

ISLAMIC RITUAL PREACHING (*KHUṬBAS*)
IN A CONTESTED ARENA:
SHĪ'ĪS AND SUNNĪS, FATIMIDS AND ABBASIDS¹

*LA PREDICACIÓN LITÚRGICA ISLÁMICA (JUṬAB)
EN UN TERRENO DE CONFRONTACIÓN:
CHIĪES Y SUNĪES, FATIMĪES Y ABAŚĪES*

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Abstract: In circumstances of political and religious conflict, the Islamic ritual sermon could be traumatic, especially when such sermons signaled a change in allegiance from a Sunni to a Shī'ī ruler (or vice versa). For more than two centuries the Ismaili Fatimids confronted the Abbasids, each claiming for itself the right to be invoked in the official sermon in the congregational mosques. One dramatic example of this change of loyalty is illustrated by a verbatim copy of what the preacher said on the occasion. This text, together with a few others that have been preserved, offer an opportunity to analyze this genre of preaching in a contested arena.

Keywords: Islamic sermons; *khutba*; Ismaili Fatimids; caliphate; Arab-Islamic rhetoric.

Resumen: En contextos de conflicto político y religioso, el sermón litúrgico islámico podía ser traumático, sobre todo si aludía a cambios de lealtad de un líder suní a otro chií (o viceversa). Durante más de dos siglos los fatimíes ismailíes se enfrentaron a los abasíes, reclamando respectivamente para sí el derecho a ser invocados en los sermones oficiales en las mezquitas. Un ejemplo dramático de este cambio de lealtades queda ilustrado en una copia literal de lo que dijo el predicador en aquel momento. Ese texto, junto con otros pocos que se han conservado, permite analizar este tipo de predicación en un terreno de confrontación.

Palabras clave: sermones islámicos; *khutba*; fatimíes ismailíes; califato; retórica árabo-musulmana.

SUMMARY

1.– Introduction.– 2. Signaling changes in political allegiance in the *khutba*.– 3. Rhetoric and rhetorical strategies in the Fatimid *khutba*.– 4. Blessings and curses in the *khutba*.– 5. Conclusions.– 6. Appendix: Qirwāsh's *khutba*.– 7. Bibliography.

¹ This paper draws on and depends in part on my volume of collected Fatimid sermons, P.E. Walker, *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*. The thirteen *khutbas* included there are numbered from 1 to 13 and the numbers cited here below in the notes are to them as they appear in that book.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of dueling caliphates, a period of intense political and religious rivalry, especially between the Sunni Abbasids and the Ismaili Shī'ī Fatimids, a most public act in support of one over the other took place during in the Friday sermon, the *khuṭba*. Although not required by Islamic law, it had long become a fixed custom to ask, as a key part of these *khuṭbas*, for God to bestow His favors and benedictions upon the current ruler, the one recognized in that particular locale. Any change or alteration in that request, particularly an omission of a name or substitution of another, was noted and commented upon. It most often implied a switch of allegiance, religious or otherwise. Medieval chroniclers record such events carefully. It is in fact one of the surest methods of tracking where and when a given town moved from one political camp to another. The inscriptions on coins likewise indicate these shifts, but less immediately. In times of frequent alteration, the weekly sermon and its invocation offers the most accurate evidence of what precisely happened.

2. SIGNALING CHANGES IN POLITICAL ALLEGIANCE IN THE *KHUṬBA*

For the two and a half centuries (909-1171) that the Fatimids, first from North Africa and then from Cairo, were locked in a bitter conflict with their Baghdad rivals, the issues at stake were as much religious—Sunni versus Shī'ī Islam—as political and territorial, a matter of which party possessed the sole right to govern the Muslim community. Normally, within the domain of one, the Friday sermon was common routine, a ritual unexceptional in every way. However, for those rare moments of change, when the preacher invoked the name and titles of the enemy power instead of the one formerly recognized, all present would have noticed and reacted, with word of what occurred spreading rapidly far beyond the location of the mosque in which he preached. If the new language also signaled a conversion from Sunnism to Shī'ism (or vice versa) on the part of the local governor, those in attendance—the audience—might or might not have acquiesced, but about that in most cases we know little or nothing. Our sources follow the sentiments of rulers and occasionally comment on the person whose task it was to deliver the sermon but not ordinary people. Nonetheless how could these preachers, the *khaṭībs*, whose profession was the composition and pronouncement of the Friday *khuṭba*, so readily switch from one side to the other? Were they not religiously bound to a doctrine that precluded, or at least made impossibly difficult, such alteration, especially in so short a period?²

Relatively rapid back and forth variations were, to be sure, quite exceptional and most likely occurred in border towns and cities. A good example is Aleppo, and some other locations in Syria, which fell between the two Islamic empires. Mecca and Madina also witnesses years of turmoil both at the advent and the waning of Fatimid influence in the Hijaz, when competition on the part of the caliphs for acknowledgement from the local elite resulted in frequent alterations. However a most dramatic instance of this kind of switching, and perhaps the best known of them, took place in the year 401 (1010-1011), when the semi-independent 'Uqaylid ruler of northern Mesopotamia, Qirwāsh b. al-Muqallad, rather abruptly proclaimed his allegiance, not to the Abbasid caliph in nearby Baghdad, as was previously the case with him, but to the more distance Fatimid al-Ḥākīm bi-Amr Allāh in Egypt. Qirwāsh

² Most of the material presented in this article provides the perspective of the Shī'ī Fatimids. For the Sunni view, one might see, for example, M.J. Viguera Molins, *Los predicadores de la corte*.

had thus now become a subject of the caliph of Cairo; he had in effect instituted an appeal, a *da'wa*, on behalf of his former master's great rival. It was cause for anguish and apprehensive reproach in the east and for pride and celebration in the west. The two sides made as much of the event as they could.

The public manifestation of the change, as was typical of the times, occurred in the next subsequent Friday *khuṭba*, this one delivered appropriately in Qirwāsh's capital Mawṣil. The 'Uqaylid ruler simply handed his *khaṭīb* the text of the sermon for the occasion and the man dutifully read it to the assembled worshippers. In the weeks that followed a similar message was heard in the congregational mosques of other cities belonging to Qirwāsh, among them al-Anbār, al-Madā'in, Qaṣr ibn Hubayra, and probably Kūfa as well. Quite suddenly, and most likely unexpectedly, Iraq outside of, but nevertheless all around, Baghdad had gone over to the Fatimids. The Sunni caliphate was surely in mortal danger of a Shi'ī take over.

That it did not happen is due less to the actions undertaken by the rightly alarmed Abbasid caliph than by his much more powerful sponsor, the Buyid amir Bahā' al-Dawla. The Sunni caliph had no army himself and he could only employ a sort of moral persuasion that would prove effective solely on those already loyal to him. One was the famous theologian Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, whose anti-Ismaili proclivities were well known. But even al-Bāqillānī could do no more than appeal to Bahā' al-Dawla. The Buyids, who were inclined to Shi'ism on their own, nonetheless saw Qirwāsh's act as a challenge to them as well as to the Abbasids. The amir ordered 100,000 dinars to be spent either on a military option or as a bribe. Whichever one it was, it worked and Qirwāsh reversed himself. The *khuṭba* in his lands quickly reverted and once again called for God's blessing to fall on al-Qādir in Baghdad. The matter was therefore soon resolved in favor of the Abbasids.

In all, this incident represents therefore but a brief interval, ordinarily hardly worth more than a passing mention. The rivalry between the two caliphates was by then old. Even so, while not itself a lasting stage in this competition, an unexpected benefit of Qirwāsh's declaration of 401 is that a verbatim copy of the actual text of the *khuṭba* he issued for the occasion survived. And, most curiously, it was carefully preserved by the anti-Ismaili Baghdadi historian Ibn al-Jawzī, and from him by the much later Egyptian Ibn Taghri Birdī³. For a vehemently anti-Fatimid writer to include this *khuṭba*, which is clearly Shi'ī as well as pro-Fatimid, in its entirety, is at the least curious. But beyond that what is odder even still is that it is the sole complete example of a standard Friday *khuṭba* on behalf of the Fatimids to reach us⁴.

