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MEDIEVAL MUSLIM SCHOLARS: TEACHERS,
MISSIONARIES AND THEORETICIANS,
QĀDI AL-NU'MĀN AS A CASE STUDY

Tahraoui Ramdane
Merah Souad

Abstract

One distinct character of education in medieval Islam is the fact that teaching and learning activities were not regarded by both the shuyūkh (master scholars) and talaba or tullāb (students) as a wazīfah (job) for the former and potential source of income after graduation for the latter. On the contrary, both segments took teaching and learning as a noble mission in life, which promised social veneration in this life and God's reward in the other. Apart from the religious drive, the dedication and zeal of both, the shuyūkh and their tullāb was sometimes stimulated by sectarian motives. The truth is that in those ages, it was customary for Muslim states, whether from the Sunni mainstream or from the minority Shī'ato manage and supervise intellectual activities, including institutions of learning, curriculum, human capitals (scholars, and students) in a flexible way. For instance, intellectual life was not run by one particular office, although educational policies were largely politicized in the case of the Fatimids. Due to such dynamic intellectual ambiance, many prominent scholastic figures emerged during this period and played a crucial role in the dissemination of knowledge, religious propaganda and sectarian dogmatic debate.

This paper highlights the role and the contribution of medieval scholars through the case of qādī al-Nu'mān, one of the most influential and notable medieval Ismā'īli scholars who served under the reign of the Fatimids. It also aims to analyze the complicated role of this scholar and his influence on the Intellectual life. The results of this study showed that al-Nu'mān devotedly served the Ismā'īli maḏhab with the heart of a candid believer and the mind of a scholar.

He used his intellect and pen to defend the Ismā'īlī cause on many fronts.

Keywords: Qādī al-Nu'mān, teachers, da'wah, theoreticians

Introduction

Becoming a regional and a military puissance in medieval Islam was not the ultimate strategic goal of the Fatimids¹ (969AD/358AH-1171 AD/567AH) when they succeeded in establishing for the first time in the history of Islam a *Shī'ī* dynasty in North Africa. Their ambition was to rule the Islamic orient not only through military might but through the dissemination of their religious *mazhab* (denomination) using *da'wah* (call) and education. Interestingly, the Fatimid reign of the *Maghreb*² (910/969 AD) did not witness serious attention towards learning activities, even though the *Maghreb* constituted an important state of wide domains. Possibly because the Fatimids in North Africa were practically concerned with the affairs of the Ismā'īlī revolutionary religio-political *da'wah* rather than establishing a long lasting policy of education for their *dawlah* (state). They were primarily preoccupied with the consolidation of their power in the *Maghreb* against the constant threats of the local inimical forces such as the remnants of the Rustamid/Ibādī Kharijites³ and the *Sunnī* Berber confederations, in addition to the external hazards of the Abbasids, *Sunnī* Umayyads in Andalusia who controlled nearby Morocco, and the Byzantines in Sicily, Pisa and

¹ Also called the Ismā'īlīs. They get this name from their acceptance of Ismā'īl bin Ja'far, as the divinely appointed spiritual successor (*imām*) to Ja'far Al-ṣādiq, wherein they differ from the Twelvers, who accept Mūsa Al-Kāzīm, younger brother of Ismā'īl as the true *imām*.

² *Maghreb*, refers to the Northwest African region which includes the present Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. Here, the term “*Maghreb*” is essentially used in historical sense. The Fatimids controlled most of the *Maghreb* except the western area that is presently called Morocco.

³ The Rustamid dynasty of Ibādī Kharijite Imāms ruled the central *Maghrib* for a century and a half from their capital Tahert, until destroyed by the Fatimids. Their state's extent is not entirely clear, but it stretched as far east as Jabal Nafusa in Libya. See, <http://www.fact-archive.com/encyclopedia/Rustamid>

Genoa. Following the capture of their jewel Egypt in 969 AD, and the stabilization of their state for two centuries, they succeeded in creating a great state and building a civilization which encompassed all aspects of medieval life. They invested heavily in education and *da'wah* as tools of expansion.

For the Fatimids, education and *da'wah* were inseparable; attaining knowledge and disseminating it was fundamentally a divine injunction that must be undertaken by man. They held that it was inappropriate for man to selfishly keep knowledge for himself. On the contrary, he shall spare no effort to disseminate what he knows to others because that knowledge is a trust which God consigned to him and ordained him to deliver. As such, the two-dimensional obligation of education and *da'wah* shall never cease to work whether the state was one of fear or security.⁴

Historically, the Ismā'īlī *da'wah* was instrumental in paving the way to the establishment of the Fatimid dynasty. When in power, the dynasty, unlike other dynasties before it (such as the Abbasids) did not get rid of its propaganda especially with regard to education.⁵

They considered education as a vessel which ensures the spread and survival of their dogma. The Fatimid's ambition was to extend beyond their political mastery over the *Maghreb* and Egypt and ultimately control the entire Muslim world, displacing the predominant Sunni religious and political authority. Education was one major instrument which they heavily relied upon to engineer such an ambitious plan. Thus the role played by scholars was fundamental. Many names of prominent scholars marked the religio-intellectual life during the Fatimid's rule. There is no shortage on the list of Ismā'īlī scholars and theologians, which included names

⁴ Because The Ismā'īlis of Egypt were in their own view, the *mu'minūn* (believers) as opposed to the uninitiated masses who were simply *muslimūn* (Muslims), therefore the religious call shall always continue. See, Petry F. Carl, ed. (1988). *The Cambridge History of Egypt*. Article: 'The Isma'ili Da'wa and the Fatimid Caliphate' by Paul Ernest Walker. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 140.

⁵ Calderini Simonetta, 'Cosmology and Authority in Medieval Ismailism'. *Diskus*, Vol 4, No 1 (1996), 11-22.

like *qādīal-Nu'mān*, *al-Mu'ayyad fī al-dīn al-Shīrāzī*, *abu Ya'qūb al-Sījīstānī*, and *Hamīd al-Dīn al-Kīrmanī*, who played influential roles, and contributed to the efforts of the regime's consolidation and *madhhab's* substantiation.

The mixture of education, politics and *da'wah*, shaped the identity of the Fatimid state. This threefold became vital for the survival of the caliphate to the point that no Fatimid caliph thought to do without them. That is why some researchers could not find better to describe the Ismā'īli *da'wah* than by stating that it “invites to the union of God (*tawhīd*), rational and thinking through.”⁶ For this reason, it is extremely hard to separately discuss the intellectual, political or religious role of any scholar. It is a three dimensional mélange.

Role of jurists and scholars

In the relative absence of official educational agencies which supervised, developed, and assessed the teaching and learning of pedagogical processes, medieval Muslim *shuyūkh* and *fuqaha'* (jurists) filled that vacuum and exercised authoritative influence over their students. They enjoyed extensive power to choose what, when and how to teach.

The pious scholars of Islam, men and women collectively known as the *ulamā*, were the most influential element of society in the fields of Sharia law, speculative thought and theology. Their pronouncements defined the external practice of Islam, including prayer, as well as the details of the Islamic way of life. They held strong influence over government, and especially the laws of commerce. They were not rulers themselves, but rather keepers and upholders of the rule of law.⁷

The triumph of learning and the mark of precedence between

⁶ Mustapha Ghaleb ed., *Kitāb of Rāhat Al-'Aql li Hamid Al-Dīn Al-Kīrmāni* [Book of Peace of Mind, or Comfort of Reason of Hamid Al-Dīn Al-Kīrmāni] (Beirut: Dar Al-Andalus li Al-Ṭība'ah wa Al-Nashr, 1st edn., 1967), 22.

