

Shipping, Trade and Crusade in the Medieval Mediterranean

Studies in Honour of John Pryor

Edited by
**Ruthy Gertwagen and
Elizabeth Jeffreys**

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Chapter 7

A Mediterranean Encounter: The Fatimids and Europe, Tenth to Twelfth Centuries

Yaacov Lev

I. Introduction

The Fatimids were an imperial power of worldwide interests and broad horizons. In the dynastic tomb inside the palace complex in Cairo there once hung a silk map of the world which depicted towns, mountains, seas, rivers and forts, including a map of Mecca and Medina. This map was produced in the year 353/964 on the orders of the imam-caliph al-Mu‘izz at the huge cost of 22,000 *dinars*. An inscription on the back stated that al-Mu‘izz commissioned it “... yearning for God’s holiness [and the wish] to depict the landmarks [associated] with the Messenger of God”. This map had a history; it was produced in Tunisia, brought to Cairo, and was installed in the dynastic tomb from where it was looted during the civil war of the 1070s, and eventually came into the possession of an emir, after which it was subsequently lost. If we take the inscription on its back at face value, the wish to possess a visual image of Mecca and Medina in the belief that holiness is derived from the very depiction of these holy sites was the motive behind the making of the map. Piety, rather than keen interest in world affairs, was what drove al-Mu‘izz to order the creation of this artifact.

Such an interpretation is, however, too narrow since other silk hangings looted from the Fatimid palace depicted other countries including the names of their kings and other pertinent information as well.¹ The Fatimids actively sought information about foreign countries and people, and the sources provide a clue as to how Fatimid maps might have been commissioned. For example, following the transfer of the Fatimid state from Tunisia to Egypt in 973, al-Mu‘izz ordered a fact-finding expedition into Nubia. The text of the report summarizing the mission is well known and published. Although no maps are mentioned, the information gathered could well have been used for this purpose.² The recently discovered manuscript

¹ I became aware of the world map in the dynastic tomb thanks to an e-mail exchange with David Jacoby and Benjamin Z. Kedar, both of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. See Maqrizi, *Itti‘az al-Hunafa* (Shayyal and Ahmad 1967–73), vol. 2: 285, 292–3. The most famous world map in medieval Islam was the map prepared for the Abbasid caliph al-Ma‘mun (813–33); see Nazmi 2004.

² Kheir 1985.

entitled *The Book of Curiosities of the Sciences and Marvels for the Eyes* offers a remarkable example of the Fatimid interest in maps and nautical information. This work was composed between 1020–50 in Egypt and the manuscript contains 17 maps, including those of the Mediterranean Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Caspian Sea as well as maps depicting specific regions, especially the Eastern Mediterranean. The author portrays himself as knowledgeable in maritime affairs and explains that he gathered information from trustworthy sailors and merchants which he verified against his own experience.³ Outside the Fatimid context, we can see that Arabic ninth- and tenth-century geographical works also contain maps and so the Fatimid maps must be seen as being part of a broader framework of Islamic medieval cartography.

The Fatimids were a Mediterranean imperial power with an interest in and knowledge of the countries found around its shores, but it is not known whether anything of the modern discourse about the Mediterranean, its geography and history as exemplified by the paradigms put forward by Fernand Braudel, or the perceptions of the Mediterranean as a “Corrupting Sea” or as an “Enriching Sea”, had any relevance to them.⁴ There is no methodology and no allusions in the sources which allow us to pursue this line of inquiry effectively. The Fatimids traversed the Mediterranean in order to wage war on their enemies and to trade; consequently, war and trade are the two major topics of this paper. The great expansion that took place in the Mediterranean trade during the tenth century coincided with the rule of the Fatimids in Tunisia (909–69) and in Egypt since 969. I, however, wish to argue that, although the Fatimids were not actively involved in directly bringing about this expansion, the attitudes and policies they adopted were, in fact, instrumental in furthering the development of trends that already existed.

II. Warfare and the Mediterranean World

a) The Fatimids and Byzantium

Although the Fatimids established themselves on the ruins of the Aghlabid emirate of Tunisia (800–909), their political ambitions were of a much broader scope. Whereas the Aghlabids had carved a territory for themselves at the geographical fringe of the Abbasid caliphate and, as Sunni Muslims, had acknowledged Abbasid legitimacy and recognized Abbasid overall sovereignty, the Fatimids, a Shi‘i-Isma‘ili splinter group, disputed Abbasid legitimacy. The overthrow of the caliphate was their goal, and they sought to realize this by launching campaigns for the conquest of Egypt immediately after seizing power in Tunisia.

³ Rapoport 2010.

⁴ For these two contrasting perceptions, see Horden and Purcell 2000; Abulafia 2003: 20. See also the special issue of *Mediterranean Historical Review* 18 (December, 2003).

In the narrower Tunisian context, the Aghlabids were a local Mediterranean power who used their naval and military resources to conquer Sicily, something which brought them into confrontation with the Byzantines and involved them in the affairs of southern Italy. This involvement did not, however, turn into permanent occupation and the attempt by the Aghlabid ruler emir Ibrahim II to take advantage of the fall of Taormina in 902 to conquer Calabria failed.⁵ Within this local context, the Fatimids were the true heirs of the Aghlabids and, with the establishment of al-Mahdiyya (916–21) as their capital city, their Mediterranean outlook became even stronger. The Fatimids, like the Aghlabids, found themselves entangled in war with Byzantium and, occasionally, with the Umayyads of Spain as well.

The naval realities of the tenth century, however, hindered the use of naval power in international conflicts. We owe much of our knowledge of the maritime aspects involving the operating of warships to the work of John Pryor and only a few points must be re-emphasized: 1) the Mediterranean sailing season was limited to the summer months only, and came to a halt between November and April; 2) sailing along the coast was the standard practice, while direct sailing across the open sea was exceptional; 3) both the operational range of warships, especially galleys, and their ability to remain at sea were seriously limited. This was also due to the need to obtain frequent supplies of fresh water.⁶ The absence of large stretches of open sea and the proximity of Tunisia to Sicily and southern Italy made southern Italy vulnerable to Fatimid naval raids. In this case since the geographical conditions compensated for the difficulties inherent in the operating of navies the use of naval power became of some significance.

The security of southern Italy largely depended on Fatimid intentions. On the whole, while the Fatimid policy was aggressive, a permanent occupation of this region was not their objective. The Byzantines, on the other hand, created an effective defense system which relied on a small naval presence in the Adriatic, especially in Dalmatia and Dyrrachium and the fortification of the coastal towns of Calabria and Apulia. The Byzantine approach reflected the recognition that the afore-mentioned limitations of galleys excluded any active patrolling of the sea as a viable option. Furthermore, the principles of naval warfare (shared by both the Byzantines and Muslims) advocated the avoidance of any full-scale confrontation of the enemy. The difficulties involved in commanding fleets of warships were so formidable and the results of naval engagements so unpredictable that the parties involved in a conflict hesitated to commit their precious navies to all-out battles.

⁵ Talbi 1966: 519–28. For these events as reflected in Isma'ili sources that were unavailable to Talbi, see Pellitteri 1994: 123–5.

⁶ See Pryor 1988: chaps. 1 and 2; Pryor and Jeffreys 2006: 333–78. For Arabic terminology referring to sailing close to the coast as opposite to sailing across the high sea, see Udovitch 1993: 44–5.

