Through The Eyes of Jūdhar:
Reconstructing the Tenth-Century World of a Fatimid Chamberlain

A dissertation presented

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is the study of the life and world of a medieval slave and eunuch named Ustādh (the master) Jūdhar (d. 972) who diligently served the first four Fatimid caliphs in North Africa in the tenth century. He began his career as a young page in the royal palace and rose through the ranks of Fatimid society eventually becoming a quasi-vizier and the third most powerful individual in the state. His life story and sixty-two years of service in the Fatimid court coincides with the history of the Fatimid dynasty in Ifrīqiya and the Maghrib between 909 - 972. Jūdhar’s history can be read alongside the history of this time period from the eyes and experiences of a slave and eunuch of the court.

After his death, Jūdhar’s biography (Sīra) was written in the Fatimid court of Egypt by his chief-secretary, al-Manṣūr al-Kātib, as a memoir consisting of epistles, personal letters, conversations, and narrations of events from the Ustādh’s life. The Sīrat Ustādh Jūdhar is both a historical document and literary work. As a historical document, the Sīra consists of archival material from the Fatimid chancellery and eyewitness accounts of the inner workings of the early dynasty. However, al-Manṣūr al-Kātib also wrote the text by selecting material which would portray his master Jūdhar as the most perfect and exemplary servant. In this manner, the Sīra was written as a didactic manual consisting of stories of good courtly conduct (adab) for other courtiers to emulate in order to achieve social mobility.
This dissertation reconstructs the world of Jūdhar through analyzing the text of the *Sīra* and explicating embedded narratives of upward social mobility from the life story of Jūdhar. Historically, Ustādh Jūdhar was a slave, a ṣaqlabī (white European), and a eunuch, all marginalized identities in the medieval Islamic world. Despite these factors, Jūdhar continued his climb up the social ladder of Fatimid society. The research presented in this dissertation contrasts Jūdhar’s marginalization with his social mobility by identifying and explicating his acquisition of various forms of social, economical, and cultural capital from narratives within the text. At the same time, the dissertation contextualizes the life and experiences of Jūdhar by reading the embedded narrative with contemporary sources written during Jūdhar’s lifetime in the Fatimid court and broader Islamic world.
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Introduction

When the second Fatimid Caliph-Imām1 al-Qā’im (d. 946) laid on his deathbed, he called his heir and successor Ismā‘īl al-Manṣūr (d. 953) to his side in order to articulate his last will and testament.2 During this conversation he said, “My beloved son, accept what God has ordered me to hand over to you. May God grant you the incentive to do as he pleases and what will bring you closer to him. May all the land come under your fold and may all the hearts of the people unite under your obedience and devotion. But also, my beloved son, I entrust you with a bequeathment which I desire not to be ruined after I am gone.” Al-Manṣūr replied, “Tell me, my Lord [what it is], may God protect you, I hope God may postpone your death and grant us and the entire people (umma) of your grandfather (Muḥammad) your recovery to health.” Al-Qā’im responded, “But 'O, the book [of life] has now come to its end. My bequeathment to you is poor

1 The Fatimid rulers of the medieval Islamic world proclaimed themselves the rightful caliphs and sovereigns of the Dār al-Islām, and at the same time they were Ḥādhākhs of the Ismā‘īlī branch of Shi‘ī Islam. Keeping these two factors in mind, I shall address these figures throughout the text with a combination of these two, Caliph-Imām, or as caliph or Imām individually.

2 Maṇṣūr al-Kāṭīb and Hamid Haji, Inside the Immaculate Portal: A History from Early Fatimid Archives: A New Edition and English Translation of Maṇṣūr al-‘Azīzī al-Jawdhari‘ī’s Biography of al-Ustādh Jawdhar, the Sirāt al-Ustādh Jawdhar, ed. and trans. Hamid Haji, (London: I.B. Tauris in Association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2012),1:9, 17-18. I have used Haji’s edited version of the manuscript as the cited text for this dissertation. From here on, the Sirāt al-Ustādh Jawdhar will be cited as Sirā and the page numbers will refer to the edited Arabic text accompanying Haji’s translation. The Sirā is organized into two sections, the first consisting of the Ustādh’s narrative starting from his initiation into the service of the Fatimids until the succession of the Fatimid Caliph-Imām al-Mu‘izz. The second section consists of tawqī‘āt (written directives) between al-Mu‘izz and Jūdhar. The citations referring to the Sirā in this dissertation use 1 and 2 respectively to denote which section is being cited and these are followed by a colon and another number to denote which passage or directive is being cited.
Jūdhar. Protect him so he is not humiliated after me.” Al-Manṣūr replied to his father by asking, “Oh my Lord, is Jūdhar not one of us?” Al-Qā’im answered, “He is just that, because my heart is pleased with him.”

The words of endearment spoken between the two Fatimid rulers paints a vivid picture of the social prominence of the historical figure Jūdhar, a eunuch and slave who lived in the tenth-century Fatimid court. The Jūdhar characterized in this passage is not just a servant of the rulers, but almost like a family member and part of the innermost circle of power in the early Fatimid state. The annals of Fatimid history also call Jūdhar the Ustādh (master) and indicate that he remained the head chamberlain and close confidant to the Fatimid Caliph-Imāms during the entirety of their reign in Ifrīqiya. The dialogue above depicts the close relationship between

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3 The spelling and pronunciation of the Ustādh’s name as ‘Jawdhar’ has commonly been employed in modern scholarship first appearing in the works of orientalist scholars such as W. Ivanow and Marius Canard. However, the original Arabic edition of the Sīrat Ustādh Jūdhar, edited by the Egyptian scholars, Muṣṭafa Kāmil Ḥusayn and Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Hādī Shu’a’ya’, suggested “Jūdhar” as the spelling and appropriate voweling. They attribute this variation of the name to the medieval quarter of Fatimid Cairo called al-Jūdariyya which was named for the military troops dedicated to the Ustādh as was made known by al-Qalqashandī (d. 1418); See: al-Jūdharī, Sīrat Ustādh Jūdhar; eds. Muṣṭafa Kāmil Ḥusayn and Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Hādī Shu’a’ya’ (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1965), 1-2. Canard, on the other hand, writes that he adopted the spelling Jawdhar (fr. Jaudhar) because it was the spelling popularized by Ivanow and also appears as the first of different voweled variations in ‘classical dictionaries like Belot and the Munjid; see Manṣūr, Vie de l'Ustadh Jaudhar: contenant Sermons, Lettres et Rescrits des Premiers Califes Fatimides, ed. Marius Canard (Algiers: Institut d'Etudes Orientales de La Faculté des Lettres d'Alger, 1958), 9 - 10. However, for the purposes of using the initial pronunciation and voweling, I will revert back to the spelling provided by Kāmil Ḥusayn and Sha’īra, based upon the fact that “Jūdhar” is a legitimate entry in the Lisān al-ʿArab and Lane, and a common name still widely used within the Dawūdī Bohra Ismāʿīlī Muslim community who attribute its use among members of their group to the memory of the Ustādh.

4 To medieval Arab geographers, Ifrīqiya denoted various geographical boundaries, sometimes including the entire Maghrib and in some cases indicating the geographical territories within the kingdom of the Aghlabids. Ibn Khurraḍāḥbih (d. 885) refers to Ifrīqiya proper as the Aghlabid domain and this is copied by most other geographers following him including Ibn al-Faqīḥ (d. 903); Istakhri (d.961); Yāqūt (d. 1229); and Marraḵūshī (d. 1249). See Talbi, M.. "Ifrīqiya." Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, 2015. Reference. Harvard University. 10 September 2015. This dissertation also refers to Ifrīqiya according to Ibn Khurraḍāḥbih ‘s geographical understanding.
master and slave and how the vocabulary of social ties and loyalty was articulated in the medieval Islamic world.

The Üstâdh Jûdhar began his service for the Fatimids in 910 soon after the Fatimid Imâm and caliph, ‘Abdullâh al-Mahdî (d. 934), had triumphantly taken control of the Aghlabid capital of Raqqâda in Ifrîqiya. After appropriating the Aghlabid regimes’s former palaces and property, al-Mahdî settled in Ziyâdat Allâh III’s palace named Abû al-Fatâ where the former amîr’s imperial slaves were brought out and presented to him. Among them were the Şaqâliba, white slaves of European origin who were the common elite slave force of the medieval Maghrib. Within their ranks was Jûdhar, still a young boy at the time. Al-Mahdî personally selected him to serve within the royal household of his heir-apparent, al-Qâ’îm, and from that day onwards Jûdhar would continue his promising career in the Fatimid court and subsequently serve the first four Fatimid rulers with diligence.

Jûdhar began his service as a palace page but quickly rose in the ranks. Within a few years of working in al-Qâ’îm’s palace he was made the head servant of the prince’s household. In 913, when al-Qâ’îm left on his first expedition to attempt to conquer Egypt, Jûdhar was left solely in charge of his palace affairs including his harem for two years until the prince’s return. Between 919 - 921, during al-Qâ’îm’s second military expedition to the east to try and conquer Egypt again, Jûdhar accompanied the prince and remained his personal attendant throughout the journey. When the caliph al-Mahdî died in 934, the Üstâdh had become so close to the rulers that he was present at the Imâm’s secret burial which took place in the palace. At this same event, al-Qâ’îm told Jûdhar in confidence that he had decided to name his son al-Manṣûr his heir and
successor. Jūdhar kept the knowledge of al-Manṣūr’s succession secret for the next seven years at court.

Jūdhar’s position continued to rise in al-Qā’im’s administration. Jūdhar was appointed as head of the treasury and the royal textile and clothing warehouses of the Fatimid capital of al-Mahdiyya. He administered and maintained the revenues of the state from the regions which fell under his jurisdiction. At the same time, he engaged in training other Ṣaqāliba servants of the palace for their future roles in the Fatimid administration. After al-Qā’im’s death in 946, mentioned in the passage above, he continued to serve the Fatimid state under al-Manṣūr, who held him in the same regard and esteem as his forefathers.

In 947, after the Fatimid’s momentous victory over the “Dajjāl,” the rebellious Kharajite Abū Yazīd, Jūdhar was manumitted to mark the occasion and rewarded for his due diligence for managing stately affairs throughout the strife. While al-Manṣūr had been out of the capital fighting this rebellion with his army, Jūdhar had been left in charge of the entire kingdom and successfully administered all stately affairs. Once free, he continued to rise higher in the ranks and eventually earned the official title, “the Client of the Prince of the Faithful (Mawlā Amīr al-Mu’mīnīn),” which was woven into the imperial ṭīrāz textiles and distributed to selected members of court. Having emerged from the position of a majordomo to a quasi-vizier, Jūdhar became one of the most powerful and influential bureaucrats of the early state for the remainder of his life.

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5 Abū Yazīd Mukhallad b. Kayrād al-Nakkārī, also known as the Ṣāhib al-Ḥimār (the owner of the donkey), was an adherent to the Nakkāriyya branch of Ḥibāḍī Islam. He led an open rebellion against the Fatimids beginning in 944 which lasted almost three years and devastated the infrastructure and political strength of the new state. The caliph-Imām al-Manṣūr was successful in ending the lengthy rebellion in 947.
After al-Manṣūr’s death in 953, Ustādh Jūdhar continued to serve the last Fatimid caliph of the Maghrib, al-Muʿizz li Dīn Allāh (r. 953 - 975). The Caliph-Imām and Jūdhar maintained a close relationship. They frequently exchanged several official correspondences and engaged in many personal conversations. These letters and dialogues highlight Jūdhar’s dynamic roles in the administration of the Fatimid state, his interactions and social relations with courtiers and other Fatimid officials, his business and mercantile affairs, and many other aspects of his life. Furthermore, they provide insider details of the workings of the early Fatimid dynasty in the Maghrib. Towards the end of Jūdhar’s life, in 972, al-Muʿizz insisted that Jūdhar accompany him on his journey to Cairo where the Fatimid capital was being relocated, despite the fact that the Ustādh was in frail condition due to old age. Jūdhar died en route and was buried in Barqa (present-day Libya) shortly after he had a final parting and an exchange of affectionate words with al-Muʿizz. Jūdhar’s sixty-two year tenure in the service of the Fatimids coincides with the entirety of their reign in North Africa, and it represents a remarkable success story of a eunuch slave's rise to power. It also serves as a co-narrative for the foundation of this dynasty.

The primary source of information about the Ustādh’s illustrious life is the Sīrat Ustādh Jūdhar. This biographical text contains a selected narrative of important events from Jūdhar’s courtly life as well as official decrees and correspondences (tawqīʿāt) between Jūdhar and the Fatimid Imāms. These tawqīʿāt were handwritten and they were often petitions for instructions requested by Jūdhar from the Imām. Jūdhar would leave a blank space on them so that the Imām could reply in his own handwriting. The Sīra was compiled decades after the death of Jūdhar by

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6 From now on Sīrat Ustādh Jūdhar, will be shortened to Sīra throughout the text of this dissertation.
7 Sīra, 1:33, 80
his secretary and successor to his official position, al-Manṣūr al-Kātib al-‘Azīzī al-Jūdharī.\textsuperscript{8} It is one of the few existing contemporary historical sources of the Fatimid dynasty in the Maghrib.

Three editions of the \textit{Sīra} have been published in the last sixty years. The first edited version of the \textit{Sīra} was published with an introduction in Arabic by Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn and Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥādī Shu’ayra in 1954.\textsuperscript{9} The introduction discusses the background of Jūdhar and the writing of the \textit{Sīra}, while also providing information regarding the historical, religious, and literary contributions the text renders. This edition was followed by a French translation written and published by Marius Canard in 1958, which like Ḥusayn and Sha’īra’s edition, also provides a useful introduction and footnotes accompanying the translation.\textsuperscript{10} More recently Hamid Haji has translated and published the most recent critical edition of the \textit{Sīra} in English and titled his translation and edited text as \textit{Inside the Immaculate Portal: A History from the Early Fatimid Archives}.\textsuperscript{11} Haji’s critical edition, research, footnotes, and introduction have been particularly useful throughout the research and writing of this dissertation.

Although these edited works have been useful resources for scholars of medieval Islamic and particularly Fatimid studies, sufficient attention primarily focused on Ustādh Jūdhar’s life has yet to be achieved and a critical deconstruction of the text has yet to be undertaken. This scholarly gap is largely due to the fact that the \textit{Sīra} itself consists of fragmented accounts of

\textsuperscript{8} From here on, al-Manṣūr al-Kātib.


\textsuperscript{11} Cited above.
Jūdar’s life for which al-Manṣūr al-Kātib’s attempt to sequentially compile them appears, at times, rather desultory to the non-specialist. Without a careful reading of the relation among accounts and their associated historical context, we risk the danger of missing key information. This dissertation, foremost, by explicating the Sīra within its historical frame of reference, aims to bridge that gap by conjoining the narrative of Jūdar’s life with its historical context.

The research presented in this dissertation gives further detail of the life of Ustādh Jūdar by contextualizing the text of the Sīra with other historical, socio-cultural, and material cultural sources and studies. This study charts the means through which a chamberlain in the early Fatimid dynasty, the Ustādh Jūdar, climbed the hierarchal ladder of court society. Beginning with his service as a young ʂaqlabī eunuch and palace page, and eventually chronicling his rise to become the third most important official in the early state, the narrative of Ustādh Jūdar and his ascent within the Fatimid hierarchy invites several significant historical and scholarly inquiries about the social and cultural development of medieval Islamic polities, the organization of their social hierarchies, and the corresponding institutions in which they functioned. Overall, my dissertation contextually reconstructs several aspects of the tenth-century world of the Fatimids of North Africa and material culture through the eyes of Jūdar: a ʂaqlabī, eunuch, servant, chamberlain, treasurer, mawlā, merchant, statesman, and governor - all vestiges of a complex medieval Islamicate identity of an adept man who lived and flourished in that time period.

The Sīrat Ustādh Jūdar represents the life of the perfect servant and not the full particulars of one eunuch’s life. Jūdar’s life story was omitted from the annals of Fatimid history because his life after entering the service of the Fatimid rulers and walā’ (clientage) between master and servant were considered more important to the medieval reader of the
Islamic world than his origins and personal information. For this reason, the author of the Sīra, al-Manṣūr al-Kātib, arranges selected events and documents in order to craft an exemplary narrative of one man’s rise to power in the Fatimid court. His deliberate and intentional arrangement of events and moments from the Ustādḥ’s life aims to create somewhat of a didactic record of exemplary virtues (manāqib) through which members of the Fatimid state could perfect their own ideal methods of service (khidma) for the Fatimid Imāms. In this manner, the Sīra can also be read as a hagiographical text.

Furthermore, the Sīra begins its narration of Jūdhar’s life from the moment he entered the service of the Fatimids who were in the process of forming a new state. By starting the Ustādḥ’s biography at this point in time, al-Manṣūr al-Kātib establishes a permanent link between Jūdhar and the founding narrative of the dynasty. This link allows the Ustādḥ’s narrative to be read as a parallel to early Fatimid history which included their ambition to expand their territory beyond Ifrīqiya. In other words, the world of the Ustādḥ is linked to the Fatimid’s tenth-century geographical realities; therefore, Jūdhar’s story is not bound to a single location within the Fatimid palace but rather to a vast area of territory which fell under the Fatimid’s domains.

Because the Sīra is a portrayal of selected identities of the ideal of the perfect servant, al-Manṣūr al-Kātib constantly negotiates among the life events he wishes to portray, the Ustādḥ’s multiple shifting identities, and those attributes and personal bits of information which he desires to omit from the narrative. The author’s balancing act leaves the modern reader with several questions: where did Jūdhar actually come from? How did he end up in the Fatimid palace? Once in the service of the Fatimids, where did he live and operate as a slave and eunuch? Additionally, scholarly inquiry begs the question of how can we map and contextualize his activity within the
constructs and institutions of his world while considering the physical geo-political boundaries and religio-cultural limitations he faced on one side, and his far-reaching influence and ascendancy in the various spheres in which he operated and prospered on the other? More importantly, what were the circumstances through which Ustādh Jūdhar, despite being a marginalized individual - a ṣaqlabī, a foreigner, and a eunuch - was able to rise in the ranks?

With the current state of information available, modern scholarship can only provide approximate answers to most of these questions without any certain confirmation. This dissertation attempts to arrive at those answers through an analysis of some of Jūdhar’s identities and their relation to the contemporary institutional and historical realities of the tenth-century Islamic world. Although precise facts regarding Jūdhar’s history prior to his service of the Fatimids might never be uncovered, this research may assist us in considering which factors enabled a white ṣaqlabī eunuch slave child to arrive in Ifrīqiya and become one of the most powerful figures in tenth-century North African history.

Because eunuchism was a widespread practice in Near Eastern as well as Western civilizations, eunuchs were a recognized class of society in the medieval Islamic world. Islamic jurisprudence gave eunuchs several reduced social rights. While the virile and reproductively intact man (fuhl) retained the maximum number of rights and privileges in medieval Islamic society, eunuchs, even as a third gender, were not completely without their own. For instance, in Fatimid jurisprudence eunuchs could also lead prayer among other eunuchs just as women could
among other women. While gender constructs delineated by Islamic jurisprudence cannot be disregarded when discussing marginalized groups with the medieval Islamic framework, they need not dictate the historical narrative. While jurisprudence is an important field to understanding the function of societies in history, it is limited in its scope for understanding how the class of eunuchs integrated into medieval Islamic society. The empowerment, individual agency, and social mobility of key figures in medieval Islamic history requires additional resources, methodologies, and lenses of research to approach this topic more effectively.

To understand more closely the Ustādh’s relation to his world I have focused my research in the context of the Ustādh’s life narrative within the social, economic, and cultural worlds of his time. Sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu have argued that social, economic, and cultural capital are necessary for an individual to acquire in order to achieve social mobility. This dissertation expounds Jūdhar’s rise to prominence within the Fatimid court by deriving the Ustādh’s embedded narrative from the text of Sīra and explicating specific socio-political, economic, and material cultural conditions of his world and life. By doing so, the research presented in this dissertation identifies and analyzes the various forms of agency and social currencies by which the Ustādh acquired courtly favor and maneuverability among hierarchies.

12 al-Nu’mān, Da’ā’īm al-Islām, ed. Asaf Fyzee, vol. 1, (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1963), 151. Al-Nu’mān reports on the authority of ‘Alī that anyone who is suffering from leprosy, vitiligo, psychosis (majnūn), or anyone who has been punished by law, or is a bastard, cannot lead prayers. He then states that a bedouin should not lead prayers for muhājrūn, a prisoner for freemen, a person who has ritually purified themselves through clean dirt (tayammum) for those who have made ablutions with water, a castrated man for virile and reproductively intact men, a woman for men, a fornicator for men, a mute person for those who can speak, and a traveler for residents of a city. Al-Nu’mān’s report of ‘Alī’s ruling indicates that castration does not invalidate one’s ability to lead prayers, however a castrated man should only lead prayers among other castrati.

This analysis reveals that even as a eunuch and slave, the Ustādh was not confined to any one spatial location. On the contrary, through his access to the nucleus of power, the Fatimid ruler and palace, Jūdhar is represented as having been able to emanate influence and authority from this center to all parts of a highly connected world of which the Fatimids were becoming an integral part. Jūdhar lived in a world which was not defined by precise geographical or political borders. The analysis of migration patterns in the tenth-century Mediterranean in combination with Jūdhar’s narrative and experiences can help shed some light on the culturally and socially porous nature of the medieval Mediterranean world in regard to the constant interchange of social, commercial, and political activity.

Reading Jūdhar’s narrative in this light is key to challenging orientalist notions which have largely shaped the general perception of the role of eunuchs in medieval Islamic courtly systems. Through their fascination with and fetishized discourse of Islamic civilization, orientalists have at times attached notions of authority and power held by medieval Muslim rulers to those of erotic pleasure and male dominance over women, especially through sexual activity. Such orientalist notions are not new; they are deeply rooted in a classical western discourse of the orient dating to antiquity. Several ancient Greek authors also feminized the orient in their writings, drawing upon examples to depict its pomp, decadence, emasculation, and deviance.14 For example, when Greek authors such as Xenophon, Ktesias, and Dinon wrote about the Persian court they often concentrated on the power dynamics of the emperor and his entourage of nobles and eunuchs. They were keen to relate that power to the royal harems of ancient Persia, locations where powerful men were made, rose, and fell - all through the

manipulation of women and eunuchs wielding their own deviant power. Modern and popular western perceptions of the east have associated many of the same “ancient oriental” notions with the premodern Islamic ruler’s harem, imagining them as representative of his corrupted power and the loci of orgiastic and erotic pleasures. Since eunuchs were employed as the guardians of these spaces, they too, through their own illicit mutilation by castration, are seen as an extension of the corrupted power held by eastern rulers. Ruler, harem, women, eunuch, and corruption are conflated notions.

Harem is the English derivative of the Arabic word ḥuram, the plural of ḥarīm, a word that refers to the quarters of the ruler’s household which were designated for his personal family, namely his women, children, concubines, and their servants. As mentioned above, this institution was not an Islamic invention; harems were known to have existed in the royal and elite societies of the Achaemenid and Sasanian -Persian empires. The harem institution was adopted by the early Muslim conquerors of previously Sasanian ruled lands. In the early Abbasid era, the word ḥarīm does not appear to be used in the historical descriptions of the Abbasid palaces to denote any actual designated architectural space. According to Hugh Kennedy, the women of the royal household initially had independent residences which they maintained like other princes and male relatives. However, by the early tenth century, there is historical evidence that suggests that the caliph’s wives, concubines, and their children began to reside in enclosed quarters within the

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15 Ibid, 22 - 23.
16 Ibid, 24 - 25.
17 Leila Ahmed, Women and Gender in Islam Historical Roots of a Modern Debate (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Pr., 2011), 19; Llewellyn-Jones, 24 - 25.
18 Oleg Grabar, The Formation of Islamic Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 158. Grabar notes, “nowhere do we read a description that can be translated into an architectural space.”
The traditional understanding of these spaces is that they were extremely private, and only men who were directly related by blood to the ruler and the women inside were allowed to enter. Eunuchs, because of their castration and third gender status, were also allowed to serve in this area of the household and allowed passage in this private space. This area was considered protected and inviolable, and that is why other words emerging from the same root, *ḥrm*, such as *ḥarām* and *ḥaram* are used to denote holy sanctuaries because of their protected status as sacred sites.

While the definitions available for the harem do indicate an identifiable space in a palace or house which is occupied by women, eunuchs, and elite men of privilege, this space can also refer to just a physical group of women. In other words, the harem was a space, which in rudimentary terms, was *out of bounds* to men outside of the ruler’s immediate family.

Architecture naturally created a designated structure for this cultural need. The popular perception of these architectural spaces is that they were hidden, largely inaccessible, and often entered after passing through labyrinthine passageways within the physical structure of the palace. This was not always the case, and harems should be considered as separate apartments in the royal residence reserved for private family use and occupied by royal women and children. Because of the large number of women residing in these designated spaces, employment of all types of other women arose as a result to fulfill the needs of the people in these spaces. Royal harems are known to have employed hair combers, bakers, reciters of the Quran, washerwomen, etc.

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19 Hugh Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled The Muslim World*, (Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press), 160 - 161. Kennedy includes an anecdote that when Ḍuḍ al-Dawla became the effective ruler of Baghdad, the chamberlain Mu’tis al-Faḍl showed the Buyid ruler around the Abbasid palace complex. When they arrived at the harem, Mu’nis explained that no man besides the Abbasid caliph had entered, however, Ḍuḍ al-Dawla could enter if he liked since he now was the ruler. The Buyid amīr declined and continued his tour of the palace complex.
midwives, washers of the dead, funeral mourners, and even spies for the caliph to know what was going on in his absence. This employment also included eunuchs.

Eunuchs, who had access to these private areas, are primarily seen by many modern scholars and medieval writers as the main guardians of these spaces, and as a result, the chastity of the women occupying them. In this reading, eunuchs’ other functions in the palace and state become subsidiary to their protection of the sacred. In other words, their castration and ability to enter women’s quarters become their main perceived characteristic within many readings of medieval Islamic social history. This reading, I argue, is ideologically in many ways, the eunuchs’ second castration.

Major scholarly works on eunuchs in medieval Islam have followed the above mentioned orientalist reading of eunuchs in premodern Islamic society. For instance, David Ayalon’s study of power relationships in medieval Islamic courts titled *Eunuchs, Caliphs, and Sultans* asserts that one of the main functions of the eunuch institution in medieval Islam was the maintenance of the ruler’s harem. Ayalon attributes the “extreme seclusion of women” in Muslim urban society as one of the “special conditions” of premodern Islamic society’s eunuchs. Their role as harem guards is what he argues was the main reason which spurred the importation of large number of eunuchs to medieval Islamic courts. Furthermore, he writes, “many of the women in the harem had little to perform. The main duty of a great part of them was just to be there. Whereas the eunuchs, even when strictly limited to the harem, had much to do. Furthermore, for keeping a vigilant eye on the women twenty four hours a day, some forms of shifts must have

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20 Ahmed, 84.

been in existence.” In his study, Ayalon lists and explicates other functions of eunuchs in medieval Islamic palatial society including the maintenance of the entire palace compound, guarding, secret missions, personal interactions on behalf of the ruler, and also the education of other eunuchs and slaves within the court. Moreover, his study greatly details their role in education and military organization. While Ayalon considers that his study of eunuchs is still “a skeleton with many bones missing and others only partly restored,” all the various functions which eunuchs carried out that he mentions in his study are subsidiary to their function as guardians of the harem space.

Another important study of eunuchs in the medieval Islamic world is Shaun Marmon’s *Eunuchs And Sacred Boundaries In Islamic Society*. Marmon’s study of eunuchs through textual analysis from material dating to Mamluk Cairo, indicates that eunuchs were placed not directly in the female quarters of the household, but rather in the vestibules which were an intermediary space between the outer public and inner private areas of a traditional household. Therefore, since eunuchs occupied “transitional zones,” they were the navigators of these spaces which reminded visitors that they had entered only after permission was granted. Marmon also argues that the proliferation of the employment of eunuchs to guard the royal tombs and mausoleums of Mamluk Cairo led to the establishment of a eunuch society to guard and caretake the Prophet’s tomb in Medina. She posits that eunuchs, in regard to their presence in the

22 Ibid, 16.
23 Ibid, 16 - 17.
24 Ayalon, 4.
transitional zones of Mamluk urban society and their protection of access to private spaces, become in purpose, guardians of the sacred.

The presence of eunuchs in imperial systems, as mentioned above, has generally been explained that it was due to the following characteristics: the castration of eunuchs rendered them trustworthy to be employed around palace women; they lacked the virility to aspire to become the ruler themselves; they could not produce offspring to challenge authority; and they possessed a fervid loyalty to the ruler because they were brought from their homelands and possessed no other viable social ties of loyalty in their new abode aside from the ruler himself. In a more recent study on eunuchs in the Abbasid Caliph al-Muqtadir’s (d. 932) court, which was contemporary to the Fatimids of Ifrīqiya, Nadia Maria El-cheikh argues that eunuchism in the Islamic world had “a much broader dimension” than previous discussions involving the role of eunuchs in medieval court systems have revealed.26 She demonstrates that during al-Muqtadir’s reign, due to the inexperience and young age of the caliph, the power of eunuchs grew because they were able to act as power brokers and intermediaries between palace officials and the ruler. El-Cheikh also argues that their access to the women of the royal harem gave eunuchs the opportunity to influence men of power who were related to the women. As a result, during this time period, eunuchs increasingly occupied high-ranking public positions in the administration.

There were especially two prominent eunuch figures in al-Muqtadir’s court, Ṣāfī al-Ḥuramī and Mufliḥ who both rose to power due to their proximity to the caliph and social maneuvering. Ṣāfī was directly responsible for protecting the young thirteen-year-old caliph when he sat on the throne in 908. He was present at the deathbed of two Abbasid caliphs, al-

Mu’tadid (d. 902) and al-Muktāfī (d. 908) and also linked to their royal harems. He was entrusted by that latter to ensure al-Muqtādir’s transition to power was smooth since the young al-Muqtādir’s succession was contested among other princes. Additionally, Ṣāfī became a member of the regency council put into place during al-Muqtādir’s reign to guide the young caliph. The black eunuch Mufliḥ, on the other hand, maneuvered through the upper echelons of Abbasid society by using his proximity to and influence over the caliph to forge alliances with powerful officials among the Abbasid elite. Mufliḥ played an important role in designating official appointments in the Abbasid government. As a result, he was able to influence political matters by exchanging his influence and power to persuade the caliph in return for favors from bureaucrats and officials seeking caliphal appointments and recognition.

Serena Tolino has also recently discussed eunuchs in the Fatimid court in great detail. Like Marmon, her study aims to establish a link between the institution of eunuchs and the idea of the sacred. She argues that since the Fatimid Caliph-Imām himself increasingly became a symbol of baraka (divine blessings) among his followers in the Fatimid court, the role of the eunuchs at court as intermediaries between the ruler and other officials enabled them also to become transmitters of those blessings. Thus, eunuchs who were the Caliph-Imām’s guardians also were “guardians of the sacred.” Tolino also points out the ambiguity in Fatimid textual sources in regards to the actual castration of eunuchs. Fatimid biographical texts, like the Siḥat Ustādh Jūdhār, do not explicitly identify these men as eunuchs nor belonging to a third gender. In Fatimid history, eunuchs also served as commanders and governors alongside non-castrated

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men. The ambiguity of identity within the texts makes it difficult to discern between the physical status of eunuchs and other men.

When approaching the subject of eunuchs in other classical, late antique, and medieval civilizations outside of the Near East, similar discourse regarding the relationship between eunuchs and the guarding of female spaces on account of their gender is not premised as their raison d’être within the administration of their respected courts and societies. For example, many elite eunuchs in the late antique Roman court and the medieval Byzantine court held the position of the praepositus sacri cubicli, the grand chamberlain or literally provost of the sacred bedchamber. The eunuchs who held this position and rank were equally influential in state politics and governance due to their proximity to the emperor and not to the women of the palace. As a result of their powerful position, they also encountered opposition from the aristocracy which they outmatched in power despite their marginalized gender status. Similarly, eunuchs in China were known to endure the honorable torture of castration which had been considered one of the Five Punishments needed to obtain imperial service, a concept initiated during the Sui Dynasty (581 - 681). Eunuchs who were lucky enough to survive the surgery were numerously employed in the Chinese Tang Dynasty (618 -908) and the Ming Dynasty (1368 -1644) where they often yielded more power than the Grand Secretaries of the imperial administration. The narrative of Wei Zhongxian reveals that he became one of the most powerful


29 Ibid.
eunuchs in Chinese history under the 16th emperor of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Youxiao, The Tianqi emperor, to the extent that his power rivaled that of the ruler himself.\(^{30}\)

Although I argue that eunuchs possessed a range of administrative and other important positions in the medieval Islamic court, it is an indisputable fact that eunuchs in medieval Islam did serve as harem guardians in large capacity. There exists considerable textual evidence which lends credence to the fact that harem safeguarding was one of the responsibilities assigned to eunuchs. Medieval Abbasid writers such as Hilāl al-Ṣābi’ (d. 1056) and al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868) have clearly acknowledged the relation between eunuchs and female residential spaces. Al-Ṣābi’ describes the number of residents in the palace of the Abbasid Caliph al-Muqtadīr (d. 932) stating that the palace complex housed 11,000 eunuchs consisting of 7,000 black (\(khādim\)) and 4,000 white Ṣaqqāliba slaves; 4000 women combined of free women and slaves; and thousands of chamber servants.\(^{31}\) This passage often leads scholars to cite the ratio of eunuchs to women in the Abbasid palace as 3:1.\(^{32}\) Al-Jāḥiẓ also describes the typical Muslim home stating that it consisted of high walls, strong doors, thick curtains, and employed eunuchs. He asserts that the sole designated function of eunuchs and other protectors of these households was to protect the women inside and “the preservation of what is obligated to protect from the bounty which is within them”, or in other words, their chastity.\(^{33}\) In the case of Fatimid Egypt, historical evidence

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\(^{32}\) Ayalon, 16.

\(^{33}\) Ibid, 19 - 20.
points to the fact that palaces did have a large number of eunuchs.\textsuperscript{34} However, the concentration of scholarship on the presence of eunuchs specifically in the harem spaces of premodern Islamic society has overshadowed the many other extraordinary achievements which eunuchs have made in history.

On the other hand, recent academic studies of marginalized social classes have demonstrated that several powerful women of the Abbasid and Fatimid harem spaces played key roles in politics and affairs of the state.\textsuperscript{35} The activity of royal women in stately affairs continued in Islamic courts throughout the premodern period, and in this respect the royal harem of the premodern Islamic palace is often considered the “central arena of politics,” since elite women including concubines were able to maneuver political decisions in the court through their influence over the ruler or other courtiers.\textsuperscript{36} Similarly, new research detailing the activity of court eunuchs in medieval Islam is also revealing the vast spectrum of positions they held and the power they wielded as a result in administrative areas outside of the ruler’s function. For example, Glaire Anderson recently has laid the foreground for research focusing on marginalized patrons, namely women and eunuchs, by discussing several other lesser known contributors of visual and material culture in the Umayyad court of Cordoba between 756 - 1031.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, 21. Ayalon quotes a passage from Ibn ‘Abd al-Ẓāhir stating that “When Saladin took possession of it [the Fatimid palace] and ousted whoever was there, the number of its dwellers was 12,000, none of whom was a non-eunuch, with the exception of the Caliph, his kinfolk and his children.”


professions of eunuchs in the medieval Islamic court ranged from guardians of harems, tombs, and other sacred spaces to politicians, military generals, and naval admirals. Therefore, their social role should not be confined to or defined by the single idea of the sacred.

Many palace eunuchs of premodern Islamic courtly society, like the Ustādh, possessed individual agency. This dissertation argues, they gained this agency, like other individuals at court, through the acquisition of various forms of social, economical, and cultural capital. As a result, through their own ingenuity coupled with their proximity to the nucleus of power of the medieval Islamic state, they achieved the potential necessary to rise in the ranks. This dichotomy of individual agency and power allowed them to wield a fair amount of their own authority and become key members of the political elite. In this respect, Jūdhar’s narrative reads more as a comparative parallel to the characteristics of the Roman office of the praepositus sacri cubicli, rather than a harem guardian. Furthermore, Jūdhar’s rise to power is not entirely anomalous when compared to eunuchs from contemporary and later Islamic societies. The histories of the eunuchs Kāfūr al-Ikshīdī in the tenth-century Egyptian court and Ṣāfī and Mufliḥ in the contemporary Abbasid court of al-Muqtadir provide comparative narratives of powerful court eunuchs in the medieval Islamic world. These eunuchs served as important components to the imperial administration and governance of the state rather than merely “guardians of the sacred.” Jūdhar’s narrative yields much more information on early Fatimid stately affairs and governance when read in this light.

To effectively contextualize the Sīrat Ustādh Jūdhar and understand his world through social, economical, and cultural lenses of research, this dissertation is divided into four chapters. The first chapter explicates Jūdhar’s multi-faceted identities. He was a slave, a ṣaqlabī, a
eunuch, a mawlā, a chamberlain, a treasurer, a statesman, a religious authority, a merchant, and finally a governor and administrator of a key Fatimid city. This chapter analyzes several of these identities individually within the framework of medieval Islamic history and society. The chapter demonstrates that the author of the Sīra, al-Manṣūr al-Kātib, performs a balancing act between Jūdhar’s multiple identities. I argue that this balancing act is a deliberate crafting of the narrative by the author and also a foundation through which we can begin to understand the complex medieval world of Ustādh Jūdhar.

Chapter Two considers Jūdhar’s social capital as the primary form of capital by which he was able to have access to all these other forms of social currency. Proximity to power was the main reason eunuchs in medieval Islam wielded considerable amounts of influence. A combination of all these factors could enable the rise of an individual in medieval Islamic society despite juridical and social factors of marginalization. This chapter demonstrates how Jūdhar, despite being a eunuch, foreigner, ṣaqlabī, and slave was able to cater successful relationships with prime actors of the early Fatimid state. Jūdhar was uniquely enabled to maneuver between various social strata with fluidity. The research presented in this chapter also identifies the various social groups and major actors of early Fatimid society in Ifrīqiya. After understanding the sociographic factors of Jūdhar’s world, this chapter also explicates his relation to each group as the narrative of the Sīra makes evident. By understanding Jūdhar’s relation with his sociographical world and the various forms of social capital he acquired during his lifetime, this chapter enables scholars to perceive social constructs of medieval Islamic courtly societies in a new way. By doing so, the cartography of power dynamics through the network of social relationships is brought into perspective.
The third chapter of the dissertation expounds the role which economic capital played in Jūdhar’s life and how it contributed to his social mobility. Although Jūdhar received a vast amount of his wealth directly from the Imām’s graces and honoraria throughout his early career, in his later years he eventually became a merchant with his own trading caravans and fleets of ships. Furthermore, he ventured and specialized in the timber trade. This chapter will explain the role of timber in the medieval Mediterranean economy. It will inquire into how the timber trade operated in the medieval Mediterranean and in congruence with the commercial trade systems of the medieval Islamic world. Through this analytical approach towards Jūdhar’s wealth and trade relations, larger questions about medieval Mediterranean politics, economic theories, and environmental situations will be addressed. Lastly, the importance of Sicily for the economic stability of North Africa, in regards to Jūdhar’s own mercantile and commercial activities there is also discussed.

The final chapter of this project deals with Jūdhar’s acquisition of cultural capital and his relationship to the growing visual and artistic culture of the Fatimids when they were in Ifrīqiya. Scholarship of the medieval Islamic world has treated eunuchs as marginalized individuals despite their explicitly active and major roles within the elite ruling classes. As a result, eunuchs do not emerge as authoritative figures within the historical narrative. Similarly, until recently, their patronage for the arts has been treated in much the same way and has often been overshadowed by historians’ (both medieval and modern) focus on the ruler’s artistic patronage over other members of the court. This chapter focuses on Jūdhar’s role within the sphere of material culture and particularly his direct patronage of artistic production within the Fatimid court. Through its focus on textile production in the Fatimid court of Ifrīqiya, the research in
*Chapter Four* proposes that early Fatimid art and architecture during the Ifrīqiyyan period of the dynasty’s history was not simply just an emulation of medieval Islamic visual cultural norms. Although the visual vocabulary and techniques of execution of material culture employed by the early Fatimids might have been similar to other contemporary Islamic dynasties, there are several cases where they attributed distinct Fatimid ideologies and meanings to royal traditions and courtly accoutrements.

The social, economic, and cultural lenses of research used in this dissertation retrieve a significant portion of the embedded narrative of Ustādh Jūdhar from the text of the *Sīra*. This contextualized deconstruction of the text demonstrates several newly discovered aspects of how social mobility functioned in the medieval Islamic world. It also gives insight into the functionings of the tenth-century Fatimid world and dynasty of Ifrīqiya. Moreover, the dissertation provides new understanding on the functioning of elite slaves and eunuchs in medieval Islamic courtly systems. Above all, the research in the following chapters allows us to learn more about a man named Jūdhar who lived a celebrated life and was held in great esteem in his lifetime and after his death within subsequent annals of Fatimid history.
Chapter 1
Recognizing The “Noble Ṣaqlabī Child”: Mapping the Identities of Jūdhar

After the Fatimid Imām and newly proclaimed caliph, ʻAbd Allāh al-Mahdī (d. 934), arrived from Sijilmāsa to his new kingdom of Ifrīqiya, he took up residence in the palaces of the former Aghlabid city of Raqqāda. Following his arrival, he summoned the Ṣaqāliba servants left behind by the previous Aghlabid Amīr Ziyādat Allāh III (d. 916) who, upon his defeat, had fled to take refuge in the east. Among these servants was a young Ṣaqlabī boy named Jūdhar. Jūdhar would remember the day very well because it was the day his story began to unfold.

It was not until the end of his life, however, that Ustādh Jūdhar would sit down with his secretary al-Manṣūr al-Kātib al-ʻAzīzī al-Jūdharī, the author of the Sīra’s text, who was also his friend and successor to his eminent official position within the Fatimid court. To tell his story, al-Manṣūr al-Kātib (the chief administrative secretary) was very interested in the factors which made possible the rise of the Ustādh, a Ṣaqlabī foreigner, a slave, a eunuch to an elevated stately and religious rank.

The Ustādh vividly retold the events of that first day when the Ṣaqāliba assembled in al-Mahdī’s court. The events include a display of firāsa. Firāsa was the skill believed to be possessed by select individuals among the ancient and medieval Arabs of foretelling the moral conditions and psychological behavior of other men through the reading of their physical state,

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1 From here on, al-Manṣūr al-Kātib.
2 Sīrāt Ustādh Jūdhar, 1:1, 2. (from now on the biographical text of Ustādh Jūdhar written by al-Manṣūr al-Kātib will be referred to as Sīrā).
3 Sīrā, 1:1, 2.
4 Sīrā, 1:1, 3 - 4.
primarily their face. This metaphysical trait in the Fatimid world was attributed to the Caliph-Imāms and the belief that their divine insight could determine the condition and state of men. The narrative suggests Jūdhar’s destiny was linked with the true insight of the Fatimid Imāms as recounted in the story of the initial encounter between the Ṣaqāliba and al-Mahdī. The Imām instructed that they be stationed in the service of the royal warehouses. Raqqāda, the Aghlabid amīr’s palatial city and center of the kingdom, had warehouses with inventories consisting of royal, luxury, and military commodities. Only the ruler’s personal servants, and in North Africa’s case the Ṣaqāliba, were trusted enough to be put in their charge and manage them. However, according to Jūdhar’s version of his initial encounter with al-Mahdī, the gaze of the latter fell upon the former and he said, “This (Jūdhar) is a noble child (al-ṣaby al-najīb); it is imminent there will be goodness in him.” Al-Mahdī then instructed that Jūdhar be placed as a servant in the household of al-Qā’im, the heir to the Fatimid throne, where Jūdhar’s “goodness” would begin to unfold.

There are several literary works written during the Fatimid period which were titled as Sīras: The Sīrat Ja’far al-Ḥājib, The Sīrat al-Imām al-Mahdī, The Sīrat Ibn Ḥawshab (written about the achievements of the Fatimid Missionary (Dā’ī) Manṣūr al-Yaman), Jūdhar’s Sīra, and the Sīra of al-Mu’ayyad al-Shīrāzī. Collectively, these works share several common characteristics. They are all monographs of politically and religiously important individuals. They clearly are set out to exemplify the contributions and services rendered by the subject to the Fatimid Da‘wa (religious mission) and/or the Fatimid state (dawla). These works attempt to

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paint a picture of the individual in light of his relationship to the Imāms he served. In other words, in Fatimid ideology the Imām holds a central position in all things created and the notion of time (zamān) revolves around his person. If another significant individual is to interject himself into that larger narrative, the details of his character would only be suitable to write about in respect to his relationship with the Imām.

Fatimid Sīras are unlike western notions of biography where the character of an individual comes to light through his dialectical relation to the world that surrounds him. They are, on the other hand, quite limited on the personal details of an individual. The events surrounding the personal lives of subjects of Fatimid sīras, their childhood, the identities of the members of their families, and their personal convictions are almost non existent. Rather, they are more reflective of the norms of Fatimid society and its ethos, and therefore offer a significant guide to understand the Fatimid habitus. Pierre Bourdieu’s social theory of habitus is often used and defined by scholars to suggest the presence of a collective mindset of people belonging to a common societal or cultural setting. In the medieval Islamic context, formal Islamic education, particularly the field of adab, can be viewed as one of several nuclei by which accepted patterns of dispositions resulting in prescribed forms of public behavior and interactions are created. Adab was a tool to engineer social behavior.

Rather than beginning with the events surrounding his natural birth or providing information about his parentage, the Sīrat Ustādh Jūdhar omits any mention of his origins. This

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7 See Pierre Bourdieu and Richard Nice, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge Etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Bourdieu argued that people belonging to any common cultural or social group share a common set of mental attitudes and perceptions which they acquired during their initial acquisition of cultural capital. These socialized habits or “tendencies” which guide behavior and thought are often formed in early childhood, through means of family structure, education, and the institutions and social circles which are available to an individual.
omission does not mean that biographers in the medieval Islamic world were not interested in such origins. On the contrary, traditional literary styles evident from biographical notice (tarjama) literature and biographical dictionaries (tabaqāt), both literary forms of biography and ramifications of the Sīra genre within the classical Arabic literary corpus were quite interested in the origins of important men. In these types of entries, often existing as independent works or present within biographical dictionaries, five key pieces of information about a person were almost uniformly reported by the authors of these texts.

A typical entry would first include onomastic information of a person: the nisba (tribal and/or geographic affiliation); shuhra (nickname); and laqab (honorable title). After the onomastic portion of the entry, the educational lineage of a person would follow. This would include the names of teachers and pupils. After this section, a lineage marking the transmission of knowledge (al-‘ilm) from person to person would be included. This section would document where a person gained knowledge from and who he, or in few rare cases she, transmitted it to after them. Information of their rihla was also significant. Following that information, the entry would include anecdotes of the person’s life which included akhbār and nawādir (entertaining or outstanding anecdotes), and manāqib (virtues of an individual) among other components. Finally, the entry noted the year, and in some cases, the circumstances of a person’s death.8

The Sīra genre was an unabridged version of the tarjama and tabaqāt genres. Although the Sīrat Ustādh Jūdhar transmits information regarding Jūdhar’s life, through its conscious

selection of anecdotes, epistles, personal letters, and dialogues, it differs in its objective from biographical dictionaries and *tarjama*. While the prior two literary forms of biography mentioned above focus largely on the most pertinent information available about a person and his intellectual, academic, and spiritual life, they are hardly capable of transmitting intrapersonal information about a person because of their brevity. The *Sīra* genre of biography encapsulates much more; it consists of the narrative of exemplary lives, much like hagiographies. As its name suggests, the *Sīra* includes an individual’s life path, which provides aspects of his conduct and behavior as he proceeded through life. Therefore, with its intimate knowledge about the subject, it is able to convey psychological and personal depictions of the character it portrays. *Sīra* literature also includes the various exemplary virtues (*manāqib*) of an individual to which his elevated social position was attributed. The *manāqib* became a genre of its own and along with virtues they also provided details of the good morals (*akhlāq*), superior qualities (*faḍā‘il*), particular attributes (*khaṣā‘is*), glorious deeds (*ma‘āthir*), and gracious qualities (*mafākhir*) of an individual.⁹

The *Sīra* of the Ustādh concentrates on Jūdhar’s relationships with the Fatimid Imāms, his interactions with them, his bureaucratic and personal dealings with men of power, and the factors which made him special among his peers. Uniquely, the text of the *Sīra* also allows a glimpse into the construction of the Ustādh’s selfhood, since many of the anecdotes are represented as his direct quotes and experiences and the *obiter dicta* occurring from such. On the other hand, the *Sīra* is a rhetorical text, a didactic manual for others to show the ultimate portrayal of a most perfect and loyal servant. By including various anecdotes of his virtues,

⁹ Reynolds, 38 - 40.
Jūdhar’s success in the Fatimid court becomes the model of service (*khidma*) through which one rises in the ranks of the court. The *Sīra* depicts that a slave’s value is not from how much he is worth, or to which social class he belongs, but rather by the means through which he serves and pleases his master. This literary work is also a memento and tribute to the life and memory of the Ustādh. Al-Manṣūr al-Kātib chooses specific elements of Jūdhar’s life and experiences to construct the ideal figure of Jūdhar - a ṣaqlabī servant worthy of emulation.

The author, al-Manṣūr al-Kātib, compiled the *Sīra* during the reign of the Fatimid Caliph-Imām al-‘Azīz (r. 975 - 996), several years after the death of Jūdhar and during the Cairene period of Fatimid history. During al-‘Azīz’s reign, the demographic of the Fatimid army was undergoing major changes. Al-‘Azīz conducted several military campaigns in Syria where the army encountered troops with sets of skills superior to their own, such as the Turks who were renowned for performing archery while on horseback. As a result, in 978 after his victory, the caliph introduced Turkish, Persian, and Daylamī troops, both of free and servile status, into the Egyptian army.  

This introduction of multi-ethnic troops, along with their move eastward from North Africa to Egypt, caused a shift in the socio-ethnic status quo within the Fatimid polity. Before this shift, the Ṣaqāliba and the Kutāma Berbers had been the primary forces making up the Fatimid army. Their military and administrative success in the *Maghrib* and their primacy in helping to structure the early state secured their position to remain under the Fatimid ruler’s grace and preferable treatment. However, after moving to Cairo in 972, the ability of importing Ṣaqāliba slaves became difficult due to an increasing limited supply of white slaves into North

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Africa. The relative decrease in the number of the Ṣaqāliba in the new capital of Cairo would have been an impetus for al-Manṣūr al-Kātib to write the Sīra of the Ustādīh. By rehashing his virtues and superior qualities and drafting a modeled depiction of Jūdhar’s identity, success, and renowned historic reputation, al-Manṣūr al-Kātib reminded his intended audience about the legacy of his master, the highest ranking ṣaqlabī official in the Fatimid state. Through the narrative of Jūdhar, he could emphasize the status of the Ṣaqāliba as well.

By what means is Jūdhar’s narrative of selfhood constructed? What were the social and historical factors informing the composition of the Ustādīh’s narrative? In the Sīra’s attempt to craft Jūdhar’s identity, which key elements did the author choose to subtly obscure through the selective telling of his story? Lastly, how can we mediate between the constructed selfhood presented by the author and the various other elements of Jūdhar’s identity?

Jūdhar’s multi-faceted identity can be understood from two different perspectives. Within his culture and society, Jūdhar belonged to several groups. He was a slave, a ṣaqlabī, a eunuch, a mawlā, a chamberlain, a treasurer, a statesman, a religious authority, a merchant, and finally a governor and administrator of a key Fatimid city. They all have a collective history, each possessing definitive characteristics by virtue of their place and role in medieval society and the Fatimid ethos.

