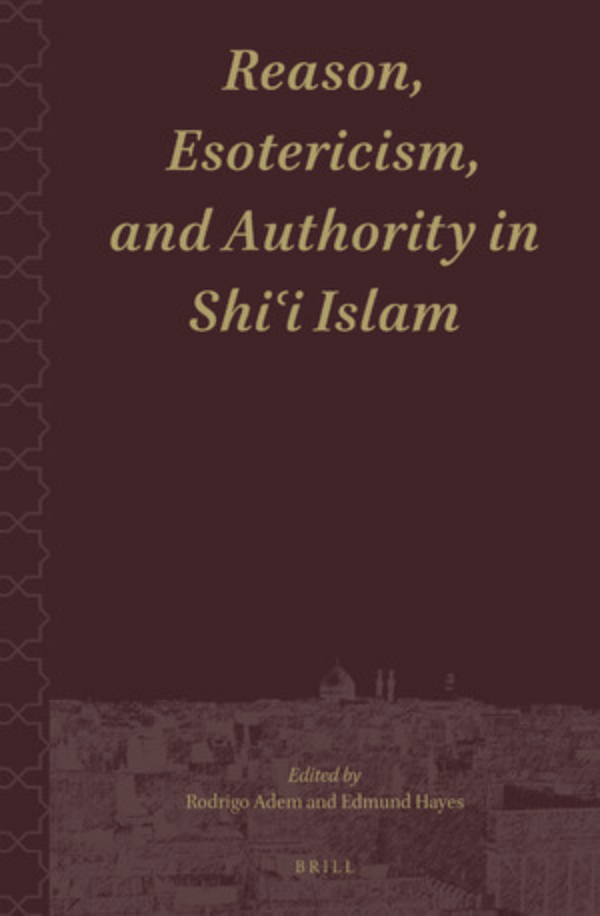
Reason, Esotericism, and Authority in Shiʿi Islam



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BRILL

Tahera Qutbuddin, "Principles of Fatimid Symbolic Interpretation (*Ta'wīl*): An Analysis Based on the Majālis Muʾayyadiyya of al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078)," in *Reason, Esotericism and Authority in Shiʿi Islam*, ed. Rodrigo Adem and Edmund Hayes, in the series *Shii Islam: Texts and Studies*, Leiden: Brill, 2021, pp. 151-189

CHAPTER 5

Principles of Fatimid Symbolic Interpretation (*Ta'wīl*): An Analysis Based on the *Majālis Mu'ayyadiyya* of al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078)

Tahera Qutbuddin

For Muslims, the Qur'an and Shari'a (divine law) brought by the Prophet Muḥammad in the early 7th century AD constitute God's message to humankind. Since the very beginning of Islam, they have sought to understand their true meaning. They grappled with some of the Qur'an's apparent contradictions. For example, which verse should be taken at face value, the one that states, "Fresh faces will look at God on the last day," or the one that says, "Eyes do not see him"?[1] They also tried to make sense of the seeming arbitrariness of the Shari'a. Why pray two cycles in the dawn prayer, for example, and three in the sunset prayer? Why fast in the month of Ramadan and not, say, Safar? The Fatimid hermeneutic answered these questions by harmonizing revelation and reason through the divinely guided authoritative exposition of the living Imam, from the line of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Legatee 'Alī.[2] In

1 Qur'an *al-Qiyāma* (75:23–24): وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاضِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ; *al-An'ām* (6:103): لا تُدْرِكُهُ ٱلْأَبْصَار.

2 The Fatimids were an Ismaili Shi'a dynasty who ruled a large part of the Muslim world from the 10th up to the 12th century, with their caliphal seat first in North Africa and then Egypt. They claimed descent from the Prophet Muḥammad through his daughter Fāṭima Zahrā' and her husband 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, hence their dynastic title. Challenging the 'Abbasids of Baghdad, they also claimed to be the sole rightful caliphs and Imams of the Muslim community, who had inherited Muḥammad's temporal and spiritual authority. They referred to their religio-political mission as the *da'wa* (lit. "call") referring to the Qur'anic verse, "The true *da'wa* belongs to God" (Qur'an *al-Ra'd* 13:14: لَهُ دَعْوَةُ الْحَقِّ). On Fatimid history, see Paul E. Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002); Heinz Halm. *The Empire of the Mahdi: The Rise of the Fatimids*, trans. Michael Bonner (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Farhad Daftary, *The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Michael Brett, *The Fatimid Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017); Shainool Jiwa, *The Fatimids: 1. The Rise of A Muslim Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018). For a summary of their philosophy, see Paul E. Walker, "The Ismā'īlīs" in *The Cambridge*

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this article I draw on the collected lectures of the preeminent Fatimid scholar al-Muʾayyad fī-l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078) – *al-Majālis al-Muʾayyadiyya* – to distill and analyze the principles of Fatimid symbolic interpretation, "*taʾwīl*."

No Fatimid text enumerates the principles of their hermeneutic system; these have to be inferred. Within the genre of Fatimid *taʾwīl*, al-Muʾayyad's *Majālis* is the culmination of their *taʾwīl* schematics. A deep mine of Fatimid philosophy, the *Majālis* systematically conceptualize knowledge in the early lectures, and then reference it and build upon it throughout. A few lectures also explicate the necessity for *taʾwīl*. The combination of these theoretical remarks on interpretive principles with rich and varied applications makes *al-Majālis al-Muʾayyadiyya* the ideal source for analyzing the principles of Fatimid symbolic interpretation.

Basing my analysis on al-Muʾayyad's *Majālis*, – and drawing also on the works of two major Fatimid scholars before him, al-Qāḍī al-Nuʾman (d. 363/974) and Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. ca. 411/1021) – I delineate in this article ten interdependent principles of Fatimid *taʾwīl*. They are: (1) the rationality of faith; (2) the inversion of the literary perception of real and figurative; (3) the harmonization of the physical and spiritual worlds; (4) the mutual validation of the exoteric and esoteric aspects of the Shariʿa; (5) the substance of *taʾwīl* manifest in God's unity, God's call, and the system and hierarchy of spiritual ascension; (6) the concept of living history, with the stories of the Prophets reflected in Muḥammad's mission; (7) the methodology of *taʾwīl*, presented through scriptural evidence and rational proofs; (8) *taʾwīl* as the true knowledge integral to salvation; (9) the sole authority of the divinely-guided Prophet, Legatee and Imam to interpret the Qurʾan and Shariʿa; and (10) the rationale for *taʾwīl*.

My analysis demonstrates that al-Muʾayyad did not randomly assign esoteric meanings on a case-by-case basis. His explication of these materials is governed by a systematic hermeneutic that, as I mentioned at the outset, harmonizes reason and revelation through the divinely guided *taʾwīl* interpretation of the living Imam. Together, these ten principles articulate a comprehensive, coherent, and logical system of symbolic scriptural interpretation.

Companion to Arabic Philosophy, eds. Peter Adamson and Richard Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 72–91. On their civilizational contributions, see Tahera Qutbuddin, "Fatimids," in *Cultural Sociology of the Middle East, Asia, and Africa*, vol. 2: *Africa*, ed. Edward Ramsamy (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2011), 37–40. On Fatimid Qurʾan exegesis, see Husain K.B. Qutbuddin, "A Framework for an Ismāʿīlī Fāṭimid Commentary of the Qurʾān," (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 2009).

1 Fatimid *Taʾwīl*: Terms, Authors, Texts

When the Fatimids came on the political and scholarly scene, three major systems of dealing with questions of Qurʾanic hermeneutic had developed: The Sunni majority, influenced by Ashʿarite theology, believed scripture was literally true. God possesses a hand, they said, but "without-asking-how" (*bilā kayf*). The Muʿtazilites averred that scripture was figuratively true, to be interpreted in a way that was compatible with human reason. They rejected the Ashʿarites' anthropomorphization of the Creator, and construed God's hand, for example, as his power. The philosophers used cosmology to explain the nature of the universe, and denied key propositions of the Qurʾan such as bodily resurrection. Going against both the Ashʿarites and the Muʿtazilites, they often argued against the necessity of Prophetic guidance for the intellectual elite.

The Fatimids, while endorsing some of their competitors' techniques, firmly rejected all three conceptualizations and distinctly delineated their own. They asserted that faith is fully rational, and that this rationality is accessed only through its true, inner meaning. They maintained that pronouncements and rulings of the Qurʾan and Shariʿa contain a deeper, symbolic dimension that complements and validates the outer, exoteric aspect. They denoted this symbolic dimension by several technical terms, harnessing words with wider lexical applications to Fatimid hermeneutics: *bayān* ("exposition"), *ʿilm* ("knowledge"), *maʿrifa* ("recognition"), *maʿnā* ("meaning"), *ḥikma* ("wisdom"), *bāṭin* ("a concealed entity"), and last but not least, *taʾwīl* ("interpretation").[3] This is the term used in the present article. It is *taʾwīl*, the Fatimids argued, that conveys the true meaning of the Qurʾan and Shariʿa.

Several Fatimid *dāʿī*s – rank holders below the Imam in its spiritual hierarchy, who were also frequently agents in their religio-political mission,

3 *Taʾwīl* is a Qurʾanic term, used in several verses to denote the meaning of God's word: Qurʾan *Āl ʿImrān* (3:7); *al-Aʿrāf* (7:53); *Yūsuf* (12:6, 21, 36, 37, 44, 45, 100); *al-Kahf* (18:78, 82). A pre-Nahrawān oration attributed to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib faults the Khārijites for not being "reciters of the Quran, or jurists in religion, or scholars of *taʾwīl*," (Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-Ṭabarī: Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1960–690, 5:78, events of the year 37H; trans. Hawting, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: The First Civil War*, ed. Ehsan Yar-Shater, 17:120). Some of the earliest Qurʾan exegetes use "*taʾwīl*" to mean simply "exegesis" or "interpretation," as is evident, e.g., in al-Ṭabarī's book title, "Collection of statements on the interpretation (*taʾwīl*) of verses of the Qurʾan" (*Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*). On the development of the term *taʾwīl*, see Ismail K. Poonawala, *EI²*, s.v. "*Taʾwīl*,"and Claude Gilliot, *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, s.v. "Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Classical and Medieval." In addition to denoting *taʾwīl* for the Fatimids, the listed terms sometimes denote *ḥaqāʾiq* (lit. "truths," denoting the highest existential realities), and yet other times both together.

the *daʿwa* – expounded their system of *taʾwīl*.[4] The first substantial exposition came in the writings of the illustrious jurist al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān ibn Muḥammad (d. 363/974),[5] who was a confidant of the Caliph-Imam al-Muʿizz (r. 341–365/953–975). In addition to major legal, historical, and heresiographical works, al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān composed two foundational books on *taʾwīl*. Based on internal evidence from al-Nuʿmān's own writings, we can estimate that he wrote these two books during the last decade of his life, following the composition in ca. 349/960 of his jurisprudential magnum opus, *Daʿāʾim al-Islām* (Pillars of Islam). The *Asās al-taʾwīl* (Foundation of Symbolic Interpretation) presented the inner meaning of the first "Pillar" of allegiance to the Imam (*walāya*), grounding it in Qurʾanic tales of the Prophets. Its continuation, the *Taʾwīl al-daʿāʾim* (Symbolic Interpretation of the Pillars of Islam), interpreted the inner meaning of the divine law, and explicated the next six "Pillars": ritual purity (*ṭahāra*), ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*), the annual alms-tithe (*zakāt*), fasting (*ṣawm*), pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥajj*), and struggle against evil (*jihād*). In his introduction to the *Asās*, al-Nuʿmān says that the *Asās* (presumably along with the *Taʾwīl al-daʿāʾim*) is the foundational book for Fatimid *taʾwīl*, just as the *Daʿāʾim* is the foundational book for Fatimid jurisprudence.[6] Between the *Daʿāʾim* and the *Asās*, al-Nuʿmān also wrote a now lost prefatory *taʾwil* book titled *Ḥudūd al-maʿrifa* (Boundaries of Recognition). He read out all four books – *Daʿāʾim al-Islām, Ḥudūd al-maʿrifa, Asās al-taʾwīl,* and *Taʾwil al-Daʿāʾim* – in regular teaching assemblies (*majālis*, sing. *majlis*).[7]

Half a century later, the Caliph-Imam al-Ḥākim's (r. 386–411/996–1021) "Chief Gate" (*bāb*, *al-abwāb*) Ḥamīd al-Dìn al-Kirmānī (d. ca. 411/1021) devoted a seven-point section in *al-Maṣābīḥ fī ithbāt al-imāma* (Illuminating Lights

4 In addition to the Fatimid *dāʿī*s mentioned here by name, others who wrote extant works of *taʿwīl* (and *ḥaqāʾiq*) are Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. ca. 322/934), Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. after 346/957), Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971), Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Nīsābūrī (d. after 386/996), and Abū-l-Barakāt al-Ḥalabī (d. 526/1132). On the Fatimid *dāʿī*s generally, see Paul Walker, *EI*^{3}, s.v. "Dāʿī (in Ismāʿīlī Islam)."

