The Institute of Ismaili Studies

Ismaili History

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Origins and Early History

On the death of Imam Ja‘far al-Sadiq in 148 AH/765 CE, his followers from among the Imami Shi‘i split into six groups of which two may be identified as proto-Ismailis or earliest Ismailis. Imam al-Sadiq had originally designated his second son Isma‘il (the eponym of the Ismailiya) as his successor to the imamate. A majority of the sources relate that Isma‘il predeceased his father. However, the two proto-Ismaili groups, which were based in Kufa and supported the claims of Imam Isma‘il b. Ja‘far and his son Imam Muhammad b. Isma‘il, had already appeared in the lifetime of Imam al-Sadiq but they separated from other *Imami*s only in 148 AH /765 CE. One of these groups denied the death of Imam Isma‘il and awaited his return as the Mahdi. The members of this group, designated as *al-Isma‘iliya al-kalisa*, or the ‘pure Ismailiya’ by the earliest Imami heresiographers, Nawbakhti and Qumi, who are our main sources for the initial phase of Ismailism, held that Imam al-Sadiq had announced Imam Isma‘il’s death as a ruse to protect him against ‘Abbasid persecution as he had been politically active against them. The second group, designated as the Mubarakiya, affirming Imam Isma‘il’s death, now recognised his eldest son Imam Muhammad b. Isma‘il as their imam (*Firaq al-shi‘a*, pp. 57-58; Qumi, pp. 80-81, 83; Ash‘ari, *Maqalat*, pp. 26-27; Daftary, 1991, pp. 220 ff.). It seems likely that the Mubarakiya, derived from Imam Isma‘il’s epithet al-Mubarak, the Blessed One (Sijistani, *Ithbat*, p. 190; Idris, *Zahr*, p. 199; H. F. al-Hamdani, 1958, text p. 10; Ivanow, 1946, pp. 103-12), were originally supporters of Imam Isma‘il before acknowledging Imam Muhammad b. Isma‘il as their Imam. At any rate, Mubarakiya was thus one of the original names of the nascent Ismailiya, a term coined by later heresiographers.

Nawbakhti (pp. 58-59) and Qumi (p. 81), who are generally hostile towards the Ismailis, identify al-Ismailiya al-Khalisa with the early Khattabiya, the followers of Abu’l-Khattab, the most famous *ghali* (a term used pejoratively by heresiographers for those who attribute divine qualities to Imams) in the entourage of Imam Ja‘far al-Sadiq, who was eventually repudiated by the Imam. They further hold that on the death of Abu’1-Khattab in 138 AH/755 CE, a group of his *ghulat* followers joined the supporters of Imam Muhammad b. Isma‘il (*Firaq al-shi‘a*, pp. 6061; Qumi, p. 83). Some later sources, too, refer to close relations between the earliest Ismailis and the Khattabis (Lewis, 1940, pp. 33-35). On the other hand, Abu’l-Khattab is condemned as a heretic by the Ismailis of the Fatimid times (see, for example, Qadi Nu‘man, *Da‘a’im*, I, pp. 49-50; tr. Fyzee, I, pp. 65-66; — —, *Kitab al-majalis*, pp. 84-85). Be that as it may, relations between *al-Isma‘iliya al-khalisa* and the Mubarakiya, on the one hand, and between these groups and the Khattabis, on the other, remain rather obscure due to lack of reliable sources. It is certain, however, that all these groups were politically active against the Abbasids and they originated within the milieus of Imami Shi‘ism in Kufa.

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Little is known about the life and career of Imam Muhammad b. Isma‘il, the seventh imam of the Ismailis. The relevant biographical information contained in early Ismaili sources has been preserved by the *da‘i* (Ismaili missionary) Idris (*‘Oyun*, IV, pp. 351-56; — —, *Zahr*, pp. 204-8). Soon after Imam al-Sadiq’s death, and after the recognition of the imamate of his uncle Musa al-Kazim by the majority of the Imamis, Imam Muhammad b. Isma‘il left Medina, seat of the ‘Alids, and went into hiding. His decision marked the initiation of the *dawr al-satr*, or period of concealment, in early Ismailism that lasted until the foundation of the Fatimid state when the Ismaili Imams emerged from their concealment. Henceforth, Imam Muhammad acquired the epithet of al-Makhtum, the Hidden One, in addition to al-Maymun, the Fortunate One. Nonetheless, Imam Muhammad b. Isma‘il maintained his contacts with the Kufan-based Mubarakiya from different localities in southern Iraq and Persia. He seems to have spent the latter part of his life in Khuzistan, where he had some following. He died not long after 179 AH/795 CE during the caliphate of the ‘Abbasid Harun al-Rashid. On the death of Imam Muhammad b. Isma‘il, the Mubarakiya split into two groups (*Firaq al-shi‘a*, p. 61; Qumi, p. 83). A majority refused to accept his death; they recognised him as their seventh and last imam, and awaited his return as the Mahdi or *qa’im*. A second, small and obscure group, acknowledging Imam Muhammad b. Isma‘il’s death, traced the imamate in his progeny. Almost nothing is known with certainty regarding the subsequent history of these earliest Ismaili groups until shortly after the middle of the 3rd AH/9th CE century, when a unified Ismaili movement appeared on the historical stage.

It is certain that for almost a century after Imam Muhammad b. Isma‘il, a group of leaders who were well placed within Ismailism worked secretly for the creation of a unified Shi‘i movement against the ‘Abbasids. These leaders did not openly claim the Ismaili imamate for three generations. They had, in fact, hidden their true identity in order to escape ‘Abbasid persecution. Imam ‘Abd-Allah al-Akbar, the first of these hidden leaders, had organised his campaign around the central doctrine of the majority of the earliest Ismailis, namely, the Mahdism of Imam Muhammad b. Isma‘il. Organising a movement in the name of a concealed imam who could not be chased by ‘Abbasid agents represented an attractive strategy. At any rate, the existence of such a group of early Ismaili leaders is confirmed by both the official version of the Ismailis of the Fatimid period regarding the pre-Fatimid phase of their history (Idris, *‘Oyun*, IV, pp. 357-67, 390-404) as well as the hostile account of the Sunni polemicists Ibn Rizam and Akhu Muhsin preserved in later sources (Ibn al-Dawadari, VI, pp. 44-156; Maqrizi, *Itte‘az*, I, pp. 151-201; — — , *al-Khetat*, I, pp. 391-97; Nuwayri, XXV, pp. 187-317). Indeed, with minor variations, the names of these leaders, viz., Imam ‘Abd-Allah, Imam Ahmad, Imam Husayn, or Imam Muhammad and Imam ‘Abd-Allah al-Mahdi, who were members of the same family and succeeded one another on a hereditary basis, are almost identical in the accounts of the later Fatimid Ismailis (H. F. al-Hamdani, 1958, text pp. 10-12; Nishaburi, p. 95; see also Hamdani and de Blois, pp. 173-207) and in the lists traceable to Akhu Muhsin and his source Ibn Rizam (Ibn al-Nadim, ed. *Tajaddod*, p. 238; tr. Dodge, I, pp. 462-64; Ibn al Dawadari, VI, pp. 17-20; Maqrizi, *Itte‘az*; I, pp. 22-26; Nuwayri, XXV, p. 189; Hammadi Yemeni, *Kashf*, pp. 16 ff.). However, in the Ismaili sources these leaders are presented as ‘Alids descending from Imam al-Sadiq while in anti-Ismaili accounts their ancestry is traced to a certain Maymun al-Qaddah. Modern scholarship has shown that the Qaddahid ancestry of the early Ismaili leaders was constructed by hostile polemicists, soon after the establishment of the Fatimid caliphate, in order to refute the ‘Alid genealogy of the Fatimid caliph-imams. Maymun al-Qaddah and his son ‘Abd-Allah were, in fact, associated with Imams al-Baqir and al-Sadiq and had nothing to do with the leaders or imams of early Ismailism (see Ivanow, 1946, pp. 61 103; Daftary, 1990, pp. 105-16).

Imam ‘Abd-Allah al-Akbar, the first of the early Ismaili leaders after Imam Muhammad b. Isma‘il,

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settled in ‘Askar Mukram, in Khuzistan, where he lived as a wealthy merchant. From there he began to organise a reinvigorated Ismaili *da‘wa* sending *da‘i*s to different districts around Khuzistan. At an unknown date, still in the first half of the 3rd AH/9th CE century, Imam ‘Abd-Allah found refuge in Syria, where he eventually re-established contact with some of his *da‘i*s, and settled in Salamiya, continuing to pose as a Hashimid merchant. Henceforth, Salamiya, situated some 35 km southeast of Hama, served as the secret headquarters of the Ismaili *da‘wa*. The efforts of Imam ‘Abd-Allah and his successors began to bear fruit in the 260s AH/870s CE, when numerous *da‘i*s appeared in Iraq and adjacent regions. It was around 261 AH/874 CE that Hamdan Qarmat was converted to Ismailism by the *da‘i* Husayn Ahvazi (Ibn al-Nadim, ed. *Tajaddud*, p. 238; Mas‘udi, *Tanbih*, p. 395). Hamdan, in turn, organised the *da‘wa* in the Sawad of Kufa, his native locality, and in other districts of southern Iraq. Hamdan’s chief assistant was his brother-in-law ‘Abdan. A learned theologian, ‘Abdan enjoyed a certain degree of independence and was responsible for training and appointing numerous *da‘i*s, including Abu Sa‘id Jannabi, who later founded the Qarmati state of Bahrain.

Centred on the expectation of the imminent return of Imam Muhammad b. Isma‘il as the Mahdi who would establish justice in the world, the revolutionary and messianic Ismaili movement appealed to underprivileged groups of different social backgrounds. It achieved particular success among the Imami Shi‘i who were disillusioned with the quietist policies of their imams and were left without a manifest imam after the death of the eleventh Imam, Abu Muhammad Hasan al-‘Askari (d. 260 AH/ 874 CE). It was under such circumstances that Hamdan won many supporters in southern Iraq and embarked on his anti-‘Abbasid activities (Ibn al-Dawadari, VI, pp. 44 ff.; Maqrizi, *Itte‘az*, I, pp. 151 ff.; Nuwayri, XXV, pp. 189 ff.; Tabari, III, pp. 2124, 2126-27; Tabari, tr. XXXVII, pp. 169,171-73). The Ismailis of southern Iraq became generally known as the Qaramita or Carmatians, named after their first chief local leader. This term was soon applied to other Ismaili communities not organised by Hamdan and ‘Abdan. At the time, there was a single Ismaili movement directed from Salamiya in the name of Imam Muhammad b. Isma‘il as the Mahdi (Stern, 1961, pp. 99-108; Madelung, 1961, pp. 43-65). In fact, in order to prepare the ground for the emergence of the Mahdi, in 277 AH/890 CE Hamdan established a *dar al-hijra*, or abode of migration, near Kufa, where his followers gathered weapons and other provisions. This abode was to serve as the nucleus of a new society for the Ismailis. Similar *dar al-hijra*s were later established for the Ismaili communities of Yemen, Bahrain and North Africa. The Ismailis (Qarmatis) now referred to their movement simply as *al-da‘wa* (the mission) or *al-da‘wa al-hadia* (the rightly guiding mission), in addition to using expressions such as *da‘wat al-haqq* (summons to the truth) or *ahl al-haqq* (people of the truth).

