departments of state were present during the *mazalim* court cases, which served as a center for sorting and distribution of complaints among the appropriate officials.¹¹¹

The chief of police, *sahib al-shurta*, was supposed to treat people equally, uphold the rights of the victim of injustice, execute the prescribed *hadd* punishments upon conviction, and compel the presence of parties before the judge, if necessary. He combined the functions of a prosecutor, interrogator, executioner of punishment, and jailor. Although the chief of police was supposed to be under the jurisdiction of the *qadi*, there was considerable tension between these

¹⁰⁹ Haji Amin "Institutions of Justice in Fatimid Egypt, (358–567/969–1171) " Edited by Aziz al- Azmeh In *Islamic Law Social and Historical Contexts* New York Routledge, 1988 Pp 198-200

¹¹⁰ Ibid, P 200 and Lev Yaacov, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, Leiden Brill, 1991 P 135

¹¹¹ Op Cit, *Institutions of Justice in Fatimid Egypt*, P 203

officials who competed over the boundaries of their jurisdiction since both were responsible for the dispensation of the *hudud* punishments of the Shari'a.¹¹²

The *Qadi al-Qudat* was amongst the greatest dignitaries in the times of the Fatimids and the highest in status and esteem. No one took precedence over him or could countermand him. He had jurisdiction over the administration of the holy law, the mints, and the verification of their standards. The jurisdictions of Egypt, Syria, and North Africa might be combined in a single chief *qadi*, who was given a single brevet of investiture.¹¹³

The chief justice was to be appointed by an order, which came from the Fatimid Caliph since the establishment of the Fatimid state in Bilad al-Maghreb, but when the Fatimid *wazir* obtained full powers from the Caliph and became *wazir* with delegated powers, he was not only the commander of the armies but also incharge of the civil diwans.¹¹⁴ It may be restated that this latter type of *wazir*, acting independently, was normally of military status. When such a *wazir* held the charge of head of the judiciary, he did not title himself as *Qazi al-Qudat*¹¹⁵ On Mondays and Thursdays the *wazir* visited in the palace in the early morning to greet the caliph, and on Saturdays and Tuesdays he sat in the old mosque in al-Fustat.¹¹⁶ He had a head cloth and a cushion, when he sat, and a stand on which his inkpot was placed. When he sat

¹¹² Op Cit, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, P 153–157

¹¹³ Op Cit, *Islam Politics and war*, P 206

¹¹⁴ Op Cit, *The Isma'ilis*, Pp 223–225

¹¹⁵ Ibid, P 251

¹¹⁶ Op Cit, *Nuzhat al-muqalatayn fi akhbar al-dawlatain*, P 205 and Op Cit, *al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah fi Misr*, P 270

in session, the legal witnesses sat around him, on his right and his left, ranked by seniority.¹¹⁷

During their North African phase, the Fatimid caliphs gave the option to the Sunni judges of the Aghlabids to either retire from Judiciary or work in accordance with the Isma'ili doctrine. Some of them willingly accepted the second option, such as Muhammad ibn Umar ibn Yahya al-Maroozi, who was a jurist during the reign of the Sunni Aghlabid state. He continued as jurist under the Fatimids at al-Qayrawan.¹¹⁸

The greatest amongst the *Qadis* under the Fatimids was al-Qadi al-Nu'man who was born around 903. He entered the service of 'Ubayd Allah al-Mahdi in 925. He served the first four Fatimid caliphs in various capacities, such as the keeper of the palace library and the *Qadi* of Tripoli and al-Mansuriyya. His importance was at its peak during the reign of al-Mu'izz, when he became the highest judicial functionary of the Fatimid state.¹¹⁹ Also al-Mu'izz was among the Fatimid Caliphs who had given great importance to the dispensation of justice in accordance with the laws laid down in the Quran, and *shari'ah* as interpreted by the Fatimid school.

Al-Qadi al-Nu'man who also wrote a number of books on the Fatimids, tells us about the system of Justice during the reign of al-Mu'iz in whose reign he had held the office of the *Qadi*.¹²⁰ He writes, "The *qada* (the administration of justice) is God's scope of justice on earth. One who turns a way from it (i.e. justice) and strives against it, he invites

¹¹⁷ Op Cit, *Islam Politics and war*, P 206

¹¹⁸ Op Cit, *Iftitahu al-Da'wa wa Ibtida'u al-Dawla*, P 215

¹¹⁹ Ibid, Pp 2257 & 250

¹²⁰ Op Cit, *The Bohras*, P 78

God's wrath and the curse of his friends. The *qada* is a great task. It is like carrying a heavy palanquin. People turned against ('Ali bin Abi Talib) as he required of them to follow the path of justice and carried them along the righteous path. And for this we follow him (i.e., 'Ali) and it is in our interest. It is expected of the *qadi* that he should treat the weak and strong, nobles and others, equally, in pronouncements as well as action, in nearness and remoteness as has been the wont of our ancestors."¹²¹

Al-Mu'iz strove for justice, to be a paragon of virtue and an example for others. He used to induce them to dispense justice amongst the subjects, irrespective of whether they were rich or poor. He used to exhort and scold the Judge if he was found soft and partial towards one or the other party to the dispute. Moreover, He exhorted the judges to follow the Quran, (the book of God) and the Prophet's path.¹²²

Al-Nu'man's family gave to the Fatimid state a number of distinguished judges. His son Abu al-Husayn Ali (d 948), the chief judge during the reign of al-Aziz for nine years, was the first person to bear the official title of *qadi al-qudat*. Abu Al-Husayn Ali was succeeded as *qadi al-qudat* by his younger brother Abu Abd-Allah Muhammad (d.999). Afterwards the office of *Qadi al-Qudat* came to be held successively by two of al-Nu'man's grandsons, Abu Abd-Allah al-Husayn bin Ali (d.1004) and Abu al-Qasim bin 'Abd al-Aziz bin Muhammad bin al-Nu'man (d 1011).¹²³

¹²¹ Ibid, *The Bohras*, P 78

¹²² Op Cit, *Khitat*, vol 1, P 199 and Op Cit, *The Bohras*, P 78

¹²³ Op Cit, *A Short History of the Fatimid Caliphate*, P 134 and *The Isma'ilis*, Pp 250-251

Al-Nu'man's grandson, Abu Muhammad al-Qasim bin 'Abd al-Aziz, was the last person of the family to hold the rank of *qadi al-qudat*. He was dismissed, from his post in 1050/442 and was succeeded by 'Ali al-Yazuri, the first to unite in his person the offices of *wazir* and chief of judiciary.¹²⁴

After the conquest of Egypt at 969/358, Abu al-Tahir al-Dhuhli, who was the *Qadi* under the Ikhshids was reconfirmed by Jawhar, the commander of the Fatimid Army on the same post, which he held until 366. Also the Fatimid caliph, al-Hakim Bi Amrillah, appointed Abu al-'Abbas ibn al-'Aw'aam, a Sunni of the Hanbali School to this office in A. H. 405.¹²⁵ One can therefore discern the change in the attitude of the Fatimid Caliphs from the Ifriqiya phase to the Egypt phase in regard to the personal beliefs of the incumbent to the post of the *Qadi*

