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978-0-521-61636-2 - The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines, Second Edition

Farhad Daftary

Frontmatter

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The Ismā'īlīs

Their History and Doctrines

The Ismā'īlīs represent the second largest Shī'ī Muslim community after the Twelvers (Ithnā'asharīs), and are today dispersed as religious minorities throughout more than twenty-five countries of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America. The bulk of the Ismā'īlīs recognize the Aga Khan as their imam or spiritual leader. The second edition of this authoritative book, the product of more than twenty years' research, traces the history and doctrinal development of the Ismā'īlīs from their origins in the formative period of Islam to the present day, a period of more than twelve centuries. It is the first comprehensive synthesis of the results of modern scholarship in Ismā'īlī studies and draws on numerous primary sources and secondary studies on the subject, particularly on the Ismā'īlī manuscripts which have only recently become available.

All the major phases of Ismā'īlī history are covered. Beginning at the pre-Fāṭimid period, Dr Daftary conducts a detailed investigation, moving through the Fāṭimid 'golden age' and the troubled Ṭayyibī–Musta'li period through the glorious age of Nizārī Ismā'īlism in Iran and Syria to the Mongol onslaught. The final part of the book traces the modern development of the Ismā'īlī community, explaining the revival of Nizārī Ismā'īlism, particularly in Iran, Central and South Asia, and the socio-economic progress of the Nizārī communities in modern times.

The new edition has been thoroughly revised and incorporates an expanded bibliography and new illustrations. For all students of Islamic and Middle Eastern history, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* will continue to serve as the most definitive account of the history of the Ismā'īlīs and their teachings.

FARHAD DAFTARY is Associate Director and Head of the Department of Academic Research and Publications at The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London. He is a consulting editor of *Encyclopaedia Iranica* as well as the general editor of the Ismaili Heritage Series and the Ismaili Texts and Translations Series. An authority on Ismā'īlī history, Dr Daftary's publications include *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Isma'īlis* (1994), *A Short History of the Ismailis* (1998), *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliography of Sources and Studies* (2004) and *Ismailis in Medieval Muslim Societies* (2005). Dr Daftary's books have been translated into Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu and numerous European languages.

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FARHAD DAFTARY

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To Fereshteh

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Foreword

The study of the history of the Ismāʿīlī religion, which for long had depended largely on the polemical and often distorted accounts of its opponents, has been transformed since the time of the First World War by the discovery of large private collections of authentic Ismāʿīlī works in the Soviet Union and India. Many of the original texts, previously kept secret from outsiders by the Ismāʿīlī communities, have now been published or are accessible in manuscript to scholarly research. Although a relatively small number of scholars in the East and the West have actively pursued such research, progress in uncovering the story of the Ismāʿīlī movement in its various branches and the development of Ismāʿīlī religious thought has been steady. The major aspects and characteristics of this thought and its transformations in the course of often catastrophic events affecting the scattered Ismāʿīlī communities have become evident. There are, to be sure, still large gaps left in our knowledge of these developments, some of which may prove difficult to fill because of a lack of sources. Moreover, on some fundamental questions, especially concerning the early stages of Ismāʿīlism, consensus has not yet been reached among scholars. Yet these problems must not obscure the remarkable advances made in the study of Ismāʿīlism, which provide both a general outline of the history of one of the major branches of Shīʿī Islam and a sound basis for further detailed research.

In the present volume, Dr F. Daftary offers a first comprehensive and detailed synthesis of the complex history of Ismāʿīlism. His presentation fully reflects the progress of recent research, widely scattered in editions of texts, monographs and articles, and integrates it into an evenly readable account. In some areas, especially on the modern developments, entirely new ground is covered. The book will no doubt be widely appreciated as a general reference work by students and by all readers interested in aspects of Ismāʿīlī history from a scholarly point of view.

Wilferd Madelung
Laudian Professor of Arabic
The University of Oxford

Preface to the first edition

The Ismā'īlīs constitute the second largest Shī'ī community after the Twelvers in the Muslim world and are now scattered in more than twenty countries of Asia, Africa, Europe and America. This book traces the history and doctrines of the Ismā'īlī movement from its origins to the present time, a period of approximately twelve centuries.

The origins of Sunnism and Shī'ism, the two main divisions of Islam, may be traced to the crisis of succession faced by the nascent Muslim community following the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, though the doctrinal bases of these divisions developed gradually in the course of several centuries. In time, Shī'ī Islam, the minoritarian view, became subdivided into different groups, many of which proved short-lived. But Imāmī Shī'ism, providing the common early heritage for several Shī'ī communities, notably the Twelvers and the Ismā'īlīs, was a major exception.

The Ismā'īlīs have had a long and eventful history. In medieval times, they twice established states of their own and played important parts for relatively long periods on the historical stage of the Muslim world. During the second century of their history, the Ismā'īlīs founded the first Shī'ī caliphate under the Fāṭimid caliph-imams. They also made important contributions to Islamic thought and culture during the Fāṭimid period. Later, after a schism that split Ismā'īlism into its two major Nizārī and Musta'lian branches, the Nizārī leaders succeeded in founding a cohesive state, with numerous mountain strongholds and scattered territories stretching from eastern Persia to Syria. The Nizārī state collapsed only under the onslaught of the all-conquering Mongols. Thereafter, the Ismā'īlīs never regained any political prominence and survived in many lands as minor Shī'ī Muslim communities. By the second half of the eighteenth century, however, the spiritual leaders or imams of the Nizārī majority came out of their obscurity and actively participated in certain political events in Persia and, then, in British India. Later they acquired international prominence under their hereditary title of Āghā Khān (Aga Khan).

