

The Fatimid Educational Administration in Egypt

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Abstract

This paper tries to investigate the Fatimid educational administration experience in Egypt. It starts by reviewing the historical conditions that paved the way for the establishment of this Ismā'īli state, as well as the principal foundations of their ideology. This is significant, because in medieval Islam administration of educational activities was part of an interconnected bureaucracy, in which education, religious sectarian preferences and politics were inseparable. Writing about the Fatimid educational administration is always difficult because the Fatimid political apparatus's nature, and the wide spread culture of secrecy. What makes the matter more complicated is the style of recording events by Muslim historians of that era. They followed a methodology which chronicled the political, religious and economic aspects of life on annual basis, and neglected other aspects such as educational administration. Concepts related to modern educational administration literature like centralization, unity of command, span of control and merit, were rarely mentioned in the historical sources. These difficulties made this research a testing challenge.

Keywords: Educational Administration, Curriculum, Fatimids, Ismā'īlis, Egypt, Medieval

Introduction

The Fatimids were Ismā'īlis. They got their name from their acceptance of Ismā'īl bin Ja'far Al-Sādiq as the divinely appointed spiritual successor to Ja'far Al-Sādiq. They were also named Fatimids because of their claim to be descendants of Fatima, daughter of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), and wife of the fourth Caliph 'Ali b. Abi Tālib and first Shī'a *imām*. They have also been called '*Ubaidis*, in reference to the founder of the Fatimid dynasty 'Ubayd Allāh Al-Mahdi Billāh.

The Fatimid *da'wah* gained impetus in North Africa with the missionary efforts of Abu Abd Allah Al-Shī'ī who effectively paved the political and military way for *imām* Ubaidullāh Al-Mahdi. Abu Abdullāh's success in propagating the *da'wah* and in his military conquests was finally crowned with his triumph over the Aghlabid ruler Ibrāhim bin Ahmad Ziadatullāh.

According to Ibn Idhāri, Al-Qayrawān's notables and jurists came out to meet Abu Abd Allāh on Saturday 1 Rajab 296 AH / 25 March 909 AD at Sāqiyat Mams to the west of Al-Qayrawān.¹ "They met with him, greeted him and congratulated him on the victory."²

Abu Abd Allah deputed some prominent leaders of Kutama tribe led by his brother Abul Abbas, and sent an invitation to Al-Mahdi in Salamia to take over the reigns of the Maghrib.

The Fatimids in the Maghrib were able to establish themselves as a powerful state; they built a very strong naval force which curtailed the dominance of the Byzantine naval in the Mediterranean Sea. The Fatimids embarked in a period of an impressive expansion that within years took them to rule Egypt, the Red Sea coast, Yemen, Palestine, and parts of Syria. However, after imposing their authority in the eastern part of the Maghrib, they grew ambitious and turned their attention to Egypt

¹ Colin G. S. and Lévi-Provençal É., ed. (1983). *Kitāb al-Bayān al-Mughrib fi Akhbār Mulūk al-Andalus wa al-Maghrib li Abu al-Abbās Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Idhari al-Marrakushi* [Book of the Amazing Story of the History of the Kings of Andalusia and Maghreb] Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 3rd edn, 1-148.

² Haji Hamid, ed. and Trans., *Qadi al-Nu'man: Ifitāh al-Da'wah*, 174.

The power of the Fatimids in North Africa had greatly increased by 969, “the fourth Caliph” of this house Al-Muizz was strong enough to mobilize an army which under the command of a former Greek slave (Jawhar) conquered the whole of Egypt... without any vigorous resistance.³

Jawhar has laid the foundation of the city of 'Al-Qāhirah at-Mu'izziyah' and wrote to Al-Mu'izz requesting him to come to Egypt, a wish that was realized in Ramadān 361 A.H. The conquest of Egypt was first in a series of military triumphs which extended the Fatimid rule from Sicily to Sind.

Nature of the Fatimid Creed and Ideology

Like in the other branches of Shī'a, the Ismā'īlī creed advocates 'Ali b. Abi Tālib entitlement to succeed the Prophet (pbuh) before the other companions, and that his Imamate⁴ was infallible and divinely chosen, it has been determined in letter and will, whether that was evident or veiled. They also hold that the Imamate remains in his descendants, and if it has been taken away from them, that is because of wrongdoing from their enemies or for *taqiyya*⁵ dissimulation purpose. The uprising of the Fatimids marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Islam because they posed a serious intellectual and political challenge to the existing order (predominantly Sunni). Their *da'wah* missionaries exploited the natural love and respect which believers carry in their hearts towards *ahl al-Bayt* to claim that their divine right has been stolen from them by the usurping rulers and that “by descent and by divine choice, so they claimed, they were the sole rightful heirs to the caliphate of all Islam.”⁶

The Fatimids gave their distinctive doctrines a central importance in their political system. Ismaili theology provided the basis of the caliphate and denied that of the Abbasids. As long as the Abbasids survived, the Fatimids were engaged in a religious and ideological conflict, in which doctrine was their most powerful weapon: thus, the Fatimids accorded prime importance to the formulation and elaboration of their creed.⁷

Fatimid Political System and Administration

The system of governance and all of its apparatus was centered on the *imām*. The Fatimid Caliphs were in full control of their state's administration.

Ismailism recognizes the authority of the Imam, who after the Prophet Muhammad is the representative of God on Earth. The Imam is both the spiritual and the political leader of the community, he is appointed either by the prophet (as in the case of Ali) or by the preceding Imam. He has to be male, pious and of specific descent. He is infallible and the only official interpreter of scriptures.⁸

³ Spuler Bertold, *The Age of the Caliphs*, translated from German by Bagley F.R.C with a new introduction by Hathaway Jane, (Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995) Vol 2, 71

⁴ *Imamate* literally means 'to lead'; *al-imām* means 'the leader'. Among the Sunni 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 Shi'ites, 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 Shiite dogma restricts the Imams to 'Ali, his sons Hasan and Husayn, and nine direct linear descendants of Husayn. Twelve-Imām Shiite doctrine 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'īlī Shiites, the succession of the Imāms breaks off from the Twelve- Imāms 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 Shiite 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

⁵ Refers to a dispensation allowing the Shī'a believers to conceal their faith when under threat, persecution or compulsion.

