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Did Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Destroy the Fatimids' Books? An Historiographical Enquiry

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ABSTRACT:

A persistent myth featuring in some modern accounts of the transition from Fatimid to Ayyubid rule (1169-71) is that one of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's (r. 1171-93) first actions upon attaining sovereignty over Egypt was to destroy the Fatimids' book collections in their entirety. Medieval sources present a different, more nuanced depiction of books sold and dispersed over a decade or more, rather than extirpated and put out of circulation altogether. This article collects and examines medieval Arabic accounts of the episode, and finds further indications of the robust survival of Fatimid-era works in the composition of later chronicles, where native Fatimid-era accounts, which clearly did endure beyond the Fatimid age, are well-represented. The article also looks at the tendentious aspects of medieval accounts of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's policies, and the difficulties they pose to a modern appraisal of the sultan's character and intellectual-ideological tendencies.

1. Fatimid Historiography: A Lost Corpus?

> 'The Sunni Ayyubids who succeeded the Fatimids in Egypt systematically destroyed the renowned Fatimid libraries at Cairo.' (F. Daftary, *A Short History of the Isma'ilis,* 5)

Modern scholarship on medieval Islamic history, historiography and book culture has not as yet unburdened itself of the historically and historiographically problematic notion that the last Fatimid vizier and first Ayyubid sultan Ṣalāh al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī (the Fatimid vizier from 1169-71 and the Ayyubid sultan from 1171-1193) destroyed the Fatimid royal libraries in the early 1170s, resulting in the loss of the primary sources documenting the Fatimid era (909-1171).[1] The idea has persisted, *pace* Lewis, Daftary, Halm[2] and others,

[1] I would like to express my thanks to Dr. Konrad Hirschler for his comments on an earlier draft of this article.

[2] 'In Fatimid times, especially after the transference of the seat of the Fatimid state from Ifriqiya to Egypt in 362/973, numerous histories of the Fatimid state and dynasty were compiled by contemporary historians, both Isma'ili and non-Isma'ili. But with the exception of a few fragments, the Fatimid chronicles did not survive the downfall of the dynasty. The Sunni Ayyubids who succeeded the Fatimids in Egypt systematically destroyed the renowned Fatimid libraries at Cairo...'

despite evidence to the contrary in a variety of studies that examine the topic directly or indirectly, in the contexts of both Fatimid historiography and of medieval learning in general, such as those by Walker, Brett, Sayyid and Hirschler.[3] That troublesome assumption is itself part and parcel of a wider series of modern debates engendered by the tendentious narratives of medieval Arabic chronicles. Virtually all of these are preoccupied with pushing forward, wittingly or not, sectarian or political agendas: pro-Fatimid, anti-Fatimid, anti-Ayyubid, pro-Zengid, pro-Ayyubid and so forth, in a variety of permutations, allied with some instances, particularly in court chronicles, of the production of historiography as hegemonic narratives, expressive of a will-to-power, or of *post facto*

Farhad Daftary, *A Short History of the Isma'ilis*, (Edinburgh, 1998), 5. For a sample of modern scholars who propound this view, see Bernard Lewis: 'Saladin and the Assassins', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (henceforth '*BSOAS*') 15:2 (1953), 239-245; 242; *idem*, review of *Die Chronik des Ibn ad-Dawādārī. Sechster Teil. Der Bericht über die Fatimiden* by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, *BSOAS* 26:2 (1963), 429-431; 429; *idem*, Letter, 'The Vanished Library', *The New York Review of Books*, 37:14 September 27 (1990); Farhad Daftary,*The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrines*, (Cambridge, 1992); 273; Heinz Halm, *The Fatimids and their Traditions of Learning*, (London, 1997, 2001), 92-3. For its popular reiteration, see, for example, *Rosicrucian Digest,* 8:1 (2006), 8. For a contrary, better-informed exposition of the events of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's first years in Egypt, see Anne-Marie Eddé, *Saladin* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2011), esp. 53-55.

[3] Paul Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, (London, 2002); Michael Brett 'Fatimid Historiography: a Case Study – the Quarrel with the Zirids, 1048-58', in David O. Morgan (ed), *Medieval Historical Writing in the Christian and Islamic Worlds* (London, 1982), 47-59; *idem*, review of Ayman Fu'ad Sayyid's edition of Ibn Muyassar's *Akhbār Miṣr*: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 2 (1983), 293-29; *idem*, '*Lingua Franca* in the Mediterranean: John Wansborough and the Historiography of Medieval Egypt', in Hugh Kennedy (ed), *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt (c. 950-1800)*, (Lieden, 2001), 1-11; Ayman Fu'ad Sayyid, Ibn Ṭuwayr's *Nuzhat al-muqlatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn*, (Beirut, 1992); *idem*, *Passages de la Chronologie d'Egypte d'lbn al-Ma'mūn, Prince Jamāl al-Dīn Abū 'Alī Mūsā b. al-Ma'mūn al-Baṭā'iḥī*, *Textes arabes et etudes islamiques*, vol. 21, (Cairo, 1983); Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands – A Social And Cultural History Of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh, 2012, forthcoming).

rationalisation and legitimisation of political sovereignty.[4] These agendas then intersect with another grand trope in Islamic history, that of library destruction, which is itself a subset of the decline paradigm of medieval Islamic intellectual history, to produce a set of assumptions of which the constituent elements are somewhat problematic to unmesh and differentiate, and await deeper and broader analysis.[5] To this mix we may add the early-generated and persistent 'Saladin myths', which in recent years have resulted in a raft of biographical works in European languages that attempt to separate 'fact' from legend in the depiction of the sultan.[6] The loss of historiographical records, the destruction of libraries, the assertion of a new political/sectarian affiliation on the part of political states, alongside a debunking of the legitimacy of those deposed, and the partisan portrayals of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's religious and political character in Islamic Arabic literature: these familiar themes form the ideological and narrative background against which the present discussion is framed.

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[4] H. A. R. Gibb '*Al-Barq al-Shami*: The History of Saladin by the Katib 'Imad al-Din al-Isfahani', *Wiener Zeitschrift für Kunde des Morgenlandes* 52 (1952-55), 93-115; H. Dajani-Shakeel, 'Egypt and the Egyptians: A Focal Point in the Policies and Literature of Al-Qāḍī Al-Fāḍil', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 36:1 (Jan. 1977), 25-38; Peter M. Holt, 'Saladin and His Admirers: A Biographical Reassessment', *BSOAS* 46:2 (1983), 235-239; Donald S. Richards, 'A Consideration of Two Sources for the Life of Saladin', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 25:1 (1980), 46-65; idem, 'Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī: Administrator, Littérateur and Historian', in Maya Shatzmiller (ed), *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth-Century Syria*, (Leiden, 1993), 133-146; Yaacov Lev, *Saladin in Egypt* (Leiden, 1999), chs. 1.2-1.3.

[5] R. M. Elayyan, 'The History of the Arabic-Islamic Libraries: 7th to 14th Centuries', *International Library Review* 22 (1990), 119-135; Ruth Stellhorn Mackensen, 'Moslem Libraries and Sectarian Propaganda', *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 51:2 (1935), 83-113; Halm (2001); Hirschler (2012).

[6] See in particular Hannes Möhring *Saladin: Der Sultan und seine Zeit, 1138-1193* (Munich, 2005); trans. as *Saladin: The Sultan and His Times, 1138--1193* by D. S. Bachrach (Baltimore, 2008), Lev (1999), Abdul Rahman Azzam, *Saladin* (Harlow, 2009) and Eddé, op. cit.

Within this multifaceted context, the principal topic of this article is the evidence from one particular narrative strand of Arabic historiography on the issue of how Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn dealt with the Fatimids' books upon his assumption of the Fatimid vizierate and subsequently the new Ayyubid sultanate in Egypt (and later Syria). Was there an anti-Isma'ili ideological aftermath of (to use a modern term) book trashing that directly resulted in the relative paucity of Fatimid-era chronicles which beleaguers our understanding of the period today? For this is the import of the idea of 'destruction' propounded by Daftary and others, who argue not just that the Ayyubids dismantled the literary institutions of their predecessors and dispersed their contents, but extirpated them and thereby removed the native Fatimid corpus from circulation altogether, in the vein of the Fatimids' own putative destruction of an Aleppo library in 1076 on account of anti-Isma'ili contents within its walls.[7] How is it, indeed, possible to piece together a view of the events of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's first years in power in Egypt, given the array of various affiliations and vantage points expressed by the handful of Arabic chronicles we may draw upon to throw light on the matter?

