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Ismaili Literature in Persian and Arabic

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Ismaili literature ("literature" is used here in its wider sense to include all the written products of scholarly disciplines delineated by learning, religion, and science) refers to the literary production of more than a millennium, from the middle of the 3rd/9th century (i.e., before the advent of the Fatimids in 909 CE in North Africa) to recent times. It deals with the writings of Ismaili missionaries (*du'at*, pl. of *da'i*) and religious dignitaries, either sponsored by the *da'wa* (religio-political organisation), or the Fatimid regime, or composed independently. Geographically, it covers wide regions stretching from North Africa to India, wherever Ismaili missions operated actively and were able to maintain a foothold through local converts and their support. The Fatimids (297-567 AH/909-1171 CE) were great patrons of learning and their newly founded capital, Cairo (al-Qahira, i.e., the victorious), soon became a rival of older centres like Baghdad as a seat of learning and intellectual activity. Ismaili literature produced during the pre-Fatimid and Fatimid periods, often referred to as the classical period, with the exception of Nasir Khusraw's works, is almost exclusively in Arabic.

After the fall of the Fatimids in Egypt, the Ismailis of Yemen, known as the Musta'li-Tayyibi *da'wa*, continued this tradition of producing Ismaili works in Arabic. It should be noted that from the very beginning of the Ismaili religio-political movement, Yemen had become an Ismaili stronghold. Although the first Ismaili state founded there by Ibn Hawshab, generally known as Mansur al-Yemen, disintegrated through inner dissensions at the beginning of the 10th century, and hence before the advent of the Fatimids in North Africa, the religious component of the mission survived and achieved new success under 'Ali b. Muhammad Sulayhi, who founded the Sulayhid dynasty in 439 AH/1047 CE. The Sulayhids, adherents of Ismaili faith and nominal vassals of the Fatimids of Egypt, ruled Yemen until 1138 CE, first from their capital San'a', in the north, and then from De Jibla, in the south. With the waning of their power, the Ismaili Musta'li Tayyibi community not only survived, but their stronghold in Haraz became the headquarters of the *da'wa* for the next four centuries. It was this Yemeni community that preserved a great portion of the classical Ismaili heritage and writing by copying and studying those works; as well as augmenting and enriching this literature through their own original contributions in various disciplines of learning.

In 1567 CE, following the death of the first Indian *da'i*, Yusuf b. Sulayman, in Tayba in Yemen, the headquarters of the Musta'li-Tayyibi *da'wa* was moved to Gujarat, on the west coast of India. In the wake of this move, most of the Ismaili literature, preserved from the classical period and produced later in Yemen, was also transferred to India. The Bohras, Indian converts to Musta'li-Tayyibi *da'wa*, continued the Arabic tradition by diligently copying and studying those earlier works, and at times commenting on them. Al-Jame'a al-Sayfiya, a well-known seminary for the Da'udi Bohras, established by the *da'i* 'Abd-i 'Ali Sayf-al-Din in 1814 for the religious education of the community, has continued the Arabic tradition to the present day. Besides preserving a major portion of Ismaili literature produced in North Africa, Egypt, Yemen and elsewhere, the

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learned Bohra *shaikhs* have put their own stamp on whatever they have added.

The Arabic tradition also prevailed in the Nizari Ismaili communities of Syria. They had succeeded in acquiring fortresses in the mountains of central Syria where they ruled from about 1100 CE to 1273 CE, the year when their power was terminated by the Mamluk ruler of Egypt and Syria, Malik Zahir Baybars. Though the Syrian Nizari community survived the adversity, they only succeed in preserving a very minute portion of the Fatimid heritage.

