The Institute of Ismaili Studies

The Ismailis in History

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Introductory Remarks

The historical study of the Ismailis, and indeed the Shi‘a more generally, has up to now been deplorably inadequate. Recent decades, however, have witnessed a steady increase in the availability of primary materials for the study of the Ismailis. The scholarship which has been

based on the study of these materials has led to a considerable revision in the estimate of the nature and degree of the significance of the Ismailis in the history of Islam. Nevertheless, the student of Ismailism still continues to be faced by particular problems that do not arise in the study of most other Muslim groups. In part, this is due to the fact that until very recently the bulk of Western scholarship in particular was predominantly dependent on non-Ismaili sources – sources which for the most part were hostile to the community. Western scholars thus automatically inherited the bias present in many such accounts, whereas the alternative Islamic visions reflected in Shi'a, Ismaili, or Sufi texts were either totally neglected, or else regarded as being on the periphery of the Sunni interpretation, which was uncritically assumed to be the most authentic interpretation of Islam.

But the mere fact of the greater availability of primary Ismaili sources in the present day does not solve the difficulty of the task of constructing the history of the Ismailis. To begin with, these sources often tend to neglect an explicit discussion of history. Furthermore, the nature of the doctrine of the Ismailis itself presents, at times, an obstacle to the construction of an historical account. Owing to the hostile circumstances under which the Ismailis were forced to live on many occasions, they found it necessary to conceal their beliefs for the sake of sheer survival. This strategy, enunciated as a formal principle, was known as *taqiyya*. Moreover, as we shall see below, the Ismailis considered that there were aspects of the doctrine which could be understood only by those who had sufficiently developed capacities of comprehension, and these aspects, therefore, had to be withheld from the knowledge of the ordinary people. Also, latter-day Ismaili writings, as indeed all retrospective historical traditions, tend to project a *post facto* image onto their earlier past, thus making it difficult for the objective historian to distinguish the historical reality from the form in which it came to be conceived under the influence of later accretions.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, we can now hope to have a clearer picture of the history of this remarkable group. Certainly, the element of exaggeration and, indeed, sheer fabrication inherent in the picture of the Ismailis, perpetuated by certain polemicists in the past and at times

unthinkingly accepted by many a Western scholar, can now be discarded once and for all. The present article does not attempt to provide anything like a complete history of the Ismailis. Its aim is rather to interpret the historical significance of the community and the faith, highlighting its salient characteristics, so as to provide an overall view with the help of which other more specialised studies can be better understood.[1]

The Formative Period of Ismailism

One of the problems which have occasioned considerable perplexity in the minds of modern historians of Ismailism is that of determining the precise 'origin' of the Ismailis. Usually, the origin has been attributed to one or another point of time in the latter part of the 8th century CE. The beginnings of the Ismailis have been traced also to one or more specific individuals, who have thus been portrayed as setting out in a deliberate and systematic fashion to 'found' Ismailism. This habit of looking for a date of origin and for one or more individual 'founders' of Ismailism involves an oversimplification of history. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that when scrutinised in the light of the self-image of the Ismailis, the question of the origin of Ismailism in a period like the 8th century appears off the mark. For Ismailism embodies a complex of attitudes – attitudes towards such fundamental questions as the nature of truth and how truth can best be attained through proper organisation of society – which can be traced back to the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad and the period immediately following his death. These attitudes came to be centred around the figure of Imam 'Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, who was also closely associated with him right from the beginning of his prophetic mission. The nature of the doctrine which evolved out of these attitudes will be considered further below. It is significant, for instance, that even as late as in Fatimid times, Ismaili writers themselves often tended to employ terms such as *al-da'wa al-hadiya*[2] (the rightly guided *da'wa*) in place of the term *Isma'iliyya* and its variants. The implication that the essential origins of the Ismailis lay in a dynastic dispute centring on the figure of Imam Isma'il, rather than in attitudes going back to the beginnings of Islam, is reflected mostly in non-Ismaili polemical writers, such as Ibn Rizam, al-Nawbakhti, al-Qummi, al-Ash'ari, al-Busti, etc.

It may also be pointed out that the aim of these writers and of others who followed them, such as al-Baghdadi – an aim which decisively influenced their whole approach to determining the origin and the history of the Ismailis – was to situate them somewhere along the scale of pre-defined 'orthodoxy'.[3] It is not surprising that the writers who treated Ismailism in this polemical and heresiological manner, tended to brand Ismailism as a heretical movement. But such an approach involved highly debatable assumptions, not the least of which was the notion of an 'orthodox' Islam which had existed from the first and from which departures had then been made by the Shi'a groups, including the Ismailis.

A similar caution needs to be exercised in regard to the interpretation of Western writers of not only Ismailism but Shi'ism in general, as having a 'political' origin. Such interpretation imposes on the early period of Islam categories which were not recognised in that milieu. Certainly, one of the keys to the understanding of Shi'ism lies in the way in which they approached the question of authority, a question which was firmly bound with the need to understand the inner core of the Islamic message and the values contained in that message. In this complex of attitudes, the distinction between 'religious' and 'political' was nowhere to be found, and it is only by forcing modern Western categories onto the early milieu that this distinction can be made in that context, at the considerable expense of accuracy. In due course, there occurred a crystallisation of a specific response to the question of what authority, both in a religious and political sense, was best fitted to preserve the purity of the Islamic message and to ensure its practical realisation in the community of the faithful. This response consisted essentially in loyalty to Imam 'Ali and his family, a loyalty which was linked in the minds of its proponents with their conception of the destiny of the Muslim community at large. Most significantly, it was associated with the Prophet's declaration of Imam 'Ali as his successor at Ghadir Khumm in 632 A.D., and the Shi'a recognition of *Imamah* as essentially a divine institution intended for the continuing guidance of the human race after the Prophet.[4] Within the movement holding this general view, sometimes simply termed as the *Shi'atu 'Ali* (Party of 'Ali), there were several candidates from within the family of Imam 'Ali's descendants who laid claim to the leadership of the group and by extension, of the whole Muslim community. [5]

Notwithstanding the number of candidates claiming the leadership of the Shiʿa, and the diverse doctrinal attitudes expressed by different groups within the broad group, there were certain common, unifying features, the fundamental being their common recognition of Imam ʿAli as both the religious and political leader of all Muslims after the death of the Prophet. Another feature was the relentless opposition of the Shiʿa to the Umayyad Caliphate and the social order buttressing its reign. The first few centuries of Islam saw widespread social and economic changes. The iniquities perpetrated by the Umayyads combined with these changes to provoke widespread dissatisfaction among the people. Furthermore, the tragedy of Karbala, when the Prophet's grandson and Imam ʿAli's son, Imam Hussein, was put to the sword together with his relatives, caused a general feeling of shock and revulsion among Muslims. The feeling that the Umayyad leaders had totally betrayed the ethical principles of Islam spread rapidly throughout the empire. These circumstances gained added support for the call of the Shiʿa that the values of justice and equality could be realised only if the faithful could submit themselves to the divinely-aided leadership of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('People of the House').[6] The spread of this appeal, as a result of which increasing numbers of people identified themselves with the ʿAlid cause, provoked the Umayyads to react in a fiercely suppressive manner to pro-ʿAlid risings, which nevertheless continued to take place. These risings contributed to the eventual downfall of the Umayyads, effected around 750 CE by the Abbasid movement, which traced the descent of its leaders to ʿAbbas, an uncle of the Prophet.[7] However, once the Abbassids were in power, they carried out something of a *volte-face*, deciding to continue suppressing the other Shiʿites for fear that the latter would unseat them. Thus, those Shiʿa who felt their hopes betrayed found themselves compelled to remain in the opposition camp.

During the later years of the Umayyad reign and the early period of the Abbasids, Shiʿa Imams such as Imam Muhammad al-Baqir and Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq gained remarkable stature amongst their followers. Although these Imams appear to have remained politically quiescent, they placed an important role in the articulation of a specific Shiʿi vision in legal and theological terms. While such articulation does not imply doctrinal homogeneity within the Shiʿis, a process of crystallisation of the Shiʿite viewpoint around the personality of Imam

Ja'far took place at this time.[8] Imam Ja'far also appears to have significantly influenced the development of the mystical interpretation of Islam. [9]

After the death of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, the body of his followers who remained faithful to the line of his descendants through his elder son and designated heir, Imam Isma'il, came to be known as Ismailis. There were others who, contending either that Imam Isma'il was already dead, or that his appointment as heir to Imam Ja'far had been revoked, turned to Musa al-Kazim, Imam Isma'il's younger brother, whom they accepted as the Imam. This group eventually came to be known as the Ithna'Ashari branch of the Shi'a. They continued to give allegiance to five more Imams after Imam Musa, believing that their last (twelfth) Imam went into hiding (*ghayba*), and would one day reappear to grant final salvation to his followers.[10] According to Ismaili sources, the next four Imams who succeeded Imam Isma'il, while maintaining anonymity, were engaged in organising the Ismailis so that, when they finally emerged into the public limelight in the 9th century CE, they were armed with a remarkable doctrinal sophistication and political structure. This no doubt shows that Ismailis had retained their vitality in this period, during which the identities of the Imams remained protected, living as they were in very hazardous circumstances. Later Ismaili sources thus speak of this period as constituting a *dawr al-satr* ('period of concealment'), one feature of which was the adoption of pseudonyms. According to these sources, the Imams settled in Salamiyya in Syria, but their identity and whereabouts would seem to have been known only to a few completely trusted disciples.[11] During this period, the Imams were engaged in the creation of a remarkable network of emissaries, which came to be known as *da'wa*. Although the term itself is not confined to the Ismailis, the skilful organisation and the elaborate and highly effective network of communications within the general structure of the *da'wa* are certainly unique to the Ismailis.[12]

Qadi al-Nu'man (d. 974 CE), the great jurist and writer who held high public office under the Imams (who ruled North Africa and Egypt in the 10th century), speaks of *iftitah al-da'wa* (the opening phase of the *da'wa*) and of *ibtida al-dawla* (the inception of the state). From his work and the works of others,[13] it is possible to reconstruct a picture of the workings of this remarkable institution of the *da'wa*. The *da'i*, the individual agent of the *da'wa*, was carefully

selected and expected to subject himself to rigorous training and discipline. This training was remarkably broad and inclusive. The terms 'missionary' or 'propagandist' which are sometimes used in English translations are grossly inadequate and misleading renderings. According to the model of the ideal *da'i* which came to be accepted in Ismaili circles, he was expected not only to lead an ethically exemplary life, but also to be in possession of a keen knowledge of the highest intellectual sciences of the day. Logic, rhetoric and jurisprudence were all numbered amongst his intellectual accomplishments which, combined with a knowledge of diplomacy and public relations, constituted the personality of the ideal *da'i*. Thus equipped, the *da'i* went out not only to summon the people to allegiance to the rightful Imam, but also to promote the social, moral and spiritual welfare of the Imam's followers. Ultimately, the *da'i*s were charged with hastening not only the establishment of an Ismaili state but also articulating the fundamental doctrinal and moral ends that the state was meant to serve.

