Paul Walker

INTENSE RIVALRY, SECTARIAN SECRECY, AND DOCTRINAL RECOURSE TO REASON: OBSTACLES TO THE FOURTH-/TENTH-CENTURY TRANSMISSION OF ISMĀʿĪLĪ THOUGHT TO AL-ANDALUS

The Historical Background

With the advent of Fāṭimid rule in North Africa commencing in 297/909, the divide between the western and eastern Islamic spheres became increasingly acute. The ʿAbbāsid East lost what little sway it had retained over any territory west of Egypt and it held on to Egypt in the face of a persistent Fāṭimid military threat, but only at the cost of the timely dispatch of re-enforcements from Iraq. Fāṭimid invasions of Egypt occurred twice early in the fourth/tenth century, and serve as an illustration of the Fāṭimid determination to move back east, an aspiration that did not come to fruition for many decades. Despite its wish to return east, the local situation where it rose to power demanded careful attention. This reality was learned by hard lessons with serious setbacks along the way, among them the fierce and constant opposition of local entrenched Mālikī scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*), the ongoing hostility of Ibāḍī Berbers, local anti-government riots, and the near fatal revolt of Abū Yazīd. A first priority of the new dynasty and the empire it was building required that it come to terms with its western environment, the lands it inherited in central North Africa and in Sicily, and the close proximity of the Umayyads of Iberia and their proxies in the Maghrib. Baghdad was far away, while Cordoba was near at hand. This remained true and dominated Fāṭimid policy until 358/969 when they finally managed, with great effort, to conquer Egypt and, in 362/973, move the court and caliphal government eastward to Cairo. As a consequence of its longstanding hopes of supplanting the ʿAbbāsids, the Fāṭimids progressively lost interest in controlling or even paying attention to the

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Islamic west. Once established in Egypt, the importance of al-Andalus began to fade.

While the political situation of the earliest Fāṭimids in the west is reasonably clear, especially in terms of the forces arrayed against them, either externally, for example by the Umayyads in al-Andalus, or internally, by Mālikī scholarly circles, the dynasty itself consisted of the state and also its religious organization, its *daʿwa*, the agency of its Shīʿism and doctrinal appeal. The precise role of the latter is often far less certain. The history of the *daʿwa* is not coterminous with its rule. It existed and was active throughout Islamic lands long before the caliphate. Major branches of it achieved notable political successes in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Khurasan, and various eastern areas prior to 297/909, as is evidenced by the conversions of large tribal groupings, or individual rulers of existing local dynasties, cities, or towns. But in addition, it had also become a fairly dynamic intellectual movement which was, over the fourth/tenth century, in the process of adapting an earlier Shīʿism, in part doctrinally esoteric, into a sophisticated set of teachings based on Neoplatonism. This development began, we now believe, among agents (*dāʿīs*) of the *daʿwa* in the far eastern regions of Iran. Scholars working there, such as Muḥammad al-Nasafī (322/943) and Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971), formulated a new synthesis of philosophy and the Ismāʿīlī version of Shīʿism[1]; this change in doctrinal approach gradually spread and took hold of the whole of the *daʿwa* underpinning the Fāṭimids. But there remains a valid question about the extent to which this development, so clear among the eastern *dāʿīs*, was also taken up by those in the west, in the North African domain of Fāṭimid rule. Eventually it did travel west, but possibly not until fairly late in the fourth/tenth century and then into Egypt, not further west. To be sure, it is not a question of the influence of ancient Greek philosophy, which appeared in the west fairly early[2], but of a

1. For the details and specifics of this development, see Paul Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism: The Ismaili Neoplatonism of Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī* (Cambridge 1993).

2. See, for example, the memoire of Ibn al-Haytham (a young recruit to the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa* in the earliest days of the Fāṭimid ascendancy in North Africa), in which he mentions his own study of Greek philosophy and that he personally owned the works of Plato and Aristotle, among other relevant Arabic translations of the classics. His memoir consists mainly of a record of long conversations of he had with the brothers Abū ʿAbdallāh and Abū l-ʿAbbās, now

specifically Ismāʿīlī version of it, a combination peculiar to the latter, in which previous Ismāʿīlī Shīʿī doctrines were married to Neoplatonic speculations, one part inherited from ancient sources, the other from Qurʾānic Islam. Simply put, when, if at all, did the works and ideas of al-Nasafī or al-Sijistānī arrive in the far west? And if any evidence of such transmission occurred, what role, if any, did the Fāṭimid era *daʿwa* play in the process?

An answer is further complicated by looking at this issue through a longer lens, not merely the key fourth/tenth century, but including later periods when, without doubt, some forms of Neoplatonic thought reached al-Andalus. As it becomes more obvious, the timeline for the advent of some form of *bāṭinism* in the west is crucial: could it have happened as early as the first half of the fourth/tenth century, or was it later in that or even in the fifth/eleventh century?

The Original Aim of the Conference

The working title of the conference was *Power, Religion and Wisdom: Bāṭinism between Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in [Fourth-/] Tenth-Century al-Andalus*. The principal questions to be answered were: (1) why did Andalusī Sunnī scholars incorporate *bāṭinī* doctrines produced in Shīʿī milieus in the east into their scholarship? (2) through what channels did this unorthodox material reach the Iberian Peninsula?, and (3) what role did the fourth-/tenth-century rulers in al-Andalus play in the reception of this material? A major issue to examine is "by what channels were Ismāʿīlī or Ismāʿīlī-like tenets introduced into al-Andalus. Here it is key to determine whether – and eventually in what proportion – this influence was part of Ismāʿīlī-Fāṭimid propaganda"[3].

published in Ibn al-Haytham, *The Advent of the Fatimids: A Contemporary Shiʿi Witness*, ed. and trans. Paul Walker with Wilferd Madelung (London 2000), especially 52, 111, 138 and the discussion that follows, notably concerning Aristotle. Clearly he and the two brothers knew a lot about ancient Greek thought and could discuss specific texts in detail, but in what he reports there is no sign of an Ismāʿīlī interpretation of such material.

