

# History of Islam

An encyclopedia of Islamic history

## Fatimids in Egypt

### The Fatimids in Egypt

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The Fatimid conquest of Egypt (969) was a defining moment in Islamic history. It destroyed any semblance of central authority in the Muslim world, provoked the reaction of the Turks as defenders of orthodox (Sunni) Islam, impelled the Omayyads in Spain to declare their own Caliphate, launched the powerful Murabitun revolution in western Africa, denied the Muslims their last chance to conquer Europe and was the decisive ideological provocation that was answered by the eloquence of Al Ghazzali (d. 1111). The cleavage opened by the Fatimid schism gave the Crusaders an opportunity to capture Jerusalem (1099). Finally, when the Fatimids left the center stage of history, they did so with a vengeance, contributing to the rise of the assassins. The assassinations, chief among which was that of Nizam ul Mulk (d. 1092), perhaps the ablest administrator produced by Islam after Omar bin Abdul Aziz, played havoc with the Islamic body politic.

We have traced in other articles the political developments surrounding the struggles of *Shi'a Aan-e-Ali*. In time, the Shi'a movement itself split into several groups over the issue of Imamate succession. The principal rift occurred after Imam Ja'afar as Saadiq. When his eldest son Imam Ismail predeceased him, Imam Ja'afar, the sixth imam in the succession of the Imamate, nominated his second son Imam Musa Kadim as the 7<sup>th</sup> Imam. The majority of Shi'as accepted this nomination. However, a minority refused to accept this verdict, declared Imam Ismail to be the 7<sup>th</sup> Imam and recognized the Imamate only through his lineage. These are called the Fatimid Shi'as or the Seveners. From the Fatimids are derived the Agha Khanis and the Bohras, two powerful groups of Muslims who have played an important part in the politics of East Africa and in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent.

The Abbasids (750-1258) were even more ruthless towards Shi'a dissidence than the Omayyads. Shorn of any hope of political success, the Shi'a movements went underground. Our focus in this chapter is on the Fatimids. The confluence of several historical developments helped the Fatimid movement. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the consolidation of vast territories in Asia, Africa and Europe led to an enormous increase in trade. Prosperity ensued. Great cities sprang up and older towns grew larger. The movement of the rural population to the cities, in search of protection from marauding tribesmen, assisted the urbanization process. Conversion to Islam was taking place at a rapid pace both in Asia and North Africa and the new Muslims found refuge in the cities from the pressure of their kinsmen who had not yet converted. Damascus, Baghdad, Basra, Kufa, Hamadan, Isfahan, Herat, Bukhara, Samarqand, Kashgar in Asia;

Fustat, Sijilmasa, Tahert, Kairouan, Awdaghost and Tadmakka in Africa; Seville, Cordoba and Toledo in Europe became centers of trade. Colonies established by Muslim merchants existed as far away as Malabar in India, Zanzibar in Africa and Canton in China. Brisk trade stimulated the demand for manufactured goods such as brass work, gold jewelry, silk brocade, fine carpets and iron and steel products. Guilds arose in the urban centers, organized around specific trades and skills. The Fatimid movement zeroed in on these guilds to propagate their ideas.

The Abbasid Caliphate also lost much of its political and military power after Caliph Mutawakkil was killed by his Turkish guards in 861. The emergence of the Turks was a new element in the body politic of Islam. Initially hired by the Caliphs as bodyguards to balance the established power of Arabs and Persians, the Turks displaced both the Arabs and the Persians and rose to control the destiny of the Caliphate itself. After Muktafi (d. 908), the Caliphs became mere pawns in the hands of Turkish generals. Sensing the political impotence of Baghdad, local chieftains in the far-flung provinces of the empire asserted their independence and established local dynasties. Idris, a great, great grandson of Ali ibn Abu Talib (r) established a Shi'a dynasty in Morocco (788). After the year 800, an Arab general Al Aghlab and his descendants exercised autonomous control over Algeria and Tunisia. In 868, a Turkish General Ibn Tulun seized Egypt and established the Tulunid dynasty. In the east, Tahir, a general who had helped Caliph Mamun in the civil war between the two brothers, Amin and Mamun, was granted autonomy over Khorasan. After the year 922, the Tahirids dropped any pretense of allegiance to Baghdad and ruled as independent rulers. In 932, Buyeh, a Persian, established a powerful dynasty at the borders of Persia and Iraq. The Buyids, who were Ithna Ashari Shi'as, quickly overran Basra and Kufa. In the year 945 they captured Baghdad itself and forced the Caliph to surrender effective power to the Alavis. But they stopped short of eliminating the Abbasids, partly because there was no single person who was acceptable as Imam to all Muslims and partly out of concern for the reaction of the Turks who were emerging as a powerful new military element. Nonetheless, the Buyids came as close as the Ithna Asharis ever did in establishing their political control over the world of Islam.