The Persian tradition in Ismaili literature, started by Nasir Khusraw, on the other hand, was continued exclusively by the reformed Ismailism of Alamut, that is, the Persian Nizaris. The Nizari branch originated from internal dissension among the Ismailis over the issue of succession to the Imam-caliph al-Munstansir in 1094 CE. Hasan Sabbah, an Ismaili *da'i* who had succeeded in gaining control of the strong mountain fortress of Alamut in Rudbar in 1090 CE, later broke off his relations with the Fatimids of Egypt in support of the claims of Imam Nizar b. al-Mustansir. Hasan Sabbah expounded in Persian his new doctrine of *ta'lim*, that in religious faith one has to accept the absolute authority of the teacher, that is, the Imam. Persian continued to be the language of the Nizari state founded by Hasan Sabbah until its destruction by the advancing Mongols in 1256 CE. The Persian Nizaris used Persian in their religious writings. They not only abandoned Arabic but also did not show much interest in the preservation of the earlier heritage that was in Arabic. The Persian tradition continued among the Nizari communities that survived the Mongol onslaught in various parts of Persian speaking regions. Considerations of space do not allow a detailed description of Ismaili literature, hence only the most prominent aspects will be highlighted and only their most outstanding representatives will be enumerated here.

In Arabic. In their classification of various “sciences” or fields of learning, Muslim writers generally make a distinction between the “religious sciences” (*al-'ulum al-shar'iyah* also called *al-'ulum al-naqliyah*, “traditional sciences”) and the “foreign sciences” *'ulum al-'ajam min al-Yunaniyin wa-gayrihim min al-umam*, also called *al-'ulum al-'aqliyah*). The former includes Quranic exegesis (*tafsir*), tradition (Hadith), theology *'ilm-i kalam*, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and other sciences, such as Arabic grammar, philology, rhetoric, and historiography that developed from them. The latter, that is, the so-called “foreign sciences,” include mathematics, natural sciences, medicine, astronomy, philosophy, etc.

The Ismailis, on the other hand, draw a fundamental distinction between the *zahir* and the *batin*, the two aspects of religion. The *zahir* consists of exterior expressions of religion as laid down in the law (*shari'a*) and explains the literal meaning of the Qur'an. The *zahir* changes with each prophet in accordance with time and circumstances, whereas the *batin*, comprised of the inner, true meaning of the Qur'an and the *shari'a*, remains unchanged. The prophet receives the revelation (*tanzil*), transmits it to the people and lays down the *shari'a*, while it is the Imam who expounds the inner, esoteric meaning of the Qur'an and the *shari'a* through *Ta'wil* (hermeneutics). The principle of hermeneutics developed by a number of outstanding *da'is*, such as Ja'far b. Ibn al-Hawshab, Qadi Nu'man b. Muhammad, and Abu Ya'qub Sijistani, became the major method of Ismaili doctrine, so much so that it has come to be regarded as typical and characteristic of Ismaili thought. It was for this reason that the Ismailis were often called *batiniyah*. *Ta'wil* begins as a method of verbal interpretation and consists in going from the surface level (*zahir*, exterior) of a given linguistic term or expression to the depth (*batin*, interior) of its meaning. Ismaili *ta'wil* is not, therefore, a simple matter of verbal interpretation; rather it has an important ontological significance. For in Ismaili doctrine, whatever exists in the physical world conceals in its ontological depths an inner reality. Thus, the Ismailis classify sciences into two



major categories: *zahiri* sciences, and *batini* sciences. The former comprises of Arabic language and grammar, poetry, history, jurisprudence, and related disciplines; while the latter comprises of *ta'wil* and *haqa'iq* (lit. truth, reality). The highest level of knowledge is, therefore, called *haqa'iq* or '*ilm al-haqa'iq* (the knowledge of the truth) which represents the ultimate cosmological and eschatological system of the Ismaili doctrine. Despite this twofold division of sciences and religion, they emphasise that both are complimentary to each other, and one cannot exist without the other. Ismaili literature is therefore overwhelmingly religious in character. In other words, it is heavily tinged with their particular ideology.

