



## The Institute of Ismaili Studies

### “Ismaili Studies: Medieval Antecedents and Modern Developments” Farhad Daftary\*

#### Abstract

This article presents a brief survey of the history and evolution of Ismaili studies, while also examining key points in Ismaili history. Beginning with the establishment of the Fatimid state and its diversity of intellectual traditions, the article chronicles the study of the Ismailis from the medieval era through to the modern age.

Accused of heresy by many early Muslim scholars, the Ismailis have been the subject of various myths and legends. From the active anti-Ismaili writings of Sunni polemicists to the spread of the Assassin legends throughout the Occident by tales of the Crusaders, early representations of the Ismailis were often based on misconception and misinformation. The recovery of Ismaili manuscripts in more recent times has significantly contributed to the development of the field and spawned a new generation of scholars.

#### Keywords

Alamūt, al-Ghazālī, Assassin legends, community, Crusaders, *dā‘īs*, *da‘wa*, Fatimids, *hashīshiyya*, heresiography, historiography, history, Islamic Studies, Ismaili, Ismailis, Ismailism, Ismaili studies, Marco Polo, Nizārīs, Orientalism, scholarship.

#### Introduction

A major Shi‘i Muslim community, the Ismailis are currently scattered in more than twenty-five countries of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe and North America. Ismaili historiography and the perceptions of the Ismailis by others, in both Muslim and Christian milieus, as well as stages in Ismaili studies have had their own fascinating evolution, of which we shall present a brief survey here; but first, a few facts about the Ismailis and their history.

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## The Fatimid Period

The Ismailis have had a complex history dating back to the formative period of Islam. By the middle of the 3rd/9th century, the Ismailis, who represented one of the early Imāmī Shi‘i groups, had organised a dynamic and revolutionary religio-political movement designated by them as *al-da‘wa al-hādiya* (the rightly guiding mission). The primary aim of this movement was to install the ‘Alid imam recognised by the Ismailis to actual rule over the entire Muslim *umma* and to have him acknowledged as the sole rightful imam by all Muslims; and the message of the movement was disseminated by a network of *dā‘īs*, summoners, who were active in numerous regions, from North Africa to Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. The success of the early Ismaili *da‘wa* was crowned in 297/909 by the establishment of the Fatimid *dawla* or state in North Africa, where the Ismaili imam was installed to the first Shi‘i caliphate. The foundation of the Fatimid state was a great success for the Shi‘a in general and it posed a serious challenge to the authority of the ‘Abbasid caliph, the official spokesman of Sunni Islam, and the position of the Sunni ‘*ulamā*’ who legitimised the ‘Abbasids’ authority and defined Sunnism as the true interpretation of Islam. The Ismailis, who as Shi‘i Muslims developed their own interpretation of Islam, now offered a viable alternative, protected by a powerful state, to Sunni “orthodoxy”.<sup>1</sup>

The Ismailis elaborated a diversity of intellectual traditions. The recovery of Ismaili literature in modern times indeed attests to the rich literary heritage of the Ismailis and their intellectual achievements which reached their summit during the Fatimid phase of their history - often referred to as the “golden age” of Ismailism. The learned Ismaili *dā‘īs* were at the same time the scholars and authors of their community. The Fatimid *dā‘īs* of the Iranian lands, such as Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971), Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020) and Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. after 465/1072), amalgamated their theology with a variety of philosophical traditions, giving rise to a distinctive intellectual tradition labelled in modern times as “philosophical Ismailism”.<sup>2</sup> These and other *dā‘īs* also produced treatises on a multitude of exoteric and esoteric subjects as well as the science of *ta‘wīl* or esoteric exegesis which became the hallmark of Ismaili thought. The *dā‘ī*-authors made seminal contributions to Islamic theology and philosophy in general and to Shi‘i thought in particular. The Fatimids developed an elaborate *da‘wa* organisation for the activities of their *dā‘īs* throughout the Muslim world; and, ironically, the *da‘wa* achieved long-term successes only outside of the Fatimid dominions, where the Ismailis were often persecuted.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, Ismaili law was codified mainly through the efforts of al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān (d. 363/974), the foremost jurist

<sup>1</sup> For general surveys of Ismaili history and thought, see F. Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990); his *A Short History of the Ismailis* (Edinburgh, 1998); his “Ismā‘īliyya”, in *The Great Islamic Encyclopaedia* (Tehran, 1998), vol. 8, pp. 681-702, and W. Madelung, “Ismā‘īliyya”, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (new ed.), vol. 4, pp. 198-206.

<sup>2</sup> See P. E. Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism: The Ismaili Neoplatonism of Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī* (Cambridge, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> See the following works by Daftary: “The Ismaili *Da‘wa* outside the Fatimid *Dawla*” in M. Barrucand, ed., *L’Égypte Fatimide, son art et son histoire* (Paris, 1999), pp. 29-43; “Sayyida Ḥurra: The Ismā‘īlī Queen of Yemen”, in G. R. Hambly, ed., *Women in the Medieval Islamic World* (New York, 1998), pp. 117-130, and “The Medieval Ismā‘īlīs of the Iranian Lands”, in *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth, Volume II, The Sultan’s Turret: Studies in Persian and Turkish Culture*, ed. C. Hillenbrand (Leiden, 2000), especially pp. 48-73. See also P. E. Walker, “The Ismā‘īlī *Da‘wa* and the Fātimid Caliphate”, in *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Volume One, Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, ed. C. F. Petry (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 120-150.



of the Fatimid period.<sup>4</sup> The Fatimids also encouraged a historiographical tradition which resulted in numerous chronicles of the Fatimid dynasty and state; but these historiographical writings perished almost completely in Ayyūbid and Mamlūk times.<sup>5</sup> In sum, the Fatimids paid considerable attention to Islamic sciences in general as well as cultural and commercial activities; and they made important contributions to Islamic civilisation.<sup>6</sup> It was in recognition of these contributions that the 4th/10th century was designated by Louis Massignon as the “Ismaili century” of Islam.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Nizārī / Musta‘lī Division**

In 487/1094, the Ismailis were permanently split into two rival communities, the Nizārīs and the Musta‘līs. The Musta‘lī Ismailis, who eventually survived only in the Ṭayyibī branch, soon found their stronghold in Yemen where their community flourished under the leadership of their *dā‘īs*. By the end of the 10th/16th century, the Ṭayyibīs themselves were subdivided into Dā’ūdī and Sulaymānī factions. By that time, the Ṭayyibīs of the Indian subcontinent, known locally as Bohras, had greatly outnumbered their co-religionists in Yemen. The Ṭayyibīs in general maintained the intellectual and literary traditions of the Fatimid Ismailis; they have also preserved, both in Yemen and India, a considerable portion of the Ismaili literature of the Fatimid period. The learned Ṭayyibī *dā‘īs* of Yemen themselves engaged in literary activities and produced a voluminous literature.