⁷ Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam; Conscience and History in a World Civilization Vol 1*. The University of Chicago, 1974, 238

graduates were always about the personal connection one graduate got with a prominent *shaykh*. As an evidence of their authority, attestation of graduation in the Islamic middle ages was not attributed to the institution which the students attended, but was an *ijāzah* (license) that only the master scholar can grant to the students who satisfactorily completed intensive training in one particular subject or text. The name and reputation of this scholar determines the value of the graduate's *ijāzah* (diploma).

This method of learning from a teacher, who learned from his teacher, who learned from his teacher, illustrates the fundamental importance that Medieval Muslims placed on direct personal interaction between teacher and pupil. Once a scholar determined that a student has mastered a given text, he granted him (or her) an *ijāzah* certifying that he (or she) was now qualified to teach that particular text or others. In part because of the emphasis on the interpersonal, we find scholars and students travelling hundreds, even thousands of miles to study with the leading lights throughout the Medieval Islamic world.⁸

Apparently, teaching and learning in Medieval Islam was not regarded by both *shuyūkh* and *ṭullāb* as a job for the former and potential source of income after graduation for the latter. On the contrary, they took teaching and learning as a noble mission in life, which brought social veneration in this life and Allāh's reward in the other. The dedication and zeal of both was—in most cases—stimulated by the religious drive, and even by sectarian motives sometimes. They were willing to embark upon their way of education even if it gave them the minimum financial gains necessary to support life. "Education was considered a ministry within Islam and those who entered it did so out of dedication and a genuine interest in the life of the mind."⁹

⁸ James E. Lindsay, *Daily Life In The Medieval Islamic World* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1st edn., 2005), 196.

⁹ Charles Stanton, *Higher Learning in Islam: The Classical Period A.D 700-1300*. (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. 1990), 33.

The modesty of the *shuyūkh* and *tullāb* does not imply by any means negligence, and lack of genuine interest in the life of the mind from the part of the medieval Muslim *khulāfa'* (caliphs) and notables. In those ages, it was customary for Muslim states, both Sunni and *Shī'a* to manage and supervise the intellectual activities, including institutions of learning, curriculum, scholars, and students in a flexible way. For instance, intellectual life was not run by one particular office, though educational policies were largely politicized in the case of the Fatimids.

Similarly, financing educational institutions, particularly, teachers' remunerations and students' stipends had never been under one particular office of the state. The sources were more individual and less formalized. From an Islamic point of view, financing projects which target the general welfare of the community is normally based on religious and moral obligation in the first place. Such commitment conforms to the Islamic principle that wealth is from Allah and shall be spent in the way that pleases Him. However, financing education was not in any way an opportunity to totally censor the thought or reduce its freedom. Formal institutions of education never replaced persons as the focus of intellectual life.

Indeed, medieval Muslims themselves seem to have been remarkably uninterested in *where* an individual studied. The only thing that mattered was with *whom* one had studied, a qualification certified not by an institutional degree but by a personal license (*ijāza*) issued by a teacher to his pupil.¹⁰

Informal and formal instruction was available for pupils in their own homes or in the private houses of learned scholars and wealthy individuals; however, politicizing education, and the ever growing spirit of sectarian affiliation were clear signs of what would later be known as *'asr al-jumūd* (age of stagnation) of all Muslim branches of knowledge. The Fatimids territories were not spared the *taqlīd*

¹⁰ Hefner W. Robert and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, eds., "Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education" in *'Madrasas Medieval and Modern: Politics, Education, and the Problem of Muslim Identity'* by, Jonathan Berkey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 43

(imitation) which killed the spirit of *ijtihād*. However, the general trend was that:

In the golden centuries of Islam, religion encouraged freedom of inquiry. Scholarship and intellectual excellence were regarded most highly. Students were encouraged to debate their views with their teachers. Libraries, both public and private, even the courts of the caliphs and the palaces of kings were centers of open and free inquiry by scholars, who often received financial aid to pursue their interests.¹¹

The state paid salaries not only to its officials and political supporters but also to people of the religious class. This type of payment had a long history in medieval Islam and expressed the state's wish to extend its patronage over both the religious class and religious life in general. On the other hand, such payments created an ideology of disassociation from the state and its corruptive powers in some religious circles.¹²

In the Fatimid era, sources of spending on educational institutions were diverse; they ranged from donations, to grants, and pious endowments. *Imāms*¹³, *khulafa'* (caliphs), *wuzara'* (viziers), *a'yān*

¹¹ Mehdi Nakosteen, *History of Islamic Origins of Western Education* (Boulder, Colorado: University of Colorado Press, 1964), 57.

¹² Lev Yaacov, *Charity, Endowments, and Charitable Institutions in Medieval Islam*, (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2005), 14.

¹³ *Imamate* literally means 'to lead'; *al-imām* means 'the leader'. For Sunni Muslims, the term is derived from *Imām*, which refers to the leader in the Friday prayer at the mosque; any pious Muslim may function as *Imām*. The term has also been used as a synonym for caliph. The *Shī'a*, with their numerous denominations throughout history have developed specific meanings for the term. Zaydi Shiites recognize as Imam any pious descendant of 'Ali and Fatima who earns his recognition as a leader through struggle. Twelve-*Imām Shī'*adogma restricts the Imams to 'Ali, his sons Hasan and Husayn, and nine direct linear descendants of Husayn. Twelve-*Imām Shī'*adoctrine presents the *Imāms* as infallible intermediaries between the human and the divine. The continuous presence of the Imams being a prerequisite for human salvation, al-Mahdi, the last *Imām*, is considered in occultation (hidden from humanity) since 874 only to return near the end of creation as a messiah like figure. For *Ismā'īli Shī'a*, the succession of the *Imāms* breaks off from the Twelve- *Imāms*

(notables) and wealthy people have traditionally been the main contributors to these projects. Some researchers argued that the methods of expenditure on education in the Muslim world developed along the changes that Muslim educational arena witnessed. In fact, in the early phase of Islam, teaching and learning activities were regarded as part of piety; hence, conducted on a voluntary basis. Taking material compensation in return was thought to be a shameful act as far as the early phase of Islam is concerned. However, after regulating the educational activities into institutions like *maktabs*, libraries and *madrasas*, remuneration policies became regulated as well. Accordingly, teachers and administrative staff in medieval educational institutions acquired fixed salaries in exchange of their services.

It is very important to note that in Fatimid Egypt, there existed two groups of *shuyūkh* and learners. The first were Sunni master scholars who represented the Egyptian majority population. The second group represented the Ismā'īli masters and learners. Obviously, for sectarian and political reasons, the latter group was more fortunate than the former; it benefited from the state's full support and unlimited sponsoring. Certainly, the state was financing educational activities but in a non-institutionalized manner. Taking this factor into consideration, we can generally say that compensation for teaching activities in Fatimid Egypt took the following forms:

- a. Compensation coming directly from students who "agreed with the teacher upon the amount of the fee to be paid, and this was in accordance with the number of students in the group."¹⁴ This form

line with Ismā'īl, the son of Ja'far al-Sādiq. At present the Nizari subgroup of the Ismā'īlis is the only group whose members claim a living and visible Imām in the person of Shah Karim al-Husayn, Aga Khan IV. The use of the title "Imām" by the Iranian revolutionary leader Ruhollah Khomeini and by the Lebanese *Shī'a* leader Musa al-Sadr signaled a new development in Twelve- Imām Shiite doctrine, since neither could not claim to be the Hidden Imām returned, reflecting the desire to transcend the passive waiting for the reappearance of the Mahdi and promote the reincorporation of political activism into Shiite religious life. See: Lagasse Paul, Goldman Lora, Hobson Archie, R. Susan and Norton eds., *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 6th edn., 2007), 23601.

