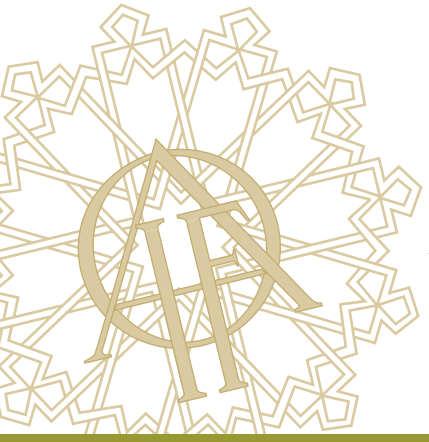

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Mathew Barber

Comparing the Crisis of 806/1403–1404 and the Fatimid Fitna (450–466/1058–1073): al-Maqrīzī as a Historian of the Fatimids

MATHEW BARBER*

Comparing the Crisis of 806/1403–1404 and the Fatimid *Fitna* (450–466/1058–1073)

Al-Maqrīzī as a Historian of the Fatimids**

◆ ABSTRACT

Modern scholars often treat al-Maqrīzī as an important, if not the most important, historian of the Fatimids, especially given the poor survival of sources from the Fatimid period, particularly for the Egyptian period of their rule. However, historians have emphasised how al-Maqrīzī was heavily influenced by crises that occurred in his own present. Al-Maqrīzī's *Ḫiṭaṭ*, *Sulūk* and *Iġāṭa* all contain criticisms of Mamluk Sultans contemporary to al-Maqrīzī and a general pessimism about the state of Egypt in his own day. This article argues that this

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critique and pessimism shapes how al-Maqrīzī documented Fatimid history in ways that can profoundly influence how we understand the Fatimid past. It takes the Fatimid *fitna* of 450–466/1058–1073 as a case study and underlines how one must compare across al-Maqrīzī's works to understand how his present has influenced how he shapes the past. The chapter is broken into four parts. Part 1 examines the text shared between al-Maqrīzī's works (which can be analysed digitally), underlining that al-Maqrīzī's more polemical views in the *Iġāṯa* could be copied into his other works. Part 2 discusses how al-Maqrīzī's *Ḫiṭaṭ* can be understood as a work of remembrance in the face of crisis, a schema in which the Fatimids feature prominently. Part 3 digitally analyses the mention of dates to show how the crisis of 806/1403–1404 is a major theme in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*, and that this text was likely conceived around the same time as the *Iġāṯa* was written. Part 4 then utilises close reading to show how the *Iġāṯa* frames that account of the Fatimid *fitna* in a way that mirrors the crisis of 806—as al-Maqrīzī saw it. This framing of the *fitna* is found in parts of the *Ḫiṭaṭ*. However, as the article concludes, there are multiple framings of the *fitna* in the *Ḫiṭaṭ* that reflect how al-Maqrīzī's views had evolved over time. Al-Maqrīzī's accounts of Fatimid history should, therefore, be treated and studied carefully in the light of his more critical views.

Keywords: al-Maqrīzī, Fatimids, Mamluks, Barqūq, memory, crisis, *fitna*, historiography, Muʾayyad Shaykh, al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh, text reuse, Digital Humanities, economic history, famine, inflation

✦ **RÉSUMÉ**

Comparer la crise de 806/1403-1404 et la *fitna* fatimide (450-466/1058-1073) : al-Maqrīzī en tant qu'historien des Fatimides

Les chercheurs modernes considèrent souvent qu'al-Maqrīzī est un important, voire le plus important historien des Fatimides, compte tenu en particulier de la rareté des sources restantes de l'époque fatimide, notamment pour la période égyptienne de leur règne. Cependant, les historiens ont souligné à quel point al-Maqrīzī a été fortement influencé par les crises qui se sont produites de son vivant. Les *Ḫiṭaṭ*, *Sulūk* et *Iġāṯa* d'al-Maqrīzī contiennent tous des critiques des sultans mamelouks qui lui sont contemporains et reflètent un pessimisme général sur l'état de l'Égypte à son époque. Le présent article soutient que cette critique et ce pessimisme façonnent la manière dont al-Maqrīzī a documenté l'histoire fatimide, ce qui peut profondément influencer la façon dont nous comprenons le passé fatimide. Nous prenons la *fitna* fatimide de 450-466/1058-1073 comme étude de cas et soulignons la nécessité de faire des comparaisons entre les œuvres d'al-Maqrīzī pour comprendre comment son présent a influencé la façon dont il façonne le passé. Le chapitre est présenté en quatre parties. La première examine le texte partagé entre les œuvres d'al-Maqrīzī (qui peut être analysé numériquement), soulignant que ses points de vue les plus polémiques dans l'*Iġāṯa* ont pu être recopiés dans ses autres œuvres. La deuxième partie examine comment les *Ḫiṭaṭ* peuvent être compris comme une œuvre de mémoire face à la crise, un schéma dans lequel les Fatimides occupent une place prépondérante.

La troisième partie est une analyse numérique des dates évoquées afin de montrer que la crise de 806/1403-1404 est un thème majeur des *Ḫiṭaṭ*, et que ce texte a probablement été conçu à peu près à la même époque que la rédaction de l'*Iġāṯa*. La quatrième partie utilise ensuite une lecture attentive pour montrer comment l'*Iġāṯa* présente ce récit de la *fitna* fatimide d'une manière qui reflète la crise de 806 telle qu'al-Maqrīzī l'a perçue. Ce cadre de la *fitna* se retrouve dans certaines parties des *Ḫiṭaṭ*. Toutefois, comme le conclut l'article, les *Ḫiṭaṭ* présentent de multiples interprétations de la *fitna* qui reflètent l'évolution des opinions d'al-Maqrīzī au fil du temps. Par conséquent, les récits d'al-Maqrīzī sur l'histoire fatimide doivent être traités et étudiés avec soin à la lumière de ses opinions les plus critiques.

Mots-clés : al-Maqrīzī, Fatimides, Mamelouks, Barqūq, mémoire, crise, *fitna*, historiographie, Mu'ayyad Shaykh, al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh, réutilisation de textes, humanités numériques, histoire économique, famine, inflation

ملخص

مقارنة أزمة سنة ٨٠٦هـ/١٤٠٣-١٤٠٤م بالفتنة الفاطمية (٤٥٠-٤٦٦هـ/١٠٥٨-١٠٧٣م): المقريزي كمؤرخ للفاطميين

كثيرًا ما يعتبر العلماء المحدثون المقريزي واحدًا من أهم مؤرخي الفاطميين، إن لم يكن أهمهم على الإطلاق، لا سيما نظرًا لندرة ما تبقى من مصادر تعود إلى العصر الفاطمي، وعلى نحو خاص إلى لحقبة المصرية من حكم الفاطميين. على أية حال، شدد المؤرخون على أن المقريزي في عمله هذا قد تأثر بشدة بأزمات وقعت في حاضره. وتحتوي أعمال المقريزي مثل «الخطط» و«السلوك» و«الإغاثة» على انتقادات لمن عاصر من سلاطين المماليك وتعكس تشاؤمًا عامًا حول وضع مصر في زمنه. يرى هذا المقال أن هذا النقد والتشاؤم قد بلورا كيفية توثيق المقريزي للتاريخ الفاطمي بطرق يمكن أن تؤثر بعمق على فهمنا للماضي الفاطمي. ويتخذ المقال الفتنة الفاطمية (٤٥٠-٤٦٦ هـ/١٠٥٨-١٠٧٣ م) كدراسة حالة ويشدد على ضرورة أن يقوم الباحث بعمل مقارنات بين كل أعمال المقريزي بغية إدراك مدى تأثير حاضره على كيفية صياغته للماضي. وتنقسم الدراسة إلى أربعة أقسام. يتناول الأول منها النص المتقاسم بين أعمال المقريزي المختلفة (والذي يمكن تحليله رقميًا)، مع التشديد على أن رؤى المقريزي الأكثر إثارة للجدل في كتاب «إغاثة الأمة» يمكن نسخها في أعماله الأخرى. ويناقش القسم الثاني كيف يمكن فهم كتاب المقريزي «الخطط» ورؤيته كعمل يحيي الذكرى في مواجهة الأزمات، في نسق يحتل فيه الفاطميون مكانة بارزة. أما القسم الثالث فيتكون من تحليل رقمي للتواريخ المذكورة بهدف إظهار كيف كانت أزمة سنة ٨٠٦هـ/١٤٠٣-١٤٠٤م موضوعًا رئيسيًا في «الخطط»، وأن هذا النص قد أُلِف على الأرجح بالتزامن مع تأليف كتاب «إغاثة الأمة». ويستخدم القسم الرابع القراءة المتأنية المعمقة لبيان كيف يؤطر كتاب «إغاثة الأمة» خبر الفتنة الفاطمية على نحو يعكس أزمة سنة ٨٠٦هـ كما رآها المقريزي. ونجد هذا التأطير للفتنة في أجزاء من كتاب «الخطط». وفي كل الأحوال، كما يستخلص المقال، ثمة العديد من

الصياغات والأطر للفتنة في كتاب «الخطط» تعكس كيف تطورت رؤى المقريزي مع مرور الزمن. بناءً على ذلك، يجب معالجة روايات المقريزي عن تاريخ الفاطميين ودراستها بعناية ودقة على ضوء رؤاه الأكثر انتقادية.

كلمات مفتاحية: المقريزي، الفاطميون، المماليك، برقوق، ذاكرة، أزمة، فتنة، تأريخ، المؤيد شيخ، المستنصر بالله، إعادة استخدام النص، الإنسانيات الرقمية، تاريخ اقتصادي، مجاعة، تضخم

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Modern historians of the Fatimids are heavily indebted to the writings of Mamluk historians, chief among them al-Maqrīzī. The Fatimids produced a rich historiographical tradition,[1] which is today mostly lost, but had survived in Egypt and elsewhere until at least the 9th/15th century. Encyclopaedists and historians of the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries then voraciously drew these texts into their own compilations, copying from them with varying levels of precision and citation.

Al-Maqrīzī stands apart from these efforts because of both his more devoted treatment of the Fatimids (writing a chronicle dedicated exclusively to them) and his more comprehensive use of their historiographical tradition. It would, however, be a mistake to see his large compilations as simple "archives" of the earlier Fatimid tradition.[2] Al-Maqrīzī also wrote a large number of essays, many of which carefully mobilised history to establish precedents for practices of his own time. Nasser Rabbat has argued that al-Maqrīzī's larger texts are not exempt from this tendency, and that they should be read as part of a broader historiographical project, with a shared "critical apparatus".[3] In this article, I will explore how this apparatus has shaped accounts of Fatimid history in al-Maqrīzī's *al-Mawāʿiẓ wa-l-ʿitibār fī ḏikr al-ḫiṭaṭ wa-l-āṯār* (known as the *Ḫiṭaṭ*).

