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‘The Jews of this Nation’

The Co-production of Sectarian Identity in the Fatimid Caliphate, c. 1120 AD

Introduction

This essay explores the importance of religious co-production for the shaping of sectarian discourses and identities within the context of the medieval Islamic world. As Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg have argued, ‘co-production can and must be studied not only across but also within each of the three religious traditions, all of which have a rich history of sectarian diversification and heresiological dispute in which figures of other religions were frequently deployed’.[1] The example that they provide for this assertion is the statement, often associated closely with Sunni heresiographical writings, that ‘the Shiʿis are the Jews of our community’, a phrase that shall be analysed in more detail below. Heyden and Nirenberg have further argued that, since Judaism, Christianity, and Islam compete over a shared canon of prophetic events thought to have occurred in the past, there is a shared potential for historical hermeneutics between them. It is to these two central questions — the co-production of sectarian identity and the ways in which such an identity was rooted in a particular mode of reading the biblical past — that this chapter seeks to contribute.

This essay addresses these questions by closely examining the Fatimid Ismāʿīlī tradition and its rich textual corpus during the medieval period. This is a particularly productive body of historical evidence for considering these issues for two reasons. Firstly, the Ismāʿīlīs — one of the major groups within Shiʿi Islam that emerged during the early Middle Ages — illustrates how the co-production of sectarian identity was evident across many different schools of thought in medieval Islam, with similar narratives, texts, and frameworks being adopted by both Shiʿis and Sunnis in their polemics. Secondly, the Fatimid case represents the only example in medieval Islamic history of a Shiʿi caliphate

1 Heyden and Nirenberg, ‘Co-produced Religions’, p. 3.

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that ruled over a substantial portion of the Islamic world. The Fatimid realm encompassed numerous religious, cultural, and linguistic groups, and (at its height) included much of North Africa, Sicily, Egypt, the Levant, the Hejaz, Yemen, and established a foothold among Muslim communities in Iran and western India.[2] The Fatimid Caliphate (909–1171) — which bridged Africa, Asia, and Europe — served as an important political context for the entangled histories of the various communities of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Mediterranean world between the ninth and twelfth centuries.[3] Rather than examining the quotidian interactions and polemical encounters between these various religious communities in the Fatimid context — as so many others have done[4] — this article specifically examines how the notion of co-production allows us to better understand the ways in which the figures of Judaism (and, to a lesser degree, Christianity) played a key role in how Muslims articulated their own theological and religious claims. It is nevertheless important to remain cognizant of this broader imperial context, since these realities shaped both the stakes and the particular forms of the articulation of sectarian identity in the twelfth-century Islamic world.

The paper draws extensively upon Ismāʿīlī texts produced between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, but focuses primarily on one particular historical document: the *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah fī Ibṭāl al-Daʿwah al-Nizāriyyah* ('The Guidance of the Imam al-Āmir in Eliminating the Nizārī Sect'). This text, a Fatimid chancery decree (*sijill*), was itself an embodiment of a more literal type of co-production between an Ismāʿīlī Imam-Caliph, a Twelver Shiʿi chief minister, and a Sunni secretary, and constitutes the most important surviving Fatimid polemic against the emerging Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs in Syria and Iran. These Nizārīs, immortalized by Marco Polo (d. 1324), among others, as 'The Assassins' of legend,[5] were among the most ardent religious and political opponents of the Fatimid Caliphate in the early sixth/twelfth century. This particular group was classified and condemned within this text as 'the Jews of the Muslim community' (*yahūd hadhihi al-ummah*). Rather than situating a reading of the *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah* solely within the narrow confines of Fatimid dynastic politics or the intrasectarian rivalries of Ismāʿīlī Shiʿism, I argue that it illustrates the role of anti-Judaism in structuring the classification and formulation of sectarian identity within the medieval Islamic world.

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2 For important studies of the political history of the Fatimid Caliphate, see Brett, *The Fatimid Empire*; Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire*; Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*.

3 den Heijer and others, 'The Fatimid Empire and Its Population', pp. 323–44.

4 Frenkel, 'Adaptive Tactics', pp. 364–89; Lev, 'Coptic Rebellions and the Islamization of Medieval Egypt', pp. 303-44; Lev, 'The Fatimid Caliphs, the Copts, and the Coptic Church', pp. 390–410; Pahlitzsch, 'The Melkites in Fatimid Egypt and Syria', pp. 485–515; Bareket, 'The Head of the Jews (ra'is al-yahud) in Fatimid Egypt', pp. 185–97; Shenoda, 'Displacing Dhimmī, Maintaining Hope', pp. 587–606; Rustow, 'Jews and the Fāṭimid Caliphate', pp. 169–87; Rustow, 'The Legal Status of Dhimmīs in the Fatimid East', pp. 307–32.

5 Daftary, *The Assassin Legends* discusses the formation and impact of these legends in shaping perceptions of the Nizaris since the late Middle Ages.

The Fatimid Ismāʿīlīs constructed notions of proper belief and practice while condemning theological error and schismatic dissension. They did so by drawing upon a longstanding Islamic polemical tradition rooted in specific terminologies, distinct biblical and Qur'anic references, and legible categories. Anti-Judaism — which marked particular ideas and actions among Muslims as an embodiment of 'Jewish error' — was among the most important of these, as will be examined in this paper. This internal use of a constructed 'Judaism' constitutes an important illustration of religious co-production in the sense that the classification, critique, and condemnation of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs in the *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah* was embedded in a set of references to Qur'anic and early Islamic representations of Israelites and Jews.

For centuries, this framework of anti-Judaism had shaped the ways in which Ismāʿīlī missionaries and authors, particularly within the Fatimid context, had constructed other groups of Muslims, and this particular document illustrates how these concepts were put to work in the service of a refutation of the Nizārīs. It is particularly important to think carefully about two aspects of the *Hidāyah*: the deployment of *taʾwīl*, or allegorical esoteric interpretation, of both the Hebrew Bible and Qur'an; and the anti-Judaism that structured the critique of all those who opposed the legitimate designation (or *naṣṣ*) of the Imams — whether Companions of Muhammad in the distant past or Sunnis and Nizārīs in the present. This essay is divided into three main sections. The first seeks to provide a broader view of the political and cultural context for the document, situating the *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah* within the particular politics of dynastic succession in the Fatimid Caliphate. It also highlights the wider context of the Near East during this period, including the establishment and consolidation of the Latin Crusader States, and the spread of a vast political-religious networks of Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs throughout Iran and Syria during the early sixth/twelfth century. These political transformations within the Fatimid Caliphate and its environs heightened the tensions between the Fatimids and their Nizārī opponents, demonstrating that these polemics took place within a dynamic regional context.

The second, and most extensive, part of this essay specifically examines the document's deployment of anti-Judaism in its representation of the Nizārīs. It looks carefully at how ideas about 'Jewish' theological error, dissension, opposition to prophecy, and violation of the covenant — all ideas embedded within an early Islamic and Qur'anic worldview — were put to work within the *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah*. This hermeneutical anti-Judaism is situated within the wider context of Islamic polemics during the Middle Ages in order to demonstrate the important continuities, as well as specificities, of the Fatimid Ismāʿīlī deployment of these ideas. The third and final part of this essay is devoted to a close analysis of how the *Hidāyah* deployed allegorical esoteric interpretation (*taʾwīl*) of Israelite history and biblical narratives, specifically the Book of Kings, to advance its central claims against the Nizārīs. The succession to King Solomon, and the fragmentation of the Israelites into the

kingdoms of Judah and Israel, served as an important point of reference for the text in its construction of sectarian identity.

The *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah*: The Politics of Succession in the Fatimid Caliphate

The *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah* is a text that provides instructive insights into the broader history of sectarian polemics and anti-Judaism within the medieval Islamic world. It was a document that was produced in a given political and intellectual context: the Fatimid chancery in the aftermath of the disputes over succession that had divided the Ismāʿīlī community in the Near East during the late fifth/eleventh and early sixth/twelfth centuries. This was also the moment in which the Crusades were ongoing, the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs emerged as a major political and religious force in Iran and Syria, and the authority of the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs themselves were being contested by the rise of powerful chief ministers, or viziers. This political context fundamentally shaped the specific arguments of the *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah*, revealing the important stakes of its formulation of a particular polemic about the boundaries of community through the construction of the Nizārīs as the 'Jews of the Muslim Community'.