In the meantime, the Ismaili *da‘wa* had appeared in many other regions in the 260s AH /870s CE. ‘Abdan’s brother Ma’mun was active as a *da‘i* in Fars, where the Ismaili converts became known as the Ma’muniya (Daylami, p. 21). The *da‘wa* in Yemen was initiated by Ibn Hawshab, later known as Mansur al-Yemen. He arrived there in 268 AH/881 CE, accompanied by his collaborator ‘Ali b. al-Fazl. By 293 AH/905-6 CE, when ‘Ali occupied San‘a’, these *da‘i*s were in control of almost all of Yemen (Qadi Nu‘man, *Iftitah*, pp. 32-54; Janadi, *Kitab al-suluk*, in Kay, 1892, text pp. 139-52, tr. pp. 191-212). Yemen also served as a base for the extension of the *da‘wa* to other regions. In 270 AH/883 CE, Ibn Hawshab sent his relative Haytham as a *da‘i* to Sind, initiating the *da‘wa* on the Indian subcontinent (Qadi Nu‘man, *Iftitah*, pp. 45, 47; S. M. Stern, 1949, pp. 298 ff.; Hamdani, 1956). On Ibn Hawshab’s instructions, the *da‘i* Abu ‘Abd-Allah al-Shi‘i was active among the Kutama Berbers of Lesser Kabylia in the Maghrib by 280 AH/893 CE. Ibn Hawshab sent other *da‘i*s to Yamama, Egypt and Bahrayn. After his initial activities in Fars, Abu Sa‘id Jannabi was sent to Bahrayn by Hamdan and ‘Abdan in 273 AH/886 CE, or a few years later. He rapidly won converts there from

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among the bedouins and the Persian emigrants (Ibn al-Dawadari, VI, pp. 55-62, 91 ff.; Maqrizi, *Itti'az*, I, pp. 159 ff.; Nuwayri, XXV, pp. 233 ff.; Tabari, III, pp. 2188 ff., 2196-97, 2205, 2232; Tabari, tr. XXXVIII, pp. 77 ff., 86-89, 98, 128-29; Mas'udi, *Muruj*, VIII, pp. 191 ff.; de Goeje, pp. 33-47,69 ff.)

In the early 260s AH/870s CE, the *da'wa* was taken to the region of the Jibal in Persia by Khalaf al-Hallaj, who established himself in Rayy. There, the Ismailis became known as the Khalafiya. Under Khalaf's successors as chief *da'i*s of the Jibal, the *da'wa* spread to Qum, Kashan, Isfahan, Hamadan and other towns of that region. Giat, the third *da'i* of Rayy, extended the *da'wa* to Khurasan and Transoxania on his own initiative. But the *da'wa* was officially established in Khurasan during the last decade of the 3rd century AH (the first decade of the 9th century CE) by Abu 'Abd-Allah Khadim who set up his secret headquarters at Nishabur. A later chief *da'i* of Khurasan, Husayn b. 'Ali Marwazi was an eminent amir in the service of the Samanids and he succeeded in extending the *da'wa* to Hirat, Gur and other localities under his control, (Nizam-al-Mulk, pp. 282-95, 297-305; tr. Darke, pp. 208-18, 220-26; Ibn al-Nadim, ed. *Tajaddud*, p. 239; Bagdadi, *Farq*, ed. Badr, p. 267; Stern, 1960, pp. 56-90; repr. in — — , 1983, pp. 189-233).

By the early 280s AH/890s CE, a unified Ismaili movement had replaced the earlier Ismaili groups. But in 286 AH/899 CE, soon after Imam 'Abd-Allah al-Mahdi, the future Fatimid caliph, had succeeded to leadership in Salamiya, Ismailism was wrought by a major schism. Hamdan now noticed significant changes in the doctrinal instructions he received from Salamiya, and dispatched 'Abdan there to investigate the matter. Hamdan found out that instead of advocating Imam Muhammad b. Ismail as Mahdi, the new leader now claimed the imamate for himself and his predecessors, the central leaders of the Ismaili *da'wa* in the *dawr al-satr*. Hamdan and 'Abdan refused to accept this doctrinal change, allowing for continuity in the imamate. They renounced their allegiance to the central leadership of Ismailism and suspended all *da'wa* activities in Iraq. Soon after, Hamdan disappeared while 'Abdan was murdered at the instigation of a subordinate *da'i*, Zikrawayh b. Mihrawayh, who initially remained loyal to Salamiya (Ibn al-Dawadari, VI, pp. 65-68; Maqrizi, *Itti'az*, I, pp. 167-68; Nuwayri, XXV, pp. 227-32; Ibn Hawqal, p. 295; tr. Kramers and Wiet, II, p. 289; Madelung, 1961, pp. 59-65,69 ff.; Daftary, 1993, pp. 123-39).

Imam 'Abd-Allah al-Mahdi's reform is explained in a letter he later sent to the Ismaili community in Yemen (see H. F. al-Hamdani, 1958; also Hamdani and de Blois, 1983), in which an attempt is made to reconcile his reform with the actual course of events in pre-Fatimid Ismaili history. He explains that as a form of *taqiya*, the central leaders of the *da'wa* had assumed different pseudonyms, such as al-Mubarak and al-Maymun, also assuming the rank of *hujja*, proof or full representative, of the absent Imam Muhammad b. Isma'il. Imam 'Abd-Allah, whose own pseudonym had been al-Sa'id, the Happy One, further explained that the earlier propagation of Imam Muhammad b. Isma'il as Mahdi was itself another dissimulating tactic and that this was in reality another collective pseudonym for every true imam in the progeny of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq. The statements of Imam 'Abd-Allah are corroborated by the few surviving early Ismaili sources (see, for instance, Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yemen, Kitab *al-Kashf*, pp. 97-99, 102 ff., 109-10, 135, 160; also Madelung, 1961, pp. 254-58).

The doctrinal reform of Imam 'Abd-Allah al-Mahdi split the Ismaili movement into two rival factions. One faction remained loyal to the central leadership and acknowledged continuity in the imamate, recognising Imam 'Abd-Allah and his 'Alid ancestors as their imams, which was in due course incorporated into the Fatimid Ismaili doctrine of the imamate. These Ismailis now allowed for three hidden imams (*al-a'imma al-masturin*) between Imam Muhammad b. Isma'il and Imam 'Abd-Allah

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al-Mahdi. This loyalist faction came to include the bulk of the Ismailis of Yemen and those communities in Egypt, North Africa and Sind, founded by *da‘i*s dispatched by Ibn Hawshab. On the other hand, a dissident faction, originally led by Hamdan, rejected Imam ‘Abd-Allah’s reform and maintained their original belief in the Mahdiship of Imam Muhammad b. Isma‘il. Henceforth, the term Qarmati came to be applied more specifically to the dissidents who did not acknowledge Imam ‘Abd-Allah al-Mahdi, as well as his predecessors and successors in the Fatimid dynasty, as their imams. The dissident Qarmati faction, which lacked central leadership, soon acquired its most important stronghold in the Qarmati state of Bahrayn, founded in the same eventful year 286 AH/ 899 CE by Abu Sa‘id Jannabi who sided with Hamdan and ‘Abdan (Ibn Hawqal, p. 295). There were also Qarmati communities in Iraq, Yemen, Persia and Central Asia. The subsequent history of Qarmatism is not treated here (see F. Daftary, “Carmatians,” in *EIr*, IV, pp. 825-32; Madelung, “Karmati,” in *EI2*, IV, pp. 660-65; — —, 1959; — —, 1996).

Meanwhile, the *da‘i* Zikrawayh b. Mihrawayh had gone into hiding following the events of the year 286 AH/899 CE, possibly fearing reprisals by ‘Abdan’s supporters in Iraq. From 288 AH/901 CE he sent several of his sons as *da‘i*s to the Syrian desert where large numbers of bedouins were converted. Zikrawayh now aimed to establish a Fatimid state in Syria for Imam ‘Abd-Allah al-Mahdi without his authorisation. Soon Zikrawayh’s sons summoned their bedouin followers to proceed to Salamiya and declare their allegiance to the imam who was still guarding his identity. In the event, Imam ‘Abd-Allah, whose position had now been dangerously compromised, secretly left Salamiya in 289 AH/902 CE to escape capture by the ‘Abbasid agents sent after him. He first went to Ramla, in Palestine, and then in 291 AH/904 CE, following the defeat of Zikrawayh’s movement in Syria by an ‘Abbasid army, he embarked on a historic journey which ended several years later in North Africa where he founded the Fatimid caliphate (see Yemeni, *Sirat al-Hajib*, pp. 107-33; tr. in Ivanow, 1942, pp. 184-223; French tr. Canard, 1952, pp. 279-324). After their defeat in Syria in 291 AH/904 CE, Zikrawayh and his sons turned against Imam ‘Abd-Allah al-Mahdi and joined the Qarmati camp. Zikrawayh was finally defeated and killed in 294 AH/ 907 CE by the ‘Abbasids while his Qarmati movement lingered on for a while longer (Tabari, III, pp. 2218-46, 2255-75; tr. XXXVIII, 113-44, 157-79; ‘Arib, pp. 9-18,36, 137; Mas‘udi, *Tanbih*, pp. 370-76,391; Ibn al-Dawadari, VI, pp. 69-90; Maqrizi, *Itti‘az*, I, pp. 168-79; Nuwayri, XXV, pp. 246-76; Halm, 1979, pp. 30-53; — —, *Empire of the Mahdi*, pp. 66-88, 183-90).

The early Ismailis elaborated the basic framework of a system of religious thought, which was further developed or modified in the Fatimid period. Central to this system was a fundamental distinction between the exoteric (*zahir*) and the esoteric (*batin*) aspects of the sacred scriptures and religious commandments and prohibitions. Accordingly, they held that the Qur’an and other revealed scriptures, and their laws (*shari‘a*s), had their apparent or literal meaning, the *zahir*, which had to be distinguished from their inner meaning hidden in the *batin*. They further held that the *zahir*, or the religious laws, enunciated by prophets underwent periodical changes while the *batin*, containing the spiritual truths (*haqa’iq*), remained immutable and eternal. These truths, representing the message common to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, were explained through *ta’wil* or esoteric exegesis, which often relied on the mystical significance of letters and numbers. In every age, the esoteric truths would be accessible only to the elite (*Khawass*) of humankind as distinct from the ordinary people (‘*awamm*) who were only capable of perceiving the apparent meaning of the revelations. Consequently, in the era of Islam, the eternal truths of religion could be explained only to those who had been initiated into the Ismaili *da‘wa* and as such recognised the teaching authority of the Prophet Muhammad and, after him, that of his *wasi*, Imam ‘Ali b. Abi Talib, and the rightful imams who succeeded him; these authorities were the sole sources of *ta’wil* in the era of Islam. Initiation into Ismailism, known as

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balagh; was gradual and took place after the novice had taken an oath of allegiance, *‘ahd* or *mithaq*. The initiates were also obliged to keep secret the *batin* imparted to them by a hierarchy (*hudud*) of teachers (see Ja‘far b. Mansur al-Yemen, *Kitab al-‘alim*; Halm, “Ismaili Oath of Allegiance,” pp. 91-115). By believing in the *batin* aspect of religion, the Ismailis came to be regarded by the rest of the Muslim community as the most representative of the Shi‘i propounding of esotericism in Islam and, hence, their common designation as the *Batiniya*. This designation was also used in a derogatory sense, accusing the Ismailis of generally ignoring the *zahir* or the *shari‘a*.

