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From the shadows into the light : the disappearance of the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim

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**FROM THE SHADOWS INTO THE LIGHT:
THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE FATIMID CALIPH AL-HAKIM**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Edlyn Suzanne Richards

August 2002

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ABSTRACT

FROM THE SHADOWS INTO THE LIGHT

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE FATIMID CALIPH AL-HAKIM

By Edlyn Suzanne Richards

This thesis addresses the topic of the reign and disappearance of the sixth Fatimid Imam and caliph al-Hakim Bi-Amr Allah, who reigned in Egypt from 996 to 1021. This man was a richly complex ruler whose actions are not easily classified, though many historians have caricatured him as a madman and a tyrant. An emphasis in the thesis has been placed on those persons and events that had the greatest bearing on the mystery of al-Hakim's disappearance. The caliph did not lack for enemies and the mystery of his disappearance is exacerbated by a plethora of suspects eager to have murdered him. Also, when the caliph's body was never recovered, his disappearance took on a religious significance. Even prior to his disappearance, some of his followers applied to him the qualities of *al-Mahdi*, a messiah-like figure. His occultation by the Druze sect follows a pattern often repeated in the history of Shi'i Islam. Seen as such, the reign and disappearance of al-Hakim is an important part of the history of Islam.

Acknowledgements

I do not readily believe in fate. Yet, when in a two-week period in 1999 I came across three separate references to the disappearance of a certain medieval Muslim caliph, I began to wonder if the universe was trying to tell me something. I had been diligently looking for a thesis topic for quite some time when the story of al-Hakim seemingly fell into my lap. I was immediately intrigued by the mystery surrounding his disappearance. It has been such a joy to be able to donate so much research time to such an interesting topic.

While working on this thesis I received help and inspiration from a number of people. For reading, rereading, and editing my thesis, I extend my deepest appreciation to Jonathan Roth, Jack Bernhardt, and Mira Zussman. Their insightful comments were invaluable. I also want to thank friends and family who were eager to offer encouraging words and willingly feigned interest when I discussed my research with them. Most importantly, I am ever grateful to my husband John for supporting me in this project.

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Were it not for him, who I hope will come today or tomorrow,

my sighing for them could cut my heart.

No doubt an Imam will rise – an Imam who will govern

according to the name of God and the Blessing.

He will distinguish the false and the truthful among us;

he will requite with favors and punishments.

- Shi'i poet Di'bil ibn 'Ali al-Khuzali (b. 148/ 765-66)¹

Introduction

The Fatimid caliph al-Hakim disappeared on the night of the 27 Shawwal 411/ 13 February 1021. Having left the palace grounds in Cairo in the company of two servants, al-Hakim traveled south to Hulwan and then east into the hills of Mount Mukattam to spend the night observing the winter constellations.² When he had not returned by the following day, the officials of the court became alarmed. Though search parties scoured the hills and nearby towns, al-Hakim's body was never found. Some like the Druze sect, even prior to his disappearance, or *ghayba*, believed al-Hakim was *al-Qa'im* ("he who

¹ Al-Khuzali as quote by Abdulaziz A. Sachedina, "Messianism and the Mahdi," *Expectations of the Millenium: Shi'ism and History*, Eds. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Hamid Dabashi and Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989) 43.

² Much has been written on the establishment of Cairo as the capital of the Fatimid dynasty by the caliph al-Muizz in 359/970. The name Cairo is a distortion by Italian merchants of the Arabic *al-Qahira*, meaning "the victorious." The original caliphal city was intended as a government and military center, distinct from the neighboring towns. Over time, the city grew and eventually enveloped these districts. The remains of al-Fustat, for instance, are found within the modern quarter of Cairo called *Masr al-'Atika* or Old Cairo. Throughout this paper the name Cairo will refer to the royal city founded by al-Muizz and distinct from its neighboring villages. Nezar AlSayyad, *Cities and Caliphs: On the Genesis of Arab Muslim Urbanism* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) 73, 139; J. Jomier, "al-Kahira," *E.O.I.*, 2nd ed. (1965).

will rise”), according to a prediction made by the Prophet Mohammed. They did not believe that he had died but rather was “in hiding” and would return at some unspecified time to bring justice and light to the world. This tradition of occultation is common in the history of Shi’i Islam.

The Fatimids were Isma’ili Muslims, a distinct form of Shi’ism. Sunni and Shi’i Muslims basically agree that the function of the prophethood was to reveal God’s law to mankind and guide mortals toward God. However, they disagree on the matter of the imamate. Unlike the Sunni, the Shi’i hold that only legislation ceased with Mohammed’s death, but the guiding of men and the explanation of Divine Law continued through the line of Imams.³ Shi’i Islam also differs from Sunnism in that it regards the first three caliphs who succeeded the Prophet Mohammed, whom the Sunni regard as the *Rashidun* (“Rightly Guided”), as illegitimate, having usurped control from whom they consider Mohammed’s rightful heir, his son-in-law, ‘Ali Ibn Abu Talib.⁴ For Shi’i Muslims, the spiritual authority of their religion is held by the holy men (Imams) descended from ‘Ali. In contrast, the Sunnis’ spiritual leader is a descendant of Abu Bakr (r. 2-3/623-4), one of Mohammed’s companions, and in the 2nd-7th/8th-13th centuries this descendant was the ‘Abbasid caliph, who resided in Baghdad.⁵

Following the reign of the sixth Shi’i Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (d. 148/765), the Shi’i split into two sects. The Twelver, or *Ithna’ashari*, Shi’i traced their succession through

³ Linda S. Walbridges, *Without Forgetting the Imam: Lebanese Shi’ism in an American Community* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997) 32.

⁴ A Sunni Muslim is one who adheres to the *sunna*, the ‘customary practice’ of the Prophet Mohammed, and is often consider as being of the mainstream or orthodox sect.

⁵ W.B.Bartlett, *God Wills It!* (Great Britain: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1999) 20.

as-Sadiq's son Musa al-Kasim, rather than his other son Isam'il who gave his name to the Isma'ili sect, to which al-Hakim adhered. The Twelver Shi'i acquired their name from the fact that their caliphal line of succession ended with the twelfth Imam after 'Ali, Mohammad al-Muntazar. Like al-Hakim, it is believed that this Imam did not die, but was granted a "hidden" and marvelously long existence by God, as predicted by the Prophet. According to Shi'i tradition, the prophecy explains that a progeny of the Prophet, a descendant of his daughter Fatima, would "go into hiding" to prepare for the day at the End of Time (*akhir al-zamaa*) when he would rise again under the title *al-Mahdi*, literally "the One who is Rightly Guided." The concealment or disappearance of an Imam was a sign that he was *al-Mahdi*.

This belief in an expected deliverer was not a part of Islam during the Prophet's era. It was only after Islam's infancy at the close of the second century of the *Hijrah* when civil wars erupted following the death of the first Umayyad sovereign and the Prophet's grandson, al-Mahdi, was assassinated, that the need for a "deliverer" arose.⁶ The Expected Mahdi or Expected Fatimid (because he was to be a descendant of Fatima) varied according to the different Islamic sects. The ambiguity of this tradition encouraged many Shi'ites to apply it to different Imams and has given impetus to the "rise" of a number of messianic sects each of which believes their leader is *al-Mahdi*. The historian al-Tabari (d. 310/922) in his book, *Tarikh al-Rusul wa-l-Muluk*, wrote of the use of this prophecy by militant sects like the Qaramita and Isma'ili in their struggle to establish a

⁶ D.S. Margoliouth, "On Mahdis and Mahdiism," *Proceedings of the British Academy, 1915-1916* (Oxford University Press, 1916) 214.

Shi'i state. The Waqifa sect was the first, alleging that the seventh Imam, Musa al-Kazim, was the true hidden Imam.

Others predicted that the hidden Imam would be the twelfth Shi'i Imam, but did not identify him by name. When the eleventh Imam, Hasan al-'Askari, died in 260/874, his young son was whisked away to a hiding place where he remained for almost seventy years. This is known among Twelver Shi'i as the first occultation (*al-ghabat al-ula*). During that time, the Imam communicated to the outside world via four representatives (*safir-na 'ib-wakil*). He only appeared in public once before retiring in 329/941 into his "second occultation" (*al-ghaybat al-thaniya*).

During the pre-Fatimid period, the descendants of Ja'far al-Sadiq who were scattered across the Arab world, organized an underground Shi'i movement known as *al-da'wa* ("the mission") or *al-da'wa al-hadiya* ("the rightly guided mission"). The movement had as its purpose the overthrow of the Sunni 'Abbasids.⁷ The Isma'ili *da'wa* that emerged in the 3rd/9th century led to the foundation of the Fatimid *dawla*, or state.⁸ The establishment of the Fatimid dynasty was expected to procure social justice and a universal religious state. But by the reign of al-Hakim, the long-awaited *da'wa* had not yet been realized and the Isma'ili sect was growing restless. Walbridge notes that, "It is commonly believed that the antipathy toward the imamate was the cause of the occultation of the Twelfth Imam."⁹ Likewise, I suggest that a waning belief in the divinely inspired powers of al-Hakim may have procured his disappearance. In order to

⁷ The 'Abbasid dynasty (132-656/750-1258) took its name and caliphal hereditary line from Mohammed's uncle, al-'Abbas.

⁸ Daftary, ed., *Medieval Ima'ili History and Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1996) 3.

⁹ Walbridge 32.

further examine what happened the night the caliph disappeared, it is necessary that we understand his reign and the major problems affecting his rule.

Surprisingly, one finds limited scholarship in regard to al-Hakim's disappearance. Despite an abundance of information on the Fatimid dynasty in general and al-Hakim's reign in particular, the caliph's mysterious exit has never truly been researched. The majority of the later medieval and modern historians have only repeated what sources contemporary to the events chronicled. Yet, based on these sources, al-Hakim's disappearance is not fully understood, mainly due to the transmission of inaccurate information. For nearly a millenium, historians have passed on this misinformation, severely altering the history of al-Hakim. According to F.E. Peters, the hostility of contemporary sources toward the Fatimid dynasty caused the inaccuracies.¹⁰

Though Shi'i ideas and propaganda had infiltrated even the 'Abbasid dynasty's capital of Baghdad (a stronghold of Sunni Islam), the Fatimids had few political and theological allies. Even other Shi'ite powers, such as the Hamdanids in Syria and the Buwayhids in Iraq, chose not to support the Fatimids. Additionally, though the Fatimid government leaders were mostly identified with Isma'ili Shi'ism, the majority of Muslims, even in the capital at Cairo, remained Sunni.¹¹ Shi'ism was seen as an arch-heresy (*ilhad*); therefore, the histories of this period were, in general, biased against the Fatimids. In the 4th/10th century, the 'Abbasids, in their efforts to defame Isma'ilism even wrote a set of false instructions for Isma'ili neophytes, "The Book of the Highest

¹⁰ F.E. Peters, *The Distant Shrine: The Islamic Centuries in Jerusalem* (New York: AMS Press, 1993) 93.

¹¹ Walbridge 33.

Initiation" (*Kitab al-balagh al-akbar*), that mocked the sect. Only in the last twenty-five years has this book been "unmasked as a propagandist travesty."¹²

Shi'ism was beginning to wane by the eleventh century and anti-Fatimid propaganda reached its apex during al-Hakim's reign.¹³ Thus, it is not surprising that biographical treatments of the Egyptian caliph by Sunni historians were not favorable and at times blatantly untrue. The most glaring example of this bias can be found in the writings of the Baghdadi historian Hilal as-Sabi (359-448/969-1056).

As-Sabi was Director of the Chancery under the vizier Fahq al-Mulk during the reign of the 'Abbasid caliph al-Kadir (r. 381-422/991-1031) in Baghdad. His administrative duties and rank at the court provided him access to the documents, government papers, and official declarations of the court archives and the time to write. As-Sabi's historical judgements, like most in early Arab historiography, were strictly partisan. An historian in the service of a ruler was expected to reflect that ruler's political or social outlook in his writings. One of the great perils of being a court historian was walking the thin line between accurately portraying the events and pleasing one's master. In his history of the Buwayhids, as-Sabi choose to praise the amir Mu'ayyid al-Dawla (r. 366-373/976-984) in writing but fearing the adverse criticism of scholars, he disparaged

¹² S.M. Stern, "The Book of the Highest Initiation and Other Anti-Isma'ili Travesties," *Studies in Early Isma'ilism* (Jerusalem and Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983) 56ff; Heinz Halm, "The Isma'ili Oath of Alligiance ('*ahd*) and the 'Sessions of Wisdom' (*majalis al-hikma*) in Fatimid Times," *Medieval Isma'ili History and Thought*, ed. Farhad Daftary (Cambridge University Press, 1996) 91.

¹³ Not until the Safavid dynasty attained power in Iran in the sixteenth century was Twelver Shi'ism declared an official religion in an Arab state, and this took a great amount of energy on the Safavids part to educate and convert the Majority Sunni population.

his own work as a fabrication of falsehoods.¹⁴

Bearing this in mind, the histories of as-Sabi are liable to bias and his accounts of al-Hakim should be read with great caution. Like all learned men of the court of al-Kadir, as-Sabi signed a manifesto, written in 402/1011, denouncing the Shi'i Fatimids as heretics. He also wrote that al-Hakim refused to bathe for seven years, that the last three years of his life he never left an underground cell, and that the caliph worshipped the planets Saturn and Mars.¹⁵ These statements are clearly preposterous, rooted in an obvious political and religious bias.¹⁶ As-Sabi was also the one who implicated Sitt al-Mulk, al-Hakim's sister, and Ibn Dawwas, a Kutama Berber chief, in al-Hakim's murder, despite the fact that those historians who were closest to the events say nothing of Sitt al-Mulk's involvement.¹⁷ On this subject, as-Sabi concludes that in 414/1024 Sitt al-Mulk executed for treason everyone who knew her secret including Ibn Dawwas, two slaves and a *qadi*, or judge.

The accounts of al-Hakim's reign and disappearance by four other contemporary chroniclers supply vital information; however, like as-Sabi, each are biased in some way. Muhammad Ibn Abu Qasim al-Musabbihi (d. 420/1029) wrote more than thirty books on

¹⁴The reverse could also occur, a historian could be punished for not displaying an obsequious attitude to his master's opinions. Muhammad b. 'Abdallah al-Utaqi (d. 385/955), court astrologer to the Fatimid caliph al-Aziz, refused to omit those parts of history that flattered the Umayyads and 'Abbasids, opponents of the Fatimids and Shi'ism. These inclusions offended the caliph. Al-Aziz denounced al-Utaqi, confiscated his farm, and placed him under house arrest where he spent the last eight years of his life.

¹⁵ Halm, *The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1997) 35.

¹⁶ As-Sabi's informant for information on the reign of al-Hakim was Abu al-Faraj Ibn Zakarriyya al-Qarqawi, who was living in Egypt at the time of the disappearance. Assaad 186.

¹⁷ Al-Antaki, al-Musabbihi, and al-Quda'I do not mention Sittal-Mulk's alleged role in al-Hakim's disappearance. However, in al-Antaki's account, Ibn Dawwas is implicated as the perpetrator of the caliph's murder. Yaacov Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1991) 34; Halm "Sitt al-Mulk" E.O.I., 2nd ed. (1965) 685.

a broad range of subjects during his career as a high official and personal friend in the service of both al-Hakim and his son and successor, az-Zahir. His connection to al-Hakim adds weight to his writing, but also raises the possibility of bias. He was certain to have taken a pro-Fatimid perspective.¹⁸

Muhammad Ibn Salama al-Quda'i (d. 454/1062) was a prominent judge and secretary to the vizier al-Jarjara'i in the Fatimid court during the reign of al-Hakim. For al-Quda'i, as for al-Musabbihi, writing history was almost an official duty and his proximity to important persons and events lent prestige to his works. Because of these official duties, al-Quda'i's account is the most reliable. His reliability as a historian is also strengthened because he was a Sunni Muslim who retained his Islamic beliefs and his life during the turbulent period under al-Hakim.

Yahya Ibn Sa'id al-Antaki (d.458/1065) was one of those rare exceptions in Arabic historiography of someone outside of government who wrote history. By occupation he was a physician. An Egyptian Christian, al-Antaki retreated to Byzantine Antioch during al-Hakim's persecution of Jews and Christians in Egypt and Palestine. Though possibly hostile toward al-Hakim on religious grounds, al-Antaki offers a fair portrayal of the events of the Fatimid, 'Abbasid, and Byzantine empires from the years 326/937 to 422/1030.

Sawirus Ibn al-Muqaffa was secretary to the Patriarch Philotheus (979-1003) and later was bishop of Ashmunein. Al-Muqaffa collected Arabic documents about the

¹⁸ Sadik A. Assaad, *The Reign of Al-Hakim Bi-Amr Allah: A Political Study* (Beirut: The Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 1974) 14-15.

patriarchs of the Egyptian Church, written by earlier biographers, and edited and published them. For the reign of al-Hakim, al-Muqaffa provides important information on al-Hakim's relationship with the Jacobite and Melkite churches in Egypt and Nubia. His bias, like al-Antaki's, was that he was a Christian.

Unfortunately, the majority of later medieval scholars, Arab, non-Arab, Muslim, and Christian alike, adopted as-Sabi's version of events as the standard. Only Taki al-Din al-Maqrizi (776/1364-845/1442), an Egyptian historian whose various positions at the Cairo court included chief administrator of the Mosque of al-Hakim, was discerning enough to choose only the most accurate accounts from previous histories. His acquaintance with the historian Ibn Khaldun may have prompted him to pursue the writing of history. Al-Maqrizi's histories are the most celebrated of the new methodology that began to be used by Arab historians in the fifteenth century. This new method incorporated topography, culture, history, economics and biography into a comprehensive retelling of the past. Al-Maqrizi utilized primary documents and first-hand accounts of Fatimid Egyptians to create an overall picture of a specific historic event, but he looked at his sources much more objectively than any previous historian had. Al-Maqrizi excluded from his histories the writing of as-Sabi which he wrote, "This contains extreme hostility which none of the Egyptian writers had ever shown."¹⁹

¹⁹ Al-Maqrizi, "Khitat II," trans. and ed. Bernard Lewis, *Islam: From the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople*, Vol. 1 (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974) 59.

Several other medieval historians, though biased, have been used cautiously in this study. William, archbishop of Tyre (1174-c. 1187), is credited with one of the best-known contemporary accounts of the Crusades. He learned Arabic in order to write a history of Western Asia (now lost) using Arab sources. Though generally reliable, his chronicles are skewed by his European bias, evident in his description of the Byzantines as lacking “sincerity and good faith” in contrast to his depiction of the Christian crusaders as embodying a “single-hearted confidence and trust.”²⁰ In regard to this study, William of Tyre recounts those events performed by al-Hakim that bore on the Crusades, including the caliph’s order to destroy the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and subsequent persecutions of the Christian community in the Fatimid Empire.

Bar Hebraeus (1226-1286), an Arab Christian of Jewish origin, was an assistant to the Jacobite patriarch of Antioch and later bishop of Maragha in Azerbaidjan. His most credited accomplishment is a universal history written in Syriac. Despite a lack of objectivity and distance from the events portrayed, the chronicles of Bar Hebraeus are an essential research tool for anyone studying the Fatimid era because of their preservation of previous historical writings. The same can be said of the writings of Abu l-Mahasin Ibn Tagribirdi (Cairo 813-874/1411-1469), a scholar who flourished in the Mamluk era. Taghribirdi wrote a general history of Egypt, *An-Nujum az-Zahira fi muluk Misr wa l-*

²⁰ William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, trans. Emily Atwater Babcock and A.C. Krey (New York: Octagon Books, 1976) 12, 19.

Qahira (*The Shining Stars Concerning the Kings of Egypt and Cairo*). An anthology of previous historical works, most notably as-Sabi's, the *Nujum* was written, says Taghribirdi, for the entertainment of him and his friends.

When western scholarly study of Islam and the Arab world began again in the nineteenth century, Orientalists led by Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838) based their research on those manuscripts available to them at the time. Unfortunately, these were mainly from the Sunni viewpoint. Due to these writings, Isma'ili Shi'ism and the reign of al-Hakim continued to be inaccurately treated. Farhad Daftary writes, "The myths of the Isma'ilis had indeed found a new lease on life by Orientalism."²¹

Not until the mid-twentieth century did factual information on the Fatimids come to light due to the recovery of a number of Isma'ili sources. Vladimir Ivanov (1886-1970) was a key figure in identifying a large collection of Isma'ili sources in Bombay and effectively "modernizing" Isma'ili studies. Twentieth century historians studying the Fatimid era were also aided by the discovery of two other unlikely sources of valuable information.

One comprises an only recently available cache of documents recovered in the late nineteenth century from a *geniza* attached to a synagogue in al-Fustat, Egypt.²² Known as the *Cairo Geniza*, these papers numbering 250,000 documents contain information on all aspects of life in Egypt and around the Mediterranean in the tenth to thirteenth centuries. This incredibly rich collection illuminates life of the non-elite of

²¹ Farhad Daftary, *The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge University Press, 1990) 11.

²² Jewish communities believed that any document containing the name of God should not be destroyed. So these papers were kept in storage compartment in a synagogue known as a *geniza*.

Egyptian society at that time. Though, in general, the documents do not discuss the court life of the Fatimids, a few exceptions prove invaluable for a study of the reigns of al-Hakim and al-Zahir. Particularly, the letters in the *Cairo Geniza* may dispel some of the myths generated about the caliph's treatment of Jews and Christians during his supposed "reign of terror".

Druze manuscripts provide the second important source for information on the disappearance of al-Hakim, only recently viewed by outside parties. They contend that al-Hakim was divine and was not murdered; instead he went into a period of concealment to test the faith of the Druze. Interestingly, the *Risala* (epistle), *al-Sijil al-Mu'allaq* (the decree of al-Mu'allaq), which was written by Hamza, the leader of the Druze sect, only a few days after al-Hakim's disappearance (in Dhu al-Qa'da 411/February 1021), warns against searching for the caliph because it states that he will never be found.

Despite these two collections, modern researchers are still dependant on analyzing the often contradictory, at times hostile, and inaccurate accounts of al-Hakim written by previous historians, in which he is either portrayed as a cruel tyrant for his infamous destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and persecution of the Christians and Jews in his empire, or he is painted as a madman evidenced by strange decrees and behavior. These depictions are flat and fail to show that al-Hakim was quite a complex historical figure. Only through reinterpretation will we be able to understand this fascinating era. Regardless, the true fate of al-Hakim may never be known but it is necessary to reexamine the facts and perhaps shed new light on this medieval mystery. The verse, "From the shadows into the light" appears five times in the Quran and it was

prominently inscribed in the Mosque of al-Hakim in Cairo, completed during the caliph's reign. This is fitting, for its imagery is a perfect metaphor for the disappearance of al-Hakim. Diligent historians and archaeologists must piece together the clues to construct a better understanding of this extraordinary man and raise his tarnished history from the darkness and into the light.

A ruler can obtain power only with the help of his own people... He uses them to fight against those who revolt against his dynasty... but with the approach of the second stage the ruler shows himself to be independent of his own people... As a result they become his enemies, and to prevent them from seizing power he needs other friends, not of his own kind, whom he can use against his people. -Ibn Khaldun¹

I

The Early Reign of Al-Hakim and the Kutama Struggle for Power

Abu 'Ali al-Mansur was born on the 23rd of Rabi' I 375/ 14 August 985. He became the sixth Fatimid Imam and caliph with the *lakab* or title al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, which means "he who governs by the order of God."² He was the first Fatimid caliph to have been born in Egypt. His father was Prince Nizar Abu Mansur, whose *lakab* was al-Aziz Bi'llah (344-386/955-996).

There is some confusion about the maternity of al-Hakim. His older sister, Sitt al-Mulk (359-413/970-1023), was born to al-Aziz and an *umm walad*, or concubine mother. Sources refer to this woman as al-Sayyida al-Aziziyya, a Christian slave (*jarya*) of

¹ Ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddimah*, 183, as quoted in Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Harvard University Press, 1991) 210.

² The title *caliph* means "successor" and symbolically refers to a vice-regent or representative of Allah. In Islamic political thought, the caliphs are the successors of the Prophet Mohammed. The term *imam* also refers to an intermediary role between Allah and the faithful. However, in Shi'i Islam the Imams (with a capital "I") are descendants of the Prophet who are believed to be the legitimate leaders of the Islamic community. The Fatimid caliph was both a political and religious leader. He was considered "the incarnation of the plan and will of Allah on earth." Andre Raymond, *Cairo*, trans. Willard Wood (Harvard University Press, 2000) 41.

Byzantine origin.³ Al-Aziz, it is said, was deeply in love with her to the point of indiscretion. The contemporary historian al-Antaki refers to al-Sayyida al-Aziziyya's brothers, Arsenius and Orestes, as "the uncles of Sitt al-Mulk, al-Aziz's daughter."⁴ He, however, does not mention these men's relation to al-Hakim, presumably because they were not kin. This is one of the few indications that al-Hakim's mother was not al-Sayyida al-Aziziyya.

Muslim custom allows a man to wed up to four wives as long as he can financially support each of them.⁵ Al-Aziz is believed to have had at least two wives. One of the only references to a second wife is in a Druze manuscript that mentions the marriage of al-Aziz to a cousin within the Fatimid family, meaning she was a Shi'i Muslim. The document identifies her as a daughter of Prince 'Abd Allah, al-Aziz's uncle.⁶ Beyond this, nothing is known of her. The Druze believed al-Hakim was the son of this Muslim wife. Considering the requisite purity of the Druze religion, that al-Hakim be born to an Islamic princess would have been more desirable than his birth to a Christian slave. In contrast, many Shi'i may have endorse the idea that al-Hakim was born to a Byzantine slave. It would have linked him to the mythic history surrounding the Twelfth Imam, whose mother was also said to have been a Byzantine noblewoman.⁷ Having been captured by a Muslim army, she was sold as a slave in Baghdad to the tenth

³ Bernard Lewis, ed. and trans. *Islam: From the Prophet Mohammed to the Capture of Constantinople*, Vol. 2 (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1974) 238.

