

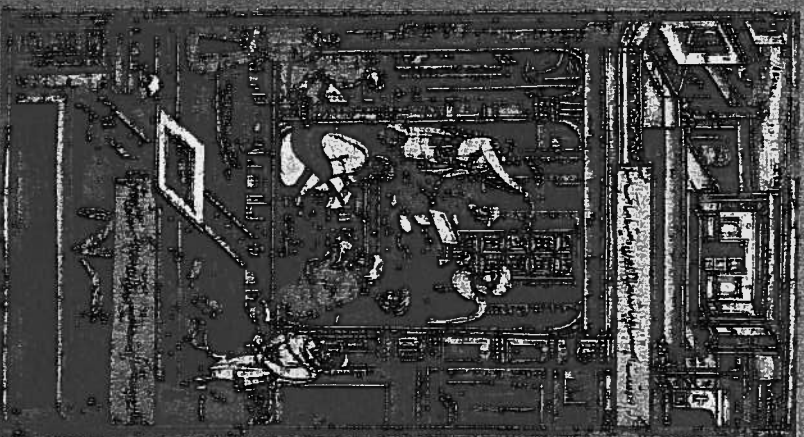


CULTURE AND MEMORY IN MEDIEVAL ISLAM
Essays in Honour of Wilferd Madelung

Edited by
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The Beginning of the Ismaili *Da'wa* and the Establishment of the Fatimid Dynasty as Commemorated by al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān

Ismail K. Poonawala

Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (d.963/974), the most illustrious Fatimid jurist and founder of Ismaili jurisprudence, was a prolific author with a versatile mind.¹ He entered into the service of the newly founded Fatimid dynasty while he was young and served the first four caliphs consecutively for half a century in various capacities. Being an Ismaili himself by persuasion,² he belonged to the elite group close to power. In 337/948 when the Caliph-Imam al-Mansūr moved his capital to the new city of al-Mansūriyya founded by him, he appointed Nu'mān as the supreme *qāḍī*, the highest judicial office in the Fatimid domain.³

Idrīs Imād al-Dīn (d.872/1468), the chief *ḍā'ī* of the Mustafai-Tayyibi *da'wa*⁴ in Yaḥḥān and a noted historian, states that it was al-Mansūr who entrusted Nu'mān with the *da'wa*.⁵ Idrīs' statement, therefore, implies that in addition to being the chief *qāḍī*, Nu'mān was also the chief *ḍā'ī* directing the affairs of the powerful religious organization from within and from without the Fatimid

empire. It was, however, during the reign of the fourth Caliph-Imam al-Mu'izz li-Dīn Allāh (341-65/953-75), with whom Nu'mān was on more intimate terms, that he reached the apogee of his long career. Al-Mu'izz not only commissioned him to compose the *Da'ā'im al-Islām* (*The Pillars of Islam*),⁷ which was then proclaimed as the official code of the Fatimids, but also to compile an official history of the beginning of the *da'wa* and the subsequent establishment of the Fatimid dynasty. Referring to the latter, Nu'mān states:⁸

And [al-Mu'izz] commissioned me to collect the history of the [Fatimid] dynasty (*al-ḥiṣṣa al-dawla*)⁹ in a book and the Fine Qualities of Bani Hāshim and the Bad Qualities of Bani 'Abd Shams (*manāqib Bani Hāshim wa-mathālib Bani 'Abd Shams*)¹⁰ in another book. Hence, I complied with the request and collected material for both, each in a large volume [arranged] in several parts, as al-Mu'izz had instructed me, and classified [the material]. After [I had finished both the books], I submitted them to him and [after scrutinizing them] he approved both of them equally with satisfaction and said, 'As for the history of the *dawla*, those missionaries (*ḍā'īn*) and the faithful ones (*mu'miriin*), who took upon themselves to carry out the task of establishing a *dawla*, I like that their deeds be immortalized for the succeeding generations so that their names will endure in the chronicles of the bygone people, and that the [praise and] prayers of those who [read] and hear about their [exemplary deeds] will reach them [in the hereafter] and [so that the rewards which] God, the Great and Mighty, has prepared in order to honour them in the eternal abode be made known to their descendants. Since those [brave and pious souls] did not live long enough to [relate their heroic deeds] to us, it is incumbent upon us to preserve their memory and repay them their due.'

Nu'mān's own statement describing the circumstances under which the book was written and its intended purpose is quite revealing.¹¹ He candidly states what he is trying to do as a historian and how he is going to accomplish his goal as instructed by al-Mu'izz. The final product of *Al-ḥiṣṣa al-dawla*, entitled *Yūṣūf al-dawla wa-ṣiḥḥat al-dawla* ('The beginning of the *da'wa* and the establishment of the *dawla*'),¹² is, therefore, the official text

commemorating the beginning of the Ismaili missionary activities (*da'wa*), first in Yaman around 268/881 and then in North Africa around 280/893, which led to the rise of the Fatimid dynasty to power in 297/909. In other words, Nu'mān compiled the book to retrieve officially sanctioned views about the beginning of the *da'wa* and the establishment of the *dawla*.

Nu'mān's primary interest as an official Fatimid historian lies not so much in recording the so-called 'bare facts' of history, but to a great extent in moulding and reshaping the raw materials at his disposal into a meaningful narrative framework for the Ismaili and non-Ismaili readers.¹³ History for Nu'mān is not a bare collection of discrete accounts of the past and their enumeration, but it serves a more noble purpose of imparting lessons and wisdom.¹⁴ Nu'mān's representation of the past history of the *da'wa* and the establishment of the *dawla* is thus significant because of its meaningfulness for the present.¹⁵

The *Yfā'idh*'s compilation suggests an intricate process by which Nu'mān, the official spokesman of the *da'wa*, perceived those events and then recorded them for political and ideological purposes for posterity. The book depicts dramatic events of the last three decades of the 9th/10th century that led to the meteoric rise of the Ismailis in Yaman and how the *dā'ī* Abū 'Abdallah al-Shīrī was able to win over one of the great Berber tribes of Kutāma to his side and topple the Aghlabid dynasty in North Africa.¹⁶ Those events may, therefore, appropriately be called the formative period of the *da'wa*, which led to the Fatimid rise to power. The tale of those tumultuous events narrated by Nu'mān in a thick volume is not only richly textured with graphic details and touching moments, but is also very compelling.

The exposition that follows intends neither to subject the aforementioned work to historical analysis, nor to source criticism, rather it aims at presenting how Nu'mān represents the past history of the *da'wa*, its origins and its mission, in a particular way that he wanted it to be remembered in the future as instructed by al-Mu'izz. Nu'mān's history of the beginning of the *da'wa*, therefore, to borrow the phrase of Bernard Lewis, can be categorized under 'remembered history,'¹⁷ because it consists of statements

about the past – that is what history is,¹⁸ or as the collective memory of the Ismaili community after their rise to power and consolidation of the Fatimid dynasty.

It also concerns Nu'mān's imaginative understanding of the minds of the main actors in this dramatic narrative with whom he is dealing,¹⁹ of the motivations behind their acts, and invokes early Islamic historical memories still vivid in the minds of the faithful. Nu'mān knew very well that for Muslims precedent was, and still remains, the most powerful guide for thought and behaviour. He, therefore, focuses his attention on contemporary events and at the same time on the memory of earlier times, especially the days of the Prophet, in order to justify the present. Nu'mān is, thus, obliged to search the past for inspiration, guidance, and above all evidence of legitimacy for the present.

