

The Genesis of the Fatimid Vizierate and Its *Modus Operandi*

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Abstract

The vizier, a pivotal figure in Muslim political history, has often been overlooked in the context of the Fatimid caliphate (297-567/909-1171). While the institution of the vizierate was widespread among Muslim dynasties, its presence and influence within the Fatimid state appear to be inconsistent. Notably, primary and secondary sources of the Fatimid historiography before 362/969, which was during its base in Ifrīqiyyah before the Egyptian conquest, make no mention of viziers, suggesting an absolute absence of the office and the institution. In contrast, the Fatimid sources of Egypt frequently make reference to viziers, indicating a significant shift in the institution's prominence. Navigating this complexity in Fatimid historiography, this paper focuses on the genesis of the Fatimid vizierate, emphasizing its development into a central administrative institution within the Fatimid caliphate. Through a critical analysis of primary sources, including administrative records and contemporary Fatimid accounts, this study traces the vizierate's origins and tracks its institutional growth right from the establishment of the Fatimid state in Ifrīqiyyah (297-362/909-969) and its later developments in Egypt (362-567/969-1171). It also distinguishes between the vizier as a title and the vizierate as an institution, highlighting how the connotations of both evolved over time. By contextualizing administrative apparatuses with contemporary political milieus, this research offers new insights into the vizierate's foundation in the Fatimid State.

Keywords

Fatimid caliphate, vizierate, Muslim governance, Egypt, historiography, political institutions.

Introduction

Shelomo Dov Goitein, the father of Geniza studies and a social historian, noted in one of his works, “We are still far from a correct historical conception of this important office (vizierate in Islam).”¹ After almost three decades of this observation of Goitein, it still stands true today, as we barely

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¹ Shelomo Dov Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 168.

know enough about the Fatimid vizierate. This is because of the lacuna in historiography owed to the limited scholarly attention dedicated to this aspect of statecraft, which is not necessarily the case with other Muslim polities.² Along with that, reasons for this discrepancy in scholarship are the regional interests among the later historians that initiated a rupture dividing the Fatimid history into two different models: Fatimid history in Ifriqiyyan and Fatimid history in Egypt. Another issue was the tendency of scholars to analyse the Fatimid administration through a strictly Abbasid lens that discounted the room for any innovations or continuities from their Ifriqiyyan past. This was a methodological fallacy, as both regimes operated under different doctrinal principles.³

Despite some recent scholarly works on the Fatimid vizierate,⁴ a significant gap remains in tracing its precise origin and the evolution of its institutional apparatus. While historians have documented the roles and contributions of some famous viziers,⁵ there is limited understanding of the genesis of the vizierate as a distinct administrative institution within the Fatimid caliphate. This study seeks to answer how the Fatimid vizierate emerged and developed as an institution over time. The research examines primary sources and administrative records to explore the early structure, functions, and transformations of the vizierate over time. Additionally, it investigates the socio-political factors that influenced its evolution, assessing the degree to which it diverged from or was shaped by pre-existing models of governance.

Before delving deep into the subject, it is important to distinguish between the term and the office as an institution. However, mixing these two aspects may be one of the reasons why the vizierate, in many Muslim polities, is still misconstrued. As an institution, the vizierate

² See Abū Maṣṣūr al-Thaʿālibī, *Tuḥfat al-Wuzarāʾ*, ed. Saʿd Abū Diyāh (Amman: Dār al-Bashīr, 1994), 21; ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥabīb al-Māwardī, *Adab al-Wazīr*, ed. Muḥammad Sulaymān and Fuʿād ʿAbd al-Munʿim (Alexandria: Dār al-Jāmiʿāt al-Miṣriyyah, 1976), 47; al-Māwardī, *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyyah wa ʾl-Wilāyah al-Dīniyyah*, ed. Nabīl ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ḥayawī (Beirut: Dār al-Arqam b. Abī ʾl-Arqam, 2016), 30-39.

³ Paul Ernest Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and Its Sources* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 10-11.

⁴ See Leila S. al-Imad, *The Fatimid Vizierate, 969-1172* (Berlin: Schwarz, 1990); Farhad Daftary and Shainool Jiwa, eds., *The Fatimid Caliphate: Diversity of Traditions* (London: I. B. Tauris, in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2018); Paula Sanders, *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994); Yaacov Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991); Muḥammad Ḥamdī al-Manāwī, *al-Wizārah wa ʾl-Wuzarāʾ fī ʾl-ʿAṣr al-Fāṭimī* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1970).

⁵ The historical sources on Fatimid viziers vary in their level of detail. Some sources offer only brief mentions of individuals who assumed the vizierate.

encompasses the leadership of the bureaucracy and the functions and responsibilities associated with the office of the vizier, who played a central role in the administration of the state. In contrast, the term vizier may simply refer to a title—either formally conferred by the sovereign or popularly ascribed to a particular figure by the public. Understanding this distinction and tracing both is essential for comprehending the origin of the Fatimid vizierate, how it evolved, and how it influenced administrative practices and political dynamics within the dynastic realm. Using primary sources, this paper seeks to outline the origins of both the title and the institution in the Fatimid empire.

Tracing the evolution of this office sheds light on the balance of authority between the caliph and his bureaucracy, as well as the broader political, social, and economic factors that shaped the Fatimid empire. Such research contributes to a deeper understanding of medieval Muslim history, governance, and the interplay between religious and secular power. In a broader frame, it also delves into details for a better perception of political life in Islam, opening the doors to comparative political histories.

The article begins by addressing the historiographical challenges surrounding the research and the reliable sources to study this institution. Through an analysis of primary sources and contemporary accounts, the study investigates whether a vizierial role existed in early Fatimid Ifrīqiyyah, despite the absence of the official title. The discussion then transitions to Egypt, where the vizierate emerged as a formalized administrative office, shaped by political and bureaucratic needs. The paper further explores the socio-political factors influencing the evolution of the vizierate, highlighting its shifting role from a position closely tied to the caliph to one held by experienced financial and administrative officials. By studying these developments within a broader picture of governance structures, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of medieval Muslim administration and the adaptability of the Fatimid state.

In the study of Fatimid history, despite its substantial documentation in subsequent periods such as the Ayyubid and Mamluk eras, numerous challenges arise. Historians from these later periods often struggled to identify or describe the positions within the Fatimid state bureaucracy without conflating them with the prevailing practices of their own times. This blending of traditions by historians of later periods presents a considerable challenge. For example, there is a high chance that they might have used the title “vizier” for individuals who managed administrative offices, even if they were not officially called viziers in the Fatimid era. This notion warrants an examination of whether such titles were used and recognized in their original Fatimid context, and whether

such terms were generally understood by the urban and rural elites, let alone the sedentary peasantry.

