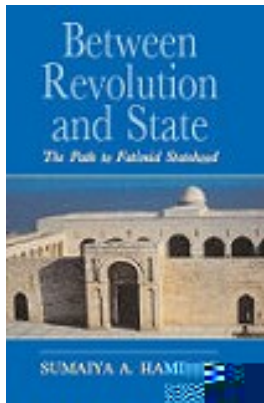




The Institute of Ismaili Studies



Between Revolution and State: The Path to Fatimid Statehood

By Sumaiya A. Hamdani

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Introduction

Al-Qadi al-Nu'man, characterised as "the greatest Ismaili jurist of all time" is undeniably one of the most outstanding figures in Ismaili

one which ti juhelDai jumai ju2ie mi julilis
Imam-caliph, al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah (d.
365/975), became the official code of the
Fatimid state and remains the greatest
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regarded the latter as the religious scholar
(*'alim*) upon whom it was incumbent to
make knowledge manifest (Hamdani, 64). Al-
Nu'man re-articulated pre-Fatimid Ismaili
teachings which had expressed revolutionary

Sumaiya Hamdani redresses this issue in her eminently readable and well-researched work, *Between Revolution and State: The Path to Fatimid State* by exploring the crucial role of al-Qadi al-Nu'man's exoteric (*zahir*) works in "the transition from revolution (*da'wa*) to state (*dawla*)

background necessary for understanding the circumstances that resulted in the *zahiri* literature of the North African period. It provides information on the major events that brought the Fatimids to power. The chapter begins with the succession crisis after the death of the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq in 148/765. Hamdani reminds us that the group who supported the imamate of Muhammad, the son of Isma'il b. Ja'far al-Sadiq, eventually emerged as the nascent Ismaili community. Relying on the authority of renowned scholars of Ismaili history, she presents the subsequent history of the Ismailis, who survived in rather obscure circumstances before 'Abd Allah al-Mahdi claimed the imamate in 286/899 and was proclaimed the first Fatimid caliph in 297/909.

As the chapter progresses, the author examines the activities of the Ismaili *da'i* Abu 'Abd Allah al-Shi'i in North Africa focussing on his religious and political achievements. The chapter briefly mentions Imam al-Mahdi's escape from Syria to the Maghrib, where he was placed under house arrest at Sijilmasa, his subsequent rescue and the foundation of the Fatimid state in 296/909 at Raqqada. jilmast R411(nd)6 r8.

and questions of *usul al-fiqh* and the history of the first Islamic state, as distinct from the more spiritual and esoteric concerns reflected in, say, the *Kitab al-'alim wa'l-ghulam* of Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman in order to ensure that the political authority of the Fatimid state was accepted" (Hamdani, 46).

The next three chapters look at al-Nu'man's *zahiri* works. The author states that these works "represent three genres of literature that are quintessentially *zahiri* in nature...the *Da'a'im*...is an example of *fiqh*, the *Majalis*...is a compilation of *hadiths*...and the *Kitab al-himma*, is a manual of duties and conventions of obedience to the imam" (Hamdani, 53). Each of these provides an insight into how *batini* issues came to be addressed in a *zahiri* context.

The *Zahiri* Framework

The third chapter explores central themes in al-Nu'man's *Da'a'im al-Islam*, which express the Fatimid policy of conciliation and ideological accommodation of Sunni and other Shi'i communities with a view to establish a consensus for the

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that of Sunni conquest literature (*futuh*)

The *Zahiri* Order

The fifth chapter explores the theory of social order in al-Nu'man's *Kitab al-himma* and a treatise on governance in the *Kitab al-jihad*, which is the first volume of the *Da'a'im*. *Kitab al-himma* provides a blueprint for the ideological underpinnings that informed the relationship between the Fatimid imam-caliph and his subjects. It centres on obedience to the imam within a religio-political framework and discusses the responsibilities of different groups amongst the imam's subjects. The work also deals with the issues of protocol that governed behaviour in the presence of the imam during processions, banquets, special occasions, etc. Al-Nu'man composed the work because, "the imams had made themselves manifest" and it was "necessary for their followers to have a book that would tell them about what acts it was appropriate to perform out of respect and obedience" (Hamdani, 115).