The historians of medieval Islam regularly report changes of allegiance that were announced in the Friday sermon, but they seldom tell us more about what was actually said in the process. They do not, as a general rule, comment on the body of the sermon. They are interested in politics not in the subtleties of expression or nuances of doctrine. Therefore to learn more it is essential to have available to us whole texts, at best verbatim copies of at least some of the *khuṭbas*, perhaps representative samples. Although all but unique, Qirwāsh's declaration of 401 provides, therefore, just about the only evidence of this kind we have. This one sermon must stand for the rest of which there would have been thousands and thousands.

Sunni historians, principally Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn Taghri Birdī, also had a hard time making sense of this incident, even though they provide far more details about it than any other sources. Both historians insist that the inhabitants

³ Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntazam*, vol. VII, pp. 248-251; Ibn Taghri Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, vol. IV, pp. 224-227.

⁴ For an English translation of the full text see the appendix at the end of this paper.

of Mawṣil agreed to the change with the *positive response of an enslaved flock, while concealing their true aversion and disgust*, and both marvel at how easily the *khaṭīb*, who had previously pronounced the sermon in the name of the Abbasid caliph, al-Qādir, would acquiesce in the change, which amounted to converting from Sunni to Shī'i Islam. They offer a list of rather sumptuous new accoutrements –by implication a bribe– bestowed on him for the occasion. The list is clearest in Ibn Taghrī Birdī. But one explanation for Qirwāsh's having bestowed what amounts to a *khil'a*, a formal robe of honor, on his *khaṭīb* is that the Fatimid colors were white whereas those of the Abbasids were black. Accordingly, *the qabā' dabīqiyya*, a tunic of *dabīqī* linen, mentioned by him would have been white to symbolize the change officially⁵.

Thus these Sunni authorities are convinced that the new *khutba* disgusted the audience who heard it, in part thereby indicating that they had decidedly not agreed to become Shī'is. Also they hint that the preacher went along with the change in response to a bribe. However neither claim is likely to have been as totally valid as these authors insist. Their words have the feel of Abbasid propaganda against the Fatimids, which is, in many other situations, reasonably easy to spot. Still, although we are fortunate enough to have the whole text of the sermon, we have no sure way of learning the exact religious sentiments of either the *khaṭīb* or the populations of Mawṣil in 401. The audience for Qirwāsh's declaration was likely mixed, some leaning toward the Shī'a, others against them, just as similarly would have been true even in Egypt or North Africa when they were both Fatimid territories.

Another case of major importance is the first Friday sermon following the Fatimid conquest of Egypt. For it, although the whole text does not exist, the crucial portion has come down to us. Ibn Taghrī Birdī, the same historian mentioned above, reports that, immediately after seizing control, Jawhar cut the *khutba* for the Abbasids and prohibited the wearing of black, replacing it with white. He commanded that the *khutba* everywhere have added to it:

O God, bless Muḥammad, the chosen, 'Alī, the approved, and Fāṭima, the chaste, and al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the two grandsons of the messenger, from whom God has removed impurity and purged of all sin. Bless the pure imams, the forefathers of the Commander of the Believers, al-Mu'izz li-Dīn Allāh⁶.

The message, clear to all, is unmistakably Shī'i. Yet another account relates a portion of the first *khutba* delivered in Fuṣṭāṭ.

When it was Friday with ten days left in Sha'bān, Jawhar went down with the army to the Old Mosque [in Fuṣṭāṭ] for Friday prayers. Hibat Allāh b. Aḥmad, the deputy of 'Abd al-Samī' b. 'Umar al-'Abbāsī [i.e. the *khaṭīb* of that mosque] gave the *khutba* wearing white⁷.

⁵ In addition he was given a yellow turban, pants of red brocade and red shoes. See A. Metz, *Renaissance of Islam*, p. 325.

⁶ The date for the first use of the new formula was Friday the 8th of Dhū'l-Qa'da (according to Ibn Khallikān). Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, vol. IV, p. 36; al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz al-ḥunafā'*, vol. I, p. 117.

⁷ The name *al-'Abbāsī* "the Abbasid" indicates that this man was a member of the Abbasid family and thus a relative of the Abbasid caliph. Jawhar confirmed him as the *khaṭīb* of the mosque of 'Amr in Fuṣṭāṭ and he held that post at least until 365.

When he reached the prayer portion (the second *khutba*), he read the following from a written note:

O God, bless Your servant and Your deputy, the fruit of prophecy, scion of the rightly guided guiding family, the servant of God, the Imam Ma'add Abū Tamīm al-Mu'izz li-Dīn Allāh, Commander of the Believers, just as You blessed his pure forefathers and his predecessors, the rightly guided imams.

O God, raise high his rank and advance his word, make his proofs clear, bring the community together in obedience to him and their hearts loving friends of his, make guidance follow his sanction, have him inherit the eastern parts of the land and its west, have him be master of the beginning of things and their outcomes, for truly You speak and Your word is the truth. "We had written in the Psalms after the remembrance that the servants of righteousness shall inherit the earth" [21: 105].

Your religion has been subject to vexation. When that which is sacred to You was defiled, *jihād* on Your behalf extinguished, pilgrimage to Your house and visitation of the tomb of Your messenger (...) disrupted, he made his preparations for the *jihād*, got ready everything necessary and sent the armies to support You. He expended funds in adherence to You, taking pains to please You, to curb those who are foolish and restrain those who are arrogant, to cause the truth to appear and the false to come to nothing. So, O God, support the armies that he has sent and the detachments that he charge with fighting the polytheists, contending with the heretics, defending the Muslims, building up of the border territories and the holy places, eradicating injustice, suspicions and greed, and spreading justice throughout the nations.

O God, make his banners stand high and prominent, his armies dominant and victorious; plant righteousness through him and by his hand; and grant us through him supreme protections⁸.

Whereas the briefer phrases were to be included in all *khutbas* everywhere in the newly conquered territories, the longer version applied to a specific event and depended on having a written text for the *khaṭīb* to read. The source suggests, in any case, that the preacher delivered his regular *khutba* for the first of the two halves of the sermon and referred to the written text only for the second. What has reached us is the latter –i.e. written– portion only.

The holy cities of the Hijaz possessed huge symbolic significance to the rival caliphates. The caliph could claim ultimate supremacy only if he controlled them. The Fatimids obtained recognition in Mecca and Madina with the advent of the caliph al-Mu'izz in Egypt. The *khutba* there named them thereafter until the pro-Abbasid Seljuks grew powerful enough to contest it. As with other cities and regions, however, the *khutba* in Mecca and Madina could revert even then⁹. Aleppo in northern Syria witnessed frequent changes of allegiances throughout the 5th/11th century. The Zīrids in North Africa likewise both renounced their recognition of the Fatimids and returned to it on several occasions, beginning in the mid-5th/11th century and continuing onward to the time of al-Āmir in the early part of the next.

Nor were *khutbas* accorded this level of political importance solely within the lands of Islam. An interesting case is that of Constantinople and the Byzantine

⁸ al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz al-ḥunafā'*, vol. I, pp. 114-115.