Al-Maqrīzī's worldview was not static, it changed with his circumstances and with the times. Larger compilations like the *Ḫiṭaṭ*, which were written over longer periods of time, evolved as the authors' viewpoint changed. Parts of these texts betray specific moments in the authors' worldview, which can shape how they deal with Fatimid-era events and source material. The *Ḫiṭaṭ* was profoundly shaped by the crisis of 806/1403–1404, a period of extreme inflation and political turmoil that al-Maqrīzī believed had been caused by the mismanagement

1. I have argued elsewhere against the (oft-repeated) notion that the Ismāʾīlī Fatimids were averse to writing works of history. Barber 2021, pp. 12–32; For an example of this claim see Daftary (2012).
2. Fozia Bora (2021, esp. pp. 15–23) has argued for reading Mamluk-era chronicles as archives. She defines an archive along the lines defined by Derrida—that is, the process of archiving is subject to biases and agendas, which inform what is archived and categorisation and preservation strategies. This reading of historiography has been disputed, see Liebrenz (2022).
3. Rabbat 2023, pp. 200–201.

of the sultanate. The project of the *Ḫiṭaṭ* was, in fact, likely conceived in the aftermath of this crisis.[4] Al-Maqrīzī wrote an essay in response to the crisis entitled *Iġāṯa t al-Umma fī Kašf al-Ġumma*. In it, he elaborated a history of crises in Egypt, all brought about by God, concluding with the crisis of his own time, which he claimed had a human cause.

The *Iġāṯa*'s history of crisis includes Fatimid examples, chief among them the Fatimid *fitna* (450–466/1058–1073)—often referred by al-Maqrīzī and his contemporaries as "the great misery", *al-šidda al-ʿuẓmā*—this crisis is discussed extensively in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*. The Fatimid *fitna* is rightly regarded as a major turning point in Fatimid history. It was sparked in 454/1062 by a rivalry between two factions of the Fatimid army, the Turks and the Blacks (*ʿabīd*). Over time it developed into a vicious civil war that encompassed the whole country and affected all its people. When the Nile flood failed around 461/1068–1069, the country was plunged into famine. The *fitna* eventually became so severe that the Caliph himself was reduced to poverty and there were attempts to initiate an Abbasid takeover. Order was only restored with the arrival of the general Badr al-Ǧamālī in 466/1072. His appointment as vizier marked the beginning of a new military vizierate and a reduction of the Caliph's real power.[5] Given the pivotal importance of this event (which was evidently also recognised by medieval historians), it is crucial that we understand how it was portrayed by later historians, sometimes our only extant sources for the event. In what follows, I will argue that some accounts of the Fatimid *fitna* in the *Ḫiṭaṭ* have been profoundly shaped by al-Maqrīzī's views on the crisis of 806.

1. Al-Maqrīzī as a Historian of his Times

The *Ḫiṭaṭ* is a topographical history of Egypt, covering its cities (primarily Fusṭāṭ and al-Qāhira), buildings and institutions from Pharaonic times until al-Maqrīzī's own day. As founders of al-Qāhira and a major state based in Egypt, the Fatimids play a central role in the text. This is seen in the text's frequent citation in modern studies of the Fatimids, from the Fatimid *daʿwa*[6] to the study of Fatimid festivals.[7] However, al-Maqrīzī's histories are not a primary, but a secondary source for Fatimid history.[8] Quotations have to be approached critically, and one must realistically assess how al-Maqrīzī uses his sources and the changes that he has potentially made when copying from a source text into his works.

Throughout modern historiography there remains an underlying assumption that al-Maqrīzī's accounts of the Fatimids can be largely trusted, because he had some kind of affinity with the dynasty. Rabbat has convincingly argued, in his recent biography of al-Maqrīzī, for reading

4. Rabbat (2023, p. 142) has taken this further, suggesting that "806/1403–1404 might have been the catalyst" for al-Maqrīzī's entire historiographical project.

5. For a summary of events see Brett (2017, pp. 197–206); for discussions of the event as a turning point see Brett (2019a).

6. For example, Stern (1983), Daftary (2005).

7. As in Paula Sander's masterful study of these festivals (for which she notes the source problem): Sanders 1994.

8. As Warren Schulz has noted, this is true for all of al-Maqrīzī's history writing: Schulz 2003, p. 170.

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his histories as: "a critical apparatus brandished as the yardstick against which actions and decisions of influential people are measured and their consequences evaluated."[9] That criticality, moreover, extends to al-Maqrīzī's evaluation of the Shīʿī groups, where he adapted from texts like those of the Ismāʿīlī Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, "to historicize Islam and to explain how its denominational offshoots quarrelled."[10] Yet, Rabbat does not feel that al-Maqrīzī's histories of the Fatimids' need to be read in this way. He reads the accounts of the *šidda al-ʿuẓmā* in the *Ḫiṭaṭ* as examples of the "theme of ruin",[11] and does not suggest that al-Maqrīzī might have altered these accounts to suit his broader discourses on power or political mismanagement. Instead, Rabbat notes: "Throughout the Fatimid section [of the Ḫiṭaṭ], al-Maqrizi expends a great deal of care verifying and collating his sources."[12]

Scholars often hold al-Maqrīzī's Fatimid source usage in high regard. Relying on the claims of al-Maqrīzī's biographers and a contemporaneous note on a copy of his chronicle of the Fatimids, the *Ittiʿāẓ*, modern historians have long argued that al-Maqrīzī had claimed descent from the Fatimids.[13] This (we are told) made him more sympathetic towards the Fatimids, and more prepared to provide extensive quotations from Fatimid-era sources. Al-Maqrīzī's accounts of the Fatimids' stand out in part because they are richly sourced, using earlier (often Fatimid-era) sources that contemporaries either could not access or preferred not to use.[14] The evidence for this is plain in text reuse data for al-Maqrīzī's texts, where there are significant amounts of text shared between his books that is not shared with other earlier texts. These cases of self-reuse suggest that al-Maqrīzī had quoted from the same source text across his corpus.[15]

The lack of available works with which to compare, however, make it difficult to properly assess how al-Maqrīzī quoted from earlier works. Al-Maqrīzī changed how he abridged and—most crucially—framed quotations from his source texts, depending on where he used them. This reframing was shaped by his various views about his own present and the way in which history might be used to teach those in his present.

As has already been argued by Rabbat and others, this use of the past is evident in his critiques of contemporary and near-contemporary sultans, and his generally pessimistic

9. Rabbat 2023, p. 201.
10. Rabbat 2023, p. 133 (discussion of al-Kirmānī, pp. 131–133).
11. Rabbat 2023, p. 190.
12. Rabbat 2023, p. 192.
13. Rabbat 2003, pp. 7–8; Rabbat 2014, p. 68; Rabbat 2012, pp. 123–127; Rabbat 2023, pp. 44–54; Jiwa 2009, pp. 41–44. Paul Walker has been more critical (2003, pp. 85–88).
14. See, for example, how two Fatimid-era texts (by Ibn al-Maʾmūn al-Baṭāʾiḥī and Ibn al-Ṭuwayr) have been reconstructed largely from al-Maqrīzī's texts. Bauden 2010a; Ibn al-Ṭuwayr, *Nuzhat al-Muqlatayn*; Ibn al-Maʾmūn, *Aḫbār Miṣr*.
15. For al-Maqrīzī's *Ḫiṭaṭ*, out of over 2 million characters (around 500,000 words) of total reuse with the OpenITI corpus, over a quarter (586703 characters) is shared only with other texts by al-Maqrīzī. For a list the locations shared only with al-Maqrīzī's texts, see: Mawaciz_maq_cls.csv. This data was generated from passim's cluster data set; for more details on the method and data, see: KITAB 2022; Barber, May 9 2022 and Barber, June 21 2022.

accounts of his own time.[16] At the core of all al-Maqrīzī's works is a critical perspective on the Circassian Mamluks, for whom he worked, first in the chancellery and later for two short stints as a *muḥtasib*.[17] His experiences and expertise as a *muḥtasib* in particular appear to have had a profound impact on his historiography, leading him to write frequent digressions on economics and even social history.[18] As al-Maqrīzī began to retreat from public life, he used his writings to criticise members of the new ruling elite.[19]

Al-Maqrīzī reserves most of his scorn for the Sultan Barqūq, for whom he had previously worked.[20] Despite his close relationship with Barqūq, al-Maqrīzī elaborated on the Sultan's faults posthumously in the *Sulūk*:

> He was avaricious, and in his days had introduced the practice of the open offering of bribes; indeed he hardly ever appointed anyone to an office or administrative position except for money, so the lowlifes acceded to prestigious positions and to high stations, and on this account political corruption was common; he also had an inordinate predilection for advancing men of the lowest classes and debasing those of noble family so that he changed the social order amongst people, and he antagonised the grandees amongst the Turcomans and Arabs in Syria, Egypt and the Hijaz.[21]

As Sami Massoud has noted, al-Maqrīzī's views on Barqūq lacked consistency, praising him at one moment and criticising him the next.[22] Such inconsistency is in part explained by the crisis of 806, as al-Maqrīzī's major complaint—the offering of positions for bribes—is related directly to this crisis.

This case reveals a major benefit of reading al-Maqrīzī's larger, more-compilatory works in the light of his shorter treatises. Al-Maqrīzī is most famous for his long comprehensive works of history, of which the *Ḫiṭaṭ* and *Sulūk* are classic examples. These large books were often the work of a lifetime, continuously and simultaneously revised and updated until the author's death. Al-Maqrīzī, however, also wrote shorter treatises, which—as has been underlined by Jo Van Steenbergen for the treatise *al-Ḏahab al-Masbūk*[23]—often used historical precedents to understand or explain contemporary circumstances.

To understand al-Maqrīzī's criticism of Barqūq's sultanate in the *Sulūk*, one should turn to his economic treatise, the *Iġāṯat al-Umma*. It was first written in 808/1405—as is indicated

16. For Barqūq, see the discussion below. See also, his overt critique of al-Muʿayyad Šayḫ (Little 2003, pp. 213–214); and omission of many 9th century buildings from his *Ḫiṭaṭ* (Raymond 2003, p. 148; Broadbridge 1999, p. 99).
17. On his career see: Rabbat 2003; Rabbat 2023, pp. 11–59; Broadbridge 1999.
18. Rabbat 2001, p. 87; Broadbridge 2003, p. 237.
19. Broadbridge 1999, pp. 87–90.
20. Massoud 2003, p. 131.
21. Massoud 2003, p. 121; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk* V, p. 231.
22. Massoud 2003, p. 132.
23. Van Steenbergen 2016, p. 42.

by the closing statement of the treatise[24]—and was a response to an economic and social crisis that had broken out in 806. The treatise and al-Maqrīzī's thesis within it have been explored in detail by Warren Schultz and John Meloy, who see it as being shaped by al-Maqrīzī's Šāfiʿī "monetary Sunna" and his negative perceptions of Barqūq and his successors.[25] In 806 the Nile flood did not reach plenitude; severe inflation and famine inevitably followed. Although al-Maqrīzī recognised that the crisis was caused by a poor flood, he argued that the crisis was exacerbated and elongated by the sultanate's flawed monetary policy. He claimed that the culprit had been an Ustādār named Maḥmūd b. ʿAlī, appointed by Barqūq in 790/1388. Maḥmūd had minted excessive quantities of copper *fulūs*, and (according to al-Maqrīzī) effectively made them the primary unit of exchange in Egypt. This weakened the link between the value of goods and the value of gold dinars and silver dirhams and led to a hyperinflationary spiral.[26]

Whether or not al-Maqrīzī's analysis is correct,[27] it seems to have shaped his views of Barqūq in the *Sulūk*. Not only does he provide a furious critique of Barqūq and his corrupt appointments,[28] but he also returns to the crisis of 806, explaining its causes, providing a summary of Egyptian monetary policy and, crucially, recounting the story of Maḥmūd.[29] There is also evidence that it had shaped his accounts in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*. For example, in his description of prisons in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*, he digresses to identify the Mamluk policy of imprisoning debtors as

24. Al-Maqrīzī, *Iġāṭa*, p. 161. A note of caution on this dating: although 808 is written at the end of the treatise, at least two of the manuscripts used for the printed edition (Istanbul, Bayazit no. 3195 and Cambridge, University Library, no. 746) are in fact collections of al-Maqrīzī's treatises—I was unable to verify the third, but its call number (Cairo, Dar al-Kutub, Majāmīʿ 77) suggests that it too is a collection of texts. This fact is not noted by the editors. In addition to this, there is a fourth manuscript collection of al-Maqrīzī's treatises (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms Arabe 4657), which also contains the *Iġāṭa* (Note: I have not systematically checked manuscripts and there may be more collections of al-Maqrīzī treatises that contain this work). With the exception of Majāmīʿ 77, Van Steenbergen has argued that all of these essay collections were published at the end of al-Maqrīzī's career, at his direction and behest. For the *Ḏahab al-Masbūk*, there is evidence that al-Maqrīzī edited the original text (first written around 20 years earlier) prior publishing it in this final collected form. Similarly, the *Iġāṭa* might have changed from its original publication in 808 to its publication in the collected volumes that survive today. However, interestingly, in the final collection al-Maqrīzī still kept his concluding note that he had completed the work in 808. Al-Maqrīzī, *Iġāṭa*, p. 69 (editor's introduction); Van Steenbergen 2016, pp. 119, 120, 121 (for descriptions of the relevant manuscripts), pp. 111–112, 123–124 (for thesis on revisions and final form of the collection).