⁴ Al-Antaki 164, as quoted in Assaad 24.

⁵ Polygamy was an economic measure sanctioned by the Prophet Mohammed to prevent the pre-Islamic practice of female infanticide. Quran 4.3; Alev Lytle Croutier, *Harem: The World Behind the Veil* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989) 20.

⁶ Druz Ms *Milad*, fol 1 as quoted in Assaad 24.

Imam, 'Ali al-Hadi, who presented her as a gift to his son, the eleventh Imam, Hasan al-'Askari. This connection between al-Hakim and the Twelfth Imam would add weight to those who argued that al-Hakim was *al-Mahdi*.

Other clues point to al-Hakim's mother not being al-Sayyida al-Aziziya. In Shawwal 385/ November 995, al-Sayyida al-Aziziyya died at Mina Ja'far. Her body was carried to the *Turbat al-Za'faran* in the royal city of Cairo where she was buried at an expense of 10,000 dinars (a large sum for the burial of a Christian concubine.)⁸ Sitt al-Mulk held a deathwatch at her mother's tomb for one month. Al-Aziz traveled from his military encampment every day during the month to pray at the tomb and personally offer sweets to those whom came to mourn.⁹ Thirteen years later in 399/1008, al-Hakim was said to have confiscated the possessions of the women of his family including those of his mother. This indicates that she was still alive at the time because when al-Sayyida al-Aziziyya died her possessions were immediately dispersed to her heirs with Sitt al-Mulk inheriting her mother's slave-girl Takarrub.¹⁰ Also, another wife of al-Aziz died and was buried in Cairo in 415/1025.¹¹ Because there is no mention in the histories of al-Hakim mourning his mother's death this may be explained by the fact that she died after her

⁷ She was called Narjis (Narcissus) Khatun, Saqil, Sawsan, and Rayhana. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, Trans. David Streight (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) 108.

⁸ The *Turbat al-Za'faran*, which held the tombs of the Fatimid ancestors and royal family, was located inside the palace walls and was accessible only to the court and official dignitaries. Jonathan M. Bloom, "The Mosque of al-Hakim in Cairo," *Maqarnas* 4 (1986): 17; Christopher S. Taylor, "Reevaluating the Shi'i Role in the Development of Monumental Islamic Funerary Architecture: the Case of Egypt," *Muqarnas* 9 (1992): 5.

⁹ Halm, "Sitt al-Mulk," 685.

¹⁰ Takarrub was Sitt al-Mulk's confidant and served her mistress as a spy in the harem. She died in 415/1025. Halm, "Sitt," 685.

¹¹ Taylor 5.

son's disappearance. There is also the record that in 414/1024, during a severe drought and general crisis in the Fatimid capital, emergency funding was sought to bolster the economy. Abu'l-Qasim al-Jarjarai, the state secretary, indicated to az-Zahir, al-Hakim's successor, that his father's wealthy mother and aunts may be potential sources for saving the state.¹²

A further point against the possibility that al-Hakim and Sitt al-Mulk were siblings from the same mother was their difference in age. Sixteen years separated the two royal children. Though it is possible that al-Sayyida al-Aziziyya gave birth to al-Hakim while in her thirties, it is more likely that he was born to another, younger woman.

Al-Hakim had been designated his father's successor in Shaban 383/ October 993 at the age of eight, following the death of his older brother Mohammed. He had only three years to adjust to his role as heir apparent. On Tuesday, 20 Ramadan 386/ 7 October 996, at the age of forty-two, al-Aziz unexpectedly died in the town of Bilbays (located approximately 60 km northeast of Cairo).

As towncriers ran through the twisting streets of al-Fustat and Cairo announcing the caliph's death and the succession of his son, the Fatimid court was thrown into a chaotic whirlwind of events. Despite the Prophet Mohammed's explicit injunction against showing the dead undue reverence, al-Aziz's funeral procession from Bilbays to Cairo was attended by an unprecedented number of mourners who marked the occasion by excessive weeping, pulling of hair, and self-flagellation. The number of mourners was

¹² The daughters of al-Muizz, Rashida and 'Abda, both of whom died in 442/1050-51 in their nineties, left estates worth several million dinars. Sitt Misr, az-Zahir's sister also left a large fortune in riches when she died in 455/1063. Bloom, "The Mosque of al-Hakim in Cairo," 17; Yaacov Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt* (Leiden and New York: E.J.Brill, 1991) 68.

swelled by the presence of a large division of the military, who had just departed on a campaign to retake Aleppo from the Byzantines when their supreme commander died.

While al-Hakim followed his father's coffin under a jewel-encrusted canopy back to the capital, Sitt al-Mulk and the chief *qadi* Mohammed Ibn al-Numan (d. 374/999) rushed to Cairo with members of the palace guard in the aim of occupying the palace in a coup d'état. Sitt al-Mulk openly opposed the appointment of al-Hakim. She wanted her cousin, a son of her uncle 'Abd Allah b. al-Muizz, to succeed her father. But she was not quick enough. Abu'l-Futuh Bardjawan, al-Aziz's most trusted servant and al-Hakim's tutor, arrived at the palace first. Bardjawan stopped Sitt al-Mulk from entering and put her under house arrest while her half-brother was installed as caliph by al-Numan. He, like Sitt al-Mulk, opposed al-Hakim's installation but exhibited his disdain in a subtler act. Remaining loyal to the pledge he made to al-Aziz on his deathbed to swear allegiance (*ba'ya*) to his son, al-Numan proclaimed al-Hakim the new caliph by declaring the mission (*iqamat al-dawa*) in his name. However, he refused to say the prayer in al-Hakim's name choosing to issue it in al-Aziz's name instead showing that he did not fully support the succession.

The Kutama chief Abu Muhammad al-Hasan Ibn 'Ammar also swore his allegiance to al-Hakim just before al-Aziz died. However, the death of al-Aziz was an unexpected boon for the Kutama and Ibn 'Ammar in particular. Al-Hakim was such a young boy when he succeeded his father that, it was thought, he could be easily guided. This was a prime opportunity for the Kutama to reclaim the political prestige they had earlier enjoyed.

The Kutama were one of the great Berber tribes at the time when Shi'i Islam was introduced into North Africa. Those living in or near the Arabian desert referred to them as "Maghriba," meaning "the westerners" from *maghrib* meaning "west" or "the setting sun" (in contrast to *mashrik* which means the east or the rising sun).¹³ The Kutama were the initial strength behind the foundation of the Fatimid Empire. They made up the majority of the forces that conquered Egypt and aided the Fatimid dynasty in moving to their new capital at Cairo.¹⁴

For the first four reigns of the Fatimid dynasty, the Kutama controlled the political and military events. During the reign of al-Aziz, however, their hold was shaken loose and their situation began to seriously deteriorate. Unlike his predecessors, al-Aziz favored the Mashariqa, soldiers from the east, mostly Turks.¹⁵ These were nomadic peoples from the steppes of central Asia who had converted to Islam in the tenth century while under the rule of the Persian Samanid dynasty and most were Sunni. That being the case, they supported and enforced the political rule of the caliph but did not recognize him as Imam, a divinely appointed leader. Al-Aziz favored these troops because of their skill at archery and their previous experience serving in the 'Abbasid army benefited his military campaigns.¹⁶

¹³ Al-Magrib historically refers to those areas today known as Tripolitania, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco located in northern Africa. H.T. Norris, *The Berbers in Arabic Literature* (London and New York: Longman Group Limited, 1982) 71; Irene Beirman, *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 81.

¹⁴ M.A. Shaban, *Islamic History: A New Interpretation, Part III* (Cambridge University Press, 1976) 189.

¹⁵ Beirman 81.

¹⁶ Paula Sanders, *Ritual, Politics, and the City of Cairo* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) 66.

Some Maghriba retained favor with al-Aziz and kept their link with the empire, if not strong, at least visible. The most powerful of these men was Ibn ‘Ammar, who led the Maghriba faction of the Fatimid army.¹⁷ Again and again Ibn ‘Ammar displayed his leadership and loyalty to the Fatimids, first he was a commander (351-352/962-964) in a campaign that defeated the Byzantines in Sicily, and then he led troops in 361/972 against the Qarmatians and their rebel allies from Tunis, pushing them out of Egypt. Throughout the following decade, Ibn ‘Ammar mediated disputes in the caliph’s inner court and successfully contained a number of clashes between the local Egyptians and his Berber tribesmen. Also under al-Aziz, he served briefly as *wasita*, or intermediary between the caliph and his subjects, in 383/993.¹⁸

Upon al-Aziz’s death, the Kutama once again became the most powerful faction in the army and the state. Their first stipulation to the young caliph was that the current *wasita*, ‘Isa Ibn Nasturus, a Christian, be dismissed and Ibn ‘Ammar be given this administrative office.¹⁹ Controlling the situation, the Kutama refused to go to the investiture ceremony of al-Hakim in the palace, instead meeting at the *musalla*, or festival grounds, until their demands were met.²⁰ On advisement, al-Hakim capitulated and appointed Ibn ‘Ammar his *wasita* and pronounced on him the *lakab*, *Ami al-Dawla* (“Trustee of the State”).²¹ On the day he was proclaimed *wasita*, Ibn ‘Ammar gave to every Maghriba twenty dinars each from the State Treasury and promised an additional

¹⁷ Adel Allouche, *Mamluk Economics: A Study and Translation of al-Maqrizi’s Ighathah* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994) 125 n.31.

¹⁸ Assaad 49.

¹⁹ The more common office of vizirate, which was used by the Fatimids including al-Aziz, did not exist under al-Hakim, only that of *wasita* or intermediary to the caliph. Alouche 125 n. 30.

²⁰ Sanders 53.

64 dinars annually.²² Such a flagrant display was only the beginning of a practice of preferential treatment toward his tribesmen.

Ibn ‘Ammar immediately dismissed many Mashariqa from state offices and cancelled endowments intended for their causes.²³ In turn he allocated social privileges to fellow Maghriba and placed friends in key government and military positions. He made Abu Abdallah al-Musiby his secretary and al-Husayn Ibn Jawhar was appointed as head of the postal service (*Diwan al-Barid wa al-Insha*).²⁴ Dismissing Jaysh Ibn al-Samsama from the governorship of Tripoli, Ibn ‘Ammar replaced him with ‘Ali Sulayman b. Jafar Ibn Falah.²⁵ This latter appointment, however, was a fatal mistake.

Jaysh was a powerful Kutama chief and his dismissal split the Maghriba into two rival factions. In revenge, Jaysh vowed to overthrow Ibn ‘Ammar in Cairo. He allied with al-Hakim’s personal attendant Bardjawan (a Mashariqa), the Mashariqa tribal chiefs, and a surprisingly large number of Maghriba supporters.

Animosities between Ibn ‘Ammar and Bardjawan, already present, escalated. Bardjawan used the privilege of his proximity to the young caliph to express his feelings about Ibn ‘Ammar’s conduct. Whispering in al-Hakim’s ears the fears that Ibn ‘Ammar and the Kutama would likely kill him and abolish the institution of the Fatimid Imam, Bardjawan tried to convince his charge that they were trying to take over the empire.

It was probably not difficult for Bardjawan to convince al-Hakim of Ibn ‘Ammar’s aims for the *wasita*’s actions were quite apparent. Friends of Ibn ‘Ammar were

²¹ Al-Maqrizi, *Khitat* II, 36; Al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az*, anno 386, as quoted in Assaad 50.

²² Al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az* annos 386-387, as quoted in Assaad 50.

²³ Al-Antaki 180-181, as quoted in Assaad 50.

²⁴ Al-Antaki 180, as quoted in Assaad 51.

said to have openly remarked, "We do not need an Imam whom we have to raise and worship."²⁶ Ibn 'Ammar ordered the people of Egypt to dismount for him, an honor that was reserved for the caliph and royal family alone.²⁷ According to al-Maqrizi, Ibn 'Ammar made sure that the Maghriba led all court processions and allowed only the Kutama chiefs to sit in the places of honor before the caliph. He also bestowed on the Kutama chiefs great fortunes in silver, property, horses and slave girls.²⁸ He himself had become the richest nobleman in Egypt with luxuries that were extravagant even for the caliph. For instance, his household daily used half a camel-load of ice, the greatest of luxuries, supplied to the Egyptian court from Syria.²⁹

The Mashariqa were not at all happy about Ibn 'Ammar and the power he wielded in Cairo. It was not to al-Hakim alone that Bardjawan had spread tales of Ibn 'Ammar's indiscretions. The Mashariqa Manjotgin, who was the governor of Damascus and the general commander of the Fatimid forces in Syria (having been appointed by al-Aziz in 381/991), learned from Bardjawan of Ibn 'Ammar's actions. He returned to Egypt from Damascus at the head of 6,000 troops, among whom were the Djarrahid Bedouin.³⁰ Ibn 'Ammar reacted swiftly. He declared Manjotgin to be a traitor and accused him of trying to overthrow the government. He then mobilized 11,000-16,000 troops under the leadership of the Kutama chief Sulayman b. Dja'far Ibn Falah. Only twelve years old, al-

²⁵ Assaad 56-57.

²⁶ Ibn al-Qalanisi 47, as quoted in Assaad 51.

²⁷ Sanders 23.

²⁸ Al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az annos* 386-387 and *Khitat* I, 36, as quoted in Assaad 50.

²⁹ Adam Mez, *The Renaissance of Islam*, trans. Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh and D.S. Margoliouth (Patna, India: Jubilee Printing and Publishing House, 1937) 402.

³⁰ Assaad 53.

Hakim was forced to appear in public and show support for Sulayman. The name of Manjotgin was cursed throughout the mosques of al-Fustat.³¹

For three days the armies of Manjotgin and Sulyman fought in the region between Ramle and Ascalon, in Palestine.³² Though the Djarrahids took part in the initial skirmishes against Sulayman's troops outside Ascalon, they quickly realized that Manjotgin could not win. Using his available resources, Ibn 'Ammar bribed the Djarrahid tribe with large sums of money if their men fought against Manjotgin.³³ They deserted him and joined the opposing camp. Their treachery decided the outcome. Vastly outnumbered, Manjotgin's troops were defeated after the majority of men were slain. Manjotgin attempted to flee to Damascus, but the population there did not know to whom they were to show allegiance and he was eventually delivered to 'Ali Ibn al-Djarrah, a Djarrahid chief who collected a 10,000 dinar reward from Sulayman for Manjotgin's capture.³⁴

The entire drama succeeded in showing Ibn 'Ammar that he had been imprudent in handling an opposition as strong as that led by Manjotgin and the Mashariqa. He was also urged to change his policy for the overall health of the empire. Al-Maqrizi notes that the period of staggering inflation in 387/997-998 in Egypt was the result of the civil strife between the Maghriba and the Mashariqa factions of the army.³⁵ Ibn 'Ammar tried to adopt a more moderate policy toward the Mashariqa, which included dismissing Sulayman as governor of Damascus, replacing him with Jaysh b. Samsama, dismissing

³¹ Al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az*, anno, 387, as quoted in Assaad 53.

³² Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*, 186.

³³ M. Canard, "Djarrahids," *E.O.I.*, 2nd ed. (1965) 483.

³⁴ Assaad 54-55.

Sulayman's brother 'Ali from his post as governor of Tripoli, and issuing a proclamation pardoning all prisoners taken in the fighting.³⁶

But Ibn 'Ammar's realization that he had dealt foolishly with the Mashariqa came too late. After a turbulent year as al-Hakim's *wasita*, he was dismissed from his post, banished from Cairo, and placed under house arrest. He was eventually executed in 390/999-1000.³⁷ Al-Maqrizi places Ibn 'Ammar's demise in perspective explaining that al-Hakim "forbade people to address anyone, in speech or writing, as Lord or Master, save himself. He gave license to dispatch summarily anyone who disobeyed this order. In the month of Shawwal he put Ibn 'Ammar to death."³⁸

Al-Hakim had dismissed and executed Ibn 'Ammar at Bardjawan's insistence and it was he who quickly filled the vacancy in Ramadan 387/ October 997. In a reversal of fortunes, it was now a Mashariqi in charge of the Fatimid throne and it was to the Mashariqa that Bardjawan promised a restoration of previous powers held under al-Aziz.³⁹ His first official order exiled the Kutama chiefs to Syria.⁴⁰

Bardjawan's service to al-Hakim, like his predecessor's, was short-lived.⁴¹ Two years after he assumed the office of *wasita*, Bardjawan was murdered on al-Hakim's

³⁵ Allouche 31-33; Al-Maqrizi, "*Khitat* II," 52-53.

³⁶ Assaad 55-57; Daftary, *Isma'ilis*, 186.

³⁷ Sanders 23.

³⁸ Al-Maqrizi, "*Khitat* II," 49.

³⁹ Assaad 52.

⁴⁰ Shaban 206.

⁴¹ Also like his predecessor, Bardjawan had prospered during his short term. Among his possessions when he died were large quantities of gold, silver, and precious stones, 150 racehorses with 150 ornamented saddles, 300 pack mules, and 1,000 drawers of linen voile. Ghada al-Hijjawa al-Qaddun, trans. and ed., *Book of Gifts and Rarities: Selections Compiled in the Fifteenth Century from an Eleventh Century Manuscript on Gifts and Treasures* (Harvard University Press, 1996) 218.338.

orders.⁴² In 390/1000 al-Hakim was fifteen years old and he was tired of being treated as a minor. He complained that Bardjawan kept him locked away as a prisoner among the women and eunuchs of the court.⁴³ And he was weary of the insufferable names his tutor had for him such as “the little lizard.” Al-Hakim concluded that Bardjawan was hindering his reign. A summons was sent to him, “the little lizard has become a large dragon.”⁴⁴ In collusion with Raydan al-Sikilli (the Sicilian), the official bearer of the royal parasol, Bardjawan was disposed of as he and the caliph walked together in the palace gardens in the month of Rabi’ II 389/ April 999.⁴⁵ The Druze epistle *al-Sira al-Mustakima* by Hamza presents Bardjawan’s assassination as an act of unprecedented courage and the beginning of the caliph’s divinely appointed reign. From that point on al-Hakim became the supreme executor of his rule.

⁴² Bardjawan was replaced as *wasita* by al-Husayn ibn Jawhar.

⁴³ Canard, “Al-Hakim Bi-Amr Allah,” *E.O.I.* 2nd ed., 77.

⁴⁴ Sawirus Ibn al-Muqaffa, *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*, trans. and ed. ‘Aziz Suryal Atiya (Publicatiions de la Societé d’Archéologie Copte: Cairo 1959) 2:183.

⁴⁵ The Fatimid caliphs in general were never slow to dispose of viziers or *wasitas* if necessary. Al-Aziz had eight viziers during his rule of twenty years. Al-Hakim also had eight *wasitas* spanning his 24-year reign. His grandson, al-Mustansir, had five viziers in a period of two years (452-454/1060-1062). Canard, “Fatimids,” *E.O.I.*, 2nd ed. (1965) 858. Raydan himself was executed in 393/1003.

'Yet we desired to be gracious to those that were abased in the land [the dhimmi], and to make them leaders, and to make them inheritors.' [Quran 28:4] This is what the slave and friend of God, Abu al-Mansur, the Imam al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, Commander of the Believers – may the Blessings of God be on him and on his pure ancestors – ordered to be done in the month of Rajab of the year 393.¹

II.

Treatment of Christians and Jews: the First Persecutions

The atmosphere at the beginning of the eleventh century was electrified by tensions between Muslims and the *ahlu ah-dhimmi*, “the protected peoples” under Islamic law (primarily the Christians and Jews), throughout the Arab world. An episode occurring in Baghdad illustrates the hostility of Muslims toward the *dhimmi* at that time. In 392/1001, Muslims rioted against Christians living in the ‘Abbasid capital, murdering them and pillaging their homes, businesses and churches. A Jacobite church there was set on fire by a Muslim mob. A large number of people receiving flour at the building next to the church and the arsonists themselves were killed when the church collapsed. Witnesses fled in terror believing Allah was angry with the people of Baghdad.²

Muqaddasi, a tenth century visitor to Jerusalem, voiced the frustration of Muslims in that city: “Everywhere the Christians and Jews have the upper-hand, and the mosque is

¹ Inscription on a marble plaque in the Mosque of al-Hakim in Cairo. J. von Hammer-Purgstall, “Inscription coufique de la mosquee de Hakim bi-Emrillah,” *Journal Asiatique*, 3rd series, vol. 5 (1838) 390.

² Bar Hebraeus, *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj, the Son of Aaron, the Hebrew Physician Commonly Known as Bar Hebraeus: The First Part of His Political History of the World*, trans. and ed. Ernest A. Wallis Budge (Oxford University Press, 1932) 183.

void of either congregation or assembly of learned men.”³ He further wrote that the “Jurists (*fuqaha*) remain unvisited, and erudite men have no renown” and he lamented that the majority of physicians and scribes at that time were Christians.⁴ William of Tyre, writing in the twelfth century, also described the animus Muslims felt for the *dhimmi* in Jerusalem. For Christians living in that city, he writes,

Even home, however, proved no safe refuge for them. The enemy threw stones and filth and made fierce attacks upon them. On their solemn feast days, especially, they were annoyed beyond measure. For the slightest trivial word, at the demand of the chance accuser, they were dragged away to punishment and torture, without due process of law.⁵

This historian also relates the story of “a certain infidel [Muslim] living in the city, a treacherous and wicked man,” who hated the *dhimmi* so much that he placed the carcass of a dog in a Jewish synagogue knowing the Christian community would be blamed for the act, which they were.

Death was decreed for all Christians, since it was judged that by death alone could they atone for such an act of sacrilege. The faithful, in full assurance of their innocence, prepared to suffer death for Christ’s sake. As the executioners, with swords unsheathed, were about to carry out their orders, however, a young man, filled with the spirit, came forward and offered himself as the sacrifice.⁶

These tales and complaints witnessed by William of Tyre and Muqaddasi in Jerusalem were of common concern to Muslims throughout the Arab world during the reign of al-Hakim.

Muslim discontent with the *dhimmi* population was not a new problem. It had

³ Peters, *The Distant Shrine*, 75.

⁴ Muqaddasi, “Descriptions of Syria,” trans. and ed. Guy Le Strange *Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society*, Vol. 3 (London 1896) 37.

⁵ William of Tyre 67.

⁶ William of Tyre 68.

begun long before al-Hakim's rule. The Fatimid caliphs before him were thought by many Muslims to be excessively tolerant of Jews and Christians, which infuriated them. Al-Muizz, al-Hakim's paternal grandfather and the founder of Cairo, consulted with Abraham Ibn Zar'ah, the 62nd Patriarch of Alexandria (364-367/975-978) and had the Christian "brought to him at all times to take opinions on what concerned him and to receive his blessing, and asked him to live in Misr [Cairo]."⁷ And it had been a Baghdadi Jew, Ya'qub Ibn Killis, who because of his disappointment with the Ikshid rulers, fled to al-Muizz's court in Mahdia (Ifriqiya) and advised the Fatimid caliph to attack the weak Egyptian dynasty. It had been Ibn Killis who the Fatimids could thank for the ease by which they founded their new capital at Cairo.⁸ Ibn Killis became head of the financial administration, reformed the coinage, and was vizier to al-Aziz in 366/977. Though he converted to Islam at some point during his rise to power, he made it a point to employ Jews as his subordinates.⁹

Al-Aziz also relied heavily on the *dhimmi* and placed them in high offices within his court. During his reign, many Muslim subjects became disgruntled with the fact that he elevated a large number of Christian men to high positions within the Fatimid government. His appointments of 'Isa Ibn Nasturus as vizier in 378/989 and Menasseh, a Jew, as deputy in Syria were the subjects of much grievance. Some people in al-Fustat placed in al-Aziz's path an effigy that held an anonymous complaint on the subject that

⁷ Al-Muqaffa 2:136; Otto F. A. Meinardus, *Christian Egypt: Faith and Life* (The American University in Cairo Press, 1970) 363-364.

⁸ Desmond Stewart, *Cairo: 5500 Years* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968) 65.

⁹ C.E. Bosworth, *The Arabs, Byzantium, and Iran: Studies in Early Islamic History and Culture* (Aldershot, Great Britain: Variorum, 1996) 22.

read, "By God who raised up the Jews through Menasseh and the Christians through Isa Ibn Nasturus and humbles the Muslims through you, will you redress my wrong?" Al-Aziz immediately removed Ibn Nasturus from office had him arrested and fined 300,000 *dinars*.¹⁰ Ibn Nasturus begged Sitt al-Mulk to intervene on his behalf, knowing the influence she had with her father. She succeeded and al-Aziz reinstated him as vizier.¹¹

Ibn Nasturius' re-appointment only increased the grumbling among the Egyptian Muslims. These were not the only appointments questioned by al-Aziz's Muslim subjects. He had appointed Orestes and Arsenius, the brothers of his Christian concubine al-Sayyida al-Aziziyya, as the Melkite patriarchs of Jerusalem and Alexandria respectfully in 375/986.

Additionally, in spite of strong Muslim opposition, al-Aziz gained favor with the Christian community by allowing them to rebuild the Church of Saint Mercurius (*Abu 'l-Sayfayn*) near al-Fustat and encouraging al-Muqaffa, bishop of Ashmunein, to hold religious disputations with al-Nu'man, the chief jurist.¹² Also his refusal to take actions against a Muslim who publicly converted to Christianity was met with hostile rebukes. This might have been Fadl b. Salih (979-1009), a military officer who converted to Christianity and is referred to in a witty and terse epigram that was written to mock al-Aziz's tolerance of Christians:

Become a Christian, for Christianity is the true religion,
So much is patently clear today.

¹⁰ Lewis 226.

¹¹ Lev, "The Fatimid Princess Sitt al-Mulk," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 32 (1987) 320.

