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978-0-521-00310-0 - Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought

Edited by Farhad Daftary

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Until recently the Isma'ilis, a major Shi'i Muslim community, were studied and judged almost exclusively on the basis of the hostile accounts of their Muslim enemies and the fanciful tales of the Crusaders and other occidental sources. As a result, numerous misconceptions and legends were disseminated about the teachings and practices of the Isma'ilis, made famous in European tradition as the Assassins. In the 1930s, however, authentic Isma'ili texts began to be recovered on a large scale from private collections in the Yemen, Syria, Iran, Central Asia and India which threw new light on mediaeval Isma'ili history and thought. This collective volume, the first major effort of its kind in this branch of Islamic studies, brings together some of the original results of modern scholarship in the area, written by leading contemporary authorities as well as some distinguished Islamists.

The chapters in the book, covering selected themes and developments related to the pre-Fatimid, Fatimid and Nizārī phases of Isma'ili history, deal with a wide variety of topics ranging from the Qarmaṭīs of Baḥrayn and their relations with the Fatimids, the earliest cosmological doctrine of the Isma'ilis, the traditions of learning and the development of jurisprudence under the Fatimids, to the Isma'ili perceptions of the 'other', the origins of the Nizārī Isma'ili movement, Saljuq perspectives on the early Nizārīs, a new perspective on Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's religious affiliations, and the ginanic literary tradition of the Isma'ili Khojas of the Indian subcontinent. As a significant contribution to modern Isma'ili studies, this book serves to underline the richness of the Isma'ilis' literary heritage and the diversity of their religio-political experience and intellectual traditions.

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The Institute of Ismaili Studies



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Frontmatter

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To the memory of Wladimir Ivanow (1886–1970),
a pioneer in modern Isma'ili studies

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Edited by Farhad Daftary

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents



<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> xi
<i>Note on transliteration and abbreviations</i>	xiii
<i>Notes on the contributors</i>	xiv
I Introduction: Isma'ilis and Isma'ili studies	I
FARHAD DAFTARY	
PART I THE CLASSICAL PHASE	
2 The Fatimids and the Qarmaṭīs of Baḥrayn	21
WILFERD MADELUNG	
3 The cosmology of the pre-Fatimid Ismā'īliyya	75
HEINZ HALM	
4 Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī and the seven faculties of the Intellect	85
WILFERD MADELUNG	
5 The Isma'ili oath of allegiance (<i>'abd</i>) and the 'sessions of wisdom' (<i>majālis al-ḥikma</i>) in Fatimid times	91
HEINZ HALM	
6 Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān and Isma'ili jurisprudence	117
ISMAIL K. POONAWALA	
7 A critique of Paul Casanova's dating of the <i>Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'</i>	145
ABBAS HAMDANI	

CONTENTS

- 8 Portraits of self and others: Isma'ili perspectives
 on the history of religions 153
 AZIM A. NANJI

- 9 An Isma'ili version of the heresiography of the
 seventy-two erring sects 161
 PAUL E. WALKER

PART II THE NIZĀRĪ PHASE

- 10 Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ and the origins of the Nizārī Isma'ili
 movement 181
 FARHAD DAFTARY

- 11 The power struggle between the Saljuqs and the
 Isma'ilis of Alamūt, 487–518/1094–1124: The Saljuq
 perspective 205
 CAROLE HILLENBRAND

- 12 The Isma'ilis of Quhistān and the Maliks of Nīmrūz
 or Sīstān 221
 C. EDMUND BOSWORTH

- 13 The philosopher/vizier: Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and
 the Isma'ilis 231
 HAMID DABASHI

- 14 'Sometimes by the sword, sometimes by the dagger':
 The role of the Isma'ilis in Mamlūk–Mongol
 relations in the 8th/14th century 247
 CHARLES MELVILLE

- 15 The Isma'ili *gināns*: Reflections on authority
 and authorship 265
 ALI S. ASANI

- 16 The Nuḡṭawī movement of Maḥmūd Pisīkhānī and his
 Persian cycle of mystical-materialism 281
 ABBAS AMANAT