5 For a summary of al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān's life and works, see Ismail K. Poonawala, "The Chronology of al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān's Works," *Arabica* 65 (2018): 84–162; Devin Stewart's introduction to al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Ikhtilāf uṣul al-madhāhib*, ed. and trans. Devin Stewart as *Disagreements of the Jurists: A Manual of Islamic Legal Theory* (New York: New York University Press, Library of Arabic Literature, 2015) ix–xv. On al-Nuʿmān's *taʾwīl* approach, see al-Ḥabīb al-Fiqī, *Al-Taʾwīl ususuhu wa-maʿānīhi fī-l-madhhab al-Ismāʿīlī: al-Qāḍi l-Nuʿmān* (Tunis: *Centre d'études et de recherches économiques et sociales*, 1976); Meir M. Bar-Asher, "Outlines of Early Ismāʿīlī-Fāṭimid Qurʾān Exegesis," *Journal Asiatique* 296, no. 2 (2008): 257–95 (also includes description of *taʾwīl* works by Jaʿfar b. Manṣur al-Yaman, d. late 4th/10th c.); Bulbul Shah, "Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān and the Concept of Bāṭin," in *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought*, ed. Todd Lawson (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 117–26.

6 Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-taʾwīl*, ed. ʿĀrif Tāmir (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1960), 27.

7 Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-taʾwīl*, 23–27.

to Establish the Imamate) to prove the rationality of the Qurʾan and Shariʿa through *taʾwīl*.[8] Al-Kirmānī probably composed the work in Baghdad or Cairo between 402/1011–12 and 407/1016–17.[9]

Another fifty years later, al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī arrived on the exegetical scene. Al-Muʾayyad had translated al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān's *Asās al-taʾwīl* into his native Persian under the title *Bunyād-i taʾwīl*, possibly during his tenure as *dāʿī* of Fars (ca. 411/1021 to 433/1042). He was also presumably well aware of al-Kirmānī's works, for he uses similar arguments about the necessity of *taʾwīl*. In the last twenty years of al-Muʾayyad's life in Cairo (450/1058 to 470/1078), during his tenure as the Caliph-Imam al-Mustanṣir's (r. 427–487/1036–1094) Chief *Dāʿī* and Chief Gate, al-Muʾayyad consolidated and elaborated the Fatimid *taʾwīl* system in his own eight hundred teaching assemblies, the *Majālis Muʾayyadiyya* (details of al-Muʾayyad's life and works follow shortly.)

Immediately after al-Muʾayyad, his Central Asian student Nāṣir Khusraw (d. between 465/1072 and 471/1078) wrote several Persian books that reflected his master's *taʾwīl* hermeneutic.[10] These works include *Jāmiʿ al-ḥikmatayn* (Encyclopedia of the Two Wisdoms), *Wajh-i Dīn* (Religion's Face), *Zād al-musāfir* (The Traveler's Provisions), *Khiwān al-ikhwān* (The Brethren's Banquet), and a substantial *dīwān* of poetry. The Persian-focused Nizārī Ismailis – who, during their formative period, were concentrated in Alamūt in northern Persia – access al-Muʾayyad's teachings through Nāṣir's works, which they revere and study.[11]

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8 Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, *Kitāb al-Maṣābīḥ fī ithbāt al-imāma*, ed. and trans. Paul E. Walker (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), Part 1, *miṣbāḥ* no. 6:28–32 (text), 63–67 (trans.). See also al-Kirmānī's treatise *Khazāʾin al-adilla* in *Majmūʿat Rasāʾil al-Kirmānī*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib (Beirut: Al-Muʾassasa al-Jāmiʿiyya, 1983), *khazāna* no. 27: *Fī ithbāt al-taʾwīl*, 207. On al-Kirmānī's life and works, see Daniel De Smet, *EI*[3], "al-Kirmānī, Ḥamīd al-Dīn," and Paul E. Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī: Ismaili Thought in the Age of al-Ḥākim* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), passim.

9 Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī*, 31.

10 On Nāṣir's life and works, see Alice Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw: The Ruby of Badakhshan* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000). On his *taʾwīl* interpretation, see Julie Meisami, "Symbolic Structure in a Poem by Nāṣir-i Khusrau," *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* 31 (1993): 103–17; Shafiqe Virani, "The Days of Creation in the Thought of Nasir Khusraw," in *Nasir Khusraw: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, eds. Sarfaroz Niyazov and Ramazan Nazariev (Khujand: Noshir Publishing House, 2005), 74–83; Diana Steigerwald, "Ismāʿīlī *Taʾwīl*" in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qurʾān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 386–400 (also includes sketches of a handful of Fatimid and Nizārī Ismāʿīlī writers and their *taʾwīl* doctrines). Nāṣir died during the Imamate of al-Mustanṣir, around twenty years before the 487/1094 Mustaʿlī-Nizārī split.

11 The Nizārīs were Fatimid-Ismailis who professed the imamate of al-Mustanṣir's son Nizār during the split that occurred after al-Mustanṣir's death in 487/1094, and broke away from the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Mustaʿlī. On the Nizārīs, see Farhad Daftary, "Nizārī Ismāʿīlī History During the Alamūt Period," and "The Post-Alamūt Centuries and Modern Developments in Nizārī Ismāʿīlī History," in *The Ismāʿīlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 301–504.

Meanwhile, the post-Fatimid Ṭayyibī *daʿwa* in Yemen and India carried forward al-Muʾayyad's direct legacy.[12] For a full five years in Cairo, al-Muʾayyad had trained the Yemeni Ṣulayḥid Qāḍī Lamak b. Mālik al-Ḥammādī (d. ca. 491/1097).[13] Lamak transported al-Muʾayyad's *Majālis* and other writings back to Yemen, and passed on al-Muʾayyad's teachings to his son, Qāḍī Yaḥyā (d. 520/1126). Yaḥyā, in turn, trained the first Ṭayyibī *dāʿī l-muṭlaq*, Dhuʾayb b. Mūsā al-Wādiʿī (d. 546/1151). The promulgation of al-Muʾayyad's teachings continued thus in the line of Ṭayyibī *dāʿī*s. Their texts also reflect al-Muʾayyad's teachings. The Ṭayyibī "*maʾdhūn*" (rank immediately following the *dāʿī l-muṭlaq*) Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir al-Ḥārithī (d. 584/1188) also produced an important work, *Majmūʿ al-tarbiya* (A Collection for Rearing), in which he composed and compiled treatises on various aspects of *taʾwīl*, drawing heavily on al-Muʾayyad's *Majālis*. The third Ṭayyibī *dāʿī*, Ḥātim Muḥyī l-Dīn (d. 596/1199), wrote a two-volume abridgement of the *Majālis Muʾayyadiyya* titled *Jāmiʿ al-ḥaqāʾiq* (Encyclopedia of Higher Truths). The fifth *dāʿī*, ʿAlī b. Muḥammad ibn al-Walīd (d. 612/1215), drew on al-Muʾayyad's arguments for *taʾwīl* in *Dāmigh al-bāṭil wa-ḥatf al-munāḍil* (Falsehood's Repudiator and Adversary's Death), a refutation of the anti-Ismaili polemic of the Ashʿarī Sunni writer al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111).[14] In 945/1539, the seat of the Ṭayyibī *daʿwa* moved from Yemen to India, where al-Muʾayyad's heritage continued to thrive. In India, the fifty-first *dāʿī* Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1385/1965) – himself hailed as the "Younger Muʾayyad" (*Muʾayyad-i aṣghar*) – acknowledged al-Muʾayyad's pivotal role as father of the Ṭayyibī *daʿwa* in a much-recited verse, "These are *dāʿī*s who are aided by

12 The Ṭayyibīs were the continuation of the Mustaʿlī following of the Fatimid-Ismāʿīlīs who, after the death of his son the Caliph-Imam al-Āmir in 524/1130, professed the Imamate of al-Āmir's infant son al-Ṭayyib (b. 524/1130). They swore allegiance to the Concealed Imam Ṭayyib and the Concealed Imams in his line, represented among the people by his appointed *dāʿī al-muṭlaq* (*dāʿī* with full authority). On the Ṭayyibīs, see Tahera Qutbuddin, "The Daʾudi Bohra Tayyibis: Ideology, Literature, Learning, and Social Practice," in *A Modern History of the Ismailis: Continuity and Change in a Muslim Community*, ed. Farhad Daftary (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 331–54; and Tahera Qutbuddin, *EI*[3], s.v. "Bohras." For details of al-Muʾayyad's role in the transfer of Fatimid learning to the Ṭayyibī *dāʿī*s, see Tahera Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid Daʿwa Poetry: A Case of Commitment in Classical Arabic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 12–13, 96–97. On the role of his poetry in the Ṭayyibī *daʿwa*, see ibid., 299–333. On the role of his *Majālis* therein, see Tahera Qutbuddin, "The Daʾudi Bohra Tayyibis," 337; and Tahera Qutbuddin, *EI*[3], s.v. "Bohras," 57, 60.

13 On the Ṣulayḥid dynasty in Yemen and their religious and political allegiance to the Fatimids, see G.R. Smith, *EI*[2], s.v. "Ṣulayḥids."

14 ʿAlī b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Walīd, "Fī Tathbīt al-taʾwīl (Establishing *taʾwīl*)," in *Dāmigh al-bāṭil wa-ḥatf al-munāḍil*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib (Beirut: Muʾassasat ʿIzz al-Dīn, 1982), 1:201–82.

the flow of al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī's blessings."[15] Indeed, the Fatimid *majālis al-ḥikma* (assemblies of wisdom), particularly al-Muʾayyad's *Majālis*, form the template for the core public teaching of the Ṭayyibīs, the "*waʿẓ*" discourse,[16] and these continue to be cited and invoked in their texts and assemblies. In tandem, the tradition of *taʿwīl*-based "Fatimid *daʿwa* poetry" founded by al-Muʾayyad flourished after him in the Ṭayyibī *daʿwa*. Through the centuries until the present day the Ṭayyibīs have continued to cherish and propagate al-Muʾayyad's *taʾwīl* legacy.

2 Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī: Life, Works, and Standing

Abū Naṣr Hibat Allāh ibn Mūsā al-Muʾayyad fī-l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī was born ca. 386–87/996–97 in Shiraz, the major city of the southern Persian province of Fars, into a prominent family of Fatimid supporters. His ancestors had proselytized for the pre-empire Fatimids, and his father was *dāʿī* of Fars under the Fatimid Caliph-Imam al-Ḥākim (r. 386–411/996–1021). Al-Muʾayyad's life falls into two distinct periods – the Shiraz period (ca. 386–436/996–1045) and the Cairo period (ca. 436–70/1045–78) – both devoted to the service of the Fatimid *daʿwa*.[17]

Al-Muʾayyad spent the first fifty years of his life in Shiraz. Early on, he served as aide to his father. After his father's death in the reign of the Fatimid Caliph-Imam al-Ẓāhir (r. 411–27/1021–35), al-Muʾayyad became *dāʿī* of Fars, and he continued in this role during the reign of al-Ẓāhir's successor, al-Mustanṣir

15 من دعاة قد أيّدتهم سواري * بركات المؤيّد الشيرازي. Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn, *Dīwān: Jawāhir al-balāgha al-ladunniyya* (Dubai: Ṭayyibī Daʿwa Publications, 1414/1993), 1:423.

