Aspects of the Reign of al-Mustanṣir bi’llāh
427-487/1036-1094 AD

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I confirm that thesis is all my own work. It has not been submitted or published before except for the section on international relations with Byzantium, which has been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*.
Acknowledgements

I want to thank my family for their constant support throughout my work on this subject, and to my fiancé Callum Thomson for sharing his house with al-Mustansir for the past five years. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Professor Carole Hillenbrand, without whom I would never have finished.

Finally, I want to thank al-Mustansir himself for proving such a fascinating subject; I hope I have done him justice.
This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, John Douglas Hoyle
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Abstract

The Fatimid caliph al-Mustansir bi'llah was the eighth caliph of the Shi'ite Isma'ili dynasty, who were based in their palace city of Cairo. Having ascended the throne at the age of seven, he ruled from 427/1036 to 487/1094. His territory fluctuated wildly. At its peak it stretched from modern-day Tunisia across Africa into Syria and Yemen, with other territories such as Syria under al-Mustansir’s control. At his reign’s nadir, the caliph scarcely controlled Cairo itself and lost much of his possessions in north Africa, Syria and the Arabian peninsula.

This thesis examines various aspects of al-Mustansir’s six decades on the throne, from his accession as a child to the most powerful empire of its day to his death after twenty years as a warlord’s puppet, his empire having been ruined by a decade of vicious fighting caused in part by his own lack of leadership. From the caliph’s scandalous family to the offices surrounding his position, his widely varying populace and the actual man himself, I have aimed in this work to finally give al-Mustansir the individual recognition his extraordinary history deserves.
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### Key to Transliteration

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Vowels

а
i
u
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i
ü

Diphthongs

ай
aw

Other

вал
Abu'l

Dhu'l
Banu'l
Guide to Footnotes

Although the footnotes are numbered consecutively, they are self-contained by chapter. Each new chapter therefore sees each work listed again in full the first time it is cited. Where two works by the same author have been used in a chapter, this will be made clear in each footnote, but only for those chapters in which both works are cited.
Guide to Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>BSOAS</td>
<td>Bulletin of the School of African and Oriental Studies</td>
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<td>EI2</td>
<td>Encyclopaedia of Islam (2nd edition)</td>
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<tr>
<td>IJMES</td>
<td>International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>JAOS</td>
<td>Journal of the American Oriental Society</td>
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<td>JESHO</td>
<td>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</td>
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<tr>
<td>JRAS</td>
<td>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>WZKM</td>
<td>Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes</td>
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FĀTIMID CAIRO

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The Eastern Palace of Fatimid Cairo

(Note that the Western Palace, facing the Eastern across Bayn al-Qasrayn, was far smaller and seems to have served as a location for the palace kitchens, it did not contain any of the caliph's state rooms)
Whatever else he may be accused of, al-Mustansir bi'llah could never be called well-known in the modern world. In Cairo the average inhabitant has never heard of him; in the West he is practically unheard of. Furthermore, his entire dynasty has failed to win recognition on the scale as that given to the Ottomans or Mamluks. Whilst scholarship on the subject continues to expand, the Fātimids remain a specialized subject, with al-Mustansir himself attracting only a very small proportion of that attention.

This obscurity shrouding the Fātimids lies in part in the destruction of the dynasty’s physical and spiritual legacy. When the last caliph al-ʿĀdīd died in 1171, the then wazir Saladin deliberately erased evidence of this Shiʿite rule; the Fātimid library’s contents were emptied and destroyed as Egypt returned to the Sunnī fold. Of the Fātimid palace city of Cairo, little remains beyond al-Ḥākim’s mosque and the three Bābs of Naṣr, Futūḥ and Zuwayla – Bayn al-Qaṣrayn, where al-Mustansir angrily burned ‘Abbāsid robes, is now just a rubbish-strewn, pot-holed lane.

As the visible marks of the Fātimid era disappeared, the dynasty’s Ismāʿīlī religion also entered a long period of secrecy. Following the collapse of Fātimid rule, the Ismāʿīlīs went underground. Since they also kept hidden most Ismāʿīlī literature, many sources that dealt with the Fātimids were lost outside a few private collections. Those sources available until the nineteenth century were almost uniformly hostile towards the Ismāʿīlīs, misleading the first European works on the group. Indeed, it was not until the late nineteenth century that the balance began to be redressed and wider possibilities for research on the Ismāʿīlīs and the Fātimids arose.

The cause of this change was the appearance of some original Ismāʿīlī texts in Paris, finally offering a non-hostile perspective and authoritative information from within the group. Earlier works by historians such as Silvestre de Sacy were thus seen to be
inaccurate\textsuperscript{1}. On the other hand, the collection was fairly small and major misconceptions remained in studies published on the Ismā‘īlīs and Fātimids. DeLacy O’Leary’s *A Short History of the Fātimid Khalifate* is a case in point\textsuperscript{2}. Published in 1923, it is clearly based on few sources; whilst some statements are a precursor to modern research, others are wildly inaccurate. For example, al-Mustanṣīr’s pleasure-loving father al-Zāhīr is described as burning 3000 dancing girls in a mosque\textsuperscript{3}, the outrageousness of the claim an indication of Sunnī hostility.

Fortunately the 1930s saw a much greater number of Ismā‘īlī texts become available; studies in the area were also given a major boost by Ismā‘īlī scholars who used sources in their own private collections to further research. Texts preserved by Ismā‘īlī communities in Central Asia, India and Yemen were released. This continuing progress was tracked by W. Ivanow, who in 1933 published his *A Guide to Ismā‘īlī Literature*;\textsuperscript{4} updated in 1963, it was then superseded in 1977 by I.K. Poonawala’s *Biobibliography of Ismā‘īlī Literature*\textsuperscript{5}. By the 1970s Poonawala could list over 1300 relevant titles and more than 200 authors; however, not all of these were published texts and many still remain in manuscript form within collections.

Meanwhile, the growth of study between Ivanow’s first compilation and Poonawala’s lists reflect the increasing attention paid to Ismā‘īlī research from the 1930s. The list of eminent scholars in the field also widened, including A.A.A. Fyzee\textsuperscript{6}, H.F. al-Hamdānī (one of the very few scholars to produce work specific to al-Mustanṣīr)\textsuperscript{7}, C. Cahen\textsuperscript{8} and M. Canard\textsuperscript{9}. From another angle, Fātimid history received another boost from the publication of S.D. Goitein’s comprehensive *A Mediterranean History*, detailing the lives of Fātimid Jews from the Cairo Geniza

\textsuperscript{1}S. de Sacy, *Exposé de la religion des druzes*, Paris 1838
\textsuperscript{2}London 1923
\textsuperscript{3}O’Leary, p. 192.
\textsuperscript{4}London 1933
\textsuperscript{5}Malibu 1977
\textsuperscript{6}A.A.A. Fyzee, *A Compendium of Fātimid Law*, Simla 1969
\textsuperscript{8}C. Cahen, *Introduction à l’histoire de l’Orient musulman*, Paris 1961
\textsuperscript{9}M. Canard, *Miscellanea Orientalia*, London 1973

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papers. Work on the Geniza continues to complement specifically Ismāʿīlī research when examining the Fatimid dynasty.

Following Poonawala’s 1977 publication, scholars of the Ismāʿīlīs have had enough evidence to research both the group and the Fatimids in considerable detail. Farhad Daftary’s *The Ismāʿīlīs* offered ground-breaking research on an exhaustive scale of the group’s history, naturally involving the Fatimids. Scholars such as Lev, Halm, Brett and Daftary himself have built further on these foundations; from the 1970s onwards narrower remits on the Fatimids were possible, with Sanders concentrating primarily on the dynasty’s ceremonial aspects, Lev on its military and Bierman on Fatimid texts. At the time of writing, new Fatimid work includes research on al-Mustansir’s chief dāʾi al-Shirāzī and the Ismāʿīlī Qāḍī al-Qāsim b ‘Abd al-ʿAzīz b Muḥammad b al-Nuʿmān. Clearly, the amount of evidence available to Fatimid scholars is now significant and wide-ranging.

On the other hand, within this academic flowering al-Mustansir continues to be overlooked. Sanders, in her work *Ritual, Politics and the City in Fatimid Cairo*, skips over al-Mustansir’s period on the grounds that hardly any evidence is available, although this is not in fact accurate. Brett offers a fascinating examination of a wazir

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12 Cambridge 1990
13 *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, Leiden 1991
14 *The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning*, London 1997
15 *Rise of the Fatimids*, Leiden 2001
16 *Ismāʿīlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, Cambridge 1992
17 *Ritual, Politics and the City in Fatimid Cairo*, New York 1994

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in "The Execution of al-Yāzūrī" without drawing in the caliph\textsuperscript{22}, whilst Lev's work on al-Mustansir's armies shows no interest in al-Mustansir himself\textsuperscript{23}. This indifference is summed up in Halm's recent work \textit{Die Kalifen von Kairo}, in which the author's cut-off date is 462/1070\textsuperscript{24}. This surprising choice of year thus cuts off al-Mustansir's reign in the middle of the civil war and entirely misses out his last twenty years as a puppet caliph that fundamentally altered Fāṭimid history; it thus tells only half a story. In a specific study of the Fāṭimid caliphs, this date simply makes no sense and is characteristic of the dismissive attitude found in many Fāṭimid works towards a man who accounts for over a third of the Fāṭimid lifespan. Whilst this accusation cannot be labelled at all Fāṭimid scholars – the works of Daftary and S.M. Stern\textsuperscript{25} being particularly useful – the frequent impression when hunting for work on al-Mustansir is of modern historians preferring to seek greener intellectual pastures.

There are several possible reasons behind this lack of work on al-Mustansir. In the first instance he is not an easy or attractive man on which to hang six decades' worth of history. His weak, retiring, unexciting character is so often absent from the sources that it cannot be used as a focus for the events of his reign. Finding a focus thus becomes particularly difficult given the sheer length of his rule and the massive upheavals contained within it. The civil war is a large topic in itself, as is the arrival and wazirate of Badr al-Jamālī. Faced with the prospect of researching such a long and complex reign by a somewhat colourless character, it is unsurprising that scholars have tackled more approachable tasks within the Fāṭimid remit. Nor is al-Mustansir alone; most of his successors remain unscrutinized by modern research. The bulk of the attention paid the dynasty is lavished on the first dynamic phase of its history, from its foundation to the reign of the charismatic al-Ḥākim.

\textsuperscript{24} Munich 2003

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much work to be done beyond the century this period represents, into the second half of the dynasty’s existence.

In addition, Sanders’ claim of too scanty evidence, whilst not entirely the case, highlights the other main difficulty of al-Mustanṣir’s reign; whilst evidence is available for his period, it is much less than that of some other Fāṭimid caliphs and frequently harder to find. Some of it is only arrived at after a process of eliminating other possibilities. Meanwhile, the caliph’s shadowy character again requires stronger analysis to draw out events. This lack of obvious evidence and the large range of history covered by al-Mustanṣir’s reign have thus led research of his period into smaller, more specific areas where al-Mustanṣir himself is merely incidental to the work. Moreover, some historians have omitted to look beyond the Muslim primary sources. Given the multi-religious identity of the Fāṭimid empire’s population, it is no surprise to find more information relevant to al-Mustanṣir’s history in the Jewish Geniza documents, as has been seen, and the contemporary Christian chronicle The History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church\textsuperscript{26}.

However, removing al-Mustanṣir from the events of this time is to provide a misleading impression of Fāṭimid history. The fact remains that even behind the scenes the caliph was the most important figure of the time. Despite seldom actively exerting his authority, he was nonetheless the pivot of events throughout the sixty years of his caliphate. The civil war came about through his own weakness as a ruler; the capture of Baghdad was in his name. Badr al-Jamālī’s seizure of power in Egypt in 466/1074 was caused by al-Mustanṣir and affected the rest of his dynasty. In every event of Fāṭimid history al-Mustanṣir was a vital figure, either by his own actions or more commonly by the lack of them. When viewed from this angle, it then becomes clear that to understand individual events in his reign, it is necessary to put them into the context of al-Mustanṣir’s caliphate. The civil war makes little sense unless placed alongside the political build up to hostility within the army and

\textsuperscript{26} Volumes I (2 and 3), tr. A.S. Atiya, Cairo 1959; the chronicler for this period was Mawhūb ibn Manṣūr

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the caliph's own inability to suppress trouble. Similarly, al-Yâzûrî's quarrel with the Zîrîds of Ifrîqiya – studied in detail by Brett, as already noted – needs al-Mustânşîr's presence to explain the significance of the wazir's actions on further levels than the territorial. To date, however, the only work specifically available on al-Mustânşîr's reign is an unreliable work by ‘Arif Tamir in 1990, solely available in Arabic.27

The irony in this neglect of al-Mustânşîr is that his rule as a whole offers a fascinating study of Islamic history. There is the fleeting glamour of Baghdad's capture and the Cutting of the Canal ceremony, followed by the desperation within and outside of the palaces as Cairo fell into anarchy and starvation. The political capability of the wazir al-Jarjârâ'i contrasts powerfully with the furious egotism of al-Yâzûrî, the grasping of the Tustariyya and the all-encompassing might of Badr al-Jamâlî. At times events verge on the comic – such as when the squabbling Coptic bishops are ordered sent to Abyssinia to build mosques – the outrageous, as with Sayyida Raşad and her astonishingly violent approach to politics, and the tragic. In the middle of it all, al-Mustânşîr offers a surprisingly rounded picture of a man who simply was not equal to all the tasks he had been set in life.

This thesis therefore offers an in-depth look at al-Mustânşîr himself and his role in various aspects of his reign, from life in Cairo to international relations and the experiences of his non-Muslim subjects. Unlike previous works on some of these areas, the caliph is examined in this thesis alongside events of his time, giving a far greater understanding of the man al-Mustânşîr, of Fâtimid history at this time, and the part he played in shaping it. It thus represents, it is hoped, an entirely new and important contribution to the field of Fâtimid research.

27 A. Tamir, Al-Mustanṣîr bi’llâh al-Fatîmî, Beirut 1990

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Al-Mustansir and the Fatimid Caliphate

The Shi‘ite Fatimid imam-caliphs ruled Egypt for two hundred years (359 - 567/969 - 1171), in an era that began in a blaze of glory, and ended with a whimper. From al-Mu‘izz’s triumphant entry in 362/973 into his palace city of Cairo, to al-‘Âḍīd’s pathetic death two centuries later28, Fatimid history is frequently turbulent and never dull. On a personal level, the imāms themselves reflected this decline, dwindling from an internationally recognised religious force to exploited puppets. The vast treasures of the Fātimids were dispersed, their empire fragmented, their followers scattered into groups.

Much of this decline may be seen in the reign of the eighth imām-caliph, al-Mustansir bi’llāh, whose reign accounts for almost a third of the entire Fātimid period in Egypt. His rule spanned from 427/1036 to 487/109429, and included civil war, famine, the brief capture of Baghdad and the acute reduction of the caliph’s power. With this in mind, it is surprising that his reign has been so neglected by modern historians. Possibly al-Mustansir is overshadowed by the showmanship of the founding caliph al-Mahdī, or by his infamous grandfather, al-Ḥākim, but al-Mustansir’s reign and his personality are vital to understanding the rapid decline of the Fātimids.

The Ismā‘ilī Dynasty

The Fātimid caliphs were the spiritual heads of the Shi‘ite Ismā‘ilī community, and their dynasty had been founded in North Africa by the enigmatic ‘Ubaydallāh al-Mahdī in 297/90930. He claimed to be descended from Ismā‘īl b. Ja‘far, son of the sixth Shi‘ite imām, Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq31. Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq had named Ismā‘īl his successor

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31 It is notable that despite this, Ismā‘īlīs claim descent from the elder son, Muhammad b. Isma‘īl

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but Ismāʿīl died before his father in 147/765. Nonetheless a small group of followers maintained that Ismāʿīl had gone into hiding and was still the true imām, working as missionaries on his behalf from their base in the Syrian town of Salamiyya. Ismāʿīlī history then enters a period of mystery until the period of ʿUbaydallāh al-Mahdī, who became the leader of the group in Salamiyya in 286/899. Shortly after attaining the leadership he suddenly claimed the imāmāte for himself, causing a schism amongst the Ismāʿīlīs. Salamiyya rapidly became dangerous for him and in 297/909 he fled to Raqqāda in Ifriqiya, where his loyal daʿī (missionary) Abū ʿAbdallāh had been building up a realm for him. A new city was built on the coast named al-Mahdiyya and was the centre of this new empire.

Thus the Fāṭimid caliphate was founded; the name comes from their claims to descent from the Prophet’s daughter Fāṭima. This claim was ridiculed by the Sunnī ʿAbbāsid caliphs in Baghdad, who regularly distributed anti-Ismāʿīlī declarations, as in 444/1053:

A proclamation was written in Baghdad containing an abusive defamation of the Egyptian caliphs and denying their descent from ʿAlī ibn Abī Tālib. It was signed by all the theologians of Baghdad, sharifs, qādīs and ... they sent the proclamation to the country and [the Fāṭimids] were reviled as necessary.

However, when the Fāṭimids came to prominence the ʿAbbāsid caliphate was in decline, allowing the Ismāʿīlī dynasty to cast covetous eyes over the Sunnī world’s territories. The original dream destination of the Fāṭimids – Baghdad, Yemen and Constantinople have all been suggested - is not clear, but certainly it did not take them long to outgrow Ifriqiya and make attempts on the wealthy land of Egypt. They finally succeeded at the fourth attempt in 359/969 when the fourth caliph al-Muʿizz’s army conquered the country and paved the way for the Ismāʿīlī empire. Al-Muʿizz followed his troops west three years later, his general Jawhar having

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33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
36 Ibn Muyassar, Akhbar Misr, ed. H Massé, Cairo 1919, p.6.
already begun building a new Ismā‘īlī palace city\textsuperscript{38}. Known as al-Manṣuriyya – “the victorious one” - this was soon changed on al-Mu‘izz’s arrival to al-Qāhira, or Cairo.

**The Crown Prince and his Inheritance**

Abū Tamīm Mu‘add al-Mustansir bī‘l-lāh was born in the Great Palace of Cairo on Tuesday 16 Jumāda II 420/2\textsuperscript{nd} July 1029\textsuperscript{39}, son of the seventh Fātimid caliph al-Ṣāhīr. This event goes unremarked by the Muslim chroniclers detailing Fātimid events of that year; al-Mustansir made his first mark on history eight months later when he was named successor to the caliphate:

\begin{quote}
Al-Mustansir, al-Ṣāhīr’s son, was acknowledged as heir at 8 months. This was imparted to all people of the state with a feast for everyone in Egypt. Money was distributed to all. The people gathered under the palace observatory calling to see their leader; al-Ṣāhīr appeared, they kissed the ground and then departed.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

The inheritance that was thus settled on Mu‘add, as he was then known, was immense; Gibb and Kraus rightly note that, “The empire to which al-Mustansir succeeded was beyond doubt the most powerful Muslim state of its time”\textsuperscript{41}. In 421/1030 the Fātimid empire was a huge and incredibly powerful creation. Founded over a century earlier in Ifrīqiya – modern day Tunisia – the dynasty had conquered Egypt in 359/969 and continued to expand\textsuperscript{42}. Al-Ṣāhīr’s realm extended from Ifrīqiya whence they had come, to Egypt, Syria and the Ḥijāz\textsuperscript{43}. His influence as the Ismā‘īlī imām carried further, into Ismā‘īlī communities and missionaries in Iran, Transoxiana and as far as India and Sicily\textsuperscript{44}. Vast amounts of trade took place over the dynasty’s territories, since they controlled most of the routes around the Mediterranean and the East, whilst they also held the pilgrim destinations of the Holy

\textsuperscript{38} Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismā‘īlīs*, p.80.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} M. Canard, “Fātimids”, *EI2*, IV, p.854
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.

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Land and – on occasion – Mecca and Medina\textsuperscript{45}. This meant a constant influx of merchants and visitors bringing money in, with other countries keen to maintain good relations to ensure access to key Fātimid-owned lands. Internationally, the Fātimids’ power was recognized with the machinery of diplomacy between them and rulers across Europe, Asia and Africa. Along with this regal status, al-Mustansir was also a spiritual leader as the eighth caliph-imām of the Ismā‘īlī dynasty.

\textbf{Cairo}

From its formation Cairo was a city with a specifically Ismā‘īlī identity. Two miles away from the busy trade city of Fustat, it was planned along much the same lines as the Fātimids’ old Maghribi city of al-Manṣuriyya\textsuperscript{46}. Originally a simple rectangle of mud walls, Cairo by al-Mustansir’s reign had expanded massively. Sanders’ book on the city and its layout is extensive and there is no need for detailed repetition\textsuperscript{47}. At the heart of the layout were the two palaces, the Eastern and Western, with the parade ground running between them and acting as the main thoroughfare (see map, page 8). There were seven gates: al-Qanṭara, al-Khukha, al-Sa‘āda, al-Faraj, Zuwayla, al-Maḥrūq and al-Nāṣr; the city walls also contained the Ḥākim and Azhar mosques and army barracks. In his visit in 439/1047, Nāṣir-i Khusraw lists ten city quarters, most named after military units:


Vast amounts of the city property belonged to al-Mustansir, Nāṣir pointing out the twenty thousand shops he owned – although probably an exaggeration, this nonetheless shows the sheer wealth of Cairo and its caliph.

The two palaces formed the topographical centre of al-Mustansir’s life. The Western Palace was the smaller and is known to have contained the kitchens, the library and

\textsuperscript{45} Canard, “Fātimids”, p.854
\textsuperscript{46} P. Sanders, Ritual, Politics and the City in Fātimid Cairo, New York 1994, p.42.
\textsuperscript{47} See above.
the Dar al-‘Ilm (House of Wisdom), this being the Fātimid centre of education founded by al-Hākim. The larger Eastern Palace across the parade ground contained the more glamorous aspects of the caliph’s trappings; the tomb room of his ancestors with gorgeous hangings, the belvedere from which the imām would speak to the people, the Gold Hall where public audiences would be held and the throne room or ʿiwān. Again, intensive details may be found in Sanders’ work on the matter. Unfortunately, information on al-Mustanṣir’s personal rooms is entirely lacking. Judging from the Book of Gifts and Rarities’ breathless inventory of his riches, they would have been luxurious, for the ʿiwān must have been a room of astounding opulence if only for its centrepiece:

The royal throne.... was cast from a hundred and ten thousand mithqals of pure gold [approximately 462 kilograms]. It was studded with one thousand five hundred and sixty precious stones of all kinds.49

Al-Mustanṣir is not recorded as having ever gone further from Cairo than Jubb ‘Amīra – apparently ‘Ayn Shams, his annual pleasure trip destination which was only a few miles from the palaces50. He spent the majority of his time within the palace walls, leaving them to perform certain ceremonies. Luckily one of the most breath-taking of these is described in full by Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the Persian Ismāʿīlī who visited Cairo in 439/1047 and witnessed the annual festival of Rukūb Fath al-Khalij, “the cutting of the canal”, when the dam of the great canal in Cairo was breached and the irrigation system flooded again.

Nāṣir’s account is not simply valuable because of the paucity of evidence for al-Mustanṣir’s ceremonial duties. It is also unusual in that it was written by an Ismāʿīlī contemporary of the caliph. The hostility or contempt of later Sunnī chroniclers is entirely absent; Nāṣir is awe-struck by both the Fātimid wealth and by actually seeing al-Mustanṣir in the flesh. His view of the caliph is wholly uncritical, yet he is obviously trying to gather as many details as he can cram into his description,

50 Ibn Muyassar, p.13.

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probably to impress those at home. Nāṣir’s caliph, surrounded by his 215,000 strong army, is very different to the rather pathetic figure of later histories:

[there] comes the sultan [al-Mustansir], a well-built clean-shaven youth with cropped hair....He is mounted on a camel with plain saddle and bridle with no gold or silver, and wears a white shirt... with a wide cummerbund.. the value of this alone is said to be ten thousand dinars. On his head he has a turban of the same colour and in his hand he holds a large, very costly whip. Before him walk three hundred Daylamites wearing Byzantine goldspun cloth.... At the sultan’s side rides a parasol bearer...the parasol he holds is studded with jewels and pearls....the custom here is for the people to prostrate themselves and say a prayer as the sultan passes.... [al-Mustansir] is handed a spear which he throws at the dam...the whole population of Old and New Cairo comes to witness the spectacle.51

This ceremony was another example of the Fātimids’ deliberately using ritual that their entire population could enjoy rather than just the Ismā‘īlīs. It also suggests that al-Mustanṣir at this time was relatively popular with his people, most of whom submitted to his authority regardless of his religion and their own. The caliph’s actual grip on affairs might be tenuous, but in 439/1047 he still seemed to be the glamorous mighty ruler with Cairo his theatre for publicly displaying Fātimid glory.

Al-Mustansir’s Childhood

Details of how the young prince was brought up before coming of age are barely recorded. The gossipy and occasionally scurrilous Egyptian chronicler Ibn Taghrībirdī manages one sentence:

He [al-Mustanṣir] was circumcised in the ceremony as a boy of six.52

Even this terse note provides more information than the other chroniclers, none of whom have anything to say. Unfortunately, this blank sheet is a result of the Muslim historians’ aims when they were writing. Chronicles were for noting the deeds and lives that shaped Islamic history – what a child did was of no importance and

51 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, pp.50-51.
therefore went unreported. On Sunday 15 Sha‘bān 427/14th June 103653, he reappeared briefly at his father’s death. Aged only seven, Mu‘add as he was then known took the title al-Mustansir and was proclaimed the eighth imām-caliph. The chronicler al-Nuwayrī, who gives the most detailed description of this event, depicts a somewhat subdued episode. Bringing the child outside, al-Ẓāhir’s wazir al-Jarjarā‘ī:

went into one of the palace courtyards and summoned the people. Mu‘add was given the ceremonial sword and turban and al-Jarjarā‘ī said, “This is your leader. Submit to him as caliph.” They did so and departed.54

The relatively low-key approach here was due to respect for the body of al-Ẓāhir, for whom mourning would continue another month55. Meanwhile the new child caliph vanished back inside the palace.

It is most likely that al-Mustansir was brought up in the harem, judging by the powerful influence his mother Sayyida Rasad would have over him as he grew older. Naturally, having a child caliph meant that a regency was inevitable; this post was filled until 436/1045 by the capable al-Jarjarā‘ī, formerly al-Ẓāhir’s wazir56. Nonetheless, al-Mustansir cannot have remained entirely cloistered behind the palace gates. Although he could not actively participate in statecraft he was still the imām-caliph to thousands of Ismā‘īlīs, having religious duties that could only be fulfilled by him.

Al-Mustansir’s religious subjects were scattered across his empire from Ifriqiya to Syria, and further beyond into the ‘Abbāsid caliphate’s territory, Transoxiana and Khurasan. To keep these distant followers in the fold was the institution known as the da‘wa (“summons”). Much has been written on the da‘wa; Walker neatly sums up this Ismā‘īlī phenomenon as:

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53 Ibn Khallikān, p.382.
55 Ibid., p.208.
56 Ibid., p.214.
A tightly controlled organization that served to propagate a religious message and spread the movement.  

The various Ismāʿīlī communities would actively seek to recruit more members although most had to work clandestinely in hostile countries. The chief daʿī was based in Cairo, al-Mustanṣir’s most famous incumbent being Muʿayyad fi’l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (450-470/1058-1078); when he died, the caliph personally led the funeral rites  

Meanwhile, the more remote daʿīs’ links with Cairo were strengthened by the exchange of letters and reports with the caliph himself. Most communities would send a daʿī annually to Egypt for this purpose as well as carrying the tribute sums paid by followers.  

As demonstrated by the letters to the Ismāʿīlī Sulayḥīd dynasty in Yemen, al-Mustanṣir took this part of his role very seriously and was diligent in discharging affairs.  

Within the Fāṭimid empire itself there was obviously no need for subterfuge, but since the majority of al-Mustanṣir’s people were not Ismāʿīlī there was an interesting compromise in the Fāṭimids’ approach to religious policy. The Sunnī mosques within the Fāṭimid realm read the khutba (sermon) for al-Mustanṣir rather than for the Sunnī caliph, whilst the various processions involving al-Mustanṣir were designed:  

to present [the Fāṭimids] in broader terms as Islamic rulers.  

The Cutting of the Canal as witnessed by Naṣīr-i Khusraw was one example of this; al-Mustanṣir presumably carried this out from 427/1036 onwards, the rituals being something no regent could perform in the child’s stead. In addition the caliph sometimes rode in grand procession between Fustat and Cairo to pray in the al-ʿAmr  

59 Walker, p.142.  
mosque, distributed food to the poor at New Year with his own hands and led the main Islamic celebrations in the prayer ground of Cairo.  

However, in addition to this open approach there was a specifically Ismāʿīlī education system within Cairo with al-Mustansir at its heart. The majālis al-ḥikma (sessions of wisdom) of teaching the secrets of the Ismāʿīlī faith were only open to those who had sworn the Ismāʿīlī oath of obedience. These were run almost continuously by various dāʾīs in the palaces, with separate classes for the poor, courtiers and the palace women. Lectures for the local women were held in the Azhar Mosque. The caliph was not necessarily present at these, although he may have appeared during the more exclusive sessions.

From his accession at seven the caliph would have been involved this process, simply because there was nobody else who could take his part. At the end of each lecture, the dāʾī would take the leaflet (written in gold or silver) from which he had taught the lesson and pass it to the caliph. The imām would sign the booklet, and it would be put into his library, the “House of Knowledge” (Dār al-ʿIlm) begun under al-Ḥākim. Until the leaflet was signed its contents could not be accepted as pure doctrine. These lectures were still continuing at the outset of al-Mustansir’s reign, although they may have fallen into abeyance during the civil war of 459-466/1067-1073.

Thus Ismāʿīlism was open to all within the Fāṭimid empire, but people were not constrained to join the faith. The religious aspect is the one theme that would have brought al-Mustansir into public during his childhood. He had to show himself leader of his faith and to be seen by his general public.

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61 Sanders, Ritual, p29
63 Ibid. p.46.
The Caliph’s Family

The Fāṭimid royal family did not generally enjoy a high profile behind the caliph; his other siblings were theoretically destined to live out their days in the palaces, forbidden to procreate or marry so that all power remained concentrated with the caliph himself. The caliph was also supposed to proclaim his heir in the *nasīx* ceremony to ensure a smooth succession. As it was, however, al-Mustansir’s caliphate saw the flouting of these traditions, and various members of his family played a far greater role in history than Fāṭimid official decrees would seem to allow.

**Siblings**

Al-Mustansir’s father, al-Zāhir, died at only thirty-one in 427/1036. Fortunately for the accession, he had decreed his son Mu’add (al-Mustansir) as heir nearly seven years previously, as already detailed above. This extreme youth in the heir has several possible explanations, but the strongest suggestion is that al-Zāhir had no other sons when al-Mustansir was born. Not every eldest son became Fāṭimid caliph; al-‘Azīz was in fact the third son, for example. At twenty-five, it was highly unlikely that al-Zāhir had a son old enough to behave less worthily than a baby, and much more probable that he wanted his only son proclaimed as soon as possible should he himself die young. The case for al-Mustansir as the only son is further supported by the chroniclers, none of whom mentions a brother during the six decades of this caliph’s rule. By contrast his own sons are named on more than one occasion and played a military role during the civil unrest later in their father’s reign. A sister to al-Mustansir is also mentioned, albeit after his death.

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65 Al-Maqrīzī, II, p.182.
66 Ibid., p.181.

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The speed of the nāss may also have been pushed for by Sayyida Raṣad, al-Mustanṣir’s mother. A black slave girl who was bought by al-Zāhir and “enjoyed his favour”, she would later show herself to be ruthlessly ambitious within the Fāṭimid state. As the Wālida, usually translated as the Queen Mother, she had a claim to power denied the other harem women and was awarded her own diwān, or government department. Given her grasping behaviour towards the state during much of her son’s reign, it is easy to suspect her influence over the caliph in naming al-Mustanṣir before another girl could produce a rival heir and deny Sayyida her privileged position. If there were other sons, they were suppressed from history.

The evidence of the sister, however, is another reason to believe that al-Mustanṣir had no brothers. Her role in Fāṭimid events is brief; it seems that for most of her life she lived quietly in the palace away from state affairs, as decreed. She only appears in the chronicles during the succession quarrel after his death, when she would have been at least in her sixties, although her part is striking:

During [al-Mustanṣir’s last] illness, he had charged his sister...and...al-Afdal [the wazir], that his young son Abu’l Qāsim Aḥmad should sit (on the throne)..... the noble lady sent to the elder sons of her brother....and she informed them of the death of their father.

Given that the new caliph – who took the name al-Musta‘lī – was married to al-Afdal’s sister and that the eldest son Nizār was violently opposed to the wazir, the impression is irresistibly one of wheeling out a senior Fāṭimid to lend public credence to al-Afdal’s usurpation through al-Musta‘lī. This would be repeated over two decades later with Nizār’s sister playing the same role. The sister’s actual status as a cipher is made plain when she is not even named in the sources. After sixty years of lying dormant, she made a dramatic entrance, mouthed the party line and promptly vanished again. This sum total of al-Mustanṣir’s siblings’ contributions to history thus makes it all the more likely that there were no further brothers.

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70 Al-Maqrizi, II, p.191.
71 Ibid., p.195.
72 History of the Patriarchs, II (3), pp.389-390
Al-Mustansir’s Children

Unlike his father, al-Mustansir produced several children; so many, in fact, that the chroniclers do not even name all his sons. Ibn Zāfir provides the most detail:

Al-Mustansir’s sons were: Abū’l Qāsim Ahmad, Abū’l Manṣūr Nizār, Abū’l Qāsim Muḥammad, Abdallāh, Abū’l Dawūd Shāqīq Aḥmad, Abū’l Ḥasan Ja’far and others.73

The History of the Patriarchs, in describing the succession scene above, also notes an “elder son” named Ismā’īl.74 Abū’l Qāsim Aḥmad (al-Musta’lī) was the youngest son, with Nizār the eldest. There were thirty-one years between the two, and Nizār was a father before al-Musta’lī was born.75 There was also a clutch of daughters who are remembered in al-Mustansir’s lifetime in one sentence by the chroniclers, “In 462/1070 al-Mustansir’s mother and daughters fled to Baghdad from hunger”76 as they hastened to escape the war and famine raging through Cairo. One daughter would later appear in the official rebuffal of the Nizārī claim to the imāmāte, long after her father’s death. Most of the sons were equally unimportant during al-Mustansir’s reign; only Nizār and al-Musta’lī played a major role in Fāṭimid events, and the latter only after his father’s death.

Nizār

Nizār seems to have been born in 437/1045. The Persian traveller Nāsir-i Khūṣraw, then visiting Egypt, briefly describes the occasion:

The sultan ordered general rejoicing for the birth of a son: the city and bazaars were so arrayed that... some would not believe [it].77

The ceremonial aspect of the public rejoicing suggests that this was the first son for the nineteen year old al-Mustansir. However, interestingly the ceremony of the nass

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75 Ibn Taghribirdī, V, p.22.
76 Ibn Zāfir, p.75.
77 Nāsir-i Khūṣraw, p.55.
is not recorded by most of the chroniclers dealing with Cairo at this time. This is possibly because it was not an issue or that descriptions of it did not survive; it is significant that the chroniclers mention it only in retrospect when the succession was usurped through al-Afdal’s machinations.

It did not take long for Nizār to show himself Badr’s enemy, which provides the interesting possibility of negatively affecting his relationship with his own father, who could scarcely have thanked his son for the discord created thus. The chronicler Ibn Taghribirdī offers another reason for al-Mustansir to dislike Nizār as he grew up; in early 466/late 1073, at the height of the civil war, the Turkish leader Ibn Ḥamdān was murdered along with some cronies:

Also defeated was Ibn al-Madabbar, who was seized in his fine clothes. He was married to a daughter of Nizār, al-Mustansir’s eldest son.78

Nizār’s association with his father’s enemy as related here is somewhat suspect however, given that he was only twenty-nine at the time and unlikely to have had a daughter of any significant age. Moreover, in the same year the same chronicler reports that Ibn Ḥamdān’s murder was a direct result of father and son working together:

A Sayrafi man pounced on Ibn Ḥamdān and stabbed him with a knife. The Sayrafi was seized and hanged on the spot. Ibn Ḥamdān was carried home wounded. It was said that al-Mustansir and his son had plotted with the Sayrafi against Ibn Ḥamdān.79

Since al-Musta’lī was not born until 467/1074, this son must be Nizār, these being the only two sons Ibn Taghribirdī mentions.

For the majority of al-Mustansir’s reign, Nizār’s life was simply not recorded; it was not until Badr al-Jamālī’s arrival that his position became awkward. What is also clear is that whilst Nizār plainly disliked the wazir, the danger of openly showing this never occurred to him. In fact, Nizār had no reason to suspect his position as heir

78 Ibn Taghribirdī, V, p.22.
79 Ibid., p.83
would be usurped. He was the eldest, had seen military service for al-Mustansir and most importantly had never been given cause to think otherwise. Indeed, as Ladak convincingly demonstrates, al-Mustansir did indeed consider Nizār his rightful heir, but was prevented from handing over the official documents before he died by al-Afdal.80 Ibn Taghribirdī had no doubts as to the truth, stating bluntly:

Al-Musta’li usurped the caliphate and in fact the naṣṣ was on Nizār81

Unfortunately, Nizār did not adapt to the hugely altered situation of the Fātimids from 437/1045 to 466/1074, when Badr al-Jamālī arrived. He did not appear to understand that al-Mustansir had no power beyond what Badr chose to allow him. Ibn al-Athīr describes a meeting between Nizār and al-Afdal:

during al-Mustansir’s reign, al-Afdal rode into the palace courtyard from the Bāb al-Dhahab [Golden Gate] on his horse. Once Nizār was coming out, but the passage was dark and al-Afdal did not see him. Nizār shouted, “You, Armenian, dog, off your horse! Nobody is as ill-bred as you!” They hated each other.82

Nizār’s arrogance was extremely unwise given the situation and probably cost him the caliphate. Ibn al-Athīr goes on to claim that al-Afdal then deliberately chose al-Musta’li as heir “from fear of Nizār”83. This is unlikely; al-Afdal had little to fear from a prince of a dynasty that al-Afdal and his father controlled, and the ease with which Nizar was usurped proved this. With his open hatred, Nizār simply proved that he would not be a docile puppet caliph as al-Mustansir was; far easier for Badr and al-Afdal to choose the teenaged al-Musta’li, who was born when Badr was already ensconced in power. Nizār, by contrast, had been born when al-Mustansir was seen as the mighty sultan of a huge empire, and he continued to behave as though it were 437/1045.

83 Ibid.
His refusal to accept or adapt to the political situation was Nizār’s downfall. Faced with al-Musta’lī as the new caliph in 487/1096, the History of the Patriarchs records that all al-Mustansir’s sons “said that his father had promised him that he (should be) the Calif.”84 Yet a brief period under arrest changed their minds, except for Nizār’s.85 The claim by all three other sons present is also an interesting one, since with the nāsš having been said for Nizar, it suggests that they grasped the usurpation and its opportunities before their eldest brother, and possible hoped to portray themselves as ideal alternatives to al-Afdal. Meanwhile, Nizar himself was left with little recourse. Despite claiming that:

our master said to me many times that I (should be) the Calif after him, and I have his written statement for this. Lo, I shall bring it to you straight away.86

he then left the room and fled Cairo for Alexandria with his entourage, where he was later captured and killed.87 The promised piece of paper never materialised, whilst Nizār’s flight left the way open for al-Afdal to destroy him. How Nizār hoped to withstand the man who controlled the Fāṭimid army is unclear, but his death was inevitable.

The image of Nizār in the chronicles is not an attractive one; he appears an overbearing, arrogant bully seriously lacking in astuteness. His attitude is in total contrast to his rather shadowy and timid father. Nonetheless, al-Mustansir can hardly have imagined that his official designation of his son as heir would have been ignored. Al-Mustansir’s interview with the Ismā‘īlī Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ – who would found the Nizar! Isma‘ths that took Nizar as its imām – whilst probably partly fictionalised – demonstrates the caliph’s confidence in the succession even at a turbulent point in his history:

In 469/1078 Hasan-i Ṣabbāḥ the Ismā‘īlī visited al-Mustansir dressed as a merchant and discussed setting up a da‘wa in Khurasan and the ‘Ajam. This was permitted and [Ḥasan] swiftly returned and implemented it. Ḥasan asked al-Mustansir, “Who will be my imām after

85 Ibid., p.391.
86 Ibid., p.390.
87 Ibid., p.393.

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you?” The reply was “My son Nizār.” The [Nizārī] Ismā‘īlis thus believed in Nizār’s imamate and behaved according to what they thought was the will of Allah in 487 [1094].

Daftary has pointed out that the chances of al-Mustansir discussing the succession privately with a lowly dā‘i are remote and that this would therefore have taken place in public, with the implication of a private meeting later added in to increase Hasan’s importance in retrospect. However, as will be seen the idea is not so far-fetched given al-Mustansir’s uncharacteristically hands-on approach to Ismā‘īli dā‘is.

Al-Musta‘li

The son who finally succeeded al-Mustansir, al-Musta‘li, was a cipher. When even Nizār, the eldest son, only warranted a few mentions during his father’s reign, al-Musta‘li appears once, in Ibn Zāfīr’s list of the princes. Evidence of his being favoured by al-Mustansir only appeared some years later in al-Hidāya al-Āmiryya (“The Epistle of the Fātimid caliph al-Āmir” – al-Āmir being al-Musta‘li’s son). This was an official document produced in 516/1122 at a public assembly in Cairo, for the specific purpose of refuting the claim of Nizār to the caliphate and emphasizing the legality of the Musta‘lian regime. It therefore cannot be used to look objectively at al-Mustansir’s reign. Al-Musta‘li, still only a teenager when he was chosen to be the next caliph under al-Afdal’s thumb, was clearly considered of little importance in his father’s history right up until al-Mustansir’s death.

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88 Ibn al-Athir, IX, p.448.
89 Lecture given at Edinburgh University, 2004.
Al-Mustansir’s Three Aunts

The lack of interest displayed by the chroniclers in a caliph’s non-inheriting children clearly demonstrates the children’s own political unimportance. As seen with al-Mustansir’s sister, a Fātimid child could live for decades without once being referred to in the dynasty’s history. It is therefore unsurprising that the fates of his other sons and his daughters remain unknown. However, this did not mean that those children automatically lived sterile lives, removed from any potential power. Even the image of the Fātimid daughters cloistered within the palace is shown to be false on at least three occasions. The source for these three is the anonymous Book of Gifts and Rarities, a contemporary and gossipy account of various riches across the Middle East that offers some fascinating descriptions of Fātimid riches. In 442/1050, when al-Mustansir’s great-great-aunt Lady Rāshida died in her nineties, she left behind a staggering inheritance:

Possessions ... worth one million seven hundred thousand dinars..... thirty thousand pieces of pure silk and twelve thousand pieces of a plain cloth... and a hundred large storage jars full of Fansūrī camphor.94

Rāshida’s riches were matched in the same year by those of her sister ‘Abda, who owned so much that:

It took thirty reams of paper to write the inventory of her household effects.... Four hundred swords decorated in gold, unlimited quantities of jewels and emeralds.... and a ewer of rock crystal.95

A third Fātimid princess and sister of al-Ẓāhir, Sitt Mīṣr, died three years later leaving eight thousand slave girls and an estate of over a million dinars.96 It was small wonder therefore that:

Whoever assumed office amongst al-Mu’izz’s [Rāshida’s father and the fourth Fātimid caliph] descendants (eagerly) awaited the death of Rāshidah. But this wish was only fulfilled in the days of the Commander of the Faithful al-Mustansir bi’llāh.97

95 Book of Gifts and Rarities, 357.
96 Ibid., 354.
The fantastic wealth of the three princesses is not necessarily surprising. All were daughters of caliphs and thus entitled to live in luxury; since they were female and all their goods would revert to the caliph on their deaths, there was no danger in allowing them to amass vast treasure troves. Money and slaves aside, they had no actual power and were no threat to the succession. ‘Abda’s wealth in particular seems to have been accumulated through a natural miserliness; living into her nineties – although the Book contradicts this claim with dates that made her eighty – she is said to have eaten nothing but tharīd, a dish of bread moistened in meat juice. Further on, however, the image of a cloistered princess is abruptly contradicted with the claim that ‘Abda:

was the grandmother of Tatar, Sa’ūd, Mufaddā and Safwān.  

The princess also had her own treasury vaults, suggesting a degree of autonomy over her household; since these were inside the palaces she presumably shared her private chambers with her family, although disappointingly no further information is given on them. Meanwhile, Rāshida’s wealth apparently came from her own resources:

Rāshidah... earned her living from spinning yarn and never laid a hand on anything that belonged to the royal treasury for her subsistence.

This quasi-independence is in marked contrast to the Fātimids’ own decrees, particularly regarding family. Possibly this injunction had long been ignored before al-Mustaṣir came to the throne, since ‘Abda must have had children several decades before he was born. His own son Nizār’s marriage and daughter also flouted this law, which may have originally been put in place to prevent rivalries for a young and fragile caliphate. Given that at some accessions there may have been disgruntled other sons, the decree may have been a response to that situation. Clearly by 427/1036, it was not being observed by several members of the Fātimid family. It is also notable, however, that ‘Abda’s wealth went back to her nephew rather than to

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97 Book of Gifts and Rarities., 356.
98 Ibid., 357.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
her own offspring at her death\textsuperscript{101} – if a fortune could be built up, it was apparently at the caliph’s discretion, and would not be used to fund a junior branch of the family into prominence.

Rāshida’s self-sufficiency, on the other hand, would not have made the slightest difference to the caliph himself – rather, it meant one less mouth to feed and so it is unlikely al-Mustanṣir complained about her spinning business. In addition, when reading of the aunts’ astonishing list of goods, it is easy to forget that in comparison to al-Mustanṣir’s own wealth their possessions were only a fraction of the enormous Fātimid riches. Eight thousand slave girls, as estimated by the \textit{Book of Gifts and Rarities}, which probably exaggerated\textsuperscript{102}, pale into insignificance beside the treasury of a man who owned twenty thousand shops in Cairo alone\textsuperscript{103}. As the \textit{Book’s} author notes:

\begin{quotation}
After seeing the ninety basins and ninety ewers.... from the Sultan’s treasuries [plundered in the civil war], they found the basin and ewer of ‘Abdah, which they had... considered so splendid, very modest and insignificant.\textsuperscript{104}
\end{quotation}

Al-Mustanṣir could therefore afford to be more tolerant towards his relatives’ personal lives, because by retaining his rights to inherit their estates, no risks were posed to his own position. The chances of any children having a claim to the caliphate taken seriously were almost nil; when even Nizār could not override al-Afdal to take the throne, ‘Abda’s grandchildren attempting the same would be ludicrous. Thus the three aunts demonstrate that Fātimid women could lead surprisingly independent lives, whilst remaining under the overall command of the caliph.

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Book of Gifts and Rarities}, 357.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 354.
\textsuperscript{103} Naṣir-i Khusraw, p.56.
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Book of Gifts and Rarities}, 358.
Sayyida Raṣad

Sayyida Raṣad, al-Mustansir’s mother, did not adhere to the general rules of Fāṭimid relatives; her life is notable for the triumph of her ambition over an empire that would have confined her to the harem. She has not fared well with the Muslim chroniclers, none of whom approved of her interference with state affairs or her blatant control of her son:

- His [al-Mustansir’s] mother was dominant over his rule.¹⁰⁵
- [Sayyida] governed until 462/1069 and issued confusing orders until the famine, civil war and plunder worsened.¹⁰⁶
- The cause of the dissent was al-Mustansir’s mother.¹⁰⁷

Sayyida’s ruthless approach to power would scarcely have won her many admirers in any case, but she compounded her negative reputation with a serious lack of political understanding that had disastrous effects on her son’s dynasty.

When Sayyida was born is not known, nor when she arrived in Cairo. Ibn Muyassar states that she was a Sudanese slave girl belonging to the Jewish slave merchant Abū Sa’īd Tustarl, “until al-Ẓāhir bought her from him”.¹⁰⁸ By producing al-Mustanṣir, she thus became the Wālida, mother to the caliph, and was granted her own administrative department, which Abū Sa’īd headed. So far this was what happened to all the Fāṭimid caliphs’ mothers. Nor for the first nine years of her son’s reign was there any sign that Sayyida Raṣad would have any further impact on affairs. This was down entirely to the wazir al-Jarjarāʾī, who would not relinquish his firm grip on state affairs and certainly would not permit Sayyida’s agent to wrest any power from him¹⁰⁹. Unfortunately, after his death in 436/1045 the Queen Mother had no obstacle to seizing the reins of government through her Tustarl henchman – the

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¹⁰⁵ Ibn al-Athīr, X, p.80.
¹⁰⁶ Ibn Muyassar, p.31.
¹⁰⁷ Al-Nuwayri, p.225.
¹⁰⁸ Ibn Muyassar, p.3.
¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

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sixteen year old al-Mustansir certainly put nothing in her path – and her thirty-year reign over the Fātimid state began¹¹⁰.

Sayyida was not the first Fātimid woman to play a part in state affairs. Al-Zāhir’s aunt Sitt al-Mulk had acted as regent for much of his reign¹¹¹. Yet there were two crucial differences between Sitt al-Mulk and Sayyida. Firstly, Sayyida was not a Fātimid princess and a caliph’s sister, but a slave girl with no political experience. Secondly, and most importantly, she was not a gifted ruler. Her decisions were often brutal, capricious and frequently short-sighted; she even attempted the destruction of half the Fātimid army and incited vicious hatred between the ethnic divisions. She was not entirely at fault; the evil genius of Abū Sa‘īd Tustarī whom she chose to help her rule led to a string of murders and seriously destabilised the state, but Sayyida herself can still justly be accused of some responsibility for the civil war of 456-466/1064-1073. In addition, she made no effort to force the passive al-Mustanṣir to actively control his birthright. Sayyida was not chosen for her skill; she took power in the absence of a rival and maintained it through the inertia of the caliph himself. However, it should be pointed out that the Queen Mother for all her faults at least demonstrated some activity and strength in government, unlike the caliph himself, and may have continued to hold power simply because she could see no sensible alternative.

Sayyida’s lowly birth unfortunately meant that she lacked the upbringing of Sitt al-Mulk, who was clearly aware of the complex political situation in Cairo and negotiated accordingly. It also was the main reason for some of Sayyida’s less sensible decisions. The Queen Mother was not the only Sudanese in Cairo; a large proportion of the Fātimid army was made up of Sudanese troops, ethnically lumped together as “the blacks”. The black troops usually formed the more lowly infantry units, in contrast to the more privileged Turkish and Kutāma Berber cavalry and

¹¹⁰ Ibn Muyassar, p.3.
archers. The various units within the army were violently jealous of their own privileges and duties, requiring a delicate hand to hold the balance between each division. This had been skilfully managed by al-Jarjarā’ī, but from the moment she and Abū Saʿīd took over in 436/1045, Sayyida Raṣād’s sympathies were very publicly with the blacks:

Behind the blacks was Sayyida Raṣād, herself a Sudanīi.

Her immediate plan of action was to buy in large numbers of blacks and publicly favour them with pay increases and more prestigious duties. This unwise plan of action originally appears to have sprung from her own need of support. Sayyida had after all no right to the authority she was exercising; in 436/1045 one ruthless wazir would have had an excellent chance of toppling her and Abū Saʿīd. Keen to bolster her usurped position, the blacks were an immediate solution:

She began to buy black slaves, making them her party & increasing their numbers until they had more power and money.

With ever-increasing numbers of black troops who identified with the Queen Mother as the source of their promotion, Sayyida’s hold on the state also strengthened. However, she was not the only beneficiary of this plan; Abū Saʿīd Tustārī, as a slave trader in blacks, would have made a fortune supplying the new troops and probably encouraged Sayyida’s strategy.

Sayyida’s and Abū Saʿīd’s lack of political foresight is most obvious in their handling of the army. In her need for instant partisans Sayyida apparently gave no thought to the effect her new policies would have elsewhere. She found the blacks more duties by simply removing some from the Turkish troops, who were used to holding the more glamorous posts, but made no effort to placate the displaced Turks or to win them over. That she did not try to appease the entire army is remarkable, although possibly she doubted her success as a Sudanese ex-slave with the Turkish

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113 Ibn Muyassar, p.13.
114 Ibid., p.3.
troops who despised the black soldiers. Inevitably the Turks were furious, but Sayyida’s response was to ignore their protests and continue her policy. Unable to touch Sayyida herself, the Turkish troops were soon ripe for mischief, and eagerly agreed to remove Abū Saʿīd Tustarī – brutally murdered in 439/1047 – at the behest of the then wazir, al-Fallāḥī.116 This incurred Sayyida’s understandable wrath. What had begun as creating a support base with the black troops rapidly turned into a vendetta, as the Queen Mother attempted to destroy the Turks as her direct enemy. That they also made up a large part of her son’s army seems to have had no effect on her, given her efforts with three of her wazirs to wipe the Turkish troops out:

When Abu’l Barakat became wazir [in 439/1047] Sayyida ordered him to set the blacks on the Turks but he feared the consequences and would not obey her. She dismissed him & appointed al-Yāzūrī instead, but when she bade him do this he disapproved and ruled wisely until his death. After him came al-Bābili – Sayyida ordered him to do it but he changed her orders to avoid war.117

It is notable that although the Queen Mother was obviously in control of the state, it is usually only in her dealings with the army that she is directly named as making state decisions. This is hardly surprising; the blacks’ rise in fortunes was easily traced back to her and her Tustarī henchman, since nobody else had anything to gain by promoting one part of the army so blatantly over another. The sheer recklessness of their decisions is staggering; Sayyida effectively placed the ruling dynasty at direct loggerheads with the strongest component of an already unruly army simply because she saw them as hindering her personal ambitions. Again though, that she was allowed to do this at all is a serious stain on al-Mustanṣir’s own character and judgement.

Inept a ruler as Sayyida was, it is important to note that her position was public knowledge beyond the Fātimid empire, and her status was acknowledged by other rulers. The Book of Gifts and Rarities makes it clear that Byzantium at least was well aware of who really held the reins:

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116 Ibn Muyassar, p.3.
The Byzantine Emperor Michael [probably Michael IV Paphlagonius] had offered the Lady, mother of al-Mustansir bi'llāh, jewellery (consisting of) five bracelets inlaid with glass in five colours.... They were fashioned with the best goldsmith's work. Their inlaid design was one of the finest craftsmanship.\footnote{Book of Gifts and Rarities, 97.}

Naturally, lavish gifts were also sent to al-Mustansir, but the specific gift to Sayyida is highly unusual within the source itself; no other Fātimid woman is noted in the Book as being honoured in this manner.

