FEJRIAN YAZDAJIRD IWANEBEL

DISSERTATION

THE FORMATION OF *TA'WĪL* IN THE EARLY FATIMID CALIPHATE :

AL-NU'MĀN B. ḤAYYŪN AND JA'FAR B. MANṢŪR ON PROPHETOLOGY IN THE QUR'AN

STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY
SUNAN KALIJAGA
YOGYAKARTA

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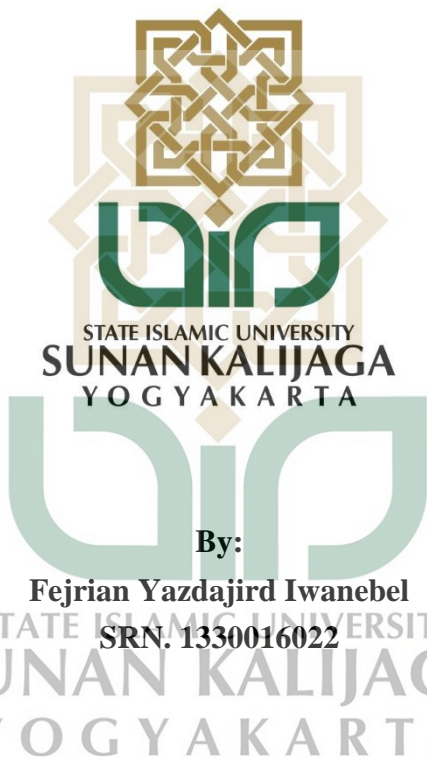

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ii

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iv

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vi

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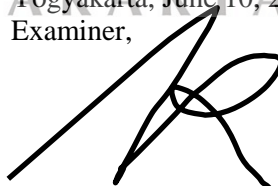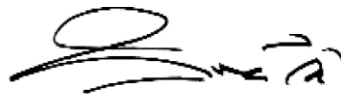
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ABSTRACT

The research aims at discussing *ta'wīl* and prophetology during the early Fatimid Isma'ili period. It focuses on two representative authors who worked at the center of Fatimid power, al-Nu'mān b. Ḥayyūn and Ja'far b. Manṣūr. As the topic of *ta'wīl* reflected the core identity of Isma'ili interpretation, the prophetology was the subject of intense scholarly discourse, especially during the early formative period of Isma'ili power. This research thus focuses on three issues, namely: 1) Why were the early Isma'ili scholars interested in prophetology?; 2) How do the texts of al-Nu'mān b. Ḥayyūn and Ja'far b. Manṣūr reflect the Isma'ili doctrine on prophetology?; and 3) What characterize the hermeneutical interpretations made by al-Nu'mān b. Ḥayyūn and Ja'far b. Manṣūr on prophets in the Qur'an?

The research employs the framework of analytical study by using Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics of understanding and Jorge Gracia's hermeneutics of historical, meaning, and implicative function of the interpretation. At the same time the research also deals with the theory of knowledge and power established by Michael Foucault to explore the political dimension of Qur'an interpretation. Besides, the research also uses the framework of analysis of Arnold J. Toynbee's theory of continuity and change and John O. Voll's dramatic change hypothesis.

The research argues that firstly, the Isma'ilis were, right from the start, deeply invested in the issue of prophetology since it was highly relevant to their basic ideology of cyclical hiero-history. Also, prophetology also shaped the very foundation of Isma'ili theology by defending the authority of the imāms and the *Qā'im* as the last cycle of the prophetic sequence.

Secondly, the early Fatimid Isma'ili interpretation of the prophets mentioned in the Qur'an, as reflected in the works of al-Nu'mān and Ja'far, constituted an attempt to retrieve the past of the cyclical narrative of history that was later adopted as part of Isma'ili doctrine and theology. Their symbolic interpretation of the number seven in the grand cyclical history, the division of the world, in addition to certain religious texts and rituals clearly reflected their emphasis on the role of the imams as part of human fate that was determined by God's words and creations. On the other hand, the account of prophets in the Qur'an was also employed as part of the Isma'ili self-reflection towards their

historical context reflected in the imāms' struggle over authority. It was also used in their criticism of their Sunnite and other Shia rivals accused of erring in their over-reliance on exoteric interpretations of the religious texts. However, both authors in question defended different points of view on the issue of the esoteric and the exoteric. Al-Nuʿmān emphasized that both dimensions complemented the approach to understanding religious texts and symbols, while Jaʿfar seems to have emphasized more on the esoteric. Furthermore, both authors had different points of view on the issue of the lawless state or antinomianism. If al-Nuʿmān made a clear statement on the *shariʿah* brought by Adam, Jaʿfar had approved on the lawless state of the Ṣāḥib al-Zamān, who is the *Qāʾim*.

Thirdly, *taʾwīl* served as a mode of hermeneutical interpretation which aimed at locating the authority of the imāms. Its manifestation was not so clear in its methodological construction unless it was employed in the symbolic interpretation placed at the basis of the esoteric and the exoteric meaning in order to uphold the authority of the imāms. Thus, the effort of interpretation was seen as an attempt to create knowledge that defended the Ismaʿili claim for power. In this respect, the *taʾwīl* of the prophets in the Qurʾan became a discursive strategy for the early Fatimid Ismaʿili scholars to formulate a new definition of religious and political authority based on distinctive Ismaʿili doctrine and creeds.

TRANSLITERATION

Transliteration used in this work refers to the Library of Congress and *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.

Arabic	Transliteration	Arabic	Transliteration
ء	'	ض	ḍ
ا	a	ط	ṭ
ب	b	ظ	ẓ
ت	t	ع	'
ث	th	غ	gh
ج	j	ف	f
ح	ḥ	ق	q
خ	kh	ك	k
د	d	ل	l
ذ	dh	م	m
ر	r	ن	n
ز	z	ه	h
س	s	و	w
ش	sh	ي	y
ص	ṣ		

Long	ا or ى	ā	
	و	ū	
	ي	ī	
Doubled	يّ	iyy (final form ī)	

وّ وُ ‎ uww (final form ū)

Dipthongs   و ‎ َ   aw

ى ‎ َ   ay

ى

- Final ىّ ِ in nouns and adjectives of the form *fā'il* which are derived from defective roots. This ending is romanized ī, not īy, without regard to the presence of ّ (*shaddah*). Ex: Raḍi al-Dīn   رضي الدين

- Final ى ِ in the relative adjective (*nisbah*). The ending is romanized ī, not īy. ex: al-Miṣrī   المصريّ

ه

- when the noun or adjective ending in ه is indefinite, or is prreceded by the definite article, ه is romanized h. ex: al-Risālah al-Bahīyah   الرسالة البهية

- when the word ending in ه is in the construct state (muḍāf wa muḍāf ilayh), ه isromanized t. ex: Wizārat al-Tarbiyah وزارة التربية

ّ (*shaddah*)

- وّ ُ representing the combination of long vowel plus consonant, is romanized ūw. ex: 'aduw عدُوّة