16 On the Ṭayyibī *waʿẓ*, see Tahera Qutbuddin, "The Daʾudi Bohra Tayyibis," 337.

17 For al-Muʾayyad's biography, see Tahera Qutbuddin, *EI*[3], s.v. "al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī;" Tahera Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid Daʿwa Poetry*, 15–100; and Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn, "Ḥayāt al-Muʾayyad fī l-Dīn: Dāʿī l-duʿāt," in al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī, *Dīwān*, ed. Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-Miṣrī, 1949), 17–50. For a personal narrative, see al-Muʾayyad's autobiography, *Al-Sīra al-Muʾayyadiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-Miṣrī, 1949). On al-Muʾayyad's Persian period, see Verena Klemm, *Memoirs of a Mission: The Ismaili Scholar, Statesman and Poet al-Muʾayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003); Rachel T. Howes, "The Qadi, the Wazir and the Daʿi: Religious and Ethnic Relations in Buyid Shiraz in the Eleventh Century," *Iranian Studies* 44, no. 6 (2011): 875–94; Elizabeth R. Alexandrin, "Studying Ismaʿili Texts in Eleventh-Century Shiraz: al-Muʾayyad and the 'Conversion' of the Buyid Amir Abu Kalijar," *Iranian Studies* 44, no. 1 (2011): 99–115.

(r. 427–87/1036–94).[18] In Shiraz, and from time to time in Ahwāz, al-Muʾayyad pastored his Daylamite flock of Fatimid Shiʿa. He also cultivated the political establishment. In ca. 430/1039, after a series of public debates with local scholars, he won over the Buyid ruler Abū Kālijār (r. 415–40/1024–35) to the Fatimid religious and political cause. Abū Kālijār instated al-Muʾayyad as his teacher, and for the next three years, read al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān's *Daʿāʾim al-Islām* with al-Muʾayyad on a weekly basis. Alarmed by this arrangement, several Sunni judges petitioned the ʿAbbasid caliph, who wrote to Abū Kālijār demanding al-Muʾayyad's incarceration. Abū Kālijār gave in and arrested him. After a volatile run of events, he managed to escape. Spending almost three years in hiding on the road or sheltering in various towns in Iraq and Syria, he arrived in Cairo in 436–37/1045–46.

Al-Muʾayyad spent the next and final thirty-three years of his life in proximity to his beloved Imam. However, he was a constant target of jealous courtiers trying to discredit him in al-Mustanṣir's eyes. The trials he faced in Cairo, coming as they did from within, were psychologically even more severe than the hardships he had encountered in Shiraz. Within this maelstrom, he held various state appointments. In 440/1048, he was drafted to write the weekly public *daʿwa* lectures to be read out by the chief *dāʿī*; al-Muʾayyad presumably gave private lectures himself even then, for Nāṣir Khusraw, who visited Cairo from 439/1047 to 441/1050, reverently praises al-Muʾayyad and his *majālis* in his poems.[19] In 443/1054, al-Muʾayyad was appointed head of the Royal Chancery (*dīwān al-inshāʾ*). In 448/1056, he was charged with liaising on the ground in Syria with the Turkmen general al-Basāsīrī (d. 451/1060) and various Syrian and Iraqi rulers against the Abbasids. With the help of al-Muʾayyad's skilled, bilingual negotiations, al-Basāsīrī took Baghdad under the Fatimid banner in 450/1058. Although the Seljuks retook it for the Abbasids the following year, this Baghdad conquest at al-Muʾayyad's hands would go down in history as the apogee of Fatimid expansion.

In the same year, 450/1058, al-Mustanṣir appointed al-Muʾayyad as Chief Gate (*bāb*, *al-abwāb*), the highest rank after the Imam in the Fatimid spiritual

18 After his father's death until the time of his elevation in Cairo to the rank of Chief Gate, al-Muʾayyad's specific rank in the Fatimid spiritual hierarchy was "*ḥujja*" (lit., "Proof"). The term "*dāʿī*" in Fatimid-Ṭayyibī literature sometimes denotes the rank of *al-dāʿī al-muṭlaq* or *dāʿī al-balāgh*, which are below the rank of *ḥujja*, but "*dāʿī*" is also used as general term indicating a *daʿwa* agent belonging to one of several ranks, including *ḥujja*. It is in this general sense that al-Muʾayyad is referred to frequently in the sources as *dāʿī*.

19 Nāṣir Khusraw, *Dīwān*, eds. M. Mīnovī and M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran: McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies, Tehran Branch, 1978), 265–74, 432–5; trans. Tahera Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid Daʿwa Poetry*, 87–9.

hierarchy, and Chief *Dāʿī* (*dāʿī al-duʿāt*), head of the *daʿwa* administration. For the next twenty years – 450/1058 to 470/1078 – al-Muʾayyad wrote and read out the weekly "assemblies of wisdom" (*majālis al-ḥikma*) and supervised the *daʿwa* and *dāʾīs*, especially in Yemen and India. This tenure was interrupted by a one-year interlude when the vizier exiled him in 453/1061 to Jerusalem; al-Mustanṣir personally recalled him in 454/1062. From 456/1064 to 461/1151, al-Muʾayyad trained the aforementioned Yemeni Qāḍī Lamak in Fatimid wisdom.

Al-Muʾayyad died a few years later in Cairo in 470/1078. He was buried in his residence, the Dār al-ʿIlm (House of Learning), across the street from where the later Fatimid mosque of al-Aqmar would be built; the general location of the Dār al-ʿIlm is known at the present time, but not al-Muʾayyad's actual gravesite. In a singular honor, al-Mustanṣir conducted his funeral prayers.

Contemporary and later scholars alike acknowledged al-Muʾayyad as an intellectual giant. His own Imam al-Mustanṣir called him "a mighty peak of knowledge that no climber could scale."[20] The Syrian poet al-Maʿarrī (d. 449/1057) praised the powerful logic of his exposition, with the words, "Had Muʾayyad debated with Aristotle, he would have vanquished him. Had he debated with Plato, he would have shred and scattered his proofs."[21] In the Ṭayyibī *daʿwa*, as mentioned earlier, al-Muʾayyad was recognized as a font of divine grace and inspired knowledge. Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn wrote the following high praise:[22]

> Al-Muʾayyad … was Imam al-Mustanṣir's Salmān [al-Fārisī]. He strengthened the foundations of the true faith by the grace (*baraka*) flowing from his noble, exalted *Majālis* and sublime, lofty, poems. God made the tree of al-Muʾayyad's grace sprout branches that became manifest in the divinely inspired (*muʾayyad*) *dāʿī*s. May God sanctify him and raise his station high among the assemblies of the angels who stand in rows and praise God. May God make us recipients of his inspiration, sublimity and affectionate benevolence.

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20 طود علم أعجز المرتقي. Al-Muʾayyad, *Dīwān*, 313; Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār wa-funūn al-āthār*, ed. Ahmad Chleilat et al. (London and Damascus: Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2007–2010), 7:75.

21 لو ناظر أرسطاطاليس لجاز أن يفحمه وافلاطون لنبذ حججه خلفه. Abū-l-ʿAlā al-Maʿarrī, *Rasāʾil Abī l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1982), 1:134.

22 Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn, *Risāla Ramaḍāniyya: Amthāl sidrat al-muntahā* (Bombay: Leaders Press, 1377/1958), 525. Salmān al-Fārisī (d. ca. 35/655), an eminent Companion of the Prophet of Persian origin, is believed by the Ṭayyibīs to be his *bāb al-abwāb*.

Each of al-Muʾayyad's works – eleven extant titles belonging to several distinct genres composed throughout his career[23] – directly or indirectly expound *taʿwīl*. (1) His *Dīwān* contains sixty-two "committed" poems composed at different times and places.[24] Its numerous panegyrics utilize *taʾwīl* concepts to formulate motifs of praise for the Fatimid Caliph-Imam.[25] Its few dialectical poems composed in Shiraz, in tandem with his formal debates there, explicate epistemological discourse and use many of the same arguments privileging human reason vis-à-vis *taʾwīl* that al-Kirmānī had touched on earlier.[26] (2) His autobiography (*al-Sīra al-Muʾayyadiyya*) chronicles his last years in Persia and his first few years in Egypt. It includes the texts of his Shiraz debates and correspondence during the Syria sojourn.[27] (3) His letters (*Rasāʾil*) to al-Maʿarrī, written during his first decade in Cairo, debate al-Maʿarrī's veganism and indirectly propagate Fatimid ideology.[28] (4–5) His twenty-nine prose supplications (*al-Adʿiya al-Muʾayyadiyya*) are grounded in *taʾwīl*, as are his special supplications for each day of the week (*al-Musabbaḥ al-sabʿ*). (6–9) Four shorter treatises are devoted to expositions of *taʾwīl* and *ḥaqāʾiq*: *al-Masʾala wa-l-jawāb*

23 On al-Muʾayyad's works, see Tahera Qutbuddin, *EI*[3], s.v. "al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī;" Tahera Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid Daʿwa Poetry*, 358–68; Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn, "Muʾallafāt al-Muʾayyad," in his edition of al-Muʾayyad, *Dīwān*, 58–65; Ismail K. Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismāʿīlī literature* (Malibu, California: Undena Publications, 1977), 103–9; Ismāʿīl b. ʿAbd al-Rasūl al-Ujjainī al-Majdūʿ, *Fihrist al-kutub wa-l-rasāʾil wa-li-man hiya min al-ʿulamāʾ wa-l-aʾimmah wa-l-ḥudūd al-afāḍil*, ed. ʿAlīnaqī Munzavī (Tehran: Chāpkhānah-i Dānishgāh, 1966), 41–44, 88, 173–75, 202–4 (contains summaries); Wladimir Ivanow, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliographical Survey*. (Tehran: Ismaili Society, 1963), 45–47.

24 On al-Muʾayyad's poetry, see Tahera Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid Daʿwa Poetry*; Tahera Qutbuddin, "Fatimid Aspirations of Conquest and Doctrinal Underpinnings in the Poetry of al-Qāʾim bi-Amr Allāh, Ibn Hāniʾ al-Andalusī, Amīr Tamīm b. al-Muʿizz, and al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī," in *Poetry and History: The Value of Poetry in Reconstructing Arab History*, eds. Ramzi Baalbaki, Saleh Said Agha, & Tarif Khalidi (Beirut: American University in Beirut Press, 2011), 195–246; Pieter Smoor, "'The master of the century.' Fāṭimid poets in Cairo," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fāṭimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk eras*, vol. 1, ed. U. Vermeulen and D. de Smet (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 139–62.

25 Tahera Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid Daʿwa Poetry*, 105–12, and passim.

26 Al-Muʾayyad, *al-Sīra*, 30–42, 57–60; al-Muʾayyad, *Dīwān*, 191–206; Tahera Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid Daʿwa Poetry*, 26–43, 235–56.

27 On al-Muʾayyad's autobiography, see Tahera Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid Daʿwa Poetry*, 15–100; Verena Klemm, *Memoirs of a Mission*; Rachel T. Howes, "The Qadi, the Wazir and the Daʿi: Religious and Ethnic Relations in Buyid Shiraz in the Eleventh Century."

28 On al-Muʾayyad's correspondence with al-Maʿarrī, see Kevin Blankinship, "Missionary and Heretic: Debating Veganism in the Medieval Islamic World," in *Insatiable Appetite: Food as Cultural Signifier in the Middle East and Beyond*, eds. K. Dmitriev, J. Hauser, B. Orfali (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 260–91.