A secondary issue, following on from this main set of questions regarding Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and his dealings with the Fatimid royal library collections, is the broader question of how much Fatimid-era historiography, a sub-corpus of the Fatimids' literary legacy, survives into later chronicles, and what this might hope to tell us about the 'destruction' trope with which this article begins. These are the themes I address here, where I juxtapose reports from historiographical sources in order to complement broader parallel or prior studies showing similar results from widely different sources.[8] I use the comparative

[7] Eddé, 54.

[8] See n. 5 above.

approach to Arabic historiographical narratives deployed by Little and then Massoud, less in order to fulfil their threefold self-reflexive aims of elucidating Mamluk historiography in general, identifying borrowings and building a 'repertorium of sources', in Cahen's wording, and more in order to throw light on an historical episode itself, risky as this may seem in view of the proclivities of the chroniclers.[9] Other sources, narrative and documentary, such as Ibn al-Furāt's (d. 1405) inventory of Fatimid-era sources (on which I will say more later), the documentary encyclopaedia of al-Qalqashandī (d. 1418), the annalistic and topographical works of al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442) and documentary specimens such as the Damascene Ashrafiyya Turba's catalogue examined by Hirschler,[10] provide irrefutable evidence of the healthy survival of Fatimid chronicles, documents and books in general beyond the duration of the dynasty. Collectively, these studies pave the way for a reconsideration of the still pervasive assumption that the Fatimids' library holdings perished alongside the ruling family; the findings of this article fall into that context and add a textual contribution to that re-evaluation. Against this backdrop, we can now examine the main question that arises in this enquiry, namely, the role of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's policies in the destruction or survival of the Fatimid historiographical corpus, a subject necessarily addressed in preliminary fashion here in view of the vastness of the source base for the crossover period from Fatimid to Ayyubid rule, both documentary and narrative.[11]

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[9] Donald P. Little, *An Introduction to Mamluk Historiography: An Analysis of Arabic Annalistic and Biographical Sources for the Reign of Al-Malik-An-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalā'ūn*, (Wiesbaden, 1970); Sami G. Massoud,*The Chronicles and Annalistic Sources of the Early Mamluk Circassian Period*, (Leiden, 2007); Claude Cahen, 'Editing Arabic Chronicles', *Islamic Studies* (1962), 1-25.

[10] Hirschler (2012), ch. 4., esp. 147-151.

[11] For surveys of late Fatimid/Ayyubid historiography, see Donald P. Little, 'Historiography of the Ayyubid and Mamluk epochs' in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, Vol. I, ed. Carl F. Petry, (Cambridge, 1998), 414-20; F. Bora, "Mamluk Representations of Late Fatimid Egypt: the Survival of Fatimid-Era

2. Fatimid Libraries

As a dynasty whose love of learning entailed a knowledge of books within and outside their own hotly contested traditions, the Egyptian Fatimids from earliest times were known to collect books and treatises in Arabic on a wide range of subjects, particularly confessional literature of a variety of hues.[12] The famed literary collections of the Fatimids are attested from as early as al-'Azīz's reign (975-996), were by then already sizeable,[13] and were housed in several major libraries established in Cairo in the Fatimid era, including the well-known and publicly accessible Dār al-Ḥikma founded by al-Ḥākim (996-1021) in 1005, where the collection was much wider than simply a set of tools for the *da'wa*, and was not limited to religious subjects.[14] Private libraries were no doubt also a significant aspect of this literary landscape, but the data in this regard appears to be sparse.[15]

The royal Fatimid libraries did not enjoy a stable existence, however, and were on several occasions plundered for their treasures by force of financial and political exigencies.[16] The most serious of these incidents took place during the financial and social crisis of the 1060s[17] cited in the sources as the *Shidda* (calamity), when, in 1068, soldiers and

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Historiography in Ibn al-Furāt's *Ta'rīkh al-duwal wa 'l-mulūk* (History of Dynasties and Kings)", DPhil Thesis, Oxford University, 2010, 58-69.

[12] Paul E. Walker, 'Fatimid Institutions of Learning', *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 34 (1997), 179-200; 193-4.

[13] Walker (1997), 195; Mackensen, 97.

[14] Halm (1997), 71.

[15] Elayyan, 21.

[16] See, for example, Hirschler (2012), 132.

[17] P. Sanders, 'The Fatimid State, 969-1171' in C. Petry (ed), *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 1

officials who had been unpaid by the state for some unspecified period of time plundered the Fatimid palaces, including the royal library complex, which comprised two collections: one each in the inner and outer palace libraries. The latter was ransacked while the former remained intact.[18] The soldiers looted books and other treasures in order to sell them, thus dispersing a significant portion of the Fatimid artistic and literary collections.[19] Ironically, this act of destruction is also indicative of the high regard in which books were held in Fatimid times, as they were through much of the medieval Arabic world: they were objects of immense value, supplanting monetary wealth when the latter dried up or was unavailable.[20]

The plunder of the Fatimid book collections mid-way through Fatimid rule in Egypt was to be repeated in a markedly different manner from 1174, when Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (d. 1193) returned Egypt to the 'Abbasid caliphate under al-Mustaḍī' bi Amrillāh (d. 1180) in Baghdad, and appointed a Shafi'ite chief judge.[21] He subsequently broke up, mainly through sale or donation, the Fatimid treasures, including the book collections at the caliphal palace and at al-Azhar. For by the end of Fatimid rule, the royal palace library complex was the main one left intact,[22] and it is this collection that features in the present article. Medieval sources, too, seem concerned solely or mainly with the royal collections. The precise

(Cambridge, 1998), pp. 151-174; p. 152; Paul E. Walker, 'Fatimid Institutions' as reprinted in idem, *Fatimid History and Ismaili Doctrine*, (Aldershot, 2008), 31-32.

[18] Walker (2008), 31.

[19] J. Bloom, *Arts of the City Victorious: Islamic Art and Architecture in Fatimid North Africa and Egypt,* (New Haven and London, 2007), p. 157.

[20] For an account of the regard for books and learning in medieval Islamic societies (and an oblique comparison with their status in western European ones), see J. Pedersen, *The Arabic Book*, trans. by Geoffrey French, (New Jersey, 1984), xiv-xv, 21, 37-9. For the 1068 episode, see Walker (2008), 31-32.

[21] *Ta'rīkh al-duwal wa 'l-mulūk,* vol. 4, ed. in two parts by M. H. al-Shammā' (1968-9); 4: 125.

nature of this latter episode of book dispersal is discussed presently, but what is not in doubt is that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's liquidation of Fatimid assets, viewed alongside his reassignment of government, military and religious posts, of state wealth and of *iqṭā*'s, as examined by Lev and Frenkel amongst others, was a profound actualisation of the end of Fatimid rule in Egypt, with far-reaching symbolic as well as economic significance.[23]

3. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and the Fatimids' Books

While the limits of space constrain this article from enumerating fully all the Ayyubid and Mamluk histories reporting Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's assignation of the books he found in the caliphal palace in Cairo, a range of reports on the issue gathered from the main medieval Arabic chronicles indexed by Little's study of Ayyubid and Mamluk historiography, supplemented by Mackensen's work on medieval Muslim libraries,[24] reveals several strands of information, some contradictory, on how the books were dispersed. Among the authors and works whose reports describe the sequence of events in question are: 'Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1201) and Ibn Abī Ṭayy (d. 1232) (both as received via Abū Shāma's *Rawḍatayn*, d. 1267, and the former also via al-Bundārī's summary of his lost *Barq al-Shāmī*, d. 1245); Ibn al-Athīr's *al-Kāmil* (d. 1233); Ibn Shaddād (d. 1234) in his *al-Nawādir al-sulṭāniyya*,; the lost *Naẓm al-sulūk fī ta'rīkh al-khulafā' wa 'l-mulūk* by Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāfi' b. 'Alī (1251-1330) (via Ibn al-Furāt's *Ta'rīkh al -duwal wa 'l-mulūk*); Abū Shāma's *Rawḍatayn* (d.