The *Qadis* enjoyed the respect and regards of the Caliphs due to their importance in society. It may be noted that al-Hakim forbade all officers from using honorifics excepting the *Qadi al-Qudat* and the *Da'i al-Du'at*, the chief missionaries.¹²⁶ It demonstrates the importance that the Caliphs attached to these two offices. The power and status of Badr al-Jamali under the Fatimids of Egypt was also because he could hold the post of the *Qadi al-Qudat*, a highly venerated post, along with being the commander of the army (*amir al-juyush*)¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Ibid, *The Isma'ilis*, P 251

¹²⁵ Op Cit, *Tarikh al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah*, Pp 310-311

¹²⁶ Op Cit, *Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 51

¹²⁷ Op Cit, *al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah fi Misr*, Pp 252-253 and Op Cit, *The Isma'ilis*, P 215

The salary of *Qadī al-Qudāt* was high, he received one hundred Dinars per month.¹²⁸ However, there does not appear to be a uniform scale of payment to the *Qadī al-Qudāt*, it differed from place to place and person to person. Nasir Khusraw, who visited Egypt during the reign of the caliph al-Mustansir, tells us that the chief judiciary was getting paid two thousand Maghribi Dinars, and that the salary of every jurist depended upon his rank and that high payments prevent the jurists from rapacity in the people's money¹²⁹ Under the Fatimid state the chief of judiciary very often also presided over the rank of *da'i al-du'at* or chief of missionaries, as was the case with Abu al-Husayn Ali b. al-Nu'man and al-Yazuri. This was an additional reason for the importance of this office.¹³⁰

***Da'i al-Du'at* (The Chief Summoners)**

The spread of the Isma'ili doctrine was one of the duties of the Fatimid state. Thus, an institution of *Da'i al-Du'at* or chief of the missionaries was an established office under the Fatimids. The provincial *du'at* reported to the *da'i al-du'at*, reports al-Qalqashandi. These *da'is* or 'summoners' acted as lieutenants of the chief *da'i*, and the representatives of *al-da'wa al-hadiya*, (the rightly-guiding mission) were stationed in several cities of Egypt as well as in the main region of the Fatimid state, such as Damascus, Ramalla, Asqalan.¹³¹ The chief *da'i* had his headquarters in Cairo, the Fatimid capital and he followed in rank after the chief *qadī*. If he was also a Qadi, he

¹²⁸ Op Cit, *Nuzhat al-muqalatayn fi akhbar al-dawlatain*, P 84 and Op Cit, *Subh al-A'asha fi Sina'atu al-Inhsa*, vol 3, P 482 and Op Cit, *Khitat*, vol 3, P 337 and Op Cit, *al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah fi Misr*, P 270

¹²⁹ Op Cit, *al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah fi Misr*, P 270 See also Nasir Khusraw, *Safar Nama*, Arabic translation by Yahya al-Khashab, Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid, Beirut, 1970, P 109

¹³⁰ Op Cit, *A Short History of the Fatimid Caliphate*, P 134

¹³¹ Op Cit, *The Isma'ilis*, Pp 227 & 644

continued to wear the dress of the qadi while discharging his duties as *da'i al-du'at*. In case he was only the *da'i al-du'at*, he would wear a different dress and an insignia.¹³²

The term *da'i* came to be applied generically from early on by the Isma'ilis. It was used in sources to any authorized representative of their *da'wa*,¹³³ His duty was to teach the doctrines of the kin of the Prophet (*Ahl al-Bait*) in the sessions of the mission that were called the *Majalis al-Hikma* (Sessions of Wisdom).¹³⁴ A discussion of the *Majalis al-Hikma* can be seen in Chapter 4. *Da'i al-du'at* had under him twelve assistants as well as subordinate *da'is* in the different provinces, to receive the conversions of those who joined the Isma'ilian fraternity, and to deliver regular courses of instruction to those who were members, according to their grades in the society. In earlier times, the *da'is* were chosen from the most earnest proselytes, but at this period the office of chief *da'i* was hereditary in the family of 'Abdul-Kawi, and in them we may be disposed, perhaps, to recognize "the power behind the throne".¹³⁵

The territorial *da'is* (*du'at al-aqalim*) enjoyed a great deal of independence in their activities, once appointed. There was nevertheless, a good deal of contact and correspondence between the local mission in any region and the main administration of the mission in Cairo, between the chief *da'i* and the sub-territorial *da'is* on the one hand, and the Imam and his chief *da'is*, on the other hand.¹³⁶

¹³² Op Cit, *A Short History of the Fatimiad Caliphate*, Pp 134-135 and Op Cit, *Islam, Politics and War*, P 207 and Op Cit, *al-dawlah al-Fatimiah fi Misr*, P 270 and Op Cit, Ibn al-Tuwayr, P 110

¹³³ Op Cit, *The Isma'ilis*, P 230

¹³⁴ Op Cit, *Islam, Politics and War*, P 207

¹³⁵ Op Cit, *A Short History of the Fatimiad Caliphate*, Pp 135-136

¹³⁶ Op Cit, *Tarikh al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah*, P 331 and Op Cit, *The Isma'ilis*, P 230

Al-Qadi al-Nu'man tells us that the *da'is* should personally know the individual initiates. The learned judge also states that the *da'i* must be exemplary in his own behavior and use sound and timely judgment in disciplining the erring members of his local community. The *da'i* could be appointed only by the Imam's permission (*idhn*), and having been dispatched to a certain locality, consequently, he would then operate independently of the central headquarters, receiving general guidance from the Imam and the central of main mission.¹³⁷

AL-Muhtasib

The third kind of the holders of religious offices was *al-Muhtasib*. He was one of their leading legal functionaries and notables. A robe of honor was conferred on him on his appointment and the decree of his appointment was read from the mosques of Fustat and Cairo.¹³⁸

The office of *Al-muhtasib* had existed under the Fatimid state in Egypt and throughout the wider region under various regimes. Regardless of the differing opinions regarding its pre-Islamic origins, it is clear that the role or the office of *al-muhtasib* (one who exercises the jurisdiction of *hisba*) was well established by the end of the fourth century as not only the post of the censor and the market inspector, but also the protector of public morals in terms of the Islamic mandate of "commanding the good and forbidding the wrong" (*al-amr bil ma'aruf wa al-nahi 'an al-munkar*).¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Ibid, *The Isma'ilis*, Pp 230-231 and Op Cit, *A Short History of the Fatimid Caliphate*, Pp 21-26 more details on the *da'i al-Du'at* see, *Tarikh al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah*, Pp 344-346

¹³⁸ Op Cit, *Islam, Politics and War*, P 207

¹³⁹ Op Cit, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, Pp 160-176

The *muhtasib* became a central figure in the public life of Muslim societies, wielding an enormous amount of authority due to his institutional authority as an official of the state, as well as his religious authority as the agent for maintaining public interest and morality. The Hisba manual was broadly conceived to constitute the totality of social life.¹⁴⁰

