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Review Article

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Gender and history in the Fatimid State: The case of Eunuchs 909-1171

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This article examines the phenomenon about the eunuchs' influence which can be traced back to centuries before the Ayyubids. It centered about the eunuchs under Fatimid rule. Although medieval sources are generally reticent about such history, they do offer generous information on certain eunuchs and incidents which gives us a reasonably detailed image of the period. One should point out, however, that contemporary sources apply different titles to eunuchs and this can lead to some confusion. Also, nothing is mentioned about their background despite the role they played. The aim of this study is to shed light on the socio-political and military role of the eunuch institution under the Fatimids.

Keywords: Gender, history, Fatimid state, eunuchs, and Shiite faith.

INTRODUCTION

Peace be upon you, Jawdhar. You know your place is in our hearts. You enjoyed the graciousness of all the guided Imams. How great is my affliction. I count on you after the Almighty. Jawdhar, be on your guard and practise restraint to the best of your ability to prevent those apes from getting at us or even stepping out of their houses. Conceal all secrets completely, particularly from relatives, assistants and the public. If they discover anything, deny it and frighten them as much as you can [1 p74].

These lines were written in 953 by al-Muizz (d. 975) the Walyy al-Ahd or custodian of the imamate when his father, Caliph al-Mansour, died. Al-Muizz entrusted his servant Jawdhar with the task of controlling the Fatimid brothers, uncles and cousins of the dead caliph, who represented a threat to the caliphate of al-Muizz, who referred to them as 'apes'. It was not the first time Jawdhar had enjoyed such prestige during what was a critical period for the Fatimid caliphate. In 934, when al-Mahdi died, Jawdhar was entrusted at the graveside by his successor al-Qaim with secret news concerning the appointment of Walyy al-Ahd to lead the Shiite faith. Jawdhar kept the secret for seven years [1 p39]. Jawdhar, the man in this privileged position, was a eunuch. According to Ayalon [2], the eunuchs under Fatimid rule deserve separate study because the realm was effectively administered by them. Ayalon, a pioneer

in the social history of medieval Islam, wrote only briefly on Fatimid eunuchs, however. This researcher therefore decided to examine the phenomenon, realizing the need for a separate study about the eunuchs' influence which can be traced back to centuries before the Ayyubids [3].

Although medieval sources are generally reticent about such history, they do offer generous information on certain eunuchs and incidents which gives us a reasonably detailed image of the period. One should point out, however, that contemporary sources apply different titles to eunuchs and this can lead to some confusion. Also, nothing is mentioned about their background despite the role they played. One finds that most of them appear suddenly between the lines, and some stories are mentioned about them, as key players. The aim of this study is to shed light on the socio-political and military role of the eunuch institution under the Fatimids. Questioning how events took place will certainly challenge some of our convictions, and will offer a better perspective on the tenth century A.D. Medieval Islam in general, and the Fatimids' rule in particular, saw the eunuchs' power rise to its greatest height.

It seems appropriate here to give a short background to eunuchs or *Khisyan* and their place in other civilizations, including the Muslim civilization. There is evidence that the Chinese, Persian, and Byzantine empires used them in their palaces, especially in the forbidden female

section of the court [4 p148]. According to Jay, the institution of eunuchs is evident in Chinese history from 1700 B.C. to 1924 A.D., and its influence spread to Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Although primarily employed in the imperial household, eunuchs were also used as intermediaries, and became deeply involved in political-military affairs; they played their part in assassinating emperors and empresses, and installing their successors [5]. Al-Jahiz, who wrote much on the eunuch phenomenon, observed that the Byzantines used to employ castration for the purpose of donating sons to the church. One should mention here that the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. excluded eunuchs from the priesthood, but found places for them in the churches of the Orient [6 p124].

In Islamic civilization, eunuchs were needed for many purposes, especially relating to polygamy and the large number of concubines of the rulers and the elite. This made their use essential. Eunuchs enjoyed full freedom of movement in royal palaces and houses. Sons and amirs from different mothers were restricted, along with the other men in the court, from such movement [7 p68]. Eunuchs were also elevated to higher ranks like their counterparts in the Far East, and were involved in other duties like guarding the caliphs and rulers, e.g. in Muslim Spain in the ninth century and for the Aghlabids in North Africa and Sicily from 800 to 909. They guarded the holy places in the Hijaz from the Fatimids' time until 1984, when the last community of eunuchs lived in Mecca and Medina [8]. One should mention here that the main difference distinguishing the institution of eunuchs in Islam from those in other civilizations is that under medieval Islam eunuchs belonged to the mamluk/slave institution whereas in other civilizations they were mainly free natives and did not have to change their faith [9 p15].

According to the Prophet Muhammad's teachings, castration was forbidden under Islam. An alternative practice was found to meet the need for eunuchs and the tasks performed by them. The demand for eunuchs was from two main sources. White met eunuchs, predominantly Sagaliba/Balkan Slavs, were imported over land via France and Spain where they were castrated or captured by Muslim military forces or the Venetian slave merchants, who controlled part of this trade. In addition, many Sagaliba slaves were captured in confrontations between Byzantine and Muslim powers [9 p28]. A Sagalibi slave has a very high price, three times or more than slaves of other races. This could explain the high numbers of Saqalibas in Muslim Spain and North Africa before the Fatimids, as the region was close to that source of eunuch trade.

Black slaves and eunuchs were imported from West Africa across the Sahara to Morocco, from East Africa down the Nile to Egypt, and from sub-Saharan Africa across the desert to Libya [9]. There are two types of eunuchs. The first had his testicles removed and the second had all his sexual organs excised. The sources

never distinguish between the two nor do they attribute particular qualities to them. It is assumed that the first type was performed on the majority of eunuchs in military-political circles owing to the nature of the tasks they were required to perform and for whom total emasculation would present a huge obstacle, as will be explained. The second type could be found mainly inside palaces and households performing miscellaneous tasks and their daily contact with the state bureaucracy would be less frequent if not altogether rare.

Generally speaking, emasculation caused big bones, larger than normal feet, intense sexual desire, and great appetite for food. Eunuchs would not grow beards if the operation was performed before adolescence, and they never became bald. Eunuchs had quick changes of temper owing to hormonal imbalance and could endure long journeys better than ordinary men. As a result of total castration, their voice was like that of a child, they were slow-moving and they were susceptible to flatulence and deformation of the eyes. Both types of eunuchs emitted a foul odour and suffered distorted limbs in old age [6].

It is hard to believe that the second type of eunuch could provide either capable military commanders or even normal soldiers. Also, as men in elite political circles they could not be expected to command respect or obedience if they were from the second type. It is worth mentioning here that eunuchs of the first type owned concubines, had a strong desire for sexual relationships with women and were capable of reaching sexual climax [6 p166]. Furthermore, the author consulted two professors of psychiatry, who observed that eunuchs would experience frequent feelings of covetousness, jealousy, and anger toward normal men. That presumably had negative effects on their emotional balance and judgment.

Medieval Islamic sources refer to eunuchs by different titles and terms. This can be problematic. From the tenth century A.D. onward, we find the following terms applied to eunuchs, according to Pellat: *Khadim*, Arabic for attendant or servant, *Sheikh* or chief, *Ustadh* or teacher, *Muallim* or teacher, and *Tawashi* (from the Turkish *tabushi*, which means servant). The terms were applied from Egypt eastward. Yet we find in Persia two other titles, *Agha* or lord and *Khawaja* or master, which spread to Syria in the Ottoman period. In the Maghrib and Spain, we see terms like *Fata* or youth and *Ghulam* meaning youth or servant [7 p74]. A further noun derived from *Ghulam* is *Ghulumiyya*, which means libido or lust in some periods.