(Question and Answer), *al-Masāʾil al-sabʿūn fī-l-taʾwīl* (Seventy Questions on Symbolic Exegesis), *Sharḥ al-maʿād* (Explaining the Return), and *al-Ibtidāʾ wa-l-intihāʾ* (The Beginning and the End). (10) Presumably written in Shiraz – for it seems likely that al-Muʾayyad would have more use for a translation in teaching his Persian followers, than later when teaching mostly Arabic-speaking followers in Cairo – al-Muʾayyad's single Persian work is his translation of al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān's *Asās al-taʾwīl*, titled *Bunyād-i taʾwīl* (Foundations of *taʾwīl*). (11) His masterwork, of course, is the *Majālis Muʾayyadiyya*.[29]

3 *Al-Majālis al-Muʾayyadiyya*: Context, Structure, Contents, and Audience

During his tenure as the Caliph-Imam al-Mustanṣir's chief *dāʿī* between 450/1058 and 470/1078 in Cairo, al-Muʾayyad wrote a weekly lecture (*majlis*), which the Imam vetted, and then, every Thursday in the Dār al-ʿIlm, al-Muʾayyad read out this lecture in the Imam's name to a select group from the Imam's followers. Al-Muʾayyad may have compiled these lectures in an initial draft, but it is likely that Qāḍī Lamak gave them their present form later in Yemen. Today, we have a total of eight hundred lectures by al-Muʾayyad, divided into eight volumes of a hundred lectures each, called The First Hundred (*al-Miʾa al-awwala*), The Second Hundred (*al-Miʾa al-thāniya*), and so on. Together they comprise the *Majālis Muʾayyadiyya*, the work analyzed in the present article, al-Muʾayyad's magnum opus, and the summa of Fatimid *taʾwīl*.

The *Majālis* have a distinctive structure: Each *majlis* is bookended with praise of God and benedictions on the Prophet and his family in a "*taḥmīd*" (praise-and-blessings formula). Both the opening and concluding lines also feature a *taʾwīl* subtext foreshadowing and echoing the main theme of the lecture. Immediately after the opening formula, al-Muʾayyad addresses the audience as "O Assembly of Believers" (*maʿshar al-muʾminīn*), followed by two lines of prayer for them. The next paragraph typically contains pious counsel, urging the audience to be conscious of God and mindful of the transience of life, and to prepare for imminent hereafter by living a life of piety and virtue. The main body of the *majlis* follows, which customarily contains a *taʾwīl* exposition, usually of a verse from the Qurʾan or a hadith by the Prophet. Bolstering

29 The *Majālis*, *Dīwān*, *Sīra*, *Rasāʾil*, *Adʿiya*, and *Musabbaḥ* are published (see Bibliography for details). The four shorter treatises and the *Bunyād* remain in manuscript form, and copies are located in the Ṭayyibī Daʿwa library in Mumbai and Surat, and in the library of the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London.

the exposition, each *majlis* abundantly quotes Qur'an, hadith, words by ʿAlī and the Imams, as well as philosophical proofs (more on this methodology shortly in section 7 of the present article). Although individual lectures are self-contained, a topic frequently continues over two or more lectures. Moreover, we find cumulative progression within the lectures of each volume and from one volume to the next. These two main units of each *Majlis* – pious counsel and *taʾwīl* exposition – constitute a response to the Qur'anic verse enjoining the Prophet Muḥammad to "call to God's path with wisdom (*ḥikma*, here taken to mean *taʾwīl*) and good counsel,"[30] and encourage Fatimid followers to lead a pious life and prioritize the hereafter (Majlis 38).

The contents of the *Majālis* encompass major themes of Fatimid *taʾwīl* doctrine. In short, they expound God's unity, the soul's ascension, and the spiritual hierarchy of the *daʿwa*. Overall, they present a rich hermeneutics of Fatimid doctrine with symbolic *taʾwīl* applications on Qur'an verses, Prophetic hadith, and Shariʿa precepts. They emphasize rationality, harmonizing revelation with reason (contents discussed further in section 5 of the present article).

The *Majālis* may be categorized overall as a work of *taʾwīl*, but what that means in terms of genre is complicated. Its logical argumentation taps into the methodology of theology (*kalām*). Its substance is grounded in Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*) and hadith commentary. Its counsel sections bring in hues of homily and sermonizing. Its eloquent language is a model of high chancery style that is distinct within works by Fatimid *dāʿīs*. Finally, it constitutes an important new chapter in the tradition of the Fatimids' ongoing assemblies of wisdom.

Compared to the mixed denominational public audience for al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān's *Daʿāʾim* lectures, al-Muʾayyad's audience for the higher-level *taʾwīl Majālis* was more in line with the audience for al-Nuʿmān's *Asās al-taʾwīl* and *Taʾwīl al-daʿāʾim*. In his "Thursday morning" poem welcoming the day of the *Majlis*, al-Muʾayyad indicates that permission to attend his lectures was a special honor, "It is a rank (Ar. *rutba*) bestowed upon us by the Imam of the Age, Almighty God's trusted one."[31] Thus, al-Muʾayyad's audience consisted of believing men and women who had attained some level of religious learning. As such, he was working within a frame of assumptions, including belief in the Qur'an and Shariʿa as divine writ, and some understanding of their contents. He formatted the argument here differently than his debates that addressed non-Fatimid Muslims, or his poetry that addressed a mixed audience.

30 Qur'an *al-Naḥl* (16:125).

31 رتبة خصّنا بها صاحب العصر أمين الإله عزّ وجلّا. Al-Muʾayyad, *Dīwān*, 314–315, poem no. 61; Tahera Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid Daʿwa Poetry*, 86–87.

4 Scholarship on the *Taʾwīl* Exposition of al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī's *Majālis Muʾayyadiyya*

Many researchers have remarked on the importance of the Fatimid *taʾwīl* hermeneutic and some interesting scholarship has come forth. This includes articles by Binyamin Abrahamov, Meir Bar-Asher, Karen Bauer, Simonetta Calderini, Julie Meisami, Parvin Peerwani, Ismail K. Poonawala, Bulbul Shah, Diana Steigerwald, and Shafique Virani, as well as Paul Walker in the present volume. Monographs and dissertations by al-Ḥabīb al-Fiqī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ḥijāzī, David Hollenberg, Husain K.B. Qutbuddin, and my own book on al-Muʾayyad's *taʾwīl*-infused poetry also address Fatimid *taʾwīl*. (I have listed these works in the Bibliography, and, in the following pages, I engage with them where relevant.) Among these, some works briefly reference al-Muʾayyad's *taʾwīl*. In a five-page article titled "Ismaili Exegesis of the Qurʾan in *al-Majālis al-Muʾayyadiyya* of al-Muʾayyad fī al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī," Peerwani argues that al-Muʾayyad's exegesis makes the Qurʾan continually applicable to humankind through the Imam's current interpretation. Though insightful, this is one aspect of many. Importantly, she misses the crucial role of reason, which, as I show here, is the starting point of al-Muʾayyad's *taʾwīl* system. Finally, none of the authors mentioned above – notwithstanding their welcome contributions – probe deeply the full substance of the *Majālis Muʾayyadiyya*, or expansively deconstruct its systemic aspects. This is the topic of the present article.

5 The Principles of Fatimid *Taʾwīl*

In the following pages, I focus on al-Muʾayyad's *Majālis*, while also referring to the works of al-Qāḍī al-Nuʾman and al-Kirmānī, to identify and analyze ten interdependent principles of Fatimid *taʾwīl*. Each principle is a complex proposition that could be discussed at much greater length, and additional tenets could be added. My goal, however, is to lay out a framework of Fatimid *taʾwīl*, rather than a comprehensive study of its content. As such, I limit my remarks on each principle to its primary facets, and include some sample quotations and illustrations.

5.1 *Rationality of Faith*

A vital principle of Fatimid *taʾwīl* is that religion is based on reason.[32] In the first two framing lectures of his *Majālis* and elsewhere, al-Muʾayyad lays out

32 For an overview of Muslim expositions harmonizing revelation with reason, see Ian Netton, ed. *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: Critical Concepts in Islamic Thought*. Vol. 2:

proofs for the rationality of the Qur'an and Shari'a. The following is a summary paraphrase of his main arguments:

- The Qur'an addresses humans who are rational beings. Moreover, it addresses them *qua* people of reason in several verses, such as "Be conscious of God, people of reason!"[33] and "Truly, [the Qur'an] is remembrance for people of reason."[34] Describing the recipient of a message as rational would be meaningless if the message itself were irrational. Since its message is for rational beings, the Qur'an must be rational (*Majlis* 1).
- Creatures without mature intelligence – all animals and some humans: children, the mentally unstable, and the sleeping – are not legally responsible (*mukallaf*), that is, they are not expected to undertake the commands of the Shari'a or held accountable for contravening them. Since the Shari'a is required only of rational beings, and is predicated on their rationality, it must be based on reason (*Majlis* 1).
- God's message either has meaning or it does not. If it does not, then the case is that of a letter-writer who does not know the meaning of what he writes, and this is patently absurd. If it does have meaning but God does not reveal it, then why reveal the message at all? If you believe the Qur'an and Shari'a constitute God's message, you must believe that they have rational meaning (*Majlis* 54).
- Muḥammad either knew the rationale of the Shari'a directives he brought or he did not. If he did not, then his messengerhood would be flawed, for he would be expecting logical beings to follow a law whose logic he could not explain. If he did know the rationale but chose to hide it, he did not convey the message fully; it was incumbent upon him to teach the rationale to his community along with the law. If you are Muslim and revere and trust Muḥammad, it has to be clear to you that Muḥammad knew and conveyed the rationale of the Shari'a, for he stated in public, "God, bear witness that I have conveyed your message!" (*Majlis* 1).
- Believing in something entails accepting it as true, and one cannot accept something as true without understanding it. Reason is necessary to "see" the hereafter, which cannot be seen by sense perception. The Qur'an's expectation of Muslims' "belief in the hidden truths" (*īmān bi l-ghayb*)[35] – such as Paradise, Hellfire, God's throne and angels – is an expectation of them

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Revelation and Reason (New York: Routledge, 2007). Many other studies, before and after Netton, also address reason vs. revelation in Islam.

33 Qur'an *al-Mā'ida* (5:100): فَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ يَٰٓأُوْلِي ٱلأَلۡبَٰب.

34 Qur'an *al-Zumar* (39:21): إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَذِكۡرَىٰ لأُوْلِي ٱلأَلۡبَٰب.

35 Qur'an *al-Baqara* (2:3).

to believe truths that may be hidden from sensory perception, but are disclosed to the perception of human reason (*Majlis* 46, 55).
- The Qur'an is God's message addressed to all humankind, whether or not they know Arabic. The proof of its veracity and its miraculous nature is embodied not in its language, but in its meaning (*Majlis* 2).[36]
- Reward and punishment are based on reason. If the Shariʿa were not based on reason, there could be no reward for carrying it out, and no punishment for not doing so (*Majlis* 2).
- The philosophers claim knowledge of the rational sciences, and Muslims generally consider them unbelievers because they deny the necessity of Prophetic guidance. If philosophers were to ask Muḥammad about the nature of the unseen and about the directives of the Shariʿa, would he say to them there is no rational proof? Would that approach support his prophecy? (*Majlis* 2).

Al-Mu'ayyad points out that if taken literally, the Islamic scriptures contain inconsistent pronouncements and random directives. Some I have mentioned earlier; here are further examples: In *Majlis* 1, al-Mu'ayyad asks why the Shariʿa mandates five ritual prayers and not six or seven. In *Majlis* 74, he cites two Qur'an verses about the creation of the heavens and earth, one claiming it took place in six days, the other that it happened in an instant upon God's command of "Be".[37] In *Majlis* 91, he gives several illustrations: One verse says God predestines human behavior, another asserts free choice.[38] One verse states that the sky was created first, while another states that the earth was created first.[39] In *Majlis* 81, al-Mu'ayyad says that the verse about God sending rainstorms "in order to stabilize your feet" is in its literal sense at odds with nature, for feet slip on wet ground rather than being steadied.[40] Fatimid *dāʿī*s posed similar destabilizing or "*tashkīk*" questions to potential converts.[41] In his

36 Similarly, Sulṭān al-Khaṭṭāb ibn al-Ḥasan al-Hamdānī (d. 533/1138) – the first Ṭayyibī "*maʾdhūn*" (rank immediately after the *dāʿī*) – argued in his *Risāla fī bayān iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* that the Qur'an's miraculous nature stems primarily from its meaning. The argument is paraphrased by Ismail K. Poonawala in "An Ismāʿīlī Treatise on the *Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108, no. 3 (1988): 379–86. I find quite inexplicable Poonawala's concluding remarks in which he states that "most of the arguments advanced by the Ismāʿīlī authors … are the same as presented by the … Sunni … al-Bāqillānī," for the differences between the two are patently obvious, and have been discussed at length in the present article.