How successful Fatimid raids were is difficult to judge. Fatimid raiding fleets were not particularly large. In 310/922–3, for example, the Fatimid raiding fleet was composed of only twenty galleys. In many cases, naval battles were no more than minor engagements and, for example, in 315/927–8, four Fatimid ships fought seven Byzantine vessels. The itineraries of several Fatimid raids effectively reflect what was achievable within the context of tenth-century naval realities. In 311/923–4, Fatimid forces reached Sicily and, at the beginning of 312/April 924, Fatimid ships sailed on a raid to southern Italy. Bari is mentioned as having been attacked and the raiding fleet was back in Sicily on 27 Rabia II 312/7 September 924. Only a year later, on 12 Jumada II 313/4 September 925, the fleet returned to al-Mahdiyya. When this account is examined, it becomes apparent that, while the fleet had been on a combat mission during the months of April–September 924, the naval activities were spread over a period of two years 311–13/923–5, and used Sicily as a springboard.

The most spectacular Fatimid naval raid was launched against Genoa. The fleet left al-Mahdiyya on 7 Rajab 322/18 June 934 and returned on 26 Ramadan 323/28 August 935. The raiders reached Genoa from the direction of al-Andalus, i.e. they sailed along the Spanish and French coast, apparently crossing the Gulf of Lions. Some accounts claim that Corsica and Sardinia were also raided and this might indicate that the Fatimid navy used these islands as stops on their way back to al-Mahdiyya. Late Ismaʿili sources, although based on contemporary Fatimid sources, tend to exaggerate the Fatimid naval success and the extent of destruction inflicted on Genoa.

The Byzantine military effort to defend southern Italy was enhanced by diplomacy and, when necessary, the Byzantines were ready to pay tribute to prevent Fatimid aggression. Payments were made in the years 913, 917 and 924 and, in 931, Byzantine diplomacy forestalled Fatimid naval preparations for a raid. Fatimid religious constraints and political considerations were explained to a Byzantine emissary in 346/957–8. Al-Muʿizz (ruled in Tunisia 953–73) declared that the request for a prolonged truce could not be granted because the duty of holy war was incumbent on him. He went on to state that the holy war should be fought until the surrender of the infidels or the payment of tribute, but that short periods of truce were permissible. Actually, in the Islamic medieval state the ruler had wide discretionary powers in his hands and could conclude an armistice with enemies when it suited his interests. When he concluded truce agreements with Byzantium, al-Muʿizz's conduct was in line with the political realities of the Muslim world, and the Fatimid sources depict it as serving the cause of Islam.

During al-Muʿizz's rule in Tunisia, Fatimid-Byzantine relations became entangled as a result of Fatimid-Umayyad hostilities and naval battles between the Fatimids and Umayyads and Byzantines were fought, eventually leading to a Fatimid-Byzantine truce. In 960, during such a truce, the Byzantines launched a massive invasion of Crete aimed at the conquest of the island. On this occasion the Fatimids gave preference to their broader political ambitions and aims

(they were engaged in preparations for the conquest of Egypt) over any other considerations. They ignored the requests for help sent from Crete and confined themselves to diplomacy by only threatening the Byzantines.⁷

With the transfer of the Fatimid state to Egypt the focus of Fatimid–Byzantine relations changed dramatically and the issue of Aleppo came to the fore. The Fatimid conquest of Palestine and Damascus (970–80) coincided with Byzantine expansion in northern Syria (the so-called Crusade of John Tzimiskes) and led to Fatimid and Byzantine armies fighting in the winter of 970–1 in Antioch and in the summer of 975 in Tripoli. Fatimid attempts to conquer Aleppo were frustrated by Byzantine military intervention. In April 995, the emperor Basil II unexpectedly arrived at the gates of Aleppo and put an end to the Fatimid siege of the town. The Byzantine policy toward Aleppo was well-defined: it aimed to prevent Fatimid attempts at conquest while preserving the town's local independence and its role as a buffer zone between Byzantium and Muslim Syria.

Another issue that figured prominently in Fatimid–Byzantine diplomatic exchanges concerned the church of the Holy Sepulchre. For almost one hundred years, from the Fatimid conquest of Palestine in 970 until the Seljukid conquest of Jerusalem in the early 1070s, the church was under Fatimid rule. The Byzantines sought Fatimid official recognition of their status as patrons of the church and this request was readily granted. In exchange, the Fatimids requested that the sermons delivered in the mosque of Muslim prisoners in Constantinople be pronounced in the name of Fatimid rulers.⁸

b) *The Fatimids and the Crusades*

If we take a bird's eye view of the Fatimid state in 980, we see a truly Mediterranean power whose rule extended from al-Mahdiyya in the west to Tripoli of Syria in the east. In 1051, however, the Fatimid relationship with the Zirid vassal state in Tunisia was completely shattered and, consequently, the Fatimids became an eastern Mediterranean state whose rule extended only from Alexandria to Tripoli. The question is whether a description of the Fatimid state as a Mediterranean power reflects only geography, or whether the Fatimids also developed a Mediterranean outlook. I would argue that the Mediterranean experience during the Tunisian phase also guided the Fatimid policy toward the Syrian littoral.

Although Damascus was undoubtedly the main goal of the Fatimid activity in Syria, the town fiercely resisted them and only after many setbacks did the Fatimids consolidate their rule in it in the late 980s. Despite the fact that Damascus sapped most of the Fatimid resources, their expansion in Syria was a two-pronged effort

⁷ Qadi al-Nu'man, *Kitab Iftitah al-Da'wa* (Wadad al-Qadi 1996): 187, 189; *Kitab al-Majalis wa-l-Musayarat* (al-Habib al-Faqi et al. 1978): 367; Idris 'Imad al-Din, *'Uyun al-Akhbar* (Ghalib 1975): 5: 132, 151, 170–71, 207, 210, 214, 228, 232, 233–4, 258–89, 328, 337, 338–9.

⁸ Lev 1995 and 1999–2000.

directed both toward Damascus and the coastal towns as well. The Fatimid efforts to conquer the coastal towns were unrelated to the battle for Damascus. In 975, for example, the Fatimids sent troops to conquer Beirut in spite of a grave military situation in Damascus. When the broader picture is considered, it becomes clear that during 970–75 the Fatimids failed in their attempts to secure a firm hold over Damascus but did establish their rule in Jaffa, Ascalon, Acre, Tripoli, and Beirut (lost to the Byzantines in 974 and recovered in 975).

The allocation of military resources for controlling the coastal towns of Syria became a matter of policy irrespective of what was happening in the inland regions of Palestine and Syria. In 997, in spite of the temporary internal disarray in Cairo, the Fatimids quickly quelled a rebellion in Tyre. A flotilla of 20 ships was dispatched from Egypt and the governors of Sidon and Tripoli were ordered to send their troops against the rebellious town. In 1024–5, as a result of a widespread Bedouin insurrection, the Fatimid rule in Palestine collapsed and a famine in Egypt prevented the sending of reinforcements to the region. The Fatimids lost control of Ramla, the provincial capital of Palestine, but sent troops via the sea to the coastal towns (including Tyre and Tripoli) which were not directly threatened by these events.