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11 See Shainool Jiwa, "The Roles of the Slavs in the Fatimid Mediterranean Empire in the Fourth Century/Tenth Century," *Mediaeval Studies*, no. 77 (2015): 124; Also see, Ahmad al-Maqrīzī, *Toward a Shi’i Mediterranean Empire: Fatimid Egypt and the Founding of Cairo: The Reign of the Imam-caliph Al-Mu‘izz from Taqī Al-Dīn Ahmad B. ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī’s Itti‘āẓ al-ḥunafī‘ bi-akhbār al-A‘imma al-Fiṭāmiyyīn al-khulafā‘*, trans. Shainool Jiwa (London: Tauris, 2009), 208. Jiwa translates a passage from al-Maqrīzī indicating there was a shortage of the supply of Ṣaqāliba slaves in Egypt shortly after al-Mu‘izz’s departure towards Cairo. The passage states, “[In this year] Ṣaqāliba slaves were sought from all the people and were bought.”
I argue that the Sīra performs a balancing act between Jūdhar’s multiple identities. This chapter aims to analyze this balancing act. Through such an analysis can we begin to understand the complex medieval world of Ustādh Jūdhar. This chapter is the first of several mnemonic maps which this dissertation charts to understand the connection between various identities of Jūdhar and the complex networks of his world.

The Nomenclature of a Slave

Throughout the opening scene of the Sīra detailing Jūdhar’s initiation into service of the Fatimids, al-Manṣūr al-Kātib states the main intent of the biography. Here we see the author casting Jūdhar’s initiation in terms of his birth into Fatimid society. Jūdhar’s story begins at the same moment when al-Mahdī arrives in North Africa, at the inception of the Fatimid state, whereby Jūdhar is connected to the founding narrative of the dynasty. His character within the narrative is depicted as being essential to the continuance of this newly founded state. Although he was a ṣaqlabī, a eunuch, a foreigner, and a slave, the idea that such a seemingly displaced and marginalized individual would be an early offspring of the new state is an idea which, through the lens of historical context, is not incoherent.

Al-Mahdī describes Jūdhar as a ‘noble child’ (al-ṣaby al-najīb). The Ustādh’s age was most likely very young at the time of al-Mahdī’s arrival, as the meaning of ṣaby would indicate. Ibn Manẓūr (d. 1312), the compiler of the medieval Arabic lexicographical work entitled the Lisān al-ʿArab (The Language of the Arabs), has defined ṣaby as literally meaning a child who has not yet been weaned or is prepubescent.12 Jūdhar lived for another sixty-two years after al-Mahdī’s arrival and outlived his first three masters, so there is no doubt that he must have been

12 Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-ʿArab, s.v. Ṣ-B-A.
fairly young at the time of his initiation. However, there are more nuanced socio-cultural connotations with the use of the term ṣaby within the vocabulary of the medieval Islamic court.

Firstly, ṣaby, rather than a measure of age, is more indicative of his servile status. Typically, the common word for slave in the Arabic lexicon is ‘abd for a male slave and ’ama or jāriya for a female slave. The word mamlūk, meaning an object subject to ownership, is also very common. The Quran and religious literature often use two other terms: raqīq (neck), probably alluding to the yoke of slavery, and the phrase ma malakat aymānukum, or literally what is owned by your right hand. However, medieval Islamic social practice replaced these legal categorical definitions of slaves with words used for young children and youth. This practice was influenced by religious teachings. According to Ṣahīḥ Muslim, the Prophet Muḥammad’s ḥadīth instructed Muslims to act in this manner: “No one among you should address their male or female slave as my slave. You are all the slaves of Allāh and your women are his female slaves. On the contrary, call them my ghulām (young boy), my jāriya (young girl) my fatā (young man), or my fatāt (young woman).”

Therefore, male slaves of all ages were commonly called ghulām, murdān (beardless), fatā among other euphemistic terms. Female slaves of all ages were also commonly called

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13 Quran, 4:36.
14 Ṣahīḥ Muslim, Book 47: Ḥadīth 5591. Similar versions of the same ḥadīth are found in Bukhārī and Abī Da’wūd.
jāriya (young girl), and in some cases, fatāt. Similarly, this practice was so extensive that in the medieval Abbasid court, al-Masʿūdī reports that beautiful faced and well built slave girls dressed as men were brought to the palace of al-Amīn by his mother Zubayda to divert his sexual interest in eunuchs. These girls had short cut hair, wore turbans, and dressed in tight clothing in order to look like men. Because of their appearance as young male slaves even these individuals were labeled as ghulāmīyyāt rather than any other term to define their intended role in the Abbasid caliph’s court.¹⁷

Euphemistic terms to address slaves also extended to the Fatimid court. The Fatimids often used the term ṣaby to refer to palatial slaves. In the Fatimid dynasty, the word ṣaby, referred to the prepubescent slaves of the palace who were trained for palatial duties and military purposes.¹⁸ According to the Mamluk historian and biographer, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir (d. 1293), during the later Fatimid period military reforms took place under the vizier al-Afḍal (d. 1121) who served the Fatimid Caliph al-Mustaʿlī (d. 1101). Al-Afḍal created an improved ḥujra (barrack) system for the Fatimid military, where he divided the troops into seven different barracks. These barracks included areas for the shabāb, the troops consisting of young teenage men, and the şibyān, the younger children meant to be trained by their instructors (ustādhās). They provided servants (khuddām) to them as well in order to enhance their training and potentialize their future military service.¹⁹ Furthermore, the children of loyal and fallen military

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¹⁶ According to Lane-Poole’s Arabic-English Lexicon a jāriya is a girl or young woman and equivalent to ghulām in its use for females and female slaves, “[in this sense] applied even to one who is an old woman, unable to work or employ herself actively; alluding to what she was.

¹⁷ Rowson, 47 - 48.

¹⁸ Lev, 100 - 101.

¹⁹ Lev, 100.
soldiers were known as the *ṣibyān al-khāṣṣ* within the Fatimid court and they held an important position within the polity.\textsuperscript{20}

The *Ṣīra* also demonstrates the use of *ṣaby* in the North African court to refer to the servile status of an individual. In a letter exchanged between Jūdhar and the Fatimid Caliph al-Manṣūr (d. 953), the terms *ghulām* and *ṣaby* appear interchangeably.\textsuperscript{21} During the reign of al-Qā’im bī Amr Allāh (d. 946), while his son al-Manṣūr was the secret heir to the throne - a secret to which Jūdhar was privy, the prince subtly asked him in this letter to release three ṣaqlabī servants, Qayṣar, Muẓaffar, and Ṭāriq, from confinement. Jūdhar had placed them there as a punishment for wrongdoing, most probably in the course of their training. At the time, it seems Jūdhar’s role within the palace was that of an *ustādh*, and therefore charged to prepare and train other servants to carry out palatial duties, a point which will be discussed further below. In this letter, however, al-Manṣūr refers to these three servants as *al-ṣibyān al-khuddām*, in one location, and in another as *ghilmān*. In light of these factors, when the author of the *Ṣīra* quotes al-Mahdī as calling Jūdhar “*al-ṣaby al-najīb*”, he is uniquely locating him within the the social strata of Fatimid society to which he belongs, a palace slave, simultaneously, he places him above the rest of the early Fatimid polity by describing him as the *noble one*, or in light of the anecdote, the *chosen one*.

Jūdhar’s name is the far most obvious marker of his being a slave. The name Jūdhar literally means ‘the offspring of a wild cow’, most probably referring to the calves of desert

\textsuperscript{20} Lev, 100; Furthermore, al-Maqrīzī reports that in Fatimid processions, the *ṣibyān al-khāṣṣ* would march proceeding the caliph’s entourage in the parade. See Paula Sanders, Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 91.

\textsuperscript{21} *Ṣīra*, 1:6, 12 - 15.
antelopes and other similar fauna. Therefore, this was not his birth name, but the name given to him by his North African masters. Arab culture fully utilized the use of nature and its beauty, and in many cases its crudeness, to name children. The use of animal names was also commonplace in medieval Arabo-Islamic culture for the first name (ism) of children or their title or nickname (laqab). However, the name Jūdhar, unlike Asad, Usāma, Ḥaydar (all names for lion), Fahd (cheetah), or Nimr (tiger), to list a few common animal names, appears to be rare. The use of Jūdhar as a name and the image depicted so forth of a gentle and graceful creature, especially when compared to the fierce ones mentioned above, most definitely alludes to his slave status.

This conclusion is apparent when looking at classical Arabic onomastics. Bedouin Arabs often chose strong, ugly, and fearsome epithetical names for their children in order to reek fear into their enemies. On the contrary, they gave slaves attractive and appealing names, suitable to be repeatedly spoken within the home. Therefore, slaves are often known with gentle or pleasant names such as Mabrūk (blessed), Masʿūd (happy), Luʾluʾ (pearl), Marjān (coral), or Zamarrūd (Emerald) to cite some examples. This custom appears to be a prevalent Islamicate custom and widespread within the culture as is evident by other similar examples from the Geniza documents which provide slave names like Fidelity, Gold, Dexterity, Pleasure, and Gazelle, as a few examples. The famous female slaves of the ‘Abbasid court also possessed similar names such

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22 Ibn Manẓūr, Līsān al-ʿArāb, s.v. J-Dh-R.

23 For an overview of Islamic naming practice see Annemarie Schimmel, Islamic Names (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989). Although uncommon, the name Jūdhar (Jawdhar) appears for another eunuch in the Umayyad court of Spain.

24 Schimmel, 70.

as Farīda (Solitaire); Nabh (Flora); Khamrah (Bouquet); Banafshā (Amethyst); Shāhān (Regina); Dawlah (Fortune), to name a few.\textsuperscript{26}

Similarly, like slaves, eunuchs often received names denoting objects of value and splendor. For example, Marjan, Lu’lu’, ‘Anbar (amber), Hilāl (new moon), Dīnār, Shāhīn (sparrow hawk), Mīthqāl (jewelry/unit of weight), and Sawāb (properness), are common names listed for eunuchs by al-Qalqashandī (d. 1418), the thirteenth-century Egyptian Mamluk mathematician and compiler of the literary compendium about medieval Islamic government administration, the Ṣubḥ al-A’shā Fī Šinā’ al-‘Inshā’ (The Dawn of the Dimsighted on the Art of Correspondence).\textsuperscript{27} Their precious names were indicative of their value and the hefty price which the sale of eunuchs demanded. Also, it was often the case that the name of eunuchs reflected which geographic region they had originated from. For example, Abyssinian eunuchs were often known as Mīthqāl, Jawhar (jewel), Yāqūt (ruby), while eunuchs coming from Byzantine lands were often given names such as Khushqadam (welcome), Fīrūz (turquoise), or Kāfūr (camphor). Yet we know that in tenth-century Egypt, Kāfūr al-Ikhshīdī, who will be discussed below, was an Abyssinian slave suggesting that the link between nomenclature and regional origin was not always absolute.\textsuperscript{28}

Although ‘Jūdhar’ is not very common in the occurrence of medieval Arabic names, it does appear to have been the name of both male and female slaves in the early Islamic period. For instance, Jūdhar (or its variations as Jawdhar or Jū’ dhar), appears to be a name occurring


\textsuperscript{28} Schimmel, 70-71.
among singing slave girls (qinān sing. qayna) in both the eastern and western Islamic worlds.\textsuperscript{29} Another figure recorded in history bearing the same name was an important eunuch of ṣaqlabī origin in the Umayyad court of al-Hakam II (d. 976) in Andalus. He was the head falconer (sāhib al-sāgha wa al-bayāzira) and goldsmith working within the atelier of the caliph.\textsuperscript{30} He also seems to have had a direct role in the creation of art in the royal workshops.

The Ṣīra only refers to Jūdhar by his first name. Even when being directly addressed, he was never called upon by a kunya or a laqab. The typical name structure in Arabic speaking culture and especially medieval Islamic society included a kunya (agnomen), ism (proper name), nasab (lineage), nisba (relation to a place or profession), and laqab (nickname).\textsuperscript{31} Although slaves often appear in texts only being mentioned by their first name, sometimes they frequently receive a kunya or are presented with some additional names pertaining to their nasab. Sometimes the kunya and nasab are completely honorary and the latter signifies the household in which a slave served. For instance, Kāfir al-Ikhshīdī, the de facto ruler of Egypt for the Ikhshidids between 946 - 968 (contemporary of Jūdhar), was a black slave and also a eunuch. He

\textsuperscript{29} See, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, al-‘Iqd al-Farīd, vol. 7, ed. Muḥammad Qamīḥa, (Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya), pg. 77. He mentions a qayna in Medina named Jūdhar that belonged to a man from Banī Hāshim; Also an additional reference of a famous qayna from Cordoba named Jūdhar can be found in Ibn al-Abbār, al-Takmilā fi Kitāb al-Ṣila, 3500, vol. 5, 296.

\textsuperscript{30} The Andalusian Jawdhar (or Jūdhar), along with another ṣaqlabī named al-Fa‘iq, yielded a lot of power and commanded a faction of 1000 saqāliba within the palace, and they commanded the palace guard. They also had a close relationship with the caliph, being present at his deathbed and even conspiring to consolidate their own power after his death by conspiring to put al-Hakam’s brother al-Mughīrah on the throne. Jawdhar was executed as a result. See, Hugh Kennedy, Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of Al-Andalus (London: Longman, 2005), 112 - 113; For more detail on Jawdhar’s role within the Hispano-Umayyad court see, Mohamed Meouak, Saqlabî, Eunuques et Esclaves à la Conquête du Pouvoir: Géographie et Histoire ses Élites Politiques "Marginales" sans l’Espagne Umayyade (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2004). Jawdhar also had a hand in the making of an ivory pyxis for al-Mughīrah in the palace workshops. See Glaire D. Anderson, "A Mother’s Gift? Astrology and the Pyxis of Al-Mughīrah," Journal of Medieval History, 42, no. 1 (2015).

appears in the chronicles by his honorary kunya of Abū al-Misk and his dynastic lineage (nasab) al-Ikhshīdī - since he obviously had no apparent genealogy of his own. Jūdhar only appears as Jūdhar in the Sīra.

The Ustādh

Although, Jūdhar never appears with an added appendage to his name or a nisba of any sort in the Sīra, he is addressed by his honorary title of al-Ustād throughout the text. In classical Arabic, the word ustād, a word of Persian origin, was a title reserved for highly respected and intelligent individuals in society. In the educational sense, which is closer to its modern usage, it signals the sense of master, maestro, or a master craftsman. Ustād in many ways resembles the classical usage of the word Shaykh, used for a person who is a master in a field of the arts or sciences and thus capable of passing on his knowledge to a pupil. 32 This is why the Buyid Amīr ʻAdud al-Dawla addressed his vizier Ibn al-ʻAmīd as al-Ustād al-Raʿīs (d. 970).33

It is the classical meaning of ustād that allowed it to be used euphemistically for eunuchs in the medieval Islamic world.34 It was meant to replace the categorical word of khaṣī (pl. khişyān) which directly referred to a man who had been castrated through the method of

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33 Ibid.

34 The title Ustādhi was commonly used in reference to powerful court eunuchs in the medieval Islamic world. Marius Canard gives several examples of its usage in the tenth-century specifically for powerful court eunuchs. Among several figures, he refers to the Murūj al-Dhahab in which the Abbasid eunuch Waṣīf who was murdered and decapitated by a crowd of people is reported to have been called ʻal-Ustādhi, al-Ustād at that moment. Furthermore, he refers to Abū al-ʻHasan Muʿnis al-Muṣaffar, another ʻAbbasid eunuch and commander in chief of the army who successfully defended Egypt from the Fatimids in 915 and 920 and Baghdad from the Qarmatians in 924, as being addressed as al-Ustādhi. See footnote 138 by Marius Canard in Muhammad B. Yahya Al-Sūlī and Marius Canard, Akhbaar ar-Radī Billah Wa'l-Muttaqi Billah: Histoire de la Dynastie Abbaside de 322 à 333/934 à 944, (Paris: Imprimeries "La Typo-litho" Et J. Carbonel Réunies, 1946), 210.
khiṣā’ (the ablation of the testicles). In other words, ustādh was the polite manner in which to address a eunuch. Similar euphemistic wordings were also used such as khādim, mu’allim, shaykh, and a much later time the words ṭawāshī, agha, and khwāja.

Although al-ustādh was a euphemism, it was not meant to be derogatory in its usage. On the contrary, it was symbolic of the power and prestige an individual, and in most cases a eunuch official, possessed within the hierarchal ranking of the court and state. This idea is best understood with reference to material culture dating closely to the period in which Jūdhar lived. For the eunuch ruler Kāfūr, mentioned above, the title of al-Ustādh, signified his power and governing role in the Ikshidid state. When Kāfūr rose to power in 946 after the death of his master and the ruling governor of Egypt, Muḥammad b. Tughj al-Ikhshīd, he became the de facto ruler of Ikshidid Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. Kāfūr rose to power because Ibn Tughj appointed him as the guardian of his young children. During this period, a 营运 (kāf) was inscribed on Ikshidid coinage to symbolize Kāfūr’s de facto power since he ruled in the name of both Ibn Tughj’s sons Unujur (d. 961) and ‘Alī al-Ikhshīd (d. 966).

Following ‘Alī’s death in 966, Kāfūr did not instate ‘Alī’s young son Aḥmad, but instead became the de jure ruler of the Ikshidid dynasty himself. At the beginning of Kāfūr’s autonomous reign he did not have the rights to have his own name inscribed on the coinage (sikka). The coins at this time appeared with the inscribed 营运 (kāf) which represented his role and power on one side of the coin with the name of the Abbasid caliph on the other. However, a few years after 966, as his powers grew, Kāfūr’s full name begins to be minted on coins in Mecca.

36 Ibid.
with the inscription “amara bi-hī al-Ustādh Kāfūr al-Ikshīdī” (ordered by the Ustādh Kāfūr al-Ikshīdī) on one side of the coin. Copper coins minted later in the name of ‘Alī b. Aḥmad and Kāfūr also depict Kāfūr’s authority with al-Ustādh in the inscription (figs. 1 - 2). These coins demonstrate the significance of the title of al-Ustādh within royal court systems of the medieval Islamic world. In Kāfūr’s case, the title signified an authoritative governing position of power - much like a quasi-vizier - albeit reserved for a eunuch governor.

Another example of the use of al-Ustādh to signify power comes from an inscription encircling an Egyptian Fatimid ceramic dish dating to circa 1011 during the reign of al-Ḥākim (r. 996 - 1021) and commissioned by the Commander in Chief named Ghabn who was also a powerful eunuch (fig. 3). Ghabn was a black eunuch who rose in the ranks and was awarded the title of Commander in Chief (Qāʿid al-Quwwād) in 1011 by the caliph, a title also used in the Abbasid court for the top official chief of the military. Al-Ḥākim favored Ghabn, visiting him personally when he was ill and making him the market inspector (muḥtasib) and captain of the city guards (ṣhirṭa) for the Fustat and Giza markets. Here he made sure to prohibit the sale of certain items which al-Ḥākim had forbidden such as watercress (mulūkhiyya), fish without scales, and other transactions and dealings which went against Fatimid jurisprudence regulations. Ghabn’s success, however, was short-lived. Although he had been the object of the caliph’s favor, he was removed from his post two years later and his hands were cut off as a punishment by al-Ḥākim, although, the caliph reportedly sent him a doctor afterwards to care for his wounds. Later, after a disagreement with al-Ḥākim’s sister, Sitt al-Mulk, his tongue was cut off and he

37 See Jere L. Bacharach, Islamic History through Coins: An Analysis and Catalogue of Tenth-century Ikhshidid Coinage (Cairo: American Univ. in Cairo Press, 2006), 73 - 76.

38 For more information on Ghabn see, Paul Ernest Walker, Caliph of Cairo: Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, 996-1021 (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 106.
died soon after. The lustreware dish which he commissioned bears a complete inscription around the rim which reads: “Power and thriving to the Ustādh of all Ustādhs (Ustādh al-Ustādhīn), Commander in Chief (Qāʾid al-Quwwād), Ghabn, servant of the commander of the believers, al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh - may God’s blessings rest upon him and his pure ancestors.”

These objects suggest that the use of the word ʻustādh was employed not merely as a euphemism for eunuchs, but also to denote a respected office. In particular, the use of Ustādh al-Ustādhīn in Ghabn’s dish clearly demonstrates that the ʻustādh was a respected official position. In the Fatimid empire, the title was held by ranking officials of the state as well as court and palace eunuchs. Many times the same eunuchs who held important positions within the palace also played an important role in government administration as governors, military commanders, navy admirals, muḥtasibs, directing the șhurstā, and even forming their own military regiments.

Al-Qalqashandī elaborated on the esteemed positions (waẓāʾif) that eunuchs held in the Fatimid court. The caliph had several eunuchs in his personal service as attendants and bodyguards. Part of their uniform comprised elaborate tied turbans with a “tail” hanging down the back or to one side. A subset of the caliph’s eunuchs was a group known as the ʻustādhūn muḥannakūn. The muḥannakūn ʻustādhs were the most elite and highest ranking eunuchs in the entourage of the caliph and they received their descriptor muḥannak from the word ʻhanak, meaning chin, because their dress code was to tie the ‘tail’ of their turbans under their chins (taḥt al-ʻhanak). The elaborate costume work by these eunuchs differentiated from other palace servants and symbolized their close access to the ruler.


In many ways, by utilizing their easy passage between the caliph’s personal and public spheres, eunuchs could uniquely become the eyes and ears of the caliph to ensure his full authority. In their own way, their proximity to the caliph also allowed them to become the masters of the public and private spaces of the court. The following table (table 1) highlights the ceremonious role held by eunuchs in the Fatimid court according to al-Qalqashandī’s designation of the hierarchal ranking of different positions of eunuchs.41

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hierarchal Rank of Position according to al-Qalqashandi</th>
<th>Name of Position</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Position held by a muḥannak or general eunuch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Shadd al-Tāj (The Crown (turban) Wrapper)</td>
<td>Responsible for the special handling of the Caliph’s turban.</td>
<td>Ustādh Muḥannak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Şāḥib al-Majlis (Master of the Court)</td>
<td>Responsible for court protocol.</td>
<td>Ustādh Muḥannak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Şāḥib al-Risāla (The Master of Messages)</td>
<td>Responsible for sending messages from the Caliph to viziers and other officials.</td>
<td>Ustādh Muḥannak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Zimām al-Quṣūr (Majordomo)</td>
<td>Responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the caliphal household.</td>
<td>Ustādh Muḥannak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Şāḥib Bayt al-Māl (Royal Treasurer)</td>
<td>Responsible for inventory and care of the treasury.</td>
<td>Ustādh Muḥannak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Şāḥib al-Dafīr (Clerk)</td>
<td>Responsible for overseeing all the official dīwāns (chanceries).</td>
<td>Ustādh Muḥannak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Hāmil al-Dawāt (Bearer of the Royal Ink Stand)</td>
<td>More of a ceremonial position. Responsible for holding the Caliph’s ink stand which was displayed during processions.</td>
<td>Ustādh Muḥannak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Zamm al-Aqārīb (The Manager of the Royal Family)</td>
<td>Responsible for maintaining the royal family members of the Caliph and relaying his communications to them.</td>
<td>Ustādh Muḥannak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Zamm al-Rījāl - Palace (The Manager of Men)</td>
<td>Responsible for the Caliph’s food.</td>
<td>Ustādh Muḥannak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

41 For the list of positions held by eunuchs in the Fatimid court of Egypt see, al-Qalqashandī, Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā, vol. 3, 484 - 486.
Another role that the ‘ustādh’ pertains to is the military training of young recruits, the ṣibyān, as mentioned above. Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442), the fourteenth to fifteenth century Mamluk historian and topographer, describes this role in two different passages.

The ṣibyān troops have a special barrack apart from the rest, and they have a eunuch who stays the night with them and servants who attend to them.\(^42\)

Another passage further elaborates on the role of ustādh in training the troops.

The children from the acquired prisoners of war are handed over to ustādh who raise them, and the children learn writing and archery from them. These children are so named “the nurtured ones” (al-tarābī), and some of them become commanders from the ṣibyān al-khāṣṣ of the Caliph (his personal guards).\(^43\)

As in the cases of Ghabn and Kāfūr, the fact that Jūdhar is addressed as al-Ustādh by the author al-Manṣūr al-Kātib throughout the Sīra is not indicative of his debased status as a eunuch. On the contrary, royal eunuch officials -ustādh - appear to be addressed as such because of the respect and power that they possessed. It should be noted that the Sīra makes no explicit mention that Jūdhar is in fact a eunuch. Jūdhar held many of the administrative and courtly roles described above, although perhaps during the North African phase of the dynasty the positions were not as clearly defined as they were in the later Cairene phase, which is described by al-

| 10 | Niqābat al-Ṭalibiyīn (The Unionizer of the Nobles from the Offspring of ’Alī b. Abī Ṭalib) | Responsible for the wellbeing of the nobles and taking care of their needs. | Ustādh (general) |
| 11 | Zamm al-Rijāl - State (The Manager of the Army) | Responsible for the upkeep of the various troops of the military in their barracks. | Ustādh (general) |


\(^43\) Ibid. The quotation above is my own translation from Ayalon’s Arabic transcription of al-Maqrīzī.
Qalqashandī. His tenure in these positions, at times holding them simultaneously, and his epithet of Ustādh are indications of his being a eunuch.

Jūdhar began his career as a young palace page chosen by al-Mahdī to serve in the house of al-Qā‘im. During the al-Mahdī’s reign over Ifrīqiya between 909 - 934, he rose up the ranks becoming the head household servant of al-Qā‘im (d. 946). When al-Qā‘im led the Fatimid army in campaigns westward to quash a Kutāma Berber rebellion, he put Jūdhar in charge of his household and the royal harem (the women's quarters), an authoritative role signifying Jūdhar’s advancement in the palatial ranks. During al-Qā‘im’s reign between 934 - 946, the Ustādh became the head of the treasury and in charge of the royal textile warehouse. During this period, Jūdhar was also in charge of carrying out the activities of the city guards (ṣhurtā) and ensuring public order in al-Mahdiyya. This role is carried out specifically when the caliph instructs him to order a resident of the city to not publicly mourn his deceased relative in the streets and cry out loud. Such public bereavement was against Fatimid juridical rulings and it appears that Jūdhar was charged to ensure that the implementation of Fatimid law was regulated in the public sphere. He continued his position as director of the treasury for a long time and the Sīra mentions his dealings there on several occasions.

During this same period, Jūdhar appears to have been an ustādh charged with the training and discipline of younger Ṣaqāliba in al-Mahdiyya. In addition, Jūdhar was in charge of ensuring and maintaining the care, welfare, and education for the children of several state

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44Sīra, 1:3, 10.
45Sīra, 1:4, 10.
46Sīra, 1:7, 15.
47Sīra, 1:6, 12 - 15.
officials so that they would one day be able to assume positions of authority within the
government. This role is exemplified when he personally took care and was the guardian of the
Kalbid princes of Sicily, Ja’far and al-Ḥasan, the sons of ʿAlī b. Abī al-Ḥusayn al-Kalbī (d. 938),
while their father was fighting in Sicily.48 He was also responsible for the dispersement of
stipends and salaries for the royal family members residing in the palace.49

Jūdhar acted as the ruling authority over al-Mahdiyya under the Fatimid caliph al-Manṣūr
(d. 953) when the latter set out with his army in 947 to quash the rebellion of his Kharijite
adversary, Abū Yazīd. This figure, known in the Fatimid sources as al-Dajjāl (the false messiah),
had assembled and mobilized a significant rebel force against the Fatimids which greatly
challenged the security of the newly formed state.50 During the absence of the caliph, Jūdhar was
left solely in charge to manage the state and all its expenditures. He also was charged to ensure
that law and order was maintained throughout the Fatimid dominion and constantly kept an eye
on governors and the situations occurring in their provinces, reporting them back to the Imām.51
In al-Muʿizz’s reign around the year 960 the Sīra reveals that Jūdhar was managing and
governing the administrative principality of al-Mahdiyya and its surroundings. Further, he was
responsible for allocating funds from the treasury for the upkeep and maintenance of the slaves
in his charge.52 When he moved to al-Manṣūriyya a few years before al-Muʿizz’s departure to

48 Sīra 2:72, 153.
49 Sīra 1:24, 42 - 44.
50 Sīra 1:10, 18.
51 Sīra 1:27, 54 - 56.
52 Sīra, 2:48, 129.
Egypt, he also assumed the responsibility of relaying the material of petitions, letters, and requests addressed to the caliph on many occasions.

Jūdhar’s transition from position to position may be understood as a rise in the ranks especially when juxtaposed with al-Qalqashandi’s observations about the hierarchy of positions reserved for high ranking Muḥannak Ustādhs. Orientalist and medieval Arab discourse alike often equate the term al-Ustādh with eunuch - a term which often focuses on the castration of an individual and his role and easy passage within the caliphs’ harem as a third gender. While both of these factors figure in medieval Islamic courts, Jūdhar’s various role in the Fatimid palace and administration, and al-Qalqanshadī’s descriptions of the various positions held by the ustādhs, demonstrate that the term represents a range of official professions and positions within the royal Islamicate court. Rather than understanding the epithet ‘ustādh’ as having been used in the Middle Ages as a polite title or euphemism underlining their status as eunuchs or masking their lack of virility, I argue that it highlighted their capabilities as high-functioning government officials. It was not derogatory. Considering the customary practice of employing eunuchs to fulfill these positions and the logic behind this action found in medieval political thought, we can conclude that al-ustādh was a professional role that happened to belong to one particular segment of medieval Islamic society - eunuchs.
The Slave

Understanding the context in which Jūdhar’s identity was constructed begins with comprehension of the institution of slavery in the Islamic world during the Middle Ages. While many scholars depict Islam as a religion which called for the end of slavery through its promise of spiritual reward for manumission, historically, Islamic civilization actively maintained the institution. Slavery remained a prominent component of Islamic society and widely existed within the Muslim world up until the twentieth century. Islamic doctrine did, however, emphasize the act of manumission, albeit with a preference for Muslim slaves.

From a juridical perspective, slaves were uniquely stationed within the strata of medieval Islamic society as both members of society and the private property of individuals. Islamic law corresponded to both of these conditions, protecting slaves from outright abuse and protecting masters from obstinate, fugitive, or rebellious slaves. Through its basic juridical tenets, Islam regulated the institution. Islamic law, in its medieval developed form, ca. 800, recognized that the main condition of mankind was the notion that all men are essentially free. Enslavement was

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54 Of the last states to abolish slavery were Saudi Arabia in 1962 and Oman in 1970. See Michael Muhammad. Knight, Journey to the End of Islam (New York: Soft Skull, 2011), 93 - 94. It should also be noted that it still exists today among some Muslim societies in Mauritania.
the exception. Keeping this in mind, the status of slaves under the law was sufficiently straightforward. Under all schools of thought man was considered a freeman or a slave.

Due to the eventual emergence of a universally standardized and codified set of jurisprudence, developed by jurists over a three-hundred year period after the death of the Prophet, the general rule which came to pervade the medieval Islamic world in regards to enslavement was that the slave had to be either born as one or be a prisoner of war to be placed in bondage and servile status. In most cases the latter never applied to Muslims, although in some cases opposing forces were creative in denouncing their rebellious opponents as infidels rather than true Muslims.

These laws eventually led to four methods within this legal precedent of slave acquisition: capture; tribute; offspring; and purchase.\textsuperscript{55} This was in contrast to pre-Islamic practices in the Near East where the systems of enslavement included capture in war, birth, being sold into servitude by a parent or guardian, as a punitive measure for a crime or debt repayment, an alternative for the contrition of sin, or just the unlucky foundling who was made a slave by those who found him. The story of Yūsuf in the Quran demonstrates that the last situation was not that uncommon.\textsuperscript{56} Therefore, a newborn slave’s legal status corresponded with that of the individual’s mother. The only exception was the child of an \textit{umm al-walad}, a female slave who had been impregnated by her master; her child would be born free due to his or her father’s status. The Fatimids were in line with these general statutes as well.

\textsuperscript{55} Lewis, 9

\textsuperscript{56} According to the \textit{Sūra} of Yūsuf in the Quran, the prophet Yūsuf (Joseph son of Jacob) was abducted and sold into slavery.
Non-Muslims, like the *Ahl al-Kitāb* (People of the Book) who lived in Islamic territory and paid the poll tax (*jizya*) also could not be made slaves. Even after the conquest of Persia, the conquered majority population of Zoarastrians (Majūs) became a token *People of The Book* under their new Muslim overlords, so they were not subjected to enslavement. While conversion to Islam did not emancipate a slave, if someone converted to Islam in the *Dār al-Ḥarb* (non-Muslim territory) before crossing over to the *Dār al-Islām* (Muslim territory), he/she too could not be made a slave. Therefore, in the years of the early Islamic conquests lasting from the end of the seventh until the mid eight century, there was a sufficient supply of slaves coming into the Islamic world through warfare and newly conquered non-Muslim populaces. Local governors and generals regularly sent slaves as tribute from North Africa and al-Andalus, Iberia, Southern Italy, the Dalmatian coast, and Sicily. Slaves of various racial identities came into high demand in the eastern Islamic world. However, as these conquered populaces converted to Islām or entered in protection, it became almost impossible to enslave a Muslim or anyone living within the boundaries of the *Dār al-Islām*. As a result, Islamic civilization was compelled to look beyond its borders to acquire new slaves. North African Muslims began to look towards sub-Saharan Africa to the south, and Iberia, Southern Italy, the Dalmatian coast, and Sicily towards the north for new slaves.

The result of this predicament was that the mass majority of the slave population in the medieval Islamic world were foreigners. They were purchased from foreign merchants outside of Islamic territory or acquired through the enterprise of *jihād* waged in non-Muslim territory. As slaves became a much needed commodity and the demand for them increased in the markets, the slave trade became a profitable enterprise. This commercial demand was met through quasi-wars
or raids (ghazawāt) conducted by military commanders and privateers into non-Muslim territory. Pirates and marauders also joined in the trade, and kidnapping young children to be sold as slaves also became a commonplace fact of life. The import of Christian slaves from medieval Europe into the Muslim world became such a widespread trade that Pope Zachary I (741-752) called for the prohibition of merchants to sell Christian slaves to Muslims, even buying them himself from Venetian merchants set up in Rome and setting them free. Egypt and North Africa also had direct access to sub-Saharan Africa which allowed a ready supply of slaves channeling up through various trade routes originating beneath the Niger River belt.

From a socio-cultural perspective, slaves were a regular component of medieval life. Both religious doctrine and social practice acknowledged the humanity of slaves. Besides the countless hadīth and doctrinal passages from religious texts calling for the emancipation of slaves, there were many others that also recommended their humane treatment. For instance, several versions of a hadīth record the Prophet Muḥammad warning against the killing of slaves, their mutilation, and even their castration. Furthermore, a master could not profit from the prostitution of his female slaves. Slaves could marry, possess property, and they could also

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57 Al-Mawardī reports that slave traders lured young children by dropping dates repeatedly overtime for the children to consume leading them farther away from their homes in order to kidnap them and sell them into slavery. See Muhammad ʻAbd Al-Jabbar Beg, “The Serfs of Islamic Society Under The Abbasid Regime,” *Islamic Culture* 49 (1975), 107.


59 For instance, in the *Sunan of al-Nisā‘ī*, the Prophet Muḥammad is recorded as saying, “We shall kill whoever kills their slave, we shall mutilate whoever mutilates their slave, and we shall castrate whoever castrates their slave.” See al-Nisā‘ī, v. 5, *Ḥadīth*:35, no. 4736.

60 See Bukāhrī, Book 37, *Ḥadīth*:23, no. 2283.
conduct business - albeit with the permission of their masters. If a master could not upkeep their maintenance, he was suppose to sell them to someone who could.

The bottom line, however, was that slaves were bought, could be sold, and inherited. In contrast to the legally permitted number of four wives for free Muslim men, male slaves could only marry two women (free or enslaved), and they could never marry their female owners. Female slaves were obliged to engage in sexual intercourse as concubines with their masters without their consent. The ability for a slave to gain freedom ultimately rested in the hands of his master. Although both freemen and slaves faced no restrictions in the eyes of religion, slaves were not mandated to perform religious duties in the same manner as freemen. Therefore, under Islamic law, slaves only received partial rights in comparison to other freemen. While legal maxims provided slaves with protection and some sense of human dignity, the actual condition of a slave’s life was not so clear cut.

For example, in Fatimid North Africa there appears to have been a distinction made between coreligionist slaves loyal to the Imām and other non-Ismā‘īlī slaves. For the Fatimids, religion became a factor through which the legal status of slaves entered a gray area in regards to their jurisprudent rights. Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, the chief justice of the Fatimid caliph al-Mu‘izz li Dīn Allāh (d. 975), wrote to the Imām asking him to look into a question raised to him about the Fatimid policy of allowing his unfree slaves to bequeath their inheritance to their kin and the permissibility of slave testimony (shahāda) in legal cases. In fact, such practice was contrary to the jurisprudence put forward by al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān himself in the Da‘ā‘im al-Islām, the Fatimid’s primary legal text. Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān informed al-Mu‘izz that during his grandfather al-Qā’im’s reign, a slave who was the master of the chancellery (dīwān) died and his inheritors
came to al-Qā’im seeking their inheritance in accordance with his bequest (waṣīyya). One of them came to al-Nu‘mān to seek his ruling on the matter. Al-Nu‘mān ruled that a slave could not legally leave a bequest and therefore all property and wealth left behind belonged to his master, who in this case was al-Qā’im. Later the same individual approached al-Qā’im who concurred with al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s ruling. Al-Mu‘izz however, made an exception to the ruling:

Whoever is one of our slaves and also a member of our religious order (Da ‘wa), his affairs shall be conducted in the manner by which you would conduct the affairs of a freeman who is in charge of his own affairs of inheritance, testimonies, actions, and all matters that involve and concern him.61

From al-Mu‘izz’s policy above, it is evident that the level of rights slaves possessed was not static. In the Fatimid court, it sometimes was in contrast to the official state jurisprudence code. Coreligionist slaves loyal to the Imām enjoyed a level of freedom and superiority which Islamic law did not award them. Therefore, slave status was socially fluid and from the example above it seems jurisprudence cannot be the only lens to look at the true nature of social practice in the medieval Islamic world.

On the opposite side of the spectrum from the treatment of slaves, however, the Fatimids maintained a relentless policy against slaves who apostatized. In the North African Fatimid palatial cities, the royal textile factories employed Christian embroiderers who were captured as slaves from Byzantine territory during military campaigns.62 At some point they had converted. However, some of the younger members of this guild wished to convert back to Christianity. When Jūdhar informed al-Mu‘izz about this ordeal, the caliph ordered their immediate arrest,

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imprisonment, and chastisement for their actions. Furthermore, he warned if they did not return to Islam he would order their public dismemberment to deter other slaves from considering apostasy.⁶³

**The Ṣaqlabī**

Another byproduct of this system was an institution particular to the medieval Islamic world: elite slavery or slave soldiers.⁶⁴ Although foreign slaves existed in the *Dār al-Islām* during the formative period and the Umayyad era, the creation of the institution of slave soldiers is attributed to the ‘Abbasids and particularly to al-Mu‘tasim (d. 842). The original Abbasid army in the eighth century had consisted of Khurasānī troops, *mawāli* converts who were the direct clients of the caliph, and the *abnā‘ al-dawla* who were descendants of the original Khurasānī supporters who had brought the Abbasids to power. However, after the death of the Abbasid caliph al-Amīn in 813 and due the civil war which happened during his reign between al-Amīn and al-Ma‘mūn (d. 833), the empire was left fragmented. During al-Ma‘mūn’s reign (r. 813 - 833), the complete loyalty and efficiency of the original army came into question. As a counter measure and because of this lingering mistrust, al-Ma‘mūn began to recruit Turkish troops to send armies from Baghdad to parts of the empire which had fallen out of Abbasid control during

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⁶³ *Sīra* 2:65, 145.

the civil war. These areas consisted of Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and the mountainous region of northern Iran.

At the same time, his younger brother al-Mu’tasim had also begun the process of gathering soldiers of Turkish origin in order to create his own powerful private military force. In 815 he purchased three men: Ashinās, a slave, Ītākh, was a cook, and Waṣīf an armorer. These three figures would eventually become the head of his private military army when he became caliph. Al-Mu’tasim continued to amass Turkish slaves sending people to Samarqand to purchase men. These Turkish soldiers, who were likely a mix of slaves and freemen, were not called ‘abīd or mamlūks. Rather they were called mawālī (clients) and ghilmān. These factors led the the recruitment and populating of Turkish troops within the Abbasid polity.

When al-Mu’tasim finally came to power in 833, his private militia of Turkish ghilmān became his new army. They were his most trusted guards and protectors of the palace. However, their presence in Baghdad was not welcome by the old elite, who saw them as uncouth foreigners usurping the authority and power which once belonged to the Abnā’ and Khurasānī forces which had originally brought the Abbasids to power. The caliph decided that the best solution to the constant public clashes occurring between old and new power circles was to build a separate capital to house his new military. He built the new palatial city of Samarra about sixty-three miles north of Baghdad where he could govern and consolidate his power under his new order.

He resided there with his new Turkish ghilmān and awarded them land grants (qaṭā‘ī’ī) to ensure their loyalty.

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66 Ibid, 121.
67 Ibid, 122.
Contemporary to the occurrences happening at the Abbasid capital, the Aghlabid rulers of
North Africa seem to have applied the same strategy of employing foreign troops in their own
methods of governance over the province of Ifrīqiya. Like other Muslim sovereigns of the
Middle Ages, the Aghlabids had also invested in the importation of a foreign non-Arab
mercenary force to ensure their protection and maintain their palatial cities. This was a calculated
measure. The Arab population of Ifrīqiya during the time of the Aghlabids is estimated to have
been between 100,000 - 150,000. The majority population consisted of native Berbers. Up until
the mid-eighth century, local Arab rulers in North Africa regularly enslaved Berbers and sent
them eastward as either tribute or via the slave trade. In 754, at the beginning of the reign of the
Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr, the governor of Ifrīqiya informed the Abbasid ruler that he was no
longer able to send Berber slaves as the annual customary tribute stating that Ifrīqiya had become
entirely Muslim. During this period, Ibāḍī merchants began to expand their long distance trade
routes and monopolize the eastern and central Saharan trade routes which included the import of
slaves from West Africa. Ibāḍism is an Islamic school of thought which emerged from
Kharijism, a branch of Islam which began in the mid-seventh century. It spread in North Africa
in the eighth century and was a popular form of Islam adopted by many Berbers in the Maghrib.
The prominence of Ibāḍism in North Africa coincides with the Rusṭamid Imamate, an Ibāḍī
kingdom, which existed in Tāḥart Algeria between 763 - 909. Therefore, when the Aghlabids

70 Ibid, 363 -364.
arrived the majority slave force was of sub-saharan African origin as a result of the Ibāḍī trade network.

In addition to the Aghlabids being a minority Arab government, the eleventh-century Zirid historian Raqīq al-Qayrawānī (d. ca. 1030) reports that they also constantly struggled with their own Arab state army (jiind), the descendants of the original Arab army that conquered North Africa in the seventh century, during their reign and had to subdue several rebellions. Furthermore, they were met with opposition by the Mālikī ʿulamā’ based in Qayrawān.

Although, Malikism was the dominant form of Islam practiced in North Africa, the Aghlabids, like their Abbasid overlords, had adopted the Ḥanafī school of thought as their official state religion, causing a persistent turmoil for their religious authority. This continuing recalcitrance on the part of the leaders (wujūh) of the jund as well as the religious leaders was the reason that Ibrāhīm I decided that it was necessary to move to a more secure location. He founded al-ʿAbbāsiyya outside al-Qayrawān as a palatial city, following Samarra’s model, as a safe haven for the dynasty from which he could govern and be secluded.

The Aghlabids had ruled Ifrīqiya for a little over a century before the arrival of the Fatimids during which time they greatly developed the region. They had gone to great lengths to develop urban centers with public works, including religious architecture, hydraulic structures, military installations such as ribāṭs, and fortified city walls. In this time, they established two luxurious palatial cities of their own, al-ʿAbbāsiyya in circa 801/185 AH, also known as al-Qaṣr al-Qadīm, and Raqqāda in 876. Al-ʿAbbāsiyya became well fortified overtime, transforming into a walled city with five gates of entry. The ninth-century Abbasid historian, Al-Balādhwī (d. 892),
reports that al-‘Abbāsiyya contained a sizable and well built Jāmi‘ mosque. The Jāmi‘ had a round tower made from clay and bricks which was seven stories high. It was in this palatial city that Ibrāhīm al-Aghlab (d. 812) received Charlemagne’s emissaries in his palace so they could retrieve the remains of St. Cyprian. The city had its own hippodrome, a dār al-ḍarb (mint), tīrāz workshops, a market, baths, arsenals, and hydraulic installations to supply its own water. Furthermore, al-‘Abbāsiyya had both a conscripted soldier population (al-nās) and there were also quarters for 5,000 ‘abīd or black military slaves which he had purchased and set free.

Thus, the maintenance of such infrastructures, and the assurance of their own protection within their fortified and secluded palatial cities, could only be supported through a sizable slave population contributing to the workforce and military organization of the dynasty. Raqīq al-Qayrawānī affirms this idea. He states that Ibrāhīm b. al-Aghlab purchased and brought black slaves to al-‘Abbāsiyya to be part of the workforce and subsequently purchased more black slaves a second time specifically for a private military force. The aim for this move was to make the dynasty and palace free from requiring the protection and resources of the existing state military. His private ‘abīd became his own private army. His successors followed suit. Ibn

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76 Ibid, 23.
Khaldūn (d.1406) states that Aḥmad b. Aghlab (r. 856 - 863) “made black slaves (al-ʿabīd) the members of his jund.”

While the import and export of black slaves was well established in North Africa, both by the original Arab conquerers and later adopted by Ibāḍī merchants, the Aghlabids also imported Ṣaqāliba slaves to maintain their palatial cities. The Ṣaqāliba were white European slaves originating from Slavic lands as well as other parts of the continent, and their presence is well attested in the medieval Islamic Maghrib and al-Andalus. The geographical origins of the Ṣaqāliba and the routes by which they arrived to North Africa vary. At this point, scholarship on Fatimid Ṣaqāliba has widely noted that their presence as slaves in Aghlabid and Fatimid North Africa is mainly on account of their acquisition from Slavic lands and via established trade routes between the Dalmatian coast and North Africa. The Ṣaqāliba begin to appear in al-Andalus in the early ninth century and eventually become a powerful force of elite slaves in the Umayyad court of al-Andalus which is comparable and contemporary to their presence within the Fatimid dynasty.

In the reign of Abū Ishāq İbrāhīm b. Aḥmad (İbrāhīm II) between 875 - 902, the presence of Ṣaqāliba slaves is most mentioned within historical chronicles and texts. In 876, İbrāhīm II decided to abandon al-ʿAbbasiyya for Raqqāda, a new palatial city a few miles southwest of

77 Ibid, 23.


Qayrawān. Two anecdotes reveal the role that the Ṣaqāliba played in the Aghlabid administration and military. The first is transmitted by al-Mālikī, an eleventh century chronicler from Qayrawān in his *Riyāḍ al-Nufūs*, a *tabaqāt* (biographical encyclopedia) on the major ḫulamā of al-Qayrawān. Al-Mālikī reports that Ibn al-Bannā was a judge for the Aghlabids in Qaṣṭiliya, but due to a conflict with the people there, the governor of Qaṣṭiliya excused him and sent him to Raqqāda to plead his case in front of Ibrāhīm II. While he spoke with Ibrāhīm II, the Aghlabid ruler consulted Balāgh, a eunuch (*al-fatā*) regarding the case. During this incident, Balāgh was standing next to the ruler, which indicates Balāgh’s high official status within the Aghlabid court. The report states that Ibrāhīm II spoke to Balāgh in the *ṣaqlabī* language. On another occasion, Ibrāhīm II was interrupted and criticized by his court astrologer Ḥamdīs regarding the ruler’s removal of Abū al-ʿAbbas b. Ṭālib from the post of judge (*qāḍī*) of Qayrawān because the latter was in disagreement of the Amīr’s policies. Here again, Balāgh, who was present next to the Amīr, stood up angrily and began to walk over to Ḥamdīs to rebuke him. Again the ruler spoke to Balāgh in the *ṣaqlabī* language instructing him to refrain from doing so.

These anecdotes demonstrate that Balāgh was like an *ustādh* and acted in the capacity of a quasi-vizier of Ibrāhīm II. He also guarded the chamber of the ruler, assuming the role of the acting *ḥājib* between officials and the amīr through his granting and denial of access. His name also appears to have been minted at one point on Aghlabid coinage. Balāgh also commanded

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81 Mishin, 240.

the Aghlabid forces that joined the army of Ibn Qurhab, the governor of Tripoli, to ward off a Tulunid attack.83

Balāgh’s presence in the Aghlabid regime foreshadows the Fatimid policy of also keeping Ṣaqāliba members of their court in elevated positions. Furthermore, the fact that Ibrāhīm II spoke the ṣaqlabī language denotes the full integration of the Ṣaqāliba in the courtly life of the Aghlabids. The Ṣaqāliba seem to have been influential in the later Aghlabid court and lived in close proximity to the ruler, as suggested by the fact that the reign of ʿAbdallāh II (r. 902-903) was cut short when three of his eunuch Ṣaqāliba murdered him.84 They were not completely arabized and remnants of their birth culture and behaviors appear to have persisted in their new home. The extent of the Ṣaqāliba presence in the Aghlabid court is evident from the actions of the final amīr Ziyādat Allāh II’s (d. 916) when he fled Ifrīqiya towards the east to escape the approaching Kutāma soldiers fighting for the Fatimids. Al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān reports that he took 1000 of his Ṣaqāliba servants with him and girdled a belt on each of their waists which contained 1000 dinars each in order to spread his cash among his entourage. This precaution was taken because he had departed so quickly after hearing of the victory of the oncoming Fatimid army and he did not want to be completely deprived of his remaining wealth in case he was looted enroute while he fled.85

The remnants of this well established Aghlabid slave institution were still present when al-Mahdī arrived in Raqqāda in 909. Al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān mentions that al-Mahdī “took possession of both the black (al-Sūdān) and white (al-Rūm) and set up an office to disperse

83 Mishsin, 241.
military stipends (ʼaṭāʼ). He also ordered the registration of the clients (mawālī), and the children of slaves, and those soldiers who made haste to receive their stipends.”\textsuperscript{86} Al-Mahdī also ensured that the clients (mawālī), soldiers (rijāl), and followers (atbāʼ) of the previous regime be incorporated into the new Fatimid polity. The new Fatimid military consisted of an ethnic mix of troops: namely Kutāma Berbers, black slaves, white slaves, and the Ṣaqāliba.

The Ṣaqāliba were a military force in the early Fatimid dynasty. In addition to their military service they also worked in the palace administration, the royal warehouses and factories, the education of palace members, and the upkeep of daily life in the Fatimid palatial cities. They were even part of the ceremonial display in which the Fatimids manifested their power and prestige. Furthermore, the Ṣaqāliba served as governors, commanders in the army, admirals in the navy, and successful administrators.\textsuperscript{87} It should be also noted that the Fatimid caliph al-Muʻizz was versed in several languages which included, besides Arabic, the Berber language, Greek, and the languages spoken by the Sudānī and the Ṣaqāliba slaves.\textsuperscript{88} Al-Muʻizz learned the ṣaqlabī language after he heard a peculiar word spoken to him by al-Mużaffar and Qaysar, two of his servants. Al-Muʻizz was determined to learn the meaning of this word. He learned their language and after knowing that the word spoken by his ṣaqlabī slaves was actually a curse word, he had them killed.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, 303 - 304.

