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## BEYOND SPACE AND TIME: THE ITINERANT LIFE OF BOOKS IN THE FĀṬIMID MARKET PLACE. DELIA CORTESE\*

In the popular science fiction series *Star Trek* (1966 – to present) Vulcans are famously shown to communicate with each other through mind-melding, a technique that enables interlocutors to merge thoughts, consciousness and ideas without the need for physical contact or verbal interaction. When looked at from today's standpoint, texts produced by early and Muslim medieval thinkers could indeed seem to be the product of some sort of pre-modern mind-melding having taken place across the Islamic world. Through the texts that have reached us we can appreciate the outcome of intellectual interaction in the fusion or contrast of ideas, the mutual proliferation of influences and the interpolation of some works by some scholars as they found their way in those of others. However authors are mostly silent on the practicalities and modalities that enabled the intellectual interaction they display to take place in the first instance. What was the physical dimension that underpinned intellectual exchange? In which spaces did scholars come together? Which occasions did become catalysts for encounters? Which tools did they make use of? Biographical dictionaries and historiographical works are replete with anecdotes of people coming into personal contacts in a variety of circumstances, such as for example, while travelling to and from the pilgrimage to Mecca or meeting up in markets or centres of learning and mosques or gathering in someone's house. Sometimes casual walks in the streets of Baghdad, Damascus or Cairo might have been the set of chance dialogues between high calibre scholars. This information is, however, mostly generic and vague with the boundary between historical reality and hagiography often blurred. Given that transmission of knowledge –even when orally communicated- depended ultimately on access to and availability of written material, charting how books as objects changed hands through trade could provide us with some tangible examples of how material exchange of cultural goods might have ultimately impacted on literary output marked by the blend of ideas.

The information in Muslim historiographical works on the book trade in the pre-modern Middle East is scanty and fragmentary at best.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this neglect rests on

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\*I am grateful to Prof. Yaacov Lev for his suggestions in writing this paper. I am solely responsible for any shortcomings.

<sup>1</sup> Comprehensive, in-depth research on this practical aspect of pre-modern Islamic cultural history is non-existent. On the emergence, formation and proliferation of a book culture at the Fāṭimid court and beyond

the fact that, in the context of a culture where, from the AH 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> CE century onwards, social élites became book-obsessed, the modality of production as well as the circulation and distribution of books came to be taken for granted to the point of not needing special recording unless for exceptional episodes concerning exceptional books.<sup>2</sup> The adoption of paper to replace vellum as a cheaper writing medium helped making books a common-place feature of cultural life. It was a given that royal patrons would establish libraries in their palaces and that mosques would house collections of books. Men of learning were often book collectors as well as producers of tomes both as authors and copyists. In the eastern part of the Muslim world the *madrasa* became the obvious gravitational point for book production, trade and circulation.<sup>3</sup> The typical mechanisms that brought books to become owned and gathered in collections consisted of copying them, endowing them as pious donations and trading them. Also, since books were generally expensive<sup>4</sup>, they were considered valuable commodities to be passed on through inheritance as family heirlooms.

The *warrāq* is the figure that is most typically associated with all things relating to the production of the medieval Islamic book. Encompassing the role of paper vendor, seller of writing tools, copyist and scholar in his own right at any one time, the *warrāq* could occupy a varied position in the social scale from being a marginal who scraped a living through writing for others to being a distinguished member of the scholarly élite. To the latter category belonged the celebrated bibliophile Ibn al-Nadīm (d. AH 385/995 CE) who, indeed, became known as *al-warrāq*. Whether through commission or produced by own initiative, the ultimate purpose of copying books as a profession was to sell them. For this reason often the activities of the copyist overlapped with that of the *kutubī*, the vendor or broker of volumes already in circulation. This paper will focus on this latter figure, by concentrating on personalities that became primarily famous in Fāṭimid Egypt because of their bookselling

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in that period see Walker, Paul E. 'Libraries, Book Collection and the Production of Texts by the Fatimids.' *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World*, 4 (2016), pp. 9–21.

<sup>2</sup> A succinct yet detailed overview of major public and private libraries in the medieval Muslim world can be found in Kohlberg, Etan. *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work: Ibn Tāwūs and his Library*. Leiden, London and Köln: 1992, pp. 71-74.

<sup>3</sup> On business opportunities generated by *madrasa* where students and teachers provided a ready market for booksellers, paper makers etc. See Leiser, Gary. 'Notes on the Madrasa in Medieval Islamic Society'. *The Muslim World*, 76 (1986), pp.16-23.

<sup>4</sup> On the value of books see Ashtor, Eliyahu. *Histoire des prix et des salaires dans l'orient medieval*. Cairo: 1981, pp. 60, 112, 212.

activities. The works circulated via the *warrāq* were mostly the result of personal selection by the copyist and/or the commissioner; of a projectural intention, often influenced by intellectual trends within specific scholarly networks. Instead, the book vendor had to rely on whatever and whenever stock was available, he had to go out of his way to procure books to sell, a factor that made the *kutubī* more exposed or reliant to the contingencies of the time and place in which he lived. In terms of cultural impact, by circulating extant books, the *kutubī* provided greater potential for the popularisation of a broader, random and diverse range of subjects to a broader audience while, at the same time, contributing –deliberately or by default- to the life or death of a particular line of literary tradition.