In 487/1094, the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Mustanṣir billāh (r. 427–487/1036–1094), who had reigned for nearly fifty years over a vast realm extending across North Africa, Egypt, Syria, the Hejaz, and Yemen, died. Following his death, his youngest son Abū l-Qāsim Aḥmad was enthroned as the ninth Fatimid Imam-Caliph, al-Mustaʿlī billāh (r. 487–496/1094–1101). This succession took place as a result of the intervention of the Fatimid chief minister and military commander al-Afḍal Shāhanshāh (d. 515/1121). This figure was the son of the powerful Fatimid statesman and military vizier Badr al-Jamālī (d. 487/1094), and was also married to al-Mustanṣir's daughter, which made him the brother-in-law of al-Mustaʿlī. The elevation of al-Mustaʿlī to the position of Imam-Caliph by al-Afḍal prompted a rebellion by the eldest son and heir-apparent of al-Mustanṣir, Nizār, who fled to Alexandria and rallied his partisans. However, he was soon defeated by al-Afḍal and killed several months later, a fact which allowed al-Mustaʿlī, under the supreme influence of al-Afḍal, to secure his authority over Egypt as Imam-Caliph.[6] Both the reign of al-Mustaʿlī and his son and successor, al-Āmir bi-Aḥkām Allāh (r. 495–525/1101–1130), were dominated by the influence of the powerful military vizier al-Afḍal.[7]

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6 Ibn al-Muyassar, *al-Muntaqā min Akhbār Miṣr*, pp. 74–78. For a detailed overview of these events, see Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, pp. 241–44; Brett, *The Fatimid Empire*, pp. 228–30; Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire*, pp. 71–73.

7 Ibn al-Muyassar, *al-Muntaqā min Akhbār Miṣr*, pp. 87, 94.

The execution of Nizār did not put an end to his partisans, known as Nizārīs, who continued to emphasize the legitimacy of his succession and established an extensive network of *dāʿāt* (sing. *dāʿī*), missionaries and agents throughout the Near East, becoming implacable opponents of the Fatimid Caliphate during the early sixth/twelfth century. They would wage a violent campaign of assassinations and intimidation against Fatimid officials, partisans, and caliphs and were perceived as a serious threat to both the religious integrity and security of the Fatimid Caliphate. Although the complexity of dynastic politics, powerful viziers, and court intrigue often shaped the outcome of royal succession in the Middle Ages, the nature of legitimate authority in the Fatimid context magnified the importance of succession.

The idea of the Imamate, particularly within the Fatimid-Ismāʿīlī context, is crucial to better understanding the wider historical stakes of the *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah*. The Fatimid rulers were not conceived of simply as temporal lords or kings by their followers, but were viewed as the sole legitimate heirs of the Prophet Muḥammad and his direct descendants through his daughter Fāṭimah and her husband ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. The Fatimids were caliphs, but also Imāms, infallible beings endowed with supreme spiritual authority to legislate Islamic belief and practice, interpret scripture, and govern human affairs.[8] The convergence of political and religious authority within the person of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph and the supreme importance attached to the idea of *naṣṣ*, or divinely-mandated designation, meant that the controversial question of succession to al-Mustanṣir in 487/1094 had major implications for the unity of the Ismāʿīlī Shi'i community.[9] As a result of the events described above, the Fatimid Ismāʿīlī movement was fractured into two main opposing camps, with the partisans of Nizār (based mainly in Syria and Iran) emerging as a competing Ismaʿīlī sect that challenged the legitimacy of al-Mustaʿlī and his successors who ruled in Egypt. Over the next several decades, this schism led to the evolution of distinct religio-political movements and systems of thought, constituting a watershed moment in the history of Fatimid Ismaʾilism and leading to an irreparable fissure within the movement that would culminate in the division of Ismāʿīlīs into two major factions: Mustaʿlī-Ṭayyibis and the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs. In other words, while rooted in the particular context of late fifth/eleventh-century Cairo, the question of the designation of the successor to al-Mustanṣir would have transformative consequences for the religious, cultural, and political history of the Islamic world.

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8 For two important representations of the Imamate, and particularly the figure of the Imam, in Fatimid-Isma'ili thought during the fifth/eleventh century, see Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Naysābūrī, *Degrees of Excellence* and Ḥāmīd al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Kirmānī, *Master of the Age*.

9 A detailed discussion of the centrality of succession and divinely-mandated designation (*naṣṣ*) in the Fatimid Caliphate is provided by Walker, 'Succession to Rule in the Shiite Caliphate', pp. 239–64.

The *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah* is one of the most important surviving documents that can illuminate the various claims and arguments deployed during the early years of this schism. This text, bearing the name of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Āmir (r. 495/1101–525/1130), al-Mustaʿlī's son and successor, was written around 517/1122 by Ibn al-Sayrafī (d. 542/1147), a leading secretary within the Fatimid chancery.[10] It is significant that the *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah* was composed shortly after the assassination of the powerful chief minister al-Afḍal, a development that allowed al-Āmir to consolidate his own sovereign power and authority, a central theme within the text. The epistle's main objective was to refute the claims of the Nizārīs, whose movement had attracted a large number of adherents in the three decades since the succession dispute of 487/1094 and was intended as a proof text of the legitimacy of al-Mustaʿlī as al-Mustanṣir's undisputed, and divinely-ordained, successor. The document reflects the official doctrinal position of the Fatimid religious and political establishment on the Nizārī *daʿwah* during the early sixth/twelfth century, making it one of the earliest surviving Fatimid, or Mustaʿlī, historical and doctrinal reflections upon the schism. The epistle was based upon the proceedings of a council held in Shawwāl 516/December 1122 under the auspices of al-Āmir and his newly-appointed chief minister al-Maʾmūn al-Baṭāʾiḥī (d. 522/1128), a Twelver Shīʿī. The council was convened in the Fatimid royal palace, with many high-ranking members of the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwah* and royal administration present. According to surviving fragments of the sixth/twelfth-century history written by Ibn al-Maʾmūn, the son of the aforementioned Fatimid chief minister and preserved by the ninth/fifteenth-century historian Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442):[11]

> In the month of Shawwāl 516/December 1122 the caliph al-Āmir bi-Aḥkām Allāh sent an emissary to the lord of Alamut [Ḥasan-i Sabbāh, d. 518/1124]. This occurred following a council of Ismāʿīlī and Imami religious scholars (*al-fuqahāʾ min al-ismāʿīliyyah wa l-imāmiyyah*), including the chief *daʿī* Walī al-Dawlah Abū al-Barakāt b. ʿAbd al-Ḥaqīq, along with all the other Ismāʿīlī *daʿīs*, Abū Muḥammad b. Adam, the head of the House of Knowledge (*mutawallī Dār al-ʿIlm*), Abū l-Thurayyā b. Mukhtār, the chief jurist of the Ismāʿīlīs (*faqīh al-ismāʿīliyya*), Abū ll-Fakhr, the *sharīf* Ibn ʿUqayl, the leaders of the *shurafāʾ* (*shuyūkh al-shurafāʾ*), the chief judge (*qādī al-qudāt*), the children of [the Imam-Caliph] al-Mustanṣir], some of the caliph [al-Āmir's] nephews [i.e. grandsons of al-Mustanṣir],

10 For more on Ibn al-Ṣayrafī and his central importance in the Fatimid chancery, see Rustow, *The Lost Archive*, pp. 275–95.

11 Al-Maqrīzī was one of the most important historians of the Fatimids in the late medieval Islamic world. For more on al-Maqrīzī as a historian, and his role as a compiler and preserver of Fatimid histories in particular, see Walker, 'Al-Maqrīzī and the Fatimids', pp. 83–97; Bauden, 'Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Maqrīzī', pp. 161–200, and Rabbat, *Writing Egypt*.

> Abū al-Ḥasan b. Abī Usāmah, the head of the chancery (*kātib al-dast*), and some of the emirs.
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> The chief minister al-Maʾmūn al-Baṭāʾiḥī asked them 'What are your arguments against these [Nizārīs] who have rebelled against the Ismāʿīlīs (*al-khārijīn ʿalā al-ismāʿiliyyah*)?' They each replied 'Nizār cannot be considered an Imam, and anyone who believes in his Imamate has left this school of thought (*madhhab*), gone astray and must be killed. Even though his father al-Mustanṣir had bestowed upon him the epithet 'Heir-Designate of the Muslims' (*walīʿahd al-muslimīn*), he had also bestowed the epithet 'Heir-Designate of the Believers' (*walīʿahd al-muʾminīn*) to Nizar's brothers, including Abū al-Qāsim Aḥmad [al-Mustaʿlī]. Verily, every believer is a Muslim but not every Muslim is a believer, as the Sacred Book itself confirms'.[12]

The *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah*, issued in the immediate aftermath of this council, preserves many of the theological, legal, and historical arguments mobilized against the Nizārī movement during this council and reflects the increasingly hardline Fatimid position towards the Nizārīs. Following this council, the Fatimid chief minister al-Maʾmūn

> commanded the *shaykh* Abū l-Qāsim b. al-Ṣayrafī to compose an official decree (*sijill*) that would be publicly read, and copies of it circulated to different regions on the aforementioned matter of negating Nizār's claim to the Imamate. The [captured] group [of Nizārīs] were then publicly executed and crucified.[13]

The *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah* was the *sijill*, or official proclamation, that was read publicly across all the mosques of the Fatimid Caliphate, disseminated throughout the lands of the Middle East — particularly Syria, Yemen, and Iran — where the Fatimid Ismāʿīlī movement had supporters and a strong presence.