¹² Al-Muqaffa edited and published the works of the patriarchs of the Egyptian Church while he was serving as secretary to Patriarch Philotheus (979-1003) and later bishop of Ashmunein. After his death, Mawhooh Ibn Mufrah resumed al-Muqaffa's study and published the entire work under the title *The Lives of the Patriarchs* in 1087. Canard, "Al-Aziz Bi'llah," *E.O.I.*, 2nd ed.(1965) 823.

Have faith in three persons and forsake all others as useless:
The vizier Yakub [Ibn Killis] is the Father, Aziz is the son,
and Fadl is the Holy Ghost.¹³

Just before al-Aziz's death in 386/996, Muslims began a popular anti-Christian movement in al-Fustat following the suspicious burning at the port of the Fatimid fleet, numbering sixteen men-of-war built in the arsenal of Cairo. Christian merchants from Amalfi, Italy who had established a permanent delegation in al-Fustat earlier that year, were accused of the crime, though their guilt was never proven.¹⁴ Over a hundred of these Amalfi merchants were massacred by Maghriba troops and a local mob before an investigation could be conducted.¹⁵ Several churches in the area were looted and vandalized and the house of Manak, a type of treasury for the Italians who lived in the *ar-Raffa'in* quarter, was looted.¹⁶ Al-Hakim began his reign with this anti-Christian movement in full force.

At the start of his reign, al-Hakim paid little attention to the rising anti-*dhimmi* sentiment and his predecessors' roles in its construction. He continued his father and grandfather's tradition of placing *dhimmi* in powerful and lucrative government positions. Bar Hebraeus wistfully wrote, "At that time Christians could be made viziers in the Egyptian lands without having to renounce their faith, but this is unfortunately not the case in our time."¹⁷

¹³ Raymond 44.

¹⁴ Max Rodenbeck, *Cairo: The City Victorious* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999) 78.

¹⁵ Raymond 41.

¹⁶ Despite this tragic occurrence, commercial relations between Amalfi and the Fatimid Empire grew quite strong. So much so that in 1070, Amalfi merchants built a hospital in Jerusalem that became the Hospital of St. John, the guardians of which were the Knights Hospitallers. Al-Maqrizi, "*Khitat* II," 195-196; Stern, "An Original Document from the Fatimid Chancery Concerning Italian Merchants," *Coins and Documents from the Middle East* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1986) 530.

¹⁷ Bosworth, *Arabs*, 22.

Jews also advanced to high positions at the Fatimid court. The Fatimid poet Rida

Ibn Thawb wrote of the Muslim resentment toward the Jews:

The Jews of this time have attained their uttermost hopes,
And have come to rule.
Glory is upon them,
Money is with them,
And from among them come the counselor and the ruler.
O people of Egypt, I advise you,
Turn Jewish, for the heavens have turned Jew!¹⁸

Among the many prominent Jewish men at the court of al-Hakim, Abu Said and Abu Nasr, both Jewish commercial agents and bankers, stood out as fixtures in the caliph's court.¹⁹ Throughout his reign the yeshivas, or Jewish schools, in al-Fustat and in Jerusalem received an on-going subsidy. Elhanan b. Shemaya, his father, and grandfather ran a school that they operated with the aid of a grant from the Fatimid government. It is not known if they were ever refused their funding but they remained in al-Fustat "during the grave crisis [of al-Hakim's reign] which Egyptian Jewry passed."²⁰

The most illuminating document from al-Hakim's reign in regards to the Jewish population was a eulogy written by a Jewish congregation in praise of the caliph.

And it was in the days of the king, who is called our master, Hadan b. Omer-El [al-Hakim], who ruled over the land of Egypt, and in all the corners of the earth, west and east, north and south. His kingdom was exalted and strengthened, and his throne was higher than the throne of his fathers and forefathers. Thirteen years old [sic] was he when he began to reign, and he carried on his government

¹⁸ Jalal-Din As-Suyuti, *History of the Caliphs*, trans. H.S. Jarrett (Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 1970) 129.

¹⁹ Abu Said continued under az-Zahir as the caliph's official jeweller and purveyor. He was also responsible for purchasing the black slave, whom az-Zahir took as his favorite and who gave birth to al-Mustansir. When al-Mustansir succeeded his father as caliph, his mother reigned as regent to her son with her own "Diwan of the Caliph's Mother" and Abu Said was appointed her vizier. Walter J. Fischel, *Jews in the Economic and Political Life of Medieval Islam* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1969) 71-72, 81-85.

²⁰ Elhanan "made it his rule never to demand assistance from the caliph till he offered it on his own account." Jacob Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine Under the Fatimid Caliphs* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1970) 38.

with largeness of heart and a good understanding, and needed neither minister nor counselor. Many plots were made against him, and many enemies rose up against him, but God made them to fall under the soles of his feet: because he loved righteousness and hated iniquity, and set up judges in the land and commanded them to judge and decide in equity and truth. He took away the violent men and removed the foolish: he rejected them that pervert their way and are corrupt in their doings. But he loved men of understanding, and to establish judgement and the way of goodness.²¹

The date of the document if not known but the language used, according to Neubauer and Margoliouth, establishes that it was written during the latter part of the reign of al-Hakim. This is obviously not the expected description of al-Hakim by a Jewish people at a time infamous for its cruelty to *dhimmi*.

In 393/1003 Sitt al-Mulk learned from a Syrian scribe in her household of a treasonable act by two Muslim *diwans* (lawyers or administrative heads), 'Abu Tahir and Bar 'Addas.²² She took the news to her brother. The men were accused of having earlier brought false accusations against al-Hakim's Christian scribe Fahid b. Ibrahim, which resulted in the execution of this faithful servant. The two *diwans* were also extracting fraudulent and excessive taxes from their districts in Syria and Palestine in the caliph's name. On the basis of Sitt al-Mulk's account, al-Hakim ordered the two men's deaths. Their heads were carried back to Egypt on staffs and their bodies dragged through the bazaars of their respective districts.²³

Al-Hakim replaced the two *diwans* with Mansur Ibn 'Abdun, a Christian. Members of the Muslim nobility objected to Ibn 'Abdun's appointment. A riot was

²¹ A. Neubauer, "Egyptian Fragments II," *JQR* 9 (19) 24.

²² The princess owned estates in Syria that were administered by Christian scribes. Halm, "Sitt al-Mulk," 685.

²³ Lev, "Fatimid Princess," 322; Bar Hebraeus 182.

started over the matter in al-Fustat and Cairo in which many Christian lawyers were beaten to death and their bodies fed to the packs of feral dogs that inhabited the capital. Ibn ‘Abdun himself was attacked and left for dead. Discovering this calamity, al-Hakim had Ibn ‘Abdun nursed back to health and restored to office in a public ceremony in which the caliph pronounced him a *‘kafi*, or capable man.²⁴ Surely this honor only enraged some Muslims even more.

Al-Hakim had to deal with the animosity the Muslim populace showed toward his *dhimmi* officials and subjects and that his own popularity as a ruler was tied to this problem. That same year (393/1003), in response to the growing tensions between the Muslim and Christian communities, al-Hakim began a program of religious apartheid. He relocated the Melkite Christians living in pockets around al-Fustat and Cairo to the quarter of *al-Hamra* in al-Fustat for their own safety.²⁵ A Jew living at the time explained that al-Hakim assigned the Jews to special quarters near the gate of Zawila.²⁶ Segregation of the Christians and Jews to walled quarters may have been an attempt to limit the frictions between them and the Muslims. Eventually, al-Hakim would set apart special baths for Christians and Jews so no interactions with Muslims would be necessary.²⁷ The destruction of churches, for which al-Hakim is notoriously known, may have been part of this plan to relocate the Christian community in his realm.

The earliest description of a church being “destroyed” during al-Hakim’s reign

²⁴ Bar Hebraeus 182.

²⁵ Canard, “al-Hakim,” 77.

²⁶ Mann 33.

²⁷ Arthur Stanley Tritton, *The Caliphs and Their Non-Muslim Subjects: A Critical Study of the Covenant of ‘Umar* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1970) 120.

was also in 393/1003 when Saint Mark's Church in al-Fustat, which was in the process of being restored, was taken over by the caliphate and turned into the Mosque of al-Rashida. This mosque was much larger than the original church and engulfed parts of the adjoining Jewish and Christian cemeteries. Commandeering this church was al-Hakim's prerogative and it did not jeopardize the rights of the *dhimmi* under Muslim law. The *dhimmi*, though they paid the price for the privilege of living under the rule of the caliphs by adhering to restrictions on their public and private life and literally paying a special tax (*jizya*), were also guaranteed certain protections under Islamic law.²⁸ Mainly they were provided the security of their properties, provided that they did not proselytize the Muslim population or build any new churches or synagogues.²⁹ The rebuilding of churches or synagogues was not legally allowed without the state's consent. Al-Hakim claimed St. Mark's was being rebuilt without his permission. In compensation for building the al-Rashida mosque, "he allowed three new churches to be built in another quarter" of al-Fustat.³⁰

Clothing restrictions on Christians and Jews began under Fatimid rule the following year. Prohibitions on dress were a common means of differentiating the various religious groups within large populous cities while at the same time limiting the freedoms of the *dhimmi*.³¹ Beginning in 395/1004, he ordered the *dhimmi* to wear black belts

²⁸ Tritton 5.

²⁹ Meinardus 346.

³⁰ Bosworth, *Arabs*, 24.

³¹ In 191/800 Harun al-Rashid forbade the Christians of his realm from being like Muslims in manner of dress. An edict of the 'Abbasid caliph Mutawakkil in 236/845 ordered Christians to wear yellow robes and two patches on their robes and turbans, which earned them the epitaph of the "spotted people."

(*zunnar*) and turbans to distinguish them from the Muslim population.³² The color black was chosen because it was the official color of their Muslim rivals the ‘Abbasids.³³ In contrast, the Fatimids wore white symbolizing light and luminosity.

Other restrictions were also enforced as a means of setting the peoples apart. Christians and Jews were not allowed to ride horses and if they were to mount mules, the saddles they used had to be plain with stirrups of sycamore wood and reigns of black, unadorned leather.³⁴ They were also not allowed to keep Muslim servants or be rowed across the Nile by Muslim boatmen.

There was also at that time a prohibition on the production and consumption of wine and beer (*fukka*) and al-Hakim had all the stores of honey and raisins (which could be made into intoxicating drinks) destroyed.³⁵ According to M.A. Shaban, the ban on wine and beer may have been an economic necessity, as the growing of vines and grain for beer took away much needed land for the growing of grain for bread. The majority of his subjects could not do without bread and could not afford the ale, wine, or lupin appetizer served with the alcoholic drinks (also banned). For a brief period these decrees were rescinded when al-Hakim’s Christian physician Ibn Anastas prescribed wine to counteract the caliph’s melancholy.³⁶ However, when Ibn Anastas died al-Hakim reinstated the prohibitions and became an even stronger opponent of alcohol. This ban on

³² Bosworth, *Arabs*, 24.

³³ Tritton 120.

³⁴ Mann 37.

³⁵ Assaad 82; Al-Maqrizi, “*Khitat* II,” 285ff.

³⁶ Mez 399.

wine, though it may have been stimulated by economic concerns, affected the Christians most adversely, as they used wine as part of their sacramental service.³⁷

³⁷ Al-Hakim was the only Muslim caliph to enforce the law forbidding the making, selling, or drinking of wine. Stores of grapes, raisins, and other fruit that could be made into intoxicating drinks were destroyed throughout Egypt and the import of wine was banned. A wine merchant who petitioned the courts demanding restitution for lost revenues was rewarded a thousand gold pieces by al-Hakim. Assaad 82; Al-Maqrizi, "*Khitat* II," 285ff.

The Prophet has said, 'The Muslim is brother of the Muslim' ... How then can it be permitted to the community of Muhammad to divide itself into such diverse opinions that a man can join one group and hate another one simply on the basis of presumptions or personal caprices, without any proof coming from God? ... Unity is a sign of divine clemency, discord is a punishment of God.

- Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya¹

III

The Revolt of Abu Rakwa and the Isma'ili *Da'wa*

By the middle of al-Hakim's reign, open ruptures between Shi'i and Sunni occurred on a daily basis. Conflict between the sects had been brewing in the Arab world since the resurgence of Shi'ism in North Africa in the mid-tenth century. In Baghdad in the Shi'ite quarter of *al-Karkh* in 398/1007-1008, the Shaykh Abu Ahmad al-Asfarani was almost killed when a group of Shi'i provoked a Sunni congregation in a mosque by shouting praises for their spiritual leader, "Hakim! Ya Mansur!" (Hakim! The Victorious!).² Enraged, the 'Abbasid caliph al-Kadir sent mounted guards to arrest and disperse the Shi'i.

Like his father and grandfather, al-Hakim tried at the beginning of his reign to follow a strict Isma'ili Shi'i policy that was decidedly more tolerant of the *dhimmi* than it was of Sunni Muslims. During the reign of al-Muizz several pro-Shi'ite ideas were imposed on the majority-Sunni state. The most important of these was the integration of

¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu'at al-rasa'il al-kubra* (Cairo 1323/1905) Vol I, pp 307-9, as quoted and translated in Hourani 263.

² As-Suyuti 434.

the Shi'i laws of the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, one of which gave Muslim women a larger share of a man's inheritance. He also introduced the feast of '*Ashura*, a day of mourning on the 10th of Muharram commemorating the battle of Karbala at which the third Shi'i Imam al-Husayn (d. 58/680) had been killed and became a martyr. On that feast day, the Shi'i faithful would trek to a shrine in Cairo where the head of al-Husayn was said to be buried and listen to sermons narrating his martyrdom. These Shi'i customs caused only minor contentions among the Sunni population.³

Al-Aziz continued where his father left off. In Ramadan 372/982 he suppressed the *salat al-tarawaih*, a Sunni ritual prayer. Indeed, al-Aziz had gone so far as to have built a golden cage in his apartment in the Great Palace to hold the rival orthodox caliph of Baghdad when he eventually captured that capital city and forced its inhabitants to convert to the Shi'i doctrine.⁴ Al-Hakim, however, went further to discredit the Sunni than either his father or grandfather. In a *sijill* dated Muharram 395/ October-November 1004 he forbade his subjects from selling or eating a certain vegetable called *mulukhiyya* because it was known that 'Aisha (d. 11/632), Mohammed's third wife and the daughter of Abu Bakr, and Mu'awiya (d. 60/680), the founder of the Sunni Umayyad dynasty, were particularly fond of it.⁵ By the same token, he outlawed the playing of chess (*shatranj*)

³ Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (New York: Longman Group Limited, 1986) 322.

⁴ James Aldridge, *Cairo* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969) 80-81.

⁵ 'Aisha disputed 'Ali's claims to succession. She personally fought against 'Ali and his supporters in a battle (36/656) in which she rode into combat on a camel. She was unsuccessful and was captured by 'Ali but fairly treated by her captors because she was considered to have been Muhammad's favorite wife. As mentioned above, dietary regulations such as this were possibly measures aimed at protecting the rural economies. The growing of *mulukhiyya*, water-cress and vines took away land that was better used to grow grain. Shaban 207-8.

because the game was a favorite 'Abbasid pastime. And in 395/1005 he had a number of prominent Sunni men of al-Fustat confined until they died.⁶ This was a rather politically dangerous tack to take considering that the overwhelmingly majority of Muslims living in Egypt at that time were of the Sunni sect. But this fact did not curtail al-Hakim's anti-Sunni pronouncements and strangely the Sunni did not revolt against his rule. Andre Raymond explains that the Sunni felt, in general, that "one should remain patient under the king's banner, whether he proves a tyrant or a just man."⁷

In 394/1004 al-Hakim inscribed public buildings with large gold and colored script that slandered the companions of the Prophet Mohammed and the first three Muslim caliphs. These "golden curses" were written on the outside and inside of all the mosques, tombs, and bazaar gates in Cairo and al-Fustat. Despite having instigated a riot among Sunni pilgrims returning from Mecca and seeing the defamatory statements insulting them, they remained until 397/1007. At that time Abu Rakwa al-Walid ibn Hisham al-Khariji (d. 397/1007), a rebel from Cyrenaica, claimed that he was the true descendant and rightful heir to the Umayyad dynasty (661-750).⁸

Abu Rakwa's threat to the Fatimid dynasty was at first difficult to resolve. He led a powerful Arab coalition that included Bedouin from Cyrenaica and the Banu Qurra. The latter supported Abu Rakwa because al-Hakim sent troops to disperse them from the province of Buhayra the previous year (395/1004-5). Despite the Djarrahid chief Mufarridj sending in 396/1005-6 his three sons, 'Ali, Hassan, and Mahmud, with large

⁶ As-Suyuti 434.

⁷ Raymond 44.

⁸ Abu Rakwa was originally from Andalusia and his name means "the one with the canteen." Assaad 38.

numbers of Djarrahid tribesmen to assist al-Hakim's troops in fighting the rebel leader, Abu Rakwa's army successfully seized Alexandria and Barqa and defeated the Fatimid forces at several major battles.⁹

When the rebel army was finally defeated in a bloody battle at Giza (397/1007), Abu Rakwa fled south into Nubia. The Nubian king Raphael was loath to create any fissures in the peaceful alliance he had with his northern neighbor.¹⁰ Thus, he quickly captured and presented Abu Rakwa to the Egyptian authorities. Al-Hakim dealt with Abu Rakwa's treason as he would any criminal in his empire, with an iron fist. The rebel was paraded through the streets of the Fatimid capital on a camel, which he shared with a monkey trained to whip the prisoner. By the time Abu Rakwa reached the site of his execution, he was already dead from the assault of the monkey and the crowds. His body was impaled and then burned save for his head, which was placed on a *manzara*, or belvedere, outside the royal city facing south toward the people of al-Fustat as a warning to future revolutionaries.¹¹

The revolt of Abu Rakwa caused enormous economic and political upheaval in the Fatimid Empire. This revolt had major economic consequences for the Delta provinces and caused a shortage of grain in Cairo.¹² It forced al-Hakim to see that reconciliation with his Sunni subjects was necessary. First, al-Hakim removed the golden

⁹ Al-Maqrizi, "*Khitat* II," 285.

¹⁰ The Fatimids referred to Nubia as *Dar al-'Ahd* ("Land of Treaty Relationship"). Nubia retained its autonomy but paid a tribute to the Fatimid state. Bosworth, *Arabs*, 8.3.

¹¹ Bierman 78.

¹² Sanders 57.

curses from the mosques and public buildings soon after Abu Rakwa was executed.¹³ Then, breaking from his past, al-Hakim attempted to procure a rapprochement between the three largest Muslim factions: the Sunni, the Twelver Shi'i, and the Isma'ili Shi'i. In Ramadan 399/May 1009, the Fatimid caliph issued a *sijill* of tolerance that permitted the practices of many Sunni rites, earlier prohibited.¹⁴ It allowed differences in the manner of prayer used by the different sects. For instance, the Shi'i had added the formula "arise to the best of deeds" (*hayya 'ala khayr al-'amal*) to the call to prayer and the *muezzan* included the Shi'i formula "Come to good works" but those who omitted it would not be punished. Likewise those who performed the *khamzin* prayers (those recited during the hot southerly wind that affected Egypt for roughly a month and a half in the spring and early summer), the morning prayer, or the *tarawih* prayers should not be prevented from doing so. Also those who began and ended their fast according to their calculations (Shi'i) or by the sight of the moon (Sunni) should each do so without obstruction. Al-Hakim ended his *sijill* with the statement, "Each Muslim may try to find his own solution within his religion" (*li-kulli Muslim fi dinihi ijtiḥad*). This was an extremely liberal pronouncement but he supported it with the Quranic verse: "No compulsion is there in religion."¹⁵ These were al-Hakim's first bold steps towards the fulfillment of the Isma'ili *da'wa*. Other measures aimed at courting the Sunni followed.

He made a general decree that forbade anyone to curse the first three caliphs. Those who disobeyed were flogged and publicly reviled. He also appointed Shafi'i and

¹³ The Armenian Abu Salih, *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and Some Neighboring Countries*, trans. B.T.A. Evetts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895) 265.

¹⁴ A complete translation of this *sijill* is located in Appendix C.

¹⁵ Quran 2:256.

Maliki scholars, who belonged to two of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence (the other two being Hanbali and Hanafi), to the faculty of the scientific institute in Cairo, the *Dar al-‘Ilm* (House of Knowledge), that he founded in 396/1005. To the *Dar al-‘Ilm* he invited the most accomplished of scientists, mathematicians, jurist, and physicians, regardless of religious or sectarian affiliation.¹⁶ Moreover, he ordered students at the *Dar al-‘Ilm* to study the lives of the first caliphs and the companions of the Prophet.¹⁷ Later, al-Hakim appointed a Sunni of the Hanbali rite, Ahmad b. Muhammad b. al-‘Awwam, to the office of chief *qadi*. Until that time, the chief *qadi* had been an Isma‘ili of the al-Numan family. He argued that this Sunni man was an honest and just Egyptian and best qualified for the position. To appease those offended by the appointment he ordered four Isma‘ili judges to assist al-‘Awwam.¹⁸ Finally, al-Hakim also conciliated the Sunni by inclining to the Maliki rite of *sunna*. As a display of his acceptance of Sunni rites, he rode

¹⁶ The school founded by al-Hakim in Cairo is sometimes misnamed the *Dar al-Hikma*, "House of Wisdom." Among those of repute who served under the caliph at the *Dar al-‘Ilm* was Ibn al-Haytham (d. 431/1039) whose pioneering work in optics, including explaining the laws governing refraction and reflection, influenced generations of scientists throughout Europe and Asia. Al-Hakim was unsuccessful in attracting to the *Dar al-‘Ilm* only one man, the blind poet Abu'l-‘Ala al-Ma‘arri (394-449/973-1058) who declined the caliph's invitation in favor of staying at his home in Syria. (Beirman 78) One of the most important scientific achievements produced by the school was a *zij* (a chart of the courses of the stars and planets) produced for al-Hakim by the astronomer Ahmad Ibn Yunus al-Hakimi. The *zij*, also called "al-Hakim's Tables," replaced the *zij* previously used by the astronomers of the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Ma‘mun (r. 198-218/813-833). The Arab scientist and theologian Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292-1349) believed the *zij* composed for al-Hakim was far more accurate than its predecessor. (Jonh W. Livingston, "Science and Occult Thinking of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya," *JAOS* 112:4 (1992) 602) An observatory at *Dar al-‘Ilm* was equipped with the best astrolabes. (Charis Waddy, *Women in Muslim History* [London and New York: Longman Group Ltd, 1980] 72) In conjunction with the establishment of the *Dar al-‘Ilm*, al-Hakim set aside an annual fund of 257 dinars to be spent on the copying of manuscripts. (Philip K. Hitti, *The Origins of the Druze People nad Religion with Extracts from their Sacred Writings* [New York: AMS Press, 1966] 628) The library of the *Dar al-‘Ilm* was considered, at the time, to be one of the great wonders of the world, containing roughly 1,600,000 volumes. Such was the quantity of books that in 461/1068 when the library was looted by Turkish soldiers and the bindings scavenged for sandals, the unbound books formed man-made dunes in the city called *Tilal al-Kutub* (the Book Hills).

¹⁷ Nejla M. Abu-Izzeddin, *The Druzes: A New Study of Their History, Faith, and Society* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1984) 80.

¹⁸ Abu-Izzeddin 76.

to the Old Mosque, also known as the Crown of the Mosques (*Taj al-Jawami*), and offered the non-ritual forenoon prayer, *salat al-duha*. As well, he forbade the Shi'ite feast of *al-Ghadir* (18th of Dhu-'l-Hijja) that commemorated the day when the Prophet, according to Shi'ite tradition, designated 'Ali as his successor at a place near Mecca, Ghadir Kuhmm.¹⁹

Al-Hakim completed these compromises all in the spirit of the Isma'ili *da'wa*. The success of the *da'wa* depended on the creation of a unified Islamic society based on a single devotion to God and loyalty to one ruler. Sectarianism would not be tolerated. He had to bring the Sunni and Shi'i sects into a common understanding and acceptance of their differences. It was also necessary to win over the religions of Christianity and Judaism. The Shi'i especially would have supported the conversion of Christians. Failure of the *da'wa* was seen in the peaceful negotiations the Fatimids had with Christian states like Byzantium and Italy. Though the Fatimid government reaped economic bounty from their dealings with these nations, it also illustrated that it was an ordinary state not a messianic kingdom. Shi'ites applauded the persecution of the Christians and Jews. The conversion of large numbers of *dhimmi* would, perhaps, hasten the advent of the universal religion. Thus, the timing of al-Hakim's initial *sijill* of tolerance, just a few months before the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was significant. Surely, it was not coincidental that the official start to the *dhimmi* persecutions occurred at the same time al-Hakim was trying to unify Islam.

¹⁹ Abu-Izzeddin 81.

Al-Maqrizi wrote that in the summer of that year when al-Hakim announced his *sijill* of tolerance, “sickness spread, deaths increased, and medicines became scarce... the churches which were on the Makas road were destroyed, as was also a church which was in the street of the Greeks in Cairo, and its contents pillaged.”²⁰ The razing of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in September and the ordered destruction of other churches throughout Egypt, Palestine, and Syria occurred shortly after.

²⁰ Al-Maqrizi, “*Khitat* II,” 53.

Kindled from a Blessed Tree, neither of the East nor of the West

whose oil well nigh would shine even if no fire touched it.