- وّ َ representing the combination of dipthong plus consonant, is romanized aww. Ex: shawwal شوَّل

- Medial ىّ ِ, representing the combination of long vowel plus consonant, is romanized īy. ex: al-Miṣrīyah   المصريّة

- Medial and final ىّ ِ, representing the combination of dipthong plus consonant, is romanized ayy. Ex: Quṣayy قصَيّ

- Over the letters, ّ is represented in romanization by doubling the letter or digraph concerned. Ex: al-Ghazzī   الغزّيّ

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xviii

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Semarang, 1 July 2020

Fejrian Yazdajird Iwanebel

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY
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CHAPTER I

A. Introduction

The rise of the Isma'ili community to power resulted in their distinctive view on the Qur'an and Islamic teachings. Besides the issue of sectarianism in terms of the Sunni-Shi'ah divide,[1] religious thought as expounded by the Isma'ilis was already considered controversial in its own time. Their employment of *ta'wīl*[2] as a tool for establishing

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[1] Maria Massi argues that the origin of Shia is not political in nature but more spiritual and based on charismatic figures which shaped a more fanatical attitude towards their Imāms. See Maria Massi Dakake, *The Charismatic Community: Shi'ite Identity in Early Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

[2] There is no agreement in early Muslim scholarship on a specific meaning of *ta'wīl*, whether in Sunnite and or Shi'ite traditions. Al-Suyūṭī stated more than fifteen arguments promoted by early Muslim scholars with special consideration to *tafsīr*. Those opinions can be classified into first, *ta'wīl* has similar meaning with *tafsīr* in interpreting the Qur'an; second, *ta'wīl* (*dirāyah*) covers a wider range of interpretation than *tafsīr* (*riwāyah*); lastly, *ta'wīl* has its own procedure to interpret text esoterically and allegorically to grasp multi-layered meanings. To some extent, *ta'wīl* has remained an ambiguous form of interpretation due to its vague approach to the Qur'an. This distinguishes it from *tafsīr* whose methodology has undergone certain developments. Typically, *ta'wīl* has been used as the alternative to approach the text that is difficult to understand and is generally used for interpreting *al-āyāt al-mutashabihāt* (the verses that have an obscure meaning). Therefore, *tafsīr* brings the text from the vague to the distinct (*ikhrāj al-shay' min maqām al-khafā' ilā maqām al-tajallī*), while *ta'wīl* brings the text from the distinct to the vague. For further information, see 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqan fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* (Madinah: Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmīyah, 2005); Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Mātūridī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 2005); Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. Muslim b. Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Musykil al-Qurān* (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1973); Muḥammad Hādī Ma'rifah, *Al-Ta'wīl fī Mukhtalaf al-Madhāhib wa al-Ārā': Baḥthun 'ilmīy Muqāran wa Ḥādif Ya'nī bi Shu'ūn al-Ta'wīl wa 'Ilāqatuh bi al-Tafsīr wa al-Majāz wa al-Hirminūtiqā* (Tehran: al-Majma' al-'Ālamī li al-Taqrīb Bayn al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyyah, 2006). See also the discussion on *al-āyāt al-mutashābihāt* in Sahiron Syamsuddin, "Muhkam and Mutasyābih: An Analytical Study of al-Ṭabarī's and al-Zamakhsharī's Interpretations of Q.3:7", *Journal of Quranic Studies*, Vol. 1 Issue 1 (1999), 63-79.

their own distinctive identity justified their political move to acknowledge Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar as the last and final holder of Shi'ite leadership (hidden *Imām*),[3] in addition to their strategies to uphold the authority in religious knowledge. The duality of the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and the esoteric (*bāṭin*) aspects of religion in Isma'ili doctrine appears to have been an ideological and thus political strategy to distinguish it from that of other Muslim communities.

In this context, the Isma'ili scholars took part in the political discourse of *taʾwīl* by imposing the spiritual knowledge and divine legacy of the Imāms. They assumed that the Prophet Muhammad had passed spiritual authority on the Imāms. While Muḥammad sent down to promulgate the Shariʿah or ritual path (*ẓāhir*) of the religion, his nephew and son-in-law, ʿAlī, was chosen to accompany the Qur'an as part of the believers' spiritual guidance through esoteric interpretation (*bāṭin*), defining the first as "*tanzīl*" and the last as "*taʾwīl*".[4] Therefore, the right to impart religious interpretation in the esoteric aspect (*taʾwīl*) belongs exclusively to the Imāms.

In respect to the occurrence of the word *taʾwīl* in the Qur'an, the most authoritative reference appears in Q. 3:7, which states: "But no one knows its hidden meanings (*taʾwīlah*) except Allah and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūn fī al-ʿilm*)." The last words in this verse are generally understood to imply a controversial notion of religious and spiritual authority in Islam. It indicates that the right (and ability) to interpret the Book is reserved for particular individuals. Here, the Shia employed the verse as a justification to their claim on the exclusive right in understanding the text through *taʾwīl*.

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[3] The Isma'ili sect constitutes one branch of the Shia community whose followers believe that the seventh Imām, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar disappeared but was not "lost", rather he was "hidden" and would re-appear in the last days as the Messiah. The Isma'ilis constitute the second largest Shia community after the Twelver Shia (*Shia Ithnā ʿAsharī*).

[4] Al-Nuʿmān b. Ḥayyūn, *Asās al-Taʾwīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Manshūrāt), 40. See also, Ismail K. Poonawala, "Isma'ili *Taʾwīl* of The Qur'an" in Andrew Rippin (*ed.*), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 206.

Furthermore, they claimed that those "firmly grounded in knowledge" refers strictly to the family of Muḥammad (*ahl al-bayt*) and his progeny.[5]

On the other side, it is worth noting that the Isma'ili school did not provide a complete work on *ta'wīl* meaning that a complete approach to Qur'anic exegesis (read: *tafsīr*) did not emerge from Isma'ili literature that focused on selected verses and can only be established based on a thematic study considering their particular perspective. In this respect, certain Qur'anic verses dealing with the story of the prophets were chosen as subjects of early Isma'ili interpretation. However, here, the high subjectivity of the interpretation raises certain questions inasmuchas they did not interpret these verses in the light of moral teaching as most commentators did and more in the light of their particular theological interest.

Several scholars such as Michael Pregill observed that the "Isma'ili exegesis of Qur'anic passages in *ta'wīl* tends to be much more explicitly political in nature."[6] It makes sense for the early Fatimid dynasty to try and extend their power beyond Egypt into other Muslim territories. His study also shows that anti-Sunnite propaganda is most discernable in the works produced in the early Fatimid era. His study of an early Fatimid manuscript (London, BL Or. 8419) that focuses on the prophet stories and their interpretations revealed that they contained challenging views used to defend the high position of the *ahl al-bayt* (the family of the prophet, specifically the 'Alids) in the history of

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[5] Abū Naṣr Muḥammad b. Mas'ūd b. 'Ayyash, *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, ed. Hāshim al-Rasūlī al-Maḥallātī, vol. 1 (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lāmī li al-Maṭbū'āt, 1991), 187; 'Alī Ḥasan b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, ed. Ṭayyib al-Musāwī al-Jazā'irī, vol. 1 (Iran: Mu'assasat Dār al-Kitāb li al-Ṭibā'at wa al-Nashr, 1984), 96-97.