The efforts made by the Fatimids to control the coastal towns of Syria paid off. In the mid-eleventh century a Persian traveller, Nasir-i Khusrau, visited Tripoli and was much impressed by the town and its commercial relations with Byzantium, Sicily, and North Africa. The custom duties collected at the port covered the cost of maintaining the garrison and the Fatimid ruler kept his private ships, which were engaged in the Mediterranean trade on his behalf in the town. Nasir-i Khusrau also noted the prosperity of Tyre and the prominent role and wealth of its Sunni *cadi*, Ibn Abi ‘Aqil, whose commercial activities, ships and contacts with Jewish merchants are also attested to by documents found in the Cairo Geniza.⁹

In the second half of the eleventh century the Fatimids lost Damascus and inland Palestine to the Seljuks. Furthermore, as important as the coastal towns of Palestine-Syria were, the Fatimids lost them all between 1100 and 1124, failing to defend them against the onslaught of the Crusaders. This failure was the outcome of several things: the Fatimid initial misunderstanding of the intentions of the First Crusade, the poor performance of the Fatimid army, and naval disadvantages. The failure to grasp the purpose of the First Crusade, not to say the driving force behind it, is exemplified by the Fatimid repeated attempts to cooperate with the Franks against the Seljuks. The Fatimids took advantage of the First Crusade and, in 1098 (probably December), re-conquered Jerusalem from the Seljuks. During the winter of 1099 (February–March), the Fatimids begun military preparations in Cairo for dispatching an army to Palestine. The preparations took a long time and the army arrived in Ascalon only on 3 August 1099, after Jerusalem fell to

⁹ Ibn Zafir, *Akhbar al-Duwal al-Munqat ‘ai* (Ferré 1972): 24; Ibn al-Qalanisi, *Dhayl Ta’rikh Dimashq* (Amedroz 1908): 15, 50; Musabbihi, *Akhbar Misr* (Sayyid and Bianquis 1978): 39, 54, 68; Nasir-i Khusrau, *Book of Travel (Safarnama)* (Thackston 1986): 13–17.

the Crusaders. On 12 August, the Fatimid army in Ascalon suffered a humiliating defeat which rendered the Fatimid military response to the Frankish expansion during the first decade of the twelfth century ineffective.

During the first half of the twelfth century, and especially during 1000–10, the Fatimid navy bore most of the burden of fighting the Crusaders but was unable to prevent the fall of the coastal towns. More than anything else this failure highlights some of the naval realities of the Mediterranean and the complex and elusive interplay between trade and naval power. Sea-borne commerce was unrelated to naval power and the Fatimids, for example, did not maintain any naval presence in the coastal towns of Syria. Thus the commercially oriented ruling families of Banu ‘Ammar, in Tripoli, and Banu ‘Aqil, in Tyre, had no warships at their disposal. Fatimid fleets operating in the Eastern Mediterranean sailed from Egypt and did not have the capability to respond to every Frankish aggression against the coastal towns of Palestine and Syria.

During 1100–24, the Fatimids suffered two naval setbacks. In 1105, 25 Fatimid ships were driven by a storm onto the shores of Palestine and 2,000 rowers and sailors were captured by the Franks. In 1123, in a battle fought off al-‘Arish in southern Palestine, the Venetians inflicted a defeat on a Fatimid fleet. The main value of the Fatimid naval effort during 1100–24 was in bringing supplies to the coastal towns of Syria, but this effort failed because of European naval superiority in numbers and the dismal performance of the Fatimid army. Although the Fatimids maintained a naval presence in the Mediterranean, they were, first and foremost, a trading Mediterranean state and not a naval power.¹⁰

III. The Fatimids and Mediterranean Commerce

a) Ninth- to Tenth-century Tunisia

The main thrust of my argument is that the great expansion in Mediterranean trade that took place in the tenth century coincided with the rule of the Fatimids in Tunisia and Egypt. The congruence between the tenth-century trade expansion and the Fatimids raises the question of whether the link between these events was incidental or casual, and whether the Fatimids played a passive or active role in this trade expansion. I wish to argue that, although the Fatimids were not actively involved in directly bringing about this expansion, the attitudes and policies they adopted were instrumental in furthering the development of trends that already existed. To support this claim, brief discussions on the economy of Tunisia and the events that took place in 996 in Cairo are needed. A further discussion of twelfth-century Fatimid Mediterranean trade will focus on the shopping list of the vizier Ma’mun al-Bata’ihi (1122–6), which reveals Fatimid trade policies and practices.

¹⁰ Fulcher of Chartres, *A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem, 1095–1127* (Fink 1969): 187–8; Bramoullé 2007.

Although agriculture was the mainstay of the ninth-century economy of Aghlabid Tunisia, commerce was also important and its relative significance was greater than one would assume to be the case for a medieval economy. Ninth- and tenth-century Tunisian agriculture was dominated by huge and medium-size olive producing estates cultivated by slave labour obtained both through trans-Saharan trade and by raiding Sicily and southern Italy.¹¹ From the Arab conquest of North Africa in the seventh century onwards this region became an important source for the supply of slaves to the Middle Eastern Muslim world and most of the shipped slaves were Berbers. The progressive Islamization of the Berber population, however, dried up this source of supply and, in the ninth century, black slaves from sub-Saharan Africa (*bilad al-sudan*) replaced Berber slaves in the Middle Eastern slave markets. The sub-Saharan slave trade was initiated and developed by Ibadi merchants who installed themselves in towns on the northern fringe of the Sahara from mid-eighth century onwards. Black slaves were also used as military manpower and both the Aghlabids and Fatimids employed black slave infantry regiments in their armies.¹²

To what extent a trans-Saharan gold trade existed and what its importance was prior to the Arab conquest of the seventh century is a controversial issue, as is the economic significance of gold and gold coinage for medieval economies.¹³ It was Robert S. Lopez who both noted the exceptionally high quality of the Byzantine *nomisma* and questioned the economic significance of this phenomenon. In the Muslim North African context the link between gold coinage and economic prosperity has been questioned by Michael Brett who suggests seeing gold as only one of the commodities traded across the Sahara. He perceives the sub-Saharan trade as having been dependent on markets both inside and outside the Sahara and geared to supply the needs of “islands of purchasing power”.¹⁴ The equation of gold coinage and economic prosperity has, nevertheless, persisted in the writings of historians dealing with the economic history of the medieval Middle East and its most prominent advocates have been Maurice Lombard and Andrew S. Ehrenkreutz.¹⁵ It has been pointed out that the availability of gold in North Africa made possible the purchase of Sicilian grain to supplement local production. These imports are documented from the last decades of the tenth century and continued

¹¹ For the agriculture of Aghlabid Tunisia, see Talbi 1981. For a much broader and detailed study of North African economy, accompanied by illuminating maps, see Vanacker 1973. For the demographic effects of Muslim raiding on ninth-century southern Italy, see Kreutz 1991: 53 and 1994: 353 (for the role of Napoli in the ninth century slave trade).

¹² For these developments, see Savage 1997: ch. 4.

¹³ Michael Brett, for example, suggests a link between the Arab conquest and the trans-Saharan trade; Brett 1983: 431. For an earlier dating of this trade, see Garrard 1982: 452–3. For a critical approach to Garrard’s thesis, see Kaegi 1984.

¹⁴ Lopez 1951; Brett 1969: 351, 358, 360 and 2001: 255–6.

¹⁵ Ehrenkreutz 1963: 262 (reprinted in Ehrenkreutz 1992: no. VII); Lombard 1975: ch. 5.

during the first half of the eleventh century, which was a disastrous period in North African history marked by famines and epidemics.