\textsuperscript{87} Shainool Jiwa, ”The Roles of the Slavs in the Fatimid Mediterranean Empire in the Fourth Century/ Tenth Century,” 112 - 113.

\textsuperscript{88} Shainool Jiwa, Towards a Shi’i Mediterranean Empire, 65.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid, 65. Both of the mentioned Ṣaqāliba were previously close to the caliph al-Manṣūr, and al-Mużaffar was particularly close to al-Muʻizz and taught him calligraphy when he was young, which enabled him to act casually around the caliph.
The Ṣaqāliba were also successful arbitrators in court on behalf of the caliph. For instance, the *Ṣīra* mentions the role a ṣaqlabī servant played in mediating a domestic dispute which broke out amongst Kutāma tribesmen in a Fatimid municipality. When al-Mahdī had moved the Fatimid court to al-Mahdiyya he set up a *maṭālim* court of redress where certain legal cases could be brought directly to the Imām, and plaintiffs (*mutaṣālimūn*) could appeal previous rulings which they could contest. The caliph gave agency to the Ṣaqāliba for mediating these grievances on behalf of the Imām. In this situation, certain Kutāma had received land grants (*iqṭā‘*) for their service to the Fatimid state and army. A group of Kutāma began to quarrel and argue over the rights of irrigated lands which they had received. Al-Mahdī sent a trusted ṣaqlabī servant to go to the area where the dispute took place and investigated the matter with the local *qāḍī* and the elders (*shuyūkh*) of the tribe. When the ṣaqlabī was successful in his arbitration and brought about a satisfactory and pleasing solution for all the parties involved, the Imām rewarded him with a prayer of *baraka*.

Throughout this time, we should recall, Jūdhar was an observer of many of these events taking place in the palace and court. His many observations confirm his proximity to matters and functions of the early Fatimid state, despite being allocated to the household of al-Qā’im. After the ṣaqlabī servant received the praises and prayers of al-Mahdī, Jūdhar saw him sitting outside the court sulking and visibly dissatisfied. The Ustādh learned from this man that he would have rather received a monetary gesture of gratitude over the Imām’s prayers. Jūdhar, being the most perfect servant, attempts to convince the unsatisfied ṣaqlabī of the great *baraka* of the well wishes and prayers of the Imām. When Jūdhar saw that this man would rather have money over *baraka*, Jūdhar asked him how much the prayers of the Imām would be worth to him. The man
asked for ten dīnārs, but Jūdhar paid him twenty to purchase the Imām’s prayers of *baraka*.

When al-Mahdī learned of Jūdhar’s exemplary conduct in this matter at court, he awarded him a hundred dīnārs along with the additional prayers. ⁹⁰

**The Importance of Race**

While certain slaves like the Ṣaqāliba enjoyed a level of freedom under their masters, they could also frequently be the subject of stereotypes and ridicule within medieval Islamic texts. This is evident from proverbs and passages that denote racial prejudice found in numerous textual sources. Often slave-proverbs reveal the following sentiments held against slaves: they were greedy; base and lowly; they should be treated with contempt and disdain because of their limited mental capacity for understanding commands; educating slaves was difficult or near to impossible; slaves were not trustworthy.⁹¹

Racial categorization of slaves attached to their presumed stereotypical behaviors appear in many medieval treatises. For example, in the *Risāla fi Shīrā‘ al-Raqīq* (Treatise on the Purchase of Slaves) written by Ibn Buṭlān (d. 1038), he describes what one should keep in mind when acquiring slaves and his critique divulges the characteristics he believed were inherent with each slave’s race. He writes, “If you would like a female slave for pleasure, then choose a Berber; for safekeeping inventory (*khāzina*) and safeguarding, a Byzantine; for children, a Persian; for breastfeeding, a Black (*zanj*), and for singing, a Meccan. If you would like a male slave for protecting your lives and property, choose an Indian or Nubian; for hard labor and servitude, a Black (*zanj*) or Armenian. If you want slaves for battle and bravery, then Turks and

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⁹⁰ *Sīra*, 1:2, 6.

Ṣaqāliba.”

Race was an important factor in Jūdhar’s life. His ethnicity as a ṣaqlabī is portrayed as a factor of marginalization in the Sīra.

Along with giving many details about the reality of slavery in the medieval world, the treatise also deals with discrete matters like the physical characteristics and conditions of a slave’s body which a purchaser should be aware of when presented with slaves in the market. Similarly, in a separate section of this treatise, Ibn Buṭlān provides an ethnography of the different categories of slaves according to their country of origin. His categorization demonstrates the vast variations of the ethnic divisions the Arabs saw in foreign slave populations. He mentions slaves coming from as far as al-Manṣūra, which he names as Multan and of various ethnicities, Yemenīs, Zaranjīs, Zanjīs, Sindīs, Madanīs (of Madīna), Ṭā’īfīs (of al-Ṭa’īf), Berbers, Nubians, Qandaharīs, Turks, Ḥabashīs, Makkīs (of Mecca), Zaghawīs, and Bajawīs. Each group has certain attributes and characteristics unique to them.

Among other medieval scholars who took a keen interest in the different ethnicities of slaves and their corresponding innate characteristics was al-Jāḥiz (d. 868). He wrote several different treatises on the subject. For instance, he wrote a treatise titled Manāqib al-Atrāk (Qualities of the Turks) during the reign of al-Mu’tasim which was aimed to calm tensions as a result of the rise of the Turkish ghilmān imported by al-Mu’tasim to join the Abbasid army. The stereotype which al-Jāḥiz precipitated, in his fictitious comparative essay between Turks and Khārijī warriors, was that the Turks were natural born warriors who were excellent on horseback and had the ability to shoot arrows as they rode. Their skills were so advanced that they could

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accurately shoot down any moving target: a flying bird, running animals, or even other soldiers riding horseback. They possessed four eyes, two in the front and two in the back of their heads. They were superior, skilled, and determined in matters of warfare, conquest, plunder, hunting, and horseback riding. They were also tenacious and not accustom to flattery, hypocrisy, slander, affectation, abuse, or dissipation. ⁹⁴

Similarly, al-Jāḥiṣ wrote another treatise in praise of dark skinned slaves, *Fakhr al-Sūdān ‘alā Bayḍān* (The Pride of the Blacks Over the Whites). This treatise was written during the *shu ‘ubiyya* period, and considering al-Jāḥiṣ’s own ethnicity as the son of black female slave, the treatise was aimed to expose the racial prejudices held by the Abbasid elite towards other members possessing an African descent or lineage. The treatise was a polemic ridiculing the Arabs and Persian ethnic groups which were dominant in Iraq at the time. Like his treatise on the Turks, this text also included praises of people of African origin (the Sūdān), their glorified attributes, an explanation on how Arabs actually belonged to the same phylogenetic tree as the Sūdān, and reasons for their dark skin and physiognomical traits. ⁹⁵ This text reflects the growing racial diversity of the Islamic world occuring during al-Jāḥiṣ’s time.

The racial superiority that Arab literature and culture purported extended to other races as well. For instance, al-Jāḥiṣ writes the following about the Ṣaqāliba:

If there are two ṣaqlabī brothers from the same mother and father, even if one of them is the twin brother of the other, when one of them is castrated, he becomes a better servant and smarter in all kinds of activity and manual work. He will be

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more skilled in them and more fitting for them. You will also find him more
intelligent in conversation - these are all his qualities. His brother will remain in
his innate ignorance, natural stupidity, and ṣaqlabī simple-mindedness; he will
also be unable to understand foreign languages. His hand will be clumsy and he
will not become skillful, because his intellect will not be trained. He will not be
able to express himself freely and eloquently, nor to pronounce clearly... The first
result of castration of a ṣaqlabī, is the purification of his intelligence, sharpening
of his acumen, strengthening of his nature, and stimulation of his mind. 96

This passage demonstrates the racial and ethnic views held by medieval Arab society as evident
from the text. The call against the castration of slaves was already established at the time of al-
Jāḥiz’s writing of his encyclopedic work of the Kitāb al-Ḥayawānāt (Book of Animals) in which
the Ṣaqlība receive their own entry. It clearly emphasized a derogatory view of imported races.
Yet, despite the religious taboo against castration and the racial views held by medieval writers
against foreign slavers, eunuchs were still almost unanimously of foreign origin and remained in
demand in the marketplace.

This ideology of innate characteristics which enabled racial superiority was also present
in medieval Islamic philosophical thought as a justification for enslaving other races. As
Aristotelian thought made its way into medieval Islamic philosophical discourse, Aristotle’s
notion of natural slavery, which stated that some people are slaves by nature while others become
so by virtue of the law, was picked up by the medieval philosophers al-Farābī and Ibn Sīna. Al-
Farābī justified war in its purpose of enslavement of those whose most advantageous status in the
world is to be a slave. 97 Ibn Sīna, on the other hand, believed it to be God’s planning that people

96 al-Jāḥiz, Kitāb al-Ḥayawānāt. Trans. by Marek Jankowiak, See online publication, Marek Jankowiak,
“Dirhams for Slaves. Investigating the Slavic Slave Trade in the Tenth Century,” Oxford University,

97 Lewis, 54 - 55.
living in the extreme cold and hot parts of the world were rendered incapable of living life with a higher purpose and so should be enslaved.  

The Fatimids also saw the world as ethnically divided into twelve different regions or islands (jazīra) in their religious ideology. These regions, besides the Land of The Arabs, spread beyond the Dār al-Islām and where theoretically the Ismāʿīlī religious doctrine of the Fatimids was being preached by designated missionaries. Fatimid textual sources divide these regions into the following ethnographic and geographic categories: they included Rūm (Byzantium); Daylam (Persia); Sind (Modern day Pakistan); Hind (India); Śīn (China); The Lands of the Arabs; Nubians, Khazars, Șaqāliba (Slavs); Berbers; Zanj (Sub-Saharan Africa); and Abyssinians (Habash).  

According to the tenth-century neoplatonic Fatimid philosopher, Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī, God’s prophets were never sent to Sind, Hind (India), the Zanj, the Turks, the Khazars, and the Șaqāliba (Slavs). He only cites the areas surrounding Mecca in the south and Syria and Jerusalem in the north, the region in which prophetic activity took place. The people of these other places outside the prophetic zone do not appear worthy of the prophetic message. Similarly, a later Fatimid theologian and philosopher, Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. 1021), also remarks that Turks, Zanj, and Berbers, through their own natural state, lack the ability for intellectual reception and therefore religious truth. Therefore, any member of these groups who became part of the

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98 Lewis, 55.


101 Lewis, 55.
religious order would be constantly aware of their subordinate status and their membership itself would be an act of grace and patronage on the part of the caliph or broader society. Jūdhār’s self-identification as a ṣaqlabī throughout the Sīra is indicative of this factor.

Although the Ustādh was privileged within the court due to his close relation and loyal service to the Fatimid Imāms, he too was the target of humiliation and ridicule on account of his race and status. In a correspondence recorded in the Sīra between Jūdhar and al-Muʿizz, the Ustādh complains to the caliph about rumors spreading through the court about his association with two brothers, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-Kalbī (d. 964) and Jaʿfar. Jūdhar had been given the care when they were children while their father ʿAlī was fighting the jihād in Sicily.102 Jūdhar had a close relationship with the Kalbid family which will be discussed later. His favorable disposition toward the two brothers became the subject of palace gossip to the point that al-Ḥasan was ridiculed for “worshipping Jūdhar,” and for not visiting the palace of al-Mūʿizz without paying a visit to the Ustādh’s home. The gossip made Jūdhar “dismayed, extremely wary and cautious, and bent on not being the subject of gossip.”103 He wrote a petition to the Imām in which he states, “[They say] he (speaking about himself) is a ṣaqlabī man, a foreigner (ʿajamī), with no kin of his own and no children.”104 Regardless of Jūdhar’s successful upward mobility, the ridicule he faced because of his origins and his absence of kin seem to have had an impact on his emotions at times.

102 Sīra 2:72, 153.
103 Sīra 2:72, 153 - 154.
104 Ibid. This quote and the assertion the Jūdhar is without kin or children, seems to be the only indication within the Sīra text which indirectly refers to him being a eunuch and castrated - or unable to marry or have children.
Race and genealogy, however, did not dominate the status quo for the Fatimid elite. In a letter written to Jūdhar by the caliph al-Manṣūr, the inconsequential value of genealogy and race in relation to service and rank is clearly discussed. The letter was written because royal family members who were descendants of the two previous Imāms, al-Mahdī and al-Qā’im, were quite hostile towards the Ustādh and outwardly castigated him because of his rising status and closeness to the caliphal circle of power. Their increasing bitter disposition can be understood in the context of the rising status of the Ṣaqāliba and their growing power and authority in the Fatimid court, similar to the Khurasānīs and Abnā’ of Baghdad mentioned above. Hence, Jūdhar, the leading ṣaqlabī figure of his time, often became a target of their frustrations. Al-Manṣūr was not very fond of the royal family to say the least. In a previous correspondence with Jūdhar and al-Muʿizz, he compared them to the Umayyads and “the cursed tree”, which is detailed in the Quran (17:60).

In this letter al-Manṣūr ridicules the idea of social superiority purely through genealogical status (nasab). Jūdhar had informed the Imām that the royal family consisting of al-Mahdī’s and al-Qā’im’s descendants felt they were superior and entitled to preferential treatment and protection due to their status as the mawālī (clients) of the Prophet Muḥammad and his descendants. Al-Manṣūr replied forcefully and with agitation towards this group of elites, as is evident in the tone of his letter. He writes that it is shocking that al-Mahdī’s and al-Qā’im’s descendants would claim superiority through their genealogical link to the Prophet. Referring to them as donkeys, he instructs Jūdhar to tell them every human being on earth can claim

105 Sīra, 1:26, 45 - 47.
106 Sīra 1:25, 47 -54.
descendance from Adam who is also a messenger of God. He says that the black race (al-Sudān) can claim descendance from Noah through his son Ḥām. Furthermore, the Imām goes on further to say that the Ṣaqāliba race can also claim the same descendance from Noah through Yāfīth (Japheth). Therefore, according to the Imām, people belonging to these two races are technically the descendants of a messenger of God as well. Medieval Islamic thought on race also concurred that the different races of mankind were split with the offsprings of the three sons of Noah, Shām (Shem), Ḥām and Yāfīth). However, the Arabs were considered superior as they were the offsprings of Shām, who in the Quranic tradition is the most superior and rightful heir of Noah’s offspring.107

In addition to his ridicule of their genealogical claims, al-Manṣūr also contests their claim of being the mawālī of the Prophet. He rhetorically asks them, “Do you even know who the mawālī of the Prophet are?” He cites the prominent example of Salmān al-Fārisī (d. ca. 656). Salmān is a hagiographical figure of early Islam who was originally a Persian Zoroastrian and Christian convert. He traveled to Arabia on his quest to seek religious truth. Hearing of Muḥammad, he traveled to Medina. However, en route he was enslaved. After meeting the Prophet he became the first convert to Islām from Persia and he was also freed with the Prophet’s help. He became the mawla of the Prophet.

Al-Manṣūr is blunt in his reproach of his royal cousins. He says Salmān was an Imām whose obedience (ṭā’a) was obligatory after the obedience of the supreme Imām. He reminds them of the core tenets of the Fatimid faith - that the obedience to God can only be achieved through the chain of divine command - obedience to the Prophet, the obedience to Alī, his

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legatee, and the obedience to Salmān whom the Prophet and ‘Alī ‘liberated in body and spirit.’

The entire letter chastises the royals for shaming the house of the Prophet Muhammad, Fatima, and the Imāms through their disobedience.

However the hidden message is made more clear in the following words of al-Manṣūr. He writes, “By God, If Salmān were alive today, he would not greet you or approach you; nor would he command others to greet you or approach you, so that you do not burn them with your fire and your disgrace.” These words were similar to the instructions from the Imām to Jūdhar about the treatment of the descendants of al-Mahdī and al-Qāʿim and for which they continued to make complaints against him. He had instructed Jūdhar to disregard them. The Sīra here is placing Jūdhar in an elevated religious position through its implicit comparison of him, a mawla of the Fatimid Imām, to Salmān al-Farisī, a mawlā, an outsider, a foreigner, a slave, who was third in command under the Prophet and his successor in the spiritual chain of command according to Fatimid theology. Therefore, race and genealogy were fluid concepts in courtly hierarchy. This particular narrative highlights the superior religious and authoritative position held by Jūdhar and suggests the construction of a notion that his identity as a foreigner, a ʂaqlabī, and a eunuch did not hinder his social climb. According to this correspondence, authority, privilege, and prestige, both religious and temporal, is granted only through the graces of the Imām.

The Mawlā and Kinsman

The figure of Jūdhar created by the Sīra of Jūdhar demonstrates that despite the predominant attitudes towards slaves and slavery expressed in medieval Islamic culture, their situations could change greatly once purchased. On one hand, slavery appears limited with the
legal, proverbial, historical, and philosophical disposition toward slaves expressed in medieval Islamic culture and their debasement and humiliation through the means of enslavement. On the other, slaves have risen to elite positions throughout medieval Islamic history. In medieval Islamic culture at times, the relationship between master and slave has often been compared to the relationship between a father and a son. When masters bought male slaves, they were congratulated in a manner similar to when a son was born in the household. Male slaves often fulfilled the role of sons as well. They managed the affairs of their master, travelled with them on important business, and took care of their household in their absence. Slaves of businessmen and merchants often negotiated and handled affairs of their masters on their behalf.

Military and elite slaves especially upheld this paternal and filial status quo within their prestigious households. In the Abbasid court, for instance, the Turkish ghilmān who protected the caliph and the palace were brought up like foster children of the caliph. This relationship’s bond was strong due to the fact that military and elite slaves were brought from foreign lands. Brought as children, they possessed no ties to opposing forces in their new homes. Because of their allegiance and loyalty they were able to gain status and rise to prominent positions above even family members of the royal household. The military systems of both the Abbasid and the Buyid courts relied on Ḥ šīnā (education, discipline, and training) to ensure the order and control of their troops. Ḥ šīnā literally meant to foster the complete care for an individual through their rearing and nourishment. In the Middle Ages it was a political technique for a caliph to bestow

108 Goitein, 132.
109 Ibid, 132.
ni’mah (grace) on a subordinate individual to create ties of loyalty. The Abbasids, the Fatimids, and the Buyids extended this practice to their soldiers by adopting them and taking charge of their care, nurture, training, housing, and education.\textsuperscript{111} In this sense, the caliph or ruler was much like a revered father figure. Often, since the young recruits began their careers as children or teenagers, an ustādh would be put in charge of them and made responsible for their training. He too had a very prestigious position within the court as in the case of Jūdhar.

This close relationship of patronage and the unconditional loyalty it fostered as a result can be further understood by detailing the concept of walā’ in medieval Islamic culture. Scholars have commonly defined the word walā’ to mean clientship, or a relationship of loyalty between two individuals both of whom come to be referred to as the mawlā. The word mawlā holds several meanings in the Arabic language. It is the word used for client, patron, agnate such as brother in law and son in law, a friend, supporter, a companion with whom one drinks, a partner, an ally, and a newly converted Muslim.\textsuperscript{112} The latter use of mawla as a newly converted Muslim, was widely employed for early non-Arab converts. When a person converted, he became a client of a sponsoring member of an Arab tribe. This relationship resulted in an exchange of tribal protection for the mawla’s loyalty. This relationship, it should be recalled, emulates the mawla status of Salmān al-Fārisī and the Prophet.

Historically, Islam began in Arabia within a tribal based social system. Therefore, a person’s identity was largely dependent on the social role one played within his respected tribe. There was a reciprocal symbiotic relationship between the tribe as a whole and the individual.

\textsuperscript{111} See Mottahedeh, 82 - 96.

Islam incorporated this preexisting system into its message of universal acceptance and a call for equality for all believers entering its fold - regardless of their ethnic background. However, since Islam began as an Arabo-centric tribal society, the system for non-Arab converts was typically to affiliate themselves with an Arab tribe as a client in order to emulate and be part of the existing social fabric of the time. This was the mawālhī system in theory, but it was obviously more complicated and nuanced. Over time, it extended beyond a binding cliental relationship between a non-Arab individual with a tribe. As the Islamic world expanded in the seventh and eighth centuries, the mawālhī system evolved from an Arab - non-Arab binary to a Muslim - non-Muslim one. The common denominator among the mawālhī was no longer ethnicity but religious affiliation. This clientage was bound through the legalized patronage of the walā’. Linguistically, mawla’ was used to denote both client and patron who had entered into this legal contract, with internal distinctions between who was the patron and superior in the relationship, and the beneficiary on whom the patron’s grace was bestowed.

Walā’ also described through a father son relationship. The 14th century Mālikī jurist, Khalīl b. Ishāq (d. 1365), writes that when a master frees his slave, just as a father sires a child, the master is allowing the slave to be reborn as a freeman.113 The Fatimids also expressed this parental filial relationship between master and slave, especially in reference to manumission. In the chapter on manumission in the Da‘ā’im al-Islām, al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān quotes Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 765), on whose teachings the basis of Fatimid jurisprudence is formed, as saying, “the most criminal of God’s creatures is one who kills a man who is not his murderer, or one who strikes a man who has not assaulted him, or a [freedman] who claims someone as a master

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(mawla) who is not his master, or who claims descent from one who is not his father.”¹¹⁴ The relationship forged through walā’ between master and mawla (freedslave) was considered comparable to the natural relationship between father and son, a vow of loyalty which was unbreakable. Another standard practice of walā’ was its inheritable status. Freed mawālī, like their earlier counterparts who had converted to Islam, maintained their loyal and sincere relationship with the heirs of the master who freed them. The bond between a mawla and the family he served became permanent. Jūdhar exemplifies this bond in his service to four Imāms over a span of sixty-two years.

In light of the research presented above, Jūdhar’s initiation scene was the ideal place for al-Manṣūr al-Kāṭib to begin the narrative. A slave’s origins were not his natural beginnings. Rather, his life actually began on the day he joined the service of his master. In Jūdhar’s case, al-Mahdī accepts the remaining Ṣaqāliba of the Aghlabids, whom the Fatimids had considered unjust and unholy rulers. These slaves becoming part of the Fatimid state, and in Jūdhar’s case the Da’wa itself, was in itself considered true birth. For the character of Jūdhar depicted in the Sīra, his slave status does not occupy a major role in the creation of his selfhood. In his world, slave status is an understood factor of his existence. The most important characteristic emphasized throughout the text is his deep sense of kinship and loyalty with his masters and the nurturing and development of his walā’ and relationship with the Imāms. The next chapter of this dissertation analyzes Jūdhar’s other social ties which he fostered as a result of his relationship to his masters and how he catered those relationships to gain various social currencies to continue to rise in the Fatimid court.

The ethnic demographies of the early Fatimid court comprised mainly the Ṣaqāliba and the Kutāma Berbers. An account of their significance in the early Fatimid court was recorded by al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān in the Kitāb al-Majālis wa al-Musā‘irāt (The Book of Courtly Sessions and Excursions), where he details a plea made by a courtier for al-Mu‘izz’s recognition at his court in al-Manṣūriyya. He observes that on the occasion of ‘Īd al-Adḥā, a crowd of Kutāma Berbers flooded the royal palace to attend the festivities celebrating the holy day.¹ The Kutāma were a Berber tribe at the forefront of Fatimid courtly favor following their alignment with Abū ‘Abdallāh, the Ismā‘īlī missionary who militarily defeated the Aghlabids bringing the Fatimids to power. When he learned of their arrival at the palace that day, al-Mu‘izz lavished praise on them in the presence of his courtiers. Following suit with the Imam’s praises, the chief justice al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān joined the commendation of the Kutāma’s military prowess and arduous efforts in aiding the Fatimid’s ascension to power.

Upon hearing the Kutāma’s praises, a member of the Ṣaqāliba military corps rose to contend with the Imam’s words of recognition, asking, “And what about us, Commander of the Faithful? Do you presume that we are not equal despite the fact that we have endured the same burdens and performed jihāds like others before us?”² Like the Kutāma, the Ṣaqāliba had played an important role in the early Fatimid government administrations and military operations. They had diligently served the early Imāms who in turn awarded them a high level of administrative

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² Ibid, 224.
and religious authority and power within Fatimid society as indicated by the ṣaqlabī courtier that day.

Yet, al-Muʿizz replied to him that they were not equal to the Kutāma. He pointed out that the Ṣaqāliba had become his royal subjects due to their importation, not on account of their own initiative. The Caliph-Imām ultimately credited the Kutāma, who stabilized Fatimid rule in the region, for paving the way for the arrival of the Ṣaqāliba. Al-Muʿizz also proclaimed the Kutāma’s precedence (sabāqa) over the Ṣaqāliba, placing them one step behind the Kutāma in the social hierarchy of his court. He indicated, however, that the favor and sabāqa of the Kutāma in Fatimid society did not diminish the merits of the Ṣaqāliba, and they too were privy to his favor. In this way, the Ṣaqāliba’s preconceived foreignness and otherness symbolically limited their social ascent in Fatimid society.

The outspoken ṣaqlabī’s plea for the Caliph-Imām’s recognition that day, recorded by al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, suggests the contested nature of hierarchy in the early Fatimid state of tenth-century Ibrāqiya. Moreover, it represents an appeal for social upward mobility, as fueled by the Imām’s public recognition, and other social currencies such as sabāqa, valor, and military service. In this case, the Caliph-Imām al-Muʿizz appears as an arbitrator for a social system consisting of competing ethnic groups and ranks (ṭabaqa) in his court. Al-Muʿizz acts as the just ruler, a figure present to both define and administer social justice. In this case, he does so by

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3 The concept of sabāqa is a Quranic and early Islamic cultural ideology associated with ‘Umar and ‘Alī’s policies of setting an Islamic criterion of social worth over a tribal one. Thus, it became a means for achieving favor (faḍl) in the hierarchal social order and serving as a token for being praiseworthy for glorious deeds and outstanding traits (manāqib). For sabāqa see Louise Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 14 -15; On the genesis of the ‘disputes of precedence,’ in early medieval Arabic sources and their relation to ideologies regarding the caliphate, see Asma Afsaruddin, "In Praise of the Caliphs: Re-Creating History from the Manaqib Literature," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31, no. 3 (August 01, 1999): 330 - 332.
ensuring that both the Kutāma and the Ṣaqāliba were satisfied with his responses and praises so that they remain united and loyal. The anecdote reveals an exchange of social currencies: the Caliph-Imām’s bestowment of recognition of merit and praise of virtues in exchange for devotion and loyalty of his people. This preservation of social order was very much part of the medieval Islamic ruler’s job.4

The Sirat Ustādh Jūdhar identifies various forms of social currency, similar to those mentioned in the anecdote above, throughout al-Manṣūr al-Kātib’s selective narrative of Jūdhar’s story. Jūdhar’s marginalized identities, especially of slave, eunuch, and foreigner are factors which modern social perspectives would consider obstacles to his ability to rise in the ranks. Yet the Sīra constantly negotiates between the perceived limitation set by Jūdhar’s social marginalization and his possession of social currency such as his virtues (manāqib), excellence (faḍl), and other forms of merit (ḥasab).

This chapter contends that even as a eunuch, foreigner, ṣaqlabī, and slave, Jūdhar’s proximity to the nucleus of power and his relationships with prime actors in the early Fatimid state, are representative of having enabled him to maneuver between social strata with fluidity. The research presented in this chapter also identifies the various social groups and major actors in early Fatimid society in Ifrīqiya. The negotiation between marginalization and social power within medieval Islamic societies also comes to light when we consider how Jūdhar is located within the contested hierarchical structure of the Fatimid court.

The Formation of Medieval Islamic Social Stratification

When Islam emerged in the early seventh century as an Arabian religion, its original social structure reflected many of the existing tribal norms of pre-Islamic Arabia. In this early social milieu, egalitarianism was not a foreign concept to Muslims. Unlike their Byzantine and Persian neighbors, early Arab tribal society closely resembled a pseudo-egalitarian structure.\(^5\) This social structure came about largely because tribal hierarchies of late antique Arabia did not consist of caste systems or closed aristocracies. On the contrary, the Arabs of late antiquity challenged leaderships and hierarchal authorities. As a result, the power of authority was constantly shifting and some forms of egalitarianism were achievable.

Islam adopted many aspects of the previous Arabian tribal social structure while implementing its own norms. During the formative period of Islamic thought following the death of Muhammad in 632, social currencies of worthiness and social standing in early Islamic ideology were based on several newly introduced criteria established by the early caliphs. \(^\)Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 644), for instance, is reported to have created the system of \(sabāqa\). This system established one’s social standing in accordance to the order by which he accepted Islam. Under this system, throughout the early formative period of Islam, the \(ṣaḥābā\), the companions of the Prophet, were considered to be the elite members of this emerging society and the length of time they had devoted to Islam was the source of their social worth.

\(^\)Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 661) was also open to creating egalitarian and Islamic variables of worth in early Islamic society. He introduced several egalitarian fiscal measures when he lived in Kūfa such as abolishing the distinction between early-comers and new-comers and introducing a

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policy in which “shown valor” among newcomers was a way through which they could receive additional worth in society.\(^6\) It was through such measures that he was able to garner the support of many Kūfans, but also upset the established noble class (\(\text{ashref}\)) who had enjoyed prominence through the earlier system of \(\text{sabāqa}\). There are also several sayings attributed to ʿAlī within the corpus of classical Arabic \(\text{belles-lettres}\) which demonstrate the egalitarian thinking emerging in this period. For example, “Nobility is in learning and culture, and not in origin and lineage,”\(^7\) and “There is no merit (\(\text{hasab}\)) more effective than knowledge (\(\text{adab}\)).”\(^8\) These early emerging ideas from the classical period demonstrate that in addition to the nobility of lineage (\(\text{nasab}\)), several other forms of social capital could raise one’s status in society.

The early Islamic conquests brought about distinctive changes to the social structure which had previously existed in the formative period of classical Islam. Before the conquests, the concept of social equality was congruent with the message of universal acceptance many early Muslims believed Islam wished to convey. However, this message was interpreted vis-a-vis a tribal structure of social organization. After the initial conquests, there was not an active movement to convert the conquered Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian populaces. The conquerors left them with the social status of protected people (\(\text{ahl al-dhimma}\)) and subjected them to a poll tax. Conversion to \(\text{muslimhood}\) was achieved through the contract of \(\text{walāʾ}\), as mentioned in \textit{Chapter One}. In many ways, in early Islamic society the payment and distribution of taxes became the mechanism by which the social strata was structured and reinforced. The conquerers and military forces collected taxes and essentially became the elite class, while

\(^6\) Marlow, 14 -15.
\(^7\) Ibid, 29.
\(^8\) Ibid, 29.
peasants, workers, merchants, and protected non-Muslims all worked to pay taxes, thus becoming the inferior class of society. In the next hundred years following 634 after the caliph Ḥūrman initiated the global conquests of Islam, this social dichotomy consisting of an aristocratic Muslim ruling class and subjugated and taxed populaces ceased to exist in its original form. The rise of settlement, the growth of the economy, and cultural assimilation brought about massive changes in the social structure of medieval Islamic society. For example, the Umayyad caliph Ḥūrman II (r. 717 - 20) created laws and regulations which created a sense of equality among all Muslims regardless of their Arab or non-Arab origins.⁹

The Arab conquests brought about the need for successful governance and brought about immense economic and social change. These factors gave Arabs a moment to reflect on their own cultural practices when they assimilated with the conquered populations of previously Sasanian-ruled Persia. As they settled in these areas they came into contact with previous Sasanian ideas of governance, traditions, and customs. As a result, they encountered a civilization which was in sharp contrast to their own. Whereas hierarchal delineation and the status quo had been somewhat fluid in the Arab and Bedouin cultures from which early Islamic society evolved, the Muslim conquerors found that the rigid hierarchy of heredity and class in Sasanian social order played the most important role.¹⁰ As Islamic civilization situated itself in the conquered cities of Sasanian Persia through settlement, it undoubtedly adopted and implemented several previous administrative and cultural aspects from its new subjects. This

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¹⁰ Marlow, 67.
encounter brought about major changes in the status quo. The sociography of the elite and the idea of leadership evolved as well.

Islamic society’s turn towards new a social order was influenced by ideas from Persian literary sources. The Umayyad Caliphs, such as Hisham (r. 724 -43), were keen to oversee the translations of several Sasanian political documents into Arabic. This translation movement continued when the Abbasids rose to power in 750. Throughout the eighth and ninth centuries, several Persian literary works were widely translated into Arabic and disseminated. The translation movement of the early Abbasids also included the scientific, medical, mathematical, astronomical, geographical, technological, and several other literary traditions of both the Hellenistic and Sasanian worlds.

The proper rules of character, conduct, good governance, and organizing society were recorded in several sources of early Arabic adab literature written during this period. Mirrors for princes were especially translated in the form of manuals providing codes of conduct and governing advice for rulers and other members of the elite class. This rich literary tradition which was imported to Arabic texts and manuals helped to shape the social engineering of medieval Islam. Much of the Persian social literature translated into Arabic still maintained its rigid hierarchal view of political order. In this ideology, the monarch possessed absolute divine authority over religious and secular matters. Each stratum of society, from ruling class to peasant class, had a fixed and ordained position in life. The contrast between Sasanian rigidity and Arab-Bedouin fluidity spurred constant negotiation and discourse in the literature.

For instance, Ibn Muqaffā (d. 759), a statesman and prolific writer of the late Umayyad and early Abbasid period, was well aware of this amalgam of old and new social structures in his
numerous translations and writings. He is perhaps most known for his translation of the *Kalīla wa Dimna*, fables which tell parables of animals whose actions reflect the Indo-Iranian ideals of social harmony and political stability. These stories are narrated by two protagonists who are jackals named Kalīla and Dimna. These two characters narrate several stories which analyze the ideal of class stratification within society. For instance, in their narration and commentary of the parable of the lion and the rabbit, Kalīla says, “Each person has a station (*manzila*) and [social] worth (*qadr*), and if he sticks to the station in which he finds himself, then he is likely to be content… As man’s station has been determined for him since the beginning of time, he has no alternative but to be satisfied with it, whatever it is.” Dimna offers an alternative approach to social hierarchies by replying, “There are some people who lack manliness (*muruwwa*); they are the ones who are satisfied with little and pleased with an inferior position, just as a dog, on finding a dry bone, is delighted with it. But men of excellence (*faḍl*) and manliness are not content with little, nor satisfied with it, until their souls have lifted them up to the position to which they are entitled and which is also worthy of them.”

The discourse between the two jackals is reflective of the way medieval Islamic social structure developed into an intricate combination of its Arab tribal ideologies, rooted in basic forms of egalitarianism, and age-old Sasanian social structures which were rigidly stratified. Because of this cultural fusion, medieval Islamic societies were neither completely egalitarian or completely devoid of a stratified hierarchal status quo. This newly conceived social stratification of medieval Islam during the late Umayyad and early Abbasid period developed its own form of

12 Ibid, 76.
13 Ibid, 76.
fluidity. Ideals which had structured society in the formation of Islamic culture such as precedence (*sabāqa*), lineage (*nasab*), nobility, valor, birth-rights, and piety were coupled with new ideals and forms of social currency such as wealth, character, and cultivation (*adab*). The importance of *adab* and literary sophistication cannot be emphasized enough as a form of currency.

**Early Fatimid Society and Social Order**

‘Abdallāh al-Mahdī, the first Fatimid caliph, spent four years between 905 - 909 in the western Saharan trade outpost city of Sijilmāsa disguised as a merchant after he fled his home in Salamiyah in Syria and traveled to North Africa to escape Abbasid persecution in 902. When he fled Salamiyah, only his son and a few personal attendants accompanied him. Sijilmāsa was a remote city located at the far southwestern borders of the Islamic world (present-day Morocco). It was a trade post which connected the West African trade routes to North Africa, and from there to the rest of the Islamic world and beyond. The remote location of this new place allowed al-Mahdī to keep his true identity hidden. He assumed the identity of a textile merchant, a suitable alter identity for being in a trade-post city.

During the last few months of his time in Sijilmāsa, the city’s Midrārid ruler and prince, al-Yasa’ b. Midrār, became suspicious of the “eastern” merchant who had been residing in his city for the last several years. Al-Yasa’ had been warned by the Aghlabid rulers of Ifrīqiya to his east that a descendant of the Prophet’s family claiming to be the *mahdī* was likely hiding in his midst. As a result, he became suspicious of ’Abdallāh and his son al-Qā’im. During this time, the Kutāma Berber army of Abū ’Abdallāh, the Fatimid missionary (Dā‘ī), were succeeding in their rebellion against the Aghlabids and coming closer to accomplishing their goal in bringing an end
to Aghlabid rule in Ifrīqiya. When al-Yasa’ finally learned that ‘Abdallāh al-Mahdī was indeed a descendant of the Prophet, he put him and al-Qā’im under house arrest as a precaution. When the Dā‘ī Abū ‘Abdallāh was successful in removing the Aghlabids and the Rustamids from power, his army marched west to Sijilmāsa to free their Imām al-Mahdī from imprisonment.

Abū ‘Abdallāh’s army overtook Sijilmāsa and freed al-Mahdī from captivity. Once free, the Imām summoned all his personal servants who had been with him throughout his journey from Syria to Sijilmāsa to his tent which had been erected in the encampment of the Kutāma’s army. One of al-Mahdī’s servants named Ja’far, who would become an important religious leader of the Fatimid religious mission, vividly narrates the story recorded in his own Sīra.14 Ja’far and al-Mahdī’s other servants entered the tent which had been adorned with luxurious carpets covering the entire ground. As they entered, they saw al-Mahdī seated on an elevated platform (sarīr). Even at this early moment, courtly protocol was of the utmost importance to the Imām. When they approached al-Mahdī, the Imām instructed his eunuch Ṣandal to bring forth his personal garment trunk which he had instructed to be hidden during his incarceration. The trunk was full of several garments which he instructed Ṣandal to remove. Ṣandal handed al-Mahdī two beautifully woven garments. Al-Mahdī wore one set while he instructed al-Qā’im to put on the other. He then instructed Ṣandal to bring forth additional garments and the Imām clothed and robed Abū ‘Abdallāh with his own hands and wound a turban around his head. He gave him an

14 Ja’far b. Maṣūr al-Yaman was a high ranking member of the Fatimid religious mission and author of several religious texts which include esoteric treatises. He was the son of the Fatimid Dā‘ī, Ibn Ḥawshab, who was located in Yemen and played an important role in the spread of the Fatimid Da’wa there. His role in the Fatimid’s state administration is not as well known. However, the numerous texts he has left behind point towards his religious occupation in the Fatimid order. He accompanied al-Mahdī on his journey from Salamiyāh to Sijilmāsā and became his chamberlain. Ja’far’s Sīra was recorded in the era of the Fatimid caliph al-‘Azīz billāh by Muhammad b. Muḥammad al-Yamānī, and was contemporary to Jūdhar’s Sīra. See, Muhammad Ibn Muhammad Yamani, Sīrat Ja’far Al-Hājib, ed. Ḥusām Khuḍūr (Salmīyya: Dār Al-Ghadīr Li- Al-Ṭabā’a Wa Al-Nashr Wa Al-Ta’wil, 2010).
honorary sword. He did the same with his servants. Al-Mahdī gave Jaʿfar a garment with a 
dabūqī linen base\textsuperscript{15}, a turban, trousers, and slippers. Jaʿfar also received a sword. Al-Mahdī 
awarded this combination of gifts to all remaining men who had been in his personal entourage.

The bestowal of garments from caliph to recipient was an important medieval Islamic 
courtly gesture. Following the Abbasid precedent, in Fatimid tradition, the khilʿa, or garments 
handed down from the ruler to his subjects, were considered an investiture of rank and status.\textsuperscript{16} 
They held stately and spiritual value within Fatimid cultural ideology which will be discussed in 
the following two chapters. The khilʿa also signified a transference of honor and divine baraka 
vis-a-vis the touch of the Caliph-Imām’s hands.\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, it was a form of cultural capital 
constituted by one’s acquisition of social capital.

A basic description of the social hierarchy of the early Fatimid state is also present in the 
narration of Jaʿfar surrounding this event. Jaʿfar goes on to narrate that al-Mahdī instructed Abū 
ʿAbdallāh to erect a large and spacious tent for the Imām to hold his first official court so that the 
army and officials could attend and meet their new leader. When that day arrived, al-Mahdī’s 
personal servants were the first to enter the tent. Like the day before, they again saw al-Mahdī 
seated on an elevated platform located at the center of the tent. His son al-Qāʾim sat to his right 
holding a sword at his side. Al-Mahdī’s personal servants were arranged in specific positions 
throughout the tent to enhance the performative aspects of that day. Jaʿfar stood at the door of the

\textsuperscript{15} S. D. Goitein, \textit{A Mediterranean Society: Daily Life}, vol. IV (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 
1999), 166.

\textsuperscript{16} See Jochen Sokoly, "Textiles and Identity," in \textit{A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture}, by Finbarr 

\textsuperscript{17} Paula Sanders "Robes of Honor in Fatimid Egypt," in \textit{Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of 
tent, hence achieving his future title as the curtain drawer al-hājib. In medieval Islamic courts, the hājib was the royal chamberlain and the official who controlled access to and from the ruler. The Dāʿī Abū ʿAbdallāh stood two hundred cubits away from the tent with almost a thousand foot soldiers, whom he labeled as the bawwāb (gate guardians). These soldiers had been arranged in two rows guarding the passageway in front of the entrance of the tent. Inside the tent, two of al-Mahdī’s personal servants stood at both of his sides, indicating their elevated status within the household. Al-Ṭayyib stood two steps to the right of al-Mahdī’s platform right behind al-Qā’im, while Abū Ya’qūb stood two steps to the left. Additionally, a ṣaqlabī eunuch slave named Bushra\textsuperscript{18} and al-Mahdī’s eunuch Ṣandal stood directly at both sides of the throne as they waved a fly-whisk above al-Mahdī’s head.

Al-Mahdī’s use of the fly-whisk and his placement of eunuchs near him were not without a deeply embedded cultural significance. The fly-whisk was customarily used by several medieval Islamic courts and the Abbasid caliphs were known to use them. For example, al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868) writes in the Risāla al-Qiyān (Treatise on The Singing Slave Girls) that, “a caliph, or someone else in a comparable position of power and influence, used to never to be without a slave-girl standing behind him to wave the fly-whisk and fan, and another to hand him things, in a public audience in the presence of other men.”\textsuperscript{19} Another late Abbasid historian, Hilāl al-Ṣābi’ (d. 1056), also writes about the use of the fly-whisk when he writes about the traditions of the later Abbasid court in his work titled the Rusūm Dār al-Khilāfa (The Ceremonies of the Capital of the Caliphate). In a chapter describing the caliph’s court, throne, and processions, he describes

\textsuperscript{18} Bushra was a ṣaqlabī eunuch purchased by the Dāʿī Abū ʿAbdallāh in Ikjān and later gifted to al-Mahdī by the former in Sijilmāsa. See Sīrat Jaʿfar al-Ḥājib, 59.

the formal organization of the Abbasid court. He mentions the royal attendants who flanked the throne: “The ghilmān dāriyya (household attendants), the private (khāṣṣa) eunuchs, and exterior (barrāniyya) eunuchs stand to the back and sides of the throne and they are all girded with their swords. They all hold axes and clubs in their hands. Immediately behind the throne and at both sides of the caliph stand ṣaqlabī eunuchs who wave a fly-whisk. The whisks are plated in gold and silver.”

The fly-whisk was a functional tool, but it also evoked a deep symbolic meaning of kingship in ancient Near Eastern and medieval Islamic courtly protocol.

This common medieval Islamic courtly orchestration of fly-whisking behind the ruler is the subject material for the frontispiece miniature of a manuscript copy of the Epistles of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ which dates to 1287 (fig. 4). In this miniature, a beardless figure, indicating his status as a eunuch, stands adjacent to the turbaned ruler waving a fan. In the same manner, Al-Mahdī’s courtly organization in the tent was an emulation of medieval Islamic courtly ritual which had been adopted by earlier rulers. Many Islamic courts continued in this fashion throughout the premodern Islamic world. Therefore, al-Mahdī was reusing a common Near Eastern courtly apparatus and not creating courtly protocol and ritual ex nihilo. In Ja’far’s narrative, the fact that the whisk was purposefully used in a remote makeshift tent setting in Sijilmāsa on the first day of al-Mahdī’s public ascension to the throne demonstrates the Caliph-Imām’s desire to convey messages of power, authority, and legitimacy through the common

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22 Rasā‘īl Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, Süleymaniya Esad Efendi, 3638, fol. 4 r.
visual language of customary courtly accoutrements. This visual language was widely understood by his subjects. Articulating these ideas in a newly created cultural language would not have made political sense. Similarly, much like the use of common courtly visual language, the Fatimid hierarchal organization also reflected preexisting courtly structures.

The visual display of power and social stratification within the tent was equally matched with the performative aspect of this day’s public ceremony. Abū Ḥāmid orchestrated al-Mahdī’s reception by summoning precisely numbered groups of men to enter al-Mahdī’s tent and see their Imām for the first time. The summoning began with smaller groups of ten men who were the highest ranking of the early Fatimid polity, consisting of religious missionaries (Du‘āt) stationed in the North African region and the commanders of Abū Ḥāmid’s army. After al-Mahdī had received these important men in his audience, Abū Ḥāmid arranged groups consisting of fifty men who were of lesser importance to meet the Imām. This was followed by larger groups of one hundred. After the elite class was complete, the troops of the army were given the honor to march in front of al-Mahdī so they could see their new leader and convey their salāms to him, even from afar. This manner of courtly assembly took place for three days and clearly demonstrates the visual tools of performance which medieval Islamic governance took into account to create a sense of social order through stratifying rank.23

In terms of the relation between social and visual culture, it is also important to imagine the physical path al-Mahdī’s subjects would take to enter the tent in order to understand the precise orchestration and drama of legitimacy choreographed that day. Having waited in anticipation to see their new ruler for the first time, the loyalists of al-Mahdī would pass through

the hundreds of soldiers lined up outside the tent as gate guardians. Reaching the door of the tent, they would see Ja’far the ḥājib, with his sword at his side and clothed in elaborate dress. After passing all these officials, they would enter the tent and see that it was large and spacious, decorated with lavish carpets. At the center of the tent was their leader, al-Mahdī, seated on an elevated platform with his heir at his side. The sight of royal attendants girded with swords and rich textile clothing, and flanking the Imām as they waved fly-whisks above his head would equally be a mesmerizing spectacle to those who had never seen royal courtly protocol. Finally, they would receive the blessings of the Imām, their religious leader, and convey their regards and greetings unto him. The awe and amazement the performative aspect of courtly protocol provoked, in turn, fostered loyalty and devotion and also stabilized the perceived chain of command to the masses. Those who had entered the tent undoubtedly left with a sense of privilege because they had reached a place where others could not.

Courtly protocol and dramatic performance similar to al-Mahdī’s first courtly session in Sijilmāsa came to prevail in the customs and rituals of contemporary medieval Islamic courts which were largely competing with one another for legitimacy throughout the Muslim world. For instance, the historical work Akhbār Mulūk al-Andalus (The Historical Reports of the Rulers of al-Andalus) by the Andalusian chronicler ʿĪsa b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Mūsa al-Rāzī (d. 955) mentions his observations of Hispano-Umayyad courtly ceremony in Maḏīnat al-Zahra. Al-Rāzī and his Umayyad masters, Abd al-Raḥmān III (d. 961) and al-Ḥakam II (d. 976), were all contemporaries to the Fatimids of Ifrīqiya. He describes Hispano-Umayyad courtly ritual and ceremony in detail in his work and pays particular attention to the organization and performance in the audience hall of the palace and the sequence of how people were received at court. Just
like Ja’far’s detailed description above, al-Rāzī is also concerned with the caliph’s central position on a throne, the precision of the placement of high ranking officials like the ḥājib and other attendants surrounding the ruler, the dispersal of rank, and the sequence of attendees received at court. These types of performative courtly rituals and ceremonies were "symbolic articulations of legitimacy," much needed in a world in which various rulers were competing for legitimacy and the recognition of Muslim populations at large.

Al-Mahdī’s first court narrative above also sheds light on the sociographic composition of early Fatimid society. Ja’far’s narrative places the Imām and caliph at the center of this social cosmos. When describing that day Ja’far wrote, “When we woke the next morning, al-Mahdī sat on an elevated platform which had been prepared for him in the heavens. It was as if the sun was rising from his face. Al-Qā’im was standing at his side, girded with his sword, adjacent to the throne like the full moon.” Using celestial metaphors to describe the Fatimid hierarchy was prevalent throughout the cultural and religious literature of the dynasty where the Caliph-Imām assumed the position of the sun and all other officials under him were the remaining celestial bodies of the known universe. The use of celestial bodies to praise rulers is a long dominant trope in classical Arabic literature and appears widely in court panegyrics. The sun and moon were quintessential in Fatimid adab in identifying the highest ranks of authority.

After the Caliph-Imām and his heir, al-Mahdī’s courtly attendants and personal entourage were the next group of individuals ranking in importance. After the inner circle of the Caliph-

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26 Sīrat Ja’far al-Ḥājib, 63.
Imām, the hierarchal order then continued down to include the elite members of Fatimid society. This elite group consisted of leaders of the religious and government hierarchy. These elite individuals often retained a position in both spheres of the Fatimid world, the Da‘wa (religious order) and the Dawla (government). They consisted of officials such as the missionaries, the army commanders, governors (‘ummāl), and other high-ranking officials. After the elites, the next in order was the general public. They consisted of the foot soldiers of the army and the commoners. These groups of individuals are reflective of the members of the early Fatimid polity. Despite their varying ranks in the religious and governmental organizations of the state, they all had one thing in common: they were all constantly competing for the recognition of the Caliph-Imām because it validated their social position. As mentioned above, the recognition of the ruler was probably the most valuable form of social currency in medieval Islamic courtly systems and especially in the Fatimid social cosmos since he divinely sat at the apex of the hierarchal order.

In this way, public ceremonies in which social rank was put on display were an exchange of different forms of recognition between ruler and the public spectators. The ruler offered social capital through currencies of favor and recognition of status, while the public viewers conferred acceptances of legitimacy. These types of public spectacles of rank served the Fatimids in establishing their foothold in the region by creating a new social order where all members of society fell into rank under the central authoritative figure of the Caliph-Imām. For al-Mahdī, taking this step towards creating social order at the very beginning of his rule was key because he had to transform his subjects from a largely military army to a royal court. The early regime of the Fatimids, as it will be explained below, consisted primarily of Kutāma Berbers. The
Kutāma had maintained culturally embedded traditions specific to their tribal customs which were in sharp contrast to the lavish courtly displays of power and authority which had developed in medieval Islamic culture under the Umayyads and Abbasids. However, after a process of acculturation conducted by the Fatimid state, the Kutāma were assimilated into the new social order and regularly took part in the ostentatious and performative courtly rituals which reinforced the new status quo.

Public spectacles exulting men of rank were constantly orchestrated in Fatimid courtly society. These types of public displays of rank were intended to reinforce the social order of the Fatimid state, and they increased in frequency and grandeur once the Fatimids shifted into the more permanent urban environments of their own built cities. In the royal cities, their courtly rituals turned into elaborate public displays of power which expanded beyond the walls of the palace throne room to the entire city. Fatimid cities were themselves structured and organized to reinforce public displays of the social hierarchy. For example, a prominent feature of Fatimid cities was the public square in the vicinity of the palace where public ceremonies and parades took place and upon which the ruler could spectate from the palace, being physically distant from the ceremony but symbolically very much its centered focus.