Sayyida’s hold lasted throughout the 440s/1050s with the eight year tenure of the capable wazir al-Yazūrī whom she had picked for the job from being head of her own diwān. However, after the wazir’s arrest and execution in 450/1058 there are signs that al-Mustansir – then thirty – was beginning to find his overpowering mother a burden and disliked her policy towards the army. Not being a forceful personality himself, he appears to have tackled the problem by conniving with the Turkish soldiers, as is suggested by events in 454/1062. On a pleasure trip with his women and servants, violence broke out between the caliph’s drunken Turkish guard and the black troops:

\[\text{[the Turks] fell on the blacks, killing them, then gathered round the caliph saying, “This was done within your earshot, with your approval and compliance”} \ldots\text{. Al-Mustansir denied this.}\]

\footnote{Ibn Muyassar, p.13.}

Despite his denial in his mother’s presence, the accusation of complicity is probably correct. Al-Mustansir had no reason to support Sayyida’s destructive approach to his own army, nor to be a partisan of the blacks. On the other hand, his strong-willed mother had been running matters for fourteen years and the caliph was not adept at standing up to her. The Turks’ claim to his secret support is further bolstered by ensuing events; the blacks having fled to the outskirts of Cairo, Sayyida once again demonstrated her loyalties:

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\footnote{Ibn Muyassar, p.13.}
Al-Mustansir's mother helped them with money and weapons until they scored a victory over the Turks. The Turks went to al-Mustanṣir and spoke roughly to him; he swore he knew nothing of it then went to his mother and rebuked her.¹²⁰

This is the only example in the chronicles where the caliph openly showed displeasure at his mother's behaviour, and his exceptional reaction suggests a considerable degree of frustration and anger. Sayyida Raṣad may also have been intimidated into dropping her patronage of the blacks. She disappears from the sources for the next five years until 459/1067, by which time the Turks were already over-mighty and emptying the Treasury¹²¹. Falling back on her old tactics, the Queen Mother “sent to the black leaders and set them on the Turks.”¹²² Whilst their first army was defeated, she managed to amass a force of 15,000 men at Giza, which sent the Turks scurrying back to the caliph to complain again¹²³.

By this point the anger caused by Sayyida amongst the army had been rumbling on for twenty years, and became increasingly destructive. The obvious danger of her strategy towards the army also became apparent. By her treatment of the Turks, the Queen Mother had created an implacable enemy, with only the blacks standing between her and the Turks' revenge. In 439/1047 this had not seemed a problem since the blacks were stronger and supported by the state. Two decades on, the Turks – ironically, with the assistance of al-Mustanṣir himself – were beginning to turn the tables. Sayyida had made it inevitable that they would seek revenge, and their festering resentment and anger exploded. Following the defeat of the blacks at Giza in 459/1067, there was nothing to stop the furious Turks from exacting vengeance on Sayyida herself except possibly al-Mustanṣir's authority. Unfortunately, al-Mustanṣir could not hold out against his former collaborators who turned on him in the same year and began looting his palaces¹²⁴. Finding himself

¹²⁰ Ibn Muyassar, p.17.
¹²¹ Ibid.
¹²² Ibid.
¹²³ Ibid.
¹²⁴ Ibid.

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accused of aiding the blacks, the caliph was so desperate to distance himself from Sayyida’s work that he:

finally agreed as compensation that they [the Turks] could destroy the blacks and provided one million dinars.\(^{125}\)

The sheer chaos of events in Egypt at this time probably explains the lack of evidence for Sayyida’s activities until 461/1069. Facing the Turks marauding through her possessions, Sayyida remained defiant and even managed to momentarily triumph over them. Appealing to the local people for aid and playing on their duty to the caliph, Sayyida incited the populace to turn on Ibn Ḥamdān. After the looting of his houses, Ibn Ḥamdān was briefly subdued, although this cannot have lasted long.\(^{126}\) Given al-Mustaṣir’s passivity and his usual thrall to his mother, it is easy to see Sayyida’s hand at work pushing her son into rousing support that she could not incite directly. This respite was short-lived. The next year saw the Turkish leader Ibn Ḥamdān in control of Cairo and al-Mustaṣir utterly at his mercy\(^ {127}\). However, Sayyida remained unscathed until 464/1072. This seems to have been due to her position as the caliph’s mother; Ibn Ḥamdān had actually begun to support the destitute caliph through the famine gripping the country, but he became increasingly insulting towards al-Mustaṣir. The original remains of the deference due the caliph provide the only explanation for Sayyida’s being left alone for several years after the Turks were in control of the Fātimid capital. By 464/1072, Ibn Ḥamdān was sufficiently confident to strike into the harem. His actions make plain the personal hatred he bore Sayyida, with a strong element of exacting justice:

He confined Sayyida, punished her and took a lot of money from her.\(^ {128}\)

Sayyida was not the only wealthy woman left in the palaces at this time; al-Mustaṣir’s daughters were certainly present with her. It is significant that Ibn Ḥamdān did not simply loot Sayyida’s own possessions, but actively punished her for her treatment of the Turks. Shutting her up is an indication that she was

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\(^{125}\) Al-Maqrīzī, II, p.276.

\(^{126}\) Ibn Ṭaghrībirdī, V, p.83.

\(^{127}\) Ibn Muyassar, p.20.

considered to have stepped out of her proper role and had no place in deciding state affairs.

This punishment and confinement must have been brief, but it marked the end of Sayyida’s part in history. With no black troops left to support her, the land in anarchy and her own son’s power ruthlessly stripped from him, the Queen Mother decided to cut her losses. In the same year that Ibn Ḥamdān exacted his revenge, Sayyida fled Cairo with al-Mustanṣir’s daughters.129 Her destination was also remarkable:

It was said Sayyida went to Iraq.130

Having decided to leave the capital, the Queen Mother aimed straight for the heartland of al-Mustanṣir’s great religious rival, the ‘Abbāsid caliph. Presumably she died there, for she is not recorded in the chronicles after her flight, although al-Ḥamdānī claims that she wrote a letter to Yemen from Cairo in 471/1074131. This is unlikely since her return to and death in Cairo would have been recorded; it is probable that this Sayyida was in fact al-Mustanṣir’s sister back from her exile or even al-Musta’li’s mother, since the latter wrote to the Sulayhid dynasty in 489/1096.132 Sayyida’s reign was over, and effectively so was her son’s beyond a purely ceremonial role.

It is not difficult to understand the hostility demonstrated towards Sayyida Raṣad by the chroniclers. She had no right to play any significant part in Fāṭimid history at all, and should have remained in the harem quietly performing charitable deeds. Instead, according to the chroniclers, she thrust herself into control of the entire state and shamed the caliphate by flagrantly usurping al-Mustanṣir’s power. She might have been forgiven this, except that she made such a poor job of it. Sayyida was not a successful ruler. Instigating self-serving practices bound to cause resentment, her

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129 Ibn Muyassar, p.20.
132 Ibid., p.318

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response to criticism was one of rage and stubbornness; despite the overwhelming evidence that the blacks could not destroy the Turks, she continued to press for this ambition even after the Turks had control of Cairo itself.

Even less fortunate than the Queen Mother’s blinkered approach to statecraft was her thirst for power. She was apparently uninterested in being a regent – she did not take over until al-Mustansir was already sixteen – nor in a scenario where she helped the caliph from behind the scenes. Possibly this was because she was only concerned with her own desires and would destroy her own son’s military power to get what she wanted. The overall good of the Fātimid empire or her son was irrelevant to her provided she was in power, and her decisions thus reflect her inability to consider anyone but herself. Al-Mustansir, having had a regent wazir until he was sixteen, was unable to withstand her, and she was unable to see that she was on a course for disaster. However, it could also be claimed that Sayyida at least provided a strong hand on the empire at a time when nobody else did. Unwise and unskilled though she was, she had the courage to hold to her policies that her son so notably lacked, and to forge a political path where he would not.

It is thus unfair to accuse the Queen Mother of complete ruthlessness towards al-Mustansir. Whilst there is no evidence of maternal feeling from her, this probably would not have been reported in the chronicles anyway due to its occurring in private; whilst Sayyida’s own policies brought the Fātimid empire into chaos and war, it was al-Mustansir’s weakness of character that allowed her such license. She may well have realized that she would never be able to rely on her son to take the initiative - when she and the caliph acted jointly, it was always in a situation where she had no other man who could carry out her orders, as with the appeal to the people for aid in 461/1069. Ironically, her own grip on power also ensured that al-Mustansir never learned the strength of character to take his rightful place at the helm of the state.
In addition, there is a suggestion that Sayyida could be respectful towards the caliph’s status. After his rebuke to her in 454/1062 she is not recorded as meddling in affairs for five years, possibly as a response to al-Mustanṣir’s anger. In those years without her active intervention, nobody managed to take her place in controlling the Fāṭimid empire. Disastrous as the Queen Mother could be, without her matters rapidly deteriorated further. Whilst she fled the moment the Turks turned upon her specifically, she had already endured several years of civil war that cannot have left her completely untouched since the palaces were looted. She would also have been elderly when she left Cairo and had a right to expect her son to protect her rather than the other way round. There was no point in Sayyida remaining. Indeed, her decision to flee was probably the most sensible one she ever made.

Sayyida is a peculiar character; with her motivations lost to history, much of her behaviour is incomprehensible and perceptions of her are accordingly unsympathetic. Her hatred of the Turks verged on the obsessive, and her sheer lack of foresight led her to make incredibly reckless decisions. Whilst she may have done her best, she was disastrous for her son’s legacy. She has been aptly described as al-Mustanṣir’s “evil genius”, denying him his right to rule –either deliberately or through unwitting force of personality. Nonetheless, for all her failings as both ruler and mother, Sayyida deserves to be known to a wider audience; she pushed herself into prominence from nowhere and held that position for thirty years, being a pivotal character in the events of the Fāṭimid dynasty.

**Al-Mustanṣir bi’l-lāh – the man behind the Caliphate**

For a man whose rule takes up almost a third of Fāṭimid history, the amount of attention paid by modern historians to al-Mustanṣir himself is pathetic; in fact, it is almost non-existent. As a whole, his reign has not attracted much attention compared to the huge amount of writings available for al-Ḥākim’s reign, for

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133 Gibb and Kraus, p.729.
example, even though he ruled for over three times as long. However, even within the work available on the years 427-487/1036-1094, the caliph himself as a personality is universally ignored on the grounds that there is no evidence of it. Gibb and Kraus’ summing up of al-Mustansir himself has apparently been taken to heart by following writers:

His personality as a ruler is entirely obscured by the successive wazirs and generals that kept him virtually a prisoner.\(^{134}\)

Even notable Fātimid historians such as Lev, Sanders and Brett, in their works covering al-Mustansir’s period, skip over the caliph’s personality entirely. Events are related but the man at the centre of them is oddly ignored; the overall impression is that al-Mustansir’s character is not worth discovering since he was too weak to have any effect on the state. In fact this is simply not true, and following Gibb and Kraus in dismissing al-Mustansir at the outset creates an imperfect understanding of the events of his time. Certainly, al-Mustansir was not a forceful man, and it may be truthfully said that he was not an active or talented ruler. On the other hand, he made his own contribution to events, whilst the evidence paints an intriguing picture of a man ideally suited to his role as spiritual leader but hopelessly ill-equipped for that of imperial caliph.

The chroniclers’ judgements on al-Mustansir’s performance as ruler are consistently unflattering. Ibn Žâfir, for instance, is openly contemtuous:

he spent too much to count on finery and entertainments....His management was equally careless.\(^{135}\)

Ibn Muyassar is equally unimpressed:

He sat on his carpet ......and did not start ruling\(^{136}\)

\(^{134}\) Gibb and Kraus, p.730.
\(^{135}\) Ibn Žâfir, p.77.
\(^{136}\) Ibn Muyassar, p.31.
Even Ibn Taghribirdi – who as an Egyptian himself occasionally seems more sympathetic to the Egyptian-born al-Mustansir than to the Sunni ‘Abbāsid caliph – offers:

He [al-Mustansir] occupied his time with entertainment, drinking and music.137

This love of pleasure was nothing new in the Fātimid caliphs; al-Maqrizi’s report of al-Mustansir’s father al-Zahir is strikingly similar:

He spent his time in sanctuary and protection, listening to singers.138

On the other hand, al-Zahir was more fortunate; as al-Maqrizi also notes:

All his reign was peaceful and calm.139

It was al-Mustansir’s misfortune that most of his reign was neither. However, he was not always idle; there is evidence that clearly shows he was very active in some aspects of his empire, although unfortunately not in matters of politics.

As has been seen, after his accession in 427/1036 at the age of seven, al-Mustansir disappeared from the chronicles for some years but must have carried out his religious duties as imām. Politically, despite events occurring in his name – such as agreeing a treaty with Byzantium in 429/1038 – he was kept from power until he was sixteen (assuming he had ever wanted it before then) by the wazir al-Jarjarā’ī. After the latter’s death the caliph’s mother Sayyida Raṣad took over. It would seem that al-Mustansir was already demonstrating the nervousness and credulity that would bring down several wazirs over vicious rumours:

[Sayyida and Abu Sa‘id Tustarl] turned al-Mustansir against [the wazir al-Anbārī] and he was replaced with their choice.140

What is notable here is Sayyida Raṣad’s acknowledgement of her son’s position; later she would often dispense with the courtesy of even asking him before issuing...
orders. Given that this occurred only days into Sayyida’s usurpation of power, it is likely that she and Abū Saʿīd were being careful at the outset to include al-Mustanṣir rather than be seen to have wrested state control away from him. His grandfather al-Ḥākim had been only fifteen when he destroyed his over-mighty regent Barjawān; the possibility of al-Mustanṣir repeating the act at around the same age could not be ignored.

On this occasion the caliph was docile; that docility would continue for years, but it was soon underpinned by a certain sly cunning. Al-Mustanṣir, contrary to Gibb and Kraus’ assertion, was not the total prisoner he seemed under Sayyida’s reign. At some point between 436/1045 and 439/1048, the young caliph apparently identified Abū Saʿīd Tustarī as his enemy – or at the least, a man he could do without. Political events were already conspiring against Abū Saʿīd; he had aroused enormous hostility within Cairo, culminating in his murder in 439/1048. The actual assassins were al-Mustanṣir’s Turkish soldiers, but al-Maqrīzī reports an interesting scene:

Al-Mustanṣir ordered the killers to show themselves; the troops gathered and said, “We have killed him.” Al-Mustanṣir had been caught up in this conniving.

The caliph’s personal feelings on the Tustarīs’ meddling in state matters were further revealed when he then refused to bestow Abū Saʿīd’s office on his brother Abū Naṣr or his nephews, although he would later use Abū Naṣr as a diplomatic mediator and a nephew as a wazir. It would seem that al-Mustanṣir’s aim was limited to the removal of Abū Saʿīd, and he secretly encouraged others until that ambition was realized. It is also feasible that this was as far as he dared go in removing his mother from her position of control, since without Abū Saʿīd Sayyida would need another henchman.

This unexpected streak in al-Mustanṣir’s character showed itself again on at least three more occasions. Each time he struck back against a powerful person, although
ironically each time he could have simply used his own authority against his subject and spared himself the subterfuge. Astonishingly one of them was his mother Sayyida Raṣad. The caliph would publicly dismiss or execute people only when someone more forceful was behind him. When the most forceful character was the one he wanted to overrule, he always acted surreptitiously. He was not a Machiavellian man; all three occasions are notable for the caliph being placed in a public embarrassing position beforehand. When he felt pushed into a corner, al-Mustaṣṣir could and did respond.

Following the success of the plot surrounding Abū Saʿīd Tustarī, the next suggestion that the caliph had struggled against a stronger character than his own came in 450/1058 when he ordered the execution of his wazir al-Yāzūrī\(^\text{144}\). The wazir had been at the helm for eight years and was a favourite of the intimidating Sayyida Raṣad. The situation with Abū Saʿīd is remarkably similar in that al-Mustaṣṣir once more took advantage of prevailing undercurrents to dispose of his mother’s overpowered servant. Ostensibly the wazir was arrested because he had written to the Seljuqs in Baghdad urging their arrival in Egypt; privately, al-Maqrīzī reported that the caliph wanted al-Yāzūrī’s vast fortune\(^\text{145}\). The charge of treason sprang from rumours spread by envious ministers that al-Mustaṣṣir had ignored for most of the wazir’s tenure\(^\text{146}\). His sudden turnaround is suspicious, particularly since once more a man who had become wealthy off the state and had a very high profile was conveniently disposed of with the caliph escaping any unpleasant accusations.

Al-Mustaṣṣir’s efforts to prevent his mother from exterminating his Turkish troops by plotting the ambush of the blacks at ‘Ayn Shams in 454/1062 have already been discussed, as have his and his son Nizār’s attempts to assassinate the Turkish leader Ibn Ḥamdān in 461/1069 through a Sayrafī. The caliph was not a man of action; he was always distanced from the outcome of his own plottings, even if his hand was suspected. His timid character thus could on occasion be driven to action, albeit

\(^{144}\) Ibn Muyassar, p.8.
\(^{146}\) Ibid., p.204.
usually underhand scheming; he was not necessarily the passive cipher portrayed by Gibb and Kraus. Al-Maqrīzī certainly saw al-Mustansir as a man with a native slyness; in 459/1067 he reports that the caliph was entirely at the Turks’ mercy because “his cunning deserted him”.147 As noted earlier, the same cunning had kept his many jealous sons at bay because he had refused to name a successor.

His love of pleasure, an accusation levelled at him by more than one chronicler, is also well-attested in the sources. A singer who performed a victory song for the caliph following the brief conquest of Baghdad in 450/1058 was rewarded with a grant of land by a delighted al-Mustansīr.148 This event is an innocuous one, unlike the trip to ‘Ayn Shams in 454/1062 a few miles from Cairo. Although al-Mustansīr “every year rode in state with his women and servants”,149 the trip in 454/1062 is memorable not only for the Turks’ assault on the blacks, but for the behaviour of the cortege along the way. Ibn Zāfīr, not an admirer of al-Mustansīr, is openly revolted, accusing the courtiers of verging on the blasphemous, with comparisons of the pleasure trip to the pilgrimage and of the wine to the water of the Zamzam well at Mecca.150 Al-Nuwayrī, noting the same incident with less disgust, reports the courtiers’ “derision” in pretending to be pilgrims, but this impious attitude is all the more surprising since it conflicts entirely with al-Mustansīr’s own piety and jealous guarding of his religious role. There is in fact no record of his joining in with the disgraceful behaviour, suggesting that this was yet another example of the caliph failing to exert his authority as he should.

Weak, enjoying entertainments, devious if pushed to it, and easily overborne by the more forceful, al-Mustansīr nonetheless had many admirable qualities, although sadly none that was ideal for the ruler of the Fātimid state. He was generally tolerant of his subjects’ varying religions, being depicted in the Christian History of the Patriarchs as a compassionate man. He was on occasion almost too merciful; when

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147 Al-Maqrīzī, II, p.275.
148 Ibn Muyassar, p.10.
149 Ibid., p.13.
150 Ibn Zāfīr, pp.73-74.
151 Al-Nuwayrī, XXVII, p.225.
the Zirid warlord of Ifrīqiya, Ibn Bādis, was caught pledging allegiance to Baghdad in 443/1051 al-Mustansir appeared to have forgiven him152; the unleashing of destructive Bedouin tribes upon Ifrīqiya in 444/1052 was at the wazir al-Yāzūrī’s orders because only al-Yāzūrī had been insulted153. Al-Mustansir also undoubtedly took his responsibilities as leader of the Ismā‘īlīs extremely seriously.

Al-Mustansir’s interaction with his missionary network shows a completely different person to the insubstantial caliph of Cairo. By contrast to this latter weak character, the Ismā‘īlī imām al-Mustansir was a hard-working, decisive man who liked to keep his own finger on events. This picture is highlighted by surviving letters from the caliph himself to the Sulayhīd dynasty in Yemen, who took the area for the Ismā‘īlīs in 429/1037. Al-Ḥamdānī’s original article was superseded by the publication in 1954 of the letters as the Sijillat al-Mustansiriyya, which form a surprisingly large corpus. Confusingly, they are not filed in chronological order in their published form; letters throughout the forty years are jumbled together with no apparent reason behind the order. In addition, these letters are not an opportunity to hear the caliph’s personal voice. Most of each epistle is taken up with flowery rhetoric and high-flown praise of the caliph himself. Al-Mustansir’s letters are fixed in set phrases and any individuality in his writing is lost. Nonetheless, the Sijillat demonstrate the caliph at work, the issues he considered important and the image he wished to project to his followers. Al-Mustansir wrote on a variety of subjects between 445/1054 and his death in 487/1094. In 445/1054 he provided a description of his opulent procession to the public prayer ground at ‘Id al-Fitr and his sermon there154. Other topics included notification of the birth of several of his sons and sympathies on Sulayhī’s death in 459/1067155. On a more sensitive note, the caliph also alluded to his own troubles during the civil war and Badr al-Jamāl’s victory in re-establishing peace156. The overall impression is one of a ruler who made his exalted status clear

152 Ibn Muyassar, p.5.
153 Ibn Zafir, p.70.
155 Ibid., p.137.
156 Ibid., pp.66-69.
yet paid constant attention to the minutiae. It is obvious from the letters that al-Mustansir was far more confident in this role than he ever was in that of Sultan.

Nor did al-Mustansir save his personal attention purely for important dynasties. As has been seen, Hasan-i Sabbah, founder of the Nizari Isma’Ilis but then another Isma’ili dā‘i, visited Cairo in 469/1078. Ibn al-Athir’s depiction of Hasan having open access to the caliph is further supported by al-Maqrizi’s version of events:

Hasan had written to his chief, who corresponded with al-Mustansir, and thus met the caliph. Al-Mustansir conversed with him.... Hasan asked him questions about the Isma’ili faith which al-Mustansir answered in writing....After meeting al-Mustansir several times and receiving gifts, Hasan left Egypt. When he reached his home he announced a da’wa for al-Mustansir and began to spread propaganda.157

The image here is of specific discussions leading up to the establishment of a da’wa in Alamut, and it is far more likely that al-Mustansir would agree to meet a dā‘i through an important Isma’ili’s recommendation – although they would not have met in private. Ibn Muyassar corroborates al-Maqrizi’s report, adding that:

al-Mustansir wrote [to Hasan] to ask about the Isma’ili progress158

The idea of the caliph condescending to write to Hasan no longer seems so improbable in the light of the attention to all matters that he displays towards the Sulayhids. As seen with the Yemeni dynasty, the caliph was prepared to devote large amounts of time and effort in the name of his da’wa, keeping track of the most mundane details. In additional support of Hasan’s claim to a meeting, dā‘is appear to have had some privilege of access to the centre of their faith even if they were of the lowliest levels. On visiting Cairo in 439/1047 the dā‘i Nāsir-i Khusraw was keen to see one of al-Mustansir’s fabled banquets, and this was arranged for him:

I was very anxious to see one with my own eyes... I told one of the sultan’s clerks... [that] I wanted to see the court of the Prince of the Faithful. He therefore spoke a word to the chamberlain159.

157 Al-Maqrizi, II, p.323.
158 Ibn Muyassar, p.27.
159 Nāsir-i Khusraw, p.56.

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Nāṣir’s testimony aside, al-Mustaṣṣir himself was not mute during his reign. He is very seldom recorded as speaking directly – prior to the civil war his few speeches are fairly uninteresting because of being entirely predictable. In 439/1047 he reassured a fearful ‘Abū Naṣr Tustarī, who was terrified of following his brother ‘Abū Sa‘īd as a murder victim:

You rest secure and return to your home. No one will harm you and we have no need of anyone’s money.\(^{160}\)

Much more interesting are the caliph’s responses when faced with rioting and plundering Turkish troops. Stripped of his possessions and forced to respond directly, he yet managed to retain some dignity. In 460/1068 the wazir Abū Kadīna wrote the caliph a note at the Turks’ behest demanding more money for them. The caliph’s weary response shows the strain of events:

I neither hope nor fear; apart from my people all else is secondary. I have my sons and before me my father. They tell me to believe in God and justice.\(^{161}\)

Four years later al-Mustaṣṣir responded bitterly to a messenger from the Turkish leader Ibn Ḥamdān, who had come to demand yet more money:

Ibn Ḥamdān’s delegates entered and found the caliph sitting on a carpet with no other furniture in the room. Nobody was with him save 3 servants. There were no signs of a great and mighty caliph. As the messenger approached al-Mustaṣṣir said to him, “Isn’t it enough for Ibn Ḥamdān that I sit here in this state?” The messenger wept at this and left to tell Ibn Ḥamdān what he had seen of al-Mustaṣṣir’s misfortune.\(^{162}\)

Ibn Taghribirdī – who gives the most examples - only records the caliph as speaking three times, but the third is the most intriguing. In 465/1072 Ibn Ḥamdān was brutally slaughtered by his enemies including another warlord Ildegūz. The latter then visited al-Mustaṣṣir. Given that the war had been raging for almost a decade, the caliph had been left destitute and in the circumstances of Ildegūz’s visit, al-Mustaṣṣir’s reply shows considerable courage, even though he was forced to give in.

\(^{160}\) Nāṣir-i Khusraw, p.58.
\(^{161}\) Ibn Taghribirdī, V, p.81.
\(^{162}\) Al-Maqrīzī, II, p.306.
Arriving to demand money for having finally killed Ibn Ḥamdān, Ildegüz was received coldly by the caliph:

The caliph replied, "As for money, Ibn Ḥamdān took it all from me and he was my enemy. But the hatred between you and him, Ildegüz, has led you to kill him instead of treating with him, and will destroy both of you. I will see the end of this behaviour." Many words passed between them, but it ended with al-Mustansir selling pearls and other goods before giving Ildegüz the proceeds.163

Nor was al-Mustansir speaking rashly; he had most likely already sent for Badr al-Jamālī, who arrived the same year. Ibn Taghibirdī certainly credits the caliph with the sense to realize the potential trouble after his encounter with Ildegüz and – more surprisingly – the wit to combat it, in the final manifestation of his occasional cunning:

The caliph knew that his dealings with Ildegüz would lead to an evil situation, so he sent to fetch Badr al-Jamālī.164

Sadly with Badr on the scene al-Mustansir retreated back into the palace as a puppet-caliph. He is not recorded as speaking again or even playing any part in events. The brief glimpse of his personality is over; as has been seen, the claims of the Hidāya of al-ʿĀmir’s reign cannot be trusted.

**Conclusion**

With his vast and glittering inheritance, al-Mustansir was a major religious and political figure in the Middle East and beyond. From Cairo he headed both the Ismāʿīlī group and the Fāṭimid empire, but was far more active with the former than the latter. His weak hold on his empire was exacerbated by family members exploiting their position without having the necessary sense behind it. The caliph himself was a quiet figure who on occasion would connive for what he wanted rather than exercise his authority against someone. This timidity has led to a weaker

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164 Ibid.

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impression on history than he deserves, whilst his lack of decisiveness was a direct factor in the civil war, the succession crisis after his death and the founding of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs. Thus al-Mustanṣir himself may not appear a striking character, but his very failings in this respect had a serious impact on events that lasted for centuries, in some respects up to the present day.
When the eighth Shi'ite Fatimid caliph al-Mustansir ascended the Fatimid throne, he inherited an army that had been built up over more than a century and was older in parts than the Fatimid Empire itself. From the original Kutāma Berber force converted by Abū 'Abdallāh, the great Ismā'īlī dā’ī (missionary) in Ifrīqiya, by 427/1036 it contained Turks, blacks, Berbers, Daylamīs and various other small ethnic contingents. Whilst the estimate of 215,000 men given by a Persian visitor to Cairo in 439/1047-8 is almost certainly excessive, it is clear that by al-Mustansir's time his army was both large and ethnically complex. However, this model contained inherent problems; rivalries between ethnic groups were rampant, demands for increased pay and privileges frequent, and the need for careful but firm handling of the army essential. Under al-Mustansir, the balancing act failed and the army's behaviour deteriorated from inter-troop skirmishes to all-out war which decimated the Empire, finally breaking down altogether by 455/1063 into total anarchy. With the arrival in 466/1074 of the Armenian warlord and wazir (minister) Badr al-Jamālī, who brought his own private army with him, the old military model was destroyed completely for the wazir’s army, the various factions moulded into one force with allegiance to the wazir rather than the caliph.

The army at this time has already been extensively researched by Yaacov Lev. However, whilst exhaustive in some areas, Lev’s work is not concerned with the human activity behind the military. For al-Mustansir’s army this is particularly

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important because much of the motivation behind events sprang from emotional motives. Jealousy, envy, pride and even affection all directed various factions' responses to the varying situation. In addition, it is vital to see both the earlier Fāṭimid army and that of Badr al-Jamālī as diverse groups of people as well as military forces to understand fully what lay behind the collapse of one and the cohesion of the other.

**Ethnic Factions**

The Persian Ismā‘īlī Nāṣir-i Khusraw, visiting Egypt in 439/1047-8, gives a doubtlessly inflated description of the army that highlights its sheer size but also its widely diverse units:

The sultan’s soldiers stand in groups and battalions and each ethnic group has a name. One group is called the Kotāmis [sic].... Another group called the Bātelis came from the Maghreb...Another group... are Turks and Persians, non-Arab by origin.... Another group is called the ‘Abid al-Sherā... said to be thirty thousand in number.... The Bedouins....all fifty thousand of them... Ostādhs...Sarā’is....Zanjis...also a contingent of princes from all over the world167

The in-depth analysis offered by Nāṣir includes some units – such as the princes – who did not play an individual role in the military rivalry. The actual protagonists are mainly identified as the Kutāma Berbers, the Turks and the blacks.

**The Kutāma**

In 280/893, the Shi‘ite Ismā‘īlī dā‘ī (missionary) Abū ‘Abdallāh arrived in Ifrīqiya, on a mission to prepare the country for the arrival of his caliph, al-Mahdī, who was in hiding in Syria. He enjoyed notable success in his efforts to convert the population to Ismā‘īlism with the Kutāma, a native tribe who controlled the mountainous region of Ikjān in modern-day eastern Algeria. Over the next eighteen

167 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, p.50.

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years, Abū ‘Abdallāh organised and trained this fledgling army until in 296/909 he defeated the ruling Sunni Aghlabid army to conquer the cities of Qayrawān and Raqqāda. The following year, al-Mahdī entered Raqqāda in triumph. Although he had actually proclaimed himself imām in 286/899 in Syria, he had no empire prior to the Aghlabid defeat, and thus owed the foundation of the Fāṭimid Empire to Abū ‘Abdallāh and the Kutāma troops.168

The Kutāma’s position as the entire Fāṭimid army did not last long after al-Mahdī’s arrival. Finding the Aghlabid slave forces - both blacks from Nubia and white Ṣaḍāqība eunuchs from Spain169 - still in Qayrawān, he promptly incorporated them into his own army thus marking the beginning of the diverse army al-Mustanṣir would inherit170. By the time al-Mu’izz successfully conquered Egypt in 358/969, the Kutāma’s stranglehold on the military was beginning to loosen, although they still provided the bulk of the forces. More blacks and white slaves had come in, since the Kutāma on their own had limitations171. Numerically, they may not have been sufficient to attack the Ikhshīdīd forces in Egypt alone, but they also were hampered by their fighting style. Where they fought on horseback with spears, those armies further east depended heavily on archery, to which the Kutāma had no effective reply. As Lev points out, the army had to change for the Fāṭimid “to accommodate themselves to the military realities of the Eastern Islamic world to which the Fāṭimid were not exposed in North Africa”.172 However, whilst archers and more troops were brought in, the Kutāma still enjoyed a privileged position. Exempt from taxation, they were known as the awlīyā (friends or adherents), demonstrating their special status within the Fatimid military framework173. The heads of some Kutāma families could become protégés of the Fāṭimid royal family174.

172 Lev, State and Society, p.90.
By 427/1036, this situation had altered somewhat, and the Kutāma no longer enjoyed the status they once had. During the reign of Al-ʿAzīz, the caliph had reformed the military by bringing in more troops from ethnically diverse groups, whilst his successor al-Ḥākim further increased the numbers of black troops. More significantly, privileges once open to the Kutāma alone had been extended. Patronage was given to soldiers from all ethnic backgrounds, whilst the awlīyyāʾ term was now also used elsewhere. A Kutāma revolt against this in al-Ḥākim’s reign was rapidly defeated and led to the loss of their land grants, and although al-ʿAzīz had attempted to recruit more Kutāma from Iīrīqiya, he was unsuccessful.

Moreover, many Kutāma had settled in Fustat and intermarried with the local populace; many of their children did not join the army but lived as freeborn citizens, which diluted the Kutāma identity and the cohesion of their community.

Nonetheless, the Kutāma survived these setbacks; Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s estimate of them in 439/1047-8 as 20,000 is not the largest number of the troops, but shows that they still provided a large presence within the army. In 427/1036, al-Nuwayrī’s description of the Kutāma as taking their places by the palace gates and participating in the ceremony with the wazir also suggests privilege through their proximity to the caliph. It is notable that during al-Mustansir’s reign, the Kutāma gradually faded out of the military spotlight. As more Turkish troops were brought into the army, the increasingly stronger Turkish identity began to submerge the Kutāma until they seem to have come under the Turkish banner. Already acting in collusion with the Turks in the accession ceremony as noted by al-Nuwayrī, they were still noted separately, but this changed in later military events. The chronicler Ibn al-Athīr mentions the Kutāma during this period in 463/1071 to claim that:

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176 Lev, State and Society, p.81.
177 Beshir, p.39.
178 Al-Maqrizi, Ittiḥāz, I, p. 262.
180 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, p.49.

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They [the Turks] won over the Kutāma and Masamāda [another Berber tribe] and they reached agreement.\textsuperscript{182} but he does not bother to differentiate afterwards, and he is followed in this by most of the chroniclers. Unlike the Turks, who were seen as the perpetrators of most events in the military at this time, the Kutāma were no longer leading the way, and they became indistinguishable from the Turks.

The Blacks

The black slave troops in the Fātimid army began with a very different position to that of the Kutāma. At the outset, as has been seen, the first black soldiers were those left by the Aghlabids in Ifrīqiya, who were brought under the Fātimid banner by al-Mahdī. These were then added to prior to the conquest of Egypt by black slaves, "Zawila", bought through the slave markets of the Fezzan\textsuperscript{183}, filling the important role of infantry soldiers. Later on, black slaves were bought via Aswan and were lumped into the mass of al-ʿabīd\textsuperscript{184} and their numbers were swelled hugely under al-Ḥākim as a continuation of his father's diversification policy. By 386/998 a black unit was fighting a rebellion in Tyre, and at least four separate black units are referred to in his reign.\textsuperscript{185} Nāṣir-i Khusraw later identified two separate black contingents, each 30,000 strong - again, this is exaggerated, but it means that the blacks hugely outnumbered the Kutāma by 439/1047-8, a massive and rapid increase\textsuperscript{186}.

The blacks originally were less of a threat to the Kutāma than the Turks, the white slaves. Despite the odd occasion of patronage, black troops did not in general enjoy much privilege or status. Those blacks inherited from the Ikhshidid regime were

\textsuperscript{182} Ibn al-Athir, Al-Kāmil fiʾl-tārīkh, ed. A. al-Najjar, Cairo 1929, X, p.81.
\textsuperscript{183} Walker, p.58.
\textsuperscript{184} Although this term merely denotes a slave, it is used almost exclusively for the black units at this time
\textsuperscript{185} Lev, State and Society, p.88.
\textsuperscript{186} Nāṣir-i Khusraw, p.49.

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deliberately stripped of all position and belongings, and black troops held the lowest status in the army. Unlike the Turks and Kutama, they were forbidden to intermarry with the locals "because of their servile status and ethnic barrier"\(^{187}\) or to stay in Fustat. Instead they were quartered within Cairo, or on estates outside villages that came under central jurisdiction rather than that of the governor, in a policy of isolation that deprived them of native support\(^{188}\). They were also lower paid than the cavalry units. This is further reflected in the chronicles for al-Mustansir’s reign, where in contrast to the numerous Turks named, not a single black is singled out from the al-‘abīd mass.

The increasing numbers of blacks prior to al-Mustansir’s rule were not accompanied by a rise in their status, but rather their presence undermined the troublesome Kutama and white slave contingents, and their ever-larger numbers clearly began to cause concern within other units. In 410/1020, al-Ḥākim is said to have sent out his black troops to combat the rioting populace but they were so violent that he had to call them off and denounce them in front of the rest of his army. As Bacharach notes:

> This incident marked a fundamental shift in the relative power of African troops. This increase in the Africans’ role as an instrument of the caliphate affected the attitudes of other military units towards the Africans.\(^ {189}\)

The other units, thus already aware of the blacks’ growing importance, were further unsettled during al-Ẓāhir’s reign when the numbers increased again, but their treatment under al-Mustansir was the catalyst for the explosive hostilities between black and non-black troops. Indeed, for the blacks the first few years of al-Mustansir’s reign marked the high point of their involvement with the Fātimid army. This was due to the machinations of the caliph’s mother, Sayyida Raṣad, herself a Sudanese former slave girl. On the death of the wazir al-Jarjarāʾī in 436/1045, she immediately began importing large numbers of Sudanese slave troops, whilst also

\(^{187}\) Lev, State and Society, p.94.

\(^{188}\) Al-Maqrizī, Kitāb al-mawāʾīz wa’l-iʿtibār bi’dhikr al-khīṭāṭ wa’l-āṯār, Cairo 1911, III, p.314.

\(^{189}\) Bacharach, p.482.

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making clear her support for the blacks against the Kutāma and Turks\textsuperscript{190}. With their pay increased and their duties augmented, the blacks finally had the political power to match their numerical superiority, which allowed them to seriously rival the other factions in the army. They appeared in the higher status cavalry units at this time also, another sign of the rise in their prestige; this was different to those black members of the caliph’s personal guard, who would always have been mounted\textsuperscript{191}. 

Whilst the chroniclers condemn Sayyida Raṣad for her policy of removing the servility of the blacks, Lev suggests that it was the only reasonable option, to stop the non-black units running riot at a time when the Kutāma and Turks were growing out of hand\textsuperscript{192}. Unfortunately, her activities served to violently increase the hatred felt towards the blacks by other military units. By 454/1063, trouble had already spilt over in the caliph’s presence, and the blacks became one side of a divided army. Sayyida’s policy was successful only in that the blacks are not reported as attacking the Fāṭimid family, as did the Turks, but in giving them power she freed them of the shackles keeping them under control. As suppressed slaves they could do little; as supported equal units they were a huge force and the government was not strong enough to contain them or deal with the inevitable backlash from the rest of the army.

The blacks’ decline was rapid; they were slaughtered in bursts by the Turks, who made it a mission to exterminate all of them. By 459/1068 one of the last surviving groups, holding out in Alexandria, had been massacred\textsuperscript{193}. However, some clearly survived the civil war, since after Badr al-Jamālī had subdued Egypt by 469/1078 he had formed a black guard made up of those left in Upper Egypt, and possibly another unit\textsuperscript{194}. In later years they would come to form the main section of the army, and fought for the Fāṭimid survival against Saladin before finally being wiped out.

**The Turks**

\textsuperscript{190} Ibn Muyassar, Akhbār Miṣr, ed. H. Massé, Cairo 1919, p.19.
\textsuperscript{192} Lev, State and Society, p.95.
\textsuperscript{193} Al-Maqrīzī, Iṭṭā‘īẓ, II, p.273.
\textsuperscript{194} Bacharach, p.486.
Like the term al-'abid for the blacks, the Turks' designation as Rūmīs in the chronicles is actually a general banner for a variety of units, only some of which would be recognised in the modern sense as Turkish. Nor did they all have similar status. Within this term were freeborn Persians and Turks from Central Asia, Daylamīs (they are occasionally distinguished), and slaves from both Asia and Europe - the Ṣaqāliba, whose homeland is unidentified. Others were the Egyptian-born offspring of Eastern troops and the local population\(^{195}\). However, as "Turks" they, like the blacks, formed a cohesive group in the later military struggles for supremacy, and were the most dynamic within the army. They were also the group with the most prestige once the Kutāma began to decline under al-ʿAzīz.

As has been seen, the first "Turks" in the wider sense were those white slave troops belonging to the old Sunnī Aghlabīd and Ikhshīdīd units, who had been incorporated into the Fāṭimid army after the conquest of Egypt. Most of these "Turks" had probably been brought to Egypt via the Sunnī world, an option closed to the Shiʿīte Fāṭimids. The numbers began to notably increase once the specific need for archers within the army had been identified, and actual Turkish troops rather than Ṣaqāliba are generally thought to have first arrived in 367/978 at Tawahīn\(^{196}\). Prior to this, the Fāṭimid army's efforts at extending the conquered territory into Syria had led to the decimation of their troops by Syrian archers; after this, cavalry archers soon began to appear within the ranks. However, it was difficult to recruit large numbers of Turks to Cairo, since they would have to be brought across ʿAbbāsid lands to the Fāṭimid Empire; they also cost considerably more than black slaves\(^{197}\). This was surmounted by obtaining increasing numbers of slaves from the Byzantine Empire (hence "Rūm" in the chronicles). Some units were referred to as "Ṣaqalābī", the term denoting white slaves\(^{198}\). There is also evidence that men and children captured by the

\(^{195}\) Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw, p.49.
\(^{196}\) Beshir, p.41.
\(^{197}\) Bacharach, p.481.
\(^{198}\) The term may also come from an Arabicized form of Slav, many of these white slaves coming from Slavic territories within the Byzantine Empire.
Fatimid navy were forced into the military as *Rāṁīs* but by the time of Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s visit to Cairo he still estimated the Turks at only 10,000 men, 50,000 less than the blacks and only half the size of the Kutāma contingent – some of these white soldiers he refers to as “Greeks”, who formed part of al-Mustansir’s personal guard and may have been specifically Greek in background.

In 384/996 al-‘Azīz had brought in several thousand Turks, leading to the failed Kutāma rebellion, and al-Ḥākim openly described them in one speech as “fostered” by his father, a marked sign of favour. From this point their position gained in strength. Allowed to intermarry with the natives, the Turks never followed the Kutāma in integrating with the native populace at the expense of their own ethnic identity. Some Turkish leaders also became remarkably powerful warlords such as Nāṣir ad-Dawla Ibn Ḥamdān, who was governor of Damascus for the Fatimids.

They had, like other groups, quarters in Cairo, as Nāṣir-i Khusraw describes, although they were also dispersed around Fustat and in garrison cities of the Empire. Not all the Turks lived in barracks. In one description, Ibn Ḥamdān was said to live in a large house with his own servants, highlighting the high place carved out for the Turks in the army, and the possibilities for gain open to them. Unfortunately, there is no evidence for the other ethnic divisions with which to compare this.

Ibn al-Athīr’s description of the Turks and Kutāma bonding together occurred after the threat of the blacks had become more pronounced under Sayyida Raṣād’s reforms, although the desire for more blacks signals the threat the Turks had already become. Together with the Kutāma, still hankering after their privileges of the past, the Turks were always potentially disruptive. They were not Ismā’īlī, they were powerful and they had both status and money. They were spread out in both Cairo and Fustat, and some were mercenaries, so that their loyalty was never entirely

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200 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, p.46.
202 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, p.46.
203 Ibn Muyassar, p.22.
certain. Faced with the blacks' new might, however, they were hugely outnumbered - Bacharach estimates 6,000 Turks against 15,000 blacks - and so from the 440s/1050s onwards they incorporated the Kutāma and other non-black contingents into their struggle for supremacy within the army.\textsuperscript{204}

The Turks' strength was seen most clearly during the civil war of 459-466/1067-1073, where they rapidly overran the whole of Egypt, destroyed the black troops and then turned on al-Mustansir himself. Their lack of loyalty to the Ismā'īlī regime was in stark contrast to the Kutāma's support of the Fātimids; not only did they lay waste all of Cairo and loot the palaces, they early on showed a lack of respect for the caliph that was alarming, and further highlights Sayyida Raṣad's desire to counteract them.\textsuperscript{205} When this failed, the Turks broke free, and it is no surprise that Badr al-Jamālī murdered any he could find rather than take any back into his own army.

They lacked the dependence of the blacks on the Ismā'īlī regime or the spiritual faith of the Kutāma; they soon identified the weak government and their opportunities for enrichment, along with the lack of reason to fear reprisals. When their demands were not met they immediately turned on their ruler. Lev highlights the danger of bringing in the Turks in 384/996:

\begin{quote}
The Turks and other Eastern troops were military bodies which had as yet no connection with local society. They fought for their own survival, displaying greater cohesiveness and determination than did the Kutāma.\textsuperscript{206}
\end{quote}

This lack of connection, combined with the threat of the blacks to Turkish supremacy within the army and the weak government of al-Mustansir, made almost inevitable both the Turks' spiral into anarchy and their ultimate destruction.

\textsuperscript{204} Bacharach, p.484.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibn Muyassar, p.13.
\textsuperscript{206} Lev, State and Society, p.91.
Other Units

In Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s vital description, despite the numbers being unreliable, various other ethnic units are named. The Daylamīs were noted by al-Maqrīzī along with the Turks as cause for the Kutāma rebellion of 384/996\(^{207}\) and had served in Egypt under the Tulūnids, but by al-Mustanṣir’s time they were seldom mentioned. The main reason for this is probably because they were infantry from ‘Abbāsid territory, and thus far easier and cheaper to replace with black slave troops. In addition, they were so closely identified with the Turks that at one point they shared the same quarters, making it impossible to pick them out during most of the recorded events\(^{208}\).

The largest contingent in Nāṣir’s picture were Bedouin Arabs, but they were not an official unit of the Fātimid army and thus were not involved in the power struggles and fighting; they were probably present because Nāṣir was watching a ceremonial display of al-Mustanṣir’s power and wealth, requiring a Bedouin demonstration of obedience. Similarly, Nāṣir also mentions a unit made up entirely of princes and aristocrats from various countries, which was almost certainly only ceremonial\(^{209}\). Given that al-‘Azīz often welcomed mercenaries, it is possible that several other ethnicities were represented in tiny numbers with the army. However, their contribution to the events of the army between 427/1036 and 487/1094 was likely to be very minor, given the chroniclers’ silence; any white soldiers would in any case simply be incorporated by the Turks.

Organisation

As noted previously, the Fātimid army was divided first into tribal units, but within those units were subdivisions into groups of ten. The reasons behind forming the subdivisions appear complicated, ranging from function and age to recruitment under

\(^{207}\) Al-Maqrīzī, Khīṭāt, III, p.17.
\(^{208}\) Ibid., II, p.10.
\(^{209}\) Nāṣir-i Khusraw, p.49.
specific leaders or caliphs\(^{210}\) each with its own leader from the amīr or qāʾīd officer corps. Above these amīrs was a military official, the Qāʾīd al-Quwwād; since this office was not the highest-ranking in the army, this was possibly a military administrative post, since at the top was the amīr al-juyūsh, the title taken by Badr al-Jamālī, "Commander of the Armies". As Beshir points out, however, prior to Badr this was not the grandiose position its title claimed and designated the head of the Syrian garrisons\(^{211}\).

Even allowing for the inflated figures given by Nāṣir-i Khusraw on his visit to Cairo, it would have been impossible to house all the soldiers he saw within Cairo, and in fact the majority of them would have been situated outside Egypt itself. The largest garrisons were in Syria, the less stable part of the Fāṭimid Empire, with headquarters at Damascus and later, once the Seljuqs took the city in 468/1076, the garrisons moved back to the Syrian ports, thus reforming the Fāṭimid line of defence on their eastern borders. Other troops were placed at the ports and Delta towns, whilst another was at Aswan in the south\(^{212}\). The placing of the garrisons was clearly defensive; whilst Syria was always vulnerable due to its geographical position in the Islamic world and thus required the largest military presence, the Fāṭimids were also protecting their trade and the tourist route to Mecca. When there was an uprising in Buhayra in 443/1051, troops were sent out from Cairo, presumably since somewhere so near to Cairo had none of its own although it had a governor\(^^{213}\). Notably, Ifrīqiyya is not recorded as having a specifically Fāṭimid garrison, since it was held by the Zirid dynasty in al-Mustanṣir’s name. When the Zirids rebelled in 442/1050, al-Mustanṣir’s wazir al-Yāzūrī sent Bedouin tribes to destroy the area rather than troops, suggesting a lack of economic and political importance of the area to the Fāṭimids\(^{214}\). It would also have been far cheaper to use Bedouin instead of mobilizing an army; possibly al-Yāzūrī did not envisage that a military invasion would be economically worthwhile.

\(^{210}\) Beshir, p.51.
\(^{211}\) Ibid.
\(^{212}\) Ibid., p.50.
\(^{213}\) Ibn Muyassar, p.6.
\(^{214}\) Ibn al-Athīr, IX, p.566.
Fātimid soldiers were housed in barracks specifically built and usually named after the unit therein; Cairo had quarters such as the Kutāma, officers’ and Rūmī Quarters. Bacharach claims that no quarters were named after black troops, but chroniclers specify various units within the city, such as the Atufiyya and Sa’diyya—these may not have been actual quarters, but black troops were housed in the city and it is likely their barracks were seen as such. Some quarters were built by army leaders as a public mark of their position; Ibn Muyassar records that the Turkish leader ‘Azīz al-Dawla Riyan in 439/1047-8, “increased his importance by building a quarter” shortly before dying suspiciously. Badr al-Jamālī did the same in 485/1092, with “great gates and alleys”. It is possible that the now empty barracks of the pre-war Fātimid army had either been destroyed or were not up to Badr’s standard. Some soldiers also lived on their iqṭā’ land grants, particularly after the 440s/1050s when plague meant a lack of manpower to farm the land. As has already been noted, many black troops lived on specifically designated land outside rural villages directly under the government’s control. Army leaders presumably often lived in the “officers’ quarter” noted by Nāṣir-i Khusraw, although freeborn soldiers could and did live outside the military areas. Ibn Ḥamdān, who was recorded as having a very fine house with servants and a courtyard, probably lived in Cairo itself, although unfortunately this is not made clear.

Training of the troops took place within military academies known as hujras, which the Fātimids possibly inherited, both Ikhshidids and Aghlabids being known to have had such institutions. Whilst originally intended to groom more elite officers, the hujras were expanded in al-Ẓāhir’s reign:

> to teach them in it a range of subjects and ...... weapons and strategies of war such as shooting, stabbing, combat and so on.

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215 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, p.5.1
216 Bacharach p.481.
217 Ibn Muyassar, p.3.
218 Ibid., p.29.
219 Al-Maqrīzī, Khīṭāt, 1, p.443.
Within the *hujra* students were taught and trained for a certain number of years. However, it is not known whether the *hujra* were open to all troops, and it is possible that black troops, as infantry, were not enrolled. The *hujra* trained troops in archery and horsemanship amongst other skills, and it is unlikely money would be spent teaching such areas to infantry soldiers. One of the named *hujra* graduates, Anushtakln, al-Mustanšir’s general, was graduated early as an exceptional candidate, and again, an elite Turkish officer would not be likely to share his training with black troops.\textsuperscript{220} Since most of the blacks were also based outside Cairo and away from the *hujras*, the chances are high that they either had their own specific academy, or that they simply had none at all. Unfortunately, as Pipes notes, information on this system in general “is severely limited” before the 7\textsuperscript{th}/13\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{221} As to training for the blacks, Lev’s exhaustive search forced him to conclude that “the system that dealt with them... is not even alluded to.”\textsuperscript{222}

It was not just the training that cost money; maintaining a standing army was astronomically expensive. Beshir, in dismissing Nāsir-i Khusraw’s estimates of the army’s size at 215,000 as impossible, points out that the ‘Abbāsid army’s fifty thousand men at the height of their power cost fourteen million dinars a year, and suggests that the Fātimid army never reached over a fifth of that number.\textsuperscript{223} In 436/1045 revenue was 1.7 million dinars, to demonstrate the unlikelihood of Nāsir’s claim.\textsuperscript{224} Yet numbers apart, the Fātimid army was ostentatiously expensive. Whilst Nāsir watched a ceremony, the thousands of jewelled saddles and gold sword hilts along with the horses, camels and armour he saw were a deliberate display of al-Mustanšir’s wealth. Whilst most weapons were made in workshops owned by the caliph, others had to be imported.\textsuperscript{225} Moving the army about was equally costly. Al-Maqrizi states that in 459/1068, the Turks’ expedition to Ramla cost a million dinars

\textsuperscript{220} Beshir, p.47.
\textsuperscript{221} D. Pipes, *Slave Soldiers and Islam*, Yale 1981, xxi
\textsuperscript{222} Y. Lev, “Medieval Egypt, 9th-12\textsuperscript{th} centuries”, *War and Society in the Eastern Mediterranean*, p.147.
\textsuperscript{223} Beshir, p.45
alone. Considering that the Fatimid army was frequently fighting in Syria and repelling attacks on their border cities such as Aleppo, millions more dinars must have been spent in shifting troops around, and in amassing thousands of soldiers for ceremonial purposes. Armies moving across desert terrain had to dig wells in advance and make provisions, and whilst many troops looted along the way, this would be not permitted within their own territory to any great extent. Ships could also be used to transport supplies along the Syrian coast, and Bedouin nomads were sometimes employed to carry supplies, particularly water, inland.

