



Tahera Qutbuddin

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Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī  
and Fatimid *Da'wa*  
Poetry

*A Case of Commitment  
in Classical Arabic  
Literature*



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AND FATĪMĪD DA'WA POETRY

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BY

TAHERA QUTBUDDIN



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*To the cherished memory of my grandfather*

“mu'ayyad-i asghar”

*Syedna Taher Saifuddin*

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*Manuscript History of al-Mu'ayyad's Dīwān*

Due to the absence of documented evidence, many questions remain unanswered about the collection and publication of al-Mu'ayyad's *Dīwān*. However, it is logical to hypothesize that al-Mu'ayyad's Yemenite student, the dā'ī-qāḍī Lamak b. Malik al-Ḥammādī, brought al-Mu'ayyad's works with him when he returned to Sanaa after his five-year sojourn in Egypt with al-Mu'ayyad from 456/1064 to 461/1069. Lamak is probably the person who collected and published al-Mu'ayyad's poems, perhaps even in al-Mu'ayyad's lifetime, conceivably even with the poet's own collaboration. This hypothesis is borne out by the fact that in all the manuscripts, al-Mu'ayyad's poems are followed by an appendix containing a few poems by earlier Imams and dā'wa luminaries,<sup>35</sup> the last of which is a panegyric on the Imams by someone named "Ibn Ḥammād"—this is probably Lamak himself.<sup>36</sup> The poem by Ibn Ḥammād is followed in all the manuscripts by a sentence saying "The *Dīwān* ends here," which is followed by another four poems by a poet who probably lived in the early Ṭayyibī period;<sup>37</sup> so it would appear that the *Dīwān* was fixed in the form that we have it today by the early twelfth century, that is, at the very beginning of the Ṭayyibī dā'wa.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> The poets are: 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (four poems), three Fatimid Caliph-Imams al-Qā'im (one poem), al-Ḥākīm (one poem), and al-Mustansir (two poems), and an Alexandrian poet named al-Iskandarānī, who lived in the reign of al-'Azīz (r. 365–386/975–996), as is clear from his panegyric which names al-'Azīz as the *mamūlīh* (one poem).

<sup>36</sup> The last verse of this poem is the poet's plea for the Imams' intercession, a signature verse in al-Mu'ayyad's tradition. The poet names himself as "Ibn Ḥammād," and also prays for "Abī Ḥammād," here in the position of the rhyme word.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Shaykh Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Abī Yazīd. According to the Ṭayyibī theological compilation *Majmū' al-tarbiyya* (ms., vol. 1) by Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir (d. 584/1189), this was the name of the author of *R. al-Mathbūh fī al-mabūd' wa al-mā'ūd*, who lived in the reign of al-ʿAmir (r. 495–524/1101–1130, cf. also Poonawala, *Biographical*, pp. 127, 145). The *Tuḥfat al-qulūb* (ms.) of the Ṭayyibī dā'ī Ḥatīm b. Ibrāhīm (r. 557–597/1162–1199) mentions a Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Abī Yazīd as being ranked 7th in the dā'wa hierarchy of Ḥatīm's time.

<sup>38</sup> The *Dīwān* manuscripts all inexplicably leave out al-Mu'ayyad's panegyric for Abū Kālījār (#62 of *Dīwān* ed.). Al-Mu'ayyad's *Ṣira* (pp. 48–54, full poem) cites this poem, as does the fifteenth century Ṭayyibī dā'ī Idrīs' *ʿUyūn al-akhbār wa jinān al-akhbār* (vol. 6, ed. Muṣṭafā Ḥalīb, Beirut, 1984, p. 341, part of poem), so its exclusion from the *Dīwān* ms. was probably not a consciously formulated dā'wa policy. Six poems from al-Mu'ayyad's *Dīwān* are cited in full or in part by dā'ī Idrīs: *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, vol. 6; pp. 325–328 (#7), p. 329 (#44), p. 341 (#62), pp. 356–358 (#17); vol. 7 (ed. Aymān Fu'ād Sayyid, titled *The Fatimids and Their Successors in Faram*, London & New York, 2002), pp. 73–74 (#38), p. 75 (#60). The ordering of the *Dīwān* is arbitrary and does not appear to follow any particular pattern.

After Lamak's death in c. 491/1097–98, the Yemenite Ṭayyibī branch of the Fātimids preserved al-Mu'ayyad's *Dīwān*, and the *Dīwān* manuscripts that we have today all originate from the Ṭayyibī (Dā'ūdī Bohra) dā'wa library.<sup>39</sup> The major portion of the Ṭayyibī library (along with the seat of the Ṭayyibī dā'wa) moved to India in 946/1539, where it is currently housed in Mumbai and Surat under the jurisdiction of the Ṭayyibī dā'ī. The earliest *Dīwān* manuscript that I was able to locate is dated 1075 AH (1665 CE). Earlier ones in the library's possession were probably destroyed in various natural and man-made disasters through the ages. However, in time, manuscripts from the early Yemeni-Ṭayyibī period may indeed be recovered from personal collections in Yemen and, in addition to providing an even more accurate rendition of al-Mu'ayyad's poetry, they may provide hard evidence concerning the collection and publication of the *Dīwān*.