- Quran 24:38¹

IV

Destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and Persecution of Christians and Jews

In Egypt by the eleventh century, the Easter service commemorating the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth had become an ecumenical celebration called the Olive Festival. Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike attended and took part in the festivities, decorating the streets with palm fronds and olive branches. Thus, there was much grumbling among his subjects when al-Hakim cancelled the Olive Festival in 397/1007 and again in 400/1009.² The caliph made it clear that such actions were necessary to reassert Islamic ideals in his empire and Muslim traditionalists approved of these measures. It was presumably for this same reason and the political support of the majority Muslim population that al-Hakim commanded in 400/28 September 1009 that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (*Bai'at al-Qumamah*) in Jerusalem be leveled.³

¹ Inscribed on the northern minaret (third band, north window) of the al-Hakim Mosque. Bloom, "The Mosque of the Qarafa in Cairo," *Muqarnas* 4 (1987) 35; K.A.C. Creswell, *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt: Ikshids and Fatimids AD 939-1171* (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1978) 24.

² Tritton 109.

³ Also called the Church of the Resurrection or Anastasis, the Arabic name (*Bai'at al-Qumamah*) is a corruption of the Arabic word for resurrection, *Qayamah*, and translates as the Church of the Dunghill. This corruption continues to be used. The original church was destroyed in the early 7th century by the Persian Sassanid dynasty, which occupied Jerusalem as part of its extended wars with the Byzantines. The church was eventually rebuilt in the fashion of the former Byzantine structure. It was this church that al-Hakim destroyed. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre has been destroyed and rebuilt four times.

Originally built by Maximus, bishop of Jerusalem, at the command of Emperor Constantine in 325AD, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was the preeminent church in the Arab world at the time of al-Hakim's reign.⁴ And the caliph was well aware of its importance to the Christians of his empire. Every spring he witnessed the large numbers of Coptic Christians making pilgrimage to the holy site to celebrate the Epiphany services "with great and offensive display." Ibn al-Qalanisi wrote, "It was the current custom of the Christians of Egypt to go every year to Jerusalem in great camel litters to celebrate Easter there in the Church of the Qumamah."⁵ The pilgrims who made this journey were called Palmists, as they are still today, for they carried the symbol of the palm frond with them. As an anecdote related by Nasir-i-Khrusau reveals, al-Hakim knew that some years even the Byzantine Emperor Basil II (r. 367-416/976-1025) made the journey to Jerusalem "privily, so that no one should recognize him."⁶ On one such occasion, al-Hakim sent one of his cup bearers to approach the Emperor incognito with a message "lest he should think that I, al-Hakim, knew not of his coming; but let him be of good cheer, for I have no evil intention against him."⁷

That the Christians of his realm flocked to this specific church each year with such religious zeal was a thorn in al-Hakim's side. Although many places associated with the life of Jesus were honored by Muslims, such as a well in Jerusalem where it was said

⁴ Bartlett 14.

⁵ Peters, *Distant Shrine*, 94.

⁶ Nasir-i Khrusau, "Diary of a Journey Through Syria and Palestine," trans. Guy Le Strange, *Palestine Pilgrim's Text Society* (New York: AMS Press, 1971) 59.

⁷ Guy Le Strange, *Palestine Under the Moslems: A Description of Syria and the Holy Land From AD 650 to 1500* (Beirut: Khayats Booksellers & Publishers, 1965) 205.

he washed or the site where he was baptized by John, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was not venerated because the Quran teaches that Jesus was not resurrected.⁸

This church especially aggrieved the Fatimids because they knew that the attraction of this site was a miracle of sorts occurring each year on the eve of Easter in which the oil lamps in the sepulchre spontaneously lit as if the light had come directly from heaven.⁹ Despite the fact that this "miracle" was much chastised as a hoax by non-Christians, traditional Sunni and Shi'i Muslims found it to be intolerable because certain of their brethren believed the Ceremony of the Holy Fire to be an actual manifestation of Allah's will. It made "a great impression on their spirits."¹⁰ Like Christianity which uses light to symbolize holiness, purity, and truth such as in I John 1.5: "God is light and in him is no darkness at all," the Isma'ili Shi'i also had a strong connection to the light metaphor. They saw it as evidence for the *nass*, the divine portion of light transmitted to the successive Shi'i Imams. The Fatimids incorporated the symbol of light into their dress by wearing only white and silver and into many of their religious observances. The Mosque of al-Hakim, begun by al-Aziz and finished by his son in 403/1012, was initially known as *al-Anwar*, or the Lights Mosque.¹¹ Quranic verses referring to light were inscribed throughout its edifice. On its northern minaret it read, "God is the light of the heaven and the earth," "Light upon Light, God guides to His Light whom He will," and

⁸ Ronald C. Finucane, *Soldiers of the Faith: Crusaders and Moslems at War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983) 142.

⁹ The first reference to the ceremony of the Holy Fire is that of Bernard the Wise in 870AD. Meinardus 261.

¹⁰ The Turks were also captivated by this ritual. Following their conquest of Jerusalem in the late eleventh century, it is said, "when they learned the verity of its [the Holy Fire's] descent every year they had consideration for the Christians." Meinardus 262; Al-Muqaffa II, 364.

¹¹ Beirman 76.

the previously mentioned verse, "From the shadows into the light."¹² Therefore, many Shi'i Muslims could relate the Ceremony of the Holy Fire to their own beliefs.

Al-Hakim also saw the connection and the effect this "miracle" had on his subjects. To learn more about what happened at the Easter service at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, he questioned Qutekin al-Adudi, an Isma'ili agent knowledgeable about the celebrations in Jerusalem. Al-Adudi related to the caliph:

When the Christians go there on the day of their Easter... They hang their lamps on the altar, and then by a trick they cause fire to appear in the balsam oil in their lamps, since this oil has the property of igniting with the oil of jasmine and it produces a flame of remarkable whiteness and brilliance. They have a trick which involves connecting one lamp with the next by a metal filament stretched between them... They conceal this filament... When in the course of their prayers the moment comes for the descent of the fire, somebody opens the altar where they believe is the crib of Jesus from which he was taken to heaven... It is then that one of the clergy puts a flame near the filament, which catches, passes from lamp to lamp and lights them all. Those who see it imagine that the fire has come down from heaven and lit the lamps.¹³

Though this was not the first that al-Hakim had heard of this event, al-Adudi's account justified his order to destroy the church in the autumn of 400/1009. Bar Hebraeus wrote, "Hakim commanded the Temple of the Resurrection in Jerusalem to be leveled and its furniture and fixtures looted."¹⁴ Al-Hakim's chancery secretary Abu Mansur Bishr ibn Sawari drew up the edict that directed the Anastasis and the Martyrium of Constantine to be razed and his scribe Ibn 'Abdun signed it.¹⁵ It is interesting that both of these men were Christians. Ibn 'Abdun was rewarded for his part. On 11 Sefer 400/4

¹² Located on the third band of the north and west windows of the north minaret of the al-Hakim Mosque. Bloom, "The Mosque of the Qarafa," 34-35; Creswell, pl. 1, 24a, b.

¹³ Peters, *The Distant Shrine*, 94-95.

¹⁴ Bar Hebraeus 184.

¹⁵ Hitti 621.

October 1009 he was appointed Chief Trustee (*Thiqqa*) of the Sword and the Pen, putting him in charge of both the military and bureaucratic branches of the Fatimid State.¹⁶

The order to demolish the church was sent to Yarukh, the Fatimid prefect of Ramle and to Ya'qub, an Isma'ili agent. It directed them to go to Jerusalem with troops and on the orders of al-Hakim to tear down all structures on the site of Golgotha. Before they arrived, Orestes the Patriarch of Jerusalem was informed of the order and quickly emptied the church of all its gold and silver objects, jewels, and holy vestments. After al-Hakim's orders were exacted only a few sections of the Rotunda remained.

Peters writes, "The destruction of the premiere church in the Dar al-Islam, was as politically mindless as it was illegal."¹⁷ Granted, it was illegal for al-Hakim to destroy or confiscate church and synagogue property within his empire according to the rules by which the *dhimmi* lived. But rather than being "politically mindless," al-Hakim's persecutions of non-Muslims, such as the leveling of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, were inherently political. Peter's belief that it was political suicide, of sorts, may stem from the assumption that the leveling of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre ended stable political relations between the Fatimid State and Byzantium. At the time, these two great powers were embroiled in territory disputes in Syria: mainly fighting for control of Aleppo. Moreover, the welfare of the Muslim community living in Constantinople was

¹⁶ Ibn 'Abdun remained in al-Hakim's good graces and was appointed Chief Trustee of the Sword and Pen in 400/1009. Though he lasted less than one year at this post before he was dismissed and eventually executed, his replacement, a Muslim, lasted only ten days before he met a similar fate. Another Christian scribe, Ibn Nasturus (d. 2 Rabi' I 403/ 21 September 1012) was then appointed to this powerful office. Christians it seemed were indispensable to al-Hakim's court.

¹⁷ Peters, *Allah's Commonwealth: A History of Islam in the Near East, 600-1100 AD* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973) 637.

always of concern to the Fatimid caliphs. Al-Hakim wanted to ensure that the *khutba*, or Friday sermon, was pronounced for Muslims living in the Byzantine capital in his name, and therefore, sustaining good relations with his northern neighbor was important.¹⁸

Like Peters, most historians assume that the destruction of the church ended a truce agreed to in 391/1001 by al-Hakim and Basil II (r. 367-416/976-1025). Yet, this is not the case. Certainly, Basil II was angered by the act but it did not end the armistice agreed upon. In actuality, this ended several years later in 408/1017 when the Emirate of Aleppo fell under Fatimid rule and received a Fatimid governor, Aziz al-Dawla Fatik.¹⁹ The Emperor reacted by prohibiting travel and commerce from Byzantium to any part of Syria or Egypt. Only when their interests in northern Syria came under threat by the rebellion of Fatik did Byzantine troops move southwards.²⁰ As Peters admits, the Fatimids “showed little appetite for engaging the Byzantines in a jihad... Their religious energies were reserved for the ‘Abbasids of Baghdad.”²¹ Therefore, the demise of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre had little real impact on Fatimid-Byzantine relations.

However, it was a great boon to al-Hakim’s popularity in Jerusalem and Egypt among Muslims. The Shi’i were especially supportive because until that time peaceful negotiations with the Byzantines meant that the Fatimid dynasty had become an ordinary political state, “little different in structure from that of the ‘Abbasid enemy.”²²

Presumably, al-Hakim’s destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre revived the

¹⁸ Bosworth, *Arabs*, 8.3.

¹⁹ With the submission of Aleppo, all of Syria recognized Fatimid rule except Antioch and a small enclave in that city’s vicinity. Abu-Izzeddin 74.

²⁰ Bosworth, *Arabs*, 7.25.

²¹ Peters, *Allah’s Commonwealth*, 637.

²² Assaad 37.

hope that the Fatimids might still achieve the religious ideals of the Isma'ili *da'wa*.

According to al-Qalanisi, when al-Hakim's Muslim subjects learned of the destruction of that great church the caliph received the response he wanted:

The Muslims rejoiced at hearing it and showered al-Hakim with gratitude for what he had done. His information agents reported on the public reaction, which pleased him a great deal and he ordered the destruction of churches and synagogues in various provinces.²³

This shows that al-Hakim's Muslim subjects enthusiastically supported the destruction of this preeminent church. Indeed, the encouraging approval al-Hakim received that autumn was a major reason why he continued persecuting *dhimmi* and destroying their places of worship. His actions, however, were by no means mere gimmicks to elicit Muslim sympathies. Al-Hakim's reign was being weakened by the animus Muslims had for the *dhimmi* and the caliph himself was at the center of the turmoil. Muslims resented these peoples because of their growing power, wealth, and disregard of the Muslim *sharia*, or religious laws, and they resented al-Hakim for his favorable treatment of the *dhimmi*. It is important that one see the desecration of churches and synagogues, and the sumptuary laws placed on the "people of the tribute" during the reign of al-Hakim as an attempt to contain the rise of anti-*dhimmi* sentiment.

William of Tyre contends that the *dhimmi* persecutions were an attempt by al-Hakim to deflect Muslim animosities aimed directly at him, "For the name of Christian was used as a reproach against him, because he was born of a Christian mother."²⁴ As mentioned previously, there is some confusion about the maternity of al-Hakim. Of all

²³ Al-Qalanisi as quoted in Peters, *Distant Shrine*, 95.

²⁴ William of Tyre 66.

the historians who have written about al-Hakim, only Assaad proposes the idea that the caliph's mother was not the Christian slave al-Sayyida al-Aziziyya.²⁵ The majority have taken the opportunity to emphasize, what they believe to be the irony of the situation: namely that al-Hakim, whose measures against the Christian community are infamous for their cruelty, had a Christian mother. Canard muses, "one wonders whether al-Hakim was not at times inspired by the memory of his Christian mother."²⁶ William of Tyre explains why, he believed, al-Hakim ordered the Church of the Holy Sepulchre destroyed:

Hence, desiring to clear himself of that charge [of being a Christian], he ventured to perpetrate that crime. In the belief that thereafter no reproaches could be cast against his person and that his rivals would have opportunity for no further malicious attacks, he had overthrown the cradle of the Catholic faith, the fount from which the Christian religion flows.²⁷

His persecutions of Christians and Jews can be viewed as part of a conciliatory attempt to regain Muslim loyalty. William of Tyre wrote that "the caliph used this extreme measure [the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre] to prove to the infidels that he was loyal to them."²⁸ His subsequent persecutions of the *dhimmi* were, thus, completed as part of a greater attempt to gain Muslim support. For instance, in that same year (399/1009) the caliph instigated more stringent clothing restrictions for the *dhimmi*. He insisted that Christian men wear wooden crosses around their necks while attending the public baths so as to differentiate them. As-Suyuti wrote, "The crosses

²⁵ Halm in "Sitt al-Mulk" calls Sitt al-Mulk al-Hakim's half-sister, also alleging that they had different mothers, but he does not explain his reasoning.

²⁶ Canard, "Hakim," 78.

²⁷ William of Tyre 66-67.

²⁸ William of Tyre 66.

were supposed to be 1 cubit in length and weigh about 5 Egyptian *ratls*.²⁹ At that time Jewish men were also required to identify themselves by wearing small bells in the baths and displaying an image of a calf while in the streets.³⁰

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was the most prominent of a number of churches destroyed on al-Hakim's orders. The actual number of churches and synagogues that were destroyed is not known. Bar Hebraeus, like other Christian historians, exaggerates the number, saying thousands of churches were destroyed. Canard, who reports that only the monastery of Sinai was spared due to the quick thinking of the abbot there, also supports this inaccuracy that the majority of the churches in the Fatimid Empire were destroyed. However, only the fate of a small number of churches and synagogues is known. The majority of those places of worship mentioned during the reign of al-Hakim were not destroyed but rather converted into mosques.

Interestingly, of the eight churches of the Melkite monastery of al-Qusair (Saint Arsenius or *Dair al-Baghl*) on Gebel Tura that al-Hakim often visited on his wanderings in the Muqattam hills, only the Church of the Apostles was destroyed in Shaban 400/1010. Soon after the deconstruction of this church began, a group of Muslims pillaged coffins and timbers from the ruins. Why only this one church at the monastery was destroyed is not known. Perhaps this 208-year-old church required repairs and was slated for remodeling.³¹

²⁹ An Egyptian *ratl* was the equivalent of a pound. It equaled 144 *dirhams* (one *dirham* = 3.186 grams).

³⁰ Mann 33.

³¹ One *feddan* was defined by al-Kalkashandi (9th/15th century) as being equal to 400 square *kasabas* or 6,369 square meters (roughly equivalent to 1.573 acres).

Nearby the Monastery of Sharan outside Tura and also one that al-Hakim frequented were presumably closed for Abu Salih wrote that Poemen a monk who converted to Islam and then returned to the Christian faith during the caliphate of al-Hakim was said to have reopened it. This monk it is also said to have spearheaded a movement following al-Hakim's disappearance to "reopen" many of the churches in Egypt. This suggests that the churches were not physically destroyed as the Christian historians have insinuated but were taken over by the state and many rededicated as mosques. The Melkite Monastery of Saint John the Baptist next to lake al-Habael, for example, was taken over by al-Hakim who "rebuilt it as a mosque, with a minaret, and his name was inscribed upon it."³² Likewise, the Church of Saint Theodore the Asian (*Dair Tadrus*) in the monastery of Saint Mennas in al-Fustat, was stripped of its marble columns and affixed with a minaret.³³

Despite the abundance of contemporary Jewish records and accounts afforded historians by the *Cairo Geniza*, one finds little information in it regarding Jewish property being destroyed at that time. It does contain a record of a complaint made to al-Hakim by a Jewish congregation in Tripoli, Syria that argues that the government officials who converted their synagogue and several adjoining houses into a mosque refused to pay rent on the properties. Records from al-Hakim's reign also note the burning of a synagogue in the Jewish quarter of *Jaudariyya* in al-Fustat. Al-Hakim ordered a fire to be set in that district and its gates closed. Many people and buildings,

³² Abu Salih 108.

³³ Abu Salih 108.

including the synagogue, perished before the fire was put out.³⁴ This incident was allegedly instigated by a song insulting the religion of Islam that was being sung in jest in that part of the city. It has also been explained as a warning to those Jews who commonly referred to the Prophet Mohammed not with the honorary title *rasul* but with the word *pasul*, which means corrupt.³⁵ The Synagogue of Ben Ezra in al-Fustat, formerly the Church of Saint Michael, provides further evidence that few Jewish edifices were destroyed as part of the persecutions. For despite its proximity to the “mad caliph”, the Synagogue of Ben Ezra was destroyed only once, in the twelfth century during Mamluk rule in Egypt.³⁶

That so few synagogues were affected by al-Hakim’s infamous anti-*dhimmi* persecutions is telling. It could be argued that there had always been a shortage of mosques in the Fatimid capital. This is certainly the best explanation for the building of the Mosque of al-Rashida and the Mosque of al-Hakim. Both of these places of prayer dwarfed in size the already present al-Azhar Mosque, which was said to have been unable to hold the large numbers of Fatimid soldiers who lived in its vicinity.³⁷ The only other large mosque was that of Ahmad Ibn Tulun, the oldest in al-Fustat and ironically built by a Christian architect from Iraq.³⁸ Until the construction of the al-Hakim and al-Rashida mosques, the Muslim people had had to meet at the *musalla* or festival grounds to pray on holidays because there was not enough room available in the mosques.

³⁴ Mann 33.

³⁵ Finucane 156.

³⁶ Jill Kamil. *Coptic Egypt: History and Guide* (The American University in Cairo Press, 1987) 93.

³⁷ Bierman 79.

³⁸ Bosworth, *Arabs*, 7.21.

When the Fatimids founded their capital at Cairo in 358/969, the population in that region dramatically increased in a relatively short time.³⁹ Ibn Battuta, the Muslim traveler, described the city of Cairo in 1320: “she surges as the sea with her throngs of folk and can scarcely contain them for all the capacity of her situation and sustaining power.” The great capital was little different two centuries earlier. Cairo and al-Fustat were bursting at their seams, so to speak. It should be no wonder then that additional mosques were required and those already in existence needed refurbishing.

Early in his reign, al-Hakim learned from a census report that about 800 mosques were operating without revenues.⁴⁰ He allocated 9,220 dirhams each month as an endowment or *waqf* to provide for the restoration of the al-Azhar Mosque, the first mosque built in Cairo, and the other *jami*’, or Friday mosques in al-Fustat. He also sent 814 copies of the Quran to the Ibn Tulun Mosque and 1,290 Qurans to the Mosque of ‘Amr, both in al-Fustat. This provides some indication as to the size of these congregations. Though such charity was expected of the caliph, these acts along with the building of the two new mosques may point beyond al-Hakim’s great piety and illustrate a need being met. A greater number of mosques would have been needed to handle this expanding Muslim population, growing also due to the large numbers of Christians and Jews who converted to Islam under duress during al-Hakim’s reign. This may answer the question as to why only a few of the churches and synagogues were marked for demolition while the majority were converted into mosques. If it was al-Hakim’s

³⁹ The conquest of that part of Egypt was especially swift because plague and famine had decimated the population just prior to the Fatimids arrival. The population of Cairo expanded threefold from 100,000 at the time of the Fatimid conquest to 300,000 by the eleventh century.

⁴⁰ Abu-Izzeddin 79; Al-Maqrizi, “*Khitat* II,” 84.

intention, as most historians purport, to eradicate Christianity and Judaism from his empire, why not simply level all the structures?

The “destruction” of churches and synagogues were means of urging conversions, though al-Hakim’s policy was not one of mandatory conversion to Islam. The *dhimmi* were given options. They could wear the required dress and adornments determined by their religious affiliation (wooden crosses or calves), ride mules, and dismiss or sell their Muslim slaves. They could convert to Islam or they could immigrate to the Byzantine territories to the north or Christian Nubia and Ethiopia to the south.⁴¹

Evidence indicates that a great majority of the Christians and Jews living in Egypt at the time became Muslim. It was claimed that in 411/1020 when al-Hakim allowed those who apostatized to abjure their adopted faith, 6,000 Christians did so in a single week. This hints at the large numbers of Fatimid subjects who converted to Islam at that time. Abu ‘Ali Yefet b. ‘Ali al-Basri, a Karaite Jew who lived in Palestine and wrote a commentary on the Book of Daniel, lamented that during his lifetime “a great number of Israel became apostates and accepted his [al-Hakim’s] doctrine.”⁴² He also wrote, “...everybody who enters his religion attains such high degrees, while those who do not accept his doctrine he kills and burns... This is the reason why so many of our people got into perdition at the beginning of the reign of this dynasty and even till now.”⁴³

Al-Hakim appeased and increased his own popular appeal among Muslims by persecuting Jews and Christians. His persecutory measures were enough to hide the

⁴¹ Al-Muqaffa .3.1.196; John Vantini, *The Excavations at Faras: A Contribution to the History of Christian Nubia* (Stampato, Italy: Nigrizia Press, 1970) 84.

⁴² Stern, *Studies*, 91.

⁴³ Stern, *Studies*, 93.

reality that he still treated the *dhimmi* community with fairness and appointed them to important government offices. For instance, at the height of the persecutions, on 3 Shevat 4772/31 December 1011, twenty-three Jewish men were arrested following a riot that erupted between members of a Jewish funeral procession and a Muslim mob. While the men were imprisoned at the court of al-Hakim, the Jewish population hid in their homes fearful of the angry Muslims who controlled the streets. Two days later, the arrested appeared before the caliph, who examined the accusations and found them to be unjustified. The Jews were released. A great procession of Jews marched through al-Fustat praising al-Hakim and his fairness. When acts of violence against Jews continued, al-Hakim sent an official proclamation throughout the provinces ordering the agitation to cease. This would seem to contradict the widespread belief that the Jews were treated unfairly. It also reiterates that al-Hakim was known for imparting justice and exhibiting impartiality. This event must have forced the Muslim populace to question the sincerity of the *dhimmi* persecutions.

*Pilgrimage to the House has never been a reason for which they have braved
the fearsome deserts and wastes. Yes indeed, whilst we ourselves make the
pilgrimage to the House they raid and attack it! So woe upon them!
They have assumed a heavy burden of sin.* -al-Sanawbari¹

V

Rebellion of Al-Rashid and Alliances with the Bedouin Tribes

During the reign of al-Hakim, Egyptians making their *hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca (one of the Five Pillars of the Muslim faith and an obligation for every adult Muslim with the requisite means), were attacked by Bedouin tribes. The caravans of camel litters and pilgrims were besieged by problems including raids on their camps resulting in the destruction of their property. Some years the pilgrims lost so much time in the process of paying tribute to the desert tribes that accosted them that they had to call off the pilgrimage and return home. In 401/1010 the Egyptian pilgrims were forced to return to Cairo without having reached Medina. Al-Hakim ordered the pilgrims to leave earlier than normal the following year so that they would have enough time to reach their destination even if they met with obstacles. The departure dates were shifted forward to the middle of the previous month (Shawwal) and al-Hakim commanded that the pilgrims visit Medina first.

¹ Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Dabbi al-Halabi (called al-Sanawbari) was a Shi'i poet (d. ca. 334/945-6). His elegy on the pilgrims slain in the Qarmatian attack on Mecca in 317/930 may be found in Bosworth, *Medieval Arabic Culture and Administration* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1982) 233.

The problems faced by the pilgrims in those years arose due to an increasing unrest among Bedouin tribes in the regions of Palestine and Syria. Though technically under Fatimid control, the Bedouin paid little heed to the laws of the parent state, bristling at attempts to control their actions. They vacillated unpredictably between loyalty to the Byzantines, Fatimids, and tribal alliances. The attacks on the *hajji* caravans reached their apex at a time when these tribes were asserting their independence from the empires that surrounded them.

The major Bedouin tribes that affected the *hajj* and al-Hakim's rule were the Banu Qurra, the Djarrahids, the Qarmatians, the Kalbis and the Kilabis. The Banu Qurra were descended from Kurra b. Sharik b. Marthad b. Hazim al-'Absi al-Ghatafani. This patriarch had been governor of Egypt from 90/709 to 96/714 for the Umayyad caliph al-Walid b. 'Abd al-Malik (r. 705-715). His descendants settled in northern Syria. The Djarrahids were chiefs of the tribe of Tayy. They settled in the Balka region of Palestine. The Kilabis and Kalbis were both tribes from northern Syria whose objectives often conflicted with the Fatimids, Byzantines, and local ruling entities.

The Qarmatians were a slightly different force to deal with because they were a splinter group of the Isma'ili Shi'i. A decade before the establishment of the Fatimid caliphate, the then unified movement split into two rival factions over the question of the imamate. The future Fatimids recognized 'Ubaidallah and his successors as the Shi'i Imams. The Qarmatians did not and founded their own state in Bahrain in eastern

Arabia. The Qarmatians are best known for their sacking of Mecca and their removal of the Black Stone in 317/930.² The poet al-Sanawbari lamented the tragedy:

The waistcoats of the sanctified garb of the pilgrimage
had been white on them in the morning,
But they went along to their tombs later in the day in waistcoats stained crimson.³

These actions offended the entire Muslim world and discredited the Isma'ili movement.