3. The Call for Papers continues, «The sources at our disposal to answer this question are notoriously both less numerous and authoritative than one may have hoped, but we do have evidence that some diplomacy implying missionary activities took place between the arch-rival Fāṭimids and Umayyads during

An interesting auxiliary question, added to the topic by Prof. M. Fierro, is "whether the Umayyad caliphs of Cordoba could have deliberately developed, in order to legitimize themselves, a sense of esotericism directly modeled on the one used by their Fāṭimid adversaries". An answer here clearly assumes positive evidence supporting the previous questions.

What follows here concentrates on issues that arise from the inquiry set in motion by the major point stated and/or implied above; namely, the possible transfer to the Iberian Peninsula during the fourth/tenth century of an Ismā'īlī form of esoteric doctrine, a kind of *bāṭinism*, from Fāṭimid sources, either those present at the time in North Africa or in the Islamic East.

The Meaning and Implications of the Term Bāṭinism

Because it is so crucial to this investigation as a whole, it is essential to begin with an analysis of the Arabic terms *bāṭin*, *bāṭinī*, and *bāṭiniyya*[4]. The word *bāṭiniyya* derives from the Arabic *bāṭin*, which means "inner," "inward," "interior," and hence "hidden," "secret," and most importantly in this context, «esoteric». It is normally contrasted with *ẓāhir*, which, accordingly, carries the sense of "outward," "obvious," "literal," and "exoteric". In its abstract form and as the name of a group, the Bāṭiniyya, it indicates those who advocated the esoteric meaning of the holy scripture and the law. Such a group most likely also claimed that the inner, esoteric meaning and significance of religious rites, rules, and rituals supersedes, or is in some way superior to, the outward expression of them. To be labeled *bāṭinī* must therefore involve an assertion of the greater value of the *bāṭin* over the *ẓāhir*, the inner, non-literal over the outer, literal meaning of the text or law. In general, it does not include those who recognize these as equal components. There are, however, serious prob-

the fourth/tenth century and we also know with certainty that during the same period the Fāṭimids also established contacts with Andalusī rebels against the Umayyad regime. On the other hand, it has repeatedly been stressed that important Ismā'īlī-flavored productions such as the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* remained largely unknown to the Fāṭimid *da'wa*».

4. What follows here on this subject depends in part on Paul Walker, «Bāṭiniyya», in *EI*³.

lems with what a given group holds as the relationship between the esoteric (*bāṭin*) and the exoteric (*ẓāhir*), and how, when, and on whose authority is a shift from one to the other allowed or necessary. When is it permitted to interpret scripture according to its non-literal meaning and, under what circumstances, if any, is it necessary to take the outward wording of the holy law in its figurative sense?

In the history of Islam there have been a number of cases in which an opposing party tried to apply the name Bāṭiniyya to a group it disliked or disapproved of. Typically, for Sunnīs, the term might be used against the Philosophers (Falāsifa) or the Sufis, both of whom were accused of elevating the figurative interpretation of the holy book over its literal meaning, which they thus tended to ignore. Despite the insistence of their enemies that the term *bāṭinī* applied to either the Philosophers or to many of the Sufis, ordinarily neither group would admit that it was an appropriate name for themselves or what they advocated. Most often, in fact, in the Islamic world, the designation Bāṭiniyya served as a pejorative name for the Ismāʿīlīs, on the theory that they maintained the superiority of the *bāṭin* over the *ẓāhir*, or even at its most extreme, the cancellation of the *ẓāhir* by exclusive adherence to the *bāṭin*. Although there is little direct evidence that the majority of the Ismāʿīlīs or the followers of the Fāṭimid line of imams denied the validity of the outward forms of Islamic law and scripture, some elements of the Ismāʿīlī movement did so. Among the earlier Shīʿī extremists (*ghulāt*), moreover, there were several situations when a leader taught just such a doctrine, in which the esoteric meaning of the law replaced that recognized and observed by the majority of Muslims. Various Shīʿī groups professed to have secret knowledge that had been transmitted to them from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and the imams descended from him. Such knowledge involved interpretations that were highly esoteric and thus passed solely to and by initiates.

But the term Bāṭiniyya did not apply in those instances in which the members of a group simply advocated knowing the inner spiritual meaning. Among the Ismāʿīlīs, especially in its classic period of the Fāṭimid caliphate, virtually all the leading members of the group who wrote on this subject vehemently insisted that they scrupulously observe both the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin* and that this was the doctrine of the imams they followed. Nevertheless it remains important

to establish how and to what degree the two (*bāṭin* and *ẓāhir*) are related. How do these Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs* derive the *bāṭin* from the *ẓāhir* and does the act of deriving it depend on a process that yields a coherently associated result or does it involve a mysterious, even esoteric, operation known only to members of the *daʿwa*. Who is allowed access to the *bāṭin* and on what basis? In Arabic the operation itself is called *taʾwīl* (which might be translated as "interpretation"); in Ismāʿīlī thought, its role is immense, though seldom defined with precision. In fact, what *taʾwīl* is, who is authorized to do it, and under what circumstances varies considerably throughout our source texts[5].

Basically there appear to exist three modes or concepts of *taʾwīl* used by the various major Fāṭimid-era Ismāʿīlī authors. We have no clear statement of principal, only some discussion, and many examples that we have managed to cull from the texts known to us. However, in a considerable number of situations the esoteric nature of the *bāṭinī* aspect of *taʾwīl* is notably divorced from any reasonable interpretation of the outward, plain meaning observable in the wording of the text or ritual under consideration. Accordingly, in such cases, the *taʾwīl* is truly esoteric, that is, unconnected to the outward *ẓāhirī* text by some form of logic (for example, a metaphoric extension of meaning). Therefore, it represents a newly revealed truth, one gained by a rite of initiation that leads to something that transcends what might be ordinarily understood, or may even lead to a different and new form of knowledge altogether[6].