Fāṭimid Egypt (AH 358-567/969-1171CE) offers a distinctive social, religious and cultural context to map the function and role that the book trade played in facilitating intellectual interaction. While defined by activities and events linked to and/or determined by an Ismaili dynasty –except for strictly *da‘wa* literature- practical means of book exchange transcended Ismailism as a doctrinal entity. Unlike the territories under ‘Abbāsīd rule, the institution of the *madrasa* was absent in Egypt until towards the very end of the Fāṭimid reign. This meant that Egypt lacked a predictable learning hub where book exchange would be expected to occur. The Fāṭimids, as a Shi‘a Ismaili dynasty, ruled as a religious minority over a majority Sunnī population, a factor that brought into contact contrasting and competing scholarly traditions. For example, the imam-caliph al-Ḥākīm ostensibly founded in Cairo his ‘abode of knowledge’ known as the *dār al-‘ilm* as an outreach venture intended to serve scholars irrespective of their religious affiliation.<sup>5</sup> In Egypt the Fāṭimids became the first Muslim dynasty to patron major libraries located in royal palaces and in the learning institutions they supported. Perhaps with some exaggeration, the royal libraries were said to boast one and a half million volumes.<sup>6</sup> Books were produced for Ismaili *da‘wa* purposes with very strict circulation; book were written on Ismaili law that could be publicly circulated and, outside the doctrinal context, books on all the known fields of learning were authored, copied, circulated, collected and praised. The book culture the Fāṭimids promoted was so infectious that it was embraced by high ranking officers - for example the viziers Ibn Killis (d. AH 380/991 CE) and al-Afḍal (d. AH 515/1121 CE) - as well as the wider urban cultural élite. Throughout most of their reign the Fāṭimids succeeded in rivalling the ‘Abbāsīds by

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<sup>5</sup> However, testimonies on the effective use of this facility by visiting scholars are rare.

<sup>6</sup> Walker. ‘Libraries’, p. 10.

securing trading routes that enabled international travellers to combine stellar trading opportunities with the undertaking of the pilgrimage to Mecca. This attracted to Egypt an international traffic of scholars-*cum*-traders<sup>7</sup> who – notwithstanding the boom-and bust crises that marked the economic and political life of Fāṭimid period - found Egypt conducive to establish or reinforce networks through which goods and learning would be exchanged. My argument in this paper is that it is against the backdrop of these ‘fluid’ contexts that we can situate the *kutubī* as cultural agent, emerging as it does with a sharper focus than the ‘mere’ copyist in historiographical accounts covering the Fāṭimid period.

## ATTITUDES TO BOOK BUYING AND SELLING IN THE MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC WORLD

The price of books differed from region to region due to a number of factors, one of many being the fluctuation in currency value in different places at different times. It is therefore difficult to establish the exact cost of books across the Near and Middle East throughout the medieval period. However, it is generally agreed that books were an expensive commodity. Typically, written sale contracts were drafted when books were purchased, a practice that – beside books – was only applied when buying houses, other immobile property and slaves.<sup>8</sup> With so much at stake, book acquisition would need careful consideration and discernment on the part of the buyer. Ibn Jamā‘a (AH 767/1366 CE) in his *Tadhkira* provides guidelines on how to buy a book. For example, to ensure its quality the buyer should check that it is complete at beginning and end; that there are no missing parts in the middle; that the general state and quality of the paper is consistent with the asking price. The book’s editorial qualities would have to conform to certain expectations and conventions.<sup>9</sup> Indeed we can detect a degree of preciousness over the quality of books at the Fāṭimid court where preference was given to bespoke copies of books to be housed in sponsored libraries. In fact, it appears that the purchase of existing books was not contemplated in the detailed budget of al-Ḥākim’s *dār*

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<sup>7</sup> On the link between trade and scholarship among medieval Muslim savants see Cohen, Hayyim J. ‘The economic background and the secular occupations of Muslim jurists.’ *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 13 (1970), pp. 16-61.

<sup>8</sup> Goitein, Shelomo D. *A Mediterranean Society: The Economic Foundation*, vol. 1. Berkeley: 1999, p. 196.

<sup>9</sup> Ibn al-Jamā‘a, Badr al-Dīn. *Tadhkirat al-sāmi‘ wa ’l-mutakallim fī adab al-‘ālim wa ’l-muta‘allim*. Hyderabad: DELETE DMU, 1353/1934, pp.172-177.

*al-‘ilm* where, instead, enormous sums are destined to paper, scribes, writing tools and book restoration.<sup>10</sup>

The fact that the pre-modern Islamic world became awash with books, whether by means of the *warrāq* or the *kutubī*, does not necessarily mean that trading in books was an unconditionally endorsed practice. In the eastern part of the Islamic world, the establishment of the *madrasa* had led to the professionalization of the ‘*ulamā*’s who, for the sake of preserving their socio-political power rooted in scholarly religious authoritativeness, deliberated on what was admissible and non-admissible in matters of learning transmission. For example, Ibn Jamā‘a recommended that students –when possible– should buy the texts they needed and/or to copy them to cut costs while facilitating memorisation. At the same time though, Ibn Jamā‘a went to some length to point out that acquiring books, even large number of them, did not by itself promote knowledge and understanding. Private reading and note taking did not in any way relieve the student from checking his reading of a text against that of his *shaykh*. Ultimately, Ibn Jamā‘a insisted, true knowledge derived only from a learned person not from books.<sup>11</sup> The lack of a professional ‘*ulamā*’ class in Fāṭimid Egypt meant that privatisation of learning was seen as less problematic.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly the scholar and *ḥadīth* transmitter Abu’l-Faṭḥ al-Sawwāf (AH 374-440/984-1048 CE), arriving in Baghdad from *madrasa*-free Cairo, came across as an oddity for buying books, choosing to study them by himself ignoring the authority of the *shaykh* and transmitting *ḥadīths* he learned about from books without the support of oral authority.<sup>13</sup>

With the exception of possibly one institution, in Cairo *madrāsas* appeared under the Ayyūbids and it was not until the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century that a distinctive and defined ‘*ulamā*’ class began to take hold in Egypt. In Alexandria *madrāsas* had been established during the last phase of Fāṭimid rule, following the arrival of prominent foreign

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<sup>10</sup> As noted by Eche, Youssef. *Les bibliothèques arabes publiques et semipubliques en Mesopotamie, en Sirie et en Egypte au Moyen Age*. Damascus: 1967, p. 364. For a detailed breakdown of the *dār al-‘ilm*’s budget see Walker. ‘Libraries’, pp. 14-15.

