



BRILL



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## METHOD IN MADNESS: RECONTEXTUALIZING THE DESTRUCTION OF CHURCHES IN THE FATIMID ERA

The reign of the controversial Fatimid Egyptian caliph al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (r. 996–1021) has been derided as a “psychotic” blip within the general context of the Fatimid period (909–1171), which usually is regarded as one of multi-confessional tolerance and artistic efflorescence. Within the context of interfaith collaboration, al-Hakim is often considered to be the single exception to this culture of tolerance and artistic production. While Fatimid courtly arts thrived under the reigns of his predecessors, al-Mu‘izz (r. 953–75) and al-‘Aziz (r. 976–96), who founded the new capital city of Cairo, sponsored courtly luxury objects, and initiated major architectural projects, al-Hakim’s reign is most notorious for its destructive elements.

In the history of Christian-Muslim relations, al-Hakim is infamous for ordering the destruction of all the Christian churches in his realm, most notably that of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem—an act that would later mobilize Latin Crusaders to liberate the Holy Land from Muslim reign. Due to the capricious nature of al-Hakim’s reign, the precise context for these pivotal acts of destruction has been underexplored by scholars of architectural history, in spite of their key contribution to the history of church and mosque construction in the Middle East and their crucial role in the history of multi-confessional relations.

This essay takes a closer look at al-Hakim’s program of church demolition, bringing to light broader political, economic, and cultural forces that ultimately marked a change in Fatimid sectarian identity during his reign. An analysis of urban pressures at the time, together with a consideration of Islamic religious law (sharia), removes these acts of widespread church

destruction, so iconic to his reign, from the context of psychotic whimsy, and places them within a larger socio-historical framework. This study suggests that al-Hakim’s destruction of churches was consistent with other extreme measures he took specifically tied to questions of faith—such as his persecutions of urban *dhimmi*s (non-Muslim subjects of a Muslim state), the public cursing of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad and the first three caliphs, and his harsh, religiously-based restrictions against women. Rather than being reductively attributable to a personal psychological imbalance, al-Hakim’s dramatically negative treatment of churches signaled a general shift from an esoteric form of Ismaili Shi‘ism to one more appealing to the broader Islamic umma. In considering this shift, this article draws not only on the frequently discussed Mamluk sources on the Fatimid period, but also on Christian and newly published Ismaili sources.

It is difficult to determine the chronology of al-Hakim’s destruction of churches with precision. As most sources focus on extant monuments, these acts have not always been recorded in detail. Many Muslim sources simply state that al-Hakim destroyed churches, without documenting any details of the particular structures. Christian sources, however, are more useful in recording the phases of church destruction under this caliph. Based on these accounts, al-Hakim’s treatment of churches may be divided into three distinct periods: 1) from his ascension to the throne as a young boy in 996 to circa 1009; 2) from 1009 to 1015; and 3) from 1015 to his mysterious death in 1021. The first two periods, which coincide with a marked shift in his reign and behavior, are the focus of this article.

THE STATUS OF EGYPTIAN *DHIMMĪS* BEFORE  
AL-HAKIM'S REIGN

After the Fatimid conquest of Egypt in 969, Christians and Jews in the Fatimid realm rose to prominent positions, and generally lived in favorable conditions.<sup>1</sup> Continuing in the tradition of prior rulers of Egypt, the Fatimids took advantage of skilled *dhimmīs* in the administration of their empire. Notably, following the conquest of Cairo, al-Mu'izz appointed as his vizier the famous Jewish convert to Islam Ya'qub ibn Killis, who continued to serve his son, al-'Aziz.<sup>2</sup> After Ya'qub died, al-'Aziz later relied on the services of an unconverted Christian, 'Isa ibn Nasturus.<sup>3</sup> Under these early Fatimid rulers, the Christian communities flourished, as did their churches.<sup>4</sup>

The synergy between *dhimmī* and Islamic monuments is a subject that has gained increasing attention in art historical studies. Particularly in the arts of medieval Islam, the artistic traditions of Muslims, Christians, and Jews were often indistinguishable from one another. In the pre-Fatimid period, the mingling of shared forms between Islam and Christianity is elegantly demonstrated by the early tenth-century stucco decoration from the Church of al-'Adhra' at Dayr Suryani in the Wadi al-Natrun monastic complex (fig. 1).<sup>5</sup> With its undulating arabesques, executed in characteristic stucco, these forms fit firmly within the tradition of the international Abbasid ornamental mode, based in Samarra but spread as widely as the ninth-century mosques of Ibn Tulun in Cairo and Samanid sites in Afghanistan and Nishapur. While the style was associated with the Abbasid caliphate, its incorporation into the Christian monument suggests that Abbasid imperial design transcended religious boundaries. The integration of crosses into the decorative program is the only indication that the stucco belongs within a Christian context.<sup>6</sup>

This synergy continued and flourished in the Fatimid period, in which Christian and Muslim works of art shared similar motifs and styles. The restoration of the Church of Saint Mercurius (Dayr Abu Sayfayn), under the caliph al-'Aziz, employed a technique in dome construction that paralleled those used at the Mosque of al-Hakim in the royal city of al-Qahira (990–1013), utilizing an octagonal transition from the square base to the



Fig. 1. Early tenth-century stucco decoration from the Church of al-'Adhra' at Dayr Suryani in the Wadi al-Natrun monastic complex. (Photo: Herbert Rieke, 1929)

dome, with niches in the corner (figs. 2 and 3). In woodwork, the church screen of Saint Barbara in Old Cairo recalls the wooden beams from the Fatimid palace, discovered in the Qalawun complex (figs. 4 and 5). In these examples, the delicate vegetal scrollwork occupies the background, while scenes of courtly life animate the foreground.<sup>7</sup>

AL-HAKIM, "THE WILY AND FLAMBOYANT  
FATIMID"

In his poem "The Caliph," which appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1996, Eric Ormsby colorfully characterized the dominant view of al-Hakim:





Fig. 2. Dome of the Church of Saint Mercurius (Dayr Abu Sayfayn), Cairo. (Photo: Jennifer Pruitt)



Fig. 3. Dome over the mihrab of the Mosque of al-Hakim. © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Neg. EA.CA.3183. (Photo: courtesy of the Fine Arts Library, Harvard College Library and ArchNet)



Fig. 4. Wooden screen from the Church of Saint Barbara, Old Cairo, now in the Coptic Museum, Cairo. (After Edmond Pauty, *Bois sculptés d'églises coptes (époque Fatimide)* [Cairo, 1930], pl. 1)



Fig. 5. Wooden beam from the Fatimid palace, now in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo. (Photo: Jennifer Pruitt)

The wily and flamboyant Fatimid, the intricate Caligula of God, the neurasthenic delegate of prophets (may God pray for them!), forbade all women to wear shoes.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, al-Hakim is a unique figure in the history of the medieval Mediterranean. His cruelty, bizarre edicts, and

large-scale destruction of churches and synagogues are usually considered evidence of his mental defects and despotism. Many medieval chronicles document the reign of al-Hakim in great detail, attesting to its singularity. The contemporary Christian chronicler Yahya ibn Sa'īd al-Antaki even regarded al-Hakim's unusual actions as possible evidence of mental illness.<sup>9</sup> Some of al-Hakim's actions do suggest eccentricity and perhaps mental imbalance, such as his penchant for wandering the streets of Fustat alone at night, his order to kill all

the dogs in Cairo, and his forbidding both the consumption of *mulukhiyya* (a popular green vegetable) and the playing of chess. His behavior was rendered even more puzzling by the vacillation he showed in actually enacting the edicts he issued, many of which were first enforced, then retracted, and then reinstated, sometimes repeatedly.<sup>10</sup>

While many of his actions in his early life were enigmatic, his demise is perhaps still more mysterious. After becoming increasingly ascetic in his practices, reversing many of his prohibitions against *dhimmīs*, al-Hakim was declared divine by a group now known as the Druze, led by al-Darazi, whom the ruler eventually had put to death, in 1018.<sup>11</sup> In 1021, al-Hakim disappeared on an evening walk in the Muqattam Hills of Cairo, though his clothes were later found, pierced with daggers. Many historians suspect that his sister, Sitt al-Mulk, ordered his execution, but the Druze believe in his divinity and proclaim that he will appear again at the end of days.<sup>12</sup>

During al-Hakim's reign, the Fatimid Empire ruled over Ifriqiya, Egypt, the Hijaz, and Jerusalem, with intermittent control over lands in Syria. As Ismaili Shi'is, the Fatimids declared themselves caliphs in opposition to their Sunni rivals, the Abbasids in Iraq (750–1258) and the Spanish Umayyads (711–1031). The unified nature of the Islamic caliphate was thus splintered into three competing dynasties. However, during the time of al-Hakim, the Iraqi Abbasid caliphs were under the control of Shi'i Buyids (945–1055). Thus, sectarian divisions and identity were of paramount importance in the caliphal rivalry of the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Although this essay focuses on the destruction of churches under al-Hakim, his reign was not predominantly defined by architectural demolition. On the contrary, it was a productive period of architectural patronage, with the completion of the Mosque of al-Anwar (now known as the Mosque of al-Hakim), the Mosque of al-Maqs, the Rashida Mosque and the Mosque of al-Lu'lu'a, as well as the establishment of the *Dār al-ḥikma* (or *Dār al-'ilm*, house of knowledge), and the patronage of a major observatory in the Muqattam Hills. These projects, in fact, often coincided with the destruction of churches.<sup>13</sup>

While his predecessors and successors are noted for their openness to the *dhimmī* populations in their realm, al-Hakim is considered a singular exception in

an era of interfaith cooperation. As in all medieval Muslim societies, Christians and Jews were considered "people of the book" (*ahl al-kitāb*) and as such were treated as a protected population. The *dhimmīs* were allowed to practice their religion in return for their loyalty to the state and the payment of an extra head tax known as the *jizya*. However, as mentioned earlier, under the Fatimids, these communities rose to particular prominence and were generally granted the freedom to practice their faith openly.

