



## The Institute of Ismaili Studies

“Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani”

*The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

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Biographical Details

Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, a prominent Ismaili *da'i* or missionary and one of the most learned Ismaili theologians and philosophers of the Fatimid period. As in the case of other prominent missionaries who observed strict secrecy in their activities in the midst of hostile milieus, few biographical details are available on al-Kirmani, who flourished during the reign of the Fatimid caliph-*imam* al-Hakim (996-1021). Al-Kirmani is not mentioned in any contemporary Muslim historical sources, but highlights of his life and career can be gathered from his own numerous extant works as well as the writings of the later Musta'li-Tayyibi Ismaili authors of Yemen.

Kirmani's  
Early Career

Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani's date of birth remains unknown, but he was of Persian origin and was probably born in the province of Kirman. He seems to have spent the greater part of his life as a Fatimid *da'i* in Iraq, having been particularly active in Baghdad and Basra. In Iraq, al-Kirmani successfully concentrated his efforts on local rulers and influential tribal chiefs, with whose support the Ismailis aimed to bring about the downfall of the 'Abbasids. Alarmed by the successes of the Fatimid *da'wa*, or mission, in Iraq, the 'Abbasid caliph al-Qadir took retaliatory measures. In 1011, he sponsored the so-called 'Baghdad Manifesto' to discredit the Fatimids, also refuting their 'Alid ancestry. The honorific title *hujjat al-'Iraqayn*, meaning the *hujja* or chief *da'i* of both Iraqs (al-Iraq al-'Arabi and al-Iraq al-'Ajami), which is often added to al-Kirmani's name and may be of a late origin, implies that he was also active in central and western parts of Iran.

Kirmani as  
Theologian

Al-Kirmani rose to prominence during the reign of al-Hakim, when the central headquarters of the Fatimid *da'wa* in Cairo considered him as the most learned Ismaili theologian of the time. It was in that capacity that al-Kirmani played an important role in refuting the extremist ideas of some dissident *da'is*, who were then founding what was to become known as the Druze movement and religion. As part of the official Fatimid campaign against the dissident *da'is*, who had also proclaimed al-Hakim's divinity, al-Kirmani was summoned in 1014 or shortly earlier to Cairo where he produced several works in refutation of the extremist doctrines. Al-Kirmani's writings, which were widely

This article was originally published in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. James Fieser, at '<http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/k/kirmani.htm>,' 2003. An electronic version appears on the website of The Institute of Ismaili Studies at <http://www.iis.ac.uk/research/encyclopaedias/kirmani.htm>.

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circulated, were to some extent successful in checking the spread of the extremist doctrines associated with the initiation of the Druze movement. Subsequently, al-Kirmani returned to Iraq where he completed his last work and *magnum opus*, *Rahat al-'aql*, in 1020 and where he died soon afterwards.

A prolific writer, Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani was one of the most learned Ismaili theologians of the Fatimid times. He was well-acquainted with the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, the Syriac version of the New Testament, and the post-Biblical Jewish writings. He expounded the Ismaili Shi'i doctrine of the *imamat* in numerous writings. In a few treatises, al-Kirmani refuted the theological views of the Zaydis, the Twelver Shi'is, and other Muslim opponents of the Fatimid Ismaili *imams*. In his *al-Aqwal al-dhahabiya*, al-Kirmani refuted the ideas of Abu Bakr Mohammad b. Zakariya al-Razi (d. 934), who had argued for the necessity of revelation and prophethood while tracing all sciences to revelational origins.

Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani was also an accomplished philosopher belonging to that select group of Ismaili *da'is* of the Iranian lands who amalgamated in an original manner their Ismaili theology (*kalam*) with different philosophical traditions, notably a type of Neoplatonism then current in the Muslim world. As a philosopher, al-Kirmani was fully acquainted with Aristotelian and Neoplatonic philosophies as well as the metaphysical systems of the Muslim philosophers (*falasifa*), notably al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) who was his contemporary. In his *Kitab al-riyad*, al-Kirmani acted as an arbiter in a philosophical debate that had taken place earlier among some Iranian *da'is*, notably Muhammad al-Nasafi, Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani and Abu Hatim al-Razi. Al-Kirmani developed his own elaborate metaphysical system in his major philosophical treatise, *Rahat al-'aql*, which is written for the advanced adepts. In this book, al-Kirmani also propounded what may be regarded as the third stage in the development of Ismaili cosmology in medieval times. Al-Kirmani replaced the Neoplatonic dyad of the Intellect (*'aql*) and Soul (*nafs*) in the spiritual world, which had been adopted by his Iranian Ismaili predecessors, by a series of ten separate Intellects in partial adaptation of al-Farabi's Aristotelian cosmic system. Al-Kirmani's cosmology, representing an original synthesis of different philosophical traditions, was not however adopted by the Fatimid Ismailis; it later provided the basis for the development of the fourth and final stage of Ismaili cosmology at the hands of the Musta'li-Tayyibi scholars in Yemen.

Kirmani as  
Philosopher



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