The earliest extant writings, such as the *Kitab al-kashf* (The book of revelation), *Kitab al-rushd wa'l-hedaya* (The book of proper conduct and guidance), and *Kitab al-'alim wa'l-ghulam* (The book of the master and the disciple), ascribed either to Ibn al-Hawshab or his son Ja'far, give us insights into the theory of the imamate, the practices of the mission, the technique used for the esoteric interpretation, and a partial picture of the entire framework of their doctrines. Another important work from the early period that occupies a unique position in the history of Islamic thought and exercised a great influence on the Muslim elite is *Rasa'il Ikhwan al-safa' wa-khullan al-wafa'* (the epistles of the brethren of purity). *Ikhwan al-safa'* was a pseudonym assumed by the authors of this well-known encyclopaedia who described themselves as a group of fellow-seekers after truth. They deliberately concealed their Ismaili identity so that their treatises could gain wider currency and appeal to a broader cross-section of the society. The philosophical system of the *Rasa'il* is a synthesis of reason ('*aql*) and revelation (*wahy*), wherein the cosmos is viewed as a unified whole. The philosophical structure and the cosmology are derived from Neoplatonic and Neo-Pythagorean sources. The *Rasa'il* offered a new political order headed by an 'Alid Imam. Their utopia, referred to as *al-madina al-fazila al-ruhaniya* (the spiritual, virtuous city) or *dawlat ahl al-khayr* (the governance of virtuous people), was to be governed by a lawgiving philosopher-prophet or his spiritual successor. The organisation and arrangement of the *Rasa'il* and their classification of the sciences, although somewhat different from the twofold division into the *zahiri* and the *batini*, reflect their ultimate objective.

Conspicuously absent from Ismaili literature are the two important branches of Islamic sciences, *hadith* and *tafsir*, classified as branches of the *zahiri* sciences. The reason for their absence could be explained by the fact that, after the establishment of the Fatimid dynasty, the imamate as conceived by Ismaili doctrine, unlike what happened in the case of the Imamis (i.e., the Twelver Shi'i), became a living institution. It implied that as long as the Imam (i.e., the Fatimid caliph-imam), who represented the living *sunna* of the Prophet was accessible, there was no need for the compilation of *hadith* and *tafsir*. The traditions needed for clarification of the shari'a and handed down by the Imams, were collected by Qadi Nu'man in his *Da'a'im al-islam*, hence there was no further need for them. As for the external philological meaning of the Qur'an, any *tafsir* could be used. Its inner true meaning, however, could be obtained only through the *ta'wil* derived from the rightful Imam. For this reason, the Imam, the repository of true knowledge and the authoritative interpreter of the Qur'an, is often called "the speaking Qur'an" (*Qur'an-i natiq*), while the Qur'an, since it needs an interpreter, is called "the silent Qur'an" (*Qur'an-i samit*). There are numerous works on *ta'wil* that deal with specific verses or chapters of the Qur'an. Qadi Nu'man's *Asas al-ta'wil* (the foundation of *ta'wil*), *Ta'wil al-da'a'im* (*Ta'wil* of the pillars), and *Ta'wil al-shari'a* (*Ta'wil* of the canon law of Islam) and Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yemen's *Sara'ir al-nutaqa'* or *Asrar al-nutaqa'* (Secrets of the *nutaq'*, i.e., the major prophets), *Kitab al-fara'iz wa hudud al-din* (the book of religious duties and the hierarchy of the *da'wa*), *Kitab al-reza' fi'l-batin* (the book of the inner meaning of foster relationship), *Kitab ta'wil al-zakat* (the book of the esoteric interpretation of the alms tax), and *Ta'wil surat al-nisa'* (the esoteric interpretation of the



Qur'anic chapter on women) are noteworthy works of *ta'wil* from the early period. Sijistani's *Kitab al-iftikhar* (The book of glory) is the best example of the whole range of *ta'wil* applied to the basic beliefs of Islam and its shari'a; as well as being a compendium of Ismaili doctrine. *Mizaj al-tasnim* (medley of a fountain in Paradise) by Zia'-al-Din Isma'il b. Hibat-Allah, a partial *tafsir* from *Surat al-tawba*, verse 94, to *Surat al-'ankabut*, verse 44, was compiled during the second half of the 18th century in Yemen.

Isma'ili literature of pre-Fatimid and Fatimid periods reflects the general concern of Muslims and of Islamic theology, which was being developed and debated among scholars of various schools of thought, such as the Mut'azilite, Ash'arite, and the Imami theologians (*mutakallimun*). The major Isma'ili contribution to Islamic thought is their formulation of a new synthesis of reason and revelation based on Neoplatonic cosmology and Shi'ite doctrine. Thus, they offered a new world order under the Imam who resembles Plato's philosopher-king. The classic formulation of this synthesis, as indicated above, is found in the *Rasa'il Ikhwan-al-Safa'* (Epistles of the Brethren of Purity).