In his seminal work on inter-confessional relations in the medieval Mediterranean, S. D. Goitein suggests that the Fatimid Empire was characterized by "a spirit of tolerance and liberalism."<sup>14</sup> In contrast, he characterizes al-Hakim's large-scale destruction of Christian and Jewish monuments as a "fit of religious insanity" and vividly describes the ruler as "the interesting psychopathic caliph, who ordered the destruction of churches and synagogues."<sup>15</sup> Goitein's diagnosis of insanity as the reason behind al-Hakim's decision to raze churches and synagogues dominates the modern scholarly assessment of this destructive aspect of al-Hakim's architectural program.

Although the dominant narrative in modern scholarship links al-Hakim's bizarre behavior with his demolition of church buildings, medieval accounts suggest a more complex dynamic. Rather than viewing the destruction of churches and synagogues as a symptom of his madness, medieval Muslim sources often praise al-Hakim on this account, while criticizing the decision to rebuild these monuments at the end of his life.<sup>16</sup>

#### AL-HAKIM'S EARLY REIGN, A "TIME OF PEACE" FOR THE CHURCHES

In the first years of al-Hakim's reign, from 996 until circa 1010, the young caliph continued the general pattern of church tolerance established by the early Fatimid caliphs.<sup>17</sup> The *History of the Patriarchs* refers to these early years as a "time of peace" for the churches, even though harsh sumptuary laws against Christians were instituted at this time. Several accounts offer examples of al-Hakim visiting monasteries early in his reign, and there are some Christian and Jewish sources that mention him positively.<sup>18</sup> An account in the *History of the Pa-*

*triarchs* of the conversion of a Muslim named Ibn Raga to Christianity is particularly revealing for its depiction of al-Hakim's tolerance toward Christians. According to the source, al-Hakim sides with the Christian convert against his Muslim family, who imprisons him and tries to force him to renounce Christianity and convert back to Islam. The son stays true to his new religion and begins construction of a church. The ensuing events demonstrate the pattern of tolerance characteristic of the reigns of al-Hakim's predecessors al-Mu'izz and al-'Aziz. The story records that when the people of the district, Ramadiyat in Misr, stole the precious wood meant for the church, Ibn Raga saw this and told them to return the wood or he would complain to the *wālī* (governor) of Cairo. When they denied his claim, Ibn Raga responded with the threat: "I shall go to al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, and he, if God will, will order the wood to be taken from where ye have put it and ye shall suffer harm from that."<sup>19</sup> This account suggests not only that there was a church constructed at some point in al-Hakim's reign, but also that he actually followed in the footsteps of his predecessors in supporting the Christian builder over the Muslim masses who wished to plunder it. Based on the developments outlined by the Christian sources, I would suggest that this event occurred early in al-Hakim's reign, in the "time of peace" for the churches.

Despite such examples of tolerance, there is documented evidence for two episodes involving the destruction of *dhimmi* monuments that took place during this phase of al-Hakim's reign. Yet even these cases point to motivations that reach beyond the mere whims of al-Hakim. According to Yahya al-Antaki, in 1000 al-Hakim oversaw the destruction of two churches, their conversion into mosques, and the forced expulsion of Greek Melkites from their quarter, in order to turn the entire area into one mosque. Another demolition occurred in 1003, in the district of Rashida, on a site that had contained the graves of Christians and Jews.<sup>20</sup> In its place was built the Mosque of Rashida, known in its time as the Mosque of al-Hakim.<sup>21</sup> The accounts of this destruction, preserved by both Yahya al-Antaki and al-Maqrizi, point to simmering tensions between local Muslims and Christians surrounding this event. Both historians record that Christians had begun rebuilding a ruined church in the area when the destruction in Rashida took place, suggesting that it was the rebuilding itself that

had caused offense. Yahya al-Antaki recounts that it was, in fact, a group of Muslims who attacked the Christians and destroyed the building and other nearby churches. This highlights the fact that the Muslim segment of the urban populace was often in conflict with the Christians regarding the issue of church restoration.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, however, in these early cases of church demolition, the sources suggest that the Christians were allowed to reconstruct their houses of worship elsewhere; this may indicate that the religious structures were not destroyed merely out of intolerance, but as a part of a constructive plan to build new Muslim structures, and as an attempt to Islamicize the Fatimid city.<sup>23</sup>

While al-Hakim's early reign did not result in the destruction of many churches, it did introduce a series of harsh sumptuary laws against the Christians and Jews in his realms. These include the prohibition of wine in 1003 (393) and again in 1005 (396), and the order to wear the *zunnār* (a black belt designated for *dhimmi*s) in 1004 (395).<sup>24</sup> Additionally, in 1003, he had the Christian administrator, Fahd ibn Ibrahim, executed, and arrested several Jewish and Christian secretary-scribes (*kuttāb*).

#### CURSING THE COMPANIONS AND THE FIRST THREE CALIPHS: AN ANTI-SUNNI PUBLIC TEXT

However, in these years al-Hakim's harsh persecutions extended beyond the *dhimmi* context to include the Sunnis in his realm, indicating a desire to orient his rulership toward a specifically Ismaili faith. In 1005, al-Maqrizi recorded that al-Hakim changed the face of the architectural structures of Cairo and Fustat by ordering that curses on the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad and the first three caliphs be inscribed throughout the city. These imprecations were placed on the mosques of the city, including the central mosque of Fustat, and the oldest in Cairo, the Mosque of 'Amr (*jāmi'* *'atīq*). According to al-Maqrizi, the curses were recorded on the inside (*bāṭin*) and the outside (*ẓāhir*) of all the mosques, on the doors and walls of shops, and on graves. He adds that these curses were painted in various colors and in gold, and that residents of the city were forced to place them on the doorways of the markets and houses. The act seems to have been correlated





Fig. 6. Inscription from the Mosque of al-Hakim. (After K.A.C. Creswell, *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, 2 vols. [Oxford, 1952–59], 1, pl. 30b)

with increasing Ismaili activity, as more people from Cairo-Fustat came to join the *da'wa* (Ismaili mission) shortly thereafter. Al-Maqrizi records that the Ismaili crowds were so large that people were crushed in the confusion.<sup>25</sup>

Although the text does not record the epigraphic style of the curses, al-Maqrizi's reference to the variety of colors and gold used to inscribe them confirms the attention given to their aesthetic dimension, while the sheer scale of this project—on the mosques, shops, tombstones, and houses of Cairo-Fustat—points to a well-organized caliphal initiative, manifest in a particularly Shi'i tradition. In this way, these early actions of al-Hakim, as expressed in the built environment, not only were intended to persecute *dhimmīs*, but also represented an effort to “Ismailize” the urban space and its inhabitants. The tradition of cursing the first three caliphs and the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad was not limited to the Fatimid context, but also occurred in the Shi'i-Sunni conflicts of Abbasid Baghdad, highlighting the centrality of sectarian identity in the contestation of power in the Islamic world in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The episode also points to the increasing importance of the public display of prominent texts in the Fatimid realm, a development seen in the inscriptions of the minarets of the Mosque of al-Anwar (now known as the Mosque of al-Hakim), constructed at roughly the same time (fig. 6).<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, in these early years many of al-Hakim's persecutions and prohibitions are described in a particularly anti-Sunni context. Even the sumptuary laws against Christians and Jews were characterized in such a way. Al-Maqrizi notes that the special waistband (*zunnār*) and badges (*ghiyār*) worn by Christians and Jews should be black, since this was the color of the Sunni Abbasids. Even seemingly bizarre edicts, such as the banning of *mulukhiyya* and *jirjir* (two popular Egyptian vegetables) were associated with anti-Sunni sentiments, as *mulukhiyya* had been favored by the Umayyad caliph Mu'awiya b. Abi Sufyan and *jirjir* was associated with the Prophet's wife, 'Aisha, the daughter of Abu Bakr, who opposed the succession of 'Ali as caliph.<sup>27</sup>

#### SEEDS OF CHANGE: THE ABU RAKWA REBELLION PLACES PRESSURE ON THE CALIPHATE

Al-Hakim's treatment of the Sunnis and *dhimmīs* in his realm shifted markedly following the revolt of the North African rebel known as Abu Rakwa. Born Walid b. Hisham b. 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Abd al-Rahman, Abu Rakwa claimed to be a descendant of the Spanish Umayyad dynasty. Once rivals to the Abbasid and Fatimid empires, the power of the Spanish Umayyads had waned in the previous years, resulting in the persecution of the Umayyad family in al-Andalus. Apparently, this persecution partially motivated Abu Rakwa's flight from Spain to North Africa, where he sought to establish his own power, in contestation with the Fatimid dynasty.<sup>28</sup> Abu Rakwa used his Umayyad heritage as a source of legitimacy, traveling throughout North Africa, where he taught the Koran and hadith, and promoted Sunni doctrine. Eventually, Abu Rakwa gained the support of the Banu Qurra, a vehemently anti-Fatimid Bedouin tribe in Libya; he also brought the Berber Zanata to his anti-Fatimid, Sunni cause.<sup>29</sup> The mission of Abu Rakwa was couched largely in sectarian terms, aimed at wresting power from the heretical Shi'i Fatimids and reclaiming it for the rightful Sunni heirs to the caliphate. The sectarian message of Abu Rakwa's revolt was demonstrated in his use of al-Hakim's cursing of the Prophet's Companions and the first three caliphs in Cairo as a rallying point against the Fatimid rulers.<sup>30</sup>

Abu Rakwa had begun his anti-Fatimid mission as early as 1004, although it would take a few years for him to become a discernible threat to the authorities in Cairo. His movement first caught the attention of the Fatimid caliph when he marched into Barqa, in Palestine. Al-Hakim sent troops to quash the rebellion, after initial diplomatic efforts proved unsuccessful. When the troops failed to contain the rebels, al-Hakim sent five thousand more men under the command of the Turkic general Yanal. In an upsetting shift in power, the Fatimid armies were defeated by Abu Rakwa's troops. In October 1005 (Dhu 'l-Hijja 395), the rebel claimed victory in Barqa and declared himself al-Walid b. Hisham, the Umayyad Qa'im (a messiah-like figure), and Amir al-Mu'minin (a caliphal title, meaning "commander of the faithful"). He assumed the title *al-Nasir li-Din Allah* (the Victor of God's Religion), which was struck on coins in the realm, and had the khutba read in his name. According to sources, upon Abu Rakwa's victory in Barqa "Sunni law [was] declared supreme throughout the land of his conquest."<sup>31</sup>

The true urgency of the Abu Rakwa revolt became clear to al-Hakim when the Umayyad pretender advanced toward Cairo, besieging Alexandria and progressing as far as Giza. Abu Rakwa's swift conquest sent waves of panic throughout the Fatimid administration and, it would seem, the general population. Under the leadership of the general Fadl b. Salih, Abu Rakwa was finally defeated. After fleeing to Nubia, where the Nubian king was paid to give him up, he was finally captured, brought to Cairo, and executed in 1006–7. Abu Rakwa's revolt not only brought territorial losses, but also precipitated an economic crisis in Egypt. Al-Musabbih noted that prices rose significantly and bread became scarce. Al-Hakim reacted by executing anyone found guilty of inflating prices or hoarding coins.