The Ḥusayn edition of al-Mu'ayyad's *Dīwān* is a fairly accurate, critical version.<sup>40</sup> The manuscripts he utilizes were all produced in the Ṭayyibī dā'wa; the earliest dated manuscript among them is 1309 AH (1892 CE). In addition to the Ḥusayn edition, I was able to consult other, earlier manuscripts from the Ṭayyibī library, such as the seventeenth-century manuscript mentioned above (details of these manuscripts are provided in Appendix B). In several instances, my manuscripts contain variants from the edited version, and I have used these variants whenever the edited version appears to be inaccurate.

<sup>39</sup> The Ṭayyibīs today belong to several different denominations based on the line of dā'īs they consider legitimate; doctrinal differences are minimal. For the purposes of this study, the majority Dā'ūdī Bohra Ṭayyibī denomination is taken as the representative group.

<sup>40</sup> Note that Ḥusayn includes two poems in his edition that are not in the *Dīwān* manuscripts. One of these, #63, is an incorrect inclusion. This poem is not by al-Mu'ayyad at all, but is quoted by him in his *Majālis* and attributed to "one of the truthful, sincere ones . . ." (vol. 1, majlis 14). The other poem, #62, is by him, and he quotes it as his own composition in the *Ṣira* (pp. 48–54).



but the near absence of poetic tropes, the second necessary feature of Arabic didactic verse, is not. The two spheres of didacticism and literary commitment overlap in their common trait of instruction, but they are not identical. One is belles-lettres, the other is not. Al-Mu'ayyad's *Dirwān* is vastly more literary than, for example, the thousand-verse grammar text *al-ʿAlfīyya* by Ibn Mālik, which would consensually be placed in the category of didactic versification. Thus, al-Mu'ayyad's poems are not didactic. They are committed.

Regarding the next two issues, it is imprecise, in my opinion, to apply the criteria for evaluating Abbasid poetry ad hoc to Fatimid da'wa poetry. To paraphrase a fellow Arabist, the merit of al-Mu'ayyad's poetry is different.<sup>32</sup> In order to produce a fair assessment, therefore, it is necessary to analyze its literary style in the context of its ideological setting, and to evaluate its effectiveness in achieving its particular goals. Al-Mu'ayyad's verse, although it had numerous features similar to Abbasid poetry, is grounded in its own distinct heritage, the Fatimid esoteric tradition. Because of its deep and complex subtext, the poetic text is multi-layered, yielding up to the audience only as much theological information as it has prior exposure to. Without an awareness of these subtle *tāwīl* nuances, it is difficult to appreciate its art fully. Moreover, his poetry was composed for its own clear aims, the propagation of the Fatimid da'wa. And without understanding this religio-political function, it is not possible to measure its success.

A double standard seems to operate that allows European literature to be both committed and artistic but does not allow Arabic—especially Fatimid, and particularly al-Mu'ayyad's—literature to be both, denying its aesthetic value because of its ideological engagement. When discussing the artistic merit of a poem, what is material is not the content of the ideas in that poem, but rather, the poetic style in which these ideas are expressed. Al-Mu'ayyad's poems, despite their theological substance, do not fail the test of being true poetry. Although scholars have argued interminably through the ages over what exactly constitutes poetic style, most accept certain core elements as essential, including mimesis, rhythm, language that aims to be powerfully persuasive, and abundant use of figures of speech such

<sup>32</sup> Stefan Sperl, arguing for the aesthetic value of Mithyār al-Daylamī's mannerist poetry, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry: A Structural Analysis of Selected Texts (3rd century AH/9th century AD–5th century AH/11th century AD)*, Cambridge, 1989, p. 70.

as metaphor. These components are well integrated into al-Mu'ayyad's poems. The most striking aspect of his poetic technique is a blending of high literary style and Islamic faith motifs. Not only are his poems treatises of Fatimid dogma, they are also, as I hope to illustrate in this study, masterpieces of Arabic literature. The ideological content of the poems is irrelevant to their literary evaluation, or rather, it enhances their aesthetic value. The strength of al-Mu'ayyad's thought, the force of his arguments, cannot be separated from the literary qualities of his writing.<sup>33</sup>

Al-Mu'ayyad's poetry disproves some of the criticisms leveled at Arabic literature that stereotype its praise poetry as lacking sincerity and substance. For al-Mu'ayyad was not a professional poet, and his verse differed from the Abbasid and earlier Fatimid model in its warm, sincere, and personal nature, and its lack of expectation of monetary reward. Its literary character, too, was distinct from that of the earlier poets in several important ways, chief among them being: (a) the predominance of theological motifs; (b) a focus on praising the Imam using these motifs; (c) the composition of distinctive preludes and closures to paenegyric; (d) the production of original da'wa-oriented genres of poetry, such as *munāẓāt* to commune with God and disputational verse to reveal weaknesses in non-Fatimid doctrines; (e) special light-focused and Egypt-centered imagery; and (f) above all, the use of the unique form of *tāwīl*-based religious symbolism—metaphor, in fact, as manifestation, in the sense that what seems at first glance to be metaphor turns out upon closer acquaintance not to be metaphor at all but, rather, the theological reality of the Imam on a cosmic scale.