Epistolary correspondence and sermons directly attributed to the Fatimid caliphs and official documents produced by the Fatimid bureaucracy, such as administrative texts and *da'wah* literature of al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974) and Ibn al-Ṣayrafī (d. 463/1147), could help highlight the beginning of this institution and its purposes. It was commonplace for these authors to interpret, define, and convey anecdotes on the institutions of Fatimid bureaucracy. For this reason, an intertextual analysis of literary, jurisprudential, and philosophical texts will further illuminate the usage and meaning of the term “vizier” within the broader cultural and intellectual context of the Fatimid period.

Ibn al-Ṣayrafī's book *al-Ishārah ilā Man Nāla 'l-Wizārah* is a crucial source for this analysis, which will also be analysed in upcoming sections. We find some historical accounts specifically dedicated to Abbasid viziers. However, the only primary and contemporary source devoted to the Fatimid viziers was authored by Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, a civil servant in the chancery during the reign of Caliph al-Āmir bi Aḥkām Allāh (r. 494-526/1101-1130).⁶ Ibn al-Ṣayrafī wrote this book,⁷ which is a biographical dictionary for all the viziers who had been conferred with vizierate in the Fatimid period, and dedicated this book to his contemporary vizier al-Ma'mūn al-Baṭā'ihī.⁸

Vizierate in the Ifriqiyyan Period?

Muḥammad Ḥamdī al-Manāwī notes that “the system of vizierate was never known in the Fatimid rule of Ifrīqiyyah.”⁹ Ayman Fuad Sayyid similarly states that the Fatimids “did not recognize the position of vizier during the African phase.”¹⁰ While examining research on the Fatimid vizierate, there remains a significant gap in recent works on the

⁶ Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid, preface to *al-Qānūn fī Dīwān al-Rasā'il wa 'l-Ishārah ilā Man Nāl al-Wizārah*, by 'Alī b. Munjib b. al-Ṣayrafī, ed. Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid (Cairo: al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah al-Lubnāniyyah, 1990), 20.

⁷ The sources used by Ibn al-Ṣayrafī to write this book are not immediately clear, as he has only mentioned one source throughout his book, *Kitāb Akhlāq al-Wuzarā'* by Abū Ḥayyān. Contemporary researchers assume that Ibn al-Ṣayrafī could have used the archives and letters available at the chancery to compile this account. This assumption is acceptable to an extent. Historians who came after him, like Ibn Khallikān and al-Qalqashandī, have used this source in their encyclopedias.

⁸ Sayyid, preface to *al-Qānūn*, 17.

⁹ Al-Manāwī, *al-Wizārah*, 33.

¹⁰ Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid, *al-Daulah al-Fāṭimiyah fī Miṣr: Tafsīr Jadīd* (Cairo: al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah al-Lubnāniyyah, 1413 AH), 250.

institution of the vizierate in Fatimid Ifrīqiyyah (296-358/909-969). Frequently, the focus has been on the vizierate's status in the dynasty's second part in Egypt (358-566/969-1171), either due to the scarcity of historical sources for the Ifriqiyyan period or the authors' emphasis on Egypt's history. Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, the scribe, did not include the history of viziers of the Ifriqiyyan period in his work, as he clarified in his introduction that he began his account from "the inception of the Fatimid state in Cairo."¹¹ In doing so, however, he did not entirely negate the existence of the vizierate in Ifrīqiyyah. Thus, the next section seeks to identify the patterns of vizierate in the Fatimid bureaucracy during the dynasty's rule of Ifrīqiyyah. Were there no viziers during that period? Did the vizierate in Fatimid Egypt have precedents in Fatimid Ifrīqiyyah, or did it emerge as a new apparatus of statecraft?

Getting into the Specifics of the Case Study

The Aghlabids, vassals of the Abbasids in North Africa, imitated the administrative apparatus and bureaucracy of their imperial centre. However, their adoption was a less sophisticated bureaucratic imitation. The Aghlabid state included positions such as the chamberlain (*ḥājib*), scribes (*kuttāb*), postal officials (*aṣḥāb al-barīd*), and established fiscal bureaus like the *dīwān al-kharāj* (bureau of taxation), *dīwān al-jund* (bureau of military spending), and *dīwān al-maskūkāt* (bureau for the minting of coins),¹² mirroring those in Baghdad, the Abbasid capital.

When the first Fatimid Caliph Imam al-Mahdī bi Allāh (r. 296-322/909-934) established his state, he undertook several significant political steps upon establishing his caliphate. Among his key actions were the appointment of officials and the establishment of new administrative offices.¹³ He introduced new *dīwān* offices and appointed men to oversee them, relying on some officials who had proven successful under the Aghlabids,¹⁴ and others from his supporters, including the Kutāmah tribe. He revived the *dīwān al-kharāj*, which had been burned after the departure of Ziyādat Allāh, and appointed Abū 'l-Qāsim b. al-Qadīm,¹⁵ who had previously served in this office. He established *dīwān al-kashf* for

¹¹ 'Alī b. Munjib b. al-Ṣayrafī, "al-Ishārah ilā Man Nāl al-Wizārah," in *al-Qānūn fī Dīwān al-Rasā'il wa 'l-Ishārah ilā Man Nāl al-Wizārah*, by 'Alī b. Munjib b. al-Ṣayrafī, ed. Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid (Cairo: al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah al-Lubnāniyyah, 1990), 47.

¹² 'Abd al-Mun'im Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ṣādiq, *Fī Ta'rīkh al-Maghrib al-Islāmī: Dirāsah li 'l-Ḥayāh al-Siyāsiyyah wa 'l-Iqtisādiyyah bi Ifrīqiyyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1435 AH), 31.

¹³ Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz al-Ḥunafā bi Akhbār al-A'immah al-Fāṭimiyyīn al-Khulafā*, ed. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl, 3 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Taḥrīr li 'l-Ṭab' wa 'l-Nashr, 1996), 1:66.

¹⁴ Al-Ṣādiq, *Fī Ta'rīkh al-Maghrib al-Islāmī*, 79.