<sup>11</sup> Ibn al-Jamā‘a. *Tadhkirat*. pp. 164-167. Cf. also Berkey, Jonathan. *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education*. Princeton: 1994, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> In Ismaili context public access to religious and sacred literature was under the strict control of the *da‘wa* organisation. There is no evidence however that Ismailis were prevented or forbidden from buying and reading books belonging to traditions and genres outside those produced by and for the community.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad. *Kitāb al-Muqaffā al-kabīr*. Ed. M. Ya‘lawī, Beirut: 1991, no 1833.

Mālikī and Shāfi‘ī *ḥadīth* transmitters who received patronage in that city.<sup>14</sup> The most distinguished figure to settle in Alexandria was the greatest Shāfi‘ī scholar of the late Fāṭimid period, Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī (d. AH 576/1180 CE) who, over time, amassed an extensive personal library and, as book collector, engaged with the most important book sellers of his time.<sup>15</sup> It is indeed around this personality and his close-knit intellectual network that much of what is known about *kutubīs* in 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> centuries Egypt revolves.

## BOOKSELLERS IN CAIRO AND ALEXANDRIA

It is likely that - at least from the middle of 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century up until the end of the Fāṭimid period and possibly beyond - the *sūq* of the books was in Fuṣṭāṭ, on the eastern side of the ‘Amr b.al-‘Āṣ mosque, in the first lane of the lamps’ vendors by the wall of ‘Amr’s house.<sup>16</sup> The Persian Ismaili missionary and poet Nāṣir-i Khusraw who visited Cairo and Fuṣṭāṭ in AH439-441/1047-1050 CE does not mention in his *Safarnāmeḥ* the book market but when he describes the ‘Amr mosque he says that outside it on its four sides there were bazars on which the mosque’s doors opened. He comments that the court of the mosque was continuously full of scholars and Qur’an readers<sup>17</sup>, thus confirming the area by the *jāmi‘* as the obvious location for booksellers to conduct their trade.

It is indeed in the alleys of this *sūq* that we encounter Ibrāhīm b. Sa‘īd al-Ḥabbāl (AH 391 - 482/1000-89 CE), arguably the most dominant figure in the 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century Egyptian book trade scene. A Shāfi‘ī, connected to the Ismaili élite as a descendant or *mawlā* of the eminent

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<sup>14</sup> For a concise overview on the presence of *madrasas* in Egypt shortly before and immediately after the demise of the Fāṭimids see Eddé, Anne-Marie. *Saladin*. Paris: 2008, pp. 440-2.

<sup>15</sup> His most celebrated work, *Mu‘jam al-safar*, has been the subject of an extensive range of studies and partial as well as complete editions. Among the most important see Rizzitano, Umberto. ‘Akhbār ‘an ba‘ḍ muslimī ṣiqillīya alladhīna tarjama la-hum Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī.’ *Annals of the Faculty of Arts, Uni. Of ‘Ayn Shams*, 3 (1955): pp. 49-112; ‘Abbās, I. *Akhbār wa tarājim Andalusīyya al-mustakhraja min Mu‘jam al-safar li al-Silafī*. Beirut: 1963; Zaman, S.M. *Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī al-Iṣbahānī. His life and works with an analytical study of his Mu‘jam al-safar*. PhD thesis, Harvard Univ., Cambridge (Mass.): 1968; Ṣāliḥ, Ḥ. *The life and times of al-Ḥāfiẓ Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī accompanied by a critical edition of part of the author’s Mu‘jam al-safar*. PhD thesis, Univ. of Cambridge, 1972; al-Ḥasanī, Bahīja Bakr (ed.). *Mu‘jam al-safar*. Baghdad: 1978, vol. 1; Ma‘rūf, B. A. “Mu‘jam al-safar li-Abī Ṭāhir al-Silafī,” *al-Mawrid*, 8 (1979): pp. 379-383. The full text was published by Zaman, S.M. *Mu‘jam al-safar*. Islamabad: 1988. For this paper however *DELETE I* only al-Ḥasanī’s edition and S.M. Zaman’s PhD thesis were available to me.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad, *al-Mawā‘iz wa ‘l-i‘tibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa ‘l-āthār* (henceforth *Khiṭaṭ*). Ed. Ayman Fu‘ad Sayyid, London: 2002, vol. 3, p. 338.

<sup>17</sup> Nāṣir-i Khusraw. *Sefer Nameh Relation du Voyage de Nassiri Khosrau*. Ed. Ch. Schefer, Amsterdam: 1970, p. 148.

Fāṭimid jurist al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s family, Ibn al-Ḥabbāl was rated as one of the greatest savants of his time having reportedly learned from some 300 *shaykhs*. Among his mentors was ‘Abd al-Ghanī b. Sa‘īd whom he listened to 407/1016. ‘Abd al-Ghanī ( AH 332-409/990-1018 CE) occupies a special place at the very heart of the transmission of learning in 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century Egypt: he is indicated as having headed on an on-and-off basis al-Ḥākim’s *dār al-‘ilm* and he is indeed one of the very few scholars, irrespective of *madhhab*, to be named as having been formally associated with that institution. ‘Abd al-Ghanī can therefore be regarded as a major figure that bridged the gap between two coexistent religious, intellectual and cultural realms, those of Fustāṭ and Cairo, complementing as he did his role at the Fāṭimid centre of learning with his teaching in the ‘Amr mosque. <sup>18</sup>

Many notable scholars named Ibn al-Ḥabbāl as one of their informants and several travelled to Cairo to receive their *ijāza* from him. <sup>19</sup> He is known as the author of several collections of *ḥadīths*, but he is best remembered for *Wafayāt al-miṣriyyīn*.<sup>20</sup> His fame, and the influence that came with it, must have generated anxiety within the Fāṭimid establishment given that Ibn al-Ḥabbāl became the target of a rare case of scholarly censorship under this regime. Towards the end of his life the Fāṭimid rulers forbade him from transmitting *ḥadīths*, threatened him and controlled his movements. The reason for these restrictions is not known. However, his importance as a figure at the core of the international network of exchange of learning and practical circulation of knowledge during this period lies in his reputation as having been one of the greatest book wholesaler and bibliophiles of his time.