Abu Rakwa did not look to the Sunni rulers of the Spanish Umayyads or Abbasids for assistance in his quest for power but instead operated on a grassroots level in North Africa, appealing to the popular masses, who would support his own private, Sunni caliphate as an antidote to the heretical Shi'i Fatimids. The complexity of this relationship is illustrated by the fact that although Abu Rakwa preached a Sunni doctrine, he was resisted fiercely and feared by the populations of Alex-

andria and Cairo-Fustat. Although there is no evidence that Abu Rakwa garnered the general support of local Egyptian Sunnis, his reliance on tales of al-Hakim's anti-Sunni measures as a catalyst for revolt marked a turning point in al-Hakim's treatment of the Sunni populations in Egypt and the empire's strategy in gaining support throughout eastern Islamic lands. While much of the rebellion could be said to have been politically opportunistic, taking advantage of the region's economic hardship and al-Hakim's ill treatment of the North African tribes, the rhetoric of the revolt was based in sectarian divisions. Using al-Hakim's cursing of the Companions as an illustration of Shi'i heresy, Abu Rakwa gathered enough Sunni sympathizers to pose a threat to the powerful Fatimids. While there was probably never a real danger of Abu Rakwa overthrowing the Fatimid caliphate, his surprising victories served as a wake-up call to the Fatimid ruler that would alter the tenor of Sunni-Shi'i relations in the years to come. Thus, Abu Rakwa's revolt marks a turning point in sectarian relations during the reign of al-Hakim.

#### SUNNI RAPPROCHEMENT AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHER (CA. 1010)

It seems that after the threat posed by Abu Rakwa subsided, al-Hakim instituted a policy of rapprochement with the Sunni majority of his realm. In 1007, he pardoned the Arab Berber Banu Qurra tribe, which had been an instrumental supporter of Abu Rakwa, and he also began to mitigate his own persecutions of his Sunni subjects. The new, favorable, Sunni-oriented policy literally altered the face of Cairo and Fustat's buildings as al-Hakim ordered that the curses inscribed in gold denouncing the Rashidun be removed from all the mosques.<sup>32</sup> In an apparent concession, al-Hakim ordered that the Companions be mentioned only in connection with the good deeds they had done, especially Abu Bakr. In addition, the caliph allowed for a practice that resulted in a decrease in explicitly Shi'i expressions in the city fabric: in 1009 (399), he decreed that his subjects could begin and end their fasting by sighting the moon, according to Sunni practices, rather than by Shi'i



calculations. He reinstated the *qunūt* and *ḍuhā* (forms of prayer), which had been forbidden by the Fatimids since 980–81,<sup>33</sup> and also declared that muezzins would not be punished if they omitted from the call to prayer the Shi'i formula *ḥayya 'alā khayr al-'amal* (come to good works), which had been in use since Jawhar established it at the time of the conquest. In this way, al-Hakim began to shift the focus of his reign away from expressly Shi'i concerns to address the Sunni majority.<sup>34</sup>

Concurrent with this Sunni rapprochement was the large-scale destruction of churches. It is important to note that popular fervor for such demolitions had already been rising during the reigns of al-Mu'izz and al-'Aziz.<sup>35</sup> Yet it reached another level in the second phase of al-Hakim's reign, most notably with the destruction of one of the most sacred buildings for Christians, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. Sources disagree on the precise date of this watershed moment, with Muslim sources generally stating that the destruction happened in 1007 and Christian sources suggesting a slightly later date of 1009 or 1010.<sup>36</sup> At the time of the monument's destruction, Jerusalem was under the control of the Fatimid caliphs, yet the church remained an important Christian pilgrimage site and was protected by a Fatimid treaty with Byzantium. Jerusalem had stood at the center of disputes between the Islamic caliphates and Christian Byzantium since the Arab conquest of the city in 638. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher symbolized the Christian presence in the Holy Land, standing as a testament to the most central mystery in the Christian faith, marking the site of Christ's Crucifixion, Entombment, and Resurrection.

The Byzantine empress Helena (d. ca. 330) famously discovered the rock-hewn tomb of Christ in 326, and a martyrium was constructed around it between 325–26 and 336. While the monument was destroyed under al-Hakim and its exact form prior to destruction is unknown, a series of tenth-century ivories represent it as a cylindrical structure, typical of Byzantine-era martyria. In one surviving ivory, dated to the early tenth century, and now at the Cloisters museum in New York, the three Marys are depicted at the Tomb of Christ. The cylindrical structure is similar to the reconstructed edicule, which continues to mark the site of the tomb today (fig. 7).<sup>37</sup> Connected to the rotunda of the sepulcher was



Fig. 7. Three women at the Holy Sepulcher. Tenth-century ivory, northern Italy. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 1993.19. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

a basilica, linking the tomb to Golgotha, the site of Christ's Crucifixion. In this way, the church housed the central aspects of the Christian miracles, enclosing the site of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection in a single monument.<sup>38</sup> While the architectural details of the pre-Fatimid church are known primarily through textual and archaeological projects, we do have a few remaining images of the early structure. The Holy Sepulcher is





Fig. 8. A sixth-century mosaic, illustrating the major monuments of Jerusalem, from the Church of St. George in Madaba, Jordan. The rotunda and basilica of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher may be seen at the bottom of the mosaic.

represented in two mosaics, from Madaba and Um al-Rasas, in Jordan. In these the key rotunda, marking the spot of Christ's tomb, and basilica are indicated (fig. 8).<sup>39</sup> The account of the Holy Land provided by the Frankish bishop Arculf (late seventh century) contains documented plans of the church, indicating a rotunda with twelve columns, three aisles, and three recessed altars, and, in the center, the sepulcher.<sup>40</sup>

Byzantine accounts describe repeated attempts to reclaim the city, often situating the Holy Sepulcher at the symbolic heart of the struggle. For example, in 975 the emperor John Tzimiskes sent a letter to the king of Armenia describing his military campaign: he noted that "we were also intent on the delivery of the Holy Sepulcher of Christ our God from the bondage of Muslims," and detailed his military endeavors to secure it.<sup>41</sup> The emperor's focus on the monument and the importance of liberating it from Muslim rule illustrates the historic centrality of the church in the spiritual, political, and ideological struggle for dominance between religions in a city that was of primary importance to both faiths.

The tension surrounding control of the holy city existed on both an elite and a popular level. While Tzimiskes' letter exemplifies the significance of imperial control of the city as a form of religious legitimacy, the confessional demographics of the urban population

were also a concern for contemporary chroniclers. Muslim authors of the period lament the fact that although Jerusalem was controlled by Muslim dynasties, Christians and Jews were the primary inhabitants. Not surprisingly then, many of the same religious-based power struggles appear in the Jerusalem literature as in the local Egyptian literature.<sup>42</sup> In 985, al-Muqaddasi, the most famous Muslim chronicler of Jerusalem, wrote: "Her streets are never empty of strangers...Everywhere the Christians and Jews have the upper hand."<sup>43</sup> Before the Fatimids took control, Abbasid Jerusalem was attacked frequently and Christian monuments plundered, a sign of the multi-confessional tensions in the city.<sup>44</sup> Ultimately, al-Hakim's destruction of the Holy Sepulcher symbolically asserted Muslim domination over the contested city.<sup>45</sup>

Although this act invalidated the Fatimid treaty with Byzantium, Byzantine reports did not take much notice of the razing of the church. Moreover, at that time, Fatimid-Byzantine relations were relatively secure, unlike in the earlier reign of al-'Aziz, which was defined by wars over Syrian territory. Although the destruction of the church would later be taken up as a theme in restoring Byzantine relations under the reign of al-Zahir (r. 1021–36) and subsequent rulers, there was not a loud outcry among the Eastern Christian population at the time of its destruction. However, the later Christian Crusaders used this episode as a rallying cry to defend the Holy Land from the Muslim empires.