The missal provides a rare instance of a historical document that preserves the voice of the Fatimid Imam-caliph (mediated through the secretary Ibn al-Ṣayrafī). It appears that a version of it was also sent to Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ (d. 518/1124), the leading Nizārī religio-political authority during the early sixth/twelfth century.[14] The participation of the highest-ranking religious and

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12 Mūsa ibn al-Ma'mūn, *al-Sīrah al-Maʾmūniyya aw Akhbār Miṣr*, p. 78.

13 Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāẓ al-Ḥunafāʾ bi-Akbār al-Aʾimmah al-Khulafāʾ*, 3. 78. According to the seventh/thirteenth-century historian Ibn al-Muyassar, 'al-Maʾmūn ordered the secretary Ibn al-Ṣayrafī to compose an official epistle (*sijill*) that would be read from the pulpits of Egypt, which the later proceeded to do' (Ibn al-Muyassar, *al-Muntaqā min Akhbār Miṣr*, p. 126).

14 According to Ibn al-Muyassar, 'when the council ended, al-Maʾmūn ordered Ibn al-Ṣayrafī to compose a long epistle to Ibn al-Ṣabbāḥ, summoning him to the truth and [providing him an opportunity] to recant his belief in the Imamate of Nizar by deploying against him the same proofs and mode of argumentation mentioned above' (Ibn al-Muyassar, *al-Muntaqā min Akhbār Miṣr*, p. 128).

political officials of state, leading members of the Fatimid Ismāʿīlī *daʿwah*, and the extended royal family (including two sons of Nizār, as well as the latter's sister), whose testimony against Nizar's claims to the Imamate was incorporated into the document, was intended to further undermine Nizārī claims and further legitimize al-Mustaʿli's succession to al-Mustansir.[15]

The excommunication and condemnation of all Nizārīs to death — which coincided with measures to identify, arrest, and execute all known sympathizers within Egypt — reminds us of the stakes and the wider imperial context. The political crisis facing the Fatimids was twofold. It was precisely at this moment of schism that the Latin Crusader kingdoms were established in the Holy Land. The entire reign of al-Mustaʿli and al-Āmir was consumed with facing this new threat, with al-Afḍal playing a particularly important role in this regard.[16] More significantly, the emergence of a powerful Nizārī challenge (particularly following the establishment of strongholds in Syria and Iran) under the leadership of a political-religious network of missionaries and *fidāʿīyyūn* (sing. *fidāʿī*) under the leadership of Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ generated a major sense of urgency among the Fatimids in addressing the schism.[17] The text also served as a strong affirmation of the supreme authority and role of al-Āmir as Fatimid Imam-Caliph following the assassination in 515/1121 of his chief minister, al-Afdal, who had previously appropriated power within the Fatimid realm. In other words, the *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah* was a document that sought to accomplish a number of different purposes.

The document was circulated as early as late 516/early 1123 among the Nizārīs of Damascus — referred to as being associated with the derogatory epithet *ḥashīshiyyah* ('consumers of hashish') — and prompted a short response from a leading Nizārī missionary in 517/1123, which led to a subsequent refutation from al-Āmir, a strongly-worded epistle, also penned by Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, entitled *Īqāʿ Sawāʿiq al-Irghām* ('Hurling the Thunderbolts of Compulsion').[18] Various surviving manuscripts of the *Hidāyah* incorporates the two documents within the same codex.[19] The text, which was edited and published as early as 1932 by Asaf Fyzee,[20] has received relatively little attention from scholars beyond the fields of Fatimid history or Shi'i Studies. Although the works

15 A detailed study of the production of the document and its relationship to the aforementioned council in the Fatimid palace that was convened in Shawwāl 516/December 1122 can be found in Stern, 'The Epistle of the Fatimid Caliph al-Āmir', pp. 20–31.

16 Brett, *The Fatimid Empire*, pp. 233–45.

17 For more on the emergence of the Nizārī Ismaʿīlīs and their extensive networks of missionaries and political agents in both Iran and Syria, see Hodgson, *The Secret Order of Assassins*; Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, pp. 301–55; and Brett, *The Fatimid Empire*, pp. 248–51.

18 Fyzee, ed., *Al-Hidayatu'l-Amiriya*, pp. 27–39 (Arabic pagination).

19 de Blois, *Arabic, Persian and Gujarati Manuscripts*, p. 127.

20 Fyzee, *Al-Hidayatu'l-Amiriya*. This edition of the document, along with the *Īqāʿ Sawāʿiq al-Irghām* and the cycle of Nizārī-Mustaʿlī responses, has been reprinted in Jamal al-Din al-Shayyal, *Majmūʿat al-Wathāʾiq al-Fāṭimiyyah*, pp. 211–42.

of Samuel Stern,[21] Paul Walker,[22] and Paula Sanders,[23] as well as Fyzee's own introduction of the text,[24] have done much to illuminate the religious and political context in which the epistle was produced, the specific contents of the epistle have remained significantly understudied. Rather than undertaking a comprehensive analysis of the *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah*, which I am currently preparing alongside an annotated translation of the text, the remainder of this essay will closely examine several key passages that shed important light on the co-produced nature of sectarian identity in the Fatimid Caliphate during the early sixth/twelfth century.

'The Jews of this Nation': The Representation of the Nizārīs in the *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah*

The contention between the two factions — Mustaʿlīs and Nizārīs — was increasingly violent throughout the early sixth/twelfth century (including assassination, subterfuge, incarceration, and execution). This context of hardening sectarian boundaries is evident within the *Hidāyah*. The vitriolic rhetoric against the Nizārīs and the various rhetorical and polemical strategies employed by the text — which, it should be remembered, was the product of the royal chancery of a significant imperial polity — should not be disassociated from this broader political and social context. It is equally important to remember that, even as the *Hidāyah* directed its primary arguments against the Nizārīs of Iran and Syria, many other communities — Sunnis, Jews, Christians, Twelver Shiʿis — were implicated within the text.

Although a variety of legal-theological proofs, historical arguments, and rhetorical strategies are utilized within the document, one of the most important is its construction of the Nizārīs as the 'Jews of the Muslim community', a claim embedded within Qur'anic and biblical texts, symbols, and narratives. Understanding the idea of the Nizārīs as the 'Jews of this Community' — a phrase utilized at least twice in the text — requires a critical engagement with the co-production of sectarian identity within Ismaʾilism. Far from being unique to this particular document, however, anti-Judaism was central to the formation of Ismāʿīlī — and particularly Fatimid Ismāʿīlī — sectarian identity, and to the ways in which it sought to condemn all other forms of Islam as rebellious, transgressive, and misguided. The *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah* provides an important illustration of the manner in which anti-Judaism, which served as a crucial touchstone for the formation of Islamic identity within early Islam, was put to work within the specific context of Fatimid Ismaʾilism.

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21 Stern, 'The Epistle of the Fatimid Caliph al-Āmir', pp. 20–31.
22 See, in particular, Walker, 'Succession to Rule in the Shiite Caliphate', pp. 254–58.
23 Sanders, 'Claiming the Past', pp. 91–94.
24 Fyzee, *Al-Hidayatu'l-Amiriya*, pp. 1–16.