[22] Elayyan, 119-135; 127-8; Mackensen, 100.

[23] For a full account of the disintegration of Fatimid rule and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's policies upon stepping into the breach there, see Lev (1999), ch. 3, esp. 116-136; cf. Yehoshua Frenkel, 'Political and social aspects of Islamic religious endowments (*awqāf*): Saladin in Cairo (1169-73) and Jerusalem (1187-93)', *BSOAS* 62:1 (1999), 1-20.

[24] Little (1998), 412-444; Mackensen, 99-100.

1268); Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt al-aʿyān* (d. 1282); Ibn al-Furāt's *Taʾrīkh* (d. 1405); Ibn Khaldūn's *Kitāb al-ʿibar* (d. 1406); al-Maqrīzī's *Khiṭaṭ* (d. 1442) and Ibn Taghrībirdī's *al-Nujūm al-zāhira* (d. 1470).[25] All agree that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn found an enormous literary collection, amongst other treasures at the palace, but its size (where mentioned), or his methods of disposal, are differed upon widely. I do not deal here with the number of books or volumes reported as such, which are often tropological, symbolic or figuratively 'rounded up' in any case, but with the question of disposal.[26] The earliest extant *description* of the collection is provided by Ibn Ṭuwayr, a Fatimid official whose truncated account, echoed in most of the later sources, is taken from his lost chronicle of the Fatimid and Ayyubid dynasties, *Nuzhat al-muqlatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn* (the Fatimid section of which has now been reconstituted from citations in later sources), and does not mention the fate of the Fatimids' books, though he witnessed the period of transferral from Fatimid to Ayyubid rule, and indeed served both administrations.[27]

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[25] The report from Ibn Abī Ṭayy is reported by Abū Shāma: *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn*, ed. in 2 vols (Cairo, 1870-1871), 1:199-200; for the remaining authors mentioned here, see: al-Bundārī, *Sanā al-Barq al-Shāmī* ed. By F. al-Nabrawi (Cairo, 1979); *al-Kāmil*, ed. in 11 vols by M. Y. al-Daqqāq, (Beirut, 2003), 10:34; *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās, 8 vols (Beirut, 1968-72), no. 846, 158-9; *Taʾrīkh al-duwal wa 'l-mulūk*, 4(1): 167-8; *Kitāb al-ʿIbar wa dīwān al-mubtadāʾ wa 'l-khabar*, ed. in 7 vols (Cairo, 1867): 81-2; *al-Mawāʿiẓ wa 'l-iʿtibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa 'l-āthār* [also known as the *Khiṭaṭ*], ed. by K. al-Manṣūr (Beirut, 1998), 2:292; *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa 'l-Qāhira*, ed. in 16 vols by M. H. Shams al-Dīn (Beirut, 1992), 5:321; for Ibn Shaddād: D. S. Richards, *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin: Or al-Nawadir al-Sultaniyya wa'l-Mahasin al-Yusufiyya by Baha' Al-Din Ibn Shaddad* (London, 2001), 47; cf. Mackensen, 99.

[26] Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography: religion and society in the Near East, 600-1800*, (Cambridge, 2003), 153; citing Albrecht Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study*, second edition in collaboration with Lawrence I. Conrad; translated from the German by Michael Bonner (New Jersey, 1994), 109ff. Cf. Eddé, 53.

[27] Sayyid, *Nuzhat*, 126-127.

The earliest of the authors to describe the vicissitudes that befell the Fatimids' literary assets, 'Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1201), Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's private secretary and one of his three chief advisors and 'spokesmen',[28] describes in detailed reports extant in Abū Shāma's extract and in al-Bundārī's summary, his personal experience of acquiring books from those collections, and he refers to books purchased from the Fatimids' royal collections in 572/1176, a fact supporting the assertion that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn sold the books over a period of time, ten years according to Abū Shāma, and sold twice weekly in at least the six years after the Ayyubid takeover in 'Imād's report; these accounts undermine the theory of wholesale disposal or even destruction once the collection fell into Ayyubid hands.[29] The next earliest of these authors, Ibn Abī Ṭayy, also comes to us through later quotations; in this instance, his account, extracted from his lost chronicle on Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, is related at length by Abū Shāma in the first volume of his *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn*, and briefly in al-Maqrīzī's *Khiṭaṭ.*[30]

According to the sources above, the following possibilities explain the fate of the Fatimids' royal book collections:

[28] The others being his Bahā' al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād and al-Qāḍī al-Fādil, his chief administrator in Egypt: for the latter's roles, alongside 'Imād al-Dīn's, especially in the context of Salāḥ al-Dīn's building of the Citadel at Cairo and its inscriptions, including the new sultan's honorific titles as expressions of his relationship with the 'Abbasid caliph, see N. Rabbat, *The Citadel of Cairo: a New Interpretation of Royal Mamluk Architecture* (Leiden, 1995), 68-74.

[29] Abū Shāma, *al-Rawḍatayn* 1:200; al-Bundārī, 116; cf. Eddé, 54.

[30] See n. 25 above.

	Explanation	Source
1.	Many of them were sold.	ʻImād al-Dīn, Ibn Khallikān
2.	Qāḍī al-Fāḍil (a late Fatimid/early Ayyubid high official in the state bureaucracy and later Ṣalaḥ al-Dīn's 'vizier') took what he could, and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn sold or discarded the rest; the discarded portion was later recovered and also sold to the public.	Ibn Abī Ṭayy, via Abū Shāma
3.	They were all sold.	Ibn al-Athīr
4.	Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn gave away all of the Fatimids' books and treasures, keeping nothing for himself.	Ibn Shaddād
5.	Some (eight camel-loads) were taken to Damascus, while some were sold and others given freely to those especially interested in them.	Ibn al-Furāt
6.	Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn allowed Qāḍī al-Fāḍil to take what he wanted of the collections; the fate of the remainder is not mentioned explicitly or in detail.	Ibn Khaldūn, al-Maqrīzī, and Ibn Taghrībirdī

Of these narratives, those earliest and closest to the historical events of the 1170s are collected by both Ibn al-Furāt and – more so – by his predecessor Abū Shāma, who relates reports from eye-witnesses to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's early policies. One such eyewitness is an emir named Shams al-Khilāfa, who appears in the early volumes of Ibn al-Furāt's chronicles (volumes 1-3 of the 9-volume autograph MS) in the latter's account of late Fatimid rule. This emir's father lived under late Fatimid rule and relayed accounts of it to his son; Shams al-Khilāfa's accounts were transmitted to both Abū Shāma and Ibn al-Furāt

by the intermediary figure of the Aleppan Shi'i chronicler Ibn Abī Ṭayy.[31] Alongside other unspecified 'Egyptian sources' [*al-Miṣriyyūn*], the emir informs Abū Shāma that some of the wealth left by the Fatimids was distributed by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn among his coterie of men, and that he sold much of the rest, including the contents of the reputedly greatest library then known in the Islamic world, the collection at the Fatimids' caliphal palace, which was, incidentally, the only major library complex in Cairo to have partially survived the above-mentioned year of looting and inter-regimental violence that had erupted over a hundred years earlier in 461/1068-9.[32] As well as iterating the well-known descriptions of these book collections as containing well over a million books and many hundreds of copies (though perhaps 'volumes' is meant here) of al-Ṭabarī's history alone,[33] Shams al-Khilāfa's report provides several unique tidbits of information that bring clarity to the vague outline of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's disposal of the Fatimids' assets, including their books, supplied by other sources, and the more substantial textual evidence of their survival embedded within the composition of chronicles.

Abū Shāma's informant describes the collections that fell into Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's hands in 1171,[34] and then reconstructs related events as follows:

1. Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, a lover of books, was allowed to survey the collections and take 'a great quantity' of them.

[31] For more on his ouevre, see N. K. Singh and A. Samiuddin (eds.), *Encyclopaedic Historiography of the Muslim World* (Delhi, 2004), 15-16.

[32] Abū Shāma, *al-Rawḍatayn* 1:200; Walker (1997), 31; Mackensen (1935), 97. The famous collection at al-Ḥākim's Dār al-Ḥikma, which included books of great value, was largely liquidated in these riots, though it survived in an attenuated form until the end of Fatimid rule: Elayyan: 127-8; Mackensen, 100.

[33] Mackensen, 97, 100.

[34] Halm (1997), 92.

2. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn cut off the bindings from many of the rest that were in a good condition, to sell or re-use the leather, and threw the unbound contents into a lake.
3. Other volumes were sold to the public,[35] over a period of ten years.
4. When news of the books in the lake became common knowledge, 'people' recovered those, too, because '[books] are revered items'.
5. Much of the corpus that was initially discarded was thereby preserved, and this is how 'that which we have [today] was attained'.

The sequence described here suggests, and permits tentative conclusions, that:

(i) Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's method of dispersing the Fatimids' book collections – those of the palace libraries in particular, which are mentioned by name in many sources – was *ad hoc* rather than planned;

(ii) that he freely allowed Qāḍī al-Fāḍil to take what he could for his own use;

(iii) that he permitted monetary value to be derived from the rest, even if this entailed tearing valuable covers from the books and discarding their contents.

The recovery of this last mentioned portion of books by 'the people (which could refer to ordinary, socially unspecified members of the public, or, more likely, middle-class trading/mercantile-class and perhaps even scholarly-class Cairenes, in Maqrīzī's classification, who would appreciate the value of the contents of these books) is significant: though we have little palaeographic evidence that water-spoiled books from this era were re-copied and their contents thus saved, the description certainly fits well with the evidence from the historiographic sources of some earlier texts surviving into the Mamluk

[35] A portion of these fell into the hands of a broker named Ibn Sūra, who sold them on to individuals: Ibn Ṭuwayr, *Nuzhat* 126-127; Halm, *loc. cit*, 92.

era partially intact and others whole.[36] Historiographical texts might only have formed a fraction of the contents of the Fatimid libraries; but their survival into the Mamluk period suggests that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn did not expunge all or even most vestiges of the Fatimids' literary corpus, historiographic and otherwise. This line of investigation resolves the paradox expressed by al-Maqrīzī, who suggests in the *Itti'āẓ* that Egyptian books on the Fatimid caliphate are hard to find; meanwhile, both his *Itti'āẓ* and his *Khiṭaṭ* subvert his argument and bear witness to the richness of the source base for the Fatimids available to the historians of their era and earlier.[37]

The testimony of Shams al-Khilāfa is, alongside 'Imād al-Dīn's report cited by Abū Shāma, the earliest surviving first-hand account of this episode available. His mention of Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's role in the transfer of books from the royal palaces, together with that of (minimally) three other chroniclers, is a significant point that requires further expansion, and I will turn to Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's role in this context, as well as his influence on Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's policy in general, presently.[38]

[36] Walker (2002), chs. 6-7; Bora, 58-69; al-Maqrīzī, *Ighāthat al-umma bi kashf al-ghumma*, M. al-Ziyāda and J al-Shayyāl (eds.), Cairo, 1957, 72-3. His classification of Cairo society into seven social strata is a useful heuristic tool, and the merchantile/scholarly classes mentioned here fall into sections 2, 3 and 5 of the following list: (1) the Mamluk political elite; (2) merchants; (3) lower-class merchants and tradesmen; (4) peasants; (5) professional scholars; (6) artisans and those who worked for a living (7) the urban poor, water-carriers, etc. Cf. Hirschler 25-6 and *passim* on the reading practices and literarisation of these groups.

[37] *Itti'āẓ*, 3: 346; cf. the wide range of Fatamid-era and other sources listed in A. R. Guest, "A List of Writers, Books and other Authorities mentioned by El Maqrizi in his *Khitat*', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1902), 103-125.

[38] Little (1998), 417.

4a. Historiographical Agency: Ibn Abī Ṭayy

Despite the layers of historiographical motive discussed earlier, there are compelling reasons to regard the Aleppan Imāmī Shi'i Ibn Abī Ṭayy's report, recounted above, as a safe and reliable account of the manner in which the Fatimids' library holdings were dispersed in the early years of Ayyubid rule. The foremost of these is that he proves himself time and again in the *Ta'rīkh al-duwal* of Ibn al-Furāt - one of two main later chronicles that preserve his reports – as an historian who sets out to collect primary eyewitness accounts and transmits these faithfully;[39] he is drawn upon by Ibn al-Furāt and by Abū Shāma before him precisely because he often provides information not available in the 'mainstream' accounts of, for example, Ibn al-Athīr or Ibn Khallikān. Based in Aleppo, his regional and confessional distance from Egypt and the struggles between Sunnis and Isma'ilis no doubt made him an even better choice in the eyes of a historian like Ibn al-Furāt, who does not allude to him except by his full title, including honorifics, and gives him pride of place in his own narrative by presenting his viewpoint with more regularity than that of any other author he relies on.

Indeed, Ibn Abī Ṭayy's description of Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's role in acquiring a large portion of the Fatimids' books is widely echoed in most of the other Ayyubid and Mamluk histories consulted here, and is corroborated by the fact that the latter's *madrasa* in Cairo, the Fāḍiliyya, inaugurated in 580/1184-5, housed an extremely well-stocked library, 'perhaps the largest in Egypt', and certainly one of the three best provisioned public libraries of medieval Cairo, no doubt lined with volumes that the Qāḍī had unburdened Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn of

[39] For documentation of this predilection, see Bora, chs. 2, 6.

in the early 1170s.[40] Even that collection was largely dispersed just over a hundred years later in 694/1294-5, in the wake of a famine that forced students to sell off the library's assets in exchange for food, but the point here is that the books exchanged ownership rather than disappeared from circulation altogether, ending up, one might surmise, in some of the private collections that were dotted around medieval Cairo.[41] The transfer of books from endowed to private collections and vice versa in medieval Islamic cities of the central Arab lands has been recently documented in a study by Hirschler, in which one particular set of volumes can indeed be traced back to the Fatimid royal collection itself, via Qāḍī al-Fāḍil and his son al-Ashraf, whose donation to the Ashrafiyya *turba* in Damascus is identifiable through the extant inventory of that institution.[42] This new discovery adds to the picture we may draw overall regarding the survival of Fatimid historiography and learning in general: the Ayyubid and Mamluk historiographic traditions certainly support the notion that Fatimid books – if not Isma'ili religious works in the same numbers[43] – found their way into a well-furnished textual corpus from which authors like Ibn al-Furāt and al-Maqrīzī made their selections.[44] This also brings us back to the instrumentality of

[40] Gary Leiser, 'The Restoration of Sunnism in Egypt: *Madrasa*s and *Mudarrisūn* 495-647/1101-1249', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1976, 336; idem, 'The *Madrasa* and the Islamization of the Middle East: The Case of Egypt', *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 22 (1985), 29-47; 44; Elayyan, 124; Hirschler (2012), 131.

[41] Mackensen, 99; Elayyan, 121.

[42] Hirschler (2012), ch. 4.

[43] Although al-Maqrīzī is said to have availed himself of Isma'ili theological writings, which would otherwise have been scarce in post-Fatimid Egypt: Walker (2003), 85-87.

[44] Al-Ṣuyūṭī (d. 1505), in characteristically polemical mode, stated that Qāḍī al-Fāḍil burned those books he regarded as heretical, though none of the early sources mention this: Dajani-Shakeel, 30. That he would have burned chronicles as opposed to Isma'ili religious books is even less credible, and in fact he was involved in the commission of literary works while he served the Fatimids:

Qāḍī al-Fāḍil in the chain of events that led to the break up of the Fatimid libraries, and the aftermath that is the subject of our scrutiny here. In textual terms, Ibn Abī Ṭayy provides the best – and least cryptic – elucidation of the disposal of the Fatimids' books. In political terms, and in respect of the actual events themselves, examination of a different kind of agency, that of Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, promises to throw light on this convoluted historical and historiographical problem.

4b. Political Agency: Qāḍī al-Fāḍil

The wider account of how Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn engineered his takeover of Egypt with the help of the chancellor who served him for twenty-two years, Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, is best provided in Lev's comprehensive account, and to this we may add prior work carried out by Dajani-Shakeel that emphasises the Qāḍī's fondness for – if not obsession with – Egypt, and his crucial role in Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's attainment of sovereignty there.[45] Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's putative statement, reported in the chronicles, that he conquered Egypt not by force of violence but by the pen of Qāḍī al-Fāḍil,[46] is no mere rhetorical statement of affection for a loyal official: Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's letter of appointment as vizier to the Fatimid caliph was drafted by the Qāḍī, who made sure that the position was hereditary, and he was said to be responsible for discovering and alerting Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn to a plot to overthrow him by some remaining Fatimid loyalists including the Shafi'i pro-Isma'ili court poet 'Umāra al-Yamanī, who was

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Daftary (2004), 194.