¹⁴ Goerge Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and in the West*. (Edinburgh: University Press, dn., 1981), 160.

of deals were mostly common in *maktabs*, where children received training on the Qur'an and some principles of the religion. The financial package that the *mu'addibs* earned in *maktabs* was generally meager, in contrast to the lucrative salaries that their fortunate colleagues may earn once they obtained the chance to tutor the children of wealthy or influential families.

- b. Compensation from donations and grants accorded to the learning institutions by princes, viziers, and wealthy philanthropists. As stated earlier, this practice developed later on to the appropriation of pious endowments. George Makdisi attests that wealthy men and princes volunteered to spend on *kuttābs*, and endowed them with properties to survive.¹⁵
- c. "Pensions were offered by the sovereign to juris-consults, learned men generally and students."¹⁶

To manipulate popular support, man and women from the Fatimid court financed the three brackets of education; professors, students and physical structures in lavish extravagance. Interestingly, the Fatimid caliph, in person, supervised the discharge of monthly professional salaries for professors, *du'āt* and learned men.

In addition to the social status and prestige, scholars were also honoured and rewarded by the state. Al-Maqrīzi's second volume of *al-Khitat*, pages, 401 - 402, and al-Qalqashandi's third volume of *Subhal-A'sha*, pages, 525 - 526 provided information of great value on financial wages of important office-bearers in the Fatimid state, they were fixed as follows:

Viziers earned 5000 dīnārs monthly. Children of viziers, earned from 200 to 300 dīnārs monthly. *kātib al-dast al-sharīf* (clerk of the honored bench) earned 150 monthly. *sāhib al-bāb* (master of the gate, or, caliph's door keeper) earned 120 dīnārs monthly. *qādī al-quḍāt*

¹⁵ Ahmad Fuad Al-Ahwani, *Al-Tarbiyah fi Al-Islam* [Education in Isla]. (Cairo: Dār Al-Ma'arif, 1980), 103.

¹⁶ Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 162.

(chief judge), *dā'i al-du'āt* (chief missionary)..., *al-ustādhūn al-muhannakūn* (princes of the palace, wearing distinctive turbans that are wound under the chin), *sāhibbayt al-māl* (chief of the treasury), *hāmil al-risāla* (the message carrier), and *sāhib al-daftar* (the director of the palace offices), earned all 100 dīnārs. *Sāhib al-sayf* (the master of the sword), *sāhib al-Rumh* (the master of the spear), and *ra'is diwān al-nadhar* (chief of the bureau of inspection), earned all 70 dīnārs. *al-tabīb al-khās* (royal private physician), and *ra'is diwān al-tahqīq* (chief of the bureau of investigation), both earned 50 dīnārs. *Ra'is diwān al-majlis* (chief of the bureau of council), earned 40 dīnārs. *Al-wā'idh bi al-masjid* (the preacher in the mosque) and *shā'ir al-khalīfa* (the poet of the caliph), earned between 10 to 20 dīnārs monthly. Other physicians, who worked in the court, earned 10 dīnārs.¹⁷

The generous patronage of learning activities by the Fatimids was driven by the conviction that learning and money could buy influence and loyalty; thus, they used both to the edge in their ultimate aim to transform the Egyptian population into Ismailism.

The Fatimid royal family amassed immense wealth and held vast properties. Special administrative organs dealt with the management of the private property of the imam and other members of the family.¹⁸

To attract people to their mosques and disseminate their *da'wah*, the Fatimid court, in coordination with the institution of *da'wah* overdid in decorating and furnishing mosques. *Al-Hākim's* mosque for example was excessively decorated.

¹⁷ Abdullah Abd Al-Daim, *Al-Tarbiyah 'abra Al-Tārikh: Min Al-'Usūr Al-QadīmahhattaAwā'il Al-Qarn Al-'Eshrīn*[Education across History: From the Ancient Ages up to the Twentieth Century]. (Beirut: Dār Al-'Ilm li Al-Malayeen.1973), 170.

¹⁸ Yaacov Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, (E.J.Brill, Leiden. New York. Kobenhaven, Kolen 1991), 65.

In Jumada II of this year he resolved to furnish the mosque which bears the name of Hakim's mosque. A preliminary estimate of the cost of the lamps, chains, mats, etc. came to 5,000 pieces of gold. Early in Ramadan he presented a *tannūr* of large candelabrum to the old Mosque in Fustat. This *tannūr* weighed 100,000 drams and had 1,200 lights... the Khalif presented the mosque at the same time with 1,290 copies of the Qur'an, some of which were written in letters of gold.¹⁹

Historians held that the state's possession of the learning institutions was a step towards its full control and manipulation of education. Similarly, many historians reported that commitment to learning was a central element in the Fatimid culture.

As it was the case of *al-mu'izz li-dīnillāh al-fātimi*, who limited learning in al-Azhar for the teaching of *fiqh* (law) according to the Fatimid *madhhab*, religious Fatimid doctrine, philosophy and *tawhīd* (theology). For this purpose, he assigned thirty senior professors and jurists of his time. He gave them generously and built luxurious homes for them which later on have been annexed to al-Azhar and became part of its galleries. They commenced to teach and develop more profound knowledge according to Fatimid *madhhab* and teachings.²⁰

It is not strange that the Fatimid court paid attention to learning and learned men; they were aware that only through the tireless efforts of their early *du'āt* in Egypt before the establishment of their state, the ideological foundation was laid down, and the way was paved for military commanders to invade Egypt and set up the Fatimid caliphate. The interest in the intertwined *da'wah*-learning activities continued with the same zeal and enthusiasm even after their political

¹⁹ De Lacy O'Leary, *A Short History of the Fatimid Khalifate* (London: Routledge, 2nd edn., 2000), 167.

²⁰ Muhammad Abd Al-Mun'im Khafaji, *Al-Azhar fi Alfī 'Ām* [The Azhar in One Millennium]. (Cairo: 'Ālam Al-Kutub, Maktabat Al-Kulliyah Al-Azhariyah, 2nd edn, 1988), Vol 1, 28.

and military victory. Interestingly, many contemporary Ismā'īlī thinkers attribute the success of their *madhhab* and its large-scale dissemination in the middle ages to the encouragement that the *imāms* accorded to education and intellectual activities. This strategy was summarized by Arif Tamer,

The reason that prompted the Fatimids to support learning and learned men is found in the Fatimid *mazhab*. The latter was essentially based on knowledge and action of the intellect in every aspect. By means of knowledge, argumentation, and debates, the Fatimid teachings were disseminated throughout the Muslim world and Egyptian territories in particular.²¹

The Ismā'īlī *da'wah* relied heavily on the debating skills of the *du'āt*, as well as the dictation method that they followed, and the huge amount of knowledge they carried. In fact:

The Fatimid *du'āt* were authorities not only in their respective religious knowledge of *fiqh*, *hadīth*, *tafsīr*, and *ta'wīl*, they exceeded that intellectual boundaries, to master principles of the other old doctrines altogether, Jewish, Christian and pagan. Equally, the Fatimid have not forgotten other disciplines such as the Arabic language and what is related to it, from narrating, explaining and criticizing the classic Arabic literary. These sciences were advancing side by side with other disciplines, and were undertaken by scholars and learned men in Egypt. The latter became like the *ka'bah* (direction) to whom seekers of knowledge from other Muslim region have sought in order to benefit from their knowledge and quote from them.²²

In the meantime, some historians think that the literal prescription of Ismā'īlī scholars to their *mazhab* and the dogmatic restriction of *ta'wīl* to some limited circles and elites, who exclusively drew the

²¹ Aref Tame, *Tārīkh Al-Ismā'īliyah* [History of Isma'ilism] (Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes li Al-Kutubwa Al-Nashr. 1st edn., 1991) Vol.2. 184.