Perhaps the most persuasive reason for the success of the Fatimid movement was the internal corruption in the ruling circles. After Harun al Rashid, Baghdad became a dazzling city of splendor. Long gone was the spartan simplicity of the first Caliphs. In a bygone era, Caliph Omar ibn al Khattab (r) had traveled from Madina to Jerusalem to accept its surrender, sharing a single camel for the journey with a servant. Ali ibn Abu Talib (r) would fast for days on a ration of dried dates. By contrast, the Caliphs of the 9<sup>th</sup> century moved in golden chariots with an entourage of thousands. Lavish sums were spent on pomp and ceremony. Surrounded by eunuchs and dancing girls, the court of Baghdad was no different from the Byzantine court in Constantinople or the Persian courts it had displaced. The Islamic Empire was now held together by political expediency and brute force rather than by fidelity to a higher transcendental idea, as was the case in early Islam. In North Africa there was continued tension between rural Berbers and the Arab city dwellers. In Persia, the Turks had displaced the Persians from the centers of power but were looked down upon by both the Arabs and the Persians as pushy intruders. Corruption was rampant and it was time for a revolutionary movement like that of the Fatimids who promised a new era led by the Fatimid imams.

For more than a hundred years after Imam Ja'afar, the Fatimid movement ran like a subterranean stream of hot lava in the Islamic body politic. Then, in the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, it burst out from horizon to horizon like a hundred volcanoes spewing forth at once. The architect of this movement was Abdullah bin Maimun. He was a student of Abul Khattab, who had at one time studied under Imam Ja'afar, but was executed by Caliph Mansur as a heretic for his ideas on *Taqiyya* (permissibility of

denying your beliefs if you are threatened by death or grave injury). As we have pointed out earlier, the Fatimids had refused to accept Imam Ja'afar's verdict nominating Musa Kadim as the 7<sup>th</sup> Imam, claiming instead that Imam Ismail had not died but was just hidden from view.

The lineage of hidden imams from Ismail till the latter part of the 9<sup>th</sup> century is not clear, but in 875, one Hamdan Karamat, set up his operations near Baghdad. In 893, the Karamathians, as the followers of Karamat are called, captured Yemen under the leadership of Abu Abdallah. Using Yemen as his base, Abu Abdallah raised an army of Bedouins and Yemenis. In 903, he moved on Damascus and massacred its inhabitants. Basra was plundered in 923. The Karamathians were ruthless. They attacked caravans of Hajj pilgrims on the caravan routes from Basra to Madina and massacred thousands of men, women and children. In 928, they attacked Mecca and carried off the *Hijre Aswad* (black stone) from the Ka'ba to Bahrain where they set up their headquarters. There the black stone remained for 22 years until it was returned to Mecca in 950 upon orders of the Fatimid Caliph al Mansur. Baghdad moved swiftly to retake Damascus but in the meantime the Karamathian movement had spread to North Africa.

The Arabs called the territories that today comprise Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia *Maghrib al Aqsa* (the farthest western frontier). More often, this area is simply referred to as the Maghrib. Maghrib al Aqsa was the hinge around which the fate of Muslim Spain and southwestern Europe revolved. The region was an historic caldron of discontent and sporadic rebellion against external authority. In part, this was a reflection of the free spirit of the mountain Berbers and the desert Sinhajas. The Arab experience was no different from that of the Romans who had clung to fortified positions along the Mediterranean shores but were unsuccessful in subduing the Atlas mountain interior.

