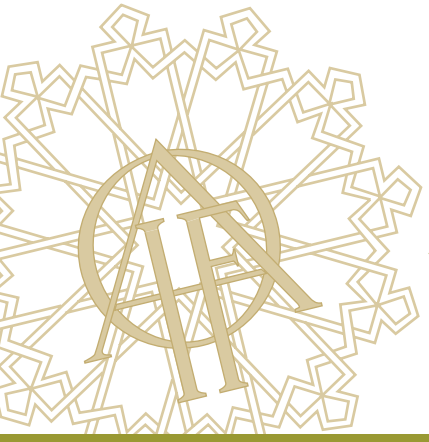
MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION NATIONALE, DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR ET DE LA RECHERCHE



ANNALES ISLAMOLOGIQUES

en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne

AnIsl 25 (1991), p. 127-131

Paula Sanders

A New Source for the History of Fatimid Ceremonial: The Rasāʾil al-ʿAmīdī.

Conditions d'utilisation

L'utilisation du contenu de ce site est limitée à un usage personnel et non commercial. Toute autre utilisation du site et de son contenu est soumise à une autorisation préalable de l'éditeur (contact AT ifao.egnet.net). Le copyright est conservé par l'éditeur (Ifao).

Conditions of Use

You may use content in this website only for your personal, noncommercial use. Any further use of this website and its content is forbidden, unless you have obtained prior permission from the publisher (contact AT ifao.egnet.net). The copyright is retained by the publisher (Ifao).

Dernières publications

9782724711264	*La chapelle d'Osiris Ounnefer Neb-djefaou*	Laurent Coulon
9782724711752	*Guide du Caire Islamique*	Hadrien Collet
9782724711660	*Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales 41*	Adrien Candiard (éd.)
9782724711745	*Bulletin archéologique des Écoles françaises à l'étranger (BAEFE)*	
9782724711271	*Du côté de chez Zeus*	Emmanuel Botte (éd.), Hélène Cuvigny (éd.), Michel Reddé (éd.)
9782724711677	*La Description de l'Égypte*	Paul-Marie Grinevald
9782724711714	*La pensée et la pratique pharmacologiques d'Avicenne*	Sylvie Ayari
9782724711899	*BCAI 40*	

© Institut français d'archéologie orientale - Le Caire

Paula SANDERS

A NEW SOURCE FOR THE HISTORY OF FĀṬIMID CEREMONIAL: THE *RASĀ'IL AL-'AMĪDĪ*

Students of Fāṭimid ceremonial have always had to depend primarily on descriptions of caliphal processions embedded in the works of Mamlūk writers. The works of al-Maqrīzī, Ibn Taġrī Birdī, and al-Qalqašandī are invaluable as anthologies of earlier (mostly lost) Fāṭimid sources, but they are necessarily limited. In recent years, a very few Fāṭimid sources have been uncovered that have come to us directly, unmediated by Mamlūk historians. While these sources have often been fragmentary, they have added richly to the available corpus of materials on Fāṭimid history [1].

The late Prof. Rudolf Mach brought one of these sources to my attention. The *Rasā'il al-'Amīdī* is a collection of the correspondence of the Fāṭimid *kātib* Abū Sa'īd Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-'Amīdī (d. 433/1042). The Garrett collection of Princeton University Library possesses two manuscripts of this work [2].

Little is known about the author of the collection. Abū Sa'īd al-'Amīdī served in different capacities under the Fāṭimid caliphs aẓ-Ẓahir (r. 411-427/1021-1036) and al-Mustanṣir (r. 427-487/1036-1094). We know only the bare outlines of his career. He served under aẓ-Ẓāhir as supervisor (*mutawallī*) of the *dīwān at-tartīb*, but was dismissed in 413/1022 (we do not know when he was appointed to this post). The only other post he apparently held was as the head of the *dīwān al-inshā'* under al-Mustanṣir. He was appointed to this post after Ibn Khairān was dismissed in Ṣafar 432/1040. He died the following year [3].

1. For a discussion of the sources for the Fāṭimid period, see Aymān Fu'ād Sayyid, "Lumières nouvelles sur quelques sources de l'histoire Fāṭimide en Égypte," *Annales islamologiques* XIII (1977), p. 1-41.