[6] Michael Pregill, "Measure for Measure: Prophetic History, Qur'anic Exegesis, and Anti-Sunni Polemic in a Fatimid Propaganda Work (BL Or. 8419)", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, Volume XVI, Isuue 1 (2014), 21. See also, Bar-Asher, M.M., *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmi Shi'ism* (Leiden & Boston: Brill; Jerussalem: Magnes Press, 1999), 104-24.

Islam, which prompted Pregill to assume that this work had an early Isma'ili author.[7]

However, the issue of prophetic narrative played a significant role in the increasingly sectarian politics of early Islamic history. It can be traced back to the existence of the storytellers and converted communities who popularized the stories of prophets in the early period of Islam.[8] The evidence of early Muslim converts such as Ka'b b. al-Aḥbār and 'Abd Allāh b. Sallām suggests that they acted as central agents who circulated the prophetic narratives. The historical evidence available suggests that the storytellers and converted people enjoyed the high respect in their community and utilized their position to explain the prophet stories in the light of other scriptures and traditions.

The storytellers had an important role to play especially in times of war and conflict as their stories were used to encourage their fellow Muslims by giving them examples of bravery, sacrifice and heroism. Also, some storytellers were actively involved in creating frictions among the Muslim community after the death of Caliph 'Uthmān, motivated by the political strategies employed by the various political groups that were emerging in their quest for power.[9] Another source suggests that among the storytellers were also those who belonged to the pro-'Alid faction, which later resulted in the emergence of the Khawārij and the Shi'ah.[10] The research concluded by Athamina and Pedersen offers plenty of material highlighting the role of certain individuals and groups invested in directing the public discourse until the Abbasid period.[11]

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[7] Pregill, "Measure for Measure", 21.

[8] Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature*, (UK: Curzon Press, 2002), 88.

[9] Ibid., 87.

[10] Khalil Athamina, "Al-Qasas: Its Emergence, Religious Origin and Its Socio-Political Impact on Early Muslim Society", *Studia Islamica*, no. 76 (1992), 55; Johs. Pedersen, "The Criticism of the Islamic Preacher", *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 2, Issue 4 (1953), 216-7. See also, Ibn Abī Shayba, *Al-Muṣannaf fī al-Aḥādīth wa al-Āthār*, vol. vi (Beirut: tp, 1989), 195-8.

[11] Athamina, "Al-Qasas", 55; Pedersen, "The Criticism", 217.

As part of the role of the storytellers and early converts who were mostly born Jews and Christians to strengthen the belief in the prophethood of Muḥammad and stress that his coming had been foretold in the scriptures, they also proposed that not only Muḥammad was predicted in the Bible but also 'Alī and his progenies.[12] For example, there is the story of 'Umar asking Ka'b b. al-Aḥbār about his knowledge of the Bible and the previous prophets. He asked Ka'b who was the most pious person from the Banu Israel after Moses who answered that it was Joshua, his *wāṣī*.[13] This fact suggests that the role of the storytellers and the converted people consisted not only in telling stories of the prophets but also in providing political legitimation.[14] Thus, the act of telling these stories was closer to being a political act rather than an act of pious excortation. The members of the Shi'ite sect constituted one of the groups that began using the Qur'anic prophet stories as part of their strategy to establish their political authority.

It is also important to state that in Sunnite literature, the interest on the prophet stories continued beyond the early Isma'ili period, as illustrated in works such as that of al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1035), *Arā'is al-Majālis*, a major work in the genre of prophet stories in the Sunnite tradition. Of specific scholarly interest here is the material used by al-Tha'labī which includes not only Islamic traditions but also various kinds of non-Muslim traditions and literature.[15] This suggests that al-Tha'labī utilized references found in Jewish and Christian traditions for

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[12] Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, 90.

[13] *Wāṣī* is a prevalent terminology in Shi'ite theology, mainly used by the Isma'ilis to denote the continuation of divine prophecy through the silent one (*ṣāmit*). This also indicates a turning point from *tanzīl* (divine revelation to the prophets, mainly contains sharia) to *ta'wīl* (the continuation of divine revelation mainly contains hidden explanation of sharia). See, Ḥayyūn, *Asās*, 40; Poonawala, "Isma'ili *Ta'wīl*", 206.

[14] Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, 90.

[15] William M. Brinner, "Introduction", in Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Tha'labī, *'Arā'is al-Majālis fī Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, trans. William M. Brinner (Leiden: Brill, 2002), xi.

his interpretation of the prophet stories in the Qur'an. [16] This assumption seems plausible as the Qur'an does not provide detailed information on the story of prophets and only mentions those points that are substantial for moral teachings. Therefore, the commentators often consulted the other scriptures and made reference to popular traditions in order to fill the gaps encountered in the Qur'anic prophet stories, put them into a more definite historical context and make them more accessible.

In this case, the pre-Tha'labī period has not been much-given attention by scholars. Thus, this research aims to capture the interpretation of prophets in the Qur'an by focusing on the works produced prior to al-Tha'labī. As the issue of prophetology constitutes the focal point of discussion in Isma'ili tradition, this study focuses on the works of the two early Fatimid Isma'ili scholars, Qāḍi al-Nu'mān b. Ḥayyūn (d. 363/974) and Ja'far b. Manṣūr (d. ca. 346/957). Both have been regarded as prolific scholars in their own right who were acquainted with the issue of *ta'wīl* and prophetology and included the Qur'anic stories of the prophets in their discourse of *ta'wīl* used to address the issue of prophetology. Both scholars represent Muslim scholarship during the early Fatimid Isma'ili period in which there occurred a number of theological disputes among the Isma'ili scholars, mainly on the matter of prophetology.

Al-Nu'mān is a well-known Isma'ili scholar of the Fatimid era. He had a close relationship with the Fatimid court and served from the first to the fourth Fatimid Imām. His professed mastery of religious knowledge resulted in his promotion to the position of Supreme Judge (*Qāḍi al-Quḍāt*) in the reign of al-Mu'izz (d.365/975). Although his sectarian background is somewhat ambiguous and ranges from Mālikī and Ḥanafī to Imāmi Shi'ite and Isma'ili,[17] his major works, *Da'ā'im*

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[16] Walid Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); see also, Marianna Klar, *Interpreting al-Tsa'labī's Tales of the Prophets: Temptation, Responsibility and Lost* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

[17] Several academic works explore the religious background of al-Nu'mān, most of them suggesting that he had become an Ismaili at the end of

al-Islām served as the basic reference of the Fatimid law. Besides his prolific works on legal matters (*fiqh*), he also wrote many books on other subjects. Asaf Fyzee classified his works into ten subjects[18] including that of *ta'wīl* and *ḥaqā'iq* (truths). Here, the work directly relating to this study is *Asās al-Ta'wīl* where al-Nu'mān pays distinctive attention to *ta'wīl* and its presentation of prophet stories. This book contains al-Nu'mān's description of the life of the prophets before Prophet Muhammad and also explains the importance of *ta'wīl* to gain the appropriate meaning based on esoteric values. The fascinating point of this work is that it attempts to produce a thematic explanation of prophet stories characterized by the number seven. Number seven, however, signifies the number of the Imāms in the Isma'ili tradition that culminates in the seventh and hidden Imām, Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl b. Ja'far. The important question here is why his explanation of prophet stories is not based on the historical evidence but relies foremost on doctrinal issues.