The philosophical trend was the most dominant in the Iranian school of the Isma'ili *da'wa* and it has contributed the lion's share to this discipline. The elaboration of theoretical and doctrinal discourse among major *da'is* varied to a certain extent in keeping with their social and intellectual environment as well as their textual sources. The spirit of intellectual inquiry fostered by the *da'wa* allowed some degree of freedom. In his *Kitab al-islah* (The book of correction; lost), Abu Hatim Ahmad Razi wrote a correction of Abu'l-Hasan Muhammad b. Ahmad Nasafi's views expounded in his *Kitab al-mahsul* (The book of the harvest). Razi disagreed with the latter concerning several issues, such as the precedence of *qada'* (fate, predestination) over *qadar* (freedom of will), the imperfect nature of emanation (*fayz*) of the Soul (*nafs*) from the Intellect (*'aql*), and the dissociation of *shari'a* from the first *natiq*, that is, Adam. In his *Kitab al-nusra* (The book of support; lost), Abu Ya'qub Ishaq Sijistani disagreed with Razi's corrections and upheld Nasafi's opinions. In his *Kitab al-riaz* (The book of the meadow), Hamid al-Din Ahmad Kirmani tried to harmonise the acrimonious debate that had raged within the *da'wa*. He criticised the previous views and offered his own solutions. In his *magnum opus*, *Rahat al-'aql*, Kirmani modified the earlier Neoplatonic cosmology he had inherited by introducing the Ten Intelligences and their astronomical counterparts that had been current in philosophic circles since Abu Nasr Farabi. In accordance with this system, Kirmani revised the structure of the spheres, the hierarchies of the physical world and of the *da'wa*, known as *hudud-al-din*. The refined cosmology of Kirmani was adopted with some modifications by the Musta'li-Tayyibis of Yemen. Again, considerations of space prevent one from elaborating on this except for citing some important works on *haqa'iq* during the Yemeni period: *Kanz al-walad* (The treasure of the offspring) by Ibrahim Hamidi, *al-Anwar al-latifa* (Delicate lights) by Muhammad b. Tahir Hariti, *Kitab al-dhakhira* (The book of the treasure) by 'Ali b. Muhammad b. Walid, and *Zahr al-ma'ani* (The blossoming of [spiritual] concepts) by 'Imad al-Din Idris. Numerous small treatises entitled *al-mabda' wa'l-ma'ad* or *al-ibtida' wa'l-intaha'* (the beginning and the end) compiled during the Yemeni period attempt to summarise the *haqa'iq* system very much like the account of the soul's initial downfall and its subsequent ascent through "knowledge."

The Ismailis view history as a progressive cycle, which advances through seven major cycles, each inaugurated by a *natiq* (speaking prophet; pl. *nutaqa'*) or *ulu'l-'azm* (endowed with resolution) who brings revelation and promulgates law in its external form. Adam, (Adam), Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), 'Isa (Jesus), and Muhammad were the six *nutaqa'*. Each succeeding *natiq* abrogates the law of his predecessor and brings a new law. *Natiq* is



followed by *asas* (foundation), or *samit* (one who remains silent) who promulgates the *batin* through *ta'wil*, Shith (Seth), Sam (Shem), Isma'il (Ishmail) or Ishaq (Isaac), Harun (Aaron), Yusha' (Joshua) the son of Nun, Sham'un al-Safa (Simon Peter), and 'Ali were the six *usus* of the aforementioned six *nutaqa*'. The *asas*, in turn, is followed by series of seven imams; the last rises in rank and becomes the *natiq* of the following era. Thus, each major cycle contains seven minor cycles. The length of each cycle varies. Imam Muhammad b. Ismail b. Ja'far al-Sadiq, considered by some groups of Ismailis as the seventh *natiq* would abrogate the *zahiri shari'a* of Muhammad and promulgate the *batin*. This doctrine, however, has undergone many modifications in the course of Ismaili history. During the Fatimid period, *zahir* and *batin* together were considered two complimentary aspects of religion and both were emphasised.