The *muhtasib* was part of the legal apparatus of the state because his appointment was usually listed among the responsibilities of the chief judge (*qadi al-qudat*), which intrinsically meant that it was also a religious institution (*wazifa diniyya*). The *muhtasib* held the *mazalim* courts in the capital mosques of Cairo and Fustat to hear complaints confirming the central legal character of his position.¹⁴¹

Yet, his jurisdiction was regarded as a religious function, requiring the appointment of persons of the highest moral character.¹⁴²

He was charged and authorized to inflict discretionary punishments (*t'azir*) although legal punishments (*hudud*) were not under his immediate mandate.¹⁴³ The significance and the enormous power of the position are indicated by the fact that the post was at times taken up by the chief judge or *wazir*, or the *Imam* himself. Al-Hakim, the *wazir* Ibn Killis, as well as chief judge Ali ibn al-Numan did this.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Berkey, Jonathan "The Muhtasibs of Cairo under the Mamluks Toward an Understanding of an Islamic Institution" Edited by Michael Winter and Amalia Levanoni, in *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society* Leiden Brill, 2004 P 247 And See Zaman, Muhammad Qasim *Religion and Politics under the Early 'Abbasids The Emergence of the Proto-Sunni Elite* Leiden Brill, 1997 Pp 129–166

¹⁴¹ Op Cit, *The Muhtasibs of Cairo under the Mamluks*, P 251

¹⁴² Op Cit, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, P 249 And see Lapidus, Ira M *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1988, P 24

¹⁴³ Berkey, *The Muhtasibs of Cairo under the Mamluks* , P 248

¹⁴⁴ Shoshan, Boaz "Fatimid Grain Policy and the Post of the Muhtasib" *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 13, 1981, P 185 & *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, P 161

These instances not only indicate that the position of *muhtasib* lacked genuine autonomy or independence, but also emphasize that the institution combined religious and political authority.

By and large, the role of the *muhtasib* in the Fatimid history was that of a market monitor not limited to the *Suq* only, but rather to all aspects related to trade, including production, distribution, and importation of food products. What makes this role peculiar is that the *muhtasib* was an arbiter of trade, while at the same time an agent of the regime, of which it was an active participant (often to the point of monopolization) in the commercial on-goings of Egyptian society.¹⁴⁵

The regime obtained grain by purchasing it on the free market, cultivating it on the private estates of the *imam*, and sometimes by taking possession of commodities against the will of the merchants carrying them.¹⁴⁶ That made it difficult to differentiate between private property and the interests of the ruler and the public domain.¹⁴⁷

The role of *muhtasib* as a public state agent and religious symbol was therefore problematic in many ways. For instance, the grain trading practices of the ruling elite during the Fatimid period was mainly self-interested and ignored the demands of the dependent and impoverished subject base.¹⁴⁸

The potential problems associated with having religious institutions blend with those of the state often entail hypocrisy and corruption, as illustrated by the additional functions of the *muhtasib* as a tax collector as well as a guardian of public morality. *Al-muhtasib* was in charge of

¹⁴⁵ Op Cit, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, P 162

¹⁴⁶ Op Cit, *Fatimid Grain Policy and The Post of the Muhtasib*, P 182

¹⁴⁷ Op Cit, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, Pp 162–63

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, P 176

the weight and measures control and his responsibilities to include the enforcement of prayer, fasting, payment of zakat, in addition to public morality concerns about public mixing of men and women, displays of drunkenness, or the use of musical instruments. These functions were coercively enforced in the streets of Cairo and other cities.¹⁴⁹

Dealing with *dhimma*, to be reviewed later, was also within the jurisdiction of the office. This included requirements that the *dhimmis* are not allowed to ride on horse or donkey within the city limits and that they should wear distinctive clothing and public bells around their neck when visiting public bathing facilities.¹⁵⁰ Day after day the *Muhtasib* sat for judgment in the mosques of Cairo and Fustat. The weight and measures control of Fustat and Cairo was sometimes added to the duties of the chiefs of police in these two places.¹⁵¹

Qurra al-Hadharah

Qurra al-hadharah (lit. 'Those who read out to an audience') were religious men, ten in number, who recited the verses of the Holy Quran on various ceremonies and occasions. They also accompanied the Caliphal entourage when the caliph was on the march. According to al-Qalqashandi, a *qari* received a monthly salary of ten to twenty Dinars.¹⁵²

The Fatimid state had assigned a number of personal to *masjids* who performed certain religious duties. They were generally known by four

¹⁴⁹ Op Cit, *Tarikh al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah*, P 324 and *Islam, politics and War*, P 207 and Op Cit, *The Muhtasibs of Cairo under the Mamluks*, Pp 261–64

¹⁵⁰ Op Cit, *The Muhtasibs of Cairo under the Mamluks*, Pp 262–63

¹⁵¹ Op Cit, *Tarikh al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah*, P 324 and Op Cit, *Islam, Politics and War*, P 207

¹⁵² Ibid, *Subh al-a'sha fi sina'at al-insha*, P 522, and Op Cit, *Islam, Politics and War*, P 208 and Op Cit, *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 55

terms; *Khatib*, *muzakkir*, *wa'iz*, and *naseh*. *Al-Khatib* is always applied to the official who recited the *Khutbah*, or the sermon in the Friday service. The other three terms were applied generally to preachers. The Fatimids also appointed two *Mu'azzins* (the callers of the *azan* or "summons to prayer") for each Jami' Masjid. In the small *masjid*, the imam of the mosque called the *azan*. In large mosques, the *muezzins* called the *azan*, invariably from the minarets of the mosque. They received salaries ranging between 10 to 20 dinars per month according to Al-Maqrizi.¹⁵³

The Trading Community

During the reign of the Fatimids the administration was reorganized and expanded. It functioned with admirable efficiency: tax farming was abolished, and strict probity and regularity in the assessment and collection of taxes was enforced. The revenues of Egypt were high and were then augmented by the tribute of subject provinces. The Fatimid period was also an age of great commercial expansion and industrial production

The Fatimids fostered both agriculture and industry and developed an important export trade. Realizing the importance of trade, both for the prosperity of their state and for the extension of their influence, the Fatimids developed a wide network of commercial relations, notably with Europe and India.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Op Cit, *Itt'az al-Hunafa*, vol 2, P 114

¹⁵⁴ Heyd W, *Histoire du Commerce Levant au Moyen Age*, vol 1, Leipzig, 1923, P 41 & Op Cit, Hasan I Hasan, Pp 608-609 & 613

Through the traders, Fatimid ships sailed to *Bilad al-Andalus* (Spain)¹⁵⁵ and *Siqilliyyah* (Sicily)¹⁵⁶ Their fleets controlled the eastern Mediterranean, and they established close relations with the Italian city-states, particularly Amalfi and Pisa. The two great harbours of Alexandria in Egypt and Tripoli in present-day Lebanon became centers of world trade In the east, the Fatimids gradually extended their sovereignty over the ports and outlets of the *al-Bahar al-Ahmar* (Red Sea) for trade with India and Southeast Asia and tried to win influence on the shores of the *al-Muhit al-Hindi* (Indian Ocean) In lands far beyond the reach of Fatimid arms, the Ismaili *da'wa* and the Fatimid merchant went side-by-side¹⁵⁷