37 Qur'an *al-Aʿrāf* (7:54) and *Yā Sīn* (36:82).

38 Qur'an *al-Kahf* (18:29), and *al-Dahr* (76:30).

39 Qur'an *al-Nāziʿāt* (79:27–32), and *Fuṣṣilat* (41:9–11).

40 Qur'an *al-Anfāl* (8:11).

41 See discussion of this method, and relevant primary citations, in Tahera Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid Daʿwa Poetry*, 240–42.

Majālis, al-Muʾayyad – like al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān and al-Kirmānī before him – declares that *taʾwīl* is what makes rational sense of the Qurʾan and Shariʿa. He maintains that assertions in the Qurʾan that appear contradictory and rulings in the Shariʿa that appear arbitrary are in fact not contradictory or arbitrary at all. On the level of their inner meaning, they are fully rational and consistent.

5.2 *Inversion of the Literary Perception of Real and Figurative*

Another principle of Fatimid *taʾwīl* is the belief that the Qurʾan contains only absolute truth (*ḥaqīqa*); nothing is figurative or metaphorical (*majāz*), in the sense of words used to indicate something different from the literal meaning.[42] Like its rationality, moreover, the Qurʾan's full truth is visible only through the lens of *taʾwīl*. Inverting the Ashʿarī and Muʿtazilī perception, al-Muʾayyad asserts that the outer, exoteric meaning is in fact the figurative one. *Taʾwīl* is the literal, real truth.

In *Majlis* 3, al-Muʾayyad explains this principle of *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz* at length. He writes that when the literal interpretation of a Qurʾanic verse does not make rational sense, Sunni literalists – who otherwise deny *taʾwīl* – are forced to interpret it figuratively. In these cases, they move from what they believe is the unintended literal meaning to what they believe is the intended figurative meaning. Al-Muʾayyad takes the example of the verse that describes "one who was dead, and whom We [i.e., God] gave life and granted a light with which he walks among people."[43] The literalists, he says, cannot claim this verse to be literally true for the obvious reason that dead people do not come to life and walk around in an envelope of light. So they put forward a figurative interpretation: The dead person is the disbeliever, God revivifies him by granting him true belief, and illumines him with the light of the Qurʾan.[44] Al-Muʾayyad

42 On *majāz*, see Hossein Modarressi, "Some Recent Analyses of the Concept of *majāz* in Islamic Jurisprudence," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106, no. 4 (1986): 787–91; Wolfhart Heinrichs, "On the figurative (*majāz*) in Muslim interpretation and legal hermeneutics," in *Interpreting Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, eds. Mordechai Cohen and Adele Berlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 249–65. Al-Sharīf Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Raḍī, *Al-Majāzāt al-nabawiyya*, ed. Maḥmūd Muṣṭafā (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1937); al-Sharīf Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Raḍī, *Talkhīṣ al-bayān fī majāzāt al-Qurʾān*, ed. Muḥammad al-Mishkāt (Tehran: Maṭbaʿat Majlis al-Shūrā, 1953).

43 Qurʾan *al-Anʿām* (6:122): مَن كَانَ مَيْتًا فَأَحْيَيْنَٰهُ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُۥ نُورًا يَمْشِى بِهِۦ فِى ٱلنَّاس.

44 See, e.g., al-Jurjānī's metaphorical description of an ignorant person as dead, and someone who has knowledge of the unity of God as alive, citing this verse (ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Asrār al-balāgha*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo and Jeddah: Dār al-Madanī, 1991), 74–82, sections 70–77).

agrees with the interpretation itself; what is this, he asks, but *ta'wīl*? However, he disagrees with the labeling, which is here not just a matter of semantics but actual conceptualization. He turns the claim of figurative interpretation on its head, asserting that what most people consider figurative or *majāz* is in fact the real or *ḥaqīqa* meaning, and what they consider the real meaning is in fact figurative. The natural life of a disbeliever, like the life of a grazing animal, is not real life. It may be called life only figuratively, for it is temporary; its end is death and annihilation. Disbelievers are in real terms "dead, not alive" (أَمْوَاتٌ غَيْرُ أَحْيَاءٍ), he says, quoting another Qur'anic verse.[45] The life of the soul, earned through true belief and through the beneficence of the Prophet, is in fact real life, for it is eternal. It is the person who believes, who is conscious of God, who is truly alive.

Asserting the absolute truth of the Qur'an in *Majlis* 76, al-Mu'ayyad accuses both literalist Sunnis and rationalist Mu'tazila of changing its meaning. Literalist interpretations that assign to God physical attributes of hands, face, and the like are anthropomorphic and thus akin to polytheism. On the other hand, the rationalist Mu'tazila's refusal to acknowledge the literal truth of these verses is an open refutation of God's word, for in order to make rational sense of some verses, they sometimes add words; for example, "When *God* comes"[46] becomes "When *the command of God* comes." Or they massage the language of the Qur'an; in the verse about God creating Adam "with his two hands," for example, they render God's two hands as one, in order to interpret God's hands as God's power.[47] Al-Mu'ayyad says in *Majlis* 95 that all Qur'anic verses are absolutely and literally (not figuratively) true, and this truth can be understood only when explained by its truthful and rightful interpreters, the Imams from among Muḥammad's descendants.

5.3 *Harmonization of the Physical and Spiritual Worlds*

The Fatimids assert the existence of perfect harmony between the physical and spiritual worlds. They say the visible world signifies for humans the unseen realm of the spirit. This is another major principle of their *ta'wīl*. The terms they use for this binary are "the world of creation" (*'ālam al-khalq*) and "the world of [God's] command" (*'ālam al-amr*), in reference to the Qur'anic verse,

45 Qur'an *al-Naḥl* (16:21).

46 Qur'an *al-Fajr* (89:66): وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا.

47 Qur'an *al-Mā'ida* (5:64): بَلْ يَدَاهُ مَبْسُوطَتَانِ.

"His is the creation and the command."[48] In the same context, they use the terms "the lower realm" (*al-dunyā*), that is, this world, the physical universe, and the realm of "religion" (*al-dīn*). They assert that these parallel spheres of existence are identically structured, the structure of the spiritual realm corresponding to that of the physical realm, and vice versa. They further posit that an understanding of sensory objects and phenomena (*al-maḥsūs*) leads to cognizance of abstract "intellected" concepts (*al-maʿqūl*).

Engaging a correspondence pointed out earlier by the 4th/10th century *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* (Treatises of the Pure Brethren),[49] they bring in a third parallel sphere, the human body, as the microcosm (*al-ʿālam al-ṣaghīr*) which reflects the macrocosm (*al-ʿālam al-kabīr*) of earth and sky. Both the microcosm of the human body and the macrocosm of the universe further reflect the realm of religion. Endorsing this view with a scriptural proof-text, al-Muʾayyad recites the Qurʾan verse, "We will show them our signs in the horizons and within themselves, so that it becomes clear to them that [the Qurʾan] is indeed the truth."[50] In this interpretation, the horizons of the universe (*āfāq*) and our own persons (*anfus*) – the macro- and microcosms – are God's signs that lead us to him.

Citing another proof-text, this time a hadith of the Prophet Muḥammad, al-Muʾayyad says (in *Majlis* 72 and 128), "Truly God has structured his religion on the model of his physical creation, so that proof may be inferred from his creation for his religion, and from his religion for his oneness."[51] God's physical creation is the road map (lit. *sullam*, or ladder, *Majlis* 83) to his spiritual creation, and his spiritual creation guides humans to God.

Here are three examples from the *Majālis* demonstrating correspondence between the physical and spiritual worlds:

– Just as there is a sky and an earth in the physical cosmos, so too is the spiritual cosmos structured. The Prophet or Imam in every age is the sky that engenders the rain of divine knowledge. His spiritual "consort" (*zawj*) – the

48 Qurʾan *al-Aʿrāf* (7:54): أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ. Simonetta Calderini ("*ʿĀlam al-Dīn* in Ismāʿīlism: World of Obedience or World of Immobility?" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 56, no. 3 (1993): 469) argues that the basis of the hierarchy is the concept of obedience to a higher principle, ultimately to God, and in practice, to the "official interpreters of the divine, the Ismāʿīlī ranks."

49 *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 2:24–26.

50 Qurʾan *Fuṣṣilat* (41:53): سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْآفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ.

51 إن الله أسّس دينه على مثال خلقه ليُستدَلّ بخلقه على دينه وبدينه على وحدانيّته. This hadith is also quoted by the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Muʿizz in his prose supplication to be recited every Sunday (cited from the MS source by Tāhir Sayf al-Dīn, *Risāla Ramaḍāniyya: Mafātīh al-yāqūta al-ḥamrāʾ* (Bombay: Leader's Press, 1373/1954), 73).

individual immediately after him in the spiritual hierarchy, the Prophet's Legatee (*waṣī*) and the Imam's "Proof" (*ḥujja*) – is the earth that accepts the rain.[52] Just as the earth's engagement with the sky's rain brings forth living physical beings, the Legatee's engagement with the Prophet's knowledge (and the Proof's with the Imam's), brings forth "luminous, eternal forms" which constitute the "pure harvest" of believers' souls (*Majlis* 36).

– Parallel with the sun and moon in the cosmos are the Prophet and his Legatee in the spiritual realm. The sun with its rays of light and warming heat is the source of life in the physical realm, and the Prophet with his life-giving knowledge is the source of eternal life in the realm of the spirit. The sun controls all cosmic entities, and the Prophet controls all functionaries and functions of the spiritual realm. The moon receives the sun's light and reflects it, and the Legatee receives the Prophet's knowledge and transmits it to believers; he plays the second principal role in the soul's acquisition of eternal life, and in the direction of the spiritual cosmos (*Majlis* 28). Following the same line of interpretation, the Imams are stars that help humanity navigate the darkness of this physical realm – they are the Prophet's true "Companions" signified by the hadith, "My companions are like stars, those who follow them will be guided" (*Majlis* 12). Parallel with the sun and moon in the cosmos are the heart and brain in the human body; in the spiritual realm, the Prophet and his Legatee are heart and brain (*Majlis* 29).
– Different types of people in the physical world represent different animal temperaments. Some resemble predators that tear apart other animals and devour their flesh; others resemble snakes and scorpions that sting and bite; yet others resemble cows and asses whose sole interest is to eat and mate. Just as a human's bestial traits are in constant conflict with his rational soul, so too bestial types of humanity are in constant battle with the Imam. This is the reason the Imam is the locus of trials in this world, and the focus of the enmity of the wicked (*Majlis* 59).

5.4 *The Mutual Validation of the Exoteric and Esoteric Aspects of the Shariʿa*

Another important principle of Fatimid *taʾwīl* is that the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and esoteric (*bāṭin*) aspects of the Shariʿa complement and validate each other.[53]

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52 On males and females in the Qurʾan as references to spiritual teachers and their students, see Karen Bauer, "Spiritual Hierarchy and Gender Hierarchy in Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī Interpretations of the Qurʾān," *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 14, no. 2 (2012): 29–46.

