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Remarks on the Blacks in the Fatimid Army, 10th–12th CE

Abbès Zouache

(CNRS)

Originating in Ifrīqiyya, the Fatimids conquered Egypt at the end of the tenth century CE. They established a Shi'i caliphate that disappeared in the last quarter of the twelfth century. The Fatimid caliphs adopted a policy of expansion. This expansion was ideological, led by the Ismaili *Da'wa*, especially in Yemen and the Persian Gulf. It was also economic: the Fatimid state, which was largely based on trade, created an extensive road and maritime network for economic purposes. Finally, it was a political and military one, as the Fatimid caliphs extended their influence to southern Syria and Arabia.¹

Of course, this expansion was not endless. The Fatimid Caliphate knew decadent periods. In particular, it had to endure a great crisis in the middle of the eleventh century (ca. 457–466 AH/1065–1073 CE).² Then Egypt faced a great famine, and military factions struggled for power. Less than a century later, the Caliphate was again the victim of internal strife, and fell into decay until Saladin put an end to it in 1171 CE.³

In many respects, these crises were provoked by the Fatimid army, which has been the subject of several studies by Arab and Western scholars in recent decades.⁴ In this article, I would like to return to some aspects of the organization of this army, and in particular to the role played by its black contingent,⁵ which is still often considered the most faithful supporters of the dynasty, wherever they may have come from and regardless of their social and legal status.⁶ One can see in this statement the paradigmatic inclination to confine black troops in the irreducible and unchanging essential identity so often conveyed in medieval sources.

I will rely on Arabic and Latin sources, mainly chronicles, where one can find some descriptions of the composition and organization of the armies that are sometimes different from the theoretical structures described in didactic sources such as al-Qalqāshandī's (d. 1418 CE) encyclopedia, *Ṣubḥ al-a'šā fī šinā'at al-inšā'*.⁷ However, all convey representations that reflect cultural values that can explain the inaccuracy often applied to the blacks.⁸

Indistinctive Groups

Ethnicity of Medieval Muslim Armies: The Inaccuracy of the Sources

Let us begin with some facts about medieval Muslim armies, whose structure and composition are often difficult to reconstruct. Most of researchers' inaccuracy comes from medieval sources. Indeed, few military administrative documents produced by medieval Islamic chancelleries have survived.⁹ Military historians of the medieval Middle East have to rely on a plethora of textual sources, especially chronicles often written after the related events, and by authors too often poorly informed on armies and warfare, or who had no pressing need to be accurate.¹⁰ So it is no surprise that it is often difficult—and sometimes simply impossible—to know how soldiers were recruited in medieval armies where free men, military slaves, professional soldiers, and auxiliaries such as nomads and occasional fighters, were mixed.

Moreover, even if Muslim armies—particularly the Fatimid one—included some multiethnic elite and professionalized regiments, in general they are described in the sources as organized in an ethnic way.¹¹ The problem is that when we want to recognize the ethnic groups, we face the inaccuracy of the sources. Thus, Arab authors use ethnonyms like *Arab* as well as geographical words like *Ḥurāsānī*, this latter term theoretically referring to all soldiers from Ḥurāsān. But the sense of these words is not always clear. For example, *Ḥurāsānī* often refers to

everyone who lived in the not clearly limited eastern area of what is now Iran, irrespective of whether they were Turks, Kurds, Arabs, etc.¹²

One Color, One Status, One Group: Blacks and Slaves

The inaccuracy is even more relevant for the black soldiers of the Fatimid army. Medieval authors often use the words *Sūdān* or *Sūdānī* to refer to them. As is well known, the expression *Bilād al-Sūdān* properly means “land of the blacks.” It would appear that the word *Sūdān* that comes from it and refers to black color¹³ and it ought to mean all the parts of Africa inhabited by the blacks, even if some authors tend to restrict it to that part of sub-Saharan Africa that had relations with Islam.¹⁴

Furthermore, Arabic language has a rich vocabulary for slaves often not sufficiently studied. For example, Daniel Pipes assert that the *buq‘ān* (singular *abqa‘*) was the one “brought from Ethiopia.”¹⁵ However, this specialized word, which is mainly used in medieval Arabic sources to refer to children born from slaves of mixed race, especially ones born from white and black parents, did not find its way into the texts referring to Fatimid black military slaves.¹⁶

In fact, Arab chroniclers use literary *topos* in which blacks are more or less fit for slavery, *Sūdān* (and even Nubian) being interchangeable with “slave.”¹⁷ For example, this is the case for Ibn Muyassar (d. 1278 CE). He mainly used the words *al-Sūdān*, *al-‘abīd* (the slaves) and *al-‘abīd al-Sūdān* (black slaves) without specifying their origin but, in the latter two cases, with information on their legal status: we are informed that they were (or had been) slaves.¹⁸ He also refers to *‘abīd al-širā’* (slaves by purchase) on one occasion, when describing a struggle (*fitna*) dated Ğumādā II 454 AH/June 12–July 10, 1062 CE between black slaves (alternatively designated as *‘abīd al-širā’*, *‘abīd, al-Sūdān*) and Turks (*al-Atrāk*).¹⁹

Other authors also mention this word. Two centuries before Ibn Muyassar, Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw (d. after 1070 CE), a Persian traveler who visited Cairo in the middle of the eleventh century CE, described a military review.²⁰ He recognizes “a group (*firqa*) [of the army] called ‘*abīd al-šīra*, who are purchased slaves (‘*abīd*); it is said that they were 30,000 foot soldiers.”²¹ He also mentions elsewhere in his *Safar Nāmāh* a quarter called *Hārat ‘abīd al-širā’*.²² According to Ibn al-Qalānisī (d. 1160 CE), a secretary of the Damascus chancellery often well-informed about Egyptian events, the ‘*abīd al-širā*’ took a great part in the conquest of Syria at the end of the tenth century.²³ More latter, the Egyptian encyclopedist al-Qalqašandī (d. 1418 CE) simply says that some *Sūdān* “who were slaves by purchase” were incorporated in the Fatimid army.²⁴ In his chronicle entitled *Itti ‘āz al-Ḥunafā’ bi-Aḥbār al-A’imma al-Fāṭimiyya al-Ḥulafā’* as well as in his extensive study on the historical topography of Fustāt and Cairo known as *al-Ḥitāt*, the Egyptian polymath al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442 CE) is slightly more precise. He calls a group *al-Sūdān ‘abīd al-širā’*, and he distinguishes various units (*tawā’if*) constituted of ‘*abīd al-širā*’.²⁵ In the following extracts, he describes two quarters (*ḥārat*)²⁶ named *Hārat al-Faraḥiyya* and *Hārat al-Ḥusayniyya*²⁷:

It was inhabited by *al-ṭā’ifa* al-Faraḥiyya. [Al-Faraḥiyya] is beside *Hārat al-Murtāḥiyya*. Until today, there is a *zuqāq* known as *Darb al-Farḥiyya*, between the *Suwayqa* Amīr al-Ġuyūš and *Bāb al-Qanṭara*.²⁸ As for al-Farḥiyya, it was a corps/regiment composed of ‘*abīd al-širā*’. There were several units (*tawā’if*) of ‘*abīd al-širā*’, *id est*: al-Farḥiyya, al-Ḥusayniyya, and al-Maymūniyya who were named after Maymūn, one of the eunuchs (*al-ḥuddām*).²⁹ . . . *Hārat al-Ḥusayniyya*: known after a unit (*ṭā’ifa*) of ‘*abīd al-širā*’ called al-Ḥusayniyya.³⁰

Other units of black slaves serving during the early history of the Fatimid Caliphate are sometimes mentioned by Arab authors, like *al-Sa‘diyya*³¹ and *al-Ġawwāla* under al-Ĥākim.³² Ibn al-Furāt (d. 1405 CE) also outlines two latter military units called *al-Rayḥāniyya* and *al-Ġuyūšīyya* (the latter named after the Armenian vizier Badr al-Ġamālī Amīr al-Ġuyūš, r. 1073–1094 CE). According to him, when Saladin brought the Fatimid Caliphate to an end, it was composed of *Sūdān*.³³ And as we will see, *Sūdān* were also mixed with other troops whether they were ‘*abīd*’ or not.

Where They Came From

Nevertheless, in most cases medieval authors refer to large groups when they discuss with the Fatimid army. Black soldiers existed as a group, as did the slaves who were transported from sub-Saharan Africa. Even the Fatimid courtier and historiographer al-Musabbiḥī (d. 1029 CE), who was particularly well-informed about everyday life in Cairo, is just giving general information when describing the arrival of black slaves in Fustāṭ³⁴:

On Tuesday [20 Ġumādā II 414/11 September 1023], eight nights staying in his month, came the gift sent from al-Muḥḍaṭa, near Aswān,³⁵ by Ibn Mukārim Ibn Abī Yazīd.³⁶ It consisted of twenty horses, twenty-four female camels (*naġīb*), many *Sūdānī*, male and female, a cheetah in his cage, Nubians sheep, birds, little monkeys (*nasānis*), and elephant tusks. He marched in person in the city, accompanying his gifts and escorted by his sons. He crossed the whole city up [the residence of] His Majesty and he presented what he had brought with him.³⁷ . . . At the end of this month [Rabī‘ al-Awwal 415 AH/mid-June 1024 CE], a present arrived from the country of the Nubians (*balad al-Nūba*). In it were [male] slaves (‘*abīd*’) and slaves female (*immā’*), ebony wood, elephants, giraffes, etc.³⁸

Other such examples refer in Arabic sources to the so-called *baqt*, a “tribute-barter treaty” between the master of Nubia and the Muslims,³⁹ which has been so often studied by historians that one might say they have an obsession with it.⁴⁰ Indeed, soon after they conquered Egypt, the Fatimids sent Ibn Sulaym al-Aswānī as ambassador to Nubia.⁴¹ According to his own account in the lost but partially preserved *Kitāb Aḥbār al-Nūba wa-l-Muqurra wa ‘Alwa wa-l-Buḡa wa-l-Nīl*, Ibn Sulaym would have managed to renew the *baqt* to be delivered by Nubia since the beginning of Islam.⁴² Nubians had to send prestige goods (e.g., ivory, ebony, exotic animals) and slaves, probably in exchange for various commodities. The sources reflect the regularity of *baqt* exchanges during the Fatimid Caliphate.⁴³ But even for this rather well-documented period, the paucity of the evidence forces us to make assumptions for which sufficient arguments cannot be made.⁴⁴ It has been argued that some 400 slaves per year were delivered through the *baqt* “from about 650 until the fourteenth century,”⁴⁵ which should be augmented by numerous slaves imported and sold by merchants. But the surviving sources of information are too fragmented to validate such an assumption.⁴⁶

In my opinion, giving the inaccuracy of the sources, it is difficult to know where military slaves really came from. A great number of them were certainly sent by the Nubian king through the *baqt* agreement. Moreover, even if Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw refers also indirectly to the thieves’ raids on the East coast of Africa and to the role of the Buḡa tribe in the caravan trade, he states more explicitly that “in Egypt, the slaves are Nubians or Rūm.”⁴⁷ It is clear that an unknown number of slaves were purchased in several areas, including western and eastern sub-Saharan Africa, especially the Horn of Africa.⁴⁸ The number of African military slaves originating from the southeast Egyptian border probably increased from the eleventh century. But it is likely that slaves from further western areas continued to flow in Egypt through or not the Fazzan and the