Through the traders, the Egyptian ships also sailed to al-Mahdiyyah on the coasts of Ifriqiya, and vice versa to Alexandria in Egypt.¹⁵⁸ And indeed, Nasir Khusraw had seen in the market of al-Fustat (old Cairo) a piece of minor crystal brought from Bilad al-Maghreb.¹⁵⁹

The big traders occupied, a high status in the Fatimid society, and were closely connected with the Fatimid court. Al-Maqrizi tells us they attended the official levees of the Fatimid caliphs and their celebrations and intermixed with the grandees of the empire.¹⁶⁰

The big traders of al-Maghreb, notably in Tahart, lavishly displayed their libraries containing rare books, costly jewelry and gems and rarities of various parts of the world that they had collected during the

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, *Histoire du Commerce Levant au Moyen Age*, P 49

¹⁵⁶ As successors, to the Aghlabids, the Fatimids had inherited the island of Sicily, separated from Italy by the narrow strait of Messina Op Cit, *The Isma'ilis*, Pp 155-157

¹⁵⁷ Op Cit, *Histoire du Commerce Levant au Moyen Age*, Pp 104&124&362&392

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, *Histoire du Commerce Levant au Moyen Age*, P 49

¹⁵⁹ Op Cit, *Safar Nama*, P 175 and Op Cit, *Tarikh al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah*, Pp 613-615

¹⁶⁰ Op Cit, *Itti'az al-Hunafa*, vol 2, Pp 110 & P 131

course of their business trips to those places.¹⁶¹ According to Ibn Khaldun (d.1406), because of brisk trading activity during this period, the traders of Bilad al-Maghreb made a fortune. They brought goods from foreign lands and their clients were the nobles and the grandees, the rich and powerful of the Fatimid state. It is due to this reason that the fate of the traders was closely linked with stability and peace in the state. During the period of financial crunch for the Fatimid state, the latter resorted to attack and seizures from people including traders.¹⁶² Thus Arabic authorities tell us that the Fatimid army attacked and plundered the tribe of Lawatah, killed its people and took away their wealth and assets. In the year 912, the assets of Tahart (in western Algeria) were pillaged. And in the same year the Fatimids plotted and killed Abi Ja'far Mohammad ibn Khairoon al-Ma'afri, who was one of the most well known of al-Andalusí traders at al-Qayrawan and confiscated his wealth.¹⁶³

The seizures of wealth of merchants and others were done by the army commanders who had the freedom to use any method they found suitable for acquiring the wealth and assets of the wealthy. In fact such forcible acquisitions from traders and other moneyed classes in al-Maghreb had become a feature of the Fatimid state from the time of the first caliph al-Mahdi.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Morris Tumber, *al-Islam fi majdih al-awal*, Arabic translation by Isma'il al-Arabi, published by al-sharika al-wataniah'l-anashir wa al-tawzi'a, Algeria, 1979, P 223

¹⁶² Ibn Khaldun, Abdu'r-Rahman bin Muhammad, *al-Mukaddima*, 2ed, Cairo, 1964-65, P 396 and Judat Abd al-karim, *al-awda'a al-iqtasaadiyah wa al-ijtima'iyah fi al-Maghreb al-awsat*, (9-10 A D), Diwan al-matboaat al-jamia'h, Algeria, 1992, P 147

¹⁶³ Al-Habib al-Janhaaty, *Multaqaa al-qadi al-nu'man'l-adirasatu al-fatimiah*, Wazaratu al-Saqafah, Tunis, 1977, P 195

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, *Multaqaa al-qadi al-nu'man'l-adirasatu al-fatimiah*, Pp 195-196

Ibn Idhari, a Maghrebi historian who died after 712/1312, tells us that, in the year 921 A.D and under the Fatimid general Masala ibn Habus (d.312/924), the Fatimid army confiscated the assets of the traders of Sijilmasa in 912 A.H ¹⁶⁵

In fact seizures of assets of big traders as noticed before had become a part and parcel of the Fatimid financial system in the Bilad al-Maghreb. This policy of confiscation of the assets and the deceitful attack on the traders and plunder of their shops and properties started under Caliph al-Mahdi and carried on under his successors in the Bilad al-Maghreb led to many uprisings from the population of the cities ¹⁶⁶

It is interesting to note that while the splendour of the Fatimid court rested to some extent on the policy of confiscation and seizure of wealth by the state from big traders, the law and order situation on the whole was well under control of the state. Nasir Khusraw, who traveled extensively in the Fatimid state and whose *Safarnama* is of foremost importance notes that the jewelers and others in the market did not have to lock their shops; only a curtain was enough and no one dared to even touch the goods kept there. Such was the general security enjoyed by the population. ¹⁶⁷

There was a strict supervision of the administration over the activities of traders and merchants. Khusraw again informs us that if a trader was found cheating his customer, strict public punishment was meted out to him. He was put on a camel, made to hold a bell in hand which

¹⁶⁵ Op Cit, *al-Bayan al-Mughrib fi Akhbar al-Maghreb wa al-Andalus*, vol 1, Pp 166ff, and Op Cit, *The Isma'ilis*, P 154

¹⁶⁶ Op Cit, *Multaqaa al-qadi al-nu'man'l-adirasatu al-fatimiah*, Pp 193-197

¹⁶⁷ Op Cit, *Safar Nama*, Pp 61-64

he was to constantly ring, and paraded on the streets in such a fashion. This deterred other traders from resorting to fraudulent practices, or else they would have to face the same punishment ¹⁶⁸

The Fatimids caliphs ensured against monopoly of goods by traders by getting information about it from surveillance inspectors. The shops could be seized until the monopolized commodities were released in the market by owners of shops and stores at the price determined by the state.¹⁶⁹ Thus we see that, when a severe famine occurred in the reign of the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim Bi Amrillah in the year 1006 A D, he ordered wheat, barley and all other cereals be sold at a fixed price so that common people could afford to buy them. The following year, when the people appealed to the caliph that the prices were still high, he threatened traders with confiscation of goods and assets, even imprisonment, if they did not lower the prices. The traders responded to the order of the caliph and correctly displayed the stocks in their warehouses.¹⁷⁰

The traders also helped the state in cash and kind in the form of loan during the time of need. Badr Jamali was advanced loan in cash and in the form of commodities by the provincial traders when the Fatimid state was facing a financial crunch during the period of caliph al-Mustansar.¹⁷¹

The traders were distinguished from others by their headgear, they wore rounded turbans. Traders had their organization headed by the

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, *Safar Nama*, P. 61

¹⁶⁹ Op Cit, *al-awda'a al-iqtasaadiyah wa al-ijtima'iyyah fi al-Maghreb al-awsat*, P. 195