Since al-Nu'mān was closely associated with the Fatimid court and his jurisprudence was considered as the canon of Fatimid law, it leads the assumption that he attempted to lay the foundation of *ta'wīl* in the Fatimid Isma'ili tradition. He tried to conceptualize *ta'wīl* by integrating the outer (*ẓāhir*) and the inner (*bāṭin*) dimension of religion which allowed him to incorporate both dimesnions without having to

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his life. This idea was, for example, promoted by Asaf Fyzee, W. Ivanow, Muḥammad Kamil Ḥusayn, and R. Strothmann. For Asaf Fyzee, see, "Qāḍī al-Nu'mān The Fatimid Jurist and Author", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 1, (Januari, 1934), 1-32.

However, this idea has been contested by Ismail Poonawala whose detailed study of al-Nu'mān's biography brings him to the conclusion that al-Nu'mān was originally an Isma'ili; the evidence points to his area of birth being dominated by Ismaili missionaries. See, Ismail K. Poonawala, "A Reconsideration of al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's "Madhhab"", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, Vol. 37, no. 3 (1974), 572-579.

[18] Based on the observation, the works of al-Nu'mān is counted as being forty-four in total; twenty-two are completely lost, eighteen have been preserved and four have been partly preserved. See, Fyzee, "Qāḍī al-Nu'mān", 15.

include one of them at the expense of the other. In fact, many of his works are written to promote both dimensions, although the inner is much more accentuated than the outer.

The second scholar upon wich the present study focuses is Ja'far b. Manṣūr (d. ca. 346/957), a prominent Isma'ili missionary. His father, Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥasan b. Faraj b. Ḥawṣab al-Kūfī, known as Ibn Ḥawṣab (d.302/914), was a founder and leader of the Yemeni Isma'ili *da'wā* community.[19] Ibn Ḥawṣab had been a Twelver Shi'i notable in Kufa but was deeply disturbed by the occultation (*ghayba*) of the twelfth imām in 260/874; an event which, together with the related confusion, made many notables of his community receptive to Isma'ili doctrines. Having been converted to the cause and soon leading and spreading the mission, he moved to Yemen, where his son Ja'far was born. After the death of his father, Ja'far's brother apostatized. Facing persecution in Yemen with the massacre of most of his family, Ja'far fled to the newly founded Fatimid state in Ifrīqiyā, in modern-day Tunisia, at the beginning of the reign of the caliph-imām al-Qā'im (d.334/946).[20]

Ja'far remained a close confidant of the caliph-imām and was a prolific writer specializing in the Isma'ili genre of *ta'wīl* works. His high rank in the Fatimid state and spiritual hierarchy is indicated in the Sīrat al-Ustādh Jawdhar, who noted that Ja'far's house was the nearest one to the palace of the caliph-imām al-Mu'izz in the new capital of al-Mansūriyya.[21] It suggests that he may have been the leader of the *da'wā* and conducting religious meetings (*majālis*) in which the inner meanings of the faith and key revelational texts were expounded. It appears that he died in the reign of al-Mu'izz, some time before 346/957, based on the fact that Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's used the biography of

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[19] Heinz Halm, "Dja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman", in P.J. Bearmen (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. XII (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 236.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Abī 'Alī Manṣūr al-'Azīzī al-Jawdharī, *Sirāt al-Ustādh Al-Jawdhar*, ed. Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn and Muḥammad 'Abd al-Hādī (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1954), 126-127.

Ja'far's father, *Sirāh Ibn Ḥauṣab*, which indicates that he was no longer alive.[22]

Ja'far authored several *ta'wīl* works that sought to elucidate the inner reality of the faith and to elaborate on the homology between the spiritual hierarchy of the *da'wā*, key Qur'anic verses and episodes from the experiences of past peoples and prophets. In his view, theology and sacred history were intimately linked and the unfolding of human history revealed the divine plan and realities to the initiated, often through the subversion of a master narrative linked to the developing notion of a normative Sunni conception of the early Muslim community.[23] The elaboration schema whereby he links the previous experience of the prophets in the Qur'an to the difficulties faced by the *da'wā* express the hermeneutic of *ta'wīl* as a process of interpretation embedded in an account of counter-history.[24]

Ja'far's presentation of the Qur'anic story of the prophets has been preserved in his book *sarā'ir wa asrār al-nuṭaqā'*. This book aims at discussing the prophets in the Qur'an, from Adam to Muḥammad, from a philosophical and historical point of view. Unlike al-Nu'mān, Ja'far's inclination to Biblical stories was apparent, in addition to his intimate knowledge of philosophy by preserving the Neoplatonist views of Isma'ili schoarship. His elaborations on prophetology resulted in formulating a complete system that related to the fundamental theology of the Isma'ili sect and the authority of the imams.

Based on the above explanations, this research sheds light on the dynamic idea of prophetology as reflected in the works of the early Fatimid Isma'ili scholars, al-Nu'mān b. Ḥayyūn and Ja'far b. Manṣūr.

B. Research Questions

The aforementioned points suggest that the early Ismaili interpretation includes the subject of prophet stories and thus

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[22] Feraz Hamza and Sajjad Rizvi (eds.), An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries: On the Nature of the Divine (New York: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Isma'ili Studies, 2008), 30.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., 31.

comstitute a political act as part of the Isma'ili strategy to confirm the divine religious legacy of the Imāms. Thus, this study will address the following questions related to the formation of *ta'wīl* in early Fatimid Isma'ili thought:

1. Why were the early Isma'ili scholars interested in prophetology?

2. How do the texts of al-Nu'mān b. Ḥayyūn and Ja'far b. Manṣūr reflect the Isma'ili doctrine on prophetology?

3. What characterize the hermeneutical interpretations made by al-Nu'mān b. Ḥayyūn and Ja'far b. Manṣūr on prophets in the Qur'an?

C. Aims and Significances

The research discusses the notion of prophets and prophetology introduced during the early Fatimid Isma'ili period by focusing on the thought of al-Numān b. Ḥayyūn and Ja'far b. Manṣūr. Several objectives will be achieved in this research. First, to analyze the discourse subject of prophetology as it emerged in the early period of Fatimid Isma'ili thought. It aims at explaining the intellectual discourse of prophetology as presented by the Isma'ili authors who were both inside and outside the boundaries of Fatimid Isma'ili thought. It will investigate how the Isma'ilis engaged in the intellectual discourse on the issue of prophetology and attempt to determine why it was important to them.