The public parades were organized so that participants marched according to their ranks and spectators could view their social status in relation to the Caliph-Imam. Medieval authors often point out the central plaza of the Fatimid palatial city of al-Qāhira (Cairo) in Egypt built by al-Muʿizz known as the area of Ma Bayna al-Qasrayn (The Place Between The Two Palaces)

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28 Ibid. Sanders’ work on the ritual aspects of Fatimid ceremonial has greatly impacted this study.
used for public ritual and ceremony.²⁹ Excavations of al-Mahdiyya have suggested that the first Fatimid city also had a central plaza between al-Mahdi’s and al-Qā’im’s palaces which were located across from one another (fig. 5). The excavation of al-Mahdi’s palace has revealed that it was built with a large audience hall (īwān) for official receptions.³⁰ The presence of a large central plaza between the two palaces, a feature they emulated in Cairo, indicates the importance the Fatimids gave public ceremony in their city planning.

The sociography of the Fatimid city in many ways was itself symbolic of social rank. Fatimid cities were walled and gated with massive portal gates which were well guarded. In other words, these cities were mostly inaccessible to the general public except on rare occasions. Al-Mahdiyya, the first Fatimid-built city of North Africa, primarily consisted of the royal palaces, residences for the royal family members and official courtiers, the main mosque, smaller mosques, the port, the naval arsenal, and other royal administrative buildings and warehouses.³¹ Al-Mahdiyya was more an administrative center which surrounded the royal palace. It was inhabited by the elite of Fatimid society consisting of the ruler, the royal family, state officials, and the numerous slaves and mawāli holding both official state occupations as well as servile positions.

The Fatimids strategically housed their state military outside of the main city. While the Arab jund remained stationed near al-Qayrawān as they had during the Aghlabid era, the Imām’s

²⁹ For a recent study on the Bayn al-Qasrayn plaza’s use in Mamluk times and its memory from the Fatimid era, see Jo Van Steenbergen, "Chapter Nine: Ritual, Politics and the City in Mamluk Cairo: The Bayna al-Qasrayn as a Dynamic 'lieu De Mémoire' (1250-1382)," in Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean: Comparative Perspectives, by Alexander Daniel. Beihammer, Stavroula Constantinou, and Maria Parani (Leiden: Brill, 2013).


personal army resided in the suburb of Zuwayla located just outside of al-Mahdiyya’s walls. Zuwayla was actually the name given to the new sub-Saharan black slave troops who had been introduced to the Fatimid army. The Fatimids had purchased these slave recruits from traders located in Zuwayla, an oasis in the Fezzān region of southern Libya. Hence, the Zuwayla troops acquired the *nisba* of their location of purchase. Since this new ethnic faction made up a significant portion of the Fatimid army, the suburb Zuwayla was named after them. Zuwayla housed all ethnic factions of the Fatimid army including the Kutāma troops. Only senior officials from the military were allowed inside al-Mahdiyya. Even though a small garrison of Kutāma were stationed within al-Mahdiyya’s walls, these soldiers primarily resided in Zuwayla with their families and returned there after their shifts. Zuwayla was developed and consisted of markets, bathhouses, inns, and other facilities which catered to the general population. The demographic layout of al-Mahdiyya and Zuwayla is representative of the social dichotomy of the classes of Fatimid society consisting of the elite (*al-khāṣṣa*) and the common folk (*al-ʾāmma*).

Al-Mahdiyya, like other Fatimid cities, became a sanctuary and symbol for divinely ordained authority and social order. An anonymous poet’s verses recorded by Ibn Idhārī, the fourteenth-century historical chronicler of the Maghrib, echo this idea quite clearly. In praise of the new construction of al-Mahdiyya this poet writes:

Felicitations, 'O ruler and king for your arrival, a moment for which time itself rejoices.

You have encamped in this honorable city which the blessed angels have protected for you.

If the Holy Land of Mecca (*al-Ḥarām*) and its surrounding areas are considered glorious as are its magnificent shrines,

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Then this place in the land of the West, where prayers and fasting are approved [by God], is also glorious.

[This place] is the protected sanctuary (haram) of al-Mahdiyya, similar to [Mecca], the sacred city (al-balad al-ḥarām) of Ṭīḥāma.\(^{33}\)

Even though al-Mahdiyya has no actual shrine [maqām], it is almost as if the Maqām of Ibrāhīm\(^{34}\) is present there upon the earth beneath your two feet.

Just as the pilgrims performing hajj kiss the sacred corner of the Ka’ba, we kiss the ground of your palace’s courtyard.

Even if nature takes its course and time leads to the crumbling of the foundations of kingdoms,

'O Mahdī, your kingdom will remain forever young since time is its servant.

The entire world is yours and your progeny’s, wherever you might be. For all of you are the world’s Imāms forever.\(^{35}\)

Along with deeply embedded Ismā’ilī religious ideologies, these verses also depict the social significance that Fatimid cities had in the eyes of the people. This poem emphasizes the divine authority of the Caliph-Imām while simultaneously exulting the area in which he resided as being equal to holy sites. Adherence to protocol and courtly adab in the Fatimids when it came to the Imām was not only tradition and custom, it was considered divine worship. In the same light, the walled city in which he lived was considered impenetrable and a protected hallowed ground as described by the anonymous poet above. The social cartography of the Fatimids was set up in the same way. The Caliph-Imām resided within this sanctuary with his entourage and

\(^{33}\) Ṭīḥāma refers to the coastal plain on the western half of the Arabian Peninsula adjacent to the Red Sea. Mecca falls in this plain, hence the reference here.

\(^{34}\) The Maqām of Ibrāhīm is a prominent station in the haram of the Ka’ba which holds a stone which signifies the rebuilding of the Ka’ba by the prophet Ibrāhīm (Abraham) and his son Ismā’il (Ishmael).

administrators who were the khāṣṣa of society. Those residing outside of the city, commoners or the ʿāmma, could not easily enter this sanctuary and considered their entry into this hallowed area, if it ever occurred, as a privileged experience. The textual examples above demonstrate that whether in a tent or palace throne chamber, the traditional protocol designed to uphold this constructed social model and hierarchy was readily enforced throughout the history of the dynasty.

Al-Mahdiyya retained its political significance as the first capital of the Fatimid state even after al-Manṣūriyya became the home of the Caliph-Imāms when al-Manṣūr shifted there in 949. In a correspondence between al-Muʿizz and Jūdhar written in al-Manṣūriyya, the Imām instructed the Ustādh of his desire to build a wall surrounding the suburb of Zuwayla as an additional fortification to al-Mahdiyya which already had its own wall. The Ustādh instructed the governor Nuṣayr of al-Muʿizz’s wishes. Nuṣayr had been left in charge of the city after Jūdhar had permanently shifted to al-Manṣūriyya. After learning about the estimated costs, al-Muʿizz reaffirmed the importance of al-Mahdiyya stating, “This is a project which we cannot do without. The name al-Mahdiyya bears is great. It has pure foundations and it is the seat of the kingdom. If anything calamitous should happen to it, our spirits would be dismayed and our hearts would break. May God Protect it. We shall not consider the amount that you (Nuṣayr) have suggested as excessive, God willing.”

The Sīra also makes reference to the location of Jūdhar’s home in al-Manṣūriyya after he moved there to join al-Muʿizz soon after the Caliph-Imām ascended to the throne. Al-Muʿizz had built a palace in al-Manṣūriyya for his residence which had an artificial lake in its center known

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36 Siṣra, 2:40, 122.
as the Dār al-Baḥr. Al-Mu‘izz provided all his mawālī with homes. However, because of Jūdhar’s eminent position, his home was located in the palace complex near the Imām.37 The social rank and one’s proximity to the Caliph-Imām was important in determining if he or she could reside in the royal city and how close to the ruler’s palace one’s home would be.

Another example of this hierarchal organization of topographic space corresponding to the value placed on proximity to the Caliph-Imām’s palace is evident from a petition from Jūdhar to al-Mu‘izz regarding the widow of the military commander ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Kalbī (d. 938). ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn died in Agrigento in 938 fighting a rebellion in Sicily during al-Qā‘im’s reign. The Kalbids were a prominent family in the Maghrib and became strong supporters of the Fatimids. They held several official positions in the Fatimid state and Sicily as explained below. Jūdhar learned that ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn’s widow wanted to buy a property in al-Manṣūriyya near the palace of the Imām for her home. The Ustādh had a close relationship to the family so he made a petition on her behalf, and al-Mu‘izz granted it.38 These are some examples of the intersection of social standing and spatial organization in Fatimid capital cities. Residences located near to the royal palace were only awarded to those who had close ties to the Caliph-Imām.

**The Making of the Khāṣṣa and ‘Āmma Binary in Fatimid Society**

Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān identifies various groups and classes of early Fatimid society in detail in the introduction of his work titled the Kitāb al-Himma fī Ādāb Aṭbā’ al-‘imma (The Book of

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37 *Sīra*, 1:33, 79 - 80.

38 *Sīra*, 2:79, 163 - 164.
High-mindedness. Detailing the Etiquette of the Followers of the Imāms.  

This book is a mirror for princes written as a manual for all members of the Fatimid state to learn how to be good subjects of the Imāms. Al-Nu‘mān lists the different strata (ṭabaqāt) of Fatimid society and his list appears to be ordered in accordance with the existing social status quo of the time. He lists the classes of society for which his book on courtly ethics is intended: the wives and nuclear family of the Imām (al-ahl); the inner circle of the ruler (al-dakhla); the personal retinue of the ruler (ḥasham); the elite male slaves (khaṣṣat al-‘abīd); and elite women slaves (khaṣṣat al-imā’); eunuchs (khadam)40; relatives (aqārib); religious officials (ahl al-diyyānat) from the loyalist followers (awliyā’); the jurists (quḍāt); clerks (kuttāb); administrators (dhawī al-kifāyat); ministers (ašāb al-dawāwīn); treasurers (ahl al-amānāt); deputies (al-‘ummāl), tax collectors (al-jubbāt), postal messengers (al-su‘āt); soldiers of war (rijāl al-ḥarb) who belong to the devoted followers (al-awliyā’)41 and to the group of the helpers (al-anṣār); the classes of slaves and the army (ṭabaqāt al-‘abīd wa al-ajnād); the artisans and craftsmen (al-ṣunnā’); sellers (al-bā’a); merchants (al-tujjār) who variegate the sellers’ and merchants’ affairs and work for them;

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40 Khādim (sing) and khadam (pl.) are commonly used to denote eunuchs in classical Arabic and historical texts. I have retained this common use of the word as a translation here. However, it should be noted that in a contemporary listing of royal strata from the Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk written in the Samanid kingdom, Louise Marlow states that khadam denotes all individuals in the royal household who served the ruler in a metaphorical sense. See Louise Marlow, "The Khaṣṣa and ‘Amma of Intermediaries In The Samanid Polity," in Medieval Central Asia and the Persianate World: Iranian Tradition and Islamic Civilisation, by A. C. S. Peacock (London: Tauris, 2015), 92 -93.

and the commoners (al-riʿāya) who are connected to everyone’s sustenance (asbāb). This list represents the various classes that made up tenth-century Fatimid society and with whom Jūdhar would conduct his social interactions during his daily operations in the palace and royal cities. The arrangement of people in this list appears to start with those closest to the caliph and then branches out to those who are furthest away from the nucleus of power.

Another ideal this list portrays is the social dichotomy of the elite (khāṣṣa) and common class (ʿāmma) of medieval Islamic culture. This binary class system was used in some form throughout the premodern period by Islamic societies in order to divide society into two general parts, special and common. The tenth-century Samanid mirror for princes work titled Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk, anonymously written but previously mistaken as a work by al-Mawardī (d. 1058), an Abbasid jurist and political philosopher, outlines the principles of governance (siyāsat) and the relationship between the political ruling class and their systems of governance over the people. Modern scholars often argue that this text, compiled in the Samanid kingdom, echoes Abbasid practices of governance. It echoes Fatimid practices as well. Three chapters of this mirror are dedicated to the governances of the self, the khāṣṣa, and the ʿāmma. The author of Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk sees governance as a systematic affair in which the ruler administers governance through several intermediaries who must constantly assist him. Despite this joint approach to governance through multiple actors, the ruler is the center of political activity and culture.

In the chapter of this work dedicated to the elite (khāṣṣa), the authority of the king and

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ruler is considered a divinely appointed position. The author compares earthly rule to divine rule. Just as God has created angels to be close to him and carry out his works, and prophets to act as stewards over his people, the king is also obligated to cultivate obedience within his khāṣṣa so that they will carry out his governance. The khāṣṣa are his tools (āla) to manage and shape his ʿammā, who are the raw material (madda) of his kingdom. The Fatimids appear to have taken a similar approach to the Samanid social model and to the dichotomy of the khāṣṣa and ʿāmma divide between various social strata.

Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān posits this idea in the Daʿāʾim al-ʾIslām in a chapter on good governance expected by an army commander. Al-Nuʿmān cites a letter from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib to his deputy Mālik b. Ḥārith al-Ashtar al-Nakhaʾī (d. 658) written when the latter was appointed the governor of Egypt in 658 during ʿAlī’s caliphate. This letter, written in the mirror for princes genre, is titled the ʿAhd (Oath) of ʿAlī in the Daʿāʾim. The ʿAhd outlines the principles of good governance and how a governor should treat each class within the social hierarchy. The partition of the general classes which fell under a governor’s polity consisted of five groups according to the Daʿāʾim: (i) soldiers; (ii) those professions which assist the governor like the judges (al-qūḍāt), local deputies (al-ʿummāl), and secretaries (al-kuttāb) and the like; (iii) taxpayers (ahl al-kharāj) who are land owners and others; (iv) merchants and artisans (al-tujjār wa dhawīw al-ṣanāʾāt); (v) and the lower classes (al-ṭabaqat al-sufla) which include the needy (ahl al-ḥājjja) and destitute (al-maskana). The ʿAhd states that each of these groups cooperate with one another in carrying out

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46 Ibid, 357.
subscribed duties. The first two groups, soldiers and aides to the governor, fall under the administrative branch. They are responsible for providing military and civil services for the state. The third and fourth group consisting of land cultivators, merchants, and artisans are responsible for providing revenue through tax and market activity to help maintain the social classes above them.

The ‘Ahd’s position on merchants, craftsmen, and the commercial activity they spur in society is also an important observation considering the Fatimid’s interest in maintaining successful trade networks throughout the empire as will be discussed in the next chapter. According to the letter, merchants and artisans contribute to society by providing products for consumption and for the comfort of the people, which they acquire by land and sea trade. Without their service, society would not be able to make or import similar products. The ‘Ahd acknowledges the necessity for the ruler to protect the rights and dignity of this class. It is also his responsibility to regulate market pricing so that consumers remain satisfied.

The fifth class of society mentioned by the letter consists of peasants and needy people. The ‘Ahd points out that this class is dependent on all the classes above it for its survival. It also suggests that even though peasants and needy people do not provide a noteworthy contribution to society, they are worthy of ethical compassion. Finally, the ‘Ahd states that each group must hold the governor accountable to administer justice and act in accordance to what is entitled to each group.

The ‘Ahd of ‘Alī also pays particular attention to the khāṣṣa and ‘āmma binary of

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medieval Islamic society. It takes a pseudo-egalitarian stance towards the prescribed treatment of
common folk. The 'Ahd states:

Bring forth the emotions of mercy, compassion, and clemency from your heart when dealing with your subjects (al-ra‘iyya). Do not act as a predator with them; do not take advantage of their aberrations and mistakes, for they are your brothers and sisters through kinship (al-nisba). They are your equals in creation. Pardon their aberrations and look away from their weaknesses. They will certainly be guilty of mistakes, made by accident or by purpose, so bestow on them your forgiveness. Pardon them just as you would desire pardon from a person of higher rank than yourself.\textsuperscript{49}

The khāṣṣa are not held in the same high regard in the letter. The 'Ahd clearly tips the ruler’s favor towards the positive treatment of the 'āmma. The justification for this position is stated in the letter:

May your most desired and strongest position be righteousness (al-haqq). And its entire purpose should be obedience (gā‘a) to God and the happiness of the 'āmma. For the anger of the 'āmma will eventually peel away the contentment of the khāṣṣa. The anger of the khāṣṣa can withstand the contentment of the 'āmma. There are none among your subjects more troublesome than the khāṣṣa when it comes to difficult matters. They are the hardest to satisfy with rations; the least supportive during times of calamity; the most hostile to justice; the most importunate; the least grateful when given generosity; the more inclined to give excuses for delaying [aid]; and the least tolerant over tragedies. In fact, the culmination of all the matters of government (wulāt), the power of the ruler (yadd al-sultān), and the intimidation of the state’s enemies, all lie in the 'āmma.\textsuperscript{50}

From these passages within the Da‘ā‘im al-Islām it appears the Fatimid philosophical approach towards governing society placed commoners and their contentment in a more elevated position than that of the elite. In theory, societal harmony could only be achieved through the satisfaction of the common folk. Therefore, the ruler constantly was in need of individuals who could ensure

\textsuperscript{49} al-Nu‘mān, Dā‘ā‘im al-Islām, Vol. 1, 354.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, 354 - 355.
that all members of society were satisfied with the state. Eunuchs often served as the ruler’s eyes and ears in areas which he could not physically visit himself in order to ensure that his justice and governance was in motion. The Sīra often depicts Jūdhar fulfilling this role.

Thus, to understand the social dynamics of the early Fatimid rulers and their subjects consisting of the khāṣṣa and ʿāmma, Jūdhar’s life story is particularly useful. It was in this milieu of courtly performance, ritual, ceremony, and rigidly monitored and orchestrated social stratification that much of Jūdhar’s daily life and routine was spent during his service for the Fatimids. As a chamberlain, governor, and close official to first four caliphs, he often acted on behalf of his masters to carry out acts of governance on their behalf. The Sīra’s pages are filled with the Ustādh’s social interactions and prescribed directives from his rulers on how to maneuver among the personalities of various classes of subjects within the court. Adhering to protocol, proper conduct, and customary traditions were very much part of the constant social negotiation Jūdhar would have to do when interacting between with various social strata. While, a complete analysis of the intricate workings of the social network of the early Fatimid state would entail a study of its own, the research presented here focuses on Jūdhar’s narrative and his social interactions with selected classes of people belonging to the early Fatimid polity. The Sīrat Ustādh Jūdhar, above all its categorizations, is primarily a documentation of social interactions. In his lifetime and due to his position, Jūdhar forged many ties with key members of the early Fatimid state. Some of his relations were purely political, while others were more personal. To better understand Jūdhar’s social world, interactions, and the forms of capital and currencies he used to anchor his political power, it is first essential to identify the key groups of people who made up the elite of the early Fatimid state.
The Kutāma

The most important ethnic faction in the early Fatimid state were the Kutāma Berbers. The Berbers of North Africa were an ethnic group of people who were the original inhabitants of the region who resided west of the Nile river before the invasion of the Romans. They received the epithet “Berber” from their Roman and Byzantine colonists who classified them as *barbari* and *bárbaros* (barbarians) in Latin and Greek respectively. The Arab conquerers who followed the Byzantines arabicized the epithet as *barbar* and maintained that this race had descended from the offspring of Noah, often vacillating between Ham or Shem as their original ancestor. The Berber people’s organization was tribal and the sub-groups they created were based on a common genealogical descendence of a tribe.\(^1\)

It was through this tribal organization that they governed themselves and had been largely excluded from the civil constructs of Roman civilization in North Africa. The early Muslim conquerors of the seventh and early eighth centuries initially continued the alienation of Berbers from Islamic civilization by acknowledging them as pagans rather than the *ahl-dhimma* (protected peoples), the latter being the social category they had extended to Zoroastrians of Persia in the earlier years of the conquests. The alienation of the Berber populaces of North Africa from Islamic civilization led to the mass enslavement of the Berber people in early years of North Africa’s conquest. After the gradual Islamization of the region, the majority of Berbers converted to Islam. However, despite this apparent conversion, the unequal social treatment of Berbers at the hands of their Arab governors persisted under the policies of Umayyad and Abbasid governments of the region. For instance, the uneven levying of taxes against the Berber

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population and the unfair payment of Berber members of the jund (army) led to “the Great Berber Revolt” which lasted between 740 - 743. Starting in Tangiers, large numbers of the Berber population united in revolt against the Arab rulers. Their movement spread across the Maghrib and also to Al-Andalus.

As a result of “the Great Berber Revolt” the Maghrib largely fell out of the control of Umayyad rule, and this political divide was never rectified under the Abbasid governors of Ifrīqiya or the Aghlabids who succeeded them. As a result of the political turmoil in the region, large Berber populations throughout North Africa mostly adhered to the ‘Ibāḍi school of thought and doctrine which had begun to spread throughout the region from 735 onwards. Ibāḍī doctrine sprouted from Kharijite ideologies which professed that all believers of Islam were equal and the position of Imamate and leadership in the community could be held by any Muslim regardless of his social or racial background. Ibāḍī doctrine critiqued the Arabo-centric view of Islam and rejected the political legitimacy of the Arab rulers of North Africa. For these reasons, it became a popular choice of Islamic schools of thought for the Berbers. This divide took political form under the Rustamid empire, which was governed by a series of Imāms who created a separate kingdom between 777 - 909 in Algeria with their capital as Tahert.

The Fatimids arrived in this politically and socially divided region of the Islamic world at


53 Ibid, 130.


the end of the ninth century. The Fatimid missionary, Abū Abdallāh, convinced the various self-
governing sub-tribes of the Kutāma to embrace the message of the messianic figure of al-Mahdī. The Kutāma Berbers had been a tribal society which resided in the northern part of the historic Constantinois region of Algeria. They lived in the Lesser Kabylia mountainous region which is located in what is today northeastern Algeria slightly inland from the coast. The Kutāma were a community who administered justice and punishments for wrongdoings amongst themselves and applied their own methods of governance among their sub-tribes. Their operating tribal system gave religious and judicial leadership and authority to the elders of the tribe whose rulings and pronouncements were very important to follow.56

The Kutāma were militarily strong as well. When Abū Abdallāh first encountered them he asked about their military capabilities and if they had a sufficient supply of horses and weapons. The leaders of the tribe informed Abū Abdallāh that the accumulation of horses and weapons was the tribe’s trademark, an endeavor in which they took much pride. Since they were in a constant state of battling rival tribes, military preparation was in constant demand.57 When Abū Abdallāh first mobilized the Kutāma he also reorganized their social structure and divided them into seven sub-tribes. These seven tribes each had an independent militia with its own commander and chieftain (muqaddam). Subsequently, each of these Berber tribes also had its own Dāʿī designated by Abū Abdallah. Through the common tribal notion of social solidarity (’aṣabiyya) and belief in the Fatimid mission, which promised to deliver justice in a tyrannical land, the tribes became united. With Abū Abdallāh’s proselytizing and efforts of unification over

56 Brett, 81 - 82.
a period of nine years (893 - 902), the Kutāma became one of the single strongest regional
powers in the Maghrib under his sole command.

After the establishment of the Fatimid state in Ifrīqiya in 909, the Kutāma continued to
serve militarily and they were present with with al-Qā’im in both of his campaigns from
Raqqāda to conquer Cairo. Several decades later, they also constituted the majority of al-
Mu’izz’s army when he sent his general Jawhar with a large army to conquer Cairo in 969. The
Kutāma physically made the transition to Cairo from Ifrīqiya when al-Mu’izz moved the Fatimid
capital there in 971. In Cairo they formed their own quarter of the palatial city. The Kutāma were
a privileged class of people under the Fatimid social structure because of their valor, military
service, and initial devotion to the cause of the Fatimids. These privileges included leadership
positions such as local deputies and governors, land ownership through receiving ḍiṭ’a (land
grants) from the Caliph-Imām, and exemptions from paying taxes to the state. Early Fatimid
texts award the epithet al-Awliyā’ (the friends) to the Kutāma in consideration of their
unparalleled early support for the Fatimids.

The Kutāma were the strength of the early empire and its backbone and could not be
taken for granted by the early Fatimid rulers. Yet their transition to elite status was not without its
own political strife. When al-Mahdī came to power, the Kutāma tribesmen revolted against the
new Caliph-Imām. Their revolt was largely spurred by the murder of the Dā’ī Abū ‘Abdallāh in
911, who had been their leader before al-Mahdī’s arrival. The months following the Dā’ī’s
murder included several Kutāma uprisings and moments of political unrest. These frequent
occurrences culminated in a large uprising in 912 which occurred after several Kutāma were
slaughtered in the streets of al-Qayrawān by the inhabitants of the city over a market dispute. The
Kutāma felt that al-Mahdī had been soft on the perpetrators and did not deliver a harsh enough punishment against the residents of al-Qayrawān. As a result, many Kutāma left Raqqāda and al-Qayrawān and returned to their homelands in Algeria. Soon after, an anti-Mahdī named Kādū b. Mu'ārik al-Māwaṭī, who was still a child, was deemed the new religious leader of the Kutāma tribes. The Fatimids knew they could not sustain their new kingdom without the support of the Kutāma. Al-Mahdī sent his prince Al-Qā‘im to quash the Kutāma’s uprising.58

Al-Qā‘im’s success and suppression of intertribal feuds for leadership and power which had occurred among the Kutāma, brought them back to the fold of Fatimid rule once again. The four tribes of the Kutāma, the Jīmala, Lahīṣa, Malūsa, and Ijjāna became the main components of the Fatimid army. Throughout the Fatimid’s early reign and due to the fragility of the new state’s political control over the region, it was imperative for the state to constantly appease members of the Kutāma tribe. The Fatimids knew all too well that another revolt by the Kutāma could possibly signal an end to their fragile rule over the region. As a result, they implemented a necessary policy of ensuring that the Kutāma remained appeased at all times. This pattern of privilege and appeasement continued throughout the rule of the Fatimids in Ifrīqiya. There was no major recorded uprising after the initial Kutāma revolts in al-Mahdī’s reign.

The Kutāma’s service and valor was constantly a subject of praise within the court, as seen in the example at the beginning of this chapter. When another Berber uprising led by the Nakkārī tribesman Abū Yazīd erupted in 944, al-Qā‘im and al-Manṣūr had to rely on the Kutāma to survive the powerful forces of the revolt. Around the time of these events, Ustādh Jūdhar had been given two sermons (khutba), one written by al-Qā‘im and the other by al-Manṣūr, which

58 Halm, 169 - 176.
had been delivered to the masses during the revolt. Both sermons underscore the direct caliphal attention which the Kutāma received.

The first sermon was delivered by the Fatimid jurist al-Mawarudhī (also pronounced al-Mawarzī) in al-Qayrawān on behalf of al-Qā‘īm. In it the Kutāma were exalted with the following words:

And you know, ‘O assembly of Kutāma, how in the past your forefathers and ancient ancestors remained devoted and obligated to obedience (ṭā‘a), holding the rope [of obedience] tightly, seeking shelter under its shade, and fighting the most righteous jihād for God. You are the hidden force of God for the Muhammadan, Fatimid, and Mahdiyyan truth, until the moment God manifests it, and raises it, and provides its pride and glory for you. You are like the disciples of Jesus and the Anṣār (helpers) of Muhammad. 'O descendants of the Muhājirūn (migrants) and Anṣār (helpers) of the first people who came before us, was it not because of you that God ended the kingdoms of tyrants which had persisted for so many years?59

The sermon boosted the morale of the army and led to the Fatimids’ first victory against Abū Yazīd. It is important to pay attention to the comparisons of the Kutāma made by al-Qā‘īm in the sermon. The Caliph-Imām showered several different praises over the Kutāma acknowledging their sabāqa (precedence), qurba (closeness), and likeness to the Muhājirūn (migrants) and Anṣār (helpers) of Muhammad’s time. These old forms of Islamic social currency were reoriented by al-Qā‘īm to elevate the social standing of his new populace.

The second sermon given to Jūdhar was delivered by al-Manṣūr after the death of his father al-Qā‘īm. This sermon also was full of praise for the Kutāma. Like the sermon before, after showering praise over the Kutāma and their obedience and adherence to the faith, al-Manṣūr said:

59 Šīra, 1:20, 31 - 32.
‘O God, I have become pleased with the Kutāma because they held on to your rope; and because of their perseverance over adversity and hardships which they have encountered for your sake, in service of us, in acknowledgment of our virtue, in fulfilling what God has obliged his servants to do for us, and in seeking intercession towards you [God] through our obedience. ‘O God, be pleased with them, double the reward of their good deeds, and erase their transgressions. Assemble them [on the Day of Judgement] with the people of your Prophet and your Walī [i.e. Imām Ali] through whom they brought the faith and to whom they are devoted. Preserve your bounty for them and make your reward for them abundant and complete. Make honor everlasting in their offspring and make their spiritual reward plentiful. Guide them and purify their hearts. You are the Listener (of our prayers), the Close One, and the Answerer (of prayers).

The Kutāma’s privilege and appeasement was a social factor which Ustādh Jūdhar had to consider during his interactions when in service at the Fatimid court. One example of Jūdhar’s cognizance of the Kutāma’s favorable position occurred when a property dispute took place with a Kutāmī man named Rabī‘ b. Šuwāt from the tribe of Ijjāna. He was one of the Ustādh’s land managers (wakīl). The Sīra claims that Rabī‘ had taken a plot of land by force which belonged to Jūdhar and removed his representative from there, claiming that he had purchased the plot for sixty dīnārs.61 Rather than engage Rabī‘ through litigation, the Ustādh took the social standing of the Kutāma into consideration with this particular situation and brought the case to al-Mu‘izz’s attention. Jūdhar told al-Mu‘izz that he would rather pay Rabī‘ sixty dīnārs and rebuy the land than to have the Kutāma feel that an injustice was committed upon a member of their tribe. Al-Mu‘izz concurred with the Ustādh’s decision and told him to settle all the disputes that Rabī‘ might have over land ownership in this manner with payouts to be deemed as alms. Al-Mu‘izz further stated, “It is better that the administration of justice be from you over them rather than

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60 Sīra, 1:20, 40.
61 Sīra, 2:59.
from such a lowlife (al-suflā).” Thus, this anecdote demonstrates how the complex status quo of Fatimid society often influenced administrative matters. Rabīʻ does not appear to have been a high ranking official, yet since he belonged to the Kutāma, both al-Muʻizz and Jūdar appealed him to minimize conflict with the tribe.

The Ṣaqāliba

The other major ethnic class of people in the early Fatimid regime were the Ṣaqāliba. As mentioned in Chapter One, the Ṣaqāliba were brought to Ifriqiya and employed as an elite military unit for the Fatimid Caliph-Imām and served as his palace guards (ghilmān) and administrators. Their inclusion into the Fatimid state was comparable to the introduction of the Turkish ghilmān in Abbasid and Buyid polities. The Ṣaqāliba’s social status as imported foreigners to the Fatimid state was a major reason for their rise within the Fatimid polity. Unlike the Kutāma and other members of the Fatimid state, the Ṣaqāliba lacked any constricting tribal allegiances or bonds in their new home. Without the complex duty-bound obligations resulting from traditional ‘aṣabīyya, their loyalty and devotion were focused solely on the Caliph-Imām. The Caliph-Imām, in turn, ensured their living needs were met, their upbringing, training, and education undertaken, and their prestige maintained within society.

The Ṣaqāliba did not only serve as functionaries of the state and urban administrators of Fatimid Ifriqiya, but they were key citizens of the early Fatimid regime and also sometimes coreligionists of the Ismāʿīlī Daʿwa. Many Ṣaqāliba, as we see in the narrative of the Ustādh, believed in the divine authority of the Caliph-Imām as professed by Ismāʿīlī theology. Their eventual role as full members of the state and adherents to the Ismāʿīlī school of thought suggests

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62 Sīra, 2:57.
that they were educated and indoctrinated upon their arrival in the Fatimid court. Their education enabled them to obtain high official positions within the state and army by serving the caliph as his royal attendants, palace servants, governors, admirals, and generals to name a few examples. Many Ṣaqāliba also served in the Fatimid military as soldiers alongside the Kutāma. Therefore, both groups basked in the light of their social prestige, caliphal favor, and fiscal rewards, albeit the scale of royal favor was tipped towards the Kutāma.

An example of the social prestige awarded to the Ṣaqāliba was the duty to carry the caliph’s parasol. For the Fatimids, the parasol was a principal imperial regalia and seldom did the Imāms appear in public without it. The socio-cultural significance of the parasol in Fatimid culture lent its own form of social currency to the bearer of this courtly apparatus. The word for parasol in Arabic, mīzalla, is contrary to the Latin etymological meaning of parasol - to block or protect from (para) the sun (sol). Mīzalla is better translated as umbrella, meaning an apparatus which creates a small (the diminutive ella) shade (umbra). The idea of a shading instrument conveyed a more nuanced and deeply rooted Near Eastern cultural meaning.

The symbolic meaning conveyed by the use of the parasol is depicted in a seventh-century B.C. Assyrian relief from the South West Palace of Nineveh in which the King Sennacherib (d. 681 B.C.) is shown riding in his chariot which two servants are pulling (fig. 6). One servant, who is a eunuch, as indicated by the absence of his beard, fans the king while another holds the imperial parasol above his head. The inscription on the relief reveals that it is a depiction of the royal transportation of bulls from Balatai to Nineveh. The practical use of the parasol and fan in the relief is apparent: they were both used to protect the king from the sun and heat. Iconographically, however, the king is instantly recognizable in the relief and the presence
of these royal accouterment separates him from all the other social classes surrounding him, consisting of soldiers, slaves, and eunuchs.

In this manner, the parasol (mizalla) was an ancient Near Eastern symbol of social superiority and political sovereignty. This explains why the apparatus was reserved solely for the ruler who conveyed his symbolic shade or protection over his subjects. He was the parasol of his people. Linguistic evidence alludes to the relation of the parasol to the notion of protection. In Assyrian, the word sīllu, from which the word for parasol is derived, held several meanings. The most common meaning was shade, a shaded place, or the shade of a tree. However, sīllu also could mean protection, aegis, and patronage. Eventually, the Assyrian sīllu carried on into all Semitic languages and ultimately into Arabic. In Arabic, the derivative of sīllu is ẓill. Zill primarily means shade, however it simultaneously denotes meanings of protection, aegis, and patronage as well. Similarly, the word for parasol, mizalla, was derived from the root zalla, meaning ‘to shade.’ Therefore, mizalla literally means ‘an instrument or apparatus for providing shade.’

Keeping this etymology in mind, the fact that the royal attendant from who carried the parasol for the Caliph-Imām was a ṣaqlabī is indicative of the supremacy this social class held within Fatimid society. If the Caliph-Imām was the protector of the realm, symbolized by the shade of the parasol, then the ṣaqlabī attendant who held it became part of that analogy. In other words, since the Ṣaqāliba were employed as guardians and protectors of the Fatimid caliph, it made sense that the honor to carry his parasol would fall to an official from their group. The honorable service awarded to them became a form of social currency for the person charged to carry the parasol, and by extension, to the entire social class.
The Fatimids’ persistent use of the parasol and the connection of the Şaqāliba to this courtly protocol is demonstrated in an account given by the Yemeni ‘Ismā‘īlī-Ṭayyibī Dā‘ī and historian, Idrīs ‘Imād al-Dīn (d. 1468), in his reporting of a military campaign of the Fatimid caliph al-Mansūr when he was fighting Abū Yazīd near al-Qayrawān. He writes,

[During the battle] al-Dajjāl (Abū Yazīd, the leader of the Kharijite revolt) and a group of his finest soldiers and fiercest fighters came towards al-Manṣūr. When al-Manṣūr saw that they were coming towards him, he went out to meet Abū Yazīd carrying the sword of the Prophet, Dhū al-Faqār. The official holding the parasol over the head of the Imām was a şaqālibī from his servants. When the servant saw that a group of Berber fighters were approaching al-Mansūr and that their cavalry was preparing to attack him, he put away the parasol in order to hide the position of the Imām. Al-Manṣūr rebuked him by saying, “Raise the parasol back up and do not hesitate or fear, for God has promised us victory and he never abandons his promises.”

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Along with demonstrating that the parasol accompanied the Imām in the battlefield, the account equally depicts the notion of the divine protection associated with him. Al-Manṣūr was not afraid of the enemy and was in full trust of God’s protection. Fatimid literary and artistic sources also convey symbolic undertones in reference to the mizalla and zill of the ruler. For example, the works of Ibn Hāni’ al-Andalusi (d. 972), the most renowned panegyrist at the court of al-Mu’izz in North Africa, offer insight on how the Fatimids symbolized the parasol. In a panegyric attributed to al-Mu’izz he writes,

[The parasol is like] a cloud in the shadow of the banners of divine assistance, which wave and flutter. 64

This verse links the Caliph-Imām’s position to that of the Prophet Muḥammad to whom it was narrated that a cloud followed him everywhere casting a shade over him wherever he walked.


Additionally, in the physical description of the parasol Ibn Hāni’ writes,

The Commander of the Faithful has a cloud over him which rises up providing shade over his crown.

[The parasol] rises with precious pearls embellishing its woven gilded gore.

It [the parasol] is hoisted over al-Mu’izz, resembling the domes which cover the litters of caravans.

[The parasol] is crowned with a golden nest on which a dove (ḥadīl) is set appearing to spread its wings.

[The parasol is so high] that it seems to touch the atmosphere, aspiring to reach the sky with the dove (ḥadīl).

The symbolism of the shade and parasol was so deeply rooted in the culture of the Fatimids that it also found its place in architecture. French excavations in the 1960’s of the first Fatimid palatine city of al-Mahdiyya, conducted by Alexander Lezine in Tunisia, revealed eight sets of aligned blocks in the foundation of the central court of the mosque, which were part of the original early tenth-century structure (fig. 7 and 8). These blocks supported rectangular piers cut from ashlar masonry which supported individual vaulted domes. The series of domes once formed a covered gallery consisting of nine bays which were each approximately nine square meters in size (fig. 9). The height of the gallery was approximately seven meters. The construction of this covered gallery in the central courtyard is an architectural feature exclusively belonging to al-Mahdiyya’s Fatimid mosque. Some art historians have interpreted this covered pathway, a permutation to mosque construction of the period, as a physically built reference to

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65 Ibid, 146.

66 Lézine, 81 - 82.
the ceremonial parasol. Since the Imām came to the mosque for divine worship, the parasol, being a symbol of sovereignty, was put away as a sign of humility. The covered gallery offered a way to continue the important ceremonial ritual while also observing the religious ones.

In this way, the Ṣaqqāliba’s connection to the parasol emphasizes their public significance in the early Fatimid state. The parasol and its shade signified divine protection, and in connection to this widely accepted understanding in Fatimid society, the Ṣaqqāliba also, as parasol bearers, became agents for providing that protection. Their main occupation was the royal guard, charged with upholding and protecting the Caliph-Imām and the state. This is the reason why historically, the parasol-bearer was a high ranking official and traditionally a ṣaqlabī, even when the dynasty was in Cairo up until the time of the caliph al-‘Azīz (d. 996). Starting from al-Mahdī’s reign, the first ṣaqlabī subject chosen for this honor was Mas‘ud al-Ṣaqqālibī, who also served as an admiral for the Fatimid navy. He was succeeded by another ṣaqlabī named Ghars al-Fatā.69

The Ṣaqqāliba’s introduction into society and their rise to prominence and important official positions was not a system introduced by the Fatimids. Rather, it was the system of governance that was prevalent in the Maghrib region before the Fatimids’ arrival. As a social class, as mentioned in Chapter One, they already had an important role as palatial guards for the Aghlabids and many of them held important official roles within the hierarchy. The Ṣaqqāliba played an important role in the Hispano-Umayyad administration and government as well.70

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67 Wijdan Ali, The Arab Contribution to Islamic Art: From the Seventh to the Fifteenth Centuries (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2000), 137.

68 Jiwa, From Slaves To Supporters, 113.

69 Ibid, 113.

70 For the Ṣaqqāliba in al-Andalus see Mohamed Meouak, Saqqāliba, Eunuques et Esclaves à la Conquête du Pouvoir: Géographie et Histoire des Elites Politiques "Marginales" dans l’Espagne Ummayade (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2004).
When al-Mahdī assumed control of the Aghlabid throne and their domains, he continued with the employment of the Ṣaqāliba in official positions within the new Fatimid administration. When Jūdhar was still a young page, one of al-Mahdī’s close attendants was a ṣaqlabī eunuch named Sulaymān. Sulaymān also served as a military commander and was sent to Egypt with a military naval squadron of reinforcements during al-Qā’im’s second expedition to Egypt in 920. Sulaymān’s fleet was defeated by the Abbasid navy, and he was captured and eventually sent to Baghdad where he was executed.71

Another important ṣaqlabī from the early Fatimid court was Ṣābir. Ṣābir was a ṣaqlabī official of the early Fatimid state whose origins can be traced back to Sicily. Before serving the Fatimids he was the mawla of the controversial governor of Sicily, Ibn Qurhub, who was appointed by the Palermitians to take the place of the Fatimid appointed governor of the island, ʿAlī b. ʿUmar al-Balawī in 912. Ibn Qurhub rebelled against the Fatimids and claimed allegiance to the Abbasids in Baghdad. The Fatimids were able to quash his rebellion centered in Palermo with the help of the inhabitants of Agrigento and other Sicilians. Ibn Qurhub was captured and sent to al-Mahdiyya where he was executed. Ṣābir was spared and rose to be a prominent official in the Fatimid state. He was made the ʿĀmil (provincial governor) of al-Qayrawān in 926 and also served in the Fatimid navy as a commander and admiral. He conducted several successful naval and military raids of Apulia, Campania, and the Adriatic coast between 928-930 operating from Fatimid bases in Sicily. He returned to al-Mahdiyya with 18,000 captive slaves.72

The Sīra mentions several other ṣaqlabī officials in the Fatimid court. Particular attention

71 ʿImad al-Din says he died in Baghdad while Ibn al-Athīr writes that he died in captivity in Egypt.

72 Halm, 238.
is paid to the eminent Fatimid general Jawhar, whose relationship with Jūdhar is highlighted throughout the text. Most recent scholarship has considered Jawhar a ṣaqlabī based on readings from historical texts, although some sources point out that he was originally from Byzantium because of his epithet of al-Rūmī, which is mentioned in some sources. Other sources attribute the nisba al-Ṣiqillī (the Sicilian) to him as well. Shainool Jiwa has contended that despite the various attributions, he was most likely a ṣaqlabī. Jawhar was the most successful and celebrated military commander in the Fatimid court of Ifrīqiya and he is primarily known for his conquest of Cairo in 969, an event which allowed al-Muʿizz to move the capital east. Jawhar remained al-Muʿizz’s slave for most of his career and was only manumitted after the conquest of Egypt. However, he was married to a woman who the Sīra indicates owned property. This fact speaks to the ambiguous reality of slave status in Fatimid society.

The Sīra acknowledges Jawhar’s social prominence in the Fatimid court and he is mentioned several times in the text. In one narrative, the Sīra skillfully combines the successful careers of both Jūdhar and Jawhar. After Jawhar’s manumission, a series of correspondence were sent between Jūdhar and Jawhar. Jūdhar, since the day al-Manṣūr manumitted him in 947, was officially entitled as the Mawla of Amīr al-Muʿminīn (the client of the Commander of the Faithful). This was the title he used in all official correspondence including works commissioned under his supervision and in the state tirāz factories which will be mentioned in Chapter Four. After Jawhar’s manumission, he too received the title of the Mawla of Amīr al-Muʿminīn. Previously, Jawhar’s title had been ‘Jawhar the official secretary (al-Kātib), the slave (ʻabd) of

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73 Jiwa, “From Slaves to Supporters,” 108.

74 Sīra, 2:74.
the Commander of the Faithful. This former title was how Jūdhar addressed him. The Ustādh continued to do so even after Jawhar’s manumission, but it is clear from the Sīra that he was uncomfortable with Jawhar’s new title and status. Jūdhar had carried the title of the Mawla of Amīr al-Muʾminīn for almost twenty years before Jawhar received it from al-Muʿizz.

The Sīra captures a very human moment in the Ustādh’s life while highlighting his attention to protocol and proper courtly adab in reference to official addresses at court. Al-Manṣūr al-Kātib writes that the Ustādh became concerned about how to address Jawhar properly after the latter’s manumission. He did not want to create a misunderstanding of any sort or to suggest he had become jealous of Jawhar on account of his success and rise in the ranks. Accordingly, he took it upon himself to write to al-Muʿizz asking how he should address Jawhar in future correspondences and what was the correct courtly protocol. Al-Muʿizz’s answer to Jūdhar’s petition was the symbolic action of binding both figures together in a pact of brotherhood. The caliph instructed Jūdhar to write in all his correspondences to Jawhar, “From Jūdhar, the client of the Commander of the Faithful, to his brother Jawhar, the client of the Commander of the Faithful.”

The Royal Family

The Fatimid royal family is present throughout the text of the Sīra, but al-Manṣūr al-Kātib portrays them as being disassociated from the inner circle of the Caliph-Imām. Jūdhar’s career, it should be recalled, spans the lifetimes of almost four individual Imāms. In his sixty-two years of service, the royal family grew in number since al-Mahdī came to power in 909. The Sīra does not paint this growing family in a positive manner. On the contrary, due to the political dramas they stirred in the palace, the royal family members are portrayed with arrogant,
scheming, and entitled personalities. In the history of the early Fatimids, royal family members are not known to have held important official positions such as governorships. Moreover, while the Imāms often engaged in battle themselves and traveled around the region to quash rebellions, there is almost no detail of any members of the royal household engaging in stately activities. These positions are held by the supporters of the state such as Kutāma chieftains, the Ṣaqāliba, and other key families and tribes.

Moreover, the royal family members were depicted in the Sīra, more often than not, as troublemakers. For instance, the Sīra suggests an underlying conflict spurred by the offsprings of al-Mahdī and al-Qā’im who refused to acknowledge al-Manṣūr’s sovereignty and religious leadership as the Imām. Al-Manṣūr rebuked them in his correspondence with the Ustādh, and went so far as to deem them “The Cursed Tree In The Quran,” as mentioned in Chapter One. This conflict continued throughout the next generations. As a result, the Sīra indicates that Jūdhar was charged by al-Mu‘izz to intercept the correspondences between royal family members “between the two palaces” at al-Mahdiyya and to inform him of the conflicts they were inciting.

The dispute in the royal family of the Fatimids began during al-Mahdī’s reign and seems to have been instigated by al-Qāsim, the son of the Caliph-Imām al-Qā’im. Al-Qāsim’s offspring continued to have the residual animosity of the first event and were constantly angry at the Caliph-Imām and his inner circle. In al-Mu‘izz’s time, his son, the poet prince al-Tamīm, was not popular in the higher social circles of the palace. He is also alleged in the Sīra to have schemed with the sons of al-Qāsim in a conspiracy against the Imām. The Ustādh kept a close eye on Tamīm’s activities as well and constantly reported his findings back to the Imām. In this manner,
the *Sīra* depicts Jūdhar as a spy of sorts, continuously gaining information on members of the palace and reporting it back to his masters. Because of this position, he was in constant conflict with members of the royal household who held him in contempt.

Jūdhar’s own social standing allowed him to skirt prescribed protocols of courtly *adab*. For example, when preparations were being made to go to Cairo, the Ustādh visited al-Mahdiyya with al-Muʿizz to pack some of the items from the royal warehouses. When al-Muʿizz returned to al-Manṣūriyya he ordered that the entire royal family, dignitaries, and officials of the state receive him upon his return. Jūdhar accompanied him. When Jūdhar saw all the princes lined up and his turn to greet the royal family came up, he only paid attention to Prince ʿAbdallāh, who at the time was al-Muʿizz’s designated heir. Jūdhar ignored the other princes and went straight to ʿAbdallāh who was mounted on his horse and kissed the ground before the prince and then kissed his stirrup. Prince ʿAbdallāh reciprocated the gesture by bending towards Jūdhar in respect, to the extent that he almost fell off his saddle.75

The fact that the Ustādh ignored the other princes by not greeting them, which was demanded by protocol, became a scandal at the palace. The Ustādh’s actions were met with rancor by jealous members of the royal palace and harem. Jūdhar wrote to the Imām about the spewing disdain of the royal family being hurled towards him as a result of his ignoring protocol. The Imām replied, “It would have sufficed you to at least kiss their [the Princes’] hands if not kiss the ground in front of them. But we have distinguished you from them by the privilege that God has granted for those he has chosen.”76 Al-Muʿizz told Jūdhar how he defended his actions

75 *Sīra*, 2:82.

76 *Sīra*, 2:82, 168 - 169.
to the angry members of the royal family by telling them that his primary act of kissing the
ground was in fact a collective greeting of all the princes. This narrative points to the immense
fluidity and maneuverability Jūdhar possessed among the social hierarchy due to his close
relation with the Imām. It also demonstrates that above all relations, the one that mattered the
most was his personally cultivated relationship to the Imām.

The Kalbids

Another important social group in the history of the early Fatimid empire is the Kalbid family known as the Banū Abī al-Ḥusayn in Fatimid historical sources. The Kalbids played a key role in the formation of the early Fatimid state and eventually became the ruling monarchy of Sicily, first as appointed governors and overtime as vassals of the Fatimids when they transferred to Egypt. The Kalbids were descendants of the tribe of Banū Kalb b. Wabara. Members of this tribe had migrated to the Maghrib and rose in prominence during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. They were very much involved in the bureaucracy and administration of the region and served as governors and senior officials before the arrival of the Fatimids.

When the Fatimids overthrew the Aghlabid amīrs, Sicily also came under their rule by default. The Fatimids had a difficult time establishing their governance over the inhabitants of the island. The Kalbid family, beginning with ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Kalbī, who was also the son-in-law of Sālim b. Rāshid, a successful Fatimid governor of Sicily, fought several military campaigns on the island. As mentioned above, he died in Agrigento fighting a rebellion which the Sicilians had incited against the Fatimids. His offspring, beginning with his son al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī, continued as military commanders for the Fatimids and led several military campaigns in Ifrīqiya and Sicily, especially against the Byzantines in the eastern half of the island. Al-Ḥasan
became the first governor of Sicily from the Kalbid family and a succession of Kalbid amīrs ruling the island under the Fatimids continued after him. Their military prowess and efforts expended on behalf of the Fatimid state, especially in Sicily, was cause for their rise to power at court. Once al-Mu‘izz moved to Cairo, he appointed the Kalbids as dynastic governors of Sicily and they created a semi-autonomous dynasty loyal to the Fatimids which lasted until 1053.

Jūdhar had a profound relationship with the Kalbid family whose members flourished in the urban centers of Ifrīqiya and Sicily. Jūdhar, it should be recalled, had been the guardian of ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn’s sons al-Ḥasan and Aḥmad. They remained close friends throughout the Ustādh’s life. As mentioned above, when al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī died, the Ustādh looked after the familu. He made sure that their inheritance was distributed correctly and also petitioned al-Mu‘izz to allow ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn’s widow to purchase a home near the palace complex in al-Manṣūriyya so she could live near the Imām. Upon al-Ḥasan’s death, his son Aḥmad became the governor of Sicily. Soon thereafter, Aḥmad expressed his grief to the Ustādh in a letter. Jūdhar discussed the letter’s content with al-Mu‘izz.77 Since Jūdhar was the constant point of contact for the Kalbid family to relay messages to the Imām, he also became acquainted with the geopolitical matters pertaining to Sicily. He was not only privy to personal matters but also became intimately familiar with Sicilian domestic matters.