⁹ Various medieval chronicles preserve details of these changes back and forth. See my *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, p. 8, note 11 and the references there.

empire. Fatimid relations with the Byzantines continued, at times with animosity and other periods with peace, for two centuries or more. In the year 378/988, a treaty concluded with Byzantium stipulated, among other provisions, that the *khuṭba* said in the mosque of Constantinople name the Fatimid caliph al-‘Āzīz as the Muslim supreme authority¹⁰. It is difficult to imagine that the congregation of Muslims in the Byzantine capital was large enough to be significant. However, renewals of this treaty maintained that provision. In 418/1027, a treaty with the Emperor made sure that *khuṭbas* in the lands of the Byzantines were to name only the Fatimid al-Zāhir. The mosque in Constantinople is to reopen, it says, and in exchange al-Zāhir will permit the reopening of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (both were evidently closed in the period prior to this)¹¹. Three decades later, in 447/1055, this stipulation remained in effect (or had been renewed in subsequent treaties), when an ambassador from the Seljuk sultan Tughril Beg arrived in Constantinople and asked if he could use its mosque. The Emperor granted him permission. The man went to the mosque on Friday to say his prayer and while there also gave a *khuṭba* in the name of the Abbasid caliph al-Qā’im. At the same time the qadī Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Qudā’ī, who was the official representative of the Fatimid caliph al-Mustaṣfir, happened to be in Constantinople on behalf of his own master. He reported this breach of the treaty to Cairo, whereupon al-Mustaṣfir revoked its provisions and ordered that all the goods and possessions in the Holy Sepulchre be seized by the government, leading predictably to a serious deterioration of relations with the Byzantines¹². Yet it is unclear if the Byzantines fully appreciated how a small gesture on their part –allowing a visitor to use the mosque– could cause such an aggressive reaction elsewhere. Or how easily one Muslim could violate standing policy by his choice of a simply benediction in a Friday sermon.

Changing the *khuṭba* might come with other symbolic measures as well beyond the naming of the new ruler and altering the color of the preacher’s robes. In 450/1058, when the amir al-Basāsiri captured Baghdad on behalf of the Fatimids, he had the *khuṭba* read in the name of al-Mustaṣfir in all its mosques and the *muṣallā* (the festival grounds) one by one. Al-Maqrīzī reports that, on the Feast of the Immolation (*īd al-nahr*), he smashed the *minbar* (pulpit) in the *maṣjid* (mosque) in Baghdad and built a new one, stating *this [old] minbar is sinister; from it hatred of the family of Muḥammad has been proclaimed*¹³.

But the other side could be equally as vociferous. A case in point involves the Zirids. They were theoretically vassals of the caliph in Cairo. The Ṣanhāja Berbers from which tribe these rulers came were not, however, ever converted to Ismailism. Most remained Maliki Sunni even while supporting, at first loyally, the Fatimid cause. Thus they were partisans of the Fatimid caliphate politically, but not religiously. al-Mu‘izz b. Bādīs, the Zirid ruler, preserved the trappings of continued allegiance, notably the *khuṭba*, until 440/1048-49. In that year he cut his ties to Cairo for the first time. The Maghribi (Sunni) historian Ibn ‘Idhārī reports that he ceased the *khuṭba* in favor of the lord of Egypt and burned the banners of the Fatimids. He also quotes from the poet Ibn Sharaf al-Qayrawānī, who was extremely well connected at the Zirid court and lived contemporary to the event¹⁴. He offers a detailed account of

¹⁰ Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, vol. IV, p. 152.

¹¹ al-Maqrīzī, *Itti ‘āz al-ḥunafā’*, vol. II, p. 176.

¹² Ibn Muyassar, *al-Muntaqā min Akhbār Miṣr*, p. 14.

¹³ al-Maqrīzī, *Itti ‘āz al-ḥunafā’*, vol. II, p. 254.

¹⁴ On this man see “Ibn Sharaf al-Qayrawānī” by Ch. Pellat in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd. edition.

this al-Mu'izz's switching the *khuṭba* to the Abbasids, thereby putting an end to the *da'wa* of the Fatimids. The reason given by him is that, following the departure of the caliph from the Maghrib in the middle of the previous century, the appeal of the Fatimids –recitation of their names from the *minbars*– was resented so strongly that fewer and fewer attended the Friday service, leaving the mosques empty. After many years the Zīrid ruler finally, according to this view, came to agree with his subjects, broke off the *khuṭba* in their favor, and divorced himself from them. On top of that he ordered his *khaṭīb*, commencing with the *khuṭba* of the next *'id al-adhā*, to insert into the *khuṭba* a cursing of the Fatimids. Ibn Sharaf preserved a copy of the portion that contained this curse and we have it even now¹⁵.

It is worth wondering again, as the medieval authors often do, how the same *khaṭīb* could, after perhaps years of calling upon God to bless the Fatimid caliphs, suddenly recite a string of curses against them, asking that God do the same. But this problem occurred often enough as we have seen. In the obituaries of famous preachers, their biographers might note, as in one example, that 'Abd al-Karīm b. al-Ḥusayn Abu'l-Barakāt, a well-respected preacher, had said the *khuṭba* in Damascus for both the Abbasids and the Fatimids¹⁶. And, as with Qirwāsh's *khaṭīb* in 401 and the example here for the Zīrids, there are many more like him¹⁷.

Most *khuṭbas* were never copied; and it is probable that on the vast majority of occasions the preacher spoke extemporaneously, perhaps embellishing a memorized sermon, or elements thereof. Famous *khaṭībs* –those noted for their rhetorical skills and eloquence– did in certain instances assemble collections of their work in book form, providing in turn models for others in the profession. However, it is difficult now to determine which of them might have been originally actually read in a mosque rather than composed solely for the book. Thus, while such books of sample sermons may have value as literature, they tell us little about historical events. Under such conditions, the survival of a verbatim copy of Qirwāsh's *khuṭba* is extraordinary.

We may have the copy of Qirwāsh's *khuṭba* because it was not merely a written text, which seems to have been a basic requirement for survival, but because copies of it circulated to the other cities of his domain. The same *khuṭba* was likely used in al-Anbār, Qaṣr and al-Madā'in, and perhaps elsewhere in towns unnamed in our reports. Obviously agents of the Abbasid caliph obtained an example of it, which thus made it available to later historians such as the Baghdad-based Ibn al-Jawzī. The one portion of the first *khuṭba* in Egypt similarly survives because it began as a written text.

Within their own domain the Fatimids ruled a diverse population; their subjects belonged to a complete array of Islamic sects and schools. Even the chief justices, men who had ultimate responsibility for the *khuṭba* and the *khaṭībs* employed under their supervision, were frequently not Ismaili. Many judges were Maliki or Hanafi, in other words, Sunnis¹⁸. Yet a basic stipulation of holding such offices required acceptance of the *khuṭba* that was said in the name of the Fatimid caliph. Muslims attending Friday

¹⁵ Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-mughrib*, pp. 277-278. The curse is fairly elaborate and full of invectives, given that al-Mu'izz and the Zīrids were later to revert to the Fatimids on more than one occasion.

¹⁶ Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, vol. V, p. 138.

¹⁷ Not all *khaṭībs* so readily acquiesced. In 401 when the change of the *da'wa* first reached al-Anbār and was presented to the resident *khaṭīb*, rather than accept, he fled from there to Kūfa to avoid it (Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. VII, p. 251).

¹⁸ A notable example is Ibn Abī'l-'Awwām, mentioned later, who was Ḥanafī, but there were many others.

services anywhere within the empire would hear the preacher ask God to bestow His blessings on these Ismaili imams. The average citizen need accept what he heard only passively. Even so he could not escape at least a basic level of recognition of those who ruled over him without fleeing or hiding, and there is little evidence of that, not withstanding the resistance in the Maghrib cited above. Many other parts of the Fatimid Empire accepted their rule without protest. These caliphs enjoyed considerable support and evident loyalty from all their subjects. Willingness to listen to that *khuṭba* would have constituted a minimal requirement for citizenship within their territory.