Nu'mān's narrative strategy in the aforementioned book is subtle and artistic. Like other historians he employs various literary devices, such as direct discourse, speeches, letters, rhetorical embellishments and well-knit narrative structure, to reveal the intended meaning.²⁰ The larger narrative of the beginning of the *da'wa* and its success in attaining political power, first in Yaman and then in North Africa, which subsequently led to the establishment of the *dawla*, provides a framework for a series of small but highly anecdotal accounts.²¹ Nu'mān's account of the Yamani *da'wa* is derived mainly from the *Sirat Ibn Hawshab*,²² while that of the Maghrib seems to have been drawn from individual or collective traditions, which referred to the events in detail.²³ Using those traditions as building blocks, he has constructed the *Yfā'idh* and accomplished his task through a process of systematizing, expanding, abbreviating, omitting and creating. The way Nu'mān has used and arranged the material at his disposal has significantly enhanced the import of his message.

From the start Nu'mān invokes the traditions (*ahādīth*) of the Prophet concerning the imminent advent of the Mahdi.²⁴ Belief in the coming of the Mahdi from the Family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*) with messianic expectations and the hope of a religious restorer who will restore Islam to its original perfection and bring justice to people was an essential element of the faith not only

among the radical Shi'a but also among the Twelver Imānis and the Ismailis. The eleventh Imam had died in 260/874, and the question of his succession not yet resolved, one could argue that the belief that there was a hidden twelfth Imam had not yet taken firm hold over the Imāni community. On the other hand, it should be noted that these traditions were exploited since the revolt of al-Mukhtār al-Thaqafi and this fact is well documented in the annals of Islamic history.²⁵ Moreover, Mahdi traditions incorporated in the Sunni canonical *ḥadīth* collections of Ibn Māja, Abū Dāwūd, Nasa'i, Tirmidhi and Ibn Ḥanbal suggest a firm basis for the popular belief in the Mahdi.²⁶ Nu'mān's profuse use of those traditions at the beginning of the book was thus not only a textual and narrative strategy, but was equally meant to be legitimizing the *dā'wa* and the *dawla* at the same time.

Let us now turn to the *Yfīdh* itself. It opens with a brief invocation of the *basma* and *ḥamdala* and with appropriate Qur'anic verses. It states:²⁷

Praise be to Allah, the defender of the truth and the guardian of his friends (*ḡayyid*), who refutes falsehood and disgraces its upholders. He is the most truthful [when He says]: *Lo! the party of Allah, they are the victors* [5:56]; and *Our host, they are the victors* [37:173]; *the earth shall be the inheritance of My righteous servants* [21:106].

After invoking God's blessing upon the Messenger of God, in accordance with the cardinal principle of the Shi'i doctrine, he states:²⁸

God sealed the prophethood with Muhammad, but retained the imamate in his progeny. The earth will never be devoid of an Imam. As the tyrants have overwhelmed the community the Imams were obliged to go into concealment; however, their *dā'wa* has continued in every region of the globe. We have decided to record [the history of] the *dā'wa* in the Maghrib until the advent of the Mahdi for the benefit of the posterity. We have related the description of the Mahdi and the traditions of the Messenger of God giving glad tidings of his advent in a separate tome.

Having set the stage, the main narrative begins with the launching of the *dā'wa* in Yaman. Nu'mān states:²⁹

We begin by mentioning this blessed *dā'wa* [i.e., the Yamani *dā'wa*], since it is the origin of the [Ismaili] *dā'wa*, which we intend to recount, and that a particular *dā'wa* was dispatched to that region. Then, [a *dā'wa*] who was inspired by the holder of the *dā'wa* in Yaman and had followed his moral example, was sent to North Africa (*al-Maghrib*). The holder of the Yamani *dā'wa* was Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Ḥasan b. Farah b. Ḥawshab b. Zādān al-Kufī [generally referred to as Ibn Ḥawshab]. He was given the [honorary and pseudo-messianic] title *Mansūr al-Yamani* [(the divinely aided) Conqueror of Yaman]³⁰ because he was granted victory [by God]. Whenever he was addressed by that epithet he used to say [out of modesty], 'The [divinely aided] Victorious (*al-Mansūr*) is an Imam from among the Imams of Alī-Muhammad.' Did you not hear what the poet said? When the 'Victorious' appears from the progeny of Ahmad,³¹ Say to the Abbāsids, 'Get up on [your] feet [and run]!' It is related from Ja'far b. Muḥammad [Imam al-Sādiq] that he said, 'From us [i.e., from our progeny] there will be the [advent of the] *Mahdī* and the Victorious (*al-Mansūr*).' Yet another tradition states, 'Give good tidings [to the faithful] that the days of the tyrants will soon come to an end. Then there will be a Restorer (*al-fāḥi*) through whom God will restore the *umma* of Muḥammad [to a healthy state]; [finally] there will be [the advent of] the Victorious (*al-Mansūr*) through whom God will make [his] religion victorious.'

Nu'mān then narrates in full detail and with moving imagery the story of Ibn Ḥawshab's as well as his companion 'Alī b. al-Faḍl's conversion to the Ismaili *dā'wa*. In both cases the memory of the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn³² is invoked as the most powerful image not only to determine the degree of devotion of a Shi'i devotee, but also to win him over to the side of the *dā'wa* and recruit him as a *dā'wa*.³³ What is important to note here is that according to Nu'mān, based on Ibn Ḥawshab's biography, both these *dā'was* were converted to the Ismaili cause and recruited by the then hidden Imam himself in southern Iraq.³⁴

While describing Ibn Ḥawshab's journey from al-Qādisiyya, in southern Iraq, to the designated place in Yaman, Nu'mān has

employed the clearly etched Mahdi traditions in the collective memory of the Muslims with great subtlety. As both the Shi'is and the Sunnis shared these traditions, one can state that Nu'mān speaks of 'shared knowledge' or 'common memory.'

Ibn Hawshab's mission to Yaman as depicted by Nu'mān hardly provides the historian with bare facts, because Yaman is drawn into the picture for a different reason, while the main focus of the book is North Africa from where the Fatimids emerged. Nu'mān's description of the beginning of the *da'wa* in Yaman, from where the Maghribi *da'wa* originated, consciously or unconsciously, reflects that the Ismaili *da'wa* was one of charismatic sanction with divine endorsement. Unfortunately, as the *Sira* of Ibn Hawshab is lost, one cannot exactly determine Nu'mān's contribution; however his literary and artistic endeavours are quite obvious from fine modulations of the Mahdi theme throughout the *fiṭāhā*. The use of animated dialogues and direct speech in recounting those traditions adds to the liveliness of the discourse.⁵⁵

The first episode sketches Ibn Hawshab's and his companion 'Ali b. al-Faḍl's arrival in Yaman when they began their clandestine activities. It is narrated by Ibn Hawshab himself in the first person and runs as follows:⁵⁶

Then we [Ibn Hawshab and his companion 'Ali b. al-Faḍl] arrived in the town called 'Adan Abyan, in southern Yaman, we discovered a Shi'i community there known as Banū Mūsā. I entered that town in the company of my companion ['Ali b. al-Faḍl] under the guise of a cotton merchant and rented a shop in the market.⁵⁷ One day while I was seated in the shop clouds started to gather in the sky and soon there was a downpour. Then I realized that there were a number of people standing in front of the shop looking at me and talking among themselves. One of them came up to me, stood over me and asked if he could come into the shop.⁵⁸ I complied with his request. When that man came in he said to me, 'I don't think this is the face of a cotton merchant.'⁵⁹ I replied, 'How is that?' The man said, 'Do you have any news about 'Alī Muḥammadi? (*na'at-ha min 'im āl Muḥammadi?*)'⁶⁰ I responded, 'I am a merchant.' The man rejoined, 'Spare me that [leave your business aside]. Perhaps you have heard about Banū Mūsā. [Haven't you?]' I answered, 'Yes.' The man then said, 'We belong

to them [i.e., Banū Mūsā], we are Shi'a. This is the time we anticipate the arrival of the Mahdi's *da'wa* among us. Indeed, we recognize in you those characteristics [and for that very reason we came to you].'⁶¹ So, tell us what it is you have [for us], we are your brethren.' The man persisted until I divulged the matter (*al-amr*) and he refused to depart until I took a pledge [of loyalty and secrecy]⁶² from him.⁶³