Al-Ḥasan had two other sons, Muḥammad and Abū al-Futūḥ Mūsa, who did not share the same close relationship to the Ustādh as did their brothers. The latter, according to Jūdhar’s memory, spoke ill of the Ustādh and prompted Muḥammad to cut ties with him. As a result, Jūdhar contemplated breaking ties with the entire family and to stop corresponding with Aḥmad,

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77 Sīra, 2:68.
who was the governor of Sicily at the time. He wrote about the matter to al-Mu‘izz who instructed him to maintain his ties with Aḥmad. Al-Mu‘izz said,

Do not cut ties with Aḥmad because that will be unfair to him. Sometimes a man feels pain in some of his body parts; does that mean he should cut them off? The world is like this and matters like these will never cease to happen. The need to stand up in the face of adversaries will never stop, and the facing of enemies will never stop. Sickness succeeds health and death follows life. What sullies today will be cleansed tomorrow. Do what you must to protect yourself in the capacity which is necessary for someone like you…There have been several events in the past which link you and them [the Kalbids]. Because of this link, you cannot break your ties with them and they should not break their ties with you. You are well aware that when their enemies’ arrows were fired at them in a moment when they nearly fell from grace because of their Imām’s (al-Manṣūr’s) anger towards them, you intervened by appealing to me and al-Manṣūr. As a result, they were spared. And al-Manṣūr acted with them, at that time, in a way which befitted him. Whatever compelled you not to break ties with them then should compel you not to break ties with them today, especially considering how we value them with our grace and satisfaction.  

Jūdhar’s ties with the Kalbids were strong as well as longstanding, as indicated by al-Mu‘izz’s advice to Jūdhar in this letter. This social relationship, I argue, helped Jūdhar in his own commercial endeavors, namely the import of timber from Sicily for consumption in Ifrīqiya, which will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

**The Ḥamdūnids**

Another important family mentioned in the Sīra and to whom Jūdhar maintained ties were the Banū Ḥamdūn. They were a clan that originated in Yemen and maintained their identity as a distinguished Yemeni Arab family after their migration to the Maghrib. They originally settled in Spain and came to Ifrīqiya during Aghlabid rule in the ninth century. The first figurehead of this family to align himself with the Fatimids was ‘Alī b. Ḥamdūn al-Andalusī. He

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78 *Sīra*, 2:73, 158.
joined the Fatimid ranks at the time al-Mahdī made his way to Raqqāda from Sijilmāsa in 909.

At the beginning of their reign, the Fatimids struggled with bringing the Maghrib fully under their control. Al-Qā’im, waged several campaigns west of Ifrīqiya to expand and fortify Fatimid rule. During this time, ‘Alī b. Ḥamdūn, who was the governor of Zāb, aided the Fatimids militarily. He was also very active in helping to subdue the revolt led by Abū Yazīd. ‘Alī was killed fighting in this revolt in 946. Al-Qā’im had built the city of al-Masīla with the help of ‘Alī’s supervision and awarded this city to be the seat for the Ḥamdūnid dynasty in the Zāb. Here the family governed the region as viceroy for the Fatimids. ‘Alī’s sons, Jaʿfar and Yaḥya, had been brought up at the Fatimid court in al-Mahdiyya. As a result, Jūdhar knew them well. Jaʿfar eventually succeeded his father and continued to rule the area of the Zāb from Masīla.

The Ḥamdūnids were bitter rivals of another important Berber tribe, the Ṣanhāja. The Ṣanhāja, like the Ḥamdūnids, aided the Fatimids militarily and helped them to maintain power in Algeria. Their chieftain, Buluggin b. Zīrī, was also allegiant to the Caliph-Imāms of Ifrīqiya, and when al-Muʿizz departed to Cairo in 971, the entire region of Ifrīqiya was left in their charge to govern as viceroy. The Zirids remained allegiant to the Fatimids until the ascension of Muʿizz b. Bādīs (r. 1016 - 1062), who in 1045, switched his support to the Abbasid caliph al-Qādir. During Fatimid rule in Ifrīqiya, the Zirids and Ḥamdūnids often found themselves competing for approval and favor from their sovereigns. Eventually, when Ifrīqiya was given to the Ṣanhajā to govern, Jaʿfar switched his allegiance from the Fatimids to the Umayyads of Spain in 971 and aligned the Zanāta Berbers against the Fatimids and Zirids. Jaʿfar’s break with the Fatimids occurred around the time of Jūdhar’s death and his betrayal of the Fatimids appears to be the reason why al-Manṣūr al-Kātib highlights Jaʿfar’s rebellious nature in the text of the Sīra.
Al-Manṣūr al-Kātib also pays particular attention to the friendship of Jaʿfar and Jūdhar in the Sīra, while simultaneously highlighting the former’s rebellious personality. The Sīra’s author provides some detail about this relationship and the worries Jaʿfar’s behavior caused Jūdhar. The Zīrid and Ḥamdūnid turmoil is attested to in the Sīra when Jaʿfar b. ’Alī and Yusuf b. Zirī were summoned to al-Muʿizz’s court to work out their differences. Their rivalry was so intense that al-Muʿizz had a private meeting between the two in order to create peace and bring order to the state. This meeting was conducted without any palace guards or officials. Jūdhar had been requested to be present, but he excused himself from attending the meeting. The meeting was successful and the Imām was able to arbitrate an agreement between the two men. However, the Imām wrote to Jūdhar and told him that Jaʿfar and Yusuf conducted themselves in a manner that was not even befitting for his slaves to act. Since Jūdhar was close to Jaʿfar, the Imām asked him to use his personal relationship with Jaʿfar to reaffirm his allegiance and personal loyalty.79

Jaʿfar’s governorship of the Zāb was highly sought by other competitors. Governorships appear to have been available for purchase in the Fatimid administration and according to the Sīra, several governors were trying to outbid Jaʿfar and replace him by promising more revenue for the Fatimid treasury. Jaʿfar’s governorship came with full autonomy and he was not bound by a contract from the state. Under the Fatimid system of governance practiced in Ifrīqiya, an autonomous governor’s revenues were spent maintaining his military expenditures and his province. The remainder of the revenues were then sent to the Fatimid capital. The other contenders of Jaʿfar’s governorship who wanted to lease the province, promised to raise more money for the treasury in return for the territory. Accepting such an offer would have been

79 Sīra, 2:22.
beneficial for the state. However, considering Jūdhar’s friendship with Ja’far, al-Mu‘izz left the latter in his post even with the loss of revenues for the state.\textsuperscript{80} Jūdhar was not pleased to learn that Ja’far was kept at his post on his account. Al-Mu‘izz assured Jūdhar that his esteem for the Ustādh far outweighed the loss of revenue.

This chapter provided some examples which the \textit{Sīra} provides on how social relations were forged and maintained in the \textit{khāṣṣa} of Fatimid society and how Jūdhar’s social world operated. As an intermediary for the Caliph-Imām, Jūdhar’s social ties and influence extended beyond the realms of the palace and the Fatimid capital city. The social cartography of the Ustādh highlights the constant interchange and adherence to protocol that a member of the elite had to keep in mind at all times. This chapter provides a unique insider understanding of the complexity of social networks and relationships within medieval Islamic courtly society through the eyes of a courtier and eunuch. It also sheds light on several forms of social currency in the medieval Islamic world and courtly system. The strongest currency which Jūdhar possessed in his world was his proximity to the Imāms. Proximity gave him power, prestige, and influence and it appears to be the basis of his social nexus. As seen in the following chapter, this form of capital also allowed Jūdhar to profit economically.

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Sīra}, 2:69.
A few days after Jūdhar entered the service of the Fatimids in Raqqāda, the caliph summoned all the Ṣaqāliba servants to assemble in his court.¹ The Imām wished to honor them with the conferment of a token gift, in this case, a textile. The conferment of textiles or robes of honor was a common courtly ritual in the medieval Islamic world whereby the ruler affirmed his authority within the hierarchic structure of the court while reinforcing his subjects’ loyalty.² As the Ṣaqāliba stood in al-Mahdī’s presence, he instructed his attendants to bring a collection of textiles in various types and colors to cut for his newly recruited servants. Al-Mahdī commanded the Ṣaqāliba to line up in front of him, and one by one each approached him and chose the textile of their liking. Presumably, the Imām would have given each recipient the textile piece from his hands directly, which transferred his divine baraka to the material itself.³

Jūdhar observed that his fellow Ṣaqāliba chose tusṭarī over the other textiles. They were well aware that tusṭarī, a woven silk brocade, was an expensive and luxurious choice of fabric and were eager to receive this valuable commodity. Jūdhar, on the contrary, decided to settle for the less expensive and coarse linen ʿattābī textile which was also present among the other fabrics. When al-Mahdī saw him reach over and choose this material, he instructed Sulaymān, ¹ Sīra, 1:1, 4-5.


³ See, Sanders,“Robes of Honor”, 226-227.Sanders writes, “Objects that the imam had touched could transmit his baraka. During the banquet of the New Year, the caliph distributed food with his own hands, the recipient kissed it, and then placed it in his sleeve for the baraka.
the highest ranking ṣaqlabī official at that time, to tell Jūdhar to choose tusṭarī instead. Al-Mahdī said, “He (Jūdhar) is a noble servant (al-waṣīf al-najīb) and is steadfast in his service. Tusṭarī will prove to be more long-lasting for him and beneficial.”4 Although Sulaymān urged Jūdhar to heed the Imām’s wish and accept the tusṭarī, Jūdhar remained obstinate in his choice of ‘attābī and told Sulaymān that he desired no other type of fabric besides the one he had already chosen.

Al-Mahdī’s exclusive gaze fell upon Jūdhar once again. He turned to the members of his court and said, “He (Jūdhar) will be a virtuous servant. Did you see that he did not reach for the cloth of the righteous (libās al-ṣāliḥīn)? Rather, he chose the fabric which resembles a burial shroud. My divine insight (firāsa) about him was not misplaced. He shall be a servant who desires the afterlife more than the luxuries of this world (asbāb al-dunyā).”5 After al-Mahdī’s lofty praise for Jūdhar, he ordered that the Ustādh receive both fabrics, the tusṭarī chosen by the Ṣaqaṭliba and the ‘attābī chosen by him. This gesture was highly symbolic of Jūdhar’s pure devotion over his self interests.

As mentioned in Chapter One, one of al-Manṣūr al-Kātib’s underlying reasons for the compilation of the Sīra was to illustrate the life story of the Ustādh and what it meant to be the most virtuous and loyal servant. Jūdhar’s virtuous qualities, as recorded by the Sīra, served as a guide for the exemplary conduct necessary of a Fatimid servant, official, and statesman. Therefore, it is not surprising that this anecdote appears at the beginning of the text. At face value, this event pays particular attention to Jūdhar’s choice of the attābī textile over the tusṭarī one, despite the Imām’s recommendation to take the more expensive fabric of the two. It serves

4 Sīra, 1:1, 5.
5 Ibid, 5.
to demonstrate, as does the anecdote which precedes it in the Sīra, that Jūdhar was linked to the Imām’s firāsa. The Ustādh’s choice of the less valuable fabric serves as a literary device which foretells his rise in the Fatimid court. The visual vocabulary of textiles was in no way coincidental nor was the language used cryptic or ambiguous to members of the Fatimid habitus. On the contrary, textiles and clothing were directly representative of social status in medieval Islamic culture. The symbolic value of the narrative scene above would not have been lost to elite members of Fatimid society who were the intended audience of the Sīra. Jūdhar’s loyalty was undeniable.

In Fatimid court culture, ceremonial investiture and the bestowment of robes of honor at the hands of the Imām symbolized stately and/or religious upward social mobility. Furthermore, in the historical period in which the Sīra was written, clothing and textiles were considered a direct form of economic capital. In the Fatimid court, all types of robes, costumes, headgear, and other items of clothing produced from luxurious textiles carried with them both an economic and symbolic value. Historically, the Fatimids’ royal wardrobe treasuries were renowned for consisting of all types of expensive fabrics and materials.6

Here, I argue, that the author of the Sīra was providing his readership with another perspective, one which would have also been apparent to members of the Fatimid court. The author deliberately juxtaposes tusṭarī, the expensive and ‘worldly’ cloth of ‘good people’, and ‘attābī, a simple fabric favored by the pious who are cognizant of the afterlife, together in the narrative. In the end, Jūdhar was awarded both textiles by the Imām in fulfillment of his foretelling of Jūdhar’s potential goodness. The narrative indicates that the Imām’s firāsa (divine

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foresight) predicted Jūdhar’s transcendence in both economic prosperity, symbolized by ṭusṭarī, and the socio-religious hierarchy of the Fatimid court, represented by ʻattābī. Since Jūdhar rose to become the third highest official in the early Fatimid state, he no doubt amassed a considerable amount of personal wealth. Social mobility and economic wealth went hand in hand in the elite society of the medieval Islamic world. Al-Manṣūr al-Kātib conveys this idea through his symbolic narration of Jūdhar choosing ʻattābī over ṭusṭarī, or as al-Mahdī explains in the anecdote, his preference of the spiritual afterlife (al-ākhira) over material and worldly matters (al-dunyā).

Historically, ṭusṭarī was a finely woven silk and gold brocade originally produced in Tusṭar (Shushtar), a fortress city in the province of Khuzistan (southwestern Iran). According to the tenth-century medieval Muslim historian and geographer al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 956), the weave technique used in ṭusṭarī was Roman in origin and was brought to the region via prisoners captured in raids of Roman towns in the Near East conducted during the reign of the Sasanian Emperor Shahpur II (r. 309 - 379). In the Middle Ages, Tusṭar fell under the jurisdiction of Ahwāz, the capital city of Khuzistān. It was located on a cliff near the Kārūn river which gave it the ability to engage in commerce with the rest of Persia and beyond. Because of its proximity to Baghdad it grew in prosperity during the Abbasid era on account of trade. A quarter within Abbasid Baghdad was known as the Maḥallat al-Ṭusṭariyyīn where luxury goods such as ṭusṭarī brocade could be sold in the markets of the capital and distributed to all parts of the medieval Islamic world.

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7 For the production of tustar see, R. B. Serjeant, Islamic Textiles: Material for a History up to the Mongol Conquest (Beirut: Librairie Du Liban, 1972), 41-44.
8 Ibid, 41
Ṭuşṭarī was a widely popular and in-demand textile during Jūdhar’s lifetime. The tenth and eleventh-century Abbasid historian al-Miskawayh (d. 1030), reports that Shaghab (d. 933), the mother of the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir, collected embroidered textiles and brocades from Byzantium (Rūm) and Tusṭar. The Buyid ruler, Muʻizz al-Dawla (d. 967), opened a ṭirāz factory in Tusṭar, most probably because of its renowned fame as a skilled textile production center. Ibn Ḥawqal (d. ca. 978), who also wrote his geographical treatise in the tenth century, mentions that, at one point in time, the coverings of the Ka’ba were traditionally made from tusṭarī until the Buyid Sulṭān could no longer afford to do so.\(^9\) By the eleventh century, tusṭarī was generically produced in the Maghrib and brought to Fatimid Cairo by Jewish merchants bearing the onomastic nisba (attribution) ‘al-Andalūsī.’ Tunisia, Sicily, and Spain were all textile production centers, so Maghribī tusṭarī could have originated from any of these places.\(^10\) Regardless of its place of production, the tusṭarī fabric distributed in al-Mahdī’s court that day was still considered expensive, in high demand, valuable, and the token of choice to honor his Ṣaqāliba servants and assure their loyalty and allegiance to him.

‘Attābī, although also a widely used and popular textile, was nowhere close to tusṭarī in scale of luxury and worth. The Andalūsī traveler and geographer of the 12th century, Abū Ḥāmid al-Gharnāṭī (d. 1170), gives a visual description of this cloth in his quasi-geographical treatise and travelogue, Ṭuhfat al-Qulūb (The Gift For The Hearts). He writes, “In the land of the zanj (East Africa) there are wild donkeys (zebras), each of which is similar to the likes of ‘attābī - a

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\(^9\) Ibid, 42.

striped cloth (*mukhaṭṭat*) with black and white in regular stripes (*khūṭūt*)” (Fig. 10).\(^{11}\) The zebra striped textile described by al-Gharnaṭī was linen tabby fabric which was also originally produced in Abbasid Baghdad in the ‘Attabiyya Quarter. Like *tusṭarī*, this fabric was also eventually generically reproduced in the Maghrib and chroniclers mention that it was produced in Almeria during twelfth-century Almoravid rule in Spain. In Jūdhar’s account above, al-Manṣūr al-Kāṭib quotes al-Mahdī likening the fabric to those used as burial shrouds, most probably on account of its simplicity and coarseness. From archeological finds, it appears that tabby linen (*‘attābī*) was indeed a common material used in burial tunics during the Fatimid period (see Fig. 11).\(^{12}\) Therefore, al-Manṣūr al-Kāṭib’s specific use of these two diverse fabrics to represent the material world and the afterlife was in sync with the contemporary use of these textiles.

This chapter focuses on the Ustādh’s acquisition of wealth in the socio-cultural context of the world in which he lived. How did Jūdhar make money and what were the institutions and social and economic circumstances which allowed him to do so? The research in this section of the dissertation demonstrates how economic capital and social mobility operated within the tenth-century world of Fatimid Ifrīqiya. Additionally, this chapter explains how wealth was justified in the context of Fatimid religious ideology. On the one hand, Fatimid religious and philosophical thought and doctrine clearly called for the abandonment by the faithful of the transient things of the material world, while on the other, it considered the accumulation of material wealth an act of piety and worship when used in the pursuit of the afterlife. This chapter

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11 Serjeant, 28.

also aims to show how the author of the Sīra depicted Jūdhar’s character and his immense acquisition of material wealth in light of this thought.

Although Jūdhar received a vast amount of his wealth directly from the Imām’s graces and honoraria throughout his career, he became a merchant with his own trading caravans and fleets of ships in his later years. Furthermore, he ventured and specialized in the timber trade. In the interest of contextualizing Jūdhar’s role in the acquisition of wealth, this chapter will inquire into the Mediterranean timber trade and commercial systems of the medieval Islamic world. Through this analytical approach towards Jūdhar’s wealth and trade relations, larger questions about medieval Mediterranean politics, economical theories, and environmental concerns will be addressed. Lastly, the importance of Sicily for the economic stability of North Africa, in regards to Jūdhar’s own mercantile and commercial activities there, will also come to light.

The Concept of Wealth: al-Dunyā and al-Ākhira in Fatimid Ideology and Thought

The juxtaposition of the material world and the afterlife as two opposite perspectives for viewing the meaning of life is a fundamental idea in Islamic theology. The abandonment of worldly pleasures (tark al-dunyā) in pursuit of procuring the afterlife (talab al-ākhira) was considered a pious way to live one’s life. Excessive desire in worldly matters was a sign of avarice and could lead to sin. Numerous ḥadīth and religious teachings linked ideal piety to the rejection of dunyā and the procurement of al-ākhira through good deeds, the search of religious knowledge (al-ʿilm), worship (ʿibāda), and asceticism (zuhd). The anecdote above clearly is based on this ideology. Jūdhar’s acumen in gravitating towards spiritual desire over worldly was a trope easily understood in the literary discourse of the medieval Islamic world and the Fatimid ethos as another remarkable and praiseworthy characteristic which he possessed.
Fatimid religious thought unequivocally called for the denouncement of outright indulgence in material wealth, like most other Islamic schools of thought. Yet, it simultaneously embraced and justified the procurement of wealth. Wealth and the *dunyā* could be considered valuable, in a religious sense, if they were used in pursuit of the afterlife. Therefore, wealth expended in the service of the Caliph-Imāms and the Fatimid state was considered a pious act since they were the providers of the best of this world and the next in Fatimid religious ideology. Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿman specifically directs the followers of the Fatimid Imāms towards this notion in the *Kitāb al-Himma*. Along with the notion that the Imāms were rightfully in the position of the Prophet to accept and utilize the wealth of their followers and the Muslim *Umma* as they wished, he also deems that,

> God has reserved the best of this world (*dunyā*) and the hereafter (*al-ākhira*) for those who acknowledge the authority of the Imāms, submit to their rule, and agree to obey them and acknowledge their Imamate. If someone readily seeks the afterlife and comes to them, he will find it. Those who covet the material world and come to them, will also receive it. And those who seek both shall find it with them as well.\(^{13}\)

This idea was prevalent throughout Fatimid theology and thought. For instance, al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, in the Book of *Walāya* (*Love and Devotion for The Imāms*) from the *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*, quotes a conversation between the Shīʿī Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765) and his followers. His followers had complained to him about the ill-treatment they were receiving from fellow Muslims who continuously hurled insults at them, defaming their character and deeming them non-Muslims, because of their adherence to the Fatimid Imāms. Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq reminded this group of believers of their fortunate circumstance of being the followers of the Imāms and explained that trials, tribulations, and persecution are a fact of life for the faithful. He also explained that trials, tribulations, and persecution are a fact of life for the faithful. He also

\(^{13}\) al-Nuʿmān, *Kitāb al-Himma*, 34.
mentioned that the Prophet Muḥammad had explained that worldly hardships are faced foremost and to a larger degree first by prophets, then their wasīs (their legatees and successors), then the Imāms, and finally their faithful followers. According to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq’s quote from the Prophet’s hadīth, these trials were expected because God has reserved the best of the afterlife for his followers. He quotes the Prophet as having said, “the material world is a prison for believers and heaven (jannat) for non-believers. Whatever the faithful follower might receive as fortune from the material luxuries of this world, it will be polluted [with hardships]. His endurance of those hardships will serve as a reward from God who has already fulfilled the best of the afterlife for him.”

Similarly, in Fatimid thought, the pursuit of knowledge (al-ʿilm) was only valued if it led to the attainment of the afterlife. Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān expresses this idea when he references another hadīth of the Prophet in the Daʿāʾim Al-Islām which states, “The fear of the afterlife will leave the heart of the one who loves the material world. God is angriest at the man to whom he has given knowledge but who increases his own desire for the material world.” The deeply embedded religious and ideological dialogue surrounding material wealth and the afterlife in Fatimid culture also found its way in the discussion of the legitimacy of leadership. A good leader was considered someone who did not possess the vices of avarice and greed. The tenth-century Fatimid philosopher, Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Naysābūrī, writes about the qualities that a Fatimid missionary (Dāʾī) should possess in his mirror for princes, Risāla al-Mūjaza al-Kāfiya fī Ādāb al-Duʿāt (A Concise and Complete Treatise on the Mannerisms of the Duʿāt). He writes,

14 al-Nuʿmān, Daʿāʾim Al-Islām, vol. 1, 27.

15 Ibid, 57.
“The Du‘āt of truth shall remain virtuous. They should never relish in the transient things of this world (ḥuṭām al-dunyā) and should not imbue in their hearts the desire for power. All those who covet the materiality of this world and follow their hearts’ desire to gain power shall be led astray from the right path and lead others astray as well.”¹⁶ In this manner, al-Manṣūr al-Kātib was expounding this widespread religious trope when he included the anecdote of Jūdhar’s selection of attābī. The choice of the lesser valuable fabric signaled the lack of avarice and foretold his ascent as a high official.

Although Fatimid religious and philosophical thought rejected indulgence of materiality at the expense of ākhira, the accumulation of material wealth was never prohibited. Unlike Sufism and its call for the complete rejection of the world (tark al-dunyā), Fatimid ideology proposed the building up of the material world to bolster and support the spiritual world. It was this concept which paved its way into medieval Islamic political thought and enabled rulers to justify amassing wealth in their kingdoms, and yet still be able to claim pious intention.

Medieval Islamic religious authority in the early period was embodied in the figure of an imām or caliph who was considered a vicegerent of the Prophet Muḥammad. They had an obligation to ensure the continuation of Islām through safeguarding the welfare of Muslims by implementing the sharī‘a and enforcing believers to abide by its laws.¹⁷ Therefore, the maintenance of the state was also part of their responsibilities since it could implant policies which guided the followers to the afterlife. This relationship brought justification to the political ideology that religion (dīn) and state (dawla) are coterminous entities. The merger of this interdependent brotherhood,


governed by a single imamate or caliphate was necessary to achieve the requirements of political
and religious authority.

This ideology was also prevalent in Fatimid thought and is expressed throughout the
early textual sources of the dynasty. For instance, in the *Majālis wa al-Musāyirāt*, al-Qādī al-
Nu‘mān records the Fatimid caliph al-Mu‘izz’s acknowledgement of all the material wealth
(*dunyā*) and prosperity which he had acquired during his reign. Al-Mu‘izz categorized his
prosperity in the following groups: capital (*ṣunūf al-amwāl*), horses (*al-khayl*), weaponry (*al-
silāḥ*), accoutrements (*al-‘udda*), and textiles (*al-ṭirāz*). In other words, monetary capital,
military prowess (horses and weaponry) and some forms of material culture (textiles and
accoutrements) were also considered forms of economic capital in medieval Islamic civilization.

The Fatimid ruler also took pride in the outstanding achievements and productions which
he had accomplished through the agency of Byzantine (*Rūmī*) slaves whom he had captured in
war and brought to North Africa. He boasted that the works they produced were so skillfully
executed that expert craftsmen from the east were not capable of the same standard of production
in Fatimid Ifrīqiya. It is most likely he was making reference to the official textile and *ṭirāz*
production of the Fatimid state which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. In
*Chapter One*, the reference to slaves most likely refers to these Rūmī slaves who worked in the
textile factory and desired to apostatize back to Christianity. He also exulted about the quarrying
of stones from a mountain which previous kings were unable to reach, the numerous construction
projects undertaken by him around Ifrīqiya, and the vast amount of trees he had planted

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19 It is most likely that the Fatimid ruler was speaking about textile production in Fatimid North Africa. See al-Nu‘mān, *al-Majālis*, 166 - 167.
throughout the kingdom. He linked this boost of production and economic prosperity with the obedience of the population of Ifrīqiya which coincided with his rule and with the widespread order throughout the kingdom.

Al-Mu‘izz found his fortuitous economic and political situation in sharp contrast with his rivals, the Abbasids, whom he likened to orphans in the laps of the Buyids who had conquered them in 945 and taken control of Baghdad, assuming power over all of their wealth and property. The Imam then justified his own economic growth and prosperity by saying,

We have rejected material wealth (dunyā) and rid ourselves of it. On the contrary, we have sought the afterlife (al-ākhira) and have made it our preference. God has brought forth for us material wealth (dunyā) even though it is worthless [to us], and he has preserved what he deems most precious for the next world (al-dār al-ākhira).

Al-Mu‘izz explained how the actions of his political rivals are different from his own. He suggested that their wealth and prosperity is ridden with indignity, fear, and deception while the material wealth of the Fatimids was justified because they used it in God’s obedience (tā‘a). The Caliph-Imām asserted that his enemies, namely the Umayyads of Spain and the Abbasids, used their material wealth in disobedience of God.

An important point to be noted from al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s narrative above about al-Mu‘izz’s pride in his achievements, is his inclusion of the planting of trees around the kingdom as being symbolic of prosperity. The abundance of textile production, the increase in building projects, the access to building materials such as stone, and the planting of trees throughout the kingdom all are indicative of the natural resources which were available to the Fatimid ruler within his domain. The tirāz textiles, which will be discussed in further detail in the Chapter

20 al-Nu‘mān, Majālis, 182.
Four, were an important industry of the state, and as al-Mu‘izz mentioned above, they were considered part of the empire’s wealth. Furthermore, the fact that the caliph took pride in the planting of trees is indicative that he was taking the necessary steps to ensure that Ifrīqiya would maintain a supply of greenery as a natural resource in order to maintain the economic stability of his kingdom. The need for trees as a natural resource is a point which will be revisited and explicated below.

Fatimid jurisprudence also advised followers to earn and provide for their families. The emphasis on fulfilling social obligations was important for the new state in its aim to make a new society. In Fatimid jurisprudent ideology, earning and providing for one’s self and family were considered pious deeds. This ideology was also linked to the concept of material wealth and the afterlife. The first book of the second volume of the Da‘īm al-Islām by al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān was titled Kitāb al-Buyū‘ wa al-Āḥkām Fīhā (The Book of Sales and Transactions and Their Rulings) and is dedicated to regulations of business practices of the time. The first chapter of this book focuses on the religious appeal and call to conduct business and trade in a ḥalāl and lawful manner. Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān chooses particular teachings to link the pursuit of material wealth to the pursuit of the afterlife and pious deeds.

Early on in the chapter he quotes a saying of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, “I dislike a person who is indolent about [procuring] his material world because whoever is indolent in the matters of his material world will surely be even more indolent in matters of his afterlife.”21 He quotes another saying of ‘Alī which likens those who continuously spend their time in the pursuit of a ḥalāl livelihood as being equal to a warrior fighting the jihād. The comparison of the struggle of

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making money with *jihād* is exemplified by al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān when he provides an account of the Prophet Muḥammad coming across a young strong man in the battle of Tabūk. The young man was a camel herder who had in his possession several well fed camels he was selling. The companions of the Prophet turned to him and said it would be ideal if we utilized this young man and his herd in the *jihād*. The Prophet called over the young man and asked him why he toiled and exerted himself with the selling of these camels. The man replied that he had a wife and family and so he sold camels to make a living in order to keep them out of need and poverty and to fulfill his debts. When the young man left, the Prophet said that if he was telling the truth he shall have the same spiritual reward as a warrior and a pilgrim of the *ḥajj* and ‘*umra*. It is clear that the impetus to earn a living was very much part of Fatimid society. The above-mentioned ideologies must be kept in mind when interpreting al-Manṣūr’s anecdote of Jūdhar and the Imām’s conferment of robes of honor to the Ṣaqāliba.

As discussed in *Chapter Two*, medieval Islamic courtly systems and their hierarchies were greatly influenced by Sasanian customs and traditions. However, in sharp contrast to Sasanian society, which was rigidly stratified into classes leaving little or no social mobility, medieval Islamic society was fluid. Part of the reason that this fluidity existed was because of the continuous distribution and redistribution of wealth in most strata of society.

The contrast between Sasanian and Islamic social stratification and its relation to the distribution of wealth can be understood through a widely transmitted Sasanian didactic text known as the *Tansarnameh*. It was a text written to depict ideas of good governance and was passed down to early Muslim writers such as Ibn Muqaffā (d. 759) who possibly translated it.

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22 Ibid, 15.
The text was recorded in the form of a letter between the Sasanian high priest Tansar and the ruler of Parishvār and Ṭabaristān, Gushnāsp. Gushnāsp had disavowed his allegiance to the ruler Ardashīr and the letter was written as propaganda to convince him that Ardashīr’s rule was legitimate. Tansar attempts to get his message across by explaining the strict hierarchies which existed in Sasanian society and to demonstrate the emperor’s stringent distinctions between social groups. The emperor was obviously above and beyond the social strata. However, he was also the pivot around which all the groups spun harmoniously.

In this ideal Sasanian socio-religious setting, the population was divided into four estates or classes: the first, men of religion; the second, the military; the third, the secretaries; and the fourth, the artisans and craftsmen. The fourth stratum was considered the lowest of all four and included cultivators, herdsmen, merchants, and other craftsmen. Sasanian religious ideology, according to this letter, emphasized the rigid stratification of these classes and forbade the intermingling or traversing of any individual between these demarcated estates. Even men were not suppose to marry beneath their station so that their offspring would not become of lower rank and character as a result of an uneven union. Ibn Muqaffā’ expresses these same ideas of fixed social stratification in the Kalīla wa Dimna fables as mentioned in Chapter Two.

The placement of men in their station, mostly on account of birthright, was considered an outcome of divine providence. In this same respect, the distribution of wealth in society was also deliberately unevenly distributed. The Sasanian system was designed so that wealth gravitated towards the powerful in order to avoid social mobility. According to the method of governance suggested in this letter, the general idea was to ensure that the distinction between nobles and

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commoners was never lost. Men of high rank (*ahl al-darajāt*) were to be distinguished from the common folk (‘āmma) in their wealth and possessions. Similar to al-Muʿizz’s list of wealth in the anecdote above, the letter of Tansar lists wealth and possessions to be “horses, clothing, houses, gardens, women, and servants.”

Although the Sasanian ideas of what constituted wealth appear to be similar to Fatimid thought, the Fatimids’ idea of the redistribution of wealth in society seems to have been in sharp contrast to Sasanian norms.

Fatimid literary sources indicate that they made an appeal to followers to participate in mercantile activity regardless of one’s social stratum. By calling people to commerce, the distribution of wealth produced an additional currency for social mobility. According to medieval Islamic and Fatimid thought, the Prophet Muhammad was a merchant. The Fatimids also professed that ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was known to have worked the fields of his estate. Moreover, many of their early Imāms such as Muḥammad al-Bāqir were also reported to have conducted commerce. When al-Mahdī fled Salamiyah in Syria and made his way to Sijilmāsa, he chose to disguise himself as a traveling merchant above all other social classes from which he could have assumed a new identity. The Fatimids connected the class of the merchant to the identities of their Imāms because they wanted members of the state to engage in mercantile activities. Jūdhar’s acquisition of wealth and his rise in the ranks through economic capital despite his

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24 Ibid, 84.
26 Ibid, 12.
perceived marginalized social status as eunuch, foreigner, and slave further demonstrates the level of fluidity which existed among the social strata of Fatimid society.

It was arguably Jūdhar’s long term service in the Fatimid court and his fortunate placement in the palace of al-Qā’im that provided him with the opportunity to acquire all three forms of social, economic, and cultural capital. This chapter demonstrates that it was Jūdhar’s social position under the patronage of the Caliphs-Imāms, albeit a șaqlabī slave, which allowed him to receive the education, skills, diplomacy, adab, and other forms of cultural capital that formed his habitus. As discussed in Chapter Two, his position also allowed him to form the social network necessary for navigating the hierarchy. This network and social capital enabled him to extend his own authority and power at the same distance and measure of the Fatimid governmental administration to which he was attached and in which he functioned.

Making Money in Fatimid Ifrīqiya: Economic Capital and Social Mobility

When the Fatimids assumed control over Ifrīqiya in the early tenth century, their rise to power coincided with an upsurge of commerce and trade in the Mediterranean basin. Several scholars such as Avner Greif and Timur Kuran have suggested that the inefficiencies of Islamic institutions and collective cultural practices hindered economic growth, relative to the economies of Europe. Greif’s argument was that the “collectivist cultural beliefs” of Islamic society presented an obstacle to the accumulation of wealth. In his view, this hindrance was partly due to a corresponding horizontal social structure in premodern Islamic civilization. He maintained that the cultural and religious belief system of Islam created a “collective equilibrium” which did not

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allow Islamic traders (even Jews and Christians living in the Dār al-Islām) to participate fully in economic activities and opportunities. These factors, according to Greif, ultimately limited economic progress and prosperity in premodern Muslim societies.29

Kuran, on the other hand, blames Islamic jurisprudence for the inefficiency of Islamic trade institutions. To his mind, the Middle East fell behind in living standards, technology, and economic development because Muslim cultural practices were incompatible with capitalism. He claimed that business partnerships, because of regulations in Islamic law, were minuscule, insignificant, and unable to grow into larger entities since inheritance law mandated the immediate dispersal of property and wealth to the inheritors, which ultimately led to the collapse of investment partnerships.30

Maya Shatzmiller, however, has argued that purely theoretical approaches to Islamic economic history, such as those of Greif and Kuran, lead to sweeping generalizations about Islamic institutions and their role in economic growth. In her research on labor in the medieval Islamic world she has observed a lack of precision in the analysis of textual sources dealing with medieval Islamic economic history. Her critique of Eurocentric economic scholarship on the medieval Islamic economy is perhaps best stated in her own words:

The attribution of irrational economic behavior to Muslims is baffling in the context of medieval historiography. Both medieval and modern Europeans have always acknowledged the contribution of medieval Arabs and Muslims, regarding them as their masters and mentors in the natural and exact sciences, medicine, mathematics and philosophy, theology and geometry. It is widely acknowledged that Islamic scientific expertise contributed to the development of technical


devices. On what basis then, could they be seen as ‘irrational’ human beings when it comes to economic behaviour?31

For this reason it is necessary to take a closer look at specific case studies of economic institutions in the medieval Islamic world. This chapter observes how commerce was conducted and wealth distributed by the Fatimids within their geographical and commercial networks. It also demonstrates how Jūdhar operated within them to create his own independent fortune.

The Imām and State as a Source of Wealth

As an elite slave and official of the state, Jūdhar would have obtained wealth primarily through the direct conferments of the Caliph-Imām. The caliph distributed wealth among his officials and servants as he saw fit, as he was the divinely appointed sole proprietor of the state’s wealth. This idea is best explained by al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān in his Majālis when he narrates an event in al-Mu‘izz’s court where the caliph expresses his satisfaction with his officials and soldiers and the ways in which he distributes his wealth and generosity to them.32 Al-Nu‘mān reports that he received a letter from the Master of the Endowments (Ṣāhib al-Aḥbās) in Sousse (Sūsa), a city located on the Tunisian coastline. While building the new maritime arsenal in Sousse, he discovered a Roman hydraulic system built under the foundations of the new structure. The Roman structure had seven water catchment basins (mawājil) which were interconnected and supplied by a large pool of water. When properly filled, the freshwater supply was generally made available to the inhabitants of the city as well as the ships, since the arsenal was also the location where ships were built. Because it was an ancient Roman hydraulic system


32 al-Nu‘mān, al-Majālis, 488 - 490
and had been presumably abandoned for centuries, al-Mu‘izz desired to repair it and make it functional once again. He also wanted to build a mosque to commemorate his rebuilding of this hydraulic structure. He saw the discovery of the remains of the Roman hydraulic engineering structure as a good omen for the building of the new arsenal in Sousse. The Imām also expressed his wish to one day build a canal to connect al-Manṣūriyya, the inland Fatimid capital city at that time near al-Qayrawān, directly to the Mediterranean so that ships could dock there. He wished to do this because he had received reports that there was overcrowding in the two arsenals of al-Mahdiyya because of the vast amount of ships, both commercial and military, which belonged to the state. This overcrowding was the reason for building the new arsenal in Sousse to alleviate the maritime traffic of al-Mahdiyya.

On this occasion, al-Mu‘izz took the opportunity to be thankful to God for his prosperity and wealth. He was appreciative of his officials and his military troops. He took pride in the fact that they were devoted to him. Making a comparison between his kingdom and the Abbasid kingdom, al-Mu‘izz claims that:

And if they (the Abbasids) think that they have gained more of the material world (dunya) than us, they should know that God has placed baraka in all that he is given us. We shall prosper more than they ever will have prospered. We provide more stipends (‘atā’) to our officials, soldiers, and allies directly from our wealth than they do for their men. We possess more [wealth] than they do. Our soldiers (rijāl) are superior to their soldiers in their love for us, their insightful acknowledgement of our divine position, and their immaculate devotion (walāya) to us. They are superior in their camaraderie and steadfastness for jihād against our enemies.33

Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān makes the point of the Imām being the primary source of wealth for members of the state as he continues the narrative. In this recording of the event, al-Mu‘izz went

33 Ibid, 489.
on to recall the natural resources which usually make up the wealth of any kingdom. He stated, “The kings of the past built their capitals near places which were near rivers or that were abundant in mineral resources. We have chosen to live in a place which is rich with the resource of walāya (love and devotion).” Al-Mu‘izz was reflecting on the fact that al-Manṣūriyya was inland and located in an arid zone with little rainfall. The new capital, although near the remnants of the previous Aghlabid capital of Raqqāda, was a stark environmental and topographical shift from al-Mahdiyya. In his mention of walāya, he was referring to the Kutāma since they made up the most significant sector of the early Fatimid polity. As detailed in Chapter Two, members of the Kutāma Berber clan were government officials and soldiers who loyally served the Fatimid state and were solely responsible for its establishment before the arrival of al-Mahdī in 909. Al-Mu‘izz continued to praise them immensely for their loyalty. This entire narrative is an example of the types of capital exchanges which took place in the Fatimid court.

When al-Mu‘izz made these statements, Fatimid officials were visiting the Imām in al-Manṣūriyya from the eastern Islamic world. During their audience with the Caliph-Imām at court, they spoke of al-Mu‘izz’s distinction in the distribution of stipends (‘aṭā’) to his officials and soldiers. They compared al-Mu‘izz’s actions to his Abbasid rivals. They claimed that the amount the Abbasids gave their troops (jund) was trivial in comparison to the conferments of al-Mu‘izz on his officials and military personal. They explained how the Abbasid system of ‘aṭā’ operated: the largest portion of the budget went to the salaries of the army personnel: leaders of the jund, followed by their foot soldiers (atbā’), and then to whomever in the army they wished to give salaries. The remainder of their allotted portion of the budget then went to the servants to

34 Ibid, 489.
fulfill their needs. Then the military commanders would reserve another large portion of the
budget for themselves from the amount conferred from the Abbasid caliph. In the end, whatever
was left of the budget was given to whomever they wanted, although sometimes those recipients
had to earn it through trade.

Al-Mu’izz’s eastern visitors continued their description of the Abbasid stipend system
saying, “Whatever they (the Abbasid officials and army) receive is not even close to the amount
received by the lowest ranking servant of our lord (al-Mu’izz). Our lord generously bestows
grants (ṣilāt), sustenance (arzāq), textiles (kusā), beasts of burden (ḥumlān), stall-fed animals
(al-‘ulūfa), and salaries and rations for their wives and children. All his subjects accept these
gifts with their own hands.”35 The entourage visiting the court continued to say that when a
soldier goes for battle and happens to be injured or martyred in battle, it is Fatimid policy to keep
his pensions and stipends ongoing for the benefit of his surviving family members and loved
ones. Soldiers are provided with weaponry (al-silāh), camels for traveling (zawāmil), tents, and
all the required necessities for traveling when they desire to make a journey. They are also given
the iqṭā’ (land grants), farming estates (day’a), and rights to use the returns yielded from the
land. Their livelihood is constantly maintained through the rewarding of precious gifts and
bonuses. Their salaries are increased when they return from war with conferments of textiles,
gifts, ships, and camels. In this manner, the court itself was an economic institution that not only
provided for its members but also generated and distributed wealth to individuals across the
various strata of the Fatimid populace.

Grants of camels as a form of capital and other gifts commonly occurred in the medieval Fatimid world. A ṣaqlabī governor named Aflāḥ al-Nāshib, with whom Jūdhar had consistent interaction, sent the Ustādh twenty camels as a gift. Aflāḥ was reciprocating an earlier gift from Jūdhar to him of ten camels. Since the gift was not equal, Jūdhar was hesitant to accept because he wanted to avoid a reputation for taking bribes, a practice at the time. The Ustādh is depicted by al-Manṣūr al-Kātib as being frugal, cautious, and a protector of the Imām’s and state’s wealth. In this particular narrative, Jūdhar wrote about the entire exchange to al-Mu‘izz in a letter in order to distance himself from any blame whatsoever. In it, he informed al-Mu‘izz that he planned to reciprocate Aflāḥ’s gesture with another gift to equal the exchange. The Imām applauded Jūdhar’s generosity in the matter.\textsuperscript{36}

When it came to his own commercial enterprises, the Ustādh is depicted as a wise businessman who was not shy to use his social standing for financial matters. From a correspondence between Jūdhar and al-Mu‘izz, we learn that the Fatimid city of al-Manṣūriyya seems to have had a toll tax set up at its gates for people entering with camels. Jūdhar’s entry and exit must have been quite frequent since he actively engaged in land trade activities and during this time his residence was in the capital city. The amount of payment from these gate tolls were adding up for the Ustādh, so he wrote to al-Mu‘izz requesting an exemption from the tax. The Imām obliged and told Jūdhar to write to the general Jawhar, and instructed the latter to write him an exemption certificate which would enable his camels to pass through the gates at no charge.\textsuperscript{37}

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\textsuperscript{36} Sīra, 2: 10.

\textsuperscript{37} Sīra, 2: 11.
The Commodity of the Land

As mentioned above, conquered farmland was given to the state treasury with the Imām given the right to disperse. We can safely assume the Fatimids followed Aghlabid practices of granting land ownership to officials and soldiers in reward for outstanding military service. Aghlabid Ifrīqiya’s economy had been largely dependent on the agricultural sector. Ifrīqiya’s olive farm estates producing olive oil were one of the major industries of the region. The Fatimids inherited and made good use of this well established agricultural infrastructure. When ascending to the throne, al-Mahdī would have given certain land ownerships to officials and soldiers as an iqṭā in return for their military service when he first took control over the conquered Aghlabid domains. The term iqṭā denoted a piece of land or the revenue of a piece of land that was allocated to a high ranking official of the state.

The iqṭā system was instituted in early Islam to do just that, and its presence in Fatimid North Africa is evident from the Sīrat Ustādh Jūdhār. It should be recalled in Chapter One of this dissertation, when Jūdhār observed the proceedings at al-Mahdī’s mazālim court. A ṣaqlabī official was put in charge by the Imām to settle a dispute between a group of Kutāma Berbers fighting over irrigation rights. The land they were arguing over were iqṭās given to them by al-Mahdī.

In this manner, land ownership itself appears to be a direct way in which wealth was acquired in the Fatimid world, and this form of wealth could only be given to those with direct social connections to the state. The Sīra reveals that Jūdhār also received a plot of land as an

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 iqṭā’ from the areas of lands awarded by al-Mahdī. Jūdhar’s land was located in Jazīrat al-Shārik, an area which was the northernmost point on the Tunisian coastline and the closest area of land of Ifrīqiya to the island of Sicily. The Sīra mentions that the property brought the Ustādh little income in comparison to his commercial activities. Al-Manṣūr al-Kātib attributes the limited profit yielded from Jūdhar’s land to the Ustādh’s lack of worldly desire, although income from granted land was made from the tax collected from its residents. The Ustādh’s lack of interest in developing the Jazīrat al-Shārik indicates that his other commercial enterprises were bringing him more money.

The governor of the district in which the Ustādh’s lands were located was named Ḥamza b. Ṣalūk. It appears that he was not favored by the Ustādh. Jūdhar lodged a complaint against him to al-Muʿizz informing the Imām that Ḥamza was harassing the residents of Jūdhar’s domains with extremely high taxation. Since the land had been given by ʿAbdallāh al-Mahdī as an iqṭā’ to Jūdhar, this meant that by al-Muʿizz’s time the land had been in Jūdhar’s possession for decades. The instructions set forth in the Imām’s reply demonstrate how the Fatimids handled the administration of land. Al-Muʿizz told the general Jawhar that he should write to Ḥamza and inform him that he should cease all sabotage of Jūdhar’s domains immediately. The Imām insisted that Jūdhar was the most equitable of all his officials and that he ordered that he continue to be allowed to collect taxes on the Imām’s behalf from the residents of his domain.

After giving Jawhar these instructions, al-Muʿizz identified the appropriate channels of redress in regards to land administration. He instructed Jawhar to tell Ḥamza that he had three possible ways to redress the matter. First, if he lacked confidence in Jūdhar’s appointed manager

39 Sīra, 2:18.
(wakil) who administered the affairs of his iqṭā’, he could petition to have him removed; secondly, he had the choice to replace Jūdhar’s manager with another official who the Sīra specifically named as al-Ḥasan b. Ṣaqlabī; finally, he could also contact the local judge in the area and request him to oversee the actions of Jūdhar’s current manager. However, al-Mu’izz reminded Ḥamza that when he chose from the options mentioned above, he should remember that Jūdhar carried the caliph’s favor.

The correspondence demonstrates that there were several officials involved in land administration and taxation within the Fatimid state. Even though iqṭā’ lands were awarded as grants, they were still managed by the state by proxy. The manager who oversaw them was state appointed. Furthermore, if grievances occurred, they were received through the appropriate channels. This letter indicates there were many local steps to be taken before reverting to central authority in al-Manṣūriyya. It also indicates that taxation was a large source of wealth for the Fatimid state. Since the Fatimids professed divine authority over the land, they also claimed control over the water supply used for irrigating farmland. According to the mandates of zakāt in Fatimid jurisprudence, a tithe of zakāt was due for agricultural estates producing grain and fruits that used irrigation methods from a natural body of water such as a river. On the other hand, only half a tithe was due for all other crops grown where providing water was done manually - for instance bringing water to the fields by means of buckets on camels or by using water wheels. So it appears that if water was directly available for farming via irrigation channels or direct water sources like rivers, the zakāt due was double than if one directed water to one’s field through
laborious procedures. The underlying idea expressed in Fatimid juridical books was that the water belonged to God and his Imām.

Agriculture was only one sector of the tenth-century economy of Ifrīqiya, and as mentioned above, Jūdhar profited more from trade and commerce than from the tax revenue coming from his iqṭā’. Since Ifrīqiya in general had a small amount of rainfall, agricultural activity was also limited. The areas surrounding al-Manṣūriyya, the Fatimid capital, are recorded in recent times to receive a mean of 286 millimeters. So rather than agriculture, it was trade which appears to have been a more profitable choice in tenth-century Ifrīqiya. As mentioned in Chapter One, the slave trade also was a major component of commercial activity in the region. During the post Islamic-conquest years of the seventh and eighth centuries, the main source of slaves had been Berbers, but the Berber population became predominantly Muslim and could no longer be enslaved due to prohibitions by Islamic law. The sub-Saharan slave trade grew as a result, and during the ninth century, Aghlabid-ruled Ifrīqiya was a major supplier of black slaves to the rest of the Islamic world. Ibāḍī merchants were able to have a prominent role in this trade.

Ibn Ḥawqal provides contemporary accounts of Jūdhar’s world and the importance of sub-saharan trade in the Maghrib. He reports that merchants from as far as Baṣrā, Kūfa, and Baghdad regularly took part in sub-saharan trade activities. He also makes his observations on the slave trade. He speaks about the importance of Sijilmāsa, one of the most remote trade cities on the Saharan borders of the medieval Dār al-Islām, but equally as important because of its

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40 Nu’mān, Daʾāʾim Al-Islām, Vol. 1, 86.
central position in the trans-saharan trade route. It was linked to important cities in West Africa like Awdaghust. This connection allowed the Fatimids a direct link via saharan trade routes to the goods and commodities of West Africa and beyond. Not only did this give them access to a ready supply of slaves but, more importantly, they were able to maintain a supply of gold. For this reason, this outpost desert trading city rose in prominence.

The Fatimids were well aware that their financial and economical prosperity relied heavily on their ability to trade with West Africa, and therefore, they continuously aimed to control Sijilmāsa. After five attempts, they finally managed to capture it in 958. Its Fatimid governor imposed taxes and customs on caravans and merchants exchanging goods between Fez, Spain, Ifríqiya, Sūs, and Aghmāt and sub-saharan Africa. For the next twenty years until the Umayyads captured it in 977, Sijilmāsa and its mint were responsible for a fourth of the gold coinage struck by the Fatimid state.\(^{42}\)

We learn more about commercial land activity from the writings of another tenth-century geographer and traveler al-Muqaddasī. In regards to commercial trade in the Maghrib, he writes:

The Maghrib consists of commerce that brings woolen fabrics and garments from Barqa. They also import the most exquisite short garments from Sicily. From Ifríqiya they trade olive oil, pistachios, saffron, almonds, plums, canteens, leather mats, and waterskins. From Fez, dates are also traded in addition to the other above-mentioned commodities. From Al-Andalus, they trade cloth and other luxury items.

Among the distinctive features of the region is coral, which is extracted from an Island in the sea. The name of the city of this island is Marsa al-Kharaz and it is only possible to enter it through a narrow passageway, much like the way the passage to al-Mahdiyya is positioned. The top of the coral rises up from the sea, and it is all coral. There is no source for it besides this Island. It is a mountain in the ocean and people go to collect coral from it on small boats. They have wooden...
crosses with them on which a cotton cloth is fastened. Each cross has two ropes attached to it. Two men take these ropes and throw the crosses onto the mountain while the oarsmen spin the boat around so the men can latch on to the coral mountain. They then pull on the mountain to detach pieces of it. These men gather about 100,000 dirhams worth of coral. The coral is then polished in specific coral markets where they are sold in wholesale at a low price. The color and shine of the coral does not appear until it has been polished. Also in Tudela there are many sables/beavers. In al-Andalus they also sell reptile leather (al-safān), which is used to sharpen swords. At one time of the year, a large amount of ambergris comes to them from the Atlantic Ocean. White ammonium is extracted from Sicily, and I have heard that its source has been cut off and so the Egyptians now take advantage of it to make steam for their public baths.