¹⁵ Ibid., 82.

inspections, appointing Abū Ja'far al-Baghdādī to it;¹⁶ *dīwān al-ḍiyā'* (estates); a *dīwān* for the property of fugitives with Ziyādat Allāh, *dīwān al-'atā'* for grants and generosities, appointing 'Abdūn b. Ḥubāsah to it; and a *dīwān* for the Treasury, appointing Abū Ja'far al-Khazarī. These offices were listed by the Fatimid Chief Justice and Dā'ī al-Nu'mān b. Muḥammad, when discussing the emergence of the Fatimid state in his book *Iftitāḥ al-Da'wah*.¹⁷ Additionally, other *dīwān* offices during the Fatimid imamate in Ifrīqiyyah are mentioned, such as the *dīwān al-inshā'*, from which al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān received his judicial investitures.¹⁸ This *dīwān* played a prominent role in inscribing verses and texts and was responsible for preparing communications sent to various regions. Nonetheless, it was an important office in Muslim dynasties like the Umayyads and Abbasids.¹⁹

A critical examination of the Fatimid administrative apparatus at its inception reveals that the complexity of its bureaucratic structure—marked by an intricate network of *dīwān* offices and multifaceted administrative functions—necessitated the presence of a central coordinating authority. The position of vizier, traditionally charged with overseeing governance, implementing policy, and managing state affairs, emerged not as a supplementary post but as an indispensable pillar of administrative coherence. The very scale and sophistication of the Fatimid bureaucracy made the existence of such a high-ranking official a structural imperative, intrinsically tied to the regime's capacity for centralized control and institutional stability.

Parallel to these postulations, historical sources are not devoid of mentions of key figures among the officials of the Fatimid state in Ifrīqiyyah, who were appointed to vizier-like positions. This leads us to investigate these key figures to take a step further in understanding the genesis of the Fatimid vizierate.

Sources note that Caliph Imam al-Mahdī bi Allāh relied on 'Abd Allāh b. al-Qadīm, a prominent figure from the Aghlabid period, and gave him oversight of all the *dīwān* offices and administrative affairs.²⁰ The same policy was adopted by the commander Jawhar al-Siqillī when he conquered

¹⁶ Muḥammad al-Marrākishī b. 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib fī Akhbār al-Andalus wa 'l-Maghrib*, ed. Colan Lévi-Provençal, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1983), 1:159.

¹⁷ Al-Nu'mān b. Muḥammad, *Kitāb Iftitāḥ al-Da'wah*, ed. Farḥāt Dashrāwī, 2nd ed. (Tunis: al-Sharikah al-Tūnisiyyah li 'l-Tawzī', 1986), 303-4.

¹⁸ Al-Nu'mān, *Kitāb al-Majālis wa 'l-Musāyarāt wa 'l-Mawāqif wa 'l-Tawqī'āt*, ed. al-Ḥabīb al-Faqī, Ibrāhīm al-Shabbūh, and Muḥammad al-Ya'lāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Muntaẓar, 1996), 348.

¹⁹ Al-Ṣādiq, *Fī Ta'rīkh al-Maghrib al-Islāmī*, 102.

²⁰ Al-Manāwī, *al-Wizārah*, 33.

Egypt, retaining the vizier Ibn al-Furāt in his office and allowing him to continue to oversee the *dīwān* offices as he had done under Kāfūr al-Ikhshīdī.²¹ It is also reported that Imam al-Mahdī bi Allāh appointed Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Baghdādī to oversee the *dīwān* offices and supervise the officials after the assassination of Ibn al-Qadīm.²² This indicates that traces of the vizierate and the presence of a vizier-like position can be observed from the very inception of the dynasty.

Furthermore, when al-Qāʾim bi Amr Allāh (r. 322-334/934-946) assumed the caliphate, this institution as a position became more apparent. It is noted in *Sīrat al-Ustādh Jūdhar*²³ that at the onset of al-Qāʾim's era, "*naẓar*" (overseeing) of treasuries was delegated to al-Ustādh Jūdhar, and he was made a "*saḥr*" (ambassador) between al-Qāʾim and his adherents and the masses.²⁴ Whenever he wanted to disclose information, he would send it to him. His position became more prominent in the successive years as al-Qāʾim's successor al-Manṣūr bi Allāh (r. 334-341/946-953) left him in charge of the royal court and governance of the realm when he set out to suppress the rebellion of Abū Yazīd Makhlad b. Kaydād.²⁵ His status rose to the point where he was given the title of "Mawlā Amīr al-Mu'minīn," and the caliph ordered him not to place any name before his own.²⁶

At this point, it is important to examine the true meaning and interpretations of these terms: "*naẓar*" and "*saḥr*." Do they have any connection with the vizierate? Ibn al-Ṣayrafī sheds light on this question. He states in the introduction of his work focused on viziers: "This book tends to speak briefly about his history [i.e., the vizier of that time, al-Ma'mūn al-Baṭā'ihī] along with those who preceded him among the ambassadors (*sufarā'*) of the state, its viziers, sultans, and kings."²⁷ This statement conveys a crucial point regarding the nature of the Fatimid vizierate. It points to the diversity of those who attained the vizierate, including *saḥirs* (ambassadors), viziers, kings, and sultans, all of whom are considered part of the Fatimid state's vizierate.

²¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz al-Ḥunafā*, 119.

²² Al-Manāwī, *al-Wizārah*, 34.

²³ This work was written in the Fatimid court of Egypt by the caliph's Chief Secretary al-Manṣūr al-Kātib, as a memoir consisting of epistles, personal letters, conversations, and narrations of events from the Ustādh's life.

²⁴ Manṣūr al-Jūdharī al-'Azīzī, *Sīrat al-Ustādh Jūdhar*, ed. Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn and Muḥammad 'Abd al-Hādī (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1954), 39.

²⁵ Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn, *Ta'rīkh al-Khulafā' al-Fāṭimiyyīn bi 'l-Ifriqiyyah: Al-Qism al-Khāṣṣ min 'Uyūn al-Akhhbār*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ya'lāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2006), 350.

²⁶ Ibid., 444.

²⁷ Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, "al-Ishārah," 46.

When examining the biographies of viziers in his above-mentioned book, Ibn al-Ṣayrafī used terms such as “*al-naẓar*,” “*al-tadbīr*,” and “*al-amr*” to indicate that the individual in question held the position of the vizier. Phrases such as “*radd al-umūr ilayhi wa ’l-tadbīr*”²⁸ (In the biographical entry of Ḥasan b. ‘Ammar, Amīn al-Dawlah) and “*radd al-naẓar ilayhi wa ’l-sifārah*”²⁹ (In the biographical entry of Zur‘ah b. ‘Īsā b. Naṣṭūrus) further demonstrate that an individual held such a position.