Payment of the troops took two forms - actual cash and *iqṭā*, or land grants. Interestingly, al-Mustanṣir's first encounter after his accession with his troops was over pay. Al-Nuwayrī describes the encounter as a series of evasions on the part of the palace, clearly aware that the salary they proposed would not be well received. He records that, only two days after al-Mustanṣir's accession, the Turks, Daylamīs and Kutāma went armed to the palace to demand their pay details. Prior to this they had already met al-Jarjarā'ī, who had handed over some of his personal wealth since he had not yet been sworn in as al-Mustanṣir's wazir, and therefore could not authorise their pay (although the Turks gave it back in a gesture of support). This hints at suspension of administration at each succession until the *nāṣṣ* was sworn for the new caliph, but clearly the troops were significantly concerned over their livelihoods, and may well have been hoping for a pay increase under the new caliph. It had also been customary to grant *iqṭā* at previous accessions and special occasions. At the first meeting, ten of each group was allowed in to see al-Jarjarā'ī, who swore that their salary details would be known by the end of Ramadan. Al-Nuwayrī then mentions that pay would be three *rizqs* for each soldier (*rizq* translates as “sustenance”, so the monetary amount involved is unclear), and that none of the troops was satisfied with this. Presumably demands and procrastination

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227 Beshir, p.50.
went back and forth, since what happened next was an alarming foreboding of a disobedient army:

This ...continued until 10th Shawwāl, when the Kutāma and Turks united to form one group to demand their duties. They congregated outside the palace gate... al-Mustansir came riding out to the river gate. A stone was thrown and they shouted at him. One of the slaves hurled a spear but missed. Al-Mustansir threw himself from his horse and fled... the next day a hundred troops from each group went inside [the palace] and there was a long debate. Finally it was agreed that they should have what they wanted... They came back once more to swear their obedience.230

The exasperation and fury of the army are plain after weeks of being put off by a palace hoping to keep their pay down. Throwing a spear at the caliph, who was only seven at the time, ought to have ended in the death of the thrower but what happened to the slave responsible is not known. Thus from the very outset of his reign al-Mustansir had to face an army whose demands for pay were insatiable, could be dangerous if thwarted and who were a huge drain on Fātimid resources. This is also an important chapter in the Turk-Kutāma alliance, although the Turks still apparently considered themselves superior - the following month they burst into al-Jarjarā’ī’s house and crudely attempted to extract more pay from him, threatening him with death before he was rescued.231

How much the army was paid was not usually recorded, although it is known that it varied according to position. Cavalry earned more than infantry. Turks earned the most, the blacks, unsurprisingly, the least. Each ethnic group was fiercely jealous of their share of the financial pie; when Sayyida Raṣad increased the blacks’ pay in 438/1046, it caused outrage amongst the rest of the army.232 Conversely, every promotion of the Turks in response exacerbated the rivalry. The Turks were troublesome about their pay - and Ibn Taghribirdī reports their complaining about both pay and their land grants as early as 431/1040233 - in 463/1072, in control of

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230 Al-Nuwayrī, XXVII, p.211.
231 Ibid.
Cairo, they demanded and got 28,000 dinars a year. Whether this is each or for the emirs alone is not known, but presumably the standard soldier was not included to this extent. At the height of the civil war crisis this rose to 400,000 dinars a year until al-Mustansir was penniless trying to pay an army what amounted to menaces\textsuperscript{234}.

The money paid out to troops was administered through the \textit{diwān al-juyūsh wa'l-rawātib}, the department of the Army and Salaries, and they were usually paid monthly in a system taken over from the Ikhshîdids\textsuperscript{235}. These salaries, however, became increasingly supplemented by the \textit{iqtā'\textsuperscript{2}} system, in which land grants were given to soldiers at what appears to be most levels. Some officers were able to use their \textit{iqtā'} to support and pay for their own retainers, so that these must have been substantial grants, unlike the smaller \textit{iqtā'} that soldiers farmed themselves. How often the \textit{iqtā'} were handed out is not noted, but it cannot have been too frequent.

What does become clear under al-Mustansir is that the use of \textit{iqtā'} was allowing some military leaders to become less dependent on the state due to their personal wealth and estates accruing through the system, which in turn weakened the economy further\textsuperscript{236}, whilst undermining the patronage system that allowed the government to keep a tighter hold on troops' allegiance. Claude Cahen also points out another effect of the land grants on overall Fāṭimid possessions:

\begin{quote}
En Syrie... les Califes Fāṭimidès ont... concédé sous le nom d'\textit{iqtā'} de vastes ressorts gouvernementaux\textsuperscript{237}
\end{quote}

As the economy weakened under famine, plague and failed crops, the government fell back on \textit{iqtā'} grants even more. Since every grant left the state with less land and thus less economic revenue, this practice set up a vicious circle of chipping away at the state wealth; by the time of the civil war, \textit{iqtā'} were in any case almost worthless. Much of Syria had left Fāṭimid military control, leaving those Fāṭimid troops still stationed there vulnerable to the incoming Seljuqs, and Egypt itself was in

\textsuperscript{234} Ibn al-Athir, X, p.83.
\textsuperscript{235} Nāṣir-i Khusraw, p.49.
\textsuperscript{236} Sanders, p.156.

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the grip of drought, with irrigation failure and many wells poisoned by marauding troops. In such a situation it is unsurprising that the Turks wanted hard cash rather than land, but al-Mustansir’s resources could no longer cover the military financial drain. The attitude of the Turks at least was still that of mercenaries - without pay, they showed no loyalty, and since the Fātimids depended on them for their military skills, the dynasty had little choice but to give in and pay the Turks what they asked. Without any control over them, this situation made disaster inevitable.

**Rivalry and the Origins of the Civil War**

The rivalry between the two main protagonists of the civil war, the blacks and the Turks, had been rumbling on since al-‘Azīz’s reforms the previous century, but it was under al-Mustansir that the discontent rapidly escalated into violence. The two reasons behind this have been mentioned already - Sayyida Raṣād’s obvious and partisan support of the black troops, and the changes under her of their military position. When Naṣir-i Khusraw saw the black cavalry unit at the Canal ceremony, he was witnessing a signal display of blacks trespassing on what the Turks saw as their military preserve. They had always been the Fātimid army mounted archers, the most expensive and high status troops. Should this black cavalry unit prove effective, there was a chance that the Fātimids would increase their numbers therein and this could only be to the Turks’ detriment. As Bacharach neatly puts it:

> An African victory in the power struggle meant the elimination of the Turkish military role...
The Turks were fighting for their military, political and economic life and the intensity of the warfare reflected it.\(^{238}\)

The army’s outburst of anger at the accession already indicated the divide between the blacks and other units, the blacks not having been included in the meeting over the salaries, and not having demands of pay rises met by the palace.

\(^{238}\) Bacharach, p.485.

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Aspects of the Reign of al-Mustansir bi’l-lāh
The death of al-Jarjarā‘ī in 436/1045 altered the state of affairs further. He had kept a firm hand on the state tiller, and was wily enough to survive over 17 years as a wazir when some of his successors managed less than a week. Unfortunately his replacement had neither his ability nor his firm handling of Fātimid affairs. Although his successor was al-Anbārī, actual power rested with Sayyida Raṣad, al-Mustansir’s mother, the caliph apparently taking no part in affairs of state. A Sudanese herself, Sayyida Raṣad ran the government through her former masters, the Tustarī brothers. Al-Maqrīzī claims that Abū Sa‘īd Tustarī actually controlled the Queen Mother and "ran the caliphate as he wished through her"239, although Sayyida’s policies continued for years after Abū Sa‘īd’s murder. That said, Abū Sa‘īd, as a merchant dealing in black slaves, could well have been behind the drive to bring in more black troops and thus make himself more money. Ibn Taghribirdī agreed that "Abū Sa‘īd controlled Sayyida" but also thought that the Queen Mother was active in her own right:

al-Mustansir’s mother sympathised with the blacks since she herself was black240.

Despite this new support for the black troops, trouble did not flare until 438/1046, and was not instigated by the army. Al-Anbārī was sacked at Abū Sa‘īd’s doing, and died soon after, having probably been murdered241. He was replaced by al-Fallāhī, a converted Jew, who soon became frustrated as he realised he held merely a title and no power whatsoever. Remarkably, he decided to incite the army to murder Abū Sa‘īd - remarkably because it is difficult to imagine that he could not have foreseen the obvious repercussions of such an act. Already though, he was able to exploit the Turks’ disgruntlement at the pro-black policy currently in force. Al-Maqrīzī suggests that the black troops had already caused unrest within Cairo:

Although the blacks had had fights with other units, Abū Sa‘īd had increased their pay and duties. The Turks’ pay and that of those attached to them therefore decreased, and the two sides fought at Bāb Zuwayla242.

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242 Ibid., p.195.

Aspects of the Reign of al-Mustansir bi’Ilāh
This account also shows that blacks’ pay increases meant that other units’ share would lessen, underlining the need for each unit to keep fighting for their own wages not to be cut. After this initial skirmish demonstrating their rivalry - casualties, if any, were minor - and Abū Sa‘īd’s murder, the Turks thus found themselves ranked against the government and the blacks. Sayyida Raṣad, understandably furious, had the wazir arrested in Muḥarram 440/June 1048 and assassinated, in a clear message to all that opposition would not be brooked241. Over the next eight years, she continued her policy of increasing the amount of black troops. Meanwhile the main Turkish leaders were distracted by events in Syria. Ibn Ḥamdān, having retreated from Aleppo in the face of disorder in 440/1048, was arrested by a white slave Fāṭimid army the following year and imprisoned in Ramla244. Al-Mustanṣir sent out a large army into Syria - given that their enemies would almost certainly be archers from the Sunnī world, this army was probably made up predominantly of Turks, meaning fewer Turkish troops in Cairo to rebel against the preferment shown to the blacks. Throughout 437/1045 to 440/1048 the army was busy consolidating the Fāṭimid hold on Damascus and Aleppo.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s visit in 439/1047-8 left a fascinating description of the Fāṭimid army seen at its most glamorous and ceremonial. It was designed to impress, and certainly it achieved this with Nāṣir, who was awestruck at the spectacle before him. There was no sign of the disobedience and growing unrest in the ranks - although the devout Ismā‘īlī dā‘ī would probably not have recorded it had there been - and whilst his numbers are exaggerated it still seems as though every soldier in the Empire had been brought in to demonstrate Fāṭimid military power as al-Mustanṣir performed the ceremony of the cutting of the great canal in Cairo. Even allowing for huge over-inflation, thousands of men were lined up245. Another reason for the lack of inter-army fighting between 442/1050 and 450/1058 was the stability of the regime under al-Yazūrī, the Palestinian wazir who controlled all the state apparatus. Although dependent on Sayyida Raṣad’s patronage for his position, he was by no
means subjugated to her plans, and was also supported by Ibn Ḥamdān. Ibn Muyassar also claims that Sayyida spent years trying to find a wazir who would obey her order of setting the blacks on the Turks deliberately to destroy them:

[Sayyida Rasad] hated the Turks. When Abūl Barakāt became wazir [after al-Fallāhī’s murder] she ordered him to set the blacks on the Turks, but he feared the consequences and would not obey her. She dismissed him and appointed al-Yāzūrī instead, but when she bade him do this he disapproved and ruled wisely until his death. After him came al-Bābīli... he changed her orders to avoid war.

If Sayyida was already trying to wipe out the Turks through the wazir Abūl Barakāt, and still after al-Yāzūrī’s death, this means she had been trying to destroy the Turks for over a decade, presumably buying more blacks throughout this period and supplying them with money and weapons. Also the dangers in dealing with the various army factions were already known and deliberately avoided years before matters came to a head. Unfortunately, there was little that could be done to resolve the situation - without the blacks as a counter-threat the Turks would simply continue their demands for pay unchecked by fear of a rival, and the Turks had a stronger political voice despite having lesser numbers. Buying in more blacks was probably Sayyida’s attempt to prevent an attack on them by the Turks, who would probably have destroyed a smaller population. As it was, they eventually slew a force far greater than their own, justifying the Queen Mother’s fears. The best the state could hope for was to continue the desperate balancing act so that no one side could overcome either the other or the government. In 450/1058 Ibn Taghribirdī reports that the troops sent to aid in the conquest of Baghdad comprised 500 cavalry, 10,000 archers and “thousands of infantry”, so that the army was clearly still impressive and units could fight with rather than against each other, but how many actually survived the Baghdad campaign is not known. Since blacks made up the infantry and Turks the cavalry in general, it appears that whilst this army was ethnically diverse, many times more blacks than Turks were sent out in the conquest. However,

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246 Ibn Muyassar, p.9.
248 Ibn Taghribirdī, V, p.11.
since it cost far more to transport and maintain cavalry than infantry troops, the reasons behind this may have been purely financial.

In 454/1062 the first major outbreak of fighting occurred in al-Mustanṣir's presence, although the catalyst was alcohol. Both blacks and Turks accompanied the caliph and his retinue on an annual pleasure ride to Jubb ‘Amīra [‘Ayn Shams, outside Cairo], riding in state. Yet this year there was a shift in the attitude of some of the military towards al-Mustanṣir. Ibn Muyassar disapprovingly relates the incident:

when he set off on the road this year there was mockery and foolishness. There was wine instead of water in the carriers.... some of the Turks plotted in their drunkenness to draw their swords on the blacks. 249

A fight then broke out in which several blacks were killed and the Turks accused the caliph of complicity:

"This was done within your hearing, with your approval and compliance.".... Al-Mustanṣir denied this. 250

More blacks were killed at a nearby hill after this and the rest fled, but the deliberate ambush in front of al-Mustanṣir is interesting for the possible political aims of the Turks, who may have been attempting to publicly force the passive caliph onto their side. Sayyida Rasad was evidently blamed for the blacks' newly elevated status, but it was not unreasonable to expect the caliph to take a more objective but active stance instead of allowing his mother to do as she pleased. By attacking in front of him, the discord was thrust upon al-Mustanṣir, and he did make a slight effort afterwards; on being told that his mother had been supplying the blacks with arms until they defeated the Turks in another battle the same year, the caliph significantly disclaimed all knowledge before rebuking his mother251. Exactly why al-Mustanṣir did no more than this is impossible to determine. He seems to have found the Turkish leaders intimidating or disliked confrontations. Al-Maqrīzī's description "They [the Turks] went to al-Mustanṣir, swearing and insulting him. He swore he knew nothing of

250 Ibid.
suggests a man who did not want to become involved or face the realities of his increasingly dissatisfied army. Ostensibly the wazir Abu'l Faraj stepped in to make peace between the two sides but the reconciliation agreed upon was worthless, although the Fātimid army was able to fight uprisings in Ifrīqiya that same year.

The following year, 455/1063, Badr al-Jamalī appeared for the first time on al-Mustaṣir's scene, as Ibn al-Athīr records that he took over Damascus from the Bedouin for the caliph in Rabī' II 455/April 1063. The troops Badr was in charge of rebelled and forced him out the following year, but nonetheless, if al-Mustaṣir allowed him the powerful governorship of Damascus, Badr must have been known to him beforehand. This goes some way to explaining why he chose Badr to reclaim Egypt during the anarchy of a decade later, particularly since by 462/1070 Badr was besieging Tyre for the Fātimids, albeit unsuccessfully. However, in 455/1063 Badr was a long way from Egypt and the Fātimid army was beginning to break down altogether. Ibn Ḥamdān returned from Syria, took over control of the Turks and led them to victory over the blacks in a vicious battle outside Alexandria. There are no recorded reprisals for this, since there was nobody in control of the army any longer.

After al-Yāzūri was executed in 450/1058 a string of puppet wazirs replaced him. Whilst some such as al-Bābīlī could still refuse the Queen Mother's orders to unleash her troops to massacre the Turks, others were in office for two days. This meant that above a leader such as Ibn Ḥamdān there was nobody with power over him, since al-Mustaṣir was patently not about to hinder the Turks. Sayyida Raṣad meanwhile continued to desperately build up the blacks in response. In 459/1067 an army of 15,000 black troops in Upper Egypt sent the Turks hastening angrily to the palace again, but the Queen Mother had those there killed by some of her blacks.

Ibn Ḥamdān promptly escaped to the outskirts of the city, but the superior Turkish military skill was shown by the outcome:

253 Ibn Taghribirdī, V, p.18.
254 Ibid., p.71.
256 Ibn Muyassar, p.17.
War broke out in Cairo and elsewhere between the Turks and the blacks which lasted for days. Ibn Hamdän... won victory over the blacks and killed so many that only a few remained in Upper Egypt. There was also a group of them in Alexandria; Ibn Hamdän... demanded the blacks who were sheltering inside. This was arranged.  

Despite this the blacks were not entirely defeated, but in Cairo power was in the hands of the Turks - it was in this year that their pay demands inflated grossly from 28,000 to 400,000 dinars a month. Al-Mustansir, now without even the blacks to stave off the Turkish troops, was entirely at their mercy and was forced to strip his treasury before stripping his palaces of anything the Turks wanted to take as payment. Outside Cairo, many Fātimid garrisons had been beaten by the Seljuq Turks' onslaught; meanwhile, Fātimid blacks and Turks stationed in Damascus in 461/1069 began a fight that led to large sections of the city being burned down. The towns of Damietta and Alexandria had also sworn allegiance to the 'Abbāsid caliph by 462/1070, although since these were under Ibn Hamdän's control this was probably at his command. Ibn Hamdän, freed of the need for restraint, began to correspond with the 'Abbāsid and invited the Seljuq sultan Alp Arslan to help him destroy al-Mustansir's caliphate in Egypt - as al-Maqrizī notes, "he despised al-Mustansir and all those with him". His motive was almost certainly self-serving; he could expect little reward from al-Mustansir and Sayyida Rasad after his treatment of them and slaughter of the black troops. The caliph was also impoverished and had lost control of much of his lands. By contrast the Sunni world could offer Ibn Hamdän money, titles and religious legitimacy from the Sunni caliph, and would possibly allow him to rule Egypt for the 'Abbāsids. Another black army appeared briefly in the north again and created havoc within the country by poisoning wells and cutting the Nile supply line, but this was massacred the same year. After this massacre, the black troops' power was over altogether. They

257 Ibn Muyassar, p.17.
258 Ibn al-Athīr, X, p.83.
262 Ibid.
could not be replaced because neither al-Mustansir nor Sayyida Raşad had the money, the country was in a state of warfare that disrupted trade, and the Turks had now taken over Cairo, making importing any black troops wholly impossible.

The Fāṭimid army had thus changed significantly since al-Mustansir’s accession forty years before. The black contingent had been almost exterminated, whilst the Kutāma and Daylamīs had either come under the Turkish banner – as related by Ibn al-Athīr in 462/1070\(^{264}\) - or had been killed or refused to take part in the fighting. However, the Turkish forces were by no means united, and by 460/1068 they were beginning to show disaffection. In particular, Ibn Ḥamdān’s assumption of power alienated other Turkish emirs, and the looting of al-Mustansir’s fabulous wealth was suspected of not having been fairly distributed\(^{265}\). By 461/1069 a group of Turkish officers had agreed to assassinate Ibn Ḥamdān, but he received prior warning and fled. A battle against his opponents saw him defeated, but he escaped again to Giza\(^{266}\). Another letter to Alp Arslan in 462/1070 might have yielded a Seljuq force being sent to Egypt but the Sultan had only reached Aleppo when a Byzantine attack on Armenia sent him hurrying north to protect his dominions\(^{267}\). Al-Mustansir somehow managed to send out three Turkish armies against Ibn Ḥamdān for this treasonous act, but all were defeated with ease\(^{268}\). Fortunately for the caliph, the situation in Egypt was now so appalling after famine, plague, drought and war that the Turks agreed to leave him in peace in his palace; he had little of any value left in any case. When another emir, Tāj al-Mulk, looted what was left and prevented Ibn Ḥamdān receiving money, there was more fighting, with large swathes of Cairo being deliberately burned:

Ibn Ḥamdān went to Giza and invited ...the other Turkish leaders to meet him. All but a few went and were seized. The district was plundered and much was burned. Al-Mustansir sent an army to attack Ibn Ḥamdān; they were routed and some fled.\(^{269}\)

\(^{264}\) Ibn al-Athīr, X, p.82.

\(^{265}\) Ibn Muyassar, p.18.

\(^{266}\) Ibid., p.19.

\(^{267}\) Ibid., p.20.

\(^{268}\) Ibn al-Athīr, X, p.85.

\(^{269}\) Ibid., p.86.

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With the royal family and the Fāṭimid Empire utterly destitute, the Fāṭimid army as such had ceased to exist. Ibn Ḥamdān was scarcely a Fāṭimid soldier so much as a brutal warlord, and neither Turks nor blacks fought so much for the caliph at this time as they did for their own agenda. The troops still in Egypt were scattered, allegiances made and swiftly broken, and a confusing stream of minor emirs appeared to cause trouble. That those minor soldiers involved were fighting for the leaders rather than al-Mustansir, made clear when Ta‘j al-Mulk’s army was beaten by Ibn Ḥamdān’s. Although Ibn Muyassar writes that "Al-Mustansir was defeated"²⁷⁰, it was not the caliph’s army fighting, and was led by the man who had plundered his palace in violation of the pact. The next four years until 466/1074 when Badr arrived were a depressing tale of anarchy, destruction and suffering. Ibn Ḥamdān was murdered in his own courtyard in 465/1073:

Ibn Ḥamdān had felt safe because of his power. One night in Rajab [March-April] the Turks who were his enemies rode just before dawn to his house in Cairo. This was a large building, its location well-known. They entered without permission and fell on him in the courtyard as he was without help. They stabbed him with swords [and] beheaded him ²⁷¹.

It was claimed that al-Mustansir had “connived in Ibn Ḥamdān’s murder to breathe after Ibn Ḥamdān’s suffocating grip” ²⁷², but if true he simply found himself at the mercy of Ibn Ḥamdān’s enemies. After over a decade of disruption and strife, the caliph was finally moved to ask Badr al-Jamālī to come to Egypt, and the Fāṭimid army entered another phase of its history²⁷³.

**Badr al-Jamālī’s Army**

Al-Mustansir, as already noted, knew of Badr prior to his invitation to Cairo, although there is no indication that he had ever met him. An Armenian of around

²⁷⁰ Ibn Muyassar, p.21.
²⁷¹ Ibid., p.22.
²⁷² Ibid.
sixty who was originally a slave, Badr was briefly governor of Damascus in 455/1063 and besieged various cities (albeit usually unsuccessfully) for al-Mustansir such as Tyre before becoming governor of Acre. From al-Maqrizi’s account, it was after Ibn Ḥamdān’s murder that al-Mustansir finally invited Badr to bring order to the anarchy in Egypt. Having apparently thought that Ibn Ḥamdān’s death would bring him peace, he was dismayed to find the killers every bit as overbearing towards him and demanding of money. In 466/1074 therefore, the caliph wrote to Badr for help.

Badr’s response demonstrates not only his political intelligence but his view of the remaining Fāṭimid military. He gave al-Mustansir two conditions, “that he bring his own army and that the army and ministers in Egypt be wiped out.” Whilst he would obviously be aware of the situation in Egypt, he presumably also guessed that attempting to set Egypt to rights would be impossible with an army that had shown itself to be undisciplined, dangerous and violently unstable. He had no interest in rejuvenating what remained of the Turkish troops or incorporating them into his own forces. In fact, had he attempted to do so his chances of success were slim given the bloody events of the previous decade within the troops, particularly since Badr was not a Turk himself. It is significant that he began his campaign in secret, and gave the Turks no sign of his intentions, so that “they thought he was there to do as they wished,” presumably as another ineffective minister of the caliph.

Badr’s arrival in Egypt took many by surprise, since he flouted the usual custom of not travelling in winter, and sailed from Acre to Damietta in December without any difficulty. How many troops he brought with him is open to conjecture. Al-Maqrīzī states that on his arrival in Cairo his followers entered the city “in secret, one by one until nine hundred were inside” but numbers elsewhere are not given.

What made this army different from the original Fāṭimid force was its unity and

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274 Ibn Taghribirdi, V, p.22.
275 Al-Maqrizi, Itti’āz, II p.311.
276 Ibid., p.312.
277 Ibn Muyassar, p.22.
278 Al-Maqrizi, Itti’āz, II, p.312.

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status as Badr's private army, almost all of whom were Armenians, probably archers. Like the Turks, the Armenians were also known for their skill with the bow when on horseback\textsuperscript{279}. That said, they cannot have been a very large force. Once established in Egypt, Badr's many attempts to regain Syrian cities beyond the coastal strip all failed against the Seljuq Turks, suggesting that they were not in fact a numerous or particularly brilliant army. However, in Egypt they blazed a trail of success. This was partly down to Badr's ruthlessness and cunning but also, as Lev notes, because "the different elements which had assumed power... pursued their own narrow, selfish interests... Badr, therefore, could crush each one separately"\textsuperscript{280}.

The first strike against the marauding tatters of al-Mustanṣir's army was taken on the first night Badr was in Cairo, having already arranged food supplies for his troops on his journey from Damietta, another sign of his administrative capabilities. Every important Turkish emir was invited to a banquet - where the food came from in such a time of deprivation is a puzzle in itself - and after much drinking, were set on by Badr's troops and slain. Any leaders left were routed out and murdered apart from a few who fled to Syria, before many of the government ministers, including the then wazir Abū Kadina, were also killed\textsuperscript{281}. This marked a period of ruthless killing to wipe out nearly every element of the rebellious army. In 467/1075 Badr was on the coast fighting rebels, burning Damietta and clearing Alexandria. Two years later a night attack on an Arab army in Upper Egypt was successful before the Armenians marched to Aswan to defeat Kanz al-Dawla, the Nubian prince nominally under al-Mustanṣir's rule. This was apparently "the last rebel battle", unsurprisingly, since almost all Badr's enemies had been massacred within three years\textsuperscript{282}.

Al-Mustanṣir had hastened to recognize Badr's achievements by 467/1075, investing him with various titles, amongst them wazir, chief qāḍī and Commander of the Armies, "amīr al-juyūsh". However, this title had a different significance to the same

\textsuperscript{279} Beshir, p.43.
\textsuperscript{280} Lev, State and Society, p.45.
\textsuperscript{281} Al-Maqrlīzī, Itti'āz, II, p.312.
\textsuperscript{282} Ibid., p.316.
title held by Ibn Ḥamdān. Despite the latter's attempts to enforce what Badr had managed, namely unopposed military rule on Egypt, this title had meant simply the military chief of Damascus. For Badr al-Jamālī, it was a literal translation, since the entire army belonged to him. It was also a recognition that his private force had become the Fāṭimid army, an acknowledgement that al-Mustaṣir had no other army but his wazir's. This marked a vital shift in military positioning that would prove fatal in later years of the dynasty, and even within al-Mustaṣir's own reign. Prior to Badr's investiture the army had ultimately come under the caliph's command. Admittedly, under al-Mustaṣir this had not counted for a great deal, yet it had given him a genuine power had he cared or been able to use it. The instances of troops coming to see him show that they at least believed he was in ultimate control of them. Once Badr al-Jamālī's army replaced the old forces, al-Mustaṣir had no control over them and no administrative position. Symbolically he was still their leader, but he had no actual say in military matters. The Fāṭimid army had moved under the wazir's control. This is hardly surprising - after all, in agreeing to put his personal army entirely at the Fāṭimid disposal, Badr was inevitably motivated by his personal interests. Whereas previously the military had defended the caliph's Empire, after 466/1074 it was in fact protecting Badr's domain with al-Mustaṣir as a convenient figurehead.

That al-Mustaṣir did not realize this would happen is difficult to credit, particularly given his decade of misery at the hands of his own forces; by permitting Badr to destroy what remained of the old army, he was putting a great deal of trust into the Armenian force, and indeed much of that trust proved to be justified. He had never displayed much interest in military affairs nor any skill, unlike caliphs such as al-ʿAzīz, who was notably active in the area. However, possibly he did not understand how much power was bound up within the military given the Fāṭimid state structure. Without the army at his command, he could only be passive and had little chance of seizing power back from Badr unless he could somehow win over the Armenian army or find another of his own, both equally unlikely. Unlike the Ismāʿīlī Kutāma with their ties of loyalty to his caliphate, Badr's army had no reason to support him.
unless the wazir ordered them to do so. Thus the army, from the caliph's viewpoint, changed from a protective force into something closer akin to a prison guard.

Having enjoyed the run of success in Egypt in restoring order, Badr turned his attention to Syria, and a series of campaigns to win back former Fāṭimid cities. Along the coast his army managed to take Tyre, Acre, Sidon and Jebel. Further inland, however, they were less effective, failing three times to win Damascus. Possibly they were outclassed by a much larger Seljuq army, whereas along the coast the Seljuq presence was far weaker. Most of these attempts were led by Badr's general Nāṣir al-Dawla al-Juyūshi, his patronymic denoting that he belonged to Badr.

This was another signal shift within the military, since previously he would have been "al-Mustanṣirī", of the caliph. Badr himself did take this patronymic to portray himself as the protégé of al-Mustanṣir, but this was a meaningless, albeit courteous title. Lev suggests that Badr's use of patronage terms, despite his being far more powerful than the patron, was a diplomatic tactic to bestow legitimacy on an Armenian Christian taking over a Muslim state, and to smooth over any potential resistance arising from that. It could also have been a deliberate step to win international status; without this token nod to the caliph's status, Badr was one more warlord in a region of many. With ostensible patronage, he gained public legitimacy and his army was an imperial rather than a personal force, and accordingly more intimidating to those with their eyes on Egypt. An attack by the Turkish leader Atsiz was repelled in 469/1077; he tried again in 472/1080 but was beaten off, after which the only notable unrest within Egypt itself was Badr's son's rebellion of 477/1085. Badr enjoyed considerably less success in Syria, frontier of the Seljuq Turks.

The new army left its mark on the urban landscape of Cairo, and military fortifications built by Badr still remain in parts today. Given the chroniclers' descriptions of Badr al-Jamālī's frequent marches up and down Egypt, he did not

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283 Ibn Muyassar, p.28.
284 Lev, State and Society, p.47.
285 Ibn Muyassar, p.25.
have enough men to man garrisons as had been done previously. Indeed, in
477/1084, his own son was able to take over Alexandria with no evidence of a fight
and stand against his father, suggesting that there was no permanent or sizeable
military presence there either\(^{286}\). Since he had destroyed what remained of the
military, there was probably less to fear than there had been in earlier years; Ifrīqiya
was still suffering the decimation of al-Yāzūrī's doing over twenty years before,
Nubia had been subjugated, and the only real threat lay to the East, where Fāṭīmid
troops were often active. Thus the system of defence altered, with the scattered
troops of before pulled back into Cairo, which the wazir then fortified far more
strongly. Cairo had already had fortifications, but it seems that Badr made them far
larger and stronger. Al-Maqrīzī reports that he pulled the old Bāb Zuwayla back,
put in a larger gate and walls and installed a system of alleys so that any incoming
attackers would be at the city's mercy should they breach the gate\(^{287}\). Close to the
Bāb Zuwayla he also built his new quarter. He may have taken over some of the old
barracks that survived the fire of 464/1072\(^{288}\), although taking into account his
building programme within Cairo, it is more feasible that he started afresh. Thus
even the layout of the city took on a new face in the wake of his arrival.

Although the evidence is scanty, it would also appear that the army began to expand,
and also to take on a slightly more diverse character. Black slave troops reappeared
to a far lesser extent than previously. According to al-Maqrīzī, a small number had
escaped the Turks' slaughter in Upper Egypt and never disbanded, leading Badr to
recruit a black guard into his army\(^{289}\). The advantages to this were several. Like the
Kutāma before them, the Armenians were not particularly numerous, and since
Armenia was now under the Seljuq Sultan's control, recruitment could prove
difficult. Black troops were also cheaper and easier to obtain, whilst those surviving
black troops in Upper Egypt were already experienced in warfare. Furthermore, with
Upper Egypt firmly back under state control, they had no power base of their own.

\(^{287}\) Ibid., p.327.
\(^{288}\) Ibn Muyassar, p.21.
\(^{289}\) Al-Maqrīzī, \textit{Khīṭāt}, II, p.3.

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from which to rebel against Badr al-Jamālī, and had in fact never actually rebelled against al-Mustansir. Al-Maqrīzī gives this loyalty as a reason for Badr’s bringing the surviving blacks back into the military fold\textsuperscript{290}. A repeat of Sayyida Rasad’s partisanship was also impossible given the caliph’s puppet role. Thus the black guard was formed, and was augmented; by 518/1124 they made up 700 out of a force of 1100 men, the rest being Armenian\textsuperscript{291}. In 564/1169 they fought for the caliphate but were defeated against the wazir Saladin, demonstrating the same loyalty to the caliphate as had the Kutāma two hundred years earlier.

The rest of al-Mustansir’s reign was fairly uniform and little is recorded as happening; certainly the military were quiescent. In 487/1094, when Badr died, the aging al-Mustansir tried once more to take back the power he had unwittingly surrendered. He failed almost immediately because the army officers were all behind al-Afdal, Badr’s son\textsuperscript{292}. Once again the caliph sank back into his figurehead role, forced by the military, until his own death a few months later. Al-Afdal then used his army to install al-Musta’lī, the youngest son, on the throne, and to kill the eldest, Nizār. Nizār fled to Alexandria, but significantly could not raise a military presence, a testament to the army’s allegiance to the al-Jamālī wazirs. Although the people let him in, al-Afdal swiftly took the city and, according to Ibn al-Athīr at least, had Nizār walled up\textsuperscript{293}. Thus the Fātimid army embarked on a new era, and the caliphate was shaped to accommodate this.

**Fighting during al-Mustansir’s Reign**

Between 427-487/1036-1094, there were few years when the Fātimid army was not involved in fighting. Most of the action took place in Syria and Palestine against city governors who had abandoned loyalty to the caliph. In 427/1036, Anushtakīn was in

\textsuperscript{290} Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭāt*, II, p.3.
\textsuperscript{291} Beshir, p.43.
\textsuperscript{293} Ibn al-Athīr, *X*, p.238.

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Syria with his troops attempting to subdue various towns, Aleppo and Ḥamā being noted in particular. Aleppo was besieged and fell on 8th Ramadan 429/14th June 1038, apparently holding out longer than Hammat judging by al-Maqrīzī’s comment that “Anushtakin reached Hammat and took it”.294 Four years later, in 433/1042, the Ibn Mardīs family – whom Anushtakīn had expelled from Aleppo as traitors – were back fighting again against Fātimid troops. The army had not left the area, in fact, having fought off a Byzantine attack on Aleppo the previous year.295 After Anushtakin’s death in 433/1042, however, al-Mustansir accepted the Ibn Mardīs family’s claim to govern Aleppo, and the fighting ceased.

By 439/1047-8, ‘Azīz al-Dawla, a Turkish commander, was attacking the Banū Qurra tribe at Buhayra, although from al-Nuwayrī’s phrasing, it sounds as though he was acting on his own initiative. Presumably he was not, and the Banū Qurra had been causing problems, because on his return to Cairo “he had a great reputation” and was assigned more duties by the caliph. This greatly concerned Abū Sa‘īd Tustarī, who was rumoured to have poisoned him shortly afterwards.296

440/1049 saw more fighting once again in Aleppo. Ibn al-Athīr reports that “the Egyptian army arrived at Aleppo in a large group and besieged it”; however, they were driven back, and a second attempt was abandoned due to torrential rain. The Fātimid force then gave up and “went to Upper Syria”.297 Presumably this army was based in Damascus, but moved around freely as required – or the chroniclers could be referring to several different bands of Fātimid soldiers within Syria. Unfortunately, this is not made clear. In 441/1050 Aleppo was yet again under siege, and the Fātimid troops were once more victorious, whilst the following year the Banū Qurra were subdued at Giza and pledged allegiance to al-Mustansīr.298

294 Al-Maqrīzī, Itti‘ār, II, p.177
295 Ibid., p.188.
296 Al-Nuwayrī, XXVII, p.216.
297 Ibn al-Athīr, IX, p.549.
298 Ibid., p.578. Ibn Muyassar records this as happening in 443/1051.
In 446/1054, a Fātimid force attacked Byzantine forces at Afāmiyya in a misunderstanding over the grain supply to Egypt. One leader, Ibn Malhum Qastūn, took the initiative to raid Antioch, much to the embarrassment of Cairo when he was captured.299 In 447/1055, Aleppo had come under threat again from Turcomen, but the attack on Baghdad apparently took precedence, with large numbers of troops there from 447-479/1055-1057. It was not until 452/1060 that Ibn Ḥamdān could attempt to win back Aleppo, which he failed to do in the face of Turcomen and Bedouin troops.300 After this, the chroniclers turn their attention to the brewing inter-army strife, so that if there was indeed further fighting in Syria, it is not recorded for the Fātimids. That said, Ibn Muyassar claims that “there was always war between Syria and Egypt”, referring specifically to a skirmish in Damascus in 460/1068.301

During the civil war, what had been the Fātimid army marauded around Cairo, Egypt in general and further afield. As al-Mustānsir lost control of the Damascus troops, they presumably followed whomever seemed strongest or was nearest; Ibn Muyassar reports that “all the Turkish troops in Syria shook off Egyptian control,”302 Some black troops must have remained, since they would later be brought into Badr’s army, albeit in small numbers, but they were concentrated around Alexandria.

Badr’s arrival in 466/1074 saw his killing off many factions within Cairo, but the next year he had a force at Acre subduing the city and killing the Turks therein. He also fought at Damietta in 467/1074-5 and Alexandria, where he killed any soldiers but spared the populace.303 In 468/1076 he failed to recapture Damascus. He tried again in 470/1078 and 472/1080, but the city was never reconquered. Prior to that, in 469/1077, his army was fighting down in the south of Egypt against the prince Kanz al-Dawla; the troops also defeated the warlord Atsiz outside Cairo, and again later on 8th Rajab 469/5th February 1077.304 In 482/1089 the Fātimid army successfully

300. Ibid., p.12.
301. Ibid., p.18.
302. Ibid., p.20.
303. Ibid., p.24.
304. Ibid., p.25.
seized Tyre, Sidon and Acre, but these were apparently fleeting victories; only four years later Badr – now in his seventies – was at Tyre besieging the city again. On defeating it, he fined the city 60,000 dinars and deliberately killed some locals for their disobedience.\(^{305}\)

The military manoeuvres of the army, like its identity, are thus again in two distinct parts; pre-Badr al-Jamālī, and post his arrival on the scene. Prior to his coming, al-Mustanṣir’s army fought almost exclusively in Syria for the towns that fell so frequently out of the caliph’s allegiance, in particular Aleppo and Damascus. The civil war saw an end to official military engagements; Aleppo and Jerusalem were both lost to the Turks in 463/1071, but al-Mustanṣir had no army to defend it for his name. Once Badr arrived, the new state army was far more mobile, moving from Aswan to Alexandria and into Syria within short spaces of time. This reflected both the scattering of dissidents around Fāṭimid territory during the civil war, and Badr’s desire to bring much of the Syrian territory back into the fold. With a smaller army than previously maintained in the empire, mobility was essential; the shrinking of territory to cover after the civil war also meant that a smaller army could be equally effective at maintaining defence.

The Identity and Loyalty of the Army

In the sixty years of al-Mustanṣir’s rule, the identity of his army went through a crisis in common with the enormous upheavals dominating every aspect of Fāṭimid life. The multi-ethnic force owing allegiance to their caliph was replaced by the Armenian military of Badr; the caliph’s army became the wazir’s army. However, to see the army in 427/1036 as entirely faithful to al-Mustanṣir, or as seeing themselves as multi-racial but coherent, would be naïve. From al-Nuwayri’s description of the argument over pay at the caliph’s accession, the army clearly was not an idealistic Ismā‘īlī military group. At the same time, Kutāma and Turks had already set

\(^{305}\) Ibn Muyassar, p.30.
themselves apart from the blacks in visiting al-Jarjarā’ī without any black troops. The background of the army was not conducive to fostering identity either. Beyond the original Ismā’īli converts amongst the Kutāma, the Turks and blacks were slave troops brought into a foreign country, and their leader was a caliph of a religion they were unlikely to share. The black troops were already rioting as a separate group under al-Ḥākim, as has been seen. It could be claimed that the only time the Fāṭimid army was a coherent whole dedicated to the caliph was at the dynasty’s inception under al-Mahdī, with a purely Kutāma military, and that this ended once slave components entered the army. Slaves were bought often because they had no loyalty beyond what was bought of them; certainly the often-named Muslim Turkish leaders, such as Ibn Ḥamdān, were probably Sunnī but showed the ‘Abbāsid caliph no loyalty at all. Their loyalty to al-Mustansīr was purely financial, so that they were not the caliph’s troops in the same sense as the Kutāma, who held an Ismā’īli bond with al-Mustansīr. Whilst the Fāṭimid force could and did fight with a mixture of groups, the underlying separation between the various ethnicities was never far beneath the surface. Its identity was one of fragmentation and division, loosely pulled together under the Fāṭimid mantle. Since there was no military wazir to be an undisputed chief of the army, al-Mustansīr was automatically the army’s overall leader. The civil war, in which some troops still fought for him, is misleading; the troops did not fight for the caliph as much as against an enemy. Al-Mustansīr lost control of his army long before Badr’s arrival, and may never have had any control at all. What was there was bought, or maintained by juggling of duties – without money, the caliph could not rely on his army at all.

Badr’s army was entirely different, enjoying a far stronger identity. Led by a man who shared their nationality, they had fought specifically under Badr himself. Unlike the caliph, Badr took an active part in engagements, being a commander both in theory and in practice. This second army was an Armenian unit used to being directed on the field by their chief, and once in Egypt they continued to serve Badr. Al-Mustansīr was not of their race, their religion, or involved in the military; there was no need for the troops to give him loyalty when he was Badr’s puppet. The
Commander of the Armies housed, clothed, fed, paid and directed them. The differences between this second army of al-Mustansir’s reign are patently obvious. The Fāṭimid army did not undergo a drastic change; it was almost entirely destroyed and replaced, with only a very few of the original troops being incorporated into the new identity. In ironic contrast to the original Fāṭimid army’s disloyalty in the civil war, the army Badr founded was wiped out in 564/1169 fighting against Saladin, Badr’s equivalent, for the Ismā‘īlī caliphate.

Conclusion

Like so much else during al-Mustansir’s long reign, the Fāṭimid army saw tremendous upheaval and the conclusion of his era found a vastly different military force to that existing in 427/1036. At the outset he inherited a large, ethnically diverse and massively expensive army that was already divided and constantly jostling for more pay or privileges. However, he was its head and the behaviour of his troops reflects their view of him as their overall leader. Paid by the iqṭā’ land grant system and through the state administration, the army also had a social status with black infantry troops at the bottom and free Turkish cavalry soldiers at the top, with the Kutāma occupying a special position due to their long-standing service to the Fāṭimids. The role of each unit also determined its status, with cavalry above infantry. Most troops were housed in garrisons around the north and east edges of the Empire, with a large presence in Cairo, and some Kutāma and Turks living in Fustat, which was forbidden to the socially isolated blacks. Troops were trained within the hujra system.

This balance, never notably stable, was damaged under Sayyida Raṣad’s attempts to diminish the Turks’ power by hugely outweighing them with blacks. Once the blacks began to encroach into the cavalry units and saw pay rises at the Turks’ expense, the black and non-black units of the army divided and inter-army fighting broke out, at first sporadically but with increasing viciousness in the face of no state intervention. This escalated into outright warfare that lasted years, at the end of which the blacks
were almost destroyed, the Empire close to extinction and the caliph was left penniless and helpless against violent Turkish solders. Following Badr al-Jamālī’s arrival in 466/1074, almost every trace of this army was destroyed as his private Armenian force killed off all the Turks they could find and allowed only a small number of the surviving black troops back in.

It is vital to understand the huge change in the "Fātimid" army, which is usually passed over in primary and secondary sources. In fact, there are two specific armies during al-Mustanṣir’s reign that take this title. The first Fātimid army of the caliph’s reign was the one built up over decades by the dynasty as a multi-ethnic force, inherited by al-Mustanṣir at his accession. This army, whilst only partly Ismā‘īlī in religion, fought for the Ismā‘īlī empire at various points in the Fātimid realm and owed loyalty directly to al-Mustanṣir, which was reinforced by various military rituals and displays. This army survived in fragments that were still loyal to al-Mustanṣir – or opposed to his main enemy of Ibn Ḥamdān – right up until Badr was invited to Egypt. The second Fātimid army was in fact Badr’s own private troops of mainly Armenians; as time passed and he became firmly established in Egypt, he reintroduced some elements of the first army, such as the blacks, to help his efforts to reconquer lost areas of Syria and Palestine. However, this was not al-Mustanṣir’s army. He played no role in it – there is no evidence that the military parades of his early reign were repeated. He was not involved with this army, and his personal allegiance was not a prerequisite of the troops, whose loyalty was to Badr. The Fātimid state had two armies between 427/1036 and 487/1094, but al-Mustanṣir really had only one. Without an army, he had no power of any note, and came wholly under Badr’s control. Thus this period saw the army destroyed and reinvented so that it was unrecognisable by 487/1094 to that of 427/1036, and this change of its allegiance would prove to be significantly detrimental to the future development of the Fātimid dynasty.
The Wazirs of al-Mustansir bi’llāh, 427-487/1036-1094

Like so much else of the Fāṭimid governmental structure during al-Mustansir’s reign, the wazirate at the outset of his reign was very different from its role at the time of his death; having suffered greatly under the caliph’s weak rule and almost breaking down entirely in the violent unrest of the 450s/1060s, it was rejuvenated by Badr al-Jamālī. This revival, however, saw the wazirate take on a new shape that cost al-Mustansir dearly. Somewhat disappointingly, however, research on the subject to date has consisted of simply listing the strings of postholders’ names straight out of Ibn Muyassar’s chronicle, without reference to the underlying history. Beginning with al-Jarjara’ī the various wazirs are a fascinating mirror into the increasingly unstable Fāṭimid government. They also offer a string of wildly varying personalities and experiences that reflect the swings of Fāṭimid fortunes between 420-427/1036-1094.

The Office of Wazirate

The Arabic word wazīr translates into English as “minister”, meaning that in effect there were dozens of wazirs within the Fāṭimid administration. Within the sources, it can hold this meaning but also the equivalent of a “prime minister”; al-Maqrlī might refer to “wazirs” but “the wazir” meant only one man – the most senior Fāṭimid civil servant.

The original wazir as mentioned in the Koran was Aaron:

We gave Musa the Book and We appointed with him his brother Haroun a wazīr.307

The word was used in this instance with the meaning of “helper” but evolved over time, with the ‘Abbāsid interpretation the evident model for the wazirate of the Fāṭimid. As Bianquis points out:

307 Koran, 25.35

Aspects of the Reign of al-Mustansir bi’llāh
The term *wazir* came to acquire the sense of "representative" or "deputy" and, under the ‘Abbāsids, designated the highest-ranking civil functionary of the state next to the caliph.\(^{308}\)

Even then, a "wazir" could simply be a close adviser or intimate of the caliph rather the head of the state administrative structure. For the Fāṭimids this was not the case; whilst al-Mustansir had Abū Sa‘īd Tustarī as an adviser, the latter was never referred to as the wazir since this office was entirely separate. The Fāṭimids’ first wazir was Ya‘qūb ibn Killis, chosen by the caliph al-Azīz in 367/977, as al-Qalqashandī notes:

The first man to be addressed as wazir during the Fāṭimid Caliphate was Ya‘qūb ibn Killis, the minister of al-‘Azīz.\(^{309}\)

Bianquis suggests that this new Fāṭimid office came into being due to previous local dynasties, loyal to the ‘Abbāsids, having had wazirs\(^ {310}\). However, it also seems likely that al-Azīz was responding to the vast increase in Fāṭimid territory and administrative structure. In addition, the man came before the job. Ibn Killis, a Jewish convert to Iṣmā‘īlism, had been a tax farmer in Egypt before gaining years of experience within the country’s government administration. He was the ideal person to overhaul the administrative structure and combine Fāṭimid needs with the Ikhshīdīd inheritance\(^ {311}\). The office of wazir placed Ibn Killis above every other minister and was the strongest demonstration that he had al-‘Azīz’s full support as he pushed through his various state reforms.

The wazir’s remit did not merely extend to administrative matters, even before Badr al-Jamālī’s entrance. Apart from his position as overall head of the civil service, the wazir was also head of the legal system and could be applied to as a final resort of appeal. Added to this he was expected to play a leading cultural role at court, fostering poets and musicians. In fact, the power of this post led the caliph al-Ḥākim to dismantle parts of its responsibilities to create two other offices\(^ {312}\). Whilst this

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\(^{310}\) Bianquis, “Wazir”, p.188.

\(^{311}\) Ibid., p.189.

\(^{312}\) Ibid.
worked under the caliph’s own strong leadership, his succession in 411/1021 by his young son al-Ẓahir then saw the simplification of delegated control as the office was restored to its original scope, this time for al-Jarjarāʾī, who would become al-Mustansir’s first wazir.  

The Fātimid bureaucracy of al-Mustansir had thus been developed from that inherited at the time of the conquest of Egypt in 358/969. Each government department, or diwan, had its own staff and chief, but the wazir was at the head of the very structure, beneath the caliph himself. In effect, he was the ultimate pen-pusher within the state. However, he was also the conduit between al-Mustansir and the Fātimid government. Where some caliphs had been actively involved in their empire’s administration, al-Mustansir was apparently not, and relied on his wazir to bring various matters to his attention. Petitions to the caliph were usually channelled through people at court, with the wazir the best candidate. Similarly, the wazir normally controlled who was appointed to posts within the administration. He corresponded on the caliph’s behalf with international rulers. Most importantly, he had the most access to the caliph. Al-Mustansir was not always available to whomever wished to see him – there were complaints during al-Yazuri’s period in office that the wazir could see the caliph whenever he liked, and the others were shut out. As al-Maqrizi notes:

[al-Yazuri’s] rank increased and powerful men came to see him. Important men and chiefs would come to plead with him. He controlled who should receive those positions of honour….. He was also….allowed into al-Mustansir’s presence when he asked, as Abū Sa’īd had done with al-Falāḥī…. al-Mustansir decreed it thus.

Since al-Mustansir seldom exerted his own authority, his wazir on occasion had a monopoly over decisions made at court, and this led to his accumulation of riches as people paid him to either grant their wishes, or pass on requests to the caliph himself. Although the majority of the wazirs under al-Mustansir actually wielded very little power, for thirty-seven years of the caliph’s six decades on the throne three wazirs

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controlled the Fāṭimid empire, at the same time making personal fortunes for themselves.

**Al-Jarjarā’ī 427-436/1036-1045**

Al-Mustanṣir’s first wazir, al-Jarjarā’ī, is in stark contrast to some of the inadequate wazirs of later years. An accomplished courtier, he had served under al-Ḥākim and al-Ẓāhir and his experience at Cairo made him adept at political survival. An early indiscretion in his career -reading al-Ḥākim’s private correspondence - had led to amputation of both his hands, but he overcame this with the employment of scribes, and he held the wazirate from 419/1028, being thus inherited by the new caliph. Al-Nuwayri notes the wazir’s own explanation, suggesting that the double amputation had been a mistake:

[al-Ḥākim] had him [al-Jarjarā’ī] arrested in 404 [1013/14] and his hands cut off. He first cut off the right instead of the left, although al-Ḥākim reportedly ordered the left to be cut off.....

Some asked, “Why did al-Ḥākim cut off al-Jarjarā’ī’s hands but continue to employ him in the *divān*? Al-Jarjarā’ī explained, “Al-Ḥākim punished and dismissed me, but then I was reinstated.”

In fact, the wazir was dismissed twice more before becoming wazir in 412/1021. Interestingly, al-Jarjarā’ī was originally from Iraq – the heart of the Sunnī ‘Abbāsid empire, but also a hotbed for secret Ismā’īlī missionary activity. It is therefore quite likely that he was an Ismā’īlī convert, in contrast to many of his successors.

Al-Jarjarā’ī had already worked for a child caliph, al-Ẓāhir being only eight on his own accession, but al-Ẓāhir’s minority had been firmly controlled overall by his

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316 Al-Maqridī, II, p.191
317 Al-Nuwayri, XXVII, p. 215.
318 Ibid.
319 Ibid. p. 214.

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aunt, Sitt al-Mulk. For al-Mustansır, however, there was no equivalent regent, and the wazir thus spent his entire period of office for this caliph in total control of the Fātimid state. Judging from the evidence of the chronicles, he had a firm grip on the Fātimid helm, and followed a policy of making peace with the Byzantines whilst crushing any potential rivals within the Empire. His personality was clearly forceful; Ibn Muyassar writes that the notorious Abū Sa‘īd Tustarl had been afraid of al-Jarjarā‘ī, and “did not show his true colours before [the wazir died]”. In fact, Abū Sa‘īd had good reason to keep a low profile with the wazir, not least because it seems that al-Jarjarā‘ī was well aware of his and Sayyida’s plans for power. The Queen Mother was unable to promote Abū Sa‘īd until after the wazir was dead, suggesting that al-Jarjarā‘ī either specifically blocked his appointment, or refused to allow Sayyida to choose her own ministers. Given the ease with which Sayyida and Abū Sa‘īd seized control after the wazir’s death, and the lack of political opposition – al-Maqrızī simply says that Abū Sa‘īd “ensconced himself at her side and ran the caliphate as he wished through her [Sayyida]” – al-Jarjarā‘ī must have had either an extraordinarily intimidating personality, a proven record of ruthlessness against his opponents, or both.

Ruthlessness was certainly seen in the wazir’s steps against what he saw as the growing popularity of Anushtakın, the Fātimid general who had been waging war against Byzantium since al-Mustansir’s accession. By 433/1042 al-Jarjarā‘ī “could no longer bear” the general’s success and ordered him to withdraw his troops from combat. When Anushtakın refused to do so, the wazir made a show of covering up Anushtakın’s “cowardice” in an effort to discredit him. He then seized an opportunity to do his rival further damage; after some of the general’s own troops complained of Anushtakın to the wazir, al-Jarjarā‘ī ordered them to create deliberate discord in the ranks. This subterfuge did not fool Anushtakın, who delivered a long

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distance insult to al-Jarjarā’i by finding the troops’ ringleader and striking him in contempt.327

Anushtakīn apparently had no faith that the wazir would be ruled by the Fāṭimid Empire’s best interests if his own were at stake. Unfortunately for the general, his troops, now aware of the wazir’s feelings, began to openly disobey his harsher orders328. Unable to compete with al-Jarjarā’i’s proffered money and advancement from Cairo, Anushtakīn was eventually stripped of his booty, deprived of his post and harried around the area from Baalbek to Hama to Aleppo, where he finally died later in the same year329. Anushtakīn was replaced by Naṣir al-Dawla ibn Ḥamdān, who would later create such havoc within the Fāṭimid state330. However, al-Nuwayrī’s chronicle makes clear that Anushtakīn was threatening the wazir’s power on another level by attempting to marry his daughter into the Namīrī dynasty “to make himself head of the Namīrīs in al-Jazīra”331. Such dynastic plans were more menacing than his popularity through success in battle and explains the wazir’s deliberate destruction of the general.