The weight system of the entire region of the Maghrib follows the Baghdadī system except when measuring peppers. This is done by a weight that is ten dirhams lighter than the Baghdadī measurement. Currently, it is used in all the Fatimid territories in the entirety of the Maghrib. As for the weight system, the qafīz of al-Qayrawān is thirty-two thumns. A thunn is considered six mudds according to the mudd of the Prophet. The qafīz of al-Andalus is sixty raṭls. The rub’ is eighteen raṭl and the fanīqa is half a qafīz. The Fatimid standard measure of capacity (mikyāl) is called the dawwār. It weighs less than the wayba of Egypt by a slight variation. An iron cross beam has been attached to the top of the measure. An iron bar has been set up to fit between its base and the iron crossbeam at its top. This bar rotates at the top of the wayba. When the device is filled for weighing the iron spins and touches the mouth of the wayba and the measurement is accurate. The raṭls are lead and the name of the Commander of the Faithful appears on each one. If the raṭls are gathered together in a single place and what is being measured is spread out, each raṭl will be stamped (equally) even if there are ten.

The coinage of the Maghrib including all its territories extending all the way to the far reaches of Damascus is the dīnār, which is lighter than a mithqāl by a grain. By grain, I mean a grain of barley. The coin has inscriptions written circularly and there is also a small rub’ (quarter dīnār). These two coins circulate by number. The dirham is the same as well. There is also a half-dirham called a qārāṭ, as well as a quarter, an eighth, and a sixteenth known as a kharnūba. All of these also circulate by number and their use does not bring about any drop in price in transaction settlements. The sanja of the Maghrībis is made from stamped glass in the same way that we described the raṭls. The raṭls of the city of Tūnis are twelve ṣugīyas (ounces). One waqīya is twelve dirhams.

There are also many amazing things in this region. From them is the Abū Qalamūn, an animal that scrapes itself against rocks on the coast which causes its
fur to come off on the rock. The fur of these animals is as soft as silk and its color is golden. Not a single hair of it is left by the Maghribis and it is truly a wondrous creation. They gather these furs and weave cloth from it that changes several colors throughout the day. The ruler forbade that this material be exported to other places except for what is hidden from them. Sometimes the price of this cloth might even reach up to ten thousand dīnārs.\(^43\)

This passage gives a glimpse of the world of trade in which Jūdhar thrived. Muqaddasī’s description of Maghribi trade allows us to see all the different types of commodities which made their way across trade routes ranging from textiles, furs, natural resources, fruits, and nuts. He pays particular attention to the Fatimid marketplace weights and the worth of Fatimid gold coinage.

**The Importance of Quality Gold Coinage**

Gold was one of the most important commodities that the Fatimids were able to accumulate in Ifrīqiya via the trans-Saharan trade routes. The numismatic evidence of both Aghlabid and Fatimid North African and Egyptian dīnār coinage shows that it maintained a high standard of weight and purity of gold. Because of the pre-established land trade routes between Ifrīqiya and the sub-saharan region of Africa, the Fatimids maintained a continuous supply of gold which helped them regulate a superior quality for their gold coinage. The extent of the Fatimids acquisition of wealth through gold is demonstrated in the narrative of the conquest of Cairo provided by al-Maqrīzī. When the Fatimid caliph al-Mu’izz marched from Ifrīqiya to his newly conquered capital of Cairo a few years after its conquest, his journey was a spectacular event. When leaving Ifrīqiya to make the 1,700 mile trek, he loaded the palace treasures on the backs of 2,000 Zanāta camels which had been gifted to him. He also had Fatimid gold dīnārs

from the treasuries melted and molded into millstones with holes in their center so they could be tied and hung over the backs of the camels. As this splendid camel train made its way to Egypt, spectators stood on the streets to observe the ostentatious display of wealth and power. Three years before al-Mu’izz’s journey, when the Fatimid general Jawhar conquered Cairo for the caliph, he arrived in the city crossing the Nile in a procession with 1,500 chests of gold dīnārs, ceremonial swords, and wearing garments embroidered in gold.

These examples of the Fatimids’ ostentatious exhibition of wealth, gold, and coinage as part of their conquest narrative, clearly demonstrate that coinage was a signifier of their stately prosperity. In the case of the Fatimid conquest of Egypt in 969, the showcase of wealth and gold dīnārs sent an intentional message of economic dominance. Prior to their arrival, Egypt had fallen into a dilapidated state because of flooding of the Nile, external threats, famine, and an earthquake during the final years of Ikhshidid rule and the death of the dynasty’s eunuch ruler Kāfūr in 968. Therefore, the Fatimids were entering a zone of economical chaos with an inflated currency circulating the market. When Jawhar entered the city he offered the officials of Fustāt, the capital of Egypt at the time, a capitulation document, historically known as The Amān (The Manifesto of Safe Passage). The manifesto served to explain the reasons legitimizing the Fatimids campaign against Egypt while hinting at the Byzantine ‘tyrant’ emperor’s threat to the eastern lands of Islam and including a series of promises to the local populace under Fatimid


rule. It also promised the Muslims throughout the Islamic world safe passage on the route to the Hajj. Among the other promises, the Amān specifically states that al-Mu‘izz will,

….renew the coinage and adjust it to be of the same standard as the blessed ṭirāz dinārs.\textsuperscript{46} He will eliminate their metal impurities. These are the three characteristics that must be addressed by a Muslim ruler. He must exert all his time and effort in their achievement.\textsuperscript{47}

Thus, Jawhar’s manifesto provides a key understanding for medieval Islamic political thought in relation to the legitimacy of rule and the market value of currency. In the medieval Islamic world, among the many symbols signifying kingship were, control of the mint, the appearance of a ruler’s name and titles on coins and the ṭirāz textiles, and the articulation of his name in the Friday khitba (sermons).\textsuperscript{48} Therefore, when the Fatimids first arrived in Egypt they came prepared. As mentioned above, Jawhar had 1,200 chests of gold and coins which were ready to supply the market place. Upon assuming power of the local government, Jawhar established a new Dār al-Ḍarb or mint in Cairo. When Jawhar left Ifrīqiya for the conquest he had already brought dies for striking the Manṣūrī dinār prototype in al-Mu‘izz’s name in order to replace the debased Ikhshidid ones. These coins were deliberately designed to look different from contemporary Abbasid types.

Al-Maqrīzī reports that Jawhar established a mint which produced “red coinage.”\textsuperscript{49} The description of coins in Arabic sources by color designates the purity of the content of the coins. The “red coins” indicate the Fatimids’ solid gold dinār, a standard quality which did not falter

\textsuperscript{46} The manṣūrī dinār was the Fatimid prototype of coinage which was minted in Ifrīqiya under the third caliph al-Manṣūr.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, 70.


\textsuperscript{49} Jiwa, \textit{Towards a Shi‘i Mediterranean Empire}, 82.
throughout the entirety of their reign. On the other hand, the medieval Mamluk chronicler, Ibn Muyassar, reports that Ya’qūb b. Killis, the Jewish vizier who had aided the Fatimid conquest, and ‘Aslūj, the tax collector, ensured that all “white” dīnārs minted in the name of the Abbasid caliph al-Raḍī (d. 940) be outrightly rejected after the conquest of Egypt. The description of “white” undoubtedly indicated the paleness and low quality of the gold used in the Abbasid dīnārs.⁵⁰ The decree of rejection, according to Ibn Muyassar, resulted in the population losing a quarter of a dīnār in the exchange rate from Ikhshīdīd Abbasid coins to the new Fatimid ones.

In the eleventh century, the Fatimids’ gold supply coming from the Maghrib was cut off when their Zirid deputies renounced allegiance to their Fatimid sovereigns. As a result, the caliphs had to look elsewhere to find gold. The tombs of the pharaohs as well as the supplies of gold coming from northern Egypt became a suitable replacement for distant Sijilmāsa.⁵¹ Gold was also acquired from Nubia and perhaps even East Africa.⁵² The previous West African gold reserve channeled through Ifrīqiya before the Zirid succession, along with the new regions of supply, enabled the Fatimids to maintain the renowned quality of their gold dīnār, even during the years of crisis and famine (al-shidda al-‘uzma) between 1061 - 1072. During the span of their reign up until the end of the twelfth century, the reputation for the high value of their coins preceded them to the extent that the crusaders made counterfeit Fatimid dīnārs with low intrinsic quality which flooded the Mediterranean markets. Similarly, the Nizārīs, also challenged Fatimid


authority by minting their own similar coinage in Alamut in northwest Iran. As the Fatimids lost more territory to the crusaders in Syria, the Caliph-Imām Āmir launched an investigation in 1122 to reinstate the loss of prestige that the Fatimid dīnār had incurred as a result of the counterfeit coinage. For the first time, al-Dār al-Āmiriyya consisting of a mint, treasury, and exchange, was established within the imperial city of Cairo to ensure a pure striking of all coinage. Prior to its establishment the Fatimid mint had been located in Fustat, the original location of the first Muslim capital of Egypt. By the time Šalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī (Saladin) (d. 1193) came to Egypt at the end of the twelfth century, the supplies of gold had run out and therefore the Ayyubid successive coinage resulted in a debased standard of gold content.

Another form of prestige of Fatimid coinage came from its visual and symbolic value, which linked it to the Fatimid caliph. Medieval historians have written in detail about the public rituals performed in the Fatimid capital cities throughout the history of their empire. The celebration of the new year was marked by the Imām distributing the first batch of minted coins of the year to his family members, princes, courtiers, and troops. Dīnārs became even more valuable because they were first distributed directly from the hands of the ruler.

The Sīra also demonstrates the symbolic value placed in Fatimid coinage. When Jūdhar was manumitted by the Fatimid caliph al-Manṣūr, the Imām sent him the first thousand struck coins in celebration of the moment. These were the newly minted mansūrī dīnārs, according to the text. In the letter which came with the highly symbolic gift, al-Manṣūr wrote, “no riches are purer than the wealth I am offering here.” These coins were significant for several reasons.

53 Sanders, Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo, 84.

54 Sīra, 1: 22.
These were the first strikes of the new minted coins. In the letter, the Imām states that they had been delivered to his most cherished servant by his own hands. They were not only a gesture of appreciation but also a token of prosperity and \textit{baraka} directly from the Imām. The Imām writes, “No blessing is more worthy for the one to whom we give it with the best of our heart’s intention, because we deem you deserving of kindness and we would not like to consider this an act of over-generosity.”\textsuperscript{55} The Imām had to implore Jūdhar not to return the coins to the treasury since he knew the Ustādh did not like to waste money. Even in this case, al-Manṣūr depicts frugality as a good characteristic of a servant and this notion is repeated continuously as part of the Imām’s acknowledgement of Jūdhar’s character. He is constantly deemed to be a fiscal conservative, a guardian of the state’s wealth, and an ethical figure who was careful to stay clear of allegations of corruption. Hence, this anecdote clearly highlights the juxtaposition of Jūdhar’s economic story: one of a servant who is a good steward of the state’s wealth due to his frugal nature, and at the same time, an individual who acquired great wealth. The contradiction of Jūdhar’s frugality and his accumulation of wealth is clarified by the Fatimid theological stance for acquiring economic capital.

For the Fatimids, the accumulation of wealth was necessary and justified to fulfill their political needs and increase their temporal power and prestige. They understood that economic capital was necessary to further their goals in becoming the supreme leaders of the Islamic world and defeating and conquering their rival Hispano-Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates. Therefore, they took all the steps possible to ensure that the Fatimid state accumulated wealth through trade.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, 1:22.
and commerce. Jūdhar’s own mercantile activities demonstrate that all members of Fatimid society were supposed to play an active part in this endeavor.

**Mediterranean Sea Trade and Fatimid Maritime Power**

Fatimid trade expansion also extended beyond land routes to maritime commerce and trade around the Mediterranean basin. In this respect, Ibn Ḥawqal mentions Ajdābiya, another important inland trading city in Cyrenaica (modern-day Libya) under Fatimid rule in the tenth century. He mentions the tax levied on the town by its Fatimid governor. The Berber nomads had to pay a tax known as the ṣadaqa which was calculated according to how much livestock they possessed. A kharāj tax was collected for arable farmland and crops yielded from them. And sub-saharan caravan traffic arriving from the Sūdan had its own taxes due. In addition to land trade, Ibn Ḥawqal mentions the duty (lawāzim) charged for commercial goods arriving to Ajdābiya from around the Mediterranean and specifically from Rūmī (Italian and/or Byzantine) traders. He also lists this duty in his discussion of Tripoli.56 In his description of Tripoli, the specific item he mentions being imported in 971 by Venetian merchants is timber.57 The increase of the import of timber to the Maghrib was a result of the increase of naval and maritime activity by medieval Islamic governments. Timber was always needed and remained in high demand because of the presence of a naval and commercial sailing fleet which was essential for economic and political prosperity. Since timber was a rare commodity, like gold, it also became one of the most important goods of trade, second only to wheat in the medieval Mediterranean economy.58

57 Ibid, 45 - 46.
The rise in importance of seafaring in medieval Islamic civilization began soon after the expansion of Muslim populations outside the Arabian peninsula in the first century of the *hijra*. This phenomenon was mainly on account of the Muslim world’s acquisition of former Byzantine and Sasanian territories and their port cities. The trade routes of both of these great empires were enjoined by the advent of the expanding Islamic empire when it absorbed more than half of their former territories. Thus, by the mid-eighth century, the Red Sea, the Arabian Peninsula, areas of the Indian Ocean, and the eastern, western, and southern shores of the Mediterranean had now come under the fold of Islamic civilization.\(^59\) Since Islam originated in an interior desert region, where land travel predominated, the religious emphasis in theological writings and jurisprudential sources was minimal in regards to rulings and dealings with provisions for sea travel, seamen duties, shipwrights, and custom regulations for seafaring merchants.\(^60\) In the seventh and eighth centuries local Muslim governments around the Mediterranean and Arabian Peninsula most probably adopted administrative practices of the Byzantines and Sasanians.

Before the ninth century, and prior to Muslim maritime dominance in the medieval Mediterranean, seafaring was primarily in the control of the Byzantine church-state, regional merchants, and those in the middle-entrepreneurial class of society. For example, the patriarch of Alexandria personally maintained the dockyards and commercial fleets, hiring sailors and setting provisions for maritime laws.\(^61\) Furthermore, before the advent of Muslim civilization, the Byzantines had become the supreme masters of maritime military activity in the Mediterranean after Justinian’s conquests of former Roman territories. An indication of their maritime

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\(^{60}\) Ibid, 11.

\(^{61}\) Ibid, 11.
supremacy is the Rhodian Sea Law, a Byzantine maritime code written between the seventh to ninth centuries, which served as a basis for the regulations related to cargo and its legal standings when lost, raided, or destroyed during sea travel. Such legal documents indicate the advancement of the Byzantine Empire in the institution of sea travel and the development of Mediterranean port administration, for which, prior to the ninth century, the Islamic sources are extremely vague.

The origins of Muslim dominance as a Mediterranean maritime power began after the Muslim conquerors established a port in the city of Tunis in Ifrīqiya some time between 698 - 703. Other port settlements in North Africa soon followed suit. These ports became centers for naval raids from where Muslim armies could venture to raid and eventually conquer other islands in the Mediterranean. Alexandria, under Muslim control, also remained an important commercial

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63 According to Aly Mohamed Fahmy, the account of al-Bakrī, in al-Mamālik wa al-Masālik is the most plausible account for the construction of Tunis’s port since there are varying accounts from Muslim historians. Ibn Khaldūn and Maqrīzī both concur and relate al-Bakrī’s account. Fahmy writes, “According to Bakrī, Ḥassan b. al-Nu’mān was entrusted with the building of the arsenal.” He quotes the following tradition from Abū Muhājir: “When the Greeks sent a naval expedition against the defenseless Muslims stationed at Tunis, many were killed or taken captive. Ḥassan therefore sent forty leading Arabs to the Caliph and wrote him a letter describing the calamities which had befallen the Muslims. He, meanwhile, waited at Tunis for an answer. Two followers of the Prophet, Anas b. Mālik and Zayd b. Thābit, who were at the court, informed the Muslims that those stationed at Rādis (Tunis), for one day would surely enter heaven. They advised the Caliph to send help to the luckless city in case of any further attack, and assured him that God would reward him for his action, as Tunis was considered a holy city whose people were blessed. It was in fact a garrison town for the protection of Qayrawān against any assault from Macedonia. The Caliph immediately sent to his brother ‘Abd al-Azīz b. Marwān, governor of Egypt, requesting him to dispatch a thousand Copts (Coptic shipwrights), with their families, and provide for them until they reached Tunis. He also wrote to Ḥassan authorizing him to build an arsenal as an aid to the firm establishment of Muslim power. Berbers in the locality were to be employed for the transport of the timber required for building ships for raiding the Greek coasts. Thus, the safety of Qayrawān would be assured. These orders were carried out; the arsenal was completed and connected with the sea in the harbor of Rādis.” trans. Fahmy, See, Aly Mohamed Fahmy, Muslim Sea-Power In The Eastern Mediterranean: From The Seventh To The Tenth Century A.D., Studies in Naval Organization (London: University of London, 1950), 69 - 70.
center as it had since antiquity and the early Middle Ages. All of these factors contributed to the rise of Islamic sea power.

A seventh-century Byzantine text titled *Pseudo-Methodius Apocalypse* written in northwestern Iraq mentions a naval raid carried out by Muslims on the coastal port-city of Gigthis, an ancient Byzantine settlement located in southern present-day Tunisia, during the Islamic conquest of North Africa. This apocalyptic text anticipated the Muslim rise to Mediterranean maritime dominance in the following passage written in reference to Muslim naval raids:

> When the sons of Ishmael have seized power over every land and wasted cities and their districts and gained dominion in all islands, then they will build ships for themselves in the manner of birds and will fly over the waves of the sea. Then they will go up even to lands of the west as far as Rome the great and Illyricum and Gigthis and Thessalonica and Olbia the great, which is beyond Rome.\(^{64}\)

Ibn Khaldūn offers a similar explanation to the rise of Muslim sea power. He says:

> The royal and governmental authority of the Arabs became firmly established and powerful at that time. The non-Arabs nations became servants of the Arabs and were under control. Every craftsman offered his best services. They employed seagoing and nations for their maritime needs. Their own experience of the sea and of navigation grew, and they turned out to be very expert. They wished to wage the holy war by sea. They constructed ships and galleys and loaded the fleet with men and weapons. They embarked the army and warriors to fight against the unbelievers across the sea. This was the special concern of the provinces and border regions closest to the shores of the Mediterranean, such as Syria, Ifrīqīyyah, the Maghrib, and Spain. The caliph ‘Abd al-Mālik recommended Ḥassan b. al-Nu‘mān, the governor of Ifriqīyyah, that a shipyard be set upon Tunis for the production of maritime implements, as he was desirous of waging the holy war. From there, the conquest of Sicily was achieved.\(^{65}\)


Raiding expeditions continued throughout the Mediterranean on Byzantine territories throughout the eighth century. However, there was no open attempt by the Muslims of North Africa to challenge the Byzantines in outright naval warfare in order to conquer Byzantine territory. They simply did not have the maritime power or natural resources to do so.

Eventually, when Abbasid power in Ifrīqiya became only nominal, and the Aghlabids assumed power around 800, the naval power which had grown in the last century after the establishment of port cities in North Africa would pass into their hands. Thus, in the ninth century, the Aghlabids began to wield more power as a maritime force especially because of their incursions into the islands of Sicily and Crete. Before the conquest of Sicily took place in 827, the island held little importance in the political realms and commercial enterprises of the Islamic world. This notion is evident from the historical data surrounding the island’s conquest. Besides random military raids (ghazawāt) by Muslim armies and marauders on Sicilian coastal cities that continued throughout the seventh to eighth centuries, the political interests of Islamic rulers in Sicily were quite minimal, probably due to their inferiority to Byzantine naval power. However, because of the rise of Aghlabid maritime capabilities, the general North African indifference to Sicilian matters changed drastically.

In 827, after approval from a council comprised of the leaders and jurists of al-Qayrawān, the capital of Ifrīqiyya, and under the orders of Ziyādat Allāh I (d. 838), the Muslims set out to attack Sicily. The military expedition was led by Asad b. al-Furāt and his army consisted of Berbers, Arabs, Andalusians, Persians, religious men, jurists, and tribal leaders. According to al-

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Nuwayrī, Asad’s force included 100 ships, 700 horsemen, and 10,000 soldiers.\(^{67}\) According to Ibn al-Athīr’s account, the Aghlabid forces left from the port of Sūsa on the fifteenth of June 827 and approximately three days later landed at Mazara, the western port of Sicily. Other accounts mention that it was actually the city of Tunis from which they set out. When they reached the island, after a series of skirmishes with Byzantine forces, the army marched on to Syracuse, the military capital of Byzantine Sicily.

The conquest of the island of Sicily was a gradual process that begun in 827 and lasted for several decades with the fall of the last Byzantine stronghold of Taormina in 902. When Asad’s army first arrived, its initial strategy was to march on Syracuse, the Byzantine capital since 660. However, the attack on Syracuse was unsuccessful and ultimately amounted to grave failure causing the Muslim army to retreat and leading to Asad’s death. Eventually the army altered their strategy and attacked Palermo instead of Syracuse. Asad’s soldiers surrounded Palermo in 830 and conquered it in 831, nearly four years after the initial invasion.

Soon after the acquisition of Palermo, the Aghlabids made the classical port-city of Palermo into their base of operations in order to conquer the rest of the island. However, their naval military activity and maritime prowess originating from the port of Palermo gradually increased. For example, conquests outside the Val di Mazara that required naval forces, such as Messina in 842-843, were only accomplished with the help of naval forces from Naples.\(^{68}\) An attack on Cefalù occurred in 838. However, it was unsuccessful because the city was continuously aided by reinforcements from Byzantine fleets. Despite its close proximity to

\(^{67}\) al-Nuwayrī, “Nihāyat al-‘Arab” in *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula*, ed. Michele Amari, (Lipsia: Presso F.A. Brockhaus, 1857), 428

Palermo, it took the Aghlabids nearly twenty years to conquer it after their first expedition. 69

These series of unsuccessful conquests seems to be indicative of the inferior naval force of the
Sicilian Muslims in comparison to that of their Byzantine enemies.

However, this is not to say that the port of Palermo did not become a center for raiding
expeditions. The strategic location of the port enabled the Muslim armies to embark on a series
of naval raids on coastal cities around the Tyrrhenian and Adriatic regions. Aghlabid naval raids
continued to occur on the mainland of Calabria throughout the ninth century. The Muslim armies
even raided Rome in August of 846. They also established an Emirate in Bari which lasted
between 847 - 871. It seems that initially the Aghlabid navy at Palermo continued to launch
successful raids in order to procure an influx of cash rather than a means to seek territorial
expansion.

After the 870s there was a drastic shift in Aghlabid naval success. Malta, which had been
raided since the mid-830s was conquered in 870. In May 878, Syracuse, the Byzantine-Sicilian
capital was conquered due to a successful naval blockade which began nine months earlier. All of
these successes are indicative of a growing mastery of maritime power. It should also be noted
that during this time period the Aghlabids were also fortifying and rebuilding their coastal ribāṭs
with fortress installations spaced out every ten - twenty miles from Ifrīqiya all the way to
Alexandria. 70

The frequency of marauding expeditions during the ninth century from North African
ports and the newly conquered Mediterranean islands including Sicily did not diminish trade in

69 Ibid, 14.

70 Lev, “A Mediterranean Encounter: The Fatimids And Europe, Tenth to Twelfth Centuries,” 139.
the region, but on the contrary, enhanced it. All types of commodities and goods were shipped across the Mediterranean at this time. According to Michael McCormick, during this period the Neapolitans made alliances with the Arabs and allowed them to have safe anchorage at Naples. Christian slaves were sold to the Arabs by Neapolitan merchants. The slave trade of Christians by Christians to Muslim merchants from Naples and Sardinia continued despite a strong papal admonition against the practice continued throughout the ninth century.\textsuperscript{71} The slave trade industry was one among many industries that contributes to the increase of Mediterranean commercial activity.

In 909, the Fatimids inherited the Aghlabid maritime infrastructure, navies, and ports. Fatimid military and commercial maritime power was an inheritance, but they constantly were increasing its potential. At first they were not very successful at commanding their naval fleets. They suffered naval defeats in Tripoli in the year 912-13 trying to quash a local rebellion. Al-Mahdi’s fleet of fifteen vessels was destroyed by Tripoli’s navy. Soon after, Ibn Qurhub, a rebelling member of the elite society of Sicily, also led a fleet from Palermo to Lamṭa, an important harbor in antiquity located on the coast of Ibrīqiya. He burned the Fatimid fleet which was anchored there. Eventually, however, the Fatimids were able to defeat Ibn Qurhub in a naval battle and from that time onwards, they were able to establish their authority and rule once again in Palermo. The Fatimids’ rise in naval power followed. After these dates their offensive against the Byzantines and Abbasids increased in the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{72}


Successful naval attacks on the Byzantines occurred around Sicily in the Italian mainland following Ibn Qurhub’s defeat. In 918, the Fatimids successfully attacked and conquered Reggio di Calabria. Between 918-920, al-Qā’im led several campaigns to conquer Abbasid-controlled Egypt via a naval force. Between 922-923 the Fatimids conquered the fortress of Sant’ Agata near Reggio with a fleet of twenty ships. In 924 they attacked Taranto, and in 928, a ṣaqlabī eunuch naval commander named Ṣābir led a naval fleet of thirty ships from al-Mahdiyya to attack Calabria. These naval incursions would force the Byzantines to enter into an armistice with the Fatimids in the following decade which would be observed for many years.

The maritime naval success of the Fatimids in the Mediterranean, and especially those against the Byzantines, was largely on account of military expeditions originating directly from Palermo. These successful battles appear largely contingent on the security of the ruling authority in the Sicilian capital. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the Fatimids would have been keen on developing their harbor and port in Palermo. It is more likely to assume that a bulk of the ships of the Fatimid navy were constructed in Sicily from Sicilian timber.

In the year 938, after a bloody dispute took place between the citizens of Palermo and Agrigento, the Fatimids sent Khalīl b. Ishāq as the new local ruler of the Island to handle the situation. A result of the strife was the construction of a fortified administrative city at the southeastern end of the walled city of Palermo, located in the modern-day Kalsa district. The Fatimid administrative city was named al-Khāliṣa (The Pure) and was an independent military harbor for the Fatimid fleets. It was built from the ruins of Palermo, most probably the Aghlabid palace, according to the account of Ibn al-Athīr. However, rather than view the construction of

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73 Metcalfe, 51-52.
al-Khāliṣa as directly related to a single event of internal strife, it seems more plausible that this administrative center was part of a larger Fatimid aspiration to ensure military and commercial superiority in the Mediterranean.

The military and naval significance of Palermo’s port under the Fatimids cannot be understated since the presence of this external military and naval force, separate from the mainland of Ifriqiyya, historically resulted in the preservation of the Fatimid state. When the Fatimids suffered great losses, both political and territorial, during the revolt of Abū Yazīd (al-Dajjāl), occurring between the years 943-947, the Fatimid state was literally reduced to the walls of the capital in al-Mahdiyya. When Abū Yazīd laid siege and surrounded the Fatimid capital for eight months beginning in January of 945, the Fatimids had no means to break the siege and could not obtain rations or supplies via land routes. Therefore, at this time, the naval force of the Fatimids ensured their survival, and ships regularly supplied the city from Tripoli and Sicily.74 Therefore, the building of a stronger administrative center and naval harbor in Palermo strengthened the Fatimid’s power both in Ifriqiyya and as a rising power in the Mediterranean.

The main achievement of the Fatimids in terms of naval power can be measured by their successful campaign against the Byzantines in northeastern Sicily. The northeastern part of the island was always in constant struggle to align itself with the Byzantines since it was closer to mainland Italy than Palermo. This region of Sicily still maintained a significant Christian population. The Fatimids succeeded in finally gaining control over the entire island after they conquered Taormina in 962 after a nine-month siege. It fell to the Kalbid amīr, Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Kalbī, who was close to Jūdhar. In 962, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAmmar al-Kalbī was able to

conquer Rometta. These events led the Byzantine emperor, Nikephorus II Phokas, to send a naval fleet led by Niketas Abalantes and the emperor’s own nephew Manuel Phokas. The Kalbids led a successful naval attack against the Byzantine fleet which took place in the Straits of Messina between mainland Italy and Sicily. Most of the Byzantine fleet was destroyed, especially on account of Fatimid sailors diving into the sea and setting fire to the Byzantine fleet with Greek fire.

The Importance of Timber in the Tenth-century Mediterranean Economy

The rise of maritime activity led to the growth of the timber trade since large amounts of timber were required by Mediterranean societies for the building of naval and commercial fleets. The fourteenth-century historian and philosopher Ibn Khaldūn expresses the importance which timber held in the economy and urban development of the medieval Islamic world. In his historical magnum opus, *The Muqaddima*, he wrote about the industry of carpentry:

> This industry (carpentry) is considered very necessary for civilization. Its primary natural resource is timber and that is because God has placed benefits in each and every natural creation in order for man to fulfill his needs. From these creations are trees, and trees have so many benefits that they cannot fully be perceived by anyone. One of the benefits of trees is that when they become dry their wood can be resourced. The primary benefit of timber is for the purpose of firewood for use in daily life and columns for structural support and protective outer coverings. Besides these two purposes, other needs are fulfilled. [Wood is made] into support beams to avoid structural shifting from the load bearing weight in construction. Other benefits are those specific to bedouins and those specific to urban dwellers. Bedouins use wood for pillars, pegs for their tents, camel litters for their women, and lances, bows, and arrows for their weapons. Urban dwellers use wood for the roofs of their homes, locks for their doors, and chairs for their seating. So every one of these things is made from wood and it cannot be transformed into its crafted form without the profession of carpentry.\(^\text{75}\)

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In addition to the many uses above named by Ibn Khaldūn, he goes on to show that wood was necessary for the construction of ships.

The maritime needs for timber competed with the rise of the medieval Islamic city and widespread urbanization. Both of these advancements also greatly contributed to the high consumption of wood. Construction projects, although using locally sourced material such as clay, stone, or brick, no doubt required wood in the building process. The numerous palaces, mosques, homes, public buildings, as well as civil engineering projects such as aqueducts and hydraulic water wheels, to name a few, all required large amounts of wood for construction. Fuel was another main source of timber consumption. Fire was one of the main energy sources in the Middle Ages for which wood was required. Furthermore, as Ibn Khaldun mentioned above, the roofs of buildings, although ornate and decorative, as well as ships also required large pieces of timber.

The necessity to build maritime fleets for the navy and for the expansion of trade required the largest supply of timber. With the widespread use of the triangular lateen sail by Muslim sailors in the Mediterranean, a technology widely employed in the region since its inception by the Romans in antiquity, very tall pieces of timber were required in order to build solid masts and yards for ships. This demand meant that trees which were left to grow for several decades and reach the required height to create the mast for these ships were needed. Furthermore, as nautical engineering improved, wood craftsmen required larger pieces of timber as well to carve certain curved patterns in them to ensure the hull of the ship could accelerate well through water. Taller trees were certainly a rare commodity which in turn increased the demand for timber. The
demand for timber was met with two distinct challenges. The first was environmental and the second was political.

**Environmental and Political Factors Affecting the Timber Trade**

Although, al-Mu'izz clearly took part in the green revolution in his planting of greenery and trees throughout Ifrīqiya, there was one problem he could not solve: the irreversible aftereffects of deforestation in the Mediterranean basin which had taken place during classical antiquity. Shipbuilding remained the main industry requiring wood for nearly two millennia. Forests, once cut down, take a lot of time to replenish themselves. When and if they do, it is done with much difficulty. If there is no deliberate attempt or state policy to replant trees, depleted forestland might only be replaced by shrubs or smaller pines. If depleted, forestland eventually became grazing pastures. As a result, the entire topography of an area changed and trees ultimately became non-existent in certain regions.

According to the research presented by Marius Lombard, the deforestation which occurred in classical antiquity around the Mediterranean basin left the majority of the entire Dār al-Islām without significant forestland. According to his economical theory, the absence of the supply of this very necessary natural resource ultimately led to economic decline in the Middle East. This was by and large the case for the medieval Mediterranean basin, and especially North African forestlands. The Islamic Maghrib region was far more depleted than the eastern Islamic world. When the Muslim armies arrived in the Maghrib in the seventh century, the region

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already had depleted forestlands due to deforestation in Classical Antiquity. Timber was a scarce resource.

By the time the Fatimids arrived, Ifrīqiya had no significant supply of timber, especially of the caliber needed for shipbuilding. The Fatimids, as a growing Mediterranean power, had no choice but to find a ready timber supply for their urban developments and maritime purposes. Therefore, they had to look elsewhere. In the tenth century, timber was supplied to the medieval Islamic world from five major geographical regions: 1) the southern shores of Caspian Sea located at the eastward side of the Pontic forest; 2) the forests of northern Syria located at the edge of the Anatolian plateau 3) the northeastern region of Sicily; 4) the far Maghrib (the Rīf region of Morocco); 5) and Eastern Spain.⁷⁸

This dire environmental situation causing a lack of the natural resource of timber was coupled with political difficulties as well. According to Lombard, Fatimid Ifrīqiya originally imported wood mainly from Spain and the Rīf region of Morocco. At times, they also imported timber from the Adriatic region consisting of the Apennine, Dalmatian, and Istrian forests. The Idrīsīds, who ruled the northern areas of Morocco between 788 and 974 controlled the Rīf region. When the Fatimids sought to extend their political control to the far Maghrib in 917 during al-Mahdī’s reign, they entered into conflict with ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III (d. 961), the Umayyad ruler of al-Andalus who was also attempting to extend his rule across the straits of Gibraltar in the Maghrib. During this decades-long struggle to control the region, the Idrīsīd leader from the Banū Kanūn, al-Qāsim Kanūn b. Ibrāhīm (d. 948), who ruled the Rīf region of northern Morocco, had remained a loyal deputy of the Fatimids between 934 until his death in

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948. After his death, the Umayyads tried to reestablish their control over the region and they were successful. At that time, al-Qāsim’s successor, Abū al-‘Aysh Aḥmad ibn al-Qāsim Kanūn, recognized Umayyad sovereignty over the Fatimids.

During the decade of the 950s and after the Umayyads had regained control over the forestlands of the Rīf of northern Morocco, they used the timber produced there as the main supply for their naval fleet in Almeria (al-Mariyya). This port city had been built by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III in 955 as a counter measure to the increasing Fatimid maritime presence in the Mediterranean. It was the main arsenal and the location where their fleets were assembled and dispatched. The building of the arsenal in Almeria marks the point in the tenth century where Fatimid and Umayyad naval conflict was at its height.

In the Majālis, al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān mentions an event that took place at this port which changed the political environment drastically between the Fatimids and the Hispano-Umayyads. When an Umayyad ship coming from the east collided with a Fatimid vessel coming from Sicily in 955, the Umayyad ship boarded the Fatimid vessel and took all the timber it was carrying along with other commodities and property. Al-Mu’īzz was outraged upon hearing this and in response ordered a naval attack against Almeria. The Fatimid fleet attacked the port, burned down all the ships and the arsenal, and destroyed the timber supply which was present in the arsenal. This event, although a clear victory for the Fatimids, no doubt affected their political ability to procure timber from the far Maghrib’s Rīf region and al-Andalus.\(^{79}\)

As mentioned above, wood also arrived in Ifrīqiya via trade routes of merchants originating from the ports of Venice or Amalfi. Although these trade routes were well

\(^{79}\) al-Nu’mān, \textit{al-Majālis}, 165.
established, timber was not readily available for trade due to political conflict with Byzantium. In 961 the Byzantines had retaken Crete, and the Muslims of the island came to Ifrīqiya several times requesting al-Mu‘izz to intervene and retake it. At the time, the Fatimids were in an armistice with the Byzantine emperor in which they had agreed not to attack southern Italy. In return, the Byzantines would pay an annual tribute to al-Mu‘izz. Since timber was primarily used to build naval fleets, it is clear that the Byzantines would be opposed to trading timber with the Fatimids. They took measures to prevent their natural resource of wood from reaching the shores of Ifrīqiya. For instance, due to pressure from Emperor John I Tzimiskes, who ruled the Byzantine Empire between 969 - 976, the doge of Venice forbade Venetian merchants to supply the Fatimids with timber. This prohibition became so severe that in 971, when Byzantine officials discovered that some Venetian merchant ships anchored at Constantinople were subsequently bound for al-Mahdiyya and were carrying large and long pieces of timber, they reacted fiercely by ordering these ships to be burned.80

As a result of the historical and geo-political events mentioned above, I argue that the Fatimids became extremely reliant on Sicilian timber to further their political goals and maritime prowess in the Mediterranean. Historical sources point out that the Fatimid attempt to establish control over the northeastern part of the island also increased in the decades of the 950s and 960s. Letters exchanged between al-Mu‘izz (r. 953 - 975) and Jūdhar during this period reflect these factors. Their communications were often centered on the discussion of timber and the various circumstances which arose in regard to its supply for shipbuilding. The Sīra indicates

that it was during this period that Jūdhar had become personally involved in maritime commerce and specifically in the timber trade.

The scarcity of timber, coupled with the political ambitions of Mediterranean political powers, made it one of the most valuable and important commodities of trade. The demand for timber was second only to the trade of wheat. Because of its value due to increased demand, timber was often exchanged directly for gold. Thomas Glick affirms this idea when he writes that timber constituted the “tyranny of trade routes.” He meant that timber “governed” or determined trade patterns and routes because of its high demand. This meant that ships which originated with timber from one location would return from their market destinations with a “less valuable” commodity. Therefore, many of the trade routes were formed upon the original and final destinations of wheat and timber commerce. Simply put, the timber was probably the most lucrative business of the time, as most natural resource enterprises used in defense and energy usually are.

The Ustādh owned a large fleet of ships through which he was able to engage in commerce and the transport of goods on a regular basis. The several accounts cited in the Sīra in this regard indicate that the majority of the Ustādh’s maritime commercial transactions and activity occurred between Sicily and Ifrīqiya. Keeping this fact in mind, Jūdhar’s life story becomes an important link to further understanding the Fatimids’ political and economic role in Sicily.

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81 Glick, 107.
The Strategic and Commercial Importance of Sicily for the Fatimids

Sicily and Palermo played an important role as they possessed a primary position on the trunk routes of the Mediterranean. John Pryor writes:

The period marks the high point of the offensive at sea of various Muslim powers, such as the Abbasid Caliphate, the Umayyads of Cordova, the Aghlabids of Tunisia and Sicily, the Fatimids of North Africa and Sicily, and various corsair emirs of the Balearics, Crete, and other islands. In this period the areas of operations of Muslim fleets and corsairs were within easy striking distance from their advance bases on the various islands and on the northern mainland. When Ibn Khaldūn referred to Muslim control of the seas in this period, what he really meant, whether he realized it or not, was that Muslim territorial gains along the trunk routes had given Muslim shipping a freedom to move virtually wherever it liked in the Mediterranean and had denied the same freedom to Christian shipping.\(^{82}\)

Since timber could only arrive by sea, merchants who had ships equipped to carry large amounts of cargo could make a considerable amount of money in this economical milieu. Commercial and military maritime travel were dangerous and expensive endeavors in the medieval Islamic world. The length of a journey was the hardest factor to endure during sea travel. Journey times were unpredictable and contingent upon wind, currents, and the weather. Furthermore, instead of traveling on a straight linear or direct route to the destination, ships often traveled employing cabotage, or short distances from port to port loading and unloading cargo as they proceeded to the final stop.

Evidence for these frequent stops in the Middle Ages can be seen from an itinerary present on a schematic map of al-Mahdiyya from the Bodleian Library’s *Kitāb Gharāʾib al-

Funūn wa Malāh al-‘Uyūn. Folio 34a of the Bodleian Gharāʾib features a schematic map of the Fatimid city of al-Mahdiyya with a complete itinerary of the route between the city and Palermo (fig. 12). This itinerary indicates that a ship departing from al-Mahdiyya to Sicily would travel through twenty ports before reaching Palermo. The text reads:

- From al-Mahdiyyah to Broul? (either Monastir or Qaru’in) is 30 miles.
- Then to Sūsa (Sousse) - 15 miles.
- Then to (illegible) - 16 miles
- Then to Harqliyya - 12 miles
- Then to al-Harqūn (al-Madfūn) - 16 miles
- Then to al-Marṣad - 16 miles
- Then to al-Manara- 12 miles
- Then to Tawsīhān - 12 miles
- Then to Qasarna (Qurba) - 10 miles
- Then to Qaṣr Saʾīd - 17 miles
- Then to Qaṣr Lubna - 6 miles
- Then to Qaṣr Nawrīq (Qaṣr Abī Marzūq) - 12 miles
- Then to Kēlibiya - 6 miles
- Then to Jazīra Qawsara (Pantelleria) - 60 miles
- Then to Wādī Māzar (Fiume Mázar) - 80 miles
- Then to Raʾs al-Nubuwwa (Capo Boeo) - 18 miles
- Then to Jazīra al-Rāhiba (Isola di Favignana) - 6 miles
- Then to Aṭrānīsh (Trapani) - 12 miles
- Then to Sanṭ Bīṭ (San Vito Lo Capo) - 18 miles
- Then to Madīna Marya - 40 miles
- Then to Şiqillīyya (Palermo) - 24 miles

The entire journey measured 432 miles, even though there are some discrepancies in the measurement of distances between the calculations of the anonymous author of the Bodleian Gharāʾib and the twelfth-century Sicilian and Norman geographer, al-Idrīsī. The direct route to Sicily from Tunisia is only around 200 miles. The itinerary provided by the Bodleian Gharāʾib demonstrates that ships traveled along well tread routes which which were not linear but

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83 For detailed information on the manuscript with images and commentary see Emilie Savage-Smith and Yossef Rapoport (eds.), The Book of Curiosities: A critical edition. World-Wide-Web publication. (www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/bookofcuriosities) (June 2012). Also see Evelyn Edson and Emilie Savage-Smith, Medieval Views of the Cosmos (Oxford: Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, 2004).
remained close to coastlines. By making additional stops at trading port cities, the distance increased as did the length and time of the journey. In analyzing the letters of Jewish merchants in the Geniza documents, Abraham Udovitch estimates the duration of the travel for ships journeying between various sea ports around the Mediterranean.\(^{84}\) For example, a letter dating to August in the 1050’s demonstrates that three separate ships reached Alexandria from al-Mahdiyya via Palermo in forty-one days.\(^{85}\) In Udovitch’s words, “distance was the first enemy” and a “permanent antagonist” for those at sea, and definitely a factor that travelers had to keep in mind. In light of these facts, timber’s price increased exponentially in the market since distance and time meant that fewer other commodities could be loaded on ships until the larger pieces of timber had reached their final destination.

The “enemy of distance” problem proposed by Udovitch is exemplified in a conversation between Judhhar and al-Mu'izz, recorded by al-Manṣūr al-Kātib in the Sīra. Judhhar regularly imported goods and merchandise from Sicily to Ifrīqiya. The strife of distance coupled with the political constraints of trade routes which affected mercantile activity is evident from a correspondence between al-Mu'izz and Judhhar.\(^{86}\) When the Imām learns that Judhhar’s ship coming from Sicily perished at sea with all its cargo and merchandise, he wrote a note to the Ustādh condoling him on his loss. In the letter, al-Mu'izz happens to also hint at his political ambitions and says, “May God keep you well until you see the day in which we accomplish our


\(^{85}\) Ibid, 510. Udovitch has created a table based on data from the Genizah documents calculating approximate travel speed according to the amount of days travel took on ships mentioned in the letters.

\(^{86}\) *Sīra*, 2:77.
ambitions, both religious and material (*dīna wa dunyan*). May you witness [the day] that we conquer the domains of the tyrants … so that you may perform the *Hajj* and visit the tomb of our grandfather Muḥammad, and complete your *Hajj*, exoterically and esoterically.” The Fatimids’ ambition to expand eastward was in line with their policy to control and maintain several travel and trade routes. As is indicated in the *Amān* document of Jawhar mentioned in the last chapter, al-Mu‘izz reiterates in his letter to Jūdhar the caliph’s obligation to creating a safe passage to the annual *Hajj* and to the *Ḥijāz* with the ultimate goal of being able to reclaim the lands of his ancestor, the Prophet. The reasoning behind this inclusion of the Imām’s ambition with the news of Jūdhar’s loss of ships hints at the political obstacles which hindered maritime trading routes.

The dangers of sea travel were probably the highest financial risk factor for merchants engaged in Mediterranean trade. This fact is made clear when, in another instance, Jūdhar wrote a note to al-Mu‘izz informing him that an additional trading ship of the Ustādh had perished at sea. Jūdhar informed al-Mu‘izz that he could not find another ship for purchase at the moment to replace his sunken one. He reluctantly requested a favor from the Imām: to borrow one of the two new Byzantine-made ships which had been recently purchased by the caliph. Jūdhar needed a ship immediately so that he could continue the movement of his merchandise to the eastern Islamic world. Although the Fatimids had arsenals in al-Mahdiyya, Sūsa, and Palermo, this letter indicates that at times, they still bought ships from foreign Mediterranean powers. The absence of a ready timber supply could explain why Al-Mu‘izz needed to purchase Byzantine-made

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88 *Sīra*, 2:67.
ships and why Jūdhar could not find an immediate replacement for his lost ship. Al-Mu’izz’s reply to Jūdhar demonstrates the respect and financial power the Ustādh possessed. He wrote:

Jūdhar, may God protect you. We do not consider our wealth as separate from yours. God has bestowed upon you our happiness and the pure affections of our heart. [Our love for you is so great] that if we thought that your wealth was only what you possessed in your two hands from our good graces, we would want to give you double of that as we have done for others who are far less deserving than you. We know that your wealth is much more than theirs and your social standing far outweighs theirs because of what God has given you because of our satisfaction with you which will fulfill for you all the bounties of the afterlife (al-ākhira). You may choose whichever ships you desire. May God bless you in his service and make his baraka known to you. The petition you made shall be answered. I swear by God that all you desire has been obtained by you on account of your religious (dīn) and worldly affairs (dunyā) and from what has been provided for you by God through us. Trust in God, thank him, he shall increase his grace and generosity. We will hasten the fulfillment of your petition, God willing.  

In the Fatimid world, the Ustādh’s economic success was seen as being naturally hand in hand with his acquisition of the Imām’s favor and grace. Additionally, as mentioned above, the acquisition of material wealth was deeply tied to the notion of the afterlife (al-ākhira).

The Imām’s generosity towards Jūdhar was not without reciprocation. As was pointed out in this chapter, abstract socio-cultural forms of capital such as the caliph’s grace, favor, and respect, as defined by the Fatimid habitus, could be exchanged in return for material wealth. Jūdhar seems to have done his fair share of these types of transactions. It is evident in the correspondence mentioned above that the shortage of timber was a bitter reality faced by the Fatimids towards the end of the tenth century while they were in still the Maghrib. The timber shortage provided Jūdhar with a means to gain both of these types of capital.

89 Sīra, 2:67, 148.
When the supply of timber became an obstacle for ship production in Ifrīqiya, Jūdhar often volunteered his own supply to serve the state. One occasion, al-Mu‘izz began the construction of a fleet of warships at the arsenal in al-Mahdiyya. During the construction the Ustādh learned that the arsenal did not have the appropriate pieces of timber to build some of the masts and yards of the ships, which had to be made of one single piece of timber which came from a tall tree. Such trees only grew in places having sufficient rainfall and high altitudes. Timber for masts could only be imported to Ifrīqiya since no forests with trees tall enough to build masts for warships existed in the region. Jūdhar had his own warehouse in which he stored the timber he imported and sold locally. From his warehouse, he offered the Imām timber suitable for the construction of the masts and yards in service of the state. Al-Mu‘izz thanked Jūdhar, but told him that Nuṣayr, the ṣaqlabī servant in charge of al-Mahdiyya’s arsenal, would procure and purchase the timber necessary as not to impede on the Ustādh’s personal supply and business.90

At times, when Nuṣayr could not procure the necessary timber, Jūdhar’s offer was readily welcomed by al-Mu‘izz. On another occasion, when the Ustādh’s supply of raw timber arrived from Sicily, he learned that the arsenal was short once again in its timber inventory. This time when Jūdhar offered his supply to the Imām, the Imām accepted it and prayed for Jūdhar’s wellbeing and prosperity. He instructed the Ustādh to inform Nuṣayr to accept the timber in the arsenal and to record its receipt. It is clear from these letters that the bulk of Jūdhar’s maritime commercial activity included the import of goods from Sicily and their export to the local markets of Ifrīqiya and abroad to the eastern Islamic world.

90 Sīra, 2:52.
In this respect, his close personal ties with the Kalbids of Sicily, and the fact that Sicily remained the last region in which the Fatimids could receive a direct supply of timber, carried the utmost importance. Jūdhar became a middle man between al-Manṣūriyya and Palermo because of his link to both courts and governing families. This role is evident from a letter he wrote to Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī, the governor of Sicily and whose connections to the Ustādh were well-known. In the letter, Jūdhar discussed a shipment of his cargo and merchandise arriving to Ifrīqiya from Sicily. He requested al-Ḥasan al-Kalbī that if there was money left to pay from the Ustādh’s account for the cargo being brought on his ship from Palermo to Ifrīqiya, then it should be paid from al-Muʿizz’s treasury. The Ustādh asked al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī to inform him how much the borrowed amount was so he could deposit it in the treasury in al-Manṣūriyya. Al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī let Jūdhar know that he was short by one hundred dinārs and that he had paid it to the agent designated by the Ustādh to export and import his merchandise. He also mentioned that if there was payment left for the cargo being put on his ship, that he send a request to the Imām to have it fulfilled from the treasury in al-Manṣūriyya. Jūdhar informed al-Muʿizz of this transaction which occurred in Palermo and assured the Caliph-Imām that he would repay the amount to the master of the treasury in al-Manṣūriyya. In his reply, the Imām tells the Ustādh, “Jūdhar, may God protect you. Your wealth is our wealth. And our wealth is your wealth. By God, you are more circumspect of our wealth than we are ourselves.” Here again, Jūdhar is depicted as the prudent guardian of the state’s wealth.

Jūdhar was able to take full advantage of the same relationship with the Kalbids to have an active role in the political situations surrounding the timber trade. In a correspondence

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91 *Sīra*, 2:75.
between himself and al-Mu‘izz, the caliph expressed his concern about the Christian inhabitants residing in the northeastern region of Sicily and their refusal to cut down trees for raw timber supply in the forests located there. This issue was raised when a letter, dating sometime between 962 and 965, reached the Ustādh from Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Kalbī informing him about the ordeal of woodcutting near the fortified settlements in that region belonging to the Fatimids. Aḥmad was the acting Fatimid governor of Sicily at the time. As mentioned above, the area of the island with forests abundant enough to still provide timber for ships was in the northeast. The western region of the island had been the main supplier to Rome for timber in the classical world, but due to deforestation in antiquity, by the time the Muslims arrived on the island there was no more significant forestland left in that part.