¹⁷⁰ Op Cit, *al-Hayatu al-ijtima'iyyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, Pp. 68-69

¹⁷¹ Op Cit, *Khitat*, vol. 1, P. 383

naqib ut-tujjar, who was the traders' representative and spokesman and he interacted with state officials on behalf of the traders.¹⁷²

The Artisans and Occupational Groups

There were varied types of artisan activity under the Fatimid rule in al-Maghreb and Egypt. The artisans were mainly located in big towns and cities. They however, constituted the lowest rung of the Fatimid social order. Qadi Nu'man observes about their status thus, "I had seen ragtag and bobtail (canaille) of people and commonalty and those are never or would rather to say similar to animals but never the worst than the artificers." They were in perpetual "penury and exigency".¹⁷³ Some idea can be had from the wages that they received. We have some information on it in the *Awraq al-Burda* (Arabian Papyrus) of the 4th/10th century. It mentions that a mason got one Dinar per month as a compensation of his work and also sometimes additional meals, if he worked inside someone's residence.¹⁷⁴

The artisans specialized in various crafts such as the *haddadin* (blacksmiths), *kayyatin* (tailors) (seamstress) *sayyadin* (hunters), *hallakin* (barbers), *najjarin* (carpenters), *bannain* (masons) etc.¹⁷⁵ these were the specialists in their crafts and served the needs of mainly the urban classes.

Then there were small vendors who sold elementary commodities such as clothes and garments, meat, groceries, sweets and vegetables.

¹⁷² Op Cit, *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 70

¹⁷³ Al-Qadi al-Nu'man, *Kitab al-hima fi adab atba al-a'imma*, ed Muhammad Kamil Husayn, Cairo, 1948, p 44

¹⁷⁴ Op Cit, *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi* Pp 71-72

¹⁷⁵ Ibrahim Riziq-allah Ayub, *al-Tarikh al-Fatimi al-Ijtima'i*, First Edition, al-Sharikah al-'Aalamiyah lil-kitab, Beirut, 1997, P 27

They mainly sold their commodities in organized markets that dotted big cities. The famous geographer and traveller of the second half of the 4th /10th century, Ibn Hawqal (d after 366/977) who visited Ifriqiya, in his *kitab surat al-ard* (Portrait of the Earth), tells us that, al-Qayrawan was the greatest city in the times of the Fatimids. It was distinguished by its ameliorated, worthy and decent markets (*suqs*)¹⁷⁶ Similarly, in Cairo was *suq-al-Nahhasin*, located between the 'two palaces (*bayn al-qasrayn*).¹⁷⁷ It was in these *suqs* that the artisans and other occupational groups earned their living.¹⁷⁸

The artisans and other occupational groups steadily created their own guilds, which systematically regulated the business matters of their crafts and professions during the Fatimid rule. The beginning of such a fraternity can be traced to Ifriqiya under the Aghlabids, before the Fatimids, when we notice that a person of a particular occupation handed over his premises in the market to a person of the same occupation when moving out of the market for some reason.¹⁷⁹ Each occupational group had its leader called *Shaikh* to look after the interests of that group *visa vis* the Fatimid administration. He also oversaw all other works of the community including settling of disputes amongst its members. Without his permission no one was allowed to join that craft or vocation.¹⁸⁰ He would be qualified to hold that position if he was deemed to be knowledgeable about the concerned vocation, honest and trustworthy.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ Ibn Hawqal, Abu al-Qasim b. Ali *Kitab surat al-ard*, 2 edition, Leiden, 1938-1939, P 96

¹⁷⁷ Op Cit, *A Short History of the Fatimid Caliphate*, Pp 104-105

¹⁷⁸ Op Cit, *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 70

¹⁷⁹ Op Cit, *al-awda'a al-iqtasaadiyah wa al-ijtima'iyyah fi al-Maghreb al-awsat* Pp 88-89

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, P 89

¹⁸¹ Op Cit, *Ittir'az*, vol 2, Pp 224-225

The *Shaikh* reported to the *muhtasib*, (inspector of markets) about the activity of his vocation. He also gave full information to the *muhtasib* about any investigations regarding any malpractice that members of the vocation under his charge may be indulging in ¹⁸²

Unfortunately our sources do not yield much information about the state of the peasantry. We only know that slave labour was freely used in agricultural operations. ¹⁸³

Al-Abid (The Slaves)

Slaves have always remained an integral part of Islamic Empires from the very beginning. They were purchased on the frontiers of the Islamic world and then imported to the major centers, where there were slave markets from which they were widely distributed. In one of the sad paradoxes of human history, it was the humanitarian reforms brought by Islam that resulted in a vast development of the slave trade inside, and still more outside, the Islamic empire. The great numbers of eunuchs needed to preserve the sanctity of palaces, homes, and some holy places had to be imported from outside or, as often happened, "manufactured" at the frontier. In medieval Islam the two main sources of eunuchs were Slavs and Ethiopians (Habasha, a term which commonly included all the peoples of the Horn of Africa). Eunuchs were also recruited among Greeks (Rum), West Africans (Takarurl, pl. Takarina), Indians, and occasionally West Europeans ¹⁸⁴ Slaves of Fatimid state among them notably white and black eunuchs rose to

¹⁸² Op Cit, *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 71

¹⁸³ Ibid, *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, Pp 27-28

¹⁸⁴ Bernard Lewis *Race and Slavery in the Middle East*, Oxford University Press 1994, Chapter 1, Slavery

important positions in the state becoming by any definition part of the ruling circles. White eunuchs -- Saqaliba i.e. Slavs -- had already been eminent at the Fatimid court in Tunisia. Spain was the main source of supply of Saqaliba eunuchs, and the Fatimid practice of employing them was in line with Aghlabid heritage.¹⁸⁵ The slaves actively participated in the wars during the tenth century under the banner of the Fatimid army in Bilad al-Maghreb. The First Fatimid caliph Ubayd Allah al-Mahdi adopted the slaves from al-Sudan and the Romans (the Greek).¹⁸⁶ They also formed an article of present. Kitab Sirat Ja'far al-Hajib tells us that da'i 'Abu Abd-Allah al-shi'i presented Ikijan, his slave to Caliph Ubayd Allah al-Mahdi. This slave was called Akijan as he was purchased at a place by that name in the Kutama country by Abu abd-Allah al-Shi'i.¹⁸⁷ The same author has highlighted the loyalty of Ikijani towards al-Mahdi by giving an account of his first meeting with this slave. He writes, "when the da'i Abu Abd-Allah al-Shi'i saw us (the partisans of al-Mahdi) approaching, he dismounted, and we dismounted, and embraced him one after another, while the Ikijani slave was introducing himself to every one of us mentioning his name and then he said: 'I swear by the head of al-Mahdi that he has given me the power to achieve what he desired, and this is how I accomplished this he made me to uncover my back, and touched the wounds inflicted by flogging, my deformed fingers, and the eyes' " ¹⁸⁸

The most important eunuch, during the North African phase of the Fatimid imamate, was Jawhar b. Abd Allah, a freedman of the Fatimids and of slave origin, who carried various epithets such as *al-Saqalibi*