The episode with Anushtakīn also highlights that the wazir’s determination to survive was his primary driving force, occasionally to Fāṭimid disadvantage. Indeed, despite his general reputation as an excellent wazir, al-Jarjarā’i is no different from the most appalling of his successors in this respect. However, he enjoyed the enormous advantage of having been wazir to al-Ẓāhir at the caliph’s death. Having been appointed by a caliph, it would be irreligious for anyone but al-Mustansīr to depose him. In fact, al-Mustanṣîr had written a letter confirming al-Jarjarā’i in his post within weeks of his accession; since the caliph was a child of seven, writing another to sack him was unlikely to happen332. The wazir was thus at his most vulnerable before this letter was written; the Fāṭimid army’s demands to know their

328 Ibid.
329 Ibid.
330 Al-Nuwayrī, XXVII, p. 213.
331 Ibid.
pay and duties were made the day after al-Mustaṣir’s accession, when the wazir was forced to admit that he could do nothing because “I was al-Ẓāhir’s wazir, and now he is dead.” He offered to temporarily cover the army’s pay from his own private purse:

“I can only give you some of what is in my own house.” And he brought some of his possessions to the palace from his house for [the army], although the Turks were supportive and gave them back..... [the next day] the wazir said to [the troops], “When Ramadan begins, you will know what your salary will be.”

In fact, this was a cunning delaying tactic; the debate dragged on for another six weeks. At the same time, al-Jarjara’ī was certainly handling state affairs; possibly the new caliph’s participation in the month-long lamentations for his father delayed the letter of appointment. By Shawwāl 427/August 1036, however, the letter must have been signed, for the army pay debate was settled, albeit not as the wazir might have wished:

[troops] congregated outside the palace gates... al-Mustaṣir came riding out to the river gate. A stone was flung at him; one of the slaves hurled a spear.... The next day... there was a long debate and it was finally agreed that [the troops] should have what they wanted..... Al-Jarjarā’ī and the army made peace between them.

An abortive attempt by the Turks to extort more money by threatening al-Jarjarā’ī in his own house failed when another group of emirs rescued him. Unlike the majority of his successors, al-Jarjarā’ī appears to have had a measure of popularity. His actions in the face of the army’s threat display a felicitous mixture of cunning, evasion tactics, and the sense to know when to give in – the latter being missing in several of his successors.

Dislodging this skilled wazir was therefore extremely difficult even had he not been experienced enough to defeat his rivals. His career under al-Mustaṣir demonstrates

334 Ibid.
335 Ibid., p.211.
336 Ibid., p.208.
337 Ibid., p.211.
338 Ibid., p.212.

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this at every level. Internationally, the threat of Byzantine attacks was curtailed by a treaty pushed through in 429/1038\textsuperscript{339} and further lessened as Anushtakin’s skirmishes ceased with the general’s dismissal four years later. The army was held to obedience with a careful policy of balancing duties between units; not only did the wazir not bring in the huge, unbalancing numbers of ethnic troops that would prove so disastrous later on, but his treatment of Anushtakin publicly proclaimed that no man was more powerful than the wazir. Sayyida and Abū Sa‘īd were mistrusted and suppressed, whilst an impostor claiming to be al-Ḥākim, who stormed Cairo in 434/1043, was swiftly crucified with his followers on the wazir’s orders\textsuperscript{340}.

Al-Jarjarā‘ī died on 6\textsuperscript{th} Ramadan 436/27\textsuperscript{th} March 1045, having been wazir seventeen years\textsuperscript{341}. Unlike some of his less successful followers, he died of natural causes, and the caliph awarded his death his personal notice:  

\begin{quote}
[Al-Jarjarā‘ī] was determined to be buried in his house where he used to sit. So al-Mustansir read the prayers over his body in the throne room, and then al-Jarjarā‘ī was taken to his house and buried, although the body was later moved to a tomb in the cemetery\textsuperscript{342}.
\end{quote}

Surprisingly, information on al-Jarjarā‘ī’s death is sparse amongst the chroniclers; possibly without the wazir there was already disarray. Al-Maqrīzī limits himself to observing that, “In those days revenue was 1,700,629.5 dinars”\textsuperscript{343}. However, it is evident that the wazir was considered to have acquitted himself well in office. At the time of his death, the Fātimid empire was wealthy and apparently stable. The Byzantines had signed the peace treaty, Aleppo had been reconquered for al-Mustansir, and a potential threat to the throne, in the guise of the pseudo al-Ḥākim, Sikkīn, had been averted\textsuperscript{344}. Moreover, the army was as stable as it would ever be in al-Mustansir’s reign, and mischief-makers at court had been firmly crushed. Such was the state of affairs at al-Jarjarā‘ī’s death.

\textsuperscript{339} Ibn al-Athīr, IX, p.460.  
\textsuperscript{340} Ibid., p.513.  
\textsuperscript{341} Al-Nuwayrī, XXVII, p. 214.  
\textsuperscript{342} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{343} Al-Maqrīzī, II, p.190.  
\textsuperscript{344} This peculiar and possibly derisive name, meaning “knife”, is given by Ibn al-Athīr, IX, p.513. Al-Maqrīzī, more convincingly, calls him Sulayman, II, p.189.
Unfortunately, the wazir’s very firmness meant that his legacy was not an entirely positive one, for he had left no replacement with either his talent or his unrivalled position. By deliberately not encouraging protégés, he left behind him no obvious successor. After being in office for seventeen years, the chances of a similar candidate being available were small. Whilst this caution by the wazir is understandable, in the light of the ruthlessness of Fāṭimid politics, his determination to hold all the reins meant that al-Mustanṣir was not brought into his natural role within state government, leaving matters wide open for anyone bold enough to seize control. Thus his major strength in his single-mindedness also led to the main weakness of his legacy, which was mixed. Given what came after, however, it is not surprising that al-Jarjarā’i is seen as one of the greatest of al-Mustanṣir’s wazirs.

The Tustarīs and the Puppet Wazirs 436–441/1045–1050

Immediately after al-Jarjarā’i’s death, the wazirate underwent a transformation. Sayyida Raṣad and her former owner Abū Saʿīd Tustarī seized the opportunity to gain control of the state, and installed their own candidate, al-Anbārī, the first of many puppet wazirs of al-Mustanṣir’s reign. Wholly dependent on the Queen Mother and Abū Saʿīd for his position, al-Anbārī also found that the wazirate he inherited was not the office al-Jarjarā’i had bequeathed. Despite his actual office being head of Sayyida’s own dīwān, Abū Saʿīd had stripped the wazirate of much of its power and access to wealth. Whereas al-Jarjarā’i had run everything, Abū Saʿīd left the new wazir little more than a title to cover the Tustarīs’ involvement in state affairs. Abū Saʿīd’s brother, Abū Nasr, treated al-Anbārī as his servant, much to the wazir’s offence, but since Abū Saʿīd was responsible for his appointment, there was nothing the wazir could do about it.

345 Al-Maqrīzī, II, p.190.
346 Ibid.
347 Ibid., p.191.
348 Ibid.

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In fact, it seems rather odd that Abū Sa‘īd did not simply have Sayyida appoint him wazir outright, since the promotion from head of her diwān to wazir would have been unsurprising; such was al-Yāzūrī’s career path, for example. Yet he never held the post, his official title being head of the Queen Mother’s diwān. His brother, Abū Naṣr, does not seem to have held any official post within the Fāṭimid government at all, yet both were ubiquitous in the administration. All the chroniclers state that Abū Sa‘īd denuded the wazirate for his own greater power; it is no coincidence that al-Nuwayrī calls him “the most powerful man since al-Jarjārī”. Why he actually did not hold the same office is a puzzle. His Jewish origin can scarcely have been a problem to a Christian queen mother who then chose a Jew by birth, although the Jewish Fāṭimid wazirs, such as Ibn Killis and al-Fallāḥī, had converted to Islam. Perhaps Abū Sa‘īd himself preferred to hide behind his puppet wazirs to avoid public hatred or any restrictions within the role; if so, the former certainly failed miserably. He did not need to hold the office since he had all its power under his control in any case.

Nor did al-Mustaṣir show any signs at this point of restoring the wazirate to its original function, which would both have granted some power back to al-Anbārī and removed more from Abū Sa‘īd. Indeed, the only time he attempted to mould the office back to its original subordinate function was when Badr al-Jamālī was in the post and the caliph’s efforts were far too late. Prior to that point he is not recorded as making any effort to redress the balance of control wrested from his wazirs, many of whom spent a few miserable months in office entirely at Sayyida’s beck and call before being dismissed with no warning. He is also accused of conniving in the political murder of the wazir al-Yāzūrī on trumped-up charges; certainly he did nothing to address the damage done to the wazirate under his mother’s government.

Part of the responsibility for this lies with al-Jarjārī and his desire for sole rule over the state, and part with al-Mustaṣir himself. The first wazir had not been used to

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350 Al-Nuwayrī, p.216.
351 Al-Maqrīzī, II, p.240.
running the state with an active caliph by his side; al-Zahir is described as spending all his time in his palace listening to music rather than dealing with government affairs. Al-Mustansir at seven was unable to fulfil this role – by the time he was old enough to do so, the wazir had had years of personal control and did not appear keen to relinquish the reins. In addition, the question of how old was old enough had never been officially answered by the Fātimids. Al-Ḥākim had taken control at eleven, but al-Zahir had relied on Sitt al-Mulk until her death when he was eighteen, and after her, al-Jarjarā‘ī himself. Al-Mustansir therefore had the example of his father before him, and a wazir who did an excellent job without any effort on the caliph’s part. Given his shadowy involvement in his own empire’s politics throughout his reign, it appears that he was not a man to take control when someone else could do it for him, and this tendency was encouraged by his wazir and later on, his own mother. Al-Jarjarā‘ī was thus short-sighted in not considering what would happen to the Fātimid government that he had shaped to rely so entirely upon him, or to a caliph brought up to leave the administration to others.

At sixteen, al-Mustansir thus gave no signs of being interested in government affairs, and indeed, he could have seen few dangers in allowing Sayyida and Abū Sa‘īd to manipulate the wazirate. He was at no risk of being deposed by his slave girl mother and a Jew, whilst the state was still being run by the army of civil servants as it always had been. Ibn Muyassar bluntly states that “he [al-Mustansir] sat on his carpet... and did not start ruling when al-Jarjarā‘ī died”, whilst Ibn Zāfir accuses him of having “spent money lavishly, oppressing his people... He spent too much to count on finery and entertainments... His management was careless.” It seems likely that the caliph simply continued his life of pleasure and luxury rather than take a hand in government and that Sayyida followed al-Jarjarā‘ī in encouraging this.

352 Al-Maqrizī, II, p.182.
355 Ibn Muyassar, p.31.

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The resulting emasculation of the wazirate would soon prove to have serious consequences, and almost immediately disruption was visible at the court. Al-Anbārī, unhappy with his position, must have shown remarkably quickly that he could not be relied upon to carry out Abū Sa'īd’s orders, because al-Maqrīzī reports his being replaced only five days after al-Jarjarā’ī’s death.357 Ironically, Ibn Muyassar lists his son as holding the wazirate in 457/1065 – lasting a month, he fared better than his father.358 His replacement was a safer choice for Sayyida and her henchmen; Ibn Yūsuf al-Fallāḥī, a converted Jew who had been a protégé of al-Jarjarā’ī.359 Conveniently, he had fled to Cairo from Syria in fear of Anushtakin, and thus had no support in Cairo beyond that of al-Jarjarā’ī himself; after the wazir’s death, al-Fallāḥī’s career was at the mercy of Sayyida. Even more conveniently, he produced a letter the former wazir had dictated, declaring that he wished al-Fallāḥī to succeed him.361 It is difficult not to read into this a ruse by Sayyida and the Tustarīs to legitimize their overthrow of al-Anbārī, using the old wazir’s name to imply al-Fallāḥī would enjoy the same levels of power. However, it appears that, like al-Anbārī, al-Fallāḥī had been misled as to the real status of his new post, and had not expected to become a servant of the Tustari brothers.362 Matters worsened when al-Anbārī was arrested and murdered, leading al-Fallāḥī to live in fear that he would be next; ironically, he was blamed for his predecessor’s murder instead of the Tustaris.363

In fact, this was not the only example in al-Mustanṣir’s reign where the duties of a Fātimid post had been carried out by someone other than the titular holder. On several occasions, the chief qāḍī appointed was not an Ismā’īli (Badr al-Jamālī, somewhat ridiculously as a recipient of the title, was an Armenian Christian), and

357 Al-Maqrīzī, II, p.191.
358 Ibn Muyassar, p.16.
360 Ibid.
361 Ibid.
362 Al-Nuwayrī, XXVII, p.216.
364 Al-Maqrīzī, II, p.203.
365 Ibn Muyassar, p.31.

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it was openly acknowledged that an Ismā'īlī cleric would step in to perform various functions where necessary. Al-Yāzūrī also had his specifically Ismā'īlī duties performed by others, as a Sunnī Muslim, and under the Fātimid policy of religious tolerance, this was wholly accepted. Theoretically, therefore, Abū Sa‘īd’s usurpation of the wazirate in all but name need not have damaged the state. Unfortunately, the Tustarīs were not the right men to achieve this. All the other examples of stand-ins were made clear in advance. Those doing the work for the postholder understood the situation beforehand, and were Ismā’īlī ‘ulamā’, besides being much less powerful than the titular postholder.

By contrast, the Tustarīs’ and Sayyida Raṣad’s stripping of the wazirate was done without official permission, and for no other purpose than to serve their own interests. The new incumbents had no warning that their new title was effectively meaningless, and the resentment was heightened by the massive power the Tustarīs held despite having no official posts beyond heading Sayyida’s personal offices. This power was humiliatingly flaunted in front of al-Fallāḥī, who found himself lumped in with the Tustarīs as a target of anti-Semitism, whilst his prestigious appointment had become a menial job of doing what he was told on pain of following al-Anbārī to a suspicious end. When he finally struck back and incited Abū Sa‘īd’s assassination in 439/1047-8, he was swiftly murdered on Sayyida’s orders. Ibn al-Athīr, probably more accurately, reports that Sayyida goaded al-Mustansir into ordering al-Fallāḥī’s death, finding eager allies amongst the ministers, including al-Anbārī’s son. Having no right to rule herself, the Queen Mother always needed a conduit to action – without the wazir or the Tustarīs, her son was her best option because his authority could not be questioned.

Al-Fallāḥī’s three-year stint in the wazirate was brief compared to that of al-Jarjarā‘ī, but enormous in comparison to some later incumbents. His death also exposed the

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367 Ibn Muyassar, p.3.
368 Ibid.
369 Ibid.
370 Ibn al-Athīr, X, p.81.
price of the Tustarīs’ raid on his office’s powers. Without al-Mustanṣir firmly
guiding his empire, the Fāṭimid state needed an acceptable leader for government
policy. The Tustarīs and Sayyida obviously did not come under this description;
they had no right to any power by their position, and the caliph had never officially
awarded them any. They were also unpopular with much of the population, judging
from the poetry quoted by Ibn Muyassar, and with many troops:

The Jews’ fortunes have reached such heights of wealth and power
They are advisors and kings
People of Egypt, become Jews
For even Heaven has turned Jewish!371

The wazirate had been the only office except the caliphate that could control the rest
of the state – thanks to the Tustarīs’ indiscreet behaviour, it was well known that the
wazir was now a Tustarī creature. Rebelling against the wazir no longer meant
disobeying the caliph’s right-hand man, but simply disobeying two Jewish slave-
merchants. The various loyalties within the Fāṭimid Empire thus had no uniting
presence who was exerting any power, and the disintegration of the state into
factions and power struggles was thus made more likely by the wazirate’s loss of
control at this period.

Sayyida Raṣad’s search for a replacement to do her bidding was not immediately
successful. Following the deaths of al-Fallāḥī and the Tustarīs, she appointed Abu’l
Barakāt to the wazirate, the nephew of al-Jarjarū’ī 372. Possibly she hoped that he
would combine his uncle’s skill with grateful obedience, but Abu’l Barakāt’s failure
to supply the latter meant the former was never proven. The wazir began by
following orders to buy in more black troops, but then flatly refused to order an
attack on the Turkish troops – this almost certainly being Sayyida’s revenge for their
murder of Abū Sa’īd373. Disappointed, Sayyida promptly had the wazir exiled to
Tyre in 441/1050374, appointing in his stead al-Yāẓūrī, who had previously been head

371 Ibn Muyassar, p.3.
372 Al-Nuwayrī, XXVII, p.218.
373 Ibn al-Athīr, X, p.81.
374 Al-Nuwayrī, XXVII, p.218.
of her diwān, and had replaced the chief qāḍī al-Qāsim b ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b Muhammad b al-Nu‘mān in his post on 5th Muḥarram/30th April that year. Abu’l Barakāt rightfully suspected that the wazirate was next, and his reaction demonstrated a clear understanding of where the real power lay. Rather than apply to the caliph, he angled for his son to head the Queen Mother’s diwān. This far-sighted move failed, however; indeed, his tenure was so unmemorable that at one point Ibn al-Athīr mistakenly states elsewhere that al-Yāẓūrī replaced al-Falāḥī in Dhu‘l Qa‘da 440/April 1049; exactly how long Abu’l Barakāt was in the wazirate is impossible to accurately gauge due to the varying claims of the chroniclers. Al-Nuwayrī even adds to the confusion by putting in another wazir, Abū Fadl, between al-Falāḥī and Abu’l Barakāt. These forgettable candidates, like those who in later years would be erased by Badr al-Jamālī, were eclipsed by the arrival of al-Yāẓūrī in 442/1050.

Al-Yāẓūrī 442-450/1050-1058

Al-Yāẓūrī’s survival for eight years in the wazirate owed much to his experience under the Queen Mother and the Tustarīs in Sayyida’s diwān. Unlike the previous three wazirs, he knew from working for her previously that he was expected to do Sayyida’s bidding, and thus understood the limits of wazirate power. However, he was also free of the Tustarī brothers, so did in fact enjoy considerably more power than either al-Anbārī or al-Falāḥī. The gap left by the Tustarīs worked to his advantage additionally, in that Sayyida Raṣad’s options for keeping a grip on government were running out; having sacked at least three wazirs and lost her two closest supporters, she could not easily afford to sack a fourth. Not could she rely on her son - al-Mustansir was administratively dormant in most respects for his entire reign. Sayyida’s difficulties in finding someone who would run the state entirely to

375 Ibn Muyassar, p.4.
376 Ibid.
377 Ibn al-Athīr, IX, p.552.
378 Al-Nuwayrī, XXVII, p.218.
her orders are apparent in that al-Yazūrī also refused to set the blacks on the Turks, yet retained his position\(^{379}\).

The wazir may have got away with this disobedience because of his performance elsewhere. He was undoubtedly popular with the caliph and Sayyida for much of his wazirate; that said, Sayyida’s wishes are not recorded as wide-ranging, and al-Yazūrī presumably appeased her over his refusal to follow her orders of destroying the Turkish troops by buying more black troops and increasing their pay\(^{380}\). Since the empire was being run by her own man, she therefore had no reason to oppose al-Yazūrī’s wazirate. Nor did the caliph, and al-Yazūrī proved himself a competent incumbent. Unlike previous chief qāḍīs, he did not relinquish the post on becoming wazir\(^{381}\) – since he was not Ismā‘īlī, and therefore delegated his duties, this was scarcely a logistical problem, but it highlights the trust placed in him by al-Mustansir and Sayyida, particularly since he replaced the famous Qāḍī i al-Nu‘mān\(^{382}\).

On the other hand, al-Yazūrī may not have held office for so long simply due to his skill at the job. He was not popular with various contingents at court, who resented his control of so much power, and on occasion bitterly complained\(^{383}\). That said, it is notably difficult to identify other serious rivals. His replacement, al-Bābili, was the wazir’s second in command at the time of his arrest, suggesting that the opposing party to the wazir did not have a serious candidate of their own\(^{384}\). Given al-Yazūrī’s control of the state, and the ministers’ impotence in 440/1050, it is quite possible that he had imitated al-Jarjara‘ī and removed potential rivals from positions where they might threaten him. Since al-Yazūrī was both chief qāḍī and head of Sayyida Raṣad’s dibān in addition to wazir\(^{385}\), it must have been difficult for his enemies to find roles of any great weight at court. Indeed, al-Maqārizī accuses him of deliberately conniving with the chief judge to block Abū Naṣr Tustārī’s remaining power after


\(^{380}\) Ibn Taghribirdī, Al-nujūm al-zahirī fī Miṣr wa’l-Qāhirah, ed. W. Popper, Cairo 1963-71, VI, p19

\(^{381}\) Ibn Muyassar, p.32.

\(^{382}\) Ibid., p.4.

\(^{383}\) Al-Maqārizī, II, p.204.

\(^{384}\) Ibid., p.240.

\(^{385}\) Ibn Muyassar, p.5.

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Aspects of the Reign of al-Mustansir bi’lāh
Abū Saʿīd’s murder\textsuperscript{386}. By staying in the Queen Mother’s good graces, he could not be dislodged, and the lack of an obvious alternative to him must have prolonged his own office. It took eight years of complaining before his enemies brought him down with rumours; had someone like the ambitious Turkish military leader Nāṣir al-Dawla Ibn Ḥamdān been on the scene in Cairo as he was later in al-Mustanṣīr’s reign, it is much more likely that al-Yāẓūrī’s tenure would have been shortened.

Despite this, the Palestinian wazir had had enemies at the Fāṭimid court long before his appointment, due in part to his background. Unlike al-Jarjarāʾī and his ilk, he came from a non-ministerial social class\textsuperscript{387}. Ibn al-Athīr describes him as coming from “the peasant class”\textsuperscript{388} although in fact he was the younger son of a Palestinian qāḍī\textsuperscript{389}. At court in Cairo, this caused some public humiliation – al-Maqrizī relates al-Yāẓūrī’s attending a meeting with other high-ranking officials at the outset of his career where he was immediately demanded to leave on the grounds that he was not of the ‘ulamā’ nor the sharifs. The embarrassed al-Yāẓūrī left swiftly before he could be forcibly thrown out.\textsuperscript{390}

He then tried unsuccessfully to curry favour with gifts of apples from his estates, but “not one of them took any notice or thanked him except the chief judge”\textsuperscript{391}. This unorthodox background may well have been what attracted the similarly unqualified Sayyida Raṣad, but it laid him open to ridicule and contempt, affecting both his authority and his support. It also caused a minor disaster for the Fāṭimid empire in the Ifrīqiya debacle of 442/1050.

Al-Yāẓūrī’s overall efforts with the wazirate compare highly favourably with what came afterwards, but his lack of experience outside Sayyida’s court was compounded by nobody in power being able to guide him. In his first year in office, he eased the grain shortage by signing a pact with Theodora, the Byzantine empress, to be

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{386} Al-Maqrizī, II, p.200.
\item \textsuperscript{387} Ibn Zāfīr, p.69.
\item \textsuperscript{388} Ibn al-Athīr, IX, p.566.
\item \textsuperscript{389} Ibn Zāfīr, p.69.
\item \textsuperscript{390} Al-Maqrizī, II, p.198.
\item \textsuperscript{391} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
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supplied with Byzantine crops, only to grossly offend her by refusing to honour the treaty the following year. Theodora’s claims to have been deceived suggest that the novice wazir had not made the treaty terms sufficiently clear to prevent this, true or false.

The grain argument, however, pales compared to the events of 442/1050, when a long-running argument came to a head. All al-Yāzūrī’s correspondence with foreign rulers was composed as if from al-Mustaṣir himself; in return, letters to him were addressed to sani’at, “lord”. Local rulers who held lands for the Fāṭimid caliph were therefore under two obligations, as rulers themselves and Ismā’īlī followers. Yet by 444/1052, Ibn Badis, the Zirid warlord who held Ifrīqiya, was writing to al-Yāzūrī using the address, ‘abd, “servant”, on the justification that the wazir’s birth was too lowly for the proper title.

Ibn Badis had already shown himself to be problematic and disaffected with Fāṭimid rule; two years before, his messenger to the ‘Abbāsid caliph al-Qā‘im was caught, revealing letters pledging Ifrīqiya to the Sunnis once more. Al-Mustaṣir had burned the ‘Abbāsid robes of honour sent in response in the public square and Ibn Badis had apparently been quashed; in his quarrel with al-Yāzūrī, it is difficult not to see a deliberate attempt to stir up trouble in Cairo. His method infuriated the wazir over a sensitive point, but the response is significant. Rather than involve al-Mustaṣir, or point out the insult to the caliph, al-Yāzūrī tackled it from a purely personal standpoint. Having summoned Ibn Badis’ agent, the wazir first demanded, “Does Ibn Badis think to denigrate me by addressing me as though I were not of the ministerial class?” before claiming that, whilst not of that class, he was yet on the same level. This failed to convince Ibn Badis, who still refused to use sani’at. Al-Yāzūrī then sent a letter himself warning Ibn Badis to be courteous, but again, he

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393 Ibid., p.731.
394 Ibn Zāfīr, p.69.
396 Ibn al-Athīr, IX, p.566.
397 Ibn Muyassar, p.5.
398 Ibn Zāfīr, p.70.
only referred to his own interests; possibly he believed involving al-Mustansir would be all the more embarrassing should Ibn Badis again ignore the commands\(^{399}\).

Interestingly, Ibn Badis’ own responses are also entirely personal towards al-Yazuri, as a man holding offices for which his birth was too low. Writing to a non-ministerial wazir as \(\textit{sani`at}\) was evidently considered beneath him, but his own desire to break with Cairo probably gave him the incentive to say so. Ibn Zafir describes the warlord as shouting, “What does this peasant want from me? To write to him as though I were his serf? Never!”\(^{400}\) He is then careful to make sure his agent reports this back to al-Yazuri in a calculated insult\(^{401}\). On receiving another warning from the wazir, he crudely claims, “I will write to this stupid barbarian and tell him that I’ll take his ‘good manners’… and give him an education with them!”, before liberally scattering obscenities throughout his reply\(^{402}\). Ibn Badis’ behaviour is so crass that it is impossible not to suspect a trap set for the wazir and the Fatimids. If he were indeed trying to break with Cairo, he succeeded. Al-Yazuri promptly dispatched two Arab tribes – the Banu Riyah and the Zughba, both of the Banu Hilal group - to Ifriqiya to decimate the area\(^{403}\), which they did so effectively that the damage could still be seen centuries later in al-Maqrizi’s time\(^{404}\). The Zirids, unsurprisingly, took this to mark the end of their Fatimid allegiance and repeated their contact with Baghdad, this time successfully:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{al-Yazuri} & \quad \text{sent [two Arab tribes] to Ibn Badis so they would destroy Qayrawan. Ibn Badis then revealed his opposition to al-Mustansir and his house... His chief of the district went to al-Qa'im [the of the district went to al-Qa'im [the ‘Abbāsid caliph] to offer submission and read the \textit{khutba} [sermon] for him.}\end{align*}
\]

What is also clear from this episode is Ibn Badis’ awareness of Cairo’s court dynamics through his agent; he either knew that he could not circumvent al-Yazuri to

\(^{399}\) Ibn Zafir, p.70.
\(^{400}\) Ibid.
\(^{401}\) Ibid.
\(^{402}\) Ibid.
\(^{403}\) T. Bianquis, “Al-Yazuri”, \(EI2\), XI, p.320.
\(^{404}\) Al-Maqrizi, II, p.214.
\(^{405}\) Ibn Zafir, p.71.
reach the caliph, or that the caliph would not gainsay his wazir. His anger at using the *sani’at* title may spring in part from the wazir’s usurpation of al-Mustansir’s power – despite claims that al-Yāzūrī wrote for the caliph, it must have been obvious that in fact he acted entirely on his own initiative. In addition, Ibn Badīs not only knew the wazir’s origins, but also that he was sensitive about them, although how he discovered this is intriguing. He had an agent in Cairo, Ibn al-Akhūt, who probably picked up news for him when in the palace⁴⁰⁶, but it is also highly possible that Ibn Badīs was in contact with enemies of al-Yāzūrī who passed on useful information.

Al-Yāzūrī’s vicious tactics with Ibn Badīs are difficult to understand; it is scarcely likely that he was looking to coax the Zirids into submission by destroying their territory. To modern eyes in fact, the wazir seems more of a man over-reacting and creating a personal vendetta. Either way he was certainly not acting with the Fātimids’ best interests at heart. Ibn Badīs’ second insulting letter was followed immediately by the deliberate aim of laying Ifrīqiya waste, an extraordinarily drastic step that could only push the Zirids towards alternative Islamic authority in Baghdad or Spain. Nor was Ibn Badīs the only warlord to kick against Fātimid authority – rebellion was rampant in Syria, with the Mirdas family who governed Aleppo frequently appearing in the chronicles for the same reason⁴⁰⁷. Ifrīqiya was less strategically important than Aleppo, but shedding parts of the Fātimid empire was never a deliberate policy in Cairo. Al-Yāzūrī acted on his own initiative, and for his own motives; he never referred the problem to the caliph.

This loosening of the reins of the wazirate, even from Sayyida Raṣād, is further demonstrated by the caliph’s total lack of response to Ifrīqiya’s destruction. Al-Mustansir and his mother did nothing at all; there is no record that al-Yāzūrī was even reprimanded, although Ibn Badīs had always been swift to offer lavish annual tribute to the caliph⁴⁰⁸. The wazir’s star remained firmly in the ascendant, Sayyida still firmly under his spell. By 450/1058, al-Mustansir even permitted a coin to be

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⁴⁰⁶ Ibn Zāfir, p.70.  
minted for him, a signal and very unusual honour\textsuperscript{409}. This was by no means popular everywhere. As early as 440/1048, other ministers were complaining over his increased power – his residence had doubled in size\textsuperscript{410} – but the wazir shrewdly managed to deflect the criticism by insisting that only the caliph ruled, and agreeing to stay at home during some sessions, which would have made little difference\textsuperscript{411}. Since nobody could point out al-Mustansir’s passivity without punishment, there was nothing else to be done. Al-Maqrizi also describes al-Yazuri as having access to the caliph whenever he asked, “as Abū Sa’īd had done with al-Fallāhī”, and that al-Mustansir “decreed it thus”\textsuperscript{412}. Given what happened to Abū Sa’īd at al-Fallāhī’s instigation, this is a sinister parallel, and hints further that the wazir was becoming overbearing in his position.

Al-Yazuri’s shrewdness and ability allowed him to survive the criticism of 440/1048, but by 448/1056 there are signs that his elevated status was clouding his judgment. The previous year had been turbulent; the Byzantine permission to read the ‘Abbāsid call to prayer in Constantinople’s mosque had led to Cairo confiscating relics in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and a diplomatic row had ensued which was still unresolved\textsuperscript{413}. In Syria, Turcomen groups were congregating around Aleppo in a deliberate attempt to isolate the city\textsuperscript{414}. Egypt itself was ravaged by plague and famine\textsuperscript{415}. Meanwhile, Ibn Muyassar reports that al-Yazuri had emptied the palace coffers supporting the renegade Iraqi general al-Basasiri’s attempt to take Baghdad for the Fātimids. Furthermore, the messenger sent to Baghdad was his own son, Khaṭīr al-Mulk\textsuperscript{416}. This is intriguing since two years later he would be accused of sending money with Khaṭīr to Tinnis for his personal gain\textsuperscript{417}; possibly this accusation relates to Khaṭīr’s original journey north.

\textsuperscript{409} Ibn Muyassar, p.10.
\textsuperscript{410} Al-Maqrizi, II, p.203.
\textsuperscript{411} Ibid., p.204.
\textsuperscript{412} Ibid., p.203.
\textsuperscript{413} Ibn Muyassar, p.7.
\textsuperscript{414} Ibid., p.7.
\textsuperscript{415} Ibid., p.7.
\textsuperscript{416} Ibid., p.8.
\textsuperscript{417} Ibid.
By this time, al-Yāzūrī had been in power for eight years, seven as both wazir and qāḍī, and his grip on the state must have seemed as secure as al-Jarjarā’ī’s. He had successfully defied the Queen Mother’s orders for the army, had his own coin struck, and could see al-Mustanṣir at will – probably for the caliph to sign documents. His downfall was therefore all the more astonishing, and this is reflected by the varying details given in the chronicles. Al-Maqrīẓī states that the wazir was arrested in 450/1058 because al-Mustanṣir was jealous of his huge personal fortune, and wanted it for himself. Ibn Muyassar claims that the arrest took place at the beginning of Muḥarram 450/March 1058 because he [al-Yāzūrī] had betrayed al-Mustanṣir by writing to Tughrīl Beg [the Seljuq sultan] and talking of his arrival in Egypt. He also took booty with his son and sent it to Tinnis in Ṣafar with the connivance of his family, women and dependents.

Ibn al-Athīr places this a month earlier in Dhu’l Hijja 449/February 1058, although he agrees that the wazir corresponded with Baghdad. Astonishingly, Ibn Tagrībirīdī, himself an Egyptian, simply does not mention al-Yāzūrī at all. In this confusion, however, what is certain is that al-Yāzūrī was arrested on various charges, and executed in Tinnis on the caliph’s orders; claims that all his family were killed with him are contradicted by the evidence of his son Khatīr al-Mulk in the Book of Gifts and Rarities. The chroniclers’ conflicting evidence suggests that it was done with speed and a degree of secrecy that took the court by surprise.

Also certain is that al-Mustanṣir or Sayyida Raṣad backed the wazir’s execution; the only person who could have ordered al-Yāzūrī’s arrest was the caliph himself, and there were no repercussions after his death as seen after that of Abū Sa’īd. Exactly why it was ordered is another matter. Although the wazir was certainly powerful, he had been so for years, whilst remaining totally dependent upon Sayyida and the

419 Ibn Muyassar, p.8.
420 Ibn al-Athīr, IX, p.635.
421 Ibn Muyassar, p.7.
422 Book of Gifts and Rarities, 96-100.
caliph for his continued position. There is no evidence that he overruled al-Mustansir or drew public hatred as the Tustarīs had, and his disobedience to Sayyida had occurred some years before. Moreover, it is doubtful that al-Mustansir killed his wazir for the money. At the time of al-Yāẓūrī’s arrest, the Baghdad assault was ongoing, and promised huge riches if successful; this conquest briefly did indeed succeed only a few months later. The caliph could also have simply dismissed the wazir and confiscated his fortune, although he was not in the desperate financial straits of a decade later. Nor was al-Yāẓūrī the first wazir to make money from his post; as has been seen, al-Jarjarā’ī was so wealthy he offered at one point to cover the army’s pay.

A more feasible explanation is that al-Yāẓūrī’s enemies – those ministers at court whose own powers were strictly limited by his control - excluded and resentful for almost a decade, began to turn al-Mustansir and Sayyida against him. The claims that the wazir had corresponded with Tughrīl Beg are suspect in that it was the one charge guaranteed to rouse the passive caliph to anger, as demonstrated by his actions in the Holy Sepulchre in 447/1055. Al-Mustansir had suffered rapacity, avarice, incompetence, disobedience and even superiority at his court, but any hint of pro-‘Abbāsid leaning had always been swiftly and strictly dealt with. The wazir’s enemies had had eight years in which to discredit al-Yāẓūrī, and probably seized on Tughrīl Beg’s arrival in Iraq in 447/1055 as a convenient focus. Al-Yāẓūrī’s monopoly on state control, and his nepotism when handing out offices, could have made him few friends – al-Mustansir, for good measure, arrested his entire family including the women – a somewhat excessive step if all he wanted was the money.

422 Ibn al-Athīr, IX, p.641.
423 Al-Nuwayrī, XXVII, p.211.
424 Ibn Muyassar, p.7.
425 al-Athīr, IX, p.610.
426 Al-Maqrīzī, II, p.203.
427 Ibn Muyassar, p.8.

Aspects of the Reign of al-Mustansir bi’l-lāh
With al-Yāzūrī’s execution it might have been supposed that the caliph would continue his active interference in state affairs. In fact he possibly did or otherwise Sayyida had reverted to her demanding standards, it being impossible in the chronicles to tell where al-Mustanṣīr’s actions were his own or his mother’s. Like al-Jarjarāʾī, al-Yāzūrī had not fostered any protégés who could become potential rivals and thus left no obvious successor of his ability; similarly he was replaced by a mediocre candidate, al-Bābīlī. Presumably the cleric fulfilling his duties as chief qādī continued to do so since a new incumbent is not recorded. Meanwhile, by having thrown the wazir to the wolves of rumour al-Mustanṣīr swiftly discovered the upshot. Al-Maqrīzī is blunt about both the immediate chaos, and the reasons behind it:

The cause of the sackings and the increasing numbers of ministers was the amount of lies about each minister after al-Yāzūrī. No sooner had a minister been appointed... than the other ministers combined against him and increased their accusations until he was dismissed and his successor did no better. The people turned to the caliph himself.... al-Mustanṣīr was receiving eight hundred petitions a day... the wazirs quickly lost all authority and power.

Al-Mustanṣīr’s actions smack of hopeless confusion. Not only was he suddenly overwhelmed by the petitions – none of which he refused to accept despite many being a “market of trash” – but having believed ill of one wazir purely on speculation, he then repeated this with every other incumbent. Without al-Yāzūrī he had no idea whom to trust or what to do. Meanwhile the wazirs’ lack of actual power was aggravated by the caliph’s weakness and failure to offer his support, whilst nobody was actually running the Fāṭimid ship of state. It is interesting to note that even the feeblest wazirs after al-Yāzūrī appear to have also held on to the post of qādī although the likelihood of their actively carrying out their duties is remote. Al-Mustanṣīr was either unwilling or unable to take an active role beyond the

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429 Ibn Zāfir, p.78.
430 Al-Maqrīzī, II, p.262.
431 Ibid.
432 Ibn Muyassar, p.16.
absolute necessities demanded by his position. This seems another example of the apathy directed towards state administration by al-Mustansir in that he did not bother to appoint a proper Ismāʿīlī qāḍī to the post again.\(^{433}\) In addition, the lack of authority meant that the rivalry and instability at court in the vacuum of al-Yāzūrī’s death were mirrored in the military and across the Fātimid empire\(^{434}\). By the time wazirs were being sacked after two days, the entire army must have known that the wazirate was a joke and unrest mounted accordingly. By failing to apply the brakes to a growing problem al-Mustansir allowed everything to escalate into backstabbing and violence; several of his wazirs were murdered.\(^{435}\)

The change of status in the wazirate is reflected in the chronicles. Despite there being several years after al-Yāzūrī’s death before unrest broke out on a large scale, the following incumbents are only briefly alluded to. Unlike al-Jarjarāʾī, al-Yāzūrī and even al-Falāḥī and al-Anbārī, these men had no effect on Fātimid power or events. Even more confusingly they were simply sacked and reinstated without reasons being given.\(^{436}\) Exactly what was happening to create this political revolving door can only be guessed. After nearly two decades of interfering, Sayyida Rasād was probably still choosing the wazirs; she may have been pursuing a deliberate policy of short tenure to discourage any ideas of attaining al-Yāzūrī’s heights of power and wealth. It is even possible that al-Maqrīzī’s claim is correct, but that the caliph had simply gone through all the candidates, and was forced to reinstate previous holders because there was nobody else left. This last would represent a ludicrous turnover, and a total lack of control by al-Mustansir or Sayyida. However, if every wazir were sacked due to rumours or hostility, there was no reason for their reinstatement, particularly since most second tenures were as short-lived as the first. Given this it seems more likely that al-Mustansir, having begun by firing wazirs over malicious rumours, became increasingly paranoid and permitted the rapid succession to avoid anyone having enough power to target him personally.

\(^{433}\) Ibn Muyassar, p.12.  
\(^{434}\) Ibid., p.13.  
\(^{435}\) Ibid., p.22.  
\(^{436}\) Ibid., pp.12-13.
Who exactly came after al-Yazuri, in what order, and how long they lasted, is as confusing to modern historians as it was in al-Maqrizi’s time. In her recent book listing the wazirs al-Imad puts Abū Kadīna down as holding office six times, directly contradicting al-Maqrizi’s statement that he was wazir on seven occasions and Ibn Muyassar’s count of eight\(^{437}\). Bianquis skips the problem by noting that a list “is difficult to establish with precision”\(^{438}\). The chroniclers, writing some centuries afterwards, evidently had their work cut out to track the various wazirs until Badr’s arrival. Ibn Ṣafīr tallies with al-Maqrizi in stating that the immediate successor was al-Bābīl\(^{439}\), who only lasted two months before being replaced by al-Maghribī – Ibn Muyassar’s “al-Tārikī” is probably the former, also described as replacing al-Yazūrī\(^{440}\) – but after a few more, Ibn Ṣafīr concedes defeat in disentangling the rest, and dismisses them with “After this the list is too long.”\(^{441}\) More conscientiously, Ibn Muyassar does in fact go through all the wazirs, whom he counts as twenty-four in al\(^{442}\). Some candidates held the post three times, some for two days, whilst one was sacked after it was revealed that his father had been an ‘Abbāsid civil servant\(^{443}\). In such a climate, few can have felt great loyalty in a job they were unlikely to hold beyond a month. As it is, Ibn Muyassar’s deadpan sentences become ludicrous:

On 9\(^{\text{th}}\) Ramadan 452 [7\(^{\text{th}}\) October 1060] al-Maghribī was dismissed from the wazirate and al-Bābīl brought back in.....

On 3\(^{\text{rd}}\) Muharram 453 [28\(^{\text{th}}\) January 1061] al-Bābīl was sacked in favour of Abū Fādīl....On 13\(^{\text{th}}\) Muharram 456 [6\(^{\text{th}}\) January 1064] ‘Abd al-Hākim was dismissed from the government and the wazirate. Ibn ‘Aqīl was the next wazir.....Abū Fādīl returned as wazir.\(^{444}\)

This game of musical chairs lasted right up until 466/1074, when Badr al-Jamālī arrived. Even at the height of the civil war, wazirs were still being appointed for one day, dismissed, reinstated or murdered. Al-Maghribī and al-Bābīl held office at

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\(^{437}\) Al-Imad, p.186.

\(^{438}\) Bianquis, “Wazir”, p.189.

\(^{439}\) Ibn Ṣafīr, p.79.

\(^{440}\) Ibn Muyassar, p.10.

\(^{441}\) Ibn Ṣafīr, p.80.

\(^{442}\) Ibn Muyassar, p.31.

\(^{443}\) Ibid., p.16.

\(^{444}\) Ibid., p.12.
least three times, whilst Abu Kadīna, according to al-Maqrlīzī, was wazir and qādī on seven occasions⁴⁴⁵. Almost twenty years after his first effort, in 456/1064, Abu’l Barakāt al-Jarjarā’ī was reinstated but apparently had no more success than previously:

Abu’l Barakāt al-Jarjarā’ī was recalled to Egypt and reinstalled at the beginning of Rajab 456/June 1064. He was dismissed in the last days of Ramadan/September and did not return.⁴⁴⁶

The chances of anyone being effective in the short time they would have in office are remote, and this is borne out by the facelessness of these wazirs. In exchange, the wazirs obviously had little loyalty to the Fāṭimid empire, and some used their brief residence to simply grab whatever they could against an inevitable dismissal. On the rare occasion that the wazir is mentioned for a reason other than his sacking, it is seldom edifying. Al-Maghribī, in an ungrateful echo of his more successful predecessors, convinced the caliph to forbid the desperate general al-Basāsīrī – whose assault on Baghdad for the Fāṭimids had failed after a year - to come to Cairo on the grounds that there was “no room” in Egypt for him⁴⁴⁷. It is more likely that he feared al-Basāsīrī’s military glamour and strength after the assault on Baghdad. Abū Kadīna, during his residence in 459/1067, fared little better against the Turks:

[the Turkish leader Ibn Hamdān and his troops] went to Abū Kadīna’s house and demanded goods, but he said, “What goods would I have? So & so owns the countryside, the blacks have Upper Egypt and so & so has Syria.” They replied, “Then the way to get our money is to demand it.” So Abū Kadīna wrote to al-Mustansir in their presence setting out their demands.⁴⁴⁸

It therefore comes as little surprise to read in the Book of Gifts and Rarities that Abū Kadīna later used the unrest to fill his own pockets:

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⁴⁴⁵ Al-Maqrlīzī, II, p.313.
⁴⁴⁶ Ibn Muyassar, p.15.
⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., p.11.

Aspects of the Reign of al-Mustanṣir bi’l-lāh
A string of pearls was brought out [from the treasuries]. Its value was at least eighty thousand [dinars].... [Abū Kadın] said, “Put two thousand dinars for it.” He took the marvellous, precious, magnificent large pearls.  

It must be said that he differed little from many wazirs except perhaps in levels of subtlety; al-Yāzūrī is accused in the same source of stealing a ruby pomade container from one of the caliph’s aunts at her death.

From the chronicles, there is some doubt that the wazirate was continuously occupied between these years, when the unrest was at its worst. Al-Maqrīzī’s evidence is conflicting:

Ibn Ḣamdān’s delegates entered and found the caliph sitting on a carpet with no other furniture in the room. Nobody was with him save three servants. There were no signs of a great and mighty caliph....People abandoned al-Mustansir including his own family..... Only those too poor to flee remained.

Abū Kadın became wazir and qādī as the situation continued throughout 464[1071].

Similarly, five years earlier the same wazir was found by the Turks in his own house rather than the palace, and he corresponded with al-Mustansir instead of actually going to visit him. The question arises as to whether the caliph was actually nominating the wazirs by this time, or if a small group of men were simply fighting it out amongst themselves away from the palaces. Al-Maqrīzī’s description of the desolate caliph also contrasts with Abū Kadın helping himself to the Fātimid treasures. It would therefore appear that the wazirate at some point in the growing unrest had split away from al-Mustansir and sided with the much stronger Turkish factions – probably both for personal survival and personal gain. It is hard to picture the caliph caring whether he had a wazir or not when he had no money, no servants, was at Ibn Ḣamdān’s mercy and lived on donated loaves of bread. In fact, it is even possible that Ibn Ḣamdān, in control from 462/1069 until his murder three years later ...

449 Book of Gifts and Rarities, 378.
450 Ibid., 411.
452 Ibid., p.275.
453 Ibn Ṣafīr, p.74.
later, appointed the wazirs himself. In 461/1068 he drove the wazir Abū 'Abdallāh out of office, presumably because he was in the way of Turkish ambitions. Ibn Muyassar, like al-Maqrīzī, cannot list all the wazirs between 462/1069 and 464/1071, but he describes a disturbing picture of ministers looking to destroy the Faṭīmid caliphate:

[Ibn Ḥamdān] ruled Cairo .... but he did not seize power until ["some of al-Mustanṣir’s ministers"] ordered him to spread the ‘Abbāsid influence in Egypt and remove the Faṭīmid caliphate.

Given Ibn Ḥamdān’s power by this point, a more feasible angle would be that al-Mustanṣir’s ministers, seeing the state crumble around them, were telling the Turkish leader what he wanted to hear and also trying to find a future for themselves in Cairo. If al-Mustanṣir were overthrown, Egypt was likely to become an ‘Abbāsid state again and Ibn Ḥamdān was the most obvious ruler. In addition, deprived of his wealth and power, the ministers had no real reason to prefer the uncertain employ of al-Mustanṣir over that of Ibn Ḥamdān. Certainly the caliph had no control over anybody by this point; the Faṭīmid wazirs had become, like the Faṭīmid army, part of the force directly opposed to the Faṭīmid caliphate’s regaining any power.

Al-Maqrīzī further supports this with his description of the situation in early 466/late 1073:

The Turks were on the ascendant again and none was more powerful than Ildegüz [a warlord]... and the wazir Abū Kadina. Their hold tightened. Al-Mustanṣir had thought to have peace after Ibn Ḥamdān’s murder but Ildegüz became overbearing to him with Abū Kadina and they harassed him. Al-Mustanṣir was dismayed and wrote to Badr al-Jamāl who was then in Acre. He asked Badr to help him and restore him to power. Badr stipulated that he bring his own army, and that the army and ministers in Egypt be wiped out; al-Mustanṣir agreed. (emphasis mine)

Badr al-Jamāl may simply have been preparing for the execution of his predecessor as was standard then in the ‘Abbāsid wazirate at the time, but in this case he would

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454 Ibn Taghribirdi, V, p.83.
455 Ibn Muyassar, p.22.
only destroy Abu Kadina. He wanted no opposition at all, and al-Mustansir could not trust any ministers remaining in Egypt not to take Abu Kadina’s place. The ruthlessness of this plan was justified by the sheer effrontery of Abu Kadina’s response in Ibn Muyassar’s chronicle – the wazir who had stolen from and publicly humiliated his own caliph “turned up in Cairo to take up a post”457.

Badr al-Jamali, 466-487/1074-1094

Although Abu Kadina seems incredibly stupid not to have fled, to him Badr al-Jamali was just another Syrian governor; he had little reason to differentiate him from Ibn Ḥamdan or Ildegiiz, and must have assumed that he could hold a similar post under a different warlord; al-Maqrizi points out that:

the nobles thought that he [Badr] was there to do as they wished. He deceived them with flattery and claims of friendship, and did not mention al-Mustansir.458

Badr, however, had no intention of allowing Abu Kadina back into a state post. Rather than massacre him with the military leaders, he arrested the former wazir and chose a method of execution remarkably like that of al-Yazuri. Where al-Yazuri had been arrested, sent to Tinnis and executed, Abu Kadina was:

arrested, sent to Damietta and murdered... When the swordsman came to kill him, his sword was blunt, and it took seven strokes before they could perform the eulogy. The minister ‘Abd al-Mukarim was also murdered, along with ... many others.459

Some were more fortunate; al-Maghribi somehow escaped the bloodbath, surviving until 478/1085460.

Badr al-Jamali’s wazirate began in 466/1074461, but immediately it was made clear that this was a different arrangement to any seen previously:

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457 Ibn Muyassar, p.23.
458 Al-Maqrizi, II, p.322.
459 Ibn Muyassar, p.23.
460 Al-Maqrizi, II, p.322.
461 Ibid., p.311.

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Badr’s staff, deputising for him, joined the government and da’wa. Similarly they were in the qādī’s office. The qādī al-‘Iraqī acted as wazir.462

Badr became chief qādī and dā’ī, although al-Farāqī actually held the latter post whilst Badr had the title 463.

The only post Badr held that he actively executed was Amīr al-Juyūsh, Commander of the Armies 464. Unlike his predecessors, he was a “wazir of the sword”, where all others had been “wazirs of the pen”, and this change was reflected in the alteration of the Fāṭimid administrative structure. For the first seven years of his wazirate, Badr spent most of his time out of Cairo crushing the rebellions around the country, or attempting to win back former Fāṭimid territory in Syria 465. Running the state personally during this time was impossible. However, he could not set himself up as overall head of state because the post was occupied by al-Mustansir, whilst neither was he prepared to abandon the titles and thus his stranglehold on the state.

For the qādī and dā’ī posts, this was nothing new; as has been seen, al-Yāzūrī had kept the title for a job he did not perform. Yet Badr was the first wazir to actually delegate the wazirate; or rather, he delegated the functions of a wazir of the pen 466. The original administrative purpose of the wazir’s post could be carried out by one of his men, whilst the accompanying power could be detached for Badr himself. The wazirate was thus divided; that “of the pen” reverted to its original purpose of a senior civil service post. Badr then took the title, power and status of the role, and used them to create the wazirate “of the sword”, legitimising his position within the Fāṭimid state. This also was convenient in covering up al-Mustansır’s total loss of control; it allowed Badr free rein whilst pretending that the caliph had simply employed a new wazir, rather than surrendered to a warlord. By distancing himself from the administration, moreover, Badr made it clear that he was no al-Yāzūrī, at the mercy of envious rivals. Whilst this may seem obvious to modern eyes, al-

462 Ibn Muyassar, p.23.
463 Al-Maqrīzī, II, p.313.
464 Ibn Muyassar, p.23.
465 Ibid.
466 Ibid.

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Mustansir had not made public his reasons for inviting the Armenian to Cairo, and in 466/1074 few people in Egypt suspected he was anything more than another soldier trying to control the country.\(^{467}\) Since not all the ministers were slaughtered, given al-Maghribi's survival, it was possible that a rival faction could have brought down Badr had he simply assumed a wazir's mantle. Furthermore, the rampaging remains of al-Mustansir's army, along with various rebels, could only be suppressed by military action. Badr's success added to his prestige – had he remained in Cairo, another Anushtakîn could have been created amongst his officers. This also explains why he retained al-Mustansir as a puppet. The caliph's presence bestowed upon Badr a legitimacy that all potential rivals lacked; it gave him an internationally recognized position, whilst the local people's loyalty to al-Mustansir extended to cover the caliph's choice of wazir.

This in itself, however, is not much different from the position of Abû Sa'îd Tustarî three decades earlier. Like the puppets of al-Fallâhî and al-Anbârî, other civil servants carried out the actual daily work of the post, leaving Badr al-Jamâlî with overall control. Nor was Badr the first wazir to have an army of his own. In the Seljuq state the great wazir Nizam al-Mulk had his own forces. Within the Fâtimid state, however, previous wazirs had not enjoyed this level of independence, even if they had had military experience. Nor was the wazir more powerful than al-Mustansir. Whilst previously the caliph had been passive in the face of the Tustarîs' rapacity, he genuinely had no other option with Badr.

The wazirate of the sword was thus an entirely new invention – a title for a man in complete control of state and military. Ironically, these were powers that had originally belonged to the caliphate, had al-Mustansir only chosen to exercise them; his great-grandfather, al-'Azîz, had behaved very much like Badr, leading his own troops into Syria whilst actively ruling his empire,\(^{468}\) with the various wazirs and qâdîs merely his tools for doing so. Al-Mustansir, if only by tacit permission, had

\(^{467}\) Ibn Muyassar, p.23.
connived in the removal of a powerful wazir in al-Yāzūrī, showing that he was well aware of the powers he possessed even if he seldom used them. However, removing a wazir of the pen was very different to removing Badr, and it seems likely that the caliph did not understand the difference between al-Yāzūrī’s position, and the position Badr had fortified for himself. Ibn Taghrībiridī notes that “but he [Badr] did not give back power to al-Mustānṣir, who had no might except for riding in the ceremonies”, hinting that al-Mustānṣir had expected another al-Yāzūrī; one who would rule whilst acknowledging his superior position. By the time he realized his actual position, it was too late to do anything about it. He “lived in dread” of Badr. Nor did he understand the dynastic power that Badr had conferred upon this new wazirate by passing on power to his son al-ʿAfḍal, whose sister he married to al-Mustānṣir’s youngest son; his efforts to wrest back control after the wazir’s death in Dhu’l-Qa‘da 487/November 1094 were wholly unsuccessful, and he remained under al-ʿAfḍal’s thumb until his own death the following month.

Badr’s wazirate was therefore different, but there is little doubt that he was one of the most successful incumbents. He clearly chose his men well when delegating his administrative duties – despite being absent from Cairo seven years out of the first ten in power on military campaigns, there was no repeat of the violence prior to his arrival. His confiscation of the murdered emirs’ and ministers’ possessions replenished al-Mustānṣir’s empty coffers. The annual revenue rose again to three million dinars, and the shattered administration was rebuilt. Conscious of possible future threats, he also managed to improve Cairo’s fortifications, as al-Maqrīzī relates:

Badr al-Jamālī moved the Zuwayla gate to increase the space behind it and built the great Bāb Zuwayla standing now. He also raised its towers….. there were turns to stop troops

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469 Ibn Muyassar, p.8.
470 Ibn Taghrībiridī, V, p.4.
471 Ibn Zāfīr, p.76.
472 Gibb and Kraus, p.730.
474 Ibid., p.312.