The historian of Mecca, Qutb al-Din Muhammad al-Nahrawali (d. 990/1582), described the event:

One of the greatest disasters which ever struck Islam, and the severest blow to religion on the part of those vile evildoers; the hearts of the Muslims turned to jelly when they heard about it, and the perturbation it caused became general in both the settled lands and the desert.⁴

The Sunni alleged that the Qarmatians received their orders to attack the religious shrines and pilgrims from the Fatimid caliphs in Ifriqiya. However, the Fatimids detested these Isma'ili brethren and open warfare raged between the two Shi'i sects shortly after the Fatimid's conquest of Egypt in 358/969. The animus between these groups was still strong during al-Hakim's reign. The nickname "qarmut" for the bottom-dwelling barbel fish was a reference to the Qarmatians, whose unpopularity aided al-Hakim in banning the eating of this fish.⁵

Each of these tribes had its own agenda and had a shifting relationship with the Fatimid State. The Djarrahids' role in the defeat of Manjotgin, at the start of al-Hakim's

² The Qarmatians returned the Black Stone, described as "the right hand of God on earth," to Mecca in 339/950-51. Bosworth, *Medieval Arabic Culture*, 225.

³ Bosworth, *Medieval Arabic Culture*, 232:15.

⁴ Bosworth, *Medieval Arabic Culture*, 222.

⁵ The scale-less fish, barbel, are a bottom-dwelling species that provide the service of unclogging the canals. There is still a prohibition against fishing for barbels. As-Suyuti 434n.; Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 171; Shaban 208.

reign, illustrates the fickleness of these Bedouin tribes. In 401/1010 the Djarrahids revolted against al-Hakim and declared the Shi'i amir of Mecca, Abu'l-Futuh al-Husan b. Ja'far, the caliph of Mecca, Medina, and Palestine. Abu'l-Futuh was given the *lakab*, al-Rashid. On entering his new capital of Ramle, al-Rashid was addressed as "the commander of the faithful" (*amir al-mu'minin*) and his followers kissed the ground before him. He delivered the next Friday sermon, or *khutba*, in his own name. That evening the *khatib* recited the first six verses of the *surat al-Qasas* (the Narrative) in which the virtues of Moses are compared with the evils of the Egyptian Pharaoh, a direct attack on al-Hakim. This was not the only affront the Fatimid caliph faced.

The amir was a descendant of the Prophet and a Shi'i with the same privileges of lineage (*nasab*) as al-Hakim himself. His rebellion questioned al-Hakim's legitimacy to rule and was not without some credence: al-Rashid not only claimed the title of caliph but claimed to possess *Dhu'l-Faqar* (the sword of the Prophet) and Mohammed's rod (*qadib*) both caliphal symbols.⁶ Most important, al-Rashid controlled Mecca, an aspiration of most Muslim leaders because of that city's prestigious place in Islam's formation. Thus, Al-Rashid's rebellion illustrated the failure of the Fatimids to manifest the Isma'ili *da'wa*. Rather than uniting the Muslim world under one white banner, the Fatimid Empire was dissolving into independent segments, both geographically and theologically. For these reasons, al-Rashid's rebellion was a devastating blow to al-Hakim.

⁶ Al-Rashid's use of these symbols-- sword and staff-- was in part a reaction to al-Hakim's confiscation in Medina the previous year of items that belonged to Ja'far al-Sadiq, the sixth Shi'i Imam. At that time al-Hakim's agents recovered Ja'far's Quran and prayer mat. They brought these relics back to Cairo.

Al-Hakim forbade his subjects from going to Mecca, specifically the grain merchants, in an attempt to sever the city's food supply.⁷ When al-Rashid's own family challenged his caliphate, it turned out to be quite easy to put down the rebellion. Al-Hakim simply bribed al-Rashid's supporters and persuaded the Djarrahid chiefs, Hassan and Mufarridj, to abandon al-Rashid, crushing the revolt.⁸ The amir fled to Mecca but was found and granted pardon.⁹

In 401/1010-1011, in response to the rebellion, al-Hakim added bastions (*arkan*) with new inscriptions to the minarets of the Mosque of al-Hakim. Many historians have questioned why he chose to hide the original inscriptions with these bastions rather than simply replacing them. Perhaps, al-Hakim wanted people to know that the originals remained but were obscured, both literally and figuratively, by the new inscriptions. Inserted on the marble frieze that wrapped the bastions, these new inscriptions were Quranic admonitions to unbelievers, corrupt women and men, warnings against undue familiarity between the sexes and the urging of Muslims to properly observe Friday prayers. The new inscriptions also called on Muslims to remain unified and obedient to the Fatimid dynasty. A portion of the new inscription was a fragment of a verse from the Quran (9:107) and a direct attack on al-Rashid and the Djarrahid's failed revolt:

And those who have taken a mosque in opposition and unbelief, and to divide the believers... they will swear "we desire nothing but good"; and God testifies they are truly liars.

⁷ Bloom, "Mosque of al-Hakim," 28.

⁸ Sanders 58.

⁹ Abu-Izzeddin 75.

Unlike his placement of the head of Abu Rakwa on a belvedere warning the people, the bastions would not decompose but remain a permanent reminder of the consequences of rebellion.

The Djarrahids continued to rebel against the Fatimid State, first, giving refuge to Abu'l-Qasim who was hiding from al-Hakim in Hassan's encampment in Palestine.¹⁰ They then failed to submit to al-Hakim's authority because the caliph had given the governorship of Damascus and command of troops in Syria to Yarukh, a Turk. The Djarrahids ambushed Yarukh, took him prisoner and occupied Ramle. They had been trying to take Ramle since 387/997 when the then new governor of Damascus, Djash b. Samsama, chased Muffaridg and his men away. Hassan, fearing his father would capitulate to al-Hakim's pleas to release Yarukh, beheaded the captive.

In the summer of 404/1013, al-Hakim sent an army against the Djarrahids. He was also trying to deal with the Qarmatians who were putting pressure on the Fatimid authorities in Palestine, the Kilabis and Kalbis who were attacking Aleppo and Damascus respectively, and the Banu Qurra who were violently claiming land in Alexandria.

A universal Muslim empire, outlined by the Isma'ili *da'wa*, required the suzerainty of all the Arab lands. His goal of achieving this "new world order" was aided by the expansion of the state that occurred during his reign. In the same year that he put down the rebellion of al-Rashid in Mecca (401/1010), the amir of Mosul, Qirwash al-'Uqayli acknowledged al-Hakim as the head of his region and the *khutba* was recited in

¹⁰ When Mufaridj and Hassan once again realigned their loyalties to the Fatimids at the end of al-Hakim's reign, Abu'l-Qasim was forced to flee to Iraq.

the name of al-Hakim in Mosul, al-Anbar, Mada'in, and Kufa (Iraq).¹¹ Mosul was an important ally for al-Hakim to have obtained, it being the main granary for Iraq, including Baghdad. Al-Hakim was strengthening his attachments to other areas in Iraq, Iran, India and Yemen through the missionaries that he had sent to these places. Mecca and Medina were also cooperating with the Fatimids at the time, if only because they were dependent on Egypt for grain.¹²

Shaban writes that the Fatimids, "might have dreamt about a universal empire that would envelop all Islamic domains, but their efforts in this respect never went beyond sending missionaries to Baghdad as well as India and Central Asia."¹³ Though this is true, in hindsight, al-Hakim may have truly believed he was on his way to unifying Islam and the Arab world. A line of poetry ascribed to al-Hakim portrays his vision of being the "Great Unifier" of the Muslim people.¹⁴ The last step to realizing the promises of the Isma'ili *da'wa* was to fashion himself as al-Mahdi, the Expected One, the Imam who would rule over the new world and bring justice to the faithful.

¹¹ Abu-Izzeddin 74.

¹² Abu-Izzeddin 78.

¹³ Shaban 189.

¹⁴ The poetry of al-Hakim is as of yet translated into English but is often mentioned by historians who note its appearance in Ibn Taghribidi's *Nujum*, IV, 196.

*Almighty God created sexual desire in ten parts;
then he gave nine parts to women and one to men.*

-‘Ali Ibn Abu Talib

VI

Persecution of Women and the Appointment of Al-Rahim as Successor

By 402/1011 al-Hakim began to shed many of the trappings that marked him as a caliph of the most lavish of Arab courts. In the early years of his reign, al-Hakim was still very much obliged to display the great wealth of the Fatimid dynasty. For example, prior to the arrival in Cairo of the Byzantine Emperor Basil II's envoy to conclude an armistice agreement, al-Hakim went to great lengths to redecorate the throne room. When completed, "the whole of the throne room was furnished with brocade stitched with gold...Everything, floors and walls, was nothing but glittering gold...when sunlight fell on it, the eyes could not look at it [without] becoming tired and dazzled."¹ The Fatimids were, in fact, known for their elaborate and spectacular processions and public rituals. This dynasty's awareness of the power imbued in the visual symbolism of their court ceremonies, architecture, coins, banners, festivals, parades, and the aura that surrounded the caliph himself aided in attaining and maintaining the popular support of

¹ Al-Qaddumi 163.

the Egyptian people.² The modern historian Behrens-Abouseif describes medieval Cairo as a “stage for religious performances that the caliph led as imam.”³

The caliph al-Muizz had feared that the magnificence of his court might alienate his staunchest allies, the Kutama Berbers. So, he had invited them to his palaces to witness him austere dressed and had spoken to them about the importance of leading noble lives.⁴ Unlike al-Muizz, al-Hakim eventually came to practice the pious and abstemious lifestyle that he preached by renouncing the worldly glories of his office.⁵ He banned all ceremonies and feasts in his palace and ate only simple foods prepared by his own mother. In 403/1012 he forbade his subjects from prostrating themselves before him, (because bowing before a mortal had been an invention of the Greeks), or using the term *Maulama*, “Our Lord,” in reference to him.⁶ He requested that no more be said when addressing him than “Peace be upon the Prince of the Faithful and God’s mercy and blessings.”⁷ He shrunk completely from the ostentatious displays and retinues that were expected of him.⁸ On the *‘Id al-Fitr*, the festival of the breaking of the fast of Ramadan, in 403/1012-1013 the caliph’s changed appearance was noted:

Al-Hakim rode on horseback to the place to pray without adornment, sumpter animals, or any pomp, save only ten led horses with saddles and bridles adorned with light white silver, with plain flags and with a white parasol without any gold adornment. He was dressed in white without embroidery or gold braid; there were no jewels on his turban and no carpets on his pulpit.⁹

² Bloom, “The Origins of Fatimid Art,” *Muqarnas* 3 (1985) 20.

³ Doris Behrens-Abouseif, “The Façade of the Aqmar Mosque in the Context of Fatimid Ceremonial,” *Muqarnas* 9 (1992) 30.

⁴ Bloom, “Origins,” 32.

⁵ Abu-Izzeddin 85.

⁶ Mez 139; Sanders 62.

⁷ Abu-Izzeddin 85.

⁸ Halm, *The Fatimids*, 36.

⁹ Al-Maqrizi, “*Khitat* II,” 56-57.

His simple lifestyle was attributed to his increasing piety. Al-Hakim's piety was also the explanation for his many moral decrees, the majority of which affected women. He attempted to disband brothels, punishing the owners and women working there with public torture and execution. He instituted punishments based on the Quranic verse: "The whore and the whoremonger, shall you scourge with an hundred stripes. And let not compassion towards them prevent you from executing the judgement of God."¹⁰ He condemned prostitution even though the Quran permits this oldest of professions.¹¹ Singing and dancing girls were not permitted in his palace and their profession was banned throughout Egypt in 401/1011.¹² Ibn al-Washaha wrote at the beginning of the tenth century on good morals and the "Damnation of the Singing Girls": "no virtuous and educated man... can be afflicted by a greater tribulation than a passion for the singing girls."¹³ Al-Hakim forbade unveiled women from following a funeral procession and insisted that female mourners not weep, howl or process with drums or pipes to a burial, a popular practice that had been forbidden by the Prophet.¹⁴

When his police complained that it was difficult to enforce these decrees, al-Hakim ordered in Rabi II 404/ October-November 1013 that all women stay indoors.¹⁵ Bar Hebraeus wrote of this decree: "Hakim commanded that no woman should be seen

¹⁰ Quran 24:2.

¹¹ Wiebke Walther. *Women in Islam* (Monclair, New Jersey: Abner Schram Ltd., 1981) 71.

¹² In Fars in the tenth century Adub-ud-Dawlah had placed a tax on prostitutes and dancing girls in a similar attempt to curtail the impropriety of the masses. Mez 362.

¹³ Walther 114.

¹⁴ Prior to this edict, professional female mourners would attend funerals and with loud lamentations express, for a fee, the grief of those present. Al-Hakim was not the first Muslim caliph to impose strict regulation on funeral mourners. In 804 and 907 women were forbidden from tearing their clothes, blackening their faces, or clipping their hair short as signs of mourning. Professional lamenters were imprisoned if caught performing in public. Walther 71; Mez 391.

¹⁵ Assaad 82.

outside her house nor look out from doors, windows, roofs because he had been convinced of the lasciviousness of Egyptian women.”¹⁶ Al-Hakim supported this stringent decree by intoning the Quran 33:33 that instructs women to “stay in your homes.”

Women were banned from attending funerals. Cemeteries were restricted to men, even on holy days. *Ziyara*, or the visiting of the tombs of the holy dead, had been quite popular at the beginning of al-Hakim’s reign. The cult of the ‘Alid (Shi’i) saints was believed to have been started by women and they were by far the most numerous supporters of the cult.¹⁷ The cemeteries, prior to al-Hakim restricting them to men, had been full of women “pressing themselves against the wooden screens that surround the saints’ cenotaphs, mumbling prayers” as they continue to do today.

Shoemakers were enlisted in al-Hakim’s effort to reduce the mobility of women and were forbidden to make women’s shoes.¹⁸ “Hakim commanded those who bought or sold the work of women to go round about among the houses. And the woman was to open her door, and to buy and sell without uncovering her face or her hands,” wrote Bar Hebraeus.¹⁹ Any woman seen in the streets was subject to arrest unless she carried with her a license allowing her freedom of travel.²⁰ Licenses were issued to women who had to appear in court, who were preparing for pilgrimage or a funeral, who possessed a

¹⁶ Bar Hebraeus 185.

¹⁷ Taylor 3, 8.

¹⁸ Walther 48; Mez 363.

¹⁹ Bar Hebraeus 186. Normally the hands and face are excluded from what is considered *‘awrat*, or that which is indecent to reveal. Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992) 172.

²⁰ Assaad 82; Mez 363.

petition to the caliph, were widows without a male relative to support them, midwives or those who washed and prepared the bodies of corpses. To enforce the prohibition, al-Hakim created a secret police force, which included a number of women, who according to Bar Hebraeus, “learned the secrets and crafty devices women used to leave their homes without permission.”²¹ Many adulterous women were discovered by these means and publicly drowned in the Nile.

Not all women submitted to the prohibitions. One recorded incident of protest against these measures involved an effigy made in the image of a veiled woman which held a piece of paper in its hand. The effigy was placed in the street to be discovered by the police. The note it held insulted and cursed al-Hakim for his prohibitions.²² In another tale of rebellion, a group of women went to the public baths protesting al-Hakim’s decree prohibiting women from using the baths. The caliph had them walled-up there and they eventually died of starvation.²³ Though I find the historian Desmond Stewart’s statement about the latter event distasteful that, “some henpecked husbands may have nodded heads with sage approval” when their wives were “parboiled”, he is right in that al-Hakim’s severe measures were met with little argument from men.²⁴

Al-Hakim’s many prohibitions relating to women’s freedoms must be qualified by his strict piety and the realization that such prohibitions were not novel in the medieval Muslim world. It seems he was determined to restore what he believed were Islamic

²¹ Bar Hebraeus 185.

²² Canard, “Hakim,” 79.

²³ Stewart, *Great Cairo: Mother of the World* (The American University in Cairo Press, 1996) 67.

²⁴ Stewart, *Great Cairo*, 67.

ideals within the empire. His religious convictions would explain his attempts to eliminate prostitution, fortune telling, drinking of alcohol, and other morally illicit acts. He dealt severely with what he considered debauchery and excess among his Egyptian subjects. In describing the folkloric culture of medieval Egypt, S.J. Staffa explains that the women of Cairo were especially known for their impropriety. In some folktales, the ill-disposition of women is explained by their having lived in Cairo and learned the evil ways of the people of that capital.²⁵ This perception of Egypt's female population may explain al-Hakim's decrees against women specifically.

In general, Muslim women had been secluded from public affairs and had never enjoyed the freedom to leave their homes without permission.²⁶ "Like other medieval urban cultures," writes Huda Lufti, "Egyptian Muslim culture viewed the basic role of women to be within the boundaries of the household."²⁷ According to the *sunna*, a model for pious behavior, there are rules for women leaving their homes (*adab al-khuruj*): "a woman should go out only for a necessity, and if she does, she should go in long and unattractive garments. If women walk in the streets, they should walk close to the walls of houses, in order to make way for men."²⁸ Though female professions such as bath attendants, hairdressers, matchmakers and professional mourners took women outside the

²⁵ S.J. Staffa, "The Culture of Medieval Cairo as Reflected in Folk Literature," *Middle Eastern Studies* (1974) 339.

²⁶ Walther 48.

²⁷ Huda Lufti, "Manners and Customs of Fourteenth Century Cairene Women: Female Anarchy Versus Male Shar'i Order in Muslim Prescriptive Treatise," *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*. Eds. Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) 103.

²⁸ *Sunna* literally means 'trodden path.' It developed the meaning of the 'customary practice' of Muhammad himself. Lufti 103.

home on a regular basis, spinning and weaving were the most common trades for women precisely because they could be done within the confines of private spaces.²⁹

Upper-class women could only leave their homes with permission of their husbands, fathers, or brothers, and then only if they were veiled.³⁰ Control of women was viewed as a male right like that over other property. Only certain destinations were acceptable for upper-class women to visit without a male chaperone: the homes of relatives, the cemetery, and the market. Wealthy women were perhaps worse off than their poorer contemporaries, in terms of freedom of movement. Charis Waddy notes that they were often “cloistered in private gardens and courtyards always beyond the view of men.”³¹ The poet Abu ‘l-Atahiya (139-214/748-825) wrote of these women and the women of the harem who “never seeing the sun save as a pendant through the gaps of curtains.”³²

The rights and freedoms of medieval Muslim women had always been circumscribed by Islamic values. Lufti argues that Muslim religious scholars often targeted the female population as the primary reason for the problems that they could not control.³³ Drought, famine and inflation were seen as tribulations for un-Islamic practices and signs of Allah’s wrath. Religious scholars at the time often blamed Allah’s discontent on the impropriety of women. In the late eleventh century, the Muslim theologian al-Ghazali (450-505/1058-1111) addressed this issue writing, “A woman should not leave her spindle or her private apartment, nor look down on the street from her terrace.”³⁴ In

²⁹ Walther 71.

³⁰ Walther 48.

³¹ Waddy 107.

³² Croutier. 41.

³³ Lufti 101.

³⁴ Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo* (Cambridge University Press, 1993) 62.

general, this treatment of women served both to control female public behavior and hide the real causes of the state's problems, usually the ill-management of resources or misappropriation of funds.

There may have been other reasons for al-Hakim's prohibitions aimed at women. For these we must look closer to home. According to al-Antaki, "Unlike the majority of Muslim caliphs he [al-Hakim] did not indulge in a harem and seems to have freed all his female slaves."³⁵ This is said to have occurred in 404/1013 and was accompanied by the adjunct that they could dispose of their possessions as they saw fit.³⁶ This contradicts the more common, though improbable, story of how he dismissed his harem, that in 400/1009 he had a number of his concubines nailed shut in crates, weighted with stones and drowned in the Nile.³⁷ In either case, historians such as Wiebke Walthers and Fatima Mernissi see such actions as al-Hakim's attempt to "abandon sensual pleasure."³⁸ "Women and everything related to pleasure haunted the caliph," writes Mernissi.³⁹

Al-Hakim had two legally recognized wives. One was called Amina, a daughter of 'Abd Allah, a son of al-Muizz. No other mention is made of her. By Amina, al-Hakim had one son, al-Harith (b. Rabi' I 395/1004). Al-Harith was heir to the caliphate until his

³⁵ Al-Antaki 206, as quoted in Assaad 32.

³⁶ Abu-Izzeddin 79.

³⁷ Walther 73; Stanley Lane-Poole, *A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968) 136. Perhaps the apple did not fall far from the tree. A story alleges that in 423/1032 az-Zahir, al-Hakim's son and successor, did away with 2,660 girls of his court by inviting them to a feast in the palace mosque. He then locked them all inside and bricked up the doors. All died of starvation at this "feast." Family members had to wait six months before az-Zahir allowed the bodies to be removed and buried.

³⁸ Walther 73.

³⁹ Mernissi 169.

early death at age five (400/1009). ‘Ali, the future caliph az-Zahir, was born in Ramadan 395/1004 (the same year as his half-brother) to Rukayya, an *umm walad*.⁴⁰

That ‘Ali was not recognized as the heir-apparent when his brother died raises some questions. Was it because his mother was a slave? Was she perhaps not Muslim? More importantly, why did al-Hakim’s prohibitions against women begin shortly after the death of his first-born son? Did grief cause him to dispose of his harem? Or did circumstances implicate these women in al-Harith’s death? Others have ventured that al-Hakim was not sexually attracted to women and thus he did not “indulge” in a harem. His pederastic impulses are well documented.⁴¹ Regardless, no evidence relates his pederasty to his ill-will toward the female population.

Animosity toward the female members of his court began in 399/1008 when al-Hakim attempted to confiscate the property of his mother, wives, sister, and daughter Sitt Misr.⁴² In 401/1011, as mentioned previously, he banned singing and dancing girls from entertaining at his palace and throughout Egypt. Then in 404/1013-1014 al-Hakim’s treatment of the women of his own family propelled Sitt al-Mulk to “rescue” ‘Ali and

⁴⁰ Assaad says that al-Hakim’s second wife was a slave but does not provide her name. Most historians refer to the mother of az-Zahir as Rukayya or the *umm walad*. Bloom (“Mosque of al-Hakim” 17) calls her al-Sayyida Rasad.

⁴¹ Pederasty was not uncommon in this era. Three instances point to al-Hakim’s own pederastic impulses. The first, al-Antaki relates that while in the company of the caliph in the market, al-Hakim appeared “greatly pleased with a lusty pederastic street figure.” (Mez 359) The second is the mention that al-Hakim had bought a pretty boy for 100 gold pieces. (Aldridge 83). Lastly, is the tragic story of the Fatimid General Fadl. Having defeated in 397/1007 Abu Rakwa, a rival to the throne, Fadl was in good standing with the caliph until he accidentally happened upon al-Hakim in the compromising position of disemboweling a young boy whom, it was believed, the caliph had raped and murdered. The wise Fadl returned home immediately, wrote out his will, and was ready to greet the caliph’s henchmen when they arrived at his door. (Lane-Poole 129; Stewart 66.)

⁴² Canard, “Hakim,” 79.

Rukayya, harboring them in her own palace for their safety.⁴³ Despite this affront to the caliph and al-Maqrizi's report that her actions were a constant worry to him, al-Hakim did not take any direct action against Sitt al-Mulk.

This was, however, the same year he appointed his cousin, 'Abd al-Rahim Ilyas as his heir apparent (*wali al-'ahd*).⁴⁴ His appointment of someone other than his son was unprecedented in Fatimid dynastic history. One of al-Hakim's own scribes had espoused in a treatise that father-to-son succession was a central principle of Isma'ilism.⁴⁵ The modern historian S.M. Stern translates a later Fatimid *sijill*, or decree, that relates that al-Hakim's appointment of his cousin set the precedent for cousin-to-cousin succession. When the Fatimid Imam al-Amir (r. 495-524/1101-1130) died without an heir, a *sijill* proclaimed his cousin 'Abd al-Majid the new Imam with the *lakab*, al-Hafiz li-din Allah (r. 524-544/1130-1149). The *sijill* underscores al-Hakim's role in this succession, "the hidden secret appeared and the allusion became manifest...made clear the implicit meaning of al-Hakim."⁴⁶ Whether or not al-Hakim was aware of this future need for a cousin-to-cousin precedent for succession, to have designated someone other than his own son was a highly questionable innovation. Yet, despite this deviation, it had been within his prerogative to do so.⁴⁷

⁴³ Lev, "Fatimid Princess," 323.

⁴⁴ Al-Rahim is said to have been the great-grandson of the caliph al-Mahdi but his exact relation to al-Hakim is confused by the fact that Canard calls him the caliph's nephew in his E.O.I. article "Fatimids" (857) and on another occasion in "Djarrahids" (484) refers to him as al-Hakim's brother. Generally, al-Rahim is understood to have been a cousin of the caliph's.

⁴⁵ Sanders 62.

⁴⁶ Stern, "The Succession to the Fatimid Imam al-Amir," *History and Culture in the Medieval Muslim World* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984) 209.

⁴⁷ The *nass*, a manifestation of the Divine will symbolized by light, was believed by Shi'i Muslims to govern the succession of the Imam. However, in reality, the incumbent caliph chose his successor.

Rather than keep the appointment a secret, as was the Shi'i tradition, al-Hakim publicly recognized al-Rahim in the *khuṭba*.⁴⁸ He was announced as heir in a written proclamation read first in the palace and then in all the mosques of al-Fustat, Cairo, Alexandria, and Ifriqiyya. Orders were issued that al-Rahim be announced at public events, "Greetings to the cousin of the Commander of the Faithful, the heir apparent of the Muslims."⁴⁹ In 404/1013-1014 al-Rahim performed the sacrificial ceremony for al-Hakim at the *'Id al-Fitr*. He also led the four Friday prayers during Ramadan in 405/1014-1015 in al-Hakim's absence in the Mosque of al-Hakim and the al-Azhar Mosque.⁵⁰ The ceremonies surrounding the four Fridays of Ramadan were an integral part of the Fatimid ritual year. Al-Rahim's participation at these events was a symbolic expression of his political and religious authority. His name was also written on banners and inscribed on textiles. Coins bearing his name and the title "heir of the covenant of the Muslims" were minted in al-Fustat, Damascus, and al-Mansuriya between the years 1012-1021.⁵¹ As Paula Sanders explains, al-Rahim was "imprinted in the map of the ritual city."⁵²

Despite al-Hakim's enthusiastic endorsement of his cousin, al-Rahim's appointment as heir was greeted with much opposition. The Maghriba, Abu Munad Badis, showed his

⁴⁸ Shi'i policy concerning a designated heir was normally one of concealment. Whereas the Sunni, or orthodox, custom immediately presented a caliph's choice for heir before the public for ratification.