¹⁸⁵ Op Cit, *al-awda'a al-iqtasaadiyah wa al-ijtima'iyah fi al-Maghreb al-awsat*, P 268

¹⁸⁶ Op Cit, *Iftitahu al-Da'wa wa Ibtida'u al-Dawla*, Pp 256-257

¹⁸⁷ Op Cit, *Sirat Jaf'ar al-Hajib*, (Bulletin, Pp 128-129), in *The Rise Of The Fatimids*, P 216 and *al-awda'a al-iqtasaadiyah wa al-ijtima'iyah fi al-Maghreb al-awsat*, P 268

¹⁸⁸ Op Cit, *Sirat Ja'far al-Hajib*, (Bulletin, Pp 129-130), in *The Rise Of The Fatimids*, P 217

(the slave), al-Siqilli (the Sicilian) and al-Rumi (the Greek), and who had risen in rank to become secretary to the caliphs al-Mansur and al-Mu'izz in Ifriqiyyah, and then the latter's *al-qa'id* or commander of the army. Jawhar became the governor of Egypt for four years, until the arrival of the caliph al-Mu'izz. During this period, he assigned high priority to alleviating the problem of famine, improving the country's finances and reforming its existing administrative set-up.¹⁸⁹

Another powerful slave under the Fatimids was Abu al-Futuh Barjawan, the tutor and guardian of al-Hakim, and had enjoyed a pre-eminent position from before. Being a highly ambitious person, Abu al-Futuh envisaged becoming the caliph's regent. He had been brought up at the court and fostered by al-'Aziz who made him responsible for his *harem* and palaces. His ability to assume power was a result of the consolidation of his position during al-'Aziz's rule.¹⁹⁰ He discharged his responsibilities faithfully and diligently and on the caliph gaining the age of a major, proclaimed him as a sovereign caliph. During the period of al-Hakim's minority (386/996-411/1020), Abu al-Futuh Barjawan ruled the state as a *wazir* of second rank for almost three years (A.H.387-390). However, there was a perception that his loyalty to the Caliph was not as strong as that of the *wazir* al-Hasan Ibn Ammar (386-387). Abu al-Futuh wanted the caliph to remain subservient to him. The caliph no longer liked the craving of power that Barjawan wanted. Hence soon after getting the independent charge of

¹⁸⁹ Op Cit, *The Isma'ilis*, Pp 173-174

¹⁹⁰ Op Cit, *A Short History of the Fatimid Caliphate*, Pp 125-134 Op Cit, *The Bohras*, Pp 187&190

his caliphate on reaching the age of majority, caliph al-Hakim got rid of Barjawan in.¹⁹¹

Far more typical and common was the case of the black eunuch Mi'dad. He began his career in the service of Sitt al-Mulk who employed him as tutor (*ustadh*) of the young al-Zahir. An important turning point in Mi'dad's career was Friday, 18 Safar 415/1 May 1024, when al-Zahir bestowed on him honorific titles and named him Abu al-Fawaris. Mi'dad belonged to the highest-ranking group of *al-austadhun al-muhannakkun* (those who tied their chin).¹⁹² According to a long official decree (*sijjil*), read publicly in a grand ceremony in the palace, Mi'dad was entrusted with the management of the affairs of soldiers. Among the administrative responsibilities of Mi'dad was the headship of the Office of the Kutama. He was among the small group of administrators and courtiers who took the reins of power into their hands preventing al-Zahir from running the affairs of the state.¹⁹³

Many of the Fatimid expeditionary forces in Palestine and Syria were commanded by eunuchs. Eunuchs were frequently appointed as governors of towns and provinces. The two most important executive posts in the capital -- the chief of police and the Inspector of the markets (*muhtasib*) -- were on many occasions held by eunuchs.¹⁹⁴ These officials had at their discretion the most sensitive aspects of city life; suppression of crime and commerce, including the supply of wheat and bread. Other eunuchs, serving as generals and governors, also

¹⁹¹ Ibid, *A Short History of the Fatimid Caliphate*, Pp 124-131 & *The Isma'ilis*, Pp 84-85

¹⁹² Al-Musabbih Muhammad bin Ubayd Allah, *Akhbar Misr*, ed Ayman Fu'ad Sayed, Cairo, 1978-1984 & ed W G Millward, Cairo, 1980, Pp 24-25. On the title of al-astadun al-muhannak, see Op Cit, *Subh al-a'sha fi sina'at al-insha* vol 1, Pp 480-486

¹⁹³ Op Cit, *Akhbar Misr*, Pp 24-25 & Pp 45-46

¹⁹⁴ Op Cit, *Subh al-a'sha fi sina'at al-insha*, vol 2, P 297 and *Itti'az al-Hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*, vol 2, P 91 and Op Cit, *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 41

wielded wide powers in spheres of vital importance for the state. As with other people in ruling circles, some eunuchs attained great wealth. In Cairo there were quarters and lanes known under the names of certain eunuchs testifying to the extent of their households and the size of houses. The most notable case was of Sayf al-Dawla Nadir al-Saqlabi (who died on 12 Safar 382/14 April 992) after whom one of the lanes was named. He left behind 300,000 dinars in cash and property worth 80,000 dinars, including horses and slaves¹⁹⁵

There were two aspects, which also contributed towards the acceptance of slaves and eunuchs in the corridors of power. The first was economic: the supply of eunuchs, white and black, was not abundant, and they were expensive. Their high price explains why eunuchs were included in gifts exchanged by rulers of the period. Thus, we should not be misled into thinking that eunuchs were among the ruling circles in great numbers. The eunuchs were conspicuous, attracting the attention of the historians, but they neither dominated the ruling circles nor constituted a majority. In the multi-ethnic composition of the ruling establishment, *khasian* (eunuchs) and blacks were yet other social groups. The people of the ruling circles themselves used slaves, and to a lesser extent eunuchs, imitating the example set by the ruler. People who themselves were of servile status employed slaves.¹⁹⁶ The ease in which slaves and eunuchs moved in the court and the ruling circles should not obscure the basically inhumane features of slavery and castration. When convenient the servile status could always be invoked. Following the killing of Barjawan, al-Hakim

¹⁹⁵ On the Fatimid expeditionary forces in Palestine and Syria. See Op. Cit., *Tarikh al-Dawlah al-Fatimiah*, Pp 151-163