In the same vein, Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Qalqashandī gives a brief overview of this office under the Fatimids in their rule of Egypt, where he states that the vizierate was the highest and most prestigious office. It was sometimes held by the *arbāb al-suyūf* (men of the sword) and sometimes by the *arbāb al-aqlām* (men of the pen). In both cases, the vizierate could either be highly elevated, equivalent to the sultanate in its authority, and referred to as *wizārah*, or it could be diminished in stature, being less powerful and referred to at that time as *wisāṭah* (the intermediary).³⁰ Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī expounds on the same phenomenon of this dynasty’s vizierate, noting that after Ibn Killis (the first known vizier of the Fatimids in Cairo), Caliph al-‘Azīz bi Allāh (r. 364-386/975-996) did not appoint anyone to the position of *wizārah* after him. Instead, a man would assume the roles of *wisāṭah* and *sifārah*, and many individuals held these positions successively.³¹

These insights and overviews of late historians, with the usage of words in the primary sources, clearly denote that the terms *wasīṭ* and *safīr* indicate the existence of a vizier-like position, representing some variations in power and roles, but still within the same framework, rather than distinct or separate positions.

After Jūdhar, Jawhar al-Siqillī held a prominent position within the administration and enjoyed the favour of Caliph Imam al-Mu‘izz (r. 341-364/953-975). Jawhar al-Siqillī (d. 381/992), also known as Jawhar al-Kātib or al-Qā’id, was a prominent military commander and statesperson of the Fatimid caliphate. Originally a slave of Sicilian origin, Jawhar rose to become one of the most trusted generals of the Caliph al-Mu‘izz.³² Before his famous conquest of Egypt in 358/969, Jawhar achieved significant military

²⁸ Ibid., 56.

²⁹ Ibid., 59.

³⁰ Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Qalqashandī, *Kitāb Ṣubḥ al-A’shā fī Ṣinā’at al-Inshā’*, 14 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1922), 3:483.

³¹ Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā’iz wa ’l-I’tibār fī Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa ’l-Āthār*, ed. al-Khalīl al-Manṣūr, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1998), 2:343.

³² ‘Alī Ibrāhīm Ḥasan, *Ta’rīkh Jawhar al-Siqillī Qā’id al-Mu‘izz li Dīn Allāh al-Fāṭimī* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, 1963), 24.

success in the Ifrīqiyyah, where he played a key role in consolidating Fatimid rule over Maghrib, including campaigns in what is now Morocco and Algeria. His victories in these regions secured the loyalty of key Berber tribes and strengthened Fatimid control in the Western Muslim world.³³ After conquering Egypt, he founded the city of Cairo, solidifying Fatimid rule in the region. He served as the de facto ruler of Egypt for four years, administering it in the name of the Fatimid caliph before being succeeded by al-Mu'izz himself.³⁴ Jawhar's leadership and strategic prowess were pivotal in setting up Egypt as the centre of the Fatimid caliphate.

Unfortunately, all the biographies written on him are lost, and later historians are divided on whether Jawhar was officially a vizier in the Fatimid state or not, with many not addressing this issue. Despite this, sources confirming his role as a vizier include al-Maqrīzī, in his three major works on Fatimid history (*Itti'āz al-Ḥunafā*, *al-Mawā'iz wa 'l-I'tibār*, and *al-Muqaffā al-Kabīr*), noted that Jawhar reached the rank of "vizier."³⁵ Along with him, 'Izz al-Dīn b. al-Athīr, in his *al-Kāmil fī 'l-Ta'rīkh*, recorded that in 347/958, Jawhar's prominence grew to the rank of a vizier.³⁶ Another piece of evidence in favour of Jawhar's vizierial role is the documented time of his removal from the vizierate. According to al-Maqrīzī, when Jawhar returned from Syria and his campaigns against the Qarmatians, Caliph-Imam al-'Azīz bi Allāh removed him from the vizierate and replaced him with Ya'qūb b. Killis.³⁷

Although the majority of historians have not commented on this matter, some researchers question Jawhar's vizierial status. Muḥammad Ḥamdī al-Manāwī³⁸ notes a contradiction in al-Maqrīzī's works, as the latter states that at one point Jawhar gained the trust of al-Mu'izz and became a vizier in 347/958, but states elsewhere that "al-Mu'izz did not assign the title of vizier to anyone during his reign."³⁹ It is important to note that this does not present a contradiction. Al-Maqrīzī's statement requires careful interpretation: he indicated that the title of "vizier" was

³³ Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iz wa 'l-I'tibār*, 2:352.

³⁴ Shams al-Dīn b. Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa Anbā' Abnā' al-Zamān*, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1978), 1:119.

³⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iz wa 'l-I'tibār*, 2:252; al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz al-Ḥunafā*, 1:101; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā al-Kabīr*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ya'lāwī, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1411 AH), 3:84.

³⁶ 'Izz al-Dīn b. al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī 'l-Ta'rīkh*, ed. Abū Ṣuhayb al-Karmī (Riyadh: Bayt al-Afkār al-Duwalīyyah, 2009), 1243.

³⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā al-Kabīr*, 3:111.

³⁸ Al-Manāwī, *al-Wizārah*, 34.

³⁹ Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iz wa 'l-I'tibār*, 2:443.

not used during the reign of Caliph Imam al-Mu'izz, rather than claiming that the vizierate did not exist.

This is a point to reflect upon, as a careful examination of the primary sources reveals that the Fatimids did not use the title "vizier" for all their viziers, particularly for military viziers, who were given titles such as Amīr al-Juyūsh (Commander of the Armies) and al-Qā'id (Commander). Looking at the second half of the Fatimid history, many military commanders and officials were recognized as viziers in Egypt, including notable figures such as Amīr al-Juyūsh Badr al-Jamālī and others like al-Qā'id Ḥusayn b. Jawhar, Amīr al-Juyūsh al-Afḍal b. Badr al-Jamālī, and 'Alī b. Ja'far b. al-Falāḥ. Chancery letters by caliphs, primary sources like Ibn al-Ṣayrafī,⁴⁰ and later sources like Ibn Khallikān⁴¹ and al-Maqrīzī,⁴² all listed them among those who were appointed to vizierial roles without any dispute or argument, despite the title "vizier" not being used in their records. The same could be the case of Ustādh Jūdhar, as there were officials like Barjawān, the vizier of Caliph al-Ḥākim (r. 386-411/996-1021), who was called Ustādh rather than vizier but was a vizier.⁴³

This section, along with the critical observation of primary sources, implies that although the title "vizier" may not have been explicitly employed, the functions and responsibilities associated with the role remained operative throughout the Fatimid period in Ifrīqiyyah. It also expounds the varying nature of terminological usage in the medieval period, reflecting the importance of interpretation and deep examination of primary sources for a better and deeper understanding of the genesis and continuation of positions and institutions.