It is difficult to see from the sources whether the person referred to as a *Sheikh* or *Ghulam* is a eunuch or a non-eunuch. In addition, a great number of eunuchs under the Fatimids were Saqalibas, and many others were elevated to the rank of *Ustadh*, or *Ustadh Muhannak*, and wore turbans that partially covered their faces. Nearly all were eunuchs. Nonetheless, it is notable that eunuchs could

be distinguished in the sources not only by their titles or descriptions but also by their strange names. Almost the entire institution enjoyed names like Sandal, Raydan, Maysur, Midad, Yanis, Aqiq, Wafa and Barjawan. In one or two cases, there were names containing the term *Abu* or father of, leading the reader to understand that the person was a normal man, even though he was a eunuch.

It seems relevant here to explain how the Fatimids were influenced by previous and contemporary dynasties to use the eunuch institution in their state. Yacob Lev, an authority on Fatimid history, states that the Fatimids had been influenced by the Aghlabid administration (800-909) in using eunuchs in their kingdom. Ibn Hayyun (d. 974) mentioned that the last Aghlabid ruler, Ziadat Allah III R. (903-909), while escaping from the Fatimid armies to the East, was accompanied by about a thousand eunuchs [10 p70]. He was closely attached to them and refused to sell any of them to the Abbasids [8,10]. The Fatimid dynasty, which had originated in North Africa, also exerted its influence from a second direction, Muslim Spain. From the mid-ninth century, the Umayyads had been using Sagaliba eunuchs on a large scale in their administration, employing them both as high military commanders and as domestic servants in their palaces [11].

In the East, the Abbasid dynasty used eunuchs in high places in state offices from the time of al-Rashid's reign (786-809). In 910, the Amir of Persia Qinbaj al-Khadim under the Abbasids – a eunuch - died. Parallel with the early Fatimid rise, Munis al-Khadim (d. 933), the legendary Abbasid commander, was installed by Caliph al-Muqtadir as custodian of Mecca and Medina in 912, a highly prestigious post. In addition, he was the administrator of the province of al-Thughur in northern Syria. The following year, Munis was given the four-year-old al-Abbas, son of the caliph, to raise and appointed him to govern Egypt [12].

Munis played a central role in successfully repelling the Fatimid campaigns, attacking Egypt with large forces from the Maghrib. He reached his pinnacle of influence when in 932 he toppled the Caliph al-Mugtadir (omnipotent) and installed al-Qahir (Vanguisher) in his place. In the same period, several eunuchs commanded other Abbassid palaces, and in 917 Thumal al-Khadim as head of the Abbasid navy in the Mediterranean was instructed to fight the Byzantines [12 p69]. Among the Buwayhids (933-1062) in Iran, one finds the eunuch Shukr who became the de facto ruler under Adid al-Dawla (d. 983), and for some years under Sharaf al-Dawla (d.990). Contemporary with the Fatimids we also see a eunuch as commander of the army in Saljugid Damascus in 1149. One year after the siege of Damascus Ata al-Khadim a eunuch took part in the second crusade [12,13] and other cases are also cited.

Egypt, which the Fatimids were trying to capture from the Ikhshidids (935-69), we find Kafur (d. 968), a highly

capable commander in 945 under the Ikhshidids in Syria. For two decades he protected Egypt not only from the vigorous Fatimid attacks but also from other external forces, like the Hamdanids of Syria, the Karmatians in Arabia and the Nubians. From the above, a long tradition of using eunuchs in the highest circles is apparent among different Muslim powers and dynasties across the Islamic world. The Fatimids were encouraged to follow suit, especially since they constituted a minority in North Africa and Egypt regarding their ethnicity and religious doctrine. Thus they counted on the eunuch institution to preserve their hereditary religious-political system, no matter how inhuman and despicable that practice, and the extensive demand for it, which encouraged the continuation of trade in eunuchs from overseas.

Eunuchs torn between politics and the Shiite faith

The Fatimid rule counted on eunuchs in political life from Jawdhar under Caliph al-Mahdi (d. 934) to Jawhar under the last Fatimid Caliph al-Adid (d. 1171). Jawdhar, who was a Saqalibi eunuch, was bought from Spain and entered the services of al-Mahdi in his early years, enjoying the highest influence among the eunuchs until the fall of the dynasty in Cairo. Under Caliph al-Qaim (r. 934-46) Jawdhar became a deputy to his master and his influence increased significantly when al-Qaim dealt with the revolt of Ibn Kindad al-Khariji in Tuzar in the Maghrib area. This revolt spread to the Atlas Mountains and occupied nearly the entire rule of al-Qaim. At one point, it threatened the capital of the Fatimids, al-Mahdiyya, besieging it in 944. Moreover, Jawdhar was put in charge of the whole Fatimid realm as keeper of all the treasuries and *Diwans* by al-Qaim's successor [1].

In 946, al-Qaim died but his death was concealed by his son al-Mansour (r. 946-53) with the help of Jawdhar. Ibn Kindad's revolt increased the pressure on the Fatimids that year, as al-Mansour left al-Mahdiyya for the Maghrib area further west and appointed Jawdhar as his deputy (al-Mansour left Jawdhar in control of the realm and gave him keys to the treasures. The correspondence between them was carried out in al-Qaim's name) [1 p44].

No assistant ever had such responsibility as that given to Jawdhar, who not only administered the realm but also managed to conceal the death of Caliph al-Qaim to prevent a rupture in the unity and support of the Fatimids among the Maghribi tribes. Caliph al-Muizz (r. 953-75) followed suit in 969 when he left Tunisia to fight the Khariji Zanata chief Abu Khazar in the West and appointed Jawdhar as his deputy in Mahdiyya [1 p109]. One should note the importance to researchers of Jawdhar's biography, a rare case in Islamic history - a eunuch enjoying such an honour as his personal documents being included with those of his masters, the Fatimid caliphs, in a book which provides invaluable details (discussed below).

After the Fatimids had moved to Egypt and founded Cairo as their capital, the influence of the eunuch institution on politics continued to the end of the tenth century. During the first year of the rule of the eleven-year-old boy Caliph al-Hakim (r. 996-1021) Barjawan (d.1000) was in charge of the royal palace under al-Hakim's father al-Aziz. He was assigned as tutor and regent of al-Hakim [12,14] and tried to subject Egypt to his authority. Barjawan, a white eunuch of probable Turkish origin, refused to submit to the leader of the Kutama Berbers in Egypt, Ibn Ammar, the Wasita or prime minister of al-Hakim. Ibn Ammar's economic and political policies favoured the Berber elements, so Barjawan conspired with Shukr, a commander who had escaped the Buwayhids and entered the service of al-Aziz. Shukr, a eunuch, and Ibn Ammar entered into a pact with the enigmatic Turkish commander, Manjutakin, Lord of Damascus. Meanwhile, Ibn Ammar dispatched most of the Kutama army to restore Syria and Palestine and put them under his authority. The sources also show that Barjawan concealed al-Hakim's succession to the throne and led a Turkish force against the few Maghribi elements left in Cairo, managing to defeat Ibn Ammar. Ibn al-Athir (d. 1233) wrote: (when Barjawan prevailed, he declared al-Hakim, put him on the throne and renewed the oath of sovereignty to him). Barjawan wrote to the nobles and commanders of Damascus asking them to attack the Kutama army. They did this and stole its treasures [12]. Later, Barjawan guaranteed Ibn Ammar his personal safety and allowed him to use his lata, but with full retirement from politics under house arrest.