Berber city of Zuwayla,⁴⁹ which was one of the centers of the slave trade in Northern Africa.⁵⁰ Zuwayla troops, who gave their name to a gate and a quarter of Cairo (*Bāb* and *Hārat Zuwayla*), seem to have mixed Arabs, Berbers, and blacks (freemen and slaves?). They served the Fatimids in Ifrīqiyya then in Egypt, but their number declined substantially from the first decade of the eleventh century, perhaps because the slave trade through the Fazzan decreased.⁵¹

They were probably replaced by purchased blacks from Nubia, as well as by slaves from the Horn of Africa transported by caravan or coastal routes, and purchased in large groups in big markets, especially those of Aswān and Qūṣ.⁵² Ethiopian slaves, who are so difficult to detect in the sources, were reputed for their warlike qualities as well as their loyalty—even before the advent of Islam.⁵³ Of course, it would be difficult to affirm that many Fatimid black soldiers—freeborn or slaves—came from *Bilād al-Ḥabaš* (the word usually applied in Arabic sources to the land and peoples of Ethiopia and “at times to the adjoining areas”⁵⁴). Egyptian authors do not use the term *Ḥabaš* when they write about the Fatimid army. Yet they knew the *Bilād al-Ḥabaš*. Some of them were aware that the master of Egypt had diplomatic relations with the king of Ethiopia, and that the Fatimid caliph allowed the patriarch of Alexandria to send a bishop who would become the head of the Ethiopian church.⁵⁵ As for Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw, he describes a group of Fatimid soldiers that he calls the *Zanğ*, a stereotypic word that theoretically refers to the blacks from East Africa in Arabic medieval texts.⁵⁶ However, the word *Zanğ* is just as vague and unclear as the ethnonym *Sūdān* in the sources. It was associated with Eastern Africa areas as well as other sub-Saharan regions, and referred to free men as well as slaves.⁵⁷

The Fatimids, the Black Soldiers and the Latin Chroniclers of the First Crusade

The Fatimids and the Crusaders

Are the Latin sources of the First Crusade (1095–1099 CE) more accurate about suspected Fatimid soldiers coming from the Horn of Africa? At first sight, such sources are undoubtedly interesting; they sometimes provide surprising details on the composition of enemy armies, especially those of the Fatimids.

According to some Latin chroniclers, the Fatimids and the Crusaders did not see themselves as enemies. They would have been in contact early in 1098 CE, during the siege of Antioch. The reality and frequency of those contacts are not easy to establish.⁵⁸ However there is no doubt that the Fatimids took advantage of the arrival of the crusaders in Syria to reinforce their presence in Palestine. They conquered Jerusalem in the summer of 1098, where they “appointed as deputy . . . a man called Ifṭihār al-Dawla.”⁵⁹ He would have commanded a garrison of 400 cavalymen and footmen, especially *Sūdānī*. Despite his efforts, he failed to prevent the crusaders from capturing the city on July 15, 1099 CE. Then the military vizier al-Afdal (d. 1121 CE), who was the de facto ruler of the Caliphate, left Egypt with an expeditionary force. On August 12, he was routed by the Franks at Ascalon. He fled to Cairo, but the Fatimids made further attempts against the crusaders in Palestine. For several years, they sent armies from Egypt that fought the troops of the king of Jerusalem. They were sometimes defeated, as in Ascalon, and sometimes victorious, as in Ramla in 1105 CE.⁶⁰

Ascalon (August 12, 1099 CE): The Azoparths Came on the Scene

Latin chroniclers provide many details about these expeditions. In general, they stress the strength of “Ethiopian” troops of the Fatimids. For instance, Baldric of Bourgueil, who wrote the *Historia Ierosolimitana* around 1105–1107 CE,⁶¹ provides a description of the battle of Ascalon. He adds some details to the anonymous *Gesta Francorum* upon which he based his account.⁶² In particular, he refers to Ethiopian bowmen, who stood on one knee and had been ordered to lie

still for the fight, without fleeing nor moving forward. As such, they were “much down[ed] by the sword of the Christians . . . as the harvest is mowing.”⁶³ Albert of Aix, who wrote the first part of his *Historia* in the first years of the twelfth century,⁶⁴ also outlines the role played by Ethiopian troops in the battle of Ascalon. According to him, the Franks had been informed of the arrival of an Egyptian army; the fight was especially cruel⁶⁵:

Then, after five weeks had passed, Duke Godfrey, hearing the rumour of an army of gentiles, garrisoned the city [of Jerusalem] and the Tower of David with a loyal guard and, taking with him certain comrades, likewise Robert of Flanders and Tancred, set out for the plains of Ascalon to hear and find out about the affairs and plans of gentiles. There by chance a messenger met him, reporting that Meraius, second to the king of Egypt,⁶⁶ and the entire multitude of gentiles, innumerable as the sands as the sea, were already sailing to Ascalon on the king’s orders, bringing weapons, food, and countless herds, and plenty of all the apparatus of war, and that they had decided to besiege the city of Jerusalem and the Christian exiles. The race of Publicans, and the race with very black skin from the land of Ethiopia, commonly called Azoparth (*gens nigerrime cutis de terra Ethiopie dicta uulgariter Azoparth*), and all the barbarous nations which belonged to the Kingdom of Egypt had decided to hold an assembly there at the city of Ascalon. . . . In this way cruel war shook those who were standing face to face on the two sides. For the Azoparth, whose custom was to wage war in their own fashion on bended knee, were sent ahead in front of the battle and attacked the Gauls fiercely with a hail of arrows, making a thunderous noise with trumpets and drummers in order to frighten off the terrified horses and men with such a horrible

din from the battle and the plains. Those same Ethiopians, dreadful and hideous men, also had iron-tipped and savage whips, which they used to penetrate hauberks and shields with a severe blow, strike horses on the face, and make a terrible noise throughout all the army of the faithful. . . . This battle was fought on a Friday in August, on the birthday of the martyr Euplius, by twenty thousand Christians against three hundred thousand gentiles, Saracens, Arabs, Publicans, and Moors from the land of Ethiopia. It was reported to us by people who were present in that same conflict that thirty thousand of the gentiles fell on the open plains, besides two thousand who were suffocated and killed in the gateway of the city, and not counting those who reckoned to escape the danger of weapons and sans in the waves of the bottomless sea and died without number.

Latin Chronicler's Representations

Although Albert does not give in these extracts the status of Ethiopians soldiers, it is likely that for him, they were not necessarily slave soldiers. Moreover, he also relates that after the conquest of Caesarea by assault, two years later, “five hundred [soldiers] from Ethiopia (*Azopart*) were beheaded, who had been sent by the king of the Egyptians as mercenaries.”⁶⁷ Ethiopian troops are also referred to in various contexts by Albert or other Latin authors like Fulcher of Chartres, Guibert of Nogent or Tudebod. Fulcher, an eyewitness chronicler who also recognized the presence of “black Ethiopians” (*nigri Aethiopes*) during the battle of Ascalon, says that a few months before, during the siege of Jerusalem, there was some “black Ethiopians” among the 500 soldiers who were permitted by Count Raymond of Saint-Gilles to safely leave the city and take refuge in Ascalon.⁶⁸

It appears unlikely that these troops were really Ethiopians: Latin chroniclers of the early twelfth century used the exotic and mythical words “Azopart” or “Aethiopes” to refer to an enemies’ group that is distinguished by color and race and were apparently considered Muslims.⁶⁹ “Aethiopes” was used by Western clerics for a long time, whereas “Nubiani” did not appear until the twelfth century.⁷⁰ Latin “chroniclers and propagandists”⁷¹ of the First Crusade, who were all cultured clerks, turned to Classic and Christian traditions to shape their characterizations of their enemies. This is not the place to elaborate further on the representation of blacks in their work. Let us simply bear in mind that like in Albert’s extracts (above), black Ethiopians were given negative connotations. As in many patristic stories,⁷² they appear as devils and embody monstrosity.⁷³ Moreover, as Muslims or members of a Muslim army, they could only be pagans whose slaughter was morally right and necessary.

Between Representation and Reality: Number and Function of the Blacks

The Fatimid Army: A Multiethnic, Too Large, and Inefficient Instrument

In any case, these “Ethiopians” sometimes even represent for Latin authors a “synecdoche for the whole of Egyptian troops.”⁷⁴ But they focused on them although the Fatimid army included other corps. Indeed, the Fatimid army was a multiethnic one, including Berbers, blacks, Arabs, Turks, Daylamis, Kurdish, and Armenians.⁷⁵ It is traditionally divided by scholars into three categories: *al-Mašāriqa*, “the Easterners”; *al-Maġāriba*, the “Westerners”; *al-Sūdān*.⁷⁶ As William Hamblin demonstrated more than forty years ago, “each of three divisions could potentially contain a number of different cultural, linguistic and religious groups,” and “the actual numbers, sources and relative proportion of the soldiers in each of these groups varied greatly throughout the history of the Fatimid dynasty.”⁷⁷ For instance, the *Maġāriba* gradually

disappeared whereas the Armenians became increasingly important among the Easterners at the end of the eleventh century.

As for the troop numbers, any estimate is in doubt because the figures given by the sources are sometimes symbolic and/or rhetoric.⁷⁸ What is clear is that these figures are often overstated. For instance, the data provided by Nāṣir-ī Ḥusraw just for the corps stationed in Fustāt amounted to 215,000 men, to which must be added the other troops of the Fatimid Empire. The overstatement is obvious, especially given that it would not have been possible for the state to maintain such an army in a city.⁷⁹

In fact, one can only assume that in the eleventh century, the regular army may have exceeded 15,000 men. Before the great crisis (*al-šidda al-‘uẓma*), expeditionary forces usually amounted from 5,000 to 10,000 men, sometimes as many of 20,000 soldiers. It seems that it decreased slightly during the vizierate of Badr al-Ġamālī (1073–1094 CE) and his son al-Afḍal (1094–1121 CE), who is said to have built a more professional force. The entire regular army should have reached up to 20,000 men⁸⁰; an expeditionary force probably would not have exceeded the 10,000 men gathered by Šams al-Ma‘ālī that was defeated by the Franks in Syria in 1105 CE.⁸¹ Then, the sources only allowed to assume that the recruitment pool did not decline between the death of al-Afḍal (d. 1121 CE) and the fall of the Fatimids (1171 CE).