The Nizārī Ismailis, on the other hand, acquired political prominence within Saljūq dominions, especially in Persia where they organised a state of their own with a subsidiary in Syria. The Nizārī state, founded by Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ (d. 518/1124) and centred at the mountain fortress of Alamūt, lasted some 166 years until it too was destroyed by the all-conquering Mongol hordes in 654/1256. Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ designed a partially successful revolutionary strategy against the Saljūq Turks, whose alien rule was intensely detested in Persia, and thus he capitalised on the Persian sentiments of different social strata there. Preoccupied with their struggle and survival tactics in the midst of an extremely hostile milieu, however, the Nizārīs of the Alamūt period did not produce as many learned *dā‘īs* and a substantial volume of literature as in Fatimid times. Nevertheless, they did maintain a sophisticated outlook and literary tradition, also elaborating their teachings in response to changed circumstances. The Nizārī Ismailis of Persia, like the Fatimids, also developed a historiographical tradition and commissioned the compilation of official chronicles recording the events of their state according to the reigns of the successive lords of Alamūt, starting with the *Sargudhasht-i*

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<sup>4</sup> I. K. Poonawala, “Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān and Isma‘īli Jurisprudence”, in F. Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Isma‘īli History and Thought* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 117-143.

<sup>5</sup> A. Fu‘ād Sayyid, “Lumières nouvelles sur quelques sources de l’histoire Fatimide en Égypte”, *Annales Islamologiques*, 13 (1977), pp. 1-41, and his *al-Dawla al-Fāṭimiyya fī Misr: taḥṣīn jadīd* (2nd ed., Cairo, 2000), pp. 29-75.

<sup>6</sup> See H. Halm, *The Fatimids and their Traditions of Learning* (London, 1997); P. E. Walker, “Fatimid Institutions of Learning”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 34 (1997), pp. 179-200, and F. Daftary, “Intellectual Life among the Ismailis: An Overview”, in F. Daftary, ed., *Intellectual Traditions in Islam* (London, 2000), pp. 87-111.

<sup>7</sup> L. Massignon, “Mutanabbi devant le siècle Ismaélien de l’Islam”, in *Al-Mutanabbi: Recueil publié à l’occasion de son millénaire* (Beirut, 1936), p. 1.



*Sayyidnā* which covered the life and career of Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ.<sup>8</sup> But none of these chronicles survived the Mongol catastrophe. However, the Nizārī chronicles were seen and utilised by a number of Persian historians of the Īlkhānid period, notably ‘Aṭā Malik Juwaynī (d. 681/1283), who had access to the famous library at Alamūt before it was burned by the Mongols, Rashīd al-Dīn Faḡl Allāh (d. 718/1318) and Abu’l-Qāsim Kāshānī (d. ca. 736/1335), who remain our main sources on the history of the Nizārī state in Persia.<sup>9</sup> And the Syrian Nizārīs preserved a portion of the Ismaili literature of the Fatimid period.

The Nizārī Ismailis of Persia survived the Mongol destruction of their fortresses and state in considerably reduced numbers, while the Syrian Nizārīs were subdued by the end of the 7th/13th century by the Mamlūks who had also checked the westward advances of the Mongols. By the middle of the 9th/15th century, the Nizārī imams emerged in Anjudān in central Persia, initiating a revival in Nizārī *da‘wa* and literary activities. The Nizārī *da‘wa* now achieved particular success in Central Asia, and on the Indian subcontinent where large numbers of Hindus converted to Ismailism and became locally known as Khojas. The Nizārīs of the post-Alamūt period developed distinctive literary traditions in Syria, Persia, Central Asia and India. The Persian Nizārīs now adopted poetic and Sufī forms of expressions, while the Central Asian Nizārīs preserved a good share of the Nizārī literature of the Alamūt and subsequent times written in Persian, chosen as the religious language of the Persian-speaking Nizārīs from the early Alamūt times. The Nizārī Khojas elaborated an indigenous literary genre in the form of devotional hymns known as *gināns*.<sup>10</sup> Originally transmitted orally, the *gināns* were eventually committed to writing mainly in the Khojki script developed within the Nizārī Khoja community in India.

### The Anti-Ismaili Campaign

In the course of their history the Ismailis have often been accused of various heretical teachings and practices and, at the same time, a multitude of myths and misconceptions circulated about them. This is mainly because the Ismailis were, until the middle of the twentieth century, studied and evaluated almost exclusively on the basis of the evidence collected or often fabricated by their enemies. As the most revolutionary wing of Shi‘ism with a religio-political agenda that aimed to uproot the ‘Abbasids and restore the caliphate to a line of ‘Alid imams, the Ismailis from early on aroused the hostility of the Sunni establishment of the Muslim majority. With the foundation of the Fatimid state, the Ismaili challenge to the established order had become actualised, and thereupon the ‘Abbasid caliphs and the Sunni

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<sup>8</sup> F. Daftary, “Persian Historiography of the Early Nizārī Ismā‘īlīs”, *Iran, Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, 30 (1992), pp. 91-97.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Aṭā Malik Juwaynī, *Ta’rīkh-i jahān-gushā*, ed. M. Qazwīnī (Leiden and London, 1912-1937), vol. 3, pp. 186-278; English trans., *The History of the World-Conqueror*, tr. J. A. Boyle (Manchester, 1958), vol. 2, pp. 666-725; Rashīd al-Dīn Faḡl Allāh, *Jāmi‘ al-tawārīkh; qismat-i Ismā‘īliyān*, ed. M. T. Dānishpazhūh and M. Mudarrīsī Zanjānī (Tehran, 1338/1959), pp. 97-195, and Abu’l-Qāsim ‘Abd Allāh Kāshānī, *Zubdat al-tawārīkh; bakhsh-i Faṭīmiyān wa Nizāriyān*, ed. M. T. Dānishpazhūh (2nd ed., Tehran, 1366/1987), pp. 133-233.

<sup>10</sup> A. Nanji, *The Nizārī Ismā‘īlī Tradition in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent* (Delmar, NY, 1978), pp. 50-96, and A. Asani, “The Ismaili Ginans as Devotional Literature”, in R. S. McGregor, ed., *Devotional Literature of South Asia* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 101-112.