The esoteric truths or *haqa’iq* formed a gnostic system of thought for the early Ismailis, representing a distinct worldview. The two main components of this system, developed by the 280s AH/890s CE, were a cyclical history of revelations or prophetic eras and a gnostic cosmological doctrine. They applied their cyclical interpretation of time and the religious history of humankind to Judaeo-Christian revelations as well as a number of pre-Islamic religions such as Zoroastrianism with much appeal to non-Muslims. This conception of religious history, reflecting a variety of influences such as Hellenic, Judaeo-Christian, Gnostic as well as eschatological ideas of the earlier Shi‘i, was developed in terms of the eras of different prophets recognised in the Qur’an. This cyclical conception was also combined with the Ismaili doctrine of the imamate inherited from the earlier Imamis.

According to their cyclical view, the Ismailis held that the religious history of humankind proceeded through seven prophetic eras (*dawr*s), of various duration, each one inaugurated by a speaker or enunciator (*natiq*) of a divinely revealed message which in its exoteric (*zahir*) aspect contained a religious law (*shari‘a*). Each *natiq* was, in turn, succeeded by a spiritual legatee (*wasi*), also called the silent one (*samit*) and later the foundation (*asas*), who revealed to the elite the esoteric truths (*haqa’iq*) contained in the *batin* dimension of that era’s message. Each *wasi* was succeeded by seven imams, who guarded the true meaning of the sacred scriptures and laws in their *zahir* and *batin* aspects. The seventh imam, also called *mutimm*, of every era would rise in rank to become the *natiq* of the following era, abrogating the *shari‘a* of the previous era and enunciating a new one. This pattern would change only in the seventh, final era of history. As the seventh imam of the sixth era, the era of Prophet Muhammad and Islam, Imam Muhammad b. Isma‘il was initially expected to return as the Mahdi (or *qa’im*) as well as the *natiq* of the seventh eschatological era when, instead of promulgating a new law, he would fully reveal the esoteric truths of all the preceding revelations. This original cyclical view of religious history was modified after Imam ‘Abd-Allah al-Mahdi’s doctrinal reform. Recognising continuity in the imamate, the seventh era now lost its earlier messianic appeal for the Fatimid Ismailis, for whom the final eschatological era, whatever its nature, was postponed indefinitely into the future. On the other hand, the Qarmatis of Bahrayn and elsewhere continued to consider Imam Muhammad b. Isma‘il as their Mahdi who, on his reappearance as the seventh *natiq*, was expected to initiate the final age of pure spirituality (see F. Daftary, “Dawr,” in *EIr*, VII, pp. 151-53; also Ibn Hawshab Mansur al-Yemen, *Kitab al-rushd*, pp. 185-213; tr. Ivanow, 1955, pp. 29-59; Ja‘far b. Mansur al-Yemen, *Kitab al-kashf*, pp. 14 ff., 103-4, 109-10, 113-14, 132-33, 138, 143, 150, 169-70; Qadi Nu‘man, *Asas al-ta’wil*; Sijistani, *Ithbat*, pp. 181-93; Corbin, 1983, pp. 1-58; Madelung, 1961 , pp. 51 ff., 82-90; Halm, 1978, pp. 18-37; Walker, 1978, 355-66).

The cosmological doctrine of the early Ismailis may be reconstructed from the fragmentary evidence preserved in later Ismaili texts (see especially Stern, 1983, pp. 3-29; Halm, 1978, pp. 18-127, 206-27; — —, “The Cosmology of the Pre-Fatimid Ismailiyya,” in Daftary, ed., 1996, pp. 75-83). This doctrine, representing a gnostic cosmological myth, was espoused by the entire Ismaili (Qarmati) movement until it was superseded by a new cosmology of Neoplatonic provenance. According to this doctrine, through His intention (*irada*) and will (*masi’a*), God first created a light (*nur*) and addressed

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it with the Qur'anic creative imperative *kun* (be!). Through the duplication of its two letters, *kaf* and *nun*, the name acquired its feminine form *Kuni*. On God's command, Kuni created from its light Qadar, its male assistant. Kuni and Qadar were thus the first two principles (*aslan*) of creation. It was out of the original heptad of consonantal letters of Kuni-Qadar, also called the higher letters (*al-huruf al-'ulwiyai*), that all other letters and names emerged; and with the names there simultaneously appeared the very things they symbolised. This doctrine explained how God's creative activity, through the intermediary of Kuni and Qadar, brought forth the beings of the spiritual world, also accounting for the creation of the lower physical world which culminated in the genesis of Man.

The Fatimid Period to 487 AH/1094 CE

In this period, often referred to as the "golden age" of Ismailism, the Ismailis possessed an important state of their own and Ismaili thought and literature as well as *da'wa* activities attained their summit. After his stay in Ramla, Imam 'Abd-Allah al-Mahdi arrived in Egypt in 291 AH/904 CE where he spent a year. Subsequently, he was prevented from going to the Maghrib, where the *da'i* Abu 'Abd-Allah al-Shi'i had been successfully active among the Kutama Berbers from 280 AH/893 CE (see Qadi Nu'man, *Iftitah*, pp. 71-222; Dachraoui, pp. 57-122; Halm, *Empire of the Mahdi*, pp. 9-128; M. Talbi, *L'Emirat Aghlabide* 184-296/800-909, Paris, 1966, pp. 579-672), because the Aghlabid rulers of the region and their 'Abbasid overlords had discovered the Imam's plans and awaited to arrest him. Imam 'Abd-Allah now headed for the remote town of Sijilmasa, in southern Morocco, where he lived quietly for four years (292-96 AH/905-9 CE), maintaining his contacts with Abu 'Abd-Allah who had already commenced his conquest of Ifriqia (the eastern part of the Maghrib) with the help of his Kutama soldier-tribesmen. By 296 AH/908 CE, this Kutama army had achieved much success, signaling the fall of the Aghlabids. On 1 Rajab 296 AH/25 CE March 909, Abu 'Abd-Allah entered Raqqada, the royal city outside of the Aglabid capital of Qayrawan, from where he governed Ifriqia, as al-Mahdi's deputy, for almost a whole year. In Ramadan 296 AH/June 909, he set off at the head of his army for Sijilmasa to hand over the reins of power-to the Ismaili imam himself. Imam 'Abd-Allah al-Mahdi was acclaimed as caliph in a special ceremony in Sijilmasa on 7 Du'l Hijja 296 AH/27 August 909. With these events, the *dawr al-satr* in early Ismailism had also ended. Imam 'Abd-Allah al-Mahdi entered Raqqada on 20 Rabi' II 297 AH/4 January 910 and was immediately acclaimed as caliph (for a detailed eyewitness account of the establishment of Fatimid rule, see Ibn al-Haytham, *Kitab al-Munazarat*). The Ismaili Shi'i caliphate of the Fatimids had now officially commenced in Ifriqia. The new dynasty was named Fatimid (Fatimiya) after the Prophet's daughter, Fatima, to whom Imam al-Mahdi and his successors traced their 'Alid ancestry.

The Fatimids did not abandon the Ismaili *da'wa* on assuming power, as they entertained universal aspirations aiming to extend their rule over the entire Muslim community. However, the early Fatimid caliph-imams, ruling from Ifriqia, encountered numerous difficulties while consolidating their power. In particular, they confronted the hostility of the Kharijite Berbers and the Sunni inhabitants of Qayrawan and other cities of Ifriqia led by their Maliki jurists. Under the circumstances, the Ismaili *da'wa* remained rather inactive in North Africa for some time (Madelung, 1999, pp. 97-104). Fatimid rule was established firmly in the Maghrib only under Imam al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah (341-365 AH/953-975 CE), who succeeded in transforming the Fatimid caliphate from a regional state into a great empire. He was also the first Fatimid caliph-imam to concern himself significantly with the propagation of the Ismaili *da'wa* outside the Fatimid dominions, especially after the transference of the seat of the Fatimid state in 362 AH/973 CE to Egypt, where he founded Cairo as his new capital city. The *da'wa* policy of Imam al-Mu'izz was based on a number of religio-political considerations. In particular, he was apprehensive of the success of the Qarmati propaganda which not only

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undermined the efforts of the Fatimid Ismaili *da'i*s operating in the same lands, notably Iraq, Persia and Transoxania, but also aroused the general anti-Ismaili sentiments of the Sunni Muslims who did not distinguish between the Ismailis and the Qarmatis who had acquired a reputation for irreligiosity and lawlessness. Imam al-Mu'izz's policies soon bore fruit as the Ismaili *da'wa* and Fatimid cause were reinvigorated outside the Fatimid state. Most notably, Abu Ya'qub Sijistani, the *da'i* of Sistan, Makran and Khurasan, who had earlier belonged to the dissident Qarmati faction, transferred his allegiance to the Fatimids; and, consequently, many of his followers in Persia and Central Asia acknowledged the Fatimid caliph-imam. Ismailism also acquired a stronghold in Multan, Sind, where an Ismaili principality was established.

The Caliph-imam al-Mu'izz also permitted into the teachings of the Fatimid *da'wa* the Neoplatonic cosmology elaborated by the *da'i*s of the Iranian lands. Henceforth, this Neoplatonised cosmology was advocated by the Fatimid *da'i*s in preference to the earlier mythological doctrine. In the course of the 9th/10th century, Muhammad Nasafi, Abu Hatim Razi and Sijistani had set about harmonising their Ismaili Shi'i theology with Neoplatonic philosophy. This led to the development of a unique intellectual tradition of philosophical theology in Ismailism. These *da'i*s wrote for the educated classes of society and aimed to attract them intellectually. This is why they expressed their theology, always revolving around the central Shi'i doctrine of the imamate, in terms of the then most intellectually fashionable terminologies and themes. The Iranian *da'i*s elaborated complex metaphysical systems of thought with a distinct Neoplatonised emanational cosmology. In this cosmology, fully elaborated in Sijistani's *Kitab al-Yanabi'* and other works, God is described as absolutely transcendent, beyond being and non-being, and thus unknowable (Sijistani, *Kashf al-mahjub*, pp. 4-15). Here, the Neoplatonic dyad of universal intellect (*'aql*) and universal soul (*nafs*) in the spiritual world replace Kuni and Qadar of the earlier cosmology; and the emanational chain of creation is traced finally to Man, while recognising that God created everything in the spiritual and physical worlds all at once (Sijistani, *Ithbat*, pp. 2-3, 28; Nasir-i Khusraw, *Jame' al-hikmatayn*, pp. 210-32). These *da'i*s also expounded a doctrine of salvation as part of their cosmology. In their soteriology, the ultimate goal of salvation is the human soul's progression towards its Creator in quest of a spiritual reward in an eternal afterlife. This depended on guidance provided by the authorised sources of wisdom in every era of history (see Daftary, 1990, pp. 234-45; Walker, 1993, pp. 67-142; — —, 1996, pp. 26-103). Neo-platonic philosophy also influenced the cosmology elaborated by the Ismaili-connected Ikhwan al-Safa'. It was also in Imam al-Mu'izz's time that Ismaili law was codified and its precepts began to be observed by the judiciary throughout the Fatimid state.