Barjawan managed to orchestrate this plot not only by gathering the Turkish elements around him but also by penetrating the Kutami pact and placing spies inside the palace of Ibn Ammar. As a result, Barjawan became the Wasita [15] or intermediary between the caliph and the rest of Egypt, elevating himself to de facto ruler of Egypt until his murder in 1000. One should add that delaying the appearance of the boy caliph was out of regard for the Fatimids' religious feeling, particularly in view of the controversial circumstances surrounding the beginning and development of the Shiite doctrine and caliphate.

For four years, Barjawan dominated state affairs. He planted a spy named Aqiq, a eunuch, inside the caliph's palace to report to him personally, mainly about those commanders of the realm [15] who might influence the boy caliph. One of the elite commanders feared by Barjawan was Raydan, bearer of the umbrella for al-Aziz and al-Hakim (the fourth highest military rank in the Fatimid army, [16] it allowed close proximity to the caliph). Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), who paid detailed attention to Fatimid history, wrote that Raydan, also a eunuch, wanted to remove Barjawan from his dominant position and urged al-Hakim to assassinate him saying: 'Barjawan wants to dominate you like Kafur did his Ikhshidid lords'. Al-Hakim replied: 'If that is your opinion, Raydan, and you believe it valid, I want you to help in prevent it'. Al-Hakim

ordered Raydan to kill Barjawan covertly. Raydan carried out his master's order and beheaded Barjawan in the presence of al-Hakim [15 p26]. As a result, al-Hakim held absolute power in his realm, and Raydan inspired his master to place more confidence in him.

The paramount importance of Barjawan among the ruling circles in Egypt is reflected in al-Hakim's fear of a potential revolt in his realm, so, in an exceptional step, he issued a declaration, which was read throughout Cairo, Fustat, and Giza and all Fatimid provinces, justifying his murder of Barjawan: 'O, public, Barjawan was a slave of mine, who once served the commander of the faithful sincerely. When he abused his services the commander of the faithful did as he wished with him and covered him in wrath' [15 p27]. Clearly, such action by al-Hakim reflected how powerful the eunuch had been in his service.

As politics and religious doctrine were closely connected and influenced each other under the Shiite Fatimids, we can see how eunuchs protected the continuation of the religious doctrine and thus ensured the continuation of the dynasty. In 934, while Caliph al-Mahdi was being buried by his son and Walyy al-Ahd al-Qaim - heir to the throne, the latter whispered to Jawdhar: 'Jawdhar, you know that it is forbidden for Walyy al-Ahd to bury the Imam unless the latter required Walyy al-Ahd to do so. I have chosen you out of the whole world to keep this trust. I accept from you the strongest of oaths to conceal what I will reveal to you. My son Ismail (titled al-Mansour) is my Walyy al-Ahd. Keep that secret until I myself reveal it'. Jawdhar kept his promise to the new caliph for seven long years [1]. The same happened on the death of al-Mansour in 953, when al-Muizz revealed to Jawdhar alone the caliph's selection of his son Abd Allah as successor. Jawdhar kept it secret for seven months [1]. This incident relates to the one mentioned on the first page. The exceptional trust placed by the caliph in a eunuch shows how much respect the latter enjoyed, probably because of his devotion, although eunuchs who could never have families had their own agenda and would go to great lengths. participating in intrigues, conspiracies, revolts, etc. and would stop at nothing to elevate themselves politically and militarily, like Munis and Barjawan mentioned above. The behaviour of Jawdhar in both cases enhanced the rule of the caliphs. Under al-Mansour and in the early reign of al-Muizz, there were serious domestic disputes, and Jawdhar's ability to keep secrets gave stability to the caliphate in these transitional periods. Furthermore, al-Muizz, according to Shiite doctrine, should have selected his eldest son Tamim as successor, so Jawdhar's concealed knowledge of the different choice by al-Muizz contributed to political stability and avoided a coup d'etat by members of the family in support of the neglected Tamim. Additionally, Caliph al-Mansur (d. 953) entrusted Jawdhar with all the precious manuscripts of his rule as well as those of the previous Shiite imams [1 p53]. This

put Jawdhar in the position of guardian of the fundamental Ismaili sources far more than any other Fatimid amir or commander; he was therefore able to alter those sources if he wished to do so or use them to his advantage.

From Tunisia to Egypt, the influence of eunuchs continued. During the reign of Caliph al-Aziz (d. 996), Barjawan was appointed as regent of his young son and successor Abu Ali-al-Hakim in 993. When al-Aziz died suddenly in Belbais, East of the Nile Delta on 13 October 996, Barjawan had in his company the caliph's powerful daughter Sitt al-Mulk, the Qadi, and the eunuch Raydan, bearer of the umbrella. According to Ibn al-Qalanisi (d. 1160) Sitt al-Mulk tried to hijack the caliphate for her cousin Abd Allah, who was her husband-to-be. Barjawan knew of the conspiracy and ordered a thousand strong knights to detain her in a separate palace in Cairo. Barjawan swiftly installed al-Hakim, revealed him to the leaders of the realm, and exacted from them an oath of obedience [12 p118].

Al-Maqrizi either did not report or else he ignored the story. He gave a similar account of how Barjawan had rushed to seek the boy al-Hakim, who was playing on top of a sycamore tree in the garden of a house in Belbais. He brought him down, dressed him in the caliphal gown and prepared for a public entry with him into Cairo. The following day, he escorted the young successor in a procession across Cairo with armed guards in the presence of another important commander, the eunuch Raydan, bearing the umbrella for the new caliph [15]. This meant that Barjawan could survive the transitional period and secures the full loyalty of the ruling circles for the new boy caliph, fulfilling the wish of al-Aziz.

The writer will abandon chronological order briefly to follow the eunuch influence on the Fatimid religious doctrine, before resuming analysis of its influence on politics. In 1122, during the caliphate of al-Amir (r. 1101-30), a dispute arose about the authenticity of the succession of Nizar, son of Caliph al-Mustansir (d. 1094), instead of his younger brother al-Mustali (d. 1101) imposed by the Wazir of Egypt and caused great strife in the Fatimid faith across the caliphate. In that year, 1122, the Grand Wazir of Egypt, al-Mamun, became suspicious of a group inside the royal palace that was supporting the Nizari wing. In the presence of Caliph al-Amir, the eldest sister of Nizar, along with her other sisters, was summoned to testify behind the veil that Nizar was never a candidate for the throne of the caliphate. This took place in the presence of some of the elite eunuch commanders or ustadhin (plural of ustadh), according to Ibn Muyassar as reported by al-Magrizi [15]. Such witnesses were not only prestigious but also vital in terms of persuading the ruling circles of the Fatimids to support al-Amir.

Three years later, the Wazir al-Maumun was in full control of the state together with his brother al-Mutaman, who governed Alexandria and the Nile Delta region. Al-

Maumun tried to lend his support to Nizar, son of al-Mustansir [15], probably for political reasons, thus threatening the position of the caliph. He was also a true Fatimid. Caliph al-Amir was alarmed by this act of the wazir and his brother. Al-Amir summoned a eunuch Ustadh and instructed him to infiltrate the service of the wazir and his brother and secretly persuade the commanders to support the caliph and weaken al-Mamun's position. As a result, al-Mamun and al-Mutaman were arrested [15] and al-Amir remained without a wazir for the remainder of his rule. After al-Amir was killed in 1130 without leaving an obvious heir to the throne, the vacuum of power was filled by a Fatimid prince, who was given the title al-Hafiz, keeper or regent of the expected son al-Tayyeb to be born in Alexandria to the murdered caliph. The sources are unclear the birth of this child, but it seems that Yanas, the chief commander of the army and keeper at the royal port, had got rid of the child candidate in the same year in favour of al-Hafiz, who in return appointed Yanas as Grand Wazir. Yanas was very probably a eunuch [12,17], judging from his various functions in the palace and his name, which was one normally given to eunuchs. There are no family references to him in the sources. In 1160, when Caliph al-Faiz died, his Grand Wazir al-Salih headed to the Fatimid royal palace in search of a suitable successor. A powerful eunuch inside the palace helped him to select young al-Adid, a relative but not a son of the dead caliph.