25. Schultz 2003; Meloy 2003.

26. Meloy 2003, pp. 187–189.

27. Schultz cautions against reading these texts with modern economic eyes; others have been more dependent on them for understanding the Egyptian moral economy and monetary policy. Schultz 2003, pp. 169–170 (summarises Mamluk monetary and economic scholarship that relies on texts like the *Iġāṭa*), p. 180 (his critique).

28. Broadbridge has argued that the *Iġāṭa* should be read as a critique of the sultanate and thus in her analysis the link between the critique of Barqūq and the views expressed in the *Sulūk* is even stronger. Broadbridge 2003, p. 238.

29. Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk* VI, pp. 111–114.

a cause of contemporary monetary problems—that is, imprisoned debtors are unable to earn money to pay off their debts.[30]

Al-Maqrīzī's views on the crisis of 806 also shaped his views of the more distant past. The *Iġāṭa* is split into seven sections (*faṣl*). The first is entitled: "The first section, which mentions the famines [*al-ġalwāt*] that happened in Egypt and short reports on what caused these famines". Within this section, al-Maqrīzī lists 17 famines.[31] Meloy has argued that al-Maqrīzī associates each of these famines with a natural cause, unlike 806 which he claimed was exacerbated by human actions.[32] Thus, al-Maqrīzī mobilises the past to serve his view of the present. Although al-Maqrīzī's accounts of the Fatimid *fitna* in the *Iġāṭa* do not quite fit this model (see my argument below), it is abundantly clear that every account of famine in the *Iġāṭa* was in some way shaped by more contemporary concerns.

1.1. *Overlaps Between the* Iġāṭa *and al-Maqrīzī's Other Works*

This analysis of earlier famines is reflected in al-Maqrīzī's other texts, particularly the *Ḫiṭaṭ*. The overlap between the *Iġāṭa* and al-Maqrīzī's other texts can be seen in the text reuse data (shown in figure 1). As the *Iġāṭa* largely summarises events, there is a lot of shared material that cannot be picked up by text reuse detection (which looks for verbatim or near-verbatim text reuse).[33] Note that there is no evidence of text reuse between the *Sulūk* and the *Iġāṭa* even though both provide a similar account of the 806 crisis. In this case, the differences between the accounts are significant enough that no text reuse instances can be identified.

The largest reuse instance in the *Iġāṭa* is with two of al-Maqrīzī's treatises related to monetary policy and currency: the *al-Nuqūd al-Qadīma al-Islāmiyya* (Old Islamic currency) and the *Shudhūr al-ʿUqūd fī Dhikr al-Nuqūd* (*Items of importance regarding currency*). Both of these essays contain extensive discussions of gold (*dīnār*), silver (*dirham*) and copper (*fulūs*) currencies, and the appropriate ways to manage them. These discussions in the treatise overlap with the sections of the *Iġāṭa* that deal with the same subject matter—this underlines how al-Maqrīzī had adopted a very similar discussion of currency across all three of his economic treatises.[34] The remaining overlap is with three of al-Maqrīzī's larger histories: the *Muqaffā* (a biographical dictionary), the *Ittiʿāẓ* (a chronicle history of the Fatimids) and the *Ḫiṭaṭ*.[35] In all cases they

30. Petry 2003, p. 139.
31. Al-Maqrīzī, *Iġāṭa*, pp. 81–114.
32. Meloy 2003, p. 191.
33. On the text reuse algorithm being used, passim, see KITAB (2022).
34. Al-Maqrīzī, *Rasāʾil*, pp. 157–175; al-Maqrīzī, *Šudhūr*, pp. 11–28; al-Maqrīzī, *Iġāṭa*, pp. 120–141.
35. OpenITI texts used in run:
0845Maqrizi.IghathaUmma.Kraken210223142017;
0845Maqrizi.ItticazHunafa.Shamela0000176;
0845Maqrizi.Muqaffa.Shamela19Y0145334;
0845Maqrizi.Mawaciz.Shamela0011566 (the *Ḫiṭaṭ*);
0845Maqrizi.Rasail.Shamela0010710;
0845Maqrizi.ShudhurCuqud.MMS00014-ara1.

share material with two sections discussing Fatimid famines. These are among the longest and most detailed accounts of famine in the *Iġāṭa*, and these strong reuse cases indicate how al-Maqrīzī has used the same narrative across his works (Fig. 1).

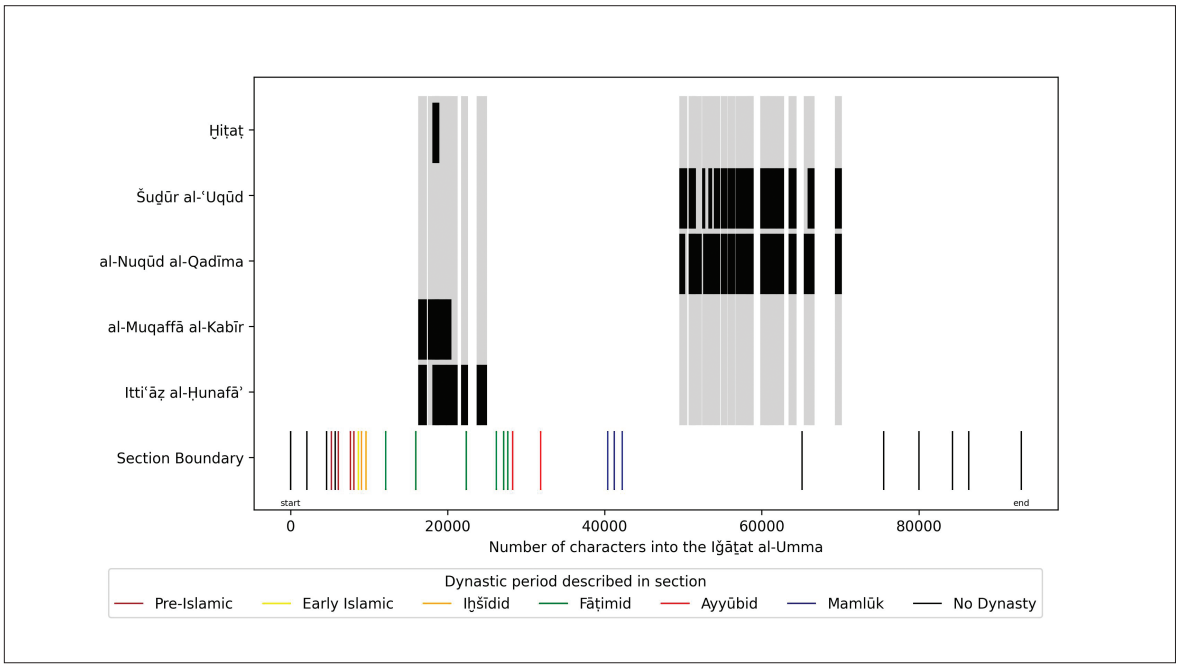

Fig. 1. Text reuse between al-Maqrīzī's *Iġāṭat al-Umma* and his other texts as identified by the text reuse algorithm passim (if a text by al-Maqrīzī does not appear on this graph, there is no reuse between it and the Iġāṭa). The Iġāṭa is given from start to end on the x-axis. Grey blocks indicate a part of the Iġāṭa that is shared near-verbatim with another of al-Maqrīzī's texts, and black blocks identify the work that contains the shared text (labelled on the y-axis). Thicker blocks indicate longer instances of reuse. Lines at the bottom of the graph indicate where sections begin, with colours indicating the historical period described in the section.

These two sections with heavy reuse both relate to the Fatimid *fitna*. The first section details a famine that occurred in 446/1054–1055, during the vizierate of al-Yāzūrī, and the vizier's successful attempts to face it. I have argued elsewhere that this account likely derives from the lost *Sīrat al-Yāzūrī*, which is the basis of al-Maqrīzī's biography of al-Yāzūrī in the *Muqaffā*, and an important source for the *Ittiʿāẓ*. A very small part of that biography is used in two places in the *Ḫiṭaṭ* (the only place where al-Maqrīzī cites the text), to elaborate on the *Matjar*, a Fatimid office responsible for stockpiling commodities to guard against crisis.[36]

In the accompanying data repository, start and end points for the clusters are marked in: 0845Maqrizi.IghathaUmma.Kraken2102231420l7.dyn-tagged.cl-tagged and the corresponding texts and their milestones are found in 0845Maqrizi.IghathaUmma.Kraken2102231420l7.cl-tagged-reuse.csv. The latter was used to draw figure 1, along with a data set recording the locations of the section boundaries and the dynastic period that each section concerns: 0845Maqrizi.IghathaUmma.Kraken2102231420l7.cl-tagged-section.csv.

36. See Barber 2021, especially chap. 2. The story of the 446 famine from the *Sīrat al-Yāzūrī* has been used (perhaps disproportionately) as a major source for understanding Fatimid economic, particularly grain, policy. See Shoshan, 1981, particularly p. 182 for the office of Matjar.

At the end of the section on the 446 famine, al-Maqrīzī outlines how al-Yāzūrī's dismissal saw a fragmentation of the state, characterised by a rapid change in offices (for excerpts and a discussion of the passage, see below). Al-Maqrīzī claims that this unstable political situation had led to the Fatimid *fitna*. These claims are not taken from the *Sīrat al-Yāzūrī*. These views are uniquely shared with al-Maqrīzī's *Ittiʿāẓ* (according to the text reuse data, they appear nowhere else verbatim), where he also makes these claims immediately before his discussion of the Fatimid *fitna*.[37]

With the *Ittiʿāẓ*, we have an instance where al-Maqrīzī's views in the *Iġāṭa* are repeated word-for-word in a text about Fatimid history. However, the association between the *Ḫiṭaṭ* and the *Iġāṭa* cannot be seen clearly in text reuse. In this case, the *Ḫiṭaṭ* shares many of the ideas of the *Iġāṭa*, but it does not express them in the same way. Instead, some of the key arguments presented in the *Iġāṭa* (in particular al-Maqrīzī's pessimistic views about 806) permeate the structure, layout and content of the *Ḫiṭaṭ*.