⁶ Holt P.M, Lambton Kis Ann and Lewis Bernard eds., *The Cambridge History of Islam*. Vol 1. (Cambridge: Cambridge at the University Press, 1970), 184.

⁷ Lewis Bernard, *Interpretation of Fatimid History* (Cairo, Egypt: Colloque International sur L'histoire du Caire, 27 Mars- 5 Avril 1969), 9

⁸ Calderini Simonetta, 'Cosmology and Authority in medieval Ismailism', *Diskus*, Vol 4, No 1 (1996), pp.11-22

Meanwhile, the office of the *wazir* (minister) managed the day to day business and looked after the affairs of the *ra'iyah* (people). As far as the titles are concerned, Fatimids rulers favored the title of *imām* although *khalifah*, and *amir al-Mu'minin* were also used to indicate the supreme portfolio.

Literally, *imām* is a leader, and means to lead. Whereas the Sunni Islamic literature regard *imamate* as a vicegerency of the Prophet to handle the worldly and religious affairs of the Muslims, "Imamate in the Shī'a literature refers to an empire in terms of the vicegerency of Prophet [s], for the affairs that pertain to the world and religion"⁹ [Translation mine] or to protect the religion and manage the affairs of this world. "Imamate is prescribed to succeed Prophethood as a means of protecting the *dīn*, and managing the affairs of this world."¹⁰

All Shī'a Islamic literature is in absolute agreement with the Sunnis over the necessity to have an *imām* to lead the *ummah*. However, in common with other Shī'a Muslims, the Ismā'īlis affirm that political leadership of the community is inseparable from the religious leadership, hence it is for Allāh and his Prophet to decide on who will lead, while the Sunnis believe this is incumbent on the public. The Ismā'īlis consider the *Imamate* a fundamental doctrine as it answers the questions of who should lead; it also determines the legal right of the caliphate. This originates from the radical Shī'a belief of 'Ali Ibn b. Tālib's entitlement for the caliphate and his descendants after him. Hence, the major political reference which the Ismā'īlis recline on is the *imāms'* existence, possessed of supernatural knowledge, authority and free from any error and sin. This importance is stressed by Farhad Daftary, an authority in the Ismā'īli studies:

This man who is also the inheritor of Mohammad's secret knowledge, is endowed by God with special *ilm*, and has perfect understanding of the onward or exoteric (*zahir*) and the inward or esoteric (*batin*) aspects and meanings of the Qur'an and the sacred law of Islam. Indeed, the world cannot exist for a moment without an Imam, the proof (*Hujjah*) of God on earth. Even if only two men were left upon the face of the earth, one of them would be the Imam. And there can only be one Imam at one and same time, though there may be a silent one (*samit*), his successor, beside him.¹¹

The Ismā'īli doctrine places great importance to the submission of the believers to the authority of the *imām*, it considers believer's obedience to his *imām* as part of his obedience to God, and his disobedience to the *imām* as equal to disobeying God by virtue of the command in the Quran for Muslims to obey those vested with authority. Daftary explained the importance of the *imām* further:

In Shii thought, the Imam's all-important spiritual function of interpreting the inner meaning of the revelations announced by the Prophet is known as *tawil*. The term *walayah*, meaning devotion to the Imams, is sometime also used in this sense... According to the shiis, the cycle of prophecy (*dairat al-nubuwwah*), representing the deliverance of new sacred laws by different prophets came to its end with the Prophet Muhammad; but then, there arose the permanent need for the initiatic function connected with explaining the secret meaning of the Islamic message. And the person whose duty it is in every age to fulfill the function of *ta'wil* (or *walayah*), inseparable from the *Imamate*, is the rightful Imam. It is through this function that the Imams become the *awliya* Allah, or the friends of Allah.¹²

Fatimid Political and Religious Administrative Hierarchy

By such glorification to their *imāms*, *hujjahs* and *dā'is*, the Ismā'īlis created a 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 hierarchy."¹³ The Ismā'īli *da'wah* in Fatimid Egypt had a strictly defined hierarchy. Mustapha Ghalib Tamir, a Syrian contemporary Ismā'īli historian, provides a list of 12 ranks within the Ismā'īli *da'wah*, with the *imām* at the helm and the *mustajīb* (candidate for membership in the *da'wah*) at the bottom.

⁹ Abdul Rahman 'Umayra ed., *Kitab Sharh al-Maqāsid of Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftazani* [Book of Explanation of the Purposes] Beirut: Dār 'Ālam Al-Kutub, 1st edn, 1989), Vol 5, 232

¹⁰ Al-Māwardi Abu al-Hasan Ali b. Muhammad b. Habib, *Al-Ahkām al-Sultaniyah wa al-Wilayat al-Diniyah* [The Ordinances of Government], Translated by Dr. Asadullah Yate (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1996), 10

¹¹ Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn., April 24, 1992), 86

¹² Ibid, 87

¹³ Calderini Simonetta, 'Cosmology and Authority in Medieval Ismailism' Ibid, 11-22

- The *imām*: He occupies the highest rank and possesses the right for *ta'wīl* (inner interpretation). He could be an *asās* (founder), *mustaqar* (regular and permanent *imām*), or *mustawda'* (temporarily entrusted).
- *Al-Hujjah* (the proof): He is *imām's* representative and special shadow. He deputizes him in unattainable regions.
- *Dā'i al-Du'at* (Chief *da'i*): He is in charge of the *da'wah* activities in the regions, and directly accountable in front of the *hujjah*.
- *Dā'i al-Balāgh* (the message bearer): He writes the message and keeps it confidential. He also serves as a liaison between *Dā'i al-Du'āt* and *dā'is* in the regions.
- *Al-Dā'i al-Mutlaq* (the *dā'i* with authority): Without seeking any permission from anyone, can move to any place he feels that it needs him. However, his organizational relation is with *dā'i al-Du'āt*.
- *Al-Dā'i al-Muhaddad or al-Mahsūr* (the *dā'i* with limited authority): His task is limited to one particular region or district and cannot go beyond it without permission.
- *Al-Ma'dhūn* (the licentiate): He is responsible for taking oath and *mithāq* (covenant) from the new members (responsible for organization).
- *Al-Muqāsir* (the persuader): He contacts the public and possesses the ability of argumentation and persuasion. Hence, his role is primarily educational.
- *Al-Mustajīb* (the candidate member): He is the novice member, who gave his '*ahd* (oath) and *mithāq* (covenant). He would not disclose the secrets. He is chosen from the active members of the society.