The second research objective is to analyze how the notion of prophetology is reflected and conceptualized by al-Nu'mān and Ja'far in the context of interpretation and ideologization. It shall explore how the use of prophet stories can be regarded as an intellectual initiative and connected to political issues based on the authority of the imāms. Thus, by analyzing their text in its contextual discourse of interpretation, the assumption will lead to the fact that the act of *ta'wīl* has to be understood not merely as a religious activity but more as a reflection of theological tendency and even political strategy.

The third part will investigate the hermeneutical principles of al-Nuʿmān and Jaʿfar in interpreting those verses in the Qurʾan that mention previous prophets. This exploration will give a clear picture on methodological issues and the form of interpretation constructed by al-Nuʿmān and Jaʿfar. Thus, it will examine how both scholars produced a meaning that was different from that of other Qurʾan commentators who were either their contemporaries or predated them, in addition to determining their significance as part of the development of Fatimid Ismaʿili doctrine.

D. Previous Studies

The topic of the prophet stories in the Qurʾan has merited much interest among scholars who have devoted a considerable portion of their research to it. In this respect, two types of inquiries have been made by the scholars; one through studying the text of the Qurʾan itself and the other through studying the rich repository of Muslim literature. While the first aims at constructing the original meaning and intention of the Qurʾanic text, the second intends to determine how Muslim scholars of the past approached, understood and utilized the prophet stories mentioned in the Qurʾan.

Both types of studies follow a similar approach to the intertextuality of the texts towards other traditions. Sometimes the scholars do not intend to discuss the stories of all the prophets mentioned in the Qurʾan and instead focused on one particular prophet, according to their own needs. The prophets that were quite popular in many works are Prophet Abraham, Moses, and Jesus as they influenced the history and development of religion most and become the point of interest in the religious encounter between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. The direct study of the text of the Qurʾan is usually aimed at investigating the Qurʾanic text in line with Christian and Jewish traditions. This study expects to identify the similarities and differences between the Qurʾanic descriptions and Biblical presentation of the prophet stories. Further, the study also attempts to capture the

state of narrative and significance of each interpretation and explanation.

Besides intertextual study, some scholars also study the Qur'anic prophet stories by applying literary criticism such as the peculiar arrangement of the verses in the stories, the structure, and the rhyme of the text. In this case, the arrangement of the whole is studied how the stories are arranged in the Qur'an as compared to the Bible. In that respect, Aḥmad Khalafullāh's *al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* argues that the stories in the Qur'an are not meant to be used as accurate historical accounts.[25] Further, his statement emphasizes that it is not the historical value that the Qur'an wants to present but certain matters of religious and moral significance and import. Thus, he dismisses the conventional historical approach towards the Qur'an and engages instead in literary examination and analysis. *The Jesus Verses in the Qur'an* authored by Karel Steenbrink entails a comparative literary analysis with particular attention to the historical study of the story of Jesus.[26]

The second type of study is the examination of the Muslim literature in light of the understanding of the prophet stories included in the Qur'an. The classical development of this particular genre is reflected in the works of al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, al-Thaʿlabī's *Arāʾis al-Majālis*, al-Kisāʾī's *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ*, and Ibn Kathīr's *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ*. Several modern studies are devoted to the detailed study of those works, for instance, M.O. Klar's *Interpreting al-Thaʿlabi's Tales of Prophets' Temptation, Responsibility and Loss*, Brannon M. Wheeler's *Moses in the Qur'an and Islamic Exegesis*, and Hosn Abboud's *Mary in the Qur'an: A Literary Reading*.

As both of our prominent scholars under study lived in the early Fatimid era, we find that a considerable number of modern scholars

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[25] Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalafullāh, *Al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Intishār al-ʿArabī, 1999), 211-224.

[26] Karel Steenbrink, *Nabi Isa dalam Al-Qur'an Sebuah Interpretasi Outsider atas Al-Qur'an*, trans. Sahiron Syamsuddin & Fejrian Yazdajird Iwanebel, ed. M. Nur Prabowo (Yogyakarta: Suka Press & Baitul Hikmah Press, 2015).

have devoted academic research to the study of their biography and works. My own survey categorizes three areas in which al-Nu'mān was studied, the first and the most popular being on the subject of law. The background of al-Nu'mān as a chief judge and senior jurist promted scholars to examine his contribution to Fatimid law, among them being Asaf Fyzee,[27] Husain Qutbuddin,[28] Sumaiya Abbas Hamdani,[29] and Azim Nanji.[30] Most of them paid particular attention to al-Nu'mān's major opus, the *Da'ā'im al-Islām*. Since it was used as the primary source of early Isma'ili law, the scholars explored how it was used to develop legal methodology. In this respect Husain Qatbuddin illustrated that al-Nu'mān did not try to introduce new methods of Islamic jurisprudence like his Sunni counterparts in *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence) and instead based his opinion on the Imāms' legacy. He criticized the Sunnite jurists for their methodology which in his eyes was too subjective and prone to error.

The second line of investigation focuses on the personal background of al-Nu'mān and has been followed by scholars such as Asaf Fyzee[31] and Ismail Poonawala. Asaf discussed the biography of al-Nu'mān, including his education and works by utilizing the three classical sources of Islamic history in the form of Ibn Khallikān's *Biographical Dictionary*, Ibn Ḥajar's *Rafʿ al-'iṣr*, and volumes V and VI of 'Imāduddīn Idrīs b. Ḥasan's *'Uyūn al-Akhbār* and does not, therefore, depart much from other studies of this sort. Poonawala's

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[27] A.A.A. Fyzee, "The Fatimid Law of Inheritance", in *Studia Islamica*, No. 9, (1958), 61-69; Fyzee, "Aspects of Fatimid Law", in *Studia Islamica*, No. 31 (1970), 81-91.

[28] Husain K.B. Qutbuddin, "Fatimid Legal Exegesis of the Qur'an: The Interpretive Strategies Used by al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974) in His *Da'ā'im al-Islām*", *Journal of Quranic Studies*, Vol. 12 (2010), 109-146.

[29] Sumaiya Abbas Hamdani, *From Da'wā to Dawla: Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's Zahiri Construction of Fatimid Legitimacy*, Dissertation, Princeton University, 1995.

[30] Azim Nanji, "Between Metaphor and Context: the Nature of the Fatimid Isma'ili Discourse on Justice and Injustice", *Arabica*, T. 32, Fasc. 2 (Jul., 1990), 234-39.

[31] Fyzee, "Qāḍī al-Nu'mān", 1-34.

study[32] constitutes a more detailed and comprehensive examination of al-Nu'mān. the most interesting aspect of his paper being in regard to his legal school (*madhhab*). While earlier studies alleged that al-Nu'mān was originally a Mālikī and only later in life switched to the Isma'ili school, he argued that al-Nu'mān had always been an Isma'ili. Upon examining the geographical origin and social background of al-Nu'mān, he found that the area from which al-Nu'mān hailed was at the time dominated by Isma'ili missionaries (*du'āt*) and thus concluded that he had been born as an Isma'ili.