2. Introducing al-Maqrīzī's *Ḫiṭaṭ*: a History of Ruin?

The *Ḫiṭaṭ* is ostensibly a work of topographical history, organising and narrating the history of Egypt through a geographical framework. As al-Maqrīzī himself states of his motivation to author the work:

> As I was doing research on the history of Egypt, I found the bits of information mixed and scattered. In collecting them, I could not set them down arranged by years because it was not possible to establish the exact time of each event, especially in long-bygone ages. Nor could I, for different reasons which will become apparent as one leafs through this work, set them down according to people's names. I therefore arranged the [information] in a rubric [corresponding to] *ḫiṭaṭ* [allotments] and *āṯār* [historical remains].[38]

> Each section of the [book] contains all the [information] that is appropriate and relevant. From this standpoint, it has brought together the parts of Egypt's history that had been separated [previously]. I did not refrain from repeating information [*al-ḫabar*] if I needed to… so that someone who reads any chapter of it will be able, thanks to its content, to dispense with what is contained in other sections.[39]

37. Passim's cluster dataset indicates that these passages are only shared between the *Ittiʿāẓ* and the *Iġāṭa* and are not linked to any other text in the OpenITI corpus. For an explanation of the cluster data see: Barber, May 19 2022. Relevant clusters: 515396256111 and 214748386730 (data locations outlined in note 35 above). Corresponding to: al-Maqrīzī, *Iġāṭa*, pp. 96–97; al-Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāẓ*, pp. 343–345. Compare the same years of Ibn Muyassar's *Aḫbār* (an important source for the *Ittiʿāẓ*), where there is no parallel report (pp. 27–28).
38. Rabbat (2023, p. 173–174) has convincingly unpacked what these two terms meant for al-Maqrīzī.
39. al-Maqrīzī, *Ḫiṭaṭ* I, p. 6, adapted from Stowasser (2014, p. 15).

Al-Maqrīzī's summary frames the *Ḫiṭaṭ* as something of a reference text, focussed on topographical material that would be unsuited to other works, or whose importance would be lost in the organisational schemata of his other works (that is, chronicles and biographical dictionaries). Already in his stated aims al-Maqrīzī suggests that he will be adapting source material to suit the new categorisation, as he wishes for each chapter to stand on its own and be intelligible outside of the whole.

2.1. *Ruin and Remembrance in the* Ḫiṭaṭ

Al-Maqrīzī's work on the *Ḫiṭaṭ* seems to have been motivated by a larger worldview. A primary reason for collecting and categorising all of this topographical material was preservation, and that need for preservation was animated by al-Maqrīzī's pessimism. Rabbat has suggested that one read the *Ḫiṭaṭ* as a "Khaldunian history" with a structure that sets out a cyclical history of Egypt, characterised by the rise and fall of dynasties. As part of that narrative, al-Maqrīzī focusses on the theme of ruin (*ḫarāb*) throughout Egyptian history, noting how various places had fallen into decay.[40]

The work includes extensive reporting of the failings of the Circassian Mamluks. This is particularly evident in the proposed final section of the text, which is outlined in the introduction as "reasons that have emerged for the ruin of the region of Egypt."[41] Intriguingly, the section does not survive in the final text that we have today, but a small fragment of it is found in al-Maqrīzī's draft manuscript. Rabbat and Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid propose that the section should belong in the final version of the work, but al-Maqrīzī ran out of time to add it.[42] However, I am more convinced by Meloy's argument that this mirrors al-Maqrīzī's evolving worldview, which came to be less pessimistic as al-Muʿayyad Šayḫ reissued a silver coinage—the remedy for the 806 crisis that al-Maqrīzī had proposed in his *Iġāṯa*.[43] As Rabbat has himself noted, the *Ḫiṭaṭ*'s introduction does not properly reflect the addition of more contemporary locations and monuments to the work.[44] It is conceivable that he had forgotten to amend the introduction, rather than been unable to add the final chapter. I would, therefore, argue that as al-Maqrīzī became a little more optimistic, he scrapped work on the final chapter. Despite this later change of heart, a pessimistic worldview still pervades the *Ḫiṭaṭ*, with a focus on the crisis of 806. This is likely because the project was conceived, like the *Iġāṯa*, in the aftermath of this crisis.[45]

40. Rabbat 2012, pp. 131–132; Rabbat 2023, pp. 197–201.
41. Rabbat 2012, pp. 134–135; al-Maqrīzī, *Ḫiṭaṭ* I, p. 8.
42. Rabbat 2012, p. 134; Rabbat 2001, p. 89; Rabbat 2023, p. 158; See Sayyid's edition of the *Ḫiṭaṭ*, which adds the section in its entirety from al-Maqrīzī's draft: al-Maqrīzī, *Ḫiṭaṭ* IV, pp. 1087–1088; I cannot find the corresponding passage in Sayyid's version of the draft: al-Maqrīzī, *Musawwada*.
43. As Meloy notes, al-Maqrīzī was disappointed to discover in the following crisis of 818 that the reissue did not have the intended affect and the *Šuḏūr* proposes a further remedy to the Mamluk's monetary policy. Meloy 2003, pp. 200–202.
44. Rabbat 2023, p. 159.
45. Rabbat has noted elsewhere how the cyclical view of the *Ḫiṭaṭ* is shared with the *Iġāṯa* (2001, p. 90).

The narrative of ruin is outlined from the start of the *Ḫiṭaṭ*, in a section that follows the introduction, simply entitled "*faṣl*" ("section"), that outlines the works of *Ḫiṭaṭ* that preceded al-Maqrīzī's own. As Rabbat has noted, this section identifies the authorship of *Ḫiṭaṭ* with acts of remembrance (that is, remembering places that had been later ruined during crises), and proposes that al-Maqrīzī's text be understood (following the work of Pierre Nora) as a *lieu de mémoire*.[46] This reading is broadly convincing; however, I feel that Rabbat has significantly underplayed the role that Fatimid history plays in the introductory *faṣl*. It is useful, therefore, to provide its full translation:

> The first man to arrange and discuss the *Ḫiṭaṭ* of Miṣr and its *āṯār*, and mention them collected in a compendium, is Abū ʿUmar Muḥammad Ibn Yūsuf al-Kindī. Then, after him, the Qāḍī Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Salāma al-Quḍāʿī wrote his book entitled *al-Muḫtār fī ḏikr al-ḫiṭaṭ wa-l-āṯār*. He died in 454 [1062–1063] prior to the years of misery [*al-šidda*].
>
> Most of what these two men described became obliterated and only a mirage and wasteland were left, due to the famines and epidemics which befell Miṣr during the years of misery [*al-šidda*] under al-Mustanṣir from [4]57 [1064–1065] to 464 [1071–1072]. Its people died, its houses fell into decay, and its condition deteriorated. Desolation engulfed the western and eastern sides of the upper District of al-Fusṭāṭ—the western side extending from Qanṭarat Banī Wāʾil, where nowadays there are the shops of the papermakers, in the vicinity of the Bāb al-Qanṭara outside the city of Miṣr, all the way to the elevation known today as al-Raṣd, as one heads toward the Great Cemetery, and the eastern side extending from the edge of the Birkat al-Ḥabash, which is adjacent to the cemetery, down to the area of the Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn Mosque.
>
> Then in 466 [1073–1074], the *amīr al-ǧuyūš* Badr al-Ǧamālī entered al-Qāhira, while all these places were completely devastated and deserted, the population wiped out by pestilence and disease and decimated by death and destruction. Only a few people were left in the city, their appearance that of corpses, their faces pale and gaunt, due to the exorbitant prices and their constant fear of the soldiery and of the evil wrought by the bands of slaves and the Milḥiyya. No one made a serious effort to plant new crops. Moreover, the overland and river routes were cut off, unless [one went] under guard and at great inconvenience. Al-Qāhira, too, was like a ghost town. So [Badr al-Ǧamālī] allowed the troops, the Milḥiyya, the Armenians, and anyone who was able, to build or restore whatever they wanted in al-Qāhira [with building material] from the houses of Fusṭāṭ left vacant by the death of their owners, and people began to tear down residences and the like in Miṣr and built with them new ones in al-Qāhira. This was the first time that the people settled in al-Qāhira.

46. Rabbat 2003, pp. 93–93; Rabbat 2023, p. 196 (see also, his comments on the memorial function of *ḫiṭṭa*, p. 173).

> After al-Quḍāʿī, the next man to draw attention to the *Ḫiṭaṭ* and to describe them was his student Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥummad ibn Barakāt al-Naḥwī in a nice work in which he brought to the attention of al-Afḍal Abū al-Qāsim Šāhanšāh, son of the *amīr al-ǧuyūš* Badr al-Ǧamālī, certain places which, having been endowments, had been illegally seized and taken possession of.
>
> Next, the Šarīf Muḥammad ibn Asʿad al-Ǧawwānī wrote his *al-Naqṭ li-ʿaǧim mā aškala min al-ḫiṭaṭ*, in which he pointed out the landmarks by then unknown and archaeological vestiges already obliterated.
>
> The last one to write on that subject was the Qāḍī Tāǧ al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ibn al-Mutawwaǧ. In his *Īqāẓ al-mutaġaffil wa-ittiʿāẓ al-mutaʾammil fī-l-ḫiṭaṭ*. He presents an overview of conditions in al-Qāhira and of the city's topography up to the seven-twenties [1320–1328]. Most of that [which he wrote about] was obliterated after his death in the course of the two plagues of 749 [1348–1349] and 761 [1359–1360] and then at the time of the severe famine in 776 [1374–1375].
>
> The Qāḍī Muḥyī al-Dīn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir wrote his *al-Rawḍa al-bahiyya al-ẓāhira fī ḫiṭaṭ al-Muʿizziyya al-Qāhira*, thereby initiating a much-needed undertaking. After his death, building activity in al-Qāhira and its suburbs then increased during the time of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn to such an extent that the city could barely contain its population. But then it was stricken by the plague in 749 [1348–1349] and 761 [1359–1360] and by the severe famine of 776 [1374–1375], and numerous places there were destroyed. In the course of the events and tribulations [*al-ḥawādiṯ wa-l-miḥan*] from the year 806 [1403–1404] onward, both Miṣr and al-Qāhira and the population of the region suffered extensive ruination.[47]

Much like the *Iġāṯa*, al-Maqrīzī provides here a list of Egyptian crises, many of which are defined by the occurrence of "*ġalāʾ*"—translated here as famine, but which could also mean "price rises."[48] This narrative culminates with the crisis of 806. Added to this, however, is a layer of remembrance—that is, al-Maqrīzī is justifying his work on the *Ḫiṭaṭ* as an effort to remember places ruined in 806.

As in the *Iġāṯa*, the Fatimids play an important role in this worldview, but in the *Ḫiṭaṭ* their role is more significant. In the *Iġāṯa* al-Maqrīzī mentions 19 crises in total, of these: 5 are pre-Islamic, 3 date after the Islamic Conquest and prior to the Fatimids, 6 are Fatimid, and the remaining 5 are post-Fatimid; a large number of these events are Fatimid, but significant emphasis is given to the period before and after.[49] By contrast, the introductory *faṣl* of the *Ḫiṭaṭ* mentions three authors belonging to the Fatimid period: al-Quḍāʿī (d. 454/1062–1063),

47. Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḫiṭaṭ* I, 9–10; adapted from Stowasser (2014, pp. 18–20).

48. As Meloy has noted, this is a difficult term to translate, pointing to how Adel Allouche preferred "inflation"—rather than "famine"—in his translation of the *Iġāṯa*, to reinforce his reading of the text as an economic treatise. Meloy 2003, p. 184.