The Ismailis had high esteem for learning and created distinctive traditions and institutions of learning under the Fatimids. The Fatimid *da'wa* was particularly concerned with educating the converts in Ismaili esoteric doctrine, known as the *hikma* or "wisdom". As a result, a variety of lectures or "teaching sessions," generally designated as *majalis* (singular, *majlis*), were organised. The private lectures on Ismaili esoteric doctrine, known as the *majalis al-hikma* or "sessions of wisdom," were reserved exclusively for the Ismaili initiates who had already taken the oath of allegiance and secrecy. The lectures, delivered by the *da'i al-du'at* at the Fatimid palace, were approved beforehand by the imam. Only the imam was the source of the *hikma*; and the chief *da'i*, commonly called *bab* (the Gate) in Ismaili sources, was merely the imam's mouthpiece through whom the Ismailis received their knowledge of Ismaili esoteric doctrines (see Kirmani, *Rahat al-'aql*, pp. 135, 138, 143, 205-8,212-14). Many of these *majalis* were in due course collected and committed to writing. This Fatimid tradition of learning culminated in the *Majalis al-Mu'ayyadiya* of the *da'i* al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din Shirazi (see Maqrizi, *al-Khitat*, I, pp. 390-91; Qalqasandi, X, pp. 434-39; Halm, "The Ismaili Oath of Allegiance," pp 98-112; — —, 1997, pp. 23-29, 41-55; Walker, 1997, pp. 182-86). Another main

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institution of learning founded by the Fatimids was the Dar al-‘Ilm, the House of Knowledge, sometimes also called Dar al-Hikma. Established in 395 AH/ 1005 CE by the Caliph-imam al-Hakim (386-411 AH/996-1021 CE), a variety of religious and non-religious subjects were taught here and it was also equipped with a major library. Many Fatimid *da‘i*s received at least part of their training at the Dar al-‘Ilm (Maqrizi, *al-Khitat*, I, pp. 458-60; Halm, 1997, pp. 71-77; Walker, 1997, pp. 189-93).

Information on the structure and functioning of the Ismaili *da‘wa* organisation was among the most guarded secrets of Ismailism. The religio-political messages of the *da‘wa* were disseminated by networks of *da‘i*s within the Fatimid dominions as well as in other regions referred to as the *jaza’ir* (singular, *jazira*, “island”). Each *jazira* was placed under the charge of a high-ranking *da‘i* referred to as *hujja*; and every *hujja* had a number of *da‘i*s of different ranks working under him. Organised in a strictly hierarchical manner, the Fatimid *da‘wa* was under the overall supervision of the imam and the *da‘i al-du‘at*, or *bab*, who acted as its administrative head. The *da‘wa* organisation developed over time and reached its full elaboration under the Caliph-imam al-Mustansir (see Daftary, “*Da‘i*,” in *EIr*, VI, pp. 590-92; — —, 1990, pp. 224-32; Stern, 1972, pp. 437-50; Hamdani, 1976, pp. 85-114). It was in non-Fatimid regions, in the *jaza’ir*, especially Yemen, Persia and Central Asia, that the Fatimid *da‘wa* achieved lasting success (Daftary, 1999, pp. 29-43; — —, “Medieval Ismailis,” pp. 48-61). The *da‘wa* was intensified in Iraq and Persia under Caliph-imam al-Hakim. Foremost among the *da‘i*s of this period was Hamid al-Din Kirmani. A learned philosopher, he harmonised Ismaili theology with a variety of philosophical traditions in developing his own metaphysical system. In fact, Kirmani’s thought represents a unique tradition within the Iranian school of philosophical Ismailism. He expounded a particular cosmology, replacing the Neoplatonic dyad of intellect and soul in the spiritual world by a system of ten separate intellects in partial adaptation of Farabi’s Aristotelian cosmic system (Kirmani, *Rahat al-‘aql*, pp. 134 ff.) Kirmani’s cosmology was not adopted by the Fatimid *da‘wa*; it later provided the basis for the fourth and final stage in the evolution of Ismaili cosmology at the hands of Tayyibi Musta‘li *da‘i*s of Yemen (see W. Madelung, “Cosmogony and Cosmology in Ismailism,” in *EIr*, VI, pp. 323-24; de Smet, 1995, pp. 16-377; Walker, 1999, pp. 80-117). Imam al-Hakim’s reign also coincided with the initial phase of what was to become known as the Druze religion, founded by a number of *da‘i*s who had come to Cairo from Persia and Central Asia, notably Akram, Hamza, and Darzi. These *da‘i*s proclaimed the end of the era of Islam and declared the divinity of Imam al-Hakim. Kirmani was officially invited to Cairo around 405AH/1014CE to refute the new extremist doctrines from a theological perspective (M. G. S. Hodgson, “Duruz,” in *EI*2, II, pp. 631-34; Bryer).

The Ismaili *da‘wa* activities outside the Fatimid dominions reached their peak in the long reign of Imam al-Mustansir (427-487 AH/1036-1094 CE), even after the Sunni Saljuqs had replaced the Shi‘i Buyids as overlords of the Abbasids in 447 AH/1055 CE. The Fatimid *da‘i*s won many converts in Iraq and different parts of Persia and Central Asia. One of the most prominent *da‘i*s of this period was al-Mu’ayyid fi’l-Din Shirazi who, after his initial career in Fars, settled in Cairo and played an active role in the affairs of the Fatimid *dawla* and Ismaili *da‘wa*. In 450 AH/ 1058 CE, Imam al-Mustansir appointed him as *da‘i al-du‘at*, a post he held for twenty years, with the exception of a brief period, until his death in 470 AH/1078 CE (see al-Mu’ayyid fi’l-Din, *Sirat*; Klemm, pp. 2-63, 136-92). Al-Mu’ayyid established closer relations between Cairo and several *jazira*s, especially Yemen where Ismailism had persisted in a dormant form throughout the 4th/10th century. By the time of Imam al-Mustansir, the leadership of the *da‘wa* in Yemen had fallen into the hands of the *da‘i* ‘Ali b. Muhammad al-Sulayhi, an important chieftain of the Banu Hamdan in the mountainous region of Haraz. ‘Ali al-Sulayhi rose in Haraz in 439 AH/1047 CE, marking the effective foundation of the Sulayhid dynasty ruling over different parts of Yemen as vassals of the Fatimids until 532 AH/1138

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CE. On ‘Alis death in 459 AH/1067 CE, Lamak b. Malik Hammadi was appointed as chief *da‘i* of Yemen while ‘Ali’s son Ahmad al-Mukarram succeeded his father merely as head of the Sulayhid state. The *da‘i* Lamak had earlier spent five years in Cairo, studying with the chief *da‘i* al-Mu’ayyid. From the latter part of Ahmad al-Mukarram’s reign, during which time the Sulayhids lost much of Yemen to Zaydis there, effective authority in the Sulayhid state was transferred to al-Mukarram’s consort, al-Malika al Sayyida Hurra. She also played an increasingly important role in the affairs of the Yemeni *da‘wa* culminating in her appointment as the *hujja* of Yemen by Imam al-Mustansir. This represented the first application of a high rank in the *da‘wa* hierarchy to a woman (‘Umara b. ‘Ali al-Hakami, *Ta’rikh al-Yemen*, in Kay, 1892, text pp. 1-102, tr. pp. 1-137; H. F. al-Hamdani, 1955, pp. 62-231). The Sulayhids also played an active part in the renewed efforts of the Fatimids to spread the *da‘wa* on the Indian subcontinent (see al-Mustansir, *al-Sijillat*, pp. 167-69, 203-6). The Ismaili community founded in Gujarat by *da‘i*s sent from Yemen in the second half of the 5th AH/11th CE century evolved into the modern day Tayyibi Bohra community.

Meanwhile, the Ismili *da‘wa* had continued to spread in many parts of the Iranian world, now incorporated into the Saljuq sultanate. By the early 460s AH/1070s CE, the Persian Ismailis in the Saljuq dominions were under the leadership of ‘Abd al-Malik b. ‘Attash who had his secret headquarters in Isfahan. He was also responsible for launching the career of Hasan-i Sabbah who in due course led the Ismaili *da‘wa* in Persia. In Badakhshan and other eastern parts of the Iranian world too the *da‘wa* had continued to spread after the downfall of the Samanids in 395 AH/1005 CE (Ibn al-Athir, IX, pp. 211, 358, X, pp. 122 ff.,165-66; Barthold, pp. 251, 304-5, 316-18). One of the most eminent *da‘i*s of Imam al-Mustansir’s time, Nasir-i Khusraw played an important part in propagating Ismailism in Central Asia as the *hujja* of Khurasan; he also spread the *da‘wa* to Tabaristan and other Caspian provinces. It was mainly during his period of exile in Yumgan that Nasir extended the *da‘wa* throughout Badakhshan while maintaining his contacts with the *da‘i* al-Mu’ayyid and the *da‘wa* headquarters in Cairo. In fact, the Ismailis of Badakhshan, now divided between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, and their offshoot groups in the Hindu Kush region, now situated in Hunza and other northern areas of Pakistan, regard Shah Nasir-i Khusraw as the founder of their communities (Ivanow, 1948; Berthels, Nasir-i Khusraw; Corbin, “Nasir-i Khusraw,” pp. 520-42; Daftary, 1990, pp. 215-18; Hunsberger, pp. 220-54). By the time the Qarmati state of Bahrayn was finally uprooted in 470 AH/1077-78 CE by some local tribal chieftains, other Qarmati groups in Persia, Iraq, and elsewhere too had either disintegrated or switched their allegiance to the Ismaili *da‘wa* of the Fatimids. There was now, once gain, only one unified Ismaili *da‘wa* under the supreme leadership of the Fatimid caliph-imam.

During the long reign of Imam al-Mustansir the Fatimid caliphate had already embarked on its decline resulting from factional fighting in the Fatimid armies and other political and economic difficulties. The unruliness of the Turkish troops led to a complete breakdown of law and order, and drove Imam al-Mustansir to appeal to Badr al-Jamali, an Armenian general in the service of the Fatimids, for help. Badr arrived in Cairo in 466 AH/1074 CE and soon assumed the leadership of civil, judicial and religious administration in addition to being “commander of the armies” (*amir al-joyush*), his main source of power. He managed to restore peace and relative prosperity to Egypt in the course of his long vizierate of some twenty years, as the de facto ruler of the Fatimid state. Badr died in 487 AH/1094 CE, having arranged for his son Afzal to succeed him in the vizierate. Henceforth, real power in the Fatimid state remained in the hands of the Fatimid viziers who also commanded the troops, whence their title of “Vizier of the Sword” (*wazir al-sayf*). They were also in charge of the *da‘wa* organisation and activities.

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Imam Al-Mustansir, the eighth Fatimid caliph and eighteenth Ismaili imam, died in Du'l-Hijja 487 AH/December 1094 CE, a few months after Badr al-Jamali. Thereupon, the unified Ismaili *da'wa* split into two rival factions, as Imam al-Mustansir's son and original heir-designate, Nizar, was deprived of his succession rights by Afzal who quickly installed Nizar's younger half-brother to the Fatimid throne with the title of al-Musta'li bi'llah (487-95 AH/ 1094-1101 CE). The two factions were later designated as the Nizariya and Musta'liya. Afzal immediately obtained for al-Musta'li the allegiance of the notables of the Fatimid court and the leaders of the Ismaili *da'wa* in Cairo who now also recognised al-Musta'li's imamate. Nizar refused to pay homage to al-Musta'li and fled to Alexandria where he rose in revolt, but he was defeated and killed in 488 AH/1095 CE. The imamate of al-Musta'li was recognised by the Ismaili communities of Egypt, Yemen, and western India. These Ismailis, who depended on the Fatimid regime, later traced the imamate in the progeny of al-Musta'li. The bulk of the Ismailis of Syria, too, joined the Musta'li camp. On the other hand, the Ismailis of Persia who were then already under the leadership of Hasan-i Sabbah supported the succession rights of Nizar. The Central Asian Ismailis seem to have remained uninvolved in the Nizari-Musta'li schism for quite some time (al-Mustansir, *al-Sijillat*, pp. 109-18; Ibn al-Qalanisi, p. 128; Ibn Muyassar, pp. 59 ff., Ibn al-Dawadari, VI, pp. 443 ff.; Maqrizi, *Itte'az*, III, pp. 11 ff.; . — —, *al-Khetat*, I, pp. 422-23; Ibn Tagriberdi, V, pp. 142-45).