The numismatic evidence is very clear and must have had economic repercussions: Aghlabid and later Fatimid *dinars* in North Africa and Egypt until the Crusades were characterized by both uniform standard weight and excellent standard of fineness. These *dinars* were minted using West African gold and, during their rule in North Africa, the Fatimids accumulated vast liquid resources that they used for the conquest of Egypt (the sum of 24,000,000 *dinars* is quoted in the sources).¹⁶ The ability of the Fatimid regime in Egypt to mint large quantities of high quality *dinars* is illustrated by an exchange of gifts between the Fatimid imam-caliph al-ʿAziz (975–96) and his brother the prince Tamim (d.984) upon whom al-ʿAziz bestowed 167,000 *dinars* that were minted from the beginning of a certain unspecified year. The account adds that the event took place early in the year, which means that the sum did not represent the total annual minting output of the state, which must have been significantly higher.¹⁷ In the context of the debate about the link between gold coinage and prosperity, the least controversial and safest observation that can be made is that the ability of the regime to maintain high quality coinage had a stabilizing effect on the local economy. In medieval Islam the state was the major economic player and its ability to pay for its purchases and to provide salaries to its employees in good quality currency affected all levels of economic activity. Expectations and fears shaped the economic conduct of medieval people then as much as it does today.

For ninth-century Tunisia the sub-Saharan trade was far more significant than the Mediterranean which, as the studies of scholars such as Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, Michael McCormick, and Chris Wickham have pointed out, never ceased despite periodic low ebbs. In fact the ninth century was marked by intense Byzantine and Muslim naval activity in both the eastern and western Mediterranean. In the western Mediterranean not only did the Byzantines lose Crete but Muslim fleets of Tarsus, Tyre, and Tripoli raided Byzantine shipping and coast. When the Mediterranean context of the Aghlabid state is considered it is interesting to note that during the 870s the Aghlabid rulers invested in the improvement of the coastal route linking North Africa to Alexandria and built fortified installations along the coast.¹⁸

A glimpse into the economic realities of tenth-century North Africa is provided by the writings of the geographer Ibn Hawqal. Writing in the mid-tenth century, Ibn Hawqal emphasizes the role of the trans-Saharan trade and refers to the importance of Sijilmasa and the involvement of Iraqi merchants from Baghdad, Kufa and

¹⁶ Messier 1974: 34, 35, 39.

¹⁷ Maqrizi, *Kitab al-Muqaffa al-Kabir* (Yalaoui 1991), vol. 2: 593.

¹⁸ Horden and Purcell 2000: 153–72; McCormick 2001: 115–19, 270–77, 386–7; Wickham 2005: ch. 13, esp. 821–2; Maqrizi, *Khitat* (Sayyid 2002–2004), vol. 1: 470; Maqrizi, *Kitab al-Muqaffa al-Kabir* (Yalaoui 1991), vol. 6: 137 (referring to raids of the Egyptian navy between 957–64).

Basra in the trade with sub-Saharan Africa. During the tenth century Sijilmasa, an oasis town on the northern edge of the Sahara in south-eastern Morocco, served as an *entrepôt* for the trans-Saharan trade in gold ore and black slaves and maintained extensive relations with Awdaghust (in Mauretania), a town which served as an *entrepôt* for the salt trade in West Africa. Black slaves were also procured from the Lake Chad region and were shipped through a long and arduous route that linked today's Chad through the Fazzan to North Africa.¹⁹

Ibn Hawqal also attests to the importance of the Mediterranean trade and this complex web of economic activities is neatly illuminated by his description of Ajdabiya, an inland town on the coastal plain of the Gulf of Sidra. The economy of the town can, broadly, be reconstructed from the taxes collected by the Fatimid financial official. The Berber nomads paid a tax referred to as *sadaqat* which was levied on their livestock; *kharaj* was collected from arable land, while other taxes were levied on the caravans arriving from the Sudan. In addition the town also attracted a good deal of Mediterranean trade. Ibn Hawqal alludes to the Christian Mediterranean world using the term *rum* that appears twice in his description of North Africa. In the Arabic medieval nomenclature the term *rum* could either mean the Byzantines or the Italians and both of these possible meanings are attested by the text. One of these references appears in an account dealing with Tripoli which attracted commercial traffic from both the Maghreb and the lands of the Rum, and the second reference appears in the context of the Fatimid tax revenues of the year 336/947–8. The minimal estimate of state revenues was between 700,000 and 800,000 *dinars* and the list of taxes collected included imposts levied on goods from the lands of the Rum.²⁰ Ibn Hawqal's report concerning Tripoli's Mediterranean commerce tallies with the information about the exportation of timber by the Venetians to al-Mahdiyya and Tripoli in 971.²¹

b) Fatimid Trade with Amalfi and Byzantium

Although the Arabic sources pertinent to the history of the Fatimids in Tunisia refer only to Fatimid relations with Byzantium, this should not obscure another significant development which was taking place in that period: the rise of Amalfi as an important Mediterranean trading town. Barbara M. Kreutz has explained the Amalfi maritime success as being motivated by an acute lack of arable land, and profits made in sea-borne trade were invested in purchasing of land. Although the Amalfitan ships were not big, they were lateen-rigged and sailed to Muslim Spain, Byzantium and, undoubtedly, Fatimid Sicily and Tunisia as well. Their trading practices can be characterized as cabotage.²² Armando O. Citarella, who has

¹⁹ Messier 1997; Brett 2001: 250–59; Savage 1997: 160–61; Levtzion 1968 and 1982.

²⁰ Ibn Hawqal, *Kitab Surat al-Ard* (De Goeje and Kramers 1967): 67, 69, 97; Halm 1996: 355–66; Brett 2001: 257–69.

²¹ Laiou 2002: 723.

²² For Amalfi's geography and ships, see Kreutz 1988: 103–13 and 1994: 349–50.

collected and discussed data about Amalfi's trade with the Muslim Mediterranean in the ninth and tenth centuries, characterized it as involving "essentially a process of distribution without any productive base".²³ The impact of trade with the Muslim Mediterranean on tenth-century southern Italy must have been quite considerable as shown by quarter *dinars*, known as *tari*, becoming the standard coinage of the region. Muslim ceramics, known as *bacini*, of Spanish, Tunisian, and Sicilian origin found a ready market in tenth- and eleventh-century Pisa and were used, for example, as external decoration for churches. Since the evidence of the *bacini* pre-dates any textual testimony for Pisa's trade with the Muslim world during the tenth century its interpretation is open to several possibilities and so the nature of the trade links between Pisa and the Muslim Mediterranean remains unsolved.²⁴

Amalfi's extensive relations with Byzantium, including their political, economic and religious aspects, have been studied by Michel Balard. Throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries Amalfi, as a political ally of the Byzantines, enjoyed a privileged commercial position in Constantinople and established parallel trade relations with the Fatimids.²⁵ The clearest evidence for Amalfi's trade relations with the Fatimids appears in Arabic chronicles reporting about events that took place in 386/996 in Cairo. The first account is that of the nearly contemporary Christian chronicler Yahay ibn Sa'id al-Antaki who writes that on Friday 12 Rabia II/5 May 996 16 ships in the arsenal were consumed by fire for which the population of Cairo blamed Amalfitan merchants.

In the riots that erupted Dar al-Manak was stormed and looted and 160 people were killed. Two churches were also looted but the Christian vizier 'Isa ibn Nestorius restored order, protected those who survived the riots and returned the looted goods to their owners. Sixty-three looters were arrested and the Fatimid ruler al-'Aziz ordered a lottery in which each of the prisoners had to draw his lot to either to be set free, flogged or put to death (8 Jumada I/30 May). At the time of the riots, al-'Aziz was in a military camp outside Cairo preparing for a campaign to fight the Byzantines in Syria and had ordered the vizier to prepare the navy to sail to Tripoli in conjunction with the land expedition. His orders were carried out and those ships not consumed by fire were part of the naval preparations for the impending campaign.