Mustapha Ghalib added to this skeleton structure:

- *Al-Bāb* (the gate or threshold): He has the degree of deciding the meaning of the discourse (*fasl al-Khitāb*)
- *Al-Naqīb* (leading propagator): His rank entitles him to define and grade authorities in different degrees, as well as defining the exoteric worship (*Al-'Ibādah al-'Amaliyah*)¹⁴

The Ismā'īli doctrine of imamate claims that the *imām* is the only being who possesses the entire truth and he is the only legal source of that truth. Such status qualifies him to hold the right of command and prohibition. In addition to that, He inherits the hidden (*bātin*) knowledge and successive symbolic verses passed on by means of inheritance in the family of the Prophet, from one generation to the other one. This knowledge contains realities of the religion and all events in the world.¹⁵

The conclusion that could be drawn from our analysis of the Ismā'īli creed is that it emphasized the exclusive character of their *imāms* and their special connection with Allāh. The *imāms* were so fundamental to the extent that their role matched to some degree Prophets' role, in a sense that the deliverance of Allāh's revelation by the Prophets came to its end, but the initiatic functions connected with the secret meanings of the religion were always handled by the *imāms* through the functions of *ta'wīl* at every age. Hence, like any sect, the Ismā'īlis were:

- 1- A charismatic group...characterized by the following psychological elements: (a) members who have a shared believe system, (b) they sustained a high level of social cohesiveness, (c) they were strongly influenced by the group's behavioral norms, and (d) charismatic (or sometimes divine) power was accorded to the group or its leadership.¹⁶
- 2- Bound together by beliefs vital for the group's operation. They shaped their attitude and motivated them to act in self-sacrifice.

The selection of the *imām* is through hereditary chain and the succession to the Imamate is by way of *nas* (designation) from the preceding *imām* to one amongst his male descendants, and the common divisor is their lineal (physical) descent from the Prophet's son-in-law 'Ali b. Abi Tālib. Obviously, this order constitutes a monarchical system concealed under an aura of veneration that ensures their dominance and secures their followers' obedience.

¹⁴ Ali Nuh, *Al-Khitāb al-Ismā'īli fī al-Tajdīd al-Fikri al-Islami al-Mu'āsir* [The Ismā'īli Discourse in the Contemporary Islamic Intellectual Renewal] (Damascus: Dār Al-Yanābī' li Al-Tibā'a wa Al-Nashr wa Al-Tawzi', 1994), 91

¹⁵ Muhammad Al-Said Jamal Al-Din, *Dawlat al-Ismā'īliyah fī Iran* [The Ismā'īli State in Iran]. (Cairo: Muassasat Sijil Al-'Arab, 1975), 5

¹⁶ Galanter Marc, *Cults: Faith, Healing and Coercion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2nd edn., 1989), 5

Character of the Fatimid Administration

The Fatimids engaged into intensive administrative reforms in order to tend to the affairs of their subjects, though they retained some institutions inherited from the conquered Ikhshidids, meanwhile, they adopted many forms of governing from their old foes, the Aghlabids. Some historical sources, particularly Ismā'īli ones, stressed that the Fatimids did not hesitate to turn to former officers from the old Ikhshidi and Aghlabi regimes and employed them in their *dīwāns*.

Chronicler, al-Maqrīzi provides us with an explicit illustration about the administrative institutions during the Fatimid era. Quoting Ibn al-Tuwayr, he enumerated and explained functions and history of *dīwān al-Majlis* (Bureau of Council), *dīwān al-Nazar* (Bureau of Inspection), *dīwān al-Tahqīq* (Bureau of Investigation), *dīwān al-Juyūsh wal al-Rawātib* (Bureau of the troops and Remuneration), *dīwān al-Insha' wa al-Mukātabāt* (Bureau of State).¹⁷ The Fatimids maintained several posts, administrations and *dīwān* (bureaus) such as:

The *dīwāns* for land tax, post and stipends (or ‘*ata*’, which paid the salaries of the old Arab *jund* or standing army)... others were abolished such as the position of vizier and its corollary, the chancery or *dīwān al-Insha'* both replaced simply by a secretary to Al-Mahdi. At the same time, new bureaus were established to meet the needs of the transition from revolution to state, such as the *dīwān al-Kashf* (bureau of investigation) and another to deal with lingering issues such as reclamation of plundered property.”¹⁸

Beside the above, the Fatimids established additional senior administrative offices, such as the post of *sāhib al-Qalam al-Jalīl* (Secretary of the thick pen) and *Sāhib al-Qalam al-Daqīq fī al-Mazālim* (Secretary of the thin pen in grievances); both belonged to the Bureau of State.

We conclude from the above that the political and ideological policies brought to Egypt by the Fatimids were absolutely new. They created a number of portfolios and agencies to ensure their survival and success in serving the new regime. However, these political and ideological policies had profound impact on other aspects of life, especially the educational life in Egypt.

The Educational Experience in Fatimid Egypt and its Features

Following their capture of their jewel Egypt in 969 AD, and the stabilization of their state for two centuries, Fatimid civilization and advancement encompassed all aspects of medieval life and reached its peak. The Fatimids earmarked education with special consideration. However, it is incorrect to assume that the Fatimid state possessed an integrated and holistic system of education that involved establishments, clear-cut objectives, curriculum, syllabus, methods of teaching, and levels in the manner of modern systems of education. Consequently, we will discuss the Fatimid educational system as conventionally understood and practiced in the medieval world. The significance of education for the Fatimids in Egypt originated from the purpose of establishing their state in Egypt. The Ismā'īli *imāms* were not after wealth and personal glory. They aimed to establish a theocratic Ismā'īli orthodoxy which can displace the Abbasid Sunni caliphate and rule the entire Muslim world. To reach that aim, the Fatimids invested immense efforts in disseminating knowledge, arts, literature, and the Ismā'īli culture in Egypt.