5. Of the many studies now available on this topic, perhaps the most essential are the following: Ismail Poonawala, «Ismāʿīlī Taʾwīl of the Qur'an», in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, ed. A. Rippin (Oxford 1988), 199-222; Tahera Qutbuddin, «Principles of Fatimid Symbolic Interpretation (*Taʾwīl*): An Analysis Based on the *Majālis Muʾayyadiyya* of al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078)», in *Reason, Esotericism and Authority in Shiʿi Islam*, ed. Rodrigo Adem and Edmund Hayes (Leiden 2021), 151-89; and David Hollenberg, *Beyond the Qur'ān: Early Ismāʿīlī Taʾwīl and the Secrets of the Prophets* (Columbia, SC 2016).

6. This kind of *taʾwīl* and its use most particularly applies to the material on which Hollenberg based his previously cited *Beyond the Qur'ān*. I have cited and included many example of a similar form from Abū l-ʿAbbās, «*Mafātīḥ al-niʿma* (The Keys to Grace)», in *Affirming the Imamate: Early Fatimid Teachings in the Islamic West, an Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Works Attributed to Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shiʿi and His Brother Abū'l-ʿAbbās*, ed. and trans. Wilferd Madelung and Paul Walker (London 2021).

But a complete answer is not that simple. The situation cited above describes one form of *ta'wīl*. Another mention by an early North African Ismāʿīlī source, the memoire of Ibn al-Haytham (d. first half of fourth/tenth century), comments about what he learned from the shaykhs of the group: "I harvested from their fruits both the exterior and the interior (*min thimārihim ẓāhira wa-bāṭina*)", and further,

> I shall never forget the *dāʿī* of Malūsa, the shaykh of the community and their legal authority [i.e., a Fatimid Berber (Kutama) authority], Aflaḥ b. Hārūn al-ʿIbānī. He combined his activity as a *dāʿī* with the sciences of the religious law.... I heard from him the summons for the women (*daʿwat al-nisā'*, the "*daʿwa* for women") and what types of proofs he would address to them that their minds will accept and retain. He would say, «God has the convincing proof [Q 6:149]". He said: "This means the proof with which the scholar addresses the one he teaches or the ignorant person, using only what that person comprehends". He would address women and employ as evidence in their case items of their jewelry, rings, earrings, headgear, necklaces, anklets, bracelets, dresses, head binding. Next he would cite examples pertaining to spinning, weaving, costume, and hair, and other items that suit the natural disposition of women. He would speak to the craftsman using the terms of his craft and thus, for example, address the tailor by reference to his needle, his thread, his patch, and his scissors. He addressed the shepherd using references to his staff, his cloak, his horn, and his two-pouched travelling bag[7].

It should be noted that there is nothing particularly esoteric in what al-ʿIbānī seems to be doing in this kind of *daʿwa*.

Al-Sijistānī, from about mid-fourth/tenth century, writing in the far east, offers us a curious example of what might constitute yet another type of *ta'wīl*. He says about the crucifixion of Jesus:

> The wood Jesus was crucified on was provided for this purpose by a group other than his own, and these people were the ones who crucified him on it, openly and manifestly. Accordingly, the explanation that the messiah [the Qā'im] and his deputies, on whom be peace, will reveal concerns the sacred laws of the messenger-prophets who have come before him. The cross thus becomes a clear sign and evidence of all ranks of the hierarchy. [Christian] veneration of it is something required of them, as, similarly, our veneration of the [Islamic] profession of faith[8] is [required of us].

7. Ibn al-Haytham, *The Advent of the Fatimids*, Eng. 168-70, Ar. 121-22.
8. The profession of faith is, «There is no god but God» (*lā ilāha ilā Allāh*).

The profession of faith is built on denial and affirmation, beginning with denial and ending with affirmation. Similarly, the cross is two pieces of wood: a piece that stands on its own and another piece whose placement depends entirely on the placement of the other. The profession of faith is four words. Likewise the cross has four extremities. The end fixed in the ground has the position of the master of interpretation [*ta'wīl*] in whom the souls of the seekers attain lasting security. The end opposite this, high in the air, has the position of the master of divine inspiration [*ta'yīd*], in whom the souls of the inspired ones attain lasting security. The two ends in the middle, which are to the left and the right, indicate the Follower [i.e., the universal soul] and the Speaking-prophet, of whom one is the master of natural composition [*tarkīb*] and the other master of scriptural compilation [*ta'līf*]. One is opposite the other, with the end standing for the Preceder [intellect] sustaining all of the edges[9].

The works of al-Sijistānī contain many other examples of the same type of *ta'wīl*, but what is particularly significant is his discussion of interpretation in a more theoretical context, especially as paired or associated with "revelation" (*tanzīl*). The latter he says resembles something in an undeveloped, organic form. By contrast, *ta'wīl* is like the product of a craftsman who works with organic material in order to make something of greater benefit. His own example is wood, which in a natural state is good only as fuel for a fire, but when crafted it becomes an object of greater benefit, such as a door, a box, arrows, spears, a pulpit, or a chair. Thus *tanzīl*, the revelation in plain form, is a set of "subjective items and restricted phrases beneath which there are hidden meanings. *Ta'wīl* on the part of its master puts all of these into a proper context and extracts from each phrase what was intended by it"[10]. The master of *ta'wīl* approaches each word or phrase in order to adduce its deeper meanings. Here we have the idea of exploiting and/or nurturing what was originally only "seeded" in the scripture.

Al-Kirmānī, writing in the East in the first two decades of the fifth/eleventh century, used a tendency already evident in al-Sijistānī, to rationalize the process of moving from the *ẓāhir* to the

9. Paul Walker, *The Wellsprings of Wisdom: A Study of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī's* Kitāb al-yanābī', including a complete English translation with commentary and notes on the Arabic text (Salt Lake City, UT 1994), para. 146, 147, and 183.

10. Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, 127 (quoting from al-Sijistānī's *Maqālid*)

bāṭin – in effect, to make it less mysterious and esoteric – makes it clearer as if to correct an earlier restrictive sense for *ta'wīl*. Where the older forms needed to be kept from public view, certain aspects of some statements of al-Kirmānī suggest the possibility of an open discourse, almost as if they were used in debates. In part, al-Kirmānī was concerned to deny the claim of enemies and detractors that secret interpretations made Ismā'īlīsm a heresy, or that, by adhering only to hidden notions of what the law actually meant, an Ismā'īlī could avoid performing and following Islamic rites and rituals of ordinary belief. Al-Kirmānī would insist that both *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* must be accepted, practiced, and observed; one without the other was for him intolerable. Both together were absolutely essential. He says:

When we specify the *ẓāhir*, we mean by it the acts ordained in the law in accord with the subordinate parts of the profession of faith, namely alms-giving, fasting, pilgrimages, *jihād*, and the implementation of the acts of submission to the persons in authority, on whom be peace. All these acts and rites in the law which, when they come into being, are perceptible to the senses, are commonly perceived by every creature that possesses senses that are sound, as is the case with regards to the heavens, the earth, and what is between them of the planets, the elements, the natural kingdoms, which, in that they are evident and obvious, are subject to sensation and every creature having sensation perceives them equally without any differentiation between one over another. If we specify the *bāṭin*, we mean by it the knowledge that accrues from knowing the existence of a thing and its elements and of its existing as a thing and whether it is manifest or hidden, of its measure and its form, of the cause of its existence, of the purpose because of which it has existence, which is a matter not subject to sense perception but is rather known by the mind, and of eternal punishment, the gathering, the reckoning, paradise and the inferno, the temporal contingency of the world and its annihilation, and other matters which, since they are esoteric (*bāṭinī*) in essence and hence not subject to sensation, all groups do not participate in perceiving but instead one group only is singled out to acquire it[11].

11. Paul Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī: Ismaili Thought in the Age of al-Ḥakīm* (London 1999), 75.

He explains further:

[…] the absolute oneness of God and an understanding of the hierarchy of beings is a truly difficult matter, but, by means of it, there is life for the souls and their eternity, and salvation from the world of nature […] Since it is so difficult, God knew that His servants as a whole would never achieve the level at which they could obtain a perfect understanding of God's hierarchy or of His own absolute unity. Therefore God favored among them all a single person in each age for that perfection and purity, as is the case with the Imam, may God bless him profusely. That is to say, God favored him with a perfection in which he receives completely the emanation that flows into the world of nature from the angels. This man, by virtue of that emanation, is the guardian over the rest […] God has thus made obedience and love of him obligatory […][12]

My Purpose in this Chapter

Having spent considerable time and effort investigating these topics in Fāṭimid era Ismā'īlī sources, as the previous material illustrates, I feel comfortable in describing the range and complexity of the doctrines involved[13]. However I am far less at home with the other side of the problem at hand, namely the non-Ismā'īlī Andalusī

12. Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī*, 76, quoted from al-Kirmānī's *al-Riyāḍ*. It is important to add here al-Kirmānī, *al-Maṣābīḥ fī ithbāt al-imāma*, in *Master of the Age: An Islamic Treatise on the Necessity of the Imamate*, ed. and trans. Paul Walker (London 2007), the Sixth Light, «In proof of the interpretation of the revelation and the law that comes from the messengers, which is knowledge», trans. 63-67, Ar. 28-32.

13. See, for example, the following items on this subject: Paul Walker, «Techniques for Guarding and Restricting Esoteric Knowledge in the Ismaili da'wa during the Fatimid Period», in *Sharing and Hiding Religious Knowledge in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Mladen Popović, Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, and Clare Wilde (Berlin 2018), 186-98; Paul Walker, «To What Degree Was Classical Ismaili Esotericism Based on Reason as Opposed to Authority?» in *Esotérisme shi'ite, ses racines et ses prolongements*, ed. M. A. Amir-Moezzi, M. De Cillis, D. De Smet, O. Mir-Kasimov, 493-505 (Turnhout 2016); Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, ch. 12: «Interpretation and Its Institution»; and Walker, «Double Observance by Works and Knowledge», in *Early Philosophical Shiism*, 62-79; and most recently, Paul Walker, «The Doctrine of Ta'wīl in Fatimid Ismaili Texts», in *Reason, Esotericism and Authority in Shi'i Islam*, ed. R. Adem and E. Hayes (Leiden 2021), 137-50. This last paper offers a good idea of the range and variety of *ta'wīl* in these texts.

response, if indeed there was a response. A key issue requires careful delineation of that side, again, with some precision as to dates. First we need to know what *bāṭinī* doctrines are found and in the works of which authors. Then, how might these writers have been influenced by Ismāʿīlī teachings. What were the possible means of transmission? If there is evidence of it, does it come from North Africa, or was it perhaps from much further east?

Therefore, my role is first and foremost to set out what I see as the situation from the Fāṭimid-Ismāʿīlī side, and outline what I find as the basic obstacles in the way of transmission. I do not argue that it did not happen at all, but suggest caution and careful circumspection in looking for it or claiming that it did happen.

Intense Hostility and Rivalry

Despite evidence of Fāṭimid attempts to gain a foothold in Umayyad Iberia, as in the embassy of Ibn al-Haytham and colleague sent to Ibn Ḥafṣūn[14], the divide between the two rivals persisted openly with fierce polemical exchanges on all sorts of issues[15]. Over the first two-thirds of the fourth/tenth century, the constant vocal opposition emanating from al-Andalus and the threat of Umayyad interference in North African affairs precluded any but the most minimal exchange of ideas or texts. Fāṭimid authorities were particularly sensitive to and focused on the Umayyads, perhaps even more so than they were on the ʿAbbāsids, who were less a threat in that period, at least locally.