These tasks were evidently being pursued in an organised fashion before the end of the 9th century CE, by when the rudiments of a hierarchical organisation had already been established. The various officials in the rank of the *da'wa* were assigned for work in various geographical divisions know as the *jaza'ir*.[14] The main areas of activity by this time were Yaman, where by 881 CE the *da'i* Ibn Hawshab, with the help of 'Ali bin Fadl, had been able to establish a secure base; al-Kufa, where Hamdan Qarmat established a mission (though he was later to split from the main *da'wa* towards the end of the century); Khurasan and Transoxiana, where several prominent *da'i*s were at work; Sind, where Ibn Hawshab had sent his nephew al-Haytham; and North Africa, where Abu 'Abdallah al-Shi'i was able to win the support of the Kutama Berbers.[15] There can be little doubt that central direction for these activities came from the Imams who for the latter part were mostly resident in Salamiyya, Syria.

A good illustration of the way in which the *da'i*s achieved success in their tasks is afforded by the examples of Sind and North Africa (Ifriqiya). In Sind, al-Haytham and his supporters were able to convert the ruler, thus establishing control over the area, so that by the time the Fatimids came to power, an Ismaili principality was already in existence there. In North Africa, the base established by Abu 'Abdallah al-Shi'i anticipated the tangible, politico-religious goal which was later to be realised when the Fatimid dynasty came to power. The

process of laying the foundations for a state gained momentum at the beginning of the 10th century CE. The Imam ‘Abd Allah (also called ‘Ubayd Allah) who had arrived at Sijilmasa, was valiantly rescued by the forces of the *da‘i* from the custody of his opponents and brought to Raqqada, which had already been wrested from Aghlabid sovereignty. Early in 910 CE, the Imam was proclaimed as the *amir al-mu’minin* (‘commander of the believers’), with the title of *al-mahdi* (‘the saviour’). The successful proclamation of the *Imamah* of Imam ‘Abdallah al-Mahdi marked the opening phase of the Ismaili attempt to give concrete shape to their vision. The dynasty of the Imams, which established effective power centred initially in North Africa and then in Egypt, which was to last for over two centuries, adopted the title of *al-Fatimiyyun* (commonly rendered as ‘Fatimids’) after Fatima, the Prophet’s daughter who was married to Imam ‘Ali, from whom the Imams were descended.

The Period of Fatimid Rule [16]

In the period following the Fatimids ascent to power, they faced a problem similar to the movement which had preceded them and which from now on was to be one of their principal enemies, namely the Abbasids. This problem was partly one of coping with the expectations of the people who had supported the movement when it was still seeking to gain power. Moreover, a greater centralisation of the *da‘wa*, which political necessities dictated, made the prospect of the emergence of splinter movements imminent by the time the Fatimids came to power. In Bahrayn and in Iraq, a comparatively ‘extreme’ offshoot known as the Carmatians came into being. This group, which was greatly feared and spurned by *Dar al-Islam* at large, engaged in a long drawn out period of hostility against the Fatimids.[17]

Thus, the Fatimids were faced by dangers on a variety of fronts. There was, first of all, the threat of internal disintegration provoked by potential dissidents within the *da‘wa*. There was also the serious danger posed by the Carmatians. Again, the Fatimids had to be on guard against the hostilities of the Abbasids and of other dynasties which were politically and ideologically opposed to them. The Berbers in North Africa remained recalcitrant to the attempts of the Fatimids to impose their authority over them. Under the leadership of Abu Yazid, the Khariji, they engaged in a protracted revolt against the Fatimids which, however, was suppressed and,

by the middle of the tenth century CE, the Fatimids were able to re-assert their dominion over the North African region.

From North Africa, the Fatimids steadily expanded their realm of influence and authority. The most dramatic achievement in this regard was the conquest of Egypt, carried out in 973 CE by the great general al-Jawhar, during the reign of the fourth Fatimid Imam, al-Mu'izz. The rule of the Fatimids in Egypt marked the climax of their military, political and religious achievements. Politically, the new capital of al-Qahira (Cairo) founded by the Fatimids in 969 CE became the centre from which a far-flung empire was conquered and ruled. It needs to be noted here that the strength of Fatimid rule was to a significant extent dependent on its naval power. Islands such as Crete, Corsica, Malta and Sicily were brought under Fatimid control, thus giving it a precious degree of suzerainty over the Mediterranean. The Fatimid rulers took advantage of their strategic hold over the Mediterranean to build ports like al-Mahdiyya, which acted as a gateway to a flourishing maritime trade. Simultaneously, the Fatimids were able to extend their authority and influence far beyond Egypt to Palestine, Syria, the Hijaz, Yemen and Sind. Indeed in 1058 CE, the Fatimids came near to wresting power from the Abbasids by occupying Baghdad for a short time.

Running parallel to the military expansion of Fatimid power was the steadily extending consolidation of influence through the work of the *da'wa*, chiefly in Iran, India and Transoxiania. The achievements of the *da'wa* in different regions where the 'Alid sentiment came to be more or less firmly rooted and where sources of material and moral support for the ruling dynasty in Egypt came to be established, acted as a vital factor in the survival of Ismaili influence even when its political supremacy outside Egypt was imperilled or destroyed. It is important to note that the Fatimid empire was widely scattered, and that its various parts were separated in some cases by vast distances. The lack of geographical contiguity had therefore to be compensated for by means of abiding ideological loyalty and support, which were ensured chiefly through the unflagging perseverance of the *da'i*s committed to the Fatimid cause.

In the 11th century CE, the Fatimids suffered a number of severe political and military setbacks. The forces of Mahmud of Ghazna, who was fiercely anti-Ismaili, caused considerable havoc

and destruction in Sind, where large numbers of Ismailis were brutally massacred. Around the middle of the century, Ifriqiya too was lost to the Fatimids as a result of a local rebellion in favour of the Abbasids, which was accompanied once again by the massacre of several Ismaili communities in the area. But these losses were to a certain extent offset by the gains established by the *da'i*s in other areas. If the Fatimids lost the western flank of their headquarters, namely Ifriqiya, they made an important advance in an eastward direction through the work of the *da'i* 'Ali bin Muhammad al-Sulayhi, who was able to secure the allegiance and support of Yaman.[18] From there, attempts were made to re-establish a hold in Sind amongst such communities as had survived the massacre carried out by Mahmud. *Da'i*s also went out to Gujarat and along the western coast of India. In the Upper Oxus region, the eminent *da'i* Nasir-i Khusraw carried out a sustained exercise of preaching which was to have lasting results. During his stay in Yumgan, he wrote a number of significant works in Persian which were to become an integral part of the heritage of Ismailis of Badakhshan in succeeding centuries.[19] In Iran too, the *da'wa* persevered in its efforts, though after the rise of the Turkish Saljuq dynasty, one of whose express aims was to exterminate the influence of the Fatimids, the *da'wa* in Iran was forced to operate undercover. In short, the picture of Fatimid rule over its scattered dominions presents a fluctuating pattern of strategic triumphs followed by reversals and losses. These were, however, accompanied by less dramatic but nevertheless real and lasting achievements in the establishment of a distinctively Ismaili tradition.

The history of Egypt itself, where the Fatimid rulers were resident, is characterised by fluctuations in internal cohesiveness and economic prosperity. Since the Fatimids were able to establish strategic control over Mediterranean and Red Sea trade routes, and since Cairo was able to serve a crucial function as an inland port, a flourishing commerce sprang into existence. Under Fatimid reign, Egypt participated vigorously in international trade with lands such as India and the Far East, North Africa and Nubia, Europe, Byzantium (Constantinople in particular), and the islands of the Mediterranean.[20] Agriculture advanced to a level of general self-sufficiency; industry received active stimulus and helped to boost both inland and maritime trade. In the sphere of political organisation, a remarkable degree of centralisation took place. The Imam, of course, was at the apex of the administrative hierarchy. He was aided by

the *wazier*, under whose direction worked a whole series of officials concerned with the administration and supervision of internal institutions and outlying imperial provinces. The military forces were subjected to a similar hierarchical and centralised form of authority, as was the civil service.[21] In the context of that period, it can be said that the administrative bureaucracy established by the Fatimids led to an appreciable measure of stability and efficiency, though it was not entirely free from a number of severe shortcomings.

It was, however, in the sphere of intellectual life that Fatimid achievement seems most brilliant and outstanding. The Fatimid rulers were lavish patrons of learning, and their generous encouragement of scientific research and cultural activity caused Cairo to exert a degree of magnetic attraction such as to draw renowned mathematicians, physicians and astronomers to the city from all over the Muslim world. Within the royal court, noted poets such as Ibn Hani and Tamim b. Mu‘izz, and historians and geographers such as al-Musabbihi and al-Muhallabi, flourished under the patronage of the rulers. The universities of al-Azhar and Dar al-Hikmah provided a monumental and enduring testimony to the Fatimids’ love of learning. Figures of outstanding ability, such as al-Nasafi, al-Razi, al-Sijistani, al-Nu‘man, Hamid al-din al-Kirmani, al-Mu‘yyad fi al-din al-Shirazi and Nasir-i Khusraw, made crucial contributions to the articulation of Ismaili theology which, as we shall see below, was characterised by a remarkably complex upsurge of intellectual activity which M. Canard has described as analogous to that which took place in Europe in the eighteenth century CE.[22] The cultural impact of the Fatimid state was not confined to the Muslim world. At the height of its power, while the Fatimid fleet and commerce dominated the eastern Mediterranean, the influence of the universities at Cairo spread into Europe, with Fatimid writers contributing significantly to the development in the West of sciences such as optics, medicine and astronomy.