Ultimately, the precise reason for the destruction of the church remains unknown. According to the Buyid chronicler Hilal al-Sabi (d. 447 [1056]) as well as al-Maqrizi, al-Hakim was curious about the Christians who made a pilgrimage to the church every Easter. When the caliph inquired about this practice, one of his *dā'īs* (Ismaili missionaries) informed him that the church was so significant to the Christians that the Byzantine emperor sometimes attended Easter celebrations in disguise and gave the church expensive gifts. The sources also lament that the Christians visited the church much as Muslims visited Mecca, and that there was too much pomp surrounding this act. They also suggest that al-Hakim was especially angered that Christian pilgrims regarded it as the locus of miracles, particularly the miracle of the Holy Fire.<sup>46</sup>

Although the precise reasons as to why al-Hakim destroyed the church remain a mystery, the multivalent results of its demolition were praised by many writers in the medieval Muslim world, and the apparently strong support for the act became leverage for al-Hakim's ambitions.<sup>47</sup> By destroying a formerly protected monument that had resided at the heart of Muslim-Christian struggles for centuries, al-Hakim had accomplished something that previous Muslim rulers were reluctant or unable to do.<sup>48</sup> Ibn al-Qalanisi (d. 1160) noted that when the church was destroyed, Muslims rejoiced and that when word of this reaction reached the caliph, he was overjoyed and encouraged to demolish more churches in his realm. To enlist popular support for this act, al-Hakim did not collect its precious objects for his own treasury upon its razing, but instead allowed the local populations to rob and plunder it, making them complicit in the deed. The fervor of the destruction is attested in Yahya al-Antaki's report that it was "plucked up stone by stone," and was accompanied by the razing of other churches in Jerusalem, in addition to the desecration of a graveyard and a convent.<sup>49</sup> The demolition of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, together with the acclaim it brought al-Hakim throughout the Muslim world, seems to have emboldened the caliph to embark on an intensified program of church destruction and persecution of Christians and Jews in the following years.

#### RAZING EGYPT'S CHURCHES: THE ISLAMICIZATION OF THE FATIMID EMPIRE

It is particularly difficult to piece together the precise policy for church demolition instituted by the Fatimids following the destruction of the Holy Sepulcher. Many Muslim sources state simply that all the churches were destroyed. In analyzing this phenomenon, we are faced with the difficult task of assessing structures that are no longer extant and, therefore, were not always recorded in medieval accounts. In examining some of the specific instances of destruction, I have relied particularly on the analysis of Abu Salih, an Armenian Christian who recorded the history of Egyptian churches in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.<sup>50</sup> As several

of the churches and monasteries he documented were initially destroyed under al-Hakim and then rebuilt, his account allows for a consideration of key demolitions.

The Monastery of Qusayr offers a rare example of a dated Egyptian church destruction and, by all accounts, this event occurred after the obliteration of the Holy Sepulcher. The description of its demolition suggests a tide of public support for such acts. The monastery, a favorite location for the early rulers of Egypt, was particularly famous for its mosaic depictions of the Virgin Mary. However, according to al-Maqrizi, in 1010 al-Hakim ordered it razed, and the subsequent plundering lasted several days. Abu Salih also recorded this event, corroborating the theme of plunder. According to his account, "a band of the common people came here, and seized the coffins of the dead, the timbers from the ruins."<sup>51</sup> In this manner, a fervor for destruction was given a caliphal endorsement in the middle period of al-Hakim's reign. However, accounts suggest that grave robbers raided this church so extensively that al-Hakim finally had to put a stop to it, providing further evidence that church destruction was encouraged by populist urban pressures. While unique in their impact, the destructions attest more to political ambition buttressed by popular support than to the maniacal whims of a mentally unhinged ruler.

Church destructions may have functioned as something more than an indicator of al-Hakim's personal anti-Christian zealotry. Instead, they appear as part of his political program of shoring up support for his rule and for the Fatimid caliphate through an urban renewal project aimed at further Islamicization of the empire, oriented toward the Sunni majority. The case of the Church of Saint Mennas, located in al-Hamra, between Cairo and Fustat, provides the first of several examples (fig. 9). Much information about the Monastery and Church of Saint Mennas comes to us through Abu Salih, who described it as having experienced various periods of decay and restoration prior to the Fatimid period. It also contained the bodies of many saints. He further writes, "this church was wrecked, and its columns were carried away and it was turned into a mosque, in the caliphate of al-Hakim; and a minaret was built for it."<sup>52</sup> According to Abu Salih, al-Hakim did not simply destroy the church; he changed certain confessional signifiers,



Fig. 9. The Church of Saint Mennas, Cairo, 2012. (Photo: Jennifer Pruitt)

for example, through the addition of a minaret.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, in the case of the Monastery of St. John the Baptist, near the lake of al-Habash, Abu Salih recounts that “al-Hakim seized upon part of this monastery and church, and rebuilt it as a mosque, with a minaret, and his name was inscribed on it.”<sup>54</sup> By such means al-Hakim in effect transformed Christian monuments into mosques. It is particularly interesting to note the inscription of the caliph’s name on the newly Islamized structures, as his name also appeared on the original minarets of the Mosque of al-Anwar. Indeed, in most of the accounts given by Abu Salih, the churches destroyed by al-Hakim were turned into mosques, suggesting a larger movement to Islamize the city and country. A church in al-Ashmunayn was also turned

into a mosque.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, Abu Salih mentions a large monastery and church “composed of tesserae of glass gilded and colored; and its pillars were of marble; but it was wrecked by al-Hakim.”<sup>56</sup>

The specific trajectory of reconstruction after demolition can perhaps best be thought of as part of a larger urban renewal project designed to win political favor.<sup>57</sup> The obliteration or conversion of non-Islamic monuments signaled a shift in architectural priorities toward Islamic structures that was further supported by a program of endowment. In 1010, the year of the most intensive demolitions, al-Hakim endowed the *Dār al-‘ilm/Dār al-ḥikma* in Cairo, along with the mosques of Al-Azhar, Rashida, and Maqs.<sup>58</sup> These would be guaranteed financing, thereby ensuring their continuation and solidifying the significance of the caliph’s Islamic architectural projects. The endowment of these structures indicates the extent of al-Hakim’s architectural and urban concerns, and suggests that al-Hakim’s treatment of Christian monuments was not merely destructive, but part of a larger pattern of urban Islamicization and renewal.

#### CHURCH DESTRUCTIONS AND CALIPHAL LEGITIMACY

News of al-Hakim’s rapprochement with his Sunni subjects and his policy of razing churches spread beyond the Egyptian context and was embraced by Muslims in Abbasid territory. Evidence exists that this broader program did bear fruit in terms of the caliph’s influence and popularity. In 1010, shortly after al-Hakim had had several churches destroyed, Qirwash b. Muqallayd, the Iraqi governor, pledged his allegiance to the Fatimid rather than to the Abbasid caliph, reading the khutba in the name of al-Hakim and striking the Fatimid ruler’s name on coins, both of which were purely caliphal prerogatives. The centrality of al-Hakim’s role in destroying churches is noted in the text of this khutba:

Thanks to God Who by His light dispels the flood of anger and by His majesty demolishes the pillars of graven images and by His power causes the sun of righteousness to rise in the west.<sup>59</sup>

By evoking the “pillars of graven images” that al-Hakim destroyed, Qirwash uses the ruler’s program of church



destruction as a rallying cry to the Muslim faithful. Although this pronouncement lasted only one month, it demonstrated both the success of the Ismaili *da'wa* and the increasing popularity of the Fatimid caliph beyond Egyptian lands as a result of his demolition of Christian monuments and increasing sympathy to the Sunni and Shi'i populations beyond his empire.<sup>60</sup>

While al-Mu'izz and al-'Aziz explicitly sought control of the Eastern lands of Islam through military incursions, al-Hakim focused on gaining ideological inroads into Abbasid territories through increasing *da'wa* activities and other propagandistic efforts. Yahya al-Antaki noted his non-military propaganda in the Abbasid realm, writing:

[al-Hakim] drew most of the people of distant places to support him and follow him. He was recognized in the prayer in al-Kufa and his propaganda reached the gate of Baghdad and into the city of al-Rayy. He sent many splendid articles to the governors and rebels in the districts of Iraq to win them to his side.<sup>61</sup>

Yahya also mentions al-Hakim's eastern ambitions, noting that when a visiting merchant had his goods confiscated, he praised the caliph by claiming that the ruler would soon hold Baghdad "and the territory which he did not as yet control"; this pleased al-Hakim so much that he gave the merchant thousands of dinars.<sup>62</sup>

The impact of al-Hakim's ideological program outside Egypt is reflected in the chants that Shi'i protesters shouted in Baghdad in 1008, "*Yā Ḥākīm! Yā Mansūr!*" referring to the Ismaili caliph as the preferred ruler.<sup>63</sup> Two years later, around the same time that Qirwash b. Muqallayd pledged his loyalty to al-Hakim, 'Ali al-Asadi, the chief of the Banu Asad, also proclaimed his allegiance to the Fatimid caliph in Hilla.

The increasing popularity of al-Hakim in the Abbasid realm was a critical threat to the Abbasids and the Shi'i Buyids, who controlled them. As such, Qirwash was forced to retract his earlier message of support just one month after offering it. Indeed, al-Hakim's influence had spread through Abbasid territory to the point that, in the following year, under the Buyid vizierate of Fakhr al-Mulk, the Abbasid caliph al-Qadir (r. 991–1031) gathered important members of his empire, including various Twelver Shi'i leaders and the *ashraf* (sing. *shārif*,

one claiming descent from Muhammad) nobility, and compiled a manifesto denouncing the Fatimid lineage, accusing the dynasty of destroying Islam.<sup>64</sup> In 1011, this decree was read at all of the mosques in Abbasid territory, testifying to their role as sites for religio-political propaganda in the tenth and early eleventh centuries. The so-called "Baghdad Manifesto" marked a turning point in Fatimid history, confirming that the dynasty posed a substantial threat to the Iraqi-based leadership. It underscored the importance of the claim to 'Alid descent for their power, and the importance of uniting Sunnis and Shi'a against them.<sup>65</sup> At the same time the manifesto was drafted, a treatise was composed against Ismaili doctrine, once again demonstrating the perceived threat of the Fatimid worldview in this crucial period of al-Hakim's reign, coinciding with massive church destructions.<sup>66</sup>

The writings of al-Kirmani (d. 1021), the most important *dā'ī* of al-Hakim's age and his chief apologist, provide further support for the idea that al-Hakim's destruction of churches was integral to a wider program of political propaganda and shifting sectarian relations. Al-Kirmani's treatises, recently translated by Paul Walker, offer tremendous insight into the Fatimid *zeitgeist* during al-Hakim's reign.