The Friday sermon is a required element in Islamic ritual; it is universally acknowledged by Muslims and performed in every weekly service as part of the community's congregational worship. Its origin is extremely old, going back to the practice of the Prophet, perhaps even earlier. Many of the provisions for it are common to the several *madhhabs*, including the Shī'a. The Fatimids were no exception¹⁹. Typically, the ordinary sermon, which precedes prayers, is delivered by a professional preacher. Under the Fatimids *khaṭībs* (the Arabic plural is *khuṭabā'*) were government officials employed by the judiciary. Although the Fatimids continued to maintain the *da'wa*, its teaching and proselytizing organization, which was likewise a bureau of the government, the *khuṭba* was not the responsibility of the chief *dā'ī* or of his missionaries. Apparently the *dā'ī*, who as members of the *da'wa* were the agents for the religious appeal of the Fatimid imams, did not deliver such sermons. Thus there was a distinction in this regard between the *khaṭīb*, the preacher, and the *dā'ī*, even though both were agents of the government. One obvious difference is that preaching was considered a public activity open to a wide and diverse audience, whereas the *da'wa* was restricted to a smaller group consisting solely of those who had sworn an oath of religious devotion to the imam.

A late source reports that the salary allocated for individual *khaṭībs* was ten to twenty dinars per month²⁰, which is a not inconsiderable amount, and indicates how important they were²¹. A passage from a section of al-Qalqashandī's manual of chancery practice includes the text of a decree of appointment for a judge under the Fatimids. One paragraph in it is devoted to the role of the *khaṭībs* whose job he is to supervise:

The *khaṭībs* are the knights of the *minbars*, the tongues of those assembled, the spokesmen of the sacred rituals, and the leaders of the congregations. They are the emissaries of the heart to its lofty station by means of the ears, its purifier that makes hearts overcome its illnesses. His warfare drives away the satans of the communities when they commit aggression against them. He gives expression to guidance and uses his eloquence to the utmost to lead them rightly. He perfects the articulation of the letters so that they serve to enable their fulfillment and manifestation. His exhortation unties from the hardened eyes the knots that bind them and he calls to the rusted hearts until his cry unleashes their tears. He wears proudly the robes of high dignity so that *minbars* appear properly dressed because of him. His sermons nourish the souls when they come to him seeking assistance and appealing for help²².

¹⁹ For some indication of Fatimid doctrine in regard to the *khuṭba*, see Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, part one, pp. 182-187, English translation, vol. I, pp. 227-233.

²⁰ al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz al-hunafā'*, vol. III, p. 340.

²¹ There is unfortunately little specific discussion of the appointment of individuals to the office of *khaṭīb*, the *khaṭāba*. But see *Orations of the Fatimid Caliph*, p. 6, n. 8, for some references.

²² This document was written by Qāḍī al-Fāḍil on behalf of the final Fatimid caliph al-Āḍid for the appointment of a judge who is not named (al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*, vol. 10, pp. 424-434); the paragraph about the *khaṭīb* is found on pp. 432-433.

Just as they would have been in other regions of the Islamic world, these “knights of the *minbar*”, whether Ismaili or not, were, under the Fatimids, men of distinction and religious probity.

Other occasions for the *khuṭba* include the two ‘*id* festivals: ‘*id al-ḥajj*, breaking of the fast following the close of Ramaḍān, and ‘*id al-adhā* (also called ‘*id al-nahr*) the feast of sacrifice on the 10th of Dhu’l-Ḥijja. *Khuṭbas* may be a part of rituals for special purposes such as an eclipse, a drought, or an appeal for a *jihād*. A festival *khuṭba*, which, in contrast to that of Fridays, follows prayers, conforms to the occasion of it, featuring instructions to the congregation on the stipulations for either the *zakāt al-ḥajj* (alms due at the breaking of the fast) or for proper and acceptable sacrifice (i.e. what animals may be slaughtered and how)²³. This later type of *khuṭba* was, in Fatimid lands, the responsibility of the imam-caliph in person, who delivered it personally whenever possible. Luckily more examples of it, although even so few enough, survive.

With the addition of some dozen of this type, the material for analysis becomes that much richer, although not precisely of the same order as the common Friday sermon, which is therefore different in many respects. Even so the rhetoric in them and its use can tell us a great deal about how the imam-caliph sought to engage an audience often at odds with him. The festival sermon could thus also involve a contested arena, though seldom as dramatic as that of Qirwāsh. A major exception comes from early in the reign when the future caliph al-Qā’im preached the sermon to a hostile Egyptian crowd during a military incursion. That text which survives provides some of the most vehement denunciations of Fatimid enemies to appear in the surviving literature.

Many of the reports we have provide detailed descriptions of the festival itself, but not necessarily joined to a copy of the text, which rarely exists. The first of those in Egypt is a nice example of such detail.

On the day of fast-breaking [in 362], al-Mu‘izz rode in procession to the *muṣallā* of Cairo that Jawhar had constructed for the ‘*id* prayer (...). al-Mu‘izz approached in full attire²⁴ with his banners and coverings. He prayed with the people the prayer of the ‘*id* at full length and completely, reciting for the first, after the Sūrat al-Fātiḥa, “Has the story of the overwhelming event reached you” [88: 1] ²⁵. Following the recitation, he pronounced the *takbīr*, bowed for a long time, and prostrated at length (...). Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān relayed the *takbīr* from him. In the second he recited, after the Fātiḥa, the Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā [no. 93] and said the *takbīr* following the recitation. This was the prayer of his grandfather ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. He held the bowed position and the prostration in the second also at length (...). When he had completed the prayer he mounted the *minbar* greeting the people on the right and the left. Next he unfurled the two banners that were on the *minbar* and he delivered the *khuṭba* with them to the front of

²³ On the role of the *khuṭba* in Islamic ritual, see “*Khuṭba*” by A.J. Wensinck in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, and for the Shi‘i (Fatimid) rules for it according to the imams, see the section on ritual prayer in Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s *Da‘ā’im al-Islām*, particularly Arabic pp. 182-187, translation pp. 227-232.

²⁴ The attire of the imam on these occasions was highly important if only for ritual purposes. Note the hadith quoted from the imams by Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān in the *Da‘ā’im al-Islām* (translation pp. 228 and 230) to the effect that the imams on Friday and the two festivals should wear their finest. Requirements of royal prestige obviously added another dimension.

²⁵ On the recitation of this passage as well as other details of the ‘*id* prayer see the hadith of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq related by Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān in his *Da‘ā’im al-Islām*, vol. I, p. 186, translation vol. I, p. 232.

him. On the highest step of the *minbar*, there was a heavy brocaded cushion for him to sit on between the two *khuṭbas*. He began the sermon with “In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate”. With him on the *minbar* were Jawhar, ‘Ammār b. Ja‘far, and Shafī‘, the bearer of the royal parasol. Then he commenced with “God is great, God is great”, opening with this. He preached so eloquently the people cried. His *khuṭba* was humble and submissive.

When he had completed the *khuṭba*, he departed with his troops, followed by his four sons wearing armor and helmets riding on horses in the finest attire. Two elephants preceded him²⁶.

The record for the reign of his grandson al-Ḥākīm, to cite another example, is spotty and uncertain; no copies of what he said in any of his *khuṭbas* survive. Even so one account from the year 395 offers the following description of one such event:

The Mosque of Rāshida was fitted out and the caliph rode to it on the feast of fast-breaking, wearing a plain yellow robe with an indeterminate turban on his head, which had been wrapped on his head with a hanging tail and with a jewel between his eyes²⁷. In front of him in the procession were six horses bearing saddles studded with jewels, six elephants and five giraffes. He prayed with the people the ‘*id*’ prayer and preached to them. In his *khuṭba* he cursed his enemy oppressor as was his due and those who would spread false rumors about him. The commander of the armies and the chief judge climbed the *minbar* with him²⁸.

Most reports of this type are important less for what they say about the giving of the *khuṭba* than for the information they provide about the procession to the place where it was given. Obviously the ceremony on these occasions needed to be as elaborate as possible. The number and type of animals was one key element. From only a few years before, an account of the Zīrid ruler’s procession to the *muṣallā* in 387 describes him as wearing the finest attire and being preceded by an elephant, two giraffes and “a gleaming white camel the like of which had never been seen before”²⁹. There are also descriptions of family members and other notables who walked behind the caliph and in what order. However, as interesting as these ceremonies might be, it is the language of the actual *khuṭba*, its rhetoric, that concerns us here. How, in a situation fraught with potential conflict between Sunnī and Shī‘ī, did the speaker convey his message? Was the Shiism of the dynasty obvious and always present?