Aspects of Fatimid Ismaili Doctrine

One of the most striking features of the doctrinal system of the Ismailis is its comprehensiveness. This quality is really a reflection of the theocratic ideal of Ismailism, an ideal which it shared, in a general way, with the rest of Islam. It is necessary in this connection

to remind ourselves that the work carried out by the Prophet, in ordering social and political life at Medina on the basis of the principles contained in the revelation of the Qur'an, could be described as an exercise in theocracy, because it represented an attempt to organise a community governed by divine will rather than human caprice. The subsequent history of Islam consists of an attempt on the part of different groups to bring into being a community which would embody this theocratic principle. What eventually came to be known as the *ahl al-Sunna* maintained that by means of the institution of the *shari'a*, which governed social and political life as well as the conduct of the individual Muslim believer, the preservation of a divinely-guided community could be ensured for ever. The Shi'a, on the other hand, maintained from the very beginning that it was only through the agency of a divinely-guided Imam, descended from Imam 'Ali, that a theocratic order could be guaranteed on earth.

It was on account of his superior *'ilm* that the 'Alid Imam was regarded by the Shi'a as the sole instrument through whom the divine purpose could be fulfilled on earth. The term *'ilm* in the context of Shi'a philosophy has a range of denotations, largely obscured by the word 'knowledge', which is commonly substituted for it in English translation. The Imam was regarded in Shi'ite doctrine not only as being endowed with the wisdom requisite for the effective ordering of society, but, above all, with a knowledge of spiritual realities which enabled him to guide his followers to an understanding of the inner meaning of the Islamic message. The essentially spiritual nature of the Imam's *'ilm* was reflected in the notion that it did not originate in the fallible operations of the human mind. Rather, it was bestowed by Allah and was transmitted directly from one Imam to the other. Thus, the Imam's *'ilm* was fundamentally different from the kind of knowledge obtained through historical study or logical deduction used by the *ulama* in the formation of the *shari'a*. The authority of the Imam, therefore, occupied a central place in Shi'ism, and obedience to him on the part of the believer was considered as the principal index of acceptance of the divine message of Islam. This principle receives central emphasis in Ismailism.[23]

The principle of obedience to the Imam, of leading a life in accordance with his will, did not rule out the use of rational or intellectual faculties on the part of the believer in trying to comprehend the mysteries of existence. A kind of rationalism may in fact be said to have been

an important feature of Ismailism from the very beginning, provided that the term ‘rationalism’ is here understood in the context of the times. The most advanced form of a rational thought in that time was exemplified by the heritage of the ancient Greek philosophers, a heritage which became available to the Muslims following the Arab conquests. The more intellectually advanced minds amongst the Muslim community were considerably impressed and stimulated by Greek rationalism, and tried to make use of it in such a way that the methods of Greek philosophy could be reconciled with the tenets of the Islamic revelation. Like the great non-Ismaili philosophers who attempted to harmonise Greek philosophy with Islamic faith, a number of Ismaili intellectuals were also inspired by a similar desire and tried to use speculative reason for their own purposes. However, Ismaili intellectuals on the whole tended to define the limits of the scope of free rational inquiry with a greater degree of strictness than that observed by some non-Ismaili philosophers. In the case of the Ismailis, the principle of the authority of the Imam had to be given primacy, for the Imam derived his *‘ilm* directly from God - a concept which, as mentioned above, was understood by the Shi‘as in a predominantly spiritual sense. Thus, while Ismaili intellectuals immediately before and during the Fatimid period showed a keen interest in speculative reasoning, this interest was balanced against the principle of authoritative transmission of *‘ilm* from the Imam. The generally cautious approach to Greek philosophy on the part of some Ismaili intellectuals is exemplified in the argument between the free-thinking Muhammad b. Zakariyya al-Razi and the Ismaili Abu Hatim al-Razi.[24]

Ismaili doctrine also places great emphasis on the distinction between the *zahir* and the *batin*, the outward and the inward, or, according to conventional translation, between the ‘exoteric’ and ‘esoteric’ aspects of faith. This distinction between the external and obvious aspects of the Prophetic message and the hidden truths or mysteries (*haqa’iq*), which are believed to be incomprehensible to ordinary minds but intelligible to those who were chosen and initiated, step by step, by the Imam or the *da‘i*s working under his direction, is central to Ismailism. The *zahir* was understood broadly as the letter of the law promulgated by the Prophet.

The fact that the Ismailis recognised the law of Islam and advocated a scrupulous observance of it is sometimes wrongly overlooked. The Fatimids insisted upon careful adherence to the precepts of the Islamic faith and practice. The science of *fiqh* (jurisprudence) was one of the

major sciences to which the Ismailis devoted their energies. The monumental work of the great Fatimid jurist, Qadi al-Nu‘man, entitled *Da‘a’im al-Islam*, contains a systematic, logical discussion on the principles of jurisprudence, and sets out a whole body of rules and regulations intended to govern the life of the Ismaili believer from birth to death.[25] Thus, the Ismailis had a *shari‘a* which shared a number of essential characteristics with the *shari‘a* in force amongst the *ahl al-Sunna*. But the Ismaili *shari‘a* had additional features deriving from the fundamental principle of *walayah* (devotion to Imams).[26] Furthermore, the basis of the legal principles and prescription among the Ismailis, as exemplified by the *Da‘a’im al-Islam*, is provided by the traditions (*ahadith,* sing: *hadith*) going back to the recognised Ismaili Imams rather than the companions and associates of the Prophet in general as was the case among the *ahl al-Sunna*. The principles of *qiyas* (logical deduction), *ijma‘* (communal consensus), etc., which were important elements in the Sunni *fiqh*, are here considered subordinate to authoritative guidance from the Imam. By the time of the Fatimids, the Ismailis had thus evolved a *shari‘a* which followed closely the revelation contained in the Qur’an while at the same time articulating a specifically Ismaili interpretation of this message.[27]

While the *zahir* formed the foundation of the faith, the Ismailis gave a higher stature to the *batin*.[28] The latter, consisting of the inner mysteries of the faith, did not contradict or cancel out the *zahir*. It represented a dimension which went beyond the *zahir* without contradicting it. Ultimately, the Ismailis maintained, the true believer should not remain content with the *zahir*. He should attempt to penetrate and go beyond it to the *batin*. Once this was done, the *zahir* was understood in a new perspective, as an outward aspect visible to all, extending into a dimension of profound mysteries which, by contrast, was accessible only to the select few. One of the essential duties of the Imam was conceived as being that of enabling his followers to go beyond the understanding of the *zahir* and penetrate into the mysteries of the *batin*. Though in certain periods in Ismaili history and in certain geographical areas, enthusiasm for *batin* tended to overshadow adherence to *zahir*, the standpoint adopted by the authorities was always one of preserving a careful balance between the two elements. Thus, during the Fatimid period, it was maintained that the *zahir* and the *batin* were complementary. Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, one of the most renowned philosophers of the Fatimid period, was certainly well-versed in the esoteric

philosophy of Ismailism, but was nevertheless concerned that enthusiasm for it should not be permitted to get out of hand. His standpoint may be regarded as representative of the Fatimid position,[29] though this should not be allowed to obscure the fact that in actual practice, a whole spectrum of attitudes, ranging from preoccupation with the *zahir* to high enthusiasm for the *batin*, was in existence in the empire as a whole.

Among the doctrinal principles with which the idea of *batin* was inseparably linked, two may be singled out here. One was the principle of *ta'wil*, applied specifically to the exegesis of the Qur'an. Over the course of its early development, the Ismailis developed a special method or technique of interpreting the Holy Book. The purpose of the study of the Qur'an, for the Ismailis was not simply to understand or memorise its literal meaning but to penetrate to its hidden or inner meaning. The idea that the Qur'an had many meanings was given the greatest importance in Ismailism. Each and every verse of the Qur'an was believed to be open to interpretation on a number of levels. The *ta'wil* was the technique of interpretation which allowed the hidden meaning of the sacred text to shine forth. The term *ta'wil* has sometimes been translated into English as 'allegorical interpretation'. Though this is a somewhat loose translation, the Ismailis did maintain, in accordance with hints contained in the Qur'an itself, that the text of the Qur'an was full of profound allegorical and symbolic truths. For example, in addition to the literal meaning of reference to, or instructions concerning, domestic issues or everyday affairs in the Qur'an, to the Ismailis these references simultaneously represented symbolic expressions of higher metaphysical truths. Sometimes speculative interest in astrology and the esoteric significance of numbers was combined with this technique of interpretation. In general, the conclusions of this form of interpretation were related to the spiritual status and significance of Imam 'Ali or of the Imams.[30]

The other important issue with which the distinction between *zahir* and *batin* was connected was the respective positions and functions of Prophecy (*Nubuwwa*) and *Imamah*. The Prophet, who in the specialised terminology of early Ismailism was usually referred to as *natiq* (the speaking one), was understood as being charged with the promulgation of the divinely ordained law or *shari'a*. The Imam, on the other hand, was regarded as the authority on the *ta'wil*. The Prophet's role was public. Although he in his supreme wisdom knew both, the *zahir* and

the *batin*, his mission was to proclaim the former and, therefore, to establish the foundation on which a community of believers could come into being. The task of drawing out the inner meaning, the *batin*, and explaining it to the fortunate few who were capable of receiving this profound knowledge was entrusted by the Prophet to the Imam.