Returning to the political influence of eunuchs, we note the first appearance of al-Zahir, the sixteen-year-old son of al-Hakim. On that occasion he was, in 1021, escorted by the wazir and Nasim, holder of the caliphal sword, one of the eunuch military commanders [12,17]. Sitt al-Mulk, sister of al-Hakim, also participated in the succession process of her absent brother. This reflects awareness by those on her cousin's side. That cousin had been toppled by her as she wanted to guarantee the loyalty of the elite with the aid of the commanders. Later in the year, when Sitt al-Mulk wanted to end the influence of Ibn Dawwas, the Kutami regent to the caliphate, she orchestrated the whole plot with the aid of Nassim, the sagalibi eunuch, bearer of the sword. The latter led a battalion of Sagalibi eunuchs to ambush and kill Ibn Dawwas swiftly to avoid rousing the Berbers. Previously, the teacher of al-Zahir, Midad, another leading eunuch working for Sitt al-Mulk, contrived to deceive Ibn Dawwas in order not arouse his suspicion. Midad had appointed another to replace Ibn Dawwas as keeper of the treasury. That person was Rifq the eunuch. Midad continued to gain power in the Fatimid state, particularly from 1024 when Sitt al-Mulk died. Among the many signs indicating the rise of Midad's influence, as detailed by al-Magrizi, is his title of 'Most Glorious Commander'. Midad formed and led a supreme council consisting of himself and four other leaders including the wazir to administer the realm. He even prohibited the rest of the commanders, including the powerful bearer of the umbrella, from meeting with Caliph

al-Zahir, who led a dissolute life. Midad successfully dispatched an army to put down a revolt in Palestine by the Arab Aljarrah. This was domestically coordinated with another eunuch, Nasim, to punish the slaves who looted Cairo and Fustat during a particularly hard economic year [15]. That development was a continuation of Barjawan's influence and occurred only half a century before the end of Fatimid rule in Egypt when we witness diverse infiltrating influences in several governing posts.

When al-Afdal, the grand Fatimid wazir, was killed in 1121 there was a revolt by the Armenian community in Cairo. Caliph Al-Amir entrusted a eunuch *ustadh* to put down that revolt, because al-Afdal's sons coveted their father's post. More importantly, al-Amir trusted the chief of eunuchs, Rihan, keeper of all treasures, to count the financial resources left by al-Afdal, some of which were not on record. Rihan found twelve million dinars, an unbelievable amount - more than the whole *kharaj* of Egypt. It was probably collected during his three decades as wazir [15].

In 1134, Caliph al-Hafiz became fearful of his violent son Hassan, who had acted as wazir since 1131. Al-Hafiz wanted to kill his influential son, so he ordered Wafyy, one of the chief *muhannak* eunuchs, to confront Hassan. Wafyy went to Upper Egypt and contacted the Rihaneyya eunuch group for help [12]. Here one sees the unprecedented level of trust in the eunuch institution to fight the caliph's son and heir. The conspiracy led by the last eunuch commander Jawhar against Saladin in 1170, which will be examined under the military system described below, illustrates further the immense influence of the eunuch commanders in the Fatimid state.

Lev studied the Fatimid history extensively and noted that eunuchs did not form a majority in the state and did not control or dominate the ruling circles [10]. One can agree with the first statement but given the evidence examined in this study they consistently dominated the ruling circles, whether in North Africa or in Egypt. More evidence will be presented later.

Eunuchs and the military system

Commanders – Eunuch battalions – Maritime activities – Police:

Commanders

If the use of eunuchs under Muslim rule started by giving them miscellaneous duties inside the palace, it was not long before they were used in other sections of society, including the army. There were several reasons for such a development. First, eunuchs wanted to elevate themselves from domestic posts in the palace as they became rivals to the outer bureaucracy. Second, caliphs assumed that they could rely on the loyalty of eunuchs. Moreover, they would be less ambitious as they had no families. Eunuchs enjoyed greater physical strength than

ordinary soldiers which gave them an advantage in terms of rising through the ranks.

In North Africa, according to Ayalon, there was a large number of eunuch commanders from the beginning of the Fatimid era [8]. As soon as Caliph al-Qaim came to power in 934, he was faced with a dangerous revolt in the Maghrib area around Fas and down to the Sinigal, led by the Khariji leader, Ibn Kindad. Al-Qaim sent a huge army (Kathif) to restore order to that region. It was led by his trusted commander, Maysour, a eunuch [8], who managed to restore order to the area. Maysour enjoyed the full trust of his master and remained in his service as the leading commander until his death in 944. In that year, Maysour had to confront a 100,000-strong Berber army which captured al-Qairawan, threatening the caliphate. He was given a large army by al-Qaim to defend the Fatimids. After his death Maysur was succeeded by another eunuch commander, Bushra, who had fought Ibn Kindad earlier. Bushra was able to defeat the Khariji revolt and protect the Fatimid capital, Mahdiyya [12]. In Jawdhar's biography, one finds stories of other eunuch commanders in the service of caliphs, like Shafi in Tunisia under al-Qaim [1], but this research cannot cover all such stories.

While fighting in Maghrib, al-Qaim continued the Fatimid attack on Egypt, and sent another large army (Kathif) on which, according to Ibn al-Athir, the caliph spent lavishly in order to capture Egypt. Raydan, the faithful eunuch commander, was the chief commander of this military project and managed to seize Alexandria, but he was defeated by the Ikhshidid army in 934 [12]. The Fatimids clearly depended on eunuch commanders in important crises and projects. Al-Muizz moved all his family and treasures in 974 to Egypt; he faced a threatening invasion of the Nile Delta region by the Qaramita, who dominated most of its eastern and central parts. The caliph dispatched his eunuch commander Raydan, a Sagalibi, to confront them and save the Fatimid realm [15]. The sources suggest Al-Muizz's great trust in Raydan's ability and loyalty. The caliph had dispatched him earlier in the year to Tripoli, where he defeated a Byzantine army dispatched by John I Tzimisces. Raydan was then ordered to march to Damascus to restore the authority of the Fatimid there by defeating a rebellious commander, Abu Mahmoud. Raydan was successful in all these missions [14].

In early 975, major parts of Southern Syria, including Beirut, Sidon, Acre and Damascus, were not under full authority of the Fatimids. The latter were confronting diverse Turkish elements venturing out of their Abbasid-Buwayhid area as well as the revolt of several Arab chiefs and the presence of Byzantine forces in these areas. Al-Muizz had no choice but to order the eunuch commander Nusair to march to Beirut and restore it to Fatimid rule [15]. This unstable situation continued to the end of the tenth century in Syria. Under the administration of Barjawan, who become *Wasita* to al-

Hakim, or prime minister, an army was sent to fight and defeat the Byzantines and restore order to Damascus. Barjawan was engaged in a series of negotiations with the Byzantines in 999 and received the Byzantine ambassador himself to conclude a truce between the two sides, according to al-Antaki. In North Africa, Barjawan failed to save Barqa and Tripoli during his administration [13]. Yet one can see here a total domination by Barjawan of military and political affairs.