Fatimid State Within Its Historical and Political Context

After recognizing some of the issues associated with the existence or non-existence of the title and office of the vizier in the Ifrīqiyyah and Egypt, it is important to analyse the personnel who occupied this position and contextualize them with their contemporary political circumstances. This yields a better appreciation of the historical and societal specificities that shaped the genesis of the vizierate as an institution, firmly grounding it in the context in which it existed.

It is significant to observe that during the eras of the first four Fatimid caliphs, most of those who are identified as viziers were competent personal slaves of the caliphs. These were trusted individuals

⁴⁰ Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, "al-Ishārah," 58, 62, 94, 97.

⁴¹ Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, 2:448-49.

⁴² Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz al-Ḥunafā*, 2:312, 334.

⁴³ Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, "al-Ishārah," 57.

who operated with integrity and were loyal to their masters. From a young age, these individuals were brought up in the caliph's palace. Their proximity to him through service and companionship was considered an honour. Their dedication to the Caliphs was matched by their religious devotion to them. Importantly, these *safīrs*/viziers were predominantly drawn from the class of the men of the sword.⁴⁴

Thematically, the development of the position and institution of the vizier during the Ifriqiyyan and Egyptian eras of Fatimid history was not entirely dissimilar. As the pattern reveals in the early Fatimid period of both eras, the vizierate—or a role similar to it—was deeply connected to individuals who demonstrated expertise in revenue collection and fiscal management. During the Ifriqiyyan period, the individual in charge of the *dīwān al-kharāj* (the taxation office), who was skilled in revenue collection, functioned similarly to a vizier. As mentioned above, the Caliph al-Mahdī bi Allāh relied on 'Abd Allāh b. al-Qadīm for managing the administrative offices. 'Abd Allāh was particularly entrusted with overseeing *dīwān al-kharāj*.⁴⁵ A parallel situation existed in Egypt, where the early viziers such as Ja'far b. al-Furāt and Ya'qūb b. Killis, both known for their expertise in taxation and financial administration, held the vizierate.⁴⁶

The trend of individuals who either held the title of vizier or wielded similar authority having fiscal experience is evidence of the centrality of financial control to maintaining political power. As the Fatimids expanded their empire, their reliance on competent financial officials likely laid the groundwork for the formalization of the vizierate in later periods.

After the establishment of Cairo, the transition towards fiscally minded viziers that partially began during the Ifriqiyyan period was complete. There was a noticeable shift in the characteristics of the viziers. During the reigns of Caliph al-'Azīz bi Allāh, al-Ḥākim bi Amr Allāh, and the early period of al-Zāhir li I'zāz Dīn Allāh (r. 411-427/1021-1036), for nearly fifty years, the vizierate was predominantly held by skilled scribes⁴⁷ and experts in financial and fiscal matters, who were well-versed in the conditions of Egyptian lands and administrative offices. These individuals had long-standing experience in these areas,

⁴⁴ In the Fatimid administration, the rank of al-Ustādh was among the titles attributed to the men of the sword, as described by al-Qalqashandī. Similarly, al-Qā'id Jawhar was also classified as a man of the sword. His title al-Qā'id which translates to "commander" underscores his prominent position within the military structure. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā*, 3:484.

⁴⁵ Al-Ṣādiq, *Fī Ta'rīkh al-Maghrib al-Islāmī*, 82.

⁴⁶ Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz al-Ḥunafā*, 1:119, 242.

⁴⁷ Besides some exceptional short periods when military figures assumed the vizierate, such as Barjawān and the commander Ḥusayn b. Jawhar.

such as Ya'qūb b. Killis and Ibn Naṣṭūrus. Given their professional careers and early lives spent in bureaucracy and tax collection, they were able to establish a new bureaucratic model for the Fatimid state and solidify the administrative and fiscal systems.

The expansion in the scope of the vizierate is indicative of the role's evolution during this period. Early on in Ifrīqiyyah, the holders of the vizier-like position were typically limited to the personal slaves of the Imams, who were brought up in their palaces. However, during the Fatimid rule of Egypt, the state employed viziers from diverse backgrounds, ethnic origins, and faith communities. Individuals from Ifrīqiyyah, Iraq, Persia, and Egypt, and men from various faith backgrounds, such as Christians, as well as mainstream non-Isma'īlī Muslims, rose to the rank of vizier.

Below is a table of Fatimid viziers as recorded in sources. The diversity of these individuals in the later period (of Egypt) is evidence of the changing circumstances of the vizierate as an institution:

Official Viziers/Pseudo-Viziers	Tenure	Ethnicity	Religion
Ifrīqiyyah			
'Abd Allāh b. al-Qadīm	296/909	Maghribī	Muslim
Abū Ja'far al-Baghdādī	(unknown)	'Irāqī	Muslim
Al-Ustādh Jūdhar	322-347/934-958	Slavic (slave)	Muslim
Jawhar	347-367/958-978	Sicilian (slave)	Muslim
Egypt			
Ya'qūb b. Killis	367-380/978-990	'Irāqī	Muslim
'Alī b. 'Umar al-'Addās	380-382/990-992	Maghribī	Muslim
'Īsā b. Naṣṭūrus	382-386/992-996	Egyptian	Christian
Ḥasan b. 'Ammār	386-387/996-997	Maghribī	Muslim
Al-Ustādh Barjawān	387-390/997-1000	Slavic	Muslim
Al-Qā'id Ḥusayn b. Jawhar	390-398/1000-1008	Maghribī	Muslim
Ṣāliḥ b. 'Alī al-Rūzbārī	398-400/1008-1010	'Irāqī	Muslim
Manṣūr b. 'Abdūn	400-401/1010-1011	Egyptian	Christian
Aḥmad b. Muḥammad	401/1011	'Irāqī	Muslim
Zur'ah b. 'Īsā	401-403/1011-1013	Egyptian	Muslim