Information on al-Ḥabbāl’s book trading activities comes to us from a reliable source in matters of books, the already mentioned Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī, whose *Mu‘jam al-safar* represents a detailed record of his interaction with all the scholars he had met. These include Ibn Ṭāhir, a customer and friend of al-Ḥabbāl. Al-Silafī reports Ibn Ṭāhir’s accounts of his first encounter with al-Ḥabbāl. Intending to meet him while in Cairo, Ibn Ṭāhir went to look for him in the *sūq* by the ‘Amr mosque and spotted him in the perfumer shop. After approaching

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<sup>18</sup> On ‘Abd al-Ghanī see Cortese, Delia. ‘Voices of the silent majority: the transmission of Sunni learning in Fāṭimī Egypt’. *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 39 (2012), pp. 345-365 (pp.353-356).

<sup>19</sup> See al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad. *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*. Ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arna‘ūt, Beirut: 1410/1990, vol.18, 496-501; Ibn al-‘Imād, ‘Abd al-Ḥyy b. Aḥmad. *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār min dhahab*. Beirut: 1350/1982, vol. 3, p. 366; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā*, no. 147. See also Ibn al-Ḥabbāl, Ibrāhīm b. Sa‘īd. *Wafayāt al-miṣriyyīn*. Ed. Maḥmūd al-Ḥaddād, Riyāḍ: 1408/1987, introduction.

<sup>20</sup> The work is an annotated list of obituary entries, which constitute arguably the most systematically compiled directory to date of AH 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century CE Sunni scholars, active in Egypt, written by a contemporary.

him, Ibn al- Ḥabbāl read two *ḥadīths* to Ibn Ṭāhir who, from that moment on kept a daily appointment with the scholar at the ‘Amr mosque all the while he was in Cairo.<sup>21</sup> It is reported that al-Ḥabbāl’s stock amounted to over 500 *qinṭārs* of books (*ca.* 22,500 kg).<sup>22</sup> This he sold on average at 100 *dīnārs* per 20 *qinṭārs*, according to the testimony of one of his clients, Murshid b. Yaḥyā al-Madīnī.<sup>23</sup> According to an anecdote, when some 500 *dīnārs* worth of al-Ḥabbāl’s books became spoilt by rain, Ibn Ṭāhir advised him to build a special *khizāna* (repository) to contain his stock. He replied that should he build a *khizāna*, it would have to be of the size of the ‘Amr mosque so big was his collection.<sup>24</sup> Ibn al- Ḥabbāl’s reputation as a book expert made him a bibliophile’s magnet on many levels: when Ibn Ṭāhir came into possession of 20 quires of old paper (*kāghaz ‘atīq*) he consulted Ibn al-Ḥabbāl who informed him that it was paper that had been brought to the vizier Ibn al-Furāt (d. AH 327/938 CE) from Samarqand.<sup>25</sup> Ibn al-Ḥabbāl took advantage of his privileged access to books to hold story telling sessions for which he became a model. It is reported that in AH 489/1095 CE in the ‘Amr mosque Ibrāhīm b. Sulaymān al-Bazzāz (d. after AH 489/1096 CE) narrated the *Book of Marvels* (*Kitāb al-‘ajā’ib*) by al-Ḥasan b. Ismā‘īl al-Ḍarrāb, in the beautiful style of Ibn al-Ḥabbāl.<sup>26</sup> Finally, one of his students, the Mālikī jurist Ibn Ḥayḍara al-Kutubī (b. AH 447/1055 CE) followed in his footsteps and became a renowned bookseller in Alexandria in his own right.<sup>27</sup>

Ibn al-Ḥabbāl built his enviable stock thanks to the extensive network of scholars to which he belonged, through his travels particularly his permanence in Mecca, and via supply from the *warrāq* families of his time. In his *Wafayāt* he lists eight of them with whom he was

<sup>21</sup> Al-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad. *Ta’rīkh al-islām wa wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa ‘l-‘lām*. Ed. Bashshār ‘A. Mar‘ūf, Beirut: 1424/2003, vol. 10, no. 40, pp. 503-505.

<sup>22</sup>One *qinṭār* in Egypt corresponded to 44.93 kg. Note however that the word used in the edited text could be a misreading of *qimṭār* a case specially used to store books. If that is the case the subsequent passage should be understood that the sale of books here went by case rather than by weight.

<sup>23</sup> As reported by al-Silafī who met him in al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*. vol.18, p. 499.

<sup>24</sup>Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, vol. 18, 496-501; Ibn al-‘Imād. *Shadharāt*: vol.3 , p. 366; Ibn al-Ḥabbāl, *Wafayāt*, pp. 9-10 of the introduction.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Dhahabī. *Siyar*. vol.18, p. 500.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā*, no. 157. The reporting of daily life events capturing the modalities and occasions for the public dissemination of popular literature in medieval Egypt are rare. See Boaz, Shoshan. ‘On Popular Literature in Medieval Cairo’. *Poetics Today*. 14 (1993), 2, pp. 349-365.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā*, no 2188. He was known to al-Silafī who wrote on him.