These features are discussed in detail in the following chapters, which demonstrate the fact that in contrast to the *da'wa* (state) poetry of the earlier era, al-Mu'ayyad's poetry was truly "Fatimid da'wa poetry," the beginning of a dynamic literary tradition that flourished through the Fatimid-Tayyibī<sup>34</sup> da'wa for over nine and a half centuries and continues to thrive today.

<sup>33</sup> This last sentence is a paraphrase of Engells' remarks on some 18th century English writers and poets, *The Committed Poet*, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> The Tayyibī da'wa and its poetry is discussed in detail in chapter 6.

panegyric convention of requesting financial remuneration from patrons.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, Fatimid poetry had developed over a century along almost the same lines as Abbasid poetry. But the structure of the Fatimid court, which was the cultural environment for such verse, was not a facsimile of the Abbasid one. A major difference was the existence of the *da'wa*, whose primary purpose was otherworldly, although it did have a secondary, imperial purpose that buttressed the primary, religious mission of saving souls. The convergence of the poetic tradition and the *da'wa* in the verse of the *dā'i*-poet al-Mu'ayyad would radically change the course of Fatimid poetry. Steeped as he was in the *da'wa*, it is logical to expect that the *da'wa* would fundamentally influence his poetic output. The question, then, is how his religious mission informed the aesthetic rules, motifs, structures, genres, motives, addressees, and aspirations of his poetry. And, furthermore, whether it is possible to discuss the artistic merit of his poems above and beyond their ideological mission.

In view of the pioneering nature of al-Mu'ayyad's poetry, it is surprising that scholars have only tentatively ventured into its domain. Al-Mu'ayyad's *Dīwān* was edited in 1949 by Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-Miṣrī), who wrote a fairly lengthy introduction in which, after a biography of al-Mu'ayyad and a section on Fatimid doctrines culled from his *Dīwān* and elsewhere, he provided an eighteen-page "Glimpse at al-Mu'ayyad's Poetry."<sup>25</sup> Ḥusayn's study, though preliminary and largely descriptive, is perceptive and contains valuable data. He was also the first and last person to work on al-Mu'ayyad's poetic output until four decades later, when Pieter Smoor briefly discussed two of al-Mu'ayyad's odes.<sup>26</sup> Although cur-

<sup>24</sup> See for example, some verses expressing expectation of monetary reward in his *Dīwān* (# 83, vv. 94-96, p. 325).

<sup>25</sup> Influenced by the Romantic school in vogue in Egypt in the 1940s which regarded the expression of feelings to be the touchstone of literature, Ḥusayn divides al-Mu'ayyad's poetic output into two distinct sections: "*naẓm*" (didactic verse, referring to al-Mu'ayyad's disputational poems and the ideologically oriented panegyrics that constitute the larger part of the *Dīwān*), and "*shīr*" (true poetry, referring to his relatively fewer love and nostalgic preludes and poignant description-of-self verses). The Egyptian scholar 'Aḥmad 'Allāh, in his survey of Fatimid thought, followed Ḥusayn's assessment of al-Mu'ayyad's poetry as didactic. (*Al-Ḥaḡāth al-ḡhāriyya fī miṣr, fī al-ḡayr al-ḡalīmī*, pp. 252-53.)

<sup>26</sup> In one article, Smoor calls al-Mu'ayyad's *Dīwān* "less a work of poetic art than . . . a metrical, rhyming continuation of the *Maqāḥis*." (Wine, Love and Praise," p. 100). Elsewhere, he brands his survey of what he calls "the sometimes strange

sory evaluations of al-Mu'ayyad's poetry offered by other modern scholars have been positive,<sup>27</sup> Ḥusayn, and, following him, Smoor, consider al-Mu'ayyad's poetry to be predominantly didactic and therefore lacking in artistic merit. Their negative assessment appears to stem from three misconceptions: they (a) confuse commitment with didacticism, (b) measure al-Mu'ayyad's poetry with the yardstick of Abbasid literature, and (c) lack an understanding of its *da'wa* function and an appreciation for its ideological "*alāwī*"<sup>28</sup> context.

The issue of didacticism (*naẓm*),<sup>29</sup> which implies, according to most medieval and modern Arabic critics, a lack of literary value, should not be conflated with commitment (*iltizām*). If we accept Geert Van Gelder's definition of Arabic didactic poetry as "any text that is poetry in terms of its prosody (i.e. meter and rhyme) in which the typical poetic style (tropes, figures of speech, etc.) is deliberately avoided, for the sake of providing information on a particular branch of knowledge,"<sup>30</sup> we see that only two of al-Mu'ayyad's sixty-two poems possess the dual characteristics of this category.<sup>31</sup> To be sure, instruction, the first integral part of didacticism, is also characteristic of committed literature (and of much of al-Mu'ayyad's poetic output),

poetry which the Fatimid belief inspired" with al-Mu'ayyad's "Thursday morning ode." ("Master of the Century," pp. 140-41, al-Mu'ayyad's *Dīwān*, #61, pp. 314-15).