The second account of these events is to be found in Maqrizi's *Khitat*, a large work dealing with the history and urban topography of Fustat-Cairo. Maqrizi (1364–1442), relying on Musabbihi (977–1029), wrote that on Friday 23 Rabia II/16 May five Nile boats (*ʿusahriyyat* which were also used for coastal sailing) and warships were consumed by fire and only six ships remained intact. Sailors and the common people attacked and killed 107 Rum Christians who were at

²³ See Citarella 1967 and 1993: 279.

²⁴ Berti 1998: 303–5.

²⁵ See Balard 1976. For a summary of Amalfi's trade with ample references to sources and literature, see Caskey 2004: 8–11. For allusions to European (Frankish) traders in mid eleventh-century Tripoli (Syria), see Kedar and Amitai 2007: 465–8.

Dar al-Manak near the arsenal in Maqs and others who survived the killing were arrested and kept in the arsenal. The Christian vizier 'Isa ibn Nestorius together with the governor of Cairo and the chief of police rescued the survivors kept in the arsenal and reported that the goods looted were worth 90,000 *dinars*. The police proclaimed a decree in the markets ordering the return of the property looted at Dar al-Manak and 20 people were put to death while others were flogged, displayed and jailed. The punishments meted out were decided by a lottery in which each transgressor drew his lot. The account conveys the general feeling of fear that was experienced by the population. Parallel to these efforts to restore order, 'Isa ibn Nestorius brought timber to the arsenal and stayed there overnight to supervise the work of constructing the new navy he had ordered.²⁶

These two complementary accounts were brought to the attention of scholars by Claude Cahen and any remaining skepticism concerning them is unjustified.²⁷ Musabbihi's accounts are usually detailed and informative and his dating of these events should be preferred, but al-Antaki's date is also possible. Both reports indicate that the massacre took place in May, meaning during the Mediterranean sailing season, and the Amalfitans must have just arrived in Cairo. Perhaps, as has been suggested by David Abulafia, the term Amalfitans as used by al-Antaki should be understood as a generic term, meaning "Latin merchants largely of south Italian origin". The most significant point that confirms the reliability of these two accounts is, however, that we are well informed about the immediate and long-range consequences of the events. Despite al-'Aziz dying in the military camp and the intended campaign coming to a halt, 'Isa ibn Nestorius' efforts to build a new navy were successful and the ships sailed to Syria where they ran onto cliffs off the coast and were wrecked. Eventually, the vizier paid with his life for his involvement in the suppression of the riots, for, following al-'Aziz's death, the new men in power ordered Ibn Nestorius' execution and paid considerable compensation (between ten and 20 *dinars*) to the families of the looters who had been put to death.²⁸

When the broader picture of Fatimid–Amalfitan bilateral relations is considered it becomes apparent that the Fatimids' effort at damage control was successful. The way the Fatimids dealt with the riots reveals that they strove to convince the Amalfitans that their regime would continue to protect them. The executions were instrumental in conveying this message to both the Amalfitans and the local population. In the long run the Fatimids managed to convince the Amalfitans and other European trading nations that what had happened in Cairo was an exception to the rule. Consequently, throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries Italian and Byzantine merchants regularly visited Egypt and their purchases of spices

²⁶ Al-Antaki, *Kitab al-Ta'rikh* (Shaykhu 1909): 178–9; Maqrizi, *Khitat* (Sayyid 2002–2004), vol. 3: 619–21.

²⁷ See Cahen 1953–4 for a discussion of this text; for an expression of skepticism, see Kreutz 1991: 82.

²⁸ Abulafia 1995: 3.

and Indian goods enormously contributed to the volume of trade. Al-Mustansir (1036–94) granted Amalfi the right to establish a religious complex in Jerusalem and this concession must be seen as an extension of the bilateral trade relations. However, within the context of the Fatimid relations with Europe, the concession granted to Amalfi was rather unusual. Islam did not attempt to achieve exclusivity in Jerusalem; for instance, in the eleventh century the Fatimids recognized Byzantine suzerainty over the church of the Holy Sepulchre, but this recognition was granted in return for the pronouncement of the Friday sermons in the mosque of the Muslim prisoners in Constantinople in the name of the Fatimid rulers. Fatimid permission to establish the Amalfi complex in Jerusalem was exceptional and was not consistent with the pattern of normative Fatimid relations with Byzantium, where there was usually no extension of trade relations into the religious sphere.²⁹

c) Egypt's Trade with India

One of the most significant items of information supplied by Musabbihi, as quoted by Maqrizi, refers to the value of the goods, estimated at 90,000 *dinars*, looted from the Amalfitans in Dar al-Manak. It seems to me that this figure should be treated seriously as it appears in an official report sent to al-'Aziz and was prepared by top-ranking knowledgeable officials. Only spices and other luxury goods of local or Indian origin could be the explanation for such a high estimate. If this assumption is correct, then another question arises as to what the nature of the trade between India and Egypt was during the closing years of the tenth century. It must be pointed out that the existence of trade relations between the Abbasid caliphate and both India and China during the ninth century is well known. Siraf, on the Persian coast of the Persian Gulf, is known to have prospered from this trade and certain captains in Siraf became renowned for their repeated voyages to China.³⁰

The early history of the maritime trade between Roman Egypt and India that went from the Egyptian ports along the Red Sea to the ports of Yemen (Roman Arabia Felix) and the western coast of India is well known and needs no elaboration.³¹ The most compelling evidence is provided by the anonymous *Circumnavigation of the Red Sea* dated to the first century CE, which describes the maritime trade routes, goods, and ports along the Arabian and African shores of the Red Sea and India. Whether Egypt maintained direct maritime contacts with India and what was the volume of the Red Sea trade after the fourth century is a much discussed

²⁹ For Amalfi's presence in Jerusalem, see Lev 1999–2000: 273–4. For information about the presence of Italian traders in Fatimid Egypt derived from Latin sources not the Geniza documents, see Jacoby 1995; Balard 1999: 627–33.

³⁰ Chaudhuri 1985: 49–50; Whitehouse 1988. For the Chinese perspective, see Jun-yan 1983.

³¹ For the Hellenistic period, see Karttunen 1997: 328–38. For the Roman period, see Begley and de Puma 1991.

topic.³² Recent scholarship about early Byzantine trade has produced a great deal of evidence, indicating that there was a continuation of trade in the Red Sea during the fifth to seventh centuries, including indications of Indian goods reaching both the port of Ayla (medieval ‘Aqaba) in southern Palestine and Egypt.³³

One point is clearly attested by Arabic tenth-century geographical writings: the existence of ports and an active trading system in the Red Sea that connected Egypt and Arabia. It seems that the most important Egyptian port on the Red Sea was Qulzum which is described by the geographer and historian Ya‘qubi, writing in the ninth century, as a big town with a diversified (perhaps one should say cosmopolitan) population that serviced the shipment of supplies to Arabia and trade with Yemen. The geographer Muqaddasi writing in the tenth century noted Qulzum’s barren environment and the dependence of the town on external sources for the supply of foodstuffs and water. Both geographers described the merchants of Qulzum as being affluent and having opulent houses.³⁴ On the Arabian coast the ports of Jarr and Jedda served the sea-borne commerce of Medina and Mecca and, although Jarr received shipments of Egyptian grain, in comparison to Jedda it was an insignificant port and probably no more than an anchoring place. Jedda on the other hand was a true commercial port that handled diversified goods, while Aden was the main port connecting the Red Sea with India. An Ismai‘ili tenth-century author, referring to Aden in the 880s, termed it as “the sea port of India” and it was already a busy port in the ninth century.³⁵ Ibn Hawqal writes that “China ships” visited it. As has been pointed out by scholars, the collocation “China ships” (*marakib al-Sin*) is an elusive one and could have had a wide range of meanings ranging from “Chinese ships” to “ships that sailed to China” or “ships that brought Chinese products”.³⁶ The only known explicit reference in the Arabic sources to Chinese ships visiting the ports of Arabia is from 1432 but other indirect textual evidence and archeological finds indicate that Chinese goods were available in Fatimid Egypt.³⁷