‘*ulamā*’ launched what amounted to nothing less than an official anti-Ismaili propaganda campaign. The overall objective of this systematic and prolonged campaign was to discredit the entire Ismaili movement from its origins so that the Ismailis could be readily condemned as *malāhida*, heretics or deviators from the true religious path. In particular, Sunni polemicists, starting with Ibn Rizām who lived in Baghdad during the first half of the 4th/10th century, began to fabricate evidence that would lend support to the condemnation of the Ismailis on specific doctrinal grounds. Ibn Rizām’s anti-Ismaili tract does not seem to have survived, but it was used extensively a few decades later by another polemicist, the Sharīf Abu’l-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. ‘Alī better known as Akhū Muḥsin whose own anti-Ismaili work, written around 372/982, has not survived. However, the Ibn Rizām — Akhū Muḥsin accounts have been preserved fragmentarily by several later historians, notably al-Nuwayrī (d. 732/1332) Ibn al-Dawādārī (d. after 736/1335) and al-Maqrīzī (d.845/1442).<sup>11</sup> The polemicists concocted detailed accounts of the sinister teachings and practices of the Ismailis, while refuting the ‘Alid genealogy of their imams, descendants of the Imam Ja‘far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) and the last of the early ‘Alid imams recognised jointly by the Ismaili and the Twelver (Ithnā‘asharī) Shi‘is. Anti-Ismaili polemical writings provided a major source of information for Sunni heresiographers, such as al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037), who produced another important category of writing against the Ismailis;<sup>12</sup> while the earliest Imāmī Shi‘i heresiographers al-Nawbakhtī (d. after 300/912) and al-Qummī (d. 301/913), who were better informed than their Sunni counterparts on the internal divisions of Shi‘ism, were less hostile towards the Ismaili Shi‘is.<sup>13</sup>

Polemicists also fabricated travesties in which they attributed a variety of shocking beliefs and practices to the Ismailis; these forgeries circulated widely as genuine Ismaili treatises and were used as source materials by subsequent generations of polemicists and heresiographers. One of these forgeries, the anonymous *Kitāb al-siyāsa (Book of Methodology)*, acquired wide popularity as it contained all the ideas needed to condemn the Ismailis as heretics on account of their libertinism and atheism. This book, which has survived only fragmentarily in later Sunni sources, such as al-Baghdādī’s heresiography<sup>14</sup>, is reported to have candidly expounded the procedures that were supposedly followed by Ismaili *dā‘īs* for winning new converts and instructing them through some seven stages of initiation or *balāgh* leading ultimately to unbelief and atheism. Needless to add that the Ismaili tradition knows of these fictitious accounts only from the polemics of its enemies. Be that as it may, the anti-Ismaili polemical and heresiographical traditions, in turn, influenced the historians, theologians and jurists who had something to say about the Ismailis.

<sup>11</sup> Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Nuwayrī, *Nahāyat al-arab fī fuvūn al-adab*, vol. 25, ed. M. J. ‘A. al-Ḥinī et al. (Cairo, 1984), pp. 187-317; Abū Bakr ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar wa jāmi‘ al-ghurar*, vol. 6, ed. Š. al-Munajjid (Cairo, 1961), pp. 6-21, 44-156, and Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz al-ḥunafā’ bi-akhbār al-‘imma al-Fāṭimiyyin al-khulafā’*, vol. 1, ed., J. al-Shayyāl (Cairo, 1967), pp. 22-29, 151-202.

<sup>12</sup> Abū Maṣṣūr ‘Abd al-Qāhir b. Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-firaq*, ed. M. Badr (Cairo, 1328/1910), pp. 265-299; English trans., *Moslem Schisms and Sects*, part II, tr. A. S. Halkin (Tel Aviv, 1935), pp. 167-157.

<sup>13</sup> See al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, *Kitāb firaq al-Shī‘a*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1931), pp. 37-41, 57-60, and Sa‘d b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Qummī, *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa’l-firaq*, ed. M. J. Mashkūr (Tehran, 1963), pp. 50-55, 63-64, 80-83; both of these authors relate important details on the opening phase of Ismailism.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq*, pp. 277-279; tr. Halkin, pp. 130-132; see also Stern, “The Book of the Highest Initiation and other Anti-Ismā‘īli Travesties”, in his *Studies*, pp. 56-83.



## Heterodoxy and Heresy

The Sunni authors, who were generally not interested in collecting accurate information on the internal divisions of Shi'ism and treated all Shi'i interpretations of Islam as "heterodoxies" or even "heresies", also readily availed themselves of the opportunity of blaming the Fatimids and indeed the entire Ismaili community for the atrocities perpetrated by the Qarmaṭīs of Bahrayn who, in 317/930, attacked Mecca and massacred the pilgrims there and then carried away the Black Stone (*al-ḥajar al-aswad*).<sup>15</sup> The Qarmaṭīs, it may be recalled, seceded from the rest of the Ismā'īliyya, at the latest by 286/899, and never recognised continuity in the imamate which became the central doctrine of the Fatimid Ismailis. At any rate, the hostile accounts and misrepresentations contributed significantly to shaping the anti-Ismaili opinions of Muslims at large.

By spreading these defamations and forged accounts, the anti-Ismaili authors, in fact, produced a "black legend" in the course of the 4th/10th century. Ismailism was now depicted as the arch-heresy, *ilhād*, of Islam, carefully designed by some non-'Alid impostors, or possibly even a Jewish magician disguised as a Muslim, aiming at destroying Islam from within.<sup>16</sup> By the 5th/11th century, this "black legend", with its elaborate details and stages of initiation, had been accepted as an accurate and reliable description of Ismaili motives, beliefs and practices, leading to further anti-Ismaili polemics and heresiographical accusations as well as intensifying the animosity of other Muslims towards the Ismailis.

## al-Ghazālī

By the end of the 5th/11th century, the widespread anti-Ismaili campaign of the Sunni authors had been astonishingly successful throughout the central Islamic lands. The revolt of the Persian Ismailis led by Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ against the Saljūq Turks, the new overlords of the 'Abbasids, now called forth another vigorous Sunni reaction against the Ismailis in general and the Nizārīs in particular. The new literary campaign, accompanied by military attacks on Nizārī strongholds in Persia, was initiated by Nizām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), the Saljūq vizier and virtual master of Saljūq dominions for more than two decades. Nizām al-Mulk himself devoted a long chapter in his *Siyāsat-nāma* (*The Book of Government*) to the condemnation of the Ismailis.<sup>17</sup> However, the earliest polemical treatise against the Persian Ismailis and their doctrine of *ta'līm*, propounding the necessity of authoritative teaching by the Ismaili imam,

<sup>15</sup> For the best modern treatment of the subject, pointing to the lack of any collaboration between the Qarmaṭīs and the Fatimids, see W. Madelung, "Fatimiden und Bahrainqarmaṭen", *Der Islam*, 34 (1959), pp. 34-88; slightly updated English version as "The Fatimids and the Qarmaṭīs of Bahrayn", in Daftary, ed., *Medieval Ismā'īli*, pp. 21-73; see also F. Daftary, "A Major Schism in the Early Ismā'īli Movement", *Studia Islamica*, 77 (1993), pp. 123-139, and his "Carmatians", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 4, pp. 823-832.