There was also tension between the Arab city dwellers and the Berbers who lived in the hinterland. The classical Islamic civilization was primarily urban. People congregated in towns and cities for safety as well as for economic opportunity. Resentment against the perceived haughtiness of the city dwelling Arabs surfaced time and again as rebellion against established authority. The Berbers welcomed new ideas that challenged the status quo as a vehicle for expressing their resentment and anger. For instance, in the year 900, a Persian Kharijite, Rustum, moved to the Maghrib and established his base there. He successfully challenged the local Aghlabid emirs who represented Abbasid authority. Support from the Berbers and the Sinhaja enabled Rustum to establish a Kharijite dynasty in southern Algeria centered on Sijilmasa. The Kharijites-an extremist group who espoused killing those who did not agree with them-rejected the claims of both the Sunnis and the Shi'as for leadership of the Islamic community and held that the Caliphate should be open to anyone, Arab or non-Arab. This seemingly democratic position was welcome to Berber ears. The Kharijites survived in isolated pockets long after the Rustamid kingdom disappeared. Ibn Batuta reported the existence of Kharijite communities in north central Africa as late as 1350. (The American traveler John Skolle has recently provided an account of the remnants of this community. He mentions in his travelogue a community around Ghardaja in Algeria, as "of the Ibadite faith. . . Muslim Puritans . . . driven south . . . in the 11<sup>th</sup> century . . .". Ref: John Skolle, *The Road to Timbaktu*, Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1956).

South of the Atlas belt, the powerful Sinhaja tended their sheep and roamed freely, much as their ancestors had for centuries and acted as power brokers between the Berbers and the Arabs. There developed in the Maghrib a triangular relationship between the Berbers, the Arabs and the Sinhajas, much as there was a triangular relationship between the Arabs, the Persians and the Turks in Persia and Central Asia. Occasionally, there was a fourth element in this relationship, namely the Sudanese from sub-Saharan Africa, who were recruited by the Ikhshedids and later by the Fatimids, in their armed forces as a counterbalance to the power of the Berbers.

Conditions were ripe in North Africa for a revolutionary movement like that of the Fatimids. The Aghlabid rulers had become more interested in women and wine than in the affairs of state. Law and order had deteriorated to such an extent that people longed for deliverance by a Mahdi. In 907, Abu Abdallah, who had by this time lost Damascus to the Abbasids, proceeded to North Africa. By the sheer magnetism of his character and the force of his arguments, he converted the powerful Kitama tribe to Fatimid doctrines. In 909, taking advantage of the incompetence of Aghlabid Ziadatulla, Abu Abdallah moved on Salmania, driving out the Aghlabids. It was now time to invite the Fatimid Imam Ubaidullah who was living in Syria. After a harrowing travail, with Abbasid agents hot on his trail, Ubaidullah reached the Maghrib. He was arrested in Sijilmasa but Abu Abdallah moved with a powerful force on the town, freed his mentor and proclaimed Ubaidullah to be the long awaited Mahdi and the hidden Imam and the first Fatimid Caliph.

Ubaidullah al Mahdi, the first Fatimid Caliph, was an able general, a capable administrator, a shrewd but ruthless politician and was tolerant of the Sunnis who made up the vast majority of his subjects. He established a new capital, Mahdiya, near modern Tunis. His first act was to assassinate Abu Abdallah and eliminate any possibility of a challenge from that quarter. History repeats itself. The fate of Abu Abdallah was similar to that of Abu Muslim (d.750) who was disposed of by the Abbasids once they came to power. After consolidating his hold on Algeria and Tunisia, he moved west into Morocco displacing the floundering Idrisid dynasty (922). But his eyes were on the prosperous provinces of Spain to the northwest and Egypt to the east.

The conquest of Morocco provoked a response from the powerful Umayyad, Abdur Rahman III of Spain, who declared himself the Caliph in Cordoba (929) and the protector of Sunni Islam in Africa and Spain. There emerged at the same time three claimants for the Caliphate based in Baghdad in Asia, Mahdiya in Africa and Cordoba in Europe.

Ubaidullah died in the year 934 without realizing his dream of conquering Spain or subduing Egypt. His son Abul Kasim was a fanatic and tried to force his brand of Islam on everyone. He is best remembered for building a powerful navy and his raids on France, Italy and Egypt. To pay for these adventures, taxation had to be increased. The Berbers rebelled against this excessive taxation. Centered on Sijilmasa, which was a Kharijite stronghold, the rebellion gathered momentum and received support from the Spanish Umayyads. Abul Kasim was cornered in Mahdiya where he died in 946. His son Mansur, with the help of the Sinhajas, put down the rebellion in 947. To teach the Spanish Umayyads and the Moroccans a lesson, he stormed the Maghrib all the way to the Atlantic, devastating much of what lay in his path. All of North Africa except Mauritania was conquered. According to Ibn Khaldun, the Maghrib never fully recovered from the devastation caused by the Fatimid-Sinhaja invasions. The power of the cities in North Africa was destroyed. The social political vacuum created by this devastation was in part responsible for the germination of the Murabitun revolution, which was soon to engulf all of West Africa and Spain.