The Ismailis also believed that each of the great Prophets who brought a new revelation superseding an old one was accompanied by a *wasi* (‘heir’), who was effectively an Imam, also known as the *samit* (‘the silent one’). After the departure of the Prophet, the *wasi* would develop an esoteric exegesis of the words revealed through the Prophet.[31] The *wasi* in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, endowed with knowledge of the batin, was of course Imam ‘Ali. The early Ismailis elevated Imam ‘Ali to a position superior to his successor-Imams, and ranked him immediately below the Prophet. He was referred to as *asas* (‘foundation’), not only because he ‘founded’ the line of *Imamah* but also because his successor-Imams derived their knowledge of the divine mysteries from him.[32] Early Ismailism contained speculation about the advent of a figure who would serve as the seal of the *Imamah*, generally known as the *qa’im* (‘the last one’), who was expected to disclose the *batin* once and for all to the world and establish universal justice and enlightenment.[33] In keeping with the tendency in early Ismailism to reckon the Prophets as well as the Imams in groups of seven, the *qa’im* was expected to be the seventh Imam. By the Fatimid period, this notion had undergone a change, so that each Imam was now regarded as discharging the function expected of the *qa’im*. Expectations concerning the *qa’im* thus formed an integral part of the Ismaili view of history.

The Ismailis regarded history as the means through which the divine purpose was to be fulfilled. They had an essentially cyclical conception of history. Each cycle or epoch (*dawr*) was introduced by a Prophet, who proclaimed a divine revelation. History as a whole was composed of a series of such cycles. The end of history was visualised as a consequence of the appearance of the *qa’im* (also called *mahdi*, i.e., saviour) who, it was believed, would eradicate injustice from the face of the earth and establish the ideal Islamic state.[34] Thus, early Ismailism may in some respects be described as a messianic or millenarian community, marked by idealistic zeal and political activism. As might be expected, the Ismailis drew the enthusiastic allegiance of those classes of the population who were dismayed at what they saw as the

betrayal of the Islamic ideal of social justice on the part of the Umayyad and Abbasid rulers and their material and ideological supporters. With the accession of the Fatimids to power, the idea that each Imam contributed his share to the eventual establishment of a reign of universal peace and justice came to receive emphasis. Thus, a firm conviction that history was laden with a divine purpose and that this purpose would be fulfilled through the divinely ordained institution of *Imamah* provided spiritual reassurance to the Ismailis, besides motivating them to make active efforts to achieve their ends whenever the circumstances proved to be suitable.

Lastly, we need to devote some attention to the cosmology of the Ismailis which, particularly during the Fatimid period, occupied a fundamental place in their doctrinal system as a whole.[35] The Ismailis had a coherent view of the structure of the universe. Their cosmology was based on the principle that the universe was composed of well-defined constituent parts which were linked together to form a harmonious totality. Moreover, the various components of the cosmic structure were also regarded as constituting a hierarchical structure: the planets and the abstract principles which governed them were ranked one above the other, just as the Prophets, the Imams and the officials of the *da'wa* also formed a hierarchy with clearly defined ranks. The cosmology of the Ismailis contained elements from the Greek Ptolemaic system and a variety of other influences, including Neoplatonism. But the Ismailis did not indulge in cosmological speculation out of disinterested intellectual curiosity. They utilised the prevailing picture of the universe in order to articulate their own religious conceptions. Cosmology, metaphysics and religion were thus closely interlinked. This interlinking was made possible by the tendency to regard various aspects of existence as mirroring each other, so that for each element in the chain of cosmic principles or entities, there was a corresponding figure or personality in the politico-religious sphere. In this way, the universe appeared intelligible and composite, while the religious tenets of the community were at the same time given cosmic dimensions.

Allah, in His majestic unity, stands totally above and aloof from the chain of cosmic and spiritual entities. The principle of *tawhid*, or the unity of the Divine Essence, was not only subscribed to by the Ismailis, but carried to its logical conclusions. No attributes derived from sense-experience can be attributed to Allah; no efforts of the human imagination, however

fertile and far-reaching, can grasp His unique nature, and no analogy, comparison or resemblance can be drawn between Him and His creatures. Indeed, Allah is asserted to be beyond even the categories of being and non-being, of existence and non-existence. The concept of Divine Unity in Ismailism is thus articulated in highly abstract, metaphysical terms, but in the last analysis it is a reflection of a principle which emphatically pervades the entire text of the Qur'an.[36] By the timeless and transcendent act of will or command (*amr*), the Supreme Being created the *'aql al-kull*, the universal intellect, sometimes also called *al-'aql al-awwal*, the first intellect. From this, by a process of emanation, the *nafs al-kull* or universal soul, comes into existence. Sometimes the *nafs al-kull* is substituted by the *'aql al-thani*, the second intellect. Below it there is a whole hierarchy of intellectual principles, which were conceived as the abstract entities governing and motivating the spheres of fixed stars and zodiacal constellations, the planets and the luminaries. Corresponding in the religious world to the *'aql al-kull* is the Prophet, followed by Imam 'Ali, who is the hypostasis of the *nafs al-kull*. The Imam is usually considered as equivalent to the intellectual principle immediately in charge of the physical world (*al 'aql al-fa'al*).

The whole system is described at great length in that famous encyclopaedic work that is said to have been compiled in early Ismaili circles, the *Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa'*.[37] It was also expounded by eminent *da'i*s such as al-Nasafi, al-Sijistani, al-Kirmani, and Nasir-i Khusraw.[38] It must be noted that the exact hierarchy of the various intellects and the terminology employed tend to differ in the various authors, for instance, al-Nasafi's and al-Kirmani's systems are at variance. But the fundamental principle of the absolute transcendence of God, the general order of the cosmic principles and the relative positions of the Prophet, Imam 'Ali and so on, are the same. Finally, it is of the greatest importance to note that this whole system is inseparable from the Ismaili conception of human destiny. In keeping with the principle which pervades the entire philosophy, the ultimate fate of man and the fate of the cosmos are treated as being closely interlinked. The appearance of the various entities in a descending order is followed by an ascending movement. Each cosmic entity is activated by the impulse to merge in the immediately higher entity, and thus to get eventually absorbed in the Ultimate Source. In the same way, each dignitary or official in the religious sphere aspires

to be associated with the figure ranking immediately above him, and thus to ascend along the scale. Man, by associating himself with the Imam, can seek salvation by participating in the cosmic ascent, reaching the Original Source.

The Decline of the Fatimids

The later period of Fatimid rule in Egypt was not free from grave internal disorders. Some of these were a result of natural disasters such as the great famine during the reign of Imam al-Mustanisir (d. 1094 CE) which caused widespread suffering and misery. Also, various sections of the army, comprising of Berbers, Turks, Sudanese and Armenians, were at odds with each other, which caused further disorders. These difficulties and the loss of imperial territories contributed to severe economic difficulties which led to a rising disaffection amongst sections of the population. A significant event took place immediately after the reign of Imam al-Hakim (d. 1021 CE) when a group of Ismailis, preferring to remain faithful to the memory of Imam al-Hakim, broke away from the Fatimid *da'wa*, thus giving birth to what later came to be known as the Druze movement.[39]

The difficulties facing the Fatimid regime, however, came to a head during Imam al-Mustansir's reign, when Badr al-Jamali, the head of the Syrian troops, was given wide powers in the belief that strong military action was necessary to control the deteriorating situation in the state. Badr al-Jamali was successful in restoring order, and in time he and his successors, known as the "*waziers* of the sword", came to wield increasing military and political power. Following Imam al-Mustansir's death, in Iran and in parts of Syria his elder son and designated heir Nizar was hailed as the Imam, whereas in Egypt, Yaman and Sind, Nizar's younger brother al-Musta'li, under the patronage of the new military commander al-Afdhal, gained recognition as the successor.[40] In politics as well as religion, the two groups were from now on to follow somewhat divergent paths.

Imam-caliph Musta'li was succeeded by his son, al-Amir, upon whose death there was a further division amongst the Musta'li branch of Ismailis. There were those, chiefly in Yaman, who recognised Imam-caliph al-Amir's infant son, Tayyib, as the Imam, who, however, was believed to have gone into 'occultation'.[41]

Others, mainly in Egypt, supported the claim of Imam-caliph al-Amir's cousin, al-Hafiz, who took over the reins of power. By this time, the vitality of the Fatimid regime had already been sapped and effective power was wielded by the *wazier*s. Fatimid power finally became extinct when Salah al-Din took over control of Egypt and established the Ayyubid dynasty. In Yaman, on the other hand, the Musta'lian *da'wa* flourished vigorously. A *Da'i al-Mutlaq* (Chief Da'i) was appointed to guide the community on behalf of the hidden Imam. In spite of the occasional persecution, such as that inflicted by the Zaydi rulers, the Musta'li community preserved the rich esoteric tradition which had been formulated in Fatimid times. Amongst the intellectuals produced by this community, the 19th *da'i*, Idris 'Imad al-Din (d. 1468 CE), was the most outstanding. In 1567 CE, the headquarters of the *Da'i al-Mutlaq* were transferred to Gujarat in India, with which the Yamani community had from the first maintained strong ties of communication.[42]

The Ismailis of Alamut

The history of the Nizari branch of Ismailis is marked by a continuation of the goals aimed at by the Fatimids in the establishment of a truly Islamic polity, as well as the emergence of new goals and policies in the context of a changing and increasingly hostile environment. The problems that confront the writer trying to reconstruct the history of the Nizari period are much more daunting than those encountered in the study of the Fatimid period. The extant source material is far more limited both as regards quantity and reliability. The bulk of this material consists of accounts written by those who despised the group, particularly in the period of its rule at Alamut, and therefore tried to present its history as well as doctrines in a deliberately distorted and negative fashion. Their accounts were picked up by European chroniclers and travellers such as Marco Polo who proved themselves altogether naïve in depending uncritically on these hostile sources. Some of them in fact wrote simply from hearsay, and their accounts are essentially legendary, marked by a romanticism which appealed to the imagination of Europeans in the medieval and post-medieval period. The old attitude still tends to persist in popular notions about the Nizari Ismailis in both the Western and the Muslim worlds. However, a few serious scholars have in recent decades carried out creditable studies which

have helped considerably in the correction of the old image and in the emergence of a new understanding which attempts to take account of the historical realities of the movement as well as the hopes and aspirations which inspired it and contributed to its lasting vitality.[43]