For a full accounting of the relevant issues on this point, it is useful to begin with what happened to or began to happen upon the advent of Fāṭimid control over the former territories of the Aghlabids. Throughout the previous decades, the principal local factions pitted

14. On which see Paul Walker, «The Identity of One of the Ismaili Dāʿīs Sent by the Fatimids to Ibn Ḥafṣūn», in *al-Qanṭara* 21 (2000), 387-88.

15. For the Fāṭimid side, see Paul Walker, «Fatimid Portrayals of the Umayyads in Official Pronouncements and in Daʿwa Literature», in *Fatimids and Umayyads: Competing Caliphates*, ed. M. Ali de Unzaga (London forthcoming); now also available as chapter 22 in *The Fatimids; Select Papers on their Governing Institutions, Social and Cultural Organization, Religious Appeal, and Rivalries* (Leiden 2023).

an entrenched Mālikī *'ulamā'*, backed by a majority of the scholarly population, against a much smaller contingent of Ḥanafīs who were often supported by the pro-ʿAbbāsid government. But, on the whole the Mālikīs fared well, were respected, and could find employment. When the Fāṭimids appointed as the new chief judge (*qāḍī*) of Kairouan a local Shīʿī who insisted on some elements of Shīʿism, for example, forbidding *tarāwīḥ* prayers with an imam during Ramaḍān, a clash with the Mālikīs was inevitable. Not only were they denied cherished practices, but even more seriously, they lost standing and employment. The legal texts they depended on became worthless, so reduced in value that they were sent abroad or used as paper for wrapping medical prescriptions[16]. A few of the most uncompromising among them suffered physical harm which, in later Mālikī accounts, were vastly exaggerated into cases of full-blown martyrdom. The main point is that many felt that they would be better off leaving for Umayyad-ruled al-Andalus, carrying stories of Fāṭimid persecution. Could they also have taken to Iberia what they had managed to learn of Ismāʿīlī doctrines? Did the process, begun in the early to mid-fourth/tenth century, continue, with the arrival of more and more Mālikī refugees from the east?

A second issue in this rivalry that needs consideration is the long-standing and deep-seated Ismāʿīlī, and hence Fāṭimid, hatred of the Umayyads, a matter that began with a clash of clans in the earliest Islamic period. Al-Kirmānī, a great *dāʿī* at the beginning of the fifth/eleventh century, says about the Umayyads, and here specifically one "who resides in al-Andalus": that "he is not pure due to his being from the Tree of Zaqqūm which are the Umayyad clan"[17]. Thus the whole family, root and branches, are from the "accursed tree" (Q. 17:60). The Fāṭimid caliph al-Manṣūr says in a letter to his son: "Know, O my son, that the Cursed Tree in the Qur'an applies to the Umayyads"[18]. Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān's *Kitāb al-majālis wa-l-musāyarāt* contains more, much of it quite specific to the Umayyads of Cordoba[19]. The author himself was a North African and his view-

16. As reported by Ibn al-Haytham, *The Advent of the Fatimids*, 166.

17. Al-Kirmānī, *al-Maṣābīḥ*, 121. The tree of Zaqqūm is a tree in hell with fruit that are the heads of devils: see Qur'ān 37:62, 44:43-46, and 56:52.

18. Manṣūr al-ʿAzīzī l-Jawdharī, *Sīrat al-Ustādh Jawhar*, ed. and trans. Hamid Haji, *Inside the Immaculate Portal* (London 2012), Eng. 57-58, Ar. 46.

19. Note key examples in Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *Kitāb al-majālis wa-l-musāyarāt*, ed. al-Ḥabīb al-Faqhī, Ibrāhīm Shabbūḥ, and Muḥammad al-Yaʿlāwī (Tunis

point clearly represents a Fāṭimid attitude from the mid-fourth/tenth century and earlier. His more essential work in this regard is a treatise he often called simply *Kitāb al-manāqib wa-l-mathālib*, which might be translated as Book of virtues and vices[20]. However, its actual title is *Kitāb al-manāqib li-ahl bayt rasūl Allāh al-nujabā' wa-l-mathālib li-banī Umayya al-luʿanā'*, which translates as Book of the virtues of the house of God's messenger, the most noble, and the vices of the house of Umayya, the accursed ones. Most significantly for the present purpose, it concludes with a chapter entitled "A review of the virtues of the imams who presently hold the imamate and the vices of those of the house of Umayya who dominate the territory of al-Andalus". Although this is only one chapter of many, it offers the most explicit view of the Iberian Umayyads as they were seen by the Fāṭiimids (or as the Fāṭimids wanted them to be seen). In short, it is a prime document in their polemical attack against the rival caliphate of the west.

And finally, it was obviously ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III's declaration of his caliphate that, above all else, engendered the ire and fury of the Fāṭimids, raising the level of their animosity even higher. At a key point in this book, having just named the Umayyad rulers of al-Andalus from ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III, Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān comments:

> These were all wicked rulers, of vile standing, of despicable intentions, who drank wine, passed time with musical instruments, amused themselves with young boys, caroused with fools, listened to singing girls, ate forbidden things, transgressed regulations, in the same way as their forefathers in the past. All of them were styled *amīrs*. None claimed the caliphate, nor

1978) as follows: (pp. 92-93) a list of their criminal activities such as consuming wine and selling it in public, pederasty, prostitution, imprisoning women and selecting certain of them for sex; (pp. 115-16) a session about the cursing of the Banū Umayya, discussion of the «Accursed Tree»; (pp. 164-70) the episode of the Fāṭimid raid on Almeria, counter raids, and Byzantine truce; (p. 168) preparation for Jawhar's conquest of the furthest Maghrib to cleanse it of supporters of the Umayyads; (p. 190) expression of scorn for the inhabitants of al-Andalus who are feeble-minded (*sakhf ʿuqūlihim*) and coarse in character (*ghalīẓ ṭibāʾihim*); (p. 234) ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's committing of forbidden acts openly; (p. 253) whether they are related to dogs, monkeys, or pigs?; (pp. 285-86) a session disparaging the Banū Umayya, Marwānid cursing of the Fāṭimids from their minbars, al-Muʿizz seeing al-Nāṣir in a dream.

20. Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *Kitāb al-manāqib wa-l-mathālib*, ed. Mājid b. Aḥmad al-ʿAṭiyya (Beirut 2012).

styled themselves as imams; they did not preach from the *minbar*, nor was the *khuṭba* said for them from it. They did not mint coins in their own name, neither dinar nor dirham, and they did not name themselves in the *ṭirāz* or on flags. The coinage with them was struck with the name of the governor of Ifrīqiyya among the commanders of the House of ʿAbbās. All that ran in accord with the standard practice in the region by its governors. They did not permit themselves to transgress that, nor contradict anything in it. Nor to depart from the limits set by the previous rulers who had occupied their position and controlled the place, until the advent of the time of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad.

It was he who exceeded the boundaries and crossed over into what none of his forefathers had done. He was allowed that by the common people of al-Andalus who, had his forefathers wanted to do that, they would not have allowed them nor approved of them doing it. So it was that he called himself "Commander of the Believers", coined money, decorated *ṭirāz* with his name. He parted with his loyal followers because of his animosity due to the vileness of his condition and meanness of his character and intentions and the shamelessness of his opinions. This was caused by what we have cited as the malicious states of his forefathers that had come together in him, being deposited in his soul and active in it. That aspect of his condition was not hidden nor was there any way to avert the possibility of its being proved. He was well known and famous for it and he adopted from the possessors of stamina and power for sexual intercourse that with his young boys, group after group. They knew about that and characterized him so. That went along with his openly drinking wine, listening to singing girls, playing *ṭanbūrs* and *ʿūds*. The keepers of pleasure houses visited him from remote lands and he settled them with him accordingly, in close proximity, and he gave them abundant gifts and favors. He manifested a mockery of heroes even though he was the one most certainly mocked by doing it. But he insisted on that for reasons of pretense and meanness. He had his subjects firmly believe a behavior good according to his own claims for it by permitting them these transgressions and by passing over the reprehensible in it, thus leaving it aside, along with what of their doctrine they might have believed. So they amused themselves with young boys, openly practicing pederasty in public. Daughters were shared among them as they accustomed her [to it] young and proceeded with the same when older. Among them fornication was evident and they flaunted openly sedition and wealth. They did commerce in wine in their markets, safe with him from this manifesting of crime that was due to their own moral depravity[21].

21. Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *Kitāb al-manāqib*, 400–1 (my translation). At several points in this chapter Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān says much the same, that in his other

This form of inherent hostility to the Umayyads need not, or course, have precluded any and all contact or transmission but, along with the almost constant defensive state of the Fāṭimids against incursions from Iberia or from pro-Umayyad Berbers closer by in the Maghrib, there does appear to have been a wall of physical, if not intellectual, separation[22].

Imposed Secrecy and Ensuring Compliance

As an additional factor blocking possible transmission, the more esoteric doctrinal writings by agents of the *daʿwa* were subject to a rule of secrecy imposed by an oath and other mechanisms. There was thus a sharp distinction between public discourse and what was kept highly restricted. The latter was accessible solely to members tested and approved by senior *dāʿīs*. All were sworn never to reveal anything of the doctrinal writings without explicit permission. It is only recently that modern scholarship has gained some degree of access, but with difficulty. Scholars have studied what the opponents and detractors of Ismāʿīlīsm in the Fāṭimid era knew of these secret writings and the breaches wherein an outsider or renegade exposed the true esoterica, but these cases are rare. Most denunciations of the Ismāʿīlīs were based on generic polemical falsehoods, not on

works he set out a detailed account of the virtues and excellences of the Fāṭimid imams and their predecessors. Thus, he sees no explicit need to repeat it in this treatise that is primarily devoted to the vices of the Umayyads.

22. At this point we might note the evidence Dachraoui discovered and published in an article long ago about the Umayyad conception of Fāṭimid corruptions. He adduced the Umayyad view by extracting information from Ibn Sahl's account of testimony taken in a case brought against a person (Abū l-Khayr) who was thought by local Andalusī authorities to be an agent working in al-Andalus on behalf of the Fāṭimids. The testimony presented to the judge is hearsay, but even so, likely indicates what the Umayyad authorities considered the vices of the Fāṭimids, and the practices their agents would have advocated. Among them was condoning the cursing of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, slandering ʿA'isha, denying intercession, advocating permanent punishment by the fire of sinning Muslims, not performing the five prayers, not attending prayer on Fridays, *and drinking wine*. The culprit in question – the so-called Fāṭimid agent – was apparently so devoted to wine consumption that he is reported to have said: «when I die, wash me in it». Farhat Dachraoui, «Tentative d'infiltration shiʿite en Espagne musulmane sous le règne d'al-Hakim II», in *al-Andalus* 23 (1958), 100-1.

authentic examples of what they actually advocated. For the former, we can cite the fourth-/tenth-century anti-Ismāʿīlī tracts of Ibn Rizām (d. first half fourth/tenth century) and Akhū Muḥsin (d. 374/985) which may have been based in part on material captured by the ʿAbbāsids, or the section on the Ismāʿīlīs in al-Baghdādī's (d. 429/1037) early fifth-/eleventh-century *Farq bayn al-firaq*. Although significantly later, al-Ghazālī's first of many attempts to expose and condemn the Ismāʿīlīs, whom he called Bāṭinīs, and his work *Faḍāʾiḥ al-bāṭiniyya* (completed in 488/1095), offers a better picture of the problem he (and others) faced in trying to gain access to genuine Ismāʿīlī texts or doctrines. When challenged as to how he could have acquired true knowledge of these texts and doctrines, al-Ghazālī replied, but first noted that these people divulge their secrets

> only after pacts and covenants and they guard them save from one agreeing with them in belief – so whence has it happened to you to become cognizant of them, since they hide their religion and strive to keep their beliefs secret?
>
> I [al-Ghazālī] reply: As for becoming cognizant of that, we came across it simply through many men who had professed their religion and responded to their propaganda, then they became aware of their error and returned from their seduction to the plain truth and [then] reported the views those men had proposed to them[23].