Under the al-Hakim caliphate in 1020, the caliph wanted to punish the people of Fustat for being loyal Sunnites. He sent Sudanese battalions to burn and loot some of their properties. The result was disastrous as the rage and rebellion in al-Fustat threatened to spread to Cairo. The caliph selected Ghadi, a Saqalibi commander, to confront this crisis, which he successfully overcame by putting down the rebellion [13]. Considering the large population of al-Fustat, which extends to the southern walls of Cairo, one can see how important the task given to Ghadi was.

Under the caliphate of al-Zahir (1021-36), Midad monopolized political affairs. In 1024 he enjoyed the highest of titles, appointed as he was to administer the affairs of the army and the provinces. He also held the prestigious Kutama diwan,the most influencial berber tribe thus controlling the main Berber elements. Despite the famine of 1024-25 and the revolt of some battalions of the army in protest at not receiving their pay, and motivated by some military commanders, Midad succeeded in keeping the capital and Fustat from any harm which might have been caused by rebellious military elements [10].

Midad, a black eunuch, was determined to assert his authority over the other elements of the army, including the Turks. He marched in a triumphal parade across Cairo, heading for Giza. Al-Magrizi described Midad's dispatch of several armies to Palestine and within Egypt to enforce his policy [15]. While Midad was in charge of the armed forces, another chief black eunuch named Rifa was commander of the Nile Delta. It seems that Midad wanted to increase the number of eunuch commanders under the Fatimids, and in one year three Ustadh Muhannak eunuchs, were added to the service of the caliph. We find in 1049 an illuminating piece of information on the position of eunuchs in the military. In 1049 Caliph al-Mustansir went out in a farewell ceremony given in honour of his chief commander, the 'Victorious, Glory of the Rule, Count and Pillar of the state', Rifg al-Khadim. Under his command thirty thousand soldiers were sent to Aleppo. The amirs of Syria received orders to follow his command and to dismount when they saw him [15]. The caliphate evidences full trust in the leadership of one eunuch, who would eventually control the whole of Syria. This is an illuminating episode demonstrating the position of eunuchs in the military.

Fighting the Crusaders was another demonstration of the use of eunuch commanders. In major campaigns in 1100 and in 1102, al-Afdal the Wazir of Egypt, dispatched his father Mamluk, Saad al-Tawashi to fight Baldwin I near Jaffa. The army led by Saad had approximately five thousand knights [12]. With the Fatimids' loss of Jerusalem in 1099, and the rapid Crusader expansion in Palestine, the Fatimids probably did not discriminate against eunuch commanders in such critical situations and relied on them equally.

The actual evidence of some sources and hints in others imply that political-military power was in decline after the first century of Fatimid rule in Egypt. It can be argued that the Wizarat al-Tafwid which started with Badr al-Jamali in 1074 had a role in excluding large number of eunuchs from powerful positions in order to avoid competition from the latter, although there is no reason for not using them in a smaller scale. Also, the high price of eunuchs might have contributed to the decrease in their numbers. On the other hand, the Fatimids under the al-Jamali wazirs 1074-1131 were strong economically despite the loss of the Syrian coast to the Crusaders, and a better explanation of the diminishing role of the eunuchs must be sought.

The last strong eunuch commander appeared at the end of the dynasty. The famous Mutaman al-Khalifa Jawhar, who was in charge of the royal palace, rejected the wizarete of the Sunni commander Saladin in 1169 and plotted with the Crusaders to topple Saladin. The plot was discovered and Jawhar was beheaded and replaced by another eunuch, the famous Qaraqush, as military commander who had been in charge of the palace [12]. In protest at the killing of Jawhar, fifty thousand Sudanese troops with the help of Qaraqush and other Fatimid elements in the army revolted against Saladin, who had to burn their camp outside Cairo to assert his new rule [18]. Such massive defiance as a result of Jawhar's killing can be understood as the actions of a popular and dominant commander.

Eunuch battalions

We have no direct evidence that there were separate eunuch battalions on battlefields, but we have substantial evidence that during the Ikhshidid and Fatimids eras there were chief eunuch commanders who headed large battalions including thousands of soldiers in many units that included eunuchs and soldier-slaves. During the Fatimid invasion of Egypt in 969, a *Kafuriyya* battalion of about five thousand soldiers was apparently under two eunuch commanders who resisted the Fatimids. There was more than one battalion under the same name, and in 974 there was another *Kafuriyya* revolt in Damascus against the Fatimid authority [13].

Al-Maqrizi writes of the Jawdhariyya division, named after Jawdhar, the great mamluk of al-Mahdi in North Africa. It had its own quarters in the newly built Cairo [15 p6]. Under al-Hakim, there was a Yanisiyya division named after Yanis, chief of the royal palace and later

governor of Barqa, and in 1004 al-Muzaffariyya was named after Muzaffar, bearer of the umbrella [16 p363].

In 1021, when Midad wanted to eliminate Ibn Dawwas. he commissioned the eunuch Nasim to murder him. Nasim headed a battalion called al-Saadiyya, the personal guard of the caliph, the majority - if not all - of whom were eunuchs [17]. According to al-Sayyed, there was an influential army division in the early years of al-Mustansir (d. 1094) named al-Rihaniyya and founded by the eunuch Aziz al-Dawla Rihan, an amir in the royal court. They had their own dwelling in Cairo. This unit and the Jeushiyya of Badr al-Jamali were the most important divisions in the army in the second half of the eleventh century and their influence continued to the end of al-Hafiz's rule in 1149 [15,19]. There was another Rihanniyaya battalion under Caliph al-Hafiz in 1134 headed by Rihan al-Khadim, who led a battalion in Upper Egypt during the civil war against Hassan, son of the caliph, as mentioned earlier [15]. Such influence in the military structure passed to the Ayyubids. In Saladin's army of 1181 there were seven thousand, out of a total eleven thousand, Tawashi soldiers [15].

Maritime activities

The Fatimids were influenced by the Aghlabids (800-909), who had a formidable navy consisting of hundreds of ships and who, as they expanded, captured Sicily. Their constant skirmishes with the Byzantine fleets made them more eager to increase their naval power, which remained intact in Tunis, Susa and Palermo after the escape of the last Aghlabids [19]. The Fatimid caliphs of North Africa pursued an expansionist policy toward the East and their maritime activities in the Mediterranean, and their navy comprised around six hundred ships. The Fatimid caliph personally supervised the navy and appointed one of his leading commanders to be in charge of it [19].

In 918, al-Mahdi, the Fatimid caliph, sent his son Abu al-Qasim to launch a huge military campaign against Egypt. He was accompanied by a large fleet of eighty ships commanded by the eunuch Sulayman, who managed to seize Alexandria. Later in the year, the Abbasid caliph sent a fleet from Tartous in Syria to confront Sulayman, who was defeated by Bishr the eunuch Abbasid commander [12]. The following year, the Fatimids repeated their attempt, but another eunuch commander headed their fleet to Egypt. He was taken captive by Thumal, the commander of the Abbasid navy, also a eunuch [12]. We should remember that Egypt was governed by another eunuch, Munis.

Under Caliph al-Qaim, the Fatimids continued using eunuchs as commanders in the navy. In 934, Raydan was in command of a campaign targeting Egypt and managed to capture Alexandria for a short period [12 p284]. Evidence shows that eunuchs led major military campaigns on the seas to capture the most important

targets of the Fatimids; they were partly successful. Their counterparts on the Abbasid side were also eunuchs. A comparative study might be useful for examining this period.

In a rare biography of Jawdhar, the loyal eunuch deputy and commander of the first four caliphs, stories abound regarding his responsibility for the navy: e.g. in 948 when the Byzantine fleet was attacking Fatimid Sicily, the governor there asked the caliph for help and Caliph al-Mansour ordered Jawdhar to prepare the military and other supplies for the fleet [1]. Again, in 951, the Fatimid governor of Sicily asked for help against Byzantine raids. Jawdhar supervised the dispatch of the Fatimid fleet headed by the eunuch commander Farah [1].