The last subject of enquiry related to the present study is al-Nu'mān's interpretation of the Qur'an. There exist several studies on the genre of Qur'an interpretation, including Ja'far. Karen Bauer's article "Spiritual Hierarchy and Gender Hierarchy in Fatimid Isma'ili Interpretation of the Qur'an[33] focuses on the figure of the Yemenite queen Arwā (d. 532/1138), also known as Sayyida Hurra. According to the historian al-Khaṭṭāb, author of *Gāyat al-Mawālīd*, she was considered as a spiritual leader among the Isma'ilis. She explored how Queen Arwā was viewed by the other Isma'ilis figures that came before al-Khaṭṭāb in the person of al-Qāḍi al-Nu'mān, Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yamanī, and al-Mu'ayyad fī al-Dīn al-Shīrazī. Bauer argued convincingly that the spiritual hierarchy of the Isma'ilis was not gender-biased and accepted her as an equal to her male counterparts and that one's spiritual rank was not affected by the exoteric limitations of gender.

The other work related to the issue of *ta'wīl* is the writing of Ismail K. Poonawala, author of the article "Isma'ili *Ta'wīl* of the Qur'an."[34] Here, the author also followed the mode of hermeneutical inquiry, which reshapes the thoughts of figures. Poonawala tried to investigate the elements of hermeneutics as represented by al-Qāḍi al-Nu'mān, Ja'far b. Mansūr al-Yaman, and Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī;

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[32] Poonawala, "A Reconsideration", 572-579.

[33] Karen Bauer, "Spiritual Hierarchy and Gender Hierarchy in Fatimid Isma'ili Interpretation of the Qur'an", in *Journal of Quranic Studies*, Vol. 14, Issue. 2 (2012), 29-46.

[34] Poonawala, "Isma'ili Ta'wīl", 201.

however, more focusing on the latter's views and their relation to neo-platonism. The two figures left were used to complement the philosophical scheme in light of the concept of dualism in form of the exoteric and esoteric aspects of creation. Nonetheless, his detailed writing on the necessary foundation of *ta'wīl* in early Isma'ili thought illustrates his distinguished insight into Isma'ili tradition.

Related to the study of Ja'far b. Manṣūr, the dissertation of David Hollenberg entitled *Interpretation after the End of Days: The Fatimid Isma'ili Ta'wīl (Interpretation) of Ja'far ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. ca. 960)* later pulished in form of a monograph under the title of *Beyond the Quran: Early Isma'ili Ta'wil and the Secret of the Prophets*[35] can be regarded as the most related study to my inquiry. His research focuses on the allegorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of Ja'far's work *sara'ir wa asrār al-Nuṭaqā'* where he argues that Ja'far's interpretation is also supported by Greek philosophy, the Torah, the Gospels as well as the traditions and rituals from Jewish and Christian lore. Further, he argues that Ja'far's aggressive eclecticism intended to demonstrate the breadth of the Fatimid Imām's knowledge and to fulfil the Isma'ili movement's earlier prediction of the imminent advent of the End of Days.[36]

In the work *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries: On the Nature of the Divine*, Ja'far b. Manṣūr takes the role of a typical representative of Isma'ili Qur'anic commentary. It provides a comprehensive overview of the various Muslim commentators and their approach to interpreting the Qur'an, be they Sunnī, Shi'ī, Ibadī, Mu'tazilī or Sufi, across thirteen centuries of interpretive activity. The theme is focused on the nature of the Divine covering a wide array of topics such as the face of God (Q. 2:115), God's throne and the seat of knowledge (Q. 2:255), incumbent mercy (Q. 6:12), light of the heavens and the earth (Q. 24:35), the measure (Q. 54:49), and oneness (Q. 112).

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[35] David Hollenberg, *Beyond the Quran: Early Isma'ili Ta'wil and the Secret of the Prophets* (USA: University of South California, 2016), 127.

[36] David Hollenberg, Interpretation after the End of Days: The Fatimid Isma'ili Ta'wīl (Interpretation) of Ja'far ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. ca. 960), *Dissertation*, University of Pennsylvania, 2006.

However, not much reference is made to Ja'far and lacks elaboration on his interpretation.

Both articles summarize the generic writing on *ta'wīl* and analyze the symbolisms used in the interpretation. Both Poonawala and Bauer, on the other hand, fail to offer a complete analysis of the role of the prophet stories in the Qur'an, even though this genre would become the most popular subject of interpretation in early Ismaili thought. Here, Hollenberg's contribution directed new focus to Ja'far's interpretation of the prophet stories. However, he fails to examine the hermeneutical and political aspects within the interpretation of Ja'far, in addition to the book of anthology not ceding enough attention to the particular ideas of Ja'far or his use of the prophet stories. From this preliminary investigation, my research will, therefore, attempt to fill the gap left by the aforementioned researchers on the subject.

E. Theoretical Framework

Since this research focuses on the textual expression of the works of early Fatimid Isma'ili authors related to prophetology in the Qur'an, it will use some theories to support the subsequent analysis. Some "old" theories related to the prophet stories in the Qur'an focusing on its narrative tale and its morality as meaningful content will be used in the secondary analysis. The Islamic literature does not sufficiently elucidate on the value of the Qur'anic prophet stories from a historical perspective and cannot be used to reconstruct the historical plot of the Qur'anic narrative of the prophets. The book of prophetology written by our scholars has much to do with their attempt to build a strong theological foundation, while the Isma'ili scholars seek to defend the concept of imamology within the framework of Qur'anic prophetology. Therefore, hermeneutics will be used as the primary approach in this study, while incorporating certain social perspectives to produce a firm and final analysis.

In the book of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer stated,

In the sphere of historical understanding, too, we speak of horizons, especially when referring to the claim of historical

consciousness to see the past in its own terms, not in terms of our contemporary criteria and prejudices but within its own historical horizon. The task of historical understanding also involves acquiring an appropriate historical horizon, so that what we are trying to understand can be seen it its true dimensions. If we fail to transpose ourselves into the historical horizon from which the traditionary text speaks, we will misunderstand the significance of what it has to say to us. To that extent this seems a legitimate hermeneutical requirement: we must place ourselves in the other situation in order to understand it.[37]

I take this sophisticated notion of the historical understanding to remind myself of the immense difficulty of truly understanding a historical text. Although in general, the theory of understanding proposed by Gadamer tends to focus more on philosophical hermeneutics and attempts to reduce every attempt to what he calles "method",[38] his theory on consciousness can be meaningful in this inquiry.

Furthermore, I consider the theory of hermeneutics as proposed by Gracia related to the issue of understanding. In his book, *A Theory of Textuality*, Gracia differentiates between understanding and meaning. Understanding, according to Gracia, is a "mental act", thus a process whereby people are trying to grasp something, from a written text or other sources. The meaning is what is understood when one claims to have understood a text. The two entities commonly interplay with each other. Therefore, Gracia introduced the notion of "limits of meaning" and "limits of understanding". He explained, "If there are no limits to

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[37] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London & New York: Continuum, 2004), 302.