in direct contact.<sup>28</sup> Above all, however, al-Ḥabbāl's bookselling fortunes must have been favoured by the massive amount of books that suddenly flooded the Cairo market following the plundering and consequent dispersal of the famed Fāṭimid caliphal libraries that took place in AH 460-1/1067-9 CE.<sup>29</sup> In those years, at the apex of the political, economic and social crisis that hit Egypt during al-Mustanṣir's reign -*al-shidda al-mustanṣiriyya* -angered unpaid soldiers and officials of the Fāṭimid army ransacked the palaces and the institutions of the regime, including the library in the outer section of the royal palace.<sup>30</sup> In the aftermath of this dispersal of books the book trade market became so saturated that dealers sent volumes to sell in Alexandria, the Maghrib and even as far as Baghdad.<sup>31</sup> A graphic account of how books found their way out of the Palace into private hands relates to an episode involving Muḥammad b. Barakāt al-Naḥwī al-Ṣūfī (AH 420-520/ 1029-1126 CE), an eminent scholar who dwelled by the 'Amr mosque and who was part of a distinguished network of traditionists. Caught like most in the famine that hit Egypt, Ibn Barakāt had had the good fortune of being invited for lunch by the head of police in Fustāt, on the ground that he was his children's tutor. On that occasion he took two loaves of bread, one of which in turn he sold to his mentor, Ibn Babshadh. He then sold the other loaf in the market of the lamps for 14 *dirhām*. With the money, Ibn Barakāt approached in Cairo the attendants at the entrance hall of the Palace library who sold him a book for every *dirhām*. Back at home, Ibn Barakāt locked the door and hid the books in a hole he dug in the ceiling.<sup>32</sup> In a topsy-turvy world where bread became more valued than books for the ordinary folk, the scholar here is shown to privilege feeding the intellect rather than the body but also having an eye for long term investment in durable goods.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibn al-Ḥabbāl, *Wafayāt*. nos: 83, Abu'l-Qāsim Ja'far b. Muḥammad b. al-Maristānī al-Warrāq (d. AH 387/997 CE) who had two sons from whom al-Ḥabbāl heard *ḥadīths*; 142, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. al-Warrāq (d. AH 394/1003 CE); 201, Abu 'l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Dimashqī b. al-Warrāq (d. AH 414/1023 CE); 219, Abu 'l-Ḥusayn Muḥammad al-Fārisī al-Warrāq (d. AH 416/1025 CE); 226, Abu 'l-Qāsim 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Warrāq al-Kharqī (d. AH 416/1025 CE); 324, Abu 'l-Ḥasan al-Ḥākīmī al-Warrāq (d. AH 440/1048 CE); 355, Abu'l-Qāsim Ḥamza b. al-Qāsim b. 'Afīf al-Warrāq (d. AH 447/1055 CE); 375, Abu 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. al-Baqā' al-Warrāq (d. AH 450/1058 CE).

<sup>29</sup> The most detailed accounts on the vicissitudes pertaining the fate of the Fāṭimid royal libraries can be found in the works of al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz al-Ḥunafā'* and *Khiṭaṭ*. For a summarised version of his accounts see Halm, Heinz. *The Fāṭimids and their traditions of learning*. London: 1997, pp.81, 91-93.

<sup>30</sup> See Walker. 'Libraries', p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> See Walker. 'Libraries', p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā'*, no.1903.

In time of cash-flow crises books entered also the book market through being institutionally and formally released from the Fatimid royal libraries to serve as collaterals in lieu of monetary payments owed by the regime to government officials. A Cairo Geniza document from the year 537/1142 records, for example, a minute written by al-Zāfir (still heir apparent at this stage) instructing that a medical work by ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā held in the library of his father, the caliph al-Ḥāfiẓ, be issued to the *amīr* Fakhr al-Dīn Abū Maṣṣūr. Additional documentary evidence for this period shows that in these instances the books served as financial securities rather than as objects of study.<sup>33</sup> There is evidence that books released or liberated from al-Ḥāfiẓ and al-Zāfir’s libraries eventually came to be part of the library collection of the Iraqi Shi‘i scholar Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. AH 664/1266 CE).<sup>34</sup>

(~~DELETE THIS SENTENCE: It looks like Ibn Barakāt’s carefulness in hiding his treasured volumes was well justified.~~) Whether royal or private, no library was spared during years of chaos and devastation. According to Muḥammad, the son of a Shāfi‘ī traditionist and juris consult, Abu’l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Rāzī (d. AH 491/1097-8 CE),<sup>35</sup> his family had moved from Cairo to Alexandria because of the *shidda*. While in Cairo, Aḥmad al-Rāzī had systematically collected extensive notes and books gathered from meeting with and attending the lessons of a great number of scholars. According to his son however, all this material was looted –together with the family belongings- during the family’s transfer to Alexandria.<sup>36</sup> Eventually Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī came to be part of Aḥmad al-Rāzī’s scholarly legacy. Al-Rāzī’s daughter, Turfa (d. AH 534/1139-40 CE) –herself an authoritative transmitter of *ḥadīths* - became al-Silafī’s mother-in-law and one of his mentors.<sup>37</sup> He was also close to Muḥammad, whom he wrote about in his *Mu‘jam*. In AH 512/ 1118 CE al-Silafī made a selection of his *mahyakha* titled *Intikhāb min mashyakhat al-Rāzī wa thabt*

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<sup>33</sup> For the edition, translation and commentary on this document see Khan, Geoffrey. *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents in the Cambridge Genizah Collection*. Cambridge: 1993, document n. 116. For another significant example of books taken in lieu of salary in the Fāṭimid period see Walker. ‘Libraries’, p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Kohlberg. *A Medieval Muslim Scholar*. nos 149, 344 and 352.

<sup>35</sup> On him see Vajda, George. ‘La Mašyaḥa d’Ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb al-Rāzī. Contribution à l’histoire du Sunnisme en Égypte fāṭimide.’ Ed. N. Cottard. *La transmission du savoir en Islam (VIIe-XVIIIe siècles)*. London: 1983, V, pp. 21-99 [originally published in *Bulletin d’Études Orientales* 23 (1970)], p. 32, no. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Vajda. “La Mašyaḥa”, p.22

<sup>37</sup> On Turfa and other female savants in her family circle of see Cortese, Delia. ‘Transmitting Sunni Learning in Fatimid Egypt: The Female Voices.’ Daftary, Farhad and Jiwa, Shainool (eds). *The Fatimid Caliphate, Diversity of Traditions*. London: 2018, pp. 164-191 (pp.175-176).