3. RHETORIC AND RHETORICAL STRATEGIES IN THE FRIDAY *KHUṬBA*

Whoever delivers the Friday *khuṭba*, or that of the two ‘*id*’ festivals, must assume the responsibility of employing terms and phrases aimed at a broad audience, the rhetoric, in other words, of public address. To understand fully what might have been involved, we ought to have a much larger sample of these sermons. But, although

²⁶ This account is from al-Maqrīzī’s *Itti‘āz al-ḥunafā’* (vol. I, pp. 137-138) but ultimately from Ibn Zūlāq. In al-Maqrīzī’s notes from Ibn Muyassar’s *History of Egypt (Akhbār Miṣr, A.F. Sayyid edition, pp. 159-160)* the same passage appears, indicating that this work was his source for it.

²⁷ P. Sanders, *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo*, p. 25.

²⁸ al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz al-ḥunafā’*, vol. II, p. 58.

²⁹ Ibn ‘Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-mughrib*, vol. I, pp. 238-239.

the evidence is not as plentiful as we might want, what we do have is all the more precious for its rarity. If we cannot expect definitive answers, we nonetheless have important material to investigate in the sermons that survive.

The Fatimid caliphs obviously always guarded carefully what they said, but perhaps no more so than on the occasions of the *khuṭbas* just described when they spoke before an audience that may well have included a vast array of their subjects, representing many different religious inclinations –Sunnis and Shi'is of various kinds– and also a variety of ranks: men of the elites from both the military and the bureaucracy, merchants, religious scholars, and the common folk among them. These rulers knew well that the audience for such *khuṭbas* likely consisted both of their most loyal subjects and at the same time others less attached, possibly some who harbored grave doubts about them, even hostility. The surviving *khuṭba* by al-Qā'im in Alexandria in 302 acknowledges such conditions forthrightly. The future imam even anticipated the resistance and possible enmity of the Egyptians to himself and his dynasty³⁰. The ceremonial *khuṭba* was open at least theoretically to all Muslims, not simply to Ismaili believers, and the person speaking had to take that fact into account in choosing his words. The sermon for the festival, moreover, was delivered at the *muṣallā*, which was always a large open space designed to accommodate the maximum number of worshipers at one time. The Friday *khuṭba* given inside a mosque naturally limited the size of the audience. No so that of the *'id*.

With crowds so large it is fair to ask how many could actually hear what was said. Even in a mosque that may have been a problem. The congregation was under strict rule to maintain absolute silence. A hadith on the authority of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq states clearly *When the imam stands up to deliver his sermon, it is obligatory for the congregation to observe complete silence*³¹. Nevertheless, in the open air of the *muṣallā*³², surely only those close to the *minbar* heard the words of the imam directly. Perhaps the same was true in the largest congregational mosques. But this difficulty was in part overcome by having a series of voices relay the message out beyond the reach of the speaker's own immediate circle.

It is likely that those allowed to be close to the imam had a special claim to this privilege, either through rank or proven loyalty. From the descriptions provided by eyewitnesses from the last phase of Fatimid rule, it is clear that the protection of the caliph was taken seriously whenever he appeared in public. The occasion of the *khuṭba* required careful control of exactly who came into close proximity to him. One note indicates that no one outside of the governing elite was admitted to the ceremony without being vouchsafed by the chief *dā'ī*. That stipulation would appear to confine the scope of the public audience –that is, those from outside the government– to Ismailis. Only Ismailis would have had access to the *dā'ī*. This condition, however, may have applied more to the Friday *khuṭba* that the caliph gave in Ramaḍān in a mosque than to the festivals. In any case there is no comparable evidence about such a restriction from the earlier periods.

One important detail in two of the *khuṭbas* from North Africa, however, features a direct appeal by name to the Kutāma Berbers, who must therefore have constitute a major portion of the audience at the time. The first instance is particularly

³⁰ For more detail about what he said on that occasion see below.

³¹ Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, vol. I, pp. 182, 186, translation vol. I, pp. 227-228, 231.

³² The Imam Ja'far had stated that “The prayers on the two festivals should be offered neither under a roof nor in a house. For the Messenger of God used to go out of [Madina] until the horizon would come into view [far away from habitation] and place his forehead on the bare earth”, Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, p. 185, translation, p. 230.

striking. It occurs in the *khuṭba* read to the army during Abū Yazīd's siege of al-Mahdiyya in Rajab 333 (March 945). In the name of al-Qā'im, the judge al-Marwadhi praises the Kutāma, whose forefathers had performed so gloriously both in keeping the rights of the Fatimid line safe when it had been forced into hiding and in fighting for its return to triumphal victory. *You were the cache where God placed this Muhammadan, Fatimid, mahdist right [to the imamate] until He caused it to triumph. You are, it goes on to say, like the apostles of Jesus and the Anṣār of Muḥammad.* The appeal here is so specific we must conclude that the audience on that occasion was predominantly if not exclusively Kutāma Berber. The second instance is the festival sermon for the 'īd al-ḥiṭr of 336, again at al-Mahdiyya. In it al-Manṣūr addresses part of his remarks to the Kutāma, noting effusively God's favors to them and thus their special status in the Imam's eyes, and how pleased he is with them and their devotion to the Fatimid dynasty.

An element in the rhetorical strategy of these *khuṭbas* may have involved the use of phrases that a Sunni audience would understand differently from the Shī'a. For example the commonly employed words 'Alī walīy Allāh ("Alī is the walīy of God"), which eventually appeared on all Fatimid coins and is quite standard in Shī'a discourse of every type, is readily taken by Sunnis to mean "Alī is the friend of God". Ordinarily, because this sense of the word walīy, which is perfectly valid for it, is not objectionable, it causes no resistance or hostility on their part. For the Shī'a, however, it means more than 'friend'. 'Alī was, in their view the 'guardian' (walīy, in a different sense) of God's community on earth. He was thus the agent of God with exclusive authority to act as regent for the Muslims; he is their guardian.

One good example, albeit by mistake, of how Sunnis might misread the words of a Fatimid *khuṭba* occurs with the line in Qirwāsh's Friday sermon about God, *who, by His light, caused the rising of the sun of truth from the west.* Islamic messianic speculation, even among Sunnis, regarded the signal for the end of time as the rising of the sun from its place of setting, in other words of time being made to reverse course or to cease altogether. With the Shī'a, in expectation of the return of this or that imam, who had temporarily gone into occultation, such speculations are more pronounced. The doctrine of several early Shī'i sects included a rising of the imam from the west, from where he will restore true Islam and reclaim his rightful position as head of the Muslim community. The Fatimids, who had first attained power in the Maghrib, i.e. in the west, naturally made the most of this concept. They were, beginning with al-Mahdī, but subsequently collectively, the embodiment of such messianic aspirations. With their rising to the imamate in the westernmost region of the Islamic realm, these speculations had become a reality. But, in at least one major source that reports these opening words of Qirwāsh's *khuṭba* – Ibn al-Athīr's early 7th/13th century universal history, *al-Kāmil fi'l-ta'rikh* – some copies have changed the word *west* to *Arabs*, which in Arabic script is quite easy: instead of *al-gharb* (the west), read *al-'arab* (the Arabs), the difference is a dot above the Arabic letter غ or غ.³³ Thus the key phrase would have the *sun of truth rising from the Arabs*, which would sound quite reasonable to a Sunni audience.

To bear witness or testify that Muḥammad was the prophet and messenger of God is a standard feature of the *khuṭba* in general. Most of the attributes ascribed to Muḥammad in Fatimid *khuṭbas*, moreover, agreed well with such statements in those not by them. What is different and uniquely Fatimid is the reference to him as the *grandfather*, e.g. of the current caliph, or, as it most often appears, as "our

³³ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi'l-ta'rikh*, vol. IX, p. 223. This edition, in fact, prefers the reading *al-'arab*, listing *al-gharb* in the notes as an alternate given by one of the manuscripts.

grandfather”, as in the invocation of God’s blessings on “our grandfather” (*jiddinā*). The meaning, of course, is ancestor or forefather, but it carries a special connotation in conjunction with references to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who is always called “our father” (*abūnā, abinā*).