<sup>16</sup> W. Ivanow produced a number of pioneering studies on this "black legend", see especially his *The Alleged Founder of Ismailism* (Bombay, 1946).

<sup>17</sup> Nizām al-Mulk, *Siyar al-mulūk* (*Siyāsat-nāma*), ed. H. Darke (2nd ed., Tehran, 1347/1968), pp. 282-311; English trans., *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings*, tr. H. Darke (2nd ed., London, 1978), pp. 208-231.



was written by no lesser a figure than al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), the most renowned contemporary Sunni theologian and jurist. He was, in fact, commissioned by the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Mustazhir (487-512/1094-1118) to write a treatise in refutation of the Bāṭinīs - another designation coined for the Ismailis by their enemies who accused them of dispensing with the *zāhir* or the commandments and prohibitions of the *sharī‘a* because they claimed to have found access to the *bāṭin* or the essence of the Islamic message as interpreted by the Ismaili imam. In this widely circulating book, completed around 488/1095 and generally known as *al-Mustazhirī*, al-Ghazālī fabricated his own elaborate “Ismaili” system of stages of initiation leading to the ultimate stage (*al-balāgh al-akbar*) of atheism.<sup>18</sup> Subsequently, al-Ghazālī wrote several shorter works in refutation of the Ismailis, and his defamations were adopted by other Sunni writers who, like Nizām al-Mulk, were also familiar with the earlier “black legend”. It is interesting to note that the Nizārīs never responded to al-Ghazālī’s polemics, but a detailed refutation of the *Mustazhirī* was much later written in Yemen by the fifth Musta‘lī-Ṭayyibī *dā‘ī* who died in 612/1215.<sup>19</sup> At any rate, Sunni authors, including especially Saljūq chroniclers, participated actively in the renewed literary campaign against the Ismailis.

### *Hashīshiyya*

By the opening decades of the 6th/12th century, the divided Ismaili community had embarked on internal Nizārī versus Musta‘lī feuds to the obvious delight of their Sunni adversaries. In one anti-Nizārī polemical epistle, issued in 516/1222 by the Fatimid caliph al-Āmir (495-524/1101-1130), the Nizārī Ismailis of Syria were for the first time referred to with the abusive designation of *hashīshiyya*, without any explanation.<sup>20</sup> This term was later applied to the Syrian Nizārī Ismailis by a few Sunni historians, notably Abū Shāma (d. 665/1267) and Ibn Muyassar (d. 677/1278), without accusing the Ismailis of actually using *hashīsh*, a product of hemp.<sup>21</sup> The Persian Nizārīs, too, were designated as *hashīshīs* in some Zaydī sources written in northern Persia during the Alamūt period.<sup>22</sup> It is important to note that in all the Muslim sources in which the Nizārīs are referred to as *hashīshīs*, this term is used metaphorically and in its abusive sense of “low-class rabble” and “irreligious social outcast”. The literal interpretation of this term in reference to the Nizārīs is rooted in the fantasies of medieval Europeans and their “imaginative ignorance” of Islam and the Ismailis. At any event, the Fatimids and the Syrian Nizārīs soon found a common enemy in the Christian Crusaders, who seized Jerusalem in 492/1099. Subsequently, the Crusaders founded four principalities in the Near East and engaged in extensive military and diplomatic encounters

<sup>18</sup> Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā‘ih al-Bāṭiniyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Cairo, 1964).

<sup>19</sup> ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Walīd, *Dāmigh al-bāṭil*, ed. M. Ghālib (Beirut, 1982), 2 vols.; see also H. Corbin, “The Ismā‘īlī Response to the Polemic of Ghazālī”, in Nasr, ed., *Ismā‘īlī Contributions*, pp. 69-98.

<sup>20</sup> Abū ‘Alī al-Manṣūr al-Āmir bi-Aḥkām Allāh, *Īqā‘ ṣawā‘iq al-irghām*, in al-Āmir’s *al-Hidāya al-Āmiriyya*, ed. A. A. A. Fyzee (Bombay, 1938), pp. 27, 32, reprinted in J. al-Shayyāl, ed., *Majmū‘at al-wathā‘iq al-Fāṭimiyya* (Cairo, 1958), pp. 233, 239.

<sup>21</sup> Abū Shāma Shihāb al-Dīn b. Ismā‘īl, *Kitāb al-rawḍatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn* (Cairo, 1287-1288/1870-1871), vol. 1, pp. 240, 258, and Tāj al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbār Miṣr*, ed. A. Fu‘ād Sayyid (Cairo, 1981), p. 102.

<sup>22</sup> See W. Madelung, ed., *Arabic Texts Concerning the History of the Zaydī Imāms of Ṭabaristān, Daylamān and Gilān* (Beirut, 1987), pp. 146, 239.



with the Fatimids in Egypt and the Nizārī Ismailis in Syria, which had lasting repercussions in terms of the distorted image of the Nizārīs in Europe.

The Syrian Nizārīs attained the peak of their power and fame under the leadership of Rāshid al-Dīn Sinān, who was their chief *dā'ī* for some three decades until his death in 589/1193. It was in the time of Sinān, the original “Old Man of the Mountain” or “Le Vieux de la Montagne” of the Crusader sources, that occidental chroniclers of the Crusades and a number of European travellers and diplomatic emissaries began to write about the Nizārī Ismailis, designated by them as the Assassins. The very term Assassin was evidently based on the variants of the Arabic word *hashīsh* (plural, *hashīshiyya*), applied to the Nizārī Ismailis in a derogatory sense by other Muslims and picked up locally in the Levant by the Crusaders and their European observers. At any rate, the Crusader circles and their occidental chroniclers, who were not interested in collecting accurate information about Islam as a religion and its internal divisions despite their proximity to Muslims, remained completely ignorant of Islam in general and the Ismailis in particular. It was under such circumstances that the Crusader circles produced reports about the secret practices of the Ismailis. In the event, medieval Europeans themselves began to fabricate and put into circulation both in the Latin Orient and in Europe a number of tales about these secret practices. In this connection, it is important to note that none of the variants of these tales can be found in contemporary Muslim sources, even the most hostile ones, produced during the 6th/12th and 7th/13th centuries.