Given this view of history, one finds very few historical works in Ismaili literature. Qadi Nu'man was an early exception to this rule; and although he composed several historical works, only the following have survived: *Iftitah al-da'wa wa-ibtida' al-dawla* (Commencement of the *da'wa* and the establishment of the [Fatimid] state; Dachraoui has analysed and summarised it in his edition in French) deals with the beginning of the Ismaili mission in Yemen and North Africa, leading to the establishment of the Fatimid dynasty. Nu'man's account is based on contemporary sources that have not survived. It is, therefore, a primary source for that period and has been exploited extensively by modern historians. *Sharh al-akhbar* (The elucidation of the traditions), in three volumes, is a detailed account of the outstanding traits of Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib and early Imams up to Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, based on the traditions of the Prophet. It is followed by a brief account of the advent of the Fatimid imam-caliph al-Mahdi and the traditions concerning this event. *Kitab al-managib wa'l-matalib* (the book of virtues and defects) treats the history of the two powerful clans, Banu Hashim and Banu Umayya, from pre-Islamic times up to the reign of the Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Mu'izz. As the title indicates, Nu'man exposes immoral traits and vices of the Banu Umayya by juxtaposing them with the piety and learning of the Imams from the House of Banu Hashim. *Kitab al-majalis wa'l-musayarat* is a collection of Nu'man's intimate conversations with Imam al-Mu'izz during their strolls together as well as through the correspondence between them.

Ismaili literature of the Fatimid period contained at least half a dozen autobiographies and biographies. Unfortunately, two important ones, *Sirat Ibn Hawshab*, and *al-Sira al-Kutamiya*, used by Qadi Nu'man for his *Iftitah al-da'wa*, have not survived. *Sirat al-Hajib Ja'far* (tr. into English and French), written by a scribe during the reign of Imam-caliph al-'Aziz, describes the journey of the Fatimid imam-caliph al-Mahdi from his hiding place in Salamiya, Syria, to Sijilmasa and his subsequent arrival at Raqqada. *Sirat al-Ustad Jawdhar* (tr. into French) was written by a scribe who served Ustad Jawdhar, the chamberlain of Imam-caliph al-Mu'izz. *Sirat al-Mu'ayyad* is an autobiography of the famous *da'i* Abu Nasr Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din of Shiraz during the reign of the Imam-caliph al-Mustansir, who played a leading role as an intermediary between the Turkish military leader Abu'l-Harit Arsalan Basasiri and the Fatimid government in the campaign against the Saljuqs after the fall of the Buyids in Baghdad.

'Imad-al-Din Idris was another noted historian of the *da'wa* during the Yemeni period. His *'Uyun al-akhbar* (The fountainheads of history), in seven volumes, narrates the history of the Prophet and the Isma'ili Imams until the occultation of the twenty-first Musta'li-Tayyibi Imam, son of the Fatimid caliph-Imam Amir, following the latter's assassination in around 524 AH/1130 CE. Some of the sources used by Idris have not survived. The first three volumes still remain unedited. Although volumes four, five, and six have been edited, they cannot be regarded as definitive editions. The seventh volume, which also contains the history of the Sulayhid dynasty in Yemen,



is available in a critical edition with an English summary. *Nuzhat al-afkar wa rawzat al-akhbar* (The promenade of reflection and the meadow of history), in two volumes, is a political history of Yemen after the collapse of the Sulayhid dynasty up to the year 853 AH/1449 CE. It is considered a most important primary source for the three-hundred year history of the Musta'li-Tayyibi community in Yemen. In his third work, entitled *Rawzat al-akhbar wa nuzhat al-asmar* (The meadow of history and the promenade of stories), Idris continued the history of Yemen where he had left off in the *Nuzhat al-afkar* up to the year 870 AH/1465 CE. During the Indian period, the following works should be noted for the beginning and the early history of the Musta'li-Tayyibi *da'wa* in Gujarat. *Majmu' al-rasa'il al-sett* by Khawj b. Malik and *Kitab pali midu* by Shaikh Adam Safi-al-Din, *Muntaza' al-akhbar*, in two volumes, by Qutb al-Din Borhanpuri is a comprehensive history of the *da'wa*. The first volume deals with the history of twenty-one Musta'li-Tayyibi Imams, and the second volume with the history of the *da'is* beginning with the first *da'i mutlaq*, Du'ayb b. Musa Wade'i, to the year 1824. It is an important source for the later Yemeni and early Indian periods.