Here then is fairly sound evidence of two factors. One is the Ismāʿīlīs' imposition of secrecy, as noted by al-Ghazālī. The Ismāʿīlīs were famously reticent about publicly declaring any of their religious messages, preferring to carefully guard them. The means they used to protect themselves and their doctrines needs some discussion at this point, as it may be key to why the opposition, including the Umayyads of Iberia, did not and could not have had access to it. We must also stress that the anti-Ismāʿīlī writers mentioned above appear to have known little or nothing about genuine Ismāʿīlī works. Al-Ghazālī's account of their older, classical doctrines is significantly weak, despite his claim to have had access to some of

23. Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍāʾiḥ al-bāṭiniyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Cairo 1964), 33; and al-Ghazālī, *Freedom and Fulfillment: An Annotated Translation of al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl and Other Relevant Works of al-Ghazālī*, trans. by R. J. McCarthy (Boston 1980), 192, 55–56.

them[24]. However, we do know of a small number of Ismāʿīlī opponents – the Zaydī author Abū l-Qāsim al-Bustī (active late fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh century)[25] and a Yemeni author named Abū Muḥammad[26] – who cited and even quoted Ismāʿīlī works, thus indicating that there must have been a few breaches in the barriers. Perhaps an ex-Ismāʿīlī became an informant or one or two valid accounts by critics circulated to the west.

Still the policy of imposed secrecy involved a long-standing method of oaths and payments. An oath of allegiance administered to anyone who wanted to join served two main purposes. One was to ensure the absolute loyalty of each new member and the other was to guard and protect, and thus control access to, the esoteric knowledge imparted in the course of the *daʿwa*'s appeal and its instruction. The new adept swore that "he will support the imam of his time and will not forsake him, that he will not reveal any secret of the faith to a person not worthy of it or to anyone who has not sworn the oath of covenant"[27]. Another version says,

> Thus you must reveal nothing of it, neither little or much, nor in allusions, except those things about which I myself or the person responsible dwelling in this city explicitly allow you to speak, so that in this matter you must only act according to our command, which you must not contravene and to which you must add nothing.... If you do anything of the kind, although you know that in so doing you violate [the oath], which you remember exactly, then you renounce God the Creator of heaven and earth.... You leave the party of God and his saints, to God's unconcealed disappointment, but He will soon bring retribution and punishment on you, and you will walk into the fire of *jahannam* [Hell], in which there is no mercy[28].

24. Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍāʾiḥ al-bāṭiniyya* contains a chapter on earlier forms of Ismāʿīlī doctrine and a second chapter on their doctrines during his own time and place.

25. Abū l-Qāsim al-Bustī, *Kashf asrār al-bāṭiniyya wa-ʿawār madhhabihim*, ed. ʿĀdil Sālim ʿAbd al-Jādir, in *Ismāʿīlīyūn: kashf al-asrār wa-naqd al-afkār* (Kuwait 2002).

26. Abū Muḥammad, *ʿAqāʾid al-thalāth wa-l-sabʿīn farqa*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh Zarban al-Ghāmidī (Medina 1993).

27. Walker, «Techniques for Guarding», 190.

28. Heinz Halm, «The Ismaili Oath of Allegiance (*ʿahd*) and the 'Sessions of Wisdom» (*majālis al-ḥikma*) in Fatimid Times», in *Mediaeval Isma'ili History & Thought*, ed. Farhad Daftary (Cambridge 1996), 75-115. This particular version of the oath, as translated by Halm, appears on 95-97.

The second and perhaps most important benefit of membership concerns access to esoteric knowledge, to the *ta'wīl*. A newly uncovered text from about 298/911, the earliest period in North Africa, explains:

> [For] the person who renders that [alms] offering out of the goodness of his own self, God will cleanse thereby his spirit and purify his money, and thus it will be lawful for his *dāʿī* and mentor to reveal to him the interpretive *(ta'wīlī)* sciences and make known to him the truths hidden from the enemies of God's religion[29].
>
> […] The believer pays what he pays on the measure of his sincerity and in accord with what his *dāʿī* determines for him in order to test him. If he pays that once, he has fulfilled the basic requirement of the religion and thus fulfills the necessary obligation, by his fulfillment of which he distinguishes himself from the people of outward meaning [Sunnī Muslims and other non-Ismāʿīlīs] and he departs from their ranks. If he pays a second time, his *dāʿī* knows the goodness of his intention and the firmness of his certainty and then he reveals to him the *secrets of the interpretation* [italics mine]. If he pays out a third time, his status with God's guardian rises and his rank similarly rises among the believers[30].
>
> […] God orders him [the *dāʿī*] to examine the believers who seek the benefits of the religion to test out their secrets. If they bear the trial with patience, *it is licit for the teacher to initiate them and raise them in the interpretive sciences* [italics mine][31].

Was Ismāʿīlī Bāṭinism *Mystical or Strictly Rational*

Yet another possible obstacle needs to be considered as well. Although fourth-/tenth-century Ismāʿīlī thought became heavily dependent on a form of Neoplatonism, most clearly seen in the works of al-Sijistānī, there are serious questions about the degree to which it was accepted in the Maghrib. To be sure, it was adopted

29. Wilferd Madelung and Paul Walker (ed. and trans.), *Affirming the Imamate: Early Fatimid Teachings in the Islamic West, an Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Works Attributed to Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shiʿi and His Brother Abū'l-ʿAbbās* (London 2021), trans. 81.