[45] Lev, chs. 1.2, 2.2, 2.3; Dajani-Shakeel.

[46] For a discussion of various works left behind by Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, including his court and administrative 'daily' diaries, the *Mutajaddidāt* and *Muyāwamāt*, alongside his collected official correspondence, known as both the *Mujalladāt* and the *Rasā'il*, which were apparently available to his colleague 'Imād al-Dīn and to the chronicler Abū Shāma, though not extant in themselves, see

later executed by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. These are but two of numerous instances where the Qāḍī proved himself politically indispensible to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in a variety of ways, over and above his duties as an administrator and the head of the chancery. With regard to the Fatimids' books, too, he might be said to have rendered Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn a service (as well as pursuing a personal interest; and of course the two were deeply enmeshed): he facilitated the seeming removal of the vast treasure of Fatimid literary assets from under the nose of the nascent regime, which represented the intellectual and cultural attainments of its predecessor, while at the same time ensured its protection and survival. Might we even have him to thank, through his canny plotting of the transition from Fatimid to Ayyubid rule, for the textual corollary of numerous Fatimid-era accounts surviving and furnishing the building blocks of later accounts of the Fatimid era such those of Ibn al-Furāt and al-Maqrīzī? As a man with long service to both regimes, Qāḍī al-Fāḍil is a pivotal figure in this discussion, as the chronicles demonstrate in both their explicit discussions of how the Fatimids' books fared under the new regime, and in their very constitution from earlier sources. His own *madrasa*'s library, and, most crucially, the documentary evidence of his son's endowment of a Damascus *turba*, also offer decisive indications that many volumes from the Fatimid royal library collections were saved and remained in circulation in both Egypt and Syria. Indeed, some years later, according to Bar Hebraeus, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn later in his career, on his capture of Amid in 1183, made over the whole of that city's fine library collection to Qāḍī al-Fāḍil intact.[47]

Singh & Samiuddin, 782-5.

[47] Eddé, 55.

5. Fatimid Historiography in Mamluk Chronicles

In addition to these transparent discussions of the fate of the Fatimids' books in the Arabic chronicles, can we turn to the general content of the chronicles themselves to seek indications of how much Fatimid-era historiography (though largely not works in other genres) survived the demise of the dynasty? An early phase of (thus far unpublished) historiographical research, in which the present author had an opportunity to edit and discuss the account of early Fatimid history produced by a Fatimid-era Shafi'ite state official, al-Quḍā'ī (d. 1062), in the surviving *mukhtaṣar* (digest) of his work,[48] revealed immediately the inadequacy of the idea that the Fatimids' history books fell into oblivion after 1171. It did so by demonstrating that while al-Quḍā'ī's universal chronicle, *'Uyūn al-ma'ārif*, is no longer extant, some of the main threads of information in the *mukhtaṣar* of that work still present (in at least two redactions) were successfully preserved and used *in their more complete forms* by at least nine major Ayyubid and Mamluk authors. In other words, this particular early Fatimid historiographical account continued to circulate widely *after* Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's supposed destruction of the Fatimids' book collections in the interval between the death of the last Fatimid caliph al-'Aḍid in 1171 and the inception of the new Ayyubid sultanate in 1174. It became clear to me at that juncture that further scrutiny of Ayyubid and Mamluk chronicles covering Fatimid rule might yield not dissimilar results as those provided by al-Quḍā'ī's epitome.

Subsequent research by the present author into the later phase of Fatimid historiography (c. 1100-1170) as represented in Mamluk chronicles, especially in the first three unpublished volumes of the Cairo-based Hanafite historian Ibn al-Furat's (d. 1405)

[48] 'An Historiographical Study of al-Quḍā'ī's *Ta'rīkh*', MPhil Thesis (University of Oxford, 1998); the codices I was able to examine are Bodleian Pococke 270 and Marshall 37.

multi-volume universal history mentioned above, the *Ta'rīkh al-duwal wa 'l-mulūk*, a holographic unicum overwhelmingly composed of ascribed reports from earlier textual witnesses, also sheds light on the range, extent and nature of Fatimid-era historical reports as they were preserved by the historians of Mamluk Egypt. Ibn al-Furāt's chronicle offers proof from a text additional to and earlier than al-Maqrīzī's (d. 1442) more seamless *Ittiʿāẓ al-ḥunafā'*, which is similarly founded upon native Fatimid-era sources, that Fatimid historiography was a robust, creative genre that enjoyed authority as well as longevity, despite the seeming paucity of Fatimid chronicles as a record of, if not a justificatory vehicle, for Fatimid rule – a paucity both in terms of what was produced and what survives. Like so many Mamluk chronicles, the *Ta'rīkh al-duwal* reveals that the dramatic motif of library destruction has become in this instance a truism, and an image that abides, despite an array of indications to the contrary, for its seems to capture the ideological flavour of a period of Sunni resurgence within Egypt.[49]

Yet the chronicles overall tell a nuanced story, laying bare the superficiality of the view that the Sunni 'hero' Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn entered Fatimid Egypt and wiped out its 'heretical' literary legacy; or its obverse, that the anti-Ismaʿili 'villain' Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn systematically jettisoned or destroyed the Fatimids' valuable intellectual heritage. The diverse accounts of his takeover in Egypt, examined in detail by Lev, reveal something of his general circumspection in shoring up power for himself, and that his approach to his new political

[49] A stance that most famously took succour from the refutation of the Ismaʿili creed produced by al-Ghazali in the eleventh century, as the Fatimids' power seemed firm and expanding: Abū Ḥamīd al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), *al-Mustaẓhirī* or *Faḍā'iḥ al-Bāṭiniyya wa faḍā'il al-mutaẓhiriyya* (Infamies of the Esoterics and the Renown of the Exoterics): for a variety of print and electronic editions, see <http://www.ghazali.org/site/oeuvre-t.htm>; cf. Farouk Mitha, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ismailis: a debate on reason and authority in medieval Islam*, (London, 2001).

roles was far from straightforward, characterised by his 'feeling his way' into them, free from either sincere service to the waning Fatimid house or the overlordship of Nūr al-Dīn.[50] The portrayal of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's policy in regard to the vast stores of books left behind by the Fatimid ruling house, in the dual contexts of late Fatimid and early Ayyubid Egypt narrative history, and the depiction of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn more generally by authors from eras ranging from the late Fatimid period to the late Mamluk (c. 1150-1500); these are themes that require further elucidation, and I address them next, alongside an appraisal of the textual evidence we currently possess of substantial works of Fatimid-era historiography that clearly did survive well into the Mamluk period, but perhaps not after the fifteenth century. After that stage, we have no record of their continued presence, either as extant archaeological objects or as bodies of reports transmitted to and within later works.

To return to one particularly fulsome Mamluk account of late Fatimid and early Ayyubid rule, Ibn al-Furāt's narrative of that era (c. 1130-1180), like those of the *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn* of Abū Shāma (d. 1267) before him and *Itti'āẓ* and *Khiṭaṭ* of al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442) after him, collects and preserves a portion of what circulated in his times of the main strands of Fatimid-era historiographic material, without which the dynasty's last years would be poorly understood. For Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's rule proper (1174-1193), he uses conventional sources: *al-Muntaẓam* of Ibn al-Jawzī (d 1201), 'Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī's reports (1201) (apparently via the *Rawḍatayn* of Abū Shāma) and *al-Kāmil fi 'l-ta'rīkh* of Ibn al-Athīr (d. 1233) amongst others.[51] Where his own voice comes through, that is to say where he offers an opinion rather than a quotation, the Hanafite Ibn al-Furāt expresses a rather muted admiration for Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and his new policies, such as the establishment of

[50] Lev (1999), chs. 1.2, 1.3.