⁴⁹ Al-Maqrizi, "*Khitat* II," 57.

⁵⁰ During the first Ramadan following the completion of the Mosque of al-Hakim in 404/1013-1014, the caliph led the Friday prayers in all four congregational mosques of Cairo and al-Fustat: al-Azhar, 'Amr, Rashida, and al-Hakim. It was the first time a caliph led the prayers in more than one mosque and this became standard practice for the Fatimids, though as noted, al-Hakim split the duties with his heir the following year. Bloom, "Mosque of al-Hakim," 28-29; Sanders 61.

⁵¹ Lane-Poole 134.

⁵² Sanders 62.

disdain with the appointment by announcing, "Had it not been that the Imam's orders are not to be interfered with, I would have written asking him not to withdraw this matter from his son's hands."⁵³ The chief *qadi* Malik Ibn Sa'id al-Fariqi refused to hold his tongue and was executed in 405/1014-1015 for his opinion on the matter, though it is also said he lost his life on account of his service to Sitt al-Mulk.⁵⁴ This man's demise illustrates al-Hakim's morbid humor. The caliph would often load with lavish gifts those who he was about to kill. To Malik Ibn Sa'id he did just this, heaping on him beautiful robes and jewelry. He also had him assist in a sacrificial ceremony and had him paraded on a horse that wore a saddle of inlaid gems before he ordered the man's execution.⁵⁵

'Ali and Rukayya remained under Sitt al-Mulk's protection until al-Hakim's disappearance. They resided at her private palace, the *Dar al-Bahr* or Palace of the Lake. Its four mosaic-filled halls surrounded in a cruciform an oblong reflection pool giving it its name.⁵⁶ This residence was built during the reign of al-Aziz and stood to the west and apart from the pavilions of the original palace. Traditionally going back to the Fatimid dynasty's beginnings in Mansuriyya, the palace of an heir was built with its entrance facing east in the direction of the caliph's palace and the rising sun.⁵⁷ Thus, the *Dar al-Bahr* was correctly aligned for its purpose even though 'Ali was not officially recognized as al-Hakim's heir. The palace was guarded at all times by Sitt al-Mulk's private military

⁵³ Al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az*, anno, 404, as quoted in Assaad 187.

⁵⁴ Al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az*, anno 405, as quoted in Assaad 187; Sanders 61.

⁵⁵ Sanders 61.

⁵⁶ What we know of this palace comes from a limited archaeological excavation in 1908. G. Marcais, "Fatimid Art," *E.O.I.* 2nd ed.(1965) 863. The palace was used as a *bimaristan*, or hospital under the Bahri Mamluks (1250-1382). AlSayyad 75.

⁵⁷ Raymond 40.

unit, a gift from her father.⁵⁸ It was here that Sitt al-Mulk protected ‘Ali from the erratic temperament of al-Hakim.

That ‘Ali lived solely among women at *Dar al-Bahr* was not unusual. It was normal for a young prince until the age of puberty to live within the confines of the woman’s world of the harem.⁵⁹ Surrounded by his mother, aunts, nurses and the court eunuchs he was taught and trained in the basics – recitation of poetry, calligraphy and the Quran.⁶⁰ When ‘Ali was placed within the protective walls of the *Dar al-Bahr* very little changed. He was still surrounded by women and eunuchs but his mother lost her control over his upbringing in this new environment. Normally, the mother of the caliph’s only son would have held a great deal of power within the court. Heirs were sometimes chosen for the sole reason that they lacked a mother who could extend any real power.⁶¹ Sitt al-Mulk competed with Rukayya for control of the boy and won. Thus, it was Sitt al-Mulk who brought up and educated the young prince.⁶²

⁵⁸ Lev, “Fatimid Princess,” 320.

⁵⁹ Croutier 35.

⁶⁰ Waddy 78.

⁶¹ Mez 142-143.

⁶² Halm, “Sitt al-Mulk,” 686.

*When solitude is combined with secret intercourse with the Beloved,
the joy of that intercourse overwhelms the mind, so that it is no longer
concerned with this world and what lies therein. - al-Isbahani¹*

VII

The “Hakim Cult” and the Druze

The Shi’i sect of Islam holds that ‘Ali and his successive Imams were infallible rulers imbued with the divine “essence” of Allah. Imams were placed in the world as proof (*hujja*) of Allah. They were to teach the truth of religion and govern mankind in accordance with justice.² The Shi’i caliphs saw themselves as divinely appointed and guided. From them the divine light was emitted and would bring goodness and justice to the dark world in which they lived. They were considered to be otherworldly like angels or *jinn*. “They were in the world though it was not worthy of them.”³

The Twelver Shi’i believed that al-Muntaza, the twelfth Imam, did not die a natural death but simply vanished. They believed he would remain concealed until a future date when he would reveal himself to his followers and spread justice throughout the world.⁴ This was the Twelver Shi’i adaptation of the Islamic legend of *al-Mahdi*. It

¹ Al-Isbahani, *Hilyat al-awliya*, Vol. 10. (Cairo, 1938), 79, as quoted and trans. in M.S. Smith *An Early Mystic of Islam* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1935) 243.

² Hourani 182.

³ David Bryer, “The Origins of the Druze Religion,” *Der Islam* 52 (1975) 69.

⁴ Muhammad Abdullah Enan, *Decisive Moments in the History of Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: Ashraf Press, 1968) 317.

is a common theme in Islam: a man of the Prophet's family (*Ahl al-Bait*) will restore justice and glory to the world.⁵ The designation by the Twelver Shi'i of Imam Mohammed al-Muntazar as *al-Mahdi* was determined by a formula that they arrived at based on theological texts and historical explanations. The Isma'ili Shi'i, however, arrived at a different conclusion based on their own calculations.

The Isma'ili believed there were seven cycles of divinely guided men. Each cycle began with a messenger (*natiq*) who revealed "the truth" of Allah to the world. An interpreter (*wasi*), who explained or clarified the *natiq*'s message, followed. Then came seven Imams, the last of whom was the *natiq* of the subsequent era. Al-Mahdi was the seventh Imam of the seventh cycle. With his coming, "the era of external law would end and that of undisguised knowledge of the nature of the universe would begin."⁶

Toward the end of al-Hakim's reign there appeared in Cairo Isma'ili *da'i*, or missionaries, whose theology extended beyond what was traditionally accepted. The first was Hasan b. Haydara al-Farghani al-Akhram. This man preached that God was incarnate in al-Hakim. The caliph, at first, apparently appreciated this endorsement of his infallibility and showered al-Akhram with gifts and a robe of honor. Eight days after the robe was presented to al-Akhram in Ramadan 409/1018, he was killed while riding in al-Hakim's entourage. The assassin, a man from the Shi'ite quarter *al-Karkh* in western Baghdad, was executed on al-Hakim's orders.⁷ His execution of the assassin did not necessarily mean that al-Hakim supported al-Akhram's teachings but that his sense of

⁵ Enan 316.

⁶ Hourani 185.

⁷ Bryer 68.

justice did not tolerate vigilante killings in his empire, especially a man riding in his own retinue. That he had loaded al-Akhram with gifts shortly before the man died was indicative of al-Hakim's *modus operandi*.

In 407-408/1017-1018, another Isma'ili *da'i* Mohammad b. Isam'il al-Darazi appeared in Egypt. He came from Bukhara in Turkey, which is why he was also called Anushtakin al-Bukhari.⁸ Al-Darazi also gained favor with al-Hakim. His position at the royal court among those closest to the caliph ruffled many feathers. High officials, it was said, had to seek this man's good graces before being allowed to speak with al-Hakim. He gave himself the title *Sanad al-Hadi wa Hayat al-Mustajibin* ("Support of the Leader and Life of the Obedient").⁹

Al-Darazi was accused of teaching a number of un-Islamic beliefs in the caliph's name. His key treatise held that the spirit of God had passed through Adam to 'Ali (bypassing Mohammed) and then through the Shi'i Imams to al-Hakim. His displacement of Mohammed outside the divinely appointed line was a heretical innovation (*bid'a*).¹⁰ While in residence at the Great Palace al-Darazi compiled a book for al-Hakim that outlined this succession of the divine spirit from Adam to al-Hakim.¹¹ He was also accused of preaching on the topics of reincarnation (*tanasukh*).¹²

In 1019, al-Darazi publicly declared al-Hakim to be divine and the caliph did not, at first, deny the announcement. Al-Hakim already considered himself closer to the

⁸ Bryer 70.

⁹ Bryer 70.

¹⁰ Mernissi 34.

¹¹ Bryer 71.

¹² Byrer 71.

heavens than to the earth. Al-Antaki wrote, "And when it was the time of al-Hakim, he made up his mind to publish his beliefs and make known what his fathers had concealed": namely that he was divinely appointed and endowed with divine gifts.¹³ For al-Hakim to consider himself an equal of Allah was a heresy, though not an uncommon one. 'Ali had had to have a number of persons executed who worshipped him as Allah. The *qadi* al-Numan in his *Da'a'im* condemned similar occurrences. Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. 'Ali had to have Mughira b. Sa'id and 'Abu'l-Khattab killed when they declared the caliph to be God.¹⁴ Even al-Muizz was said by one *da'i* to be divine, or at the very least a demi-God. Al-Muizz quickly squelched the assertion:

We have no knowledge except what we are taught and what has come to us from His prophet, our ancestor, Mohammed... We claim neither prophethood nor apostleship. Obedience to us is a duty laid on the worshippers of God... We are less than what the Extremists say and above what the Ignorant think.¹⁵

Al-Darazai began calling on the people to believe that al-Hakim was "god, maker of the worlds, creator of created beings and made his *da'wa* public and revealed his belief."¹⁶ Al-Hakim's reluctance to deny what al-Darazi was preaching about him may have motivated the *da'i* to continue his heretical sermons. He wrote to the Mashariqa in command positions in the army requesting they meet with him and discuss his beliefs. He also wrote to the *Da'i al-Du'at* and the *Wali 'Ahd al-Muslimin* urging them to do the same. These men were alarmed and immediately informed the caliph of what al-Darazi

¹³ Bryer 70.

¹⁴ Bryer 64; Stern, "Heterodox Ismailism at the time of al-Muizz," *BSOAS* 17 (1955) 10-33.

¹⁵ Bryer, "Origins," 65; Tritton and P. Kraus, "Notes on Some Isma'ili Manuscripts," *BSOAS* 7 (1933-35) 34.

¹⁶ Bryers, "Origins," 69.

was saying. "Al-Hakim published a denial of it when he saw their dislike of it," wrote al-Antaki.¹⁷ But al-Darazi continued.

The followers of al-Darazi were denounced for neglecting to go to the mosques and pray. Al-Hakim was asked why he encouraged such a *da'wa* that failed to recognize the rituals of Islam and the laws of the *sunna*. To these accusations, al-Hakim replied that these men were seeking spiritual closeness to God, a far greater goal than performing the rituals of a religion.¹⁸ The caliph himself stopped leading the congregational prayers and refused to attend the services held on holy feast days.¹⁹ He had earlier suspended the *majalis al-Hikma* (sessions of Wisdom) in 403/1012.²⁰

Many Muslims worried that al-Hakim would order the populace to accept the teachings of al-Darazi. By 1019, a number of songs and poems that chastised al-Hakim's "divinity" were in circulation in al-Fustat. In anger, the caliph ordered certain quarters of the city, where the defamation was most prevalent, plundered and a third of the city was burned.²¹

The problem reached its climax when al-Darazi was said to have presented to the chief *qadi*, while he was in session in the Mosque of 'Amr, a letter asserting al-Hakim's divinity, which began "In the name of al-Hakim, Allah, al-Rahman al-Rahim." A riot ensued in which al-Darazi's companions were killed. Al-Hakim arrested and executed

¹⁷ Bryer 70.

¹⁸ Abu-Izzeddin 102.

¹⁹ Abu-Izzeddin 103.

²⁰ These lectures on Isma'ili Shi'ism given by the chief *qadi* were so popular that people had been killed in the crush of bodies trying to hear the *qadi*'s words. They were first cancelled in 396/1006. Officially, they were closed in Dhu'l-Qad'da 400/June-July 1010. Halm, "Isma'ili Oath," 106.

²¹ Raymond 44.

those involved in the attack but vigilante killings of al-Darazi's followers continued to sweep through al-Fustat. Al-Darazi himself escaped the violence. It is not known what happened to him after that. The popular story tells of how al-Hakim hid the man in his apartment and when the mob came to find him, the caliph told them that they could lynch al-Darazi the following day. But when they returned the next morning they were informed that the missionary had already been killed. Most believe al-Hakim had the man smuggled out of the country, possibly to Syria. Abu Bakr b. al-Dawadari and Shams al-Din Sibṭ b. al-Jawzi both relate that al-Hakim "provided him [al-Darazi] with money and sent him to the mountains to establish the evil *da'wa*."²²

Though al-Darazi was not present, his followers remained true to his teachings. Again a new Isma'ili *da'i* emerged to take up the banner, this time a Persian from al-Zuzan, Iran named Hamza b. Ahmad al-Hadi.²³ This man lived in a mosque just outside the walls of Cairo at the *Bab al-Nasr* near the aqueduct of Raydan. There, he and his followers met to discuss theology. Hamza was said to have gained an audience with al-Hakim almost every day when the caliph rode out of the city. On one occasion Hamza told al-Hakim that members of the army had threatened his life. Al-Hakim was said to have responded by providing Hamza with an arsenal of weapons, which were hung on the door of the mosque.²⁴ As his confidence grew and his followers multiplied, Hamza began to regard himself as the Imam, or human guide, as al-Hakim was now the embodiment of the Ultimate One who created the intellect itself. He formed the five

²² Bryer 71-72.

²³ Bryer 72.

²⁴ Bryer 73.

great *hudud* or cosmic ranks within the Druze sect. He sent his deputy, a man he called Safir al-Qudra, the Mediator of Power, to take oaths from important leaders that they would recognize the divinity of al-Hakim. These leaders “could not resist because of the fear they felt for him [Safir al-Qudra] on account of his might.”²⁵

Al-Hakim did not deny what al-Darazi and Hamza preached about him because he had been brought up to believe that he was indeed divine. The idea that al-Hakim was al-Mahdi predated the arrival of the Isma’ili missionaries. An epistle dated to the second month of the year 400/1009 had been issued by Diwan al-Insha’ in Cairo and made public “in all the land as far as Hind [India] and Sind [the region west of the Indus River], Iraq, and Palestine.” The epistle portrayed al-Hakim as a Sufi, having undergone a spiritual ascent. Common Sufi themes were used in the wording such as God saying, “I was a hidden treasure and I wanted to be known, therefore I created creation that I might be known.”²⁶ It may have been this proclamation that brought the missionaries to al-Hakim’s court. It would have seemed a sign that the *da’wa* was being fulfilled and al-Mahdi revealed.

The cosmic principle of *al-’akl al-kulli* (the highest of intellects) was applied to al-Hakim. He began to be called the one “who bestows and refuses; who gives life and takes it away.”²⁷ A roster that circulated at this time recorded that 16,000 men had accepted al-Hakim as their God, though this number may include those who were forced to pledge an oath of allegiance to al-Hakim. This roster of men regarded themselves as

²⁵ Bryer 74.

²⁶ Quran 51:56 – “God says he created the jinn and mankind to worship [to know] Him.”

²⁷ Bryer 72.

members of the “Hakim Cult.” They were called the Duruz (or Druze) after the founder of their sectarian movement, al-Darazi, but they referred to themselves as Unitarians, “Muwahhidun” – believers in one and only one God.

*He thinks the wilderness the best society, and finds his way
withersoever the galaxy finds hers. – Abu'l-‘Ala al-Ma’arri¹*

VIII

The Disappearance of Al-Hakim

On the day he disappeared, al-Hakim had left the palace grounds of Cairo riding on a gray mule. In Fatimid Egypt a man’s mount was a symbol of his wealth and position in society. Ordinary people rode mules. The elite rode horses. And a caliph’s horse was especially marked by its accoutrements: gold anklets, a brocade silk saddle, or a harness encrusted with precious stones, gold and silver. In contrast, but fitting with his asceticism, al-Hakim chose to ride a mule, fitted only with a cheap iron saddle.

Though men were still allowed to ride horses outside the city of Cairo, al-Hakim made a general prohibition in 395/1004-1005 that no one be allowed to enter the city gates mounted. Had he not been mounted atop the mule within the palace walls – his prerogative alone – one may not have recognized him as royalty.² He was clothed simply in an unadorned tunic (*djubba*) of white wool and sandals. To complete his austere attire he covered his head with a cloth in the Bedouin style.³ His refusal to wear a turban

¹ Al-Ma’arri was a famous Syrian poet and contemporary of al-Hakim. D.S. Margoliouth, ed. *Letters of Abu'l-‘Ala of Ma’arrat al-Numan*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898) 36.

² Sanders 22-23; Al-Maqrizi, “*Khitat* II,” 51.

³ Halm, *The Fatimids*, 36; Stillman, “Libas,” *E.O.I.*, 2nd ed. (1965) 733.

(*'imama*), a distinctive emblem of the Fatimid dynasty, was a telling reminder of his disdain for pomp and vain display.⁴

His only companions that night were a eunuch named Nesim al-Saqlabi (the Slav), who was his *sahib al-sitr* (the bearer of the veil behind which the ruler spoke to the people), and an unnamed attendant for his mule. The three left the eastern palace probably through the *Bab Qasr al-Shawk*, one of the gates nearest the stables (*Istabl al-Tamisa*), where the caliph kept his horses and his favorite gray mule, the "Moon."⁵ From there they traveled south along the Great Street (*Sharia al-a'zam*) which ran roughly north-south, bisecting the walled city. Exiting Cairo through the double-arched gateway, *Bab Zuwayla*, al-Hakim and his slaves headed south along the foothills of Mount Mukattam. There was a path leading into the hills that departed almost immediately from the royal city but it was difficult and rough. The Christian pilgrim Friar Felix Fabri described it in 1483 as "a path so steep that even the sure-footed donkeys must be led by the bridle."⁶ Al-Hakim did not take this route but chose one that entered the Mukattam hills from the south, just east of the town of Hulwan.

The ascension of the caliph into the eastern hills at night was not an uncommon occurrence. Al-Hakim preferred the night. Early in his reign (391/1001) to appease this

⁴ The turban, or *'imama*, of the Fatimid caliphs was exceptionally long and the *mandil* was uniquely wound in the shape of a myrobalan, a fruit tree. This special manner of winding was called "the winding of majesty" (*shaddat al-wakar*). The Fatimid turban was also dressed with many precious jewels with one large solitaire that hung upon a silk cord in the middle of the caliph's forehead. The eunuch who wound the turban (*shadd al-taj*) was highly privileged because of his proximity to the ruler. Sanders 25; For a detailed description of Fatimid costume see Stillman, "Libas," 733.

⁵ Nasser Rabbat, "Architectural History of Al-Azhar Mosque," *Muqarnas* 13 (1996) 54.

⁶ H.F.M. Prescott, *Once to Sinai: The Further Pilgrimage of Friar Felix Fabri* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1957) 151.

nocturnal desire, he had commanded that lanterns light the markets and streets of al-Fustat at night. Some believed he used the cover of darkness to spy on his subjects to ascertain their true opinion of him.⁷ Lane-Poole writes that al-Hakim “had a creepy slippery way of gliding among his subjects.”⁸ The majority, however, disregarded this notion and wholeheartedly took to the opening of the marketplace at night. Soon the taverns and alleys were bursting with raucous and rowdy revelers well past the midnight hour. This went on only a short time before al-Hakim became disgusted by the impropriety of the scene. The scandalous behavior was soon suppressed with a curfew stringently enforced by the police and al-Hakim’s undercover agents and the lanterns removed.⁹

Al-Hakim’s own outings at night continued. Most Egyptians believed him to be mad to traverse the hills at night without his bodyguard. His popularity had waned considerably in the last years of his reign and his enemies had multiplied. The hills offered ample opportunities for ambush. Besides, the hills were believed to be filled with evil spirits who came out after nightfall, such as the monster Kutruba who, disguised as an old woman, was said to wander the southern cemetery (*al-Karafa al-Kubra*) at the base of the Mukattam hills, opening graves and snacking on the decomposing bodies. One had to be either mad or courageous to chance a meeting with Kutruba.¹⁰ It was also

⁷ Lane-Poole 125.

⁸ Lane-Poole 125.

⁹ Al-Hakim kept a full arsenal of secret police, both men and women, to augment regular law enforcement and aid him in personal matters. Staffa, *Conquest and Fusion: The Social Evolution of Cairo, AD 642-1850* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1977) 58-60.

¹⁰ Behrens-Abouseif, “Al-Mukattam,” *E.O.I.*, 2nd ed. (1965) 510. The southern cemetery was in the area of al-Kata’i’, south of the mosque of Ibn Tulun. This was the main cemetery during the Fatimid period and was a popular destination when it was the center of the Shi’i saint cult. J. Jomier, “al-Kahira,” 424.

believed that sleeping under an open moon weakened a man's mind, causing headaches and insanity.¹¹ Al-Antaki suggested that al-Hakim suffered from insomnia caused by melancholy and "the ill-constitution of his brain."¹² But insomnia and madness were not the reasons for his twilight sojourns into the eastern hills this night or any other. Rather it was his intense interest in the science of the stars (*'ilm al-nujum*).

Al-Hakim was not alone in his fascination for astrology. Throughout the medieval east and west, horoscopes were prescribed for even the most minor of undertakings. Since the time of the Umayyad Dynasty (41/661-132/750), astrologers had been a fixture in the Arab dynastic courts.¹³ The Fatimids were especially fond of astrological portents. For instance, the foundation of their new capital city in conquered Egypt was laid with great care and precision in alignment with the stars. In fact, the city was named after the planet Mars (*al-Qahira*, "the Victorious"), in an attempt to avert the sinister omen of that planet's ascension on the day they broke ground.¹⁴

Like all Isma'ili Imams of his time, al-Hakim studied astrology with a religious passion. Isma'ili Shi'ism used astrology to foresee events such as the all-important

¹¹ Livingston 605.

¹² Canard, "Hakim," 21.

¹³ Livingston 601.

¹⁴ Livingston 601; Staffa, *Conquest and Fusion*, 54; Dörthea Russell, *Medieval Cairo and the Monasteries of the Wadi Natrun* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963) 145. The town was laid out on a Friday in the month of Sha'aban in 358/969. The soldiers had not finished their task by dusk and were ordered to continue throughout the night. In the morning it was realized that some mistakes had been made. The soldiers quickly blamed the inconsistencies on crows having moved the lines. The irregularities were not corrected because "it was laid out in a holy night and... must have been caused by a divine logic." Al-Sayyad 136-138.

arrival of al-Mahdi.¹⁵ Astrology supported the Shi'i mystical teaching and fed al-Hakim's belief that he was the possessor of divine secrets and the manifestation of Allah's will.¹⁶

Ever since he was a young boy, al-Hakim was very interested in the constellations and planets. Rather than study in the *Dar al-'Ilm*, al-Hakim preferred to make his astronomical observations from the desolate Mukattam hills. He had a small oratory which he named the Lu'lu'a or "Pearl" built at the base of the Jabal al-Mukattam in 406/1016 and a larger barn erected and stocked with firewood farther into the hills. To these he would retire or walk out into the open hills, often alone, to pursue his stargazing.¹⁷ An informant of the contemporary historian Ibn Hammad saw one of the astrolabe-like copper instruments al-Hakim had built in the hills and said it was the largest he had ever seen, for it sat on two towers and could measure even the largest of the signs of the zodiac.¹⁸

On the night he disappeared al-Hakim and his party made their way south across the er-Rasad spur in the Mount Mukattam foothills just below Cairo. They traveled toward Hulwan, a village situated 25 kilometers to the south, along the east bank of the Nile River.¹⁹ En route they were stopped by a group of Bedouin men from the Banu

¹⁵ Astrology was also important in setting the Shi'i calendar. Unlike the Sunni custom of beginning the month based on the sighting of the new, crescent moon, the Shi'ites calculated the first day of the month by their star charts. The difference between the two systems was usually one to two days. In 399/1009, al-Hakim proclaimed that people could choose to begin and end their fasting either by the Sunni or the Shi'i calendar. Mernissi 165; Sanders 57.

¹⁶ Lane-Poole, *The Story of Cairo* (London: J.M.Dent & Co., 1906) 142.

¹⁷ Behrens-Abouseif "al-Mukattam," 510; Lane-Poole "History," 3; Taylor 5.

¹⁸ Hitti 628.

¹⁹ Hulwan had been known for its rejuvenating sulfur mineral springs. By al-Hakim's time, the springs were mostly filled in with silt and were little used. The village is situated 35 meters above the bank level which prevented it from ever flooding. Its nearest neighbor was a settlement at al-'Adawiyan, 9-10 kilometers (5-6 miles) to the north.