Musta'li Ismailism

The Fatimid state survived for another 77 years after the Nizari-Musta'li schism of 487 AH/1094 CE. These decades witnessed the rapid decline of the Fatimid caliphate which was beset by continuing crises. Al-Musta'li and his successors on the Fatimid throne, who were mostly minors and remained powerless in the hands of their viziers, continued to be recognised as imams by the Musta'li Ismailis who themselves soon split into Hafizi and Tayyibi branches. After al-Musta'li's premature death in 495 AH/1101 CE, the all-powerful vizier Afzal placed his five-year-old son on the throne with the caliphal title of al-Amir bi-Ahkam Allah. Afzal was murdered in 515 AH/1121 CE; and when al-Amir himself was assassinated in 524 AH/1130 CE, the Musta'li Ismailis were confronted with a major crisis of succession. A son, named Tayyib, had been born to al-Amir a few months before his death; and he had been designated as the heir. But on al-Amir's death, power was assumed by his cousin, 'Abd al-Majid, the eldest member of the Fatimid family, and nothing more was heard of Tayyib. After a brief confusing period in Fatimid history, when Twelver Shi'ism instead of Ismailism was adopted as the official religion of the Fatimid state by Afzal's son Kutayfat who had succeeded to the vizierate, 'Abd al-Majid re-emerged on the scene in 526 AH/1132 CE, proclaiming himself as caliph and imam with the title of al-Hafiz le-Din Allah; and Ismailism was reinstated as the state's religion (Ibn al-Qalanisi, pp. 203, 229, 242 ff., 262, 270, 272-73, 295-96, 308; Ibn Zafir, pp. 94-101; Ibn Muyassar, pp. 113-41; Ibn al-Dawadari, VI, pp. 506-56; Maqrizi, *Itte'az*, III, pp. 135-92; Ibn Tagriberdi, V, pp. 237-87).

The irregular proclamation of al-Hafiz as imam, whose father had not been imam previously, caused a major schism in Musta'li Ismailism. As in the case of the Nizari-Musta'li split, the Musta'li *da'wa* headquarters in Cairo endorsed the imamate of al-Hafiz, who claimed al-Amir had personally designated him (see Qalqasandi, IX, pp. 291-97). Therefore, it was also acknowledged by the Musta'li Ismailis of Egypt and Syria as well as a portion of the Musta'lis of Yemen. These Ismailis, who recognised al-Hafiz and the later Fatimid caliphs as their imams, became known as the Hafiziya. On the other hand, the Sulayhid queen of Yemen, al-Sayyida, who had already drifted away from Cairo, upheld Tayyib's cause and recognised him as al-Amir's successor to the imamate. As a result, the Musta'li community of the Sulayhid state, too, recognised Tayyib's imamate. These Musta'li Ismailis

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of Yemen, with some minority groups in Egypt and Syria, initially known as the Ameriya, became later designated as the Tayyibiya. Hafiziya Ismailism disappeared completely soon after the collapse of the Fatimid dynasty and caliphate. The Ayyubid Salah al-Din, the last Fatimid vizier, ended Fatimid rule in 567 AH/ 1171 CE and thereafter persecuted the Ismailis of Egypt. Henceforth, Musta‘li Ismailism survived only in its Tayyibi form (Casanova, pp. 415-45; Stern, 1951, pp. 193-255; Daftary, 1990, pp. 256-84).

Tayyibi Ismalism found its permanent stronghold in Yemen, where it received the initial support of the Sulayhid queen al-Sayyida who had been looking after the affairs of the Musta‘li *da‘wa* there with the help of the *da‘i* Lamak b. Malik Hammadi and then his son Yahya (d. 520 AH/1126 CE). It was soon after 526 AH/1132 CE that the Sulayhid queen broke her relations with Cairo and declared Yahya’s successor Du’ayb b. Musa as the *da‘i* mutlaq, or *da‘i* with absolute authority, to lead the affairs of the Tayyibi Musta‘li *da‘wa* on behalf of Tayyib, who was thought to be in hiding. This marked the foundation of the Tayyibi *da‘wa* independently of the Sulayhid state. On Du’ayb’s death in 546 AH/1151 CE, Ibrahim Hamidi succeeded to the headship of the Tayyibi *da‘wa* as the second *da‘i mutlaq*. The Tayyibi *da‘wa* spread successfully in the Haraz region even though it did not receive the support of any Yemeni rulers after the death of the Sulayhid queen in 532 AH/1138 CE. After Ibrahim Hamidi (d. 557 AH/1162 CE), the position of *da‘i mutlaq* remained hereditary among his descendants until 605 AH/1209 CE when it passed to ‘Ali b. Muhammad al-Walid of the Banu al-Walid al-Anf family of the Quraysh, and it then remained in this family, with minor interruptions, until 946 AH/1539 CE. The Tayyibi Ismailis are of the opinion that in the current period of *satr*, initiated by Tayyib’s own concealment, their imamate has been handed down among his descendants down to the present time. All these imams have remained in concealment, and in their absence the *da‘i mutlaq*s lead the affairs of the Tayyibi *da‘wa* and community (Hamdani, 1970, pp. 279 ff.; Daftary, 1990, pp. 285-91; . — — , “Sayyida Hurra: The Ismaili Sulayhid Queen of Yemen,” in G. R. G. Hambly, ed., *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, New York, 1998, pp. 117-30).

In the doctrinal field, the Tayyibis maintained the Fatimid traditions, and preserved a good portion of the Ismaili texts of the Fatimid period. Similarly to the Fatimids, they emphasised the equal importance of the *zahir* and *batin* aspects of religion, also retaining the earlier interest of the Ismailis in cyclical history and cosmology which served as the basis of their gnostic, esoteric *haqa’iq* system of religious thought with its distinctive eschatological themes. This system was founded largely by Ibrahim Hamidi who drew extensively on Kirmani’s *Rahat al-‘aql* and synthesised its cosmological doctrine of the ten separate intellects with gnostic mythical elements (see Hamidi, *Kanz al-walad*). This represented the final modification of Neoplatonic cosmology in Ismaili thought (Corbin, 1983, pp. 37-58, 65 ff., 76 ff., 103 ff., 173-81; Daftary, 1990, pp. 291-97). The Tayyibi *da‘wa* organisation has drawn on Fatimid antecedents with certain modifications. As in the case of imams, every *da‘i mutlaq* has appointed his successor by the rule of the *nass*. The *da‘i* mutlaq was normally assisted in the affairs of the Tayyibi *da‘wa* by several subordinate *da‘i*s designated as *ma’dhun* and *mukasir*. Meanwhile, the Tayyibi *da‘i mutlaq*s in Yemen maintained close relations with the Tayyibi community in western India. There, the Ismaili converts, mostly of Hindu descent, were known as Bohras, a name believed to have been derived from the Gujarati term *vohorvu* meaning “to trade,” since the *da‘wa* originally spread among the trading community of Gujarat. The Ismaili Bohras of Gujarat were persecuted under the Sunni sultans of the region from 793 AH/1391 CE, forcing them to observe *taqiya* in the guise of Sunnism. With the establishment of Mongol rule in 980 AH/1572 CE, however, Bohras began to enjoy a certain degree of religious freedom and conversions to Sunni Islam ended.

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On the death of the twenty-sixth *da‘i mutlaq*, Da’ud b. ‘Ajabshah, in 997 AH/1589 CE, his succession was disputed, leading to the Da’udi-Sulaymani schism in the Tayyibi *da‘wa* and community. The great majority of Tayyibis, then located in India, acknowledged Da’ud Burhan al-Din (d. 1021 AH/1612 CE) as their new *da‘i* and became known as Da’udis. A small number of Yemeni Tayyibis, too, supported the Da’udi cause. On the other hand, a minority of all Tayyibis, who accounted for the bulk of the community in Yemen, recognised Sulayman b. Hasan (d. 1005 AH/ 1597 CE) as their new, twenty-seventh *da‘i*; they became known as Sulaymanis. Henceforth, the Da’udi and Sulaymani Tayyibis followed separate lines of *da‘i*s. The Da’udi *da‘i*s continued to reside in India, while the headquarters of the Sulaymani *da‘wa* were established in Yemen (Muhammad ‘Ali, *Mawsem-e bahar*, III, pp. 169-259; Misra, pp. 27-31; Daftary, 1990, pp. 299-306). Subsequently, the Da’udi Bohras were further subdivided in India due to periodical challenges to the authority of their *da‘i mutlaq*.

In 1200 AH/1785 CE, the headquarters of the Da’udi *da‘wa* was transferred to Surat, where the forty-third *da‘i*, ‘Abd ‘Ali Sayf al-Din (1213-32 AH/1798-1817 CE), founded a seminary known as Sayfi Dars, also Jami‘a Sayfia, for the education of Da’udi scholars and the functionaries of the community. This seminary, with a major library, has continued to serve as an institution of traditional Islamic learning for the Da’udi Bohras. Since 1232 AH/1817 CE, the office of the *da‘i mutlaq* of the Da’udi Tayyibis has remained among the descendants of Shaykh Jiwanji Awrangabadi, while the community has experienced intermittent strife and crisis rooted in opposition to the *da‘i*’s authority. The present *da‘i mutlaq* of the Da’udi *da‘wa*, Sayyidna Burhan al-Din, succeeded to his position as the fifty second in the series in 1385 AH/1965 CE. The total Da’udi population of the world is currently (2002) estimated at around 900,000, located mainly in South Asia. Since the 1920s, Bombay, with its largest single concentration of Da’udi Bohras, has served as the permanent administrative seat of the Da’udi *da‘i mutlaq*. The Tayyibi Bohras, together with the Nizari Khojas, were also among the earliest Asian communities to settle, during the nineteenth century and subsequently, in East Africa (Amiji, 1969, pp. 141-81; — —, 1975, pp. 27-61).

In Yemen, the leadership of the Sulaymani Tayyibis has remained hereditary, since 1088 AH/1677 CE, with few exceptions, in the same Makrami family. Unlike the Da’udis, the Sulaymanis have not experienced succession disputes and schisms. The Sulaymani *da‘i*s established their headquarters in Najran, in northeastern Yemen, and ruled over that region with the military support of the local Banu Yam. In the twentieth century, the political prominence of the Sulaymani *da‘i*s, checked earlier by the Ottomans, was further curtailed by the Sa‘udi family; Najran was, in fact, annexed to Saudi Arabia in 1353 AH/1934 CE. The present *da‘i mutlaq* of the Sulaymanis, the forty-ninth in the series, Sayyidna Sarafi Husayn Makrami who succeeded to office in 1396 AH/1976 CE, lives in Saudi Arabia. At present, the Sulaymani Tayyibi Ismailis of Yemen number around 70,000 persons. The Sulaymani Bohras represent a very small community of a few thousands in India (Daftary, 1990, pp. 318-23).