Another genre peculiar to the Ismailis is that of sermons (*majlis*; pl. of *majalis*), prepared by the chief *da'i* to be delivered to the faithful at special sessions. Usually these lectures were written and submitted to the Imam-caliph for approval. Qadi Nu'man's *Ta'wil al-da'a'im* is composed in this form and was delivered as sermons. The most famous is *al-Majalis al-mu'ayyadiya*, in eight volumes, each volume with a hundred *majlis*, composed by al-Mu'ayyad fi-Din of Shiraz. Hatim Hamidi abridged those eight volumes in his *Jame' al-haqa'iq* and divided it, according to the subject matter, into eighteen chapters. The *al-Majalis al-Munstansiriya* of Abu'l-Qasim Maliji were written during the reign of caliph-imam al-Mustansir, and the *Majalis Abi'l-Barakat* were composed by Abu al-Barakat Halabi during the reign of Amir. In addition to these works the following should be noted: The *Majalis Sayyidina Hatim Hamidi*, *Majalis al-nush wa'l-bayan* of 'Ali b. Muhammad b. Walid, and an anonymous work entitled *Majalis 'Ashuriya*, containing sermons to be delivered during the first ten days of Muharram.

Among the anthologies of Ismaili literature three deserve special mention. The *Majmu' al-tarbia*, compiled by Muhammad b. Tahir Hariti in two volumes, and *Kitab al-azhar wa majma' al-anwar* by Hasan b. Nuh Bharuchi in seven volumes. Both these anthologies have preserved extensive excerpts as well as complete treatises of some of the earlier works which are no longer extant. *Sandug al-la'ali'* another anthology that was compiled by an anonymous author (Poonawala, 1977, pp. 144-48, 179-82).

Ismaili literature is rich in religious and devotional poetry. *Diwans* of al-Mu'ayyad of Shiraz and Sultan Khattab are just two outstanding examples among several of this genre of poetry. *Semt al-haqa'iq* by 'Ali b. Hanzala is a versified version of Ismaili doctrines. *Al-Urjuza al-mukhtara* by Qadi Nu'man, in 2,375 verses, deals with the imamate. His *Muntakhaba* is yet another attempt at versifying the Pillars of Islam and law. Among the several treatises on the question of the imamate, the following should be noted: *Tathbit al-imama* by the Imam-caliph al-Mansur, *Ithbat al-imama* by Ahmad Nishaburi, *Risala fi'l-imama* by Abul-fawares, and *Kitab al-masabih* by Hamid al-Din Kirmani.

Qadi al-Nu'man, the founder of Ismaili law, wrote numerous books on jurisprudence, with the *Da'a'im* as the most famous. Among the chancery documents, *al-Sijillat al-Mustansiriya*, and *al-Hidaya al-Amiriya*, are worth noting from the Fatimid period. *Qaratis al-Yaman* contains letters exchanged between the *da'wa* dignitaries in Yemen and India (Poonawala, 1977, pp. 326-28). *Kitab al-zina* (The book of ornament) of Abu Hatim Razi is a dictionary of Islamic theological



terms, which also contains a section on Islamic heresiography. It is a comprehensive work on Islamic nomenclature and Razi's philological method of discussing the etymologies of those terms sheds light on the history of Arabic linguistics. His other work, *A'lam al-nubuwa* (The distinguishing marks of prophecy), records Ismaili views in defence of religion and the principle of prophethood while refuting the arguments of his opponent, Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Zakariya' Razi. In his *al-Aqwal al-dhahabiya fi'l-tibb al-nafsani*, Hamid al-Din Kirmani supported Abu Hatim's criticism of Abu Bakr Razi's views on the therapy of the mind expounded in the latter's *al-Tibb al-ruhani*. Lastly, Isma'il b. 'Abd al-Rasul Majdu's *Fihrist*, compiled during the second half of the 18th century, provides a detailed catalogue of extant Ismaili literature.