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rushing in and taking the citadel by force. It had gutters of granite so that should troops attack, their horses would not be able to keep their footing on the smooth stone.\footnote{476 Al-Maqrīzī, II, p.327.}

Al-Mustansir therefore owed his wazir not only his deliverance during the civil war, but his continued security afterwards. For the population meanwhile, there is no mention of famine during Badr’s years in office, suggesting that his crushing of the violence had allowed the people to raise a harvest again. Moreover, if the caliph could participate in ceremonies again this must mean that Badr had brought back a certain measure of wealth and public safety to Cairo. To do this, he had faced obstacles no other wazir had overcome. Thus, although he was more of a ruler beneath the wazir’s mantle than a civil servant, he was an exceptional incumbent for his twenty years in power.

However, once the uprisings throughout Egypt had been repressed Badr was free to return to Cairo and make an impact on state administration. Perhaps surprisingly this is not dealt with by the Muslim chroniclers of the time, who prefer to discuss his military activities. Ibn Muyassar sums up twenty years’ rule in a few lines:

He began his success by killing the civil war’s ringleaders, soldiers and those who had destroyed the fields for 3 years, until the peasants’ situation improved and they could manage under his rule. He brought some trade to Egypt and governed there for 21 years.\footnote{477 Ibn Muyassar, p.30.}

Nor do the other Muslim chroniclers have anything to add to this. On the other hand, the Christian History of the Patriarchs, in discussing the Copts’ excursions to court, highlights Badr’s activities in a far wider range of work than his predecessors had encompassed. As Bianquis notes:

The sphere of competence of the military vizier (sic) …. was much wider than that of his civilian predecessors, notably in the domains of application of the law and execution of justice.\footnote{478 Bianquis, “Wazīr”, p.190.}
As with al-Jarjarā‘ī and other wazirs of the pen, Badr continued to conduct the official international diplomacy and wrote letters. At the same time, he gave his attention to smaller matters. Covering both, the History describes a meeting with the Coptic bishops to discuss attacks on Muslims in Nubia and Abyssinia:

A Muslim merchant presented a letter to [Badr] complaining that [a Christian] had waylaid him in the lands of Abyssinia and had taken his money. [Badr] caused him to be brought into [the Coptic officials’] presence and he inquired of him concerning the affair.479

He later commanded the Copts to build mosques in Abyssinia and Nubia and forced their departure from Cairo to do so. From this, it is clear that Badr was in regular communication with both the southern kingdoms, and was also sufficiently accessible receive the complaints from the Muslim travellers concerned. Furthermore, the wazir was acting as the supreme judge in deciding on the matter and overruling the angry bishops. In fact, the Coptic officials are recorded on several occasions as having met with Badr; more often than not, this was simply so that they could air their grievances. Yet if Badr was prepared to hear the tedious complaints of the Christians, he must have devoted still more time to those of the Muslims. There are no Muslim accusations of his favouring the Christians as with previous wazirs such as ‘Isā ibn Nestorius, successor to Ibn Killis, and yet he clearly knew them well and allowed them frequent access to him. The praises heaped upon him by the History’s author also suggests that Badr—and following him, al-Afdal—may have cut back on the taxes that caused such misery in the non-Muslim communities:

He was free from injustice... he relieved the oppressed of their oppression and he avenged them of their adversaries....He performed all pleasing deeds.480

This last is entirely possible given the huge change in the military situation; with Badr directing an army entirely at his command, the need for enormously expensive expeditions had gone. Al-Mustanṣir had lost most of his fortune through the Turkish troops’ incessant demands for more pay and their later looting, neither of which now applied as Badr began to repair the financial ravages. Bearing this in mind, the fact

480 Ibid., p.389.
that financial revenue recovered may be due more to a lack of military expenditure than Badr’s financial acumen. Such was the case for the agricultural output of Egypt, which naturally rose again as the troops rampaging through harvests vanished, and the Nile reached plenitude in 466/1074 after seven years of drought.

Nonetheless, that Badr’s grip on the state was both total and far more extensive than any other wazir’s before him is supported by the reaction of the chroniclers in describing his period in theoretical office. Where al-Jarjarā’ī is “a devoted wazir”, Badr “ruled Egypt”. The History goes off into paeans extolling his virtues in terms that would be more suitably applied to a caliph than an ostensible civil servant:

None of those who were before him, from among the preceding kings and former emperors, surpassed him.481

He ran the court, controlled the administration, directed the military, corresponded with overseas contacts, acted as the chief dā’ī and was the centre of Cairo and the remaining Fāṭimid empire. Under Badr, the ministry had become the kingship.

**Conclusion**

The very different characters of al-Mustansir’s wazirs reflect the unpredictability of his reign, with the three most successful coming from contrasting backgrounds; an Iraqi civil servant with years of experience, a low-born Palestinian, and an Armenian Christian warlord. All three also arrived at the post by separate paths – al-Jarjarā’ī through his service in the Fāṭimid administration, al-Yāzūrī through Sayyida Rasād’s favour, and Badr because the caliph desperately needed his military help. In between were strings of nonentities, whose tenure sometimes bordered on the laughable, and the flexible Abū Kadina, whose political shortcomings led to his death.

Interestingly, given the Empire’s epicentre of Cairo, none of the three major wazirs was Egyptian; only al-Jarjarā’ī was possibly an Išmā’ili. The questions therefore

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arises of what bound them to the wazirate and al-Mustansir. For Badr al-Jamali, the answer is obvious. In exchange for wiping out the civil war in Egypt, he received money, power, and in essence his own kingdom, with the caliph a useful tool of legitimacy and status\textsuperscript{482}. Al-Mustansir was scarcely exploited by this contract with Badr, who gave in exchange years of marching around Egypt suppressing riots, and managed to repair the damage done to the state through the wars\textsuperscript{483}; the caliph held no genuine authority, but he at least regained the trappings of his position\textsuperscript{484}. Al-Yazuri similarly won money and power, but he was also tied by loyalty to Sayyida Rasid. Having been raised up by her to a position he could not otherwise have attained, he owed her and al-Mustansir everything; conversely, he had nothing without them, unlike Badr. Meanwhile, al-Jarjarai’s migration from ‘Abbasiid Iraq at the outset of his career suggests that he was an Isma’ili, and this would also explain the loyalty he showed three caliphs.

The executions of al-Anbari and al-Fallahi were countered by al-Yazuri’s longer time in office, but his own death marked the collapse of the wazirate as it had been. Any candidate who had his ability did not have the stability bestowed by Sayyida and al-Mustansir, whose withdrawal of backing for more than a few months at most had a disastrous effect on the office. To reach the top of the Fatimid civil service inevitably meant creating numerous enemies, and without the caliph’s backing, the position became a greasy pole impossible to climb in the face of vicious rumours. However, the added grease of civil disturbance meant that al-Mustansir himself lost his grasp of the wazirate, which ricocheted into the hands of various characters, such as Ibn Hamdan and Ildeguz, and turned against the caliph with the thefts and intimidation of Abu Kadina.

Ironically, Badr al-Jamali held the wazirate by the same expedient as al-Jarjarai, namely of destroying his rivals, although on a far greater scale than anything previously seen. Indeed, much of Badr’s wazirate was simply history repeated but

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{482} Ibn Muyassar, p.30.
\item \textsuperscript{483} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{484} Ibn Taghribirdi, V, p.4.
\end{itemize}
on a much grander scale. The control of multiple posts under al-Yāzūrī was extended to encompass every post of any importance, or its power, including that of the army general. The passivity of al-Mustanṣir was exaggerated into his removal from any meaningful power within the state, whilst the nepotism of previous wazirs was aggrandized into the founding of Badr’s own dynasty. Where al-Jarjarāʾī’s nephew had been placed in Sayyida’s diwān, Badr’s son al-Afdal married his sister to al-Mustanṣir’s youngest son, al-Musta’li. The first wazir had ruled the Fāṭimid empire for the caliph; the last wazir ruled it despite him. In many ways the wazirate itself had not changed from 427/1036, but the wazir’s personality was very different. The first wazir had ruled the Fāṭimid empire for the caliph; the last wazir ruled it despite him. Although the office’s theoretical role had not much changed from 427/1036, the wazir’s personality was very different. Al-Jarjarāʾī was remembered as “always a devoted wazir” to the state. The string of wazirs in the war years were devoted to their personal finances; Badr was devoted to the state because it effectively belonged to him.

The wazirate’s progress in al-Mustanṣir’s reign is thus more of a mutation; open to abuse from any incumbent, it was altered by Badr al-Jamālī in order to preserve what was left of the Fāṭimid state. However, unlike many other aspects of Fāṭimid history at this point, this was not entirely due to al-Mustanṣir. Although he had been unable to find a stable balance with his wazirs after al-Yāzūrī, leading to the revolving door policy, the office was wrested from his control during the civil war of the 460s/1060s. When he had been stripped of his possessions and abandoned by his servants, he had no hope of influence over anyone. Most of his potential wazirs had already demonstrated, like Abū Kadīna, that they were in league with the Turks and could not be trusted. Indeed, the idea of bringing in an outsider to the wazirate was a sensible one to put an end to the petty rivalries within the group of current candidates. Unfortunately for the caliph however, Badr al-Jamālī was far stronger than Abū Kadîna and his ilk. No other wazir had his own army, or had permission to

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485 Ibn Taghribirdî, V, p.28.
486 Al-Nuwayrî, XXVII, p.201.
destroy every potential rival in one fell swoop; the contest was hopelessly unequal, as all the reasons holding al-Mustansir in power over his rivals were removed. Badr had no religious affiliation and was not even Muslim; the caliph had no army except Badr’s own and no real alternative to Badr. After forty years of passive rule and ten years of shattering civil war, there was little chance that the caliph would attempt to run the state alone – this would have been impossible without a loyal army, which he did not have.

Given that al-Mustansir’s wazirs span sixty years’ rule, it is unsurprising that significant changes would be made within the role between 427/1036 and 487/1094. What is surprising in fact is not how much changed, but why the upheaval in the role occurred. Whilst Badr was welcomed because of the anarchy in Egypt, al-Yāzūrī and the majority of his successors were replaced in a mass of slander and rivalry that bore little resemblance to genuine political affairs. Meanwhile, al-Jarjarā’ī survived a caliph’s death in the face of his enemies precisely because of his grasp on politics. Alternatively, he survived because al-Mustansir was a child, and thus could not be looked to above his wazir. Once the caliph entered adulthood however, the wazirate depended on him as its complementary counter-balance. Without al-Mustansir’s support, the wazirs withdrew any support for the caliph, until events spiralled out of control. Badr al-Jamalī thus had to be completely different from his predecessors, which he did by removing the need for mutual backing altogether. The wazirate was thus cut off and begun again in an entirely different direction, changing along the way the course of Fātimid history.
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<td>Dismissed and murdered</td>
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<td>Ram 436 – Muh 440</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Muh 440?</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Muh 440 – 441</td>
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<td>Muh 442 – Muh 450</td>
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<td>? Al-Malīji</td>
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<td>453 – Muh 454</td>
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<td>Muh 454</td>
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<td>454 – Muh 455</td>
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<td>Şafar 455</td>
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<td>464-6?</td>
<td>1071-3?</td>
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<td>Badr al-Jamālī</td>
<td>466-487</td>
<td>1074-1094</td>
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<td>Al-Afḍāl</td>
<td>487</td>
<td>1094</td>
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Aspects of the Reign of al-Mustansir bi’llāh
* The chronology is taken from Ibn Muyassar where available; in the confusion, it is not surprising that the chronicler’s lists do not match his previously claimed number of twenty-four wazirs. Abū Kadīna (as distinct from Abū ‘Alī Kadīna, who may have been his father) is also listed eight times rather than seven as definitely holding the wazirate.
Throughout their era, the Fatimids would devote considerable effort to the maintenance of their diplomatic relations and links with other countries; al-Mustansir’s reign was no exception to this, and in fact saw significant changes in those relations and the results they brought. His empire’s status and power were carefully buttressed by a network of links stretching as far as India and Khurasan, leading back to the hub of Cairo. At the ideal level, letters and embassies were reciprocated whilst trade would flourish, and the mutual amity would lead to advantages for both sides. However, whilst this state of affairs was achieved on occasion, more often than not the Fatimid efforts with international powers was fraught with difficulty, hostility and misunderstandings as al-Mustansir’s government attempted to pursue its aims. These targets were to protect the Fatimids’ Ismā’īlī empire, to look after al-Mustansir’s interests, and wherever possible to enlarge the sphere of Fatimid influence; unsurprisingly, these frequently collided with the aims of the opposite power, leading to turbulent relationships or on some occasions, no diplomatic relationship at all. This turbulence in itself reflects the dramatic events of al-Mustansir’s reign itself, and the struggles faced by a minority Ismā’īlī government in dealing with Christian and Sunni counterparts.

The Caliph’s Role

How far al-Mustansir himself was involved in the diplomatic process is difficult to gauge, but it seems probable that the caliph did little of the actual administration – Ibn Taghribirdi’s description of him as having “occupied his time with entertainment, drinking and music”487 does not suggest a conscientious attitude. It is also notable that the descriptions of embassies and gifts to Cairo from various countries are never recorded as having been received by al-Mustansir directly.

Indeed, the caliph was apparently not expected to be actively involved. He went on no visits to other countries and would have received embassies only at audiences, where he seldom spoke and may not even have personally seen the visitors.

In fact, this was not necessarily due to any apathy on al-Mustansir’s part; court protocol did not demand such action by the caliph, who generally held himself distant in public, and the actual duties were usually carried out by the wazir. In addition, when he ascended the throne as a child the caliph was too young to decide policy, then later became a passive ruler. It could therefore be said that al-Mustansir seldom if ever had any active involvement with his diplomatic machine at all. There is no evidence that he personally chose or followed any policies, with the sole exception of his responses to any impugning of his religious status as imām.

The bulk of the diplomatic duties at court were fulfilled by the wazir on al-Mustansir’s behalf; as described in the chronicles, the caliph’s correspondence with Mu‘izz ibn Bādis of Ifriqiya – a Fātimid warlord who turned rebel and broke away in 443/1051 – was undertaken by his wazir al-Yāzūri488. Similarly, for the first decade of al-Mustansir’s reign the wazir al-Jarjarā’i dealt with everything diplomatic, the caliph being only a child. Later on, Badr al-Jamāli’s stranglehold on the state meant that he undertook these duties. Al-Mustansir was thus one step removed from matters at almost all times, although it is unclear whether this was expected or simply occurred due to the combination of a passive caliph and power-hungry wazirs. On the other hand, there is no evidence to suggest that the caliph was ignorant of international issues affecting his empire despite his non-participation. He must have been kept informed of events if only to sign the various necessary papers. In addition, by keeping himself removed from general diplomacy, al-Mustansir’s rare involvement became a powerful message of Fātimid sentiment – usually one of anger.


Aspects of the Reign of al-Mustansir bi’l-lāh
Unfortunately the information for much of the international relations is scanty. Whilst those with Byzantium are relatively well documented, evidence of the diplomacy with the Normans and Italian maritime states is disappointingly sparse although it clearly did exist if only for the known trade arrangements to be available. This omission is probably due to reluctance amongst Muslim and Christian states to openly chronicle their dealings with their religious opponent, particularly when an international reputation for piety was desirable. Yet enough remains to show a colourful and busy field that crossed borders, cultures, languages and faiths, headed by al-Mustaṣṣir himself and an interesting variety of royal counterparts elsewhere.

**Byzantium**

The Fāṭimid propaganda circulated during their time in North Africa not only claimed they should displace all other caliphs, but added that the Byzantine emperor was counted in this number⁴⁸⁹. In reality this was mere propagandistic bravado that probably stemmed from the time of the Arab conquest. Muslims having displaced the Byzantines from North Africa in the early 1st/8th century, this proclamation may well have been an expected formula to declare continuing Islamic superiority. Certainly al-Mustaṣṣir’s reign showed little sign of exerting this superiority beyond the frequent border skirmishes in northern Syria where both empires met. In any case, the caliph would have gained little from an attempt to subjugate Byzantium, since such a scheme would have taken more men and dinars than the caliph possessed. Byzantium’s vast territory stretched across Asia Minor and into southern Europe; to gain perspective, taking Baghdad alone in 450/1058 exhausted al-Mustaṣṣir’s coffers⁴⁹⁰. Spending fantastic sums to capture unwieldy, mainly Christian territory with little trade-route value (the Fāṭimids already had Mediterranean freedom) was obviously not a wise idea; had such an idea ever existed with the Fāṭimids, it could not long have survived reality. Constantinople was

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Aspects of the Reign of al-Mustaṣṣir bi’l-lāh
recognised as a prize worth having, as were the grain estates of Anatolia, but the empire at the time of al-Mustanṣir’s accession was well defended and politically stable. Unable or uninterested in conquering Byzantine territory, Cairo worked to gain the advantages the Byzantines had to offer through diplomacy instead.

Embassies between Constantinople and Cairo were regular between 430-50/1038-58, falling off during the civil unrest in Egypt in 456-468/1064-75, and dwindling later as Byzantium itself fell prey to increasing instability and the advancing Seljuq Turks. The ambassadors would arrive laden with fantastic gifts both to flatter the recipient and to emphasise the power of the giver. Although not always well recorded, al-Maqrîzî relates some gifts given, as shall be seen. However, most of the diplomatic work went on through correspondence, being a far faster and cheaper alternative.

Relations with Byzantium were positively cordial at various points of al-Mustanṣir’s reign, but prior to his accession they had been far less friendly. Much of this could be traced back to al-Ḥākim’s time (386/996 – 411/1021). In 384/994 the Fāṭimid, still expanding under al-‘Azîz, had taken Aleppo from Byzantium, but far more offensive was al-Ḥākim’s sporadic persecution of the Christians within his empire. The Byzantine emperors liked to see themselves as protectors of the Christians in the Fāṭimid empire—although the patriarch of Alexandria at least was protected by the King of Nubia, and Byzantium seems to have done little enough to claim this title. However, in 399/1009 al-Ḥākim’s persecutions culminated in the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem; the outraged Basil II immediately broke off all relations with the Fāṭimidūs.

In 411/1021, al-Ḥākim was succeeded by his son al-Zāhir, a regency being set up by his aunt, Sitt al-Mulk. With an end to al-Ḥākim’s anti-Christian measures, diplomacy between the empires was cautiously reawakened. Re-establishing

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491 Canard, p.855.
diplomacy with the Fāṭimids was advantageous to the Byzantines as well as to Cairo; the Ismāʿīlīs were wealthy, controlled the entire southern Mediterranean coast with its vital trade routes, and within their lands held the key cities for the thousands of Byzantine Christian merchants and visitors. They were also the other major power in the Mediterranean and could make life very difficult for Byzantium along its Syrian borders and the sea routes in times of hostility. Accordingly, Michael IV and Sitt al-Mulk began negotiations for a peace treaty. That these negotiations were still continuing in 427/1036 — the usual, ten-year treaty concluded in the same year apparently not being sufficient — when al-Mustanṣir succeeded his father suggests an unwillingness on either side to give ground, or possible religious obstacles thrown up over Jerusalem.

Finally concluded in 430/1038, the treaty was set for thirty years. This was unusual; under Islamic law it was also illegal, casting doubt on the Fāṭimid government’s attitude towards the matter, and towards Byzantium itself. They could clearly argue when breaking it that the treaty had never been legal in the first place. However, it might also have been mutual acknowledgement that peace between the two empires was a necessity for a longer period than normally set in treaties. Economically it was foolish to be on poor terms with each other, each empire being a major trading partner of the other. Politically, a Fāṭimid-Byzantine alliance created an enormous power with complete control of the Mediterranean and further bolstered each empire’s defences. On a local level, Michael could scarcely abandon the Fāṭimids’ Christian subjects without risking condemnation, whilst Cairo would want to show the new caliph’s non-Muslims that his reign did not herald a return to the terrors of al-Ḥakim’s reign.

The terms of the treaty named in the sources offer a fascinating insight into what was thought acceptable:

Al-Mustanṣir made a truce with the King of Byzantium [Michael IV]; he stipulated the freeing of 5000 prisoners, whilst the King of Byzantium stipulated that the Egyptians

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495 Ibid., p.187.
renovate the ruined church [of the Holy Sepulchre]. He sent over stonemasons and some money.

Al-Mustansir comes off the better to modern eyes, gaining the release of five thousand prisoners, but Michael IV won a significant concession. Byzantine masons were to be sent into Fāṭimid territory to repair those churches damaged during al-Ḥākim’s reign, thus giving the Emperor caliphal approval as the overall leader of those Christians in Fāṭimid territory. Thus al-Mustansir’s reign began with the apparent determination to be on excellent terms with Byzantium, and to draw a line under what had gone before.

This end to hostilities lasted a mere three years. In 432/1040 Ibn al-Athīr reports al-Mustansir’s general Anushtakīn as harrying Byzantine troops around the northern Syrian city of Afāmiyya. Matters did not go well for the Byzantines:

> Al-Dīzīrī [Anushtakīn] prepared the army and..... met the army of the Rum.... The two sides met between the towns of Hama and Afāmiyya. There was terrible slaughter between them. Then Allah gave victory to the Muslims and humiliated the infidels. They were defeated and a huge number of them killed. The king’s nephew was captured and a lot of money paid for his ransom.

Clearly when it came to the borders neither side trusted the other, although Anushtakīn had a ready explanation. Arabs had recently been expelled from Byzantine territory after pillaging around Afāmiyya; in retaliation, Aleppo’s Fāṭimid governor had ejected all foreign merchants from the city. However, the governor’s request that his Byzantine counterpart in Antioch do likewise was met with a rude refusal, leading him to inform Anushtakīn that the Fāṭimid dominions were under threat. The Fāṭimid thus had a convenient excuse for any fighting and could put the blame onto Byzantium for beginning the hostilities. Indeed, al-Maqrīzī goes further and states bluntly that, “the emperor violated the treaty and attacked

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498 Ibid., p.491.

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Aspects of the Reign of al-Mustansir bi’llāh
Afāmiyya”499. With many men dead and large sums handed over for the release of Michael’s nephew, Ibn al-Athîr unsurprisingly notes that, “the Byzantines stopped making trouble after that”500. On the other hand, Anushtakîn did not; he was attacking the Rum again the next year, and disobeyed the wazir’s command to cease hostilities501. This may have simply heralded a return to the constant skirmishing around the borders, since it does not seem to have impacted on overall relations.

In 435/1043, in stark contrast, the Fâtimids were furious to discover that Byzantium had aided the ruler of Ifrīqiya in rebellion against al-Mustansîr. This ruler, Ibn Badîs, had sent a message to the Sunni ‘Abbâsid caliph of Baghdad offering allegiance; the caliph al-Qā’îm had sent his reply via Constantinople. More insultingly to al-Mustansîr, the messenger had pronounced the khutba (sermon) for al-Qā’îm in the city’s Friday mosque502. This provoked an outraged letter from Cairo, although whether the prayer was usually read for al-Mustansîr seems doubtful, given that Byzantine Muslims were mainly Sunni and therefore followed al-Qā’îm. In fact Ibn Bâdis had asked Michael IV to heal a rift between him and al-Mustansîr as early as 428/1037:

There was an estrangement between Ibn Bâdis and al-Mustansîr; Ibn Bâdis wrote to the king of Byzantium [Michael IV] and sent him presents whilst informing him of this rift. [Ibn Bâdis] asked [Michael] to intervene over his obedience to al-Mustansîr and submitted to him. This was sent to Cairo with presents and a large delegation.503

Unfortunately, any success had been as short-lived as the peace treaty. However, the row over the Constantinople prayers had evidently been smoothed out by 437/1046, since another embassy came to Cairo to celebrate and prolong the new peace. Al-Maqrîzî gives an arresting picture of this ritual show of friendship:

On 8th Dhu’l Hijja [437/16th June 1046] the Byzantine King [Constantine IX] sent gifts from Constantinople to Cairo; 30,000 qintars of gold worth 7100 dinars carried on the most beautiful mules and horses. All of them were covered in Byzantine silk damask, heavily

499 Al-Maqrîzî, II, p.188.
500 Ibn al-Athîr, IX, p.491.
501 Ibid., p.500.
502 Ibid., p.522.
503 Al-Maqrîzî, II, p.186.
Four years later, Constantine intervened again to make peace between Cairo and Ibn Mardis of Aleppo. Again, in 443/1051 he demonstrated his allegiance to al-Mustansir when Ibn Bādis of Ifriqiya once more pledged faith to al-Qāʾim in Baghdad. Al-Qāʾim’s messenger was seized in Byzantine territory and sent straight to Cairo, where al-Mustansir enjoyed the public ceremony of burning the ‘Abbāsid robes in a pit hastily dug between his palaces. The angry letters of 435/1043 appear to have left their mark, at least for the time being.

Meanwhile, Byzantium itself had problems; within Constantinople the landed elite were growing more independent and seeking power at the expense of the emperors. The empress Zoē, who ruled from 419-442/1028-50, had three husbands but none of great ability. Michael IV died in 433/1042 and his successor Michael V was deliberately blinded the same year, removing him from power and setting a pattern of increasing instability. In 446/1054 the friction with Rome ended in the Great Schism of the Catholic church, Byzantium splintering off to form the Eastern Christian church. The Western Christian Normans promptly invaded Byzantine Italy and began chiselling away at the empire; in the east the advance of the Seljuq Turks from central Asia had reached the ‘Abbāsid empire in Iraq and would soon threaten Asia Minor, whilst the tribes of the Danube were once more in revolt. Although al-Mustansir’s empire was already beginning to disintegrate, as shown by Ibn Bādis, the Rum probably could not afford to offend the Fātimids in 443/1051 when so many other concerns were threatening them.

In 446/1054 another treaty was drawn up, this time to supply Egypt with grain during that year’s famine. Constantine sent four hundred thousand ardebs of wheat (one

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504 Al-Maqrizi, II, p.194.
505 Ibn Muyassar, p.5.
506 P. Sherrard, Byzantium, Amsterdam 1966, p.76.
508 Ibn Muyassar, p.7.

Aspects of the Reign of al-Mustansir bi’llāh
ardeb is roughly 198 litres), although Ibn Muyassar relates an embarrassing incident in Lattaqiyya. The local emir rebelled against al-Mustaṣir, causing the Byzantines to hold on to his grain ration; this caused uproar which was exploited by the warlord Ibn Malhum Qustüm, who took his chance to plunder Antioch. Constantine retaliated with eight naval units sent to capture him and other Muslim notables509. What happened after this fiasco is not recorded, although at least al-Mustaṣir could not be blamed for it; it was probably forgotten in the sudden deterioration of Fāṭimid-Byzantine relations the following year. The new ruler, Theodora, had assumed that grain would again be sent to Egypt, in a lucrative trade for her empire, demanding in addition Fāṭimid military aid against the Seljuqs. Al-Yāzūrī, the wazir, then declined to purchase grain since there was no famine, despite her angry protests that he had broken the treaty510. The coldness engendered by this impasse was heightened when al-Mustaṣir discovered the same year that one of his qāḍīs had been writing to Constantinople asking for help to install Tughril Beg, the Seljuq sultan, as ruler of Egypt511. Once more demonstrating personal anger with public actions, al-Mustaṣir took swift retribution:

Al-Mustaṣir confiscated the relics in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This was because the qāḍī ‘Abdallāh had sent a note to Constantinople that contained letters asking Tughril Beg to rule Egypt. He prayed for al-Qā‘īm in his letters to Constantinople and led groups in praying for al-Qā‘īm. Al-Mustaṣir found out, hence his actions at the Church. This also accounts for the rift between Egypt and Byzantium.512

Byzantium was furious. The inference was obvious; the Byzantine ruler’s status as protector of the Holy Land was wholly dependent on the Fāṭimids’ goodwill. Further insult was caused when the Fāṭimids built a quarter for Jerusalem’s Christians in the 450s/1060s, the impoverished Christians being crammed into the city’s northern quarter around the rebuilt Church of the Holy Sepulchre513. Constantinople’s protests were once more ignored, suggesting that Cairo was aware of the increasing instability within the Rum empire. This was exacerbated by a swift

509 Ibid.
511 Ibn Muyassar, p.7.
512 Ibid.
513 M. Gil, A History of Palestine, 712.

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succession of rulers – Theodora’s year-long reign was repeated by Michael VI (448-9/1056-7), whose own successor Isaac Comnenus died in 451/1059.

The diplomatic situation in the early 460s/mid 1050s was also not conducive to a Byzantine show of force. In Iraq the formerly moribund ‘Abbāsid caliphate with its decaying environs had been rejuvenated by the advance west of the Seljuq Turks, Sunnīs from Central Asia. Tughril Beg, the Seljuq sultan, chipped away at territory in Iran and arrived in Baghdad in 447/1055, sweeping away the last Shī’ite Būyid emir514. Al-Qā’im, the caliph, was retained as a nominal ruler and Tughril began a series of campaigns to extend and fortify those areas under ‘Abbāsid allegiance. Since further extension westwards would lead the Turks into Anatolia, Byzantium had good cause to adopt a defensive stance, leaving little leeway for attacks on the Fāṭimids. Meanwhile al-Mustanṣir’s fortunes in 450/1059 reached their apparent zenith. A Būyid Shī’ite general, al-Basāṣīrī, threw in his lot with Cairo after being pushed out of power under the Seljuqs’ arrival. On 8th Dhu’l Hijja with huge financial support from al-Mustanṣir, he marched into Baghdad whilst Tughril was around Mosul, captured the city and declared for the Fāṭimids. Al-Qā‘im was hastily bundled out of the city by his supporters and endured a year of moving around those parts of Iraq still under his control. Cairo’s court celebrated with gusto, a palace being prepared for the rival caliph they confidently expected to capture. Other cities also pledged allegiance to al-Mustanṣir, including Wasit and Basra515. To Byzantium, the Fāṭimids’ subjection of Baghdad must have been an intimidating display of power, and aroused alarming possibilities of what might happen should the ‘Abbāsids fall. Fortunately for them, Tughril recaptured Baghdad after an exact year of al-Basāṣīrī’s control, and al-Mustanṣir was left with nothing but an empty treasury. Unfortunately, however, it soon became clear that the Seljuqs were not interested in alliances with the Christian Rum, nor had they finished their expansions west.

514 Ibn Taghrībīrī, V, p.57.
515 Ibn Zāfīr, p.68.
The increasing weakness of al-Mustanṣir’s reign was growing apparent, as the financial toll caused by the invasion of Baghdad was counted. It seems that Byzantium was aware that all was not well in Cairo. In 462/1070 the emperor Romanus IV Diogenes made another advance into Syria, where his troops massacred the people of Manbij in a display of Byzantine power, but this was short-lived\textsuperscript{516}. Meanwhile, the Seljuqs had taken Aleppo and were dangerously close to his territory.

By this time also, al-Mustanṣir’s reign had spiralled out of control to the point where diplomacy was impossible. The caliph had no money to send an embassy or gifts, even if the state had not collapsed to the point where arranging or receiving an embassy was possible. Travel throughout the empire was also notably dangerous at this point. Al-Mustanṣir could barely control Cairo as the army rampaged through the city and its starving inhabitants turned to cannibalism to survive\textsuperscript{517}. With thousands dying and important personages fleeing the capital, the thought of an embassy to Constantinople was laughable; the caliph himself had no money and barely enough food to live. The Fāṭimids were thus of no use to Byzantium at all, at a time when the empire was coming under attack. The Seljuqs’ advance brought them into Anatolia from the late 420s/1030s from their cities in Azerbaijan; Byzantium lost Kayseri (Caeserea) in 459/1067 and in 463/1071 there was the disastrous battle of Manzikert. Alp Arslan routed the Byzantines on the field; by 470/1078 Byzantium had been pushed back through Asia Minor and lost all their territory there beyond a few coastal cities. With Bari, its last Italian possession, lost to the Normans in 463/1071, Byzantium’s status as a massive international power was over\textsuperscript{518}. It no longer had control of the major trade routes, and was sandwiched between the might of the Seljuqs and that of the Franks. This decline was mirrored by the Fāṭimids, al-Mustanṣir’s domains dwindling to little beyond Egypt itself. With this decline, the desire, necessity and ability to make complex alliances and expensive shows of friendship had vanished; the need to protect those borders from

\textsuperscript{516} Ibn al-Athir, X, p.60.  
\textsuperscript{517} Ibn al-Athir, X, p.61.  
\textsuperscript{518} P. Sherrard, Byzantium, p.81.
within took over. In 466/1074 the warlord Badr al-Jamālī arrived in Cairo from Acre at al-Mustansir’s bequest to begin rebuilding Egypt. The caliph never asked Byzantium for help during the long years of violent unrest between 459/1066 and 466/1074; possibly he was afraid that if he did so, the Rum would swiftly annex his empire. On the other hand, Byzantium lay on the other side of the Seljuqs, a long and risky way to send aid even if the Rum could afford to do so. Al-Mustansir was probably aware of Byzantium’s increasing difficulties. In any case, he needed a strong military leader who would ruthlessly crush all opposition in the caliph’s name – Constantinople’s emperors scarcely fitted the bill.

Badr al-Jamālī’s arrival marked another phase in international relations. His diplomatic aim was simple – to stabilise what remained of the Fāṭimid lands, and to win back lost territory in Syria. In this scheme, Byzantium did not greatly figure. Instead of Fāṭimid cities being taken by Byzantium, their cities in Syria had been captured by the current menace of the Seljuqs; Byzantium was no longer a threat to Egypt. The chances of Byzantium providing active support were so low by this time that Badr had very little to gain from keeping up diplomatic relations with Constantinople, and so the Rum vanishes from most primary sources, reflecting the Fāṭimids’ internalisation of their politics, until 485/1092-3. According to the chronicler al-‘Azīmī, the Fāṭimids, still holding the ports of Syria:

> prevented Frankish and Byzantine pilgrims from crossing to Jerusalem. Those of them who survived spread the news about that to their country. So they prepared themselves for military invasion.  

The mention of “survivors”, with its implications of slaughter, if true was a disastrous move very different to the careful displays of power of earlier years. Al-‘Azīmī claims that this pushed the Christians – divided since the Schism of 446/1054 – together to fight the Muslims and that as a catalyst for this union, the massacre bore responsibility for the Crusades. Whether Cairo knew and approved of this or not, al-Mustansir made no attempt at apology or recompense. Byzantium had not attacked

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519 Al-Maqrizi, II, p.311. 
for years and Badr was in control of Egypt so over-confidence may well have been at fault, but al-Mustanṣir’s son at least would live to regret this.

Al-Mustanṣir’s dealings with Byzantium offer intriguing glimpses into how the Fāṭimids viewed their own empire’s position at the time. When feeling powerful and expansive, they worked hard to keep up good relations, as shown in the treaty of 429/1038. When strong, they would grant concessions but drive a hard bargain; when weak, the letters show signs of bluster. Earlier on, Byzantium was handled as an equal with whom the Fāṭimids had to be wary; later, as the Ismā’īlī hold was loosening, distrust crept in as though Byzantium may have had designs upon Egypt, and a more defensive stance was adopted. The civil war saw the collapse of what was an increasingly cold relationship. Afterwards, neither side was of much use to the other, both taken up with their own internal affairs. Externally, since the Seljuqs could evidently attack both sides at once, an alliance was pointless and in any case too expensive. There was no other real reason for a union, and several against, not least the religious aspect. Cairo and Constantinople had been allies because each could gain something from the other; without this promise, the essentially self-serving union lay dormant with only occasional embassies until the Crusades would bring it back to life.

The Sunni World

Throughout al-Mustanṣir’s long reign, his greatest religious rival was the Sunni ‘Abbāsid caliph in Baghdad. Claiming descent from the Prophet’s uncle ‘Abbās, the caliphate was founded in direct opposition to the Umayyad caliphs in 132/749, in Khurasan. By 132-3/750 the ‘Abbāsids were in Kufa and shortly afterwards founded Baghdad. Within a few years their authority was accepted by Sunnīs across the Islamic world, but by the time the Fāṭimids arrived in Egypt the ‘Abbāsid caliphate was already in decline. Egypt itself had broken away under its governor Ibn Tulūn, who founded the brief Tulūnid dynasty. His actions were mirrored widely in Syria.
and Palestine, whilst internal rifts in Baghdad worsened the situation. From the ninth century the caliphs, as Bernard Lewis points out, had become “the puppets of their own generals, who were often able to appoint and depose them at will.”521 This lack of authority became shamefully apparent in 334/945, when the caliphs came under the control of the Shi‘ite Būyid dynasty.522 The Būyids were still in power when al-Mustansir came to the throne, and the ‘Abbāsid caliphs moribund figureheads.

To the rest of the Islamic Near East the Fātimids were anathema. Al-Mustansir represented a minority Shi‘ite group, whose claims of descent from the Prophet’s daughter Fātima were questioned. He was also seen as controlling ‘Abbāsid land and having power over ‘Abbāsid subjects. To several of the chroniclers al-Mustansir is merely “governor of Egypt”; to the likes of Ibn al-Athīr he was a king but certainly not a religious leader. However, to Baghdad the Fātimids were particularly obnoxious because of their massive power and wealth. The land al-Mustansir occupied contained gold mines and the fertile Nile valley, whilst his heretical forefathers had all the might the ‘Abbāsids so evidently lacked. Meanwhile, the Fātimids viewed the ‘Abbāsids as springing from a branch that had no rightful claim of spiritual leadership; the chances of any diplomatic overtures between the two caliphs were therefore extremely low. This mutual enmity was therefore nothing new in al-Mustansir’s time, but it was exacerbated by two events: the renegade Būyid general al-Basāsīrī’s ill-fated capture of Baghdad for the Fātimids in 450/1058, and the return of the Sunnī Seljuq Turks the same year.

In 427/1036, on al-Mustansir’s accession, the Fātimids were undoubtedly the most powerful Islamic rulers of the time. However, his ‘Abbāsid counterpart al-Qā‘im had far more followers. The actual numbers of Ismā‘īlīs during al-Mustansir’s reign are not available, but from the number of Sunnīs who held even the most religious of posts in Cairo, it is clear that Ismā‘īlīs were not in the majority. After 450/1058 the chief dā‘ī in Cairo was frequently Sunnī and on one occasion a Christian (Badr al-
Jamālī), although an Ismāʿīlī still gave the public lectures\(^5\). Many of the Fātimid qādīs were also Sunnī and the same held true for the wazirs. Religiously tolerant the Fātimids therefore were, but possibly this only came about through necessity. The relative sparsity of the Ismāʿīlīs, despite constant work by the faith’s missionary arm, meant that many of al-Mustansir’s subjects theoretically owed allegiance to Baghdad. Perhaps surprisingly, this advantage was not notably exploited until long after al-Mustansir’s death. On a basic level, the general populace was poor and unable to overthrow their Shīʿite masters, but they may not have been interested in doing so. The Fātimids’ tolerant approach gave little reason for religious rebellion amongst the masses; it seems likely that their lives had been little affected by the change from Tulūnids to Fātimids. There is no evidence that the conquest of Egypt created any great disruption at the lower echelons of society, many of whom possibly preferred an Ismāʿīlī ruler based in Cairo than a Sunnī based in Baghdad. In addition, a certain proportion of al-Mustansir’s subjects were Christians and Jews who had no reason at all to prefer the rule in Iraq. Conversely, despite the Būyids being Shīʿite they were not Ismāʿīlīs, so that al-Mustansir had no powerful allies within the Sunnī world’s territories.

According to the chronicler Ibn Taghribirdī, the final days of al-Ẓāhir, al-Mustansir’s father, provide an intriguing tale in Fātimid-ʿAbbasid relations in this period. The Fātimid caliph had apparently provided 5000 dinars to build a canal at Kufa from the Euphrates, although why he should do this is not explained; possibly there was a significant Ismāʿīlī community in the area. The local people then sent to al-Qāʾīm to ask permission to take this gift, but the ‘Abbāsid caliph was unsurprisingly uncertain whether or not to accept Fātimid money for any reason. His concern was not shared by his lawyers, however, who promptly bade him permit it since it was for the benefit of Muslims.\(^6\)

\(^5\) Ibn Muyassar, p.4.
\(^6\) Ibn Taghribirdī, IV., p.282.
This curious episode neatly demonstrates the realistic – and on occasion cynical-approach towards other religions often seen in international relations at the time. Whilst al-Zāhir was an enemy to Baghdad, his money could conveniently be taken without impugning al-Qā’im’s piety. However, the tale is not reported by other chroniclers, suggesting that it was either untrue or simply unimportant; Ibn Taghribirdī’s work is notable for his unusually gossipy style. In showing its opposition to the Fāṭimids during the early part of al-Mustanṣir’s reign, there was indeed little Baghdad could do beyond the petty. Militarily only minor skirmishes in Syria between the two empires were common, and until the advent of the Seljuqs, all that could be achieved by the weakened Sunnī world. Attacking from a different angle, in 444/1052 a proclamation was issued from Baghdad denouncing al-Mustanṣir and the Ismā’īlīs as impostors with no claim to the imāmate. Although circulated widely throughout the Sunnī vassal states of the Middle East, this was not as dramatic as it may sound. Such official declarations were issued at intervals, the previous one being in 401/1012 when an Iraqi emir briefly pledged Mosul to the Fāṭimids. Certainly Cairo was able to ignore this insult and again, not all the chroniclers bother to report the proclamation of 444/1052. If the aim was to ignite Sunnī passion within the Fāṭimid empire then it failed.

The chronicles do not mention al-Mustanṣir issuing any similar printed attacks on the ‘Abbāsids, although naturally he did not recognise al-Qā’im’s status as caliph either. Any such retaliation would have been unwise given that a large proportion of al-Mustanṣir’s subjects were Sunnī, and he could not risk arousing anti-Shī’ite sentiment within his own empire by openly attacking the Sunnī caliph. Instead, he adopted more subtle tactics. During the Seljuq sultan Tughril Beg’s campaigns in Iraq, Ibn Taghribirdī records al-Mustanṣir’s supporters winning over his brother Ibrahim Ināl with money and arms:

525 Ibn Muyassar, p.6.
It was said of Ibrahim [Ināl] that the Egyptians wrote to him and that al-Basāsīrī had made him rich and envious of Tughril Beg’s position and influence. 527.

The Būyid emir al-Basāsīrī was himself also secretly wooed to the Fātimid cause after becoming angry at the Seljuqs’ squeezing him from influence; who made contact with whom is not recorded, but it seems likely that the Ismā‘īlīs did have contacts within the ‘Abbāsīd empire who were on the alert for such disaffected people as could help their cause:

In this year [447/1055] the estrangement began between al-Basāsīrī and the caliph al-Qā‘īm, ruler of Baghdad. Al-Basāsīrī went to Dahiyya, where he heard of the bravery of the sultan Tughril Beg, and then sent to al-Mustansīr asking for help to take Baghdad & to protect him from Tughril Beg’s return from Syria. This was promised. 528

Since the Ismā‘īlī da‘wa had been clandestinely working in Iraq for years, this would not be surprising. The Sunnī world was aware of this, judging from Tughril’s swift annihilation of his brother and al-Basāsīrī’s arrest the year before he took Baghdad in 447/1055; they also had their spies within the Fātimid lands, as will be seen.

Until the arrival of the Seljuqs in 447/1055 the original sources report very little involving both sides. The Sunnī world and the Fātimids never exchanged embassies or corresponded; they were not allies and had no common enemy. The only major neighbour both shared, Byzantium, was on friendly terms with al-Mustansīr at least. How this hostility affected the lower classes is not mentioned, although Fātimid dinars were frequently found in Iraq suggesting that trade was not damaged. As has been seen, the Sunnī world meddled in al-Mustansīr’s affairs in 443/1051 by receiving overtures of submission from Ibn Badis of Ifrīqiya, and sending back ‘Abbāsīd robes of honour. Although Ifrīqiya was of little strategic value to al-Qā‘īm, it was the founding place of the Fātimid empire and its loss would be a public embarrassment for his rival. Unfortunately for the Sunnī world, the Fātimids were alerted to Ibn Badis’ treachery by Byzantium. Clearly the Fātimids were also keen

528 Ibn Muyassar, p.7.
on publicly humiliating their rivals, judging from the deliberately offensive burning of the ‘Abbāsids robes in a dirt pit by al-Mustanṣir, symbolically linking the ‘Abbāsids with uncleanness\textsuperscript{529}.

Tughril Beg began building up the Seljuq state in 432/1041 in central Asia, and Ibn al-Athīr notes his progress westwards. In 429/1038 he had been declared sultan at Nishapur, and by 438/1046-7 he was at Isfahan, taking it four years later\textsuperscript{530}. By 443/1052 he was corresponding with the caliph al-Qā‘īm to make terms to rescue the caliphate from Shī‘ite control\textsuperscript{531}. This approaching Sunnī force, whose deeds must have reached Baghdad long before Tughril himself, may explain the sudden riots in Baghdad between the Sunnīs and Shī‘ites between 443/1052 and 446/1054, as the population became unsettled in the face of approaching change. This increasing instability was felt outside the city, with Kurds and Arabs rioting, then the Turks\textsuperscript{532}.

Tughril Beg finally arrived in Baghdad in 447/1055 and had his name inserted in the \textit{khutba} (sermon) whilst the city saw discord on several levels. The Turks now turned on al-Basāsīrī, who was in turn struggling with the grand wazir. The native population rioted against the Seljuq troops whilst the Shā‘īts and Hanbālis fought each other\textsuperscript{533}. Meanwhile, the Fāṭimids’ lack of involvement ceased as a dazzling opportunity presented itself. Al-Basāsīrī, the Būyid emir, had once been in high favour with al-Qā‘īm but had fallen victim to the machinations of the wazir Ibn Muslima. Ibn Muyassar relates that by constantly linking al-Basāsīrī with the Turks, Ibn Muslima managed to alienate al-Basāsīrī from the caliph and Baghdad’s other emirs.\textsuperscript{534}

\textsuperscript{529} Ibn Muyassar, p.5.
\textsuperscript{530} Ibn al-Athīr, IX, p.534.
\textsuperscript{531} Ibid., p.580.
\textsuperscript{532} Ibn al-Athīr, IX, p.596.
\textsuperscript{533} Ibid., p.614.
\textsuperscript{534} Ibn Muyassar, p.11.
The same year that Tughril Beg reached Baghdad, al-Basāsīrī wrote to al-Mustanṣir “asking for help to take Baghdad and to protect him from Tughril Beg”535; as a Shi‘ite he knew he would have little chance of remaining in his privileged position once the Sunnī Seljuqs arrived. Al-Mustanṣir was delighted – he sent back his promise of aid and the next year began emptying the palace coffers to finance the capture of Baghdad:

In this year al-Yāẓūrī [al-Mustanṣir’s wazir] provided al-Basāsīrī with money from the Treasury until there was nothing left in the palace coffers, it all having gone to take Baghdad.536

To Cairo it must have seemed that at last al-Mustanṣir would stamp his authority over the entire Islamic world and destroy the ‘Abbāsid caliphate. That the territories covered by al-Qā‘im’s spiritual rule were predominantly Sunnī was not a problem, since the Fāṭimid empire also contained large numbers of Sunnī Muslims, probably more so than Shi‘a. Exactly where the Seljuqs fitted into this plan is unclear, although the city riots could give al-Mustanṣir hope that the people would support him once his khutba was installed. Fortunately, however, al-Basāsīrī’s subjugation of Tughril’s brother Ibrahim Ināl bore fruit. Ibrahim promptly embarked on a tour of Iraq, subduing various cities and declaring himself governor, his brother in pursuit. At the beginning of 450/1058 Ibrahim was at Hamadhān being besieged by Tughril, who was thus distracted from the Fāṭimids’ goal of Baghdad537. The unfortunate Ibrahim was killed the following year, having outlived his usefulness to the Fāṭimids538. Al-Basāsīrī’s death followed shortly afterwards.539

The Fāṭimid conquest of Baghdad lasted exactly a year. It was confusing, bloodthirsty and treacherous. Ibn Muyassar’s succinct paragraph manages to convey all this and the main events in a few lines:

535 Ibid., p.7.
536 Ibid., p8.
537 Ibn al-Athīr, IX, p.640.
538 Ibid., p.645.
539 Ibid., p.648.
On Friday 7th Shawwal 450 [27th November 1058] the prayer to al-Mustansir took place in Baghdad after much fighting between al-Basasîrî and the locals, which used up money and troops from Egypt... The caliph al-Qâ’im fled... Al-Basasîrî broke the minbars in the Friday mosques and replaced them for al-Mustansir’s khutba. A coin was struck in al-Mustansir’s name..... When al-Mustansir heard this he rejoiced greatly.540

Al-Basasîrî’s troops came in, took the city whilst Tughril was absent and gave al-Mustansir the high point of his reign. Without al-Qâ’im in the city the people split into factions, some obviously with al-Basasîrî to stay on the winning side. However, in Cairo al-Mustansir’s actions make it clear that he did not intend to have his rival put to death, or treated in anything other than an honourable manner. Al-Qâ’im’s robes and turban were sent to Cairo to be gloated over, but two million dinars were spent preparing a palace to house him541. Losing the ‘Abbâsid caliph to a Bedouin emir was not part of the plan; the Fâtimids wanted him contained in Egypt and under their control. To treat al-Qâ’im in any other manner would be foolish; whilst many Sunnis in Iraq and the Fâtimid empire disliked the Seljuqs, bringing down their religious figurehead could be catastrophic. Not only would they be likely to revolt against their Shi‘ite rulers, it would set a dangerous precedent for destroying a caliphate. Al-Mustansir appears to have pursued the line so popular in medieval Europe, where kings could be seized by other rulers but were then held. In addition, al-Qâ’im alive and under control in Cairo was worth far more than if he were murdered, when another caliph under Seljuq control could simply be set up in his place. To wipe out the entire ‘Abbâsid line would be fraught with obstacles; to hold the prize person considerably easier. As it was, al-Qâ’im’s escape from Baghdad was followed by the caliph making progress around those parts of the Sunni world still loyal to him and stirring up anti-Fâtimid feeling542. Interestingly, the Egyptian Sunni chronicler Ibn Taghibirdî demonstrates the pull between religion and nationality in his report of al-Qâ’im’s trials; he goes into revolting detail of the caliph’s illness whilst in exile and paints a painfully undignified picture of the man

540 Ibn Muyassar, p.10.
541 Al-Maqrizî, II, p.257.
542 Ibn Taghibirdî, V, p.6.
who at the time represented the spiritual head of Ibn Taghribirdî’s own religion. 543 Indeed, the chronicler is far gentler in his handling of al-Mustanṣir, who was a local. As it was, however, the ‘Abbāsid caliph survived and escaped capture. The two million dinars spent on the palace went to waste, and al-Mustanṣir lost his chance to rule the Sunni world.

Baghdad was lost shortly afterwards. The Fātimid chances of holding it were hopeless; Tughril Beg had finally killed his brother Ibrahim and was hastening back to the city by early 451/1059. Meanwhile, al-Qā‘im was still at large and being cheered by the populace wherever he appeared, whilst several warlords who had opposed Tughril decided that he was preferable to being ruled by the Ismā‘īlīs. However, internal politics within Cairo also played their part. The wazir al-Yāzūrī having been executed in 450/1058 for apparent treason, al-Mustanṣir’s wazir when al-Basāṣirī entered Baghdad was al-Maghribī. This latter had once fled from the Būyid emir, and had not forgotten it, according to Ibn al-Athīr. Fearing the consequences of al-Basāṣirī’s success, al-Maghribī disparaged him to al-Mustanṣir and deliberately delayed any official response. When finally sent, the wazir’s reply did not contain “what al-Basāṣirī had hoped for or expected”. 544

Ibn Taghribirdî, possibly exaggerating from Egyptian pride, claims that “If [al-Mustanṣir] had persevered, al-Basāṣirī could have won over the rest of the country.” 545 According to the chronicler, the lack of a positive response from Cairo restricted al-Basāṣirī’s power and thus allowed the Sunni world to repel this attack on Baghdad. 546

Ibn Taghribirdî may have believed this to be the case, but al-Maghribī’s propaganda was not the only reason for al-Mustanṣir’s gradual withdrawal from al-Basāṣirī and the failure to hold Baghdad. The Fātimid treasury was exhausted by the huge sums

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543 Ibid., p.11.
544 Ibn al-Athīr, IX, p.644.
545 Ibn Taghribirdî, V, p.11.
546 Ibid., p.12.
spent on this expedition. The two million dinars for the palace were added to another half a million dinars sent straight to al-Basāsīrī, as well as arms, horses and thousands of troops. The Fāṭimid state was wealthy but this level of expenditure was unsustainable. Al-Yāẓūrī’s execution had left a void at the highest levels of the court with nobody of similar ability to fill it, whilst the various ethnic groups that made up the Fāṭimid army were already fighting amongst themselves and destabilising the empire. The exhausted treasury could not cope with increasing demands for pay. All these aspects contributed to the weakness of al-Mustansir’s hold on Baghdad; even had he remained a whole-hearted supporter of al-Basāsīrī, al-Basāsīrī could do nothing without a constant supply of money and arms. With Tughril bearing down on Baghdad in 451/1059 and al-Qā’im under Seljuq protection again, the loss of Baghdad was inevitable. Al-Basāsīrī was beheaded and the head nailed over the city gate in another public insult between the two caliphates.

The capture of Baghdad was a curious episode in Fāṭimid-‘Abbāsid history. That it happened at all seemed at first a clear signal of the Fāṭimids’ superior power over weak Sunnī territories. Yet only a year later the conquest was over and Tughril’s grip on the Seljuq empire more powerful than before. By contrast, Cairo was bankrupt with nothing to show for it beyond a new palace, and already on the downward slope to civil war. It also seems from this time that al-Mustansir’s government had begun to realize that the Seljuqs could pose a genuine threat to the Fāṭimid empire. The wazir al-Yāẓūrī was brutally executed in 450/1058 on the grounds that he had corresponded with Tughril Beg and discussed his arrival in Egypt; although Brett’s detailed investigation fails to unearth any proof of this being true, it suggests that a Seljuq conquest of Egypt was a genuine fear at the time.

Possibly al-Mustansir, covetous of his wazir’s vast fortune as al-Maqrlīzī suggests, was killing two birds with one stone – taking al-Yāẓūrī’s wealth whilst sending an unmistakable message to any ‘Abbāsid supporters within his own realm. Several

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547 Ibn Muyassar, p.17.