Nu'mān has organized the following four episodes under the rubric 'Anecdotes from the reports about Abu'l-Qāsim [*kurūya* of Ibn Hawshab], the holder of the Yamani mission (*dhīr rukat min dhīr Abi'l-Qāsim, sūbiḥ da'wat al-Yamani*).'⁶⁴ The first three of them are outwardly portrayed as if they were a series of misrecognitions, because those events took place during the initial period of clandestine activities. These incidents are presented as a prelude to the ultimate unfolding of the events in the near future. The hidden, inner meaning behind those occurrences is, therefore, left for the reader to detect. The first anecdote, 'the anecdote of the rock,' narrated by Ibn Hawshab himself, runs as follows:⁶⁵

At the beginning of the mission, as I was working incognito, I observed that the atmosphere was charged with the anticipation of an imminent coming (*ziḥur*) of the Mahdi ... once I was travelling in some of the valleys while one of the leather straps of my sandals, which passed between two toes, snapped. Hence, I sat down on a rock to repair it. And lo, an old man came to me panting and asked, 'From where are you? (*minman al-rjūl?*)' I replied, 'A stranger.' The old man asked, 'Do you have any news of the Mahdi?' I retorted, 'And who is the Mahdi?' The old man said, 'If you don't know, then this is a pure coincidence.' I asked, 'What is that? (*wā mā dhakar?*)' The old man said, 'Once I followed a *shaykh* (old man), a Shi'i, *alim* (learned man), to this place who said to me, "The messenger of the Mahdi would enter this village; the straps of his sandals would snap near this rock and he would sit on it repairing them. Some of you may live [long enough] to witness that event (*al-zamān*, literally time).'⁶⁶ I retorted, 'But Shi'i traditions [with regard to the Mahdi] are numerous (*kalām al-shi'a kaḥīr*, literally: the Shi'a have many stories.)' The old man murmured, 'Yes, by God, [they] are numerous.' I did not find friendly reception with

the *shaykh* (*wa-lam ajid 'inda al-shaykh qabilan*); he turned away and left.⁴⁷

The next anecdote that Nu'mān recalls is even more dramatic. Ibn Ḥawshab recounts as follows:⁴⁸

Following my arrival in the city of San'a', I went to the [central]⁴⁹ mosque [where the public prayer is performed on Fridays] and offered two *raka'at* of prayers near a column. After I had finished prayers [I was overtaken by fatigue],⁵⁰ so I folded my outer garment, put it under my head [as a pillow] and lay on my back putting one leg over the other. And lo, [as soon as I settled in the place]⁵¹ an old man kicked me with his feet, scolded me and said, 'Get up. I got up immediately and reposed. What's the matter, O shaykh that I am the one to be singled out from the rest. There are many people lying in the mosque.' The old man replied,⁵² 'I do not disapprove of your lying down, but this column - it is related that when the Mahdi's *da'i* enters San'a' he will come to it, offer two *raka'at* of prayers and lie down on his back near it, putting one leg over the other. I disapproved of your [manner] for making yourself to resemble him.' I rejoined, 'What that has to do with me? (*wa-mā anā wa-hādhā*)' Some of those who were lying in the mosque heard [what] the shaykh [had uttered] and said [to him], 'How strange is what you said! (*mā d'jida amrakal Amr*, literally means an affair). It is as if this man was the Mahdi's *da'i*! The Shaykh retorted, 'He is not that person, but I disliked that any person other than [that providentially designated *da'i*] should make himself to look like him.' I therefore [collected my belongings], stood up and slipped away [from the mosque].⁵³

Another anecdote Nu'mān relates takes place in the city of Janad, in the southern highlands of Yaman. It is also narrated in the first person from the mouth of Ibn Ḥawshab who states:⁵⁴

I entered that city in disguise and went straight to the central mosque [where the public prayer is performed on Fridays]. There I performed my *zuhr*, *asr* and *maghrib* prayers. [When it was late evening] I asked a person who was in the mosque,⁵⁵ 'Can one spend a night in the mosque? I am a stranger here and wish to stay overnight.' He said, 'Yes, of course! All the strangers you see, they spend their nights in the mosque.' [Satisfied with the response], I sat down [in a corner].

When the people finished their last evening prayers they divided into two groups and started debating about their [religious] learning. I myself, [not taking the side of either party], sat between the two groups. One group consisted of the Shi'a while the other belonged to the Hashwiya (i.e., the Sunnis).⁵⁶ They debated for a long time, and then the Shi'a departed. The other group also rose to disperse, but one of them said, '[Please] sit for a while.' They therefore sat and the man began looking at the Shi'a while they were leaving. When the last of the Shi'a had left, the man turned towards his group and said, 'Do you know the news about tonight?' They said, 'What is it?' He said, 'Isn't tonight such and such, and the month such and such?' They answered, 'Yes.'

Thereupon the man took out a book from under his sleeves and said, 'Isn't this book about which so and so from those workers in clay (*fir'ada*,⁵⁷ meaning Shi'a) referred to?' They looked at the book and replied, 'Yes, indeed it is well-known to them.' He⁵⁸ then singled out a tradition [for that night] and read to them [saying], 'One of their Imams reported to the author of this book and said, "One who lives long enough to reach the year such and such from among the inhabitants of your city, should seek the Mahdi's *da'i* during such and such night. For he will spend that night in the city's [congregational] mosque." They said, "We have heard this tradition." He rejoined,⁵⁹ "Don't you see that those [Shi'a] dispersed while none of them remembered this [tradition, or recognized it]? So, come on! Let us invalidate their tradition and charge them of lying by expelling everybody from the mosque and tonight. Nobody will spend tonight in the mosque and thus we invalidate their report.' They all agreed, hence one of them stood up and announced, 'Oh, ye who are away from your homes, [please] disperse. Nobody from among you will spend tonight in this mosque under any circumstance. Indeed, there is a reason for this.'

Abu'l-Qasim [Ibn Ḥawshab] said, 'I saw that every one of the strangers collected whatever possessions he had and left the mosque. But I did not know where I would go, hence I walked up to a corner and sat there and said to myself, "Perhaps whoever would force me [to leave] would take me to his house." They started forcing people to leave and extinguished the candles. A man who had extinguished most of the candles came to me⁶⁰ and said, 'Get up, O man.' I got up and said, "I am a stranger [in this city] and do

not know of any place to go. Perhaps you will take me tonight to your house and give me shelter." The man retorted, 'No, by God! I don't have any room [in my house]'. Thereupon I exclaimed, 'Praise be the Lord! You are expelling me from the house of God and [at the same time] denying cover under your house!' The man felt ashamed, hence after ascertaining that everybody had left, he left me alone [and went away], and they locked the door of the mosque. I, therefore, spent a long night [in anguish] as I was scared that the mosque might be searched in the morning. But it did not happen. The following morning they opened the door, people entered and prayed, and nobody looked at me with regard to the last night's conversation.