In Persian. Nasir-i Khusraw's works were preserved by the Nizaris of Persia and Central Asia, and most of his extant works are edited and some translated into French, English, and Russian. He was the first Ismaili *da'i* to have used Persian exclusively for his intellectual and poetic discourse. His poetry is didactic. His *Safar-nama* depicts a vivid picture of the 11th century Islamic world from Transoxania to Egypt and includes visits to Mecca and Jerusalem. He first travelled across the Caspian coast of Persia into eastern Anatolia and southward to Syria and Palestine. He spent three years in Cairo and returned taking the southern route down to Aswan and crossing the Red Sea to the Hijaz, the Arabian peninsula to Basra, and passing through the Carmathian (Qarmati) state in Lahsa; finally arriving at Balkh through southern Persia. His role in the establishment of Persian as a language of philosophical discourse is yet to be assessed.

The Persian Nizaris used Persian exclusively in their religious writings and did not develop any interest in the copying and preservation of the classical Arabic heritage of the Fatimid period. Hasan Sabbah expounded his new teaching (*al-da'wa al-jadida*), often called the doctrine of *ta'lim*, by formulating four propositions. The first demonstrates the need for a teacher in order to know God by refuting rationalism in its contention that human reason by itself is capable of obtaining the absolute truth. Once the need for a teacher is established, the second proposition poses the question: Is any teacher acceptable or must the teacher be a trustworthy person? When the Sunni position that any teacher will do is refuted, the need for a trustworthy teacher (*mu'allim-i sadiq*) is established. The third proposition, directed against non-Ismaili Shi'i, poses the question as to whether it is necessary to know that teacher and acquire knowledge through him. The fourth and the final proposition attempts to answer the issue raised in the third proposition by proving that a particular Imam, that is, an Ismaili Imam of Hasan Sabbah, could be the authentic teacher. He expounded his doctrine in a Persian treatise, *Chahar fasl*, which has been preserved only in fragments. This doctrine had a great impact on the Sunni population, hence Abu Hamid Ghazali in his *Kitab al-Mostazhiri* tried to wrestle with the intellectual issues posed by this doctrine.

A major shift in the Nizari doctrine came during the time of Imam Hasan II, the fourth ruler of Alamut, who proclaimed the doctrine of the *qiama* (resurrection). From then on, the lords of Alamut also claimed the imamate for themselves. With the new doctrine, the imam became the focal point. The elaboration of this teaching with its cosmological implication and the development of the doctrine of the Perfect Man in contemporary Sufism paved the way for the future relationship of the post-Alamut Nizaris with Sufism. The Syrian Nizaris do not seem to have been affected by the *qiama* doctrine, and they continued the earlier Fatimid tradition.

Nasir al-Din Tusi, a major intellectual figure of the 13th century, a scientist, a philosopher, and a theologian, should be mentioned here for his long association with the Nizaris. It appears that during that period he himself had embraced the Ismaili Nizari faith. In his spiritual autobiography



entitled *Sayr wa suluk*, he describes how his search for knowledge led him to embrace Ismaili esoteric philosophy. In it he also elaborates Hasan-i Sabbah's doctrine of *ta'lim*. Another work, *Rawzat al-taslim*, also known as *Tasawworat*, an ethico-eschatological guide for ascending from the physical to the spiritual world, is an important testimony to Tusi's Ismaili-oriented philosophy.

Despite the Mongol massacres, the Persian Nizari communities did survive in certain areas, especially in Rudbar and Quhistan, and they lived clandestinely under the cover of Sufism. The Nizaris of Badakhshan and other remote regions succeeded in preserving the bulk of the extant Nizari literature of the Alamut period. The widely scattered communities of the post-Alamut period, differentiated in terms of their vernacular language and socio-ethnic background, more or less developed their own particular religious literature, independently of one another. Nizari history, for the first two centuries after the fall of Alamut, remains quite obscure. The poet Nizari Quhistani was the first post-Alamut author who chose the verse and Sufi forms of expression to conceal his Ismaili identity and views; and later authors followed in his footsteps. The period known as Anjidan (from the name of this village in central Persia), lasting about two centuries from the second half of the 15th century, marks a revival in Nizari thought and its missionary activities. It was during this period that the Nizari Imams of the Qasimshahi line developed close associations with the Ne'mat-Allahi Sufi order and attempted to extend their control over the remaining Nizari communities. Most noteworthy poets and authors of this period are Abu Ishaq of Quhistan and Khayrkah of Hirat. They were followed by Khaki of Khurasan and his son 'Aliquli Raqqami.

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