<sup>27</sup> Rubinacci describes al-Mu'ayyad as a poet who "above all others dedicated his energies to the propagation and glorification of the Fatimid creed," calling his *Dīwān* "one of the most remarkable of efforts to make poetry serve politico-religious ends," ("Political poetry," p. 200). And Marquet finds al-Mu'ayyad's poetry not without its lyrical moments and passages of beauty ("ils sont donc essentiellement lyriques, même lorsqu'ils font le panegyrique du calife, et témoignent d'une veine poétique," *Poésie érotique ismaélitane*, p. 28).

<sup>28</sup> "*Tāwīl*" is the classical pronunciation. I have used this orthography in my book (instead of the relatively modern "*al-tawīl*") as it is the one adhered to by the Fatimids and later, through the centuries, by the Tayyibīs.

<sup>29</sup> See Wolffhart Heinrichs, "*naẓm*," *EAH*, vol. 2, pp. 585-86.

<sup>30</sup> G. Van Gelder, "Arabic Didactic Verse," in J.W. Drijvers & A.A. MacDonald, eds., *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East*, Leiden, 1995, p. 117. Other articles on the development of Arabic didactic poetry are "Didactic Verse" by Š. Kluhšíř (severely critiqued by Van Gelder, *CHALRS LAP*, pp. 498-509), and short surveys by G. Endress ("Das Lehrdicht," *Grundriss der arabischen Philologie*, Bd. 2: *Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. H. Gätje, Wiesbaden, 1987, pp. 471-73) and Van Gelder, "Didactic poetry," *EAH*, vol. 1, pp. 193-94. A survey of didactic poetry in Western literature is S.J. Kalin, "Didactic Poetry," *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (eds. A. Preminger & T.V.F. Brogan, Princeton, New Jersey, 1993, pp. 292-95).

<sup>31</sup> #1, pp. 191-98, & #2, pp. 199-206. Details are provided in the section on "Disputational Verse" in chapter 1.

sometimes called "the *hāb*," lit. "the Gate" leading to the Imam).<sup>15</sup> He remained in this post and rank for the next twenty years until his death at the advanced age of eighty four.

Al-Mu'ayyad was a gifted thinker, author, proselytizer, educator, diplomat, and poet. During his tenure as *dā'ī* al-du'āt, he wrote and read out eight hundred weekly lectures on esoteric da'wa topics, collected as the *Majālis Mu'ayyadiyya*,<sup>16</sup> which remain a living testimony to his knowledge and erudition. He also composed four short but dense treatises on similar subjects,<sup>17</sup> a riveting, action-packed autobiography about his career in the da'wa,<sup>18</sup> a large number of prose prayers,<sup>19</sup> and sixty-two magnificent poems.<sup>20</sup> He devoted his entire career to the service of the da'wa, dedicating his talents—including his poetry—to advancing its cause.

Fatimid poetry<sup>21</sup> before al-Mu'ayyad was similar in its themes and

<sup>15</sup> On the spiritual hierarchy of the Fatimid da'wa, see A. Haundani "Evolution of the Organizational Structure of the Fātimī Da'wah."

<sup>16</sup> *Al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*: vol. 1, ed. Ḥatīm Ḥamiḍ al-Dīn, Bombay, 1975; ed. Mustafā Ghālib, Beirut, 1974; vol. 2, ed. Ḥatīm al-Dīn, Oxford, 1986; vol. 3, ed. Ghālib, Beirut, 1984; vols. 4–8, mss. in Tayyibī da'wa Library, Bombay (note: Ḥamiḍ al-Dīn's eds. are more accurate). The Tayyibī dā'ī Ḥatīm Muḥyī al-Dīn compiled a subject-based abridgement of the *Majālis*, titled *Jāmi' al-ḥaqā'iq*, mss., Tayyibī da'wa library.

<sup>17</sup> *Al-Ma's'ala wa al-jawāb*, *al-Ma'ā'if al-sab'un fī al-tawīl*, *Sharḥ al-Ma'ād*, and *al-Iḥdāṭ wa al-ṭibā'at*. All mss. in Tayyibī da'wa library.

<sup>18</sup> *Al-Sira al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn, Cairo, 1949 (older but more accurate ed.); ed. 'Arif Ṭāmir titled *Mudhakkirāt dā'ī al-darāt*, Beirut, 1982.

<sup>19</sup> *Al-Ad'ya al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, lithographic print titled *al-Tadhīr al-dā'īyya al-fakhima*, Bombay, 1412 H; lithographic print, Bombay, 1380 H, copied and ed. by Syedī Khuzaima Qutubuddin.

<sup>20</sup> *Dīwān*, ed. Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn, Cairo, 1949, Reprinted Beirut: Dār al-Munazzar, 1996. Partial translation (inaccurate and, without any apparent basis, Freudian) by Arthur Wormhoudt, *Selections from the Dīwān of Mu'ayyad al-Dīn Da'wa (sic) al-Darāt*, William Penn College, 1994. Many *Dīwāns* are too large to allow comprehensive treatment. Fortunately, Mu'ayyad's, with its 62 poems, does permit a full study of all its material.