### Assassin Legends

The Crusaders were particularly impressed by the highly exaggerated reports and rumours of the Nizārī assassinations and the daring behaviour of their *fidā'īs*, or the self-sacrificing devotees, who carried out the actual missions in public places and normally lost their lives in the process. It should be recalled that in the 6th/12th century, almost any assassination of any significance committed in the central Islamic lands was attributed to the daggers of the Nizārī *fidā'īs*. This explains why these imaginative tales came to revolve around the recruitment and training of these *fidā'īs*; for they were meant to provide satisfactory explanations for behaviour that would otherwise seem irrational or strange to the medieval Western mind. These so-called Assassin legends consisted of a number of separate but interconnected tales, including the “paradise legend”, the “hashish legend”, and the “death-leap legend”. The legends developed in stages, receiving new embellishments at each successive stage, and finally culminated in a synthesis popularised by Marco Polo (d. 1324). The famous Venetian traveller added his own original contribution in the form of a “secret garden of paradise”, where bodily pleasures were supposedly procured for the *fidā'īs* by their mischievous and beguiling leader, the Old Man, as part of their indoctrination and training.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For a survey of these legends, see F. Daftary, *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Isma'ilis* (London, 1994), especially pp. 88-127.





Marco Polo's version of the Assassin legends, offered as a report obtained from reliable contemporary sources in Persia, was reiterated to various degrees by subsequent European writers as the standard description of the "Old Man of the Mountain and his Assassins".<sup>24</sup> Strangely enough, it did not occur to any European that Marco Polo may have actually heard the tales in Italy after returning to Venice in 1295 from his journeys to the East - tales that were by then widespread in Europe and could already be at least partially traced to European antecedents on the subject; not to mention the possibility that the Assassin legends found in Marco Polo's book may have been entirely inserted, as a digressionary note, by Rustichello of Pisa, the Italian romance writer who was actually responsible for committing the account of Marco Polo's travels to writing. More cannot be said on this subject in our present state of knowledge, especially as the original version of Marco Polo's travelogue written by Rustichello in a peculiar old French mixed with Italian has not been recovered. In this connection, it may also be noted that Marco Polo himself evidently revised his travelogue during the last twenty years of his life, at which time he could readily have appropriated the Assassin legends regarding the Syrian Nizārīs then current in Europe. The contemporary historian Juwaynī, an avowed enemy of the Nizārīs who accompanied Hülegü to Alamūt in 654/1256 and inspected that fortress and its library before their destruction by the Mongols, does not report having discovered any "secret garden of paradise" there, as claimed in Marco Polo's account.

Different Assassin legends or components of particular legends were "imagined" independently and at times concurrently by different authors, such as Arnold of Lübeck (d. 1212) and James of Vitry (d. 1240), and embellished over time. Starting with Burchard of Strassburg who visited Syria in 570/1175 as an envoy of the Hohenstaufen emperor of Germany, European travellers, chroniclers and envoys to the Latin East who had something to say about the "Assassins" participated, as if in tacit collusion, in the process of fabricating, transmitting and legitimising the Assassin legends. By the 8th/14th century, the legends had acquired wide currency and were accepted as reliable descriptions of secret Nizārī Ismaili practices, in much the same way as the earlier "black legend" of Sunni polemicists had been accepted as accurate explanation of Ismaili motives, teachings and practices. Henceforth, the Nizārī Ismailis were portrayed in medieval European sources as a sinister order of drugged assassins bent on senseless murder and mischief.

In the meantime, the word "assassin", instead of signifying the name of the Nizārī community in Syria, had acquired a new meaning in French, Italian and other European languages. It had become a common noun designating a professional murderer. With the advent of this usage, the origin and significance of the term "Assassin" was soon forgotten in Europe, while the "oriental sect" that originally bore that name continued to arouse some interest among Europeans, mainly because of the enduring popularity of the Assassin legends which had indeed acquired an independent life of their own. Henceforth, a number of European

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<sup>24</sup> Marco Polo, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian, Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, ed. and tr. H. Yule, 3rd revised ed. by H. Cordier (London, 1929), vol. 1, pp. 139-146.



philologists and lexicographers began to collect the variants of the term “assassin”, such as *assassini* and *heysseini*, occurring in medieval occidental sources, also proposing many strange etymologies. By the 12th/18th century, numerous etymologies of this term had become available, while the sectarians in question had received a few more notices from the pens of travellers and missionaries to the East. In sum, by the beginning of the 13th/19th century, Europeans still perceived the Nizārī Ismailis in an utterly confused and fanciful manner.<sup>25</sup>

## **Orientalism**

The orientalists of the nineteenth century, led by Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838), began their more scholarly study of Islam on the basis of the Arabic manuscripts which were written mainly by Sunni authors. As a result, they studied Islam according to the Sunni viewpoint and, borrowing classifications applicable to Christian contexts, treated Shi‘ism as the “heterodox” interpretation of Islam by contrast to Sunnism which was taken to represent “orthodoxy”. It was mainly on this basis, as well as the continued attraction of the seminal Assassin legends, that the orientalists launched their own study of the Ismailis. In his famous *Memoir* on the Nizārīs,<sup>26</sup> de Sacy succeeded in finally solving the mystery of the name Assassin; he also produced important studies on early Ismailis as background materials for his major work on the Druze religion.<sup>27</sup> The orientalists now correctly identified the Ismailis as a Shi‘i Muslim community, but they were still obliged to study them exclusively on the basis of the hostile Sunni sources and the fictitious occidental accounts of the Crusader circles. Consequently, the orientalists, too, lent their own seal of approval to the myths of the Ismailis, namely, the anti-Ismaili “black legend” of the medieval Sunni polemicists and the Assassin legends of the Crusaders.