30. Madelung and Walker (ed. and trans.), *Affirming the Imamate*, trans. 92.

31. Madelung and Walker (ed. and trans.), *Affirming the Imamate*, trans. 85–86.

fairly widely later, though mainly in Egypt and the East. But there is also a matter of whether it promoted any kind of mysticism other than a narrow doctrine of intellect that tended to reject most forms of supra-rational perception.

For a full understanding of this aspect of the issue, it is necessary to consider not merely Ismāʿīlī expressions of a form of Neoplatonism, but also the history of Neoplatonic materials, the Arabic texts that conveyed them, and independent works that adopted and adapted it in the Islamic context. Elements of this school of ancient philosophical thought show up in several ways and places ranging from portions of works of the third-/ninth-century al-Kindī (d. ca. 252/866) and the fourth-/tenth-century *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* to the pseudo-ancient *Theologia* in its shorter and longer version, and the so-called *Pseudo-Ammonius*[32]. As but one key example, we know that a mid-fourth-/tenth-century work of al-Sijistānī, his *Kitāb al-maqālīd*, actually quotes passages that also appear in the *Longer Theologia*, which was apparently his source[33]. Therefore, the transmission and use of similar materials may not be connected in any way with the Ismāʿīlī al-Sijistānī but rather derived directly from the *Theologia* itself, at least from one version of it.

A further point of interest in this regard is whether or not what many have perceived as a mystical side to Plotinus (or Plato) had any influence on the Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonists. The famous passage by Plotinus in which he describes the experience of transcendence into a vision of light and splendor follows.

> Often have I been alone with my soul and have doffed my body […] so as to be inside myself, outside of other things. Then do I see within myself such beauty and splendor as I do remain marveling at […] so that I know that I am one of the parts of the sublime […] divine world. When I am certain of that, I lift my intellect up from that world into the divine world […] so as to be above the entire intelligible world, and seem to be standing in the sublime and divine place. And there I see such light and splendor as tongues cannot describe nor ears comprehend […] The place of splendor and light, which is the cause of all light and splendor[34].

32. On the *Pseudo-Ammonius* in this context see my discussion of it and source citations including the edition and trans. by Ulrich Rudolph, in *Early Philosophical Shiism* (Cambridge 1993), particularly 39-40.

33. Again see my analysis of the work in Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*.

34. *Theologia* I, 21-44 = *Enneads* IV 8, 1, 1-2, 9.

This passage was retained in the Arabic version and was certainly known to Ismāʿīlī writers. Yet it does not have much influence on them. The Ismāʿīlī writers were not necessarily interested in experiences during which ordinary humans gain a personal glimpse of a reality above and beyond the universal intellect. Intellect cannot know of anything more than itself. And if it tries, as in attempting to understand where it came from, it recoils at the experience and it falls back in confusion and failure. In this theology God is simply utterly unknowable. He is a given that cannot be attained in any sense whatsoever. For Plotinus and those under his influence trying to comprehend the very source of all things is a process that is ultimately mystical and ineffable. Plotinus, via his Arabic texts, provided the Islamic world not only with his version of the doctrine of the hypostatic One, but also with a driving force that calls the individual soul to seek it out and to rise toward a union with it. Poetic and passionate, his description of the One and of the individual soul's confrontation with it, is lyrical, mystical, and intensely personal, as illustrated in the passage just cited. The end is ecstatic not rational. Al-Sijistānī and those of his kind do not delve into these matters, rather they resist the temptation that became the major objective of the Sufi path[35]. He stops the upward progress and blocks the way by use of his special concept of double negations. The divine is, he insists, not in a place, not in time, not characterizable, not describable and also *not* not in a place, *not* not in a time, *not* not characterizable, and *not* not describable. All knowledge and all perception, any form of perception, terminate at this level. There can be no "taste" of what might be higher and beyond. No speculation about God's reality is allowed. Reason is as far as the road goes. Ecstatic experiences do not play a part in this theology.

Therefore, if some elements of Ismāʿīlī thought did move westward across North Africa and into Iberia, this restriction was likely a factor in that transmission. In sum, it appears to be premature to posit influences in the absence of solid evidence, such as clear examples of conscious adaption by Andalusī writers (or rulers) of Fāṭimid,

35. I am thinking here of a later but clearly Andalusī account found in Ibn Tufayl's *Ḥayy b. Yaqẓān* who, as with the author himself, ultimately experiences a «taste» (*dhawq*) of what is beyond and above pure intellect. But I do not know how much earlier this idea can be found in Iberian literature.

or Fāṭimid like, doctrines or practices. At present it seems that none existed, at least none were explicit enough to provide a path for further inquiry, let alone confirmation.

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ABSTRACT

Paul Walker, *Intense Rivalry, Sectarian Secrecy, and Doctrinal Recourse to Reason: Obstacles to the Fourth-/Tenth-Century Transmission of Ismāʿīlī Thought to al-Andalus*

Occasional Fāṭimid attempts to gain a foothold in Umayyad Iberia were typically accompanied by fierce polemical exchanges from both sides. Vocal opposition emanating from al-Andalus and Umayyad interference in North African affairs precluded any but the most minimal transmission of ideas or texts. Moreover, esoteric doctrinal writings by agents of the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa* were subjected to a rule of secrecy. Ismāʿīlīs were sworn never to reveal anything in their writings. Opponents in the Fāṭimid era knew little of it and most denunciations of the Ismāʿīlīs were based instead on generic polemical falsehoods. In addition, although fourth-/tenth-century Ismāʿīlī thought became dependent on a form of Neoplatonism, there are serious questions as to what degree it was accepted in the Maghrib. There is also an issue of whether it promotes any kind of mysticism rather than a narrower doctrine of intellect that tends to reject most forms of supra-rational perception.

Paul Walker
University of Chicago
pwalker@uchicago.edu