²² Ibid.

scope of what is allowed, approved, and recommended for learners, have indeed led to the spread of *taqlīd* (imitation) that killed the spirit of *ijtihād* and ultimately led to stagnation. Meanwhile, the rigorous activity of the agency of Ismā'īlī *da'wah* “contributed to the creation of a new discipline that was called *ādāb al-bahth* (art of research), that many books were written about its rules. Assemblies of thought, debates, and argumentation became widespread.”²³

Qādi al-Nu'mān: A biography

He is *Abu Hanīfah al-Nu'mān b. Abi 'Abdillāh Muhammad b. Manṣūr b. Ahmad b. Hayūn al-Tamīmi al-Ismā'īlī al-Maghribi*. He was a great Ismā'īlī jurist, historian and theoretician of the early Fatimids in North Africa and Egypt. *al-Qādi al-Nu'mān* (as he was known), appears to have sprung from *amāliki* school in Qairawān, adopting the Ismā'īlī faith early in life after the conversion²⁴ of ‘his father to Ismaili shi'ism before the establishment of the Fatimid state in (296/909). *Al-Nu'mān* himself joined the service of the Fatimids in (313/925).²⁵ The exact date of his birth is not known, but it is probable that he was born in the last decades of the third century of the Islamic Lunar calendar (*al-tārīkh al-hijrī*). His connections with the Fatimids began when he entered the service of *imāmal-Mahdī* (the first Fatimid Caliph), and continued to work for him for the last nine years of his life (313-322 AH). Thereafter, he served *imāmal-Qā'im* (the Second Fatimid Caliph) for the whole of his life. During the time of this *imām*, *al-Nu'mān* was concerned chiefly with the study of history, philosophy, jurisprudence, and the composition of his numerous works. Just prior to *imām al-Qā'im's* death, which occurred in 946 AD / 335 AH, *al-Nu'mān* was appointed as a *Qādi*

²³ Muhammad Abd Al-Mun'im Khafaji, *Al-Azhar fi Alfī 'Ām* [The Azhar in One Millennium]. (Beirut, Lebanon, Cairo: 'Ālam Al-Kutub, Maktabat Al-Kulliyah Al-Azhariyah, 2nd edn., 1988), 34.

²⁴ Although some other medieval biographical dictionaries such as Ibn Khalikan's “*Wafayāt al – ay'ān*” suggest that *al-Nu'mān* converted from *māliki* Sunnism to Twelver Sh'ism, an assertion found in many other sources. See, Hamdani , *Between Revolution and the State*. 47.

²⁵ Hamdani Sumaiya, *Between Revolution and State*, Qadi al-Nu'man and the Construction of Fatimid Legitimacy. (I.B.Tauris Publishers. London. New York in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies London. 2006), 46.

(judge). His rank was further elevated during the time of *imāmal-Manṣūr* (the third Fatimid Caliph) and he reached the zenith at the time of *imām al-Mu'izz*(d. 365 AH). During the reign of the latter, *al-Nu'mān* became the highest judicial functionary of the Fatimid state and one of the most important figures in the hierarchy of the *da'wah*.²⁶

Because of *al-Nu'mān's* self-motivation and the support rendered to him by the Fatimid *imāms* -who themselves were considered as treasures of knowledge and wisdom- he was able to writeoeuvres, believed to be 44 works in different fields of knowledge.

According to the Ismaili tradition, he wrote nothing without consulting the Imams. Nu'man tells us in his, 'Majālis-wal'-Musāerat' “, the Imam al-Mu'izz often used to invite me to address the people on the knowledge of the Fatimid Faith. I used to write books and read them to the Imam, chapter by chapter, before I read them to the people. At one time Al-Mu'izz gave me the subject matter of a book in nut-shell and explained to me everything that pertained to this matter to my fullest satisfaction.²⁷

Eventually, we can conclude that *Qādī al-Nu'mān* was the father of both, the Ismā'īli jurisprudence and the official history of the Fatimid caliphate. He faithfully served four Fatimid caliphs until he died in old Cairo in the year of 974 AD / 363 AH. As a gesture of respect to the devoted believer and servant of the Ismā'īli cause, caliph *al-Mu'izz* in person led the funeral prayer.²⁸ Such prestige and stature was evidenced in the fact that “his sons and other relatives continued to hold important positions in the Fatimid state,”²⁹ after his death.

²⁶ See, Daftary, ed. (1996). *Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought*, Article 'Al-Qadi Al-Nu'man and Isma'ili Jurisprudence', by Ismail. K. Poonawala, 117-143.

²⁷ Asaf A. A. Fyzee, Qadi an-Nu'man, <http://www.ismaili.net/hero/hero8.html>

²⁸ Hamdani Sumaiya, 132.

²⁹ Hamdani. 47.

Qādi al-Nu'mān: The teacher, the missionary and the theoretician

Islam value prized knowledge and attributed great significance to it. The *'ulama* are regarded as heirs and successors of the prophets.³⁰ Historically, the learned man enjoyed prestigious stature within the society.

The bearer of knowledge was naturally honored in a society which showed great reverence to knowledge itself. The person of a scholar was regarded as a blessing from God for the whole world and even the fishes in the water and birds in the air mourn his death along with mankind.³¹

In such sublime distinction, learning and learners were elevated by the Islamic tradition. Seeking knowledge was an unmatched honorable task that does not require forcible effort from the state. On the contrary, it was regarded as a genuine individual right and individuals were free to choose what, when, and where to learn. If assessed by the devotion of scholars and *tullāb* in the pursuit of knowledge and its dissemination, such liberal, informal and flexible traditions of teaching and learning in the early and medieval Muslim world were extensively successful.

Al-Nu'mān was a distinguished scholar who enjoyed a special place in the Fatimid annals. He was a seminal figure in the

³⁰ Related by Ahmad al-Dīnī al-Tīmī, Abu Dawūd, Ibn Mājāh and Ibn Hibbān. Abu al-Dardānarrated, "I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) saying, 'Whoever treads a path seeking knowledge, Allah will make easy for him the path to Paradise. Indeed, the Angels lower their wings for the seeker of knowledge out of contentment for the seeker of knowledge. Verily, all those in the heavens and on earth, even the fish in the depths of the sea ask forgiveness for him. Verily, the virtue of the scholar over the worshipper is like the virtue of the moon on the night of al-Badr over all of the stars. Indeed, the scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets, for the Prophets do not leave behind dinar or dirham for inheritance, but rather, they leave behind knowledge. And he who acquires it, has in fact acquired an abundant portion.'"

³¹ Munir-ud-Din, 'Muslim Education and the Scholar's Social Status up to the 5th Century Muslim Era (11th Century Christian Era) in the Light of Ta'rikh Baghdad, 194.