Indeed, de Sacy’s distorted evaluation of the Ismailis, though unintentional, set the frame within which other orientalists of the nineteenth century studied the medieval history of the Ismailis. The orientalists’ interest in the Ismailis had now received a fresh impetus from the anti-Ismaili accounts of the then newly-discovered Sunni chronicles which seemed to complement the Assassin legends contained in the occidental sources familiar to them. It was under such circumstances that misconceptions, misrepresentation and plain fiction came to permeate the most widely read study of the Ismailis, namely, the first Western book on the Persian Nizārīs of the Alamūt period written by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774-1856). This Austrian orientalist-diplomat endorsed Marco Polo’s narrative in its entirety as well as

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<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, Camille Falconet, “Dissertation sur les Assassins, peuple d’Asie”, in *Mémoires de Littérature, tirés des registres de l’Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*, 17 (1751), pp. 127-170; English trans., “A Dissertation on the Assassins, a People of Asia”, in Jean de Joinville, *Memoirs of John Lord de Joinville*, tr. T. Johnes (Hafod, 1807), vol. 2, pp. 287-328, and S. Assemani, *Ragguaglio storico-critico sopra la setta Assissana, detta volgarmente degli Assassini* (Padua, 1806).

<sup>26</sup> A. I. Silvestre de Sacy, “Mémoire sur la dynastie des Assassins, et sur l’étymologie de leur nom”, in *Mémoires de l’Institut Royal de France*, 4 (1818), pp. 1-84; English trans., “Memoir on the Dynasty of the Assassins, and on the Etymology of their Name”, in Daftary, *Assassin Legends*, pp. 136-188.

<sup>27</sup> A. I. Silvestre de Sacy, *Exposé de la religion des Druzes* (Paris, 1838), 2 vols.



all the medieval defamations levelled against the Ismailis by their Sunni enemies. This book, originally published in German in 1818, achieved great success in Europe and continued to be treated as the standard history of the Nizārī Ismailis until the 1930s.<sup>28</sup> With rare exceptions, notably the French orientalist Charles F. Defrémery (1822-1883) who produced valuable historical studies on the Nizārīs of Syria and Persia<sup>29</sup>, the Ismailis continued to be misrepresented to various degrees by later orientalists such as Michael J. de Goeje (1836-1909), whose own incorrect interpretation of Fatimid-Qarmaṭī relations was generally adopted.<sup>30</sup> Orientalism gave a new lease of life to the myths surrounding the Ismailis; and this deplorable state of Ismaili studies remained essentially unchanged until the 1930s. Even an eminent scholar like Edward Browne (1862-1926) could not resist reiterating the orientalist tales of his predecessors on the Ismailis.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, Westerners had retained the habit of referring to the Nizārī Ismailis as the Assassins, a misnomer rooted in a medieval pejorative appellation.<sup>32</sup>

The breakthrough in Ismaili studies had to await the recovery and study of genuine Ismaili texts on a large scale - manuscript sources which had been preserved secretly in numerous private collections. A few Ismaili manuscripts of Syrian provenance had already surfaced in Paris during the nineteenth century, and some fragments of these works were studied and published there by Stanislas Guyard (1846-1884) and other orientalists.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, Paul Casanova (1861-1926), who produced important studies on the Fatimids and the Nizārī coins, was the first European orientalist to have recognised the Ismaili origin of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, a portion of which had found its way to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.<sup>34</sup> More Ismaili manuscripts preserved in Yemen and Central Asia were recovered in the opening decades of the twentieth century.<sup>35</sup> In particular, a number of Nizārī texts were

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<sup>28</sup> J. von Hammer-Purgstall, *Die Geschichte der Assassinen aus morgenländischen Quellen* (Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1818); French trans., *Histoire de l'ordre des Assassins*, tr. J. Hellert and P. A. de la Nourais (Paris, 1833; reprinted, Paris, 1961); English trans., *The History of the Assassins, derived from Oriental Sources*, tr. O. C. Wood (London, 1835; reprinted, New York, 1968).

<sup>29</sup> C. F. Defrémery, "Nouvelles recherches sur les Ismaéliens ou Bathiniens de Syrie, plus connus sur le nom d'Assassins", *Journal Asiatique*, 5 série, 3 (1854), pp. 373-421, 5 (1855), pp. 5-76, and his "Essai sur l'histoire des Ismaéliens ou Batinienens de la Perse, plus connus sur le nom d'Assassins", *Journal Asiatique*, 5 série, 8 (1856), pp. 353-387, 15 (1860), pp. 130-210.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Jan de Goeje, *Mémoire sur les Carmathes du Bahraïn et les Fatimides* (2nd ed., Leiden, 1886).

<sup>31</sup> E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* (London, 1920-1924), vol. 1, pp. 391-415, vol. 2, pp. 190-211, 453-460. See also the anonymous article "Assassins", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (first ed.), vol. 1, pp. 491-492.

<sup>32</sup> Freya Stark (1893-1993), the celebrated traveller to the Alamūt valley entitled her book *The Valleys of the Assassins* (London, 1934), where she also cited von Hammer as a main authority on the Nizārī Ismailis (p. 228). Also, Professor Bernard Lewis, who has made valuable contributions to modern Ismaili studies, persistently designated the Nizārīs as the Assassins; see his "The Sources for the History of the Syrian Assassins", *Speculum*, 27 (1952), pp. 475-489, reprinted in his *Studies in Classical and Ottoman Islam* (London, 1976), article VIII, and *The Assassins; A Radical Sect in Islam* (London, 1967); the latter work has been translated into a number of European languages always retaining variants of the name Assassins, such as *Les Assassins* (Paris, 1982), *Die Assassinen* (Frankfurt, 1989) und *Gli assassini* (Milan, 1992).

<sup>33</sup> S. Guyard, *Fragments relatifs à la doctrine des Ismaélis* (Paris, 1874), and his "Un grand maître des Assassins au temps de Saladin", *Journal Asiatique*, 7 série, 9 (1877), pp. 324-489.

<sup>34</sup> P. Casanova, "Notice sur un manuscrit de la secte des Assassins", *Journal Asiatique*, 9 série, 11 (1898), pp. 151-159.