In Aḥmad’s letter he informs Jūdhar that Christian woodcutters, namely in Taormina and Rometta, had abandoned their posts and left the areas. This letter attests to the fact that Christian communities of this region were active in the woodcutting profession for some time. After Taormina was conquered in 962 and Rometta in 965, it appears that these communities refused to cut down trees and mill timber. Their actions can be attributed to several factors. They might have felt the responsibility to safeguard their ecosystem and were acting out of environmental consciousness to preserve their livelihood. In other words, they did not want the Fatimids to completely deplete their supply of timber. Muslim armies had been known to cut down a settlement’s trees and orchards if they did not capitulate as punishment. Another possible reason for their refusal to cut the trees was they still were allegiant to the Byzantines over the Fatimids. They were well aware that an embargo on timber would have repercussions in Ifrīqiya since it would have been used primarily to supply the Fatimid naval fleet. In this letter, al-Mu‘izz
instructs Jūdhar to acknowledge Ahmad’s efforts to counter the effects of this embargo and
presses the Sicilian amīr to take the further measures necessary to ensure that their supply of
timber be reinstated.\footnote{\textit{Sīra}, 2:49.}

This correspondence demonstrates the level of Fatimid reliance on Sicilian timber and
how the effects of a lacuna in its supply were so intense that they alarmed the Caliph-Imām in al-
Manṣūriyya. Similarly, the letter demonstrates how the Ustādh was a center point between the
Fatimid ruler and the timber supply from Sicily. Jūdhar’s business acumen, successful trading
practices, and social network enabled him to fulfill this role in the history of the early Fatimid
empire. This chapter highlighted the various notions of wealth within Fatimid society and
culture. It defined the notion of making money and its justification in light of Fatimid theology
and thought. Furthermore, the research presented in this chapter also identified abstract forms of
\textit{capital} which were present within the the Fatimid cultural \textit{habitus} and how this currency could
be exchanged with material wealth.

The chapter also presented some of the ways in which money was made in tenth-century
Ifrīqiya and how the \textit{Sīra} depicts them through the Ustādh’s own life story and his interactions in
the court and beyond. It also sheds light on the geopolitical, religious, cultural, and
environmental circumstances in which the Ustādh was able to amass economic capital. The next
chapter will focus on Jūdhar’s acquisition of cultural capital and the ways in which he played an
active role in the various sources of material culture and the artistic milieu of Fatimid Ifrīqiya.
Chapter 4
Weaves of Authority: Understanding Material Culture Through Textiles in the Narrative of the Sīrat Ustādh Ḫūdhar

Historical accounts indicate that the Fatimid palace and court were the primus locus for artistic production and cultural exhibition throughout the dynasty’s rule. Al-Mu‘izz, for instance, commissioned a world map made of various textiles in 963 which he displayed in the halls of the royal palace of al-Manṣūriyya. The map’s description, provided by the Mamluk historian and topographer al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442), mentions that al-Mu‘izz produced this map five years before his successful conquest of Egypt. He transported it to Cairo where his successors treasured it over the next century. It was stored among the palace treasures until it was looted in 1067.¹

According to al-Maqrīzī’s description of the map, its support fabric was a blue qurqūbī tustarī silk textile embroidered in gold. The map’s geographical details were depicted using a gold and multi-colored woven-silk textile. Al-Maqrīzī writes that al-Mu‘izz’s map included “a cartographic depiction of the climes of the earth, its mountains, oceans, cities, rivers, and travel itineraries - similar to ‘jughrafiya’ (geography).” The map also prominently depicted Mecca and Medina for onlookers and the name of each city, mountain, town, river, ocean, and road was embroidered in gold, silver, or silk. Al-Mu‘izz spent 22,000 dīnārs to commission this map with an embroidered dedication inscription on its borders which read, “This [map] is from what al-Mu‘izz li Dīn Allāh has ordered to be commissioned longing for the Holy Sanctuary of Allāh and

¹ al-Maqrīzī reports that the map came into the possession of Fakhr al-‘Arab Ḥamdān, the brother of the leader of the rebelling Turkish faction of the Fatimid army, Nāṣir al-Dawla Ḥamdān (d. 1073). After his success in taking militarily control of Cairo amidst the rebellion, Nāṣir al-Dawla became the de facto ruler of the city leaving the Fatimid caliph al-Muṣṭansir powerless. See Yaacov Lev, State and Society in Fatimid Egypt (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 44 - 45. Also, both Nāṣir al-Dawla and Fakhr al-‘Arab were successful in merchant activities due to their investments in shipping. See A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza, Vol. I: Economic Foundations, 310.
publicly displaying the landmarks of the Prophet in the year 353 (AH).”

The North African Fatimid map represented how the Fatimids viewed themselves and their rising political power in the tenth-century medieval Islamic, Mediterranean, and African worlds. In no way did they consider themselves isolated within the boundaries of Ifrīqiya. Rather, their political ideologies demonstrate that there existed a clear drive from ruler to ruler to continue their territorial expansion eastward and ultimately become the sole sovereigns of the entire medieval Islamic world. The aim was to remove their Abbasid rivals from power in Baghdad from the onset of their dynasty. However, they also understood that their goal could only become a reality if they became an integral and superior political and economic force within the world systems into which they entered. Therefore, the map’s public display was a deliberate attempt by al-Mu‘izz to convey this political message.

Like the silk textile map, artifacts and other courtly accoutrement effectively conveyed messages of power and prestige to the intended audience. In this manner, the North African Fatimid palatial cities of al-Mahdiyya and later al-Manṣūriyya became regional centers of high culture in the medieval Islamic world. Luxury goods from the region and beyond came to be imported, or at times, manufactured, and were showcased in these royal cities for social, political, diplomatic, and religious purposes. Accordingly, those living within the palace walls were the most acquainted with the material wealth and splendors accumulated by the Fatimids during their rule. As mentioned in the previous two chapters, Jūdhar’s lifelong service for the Fatimid caliphs and his close proximity to the nucleus of power awarded him a fair amount of

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2 The account of this map is reported by al-Maqrīzī in both his Itti‘āz al-Hunafa and Khiṭat with some variation in the details between the two texts. This text above is quoted from Khiṭat. See Al-Maqrīzī, Kitāb Al-Mawā‘iz Wa Al-I’tibār Bi Dhikr Al-Khiṭat Al-Maqrīzīyya, ed. Khalīl Al-Manṣūr, vol. 2 (Lebanon: Dār Al-Kutub Al-‘Ilmiyya, 1998), 305.
social and economic capital. Undoubtedly, it also allowed him to gain a significant amount of cultural capital. Because of his elite position, and in spite of his being a eunuch, his accumulated capital enabled him to contribute to the developing Fatimid cultural world of tenth-century Ifrīqiya. During Jūdhar’s life, the religious, literary, material, visual, performative, and customary aspects of Fatimid culture were taking shape. This emerging dynastic culture, having inherited major elements from other medieval Islamic and Near Eastern cultures, was being cultivated and fine tuned by various actors in the early Fatimid state. This dissertation views Jūdhar as one of those actors in the cultivation, promotion, and export of high quality products.

It should be recalled that scholarship of the medieval Islamic world has considered eunuchs as marginalized individuals despite their explicitly active and major roles within the elite ruling classes. As a result, eunuchs do not emerge as authoritative figures within the historical narrative of material cultural production. Similarly, until recently, their patronage of the arts has been treated in much the same way and has often been overshadowed by historians’ (both medieval and modern) focus on the ruler’s artistic patronage over other members of the court. Glaire Anderson recently has paved the way for research focusing on marginalized patrons, namely women and eunuchs, by discussing several other less known contributors of visual and material culture in the Umayyad court of Cordoba between 756 - 1031. Here, I build on her work by identifying a parallel in the Fatimid Shi‘ī caliphate, which is often imagined as radically different from its Abbasid or Hispano-Umayyad counterparts. This chapter focuses on Jūdhar’s role within the sphere of material culture and particularly his direct patronage of artistic production within the Fatimid court, despite his status as a slave-eunuch.

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I argue here that early Fatimid art and architecture during the Ifrīqiyyan period of the dynasty’s history was not simply an emulation of medieval Islamic visual cultural norms. Although the visual vocabulary and techniques of execution of material culture employed by the early Fatimids might have been similar to that of other contemporary Islamic dynasties, there are several cases where they attributed distinct Fatimid ideologies and meanings to royal traditions and courtly accoutrements.

Interpreting the material culture of tenth-century Ifrīqiya from this perspective differs from Jonathan Bloom’s approach to Fatimid art and architecture. In his recent book entitled, *Arts of the City Victorious: Islamic Art and Architecture in Fatimid North Africa and Egypt*, Bloom argues that the Fatimids never developed a dynastic art or particular style for their material works of art and architecture. He asserts that the art produced in the Fatimid domain (mostly in regards to Fatimid Egypt), was in fact largely commissioned by the caliphs and high officials, but was also produced by anonymous patrons who were among the elite of society. The art of the court according to Bloom, therefore, was similar to that which appeared in the regional markets for consumption in order to accommodate the growing tastes of the bourgeoisie. He further writes:

…there is little evidence that the Fatimids or their contemporaries thought much about styles, in dynastic or any other terms. As they sat in their palaces or paraded around the city in elaborate processions, Fatimid rulers - like contemporary rulers everywhere - probably thought more about the material wealth their art represented rather than about any stylistic or symbolic meaning it might have.

The Ismā‘īlī school of thought of Islam which the Fatimids promulgated was posited on an ontological view of the world that every creation and natural system possessed an inner hidden

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5 Ibid, 7
meaning (bāṭin). However, Bloom argues that the religious members of the Fatimid Da’wa were comparatively small in number and would not have created an artistic vocabulary which the masses could not comprehend. He attributes the lack of availability of paper in the region for the inability of the Fatimids to create a dynastic style because of the difficulty of creating preliminary drawings which could in turn “ensure the consistency of artistic expression from one medium to another.” Bloom sees the Fatimid’s sixty years in Ifrīqiya as a mere platform for their real ambition of moving eastward and eventually overthrowing their Abbasid rivals in Baghdad.

Bloom’s conclusions are plausible because it is accurate to say that conquering Cairo had been on the Fatimids’ military agenda as early as they established their foothold in the region, so it does beg the question of whether or not the early rulers were even interested in expending their vast amount of newly acquired wealth towards developing the region of Ifrīqiya. Although Bloom acknowledges the beginnings of an “imperial ideology” and an original art, he argues that Ifrīqiya lacked the “money, people, and thriving artistic traditions” to successfully create anything more. On the contrary, scholars such as Farhat Dachrouai and Shelomo Dov Goitein see Ifrīqiya as a burgeoning region and the “hub of the Mediterranean” from the ninth to eleventh centuries, especially during the Fatimid reign there.

The previous chapter of this dissertation presented clear evidence of the growing land and

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6 Ibid, 7. Bloom sees no evidence of specific religious meaning behind the art of the Fatimids which directly refected their beliefs as being widely professed through their art because there are no instances where Fatimid ornament was defaced or removed due to its highly Shī‘ī connotative qualities.

7 Ibid, 7. Specifically, Bloom notes that paper readily replaced papyrus when the Fatimids took control of Egypt. Certainly it was not readily available when they were in North Africa.

maritime commercial activity of the Fatimids through a historical analysis of the *Sīra*. This economic growth naturally attests to the increase of wealth in the early Fatimid state, which in turn would foster the increase of material culture in the palatial cities and throughout the region. Yet, despite the fact that economic growth should lead to material prosperity, scholars have very few objects and artifacts existing from that time period to work with in comparison to other regions. Studying the early Fatimid visual arts and the formation of their material culture through Jūdhar’s biography helps us fill some of the gaps about the scholarly problem mentioned above.

In order to study this approach, we must understand the relation between the material culture of his tenth-century world and his Fatimid era *habitus*. The Fatimid palace cities of Ifrīqiya, and the cultural systems and literary works of *adab* and jurisprudence produced in them, became the nuclei through which the *habitus* of members of the early state was formed.

For the reasons stated above, Jūdhar’s *Sīra* is an interesting model to study such behavioral interactions since he belonged to several different socio-cultural microcosms and institutions, and he held various collective identities within the early Fatimid imperial court. Each of these *fields* required the Ustādh to perform and interact in different ways. As mentioned in Chapter One, the *Sīrat Ustādh Jūdhar*, through its genre as a biography of the Ustādh, also served as a didactic manual for other elite servants to emulate its portrayal of the paragon of the most perfect and loyal servant. Therefore, this particular reading of the text serves as a mirror to understand the early Fatimid’s prescribed code of conduct. This code was the cultural foundation which the early members of the newly founded state were trying to build as they transitioned from a military regime to a dynastic state. While explicating Jūdhar’s actions as put forward by the author of the *Sīra*, we can see the nascent Fatimid *habitus* through the prescribed forms of
The Fatimid Material Cultural Milieu of Tenth-Century Ifrīqiya

To understand the Ustādh’s material world it is critical to first approach the narrative of the Fatimids’ historical treatment and ideological stance towards material culture, especially in the early court. This chapter begins with that narrative. When the Fatimids arrived on the scene in North Africa in the tenth century they were a religious minority. Despite their small numbers, they had inherited the local urban landscapes, monuments, and infrastructure of not only their Aghlabid, Abbasid, and Umayyad predecessors but also their Punic, Roman, and Byzantine ones. Ifrīqiya was in no way underdeveloped since it had been populated and made to prosper by previous polities. Despite this fact, western scholars have treated the Islamic art and architecture of the Maghrib as inferior to and derivative of the art and architecture of medieval Iberia, Egypt, and Iraq, thus lacking any monumentality of its own. This prevalent treatment of the material culture of North Africa leads scholars to the notion that when the Fatimids came to Ifrīqiya, they were entering a backwater province of the Islamic world which was underdeveloped. For this reason, scholars assume that the Fatimids did not wish to make material progress in the region, due to their actual political ambitions for eastward expansion. This chapter argues that, in fact, it was actually in the Fatimid rulers’ political interests to create an environment of rich material culture in order to further their various religio-political agendas and create a stronger sense of governance.

The Fatimids’ accession to political rule was in a great part a result of their organized military rebellion against the Aghlabids, a movement which spanned the years 893 to 909.

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Subsequently, any success in making the transition from a military force, which comprised mainly Kutāma Berbers, to a unified harmonious and inclusive state, required them to reach out to other segments of society. They needed to establish a richly represented citizenry. As mentioned in Chapter Two, this need for a state with fully functional members explained the power and elite status given to the Kutāma by placing them in prominent positions in the government. The Fatimids also took advantage of the presence of the Ṣaqāliba to populate the royal cities, run administrative offices, and create new social membership in their new state. With the absence of any one hegemonic social group, they formed other means and venues through which they could forge ties of allegiance and loyalty. Similarly, in order to cultivate this early state and new world order through governance, the Fatimids created a shared culture for all these diverse groups through which they could unify their realm. Thus, they required early architects of culture to create a foundation for their own religious and cultural vision of Islam. Through material culture, especially centralized near the court and the figure of the Imām, the Fatimids could reinforce specific socio-cultural and religious ideologies which they needed to cultivate a society with a shared universal vocabulary in a largely connected and hegemonic Sunnī world.

A prime example of these cultural architects is the renowned chief justice (Qāḍī al-Quḍāt) of the early Fatimid state, Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu‘mān b. Muḥammad (d. 974) whose works have provided us with a main contemporary resource for understanding the Sīra, as I have argued in this dissertation. His numerous books, ranging from Fatimid jurisprudence, the tā‘wil (esoteric knowledge and hermeneutics), mirrors for princes, histories, polemics, and several other works allow him to be categorized as a major spokesman and propagandist for instating Fatimid culture in Ifrīqiya. His works were foundational, as I have been arguing, for understanding Fatimid
theology, jurisprudence, philosophy, and contextualizing the Ustādh’s world.

Similarly, during this early period, poets like Ibn Hāni’ al-Andalusī (d. 973) and al-Tamīm (d. 985), the prince-son of al-Mu‘īzz, also provided literary descriptions of the physical and socio-political landscapes of Fatimid Ifrīqiya along with their praises (madhḥ) of the rulers and other officials of the early state. Their poetry also serves to articulate the cultural, material, and social world of the Ustādh. Their praises for the Caliph-Imām, although echoing and emulating conventional courtly poetic traditions, were deeply embedded with direct Fatimid socio-cultural connotations and became the basis of a Fatimid genre of literary poetry which was perpetuated by the later dynasty and spread to other courts influenced by Fatimid culture. These sources clearly provide scholars of this time period with a clear picture of the connection between the socio-cultural world of the Fatimids with their material cultural one. The Sīrat Ustādh Jūdhar also sheds light on this connection. The text firmly acknowledges his own social, cultural, and personal experiences in creating material culture.

Since the Fatimids were a medieval Islamic court like their Abbasid and Umayyad predecessors, the visual vocabulary and symbolism that they drew upon to foster their political coercion and religious devotion naturally reflected aspects of the existing material cultural forms belonging to the region and time period. Adhering to this notion does not mean, however, that there was not artistic innovation in early Fatimid culture. Rather, it alludes to the presence of common forms of artistic expression which were prevalent in medieval Islamic and ancient Near Eastern imperial cultures. The Fatimids drew upon those commonly shared visual forms and

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material expressions while assigning their own unique meanings and symbolic values to them. The research presented here will focus on textiles in Fatimid Ifrīqiya and read them in the context of contemporary jurisprudence and historical texts.

The Socio-Cultural Importance of Textiles and Clothing in Early Fatimid Society

Textiles play a central role in the narrative of the Sīra. Key moments in the Sīra, where the Ustādh’s rank and station become apparent to the reader, are expressed through the cultural language yielded by medieval Islamic textiles. In fact, it should be recalled that the beginning of the Ustādh’s narrative is marked with such an interaction, as mentioned in Chapter Three. To recap, Jūdhar gets noticed by al-Mahdī during a customary medieval Islamic courtly ritual where the caliph awards his Ṣaqāliba subjects and servants with pieces of textiles, also known in the medieval Islamic custom as khilʿa, since they were given by the Imām’s hands. The story, as narrated by al-Manṣūr al-Kātib, tells us that when al-Mahdī was dispersing his gift of textiles to his servants, Ustādh Jūdhar chose a simpler striped linen fabric, ʿattābī which was inexpensive in comparison to the other available fabric choices. This event, according to the author of the Sīra, impressed the caliph while foretelling the future glory of Jūdhar.

Jūdhar lived in a world where textiles and clothing represented one’s social rank, courtly standing, and even the level of religiosity and piety. For these reasons, different medieval Islamic cultures created several rules and regulations, customs, and traditions surrounding the use of textiles and clothing. This idea was also evident in Fatimid society and the creation of their early state. For instance, before the Dāʾī Abū ʿAbdallāh went to Sijilmāsa to free al-Mahdī, he conquered the Aghlabid capital of Raqqāda and settled in their capital city. During this time, historical reports of his military movement point out that he continued his habit of wearing
clothing made from simpler textiles and coarser fabrics. He also instructed his soldiers to do the same. They would all refrain from wearing luxurious clothing because they maintained that lavish textiles were the clothing of tyrants (jabbarīn). The only exception that they would make to their appearance was when it came to performing jihād. In medieval Islamic religious thought, all items which could enhance an army’s military prowess such as fine horses, weaponry, armor, and clothing were known as military accoutrement (al-udda). Islamic laws of jihād encouraged an army to maintain excessive ’udda (military provisions and prowess) in order to intimidate the enemy. This idea originated from verse 8:60 of the Quran, which states, “Prepare against them as best as you can from [your] military prowess and from war horses so through that you can instill fear in God’s enemies and your enemies.”

In this regard, since Abū ’Abdallāh’s army had acquired numerous horses and well functioning weaponry from the Aghlabid stables and arsenals, they were fully prepared to use those commodities for military purposes. The narrative demonstrates that it was only through the act of jihād that material excess was religiously favored.

While Abū ’Abdallāh chose to don simple attire, the first Fatimid caliph, al-Mahdī, opted for fine clothing as a political tool. When he first sat on his throne, he ensured that the dress code of the bureaucracy reflected that of his own. For this reason, chroniclers are detailed in their descriptions of the Fatimid caliphs’ clothing choices and costumes which often matched other accoutrement which made up their royal entourage. For example, Ibn Idhārī described al-Mahdī’s triumphant procession into the Aghlabid palace city of Raqqāda when he first arrived from

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11 Quran, 8:60.

Sijilmāsa. As he entered the city, he was greeted by the prominent jurists and elite of Qayrawān. When they saw him as he rode into the city, he was dressed in a dark colored silk textile with a matching turban. His horse was a unique red dun color. His heir, Abū al-Qāsim al-Qā’im accompanied him on horseback wearing an amber colored garment also with a matching turban. His horse’s color was yellow dun.

Both of these figures were led into the city by the Da’ī Abū ’Abdallāh. Abū ’Abdallāh rode in front of al-Mahdī wearing a mulberry textile garment. He wore a white linen shawl wrapped around him, and a turban fastened by an Alexandrian kerchief. He rode a chestnut colored horse. He held a sabāniyya cloth which he used to wipe the sweat and dust from his face. Even though the Dā’ī did not usually wear lavish clothing, in this instance, it appears that he was instructed by al-Mahdī to dress in ceremonial garb. Ibn Idhārī’s inclusion of this detailed report describing the color coordination between costume and horse, demonstrates the coordination of theatrics, performance, and visual arts for Fatimid public spectacles. Naturally, the clothing worn by Fatimid caliphs did not go unnoticed by the chroniclers.

As a policy, al-Mahdī extended the use of luxury textiles beyond public ceremonies. Fine clothing became the dress code for his new government administration and bureaucracy. Al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān reports the steps al-Mahdī took to organize and control the administrative infrastructure of Ifrīqiya:

13 Since Abū ’Abdallāh had a cloth to wipe his sweat and dust from his face, it is most like that the Alexandrian kerchief (mindīl Iskandarānī) was another type of material specifically used for another purpose. Because it appears in the list of items he was wearing nearest to the mention of his turban, I have inferred that the kerchief was used to fasten his turban.

14 This was a type of material made in Sabān, a suburb of medieval Baghdad. See R. Dozi, *Dictionnaire Detaillé des Vêtements Chez les Arabes* (Beirut: Librarie Du Liban, 1845), 200.

The new caliph appointed the Kutāma chieftains to govern different provinces in the region. He also designated different towns which fell under his authority and jurisdiction as new locations for the various military factions of the Kutāma to take up residence. The commanders of these factions were appointed as deputies for these cities and towns across Ifrīqiya. Al-Mahdī also instructed these newly appointed governors and the Kutāmī officials and settlers to begin to adorn themselves with the finest textiles in their clothing and embellish themselves through the display of splendor. They wore the finest textile garments and adorned and decorated their saddles and bridles. They made sure that splendor was put on full display. In this manner, they abandoned their old ways and customs of attire and dressing and adopted those of the new Fatimid order.16

The abandonment of prior dress code is an important point to be noted from al-Nu’mān’s report. It demonstrates that there was a deliberate attempt to create a Fatimid way of dress amongst officials and the court.

Al-Mahdī’s ostentatious display of wealth and his policy for pomp through clothing in the public sphere were not implemented without criticism. Although the Abbasid constituency had also prescribed forms of dress in their court in Baghdad, al-Mahdī’s choices came at a certain level of shock to the population of North Africa. Abū ’Abdallāh also opposed the new policy. On one occasion, he criticized it openly to al-Mahdī in a conversation which al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān recorded in his book chronicling the arrival of the Fatimids in Ifrīqiya, *Iftīḥāḥ al-Da’wa*:

Oh Mawlānā (Our Lord), the Kutāma are a people whom I have disciplined through training. I have implemented rank and education in them. As a result, I have managed to accomplish what I set out to do through them. Through them my expectations were met. As for this manner in which you are engaging with them by bestowing property, appointing them as local deputies and governors, awarding positions, and ordering them to wear fine clothing and embellishments, all that will corrupt them from their prior habits.17

A later Buyūd writer, ’Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Ḥamadhānī (d. 1025), who was the chief qāḍī

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of Rayy and a Muʿtazalite theologian and Shāfiʿī jurist, wrote a polemic against the Fatimids in his theological work, *Tathbīt Dalāʾil al-Nubuwwa* (Proving the Signs of Prophethood). Although his writings were compiled much later and his historical passages about the Fatimids can be classified as a biased polemic, he provides a passage about the stark cultural difference emanated by al-Mahdī’s clothing policy:

When al-Mahdī decided to travel from Sijilmāsa to al-Qayrawān and Ifrīqiya from the Maghrib, several *Maghariba* (people of the Maghrib) from Abū ʿAbdallāh’s army went to bid him farewell. They found him wearing silk and brocade (*dībāj*); having gold and silver vessels; possessing white (*rūmī*) eunuchs; and they found signs of wine. They could not accept what they saw because of the Berber simplicity of their souls. They asked Abū ʿAbdallāh (the pretender) to explain to them what they had witnessed. They renounced what they had seen because Abū ʿAbdallāh had spent many years living among the Kutāma and proselytizing them towards a *mahdī* who would be God’s authority (*hujja*) and Abū ʿAbdallāh’s master. Abū ʿAbdallāh had worn coarse fabrics and eaten coarse food. 他们 had prepared them to expect that the Mahdī would be similar. These were the reasons they disapproved and began to ask questions. Abū ʿAbdallāh explained to them that these characteristics were intended for members of his government and followers, and he had many followers. 19

ʿAbd al-Jabbār’s information was most probably supplied to him by local Qarāmiṭā Ismāʿīlīs, another sect of Ismāʿīlism which began in 899.20 Their religious doctrine had spread in the eastern Islamic world, including the regions around Rayy. Therefore, ‘Abd al-Jabbār had

18 The edition I consulted had ‘yalbis al-khashn wa yāʾkul al-khashb.’ Scholars like Heinz Halm have translated the latter part that he eats wood. Since eating *kashn* is a common phrase in dialogue about humility, I have read the word here as *khashn* rather than *khashb*.


20 The Qarāmiṭā branch of Ismailism was formed in ca. 899 by a man named Ḥamdān Qarmāṭ and his chief-assistant ʿAbdān. Qarmāṭ challenged the succession of ʿAbdallāh al-Mahdī to the imamate. His challenge led to revolt, and the group which splintered from this movement retained Ḥamdān’s epithet calling themselves the Qarāmiṭā. The group gained supporters throughout the Islamic world and created a center of power in Bahrayn. They led revolts against the Fatimids and the Abbasids in the tenth century. The group began to decline in the eleventh century. See, Wilfred Madelung, “Karmāṭī”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 30 June 2018.
access to them in Rayy in the late tenth century. The narrative which he seems to be citing appears to be that of al-Mahdī’s first court in Sijilmāsa from the *Sirat Jaʿfar al-Ḥajib* mentioned in *Chapter Two*. Rather than use this polemical passage to remark on the excessively materialistic character of al-Mahdī, which several scholars have done, what can be deduced is that it points to a dichotomy between what was deemed acceptable and non-acceptable clothing habits in medieval Islamic religious and cultural thought. It clearly indicates that the Fatimids had created a clothing policy which was starkly different from traditional Sunnī norms of dress.

An analysis of Fatimid jurisprudence sheds light on this point. The new policy of ostentation which aroused opposition appears to have been an important issue for the early members of the Fatimid state. This idea is evident from Fatimid textual sources which often provide a justification for beautification and the public display of wealth, as was also the case early on with the Umayyad caliphs who justified the adoption of luxury as means to rival the Byzantines. This idea was particularly expressed through the function of clothing in society. The Islamic expansion of the seventh and eighth centuries and increased urbanization provided medieval Islamic societies with vast amounts of wealth inherited from the civilizations they conquered. This acquisition of wealth created a dichotomy in Islamic religious ideology between the notions of *dīn* (spirituality and religiosity) and *dunyā* (material wealth), discussed in detail in the last chapter. Islamic marketplaces had a wide range of available fabrics and clothing ranging from the most luxurious and lavish textiles to the most simple coarser and humble fabrics like wool. Textiles and clothing choices were intricately entwined with Near Eastern ideals of publicly signifying rank and status in hierarchal stratified societies.²¹

Fatimid jurisprudence material written by al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān clearly figures in this tradition. In the _Book of Clothing and Perfumes_ from the second volume of the _Da‘ā‘im al-Islām_, al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān begins the first chapter, titled _The Etiquette (adab) of Clothing_, with a quote of ’Alī b. Abī Ṭālib: “it is incumbent on a man to whom God has bestowed bounty to show the impact of it through his clothing so as long as it is not for pomp.”

This ordinance sets the subject matter for the rest of the chapter and the general Fatimid attitude towards what types of clothing should be worn within Fatimid society. His entire chapter focuses on the permissibility and justification of wearing lavish fabrics and entices the act itself as a pious deed. The preferred fabric of choice is _khazz_, a raw-silk fabric. Several reported traditions in the _Da‘ā‘im_ give precedence for wearing it. Cotton is also deemed favorable and the “fabric choice of the Prophet,” while pure wool and fur are disfavored.

In several instances, al-Nu‘mān reports traditions which all suggest that wearing finer grade textiles was not in conflict with the commonly accepted Islamic notions of piety and humility. Rather, according to al-Nu‘mān, the prescribed social ethics and _adab_ the Fatimids wished to purport, professed that how one dressed in society and in accordance to Islamic law was a matter of an individual’s social and economic circumstances. Simply put, in the perspective of Fatimid jurisprudence, if one was blessed with wealth, he/she should manifest that blessing through wearing appropriate clothing that displayed it. On the other hand, according to Fatimid jurisprudence, wearing coarse and less valuable clothing in the attempt to publicly portray one’s humility was, in fact, considered an act of pomp (_riyā‘_) and impiety.

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23 Ibid, 155.
24 Ibid, 156. See passage number 554.
To emphasize this point, al-Qāḍī Nu‘mān includes several anecdotes of reported traditions which serve as evidence in its favor. One narrative is of Ṭābīb b. Ṭālib (d. 687). Ibn Ṭālib goes out to meet the Kharijites during the aftermath which followed the Battle of Ṣiffīn in 657 resulting in the Kharijite rebellion against ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. The narrative reports that “when Ṭālib sent Ibn Ṭālib to ride out against the Kharijites, Ibn Ṭālib wore the finest of his clothing and the most fragrant of his perfumes, and he rode the best of all his steeds. When Ibn Ṭālib bested the Kharijites, they said to him, “Ibn Ṭālib, you are the greatest of all men, however you still appear before us wearing the clothing of tyrants (ṣal-jabbārīn) and riding a horse like they would.” Ibn Ṭālib is reported to have answered them by reciting verse 7:32 from the Quran: “Say, who forbids the beauty of God and the pureness of his sustenance which he has brought forth for his worshippers. Say, these things are for those who believe in the life of this world purely until the Day of Judgement. In this manner, we explain the signs for the people who know.” He then said to a man standing near him, “Dress and beautify yourself because God loves all beauty that is ḥalāl.”

As mentioned above, several narrated traditions within al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s jurisprudence text juxtapose two stances on dress, luxurious dressing and subtle and coarse dressing. Medieval Islamic society largely agreed the latter was a sign of humility and piety. The purpose of these narratives in the Daʿāʾim al-Islām was to relay the actions of the Ahl al-Bayt in order to set a precedence and offer evidence for believers to follow in their footsteps through emulation. By including several of these reported traditions and narratives of the early Shiʿī

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25 Ibid, 153
26 Quran, 7:32.
Imāms’, from whom the Fatimids claimed descendance, al-Nu’mān was openly challenging other Islamic schools of thought which prescribed dressing in coarser fabrics, such as wool, to display humility. Medieval Islamic society generally attributed wool (ṣūf) to humility, poverty, and abjection, and therefore, it was the fabric of choice for ascetics and also from where ṣūfīs received their nisba. For instance, Ibrāhim b. Adham (d. 782), an early Ṣūfī saint born in Balkh, professed that the sin of īshrāf (indulgent and excessive expenditure) was not committed in matters of food, however, it definitely was present in matters of clothing and furnishings. The Fatimid official stance of the tenth century was quite the opposite.

The Fatimid notion of pomp over humility is made even clearer in another narrative provided by al-Nu’mān detailing a ruling given by the fifth Shī‘ī Imām, Ja’far al-Ṣādiq (d. 765). He was approached by a man who states that the best people in his mind are those who eat coarse food and wear rugged clothing in order to manifest their humility. The Imām rebuked him by saying, “humility is a matter of the heart.” He continued by providing the man with the example of a prophet who was the offspring of many prophets who would wear clothing made of silk brocade (dībāj) which was embroidered with gold. This prophet would sit in the court of the dynasty of the Pharaoh administering justice between the people. The Imām then stated, “the people were not interested in what he was wearing, but rather focused their attention on his fairness and justice.” The Imām instead lists the characteristics which would actually qualify an Imām to hold his position and to which people should pay their attention. They were his ability

30 al-Nu’mān, Da‘ā‘īm, vol. 2, 154 - 155. Passage number 548. It is likely the anecdote refers to Yūsuf b. Ya’qūb (Joseph son of Jacob) who is a prophet in the Islamic tradition.
to administer justice, to be truthful in whatever he says, to deliver on his promises, and to pass judgement with fairness. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq then reportedly articulated the ruling that, “God does not consider any form of clothing which he has deemed legal (ḥalāl), as being illegal (ḥarām); nor has he deemed any food or drink which is considered legal, in any amount, illegal. God has said, ‘Say, who forbids the beauty of God and the pureness of his sustenance which he has brought forth for his worshippers.’”

The constant reuse of Quran 7:32 in the texts mentioned above serves as counter evidence in Fatimid jurisprudence which challenges early Islamic cultural norms of asceticism (zuhd). This particular revelation of the Quran clearly states that something deemed ḥalāl cannot be deemed ḥarām. The Fatimid challenge to the notion of asceticism was hardly without its merit. Early medieval Islamic culture rejected the notion of kingship and vehemently opposed the styles, lavishness, and extravagance of kings and tyrants. Early Muslims saw humility, piety, and zuhd as more symbolic of religious leadership. They greatly disfavored traditional symbols of sovereignty like crowns and scepters. The Aghlabid rulers who preceded the Fatimids were chastised for this very same reason by their ‘ulamā’ who disapproved of their lavish and indulgent lifestyles, which to them were indicative of their impiety and unjust rule. However, the new movement of the Fatimids and the culture which they wished to curate in Ifrīqiya

31 Quran, 7:32.

attempted to fully embrace luxurious material culture and include it in the vocabulary of
religiosity. Al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān repeats these ideas in the juridical examples and narratives
mentioned above and they are present in several of his other writings. The Sīra of Jūdhar and
other contemporary historical texts also demonstrate the keen interest of the Fatimid rulers in
high art and material culture. This idea was especially true when it came to matters of courtly
ritual.

Fatimid ideology and culture wholly utilized the royal visual vocabulary associated with
kingship in its Near Eastern context when it came to the figure of the caliph and his
governmental administration. This policy was in stark contrast to what the early Kutāma Berber
members of the nascent state had expected. They had been used to being under Abū ʿAbdallāh,
who was known for his simple and humble appearance. Descriptors such as coarse (khashn) and
humble (kashʿ) were in contrast to notions of excessiveness (iṣrāf) and pomp (riyāʾ). Clothing
became the means through which the ruler’s personality was publicly judged. In early Islamic
history, simple clothing, as mentioned above, was the common signifier of piety in most socio-
religious circles. Coarser fabrics such as wool were characterized as a component of asceticism
(zuhd) which was a desired attribute for those seeking a spiritual life.

In fact, high fashion and decadence in both clothing and food came to be an art of its own
and attributed to a certain class of people, starting with the Umayyads. In Abbasid society this
class of people were called ‘the elegant’ (ẓurāfā‘; sing. zarīf). This categorical name came to be
used for people who had adopted and mastered high culture in the arts, namely literature,
rhetoric, fashion, and other luxuries of life. They were known to possess style and the ability to
understand posh and refined material culture and knew how to utilize it. The zurafā’, no doubt, also knew how to dress. The tenth-century Abbasid writer, al-Washsha’ (d. 937) wrote a handbook about etiquette in the Abbasid court and included passages about the zurafā’. The presence of such a text indicates that they were an anomaly to the social norms of the time. Therefore, in Abbasid society, the zurafā’ did not define the majority of society or even the royal class. They were the antithesis of the traditionalist ’ulama’s vision of how to live.

On the other hand, the rulings that al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān puts forward in his jurisprudence demonstrate that the Fatimids were challenging widely accepted ideals and practices of materialism proposed by other religious schools of thought. In Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s school of thought, for instance, zuhd could be divided into three separate classes of society. The commoners (al-ʿawāmm) of society were supposed to refrain from harām and that was considered their version of zuhd. The elite (khāṣṣa) were expected to practice zuhd through their abandonment of excessive pleasures and indulgences even though they were halāl. Finally, the ‘knowers of God’ (al-ʿārifīn) were supposed to refrain from anything which distracted them from God. Fatimid jurisprudence explicitly taught that if one has been blessed with wealth, he should manifest that blessing through materiality.

When the Fatimids chose to counter ascetic ideals, they did so, as I have been arguing, primarily through the wearing of fine and expensive textiles. Although these rulings were an attempt to clearly define the parameters of Fatimid and Ismāʿīlī jurisprudence, the emphasis given to them in the texts demonstrates that there were clear political motivations behind them.

Al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān alludes to this political motivation in another book on jurisprudence, *Mukhtaṣar al-Āthār* (Abridged Traditions), a legal text which was a concise version of the *Da’ā’im*. In the chapter entitled *Clothing and Perfume*, he writes that ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 680), the third Shī’ī Imām, wore a black robe with a blue pallium. However, he makes it clear in the next few sentences that although ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn had worn it in this particular instance, black was not suitable for Fatimid culture. He asserts,

…but the Imāms dislike black clothing because the Abbasids wear it and purport that they are wearing black in sorrow of al-Ḥusayn. If there was any righteousness in that (wearing black) or if it were incumbent to do so, surely the first to have done it would have been the Imāms who are the descendants of al-Ḥusayn. If the Abbasids were actually wearing black as a symbol of sorrow for al-Ḥusayn they would not have done what they did with his descendants. The Imāms disliked for anyone to dress like the Abbasids.\(^{35}\)

On a similar note, textiles dyed with the safflower (*uṣfur*) which emitted a light red dye, were forbidden as well in Fatimid jurisprudence. Red was also disfavored. Both of these colors were considered the choice of color for the Umayyads.\(^ {36}\) The Abbasid caliph also wore red at times as an imperial symbol. The Fatimid color of choice was white. It is clear from these passages, and contrary to Bloom’s conclusions, that the Fatimids were definitely thinking about dynastic norms and expressions in their visual culture, especially in the realm of clothing.

The Abbasids were known to wear black as an official color. Hilāl al-Ṣabī’ attests to the Abbasid caliphal tradition of wearing black in several locations throughout his book, the *Rusūm Dār al-Khilāfa* (The Ceremonies of the Capital of the Caliphate). He describes the caliph’s

\(^{35}\) al-Nu’mān, *Mukhtaṣar al-Āthār*, ed. Al Jamea Tuṣ Saifiyah, (Mumbai: Al-Jamea-Tus-Saifiyah, 2010), 161. The manuscript consulted was part of the edited collection of Fatimid and Ismā’īlī manuscripts held by the Da’wūd Bohra Religious Institution, Al-Jamea-Tus-Saifiyah in Surat, India.

official clothing worn during court: “His clothing consists of a long black caftan (*qubā‘*) of locally produced material (*muwallad*) covering an inner layer of white silk or wool. The caliph does not wear silk patterned brocade (*sigillatum - *saqlatīn*) or embroidered textiles. The caliph covers his head with a black cap (*ruṣāfiya*)” 37 Dignitaries who held prestigious stations were given the honor to wear black as well, according to al-Ṣābi’. He writes that Abbasid dignitaries also wore black outer garments and shoes. Several of the judges of Baghdad and other cities and towns who were “entitled to wear black” wore different types of black gowns. However, al-Ṣābi’ points out that wearing black raw-silk (*khazz*) and linen (*qaṣab*) together was considered excessive. He writes, “Some (dignitaries) have resorted to wearing soft linen and black wool-silk. In my opinion, linen should only be worn without any embroidery.” 38 Therefore, although pomp in clothing existed in the Abbasid court, excessiveness was still frowned upon.

Underlying the well known and documented examples of the the Abbasid caliphs wearing black is their reputation for adopting the practice of “mild asceticism.” 39 This notion did not mean that the Abbasid caliphs never dressed lavishly. However, several chroniclers point out the simplicity of the Abbasid caliph’s mode of dress as a symbol of his piety. For instance, Ibn al-Jāwzī (d. 1201), a late Abbasid hagiographer, historian, and religious jurist wrote about the caliph al-Muhtadī’s (d. 870) simple choices of clothing. He narrates that a group of Hāshimites in the Abbasid court found a basket which had the caliph’s clothing in it. It consisted of a robe of

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38 Ibid, 94.
39 “Mild asceticism” can be understood as a term which describes a median stance between the extreme asceticism displayed by *zuhhād* and extreme renunciants of materiality and extravagant and excessive luxuries available for food and clothing choices. The *ʻulamā‘*s stance and call was usually towards a coarse and simple lifestyle choice. The ‘Abbasid caliphs, in many instances, try to adopt this middle stance. See Hurvitz’s article cited above.
wool (jubba ʂūf), some clothing, and a hooded cloak (burnūṣ), which he wore throughout the
night when he prayed.” He goes on to say “Should the Abbasids not be ashamed that there is no
one amongst them like ’Umar b. ’Abd al-’Azīz?”40 In another passage by Ibn al-Jawzī detailing
al-Muhtadī’s ascetic nature in food choices, he narrates that the Abbasid caliph looked up to the
Umayyad Caliph ’Umar b. ’Abd al-’Azīz (d. 720) whom he praises again for his asceticism and
exemplary simple lifestyle.41 Al-Subkī (d. 1355), a later Mamluk era Shāfī’ī scholar and jurist,
also depicts this sense of “mild asceticism” as a sign of piety in his narrative of the Abbasid
caliph al-Mustarshad (d. 1135). He says, “It is reported that al-Mustarshid adopted piety in the
beginning of his era, he wore wool, and retired by himself to his home for worship.”42 These are
a few examples in which Abbasid culture appeared to equate humility with piety in the figure of
the ruler and his clothing choices.

Just as al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān’s jurisprudence directly opposes the wearing of black to avoid
emulating Abbasid custom, he also challenges the idea that brocades or fanciful embroidered
textiles were considered too excessive for men to wear. On the right occasion, they were not only
permissible but also encouraged. The only specific textile types which are looked down upon in
Fatimid jurisprudence explicitly for men are wool and pure silk. His stance on the permissibility
of lavish textiles is made clear from an explication he includes in his chapter entitled Clothing
and Perfume in the al-Mukhtāṣar al-Āthār:

al-’Ilmiyya), 83. The Umayyad caliph ’Umar b. ’Abd al-’Azīz was renowned for his ascetic and simple
lifestyle.

41 Ibn al-Jawzī, Muntazam, Vol. XII, 82-83

42 Al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfī’īyya al-Kubra, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī, (Damascus: ‘Īssa al-
Bābī al-Ḥalabī), vol. 7, 258

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The Imāms disfavor the wearing of pure silk for men. It is allowed if it is blended with something else from plant-based textiles. They report that the Messenger of God allowed the wearing of pure silk for those people who wished to express pride over their enemies and to adorn themselves with it in order to manifest the strength of the Muslims, in reference to God’s revelation, “And prepare for them (the troops) as much as you are able from strength and from the bridles of horses.” The Imāms wore silk, either blended with another textile or pure silk lined with a plant-based textile, in order to exalt pride over their enemies. Their followers were also allowed to wear such in order to exalt pride. They did this even though the material world (al-dunyā) was the least valuable of all things to them. They demonstrated [through these textiles] their preparedness (al-ʻudda) for the strength of Islam and the Muslims and to take pride over those people who have held enmity towards them or taken arms up against.

In addition to direct anti-Abbasid references, Fatimid jurisprudence was also challenging other prescribed Islamic religio-social norms in the field of visual culture. In this same book and same chapter, al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān provides some interesting rulings regarding figural imagery in textiles. Al- Nu’mān reports that the Imāms did not see a problem in pictures (ṣuwar) and human representations (tamāthīl) in textiles. As evidence of this ruling he reports that some of the companions of the fourth Shi‘ī Imām, Muḥammad al-Bāqir b. ’Alī, came to him while he was seated on a carpet which costed two thousand [dirhams] and on it were figural representations (tamāthīl). They asked him about them and he said there was nothing inappropriate about the figural representations since the sunna is to walk over the carpet. The last sentence of this ruling suggests that carpets and decorative items possessing human figural representation were permissible for carpets. The carpet’s purpose was to cover the bare floor where people walk. It was not meant to be used for direct religious use, as a prayer rug for example.

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43 Quran, 8:60.
44 al-Nu’mān, Mukhtaṣar al-Āthār, 159.
46 Ibid, 161.
Al-Nu’mān provides a contemporary report of the Fatimid caliph al-Mu’izz which is, to my knowledge, not present in any other Fatimid juridical text of this time period. This passage demonstrates the caliph’s interest in general artistic subject material and its intersection with religious thought. It was reported to him that a group of women disfavored depictions of living beings (al-ṣuwār al-rūḥāniyya) because the women inferred that this should not be permissible because living beings were a creation of God. Al-Mu’izz disagrees and rules that, “Is it not God who also created all things from trees, inanimate objects (jamād), and everything that sees, and they paint all of these things and do not see a problem with their depiction? What is the difference between this (depicting living beings) and that (depicting other inanimate creations).” These specific Fatimid juridical opinions are clearly in contrast to their traditional contemporary Sunnī schools of thought. Like other contemporary dynastic capitals in the medieval Islamic world, the Fatimids of Ifrīqiya produced all types of works of art. Several existing fragments of Fatimid art, especially ceramics, woodwork, and textiles produced or excavated from the palatial cities of Ifrīqiya have zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms (figs. 13 - 17).

The overarching notion that ostentatious expression of material culture was encouraged to enhance the prestige of the state and heighten its stature among its enemies became the basis for creating several works of art in the Fatimid court, especially those directly related to the act of jihād and triumph, which will be discussed below. This ideology is also prevalent in the text of the Sīra in relation to material culture. However, the question which arises here is why textiles, above all other artistic mediums, became the most important mean of expression for political and

social identity in the medieval Islamic world.

**Textile Production in the Medieval Islamic World and the Institution of the Ṭīrāz**

Medieval Islamic civilization’s main economic industry was textile production. Part of the reason for the rise of this industry was the mass diffusion of crops and the expansion of agricultural activities which prevailed throughout the medieval Islamic world, known as the ‘green revolution’, as suggested by Andrew Watson’s study.48 Because the Islamic world was connected through trade, industrial developments followed agricultural ones. In 1970, Hayyim J. Cohen published a quantitative study which demonstrated the increase of occupational *nisbas* (last name epithets) in order to shed light on the various professions which medieval Muslims held.49 He surveyed 30,000 entries of various prominent Muslim figures all living before 1078 from nineteen different ṭabaqāt from which he published the occupations of about 4,200 people. Although Cohen’s study did not comprise individuals residing in the Maghrib, his study does establish a general sense of the occupational trends of the early medieval Islamic world. Of these 4,200 eminent Muslims, mostly from the social class of ṣulama, Cohen found that between the ninth and tenth centuries, between twenty to twenty-four percent of the commercial activities indicated by the occupational *nisba* of people’s names belonged to the textile industry.

In a related study, Richard Bulliet analyzed another biographical text belonging to al-Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī (d. 1014) titled *Taʾrikh Ṣulama* *Nisābūr* (The History of the Scholars of


Bulliet used occupational epithets solely originating from the cotton industry, namely *qattān* (cotton farmer), *bazzāz* (cotton cloth dealer), and *karābisī* (dealer in heavy duty cotton cloth), to demonstrate an increase in the appearance of these occupational last names between the ninth and tenth centuries. Bulliet’s statistics point out that there is a 50 - 100 percent increase in people claiming some relation to textiles in Nishapur when compared with Cohen’s study of the entire caliphate. In the tenth century, between 35 - 42 percent of occupational epithets in Nishapur belong to people just in the cotton industry. Bulliet attributes this significant rise in number of people engaging in the cotton industry to what he terms a *cotton boom*, or an exponential increase in cotton farming and subsequent textile production in a particular geographic region.

Cotton had not been a major crop of cultivation on the Iranian plateau in pre-Islamic times according to what we currently know about Sasanian economic history. When the Islamic conquests occurred, the need for cotton exponentially increased, and even though central Iran did not have many rivers to naturally supply the irrigation needs for cotton, naturally the demand for the crop ensured that it prospered and became one of the top commercial crops of the region. Wool and fur had been previously used extensively, but due to technological advancement in irrigation methods in the medieval Islamic world and the widespread dissemination of crops in a connected world, plant fiber-based textiles came to dominate the textile market. Cotton and linen were the main fabrics used in the Islamic Middle Ages, in addition to silk produced by silkworms. Cotton had the easiest manufacturing process. With the ability to blend and decorate the fiber arts, textiles became the highest commodity of demand in the medieval Islamic

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50 Bulliet, 3-5.
economy. Textiles were lightweight, they could be manufactured in large quantities, did not spoil, and along with their low risk, they were in constant demand.

According to Maya Shatzmiller’s statistical analysis of the division of labor in the medieval Islamic world, eighteen percent of the workforce belonged to the textile industry during the tenth - twelfth centuries. Most of this workforce population existed in the cities where manufacturing took place. The industry comprised skilled laborers who could fulfill the industry and the market’s requirements for weaving, embroidering, dyeing, fulling, and tailoring, to name a few. According to the Geniza documents, clothing was an investment for a family and was passed from parents to their children. In times of emergency, clothing could be exchanged for cash. In addition to clothing, the textile industry also was the sector in which home furnishings were produced. Carpets, draperies, cushions, and canopies all belonged to this industry. The appeal to specific types of fabrics and textiles largely depended on the clothing industry. This is why clothing created such a significant dialogue in jurisprudence, as seen above, and this is why so many elites engaged in its trade and tried to regulate its consumption.

Medieval Islamic governments maintained their economic power through the institution of the ṭirāz. Ṭirāz is a word of Persian origin which means ‘embroidery.’ In the classical Islamic world it acquired a specific meaning as it found its way into the Arabic language. In medieval Islamic culture, the ṭirāz referred to an institution that produced state-manufactured textiles. These textiles retained the original meaning of the word through their decorative work, usually

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embroidery, which included embroidered patches in the shape of squares or roundels accompanied by epigraphical or ornamental bands that lined the fabrics.

The inclusion of Arabic inscriptions on the ṭirāz at an official level began with the Umayyads. According to al-Bayhaqī (d. 1066), an eleventh-century scholar and prolific writer, the introduction of Arabic inscriptions on the ṭirāz was part of state reforms introduced by ʿAbd al-Mālik. These reforms coincided with the replacement of Byzantine and Sasanian iconography and epigraphy on coins and papyrus with ideologically Islamic and Arabic counterparts. The institution of ṭirāz was developed further by the Abbasids, Fatimids, and Hispano-Umayyads, and became widespread in Islamic courtly systems thereafter. It should be recalled that, prior to Islamic civilization, the production of luxury textiles was an industry in which Byzantine and Sasanian imperial administrations also regularly engaged. As a result, medieval Islamic courts adopted the practice and institution. Under the Abbasids, the ṭirāz institution became so important to the state that the caliph entrusted it only with a senior official. For instance, in the case of Hārūn al-Rashīd, the Abasid historian al-Jahshiyyārī writes that the caliph made his most trusted vizier, Jaʿfar al-Barmakī, the head of the state’s ṭirāz factories, while also granting him full control over the mints, the postal service (barīd), and the office of taxation.