53 The Fatimids upheld both outward *ẓāhir* and inner *bāṭin* for Shariʿa rites. However, for Qurʾanic tales of the Prophets, they believed it can be one or the other or both. Whatever is unacceptable in its outward form to human reason is intended only at its inner level. For e.g., al-Muʾayyad (*Dīwān*, 193–94) rejects the outward meaning of the Qurʾanic accounts of David's coveting of Potiphar's wife, of Adam and Eve's eating of the forbidden apple,

Although the Fatimids are known for their advocacy of *taʾwīl* and indeed, were often pejoratively termed Esotericists (*Bāṭiniyya*),[54] both their practice and their texts show that they assigned great importance to the Shariʿa's physical aspect. In the *Daʿāʾim al-Islām* and other legal works, al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān lays out in detail the Fatimid school's exoteric precepts, while in its esoteric counterpart, the *Taʾwīl al-daʿāʾim*, he repeatedly counsels his audience to be even more assiduous in performing the worship rites now that they know the inner meaning. For by performing the ritual prayer, they are reiterating with their bodies what they acknowledge in their hearts. The outward practice and inner meaning are complementary aspects of a single whole, each endorsing the other.

Throughout his lectures, al-Muʾayyad also consistently and firmly exhorts listeners to enact good deeds, to pray, fast, offer the alms-levy, and perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. He enjoins them to desist from all prohibited acts, including adultery and consumption of alcohol.[55] He condemns breakaway factions whom he calls Libertines (*Ibāḥiyya*) – possibly the Qarmaṭīs of Baḥrayn? – who, claiming that they knew the Shariʿa's true meaning, reject its outward practices.[56]

In *Majlis* 21, al-Muʾayyad encourages his followers to undertake the exoteric *ẓāhir* which he chastises them for slacking in, alongside the esoteric *bāṭin* which they acknowledged, in the following strong words:

> [The Fatimid Imam] invites you to enhance your deeds with knowledge. Knowledge is the soul and deeds are the body. Only if you have both will you obtain true life. Only by undertaking both will you stay on the Straight Path. "But the transgressors substituted another saying for that which had been given them."[57] Your Imam rejects those who change and alter.

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and of Abraham's believing the sun, moon and star to be God. Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʾmān (*Taʾwīl al-daʿāʾim*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Aʿẓamī (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1982), 1:227) states that for non-Shariʿa precepts, "sometimes just the outward is intended and not the inner, sometimes just the inner and not the outer, and sometimes both together … but as for that which conveys command and prohibition, encouragement, mandate and obligation, it has a categorically dual outward and inner signification.

54 See for e.g., al-Ghazālī, *Faḍāʾiḥ al-Bāṭiniyya* (Gross Failings of the Esotericists), title and passim.

55 E.g., al-Muʾayyad, *al-Majālis al-Muʾayyadiyya*, ed. Ḥātim Ḥamīd al-Dīn (Bombay and Oxford: Oxford Printers, 1975–2011), *Majlis* 50, 76, 78.

56 E.g., al-Muʾayyad, *al-Majālis al-Muʾayyadiyya*, *Majlis* 21, 23, 64, 67. See Madelung, *EI*^{3}, s.v. "Ḳarmaṭī."

57 Qurʾan *al-Baqara* (2:59): فَبَدَّلَ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُواْ قَوْلاً غَيْرَ ٱلَّذِي قِيلَ لَهُمْ.

> He rejects those who discard a single pillar of the Shar'ia. He rejects those who claim that the ritual prayer is a symbol that indicates such-and-such, and the alms-levy is a symbol that indicates such-and-such, while invalidating its physical practice. God, bear witness! God, bear witness! God, bear witness!

Unlike the Qarmaṭīs, the Fatimids professed adherence to the Islamic Shari'a. But what differentiated them from other Muslim denominations who also undertook its outward practices was their equal emphasis on understanding its inner meaning. Condemning crude literalism, the Fatimids declared that the exoteric aspect of religion is incomplete without the esoteric one. Al-Mu'ayyad asserts that each of the two interdependent aspects that make up a human being – corporal and spiritual, body and soul – is expected to proffer worship to God in its own domain (*Majlis* 4):

> When a person faces the direction of prayer, he faces the corporal Ka'ba with his corporal body, and the sublime Ka'ba with his sublime soul. He faces with his corporal body that into which it will assimilate, and with his sublime soul that to which it will return.

The Ka'ba in this example is the symbol for the Imam. You should worship God with your body by praying in the direction of the physical Ka'ba. You should worship God with your soul by pledging allegiance to the Imam and obeying him. For he is God's vicegerent in this world, and will lead you to true knowledge of God.

The symbol and the entity it symbolizes are termed by Fatimid authors *mathal* and *mamthūl*.[58] When the symbol is a religious object like the Ka'ba, or a cosmic body like the sun, the entity symbolized is its spiritual counterpart. When the symbol is a theological concept like the Straight Path or the Pilgrimage to Mecca, the entity symbolized is its physical embodiment.

58 In addition to the terms *mathal* and *mamthūl* (or its equivalent, *mumaththal*), al-Mu'ayyad used several further terms to denote the symbol and the entity that is symbolized, many used also by philosophers, theologians, and Sufis: *dalīl* and *madlūl* (lit. indicator and entity indicated, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, *Majlis* 78); *maḥsūs* and *ma'qūl* (lit. that which is apprehended by the senses, and that which is apprehended by the intellect, *Majlis* 78); *kathīf* and *laṭīf* (corporal and sublime, *Majlis* 87); *jism* and *rūḥ* (body and soul, *Majlis* 87); *ism* and *musammā* (the name and the thing named, *Majlis* 25); *khāṣṣ* and *'āmm* (lit. specific and general, *Majlis* 78). Cf. al-Fārābī's interestingly similar presentation of the acquisition of knowledge through symbols (*mithālāt*), in Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *Ārā' ahl al-madīnat al-fāḍila*, ed. Albir Naṣrī Nādir (Beirut: al-Maṭba'a al- Kāthūlīkiyya, 1959), 121–22.

The symbol carries heavy religious weight, but the entity symbolized is superior, being the basis for the reverence accorded to the symbol. In divine consideration, the entity symbolized is first. Hence, the name of the genre, *ta'wīl*, as mentioned earlier, the term being a derivative of *awwal*, "first." The symbol is enunciated later to denote the entity symbolized, and it may change with different Prophetic cycles, while the entity symbolized remains constant. Elsewhere, I have explained this creed in terms of "metaphor as manifestation."[59]

Following are two further paradigms through which al-Mu'ayyad argues for the integral role in human salvation of both the inner and outer aspects of the Shari'a. One is philosophical, the other is scriptural:

- The outward aspect of the Shari'a by itself (*ẓāhir fard*) resembles intense cold, and the inner aspect by itself (*bāṭin fard*) resembles intense heat. Neither can support life. Only a median clime is conducive to human existence. In the same way, it is only when *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* come together that spiritual life – which generates the "virtuous forms," "angelic forms," and "children of the religious sphere" – is sustained (*Majlis* 38).
- The "pair of each kind" mentioned in God's instructions to the Prophet Noah in the Qur'anic verse, "Place on board [the Ark] a pair of each kind"[60] are the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and esoteric (*bāṭin*). The Ark is the Imam who calls toward both aspects of the Shari'a (*Majlis* 25, more later on the Ark and the hadith endorsing its *ta'wīl* as the Imam).

5.5 *Substance of* ta'wīl*: God's Unity, His Call, and the System and Hierarchy of Spiritual Ascension*

In one *Majlis*, al-Mu'ayyad himself offers us a summary of the contents of *ta'wīl*. Explicating the Qur'anic verse (*al-Baqara* 2:3) praising those who "believe in the concealed truths" (*al-īmān bi-l-ghayb*), he parses the "concealed truths" as *ta'wīl*, and enumerates its subjects as follows (*Majlis* 46):

> Knowledge of the Qur'an's *ta'wīl* may be categorized as knowledge of the hereafter, the angels, and the spiritual and corporal rank holders (i.e. the hierarchy in the heavenly abode, and the hierarchy in this world), and knowledge of the glorious Creator, gained by negating anthropomorphism as well as atheism.[61]

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59 Tahera Qutbuddin, *Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid Da'wa Poetry*, 105–12.

60 Qur'an *al-Hūd* (11:40): قُلْنَا ٱحْمِلْ فِيهَا مِن كُلٍّ زَوْجَيْنِ ٱثْنَيْنِ.

61 ومعرفة تأويل القرآن ينقسم إلى معرفة الآخرة والملائكة والحدود الروحانيّة والجسمانيّة ومعرفة المبدع سبحانه من حيث نفي التشبيه والتعطيل.

Reflecting on the term "concealed truths," al-Muʾayyad argues that God does not ask you to believe in things you cannot see. That would go against the tenets of rationality. The concealed truths may be hidden from the senses, but the intellect's eye can see them. He further explains this argument as follows:

> People who believe in the concealed truths are those who acknowledge the Qurʾan's inner meaning – which is an intangible entity placed within it, and for which the Qurʾan was created like the body for the soul.... If the Prophet were to say, "Know that somewhere there exists ... Paradise and Hellfire," and people accepted this statement without proof, his message would have no merit and the acknowledgement of those who accept it would be invalid.

But, he says, it is incorrect to say that the Prophet has brought no proof for the existence of Paradise and Hellfire. For human reason understands these and all the other concealed truths when explicated by *taʾwīl*.

A detailed list of the *Majālis's taʾwīl* themes is gleaned from the work of the Yemeni Ṭayyibī *dāʿī* Ḥātim Muḥyī al-Dīn, who, in his abridgement titled *Jāmiʿ al-ḥaqāʾiq*,[62] compiles its contents into eighteen thematic chapters. Their headings (in my summary paraphrase) signal the broad substance of al-Muʾayyad 's *taʾwīl*:

1. God's unity (*tawḥīd*)
2. The First Creature (*al-mubdaʿ al-awwal*)
3. God's Messenger [Muḥammad]
4. The Messenger and his Legatee [Muḥammad and ʿAlī]
5. ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib
6. The Imams among their descendants, and the continuity of the Imamate, father to son in their line, till the last day
7. The spiritual hierarchy (*ḥudūd al-daʿwa*)
8. Revelation and divine inspiration
9. Prophets and Imams
10. Necessity for the covenant (*ʿahd*) and for *taʾwīl*
11. Refutation of those who profess divinity for ʿAlī or the Imams, believe in the transmigration of souls, or would annul the Sharīʿa
12. Refutation of philosophers, free thinkers, atheists, and astrologers

62 Muḥyī al-Dīn Ḥātim, *Jāmiʿ al-ḥaqāʾiq*, ed. Ḥusām Khaddūr (Salamiyya and Damascus: Dār al-Ghadīr, 2012), 1:23–24 and passim.

13. Refutation of al-Maʿarrī's vegetarianism, and of an atheist named al-Thughūrī, the Muʿtazila, the literalist [Sunnīs], and the Jews[63]
14. On those who challenge the Prophet, Legatee or Imam in each age
15. Homilies, orations, prayer-poems, and the trials faced by God's elect in every age
16. Qāʾim al-Qiyāma, the last Imam
17. Recipients of reward in the hereafter
18. Recipients of punishment in the hereafter

As seen from this list, the substance of Fatimid *taʾwīl* concentrates on the workings of God's Mission (*daʿwa*) – particularly the mechanisms of the spiritual hierarchy in this world and in the heavenly abode – which leads ultimately to the exposition of God's unity, *tawḥīd*.

5.6 *Live History: Stories of the Prophets Reflected in Muḥammad's Mission*

Another major principle of the Fatimid *taʾwīl* system is their concept of living history. For the Fatimids, the Qur'anic accounts of the lives and missions of earlier Prophets and Prophetic "cycles" (*dawr*, pl. *adwār*) have full relevance to the present time. This relevance is explicated through *taʾwīl*. The stories of each of the Major Prophets (*nuṭaqāʾ*, sing. *nāṭiq*), Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, and all the many Biblical and Arabian Prophets, are not merely records of events that have happened in the past, they are also an explanation of what is happening in Muḥammad's community in the present, and an indication of what will happen to it in the future.[64] In this context, al-Muʾayyad often quotes the Prophetic hadith, "You, my nation, will experience events experienced by nations of the past, shoe for shoe and feather for feather. If they went down a lizard's den, you shall go down it too"[65] (*Majlis* 21, 155). This quotation echoes the words of the Prophet Dāʿūd (the Biblical King David) cited often in the Ṭayyibī *daʿwa*, "What has happened will happen. What was known will be known. For there is nothing under the sun that is new."[66]

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63 See analysis of some of these refutations in Paul Kraus, "Beiträge zur islamischen Ketzergeschichte: Das *Kitāb az-Zumurruḏ* des Ibn ar-Rāwandī," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 14 (1934): 335–37.