4. BLESSINGS AND CURSES IN THE FATIMID *KHUṬBA*

References and characterizations of ‘Alī are particularly important as a sign of the ancestral lineage of the Fatimids and of the Shi‘ī assertion of legitimacy for its imamate. ‘Alī bears the title Commander of the Believers, which, for the Shi‘a, applies to him alone among the companions of the Prophet since they do not recognize any of the others as valid successors to the imamate. In his position as heir to the Prophet, both physically and spiritually, he carries also the title of Legatee (in Arabic *waṣī*). In Qirwāsh’s *khuṭba* he is called the Lord of the Legatees (*sayyid al-waṣiyyin*). Another appellation denotes his close family relationship to Muḥammad, which for the Shi‘a means, in reference to ‘Alī, brother. For them the Prophet had adopted him as his own brother. He was, moreover, in the same position as had been Aaron with respect to his brother Moses. The Prophet had stated, according to a hadith of special importance to the Shi‘a, that, ‘*Alī is to me as Aaron was to Moses*.

Here follow some examples from the *khuṭbas*:

and bless the first to respond to him [i.e. the Prophet], ‘Alī, the Commander of the Believers and Lord of the Legatees, the establisher of excellence and mercy, the pillar of knowledge and wisdom, the root of the noble and righteous tree generated from the sacred and pure trunk. And [blessings be] on his successors, the lofty branches of that same tree, and on what comes from it: the fruit that grows there³⁴.

God bless our grandfather, Muḥammad, the guide to the shining path, and our father, the Commander of the Believers, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, his brother and son of his paternal uncle, whom he sanctioned for the position of executor, and the chaste imams among the descendants of both, the clear evident proofs of God to His creatures³⁵.

And bless, O God, our father, the Commander of the Believers, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who held the place with respect to him that had Aaron with Moses, the one who spoke to God³⁶.

From a brief mention of a ritual of mutual cursing which is apparently what is taking place in Qur’ān 3:61,

If any one disputes this with you after the knowledge has come to you, say, “Come, let us gather our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves; then let us pray and invoke the curse of God on those who lie”.

an entire tradition developed around the implied story of Muḥammad having brought under his cloak on that occasion his immediate family members. They were the *aṣḥāb al-kisā’* (the Companions of the Cloak). The question then became who exactly

³⁴ *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, Qirwāsh’s *khuṭba* (n. 11).

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, *Khuṭba* of al-Āmir (n. 12).

belonged to this set. For the Shi‘a this has never been much of a question since they include only the Prophet, ‘Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. The non-Shi‘a dispute the matter and they have alternate interpretations of the tradition³⁷. However, in the Fatimid *khuṭbas*, as one would expect, the Shi‘i point of view prevails, as in the following passages from them.

O God, bless Your servant and Your messenger with a perpetually perfect blessing, increase him with an honor to his honor and a nobility to his nobility. Bless also all of the Companions of the Cloak (*aṣḥāb al-kisā’*), the pure ones, the immaculates: ‘Alī, the Commander of the Believers, Fāṭima the radiant, mistress of the women of the two worlds, and al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the two most noble and most righteous, and [bless] the rightly guided imams among the progeny of al-Ḥusayn, the luminaries of guidance, the full moons of the darkness, the masters of mankind, friends of the Most Merciful, the proofs of times, and pillars of the faith³⁸. the rightly guided (mahdist) imams among his noble and chaste progeny who have been chosen for the caliphate and approved for the imamate, confirming their proof in the testament of the messenger, making obedience to them necessary in the revelation, after His conferring excellence on them over the world through the parentage of Muḥammad, the lord of the messengers, and ‘Alī, the most excellent of the legatees, those whose mother was the mistress of women, the fifth of the Companions of the Cloak³⁹.

The third caliph al-Manṣūr speaks of Fāṭima as *the radiant, mistress of the women of the two worlds* or, *the radiant, mistress of the women of the two worlds*, and in yet another *khuṭba*, in reference to his own father and grandfather, the imams al-Qā‘im and al-Mahdī, he calls her *Fāṭima, the radiant virgin*⁴⁰, *your mother*. In a sermon by the fourth caliph al-Mu‘izz the rightly guiding imams are *those whose mother was the mistress of women, the fifth of the Companions of the Cloak*. Similar characterizations appear in the *khuṭbas* of al-‘Amir well over a century later⁴¹.

In Fatimid era *khuṭbas* both Ḥasan and Ḥusayn are cited as imams and members of the five Companions of the Cloak, although they make quite clear that the imamate continued after them solely among the descendants of Ḥusayn. Some examples:

al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the two most noble and most righteous, and [bless] the rightly guided imams among the progeny of al-Ḥusayn, the luminaries of guidance, the full moons of the darkness, the masters of mankind, friends of the Most Merciful, the proofs of times, and pillars of the faith⁴².

al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the two lords of the youth among the people of paradise; and the imams from the progeny of al-Ḥusayn, the chaste ones,

³⁷ For additional information, see the articles in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 2nd. edition, on “mubāhala” by W. Schmucker, “Ahl al-kisā’” by A.S. Tritton, and “Ahl al-bayt” by I. Goldziher, C. van Arendonk and A.S. Tritton.

³⁸ From the *khuṭba* by al-Manṣūr on the ‘*id al-ḥijr* 335 (*Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, n. 5).

³⁹ From the *khuṭba* by al-Mu‘izz on the ‘*id al-naḥr* 341 (*Ibidem*, n. 9).

⁴⁰ “Virgin” here means “immaculate” (*al-Baṭūl*), untainted by menstrual impurity.

⁴¹ “And [bless] our mother Fāṭima, the radiant and chaste”; “[Bless] our mother Fāṭima, the radiant, nurturer of the prophecy singled out for revelation and nobility of character and honor”.

⁴² From the *khuṭba* by al-Manṣūr on the ‘*id al-ḥijr* 335 (*Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, n. 5).

the remainder of the messenger of God and his fruit, his two heirs, his proof to the servants, the mountains of religion, lords of the believers and saints of the worlds⁴³.

Clearly the imams after al-Ḥusayn are his offspring, not those of al-Ḥasan. However the individual imams are seldom mentioned by name in the surviving *khuṭbas*, even those prior to the period of concealment which commenced with Ismā‘īl, the son of Ja‘far al-Šādiq, or with his son Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl, who was actually the first never to have appeared in public. In Qirwāsh’s sermon they are in all simply *the righteous imams, the best and most excellent, those of them that stood forth and appeared and those of them that were concealed and hidden*. In the first *khuṭba* by al-Manšūr he calls his grandfather al-Mahdī, *the son of the Rightly Guided Ones (al-Mahdiyyin), the noble son of the most noble* without going further into the matter. That seems to have been, to judge from these *khuṭbas*, the preferred policy for public pronouncements. Only in a *khuṭba* of al-Āmir are any of them cited by name. There he refers to the imams prior to al-Mahdī as:

‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-‘Ābidin, and Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Bākir ‘Ulūm al-Dīn, and Ja‘far b. Muḥammad al-Šādiq al-Amin, and the true imam Ismā‘īl, and Muḥammad his son, possessor of the nobility of the authentic caliphate, and those who had all excellences and superiority, and [bless] the imams who were concealed from their enemy who opposed in his actions, all of them in like manner.

whom he contrasts with *the piercing stars of truth, the suns rising from the places of setting*. The latter he names one by one starting with al-Mahdī.