[38] To understand, according to Gadamer, is to stand in historical encounters. One should not take subjectivity as starting point and then ground the objectivity of their knowledge on it. The act of understanding is an act of dialectical approach. This dialectical approach is seen as the antithesis of method. In method the inquiring subject leads and controls and manipulates; in dialectic the matter encountered poses the question to which he responds. Therefore, method will never reveal the truth. See, Richard E Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (USA: North Western University Press, 1969), 164-165.

the meaning of a text, there can be no limits to its understanding." In this case, I would employ his theory of "awareness" that the readers have limitations in the process of understanding.

The first limit of such sort applies to the author of a given text since the meaning has its boundaries based on the author's intentions. The author has arranged certain symbols and signs that are transferred to the audience. Other factors that help the reader to arrive at the meaning are the context, society, language, and the text itself. The context and society usually speak about the realities whose understanding helps the reader to understand the text. Gracia stated, *"One of the prevalent views on this matter nowadays is that the limits on the meaning of texts are exclusively imposed by the texts themselves."*[39] Based on this explanation I wish to emphasize on the matter of objectivity and subjectivity of understanding in the sense that while trying to understand the text, the reader has to be aware of those factors that might hinder the understanding, while others might act as determinant factors to bring the proper meaning of the texts.

Gracia introduces the notion of the "interpreter's dilemma", meaning whether the interpreters should re-create understanding of their interpretation or should have a similar understanding as the historical author and historical audience had. Gracia proposed three acts of interpretation: historical function, meaning function, and implicative function.[40] The historical function is, he explains, "obviously a purely historical aim, whose purpose is not to go beyond the parameters of understanding experienced by the historical author and the historical audience." On the other hand, the meaning function is to produce in contemporary audiences acts of understanding that may go beyond the acts of understanding of the historical author and the historical audience of the text, revealing aspects of the meaning of the text with which their historical authors and historical audiences were not acquainted with." He defines the implicative function "to

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[39] Jorge Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality: The Logic and Epistemology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 119.

[40] Ibid., 152-164.

produce in contemporary audiences acts of understanding whereby those audiences understand the implications of the meaning of texts, regardless of whether the historical authors and the historical audiences were or were not aware of those implications."

His "interpreter's dilemma" entails that this particular hermeneutical approach can be used as a methodology of understanding. In this respect, this study will employ these theories of interpretation to construct the understanding of prophetology of the early Fatimid authors. It will seek the basic principle of interpretation which lies in the idea of *ta'wīl* with focus on certain Qur'anic prophet stories. By doing so, I will attempt to establish the concept of *ta'wīl* and prophetology in its early historical meaning, to interpret them in the light of comparison of various thoughts which exist in their contextual milieu, and to produce an understanding corroborated by their historical interest and contemporary interpretation.

Although the act of understanding does not constitute an easy task, it will confirm my previous assumption. Gracia warns that the act of interpretation may not be completely perceived through the distance of time and culture. Therefore, he stresses that the three functions are not mutually exclusive. An interpretation may have all these functions simultaneously, although, in practice, interpretations usually create more confusion than understanding. All of those inferences, according to Gracia, depend very much on the type of text in question as determined by the cultural functions, listing more than thirteen of them as related to the text produced.[41]

On the other hand, I will also employ certain social theories as a framework of analysis, for example Toynbee's theory of continuity and change, Voll's dramatic change hypothesis,[42] and Foucault's theory on

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[41] Ibid. Those cultural functions mentioned by Gracia are legal texts, literary texts, philosophical texts, scientific texts, religious texts, historical texts, political texts, pedagogical texts, confessional texts, entertaining texts, inspirational texts, and pneumonic texts, among others.

[42] See, Yudian Wahyudi, *Dinamika Politik "Kembali kepada al-Qur'an dan Sunnah" di Mesir, Maroko dan Indonesia*, trans. Saefuddin Zuhri (Yogyakarta: Pesantren Nawasea, 2010), 2-4.

discourse. I will use the theory of continuity and change in particular when examining the new idea of prophetology and *ta'wil* in early Fatimid Isma'ili thought. This topic is also linked with the dramatic change hypothesis which can be used to understand the historical narrative of the shifting power from the Qarmatian Isma'ili group to the Fatimid dynasty and how this power shift influenced the texts produced during the early Fatimid era in terms of the idea of prophetology. On a similar line this theory will be of use in the practical analysis towards the discourse of Qur'anic prophets and the act of political *ta'wīl*. I will use Foucault's theory of discourse as its perspective concerns the two corroborated entities of power and knowledge that cannot be separated in the act of understanding. Both of them are intertwined as a discursive strategy in the formation of interpretation. As reflected in most of his writings, Foucault tried to analyze how these concepts are formed and what the strategies are employed to shape the formative discourse. He stated,

> I think there is of power on knowledge and of knowledge on power. We should not be content to say that power has a need for a certain discovery, a certain form of knowledge, but we should add that the exercise of power creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge and accumulates new bodies of information… the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power.[43]

Based on this analytical viewpoint, an analysis of discourse from Foucault's perspective will help identify the statements made according to the rules of construction and evaluation, which determine within some thematic areas what may be said, by whom, in what context, and with what effect.[44] This framework will support my analysis of how and why the Ismailis were determined to uphold their distinctive politico-religious identity by employing the concept of *ta'wīl* when

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[43] Colin Gordon, "Introduction" in Michel Foucault, *Power*, Vol. 3, trans: Robert Hurley (New York: The New Press, 2000), xv.

[44] Ibid., xvi.

interpreting the account of prophet stories in the Qur'an. I will argue that they used their power to construct the idea of *ta'wīl* as a central methodology of interpretation and they put the Qur'anic prophets as a discursive strategy to establish their theological formation. To that extent, my hypothesis will be that *ta'wīl* started its discursive strategy as a form of conceptual knowledge which interplays with power, in the form of the political power assumed by the Isma'ili sect on the Fatimid throne.

F. Methods and Sources

The dissertation follows the typical study of library research with a qualitative inquiry. It focuses on analyzing the materials which exist in the books, articles, and documents that are related to the subject of investigation. Here, I will follow Sahiron's interpretative approach[45] as my essential method of scrutiny that supports my analysis in addressing some problems posed in this dissertation. I will also use his explanatory analysis to provide an understanding of why and how the subject emerged and the factors which triggered it.

The steps taken in the process of explanatory analysis consist of comparative explanation that aims at explaining the subject by comparing it to other data which refer to the similar issue. This method is usually used to evaluate the conceptual explanation of one author to another. It also aims at discerning the distinct ideas promoted by the subject. In this, both our Fatimid Isma'ili authors will be examined together with another author from among the Isma'ili circle and from other Islamic groups such as the Sunnites and the Shi'ites. The explanatory analysis will also take into account the sociology of knowledge which aims at locating the subject in its historical context where the socio-structure and super-structure predispose the subject. It

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[45] The explanation on the methods are mainly taken from the lecture of Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Metodologi Penelitian Teks*, Pascasarjana UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2012. See further on, Sahiron Syamsuddin, "Pendekatan dan Analisis dalam Penelitian Teks Tafsir: Sebuah Overview," in *Suhuf Jurnal Pengkajian Al-Qur'an dan Budaya*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2019), 131-149.

argues that no practical interpretation is immaculate from its formative background and community paradigm. Therefore, a historical analysis of the issue will suffice to give more detail on the discourse that occurred in early Fatimid period.