64 See al-Muʾayyad, *al-Majālis al-Muʾayyadiyya*, 155–89, *Majlis* 21, 25, 26.

65 كائن في أمّتي ماكان في الأمم الخالية حذو النعل بالنعل والقذّة بالقذّة حتّى لو دخلوا جحر ضبّ لدخلتموه.

66 ماكان سيكون وما عُلم سيُعلم وما تحت الشمس بجديد. ʿImād al-Dīn Idrīs, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, 5:33; Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn, *Risāla Ramaḍāniyya: Al-Mashrab al-kawtharī* (Bombay: British

Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān's *Asās al-taʾwīl* presents a comprehensive, chronological, Prophet-by-Prophet narrative of salvation history. Al-Muʾayyad's account of the Prophets is spread out over his lectures, but he too consistently applies the same principle. Here are three examples:

– Muḥammad said, "ʿAlī is to me as Aaron was to Moses, except that there is no Prophet after me."[67] Aaron was the Prophet Moses' Legatee and appointed successor, and the parallel between him and ʿAlī is a clear indication of ʿAlī's succeeding Muḥammad (*Majlis* 163).
– Moses said to the Israelites, "Enter the door prostrating."[68] Sunni exegetes interpret this Qurʾanic verse to mean the following: Moses built a low door (presumably as entrance to his house) that he called the Gate of Abasement (*bāb al-ḥiṭṭa*). He commanded his followers to come to him through it bowing, but in their arrogance, they entered the door backwards, bottoms first, so they would not have to bow down. The (true) *taʾwīl* interpretation is as follows: Moses commanded his followers to pledge allegiance to his Legatee Aaron and to obey him, and they disobeyed. Similarly, Muḥammad commanded his community to pledge allegiance to his Legatee ʿAlī and to obey him, and they disobeyed. The Legatee is himself the "gate," the conduit to the Prophet's knowledge. Muḥammad openly declared, "I am the city of knowledge and ʿAlī is its gate. Whosoever desires knowledge should come through the gate"[69] (*Majlis* 24, 41).
– Muḥammad said, "My kin are like Noah's Ark. Those who climb aboard are saved, those who waver drown."[70] In the Qurʾanic account of the flood in Noah's age, the Ark indicates Muḥammad's Legatee and the Imams from his family. Those who enter their *daʿwa* by pledging allegiance to them attain salvation. Those who do not enter the *daʿwa* drown in the sea of corporality (*Majlis* 24, 25, 73).

5.7 *Methodology: Scriptural Evidence and Rational Proofs*

The Fatimids harnessed scriptural (*sharʿī*) evidence and rational (*ʿaqlī*) proofs in support of their exegesis, which together produced a distinctly Fatimid

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India Press, 1340/1922), 81, with variant: وما تحت السماء. The text is also found in the *Old Testament*, "The Song of Solomon," Ecclesiastes 1:9, where it is attibuted to Solomon.

67 عليّ منّي بمنزلة هارون من موسى إلّا أنّه لا نبيّ بعدي.

68 Qurʾan *al-Baqara* (2:58), *al-Aʿrāf* (7:161): وَٱدۡخُلُواْ ٱلۡبَابَ سُجَّدٗا.

69 أنا مدينة العلم وعليّ بابها ومن أراد العلم فليأت الباب.

70 مثل أهل بيتي فيكم كسفينة نوح من ركبها نجى ومن تخلّف عنها غرق.

combination. Whereas al-Mu'ayyad's scriptural arguments were common to many Muslim thinkers, and included Qur'an, hadith, and sayings of ʿAlī and the Imams, the uniqueness in his philosophical line of argumentation was its underpinning notion that the world of religion resembles the physical world in all its manifestations. We have seen this idea and some resultant approaches including cosmology and anatomy earlier. Other techniques include function, numerology, and etymology, which the following examples illustrate:

- **Function**: The Imam is God's face, for just as a person is recognized by his face, the Imam leads you to true recognition of God. The aspect of *taʾwīl* connecting the Imam with God's face is his function of teaching humans about God (*Majlis* 76).
- **Numerology**: The 28 Arabic letters of the Islamic creed, "There is no god but God"[71] denote 28 rank holders in the spiritual hierarchy. The aspect of *taʾwīl* connecting the letters of the Islamic creed to the rank holders in the spiritual hierarchy is the number 28 (*Majlis* 10).
- **Etymology**: The Arabic word *nifāq* – which is usually translated as hypocrisy and denotes the *daʿwa*'s internal enemies – is derived from *nāfiqāʾ al-yarbūʿ* (a jerboa rodent's den), which has two exits. If you corner a jerboa in one, he exits from the other. Similarly, a hypocrite changes his position to suit his convenience. You cannot pin him down. The aspect of *taʾwīl* whereby a hypocrite (*munāfiq*) is called by this Arabic word is its etymology (*Majlis* 57).

Another aspect of *taʾwīl* methodology is the variety of possible interpretations for a single exoteric doctrine, each operable in a different setting. In other words, a single exoteric symbol could denote many different symbolized entities depending on the religious and intellectual context.[72]

In an indication of scholarly lineage, al-Mu'ayyad's methodology in providing proof echoes the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*. In the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā"s narrative of a debate before the king of the jinn, the human orator declares at the onset of his speech that he will bring "scriptural and rational proofs" (*dalāʾil sharʿiyya samʿiyya wa-ḥujaj ʿaqliyya*) in support of his claim that humans are superior

71 لا إله إلّا الله.

72 See Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq's explicit statement about seven, or even seventy, possible interpretations (al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-taʾwīl*, 27). Poonawala's comment that "differences in interpretation by various authors are glossed over" misses this point. His remark that "any *tafsīr* could be used for the external philological exposition of the Qur'ān" (Ismail K. Poonawala, "Ismāʿīlī *taʾwīl* of the Qur'ān," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 221,200) is also way off the mark. This is clear, for e.g., from al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān's insistence on the sole interpretive authority of the Imam in exoteric legal matters, in *Ikhtilāf uṣul al-madhāhib*, 8–17, 23–31, and passim.

to animals.[73] The two-pronged Fatimid *taʾwīl* system was presumably in place before al-Muʾayyad. It is certainly visible in his own teaching many years before he taught the *Majālis*. In a poem he composed in Shiraz some years before his arrival in Cairo, he claims his exposition "harmonizes the Qurʾan with reason."[74]

When addressing the *Majālis'* audience, al-Muʾayyad expected them to be persuaded by scriptural proofs as well as by arguments based on reason. As Fatimid Shiʿa Muslims, their recognition of scriptural testamentary materials as absolute proof could be assumed. As believers who had studied the exoteric level Fatimid texts of jurisprudence and history and were looking for deeper truths and rationales, they were also primed to engage with rational proofs.

5.8 Taʾwīl *as the True Knowledge Integral to Salvation*

The Fatimids regarded the inner meaning of the Qurʾan and Shariʿa taught by the Imams from Muḥammad's descendants as the real knowledge (*ʿilm*) that, along with good deeds (*ʿamal*), leads to salvation (*Majlis* 74 and passim). Time and again, al-Muʾayyad intimates that his *Majālis* – which expound this true knowledge – are the water of life, the immortalizing light. Those among his audience who listen with a true heart ascend in level to spiritual perfection.

Here are two further analogies from the *Majālis* explaining the salvific effect of true knowledge:

- The believer's spiritual form is etched in his (or her) soul by the Prophet or Imam, who is his spiritual father. By virtue of the knowledge his soul acquires and the deeds he performs, it develops its full potential. When the physical form dies, the fully realized spirit returns to its Lord (*Majlis* 47).
- Like the development of the embryo into a human being through physical nourishment, the rational soul develops into an angelic being through its intake of the "food and drink" of knowledge (*Majlis* 58, 59).

The distinction made by certain denominations, particularly many Sufi writers, between the terms "*ʿilm*" (cerebral knowledge) and "*maʿrifa*" (intuitive recognition) is not maintained. In Fatimid thought, they are one and the same. *Maʿrifa* is "recognizing" the higher truths. *ʿIlm* is "knowledge" of the same higher truths.

5.9 *Sole Authority of the Divinely-Guided Imam to Interpret the Qurʾan and Shariʿa*

The principle that synthesizes the aforesaid principles of *taʾwīl* is belief in the sole and God-given authority of the Prophet Muḥammad, his Legatee ʿAlī,

73 *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, 2:206.

74 Al-Muʾayyad, *Dīwān*, 320, poem no. 62, v. 95.

and each living Imam after them to communicate and interpret God's message (*Majlis* 52 and passim). Just as the Prophet is the sole individual authorized to communicate the exoteric aspect of the Qur'an and Shari'a, *tanzīl*, so too the Legatee and Imams are the sole individuals in their time authorized to communicate the inner aspect, *ta'wīl*.[75] Each of these three spiritual rank holders – Prophet, Legatee, and Imam – is also referred to as the *Maqām* (lit. "station"). In Fatimid belief, God revealed the Qur'an and Shari'a to humankind through the Prophet, who encoded the message in the Arabic language. After him, his Legatee, and then the Imam in his line in every age, has the exclusive ability to receive direct divine communication.[76] He is thus the Speaking Qur'an[77] and the Living Sign,[78] the Interpreter who decodes God's message for humanity. Humans find the true path to God only by following the Imam's guidance, either directly, or through the *dā'ī*s and scholars that he authorizes and supervises.[79] Moreover, it is only through a human's acceptance of the Imam's rational interpretation of the Qur'an and Shari'a that the potential of his own reason is fulfilled. Al-Mu'ayyad commended the Mu'tazila's privileging of reason and their rejection of anthropomorphism, but he reprimanded them for refusing to accept the Imam's guidance. He emphasized the continuity of the divine message and declared that its living repository is the Imam of the Age, saying (*Majlis* 45):

> Truly, the knowledge with which Adam was sent, the knowledge with which the Prophets were given preference, is now with the Seal of the Prophets and his pure descendants. So why do you stray? Where do you go?[80]

The principle of the Imam's interpretive authority is intrinsically linked with the larger Shi'i conceptualization of the Imamate. According to the Fatimids, undertaking the primary pillar of Islam – *walāya*: mandatory allegiance to the Imam, including love for him and obedience to him – validates

75 On this, see also al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's exposition in *Asās al-ta'wīl*, 31.

76 See al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, *Majlis* 22, 49, 50, 88. The Imam's divine inspiration is usually differentiated in terminology from the Prophet's, the Prophet's is usually called *waḥy* and the Imam's is called *fayḍ* or *ta'yīd*, but the principle is the same.

77 Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, *Majlis* 92, Ar. *al-Qur'an al-nāṭiq*.

78 Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, *Majlis* 22, Ar. *āyāt ḥayya*.

79 Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, *Majlis* 58.

80 إنّ العلم الذي نزل به آدم وما فضّل به النبيّون في خاتم النبيّين وفي عترته الطاهرين فأين يتاه بكم بل أين تذهبون.

a worshipper's performance of the other six pillars:[81] ritual purification, ritual prayer, alms-levy, fasting, pilgrimage, and jihad, and all Shari'a rites (*Majlis* 6, 28). For it is only the Imam's God-given knowledge that explicates the true meaning of the Shari'a, and it is only through allegiance to him that the worshipper can attain it.