- Bibliography* 299
Index 314

Preface



INITIATED IN the 1930s, the modern progress in Ismaʿili studies has continued at an astonishingly swift pace during the last few decades. As a result, many aspects of Ismaʿili history and thought are no longer shrouded in mystery; and the ground has been effectively prepared for the long-overdue dispelling of the major mediaeval myths of the Ismaʿilis. I have been convinced for several years now of the value of collecting in one volume some of the scattered results of modern scholarship in Ismaʿili studies, dealing especially with selective subjects which had not previously received sufficient treatment in scholarly literature. Such a collection could serve to show the richness of the literary heritage of the Ismaʿilis and the diversity of their religio-political experience and intellectual traditions, and, hopefully, make possible a better understanding of Ismaʿilism.

With these aims in mind, the present project was conceived in 1992 and invitations were sent out to some of the leading scholars of Ismaʿili studies to write original essays for a collective volume, offering the results of many decades of research and expertise in the field. Professor W. Madelung, in addition to contributing a new article, also kindly agreed to the inclusion in this volume of a somewhat updated English version of his classic study of the Qarmaṭīs of Baḥrayn and their relations with the Fatimids. Invitations for contributions were extended also to a number of other distinguished scholars who, though not particularly active in Ismaʿili studies, could shed light on specific issues of Ismaʿili history drawing on their own specialized knowledge of Islamic and Iranian studies. The results of this collaborative effort of Ismaʿili and non-Ismaʿili scholars, of both Eastern and Western origins,

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Edited by Farhad Daftary
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PREFACE

are now offered in this volume. Needless to add that none of the individual contributors would necessarily subscribe to all the views or interpretations expressed in this book. Indeed, responsibility for the contents of each chapter rests solely with the author of that chapter.

I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to all the eminent scholars who participated in this joint project. I would also like to thank Azizeh Azodi who in accordance with her own high standards of scholarship translated three of the essays contributed by Professors W. Madelung and H. Halm from German into English. I owe special debts of gratitude to Dr Patricia Crone who read an earlier draft of the book and made many valuable suggestions for its improvement, and to Farhad Hakimzadeh who searched for the cover illustration. Finally, it remains to record my thanks to Gill Thomas who assisted in the initiation of this volume and to Marigold Acland who ensured its orderly completion. May this volume prove to represent yet another step forward in the modern progress in Isma'ili studies, and may it be a source of satisfaction to all those involved in its production.

F. D.

Note on transliteration and abbreviations



THE SYSTEM of transliteration used in this book for the Arabic and Persian scripts is essentially the same as that adopted in the new edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, with a few modifications, namely *ch* for *č*, *j* for *dj*, and *q* for *ķ*. Furthermore, an attempt has been made to reproduce the more elaborate vowel system of Turkish and Mongol names, thus Hüleḡü and not Hülāḡü. Diacritical marks are dispensed with, except those for *ʿayn* and *hamza*, for some of the dynastic and community names which occur frequently in the book.

BIFAO	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale</i>
BSO(A)S	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies</i>
EI	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 1st edition
EI ₂	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , New edition
EIR	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i>
IJMES	<i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBBRAS	<i>Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
NS	New Series
SEI	<i>Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam</i>
WO	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-00310-0 - Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought

Edited by Farhad Daftary

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Notes on the contributors



ABBAS AMANAT is Professor of History at Yale University, and Editor of *Iranian Studies*, published by the Society for Iranian Studies. He is also a Consulting Editor of *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, to which he has been a regular contributor. A specialist in Persian history and religious movements, his books include *Cities and Trade: Consul Abbott on the Economy and Society of Iran, 1847–1866* (London, 1983), *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran* (Ithaca, 1989), and *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy* (Berkeley, 1997). His shorter studies have been published in the learned journals.