Al-Ḥusayn b. Ṭāhir	403-405/1013-1015	Persian	Muslim
Al-Ḥusayn and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān (two brothers appointed together)	405/1015	Egyptian	Muslim
Al-Faḍl b. Ja‘far	405/1015	Egyptian	Muslim
‘Alī b. Ja‘far b. Falāḥ	406-409/1016-1019	Maghribī	Muslim
Ṣā‘id b. ‘Īsā	409/1019	Egyptian	Christian
Al-Mas‘ūd b. Ṭāhir	409-411/1019-1021	Persian	Muslim
‘Ammār b. Muḥammad	411-412/1021-1022	(unknown)	Muslim
Mūsā b. Ḥasan	413/1023	(unknown)	Muslim
al-Ḥasan b. Ṣāliḥ	416-418/1025-1027	‘Irāqī	Muslim

Table: Official and Pseudo-Viziers of Fatimid Ifrīqiyyah and Egypt⁴⁸

In the first phase (the Ifriqiyyan era), men were chosen from among the personal slaves of the Caliphs. Fidelity was the essential attribute for these individuals, as disloyalty and betrayal contributed to the tumult the caliphate experienced during this early period. The state faced internal dissent and betrayal from its members, as many of the state’s leaders, such as Ibn al-Qadīm, Abū ‘l-‘Abbās, and the elders of Kutāmah, had rebelled against the dynasty.⁴⁹ Uprisings in later periods became widespread throughout the empire, as dissenters like al-Dajjāl,⁵⁰ Ibn Wāsūl,⁵¹ Ibn Bakr,⁵² Ya‘lā b. Muḥammad,⁵³ and Ḥamīd b. al-Faḍl⁵⁴ staged massive rebellions. In addition, the dynasty had to contend with repeated incursions by neighbouring powers, such as the Umayyads⁵⁵ and the Byzantines.⁵⁶ As a result, the Fatimids’ delegation of political authority was limited to their loyal palace slaves, who were competent both bureaucratically and militarily.

After the dynasty established its stronghold in Egypt and expanded its territories, it necessitated a more transregional focus to fortify its rule and

⁴⁸ This table owes its evidentiary basis to Ibn al-Sayrafī, *al-Qānūn* and al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz al-Hunafā*.

⁴⁹ ‘Imād al-Dīn, *Ta’rīkh al-Khulafā’ al-Fāṭimiyyīn*, 180-87.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁵¹ Al-Nu‘mān, *Kitāb al-Majālīs*, 411.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 385.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

influence in the distant provinces. The challenges of that time included establishing a new administrative system that would support the implementation of new tax and revenue systems.⁵⁷ As a result, most viziers were selected from among the scribes, individuals skilled in organizing administrative offices and managing the economy. They shaped the structure of the bureaus, enforced the taxation systems, and concentrated on maintaining full communication with the distant provinces.

To summarize the section, I argue that the evolution of the vizierate in the Fatimid state reflects the shifting political and administrative priorities of the state. During the Ifriqiyyan era, viziers were predominantly personal slaves of the caliphs, chosen for their loyalty and competence, which was crucial in a period marked by internal dissent and external threats. In contrast, the Egyptian period saw the delegation of authority to individuals with expertise in finance and administration, as the expanding empire required a more sophisticated bureaucratic structure. This shift was solidified under later Fatimid caliphs, with viziers drawn from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, emphasizing merit and administrative capability over personal allegiance. Ultimately, the transformation of the vizierate highlights the adaptability of the Fatimid administration in response to evolving political and economic demands. This evolution and development of the vizierate naturally leads us to the question of how the title itself became established within the administrative framework and recognized in broader public discourse. How did the term “vizier” gain prominence in governance, and how did its perception evolve?

Intertextual Analysis of the usage of the term Vizier in Contemporary Fatimid Records

As discussed in the introduction, along with tracking down the origin of vizierate as an institution, it is important to trace the genesis of “vizier” as a term in Fatimid historiography. Thus, the research shifts to examining the evolution of the term “vizier” throughout Fatimid history. The methodological approach employed for this investigation is intertextual analysis,⁵⁸ which focuses on understanding the development of the term “vizier” by analysing contemporary texts from the Fatimid state in chronological order. This method involves exploring how concepts are used in various texts, the intent of the author in using

⁵⁷ Al-Imad, *Fatimid Vizierate*, 3.

⁵⁸ Cesare Cuttica, “What Type of Historian? Conceptual History and the History of Concepts: A Complex Legacy and a Recent Contribution,” *History and Theory* 51, no. 3 (2012): 411–22.

specific terminology during that period, and how these concepts interrelate with one another.⁵⁹

When examining the early Fatimid writings of Ifrīqiyyah concerning the imams, there is no attestation of the term “vizier” for a position within the state bureaucracy. In the book *al-Himmah*, written in Ifrīqiyyah, which identifies and describes different duties of the adherents of the Fatimid *madhhab*, al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān does not mention the class of viziers during that period in the list of bureaucrats. He does, however, refer to officials such as scribes and state officials working in the *dīwāns* as he states:

I observed that the ranks of the followers of the Imams were numerous, including the family members, inner circle, courtiers, personal servants, slave men and women, relatives, the people of religion, including the followers, judges, scribes [*al-kuttāb*], officials of the state working in state bureaus [*dhawī ’l-kifāyāt wa aṣḥāb al-dawāwīn*], trusted individuals, governors, tax collectors, and soldiers, craftsmen, vendors, and merchants.”⁶⁰

This absence of the term “vizier” is consistent with his other works detailing the political state, such as *Kitāb al-Majālis wa ’l-Musāyarāt* and *Kitāb Iftitāḥ al-Da’wah*, in which he refers to positions like *al-quwwād* (military commanders),⁶¹ *quḍāh* (judges),⁶² *khadam* (personal servants),⁶³ and *du‘āh* (missionaries).⁶⁴ Similarly, the poet Ibn Hānī’, whose poetry remains an important historical source for that era,⁶⁵ does not use the term “vizier” or “vizierate,” even though he eulogized some of the key personalities of the state, like *Quwwād* (Commanders).⁶⁶

Sources written after the Fatimids established themselves in Cairo evince a shift, however, as the term “vizier” gradually appears in the sources and becomes a term associated with the political realm. A decade after the state’s establishment in Egypt, the prince Tamīm b. al-Mu‘izz used the term vizier to refer to the top bureaucrat at the court of al-‘Azīz bi Allāh. He penned these panegyric verses in 368/979, stating:

Live long for Abū ’l-Manṣūr, O kingdom, in safety, For the wheel of fortune does not turn against you.