*masmū ‘āti-hi*.<sup>38</sup> Also, al-Silafī expanded his collection of books by buying, upon his death, part of the library of the Alexandrian *muḥaddith* ‘Alī b. al-Musharraf al-Anmāfī (d. AH 518/1124 CE) who in turn had been one of Aḥmad al-Rāzī’s students.<sup>39</sup>

Once settled in Egypt, al-Silafī only left Alexandria for two years between ca AH 515/1121 CE and AH 517/1123 CE which he spent in Cairo. It must have been during this permanence in the Fāṭimid capital that he met the booksellers Abū Ṭāhir al-Muhadhhab and Abu’l-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Ḥāshim al-Kutubī known as Ibn al-Mawqifī (AH 464-539/1071-1144 CE). The latter was born in Alexandria but traded books in Cairo where he died. Al-Silafī claimed to have bought many books from him and praised him as a memoriser of verses by Egyptian poets.<sup>40</sup> The availability of ready-made books did not prevent al-Silafī to make the most of his time in Cairo to add to his library by frequenting also highly respected *warrāqs*. One was Abū Muḥammad al-Khuzā‘ī al-Warrāq (d. AH 530/1135 CE) of whom he appreciated the calligraphy.<sup>41</sup> Another was the more famous Aḥmad b. al-Hutaya al-Lakhmī al-Fāsī (AH 478-561/1085 –1165 CE). A Mālikī Qur’ān reciter and briefly a *qāḍī* in AH 533/1138 CE he was born in Fez and lived by the Rāshida Mosque in Fustāṭ. With his wife and his daughter, who became renowned for their ability to write in his same hand, Ibn al-Hutaya established a small cottage industry of book-copying on commission or for sale, specialising on works on *fiqh*, *ḥadīth* and literature. His family reputation for quality rested on not selling the finished book if one copying mistake had been made.<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps the most effective way for both booksellers and collectors to lye their hand on superior quality tomes, sometime even at a reasonable price was through auctions (*nidā’*).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Hashimi, Farhat Nasim. *DELETE* (1989) *A critical edition of Kitāb al-Wajīz fī dhikr al-mujāz wa al-mujīz by Abū Ṭāhir Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Silafī, al-Iṣbahānī* (d. 576/1181). PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, Glasgow: 1989, p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> Leiser, Gary. *The restoration of Sunnism in Egypt: Madrasas and mudarrisūn 495-647/1101-1249*. PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia: 1976, p.176. See also Halm. *The Fāṭimids*. p.77.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Silafī mentions them in his *Mu’jam* in paragraphs 1278 and 63 according to Zaman. *Abū Ṭāhir Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Silafī*. p. 231. For the entry on Ibn al-Mawqifī see al-Silafī. *Mu’jam*. Ed. al-Ḥasanī. no. 344.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Silafī. *Mu’jam*. Ed.al-Ḥasanī. no. 138.

<sup>42</sup> al-Maqrīzī. *al-Muqaffā*. no.495. See also Ibn Khallikān. *Kitāb waḥyāt al-a’yān/ Ibn Khallikān’s Biographical Dictionary*. Tr. B. MacGuckin De Slane, Beirut: 1842, vol. 1, pp. 151-2.

<sup>43</sup> Pedersen, Johannes. *The Arabic Book*. Princeton: 1984, p. 51.

At the very end of the Fāṭimid rule the figure that in many ways dominated the book auction market and, to some extent allegedly managed to manipulate it to his own advantage was the famous late Fāṭimid -Ayyūbid official al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil (AH 529-596/1135-1200 CE), arguably – with his brother – among the most voracious and demanding book collectors of the time. Credited with having spent almost a year worth of his revenues by buying for more than 30,000 *dīnārs* a large *mushaf* in Kufic script believed to have been one of the Uthmānic codices, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil was known to buy books on every subject from everywhere. It is reported that some twenty years before his death the number of books in his library had already reached 120,000.<sup>44</sup> The amassing of this fortune coincided with the capitulation of the Fāṭimid regime. On that occasion, Salāḥ al-Dīn gave al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil the oversight for the dispersal of the royal library, a role that he happily took given his passion for books. (NOTE THAT FOOTNOTE HERE PREVIOUSLY NUMBER 45 HAS BEEN DELETED )Reportedly, in that capacity he picked the most valuable books for himself without paying or asking permission from Salāḥ al-Dīn. An eye witness of these events, al-‘Imād al-Dīn al-Kātib, noted that a large quantity of these books were then sold. He himself admitted to buying books on this occasion but eventually not paying for them as Salāḥ al-Dīn gifted them to him. Eventually in AH 573/1177 CE he took to Syria eight camel loads of books from this collection. Al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil took part in the sale too. Apparently, having examined the collection, he selected the best works. Once he had done that, he then removed their bindings so that the books would look valueless and of poor quality. In that state, the volumes were thrown in baskets the content of which he would then buy in bulk at a very low bid.<sup>45</sup> However, it has been argued that, by acting in this way, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil did in fact his best to save as many precious royal books as he could. Indeed the practical handling of the dispersal of the Fatimid palace library had been delegated to the eunuch Qarāqūsh al-Asadī –

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<sup>44</sup> Numbers here vary massively with some biographers indicating 70,000. Cf. Kohlberg. *A Medieval Muslim Scholar*. p. 73. Details of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil’s book collecting activities can be found in al-Maqrīzī. *Khiṭaṭ*. vol. 4, part 2, pp. 463-465.