Actually, it is likely that the number of soldiers increased during the last decades of the dynasty. According to al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil (d. 1200 CE), a knowledgeable high official in the Fatimids’ and Saladin’s service, “40,000 cavalymen (*fāris*) and more than 30,000 black footmen (*rāḡil min al-Sūdān*)” were registered in the *Dīwān al-Ġayš* (army bureau), during the vizierate of Ṭalā’i’ b. Ruzzayk (1153–1161 CE).⁸² The information available about the last years of the Caliphate varies considerably among sources and is especially difficult to interpret. Some

authors assert that the Fatimids were not able to gather a strong army whereas others describe a multitude of soldiers—especially black soldiers—involved in the fights against Saladin’s troops.⁸³

As for the *Sūdān*, the sources are unanimous: they were almost always the most numerous group, and totaled not less than tens of thousands of men. Moreover, they also allow one to assume—especially in light of Ibn Muyassar’s chronicle⁸⁴—that if the early Fatimids of Egypt were actually engaged in recruitment, their number increased extensively later on. The period of peak recruitment would have been the eleventh century, under the Caliphs al-Ḥākim (r. 996–1021 CE) and even more al-Mustaṣir (r. 1035–1095 CE), who is sometimes nicknamed *ṣāhib al-Sūdān* (the Master of the blacks).⁸⁵ Their prominence would have been a direct result of the support of al-Mustaṣir’s mother, a black woman. Even if the information is less accurate for later periods, it seems that they remained numerous until the end of the Fatimid Caliphate in 1171 CE. Of course, their numbers and military and political influence were somewhat diminished whereas other ethnic groups, such as the Turks or Armenians, became more powerful. In particular, the Blacks are often described as the worst culprits and the main victims of the internal factional struggles that recurrently weakened the Caliphate, especially at the end of the so-called *al-šidda al-‘uzma* in which they are said to have been largely opposed to the Turkish units of the army. However, the Fatimids could never do without the black recruitment. Badr al-Ġamālī (d. 1094 CE), who brought an end to the great civil war, had his own black bodyguard.⁸⁶ On the contrary, as a result of what was likely increasing recruitment during the first half of the twelfth century, they appear in the sources as the main opposition force to Saladin’s army after he finished off the Caliphate in 1171. Then, even if the ferocity of this attack against rebelling blacks can probably be attributed in part to racial bias, it also reflects the

fact that they constituted a major military threat.⁸⁷ So it is possible that they were as or more numerous when Saladin ended the Caliphate than a century before.

In fact, whatever one believes about the reliability of data mainly given by Sunni authors that intended to discredit a Shi‘i caliphate, it should be stressed that they all described a too large army and rather negatively heterogeneous, in which black troops, often just described as slaves and less prestigious infantrymen, were always the most numerous group.⁸⁸ This probably reflects a linked common stereotype and negative representation and socio-racial bias concerning the blacks. In short, the Fatimid army is often represented as an overstuffed and inefficient force whose core was made up of qualitatively, socially, and probably racially inferior soldiers.

Indeed, as we have seen, black soldiers were necessary slaves for Arab authors. The following excerpt contrasts such a heterogeneous and large army with the efficient white instrument, limited in number, built by Saladin: “When their dynasty disappeared due to Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Yūsuf b. Ayyūb (Saladin), he ended an Egyptian army (*ḡund Miṣr*) of black slaves (*‘abīd al-sūd*), Egyptian emirs, Bedouins (*‘urbān*), Armenians and others. He create a new army only composed of Kurds and Turks. His troops (*‘asākir*) reached in Egypt no more than twelve thousand horsemen (*fāris*). It were scattered after his death. Only eight thousand horsemen remained with his son al-Malik al-‘Azīz ‘Uṭmān.”⁹⁰

Black Military Slaves *and* Freeborn?

Thus for al-Maqrīzī, the Egyptian army was mainly made up of black soldiers, who were all military slaves. It is not so easy to transcend this representation. Indeed, despite the many studies on the Fatimid army that have been published over the last decades, the *Sūdān* often continue to be viewed as a slave group that was ethnically, socially, and politically dominated. However, non-slave *Sūdān* could have been enlisted as free mercenaries as well. Of course, it is

not easy to assume that some of Albert's Azoparths were really black free mercenaries. But such soldiers could have come from Nubia and from other sub-Saharan African areas. Given the scarcity of information on Zuwayla troops, it is difficult to assert that none of the blacks belonging to this group were freemen. The information is also lacking for the Maṣāmida Berbers, who, according to Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw, were black and served as infantrymen.⁹¹ He also distinguished two groups of *Sūdānī*: the main group, known as the '*abīd al-širā*', and the *Zanğ*, as if he had wished to outline that some of the black troops were slaves and others freemen.⁹² But here again, we must keep in mind that nothing can be asserted or demonstrated concerning the word *Zanğ* without using uncertain circumlocutions.

This is not to say that black military slaves were not the main military force in Fatimid Egypt. There is no incompatibility between the overstatements more or less linked with a lack of information and/or negative representation, and the assertion that the blacks, mainly viewed as slaves, were the most numerous group in the army. Moreover, we must remember that it was not new. Black soldiers had been recruited for the Egyptian army long before the Fatimid conquest of Egypt. Before them, the Abbasid governors as well as the Tulunids (868–896 CE) and the Ikhshidids (935–969 CE) used black troops. For instance, Michael the Syrian reports that the second son of al-Sarī b. al-Ḥakam (d. 820 CE), 'Ubaydallāh b. al-Sarī, who ruled Fuṣṭāṭ from 822 until 826 CE, owned 80,000 black military slaves.⁹³

This latter overstatement is not surprising, because medieval authors (and especially the Egyptian ones) conveyed the same representations. Several centuries after Michael the Syrian, al-Maqrīzī put in perspective the changes that occurred in military recruitment strength and the growing role played by slave soldiers in Egyptian armies. According to him, the army was transformed into a force mainly based on slaves (*al-'abīd*) under Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn (r. 868–884

CE), who furthermore was known to have built separate quarters for the blacks. In a text mainly devoted to military slaves, more than the figures, which obviously are presented cautiously, the emphasis is on the dynamic of enslavement⁹⁴:

“. . . and their number reached more than 24,000 Turkish *ġulām*, 40,000 blacks (*Aswad*), and 7,000 free pensioned [soldiers] (*ħurr murtaziq*).”⁹⁵

Uncontrolled and Uncontrollable

Black soldiers were not only seen as the most numerous group. They were also sometimes considered dangerous to the established order—probably because of racial bias, but also because they were military men, and therefore dangerous. According to Ibn al-Furāt, the blacks were so numerous that: “there was a black (*Sūdān*) quarter in all inhabited place in Egypt.” In addition to being so numerous, the blacks were uncontrolled and uncontrollable: “no *šihna* (an urban and military official) and no *wālī* (governor), were able to gain access” to their quarter.⁹⁶ Again, an analogy can be made with a situation that would have prevailed centuries before. It is said that the inhabitants of Fustāt complained to Ibn Ṭulūn that the soldiers, especially black soldiers, continuously disturbed the Friday prayer.⁹⁷

Sūdān troops are also described as having more or less colonized some Egyptian regions, especially Upper Egypt (*al-Ša ‘īd*)⁹⁸ where, moreover, some black nomads like the Buġa tribe traveled. According to Arab chroniclers, they usually retired to *al-Ša ‘īd* during the struggles in which they were involved. Despite the governors appointed by the Fatimid state, they controlled southern Egypt, and more precisely *al-Ša ‘īd al-a ‘lā*, “the Upper Ša ‘īd.” This region is represented as a safe retreat for them as well as all men or groups that had rebelled against the central power.⁹⁹ Indeed, such groups took refuge in Upper Egypt long before and after the Fatimids.¹⁰⁰

A More Complex Reality: Social Status; Role on the Battlefield

Wherever they came from and whatever their legal status (slavery, manumission, or free), blacks also had key positions in the management of the army and public affairs. It may well be that some *Sūdān* were members of the twelfth-century elite *Šibyān al-Ḥāṣṣ*, even if information is too sparse to be certain.¹⁰¹ However, it is safer to assume that some *Ustād*-s were *Sūdānī*. In the Egyptian and Fatimid contexts, this term was used for various high officials serving the caliph as well as for military officers and instructors. A number (or most?) of these *Ustād*-s were eunuchs, but probably not all of them, as it is still often assumed.¹⁰² Some of them had long and successful careers, like *al-Ḥādīm al-Aswad* Mi‘ḍad, a black emancipated eunuch who served the Fatimid princess Sitt al-Mulk (d. 1023 CE) and educated the Caliph al-Zāhir (r. 1021–1036 CE), who gave him major military and administrative responsibilities.¹⁰³

The *Sūdān* were not only mingled with men of other races as court officials: some indices make also clear that the regular army contained a single *Sūdānī* corps with its own officers, like the *Rayḥāniyya*, who seem to have played a major military and political role after the death of the Caliph al-Ḥāfiẓ (r. 1130–1140),¹⁰⁴ as well as mixed regiments.¹⁰⁵ It was even the case for elite units like the so-called *al-Ġuyūšiyya*, which may have mixed Armenians, *Sūdān*, and other races at one time or another—perhaps soon after Badr al-Ġamālī founded it following his establishment of a military vizierate in Egypt in 1073 CE.¹⁰⁶

This is not to say that the blacks could not form cohesive groups with a certain spirit of solidarity when it was necessary to do so, especially during times of unrest. In some cases, this solidarity was a racial one: it is difficult not to see the racial tension in which black soldiers were opposed to other races (mainly the Turks) as a reflection of reality. However, their attitude was

probably also—or much more—determined by the social status of the *Sūdān* held in the Fatimid army and society.

Moreover, the sources mainly reflect their low status: that of lower paid and less respected infantry soldiers, and again, there is no reason to think that this does not reflect a certain reality. However, black soldiers did not form the homogeneous group whose attitude was determined by the race so often described in the sources.¹⁰⁷ On the contrary, they belonged, like other men, to different groups, ethnically and socially heterogeneous, whose attitude and activities were guided by their status and the interrelationships that arose from various factors, including potential ancestral relationships.

Within this framework, it is worth noting that even if the blacks historically served mainly as infantrymen,¹⁰⁸ some of them, slaves or freemen, were not reduced to infantry units. This was clearly the case at the beginning of the Caliphate. Numerous references show that there were many black horsemen in the army that conquered Egypt at the end of the tenth century. According to Arab authors, in particular Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw, al-Maqrīzī, and al-Qalqaṣandī, they mainly served as heavy and light infantry using various arms, especially javelins, swords, sling stones, and maces.¹⁰⁹ Some of them are also described serving as archers, which is no surprise, because black Africans, especially Nubians and Ethiopians, had long been recognized as skilled archers.¹¹⁰ However, there are also indications in the sources that black soldiers may have served as horsemen. After all, *Ṣibyān al-Ḥāṣṣ* are often described as skilled horsemen (*fursān*). Moreover, the *Ġuyūṣiyya* corps, which mixed people from different races or countries, was made up of both cavalry and infantry. As for the powerful Mi‘ḍad (above), he was awarded in 1024 CE the *laqab* (honorary title) *Abū al-Fawāris* (Father of the Knights), a prestigious title attributed in

Arab tradition to famous horsemen who were considered masters of *furūsiyya*, like the mythical *fāris* (knight) and poet ‘Antara b. Šaddād.¹¹¹