As I will examine the thought of a person more than ten centuries ago, the issue of the material of the research will be of fundamental importance. Here, the study will employ a variety of sources, mainly the documents that have appeared in the formative period of Fatimid Isma'ili thought. Some historical texts from Sunnite and Shi'ite authors will also be consulted to give a comprehensive picture of the life of al-Nu'mān and Ja'far. In reference to these historical texts it should be emphasized that I will not solely rely on Sunnite sources as many of them tend to be biased and are too subjective in picturing the life of Shi'ites. Thus, some books of Shi'ite history will be employed to make an in-depth comparison.

The research also consults the literature related to the topic of prophet stories, the history and traditions of the Fatimid Isma'ilis, the topics and ideas that were popular during the time, and selected works that are related to the topic of prophet stories. The research also deals with the Imāmi Shi'ah literature in Qur'anic interpretation, mainly in reference to the prophet stories. It will help the research in differentiating between the Isma'ili and the Imāmi attitude towards the prophet stories in the Qur'an. Certain other Isma'ili scholars such as Abū Ḥatim al-Rāzī who also concerned themselves with the prophet stories will also be consulted. This will be part of my humble effort to illustrate the dynamics of the Isma'ili understanding of the prophet stories. Did they have a similar knowledge of some interpretations or did they construct their ideas based on the prophet stories? Therefore, it will investigate certain facets of Isma'ili thought mainly to answer the question whether they had a dynamic or a static idea on the issue of prophet stories. In this case, the issue of origins will be significant.

As the interpretation of the prophet stories has a close relation to employing the other traditions, it is crucial to investigate deeply on the sources used by al-Nu'mān and Ja'far. In this case, the texts from older

sources such as the pseudo-Masʿūdi's *Ithbāt al-Rusul* and al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulk* are essential to shed light on this matter. In both chronicles, the prophet stories are also discussed. Also, the works that are related to Isma'ili thought, whether in philosophy, history, politics or jurisprudence, will also be consulted to acquire rich information on the history of Isma'ili civilization. Lastly, certain works on other traditions are also relevant to consult such as the Biblical scripture and the Irano-semitic religions. I assume that these sources are interrelated with some ideas of the two scholars under study.

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CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

In reference to the three research questions, I conclude this study my making three distinct points. Firstly, the Isma'ili school has been actively engaged in the issue of prophetology, since its formative period. While the majority of the Sunnite scholars studied the prophet stories in the Qur'an with the objective of identifying the moral teachings they entail, their Isma'ili counterparts applied them in their discourse on authority. They deemed the study of the prophets as relevant to their concept of cyclical hiero-history as the basis of their theology and incorporated it in their arguments for the authority of the imāms. Certain concepts such as sacred history, the cycle of prophets, number-based cosmology, and anti-nomianism were part of their scholarly discourse since the formative period of the Isma'ili school, aimed at legitimizing the position of the *Qā'im* as the last cycle of the prophetic sequence.

Secondly, our research has analyzed the Isma'ili use of the prophet stories during their post-formative period, primarily in the early Fatimid period, by examining the works of al-Nu'mān b. Ḥayyūn and Ja'far b. Manṣūr. In the course of our analytical study we have been able to affirm that *ta'wīl* served as a mode of hermeneutical interpretation aimed at locating the position of the imāms who reserve the right to exercise true spiritual authority in Islam, as the legitimate successors of Prophet Muḥammad. Its methodological construction consisted of allegorical symbolism which was arbitrarily employed as the basis of the esoteric and the exoteric interpretation, with the aim to uphold the authority of the imāms.

Thirdly, reinterpreting the prophet accounts in the Qur'an by *ta'wīl*, as reflected in the works of both scholars, was their attempt to retrieve the cyclical narrative of the past history, which was then included in the formation of Isma'ili doctrine and theology. Their symbolic interpretation of the number seven in the grand cyclical history and world cosmology reflected on the authority of the imāms as a matter of

human destiny which was divinely supported by God's words and creations.

Alongside the theological framework of interpretation, the prophet stories in the Qur'an were also employed in the form of self-reflection towards their historical context, mainly in terms of the struggle over the authority of the imāms. Besides, these accounts were also used in the Isma'ili critique of their Sunnite and Shi'te rivals who erroneously used the exoteric interpretation in understanding religious texts, without acknowledging the esoteric truths. The Isma'ilis effort of Qur'an interpretation signified their attempt to create knowledge for power. The prophet stories interpreted through *ta'wīl* or esoteric interpretation became a discursive strategy for the early Fatimid Isma'ilis in order to strengthen their religious authority and formulate the Isma'ili doctrine and creed.

Both al-Nu'mān and Ja'far entertained identical ideas on the authority of the imāms and on the methodological interpretation of the esoteric *ta'wīl*. However, both authors had different points of view on the status and the relationship between the esoteric and the exoteric. For al-Nu'mān, both dimensions of the esoteric and the exoteric constituted necessary elements in the process of understanding religious text and symbols that complemented each other. This notion of his shaped a new idea on the formation of *ta'wīl* in early Fatimid Isma'ili thought. Also, both authors had different views on the issue of lawless state or antinomianism. While al-Nu'mān made a definite statement confirming the shari'ah brought by Adam, Ja'far did not commit himself and instead alluded to the lawless state of the *Ṣāḥib al-Zamān* as the *Qā'im*.

Besides these points, our research has also made cetain important observations in regard to the authorship of the *Sarā'ir wa Asrār al-Nuṭaqā'*. It has been argued that the work succeeding the *Asrār al-Nuṭaqā'* was authored by pseudo-Ja'far between 366/977-380/990. Based on our textual analysis, we have formulated four arguments that seem to confirm this view. First, the use of language and logic seems to be different and rather inconsistent. For example, the terms *ta'wīl* and *bāṭin* are less frequently employed in the *Asrār*, while both terms mark the typical interpretation of Ja'far in his *Sarā'ir*. Second, the polemical

tone as an archetypal interpretation is also absent in the *Asrār*. Third, a paradigmatic change of the critical attitude. In the *Sarā'ir*, the critical attitude expressed in the texts is mainly initiated to disparage the Sunnite authority. In contrast to the *Asrār*, the author's critique is directed toward the internal cycle of the Shi'ah, in consequence to the schism that occurred after Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. Forth, inconsistent ideas on the level of reverence due to 'Alī, wherein the *Sarā'ir* includes certain statements glorifying 'Alī and the *Asrār* includes others that condemn this form of glorification as exaggeration and excess.

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