First, al-Mu'ayyad brings scriptural arguments to prove the Legatee and Imam's singular authority to interpret the Qur'an and Shari'a:

- The Qur'an says: "[The Qur'an's] *ta'wīl* is known only to God and those who have a firm base in knowledge."[82] "Those who have a firm base in knowledge" are 'Alī and the Imams. The Sunni interpretation of the verse – that the Qur'an's deep meaning is known only to God – is illogical. (Sunnis pause after the word "God" in the verse, and begin a new sentence from the words "those who have a firm base in knowledge.) What is the point of revealing something to humankind whose meaning they can never know? (*Majlis* 72).
- Muḥammad said: "I leave two weighty things with you: God's Book and my descendants – you will not go astray if you cleave to both. They will never be separated until they come to me together at the celestial pool."[83] The Imam is the Qur'an's companion, the Speaking Qur'an who interprets it through divine guidance just as it was revealed through divine guidance. The hadith proves that "the Book does not exist except with [Muḥammad's] descendants, and [Muḥammad's] descendants do not exist except with the Book" (*Majlis* 23, 45, 86, 94).
- The Qur'an says: "Ask the *ahl al-dhikr* if you do not know [its meaning]."[84] "*Dhikr*" means "Remembrance," and it is generally accepted as referring to the revealed text. *Ahl*, placed grammatically in construct with *dhikr* (thus

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81 Fatimid doctrine lists these seven as pillars of Islam, compared with the Sunni five (the testament of belief, ritual prayer, alms-levy, fasting, and pilgrimage). Jihad refers to a righteous struggle against the forces of evil; the term can refer equally to battle with outside enemies or to combat one's own base nature. Al-Mu'ayyad has a concentrated discussion on *walāya* in *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, *Majlis* 6. For a further comprehensive exposition on *walāya*, see al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, ed. Asaf Fyzee (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1985), 1:3–98; translated as *The Pillars of Islam* by Asaf Fyzee, revised by Ismail Poonawala (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1:5–122.

82 Qur'an *Āl 'Imrān* (3:7): وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلاَّ ٱللَّهُ وَٱلرَّٰسِخُونَ فِي ٱلْعِلْمِ.

83 إنّي تارك فيكم ثقلين كتاب الله وعترتي ما إن تمسّكتم بهما لن تضلّوا بعدي وإنّهما لن يفترقا حتّى يردا عليّ الحوض. Sunni sources also cite this hadith, some as it is cited here, and others replace the word "descendants" with "sunna." For a discussion of Sunni sources for this hadith with citations of primary sources, see al-Saqqāf, "Ḥadīth al-Thaqalayn."

84 Qur'an *al-Naḥl* (16:43).

ahl al-dhikr), can mean "people of the Remembrance," or "family of the Remembrance." In this verse, Muḥammad is himself referenced as the Remembrance, the personified Qur'an, for he explains its commands and teaches his followers how to worship, to fast, and so on. His family is *ahl al-dhikr*, and the community is directed to solicit them for the true meaning of the Qur'an. The Sunni interpretation of *ahl al-dhikr* as people with earlier scriptures is absurd. Why would God command Muslims to ask Jews and Christians – who deny Muḥammad's prophecy – about the true meaning of the Qur'an? (*Majlis* 45, 82).

– The Qur'an says: "You are a warner, and for each [generation] of people [there is] a guide."[85] Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) explains that Muḥammad was the warner, and after him, each generation of people has "a guide from among us, who guides them to the [religion] he brought" (*Majlis* 73).
– The Qur'an says: "If they revert with it to the messenger and the people of command among them, those from among them who derive (*istinbāṭ*) inference will know [its meaning]."[86] This verse indicates that there are certain individuals – the Imams from the Prophet's line – who are authorized to derive the meanings of the Qur'an (*Majlis* 45, 49, 68, 86).

Al-Mu'ayyad also argued with philosophical proofs for the Imam's authority. Here are some examples:

– The Prophet and his Legatee are spiritual parents and through their knowledge spiritual children come forth. So also are the Imam and his second-in-command, the *ḥujja* [*ʿuẓmā*]. "There is no difference between the Imams and other people in their corporality. The difference between them … is the difference between adults and children. In the world of faith, they are mature adults … and their followers are their children" (*Majlis* 67).
– Humanity is essentially distinguished by reason, and the Imam is the perfect human being, the one in whom the rational soul has reached perfection. The closer you come to him in faith, the higher you place on the ladder of humanity. The further you move away from him in faith, the further you move away from being human. The farthest point is reached by the arch-enemy who challenges the Imam and himself claims the Imamate. As a consequence of his enmity for the Imam, he loses his humanity, his true reason, completely, and becomes a mindless beast (*Majlis* 48).
– The eye can perceive only if it has light from outside. In a dark room, the blind and the sighted are equal. Similarly, the mind needs an outside source

85 Qur'an *al-Raʿd* (13:7): إِنَّمَآ أَنتَ مُنذِرٌ وَلِكُلِّ قَوْمٍ هَادٍ.

86 Qur'an *al-Nisāʾ* (4:83): وَلَوْ رَدُّوهُ إِلَى ٱلرَّسُولِ وَإِلَىٰٓ أُوْلِي ٱلأَمْرِ مِنْهُمْ لَعَلِمَهُ ٱلَّذِينَ يَسْتَنْبِطُونَهُۥ مِنْهُمْ.

> of light to see. The Prophet, Legatee and Imam are the sun, moon, and stars of the realm of religion. It is only with the light of their knowledge that the human mind can perceive the higher truths (*Majlis* 23).

The aforementioned Sunni theologian al-Ghazālī ridiculed the Fatimid notion of acquiring knowledge from the Imam, saying it was physically impossible to approach the Imam about every little thing.[87] But al-Ghazālī had either misunderstood or was deliberately misrepresenting the Fatimid epistemological system. As explained here, a believer does not seek out the Imam physically to ask him about every single thing. Rather, the Imam is a living, divinely guided authority for the age, who guides the community on its path to salvation by his very presence on earth as the spiritual head of God's mission, the *daʿwa*. After the Prophet Muḥammad, the Legatee and then the Imam form the communicatory link between God and humankind. He answers some questions personally, and trains some individuals directly, but on the larger scale, he emits his knowledge to all believers by appointing and supervising a spiritual hierarchy who conveys to them his knowledge. A clear picture of this system on the level of jurisprudence is found in the Caliph-Imam al-Muʿizz's letter of appointment for al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān as chief judge in his realm. After authorizing him to derive rulings from the Qur'an, hadith, and sayings of the Imams, and explaining the method of inference he should follow, al-Muʿizz instructs al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān that if he remains unsure on any point, he is to consult the living Imam, al-Muʿizz himself:[88]

> Whenever something continues to perplex you and thus be difficult for you, and remains obscure and thus intractable, refer it in the final instance to the Commander of the Faithful, so that he might direct you to the correct ruling on the issue, so that you might adopt it and act upon it accordingly, for he is the remnant of the Caliphs who were guided by God and the descendant of the Rightly Guided Imams, for God, exalted and sublime be His praise, has decreed that people consult them, draw from their knowledge, and refer matters of importance to them.

87 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (Cairo: Markaz al-Kitāb li-l-Nashr, 1991), 31–36 and *Faḍāʾiḥ al-bāṭiniyya*, passim. The Ṭayyibī *dāʿī* ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad in *Dāmigh al-bāṭil* refutes al-Ghazālī's accusations from the *Faḍāʾiḥ*, point by point. See *Dāmigh al-bāṭil*, passim, and analysis in Binyamin Abrahamov, "An Ismāʿīlī Epistemology: The Case of *al-Dāʿī al-Muṭlaq* ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. al-Walīd," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 41, no. 2 (1996): 263–73.

88 Al-Muʿizz's letter of appointment is recorded by al-Qādī al-Nuʿmān in *Ikhtilāf uṣul al-madhāhib*, 38–39 (trans. Stewart). See *Ikhtilāf*, passim, for more on the interpretive authority of the Imam.

One of the greatest scholars of his age, al-Muʾayyad did not shy away from acknowledging the Imam as his own source of guidance. In a poem in praise of al-Mustanṣir, he wrote:[89]

> My master Maʿadd Abū Tamīm [al-Mustanṣir]
> Has guided me to the Straight Path

5.10 *Rationale for* taʾwīl

If the point is to inform humanity of God and their relationship to Him, why not just tell it like it is? Why have a separate inner meaning? Why have *taʾwīl* at all? Al-Muʾayyad addresses this question in several places in his *Majālis*. Two points in answer to this question have been mentioned earlier, and they may be recapped as follows: (1) *taʾwīl* harmonizes revelation with reason (section 1); and (2) God created the world of religion parallel to the world of physical creation in order to guide human beings into contemplating higher truths through observation of their physical universe (section 3). Here are three more:

– All humans are not alike in their cognitive capacity. They need both intelligence and training in order to reach a stage where they can grasp the higher truths. A graded system of learning ensures that only the deserving, those who are able to digest the higher truths, are given this knowledge (*Majlis* 68).
– Abstractions are grasped more easily when presented through physical images. For example, the Qurʾan uses the image of profitable trade, of buying and selling, to articulate the complex concept of achieving your ultimate purpose in life by performing good deeds and thus being rewarded in the afterlife with paradise (*Majlis* 59).[90]
– Humans are made of body and spirit, so their worship must be bodily and spiritual. In terms of Shariʿa rites, this necessitates both a physical and esoteric form (*Majlis* 68).

Like al-Qādī al-Nuʿmān and al-Kirmānī before him who gave a focused exposition on this question,[91] al-Muʿayyad dedicated at least two full lectures – *Majlis*

89 بمولانا المعدّ أبي تميم – هديت إلى صراط مستقيم. Al-Muʾayyad, *Dīwān*, 300.

90 Qurʾan *al-Baqara* (2:16) أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱشْتَرَوُاْ ٱلضَّلَٰلَةَ بِٱلْهُدَىٰ فَمَا رَبِحَت تِّجَٰرَتُهُمْ وَمَا كَانُواْ مُهْتَدِينَ; Qurʾan *al-Tawba* (9:11) إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱشْتَرَىٰ مِنَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَنفُسَهُمْ وَأَمْوَٰلَهُم بِأَنَّ لَهُمُ ٱلْجَنَّةَ.

91 Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-taʾwīl*, 28–32 (as he mentions here, this is a summary of the detailed arguments put forward in his now lost introductory *taʾwil* book titled *Ḥudūd al-maʿrifa*). Al-Kirmānī, *K. al-Maṣābīḥ*, Part 1, *miṣbāḥ* no. 6: 28–32 (text), 63–67 (trans.).

72 and 128–to explicating the necessity of *taʾwīl*; I have noted his key arguments in this section and at various points earlier in this article.

6 Concluding Remarks

The Fatimid system of *taʾwil* is intrinsically connected with major topics in their larger system of belief, including the rationality of faith, the function of knowledge in achieving salvation, and allegiance to the Prophet, Legatee and Imam. Highlighting the role of *taʾwīl* in the Fatimid belief system, the trajectory of this system presented in broad strokes accentuates the main thrust of my analysis, which is as follows: Humans fulfill their existential potential and attain salvation by following the path shown to them by their creator. This path – delineated in God's message to humankind – is embodied in God's revelation encoded by the Prophet Muḥammad in the Qurʾan and Shariʿa. Now, despite the apparent contradictions in the Qurʾan and the seeming arbitrariness of the Shariʿa, the two are neither contradictory nor arbitrary. Rather, they have an inner rational meaning that underpins the exoteric literal one. God reveals these rational interpretations to humankind through one person in every age. The Imam, like the Prophet, is the only person in his age with the ability to receive God's direct communication. He is the rightful Imam, the true interpreter, the rightly-guided guide. He is the Speaking Qurʾan, the one who decodes God's message. As sole direct recipient and broadcaster of God's communication, he has divine authority to explain the meaning of God's revelation. Humans find the true path to God only by following the Imam's guidance, either directly or through the *dāʿī*s he authorizes and supervises. Accordingly, it is only through acceptance of the Imam's interpretation of the Qurʾan and Shariʿa that the potential of human reason is fulfilled.

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