Some historians attributed the flourishing of intellectual activities in Egypt during the Fatimid rule to another factor that is directly related to the geographical and social milieu in which they created their state, namely Egypt. They argued that the flourishing of education and intellectual life has not stemmed from a vacuum as:

Egypt has already occupied a substantial position in Islam, after the conversion of the majority of its people to the new religion and their adoption of the Arab character. Such circumstances were accompanied by a dynamic Islamic educational movement which promoted Arabic as a chief instrument for the Islamic culture. That movement attained great scientific and Islamic advancement in the first capital of al-Fustat, which eventually became a gathering point for leading scholars.

¹⁷ Muhammad Zaynhum and Madiha al-Sharqawi, ed. *Al-Mawā'iz wa al-Itibar*. Vol 2, 137-150

¹⁸ Hamdani Sumaiya, *Between Revolution and State: The Path to Fatimid Statehood. Qadi al-Nu'man and the construction of Fatimid Legitimacy*. (London, New York: I.B Tauris Publishers in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2006), 25

Thus, it is appropriate to say that the Fatimids have not destroyed the existing learning tradition, rather, they brought further advancement which involved public and military education for youngsters and adults, as well as offering religious education of the Shī'a Ismā'īli and Fatimid school.¹⁹

Nonetheless, the inherited intellectual dynamism does not undermine the Fatimid zeal and enthusiasm to develop an educational system that promotes and formulates their religious ideology.

Relationship between Curriculum and the Adopted Doctrinal School (Madhhab)

For Ismā'īli Fatimids, educational curriculum and policies shall primarily protect the Ismā'īli teachings and ensure their dissemination. There is nothing unusual with this, as every political system in the past and in modern life sought to maintain the status quo, reproducing itself and protecting its interests. In this case there is nothing more effective than education to achieve such objectives. The enthusiasm of the Fatimids towards *da'wah* have never subdued even after they attained proportional level of political stability in their territories. They were perhaps "the first to hold official offices for *da'wah* in their state."²⁰ Their *da'wah* was based on the claim of I *imām*'s absolute authority, "who is the spiritual head of the faithful wherever they were, the embodiment of God's purpose and guidance on earth."²¹ Hence, the ultimate source of *ta'wīl* (allegorical interpretation) of the Book of Allah by the terms of *zāhir* (external manifestation) and *bātin* (esoteric meaning). The Fatimid's *da'wah* and educational methods were subjected to *imām*'s authority both religious and political. Thus, even Friday sermons in mosques -which became the main venues for educational activities in the Fatimid Egypt- depended always on *imām*'s approval. The *dā'i*, regardless of his knowledge was only a spokesman in the name of the infallible *imām*, the real source of wisdom and all knowledge. The religious and political authority of the Fatimid *imām* entitled him to supervise and monitor whatever was channeled to the public. That monitoring was reinforced by the chief *dā'i*, another sensitive office in the Fatimid's executive hierarchy. Hatim Mahamid explains the various tasks of the chief *dā'i*:

The chief *dā'i* was also the supervisor of the state Ismaili educational system, his main task being to direct the scholars and 'ulama in propagating the principles of the Ismailiyya and strengthening its foundations. Thus it is difficult to separate between religious preaching conducted for missionary purposes and for the reinforcement of the Ismaili doctrine, and religious education whose objectives were to prepare Ulama, missionaries and functionaries who worked in the Fatimid's service.²²

In their capacity as *imāms*, the Fatimid caliphs used to personally supervise both, educational and *da'wah* activities inside and outside of the state:

The Fatimid palace was not only a center of political authority, but also the seat of the chief *da'i*, known as *Maglis al-Da'i* or *Maglis al-Da'wa*. Meetings and assemblies of senior Ismaili 'ulama were held in the palace, both for decision making purposes or as sessions of Ismaili training and education.²³

The mixture of these threefold, namely: education, politics and *da'wah*, went as far as they shaped the identity of the Fatimid state. They became vital for their survival that none of the Fatimid caliphs 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."²⁴

If we consider the Fatimid's *da'wah* and missionary network reflective of the Fatimid system of education and curriculum, then the main feature of the curriculum was its evident flexibility. The mechanisms of argumentation varied according to the prevailing state of affairs. Hence, they never adopted one single formula to address the community.

¹⁹ *Al-Mūjaz fī Al-Tarbiyah Al-'Arabiyah Al-Islamiyah: Al-Muassasāt wa Al-Mumārasāt*, [Summary of Arab-Islamic Education: Institutions and Practices] (Māb: Mussasat Āl Al-Bayt li Al-Fikr Al-Islami.1996), 67

²⁰ Aref Tamer, *Tārīkh Al-Ismā'īliyah* [History of Isma'ilism] (Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes li Al-Kutub wa Al-Nashr, 1st edn, 1991), Vol 1, 183

²¹ Lewis Bernard, *Interpretation of Fatimid History*, 5

²² Hatim Mahamid, 'Isma'ili Da'wa and Politics in Fatimid Egypt', *Nebula*, 3.2-3.3, (2006), pp. 4-5 of 16

²³ *Ibid*, 2 of 16

²⁴ 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-Tiba'ah wa Al-Nashr, 1st edn., 1967), 22

The Ismā'īli missionaries brought a message of comfort 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.²⁵

The Fatimid regime was capable of organizing itself in a unique and compact religio-political organization. The Fatimids were able to convert their organization from its previous status as a secretive opposition movement to a ruling state. The transitional process required the use of military, material, and educational resources, but the main factor which genuinely contributed to the success of this transformation was the regime's successful bid to choose men who shouldered with mastery the tasks of planning and execution. It was a special Fatimid blend, that harmonized the imperial purposes of the Fatimid state and the universal aims of the Ismā'īli faith and eventually permitted them to meet and merge. That harmony succeeded, in contrast to the Abbasids, arch enemies of the Fatimids failure in preventing a persistent trend of schism and split, accompanied with divorce -in several cases- between the political and religious institutions. The compact organization which characterized the Fatimid regime had its positive effects on the sectors of *da'wah* and education, though the exact organization of *da'wah* remains somehow obscure. The high level of secrecy which enveloped the Ismā'īli propaganda and the deliberate intention of the Ismā'īlis to conceal their heritage contributed to this obscurity. Nevertheless, the high level of order and performance of the Fatimid governmental machinery in general, and *da'wah* in particular, has been recognized by both, Ismā'īli²⁶ and Sunni²⁷ historians and researchers. The hierarchy of the *da'wah* structure was sacred, and every member of this structure regarded it as divine:

For an Ismā'īli of the middle ages order and hierarchy were not superimposed by the community, nor were natural of divine... All hierarchies in the universe come from God and the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the *da'wa* is ... the essential link between God and the individual believer. To resist the authority of the *da'wa* or to rebel against it, is to rebel against God."²⁸

Although the hierarchical order of the Ismā'īli *da'wah* was very successful in according religious shade over the political, it was regarded by some researchers as similar to the religious hierarchy in Christianity, hence, without any Islamic ordinance:

In reality, there is nothing about *hudūd*²⁹, *nātiq*³⁰, *sāmit*³¹, and the distinction between the *imām* and the *hujjah*³² in the Qur'an, neither in the prophetic traditions. No one from the pious ancestors (*salaf*) ever mentioned it. Rather, this Ismā'īli system of *da'wah* was borrowed from the Christianity. It was brought in to Islam by the disciple of Abi Al-Khattāb, the *dā'i* May'mūn Al-Qaddāh and his son Abdullah.

²⁵ Lewis Bernard, *Interpretation of Fatimid History*, 7

²⁶ Farhad Daftary, 'The Ismaili Da'wa Outside the Fatimid Dawla', in: *L'Egypte fatimide: Son art et son histoire* [Fatimid Egypt: Its Art and History]. Edited by Marianne Barrucand, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999

²⁷ Hatim Mahamid, 'Isma'ili Da'wa and Politics in Fatimid Egypt'.

²⁸ Calderini Simonetta, 'Cosmology and Authority in Medieval Ismailism', 11-22

²⁹ Ordinarily "*hadd*" would mean "limit", but it has several technical connotations, given the early Fatimid preoccupation with philosophy and astronomy, the term "*hudud*" would have meant "defined and graded authorities of different ranks" both in the cosmos and in the *da'wah*'s religio-political organization. See, Hamdani Abbas, 'Evolution of the Organisational Structure of the Fatimi Da'wah: The Yemeni and Persian Contribution', *Arabian Studies*, 3 (1976), pp. 85-114

³⁰ The word "*natiq*" (Plural *nutaqa*) means, a speaker. "*natiq*" is a prophet (*nabi*) sent to deliver divine revelation. See, Blank Jonah, *Mullah on the Mainframe: Islam and Modernity among the Daudi Bohras* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, April 2001), 18

³¹ The word "*sāmit*" means, silent. It refers to the Imām who is contemporary to any of the prophets. W. Ivanov (A brief Survey of the Evolution of Ismā'īlism, Leiden, 1952, pp. 50-58) stated that the term "*sāmit*" was dropped during the Fatimid period and replaced with the term "*wasi*". See, Nasseh Ahmad Mirza, *Syrian Ismailism: The Ever Living of Line of the Imamate* (UK: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 1997), 129.

³² 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.

They attributed it to the Prophet (pbuh), Ali (*Radhiallahu 'anhu*), and particularly to unjustly and falsely slandered Ja'far Al-Sādiq in order to divest the Shari'a, hold a social status and be venerated by the public, as they used these majestic people as authority.³³

In any case, regardless of its true origins, the hierarchical order of the Ismā'īlis has been vital for their even after the decline of the Fatimid state. The graduation of the Fatimid organizational structure was matched with an equivalent graduation and hierarchy in their educational and *da'wah* activities and establishments:

The Ismā'īlis adopted a strict and secret system of *da'wah* in the propagation of their doctrines which comprised highly qualified *dā'is* in varying ranks. During the process of initiation, they do not instruct their doctrines to the *mustajīb*³⁴ all at once, instead, they initiate him in gradual stages, each rested on the antecedent.³⁵

The Fatimid *da'wah* literature likened the *mustajīb* to a young child who cannot be educated all at one time, it ought to proceed with this process beginning by his nursing then his social upbringing, followed by nurturing his intellectual faculties until he attains full maturity in the final stage. "Knowledge (*'Ilm*) and wisdom (*hikmah*) are according to *Ismā'īlis* belief two gifts from God, revealed to humanity through His prophets"³⁶, it is imperative on the learned people to deliver them through progressive *da'wah*, in order to ensure the realization of a more effective teaching. The initiation process represented a second birth for any *mustajīb*.

Types of Curriculum

Considering that their *da'wah* was universal like their knowledge, the curriculum was divided into two types, public legal curriculum which involved extensive educational, mainly religious programs, for the masses in Egypt. The programs sought to provide a minimum legal education for the public. These programs were accessible to all citizens regardless of their Islamic legal affiliation. This trend prompted many historians, Ismā'īlis in particular, to declare that the Fatimid regime in Egypt, though Ismā'īlism enjoyed a privileged position as its legal doctrines were adopted by the official judiciary, yet, the regime showed high level of tolerance and flexibility towards the other legal schools of thought. The second type was an esoteric curriculum. It was mainly a religious program designed for the varying ranks of *dā'is*, such as *dā'i al-Balāgh*, *dā'i al-Mahsūr*, *dā'i al-Mutlaq*, and also for the *mustajībs*. In his article, '*The Ismā'īlis Oath of Allegiance ('ahd) and the Sessions of Wisdom (Majālis Al-Hikma)*'

The Fatimids were fully aware of the fact that despite their political and military puissance, their subjects in Egypt were predominantly Sunnists. As such, it was necessary to maintain some margin of secrecy and ensure the continuation of their confidential knowledge. Equally, the Fatimids were well informed about the displeasure of the *Sunni* jurists towards the outsider Ismā'īli doctrines, and the general public conception which branded them as *ghulāt* (heretical exaggerators in matters of doctrine). Taking these factors into account, the Fatimids opted for a compromising approach in which they simultaneously did not irritate people against them, and took the education of their minority Ismā'īlis, particularly the *dā'is* as priority. They taught their esoteric Ismā'īli doctrines in specially-designed private sessions called *majālis al-Hikmah* (sessions of wisdom). Regarded as *mustawda' al-Hikmah* (trustee of wisdom) in the eyes of his followers, those sessions were usually held with the blessing, authorization, and support of the *imām*.