2. Ms. 4059 [Cat. 4365] in the Mach catalogue of the Garrett Collection. The letter presented here is found in fols. 24-25. I have learned recently that Prof. Iḥsān 'Abbās is preparing a critical edition of the *Rasā'il al-'Amīdī*.

Al-'Amīdī was the author of a number of works of *adab*, according to Yāqūt. One of his works (not among those listed by Yāqūt) has been published. It is *al-Ibāna 'an sariqāt al-Mutannabī*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Dasūqī al-Bisāṭī (Cairo : Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1961). I am grateful to Dr. Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid for bringing this work to my attention.

3. The longest biographical entry we have for him is in Yāqūt's *Mu'ğam al-Udabā'*, vol. 17, p. 212, no. 68. He is mentioned in al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā*, vol. 1, p. 96 under his description of the organization of the *'inshā'* in Egypt, as following both Ibn Khairān and Wālī al-dawla

AnIsl 25 (1991), p. 127-131 Paula Sanders
A New Source for the History of Fatimid Ceremonial: The Rasā'il al-'Amīdī.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

The text presented here is a description of a Fāṭimid procession in a letter to one Ibn Maslama, about whom no other information seems to be available. Major caliphal processions were always announced in the Fāṭimid period to the provinces in letters issuing from the *dīwān al-inshā'*. A number of these literary specimens remain, most from the pen of the celebrated *kātib* Ibn aṣ-Ṣayrafī [4]. But these letters are much longthier and far more ornate in style. It is likely that this letter was not an official document, but rather a personal letter. This might account for several difficulties in establishing the proper context for the letter.

One problem is the identification of the procession itself. The Fāṭimid caliphs went in procession from Cairo to Fusṭāṭ on several occasions during the year : on the first day of Ramaḍān, on some Fridays during the month of Ramaḍān and for the cutting of the canal at the inundation of the Nile. The caliphs also paraded to Fusṭāṭ on the New Year, but the first mention in the standard sources for a New Year procession is in the year 517/1123, nearly a century after al-ʿAmīdī died. On the Two Festivals and the day of Ġadīr Khumm, the Fāṭimids paraded north of Cairo or stayed within its walls [5].

The only clue in the text itself is the initial reference to a procession on Thursday. If we take al-ʿAmīdī's period of literary production to be the entire reign of aẓ-Ẓāhir and the early years of the reign of al-Mustanṣir (the only times for which we have documentation of his activities), the following possibilities emerge. The first of Muḥarram and the first of Ramaḍān each fell on Thursdays on three separate occasions during the period from 411 to 433. The descriptions of processions on the New Year and the first of Ramaḍān include references to the decoration of the streets from Cairo to Fusṭāṭ. If one of these occasions was, in fact, a New Year's procession, then this letter would now constitute the earliest reference we have to New Year's processions in the Fāṭimid period.

Mūsā b. al-Ḥasan as head of the chancery. Neither Ibn Taġrī Birdī's *an-Nuǧūm aẓ-Ẓāhira* nor al-Maqrīzī's *'Itti'āẓ al-Ḥunafā* makes any mention of him. There are, however, brief references in aṣ-Ṣafadī's *al-Wāfī bi'l-Wafayāt*, vol. 2, p. 75-76.

A curious story concerning him is reported by al-Musabbiḥī, *Aḫbār Miṣr*, ed. 'Aymān Fu'ād Sayyid and Thierry Bianquis (Cairo : IFAO, 1978), p. 13. According to al-Musabbiḥī, in Raǧab 414/Sept. 1023, al-ʿAmīdī was appointed as *muḥtasib* in Fusṭāṭ. He apparently balked at the idea and asked to be excused from the office, protesting, " I was previously a companion (*ǧalīs*) of the Commander of the Faithful and master of his purse (*Ṣāḥib ḫarīṭatihī*). Should I now become a *muḥtasib*? I cannot! "

Clearly, al-ʿAmīdī felt that the office of *muḥtasib* was too common relative to his former position.

4. See al-Maqrīzī, *al-Ḫiṭaṭ* (Būlāq edition), vol. 1, p. 456-457, 479; al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ al-'Aʿshā*, vol. 8, p. 314-315, 316-319, 320-329; *as-Siǧillāt al-mustanṣiriyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-Munʿim Māǧid (Cairo, 1954), no. 1, 13, 64.