¹⁹⁶ Op. Cit., *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P. 83 and Op. Cit., *al-Islam fi majdih al-awal*, P. 289

addressed the people in the palace who were in an apprehensive mood by saying: "Barjawan was my slave and I employed him. He acted in good faith, and I treated him favorably. Then he misbehaved, so I killed him". The message conveyed by the speech was obvious: a slave is a slave, and his killing a trifling affair of no concern for others. While the punishment of a slave who misbehaved was death, the reward for a slave who served loyally was manumission. Raydan, a Saqlabi eunuch of al-Hakim and the *Hamil Madallat al-Khalifa* (Khalifa's Parasol-bearer),¹⁹⁷ who had masterminded Abu al-Futuh Barjawan's killing on 390/1000, was emancipated and the title *ustadh* (master) was bestowed on him. Typically of the Muslim patterns of slavery, the emancipation did not sever the master from his freedman. Bonds of slavery became bonds of patronage. Raydan signed his letters as *mawla amir al-mu'minin* (the client of the Commander of the Believers). Servile status and castration could be overlooked when convenient: slaves were nevertheless despised, Abu al-Tayib al-Mutanabbi's poetry against Kafur and the remarks of the Fatimid propagandists on him reflected, and echoed, popular feelings. In Egypt, the manpower resources of Nubia were too good to neglect, and the traffic down the Nile continued to provide slaves for military as well as other purposes. Black soldiers served the various rulers of medieval Egypt, and under the Fatimid caliphs of Cairo black regiments, known as 'Abid al-Shira', "the slaves by purchase," formed an important part of the military establishment. They were particularly prominent in the mid-eleventh century, during the reign of al-

¹⁹⁷ On the Raydan a Saqlabi eunuch of al-Hakim and the bearer of his parasol. See Op. Cit, *al-dawlah al-Fatimiah fi Misr*, P 98 and Op. Cit, *al-Hayatu al-Ijtima'iyah fi al-Asr al-Fatimi*, P 85 and Op. Cit, *A Short History of the Fatimid Caliphate*, Pp 130-132

Mustansir.¹⁹⁸ Nasir Khusraw, describing the number of inmates in the Mustanser palace says that the number of its inmates (Sudanese) runs into 30,000 out of which 12,000 are slaves and servants. The number of Sudanese Slaves increased.¹⁹⁹ However, again we find the influence of a woman of the royal family predominant in the Fatimid state, this time of a black ex-slave woman. In Cairo there were two Jewish merchants, Abu Sa'd Abrahim and his brother Abu Nasr Sa'd ad-Dahir, sons of Sahl.²⁰⁰ The caliph al-Zahir had brought a black Sudani slave girl from Abu Nasr Sa'd al-Dahir, and she was the mother of the caliph al-Mustanser. During the earlier years of the reign of al-Mustansir, the influence behind the throne was in the hands of the Sudani Queen Mother and her former master, the Jewish slave merchant. The Queen Mother, herself a Sudani Negroes, threw the whole weight of her influence on the side of the black troops.²⁰¹ There were frequent clashes between black regiments and those of other races and occasional friction with the civil population. One such incident occurred in 410/1109, when the Caliph al-Hakim sent his black troops against the people of Fustat (old Cairo), and the white troops joined forces to defend them. A contemporary chronicler of these events describes an orgy of burning, plunder, and rape. In 1062 and again in 1067 the black

¹⁹⁸ Op Cit, *Itti'az*, vol 2, Pp 306-316. And see al-istakhri, *kitab al-masalik wa al-mamalik*, ed Muhammad Jabir, Dar al-Qalam, Cairo, 1385/1961, P 45. According to account of buying Slaves on Eleventh Century, we find the Nubian women, of all the black races, have ease and grace and delicacy, their bodies are dry, while their flesh is tender they are strong and at the same time slender and firm. The climate of Egypt suits them, since they drink the water of the Nile, but if they are removed to some place other than Egypt, diseases of the blood and acute sicknesses overcome them and pain racks their bodies. Their characters are pure, their appearance attractive, and there is in them religion and goodness, virtue, chastity, and submissiveness to the master, as if they had a nature bent for slavery. Op Cit, *Islam Religion and Society*, Pp 249-250.

¹⁹⁹ Op Cit, *The Bohras*, P 93. And see Zahid Ali, *Tarikh Fatimiyyin Misr*, vol 1, Nafis Academy, Karachi, 1963, Pp 281-284 and Op Cit, *A Short History of the Fatimid Caliphate*, Pp 189-199.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, *A Short History of the Fatimid Caliphate*, P 193.

²⁰¹ Op Cit, *A Short History of the Fatimid Caliphate*, P 193 and Op Cit, *The Bohras*, P 93.

troops were defeated by their white colleagues in pitched battles and driven out of Cairo to Upper Egypt. Later they returned, and played a role of some importance under the last Fatimid caliphs.²⁰² By the time of the last Fatimid caliph, al-'Adid, the blacks had achieved a position of power. The black eunuchs wielded great influence in the palace; the black troops formed a major element in the Fatimid army. It was natural that they should resist the *wazir's* encroachments. In 1169 Saladin learned of a plot by the caliph's chief black eunuch to remove him, allegedly in collusion with the Crusaders in Palestine. Saladin acted swiftly; the offender was seized and decapitated and replaced in his office by a white eunuch. The other black eunuchs of the caliph's palace were also dismissed. The black troops in Cairo were infuriated by this summary execution of one whom they regarded as their spokesman and defender. Moved, according to a chronicler, by "racial solidarity" (*jinsiyya*), they prepared for battle. In two hot August days, an estimated fifty thousand blacks fought against Saladin's army in the area between the two palaces, of the caliph and the *wazir*.²⁰³

Ahl al-Dhimma under the Fatimids

The Fatimid dynasty placed heavy emphasis on the role of leadership and its relation to the construction of a just Islamic society. Indeed, the rhetoric of justice often was and still is a foundational platform from which Shi'a movements claimed legitimacy. In theory, all matters of the state, society, and religion were to be contained under the auspices

²⁰² Op Cit, *al-Nujum al-Zahira*, vol 4, P 181 and Op Cit, *al-dawlah al-Fatimiah fi Misr*, Pp 111-112&134

²⁰³ Op Cit, *Khitaf*, vol 2, Pp 203 & Op Cit, *Itti'az*, vol 3, Pp 311-313 and Op Cit, *al-Nujum al-Zahira*, vol 5, P 354. Also see Op Cit, *al-dawlah al-Fatimiah fi Misr*, P 235

of an infallible *Imam* who governed society upon a comprehensive notion of a divine authority. The status and the role of protected non-Muslim communities (*ahl al-dhimma*) in Islamic societies have always the subject of contention and tension. While the foundational texts of Islam have been largely construed to reflect the general mood of tolerance towards the *ahl al-kitab* and other non-Muslim subjects of the Islamic rule, historical data shows that hostility, more often than compassion, marked the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim elements of society.²⁰⁴

In the case of Egypt, a largely Coptic Christian country,²⁰⁵ Muslims were indebted to their Coptic counterparts for their expertise in managing the lucrative agricultural economy of the Nile basin and other aspects of Egyptian life. The technical superiority of the Coptic community in local economic activities often led to resentment in the Muslim population, who although composed the ruling elite, was in reality a dependent foreign minority. The way in which this tension was negotiated in our respective case studies reveals various patterns of *ahl al-dhimma* treatment in Muslim societies.