Originally from Iran, al-Kirmani was active in the eastern Islamic lands until he came to Cairo to serve at al-Hakim's court. He can be credited with altering the philosophical discourse of medieval Ismaili thought. Perhaps the most revealing window into al-Hakim's approach to sectarian relations can be found in al-Kirmani's treatise *al-Maṣābīḥ fi ithbāt al-imāma* (Lights to Illuminate the Proof of the Imamate).<sup>67</sup> Unlike many Ismaili treatises, this work was not intended for the *da'wa*, but was instead addressed to the Buyid vizier in Baghdad, Fakhr al-Mulk. Rather than explicate the philosophical details of the Ismaili faith, the work acted as an overt piece of political propaganda, aimed at shifting the vizier's alliances to the Fatimid cause.<sup>68</sup> Al-Kirmani's treatise was written as a series of proofs, aimed at demonstrating to the eastern Shi'a the necessity of the imamate and al-Hakim's legitimacy as the living imam. In his proofs, al-Kirmani does not emphasize al-Hakim as the source of esoteric (*bāṭin*) knowledge but as a lawgiver and figure who commands his subjects in

Islamic law. In the second half of the treatise, al-Kirmani considers al-Hakim in an international context, noting that he was preceded by a series of “false imams.”<sup>69</sup> In this proof al-Kirmani emphasizes al-Hakim’s fulfillment of the requirements to “command the good and forbid the bad,” as well as his success safeguarding property and sexual relationships. These acts are consistent with the exoteric (*zāhir*), non-Ismaili laws, which are accepted universally by all Islamic sects.<sup>70</sup> The emphasis on al-Hakim as a commander of morality appears repeatedly throughout the text. In particular, al-Kirmani argues that al-Hakim was far more dedicated in his commitment to this injunction than were his Spanish Umayyad and Abbasid rivals. Central to this effort is his swift, harsh justice of tearing down churches. Al-Kirmani notes:

There is ample evidence of his commanding the good and prohibiting the bad, which none can deny, in the way he lives, devoting his nights and days to strengthening the word of truth, aiding the oppressed, *building mosques, tearing down churches*, preserving the communal prayer, applying the regulations of the law and confirming them and the corporal punishment [emphasis mine].<sup>71</sup>

Al-Kirmani specifically suggests that tearing down churches was a central aspect of al-Hakim’s Islamic legitimacy, considered in the vein of “commanding the good, prohibiting the bad,” and regarded alongside mosque construction as a core caliphal prerogative. He notes that this is in direct contrast to the permissive nature of the families of the Umayyads and Abbasids. Al-Kirmani’s text suggests that al-Hakim, by addressing the Buyid ruler, was striving for wider Islamic support.

#### “COMMANDING THE GOOD AND FORBIDDING THE BAD”: AL-HAKIM AND ISLAMIC SHARIA

The relation of al-Hakim’s acts to a strict interpretation of the sharia is demonstrated by comparing his deeds to the tenets set forth in the so-called Covenant of ‘Umar, a treaty between Sophronius (d. 638), the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and the second caliph, ‘Umar b. Khattab (r. 634–44), outlining the rights and responsibilities of Christians under Muslim rule. Although modern scholars have debated the precise dating of this pact, it is

based on the treaties made by ‘Umar b. Khattab as he conquered lands dominated by Christians and Jews.<sup>72</sup> In all the versions of this covenant, the treatment of churches is of central importance, as can be seen in the decree that Christians may not repair dilapidated houses of worship or build new ones.

In his study, Tritton translates one version of the pact, which is in the form of a letter from the Christians:

When you came to us we asked of you safety for our lives, our families, our property, and the people of our religion on these conditions; to pay tribute out of hand and be humiliated; not to hinder any Muslim from stopping in our churches by night or day, to entertain him there three days and give him food there and open to him their doors; to beat the *nāqūs* (a board beaten to announce the prayer) only gently in them and not to raise our voices in them in chanting; not to shelter there, nor in any of our houses, a spy of your enemies; *not to build a church, convent, hermitage or cell, nor repair those that are dilapidated, nor assemble in any that is in a Muslim quarter*, nor in their presence; not to display idolatry nor to invite it, nor show a cross on our churches, nor in any of the roads or markets of the Muslims...to tie the *zunnār* round our waists; to keep to our religion; not to resemble Muslims in dress, appearance... [emphasis mine].<sup>73</sup>

Other aspects of the Covenant of ‘Umar directly correspond to al-Hakim’s persecutions of the Christians and Jews in his lands, including the prescription to wear distinctive clothing and the banning of the ringing of the *nāqūs* and general public displays of Christianity, provisions that al-Hakim seems to have been addressing in many of his anti-*dhimmī* edicts. Another version of the covenant restates these prohibitions regarding overt displays of religion and further declares that Christians are not to engage in Easter or Palm Sunday processions. These restrictions relate directly to the pomp and unseemly ceremony that al-Hakim learned had been taking place at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, engendering his wrath. Whether or not the final form of the Covenant of ‘Umar was codified at the time of Fatimid rule, it is significant that many of the most condemned acts of the caliph were promoted in this Sunni text, and that the relative tolerance of al-Hakim’s ancestors in the treatment of *dhimmī* monuments was, in fact, against ‘Umar’s precedent.

Although the pact does not call for the destruction of any of the churches, as carried out by al-Hakim, it does challenge the precedent of tolerance of church repair established by al-Hakim's Fatimid predecessors, under whom many churches were restored and new structures built. While the precise form of the Covenant of 'Umar may or may not have been recorded by the time of the Fatimid caliphate, it is clear from the accounts of church destructions that many of them resulted from violations of the basic tenets of the covenant.

Another example of the codification of behavior toward *dhimmīs*, as well as the governing of the urban masses, can be seen in *hisba* manuals of the medieval Islamic world. Indeed, Caliph 'Umar was also to be the first to perform the role of Islamic market inspector (*muhtasib*), whose duties were consistent with the Covenant of 'Umar in its treatment of the *dhimmīs* and its obligation to "order good and forbid evil." The *muhtasib* had two primary functions: first, to ensure the "orderly and equitable running of the market," and second, to guarantee "public morals and the correct execution of Islamic ritual and law."<sup>74</sup> Once again, the earliest preserved examples of *hisba* manuals slightly postdate the Fatimid period. However, Fatimid sources demonstrate the increasing prominence of the *muhtasib* in their administrative system. Al-Maqrizi describes robes of honor and a turban being given to a *muhtasib*, whose name was read out in the Mosque of Ibn Tulun and the Mosque of 'Amr.<sup>75</sup> Al-Hakim himself is said to have taken on the position of the *muhtasib* during his reign, a claim that is not entirely surprising given his demonstrated interest in morality and the urban environment. Although the earliest preserved *hisba* manual from the eastern Islamic realm postdates al-Hakim's reign, written by al-Shayzari (d. 1193) in the twelfth century, the treatment of the *dhimmīs* outlined by this author is consistent with the unusual caliph's acts.<sup>76</sup>

The role of the *muhtasib* is at times specifically conceptualized as embracing the outward laws of Islam, as opposed to the esoteric dimensions of the Ismaili faith. For example, in discussing the *muhtasib*'s duty to oversee mosques and ensure that people pray diligently, al-Shayzari argues that this is:

...in order to show the characteristic outward forms of the religion and the sign of Islam. This is especially important

in this time of many innovations, differing sects, various forms of the *bāṭiniyya* and those who have declared the destruction of Islamic law and the abolition of the norms of Islam.<sup>77</sup>

Another treatise on the *hisba*, by the Sunni scholar al-Ghazali (d. 1111), written in the Seljuq context, echoes these sentiments, noting:

The strange thing is that the Shi'ites have gone to extremes in this, and have stated that it is not permitted to order good until the infallible appears, their Imam of Truth.<sup>78</sup>

While these texts postdate al-Hakim's reign, their place in Sunni religious practice sheds new light on his treatment of churches and the tension between Shi'i esoteric faith and the Sunni sharia. Many of the harsh prescriptions and destructions of this caliph are, in fact, consistent with a puritanical strain of medieval Sunni thought. In his study of *'amr bi'l-ma'ruf* (commanding the good), Michael Cook identifies al-Hakim as the one Fatimid caliph to concern himself with this injunction, while other rulers who embraced esoteric dimensions of Ismailism did not.<sup>79</sup>

#### *DHIMMĪ* MONUMENTS AT THE END OF AL-HAKIM'S REIGN

The intense persecutions of *dhimmī* subjects and large-scale destruction of *dhimmī* monuments resulted in mass conversions to Islam and *dhimmī* emigration to Byzantine territory. Among those who emigrated at this time was the Fatimid chronicler Yahya al-Antaki. While the conversions and razing of churches that took place within his realm may have been supported by many members of the community, al-Hakim enigmatically reversed these decisions in 1021. The *History of the Patriarchs* noted that for three years, "no one was able to make the oblation in the lands of Misr, except in the monasteries alone," and people who "could not endure to be away from Holy Mysteries" would offer bribes to go at night to "remote and ruined churches" and hide church vestments. It continued:

After this, after another three years, they began to restore the churches in the houses and to consecrate them secretly and to pray in them and to communicate (in them). The Possessor of the Order used to write to the Sultan who was





Fig. 10. Nineteenth-century view of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 2005.100.373.90. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Photo: Auguste Sálzman, 1854)

al-Hakim, that the Christians had built churches in Misr and in al-Rif secretly and that they were communicating in them, but he (al-Hakim) ignored them.<sup>80</sup>

The author suggests that at this time, in addition to allowing the reconstruction of churches, al-Hakim allowed converted *dhimmīs* to return to their religion without consequence.<sup>81</sup>