49. For an outline of sections, their focus and their explanations of famine, see: igatha_famine_reasons.csv.

Ibn Barakāt (d. 520/1126) and al-Ǧawwānī (d. 588/1192), and refers to one Fatimid crisis, the Fatimid *fitna*. This event is not only described at length (with emphasis given to the level and extent of the destruction), but it is also framed as a pivotal moment in the history of al-Qāhira. That is, it led to the arrival of Badr al-Ǧamālī and the first settlement of al-Qāhira by non-elites (a step away from al-Qāhira as the Ismāʿīlī palace city and towards the bustling metropolis that al-Maqrīzī would recognise in his own day).

3. 806 in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*: a Distant Reading

The introductory *faṣl* of the *Ḫiṭaṭ* situates the text in a similar moment to the *Iġāṯa*, identifying 806 as the last major crisis, which had prompted him to collect materials on Egypt's topography and ruins. Where work on the *Iġāṯa* more-or-less concluded in 808, al-Maqrīzī continued—as with all of his large compilatory works—to write and revise the *Ḫiṭaṭ* until his death in 845/1442. During that time, as is evidenced by the *Šuḏūr*, al-Maqrīzī's views had evolved and become potentially less pessimistic, especially in the light of al-Muʾayyad Šayḫ's minting of a new silver coinage. As a result, the *Ḫiṭaṭ* is a large text that is animated by more varied concerns; despite this, the crisis of 806 has left a significant imprint upon the broader text.

As André Raymond has noted, al-Maqrīzī omitted from the *Ḫiṭaṭ* a number of buildings that had been erected in the ninth/fifteenth century (omitting 15 monuments of 34 constructed between 1404 (806 AH) and 1441 (844 AH), of which 21 date after 1420 (822 AH). Raymond and Broadbridge have argued that these omissions were wilful, shaped by al-Maqrīzī's desire to underline the prosperity of the previous "Turkish" Mamluks and earlier Egyptian dynasties.[50] By contrast, I would argue that the omissions suggest that the bulk of the *Ḫiṭaṭ* was composed in the early 9th century and only revised in later periods. This position, to an extent, follows Frederique Bauden's argument that al-Maqrīzī had taken the manuscript of his recently deceased neighbour, al-Awḥadī (d. 811/1408), updated it and published it as his own.[51] However, the overlaps with the *Iġāṯa*, a text which is undisputedly al-Maqrīzī's, suggest that al-Maqrīzī's modifications to al-Awḥadī's manuscript were significant, and that work on the *Iġāṯa* and *Ḫiṭaṭ* had begun around the same time, in the immediate aftermath of 806.

The *Iġāṯa*'s imprint can be seen through the *Ḫiṭaṭ*'s use of dates, and this section will discuss some of the patterns that can be discerned within the text. For the analysis that follows, I utilised a Python script that identified Hijri dates within the texts being studied and converted them into numerals. Using other scripts, I counted the frequencies of the dates that appeared within the text, allowing me to see which dates appear more commonly in the text.[52]

50. Raymond 2003, p. 148; Broadbridge 1999, p. 99.
51. Bauden 2010b, esp. pp. 208–209.
52. As outlined in note 1, all methods and scripts used are provided in the corresponding GitHub repository. The script used to identify and tag dates in the text is: https://github.com/mabarber92/arabic_date_tagger/blob/main/Scripts/tag_whole_text/tag_years_whole_text.py.

3.1. *The First Half of the 9th Century (1397–1442): an Important Period in the* Ḫiṭaṭ

From a study of the dates, it is clear that al-Maqrīzī had continued to work on the *Ḫiṭaṭ* until his death. In what we assume to be al-Maqrīzī's final version of the *Ḫiṭaṭ*,[53] al-Maqrīzī references 38 of the years of the 9th century (that is all but eight years from 800 up to his death—829, 834, 835, 836, 838, 839, 844 and 845). That is, 83% of the possible dates are given in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*. This is about average for the *Ḫiṭaṭ*, where 80 to 90 percent of the possible dates for any century are given in the text. The only standout exception is the fifth century (1009–1105 CE, incidentally, the century of the Fatimid *fitna*), where only 68% of the possible dates are given in the *Ḫiṭaṭ* (for the exact figures, see table 1).

Hijri century	Absolute number of times a date is mentioned	Number of dates mentioned	Total possible dates	Percentage of possible dates	Average number of mentions per date
First	847	99	99	100	8.555556
Second	187	78	100	78	2.397436
Third	214	82	100	82	2.609756
Fourth	345	90	100	90	3.833333
Fifth	191	68	100	68	2.808824
Sixth	353	88	100	88	4.011364
Seventh	381	90	100	90	4.233333
Eighth	655	99	100	99	6.616162

53. That is the version as it circulates in a number of later manuscripts. The analysis presented has utilised the OpenITI text that is based on the Beirut edition of the *Ḫiṭaṭ*, which is a reprint of the Būlāq edition. I then annotated chapter and section headings into the text based on Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid's more recent edition. This allows me to break the text into more meaningful thematic units for analysis. I have not utilised the full text of Sayyid's edition in my digital analysis because he opts to add material from both al-Maqrīzī's *Musawwada* of the text and occasionally from cross-references to al-Maqrīzī's source texts. For the sake of analysing al-Maqrīzī's text, I think it is better to work from the version that circulated and is likely closer to how al-Maqrīzī conceived of the final 'published' work. The *Musawwada*, by comparison, represents the text at a certain point in its development. As a complete *Musawwada* does not exist, it is difficult to know exactly what form this draft took. When close-reading the text, I have preferred Sayyids' edition, as it has a more elaborate critical apparatus, and I can treat Sayyids' additions and changes on a case-by-case basis—something that cannot be done at the level of the macro-analysis presented in this section. OpenITI text based on the Beirut edition: 0845Maqrizi.Mawaciz.Shamela0011566; URI of file annotated with Sayyid's headings: 0845Maqrizi.Mawaciz.MAB02082022-ara1.completed (this version is published in the zenodo release for this article).

Hijri century	Absolute number of times a date is mentioned	Number of dates mentioned	Total possible dates	Percentage of possible dates	Average number of mentions per date
Ninth	264	38	46	82.6087	6.947368
Ninth (excluding mentions of 806)	189	37	45	82.22222	5.108108

Table 1. The number of dates given for each Hijri century in the Ḫiṭaṭ, the count of each unique date, and the percentage of the total possible number of dates in that century. Note that because a century starts at one hundred (e.g., the 9th century starts with the year 800) there are only 99 dates in the 1st century, as year 0 is not a date recorded in the text.[54]

At first glance, the date mentions for the 9th century (shown in table 1) appear to agree with Raymond's observations. The absolute number of dates from the 9th century is lower than for those centuries corresponding to the Ayyubid and Early Mamluk period (6th–8th/12th–14th centuries). In the data, the eighth century (1300–1396) stands out, with 655 date mentions relating to it. We must, however, remember that al-Maqrīzī only mentions 38 distinct dates for 9th century (compared to 99 for the 8th—almost the whole century). If we look at the average number of mentions per date (calculated by dividing the absolute date count by the distinct count), we see that the average number of mentions per date is slightly larger than that for the previous century. An arithmetic mean is, of course, heavily distorted by outliers. In this case, the average per-date mention for the 9th century is inflated by one enormous outlier, the year 806; the year 806 is mentioned 75 times in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*. If 806 is excluded from the per-date average, it drops to 5.1 mentions per date, which is above average for the text but quite a lot less than the average for the 8th century. In short, in the *Ḫiṭaṭ* there is significant emphasis on the 8th and 9th centuries, but if we exclude 806 from consideration, then the 8th century is by far the most referenced period.

In the date mentions for the ninth century, there is a focus on a number of key dates. Table 2 gives all dates that are mentioned more than once, and the number of times that they are mentioned. Many of these dates likely correspond to events relating to the fall and accession of Sultans. For example, Barqūq fell from power in 801/1399 and al-Muʾayyad Šayḫ became Sultan in 815/1412 (the second-most mentioned date in the ninth century after 806). It is interesting here that 818/1415–6 is among the more frequently mentioned dates (12 mentions in total)—as this corresponds to al-Muʾayyad's introduction of a new silver coinage.[55]

54. For this table and those that follow, the data taken was created from analysis of the dates in: 0845Maqrizi.Mawaciz.MAB02082022-ara1.completed.dates_tagged. All dates found in this text and their counts are found in: 0845Maqrizi.Mawaciz.MAB02082022-ara1.completed.dates_tagged.all_dates_distinct.csv

55. Meloy 2003, p. 198.

In fact, there are a large number of dates from al-Muʾayyad's reign (815–824/1412–1421), 72 mentions in total. Altogether, these data speak to al-Maqrīzī's continued work on the *Ḫiṭaṭ* until his death and indicate that his updates took full account of al-Muʾayyad's lengthy and prosperous reign.

Date AH	Date range CE	Mentions in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*
806	1403–1404	75
815	1412–1413	15
800	1397–1398	15
818	1415–1416	12
801	1398–1399	11
803	1400–1401	10
817	1414–1415	9
816	1413–1414	8
821	1418–1419	8
825	1421–1422	8
808	1405–1406	8
807	1404–1405	7
812	1409–1410	6
814	1411–1412	6
811	1408–1409	6
810	1407–1408	5
819	1416–1417	5
802	1399–1400	5
826	1422–1423	4
820	1417–1418	4
823	1420–1421	4
828	1424–1425	4
824	1421–1422	4
813	1410–1411	3
827	1423–1424	3
809	1406–1407	3
822	1419–1420	3
841	1437–1438	2
832	1428–1429	2

Table 2. Dates from the 9th century (1397–1493) that are mentioned more than once in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*, ordered by the number of mentions.

3.2. *806 in the Ḫiṭaṭ*

Although the *Ḫiṭaṭ* had been updated through the 9th century, the text's focus on 806 remains startling. In table 2, one can already see the prominence of two dates under which al-Maqrīzī routinely described the aftermath of the crisis: 807/1404–1405 (7 mentions) and 808/1405–1406 (8 mentions). Most importantly, the mentions of 806 far exceed the mention of any date in the text. Table 3 shows the top 20 mentions of dates in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*.

Date AH	Date range CE	Mentions in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*	Percentage of total date mentions
806	1403–1404	75	2.182
10	631–632	28	0.815
20	640–641	27	0.786
700	1300–1301	25	0.727
790	1388–1389	23	0.669
358	968–969	22	0.64
516	1122–1123	21	0.611
725	1324–1325	19	0.553
567	1171–1172	19	0.553
780	1378–1379	19	0.553
660	1261–1262	18	0.524
517	1123–1124	18	0.524
65	684–685	18	0.524
21	641–642	17	0.495
300	912–913	17	0.495
59	678–679	17	0.495
403	1012–1013	17	0.495
40	660–661	16	0.466
4	625–626	16	0.466
720	1320–1321	16	0.466

Table 3. The top 20 mentioned dates in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*[56].

As can be seen in table 3, the 75 mentions of 806 far exceed those mentions for other dates; the second most mentioned date has only 28 mentions. This proportion of date mentions is also unusual when compared to another of al-Maqrīzī's texts, the *Muqaffā*. In this biographical dictionary, al-Maqrīzī mentions 6798 dates in total (compared to 3437 dates in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*).

56. Original data: 0845Maqrizi.Mawaciz.MAB02082022-ara1.completed.dates_tagged.top_20.csv

This difference roughly corresponds to the difference in text length; the *Muqaffā* is a little under twice as long as the *Ḫiṭaṭ*.[57] However, in the *Muqaffā* the most common date (710/1310–1311) is only mentioned 36 times across the work and the second most common dates (699/1299–1300, 709/1309–1310 and 711/1311–1312) are each mentioned 33 times.[58] The *Ḫiṭaṭ*'s disproportionate focus on one date is, therefore, unique in the context of his oeuvre (fig. 2).