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years later he dismissed a wazir after two days on finding out that his father had been a scribe in Baghdad.\textsuperscript{550} However, by then his empire was so chaotic that few wazirs lasted more than a few weeks; this swift decision was probably due more to al-Mustanṣir’s own jealousy of his religious position than genuine paranoia at a link to Baghdad at his court.

Tughril Beg died in 455/1063, being succeeded by his nephew Alp Arslan; the sultan left the interesting bequest of eight hundred Egyptian donkeys, suggesting that not everything of the Fātimids was anathema to him.\textsuperscript{551} Meanwhile Alp Arslan at his accession:

had the ambition to march on Egypt to destroy the stronghold of the Fātimid heresy. But he realised the necessity of maintaining his ascendancy over the Turcomans.... who were primarily interested in the richly-rewarding campaigns of a holy war on the Christian territories beyond [Azerbaijan].\textsuperscript{552}

By the time the sultan felt secure enough to turn on Egypt in 463/1071, al-Mustanṣir was rescued from an unexpected quarter. As Alp Arslan advanced into Syria, the Byzantine emperor Romanus Diogenes led a large force into Armenia to recapture the Byzantine territory of Manzikert that the Seljuqs had occupied on their way to Cairo. Hearing of this threat to the rear, the sultan hastily turned away from the Fātimid lands and fought Romanus at Manzikert. The outcome was a disaster for Byzantium. Romanus was captured, forced to grant treaties and concessions, then murdered on his return to Constantinople after his release. Alp Arslan met a similar fate in 465/1072, being stabbed in a quarrel with a prisoner; he was succeeded in the sultanate by his son Malikshāh.\textsuperscript{553} Shortly afterwards, Badr al-Jamāl arrived in Cairo and the opportunity of attacking a vulnerable, undefended Egypt was lost.

At the time of Manzikert, however, al-Mustanṣir’s rule had disintegrated. Three years after al-Basāṣir’s death the blacks and Turks in the Fātimid army had battled

\textsuperscript{550} Al-Maqrīzī, II, p.271.
\textsuperscript{553} Ibn al-Athīr, X, p.52.
in al-Mustanṣir’s presence on a pleasure ride. By 459/1067 the Turks were effectively ruling Cairo, having slaughtered most of the blacks; famine and plague arrived in 460/1068. In the same year, the holy cities of Mecca and Medina switched their allegiance to the Sunnī world in a serious blow to al-Mustanṣir’s international prestige. The next seven years were disastrous for Cairo as the civil war took hold and harvests failed; paradoxically, however, this may have saved al-Mustanṣir from losing his realm entirely to the Sunnī world. Much though the Seljuqs might have desired the destruction of the Fāṭimid caliph, the path to accomplishing this was by no means clear. Egypt had not the food to sustain an advancing army, nor the drink since many wells had been poisoned by warlords, so that reaching Cairo was fraught with difficulty. The fabulous wealth of the caliph had been stripped away by the Turkish soldiers and the country was prey to violence and horrible privations. Attempting to seize the country would thus be dangerous, expensive and problematic, with little of its former glories left in any case. These obstructions contrasted sharply with Byzantine Asia Minor, which after Manzikert was “laid open... to Turkish conquest.”

Outlying areas of the crumbling Fāṭimid empire were also more accessible. Aleppo’s khutba was read for the ‘Abbāsids from 463/1071 onwards, whilst the previous year the governor of Tyre requested Seljuq aid in fending off Badr al-Jamālī, later al-Mustanṣir’s wazir. Also in 463/1071 the Turkish leader in Cairo, Nāṣir al-Dawla Ibn Ḥamdān, implemented the ‘Abbāsid khutba in Alexandria, Damietta and other pockets around Egypt. The pinnacle of Fāṭimid success, the capture of Baghdad only eight years before, was now entirely reversed. Ibn Ḥamdān bears some similarity with al-Basāṣīrī; he had made a pact with al-Qā’im to reinstate the ‘Abbāsid khutba, and presumably looked to the ‘Abbāsids for his own advance rather than spiritual concern. By 464/1072, it seemed highly likely that al-Qā’im would

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554 Ibn Zāfir, p.74.
555 Ibn Taḡhrībīrī, V, p.79.
557 Ibn al-Athīr, X, p.60.
558 Ibid., p.86.
559 Ibn Muyassar, p.21.
indeed see his dynasty back in control of Egypt. Ibn Ḥamdān was the effective ruler of the country, and the caliph was reduced to three slaves and a palace stripped entirely bare. He subsisted on two loaves of bread a day, donated to him by a warlord556. Nevertheless, Ibn Ḥamdān did not kill him as he could so easily have done.

Why al-Mustansir survived is open to question. He was unguarded, his own soldiers being those same Turks now ruling the city and plundering his possessions; the black troops had been wiped out or fled. Judging from his work for the Sunni world, Ibn Ḥamdān was not an Ismā‘īlī, and it is unlikely that al-Qā‘im ordered his rival be spared, particularly after his own ordeal during the conquest of Baghdad. Whilst al-Mustansir represented a minority group in his own country, the ‘Abbāsids’ Sunnīsm was shared by most of the Islamic world’s subjects; the fear that outraged Ismā‘īlīs might rise up and overthrow al-Qā‘im was far-fetched. On the other hand, to those Turks who opposed Ibn Ḥamdān’s plans for power through the ‘Abbāsids, al-Mustansir provided a useful alternative. Should Egypt go over to the ‘Abbāsids, Ibn Ḥamdān not be alive to rule, the chances were high that the Seljuqs would move in, leaving little for the warlords. Seeing Egypt swallowed up into the Sunnī lands cannot have been as attractive as exploiting the now powerless caliph. The local people were also likely to infinitely prefer keeping their old Shī‘ite ruler instead of suffering the same violent Seljuq troops who had descended on Baghdad. Whatever the people’s religious bent, al-Mustansir was their own ruler born and bred in Egypt; he came from a dynasty that had built a glorious empire, and he was firmly based in Cairo. Towards his non-Ismā‘īlī subjects he was generally religiously tolerant. Becoming an outpost of Seljuq territory under Alp Arslan’s might can hardly have tempted many at the lower social levels, since they stood to gain little from it – they may also have associated the ‘Abbāsids’ regime with the anarchy of Ibn Ḥamdān’s. Of course, there was also an Ismā‘īlī population who would have been horrified at the removal of their imām. With the endemic violence in Egypt at the time, removing al-Mustansir could possibly have sparked even greater disruption.

556 Ibn Zāfir, p.74.
Whatever the reasons behind his survival, the ‘Abbasids did not manage to win Egypt. Ibn Ḥamdān was savagely murdered by other leading Turks in 465/1073 and the khutba hastily changed back to the Fātimids’ throughout the country\textsuperscript{561}.

An intriguing incident occurring in 463/1071 gives a picture of how desperate Egypt had become. Al-Mustansir’s palace had been looted and the disorder at its height; many important people had already fled the country. The exiles were joined this year by the caliph’s own family, who headed for Baghdad\textsuperscript{562}. Sayyida Raṣad, the caliph’s mother, had certainly suffered under Ibn Ḥamdān – he is reported to have extorted money from her and kept her prisoner for a while\textsuperscript{563}. Although the choice of destination seems bizarre, it becomes clear that there were few other places for them to go. Byzantium was not the friendly place it had been, following Romanus Diogenes’ disastrous defeat at Manzikert and his later murder. To the west lay Ifrīqiya, rent by marauding Arabs and unfriendly, to the south the impoverished Christian Nubia, and elsewhere warlords and hostility. Baghdad at least was ruled by Muslims whose hospitality traditions made them more likely to offer shelter than the Christian lands. Perhaps Sayyida Raṣad and those with her believed that the Sunni world would treat them exactly as al-Mustansir had once planned to handle al-Qa‘im, to be held in luxury. Al-Qa‘im’s daughter, during al-Basāsīr’s occupation of Baghdad, had been well housed and treated honourably, giving further encouragement to this idea\textsuperscript{564}. What actually did happen to them is not known. Al-Mustansir’s sons remained in Egypt, but his sister appears in the chronicles during his son’s reign. Sayyida was elderly when she left Cairo and may well have died en route; the family may have stayed secretly with Ismā‘īlīs contacted through the da‘wa. Unfortunately, since the chronicles do not offer any insights, the truth remains a matter of speculation.

\textsuperscript{561} Ibn Muyassar, p.22.
\textsuperscript{562} Ibn Zāfir, p.75.
\textsuperscript{563} Ibn al-Athīr, X, p.86.
\textsuperscript{564} Ibn al-Athīr, p.643.
In 466/1074 al-Mustansir had finally found a solution to the civil war by asking Badr al-Jamali to restore peace in Egypt. Badr was ideal for the purpose. He owed loyalty to nobody, being an Armenian Christian, and having his own army. He could thus wipe out all the Turks and any other caliphal enemies, and he did so with gusto. By 467/1075 al-Mustansir was able to successfully demand that the emir of Mecca restore the Fâtimid khutba and strike again at the Sunnî world’s superiority. In addition to these changes, the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Qâ’im died the following year, in 476/1075, being succeeded by his son al-Muqtaḍî. Badr having killed off all the Turkish emirs at a treacherous banquet in 466/1074, the Sunnî world then lost any chance of a sympathiser such as Ibn Ḥamdân, who could take Cairo from within. However, Badr’s success in Syria and Palestine against the Seljuqs was minimal.

The Seljuqs by this time had been established in Iraq for twenty years and they had continued their conquests towards the west. The emir Atsiz took Damascus in 468/1076, but Alp Arslan’s son Tutush was more successful at winning Fâtimid territory. In 471/1078 he had Atsiz killed following an argument and took Damascus for himself, then three years later most of the Syrian coast. Badr launched sieges on Damascus in 470/1077, 471/1078 and 478/1085 but never succeeded in taking the city, although he won back Tyre in 486/1093. Ibn al-Athîr relates that the ruler of Tyre’s disobedience towards Cairo was not supported by his people: When the Egyptian army arrived and attacked, the people rebelled and cried out al-Mustansir’s personal slogan with that of Badr. They surrendered and the Egyptians stormed in. [The governor] and his companions were taken to Egypt; a fine of 60,000 dinars was exacted from Tyre. On arrival in Egypt, [the governor] and all his party were killed.

The desire to be on the winning side must have been particularly strong in the hotly fought over cities of Palestine and Syria.

565 Al-Maqrizi, II, p.311.
567 Al-Maqrizi, II, p.31.
569 Ibid., p.223.

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By al-Mustansir’s and Badr’s deaths in 487/1094 the overall Fatimid-Sunnī world relations had changed again. The Turks’ frequent infighting, such as that between Atsiz and Tutush, demanded a powerful leader to unite them if Cairo and the Fatimids were to be defeated. However, over such a large area and with dozens of Turkish emirs, this was an impossible request. Accordingly, the Turks’ move west continued but without the same focus it had had under Tughril Beg and Alp Arslan. Atsiz, who had launched an offensive on Egypt in 469/1077, was killed off by Tutush before he could make another attempt and his successor showed little interest in doing so. The Turks turned away from Egypt and continued to push into the more vulnerable areas of Asia Minor instead, thus winning the Fatimids another century of rule. However, despite Badr al-Jamali’s hard work al-Mustansir’s domain never regained the splendour of his early years and the Sunnī world rose inexorably in superiority of size and power. Yemen, Ifriqiya, Sicily and most of Syria were lost; if not to the Sunnī world then to the ‘Abbāsids in terms of allegiance. Whilst Egypt was strengthened again, it was only Egypt and al-Mustansir’s international standing as a rival to al-Muqtaddi had shrunk accordingly. At his accession the Sunnī world and the Fatimid empire had been genuine rivals for control of areas, regardless of the majority religious view. This struggle had lasted years, throughout the arrival of the Seljuqs and al-Basāsiri’s brief victory in Baghdad, but the civil war swung the balance. The ‘Abbāsid khutba was read all over the former Fatimid empire and al-Mustansir was no longer of the same standing as the Sunnī caliph. This balance was never regained, and the new weakness of the Fatimids as rivals to the Sunnī world lasted until the dynasty’s end.

The Latins

Al-Mustansir did not see the foundation of the Crusader kingdoms; he died the year before Pope Urban II proclaimed the call to arms at the 487/1095 Council of Clermont that led to the First Crusade. However, during his own reign his empire’s relations with the Latins appear to have been generally amicable, albeit poorly documented. Indeed, in the Muslim chronicles for his period the Latins are almost
never mentioned. Ibn Muyassar never refers to them during the sixty years of al-Mustansir's caliphate, and his silence is mimicked by others including Ibn Zāfir and al-Nuwayrī. The painstaking Ibn al-Athir manages three references to the Latins; two deal briefly with their battles in Spain and the third to their rule of Sicily in 484/1092. Even then, he is extremely terse and does not bring the Latins' relationship with the Fātimids under discussion. From this it could be inferred that al-Mustansir's relations with the Latins – this term including Italians, Normans and other Western Europeans – did not exist, but in fact there was considerable interaction between the two. On the other hand, this was predominantly through trade rather than the lavish diplomatic envoys exchanged between Cairo and Constantinople.

The Latins in 427/1036 stood in a very different position than Byzantium despite both being Christian. Most significantly, there was no Western Christian equivalent of the great Byzantine empire. The Latin world at the time was fragmented into city-states and small kingdoms; as a spiritual figurehead, the closest Western equivalent to al-Mustansir was the Pope. Unlike the Byzantine emperors with their shared borders and Diophysite Christian population to watch over, the Pope had no need to forge diplomatic links with Cairo. Whilst a tolerant Fātimid caliph was imperative to Rome because of al-Mustansir's rule over the Holy Land, this was handled by individual states rather than the Pope himself. There were no embassies, gifts or letters between al-Mustansir and Rome. The Latins' importance to Cairo lay in their contribution to Fātimid trade and economy. Given that the chroniclers tended to report only the most important or glamorous events, it is therefore unsurprising that much of the Latin activity in al-Mustansir's empire went unremarked.

The Latin chronicles themselves are also frustratingly bare of information over interaction with the Fātimids until after the advent of the First Crusade; almost all the modern scholarship on the topic deals exclusively with events after 487/1096. By contrast, the Jewish Geniza documents of Cairo offer several glimpses of Latin merchants plying business with the Fātimids on what was clearly an everyday
business. Not all Latin merchants dealt with the Fāṭimid empire, but those who traded in the Mediterranean inevitably came into contact with them. At the forefront of the Latin states were the Italian maritime powers of Venice, Amalfi and Genoa; later on the Normans of Sicily would have a serious impact on al-Mustaṣir’s territories.

Al-Mustaṣir’s empire was ideally placed to take advantage of trade with a wide range of domains. Spanning almost the entire southern Mediterranean coast, in 427/1036 the Fāṭimid empire also controlled Sicily under the Kalbid emirs, at the crossroads of Mediterranean trade. It was therefore inevitable that the Latins and Fāṭimids would have dealings with each other purely through geographical proximity, but in addition the Latins provided several useful supplies. Predominant amongst these was timber. Since this was limited within al-Mustaṣir’s own territories, the Latins were the main suppliers of wood, used in particular to build up the navy ships. They also represented a major market for Fāṭimid exports including gold and spices. The Geniza does not go into great detail over the Latins’ involvement in trade, usually simply mentioning a merchant’s Latin status, but it is clear that the amount of interaction between Latins and Fāṭimids at the trade level was large; Alexandria, the closest Fāṭimid port to the Latin states, had a separate harbour for Christian ships, suggesting frequent Latin visits.

Not all Latin visitors were merchants, however. Another significant contribution to al-Mustaṣir’s coffers was made by the annual influx of pilgrims to the Fāṭimid-controlled holy cities, in particular Jerusalem. Pilgrims came in sufficiently large numbers to have a permanent Latin presence established in the area in the shape of monasteries and hostels, and again permission for this from al-Mustaṣir came at a price. What that price was can only be guessed, but the case of Cairo’s dealings with the Amalfitan merchants suggests that it was high. The Amalfitans were a major presence in the Palestinian ports and often transported pilgrims to Jerusalem. In the


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early 460s/late 1060s they asked al-Mustansir to grant permission for a monastery on Mount Zion. They also wanted to build a church, a hospital and two hostels beside it, all of which was granted. Al-Mustansir was generally a religiously tolerant ruler, and his later wazir Badr al-Jamali was probably a Christian himself (albeit Armenian rather than Latin), but this request did not come at a time of smooth Muslim-Christian relations. Cairo had confiscated the relics in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 447/1055, and had also recently built a cramped quarter of Jerusalem in which to cram in the Christians, who were also taxed heavily. The Byzantine emperor Constantine IX had been publicly snubbed in his role as the Christians’ protector, and yet the Amalfitan merchants began building their monastery. There must have been a significant amount of money involved in such a large project, which would further offend Constantine because the Amalfitans were Latin Christians rather than his own Eastern.

The episode of the Amalfitan building schemes demonstrates perfectly the Fatimid attitude towards the Latins, which was one of recognition towards a vital source of wealth. As will be discussed later, Latin Christians were often treated far better within the Fatimid empire than those native Christians who did not belong to the mercantile or court elite. As time went on and al-Mustansir’s state weakened, the Latins represented an essential economic contribution; it is probably no coincidence that the Amalfitans were granted their buildings shortly after the ruinously expensive capture of Baghdad that had left the Fatimid treasuries bare. Al-Mustansir could scarcely afford to turn down such a source of income.

In addition to this, relations with the Latins were shaped by the lack of military threat that they originally posed. Despite the might of early medieval Venice and the Italian maritime states, none alone was anything close to a match for al-Mustansir’s vast army in case of hostility. It would also have been notably foolish for either Latins or Fatimids to indulge in hostility towards each other in the first place.

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572 Ibid.
Fātimids had no interest in capturing Latin territory provided they could trade freely, whilst the Latins, granted total access to Christian holy sites and the Fātimid-controlled trade routes, had no reason to do anything other than cooperate fully with al-Mustansir’s government. The rivalry between Cairo and Constantinople or Baghdad was not replicated; the relationship was one of mutual dependence. Latin merchants depended on the Fātimids for access to territory beyond the Mediterranean and through the Red Sea, as well as those Mediterranean ports under Fātimid control. Since these links did not require much effort, and no involvement from al-Mustansir himself, they are seldom mentioned. In fact, there are hints that the merchants were not always as well treated as the Amalfitans – Sanders notes that the personal risks as well as the financial led many to seek partnership, and merchants did not travel alone. Avoiding the double customs tax also led Muslims and Christians to form business partnerships⁵⁷³.

The other important Latin links later in al-Mustansir’s reign were with Sicily; somewhat remarkably since Sicily had long been part of the Fātimid dominions, and was still minting coins in al-Mustansir’s name in the early years of his rule. In fact in the 440s/1050s the Sicilian Kalbid governors gave suzerainty to the Ifriqiyan Zirids who gave allegiance to Baghdad, and it appears that Cairo’s hold on the island was so slack as to be non-existent. In 452/1060 the d’Hauteville brothers, Robert and Roger, established their government on the island and easily pushed back the ineffectual Kalbids. Al-Mustansir is not recorded as having sent any aid, and possibly had doubted the Kalbid allegiance for some time. The Fātimid navy was not a powerful one, and waging war over Sicily would probably have proved costly and unsuccessful. By 463/1071 the Kalbids lost their final fortress of Palermo, and the entire island passed out of even nominally Fātimid hands⁵⁷⁴. This loss of a strategic territory was not met with any great reaction; on the other hand, to do anything would have been even more difficult than in 452/1060. Al-Mustansir’s army was locked in a self-destructive civil war by this time, and sending a naval

⁵⁷³ Sanders, p.163.
⁵⁷⁴ Ibn Taghribirdi, V, p.87.
force was equally unthinkable. Even when Badr al-Jamālī salvaged the Fāṭimid state in 466/1074, he had too much to do crushing rebellions and winning back Palestinian territory to drag a well-defended Sicily back into the fold. Instead, Cairo wisely accepted the situation and established diplomatic links with the d’Hautevilles. The revenue from Sicily, whilst not regained, was replaced with more Norman trade coming into Egypt from the island. These diplomatic foundations laid by al-Muṣṭaṣir were so successful that fifty years later Ifriqiyan emirs requested that the Fāṭimids intervene with the Normans to prevent an invasion of Ifriqiya, the Fāṭimids presumably being on sufficiently good terms with the island’s ruling Latins.

The self-serving approach adopted by al-Muṣṭaṣir’s government was undoubtedly a sensible one from an economic point of view, although it did lay them open to criticism from Muslims for being too lax towards Christians. From an international standpoint, the Fāṭimid tolerance towards the Latins both in trade and as pilgrims was also wise. Attacking either would have brought no advantages and possibly severe reprisals. It is notable that Urban II’s anger over the Islamic hold on Jerusalem struck a chord with Latin Christian leaders only after the Seljuqs had taken the city from the Fāṭimids in 463/1071. Prior to this, the Fāṭimids’ open attitude meant that pilgrims had no reason to complain. Once this access was withdrawn, however, relations with the Latins went downhill. Just as al-Muṣṭaṣir probably did not differentiate between a Diophysite and a Monophysite Christian, so the Latins in Europe made no difference between the Seljuqs and the Fāṭimids. With Jerusalem under threat for Christians in Western Europe, the idea of a Crusade against Muslims in general found fertile ground, even if the Mediterranean trade probably continued unabated. A further catalyst, if the contemporary Aleppan chronicler al-‘Azīmī is to be believed, was the attack on Latin and Byzantine pilgrims in unnamed Levantine ports in 485/1092 already mentioned – the surviving pilgrims spread the news homewards, where “they prepared themselves for military invasion”.


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It is astonishing that al-Mustanṣir – or by this time, Badr al-Jamālī – would have allowed this to happen without reprisals, and certainly does not fit with what is known of Badr’s character, so the probability is that these ports were under Seljuq control. Nonetheless, the Fātimids suffered for it regardless.

It is unlikely that al-Mustanṣir’s government understood that to threaten Jerusalem was to arouse Latin ire to the extent that was reached in the First Crusade. The relations between the two were not based on religious tolerance or anything so altruistic, but on hard economic sense and mutual advantage. Even the Crusade itself was predominantly carried out by people who had not previously been involved in dealings with the East. Ironically, it was the Crusade that opened up the Latin-Fātimid relations and shed light on what under al-Mustanṣir was at best a fascinatingly crucial yet shadowy part of history.

Conclusion

The Fātimids’ general policy in their international affairs was unsurprising and straightforward. The preservation and extension of the Empire was at the forefront of their actions, and diplomacy either through courtly ritual or through mutual advantage was a major tool in achieving both objectives. With the Sunni world in particular, the negative use of public ritual such as the public burning of robes served to make striking international statements on al-Mustanṣir’s power and status.

Al-Mustanṣir’s diplomatic links did not always function smoothly for fairly obvious reasons. His policy of putting his empire’s needs first was identical to that of every other country, so clashes were inevitable. As the Fātimids’ fortunes rose and fell, its fluctuations affected the diplomatic balance of the Middle East, but at times it seems Cairo became complacent that its power would keep al-Mustanṣir’s allies close even when an alternative was looming. This short-sightedness led to the refusal of
military aid to Byzantium in 446/1054, and it is no surprise that the next year Byzantium was making overtures to the Seljuqs as a diplomatic necessity.

Where there was no opposition and Fātimid interest were held paramount, their relations displayed judgement and intelligence, as in Sicily. By accepting the situation of the Norman invasion, the Fātimids avoided a pointless fight and continued instead to enjoy trade with the most strategic tradepost in the Mediterranean. As the Egyptian civil war exploded and the Fātimid empire shattered, however, diplomacy could not have held it together, and international relations were not to blame for the misfortunes that befell al-Mustānṣir. Overall those of his reign were positive; at the least they take some credit for holding off the Seljuk invasion and for allowing Badr al-Jamālī to rebuild after the years of destruction. International relations could not work miracles for the Fātimids, but the achievements directly attributable to them clearly demonstrate their invaluable role in the Empire’s survival.
Christians in the Reign of al-Mustansir bi'llah

When the Fāṭimids took control of the lands that became their empire, they inherited a substantial population of Jews and Christians, collectively named the ahl al-kitāb ("People of the Book") or the dhimmīs. The teachings of Judaism and Christianity represented to Muslims the first and second stages in the religion that culminated in Islam. Hence, although not equal to Muslims because they had not embraced the final stage, they held a special status within the Islamic world that was discussed in the Koran and adhered to by the Fāṭimids. Dhimmīs lived under certain restrictions; they had to pay the jīzya, a specific tax, to the Muslim authorities, and accept that their place in society was inferior. In exchange for this, they were awarded freedom of worship and protection. As the Koran has it:

Fight those who do not believe in Allah... until they pay the tax in acknowledgment of superiority and they are in a state of subjection.

Whilst no new synagogues or churches should be built within the Dar al-Islam ("House of Islam", meaning Islamic governed lands), those standing were maintained and inspected.

In theory therefore, al-Mustansir’s government continued the approach of religious tolerance of the dhimmīs and piously practised the Koranic doctrine. Unsurprisingly, in reality the Fāṭimids’ attitude was inconsistent, sometimes hypocritical and on occasion brazenly cynical; wealthy Christians at court and from abroad were far better treated than the average impoverished Christian peasant. On occasion – such as during the confiscation of the relics in Holy Sepulchre during a row with Byzantium in 447/1055 - the dhimmīs’ fortunes were determined by international events and the Koran’s injunctions wholly ignored. There were also marked differences between the handling of Jews and Christians, who were seldom treated as one large dhimmī group; indeed, they often had to be differentiated because events

578 Ibid.
579 Koran, 9.29

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made it impossible to lump them together. Within al-Mustaṣfir’s reign, the Jews of his Empire registered unprecedented influence but were taxed and oppressed, and the Christians’ fortunes saw similar variations. Unfortunately, there is little evidence for much of the dhimmis’ lives, but what remains sheds fascinating light on the adaptability of the Fāṭimid rule.

Sources

Native sources for the Christians during al-Mustaṣfir’s period are scanty; there is no paper storehouse such as the Cairo Geniza, with its thousands of Jewish documents. The rural population, unlike the predominantly urban Jews, was probably illiterate, and the Fāṭimids are unlikely to have encouraged chronicling amongst their dhimmis. This was the province of Church officials and monks, not tradesmen and farmers. Moreover, the widespread violence and destruction during al-Mustaṣfir’s reign and the Seljuq conquest could easily have wiped out evidence of Fāṭimid Christian history. The Muslim chroniclers have an almost total lack of interest in Fāṭimid Christians for al-Mustaṣfir’s reign – for the entire sixty years, Ibn al-Athīr mentions Christians once, in Byzantium. Al-Maqīzlī does not even bother with that much. Even the important Christian writer William of Tyre, writing over two centuries before al-Maqīzlī, has practically nothing to report from al-Mustaṣfir’s reign. Al-Ḥākim’s ordinances take up an entire chapter, however; some sources were still available for something so notorious. The next century is dismissed in a page. Either William did not wish to offer the history of the period, or more likely, he was unable to do so because there was no evidence available to him. Latin Christian (Roman Catholic) historians similarly have little to offer. Most had never visited the Fāṭimid Empire and had very little idea of anything that happened there. Even when

580 Ibn al-Athīr, Al-Kāmil fi'l-tārīkh, ed. A. al-Najjar, Cairo 1929, IX, p.515

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detailing events in the area, such as accounts of pilgrimages, the local Christians’ lives are not recorded; the Latin Christians offer only a tourist perspective.

It would be unwise to dismiss this as Muslim historians deliberately ignoring dhimmī events, since they certainly recorded dhimmī history on occasion. In fact, this very omission in the sources for the period is itself telling – for al-Mustaṣir’s rule, Christianity was simply not an important issue. Much of what affected the Fāṭimid Christians had been going on for years before the caliph ascended the throne in 427/1036, such as the heavy taxes. Rather than nothing happening to the Christian communities, little new took place that impinged on Islamic historians’ consciousness. This was also a time of massive events in Fāṭimid history – the Tustarl brothers’ rule and murders, the conquest of Baghdad, the civil war in Egypt and disintegration of the Fāṭimid Empire, the Seljuq conquest and the arrival of the military wazirate under Badr al-Jamāli. With all this going on, and Islamic history to be noted, chroniclers of the time would scarcely have bothered with the far less dramatic events of Christians in the Empire. William of Tyre, a Latin Christian himself, does not display much interest in the evidence of Eastern Christian history.

One Christian source from the period is still extant, this being the History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church, begun by Severus ibn Muqaffa, a Coptic bishop in the late 4th/10th century, and continued into the 6th/12th century. Al-Mustaṣir’s period was recorded by an Alexandrian deacon, Mawhūb ibn Maṣūr. Despite the apparent narrowness of its remit evident in the title, this chronicler offers an invaluable insight into Christian-Muslim relations at al-Mustaṣir’s court, with the effects on Christians of all ranks. He also, in discussing Coptic politics, reveals a Church riddled with power struggles and vicious rumours, which nonetheless loathed its other Christian rivals. Unfortunately, dates are frequently omitted whilst the narrative leaps from year to year, but events can be roughly pinpointed through other

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references. The often unflattering portrayal of the Church and Fātimid government suggests that ibn Mansūr is attempting to be objective in relating events.

**Location**

Much of the Fātimid empire of al-Mustansir’s time had once been Christian land under Byzantine control until the Arab conquest in 17/638, and four centuries later the conversion wave following the conquest had not reached many Christian inhabitants of the area. Outside Cairo, much of Egypt’s rural population was Coptic-speaking Christian, with towns such as Tinnis on the Nile delta being described specifically as a Christian city. Meanwhile, Syria’s Christian and Jewish inhabitants are estimated to have outnumbered the Muslims; the area was acknowledged to be a land of dhimmīs, one chronicler stating plainly towards the end of al-Mustansir’s reign:

> The country is theirs [the Christians] because it is they who work its soil, nurture its monasteries and maintain its churches.

In many Syrian settlements, therefore, various Christian groups formed the predominant religion. They shared this religion with their neighbours to the north, the Christian Byzantine Empire, whose status as the focal point of Melkite Christianity probably drew many Syrian Christians’ religious direction away from the Fātimid epicentre of Egypt itself. To the south of Egypt lay Christian Nubia, whilst many of the merchants coming into Alexandria and other ports were Latin Christians from Frankish and Italian states. Aswan in southern Egypt was very close to Christian Nubia across the border; the Nubian king paid the city a visit to inspect the buildings. In fact, both Nubia and Abyssinia were predominantly

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Monophysite, and came under the authority of the Patriarch of Egypt\textsuperscript{589}. The Fāṭimid Empire was thus surrounded by Christians as well as containing significant numbers.

As already noted, the Muslim chronicles lack interest in the Christians of this period, and certainly do not bother to differentiate between the different groups, but there were several different churches known to exist within the Fāṭimid empire, all dating from before the arrival of Islam. Nestorian Christians – known today as the Assyrians - had smaller numbers than other Christian groups under the Fāṭimids, being concentrated primarily farther east into ‘Abbāsid territory and looking for guidance to their patriarch in Baghdad\textsuperscript{590}. The largest Christian group was the Monophysite church, known as the Coptic or Jacobite church in Egypt, with bishops in Jerusalem and Acre and their epicentre with the patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch\textsuperscript{591}. Within Egypt, the patriarch of Alexandria moved to Cairo in 462/1070, and was a high-ranking figure at court. The last major group, the Diophysites, were headed by the patriarch of Constantinople and the Byzantine emperor – this last caused them to become known as Melkites, “the king’s men”. The Melkites were held – if only by themselves - to be the orthodox Christian group within the Fāṭimid Empire, and an official surviving document from two centuries later claims that “Since they (the Melkites) have never ceased to possess the foremost place in precedence [in the Christian community]”\textsuperscript{592}, although in fact the majority of Fāṭimid Christians were probably Copts\textsuperscript{593}. This claim is somewhat undermined by events related in the \textit{History of the Patriarchs}, in which the Coptic Church is shown to have clearly held a position of authority for all the Empire’s Christians. When al-Yāzūrī punished the Christians by shutting their churches in 449/1057, for example, he blamed the Coptic Patriarch Christodoulos\textsuperscript{594}.

\textsuperscript{589} Cohen, p.65.
\textsuperscript{590} Gil, \textit{A History of Palestine}, 661.
\textsuperscript{591} Ibid., 678.
\textsuperscript{593} Gil, \textit{A History of Palestine} , 661.
In addition to these groups, Roman Catholicism after the Great Schism of 447/1055 must have had some significant numbers due to the European merchants and traders based in the Fāṭimid ports and cities595. There were also numerous monasteries founded with the caliph’s permission and funded by various countries, such as Armenia and Georgia596. However, very few if any Roman Catholics (Latin Christians) would have been Fāṭimid citizens.

In addition to being spread about the Fāṭimid empire, Christians also seem to have spanned a wide social range, from rural peasants through to merchants, artisans and government workers597. Tinnis, the city noted for its Coptic population, was famous for its textile industry, suggesting that this was a traditionally Christian skill598, and must have contained some very wealthy people; in 420/1029, the town sent a large consignment of precious gifts to al-Zāhir599. However, it was in the government administration that the Christian workforce found a large percentage of its employment – large enough, indeed, to be considered inappropriate by some Muslims. Shortly before al-Mustansir came to the throne in 427/1036, the chronicler ‘Abd al-Jabbār complained that:

the kings of Egypt... rely upon the Christians in matters of officialdom... It is the Christians who manage the Muslims’ affairs......which is contrary to law600.

In fact, this had been the case for centuries; after the Muslim conquest of Egypt in 17/638, as has been seen, the incoming Islamic rulers had simply retained the state workers, converted or not. Where some Muslims saw working for the state as a form of slavery, and thus looked elsewhere, the Jews and Christians stayed where they were, until it seems to have been taken for granted that the majority of state workers were not Muslim601. Nor were they restricted to inferior positions – at least one of al-Mustansir’s wazirs was Christian (the Armenian Badr al-Jamālī), along with

596 Gil, A History of Palestine, 680.
598 Sanders, p.158.

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several heads of various diwāns, or departments. Christianity was no impediment to progress in a government career, which may also have explained its continuing popularity with dhimmīs, along with a lack of popular perception (the disgruntled chronicler notwithstanding) that they were taking jobs from Muslims. However, large numbers of the Christian populace, particularly in rural areas, were poor peasants.

Elsewhere in Cairo, it is interesting to note that the court itself contained significant numbers of Christians. The caliph’s harem consisted mainly of slave girls of varying backgrounds, leading to the peculiar situation of an Ismāʿīlī leader who often had a Christian or Jewish mother. Al-Mustanṣir’s mother Sayyida Raṣad, as a Nubian slave, was almost certainly a Christian by upbringing. More dramatically, al-Ḥākim’s Christian mother saw her two brothers made patriarchs, one of whom was head of the Church of the Resurrection at the time of its destruction. If Nāṣir-i Khusraw is to be believed, the caliph’s personal guard were Greeks, and therefore probably Christian as well. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to clarify whether these court Christians had facilities within the palaces to practise their religion, but it must have given the caliph a peculiarly personal slant on other religions, and caused some conflicting emotions. William of Tyre directly attributes al-Ḥākim’s persecutions of the Christians to his need to prove himself a true Islamic leader despite his dhimmī mother:

For the name of Christian was used as a reproach against him, because he was born of a Christian mother.

However, this may have been al-Ḥākim’s personal sensitivity — in general the Ismāʿīlī caliphs’ family connections do not appear to have been criticised, the harem being a long-accepted fact of Islamic palace life.

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602 Canard, p.859.
604 William of Tyre, p.66.
605 Ibn al-Athir, IX, p.460.
606 William of Tyre, p.66.
608 William of Tyre, p.66.
The palace guard’s possible Christian religion leads to another example of Christianity going unremarked in areas of Fāṭimid life that are surprising to modern eyes. The strict Islamic approach to dhimmīs would have forbidden their presence in the caliph’s army. To al-Mustanṣir’s empire, this rule was unrealistic if not impossible to enforce. To a certain extent, the caliphs got around this in the same way as with the palace guard – slave troops were brought in from another country, but, prior to Badr al-Jamālī’s arrival, they do not seem to have been treated or even regarded as Christians. The black troops whose increasing numbers brought such chaos later in his reign were predominantly Nubian and would have been Christian, as would some of the white slaves from Eastern Europe, but many Fāṭimid troops may have had any religious feeling ignored; there is no evidence that churches were provided for them. It is probably more accurate to talk of “non-Muslims” within the army rather than Christian troops, who may have begun life as Christians but were left with no way of continuing to be so. On the other hand, Badr al-Jamālī’s Armenian troops were definitely provided with the wherewithal to worship:

[Badr al-Jamālī] ordered that nobody should dwell in al-Hasaniyyah except the Armenians only, and he expelled from it... the Syrians... A body of the Armenians went... to the Amir al-Juyūsh... [saying] “We have no church in which we may pray... there are several churches [of which]... the Jacobites [Copts] are not in need.”... They took [the church] and it remains in the hands of the Armenians who serve in it and pray in it.

Possibly this was the case for other ethnic Christian divisions, although it is more likely that the slave troops in the army were not catered to in such a way. Badr’s actions were evidently deemed unusual enough to deserve recording.

The Fāṭimid troops were one aspect, but any town with defences had to have a garrison and in predominantly Christian Syria – the most vulnerable part of the Empire to external attacks – any town of size had a governor. It is highly improbable that al-Mustanṣir would install governors who were not military men. According to...

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609 D. Pipes, Slave Soldiers and Islam, USA 1981, xxi
the ban on dhimmīs carrying arms, this should have precluded Christian governors, but in fact this was the case on several occasions, perhaps the most famous example being Badr al-Jamallī, an Armenian Christian who governed Damascus for al-Mustansir before the Fātimid civil war612. Another Christian, Ibn Mu'ammar, governed Jerusalem around 453/1061, having taken over from a Karaite Jew613. The general daily maintenance of a town’s defences was also conducted by its inhabitants, so that in Syria, where most cities were mainly dhimmi-populated, Christians inevitably gained military experience and held arms. Christians, like the Jews, were not prohibited from working for the army as doctors614. This attitude on the Fātimids’ part was engendered by their own minority status within their own Empire. Ismā'īlis were so outnumbered that even the highest positions at court were more often held by Sunnis; the wazir al-Yazūrī was the son of a Sunnī qādī615. The Fātimids, faced with too few of their own to fill their positions, turned to other Muslims; similarly in Syria where there were not enough Muslims to go around, non-Muslims were drafted in. It may have been contrary to the Koran, and led some strict Muslims such as ‘Abd al-Jabbār, to complain, but within the context of the Empire’s religious make up, it made considerable sense. It also had the bonus effect of binding into the state dhimmīs who may otherwise have felt disaffected or rebellious, and giving them a Fātimid identity.

The Christians and the Fātimid government

Al-Mustansir’s attitude towards the Christians may only be glimpsed occasionally, but he does not appear to have suffered any of the agonies of Islamic conscience that affected his grandfather al-Ḥākim over a Christian mother. He is seldom mentioned in the History of the Patriarchs, but it is notable that the writers all view any hostility

612 Ibn Muyassar, p.15.
614 Goitein, A Mediterranean Society, IV, p.73.
615 Al-Maqrizī, II, p.197.
as coming entirely from the wazirs rather than the caliph himself. Conversely, generous acts of mercy are al-Mustanṣir’s prerogative, as when he discovered that a young Christian convert had been executed at an unnamed wazir’s order:

When this news reached the king Ma‘ād al-Mustanṣir billah [sic], Commander of the Faithful, he commanded that he [the executed man] should be delivered to his family, to bury him where they wished.\(^{616}\)

It is difficult not to suspect that the chronicle was deliberately trying to curry favour with the caliph with these interpretations, but much of the *History* is striking for its frankness; Badr al-Jamālī is later accused of having a “domineering nature” that makes the Christians live in fear of him.\(^{617}\) The unedifying feuds within the Church are also laid bare. If the writer was unafraid of Badr and his own Patriarch, there was certainly no reason for him to fear al-Mustanṣir. It is also entirely possible that the various wazirs who decreed anti-Christian orders were indeed acting on their own initiative. Although al-Mustanṣir is seen in the Muslim chronicles as having ordered the confiscation of the relics in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 447/1055, he is not held responsible in the Coptic records, which say simply that “al-Yāzūrī commanded” it.\(^{618}\) As the man who appointed the Patriarch, ironically, he was also a target for hopeful candidates wishing to influence the decision. The caliph also allowed a Patriarch to consecrate new churches at his accession – Christodoulos doing so with six churches in Alexandria alone in 438/1046 – before coming to Cairo for his investiture. The various court squabbles throughout the *History of the Patriarchs* makes clear that the Fātimids permitted the Christian officials a frequent presence within the palace, although it is not noted whether they ever actually met al-Mustanṣir himself instead of his own deputies. Nonetheless, the caliph escaped unscathed from the Christian chronicler, who seems to see al-Mustanṣir as a distant yet ultimately benevolent figure.

\(^{617}\) Ibid., p.349.
\(^{618}\) Ibid., p.268.
A more complicated picture is that of the various wazirs of al-Mustanṣir. As with the Jews, the Christians of the Fāṭimid Empire were allowed a semi-autonomy, being governed by their own church officials. Whilst much of the daily work involved would have been carried out at the lower levels, the History of the Patriarchs reveals a world of massive fluctuation in the treatment senior churchmen met at the hands of al-Mustanṣir’s wazirs. An extraordinary picture is given of al-Jarjarā’i’s advice to the Coptic officials following the death of the Patriarch Zacharias towards the end of al-Zāhir’s reign in 423/1032:

[A Christian scribe] went to ‘Alī ibn Ahmed [al-Jarjarā’i] and talked with him… He was a man who understood and loved the Christians.619

The wazir, an Iraqi by birth, then gives a long and detailed description of how a patriarch is selected in Baghdad, including exactly where the ballot papers should be placed in the church. He adds:

It is obligatory to pay the Royal Treasury for him who is to be elected patriarch three thousand dinars, but we have dispensed with this out of honour for you…. Thus it is necessary that you should do here [as they do in Baghdad].” They marvelled at his wisdom and his understanding and they thanked him and prayed for him, and departed.620

Indeed, the wazir’s knowledge is so exact that the question arises of whether he was a Christian himself before converting to Ismā’īlism. Unfortunately his love of the Christians was not shared by al-Yazūrī. Whilst many of al-Mustanṣir’s wazirs were not in power long enough to have an impact, al-Yazūrī had eight years (442-450/1050-1058) in which to become involved with the trouble-making Copts. In 448/1056 it is claimed that a Muslim judge who “used to detest the Christians” visited the town of Damrū’ā – a noted Coptic centre – and was slighted by the Patriarch. A letter to the wazir swiftly followed, complaining that:

this Damrū’ā was a second Constantinople, and in it seventeen churches… he[the Patriarch] had insulted Islam and its people.621

620 Ibid., p.229.
621 Ibid., p.267.
Al-Yāzūrī’s response is an interesting one that demonstrates the lack of real concern the Fātimids often felt in squabbles involving the Christians. He sent the judge to ask Christodoulos to erase a Christian inscription over his door. When the Patriarch refused, as the wazir must have known he would, al-Yāzūrī:

closed the churches, and he took the patriarchs and the bishops and demanded money from them....[the sum to be paid] by him and... all the Christians at seventy thousand dinars.622

This huge sum caused the community considerable difficulty to raise, and it is unsurprising to find ibn Manṣūr sanctimoniously gloating over the wazir’s fall two years later. Unlike the Muslim chronicles, the History of the Patriarchs goes into lurid detail of al-Yāzūrī’s death, involving his body being dragged by its heels into a sewer and then round the city streets623. The wazir’s fall is also described as a “miracle of the Christians”624, but the chronicler seems unaware that al-Yāzūrī was not the greatest oppressor the Christians faced.

In fact, the Christians were often their own worst enemy, and most of the officials seem to have utterly lacked both tact and political awareness. The Coptic church was riven with a depressing and constant pattern of back-stabbing amongst ambitious and ruthless officials. A disgruntled Copt would complain to the Fātimid court of ill treatment or bad behaviour, and the Fātimids would dole out a punishment. All too often this punishment would redound upon the entire community, since the government does not appear to have bothered investigating the truth of this bickering:

A monk called Colluthus... [wanted to] solicit a bishopric from the father Abba Christodoulos, but he would not do this....[the monk] presented calumnious reports about him [the Patriarch] to the Sultan.... Until [the Patriarch] was arrested, and they found that he had... six thousand dinars... The aforesaid money was carried to the Treasury.625

623 Ibid., p.270.
624 Ibid.
625 Ibid., p.275.

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The writer then suggests that this money was used by Christodoulos to pay for repairs on the churches. In fact, Christodoulos had also angered al-Yaṣūrī by allegedly ordering the king of Nubia to withhold his annual tribute to al-Mustansir. The Patriarch denied this, which would have been an extraordinarily unwise decision that showed considerable disregard for the inevitable outcome on his flock. On another occasion, the constant sniping and plotting concerned Christodoulos so much that he moved the seat of the Patriarchate to Cairo from Alexandria, to be closer to the protection of the Islamic government. Since this took place in 462/1070, when Cairo was in utter chaos from the civil war, it is a measure of how desperate the Patriarch was, to prefer the marauding Turks to his own officials.

Meanwhile, the Monophysite attitude towards the Melkites is often openly hostile, and entirely mutual:

Our brethren the Syrians, the faithful, at Antioch were in great difficulty... because the Melkites had pounced upon their churches and had burned them together with all their books... and they suffered a great expulsion.

On a visit to an anonymous Byzantine emperor early in al-Mustansir’s reign, a Monophysite bishop bribed the interpreter to deliberately offend the emperor by adding in insulting claims of the Nubian and Abyssinian kings being “greater than thou”, apparently not wishing to see any reconciliation. At the common social levels, the Coptic church did not recognize Melkite marriages, and anyone marrying a Melkite had to do so in the Coptic churches or be outcast.

This inability of Christian officials at least to perceive themselves as a cohesive group spanning the various sects is seen clearly under Badr al-Jamali’s wazirate. It is notable that nowhere in the Christian chronicle is he described as a Christian, and the Coptic officials’ attitude towards him is as unpredictable as that of Badr himself.

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626 Ibid.
627 Ibid., p.263.
629 Ibid., p.304.
630 Ibid., II (2), p.218.

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towards them. The wazir shows no evidence of identifying with the Copts, even as he set aside a church for his troops. Moreover, the Coptic leaders could not grasp the political necessities of a Christian wazir in a Muslim land, so that Badr’s behaviour frequently baffled them. When Abyssinian Christians began waylaying Muslim travellers, the wazir ordered the Patriarch to publicly forbid this, whilst sending two bishops to arrange building mosques in the country. When the Patriarch protested, Badr had him and the bishops “put forth from the Council in a most disgraceful manner”\textsuperscript{632}. The bishops rapidly caved in, although Badr himself wrote to the king of Abyssinia threatening to demolish every church in Egypt if he was not obeyed. The king was defiant, but Nubia’s monarch swiftly sent lavish gifts to placate the wazir\textsuperscript{633}. At the same time, the wazir executed a man who slandered Christodoulos\textsuperscript{634}, invited the Armenian patriarch to visit\textsuperscript{635} and ended one meeting by saying, “Go, pray for me.”\textsuperscript{636} To modern eyes, Badr al-Jamali trod a wise course in which his own religion played no part. The chronicler in the History of the Patriarchs clearly admires him, usually referring to him as “illustrious”; given ibn Ma’n’s contempt of much of the behaviour he records, it is scarcely surprising that he praised the man who told the quarrelling bishops:

\begin{displayquote}
Be all of you of one law, and do not disagree, and obey your chief and be like him.... Give alms from all you acquire, even as Christ commanded you. These Canons ye have compiled, I have no need of them, but I demanded them of you in order that the observance of them may be renewed among you, since it came to my knowledge that ye were far from keeping to them\textsuperscript{637}.
\end{displayquote}

Since the quarrels did not die out, the relations of the Christians with Badr’s government were therefore uncomfortable. Whilst al-Mustansir was removed from the action, the Copts at least did not move on from their weak strategy of complaining to the wazir, spreading rumours against each other, and demanding special attention. It is remarkable that the Christian source for the period actually

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{632}{History of the Patriarchs, II (3), p.349.}
\footnote{633}{Ibid.}
\footnote{634}{Ibid., p.316.}
\footnote{635}{Ibid., p.345.}
\footnote{636}{Ibid., p.340.}
\footnote{637}{Ibid., p.339.}
\end{footnotes}
blames the Christians themselves for much of the monetary punishment exacted by the Fātimids. The bishops were often antagonistic and argued against government decrees, whilst there is little evidence that the Christian representatives to the Fātimids actively sought good relations rather than just their own way. Meanwhile, the clumsy interference in international affairs, such as the accusation of Christodoulos preventing the Nubian tribute, could only harm the Fātimid Christians. In *The History of the Patriarchs*, Mawhūb ibn Manṣūr openly blames the leaders at the outset of Christodoulos’ reign:

all the Christians in the land of Egypt... became proud.... Enmity and envy occurred between them and their chiefs, and most of their concern was for worldly affairs and for pomp, display and exalting themselves over one another⁶³⁸.

The Fātimid government’s actions are seen as “chastening” to a weak and corrupt Church with little political skill of its own. It is evidence of the general religious tolerance of al-Mustanṣir’s reign that the Copts were not more brutally crushed despite their constant complaints, disobedience and defencelessness; they were protected by the Fātimids’ approach, and jeopardized by that of their own Church.

**Byzantium**

The Byzantine emperor’s position in the Fātimid Christian picture is a confusing one, and his role was never clearly demarcated. To the Melkites (Diophysites), he was their overall leader. However, the largest Christian group within al-Mustanṣir’s empire was the Monophysites. Byzantium recognized the Coptic bishops and patriarchs, but followers of this church did not look to the Rūm for their religious guidance. The Monophysites’ bishops were probably recognized by Constantinople to bring their congregations closer to Byzantine influence. Naturally, any Latin Christians did not see Byzantium as their leader, whilst the Nestorians faced further east towards Baghdad. Thus the emperor occupied a peculiar place in Christian

politics. As the closest Christian power to most of the world’s Muslims, it was unsurprising that Byzantium should see itself as a beacon of Christianity, which naturally led to activity to protecting Christians living within the Dar al-Islam. Prior to the Arab conquest in 17/638, this had in fact been the Byzantine emperor’s Christian territory, and Byzantium therefore held additional reason to still see itself in the role. Equally naturally, this activity met with varying degrees of success on different occasions.

Byzantine importance was visible at al-Ḥākim’s death, when al-Ẓāhir almost immediately opened negotiations in 412/1021 with the Byzantine emperor, Romanus III, to rebuild the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, razed at al-Ḥākim’s orders. For the rest of al-Ḥākim’s reign the Byzantines had refused to continue relations with the Fātimids. For this change in fortune, William of Tyre calls al-Ẓāhir “the excellent”, although the caliph was not necessarily being altruistic or caring of his Christian subjects. Whether the church was rebuilt or not would not affect him from a religious point of view, and many of his Muslim subjects would oppose the idea. However, rebuilding had its advantages for his state. Byzantium would be appeased, and a possible Christian invasion averted. More importantly, al-Ẓāhir could use the situation to extract something in exchange from the Byzantines, which was what happened. The treaty was not signed until al-Mustansir was on the throne, suggesting some wrangling over terms, but eventually the Fātimids agreed to rebuild the church. The then Emperor Michael IV then released 5000 Fātimid prisoners. From a public relations point of view, al-Mustansir’s government had made a very popular move. The prisoners came home, whilst the Christians had their church rebuilt, apparently at Byzantine expense. Certainly Michael sent over Byzantine stonemasons, and this was stipulated in the treaty, although there must have been Fātimid Christian masons available who saw to the churches’ upkeep.

639 William of Tyre, p.69.
640 Gil, A History of Palestine, 712.
642 Ibid.

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The treaty for the rebuilding of the Holy Sepulchre was one of the more successful occasions for Byzantium as well as al-Mustaşir. The church was one of the holiest in Christianity – William of Tyre calls it “the cradle of Catholicism”⁶⁴³ – and it was not dedicated to any one particular group. Thus Romanus III’s role in its rebuilding brought him gratitude and renown throughout the Christian world, whilst reiterating his self-imposed responsibility to Christians living under Muslim rule. William also claims that Byzantium became involved at the behest of the Christians in Jerusalem, who could not afford to rebuild the church themselves. In fact, it is more likely that Byzantium brought it up in ongoing political negotiations.⁶⁴⁴

Ironically, there was already a designated protector of the Christians in al-Mustaşir’s reign, and it was not the Byzantine emperor. The King of Nubia was given the title, although when this happened was not clear⁶⁴⁵. Certainly by 466/1074 he held it, when he was arrested at an inspection of Aswan’s churches, suggesting that the “title” was a meaningless honorific and had been forgotten about in Cairo⁶⁴⁶. Exactly why the King of Nubia should be given this title is never made explicit, although in several aspects it made political sense for the Fātimids. The King was a Monophysite in the Coptic fold and a vital Fātimid trading partner. Crucially, unlike Byzantium, it had not been a threat to al-Mustaşir’s empire for decades. Isolated, militarily far weaker than the Fātimids and dependent upon them economically, Nubia’s king was a tame Christian monarch and could be used to Cairo’s advantage. His position as protector was most probably given as a courteous acknowledgement to a Nubian mother of a caliph – possibly al-Ḥākim’s mother, since her brothers were also favoured, or even Sayyida Raṣād, al-Mustaşir’s mother. The King was flattered, the Christians under the caliph had an official royal protector, and the Byzantine emperor had had a reason for interfering in the Fātimid empire neatly removed. Cairo could point to Nubia in the face of any Byzantine protests regarding

⁶⁴³ William of Tyre, p.69.
⁶⁴⁴ William of Tyre, p.69.
⁶⁴⁶ Ibn Muyassar, p.26, claims that the governor of Qus sent him to Badr. Al-Maqrızī, II, p.320, explicitly mentions the King’s arrest.

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the Christians, whilst knowing that the King would be highly unlikely to ever go further than Aswan, or to do anything actively contrary to Fāṭimid interests.