[51] For example, *Ta'rīkh al-duwal*, IV: 124-129.

new Sunni institutions of learning in Cairo in 1170, where none had existed previously (while Alexandria had had Sunni *madrasa*s since the vizierate of Riḍwān in the 1130s.)[52] At the same time, the chronicler apparently evinces no ill will towards the Fatimid imams for this state of affairs, merely suggesting that while their rule endured, their creed prevented them from fully catering to the needs of the Sunni population: a position characterised by an absence of sectarian language or attitude.[53]

Do these three above-mentioned works, by Abū Shāma, Ibn al-Furāt and al-Maqrīzī, encompass the full range of Mamluk perspectives on late Fatimid history, however? A rudimentary but reliable litmus test of how well the Fatimid period is documented in Mamluk historiography is whether or not we have a detailed and multi-sourced chronological account of Fatimid rule: judging by the outline provided in the Mamluk record, which can be positively tested against limited corroboration or 'control' by external sources of evidence such as Geniza papers, chancery records and archaeological evidence, it appears that we have, and a rich account of the Fatimid era in its entirety at that, from a wide range of authors.[54] The areas where mystery or confusion persist, for instance the cacophony of discordant views on the succession to the caliph al-Āmir in 1128-9 registered by Ibn al-Furāt and fellow Mamluk annnalists,[55] are but familiar variations on the political succession problems of Islamic political life recorded across Islamic historiography as a whole, as Kennedy describes in relation to the chronicles of the late 'Abbasids.[56] A

[52] Frenkel, 3; Lev (1999), 119.

[53] *Ta'rīkh al-duwal*, IV: 124.

[54] Bora, 58-69.

[55] *Ta'rīkh al-duwal*, MS Vienna Arab 814, vol. 3: ff. 14b-17b.

[56] H. Kennedy, 'Caliphs and their chroniclers in the Middle Abbasid period (third /ninth century)', in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East* (London, 2006), 17-35; 18.

multiplicity of voices reveals the comprehensiveness of the Mamluk record of Fatimid rule as it survives to the present day in as much as it reflects the conflicting interests and perspectives that prevailed in the late Fatimid political milieu.[57]

The conundrum regarding the Mamluk preservation of earlier historical reports is expressed well by Brett when he notes that while most Fatimid-era documents and chronicles are no longer extant, it is clear that they did survive, in substantial quantities, into the Mamluk period, and their *subsequent* loss is the real question we have insufficient evidence to answer.[58] While that issue is not addressed directly by the contents of Ibn al-Furāt's chronicle, or indeed by this article, as it requires an examination of the working methods of the medieval Arab historian – in the vein of Hallaq's investigation of the working practices of the medieval *qāḍī* [59]– the myth of the disappeared Fatimid corpus is certainly one that the *Ta'rīkh al-duwal* exposes, as would further research into other substantial Mamluk-era works that preserve earlier reports or documents, such as al-Maqrīzī's *Itti'āẓ* and *Khiṭaṭ*, and the *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā* of al-Qalqashandī. This is especially true in cases where we can examine 'first and final versions of one and the same work side by side',[60] such as the *Khiṭaṭ*, which allow original Fatimid-era sources to be identified, and the precise deployment of earlier material to be traced.

[57] Paula Sanders, 'Claiming the past: Ghadīr Khumm and the Rise of Hafizi Historiography in Late Fatimid Egypt', *Studia Islamica* 75 (1992), 81-104.

[58] Brett (2001), 10-11.

[59] W. B. Hallaq, 'The "*qāḍī's dīwān (sijill)*" before the Ottomans', *BSOAS* 61:3 (1998), 415-436.

[60] Ulrich Haarmann, 'Mamluk studies - a Western perspective', *Arab Journal for the Humanities* 13:51 (1995), 329-347; 337.

6. Fatimid Historiography and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's Early Policies

Does the survival of Fatimid historiography shed further light on early Ayyubid policy, to supplement the data explicitly offered by the chronicles, and exploited in the wide-ranging corpus of 'Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn literature' in English and other European languages? How, indeed, has modern scholarship on early Ayyubid rule dealt with the issue of the 'regime change' of the 1170s, and its ideological implications as expressed in the remaining textual sources that firstly record the events of that historical juncture, and secondly reveal how much Fatimid historiography was accessible to Ayyubid and Mamluk authors? The reportage in Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk sources of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's treatment of the Fatimids' books is evidently varied and not without contradictory elements; it is, however, consistent with the narrative variations that characterise the historiography of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's first years in Egypt as a whole (1169-74), a period prior to the better-attested remainder of his time as sultan in Egypt (1174-1193), when his official biographers presented more detailed, continuous and politically-motivated accounts of his policies.[61] In other words, the person of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, an immensely important figure in history, one reputed to have changed the course of the Crusades, to have 'returned' Egypt to Sunnism, and to have inaugurated a mode of leadership that was to pave the way for the more long-standing military-political regime of the Mamluks, is not a figure who is readily understood upon reading the medieval accounts of his life. The ubiquitous reports on his early policies are similarly problematic, being simultaneously facile and opaque by dint of the alignments of the chroniclers.

[61] The 'three great contemporary witnesses of his career [were] Bahā' al-Dīn, 'Imād al-Dīn and al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil': George T. Scanlon, review of Andrew S. Ehrenkreutz's *Saladin* (1972): *Journal of Semitic Studies* 20 (1975), 276-8; 277.

Against this textual and historical background, Ehrenkreutz attempted to reconstruct an account of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's planning and execution of a *coup d'état* in Cairo in the late 560s/early 1170s (which brought him to power in Egypt, albeit in 'stages'), based on this confusion of discordant early materials, and to thereby revise and indeed overturn previously-held benign views of him as an 'accidental' or even an 'incidental' hero who resurrected effective leadership in Egypt once the Fatimid caliphs lost every vestige of sovereignty and charismatic appeal, and their viziers any semblance of political control.[62] However, the selective use of early historical reports for Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn by Ehrenkreutz, noted elsewhere,[63] leaves the issue of the nature of his 'step into the breach' in Egypt unresolved, and Ehrenkreutz is as much at the mercy of the regional, confessional, political and personal biases of the medieval chroniclers as anyone; these biases are prominent in standard works such as those of Ibn al-Athīr or Abū Shāma, even if the latter avows an 'eirenic purpose' in his dual biography of Nūr al-Dīn and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn.[64] In contrast, Lev's study of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's re-Sunnification of Egypt is highly conscious of the axes that chroniclers would have wished to grind.[65] Yet he, too, brings to the fore the ambiguity of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's position in relation to both the Fatimid house and Nūr al-Dīn Zengī, and the duality (as distinct from duplicity) of his policy towards both. The matters of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's attitude towards the Fatimids he initially served, and the assessment of his policies in general, remain delicate yet controversial issues, though recent efforts, which explicitly

[62] Andrew S. Ehrenkreutz 'Saladin's coup d'etat in Egypt' in Sami A. Hanna (ed.), *Medieval and Middle Eastern studies: In honor of Aziz Suryal Atiya*, (Leiden, 1972), 152; idem, *Saladin* (Albany, 1972).

[63] H. E. Mayer, review of *Saladin* by A. S. Ehrenkreutz (1972), *Speculum* 49: 4 (1974), 724-727; 727; Scanlon (1975), 272.

[64] Holt (1983), 237.

[65] Lev (1999), chs. 1.2, 1.3.

aim to re-examine the 'Saladin legend' have presented rounded, well-referenced and nuanced views.[66]

On the specific question of the Fatimids' books and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's way of dealing with them, Ibn Abī Ṭayy transmits one of the earliest accounts of this episode, as set out earlier. As an Imami Shi'i, he might be expected to attach opprobrium to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's single-minded pursuit of the re-Sunnification of Egypt. This could help to explain his characterisation of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn as high-handed in his insistence that from the year 1171, the Friday sermon be read out in the name of the 'Abbasid caliph, first at the foundational mosque of 'Amr, and then elsewhere in the capital. Yet, overall, it is far from clear that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn planned his takeover in Egypt, in defiance of both the few remaining Fatimids and their loyalists, and his former overlord Nūr al-Dīn Zengī, very tightly or early on after his arrival there. The chronicles present conflicting evidence on this score. Advocates of both Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn as a zealous anti-Isma'ili awaiting his chance to stage a takeover, and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn as a cautious politician who acted out ambiguities towards the Isma'ilism of the Fatimids ever-present on the ground in Egypt, can find historiographical reports in the medieval sources that would appear to support their interpretations.[67]

The difficulty with even the earlier testimonies adduced here is that one might succeed in identifying the bias of the chroniclers, but filtering out the 'facts' of the matter is a problematic exercise; a decisive view of the events of the 1170s may remain elusive. This is especially so in view of the narrative refractions that characterise Islamic historiography – especially Fatimid-era, as discussed by M. Brett – in which primary factual

[66] See n. 6 above.