Following the initial doxology exalting God, the Prophet, and the Imams as the bearers of light unto the universe and the source of all true guidance, the *Hidāyah* proclaims that

> the one who has truly lost is the individual who resists those who are the intimates of God (*awliyāʾ Allāh*), refuses to recognize the right of the Imām of his faith, and thinks badly of them, while following for himself leaders of misguidance whom he established for himself.[25]

It critiques the Nizārīs on three different counts here: their refusal to acknowledge the true Imam of the Age, whether al-Mustaʿli or al-Āmir, the present Fatimid Imam-Caliph; the establishment of false leaders, or anti-Imams, who are then taken as source of truth and guidance; and resistance to those considered intimates of God, namely the true Imam of the Age, along with the refusal to be guided towards the 'Straight Path'. Significantly, this statement is placed in between two significant verses from the Qur'an. The first verse states 'O you who believe, if you obey a group of those who received the scripture, they would turn you back from your belief and make you disbelievers. Whoever holds firmly to God's words will be guided to the straight path' (Q. 3. 100).[26] The second verse, centring on the narrative of Moses and the Israelites in the desert, proclaims that the latter 'have incurred condemnation, humiliation and disgrace, and brought upon themselves wrath from God. This is because they rejected God's revelations and killed the prophets unjustly. This is because they disobeyed and transgressed' (Q. 2. 61).[27] Both of these verses explicitly condemn Jews (or the Children of Israel) for failing to uphold God's commandments, resisting the commands of their own Imams, and serving as major opponents of divine guidance, even murdering their own prophets. From the outset of the *Hidāyah*, therefore, it is quite clear that (like their many counterparts within the Sunni and Twelver Shi'i traditions) this particular group of Muslims sought to represent their theological or political opponents as counterparts to the rebellious and transgressive Banū Isrāʾīl, or Children of Israel, of the Qur'an. This Qur'anic framework, in which an adversarial relationship to prophecy and divine guidance is marked as a particularly 'Jewish' error, structures the critique of Nizārīs throughout the *Hidāyah*.

This framework formed the basis for the exclusion of the Nizārīs from the elite rank of the true believers (the *muʾminūn*), with the *Hidāyah* condemning them as having apostatized from the faith, once again invoking verse 2. 61 from the Qur'an:

> It should be said that the likes of those who turn away from the Limits of God [i.e. the Imāms] and their divine knowledge and claim precedence

25 Fyzee, ed., *Al-Hidayatu'l-Amiriya*, p. 3 (Arabic pagination).
26 Fyzee, ed., *Al-Hidayatu'l-Amiriya*, p. 3 (Arabic pagination).
27 Fyzee, ed., *Al-Hidayatu'l-Amiriya*, p. 4 (Arabic pagination).

> with regards to the Guardianship (*al-wilāyah*), arbitrarily make judgments about the Imamate, and violate the covenant of faith (*ʿahd al-īmān*) have descended from the rank of the elite true faith (*al-īman al-khāṣṣah*) to the rank of the erroneous masses which is like a nation in which various types of people, from all castes and races, are gathered. Verily, divergent opinions and sects cannot be found amongst the people of the *daʿwah* and within the inviolable sanctum of the Imamate. Indeed, *these have incurred the condemnation, humiliation and disgrace from God* (Q. 2. 61) for their divergence, apostasy, and their abandonment of the traditions of their guidance.[28]

The characterization of the Nizārīs as violating the covenant of faith — represented by the figure of the Imam — is here linked directly with Q. 2. 61, a verse, as seen above, that constituted an attack against Israelite deviance and disobedience to prophecy and divine injunctions. The *Hidāyah* leaves little room for ambiguity, and explicitly characterizes the Nizārīs as the 'Jews of the Muslim community' on the basis of their deliberate and nefarious concealment of prophetic knowledge:

> Are you not astonished at a sect (*ṭāʾifah*), aligned with the devil, which has violated the Qur'ān and greatly earned [many evil deeds] in the religion of God? It has violated the inviolable and irreproachable tenets of this religion so that they resemble the Jews of this Nation (*yahūd hadhihi al-ummah*) in the manner in which they conceal the truth after they have known it and in the manner in which they avoid truthfulness even after it has been made clear and evident … These are a people who claimed the Imamate for Nizār without any clear proof or authoritative evidence [of the latter's designation] to guide them to this conclusion. Rather, they were blinded by some insidiousness which deceived the minds of the gullible and by some fabricated rumors which were camouflaged by their being distant from the center of power.[29]

The *Hidāyah* also represents the Nizārīs as the 'Jews of the Muslim Community' for violating the divine covenant, and considers the establishment of false Imams to be the equivalent of idolatry:

> … whoever doubts this matter [the Imamate of al-Mustaʿli] has gone forth from the covenant of religion and has diverged from the bond of the believers and is from among the Jews of this Nation, those who said make a god for us, like the gods they have. He said, 'Indeed, you are ignorant people' (Q. 7. 138).[30]

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28 Fyzee, ed., *Al-Hidayatu'l-Amiriya*, p. 4 (Arabic pagination).
29 Fyzee, ed., *Al-Hidayatu'l-Amiriya*, pp. 6–7 (Arabic pagination).
30 Fyzee, ed., *Al-Hidayatu'l-Amiriya*, pp. 11–12 (Arabic pagination).

The establishment of false Imams is here likened to the fashioning of the Golden Calf, a key event in the construction of Jewish theological error and deviance within the early Islamic tradition. It also served to condemn the Nizārīs not only as misguided Ismāʿīlīs of a lesser rank than true believers, but even as disbelievers and apostates. This anti-Judaism serves as the essential frame for understanding the entire critique of the Nizārīs, who were represented as 'Jews'. It is this hermeneutical anti-Judaism that permeates the entire text, heavily informing how the Nizārīs were represented, classified, and condemned. This anti-Judaism was rooted in early Muslim approaches to the Qur'an and evident in the various modes of reading and interpretation in the medieval Islamic world. David Nirenberg has argued that 'Jewish duplicity and enmity would become a basic axiom of Qur'anic ontology', while demonstrating the Qur'an's 'use of the Jews as figures for the confusion of godliness and falsity, and as an explanation for the vicissitudes of prophetic truth in this world'.[31] In a crucial intervention, Nirenberg has also argued that

> early Islam ma[de] its claim to truth through a logic of supersession that appropriates 'Judaism' and includes it within itself, while at the same time defining itself against that Judaism as a perversion of prophecy — stigmatized, enslaving, hostile — to be left behind by the Believer… Again and again the Islamic tradition invoked the threat of Judaism to make critical sense of its cosmos [with] the prophetic material contained in the Qur'an and the history of early Islam (understood as the life story of Muhammad) became mutually intelligible through a narrative structure of confrontation between prophecy and its 'Jewish' enemies.[32]

These 'Jewish enemies' would continually resurface and reappear throughout medieval Islamic history, but always depended for their construction on this fundamentally important Qur'anic framework highlighted by Nirenberg. There was a very long history of anti-Judaism in Islamic heresiography, with many 'deviant sects' being ascribed to Jewish founders or lineages, including Shiʿism,[33] and even (perhaps especially) Ismaʾilism itself.[34] While this deployment of anti-Judaism is most explicit and evident in the writings of Sunni theologians such as Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) in the fifth/eleventh century or Taqī al-Dīn b. Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) during the eighth/fourteenth century, these are hardly the only, or even the most significant, examples. Since the early Middle Ages, a saying ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad circulated widely throughout the classical Islamic world — and repeated in the famous heresiographical encyclopedia of Muhammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) — was 'the *Qadariyyah* are the Zoroastrians of this community;

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31 Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, p. 149.

32 Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, pp. 169–70.

33 Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic*; Lewis, 'Some Observations on the Significance of Heresy in the History of Islam', p. 44.

34 Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, pp. 122–26.

the *Mushabihhah* are the Jews of this community; and the Rāfiḍah are the Christians of this community'.[35] These formulas of identification associated a particular theological deviance and misguidance within the Islamic community with a particular religious community, whether Christians, Jews, or Zoroastrians. As Ahmed El Shamsy has recently demonstrated in his masterful analysis of the phrase 'the *Mushabihhah* are the Jews of this community', anti-Judaism was integral to the construction of the heresy of *tashbīh* (anthropomorphism or assimilationism) within Muslim theological polemics during the early medieval period.[36] This anti-Judaism was construed variously in genealogical terms, as direct influence of Jews on Muslim thought and practice, and in hermeneutical terms, in which 'Judaism' represented a specific form of theological error and deviance from truth. It would be deployed by various communities and theological schools of Muslims, including Sunnis, Ibadis, Twelver Shiʿis, Zaydis, and Ismāʿīlīs. In an important historical study of the phrase 'the Shiʿis are the Jews of our community', Steven Wasserstrom has examined the importance of religious co-production (although he does not employ the term) for thinking about the formulation of sectarian difference within the context of Sunni polemics against Shiʿism.[37]

It is within this wider tradition that the anti-Judaism of the *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah* should be situated. The text provides one of the most important examples of how this hermeneutic anti-Judaism was put to work within a larger Ismāʿīlī cosmology in which the Imam — the very embodiment of the Word of God — served as the basis for all true guidance. It sought to argue that the Nizārīs, through their active and deliberate rejection of the legitimate Imam of the Age, their denial of the truth of his divinely-mandated designation (or *naṣṣ*), and their establishment of an alternative — a counter-Imamate with its own advocates and defenders — constituted an egregious form of *taḥrīf*, or scriptural alteration or falsification. This followed from longstanding Islamic polemical representations of Christians and Jews as knowingly falsifying their own religious scriptures in order to conceal prophecies about Muḥammad. There was a very long tradition of representing the enemies of the Imams, or even those who failed to recognize the legitimacy of their claims, in light of Qur'anic portraits of Jews and Christians who had refused to recognize Muhammad as the fulfilment of biblical prophecies. This deep-seated hermeneutical anti-Judaism is evident in the earliest Fatimid Ismāʿīlī writings, with Sunnis also presented as 'Jewish' — and at times 'Christian' — for various reasons.