In medieval Islamic culture, rulers honored individuals by conferring textiles or garments upon them. In Arabic, this conferred garment is called the khilʿa, which was an article of clothing passed down from a higher ranking figure, the caliph/ruler, to a worthy individual as a sign of honor, as was told in Jūdhar’s story. In its original sense, it referred to clothing directly worn by

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54 Ibid, s.v., “Ṭirāz.”
the Caliph. *Khil’a*, is the verbal noun of the verb *kha-la-‘a*, which literally means to take off a garment. In medieval Islamic courtly culture, the *khil’a* at times could also referred to manufactured robes of honor given by the ruler to his subjects. Over time, however, it became synonymous with investiture. The same verb was also used when a person was seated in an official position and often when a person was elevated in rank.

Ibn Khaldūn’s description of the custom is very helpful in understanding the nature of the institution of the *ṭirāz* and its customary use in medieval Islamic courtly tradition:

Included in the splendors of the kingdom and rulers, and in the traditions of different states, is the inscription of designated names or titles onto the embroidered bands (*ṭirāz*) of their textiles which are produced for their clothing. [These textiles are produced] from silk, brocade, and *ibrīsam* silk. The calligraphy of their names and titles are weaved into the warp and woof of the textile using gold thread or non-golden threats of various colors which contrast the color of the base fabric. These colors are chosen according to the expert decisions made by highly skilled craftsmen.

Through the presence of *ṭirāz*, these imperial textiles become signifiers of the pursuit of prestige, received from the ruler and bestowed upon their wearer, or [a signal of] prestige for those who receive a garment worn by the ruler if they have sought an honor [from the ruler], or an investiture of an official position from the positions of the state.

The pre-Islamic foreign (‘ajam) rulers used to compose their embroideries (*ṭirāz*) with the depictions of kings, or with standard figures and depictions. Later on, the rulers of Islam departed from that method and began to inscribe their names accompanied by other words which were along the lines of auspicious phrases or the wording of official decrees. In the Abbasid and Fatimid dynasties, the *ṭirāz* was one of the most splendid productions and the most magnificent of works.

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55 *Ibrīsam* is a silk floss which is removed from the cocoon of a silkworm before it has broken the cocoon. According to Ibn Ḥawqal, this material was mostly found in Ṭabiristān on the Caspian sea and grown in abundance there by Muslims and non-Muslims who exported it to the rest of the world. See Ghadah Hijjawi. Qaddumi, *Book of Gifts and Rarities: Kitāb-al-Ḥadāya wa al-Tuḥaf: Selections Compiled in the Fifteenth Century from an Eleventh-century Manuscript on Gifts and Treasures* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 266. According to Istakhrī, *ibrīsam* silk was a product of Gorgan, a textile production center in the medieval Islamic world.
There were fully equipped workshops for the weaving of textiles located in the palaces of the rulers and they were known as the department (dār) of the źirāz. The person in charge to oversee the operations of these workshops was known as the master (ṣāhib) of the źirāz. He oversaw the matters of the dyers, tools, and weavers of the workshop, including their salaries, the facilitation of their tools, and the supervision of their productions. The Abbasid and Fatimid rulers only entrusted this position to the higher ranking members of their state and trusted individuals from their clients (mawâlî).56

Ibn Khaldûn’s description demonstrates the social, cultural, and economic importance that the źirāz held in early medieval Islamic courts. The attention and stately control rulers awarded to the institution of źirāz was not only on the account of the royal pomp and cultural significance it possessed. There were clear economic motivations which ensured the ruler’s personal attention to maintain the prosperity of this governmental department. Medieval Islamic źirāz textiles are one of the few objects that possessed the inscription of the ruler with all his precise titulars, as Ibn Khaldûn mentioned above. In addition, they bore the inscription of the name of the location where they were manufactured. The formulaic inscription was very similar, in terms of content, to that which appears on state-issued coinage. The official office of the sikka (mint) was also a symbol of royal authority and an important department within medieval Islamic governments.

The Islamic ruler’s decision to include his name and titulars on textiles was no doubt influenced by the economic importance of textiles and their market value. When it came to trade, textiles held the minimum risk factor in transportation combined with the maximum market potential for return, above all other commodities. On account of their light weight, textiles were also often a commodity used to exchange monetary capital. Rather than travel with the risky and heavy baggage of coinage, if a person had to travel, it made sense to exchange money into

textiles and then resell those textiles in the local markets of their destinations. Like coins, textiles
traveled far and were seen by many. Therefore, they were part of the royal vocabulary and
perceived prestige of a ruler and state. Because of the prestige their inscriptions indicated they
were very similar to coinage. Textiles and other wares were also exacted by conquering armies
from capitulating cities and settlements during warfare. For instance, Naples and Salerno
negotiated a payment of expensive wares which included textiles in return for the Fatimid naval
forces to withdraw from their land.57

When the Fatimids arrived in Ifrīqiya, the institution of the ṭirāz had already been present
in the region under the Abbasids. One of the oldest surviving ṭirāz textiles known to date was
made in Ifrīqiya under Abbasid rule. The textile has red silk as its ground fabric combined with
yellow and green colored silk for the ṭirāz (fig. 18). The textile is in fragments today. However,
when pieced together the following words inscribed in the upper register of the fabric can be read
as follows: “The Servant of God, Marwān, Commander of The Faithful. Of what was ordered [to
be made by] al-R [or al-Z] in the ṭirāz of Ifrīqiya.”58 There were two Marwāns who were caliph
in the classical period. Marwān I (d. 685) was an Umayyad. Since his reign lasted only for about
a year, scholars attribute this textile to the reign of Marwān II, an Abbasid caliph who ruled
between 744 - 750. When the Aghlabids arrived in Ifrīqiya at the start of the ninth century, they
continued with this institution within their royal cities. The Fatimids inherited their workshops
and warehouses when they conquered Raqqāda. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the Fatimids
placed Christian slaves of Byzantine origin in some of their textile workshops. According to

57 Halm, 238.

passages included in the *Sīrat Ustādh Jūdhar* and al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s *Majālis*, these Byzantine slaves were experts at embroidery and weaving.\(^59\)

The Fatimids expanded the institution in the later part of their reign in Egypt to manufacture textiles for both royal and public consumption. The inscriptions found on later Fatimid *ṭirāz* fragments, which survive in great numbers from this period, indicate the location of the factory in which they were produced. However, these factories were split into two different types, the *ṭiraz ḥāṣṣ* (private) and *ṭirāz ‘āmm* (public). The *ṭirāz ḥāṣṣ* indicated that the textile had been produced for palatial use, most likely for customary requirements such as costumes for processions, *khil‘a* bestowments, and the caliph’s own wardrobe. The *ṭirāz ‘āmm*, on the other hand, produced textiles for sale in the main market. This institution provided major revenue for the state. Reports indicate that the income of the largest Fatimid *ṭirāz* factory was 200,000 dīnārs a day in the late tenth century.\(^60\) In Ifrīqiya, according to the evidence presented below from the *Sīrat Ustādh Jūdhar*, it appears that the Fatimids had one single institution within the palatial administration which handled both public and private textile needs of the state.

**The Material Cultural World of the Ustādh Jūdhar**

As a young page in the royal household of al-Qā‘im, Jūdhar had access to the various luxury items and accoutrement of the court coming in and out of the palace. As Jūdhar rose in the ranks and gained more closeness to the Imāms he was given senior positions in the palace administration. When al-Qā‘im sat on the throne in 934, Jūdhar was instated as supervisor over


the royal treasury of al-Mahdiyya and the royal warehouse for clothing and textiles. Jūdhar’s experience as the official head of the treasuries allowed him access to all types of artifacts and objects which the Fatimids collected. Gifts received from sovereigns and foreign courts, forms of tribute from all around to the Fatimid dominion, and rarer items such as books from the private collections of the Imāms, all filled the treasury of al-Mahdiyya.

Part of Jūdhar’s role in the treasury was to care for precious items, and in some cases, restore them. In one instance, al-Manṣūr sent Jūdhar a few of his personal collections of books and those of the Imāms who reigned before him. He asked Jūdhar to store them and to keep them under his protection. Al-Manṣūr tells Jūdhar that these books are his most prized possessions. One of the books had been damaged by water, and the Imām asked the Ustādh to mend it and restore it. He also asked Jūdhar to instruct his secretary at the time, Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad, to make copies of these specific books so that Jūdhar would have his own collection. These books included the *Kitāb al-Īḍāḥ* (The Book of Clarification), a Fatimid legal code book written by al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, and two separate books which contained sermons written by al-Manṣūr and his father al-Qāʾim, the latter of which was read by the first Fatimid jurist of al-Qayrawān al-Marwazī. These sermons are included in the text of the *Ṣīra* and it is likely that the author, al-Manṣūr al-Kātib, had access to the copies made for Jūdhar. This anecdote demonstrates that books and the care of them were all part of the responsibilities of the Fatimid treasury. It also demonstrates that the Ustādh was knowledgeable of a large number of literary and legal works produced, catalogued, and stored at court.

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61 *Ṣīra*, 1:4

62 *Ṣīra*, 1:19.
Another responsibility of the royal treasurer would be to account for all the inventory of the treasury and to retrieve its contents when requested. Knowledge of the value of commodities also played an important role in Jūdhar’s job as treasurer. In 953, the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogentius (r. 945 - 959) sent an official delegation led by a monk to the court of al-Manṣūr in al-Manṣūriyya. By this time, the caliph had shifted the capital from al-Mahdiyya to al-Manṣūriyya. The Byzantines had brought tents as a gift from the emperor to the caliph in Ifrīqiya. According to Ibn Khaldūn, tents were also a symbol of royal authority in early medieval Islamic courts, so the gift was not without its symbolic merit. In preparation of the reception of the Byzantine delegation, the Imām asked Jūdhar to retrieve certain items from the treasury which he had specifically described to the Ustādh. The gifts were meant to reciprocate the emperor’s gesture, following the custom to reciprocate a gift with a more valuable one in order to display the caliph’s own superiority. Al-Manṣūr reiterated his concern to Jūdhar that the gifts he had requested from the treasury were equally matched to the criteria of royal gift-giving and fitting to the stature of sovereign rulers. Al-Manṣūr, sensing Jūdhar’s frugal nature and knowledge of the value of commodities, wrote him as follows:

Jūdhar, I am cognizant of your desire to ensure that all the precious things of this world remain with us in our treasuries. I assume that this might lead you to act parsimoniously towards the Christians in reciprocating an appropriate gift which I have recommended you to send to the court. Do not act in this manner. Our worldly treasures shall remain in this world. We collect these treasures for the purpose of boasting (our wealth) over our enemies, to demonstrate the excellence of our souls, the strength of our resolve, the generosity of our hearts against which others are stingy and jealous.63

Concerning gift exchange, Anthony Cutler remarks that, “the messages that accompanied their presents purport to demonstrate the magnanimity of the donor, to teach moral lessons about the

63 Šīra, 1:23.
faith of the society that he represented, or simply to assert the giver's political might.” Al-Manṣūr’s similar intentions are made clear when he instructs Jūdhar not to bring a substandard gift to the Byzantine emissaries on account of their being Christians.

As a senior political figure in the early Fatimid court, the Ustādh also engaged in his own gift exchanges with courtiers. Gifts strengthened ties and helped to maintain relationships of power. The Sīra specifically mentions Jūdhar’s exchange of gifts in preservation of his own relationship with the Kalbid family of Sicily. The Ustādh had the custom of gifting horses that were in his ownership to members of their household. Maintaining ties with the Kalbids was important for the Fatimids political agenda in Sicily, a region of keen interest to Jūdhar throughout the Sīra. The Sīra is also keen to point out that the Ustādh never engaged in a gift exchange unless he had official permission from the Imām. In one instance, when he gifted the Kalbid princes Aḥmad b. al-Hasan and al-Ḥasan b. ‘Ammār two horses, al-Muʻizz rewards the Ustādh with two finer horses as a replacement.65

Jūdhar also produced material culture himself. Triumph in medieval Islamic political culture was a well celebrated and very public affair. The art of conquest’s visual manifestation in the form of material culture differed from dynasty to dynasty in the Middle Ages. In the early stage of their dynasty, the Fatimids paid particular attention to ensuring that the visual and material aspects of jihād and triumph were fully expressed. As mentioned above, the Fatimids had emerged from a military regime and after forming a state in Ifrīqiya, still remained in a state of constant warfare securing borders, quashing rebellions, conquering new territory in all


65 Sīra, 2:6.
directions like Sicily, Egypt, and the far Maghrib. Because there was constant military activity, the art of ‘udda, namely swords, horses, and other military accoutrements, became a key component of visual culture.

According to al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān in his Da‘ā‘im al-Islām, verse 8:60 of the Qur’ān permits the excessive display of power through military accoutrements, especially horses, during jihād in order to spread fear in the opposition’s army.66 This call to have the best military equipment and preparation (al-‘udda) was extended to clothing as mentioned above. However, it primarily meant to include items such as swords, armor, horses, and their accompanying accessories. These accoutrements, although common to any army of the time, yielded a sense of power and triumph with their visual display to medieval Islamic society. The display of this aspect of culture was also used to entice members of the state towards jihād. As seen above in Jūdhar’s gift exchange with the Kalbid princes, because of the value placed on horses on account of their use in jihād, they were favored animals and often used in ceremonial gift exchanges. Given the value placed on horses in medieval Islamic culture, saddles obviously became a token gift and were highly ornamented. In addition to saddles, swords also had an equal importance in medieval Islamic culture.

As mentioned in the last chapter, Jūdhar was able to accumulate a large amount of personal wealth and economic capital as he rose in courtly rank. His wealth allowed him to serve the caliphs and the state financially as well, although he was a slave. An example of this monetary service from the Sīra is found in a letter from al-Manṣūr to Jūdhar written during the

66al-Nu‘mān, Da‘ā‘im al-Islām, vol. 1, 344. Also see, Quran, 8:60: “And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and of steeds of war by which you may terrify the enemy of Allah and your enemy and others besides them whom you do not know [but] whom Allah knows. And whatever you spend in the cause of Allah will be fully repaid to you, and you will not be wronged.” (Sahih International).
revolt of Abū Yazīd between 944 - 947. In this letter, the Imām was replying to Jūdhar’s gesture of presenting him with a sum of money from his personal wealth as a pious act. The Ustādh made it his habit of contributing financially to the state and giving monetary gifts to the caliphs. Fatimid religio-cultural ideology considered such exchanges as a means to gain closeness to God, and the word used to describe these exchanges, taqrūbāt, literally means things through which one gains closeness. In this particular instance, the Ustādh presented al-Manṣūr with ten thousand dīnārs. Al-Manṣūr was pleased with Jūdhar’s gesture and wrote him a letter in which he praised his presentation of the dīnārs deeming them much more than should be accepted. He told Jūdhar he would accept only a thousand dīnārs from the total amount of ten thousand.

In order to make Jūdhar’s offering more significant and valuable, the Imām asked Jūdhar to use the one thousand dīnārs to manufacture specific items for military use since he was away fighting Abū Yazīd’s army. He requested Jūdhar to use less than one thousand dirhams to make lightweight wooden travel saddles (al-surūj al-safariyya) which he also requested to have gold-plated. Al-Manṣūr then asked Jūdhar to use an ample amount of good quality wood for these saddles, which according to the research presented in the last chapter, made them quite valuable since good wood was hard to come by. With the remaining money, the Imām asked Jūdhar to manufacture swords along with baldrics. Al-Manṣūr’s precise instructions were to have the blades forged in al-Mahdiyya with the seal of the armory impressed in them. According to al-Manṣūr, who attests to his own experience and knowledge of weaponry, al-Mahdiyya’s swords were much better and sharper than all other swords, including Frankish and Yemeni swords. Furthermore, al-Manṣūr told Jūdhar to spend fifty dīnārs on each sword specifically for their ornamentation (ḥilya). He indicates that through the gift of these swords and saddles, Jūdhar
could also be present with the army in performing the *jihād* against Abū Yazīd’s rebels.67

The Frankish and Yemeni swords mentioned in the passage above are not without their significance. The location of the production of swords and their make and type were very much part of the literary discourse of the time period in which Jūdhar lived. Al-Kindī (d. 893) was a ninth-century Abbasid philosopher, polymath, mathematician, and physician who wrote several treatises including one on swords and swordmaking entitled, *Fī Jawāhir al-Suyūf* (On the Jewels Of Swords). This treatise sheds light on al-Manṣūr’s instructions above and the specific mention of Frankish and Yemeni swords. In the medieval Islamic world, Yemen had been a center for swordmaking and crucible steel. When smiths used crucible steel with iron sourced from Yemeni mines directly to forge their swords, those swords were considered more valuable than others in the market forged from imported crucible steel. Yemeni swords forged from Indian crucible steel were considered to have a medium quality in comparison to the pure Yemeni ones.68

Frankish swords, as well as some Viking swords, were imported to the medieval Islamic world from northern Europe. Al-Kindī likens the make of Frankish swords to textiles. He writes that Frankish swords resemble ṭabarī textiles, which denote the fabrics made in Ṭabaristān in Persia known for their brocade patterns and embroidered surfaces.69 Many swords which survive from this period and were produced in northern Europe demonstrate that the surfaces of the blades of these swords were decorated with patterned welding (fig. 19). Al-Kindī found these patterns strange during his time period which perhaps meant that the patterned welding designs

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69 Ibid, 77.
on Frankish swords were not common to those made in Islamic marketplaces. It is noteworthy for the purposes of this chapter to demonstrate that even in describing swords, al-Kindī uses textile descriptions as a form of expression. What is most significant from Jūdhar’s forging of ornamented and expensive swords from the workshops of al-Mahdiyya is al-Manṣūr’s assertion that the Fatimid capital’s steel productions were comparable to other contemporary brands of swords already in the medieval Islamic commercial world. The Fatimids had access to mineral mines in Ifrīqiya in places like Majjāna (Ban Magin) in Tebessa as well as other regions. Just as the Fatimids required timber to build their ships and galleys, iron was also needed. With their procurement of iron, the Fatimids were able to forge their own weaponry and armor.70

Triumph was celebrated with the public parading of tribute when armies returned to the capitals victoriously. This type of display of material culture and pageantry in Fatimid al-Manṣūriyya is described vividly in several sources. Ibn Hāni’ al-Andalūsī, al-Mu’izz’s court poet in Ifrīqiya, describes such an event in one of his eulogies (madh) for the caliph. In 958, Al-Mu’izz made Jawhar the military commander of the Fatimid forces after he sent him towards the west to secure lands which had been reconquered by the Umayyads of Spain. In a court qaṣīda (metered poem) written in 960 to describe a gift exchange between the commander and al-Mu’izz, Ibn Hāni’ describes the treasures which Jawhar brought back from the battles waged in the Maghrib. These treasures were ceremonially marched into the palatial city of al-Manṣūriyya. Ibn Hāni’’s description demonstrates the importance of royal pomp and how the display of’udda was fashioned in the Islamic Middle Ages, especially in the Fatimid period:

70 Jacob Abadi, Tunisia since the Arab Conquest: The Saga of a Westernized Muslim State (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 2013), 96.
'O how the commander of the army bring forth his gifts! He was dispatched according to the proposed strategy (al-rā’y) given by the Imām and now he delivers.

His gift is like the gift of someone who gives the most beneficial counsel (nasiḥa), and it is something which the people have never laid eyes on or imagined.

'O how the strong-built horses are paraded in [the city]! 'O how these horses have been kept from becoming weak!

The horses march and gallop as their glorious tails flow behind them like a Yemeni garment, as if they are wearing colorful embroidered textiles and brocades.71

Ibn Hāni’ is renowned for his descriptive poetry of horses. In the entire beginning part of this poem he continues his description of the horses paying specific attention to the textiles used to adorn them. In other verses in this poem, he likens the horses to singing slave girls adorned with all kinds of beautiful accessories and describes the embroidered and colorful textiles on the backs of the horses as gardens.72 The detailed descriptions of textiles become the means by which this poet is able to express ideas of royal authority and power.

Ibn Hāni’’s vivid descriptions of Jawhar’s tribute from the Maghrib appears to be more than just hyperbole when compared to a passage from al-Maqrīzī’s Ittiʿāz al-Ḥunafā (Lessons of the True Believer) describing another tribute he sent to al-Muʿizz when he conquered Egypt in 969. After the conquest of Egypt, al-Maqrīzī lists the following gifts that Jawhar sent to al-Muʿizz in Ifrīqiya:

- Ninety-nine bakhtiya camels (Bactrian bred furry camels with two humps and long necks);
- Twenty-one pavilions of brocade woven with gold thread which had golden belts encrusted with jewels;
- One-hundred and twenty camels wearing the finest quality brocade with reins adorned in silver;
- Five-hundred Arabian camels;
sixty-five camels; forty-eight beasts of burden which included one mule and forty-seven horses adorned in the finest quality of inscribed silk, having saddles and bridles which were made of either gold or silver; two pieces of timber which were the longest pieces from which one could take pride; and there were prisoner slaves (unnamed).73

In these ceremonial descriptions of gift giving in the Fatimid court of Ifrīqiya, textiles again arrive at the forefront of artistic expression and signify the power, economic wealth, and prosperity of the ruler. This idea is made more clear with the inclusion of two large pieces of timber included in the display of gifts, which according to the evidence presented in the last chapter, were directly indicative of economic prosperity in the context of Fatimid Ifrīqiya.

Textiles and Material Culture as a Symbol of Upward Social Mobility in the Sīra

During the rebellion of Abū Yazīd, the Fatimid caliph al-Manṣūr spent most of his time outside of the capital of al-Mahdiyya in pursuit of this major enemy of the state. It was in this period that al-Manṣūr gave Jūdhar full control in his absence over the royal palace and the entire Fatimid dominion, essentially making him the acting governor of the Fatimid capital and the domains which fell under it. He also placed all the keys to the treasuries in the Ustādh’s hand, which meant that the responsibility of maintaining expenditures for the kingdom and ensuring that there were enough funds in the coffers to maintain the state fell upon Jūdhar’s shoulders.

The Sīra appears to demonstrate that Jūdhar did what was asked of him during this time quite remarkably. Abū Yazīd’s revolt was devastating to the new Fatimid state and at one point the kingdom was reduced to al-Mahdiyya and its environs. Upon al-Manṣūr’s victorious return, having quashed the revolt in 947, the Sīra reaches its climax and narrates one of the most momentous experiences in Jūdhar’s life. As al-Manṣūr returned to al-Mahdiyya triumphantly,

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73 al-Maqrīzī, Ittiʿāz al-Ḥunafāʾ, ed. 79.
Jūdhar officially rode out of the city to receive the caliph at the Wādī al-Māliḥ, a valley located near the capital.

The Sīra narrates that Jūdhar was dressed in his finest clothes and received al-Manṣūr with the utmost preparations (ʿudda). When al-Manṣūr laid his eyes upon Jūdhar, he was overjoyed and pleased with him. He said, “I do not know how to shield Jūdhar from death. If youth could be purchased, I would surely trade the most precious thing that I own for Jūdhar’s youth.” After saying these words, al-Manṣūr officially greeted Jūdhar and devoted full attention towards him. The Caliph-Imām dressed him in a robe of honor which was a special khilʿa prepared for the occasion. He instructed Jūdhar to mount a piebald horse from his personal steeds. The horse was named Ablaq (piebald) b. Nuyūṭ and it was led by other horses which all bore elaborate saddles. When they entered al-Mahdiyya and reached the palace of al-Manṣūr, a meal was served. To honor Jūdhar further, al-Manṣūr invited the Ustādh to sit at his own table. This invitation marked the first instance that Jūdhar had ever sat with the caliph to eat, despite having been his close confidant for decades. The entire scene narrated by al-Manṣūr al-Kātib demonstrates the lofty social and political position the Ustādh held at this point in his life, and is signified by the conferment of a robe of honor to award Jūdhar for his service as the governor of al-Mahdiyya during this turbulent moment in the dynasty’s history.

Jūdhar received even more honors on the occasion of al-Manṣūr’s victory over Abū Yazīd. When the Imām finally captured the remaining Berber Kharijite rebels, known as the Azāriqa, letters of his victory were sent all around the kingdom. Al-Manṣūr also sent a special

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74 Sīra, 1:18, 29.
75 Sīra, 1:18
76 The Azāriqa were a branch of the Ibāḍī school of thought of Islam.
letter to Jūdhar which awarded him the honor of his freedom. The letter instructed that as a result of the victory and in order to thank God for it, Jūdhar should carry out several pious actions as governor of al-Mahdiyya. These actions included charitable deeds such as the dispersal of alms over the poor of al-Mahdiyya. All the provincial governors had been instructed to do the same. Al-Manṣūr, however, wanted to perform one extra pious act and that was the manumission of Jūdhar. In his eyes this deed was “the most pious action he could take to thank God as a result of his victory.” An important fact to note is that manumission in Jūdhar’s case is a personal honor. His status as a slave before this moment did not hinder his ability or authority to reign as governor or carry out the palatial duties that were entrusted to him. The factors of Jūdhar’s social capital far outweighed his social status as a slave.

In addition to manumission, al-Manṣūr further raised the status of Jūdhar’s public authority by instructing him to write the designated title of “The Client of the Prince of the Faithful” (Mawlā Amīr al-Muʾminīn) on all his official correspondence to men of every rank, high or low. The Fatimid custom in official documents was to list the names of higher ranking officials above those of lesser rank. Al-Manṣūr’s instructions clearly state for Jūdhar to ensure his name and newly awarded title preceded all other names of officials except the crown prince al-Mu’izz. In this respect, Jūdhar was the third highest ranking official of the Fatimid state and his authority outranked members of the caliph’s own household, including other princes.

Authority and rank were very important factors for the functioning of Fatimid society as outlined in Chapter Two. This chain of command and social rank was two-fold for the Fatimids.

77 Sīra, 1:16, 28.
78 Sīra, 1:16.
One system of ranking belonged to the private religious order, and the other belonged to the state. In the Fatimid world, members could hold ranks in both spheres. The previous research in this dissertation demonstrates that Jūdhar had no doubt risen in the ranks of the religious order of the Fatimids in his early career. However, at this moment, Jūdhar’s public authority, which had often been challenged by members of the royal household, was now indisputable with the receipt of his official title as Mawlā Amīr al-Muʿminīn. In many ways, although the term wazīr was not applied to any official in the stage of Fatimid history in Ifrīqiya, at least according to the material provided in the Sīra, the Ustādh seems to have achieved that role.

Jūdhar’s rise in rank was further signified when al-Manṣūr decreed that Jūdhar’s name would be officially inscribed on the royal ṭirāz in golden thread on textiles and garments even worn by the Imāms. This honor was extended by al-Manṣūr to include productions coming out of the royal carpet workshops. The weavers were officially instructed to inscribe Jūdhar’s name and title in their productions. Al-Manṣūr’s instructions to Jūdhar on this matter in his decree were precise, “Write to them to inscribe [the following] onto the ṭirāz and the carpets, ‘This is from what has been manufactured by Jūdhar, the Mawlā (client) of Amīr al-Muʿminīn.’”79 Al-Manṣūr inspected the textiles coming out of the royal ṭirāz to ensure that his instructions were being followed. When he saw the work being carried out by the slaves which had been working there he was impressed. The Sīra records the Imām as saying, “their works are elegant gardens.”80 The referral to gardens was a reference to the vegetal arabesque pattern embroidery and multitude of colors that these artistic textiles possessed.

79 Sīra, 1:17.
80 Sīra, 1:17.
The titles which appeared on the productions of royal workshops were very important to the ruler as mentioned in the research presented above. Another passage from the Sīra sheds light on the pragmatic use of official titulars and the purpose which these inscriptions served on royal productions. In 964, the Fatimids, led by the Kalbid Amīr al-Ḥasan b. ’Ammār (d. 964), fought the Byzantines near the Sicilian settlement of Rometta in a battle known as the Battle of the Pit (Waqʿat al-Ḥufra). After the amīr won the battle, he sent some of the captured slaves to Ifrīqiya. There was a certain slave whom the Sīra describes as the ṣaqlabī and to whom al-Muʿizz wished to give a prayer mat woven in the royal workshops. Al-Muʿizz’s intention in giving the mat is not absolutely clear. The passage, however, demonstrates that the titles served as a type of trademark for royal productions. Since al-Manṣūr had previously ordained that Jūdhar’s name and full title be inscribed on the textiles produced in the workshops, it was natural for them to be made in this manner. In this particular instance regarding the gift to the ṣaqlabī, al-Muʿizz gave the instructions to a eunuch named Nuṣaryr to commission the prayer mat, but made no precise directives to have the Ustādh’s name embroidered onto it. Because of the lack of precise directives, Jūdhar instructed Nuṣayr not to inscribe his name. The narrative of what follows reveals the production methods of the weavers in the tirāz workshops.

In this phase of Fatimid history, it appears that the embroidery on textile productions was done without a template. Paper was not readily available to create such templates, so weavers appear to have created the designs and written the inscriptions at the same moment they worked on a project. The few remaining textiles from this time period need to be further studied to see what their internal weaves reveal. However, Jūdhar specifically states in this narrative that, “when they [the weavers] laid the work before them, there appeared to be enough room for
recording (inscription) the name [Jūdhar’s] as was customary [in the textile workshops] so they weaved it in and completed the mat.” Since Jūdhar was in charge of the workshop’s supervision, it appears that he inspected the textiles coming out of the workshop, especially those important commissions that were ordered to be made from the directives of the palace. Upon checking on the finished mat intended for the ṣaqlabī, he noticed that his own name had been inscribed onto it. This additional inscription really upset him. The mat had been inscribed with gold thread and been excellently made by the weavers. As a result, Jūdhar felt that remaking it would waste resources. Lest he violate the prescribed code of conduct (adab), and since al-Mu‘izz had specifically said only to inscribe the caliph’s name, Jūdhar wrote to al-Mu‘izz to make him aware of the situation. The Ustādh feared that the inclusion of his name might indicate that he possessed a greed for power. The Imām reassured Jūdhar not to worry and said the only thing that made him suggest to omit Jūdhar’s name in the first place from the mat’s dating inscription (al-tārīkh) was the assumed limitation of space. Al-Mu‘izz’s last words indicate the importance the inscription had to medieval Islamic society: “it is better and more substantial [that your name appears] for the people so that it is known that this is the work of our slaves.” Al-Mu‘izz clearly wished people to acknowledge where such brilliant textiles works were produced.

As mentioned above, the ṭirāz was also responsible for fulfilling the textile and furnishing needs of the palace and all its members. When Jūdhar moved into his new residence in al-Manṣūriyya which was situated in one of the Imām’s palaces as mentioned in Chapter Two, he needed to furnish some of the floorings of his new home with good quality mats. The Sīra

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81 Sīra, 2:2, 83.
82 Sīra, 2:2, 84.
indicates that when Jūdhar arrived at al-Manṣūriyya, the ṭirāz workshops were still under his supervision. Therefore, it seems reasonable that the Ustādh could have commissioned his own mats. However, not wishing to take advantage of his power and position, he asked al-Mu‘izz’s permission to commission the mats he needed for his home. Al-Mu‘izz gladly granted it.  

Other events of how the ṭirāz institution functioned in the cultural lives of members of the Fatimid palace are recorded in the Sīra. These events include demands among Fatimid courtiers and faithful devotees of the Imām alike for textiles directly bestowed by the Imām himself. It should be recalled, because of the divine connection the Imām was believed to possess by adherents to the Fatimid Da‘wa, textiles given by the Imām’s own hands were acknowledged as transferrers of his divine blessings (baraka). Several Fatimid ṭirāz textiles, some originating from the Maghrib, were excavated from the burial tombs of people living in the Fatimid period of Egypt from the cemetery of Istabl ‘Antar located south of Cairo. Many people interred here appear to be Fatimid officials who wished to be buried with these textiles. Fatimid officials often requested textiles from the caliph to be used as burial shrouds. Al-Manṣūr al-Kātib, explicitly articulates this idea in the Sīra. In a recorded letter between al-Mu‘izz and Jūdhar we learn that a certain courtier named Ṣāfī requested a burial shroud from the Imām for his son Ḥusayn who had recently died. Al-Mu‘izz specifically instructs Jūdhar to procure a burial shroud for Ḥusayn and send it to his family since Ṣāfī was such a loyal slave. The conferment of the textile and the honor that accompanied it were not without their reflective gesture of also

83 Sīra, 2:21.

awarding status to the family. Al-Mu’izz specifically instructs the Ustadh to place the two other sons of Šāfī in the position which had been held by their brother.⁸⁵

Even though Jūdhar possessed the highest position achievable within the palace administration, he believed in the spiritual power of baraka. On more than one occasion the Ustadh sought textiles from the caliph as a blessing. Al-Manṣūr al-Kātib records one such incident in which al-Mu’izz writes a note to Jūdhar in which he says, “Jūdhar, we have come to know that you like wearing leggings, so we sent leggings to you which are made of raw-silk (khazz) and which were previously worn by al-Manṣūr. After some time, I have also used them when I needed them. Now you use them acknowledging God’s baraka and prosperity [in them], God willing.”⁸⁶

In his final years, Jūdhar fell ill and continued to seek blessings from al-Mu’izz. On one occasion, he requested a garment worn by the Imām to be used as his burial shroud. When al-Mu’izz read Jūdhar’s letter he sent several items consisting of khil’ā and other garments worn by al-Mu’izz himself, specifically items which he had worn during worship. Al-Mu’izz’s clothing included a coat which was lined in cotton produced in Marw, a province in Persia known for cotton production. This coat included a tunic as an undergarment. In addition, there was clothing worn by al-Mahdī which included a plain colored coat made of fākhitū, a Khuzistānī silk fabric and another tunic. Al-Mu’izz also gave clothing from al-Qā’im’s wardrobe which included two tunics, pants, a turban, and a white trouser-band made from white Armenian fabric, which according to Ibn Ḥawqal was quite well known at the time. He sent Jūdhar an additional marwī

⁸⁵ Sīra, 2:26.
⁸⁶ Sīra, 2:42. According to Haji, the original manuscripts have al-zānāt in the transcription. Haji has read it as possibly al-rānāt and translated it as leggings. I am using his interpretation and translation for this word here in this research as well.
cotton robe accompanied by a tunic. Al-Muʿizz’s intention was clear. He indicated that the items of clothing were filled with blessings for Jūdhar. He instructed Jūdhar, “Keep these garments with you until the moment of your death for which you have requested them. This [your death] will be after God has lengthened your life enough that you accompany us on the Ḥajj and see the Sacred House of God (Ka’ba in Mecca) and visit of the tomb of our grandfather Muḥammad, so that it might bring joy to your eyes…”87 These examples, as I have been arguing, clearly exemplify the significance of textiles and the tradition of the khil’a in the early Fatimid state.

In a society where there were limited natural resources such as wood, water, and paper, as was the case of the Fatimids in Ifrīqiya, textiles became one of the main media through which cultural and artistic expression could be visualized. Although stone might have been readily available to use as a medium, it was both expensive to quarry and transport. In this regard, textiles became the optimal choice. Another point which is much less noted is that textiles were also a means for literary expression in an environment where paper was not yet readily available. The production of parchment, the writing material available for codices before the introduction of paper in the medieval Islamic world, was a time consuming process and very expensive. For that reason, it was reserved for more important works of art, such as making copies of the Qurʿān. Several instances appear in the Divān (anthology) of Tamīm, the prince-son of the Fatimid caliph al-Muʿizz and poet from the early part of this dynasty, in which instructs that his verses be inscribed onto textiles in the tirāz workshops. In this manner, in tenth-century Ifrīqiya, textiles served a role which paper would replace in the following centuries.

This chapter sheds light on a connection which existed between the political, religious,

87 Siṣa, 2:81
and cultural worlds of the Fatimids with their material world as contextualized through a reading of the Ṣīra of Ustādh Jūdar. The material cultural world which emerges from the Ṣīra demonstrates that the Fatimids possessed intent and meaning in their art. Their main medium for expression in this time period was textiles. Although the research in this chapter does not cover all aspects of Fatimid art, it discusses some factors to be considered when researching works of art from the Fatimid period of rule in Ifrīqiya.
Conclusion

Jūdhar was not just a servant of the Fatimid Caliph-Imāms. During his long tenure of service, he had become a close confidant, a trusted friend, and like a member of the inner family. Al-Manṣūr al-Kātib provides an example of this close relationship through an event recorded in the Sīra in which Jūdhar’s friend, ʻAbdallāh b. Ḥajjūn, who was a builder, joined the Ustādh’s company one day for casual conversation. When ʻAbdallāh met Jūdhar on this occasion, he asked Jūdhar why he had not visited al-Muʻizz’s court for several days. ʻAbdallāh found the Ustādh’s absence from court peculiar since he was accustomed to seeing him at the palace night and day, especially during courtly sessions. Jūdhar told ʻAbdallāh that despite his close relationship to al-Muʻizz, he knew the caliph was currently occupied in his own matters and did not want to bother him. ʻAbdallāh reported his conversation with Jūdhar to al-Muʻizz in a subsequent visit to the palace. The Imām was surprised by Jūdhar’s words and told ʻAbdallāh while gesturing towards members of the royal Fatimid family present at court including his sons, brothers, and uncles, “What is the difference between them and Jūdhar?”

Moments like these narrated by al-Manṣūr al-Kātib allow the reader of the Sīra to take a glimpse at a promised vision of egalitarianism. During their reign over much of the southern Mediterranean and parts of the Ḥijāz and Levant between 909 - 1171, the Fatimids had succeeded in creating a society with an individual shared culture in which all its members could participate. However, despite their creation of a unique Fatimid culture, they constantly found themselves as a demographic minority in comparison to the populaces they ruled. During their reign over a large portion of the Islamic world, they governed a wide variety of religious and

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1 Sīra, 2: 61, 142 - 143.
ethnic groups which included, Arabs, Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Berbers, Africans, Sunnis, Shias, Copts, Melkite Christians, Nestorian Christians, Rabbanite Jews, and Qaraite Jews. Therefore, due to the diverse communities which they governed, the Fatimids maintained a policy of inclusiveness in their governance born out of a desire for pluralism and a need for pragmatism.² A literary work like the Sīra, which narrates the story of the rise of a marginalized ṣaqlabī slave and eunuch in the Fatimid court, would have only reinforced that agenda to its intended audience.

Prior scholarship on slavery and eunuchs in the medieval Islamic world has broadly arrived at the notion that their lives were limited within societal boundaries. Part of this notion is true. Medieval Islamic society and law considered slaves as property. Their status as property allowed society to objectify them. Since medieval Islamic slavery was part of an ongoing and well-connected global network of trade, slaves originated from several different ethnic backgrounds. Their ethnicities were seen as inferior to the dominant Arab ruling class. Although castration was taboo in Islam, the demand for eunuchs in courtly systems created a constant presence of eunuchs in medieval Islamic society. Thus, eunuchs became a third gender in society possessing fewer rights than intact men (fuḥūl) under the law. Based on these well-acknowledged interpretations of slavery and eunuchism in medieval Islamic society, many scholars have developed a preconceived notion that their life stories must also be confined and limited. For this reason, scholarship has not taken the eunuch very far from the harem to which he is supposedly bound.

Jūdhar was merited. Although the social marginalization of Jūdhar’s identities as a slave, eunuch, and foreign ṣaqlabī were very much a reality of the tenth-century world in which he lived, the Sīra pays little attention to them in its telling of his story. The Ustādh’s story, as told by al-Manṣūr al-Kātib, depicts Jūdhar as a character who was exemplary in matters of state and diplomacy. He was a religious figure. He was completely loyal to his masters and his friends. Jūdhar held several positions in the Fatimid court throughout his sixty-two year tenure and in each of these professions, he was diligent and thorough. He was an expert businessman and understood the value of commodities. He also participated in the patronage of Fatimid visual and performative culture. He was the model of what every person in every stratum of Fatimid society should strive to emulate. The research presented in this dissertation analyzed the Sīra’s negotiation between the historical realities of the tenth-century world of a eunuch slave and the fictional narratives of the social mobility which it portrays.

Every society has an individual set of collective values which they impose on other members to obtain in order to gain social standing. These values can be understood as social currencies necessary to exchange with other members of society in order to achieve social mobility. The precise definition of these currencies differs from society to society, however, sociological scholarship has suggested that social, economic, and cultural forms of capitals exist in many premodern and modern societies. The acquisition of capital allows an individual to move up the social ladder.

These forms of capital are embedded in the story of Jūdhar as portrayed by al-Manṣūr al-Kātib. In Fatimid culture, personal qualities like valor, excellence, loyalty, devotion, and many other forms of currency were exchanged for recognition, rank, and prestige in the court. Jūdhar
was able to acquire a fair number of these types of currencies through his acquisition of the various forms of capital mentioned above. They are the means through which Jūdhar acquired his own agency to navigate through the stratified levels of Fatimid society and ultimately rise from a young palace page to the third most powerful official of the early Fatimid state.

The strongest form of capital Jūdhar acquired to achieve his mobility was social. One’s proximity to the caliph or ruler was the basis for his measure and rank at a medieval Islamic court. The Ṣīra attests to Jūdhar’s proximity to the Fatimid caliphs from the first day of his initiation into their service when al-Mahdī arrived in Ifrīqiya in 909. His proximity allowed him access to al-Qā‘im’s palace and household. As a result of working in the royal palace, he was able to succeed at several other professions in the Fatimid court and palace. As a result, his worth to the society in which he functioned began to grow. Due to the positions he held, Jūdhar was able to expand his social network to include several elite members of Fatimid society. Through his expansive social network, his influence and power went far beyond the walls of the Fatimid palatial cities. For example, his deep ties with the Kalbid family of Sicily allowed him to have knowledge of the geopolitical situations occurring on the island.

Jūdhar lived at the moment of Fatimid history when they dynasty was first taking shape and establishing its position in the medieval Islamic world. The Fatimids needed to make the transition from a military society to an established state and a Mediterranean power since their end goal to overthrow their Abbasid rivals and conquer the entire Islamic world was never kept a secret. To achieve this goal, the Fatimid state fully engaged in the economic and commercial activities of the Mediterranean and larger Islamic world. Ifrīqiya was in a unique geographic position being a central area between the western and eastern Islamic worlds. Moreover, the
Fatimids also had control over several sub-Saharan and West African trade routes which ran along the southern borders of their territory. These factors allowed the Fatimids to prosper economically and to export and import goods to and from all over the medieval Islamic world as well as Europe.

It was also incumbent on the Fatimid state to maintain a society which consisted of members who could contribute. Fatimid legal writings written during Ūdhar’s time demonstrate that the state called on all members to engage in commercial and mercantile activity as a religious obligation. Being a high ranking official, Ūdhar was awarded several lands from the state which yielded returns from taxation. However, the Ustādh also readily engaged in trade by land and sea. Using his social ties to Sicily, he was able to enter the timber trade, by importing wood from the island for consumption in Ifrīqiya. Since timber was one of the most valuable commodities of the time due to the scarcity of forestland in the Islamic world, this trade became Ūdhar’s most lucrative form of income. His economic success allowed him to give significant monetary offerings as gifts to the Fatimid Caliph-Imām. His economic capital allowed him to rise further in the ranks of Fatimid society.

Cultural capital was also part of Ūdhar’s ascent. When the Fatimids conquered Ifrīqiya, they did so militarily and through the aid of the Kutāma Berber tribe. The Kutāma Berbers had governed themselves independently throughout the Islamization of North Africa from the seventh to ninth centuries. When the Fatimids rose to power, they wished to assimilate the Kutāma and other members of their court such as the Ṣaqāliba by creating a common culture between the various socio-ethnic groups which made up their polity. The Sīra depicts Ūdhar as playing an important role in the formation of a visual and performative culture which included
the production of works of art, ceremony, ritual, and the linking of symbolic meaning to artistic production. The Fatimids in Ifrīqiya used textiles, above all other resources, to express much of their visual culture. Jūdhar had an active role in this field as well because he served as master of the ṭirāz for several years. Jūdhar’s heightened position in this field was signified by his name being officially woven into works being produced in the Fatimid ṭirāz workshops.

There are several other forms of capital and currencies through which Jūdhar’s life can be further explicated which I did not explore in this dissertation. However, this dissertation presents a new angle of exploration for the scholarship of slaves in medieval Islam, and particularly eunuchs. Rather than focus on the limitations of slavehood and eunuchism imposed by medieval Islamic jurisprudence as a lens for researching these topics, the scholarship presented here narrows in on the individual agency a member of society could possess through the acquisition of capitals, even if that member was socially marginalized. This study has left us with new interpretations for reading Sīra literature produced in the medieval Islamic world as it has provided fresh approaches to the individual and collective lives of slaves and eunuchs in medieval Islamic history.

Perhaps it’s not Jūdhar’s life story which exemplifies the extent of his rise in the ranks of the Fatimid court, but rather it is the story of how he died. Towards the end of his life, the Ustādh remained chronically ill. Despite his illness, al-Mu’izz wished that Jūdhar accompany him on his journey to Egypt in 971 when he officially departed Ifrīqiya to make Cairo his home. When they arrived at the city of Ajdābiya, a trade post en route in Libya, Jūdhar was so weakened by his illness that he could no longer walk. He wished to see al-Mu’izz one last time and sent al-Manṣūr al-Kātib to request al-Mu’izz’s son, Prince ʿAbdallāh, to ask the Caliph-Imām if an audience
with Jūdhar could be arranged. ’Abdallāh, on al-Mu’izz’s instructions, ordered al-Manṣūr al-Kātib to bring the Ustādh’s litter, being carried by a mule, to a large domed tent where al-Mu’izz was eating. The prince instructed al-Manṣūr al-Kātib to leave the mule standing outside the tent and to make sure Jūdhar remained inside the litter.

When they arrived at the location outside the tent, Jūdhar wished to come down from the litter. However, al-Manṣūr al-Kātib, following the strict instructions he had received from the prince, did not allow his master to come down from the litter. Suddenly, al-Mu’izz came out of the tent and approached the litter. He leaned inside and hugged Jūdhar “as a brother would embrace a brother, and a friend would embrace a friend.”3 Jūdhar looked angrily at al-Manṣūr al-Kātib for not allowing him to leave the litter since remaining inside and seated while the Caliph-Imām was standing on the ground was considered a breach of courtly protocol. Al-Mu’izz reassured Jūdhar that al-Manṣūr al-Kātib had acted according to his instructions and told Jūdhar to remain inside the litter. Al-Mu’izz asked the Ustādh to remain strong and prayed for his long life so he could witness their arrival to Cairo.

Jūdhar’s response to al-Mu’izz’s kindness reflected the social marginalization which he felt due to his race and social status, despite having risen to such a high rank in his lifetime. He said, “‘O my lord, I swear by God, there is nothing that merits this slave of yours to receive the honor of seeing your victory [in Cairo], for I am a šaqlabī, a foreigner, possessing nothing which makes me worthy of that. My only honor is that I am your slave who has been enlightened with the light of your divine guidance.”4

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3 Sīra, 2: 85, 174.
Al-Mu’izz reminded Jūdhar of his years of service for the Caliph-Imāms and how he had risen above all the other Ṣaqāliba in the Fatimid court through his obedience, which he showed through desire and not fear. Al-Mu’izz also reminded him of where he had started his career. He said, “Do you not remember those days when you were satisfied by just being in a home which was located near the latrines next to the palace of your Imām al-Qā’im billah? Unlike the other Ṣaqāliba who shared your social station, you did not choose the comforts of this material world. On the contrary, God wished greatness for you from the beginning to the end.”5 The Ustādh was humbled by al-Mu’izz’s kindness. A secretary of al-Mu’izz was standing nearby. Because Jūdhar was so humbled, he told the secretary to start leading his mule away from the Imām because he felt embarrassed that the Imām had been standing there for so long. Al-Mu’izz ordered the secretary to leave the mule where it stood so Jūdhar could continue to look upon him. He said, “Leave it here, because Jūdhar’s heart feels at peace when he looks at us.”6 That was the last time Jūdhar would ever lay eyes upon al-Mu’izz.

After lodging in Ajdābiya, al-Mu’izz’s caravan approached an area near Barqa as it advanced towards Cairo. The Ustādh had become extremely weak and ill when they arrived there, however, he was still mentally fit to engage himself in matters of the state. Jūdhar called al-Manṣūr al-Kātib to ensure that the army was wearing its best attire. He wished that al-Mu’izz’s maghribī army impress the ‘easterners’ residing in Barqa. He told al-Manṣūr al-Kātib to check to see if the soldiers were bearing the best military equipment and donning elaborate attire. He wanted to ensure that al-Mu’izz’s army enter Barqa in the most impressive manner possible.

5 Ibid, 175.
6 Ibid, 175.
In Barqa, al-Mu’izz continued to ask about Jūdhar’s health. He sent him a gift of apples which had arrived from Egypt. Jūdhar received and accepted the gift, kissing the ground and thanking God. The next morning, the Ustādh passed away. His body was carried to the palace where al-Mu’izz had taken residence. Al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān was ordered to wash his body and the Imām performed funeral prayers for the Ustādh. The next day, Ustādh Jūdhar was buried.

Here our story of Ustādh Jūdhar comes to an end. It is only appropriate to end with the words of al-Manṣūr al-Kātib written at the very end of the Sīra. “And to God I express my desire with the purest intention to make my final days like he made the final days of Jūdhar.”
Fig 4. 13th Century Frontispiece of Rasā‘ī’l Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, Süleymaniye Esad Efendi, 3638, fol. 4 r. (Photo: Oxford University Press and Institute of Ismaili Studies).
Fig. 5. Map of al-Mahdiyya. Suggested location of the plaza between the two places. Map by M.M. Beaudoin, Lezine, *Mahdiya Recherches d’Archéologie Islamique*, 1965.

![Map of al-Mahdiyya](image)

Fig. 6. Sennacherib overlooking the transport of bulls from Balatai to Nineveh. 700-692 B.C. (British Museum WA124824), Photo by Ali Asgar Alibhai.

![Sennacherib](image)
Fig. 9. Ground plan of the mosque of al-Mahdiya, tenth century, proposed covered gallery in the central courtyard of the original mosque according to Lezine. Lezine, *Mahdiya*. 
Fig. 10. Tabby linen textile - ʻattābī, Abbasid Egypt, eighth century, Brooklyn Museum.

Fig. 11. Tabby linen burial tunic with gold and silver tiraz embroidery. Fatimid Egypt, eleventh century, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.
Fig. 13. This oil lamp dates to the Fatimid period of Ifrīqiya. The provenance is unknown. It clearly takes an anthropomorphic form. It is located in the Bardo Museum in Tunisia. Photo by Ali Asgar Alibhai.

Fig. 14. This carved marble relief was excavated from al-Mahdiya and dates to the tenth and eleventh centuries. The relief depicts two figures, one cross legged ruler with a crown and embroidered tunic, wearing a belt and crown. Photo by Ali Asgar Alibhai.
Fig. 15. This carving a bearded human face was found in the excavations of the Fatimid city of al-Manṣūriyya and dates to the tenth and eleventh centuries when the city was occupied. It is made of carved plaster and depicts a face with mustache, beard, and other facial features. It is in the Raqqāda Museum in Tunisia. STC (61). Photo by Ali Asgar Alibhai.

Fig. 16. Another humanoid figure made from metalwork and discovered in the excavations from al-Manṣūriyya. It is located in the Bardo Museum in Tunisia. Photo by Ali Asgar Alibhai.
Fig. 17. This tenth-century bowl was found in al-Manṣūriya and depicts an antelope surrounded by floral motifs with Allāh written above it. It is an example of the ceramic works produced in Ifrīqiya during the Fatimid period and an example of the art of depicting animals in the capital. Photo by Ali Asgar Alibhai.
Fig. 18. Textile fragment produced in Ifrīqiya for the Abbasid Caliph Marwān II, late seventh and eighth century. Silk, compound twill weave, 3 1/2 x 4 in. (8.9 x 10.2 cm). (Photo: Brooklyn Museum, 41.1265_PS2.jpg).

Fig. 19. Northwest European made sword with patterned welding. Late eighth – early ninth century CE. Kalundborg or Holbæk, Zealand, Denmark [Credit: © The National Museum of Denmark].
Bibliography


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