However, it was evidently customary practice to cite each of the preceding imams by name back from the current caliph to al-Mahdī, the founder of the dynasty (but not further back). Ibn al-Tuwayri a source from near the end of the Fatimid era suggests as much. In one of the two *khuṭbas* of al-Āmir, this caliph lists all of those who came before him from al-Mahdī through al-Musta‘lī, his own father. All those up to the reign of al-Ḥākim are named likewise in the *khuṭba* of Qirwāsh. Since the full name of each caliph contained the word Allāh, as in al-Manšūr bi-Naṣr Allāh or al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh, in the sermon where the name appears as part of a request addressed directly to God for Him to bless each of the imams so named, the proper form requires a personal pronoun, thus al-Manšūr bi-Naṣrika (*The One who is victorious through Your support*, rather than *The One who is victorious through the support of God*) or al-Ḥākim bi-Amrika (*The Ruler by Your Command* rather than *The Ruler by the Command of God*).

From the medieval period until now it has been customary to call the dynasty of Ismaili imams the Fatimids. But the history of this term is not yet clear. Did, for example, the earliest caliphs of this line refer to themselves by that name? The Spanish scholar Maribel Fierro published in 1996 an important study of this problem and of the use in general of the terms *al-fāṭimī* (Fatimid) and *al-fāṭimiyyūn* (the Fatimids)⁴⁴. Although she carefully surveyed many of the major sources, she found little evidence of these terms in works written by adherents of the dynasty. Further investigation by others since has turned up more information. These terms do, in fact, appear but more so, and more often, in the later phases of this rule. By the end of the dynasty it

⁴³ *Khuṭba* of al-Manšūr on the ‘*id al-aḏḏā* in the year 335 (*ibidem*, n. 6).

⁴⁴ M. Fierro, *On al-fāṭimī and al-fāṭimiyyūn*.

was fairly common to call it *al-dawla al-fāṭimiyya* (the Fatimid state or the Fatimid dynasty), and thus later authors grew quite accustomed to this term.

Nevertheless, it is strikingly rare in the earliest documents produced by those who held positions of authority in the government, including most particularly the imams in their public pronouncements and declarations. The *khutba* would have been a natural occasion for its use. Yet only one of those we now have contains the word in a form that suggests an appropriate meaning. In a *khutba* that al-Qā'im dictated for his chief judge to read to the army in 333, while al-Mahdiyya remained under the siege of the Kharijite forces of Abū Yazīd, his words addressed to the Kutāma appeal to them as the depository where God put the rights of the Fatimid line until it could be revealed once again. *You were the cache, it states, where God placed this Muhammadan, Fāṭimid, mahdist right [to the imamate] until He caused it to triumph and raised it high again.* The Arabic reads for the key terms: *al-ḥaqq al-muḥammadī al-fāṭimī al-mahdī*. Therefore it is certainly technically correct to say that the Fatimids called themselves *Fatimid* from quite early. It would not have been used in this fashion otherwise. The terms *al-imām al-fāṭimī* and *al-fāṭimiyyīn* also appear in early pro-Fatimid poetry⁴⁵.

Significantly, however, it appears in this one instance joined by two other adjectives, *Muḥammadan* and *mahdist* (*al-muḥammadī* and *al-mahdī*), either or both of which have the same claim to apply to the dynasty. The latter term *al-mahdī* or its plural *al-mahdiyyūn/al-mahdiyyīn*, moreover, was, to judge from the *khutbas* and other surviving documents, the standard way these early Fatimids referred to themselves. The phrase *khulafā' al-rāshidīn al-mahdiyyīn* "the rightly guided mahdist caliphs" was a part of the very first Fatimid *khutba*. Al-Qā'im in 302 asked for God's blessings on *al-khulafā' al-rāshidīn al-mahdiyyīn*. In al-Manṣūr's first *khutba* he uses the words *ibn al-mahdiyyīn* "son of the mahdis" for his grandfather. Later in the same sermon he cites *al-hudāt al-mahdiyyīn* ("the rightly guided guides"). In a subsequent *khutba* he speaks of al-Mahdī as *wārith faḍl al-a'imma al-mahdiyyīn min ābā'ihī al-khulafā' al-rāshidīn al-inhārīn al-mahdiyyīn* ("the inheritor of the excellence of the mahdist imams from his forefathers, the rightly guided caliphs"). In the same sermon he calls al-Mahdī *the distinguished offspring of the rightly guided imams (naḥīb al-a'imma al-mahdiyyīn)*. The phrase *al-a'imma al-mahdiyyīn* becomes standard in subsequent *khutbas*. And it appears regularly in many contexts—documents and *khutbas*—throughout the Fatimid period⁴⁶.

Many of the *khutbas* feature condemnations of various enemies of the Fatimids. The very earliest text requests God to:

grant him [the Imam] victory over Your apostate enemies (*a'dā'ika al-māriqīn*), and heal through him the breasts of the believers, conquer through him the easts of the land and its wests as You promised him, support him against the iniquitous rebels.

Those who oppose the Fatimid cause are in fact enemies of God. In the earliest sermon by al-Manṣūr he says:

Bring down upon his [meaning his father, al-Qā'im's] enemies, in the east and the west, on land and on the sea, the most severe assaults and

⁴⁵ See M. al-Ya'lāwī (Yalaoui), *al-Adab bi-l-frīqiya fi'l-'ahd al-fāṭimī*, pp. 37 and 139. These two references were brought to my attention by Tahera Qutbuddin.

⁴⁶ One other term that might have been considered is "Ismaili" (*Ismā'īlī*). However, it appears nowhere in the *khutbas* and is exceedingly rare in Fatimid era literature as a whole.

retributions that You have done or caused to occur with any of those who were enemies of Yours, with destructive misfortune, dishonoring exemplary punishments; destroy them by annihilation and burn them in the fire of hell.

The first *khutba* by al-Qā'im deals with specific dynastic opponents, here the Abbasids and the Umayyads. Responding to the situation in which he was at the time having invaded Abbasid Egypt, al-Qā'im castigates both the rulers in Baghdad and also their predecessors, the Umayyads. Although he does not say so in this *khutba*, descendants of the Umayyads he denounces were still governing Spain and portions of far western North Africa. They thus remained to be overcome and defeated just like the Abbasids.

The lying apostate community, reneging on its intentions, deviating from the command of their Lord, suppose that it has been correct in what it claims about its caliphs whom they insist are the caliphs of the Lord of the worlds, such as a youth not yet mature, like the boy lacking knowledge, or like the child who, according to their claim, governs Islam. And yet among them women bring them wine from every valley and region on the backs of horses and in the bottoms of ships. As God the exalted said: "They take their priests and monks as lords besides God" [9: 31]. They spend the funds of orphans and the poor, wrongly on their part and unjustly, for singing lute players, skilled tamburists, and ma'zātānists⁴⁷, and talented drummers. You have seen their governors of cities, how one of them mounts the wooden pulpit of the Prophet's *minbar* to preach to the people but he does not preach to himself. Rather he descends from that position and inquires of those in that land for male and female singers, tamburists, 'ūd players, thieves, short change artists, and shavers of weights so that those can be brought to serve him. God curses the unjust and prepares for them a blazing fire. That man is someone who neither commands the good nor prohibits the bad.

So much for the Abbasids. For the Umayyads he names specific names.

O God, curse Your enemies, the people who disobey You among the ancients and the later comers: the nation of Noah in the two worlds – truly they were an impious group and 'Ād and Thamūd, and the Associates of al-Rass⁴⁸, and the tyrants of the tribe of Umayya and tribe of Marwān, and Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān, who took from Your servants the rightful share of dinars and dirhams, and waged war with them against the Emigrants and Helpers. Curse 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ, [Here he lists fourteen more], and those who were faithless and deviant, the apostates, transgressors and heretics, and those who put off [acknowledging 'Alī's succession] and those who refrained from going to war under the Commander of the Believers.

It should be noted that this list, by including the names of certain Umayyads or Umayyad supporters and not others, suggests that the enemies named are worse than those not mentioned. Al-Qā'im likely knew what he was doing. He did not for

⁴⁷ Players of the short-necked lute.