This idea of the Sunnis as 'the Jews of this Community' was among the most predominant themes within Fatimid Ismāʿīlī writings, and is particularly evident within the surviving sermons of Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī (d. 298/911), the late third/ninth-century Ismāʿīlī missionary in North Africa who was

35 Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 1. 11.

36 El Shamsy, '"The Mushabihha are the Jews of this community"', pp. 1034–64.

37 Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, pp. 96–116.

responsible for the conversion of the Kutamah, the Berber confederation that laid the foundations of Fatimid political power in the region, with Sunnis being accused of following the 'tradition/example' (*sunnah*) of the Banū Isrāʾīl and imitating them. There were three key aspects to this critique: accusations of alteration/falsification (*taḥrīf*), usually embodied in the deliberate concealment of true knowledge about the Imam and failing to uphold the divine covenant; the elevation of religious scholars and jurists as 'lords apart from God' in the same manner as Jews and Christians established their rabbis, priests, and monks; and, most importantly, the establishment of false Imams, or idols, which they worshipped as deities instead of God. In one of his sermons, Abū ʿAbd Allāh makes this comparison quite explicit by designating the Sunni rejection of the legitimacy of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib's divinely-mandated succession to Muḥammad as a form of 'Jewish' theological error:

> The Jews of this Nation said that the Prophet did not designate ʿAlī [b. Abī Ṭālib] as commander and he was not the closest to the Believers after the Apostle of God. They declared his being a brother of the Apostle of God a lie and denied ʿAlī's being his minister and executor within his family and successor in his community. [This was just] like the Jews who denied the prophethood of Jesus, in accord with the tradition (*sunnah*) of the Israelites and in imitation of them.[38]

Anti-Judaism would structure the critique of Sunnism throughout the early Fatimid period. The sermon of the second Fatimid Imam-Caliph, al-Qāʾim bi-Amr Allāh (r. 322/934–334/946), in Shawwāl 302/April 915 (while still a prince), which was proclaimed to the largely Sunni Muslim population of Alexandria provides an instructive example:

> O people, I reach out to this community of yours, just as the Messenger of God (may God bless and keep him) reached out to the Jews and Christians, who had with them the Torah and the Gospels, churches and synagogues. He (may God bless and keep him) summoned them to the fulfillment of the knowledge that was in the Torah and the Gospels but they would not believe it. So he imposed on them the sword and the poll-tax and captivity, plunder and exile. In the same way I reach out to this community of yours who has taken your Qur'an in vain. You have thrown it behind your backs and sold it for a paltry price. And so I say to you: 'O people of the book, you stand on nothing unless you uphold the Torah and the Gospels and what has come down to you from your Lord [Q. 5. 68].'[39]

Elsewhere in the same sermon, al-Qāʾim accuses the Sunnis, particularly in lands under the sway of the Abbasids, as having 'take[n] their priests and

38 Madelung and Walker, eds, *Affirming the Imamate*, pp. 67–68 [Arabic pagination].
39 *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, ed. and trans. by Walker, p. 88.

monks as lords besides God' (Q. 9. 31)[40] due to their having acknowledged as legitimate caliphs — or successors of the Prophet — the Abbasids. The identification of aberrant or deviant sects as the 'Jews of the Muslim community' was repeatedly deployed within the writings of Fatimid Ismāʿīlīi missionaries. This even influenced other adjacent traditions, such as the early Druze. For example, Ḥamzah b. ʿAlī (d. 1021), the early fifth/eleventh-century Ismāʿīlī missionary and founder of the Druze faith, proclaimed that the 'the *Nawāṣib* (Sunnis) are the Jews of the Community of Muhammad … [and] the People of *tāʾwīl* (Ismāʿīlīs) are the Christians of the Community of Muhammad'.[41] Fatimid polemics during the early sixth/twelfth century, drawing on this broader tradition, frequently compared the Nizārīs with rebellious Israelites and deviant Companions of the Prophet in the past, and Sunnis in the present, for failing to recognize the legitimate Imam of the Age. The *Īqāʿ Sawāʿiq al-Irghām* states that 'the Imam al-Mustaʿlī bi-llāh is in the station of ʿAlī, and their lord is in the station of Abū Bakr', a reference to the first caliph, deemed illegitimate by Ismāʿīlīs for his usurpation of the position of ʿAlī as the divinely-mandated leader of the Muslim community.[42]

The centrality of *tāʾwīl* — or allegorical esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an — within Ismāʿīlī doctrine is paramount for better understanding the ways in which this reflected the co-production of sectarian identity. The principle of Ismāʿīlī *taʾwīl* relied upon the idea that 'all phenomena have both a *zāhir* and a *bāṭin*, an apparent and an esoteric meaning; the Imam acts as the guide to the inner meaning'.[43] The *Asās al-Taʾwīl* ('Foundations of Esoteric Allegorical Interpretation') by the Fatimid-Ismāʿīlī chief judge and missionary al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān (d. 363/974) constitutes one of the most significant works in this regard. It frequently provides an allegorical interpretation of Qur'anic verses about earlier prophets as references to the Imams and their followers, while verses critical of the Israelites are interpreted as references to the early Muslim community, especially in the ways that they rejected the Imamate of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.[44]

It was this system of interpretation, with its emphasis on the Imam's ability to provide (but not always divulge) the esoteric truth underlying particular verses of the Qur'an, as well as historical events and developments, that underpinned many of the claims and arguments within the *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah*.

The enemies of the Imams — whether Sunnis or Nizārīs — were represented as actively engaging in the practice of *taḥrīf*, or deliberate alteration and falsification of the word of God, through their failure to recognize the

40 Walker, *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, p. 89.
41 Bryer, 'The Origins of the Druze Religion', p. 108.
42 Fyzee, ed., *Al-Hidayatu'l-Amiriya*, p. 34 (Arabic pagination).
43 Sanders, 'Claiming the Past', p. 95.
44 Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Asās al-Taʾwīl*, pp. 243–44.

Imams. Sunni Muslims were represented as figural Jews and Christians who were responsible for the alteration and falsification of scripture (often identified with the living Imam), and the corruption of religion. Embedded within the Hidayah is a longstanding critique of Sunnism, which itself is dependent upon a deep-seated anti-Judaism. By allegorically interpreting particular Qur'anic verses in light of Ismāʿīlī doctrines of the Imamate, the Imams were considered to be the living Word of God, scripture itself. According to the Ismāʿīlī philosopher and missionary al-Muʾayyad fī-l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078),[45] it is the Imams who are meant by the term *āyah* in the Qur'an, further strengthening the association between the figure of the Imam and the idea of embodied scripture.[46]

In addition to being the supreme religious and political ruler of the Muslim community, who was believed to occupy the place of the Prophet Muhammad, the upholder of both the exoteric law and the esoteric interpretation, Ismāʿīlīs also viewed the Imam as a cosmic being whose existence was necessary for the wellbeing of the universe. Indeed, by the fifth/eleventh century, treatises were written confirming that 'the Imam's position in his realm is that of the Universal Intellect (*ʿaql al-kullī*)',[47] reflecting the integration of neo-Platonic philosophical ideas into notions about the Imamate. As such, the violation of *naṣṣ* (divinely-mandated designation) and the failure to obey the Imams was considered an egregious form of *taḥrīf*. More specifically, the verses about *taḥrīf* were interpreted as allegories for the failure of the Muslim community to properly acknowledge the legitimate Imams, which led to their transformation into 'Jews'. In the case of the *Hidāyah*, in which the doctrine of Imamate is central, the Nizārīs were cast in the role of Jews for failing to uphold their own divine covenant, rebellion against God's commands, and falsification of the text — that is the Imam himself — that was the source of all true guidance. Nirenberg has argued that 'both the falsification of scripture and the "false" claim to control its text were so thoroughly typed as Jewish in the Qur'an itself', that it is nearly impossible to understand any charge of *taḥrīf* as separate from this larger hermeneutical anti-Judaism.[48] Indeed, this is explicitly invoked by the Fatimid Ismāʿīlī tradition. As the *Hidāyah* argues:

> [The Nizārīs] have squandered the speaking and living word of God [al-Mustansir] and have distorted his sincere and truthful proofs and they have improperly taken his gracious mercy and transferred it from its proper place, without any evidence of designation or proof of any kind. 'Then woe to those who write the Book with their own hands, and then say: "This is from God", to traffic with it for miserable price! Woe to

45 He was one of the leading Fatimid Isma'ili missionaries during the fifth/eleventh century. For more on him, see Qutbuddin, 'al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī'; and Klemm, *Memoirs of a Mission*.