Ismā'īlimazhab, as well as a founder of their legal system. *Al-Nu'mān* did not just execute his duties as a *qādi*, a *dā'i* or a teacher for the Fatimid *imāms*, he was on top of all of that, the supreme guru of the ismā'īli law. This was culminated in the decision of *al-mu'izz* to adopt *da'āimal-Islam* as the official Fatimid Code.³² In fact “*al-Nu'mān* who had faithfully served the first four *imāms* and composed massive legal works with their explicit approval, was finally commissioned by the fourth caliph *al-Mu'izz* to compile his *da'āim Islam*... which was given official recognition”.³³ He was a prolific and versatile scholar, and during his life time, he wrote many intellectual books, although most of them are now lost. The Ismā'īlī trend of keeping their most important intellectual works at a very high level of secrecy and limiting their access to *khaṣah al-khaṣah* (the special of the special ones) could have contributed to the loss of many of *al-Nu'mān*'s works. Another reason could be the persecution endured by the Ismā'īlis after the fall of their state in Egypt. The historians of this period agreed unanimously that Ṣalāh al-Dīn had laid out a well coordinated plan to wipe out the Ismā'īli influence in Egypt. They were a combination of political, military and educational measures which included among other things, the removal of Ismā'īlī judges from their offices and the disposal of the *Shī'a* books. The historical sources reported that:

When the Kurd Ṣalāh al-Dīn won power in Egypt, he was quite happy at finding the Fatimid libraries, for they offered a means to pay his soldiers, and he dismembered the collections with few scruples, as he meant to cleanse the premises of Shiism. All that remained in the caliphal book-cases was 120.000 volumes, and the collection was still considered “one of the wonders of the world.”³⁴

As stated earlier, *al-Nu'mān* was a versatile scholar who wrote many

³² Ismail. K. Poonawala, “Al-Qadi Al-Nu'man and Isma'ili Jurisprudence”, in Daftary, ed. *Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought*, (1996), 118.

³³ Ibid, 119.

³⁴ Polastron X. Lucieu, *Books on Fire; The Destruction of Libraries throughout History*, Translation by Graham John (Rochester, Vermont (USA): Inner Traditions, 1stedn., 2007), 63.

books in various fields of Ismā'īli Islamic theology and jurisprudence. They could be classified into *fiqh* (law), *munāẓara* (controversy), *ta'wīl* (allegorical interpretation of the Qur'an), *haqā'iq* (esoteric philosophy), *'aqā'id* (dogmas), *akhbār and sīra* (tradition and biography), *tārīkh* (history) and *wa'z* (sermons).³⁵ The most famous is his prominent work, *da'āimal-Islam* (The Pillars of Islam), and his historical account related to the establishment of the Fatimid caliphate entitled, *kitāb iftiṭāh al-da'wah wa-ibtidā' al-dawlah* (Book on the Inception of the *da'wah* and Establishment of the Reign), *ikhtilāf uṣul al-madhāhib* (Book on the Differences in the Principles of the Legal Schools), *kitāb al-majālis wa'l-musāyārāt ma'aal-Mu'izz li-dīni Allāh* (The Book of Audiences and Rides with *al-Mu'izz li-dīni Allāh*) and *kitāb al-himmah fī adāb atbā' al-a'imma* (The Book of Zeal Concerning the Etiquette of the Followers of the *Imāms*)³⁶, and a compilation of legal *hadīths* called *kitāb al-'idāh* (Book of Elucidation), written when he was serving *imāmal-Mahdi*. Also, *kitāb al-ikhtisār li ṣahīh al-āthar 'an al-a'imma al-athār* (Summary of the Traditions Related from the Pure Imams). To refute the legal views of the rival Sunni 'ulama in *fiqh*, *al-Nu'mān* wrote *al-risālah al-misriyyah fī al-radd 'ala al-Shāfi'i* (The Egyptian Epistle in Refutation of al-Shāfi'i) and *al-risālah zāt al-bayān fī al-radd 'ala ibn Qutaibah* (Epistle in Refutation of ibn Qutaibah) as well as *kitāb ikhtilāf al-mazāhib* (Book on Differences in the Principles of Legal Schools). His legal writings were culminated in his master piece *da'āimal-Islam*.

Da'āimal-Islam is “an exposition of the Fatimid jurisprudence. The work that was finally completed during the reign of the fourth caliph, al-Mu'izz li-dīn Allāh (r. 953-975 CE/ 341-365 AH), was accepted in its time as the official code of the Fatimid state, and serves

³⁵ Fyzee A. A, Qadi an-Nu'man, <http://www.ismaili.net/hero/hero8.html>

³⁶ For further information on the writings of *qādi al-Nu'mān*, see: The Founder of Cairo: The Fatimide Imam-Caliph al-Mu'izz and his Era (An English translation of the text on al-Mu'izz from Idrīs 'Mād al-Dīn's 'Uyun al-Akhbār. Translated with annotations by Shainool Jiwa (I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2013), 88-99. Also see, Professor Wladimir Ivanow, “Guide to the Ismaili Literature”, *Royal Asiatic society*, 1933.

to this day as the primary source of law (*sharia*) for some Mustaali Isma'ili communities, especially the Tayyibis. Iran has incorporated Daim-ul-Islam into their constitution."³⁷

Besides being the book of the Ismā'īlī Law, *da'āimal-Islam* "represented the isma'ili theory of the state."³⁸ It intellectually and religiously documented the most important pillar of the state; *al-walayah*, *ahl al-zikr*, *uli'l-amr* and imamate to legitimate the Fatimid claim for the political leadership of the *ummah*. Indeed "Da'im represents not only the paramount divine constitution of the Fatimid state but also its civil constitution."³⁹

It is crucial to mention here that while introducing his books and explaining the circumstances in which they were written, *al-Nu'mān* stressed on the fact that they were produced in light of ideas, guidance and editing from Ismā'īlī *imāms*, for the latter were divinely granted exclusive rights to interpret the Qur'an and were regarded as an ultimate repository of 'ilm and *hikmah*. *imāms'* consent and endorsement of any religious script renders it legitimate in the eyes of the faithful, a matter that *Qādī al-Nu'mān* was keen to observe and remind his readers all the time. It was also a form of propaganda "which would rally men to the cause of the imam and thus contribute to the implementation of their doctrines."⁴⁰ In reference to his *kitāb al-ikhtisār li ṣahīh al-āthar 'an al-a'imma al-athār* he "states that not only did he consult the caliph regularly while composing this work but the caliph himself also scrutinized the whole book, made several corrections and suggested its title. Al-Mu'izz then permitted him to relate the whole book on his authority and that of his forefathers."⁴¹

Many scholars highlighted the significance of *al-Nu'mān's*

³⁷ Refer to Fyze, Asaf A. A. *The Book of Faith: Translated from the 'Da'im al-Islam' of Qadi Nu'man*. Bombay: Nachiketa Publication Ltd., 1974.; *Brief History of the Life of Syedna Qadi Nauman*, by Shaikh Saifuddin Rashid

³⁸ Poonwala, 127.

³⁹ Wadad al-Qadi, "An Early Fatimid," 104, mentioned in Poonwala, 127.

⁴⁰ Ann K.S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam: An Introduction to the Study of Islamic Political Thought: The Jurists*. (Routledge, 2013), 290.

⁴¹ Poonwala, 127.

da'āimal-Islām to the Ismā'īli jurisprudence. According to Sumaiya Hamdani, the book has been characterized as a well-organized dogmatic presentation of the tenets of Ismā'īli positive law.⁴² Others, like Poonwala claimed that *Qādī al-Nu'mān* was in fact the father of the 'Ismā'īlī Law' without rival, "Ismā'īlī law began with Nu'mān and ended with him. Before him, there was no independent Ismā'īlī Law and what came after him was nothing but repetition and restatement."⁴³ In fact, we can assuredly say that *Qādī al-Nu'mān* was not only a father for the Ismā'īlī Law, he was to a large extent a reflection of that type of medieval holistic Islami scholar, who dwelled on different fields of knowledge.