‘Umar ibn Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Kindi (fl. the second half of the tenth century), an Egyptian author of a booklet on the merits and excellencies of Egypt, described the country as a trading emporium with extensive international commerce. Egypt traded with Arabia, Yemen, Aden, Oman and, in the Far East,

³² For the first century CE, see *The Periplus Maris Erythraei* (Casson 1989). For the fourth-century break of trade with India, see Warmington 1974: 139–40; Mayerson 1993.

³³ Mango 1996: 151 and 2001: 879; Whitcomb 1991: 128. For a comprehensive study of the subject see Tomber 2008.

³⁴ Ya‘qubi, *Kitab al-Buldan* (De Goeje 1967a): 340; Muqaddasi, *Ahsan al-Ta‘asim fi Ma‘rifat al-Aqalim* (De Goeje 1967b): 195–6. For the geography and history of Qulzum, see Mayerson 1996.

³⁵ Qadi al-Nu‘man, *Kitab Iftitah al-Da‘wa* (Wadad al-Qadi 1996): 24. For Aden’s ninth- to twelfth-century history, see Margariti 2007: 27–9.

³⁶ See Whitehouse and Wiliamson 1973: 46.

³⁷ Chaudhuri 1982: 112.

with Sind (present-day Pakistan), India, China and the Islands of China. The goods imported from these regions included perfumes, precious stones, rarities and utensils that were brought by ships arriving in Qulzum. Equally vast was Egypt's Mediterranean trade which involved Syria, the Byzantine lands from Antioch to Constantinople and beyond, the land of the Franks, Muslim North Africa and Spain, and the islands of Sicily, Crete, Cyprus and Rhodes. Egypt's trade went beyond the Mediterranean reaching Sijilmasa as well and, from these regions, Egypt imported male and female slaves, textiles, corals, saffron, and amber.³⁸ What Egypt could offer for sale is hinted at by another account referring to the textiles produced in the Mediterranean towns of Damietta and Tinnis. Tinnis specialized in the production of inscribed fabrics (*tiraz*), linen brocades decorated with gold and silver (*qasab*), and Dabiqi linen. A plain Tinnisi *tiraz*, without gold decoration, could fetch the price of 100 *dinars* and the demand for Tinnisi textiles was universal.³⁹

Muqaddasi writes that the markets of Fustat were supplied with goods from China, Rum, meaning Europe (Italy and/or Byzantium) and the Indian Ocean.⁴⁰ The most explicit early evidence emanating from Arabic sources for Egypt's trade with India is the report that in 385/995 the Fatimid ruler al-'Aziz received a gift from India that also included aromatic wood ('*ud ratab*'). Earlier, in 365/975–6, al-Mu'izz, al-'Aziz's father, asked a merchant named Ibn al-Sawdaki to use his commercial connections in Mecca to procure *al-abanus* (ebony) wood (a type of tree that grows both in Ethiopia and India). Ibn al-Sawdaki's business partners in Mecca bought the wood in Aden and shipped it to Qulzum. Maqrizi's reports augment other earlier references that allude to commercial relations between India and the Muslim world that went through Egypt. Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam (802–71), for example, refers to a massive purchase of pepper worth 20,000 *dinars* by the person in charge of taxation in Egypt on behalf of the Umayyad caliph al-Walid (705–15), who intended to send the pepper to the Byzantine emperor as a gift. Additional information pertaining to the Umayyad period is supplied by Maqrizi, who claims that the governor al-Walid ibn Rif'ah (727–35) received an elephant as a gift from an Indian ruler.⁴¹

Although Egypt served as a land bridge for the trade with India from the Muslim conquest of the country in the seventh century onwards, the establishment

³⁸ See *Fada'il Misr* (al-'Adwi and 'Umar n.d.): 67, 70–71.

³⁹ For Tinnis, see Lev 1999.

⁴⁰ Muqaddasi, *Ahsan al-Taqaṣim fi Ma'rifat al-Aqalim* (De Goeje 1967b): 199. For China, I follow a variant reading of the text as indicated by the editor. In medieval Arabic geographical writings the term "Sea of China" meant the Indian Ocean and beyond, with the Red Sea being considered as its off-shot. Qulzum, for example, is described as lying on the edge of the Sea of China.

⁴¹ Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, *Futuh Misr* (Torrey n.d.): 99; Kindi, *The Governors and Judges of Egypt* (Guest 1912): 110; Maqrizi, *Kitab al-Muqaṣṣa al-Kabir* (Yalaoui 1991), vol. 3: 138; *Itti'az al-Hunafa'* (Shayyal 1967), vol. 1: 227, 287.

of the Fatimid rule marked a significant turning point which is exemplified by al-Mu'izz's order for the ebony wood. The Fatimid court created a huge demand for Indian products and luxury goods, foreign and domestic alike. The demands of the court and the presence of Italian merchants in Cairo dramatically increased the volume of the trade that went through Egypt.⁴² Chinese goods were also quite popular at the court; for example, the estate of the Fatimid princess Sitt Misr who died in 1063 also included 30 Chinese jars filled with musk. However, the best evidence for the flow of Chinese chinaware to Egypt from the ninth to the fifteenth century comes from archaeological excavations in Fustat and indicates that Chinese ceramics were popular with the rulers and the population at large, while excavations in Ayla reveal the importation and local use of tenth- and eleventh-century Chinese ceramics.⁴³

As scant as the evidence from the Arabic sources is, it does show that, at the time of the Fatimid conquest of Egypt, trade with India was a commercial reality. The Geniza documents pertaining to the India trade come mostly from 1080–1160 and depict an already fully developed system.⁴⁴ The evidence from the Arabic sources allows us to see the significance of the conquest of Egypt in new light for both the Fatimid Mediterranean trade and Amalfi as well. During the North African phase of the Fatimid dynasty a local inter-regional commercial system emerged which connected southern Italy, Sicily and Tunisia and, within this system, Amalfi was very prominent. Although this was of a local character, its significance was that it provided Amalfi, and probably the other Italian towns of the south as well, with access to West African gold (and/or Muslim gold coinage). After the conquest of Egypt by the Fatimids, the Amalfitans followed them to Cairo and the significance of this step was more than just a geographical extension of a trade network and relations.

In Egypt Amalfitans obtained access to spices and Indian goods and the result was an expansion of trade in terms of value and importance. What initially had been a local inter-regional system turned into a truly Mediterranean trading system. In the long run the relative importance of the India trade for Fatimid Egypt only increased since, as has been noted by Abraham L. Udovitch, by the twelfth century "... some major Egyptian exports to the western Mediterranean (e.g. flax)

⁴² Bernard Lewis perceives the Fatimids as deliberately diverting the India trade to Egypt at the expense of the Abbasids (Lewis 1953). As Lewis admits, this assumption is not supported by direct evidence. The Fatimids created a powerful stimulus for trade that was unrelated to the fortunes, or misfortunes, of the Abbasid India trade, which served the needs of the Muslim world but, having no access to the sea, remained unattractive and beyond the reach of the European traders.