In practice, of course, the King’s distance from the hub of Christian affairs in Syria meant that Byzantium could and still did intercede. Nonetheless, Badr al-Jamālī’s reaction to the King’s visit in 466/1074 demonstrates clearly both the sensitivity of Cairo towards Christian leaders within the Empire, and the desire to stay on good terms with Nubia. The embarrassment of the King’s arrest in Aswan was hastily smoothed over with a sumptuous reception in Cairo, which the King enjoyed so much that he did not go home. There is no record that any Christians saw his presence in the capital as a rallying point, or even of particular significance. Despite his use to the Fāṭimids, for religious affairs the King was a cipher. By contrast, the Abyssinian king also theoretically came under the Coptic fold, but he was further away and not intimidated by the Fāṭimids. When Badr al-Jamālī swore to demolish every Egyptian church if the Abyssinian king did not allow mosques to be built in his country, the king scornfully offered to send him every brick of the city of Mecca, with its weight in gold for every one missing. This luxury of distance from a powerful empire was not granted to either Nubia or Byzantium.

The Fāṭimids must have been aware of the situation with Byzantium and their Christian dhimmīs, even before the Holy Sepulchre treaty. Al-Ḥākim’s decision to raze the church in the first place was a powerful message that the Fāṭimids had control of the very epicentre of the Christian faith, and that Islam was strong enough to destroy it as they pleased. The church continued to be a sensitive point with Byzantium, which Cairo exploited politically. In 447/1055, Byzantium allowed the call to prayer in their mosques to be read for the Sunnī ‘Abbāsids rather than al-Mustanṣir. The obvious religious insult was immediately answered in kind. With no Christian equivalent of the khutba, al-Mustanṣir displayed his anger by simply

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649 Ibn Muyassar, p.7.
confiscating all the relics the Holy Sepulchre held. This move neatly offended and embarrassed the emperor to Christendom. Where the razing of the Holy Sepulchre had been a fait accompli, the confiscation demanded retribution, which it became clear Byzantium could not effect. The khutba was reversed for the Isma‘ilis, and the relics quietly restored – so quietly that none of the chroniclers appears to have noticed. Politically, both sides had discovered leverage through the other’s religion.

**Christians and Muslims**

There is a notable difference in the common Muslim masses’ attitudes towards the Jews and the Christians. The Jews’ handling in the sources reveals them as distinctly separate, and lacking the integration to be seen with the Christian population. Jewish settlements were mainly urban, where they lived in specific communities; although the Geniza reveals that the Jews seldom lived entirely isolated, they were commonly perceived as keeping themselves apart. The chronicler al-Qalqashandi describes the burning of “a Jewish quarter” of Cairo that is shown in the Geniza letters to have contained Christians and Muslims, whereas when the Jerusalem Christian quarter was built in the 440’s/1050’s, Gil noted that according to the Geniza documents, “formerly, Muslims had lived among the Christians” – as in the palace, so in the towns. Prior to a ban on the practice by al-Ḥākim in 328/1007/8, Muslims would sometimes publicly participate in Christian holiday ceremonies. However, some Geniza papers reveal that Christian women often disliked sharing a house with Muslims because they were affected by the Islamic purdah.

Ironically, the animosity between Copts and Melkites so vividly described in the History of the Patriarchs is seldom reflected towards the Muslims or vice versa.

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650 Ibid.
652 Gil, A History of Palestine, 601.
653 Ibid., 700.
There are individual Muslims who are depicted trying to harm the Copts, but general hostility is not mentioned. At one undated point in al-Mustanṣir’s reign, the Muslims visited Coptic churches to see the miracle of their icons weeping655. In Alexandria, meanwhile, Muslims throwing stones at Copts celebrating Palm Sunday “should be taken to the prison, and the public crier proclaimed this in the city.”656 During Christodoulos’ period in office, one Coptic official trying to buy a bishopric borrows money from the Muslims to achieve his ambition, whilst during the civil unrest, the Patriarch himself threatened to borrow from Muslims if his ransom by warlords was not paid by his bishops657. By contrast, a decree in 479/1086 that all Christians should wear a girdle to distinguish them apparently sank without trace.658

The Christian integration was so thorough because of the Fāṭimid territory’s history. The area’s long Christian reign had been embedded and accepted by the incoming Muslim culture to a large degree, whilst the preponderance of churches gave Christians access of worship almost everywhere in the empire and allowed them to live almost anywhere, unlike the Jews who had to stay close to the far less numerous synagogues659. The Christians had no history of self-segregation; much of their existing government was inherited by the Muslims, and it was impossible to herd such a widely scattered group of people into set locations. Nor did the Fāṭimids’ arrival create a great religious shift in numbers. The caliph’s own religion was not shared by many of his Muslim subjects; if they were not disturbed by an incoming Shi‘īte power, many Sunnī Muslims were unlikely to care very much whether one’s neighbours were also of a different faith. Muslims and Christians were used to living amongst each other, whilst the very numbers of Christians meant trying to put them somewhere separate would prove highly problematic.

Another aspect of the Muslim-Christian relations is found in the Koran. The Koran warned Muslims not to befriend dhimmīs:

656 Ibid., p.273.
658 Ibid., p.343.

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O you who believe! do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends; they are friends of each other; and whoever amongst you takes them for a friend, then surely he is one of them; surely Allah does not guide the unjust people.660

It also states that Jew and Christian “shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve” because of their faith in God.661 However, one Koranic verse makes explicit that there was a difference in Islamic perception of the two faiths:

Certainly you will find the most violent of people in enmity for those who believe (to be) the Jews and those who are polytheists, and you will certainly find the nearest in friendship to those who believe (to be) those who say: We are Christians; this is because there are priests and monks among them and because they do not behave proudly.662

The Christians also had an advantage of being far more numerous than the Jews; the estimate of five million Copts paying the jizya, whilst exaggerated, demonstrates the perception of vast numbers of Christians within the Fātimid Empire663. Christians were everywhere, praying in churches that had always been there, and did not hold themselves apart from the wider community. That said, Muslims who converted to Christianity faced instant hatred and swift death. The History relates the tale of a Muslim boy who appeared one day wearing a Coptic girdle; before being executed, he was beaten and attacked in the street by his outraged neighbours664. Elsewhere, a soldier’s son became a Christian monk, and later converted his father, who apparently then left the army665. Nonetheless, conversions would have been highly unusual. Under al-Ḥākim there were claims of forced conversion to Islam amongst the Christians, but al-Mustanṣir’s government is not recorded as ever having imitated this.

Latin Christians

660 Koran, 5.51
661 Ibid. 5.69
662 Koran, 5.82
663 Cohen, p.52.
665 Ibid., p.299.

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Given that they were numerous, non-Muslim and could be poorly treated by the state, it is perhaps surprising that al-Mustansir’s Christian subjects did not rise up in protest; many of them, particularly in Syria, would have access to arms, and some even controlled cities. That they did not is explained by various factors, but it is important to realize that “the Christians” as a banner covers several groups of people who did not identify with each other. The average Muslim in the Fāṭimid empire did not consider his neighbour’s religion too much, and most Christians probably felt the same. The Fāṭimids did in fact see beyond this banner, but they divided the Christians into two groups – native and non-native.

Al-Mustansir did not need to understand the difference between a Monophysite, a Melkite or a Nestorian Christian. On the other hand, he would know that whilst many of his own native Christians were poor and of little interest, Christians coming into the Fāṭimid empire almost always brought in money. Latin Christians fell into two main categories; pilgrims and traders. The first spent their money on the way to and in Jerusalem, whilst the latter contributed enormous sums to the Fāṭimid economy - all pilgrims entering Jerusalem had to pay a dinar just to get in the city gates. Not only that, but in order to keep the use of Fāṭimid ports and trade routes, the rulers of these countries would send lavish tributes to al-Mustansir. The Christian city of Tinnis could pay one million dinars to the caliph, but far more must have come from Alexandria. Christian trade in the port was so heavy that it had a separate harbour for non-Muslims. To a certain extent, Christian traders were preferable to Islamic ones, because they had to pay twice the customs tax. Latin Christians also were trade partners with the Fāṭimids, so that al-Mustansir was making money on the imports and exports on the taxes alone. Christian countries paid to build monasteries in the Holy Land, or to fund hostels, which again would pay dhimmi taxes. It is thus only expected that al-Mustansir encouraged the non-native Christian presence in his empire. He also had little to fear from favouring the

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668 P. Sanders, p.169.
669 Goitein, A Mediterranean Society, I, p.61.
Western Christians, since they in turn showed no interest in aiding those Fātimid Christians who were being taxed into poverty.

This is seen at its clearest in the 440s/1050s, when it was decided to begin building a walled quarter in Jerusalem for the city’s Christians. Why this was decided is unknown, unless it was to enforce a Muslim identity upon the city. Protests from Byzantium were speedily quieted, and the emperor Constantine IX Monomachus actually paid for a large section of the wall to be completed in exchange for more room within this ghetto. The King of Nubia was silent, and may not even have known of the plan. Meanwhile, Cairo concluded a remarkable agreement with a group of merchants from Amalfi at the same time. As the native Christians were being crushed into a small portion of Jerusalem, the Amalfitans won permission to begin a building plan in the city. Even more astonishing, the buildings included a church, in direct contradiction of the caliph ‘Umar’s decree that “no church or synagogue shall be destroyed, nor any built anew in the House of Islam”. Along with the church went a monastery, hospital and two hostels for pilgrims, and the merchants were deemed sufficiently important to have an audience with the caliph himself. This total contrast in the handling of native and non-native Christians is all the more fascinating given the easy brushing off of Byzantium’s protests towards the Jerusalem enclosure. Clearly, the Ismā‘īlīs were unafraid of losing the Byzantine contribution to their economy, which indeed could not have been halted by the emperor because of the sheer number of people involved. Byzantine Christian trade with the Fātimids was carried out by thousands of traders all along the borders and through the Mediterranean, many working on very small scales. The Amalfitans were far less numerous, and a concerted pulling out of their trade was probably feasible. They were also the major source of timber, one of the Fātimids’ most vital imports, and had provided much of the wood needed in the conquest of Egypt in

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671 Ibid., p.163.
672 Gil, A History of Palestine, 716.
674 Gil, A History of Palestine, 237.
Their merchant colony in Jerusalem was unsurprisingly not pushed into the ghetto.

Another aspect to this may have been caused by the Great Schism of Christianity in 447/1055, when the Eastern and Western Catholic churches split apart. The former was focused on Byzantium, the latter on Rome, and this divide can only have served to emphasize the distance between a Roman Catholic Italian, and a Monophysite in Syria. Al-Mustansir’s government must have been aware of the Schism, if only through their political links with the Christian world, which placed Byzantium apart from the rest of their Christian trading partners. Showing the Fatimids friendly to Byzantium would bring no advantage from those following Rome; the caliph had to signal his good intentions towards Rome, in this case through the Amalfitans, to encourage more trade from Roman Catholics. In addition, the Schism isolated Byzantium in the Mediterranean. Prior to 447/1055, it had belonged to the great world of Christendom – afterwards, Europe was divided, with Byzantium the only Eastern Christian domain with a major presence on the Mediterranean trading front. The Schism could only work to Cairo’s advantage, and allowed the Fatimids to encourage one group of Christians whilst slapping down the tiresome interference in their affairs of the other. Furthermore, the Latin Christians would be even less likely to identify with the native groups in Syria, knowing that these people did not recognize the Pope as their leader. Indeed, Latin Christians made little protest over the Jerusalem enclosure.

The Amalfitans were not the only group to build within the Fatimid empire, and Jerusalem in particular had attracted donations from the Latin world for centuries, which continued during al-Mustansir’s reign. A knight named Odilus donated a tenth of his properties to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 445/1053. The Franks continued to fund twelve lodging houses, a church, library and various.

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associated buildings that had been erected under Charlemagne, and the King of Hungary ran a monastery in the city that was funded by attached vineyards. Amalfi’s main rival at this time, Venice, must also have established a presence. Possibly some local Christians were employed on the vineyards, or in the monasteries’ fields, but overall, this influx of money into Christian Syria brought little benefit to those Christians outside the Latin bubble of safety. Indeed, five years after al-Mustansir’s death, the Copts had stopped going on pilgrimage to Jerusalem – where they still went under the Turks – because:

of what is known of their [the Franks’] hatred of us, their false belief concerning us and their charge against us of impiety.

**Taxation**

The Jerusalem projects went ahead, and those Christians in the city were herded into a tiny area far too small for them, with great discomfort. Yet this was not their only cause for misery living in the holy city, and their major burden was not protested by any Christian leader outside the Fāṭimid empire. The hardest cross the Christians under al-Mustansir had to bear was that of taxation, and those in Syria were squeezed harder than elsewhere. The various levies placed upon them were so heavy that William of Tyre was indignant over a century later, complaining that the Christians were forced into poverty by outrageous demands for money. Similarly, Gil accused the Fāṭimid government of using dhimmi Syria and Palestine as a bottomless treasure chest for the state, and certainly the area suffered more in this regard than places such as Egypt and Ifriqiya.

In fact, all the Christians in the Fāṭimid empire were taxed beyond the jizya, which was ostensibly the only specifically non-Muslim tax they should have to pay. This theory was blatantly not put into practice. As has been seen, all Christians living in

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678 Ibid, p.164.
680 William of Tyre, p.67.
681 Gil, *A History of Palestine*, 244.
any Fāṭimid community would be held responsible for meeting the Christian tribute amount given annually to the caliph. This annual tax in Tinnis, the Christian city, was a million dinars in 402/1011, but the amounts could be quite arbitrary, and were levied on the Jews and Christians separately. It was the responsibility of the community as a whole to raise the money; amongst the Jews, letters survive in the Geniza begging the Fustat community to help those in Jerusalem to meet the tribute.

Meeting the taxes grew steadily more difficult throughout al-Mustansir’s reign, as the various military campaigns grew more frequent and much larger, the short-lived conquest of Baghdad (450-451/1058-1059) being most notable in its dhimmī-funded extravagance. Unfortunately, evidence for the amounts levied on the Christians no longer exist, but it may be supposed that like the Jews, they often had recourse to money-lenders to meet the state-imposed obligations. They would also be eligible for the ‘onesh, a random tax raised on increasingly frequent occasion for the state. As Gil notes, the taxes were always heaviest in Jerusalem, for obvious reasons. Firstly, it had the one of the largest Christian populations in the Fāṭimid empire. It was also predominantly non-Muslim, of enormous importance to all three religions, and was situated in one of the Empire’s most vulnerable areas. In addition, Jerusalem probably held much of the Christians’ wealth. The city attracted huge sums in donations from all parts of Christendom, usually to build churches. The destruction of the Church of the Resurrection thus also represented a financial disaster; after its repair, al-Mustansir’s confiscation of the relics in 447/1056 deprived the dhimmīs of a fortune in gold and treasures.

William of Tyre, intriguingly, does not blame al-Mustansir for the poverty of his fellows due to the constant taxation. Instead, he paints a picture of dishonest Muslim

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682 Ibid, 256.
683 Al-Maqrizi, I, p.147.
686 Runciman, I, p.41.
This curious claim is quite possibly entirely accurate, yet has been ignored by historians. The Christians were highly likely to protest against their level of taxes, particularly the 'onesh, and to resist payment – the Geniza proves that the Jews certainly lamented the taxes constantly, and they suffered to the same degree. Coercion by tax officials to hurry along collection was therefore probable, and such a threat would be highly effective on Christians terrified of losing the church again. The caliph was not likely to know or care about the petty menaces used by his men at local level, and it is difficult to imagine his actually encouraging such a tactic, particularly since the Latins in Jerusalem might hear the threats and respond to them. On the other hand, William could scarcely claim that the caliph did know of this, having praised his excellence and kindness only a page previously; he may also have been trying to stir up feeling against local Muslims, being in Tyre during the Crusades, when the Fāṭimid dynasty was over. Nonetheless, such daily intimidation by the tax collectors towards recalcitrant dhimmīs was all too likely.

The ghetto of Jerusalem may have been intended to herald a more repressive stance on Christianity within the Fāṭimid empire, but if so, events conspired against al-Mustansir. By the time the quarter was built, law and order was collapsing and the Fāṭimid empire in Syria was falling to the incoming Seljuqs. By 463/1071, Jerusalem had fallen to the Seljuqs, but the anarchy within Egypt was such that any taxes raised would have been done so only by the local governor to fund his military; the 'onesh and the annual tribute were out of the question. However, this respite for the Christians came at the expense of violence and destruction from marauding former Fāṭimid soldiers, local warlords and the Seljuqs themselves. After the

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688 William of Tyre, p.70.
689 Ibn Muyassar, pp.23-4.

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The sack ing of Jerusalem, many Christians fled to the coastal cities in advance of the Seljuq wave, and were probably joined by many dhimmis throughout Syria, who feared that the Turks’ approach to the Christians and Jews was to destroy rather than tax them. Nonetheless, Jerusalem still remained a city with a strong Christian element, and even by 492/1099, Syria could be described as a predominantly Jewish and Christian region.

Interestingly, there is no record of anyone in Egypt being targeted during this period of anarchy solely for being Christian. Christodoulos’ ransoming by Ibn Hamdan was most likely a simple targeting of an obvious source of wealth than having religious motives. The chaos within the region was such that it was probably impossible to tell Christian from Muslim, but in any case the Christians within Egypt under al-Mustanṣir had enough threats to their safety from their own people. In 462/1070, Christodoulos then moved the Patriarchate to Cairo, hoping for protection from what remained of the Fāṭimid government after a string of threats to his position from within the Coptic church. The sheer upheaval within Egypt at this time is recorded in the Christian source only for the suffering of the people from plague and starvation. The breakdown of the government is brushed over, because the Patriarchate keeps running, giving an impression of stability for the Christians that is probably false. Christodoulos might have remained in his position, but he had no wazir to back him, no government money to fund him, and his buildings were as open to destruction by the warring groups as any others. He could not protect his people from the reality of what was happening in Egypt through civil war, and they suffered along with the Muslims and Jews until Badr al-Jamālī’s arrival.

The Muslim sources do not admit to Badr’s Christianity, nor to his meetings with the various Christian officials; on the other hand, they offer an explanation of how he managed to hold specifically religious positions within the government, such as qādī and dā’ī. Al-Maqrīzī explains that for the chief dā’ī at least, the Muslim al-Fallāḥ

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690 S. Runciman, I, p.72.
691 Gil, A History of Palestine, 279.
held the post and Badr the title, but the wazir clearly had no problems holding a variety of Islamic titles⁶⁹². Like many Christians before him, Badr’s religion in an Islamic world did not arise, whereas had he been Jewish, this could not possibly have been the case, particularly given local Muslim sentiment after the Tustarī epoch. He does not appear to have given any advantages to Christians – as has been seen, he even forced the bishops to go on a mosque-building expedition - and the various taxes continued as before.

Indeed, the history of the Christians under al-Mustansir demonstrates a continuity that is all the more surprising given the enormous upheavals of the ruling Ismā’īlī caliphate. The nadir of al-Ḥākim’s persecutions was not mimicked between 427/1036 and 487/1094, which contained little of interest to the Christian historian until the capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders. Christians paid the same taxes, held the same jobs, and put up with the same restrictions at the end as they had at the beginning. There were no Christian Tustarīs to arouse anti-Christian feeling, and no equivalent of the anti-Semitism so obvious in the chronicles towards the Jews. Byzantium’s meddling in the Christians’ affairs may have irritated Cairo, but would have had little impact at the common level, and the Latins’ interest in the Fāṭimidds had nothing to do with the state’s dhimmīs. The majority of Muslims probably had very little opinion on the Christians. They were there, they always had been, they paid their taxes, and they worshipped in their churches.

It is therefore all the more surprising that the end of al-Mustansir’s reign should see the beginning of the Western European movement that became the Crusades, particularly given the Latins’ apparent indifference towards the Christians already in the Holy Land. True, by 487/1094 Jerusalem was under Seljuq control, but the pre-Crusade preaching in Europe saw no difference between a Christian-friendly Fāṭimid rule and the more hostile Seljuq regime; those areas of Syria and Palestine under Muslim control should all be wrested back as one. In fact, the native Christians’ treatment probably had little if anything to do with growing Latin sentiment. The

⁶⁹² Al-Maqrīzī, II, p.313.
463/1071 brutal conquest of Jerusalem and its victims would have had far more of an international effect on Christendom’s conscience than al-Mustanṣir’s taxes, because it impinged on Latin activity in the area. This was compounded by the attack of high-profile German pilgrims in Seljuq Syria in 458/1065⁶⁹³, and the chronicler al-ʿAzīmi’s tale of another pilgrim massacre at Aleppo in 485/1092⁶⁹⁴. Three hundred Latin pilgrims had been forcibly ejected from Jerusalem in 449/1056, although why is not explained⁶⁹⁵. Within Jerusalem and Syria as whole, the Latin presence generated huge amounts of money – trade, pilgrimage, religious foundations – but only for the Latins themselves. War in the area would seriously impinge economically on Latins both in Syria and Europe; under the Seljuqs, what under the Fāṭimids had been accessible to the Latins at will was becoming a hostile Muslim region.

At the lowest levels the Crusader preaching did herald religious fervour, but the momentum behind the original movement came from those affected in a very different manner. It is no surprise to see the first noble Crusaders coming from those states who enjoyed Fāṭimid trade – the Normans in Sicily, the Franks and the Italians. In other words, many of the Latins behind the Crusading movement were driven more by their own interests than an altruistic desire to free their Eastern brethren of an Islamic yoke; the native Christians were useful to draw a pathetic picture of Muslim repression and provide an ostensibly selfless motive for Latin intervention. Had the Seljuq invasion not driven the pro-Latin Fāṭimids from out of much of the Holy Land and Jerusalem, the question arises whether the Crusades would have taken place at all.

Thus the Fāṭimid Christians of al-Mustanṣir’s reign offer a paradox, that they should be simultaneously placed in vital roles, yet of themselves held of little importance. A Christian wazir brought the caliphate down to a puppet figurehead, but gave no advantages to his fellows. A Christian queen mother controlled the state without

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⁶⁹³ Gil, A History of Palestine, 726.
⁶⁹⁵ Runciman, I, p.49.

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apparently acknowledging the religion. Christian states provided much of the troops that would bring the country to civil war, and the native Christians would be used on several occasions as reason for serious international intervention in the Fāṭimid Empire. Yet throughout al-Mustanṣir’s reign, the local Christian populace played little if any active role in these events. Between the repressions of al-Ḥākim, and the brutalities of the Crusader era, it is therefore no surprise that the Christians of Jerusalem at least, “came to look back upon as light .... the yoke of the Egyptians”\textsuperscript{696}

\textsuperscript{696} William of Tyre, p.71.
The Jews

Under al-Mustanṣir, Jewish history varies enormously according to which Jews are under scrutiny. For many of them, there is no evidence to suggest that 427-487/1036-1094 was a particularly turbulent period. The various restrictions notoriously imposed upon Jews and Christians alike under al-Hākim (386/996 – 411/1021) were not repeated under his grandson. Jews throughout the Fāṭimid empire worked in a variety of roles, lived in religiously intermingled communities and spanned most social strata. They often enjoyed international links with Jewish communities elsewhere, ran their own state-sponsored administration, and had freedom of worship. Even at the highest levels, several Jews at the Fāṭimid court had successful careers without attracting hostility from Muslims. On the other hand, al-Mustanṣir’s reign also oversaw the dazzling careers of the Jewish Tustarl brothers, who ran the state with al-Mustanṣir’s mother from 436/1045 to 439/1048 before being brutally murdered. Amongst themselves, the Jews suffered disagreements within their institutions, and the constant, heavy taxation by the Fāṭimid state led to continual poverty for many. Whilst this had been the case for years, these factors also ensured that al-Mustanṣir’s rule was not a high point in Jewish history in general.

Sources

The Muslim chroniclers very seldom bother to mention the Jews, and even then only when a Jew has made an impact on Fāṭimid history; the Christian History of the Patriarchs and William of Tyre offer even less information. The converted Jewish wazir al-Fallāḥī and the Tustari brothers are thus usually the only Jews to be mentioned by non-Jewish sources for al-Mustanṣir’s entire period. Fortunately, a treasure-trove of information was unearthed in the late nineteenth century in the form

697 There are many works on al-Hākim; for the Jewish evidence, see S. Goitein, A Mediterranean Society, Cambridge 1967
of the Cairo Geniza, an old Jewish paper storehouse in Fustat containing thousands of fragments covering every aspect of Jewish life, the bulk of it from al-Mustanṣir’s reign. From petitions to trousseaux lists to the Gaon’s correspondence, deciphering and arranging the Geniza is a huge project. This work is ongoing, some papers being indecipherable or meaningless scraps, but even what is currently available is a priceless glimpse of the common people’s lives698. Frustratingly, however, few letters of the Geniza are as yet reproduced in translation.

**Jewish Groups**

Unsurprisingly, the chroniclers do not bother to differentiate between the various groups when speaking of the Jews; they had no reason to be interested, although this covers over an important aspect of the Jews’ sociological makeup. In the Fāṭimid empire, the two main Jewish groups were the Rabbinites and Karaites. The Rabbinites were the largest group, seen as the orthodox stream of Judaism. Karaite Judaism dated from the 1st/8th century, when it was founded in Baghdad by ‘Anan ibn David, and by the 3rd/10th century there was a definite Karaite presence in the Fāṭimid lands699. The term Karaite, translating as “Scripturalist”, comes from the group’s rejection of rabbinical Judaism; instead of the Rabbinites’ scholars, the Karaites followed the Bible as their source of all religious law700.

Despite being smaller numerically than the Rabbinites, Karaites in al-Mustanṣir’s time often held positions of power, most notably the Tustari brothers. In Jerusalem in particular, they often received privileged treatment.701 As Stillman notes:

> Many Karaites at the time belonged to the wealthiest elite of merchants and officials in the government bureaucracy.702

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700 Ibid.

The picture drawn by the Geniza occasionally reflects the Rabbinite-Karaite tension, but the groups’ struggles appear to have been restricted to solely Judaic matters. At court, for example, the Tustarīs were petitioned and praised by Rabbinite Jews, whilst elsewhere Karaite notables were appealed to for Rabbinite aid\textsuperscript{703}. The two groups often intermarried, or combined to raise the emergency taxes frequently levied on the communities\textsuperscript{704}. In fact, it would have been almost impossible for the two not to have joined forces in the face of a Muslim government that neither knew nor cared which Jew belonged to which group. Taxes were simply levied on the Jews, rather than divided into specifically Rabbinite or Karaite amounts, whilst a powerful Jew at court was still more likely to help a Jew of the other group than a Muslim in the same position. Similarly, the Geniza contains documents from Jews of both backgrounds, demonstrating a certain degree of cooperation. The third Jewish group, that of the Samaritans, was considered part of the Jewish community only by the Muslim government, and does not appear in Jewish sources of the time\textsuperscript{705}.

\textbf{Location}

The Jews had lived throughout the lands constituting al-Mustanṣir’s empire for centuries, but unlike the Christians, they remained predominantly urban, and many rural areas had no Jewish presence at all\textsuperscript{706}. Significant Jewish communities were situated in all the major Fāṭimid trading centres and cities; the community of Fustat seems to have been fairly large and wealthy, given the frequent pleas from Syria to help with taxation, as was that of Alexandria, but as with the Christians, the majority of the Jews in the Fāṭimid empire lived in Syria and Palestine\textsuperscript{707}. Jerusalem was at the centre of Jewish self-government with the \textit{yeshiva}, the body for Jewish

\textsuperscript{702} Stillman, p.200.  
\textsuperscript{703} Goitein, \textit{A Mediterranean Society} (abr.), London 1999, p.76.  
\textsuperscript{704} Stillman, p.200.  
\textsuperscript{705} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{706} Goitein, \textit{A Mediterranean Society}, I, p.74.  
\textsuperscript{707} Gil, 283.
administration, with Damascus another city with a sizeable Jewish population. The majority of the empire’s Jews were Rabbinites, although the Karaites had important communities in Fustat and Jerusalem in particular.\textsuperscript{708} Large tracts of the Empire probably contained no Jews at all; under Christian rule, they had not penetrated into the countryside, and since Islam had forbidden more synagogues to be built, the areas where Jews could live and observe their religion were limited. All Jews had to walk to the synagogue on the Sabbath, riding animals being forbidden under Jewish law, curtailing the distance even further.\textsuperscript{709} The countryside also held little attraction for Jewish communities to settle outside the towns. Goitein notes that the majority of Jews under the Fatimids were middle class, and were close to the business of the Empire, either through administration or trade\textsuperscript{710}.

Within Cairo itself, the burning down of the predominantly Jewish Judariyya quarter in al-Ḥākim’s reign, because “they [the Jews] oppressed the Muslims and reviled Islam”, saw many Jews move en masse to the Bāb Zuwayla\textsuperscript{711}. However, it is also noted from the Geniza that such “Jewish” quarters did in fact contain many non-Jews, and were not as exclusive as modern historians have assumed\textsuperscript{712}. In fact, one document shows that it was more expensive to live in solely Jewish-occupied houses, since this was considered more desirable than sharing a property with Muslims and Christians\textsuperscript{713}.

The Jews were certainly the smallest of the three main religious groups. Even allowing for some exaggeration, there is no comparison with the Christians’ claim of sixty thousand in one city\textsuperscript{714}, whilst the Muslims are conservatively estimated to have been most numerous in Egypt, and roughly equal to the Christians in Syria. On the evidence available, Ashtor estimated that at its peak, the Jewish population of Egypt

\textsuperscript{708} Mann, I, p.65.
\textsuperscript{709} Goitein, \textit{A Mediterranean Society} (abr.), p.51.
\textsuperscript{710} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{711} Al-Qalqashandi, quoted by Mann, I, p.33 –disappointingly, Mann does not reference where he found this.
\textsuperscript{712} Goitein, \textit{A Mediterranean Society}, I, p.21.
\textsuperscript{713} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{714} \textit{History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church}, tr. A.S. Atiya, Cairo 1959, III(2), p.215.

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in the century after al-Mustanṣir’s reign was not above forty thousand\textsuperscript{715}, with the conservative estimate of Fustat’s Rabbinite Jews at under four thousand.\textsuperscript{716} Allowing for greater numbers in Syria and Palestine, and exaggeration of Christian numbers, it is still clear that the Jews made up only a small proportion of the overall Fāṭimid population. Their influence within the Fāṭimid empire was therefore disproportionate to their size, fuelling claims of the Jews forming a favoured elite. On the other hand, as already noted, most Jews were of the urban middle-class. There was no Jewish equivalent of the numerous Christian and Muslim rural peasants. Meanwhile, the traditional Jewish career path within the state administration, and the history of Jews holding senior government posts, made it inevitable that many Jews would have successful court careers under al-Mustanṣir. Even then, the actual number of Jews at such levels was still bound to be less than that of the Muslims or Christians, because there simply were not enough of them to be otherwise.

**Jews at Court**

As with the Christians, al-Mustansir’s attitude towards Jews is impossible to determine; he was not a man who voiced strong opinions, if he voiced any at all. His own situation would have made a violently anti-Semitic stance hypocritical in any case; aside from his many Jewish employees, the caliph’s harem apparently contained Jewish girls\textsuperscript{717}. Frustratingly, as with the Christian harem girls, there are no descriptions of them – nor is it revealed if any provision were made for their faith in the palace. However, there is no record, unlike the Christians, of any Fāṭimid caliph having a Jewish mother; it is possible that the Jewesses’ sons were excluded from the succession, since under Jewish law such children would be considered Jews themselves.

\textsuperscript{715} E. Ashtor, "The Number of Jews in Medieval Egypt", Journal of Jewish Studies, XIX (1968), p12-3; Stillman estimates the Jews at slightly more than 4000 (Stillman, p.202.)


Meanwhile, whilst the harem was usually kept away from politics, other Jews played an active role under al-Mustansir, most notably in the administration. Jews had always been employed by the government, even prior to the Fatimids’ arrival in 359/969 in Egypt, and their success had continued. From the Geniza documents, it is known that the head of al-Mustansir’s tax diwan at his accession was the Jew David b. Isaac ha-Levi718, and the Muslim chroniclers’ silence on this suggests that high-ranking Jewish officials were not automatically cause for anti-Semitic outrage. In a position of even greater trust, al-Mustansir himself had a Jewish physician719. Jews were renowned for their medical skill – had the caliph died suspiciously, the doctor’s life would be worth very little, but al-Mustansir evidently was not concerned in surrounding himself solely with Muslims. Unfortunately, this could cause offence to Muslims when Jewish or Christian status was flaunted. There had been accusations under al-‘Aziz that the caliph was too fond of the dhimmis720. In 436/1045, al-Mustansir witnessed the disastrous rise to power of the Tustarî brothers, and the backlash it caused at the Fatimid court and beyond.

The Tustarîs

Abū Sa’îd and Abū Naṣr Tustarî were Karaite slave merchants and bankers based in Fustat, who had supplied al-Ẓâhir with black slaves for his harem. As al-Maqrîzî describes it:

Their power came about when Abū Sa’îd was employed by al-Ẓâhir to sell him slaves. He sold him a slave girl from Sudan [Sayyida Rasad] who enjoyed al-Ẓâhir’s favour and produced al-Mustansir721.

At the outset, this would have caused little comment. Abū Sa’îd was the head of Sayyida’s diwan, running her affairs; there were other Jews running government

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719 Mann, I, p.207.
720 Ibid., p.33.
departments at the same time, such as David b. Isaac ha-Levi, but overall power was firmly held by the wazir al-Jarjarā‘ī, who had served al-Zāhir. Since Abū Sa‘īd was “afraid of al-Jarjarā‘ī”, Ibn Muyassar notes that he “did not show his true colours before”722, and his profile was low. However, once the wazir died in 436/1045, there was no check to Sayyida’s ambitions, and she wanted the Tustarl brothers with her. They were not loath:

This delighted Abū Sa‘īd, who ensconced himself at her side and ran the caliphate as he wished through her. His consequence increased until he ran all matters of state723.

In fact, Abū Sa‘īd’s consequence increased at a rate and to a point that were both astonishing. Only days after al-Jarjarā‘ī’s death, the brothers were openly confident of their power over the entire government. Deciding that the new wazir, al-Anbārī, was not the candidate they wanted, they took swift action:

Abū Naṣr went straight to him [al-Anbārī], treating him as a servant, offending him, and informed Abū Sa‘īd. They turned al-Mustansir against him and he was replaced with their choice of al-Fallāḥ, a renegade Jew. Abū Sa‘īd gave al-Fallāḥ his patronage and arrested al-Anbārī, who was so ill-treated he died.724

On a titular basis, Abū Sa‘īd was still only the head of Sayyida’s dīwān – Abū Naṣr’s official role remains unclear – yet he was controlling the Fātimid state and caliph. This had been done before, the first nine years of al-Mustansir’s reign being entirely run by al-Jarjarā‘ī, who had been equally ruthless at destroying his enemies. On the other hand, al-Jarjarā‘ī was a skilled politician; his devotion to the caliphate was well-known725. Moreover, he understood the need to control the unruly Fātimid army. At al-Mustansir’s accession, he demonstrated both of these qualities when he calmed angry troops demanding pay by offering his own money726. It is unsurprising therefore that he managed to escape public criticism despite amassing huge personal wealth.

722 Ibn Muyassar, Akhbār Mīṣr, ed. H. Massé, Cairo 1919, p.3.
723 Al-Maqrīzī, II, p.191.
724 Ibid.
726 Ibid.
The Tustarīs had none of al-Jarjara’f’s grasp on Fāṭimid politics, and none of his discretion. The treatment of al-Anbārī cleared the way for a puppet wazir to be installed; the converted Jew, al-Fallāḥī. Again, this had a precedent. Al-‘Azīz’s great wazir, Ya’qūb ibn Killis (d.381/991) had been a converted Jew. However, Ibn Killis had obviously been appointed by a strong caliph. Al-Anbārī’s handling had made it clear that the Tustarīs were in control rather than al-Mustansir, and the natural conclusion for many was that the Jews had appointed another Jew to build up a clique at court. The Muslim chroniclers’ attitude to al-Fallāḥī’s religious status is apparent from the constant description of him as a “converted Jew” – he is not seen as a proper Muslim. Meanwhile, the Tustarīs’ rapacity had already made itself plain, and public disapproval followed in a popular poem of the time:

The Jews’ fortunes have reached such heights of wealth and power
They are advisors and kings
People of Egypt, become Jews
For even Heaven has turned Jewish.

Poems were one thing, but the brothers’ greed led them into dangerous territory when they began to interfere with the Fāṭimid army. As a supplier of black slaves to the harem, the Tustarī brothers were also involved in supplying them to the army, where they formed the infantry units, and were natural rivals to the Turkish cavalry. It was therefore in their interests to increase the numbers of blacks – as a black herself, Sayyida Rasad was more than willing to implement this:

Al-Mustansir’s mother sympathised with the blacks, since she herself was black.... and augmented their numbers. When they clashed with the Turks, she gave them aid.

Since this took place to the detriment of the Turks’ privileges, the Turkish troops were soon vehemently opposed to the Tustarīs:

Abū Sa‘īd had increased [the black troops’] pay and duties. The Turks’ pay and that of those attached to them therefore decreased, and....the troops conspired [with al-Fallāḥī] to kill the Jew.

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728 Mann, I, p.17.
729 Ibn Muyassar, p.3.
Nonetheless, the Geniza evidence clearly shows that to many Jews in the Fāṭimid empire, the brothers’ meteoric rise brought with it advantages for their communities, both Rabbinite and Karaite. During al-Mustaṣir’s reign, anyone wishing to petition the caliph on any matter had two courses of action; they could stand by the palace gates, where the petitions were collected each morning by a guard, or they could bribe a high-standing court official to bring the matter to al-Mustaṣir’s notice. With Abū Sa’īd and Abū Naṣr in such exalted positions, they became a natural target for people in general seeking favours, and for the Jews in particular. One surviving Geniza letter to Abū Naṣr from a senior Jewish official is couched in grovelling terms:

I am writing to you, eminent elder and leader of the profession..... [the letters] of my two brothers have arrived reporting how kind you have been to them...I ask God to multiply people like you in the nation.

Elsewhere in the Geniza, Abū Naṣr – who appears to have been the focus for Jewish petitions rather than his brother, perhaps because he was not tied up with Fāṭimid court business – was addressed as “the mighty dignitary” by the Jews of Tripoli, who asked him to gain permission for them to build a synagogue. Another letter of thanks contains an adoring poem with the lines, “Abraham [Abū Naṣr] the chief of benefactors.... Abū Sa’īd, whom God in his grace supported and made rule everywhere.” Clearly, the Jews within the Fāṭimid empire knew exactly how powerful the Tustarīs were, and received benefits from having Jewish friends in high places. Equally clearly, the anti-Semitic poem demonstrates Muslim awareness of this; more Jews than the Tustarīs were benefiting from the brothers’ position.

It is therefore ironic that the main protagonist in Abū Sa’īd’s murder in 438/1046 was the wazir al-Fallāḥī. Al-Fallāḥī, far from exhibiting the pro-Jewish sympathy

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734 Mann, I, p.81.
735 Ibid.

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one might expect, given his background and the fact he owed his position to the Tustarîs, is accused by Ibn Muyassar of plotting Abû Sa‘îd’s death:

When al-Jarjarā‘î died and al-Fallahî succeeded, Abû Sa‘îd’s influence spread in the state until al-Fallahî had power in name only, and only executed part of the administration. Abû Sa‘îd took over the diwân sayyida; al-Fallahî was sick of Abû Sa‘îd, and he won over the army until they murdered Abû Sa‘îd in the west quarter of Buhayra.736

The Turks’ willingness to help is explained by their natural antipathy to the man who cut back their duties to favour his black slaves. In addition, however, Abû Sa‘îd was believed to have murdered the Turkish leader Riyān:

Unexpectedly, Riyān fell ill and died. It was said he had been poisoned by Abû Sa‘îd. The troops then plotted to kill him.737

Up to this point, Abû Sa‘îd’s religion does not appear to play a part in events. Had he been a Muslim, the Turks would still have hated him; they would later murder their own leader for withholding their share of booty738. Similarly, his stranglehold on the government created enemies in the same way as the Muslim wazir al-Yazûrî a few years later739. Abû Sa‘îd and Abû Naṣr were loathed predominantly for their rapacity and shamelessness rather than their Jewish background. On the other hand, Abû Sa‘îd himself twice gave Muslims religious grounds to dislike him. The first came with his treatment of al-Anbâ‘î, where a senior Muslim official was murdered at the orders of a Christian (Sâyyîda) and a Jew. Additionally, his cutting back of the Muslim Turkish troops for the non-Muslim blacks reinforced the image of a deliberate anti-Islamic campaign. In short, Abû Sa‘îd’s own poor political judgement led to his downfall rather than any anti-Semitic feeling at the time. Anti-Semitism merely provided a focus for a hatred that his actions had aroused. In stark contrast to other Jewish officials, whose discretion led to Muslim chroniclers being ignorant of them altogether, the Tustarîs flaunted themselves in Cairo, presenting the stereotypical picture of an inferior who has aimed above his social station and lacks

736 Ibn Muyassar, p.3.
737 Ibid.
738 Ibid., p.18.
739 Al-Maqûrizî, II, p.204.
the wisdom to hold his new position. When killed, Abū Sa‘īd was parading through the streets in a somewhat foolhardy public display of power. His death is shockingly different from the other murders recounted in al-Mustanṣir’s reign, with the overall themes of defilement and degradation. His body was treated with the utmost disrespect:

He [Abū Sa‘īd] was riding from his house to the palace on Sunday the last day of Jumāda I [3rd November 1046], in a grand procession. Three Turks pulled him from his horse and stabbed him to death. The Turks dismembered Abu Sa‘īd’s body and set fire to what was left. Then they covered it with dirt from a mound nearby.740

Retainers hurriedly claimed what was left of the corpse.

The gleeful details of the murder in the Muslim chronicles compare with the relative obscurity surrounding Abū Naṣr’s death. The Persian Ismā’īlī Nāṣir-i Khusraw, visiting Cairo in 439/1047, gives a bizarre description of the remaining Tustari’s actions:

[Abū Naṣr] wrote a note to the sultan [al-Mustanṣir] to the effect that he was prepared to offer the treasury two hundred thousand dinars immediately for his protection. The sultan sent the note outside to be torn up in public, and said, “You rest secure and return to your home. No one will harm you and we have no need of anyone’s money.” And they were compensated for their loss.741

Given that Nāṣir was a devout Ismā’īlī, this unusually decisive behaviour from al-Mustanṣir could be discounted as religious propaganda. Nāṣir also appears to be speaking from hearsay; he mistakenly describes Abū Sa‘īd as just the caliph’s jeweller. On the other hand, most of the Muslim chroniclers are silent. It is possible that Nāṣir’s version is correct, and al-Mustanṣir was seizing the chance to be rid of the man who was highly likely to take his brother’s place and continue stirring up mischief. By refusing to accept Abū Naṣr’s money, the caliph would not have to take action to ensure his safety, whilst making it public that the Tustari would not have his protection. There was, after all, little reason for al-Mustanṣir to love Abū

740 Ibn Muyassar, p.3.
Naṣr. The Tustarīs’ efforts at controlling the state had been disastrous, and the anti-Jewish poems embarrassing for the caliph. Meanwhile, the brothers’ meddling with the army had led to the scandalous murders of Riyān and Abū Saʿīd himself, whilst Abū Naṣr’s offer of money highlighted how wealthy the brothers had become under the Fatimid state. Given that al-Mustanṣir is accused by al-Maqrīzī of conniving to murder another wealthy force at court – the wazir al-Yāzūrī – the idea that he did the same with the rapacious Abū Naṣr is entirely feasible.

Mann, in his study of Geniza papers, claims that both Tustarī brothers were murdered on the same day, but this is directly contradicted by both Naṣir and al-Maqrīzī, who states that in 441/1049:

Thimāl [of Aleppo, a rebellious Fatimid governor] wrote to al-Mustanṣir to ask his pardon, Abū Naṣr Tustarī being the mediator.

Al-Maqrīzī also offers an explanation of Abū Naṣr’s death that became a familiar method of downfall in al-Mustanṣir’s court politics:

The wazir Abūʾl Barakāt found a way of bringing down Abū Naṣr. He told al-Mustanṣir that Abū Naṣr hated him, had killed his own brother and tried to harm the state when he mediated between Thimāl and al-Mustanṣir....Abū Naṣr was arrested and his wealth confiscated; he remained a captive and was tortured until he died.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw, having left Egypt the previous year to continue travelling, would not have known of Abū Naṣr’s fate. The lack of reporting of this event in other chronicles beyond al-Maqrīzī further suggests that Abū Naṣr’s death was accomplished quietly, in much the same way, ironically, as al-Anbārī’s. Again, the idea that he was more vulnerable as a Jew does not withstand the evidence that al-Mustanṣir was talked into being rid of al-Fallāhī, al-Anbārī and al-Yāzūrī purely on the strength of malicious rumours. Abū Naṣr was treated no differently, and al-Mustanṣir evidently trusted him for another two years after Abū Saʿīd’s murder; that he survived so long probably was indeed due to the caliph’s support. Without al-

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742 Mann, I, p.81.
743 Al-Maqrīzī, II, p.201.
744 Ibid.
Mustansir’s backing, he had nothing, but in this he was in the same position as most people at court.

This did not represent the end of the Tustars, however. Surprisingly, Abū Sa‘īd’s son Ibrahim ibn Sa‘īd is recorded in 456/1064 as al-Mustansir’s wazir. Moreover, his name passes without comment in the Muslim chronicles, although this is probably explained by the administrative chaos ongoing within Cairo at the time. Having apparently converted to Islam at some point – possibly shortly after his father’s death - he was one of over a dozen wazirs who lasted weeks before being replaced, having no effective power. That al-Mustansir employed him compares to his similar treatment of al-Yazūrī’s son, Khatīr al-Mulk, who was arrested with his father in 458/1066, but later appears as a state official and gossip in the Book of Gifts and Rarities. This second generation Tustarī had no impact on Fatimid affairs, and for the rest of al-Mustansir’s reign, no other Jew managed to reach the heights of Abū Sa‘īd and Abū Naṣr. At the common level, there was no backlash from the Jews against the murders. The surviving Geniza letters dealing with their responses show horror and a genuine fear that the Jewish communities would suffer renewed violence and repression. As one man wrote to a friend travelling to Egypt at the time:

The couriers brought us disastrous news [of Abū Sa‘īd’s murder] which terrified us....May we never hear bad news about [Abū Naṣr]. This will... calm our hearts with regard to you.

In fact, an outbreak of anti-Semitic violence did not occur, but the Jews had lost their powerful court partisans, and were reliant on the Fatimid goodwill for their survival. The Palestinian Gaon, Solomon b. Yehūda, wrote to his Babylonian counterpart, Sahlān Allūf b. Abraham some years later:

What a sad fate overtook them [the Tustarīs] through slanders and jealous enemies. They were no rebels to deserve such a death. May God avenge them, and may He place them

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745 Ibn Muyassar, p.15.

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The Tustarís' image as good men meeting an unfair and terrible end still echoes in some modern writing. Mann describes Abū Sa‘īd’s murder as “tragic”, blaming “the jealousy which a Jew in prominent position was almost inevitably bound to call forth.” Stillman concurs, describing the anti-Tustarí feeling as “frequently the case when a non-Muslim rose too high and became too conspicuous in the affairs of state in the Islamic world.” Yet this pitying attitude misses the point. Abū Sa‘īd and his brother brought hatred upon themselves not through being powerful Jews, but by the contempt they showed the Islamic state that allowed it. Their flaunting of their wealth, their treatment of the Turks and al-Anbārī, and above all their blatant exercising of power without even the pretence of al-Mustansir’s superiority, would all have earned them the same enmity from the same sources. Whilst the Geniza authors could scarcely have been expected to take the view that Abū Sa‘īd’s behaviour made his murder inevitable if not deserved, the idea that his Jewishness was the prime reason behind his unpopularity or his killing is somewhat unrealistic. The only tragedy in the Tustarís’ history is that it left the Fātimid Jews without a much-needed powerful voice at court.

Jewish Institutions and Self-Government

Al-Mustansir’s government ruled the Jewish communities at the general level, and naturally was responsible for levying the jizya tax on them as a dhimmī community. However, when it came to running Judaic institutions, or judging Jewish-only law cases according to Jewish law, the Fātimids sought a more convenient answer in state-sponsored semi-autonomy for both the Christians and the Jews. That of the Jews was centred around the yeshiva, translating roughly as “college of learning”. In fact, the Jews of the Fātimid empire could look to two different yeshivas, that in

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748 Mann quoting Geniza letter A.B.5, p.83.
749 Mann, I, p.77.
750 Stillman, p.207.

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Palestine (which moved from Jerusalem to Damascus in 464/1073), or the Babylonian, based in Iraq; Fustat had two Rabbinite congregations for each yeshiva.

Unfortunately, no sources exist that explain how the yeshivas’ relationship with the Fātimids was set up, or with their predecessors, but by al-Mustanṣir’s reign, the yeshivas’ administration of solely Jewish matters was well established. Despite the Fātimids originally attempting to only recognize the Palestinian yeshiva as the sole Jewish authority in their empire, the Babylonian yeshiva continued to run Babylonian affairs in the area, and it seems the Fātimid approach was abandoned.751 The Muslim government paid a subsidy to the Palestinian yeshiva each year.752 Yeshiva officials ran the law courts, collected the state taxes, settled disputes, gathered donations and brought petitions to the Fātimid court. The Geniza provides a variety of examples of the yeshiva’s work during al-Mustanṣir’s reign. In a demonstration of the relatively small number of Jews, in 440/1048, Ephraim b. Shemaria, the Jewish community leader in Fustat, asks the head of the Palestinian yeshiva - the Gaon Solomon b. Yehuda - to hand write his answer to a dispute, so that the other Jews will recognize it as coming from him, and not argue further.753 Letters begging for money to help other communities pay the state taxes are frequent. Complaints about neighbours and requests for intervention crop up often. In fact, had there been a Christian equivalent to the Geniza for al-Mustanṣir’s reign, much of it would probably have been the same.

From the Geniza, it is also evident that al-Mustanṣir’s government was not interested in interfering with entirely Jewish affairs. At his accession in 427/1036, al-Mustanṣir would have confirmed Solomon b. Yehuda, the current Palestinian Gaon, as continuing in that position, just as he had with al-Jarjarā’ī and the wazirate.754 When a Gaon died, the caliph confirmed his approval of the new candidate in another

751 Stillman, p.203.
753 Gil, 749; unfortunately, he does not translate the text.
754 Ibid., 746.
The Gaon could and did come to court to present petitions, and probably keep in touch with the Islamic administration, but al-Mustanṣir had no dealings with yeshiva-only affairs. Where there was a dispute between Jews, the Gaon seems to have been expected to solve it without recourse to Cairo. Similarly, non-criminal Jewish legal cases were to be heard in the Jewish courts. In fact, the Geniza demonstrates that some Jews went straight to the Islamic courts. Possibly these were Karaites, who did not recognize the yeshiva’s authority, although others were certainly seeking favourable verdicts on inheritance disputes, where Islamic and Judaic laws varied widely. This practice was frowned upon by the yeshiva, as was the custom of appealing to the Islamic courts to overturn a Jewish verdict, which could see a Jew outcast from his community. For his part, al-Mustanṣir could not have wanted to encourage Jews in appealing outside their own systems that he paid to run.

The Gaon was the link between Jews, yeshiva and the caliph himself, but he only represented the Rabbinites – there were in fact two Gaons, from the Palestinian and Babylonian congregations. To complicate matters, neither Gaon officially represented the Karaites or the Samaritans, who could thus ignore his decrees or seek alternative authority over their lives. Meanwhile, the Jewish yeshiva officials proved that on occasion they could be as trivia-minded and bickering as the Christians so mercilessly exposed in the History of the Patriarchs. At the beginning of al-Mustanṣir’s rule, the Palestinian Gaon was Solomon b. Yehuda, many of whose letters survive in the Geniza, and who died in 443/1051. He was followed by Daniel b. Azarya (443-454/1051-1062), a brilliant scholar from the Babylonian yeshiva, then Elijah ha-Kohen (454-475/1062-1083). Yet the Palestinian yeshiva’s power was waning. Already in 429/1038, Solomon had a rival proclaiming

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755 Gil, 746.  
756 Goitein, A Mediterranean Society (abr.), p190  
757 Ibid.  
758 Ibid., p.192.  
759 Stillman, p.203.  
760 Mann, I, p.76.  
761 Ibid., p.197.
himself “head of the school [yeshiva]”.\textsuperscript{762} What survives of the internal power struggles is complex and rather dull; as Mann described it, it paints “a sad picture of bickerings and intrigues... for personal advancement.”\textsuperscript{763} Also evident is that those Jews looking to the yeshiva were soon aware of this, and lost faith in the institution.\textsuperscript{764}

At some point therefore, around 457/1065, a new post was created within the Fātimid empire, that of \textit{rā‘is al-yahūd}, “head of the Jews”, more commonly known as the \textit{Nagid}.\textsuperscript{765} Unlike the Rabbinite Gaons, the Nagid’s responsibility extended over Rabbinites, Karaites and Samaritans, in a move that must have caused some upheaval to three communities all used to their own conduits to al-Mustanṣir’s government. The first Nagid, Judah b. Sā‘adīya, was a physician at al-Mustanṣir’s court, and apparently a Rabbinite\textsuperscript{766}. His post’s duties were documented two centuries later by the Muslim historian al-Qalqashandī:

\begin{quote}
It is incumbent upon him to unite his community and to gather their various elements in obedience to him. He is to judge them in accordance with the principles of his religion....He must see to it that their persons are protected by their being humble and lowly and by their bowing their heads in submissiveness to the followers of the faith of Islam.... He is responsible for appointing the various offices of rank....He has the final say in matters pertaining to all of their synagogues.\textsuperscript{767}
\end{quote}

The creation of the Nagid simplified the relationship of the Jews to al-Mustanṣir. Whereas previously Jews could legitimately claim that the Gaon did not represent them, the Nagid’s authority bound them all into one homogeneous Jewish mass. This simplification may have been in response to the increasing squabbles between officials of the Palestinian yeshiva which had seriously weakened the Gaonate, or also to address the problem of Karaite or Samaritan access to the Muslim administration. The Jews’ position to the court was thus altered to resemble that of

\textsuperscript{762} Mann, I, p.141.
\textsuperscript{763} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{764} Ibid., p.144.
\textsuperscript{765} Stillman, p.203.
\textsuperscript{766} Ibid., p.205.
the Christians. Moreover, the Nagid’s presence also removed the possibility for another Abū Sa’īd Tustarī, since high-ranking Jews at court would have to direct all requests to him. This new step in Jewish administration was thus of considerable benefit to al-Mustanṣir’s government, particularly six years later when Jerusalem fell to the Seljuqs. The Palestinian yeshiva fled to Damascus but had lost much of their power, so that the Jews remaining under Fātimid rule preferred to use the Nagid, based in Cairo and within the court, judging from the Geniza letters.