The origin of Nizari Ismailism has been indicated above. Following the death of Imam al-Mustansir, those who remained loyal to Imam Nizar organised themselves locally in various parts of Iran, establishing strongholds in which they could ensure their own survival and the furtherance of the principles and ideals of the Nizari Ismaili faith. In securing a strong and viable position for themselves, the Nizari Ismailis were not working in a vacuum. Already, during the period of Fatimid rule prior to the Nizari-Musta'lian schism, Ismaili settlements had produced outstanding intellectuals who were received with great hospitality and treated with honour at the headquarters in Cairo. The history of the Nizari Ismailis can thus be regarded as an extension of the groundwork which had already been accomplished in the Fatimid period. In Iran, however, the new movement had to function in markedly changed circumstances, which were due not only to the severance of ties with Cairo, but also to the presence of the powerful, militantly Sunni, Turkish dynasty, the Saljuqs, which had established hegemony over various parts of Iran. The Nizari Ismailis, scattered in various fortresses and strongholds as well as the towns and cities of Iran, thus found themselves in an increasingly hostile environment, which prevailed not only in the political and military sphere but also at an intellectual level. The most well-known attempt to combat Ismailis through the articulation of a rival theology was exemplified in the work of al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE), which was undertaken at the behest of the *wazier* Nizam-al-Mulk.[44]

The focal point of the Nizari Ismaili movement was the fortress of Alamut in the district of Rudbar in the Alburz mountains south of the Caspian Sea.[45] This fortress was captured by Hasan-i Sabbah, a figure of legendary fame, in 1090 CE, a few years before the Nizari-Musta'lian schism actually took place. In fact, from the 1080's CE, Ismailis had been consolidating their existence in different parts of Iran. The capture of Alamut and the establishment of a settlement there which was to prove remarkably strong, viable and long-lasting, was followed by the consolidation of Ismaili power in the surrounding areas of Rudbar. Shortly thereafter the Ismailis also wrested independence from Saljuq domination in Quhistan,

which became a subsidiary centre of Ismaili power and influence. By the end of the century, Ismailis had established strongholds in a number of mountainous zones in the Iranian highlands. One of the ways in which the Nizaris extended their power was by striking up alliances with local princes or *amir*s, and through this means they were able to establish a sphere of influence for themselves in Isfahan itself, which was the centre of Saljuq power. In the meantime, Hasan-i Sabbah, the *hujja* [46] (literally meaning 'proof') or representative of the Imam, was giving active and overall direction to the Nizari campaign on behalf of the Imam. Ismaili tradition speaks of the Imam as having been secretly brought into Alamut by Hasan-i Sabbah, who emphatically made it clear that he was acting only on behalf of the Imam. In this respect, the situation was analogous to the period before the rise of the Fatimids, which was known as the *dawr al-satr*, as the Imams were hidden from public view.

In terms of political and military strategy, the Nizari programme differed in an essential respect from that of the Fatimids. Under the new circumstances, it was no longer realistic to aim at the subjugation of the enemy at one blow. Instead, the policy now followed was one of dealing with the enemy on a piecemeal basis, each campaign being aimed at a selected local target and the consolidation of Ismaili power in that specific area. All the Ismaili settlements showed a remarkable internal cohesiveness, and their campaigns, as a result, were characterised by great solidarity and discipline on the part of the adherents of the faith. At the same time, a measure of overall guidance and co-ordination was exercised from Alamut, and the leaders of the other fortresses were usually appointed from there, which turned Alamut into the headquarters in a general sense. Each Ismaili settlement in this period had the significance of a *dar al-hijra*, an area in which adherents of the movement could acquire the necessary discipline in anticipation of the actual, tangible fulfilment of their goals. If one particular centre or fortress happened to succumb to hostile attack, its inhabitants could expect to be absorbed into any of the other remaining strongholds controlled by the Nizaris.

After the death of Hasan-i Sabbah, Buzurg-Ummid succeeded him to the office of *hujja*, and following the latter's death, his son Muhammad rose to his position. The most important development after Hasan's death perhaps was the conquest by the Syrian Nizaris of a string of fortified towns in the mountains, west of Hama and Hums. In keeping with the pattern

established by Hasan-i Sabbah, these strongholds were placed under the general supervision of an appointee from Alamut who usually resided at Masyaf.[47] The first part of the 12th century CE saw the escalation of hostilities on the part of the Saljuq authorities, reflected in a series of brutal massacres in which large numbers of Ismailis were put to death. Individual Ismailis or their sympathisers or allies, when caught in one or another of the towns under the rule of Saljuq commanders, were tortured and killed, often in a gruesome manner. As the decades went by, the arena of Nizari Ismaili activity came to be increasingly confined to the fortress settlements and to Alamut in particular, which from the very beginning had been turned into a remarkably self-contained and self-sufficient settlement. In 1164 CE, Imam Hasan *'ala' dhikrihi'l-salam* is said to have declared the *qiyamah*, expectations concerning which had been present in Ismailism right from the beginning. This proclamation involved an emphasis on the *batin*, though it should be remembered that the notion of the *batin* along with its counterpart, the *zahir,* was present in Ismailism from the earliest times. However, the current view among some historians that the proclamation involved an abrogation of the *shari'a* has never been substantiated.

Imam Hasan *'ala' dhikrihi'l-salam*'s grandson, Jalal al-Din Hasan, established cordial relations with the Caliph and the Sunni '*ulama*. His help to the Caliph in his drive against the Khwarazmian Chief proved valuable, and in the course of their concerted campaign, the Imam acquired new territories, thus resuming the policy of territorial expansion. The process was finally halted, however, by the Mongols, whose demolition of the Ismaili settlements was only part of a more general destruction of the Abbasid Caliphate. The confrontation with the Mongol power came to a height during the reign of the last of the Imams at Alamut, named Rukn al-Din Khurshah, whose initial attempt to achieve reconciliation with the Mongols did not bear fruit. In 1256 CE, Hulagu Khan, the dreaded Mongol chieftain, after having overrun the Ismaili settlement at Quhistan, arrived in Rudbar and demanded Imam Rukn al-Din Khurshah's surrender. The latter was forced to comply, and the settlement of Alamut, along with other Ismaili strongholds, was demolished, to the accompaniment of a general and widespread massacre.[48]

Aspects of Ismaili Doctrine

The doctrinal principles to which the Ismailis at Alamut and elsewhere during the same period subscribed shows in many ways a continuity of Fatimid ideas. At the same time, certain elements in the doctrine were developed and extended into a form which was a specific characteristic of Nizari Ismailism. From the very beginning, the principle of *ta'lim* (i.e., authoritative teaching) was given the greatest importance. This was, of course, a fundamental principle of Ismailism, but its relevance was naturally even greater now that discipline and obedience became indispensable values in the conditions in which settlements like those of Alamut had to be maintained. The proclamation of the *qiyamah,* believed to have been made by Imam Hasan, reflects a significant, general development within Ismailism in this period. It is very easy to overlook the real significance of this event. As has been indicated above, the idea of *qiyamah* had formed an important aspect of Ismailism from the very beginning, and the Ismailis had always expected that one of its features would be the total revelation of the *batin*. But the idea that the *qiyamah* had now arrived was not interpreted in a purely historical sense. There was a metaphysical dimension to it which needs to be understood very clearly. Without an appreciation of the metaphysical aspect of Nizari Ismailism, the proclamation of the *qiyamah* tends to be regarded as nothing more than a response to changing political conditions. To take this development as representing merely a response of this limited nature is to misunderstand its significance in the minds of the believers themselves.

The essential feature of the notion of the *qiyamah*, as the Ismailis came to understand it, lay in the manifestation of the real nature of the Imam. In those periods in Ismaili history when, owing to political danger, the Imam was forced to withdraw from the public and to disguise his identity, the knowledge of his identity and whereabouts were held to be of very great value, available only to a small, trustworthy elite among the followers. But in the perspective of Nizari Ismailism, knowledge about the physical person of the Imam was regarded as no more than scratching the surface, as it were, of comprehension of the Imam's real nature. The Nizaris further developed and laid added emphasis on the fundamental Ismaili doctrine that the Imam was the bearer of the *nur*. The term *nur*, commonly translated as 'light', has a spiritual significance that is entirely lost in its literal rendering into English. In the Qur'an, the symbolism of divine light is developed in the passage generally known as the *Surat an-Nur*.

Drawing their inspiration from this passage, in which *nur* is explained as the form in which the transcendent nature of Allah becomes manifest in the creation, the Shi‘a inter-developed the concept of *Nur-i Imamah*, signifying the innermost reality of the Imam. The Ismailis hold that *nur* is passed from one Imam to the other in direct, uninterrupted succession, and that all Imams are therefore one in essence. In this way, the real nature of the Imam is understood as lying beyond the world of time and place. Whereas on the plane of history the personality of the Imam is all important, on the metaphysical plane it is the reality beyond history which matters. To comprehend this reality is regarded as the highest goal attainable by the believer who receives divine grace.

Thus, to the two levels of the *zahir* (consisting of the *shari‘a*) and the *batin* (where the inner meaning of the *shari‘a* is understood), the Nizaris added the level on which the highest reality (*haqiqa*) manifested through the Imam is perceived in an all-consuming, mystical vision. The principle that the inner reality (*haqiqa*) of the Imam lies beyond the reach of sense-experience or logical deduction, but that it can become apparent, even in the period of *satr*, to those who are blessed with a spiritual vision of the Imam, was expounded above all by Nasir al-Din Tusi, who wrote during the last phase at Alamut.[49] One of the results of this new emphasis was that inward, personal vision of the spiritual reality of the Imam on the part of his followers gained added importance. This development in fact signifies the increasing interaction of Ismaili doctrine with the principles of Sufism. In the period following the fall of Alamut, this interaction deepened into a real coalescence of the Ismaili and Sufi dimensions of Islam.