⁵⁹ Margrit Pernau and Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Global Conceptual History: A Reader* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 121.

⁶⁰ Al-Nu‘mān b. Muḥammad, *Kitāb al-Himmah fī Ādāb Atbā’ al-A’immah*, ed. Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī, 1955), 36.

⁶¹ Al-Nu‘mān, *Kitāb al-Majālis*, 389.

⁶² Ibid., 53.

⁶³ Ibid., 98.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 91.

⁶⁵ Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire*, 172.

⁶⁶ See Ibn Hānī’ al-Andalusī, *Dīwān* (Beirut: Dār Bayrūt li l-Ṭibā’ah wa ’l-Nashr, 1400 AH), 140-46.

This is because you, with al-‘Azīz’s protection, are secure, and indeed, he has Ya‘qūb (b. Killis) as his vizier.⁶⁷

There are other literary works in which he mentioned the position (in which he praised the vizier for the stability of Egypt).⁶⁸ This shows the adoption and assimilation of Egyptian poetic styles in Tamīm’s works.

This term was not commonly used again during the era of Caliph al-Ḥākim and into the early period of Imam al-Ẓāhir. As noted by Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, Caliph al-Ḥākim appointed *saḡīrs* (ambassadors) and *wusaṭā’* (intermediaries) but rarely referred to his officials as viziers.⁶⁹ The term “vizier” was only briefly used in the Fatimid court between 367/978 and 380/990, the period of Ibn Killis.

Subsequently, the term “vizier” reappeared in the sources when Caliph al-Ẓāhir appointed ‘Alī b. Aḥmad as his vizier in 418/1027, referring to him as “*al-Wazīr al-Ajall*” (Honourable Vizier) and stipulating that no one should address him by any other name in letters and official exchanges.⁷⁰ This can be seen as a political step by the caliph to promote this title after it had been absent for over forty-two years. As the caliph stated, “The Commander of the Faithful—with the help of God—saw fit to assign you, his vizierate. Hence, he named you the vizier to assist him in carrying the burdens and confirmed this title with *al-Ajall*, because you are the most honourable of ministers.”⁷¹ The term continued to be used during the reign of Caliph Imam al-Mustaṣir bi Allāh, appearing in letters⁷² and writings during his reign,⁷³ until the position was entrusted to Badr al-Jamālī in 467/1075, after which the term “vizier” fell out of use,⁷⁴ and the officials were referred to as Amīr al-Juyūsh (Commander of the Armies) until the end of the Fatimid rule.⁷⁵

This intertextual analysis suggests that the nature of the term *vizier* in the Fatimid caliphate can be divided into two categories: 1) The presence

⁶⁷ Tamīm b. al-Mu‘izz li Dīn Allāh al-Fāṭimī, *Dīwān* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1377 AH), 144.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 145.

⁶⁹ Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, “al-Ishārah,” 55.

⁷⁰ Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl, *Majmū‘at al-Wathā’iq al-Fāṭimiyyah: Wathā’iq al-Khilāfah wa Wilāyat al-‘Ahd wa ‘l-Wizārah* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, 2002), 289.

⁷¹ Abū Ya‘lā Ḥamzah b. Qalānsī, *Dhail Ta’rīkh Dimashq* (Damascus: Maṭba‘at al-Ābā’ al-Yasū‘iyyīn, 1908), 82.

⁷² See ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Mājid, *al-Sijillāt al-Mustaṣiriyyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī, 1954), letter no. 3; Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A‘shā*, 10:389-94.

⁷³ See ‘Alī b. Khalaf al-Kātib, *Mawāḍ al-Bayān* (Damascus: Dār al-Bashā’ir, 1424 AH).

⁷⁴ Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā‘iz wa ‘l-I‘tibār*, 2:352.

⁷⁵ Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, “al-Ishārah,” 94.

of a specific administrative body to assist the caliph imam, formed by a committee of scribes and bureaucrats, managed by a chief, though not necessarily termed a “vizier.” 2) The establishment of the term “vizier” at court and the official designation of its holders as “*al-Wazīr al-Ajall*.”

Reflections on the Usage and Institutional Development of the Fatimid Vizierate

The question of the total absence of the term “vizier” in the Fatimid period of Ifrīqiyyah still needs to be answered. One possible reason for the absence of this word usage in the long term is that the term “vizier” may not have been common in Ifrīqiyyah before Caliph al-Mahdī bi Allāh, and people were not habituated to it.

Historical sources for the Aghlabid period (184-296/800-909), such as *Iftitāḥ al-Da‘wah* by al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, do not mention a vizierate or an official position explicitly designated as vizier during the Aghlabid period. References to the office appear only sporadically in later historiographical accounts. For instance, Ibn ‘Idhārī (d. 712/1312) refers to the title, noting that Ziyādat Allāh III (r. 290-296/903-909) appointed Ibn al-Šāni‘ as his vizier.⁷⁶ However, *Iftitāḥ al-Da‘wah* characterizes this figure as “*wa kāna šāḥib amrihi*” (He was the one in charge of Ziyādat Allāh’s affairs), suggesting a position of influence without explicitly designating him the term vizier.⁷⁷ This scarcity of references in near-contemporary sources suggests that the vizierate, as a formally recognized institution, was not firmly established or widely acknowledged in Aghlabid Ifrīqiyyah. On the other hand, the term was prevalent in Egypt (which was ruled by other Abbasid vassal states such as the Tulunids and Ikhshidids),⁷⁸ as Egypt had a well-established tradition of vizierate, dating back to the Pharaonic period.⁷⁹

These regional differences in the use of the term provide a partial answer to our inquiry, offering insight into its historical development and contextual significance. When the Fatimids ruled Ifrīqiyyah, where the civilians were not familiar with the vizierate, the term “vizier” was not used, even though administrative structures, such as the *dīwān* offices, were present. Upon their arrival in Egypt, where people were accustomed to a position called vizier and relied on this individual to be an

⁷⁶ Ibn ‘Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 136.

⁷⁷ Al-Nu‘mān, *Iftitāḥ al-Da‘wah*, 204.

⁷⁸ Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz al-Ḥunafā*, 1:119.