<sup>35</sup> E. Griffini, "Die jüngste ambrosianische Sammlung arabischer Handschriften", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 69 (1915), especially pp. 80-88, and V. A. Ivanov, "Ismailitskiya rukopisi Aziatskago Muzeya. Sobranie I. Zarubina, 1916g.", *Bulletin de l'Académie des Sciences de Russie*, 6 série, 11 (1917), pp. 359-386;



collected from Shughnān, Rūshān and other districts of Badakhshān (now divided by the Oxus River between Tajikistan and Afghanistan) and studied by Aleksandr A. Semenov (1873-1958), the Russian pioneer in Ismaili studies from Tashkent.<sup>36</sup> The Ismaili manuscripts of Central Asian provenance found their way to the Asiatic Museum in St. Petersburg, and are currently held there in the collections of the Institute of Oriental Studies. However, by 1922, when the first Western bibliography of Ismaili writings was prepared by Louis Massignon (1883-1962), knowledge of European libraries and scholarly circles about Ismaili literature was still very limited.<sup>37</sup>

### Modern Ismaili Studies

Modern scholarship in Ismaili studies was actually initiated in the 1930s in India, where significant collections of Ismaili manuscripts had been preserved in the Ismaili Bohra community. This breakthrough resulted mainly from the pioneering efforts of Wladimir Ivanow (1886-1970), and a few Ismaili Bohra scholars, notably Asaf A. A. Fyzee (1899-1981), Husayn F. al-Hamdani (1901-1962) and Zāhid ‘Alī (1888-1958), all of whom based their studies on their family collections of manuscripts.<sup>38</sup> Asaf Fyzee, who studied law at Cambridge University and belonged to the most learned Sulaymānī family of Ṭayyibī Ismailis in India, in fact, made modern scholars aware of the existence of an Ismaili school of jurisprudence. Among his numerous publications on the subject<sup>39</sup>, Fyzee also produced a critical edition of al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s major work which served as the legal code of the Fatimid state and is still observed by the Ṭayyibī Ismailis of India, Pakistan, Yemen and elsewhere.<sup>40</sup> Husayn al-Hamdani, who belonged to an eminent Dā’ūdī Ṭayyibī family of scholars with Yemeni origins and who received his doctorate from London University, was a pioneer in producing a number of studies based on Ismaili sources, calling the attention of modern scholars to the existence of this unique literary heritage. Zāhid ‘Alī hailed from another learned Dā’ūdī family and was for many years the principal of the Nizām College at Hyderabad after receiving his doctorate from Oxford University; he was the first person in

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English summary in E. Denison Ross, “W. Ivanow, Ismaili MSS in the Asiatic Museum”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1919), pp. 429-435.

<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, A. A. Semenov, “Iz oblasti religioznuikh verovany Shughmanskikh Ismailitov”, *Mir Islama*, 1 (1912), pp. 523-561, and his “Opisanie Ismailitskikh rukopisei, sobranuikh A. A. Semenuim”, *Bulletin de l’Académie des Sciences de Russie*, 6 série, 12 (1918), pp. 2171-2201.

<sup>37</sup> L. Massignon, “Esquisse d’une bibliographie Qarmate”, in T. W. Arnold and R. A. Nicholson, ed., *A Volume of Oriental Studies Presented to Edward G. Browne* (Cambridge, 1922), pp. 329-338, reprinted in L. Massignon, *Opera Minora*, ed. Y. Moubarac (Paris, 1969), vol. 1, pp. 627-639.

<sup>38</sup> Subsequently, these collections were made available to scholars at large. Asaf Fyzee donated some 200 manuscripts to the Bombay University Library; see M. Goriawala, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Fyzee Collection of Ismaili Manuscripts* (Bombay, 1965). Husayn al-Hamdani donated part of his family’s manuscript collection to the Bombay University, while a portion remained in the possession of his son, Professor Abbas Hamdani, who has generously made these resources accessible to scholars. The Zāhid ‘Alī collection of some 225 Arabic Ismaili manuscripts was donated in 1996 to The Institute of Ismaili Studies Library, London, where its catalogue is currently under preparation.

<sup>39</sup> See Daftary, “The Bibliography of Asaf A. A. Fyzee”, *Indo-Iranica*, 37 (1984), pp. 49-63.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Qāḍī Abū Ḥanifa al-Nu‘mān b. Muḥammad, *Da‘ā’im al-Islām*, ed. A. A. A. Fyzee (Cairo, 1951-1961), 2 vols.; English trans., *The Pillars of Islam*, tr. A. A. A. Fyzee, completely revised by I. K. Poonawala (New Delhi, forthcoming).



modern times to have produced in Urdu, on the basis of a variety of Ismaili sources, a scholarly study of Fatimid history and a work on Ismaili doctrines.<sup>41</sup>

Ivanow, who eventually settled in Bombay after leaving his native Russia in 1917, collaborated closely with the above-mentioned Bohra scholars and succeeded, through his own connections within the Khoja community, to gain access to Nizārī literature as well. Consequently, he compiled the first detailed catalogue of Ismaili works, citing some 700 separate titles which attested to the hitherto unknown richness and diversity of Ismaili literature and intellectual traditions. The initiation of modern scholarship in Ismaili studies may indeed be traced to the publication of this very catalogue, which provided a scientific frame for further research in the field.<sup>42</sup> Ismaili scholarship received a major impetus through the establishment in 1946 of the Ismaili Society of Bombay under the patronage of Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III (1877-1957), the forty-eighth imam of the Nizārī Ismailis. Ivanow played a crucial role in the creation of the Ismaili Society whose various series of publications were mainly devoted to his own monographs as well as editions and translations of Ismaili texts.<sup>43</sup> He also acquired a large number of manuscripts for the Ismaili Society's Library, which were transferred to The Institute of Ismaili Studies Library in London during the early 1980s.

By 1963, when Ivanow published a revised edition of his catalogue, many more Ismaili sources had become known and progress in Ismaili studies had been truly astonishing.<sup>44</sup> In addition to many studies by Ivanow and the Bohra pioneers in the field, numerous Ismaili texts had now begun to be critically edited by other scholars, preparing the ground for further progress in this new field of Islamic studies. In this connection, particular mention should be made of the Ismaili texts of Fatimid and later times edited together with analytical introductions by Henry Corbin (1903-1978), published simultaneously in Tehran and Paris in his "Bibliothèque Iranienne" series<sup>45</sup>; and the Fatimid texts edited by the Egyptian scholar Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn (1901-1961) and published in his "Silsilat Makhṭūṭāt al-Fāṭimiyyīn" series in Cairo.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, 'Arif Tāmir (1921-1998), who belonged to the small Muḥammad-Shāhī Nizārī community based in Syria, made the Ismaili texts of Syrian provenance available to scholars, although regrettably often in faulty editions; and a number of European scholars, such as Marius Canard (1888-1982) and several Egyptian scholars such as Ḥasan Ibrāhīm Ḥasan (1892-1968), Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl (1911-1967) and

<sup>41</sup> Zāhid 'Alī, *Ta'rīkh-i Fāṭimiyyīn-i Miṣr* (Hyderabad, 1367/1948), 2 vols., and his *Hamāre Ismā'īlī madhhab* (Hyderabad, 1373/1954).

<sup>42</sup> W. Ivanow, *A Guide to Ismaili Literature* (London, 1933).

<sup>43</sup> See F. Daftary, "Bibliography of the Publications of the late W. Ivanow", *Islamic Culture*, 45 (1971), pp. 56-67, and his "Anjoman-e Esmā'īlī", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 2, p. 84.