Qurra tribe. Begging forgiveness, the Bedouin explained their plight – having waited without success for an audience with the caliph at the palace, they attempted to catch his attention this night, knowing he would be accessible here. It was characteristic of a just caliph to hear the suit of every oppressed subject within his realm, and al-Hakim made it one of the main responsibilities of his office to admit all with a petition to his presence.²⁰ Indeed, he had decreed that people could approach him while he was walking at night.²¹ He would allow his subjects to approach him and having listened to their plea would sanction on the spot an appropriate arrangement for the disputation of the complaint.²² The Banu Qurra's request was financial in nature. Al-Hakim agreed to grant them a sum of money and sent the men back to Cairo with his page Nesim, who, he promised, would award them immediately with the dirhams they were owed from the *Bayt al-Mal*, or state treasury.²³

Having sent Nesim back with the men, al-Hakim was left with only the one attendant. When they reached a place called Qabr al-Fuqa'i, he bade the remaining slave return to the palace. From there al-Hakim traveled on alone. He went east into the high desert hills of Mount Mukattam, a desolate place, cut off from vegetation, with only pockets of chaparral clinging to the rocky soil. The remoteness of the area and its lack of comforts make it attractive only to those seeking seclusion. During the Fatimid era,

²⁰ Halm, *The Fatimids*, 36.

²¹ Sanders 60.

²² Abu-Izzeddin 77.

²³ There is a discrepancy as to the amount the Banu Qurra were awarded. Al-Antaki (233) says it was 5,000 silver dirhams (roughly equivalent to 32.8 pounds of silver), while as-Sabi recorded it at 10,000 silver dirhams (65.6 lbs), as quoted by *Sibt Mirat*. fol. 209, both quoted in DeLacy O'Leary, *A Short History of the Fatimid Khalifate* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., and New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1923) 186.

thousands of Coptic monks retreated into the caves here, which dimple the hillsides.²⁴

Mukattam is a sacred mountain where monasteries and mausoleums are the only edifices sheltered between the folds of the land. With only the moonlight and stars of the winter sky to illuminate his path, al-Hakim traveled east and disappeared.

²⁴ Abu Salih (153) wrote that during the Fatimid periods, the number of monks living in caves in the Mukattam hills was as many as 6,000. Behrens-Abouseif, "al-Mukattam," 510.

He said no one in the heavens and earth knows the unseen [al-ghayb] but God

– Quran, Miftah 488

IX

The Roles of Sitt al-Mulk and the Kutama in Al-Hakim's Disappearance

Dignitaries of the court waited near the foothills of Mount Mukattam for al-Hakim to return the next day. They waited two more days before forming search parties. Sitt al-Mulk sent groups of soldiers into all the towns between Cairo and Hulwan.¹ The historian Ibn Taghribirdi provided a reason as to why a search was not made immediately for al-Hakim. He wrote that Abu Arus, the gatekeeper, would not allow the city gates to be opened because the caliph had ordered them to be closed until his return. It is an interesting notion but one that is not mentioned by any other chronicler and cannot be verified. Bar Hebraeus offers another explanation. Believing Sitt al-Mulk to have arranged her half-brother's murder, Bar Hebraeus says that she calmed the worried household when al-Hakim failed to return by telling them that he had planned to hide himself in the desert for a week because he had seen an omen of his death. It is a creative fabrication but one challenged by Sitt al-Mulk's recorded actions of sending out search parties as soon as was advisable. Presumably they waited because it was normal for the caliph to wander in the hills for a few days at a time on his own. He would often be welcomed at the monasteries in that area if he needed food or water.

¹ O'Leary 187; Bar Hebraeus 188.

On the third day of the following month, five days after the disappearance, a team of men from the palace led by al-Mudhaffar al-Saqlabi began searching in the hills east of Hulwan.² Al-Quda'i, a contemporary, wrote of the end of the search:

After a long walk they found the ass. Its saddle and bridle were not removed but its front legs had been cut off. They followed footsteps to a small pond where they found in the water his [al-Hakim's] shirt still buttoned up.³

The shirt or *djubba* that they discovered had been cut by a dagger in several places and stained with what they believed to be blood.⁴ The evidence would suggest that al-Hakim had been murdered but without the body, no statements could be made with any certainty.

In legal terms, al-Hakim had become a *mafqud*, a man whose whereabouts are unknown, a missing person. He was neither considered alive nor dead.⁵ The initial effect of al-Hakim being a *mafqud* was surely a devastation for his family and members of his court. There were strict guidelines concerning the wife or wives of a *mafqud*. Unless informed of their husband's death, they could not remarry and then only after completing the *'idda*, or period of mourning. If ten years passed from the time the *mafqud* was last seen, he was legally deemed deceased. Only then could his dependents receive an inheritance or financial support from his accounts. In the meantime, the family of a *mafqud* was dependent on the charity of a male relative, usually a brother-in-law. If the *mafqud* was pronounced dead then there was another set of behavioral rules by which the widow had to conform. The Prophet Mohammed in the *Hadith* enumerated

² Ibn al-Athir, *Kamil* VIII, 128, as quoted by Mernissi 166.

³ This is the account of al-Quda'i as quoted by Ibn Taghribirdi, *Nujum* IV, 190, as quoted in Assaad 183.

⁴ Assaad 183.

⁵ Fyze 26.

these. During the period of *'idda*, widows were forbidden from dressing their hair with oils, using kohl for the eyes, using henna, or perfume. She was restricted from public baths, could only wear the color black and was only allowed to leave her residence during the afternoon hours.⁶

Though both contemporary and modern historians assume that al-Hakim was assassinated, there could be no funeral procession or burial. There was no tomb, no poemourners (*shu'ara*), no Qur'an readers to instruct him on how to answer the interrogation of the angels of the grave, Munkar and Nakeer. The greatest problem caused by al-Hakim's disappearance, however, was the power vacuum that it created at the court. For a state that placed its control in the spiritual leadership of its ruler, the absence of the ruler was of grave concern. Normally, if the throne of the caliph fell vacant, it was the job of the *fuqaha*, or religious experts, to resolve the problem quickly and quietly.⁷ Such a situation could create much chaos and disorder among the masses. However, in this case the *fuqaha* were not consulted.

Sitt al-Mulk controlled events following al-Hakim's disappearance. She is credited for doing so without *fitna*, or disorder. She was aided in her task by the lack of competitors to the throne because during her half-brother's reign many of the ruling elite had been liquidated, leaving very few to challenge her.⁸ Yet, this does not explain how a woman was allowed to reach such an elevated position of power. Perhaps it is best explained by Mernissi's statement that, "the emergence of women in the arena of power

⁶ Fyzee 26-28, 66, 154.

⁷ Mernissi 163.

⁸ Lev, "Fatimid Princess," 319.

indicates a breakdown in the system.”⁹ Certainly, a breakdown did exist when al-Hakim disappeared but that obscures the fact that Sitt al-Mulk was already an extraordinary figure in Fatimid politics.

Her name is itself an illustration of her underlying power. “Sitt al-Mulk” literally means lady or princess of power. The “power” that *mulk* represents is not easy to define. The historian Ibn Khaldun (732/1332-808/1406) wrote that “Mulk...implies domination and coercion...it pursues only the interests of this world.”¹⁰ It is a word imbued with an aura of despotism. Mulk is considered the opposite of the term “caliph”. Wherein the caliphate represents an authority that obeys only divine law, the *shari’a*, and has a religious or messianic dimension, *mulk* refers solely to the management of earthly affairs.¹¹ Both are presumably present in the rule of a good Imam. It is this dualistic character of an Islamic ruler that sheds light on the persons of Sitt al-Mulk and al-Hakim. They have been portrayed by historians as each resembling one of these characteristics of a good ruler. Sitt al-Mulk was praised for her control over the daily affairs of the empire.¹² Whereas, al-Hakim is frequently chastised by historians for his lack of *mulk* and his concentration on his divinely appointed aspects. But there was much more to this woman than her name.

Sitt al-Mulk was the first female member of the Fatimid dynasty to involve herself in the politics of the court.¹³ There are records of a number of instances in which

⁹ Mernissi 13.

¹⁰ Mernissi 10-11.

¹¹ Mernissi 11.

¹² Lev, “Fatimid Princess,” 328.

¹³ Bloom, “Mosque of al-Hakim,” 17.

she proved herself to be politically active in both the courts of her father and al-Hakim. Her involvement in the re-appointment of Ibn Nasturus during her father's reign and the execution of the two *diwans* during the reign of al-Hakim serve to illustrate Sitt al-Mulk's widely known ability to manipulate political situations to her favor. On another occasion, the Djarrahid rebel Hassan obtained a pardon from al-Hakim by sending his mother to beg Sitt al-Mulk to intercede on his behalf. Due to Sitt al-Mulk's cajoling, Hassan was pardoned and allowed to return to Palestine to recover his father's lands.

These incidents show Sitt al-Mulk to be politically active in the court at Cairo, and Yaccov Lev believes illuminates her "exceptional ability, especially in legal matters."¹⁴ Bar Hebraeus also noted her unique character: "Such are the marvelous deeds which this masculine woman performed."¹⁵ This shows that he felt Sitt al-Mulk's actions elevated her beyond that of the role of women and into the realm of male concerns. Certainly she was not permitted to openly rule the empire: Muslim women were not entitled to rule as caliph. In fact, the term "caliph" exists only in the masculine form in Arabic.¹⁶ However, it is generally believed that she ultimately controlled events at the court and exhibited *mulk* from the time of al-Hakim's disappearance until her death in 415/1024. For instance, Sitt al-Mulk met with the chiefs of the Kutama Berbers and the commanders of the army to solicit support for the succession of al-Hakim's young son, her nephew, 'Ali. She is said to have achieved their support by enticing them with lavish

¹⁴ Mernissi 159.

¹⁵ Bar Hebraeus 188.

¹⁶ Mernissi 13. The terms *malik* and *sultan* do have feminine forms in Arabic.

gifts and government appointments.¹⁷ She was also aided by the fact that most of these men did not want al-Rahim, the designated heir, to take the throne.

In *Jumada* II 409/ October-November 1018, al-Hakim had appointed al-Rahim governor of Damascus.¹⁸ The upper class in Damascus did not approve of the appointment or the liberal measures al-Rahim attempted to introduce there. His allowing the production and consumption of wine was particularly unbearable because it directly contradicted al-Hakim's own prohibitions against the use of alcohol.¹⁹ Another contentious issue for the caliph was al-Rahim's political support of the Djarrahid rebel, Hassan, whom al-Hakim sought to execute. Soon after al-Rahim's appointment in Damascus, al-Hakim is reported as no longer trusting his cousin and even arresting him for a time.²⁰ The situation in the province was deteriorating and the Damascenes began to revolt against al-Rahim's rule.

When al-Hakim disappeared, Sitt al-Mulk had a letter sent to al-Rahim telling him to return to Cairo immediately. Fearing he would attempt to flee, a group of soldiers under the command of 'Ali b. Dawud were also sent to escort him back to Egypt. The soldiers beat al-Rahim, sealed him in a crate, and took him to Tinnis, where he was imprisoned and executed for treason.²¹ With al-Rahim conveniently out of the way, the path was clear to appoint 'Ali. The army commanders cooperated with Sitt al-Mulk, and at her instigation they took an oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) to support the appointment of

¹⁷ O'Leary 187.

¹⁸ Al-Maqrizi, "*Khitat* II," 58-59.

¹⁹ Canard, "Hakim," 81.

²⁰ Assaad 188.

²¹ Al-Maqrizi, "*Khitat* II," 58-59; O'Leary 187.

‘Ali.²² Due to Sitt al-Mulk’s control over the situation, the transition of power to her nephew was smooth and orderly.²³

‘Ali was seventeen when he became caliph. Still too young to rule on his own, he was provided with a guardian (*gustad*) named Yusuf. Not having been designated the heir by his father, ‘Ali had not expected to become caliph. Yet, that is not to say that he was unprepared. Sitt al-Mulk had personally supervised his education since the time when he had come to live in her residence at the age of ten or eleven.

Roughly two months passed between the time al-Hakim disappeared and ‘Ali received the *bay’a*, was greeted as Imam, placed on a golden throne and his banner hung in the palace.²⁴ The decision to wait the almost two months until the *‘Id al-Fitr* festival to publicly announce al-Hakim’s death and officially recognize ‘Ali was a deliberate act on the part of Sitt al-Mulk. Eight years earlier, al-Hakim had declared al-Rahim his heir at the same festival. On that occasion, al-Rahim had performed the ritual sacrifices on behalf of the caliph. ‘Ali’s appointment during the Sacrificial Festival symbolically negated al-Rahim’s participation in the event.²⁵

On his succession to the Fatimid throne, ‘Ali’ was given the *lakab*, *al-Zahir li-‘Zazi din I’llah*, which means “the triumphant in exalting the religion of God.” “Al-Zahir” is also said to mean “the imminently visible,” perhaps emphasizing, as Mernissi believes,

²² *Bay’a* is the commitment one makes to obey a caliph. In doing so, the person gives up his will. He obeys everything he is commanded to do, whether he believes it is right or wrong.

²³ Bloom, “Mosque of the Qarafa,” 17.

²⁴ Az-Zahir’s banner was presumably white or red, the adopted Shi’i colors, and had his *lakab* painted on it. Mez 133.

²⁵ Sanders 63.

that he was merely a figurehead for the real source of power, Sitt al-Mulk.²⁶ She too was given a new *lakab*, *al-Sayyida al-'amma*.²⁷ *Sayyida* is the feminine form of *sayyid* meaning master or lord. Thus Sitt al-Mulk's title was Mistress Aunt.

Sitt al-Mulk's power was never officially recognized; the Friday prayers were never said in her name, her seal or image were not imprinted on coins, nor was she the official guardian of az-Zahir. She did not even claim the title of *malika* or *sultana*. Nevertheless, she promised the Egyptian people a just rule at az-Zahir's coronation. And by her command az-Zahir was presented to the people with the words "al-Sayyida, says to you, this is our Master."²⁸

She also appointed 'Ali Ibn Husayn Ibn Dawwas, a Kutama Berber chief, as administrator of state affairs (*Mudabbir al-Dawla*), whom she later had executed, procuring for herself the quality of *hayba*, or that of inspiring awe.²⁹ She commanded that the *ikta'at*, or salaries, of al-Hakim's favorites be cancelled.³⁰ She recovered precious stones belonging to the royal family that al-Hakim had given away as presents, and she re-imposed the custom duties (*mukus*) that al-Hakim had abolished.³¹ And the *najwa* and the *fitra* were reinstated at her insistence, having been abolished by al-Hakim in 400/1009.³²

²⁶ Mernissi 159.

²⁷ Halm, "Sitt al-Mulkt," 686.

²⁸ Lev, "Fatimid Princess," 327.

²⁹ Lev, "Fatimid Princess," 326.

³⁰ Halm, "Sitt al-Mulk," 686.

³¹ Lev, "Fatimid Princess," 327; Halm, "Sitt al-Mulk," 686.

³² The *najwa* was a voluntary one dinar levy paid by members of the Isma'ili sect and the *fitra* was a one dirham contribution given at the end of the Ramadan fast. Al-Hakim abolished a number of duties, tithes, and taxes that had been customary since the establishment of the Fatimid state, as a means of procuring favor with the masses. Abu-Izzeddin 78; Halm, "The Isma'ili Oath," 103, 106.

Sitt al-Mulk is also believed to have directed az-Zahir to reestablish the Islamic *da'wa* (earlier threatened by the Druze controversy), appoint Qasim, the grandson of al-Numan, as chief religious scholar (*da'i al-duat*), and reopen the "Sessions of Wisdom" (*majalis al-hikma*).³³ The reversal of al-Hakim's decrees prohibiting the women of Egypt from freely leaving their homes, people from listening to music and the drinking of alcoholic beverages were also carried out immediately upon az-Zahir's succession.³⁴ By these actions Sitt al-Mulk "made herself loved by the people."³⁵

Sitt al-Mulk gained much from al-Hakim's disappearance. Politically, her power increased considerably after her brother was gone. Some have argued that she singularly and effectively ruled the Fatimid Empire for at the very least the two months between al-Hakim's disappearance and az-Zahir's succession. Sitt al-Mulk also prospered personally, showing she was a woman who would not be controlled by men, a radical achievement at the time. In acquiring supreme authority over the Fatimid State, she implicated herself in al-Hakim's alleged murder. An additional motive is provided by an event that occurred just prior to the caliph's disappearance.

A story alleges that abusive letters had been sent to al-Hakim containing derisive statements regarding the immoral behavior of Sitt al-Mulk. He had reproached her for this supposed licentious behavior.³⁶ To her he said, "It is because of you that the Egyptians write and make a mock of me. They say that you permit men to have access to

³³ The *majalis* or lectures were closed in Dhu'l-Qa'da or Dhu'l-Hijja 396/ August-September 1006 but an official edict cancelling the sessions was not issued until Dhu'l-Qad'da 400/ June-July 1010, four years later. Halm, "Isma'ili Oath," 105.

³⁴ Lev, "Fatimid Princess," 327.

³⁵ Mernissi 159.

³⁶ Canard, "Hakim," 80.

your house [person].”³⁷ Though this is merely a fictitious statement created by Bar Hebraeus, it is generally understood that al-Hakim insinuated in their argument that Sitt al-Mulk was unchaste and had dishonored him and the dynasty. He suspected her of having intimate relations with certain army generals. Arab culture considered her to be her brother’s property. If she misbehaved, his honor was jeopardized.³⁸ Any situation where an unrelated man and woman were alone together could be construed as a sexual relationship because the woman, it was believed, could easily be taken advantage of and dishonored. Yedida Stillman writes, “an unaccompanied and approachable woman is a temptation even if she is not a temptress.”³⁹ As well, according to Fatimid tradition, Sitt al-Mulk was not supposed to marry and was to remain a virgin so as to ensure the royal line through male, Muslim heirs.⁴⁰

Mernissi tragically articulates the argument between the siblings: “He threatened her and her lovers with death.”⁴¹ Whether or not Sitt al-Mulk had one lover, let alone multiple lovers, is undocumented, as are most of the descriptions of this unique woman. Indeed, many of the histories relating to this incident, in which Sitt al-Mulk’s chastity is questioned, assume her to have been a young woman. This is particularly evident in the narrative of Bar Hebraeus in which Sitt al-Mulk defends her actions with the fictional speech: “Behold, I am in the prime of early womanhood. What is the good of this life to

³⁷ Bar Hebraeus 187.

³⁸ Stillman, “Attitudes Toward Women in Traditional Near Eastern Societies,” *Studies in Judaism and Islam*. Eds. Shelomo Morag, Issachar Ben-Ami, and Norman A. Stillman (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press of the Hebrew University, 1981) 351.

³⁹ Stillman, “Attitudes,” 352.

⁴⁰ Halm, “Sitt al-Mulk,” 685.

⁴¹ Mernissi 166.

me if I am to be deprived of the satisfaction of natural desire?"⁴² Sitt al-Mulk was fifty-one years old at the time.

Though al-Hakim's accusation of immoral conduct would normally have dishonored a woman's reputation, Sitt al-Mulk was no ordinary woman and the court rallied around her in defense of her virginity. She responded by reproaching al-Hakim for his erratic commands, which she believed, were weakening the authority of the dynasty.⁴³

This argument caused Sitt al-Mulk to fear that her brother might have her executed. Therefore, the historian as-Sabi suggests, she met secretly with Ibn Dawwas and plotted the assassination of al-Hakim. Ibn Dawwas recruited two of his black slaves and paid them to commit the murder. According to this account, after stabbing al-Hakim to death and then stripping him of his clothes, the two men carried the body down out of the hills to the house of Ibn Dawwas. He brought it himself to Sitt al-Mulk, who buried the body in or around the *Dar al-Bahr*.

This is the narrative of as-Sabi based on rumors overheard by Abu al-Faraj in the streets of al-Fustat. Along with the source being unreliable, the tale is, in fact, pitted with problems. To have plotted al-Hakim's murder in this way requires knowledge of and control over a number of external factors: for example, the arrival of the Banu Qurra and the exiting of al-Hakim's two slaves. Could two men, presumably on foot, overpower an armed man riding a mule? Could these two men travel with the body, even if it had been dismembered, back to al-Fustat and then onto Cairo and into the guarded royal enclosure

⁴² Bar Hebraeus 187.

⁴³ Canard, "Hakim," 80; Lev, "State," 34.

at night without arousing suspicions? One-hundred guards surrounded the palace complex at night, patrolling the grounds and no one could leave or enter by the gates without the guards there knowing of it.⁴⁴ The part about Sitt al-Mulk burying the body within the palace grounds is hardly convincing but is used to direct the crime back to her.

Having read this history and those of others, al-Maqrizi wrote, "It was said that his sister had killed him but this is untrue."⁴⁵ The actual undertaking al-Maqrizi believed based on his research was not "the story the Easterners tell in their books about his sister killing him."⁴⁶ Bar Hebraeus wrote that Sitt al-Mulk "went to the house of a certain noble [Ibn Dawwas], who was himself in terror of al-Hakim."⁴⁷ Together, it was said, they arranged the murder of the caliph. The motives behind Sitt al-Mulk's possible role in the disappearance have been outlined. Now we must ascertain who Ibn Dawwas was and why he would want to kill al-Hakim.

Ibn Dawwas' base motive for allegedly having killed al-Hakim was fear: fear that he would be killed like so many of his fellow Kutama officials at court. Ibn Dawwas was one of the few Kutama chiefs who escaped the wrath of al-Hakim. According to Lev, many of the ruling elite had been liquidated just prior to al-Hakim's disappearance.⁴⁸ For this reason Ibn Dawwas was known to have avoided as much as possible the court and particularly the caliph. Some have suggested he was "in hiding" when Sitt al-Mulk supposedly came to him for advice.

⁴⁴ AlSaiyyad 73.

⁴⁵ Al-Maqrizi, "*Khitat* II," 59.

⁴⁶ Al-Maqrizi, "*Khitat* II," 60.

⁴⁷ Bar Hebraeus 187.

⁴⁸ Lev, "Fatimid Princess," 319.

To be "in hiding" was not an uncommon place to be during the reign of al-Hakim. Numerous Muslim men of rank within the Cairo court had felt it necessary to leave the capital to ensure their safety. In 400/1009, Husayn ibn Jawhar and 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn al-Numan, each of whom held significant offices within the state, attempted to flee the country. Abu'l-Qasim al-Husayn al-Maghribi, al-Hakim's *wasita*, fled in terror to Palestine where he took refuge at the encampment of the Djarrahid chief Hassan. Al-Hakim even "wrote a number of safe conducts for a number of people, because of their great fear."⁴⁹ These fears may have been legitimate. Al-Numan was dismissed from his post for improper use of public monies. He was caught trying to leave the state, imprisoned, and later executed.⁵⁰ When Abu'l-Qasim tried to return to his post as *wasita* a few months later in 400/1010, members of his family were executed.⁵¹

Leaving the country was not always an option and thus we learn of some men who went to extreme measures to keep from being executed. The famous optician and mathematician Ibn al-Haytham was one such man. Having come to Cairo at al-Hakim's request to create a mechanism to control the flow of the Nile River, Ibn al-Haytham soon discovered that such a feat was impossible. The caliph did not take the news well and Ibn al-Haytham, to save his life, feigned madness. Bound in chains in a small cell, he remained in a state of insanity until the caliph disappeared at which point the scientist regained his mental agility, lived out the rest of his natural life in Cairo, and compiled seventy books on geometry before his death.⁵² Pretending to be mad was only a viable

⁴⁹ Al-Maqrizi, "*Khitat* II," 54.

⁵⁰ Abu-Izzeddin 76.

⁵¹ Jomier, "al-Kahira," 429.

⁵² Bar Hebraeus 189.

option if one could maintain the charade for an extended period. Several scientists who studied at *Dar al-Ilm*, among them Abu Usama, al-Hafiz 'Abd al-Ghani, and Abu'l-Hasan al-Muqri', were killed in 399/1008-9 for displeasing the caliph.⁵³

Ibn Dawwas neither tried to escape al-Hakim's wrath or feign insanity. He merely flew beneath the caliph's radar, so to speak. He was not among those who gravitated toward the caliph. That he and Sitt al-Mulk were meeting in private and/or scheming to murder the caliph is not known. Was Ibn Dawwas the man who al-Hakim accused his sister of having permitted "access to her house?" Regardless, the circumstances following al-Hakim's disappearance implicate them both.

From the time al-Hakim disappeared until his own death, Ibn Dawwas acted as *Mudabbir al-Dawla* (administrator of state affairs) and acquired the *lakab*, *Sayf al-Dawla* (Chosen of the State).⁵⁴ This represents impressive political gain for someone who had recently been certain of his own tragic end. His newly attained power, however, was short-lived. On the orders of Sitt al-Mulk, he and two of his slaves were publicly executed.⁵⁵ They were impaled while heralds proclaimed: "These are they who acted treacherously toward their lord and murdered him."⁵⁶ Al-Hakim's former *sahib al-sitr* (the bearer of the veil behind which the ruler spoke to the people), Nesim, and the late caliph's bodyguard carried out the execution of Ibn Dawwas as per Sitt al-Mulk's instructions.

⁵³ Ibn Khallikan, *Wafayat* I, 322-3, as quoted in George Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West* (Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 55.

⁵⁴ Assaad 190.

⁵⁵ Lane-Poole, "History," 135.

⁵⁶ Bar Hebraeus 188.

Treason was the reason provided for Ibn Dawwas' execution. Sitt al-Mulk learned that Ibn Dawwas with the help of the two slaves had murdered her brother. Al-Antaki, who returned from Syria following al-Hakim's disappearance, wrote that the police had searched Ibn Dawwas' house and recovered evidence directly linking him to the crime. The knife, which had been on al-Hakim's person when he left the palace grounds, was found among Ibn Dawwas' belongings.⁵⁷ It was likely a plant. That Ibn Dawwas would have kept such incriminating evidence is doubtful. However, al-Antaki also believed Ibn Dawwas was responsible for al-Hakim's death for another reason.⁵⁸ He disagrees that the assassins were the two black slaves. He instead thought the Banu Qurra whom the caliph met the night he disappeared in the foothills of the Mukkatam were responsible. Al-Antaki notes that only four men returned to Cairo with the servant Nesim whom al-Hakim had sent to retrieve the grant from the *Bayt al-Mal*. He deduces that the remaining five or six Bedouins stayed behind, waited until al-Hakim sent off his other servant and traveled deeper into the hills, and then ambushed him. It is likely, as al-Antaki suggests that the Banu Qurra were involved. Yet, despite the hostile history they had with the Fatimid government, their status in the empire changed toward the end of al-Hakim's reign when al-Maqrizi writes, "Al-Hakim went beyond all limits in gifts, giving grants to sailors, hangmen, and to the Banu Qurra."⁵⁹ It may have been part of this grant that they were collecting that fateful night.

