

undermining Wansbrough's canonization process via interconfessional polemics in the ninth century.

Halevi's findings in this book – the development of urban processions and communal prayers, the issue of the politics of burials, or the torture of the spirit and corpse in the grave – generally confirm the author's contention that, after the death of the prophet, it was the learned men who acted as the agents of Islamization in society, not the official caliphs or sultans.

Halevi, with a matchless imagination in relating the traditions and events of the past, has brought home the significance of Islamic death ritual for our understanding of the past. He has opened the way for further research in this much-overlooked field.

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PAUL E. WALKER:

Fatimid History and Ismaili Doctrine.

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The present volume is a collection of thirteen articles by Paul E. Walker (University of Chicago, Center for Middle Eastern Studies) published in journals and edited books between 1972 and 2004. Their selection reflects a recurrent focus of research of this prolific scholar, namely the interplay between Fatimid history and Ismaili doctrine. This is not an easy field to master due to the nature of the primary sources available: on the one hand the Ismaili doctrinal literature, composed mainly for insiders, dealt only rarely with historical events and, when it did, reinterpreted them within a wider meta-historical framework; on the other, historical works written by outsiders were either polemical in nature or offered limited understanding of doctrinal issues. Walker has convincingly shown that Ismaili doctrine was indeed inextricably linked to Fatimid government and dynastic rule (297–567/909–1171), the most obvious example being the nature of Fatimid leadership, both temporal (caliph) and religious (imam).

This volume is also a testimony to Walker's remarkable contribution to the field of Ismaili and Fatimid studies, which ranges from his historical analysis of the Fatimids' confrontation with the Byzantines and the 'Abbāsids to his studies on early Ismaili cosmology and philosophy, to his evaluation of the Fatimid caliphate.

In his introduction to the volume, Walker provides a thematic grouping of his papers, which I will follow here.

First, by examining specific institutions of the Fatimid state, papers I and II deal with the extent to and ways in which Ismaili doctrine shaped Fatimid dynastic policy. Paper I focuses on the state institutions of learning and whether they spread Ismailism as a doctrine. Walker discusses the case of al-Azhar and carefully distinguishes it from other educational institutions, their specific roles and developments. His aim is to dispel a myth (i.e. al-Azhar as the first Islamic university) and, by way of careful analysis of the extant evidence, Walker concludes that, in fact, al-Azhar was a college only for a brief period and it did not serve as headquarters of the Ismaili *da'wa* (mission or propaganda), but rather as an important congregational mosque. This raises the issue of whether the Fatimid state ever attempted a mass conversion of its subject populations. In paper II, Walker analyses *naṣṣ* (the designation of one's successor to the imamate), a cardinal doctrine for the existence and legitimacy of the Fatimid dynasty but which, in practice, proved highly

problematic, and its application gave rise to repeated controversies and splits within the Ismaili movement. Walker illustrates instances of different typologies of designations and successions of the Fatimid imam-caliphs and by doing so identifies shifts in the theory and practice of *naṣṣ*. It is still unclear, however, precisely when *naṣṣ* developed from being a theoretical principle to becoming a decisive factor in the succession of the imam-caliphs.

Three articles are case studies on the caliphate of the much studied (and debated) imam-caliph al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (r. 386–411/996–1021). Paper III focuses on the workings of the Fatimid *daʿwa* in its drive to proselytize and spread the Ismaili message and the diverse outcomes inside the *dawla* (“state”) and outside it. Paper IX is concerned with the literary production, which aimed at endorsing and defending al-Ḥākim’s imamate against a background of opposition to his aggressive policies on the one hand and the growing claims to his divinity on the other. The last contribution of this group (paper IV) is a specific study of the elite family of the Fāriqīs, which proves useful to the understanding of how important families were instrumental in supporting the governing structure.

A cluster of articles (V, VI and VIII) examines the relations between the Fatimids and the two rival dynasties: the Byzantines and the ʿAbbāsids. In addition to military history, these studies reveal the propaganda war and rhetorical confrontation concerning *jihād*, genealogical claims and the claimed acquisition (and loss) of symbols of legitimacy (such as Dhu’l-Fiqr, i.e. the Prophet’s sword). The rivalry between these dynasties was therefore played at different levels; recorded details about, for instance, the theft and looting of specific objects, can reveal in material and symbolic form the interconnection between religious authority and political rule.

Turning directly to the analysis of the primary sources for the reconstruction of Fatimid history, Walker devotes paper VII to the works of the Egyptian historian al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) and attempts to provide a chronology of those dealing with the Fatimids.

Papers X to XIII deal with Ismaili doctrine. Articles X and XI analyse the work by fourth/tenth c. *dāʿī* Abū Tammām, *Kitāb al-shajara*, with particular emphasis on issues of sources and attribution, and the author’s identification of the seventy-two erring “sects”. However, the link between doctrine and history is only alluded to in paper X, where Walker states that physical sciences, such as cosmology, were used in explaining and supporting Ismaili religious principles (p. 20) and, one could add, religious Ismaili hierarchies. In the two final papers the doctrines of time and of metempsychosis are presented and contextualized within the philosophical trends of the period. Walker points out the contradiction between the coexisting doctrines in Ismailism of eternal time and that of a limited prophetic “history”; in the last paper of the collection he analyses the doctrine of metempsychosis and the relation between soul and body within the philosophical framework of Neoplatonism and its interpretation by different Ismaili scholars.

All in all this volume offers a valuable collection showing the ways in which such a versatile scholar has contextualized both Fatimid history and Ismaili doctrine – through family history, source analysis, and the interpretation of philosophical and theological doctrines. Despite being topically or chronologically specific, these studies are viewed through the lens of the broader contexts of dynastic policies, of Fatimid history and of the developments of ideas and doctrines. The only desideratum: a more extensive number of updates (occasionally indicated in notes in square brackets) on the studies and recent editions of works which have appeared since the original date of publication of the individual papers.

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