⁷⁹ Ian Shaw, ed., *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, new ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 104.

intermediary between the ruler and the ruled, this term became adopted into the Fatimid administrative structure and was used by its officials.⁸⁰

An explicit example of this being the case is when Ya'qūb b. Ishāq (a commander under Imam al-Mahdī bi Allāh) was captured in Baghdad and later escaped imprisonment. Upon his escape, an announcement was made in the Abbasid court: "Whoever brings Ya'qūb, the 'Fatimid vizier,' will receive a large sum of dinars and generous rewards."⁸¹ Although Ya'qūb was not officially designated as a vizier in the Fatimid court, he was referred to by this title, as the region customarily identified officials of similar status with the term "vizier." This reflects the prevalence of the term "vizier" in the Abbasid court, as the Abbasid dynasty recognized the position of vizier from the very inception of its rule, institutionalizing it as a central administrative office that mediated between the caliph and the bureaucracy. Among the earliest Abbasid viziers were Abū Salamah al-Khallāl (d. 132/750), often regarded as the first vizier of the dynasty, followed by the influential Barmakid viziers, such as Ja'far b. Yaḥyā (d. 187/803) and Yaḥyā b. Khālīd (d. 190/806), who played a crucial role in shaping Abbasid governance.⁸²

Al-Manāwī suggested that the Fatimids adopted the title of vizier after their conquest of Egypt because "internal organization in any state only develops after its foundations are firmly established and its affairs are in order."⁸³ This statement needs to be further examined, as the Fatimid state had already established its foundations in Ifrīqiyyah, as Caliph al-Mahdī bi Allāh had set up the *diwān* offices, collected taxes, and appointed officials.⁸⁴ Moreover, if the historian referred to the sedition of al-Dajjāl, which occurred years after Caliph al-Mahdī bi Allāh's emergence, it would be an issue of misinterpretation, as the internal organization of the state was a factor that enabled the heir apparent al-Manṣūr to personally engage in warfare and delegate responsibilities.⁸⁵ The state, in Ifrīqiyyah, continued to be well-regulated even after the sedition.

⁸⁰ The Fatimid Caliphs were known for adapting to local customs and practices. For example, in Egypt, where celebrations of Nowruz and the flooding of the Nile were customary, the Fatimids continued and even participated in these celebrations. This flexibility likely influenced their adoption of familiar terms and practices in their new territories.

⁸¹ 'Imād al-Dīn, *Ta'rīkh al-Khulafā' al-Fāṭimiyyīn*, 235.

⁸² Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, 1:332.

⁸³ Al-Manāwī, *al-Wizārah*, 33.

⁸⁴ 'Imād al-Dīn, *Ta'rīkh al-Khulafā' al-Fāṭimiyyīn*, 176.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 357.

Although institutional governance was developed in parallel with the Fatimids establishing themselves in Ifrīqiyyah, the breadth of the territory it came to rule after it conquered Egypt and beyond necessitated a more expansive bureaucratic presence. As a consequence, the need for a central figure overseeing government affairs as a whole, like a vizier, was more pronounced. This viewpoint aligns with the argument of Laila Imad in her dissertation on the Fatimid vizierate.⁸⁶ However, this hypothesis is also contentious, as the Fatimid state in Ifrīqiyyah already controlled significant regions like Sijilmāsah (present-day Morocco) and Sicily and had established administrative structures akin to ministries.⁸⁷ Historical evidence indicates that as the state expanded and required more organization, additional *dīwān* offices were created, suggesting that a form of ministry existed in Ifrīqiyyah.⁸⁸

Therefore, we can conclude the following: An institution similar to vizierate existed in Ifrīqiyyah, even if not referred to by that specific term; the term “vizier” became prevalent after the conquest of Egypt, maybe because of mounting regional and developmental needs and the term was attested in sources; like other institutions, the vizierate evolved gradually over time. It was not a sudden appearance in Egypt but rather a development from earlier administrative practices.

Conclusion

This article identifies significant gaps in existing scholarship with regard to the position of the vizier and the institution of the vizierate during the Ifriqiyyan era of the Fatimid dynasty (296-358/909-969). Contrary to the prevailing argument that the vizierate was absent in the Ifriqiyyan period, evidence suggests that while the title “vizier” might not have been officially employed, the role and functions associated with it were indeed present. The administrative structure under the early Fatimids, including the various *dīwān* offices and activities of key figures such as al-Ustādh Jūdhar and Jawhar al-Siqillī, indicates a complex bureaucratic system that had central oversight akin to the vizierate.

These bureaucratic structures would then evolve during the transition from the Ifrīqiyyah to Egypt (358-566/969-1171). During this time, the vizierate emerged as a readily recognizable institution, and its status and role in the administration would evolve in accordance with developments within the wider empire. What distinguishes this period from the Ifriqiyyan era is the shift away from palace slaves holding the role to those individuals with experience and expertise in finance and

⁸⁶ Al-Imad, *Fatimid Vizierate*, 4.

⁸⁷ Al-Nu‘mān, *Iftitāh al-Da‘wah*, 303.

⁸⁸ Al-Imad, *Fatimid Vizierate*, 13.

administration. Loyalty to the caliph in the Ifriqiyyan period was paramount, given the instability and strife that faced the dynasty early on. As the empire evolved and relied on an ever more complex and sophisticated bureaucracy, it was necessary to take advantage of individuals who had experience in this sort of political environment. The empire's general stability made absolute loyalty less of a concern when compared to creating an efficient bureaucratic apparatus situated in Cairo that could effectively govern the vast territories under the dynasty's control.

As it relates to textual evidence of how this position was understood at the time, the study of figures like Jawhar al-Siqillī highlights the nuanced and often inconsistent application of the title "vizier." Nonetheless, the role of the vizier, or its equivalent, remained pivotal throughout the Fatimid caliphate, though the title's usage varied, depending on the context and the individual's responsibilities.

This analysis reinforces the idea of the functional continuity of the vizierate across different periods of Fatimid history. While terminological and administrative changes occurred, the core functions of the vizierate—overseeing state affairs, managing bureaucratic operations, and implementing policy—were present in the Fatimid administration in both Ifriqiyyah and Egypt. Understanding these dynamics provides a more comprehensive view of the Fatimid state's administrative evolution and its broader historical significance.

This study not only traces the origins and evolution of the Fatimid vizierate but also contributes to the broader understanding of political practice in the pre-modern world. By examining the institutional shifts within the Fatimid administration, it highlights how dynastic governance adapted to changing political, social, and economic circumstances. The development of the vizierate as an institution as well as a title from the dynasty's phase of Ifriqiyyah to Egypt reflects the broader patterns of state formation and administrative consolidation in medieval Muslim polities. These findings invite further comparative analysis with other Muslim and non-Muslim dynasties, offering insights into the understanding of power, authority, and institutional development across historical contexts.

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