In medieval Islam, the sciences, which included philosophy, were viewed holistically. The individual scientific disciplines were approached in terms of their relationships to each other and the whole, as if they were branches of a tree. In this regard, the most important scientists of Islamic civilization have been the polymaths, known as *hakim* or sages. Their role in the transmission of the sciences was central."⁴⁴

It is very hard to draw a fine line to separate the roles undertook by the '*ālim* in his society's affairs, and the different disciplines or fields of specialization. The medieval '*ālim* could be on top of his vast religious knowledge a historian, a philosopher, an astronomer, a poet, a physician, a judge, a teacher, and even a vizier in some cases. *Qādī al-Nu'mān* was not an exception to the practices of his time. He was active in many fields of knowledge, and held many executive portfolios in the Fatimid bureaucracy. Probably the position of *Qādī* was the most agglutinating to his name.

In addition to the legal and political significance of the title *Qādī*, it also carried prominent intellectual and scholastic distinction. *Imām al-Qā'im* handed the paramount post of *Qādī al-Qudāt* (chief judge) over Ifrīqiya to *al-Nu'mān* in 336/948, a sensitive office

⁴² Hamdani Sumaiya, *Between Revolution and State*, 63.

⁴³ Daftary, ed. *Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought*, 132.

⁴⁴ Seyed Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*. (Harvard University Press, 1968), 41.

usually bestowed only upon trusted men of knowledge and virtue. “The Fatimid *Qādi’l-Qudāt* generally had jurisdiction over all the territories held by the Fatimids... the *Qādi*’s competence can be extended to include religious attributions such as leadership of the prayers and administration of mosques and sanctuaries, as well as extraordinary attributions such as directorships of the mint (*dar al-darb*) inspectorate of the standard of weights and measures (*mi’yār*) and supervision of the administration of the treasury, (*bayt al-māl*). He could also be invested with attributions of extraordinary jurisdiction such as inspectorate of the *mazālim* of the *hisbah*.”⁴⁵ Usually, “Both the chief *qādi* (*qādi’l-quḍāt*) and the professor of law were scholars of the religious law.”⁴⁶ In his capacity as a chief judge, he was ruling in accordance with the *sharī’a* law, and had a jurisdiction over all legal matters involving Muslims. While delivering his duties, *Qādī al-Nu’mān* was doing two functions, making *Ismā’īli* laws and implementing those laws.

“*Al-Nu’mān* was further charged with supervising the *mazālim* (complaints) and ‘matters related to the royal entourage,...the various classes of the caliph’s bondsmen, [and] the soldiers stationed in the capital. ...In addition to this, he was also authorized by the caliph to hold the *majālis al-hikmah*”⁴⁷ (sessions of wisdom) every Friday following the noon prayer, in the royal palace to instruct the Ismaili congregation in the religious sciences of the *da’wa*, especially the *batini*”⁴⁸ (esoteric) sciences.”⁴⁹ Caliph *al-Mu’izz* himself issued an

⁴⁵ Islamic Law (RLE Politics of Islam): Social and Historical Contexts , edited Aziz al Azmeh, Routledge Library Editions; *Politics of Islam*, Amin Haji (Institut of Ismaili Studies) Institutions of Justice in Fatimid Egypt, 200.

⁴⁶ Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 155.

⁴⁷ The *majālis* (séances) of learning literature, which represent an extensive collection of lectures given by *dā’is*. The collection comprises segments in doctrine, history, contemporary social issues and problems. The most famous works of this school are *Kitāb al-Majālis wal-Musāyarāt* (The Book of Sessions and Excursions) and *Kitāb al-Majālis al-Mu’ayyidiya* (Book of Mu’ayyid Sessions).

⁴⁸ SessionsThe *bātin* (esoteric) literature that is based on esoteric interpretation of *haqā’iq* Works of famous *dā’is*, such as, AbūYa’qūb al-Sijistāni, Ja’far b. Mansūr al-Yamān, Hamid al-Dīn al-Kirmani and AbūHātim al-Rāzi represent most significant literature of this school.

⁴⁹ To that end, Paul E. Walker’s recent *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources* (London, 2002) reviews the source material for the study of

official proclamation of *al-Nu'mān's* duties. The latter's "edict clearly states that al-Nu'mān was given wide authority and his jurisdiction extended to every case wherein the *mazalim* matters were brought to him directly or as an appeal from any corner of the domain."⁵⁰ In medieval Islam, judgeship required looking into all complaints of religious nature. Hence, it was bestowed on individual *faqih*s who possessed extensive *shari'ah* knowledge. Still, it is quite difficult to consider such an office purely religious; the notions of *dīnī* (religious) and *dunyawī* (worldly) were hardly separated. In any case, the *qādi's* office during the Fatimid reign was sponsored and monitored by the caliph/*imam*, and the *qādi* was directly designated by him.

Historical sources⁵¹ inform that *Qādī al-Nu'mān* used to hold teaching sessions every Friday after the congregational prayer at the al-Azhar mosque⁵² until the 'asr prayer, profiting from the gathering of a big crowd of people at that particular time. The main purpose behind *al-Nu'mān's* sessions was to slowly disseminate the legal doctrine of *ahl al-Bayt* among the masses, in the hope that it will gradually become the leading legal doctrine of the state. According to the Ismā'īlī classification of knowledge, these teaching sessions belonged to *zāhir* (exoteric) learning, a lower ranked religious knowledge in comparison to the higher *bātin* (esoteric) *haqāiq* knowledge.⁵³

Fatimid history in particular, and provides a valuable bibliography of primary and secondary sources on the Fatimids. See also Daftary's *Isma'ili Literature: A Bibliography of Sources and Studies* (London, 2004). Reported in Sumaiya Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State*, 47.

⁵⁰ Farhad Daftary (ed.), *Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought*, (Cambridge University Press, 1996); Poonawala, *Al-Qadi al-Nu'man and Isma'ili Jurisprudence*, 120.

⁵¹ Refer to Farhad Daftary's *Isma'ili Literature*, Sumaiya Hamdani "Between Revolution and State" and Heinz Halm, *The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning*".

⁵² Founded by the Fatimid Ismaili Caliph, Imam Mu'izz li-Din Allah in newly built city capital of Cairo in 969-973 CE. The mosque was named Fatima *al-Zahra*, the daughter of the Prophet and the wife of the first Shi'a Imam, 'Ali, from whom the Fatimids claimed direct descent.

⁵³ For further info on the Ismā'īlī classification of religious knowledge, see : Wilferd Madelung, *Aspects of Ismaili Theology: The Prophetic Chain and the God Beyond*

Teaching at al-Azhar, the first mosque erected by the Fatimids in Egypt, was another indication of the special position that *qādīal-Nu'mān* enjoyed in the religio-intellectual sphere of his time. Until the reign of *al-Hākim bi-Amr Allāh* (386/996-411/1021 C.E.) al-Azhar was in the eyes of the Fatimid caliphs, an exclusive seat of learning and a symbol of authority through which they interacted with their subjects. They accorded it special care and spent on it from both, state public treasury and their personal wealth.

Apart from his prolific status in the Fatimid legal echelon *Qādī al-Nu'mān* excelled in the sensitive field of *Ismā'īli da'wah* (propaganda). He was a *dā'i* by sectarian affiliation, and *dā'i al-du'āt*⁵⁴ by hierarchical ranking, a position bestowed only on the most committed devotees in the *Ismā'īli* propaganda machinery.