The most significant aspect of the work is its articulation of a social order which does not give a privileged position to the Ismailis at the expense of a non-Ismaili majority. In fact, as Hamdani points out, al-Nu'man's purpose was to, "instruct all the followers and subjects of the state in the proper forms of obedience to the imam" (Hamdani, 116).

According to al-Nu'man, the imams are entitled to *amanat* (here: a tithe), deposits which God has decreed must be returned to their rightful owners (Q.4:58, 2:283, 8:27) (Hamdani, 116). *Amanat* are property owed to the imams, as part of God's bounty towards humankind, which the imams accept from people on behalf of God. This applies to non-Ismailis as well. "Situating the imam's rule within the *Sunna* of the Prophet", Hamdani states:

is an attempt to ... redefine obedience, changing it from a matter of coercion into a religious act ('to obey the imam is to obey God and His Prophet'), so that in paying *amanat* even the non-follower acknowledges the imamate of the Fatimids. (Hamdani, 117).

Members of the Ismaili community additionally take the pledge (*mithaq*) of allegiance to the imam. Their obligations include informing the imam truthfully about themselves and seeking his intercession. Among many virtues, the true followers should cultivate patience, humility, forgiveness, forbearance and should demonstrate their solidarity with each other. Their status does not entitle them to preferential treatment nor to a more privileged status over non-Ismaili Muslims or even Jews and Christians, known as the *Ahl al-Dhimma* (the protected communities) (Hamdani, 121). This indicates that Ismailis and non-Ismailis held equal status before the state and is a clear indication of the departure from pre-Fatimid revolutionary Ismail ideals. "The move to consolidate the power and authority of the Fatimids obviously necessitated the identification of the interests of the state with those of non-Ismaili communities as well as their own constituency" (Hamdani, 121).

The relatives of the imam, the officers of the state and members of the *da'wa* organization were not entitled to exemptions. They were held accountable and had to demonstrate complete obedience and loyalty to the imams. This kind of instruction in *Kitab al-himma* is further evidence of changes that took place.

Prior to the establishment of the Fatimid state, the Ismaili community defined itself as autonomous and distinct from others through mechanisms such as *dar al-hijra* ['the place of exile']. This autonomy was abandoned with the foundation of the state and as the boundaries, physical as well as religio-political, separating the Ismailis from others became obscured (Hamdani, 123).

The treatise on governance (called an *'ahd*) in the *Kitab al-jihad* similarly reflects the process of transformation from revolution to state and is analysed as such in the remaining parts of the chapter. Documents such as the *'ahd* were a "blueprint for governance in those areas where governors had...[been] given increased powers of supervision and greater authority" (Hamdani,

126). This was the case in Egypt, which was governed by the Fatimid general Jawhar al-Siqili for four years while al-Mu'izz was still in Ifriqiyya. "The *ahd* exhorts its addressee, a king/governor (*malik*) to exercise a policy of ethical governance by paying heed to his subjects and ruling wisely, mercifully and justly" (Hamdani, 126). The addressee of the treatise is, "advised to rely on the support of the people (appearing before them as an upholder of good works, restraint and humility) and seek their contentment above that of his retainers" (Hamdani, 127-128).

Among other things, the treatise advises the addressee to lighten the people's burden by relieving them from taxes, pay heed to the needs of the poor, remain accessible to the people and avoid unnecessary warfare and bloodshed. Hamdani demonstrates that Jawhar's policies as governor of Egypt seem to have reflected the advice of the '*ahd*. For example, in addition to guaranteeing the safety of the Egyptians and promising to