46 al-Muʾayyad fī-l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *al-Majālis al-Muʾayyadiyyah*, p. 95.

47 al-Naysābūrī, *Degrees of Excellence*, p. 17 (Arabic pagination).

48 Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, pp. 170–71.

> them for what their hands do write, and for the gain they make thereby' [Q. 2. 79]. For those versed in the inner meanings of the Qur'an, this verse is an exposé of the likes of these individuals, who select the Imāms according to their whimsical desires and thoughts, in ignorance of the limits of God and in malicious slander against God. And the book which they have written with their own hands is like their Imām, whom they elected based on their own opinions and the opinions of the deceivers among their leaders. Their saying that this is from God resembles their claim that [Nizār] was appointed by the divinely-guided Imām — who does not speak from his own desire [Q. 53. 3] and who never violates the command of God — so that they may purchase with it the ephemeral things of this world with a small price. Verily, they shall suffer greatly for what they have done in the afterlife and will be rewarded with a painful punishment and an everlasting affliction.[49]

This accusation of falsification and alteration (*taḥrīf*) is made even more explicit in the *Īqāᶜ Sawāᶜiq al-Irghām*, which states that 'it is astonishing to encounter one who hears the words of God, then distorts it (*fa-ḥarafahu*) and conceals the truth (*wa katama l-ḥaqq*) after knowing it'.[50] Through the employment of *tā'wīl*, Israelite history was often interpreted in light of the Islamic present, with a particular emphasis upon the notion of the Imamate, which was in close conversation with particular conceptions of biblical kingship and prophecy.

Cycles of History: The Israelite Past and the Islamic Present

The centrality of the Imam, and the doctrine of the Imamate within Fatimid Ismaʾilism, meant that the biblical past, especially as mediated through the early Islamic traditions in the Qur'an and hadith, took on a new and important meaning within this particular intellectual tradition. The development of a particular idea of cyclical history — which was viewed as being reflected within the Qur'an, accessible through the mechanism of allegorical esoteric interpretation by the Imam and his followers — was articulated through specific doctrines of the Imamate. An instructive example of these notions can be seen in the *Rawḍa-yi Taslīm* by the seventh/thirteenth-century philosopher Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274):

> It is said that after Abraham, the Kingship and Prophethood and the Religion and Imamate continued in two lineages: one was the exoteric lineage through the progeny of Isaac and the other was the esoteric lineage through the progeny of Ishmael. While the signs of Kingship and Prophethood continued to be passed down in the lineage of Isaac,

49 Fyzee, ed., *Al-Hidayatu'l-Amiriya*, pp. 5–6 (Arabic pagination).
50 Fyzee, ed., *Al-Hidayatu'l-Amiriya*, pp. 31–32 (Arabic pagination).

> the lights of Religion and Imamate continued in the lineage of our lord Ishmael. Jesus represented the last of those signs which had been passed down the lineage of Isaac and he also attained to the commencement of the divine illuminations which had graced the progeny of our lord Ishmael.[51]

This idea of cycles of Imams and prophets was closely linked with the allegorical interpretation of verses of the Qur'an (and Bible) that dealt with the Israelites. The early fifth/eleventh-century Fatimid Ismāʿīlī author Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Naysabūrī states that

> God, the Exalted, has indeed mentioned the story of the past communities and the prophets in order that they should know that the same would happen in the cycle of the Prophet Muhammad as it did in other cycles. The Prophet said: 'My community will experience exactly what happened among the Children of Israel'. He also said: 'You will follow the footsteps of those before you, step by step, in an identical manner, to the extent that if they were to enter the burrow of a lizard, you would follow them into it'.[52]

Similarly, the Ismāʿīlī philosopher and missionary al-Muʾayyad fī-l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī taught that 'this community (*ummah*) will follow all the previous communities/nations in their deeds and actions', and quotes a variant of the tradition, which he explicitly ascribes to the Prophet Muḥammad: 'The *Qadariyyah* are the Zoroastrians of this Community; the *Murjiʾah* are the Jews of this Community; and the *Rāfiḍah* are the Christians of this Community'.[53] In doing so, he associates particular forms of theological error and deviance with particular religious communities. As El Shamsy has demonstrated, the construction of the *Murjiʾah* as 'the Jews of this Community' was among the earliest variants of this tradition which circulated in the early medieval Islamic world.[54] The usage of this tradition by al-Muʾayyad therefore reflects an important continuity between these earlier Islamic polemics and the Fatimid Ismāʿīlī tradition during the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries.

Significantly, even as the *Hidāyah* co-produced sectarian identity and employed anti-Judaism as its frame for classifying religious deviance and misguidance, it simultaneously appropriated biblical figures and texts, claiming the heritage of the ancient Israelites in defence of its particular ideas about cyclical history and the Fatimid-Ismāʿīlī Imamate. As Nirenberg has argued, 'the posture of the Qur'an toward the Jews is a double one, simultaneously of inclusion and exclusion'.[55] The *Hidāyah* provides an allegorical interpretation

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51 Ṭūsī, *Paradise of Submission*.

52 al-Naysābūrī, *Degrees of Excellence*, pp. 82–83 (Arabic pagination). This hadith is also repeated in al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa l-Nihal*, 1: 11.

53 al-Muʾayyad fī-l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *al-Majālis al-Muʾayyadiyyah: al-Miʾah al-Ūlā*, pp. 92–93.

54 El Shamsy, '"The Mushabihha are the Jews of this community"', pp. 1044–45.

55 Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, p. 146.

of scripture to claim that the succession crisis that took place following al-Mustansir's death in 487/1094 should be understood as analogous to the division of Solomon's kingdom following his death. Al-Mustansir, the text explains on the basis of the *tāʾwīl* of Q. 2. 102, was the corresponding Imam within the current historical cycle (*dawr*), as Solomon had been among the Children of Israel:

> Indeed, our Master al-Mustanṣir billāh, having the corresponding station [as Imām] to the station of Solomon vis-à-vis the Children of Israel, is the one being indicated by the word 'Solomon'. Verily, the Prophet said: 'My community will experience exactly what happened among Children of Israel, [following in their footsteps] step by step, in an identical manner'. Indeed, the Solomon of this nation is our master al-Mustanṣir billāh because his number in the line of the Imāms is exactly the same as that of Solomon in his line [of the leaders of the Children of Israel].
>
> Moreover, he [al-Mustanṣir] was given dominion and kingship, the likes of which none of his ancestors had possessed, just as Solomon was given [such extensive dominion]. He was also given command over the winds and the devils, in the same manner as Solomon. The command of the winds refers to the [divine] assistance given to him in every circumstance and the command over the devils refers to his subjugation of all his opponents, his adversaries and all those who did not heed his commands.[56]

The *Hidāyah* interprets the Qur'anic story about Solomon in light of the events that transpired in the last days of the al-Mustansir's life, employing *taʾwīl* in the service of a very particular idea of succession within the context of the Fatimid Caliphate:

> As for the Almighty's words 'and verily Solomon did not disbelieve', [Q. 2. 102] this means that our master al-Mustanṣir billāh did not disbelieve, nor did he deny the truth of his knowledge of the Imām to succeed him. Indeed, he appointed our master al-Mustaʿlī billāh as Imām on the day of his wedding in the presence of many witnesses, and he further designated him as Imām at the moment of his death. Thus, this is not a matter which is open to interpretation nor was it [al-Mustaʿlī's designation as Imām] doubted by anyone present. But this has been denied by the one who has followed his base desires and the pleasures of this world, and turned the Imamate and caliphate into a matter of competition and a source of envy. Due to this, the Almighty said: 'Verily, the devils have disbelieved', meaning that these people who opposed the truth and excessively engaged in trickery, thereby becoming misguided and misguiding others in the process.[57]

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56 Fyzee, ed., *Al-Hidayatu'l-Amiriya*, p. 15 (Arabic pagination).