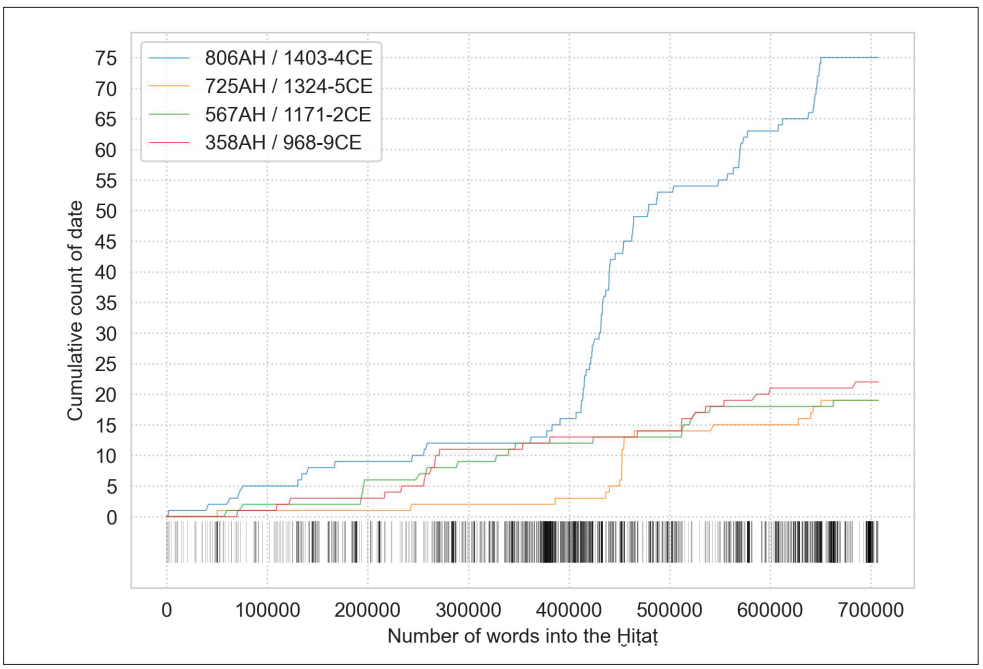

Fig. 2. A plot comparing cumulative mentions of the year 806 across the *Ḫiṭaṭ* with other dates. Each grey bar at the bottom of the graph indicates where a new section begins in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*.[59] Owing to the scale of the graph, if a section is short, then the beginning markers will appear next to each other in the graph. Longer sections appear as a grey bar followed by white space, while lots of consecutive short sections appear as a larger black bar. The chart shows the accumulation of dates from the start to the end of the work. A flat line indicates that there has been no new mentions of the respective date in that part of the work, steep lines indicate many consecutive mentions of the date.[60]

Moreover, mentions of 806 are not concentrated in one part of the *Ḫiṭaṭ*. As can be seen in figure 2, there are mentions of 806 spread throughout the *Ḫiṭaṭ*. The steep line from around 400,000 until 500,000 words into the text shows how there is a sharp increase in mentions of 806 around the part of the book where al-Maqrīzī discusses locations that are relevant to

57. The *Ḫiṭaṭ* is six-hundred and eighty-thousand words, compared to the *Muqaffā*'s one million, one-hundred and fourteen-thousand words.
58. Text with dates tagged: 0845Maqrizi.Muqaffa.Shamela19Y0145334-ara1.dates_tagged; Counts of each date in the text: 0845Maqrizi.Muqaffa.Shamela19Y0145334-ara1.dates_tagged.all_dates_distinct.csv.
59. For section divisions, I have used Sayyids' more granular headings and annotated them into the OpenITI text. These section headings do not always reflect al-Maqrīzī's own divisions of the text, but they are a good proxy for topical and topographical categories within the text's structure. See note 53 above.
60. Graph generated from this data set: 0845Maqrizi.Mawaciz.MAB02082022.sectiona-top10-dates.csv.

more contemporary periods; compare the parallel (albeit much smaller) uptick in mentions around the same point in the book for the year 725/1324–1325. However, there are multiple increases in mentions of the year 806, across the work (in other words, mention of the date is not confined to sections dealing with contemporary al-Qāhira). A similar pattern can be identified for the years 358/968–969 (the Fatimid foundation of al-Qāhira) and 567/1171–1172 (the fall of the Fatimids to Saladin), both important turning points. This pattern suggests that the crisis of 806 is a theme that al-Maqrīzī routinely returns to within the work and is part of his broader periodisation of Egyptian history within the Ḫiṭaṭ.

3.3. *Al-Maqrīzī and the Crisis of 806: a Personal Trauma?*

These data likely underplay the significance that al-Maqrīzī gave to the events of 806 in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*, as he often alludes to the crisis without mentioning the date. Turning to descriptions within the text itself, we see how the crisis of 806 appears as a personal turning point in Egyptian history. It sometimes demarcates the boundary between the past and al-Maqrīzī's lived experience; see, for example, the contrast drawn in his description of the *Suwayqat al-ʿArab*:

> I found it crowded until after the year 806 [1403–1404]. It reached me that before that [date], in the 760s [1358–1367], that every day seven-thousand loaves were baked there, for the population in its vicinity was so great. Today no one lives in those houses except owls, and nothing is heard there apart from echoes.[61]

Al-Maqrīzī is clearly drawing on his experience ("I found it") alongside records (al-Maqrīzī was born in 766/1364–1365, hence his use of the phrase "it reached me"). Other times al-Maqrīzī draws a contrast between his own experiences before and after 806. This is seen in his description of the quarter [*ḥuṭṭ*] of Ḫān al-Sabīl:

> I found [*adraknā*] this quarter at the height of its prosperity. A courtyard was set up there where it was possible to buy grain, and there was a market there where one could buy wood. The people gathered there on the afternoon of every Friday and bought there geese and chicken in amounts that cannot be estimated. There was there also a number of houses [*masākin*] that were [situated] between the mansions [*dūr*], taverns and other buildings. This quarter became disordered.[62]

In this case the cause of the decline is left unmentioned, but it is likely to be an allusion to the crisis of 806. As Rabbat has recently noted, many of al-Maqrīzī's descriptions of places in the *Ḫiṭaṭ* are like this, concluding with notes about either their complete loss, or their decline, in the author's present.[63] As can be seen in the first example, discussions of the impact of

61. Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḫiṭaṭ* III, pp. 352–353.
62. Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḫiṭaṭ* II, p. 104.
63. Rabbat 2023, p. 158 (examples listed in note 14).

the crisis could be rhetorical and melancholic. If the frequent references to 806 suggest an obsession with the crisis, the descriptions themselves reveal much about the pessimistic mood that had driven this obsession.

4. Describing the Fatimid *fitna* in the Aftermath of the Crisis of 806

The *Ḫiṭaṭ* is hugely concerned with the year 806. Al-Maqrīzī updated the text over time, taking account of the later sultanate, but the introductory *faṣl* and the routine mentions of the year 806 throughout the text all suggest that the work was conceived around the time that al-Maqrīzī wrote the *Iġāṯa*, when the mismanagement of Barqūq and the subsequent crisis of 806 were at the forefront of his mind. The introductory *faṣl*, however, gave much more significant emphasis to the Fatimid *fitna*, as a defining crisis in Egyptian history. If the concerns of the *Iġāṯa* are present in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*, then we would also expect there to be overlap between how the two works describe the Fatimid *fitna*.

4.1. *The Account of the Fatimid* fitna*: the Chronological Account*

The famine that came about as a result of the Fatimid *fitna* was well recognised by medieval historians as a pivotal moment. Accounts of the famine routinely claim that it lasted 7 years. This reference to 7 years is intended to deliberately mirror the Egyptian famine during the time of Joseph.[64] The implication is that it was a historic crisis with few parallels,[65] an event that was well-remembered. This is overt at the opening of the account in the *Iġāṯa*, where al-Maqrīzī states (emphasis mine) the famine: "had an atrocious effect and left *a horrid memory* [*šanuʿa ḏikruhu*]",[66] and at its close where he notes: "The story of these [years of] famine is well-known."[67]

64. Yāqūt, *Muʿǧam* IV, pp. 265–266; al-Maqrīzī, *Ḫiṭaṭ* II, p. 141 (both quoting the late-Fatimid author al-Ǧawwānī). Some authors directly compare to Joseph: Ibn Ḫallikān, *Wafāya* V, p. 230; Ibn Muyassar, *Aḫbār*, p. 72; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* XXVIII, p. 233; al-Ḏahabī, *Taʾrīḫ* XXXIII, p. 228; al-Yāfiʿī, *Mirāt* III, 110; al-Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāẓ* II, pp. 296–297; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Nuǧūm al-zāhira* V, p. 4; al-Suyūṭī, *Taʾrīḫ*, p. 644. Or they allude to it through a poem (sometimes omitting mention of '7 years' altogether): Ibn al-Aṯīr, *Kāmil* VIII, p. 385; al-Ḏahabī, *Taʾrīḫ* XXXI, pp. 8–9; al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn* II, p. 288; al-Suyūṭī, *Taʾrīḫ*, p. 647. Although I am citing printed texts here, I initially identified the overlaps between these texts using the text reuse cluster data set (see Barber, May 19 2022), before then consulting the texts and comparing closely.

65. Al-Ḏahabī underlined this elsewhere when he summarised: "nothing like it had ever been heard of". Al-Ḏahabī, *ʿIbar* II, p. 312.

66. Al-Maqrīzī, *Iġāṯa*, p. 98; Allouche 1994, p. 37.

67. Al-Maqrīzī, *Iġāṯa*, p. 100; Allouche 1994, p. 39.

However, many of these authors only describe a famine, and not the civil war that caused it. A more detailed account of the *fitna* itself first appears in the history of Ibn Muyassar, likely copied or adapted from lost Fatimid source texts. This version of the account (or at the very least the version provided by Ibn Muyassar's source texts) was used by al-Maqrīzī across his works.