ALI S. ASANI is Professor of the Practice of Indo-Muslim Languages and Cultures at Harvard University. A specialist in Isma'ili literary traditions of the Indian subcontinent, he is the author of *The Būjh Nirañjan: An Ismaili Mystical Poem* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991) and numerous shorter studies on the ginanic literature of the Nizārī Isma'ilis. He has recently published his catalogue of *The Harvard Collection of Ismaili Literature in Indic Languages* (Boston, 1992), a pioneering survey of some 1,350 texts and manuscripts in the regional languages of South Asia.

C. EDMUND BOSWORTH, a leading British Islamist and (Emeritus) Professor of Arabic Studies at the University of Manchester, is Co-editor of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* and a Consulting Editor of *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, and has contributed extensively to both of these encyclopaedias. He is also Co-editor of *Iran* (Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies). Professor Bosworth was on the Editorial Board of *The Cambridge History of Iran*, and contributed

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Edited by Farhad Daftary

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS

several chapters to Volumes III, IV and V of that work, as well as to *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*. He is the author of numerous books, including *The Ghaznavids* (Edinburgh, 1963), *The Islamic Dynasties*, *Islamic Surveys* (Edinburgh, 1967), *Sīstān under the Arabs* (Rome, 1968), *The Later Ghaznavids* (Edinburgh, 1977), and *The History of the Saffarids of Sistan and the Maliks of Nimruz* (Costa Mesa, Calif., and New York, 1994). He has recently translated into English three volumes of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, for the Bibliotheca Persica series; and two volumes of his numerous scholarly articles on Islamic and Iranian history have already appeared in the *Variorum Collected Studies* series.

HAMID DABASHI is Associate Professor of Persian Studies at Columbia University. He is the author of *Authority in Islam* (New Brunswick, 1989), which in 1989 won the Association of American Publishers' Award for the most outstanding publication in philosophy and religion, and *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York, 1993). His numerous shorter studies on Islamic philosophy as well as Persian history and literature have appeared in a number of collective volumes and learned journals.

FARHAD DAFTARY is Head of the Department of Academic Research and Publications at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London. A specialist in Isma'ili studies, he is the author of *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Ismā'īlīs* (London, 1994), and *A Short History of the Ismā'īlīs*, *Islamic Surveys* (Edinburgh, 1998). He has contributed articles to *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, and the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*; and his shorter studies have appeared in a number of collective volumes and in learned journals.

HEINZ HALM is Professor of Islamic History at the University of Tübingen. A leading German Islamist and a specialist in Isma'ili studies, he is also Editor of *Die Welt des Orients*. Professor Halm is the author of numerous books on Islam, Shi'ism, and Isma'ilism, including *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen Ismā'īliya* (Wiesbaden, 1978), *Die islamische Gnosis* (Zürich–Munich, 1982), and *Das Reich des Mahdi: Der Aufstieg der Fatimiden* (Munich, 1991); his *Die Schia* (Darmstadt, 1988) has been published in English as *Shiism* in *Islamic Surveys* (Edinburgh, 1991). His shorter studies have appeared in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, and in the learned journals.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-00310-0 - Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought

Edited by Farhad Daftary

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS

ABBAS HAMDANI is Professor of Middle Eastern History at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Belonging to a prominent Isma'ili Bohra family from Surat, India, Professor Hamdani is an Isma'ili specialist and is in possession of a valuable collection of Isma'ili manuscripts, which he has used extensively in his original Isma'ili studies. His family collection, used by eminent scholars such as P. Kraus, L. Massignon, W. Ivanow, A. A. A. Fyzee, S. M. Stern and many others, has played a significant role in opening up the field of Fatimid studies to western scholarship. He is also a leading authority on the famous Brethren of Purity and their *Epistles*, about which he has written several major articles in the learned journals. Professor Hamdani's other Isma'ili publications include *The Beginnings of the Isma'ili Da'wa in Northern India* (Cairo, 1956), *The Fatimids* (Karachi, 1962), and several studies on Yemenite Isma'ilism published in different volumes of the *Arabian Studies* (Cambridge) and elsewhere. Recently, his 'Fatimid History and Historians', appeared in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* (Cambridge, 1990).