Nizari Ismalism of the Alamut Period

By 487 AH/1094 CE, Hasan-i Sabbah, who preached the Ismaili *da‘wa* on behalf of the Fatimids within the Saljuq dominions in Persia, had emerged as the leader of the Persian Ismailis. He had already been following an independent policy, and his seizure of the mountain fortress of Alamut in 483 AH/1090 CE signalled the commencement of an open revolt against the Saljuq Turks as well as the foundation of what was to become the Nizari Ismaili state. As an Ismaili Shi‘i, Hasan-i Sabbah could not have tolerated the anti-Shi‘i policies of the Saljuqs, who as the new champions of Sunni Islam aimed to uproot the Fatimids. Hasan’s revolt was also an expression of Persian “national” sentiments, as the alien rule of the Saljuq Turks was intensely detested by the Persians of different

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social classes. This may explain why he substituted Persian for Arabic as the religious language of the Ismailis of Persia (see Daftary, "Hasan-i Sabbah and the Origins of the Nizari Ismaili Movement," in Daftary, ed., 1996, pp. 181-204). It was under such circumstances that, in al-Mustansir's succession dispute, Hasan supported Nizar's cause and severed his relations with the Fatimid regime and the *da'wa* headquarters in Cairo which had supported al-Musta'li. By this decision, Hasan had founded the independent Nizari Ismaili *da'wa* on behalf of the Nizari imam. As a result of this decision, the Nizari *da'wa* survived the downfall of the Fatimid dynasty, a pattern similar to the subsequent fate of the Tayyibi *da'wa* in Yemen (Juvayni, III, pp. 186-216; tr. Boyle, II, pp. 666-83; Rashid al-Din, pp. 97-137; Kashani, pp. 133-72; Hodgson, 1955, pp. 41-98; Daftary, 1990, pp. 324-71).

The revolt of the Persian Ismailis soon acquired a distinctive pattern and method of struggle, adapted to the decentralised power structure of the Saljuq sultanate and their much superior military power. Hasan devised a strategy to overwhelm the Saljuqs locality by locality and from a multitude of impregnable mountain strongholds. Hasan Sabbah did not divulge the name of Nizar's successor to the imamate. In fact, numismatic evidence shows that Nizar's own name appeared on coins minted at Alamut for about seventy years after his death in 488 AH/1095 CE, while his progeny were blessed anonymously (Miles, pp. 155-62). The early Nizari Ismailis were thus left without an accessible imam in another *dawr al-satr*; and, as in the pre-Fatimid period of concealment, the absent imam was represented in the community by a *hujja*, his chief representative. Hasan and his next two successors at Alamut as heads of the Nizari *da'wa* and state, were recognised as such *hujja*s (*Haft bab-e Baba Sayyidna*, pp. 21-22; Abu Ishaq Quhistani, text p. 23). It seems that already in Hasan Sabbah's time many Nizaris believed that a son or grandson of Nizar had been secretly brought from Egypt to Persia, and he became the progenitor of the line of the Nizari imams who later emerged at Alamut (Juvayni, III, pp. 180-81,231-37; tr. Boyle, II, pp. 663, 691-95; Rashid al-Din, pp. 79, 166-68; Kashani, pp.115, 202-4).

From early on in the Alamut period, the outsiders had the impression that the Persian Ismailis had initiated a "new preaching" (*al-da'wa al-jadida*) in contrast to the "old preaching" (*al-da'wa al-qadima*) of the Fatimid times. The "new preaching" did not, however, represent any new doctrines; it was merely a reformulation of the old Shi'i doctrine of *ta'lim*, or authoritative teaching by the imam. It was mainly Hasan Sabbah himself who restated this doctrine in a theological treatise entitled *al-Fusul al-arba'a*, or *The Four Chapters*. This treatise, originally written in Persian, has been preserved only in parts (see Shahrastani, pp. 150-52; tr. Gimaret and Monnot, I, pp. 560-65; Juvayni, III, pp. 195-99; tr. Boyle, II, pp. 671-73; Rashidal-Din, pp. 105-7; Kashani, pp. 142-43; Hodgson, 1955, pp. 51-61, 325-28). The doctrine of *ta'lim*, emphasising the autonomous teaching authority of each imam in his own time, became the central doctrine of the Nizaris who, henceforth, were designated also as the *Ta'limiya*. The intellectual challenge posed to the Sunni establishment by the doctrine of *ta'lim*, which also refuted the legitimacy of the 'Abbasid caliph as the spiritual spokesman of all Muslims, called forth the reaction of the Sunnis. Many Sunni scholars, led by Ghazali, attacked the Ismaili doctrine of *ta'lim* (see Ghazali, *Faza'ih al-Batiniya*, ed. 'A. Badawi, Cairo, 1964; Mitha, pp. 28-102).

By 489 AH/1096 CE, when the fortress of Lamasar was seized, Hasan had acquired or built numerous mountain strongholds in Rudbar, the centre of Nizari power. At the same time, the Ismailis had come to possess a network of fortresses and several towns in Quhistan, in southeastern Khurasan, which remained the second most important territory of the Nizari state. Later, the Nizaris acquired Girdkuh and other fortresses in the regions of Qumes, Arrajan and Zagros. By the opening years of the 6th/12th century, Hasan had begun to extend his activities into Syria by sending Persian *da'i*s from Alamut. By the final years of Hasan's life, the anti-Saljuq revolt of the Persian Nizaris had lost its

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effectiveness, much in the same way that the Saljuqs under Barkiaruq and Muhammad Tapar had failed in their prolonged military campaigns to uproot the Persian Ismailis from their strongholds. The Ismaili-Saljuq relations had now entered a new phase of "stalemate" (Daftary, 1990, pp. 340-44, 361-65; Hillenbrand, pp. 205-20).

After Hasan Sabbah's death in 518 AH/1124 CE, Kia Buzurg-Umid followed as the head of the Nizari *da'wa* and state. A capable administrator like his predecessor, Buzurg-Umid (518-32 AH/1124-38 CE) maintained the policies of Hasan and further strengthened and extended the Nizari state. The Ismaili-Saljuq stalemate essentially continued during the long reign of Buzurg-Umid's son Muhammad (532-57 AH/1138-62 CE) as the third lord of Alamut (Juvayni, III, pp. 216-22; tr. Boyle, II, pp. 683-86; Rashid al-Din, pp. 137-61; Kashani, pp. 172-99; Daftary, 1990, pp. 371-86). By then, the Nizari state had acquired its distinctive administrative structure. Each Nizari territory was placed under the overall leadership of a chief *da'i* appointed from Alamut; the leader of the Quhistani Nizaris was known as *muhtasham*. These *da'i*s, as well as the commanders of major strongholds, enjoyed a large degree of independence and local initiative, contributing to the dynamism and resilience of the Nizari movement. Being preoccupied with their struggle and survival in an extremely hostile environment, the Nizaris produced military commanders rather than learned theologians of the types operating under the Fatimids. Consequently, the literary activities of the Nizaris were rather limited during the Alamut period. Nevertheless, the early Nizaris did maintain a sophisticated outlook and a literary tradition, elaborating their teachings in response to changed circumstances. Hasan Sabbah himself is credited with establishing an impressive library at Alamut. Other major fortresses in Persia and Syria, too, were later equipped with significant collections of manuscripts, documents and scientific instruments. Firmly united with a remarkable sense of mission, the Nizaris acknowledged the supreme leadership of Alamut and obeyed without any dissent the religious policies initiated at that fortress initially by the Nizari imam's *hujja*s and, subsequently, by the imams themselves. Meanwhile, the Nizaris had been eagerly expecting the appearance of their imam, who had remained inaccessible since Nizar's murder in 488AH/1095CE.

The fourth lord of Alamut, Imam Hasan II, to whom the Nizaris referred with the expression *'ala dhikrihi'l-salam* (on his mention be peace), succeeded to leadership in 557 AH/1162 CE and, soon after, declared the *qiyama* or resurrection initiating a new phase in the religious history of the early Nizaris. On 17 Ramazan 559/8 AH August 1164 CE, in the presence of the representatives of different Nizari communities who had gathered at Alamut, he delivered a sermon in which he proclaimed the *qiyama*, the long awaited Last Day. About two months later, a similar ceremony was held at the fortress of Muminabad, near Birjand, and the earlier *khutba* and message were read out by Ra'is Muzaffar, the *muhtasham* in Quhistan. There, Imam Hasan II's position was more clearly equated with that of Imam al-Mustansir as God's caliph (*khalifa*) on earth, implicitly claiming the status of imam for the lord of Alamut (Juvayni, III, pp. 222-39; tr. Boyle, II, pp. 686-97; Rashid al-Din, pp. 162-70; Kashani, pp. 199-208; Abu Ishaq Quhistani, text pp. 19, 24, 38-39, 40-44, 46-47, 53, 58, tr. pp. 19, 23, 38, 40-44, 46-47, 53-54, 58; Hodgson, 1955, pp. 146-59; Lewis, 1967, pp. 70-75, Daftary, 1990, pp. 385-91).

Imam Hasan II relied heavily on Ismaili *ta'wil* and earlier traditions, interpreting *qiyama* symbolically and spiritually for the Nizaris. Accordingly, *qiyama* meant nothing more than the manifestation of unveiled truth (*haqiqa*) in the person of the Nizari imam; it was a spiritual resurrection only for the Nizaris who acknowledged the rightful imam of the time and were now capable of understanding the truth, the esoteric essence of Islam. It was in this sense that Paradise was actualised for the Nizaris in this world. The Nizaris, like Sufis, were now to rise to a spiritual level of existence, from *zahir* to

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batin, from *shari'a* to *haqiqa*, or from the literal interpretation of the law to an understanding of its spiritual essence and the eternal truths. On the other hand, the "outsiders," the non-Nizaris who were incapable of recognising the truth, were rendered spiritually non-existent. The imam proclaiming the *qiyama* would be the *qa'im al-qiyama*, or the lord of resurrection, a rank which in Ismaili religious hierarchy was always higher than that of an ordinary imam.

Imam Hasan II's son and successor Imam Nur al-Din Muhammad devoted his long reign (561-607 AH/1166-1210 CE) to a systematic doctrinal elaboration of the *qiyama*. The exaltation of the autonomous teaching authority of the present Nizari imam now became the central feature of the Nizari thought; and *qiyama* came to imply a complete personal transformation of the Nizaris who were expected to perceive the imam in his true spiritual reality. Imam Nur al-Din Muhammad also made every Nizari imam potentially a *qa'im*, capable of inaugurating the era of *qiyama*. In the spiritual world of resurrection there would no longer be any need for ranks of the *da'wa* intervening between the imam-*qa'im* and his followers. There would now remain only three categories of persons, reflecting different levels of existence in terms of relationships to the Nizari imam. There are the "people of opposition" (*ahl-i tazadd*), the non-Nizaris who exist only in the realm of appearances (*zahir*) and are spiritually non-existent. Secondly, there are the ordinary followers of the Nizari imam, the "people of gradation" (*ahl-i tarattub*), who have penetrated the *shari'a* to its inner meaning. However, they have access only to partial truth, as they still do not fully understand the *batin*. Finally, there are the "people of union" (*ahl-i vahdat*), the Nizari super-elite, or the *akhass-i khass*, who perceived the imam in his true spiritual reality as the epiphany (*mazhar*) of the word (*kalima*) of God (Tusi, *Rawza*, text pp. 104-5, 112, tr. pp. 119, 128-29; — — , Sayr, text pp. 17-18, tr. pp. 47-48); only they arrive at the realm of the *haqiqa*, in a sense the *batin* behind the *batin*, where they find full truth and, as such, they enjoy full salvation in the paradisal state actualised for them in this world. It seems that the privileged state of the *ahl-i vahdat* was attainable by only a few. Imam Nur al-Din Muhammad also explicitly affirmed the Nizarid Fatimid descent of his father and, therefore, himself, explaining that Imam Hasan II was in fact imam and the son of a descendant of Imam Nizar b. al-Mustansir who had earlier found refuge in Alamut. Henceforth, the Nizaris recognised the lords of Alamut, beginning with Hasan II, as their imams (*Haft bab-e Baba Sayyidna*, pp. 4-42; tr. Hodgson, in his *Order of Assassins*, pp. 279-324; Tusi, *Rawza*, text pp. 42, 44-45, 47-56, 98-99, 101-2, tr. pp. 46-47, 49-50, 52-63, 111-12, 115-16; Juvayni, III, 240-42; tr. Boyle, II, pp. 697-99; Rashid al-Din, pp. 170-73; Kashani, pp. 208-14; Hodgson, 1955, pp. 160-84, 210-17).