⁴⁸ For the meaning, identity and significance of those named here and in the following passage, see the notes to this "khutba" in part two of *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*.

example explicitly condemn Abū Bakr or ‘Umar, the two earliest caliphs whom the Shi‘a generally castigate vehemently, or the third caliph ‘Uthmān, who was himself an Umayyad and usually considered an enemy. To invoke the curse of God on any of these three in Egypt at the time of this *khutba* would have provoked a strongly negative reaction. In contrast the men named, who al-Qā‘im likens to a set of enemies cited in the Qur‘ān (the nation of Noah, ‘Ād, Thamūd, and the Associates of al-Rass), were not even remotely as well regarded.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The public face of Shi‘ism, as it appears in the few sermons to reach us from the Fatimid period, suggests that, even in situations fraught with partisan conflict and the potential for violent opposition, the preacher held to a fairly clear message. Thus despite some evidence of caution and the use of rhetorical strategies designed to bridge sharp divides of doctrine, the words spoken, most particularly in the request for God to bestow His favor on the Ismaili imams, consistently upheld the Shi‘i position against that of the Sunnis and of the Fatimids of North Africa and Egypt in direct opposition to the Abbasids of Baghdad. The enemies of a dynasty could be castigated, even cursed, from the pulpit; asking for God to bless one party might be paired with another request for Him to condemn the other. And one individual *khatīb* may have uttered sentiments of support or those of rejection and aversion, both for and against the same ruler barely more than a week apart. But it is less obvious that he managed the switch on his own rather than depend on a precise written text in all likelihood produced by an authority higher than himself, which was handed to him for the occasion. Written copies are, moreover, apparently a key to the survival of any of the sermons. If a *khutba* did not originate as a written document, no exact notion of what was said in it has come down to us. That rule applies also to those by the caliphs.

6. APPENDIX: QIRWĀSH’S KHUṬBA

God is great, God is great; there is no god but God.

For Him is the praise of those who are, by His light, above the floods of fury, who, by His power, burst asunder the pillars supporting idols, who, by His light, cause the rising of the sun of truth from the west, who, by His justice, blot out the tyranny of injustice and break, by His might, the back of inequity so that matters revert to their original state and truth returns to its owners. Distinct in His essence, alone in His attributes, manifest in His signs, solitary in His indications, time passes by Him not so that the seasons preceded Him and forms do not resemble Him so that places contain Him. Eyes do not see Him so that tongues can describe Him. His existence is prior to all existences; His goodness surpasses all goodness. His oneness is fixed in every intellect; His presence exists in every vision. I praise Him with what is required of His grateful friends, the highest of praise for Him. I implore Him to do as He wills and wants. I acknowledge about Him what His most sincere friends and His witnesses acknowledge. I bear witness that there is no god but God, alone, no partner does He have; this is testimony unadulterated with the filth of idolatry or afflicted with delusions of doubt. It is free of deceit; it consists solely of obedience and submission.

I bear witness that Muḥammad is His servant and His messenger, may God bless him. He chose him and selected him for the guidance of the people and for the upholding of the truth so that the message and guidance away from error arrives. The populace was at that time heedless and astray from the path of truth because of

following personal whims. He saved them from the worship of idols and commanded them to obey the most Merciful so that the proofs of God and His signs were upheld. He brought to perfection his words by the delivery of them⁴⁹, may God bless him, and bless the first to respond to him, ‘Alī, the Commander of the Faithful and Lord of the Legatees, the establisher of excellence and mercy, the pillar of knowledge and wisdom, the root of the noble and righteous tree generated from the sacred and pure trunk. And [blessings be] on his successors, the lofty branches of that same tree, and on what comes from it: the fruit that grows there.

O people, “fear God with the piety He is due” [3: 102]; seek His reward: beware of His punishment. You have seen what was recited to you in His book. God the exalted said: “the day We summon all the people by their imam” [17: 71] and He said: “O you who believe, obey God and obey the messenger and obey those with command among you” [4: 59]. So beware, beware, O people, it is as if the present world were leading you to the next. Its conditions have become clear, the pathway looms up, interrogation is its reckoning and entry is according to its book: “thus whosoever does an atom’s weight of good he will see it; whosoever does an atom’s weight of bad he will see it” [99: 7-8]. Climb aboard the ship of your salvation before you founder; “hold fast to the rope of God altogether, do not scatter” [3: 103]. Know that He knows what is in your souls, so beware of Him⁵⁰. Return to God with the best of returns, respond to the summoner⁵¹ who is the gateway of compliance, before “you yourself should say, Ah, woe is me, I neglected my duty to God and am now among those who scoffed; or should say, alas, if God had guided me I would have been among the God-fearing; or should say, upon seeing the punishment, O that I could have another chance that I might be among those who do good” [39: 56-58]. Be on your guard against heedlessness and indifference before that remorse, and the sorrow, the hoping for another chance, the begging for redemption, and “it is too late to escape” [38: 3]. Obey your imam and you will be well guided; cling to the holder of the covenant and you will be led on the right way. He has shown you knowledge by which you are led rightly and the path by which you are guided. May God make us and you those who follow His wish; He makes faith his provision. He inspires him with his piety and good sense. May God the most magnificent grant us and you forgiveness, and for all Muslims the same.

[Then he sat and rose again and said:]

Praise be to God who is the most glorious and who is the creator of mankind, who determines the divisions though He is [Himself] matchless in eternity and perpetuity, who causes the dawns to break, who creates phantoms and makes spirits. I praise Him as the first and the last. I testify that He is the outward and the inner. I seek His aid as the divine power. I request His support as the victorious guardian. And I testify that there is no god but God, alone, who has no associate, and that Muḥammad is His servant and His messenger, this testimony from one who affirms His absolute oneness in true faith and who confesses to His divinity willingly, knowing the demonstration of what He summons to and understanding the truth of the proofs for Him. O God, bless your radiant guardian and your greatest friend, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the father of the rightly guided imams. O God, bless the two pure grandsons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn and the righteous imams, the best and most

⁴⁹ Qur’ān, vol. 6, p. 115.

⁵⁰ Qur’ān, vol. 2, p. 235.

⁵¹ Qur’ān, vol. 46, p. 31.

excellent, those of them that stood forth and appeared and those of them that were concealed and hidden⁵². O God, bless the imam who is “The One rightly guided by You” [*al-Mahdī bi-llāh*], and who conveyed Your commandments and made manifest Your proofs and who took up the cause of justice in Your lands as the guide for Your servants. O God, bless “The one who takes charge by Your order” [*al-Qā'im bi-amr Allāh*] and “The one who is victorious through Your support” [*al-Manşūr bi-naşr Allāh*], these two who expended themselves for Your satisfaction and waged holy war on Your enemies. O God, bless “The one who makes strong Your religion” [*al-Mu'izz li-dīn Allāh*], warrior in Your cause who revealed Your authentic signs and prominent proofs. O God, bless “The one who is mighty because of You” [*al-'Azīz bi-llāh*] by whom the land is cleared and by whom the servants are guided. O God, extend all of Your blessings and the most perfect of Your favors to our lord and master, the imam of the age, fortress of the faith, head of the Aliid *da'wa* and prophetic religion, Your servant and guardian on Your behalf, al-Manşūr Abū 'Alī al-Ḥakīm bi-amr Allāh, Commander of the Believers, just as You blessed his rightly guided forefathers and as You ennobled Your saints who were rightly guided. O God, bear in mind what You have appointed him to do and safeguard him in what You observe of him. Favor him in what You bring to him; support his armies; raise high his banners in the east of the land and its west, for indeed You are capable of all things.

[Source: Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, 7: 248-51; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 4: 224-27]

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⁵² This is a reference to those imams in the Ismaili line –usually said to be three between Muḥammad b. Ismā'il b. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and al-Mahdī– who went into hidden to avoid Abbasid persecution.

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