The Post-Alamut Period

The historical career of the Nizari Ismailis following the destruction of Alamut and other fortresses in Iran, and their consequent dispersal in different parts of Iran is a period on which little information is available at present. It is known, however, that in Syria, the Ismailis were persecuted by the Mamluks, in spite of which they continued to exist as a group. Around the 19th century CE, the Ismailis restored the town of Salamiyya, and it is here and in the surrounding area that Ismailis in Syria are mostly to be found at present. In Iran, the organisation of the movement seems in some ways to have resembled that of the Sufi tariqas

which were to be found all over the land. The necessity of reverting to *taqiyya* was obviously a contributory factor in the adoption of a Sufi mode of existence. It must be noted too that Sufism in this period appealed to a wide range of the population.

Ismaili sources speak of an uninterrupted succession of Imams in different parts of Iran following the Mongol conquest. Certainly, the emergence of new activity, such as that undertaken by the *da'wa* in India, reflected a continuing vitality under centralised direction and co-ordination, though some degree of locally autonomous evolution in the various Ismaili communities also occurred. The first few Imams after the fall of Alamut lived in Azerbayjan.[50] Around the middle of the 15th century CE, following the death of Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad, while the majority of Ismailis accepted the designated successor, Imam Qasim Shah, another group acknowledged his brother Muhammad Shah as the Imam.[51] The latter group diminished over the course of time and is survived at the present by a very small community in Syria.

One of the developments which was to prove of great importance for the later history of the movement was the spread of the Nizari Ismaili *da'wa* to northern India.[52] This was an area of Ismaili activity in the period immediately preceding the coming of the Fatimids to power. A flourishing Ismaili state came into being as a result of the *da'wa* in Sind, but the Ghurid invasion in 1175 CE put an end to it. In the 14th century, Ismaili *pir*s from Iran arrived in northern India, and engaged in preaching on a substantial scale. Initially, their work was carried out in Punjab, Sind and Kashmir, though later the process of conversion spread southwards, where the new community came to be known as the *Khoja*, from the term *Khwaja*, of which 'gentleman' may be regarded as the nearest equivalent in English. The important *pir*s in Ismaili tradition are Shams, Sadr al-Din and Hasan Kabir al-Din. The *da'wa* carried out by the *pir*s was embodied in a devotional literature called *ginan*. The doctrines contained in the *ginan* literature constitute a markedly Nizari and mystical vision of Islam. In addition, the cosmological myths and eschatological ideas prevalent in India were utilised by the *pir*s in order to provide a locally intelligible expression to fundamental Ismaili principles.

By the middle of the 15th century CE, the Imams moved from Azerbayjan, and after settling for a while in the districts of Farahan and Mahallat, moved eventually to Anjudan, a large village in the vicinity of Sultanabad (now Aragh). The accession of the Safavids, a Shi‘i dynasty, to power at the beginning of the 16th century CE contributed to the emergence of more tolerable conditions for the Ismailis. Ivanov goes so far as to label the 16th and 17th centuries CE, during which the Imams continued to reside in Anjudan, as a period of ‘renaissance’ for the Ismailis.[53] Certainly, the Imams took the opportunity, during this relatively favourable phase, of re-asserting their hold over outlying areas.

Around this time in India, Nur Muhammad Shah, the son of Imamshah, a prominent figure in the Nizari *da‘wa*, renounced his allegiance to the Imam in Persia and instead declared himself the Imam. Remnants of his followers, who were named after Imamshah, to whom the secession came to be attributed, are now found in parts of Gujarat and Khandesh. The mainstream of the community in India stayed loyal to the Imam in Persia and maintained communications with him. From time to time, daring individuals or families in India undertook the hazardously long journey overland to Persia to meet the Imam, pay him homage and receive his blessings. Meanwhile, after the end of the period of Safavid rule, the Imams moved their residence to the neighbouring village of Kahak where the tomb of Imam Nizar II, who probably died around 1722 CE, is found. Shortly thereafter, the Imams moved on to Shahr-i Babak in south-east Iran, where an Ismaili community was already in existence. In 1817 CE, events took a new turn when the then Imam, Khalil Allah, who had shifted residence to Yazd, was assassinated at the instigation of hostile elements in the Qajar court. The Shah who ruled Iran at that time, fearing that this incident might exacerbate an already sensitive situation, granted the districts of Qumm and Mahallat, in addition to the title of Aga Khan, to Imam Hasan ‘Ali Shah, the new Imam. Imam Hasan ‘Ali Shah maintained good relations with the Shah, but later, owing to continued hostility from certain personalities in the court, he migrated to India, finally settling in Bombay in 1848 CE. Thus the headquarters of the *Imamah* now came to be situated in India.

The doctrinal expression of Nizari Ismailism after the fall of Alamut shows regional variations which are rooted in common loyalty to the principle of *Imamah*. In Syria, the Ismailis preserved the classical Fatimid tradition;[54] those inhabiting the Badakhshan region remained attached to

the memory and works of Nasir-i Khusraw; in Iran, the ideas which evolved continued to form the basis of the Ismailis' faith.[55] Henceforth, the individual search for inner, spiritual transformation received increasing emphasis in the articulation of the faith in all these areas. The cosmic or metaphysical stature of the Imam retained its overriding significance, but the goal which the individual Ismaili strove to attain was understood as a vision of the Imam's spiritual reality. The search for this kind of illumination involved, above all, a lengthy and laborious process of disciplining self-centred impulses and achieving inner purification. The Imam was revered as the *murshid* ('guide') who provided guidance for spiritual enlightenment to the *murid* ('disciple'). In India, the *ginan* literature exhibited the same quest for mystical illumination, and also advocated an inner mastery over temptations of worldly life through a state of mental detachment, rather than actual withdrawal from it by the adoption of an ascetic mode of life.

The Modern Period

The single most outstanding feature of the Islamic world in the last few centuries has been the impact of the West. Whether this impact has been felt through direct domination or indirect economic and political pressure, in all cases the expansion of Western power and influence has caused varying degrees of disruption of indigenous modes of life. The Muslim lands, however, have not been merely passive receptacles of the tide of Western culture. In a variety of ways, different sections of the population in the Islamic countries have attempted, in their own manner, to respond to the circumstances created not only by the upsurge of Western power, but by the pressing need for technological and industrial development. Some of the more learned and reflective Muslims in the *Dar al-Islam* have therefore devoted their energies to finding a solution whereby the Muslim people could organise their lives in such a way as to be able to cope with the pressures of modern life and also to benefit fully from the potential resources made available through the advancement of science. Prominent among these Muslim leaders of modern times have been two Ismaili Imams, Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III (1877-1957), and Imam Shah Karim al-Hussaini, Aga Khan IV (b. 1936).

As a result of the work of these two Imams, the Shi‘a Imami Ismaili community has developed in this century into perhaps the best example of a successful attempt by a Muslim group to create a new mode of life and a new form of organisation in accordance with the needs of a modern environment, while at the same time maintaining a sense of continuity with its religious history.[56] This process was initiated and given positive and active direction by Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, the 48th Imam of the Ismailis, who was a notable figure of the Muslim world and in international circles generally. His long life-span coincided with several important developments in history, such as the rise and fall of European imperialism, the two World Wars, and the upsurge of national independence movements in Asia and Africa. He was deeply concerned with the future of the Muslim world and searched for a solution to the predicament it faced in being confronted by the threat of political, economic and cultural domination of the West. His solution to this predicament, communicated as much to his Ismaili followers as to the Muslim world at large, was a continued adherence to the fundamental principles of Islam, and a judicious amalgamation of the classical heritage of Islam with the phenomenon of modernisation. While articulating his views on this matter, Imam Sultan Mahomed Shah also involved himself in a wide range of political, cultural and philanthropic activities for the benefit of Muslims all over the world, irrespective of their specific persuasions in Islam. His philanthropy was particularly aimed at the development of Muslim education and welfare. At international conferences and gatherings, Imam Sultan Mahomed Shah was the spokesman and champion of the Muslim world. His election in 1937 as President of the League of Nations is an indication of his international stature and public role, which was essentially that of a bridge between the East and the West. His close acquaintance with the Western world, his deep knowledge of Islamic history and theology, his passionate concern for the future of the Muslim world, the considerable scope of his activities and interests, and the versatility of his personality, are reflected in his numerous writings, speeches and broadcasts.

The most concrete and lasting impressions of the policies of Imam Sultan Mahomed Shah, however, are to be found in the remarkable changes he effected in the lives of his followers, influencing almost every facet of the community’s social life. These changes, which may be regarded as constituting a general pattern of ‘modernisation’, were implemented mainly

through the establishment of schools, hostels, dispensaries, hospitals, housing societies, welfare organisations and financial institutions, as well as the creation of an administrative system of regional boards, associations and councils. One of the bold departures from the conservatism prevailing then in Muslim societies was his emphasis on female education. As a result of these innovations, the community's traditional social organisation and patterns of behaviour began to evolve in a direction which was more favourable to life in the new circumstances.

Under the leadership of the present (and 49th) Imam of the Ismailis, His Highness The Aga Khan, Imam Shah Karim al-Hussaini, the social and economic programmes initiated by Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah have been brought to fruition. Additional steps have been taken to consolidate existing facilities and to meet new communal and national requirements, primarily in the emergent nations of the world. Imam Shah Karim has directed further developments in the administrative machinery of the Ismaili community, chiefly through the progressive revision of Ismaili constitutions which govern it. Through his economic policies, the Imam has encouraged his followers not to confine their activities merely to the field of commerce, but also to enter wide areas of human endeavour including industry and the professions. Spearheading this movement are the community's new financial institutions and organisations, set up especially for the purpose. In the pursuit of their daily lives, the Imam has stressed the necessity for Ismailis to identify completely with the national aspirations and policies of the many countries of the world in which they reside. The greatest emphasis has been placed by Imam Shah Karim on the value of education, in particular higher, specialised training. A large number of young Ismailis have been encouraged, by advice and generous scholarship programmes, to go to universities. This group is also involved actively in the conduct of the community's activities at all levels, thus ensuring a continuous injection of new ideas for its progress.