Meanwhile, the Syrian Nizaris had entered into an important phase of their history under Rashid al-Din Sinan, their most famous leader who had been appointed as chief *da'i* in Syria by Imam Hasan II soon after his own accession in 557 AH/1162 CE. Sinan reorganised and strengthened the Syrian Nizari *da'wa*, also consolidating their network of fortresses in the Jabal Bahra, in central Syria. Aiming to safeguard his community, he entered into intricate and shifting alliances with the major neighboring powers and rulers, notably the Crusaders, the Zangids and Salah al-Din. Sinan taught his own version of the doctrine of *qiyama*, which did not acquire deep roots in the Syrian Nizari community. The only one of the Syrian *da'i*s to act somewhat independently of Alamut, Sinan led the Syrian Nizaris for almost three decades to the peak of their power and fame until his death in 589 AH/1193 CE (Abu Firas Shihab al-Din Maynaqi, *Fasl*, in Guyard, pp. 387-489; B. Lewis, "Kamal al-Din's Biography of Rashid al-Din Sinan," *Arabica* 13, 1966, pp. 225-67; — — , 1967, pp. 110-18; Hodgson, 1955, pp. 185-209; Mirza, pp. 22-39; Daftary, 1994, pp. 67-74, 94 ff.).

Imam Nur al-Din Muhammad's son and successor, Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan (607-18 AH/1210-21 CE), proclaimed his own daring religious policy, aimed at redressing the isolation of the Nizaris from

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the larger world of Sunni Islam. Consequently he publicly repudiated the doctrine of *qiyama* and ordered his followers to observe the *shari'a* in its Sunni form, inviting Sunni jurists to instruct his people. Indeed, Imam Jalal-al-Din Hasan did his utmost to convince the outside world of his new policy. In 608 AH/1211 CE, the 'Abbasid caliph al-Nasir acknowledged the Nizari imam's rapprochement with Sunni Islam and issued a decree to that effect. Henceforth, the rights of Jalal al-Din Hasan to Nizari territories were officially recognised by the Abbasid caliph, as well as by the Khwarazm-Shahs, who were then establishing their own empire in Persia as successors to the Saljuqs, and by other Sunni rulers. The Nizaris accepted their imam's new instructions without any opposition. They evidently viewed Jalal al-Din Hasan's declarations as a reimposition of *taqiya*, which had been lifted in *qiyama* times; the observance of *taqiya* could, thus, imply any type of accommodation to the outside world as deemed necessary by the infallible imam. Be that as it may, the Nizari imam had now successfully achieved peace and security for his community and state (Juvayni, III, pp. 243-49; tr. Boyle, II, pp. 699-704; Rashid al-Din, pp. 174-78; Kashani, pp. 214-17; Hodgson, 1955, pp. 217-25; Daftary, 1990, pp. 404-7).

Under Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad (618-53 AH/1221-55 CE), Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan's son and successor as the penultimate lord of Alamut, the Sunni *shari'a* was gradually relaxed within the community and the Nizari traditions associated with *qiyama* were revived, although the Nizaris continued to appear to outsiders in Sunni guise. The Nizari leadership now also made a sustained effort to explain the different doctrinal declarations and religious policies of the lords of Alamut. All these teachings were interpreted comprehensively within a coherent theological framework, aiming to provide satisfactory explanations for the seemingly contradictory policies adopted at Alamut. Intellectual life indeed flourished in the long reign of Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad, receiving a special impetus from the influx of outside scholars, who fled the first waves of the Mongol invasions and took refuge in the Nizari fortress communities. Foremost among such scholars, who availed themselves of the Nizari libraries and patronage of learning, was Nasir al-Din Tusi, who made major contributions to the Nizari Ismaili thought of the late Alamut period during his three decades amongst them in Quhistan and Rudbar.

It is mainly through Tusi's extant Ismaili writings, notably his *Rowzat al-taslim*, that we have an exposition of Nizari thought of the Alamut period as it developed during *qiyama* and its aftermath. *Qiyama*, Tusi explained, was not necessarily a final eschatological event, but a transitory condition of life when the veil of *taqiya* would be lifted to make the unveiled truth accessible. In the current cycle of history, however, the full *qiyama*, or Great Resurrection (*qiyamat-i qiyamat*) would still occur at the end of the era initiated by Prophet Muhammad. Be that as it may, the identification between *shari'a* and *taqiya*, implied by the teachings of Imam Hasan II, was now made explicit by Tusi who also identified *qiyama* with *haqiqa*. Thus, the imposition of the Sunni *shari'a* by Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan was presented as a return to *taqiya*, and to a new period of *satr* or concealment, when the truth (*haqiqa*) would be once again concealed in the *batin* of religion. The condition of *qiyama* could, in principle, be granted by the current Nizari imam at any time, because every imam was potentially also an imam-*qa'im*. Thus, Tusi now expounded a new doctrine of *satr*. In his integrated theological presentation, human life could alternate between periods of *qiyama*, when reality is manifest, and *satr*, when it would be concealed, requiring the observance of *taqiya*. In this sense, the term *satr* was redefined to imply the concealment of the religious truths and the true spiritual reality of the imam, and not the physical inaccessibility of his person, as had been the cases in the pre-Fatimid and early Alamut periods (Tusi, *Rawza*, text pp. 61-63, 101-2, 110, 117-19, 132-33, 143, 145, 147, tr. pp. 67-69, 115-16, 126, 136-38, 154-55, 173, and elsewhere; Hodgson, 1955, pp. 225-38; Daftary, 1990, pp.

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407-12). The teachings of the late Alamut period brought the Nizaris even closer to the esoteric traditions more commonly associated with Sufism.

Nizari fortunes in Persia were rapidly reversed when the collapse of the Khwarazmian Empire brought them into direct confrontation with the invading Mongols. When the Great Khan Mongke decided to complete the Mongol conquests of western Asia, he assigned a priority to the destruction of the Nizari Ismaili state, a task completed with some difficulty in 654 AH/1256 CE by Hulegu who led the main Mongol expedition into Persia. Shortly before, in 653 AH/1255 CE, Imam ‘Ala al-Din Muhammad had been succeeded by his eldest son Imam Rukn al-Din Khurshah, who would rule for exactly one year as the last lord of Alamut (Juvayni, III, pp. 259-78; tr. Boyle, II, 712-25; Rashid al-Din, pp. 185-95; Kashani, pp. 224-33; Daftary, 1990, pp. 416 ff., 421-30). The youthful imam engaged in a complex, and ultimately futile, series of negotiations with Hulegu. On 29 Shawwa1 654 AH/19 November 1256 CE, Imam Khurshah descended from the fortress of Maymundiz in Rudbar in the company of Nasir al-Din Tusi and Nizari dignitaries, and surrendered to the Mongols. With the fall of Alamut a month later, the fate of the Nizari state was sealed. Alamut and many other fortresses were demolished. In the spring of 655 AH/1257 CE, Imam Khurshah himself was killed by his Mongol guards in Mongolia, where he had gone to see the Great Khan. By then, the Mongols had massacred large numbers of Nizaris in their protective custody. Shortly afterwards, the Nizari castles in Syria submitted to the Mamluks; *Kashf* was the last Nizari outpost there to fall in 671 AH/1273 CE. However, the Syrian Nizaris were permitted to remain in their traditional abodes as loyal subjects of the Mamluks and their successors. Having lost their political prominence, the Nizaris henceforth lived secretly in numerous scattered communities.

Post-Alamut Nizari Ismailism

In the wake of the Mongol debacle, the Persian Nizari Ismailis survived the downfall of their state and strongholds. Many migrated to Central Asia and Sind, where Ismaili communities already existed. Other isolated groups in Persia soon disintegrated or were assimilated into the religiously dominant communities of their locality. The centralised *da‘wa* organisation and direct leadership of the Nizari imams was no longer accessible. Under these circumstances, Nizari communities developed independently while resorting to the strict observance of *taqiya* and adopting different external guises. Many Nizari groups in the Iranian world disguised themselves as Sunni Muslims. Meanwhile, a group of Nizari dignitaries had managed to hide Imam Rukn al-Din Khurshah’s minor son, Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad, who had then succeeded to the Nizari imamate. Subsequently, Imam Shams al-Din was taken to Azerbaijan, where he and his next few successors to the imamate lived secretly.

Imam Shams al-Din, who in certain legendary accounts has been confused with Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi’s spiritual guide Shams-i Tabriz, died around 710 AH/1310 CE. An obscure dispute over his succession split the line of the Nizari imams and their following into the Qasim-shahi and Muhammad-shahi (or Mu’min-shahi) branches (Ivanow, 1938, pp. 57-79; Daftary, 1990, pp. 446 ff., 451-52). The Muhammad-shahi imams, who initially had more followers in northern Persia and Central Asia, transferred their seat to India in the 10th AH/16th CE century and by the end of the 12th AH/18th CE century this line had become discontinued. The sole surviving Muhammad-shahi Nizaris, currently numbering about 15,000, are to be found in Syria where they are locally known as the Ja‘fariya (Daftary, 1990, pp. 532-34). The Qasim-shahi branch has persisted to the present time. The last four Qasim-shahi imams have enjoyed prominence under their hereditary title of Aqa Khan (also Agha Khan and Aga Khan). It was also in the early post-Alamut times that Persian Nizaris, as part of their *taqiya* practices, disguised themselves under the cover of Sufism, without establishing formal

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affiliations with any of the Sufi *tariqa*s. The practice soon gained wide currency among the Nizaris of Central Asia and Sind as well. The earliest manifestation of this phenomenon is found in the writings of the poet Hakim Sa‘d al-Din Nizari Quhistani (d. 720 AH/1320 CE). He is the earliest known post-Alamut Nizari author to use poetic expressions and Sufi idioms for concealing Ismaili ideas, a model adopted later by many Nizari authors of Persia, Afghanistan and Central Asia.

In early post-Alamut times, a most obscure phase in Ismaili history, the Nizaris had some success in regrouping in Daylam, where they remained active throughout the Ilkhanid and Timurid periods. A certain Khudavand Muhammad (d. 807 AH/1404 CE), a Muhammad-shahi imam, even occupied Alamut for a while, before he was dislodged by Sayyid ‘Ali, the powerful Zaydi ruler of Daylaman. The Nizaris did not survive in the Caspian region after the 10th AH/16th CE century (Zahir al-Din Mar‘ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Daylamestan*, ed. M. Sotuda, Tehran, 1347 S./1968, pp. 52-68, 69-70, 76 ff., 81 ff., 89, 121, 123-30). Sultan Muhammad b. Jahangir (d. 998 AH/1589 CE) and his son Sultan Jahangir (d. 1006 AH/1597 CE), belonging to Banu Iskandar rulers of Kujur, adhered to Nizari Ismailism and spread it in their dominions; they represent the last known references in the sources to Ismailism in northern Persia (Shaykh ‘Ali Gilani, *Tarikh-e Mazandaran*, ed. M. Sotuda, 1352 S. /1973, pp. 88-89, 100). Only a few isolated Nizari groups survived a while longer in Daylam during the Safawid period when Alamut was used as a prison. In Badakhshan and other parts of Central Asia, the Ismailis evidently acknowledged the Nizari imamate only during the late Alamut period as a result of the activities of *da‘i*s dispatched from Quhistan. These *da‘i*s founded local dynasties of *pir*s and *mir*s who ruled over Shugnan and other districts of Badakhshan. Later, the Nizaris of Badakhshan were severely persecuted by the region’s Timurid and Uzbek rulers.