⁴³ Maqrizi, *Itti'az al-Hunafa'* (Shayyal and Ahmad 1967–73), vol. 1: 227, 287, vol. 2: 15 (referring to tax exemptions in Qulzum); Mikami 1988.

⁴⁴ Goitein and Friedman 2008: 14–15. For the maritime aspects involved with the trade with India, see Agius 2008.

diminished sharply”.⁴⁵ Consequently the presence of European traders in Egypt seeking Indian goods became even more significant. Furthermore, a study of the *Book of Curiosities* led Yossef Rapoport to perceive this work as representing “... a unique moment in the eastern Mediterranean, the peak of a period of shared maritime culture that ended with the arrival of the Crusades and their Italian associates in the eastern Mediterranean”. Rapoport goes on to say: “By the twelfth century, after the Palestinian coastal towns fell to the hands of the Crusaders, few Muslim or Byzantine ships traveled between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean”.⁴⁶

d) *The Shopping List of a Fatimid Vizier*

During the twelfth century the Mediterranean trade of the Fatimid state was at the high point of its development and the shopping list of the vizier Ma'mun al-Bata'ihî (1122–26) offers a rare glimpse into its geographical and commercial aspects. Because of a reference to Tyre as receiving shipments of grain from Egypt, the dating of the list can be narrowed to between 1122 and 1124 when Tyre was conquered by the Crusaders. The history of Ma'mun al-Bata'ihî's vizierate entitled *Akhbar Misr* had been written by his son, the historian Ibn al-Ma'mun (d.1192), and, apparently, was part of a larger work dealing with the history of Egypt. It is known today only through quotations by later authorities, especially Maqrîzî the great historian of Fatimid Egypt, who, in his biography of Ma'mun al-Bata'ihî, reproduced the annual shopping list of the vizier. It seems that every year the vizier used to purchase a variety of goods and materials for stocking the treasuries kept at the royal palace in Cairo.⁴⁷

The wars of the Crusades are not directly reflected by Ma'mun al-Bata'ihî's list.⁴⁸ Much of his purchasing was done in Alexandria where many textiles were bought by North African and Rum merchants. The term “Rum” is twice referred to in the list, once meaning European, more precisely Italian towns, and another more ambiguous reference which might either allude to Byzantine or European/Italian merchants. The list of textiles bought in Alexandria is, however, well understood. It included the following items: *siqlatun* (i.e. bright, scarlet, heavy fabrics); ‘Attabi fabrics (i.e. silk fabrics produced in Baghdad) which could have been of one

⁴⁵ Udovitch 1999: 683.

⁴⁶ Rapoport 2010: 207–8.

⁴⁷ For Ma'mun al-Bata'ihî's biography, see Maqrîzî, *Kitab al-Muqaffa al-Kabir* (Yalaoui 1991), vol. 6: 478–500, for the shopping list, see 488–9.

⁴⁸ A discussion of the impact of the Crusades on Byzantium and the Muslim Eastern Mediterranean is beyond the scope of the present paper. During the twelfth century, as testified by Ibn Jubayr's account, there was considerable overland trade between Muslim Syria and Acre. For allusions to Acre's maritime trade with Fatimid-Ayyubid Egypt, see Jacoby 2001: 283–4.

colour without pattern or of different colours;⁴⁹ Sicilian sprinkled kerchiefs, some embroidered with gold threads and some made of silk; cloaks embroidered with gold threads and others made of silk, some embroidered and some plain; broad shawls embroidered with gold, made of raw and unbleached silk;⁵⁰ raw textiles (or garments) made in the Tunisian town of Susa; and first quality Iskandarani textiles and Iskandarani robes.⁵¹ The quantities that were purchased are specified as follows: 18,000 Iskandarani *maqta'* (meaning either fabrics made of linen and cotton or a type of a garment), 1,000 kerchiefs, and 2,500 sari-like cloths.⁵²

Other textiles, products and materials were purchased from Muslim Spain, al-Mahdiyya, Sicily, the Italian towns, and Ascalon, the last coastal town held at that time by the Fatimids in Palestine. The list of goods procured from Muslim Spain included crystals, super-fine Spanish silk, *maqta'* fabrics/garments, rugs, lead, iron and nails, and wax.⁵³ *Maqta'* fabrics/garments and Susa textiles as well as olive oil, soap, and almonds were bought in al-Mahdiyya, while Sicily supplied tables and leather tablecloths.⁵⁴ Egyptian imports from Italy included pure silver, precious stones, atlas brocades (*dibaj*), timber, pitch, anchors, hemp, copper and lead. The imports from Ascalon were of a very different character and involved textiles and agricultural products. The textiles imported were many

⁴⁹ *Siqlatun* (*siglaton*) and 'Attabi fabrics were famous in the Islamic medieval world and are widely attested to in literary sources. See, for example, Serjeant 1972: index under *siklatun*. For the description of the 'Attabi silks produced in Baghdad, see Serjeant 1972: 28–9. Both types of fabrics were much traded and appear frequently in the documents of the Cairo Geniza. See, for example, Goitein 1967–93, vol. 1: 419, n. 43, vol. 4: 323, and vol. 6: cumulative indices (prepared by S. D. Goitein and P. Sanders), under *siglaton*. For the terms *muscat* and *mulligan*, see Serjeant 1972: 144, 202; Goitein 1967–93, vol. 1: 419, n. 4, vol. 4: 411, n. 238.

⁵⁰ For shawls used for covering the head and shoulders or even as prayer mantle, see Goitein 1967–93, vol. 2: 529, n. 76, vol. 4: 196. For *kham*, meaning raw unbleached textiles, see Serjeant 1972: index; Goitein 1967–93, vol. 4: 178.

⁵¹ Iskandarani textiles used as cloths and blankets are widely attested to in the Geniza and the literary sources. See, Serjeant 1972: 148, 150, 158; Goitein 1967–93, vol. 4: 167.

⁵² For the wide range of meanings associated with term *maqta'* (pl. *maqati'*), see Stillman 1979: 202–3; Serjeant 1972: index; Goitein 1967–93, vol. 4: 7, 409, n. 222. For references to sari-like cloth, in the literary sources, see Dozy 1845: 339–43; Serjeant 1972: index. For references in the Geniza, see Goitein 1967–93, vol. 6: index; Goitein and Friedman 2008: 175–80. One has to take into account that a term designating a certain garment could have a wide range of meanings, depending on region and period. For example, *futa* in Iraq and the Maghreb meant different things. See Y. K. Stillman. "Libas", *Enc. of Islam*, 2nd ed., 741, 746.

⁵³ For silk in Muslim Spain and the richness of Spain in metals, see Constable 1994: 173–4, 185–9.

⁵⁴ For tables, or large trays, *mawa'id* (sing. *ma'ida*), and leather tablecloths *sufur* (sing. *sufra*), see Serjeant 1972: 55; Goitein 1967–93, vol. 4: 144; Sadan 1976. For exports of hides as well as lamb and rabbit skins from Sicily, see Matthew 1993: 73.

and diversified, including inscribed and plain 'Attabi cloths, *siglaton* and damask, Aleppo silk, half garments of low and high quality, some raw and some fulled, and leather.⁵⁵ Agricultural imports included olive-oil and sumac.⁵⁶ Other goods were procured from the provinces of Lower Egypt such as Gharbiyya, where textiles were produced, and Buhayra and Sharqiyya, which were grain-producing regions.