[67] For a sense of the stylistic and methodological variations in the biographies of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, including the presence - or lack - of hagiographic elements, see Richards (1980) and Holt (1983); cf.

elements are re-interpreted and embellished in successive source-types so as to render them more figurative than factual, and then later reintegrated into 'factual' historiographical contexts.[68] This micro-genesis of historical reports appears even more pronounced in relation to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and the Fatimid libraries in view of Lewis' suggestion that the overplaying of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's role, in some medieval sources, as the destroyer of the Fatimids' legacy, fits in with a wider use of library destruction as a triumphalist motif in Islamic historiography, in this context on the part of the mainly Sunni authors who recount his first years in office in Egypt, first as the vizier to the Fatimids and then as the Ayyubid sultan.[69]

These caveats notwithstanding, the twin facets of textual evidence examined here, namely, the reports describing the dispersal of the royal book collections of the Fatimids, and the demonstrable historiographic continuity from Fatimid through to Ayyubid and Mamluk times, collectively serve to bring into focus significant aspects of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's attitudes towards the Isma'ilis and their legacy in Egypt. A Sunni-centred narrative of victory might rejoice in the dispersal of the Fatimids' treasures and books. In practice, however, Ayyubid and Mamluk sources more often than not lament the necessity of selling these assets to raise funds, and, in the case of Abū Shāma, express relief that so many books were nonetheless saved by one means or another.[70] No distinction is made, in the discussions of the Fatimids' books cited here, between 'heretical' Isma'ili books or other

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Lev (1999), ch. 1.3.

[68] Brett (1982).

[69] Lewis (1990). Cf. Halm (1997, 2001), 94-95 who cites al-Juwaynī's account of his destruction of Niẓārī heretical books, then admits they were not all lost: this sounds like the fate of Fatimid books, though Halm does not draw that analogy here.

[70] See n. 29 above.

literary genres; some Shi'i books from the Fatimid collections were certainly part of the Ashrafiyya endowed library mentioned earlier;[71] though we do see a more clearly pronounced sectarian angle on this corpus on the part of al-Ṣuyūṭī later in the Mamluk period.[72] Many Ayyubid and Mamluk historians, men of learning who, for all their Sunni commitments, valued learning for its own sake, clearly rejoiced in the recovery of the Fatimid-era corpus, much of which was far from exclusively 'Shi'ite', as an eyewitness description from Ibn Ṭuwayr describes: even the *fiqh* books spanned all the major Sunni as well as Shi'i schools of jurisprudence.[73]

For many of these preserved or reclaimed sources, Abū Shāma is the conduit, and his inventory of late Fatimid-era sources including eyewitness accounts both reveals the scope of surviving works and presents an example of first-hand sourcing that later authors followed. For if we see echoes of Ibn al-Furāt's attitudes, method and sources in al-Maqrīzī's works of history, as several modern scholars have done,[74] so we see the influence of the *Rawḍatayn* on the *Ta'rīkh al-duwal*, which constitutes a chain of textual witnesses, from Abū Shāma through to Ibn al-Furāt through to later authors including al-Maqrīzī, that allows us to appreciate the robust survival of Fatimid-era historical reports in substantive Mamluk-

[71] Hirschler (2012), 131-2.

[72] See n. 44 above.

[73] Ibn Ṭuwayr, *Nuzhat*, 127; Walker (1997), 28.

[74] Documentation of the relationship between al-Maqrīzī's *Sulūk* and Ibn al-Furāt's *Ta'rīkh al-duwal* for the year 694/1294-5 is provided by Little (1970); 73-5; for 778/1376-7 and 793/139-1 by Massoud (2007), chs. 1 and 2 (*passim*); further borrowings are indicated in: Reuven Amitai-Preiss *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Īlkhānid War, 1260-1281* (Cambridge, 1995), 43-59; Jere L. Bacharach, 'Circassian Mamluk Historians and their Quantitative Economic Data, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 12 (1975): 75-87; 76, 84.

era works.[75] This methodological influence inheres in several aspects of the *Ta'rīkh al-duwal*: the layout of the reportage, with clear attribution for the most part (though Ibn al-Furāt is more assiduous in the practice than Abū Shāma), and in the use of Ibn Abī Ṭayy's *Ma'ādin al-dhahab*, which, true to its name, is a goldmine of unique reports on late Fatimid as well as early Ayyubid Egypt, from which Ibn al-Furāt provides reports that are earlier than Abū Shāma's since his history begins some decades earlier. In addition to the sources used by Abū Shāma and other historians who mediate Fatimid-era sources for Ibn al-Furāt (for example Ibn Khallikān [d. 1282], from whose *Wafayāt al-a'yān* Ibn al-Furāt copies reports from Ibn Ẓāfir's [d. 1216] *Akhbār al-duwal al-munqaṭi'a*), there are those Fatimid-era sources that Ibn al-Furāt apparently had independent access to, notably Ibn al-Ṣayrafī's *al-Ishāra ilā man nāla 'l-wizāra*, Ibn Ṭuwayr's *Nuzhat al-muqlatayn*, and, uniquely, the aforementioned treatise he calls *Akhbār al-dawla al-Miṣriyya wa mā jarā bayn al-mulūk wa 'l-khulafā' min al-fitan wa 'l-ḥurūb min ayyām al-Āmir ilā ayyām Shīrkūh* [Account of the Egyptian dynasty, and the tribulations and wars that afflicted the kings and caliphs, from the era of al-Āmir to that of Shīrkūh, c. 1130-1170],[76] an eyewitness account with detail and local colour not available elsewhere in the Ayyubid or Mamluk historiography of late Fatimid Egypt. These sources evidently did endure well into Mamluk rule and appear clearly in the historographical record.

One might quibble that Ibn al-Furāt's chronicle, on which the argument of Fatimid historiography's survival in this article has largely though not exclusively relied, is the exception that proves the rule, that other Ayyubid and Mamluk chroniclers did not adduce the breadth of evidence he contrived to use and exploit. Yet the ubiquity of Fatimid-era

[75] For more detailed illustration of this phenomenon, see Bora, 177-244.

[76] *Ta'rīkh al-duwal*, MS Vienna Arab 814, III:185a-190a.

reports in later sources (not least in least Abū Shāma's and al-Maqrīzī's accounts) – even if not all of them cite as much original or unique material as Ibn al-Furāt – proves that as far as the sources indicate, the historiography produced in the Fatimid era did not wholly or even substantially fall victim to the change of regime. Indeed, works in other genres cited as lost, in the medieval sources, were later found to be a part of the corpus that survived the period of looting in 1068, and in fact, late Fatimid sources such as Ibn Ṭuwayr's *Nuzhat* indicate that the royal collections had been restored since that time, with holdings as vast as or greater than any others in the Islamic world.[77] The works of Ayyubid and Mamluk historians do indeed shed intriguing light on the political worlds they describe, and not just through their explicit accounts of history. Their very makeup tells a political story of sorts.

That said, and to further the argument I made earlier, the politico-religious policies of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn are well-known but described in a complex web of often tendentious historiographical sources that are *ipso facto* slippery and subversive of the prospects for unequivocal interpretation. Should we read the establishment of *waqf*s as a way for Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn to re-Sunnify Egypt[78] when Gary Leiser finds, in his in-depth study of Egypt's return to Sunnism, little reason to suppose that he built *madrasa*s to counter Shi'ism as such, and that a papable reason behind the establishment of new legal colleges by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and several emirs of the Ayyubid state, as expressed in the sources, was to bolster their power and influence in the new regime?[79]

These two facets of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's religious policies are compatible, for each set of indications in the texts presumably points to an aspect of reality; nonetheless, the lack of

[77] Walker (1997), 33, 34.

[78] Frenkel (1999), 1-2.