In addition, Latin chroniclers of the First Crusade described a group of mounted *Sūdān*. To some extent, these authors allow to go beyond the limits of the Arabic sources on the role of black soldiers on the battlefield. Indeed, even al-Ṭarsūsī *Tabṣirat*, a *furūsiyya* treatise written for Saladin at the beginning of the Ayyubid period but mainly reflecting the previous Fatimid tradition of war, leaves us dissatisfied.¹¹² In particular, this treatise, which is missing a section dealing with the art of war cultivated by nations generally present in this type of text,¹¹³ does not help us to understand how black soldiers were managed on the battlefield or how they were trained. One of the main issues is if black military slaves were purchased young enough to be shaped as specialized warriors. As it is often the case in military history, they probably were trained in various ways, according to the context (e.g., how and by whom they were purchased; how the military training system was organized, what units they were to integrate). There is no reason to believe that black military slaves were always and necessarily excluded from the *huğra* (barracks) education and training system, which may have dated back to the late Ikhshidid period, as attested to by the Arabic sources in the middle of the eleventh century, and that was renewed by al-Afḍal (d. 1121 CE) at the beginning of the twelfth century. It seems that after his defeat in Ascalon (August 12, 1099 CE), al-Afḍal introduced something new: he decided to recruit freeborn sons of Fatimid soldiers in order to stand up to the challenge posed by the crusaders.¹¹⁴ However, Ibn al-Ṭuwayr, who gives a detailed explanation of al-Afḍal’s decision, never referred to a particular race. He only said that seven barracks were built, and that 3,000 men who were soldiers’ sons (*min awlād al-ağnād talāṭat ālāf rāğil*) were selected, to whom officers and horses were assigned as well as offensive and defensive arms.¹¹⁵

However they were trained, their effectiveness on the battlefield depended on several factors, in particular, their relationship with cavalry when they fought on foot. It is unnecessary to talk about their supposed inferiority in combat that is sometimes conveyed in the sources: the difficulties that the semi-heavy Ayyubid cavalry faced to defeat the former Fatimid forces (which included a great number of blacks) rebelling against Saladin showed their warlike qualities. Moreover, we need to recall that some chroniclers of the First Crusade described black enemies as the most efficient and dangerous Fatimid soldiers. Thus, according to Albert of Aix, they faced an attack of the king of Jerusalem and his men, during the battle of Ramla in 1105 CE, with courage, and they put them to flight and allowed the Egyptians to be victorious¹¹⁶:

The unbearable people of Ethiopia, who were stationed in the middle of the thousands of gentiles attacked the king and his men with cudgels made in the manner of hammers from iron and lead, and they hit not only the knights but also their horses hard on the forehead and their other limbs, driving them away from the battle by their severe blows.¹¹⁷ Others were surrounding the admirable men and ceaselessly striking them with arrows and sling stones, like a relentless hail falling from the sky, until, no longer able to bear the assault, the king and all his men were put to flight.

Conclusion

In Egypt, employing black troops dated back at least to Pharaonic times. Using black soldiers was an old Mediterranean practice, whether they were free mercenaries, imported through the slave trade, or incorporated in the army as enslaved prisoners of war or as part of a tribute sent by an African sovereign.¹¹⁸ In ancient times, Egypt was not the only Middle Eastern country that utilized such an employment. Black soldiers, especially slaves, are reported in

several areas; they continued to play an important military role after the emergence of Islam, and sometimes a major role, like in early Abbasid Iraq and Fatimid Egypt. It is said that Egyptian black soldiers were slaughtered in several battles, especially during the great civil war of the mid-eleventh century and after Saladin destroyed the Shi'i Caliphate. The latter was undoubtedly a huge blow for the blacks. Their numbers certainly declined, but they did not completely disappear from armies. Even if the tactical changes and the evolution of combat techniques gave the advantage to Easterners' (especially Turkish) heavy or semi-heavy horsemen, black soldiers were still reported in both the Ayyubid and Mamluk armies.

However, we should avoid giving in to the temptation to look at the blacks as a uniform group. In Fatimid Egypt, black soldiers were included in single-race or racially mixed units. Some of them were entrusted with functions in important strategic areas of the army and the state. This does not mean that most of them did not belong to the "dominated mass,"¹¹⁹ but it can be said without doubt that blacks were not a homogeneous group whose members shared the same attitudes and beliefs. Was there any difference with other periods and other regions?¹²⁰ It is a difficult question to answer, but in his survey of Islamic African military slavery, Bacharach has begun to show that only a keen reading of the sources can allow scholars to transcend their scarcity, which sometimes must be linked to the racial bias of their authors.

The real problem is that the sources are often ruthless for us. When we read them, we look like visitors trying to enter a strange house. Some doors are open but behind them we find behind opaque curtains through which it is not so easy to see anything. Too often, the sources do not allow us to get accurate answers to the questions we ask. Thus, it is often difficult, if not impossible, to know if a certain number of blacks serving in Fatimid armies were freemen or whether they were freeborn or emancipated slaves. Should we be satisfied with the somewhat

stereotypic portrayals in the sources, where almost all blacks are included in the racial and/or social group generally designated by the term *‘abīd* (slaves)? To my mind, the answer to this question is no. It is safe to assume that manumitted slaves—eunuchs or not—were as numerous among blacks as other races.

It is also not so easy to know where black soldiers came from. A great number certainly came from Nubia. The texts are unambiguous on the continuous arrival of black slaves from Nubia, whether they were sent by Nubian kings or imported through the slave trade. The information is scarcer on other types of importation. However, one cannot shake off the impression that certain *Sūdān* came from western sub-Saharan Africa, even if the flow seem to have decreased starting in the eleventh century. A similar idea comes to mind regarding the Horn of Africa, including Ethiopia. As stated, however, nothing can be asserted without doubt given the inaccuracy of the sources.

At first sight, the sources also convey a rather peculiar representation of the social, political, and military roles played by blacks in Fatimid Egypt. However, wherever they came from and whatever their social status, black soldiers, whose “Egyptianness” seem indisputable, were major players in the history of the Fatimid Caliphate. Medieval authors, who sometimes wrote negative representations of the blacks, which were certainly linked with racial bias, and who were not necessarily accurate when dealing with other races, acknowledged these roles.

¹ This paper is part of the ERC COG project HornEast that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (Grant Agreement No. 726206).

The bibliography on the rise and the expansion of the Fatimid Empire is extensive. See especially A. L. Udovitch, “Merchants and *Amirs*: Government and Trade in Eleventh-Century

Egypt,” *Asian and African Studies* 22 (1988): 53–72; Marianne Barrucand, ed., *L’Égypte fatimide: son art et son histoire* (Paris: Institut du Monde Arabe, 1999); Michael Brett, *The Rise of the Fatimids: The World of the Mediterranean and the Middle East in the Tenth Century CE* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2001); Paul Walker, “The Ismaili Da‘wa and the Fatimid Caliphate,” in *The Cambridge History of Egypt, Vol. 1: Islamic Egypt, 640–1517*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 120–50.

² In medieval Arabic sources this great crisis is called ‘*al-šidda al-‘uzma*.

³ These events are covered in several books. See, for example, Paula A. Sander, “The Fatimid State, 969–1171,” in Petry, *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, 1:151–74.

⁴ See especially Beshir I. Beshir, “Fatimid Military Organization,” *Der Islam* 55 (1978): 37–58; Yaacov Lev, “The Fatimid Army, AH 358–427/968–1036 CE: Military and Social Aspects,” *Asian and African Studies* 14 (1980): 165–92; Yaacov Lev, “Army, Regime and Society in Fatimid Egypt, 358–427/968–1036,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 13 (1987): 337–66; Yaacov Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1991); Yaacov Lev, “Regime, Army and Society in Medieval Egypt, 9th–12th Centuries,” in *War and Society in the Eastern Mediterranean, 7th–15th Centuries*, ed. Yaacov Lev (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1997), 115–52; William J. Hamblin, “The Fatimid Army during the Early Crusades” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1985); William J. Hamblin, “Egypt: Fatimids, Later (1073–1171): Army and Administration,” in *Encyclopaedia of African History*, 3 vols., ed. Kevin Shillington (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2005), 435–6; Hatim Mahamid, “Persians in Fatimid Egypt,” *Journal of Middle Eastern and North African Intellectual and Cultural Studies* 4, no. 2 (2006): 37–60; Ayman Fu’ād Sayyid, *al-Dawla al-Fāṭimiyya Fī Miṣr: Tafsiṛ Ġadīd* (Cairo, Egypt: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 2007), 657–723; Abbès Zouache,

Armées et combats en Syrie de la première croisade à la mort de Nūr al-Dīn (1097–1174).

Analyse comparée de chroniques latines et arabes médiévales (Damascus, Syria: Institut Français du Proche-Orient, 2008); Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh Sālim al-‘Amā’ira, *al-Ġayš al-Fāṭimī, 297–567 AH/909–1171 AD* (Amman, Jordan: Dār Kunūz al-Ma‘rifa al-‘Ilmiyya, 2010).

⁵ Black soldiers of the Muslim armies has been studied by Daniel Pipes. See Daniel Pipes, “Black Soldiers in Early Muslim Armies,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 13 (1980): 87–92; also see Jere L. Bacharach, “African Military Slaves in the Muslim Middle East: The Cases of Iraq (869–955) and Egypt (868–1171),” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13 (1981): 471–95; P. G. Forand, “Early Muslims Relations with Nubia,” *Der Islam* (1972): 111–21.

⁶ See, for example, Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990): “With the fall of the Fatimids, the black troops again paid the price of their loyalty. Among the most faithful supporters of the Fatimid Caliphate, they were also among the last to resist its overthrow by Saladin, ostensibly the caliph’s vizier but in fact the new master of Egypt” (66). Note that Lewis also assigns a collective loyalty to the black troops of the Tulunids, who ruled Egypt from 868 to 905. Lewis’s statement is sometimes followed and more precisely assigned to slave black soldiers. See, for example, Murray Gordon, *L’Esclavage dans le monde arabe*. Paris: Robert Laffont, 1987. Translated by *Slavery in the Arab World* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1989), 69–72. See also Salah Trabelsi, “L’esclavage dans l’Orient musulman du Ier/VIIIe et IVe/Xe siècles: quelques brèves mises au point », in *Les traites et les esclavages*, In *Perspectives historiques et contemporaines*, ed. Myriam Cottias et al. (Paris: Karthala, CIRESC, 2010), 77–92.

⁷ al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a ‘šā fī šinā ‘at al-inšā’*, 14 vols, ed. (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d.).

⁸ Stuart Hall, “The Work of Representation,” in *Representations: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage and Open University, 2003, 13–74.

⁹ This also applies to the large number of administrative documents produced in pre-Crusade Europe: Bernard S. Bachrach, “Writing Military History from Narrative Sources. Norman Battlefield Tactics, c. 1000,” in *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources: Using Historical Sources to Discover*, ed. Joel T. Rosenthal (New York: Routledge, 2012), 86.

¹⁰ Of course, this general statement must be put into perspective with respect to the periods, the countries, and the authors concerned.

¹¹ See Zouache, *Armées et combats*, ch. 3.

¹² Clifford E. Bosworth, “Khurasān,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., ed. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1979), 5:57–61.

¹³ *Sūdān* is defined by Arab lexicographers as one the plural form of *aswad*, the other being *sūd*. (see, for example, al-Zabīdī, *Tāğ al- ‘Arūs*, (Cairo, Egypt: Dār al-Hadāya, n.d.), , 8:225). *Al-Bīḍān* (properly “the Whites”) are sometimes defined as “the people who are the opposite of the *Sūdān*” (al-Rāzī, *Muḥtār al-Šahḥāh*, ed. Yūsuf al-Šayḥ Muḥammad, Beirut and Saida, Lebanon: al-Maktabat al- ‘Aṣriyya and al-Dār al-Numūdağiyya, 1999), 42; al-Zabīdī, *Tāğ al- ‘Arūs*, vol. 18, 263). However, the lexicographers do not explicitly refer to the color (*lawn*) “black” when they use or define the word *Bilād al-Sūdān*.