Most of the textiles, products and materials mentioned on the list of the vizier are known from Jewish sources, i.e. the documents of the Cairo Geniza, and the congruity between Maqrizi's account and the Geniza documents indicates the authenticity of the list. The flow of materials such as lead, wax, and silver to Egypt has also been noted S. D. Goitein and this list not only confirms Goitein's conclusions but expands upon several findings on the Mediterranean trade derived from the Geniza documents. As has been shown by David Jacoby, Egypt's trade with Byzantium during the tenth century was far more extensive than earlier assumed and Egypt's dependence throughout the centuries on its European trading partners for naval and military supplies was considerable.⁵⁷ The vizier's shopping list provides the clearest textual evidence derived from Arabic sources for Egypt's dependence on Mediterranean trade for the purchase of crucial materials. For example, Egypt was poor in timber suitable for the construction of ships. Trees that were suitable for shipbuilding were grown in Upper Egypt and this forest was under government control, but this did not prevent its depletion by the twelfth-century.⁵⁸ The importation of timber by Italian traders to Fatimid Egypt is well attested by the Geniza documents and the Fatimids also kept stores of other naval supplies such as weapons, iron, pitch, hemp and flax used for the production of sails. Weapons, and possibly sails too, were made by Frankish prisoners of war, meaning Crusaders captured in wars fought in Palestine or on naval raids against Christian shipping in the Eastern Mediterranean.⁵⁹

Another point that should be considered is how state imports were actually carried out. The Fatimid authorities exercised not only the right of first purchase from foreign merchants in Alexandria but dictated the prices. Large-scale purchase of goods and materials by the state was an old Fatimid practice. The annual purchases of grain amounted of 100,000 *dinars* and from the 1050s

⁵⁵ The term *shiqqa* or *shuqqa* (pl. *shiqaq*) in the meaning of cloth or a piece of clothing is attested to in ninth-century documentary sources. See Ragib 1982–96: vol. 3: 4, 1.4; 9, 1.6; 15, II.7, 12–13; 23, 1.12; 31, 1.1. *Dibaj* brocades are sometimes referred to in the Geniza as Rumi, Maghribi, or Spanish; see Olszowy-Schlanger 1998: 234.

⁵⁶ Tanner's sumach, *summaq*, is mentioned in Arabic geographical literature and Geniza documents as a plant (bot. *Rhus coriaria*) typical of Palestine. For a wider discussion and references to sources, see Amar 1990–93.

⁵⁷ See Jacoby 2000 and 2001a.

⁵⁸ For forests in Upper Egypt, see Lev 1999a: 167.

⁵⁹ For Geniza sources, see Stern 1956. For Fatimid storage of naval supplies, see Ibn Tuwayr, *Nuzhat al-Muqlatayn fi Akhbar al-Dawlatayn* (Sayyid 1992): 141–2. For the cultivation of hemp and the production of sails, see Lombard 1975: 105–7, 199–202.

onwards honey, wood, soap, and iron were also bought. The technical term used in reference to purchases was *matjar*, which is usually understood and translated as Office of Commerce.⁶⁰ Although this term is not referred to in the text, the list reflects the spirit of this policy and its implementation. The text also refers (albeit in somewhat vague terms) to the active acquisition of goods in the markets of Muslim Spain, al-Mahdiyya, and Ascalon. How goods were procured from Sicily and the Italians towns is not specified and the wording referring to it is general and imprecise.

The issue at stake is a serious one. Did Muslim traders go to Italy and Byzantium on trade expeditions, something the Jewish traders refrained from doing? Goitein, for example, only refers to two letters of Jewish merchants who visited European ports, the first from the eleventh century which concerns business in Amalfi and the other from the thirteenth century which gives an account of a business trip to Genoa and Marseilles. Despite the above, it seems that Jewish merchants in eleventh-century Sicily did go to Italian ports with little hesitation. A letter from 1060, for example, refers to an unsuccessful business trip from Palermo to *bilad al-rum* where the merchant in question sustained losses in trying to sell pepper and ginger. Whatever the conclusions regarding the Jewish merchants of the Geniza period are, the wording of the text under examination suggests that the goods of Sicily and Italy were not bought there but elsewhere, possibly in Alexandria. With some hesitation it can be proposed that Muslim traders refrained from visiting European Mediterranean ports.⁶¹

Conclusions

Within the broad notion of Mediterranean unity that acted as a bridge between local diversities, Tunisia, Egypt, and Palestine were very different regions in terms of geography and population. With the exception of Damascus, the Fatimids never ruled inland Syria and their rule extended only over the Palestine-Syrian littoral. Thus, the Fatimids can be described as a Mediterranean power in the twofold meaning of the term: they controlled a state lying on the shores of the Mediterranean and had a Mediterranean outlook, as epitomized by their drive to control the coastal towns of Palestine and Syria.

The Fatimid attitudes toward European Christian powers, the Italian cities and Byzantium were pragmatic, not ideological. The Fatimids fought the Byzantines only when their direct interests in Sicily and Syria were at risk. The Fatimid raids on Italy were of peripheral significance, being an outcome of internal considerations

⁶⁰ The relevant text describing the eleventh-century Fatimid practice of *matjar* has been recently translated into French in Sayyid 1998: 618–19.

⁶¹ Goitein 1973: 8, 42–5, 57–61; Ben-Sasson 1991: 71, ll. 5–9, 72, ll. 16–17 (Arabic text); 80, ll. 5–9, 81, ll. 16–17 (Hebrew translation). For a more cautious view concerning Muslim traders visiting European ports, see Jehel 1996: 123; Pryor 1997: 1010.

to maintain their image as warriors of the holy war. They were not a reflection of bigotry toward the Christian world rather were marked by misunderstanding as exemplified by the Fatimid policy toward the First Crusade and their attempts to co-operate with the Franks against the Seljuks. This misguided policy reflects the basic inward Islamic orientation of the Fatimid state. The first priority of the political vision of the Fatimids was their desire to rule the Muslim world and their struggle against Shi'i and Sunni internal foes. Any notion of world rule and the fighting of external enemies came second. For the Fatimids the loss of Damascus and inland Palestine during the second half of the eleventh century must have been a painful experience which undermined their self-image as a dynasty divinely chosen to rule Islam. This justified any attempt they made to co-operate with the armies of the First Crusade to reverse the situation.

The conquest of the coastal towns of Palestine and Syria by the Franks, with naval support from the Italian towns, posed a difficult dilemma for the Fatimids. How could they reconcile the presence of Italian traders in Egypt with the hostilities of the Crusades? Fatimid Mediterranean trade was not dependant on the control of the ports of the Eastern Mediterranean. The driving force behind the Fatimid Mediterranean trade was the trade with India, and the presence of European traders in Egypt increased the volume of India trade and the state's tax profits. Eventually, the Fatimids tolerated the presence of European traders in their ports in spite of the hostilities of the Crusades. Fatimid policy was not a cynical policy that sacrificed ideology in favour of commercial gains. The Europeans also faced the similar dilemma of supplying the enemy with war materials for commercial profit. Both the Fatimids and the European trading nations adopted a similar approach: to conduct trade as an activity parallel to warfare. Although trade was not a facilitator of peace or mutual understanding, it was significant enough to create an independent sphere of common economic interests. The Fatimid Mediterranean encounter with Europe focused on trade and, I would argue, remained limited to trade.

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