The last episode is much more interesting. In addition to a Mahdi tradition, it introduces a dream wherein the Prophet himself appears to a man in his dream foretelling the coming of the awaited Mahdi. The cognitive significance of the dream is well established in medieval Muslim society and is explained by the observation that the Prophet's biography is interwoven with dreams foretelling the great events of the future. Suffice to mention a famous *hadith* that states, 'A true vision is one forty-sixth part of prophecy.'⁶¹ Nu'mān relates the story from Ibn Hawshab who states:⁶²

After I had left the city of Janad and was travelling to another destination [in the southern highlands of Yaman], I suddenly discovered that a large army was marching in [our] direction. The people [travelling with me in the caravan realized that] and said, "This is the army of Ibn Ya'fur⁶³ marching to wage war against Ja'far b. Ibrāhīm, the ruler of Muthayyharā."⁶⁴ Being afraid of the army, they dispersed seeking shelter in the nearby mountain passes, and so did I. There I saw a cave and took shelter in it. While I was sitting there a man entered, greeted me, sat down and asked, 'From where are you?' I replied, 'From this caravan. When we saw the army advancing towards us we dispersed in this mountain pass until the army passed.' The man wished me well, opened up to me in conversation and asked me about certain issues as to what is permitted and what is forbidden [according to the *shar'ā*].⁶⁵ I responded to the issues raised by him.

Thereafter, the man looked at me with complete satisfaction

and his eyes began shedding tears [of joy]. The man then stood up and started kissing my head, hands and feet, and said, 'O my master, the Messenger of God has sent me to you to rescue me [from my wretched condition], and so you will take my hand and deliver me [from this sorry state]'. I exclaimed, 'How this could be, O man! The man said, 'Yes, indeed [you will]! I used to see the Messenger of God in my dream every year during a particular night, hence I got accustomed to be prepared for that night and that vision was never denied to me. This year, however, I did not see the Messenger of God. [A long] period of time passed by and I was greatly disturbed [and worried]. [All of a sudden], last night I had the dream. So, I said to the Prophet, "O Messenger of God, my cravings for your vision had become drawn out. You cut off from me what you had accustomed me to." The Messenger of God responded, "Indeed, I [came to] give you the good tidings [of the advent of the Mahdi] and let you know that his *dar'is* is in your town, in the midst of your people. Rush to him and take your share of good fortune from him." I said, "But, how could I obtain [his blessings], O Messenger of God?" He said, "Tomorrow you will find him in such and such cave." And the Messenger of God described to me this cave. I said, "[O Messenger of God], I am afraid that I might encounter someone other than him." So, the Messenger of God gave me your description with all the characteristics and said, "In spite of all this [description] ask him such and such," and mentioned these issues to me and added, "If he answers you in such and such way," and related to me all your answers, "then he is your man."

Abu 'l-Qāsim [Ibn Hawshab] said, '[When I heard that] I was overwhelmed with awe and tears flowed [from my eyes] and I exclaimed, "What can I say to the one who is sent to me by the Messenger of God?" So, I conferred with him and laid open [my mission] and took from him [his oath of allegiance].'⁶⁶

Ibn Hawshab's recollection of the Mahdi traditions in association with his mission and then Nu'mān's relating them in a particular way is indeed his reflection, as the head of the *da'wa* and the official spokesman of the dynasty, as to how it wanted to commemorate the deeds of Ibn Hawshab and his brilliant success. In societies where the majority of the population is illiterate, history depends upon a memory that is shared by the entire com-

munity. The growing and invigorated Ismaili community under Ibn Hawshab in Yaman expressed in narratives, as narrated first by the latter and then by Nu'mān, their need to preserve their own identity as they perceived it. Nu'mān might have adjusted his stories, but that does not mean that those stories were prey to arbitrariness. Their flexibility and adaptability respect certain formal conditions and conventions of memorization, the sole means of transmission before it was committed to writing. Even after the Qarmatian⁶⁷ split and the rift with his own companion and partner 'Alī b. al-Faḍl, Mansūr al-Yaman had remained unflinchingly faithful to the Fatimids.⁶⁸ This memory was therefore very precious to the Ismaili/Fatimid *da'wa*. The Musta'ī-Tayyibī *da'wa* of the Ismailis has ever since cherished this pristine and highly valued memory of its origins and mission as preserved by Nu'mān.

Following the above prelude the narrative turns to the mission of the *da'i* Abū 'Abdallāh al-Shīṭī in North Africa, which resulted in the establishment of the Fatimid dynasty. Nu'mān recalls that, prior to Abū 'Abdallāh's mission, two missionaries were sent to that region by the Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq.⁶⁹ This is important for establishing the *da'wa's* origins as going back to the latter Imam before the dispute over his succession and a major schism of his partisans into the Imānis (Twelvers) and the Ismailis. Moreover, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq is revered for his piety and learning by the Shī'ra and the Sunnis alike. Nu'mān is, however, silent about Abū 'Abdallāh's conversion,⁷⁰ and states that when the *da'wa* in Yaman had attained power, the then hidden Imam sent him to Mansūr al-Yaman for training. The Imam instructed him to accompany the latter in his military expeditions and to follow his example. Once he had completed his apprenticeship, he was to proceed to North Africa and begin his mission in the territory of the Kutāma.⁷¹ Although Abū 'Abdallāh fell out of favour with the Caliph-Imam al-Mahdī soon after the establishment of Fatimid rule, Nu'mān rehabilitated his image in the *da'wa* and gave him full credit for his dedicated services.⁷² Here also Nu'mān has used the Mahdī traditions with ingenuity.

After a long and arduous journey from Mecca to North Africa accompanied by the Kutāma pilgrims, when Abū 'Abdallāh ar-

rived at the Kutāma territory in 280/893, he inquired about a place called *Rajj al-akhyār* (literally: 'ravine of the best people'). When he was told that in fact he was in the said location situated near Iḡjān, he exclaimed:⁷³

Indeed, places are defined by [the characteristics of] their inhabitants, and are known after them ... by God, this place is so called after You! Verily, the *hadīth* states, 'The Mahdī will migrate far from his native place during difficult and trying times, and he will be rendered victorious by the best of all people (*al-akhyār*) [living] during that time whose name is derived from *kimān*.'

Abū 'Abdallāh, then addressing the Kutāma, said, 'You are the one meant in the tradition. This place is so-called because you will emerge [victorious] from it [supporting the Mahdī].'

The tradition is pregnant with subtle allusion to al-Mahdī's long and perilous journey from Salamīyya, in Syria, to Sijilmāsa in the far west, in pre-modern Morocco. In addition to that, there is a play on the words *akhyār* and *kimān*. *Kimān*, a verbal noun derived from the root *k-ṣ-m*, means to conceal, to keep secret. The name of the Berber tribe Kutāma, the mainstay of Abū 'Abdallāh's mission, is thus implied, in the said tradition, to have derived from *kimān*, meaning that they kept the secret of the *da'wa* until the time was ripe for the Mahdī's advent. Abū 'Abdallāh thereafter decided to take *Rajj al-akhyār* as his headquarters and commenced his mission.

Soon after Abū 'Abdallāh started his missionary activity and initiated people into the mysteries of the *da'wa* by taking the pledge of loyalty and secrecy, he addressed them as 'our brethren' and urged the faithful to address each other as 'our brethren in faith'.⁷⁴ This brings back the memory of the nascent Islamic community in Medina where the Prophet instituted a pact of brotherhood between the *Anṣār* (Helpers) and the *Muhājirīn* (Emigrants).⁷⁵ When the envoy of the Aghlabid ruler Ibrāhīm b. Ahmad (261-289/875-902) delivered a warning letter to Abū 'Abdallāh, he replied:⁷⁶

I am not the one to be intimidated with your high-sounding threats... Indeed, I am in the company of the defenders of the

faith and the guardians of the faithful who are not scared out of their wits because of the numerical superiority of the forces of tyrants. God, the most truthful, says: *How often a small detachment defeated a larger detachment with Allah's permission! Allah is with the steadfast* [2: 249]... verily I am sent as an envoy to [warn you] about an event that is already decreed and the time [for its fulfillment] has drawn near... *Certainly God will not fail the trust* [3: 9].