<sup>21</sup> For information on Fatimid poets and poetry, see (in Arabic): M.K. Ḥusayn, *Fī adab nāsir al-fātimīyya*, Cairo, 1963 (sensitive to the Fatimid *lāna'il* tradition); 'A. Ṭāmir, *Tamīm al-fātimī ibn al-mā'm al-mu'tazz li-dīn allāh al-fātimī: Shā'ir al-ḥubb wa al-ṭibā' wa al-jamāl*, Beirut, 1982; M. al-Ya'lawī, ed., *al-Adab bi-ḥiṣṣiyya fī al-ṭibā' al-fātimī* (296–365 H), Beirut, 1986 (excellent edition); idem, *Ibn Ḥanī' al-Maghribī al-Andalusī: shā'ir al-dawla al-fātimīyya*, Beirut, 1985; M.'A. Ḥasan, *Mās' al-shā'ira fī al-ʿasr al-fātimī*, Cairo, 1983; Khidr Ahmad 'Alā' Allāh, *Al-Hayāh al-fihriyya fī mās' fī Tamīm b. al-Mu'tazz*, Cairo, 1989, pp. 249–66; I.D. Jād al-Rabb, *Shā'ir al-dawla al-fātimīyya*. See (in European languages): F.M. Hunzai, *Shimmering Light: An Anthology of Ismailī Poetry*, ed. K. Kassam, London, 1996 (approximately half the book is Nizārī poetry); S.M. Stern, "Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman: Poems on the Rebellion of Abū Yazīd,"

style to Abbasid court poetry. Its two most important earlier poets, Ibn Ḥanī' (d. c. 362/973) and Prince Tamīm (d. 374/984), had composed courtly panegyrics in praise of the Imam; these panegyrics were quite similar to the poems that their near contemporary Abbasid poets composed in praise of their own Caliph.<sup>22</sup> Both the Abbasid and earlier Fatimid panegyrics had primarily political goals: to legitimize and propagate the patron's authority. Although the poems by Ibn Ḥanī' and Tamīm included theological motifs, these were relatively few and inconsistently used; those that predominated, as in Abbasid panegyrics, were tribal concepts of praise, such as generosity and courage.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, although Tamīm as a royal prince was exempt from concerns about employment, the state had engaged Ibn Ḥanī' as a panegyrist, which meant that his poetry conformed to the

reprint in *Studies in Early Islamism*, pp. 146–52; Pieter Smoor, "Al-Mahdī's Tears: Impressions of Fātimid Court Poetry," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamlūk Eras*, eds. U. Vermeulen & D. De Smet, vol. 2, Leuven, 1998, pp. 139–6; idem, "The Master of the Century: Fātimid Poets in Cairo," in *Egypt and Syria*, vol. 1, 1995, pp. 139–6; idem, "Wine, Love and Praise for the Fātimid Imāms, The Enlightened of God," *ZDMG* 142/1 (1992), pp. 90–104; idem "The Poet's House: Fiction and Reality in the Works of the 'Fātimid' Poets," *Quaderni di studi Arabi* 10 (1992), pp. 45–62; idem, "Fātimid Poets and the Takhalūs that Bridges the Nights of Time to the Imām of Time," *Der Islam* 68/1 (1991), pp. 232–62. Brief overviews of Fatimid Poetry in Western languages are: Y. Marquet, ed., *Prise iséologique ismailite: La Tā'īyya de 'Amir b. 'Amir al-Basrī*, series: *Islam d'her et d'aujourd'hui* 26, Paris, 1985, "Introduction," pp. 27–30; P. Smoor, "Fātimids," *EAL* vol. 1, pp. 224–26.

<sup>22</sup> *Dīwān Muḥammad b. Ḥanī' al-Andalusī*, ed. M. al-Ya'lawī, Beirut, 1995 (see for example his poem that begins "qāmat lamīsa kamā tudāffū jadawāli," #83, pp. 318–26); *Dīwān al-'Amir Tamīm b. al-Mu'tazz li-Dīn Allāh*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan al-A'zamī, Beirut, 1971.

<sup>23</sup> Compare the predominant motifs of generosity and courage in Ibn Ḥanī' poetry (*Ibn Ḥanī'*, pp. 329–32) with those that are predominantly ideological in al-Mu'ayyad's (cf. my section on "Motifs"). For the use of theological motifs in the poetry of Ibn Ḥanī' and Tamīm, see *Ibn Ḥanī'*, pp. 239–69, and *Shā'ir al-dawla al-fātimīyya*, pp. 80–99. Compare also Ibn Ḥanī' eight different princely patrons to al-Mu'ayyad's two Imam patrons (and two poems addressed to the Buyid prince, which were also for da'wa purposes); and compare Ibn Ḥanī' eight Qur'anic allusions to al-Mu'ayyad's more than three hundred. The poetry of Ibn Ḥanī' and Tamīm also contained innumerable verses on wine and love (cf. *Tamīm al-fātimī*, pp. 68–87, 153–176; *Shā'ir al-dawla al-fātimīyya*, pp. 103–46; *Ibn Ḥanī'*, pp. 217–18; "Wine, Love and Praise," pp. 90–104), whereas al-Mu'ayyad's was strictly chaste. For other differences between the poetry of Ibn Ḥanī' and Tamīm, and that of al-Mu'ayyad, see Ḥusayn, Introduction to al-Mu'ayyad's *Dīwān*, Cairo, 1949, pp. 159–65, Ibn Ḥanī' poems are included in the syllabus of the Tayyibī theological seminary, al-Jāmi'a al-Sayfiyya, under "(General) Arabic Literature," while a few poems by Tamīm are studied under "Fatimid Literature." However, Tamīm's *Dīwān* is not studied systematically at the Jāmi'a, unlike the *Dīwāns* of those whom I have specified as "Fatimid da'wa poets" in chapter 6.