⁵⁷ Al-Antaki 238, as quoted in Assaad 189.

⁵⁸ Al-Antaki 238, as quoted in Assaad 189.

⁵⁹ Judging from the other parties who received grants, the Banu Qurra were an unsavory lot and al-Maqrizi uses them to show to what extreme al-Hakim went in his charity. The Banu Qurra accepted the grant of Alexandria and its dependencies. Al-Maqrizi, "*Khitat* II," 58.

The execution of Ibn Dawwas and his two slaves is the basis for as-Sabi's version of events. It also supports his hypothesis that Sitt al-Mulk stood behind al-Hakim's disappearance. The executions imply that Sitt al-Mulk wanted to dispose of her partners in crime or anyone that could link her to her brother's disappearance. The vizier 'Ammar Ibn Muhammad was also killed, it is said, for his role in having al-Rahim arrested and executed and his possible knowledge of al-Hakim's murder.⁶⁰ Though Sitt al-Mulk claimed 'Ammar Ibn Muhammad was killed because he was trying to take over control of the government by urging az-Zahir to adopt a life of leisure. Were these men merely pawns in a lethal game of chess? Or was she overcome at how quickly Ibn Dawwas and the Kutama chiefs infiltrated her nephew's court? Paula Sanders writes that during the early years of az-Zahir's reign "he who controlled the office of the Kutama (*diwan al-Kutamiyin*) was very powerful for this post was the most highly placed at court."⁶¹ To Sitt al-Mulk's credit, while she was alive she kept the Kutama under her control and only after she died in 413/1023 did the Kutama "reign without limits."⁶²

The Kutama and Ibn Dawwas gained the power they were seeking when al-Hakim disappeared. Bardjawan's death early in al-Hakim's reign had inspired hope among the Kutama chiefs that the Maghriba might regain their faltering status at the Cairo court. This had not been the case for al-Hakim had other plans. The Maghriba were slowly eliminated from the court: executed or fleeing in fear of being executed. Like his father before him, al-Hakim favored one ethnic division of his army. However, it was neither

⁶⁰ Aassaad 187-188.

⁶¹ Sanders 66.

⁶² Lane-Poole, "History," 135.

the Maghriba nor the Mashariqa, rather it was his black troops, mostly Sudanese, upon whom al-Hakim most relied. The majority were of slave origin and trained in archery. Primarily infantry, the black troops served in both the elite guard (*sibyan al-Khass*) and the eunuch corps.⁶³ They emerged as the primary rivals to the Mashariqa's newly gained authority in both the military and at the court.

The Sudanese were fiercely loyal to al-Hakim. When, in 410/1019-20, he ordered them to sack certain quarters of al-Fustat where defamatory remarks aimed at his rule were said to be repeated, they did so without question. They plundered the shops and set houses on fire. The black troops were also accused of raping the women there, an offense of which, historically, they were often blamed. In a strange twist, the Mashariqa and Maghriba joined forces with the people of al-Fustat in trying to defeat the black troops.

Al-Hakim, it was said, watched the fighting from the vantage point of the Mukattam hills. The fighting lasted three days before al-Hakim recalled his black troops. A third of the city was devastated by the fires and because the gates were locked many perished. Aldridge writes, "it was probably the anarchy of this situation and its danger to the Fatimids more than any insult to his sister which decided the murder of al-Hakim."⁶⁴ Assaad agrees, arguing that one of the strongest motives for assassinating the caliph was possible retribution for personal suffering caused during this turbulent event.⁶⁵ The crime, however, if there was one, alludes to a larger conspiracy.

The Kutama, for instance, were in a better position to conduct the murder of the

⁶³ Sanders 97.

⁶⁴ Aldridge 84.

⁶⁵ Assaad 190.

caliph. They had nothing to lose and everything to gain. Ibn Dawwas was the first to gain politically, immediately upon the disappearance of al-Hakim. He was also the first of the Kutama to die under the reign of az-Zahir. His execution was understood to be a means of resolving the issue of whether al-Hakim was alive or dead, legitimizing az-Zahir's succession to the throne.

I am always anxiously expecting news of you, as anxiously as the gazelle looks for its mother, or one that suffers from drought for the lightening that portends rains.

- Abu'l-'Ala al-Ma'arri¹

Conclusions

Al-Hakim's disappearance has intrigued historians for nearly a millenium. Various theories have been espoused to explain the strange circumstances that surround the case. One holds that al-Hakim disappeared of his own free will. After he disappeared, many believed that al-Hakim was still alive primarily because his body was never recovered. Stories circulated about his whereabouts and eventual return. Many believed the caliph had simply grown weary of his office and the intrigues of the Fatimid court: casting off his *lakab* as he had similarly done away with his turban and beaded gowns.

Christian historians, like Abu Salih and Bar Hebraeus, claimed al-Hakim had taken refuge among the monasteries of the desert the night he vanished. For to the monasteries of al-Qusair and Sharan, both just east of Hulwan where he was last seen, al-Hakim had previously gone for solace. Perhaps he had hidden himself in one of these or more likely the Monastery of al-Qusair al-Halekani a half days journey east into the desert.

¹ Excerpt from a letter to a friend. Al-Ma'arri 136.

This theory is not as unlikely as it first appears, for the caliph seemed to have envied the monks their simple way of life and uncomplicated devotion. Assaad writes, “toward the end of his reign al-Hakim became a great admirer of Christianity and spent hours and sometimes days with the monks in their monasteries – praising their religious beliefs and their way of life.”² One of the caliph’s confidants was Anba Salamon, the superior at the Tur Sina monastery. They would often meet and talk together when al-Hakim made his frequent trips into the Mukkatam hills. When this abbot asked the caliph for the restitution of his church’s property, al-Hakim obliged.³

In fact, before he disappeared al-Hakim had begun to mend his relations with the Christian and Jewish communities. He had cancelled the clothing restrictions placed upon them and al-Maqrizi notes that “al-Hakim went to excess in his gifts and returned all estates and properties that had been confiscated to their owners.”⁴ This included all money and lands that had been expropriated from churches or synagogues.⁵ A series of measures written in 411/1021 just before he disappeared authorized the rebuilding of the destroyed Christian and Jewish buildings including the Church of the Apostles at al-Qusair, which was renamed at that time the Church of Peter and Paul.⁶ Ibn Taghribirdi writes that, “When [ex-] Jews and Christians used to meet him, they would say: ‘My God, I desire to return to my old religion,’ and al-Hakim would reply: ‘Do what seems best to

² Assaad 183.

³ Abu-Izzeddin 80.

⁴ Al-Maqrizi, “*Khitat* II,” 57.

⁵ Al-Antaki notes that these expropriated revenues had been placed in a special state *diwan*, or treasury, under the name of the caliph rather than in the general treasury. This was a new *diwan* established in 400/1009 specifically to register property seized from executed persons and criminals. This made it possible for al-Hakim to restore to the churches the confiscated revenues, as he did in 411/1021, without any loss to those organizations.

⁶ Canard, “al-Hakim,” 78.

you,' and they would apostatize from Islam."⁷ Al-Antaki first suggested that the caliph's reconciliation with the Christian community was due to his increased mysticism. He believed that the caliph retreated into the hills at night to seek solitude and ask God to appear to him as He had for Moses. Al-Antaki likened al-Hakim to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, who also was punished by God for his destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. In contrast, Bar Hebraeus likened al-Hakim to the Christian Saint Paul,

At the time when al-Hakim was persecuting the Christians, Christ our Lord was revealed unto him as unto Paul, and from that moment he believed and departed secretly into the desert.⁸

Some of the "sightings" of al-Hakim after his disappearance also support this idea that the Muslim caliph became a Christian monk. Bar Hebraeus and al-Muqaffa record that a proselyte named Sherut who lived near Sketis and called himself Abu'l-Arab was actually al-Hakim. This monk was said to have resembled the caliph in voice and appearance. This is of note because al-Hakim's countenance was quite singular. He had bright blue eyes and red hair like his father and a peculiar face that was said to strike fear into his subjects even when he was smiling. Abu-l'Feda wrote of a similar al-Hakim pretender named Sikkin.

Indeed, al-Hakim's connection to the monks of the Mukkatam hills long outlived the Fatimid dynasty. In the thirteenth century, a monk living in one of the desert monasteries of Hulwan claimed to have found a hidden treasure trove belonging to al-Hakim. Like an Arab Robin Hood, he was said to have used what he found to aid the

⁷ Ibn Taghribirdi, *Nujum*, IV, 183, as quoted in Assaad 183.

⁸ Bar Hebraeus 189.

poor and needy, regardless of their religious affiliations. Over a period of three years this simple monk supposedly distributed large sums of money and precious stones. The fame of this monk eventually reached the sultan who summoned him to Cairo in 666/1275. When the monk refused to reveal the whereabouts of the secret treasure, the sultan had him tortured. The monk died from these abuses without divulging the secret. This 'Ali Baba character possibly carried with him the secret of al-Hakim's excursions into the hills at night.

Christians were not the only ones to believe that al-Hakim was not killed that night. Al-Maqrizi provides us with a number of instances in which al-Hakim was sighted. He relates the tale of Ahmad Ibn Tatawa, a Kutama who arrived at the court of Cairo in 415/1024 with news that he had seen and spoken with al-Hakim in Kufa, Iraq. Ibn Tatawa claimed that al-Hakim sent him as a messenger to warn the Egyptians to change their evil ways. Nejla Abu-Izzeddin believes this was the real al-Hakim, claiming that "recently uncovered manuscripts reveal that Hakim departed east, to Sijistan in eastern Iran on the border of India."⁹ 'Anbar, a Sudanese porter in al-Hakim's court, arranged a special meeting with az-Zahir to also inform him that his father was living in Iraq and planning to return to the Fatimid capital. Finally, al-Maqrizi also wrote of a man named Sulayman who resembled al-Hakim and tried to claim power during al-Mustansir's reign (427-488/1035-95). Al-Hakim would have been fifty-eight years of age in Rajab 434/ February 1043, when Sulayman organized a group of men to preach the

⁹ Abu-Izzeddin 105.

caliph's return. Sulayman entered the royal palace declaring himself the returning Imam. He was immediately executed.

The Druze had other ideas about what happened to al-Hakim after he disappeared. Like the Christian historians, they did not believe al-Hakim was assassinated but that the caliph had left voluntarily. When al-Hakim disappeared, he did not just become a *mafqud* but for those Muslims who had been following the teachings of al-Darazi and Hamza, he became *ghayb* (the absent, unseen, invisible), a term usually attributed only to God, the angels and the *jinn*.¹⁰ The Druze believed the disappearance (*ghaybah*) of al-Hakim replaced his death and they anticipated his final return (*rajah*). Ibn Taghribirdi wrote, "A group of *ghulat* [extremists] in their foolish love thought that he was still alive and that he would surely reappear and they swore by the *Ghaybah* of al-Hakim but those were just crazy delusions."¹¹

Hamza explained to his followers that al-Hakim had only withdrawn temporarily to test the faith of his followers. The caliph was said to be in a period of concealment (*zaman al-sitr*).¹² He would return and the Unitarian religion would triumph. The Druze adherents were told that when the caliph returned they would "become high office holders, to the discomfiture and affliction of all infidels." Those that did not keep the faith and apostatized would, along with the infidels be "metamorphosed into menial servants, swine and dogs."¹³ Hamza himself withdrew from the Druze community at the end of the year (411/1021-1022) promising to return by the side of al-Hakim. Al-

¹⁰ *Ghayb* and *shahuda* (the witnessed or visible) make up the two main parts of the cosmos.

¹¹ Bryer 76.

¹² O'Leary 25.

¹³ O'Leary 33.

Antaki said the *da'i* was captured and killed.¹⁴ Under az-Zahir's reign, many of the Druze were arrested. Those who recanted were freed and those who did not were executed. Like the martyrs of the early Christian Church, they gave of their lives willingly for they had "left a world of sorrow which was not ready for his [al-Hakim's] pure doctrine."¹⁵ Others escaped into the mountainous regions of Syria, where many continue to live and worship in private today.¹⁶ Conveniently, al-Hakim's disappearance emphasized his alleged divinity at a time when the Druze were struggling to validate their beliefs.¹⁷ The Druze role in al-Hakim's disappearance is definitely suspect. Hamza wrote an epistle, the *Risala, al-Sijil al-Mu'allaq*, just days after al-Hakim's disappearance in which he warns against searching for the caliph because his body would not be found.¹⁸

Other evidence implicates the Druze in al-Hakim's disappearance. The shirt, the only material evidence of a crime, was discovered in a small pond near where al-Hakim's mule was found. It was recovered still buttoned, which supports Hamza's claim that al-Hakim returned to the spirit world leaving behind his material possessions. Like the demise of the Wicked Witch of the West, al-Hakim melted from this world leaving behind his shirt in a pool of water. The shirt was pierced with a knife and coated with what looked like blood. Was it al-Hakim's blood? Perhaps it was that of his mule, whose front legs had been cut? Without DNA testing it would be impossible to know.

¹⁴ Bryer 73.

¹⁵ O'Leary 187.

¹⁶ The number of Druze has greatly declined since the mid-nineteenth century when they were recorded as numbering around 200,000 in Syria.

¹⁷ Assaad 191.

¹⁸ Assaad 190. An excerpt from the charter found affixed on the door of the mosque is provided as Appendix D.

The day after al-Hakim's disappearance there was an eclipse of the sun. Assaad asserts that his disappearance was meant to coincide with this cosmic occurrence, giving greater credence to the Druze belief that al-Hakim was divine.¹⁹

The vast majority of contemporary as well as modern scholars adhere to another school of thought, which thinks al-Hakim was assassinated for political or personal aims. But by whom and for what reason? Al-Hakim had his share of enemies. His reign was notorious, in fact, for its controversies. The caliph was known for his cruel sense of justice. One of al-Hakim's favorite tricks was to challenge a friend or enemy to jump onto a piece of balsa wood floating in one of the pools in his palace garden. To he who was successful in balancing on the wood raft, al-Hakim promised a healthy sum of dinars. Most attempted the game not for the monetary award but in fear of contradicting the caliph. The trick was that under the wood was hidden a long thin spear on which the contestant would impale himself.²⁰ Needless to say, the actual suspect list of those who might have wanted to kill the caliph is quite lengthy. Possible motives are equally extensive: personal vengeance, political coups, or religious propaganda.

There was of course his sister, Sitt al-Mulk, whose hostility toward the caliph was well-known, especially at the end of his reign. Her first act of sabotage directed at al-Hakim occurred on the day her father died and her brother succeeded him as caliph. Then she attempted a coup d'état with the hope of placing a cousin on the throne. Despite outward signs of reconciliation, Sitt al-Mulk and al-Hakim continued to disagree

¹⁹ Assaad 190.

²⁰ Aldridge 82.

on political issues, including the appointment of al-Rahim as his successor, the handling of the Djarrahid Bedouins, and the persecutions of the Christian communities. When al-Hakim began an assault on the female population of his kingdom and threatened the lives of the women in his household including his young son, az-Zahir, Sitt al-Mulk openly rebuked her brother. She moved az-Zahir and his mother into her own protective custody. Just days before his disappearance, Sitt al-Mulk and al-Hakim argued: he accused her of sexual promiscuity and she berated him for his failure to effectively rule the empire. Thus, her motive would be obvious. Always a politically active woman, Sitt al-Mulk gained complete control of the Fatimid throne immediately upon al-Hakim's absence. However, regardless of motive, Ibn as-Sabi, a hostile historian, is the only primary source to identify her as the culprit. Maqrizi, having studied all the documents from that period, denies as-Sabi's assumptions and clears Sitt al-Mulk of the charges.

Sitt al-Mulk's collusion with the Kutama chief Ibn Dawwas is another of as-Sabi's fictive accounts. Their motives though both personal were quite different. Ibn Dawwas was trying to preserve his life and regain the fading power held by the Kutama faction. His rise to the position of Administrator of State Affairs (*Mudabbir al-Dawla*) upon al-Hakim's disappearance supports his reasons for disposing of the caliph. His involvement in the disappearance though is circumspect. He seems to have been a patsy. The plant of al-Hakim's knife in his possessions would support this, as would al-Antaki's unlikely connection between him and the Banu Qurra. His execution for the crime of killing the caliph was useful only in emphasizing that al-Hakim was actually dead, legitimizing az-Zahir's succession.

The Banu Qurra and other Bedouin tribes, like the Djarrahids, are the least understood aspect of this mystery. One would think, the Banu Qurra's proximity to the caliph just before he disappeared in the Mukattam hills, would raise some questions of their involvement. Yet, only al-Antaki observed that not all of the ten Banu Qurra that met with the caliph returned to the palace treasury. They had recently acquired land grants from the caliph, a questionable enterprise in itself. They were wild cards. Perhaps they were still angry at al-Hakim for past mistreatments.

Despite the infamy of al-Hakim's persecutions of the Jews and Christians, the *dhimmi* population can almost certainly be eliminated as a potential pool of suspects. Al-Hakim's disappearance benefited these groups only in that they were no longer subject, like the rest of the Egyptian population, to the caliph's seemingly erratic behavior. The persecutions concluded at least five years before his disappearance and in general it does not seem that they were under extreme duress even during the persecutions.

Indeed, a Muslim individual or group is more likely to have assassinated the caliph. Many were disillusioned by al-Hakim's reign. His fair, some would say partial, treatment of the *dhimmi* was one reason for their discontent. His involvement with and support of the followers of al-Darazi and Hamza would have been a greater issue of contention. Personal vengeance may also have been a factor. Al-Hakim's disappearance followed quickly on the heels of the black troops destroying parts of al-Fustat on his orders. Surely many innocents lost their lives in the three-day ordeal and personal revenge could certainly have sprung from that mire.

What is unusual, is that the Muslim population did not depose al-Hakim earlier in his reign. Many believed the caliph was indeed mad, a perfectly sound reason for relieving him of his office. That he was not removed from office on the grounds of insanity illustrates that the Egyptian people may not have been disagreeable to his rule.

Until recently, few historians have proposed the idea that al-Hakim was not murdered. As new sources are discovered it may become known that the caliph did leave Cairo in search of a simpler and holier life. As of yet, it is impossible to know for certain what happened that fateful night in the hills of Mt. Mukattam. But it is said, "The moon of truth, even if hidden for a time, will appear in the end in the fullness of its light."²¹

²¹ From the *sijill* proclaiming 'Abd al-Majid (al-Hafiz) Imam, as translated in Stern, "Succession," 208.

Appendix A

The Shi'i Line of Succession

Arabic numerals (1-12) indicate the line of succession of the Twelver Shi'i. Roman numerals (i-vii) indicate line of succession recognized by the Isma'ilis. Adapted from A. Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Harvard University Press, 1999) p. 486.

Appendix B

The Fatimid Caliphs (297-567/ 909-1171)

'Ubaidallah al-Mahdi	297-322/ 909-934
al-Qa'im	322-334/ 934-946
al-Mansur	334-341/ 946-953
al-Muizz	341-365/ 953-975
al-Aziz	365-386/ 975-996
al-Hakim	386-411/ 996-1021
az-Zahir	411-427/ 1021-1036
al-Mustansir	427-487/ 1036-1094
al-Musta'li	487-495/ 1094-1101
al-Amir	495-524/ 1101-1130
al-Hafez	524-544/ 1130-1149
al-Zafir	544-549/ 1149-1154
al-Fa'iz	549-555/ 1154-1160
al-'Adid	555-567/ 1160-1171

Appendix C

Ordinance of Toleration, given by al-Hakim in 399/1008.

This is to inform you that Amir al-Mominin al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah recites the verse of God's manifest Book before you that: "There is no compulsion in religion; truly the right path is now distinct from error. He that renounces idol-worship and puts faith in God, he indeed has laid hold on the firmest handle, which shall not break off, and God is Hearing and Knowing."

Yesterday passed away in prosperity and today came up with its necessities. O multitude of Muslims! I am an Imam and you are the Ummah. Verily, all Muslims are brothers with one another, therefore, you seek unity with the brothers and fear God. It is hoped that you shall be graced with mercy. One who confesses the *tauhid* (Unity of God) and *risalat* (Prophethood of Muhammad), and one who does not boost disunity between two persons, they all are included in the bond of Islamic Brotherhood. God saves those who had saved themselves through it. And those whom were to stop, they were stopped from all unlawful things, from slaughter, means and materials, and forbidden women. Best understanding and the following on the true path are good and excellent. The quarrels and dissensions are not good. The past events should not be repeated and given up as extremely harmful for the present time. It should not be remembered what occurred in the past, notably those events and occurrences being taken place during the rules of my ancestors. Who were they? They were Mahdi billah, Qaim bi-Amrillah, Mansur billah, Muizz li-dinillah and other [al-Aziz], who adopted the true

path. The condition of Mahdiya, Mansutia and Kairwan is quite apparent, not hidden from any one, nor even it is secret.

The fast-keepers may keep fast and break accordance with their rites. One should have no objection with the person who keeps and breaks fast (according to his own belief). Those who offer five obligatory prayers, they must continue it. No one should restrict or forbid one who offers the *salat al-dua* and *tarawih* (prayer in the month of Ramadan). Those who recite five *taqbir* on the funeral prayers, they should do so, and no person should forbid those who offer four *taqbir*. The muezzin should recite “come to the best of works” in the call to pray. One should not however tease those who do not recite these words in the call to prayer.

No ill words should be uttered to revile the Companions of the past, and one should have no objection against the eulogies being extolled for them. Let him oppose who is against them. Each Muslim is responsible for himself in the deception of religious matters. Verily, he has to return to God. He has his own book of deeds, whereupon depend his accounts.

O’ God’s servant! You follow the injunctions of the above decree being enforced today. No Muslim should hemper into the faith of other Muslims, and no person should oppose the beliefs of his friends. Amir al-Mominin has written down all these points for you in his decree. Nay, God says, O believers! You are accountable for none but yourselves; he that goes astray cannot harm you if you are on the right path. You shall all return to God and He will declare to you what you have done. May peace be upon you and divine grace.

Appendix D

Excerpt from Charter Found Posted to Mosque Wall after the Disappearance of al-Hakim

The friend of Allah, the Commander of the Believers, has at last abandoned all mortals to themselves wandering in their desert and in their state of blindness which they had preferred to guidance – just as Moses had abandoned his people – until perdition came near attacking them while they were unaware. He made his exit from their midst while they were in a state of doubt regarding him, disagreeing among themselves and faltering between different opinions, neither rendering obedience to truth nor returning to the friend of Allah. Allah has said: "But if they had referred it to Allah, to his Apostle and to those in authority among them, it would have become clear to those of them who fail to understand it."

O you people! The word of Allah (may he remain high!) is the most eloquent preacher, and what is clear from this sermon to you is your poverty and your need for the pardon of Allah (may he remain high!) and the pardon of his friend, the Commander of the Believers, upon whom Allah's peace is more abundant than upon you. Oblivion leads to negligence, negligence leads to rebellion, and rebellion leads to perdition. For Allah (may his name remain blessed and high!) has said: "But if they, having wronged themselves had come to thee asking Allah's forgiveness, and if the Apostle had asked forgiveness for them, they would surely have found Allah a forgiving and merciful one." The greatest of all sayers [Allah] has also said: "excepting those who shall repent and believe and do righteous works," "or verily Allah loveth those who seek his indulgence

and loveth those who wish to purify themselves," All (may he remain blessed and high!) has moreover said: "And when my worshippers ask thee concerning me [say] I am nigh unto them, ready to answer the supplication of him that calleth, when he calleth unto me."

Hasten, therefor, hasten, O you people! If you stand upon a desolate tract of land, then your eyes shall be directed towards the first road which was pursued by the Commander of the Believers (may Allah's peace be upon him!) when he disappeared. Assemble there, yourselves and your children, purify your hearts and make your intentions sincere toward Allah, the Lord of the universe. Repent before him in a true manner and beseech him by the best methods of supplication leading to pardon and forgiveness, so that he may show mercy to you by according you the return of his friend, and may turn his heart in compassion toward you; for he is mercy unto you and unto all his creation in accordance with what Allah (may he remain blessed and high!) has said to his Messenger [Muhammad] (may Allah's grace be upon him and upon his kin!): "We have not sent thee other than as mercy unto all creatures."

But be aware, beware lest any of you should try to trace the steps of the Commander of the Believers (may Allah's blessing be upon him!), or should attempt to discover any information whatsoever! Cease not at the beginning of the road to reiterate your prayer: "Behold our dwelling place!" And when the time comes for mercy to dawn upon you then shall the friend of Allah [al-Hakim] appear before you by his own accord, well satisfied with your conduct, visible in your midst.

Persist in the practice of these exercises, by day and by night, until the last day arrives, and the hour of judgement strikes, and the door of mercy is closed, and

vengeance befalls all people of disobedience and disbelief. "He is fully excused who has amply forewarned," he has nothing to blame upon himself with regard to your case: he has given you full warning.

This is addressed to the people of intelligence among you; it is they who are particularly meant by it. It is the will of Allah (may he remain blessed and high!), and through him all success is achieved.

Peace be upon whomsoever follows guidance, fears evil results of impiety, and believes in the excellent words of his Lord!

Map 1: Western Asia

Source: Albert Hourani. *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Harvard University Press, 1991) 465.

Map 2: Region between Cairo and Helwan

Source: Max Rodenbeck, *Cairo: The City Victorious* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999) x.

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