Nu'mān, thus, compares the stand of Abū 'Abdallāh with a small band of his devoted Kutāma supporters against the superior Aghlabid army to that of the Prophet with a small band of Muslims over the numerically much superior force of Quraysh at the first Battle of Badr.⁷⁷ Nu'mān's representation of the Median parallels⁷⁸ as a kind of re-enactment of the early Muslim *umma* seems not only to be some kind of symbolic resonance of the past, but it is equally meant to legitimize Abū 'Abdallāh's mission and ultimately the establishment of the Fatimid dynasty.

Wadād al-Qādī, the editor of the *Yfritāh*,⁷⁹ notes in her introduction that Nu'mān delights in drawing comparison between the state of expectation which North Africa lived through before the arrival of the Mahdī and the state of anticipation which the Arabian peninsula underwent before the mission of Muhammad.⁸⁰ Unfortunately, she failed to realize Nu'mān's interest and purpose for writing the *Yfritāh*, and like most conventional historians of Islam she was probably looking for dry facts or 'objective' history. Unable to appreciate what Nu'mān was doing, she is at pains to show that there is a fundamental difference between the two situations.

The Mahdī traditions must have circulated widely among the Muslim communities of North Africa, especially among the various pockets of Shi'i communities, as the mission of Abū 'Abdallāh was gaining momentum.⁸¹ These traditions, Nu'mān recalls, resembled those that circulated among the pre-Islamic Arabs wherein the coming of the Prophet Muhammad was foretold.⁸² On certain occasions, Nu'mān compares Abū 'Abdallāh's conduct with his followers to that of the Prophet in Medina with the Muslim community.⁸³

In Islam, memory was and is essential from the very beginning

and Muslims have always exhibited interest in the past. B. Lewis rightly observes that since early times Muslim entities – states, dynasties, cities, even professions – have been conscious of their place in history. Almost every dynasty that ruled in Muslim lands has left annals or chronicles of some kind.⁸⁴ Memory has remarkable ability to influence subsequent behaviour. While enumerating the excellence of historiography in his *Muqaddima*, Ibn Khaldūn states:⁸⁵

History is a discipline with fine principles, manifold uses, and noble intent. It informs us about the people of the past – the characters of [different] communities, the biographies of prophets, the kingdoms and politics of their kings – thereby providing [us] with example for emulation of those who desire it in religious and worldly affairs.

One could conclude that Nu'mān represented the past history about the beginning of the *da'wa* and the establishment of the *da'wa* in the particular way that the Caliph-Imam al-Mu'izz had instructed him to be remembered in the future. One could add and state that Nu'mān was, in fact, creating memory for the posterity, and, of course, he was successful in the mission entrusted to him.

Learning cannot occur without the function of memory. Memory is necessary for proper social and religious behaviour. Today most of us are willing to admit that objective history is an illusion, for it is impossible to record an event without making some kind of judgement about its significance. As information is handed down from the past, either by memory or in writing, judgements are made at every stage.⁸⁶ As the official spokesman of the *da'wa* and the *da'wa* alike, it is Nu'mān's perspective on the history of both those institutions that allow us perceive their meaning.

Notes

I would like to thank my student Karim Jamal Ali and my colleague Professor Michael Morony for reading the earlier draft of this essay and giving their valuable comments and suggestions that have helped me to clarify certain issues. All translations in this chapter are mine.

1. For a detailed list of his works, see Ismail K. Poonawala, *Bibliography of Ismā'īlī Literature* (Malibu, CA, 1977), pp. 48–68.
2. He was raised and educated as an Ismaili; see Ismail K. Poonawala, 'A Reconsideration of al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's *Madhhab*', *BSOAS* 37 (1974), pp. 572–579; idem, 'Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān and Isma'īli Jurisprudence,' in Farhad Dafary, ed. *Medieval Ismā'īli History and Thought* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 136.
3. Poonawala, 'Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān and Isma'īli Jurisprudence,' p. 120.
4. *Dā'i* (plural, *da'ā'*), meaning one who invites people to the *da'wa*, is used for Ismaili missionaries or religio-political agents; see M.G.S. Hodgson, 'Dā'i', *EI*, vol. 2, pp. 97–98.
5. *Da'wa*, meaning call or invitation, is applied to the Ismaili religio-political organization. M. Canard, 'Da'wa', *EI*, vol. 2, pp. 168–170. It should be noted that the Ismailis themselves call their movement the *da'wa* or *da'wa ḥādīya* (the rightly-guiding mission).
6. Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn, 'Uyūn al-akhbār, ed. Mujaṭṭā Ghālīb (Beirut, 1975), vol. 5, p. 331.
7. *The Pillars of Islam*, tr. A.A. Fyzee, completely revised and annotated by Ismail K. Poonawala (New Delhi, 2002), vol. 1, pp. xxix–xxx.
8. Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Kitāb al-maǧālis wa'l-musawwara*, ed. al-Ḥabīb al-Faqī et al. (Tunis, 1978), pp. 117–118 (or 2nd ed., Beirut, 1997, p. 108). This passage is also reproduced by Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn in his 'Uyūn al-akhbār, ed. M. Ghālīb (Beirut, 1984), vol. 6, p. 47.
9. *Akhbār* (plural of *ḥabār*) means reports, pieces of information, narratives. The word was widely used for historical writing and may be older than the word *ta'rikh*. *Dawla*, literally meaning a turn, change of time or fortune from an unfortunate to a good and happy state. In early usage, therefore, it conveyed a 'time of power and success.' Later on it acquired the meaning of dynasty and ultimately of state. E. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (repr., Cambridge, 1984), s.v. d-w-i; F. Rosenthal, 'Dawla', *EI*, vol. 2, pp. 177–178; B. Lewis, *Islam in History* (London, 1973), p. 254.
10. This book of Nu'mān is known by its abbreviated title *Kitāb al-manāqib wa'l-maḥātib*, MS collection of my late father Mulla Kirbān Husain Godhrawala (Poonawala); see Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, p. 60. The bulk of the book, as the title indicates, deals with the ancestors of the Umayyad dynasty and its early rulers. Nu'mān's strategy is to expose their immoral characters and vices by juxtaposing the piety and learning of the Imams from the House of Banī Ḥāshim who were contemporaneous with the Umayyad rulers. The last, short section, compares in the

same way the Umayyad rulers of Spain with the Fatimid Imam-Caliph. This book was compiled at the same time as the *Iḥtiṣā*, i.e., in 346/957. It was the time when 'Abd al-Raḥmān III (300–350/912–961), the Umayyad ruler of al-Andalus, adopted the titles of Caliph and Commander of the Faithful in place of the previous simple designation of Amir. Al-Mu'izz, having asserted his control over the central Maghrib, was eager to press hard from the Far Maghrib in a serious threat to the Umayyads of Spain. It was against this background that Nu'mān, in a war of propaganda, fires his shot couched in the form of a tradition foretelling the end their rule. He states contemptuously, 'Abd al-Raḥmān was the first remnant (*baqīya*) of the accursed Umayyads to splash down (*saqat*) in the land of al-Andalus, and it is said that the last of them, likewise, will be 'Abd al-Raḥmān.' See also al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Kitāb iḥtiṣā al-da'wa*, ed. F. Dachraoui (Tunis, 1975), p. 240; it is hereinafter cited as *Iḥtiṣā al-da'wa*. See also F. Dachraoui, 'al-Mu'izz Ik-Dīn Allāh', *EI*, vol. 7, pp. 485–489; C.E. Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties* (New York, 1996), pp. 11–12.