¹⁴ J.-L. Triaud and A. S. Kaye, “Sūdān, Bilād al-,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1997), 9:747–50. Moreover, he considers that “Bilād al-Sūdān”

was “the general name in pre-modern Arabic sources for the Saharo-Sahelian sector of Africa, that lying south of the Maghreb, Libya and Egypt and stretching from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Red Sea in the east.” See also Jean-Charles Ducène, “Conceptualisation des espaces sahéliens chez les auteurs arabes du Moyen Âge,” *Afriques*, April 2013, <http://afriques.revues.org/1114> (accessed March 14, 2016).

¹⁵ Daniel Pipes, *Slave Soldiers and Islam: The Genesis of a Military System* (facsimile of the 1981 ed.; Charleston, MA: Acme Bookbinding, 2003), 195–98. He lists the “slave terminology” in Arabic language.

¹⁶ The word *al-abqa*‘ (plural *buq*‘*ān* or *biq*‘*ān*), which would require a comprehensive study, is mainly defined in the numerous explanations of the *hadith* reported by Abū Hurayra: *Yūšiq an yusta*‘*mal* ‘*alaykum buq*‘*ān al-Šām* (the verb *yusta*‘*mal* is sometimes replaced by the verbs *ya*‘*mal* ‘*alaykum* or *ya*‘*tīq*). For example, according to Ibn al-Ġawzī (*Ġarīb al-Ḥadīṭ*, ed., ‘*Abd al-Mu*‘*ī Amīn al-Qal*‘*aġī* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1985), 1:94–95), it refers to the “color mixing” (*iḥtilāṭ al-alwān*)—white and yellow; white and black—then to “the mixing of two races” (*al-tanāsul min ġinsayn*), that is *al-Rūm wa-l-Sūdān* (Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār Ṣādir, 1414 AH), 8:17, who along with other authors criticizes Abū ‘Ubayd explanation referring to the *Rūm* and the *Šaqāliba*). Some authors believe that *al-buq*‘*ān* refers to children that were so called “because there is within themselves the black of Arab [men] and the white of Rūm [wives]” (Al-Samīn al-Ḥalabī, ‘*Umdat al-Ḥuffāz fī Tafsīr Ašraf al-Alfāz*, ed. Muḥammad Bāsīl ‘Uyūn al-Sūd (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1996), 1:217). See also Rāzī b. Abī Ḥātim, ‘*Ilal al-Ḥadīṭ*, ed. Sa’ d b. ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥumayyid and Ḥālid ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ġuraysī (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Maṭābi‘ al-Ḥumaydī, 2006), 4:144 and n4; *Niṣwān al-Yamanī*, ed. Ḥusayn b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Umarī et al. (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu‘āsir,

1999), 1:594; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār Ṣādir, 1414 AH), 8:17–18; Ibn Qutayba, *‘Uyūn al-Aḥbār*, ed. (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1418 AH), 1:59; Al-Nīsābūrī, *Muğma‘ al-Amṭāl*, ed. Muḥammad M. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Ma‘rifa, n.d.), 1:96.

¹⁷ See the use of this *topos* by al-Mas‘ūdī (10th century) and other Arab authors in Givoanni R. Ruffini, *Medieval Nubia: A Social and Economic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 69–70, who relies on Giovanni Vantini, *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia* (Heidelberg, Germany and Warsaw, Poland: Akademie der Wissenschaften and Polish Academy of Sciences, 1975).

¹⁸ Ibn Muyassar, *al-Muntaqā min Aḥbār Miṣr*, ed. Ayman Fu’ād Sayyid (Cairo, Egypt: IFAO, 1981), 24–25, 31–33, 58, 138, 149.

¹⁹ Ibn Muyassar, *al-Muntaqā min Aḥbār Miṣr*, 24–25.

²⁰ Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw travelled for seven years (1045–1052 CE) from Central Asia to the Near East. He arrived in Cairo in 1047, and stayed three years. For a discussion of his sojourn in Cairo, see Alice C. Hunsberger, “A Traveler’s Account: Nasir-I Khusraw in 5th/11th-Century Cairo,” in *Living in Historic Cairo: Past and Present in an Islamic City*, ed. F. Daftary, E. Fernea, and A. Nanji (London: Azimuth Editions/The Institute of Ismaili Studies/University of Washington Press, 2010), 36–71. The description of the review: *Safar Nāmāh*. Translated into Arabic by Yaḥyā al-Ḥaššāb (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Kitāb al-Ġadīd, 1983), 94; *Safar Nāmāh*. Edited and translated into French by Charles Schefer (Paris, E. Leroux 1881, repr. Amsterdam, 1970), 138. See Bacharach, “African Military Slaves,” 483–84; Hamblin, *Fatimid Army*, 304–7, and *passim*; Lev, *State and Society*, 93–4.

²¹ Or “men”: *rağul*. Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw, *Safar Nāmāh* (al-Ḥaššāb), 94–95.

²² Nasir-I Khusraw, *Safar Nāmah* (al-Ḥaššāb), 100; Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw, *Safar Nāmah*, 145.

²³ Ibn al-Qalānisī, *Dayl Ta'rīḥ Dimašq*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār (Damascus, Syria: Dār Ḥasān li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Našr, 1983), 79–82.

²⁴ Al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'sā*, 3:553. See also 5:405.

²⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz al-Ḥunafā' bi-Aḥbār al-A'imma al-Fāṭimiyyīn al-Ḥulafā'*, 3 vols., ed. Ḡamāl al-Dīn al-Šayyāl and Muḥammad Ḥilmī Muḥammad Aḥmad (Cairo, Egypt: al-Maḡlis al-A'lā li-l-Šu'ūn al-Islāmiyya and Laḡna Iḥyā al-Turāt al-Islāmī, 1967–73), 2:265–66, 3:85; Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iz wa-l-I'tibār fī Dīkr al-Ḥiṭaṭ wa-l-Ātār*, (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1418 AH), 2:158, 289, 435. See also Ibn Taḡrībirdī, *al-Nuḡūm al-Zāhira fī Mulūk Mišr wa-l-Qāhira*, 16 vols. (Cairo, Egypt: Wizārat al-Ṭaqāfa wa-l-Iršād al-Qawmī, Dār al-Kutub, n.d.), 5:18; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab* (Cairo, Egypt: Dār al-Kutub wa-l-Waṭā'iq al-Qawmiyya, 1423 AH), 28:174, 225.

²⁶ For a discussion of this term, see André Raymond, *Le Caire* (Paris: Fayard, 1993; translated by Willard Wood, *Cairo*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 159: “The residential areas were organized into quarters [*harat*], defined by Maqrīzī as ‘a place where the houses are close together.’” He draws up a list of 38 *harat*.

²⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ*, Vol. 3, 28, 40.

²⁸ *Zuqāq*: “alley” or “small quarter”; *Darb*: “cul de sac”; *Suwayqa*: a *sūq* in miniature.

²⁹ See also Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ*, , 3:41. *Faraḥiyya* is sometimes spelled *Faraḡiyya*; see al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ*, 2:364; al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'sā*, 3:408 (*al-Sūdān al-ma'rūfūn bi-l-ṭā'ifa al-Faraḥiyya*), 581; Lev, “The Fatimid Army, AH 358–427/968–1036 CE: Military and Social Aspects,” 180, or, according to Hamblin, *Faraḡiyya*. Hamblin, *Fatimid Army*, 55.

³⁰ Al-Ḥusayniyya, outside Bāb al-Naṣr: one of the suburbs where the Fatimids quartered their troops (al-Qalqaṣandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a ṣā*, 3:405). On his location, see also Doris Behrens-Abouseif, “The North-eastern Extension of Cairo under the Mamluks,” *Annales Islamologiques* 17 (1981): 160–65; Aymān Fu’ād Sayyid, *La Capitale de l’Égypte jusqu’à l’époque fatimide. Al-Qāhira et al-Fuṣṭāṭ, essai de reconstitution topographique* (Beirut, Lebanon: Franz Steiner, 1998), 182.

³¹ *Al-Sa’diyya* were “part of al-Ḥākīm’s escort (*rikāb*)”: Lev, “The Fatimid Army”, 180. . See especially al-Maqrīzī, *Itti’āz al-Ḥunafā’*, 2:128 (*al-’abīd al-Sa’diyya*), 165 (*al-Sa’diyya*).

³² Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti’āz al-Ḥunafā’*, 2:166 (*al-riḡāl al-Ġawwāla*), 168 (*al-’abīd al-Ġawwāla*); Lev, “The Fatimid Army”, 180 (*al-Ġawwāla* were “patrol and guard units”). For a description of all regiments of the Fatimid army mentioned in the sources, see the works quoted above in note 3, especially those of Beshir, Hamblin, Lev, and Zouache.

³³ Ibn al-Furāt, *Ta’rīḥ al-Duwal wa-l-Mulūk*, ed. Ḥassan M. al-Šammā’ (al-Baṣra, Iraq: Maṭba‘at Ḥaddād, 1967), 4:I:7. The origin of *al-Rayḥāniyya* corps is unclear. They should have been called after ‘Azīz al-Dawla Rayḥān, a eunuch who played a very influential role at the Fatimid Court at the middle of the eleventh century. See also Usāma b. Munqid, *Kitāb al-I’tibār*, ed. Philip Hitti (Cairo, Egypt: Maktabat al-Ṭaqāfa al-Dīniyya, n.d.), 6–7; al-Maqrīzī, *Itti’āz al-Ḥunafā’*, 2:166; al-Qalqaṣandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a ṣā*, 3:408; Bacharach, “African Military Slaves,” 486; Hamblin, *Fatimid Army*, 51–52; Lev, “Army, Regime and Society,” 347. Note that they were garrisoned inside Cairo wall (in front of the gate named Bāb al-Futūḥ).

³⁴ These texts are used by Beshir I. Beshir, “New Lights on Nubian Fāṭimid Relations,” *Arabica* 22, no. 1 (1974): 15–24. Because the Bianquis and Sayyid edition was not published, he used the manuscript kept at the Escorial, Madrid, Spain, cod. 534, part 2.

³⁵ The text edited has *Al-Muḥdaṭa bi-Aswān* (“Al-Muḥdaṭa in Aswan”). Ibn Ḥawqal (d. 977 CE), *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-Arḍ*, ed. Johannes H. Kramers. 2 vols. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1938–39, 2 vols.; repr. Beirut, Lebanon: *Dār Sādir*, 1:45, says that this city (*madīna*) was located in front of Aswan and that it belonged to the Rabī‘a tribe. See also Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-Arḍ*, 1:133.

³⁶ Not clearly identified. See the few information given by Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣūrat al-Arḍ*, 1:45 (in his days, the master of Muḥdaṭa was one Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abī Yazīd of the Rabī‘a Arab tribe); Beshir, “New Lights,” 16, n2 (after Ibn Ḥawqal and al-Maqrīzī). According to Joseph Cuoq, *Islamisation de la Nubie chrétienne: VIIe-XVIe siècle* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1986), 46: “en 397/1006, Abū al-Makārim Hibat Allāh avait succédé à son père Ibn Abī Yazīd.”

³⁷ Al-Musabbihī, *Aḥbār Miṣr*, 11–12. This text is paraphrased (with some minor differences) by al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz al-Ḥunafā’*, 2:134.