Yahya al-Antaki notes three specific instances of churches that were allowed to be rebuilt during al-Hakim's reign. A decree dated Rabi' II 411 (July–August 1020) permitted the reconstruction of the monastery of Dayr al-Qusayr, including the reestablishment of its endowments, and granted permission for Christians to gather there together again. Al-Antaki also specifies that



Fig. 11. Nineteenth-century view of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 2005.100.373.96. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Photo: Auguste Sálzman, 1854)

in Jumada II 411 (September–October 1020), al-Hakim allowed the reconstruction and reestablishment of the *waqfs* of churches in and around Jerusalem and the Church of Lydda. In Sha'ban 411 (November–December 1020), he allowed all converted Christians to return to their faith.<sup>82</sup> Significantly, while modern scholars deride the intolerance of al-Hakim's destruction of Christian monuments, medieval Muslim sources often praise him for the obliteration of *dhimmī* structures and his harsh edicts, which led to mass conversions, while criticizing his reversal of these persecutions (figs. 10 and 11).<sup>83</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This discussion of the razing of churches during the reign of al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah has illustrated a series of religious and political consistencies in the seemingly “psychotic” acts of this controversial ruler. The pivotal years of intense church destructions suggest a consistency in method, beyond the whims of an unstable mad man. They reveal a ruler responding to the very real challenges of his empire. While the early years of his reign were characterized by an attempt at Ismailization of the empire that was marked by persecutions of Christians and Sunnis alike, following the Sunni threat of the Abu Rakwa revolt, al-Hakim aimed to proclaim himself the ruler of the universally Islamic *umma*, and

thus made concessions to the Sunni threat of the Abu Rakwa revolt. By contrast, early in his reign, al-Hakim did not feel the need to diverge from the tradition of tolerance toward the public symbols of resident Christians. His large-scale destruction of Christian monuments may be seen in light of this shifting emphasis of the empire: when it became clear, following the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, that the church demolitions had strong popular support, they became part of a campaign to legitimate his rule. The destruction of churches, often accompanied by an Islamicization of the church site, can be understood as part of a common political and economic tactic—the use of urban renewal to employ and placate targeted populations. Certainly, this attempt to destroy Christian spaces in order to Islamicize his realms was by no means unique. Similar measures were carried out by the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–61), who instituted similar sumptuary laws and ordered the destruction of Christian monuments, while also patronizing productive architectural projects.

While modern scholars deride the destruction of churches under al-Hakim, the medieval reality was considerably more complex. Rather than being evidence of his madness, al-Kirmani's writings emphasize al-Hakim's destruction of churches as proof of his legitimacy—as these acts were evidence of his “commanding the good and forbidding the bad,” a central prerogative of a medieval Islamic ruler. Ultimately, the destruction of churches under al-Hakim was consistent with a larger shift in public sectarian identity among the Fatimids—away from an esoteric form of Ismailism, adopted by a minority of medieval Muslims, toward one concerned with a puritanical adherence to Islamic law. Rather than being broadly destructive, the demolition of churches was accompanied by the construction of mosques, thereby suggesting that the program was part of a larger re-orientation of the city and empire. Al-Kirmani's text suggests that the church destructions were part of a larger claim for legitimacy beyond the confines of the Fatimid empire, ultimately establishing al-Hakim's caliphate as the legitimate rival to those in Córdoba and Baghdad.

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## NOTES

1. See Terry Wilfong, “The Non-Muslim Communities: Christian Communities,” in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 1, *Islamic Egypt, 640–1517*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 175–97.
2. Yaacov Lev, “The Fatimid Vizier Ya‘qub ibn Killis and the Beginning of the Fatimid Administration in Egypt,” *Der Islam* 58 (1981): 237–49.
3. For an overview of the reign of al-‘Aziz, see Marius Canard, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition* (henceforth *EI2*) (Leiden: Brill, 2007), s.v. “al-Azīz bi-llāh Nizār Abū Maṣṣūr.” The relative tolerance shown toward the *dhimmīs* in the Fatimid period stands in contrast both to various times of persecution in the Abbasid period, particularly under al-Mutawakkil, and to later persecutions of the so-called Sunni revival. For a comparison of later injunctions against *dhimmīs*, see Seth Ward, “Taqī al-Dīn al-Subqī: On Construction, Continuance, and Repairs of Churches and Synagogues in Islamic Law,” in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions II: Papers Presented at the Institute for Islamic-Jewish Studies, Center for Judaic Studies, University of Denver*, ed. William M. Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks, *Brown Judaic Studies* 178 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 169–88.
4. In Egypt, churches were located in monastic communities outside of Cairo and in smaller urban churches, centered around the area of “Old Cairo,” south of Fustat, near the Mosque of ‘Amr. This area had served as the Roman fortress of Babylon. For a consideration of churches, see Lucy-Anne Hunt, “Churches of Old Cairo and Mosques of al-Qāhira: A Case of Christian-Muslim Interchange,” in *Byzantium, Eastern Christendom and Islam: Art at the Crossroads of the Medieval Mediterranean*, 2 vols. (London: Pindar Press, 1998), 1:319–42; Peter Sheehan, *Babylon of Egypt: The Archaeology of Old Cairo and the Origins of the City* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010); Gawdat Gabra, *The Treasures of Coptic Art in the Coptic Museum and Churches of Old Cairo* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010); Gawdat Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries: Egypt's Monastic Art and Architecture* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2006).
5. Abbot Moses, under whom the stucco works were carved, had been to Baghdad ca. 927. Thelma K. Thomas, “Christians in the Islamic East,” in *Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843–1261*, ed. Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixom (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, distr. by H. N. Abrams, 1997), 367–68. See also Pierre Du Bourget, *Art of the Copts* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1971).
6. Similar phenomena occur in portable objects, in which the image of Christ and a Coptic priest appears in luster ceramics, a hallmark medium of the Fatimids.
7. Hunt, “Churches of Old Cairo,” 325–26. Many parallels can be drawn from the woodwork published by Edmond Pauty, *Bois sculptés d'églises coptes (époque fatimide)* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale,



- 1930); cf. Edmond Pauty, *Catalogue général du Musée arabe du Caire: Les bois sculptés jusqu'à l'époque ayyoubide* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1931).
8. Eric Ormsby, "The Caliph," *The New Yorker*, June 10, 1996, 48. This poem is also published in Paul E. Walker, *Caliph of Cairo: Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, 996–1021* (Cairo, New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2009), 283–84.
  9. See Yahyā b. Sa'īd al-Anṭākī, *Histoire de Yahya-ibn-Sa'īd d'Antioche*, ed. and trans. Ignace Kratchkovsky and Aleksandr Vasiliev, 2 vols., *Patrologia Orientalis* 18 (Paris: Librairie de Paris, 1924); Yahyā b. Sa'īd al-Anṭākī, *Histoire de Yahya-ibn-Sa'īd d'Antioche*, ed. and trans. Ignace Kratchkovsky and Aleksandr Vasiliev, 2 vols., *Patrologia Orientalis* 23 (Paris: Librairie de Paris, 1932); Yahyā b. Sa'īd al-Anṭākī, *Histoire de Yahya-ibn-Sa'īd d'Antioche*, ed. Ignace Kratchkovsky, trans. Françoise Micheau and Gérard Troupeau, *Patrologia Orientalis* 47 (Ternhout: Brepols, 1997). For a discussion of Yahya's account of al-Hakim's madness, see Michael Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 150–51; Walker, *Caliph of Cairo*, 249–50.
  10. For a literary consideration of al-Hakim's reign, see Bensalem Himmich, *Majnūn al-ḥukm bi-amr Allāh: Riwāya fī al-takhyīl al-tārīkhī* (Rabat: Maṭba'at al-Ma'ārif al-Jadīda, 1989); English trans: *The Theocrat*, trans. Roger Allen (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005).
  11. For an analysis of the historical development of the Druze, see Nejlā M. Abu-Izzeddin, *The Druzes: A New Study of Their History, Faith and Society* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984).
  12. See Taqī al-Dīn Abu'l-'Abbas Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī, *Ittī'āz al-ḥunafā' bi-akhbār al-'imma al-Fāṭimīyyīn al-khulafā'*, ed. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl, 3 vols. (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-'Amma li-Qaṣūr al-Thaqāfah, 1996), 2:115–23.
  13. Jennifer Pruitt, "Fatimid Architectural Patronage and Changing Sectarian Identities (969–1021)" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2009), 127–43; Jonathan Bloom, "The Mosque of al-Hakim in Cairo," *Muqarnas* 1 (1983): 15–36; Jonathan Bloom, *Arts of the City Victorious: Islamic Art and Architecture in Fatimid North Africa and Egypt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).
  14. S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 6 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967–93), 1:29. In the first chapter of volume one, Goitein situates the "classical Geniza" period of the tenth to thirteenth century as the apogee of interconfessional relations in the Mediterranean; he contrasts this with the growing "intolerance and fanaticism" of the thirteenth century.
  15. *Ibid.*, 21 and 34.
  16. Marlis Saleh demonstrates that "[t]he caliph's inconsistency was universally condemned. Ibn Khallikan complains that 'he was constantly doing and undoing.' Ibn Taghribirdi concurs that his worst quality was the fact that he would 'do something, then undo it, then do its opposite.' Al-Suyuti says firmly 'al-Hakim was the worst caliph; no one worse ruled Egypt after the Pharaoh. Among his faults is that he was fickle in words and deeds; he destroyed the churches of Egypt then restored them, and destroyed the [Church of the Holy Sepulcher] then restored it.'" She also notes that Ibn al-Dawadari considers the prohibitions against Jews and Christians as "among the good religious deeds that al-Hakim did." Al-Qalqashandi summarizes the restrictions thusly: "He did well in what he did to them." Marlis J. Saleh, "Government Relations with the Coptic Community in Egypt during the Fāṭimid Period (358–567 A.H./969–1171 C.E.)," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1995), 250–51.
  17. During the first few years of his reign, al-Hakim was essentially a puppet of his tutor, Barjawan. Following the defeat of Ibn 'Ammar in 387 (997), Barjawan became even more powerful, and was named *wāsīṭa* (similar to a vizier). Barjawan then bestowed the honorific *ra'īs* on his Coptic secretary, Christian Fahd b. Ibrahim, demonstrating that in the early years of al-Hakim's reign, Christians continued to be incorporated into the Fatimid administration. It appears that Barjawan's power eventually became a threat to al-Hakim, and the fifteen-year-old caliph ordered his execution in 1000. See al-Maqrīzī, *Ittī'āz*, 2:25–28. For a discussion, see Walker, *Caliph of Cairo*, 15–42 and 98–107.
  18. See *Ta'rikh baṭārikat al-Kanīsa al-miṣriyya (History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church, Known as the History of the Holy Church by Saōirus ibn al-Muqaḥfa')*, vol. 2, pt. 2, ed. and trans. 'Aziz Sūryal 'Aṭīyya, Yassā 'Abd al-Maṣīḥ, and O. H. E. Khs.-Burmester (Cairo: Jam'iyat al-Āthār al-Qibṭiyya, 1948), 163–64. The theme of al-Hakim's role as a "good mediator" and just ruler is echoed in other *dhimmī* sources. Yahya al-Antaki praises him for providing justice, and a Geniza fragment likewise commends him for providing "unparalleled justice." For a discussion, see Sadik A. Assaad, *The Reign of al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (386/996–411/1021): A Political Study* (Beirut: The Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 1974), 83 and 94.
  19. 'Aṭīyya, Maṣīḥ, and Burmester, *History of the Patriarchs*, 163–64.
  20. Taqī al-Dīn Abu'l-'Abbas Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Mawā'iz wa'l-i'tibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa'l-āthār*, ed. Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid, 5 vols. (London: Mu'assasat al-Furqān lil-Turāth al-Islāmī, 2002–3), 4:126.
  21. The mosque known today in Cairo as "the mosque of al-Hakim" was called Maṣjid al-Anwar in medieval texts.
  22. Al-Maqrīzī notes that a dispute arose regarding whether the church had existed prior to the Muslim conquest of Egypt, suggesting a possible application of the tenets of the so-called Covenant of 'Umar (to be discussed further below). Although the reigns of al-'Aziz and al-Mu'izz are praised by modern scholars, their leniency toward the *dhimmī* communities was often met with fierce protest from the local communities. See Pruitt, "Fatimid Architectural Patronage," 127–43; Jennifer Pruitt, "Miracle at Muqattam: Moving a Mountain to Build a Church in the Early Fatimid Caliphate (969–995)," in *Sacred Precincts: Non-*