11. The aforementioned statement of Nu'mān is quite similar to that of Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn describing the circumstances under which al-Mu'izz had previously commissioned Nu'mān to compile his *magnum opus*, *Da'īm al-Islām* (see *The Pillars of Islam*, vol. 1, p. xxx). In all likelihood Idrīs' report is derived from some work of Nu'mān himself, because the traditions related by Idrīs in the episode are mentioned at the beginning of the *Da'īm*. Moreover, Nu'mān states several times in his *Kitāb al-manāqib wa'l-maḥātib* that he never compiled a book dealing with formal legal opinion (*fatwa*) without consulting the Imam.

12. It was completed in 346/957. I have used Dachraoui's edition because it is the best of the three editions. The other two are by Wādād al-Qāḍī (Beirut, 1970) and a pirated edition by 'Arif Ṭāmir (Beirut, 1996). On the beginning of the Ismaili *da'wa* and the establishment of the Fatimid dynasty, the *Iḥtiṣā al-da'wa* has remained the main source for all subsequent historians. See Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, p. 59; Dachraoui's Arabic introduction, p. (letter) *dāl* (i.e., 4), French introduction, pp. 36–37.

13. The question as to how scholars in the field of Islamic history have tended to use historical narratives as unstructured and uninterpretative collections of fact and fiction, see M. Waldmann, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative: A Case Study in Perso-Islamic Historiography* (Columbia, 1980), pp. 3–4; J. Scott McIsami, *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century* (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 2–3.

14. Nu'mān, *Kitāb al-majālis*, pp.45-47, 118; idem, *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-Jalālī (Qumm, 1409-12/1988-92), vol.1, pp.87-88. Besides providing information about the past, history serves another purpose of revealing wisdom and ethical philosophy. See M. Arkoun, 'Éthique et histoire d'après les *Tajārib al-Umam*', in *Atti del Ierzo Congresso di Studi Arabici e Islamici, Ravenna, 1966* (Naples, 1967), pp.83-112; T. Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography* (Albany, NY, 1975), p.32; Meisami, *Persian Historiography*, p.6.
15. 'All history is contemporary history,' means that history is essentially seeing the past through the eyes of the present; B. Croce, *History as the Story of Liberty* (London, 1941), p.41, and E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (New York, 1963), p.22.
16. See S.M. Stern, 'Abū 'Abdallāh al-Shīrī', *Elz*, vol.1, pp.103-104.
17. B. Lewis, *History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented* (Princeton, 1976), pp.11-12. The relationship between memory and history is a complex and debated issue. *History and Memory: Studies in Representation of the Past*, a journal published by Tel Aviv University, is devoted to articles, which explore various ways in which the past is commemorated and constructed by historians to fulfill an increasing variety of needs.
18. 'The history we read, though based on facts, is, strictly speaking, not factual at all, but a series of accepted judgments.' Cited by Carr in his *What is History?* p.13.
19. *Ibid.*, pp.26-27.
20. J. Scott Meisami, 'History as Literature,' *Iranian Studies*, 33 (2000), pp.15-30. She states that Persian writers had a consummate interest in matters of eloquence and style, since history for them was not a dry record of events but an elucidation of the meaning of those events. See also Albrecht Noth, in collaboration with L. Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-critical Study* (Princeton, 1994), pp.62, 109-110, 173.
21. It is noteworthy that Nu'mān refers neither to the activities of al-Ḥusayn al-Ahwāzī and his companion Ḥamādān Qarmat in southern Iraq, nor to the activities of the *dā'wā* in eastern Arabia, west central and north-west Persia. The reason for it is not far to seek. One of the basic purposes of 'official historiography' as remembered and recorded by Nu'mān was to legitimize authority. The authority was vested with the Fatimid Caliph-Imams, while Ḥamādān Qarmat and other *dā'īs* operating elsewhere had betrayed the *dā'wā*/the Fatimid cause and drifted away from the central authority to what became known as the Qarāmiya. In other words, Nu'mān is distancing himself and the *dā'wā* from those dissident

Qarāmiya. For details of this schism, see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), pp.125-135. Anecdotes were used from the very early Islamic historical tradition and are found in Ibn Isḥāq's *Sīra*; see Noth, *Early Arabic*, p.13.

22. According to the Ismaili sources it was composed by Ibn Ḥawshab's son Ja'far. Unfortunately, it is completely lost, except for some extracts in Ismaili and non-Ismaili works; see Poonawala, *Bibliography*, p.74; Abbas Hamdani, 'An Early Fātimid Source on the Time and Authorship of the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-Safā'*', *Arabica*, 26 (1979), pp.62-75. Heinz Halm, on the other hand, suggests that the above *Sīra* was an autobiography composed by Ibn Ḥawshab himself in the last years of his life, especially when he was besieged in the Miswar mountains by his former companion 'Alī b. al-Faḍl; see Halm, 'Die *Sīra* Ibn Ḥawshab: Die ismailitische *dā'wā* im Jemen und die Fātimiden,' *WO*, 12 (1981), pp.107-135; idem, *Das Reich des Mahdi: Der Aufstieg der Fātimiden 875-973* (Munich, 1991), p.179; or M. Bonner, *The Empire of the Mahdi: The Rise of the Fātimids* (Leiden, 1966), p.195. His proposition seems to have derived from the fact that most of the extant extracts from it, found in Nu'mān's *Iḥtiṣāḥ*, and Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn's 'Yūn al-akhbār, are narrated in the first person. Only one brief excerpt in Ibn Mālik al-Ḥammādī's *Kashf asrār al-Bāitīyya* (in S. Zakkā's *Akḥbār al-Qarāmiya*, Damascus, 1980, p.219), prefixed by *qāla al-Manṣūr*, is similar to that in the *Iḥtiṣāḥ* but with variant readings. In his *Iḥtiṣāḥ*, Nu'mān never cites the *Sīra* by its title, but paraphrases from it using different formulas, such as *qāla Abu 'l-Qāsim* (the kunya of Ibn Ḥawshab) when he is reporting directly in the first person. When he is not quoting directly he uses other formulas, such as *akḥbaranā ahl al-'ān wa 'l-thiqa min asḥābhi*, *akḥbaranā al-thiqa min asḥābi Abi 'l-Qāsim*, or *akḥbaranā bu 'du aḥbābi Abi 'l-Qāsim*, see *Iḥtiṣāḥ al-dā'wā*, pp.3, 4, 5, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 25. Halm's assumption is not supported by firm evidence and contradicts the Ismaili tradition, which states that Ja'far was the author. In his *The Master and the Disciple: An Early Islamic Spiritual Dialogue* (London, 2001), pp.23, 51-55, James W. Morris also argues forcefully that the *Sīra* was the work of Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman.

23. In his commendable study (*Das Reich des Mahdi*, pp.45, 99, 381, 390; or *The Empire of the Mahdi*, pp.39, 102), Halm points out that the core of the *Iḥtiṣāḥ* is based on *Sīra Abi 'Abdallāh*, written either by Abū 'Abdallāh himself or by one of his closest associates. Nu'mān has suppressed the title because Abū 'Abdallāh had fallen into disgrace and was eliminated. Similarly, Nu'mān has suppressed the title of *Sīra Ibn Ḥawshab*

for a different reason as explained by A. Hamdani in his aforementioned article.