During the Fatimid period we see a general pattern of tolerance in places wherein there were few or no restrictions on employment opportunities or possibilities of social mobility for Christians and Jews. Members of the Christian and Jewish faith were employed in the

²⁰⁴ Goitein S D *The Community*, vol 2, *A Mediterranean Society The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza* Berkeley University of California, 1967–94, 1971, P 288

²⁰⁵ Christianity had been the official religion of Egypt since the Edict of Theodosius in 379, From that time forward there were two churches in Egypt, the State Church (or Orthodox Greek), supported from Constantinople, and known as the Melekite or "Royalist," and the national church, afterwards called Jacobite, and generally known as the Coptic Church. Copt is etymologically the same word as Egyptian (Greek, Aiguptios, Arabic, Kibt and Kubt, English, Copt), and the Coptic Church means nothing less than the Church of Egypt as separated by the adoption of the heresy of Eutyches. Op Cit, *The Story of Cairo*, P 38

government during the Fatimid and early Ayyubid periods despite frequently repeated prohibitions on it.²⁰⁶

Nonetheless, such practice should not be exaggerated, as Fatimid Egypt was a precariously balanced system of competing social groups, all of which were managed under the high-handed authority of the Fatimid caliphs. The Fatimid regime itself was a minority (Ismaili) managing another demographic minority (Muslims) who claimed religious superiority to the majority (Coptic). Thus, all segments of the general population of the Fatimid Egypt were vulnerable to the inflammation of the pre-existing tensions and occasional use of arbitrary and unchecked force by the state.

While the Fatimid state was relatively tolerant and supportive of *ahl al-dhimma* (especially Coptic) institutions, the general Sunni population (*amma*) was staunchly *anti-dhimmi* and resented the official Fatimid support of *ahl al-dhimma*. The general Sunni population saw those of Coptic and Jewish origins in the position of power in the Fatimid Egyptian society as representative of an illegitimate and unacceptable system of rule over Muslims. The state-sponsored persecutions of *dhimmis* should be seen in this light as concessions to an angry and ever-hostile general Muslim Sunni population, a political expediency to avoid serious confrontation with the Muslim population.²⁰⁷

The position of the Christians and Jews under Fatimid rule was both safeguarded and precarious. Islamic law protected their life, property, and freedom and, with certain restrictions, granted them also the right to exercise their religion. On the hand, it demanded from them

²⁰⁶ Op Cit, *The Community*, vol 2, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, Pp 288-289

²⁰⁷ Ibid, P 289

segregation and subservience, conditions that under a weak or wicked government could and did lead to situations bordering on lawlessness and even to outright persecutions. This as in conformity with the general character of the period, in which brisk international trade made for free intercourse between various sections of the population and for a certain reasonableness in behavior²⁰⁸

The familiar conditions that the covenant was supposed to have stipulated include distinctive styles of dress (*ghiyar*), prohibition of the reconstruction of churches or synagogues, limits on public worship, and regulations regarding the possibility of employment in the Islamic government. These provisions were, of course, in addition to the poll-tax (*jizya*). Such rules and regulations were hardly codified in Egypt both before and during the Fatimid reign, but their implications and influences were still evident in many cases.²⁰⁹

The practice, however, was mixed, depending on political and other factors. There were instances where the state permitted the construction of new churches and synagogues and the restoration of existing ones, as well as cases where the state capitulated to objections by scholars or the general population in denying such requests by dhimmi communities. For example, the Fatimid Imam or Caliph al-Mu'izz allowed the building of a new church despite the prevailing anti-Christian feelings among the Muslims masses of Fustat, and al-Aziz permitted the full restoration of a church.²¹⁰

The Fatimid caliphs also extended patronage to their non-Muslim subjects by way of endowing churches with land in the form of *awqaf*,

²⁰⁸ Ibid, Pp 288-289

²⁰⁹ Op Cit, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, P 185

²¹⁰ Ibid, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, Pp 185- 188

securing the rights of the monastery of St. Catherine, and even supporting a Yeshiva in Jerusalem. The complexity of such cases can be seen in the instance when Muhammad Ibn Tughj, an Ikshid ruler (preceding the Fatimids), faced enormous pressure from angry Muslims to prohibit the restoration of the Church of Abu Shenuda that had partially collapsed. Two of the three jurists assigned to assess the legality of the restoration request found that it was prohibited, but Ibn Tughj favored the dissenting third jurist. However, after the dissenting jurist was attacked by a mob in the streets that led to a conflict with the regime troops, it became clear that implementing his dissenting opinion could lead to further instability. Ibn Tughj capitulated to that public pressure, and the restoration works were not allowed to be carried out²¹¹

At the local level, *wazirs*, *amirs*, and *ulama* sought to use their spheres of power to exploit, persecute, and oppress their non-Muslim counterparts. For example, the Jews in Jerusalem sometimes had to pay for permission to hold religious processions

During the vizierate of al-Hasan bin 'Alī al-Yazuri in 1055 a local *qadī* complained about the building and the restoration of local churches, and the matter was settled when the Coptic community made a large payment to the local military chief, Nasir al-Dwala ibn Hamdan. This exchange occurred despite the risk of tensions it might prompt in the Fatimid state with the Coptic Patriarch and the danger it may pose for the vital agricultural role of the Coptic community in general. The supporters of the same military commander were responsible the

²¹¹ Op. Cit, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, Pp 185–89

destruction of many churches and the murder of monks ten years later during the civil war under the reign of al-Mustansir.²¹²

While there were many instances of such local persecutions of *dhimmis* despite the official policy of tolerance and protection of religious minorities, the point for our purposes is more strongly made by the persecution that occurred at the command of the Caliph himself, as done under al-Hakim Bi-Amr Allah.

Generally historians of the period agree that the treatment of non-Muslim and non-Ismaili segments of Egyptian society was among the good features of the regime, but the reign of al-Hakim (996-1021) was infamous for religious persecution, state-sponsored terror, and unbridled religious zeal. In addition to more strict enforcement of dress-code (*ghiyar*) and other humiliating restrictions on *dhimmis*, he ordered the destruction of churches and conducted a systematic campaign of persecution and harassment against non-Muslims. During his most zealous times, 1004–1012, churches and monasteries were destroyed in Cairo and other Fatimid cities, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.²¹³

Many non-Muslim buildings were converted to mosques, the treasuries of many churches were looted, and graveyards of the churches were desecrated. The confiscation of Christian religious endowment (*waqf*) of lands of the churches and monasteries was most damaging because of its wider implications for the social and economic life of dhimma communities.

²¹² Ibid, P 188

²¹³ Op Cit, *A Short History of the Fatimid Calipate*, Pp 157-158

Although al-Hakim Bi-Amr Allah reversed a majority of his decisions just a year before his death (disappearance), the damage, especially in the way of lost *awqaf* and the building of mosques over church property, was almost permanent. Some of the many Christians and Jews who had emigrated to Byzantine provinces returned to gradual recovery and better conditions of inter-religious sustainability under rule by the subsequent Fatimid Caliphs²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Lev Vaacov, *Persecutions and Conversion to Islam in Eleventh-Century Egypt* The Medieval Levant. Studies in Memory of Eliyahu Ashtor, Asian and African Studies 22, 1988, Pp 77–84