The reforms which have affected the Ismailis in this century can be seen essentially as the expression of the Imam's long-term objectives for the Ismailis. The direction in which the community is being guided is further reflected in developments such as the creation of The Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, and the establishment of the Aga Khan Foundation with

charitable aims encompassing a wide range of humanitarian and cultural activities. The impact of the modernisation of existing institutions and the creation of new ones, and the harnessing of professional man-power on the lives of individual Ismailis, has been considerable enough to achieve for the community standards of living, health and education which are generally among the highest in the Muslim world. This development must be seen essentially as the expression of the Imam's long-term objectives for the Ismailis, and as representing the traditional Ismaili world-view, in which the material and spiritual aspects of life are regarded as inter-dependent. Both Imams, in their religious guidance to Ismailis, have placed as much stress on cultivating a spiritual life based on the principles of Islam, as on the necessity of good health, sound education and active involvement in the affairs of the world. The theme of progressive spiritual advancement through self-discipline to the point of self-realisation is very prominent in the teachings of both Imams. Equally important, on the other hand, is the idea of material progress through purposive and responsible action.

The present Imam, Shah Karim, has addressed himself to the question of the future of the Muslim world more often and with greater sensitivity than perhaps any other contemporary Muslim leader. He has time and again called upon Muslims to make a determined effort to build upon their rich cultural foundation. In identifying some of the factors which could bring this about, he has emphasised the understanding of the Islamic concept of human fraternity, the necessity of fostering a Muslim intellectual elite inspired by the Islamic heritage, and of promoting the development of Islamic art and architecture. While recognising the need for accelerated economic and technological development, he has also cautioned the Muslims against the excesses of Western materialism. The Imam expresses the strong conviction that the elements necessary for a Muslim renaissance are all to be found in Islam and its heritage. These ideals were recently articulated by Imam Shah Karim in these words:

"In the face of this changing world, which was once a universe to us and is now no more than an overcrowded island, confronted with a fundamental challenge to our understanding of time, surrounded by a foreign fleet of cultural and ideological ships which have broken loose, I ask, do we have a clear, firm and precise understanding of what Muslim society is to be in times to

come? And if, as I believe, the answer is uncertain, where else can we reach than in the Holy Qur'an, and in the example of Allah's last and final Prophet?"

"There is no justification for delaying the search for the answer to this question by the Muslims of the world, because we have the knowledge that Islam is Allah's final message, the Qur'an His final book, and Muhammad His last prophet."

"…The Holy Prophet's life gives us every fundamental guideline that we require to resolve the problem as successfully as our human minds and intellects can visualise. His example of integrity, loyalty, honesty, generosity both of means and of time, his solicitude for the poor, the weak and the sick, his steadfastness in friendship, his humility in success, his magnanimity in victory, his simplicity, his wisdom in conceiving new solutions for problems which could not be solved by the traditional methods, without affecting the fundamental concepts of Islam, surely all these are foundations which, correctly understood and sincerely interpreted, must enable us to conceive what should be a truly modern and dynamic Islamic society in the years ahead."[57]

NOTES

[1] As will be clearly evident, this article has benefited greatly from the studies of the many specialists on Ismailism who have done much to go beyond the tendentious image of the Ismailis of early Western scholarship. The historiographical issues and the distortions are particularly well discussed in M. Hodgson, *The Order of Assasins* (The Hague, 1955), pp. 22 ff; B. Lewis, *The Origins of Ismailism* (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 1-23 ff., and his *The Assassins* (London, 1967), pp. 1-20. W. Ivanov's views are summarised in his *Brief Survey of the Evolution of Ismailism* (London, 1952), pp. 1 ff., and *Ibn al-Qaddah* (Bombay, 1957), pp 120 ff. Corbin's views are summed up in a recent article "Nasir-i-Khusrau and Iranian

Ismailism" in *The Cambridge History of Iran,* ed. R.N. Frye, Vol. IV (Cambridge, 1975), pp 520-3. General summations and additional references will be found in W. Madelung, "Isma'iliyya", *Encylopaedia of Islam*, IV, pp 198-206, and W. Ivanov, "Isma'iliyya" in *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam,* pp. 179-83. For Ismaili literature, see I.K. Poonawala's forthcoming *History of Ismaili Literature* (Los Angles, 1977), which goes further than Ivanov's *Isma'ili Literature: a Bibliographical Survey* (Tehran, 1963) and will do much to facilitate the location and organisation of the Ismaili materials around the world in public and private libraries.

[2] The term occurs repeatedly in works by Qadi al-Nu'man, such as the *Da'a'im al-Islam*, ed. A.D. Fyzee, I (Cairo, 1951) and *al-Urjuzat al-Mukhtarah,* ed. I.K. Poonawala (Montreal, 1970). See also Abbas Hamdani, "Evolution of the Organizational Structure of the Fatimi Da'wah in *Arabian Studies,* III (1976), p 86. For *da'wa*, see note 10 below.

[3] H. Laoust, "La Classification des sectes dans la heresiographie Asharite" in *Studies in Honour of H. A. R. Gibb,* ed. G. Makdisi (Cambridge, 1965), pp 377-86.

[4] See L. Voccia Vaglieri, "Ghadir Khumm" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edition), pp. 993-4.

[5] For instance, the general Shi'ite and also Fatimid traditions quoted in Ivanov, *Rise of the Fatimids* (Calcutta, 1942), pp. 95-127, and his article "Early Shi'ite Movements" in *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society,* 17 (1941), pp. 1-23, discusses the variety of tendencies within the Shi'a.

[6] See W.M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh, 1973), Introduction, for general remarks, and Chapter 2, where he discusses Shi'ism.

[7] For a brief survey, see B. Lewis, "'Abbasids" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edition), I, pp. 15-24, and also M. Shaban, *The Abbasid Revolution* (Cambridge, 1970).

[8] Watt, *Formative Period,* Chapter 2; M.G.S. Hodgson, "How did the early Shi'a become sectarian?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* 75 (1955), pp. 1-13. S.H. Nasr's comments in his 'Introduction' to Allamah Tabatabai's *Shi'ite Islam* (Albany, 1976) are also pertinent to the whole question of the origins of the Shi'a.

[9] See S.H. Nasr, "Shi'ism and Sufism" in *Sufi Essays* (London, 1972), and Paul S. J. Nwyia, *Exegèse coranèque et langage mystique* (Beirut, 1970).

[10] Much still needs to be done to clarify the early history of Shi'ism. An excellent attempt is W. Rajkowski, *Early Shi'ism in Iraq* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1955). Hodgson's *Venture of Islam*, I (Chicago, 1976) has also done much to illuminate that which had remained obscure and neglected for so long in general Western works on Islam. See particularly pp. 256 ff. On the Ithna 'Ashari, see Tabatabai, *Shi'ite Islam*, op. cit.

[11] For a summation and translation on Ismaili sources that deal with the events, see W. Ivanov, *Rise of the Fatimids,* Chapters II and VI. The Arabic texts are provided too.

[12] Among the various studies dealing with the nature of the Ismaili *da'wa*, the most recent is Abbas Hamdani, *Evolution of the Fatimi Da'wah,* op, cit., where on p. 103 he also provides references to previous works. Also see M. Canard, "Da'wa", *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edition), II, pp. 168-70.

[13] *Risalat Iftitah al-Da'wa wa Ibtida al-Dawla,* ed. Wadad al-Qadi (Beirut, 1970) and Hamdani's study referred to above where he cites his primary sources. See also W. Ivanov, "The Organization of the Fatimid Propaganda" in *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 15* (1939), pp. 1-35.

[14] Hamdani, *Evolution of the Fatimi Da'wah,* op. cit., pp. 89-92, 101-2.

[15] Besides the *Iftitah* and the sources cited in the *Rise of the Fatimids,* there are several excellent studies of the early activities of the *da'wa.* S.A. Stern's "The Early Ismaili missionaries in North West Persia and in Khurasan and Transoxiania" in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XXIII (1960), pp. 56-90, and "Ismaili Propaganda and the Fatimid rule in Sind" in *Islamic Culture* (1949), pp. 298-307, deal with some of the major areas. For India there is also Abbas Hamdani, *the Beginning of the Ismaili Da'wa in Northern India* (Cairo, 1956). For Ifriqiya, see F. Dachraoui, "Les commencements de la prédiction ismaélienne en Ifriquiya" in *Studia Islamica, XX* (1964), pp. 89-102. For the *da'i*s in Yemen, see A. Hamdani, *Evolution of the Fatimi Da'wah*, pp. 89-90.

[16] Several reliable secondary studies on the Fatimid period have made their appearance in recent years, superseding earlier works by Orientalists such as de Goeje, de Sacy, O'Leary and Wustenfeld, among others. M. Canard's article on the "Fatimids" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edition), II, pp. 850-62, and Abbas Hamdani, *The Fatimids* (Karachi, 1964) provide a survey. In addition to the studies of Ivanov, Madelung and Stern cited earlier, there are now specialised monographs such as B.I. Bashier's *The Fatimid Caliphate: 386-487A. H./996-1094A.D.* (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1970); S. Assad's *The reign of al-Hakim bi Amr Allah* (Beirut, 1974); A. Ladak's *The Fatimid Caliphate and the Ismaili Da'wa from the Appointment of Musta'li to the Suppression of the Dynasty* (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1971); P. J. Vatikiotis, *The Fatimid Theory of State* (Lahore, 1957); Zahid Ali's *Ta'rikh-i-Fatimiyyun-i-Misr* (Hyderabad, India, 1948) in Urdu. Hasan I. Hasan's *Al Fatimiyyun fi Misr* (Cairo, 1965) and M.J. Surur, *Al Dawla al-Fatimiyya fi Misr* (Cairo, 1965) are general studies in Arabic. M. Canard's various other articles on the Fatimids have been collected and form part of the *Miscellania Orientalia* (London, 1973).

[17] For the Carmatians, see W. Madelung, "Karmati", *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edition), IV, and his study, "Fatimiden und Bahrainqarmaten" in *Der Islam,* XXXIV (1959), pp. 34-88. For the question of their relationship with the Ismailis, see also S. Stern, "Ismailis and Qarmatians"

in *L'Elaboration de l'Islam,* ed. C. Cahen (Paris, 1961), pp. 99-108, and W. Ivanov, "Ismailis and Qarmatians", *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1940), p. 70 ff.

[18] See Husayn al-Hamdani's *Al-Sulaihiyyun wa'l harakar al-Fatimiyah* (Cairo, 1955), which discusses the Sulayhids and in particular their associations with Egypt.