CAROLE HILLENBRAND is Reader in Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Edinburgh and General Editor of the Islamic Surveys series published by Edinburgh University Press. A specialist in Islamic history, she has contributed numerous articles to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* and the learned journals. Author of *A Muslim Principality in Crusader Times: The Early Artuqid State* (Istanbul, 1990), and Co-editor of *Qajar Iran* (Edinburgh, 1983), she has also translated a number of works, including Volume XXVI of *The History of al-Tabarī* (Albany, N.Y., 1989), and G. Endress' *Einführung in die islamische Geschichte*, which appeared in a revised English form as *An Introduction to Islam*, Islamic Surveys (Edinburgh, 1988).

WILFERD MADELUNG is Laudian Professor of Arabic at the University of Oxford. He is a leading contemporary Islamist and an authority on mediaeval Islamic communities and movements. Professor Madelung has made significant contributions to modern scholarship in Isma'ili studies, especially in connection with early Isma'ilism. A Consulting Editor of *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, he has contributed extensively on Isma'ilism and Shi'ism to that encyclopaedia and to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. He has edited several volumes of Zaydī texts from Iran and the Yemen, and his other books include *Der Imam al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen* (Berlin, 1965), and *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS

(Albany, N.Y., 1988). He has contributed to Volume IV of *The Cambridge History of Iran* and to numerous *Festschriften* and learned journals. So far two volumes of Professor Madelung's many articles on religious schools, sects and movements in Islam have appeared in the Variorum Collected Studies series.

CHARLES MELVILLE is Lecturer in Islamic Studies at the University of Cambridge, and a Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge. Co-editor of Volume VII of *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge, 1991), and Co-author of *Christians and Moors in Spain* (Warminster, 1992), he is also Editor of the *Pembroke Persian Papers*, published for the Centre of Middle Eastern Studies, Cambridge. He has contributed several articles on the Īlkhānid Mongols to *Encyclopaedia Iranica* and to a number of collective volumes and learned journals.

AZIM A. NANJI is Professor and Chairman of the Department of Religion at the University of Florida. His research on Isma'ilism is set within the broader context of the study of pluralism and diversity in Islamic intellectual and cultural history. He is the author of *The Nizārī Ismā'īlī Tradition in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent* (Delmar, N.Y., 1978), and editor of *The Muslim Almanac* (Michigan, 1995); he has published numerous shorter studies, including 'Isma'ilism', in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, ed. S. H. Nasr (London, 1987). Professor Nanji has also produced several important studies on the modern conditions of the Nizārī Isma'īlī community and has contributed to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, and the new *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (Oxford, 1995).

ISMAIL K. POONAWALA is Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. A specialist in Isma'īlī studies, he is the author of the monumental *Biobibliography of Ismā'īlī Literature* (Malibu, California, 1977), a comprehensive survey of Isma'īlī writings and manuscript collections. He is the editor of several Isma'īlī texts, including *al-Urjūza al-mukhtāra* of al-Qādī al-Nu'mān, about whom he has published several important studies; he has also translated into English Volume IX of *The History of al-Ṭabarī* (Albany, N.Y., 1990). Professor Poonawala is a regular contributor to *Encyclopaedia Iranica* and the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

PAUL E. WALKER is currently Visiting Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Michigan; he has also taught at the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University. A specialist in Isma'īlī studies, he is the author of *Early Philosophical Shiism: The Ismaili Neoplatonism of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī* (Cambridge, 1993), the first major examination

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Edited by Farhad Daftary

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS

of Isma'ili Neoplatonism as it is presented in the extant works of its chief proponent, and *The Wellsprings of Wisdom: A Study of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī's Kitāb al-Yanābī'* (Salt Lake City, 1994). He is also the author of numerous shorter studies on aspects of Isma'ili thought and Fatimid history, including most recently 'The Ismaili Da'wa in the Reign of the Fatimid Caliph al-Ḥākim', *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 30 (1993).