Administration of Principal Fatimid Educational Institutions

Taking into consideration the relative old period of history this discussion is related to, in which culture and concepts transcend the original connotations; a definition for the main educational institutions that emerged during will ultimately help us shedding light on the educational experience of the period into question. We are also aware of the complexity of designating institutions of learning using the terminologies of that era; this is particularly true in the case of early centuries of Islam.

³³ Rahmatullah Qamarul Huda Al-Athari, *Al-Bohra: Tārikhuha' wa 'Aqāeduha'*, *Dirasah 'Ilmiyah Muwaththaqah 'ann Ta'efat Al-Bohra Al-Ismā'īliyah, Dirasāt fi Al-'Aqaed wa Al-Firaq* [The Buhra, its History and Creeds: Scientific and Documented Study of the Ismā'īli Buhra Sect, Studies on Creeds and Sects]. Amman: Dār 'Amar li Al-Nashr wa Al-Tawzi', 1st edn., 2007), 41

³⁴ Term denoting an initiate to the lowest rank in the Fatimid religious hierarchy.

³⁵ Rahmatullah, *Al-Bohra*, 44

³⁶ Halm, *The Fatimides and their Traditions of learning*, 17

Terminologies as George Makdisi pinpointed in his master piece “*Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*” were fluid during a stage of development when institutions were still in flux.

Jāmi’ al-Azhar (The Luminous Mosque)

The Islamic tradition that mosques were extraordinary centers for religious, political, social, judicial, and intellectual functions have been maintained in the Middle Ages.

The Fatimids did not commit any new innovation by establishing *masjid al-Azhar*, one of the great architectural achievements of the Fatimids, following their conquest of Egypt and construction of *al-Qāhirah al-Mu’izziyah* (the conquering city of al-Mu’izz) in 385 AH/969 AD. Aspired to rule the entire Muslim world and dethrone the Abbasids from the political leadership of the Muslim world, the Fatimid *imāms* intended to demonstrate part of splendor and prestige of their rule by erecting huge buildings (palaces and mosques). Nasiri Khusraw³⁷, a Persian traveler in the eleventh century dedicated some passages of his book “*The Safarnama*” (book of travels) to describe the Fatimid Palace from outside, he writes:

The Sultan’s palace is in the middle of Cairo and is encompassed by an open space so that no building abuts it. Engineers who have measured it have found it to be the size of Mayyafareqin, as the ground is open all around it, every night there are a thousand watchmen, five hundred mounted and five hundred on foot, who blow trumpets and beat drums at the time of evening prayer and then patrol until day break. Viewed from outside the city, the Sultan’s palace looks like a mountain because of all the different buildings and the great height. From inside the city, however, one can see nothing at all because the walls are so high.³⁸

In its capacity as an educational institution, it is quite hard to find first hand historical information about the administration of al-Azhar. It is difficult for us to rule out the Fatimid’s exploitation of an imposing structure such as al-Azhar for purposes of *da’wah*, even if it did not hold *majālis al-Hikma* (Sessions of Wisdom) during the early years after its establishment, nevertheless, al-Azhar was instrumental for the esoteric and public face of the *Ismā’īli da’wah*. It is just fair to say that al-Azhar was regarded as powerful symbol of the Fatimid religious and political legitimacy and a decisive tool to sever spiritual relations with the previous Abbasid proxy rule, and ensure the loyalty of the Egyptians, sever spiritual relations with the previous Abbasid proxy rule, and ensure the loyalty of the Egyptians to the Fatimid *imāms*. *Khutbas* were closely monitored by the Fatimid caliphs themselves. Hence, students and new missionaries were trained before being dispatched to different *jazā’ir*³⁹ (Islands) over the world. It gradually acquired status of a university that offers all kinds of sciences and arts.

The Minister Ya’kūb b. Killis is regarded as the first man to think of making al-Azhar an institute for organized and systematic study. He got permission from Caliph al-Aziz Billah in 378 AH/988 AD to appoint some scholars at al-Azhar. They used to hold their seminars after Friday prayers and those seminars continued till the afternoon.⁴⁰

The early education system in al-Azhar was mainly in the form of *halaqah*⁴¹ which encompassed the classes of *fiqh* (Islamic Law) according to the *Ismā’īli* creed and *Shī’a* knowledge of religion, philosophy and monotheism. Later, Arabic language, medicine, Mathematics, logic and other subjects were also been introduced. The management of these *halaqas* was the prerogative of the teaching *sheikhs* (professors) in al-Azhar.

³⁷ Abu Mo’in Hamid ad-Dīn Nāsir Ibn Khusraw Al-Qūbadiani (1004-1088 CE) was a Persian poet, philosopher, traveler, and *Ismā’īli* scholar. He was born in Qūbadyan, a village near Balkh in Afghanistan and died in Yamagan, a village in Badakhshan province of Afghanistan. He is considered as one of the great poets and writers in Persian literature, the *Safarnama*, an account of his travels, being his most famous work.

³⁸ Ehsan Yarshater ed., *Book of Travels* (Safarnama) Nāsir Khusraw’s, Trans., W.M. Thackson (New York: Sunny Press, State University of New York Press, 1986), 45

³⁹ The Fatimids divided the world into twelve *jazā’ir* (singular: *jazīra*) for the purposes of their *da’wah* activities; each *jazīra* representing a separate and somewhat independent region for the penetration of the Fatimid *da’wah*.

⁴⁰ Soad Maher, *Al-Azhar: Monument and Culture* (Cairo: Al-Ahram Press, 1983), 11

⁴¹ It was around the *shuyūkh* or master that the study circle or *halqah* (Literally: circle, or ring) was formed. Upon his death, the original study circle would eventually dissolve, and his students would either attach themselves to other *shaykhs* or for their own study circle. See, Ephrat Dapha, *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition: The Sunni ‘Ulama of Eleventh Century Baghdad* (New York: Sunny Press, State University of New York, 2000), 76

The learning experience at al-Azhar could be summed in the following: There were three kinds of classes which met at the mosque: (a) groups of pious people who wanted to learn the Quran and its interpretation, (b) circles of students sitting on the floor learning religious sciences: and (c) formal lectures delivered by the chief of the propaganda hierarchy himself. These lectures were called “sessions of wisdom” (*majalis al-hikmah*). It is reasonable to believe that the linguistic, literary, legal and Quranic studies were taught at al-Azhar as well as logic and certain amount of mathematics and astronomy.⁴²

To sum up, it is quite safe to say that al-Azhar mosque-*madrasah* complex had special prominence. Being the first mosque erected by the Fatimids in Egypt, al-Azhar enjoyed caliphs’ care and consideration who regarded it as an educational and political center, thus, spending generously from the state’s public treasury as well as from their personal wealth. Drawing al-Azhar policies was the prerogative of the Fatimid caliphs and their viziers, however the religious authorities and scholars working in al-Azhar were entrusted with day-to-day management.

