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The foremost Ismaili jurist and founder of Fatimid Ismaili jurisprudence, Abu Hanifa al-Nu‘man b. Muhammad al-Tamimi, better known as al-Qadi al-Nu‘man, was born around 290 AH/ 903 CE into a learned family in Qayrawan, in North Africa. Very little is known about his family, childhood and education. His father Abu ‘Abdullah Muhammad b. Mansur b. Ahmad b. Hayyun, was evidently a convert to Ismaili Shi‘ism from Maliki Sunnism, the prevalent Sunni school of law in Ifriqiya.

Educated as an Ismaili, in 313 AH/ 925 CE al-Nu‘man entered the service of ‘Abdullah al-Mahdi (d. 322 AH/ 934 CE), the Ismaili Imam who had founded the Fatimid caliphate in Ifriqiya in 297 AH/ 909 CE. He served the first four Fatimid imam-caliphs in different capacities, such as the keeper of the palace library, and judge of Tripoli and Mansuriyya, the new capital from 337 AH/ 948 CE under the Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Mansur. Al-Nu‘man’s advancement under the Fatimids culminated in his appointment in 337 AH/ 948 CE by Imam-caliph al-Mansur to the position of chief judge (*qadi al-qudat*) of the Fatimid state. The fourth Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Mu‘izz confirmed al-Nu‘man in that post, and in 343 AH/ 954 CE also entrusted him with the grievances proceedings (*mazalim*) throughout the Fatimid caliphate. In addition, he was authorised by Imam-caliph al-Mu‘izz to hold the ‘sessions of wisdom’ (*majalis al-hikma*) every Friday in the royal palace to instruct Ismaili audiences in the esoteric Ismaili sciences, known as *hikma*, as well as the *ta‘wil* or esoteric interpretations of the Qur’an and the commandments of the Islamic law. Al-Qadi al-Nu‘man accompanied Imam-caliph al-Mu‘izz to Egypt in 362 AH/ 973 CE and died in Cairo, the new Fatimid capital, on the last day of Jumada II 363 AH/ 27 March 974 CE; his funeral prayer was led by Imam-caliph al-Mu‘izz himself.

Al-Qadi al-Nu‘man distinguished himself as a most prolific author. More than forty of his works are extant, ranging from numerous legal compendia culminating in the *Da‘a‘im al-Islam* (The Pillars of Islam) to collections of *hadith*, works on *ta‘wil* and esoteric Ismaili doctrine, such as *Asas al-ta‘wil* (The Foundations of *ta‘wil*) and *Ta‘wil al-da‘a‘im* (Esoteric Interpretation of the Pillars), as well as historiography, notably the *Iftitah al-da‘wa* (Commencement of the Mission) covering the background to the establishment of the Fatimid state.

Al-Qadi al-Nu‘man is, however, best known as the founder of a juridical system for a Shi‘i state reflecting the universalist aspirations of the Fatimid imam-caliphs while recognising the minority status of the Ismailis within the larger Muslim society of North Africa. He codified Ismaili law by drawing on Imami and Zaydi as well as Sunni sources; and his efforts culminated in the compilation of the *Da‘a‘im al-Islam*, in two volumes, on the acts of devotion (*‘ibadat*) and worldly affairs (*mu‘amalat*), supervised closely and endorsed by imam-caliph al-Mu‘izz as the official legal code of the Fatimid state. As developed by al-Nu‘man, Ismaili law accorded special importance to the central Shi‘i doctrine of the imamate,



providing Islamic legitimisation for a state ruled by the family of Prophet Muhammad, or the *ahl al-bayt*. The *Da'a'im* has continued throughout the centuries to serve as the principal legal authority for the Tayyibi Musta'li branch of Ismailis, including the Ismaili Bohras of South Asia. Al-Nu'man was also the founder of a distinguished family of chief judges in the Fatimid state.

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