Abbasid, and Fatimid court poetry sought to validate the legitimacy of caliphal authority.

Within these genres, a new development in literary commitment came with the poetic innovations of al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirāzī, chief missionary for the Fatimids in the fifth/eleventh century. The Fatimids were a Shi'ite-Isma'ili Muslim dynasty who ruled North Africa and Egypt from the ninth through the early twelfth centuries. At that time, the Sunni Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad had become more or less a titular leader, with de facto power being wielded by the Buyid (or Buwayhid) sultan, and by local dynasties in the other lands of the Islamic empire that were nominally under the Abbasids: in Persia, by rulers from the same Buyid clan, and in Syria, by the Hamdanids. The Umayyad caliphate of Cordoba continued to be a separate entity quite distant from the central Islamic lands. The Buyids, Hamdanids, and Fatimids were all Shi'ite dynasties ruling mainly Sunni populations, but the Fatimids were distinct from the other two, for they challenged the validity of the Abbasid caliphate and claimed to be the sole legitimate rulers of the Islamic empire. They supported this claim by virtue of their superior lineage, maintaining direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fātima (hence their dynastic title) and her husband 'Alī, Muhammad's cousin and appointed heir. Rather than mere temporal caliphs, they claimed to be spiritual Imams, with absolute religious and political authority.

The Fatimid Caliph-Imams had established a distinctive religious-political organization called the "*dā'wa*." Literally, "*dā'wa*" means "call" or "mission." In Qur'anic usage, it denotes the call made to humankind by God, through His prophets, to believe in the true religion.<sup>13</sup> This Qur'anic sense is the one in which the Fatimids constituted their *da'wa*, which was a well organized and highly secret institution for religious education and proselytization. The *da'wa* was

Poetry in Early Islam," in G. von Grunbaum (ed.), *Arabic Poetry, Theory and Development*, 1973, pp. 5-17; and P.F. Kennedy, "religious poetry," *EAL*, vol. 2, pp. 649-51.

The religio-political verse of early Shi'ite and Kharijite movements in Umayyad and early Abbasid times is studied by S. Jayyusi, "Umayyad Poetry," *CHAL*, vol. 1, pp. 387-432; and R. Rubinacci, "Political Poetry," *CHAL*, vol. 1, pp. 185-201; see also W. Madelung, "The Hashimiyat of al-Kumayt and Hashimi Shi'ism," in his *Religious and Ethnic Movements in Medieval Islam*, 1992, article V; N.M. Ma'rūf, ed., *Diwan al-Khawārij: Shi'rūhum, khatūbahūm, rasā'iluhum*, Beirut, 1983; and A.T. Humayda, *Al-ḥadīth al-shi'ī al-nahāyat al-qarn al-hānī al-hijrī al-hijrī*, Cairo, 1989.

<sup>13</sup> E.g., Qur'an 13:14: *hādī dā'wat al-haqq*.

effective in winning souls for their cause, providing their followers with spiritual guidance, and, significantly for the medieval Islamic political scene, it was instrumental in the founding of their state. It continued to be active throughout the time of Fatimid hegemony and after its end. During the two centuries of rule, numerous missionariness (*dā'wā*) conducted the mission in Persia, the Levant, Yemen, India and elsewhere. A chief *dā'wī* (*dā'wī al-dīn*), who generally remained with the Caliph-Imam in the capital, supervised these *dā'wīs*.

*Da'wa* is a form of commitment. It implies commitment on the part of the person who calls and asks for commitment from the one who responds. Literary commitment follows. Any person who was committed to the *da'wa*—such as a *dā'wī*—and wrote or spoke to advance its cause, may be considered a committed *da'wa* litterateur. There were many of these, such as the Fatimid Caliph-Imam al-Manṣūr in the fourth/tenth century with his sparkling orations, and earlier in the third/ninth century, if accepted as proto-Fatimids, the Ikhwān al-Safā' with the allegories they presented in their philosophical treatises. But the first committed *da'wa* poet was al-Mu'ayyad.

Al-Mu'ayyad was one of the most illustrious of the chief *dā'wīs* and a veritable intellectual giant in the Fatimid *da'wa*. An adherent of their religious creed, he was appointed *dā'wī* in his native Persia and there succeeded in converting the local Buyid ruler to the Fatimid cause. This success led the Abbasids to exert pressure on the Buyid sultan to turn over al-Mu'ayyad to them. He consequently fled to the Cairene court of the Fatimid Caliph-Imam al-Mustansir bi-l-lāh.<sup>14</sup> There, ironically, he suffered much humiliation at the hands of viziers, but he continued nevertheless to serve the *da'wa* in various capacities. A few years after his arrival, he was appointed head of the Chancery. Next, he was sent as a special envoy to orchestrate a coalition to face the Saljuq-Abbasid threat. His diplomatic efforts led to the ex-Abbasid general al-Basāsir's conquest of the Abbasid capital, Baghdad, for the Fatimids. Following the victory, al-Mustansir raised al-Mu'ayyad to the post of *dā'wī al-du'āt* and simultaneously elevated him to the highest rank in the spiritual hierarchy, the one immediately following the Imam, called "*bāb al-abwāb*" (lit. "gate of gates."