In the *Ismā'īli* clerical hierarchy the term *dā'i* was formally used to refer to important religious leaders other than the hereditary *imāms*. From its early years, *da'wah* was considered integral for an *Ismā'īli* faith which regards the *imām* as Godly appointed head. The latter, whether an *asās* (founder), *mustaqar* (permanent), or *mustawda'* (temporarily entrusted) occupied the highest rank and was privileged with the right for *ta'wīl*. Second to the *imām* was *al-hujjah*⁵⁵ (the proof) who represented and deputized him in unattainable regions. Third in their hierarchical order was *dā'i al-du'āt*. By such glorification given to their *imāms*, *hujjahs* and *du'āt*, the *Ismā'īlis* created a matchless hierarchy of religious ranking which never existed in the mainstream Sunni Islam. "Though it is widely assumed that Sunni Islam does not have an equivalent to the Christian ecclesiastical hierarchy, Shi'i groups such as the medieval Ismailis did have an organized teaching, spiritual and temporal

Being. Also see, Aziz Esmail and Azim Nanji, *The Ismailis in History. Ismaili Contributions to Islamic Culture*, eds. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1977), Imperial Iranian, Academy of Philosophy, Tehran

⁵⁴ Asaf.A. A Fyzee (Annotator). *da'āimal-Islamof qādī al-Nu'mān*. (Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo, 1963), 11.

⁵⁵ A Qur'anic term, meaning both 'proof' and 'presentation of proof' In *Shī'a* Islam, it designates Prophets and *Imāms* as 'proofs' of God's presence on earth. In the *Ismā'īli da'wah* of the pre-Fatimid and Fatimid periods, it was also applied to senior *dā'is*, and in the Alamut period of *Ismā'īli* history, it came to be applied to those representing the *Imām*.

hierarchy.”⁵⁶

The chief *dā'i* in this hierarchy represented the will of the Fatimid authorities and the caliph himself. In the fourth chapter of his academic piece, *The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning*, Heinz Halm quotes Ibn al-Tuwayr⁵⁷ who revealed the extreme importance of the rank and role of *dā'i al-Du'āt* in Fatimid state in Egypt:

The *dā'i al-Du'āt* immediately follows the *qādi al-quḍāt* in rank and wears the same attire and other insignia. He has to know the entire jurisprudence of the holy family (*madhāhib ahl al-bayt*) and hold lectures about it; he must administer the oath (*'ahd*) to anyone converting from his own *madhhab* to their *madhhab*. He has twelve stewards (*nuqaba'*) of the faithful under his command; in addition, he has deputies (*nuwwāb*) in all cities like deputy judges. The jurists of the dynasty (*fuqaha' al-dawla*) appear before him...He holds sessions in the palace to read it out to the faithful, and he does this at two different places: for the men on the pulpit of the mission (*kursi al-da'wa*) in the great hall (*al-īwān al-Kabīr*), and for the women in the room (*majlis*) of the *dā'i*, one of the largest and most spacious buildings in the palace.⁵⁸

Profiting from his affiliation to the Ismā'īlī *da'wah*, and due to his early ranking and promotion later as a *dā'I* and *dā'ial-du'āt* respectively, *qādi al-Nu'mān* got the privilege of frequently meeting the royal *imāms*. He worked under the direct patronage of four of them; a position which allowed him further access to the ruling elites.

Despite their political and military might, the Fatimids faced the thorny domestic challenge of their population that was

⁵⁶ Calderini Simonetta, 'Cosmology and Authority in Medieval Ismailism', 11-22.

⁵⁷ Ibn Al-Tuwayr was a high-ranking official and historian of the late Fatimid period [1130-1220 AD].

⁵⁸ Heinz Halm, *The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning*, (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Limited in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1st edn., 1997), 48.

predominantly *Sunni*, and often hostile towards the minority Ismā'īlis. *Qādi al-Nu'mān* and other Fatimid *da'wah* apparatus were fully aware of that fact and adopted a strategy which included among many measures maintaining Ismā'īli confidential knowledge and limiting its access. To accentuate the deep disdain that *Sunni* scholars, jurists, and public harbored towards the Ismā'īlis, branded as *ghulāt* (heretical exaggerators), *al-Nu'mān* in particular – probably acting under Fatimid *imāms'* commands – adopted a *da'wah* reconciliatory approach which tried hard to win the hearts and minds of the *Sunnis* and avoid inflaming them against the authorities.

To serve that purpose *Qādi al-Nu'mān* wrote *kitāb al-himma fi adāb atbā' al-a'imma*. It provided “something of a blueprint ideological basis that informed relations between the Fatimid *imām*-caliph and his subjects.”⁵⁹ In the introduction of the book *al-Nu'mān* states that:

The purpose of his work is to instruct all the followers/subjects of the state in the proper forms of obedience to the *imām*. Some of these followers, of course, come from the elites of the Ismā'īli community, but many are clearly non-Ismā'īli employees of the Fatimid state or members of society who are nevertheless expected, on some level, to view their new rulers as *imams*.⁶⁰

It is clear that *Qādi al-Nu'mān* in particular, and the Ismā'īlis in general were convinced that a limited effort that focused on formulating an ideology only would not by any means guarantee the survival or the expansion of the Ismā'īli *da'wah*, the more practical business was to find an effective strategy of disseminating it. One fundamental principle in *al-Nu'mān's da'wah* strategy was his persistence on utilizing the concept of devotion to the *imāms*.

Those who are well acquainted with the true position of the Imams and have a firm faith in their Imamatus, look upon the duties they owe to them and obedience to their

⁵⁹ Al-Numan, *Kitāb al-Himma fi adab atba' al-a'imma*, ed. M. Kamil Hsayn (Cairo, 1948), 33-36. Cited in Hamdani *Between Revolution and State*, 113.

⁶⁰ Hamdani Sumaiya, *Between Revolution and State*, 116.

commands as the duties enjoined on them by God. They should have a greater regard for the glory and sublimity of the Imams than the followers and the officeholders of the temporal kings have for their masters. They should stand in greater awe of the Imams than these officers stand in awe of their kings. God has laid down in His Holy Book that it is our duty to obey them. He has associated the devotion to the Imams with devotion to Him and devotion to the Prophet by saying "Obey God, the Prophet and your Spiritual Leaders."⁶¹

In the same book *Qādī al-Nu'mān* elaborated on the qualities that every *dā'i* shall possess in order to deliver his duties.

In case of the 'daa-ee' his first and foremost duty is to live in strict adherence to the principles laid down by his faith. He should be pious to the extreme and he should carry on the propaganda with skill and prudence. God says to His Prophet "Invite the people to the path of your Lord by using your discretion and preaching to them in the best possible manner." Not unlike the Prophet, the 'daa-ee' is expected to be very discrete in his propaganda. He should maintain contact with the people and he should know all those whom he intends to preach from man to man. He should study their minds and sort them out according to their intelligence. He should deal with them individually and preach to every one of them according to his intelligence and his power of assimilation. He should know how to approach him and how to infuse his ideas into his mind.⁶²

Unfortunately, we do not know much about *al-Nu'mān*'s guidelines with regard to the more significant rank of *dā'i al-Du'āt*, but we can assume that in such momentous position the person must be versatile,

⁶¹ Abū Ḥanīfah Nu'mān ibn Muḥammad, Transl, Jawad Muscati. Selections from Qazi Noaman's *Kitab-ul-Himma Fi Adabi Ataba-el-a'emma*; Code of Conduct for the Followers of Imam Ismailia Association W. Pakistan, 1950. Original from: the University of Michigan. Digitized: 2 Jul 2009), 17.

⁶² Ibid, 135.

and have;

Extensive educational qualifications, combined with extraordinary moral and intellectual attributes, as well as excellent organizational abilities. He needed to have sufficient knowledge of the *zāhir* and *bātin* to be able to explain them to many different types of people on various intellectual levels. He was also often trained in jurisprudence. He was expected to be knowledgeable not only in the Koran, but well versed in other non-religious subjects such as philosophy and history, as well as the teachings of non-Islamic religions. In total, the supreme *dā'i* was a highly learned and cultured individual.⁶³

Flexibility and pragmatism were two peculiar aspects of the Ismā'īli *da'wah*. Although in power, the Ismā'īli *imāms* and their ruling elite were cautious in dealing with their *Sunni* subjects. One important guideline of their domestic policy was to be firm, yet to avoid and prevent confrontation with the predominantly *Sunni* public, the *'ulamā* in particular.