5. On the history of Fāṭimid ceremonial, see Paula Sanders, " The Court Ceremonial of Fatimid Caliphs in Egypt " (Ph. D., Princeton, 1984). Dr. 'Aymān Fu'ād Sayyid has gathered all of the relevant texts on Fāṭimid processions and is publishing them as an appendix to his forthcoming edition of Ibn aṭ-Ṭuwayr's *Aḫbār Miṣr*.

AnIsl 25 (1991), p. 127-131 Paula Sanders
A New Source for the History of Fatimid Ceremonial: The Rasā'il al-ʿAmīdī.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

It is peculiar, however, that no mention is made of either the New Year or of Ramaḍān. One would expect to find some specific reference to the occasion itself. In official proclamations, like those preserved in *as-Siğillāt al-mustanṣiriyya* or *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā*, the occasion itself is often the subject of a large part of the letter.

There are other peculiarities in the description of the procession. We know that the Fāṭimid caliphs traditionally had a *miẓalla* carried over them when they went in procession outside of the walls of Cairo. These *miẓallas* often matched the costume of the caliph. And they were always worthy of some mention by chroniclers. But there is no mention of a *miẓalla* in this letter, nor to any of the insignia of sovereignty.

What, then, do we learn from this small and problematic text? Its simplicity and its seeming lacunae may be what are most important about it. In official letters, the interest in describing insignia of sovereignty and costumes, and in the use of highly ornate and metaphorical language about both the ruler and the occasion, was not only a function of epistolary convention. It was also a reflection of the intense concerns about legitimacy (and, of course, the symbols of legitimacy) that pervade official texts of all kinds. Perhaps this little epistle provides a kind of snap-shot for us of how a literate man who had served at court — but who was unconstrained either by the conventions required of official correspondence or the court's concern to express symbolically its own legitimacy — saw a procession.

١) الى ابن مسلمة بذكر ركوب امير المؤمنين من القاهرة الى مصر رتبها على جناح طاير
٢) كتبت هذه الرقعة غداة يوم الجمعة الجامعة يشتمل الدولة المؤذنة بالسعادة
٣) المتصلة بذكر ما تجدد امس الخميس وهو اسعد يوم اسفر عنه صباح
٤) ولاحت على وجهه غرر واوضاح من النعمة بركوب امير المؤمنين
٥) فى صبيحته من قصر الخلافة الى مصر على الطريق الشارع لابسا
٦) من ملابس العزّ افخره واعلاه ومن نفائس الجوهر ازهره واغلاه
٧) فى طبقات الاولياء ووجوه الاشراف والامراء والاعيان والعبيد
٨) والقواد واصناف العساكر والاجناد ومواكب حسدت [كوا كب] السماء
٩) [الارض] لزينتها وعظم اقدارها وغبطت النجوم التّرب لجلالة اقدارها
١٠) وقد كانت القاهرة المعزّية الى مصر من عدّة الايام زيّنت بانواع
١١) الحلىّ والحلل وبدايع والديباج والوشى والثياب المذهبة والانماط
١٢) الطميمة المستغربة حتى لم يبق من الارض فيها الاّ وهو مزيّن
١٣) ولا فتر الا وهو مستبدع مستحسن ووقع الاجماع بان هذا اليوم
١٤) المذكور اجل يوم ارخت فيه الايام وعجز عن وصفه الانام وتزينت
١٥) بجماله بطون الدفاتر وتشرفت بذكره رؤوس المنابر ثم عاد الى قصر
١٦) الامامة ومقر العز والكرامة مؤيدا منصورا سالما مخصوصا

AnIsl 25 (1991), p. 127-131 Paula Sanders
A New Source for the History of Fatimid Ceremonial: The Rasā'il al-'Amīdī.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

١٧) بصنيع الله واقباله محفوظا بالملايكة من عن يمينه وشماله فبادرنا
١٨) لهذه البشارة العظيمة اليك لتعرف قدر الموهبة فيما منّ الله تعالى بها له
١٩) من السلامة ولحضرته الشريفة من الانتظام والاستقامة وتذيع ما جرى فى الخاصة والعامة ان شاء الله

Translation [6]

1. To Ibn Maslama, an account of the procession of the Commander of the Faithful from Cairo to Fusṭāṭ [7], which was organized in a wing formation [8].

2. This letter was written on the morning of Friday the Day of Congregation, which enfolds the *dawla* that has been called to prayer with the happiness

3. of remembering what was done anew yesterday on Thursday, the happiest day the dawn has unveiled.