<sup>14</sup> See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (henceforth *EI2*) article "al-Mustansir bi-l-lāh" by H.A.R. Gibb & P. Kraus, and the monograph *al-Imām al-Mustansir bi-l-lāh al-Fatīmī* by 'Abd al-Mun'im Mājīd, [Cairo], 1960.



"art for art's sake," its supporters maintain that commitment adds to, rather than detracts from, the artistic value of a text. Indeed, the arguments in support of literary commitment are many, among them the social function it fulfills, the moral doctrine it expresses and makes plausible, the wisdom it imparts, and the reflection and right action it engenders in its readers.<sup>5</sup> The 19th century Irish playwright Bernard Shaw ridiculed "the parrot-cry that art should never be didactic" (more, later, on didacticism, which shares with commitment its instructional feature) and defiantly proclaimed that "great art can never be anything else."<sup>6</sup> The 16th century French scholar Joseph Scaliger asserted that "imitation . . . is not the end of poetry, but is intermediate to that end. The end is the giving of instruction in pleasurable form, for poetry teaches, and does not simply amuse as some used to think."<sup>7</sup> The contemporary Arabist Stefan Sperl has remarked that "the didactic tone of the work [by the medieval Sufi poet Ibn al-Fāriḍ] does not in any way diminish its claim to full *qasida* status . . . for the imparting of insight and wisdom has been an integral aspect of the Arabic poetic endeavor from the earliest times. . . ."<sup>8</sup> And Suzanne Stetkevych, another Arabist, has argued that "the functional aspect of [pre-Islamic] poetry, far from reducing it to a demeaned and servile status, endowed it with a value and power unknown to our Romantic and post-Romantic poetry, which is by comparison not merely chaste, but impotent."<sup>9</sup> A modern critic explains the concept of commitment in the following passage:

Commitment is the acceptance of an outlook on life, a Weltanschauung, which is "defended and illustrated" to the best of one's ability in everything one undertakes. . . . A committed man is primarily a man who feels a sense of responsibility to his fellow men and who takes practical steps to help them. . . . Committed literature has no special themes,

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (1948), trans. as *What is Literature?* (1978), and André Gide, in *Littérature Engagée* (1950), among others, argued persuasively for the need for social and political commitment in literature.

<sup>6</sup> Preface to *Pygmalion*, Penguin: London & New York, 2000, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> F.M. Padelford, *Select Translations from Scaliger's Poetics*, New York, 1905, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Stefan Sperl, "Qasida form and mystic path in 13th century Egypt: a poem by Ibn al-Fāriḍ," in Sperl and Shackle, eds., *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa*, vol. 1: *Classical Traditions and Modern Meanings*, Leiden & New York, p. 74.

<sup>9</sup> Suzanne Stetkevych, "Pre-Islamic Panegyric and the Poetics of Redemption: *Muqaddimāt* 119 of 'Aljamah and *Bānat Sūdān* of Ka'b ibn Zuhayr," in S. Stetkevych (ed.), *Reorientations/Arabic and Persian Poetry*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994, pp. 1-2.

styles or methods—it is distinguished only by greater realism and by the author's attitude to life. These do not, by themselves, create a work of art, but they do enhance its quality. They help literature to make us aware of our true condition and to increase our sense of responsibility. In addition to providing aesthetic enjoyment, "littérature engagée" fulfills a "social function." Is not the blending of these two aspects characteristic of all great art?<sup>10</sup>

The works of the Existentialist-Communist philosopher Sartre, the Roman Catholic priest-poet Péguy, and the Marxist poet and dramatist Mayakovsky, are prime examples of committed European literature. Grounded in a specific historical context, the commitment and artistry found in these works is paralleled by the engagement and beauty found in many of the compositions of Arabic literature. Particularly in Arabic poetry, commitment has attained such currency in modern times that critics have coined for it the equivalent term "*ilīzām*,"<sup>11</sup> and the writings of the Palestinian diaspora and Arab nationalist literature belong in this category. Earlier, pre-Islamic poetry served to record the heroic feats of a tribe and enhance its prestige. The verse of the first generation of Muslims contributed to the defense of the Prophet and the propagation of his new religion by praising him and satirizing his enemies. Shi'ite, Kharijite, and Sufi poetry had religious or religio-political agendas,<sup>12</sup> and Umayyad,

<sup>10</sup> M. Adereth, *Commitment in Modern French Literature*, pp. 47, 50.