In selected cases we see eunuchs in charge of naval resistance against the Byzantines, reflecting their ability and their rulers' confidence in them. At the end of the tenth century, in 998, the Fatimids under Barjawan faced a rebellion in Tyre. In that year, the unknown leader of the rebellion, al-Allaqa, defeated the Fatimid garrisons and asked the Byzantine Emperor Basil II for help. Tyre received military aid and when the situation was about to deteriorate in other coastal cities, a Fatimid fleet under the command of a Saqalibi eunuch, Faiq, managed to enter Tyre and defeat al-Allaqa and restore the city to Fatimid authority [13].

Despite the numerous maritime activities against the Fatimids in the first half of the twelfth century, there is no clear evidence of eunuch commanders being involved in such operations. The sole evidence is that when the last remaining Fatimid port on the Syrian coast, Ascalon, was under siege by the Crusaders in 1153 the eunuch Maknun, the lord and Qadi of the city, evacuated from a tomb the head of al-Hussain, grandson of the prophet Muhammad and sent it to Cairo [15 p207]. That incident was considered a highly sacred mission by Muslims, especially Shiites.

The Police and Hisba

According to the book of Khitat of al-Maqrizi, the Fatimid capital was divided into four sections: Fustat, Cairo, Roda Island and Giza. The most important was Fustat [15 p45], probably owing to its large population and the area it covered. There were two *shurta* police authorities – one for the north including Cairo and another for the south covering the other three sections. The sources make little mention of the commander of the police serving under the Fatimids, but it is nonetheless appropriate to use them.

Under Caliph al-Aziz, we see that Yannas, a Saqalibi eunuch, was commander of the *shurta* in Fustat in 990 [15 p267]. In 1011 Caliph al-Hakim appointed Ghin (a very strange name, as it is the nineteenth letter in the Arabic language) as commander of the northern and southern *shurta* together with the *Hisba*. The caliph gave

Table 1. Eunuchs holding office as *wali* under the Fatimids.

Wali-Governor	Province	Year
Jawdhar	North Africa	A. 969
Nasim	Qairawan	B. 926
Sabir	Qairawan	A. 926
Raydan	Tripoli	B. 974
Raydan	Damascus	974-975
Bishara	Hims	B. 975
Nusair	Beirut	975
Bishara	Tabaria	A. 981
Bishara	Damascus	B. 998
Raqyy	Acre	A. 981
Raqyy	Jaffa	A. 981
Raqyy	Qaisariyya	A. 981
Munir	Damascus	988-990
Wafa	Aphamia	B. 993
Sawsan	Shaizar	B. 993
Yanis	Barqa	996-998
Yanis	Tripoli – West	A. 1000
Yumn	Ascalon	998
Yumn	Ghazza	998
Maysur	Tripoli – East	998
Muflih	Damascus	1003
Sandal	Barqa	B. 1004
Mawsuf	Aleppo	1023
Rifq	Damascus	1048
Saad al-Dawla	Beirut	B. 1102

Owing to the scarcity of information about eunuchs, and the unknown date of appointment or dismissal of the officer,

him full liberty in terms of jurisdiction, although one of his hands was amputated at the caliph's order in 1110. Owing to al-Hakim's trust in Ghin, he appointed the following year al-Hasan al-Wazzan, an assistant to Ghin, to the post of Wasita. This was a totally unpredictable act. In 1013 Ghin was dismissed from the shurta, and replaced by a Sagalabi commander, Muzaffar, a eunuch commander and a bearer of the umbrella to al-Hakim [15]. Ghin was promoted to Qaid al-Quwwad or chief of commanders, but, at the same time, his other hand was amputated together with his tongue at the order of Caliph al-Hakim. Ghin remained commander-in-chief, however, and received splendid gifts from the Caliph and marched in great ceremony to the royal palace [13 p309]. One cannot understand such behaviour on the part of the caliph that is keeping a disabled eunuch in this powerful post unless either he displayed exceptional ability and trust or al-Hakim was mercurial and erratic.

In 1024, during the administration of Midad, the famous

eunuch, we find Nafidh, the black eunuch, in charge of both the north and south *shurta*, replaced by another black eunuch commander, Baqyy. It happened when another black eunuch, by the name of Rifq, was in command of the Nile Delta region, mentioned earlier. Here one can only agree with Lev that the most powerful posts of the Fatimid capital, *shurta* and *hisba*, were frequently given to eunuchs, who were in charge of daily life, fighting crime and supervising prices. They were also responsible for the wheat trade and the supply of wheat to the bakeries [10 p75].

Eunuchs as Walis or Provincial Governors

Under the Fatimid administration, we find some nineteen *Walis* holding different cities and provinces either in North Africa or in Syria (Table 1). This is considered a large number in the sources. Most of the *Walis* were military commanders before their appointment, and they

A. means after that year

B. means before that year

If the year is mentioned, it means he was in service in that year.

continued in military service afterwards.

In North Africa, the most well-known *Wali* was Jawdhar, who governed Ifriqiyya (western Libya, Tunisia and eastern Algeria) on behalf of the Fatimid caliphs while they were fighting against the rebellious Berber tribes in the Maghrib. Al-Muizz appointed Jawdhar as *Wali* of al-Mahdiyya, the capital of Ifriqiyya, in 969. Al-Muizz meanwhile had left to fight a Zanata chief [1 p109]. There are several aspects of the long period Jawdhar served as *Wali* under three caliphs - al-Qaim, al-Mansur, and al-Muizz - which demand separate study of the career of that distinguished eunuch. Al-Qairawan, the second most important city after the Fatimid capital, had two eunuch governors. One was in office before 926 when Nessim, who was dismissed in that year was replaced by the eunuch Sabir, whose duration of office is not clear.

After the Fatimid rule moved to Egypt, we find only a few lines referring to the *Wali* of Libya and none referring to the rest of the Maghrib. In 998 Barjawan feared the influence of another eunuch commander, Yanis, so he appointed Yanis as *Wali* to Barqa. After the murder of Barjawan, al-Hakim extended Yanis's authority to include Tripoli in view of the unrest of the Berber tribes which prompted Ibn Badis, the farmer Wali of Tripoli, to ask for help from al-Hakim [12 p154]. In 1004, the *Wali* of Barqa was Sandal, a eunuch commander engaged in fighting Abu Rikwa, the Khariji chief [13 p260].

The principal task of the Wali was to put the city or province under Fatimid control, especially during periods of strife and instability. If one looks east as the Fatimids always did, one sees that, apparently, no eunuchs were appointed as governors of Hijaz as the Abbasids did with Munis, as previously mentioned, but all their governors were in Syria and Palestine, where confrontation between the Byzantines and the Abbasids was unavoidable. From the time of their capture of Damascus under al-Muizz to Caliph al-Mustansir in the mid-eleventh century, the Fatimids allocated responsibility for their city, the largest in Syria, to four different eunuchs. In 974, in the early years under Fatimid authority, there were bloody confrontations between the Damascenes and the Berber forces, resulting in continuous civil unrest. Al-Muizz was alarmed and according to Ibn al-Athir and Ibn al-Qalanisi, he ordered his Khadim, Raydan the Wali of Tripoli, to lead his forces to Damascus and dismiss its ruler. Raydan was instructed to assess the situation and send his evaluation of the locals' need to the caliph [12]. Raydan remained in office for a year, governing both Damascus and Tripoli despite strong anti-Shiite sentiment. In 988 Caliph al-Aziz sent his eunuch commander Munir, a Sagalibi Khadim of the Wazir Ibn Killis, as ruler of Damascus. Munir was dispatched to calm the locals after the violent rule of the Turkish Bekjur. For two years Munir remained in office and exercised leadership of other Fatimid Walis in Syria on the orders of the caliph. This made him a supreme Wali [14 p52].