24. See W. Madelung, 'al-Mahdi', *Etz.* vol. 5, pp. 230-238; A.A. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism* (Albany, NY, 1981); Lewis, *History*, pp. 25-26 and idem, *Islam: From the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople* (New York, 1974), vol. 1, p. xx.

25. For details see Madelung, 'al-Mahdi'.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Jfritāh al-dā'wa*, p. 1.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2. I have summarized the contents.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

30. For the use of this title see Madelung, 'al-Mahdi'.
31. Ahmad, meaning the most praiseworthy, was one of the names of the Prophet; al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume IX: The Last Years of the Prophet*, tr. Ismail K. Poonawala (Albany, NY, 1990), p. 156. This verse with a brief account of Ibn Ḥawshab's activities in Yamān is also referred to by Nu'mān in his *Sharḥ al-akhbār* vol. 3, pp. 403 ff.

32. The Shi'a have kept alive the memory of the martyred grandson of the Prophet for more than a millennium by rehearsing and interiorizing its tragic details every year during the first ten days of Muharram. For the collective memory of the Shi'a on this tragic event, see M. Ayyoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Ashūrā' in Twelver Shi'ism* (The Hague, 1978) and the following works by Muḥammad Mahdī Shams al-Dīn, 'Ashūrā' (Beirut, 1412/1991); *Thawrat al-Fuṣṣayn* (Beirut, 1417/1996); *Waḡā' al-Karbalā' fī-l-wajdān al-Shi'i* (Beirut, 1417/1996).

33. *Jfritāh al-dā'wa*, pp. 3-10. It states: 'While I [Ibn Ḥawshab] had started the recital of the *Sīrat al-Kalīf*, a *Shaykh* accompanied by a man [his *dā'ī*] approached... that man [the *dā'ī*] then informed me that the *Shaykh* is the Imam of the age (*imām al-zamān*).' The encounter of Ibn Ḥawshab with the Imam and his *dā'ī* is a very touching tale of conversion.

34. Some sources, on the other hand, indicate that Ibn Ḥawshab was recruited either by the chief *dā'ī* Frūz or by Ibn Abī l-Fawāris, an assistant of 'Abdān. See W. Madelung, 'Mangūr al-Yaman', *Etz.* vol. 6, pp. 438-439. The story of both these *dā'īs*' conversion is translated by Halm in his *Das Reich des Mahdi*, pp. 38-42; tr. *The Empire of the Mahdi*, pp. 31-36. The mission (*dā'wa*) in southern Iraq was managed by Ḥamdan Qarnat and 'Abdān.

35. Morris, *The Master and the Disciple*, p. 25, has pointed out that there

are remarkable parallels between the passages adapted by Nu'mān from the *Sīrat* and the outline of the *Kiṭāb al-'ālm wa'l-ghulam*.

36. *Jfritāh al-dā'wa*, pp. 15-16; see also *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, vol. 3, p. 411, wherein this episode is narrated at the end. The sequence of the remaining four episodes remains the same as in the *Jfritāh*. It should be noted that the wording of the two texts differs slightly with some additions and omissions and I have indicated only those variants or additions which I considered significant or meaningful to the context. At times I have either abridged some phrases and sentences or adjusted them for the smooth flow of the narration.

37. Addition in *Sharḥ al-akhbār*: 'I saw in the market a group of people conferring together about the excellent qualities (*fādā'id*) of 'Alī'.

38. *Sharḥ al-akhbār*: 'A group of people from among them came into the shop; they sat and conversed with me. Then one of them pulled me by the hand and took me [to the back of the shop].'

39. *Sharḥ al-akhbār*: 'But you have some news about 'Alī Muḥammad'.
40. It could also mean, 'Do you have any knowledge about the traditions (*al-ādiṭh*) of the Imams? [which you could narrate to us].'

41. Addition from *Sharḥ al-akhbār*.

42. For the importance of an oath and its formula, see H. Halm, 'The Imma'li Oath of Allegiance ('*ahd*) and the "Sessions of Wisdom" (*majālis al-ḥikmah*) in Fatimid Times', in Daftary, ed. *Medieval Isma'ili History and Thought*, pp. 91-115.

43. In this episode there is also a puzzle about 'Adan Lā'a, name of a village in Yamān, where the Imam had instructed Ibn Ḥawshab to go. Nobody in Yamān knew about it and it remains like a mystery and the reader is kept in suspense until the very end of this episode when it is finally resolved.

44. Wadād al-Qāḍī (ed. *Jfritāh al-dā'wa*, p. 47 n. 3) missed the point Nu'mān is making when she wrote that those anecdotes resemble 'tales related in the night, for amusement.'

45. *Jfritāh al-dā'wa*, pp. 18-19. In *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, vol. 3, p. 404, Nu'mān states that this incident happened in a village in the vicinity of Sa'nā'.

46. The old man implies that Ibn Ḥawshab might be that messenger: 47. *Sharḥ al-akhbār*: *wa-wallā 'annī wa-lam ara fihī qabūlan wfa'ihihi*, 'meaning 'the old man turned away from me and I did not notice on him [any sign of] friendly reception, or inquisitiveness, so that I could open the conversation with him [and disclose the secret or my identity]'. It could also mean that the old man, although he was foretold, was not disposed to recognize Ibn Ḥawshab as Mahdī's emissary. All these epi-

sodes contain yet another literary theme of recognition/misrecognition and disclosure, which is beyond the scope of this essay.

48. *Ḥiṭāḥ al-da'wa*, pp. 19–20.

49. As in *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, vol. 3, p. 404: *al-masjid al-jāmī*.

50. Addition from *Sharḥ al-akhbār*:

51. Addition from *Sharḥ al-akhbār*:

52. In *Sharḥ al-akhbār*: 'Get up [so that] you will not resemble the one who will lay down in this posture.' I asked, 'And who is that person?'

53. In *Sharḥ al-akhbār*: 'I got up and sat down. A man approached the *shaykh* and said, "How strange is your affair! Do you think that he [Ibn Ḥawshab] is the Mahdī's *da'ī*?" He then began talking the same thing.' Ibn Ḥawshab continued, 'I did not notice on both of them [any sign of] friendly reception so that I could open the conversation with them. I, therefore, stood up and left.' It is worth noting that after this episode Nu'mān relates a tradition from Imam Ja'far al-Sādiq alluding that the seed of the Yamani *da'wa* was sown by the latter Imam. *Ḥiṭāḥ al-da'wa*, pp. 20–21.

54. *Ḥiṭāḥ al-da'wa*, pp. 21–23.

55. *Sharḥ al-akhbār*: 'I looked at the people who seemingly were also looking for shelter for the night and asked them, "Can ...?" They said, "Yes, we all are strangers and we will spend the night in the mosque.'

56. A contemporary term applied to the Sunni populace. See 'Ḥaḥwiyā', in *Elz*, vol. 3, p. 269; Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijisānī, *Kiṭāb al-ḥiṭāḥ*, ed. Ismail K. Poonawala (Beirut, 2000), pp. 78, 280–281. In *Sharḥ al-akhbār*: '... and a group of the Sunnis or commonly (*al-jamā'a*).'
57. *Fa'da*, plural of *fā'id*, is applied to workers in clay, or such as work with their hands in clay, or building, or digging. It is also used for carpenters. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v. *fā'id*. It indicates the social background of the Shī'a in that village.

58. In *Sharḥ al-akhbār*: 'And he gave the name of the book.'

59. *Sharḥ al-akhbār*: 'He said, "Look at the forgetfulness of those Shī'a about this night." Abū 'l-Qāsim [Ibn Ḥawshab] said, "I shuddered and a terrible fear invaded me".'