³⁸ Al-Musabbihī, *Aḥbār Miṣr*, 34.

³⁹ After Lennart Sundelin in *Encyclopaedia of African History*, ed. Kevin Shillington (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn/Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 1:751.

⁴⁰ Indeed, there is a voluminous literature on the *baqt*. See especially Yūsuf Faḍl Ḥasan, *The Arabs and the Sudan: From the Seventh to the Early Sixteenth Century* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 1967), 14, 25–26, 42–50, 90–93, and A. Lokkegard, “Baqt,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., ed. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1960), 1:966; P. L. Shinnie, “Christian Nubia,” in *The Cambridge History of Africa*. vol. 2: *c. 500 B.C.–A.D. 1050* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 556–88; Martin Hinds and Hamdi Sakkout, “A Letter From the Governor of Egypt to the King of Nubia and Muqurra Concerning Egyptian-Nubian Relations in 141/758,” in *Studia Arabica and Islamica, Festschrift for Iḥsān ‘Abbās on*

His Sixtieth Birthday, ed. Wadād al-Qāḍī (Beirut, Lebanon: American University of Beirut, 1981), 209–29; , Vassilios Christides, “Sudanese at the Time of the Arab Conquest of Egypt,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 75, no. 1 (1982): 6–13; David Ayalon, “The Nubian Dam,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 12 (1989): 372–90; Heinz Halm, “Der nubische Baqt,” in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, vol. 2, ed. Urbain Vermeulen and Daniel De Smet (Leuven, Belgium: Orientalia Analecta, 1998), 63–103. The *baqt* has been also examined by Robin Seignobos in his thesis, “L’Égypte et la Nubie à l’époque médiévale. Élaboration et transmission des savoirs historiographiques (641–ca. 1500),” ch. 2 (PhD, University Paris, 2016). Note also that recent historiography does not see the *baqt* as a strict subordinating agreement. See Giovanni R. Ruffini, *Medieval Nubia: A Social and Economic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6–7, 69–70.

⁴¹ Ibn Sulaym would have been sent by the Fatimid general Ġawhar al-Šaqlabī (c. 969–973 CE). See Ḥamad Muḥammad Ḥayr, “A Contribution to a Textual Problem: Ibn Sulaym al-Aswānī’s *Kitāb Aḥbār al-Nūba Wa-l-Maqurra Wa l-Beḡa Wa l-Nīl*,” *Annales Islamologiques* 21 (1985): 9–72.

⁴² His work is especially known from excerpts quoted by the later authors such as al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442), Ibn Iyās (d. 1523) and al-Manūfī (d. 1524). See Yūsuf Faḍl Ḥasan, “Ibn Sulaym al-Aswānī,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1971), 3:949.

⁴³ See, for example, Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw, *Safar Nāmah* (al-Ḥaššāb), 116; Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw, *Safar Nāmah* (Schefer), 175.

⁴⁴ As pointed out by Jay Spaulding, “Medieval Christian Nubia and the Islamic World: A Reconsideration of the Baqt Treaty,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28, no. 3 (1995): 577–94.

⁴⁵ The *baqt* agreement of the year 640 stated that the Nubians were to send 360 slaves annually to the Muslim master of Egypt, to which would be added personal sends.

⁴⁶ Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 90 and 29, quoted, discussed, and criticized by Jay Spaulding. Spaulding, "Medieval Christian Nubia and the Islamic World," 591–92. See also Abdel Ghaffar M. Ahmed, "Sudanese Trade in Black Ivory: Opening Old Wounds," Occasional Paper, No. 31 (Cape Town, South Africa: Centre for Advanced Studies in African Society, 2007), 2–3.

⁴⁷ Nāṣir-ī Ḥusraw, *Safar Nāmāh* (al-Ḥaššāb), 81; Khalil Athamina, "How Did Islam Contribute to Change the Legal Status of Women: The Case of the *Jawārī* or the Female Slaves," *Al-Qanṭara* 28, no. 2 (2007): 393, 116, 119.

⁴⁸ Islamic (or Oriental) slave trade and slavery, which has been neglected by scholars for too long, is now a little better known. See in particular Manning, *Slavery and African life*; Jean-Claude Garcin, *Un centre musulman de la Haute-Égypte médiévale: Qūṣ* (Cairo: IFAO, 1976), index, s.v. "Esclaves," 643–44; Ralph A. Austen, "The trans-Saharan Slave Trade: A Tentative Census," in *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* edited by Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn London, New York and San Francisco, Academic Press, 1979, 23–76; Ralph A. Austen, "The Islamic Red Sea Slave Trade: An Effort at Quantification," *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Chicago, U.S.A. Edited by Robert L. Hess, Chicago, Office of Publications Services, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle 1979), 443–67; Yusūf Raghīb, "Les marchés aux esclaves en terre d'islam," in *Mercati e mercanti nell'alto medioevo: L'area euroasiatica e l'area mediterranea* (Sopeto: Settimane di Studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, Vol. 40 (1993),

721–63; Gudrun Dahl and Anders Hjort-Af-Ornas, “Precolonial Beja: A Periphery at the Crossroad,” *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 15, no. 4 (2006): 473–98; for the medieval period, see 478–88; Salah Trabelsi, “Réseaux et circuits de la traite des esclaves aux temps de la suprématie des empires d'Orient: Méditerranée, Afrique noire et Maghreb,” in *Espaces et dynamiques économiques*, ed. Fabienne P. Guillén and Salah Trabelsi (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2012), 47–62; Salah Trabelsi, “Commerce et esclavage dans le Maghreb oriental (VIIe–Xe siècle),” in *Couleurs de l'esclavage sur les deux rives de la Méditerranée (Moyen Âge–XXe siècle)*, ed. R. Botte and A. Stella (Paris: Karthala, 2012), 9–23; Thomas Vernet, “Slave Trade and Slavery on the Swahili Coast,” in *Slavery, Islam and Diaspora*, ed. B. A. Mirzai, I. M. Montana, and P. Lovejoy (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2009), 37–76; Marie-Pierre Ballarin et al., ed., *Traites et esclavages en Afrique orientale et dans l’océan Indien* (Paris: Karthala and CIRESC, 2013), esp. chs. 1 and 2.

⁴⁹ In the Fezzan, south of Tripoli.

⁵⁰ On the role played by this city in medieval slave trade, see especially al-Ya‘qūbī, *Kitāb al-Buldān* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1422 AH), 183; al-Iṣṭahrī, *al-Masālik wa-l-Mamālik* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār Ṣādir, 2004), 40, 44–45, 46; al-Bakrī, *al-Masālik wa-l-Mamālik* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Ġarb al-Islāmī, n.d.), 2:658; *Al-Istibṣār fī ‘Aġā’ib al-Amṣār* (Baghdad, Iraq: Dār al-Šu‘ūn al-Ṭaqāfiyya, 1986), 146–47; Al-Ḥimyarī, *al-Rawḍ al-Mi‘tār fī Ḥabar al-Aqṭār*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās (Beirut, Lebanon: Mu’assasat Nāṣir li-l-Ṭaqāfa, 1980), 295–96; Michael Brett, “Ifriqiya as a Market for Sudanese Trade from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century AD,” *Journal of African History* 10, no. 3 (1969): 347–64, esp. 354–55; B. G. Martin, “Ahmad Rasim Pasha and the Suppression of the Fazzan Slave Trade, 1881–1896,” in *Slaves and Slavery in Africa. Vol. 2: The Servile Estate*, ed. John Ralph Willis (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 55–58.

Martin discusses three towns (Zuwayla, Sabha, and Murzuq) “laid out in a triangle about 400 miles south and east of Tripoli” that formed the commercial centers of slave trade, and that the Ibādī monopolized it for several centuries after 800 CE.

⁵¹ See Lev, “Army, Regime and Society,” 339–40.

⁵² Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire*, 59.

⁵³ Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea. The Rise and Decline of the Solomonic Dynasty and Muslim-European Rivalry in the Region* (Abingdon, UK: Frank Cass, 2006), 7–12.

⁵⁴ “Ḥabash, Ḥabasha,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1971), 3:2. See also Haggai Erlich, “Ethiopia, Islam and Muslim,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 3 (Brill Online, 2016).

⁵⁵ “Ḥabash, Ḥabasha,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1971), 3:2; Emmerik Van Donzel, “Badr al-Djamālī, the Copts in Egypt and the Muslims in Ethiopia,” in *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth, Vol. I: Hunter of the East: Arabic and Semitic Studies*, ed. Ian Richard Netton (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2000), 297–309; Jean Richard, “The Eastern Churches,” in *The New Cambridge Medieval History, IV, c. 1024–c. 1198, Part I*, ed. David Luscombe and Jonathan Riley-Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 596–97; Seta B. Dadoyan, “Badr al-Jamālī,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE.

⁵⁶ G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, “Al-Zandj: 1. As a Territorial Term,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2002), 11:444–45.

⁵⁷ Paulo Fernando de Moraes Farias, “Models of the World and Categorical Models: The ‘Enslavable-Barbarian’ as a Mobile Classificatory Label,” in *Slaves and Slavery in Africa. Vol. 1: Islam and the Ideology of Enslavement*, ed. John Ralph Willis (New York: Routledge, 2013), 27–46, especially 41–42.

⁵⁸ These contacts have often been discussed by scholars. See especially Hadia Dajani-Shakeel, “Diplomatic Relations between Muslims and Frankish Rulers (1097–1153),” in *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth Century Syria*, ed. Maya Shatzmiller (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1993), 193–96; M. A. Köhler, *Allianzen und Verträge Zwischen Fränkischen und Islamischen Herrschern im Vorderen Orient* (Alliances and Treaties between Frankish and Muslim Rulers in the Middle East: Cross-Cultural Diplomacy in the Period of the Crusades) Translated by P. M. Holt (Berlin, De Gruyter, 1991; English translation: Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 44–54; Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades. Islamic Perspectives* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 43–46, 84; Yehoshua Frenkel, “Muslim Responses to the Frankish Dominion in the Near East, 1095–1291,” in *The Crusades and the Near East: Cultural Histories*, ed. Conor Kostick (New York: Routledge, 2011), 28–29; Maher Y. Abu Munshar, “Faṭimids, Crusaders and the Fall of Islamic Jerusalem: Foes or Allies?,” *Al-Masaq* 22, no. 1 (2010): 45–56.

⁵⁹ In Ša‘bān 491 AH/July 4–August 1, 1099 CE, according to the Egyptian chronicler Ibn Muyassar, *al-Muntaqā min Aḥbār Miṣr*, ed. Ayman F. Sayyid (Cairo, Egypt: IFAO, 1981), 65–66, and to Ibn al-Aṭīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Ta’rīḥ*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Arabī, 1997), 8:424. In Šawwāl 491 AH/September 1098 CE according to the Syrians Ibn al-Qalānisī, *Dayl Ta’rīḥ Dimašq*, 291, and al-‘Azīmī, *Ta’rīḥ Ḥalab*, ed. Ibrāhīm Za‘rūr (Damascus: n.p., 1984), 359.

⁶⁰ Michael Brett, “The Battles of Ramla (1099–1105),” in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, ed. Urbain Vermeulen and Daniel De Smet (Leuven, The Netherlands: Uitgeverij Peeters 1995), 1:17–37; Michael Brett, “The Muslim Response to the First Crusade,” in *Jerusalem the Golden: The Origins and Impact of the First Crusade*, ed. Susan

B. Edgington and Luis Garcia-Guijarro (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2014), 219–34; Hamblin, *Fatimid Army*, 294–301.