[19] For Nasir-i Khusraw, see the article by H. Corbin, cited in note 1 above. A bibliography of his works, most of which are now edited, will be found on pp. 689-90 of the same *Cambridge History of Iran,* IV.

[20] For works that deal with trade, see the studies cited by Canard, *Fatimids*, op. cit., p. 861, and recently G. Scanlon, "A note on Fatimid-Saljuq Trade" in *Islamic Civilisation,* ed. D.S. Richards (London, 1973), pp. 265 ff.

[21] Besides Vatikiotis, *The Fatimid Theory of State,* op. cit., there is also A.M. Magued's *Institutions et cérémonial des Fatimides en Egypte,* 2 vols. (Cairo, 1953), which deals with organs of state.

[22] Canard, *Fatimids,* op. cit., p. 861, and *passim,* where he makes reference to the cultural and intellectual activity. See also the articles on Ibn al-Haytham by A. Sabra, and O. Grabar's study of architecture in this book.

[23] Such a definition of the role and function of the *Imamah* constitutes the bulk of many works on the subject in Ismaili writings. A good example is Hamid al-din al-Kirmani's *al-Masabih fi ithbat al-Dar Islam,* XIX, pp. 245 ff. For a general definition of the notion of Imam in both Sunni and Shi'a circles, see "Imama" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edition), III, p. 1163 ff.

[24] This is part of Abu Hatim al-Razi's *A'lam al-Nubuwwa,* parts of which have been published and discussed by P. Kraus as "Raziana I" and "Raziana II" in *Orientalia,* Vols. 34 and 35.

[25] The work has been edited by A. A. Fyzee in two volumes (Cairo, 1951, 1967) and part of it has been translated by him as *The Book of Faith* (Bombay, 1974).

[26] Fyzee, *Book of Faith,* 'Introduction', p. ix, and Azim Nanji, "Qadi al-Nu'man, an Ismaili Theory of Walayah" in *Essays on Islamic Civilisation presented to Niyazi Berkes,* ed. Donald P. Little (Leiden, 1976), pp. 260-73.

[27] For the emergence of the specifically Ismaili view of law, see W. Madelung, "The Sources of Ismaili Law" in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies, 35,* no 1 (1976), p. 29 ff. Also see A.A. Fyzee, *Compendium of the Fatimid Law* (Simla, 1969).

[28] It was this concern with the *batin* that led to the designation *Batiniyya* being used for the Ismailis. See "Batiniyya", *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edition), I, pp. 1098 ff.

[29] This in particular was one of his concerns when responding to the differences that eventually led to secession by the Druzes. See for instance his work *al-Risalat al-wadi'a fi ma'alim al-din*, ed. M. Kamil Hussein, Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts of the Egyptian University (1952), pp. 1-30.

[30] For a discussion of *ta'wil*, see H. Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique,* pp. 27-30, and for its Ismaili usage his *Etude préliminare pour le "Livre réunissant les deux sagesses" de Nasir-i-Khosraw* (Paris, 1953). The Persian text of the *Kitab Jami' al-Hakmatayn* follows his introduction to the book.

[31] For these terms, see Hamdani, *Evolution of the Fatimi Da'wah,* op. cit., pp. 100-1.

[32] *Ibid.* By the time of the Fatimids, terms such as *natiq* and *asas*, so prominent in earlier works, appear to have fallen into disuse.

[33] For *Qa'im,* see W. Madelung, "*Ka'im"* in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edition), IV, pp. 456-7.

[34] For the concept of cyclical history, see Corbin, *Histoire*, op. cit., pp. 127 ff.

[35] See the table in Hamdani, *Evolution of the Fatimi Da'wah,* op. cit., p.99, and the accompanying note.

[36] Paul Walker, "The Ismaili Vocabulary of Creation" in *Studia Islamica,* XL (1974), pp. 75-85, and also his "Cosmic Hierarchies in Early Ismaili Thought" in *Muslim World,* LXVI (1976), pp. 14-28. See also Kirmani's *Rahat al-'Aql*, ed. M. Kamil Hussein and M.H. Hilmi (Cairo, 1953), pp. 37-56.

[37] For the Ikhwan al-Safa, see Y. Marquet "Ikhwan al Safa", *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edition), III, pp. 1071 ff., where he also discusses their identity. S.H. Nasr's *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Cambridge, Mass, 1964) contains a discussion of their cosmology.

[38] Kirmani's systematisation will be found in *Rahat al-'Aql,* ed. M. Kamil Hussein and M.M. Hilmi (Cairo, 1953). The earlier period including al-Nasafi and al-Sijistani in the context of a Neoplatonic background has now been studied by Paul Walker, *Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani and the Development of the Ismaili Neoplatonism* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1974), and his article, "Cosmic hierarchies in Early Ismaili Thought" in *Muslim World,* LXVI (1976), pp. 14 -28.

[39] For a detailed treatment of his reign and the emergence of the Druze movement, see Assad, *The Reign of al-Hakim*, op. cit., Chapter 6.

[40] The events that follow are detailed in Ladak, *The Fatimid Caliphate,* op. cit., pp. 87 ff. For Badr al-Jamali and al-Afdal, see C.H. Becker, "Badr al-Djamali", *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edition), I, pp. 869-70, and G. Weit, "Al-Afdal b. Badr al-Djamali" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edition), I, pp. 215-16.

[41] For the schism, in addition to Ladak above, see S.M. Stern, "The Succession to the Fatimid Caliph al-Amir and the Rise of Tayyibi Ismailism" in *Oriens* (1951), p. 193 ff.

[42] Al-Hamdani, *Al-Sulaihiyyun*, op. cit., and for the later history as it relates to India, see the survey based on the traditional Tayyibi accounts in S.C. Misra, *Muslim Communities in Gujarat* (London, 1963), Chapter 2.

[43] The most thoroughly researched is M.G.S. Hodgson's *The Order of the Assassins* (The Hague, 1955). A summary account by him has been given in his article "The Ismaili State" in the *Cambridge History of Iran,* Vol. 5, ed. J. Boyle (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 422-82. Other works are: B. Lewis, *The Assassins* (London, 1967); W. Ivanov, *Alamut and Lamasar* (Tehran, 1960); N. Mirza, *The Syrian Ismailis at the Time of the Crusades* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Durham, 1963). One of the major primary sources, al-Juvayni's *Ta'rikh-i Jahan Gusha*, has been translated as *The History of the World Conqueror,* 2 vols. by J.A. Boyle (Manchester, 1958). The Nizaris are discussed in Vol. II.

[44] A summary discussion on this will be found in G. Makdisi, "The Sunni Revival" in *Islamic Civilisation*, op. cit., pp. 155-68.

[45] The account below closely follows Hodgson's description in "The Ismaili State" and *The Order of Assassins,* op. cit.

[46] For the significance of this term and its usage in Ismaili thought see "Hudjda" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edition), III, pp. 543-45. For the role of Hasan-i Sabbah, see M. Hodgson, "Hasan-i Sabbah" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edition), III, pp. 253-4.

[47] For the developments in Syria, see Mirza, *The Syrian Ismailis,* op. cit., and the relevant sections by Hodgson and Lewis.

[48] Hodgson, *The Order of the Assassins,* op. cit., and "The Ismaili State" in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 5. The account of Nizari Ismaili history and doctrine in this article is based on Hodgson's work.

[49] A comprehensive summary of his exposition of the principle of Imama is found in his *Rawdatu't-Taslim,* ed., tr. by W. Ivanov (Leiden, 1950).

[50] W. Ivanov, "Tombs of some Persian Ismaili Imams" in *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society,* 2A (1938), pp. 49-62. A discussion of what is known about the Imams in this period is also found in H. Algar, "The Revolt of the Agha Khan Mahallati and the Transference of the Ismaili Imamate to India", in *Studia Islamica, XXIX,* pp.55-81. The description which follows is based mainly on these two accounts.

[51] W. Ivanov, "A Forgotten Branch of the Ismailis" in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1937), pp. 57-9.

[52] For the history and tradition of the *da'wa* in the subcontinent, see Azim Nanji, *The Nizari Ismaili Tradition in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent* (New York, 1978), and W. Ivanov, *Collectanea* (Bombay, 1948), pp. 1-54, and "The Sect of Imam Shah in Gujarat" in *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1936), pp. 19-70.

[53] W. Ivanov, *Brief Survey of the Evolution of Ismailism* (Leiden, 1952), p.29.

[54] This is exemplified by the poem *Ash-Shafiya*, which is attributed to Shihab al-Din Abu Firas. The work has been edited and translated by Sami N. Makarem (Beirut, 1966).

[55] Works which were compiled during this period and which exemplify the state of the doctrine in the period after the fall of Alamut, include *Haft Bab-i Bu Ishaq* by Abu Ishaq Quhistani, ed., tr. W. Ivanov (Bombay, 1959); *Fasl dar Bayan-i Shinakht-i Imam*, ed., tr. Ivanov (Leiden, 1949); and the *Diwan* of Khaki Khorasani, ed. Ivanov (Bombay, 1933).

[56] Some of the studies which discuss the recent history of the Nizari Ismailis and their adaptation to modern conditions of life are: H.S. Morris, *The Indians in Uganda* (London, 1968), and "Indians in East Africa: a study in a plural society" in *The British Journal of Sociology,* Vol. VII (1956); Shirin Walji, *History of the Ismaili Community in Tanzania* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1974); H. Papanek, *Leadership and Social Change in the Khoja Ismaili Community* (Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1962), which discusses the community in Pakistan; Azim Nanji, "Modernization and Change in the Nizari Ismaili Community in East Africa - a Perspective" in *Journal of Religion in Africa,* Vol. VI (1976), pp. 123-39; Hatim Amiji, " The Asian Communities" in *Islam in Africa,* ed. J. Kritzeck and I.M. Lewis (New York, 1969); and N. Lewis, "The Ismailis of Syria Today" in *Royal Central Asian Studies Journal* (1952), pp. 69-77.

[57]Address from the Chair by His Highness The Aga Khan at the International Seerat Conference, Karachi, March 12, 1976.

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