[79] Leiser (1976), 403.

definition in the picture, as projected by primary and secondary sources (as elaborated by Lev, drawing on the works of Maqrīzī, Ibn Wāṣil, the *Bustān al-jāmi'*,[80] Ibn Abī Ṭayy via Abū Shāma and a host of others) is hardly helped by the multifarious threads of detail surrounding Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's attitudes towards those who threatened his personal hegemony and that of the new state: within Cairo, the main opposition to him does not appear to have come chiefly from Isma'ili or even Shi'i quarters, despite his heavy-handed response to the

[80] This historiographical treatise, North Syrian in origin, has been attributed by two of its modern editors, Cahen (1937-8) and Tadmuri (2002), to 'Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī; the latter of the two offers a more definite ascription than the former. Cahen's reservations about the ascription, despite the near-identification of the two sets of author names (in which he is followed by A. F. Sayyid, *Chronique d'Égypte* , Cairo, غ, 1981) based on the fact that the biographies of 'Imād al-Dīn do not list this work within his corpus, that he was not a *qāḍī* , as the manuscript's attribution to him states, and that the writing style of the *Bustān* differs considerably from his other, more 'flowery' works, are not decisive, so I have preferred to accept the ascription of the single surviving manuscript in Istanbul (Saray 2959) to Imād al-Dīn, as Hillenbrand (2000), 618, has done, and as al-Jazarī , (d. 1338), a fellow Damascene and a specialist on Syrian scholars and authors, did (cf. Sayyid, op. cit ., اب , n. 4). Hartmann (1995), 92, suggests that the author was another 'Imād al-Dīn from Hamah. 'Imād al-Dīn was, however, ideally placed to collect the Syria-led reports that predominate in that work, though Egypt's history also has strong presence in it. It was, as I mention above, very probably an historiographical outline to be expanded upon later, styling itself a *mukhtaṣar* or summary (p. 137); the narrative reads like a prototype, with too much of either unique information or perspective to be a mere re-write of previous accounts, as *mukhtaṣar*s usually were. Claude Cahen, 'Une chronique syrienne du VIe/XIIe siècle: le *Bustān al-Jāmi'*', *Bulletin d'études orientales de l'Institut français de Damas* vii-viii (1937-8); 'Umar 'Abd al-Salam Tadmuri, *al-Bustān al-jāmi' li-jami' tawārīkh ahl al-zamān/al-manṣūb ilā 'Imād al-Dīn Abī Ḥamīd Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Aṣfahānī* (2002); Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (London and New York, 2000); A Hartmann, 'A unique manuscript in the Asian Museum, St.Petersburg: the Syrian chronicle *at-Ta`riḥ al-Manṣūrī* by Ibn Naẓīf al-Ḥamawī from the 7th AH/13th century', *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, I, U. Vermeulen and D. De Smet (eds.) (Leuven, 1995), 89-100.

supposed plot of 1174 alluded to above;[81] had he intended to quash Shi'ism at all, he would have tried to suppress it in its most populous region of Upper Egypt, especially in Qus, but, to all accounts, did not.[82] The Niẓārī 'Assassins', on the other hand, who attempted to murder him on several occasions, are described by him, in statesmanly rhetorical mode, as one of the three 'enemies' against whom he is trying to defend Islam (the other two being the Zengid rulers in Mosul and the Franks).[83] The Fatimids do not feature in Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's reported formulation; the Niẓārīs are a force to be reckoned with not because of their religious claim or because they are a residual Shi'i group but because of their attempts on his life and their political ambition. Several later sources cite another putative statement of his, namely, that one of his two main missions in life was to rid the Nile Valley of the Isma'ili heresy (the other being the removal of the 'infidels' from Jerusalem). In practice, however, his fiscal and endowment policies appear to be designed to, amongst other things, wipe out the influence of Armenians who had prospered in Egypt during the tenure of several powerful Armenian viziers (chief among them Badr al-Jamālī, d. 1095 and his son al-Afḍal, d. 1121) rather than an erasing of Fatimid influence *per se*.[84] On the other hand, his fiscal reforms pursued the agenda of diverting wealth away from the structures designed by the Fatimids to remunerate their elite, towards new financial instruments through which wealth could be released into a more socially equitable system, in keeping with his avowed aim of establishing principles of social justice, and secondly of allowing him to

[81] For a description, see Lev (1999), ch. 2.1.

[82] Leiser (1976), 430-431.

[83] Lewis (1953), 239.

[84] Frenkel (1999), 1, 8-9.

repay the loyalty of the soldiery that sustained his power. The *waqfs* he established over the course of the years following his new sultanate all point to these aims.[85]

Thus the assumption that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn worked to wipe out the Fatimid stamp upon Egypt reveals its fragility on deeper scrutiny. One might in fact deduce from the sources that by the time Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn took up the sultanate, having seemed acquiescent to treading the admittedly precarious tightrope of vizier for the last two years of Fatimid rule, when Nūr al-Dīn's expectation that he would hand Egypt over to him persisted, Isma'ilism was so attenuated a force in Egyptian life that he hardly needed to take a pronounced stance against it. His policies would do the necessary work for him over the course of time.[86] The evidence examined by Frenkel suggests that he did indeed attempt to liquidate the assets of the Fatimids as he did those of all his adversaries, current and former, but his motives were as much economic as ideological, and hence the sale and dispersal of the Fatimids' books collections rather than their annihilation.

As for his religious tolerance in general, this is an equally many-sided, equally inconclusive area: medieval Arabic sources are far from consistent on the matter. Some offer straightforward panegyrics, while others describe how dreadful a foe he was, and how cruel he could be, apparently as one mode of eulogy amongst others.[87] Aside from the official biographers, whose descriptions form the backbone of Mamluk accounts of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's life and rule, alternative voices also abound. Usāma b. Munqidh, whose

[85] Ibid.

[86] Michael Chamberlain, 'The Crusader Era and the Ayyubid Dynasty' in *The Cambridge History of Egypt Vol. I*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge, 1998), 198–242; 216; cf. Richards (1980). For an alternative view, see, for example, R. Stephen Humphreys, 'Egypt in the world system of the later Middle Ages' in Carl F. Petry (ed), *The Cambridge History of Egypt, vol 1*, (as above), 445-461; 450-451.

[87] For a sense of the stylistic and methodological variations in the biography of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn,

autobiography, *Kitāb al-i'tibār*, recounts many incidents from late Fatimid and early Ayyubid history as he himself experienced them, and who probably harboured some pro-Isma'ili sympathies as strongly implied in a passage of his quoted by al-Dhahabī, presents Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn as an awe-inspiring and uncompromising ruler who strikes fear into his opponents.[88] Conversely, William of Tyre portrays him as ruler given to leniency towards his captives and great generosity,[89] while Geniza documents offer the impression that his stances towards religious minorities, in particular the Jews, was tolerant, especially so in contrast to the policies of the 'zealous' Mamluks.[90] One is left noting these conflicting perspectives without the opportunity of reaching a firm conclusion, dissatisfying as this may be, since the primary and some secondary sources have personal stances to postulate, not merely in relation to the outline of history or the character of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn himself, but also in relation to the narrative modes and historiography that has portrayed him over the centuries. A range of narrative and more limited documentary evidence attests that several important Fatimid-era works survived the fall of the dynasty; if Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn had intended to efface the Fatimid written record (a dubious assumption, as numerous sources indicate), his attempts to do so were half-hearted if not indifferent, and need to be viewed against the

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including the presence - or lack - of hagiographic elements, see Richards (1980).

[88] Usāma b. Munqidh, *Memoirs of an Arab-Syrian Gentleman or An Arab Knight in the Crusades. Memoirs of Usamah Ibn-Munqidh* (*Kitāb al-I'tibār*), trans. P. K. Hitti, (Beirut, 1964), 14.

[89] See William of Tyre, *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum*, XX, 5-10, *Patrologia Latina* 201, 788-9, in *The Crusades: A Documentary History* (Milwaukee, 1962), (trans. J. Brundage), 139-40. Other non-Arab sources consulted for comparison, *viz.* Nicetas Choniates, *Chronicles*, translated as *O city of Byzantium: annals of Niketas Choniatēs* by H. J. Magoulias, (Detroit, 1984) and the European/Byzantine sources collected by Hannes Möhring in *Saladin und der Dritte Kreuzzug*, (Wiesbaden, 1980), appear to be focused on events subsequent to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's earliest years as the Ayyubid ruler.

[90] S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, (Berkeley, 1967), five vols, 1: 38.

wider context of his trying to keep in balance a variety of political, religious and financial aims.