⁶¹ According to Steven Biddlecombe, the new editor of the *Historia Ierosolimitana*, it was completed in two-stage process, the first around 1105, and the second after 1107 CE: “The *Historia Ierosolimitana* of Baldric of Bourgueil. A New Edition in Latin and an Analysis” (PhD diss., University of Bristol, 2010), 20, 22–30; Steven Biddlecombe, *The Historia Ierosolimitana of Baldric of Bourgueil* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2014), xxiv–xxix. Note that previous editors and historians gave a date of composition of 1108, or 1107–1108 CE. See, for example, Jean Flori, *Chroniqueurs et Propagandistes. Introduction Critique aux Sources de la Première Croisade* (Geneva, Switzerland: Droz, 2010), 49.

⁶² Baldric, who did not participate in the First Crusade, based his *Historia* on the anonymous *Gesta Francorum et Aliorum Hierosolimitanorum*. Edited and translated by Louis Bréhier (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1924; repr. 1967), which had been previously written by a participant.

⁶³ Baldric of Bourgueil, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, ed. Steven Biddlecombe, 2010, 322–23; ed. Steven Biddlecombe, 2014, 116–17. Compare to the *Gesta Francorum*, 210–17. See also Flori, *Chroniqueurs et Propagandistes*, 121.

⁶⁴ Albert of Aix, *Historia Ierosolimitana*. Edited and translated by Susan Edgington (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007). In the introduction (xxv–xxvi), Edgington states that the first six books of the *Historia* “were completed in the first years of the twelfth century,” whereas “the earlier date for the completion of books VII–XII is thus 1119.” However, the work could have been finished in the 1120s.

⁶⁵ Albert of Aix, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, 6:41:455–57; 6:47:464–65; 6:50:468–69. Albert also refers to Ethiopian soldiers (called *Azopart*) and to the “caves of Ethiopia” between the deserts of Ascalon and Egypt (7:10:500–1).

⁶⁶ Probably the Egyptian vizier al-Afdal.

⁶⁷ Albert of Aix, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, 7:56:566–67.

⁶⁸ Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, in *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades, Historiens Occidentaux* (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 1866), 3:359, 361 (partial translation in Edward Peters, *The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and Other Source Materials*, 2nd ed. [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991], 91, 93). See also Guibert of Nogent, *Dei Gesta per Francos*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1996), 300; Tudebode, *Historia de Ierosolymitano Itinere*, ed. J. H. and L. L. Hill (Paris: Geuthner, 1977), 147; Armelle Leclercq, *Portraits croisés. L’image des Francs et des Musulmans dans les textes sur la Première Croisade. Chroniques latines et arabes, chansons de geste françaises des XIIe et XIIIe siècles* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2010), 94–98.

⁶⁹ Hamblin briefly discusses the word *Azoparth/Azopart*, which appears also in different forms (e.g., *acopart*, *achopart*, *escopart*, *ascopart*) in other chronicles and in the medieval French *Chansons de geste*. Hamblin, *Fatimid Army*, 31–32. Various explanations for it have been proposed by scholars for the last half century, but its origin remain unclear. In particular, it has been proposed that it could have been a derivation from the Syrian French word for “Ethiopian”; or a word referring to the knee movements described in Albert’s *Historia* and in some *Chansons de geste*, and linked with the old French *açoper*, *achopper*; or a derivation from the Arabic *al-Ġabart* ; or a corruption of a Greek word derived from the Arabic *ḥāġib* and used by the Byzantines for Saracen, black skinned and probably enslaved “chamberlains” or “bodyguards,”

and which was also used for “the devil.” See especially Edward C. Armstrong, “Old-French ‘Açopart,’ ‘Ethiopian,’” *Modern Philology* 38, no. 3 (1941): 243–50; G. Levi Della Vida, “Encore Anc. Fr. Açopart ‘Ethiopien,’” *Modern Language Notes* 57, no. 8 (1942): 690–91; Henri Grégoire, “Encore et toujours les Acoparts (ou de L’utilité du grec byzantin pour les études romanes),” *Modern Language Notes* 57, no. 8 (1942): 691–94; Svetlana Loutchiskaja, “Barbarae nationes: les peuples musulmans dans les chroniques de la première croisade,” in *Autour de la première croisade*, ed. Michel Balard (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996), 99–107.

⁷⁰ To my knowledge, “Nubia” and his derivatives (e.g., “Nubiani”) were not used by early chroniclers of the First Crusade. It is still the case for William of Tyre (*Chronicon*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens [Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1986, 2 vols.]), who wrote towards the end of the twelfth century. It is true that if the name “Nubia” was not “completely unknown during the Upper Middle Ages, it had passed almost unnoticed until the twelfth century, when the number of mentions of Nubia started to increase noticeably,” especially in nonhistorical texts. Then “the XIIth century appears as “the starting point in the medieval ‘invention’ of Nubia.” Robin Seignobos, “The Other Ethiopia: Nubia and the Crusade (12th–14th Century),” *Annales d’Éthiopie* 27, no. 1 (2012): 307. See also Camille Rouxpetel, “Indiens, Éthiopiens et Nubiens dans les récits de pèlerinage occidentaux: entre altérité constatée et altérité construite (XIIe–XVe siècles),” *Annales d’Éthiopie* 27, no. 1 (2012): 71–90.

⁷¹ Flori’s words: *Chroniqueurs et propagandistes*.

⁷² On the blacks in the patristic tradition, see Ilaria Sabbatini, “The Physiognomy of the Enemy: The Image of Saracens in Travel Literature,” *Coldnoon: Travel Poetics, International Journal of Travel Writing* 4, no. 1 (2015): 136–59, especially 147, 149.

⁷³ The image/representation persisted. See, for example (about a battle that occurred during the Third Crusade, probably at the end of March 1190 CE), Ambroise, *Estoire de la Guerre Sainte*. Edited and translated by Marianne Ailes and Malcom Barber (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2003), 2:79: “There were there in great number and full of evil intent a hideous black people, against God and against nature, with red head-dresses on their head—never did God make more ugly creatures.” As pointed out by Debra Higgs Strickland (*Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003], 87–94, esp. 89), “the black, and especially the Ethiopian, was not only viewed in Medieval Western culture as a barbarian, but also as “a marvelous exotic, an inhabitant of the mythical land of Ethiopia.”

⁷⁴ Leclercq, *Portraits croisés*, 94.

⁷⁵ Hamblin, “Egypt: Fatimids,” 435. However, Hamblin forgot the contingent of 5,000 Kurds mentioned during al-Mustanşir’s rule (1035–1094 CE). See Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1991), 93, relying on Ibn al-Zubayr, *Kitāb al-Daḥā’ir wa-l-Tuḥaf*, ed. Muhammad Hamidullah (Kuwait, Kuwait City, NCCAL, 1959), 110.

⁷⁶ Bacharach, “African Military Slaves,” 483–84; Hamblin, *Fatimid Army*, 304–7; Lev, *State and Society*, 93–94. Let us recall that Nāşir-i Ḥusraw (d. after 1070 CE) gives an accurate (but somewhat problematic) description of the Fatimid army of his day. *Safar Nāmāh* (al-Ḥaşşāb), 100; Nāşir-i Ḥusraw, *Safar Nāmāh* (Schefer), 138–39.

⁷⁷ Hamblin, *Fatimid Army*, 14. See also Lev’s works quoted above.

⁷⁸ See Zouache, *Armées et combat*, ch. 3.

⁷⁹ After Hamblin, *Fatimid Army*, 305–8; Zouache, *Armées et combat*, 631–32. See also Thierry Bianquis, *Damas et la Syrie sous la domination fatimide (359–469/468–969)*. *Essai d’interprétation de chroniques arabes médiévales* (Damascus: IFEAD, 1986), 1:544–45.

⁸⁰ Zouache, *Armées et combats*, 632 (after al-Maqrīzī and al-Qalqašandī). My conclusions differ a bit from Hamblin. Hamblin, *Fatimid Army*, 74–79. According to him, the regular army ranged from 20,000 to 30,000 men.

⁸¹ Ibn al-Qalānisī, *Dayl Ta'rīh Dimašq*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār (Damascus, Dar Hasān li-l-ṭibā'a wa-l-našr, Syria: 1983), 240–41. See Hamblin, *Fatimid Army*, 89; Zouache, *Armées et combats*, 633.

⁸² Quoted in al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ*, 1:162.

⁸³ For a more comprehensive discussion, see Zouache, *Armées et combats*, 638–40.

⁸⁴ Ibn Muyassar, *al-Muntaqā min Ta'rīh Mišr*, 24–25.

⁸⁵ 'Abd al-Mun'im Māğid, *Zuhūr al-Ḥilāfa al-Fāṭimiyya wa suqūṭuhā fī Mišr. Al-Ta'rīh al-Siyāsī*, 4th ed. (Cairo, Egypt: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1994), 372; Muḥsin Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *al-Ġayš al-Ayyūbī fī 'Ahd Šalāḥ al-Dīn* (Irbil, Iraq: Dār Ārās li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Našr, 2003), 50.

⁸⁶ al-Maqrīzī, quoted in Beshir, *Fatimid Military Organization*, 40.

⁸⁷ On this I agree with Yaacov Lev, even if a more comprehensive study on this topic than the few words written by Bernard Lewis is needed. Yaacov Lev, *Saladin in Egypt* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1999), 142; Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 67.

⁸⁸ On the consideration shown and status of infantry in Islamic armies, see Zouache, *Armées et combats*, 414–16, 796–819; Yaacov Lev, "Infantry in Muslim Armies," in *Logistics of Warfare in the Age of the Crusades. Proceedings of a Workshop held at the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Sydney, 30 Sept. to 4 Oct. 2002*, ed. John Y. Prior (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 185–208.

⁹⁰ Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ*, 1:177–78.

⁹¹ Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw, *Safar Nāmāh* (al-Ḥaššāb), 86, 94. The *Maṣāmida* disappeared. For discussion on them, see also Ibn al-Qalānisī, *Dayl Ta'rīḥ Dimašq*, 167, 174, 453; Ibn al-'Adīm, *Zubdat al-Ḥalab fī Ta'rīḥ Ḥalab*, ed. Ḥalīl Maṣṣūr (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996), 130 (distinguishes “*al-Maṣāmida* and the slaves, *al-'abīd*”), 219; al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ*, 3:38 (“one of the military units of the army of the Fatimid Caliphs”: the vizier al-Ma'mūn al-Baṭā'ihī (1121–1125) installed some of them and gave them a quarter, *ḥārat*).

⁹² Hamblin is equally cautious mood. Hamblin, *Fatimid Army*, 31.

⁹³ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*. Edited and translated by Jean-Baptiste Chabot (Paris: Pierre Leroux, 1905), 3:59. According to Patricia Crone, “the black slaves may well have been recruited by his father who distrusted the leaders of the *jund* and a number of them disposed on.” Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 255, n578.

⁹⁴ Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ*, 1:177. For a broader view, see the data collected and analyzed by Bacharach, “African Military Slaves,” 477–80. See also Yaacov Lev, “Regime, Army and Society in Medieval Islam, 9th–12th Centuries,” in *War and Society in the Eastern Mediterranean, 7th–15th Centuries*, ed. Yaacov Lev (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 115–52.