Dār Al-Hikmah (House of Wisdom)

There is no doubt that Bait al-Hikmah (in Baghdād) was the very first institution of higher scientific studies among the Arabs...Next in chronological order to Bait al-Hikmah came Dār al-Ilm. Or as it was also called Dār al-Hikmah. There is much resemblance between this college on the Nile and its sister on the Tigris. The Fatimites in Egypt were the rivals of the Abbasids at Baghdād and they did many things in imitation or rivalry of their political opponents. Perhaps Dār al-Hikmah is an illustration of this fact. In any case, there is sufficient evidence for the fact that Cairo, as well as Baghdād supported an academy college or whatever one may wish to call it, for the pursuit of advanced knowledge.⁴³

Dār al-Hikmah was founded to serve as a centre of learning and to facilitate the working of the Ismā’īli mission as well. It rapidly became a cultural centre, attracting students from all over the Muslim world. It was a venue to teach and learn sciences such as astronomy, logic, philosophy, mathematics, history, theology, languages and medicine. The Shī’a Ismā’īli esoteric interpretation was propagated in *Dār al-Hikmah* by organizing *majālis al-Hikmah* attended by the *imām* himself, he took part in debates sometimes and granted generous gifts to the participants.

Dār al-Hikmah was according to some historians equal in stature, facilities and libraries, academic credentials, and students to a university. Such credibility and stature flourished in the form of various intellectual activities and researches. In a firsthand account of the establishment of *Dār al-Hikmah*, al-Maqrīzi quoted al-Musabbihī, al-Hākīm’s court chronicler saying:

On this Saturday, Jumada Al-Akhirah, 395... the so-called House of Hikmah in Cairo was inaugurated. The Jurists took up residence there, and books from the palace libraries were moved into it. People could visit it and whoever wanted to copy something that interested him could do so; the same was true of anyone who wanted to read any of the material kept in it. After the building was furnished and decorated, and after all the doors and passages were provided with curtains, lectures were held there by the Qur’an readers, astronomers, grammarians and philologists, as well as physicians. Guardians, servants, domestics and others were hired to serve there. Into this house they brought all the books that the caliph ordered to be brought there, that is, all the manuscripts in all the domains of science and culture, to an extent to which they had never been brought together for a prince. He allowed access to all this to people of all walks of life. Whether they wanted to read books or dip into them...he granted substantial salaries to all those who were appointed by him there to do service, such as jurists and others... He also donated what people needed: ink, writing reeds, paper and inkstands.⁴⁴

Its detailed annual budget is also given by al-Maqrīzi, and it consisted of the following items:

10 dinārs for straw matting, 95 dinārs for papers, 48 dinārs for the librarian, 12 dinārs for water, 15 dinārs for janitor, 12 dinārs for pens, paper and ink, 1 dinār for repair of curtains, 12 dinārs for rebinding books, 5 dinārs for winter matting, 4 dinārs for winter rugs.⁴⁵

⁴² Bin Salamon, *Azhar and Politics*, 11

⁴³ Khalil A. Totah, *The Contribution of the Arabs to Education*, [New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1926), 29

⁴⁴ Al-Maqrīzi, *Al-Mawā’iz wa Al-I’tibā*, Vol 2, 275

⁴⁵ Ibid.

It is unfortunate that in his presentation of the annual budget of *Dār al-Hikmah*, al-Maqrīzi forgot to mention the remunerations provided to its professors and students.

We can conclude that *Dār al-Hikmah* was a remarkable continuation of its sister *Dār al-Hikmah* in Baghdād. It assembled scholars of jurisprudence, linguistics, medicine, arithmetic, logic, astronomy and other disciplines. As far as the management and administration of *Dār al-Hikmah* is concerned, it was directly managed by its founder caliph al-Hākim bi-Amrillah⁴⁶. He carefully designed its objectives, and its general guidelines and policy.

Beside Al-Azhar and *Dār al-Hikmah*, several formal and informal educational institutions were active, such the *Jāmi's* (mosques), *Maktabās* (Libraries), *maktab* or *kuttābs* (place of writing, *ribāts* (defensive enclosures), and *bīmārīstāns* (hospitals), and the Fatimids exercised relative control, and offered minimum models of administrations.

Ranks and Duties of Teachers

Apparently, teachers in Fatimid Egypt were ranked into three major levels, ordinary teachers of elementary and preparatory schooling (*maktabs*), private tutors of elementary schooling for children of the elites and royal family, and master scholars of mosques' circles and *madrasas*.

Ordinary Teachers

Although the social status and respectability of teachers on the whole was held high, there are anecdotes which indicate that the post of elementary school (*kuttāb*) teacher was not considered high in esteem. This is because the economic position of residents in big cities such as Baghdād, Damascus, Cairo, Basra, Isfahān, etc. had improved while the ordinary *kuttāb* teacher was not paid highly.⁴⁷

Private Tutors: There are ample evidences which attested that private tutors in the Fatimid period were held in high esteem. Tutoring children of the elites, young or grown-up was great business which lent the one who undertook it dignity and surrounded him with hide of grandeur. "Most *khulafa'* and nobility, when appointing a tutor for their sons, gave specific instructions as to the main qualities expected of both of them."⁴⁸

Master scholars: They were the highest elite in Egypt's intellectual life. Public and authorities as well, accorded them great respect.