<sup>11</sup> The term "*ilīzām*" was first used in about 1950. In 1953, the novelist and critic Suhayl Idrīs published the first issue of the literary journal *al-Adāb*, in which he proclaimed the journal's advocacy of the concept of *ilīzām* (Paul Starkey, "commitment," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, eds. Julie Meisami and Paul Starkey, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, henceforth *EAL*, vol. 1, pp. 175-76). Other brief studies on the subject are: M.M. Badawi, "Commitment in contemporary Arabic literature," *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale* 14:4 (1972), pp. 859-79; and Verena Klemm, "Literary Commitment Approached through Reception Theory," Verena Klemm and Beatrice Gruendler (eds.), *Understanding Near Eastern Literatures*, Wiesbaden, 2000, pp. 145-54. Book length studies in Arabic on classical and modern Arabic committed poetry and prose include the following: (A) Broad surveys: Muhammad 'Azzām, *Qāḍiyat al-īlīzām fī al-shīr al-arabi min al-ʿasr al-jāhili ʿaa ḥattā ʿasr al-muḥallī*, Damascus, 1989; and Ahmad Abū Hāga, *al-īlīzām fī al-shīr al-arabi*, Beirut, 1979. (B) Monographs on early Islamic and Umayyad committed poetry: 'Abd al-Rahmān Khālī, *Dawr al-shīr fī maḥasat al-ḥāṭa al-islāmīya ayyām al-nasāli*, Algiers, 1971; Mahmūd Hasan Zaynī, *Dirāsāt fī adab al-ḥāṭa al-islāmīya*, Cairo, 1982; and Maw Yūsuf Khulayf, *Qāḍiyat al-īlīzām fī al-shīr al-umayyī*, Cairo, 1989.

<sup>12</sup> Some studies on Arabic religious poetry are: G. von Grunebaum, "The Early Development of Islamic Religious Poetry," *JAOIS* 60 (1940), pp. 21-29; J. Bellamy, "The Impact of Islam on Early Arabic Poetry," in A. Welch and P. Cachia (eds.), *Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge*, 1979, pp. 141-67; F. Gabrieli, "Religious

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I thank you all sincerely. جزاكم الله خيرا

## INTRODUCTION

Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirāzī (386/87–470 H/996/97–1078 CE) was a medieval Arabic-Islamic scholar and poet committed to the Fatimid<sup>1</sup> religio-political ideology. He founded the tradition of Fatimid “*da‘wa*”<sup>2</sup> (religious mission) poetry that flourished after him for a thousand years and continues to be active to the present day.

Literature with an agenda is termed “committed literature” or “*littérature engagée*,”<sup>3</sup> a committed or engaged author being one who believes in a particular social, political, religious, or other ideology and uses his or her literary production to convince society of its validity.<sup>4</sup> Although committed literature is propaganda of sorts, it is a positive, refined, form, combining aesthetics with a message. Contrary to the creed of

<sup>1</sup> Some recent books on Fatimid history and its sources are: Paul Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, London, 2002; Heinz Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi: The Rise of the Fatimids*, trans. Michael Donner, Leiden, 1996; idem, *Die Kalifen von Kairo. Die Fatimiden in Ägypten, 973–1074*, Munich, 2003; Michael Brett, *The Rise of the Fatimids, the World of the Mediterranean and the Middle East in the fourth century of the Hijra, tenth century CE*, Leiden & Boston, 2001; A.F. Sayyid, *al-Dawla al-fatimiyya fi misr, taḥsīn jadīd*, 2nd ed., Cairo, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> For information on the Fatimid *da‘wa*, in addition to the sources listed in n. 1, see: M.K. Husayn, *Tā’rīfāt al-ismā‘īliyya: Tārīkhuhā, nazamuhā, ‘aḳā’iduhā*, Cairo, 1959; F. Daltary, *The Ismā‘īlīs: Their history and doctrines*, Cambridge, 1990; idem, “The Ismā‘īlī Da‘wa outside the Fatimid Dawla,” in M. Barrucand, ed., *L’Égypte fatimide: son art et son histoire*, Paris, 1999, pp. 29–43; S.M. Stern, “Cairo as the Centre of the Ismā‘īlī Movement,” reprint in *Studies in Early Lowā‘īsm*, Leiden, 1983, pp. 234–56; A. Hamdani, “Evolution of the Organisational Structure of the Fāṭimī Da‘wah: The Yemeni and Persian Contribution,” *Arabian Studies* 3 (1976), pp. 85–114; Shainool Jiwa, “The Genesis of Ismā‘īlī Da‘wa Activities in the Yemen,” *Bullātin. British Society for Middle Eastern Studies* 15:1/2 (1988), pp. 50–63.

<sup>3</sup> The term “*littérature engagée*” was coined by the French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre in the mid-twentieth century. Sartre excluded poetry from his category, but later critics have generally argued for its inclusion.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed discussion of the aesthetics of committed literature and a critical examination of its Western types and texts, see James Engell, *The Committed Word: Literature and Public Values*, University Park, Penn., 1999; Charles Glicksburg, *The Literature of Commitment*, London, 1976; M. Adereth, *Commitment in Modern French Literature: Politics and Society in Péguy, Aragon and Sartre*, New York, 1968; W. Spiegelman, *The Didactic Muse: Scenes of Instruction in Contemporary American Poetry*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1989; and R. Montgomery, *The Reader’s Eye: Studies in Didactic Literary Theory from Dante to Tasso*, Berkeley, 1979. The *Encyclopædia Britannica*, contrary to most encyclopedias of world literature or literary theory, also provides a brief description of “*littérature engagée*.” <http://search.eb.com/eb/article?eu=49684> (accessed September 13, 2004).