<sup>44</sup> W. Ivanow, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliographical Survey* (Tehran, 1963), covering some 929 titles.

<sup>45</sup> This series was launched with Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī's *Kashf al-mahjūb*, ed. H. Corbin (Tehran and Paris, 1949); French trans., *Le Dévoilement des choses cachées*, tr. H. Corbin (Lagrasse, 1988).

<sup>46</sup> The first text published here was *al-Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya*, ed. M. K. Ḥusayn (Cairo, [1947]); as shown by S. M. Stern, this text represents the collected lectures of the chief *dā'i* Abū'l-Qāsim 'Abd al-Ḥākim b. Wahb al-Malji prepared for the *majālis al-ḥikma* sessions in al-Mustanṣir's time.



‘Abd al-Mun‘im Mājid (1920-1999) made important contributions to Fatimid studies.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, Yves Marquet had embarked on a lifelong study of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ and their *Rasā’il*.

### Contemporary Research and Scholarship

By the mid-1950s, progress in the field had already enabled Marshall G. S. Hodgson (1922-1968) to produce the first scholarly and comprehensive study of the Nizārī Ismailis of the Alamūt period.<sup>48</sup> Soon, others representing a new generation of scholars, notably Bernard Lewis, Samuel M. Stern (1920-1969), Wilferd Madelung and Abbas Hamdani produced major studies, especially on the early Ismailis and their relations with the dissident Qarmaṭīs.<sup>49</sup> Progress in Ismaili studies has proceeded at a rapid pace during the last few decades through the efforts of yet another generation of scholars such as Ismail K. Poonawala, Heinz Halm, Paul E. Walker, Azim A. Nanji, Thierry Bianquis, Ayman Fu’ād Sayyid, Farhad Dachraoui and Mohammed Yalaoui, who have devoted their attention mainly to Fatimid studies. The modern progress in the recovery and study of Ismaili literature is well reflected in Professor Poonawala’s monumental *Biobibliography*, which identifies some 1300 titles written by more than 200 authors.<sup>50</sup> Many of these texts have now been published in critical editions, while numerous secondary studies of Ismaili history and thought have been produced by three successive generations of scholars.

Modern scholarship in Ismaili studies will, in all probability, continue at an even greater pace as the Ismailis themselves are now becoming widely interested in studying their literary heritage and history - a phenomenon attested by an increasing number of Ismaili-related doctoral dissertations written in recent decades by Ismailis. In this context, a major role will be played by The Institute of Ismaili Studies, established in London in 1977 under the patronage of H. H. Prince Karim Aga Khan IV, the present imam of the Nizārī Ismailis. This institution is already serving as the central point of reference for Ismaili studies while making its own contributions through various programmes of research and publications. Amongst

<sup>47</sup> See F. Daftary, “Marius Canard (1888-1982): A Bio-bibliographical Notice”, *Arabica*, 33 (1986), pp. 251-262; and Fu’ād Sayyid, *al-Dawla al-Fāṭimiyya*, pp. 76-92.

<sup>48</sup> M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins: The Struggle of the Early Nizārī Ismā‘īlīs against the Islamic World* (The Hague, 1955; reprinted, New York, 1980). Professor Hodgson later expressed his regret for having used the name Assassins in the title of this book; see his “The Ismā‘īlī State” in *The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 5, The Saljuq and Mongol Periods*, ed. J. A. Boyle (Cambridge, 1968), p. 424 n.1.

<sup>49</sup> See, for instance, B. Lewis, *The Origins of Ismā‘īlism* (Cambridge, 1940); S. M. Stern’s relevant articles have been collected in his *Studies in Early Ismā‘īlism* (Jerusalem and Leiden, 1983); W. Madelung “Fatimiden und Bahrainqarmaten” cited already, and his “Das Imamāt in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre”, *Der Islam*, 37 (1961), pp. 43-135. Professor Abbas Hamdani has concentrated his research on the dating and authorship of the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* and holds that this encyclopaedic work was written just prior to the foundation of the Fatimid state by a group of *dā‘īs*; for summaries of his views on this subject, see his “Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī and the Brethren of Purity”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 9 (1978), pp. 345-353, and his “Brethren of Purity, a Secret Society for the Establishment of Fāṭimid Caliphate: New Evidence for the Early Dating of their Encyclopaedia”, in Barrucand, ed., *L’Égypte Fatimide*, pp. 73-82.

<sup>50</sup> I. K. Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismā‘īlī Literature* (Malibu, Calif., 1977). Numerous Persian Ismaili manuscripts preserved by the Nizārīs of Tajik Badakhshān have also been recovered in recent decades; see, for instance, A. Berthels and M. Baqoiev, *Alphabetic Catalogue of Manuscripts found by 1959-1963 Expedition in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region* (Moscow, 1967).



these, particular mention should be made of the monographs appearing in the Institute's "Ismaili Heritage Series" which aims to make available to wide audiences the results of modern scholarship on the Ismailis and their intellectual and cultural traditions; and the "Ismaili Texts and Translations Series" in which critical editions of Arabic and Persian texts are published together with English translations and contextualising introductions.<sup>51</sup> Numerous scholars worldwide participate in these academic programmes, and many more benefit from the accessibility of the Ismaili manuscripts held at the Institute's Library, representing the largest collection of its kind in the West.<sup>52</sup> With these modern developments, the scholarly study of the Ismailis, which by the closing decades of the twentieth century had already greatly deconstructed and explained away the seminal anti-Ismaili legends of medieval times, promises to dissipate the remaining misrepresentations of the Ismailis rooted either in hostility or imaginative ignorance of the earlier generations.

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<sup>51</sup> These series were launched, respectively, with P. E. Walker's *Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī: Intellectual Missionary* (London, 1996), and Ibn al-Haytham's *Kitāb al-Munāzarāt*, ed. and tr. as *The Advent of the Fatimids: A Contemporary Shī'i Witness*, by W. Madelung and P. E. Walker (London, 2000). For a complete listing, see The Institute of Ismaili Studies, Department of Academic Research and Publications, *Catalogue of Publications, 2002-2003* (London, 2002) or the publications domain of the Institute's website <<http://www.iis.ac.uk>>. See also P. E. Walker, "The Institute of Ismaili Studies", *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (forthcoming).

<sup>52</sup> See A. Gacek, *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies* (London, 1984), vol. 1, and D. Cortese, *Ismaili and other Arabic Manuscripts: A Descriptive Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies* (London, 2000).