It was under Muiz (d. 975) that the Fatimids achieved their greatest success. Muiz first turned his attention to the west. Taking advantage of the preoccupation of the Spanish Umayyad Abdur Rahman III with the Christians to the north, Muiz took Mauritania and brought the Maghrib, with the exception of the small Ceuta-Tangier peninsula, under his control. The powerful Spaniards blocked any further advance to the west, so Muiz turned his attention to the east where conditions were much more favorable. The Buyid takeover of Baghdad (945) had so weakened the Abbasids that the Fatimids sensed their golden opportunity to capture Egypt. At the time, Egypt was under the military control of the Ikhshidids, a Turkish clan who had displaced the Tulunids (933) and ruled in the name of the Abbasids in Baghdad. Abbasid power in the eastern Mediterranean had been further weakened by Byzantine

attacks in Anatolia, Crete and Syria. The Fatimids marched with a force of more than 100,000 Berbers, Sinhajas and Sudanese under a Turkish general Jawhar al Rumi and in a pitched battle on the banks of the Nile in 969, defeated the Ikhshidids.

The victorious Fatimids entered Egypt and founded a new capital near old Fustat, which they named Al Qahira (Cairo, 969). With Egypt under his control, Muiz's armies fanned out into Syria and took Damascus in 973. Mecca and Madina fell soon thereafter. For almost a hundred years, it was the name of the Fatimid sovereigns in Cairo and not of the Abbasids in Baghdad that was taken after the Friday sermons in the great mosques of Mecca and Madina.

The Fatimids were bound to attempt a conquest of Asia to fulfill their vision of a universal Islamic Empire ruled by the Fatimid imams. In this attempt they were not to be successful. There were several reasons for their failure. The Karamathians, a splinter group among the Fatimids, considered the mainstream Fatimids soft on the Sunnis. The revolution they hoped for had not materialized. Instead, the Fatimids, with some exceptions, had established a working relationship with their Sunni subjects. The disgruntled Karamathians attacked Fatimid positions in Syria and twice invaded Egypt. They were beaten back with heavy losses but they controlled the military routes to northern Syria and hence effectively blocked a Fatimid advance into Asia.

Second, the Buyids who controlled Iraq and Persia resisted the Fatimids for ideological reasons. The Buyids considered Imam Musa Kadim to be the heir to Imam Ja'afar. They considered the Fatimids to be renegades who followed Imam Ismail after Imam Ja'afar. Although the Buyids controlled Baghdad, they had established a working relationship with the majority Sunnis and had shied away from displacing the Abbasids. Third, there was a resurgent Byzantine Empire, which had built up its naval power, captured Crete and continuously challenged both the Abbasids and the Fatimids in the eastern Mediterranean. Fourth, the Seljuk (Turkish) presence in Persia and Central Asia was decidedly in favor of the Abbasids and tilted the balance of power in favor of orthodox Islam.

Egypt prospered under the Fatimids. No longer was the Nile valley a mere province, with its tax revenues carted off to far away Baghdad. It was now the center of an empire extending from the Euphrates to the Atlantic. Sitting astride the continents of Africa and Asia, Egypt controlled the trade routes from North Africa and Europe to India and the Far East. Gold flowed into Egypt from Ghana, providing a firm basis for a solid currency. The bazaars of Cairo were full of goods from East Africa, India, Indonesia and China. Alexandria became a port of exchange and a world-class trade center. European travelers such as William of Tyre marveled at the prosperity of Egypt. Italian merchants in Venice, capitalizing on the proximity of Egypt, became successful entrepreneurs. Venice grew in wealth and power and was to play an important role in the Crusades looming on the horizon.

Conversely, the loss of Egypt and North Africa meant that hard times had fallen upon Baghdad. Cut off from the Mediterranean by the Fatimids and the Byzantines, Baghdad became dependent for its trade on land routes to India and China. Loss of revenues meant loss of political power and the Caliphs in Baghdad became increasingly dependent on the Turkish sultans for their revenues. The sultans, in turn, raided India with increasing frequency in search of gold and plunder. Between the years 1000 and 1030, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna conducted no less than 17 raids into India. The territories of the Caliphate extended to no more than a few miles outside Baghdad. Since the power of the *fatwa* had been co-opted by the *ulema* from the earliest days of Islam, the Caliphate became, in effect, a wistful symbol of long lost Muslim unity. Decentralization set in, hastening the fragmentation of Asia into principalities and local kingdoms. This was a social political matrix almost tailor-made for the rise of the Seljuk Turks, who rose from nomads to become the masters of Asia.