<sup>45</sup> Abū Shāma, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ismā‘īl. *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn al-Nūrīyah wa-al-Ṣalāḥīyah*. Cairo: 1870, part 1, p. 200. See also Eche. *Les bibliothèques arabes*. p. 250 who doubts the truthfulness of the account of al-Fāḍil’s book vandalism. For an alternative view on the fate of the Fāṭimid royal libraries following the advent of the Ayyūbids see Bora, Fozia. ‘Did Salāḥ al-Dīn Destroy the Fāṭimid Books? A Historiographical Enquiry’. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 25 (2015), pp. 21-39.

deemed to know nothing about books. <sup>46</sup> Under his watch the sale, that took place every week, twice a week, was open to ordinary buyers who—not unlike al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil above—damaged the copies they were interested in so that they could buy at discounted prices.<sup>47</sup>

Besides sourcing books directly from the royal collection, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil did actually buy books from the most prominent Cairo bookseller and broker of the day, Abu'l-Futūḥ Nāṣir b. Abi'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Khalaf al-Anṣārī better known as Ibn Ṣūra (d. AH 607/1210 CE). He was a Shāfi'ī who had been a pupil on *ḥadīths* of 'Abd al-Rahman b. Salāma al-Quḍā 'ī, brother of the more famous *qāḍī* for the Fāṭimids, Muḥammad b. Salāma al-Quḍā 'ī (d. AH 454/1062 CE) and was associated to the *qāḍī al-quḍāt* 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Īsā al-Mārānī. The poet and courtier Usāma b. Munqidh (d. AH 584/1188 CE) dedicated verses to him thus indicating that the bookseller had already established his reputation during the late Fāṭimid period. Eventually he too, under the supervision of the *amīr* Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Banān, was delegated with taking care of the sale of the books in the Fāṭimid royal library at the time of Salāḥ al-Dīn.<sup>48</sup> As broker (*simsār*) Ibn Ṣūra's role was to find purchasers for other people's books. He used to conduct his business sitting in the vestibule of his house and offering books for sale to men of rank and learning. It was customary for them to assemble there every Sunday and Wednesday and remain there till trade time was over. His business must have been profitable because his house was noted for its elegance. When it eventually burned down the event was commented in poetry with some glee by one of Ibn Ṣūra's detractors. It is possible that Ibn Ṣūra's closeness to the Fāṭimid regime via his affiliation to the judiciary caused Ibn al-Munajjim to brand him an infidel, worthy of hell in his verses.<sup>49</sup> An anecdote epitomizes the level of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's refinement as a book buyer and Ibn Ṣūra's reputation as vendor trusted to meet the demands of the most discerning customer. According to Ibn Ṣūra, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil asked him to procure him a copy of *al-Ḥamāsa*<sup>50</sup> for his son al-Ashraf Aḥmad to read. Knowing how exigent al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil was,

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<sup>46</sup> About Qarāqūsh as a foolish figure of fun in Muslim medieval lore see Boaz, Shoshan. 'On Popular Literature in Medieval Cairo', pp.356-358.

<sup>47</sup> Abū Shāma. *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn*. p. 268. See also Eddé. *Saladin*. pp. 69-70.

<sup>48</sup> Sayyid, Ayman Fu'ad. *Tuwayr Ibn's Nuzhat al-muqlatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn*. Beirut: 1992, p. 127 and note 2.

<sup>49</sup> Ibn Khallikān. *Wafayāt*. vol. 1, pp.178-179.

<sup>50</sup> A number of anthologies of Arabic poetry and epics under this name came to be part of the canon of classical Arabic literature. The lack of mention of the author here may indicate that the one referred to is the ultimate

Ibn Šūra showed him from his stock 35 copies of the work. Al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil went through each copy one by one recognizing the hand of the copyist of each manuscript. Once he had seen them all however he concluded that none was of a quality suitable for his child and he ordered Ibn Šūra to procure him a copy for a *dīnār*.<sup>51</sup> Ibn Šūra's status as the preeminent AH 6<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> CE century Cairo bookseller was secured when, having gone to Alexandria specially for the occasion, he succeeded in adding to his stock possibly one of the most important private book collections of his time, that of Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī, which Ibn Šūra bought following his death.<sup>52</sup>

A survey of the book trade scene in Fāṭimid Egypt would be incomplete without the mention of the role that the Jews played in that market. Evidence gathered from the Cairo Geniza documents shows that it was typical of physicians to dedicate themselves to this commerce<sup>53</sup> and, more generally, wholesaler included trading in books among a diverse array of products they dealt with such flax, silk, olive oil, spices and metals. It is notable that the marketability of a book was mostly based on its intellectual value rather than as an object, that is because of its physical qualities and aesthetic characteristics. Within the context of a small Jewish community, comprising a small pool of readers, the activities surrounding book production and exchange were concentrated in the hands of a closely-knit intellectual élite among the merchant and civil servant classes.<sup>54</sup> There is also reason to believe that the Copt scholarly élites too had their own networks through which books changed hands through family legacy, copying and trading.

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*Ḥamāsa*, that is the one by Abū Tammām. On this genre see Pellat, Charles. 'Ḥamāsa'. *Encyclopedia of Islam* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. vol. 3, pp. 110-112.

<sup>51</sup> al-Maqrīzī. *Khīṭaṭ*. vol. 4, part 2, p. 465.

<sup>52</sup> Ibn Khallikān. *Wafayāt*. vol. 1, pp.178-179. On Ibn Šūra see also al-Mundhirī, Zakī al-Dīn Abū Aḥmad. *al-Takmila li-wafayāt al-naqala*. Ed. Bashshār 'A. Ma'rūf, Najaf: 1401/1981, vol.3, pp. 323-324.

<sup>53</sup> Goitein. *A Mediterranean Society: vol. 1*. Pp. 154, 379. For an example of a famous Jewish physician in the Fāṭimid period who became renowned for his book collecting see Walker. 'Libraries', p. 16.

<sup>54</sup> I am very grateful to Dr Miriam Frenkel for sharing with me the advance copy of her article on the subject 'Book lists from the Cairo Genizah: a window on the production of texts in the middle ages'. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. 80 (2017), pp. 233-252. On book production and circulation of books among Jews in Medieval Egypt see also Olszowy-Schlanger, Judith. 'Cheap Books in Medieval Egypt: Rotuli from the Cairo Geniza'. *Intellectual History of the Islamic World*. 4 (2016) pp.82-101.