That account leading up to the famine can be broken into 5 main parts:

1. In 454/1062, a disagreement breaks out between the Turkish and Black (*ʿabīd*) faction of the army. The mother of the Caliph, herself an emancipated black slave, supports and arms the black contingent.[68]
2. In 459/1066–1067, a full war erupts between the factions. The Turkish faction strengthens under the leadership of Nāṣir al-Dawla Ibn Ḥamdān and the black faction are forced to retreat to Upper Egypt. A small faction also goes to Alexandria, but Ibn Hamdān defeats them.[69]
3. In 460/1067–1068 the Turkish faction increases in strength and palace assets begin to be sold off to fund them. They proceed to upper Egypt to fight the black faction, but are defeated. They take up residence in Giza and cause trouble for the Caliph al-Mustanṣir, accusing him of funding the black faction. The Turks go to upper Egypt again and inflict a defeat on the black faction.[70]
4. In 461/1068–1069, the Turkish faction split from Ibn Ḥamdān, accusing him of distributing the palace's pay only among his close retinue, leaving nothing for the soldiers. Under the same year it is noted that the famine worsened (it is not made clear when it began), that food became scarce in the provinces, and that a number of people had perished because of the fighting.[71]
5. In 462/1069–1070, Ibn Ḥamdān allied with the Abbasid Caliphate and invited the Seljuq Alp Arslān to take Egypt. The hunger became even worse, and a large part of the palace was sold off to pay the army.[72]

The final mention of the famine occurs in 462. Ibn Muyassar continues to narrate Ibn Ḥamdān's actions, his eventual fall and how the fighting had continued until the general Badr al-Ǧamālī arrived from Syria in 466/1073 and gradually restored order.[73] It is clear from this narrative that the famine was caused by, or at the very least exacerbated by, the long period of civil war. Al-Maqrīzī provides more detailed descriptions of the famine itself under the

68. Ibn Muyassar, *Aḫbār*, pp. 29–31.
69. Ibn Muyassar, *Aḫbār*, pp. 38–39.
70. Ibn Muyassar, *Aḫbār*, pp. 39–40.
71. Ibn Muyassar, *Aḫbār*, pp. 41–43.
72. Ibn Muyassar, *Aḫbār*, pp. 43–45.
73. Ibn Muyassar, *Aḫbār*, pp. 46–49.

years 461 and 462 (we do not know from where these accounts originated),[74] and under both years he underlines how the famine was the result of the *fitna*. Under 461 he states:

> This famine was not just from an insufficient Nile flood; it was from differences in authority and factions warring against one-another.[75]

Al-Maqrīzī expands on these claims under the year 462:

> War between the Turks and Blacks [*al-ʿabīd*] spread to the country for eight months, fighting day and night. People were prevented from conducting their trades. The Nile rose and was sufficient, but they were not able to farm. The distress became serious for the people, their hunger worsened and their losses grew.[76]

These observations are not unique to al-Maqrīzī; similar reports are provided by Ibn Muyassar and al-Nuwayrī (they all potentially share a source text), but these authors dismiss the importance of the Nile flood entirely: "this famine was not from an insufficient Nile flood."[77] By at least the 7th/13th century, the famine that followed the fitna was not only infamous throughout the Islamic world for its severity, but it was also well-known in Egypt that it had not been caused by a failure of the Nile flood.

4.2. *The Account of the Fatimid* fitna *in the* Iġāṭa*: a Narrative of a Weak State*

In the *Iġāṭa*, al-Maqrīzī had blamed the crisis of 806 on the poor governance of the Circassian Mamluks, crucially Barqūq's reliance on bribery and appointment of an Ustādār who would mismanage Egypt's monetary policy. In service to his argument, he listed a series of Egyptian famines that had not been caused by weak governance. However, as is clear from the *Ittiʿāẓ*, al-Maqrīzī understood that the famine that had followed the Fatimid *fitna* had not just been caused by a poor Nile flood; it had been worsened by factional fighting and civil war. This factional division had, moreover, been made worse by the state. The Caliph's mother had supported and armed the black faction, and the Caliph had continued to finance and support the Turkish faction—selling off the palace's wealth in the service of this. This is not dissimilar to the kind of infighting between the Mamluk *amīr*s that al-Maqrīzī had condemned in his own day.

74. Just because some of the accounts are not given by Ibn Muyassar in the text as it survives today, does not mean that they did not originate there. Our surviving copy of Ibn Muyassar's text is a selection of material taken from the text by al-Maqrīzī that was then later copied (only copies of the text, not al-Maqrīzī's original, survive). It is possible that al-Maqrīzī had copied sections directly from Ibn Muyassar's text into his *Ittiʿāẓ* and not added those sections to his selections from Ibn Muyassar. Ibn Muyassar, *Aḫbār*, p. *13–14.
75. Al-Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāẓ* II, p. 396.
76. Al-Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāẓ* II, p. 399.
77. Ibn Muyassar, *Aḫbār*, p. 72; Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* XXVIII, p. 234.

There are similarities between the *fitna* and the crisis of 806, but how is that reflected in the *Iġāṭa*? In the section of the *Iġāṭa* that lists the famines, al-Maqrīzī lists 17 famines in total. For 11 of these, al-Maqrīzī states that these famines were caused by an insufficient Nile flood; in the remaining 6 no cause is given at all.[78] For two cases, al-Maqrīzī identifies human factors alongside the failure of the Nile flood. The first is from the pre-Islamic period during the reign of Farʿān b. Masūr: "it was caused by injustice and chaos, which increased until they became common practice. Drought struck the land and the crops were ruined."[79] The second is the Fatimid *fitna*, where al-Maqrīzī summarises:

> [the famine] lasted seven years and was caused by: the weakness of the sultanate [*daʿfu al-salṭanati*],[80] the deterioration of the affairs of state, the usurpation of power by the military commanders, the continuous strife among the Bedouins, the failure of the Nile to reach its plenitude, and the non-cultivation of the lands that had been irrigated.[81]

Through this veritable list of causes, al-Maqrīzī acknowledges that a major reason for the famine had been the growing power of the military factions. However, he adds to this another cause: the weakening of the sultanate. Al-Maqrīzī is alluding here to the aftermath of the arrest and execution of the vizier al-Yāzūrī in 450/1058. Al-Yāzūrī had ruled with strength and stability, and his demise brought about a power vacuum that no one person was able to fill. Between 450/1058 and the arrival of Badr al-Ǧamālī in 466/1073, there were rapid changes in appointment to the offices of vizier and chief *qāḍī*, with officials holding these positions for sometimes only a month at a time.[82] This political instability is seen in Ibn Muyassar's chronicle, where he dryly remarks upon those who were dismissed and appointed to offices under each year. However, he never associates this instability with the outbreak of the *fitna* or the famine, which he clearly blames on the machinations of the Caliph's mother.

Al-Maqrīzī is, in fact, the only historian to claim that this political weakness was a cause of the subsequent famine. In the *Iġāṭa* narrative, he dwells entirely upon this factor, completely ignoring Ibn Muyassar's account of the *fitna*. The following is an excerpted version of al-Maqrīzī's description in the *Iġāṭa*:

> After the vizier Abū Muḥammad [al-Yāzūrī] was killed, the state enjoyed neither righteousness nor stability. The affairs of the state were in disarray, and no praiseworthy or efficient vizier was appointed…

78. For a table of the sections and the stated causes, see: igatha_famine_reasons_no_cause.csv.
79. Al-Maqrīzī, *Iġāṭa*, p. 82; Allouche 1994, pp. 27–28.
80. Allouche translates this phrase as "the weakness of the Sultan's authority". I feel this is a little misleading, as it implies that al-Maqrīzī had described al-Mustanṣir as a Sultan. Al-Maqrīzī usually refers to Fatimid rulers as Caliphs [*ḫalīfa*] in the *Iġāṭa*, and as such it's more precise to refer to "sultanate"—that is the general ruling authority, rather than "sultan", with all of the Mamluk parallels that this might suggest.
81. Al-Maqrīzī, *Iġāṭa*, p. 98; adapted from: Allouche 1994, p. 37.
82. For a discussion of this crisis and its historiography, see Brett (2019b).

> The vizier, from the time the robe of honour was bestowed upon him to the time he left office, was constantly on guard against those who would slander him to the sultan. Then these strongmen [*al-Riǧāl*][83] would stand up against the vizier, and it would be useless for him to defend himself. [This led to] the ruin of the tax provinces and to a decrease in state revenues. The strongmen took control of most of the revenues and laid their hands on the revenue-generating sources. As a result, the revenues of Lower Egypt came to represent only a minimal fraction of what they previously were…
>
> These strongmen exceeded proper bounds and were emboldened to the point that they went beyond claiming their dues [and resorted] to confiscations. They depleted the wealth of the Caliph, emptied his coffers, and compelled him to sell his belongings…
>
> Later their boldness increased to the point that they proceeded to assess the value of the items offered for sale. Whenever the assessors arrived, they would be frightened by these men. Consequently, they would assess items valued at one thousand [dirhams] at only one hundred or less. Al-Mustanṣir and the public treasurer were aware of this; however, they were unable to exact what was due from these strongmen. The situation of the state deteriorated and authority vanished. When these strongmen realized that nothing was left for them to take, they divided the tax provinces among themselves and plunged them into a state of utter confusion. They took over these tax provinces as if they had conquered them by force. This lasted for five or six years, then the Nile failed to reach its plenitude and the ensuing rise in prices was so high that it dispersed their coalition… they killed each other.[84]

In the outlines of this account, one can recognise the traditional narrative of the *fitna*. The *Riǧāl*—nameless strongmen, perhaps used to mean important military men without rank—appear to be a veiled reference to the Turkish faction (or perhaps even both factions). These men seize control of revenue sources, later tax provinces (*al-ʿummāl*), and reduced their productivity—this seems to be referring to how rogue regiments from both factions had occupied various parts of Egypt during the *fitna*. The demands of these strongmen become such that they force al-Mustanṣir to sell palace assets to pay them. Finally, when the Nile flood fails, the strongmen take to fighting amongst themselves—this appears to be a reference to when some of the Turkish faction split from Ibn Ḥamdān in 461/1068–1069. However, al-Maqrīzī has stripped this narrative of all references to the Turkish or Black factions and instead blamed the political instability that followed al-Yāzūrī's death. In this version of events, it is the weak vizierate, not the queen mother's favour towards the Black faction, that allows the warring factions to take hold.

Al-Maqrīzī's alternative reading of the *fitna* should not, of course, be dismissed entirely out of hand. It is very likely that the weakness of the state had allowed the enmity between

83. Allouche translates this as "rogues", which is a little misleading as it implies that al-Maqrīzī had given them an overtly negative framing.

84. Al-Maqrīzī, *Iġāṯa*, pp. 96–97; adapted from: Allouche 1994, pp. 36–37.

the Turkish and Black factions to develop unchecked. However, I believe that al-Maqrīzī has crafted, or at the very least embroidered, this narrative, according to his own views regarding the link between a weak state and famine. The first hint of al-Maqrīzī's intervention is his use of terminology. In the passage quoted above, he claims that enemies of the vizier "would slander him to the sultan." Elsewhere, he also notes how "every unworthy person presented himself to the sultan."[85] In the *Iġāṭa* (as in all of his works), al-Maqrīzī is often careful to refer to the Fatimid ruler as a Caliph [*ḫalīfa*], likely imitating the language he found in his source texts. His use of the term sultan here suggests that he is intervening more thoroughly in the narrative, using vaguer terminology for "ruler" or "authority" to make his more overtly political statement.

Even more strikingly, the explanation of the *fitna* that al-Maqrīzī offers in the *Iġāṭa*, contains claims that are remarkably similar to those that he levelled in the *Iġāṭa* at Barqūq and the Circassian Sultanate. On the 806 crisis, he states:

> The first cause, the source of this decay, is the holding of administrative and religious positions, such as the vizierate, judgeships, provincial governorships, the ḥisba, and other functions through bribery… Consequently, every ignorant, corrupt, unjust, and oppressive person has reached a highly regarded and important position that he never expected to attain… The nomination and investiture take place so rapidly that the new appointee does not have on hand even a small fraction of the amount [of the bribe] pledged… Naturally then, he connives and heedlessly seeks to acquire wealth, not caring if this brings about the ruination of a number of souls, the spilling of blood, and the enslaving of free women. He is also compelled to impose taxes on his retinue and aides and to demand immediate payment from them… When the rural population was burdened with a multitude of taxes and a variety of injustices, their situation became precarious, so they scattered and deserted their land. Consequently, tax receipts and revenues decreased because of diminishing agriculture, depopulation and emigration.[86]

These claims follow those made in the *Sulūk*—outlined above—that Barqūq relied heavily on bribery for appointing officials. For al-Maqrīzī, the costs of these bribes were a root cause for the depopulation of the countryside and subsequent decline in cultivation. Although the bribery is not at the heart of al-Maqrīzī's explanation of the Fatimid *fitna*, the mechanisms at work are similar. In both cases, there is a weakness in the state and a rapid change in appointments—in the case of the *fitna* this is because of a weak Caliph, and in the case of 806, it is a result of the bribery system. In both, the unstable political environment leads to a growth in corrupt governors, who exploited revenue sources for personal gain, increasing pressure on the peasantry. The end result is a fall in the amount of cultivated land. Al-Maqrīzī's explanation of the Fatimid *fitna* in the *Iġāṭa* seems, therefore, to be significantly shaped by his views on the crisis of 806.