By the middle of the 9th AH/15th CE century, Ismaili-Sufi relations had become well established in the Iranian world. Indeed, a type of coalescence had emerged between Persian Sufism and Nizari Ismails, two independent esoteric traditions in Islam which shared close affinities and common doctrinal grounds. This explains why the Persian-speaking Nizaris have regarded several of the greatest mystic poets of Persia, such as Sanai, ‘Attar and Jalal al-Din Rumi, as their co-religionists (see, for instance, Feda’i Khurasani, pp. 113-16). The Nizari Ismailis of Persia, Afghanistan and Central Asia have continued to use verses of the mystical poets of the Iranian world in their religious ceremonies. The dissimulating Persian Ismailis also adopted visible aspects of the Sufi way of life. Thus, the imams appeared to outsiders as Sufi masters or *pir*s, while their followers adopted the typically Sufi guise of disciples or *murid*s (see F. Daftary, “Ismaili Sufi Relations in Early Post-Alamut and Safavid Persia,” in L. Lewisohn and D. Morgan, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism*, Oxford, 1999, III, pp. 275-89).

By the middle of the 9th AH/15th CE century, the Nizari imams of the Qasim-shahi line emerged in the village of Anjudan, in central Persia, in the guise of Sufi *pir*s, initiating the so-called Anjudan revival in Nizari Ismails that lasted some two centuries. With Imam Mustansir bi’llah II (d. 885 AH/1480 CE), who adopted the Sufi name of Shah Qalandar, the Qasim-shahi imams became definitely established in the locality where their tombs are still preserved. Taking advantage of the changing religio-political climate of Persia, including the spread of ‘Alid loyalism and Shi‘i tendencies through Sunni Sufi orders, the imams successfully began to reorganise and reinvigorate their *da‘wa* to win new converts and reassert their authority over various Nizari communities. These communities, notably those in Afghanistan, Central Asia and India, had been led for long periods by independent hereditary dynasties of *pir*s. The imams now gradually replaced these powerful autonomous figures with their own loyal *da‘i*s who would also regularly deliver the religious dues to them.

The Anjudan period also witnessed a revival in the literary activities of the Nizaris, especially in

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Persia where authors such as Abu Ishaq Quhistani and Khayrkhah Harati produced the earliest doctrinal works of the post-Alamut period. In the context of Nizari-Sufi relations during the early Anjudan period, valuable details are preserved in the *Pandiat-e javanmardi*, containing the religious admonitions of Imam Mustansir bi'llah II or one of his descendants. In this book, the Nizaris are referred to with Sufi expressions such as *ahl-i haqiqat*, or the "people of the truth," while the imam is designated as *pir* or *murshid*. The imam's admonitions start with the *shari'at-tariqat-haqiqat* categorisation of the Sufis, describing *haqiqat* as the *batin* of *shari'at* which would be attained by the believers (*mu'min*s) through following the spiritual path or *tariqat*. The *Pandiat* (text pp. 2-3, 11, 13, 14, 34-36, 54-58, 65-68 and elsewhere) further explains, in line with the earlier Nizari teachings of *qiyama* times, that *haqiqat* consists of recognising the spiritual reality of the imam of the time. The Nizaris now essentially retained the teachings of the Alamut period, especially as elaborated after the declaration of *qiyama*. The current imam retained his central importance in Nizari doctrine, and the recognition of his true spiritual reality remained the prime concern of his followers (Abu Ishaq Quhistani, text pp. 19-20, 37-38, 53-54, 58, 67-68, tr., pp. 19-20, 37-38, 53-54, 58, 67-68; Khayrkhah, *Kalam-e pir*, text pp. 46, 72-73, 86, 95-96, 100, 114-16; . — —, *Tasnifat*, pp. 18 ff.).

The advent of the Safavids and the proclamation of Twelver Shi'ism as the state religion in 907 AH/1501 CE, promised a more favourable atmosphere for the activities of the Nizaris and other Shi'i communities in Persia. The Nizaris did, in fact, initially reduce the intensity of their *taqiya* practices. However, this new optimism was short-lived as the Safavids and their *shari'at*-minded *'ulama'* soon persecuted all popular forms of Sufism and those Shi'i movements which fell outside the confines of Twelver Shi'ism. The Nizaris, too, received their share of persecutions. Shah Tahir Husayni (d. ca. 956 AH/1549 CE), a learned religious scholar and the most famous imam of the Muhammad-shahi line, was persecuted in Shah Ismail's reign (907 -30 AH/1501-24 CE). However, Shah Tahir, whose religious following and popularity had proved unacceptable to the Safavid ruler and his Ithna'ashari scholars, fled to India in 926 AH/1520 CE and permanently settled in the Deccan where he rendered valuable services to the Nizam-shahs of Ahmadnagar. It is interesting to note that from early on in India, Shah Tahir advocated Twelver Shi'ism, which he had obviously adopted as a form of disguise. He achieved his greatest success in the Deccan when Buhran Nizam-shah proclaimed Twelver Shi'ism as the official religion of the state in 944 AH/1537 CE. Shah Tahir's successors as Muhammad-Shahi imams continued to observe *taqiya* in India mainly in the form of Twelver Shi'ism (see Fereshta, *Tarikh-e Fereshta*, ed. J. Briggs, Bombay, 1832, II, pp. 213-31; 'Ali b. 'Aziz Tabataba, *Bohran-e ma'ater*, Hyderabad, 1936, pp. 251-70, 274 ff., 281 ff., 291, 308, 324-26, 338-39, 448-50, 452-53, 584; Daftary, 1990, pp. 487-91).

Meanwhile, Shah Tahmasp persecuted the Qasim-shahi Nizaris of Anjudan and had their thirty-sixth imam, Imam Murad Mirza, executed in 981 AH/1574 CE. By the time of Shah 'Abbas I (995-1038 AH/1587-1629 CE), the Persian Nizaris had successfully adopted Twelver Shi'ism as a second form of disguise. Shah Tahir may have been the first Nizari imam to have conceived of this new form of dissimulation, which was now adopted by the Qasim-shahi Nizari imams and their followers (see Daftary, 1990, pp. 471-74). By the end of the 11th AH/17th CE century, the Qasim-shahi *da'wa* had gained the allegiance of the bulk of the Nizaris at the expense of the Muhammad-Shahis. The *da'wa* had been particularly successful in Afghanistan, Central Asia and several regions of the Indian subcontinent. In South Asia, the Hindu converts became known as Khoja, derived from the Persian word *khwaja* (Nanji, 1978, pp. 50-83). The Nizari Khojas developed an indigenous religious tradition, known as Satpanth or the "true path" (to salvation), as well as a devotional literature known as the *ginan*s . With the fortieth Qasim-shahi imam, Imam Shah Nizar (d. 1134 AH/1722 CE), the seat of this branch of the Nizari *da'wa*, then representing the only branch in Persia, was transferred from

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Anjudan to the nearby village of Kahak, near Qum and Mahallat, ending the Anjudan period in post-Alamut Nizari Ismailism.

By the middle of the 12th AH/18th CE century, in the unsettled conditions of Persia after the demise of the Safavids and the Afghan invasion, the Nizari imams moved to Shahr-e Babak in Kirman, a location closer to the pilgrimage route of the Khojas who regularly traveled from India to see their imam and deliver their religious dues. Soon, the imams acquired political prominence in the affairs of Kirman. The forty-fourth imam, Imam Abu'l-Hasan, also known as Imam Sayyid Abu'l-Hasan Kahaki, was appointed around 1170 AH/1756 CE to the governorship of the Kirman province by Karim Khan Zand; earlier he had been the *beglerbegi* or governor of the city of Kirman (Vaziri, pp. 543-65). It was in his time that the Ne'mat-Allahi Sufi order was revived in Persia. Imam Abu'l-Hasan had close relations with Nur-'Ali-Shah and Mushtaq-'Ali-Shah among other Ne'mat-Allahi Sufis in Kirman (Daftary, 1990, pp. 498-503). After Imam Abu'l-Hasan's death in 1206 AH/1792 CE, his son Imam Shah Khalil-Allah succeeded to the Nizari imamate and eventually settled in Yazd. In 1232 AH/1817 CE, he was murdered in a mob attack on his house. Imam Shah Khalil-Allah was succeeded by his eldest son Imam Hasan 'Ali-Shah who was appointed to the governorship of Qum by Fath 'Ali-Shah and also given properties in Mahallat. In addition, the Qajar monarch gave one of his daughters in marriage to the young imam and bestowed upon him the honourific title of Aqa Khan, meaning lord and master.This title has remained hereditary among Imam Hasan 'Ali-Shah's successors.

Imam Hasan 'Ali-Shah was appointed to the governorship of Kirman in 1251AH/1835CE by Muhammad Shah Qajar. Subsequently, after some prolonged confrontations between the imam and the Qajar establishment, Aqa Khan I, also known as Aqa Khan Mahallati, left Persia in 1257 AH/1841 CE. After spending some years in Afghanistan, Sind, Gujarat and Calcutta, he settled permanently in Bombay in 1265 AH/1848 CE, marking the advent of the modern period of Nizari Ismailism. As the spiritual head of a Muslim community, Aqa Khan I received the protection of the British in India. The Nizari imam now engaged in a widespread campaign for defining and delineating the distinct religious identity of his Khoja following. The Nizari Khojas, too, had dissimulated for long periods as Sunnis and Twelver Shi'i while their religious traditions had been influenced by Hindu elements. With the help of the courts in India, Aqa Khan I's followers were legally defined as Shi'a Imami Ismailis (see Hasan 'Ali-Shah, Aqa Khan, *'Ebrat-Afza*, Bombay, 1278/1862, pp. 8-49; Vaziri, pp. 60-64, 608-13; Algar, pp. 61-81; Daftary, 1990, pp. 504-13).

Aqa Khan I died in 1298 AH/1881 CE and was succeeded by his son Aqa 'Ali Shah, who led the Nizaris for only four years (1298-1302 AH/1881-85 CE). The latter's sole surviving son and successor, Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aqa Khan III, led the Nizaris for seventy-two years, and also became well known as a Muslim reformer and statesman. Aqa Khan III, too, made systematic efforts to set his followers' identity apart from other religious communities. The Nizari identity was spelled out in numerous constitutions that the imam promulgated for his followers in different regions, especially in India, Pakistan and East Africa. Furthermore, the Nizari imam became increasingly concerned with reform policies that would benefit not only his followers but other Muslims as well. He worked vigorously for consolidating and reorganising the Nizaris into a modern Muslim community with high standards of both male and female education, health and social well-being, as well as developing a new network of councils for administering the affairs of his community. The participation of women in communal affairs also received a high priority in the imam's reforms.

Aqa Khan III died in 1376 AH/1957 CE and was succeeded by his grandson, Mawlana Hazar Imam

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Shah Karim al-Husayni, as he is addressed by his followers. The present imam of the Nizaris, the forty-ninth in the series, has continued and substantially expanded the modernisation policies of his predecessor, also developing numerous new programmes and institutions of his own which are of wider interest to the Muslims and the Third World countries (Daftary, 1990, pp. 518-32, 537-48). He has created a complex institutional network generally referred to as the *Aga Khan Development Network* (AKDN), which implements projects in a variety of social, economic and cultural areas. Prince Karim Aga Khan IV, as he is known internationally, has his secretariat near Paris. Numbering several millions, the Nizari Ismailis are scattered as Muslim minorities in more than twenty-five countries of Asia, Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America.

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