Barjawan, who was under constant Byzantine attacks

in Syria, dismissed the ruler of Damascus, Abu Tamim, and restored the Wali Bishara al-Ikhshidi, a eunuch commander [14 p87]. Needless to say, this eunuch enjoyed the caliph's favour, not only evidenced by his reinstatement but by the task to which he was appointed. In 1049, Caliph al-Mustansir sent eunuch commander Rifq to punish the rebellious ruler Ibn Hamdan and restore order. He succeeded in achieving that and as a result he was dispatched to Aleppo to lead a large army to fight the Mirdasids in the same year and become the supreme wali over all the Fatimid walis in Syria [15 p202]. Prior to that, under the authority of supreme commander Midad in Egypt in 1023, Mawsuf the Fatimid eunuch was appointed governor of Aleppo and wali of the city for one year. That followed a period of rebellion by different rulers after Caliph al-Hakim had disappeared [13,20]. Here was a eunuch who was in charge of the second largest city in Syria and lost it soon after to the Mirdasids. It is worth pointing out that appointing eunuchs as governors to citadels in Syria influenced the Suljugs and Ayyubids later on.

In Fatimid Syria, Beirut and Tripoli were among the medium-sized cities allocated to eunuchs for governance. In 975, al-Muizz appointed Nusair as *wali* of Beirut and gave him a large army (*Kathif*) to protect the city from the rebellious Turkish commander Aftakin. Nusair failed to govern the city for more than a few months [15]. Again we see in the sources that Saad al-Tawashi, the commander of the 1102 campaign against the Crusaders, had previously been *wali* of Beirut, but for how long is not clear [12]. During the same turbulent time of Aftakin, the Turkmen war lord in Syria, Raydan al-Khadim governed Tripoli before 974. Al-Muizz then placed Damascus under Raydan's authority.

The sources mention that in the time of Caliph al-Aziz there was a number of eunuchs who were governing small towns in Syria and Palestine. In 981 Bishara was wali of Tabaria and may have been wali of Himsa few years earlier, and Raqyy was wali of Acre, Qaisaryya and Jaffa. In 993 Aphamia was under Wafa and Shaizar was under Sawsan [14]. The number of eunuchs was evidently not the only factor that determined their influence within the Fatimid rule, as argued by Lev earlier, but their influence and power also derived from the offices they occupied and the posts they filled. With regard to numbers, Lev observed that under Caliph al-Aziz there were around ten thousand eunuchs and concubines. Al-Qalqashandi noted that the Muhannak Ustadh eunuchs in the Fatimid palace numbered more than a thousand [10], so the eunuchs of lesser rank were probably in the thousands. Furthermore, if the caliphs and wazirs were convinced that the use of eunuchs in civil and military posts would enhance their rule, they would not hesitate to purchase large numbers of them, notwithstanding their high prices: the lavish spending by the Fatimids, e.g. al-Afdal the grand wazir in the twelfth century, is evidence of this. The writings of Al-Magrizi and

Caliphs	Positions	Duties
 Sahib al-Majlis 	Master of the Audience	Loyal Subject of the State
Sahib al-Risala	Master of Correspondence	He was in charge of passing the caliphal correspondence to the wazir
 Sahib bait al-Mal 	Director of the Treasury	In-charge of treasury
 Sahib al-Zimam 	The Major Domo	Chief Attendant of the palace
 Sahib al-Daftar 	Head of the Diwan	Keeper of the Registry

Table 2. List of miscellaneous duties of the caliphs.

al-Qalqashandi reflect the highest numbers of eunuchs. Ibn Taghri interestingly refers to the time when al-Hakim murdered Hussain b. Jawhar al-Siqilli (we mention Hussain here so Jawhar would not be counted as *Khasi*, but *stalion*, unlike *khadim* Qaraqush, *ustadh* Kafur al-Ikhshidi, *khadim* Raydan and others]. The same historians on other occasions repeat the distinguishing term *Ghair khasi* - not eunguch - because of the large number of eunuchs who were employed by the Fatimids [17]. Ibn Taghri was clearly influenced by historians like al-Maqrizi, Ibn Khallikan and Ibn Zulaq and calls for more attention.

Titles of eunuchs and their ranks

The following is a survey of titles reflecting the status of each holder, in addition to the positions held by powerful eunuchs in the state. Caliph al-Mansour wrote to his faithful eunuch Jawdhar in 946, when he freed him: 'Do not precede your name with any names except your lord Tamim-al-Muiz-Walyy al-Mansur'. Also, al-Mansour permitted Jawdhar to copy the caliphs' gowns and put his name on them [1 p52]. That was an exceptional honour not accorded to anyone else by the early powerful Fatimid caliphs. Throughout the first century, we see titles like Qaid al-Quwwad, chief of commanders, given to Ghain in 1011, and commander Izz al-Dawla was Sanaha - glory and majesty of the state, father of knights - Midad al-Zahiri. In 1024 granting a eunuch a title like Glorious Commander or Father of Knights has more than simply lingual prestige to a patrimonial authority. Rifq enjoyed the titles, Chief Commander, The Victor, fakhr al-mulk, Glory of the Rule or Count and Pillar of the State [15]. Such titles were applied to others who were always associated with the state or the caliphate, like the last eunuch commander, Mutaman al-Khilafa, literally He who is Trusted by the Caliphate.

The care and attention paid to some eunuchs was remarkable, e.g. when Caliph al-Qaim was on his deathbed in 946, the only advice he gave to his successor concerned Jawdhar. Al-Qaim ordered al-Mansour to keep his eunuch in his high position. Al-Mansour said, 'My lord, we count Jawdhar only as one of us. Al-Qaim replied, 'indeed he is'. This prestigious treatment of Jawdhar continued under al-Muizz, who

wrote to him: 'O, Jawdhar, we never differentiate between you and ourselves' [1].

Some eunuch commanders were visited by caliphs when they were ill, e.g. al-Muizz visited Jawdhar more than once, al-Hakim in 1011 marched to visit Ghain in his house, and in 1129 al-Amir visited his veteran eunuch, Lami. In addition to this unusual step, al-Hakim installed Ghain as chief of *Shurta* and *Hisba*, as already mentioned, as well as supervisor of finance and the treasury [13]. Although the division of duties between the *Muhtasib*, the *Qad*i, and the chief of *Shurta* is not clear under the Fatimids, one can see the high status achieved by some eunuchs. Judicial power, however, was denied them.

Al-Magrizi wrote that Barjawan used to sit for al-Mazalim, hearing grievances, which required judicial knowledge [15 p14] and commanded respect. Some eunuchs had too much power in that they had to appoint deputies or wazirs. Jawdhar had a deputy in Mahdiyya named Nusair, a eunuch. Barjawan appointed a secretary with the title Wazir in 996, who continued in his position after the murder of Barjawan. In 1011, a servant in the service of Ghain named al-Wazzan was appointed as wasita to the caliph [12]. This power was extended to commercial activities. Some eunuchs enjoyed full freedom of trade to the degree that they owned their own commercial fleet, e.g. Jawdhar enjoyed the full blessing of al-Muizz. On a smaller scale we find the eunuchs Gadibu and Lami, who accumulated considerable wealth from their lucrative trade on the Red Sea at the beginning of the twelfth century [1 p136].