57 Fyzee, ed., *Al-Hidayatu'l-Amiriya*, pp. 15–16 (Arabic pagination).

This engaged with a well-established mode of allegorical scriptural exegesis evident among numerous Ismāʿīlī authors throughout the early medieval period.[58] It is the next passage within the text that is particularly noteworthy. It is here that the *Hidāyah* draws upon extra-Qur'anic material, directly invoking the books of 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles of the Hebrew Bible to make a particular claim about al-Mustaʿlī's position within the current cycle (or *dawr*), which he identifies with that of the biblical king Rehoboam. The Nizārīs are cast into the role of Jeroboam and his followers:

> Such an interpretation is further supported by what is contained in the books of the Children of Israel. Solomon had designated his son Rehoboam as Imām — just as our master al-Mustanṣir billāh designated our master al-Mustaʿlī billāh — a certain Jeroboam envied [Rehoboam] and rebelled against him and he was followed by a group whom he had beguiled by his deceit and whom he had seduced by his sorcery. [Jeroboam] altered the foundations of the faith and led his followers off the straight, clear path of guidance, just as Nizār did in his rebellion against our master al-Mustaʿlī billāh; the misfortune for Jeroboam and his followers occurred in the same way as it occurred for Nizār and his followers, and the fortunate end belonged to Solomon's son, the one who possessed the truth, just as the fortunate end belonged to our master al-Mustaʿlī billāh, the Commander of the Faithful.[59]

This is a particularly fascinating case of allegorical interpretation, since it provides an important reflection within the text on a key moment of religious and political schism, which would culminate in the eventual destruction and weakening of the Israelites. There is an implicit acknowledgement by the *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah* of the destructive nature of the Mustaʿlī-Nizārī split, and even a tacit admission that more than simply a small minority of Ismāʿīlīs belonged to the Nizārī faction. It is important to recall here that the document was produced during a moment of increased violence and attacks against the Ismāʿīlī communities across the Near East, including Syria and Damascus (whose entire Ismāʿīlī community would be massacred in 1129).[60] The foundational principle of this allegorical interpretation was to cast al-Mustaʿlī in the role of Rehoboam, the son and successor of Solomon, while depicting Ḥasan-i Sabbāḥ as Jeroboam, a figure responsible for leading the true believers astray and erecting false idols. This comparison was invoked during a specific moment of political crisis, division, and fragmentation that coincided with the establishment and expansion of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem (!) and ongoing attacks against Ismāʿīlī communities by Sunni political and military figures.

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58 For the most important to study of this phenomenon, see Hollenberg, *Beyond the Qur'ān*.

59 Fyzee, ed., *Al-Hidayatu'l-Amiriya*, p. 16 (Arabic pagination).

60 Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, pp. 348–49.

There is much that could be said about this particular *taʾwīl* of the Hebrew Bible. Quotation of the Hebrew Bible (both in its original and in translation) was not uncommon in the texts produced by the Fatimid-Ismāʿīlī *daʿwah*. One very prominent example can be seen in the writings of the fifth/eleventh-century Ismāʿīlī philosopher and missionary Ḥāmīd al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Kirmānī (d. 412/1021),[61] who quotes Deuteronomy 33. 2, Genesis 17. 20, and Isaiah 21. 6–9 in order to proclaim that Muhammad was designated as a prophet within the Hebrew scriptures.[62] Al-Kirmānī also cites the Syriac Gospel of John in order to illustrate that Muḥammad was designated a prophet by none other than Jesus Christ.[63] These passages have been famously studied, most notably in the pioneering 1931 *Der Islam* article by Paul Kraus.[64]

The particular allegorical interpretation we identified above — namely the parallelism established between al-Mustaʿlī and Rehoboam — is quite unique. There is a sharp contrast, for example, between how the *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah* deploys the figure of Rehoboam and the intense hostility towards this figure among other authors in the medieval Islamic world. In the writings of Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), for example, this figure is represented as an idolator and disbeliever whose reign was marked by political demise and weakness.[65] This passage itself is, of course, also a reflection of the various types of uses of biblical history in the medieval Islamicate context. There is a similarly negative representation of Rehoboam and his reign by Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286).[66] Other authors within the medieval Arabic historical tradition, such as Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Masʿūdī (d. 346/957)[67] and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406),[68] also provide a rather unflattering representation, while all concurring that his reign marked the division of the unified kingdom of Solomon into the polities of Israel and Judah. Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 284/898) is the only author I know of within the medieval Arabic tradition that provides an extensive narrative of Rehoboam's reign that very closely follows the structure, terminology, and narrative of the Book of 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles of the Bible, with some

61 For important studies of this figure and his writings, see Walker and al-Kirmani, *Ismaili Thought in the Age of al-Hakim*; De Smet, *La quiétude de l'intellect*.

62 al-Kirmānī, *Master of the Age*, pp. 62–64 (Arabic pagination).

63 al-Kirmānī, *Master of the Age*, p. 64 (Arabic pagination).

64 Kraus, 'Hebräische und syrische Zitate in ismāʿīlitischen Schriften', pp. 243–63.

65 'Rehoboam reigned for 17 years. He proclaimed his unbelief throughout his entire reign, and openly worshipped idols, along with the entirety of his subjects and army… It was during his reign that the ruler of Egypt [Shishak/Shoshenq I] raided Jerusalem with 70,000 horsemen and 15,000 infantry, conquering the city with the sword. Rehoboam fled, which enabled the ruler of Egypt to sack the city, the palace and Temple, looting everything that was within them… Rehoboam died in the state of unbelief' (Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl fī l-milal wa l-ahwāʾ wa l-niḥal*, 1. 217).

66 Gregory Bar Hebraeus, *Tāʾrīkh Mukhtaṣar al-Duwwal*, p. 55.

67 Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, 1. 47.

68 ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-ʿIbar*, 3. pp. 236–37.

significant differences.[69] There is also a negative representation of Jeroboam by all these authors, but unlike the *Hidāyah*, this is not put in the service of aggrandizing or legitimating Rehoboam.

The deployment of Jeroboam as the source of dissension bears a strong resemblance to Karaite-Rabbanite polemics during the same period. Karaite authors active within the Fatimid Caliphate who wrote in Arabic, such as Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī (fl. 950), invoked Jeroboam as a moment of division, and often cast their Rabbanite opponents as linked with this figure and the dissension that he fomented.[70] According to al-Qirqisānī, Jeroboam was the progenitor of the Rabbanites, and 'the first who brought dissension into the religious camp, and sowed the seeds of rebellion in Israel', and 'who altered the precepts of the religion and falsified them'.[71] There were significant translations of the Hebrew Bible into Arabic by Jews during the Fatimid period, with Karaite scholars and exegetes playing a particularly important role in this regard.[72] These translations, and the exegetical tracts associated with them, would have been familiar to at least a few Fatimid Ismāʿīlī authors. Moreover, there is clear evidence that there were significant numbers of Jews, including Karaites, who were employed within the Fatimid chancery, including during the reign of al-Āmir. There is also evidence of a codex of the Torah or the Samaritan Pentateuch (translated into Arabic?) within the Fatimid palace and chancery, upon which functionaries were expected to swear their oaths in the presence of al-Āmir. According to Ibn al-Ṭūwayr al-Qaysarānī (d. 617/1220), a Muslim and a Samaritan were jointly appointed to manage, with the assistance of a Christian monk, the fiscal administration and financial bureau of the royal administration,

> the two heads of the bureau [i.e. the Muslim and the Samaritan] would regularly come into the presence of al-Āmir bringing with them a codex of the Qur'an and the Torah, upon which they would swear an oath, each upon their own book.[73]

By the early sixth/twelfth century, there was a long history of Muslim engagement with Arabic translations of the Bible produced by both Christians and Jews.[74] Despite some notable exceptions, it appears, however,

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69 Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī, *The Works of Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī*, pp. 322–23. For an annotated translation and study of al-Yaʿqūbī's narrative, see Ebied and Wickham, 'Al-Yaʿḳūbī's Account of the Israelite Prophets and Kings', pp. 80–98.

70 Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of Community*, p. 222; Nemoy, 'Elijah Ben Abraham and His Tract Against the Rabbanites', pp. 66–67; Chiesa and Lockwood, *Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī on Jewish Sects and Christianity*, pp. 99–100; Nemoy, 'Al-Qirqisānī's Account of the Jewish Sects and Christianity', pp. 324–25; Nemoy, *Karaite Anthology*, pp. 45–49.