Muiz died in 996 and his son Al Aziz became the caliph in Cairo. He was a consummate ruler and an able organizer. He appointed a well-known financier, Yakub bin Killis as his minister. Killis wisely managed the fiscal affairs of the far-flung empire. Taxation was reduced, trade encouraged, currency stabilized and the empire prospered. Al Aziz also built a powerful navy as a counterweight to the resurgent Byzantines and the Umayyads in Spain. But he also recruited Turkish soldiers into his army to balance off the Berbers and the Sudanese, a decision that in time led to the takeover of the Fatimid dynasty by the Turks.

Al Hakim succeeded his father Al Aziz as the caliph in 996, the same year that Pope Gregory V declared the Crusades against the Muslims. Al Hakim, an eccentric man, killed his regent Barjawan, forbade women to appear in the streets, prohibited business at night, persecuted the minority Jews and Christians and in 1009 began the demolition of churches and synagogues. This was a reaction to the laxity of his father who had married a Christian and was protecting his flank against charges of laxity leveled by the Sunnis. Perhaps also, he was suspicious of the Christians in his midst because the Crusades had started in earnest in 996 with attacks on North Africa.

The Fatimids controlled a vast empire, but they had to continually come to terms with the standards of moral rectitude and religious dogma of their subjects. The dominant opinion in the community, espoused by orthodox (Sunnī) Islam, had always gravitated towards a consensus based on the Qur'an, the *Sunnah* of the Prophet and the *ijma* of his Companions. Such consensus was the central axis around which Muslim history revolved, although at times the impact of peripheral opinions proved to be important. Al Hakim was faced with a rising military challenge from Christian Europe while guarding his rear against orthodox discontent with the perceived excesses of the Fatimids. His father Al Aziz was a compromiser who had tried to weld together a consensus of tolerance by marrying a Christian. Al Hakim began a drive to convert the Sunnis and the Ithna Asharis to Fatimid doctrines. A *Dar-ul-Hikmah* was established in 1004 in Cairo to impart training to Fatimid *da'is* (missionaries). Fatimid propaganda was extremely active throughout the Islamic world. There was even a Fatimid ruler in Multan in what is today Pakistan. In the year 1058, the Fatimids briefly controlled the suburbs of Baghdad itself. These attempts drew an immediate reaction from Baghdad where the Abbasid Caliph Kaim denounced the Fatimids as renegades.

In 1017, two Fatimid *da'is*, Hamza and Darazi, arrived in Cairo from Persia. They preached that the divine spirit transmitted through Ali ibn Abu Talib (r) and the Imams had been transmitted to Al Hakim, who had thus become God incarnate. The doctrine was repugnant to the orthodox Egyptians. So, Darazi retired to the mountains of Lebanon where he found a more favorable reception. The Druze, followers of Darazi doctrines, are to be found in Lebanon and Syria today. They believe in reincarnation and Al Hakim as the reincarnate of God who will return at the end of the world.

Messianism as a reaction to political oppression is a recurrent theme in Islamic history. The belief that a Mahdi will return to re-establish a just world order after the example of the Prophet recurs in many parts of the Muslim world. This belief is to be found among the entire spectrum of Islamic opinion—Sunnī, Twelver Shi'a and Fatimid Shi'a. It occurs with greater fervor in the Sudan, Persia and India. Concrete examples of this are to be found in the appearance of the Mahdi in modern Sudan in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the movement of Uthman dan Fuduye in West Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the beliefs of the Mahdavi sect in India; the disappearance of the Twelfth Imam among the Twelvers; and the disappearance of the Seventh Imam among the Seveners. Messianism is not without its ideological pitfalls. Most Muslims managed their Messianism within the limits of *Tawhid* and stayed in the mainstream of Islam. The Fatimid positions on the transmutation of the soul, advanced by al Hakim, were rejected by orthodox Muslims as heresy.

The excesses of Al Hakim hastened the downfall of the Fatimids. Under Mustansir (1036-1096), civil strife took over. Berber, Sudanese and Turkish troops competed for power in the armed forces. In 1047 Hejaz broke away and the name of the Fatimid monarch was removed from the *khutba* in the great mosques of Mecca and Madina. The Murabitun revolution consumed the Maghrib in 1051. During the period 1090-1094, Egypt was hit with a severe drought of Biblical proportions and the economy was crippled. The Crusades-active first in Spain-descended upon North Africa and then on the eastern Mediterranean. In 1072, Palermo Sicily was lost to the Crusaders. By 1091 all of Sicily was under Latin control. Mahdiya, the first capital of the Fatimids, was attacked by sea.