The history of Islamic education is full of records which throw light on the prestige and honour in which learned scholars were held. It is said of many scholars that when they passed through the street men stood in rows to salute them and kiss their hands. Men would often dismount to stand and walk in front of the great teachers out of respect... This is why a typical Muslim teacher spent his days in the classroom, lecture hall, library or laboratory and his nights on the prayer mat seeking guidance and strength from Allāh.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Al-Mansūr Abu 'Ali, surnamed al-Hākim bi-Amrillah (He who governs by the orders of God), born in 375/ 985 in Cairo. Al-Hākim acceded the throne in 386/996 at the age of 11 years. He repeatedly exhibited erratic, eccentric and contradictory behavior. He seemed to have been keen on the morality of his subjects, repeatedly issuing orders for this to be done or that not to be done. This goes as far as micromanaging what is eaten and what is not. Moreover, he would forbid something then later allow it. He would repeatedly enforce trivial orders he issued such as the decoration of the streets and lighting them up by night, that people should not be prevented by his guards from approaching him. He issued orders that people should not eat Molokheya, since it was liked by Mu'awyah, nor water cress since it was liked by 'Aisha the Prophet's wife. He ordered that fisherman should not go for fish that has no scales. He also ordered that no one should go into bathhouses unless wearing something to cover his mid body, and no woman is to show her face on the street, nor attend funerals nor wear revealing ornate clothes. As for the non Muslims, he ordered that Christians and Jews have to wear different dress. He imposed curfew and ordered that no one should go out of their house after sunset until dawn. While al-Hākim appointed several viziers none of them lasted more than a few years. The great majority of them were ordered to be killed as they fell from favor for any real or perceived transgressions, financial or loyalty. Most of those viziers were Christians. Some of them served as physicians as well. Al-Hākim was feared by officials, soldiers and subjects alike. He reigned from 996 C.E. to 1021 C.E, having lived to age 36 and ruled for 25 years.

⁴⁷ The Muslim Educational Trust, *Issues in Islamic Education*. Article 'Teacher Training in Islam: Its Importance and Practicalities' by: Ghulam Nabi Saqeb, 'Teacher Training in Islam: its importance and practicalities' (Baltimore, Maryland (USA): The Muslim Educational Trust), 31 of 28-37

⁴⁸ The Muslim Educational Trust, *Issues in Islamic Education*, 31

⁴⁹ Ibid, 31, 32

In the second volume of al-Maqrīzi's *al-Khitat*, pages, 401 - 402, and the third volume of al-Qalqashandi's *Subh al-A'sha*, pages, 525 - 526 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.

Qādi al-Qudāt (Chief Judge), *dā'i al-Du'āt* (Chief Missionary), *al-Ustādihūn al-Muhannakūn* (Amirs of the palace, wearing distinctive turbans that are wound under the chin), *sāhib bayt al-Māl* (Chief of the Treasury), *hāmīl 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.⁵⁰

According to Yaacov Lev, there is a need to distinguish between payments of salaries to state officials, including other regular payments made by the state to various people, and charities distributed by the state and members of the ruling elite. He argued that:

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.⁵¹

Conclusion

From all the above discussion, we can draw the following:

- 1- Like the rest of Muslim societies in medieval Islam, Egyptians in Fatimid Egypt were prepared to interact with education, simply because learning requires social interaction.
- 2- In Fatimid Egypt, the inherited transcendental aim of education that is to preserve the religion has been altered to preserving the *madhhab* of the minority, even it was labeled as 'state religion'.
- 3- In order to secure the dominance of religio-political elite over the intellectual life, subjugate state's resources to politicize education, and accord legitimacy to the ruling Fatimid *imāms*, education was under the direct administration of the Fatimid viziers or prominent official scholars, and closely supervised by the *imām* (caliph) himself.
- 4- In Fatimid Egypt two systems of education co-existed, an official that was adopted, sponsored, and propagated by the state, and un-official, that was advocated and preserved by Sunni intellectual elite (scholars).
- 5- In Fatimid Egypt there was an acute association between education and politics, which contributed to the creation of a new discipline unknown before, called '*Ilm al-Da'wah* (science of propaganda). The Ismā'īli scholars counted the *da'wah* as fundamental part of their doctrine and sectarian philosophy. 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."⁵² [Translation mine]

⁵⁰ Abdullah Abd Al-Daim, *al-Tarbiyah 'abra al-Tārīkh: Min al-'Usūr al-Qadīmah hatta Awā'il al-Qarn al-'Eshrīn*, 170

⁵¹ Lev Yaacov, *Charity, Endowments, and Charitable Institutions in Medieval Islam*, (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2005), 14

⁵² Khafaji, *Al-Azhar fi Alfi 'Ām*, 29

- 6- The submission of the population in Egypt to Fatimid authority was to their political subordination not to their religious creed.
- 7- The Sunni intellectuals in Egypt constituted an independent educational entity within the Fatimid Educational tapestry. Within that realm, education was sponsored and administrated in an independent fashion.
- 8- The Fatimid Educational system and *majālis al-Hikmah* in particular, sought quality adherents rather than quantity. The processes of selecting *dā'is* stand as a strong evidence of that aspiration. This is one of the reasons why the Fatimids failed to attract the bulk of Egypt inhabitants to their cause.
- 9- The patronizing of the educational activities in al-Azhar and *dār al-Hikmah* in particular enabled the Fatimid regime to provide permanent places of instruction, residence, and employment for teachers and students, and also provided lasting endowments to pay the salaries and stipends for both and maintain the building costs. This patronage contributed to large extent to the institutionalization and professionalization of Islamic education in medieval age, an aspect that was missing in the earlier stages.
- 10- Institutions of education never replaced persons as the focus of intellectual life. Informal and formal instruction was available for pupils in their own homes or in the private homes of learned scholars and wealthy individuals. Such mode of private education was prevalent more than formal institutionalized education.
- 11- The establishment of al-Azhar and *dār al-Hikmah* in Fatimid Egypt and official financial patronage of these institutions in the form of pious endowments and salaries was one of the principal means by which ruling authorities tried to establish their religious and political legitimacy in Egypt.
- 12- Learning was free in Fatimid periods, it was open to all and in some cases, students received stipends for their support from the *waqf* income. The *waqf* was deeply embedded in the thoughts and practices of medieval Islamic community. In addition to the religious motives of the rulers and other donors, *waqf*, charitable institutions and services were exploited for political objectives.
- 13- The educational administration during the Fatimid period was a reflection of a culture of tolerance and liberalism that was current in medieval Islam. Learned people had mainly free hand to organize and monitor their teaching and learning activities, without intermediaries or interference.

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