71 Cited in Bacher, 'Qirqisani, the Karaite, and His Work on Jewish Sects', p. 694.

72 Polliack, 'The Medieval Karaite Tradition of Translating the Hebrew Bible into Arabic', pp. 189–96; Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation*.

73 Ibn al-Ṭūwayr al-Qaysarānī, *Nuzhat al-Muqlatayn*, p. 20.

74 Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible*; Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, pp. 111–29.

that very few Muslim authors engaged directly with the biblical text.[75]

As David Hollenberg has noted, Ismāʿīlī allegorical interpretation of the biblical events and figures should be understood primarily, although not exclusively, within a specifically Islamic polemical milieu.[76] This is what renders it such an important instance of religious co-production, in which the figures, texts, and histories of the Jewish tradition are put to work in the service of the construction of sectarian identity and the boundaries of community within Ismāʿīlī Shiʿism. In the case of al-Āmir's refutation of the Nizārīs, biblical history played an important role in both the construction of the Imam as a figure of authority and in casting his enemies in the role of deviant Israelites and Jews. The *Īqāʿ Sawāʿiq al-Irghām* explicitly invokes the Hebrew Bible on another occasion, referencing Absalom's rebellion against his father, David, and the former's subsequent death in order to justify the execution of Nizār during the reign of al-Mustaʿlī:

> Verily, not every person who is killed is unjustly oppressed nor is every killer an unjust oppressor. Did you not see that David killed his son Absalom when he rebelled against him? Would you say that David is the unjust oppressor and the furthest from God, while Absalom is the unjustly oppressed and the most proximate to him? These would not be words uttered by any rational person…There can be no doubt that anyone who rebels against the Imam, whether this be his brother or son, can have his blood licitly shed and has forfeited the protection [of their life and property], and the Imam would not be an unjust oppressed by killing him. This was the case with Nizār, for he was the one who rebelled against the true Imam, out of envy and seditiousness, and the Imam was correct in carrying out the ruling of God against him in exactly the same way as David was correct in carrying out the ruling of God against his son Absalom.[77]

As in the case of Rehoboam within the *Hidāyah*, the *Īqāʿ Sawāʿiq al-Irghām* departs from the biblical version of events[78] in order to establish a direct parallel between a Prophet-King and the current Imam. It was quite common for Ismāʿīlī *taʾwīl* to invert traditional or established interpretations or associations. The primary importance of the *Hidāyah*'s invoking Rehoboam and Jeroboam is to indicate the importance of cycles (*adwār*) and cyclical history as a cornerstone of Fatimid Ismāʿīlī cosmology. This employment of biblical texts and examples should not be understood simply as an attempt to invoke historical precedent to strengthen a particular claim to succession

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75 Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, p. 129.

76 Hollenberg, 'Disrobing Judges with Veiled Truths', pp. 127–45.

77 Fyzee, ed., *Al-Hidayatu'l-Amiriya*, p. 37 (Arabic pagination).

78 This also differs from the narrative provided by al-Yaʿqūbī, which closely follows 2 Samuel in emphasizing how David mourned for his son Absalom upon discovering that was killed (Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī, *The Works of Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī*, p. 313).

(although this dimension is certainly present). The idea of cycles, alongside the theological understanding of the Imam as the authoritative guide and dispenser of allegorical interpretation, meant that 'the authority for the present could be sought in past events, while the true meaning of past events can be understood only in terms of the present'.[79] The employment of Ismāʿīlī *taʾwīl* to simultaneously make claims about ancient Israel and contemporary events in the early sixth/twelfth century Islamic world was based upon the 'underlying assumption is that the past assumes its true meaning only through its fulfillment and completion in the present'.[80]

The Fatimid present was thus embedded within a multivalent and allegorical interpretation of Islamic history that cast al-Mustanṣir as Solomon, al-Mustaʿlī as a highly rehabilitated Rehoboam, and Nizār (and his followers) as Jeroboam. Simultaneously, al-Mustaʿlī was cast in the place of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, and Nizār in the place of Abū Bakr, with the Nizārīs as corrupters of text, violators of covenants, promoters of idolatry, and ardent opponents of prophets and Imams. The phrase 'Jews of the Muslim Community' was the device through which this allegorical interpretation was made possible, and transformed the emerging Nizārī Ismāʿīlī movement into the embodiment of all things that Fatimid Ismaʾilism sought to represent itself as opposing. For all intents and purposes, the followers of Jeroboam in ancient Israel, the Companions of Muhammad following his death, the Nizārīs in sixth/twelfth-century Syria and Iran were all considered 'Jewish' in the ways that they egregiously violated the divine covenant by failing to acknowledge the legitimate Imam of the Age. The critique was embedded within centuries of Qur'anic hermeneutic, sectarian polemic, and theological discourse, which rendered the idea that the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs were the 'Jews of the Muslim Community' legible to Fatimids and Seljuks, Sunnis and Shiʿis alike. This anti-Judaism, while explicitly rejecting Jewish claims on prophecy, authority, and history, also sought to claim and appropriate the Hebrew Bible by casting the legitimate Imam in the tradition of Solomon, thereby representing the Fatimid Ismāʿīlīs as legitimate heirs of both biblical prophecy and kingship. The *Hidāyah* legitimizes the position of al-Mustaʿlī as a righteous Rehoboam, explicitly designated as heir to both kingship (caliphate) and spiritual leadership (Imamate) of the Muslim community by Solomon (al-Mustanṣir). This representation simultaneously cast Ḥasan-i Sabbāḥ as a new Jeroboam, who contested the legitimate succession and fragmented the community, while sowing discord and dissension. It was in this way that the representation of 'schismatic Nizārīs' in the Muslim present were counterparts of 'disobedient Israelites' in the biblical past.

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79 Sanders, 'Claiming the Past', p. 95.
80 Sanders, 'Claiming the Past', p. 95.

Conclusion

The *Hidāyah* did not put an end to the struggle between the Nizārīs and the Fatimid Caliphate. The Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Āmir was murdered in Cairo in 524/1130 by a group of Nizārī assassins.[81] The assassination was followed by another cycle of disputes over legitimate succession, manifested in the schism between the Tayyibis and Ḥāfiẓīs, in addition to the continuing tensions between these groups and the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs of Syria and Iran, whose intellectual and philosophical traditions would flourish well into the seventh/thirteenth century, and beyond.[82] Nevertheless, the *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah* illuminates the importance of the co-production of sectarian difference across the Islamic world as a whole. By indicating how the phrase 'the Jews of this community', and its underlying logic, simultaneously shaped three layers of Fatimid-Ismāʿīlī polemic — against Jews, Sunnis, and Nizārīs — I have sought to show how the classification and condemnation of particular theological errors as 'Jewish' is evident in a variety of contexts in the medieval Islamic world.

Co-production is central for thinking about the way in which sectarian difference was articulated, constructed, and perpetuated within the medieval Islamic world. The notion of co-production provides a fruitful framework through which we can undertake a more critical examination of the categories, assumptions, and texts that framed the classification of sects and the categorization of variant religious groups within that world. The motives behind the classification of the Nizārīs as 'the Jews of the Muslim Community' — namely the assertion of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph as the legitimate and divinely-appointed successor to the Prophet Muhammad — would have fallen on highly unsympathetic ears among most Muslims in the sixth/twelfth century. However, the terminologies, framework, and categories of classifying religious deviance and infidelity through the invoking of 'Jews' and 'Jewish behavior' would have been universally intelligible across all Muslim sects. It was an indication of the malleability and power of this discourse that all groups within the medieval Islamic world employed the formula 'the Jews of this Nation' for their theological opponents. Significantly, the *Hidāyah al-Āmiriyyah* was composed in the same decade in which al-Shahrastānī would complete his monumental encyclopedia of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sects. As shown above, this text began with the formulas and equations that established a correspondence between various 'Muslim heresies' and Judaism, Christianity, or Zoroastrianism. This was also the decade in which Muḥammad b. Tūmart (d. 524/1130) — the founder of the Almohad movement in Morocco — authored his scathing critiques of the Almoravids, who were also portrayed in similar ways as the *Hidāyah* depicted the Nizārīs. In other

81 Ibn al-Ṭūwayr al-Qaysarānī, *Nuzhat al-Muqlatayn*, pp. 24–26.

82 For a study of this schism, see Stern, 'The Succession to the Fatimid Imam al-Āmir', pp. 193–255; Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, pp. 246–80; Walker, 'Succession to Rule in the Shiite Caliphate', pp. 258–64.

words, the sectarian logic of co-production studied here was not particular to one beleaguered sect of Shi'i at a moment of crisis, but was a dynamic historical tool for thinking (and rethinking) the articulation of sectarian difference in the Islamicate world.

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