85. Al-Maqrīzī, *Iġāṭa*, p. 96; Allouche 1994, p. 36.
86. Al-Maqrīzī, *Iġāṭa*, pp. 117–118; Allouche 1994, pp. 52–53.

4.3. *Parallels to the* Iġāṯa *Narrative in the* Ḫiṭaṭ

As noted above, al-Maqrīzī was aware of Ibn Muyassar's explanation of the Fatimid *fitna*. This is presented in his *Ittiʿāẓ*, only preceded by a short comment on the post-Yāzūrī political instability which is not directly linked to the *fitna*. A key question is how he portrays the *fitna* in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*, a text which is profoundly shaped by the crisis of 806. There is not one unified explanation of the *fitna* in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*, but several, each shaped by the section in which it is narrated. In this section I will focus on two of the most prominent descriptions, both of which illustrate how al-Maqrīzī's worldview (as it is presented in the *Iġāṯa*) had shaped his discussion of the Fatimid *fitna* in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*.

In the first case, al-Maqrīzī provides a summarised form of the explanation that he gives in the *Iġāṯa*. It is given as part of the historical summary entitled "the Fatimid caliphs."[87] In this section we are provided with a brief account of the *fitna*, which is framed entirely in the context of political decline:

> In the year 453 [1061–1062] the dismissal and appointment of viziers and qāḍīs increased. The rabble increasingly mingled with the caliph and unworthy[88] ones **presented themselves**. [It was] such that every day **800 slips** arrived containing petitions and complaints. **He became confused and the situation deteriorated. Discord prevailed among his subjects, and the viziers were too weak to carry out their tasks because of their short tenure.**
>
> **The tax provinces**[89] **were ruined, and their revenues decreased. Strongmen** [*al-Riǧāl*] **ruled over the majority of them** [**the provinces**], [taking] excessive returns, underestimating [important] matters and [behaving with a kind of] tyranny [found among] the elites. [This happened] until matters led to the occurrence of the great misery [*al-šidda al-ʿuẓmā*], as has been mentioned in its place in this book. Regarding the arrival of the *amīr al-ǧuyūš* Badr al-Ǧamālī in the year 466 [1073] and his rise to rule Miṣr, this is mentioned in his biography under the section on the gates of al-Qāhira.[90]

Here it seems that al-Maqrīzī has used the explanation in the *Iġāṯa* as a base and summarised, in places reusing some of the same language (shared language between the two texts is in bold, and key differences noted in the footnotes). In doing so he links the political disorder of the 450s, and the seizure of the provinces by "strongmen" to the outbreak of the Fatimid *fitna*, and in this case (unlike in the *Iġāṯa*) he makes the link explicit.

87. Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḫiṭaṭ* II, pp. 176–206.
88. The *Ḫiṭaṭ* describes these people as "*al-arḍāl*", where the *Iġāṯa* has "*al-safsāf*".
89. In the *Iġāṯa*, we find "tax provinces of the state (*aʿmāl al-dawla)*", rather than just tax provinces. Thus, Allouche reads "its revenues" as referring to state revenues rather than provincial revenues in his translation of the *Iġāṯa*.
90. Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḫiṭaṭ* II, p. 197.

In the quotation, al-Maqrīzī cross-references another description of the *fitna* in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*. The cross-reference is vague (there is no section entitled "*al-Šidda al-ʿUẓmā*" in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*), but it is likely referring to a very detailed description of the *fitna* and its causes given earlier in the book, under a section entitled "the destruction of Fusṭāṭ." This description of the *fitna* is quite different to that found in the *Iġāṯa*. It frames the *fitna* as part of a broader history of crises in Fusṭāṭ (that is, it builds on the theme he presented in the introduction). It begins:

> There were two reasons for the destruction of Fusṭāṭ Miṣr. The first of them is "the great misery" (*al-šidda al-ʿuẓmā*) which was during the caliphate of al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh the Fatimid. The second is "the burning of Miṣr", during the vizierate of Šāwar b. Muǧīr al-Saʿdī.[91]

Al-Maqrīzī in fact goes beyond these "two reasons", providing a more chronologically extensive history of destructive events in Egypt and Miṣr in a manner not dissimilar to the introductory *faṣl* of the *Ḫiṭaṭ*. Following a lengthy history of the *fitna*, he describes the "burning of Miṣr" at a similar length. He then concludes by briefly documenting the rise and fall of Miṣr up to his own time—giving only a few lines to each case. He notes first the famines and epidemics of 595–596/1198–1200 and 696/1297, then the "great ruin" (*al-fanāʾ al-kabīr*) of 749/1348. No explanations are given for these crises; they are just briefly outlined. He then concludes by stating:

> Thing after thing continued to be destroyed until the year 790 [1388–1389]. Then destruction intensified in the lanes of al-Qanādīl and the quarter of al-Naḫḫālīn and people began to demolish the houses of Miṣr and sell the rubble, until it became what it is today.[92]

Although this account does not directly mention the crisis of 806, al-Maqrīzī's note that decline accelerated after 790 agrees with his assertions elsewhere that Barqūq had appointed the corrupt Maḥmūd (the cause of the fiscal crisis) in this year.

At first glance the section on the "Destruction of Miṣr" aligns more closely with al-Maqrīzī's general pessimism about crises found throughout his works. Unlike the *Iġāṯa*, it deviates into crises other than famine, dedicating almost half of the section to the "burning of Miṣr". This event had an entirely human cause—the deliberate burning of the city by the vizier in order to prevent the invading Franks from capturing it. This betrays some of his belief that poor governance could result in loss and destruction, but he does not openly blame corruption as he does for crises elsewhere.

However, if one studies only the *fitna* portion of this section more closely, we find another variation of an argument presented in the *Iġāṯa*. As al-Maqrīzī explained in that text: "the periods of famine that have befallen mankind since the Creation have been caused largely by natural

91. Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḫiṭaṭ* II, p. 135.
92. Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḫiṭaṭ* II, p. 146.

catastrophes sent by God."[93] He follows this statement by explaining how the crisis of 806 had, by contrast, been exacerbated by human causes. As we saw above, the narrative of the *fitna* presented in the *Iġāṭa* does not neatly fit this model, placing enormous stress on how it had been caused by weaknesses in governance. By contrast, the account presented in this section of the *Ḫiṭaṭ* appears to claim that natural causes had played a more significant role.

The narrative of the *fitna* that is provided in this section of the *Ḫiṭaṭ* is a chronological account, which is a more detailed version of that given by Ibn Muyassar and it likely relies heavily either on his text or his source texts. As has already been noted, this version of events largely blames the Caliph's mother for the *fitna*. However, in the *Ḫiṭaṭ* the account is framed in a way that emphasises preceding famine events. The description of the *fitna* begins: "As for the great misery, its cause was that prices rose in Egypt in the year 446 [1054–1055]. Famine and epidemic followed."[94] Al-Maqrīzī then describes how the Caliph appealed to help from the Byzantine emperor, who agreed and dispatched grain. However, before the grain arrived, the emperor died and his successor (a "woman", al-Maqrīzī insists!) reneged on the agreement. The Caliph responded by sending an army to the Byzantine frontier and fighting ensued. Al-Maqrīzī then notes that in 447/1055–1056 the Caliph sent an ambassador to the empress, who learned that a Seljuk envoy had been allowed to pray in the Constantinople Mosque. In response the Caliph closed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and confiscated its wealth. Al-Maqrīzī then concludes: "In this year the famine worsened, and the epidemics increased in Miṣr, al-Qāhira and its provinces until the year 454 [1062–1063]."[95] Al-Maqrīzī finally moves onto the events of the *fitna* itself.

At first glance this discussion of a series of diplomatic crises with the Byzantines appears to be an odd and inappropriate digression—it has nothing to do with the destruction of Fusṭāṭ mentioned in the section title. However, the framing here is important. Al-Maqrīzī is attempting to link the *fitna* to the two famines that had occurred in the 446 and 447. The links are quite tenuous, and they are buried within the descriptions of the diplomatic crisis that surrounded them—and this seems typical of al-Maqrīzī's constant impulse (especially in his compilatory works) to be comprehensive rather than concise.[96] However, the framework presented here seems to accord with al-Maqrīzī's broader desire to associate historical Egyptian famines with natural causes, and thus exaggerate the "human" causes of the 806 crisis.

* * *

93. Al-Maqrīzī, *Iġāṭa*, p. 115; Allouche 1994, p. 50.

94. Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḫiṭaṭ* II, p. 135.

95. Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḫiṭaṭ* II, p. 136. The surviving accounts of these two diplomatic incidents are in no way uniform; al-Maqrīzī is giving one version of events here (elsewhere he provides another). Both are potentially derived from different Fatimid sources. See Barber 2021, chap. 5; Barber 2019.

96. This is further seen when al-Maqrīzī concludes the Byzantine episode by remarking: "[Relations] between the Egyptians and Byzantines were poor from then until they occupied the entirety of the coast [of Syria] and made siege to al-Qāhira, as will be returned to in its place, God willing." That is, he could not resist linking this narrative about the Byzantines to the crusades and making a cross reference to another part of the text.

It is almost certain that al-Maqrīzī's worldview has shaped the way in which he presents and frames his material in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*. Using the *Iġāṯa* as a key, we have seen how al-Maqrīzī's experience of the crisis of 806 and his interpretation of that crisis coloured his descriptions and framing of Fatimid history. As is seen in the introduction of the *Ḫiṭaṭ*, al-Maqrīzī had a significant interest in the Fatimid *fitna*, as one of a series of crises that afflicted Egypt up to the crisis of 806. It seems likely that the *Ḫiṭaṭ* began as an authorial project around the same time as the *Iġāṯa* and that it was shaped by his profound pessimism at that time. This is seen in the continual references to 806 throughout the text, suggesting a disproportionate emphasis on this one event.

However, the *Ḫiṭaṭ* was an evolving compilation, a project that lasted the author's lifetime. Consequently, the text provides multiple presentations of the Fatimid *fitna*. These reflect al-Maqrīzī's continually evolving worldview. They also echo an internal battle between his interest in judicious compiling and categorising and his interest in using history to teach lessons and find precedents. The *Iġāṯa*, like many of al-Maqrīzī's essays, was written with one historical lesson or precedent in mind. By contrast, the *Ḫiṭaṭ*, provides several perspectives on the *fitna*. This is likely true for so many of the events described in the *Ḫiṭaṭ*. It at the very least suggests that we should pay attention to the broader context of the *Ḫiṭaṭ*'s excerpts on the Fatimids, and it should encourage us to compare accounts of the same event across different sections of the *Ḫiṭaṭ*—quite ironically, the opposite of al-Maqrīzī's intention, who urges us that each chapter can be read separately from the whole. The Fatimid-era material in the *Ḫiṭaṭ* is as much evidence of al-Maqrīzī's own ideas, theories and concerns as it is evidence of actual Fatimid history. This should not dismay us but encourage us to study the work more widely and more deeply.

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Abbreviations

MSRev = Mamluk Studies Review

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