⁹⁵ This last word is somewhat obscure because the passage is mainly devoted to military slaves. It is often interpreted (and translated) as meaning *mawālī*. See, for instance, Lev, “Infantry,” 187, n8. It is evident that al-Maqrīzī wants to be precise in his meaning that these soldiers were free men, because he adds the word *ḥurr* (free) to the word *murtaziq*, which in Arabic medieval sources generally refers to regular soldiers, freely enlisted, who received regular pay. In Abbasid and Buyid Baghdad, as well as in the Samanid state, a *murtaziq* (pl. *murtaziqa*) was a regularly paid soldier.

⁹⁶ Ibn al-Furāt, *Ta'rīḥ al-Duwal*, 4:1:72. See also al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ*, 3:37; al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz al-Ḥunafā'*, 3:313; Zouache, *Armées et combats*, 639.

⁹⁷ See Thierry Bianquis, “Autonomous Egypt from Ibn Ṭulūn to Kāfūr, 868–969,” in *The Cambridge History of Egypt, Vol. 1: Islamic Egypt, 640–1517*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 99.

⁹⁸ See, for example, Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, *al-Iṣāra ilā man Nāla al-Wizāra*, ed. 'Abd Allāh Muḥiṣ (Cairo, Egypt: IFAO, 1923), 57–58 (during *al-šidda al-'uzma*), and Beshir, “Fatimid Military Organization,” 40.

⁹⁹ See, among the several examples that depicts *al-Ṣa'īd*, *al-Ṣa'īd al-a'lā*, or *Aqṣā al-Ṣa'īd* as a withdrawal place, especially (but not only) for the *Sūdān*: Ibn al-Aṭīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Ta'rīḥ*, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmūrī (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1997), 8:238–40; 9:83, 391; Abū Ṣāma, *al-Rawḍatayn fī Aḥbār al-Dawlatayn al-Nūriyya wa-l-Ṣalāḥiyya*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Zubayq (Beirut, Lebanon: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1997), 2:245; Ibn Taḡrībīrdī, *al-Nuḡūm al-Zāhira fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira* (Cairo, Egypt: Wizārat al-Ṭaqāfa wa-l-Irṣād al-Qawmī and Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.), 6:78; al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ*.

¹⁰⁰ The Fatimids considered the *Ṣa'īd* an important region, and it is specified as such by Ibn al-Aṭīr: “In Ṣafar of this year [558 AH/9 January–February 6, 1163 CE], Ṣāwar was appointed vizier for [the Caliph] al-'Aḍid li-Dīn Allāh al-'Alawī, the Master of Egypt. He began his career and [his rise] to the vizierate in the service of al-Ṣāliḥ b. Ruzzayk, from which he was very close. Al-Ṣāliḥ favored him; he appointed him governor of *al-Ṣa'īd*, which was the greater office (*wa huwa akbār al-a'māl*, which can also be translated “one of the greater offices”) after the vizierate.” Ibn al-Aṭīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Ta'rīḥ*, 9:298. On the status of Upper Egypt for the Egyptian central power, see Garcin, *Qūs*, 57, 84–89.

¹⁰¹ See Ibn Muyassar’s description of the *Šibyān al-ḥāṣṣ* (*al-Muntaqā min Aḥbār Miṣr*, 143): “*Šibyān al-ḥāṣṣ*: they were the sons of the soldiers [*al-aḡnād*], of the amirs [*al-umarā*’], and of the [black] slaves of the State [*‘abīd al-Dawla*].” However, Arab authors most often used the word *ḡilmān* for them, which was generally used in a military context for white slaves (*mamlūks*), not for blacks. See in particular, Ibn al-Ma’mūn al-Baṭā’ihī, who distinguishes *al-Sūdān* (“the blacks”) and the *Šibyān al-Ḥāṣṣ*. Ibn al-Ma’mūn al-Baṭā’ihī, *Aḥbār Miṣr*, ed. Ayman Fu’ād Sayyid (Cairo, Egypt: IFAO, 1983), 57; Usāma b. Munqid, *Kitāb al-I’tibār*, ed. Philip Hitti (Cairo, Egypt: Maktabat al-Ṭāqāfa al-Dīniyya, n.d.), 6, 9, 32; Ibn al-Ṭuwayr, *Nuzhat al-Muqlatayn fī Aḥbār al-Dawlatayn*, ed. Ayman Fu’ād Sayyid (Beirut, Lebanon: Franz Steiner, 1992), 63, 100, 174, 179; al-Maqrīzī, *Itti’āz al-Ḥunafā*, 3:198–99 (“the Caliph has *ḡilmān* of about 500 men called *Šibyān al-Ḥāṣṣ*”); al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ*, 2:287, 296, 361, and *passim*; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab*, 28:312; al-Qalqašandī, *Šubḥ al-A’sā*, 3:542 (close companions/servants of the caliph). See also Hamblin, *Fatimid Army*, 31, 40–41.

¹⁰² In this, I agree with Hamblin. See Hamblin, *Fatimid Army*, 37–40. In particular, see Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw, *Safar Nāmāh* (al-Ḥaššāb), 94 (he mentioned 30,000 *Ustāds*, who were white and black slaves). On the political and military role played by eunuchs in the Fatimid Caliphate, see Lev, *State and Society*, 74–77; Delia Cortese and Simonetta Calderini, *Women and the Fatimids in the World of Islam* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), index, s.v. “eunuchs,” 258; Taef Kamal El-Azhari, “Gender and History,” 9–21.

¹⁰³ See Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, 75–76. See also Lev, “Army, Regime and Society,” p. 341; Taef Kamal El-Azhari, “Gender and History in the Fatimid State: The Case of Eunuchs, 909–1171,” *Online International Journal of Arts and Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2013): 13–16.

¹⁰⁴ *Rayḥāniyya* corps seems to have been one of the most important units in the second half of the eleventh century.

¹⁰⁵ See note 33. Hamblin states that “they numbered no more than 5.000 men,” but this number is uncertain. Hamblin, *Fatimid Army*, 51. See, for example, Ibn Muyassar, *al-Muntaqā min Aḥbār Miṣr*, 119.

¹⁰⁶ See Hamblin, *Fatimid Army*, 52–59. Hamblin, however, is not always convincing. The *Ġuyūṣiyya* corps does not always appear in the sources as a mixed corps. Some authors are ambiguous, like Ibn Muyassar, who reports a struggle in 54 AH between *al-ṭā’ifa al-Ġuyūṣiyya wa-l-ṭā’ifa al-Sūdāniyya al-Rayḥāniyya*. This may imply that there was no *Sūdān* in *al-Ġuyūṣiyya* corps. Ibn Muyassar, *al-Muntaqā min Aḥbār Miṣr*, 140.

¹⁰⁷ Bacharach argued that “race and color were not the dominant factors” in the struggles in which African military slaves were involved (in Iraq and in Egypt), whereas in *Race and Color in Islam*, Lewis had more or less create “a paradigm whereby race is the sole or critical factor which determined the fate of the African military slaves.” Bacharach, “African Military Slaves,” 471–72.

¹⁰⁸ See Bacharach, “African Military Slaves,” 484–85 and *passim*; Lev, “Army, Regime and Society,” 350.

¹⁰⁹ This topic is studied in the references quoted above (see note 3), especially in the works of Hamblin, Bacharach, Lev, and Zouache. See also Abbès Zouache, “L’armement entre Orient et Occident. Casques, masses d’armes et armures,” *Annales Islamologiques* 41 (2007): 297–302.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 87–89.

¹¹¹ The word *furūsiyya* (horse riding) also had the broader meaning of “art of war.” See Abbès Zouache, “*Furūsiyya*: Birth and Spread of a Culture in the Medieval Middle East (VIII–XVIth),”

forthcoming. Note that an Ismaili Dā'ī named Aḥmad b. Ya'qūb (d. c. 1020 CE), active in Syria during the reign of the Caliph al-Ḥākīm, is known through the same *laqab*. He wrote a *Risāla fī al-Imāma*, which has been edited and translated by Sami N. Makarem as *The Political Doctrine of the Ismā'īlī* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1977).

¹¹² Al-Ṭarsūsī, *Tabṣīrat Albāb al-Lubāb*, ed. Kārīn Ṣādir (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār Ṣādir, 1998).

¹¹³ See, for example, the anonymous treatise probably (at least partially) written in the tenth century and entitled *al-Ḥiyal fī al-Ḥurūb wa Fath al-Madā'in wa Ḥifẓ al-Durūb*, ed. Nabīl Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīz Aḥmad (Cairo, Egypt: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 2000), 368–72, esp. 371 on Ethiopians (*al-Ḥabaša*) and Nubians (*al-Nūba*), whose art of war is described as being based on spears and shields.

¹¹⁴ Lev suggests that al-Afḍal might not have been the first to recruit and train freeborn people; according al-Maqrīzī (who relied on the Shi'ī and Aleppine chronicler Ibn Abī Ṭayy', d. 1232 CE) the Caliph al-Mu'izz (r. 975–96) ordered provincial governors to send young boys to Cairo to be trained in *ḥuḡar*, but not in the military arts. Lev, “Regime, Army and Society,” 133. But the information is unclear, because al-Maqrīzī described them as *Awlād al-Nās* (literally “the Sons of People,” i.e., “of the *Mamlūks*”), a Mamluk term that had no meaning for the Fatimid period.

¹¹⁵ Ibn al-Ṭuwayr, *Nuzhat al-Muqlatayn*, quoted in al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ*, 2:351-3. Al-Maqrīzī quotes the well-informed Ibn al-Ma'mūn and Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir (d. 692 AH/1292–1293 CE). The latter speaks only of “youths” (*ṣabāb*). See also al-Qalqaṣandī, 3:452 (“a group of youths,” *ḡamā'a min al-Ṣabāb*).

¹¹⁶ Albert of Aix, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, 9:4:640–41. For a discussion of this battle, see Brett, “The Battles of Ramla (1099–1105).” Concerning the reliability or unreliability of the *‘abīd* on battlefield, see Lev’s remarks in “Infantry in Muslim Armies,” 191–92.

¹¹⁷ Compare to al-Qalqašandī (*Ṣubḥ al-a‘šā*, 3:543, 577) who describes *Sūdān* armed with *lutūt* (sing. *latt*), a heavy mace. See Zouache, *Armées et combats*, 667, n670; Zouache, “L’armement entre Orient et Occident,” 297–302; Šihāb al-Sarrāf, “Close Combat Weapons in the Early ‘Abbāsīd Period: Maces Axes and Swords,” in *A Companion to Medieval Arms and Armour*, ed. David Nicolle (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2002), 159–61.

¹¹⁸ Franck M. Snowden, Jr., *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), esp. 33–34.

¹¹⁹ After Pierre Bourdieu. See, for example, Fabio Lorenzi-Cioldi, *Dominants et dominés. Les identités des collections et des agrégats* (Grenoble, France: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2009).

¹²⁰ In medieval North Africa, black military slavery was not the creation of the Fatimids. The Aghlabids laid the foundation of a system whose developers were probably not aware that it would be such a success. See Yaacov Lev, “David Ayalon (1914–1988) and the History of Black Military Slavery in Medieval Islam,” *Der Islam* 90, no. 1 (2013): 21–43.