- Muslim Religious Sites in Islamic Territories*, ed. Mohammad Gharipour (forthcoming, Leiden: Brill, 2014).
23. This follows early patterns in the foundation of Cairo, in which the monastery of Dayr al-Khandaq was destroyed in order to build the new city of al-Qahira, allowing the Christians to rebuild their structure outside the new Fatimid city: al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 4:130–31.
  24. For a discussion of sumptuary laws under al-Hakim, see Saleh, “Government Relations with the Coptic Community”; Marius Canard, *EI2*, s.v. “Al-Hākīm bi-Amr Allāh”; Walker, *Caliph of Cairo*. For sumptuary laws for *dhimmīs*, see A. S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and Their Non-Muslim Subjects: A Critical Study of the Covenant of ‘Umar* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930); Albrecht Noth, “Abgrenzungsprobleme zwischen Muslimen und Nicht-Muslimen. Die ‘Bedingungen ‘Umar (aš-Šurūṭ al-umariyya),” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987): 290–315; Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010).
  25. Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz*, 2:54. For further discussion, see Irene A. Bierman, *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 76–78, and Paula Sanders, *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (Albany: State University of Albany Press, 1994), 52–57. For a consideration of the aesthetic dimensions of the public text, see Yasser Tabbaa, *The Transformation of Islamic Art during the Sunni Revival* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).
  26. George Makdisi, *Ibn ‘Aqīl et la résurgence de l’Islam traditionaliste au XIe siècle, Ve siècle de l’Hégire* (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1963), 312; Bierman, *Writing Signs*, 79–100.
  27. Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz*, 2:53.
  28. Many medieval historical accounts discuss this event. See especially al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz*, 2:60–66. For an overview of events, see Walker, *Caliph of Cairo*, 169–73. On the teaching of the Koran, see Assaad, *Reign of al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah*, 135.
  29. Both groups had been hostile to the Fatimids prior to Abu Rakwa’s rebellion. The Banu Qurra had previously been oppressed by al-Hakim, while the Zanata had never accepted the Fatimids as the rightful caliphate.
  30. Yahya records that this was actually the entire reason for Abu Rakwa’s revolt. Given that the cursing occurred at approximately the same time, it is unlikely that this event was the single reason, but certainly, it must have been used in Abu Rakwa’s propaganda.
  31. Assaad, *Reign of al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah*, 140. It seems that there were also economic forces at work, as both Barqa and much of North Africa were experiencing economic hardship at the time. For a discussion of the Abu Rakwa revolt, see also Sanders, *Ritual, Politics, and the City*, 57–60; Bloom, “Mosque of al-Hakim”; and Yaacov Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, Arab History and Civilization, Studies and Texts 1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill), 27–30.
  32. This edict would be repeated by al-Hakim several times during his reign, suggesting that there were Shi‘i contingencies within Cairo who continued this practice.
  33. Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz*, 2:86.
  34. This shift is also seen in the changes in architectural projects and urban ceremonial practices. See Pruitt, “Fatimid Architectural Patronage,” 202–73.
  35. *Ibid.*, 62–143.
  36. See Saleh, “Government Relations with the Coptic Community,” 82–85.
  37. For a recent study on the Holy Sepulcher, see Colin Morris, *The Sepulchre of Christ and the Medieval West: From the Beginning to 1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). It is this centrally planned construction, executed around a rock outcropping, that was echoed in the construction of the Dome of the Rock by ‘Abd al-Malik in 692–93. See Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973 and 1987), and Rina Avner, “The Dome of the Rock in Light of the Development of Concentric Martyria in Jerusalem: Architecture and Architectural Iconography,” *Muqarnas* 27 (2010): 31–49.
  38. For a reconstruction of the fourth-century monument, see Hugue Vincent and F.-M. Abel, *Jérusalem nouvelle: Fascicule 1 et 2, Aelia Capitolina, le Saint-Sepulcre et le Mont des Oliviers* (Paris: Victor Lecoffe, 1914); Virgilio Corbo, *Il Santo Sepolcro di Gerusalemme: Aspetti archeologici dalle origini al periodo crociato*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Franciscan Print Press, 1981–82). For an image of a bread mould representing the monuments of Golgotha, see George Galavaris, *Bread and the Liturgy: The Symbolism of Early Christian and Byzantine Bread Stamps* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970); Richard Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 4th ed. rev. by Richard Krautheimer and Slobodan Ćurčić. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 63.
  39. The original church would have been substantially altered even by the time of the Fatimids, as Jerusalem was sacked and the church burned by the Persians in 614. For an account of the early church, see Kenneth J. Conant, “The Original Buildings at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem,” *Speculum* 31, 1 (January 1956): 1–48.
  40. This account is translated in Saint Adamnan, *The Pilgrimage of Arculfus in the Holy Land, about the Year A.D. 670*, trans. and annot. James Rose Macpherson, Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society 3 (London: Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society, 1889).
  41. Quoted in F. E. Peters, *Jerusalem: The Holy City in the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims, and Prophets from the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 243.
  42. Pruitt, “Fatimid Architectural Patronage,” 127–43.
  43. The use of architecture as a competitive discourse in Jerusalem was also emphasized by al-Muqaddasi, who suggested that ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705) and al-Walid (r. 705–15) constructed the lavish programs at the Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque of Damascus in direct response to