The Taxes

Whether Nagid or Gaon, the most serious part of the Jewish officials’ work pertained to the collection of the taxes. As protected people (ahl al-kitāb, or “People of the Book”), the Jews’ protection under Muslim rule was given in exchange for the jizya, or poll tax. They also paid twice the customs duty on all goods. However, this theoretical end to their state debts was certainly not recognized by al-Mustanṣir’s government, which extorted huge sums from the Jews under various guises. The largest of these was the annual sum decreed to be owed to the Fātimids, and levied on the Jewish population within any town or city. The actual jizya tax on Jerusalem in 452/1060 was 150 dinars. However, the Geniza letters mention extra, heavy taxes of 2500 dinars and more, until one Jewish official warned the governor that half the population would go into exile rather than pay:

Half the population will flee and the city will be destroyed in front of your eyes, and you yourself will have no security against a change of governors.

These sums were levied at a time when Goitein estimates that the average skilled labourer of the time was paid around 5 dirhams a day, with 36 dirhams to the

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768 Cohen, p.98.
769 Ibid., p.94.
770 Stillman, p.199.
772 Gil, 248.
773 Ibid.
774 Ibid., 253.
dinar. It is therefore unsurprising that the Gaon and other yeshiva officials wrote letters to Jews elsewhere begging them every year to aid with raising the required amount of annual tribute.

Worse still was the ‘onesh, a special tax ostensibly to pay for military operations, but which became increasingly frequent during al-Mustaṣir’s reign. One ‘onesh amount levied on Jerusalem early in al-Mustaṣir’s reign was for six thousand dinars, to be split between the Rabbinite and Karaite communities, neither of whom could find the money without heavy borrowing. This burden of taxation caused serious difficulties for the Fātimid Jews, including physical violence from the collectors:

We went out of everything we had empty, naked, sad, poor, and nothing remained to a man in his house, even a dress for himself... some of us mortgaged our houses... and some sold them completely. Many died of this suffering; for there were those who... struck them without pity, but nothing was found on them.... And with all that, [we did not arrive] at more than two thousand and five hundred [dinars].

This picture is the same as that of the Christians, whose tax collectors are accused by William of Tyre of using threats to extort the money. Whilst this does not necessarily mean that all the Jews lived in rags and starved, clearly they struggled with repayments and the unceasing financial demands of al-Mustaṣir’s government. Ironically, another burden came from Jewish pilgrims, who after paying the dinar entrance fee to Jerusalem were sometimes destitute and threw themselves on the community’s mercy. Jewish refugees from the Maghrib are mentioned in the Geniza after the wars in Ifriqiya in 443/1051 as being supported by the Jews of Alexandria.

The yeshiva, and later the Nagid, made strenuous efforts to find the money to pay these taxes. Many letters were written asking for help to the Jews in Fustat, who

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775 Goitein, A Mediterranean Society, I, p.97.
776 Gil, 264.
777 Ibid., 254.
779 William of Tyre, p.70.
780 Goitein, A Mediterranean History (abr.), p.124.
781 Ashtor, p.10.
appear to have been taxed more lightly than in Jerusalem – presumably because many of them were in senior court positions, or because they were on al-Mustaṣir’s doorstep and could thus create trouble in Cairo. A prime culprit for the constant taxation was the military extravagance of Sayyida Raṣad, who regularly bought in black troops to withstand the Turkish units. With both sides constantly demanding more pay and engaging in costly skirmishes, at the same time damaging the state’s economy with the growing violence, the money had to come from somewhere. In addition, the largest proportion of Jews, as with the Christians, lived in Syria, the strategically weakest part of the Fātīmid empire; defending Syria was expensive for its inhabitants. Later on, during the worst of the civil wars, between 458/1066 and 466/1074, al-Mustaṣir certainly did not see any of the money raised by the Jews, which probably went to the local tax collectors’ and warlords’ pockets. Nonetheless, the complaints about the extortionate taxes continue in the Geniza up to its latest papers. Whatever the upheaval in the Fāṭimid empire, taxation could not be escaped.

The Jews and other communities

Despite the Koranic injunctions on dhimmi, which effectively put Christians and Jews together, the same source also places the Jews in a definitely inferior position:

Certainly you will find the most violent of people in enmity for those who believe (to be) the Jews and those who are polytheists, and you will certainly find the nearest in friendship to those who believe (to be) those who say: We are Christians;

This attitude was also seen amongst the Christians. During al-ʿAzīz’s reign, the Coptic bishop Sawīrus refused to speak to the wazir Ibn Killis, saying to the caliph that, “It is not lawful to converse with a Jew in the presence of the Commander of the

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783 Goitein, A Mediterranean History (abr.), p.185.
784 Koran, 5.82
Faithful,” conveniently ignoring Ibn Killis’ conversion to Islam. The Coptic Patriarch Senouti II (423-437/1032-1046), in trying to unite his warring officials, grossly insulted them with a reference to Christ ruling the Jews:

“Lo, now thou ... comparest us to the Jews.” They rose up and went forth in anger.

Al-Mustansir himself, as has been seen, shows no particular sign of prejudice towards the Jews. He may have taxed them into poverty, but he applied this equally to the Christians. Moreover, his general religious tolerance extended to allowing Jews to occupy high-ranking position at his court. The caliph’s slave troops and harem girls were often supplied by Jewish merchants; the wine his party drank on a pleasure trip to Jibb ‘Umira in 454/1062 may well have been made by Jews, who were active in the craft, and he was attended medically by a Jew. Al-Mustansir, though, could afford to be personally tolerant in the rarified atmosphere of the Cairo palaces. The small, usually unarmed Jewish population was scarcely a threat to him.

Amongst the general populace, popular anti-Semitism may have been aroused by poems and brash, grasping courtiers, but it did not often intrude on daily life. The Geniza documents make it clear that Jews shared houses with Muslims and Christians, and did not usually have separate quarters in the city that excluded other religious groups. One Geniza document mentions a house jointly owned by a qādī and a rabbi’s son. Muslim-Jewish business partnerships were relatively common, since this also got around the difficulties of closing on the Sabbath. This was evidently common enough for the Nagid Maimonides, a century after al-Mustansir’s death, to lay down the rule that the two groups could not share the profits made on their own holy days. Jewish traders would also send goods by their Muslim partners to avoid paying the double customs tax. Meanwhile, in Jerusalem during al-Mustansir’s early reign, it was reported that Christians, Jews and Muslims all lived

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785 *History of the Patriarchs*, II(2), p.139.
786 Ibid., p.233.
787 Ibn Muyassar, p.13.
788 Fenton, p.152.
789 Ibid., p.153.
790 Ibid.
together side by side\textsuperscript{791}, whilst in 487/1094, the Jewish physician Ephraim ibn Zaffân sold thousands of his books to al-Afdal, al-Mustanṣir’s wazir, for his own library\textsuperscript{792}. There are also complaints in the Geniza of Muslims attending Jewish drinking parties, which led to intermarriage, this being contrary to Jewish law (although only prohibited for Muslim women on the other side)\textsuperscript{793}. Jews at all levels had friends amongst Muslims and Christians.

That said, the Jews’ position within the Fāṭimid empire remained precarious. Friends or not, they had to keep a low profile and conduct themselves with discretion. They had to publicly accept a lower social position than Muslims. On occasion, they had to accept the humiliating laws of ghīyā, or differentiation, that proscribed specific forms of dress for the dhimmi\textsuperscript{s}. Frequently occurring under al-Ḥākim, this appears only once under al-Mustanṣir. In 478/1085-6:

\begin{quote}
A decree was signed and written in the Great Hall (iwān) of the Castle [sic] that all the Christians should fasten round them black girdles, and in like manner the Jews, but that the edges of them [the Jews’ girdles] should be yellow, that they might be distinguished from the Christians, and that the full poll-tax for all should be for all, a dinar and a third and a fourth of a dinar. And the cause of this was a qāḍi known as Ibn al-Kahhal, and he was at that time the assessor of the poll tax.\textsuperscript{794}
\end{quote}

This was clearly an attempt to catch any dhimmi\textsuperscript{s} avoiding the jīzya, but since it is not mentioned by any other source, the law, as with its predecessors, was apparently allowed to lapse. It also echoes the Nagid’s duties as set out by al-Qalqashandi, in seeing that his people obey the law if they want protection.

Perhaps surprisingly, the Jewish communities of al-Mustanṣir’s empire do not appear to have had much interaction with their counterparts in other countries unless for commercial reasons\textsuperscript{795}. Jewish populations were dotted around the Mediterranean,

\textsuperscript{791} Gil, 601.
\textsuperscript{792} Fenton, p.157.
\textsuperscript{793} Ibid., p.155.
\textsuperscript{794} History of the Patriarchs, II(3), p.343.

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and frequently involved in trade, but there is no evidence of an international, specifically Jewish network, as might be expected for a scattered religious group who often encountered persecution. Where life became too difficult for Jews, such as in the Maghrib during al-Mustansir’s reign, they fled where they could. It is no coincidence that many Jewish refugees turned up in Alexandria, that being a large port with a significant dhimmi population. There was nowhere in the Middle East or Europe with a Jewish ruler; al-Mustansir’s Jews, unlike his Christians, had no Byzantine emperor making diplomatic waves at any sign of oppression. Wherever they went, the Jews were dependent upon the ruler and the rest of the populace for their survival.

**Conversions**

Conversions to Judaism in al-Mustansir’s time were extremely rare, from surviving evidence. For a Muslim to convert meant he would be subject to the death penalty in any case, which probably explains why there is no example of this in the Geniza documents. Nor is there any mention of conversions amongst the Christians for the same period.\(^7^9^6\) The Fātimids further forbade Christians to convert to Judaism and vice versa, since the only change of faith allowed was to Islam\(^7^9^7\). The same penalties applied to a Jew who had converted to Islam converting back.

Converting from Judaism still does not appear to have been a common occurrence. In al-Mustansir’s reign, the two high-ranking converts, al-Fallahî and Ibrahim ibn Sa’īd Tustarî, were both wazirs, and probably converted to further their careers – in the latter’s case, his father’s fate was probably another factor in seeking the protection of a Muslim identity. At the lower levels, the Geniza offers a few examples of conversions. Goitein notes that “there is no evidence of curses or derogatory remarks directed at apostates”\(^7^9^8\), but then this is hardly surprising. A converted Muslim was still a Muslim, and only an unwise Jew would direct curses

\(^{7^9^6}\) Goitein, *A Mediterranean History* (abr.), p.303.
\(^{7^9^7}\) Ibid.
\(^{7^9^8}\) Ibid., p.302.
that way. Conversion through intermarriage was highly unlikely, simply because Jewish law forbade intermarriage in the first place, as has been seen. Additionally, the advantages accruing to converts at the Fātimid court, such as al-Fallāḥī, were not open to converts at the lower levels and so conversion would have been less likely to attract.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Jews of al-Mustanṣir’s reign are paradoxically united and widely varying in their lives. The vast majority of Jews in Egypt backed the creation of the Nagid as one solid authority over the communities, yet the same notables squabbled over trivial matters. Many Jews were taxed into poverty, whilst others held high-ranking positions and accumulated wealth. Lumped into one religious mass by the government, they represented three distinct groups (including the Samaritans), with the Rabbinites’ loyalties divided between two yeshivas. Meanwhile, the state that taxed them so heavily also employed them as court physicians, heads of bureaux and even permitted the control of the Tustarī brothers over the Fātimid empire. Anti-Semitic poetry contrasts vividly with qādis’ and rabbis’ sons sharing property, or Muslims joining Jewish friends for religious festivals. The picture the Jews under al-Mustanṣir presents is thus a confusing one. Despite the genuine suffering caused by the taxation, they did not all live a life of unrelenting misery and enforced inferiority.

When comparing the experience of the Jews at this time to that of the Christians, what is striking is the unity of the Jews when faced with trouble from external sources. There is no equivalent of Diophysites burning down Monophysite churches, or of Jewish pilgrims being afraid of travelling to Jewish areas elsewhere. The hatred between the two main Christian groups’ leaders contrasts strongly with the cooperation of Karaites and Rabbinites when the community was under strain, or the letters of one Gaon to another of a different yeshiva. More importantly, the Jews did not succumb to the Coptic weakness of running to al-Mustanṣir’s government with their quarrels. The yeshiva’s in-fighting did not impact on the Islamic
consciousness; whatever was raging within the yeshiva itself, the duties to the Fāṭimids were correctly discharged. This self-sufficiency found unexpected benefit with the Tustarīs’ rise to power; without them, the Jews did not dare petition for synagogues to be built. They did not have the trust, bordering on arrogance, of the Christian leaders, who thought nothing of importuning Badr al-Jamālī with their demands. After the terrifying murder of Abū Saʾīd, the Jews kept a low profile, the proof of this lying in their almost total absence from the chronicles of the time, except for that preserved in their own Geniza; a testament to their self-sufficiency.
The Imam al-Mustansir bi'llâh

In examining the reign of al-Mustansir, it is tempting to look no further than the caliphate to sum up his character in its entirety; it may sometimes be forgotten that this less than dread figure of the chronicles was simultaneously a powerful, awe-inspiring religious man; the imâm to the Ismâ’îli community. In an empire in which he was himself in the religious minority, al-Mustansir’s imamate is seldom referred to or acknowledged by the contemporary non-Ismâ’îli sources, who see him as at best a caliph, and at least governor of Egypt. However, from the Ismâ’îli evidence, it is clear that the imâm al-Mustansir was a genuinely different character to his quiet caliph – the picture emerges of a dedicated, decisive and astute person who worked constantly for the good of his other empire, that at the time was scattered around Asia and Africa. This dichotomy between imâm and caliph reflects that of al-Mustansir’s two empires; one open and weak, the other often clandestine yet fundamentally stronger. Contrasting them offers fascinating differences, yet leads to a surprisingly different image of the quiet al-Mustansir viewed in most of the chronicles.

Sources

There are not many sources available to reveal the imâm al-Mustansir. The likes of Ibn al-Athîr, for example, saw al-Mustansir solely as the governor of Egypt, or at best *malîk*, “a king”, not as a spiritual leader. After the end of the Fâtimid dynasty in 567/1171, the Ismâ’îli library in Cairo was destroyed by Saladin, so that many

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chronicles would have been lost. However, some survived in private Ismā'īlī collections. Unfortunately, the turbulence of al-Mustansir’s reign also meant that for much of it there is little evidence of the imām’s life in Cairo. Nonetheless, his chief dā'ī for twenty years, al-Mu‘ayyad fi’l Din al-Shirāzī, left behind several pieces of work, amongst them his autobiographical Sīra, which deals with his time both at court and prior to his arrival in Cairo. Al-Shirāzī’s history is a priceless look at al-Mustansir as imām. Further afield, the Ismā’īlī dā’ī Idris ‘Imad al-Dīn’s ‘Uyūn al-Akhbār provides insight into the Yemeni Sulayhīd dynasty throughout its loyalty to al-Mustansir, demonstrating how the imām tended his missionary network and followers outwith Cairo, even during civil war.

The Imām

The Ismā‘īlī imām, unlike the Sunnī use of the post, was the supreme religious leader of the community, and the one person who could decide doctrine; the “single infallible representative on earth of God himself”. His decrees were divine law, whilst his title to his followers was usually ‘Amīr al-Mu‘minīn, “Commander of the Faithful”. Walker further describes the position’s responsibility thus:

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He would henceforth guide the Islamic community as God had always intended... His immediate goal was to return Islam to its true and proper form... He would... fight against the enemies of Islam both abroad and at home. 803

Al-Mustansir's claim to the imamate went back to Ja'far ibn Sādiq, the seventh Shi'ite imam, which in turn traced itself back to the Prophet through his son-in-law ‘Alī. The Prophet's status as the fount of Islam was thus handed down via ‘Alī and his wife Fatima (the Prophet's daughter) to al-Mustanṣir. How he was viewed by his followers may be gathered from the devout Ismā'īlī dā‘ī al-Mu‘ayyad fi’l Din al-Shīrāzī, who had arrived in Cairo in 437/1045. After two years' effort, he finally met al-Mustanṣir on 29th Sha‘bān 439/18th February 1048. To al-Shīrāzī, it was an overpowering moment, clearly displaying al-Mustanṣir's position to the Ismā'īlis:

My eyes had barely fallen on him when awe took hold of me.... I was standing in front of the Messenger of God and the Commander of the Faithful.... I tried.... to make my tongue intercede with him... I found it bound. 804

Al-Mustanṣir's own response to the dā‘ī's inability to speak in his presence suggests that he was already accustomed to this reaction. Rebuking with a frown a courtier who attempted to force al-Shīrāzī's departure, he permitted the dā‘ī to remain in his presence for an hour:

Each time those present tried to get me [al-Shīrāzī] to speak, I increased in tongue-tiedness and.... he [al-Mustanṣir].... kept saying, "Let him be until he calms down and becomes accustomed". 805

803 Walker, p.120.
804 Klemm, p.72.
805 Ibid.

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This incident also demonstrates that al-Mustansir, at sixteen, was already showing a different personality in his role as the imām to that of the caliph. At this point in Cairo, he was playing no part in the chronicles, power in the state being centred on his mother, Sayyida Rasad, and her henchmen the Tustarī brothers. As caliph, he was accused of being pleasure-loving and uninterested in state government. As imām, however, this meeting highlights the best qualities he would bring to his work leading his spiritual community – patience, piety, firmness and accessibility. In al-Shīrāzī’s meeting, al-Mustansir clearly lives up to his position.

This positive impression of al-Mustansir is repeated by the Persian dā‘ī Nāşir-i Khusraw, who visited around the same time; whilst he did not gain an audience with al-Mustansir himself, Nāşir watched him perform at the Cutting the Canal ceremony, and viewed one of the imām’s banquets; clearly impressed, he described the imām as a “well-built, clean-shaven young man”806. The notorious Ḥasan-i Şabbāh was also inspired at meeting al-Mustansir as a dā‘ī several decades later – during considerable upheaval in Cairo – to found another Ismā‘īlī stronghold, whilst the Sulayḥids of Yemen remained loyal during forty years’ worth of correspondence and advice from the imām807. From this, it is clear that al-Mustansir had the capability to arouse and maintain a strong loyalty from his followers, which lasted despite the chaos in his own empire. What also emerges is that this confidence and ability as imām were not qualities those controlling the state wished to see spill over into his role as caliph.

806 Nāşir-i Khusraw, Safarnāma, tr. W Thackston, New York 1986, pp.49-50
807 For these letters in full, see Al-Sijillāt al-Mustansiriyya, ed. M. al-Mun‘im Mājīd, Cairo 1954
The Imam's Duties

In order to carry out his responsibilities as listed by Walker, there were several tasks that al-Mustansir could only perform himself. However, not all of these were purely religious. The Fāṭimid empire in itself fulfilled some of the remit; simply by its existence, it was an Islamic rival to the Sunnī ‘Abbāsid caliphate, and issued frequent denunciations of the Sunnī claim to be rightly guided. The frequent public ceremonies in Cairo reiterated the Ismā‘īlīs’ power and wealth, as did their massive army. Some of these – the riding to the Azhar and al-Ḥākim mosques for the Friday prayers during Ramaḍān, the public leading of prayers in the parade ground or the Ghadir Khumm festivals – had a religious identity, but deliberately involved the Fāṭimid populace rather than just the Ismā‘īlīs. Paula Sanders’ book on Fāṭimid ritual and ceremony is extensive, and does not need to be repeated here, since the imām’s duties as distinct from those of the caliph were generally less public. This is all the more important during the wazirate of Badr al-Jamāli, when the caliph’s participation in the ceremonies was purely as a ritual figurehead; as imām, he had lost none of his significance. Away from the ostentation, al-Mustansir did far more than ride to the prayers or take part in ceremonies. His greatest duty was to propagate the spread of Ismā‘īlism, and to protect those already within the community, whether inside or outwith his territorial empire. His participation in the various public festivals as caliph has been dealt with elsewhere. As imām, he was even harder to glimpse; much of his duties appear to have been carried out by the chief da‘ī, probably at al-Mustansir’s orders.

Al-Shīrāzī’s depiction of a public audience with the imām – which unfortunately does not provide more information about the actual logistics of these events – took him almost two

808 P. Sanders, Ritual, Politics and the City in Fāṭimid Cairo, New York 1994
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years to achieve after his arrival in 435/1046; seeing the imām was not straightforward. His later access to the imām as he pleased was solely at the wazir’s discretion rather than the imām’s himself. There appears again to be a difference in al-Mustanṣir’s roles according to whether he was acting in his purely religious role or that of the “Sultan”, as he was sometimes called in chronicles. Al-Maqrizi’s description of his being overwhelmed by petitioners during the civil war is a case in point; this access, and that of visiting embassies from Byzantium, for example, were not made to an imām, but to the ruler of an empire.

The audiences with Ismā‘īlī followers were probably small and exclusive, judging from the difficulty al-Shirāzī had in obtaining one. Nāṣir-i Khusraw did not manage one at all during his visit to Cairo in 439/1047, which he is highly unlikely to have missed out if it was easy to go. Ḥasan-i Ṣabbaḥ’s audience, as already noted, was probably a public one; that it was solely for Ismā‘īlīs is demonstrated by Ḥasan’s question over the succession, and al-Mustanṣir’s response. Hasan’s access, like that of al-Shirāzī, was obtained through a more senior figure, in this case another ḍā‘ī away from court who arranged it in advance.

The majālīs al-ṭikma were al-Mustanṣir’s most important link with his populace from his spiritual position. Composed by the chief ḍā‘ī, they were read to the imām every Thursday, then signed and read again in the mosques after prayers. However, the imām’s signature was highly significant; it stamped his approval of the interpretation of Ismā‘īlī texts, and was a public declaration of his position on political and religious matters to his community. Al-Mustanṣir, accused of lying on carpets listening to music as a caliph, had no option of

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809 Klemm, p.71.
811 Ibid., p.323.
812 Klemm, p.73.
813 Ibid.

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repeating this as imām even had he wished to do so. He constantly had to keep a close eye on every Ismāʿīlī proclamation and sermon.

However, by far the greatest task faced by the imām was the care and growth of the daʿwa. Where the majāls were written and read publicly by his chief dāʿī, al-Mustānṣir clearly preferred to be more personally involved when it came to the Ismāʿīlī missionary movement. For a network that stretched across north Africa into Khurasan and Yemen, this was no mean task. The Ṣulayḥid letters alone, as has been seen, demonstrate that the imām was interested in everything from major political events to smaller personal matters. He gave advice, rebuked wrong behaviour, discussed his own activities and offered support. Whilst the Ṣulayḥid letters are remarkable for being extant, it is most likely that the imām wrote many more to his daʿwa. He certainly corresponded with Ḥasan-i Šabbah following the founding of a community in Daylam, showing interest in its progression. This is in marked contrast to the correspondence with Ifriqiya, conducted by al-Yāzūrī, which ended in vicious fighting, and might explain why al-Mustānṣir took over the responsibility in Yemen. The Ṣulayḥid letters represent a significant bulk of writing, not only for the letters but for the imām’s firm grasp of political, personal and religious matters in Arabia over four decades, and the energy he expended on assisting the Yemeni dynasty in keeping their hold on the territory. At the same time, the imām had to approve the content of lessons given to initiates in the palace and mosques within his own empire.

How much of al-Mustānṣir’s time was spent on nurturing his daʿwa is impossible to determine. What is evident is that he took an active interest in its affairs, made decisions for it, steered it and encouraged it from Cairo, with the aid of his dāʿīs. He was also keen to

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814 Ibn Muyassar, Akhbār Miṣr, ed. H. Massé, Cairo 1919, p.27.

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meet *dāʾīs* visiting the city and supportive of them, and took the final responsibility for the Ismāʿīlī position on a weekly basis through the *majālis*.

### The Daʿwa

The Ismāʿīlī daʿwa was an organization that predated the Fātimid empire, with the purpose of spreading the Ismāʿīlī message and increasing converts. In the late 2nd/8th and early 3rd/9th centuries, the *dāʾī* ("missionary") ʿAbū ʿAbdallāh laid the ground for the empire with his conversion work in north Africa, succeeding so well that al-Mahdī arrived into a ready-made domain to begin his dynasty’s caliphate. However, the daʿwa was not restricted to north Africa. From its beginnings in Iran and Syria, it spread outwards into Iran, Khurasan, Transoxiana and through the Arabian peninsula into Yemen.

The daʿwa was not the typical missionary network, however, in that it was not an unrestricted, open organization. Conversion was frequently undertaken on a clandestine basis since much of the Islamic world was not overly friendly towards the Ismāʿīlī doctrine, which did not recognize the ruling Sunnī authority. The daʿwa was forced to tread carefully outwith the Fātimid domains. Ibn al-Athīr reports of violence against the group in Transoxiana, with some Ismāʿīlīs being murdered. Given that the group looked towards Cairo as their authority rather than

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815 Walker, p.120.
816 Ibid., p.142.
817 Ibn al-Athīr, IX, p.524.
than the Sunnis in Baghdad, it is not surprising that the da'wa often had to work in secret outwith the Fatimid empire.

Whilst the imam himself was the supreme head of the da'wa, there was also a ranking system amongst the da'is; the historian Idris 'Imad al-Din was himself the 19th da'i of the Musta'lian Ismā'īlīs in Yemen. However, below al-Mustansir the most senior post within the network was the bāb al-abwāb, “Supreme Gate”, usually referred to as the chief da'i and based in Cairo. Described as “the official spokesman and mediator of the Imam in religious matters”, the chief da'i was a powerful post, coming as it did with the coveted access to al-Mustansir. At the caliph’s accession, it had been held by the qādī al-Qāsim b ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b Muḥammad b al-Nu’mān, great-grandson of the famous Fatimid jurist who had served the caliphate under al-Mahdī to al-Mu‘izz. However, in 440/1049 he was dismissed for al-Yāṣūrī, then the head of the Queen Mother’s dhūnān, or department. This was an early indication of the instability within the Fatimid state, in that al-Yāṣūrī was a Sunnī, and probably appointed to ensure that Sayyida Rasūd had control over all the top government posts. When he was promoted to wazir in 442/1050, the post returned to the qādī Ibn al-Nu’mān, much to the outrage of the famous da’ī al-Shīrāzī, who had had to help the Sunnī minister in this Ismā’īlī post by writing all the sermons for him. Ibn al-Nu’mān lasted until 450/1059, when al-Shīrāzī finally obtained the post. By this time already in his sixties, he would hold it for twenty years and achieve wide-spread

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818 Klemm, p.90.
819 Ibid.
820 Klemm, p.73.
821 Ibid.
fame for his eloquence, learning and piety. Born into an Ismā‘īlī family, he had come to Cairo in 437/1045 after facing persecution in Iran822. As a senior dā‘ī he had already been granted a house in Cairo on his arrival, but the chief dā‘ī post presumably came with higher pay and a bigger residence. His office was located within the Dar al-‘Ilm in the Western Palace823.

The decree passed by al-Mustansir investing al-Shīrāzī still exists. Referring to his forefathers’ loyalty to the Ismā‘īlī cause, and al-Shīrāzī’s own work on its behalf in various areas, the imām demands:

Take charge of what the Commander of the Faithful has put you in charge of with the resolution of someone like you....dedicate the better part of your heart’s devotion to the betterment of the corrupt among its affairs.824

The main duties of the chief dā‘ī, listed in the document, are in the main unsurprising. Al-Shīrāzī, as well as nurturing the da‘wa – particularly in more isolated areas – was also charged with the care of the existing Ismā‘īlīs both within al-Mustansir’s territories and beyond. Within the Fatimid administrative structure, in fact, the chief dā‘ī appears to have been treated as running another government department. Not only was he to run the community of Ismā‘īlīs and ensure that non-believers were excluded from all assemblies, he was charged with collecting the taxes and alms-tax from the da‘wa. Most significantly, his administrative superior was the wazir, to whom al-Shīrāzī was bidden to report and from whom he had to

822 Walker, p.144.
823 Klemm, p.93.
824 Ibid., p.92.
accept advice and orders\textsuperscript{825}. This last duty is interesting because the image of the chief dāʿī as subordinate to the wazir does not fit with the political machinations of several wazirs towards al-Shīrāzī even before he held the post. It is also surprising that the chief dāʿī’s office had not been held separately from the wazir’s authority, since it left it open to the corruption of the kind displayed by al-Yāzūrī giving the post to his son.

Once installed in office, al-Shīrāzī’s overseeing of the daʿwa ran alongside his work within Cairo itself as a centre for Ismāʿīli learning. His department inducted and taught novices and – once the oath of allegiance had been sworn – continued the education of converts up to the level of dāʿī, after which the recruits could join the daʿwa as missionaries themselves\textsuperscript{826}. On an international level, al-Shīrāzī was al-Mustānṣir’s effective ambassador within Cairo to the Ismāʿīli visitors who came annually, often seeking more instruction. Money was brought to the palace from far-flung communities in an important boost to Fatimid coffers.\textsuperscript{827}

In addition to these duties, however, al-Shīrāzī’s fame began to spread throughout the Ismāʿīli world because of his writings. As with the first Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, al-Mustānṣir’s chief dāʿī was famed for his learnedness, the main source of this being his majālis al-ḥikma, “sessions of wisdom”, the sermons based on Ismāʿīli law and beliefs. All written by the chief dāʿī himself – al-Shīrāzī’s collection was over eight hundred – these sermons were read out in the mosques after prayers on a Friday,

\textsuperscript{825} Ibid., p.93.
\textsuperscript{826} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{827} Walker, p.142.
probably by the chief da‘ī and some deputies. Prior to this public reading, however, the sermon was read in the palace in al-Mustānṣir’s presence. The imām had to sign his consent to the text of each sermon, a copy of which was then placed in his own library.828

Whilst al-Shīrāzī’s fame is only just given his talent and sheer hard work, it would be mistaken to assume that al-Mustansir was only a figurehead. He was very active in the da‘wa, with his own ideas on how communities should be run, as will be seen in Yemen. The da‘wa was the lifeblood of Ismā‘īlism and of the Fāṭimid dynasty; it kept the scattered groups held together in a cohesive network and kept Ismā‘īlism vibrant whilst continuously working to expand the numbers of al-Mustansir’s followers. It was the most important tool in the faith’s success, and the imām’s own work for the da‘wa demonstrates that he was well aware of its vital position to that of his faith and his dynasty.

Yemen – the Sulayhid Success

The Ismā‘īlī da‘wa’s efforts were rewarded in al-Mustansir’s reign by the founding of a loyal Ismā‘īlī dynasty in Yemen. In fact this was not the first time the Fāṭimids had seen success in the area; in 268/881 the da‘ī Ibn Ḥawshab established a community in the area, from which he was able to send out other missionaries.


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However, al-Mahdi’s claim to the imamate three years later caused a rift, and by 299/913 the loyalty of most of Yemen was lost. The da’wa continued to work in the area, as noted by the chronicler and dā’ī Idris ‘Imad al-Dīn, who listed nine dā’īs from Ibn Ḥawshab until ‘Ali b Muḥammad al-Ṣulayḥī. The son of a Yemeni qāḍī, he took over the da’wa leadership in the region during the reign of al-Zāhir, and gathered sufficient support to openly proclaim for al-Mustanṣir in 439/1047-8. Prior to this step, he had requested permission from the imām; he also had a dream in which the imām prophesied that al-Ṣulayḥī would win control of the entire Yemen. Following the collection of money and support from other members of the da’wa, he seized the Jabal Masār and built a fortress on the mountain’s top. By means of diplomacy and military force, the Sulayḥids managed to conquer all of Yemen except Mecca (then still giving Fāṭimid allegiance also) for al-Mustanṣir, who promptly bestowed the following titles upon al-Ṣulayḥī:

Most Sublime Sultan, Singular King, Grand Amir, Support of the Caliphate, Crown of the State, Possessor of the Two Glories, Sword of the Imām, Victorious in Religion, the Order of the Believers.

The correspondence begun by al-Ṣulayḥī in asking permission to declare for the imām continued for forty years between al-Mustanṣir and the Yemeni dynasty, as has been earlier discussed. What is notable is al-Ṣulayḥī’s constant requests for permission and advice from al-Mustanṣir. From the initial request to declare open
allegiance, he asked permission on every significant matter, from removing a troublesome sharif in Mecca to asking approval for new appointments. Moreover, al-Mustansir’s responses demonstrate that this was not a mere courtesy. He refused to allow any attacks on the sharifs, forbidding any bloodshed in Mecca, and also refused to permit al-Ṣulayḥi to visit Cairo in 459/1067 on the grounds that he would be anxious away from Yemen. In fact, the imām was probably being diplomatic and may have feared the overthrow of the da’wa in al-Ṣulayḥi’s absence – Egypt was also gripped by famine and increasing violence, which would not impress visitors.

On one occasion, al-Mustansir’s letter seems to have gone astray; on writing a second time to ask for the imām’s support in appointing his successor, al-Ṣulayḥi received a letter praising him for persisting.

Al-Ṣulayḥi’s devotion is obvious at every step of the way. Whilst he was a strong ruler within Yemen, in all spiritual matters he immediately consulted al-Mustansir. He also asked for guidance over military issues – somewhat surprisingly, since the imām had no military experience at all, al-Mustansir’s advice was usually sound and just. However, al-Mustansir’s relationship with the Sulayḥids was far more than that of religious head and adviser. As has been described earlier, his letters often touch on personal topics; he responds immediately with condolences on hearing of the death of al-Ṣulayḥi’s son in 458/1065-6, and to the dynasty again in 459/1067 when al-Ṣulayḥi himself was murdered. Later on, he even refers to his own misfortunes

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834 Ibid., p.55.
835 Sayyid, p.55.
836 Al-Sijillat al-Mustansiriyya, p.137.
during the war. This opening up by the imâm highlights the importance of Yemen to him as the da'wa's major success in his reign, and the relative closeness of his bonds with the dynasty, one of the few areas to remain loyal during the upheaval.

Al-Ṣulayḥi's rule over Yemen came to an abrupt end when he was murdered on his way to pilgrimage in 459/1067; whether his enemies murdered him because he was Ismā'īlī or simply because they wanted to overthrow him in Yemen is impossible to determine. Meanwhile, his son Al-Mukarram, already designated as successor by al-Mustansir, managed to continue the allegiance to Cairo, which continued throughout the rest of the caliph's reign through various Şulayḥid rulers; the dynasty finally ended its loyalty to the Fātimids in 524/1130.

Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn's recounting of the Şulayḥid history is also interesting for two episodes in which al-Mustansir is ascribed almost mythical powers. After his prophesy during al-Ṣulayḥi's dream, Idrīs relates the visit of al-Ṣulayḥi's chief dāʾī Lamak b Mālik to Cairo in 454/1062. Staying in the city for five years, living and studying with the dāʾī al-Shīrāzī, Lamak raised the issue of al-Ṣulayḥi's visit to Cairo several times, to which al-Mustansir would only answer, "How does he ask permission when the time of winter has come?" To al-Shīrāzī, this was evidence of the imām alone knowing the hidden meaning. This answer was repeated throughout the dāʾī's stay, until Lamak was eventually granted an audience in 459/1067, at which point al-Mustansir informed him of al-Ṣulayḥi's murder. According to Idrīs,

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837 Ibid., pp.66-69.
838 Klemm, p.103.
he then states that he deliberately delayed Lamak in Cairo “so that, although he al-Sūlayḥī might be killed, all of the righteous would not be killed with him.” Idrīs also claims that the imām announces that al-Sūlayḥī has been killed “at that very moment” in an apparent demonstration of omnipotence.839

Idrīs’ distance from Cairo meant that his grasp of the situation in the city was weak when not directly reported to him, and following Lamak’s return in 459/1067 to Yemen, he has far less to chronicle. Badr al-Jamālī’s wazirate and takeover of the chief dā’ī’s office, significantly, is glossed over; to Idrīs, Badr is “concerned with the wisdom and learning of the Imams”, a picture not corroborated by the non-Ismā‘īlī chroniclers840. However, al-Mustansir was highly unlikely to report otherwise to the da’wa, whilst Badr himself had control of the main office, so that the situation as related to the da’wa outwith the Fāṭimid empire was probably somewhat different to that as seen within. To Idrīs, Badr’s wazirate is a happy period of success; his imām’s decline and restrictions under the warlord’s regime are not mentioned. By contrast, he then ends his chronicle of al-Mustansir’s reign with the hint that the imām was possibly poisoned, although he does not give any reasons for this astonishing claim, which is nowhere else repeated841. Given Idrīs’ distance from Cairo, it is likely that he was repeating a groundless rumour.

The Ṣūlayḥids’ Yemen was clearly a major source of pleasure and prestige for al-Mustansir, who thus devoted so much time and energy to the area in his letters, and

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840 Ibid., 75.
841 Sayyid, p.75.

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who bestowed increasing recognition on the family with both titles and his own personal attention. Idris ‘Imad al-Dīn’s account also clearly depicts how the imām was viewed by a more distant community and the extent to which he ruled their lives from the devout dā‘ī to the head of a dynasty.

**The Ismā‘īlīs within the Fātimid Empire: the “Fātimid Miracle”**

The question of how many Ismā‘īlīs were in the empire during al-Mustanṣir’s time is impossible to answer beyond that they were in the minority. The chroniclers do not refer to numbers, and very few people are ever obvious Ismā‘īlīs apart from the caliph and those involved in the da‘wa. Al-Mustanṣir’s children belonged to the group, presumably, but his mother and harem did not; nor was there any guarantee that senior government posts were filled by Ismā‘īlīs. As discussed in the chapter on the Christians, it is likely that al-Ja‘farī, the caliph’s first wazir, was of the group, but al-Yāzūrī and Badr al-Jamālī were certainly not. The chief dā‘ī post was held by at least three non-Ismā‘īlīs (the two wazirs again and al-Yāzūrī’s own son), and the same applied to the post of chief qādī. The dā‘ī al-Shīrāzī’s bitter poem against his enemies at court further suggests that the Ismā‘īlīs were in a minority within the palace, with several officials conniving to prevent the formation of a governmental Ismā‘īlī elite.\(^{842}\) Within the army, the Kutāma Berbers were noted for being Ismā‘īlīs; they were originally converted by ‘Abd Abdallāh in north Africa in the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries/late 8th – early 9th, although how many still belonged to the

\(^{842}\) Klemm, p.76.
group in al-Mustanṣir’s time is again impossible to discover. The Turks and blacks, presumably, were not Ismāʿīlīs, the latter because they came predominantly from Christian areas and the Turks because their actions in the civil war alone made it clear that they did not see al-Mustanṣir as a sacred religious leader.

The other definite grouping took place in the lectures given in the palace and mosques by the dāʿīs to new and existing converts to the faith. These were run for men and women, although only men could go on to become dāʿīs. Again, however, numbers were not recorded although the classes are said to have been frequent, and it is impossible to track those in the classes once they left the palace.

Outside of the palace, the situation is even more difficult to assess. Information on the daʿwa is scarce even within the Fāṭimid empire. In an area where Muslims, Christians and Jews frequently all lived together, sorting the Ismāʿīlīs from the masses is impossible. Matters are further complicated by the loyalty demonstrated by the people towards al-Mustanṣir as their local ruler rather than their spiritual imām; the cheering crowds lining the streets for the caliph’s processions, or watching the Cutting of the Canal, were no reflection of Ismāʿīlī popularity, but rather a love of caliphal celebration. As previously noted, Muslims and Christians were used to participating in each other’s festivals in Cairo; several palace celebrations involved distributing food or money. At al-Mustanṣir’s being named heir in 420/1029, his
father al-Ẓāhir gave out both to “everyone in Egypt”, Ismāʿīlī or not843. As Walker notes:

Rule by the Fāṭimids thus had two aspects... One was the domain of the da‘wa acting on behalf of the imām; the other was more secular and involved a kind of recognition that never went deeper than the allegiance that Muslims elsewhere pledged to the ‘Abbāsid caliphs.844

This deliberately inclusive policy led to what has been described as “the Fāṭimid miracle”, whereby a dynasty survived for two centuries despite being in the religious minority within their own territories. Given that from midway through al-Muṣṭaṣīr’s reign the dynasty was in a slow decline, this is all the more remarkable, and the question has been raised as to why al-Muṣṭaṣīr was allowed to survive the civil war. Ibn Ḥamdān, the Turkish warlord, attempted in 462/1070 to overthrow the caliphate and pledge allegiance to the Sunnī ‘Abbāsids845. Removing the caliph in Cairo would have greatly helped this scheme, yet although al-Muṣṭaṣīr was penniless, alone and unprotected, he remained physically unharmed even as soldiers rampaged through his palace. Badr al-Jamālī, on restoring peace, reduced the caliph to a puppet yet still kept him as a figurehead (albeit active as imām). Given the scattered, minority status of the Ismāʿīlī communities, clearly other reasons beyond the number of followers kept al-Muṣṭaṣīr in his palace, and his dynasty in existence.

The answer to the Fāṭimid miracle is probably the same cause that kept the Ismāʿīlīs from forming a stranglehold on government; the state followed a deliberate policy of

844 Walker, p.129.
inclusion and did not favour Ismā'īlis over others. Ceremonies and rituals were planned as public occasions, and the non-Ismā'īlis from all backgrounds were encouraged to see the caliph as a secular ruler, with relevance to them beyond his own religion. In allowing all groups to succeed at court, the Fāṭimids demonstrated that keeping a local ruler based in Cairo was advantageous to a wide spread of people, rather than staying under the distant yoke of Baghdad. In addition to the popularity of this policy, however, al-Mustanṣir at least appears to have been popular with his subjects for his own sake. The Christian History of the Patriarchs directly assigns all kind treatment of the Christians to the caliph, yet all ill-treatment to his advisers846; despite the criticisms of some of the Muslim chroniclers, as a ruler al-Mustanṣir was usually tolerant, genuinely pious and had a gentle personality in contrast to the grasping ministers, Tustarī brothers and various warlords who held sway over Cairo during his reign. Whilst the majority of his subjects only saw him during his procession to the mosque or in other rituals, al-Mustanṣir was their ruler in their own empire; it is significant that during the famine the caliph was kept alive by donations of food from those subjects remaining in Cairo847. However, the protests from various writers whenever minority groups such as Christians and Jews were too obviously favoured – such as with the Tustarīs – meant that had the Ismā'īlis been similarly exalted at court, there would have been more reason for the empire’s Sunnī population to turn against the Fāṭimids. Unfortunately from the historians’ point of view, it shrouds most of the Ismā'īlis within the empire from being identified, and much about them can only be guessed.

846 History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church, tr. A.S. Atiya, Cairo 1959, II(2 and 3)
Politics and the Imām

From the government’s placing of the da’wa as a kind of department, it may be seen that this area was by no means separate from the tangled politics of Fāṭimid court life, and this was intriguingly documented by al-Shārīzī. Having met his imām after a two year wait, al-Shārīzī quickly discovered that this access did not lead to the haven of Ismā‘īlī ideals that he had hoped. Immediately after his audience, the frustrated dā‘ī spoke to the wazir al-Fallaḥī, explaining his disappointment at being unable to speak in al-Mustansir’s presence; he was granted the special privilege of seeing and speaking with the imām whenever he wished to do so848. However, al-Fallaḥī’s short tenure in office ended soon afterwards with his murder; without his support, al-Shārīzī found that his access to the imām was not popular with everyone. The next wazir to make an impact, al-Yazūrī, promptly withdrew this right, according to Ḫdrīs ‘Imad al-Dīn on the grounds that al-Shārīzī had been too friendly with al-Fallaḥī849.

In fact the truth was probably more complex. Al-Fallaḥī’s grant of complete access to al-Mustansir is intriguing, because the wazir was involved in a struggle for power himself. Becoming wazir in 436/1044, he soon realized that all real control lay with the Tustarī brothers, the wazirate being a convenient cover for their hold on the state. Al-Mustansir gave no sign of wishing to exert his authority and change this situation

848 Sayyid, p.42.
849 Ibid.
as caliph. However, as imām he was already active and dedicated. If al-Shīrāzī were given unlimited access to al-Mustanṣir, it could possibly stimulate the imām’s energy and interest towards his secular as well as his spiritual responsibilities. Al-Fallaḥī had nothing to lose and everything to gain from a newly strong caliph, who would rid him of his Tustarī burden. On the other hand, al-Yāzūrī had no Tustarī brothers sapping his powers, Abū Sa‘d having been murdered shortly before al-Fallaḥī; if al-Shīrāzī awoke the caliph’s desire to rule himself, the wazir could well find his position newly restricted. This would explain the immediate ban on the dā‘ī’s access more convincingly than the link with al-Fallaḥī; al-Mustanṣir himself would have ended al-Shīrāzī’s meetings had the former wazir’s disgrace spilled over onto the dā‘ī.

Al-Yāzūrī’s machinations made plain that he saw the dā‘ī as a threat to his own position. Currently head of the Queen Mother’s department, he was a Sunnī, as were probably the majority of officials at the Fatimid court. Al-Shīrāzī, on the other hand, as a devout Ismā‘īlī, had links to the imām that the wazir did not. He was also a prime candidate for chief dā‘ī rather than the uninspired Ibn al-Nu‘mān, who appears to have been under al-Yāzūrī’s control. That al-Shīrāzī was a threat to al-Yāzūrī is demonstrated by the latter’s deliberately shutting the dā‘ī out of government until al-Shīrāzī asked to leave Egypt in 440/1049. He ended up remaining in Cairo, however, once al-Yāzūrī became chief dā‘ī the same year, in a clear demonstration of his own belief in the position’s advantages. The absurdity of a Sunnī heading the Ismā‘īlī da‘wa outraged al-Shīrāzī, although once again his loyalty to his imām won

850 Klemm, p.72.
He even agreed to write the *majālis al-hikma* for al-Yāzūrī. These were read to al-Mustanṣir and his family every Thursday, al-Yāzūrī doing so and thus finding another loophole to keep al-Shīrāzī from the caliph. When al-Yāzūrī gave up the position to become wazir, al-Shīrāzī found that he was not chosen; the docile qādī Ibn al-Nu’mān returned.

Al-Mustanṣir was almost certainly ignorant of the machinations going on behind the scenes at the palace, but al-Shīrāzī’s response to al-Nu’mān’s reinstatement further supports the claim that the wazir feared the *dāʾi*’s influence on his imām. Klemm suggests that the wazir was afraid of the *dāʾi*’s revealing to the imām exactly what was going on in the government. Certainly the wazir felt the need to placate the *dāʾi*. Al-Yāzūrī’s explanation was to blame al-Mustanṣir’s elderly female relatives, who insisted that the office must stay in the Nu’mān family. Since he himself had been the previous incumbent, this was highly improbable, the more so since the caliph’s relatives would be unlikely to insist on a candidate in the first place. Al-Shīrāzī himself, unconvinced, accused al-Yāzūrī of deliberately keeping him out of al-Mustanṣir’s way. The wazir’s protestations were revealed as a sham when the next incumbent was his own son.

In fact, al-Yāzūrī could not take the risk of having an Ismāʿīlī at court with access to the caliph who was not under his own control. Following his weak efforts at

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851 Klemm p.73.
852 Ibid., p.74.
853 Ibid.
854 Ibid., pp.74-75.
appeasement, he appointed al-Shīrāzī to the Chancery in 443/1052 – a well paid position - but still refused to make him chief dāʿī when he was clearly the best candidate for the role. A plausible reason for this was the fear that al-Shīrāzī would influence al-Mustansir whilst not supporting the wazir, in turn suggesting that the caliphate was being steered in a different direction to the imāmate. Given al-Shīrāzī’s known veneration of his imām as a powerful leader, the wazir could scarcely expect the dāʿī to encourage al-Mustansir in the policy of non-interference that currently suited his own mother and al-Yāzūrī so well. Accordingly, he placed the dāʿī under his eye but away from the caliph, in a tactic that did not fool al-Shīrāzī for a moment.

It is interesting that al-Shīrāzī did not blame al-Mustansir for the political webs woven at his court. He seems to have been well aware of the imām-caliph’s dual role, and:

the political intrigues and constraints that surrounded the Imam and reduced him to a powerless figurehead of state.855

Nonetheless, al-Mustansir was still his leader, and it was to al-Mustansir that he appealed by writing poetry about his life and dedication to the Ismāʿīlī cause, accusing officials of working against him:

Yes, they know I am one who obeys Religion,
When others obey long robes and rags.856

855 Klemm, p.75.
856 Ibid., p.76.
This verse is intriguing by its suggestion that Ismā‘īlīs were far from being favoured at the Ismā‘īlī imām’s court. Ismā‘īlīs were not in the majority in the Fātimid empire; outnumbered by Sunnīs and Christians, how many were actually at al-Mustanṣir’s court is impossible to determine, although al-Yāzūrī’s behaviour over the chief dā‘ī post suggests that there were not many. Al-Shīrāzī may not have been the only Ismā‘īlī who felt deliberately excluded from his imām, and the picture he paints is one of non-Ismā‘īlīs closing ranks against a group with a natural advantage over them in al-Mustanṣir’s presence.

Al-Yāzūrī found a way in which to be rid of the dā‘ī’s presence in suggesting him as a plenipotentiary for the Baghdad mission of 448/1056. Told that he should lead the convoy, the horrified al-Shīrāzī protested directly to al-Mustanṣir, but made the mistake – or possibly had no choice – in doing so in writing rather than seeing the imām. Al-Mustanṣir merely signed an acknowledgement. By contrast, as al-Shīrāzī met his imām and expressed his grief at his treatment in Egypt, al-Mustanṣir “smiled warmly and expressed confidence in the success of this important mission”. Al-Shīrāzī once again responded to the imām’s personality, and set off. It is impossible not to suspect that the wazir had manipulated the situation. After al-Yāzūrī’s death in 450/1058, his successor al-Maghribī was no fonder of the dā‘ī; he gave him a cold reception on al-Shīrāzī’s return in 450/1058, apparently seeing him as a rival, as had his predecessor.

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857 Klemm, p.81.
858 Ibid.
859 Ibid., p.89.
Al-Mustansir, however, who had been active in overseeing his da‘wa throughout this time, seems suddenly to have realized the worth of his dedicated Ismā‘ili, who wrote him a lengthy verse apologizing for his long absence from Cairo. Granted entrance to an audience with the imām, the dā’i was given a qaṣīda (poem) written by the imām himself. This fascinating example of al-Mustansir’s writing explains his previous withdrawal from al-Shirāzī and then gives him instructions:

Our doors were not locked to you
Except to a hurtful, disturbing cause....

Our shunning was the shunning of a concerned father.

Our followers have lost their right guidance....
So spread among them what you will of our knowledge,
And be for them the concerned parent.860

He then bestowed the office of chief dā’i on al-Shirāzī in 450/1058. In fact the dā’i would once again be exiled to Jerusalem in 453/1061 after presumably another clash with a jealous caliphal wazir. This time, however, al-Mustansir recalled him and personally expressed his regret at the wazir’s actions861. Al-Shirāzī remained in his post until his death in 470/1078. Again, however, politics was probably partly responsible for this; the wazirate was out of control with few candidates lasting longer than a few months in office, thus making it impossible to dislodge the chief

860 Klemm, p.90.
861 Ibid., p.91.
had any of them wished to try. The schism between the rest of the increasingly chaotic state administration and the Ismā‘īlī office allowed al-Shīrāzī to survive throughout the civil war. A sign of how much the situation had altered from al-Yāzūrī’s time was that the all-encompassing Badr al-Jamālī, who gathered in all the influential offices within Egypt on his arrival in 466/1074, left the chief dā’ī alone. He then took over the post – in title if not in actions – on al-Shīrāzī’s death. Since this was not the first time a non-Ismā‘īlī had held the post, the same measures were probably taken again, with another qāḍī writing the majālis al-ḥikma and coordinating the da‘wa with al-Mustānṣir. Yet there is no doubt that the death of al-Shīrāzī was a great loss to the Ismā‘īlī community, and demonstrates how dependent the role was upon the force of the incumbent’s personality against the maelstrom of Fāṭimid politics.

Conclusion

Al-Mustānṣir’s role as imām is often difficult to reconcile with that of his position as caliph, because he seems to have become a completely different person in various ways. Possibly because this aspect of his life was kept separate from that of his position as head of the Fāṭimid empire, he seems to have expanded into this role and shown far more of his personality away from the overpowering characters of the court. His speech and actions on meeting al-Shīrāzī for the first time are both natural

862 Al-Maqrīzī, II, p.313.
863 Ibid.
and confident. Unlike the almost silent caliph, al-Muṣṭaṣir yet the imām gave voice frequently; in the mosque, in his letters to the Sulayḥids and in his touching qaṣīda to al-Shīrāzī in 450/1058. The imām knew what he wanted from his da'wa and what duties had to be fulfilled by himself and his chief dāʾī, setting them out plainly. He was just but not lax, and delivered rebukes or refusals where necessary. Unlike the court machinations, however, al-Muṣṭaṣir's refusals — such as to al-Ṣulayḥī's desire to visit Cairo in 459/1067 — stemmed from his conclusions of what was best for the da'wa.

It was not possible to keep the imāmate and caliphate entirely apart; the intervention of politics, in which al-Muṣṭaṣir did not shine, led to the poor treatment of al-Shīrāzī in his early years in Cairo, and prevented those Ismāʿīlīs at court from enjoying privileges they might have expected. Forced by minority numbers of his own religious group to throw the court open to all religions, al-Muṣṭaṣir occasionally failed to make the right decisions even within the imāmate's remit; allowing al-Yāẓūrī to put himself and then his son into the post is a prime example, resulting from the influence of politics over the da'wa's affairs. He also failed to protect the devout al-Shīrāzī from being exiled by a jealous wazir, taking so long to realize that the dāʾī was being deliberately excluded that the latter finally put his pleas into writing.

Nonetheless, when examining the spiritual duties out before him, there can be little doubt that al-Muṣṭaṣir as imām did his best to live up to the responsibilities.

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Unfortunately his own works are scanty, consisting of the Sulayḥid letters and the qaṣīda to his dāʾī, but the devotion of those across the communities, mirrored by those Ismāʿīlis who recorded having met him, are a testament to his performance as imām. The qualities that led to his weak caliphate were often, by contrast, ideal for a spiritual leader. Freed from the power squabbles within the state, his gentle, quiet, learned character steered his followers via the daʿwa and chief dāʾī, and he showed himself as entirely capable without anyone trying to wrest power from him. His devotion to his religious responsibilities came with a genuine grip on his position that was so lacking in the state government. Indeed, given the decline of the caliphate during al-Mustanṣir’s period, his diligence and strength in his role as imām must be partially responsible for preventing the Ismāʿīli community from suffering the same fate.
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