## CONCLUSIONS

In 2016 Konrad Hirschler published the catalogue of Ashrafiya library in Damascus.<sup>55</sup> Written in AH 670s/1270s CE this is the earliest-known extant purposely compiled Arabic medieval library catalogue and a rare pre-Ottoman document relating to books. In retracing the steps that led to the formation of this library which came about through the merging of a number of collections, Hirschler identified the presence of books that had previously belonged to al-Ashraf Aḥmad. This is the same person encountered above for whom his father, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, would only buy the best books on the market. Having raised him with such refined taste in books, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil eventually bequeathed him with his own collection.<sup>56</sup> Beside narrative accounts, evidence from the Ashrafiya library catalogue shows that the provenance of al-Ashraf Aḥmad's collection goes indeed right back to the Fāṭimids, featuring as it does many books that reflect the intellectual life of the Fāṭimid court.<sup>57</sup> While no Ismaili works are recorded, the Ashrafiya shows that books that were in circulation in Fāṭimid Egypt found their way to Syria. Beside the endowment formula, the details of other practical modalities of book circulation that caused some of these volumes to resurface in another library, in another continent, a century later are not known. However, another *de-facto* library catalogue testifying to the world of Muslim bibliophiles in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, is the one compiled by Etan Kohlberg thanks to his analysis of Ibn Ṭāwūs's works. The result is a systematic and annotated reconstruction of a considerable list of books in Ibn Ṭāwūs' personal library. Unlike al-Ashraf Aḥmad, he was an Iraqi Twelver Shi'i scholar whose books in some cases were explicitly stated to have come from the Fāṭimid royal libraries. Additionally, unlike the Ashrafiya, Ibn Ṭāwūs' ownership of Ismaili or Ismaili-related works is implied through his selection of quotations from a work by the Fatimid jurist al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān and from the epistle on astrology of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Hirschler, Konrad. *Medieval Damascus: Plurality and Diversity in an Arabic Library. The Ashrafiyya Library Catalogue*. Edinburgh: 2016.

<sup>56</sup> Beside building his private collection, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil had also furnished with books the *madrassa* carrying his name that he founded in 1184. See Walker. 'Libraries', p. 13. This library was however dispersed during the famine 1295 when students sold the books to procure food. Cf. Eddé. *Saladin*. P.442.

<sup>57</sup> See Hirschler. *DELETE Konrad. Medieval Damascus. DELETE: Plurality and Diversity in an Arabic Library. The Ashrafiyya Library Catalogue*. Edinburgh: 2016, pp.32-35.

<sup>58</sup> Kohlberg. *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*. The title of the work by al-Nu'mān is not indicated by Ibn Ṭāwūs but its extracts have been identified as belonging to *al-Majālis wa-l-musāyārāt*. Cf. nos. 335 and 193 for the Ikhwān. Note that Ibn Ṭāwūs attributes the epistles to a single author.

Beyond the intricate, varied and personal vicissitudes that brought to the formation of the two library collections above, this paper is illustrative of some mechanisms through which books changed hands, having looked at the role that booksellers played in facilitating the movement of books in AH 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> CE centuries Fāṭimid Egypt and beyond. Through the activities of these dealers we can appreciate how it might have been possible that books that once belonged to the Fāṭimids' court or their learning institutions might have ended up in the course of time - thanks in part to booksellers in Cairo and Alexandria- in the hands of prominent scholars such as Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī. How some copies of books that, thanks to Aḥmad al-Rāzī had 'transited' through Egypt came to rest on al-Silafī's book-shelves. How, in turn, parts of the latter's collection might have resurfaced in the house of Ibn Ṭāwūs or, in the case of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil –and later his son- in their possession through the brokerage of Ibn Ṣūra.

These book transfer mechanisms however needed agency in order to be activated as the figure of *kutubī* did not emerge in a vacuum. Two major events can be identified as having brought about the emergence of a large scale book market in Fāṭimid Egypt: one was the *shidda al-mustanṣiriyya*, a crisis that caused the first major wave of dispersal of books from the royal and other major private libraries into the market place. The royal libraries were eventually re-filled only to be dispersed once and for all when the Fāṭimid regime collapsed at the hand of the Ayyūbids. The vicissitudes of books in Egypt in this periods tell us how ultimately intellectual interactions depended on personal contacts mediated through the exchange of books; on human beings of various ranks and religious affiliations colliding with one another irrespective of personal convictions and despite or because of the major upheavals that affected their lives.

The reported anecdotes that shed light on the itinerant life of books in medieval Egypt can be hagiographical in that they often contain exaggerations intended to reflect positively on the personalities involved. Notwithstanding this limitation, these accounts are remarkable in providing us with valuable information on the *modus operandi* of booksellers in the Fāṭimid period. Whether sold by weight, case or camel loads or simply by the copy like in the example of Ibn Ṣūra, the sale and purchase of books by and large knew no boundaries be they geographical, intellectual or religious. With the demise of the Fāṭimids, however, and the restoration of Sunnism as the official religious denomination endorsed by the Ayyūbid regime, books that were Twelver Shī'ī and/or Isma'īli in content are understood to have been destroyed. The purge nevertheless did not prevent the survival of some Shī'ī and even Ismaili

works which resurfaced decades later in libraries such as for example those of Ibn Ṭāwūs and the Ashrafiya.<sup>59</sup>

For all its triumphs and upheavals, it was ultimately the cultural, religious and economic fluidity that characterized Egypt under the Fāṭimids that transformed that region from having been cultural backwater into becoming a beacon of intellectual activity that served as a launch pad for books to boldly go where no volumes had gone before.

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<sup>59</sup> Hirschler. *Medieval Damascus*. pp.123-125.

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