60. *Sharḥ al-akhbār*: 'Everyone of them except a man, who used to extinguish the candles, left, he then came to me.'

61. Wāḥy al-Dīn Muḥammad Ṭabrizī, *Mishkāt al-maṣābiḥ*, ed. M. al-Albānī (Damascus, 1961), vol. 2, p. 528; tr. J. Robson, *Mishkāt al-Masābiḥ* (Lahore, 1975), vol. 2, p. 962. See also G. E. von Grunebaum, 'The Cultural Function of the Dream as Illustrated by Classical Islam,' in G. E. von Grunebaum and R. Cailliois, ed. *The Dream and Human Societies*

(Berkeley, 1966), pp. 3–21, and T. Fahd, 'The Dream in Medieval Islamic Society,' in *The Dream and Human Societies*, pp. 351–369.

62. *Ḥiṭāḥ al-da'wa*, pp. 23–25. In *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, vol. 3, p. 410: 'Hence, I revealed my commission and called upon him [to join the mission] and he responded. I took [the oath of allegiance] from him on the spot and put him under an obligation.'

63. The Ya'furids were the Abbasid governors of Yamān, who asserted their independence and ruled from San'ā' and Janad; see Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties*, p. 100.

64. See Husayn F. al-Ḥamdānī, *al-Sulayḥiyyūn wa'l-ḥaraka al-Fātimiyya fi'l-Yaman* (Cairo, 1955), p. 36.

65. *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, vol. 3, p. 409: "'Do you have knowledge of *ḥuḍūd* (formal legal opinions)?" I said, "I have that knowledge as a person like me is supposed to have".'

66. *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, vol. 3, p. 410: 'So, I revealed my commission (*amr*) to him and called upon him [to join the *da'wa*] and he responded. Hence, I took the oath [of allegiance] from him on the spot [and put him under an obligation].'

67. See W. Madelung, 'Karmānī', *Elz*, vol. 4, pp. 660–665.

68. For details see al-Ḥamdānī, *al-Sulayḥiyyūn*, pp. 39–48.

69. *Ḥiṭāḥ al-da'wa*, pp. 26–30; see also *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, vol. 3, p. 413; Wilferd Madelung and Paul E. Walker, *The Advent of the Fatimids: A Contemporary Shi'i Witness*, an Edition and English translation of Ibn al-Ḥaytham's *Kiṭāb al-Munazarāt* (London, 2000), p. 8. The origin of the Ismaili movement is generally traced back to the dispute over the succession to the Imam Ja'far al-Sādiq (d. 148/765). The period between this origin and the beginning of intense political activities around the middle of the 9th century, a period of almost a century, despite the efforts of some scholars, still remains somewhat obscure. The secret character of the movement and its mysterious quasi-masonic organization that concealed both doctrine and personalities from the uninitiated hinder recording the history of the movement. Nu'mān passes over this issue as if it were a guarded secret of the *da'wa* not to be divulged to his readers. Whether he himself was privy to it, however, is another question. See Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, pp. 91–116; Halm's *Das Reich des Mahdī*, tr. *The Empire of the Mahdī*, is the best up-to-date survey.

70. Abū 'Abdallāh, whose full name was al-Ḥusayn b. Ahmad, and his older brother Abū 'l-'Abbās, were both converted and brought into the *da'wa* by a *da'ī* called Abū 'Alī in Fatimid sources, but known in Iraqi and Abbasid sources as Ḥamdān al-Qarnāī. This probably explains Nu'mān's

silence. See Halm, *Das Reich des Mahdi*, pp.44-45; tr., *The Empire of the Mahdi*, pp.38-39; Madelung and Walker, *The Advent of the Fatimids*, pp.6-7, 12. In his recent study 'Yamdan Qarnal and the Dar'i Abu 'Ali', in W. Madelung et al, ed. *Proceedings of the 17th Congress of the UEMU [Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants]* (St. Petersburg, 1997), pp.115-124, Madelung states that Hamdan, who had disappeared shortly after 'Abdan was murdered, re-emerged in Egypt using the name Abu 'Ali firmly supporting the new Imam al-Mahdi.

71. *Istikh al-daw*, pp.30-31.

72. See especially the section entitled *Dihru mā ghrā Abū 'Abdallāh fī Kulāma min al-siyāsa* ... in *Istikh al-daw*, pp.117-132. Nu'mān extols Abū 'Abdallāh's character, piety and fortitude, and states that peace and prosperity prevailed in the region under his control. According to Nu'mān, it was Abū'l-Abbās, the elder brother of Abū 'Abdallāh and also a high ranking *dār'i*, but insidious and vicious in character, who kept on insinuating his younger brother against the Mahdi and brought about their own downfall. *Istikh al-daw*, pp.309-319; see Halm, *Das Reich des Mahdi*, pp.148-56; tr., *The Empire of the Mahdi*, pp.159-68; also *Sharh al-akhbār*, vol.3, p.430. For a different view in defence of both brothers, see Madelung and Walker, *The Advent of the Fatimids*, pp.12, 31-40.

73. *Istikh al-daw*, p.48; see also *Sharh al-akhbār*, vol.3, p.416.

74. *Istikh al-daw*, pp.50,123.

75. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sira al-nabawiyya*, ed. M. al-Saqāh et al. (Cairo, 1936), vol.2, pp.150-153; tr. A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad* (London, 1955), pp.234-235.

76. *Istikh al-daw*, pp.57-58.

77. W. Montgomery Watt, 'Badr', *Etz*, vol.1, pp.867-868.

78. Abū 'Abdallāh's naming of his stronghold as *dār al-hijra* and urging his followers to make the *hijra* and join him there is another example of the Medinan parallel. See for example *Istikh al-daw*, pp.33, 95, 96, 97, 100, 101, 109, 117, 118.

79. *Istikh al-daw*, ed. al-Qādī, pp.8-9.

80. *Istikh al-daw*, p.76.

81. See *Istikh al-daw*, pp.50, 62, 68-69, 73, 74, 211-212; *Sharh al-akhbār*, vol.3, pp.418-429, and W. Madelung, 'Some Notes on Non-Jamā'ī Shiism in the Maghrib', *Studia Islamica*, 44 (1977), pp.87-97. For the religious situation in Qayrawān and its Shi'a community, see Madelung and Walker, *The Advent of the Fatimids*, pp.18-26.

82. *Istikh al-daw*, p.76. Jews, Christians and Arabs predicted the

Prophet's mission; see Ibn Ishāq, *al-Sira*, vol.1, pp.164-177, 191-194, 217-228; tr., *The Life of Muhammad*, pp.69-73, 79-81, 90-95.

83. *Istikh al-daw*, pp.100, 117, 118.

84. Lewis, *Islam*, vol.1, p.xviii.

85. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, ed. E.M. Quatremère (Beirut, 1992, photo reproduction of 1858 ed.), vol.1, p.8; tr. F. Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah* (Princeton, 1980), vol.1, p.15. I have adopted B. Lewis' translation at the beginning of his *Islam* with slight modification.

86. The relevant literature on the subject is quite vast, hence I will confine myself to citing a few. Carr, *What is History?*; H. Meyerson, ed. *The Philosophy of History in Our Time: An Anthology* (New York, 1959); P. Bagny, *Culture and History: Prolegomena to the Comparative Study of Civilizations* (Berkeley, 1963) and J. Lassner, "Doing" Early Islamic History: Brooklyn Baseball, Arabic Historiography, and Historical Memory', *JAOI*, 114 (1994), pp.1-10.