The *Sunni ulamā* were very often the prime focus of the Fatimid intervention in Egyptian society. Given their presence and influence in both mosque and marketplace, this should be no surprise. Unlike the now discredited officials of the *dīwān*, the *ulamā* had roots of ancient provenance among the Muslim masses.⁶⁴

To counter the high defiance of the *Sunni ulamā*, Ismā'īli *du'āt* used different styles of debate and persuasion. The mechanisms of argumentation varied according to the prevailing state of affairs. Hence, they never adopted one single formula to address the community.

The Ismā'īli missionaries brought a message of comfort

⁶³ Anderson Bill, 'Great Libraries Centers of Civilization: Dar al-'Ilm, The House of Knowledge in Cairo', *Rosicrucian Digest*, Vol 84, 1 (2006), 8-13.

⁶⁴ Gellens Sam Isaac, "Scholars and Travellers: The Social History of Early Muslim Egypt 218-487/833-1094". (PhD Dissertation, New York: Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Columbia University, 1986).

and hope, appropriate to the needs of each; for the pious, a deep, spiritual faith, sustained by the example of the suffering of the Imams and the self-sacrifice of their followers; for the intellectual, a comprehensive explanation of the universe, synthesizing the data of revelation and philosophy, science and mysticism; for the rebellious, a well-organized and widespread movement, supported by a rich and powerful ruler far away, and offering a seductive prospective of radical change. One of the important functions of the missionaries, where conditions were favorable, was what one might now call subversion.⁶⁵

Lewis Bernard believes that the overtly legal knowledge of the Ismā'īlis was not contradictory to the *Sunni* legal doctrine. In contrast, he considered it generally harmonious:

If we review the books of the Ismā'īlī jurisprudence produced during the Fatimid period, such as, the book of *Da'ayim Al-Islam* (Pillars of Islam), or *Al-Iqtisār* (The Abridged) written by *qādi* Al-Nu'mān, we will find them very close to Shafiite and Malikite Jurisprudence, except on what have been written in these books about the *walāyah* (love and devotion for the *imām*) and the necessity of his obedience. That was in front of the public, as among the prominent of *dā'is* and elites of the state...they were able to listen to these confidential opinions delivered by the Chief *dā'i*, they involved *al-'Ibādah al-'Ilmiyya* (intellectual worship), that is '*ilm al-Bātin* (esoteric science).⁶⁶

The homogeneousness of Ismā'īlī jurisprudence –written mainly by *Qādī al-Nu'mān* – and the *Sunni* jurisprudence could be attributed to *Nu'mān's* early upbringing in the predominant *māliki* town of Qāirawān, requirements of his job as a *qādi*, or as part of his

⁶⁵ Bernard Lewis, *Interpretation of Fatimid History*, 7.

⁶⁶ Mohammad Kamil Hussain, *Al-Tā'ifah Al-Ismā'īliyah: Tārīkhuha, Nudhuomuha, wa 'Aqā'iduha*. [The Ismā'īliSect: History, Systems, and Doctrines]. (Cairo: Maktabat Al-Nahdhah Al-Masriyah, Cairo, 1st edn, 1959),154-155.

propaganda strategy.

It is significant to point that unlike most of the *Sunnishuyūkh* who traditionally kept a considerable distance from the caliphs' courts, the Fatimid Ismā'īli religious authorities, –*dā'is* in particular– were an integral part of the government's machinery and the political regime of the state. Such an alliance is possibly due to the fundamental tenet of the Ismā'īli doctrine, that is the belief in *imāmah* (imamate), which involves the absolute allegiance and devotion to the *imām* (*walāyah*).

Some historians think that Ismā'īli scholars' literal prescription to the *mazhab* and the dogmatic restriction of *ta'wīl* to some limited authoritative elite, which exclusively drew the scope of *maqbul* (lawful) and *mardūd* (unlawful) for learners, have indeed led to the spread of *taqlīd* (imitation) which killed the spirit of *ijtihād* and ultimately led to stagnation. In contrast to that, the Ismā'īli *da'wah* rigorous activities “contributed to the creation of a new discipline that was called *ādāb al-Baḥth* (art of search), that many books were written about its rules. Assemblies of thought, debates, and argumentation became widespread.”⁶⁷ The acute association between religion, education and politics in Fatimid Egypt contributed immensely to the creation of a new discipline unknown before, called *'ilm al-da'wah* (science of propaganda). For the Ismā'īli scholars *da'wah* is a fundamental part of their doctrine; a point well documented by al-Maqrīzi, “They composed many books in *da'wah*, and became one of the written disciplines then it vanished and disappeared after the disappearance of its holders.”⁶⁸

CONCLUSION

From what we have explored in this paper, we can conclude that *Qādī al-Nu'mān* had devotedly served the Ismā'īli *mazhab*. He used his intellect and pen to defend the Ismā'īli cause on many fronts. With the heart of a candid believer and the mind of a scholar, he served his *mazhab*. His success in establishing a proper Ismā'īli set of law, as well as writing the early history of Fatimid *da'wah* can be

⁶⁷ Khafaji, *Al-Azhar fi Alfi 'Ām*, 34.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 29

counted among *al-Nu'mān's* chief intellectual contributions. He tirelessly carried out his duties as a judge, conducted *hikmah* sessions, and debated with Sunni scholars. Out of his devotion to the *Ismā'īlī*, *Qādī al-Nu'mān* was keen to spread the *da'wah* to all *imām's* subjects, even to the most remote geographical domains. Such zeal, devotion and distinction prompted *imām al Mu'izz* to describe him as the *alīm* of his time, who rises to fight harmful innovations.⁶⁹ A statement that showed how close and confidant *Qādī al-Nu'mān* was to the caliphs he served.

“Nu'mān rise to such a lofty position was not by accident. He was very close to the third and the fourth caliphs and had won their confidence. While holding office as supreme qādī he must have given an exemplary image of both competence and high moral qualities. But, above all, he had distinguished himself as a most prolific author and the founder of a judicial system not only accessible to the masses but conforming to the Universalist concept of the Fatimid imamate.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Daftary, *Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought*, 126.

⁷⁰ Poonwala, 120.

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	
ء	'	'	'	ز	z	z	z	گ	—	g	g	g
ب	b	b	b	ژ	—	—	ʀ	ل	l	l	l	l
پ	p	p	p	ژ	—	zh	j	م	m	m	m	m
ت	t	t	t	س	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n	n
ث	—	—	ṭ	ش	sh	sh	ʃ	ه	h	h	h'	h'
ث	th	th	th	ص	ṣ	ṣ	ʃ	و	w	v/u	v	v/u
ج	j	j	c	ض	ḏ	ḏ	ḏ	ی	y	y	y	y
چ	—	ch	çh	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ة	-ah	—	—	-a ²
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ال	al ³	—	—	—
خ	kh	kh	kh	ع	'	'	'					
د	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	ğh					
ڈ	—	—	d	ف	f	f	f					
ذ	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	k					
ر	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k/ñ					

¹ – when not final
² – at in construct state
³ – (article) al - or l-

VOWELS

	Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	—
	و	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī
Doubled	ي	īyy (final form ī)	īyy (final form ī)
	و	uww (final form ū) uvv (for Persian)	uvv
Diphthongs	و	au or aw	ev
	ی	ai or ay	ey
Short	ا	a	a or e
	ا	u	u or ū
	ی	i	o or ö
	ی	i	ı

URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. جھ jh گھ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

AL-SHAJARA

Special Issue

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