- the preexisting Christian monuments. For a discussion of competitive discourse in Umayyad buildings, see Grabar, *Formation of Islamic Art*, 61.
44. Joshua Prawer and Haggai Ben-Shammai, eds., *The History of Jerusalem: The Early Muslim Period, 638–1099* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi; New York: New York University Press, 1996), 19.
  45. One of the most provocative theories regarding the church's destruction was that offered by William of Tyre, a twelfth-century resident of Jerusalem, who suggested that al-Hakim demolished the church to counter rumors that he was a Christian, on account of his Christian mother. William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, trans. and ed. Emily A. Babcock and A. C. Krey (New York: Columbia University, 1943). Ultimately, it is unlikely that al-'Aziz's Christian wife was indeed al-Hakim's mother. While his conclusion may be flawed, William of Tyre's analysis suggests the importance of clarifying religious identity during al-Hakim's reign. It also serves as a reminder of just how intertwined the early Fatimid caliphs were with the Christian power structure—William of Tyre notes that a member of the Fatimid royal family had recently served as the patriarch of Jerusalem. Whether or not this figure was a blood relative, the fact remains that al-Hakim's destruction of churches firmly distanced his rule from the contested interfaith alliances of his predecessors, something that was still resonant in the Crusader-occupied Jerusalem of William's time.
  46. Marius Canard, "La destruction de l'Église de la Résurrection par le calife Hakim et l'histoire de la descente du feu sacré," *Byzance* 35 (1955): 21; al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, 2:74–76.
  47. The disdain for the Church in medieval Muslim thought is evidenced in the medieval nomenclature used to reference it: the term *al-Qumāma* ("the trash heap") is often adopted in place of *al-Qiyāma* ("the Resurrection").
  48. For a further consideration of Muslim-Christian relations, see Griffith, *Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*.
  49. Saleh, "Government Relations with the Coptic Community," 82–85; Yahyā al-Anṭākī, *Histoire de Yahya ibn-Sa'īd d'Antioche* (1932), 195–96. It seems that the Egyptian Christians had warned the Jerusalem patriarch about the attack and as a result many of the most precious objects had been removed. A Western medieval source alludes to the wealth of the church when Benedict suggests that in the year 1000 Charles came to the holy city and "adorned the holy place with gold and jewels, and he also placed on it a large gold standard." As quoted in Peters, *Jerusalem*, 217.
  50. Abū Ṣāliḥ, *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and Some Neighbouring Countries, Attributed to Abū Ṣāliḥ, the Armenian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895).
  51. *Ibid.*, 147.
  52. *Ibid.*, 108.
  53. For a consideration of early churches, see Mattia Guidetti, "The Byzantine Heritage in the *Dār al-Islām*: Churches and Mosques in al-Ruha between the Sixth and Twelfth Centuries," *Muqarnas* 26 (2009): 1–36. For the significance of the minaret in the history of Islamic Art, see Jonathan Bloom, *Minaret, Symbol of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
  54. Abū Ṣāliḥ, *Churches and Monasteries*, 130.
  55. *Ibid.*, 219.
  56. *Ibid.*, 282.
  57. Christian sources often point to the conversion of Muslims to Christianity as the main reason that al-Hakim punished the *dhimmi*s. William of Tyre's description highlights the importance of religious identity in the medieval world. Moreover, the story of Ibn Raga in the *History of the Patriarchs* reveals the high stakes involved in medieval conversion. My theory that al-Hakim was trying to appeal to universal Islamic goals is supported by the fact that under his reign we find many indications of Christians and Jews converting, or pretending to convert, to Islam. However, it does not appear that they converted to Shi'i Islam, particularly since the majority Sunni population protested widely when the Christians were allowed to reconvert. Yahya al-Antaki noted that al-Hakim relied heavily on Christians and Jews in his administration, but he also tried to convert them. Ultimately, whether al-Hakim destroyed churches for popular appeal, financial gain, caliphal ambition, religious fervor, or a combination of all of these, it is clear that such actions received broad popular support.
  58. Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 4:96–99.
  59. Trans. in Paul Walker, "The Ismaili Da'wa in the Reign of the Fatimid Caliph al-Ḥākīm," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 30 (1993): 173.
  60. See Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*; Assaad, *Reign of al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah*; Paul Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī: Ismaili Thought in the Age of al-Ḥākīm*, Ismaili Heritage Series 3 (London, New York: I. B. Tauris, in Association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies). Walker asserts that although this popularity grew outside the Egyptian capital, those closest to al-Hakim recognized the difficulty of defending his caliphate. His arrival in Cairo was met by a crisis in the Ismaili *da'wa* (mission), culminating in the shutting down of the *majālis al-ḥikma* (sessions of wisdom): Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī*, 16–24. For an earlier study of al-Kirmani's works, see Daniel De Smet, *La quietude de l'intellect: Néoplatonisme et gnose ismaélienne dans l'oeuvre de Ḥamīd ad-Dīn al-Kirmānī (Xe/XIe s.)* (Louvain: Peeters, 1995).
  61. Translated in John Harper Forsyth, "The Byzantine-Arab Chronicle (938–1034) of Yahyā b. Sa'īd al-Anṭākī" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1977), 227.
  62. Translated in *ibid.*, 228.
  63. Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, 2:65.
  64. At the time, the Abbasid Empire itself was defined by complicated sectarian divisions and allegiances, as the Sunni Abbasids were controlled by their Shi'i Buyid viziers. The conflict between the Sunnis and Shi'a, as seen in the Fatimid context, was just as complicated, if not more so, in Baghdad.

65. This manifesto has also altered later historical works, which accept its contestation of Fatimid genealogy and make it difficult to determine the precise historical circumstances of the beginning of the Fatimid Empire. Ultimately, the anti-Fatimid treatises by the Abbasids at this time became inextricably part of later Sunni histories on the Fatimids, making it particularly difficult to ascertain accurate information on the dynasty.
66. Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī*, 14–16. Described in Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi'l-ta'rikh*, 14 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1965 [repr. of ed. published by C. J. Tornberg under the title *Ibn-el-Athiri Chronicon quod perfectissimum inscribitur* (Leiden, 1853–67)]).
67. Paul Walker, *Master of the Age: An Islamic Treatise on the Necessity of the Imamate; A Critical Edition of the Arabic Text and English Translation of Ḥamīd al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Kirmānī's al-Maṣābiḥ fi ithbāt al-imāma* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 118. Once again, the precise dates of this work are not known. It was most likely completed between 1011 and 1015, while al-Kirmani was in Iraq. However, it is likely that al-Kirmani adapted it from writings and thoughts prior to this. Therefore, the text can be considered as both a reflection of and reaction to the Fatimid developments outlined above, including al-Hakim's increasingly harsh edicts, his destruction of churches, and his simultaneous growing popularity in some regions of the Islamic world and within Egypt itself. On one hand, the text may be conceived as an outline of al-Hakim's vision for the caliphate; on the other, it is an apology for his acts. In either case, it offers a fascinating insight into the dynamics of sectarian relations in this period.
68. Although the Buyids themselves were Shi'i, they did not recognize the Fatimid ruler as the living imam and instead supported the Sunni Abbasid caliph in Baghdad.
69. These "false imams" include "Aḥmad b. Ishaq (al-Qadir), al-Haruni (al-Mu'ayyad billah), the Zaydi imam in Hawsam in Gilan; Umar al-Nazwani, the Ibadī imam in Oman; the Umayyad ruler in Spain and the Maghrib; and the leaders of the Qarmati remnant in al-Ahsa," as well as the expected Hidden Imam of Twelver Shi'ism. Walker, *Master of the Age*, 114.
70. Al-Kirmani writes, "He who has the august authority, glorious kingship, established proof, sword unsheathed in support of Islam, commands the good and forbids the bad, applies the corporeal punishments, preserves the borders, cares for the populace, revives the *sunna*, safeguards society, endeavors to conduct the holy war, shatters the opposition, extends justice and mercy, without having to mention the condition of the designation and appointment and the nobility of universal high regards, is al-Hakim bi-amr Allāh. From that it follows that he is the imam, fealty to whom is incumbent on them and obedience to him is required of them." Walker, *Master of the Age*, 114.
71. Ibid., 114.
72. On the Covenant of 'Umar, see Tritton, *Caliphs and Their Non-Muslim Subjects*; Noth, "Abgrenzungsprobleme zwischen Muslimen und Nicht-Muslimen"; and Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). While the precise dates of the codification of this pact are debated, Griffith notes that it seems to have "reached its classical form" by the ninth century. Griffith, *Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 15.
73. Tritton, *Caliphs and Their Non-Muslim Subjects*, 5–6.
74. 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Naṣr Shayzarī, *The Book of the Islamic Market Inspector = Nihāyat al-rutba fi ṭalab al-ḥisba: The Utmost Authority in the Pursuit of Ḥisba*, trans. and ed. Ronald Paul Buckley (Oxford: Oxford University Press on behalf of the University of Manchester, 1999), 16.
75. Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, 2:135.
76. The text reads "The *dhimmīs* must be made to observe the conditions laid down for them in the treatise on *jizya* written for them by 'Umar b. al-Khattab, and must be made to wear the *ghiyār*. If he is a Jew, he should put a red or yellow cord on his shoulder; if a Christian, he should tie a *zunnār* around his waist and hang a cross around his neck; if a woman, she should wear two slippers, one of which is white and the other black. When a protected person goes to the baths, he must wear a steel, copper or lead neckband to distinguish him from other people. The *muḥtasib* should stop them from riding horses and carrying weapons and swords. When they ride mules, they should do so with side saddles. Their buildings should not be higher than those of the Muslims nor should they preside over meetings. They should not jostle Muslims on the main roads, but should rather use the side streets. They should not be the first to give a greeting, nor be welcomed in meetings. The *muḥtasib* must stipulate that they offer hospitality to any Muslim who passes by and give him lodging in their houses and places of worship. They must not be allowed to display any alcoholic drinks or pigs, to recite the Torah or Bible openly, to ring the church bells, to celebrate their festivals or to hold funeral services in public. All this was stipulated by 'Umar b. al-Khattab in his treatise, so the *muḥtasib* must keep an eye on their affairs regarding these things and force them to comply": in Shayzarī, *Book of the Islamic Market Inspector*, trans. and ed. Buckley, 121–22. The manual also includes other acts of al-Hakim, such as prohibiting women from lamenting or wailing at funeral ceremonies, and in fact, discouraging them from attending burials altogether (p. 127); cf. al-Hakim's acts of 1013, in al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, 2:93–94. Earlier, though less extensive *ḥisba* manuals are preserved in Umayyad Spain. See Claude Cahen, *EI2*, s.v. "Ḥisba."
77. Shayzarī, *Book of the Islamic Market Inspector*, trans. and ed. Buckley, 128.
78. Shayzarī, *Book of the Islamic Market Inspector*, trans. and ed. Buckley, 149. Also see Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
79. Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong*, 302.
80. 'Aṭīyya, Maṣīḥ, and Burmester, *History of the Patriarchs*, 205.



81. The source ascribes many of these reversals to al-Hakim's personal relationship with a monk named Bimin, a convert to Islam who had returned to Christianity and asked the caliph for permission to construct a monastery in Sahran, outside of Misr. After the construction of this structure, al-Hakim visited the monasteries on his nightly outings, staying with and conversing with the monks. According to the account, al-Hakim and Bimin the monk became friends, and arranged for the release of the patriarch Zacharius and the reconstruction of the churches. The text also links al-Hakim's increasing asceticism to the influence of Christian clergy, as the caliph remarks that the community reveres the patriarch, even though he is dressed humbly. 'Aṭīyya, Maṣīḥ, and Burmester, *History of the Patriarchs*, 208.
82. For a discussion of these events, see Walker, *Caliph of Cairo*, 239–61.
83. Saleh, "Government Relations with the Coptic Community," 250–51.