Meanwhile, the Turks and the Fatimids fought for control of the Syrian highlands. Seljuk warriors regained Damascus from the Fatimids and reestablished the authority of the Abbasids all the way to El Arish. Under Taghril Bey and Alp Arsalan, all of West Asia except for a few strongholds like Acre and Jerusalem were taken from Egyptian control. The lines of control ran through a plateau embracing Jerusalem. Hostility between the Seljuks and the Fatimids prevented any effective coordination against the Crusaders who took Jerusalem by assault from the Fatimid garrison in 1099. The retreating Fatimids turned to assassination for vengeance. Under Hassan Sabbah, the assassins became an effective underground movement and wreaked havoc on the Seljuks with their cloak and dagger murders.

After Muntasir (d. 1096), the Fatimid court presented a long saga of murders and mayhem. Power passed on to the viziers who wielded their authority through intrigue and assassination. In 1171, the last of the Fatimid Caliphs, Al Aazid, died. Salahuddin abolished the Fatimid dynasty and Egypt passed once again into the Abbasid domain.

Civilizations are held together by transcendental ideas. After the first four Caliphs, Islamic civilization lost the transcendence of *Tawhid*. The Fatimids came to power promising to bring that transcendence back to the world of Islam. They captured half of the Islamic world but remained a minority elite ruling over a vast Sunni world. Umayyad Spain challenged their authority. Sub-Saharan Africa remained loyal to Abbasid authority. Yet, the Fatimid presence in Egypt marked a high point in the development of Islamic civilization. The monarchs in Baghdad, Cairo and Cordoba, each claiming to be the Caliph, competed with each other in establishing universities, encouraging learning, art and culture. The Fatimids established Al Azhar University, the oldest surviving institution of higher learning in the world, in 971 (We do note that the Qawariyun University in Fez Morocco claims to have been founded in 812 and is still functioning). Universities in Baghdad, Bukhara, Samarqand, Nishapur, Cairo, Palermo, Kairouan, Sijilmasa, and Toledo competed with each other in attracting men of learning. Artisans were encouraged to produce the finest work of art. Egyptian brocades, brass work and woodwork were valued throughout Europe and Asia. It was through Sicily, no less than through Spain, that Islamic ideas and knowledge were passed on to Europe. Even during the height of the Crusades, Latin monarchs employed and patronized Muslim scholars. The Sicilian monarchs considered it an honor to be buried in caskets made in Egypt. Roger II of Sicily not only continued the University at Palermo which had been established by Muslims, he also patronized at his court the well known geographer al Idrisi, who was one of the finest scholars of the age.

Islamic history is animated by a vision to establish a universal community enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong and believing in God. But there have been different interpretations of this vision. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century there were at least four different versions of that vision. The Fatimids based in North Africa claimed the Imamate in the lineage of Imam Ismail. The Karamatians were also Fatimids but were extremist in their views and believed that their version of Islam be imposed on all Muslims, by force if necessary. The Buyids were Twelvers who believed in the Imamate in the lineage of Imam Musa Kazim. Then there were the Sunnis, the vast majority of the population, who accepted the Caliphate in

Baghdad. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, these conflicting visions collided on the political military plane. And out of this confusion emerged the victorious Turks, displacing both the Caliphate and the Imamate by a new military-political institution-the Sultanate.

The excesses of the age gave birth to a revolution—the Murabitun revolution in Africa—and provoked the dialectic of Al Ghazzali, which altered the way Muslims looked upon Islam itself. Their internal rivalry denied the Muslims their last chance to conquer Europe. In the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, Europe lived in the age of imagination, dominated by the talisman and ruled by feudal lords. After the death of Charlemagne in 814, his Carolingian heirs fought among themselves for the remnants of the Frankish kingdom. Faced with Viking attacks from the north, Europe could not defend itself in the south and was militarily vulnerable. The mutual hostility between the Fatimids, the Umayyads and the Abbasids prevented them from exploiting this historic window of opportunity. The Aghlabid conquest of Sicily and their raids into southern Italy as far as Rome in 846 marked the farthest advance of Muslims into southern Europe. The armies of the Fatimids, the Umayyads, the Buyids and the Abbasids spent their energies primarily at each other's throats.

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