In addition to the political-military involvement of the Fatimid eunuchs, two lists mentioned by al-Qalqashandi (d.1418) and al-Maqrizi (d. 1442) reflect the position of eunuchs and their influence inside the palace. The second list ranks the most powerful leaders in the state after the caliph. According to al-Qalqashandi:

The *Ustadhun* or *Asatidha* or *Tawashi* occupied the highest status under the Fatimids and the most honourable among them was the *Muhannak*, who wore his turban around his face and was given the highest salary after that of the wazir [16].

In addition to a long list of miscellaneous duties (Table 2), like preparation of food and the gowns and headgear of the caliphs, al-Maqrizi lists in his annals of 974, in

order of importance [15 p216]:

- The Caliph
- · Sahib al-Amwal finance
- Sahib al-Shurta police
- · Sahib al-Mazalla umbrella
- Al-Tabib physician
- Sahib Bait al-Mal treasury
- Muhtasib ?

From the two lists, it is clear that every *Muhannak Ustadh* inside the palace was deeply involved in state affairs outside, like correspondence, the public and the treasury. Other offices such as the *Shurta* and *Hisba* were given to several eunuchs. The ceremony of promoting a eunuch *Ustadh* to *Muhannak* was a prestigious one, and the sources give a detailed account of the ceremony which was held in the presence of the caliph [15 p163].

In al-Marquizi's lists one sees that the bearer of the umbrella is the fourth most important post in the Fatimid state. This post was not a civil one and lasted to the end of the caliphate. During al-Hakim's era, however, despite his asceticism, he kept someone in this post throughout most of his rule. The holder of the post was usually from the eunuch community, like Shafi, Raydan and Muzaffar, and they also had their role in the military. Furthermore, the bearer of the umbrella was one of the very few individuals who were constantly to be found near the caliph.

From miscellaneous lines in the sources on status, we know the eunuch Jawdhar was entrusted with the standardization and weight of the Fatimid dinar. This had significant implications for the economic policy of the state. Jawdhar was also in charge of the royal prison where the Fatimid amirs were imprisoned. Barjawan and Midad had the same duty [1]. It indicated the caliph's complete confidence that they would control his rivals. In 1004, when al-Hakim had a new son, future caliph al-Zahir, eunuch commander Shukr was in charge of the celebratory ceremonies, caring for the child while the caliph received the leaders of the state. Sources show Caliph al-Amir used to refrain from meeting anyone except his eunuch commanders, who guarded the tunnels from his palace to the Nile [15].

Owing to their eminence in society, most of the eunuch commanders in the army had streets and avenues named after them: e.g. Haret al-Rihaniyya, Yonisiyya and Jawdhariyya. Also mentioned are the Haret Barjawan, Utuf and Tawashi of al-Hakim. These sections of Cairo were quite renowned and one of the grand wazirs, al-Jamali (d. 1094), had a house in one of them. Saladin's deputy in Egypt, Qaraqush (d. 1198), a eunuch, lived in al-Rihaniyya and gave it its name [16]. One of the gates of the royal palace was named after Khukha, a eunuch of al-Aziz. This gate was reserved for the entrance of the wazirs of the state [15 p60].

From evidence implicit in the sources, one can

conclude that the eunuchs discussed in this research were viewed not with contempt but with esteem during most of the Fatimids' rule. Even historians of a later period saw their power as not unusual. Nonetheless, poetry written at the beginning and end of the Fatimid rule contains some defamatory lines relating to Fatimid eunuchs and their domination of the state which reflects their political status. Ibn Bishr, a Damascene poet writing in 996 at the end of al-Muizz's rule, writes:

Grant and hinder, and fear no one
The lord of the palace is not in there
He is not aware of their intentions
Even if he was enlightened, he would still be ignorant [12 p117]

The poet here is criticizing the wazir Ibn Killis and other leaders of the state. One should not rule out Barjawan as the major domo of the palace. Other defamatory lines were written at the decline of the Fatimid rule and on the rise of Saladin. Such lines should be viewed with caution as they reflect anti-Shiite sentiment. They are cited here to present a fuller picture of the period. Lines directly concerning eunuchs are very rare. Al-Isfahani, secretary to Saladin, described the confrontation between his lord and Mutaman al-Khilafa, the last eunuch commander, as follows [15,18]:

O, Yusuf-Saladin-of Egypt whom we all aspire to emulate You overcome the Sudanese by putting swords into them Mutaman of the nation betrayed until death ended his exils

He treated you with treason, thus his head now hangs from a spear.

Here, al-Isfahani pours scorn on Mutaman and the Sudanese soldiers who revolted with him in defence of the Fatimid rule. In an expression of contempt and disrespect towards eunuchs, Abu Shama [18 p200] mentions the lines of another poet, written at the time of the collapse of the Fatimids:

The reign which belonged to the Fatimids,

Became shining with the Ayyubid kings,

The East envied the west for them, and Cairo prided itself over Baghdad

Honour and integrity are achieved only by determination and the clash of swords

Not like pharaoh and putiphar, and those in Egypt like stallion and eunuch

Here the poet equates the Fatimid rulers with the pharaohs as rulers of Egypt, calling them putiphars or eunuchs as in the Old Testament, as well as demeaning the eunuchs in the Fatimid state, accusing them of weakness.

Ironically, the Ayyubids started using eunuchs in the

political-military system with Qaraqush and continued until 1250 when Tawashi Muhsen imprisoned King Louis IX in Egypt [8 p185]. Also, when the Abbasid Caliph al-Mustadi (d. 1180) sent ceremonial robes to Nur al-Din to celebrate the end of the Fatimid dynasty, the celebration was masterminded by the master of the palace, Imad al-Din Sandal, a eunuch [12 p371].

CONCLUSION

Eunuchs were not individual slaves bought to serve at various levels of the Fatimid administration. They were an institution which grew in number and influence, particularly from the time of al-Qaim, and lasted until al-Mustansir's era, when they faded from the sources along with their political influence in al-Jamali's dynasty. They continued, however, to participate in domestic duties inside the palace. Also, the various civil wars in Cairo probably contributed to the loss of vast numbers of Fatimid books and manuscripts, as well as the dispersion of the Fatimid caliphal library at the beginning of the Ayyubid era.

Many of the offices which were held by eunuchs had dual functions; the holder of the umbrella was seen as a palace post but was in fact a military one and often occupied the office of wali. Other eunuch commanders like Jawdhar and Barjawan held great power, the former with full support from the relatively capable caliphs at the beginning of the dynasty, and the latter dominated the boy Caliph al-Hakim [8 p70]. Both eunuchs had political, military, financial and religious power in their hands, and others held palace posts and at other times became heads of Shurta or Hisba. Ayalon and Pellot [7] hold that eunuchs were absolutely loyal to their masters since they had no families; thus they were preferred for caliphal service owing to their limited ambition. This argument cannot be generalized as it stands as we have seen many eunuchs act according to their own agenda against the state with the sole motive of improving their status and moving to higher positions. It could be that this behaviour is related to the deprivation of their manhood. Despite the high cost, the Fatimids bought eunuchs in very large numbers to support their governing system, especially the Saqalibi element, which was nearly synonymous with white eunuchs. One should emphasize that eunuchs were accepted in society as part of its fabric, and treated with respect, not only by their lords but also by commoners, especially since they were commanders in the army and governors of provinces. That respect was of the utmost importance to them.

A great deal of research is still needed on this topic, particularly comparative studies of other eunuchs, e.g. those serving the Abbasids and the dynasties under their banner, like the Buwayhids, Saljuqs, and other Turkmen powers, in order to unravel how Muslim societies were

influenced by the eunuch institution and subsequently developed.

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