4. Flashing signs and blazes of honor [9] shimmered on the face of the day of the procession of the Commander of the Faithful

5. that morning from the Caliphal Palace to Fusṭāṭ along the main road, wearing

6. the finest, most magnificent, glorious costumes [10], and the costliest and most brilliant gem

7. amidst the ranks of "the friends," [11] and the prominent *ashrāf*, the amirs and notables, the servants [of the dynasty]

8. and the commanders, the various regiments of the military, in such corteges that the heavenly planets envied

9. the earth for its ornamentation [*i.e.*, the caliph] and great dignity, and the stars envied the dust its glorious rank [12].

6. I am grateful to Prof. Roy Mottahedeh for reading the translation of the text. Any errors are, of course, entirely my own responsibility.

7. The text has *miṣr*, the common designation of the period for the city of Fusṭāṭ. On the vocabulary for the two cities, and on the relationship between Cairo and Fusṭāṭ in the Fāṭimid period, see S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. IV, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1983), p. 10-12. For a discussion of the expression of this relationship in Fāṭimid ceremonial, see Paula Sanders, "From Court Ceremony to Urban Language : Ceremonial in Fāṭimid Cairo and Fusṭāṭ," in *The Islamic world from classical to modern times* (Princeton, NJ, 1989), p. 311-321.

8. Lit., "on the wings of a bird," a common description for a military formation. It is possible, however, that the text should be emended to read "*rakabahā* [for : *ratabahā*] *ʿalā ǧanāḥ ṭāyir.*" E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. I, p. 469, gives this phrase, meaning "to quit one's home."

9. On the term *niʿma*, thei mportant quality of the ruler's beneficence, see Roy P. Mottahedeh *Loyalty and leadership in an early Islamic society* (Princeton, 1980), esp. p. 73-79.

10. The phrase *malābis al-ʿizz* is a common designation for the costumes of the caliph and his entourage in descriptions of Fāṭimid processions.

11. The term *awliyā'* may have the specific meaning here of Ismāʿīlis.

12. These are references to the great glory that the presence of the 'imām lends to the earth, a common convention in Fāṭimid poetry. See, for example, Ibn Hāni', *Dīwān*, no. I, 38 : "The (true) heaven of God isn't the one you see; the earth which contains [the 'imām] is (truly) heaven."

AnIsl 25 (1991), p. 127-131 Paula Sanders
A New Source for the History of Fatimid Ceremonial: The Rasā'il al-'Amīdī.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

10. [The road] from Cairo the Muʿizzī [13] to Fusṭāṭ had been decorated for some days with all sorts of

11. ornaments and gala costumes and marvelous things, brocade and embroidery and cloths shot with gold threads, and astonishing *ṭamīm* [14] mats,

12. until there wasn't a bit of earth that wasn't adorned

13. or that didn't seem new and beautiful. The consensus was that

14. this day was the noblest day of all the days that have ever been set down, a day that can't be described.

15. The interiors of the registers were adorned by the beauty of that day and the tops of the minbars were ennobled by its mention. Then [the caliph] returned to the Palace

16. of the Imamate — the seat of glory and generosity — strengthened, victorious, safe, revered, distinguished

17. by God's bounty, guarded by angels on the right and left. I rushed

18. these great good tidings to you so you would know the extent of this gift which God the exalted granted to the

19. noble presence of safety, organization and uprightness, so you could spread the news of what took place among the distinguished and the common [15], God willing.

13. The common designation for Cairo, which was built by the Caliph al-Muʿizz.

14. A precious brocade, see R. B. Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles* (Beirut, 1972), p. 18 and 159. There are numerous references to *ṭamīm* fabrics in descriptions of Fāṭimid ceremonies, but they seem to have been used primarily in clothing.

15. The terms *Ḫāṣṣa wa-ʿāmma*, used together, refer commonly to the basic distinction between levels of society, particularly between those associated with the ruling elite and the ordinary people. On these distinctions, see Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and leadership*, p. 120-122. In Ismāʿīlī usage, the terms can refer to Ismāʿīlīs (*al-ḫāṣṣa*) and non-Ismāʿīlīs (*al-ʿāmma*).

AnIsl 25 (1991), p. 127-131 Paula Sanders
A New Source for the History of Fatimid Ceremonial: The Rasā'il al-'Amīdī.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net