The Ismā'īlīs have almost continuously faced the hostility of the majority of Muslim dynasties and groups. Indeed, they have been amongst the most severely

persecuted communities in the Islamic world. As a result, the Ismā'īlīs have been obliged for the most part to live clandestinely, guarding secretly their religious beliefs and literature.

Under such circumstances, the Ismā'īlīs were until a few decades ago studied and judged mainly on the basis of the hostile accounts produced by their enemies, including the writings of the majority of the medieval Muslim historians, theologians, heresiographers and polemicists, as well as the fanciful stories related by the occidental chroniclers of the Crusaders. Having had confrontations with the Nizārīs of Syria, the Crusaders were also responsible for making these sectarians, followers of the Old Man of the Mountain, known in Europe as the Assassins; an unfortunate misnomer that is still occasionally applied by some writers to the entire Nizārī branch of Ismā'īlism. The same anti-Ismā'īlī sources provided the basis for the studies of the nineteenth-century orientalisks on different aspects of the Ismā'īlī movement.

However, Ismā'īlī studies have been revolutionized in the twentieth century, especially since the 1930s, mainly by the discovery and study of a large number of Ismā'īlī manuscripts preserved in India, Central Asia and Yaman (Yemen). Many of these Ismā'īlī texts, including the classical treatises of the Fāṭimid period, have been gradually edited and published. The new availability of genuine Ismā'īlī sources has enabled a small group of specialists, initially led by the late Wladimir Ivanow, to produce important studies in the field. As a result of the modern progress in Ismā'īlī studies, we have now acquired a much better understanding of the true nature of the Ismā'īlī movement, necessitating a drastic revision of previously held ideas on the subject.

This study aims to present, in a connected manner, the results of modern scholarship on the history and doctrines of the Ismā'īlīs. Drawing on a large number of Ismā'īlī texts and other primary sources, as well as the contributions of the modern authorities, it seeks to cover all the major phases and events in the development of Ismā'īlism.

The genesis of this book dates back to more than [four] decades ago when I was a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, and began to correspond with Wladimir Ivanow, who was the original inspirer of my interest in Ismā'īlī studies. The bulk of the manuscript was, however, written in Tehran between 1979 and 1987, the turbulent years of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Subsequently, some sections were revised and many additions were made to the notes and references. In conducting my research, I utilized, over the years, the collections of several private and public libraries in Tehran, Paris, London and elsewhere. I am particularly indebted to The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, for placing at my disposal their Ismā'īlī manuscripts.

Professor Wilferd Madelung of the University of Oxford read the entire typescript of the book and made many valuable suggestions for its improvement, also saving me from several errors and inaccuracies. I owe him a very special debt of gratitude.

A number of friends accompanied me on field trips to Alamūt, Lamasar, Girdkūh, Anjudān, Dizbād, and other Ismāʿīlī sites in Iran, or in different ways contributed to the completion of this book. I am grateful to all of them. I am particularly indebted to Mithra Razmjoo for her literary judgement and keen editing; to Mohammad R. Moghtader for preparing an earlier draft of the (second) map; to Azizeh Azodi for letting me benefit from her profound knowledge of the German and Russian languages; and to Susan van de Ven for carefully preparing the final typescript for the Press. Iradj Bagherzade, extremely busy with his own publishing schedule in London, always found time to advise me on publishing matters. I should like to express my warm thanks to him. And I am deeply thankful to Farideh Agha Khan, who has been a constant source of inspiration and assistance over the years.

Finally, there is Fereshteh who not only encouraged the writing of this book and then bore with me while I was writing it, but who also photographed many Ismāʿīlī sites for me, at times with great risk to her safety, and typed the various drafts of the book. I can never thank her adequately; this book is dedicated to her as a token of my deep sense of appreciation.

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Preface to the second edition

The bulk of the original text of this book was completed by the mid 1980s. After some minor additions, the first edition of the book was published in 1990. As the first comprehensive history of the Ismāʿīlīs, synthesizing the scattered results of modern scholarship in the field, this publication was well received by the academic community as well as the Ismāʿīlīs worldwide. As a result, it was reprinted several times, in addition to being translated into Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Turkish and Tajik (Cyrillic). The Persian translation of *The Ismāʿīlīs: their history and doctrines* also received the ‘best book of the year award’ in the Islamic Republic of Iran, an unexpected accolade.

Meanwhile, in 1988 I had joined The Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, which serves as an international forum for Ismāʿīlī studies. The progress in this field of Islamic studies has proceeded at an astonishing pace during the last two decades, as reflected in my *Ismaili literature: A bibliography of sources and studies* (2004), while my own Ismāʿīlī scholarship has moved beyond its initial stages in the 1960s and 1970s. All this has necessitated the production of a second revised edition of this book. In this new edition, many parts of all chapters have been re-written or otherwise revised, and much new material has been incorporated throughout the text of the book. In addition, doctrinal expositions and interpretations have been sharpened to reflect more recent academic perspectives on aspects of Ismāʿīlī thought. In order to improve the accessibility of the book, chapters have also been provided with relevant sub-headings. Finally, a systematic effort has been made to update the endnotes, annotations and references, accounting for the important publications of the last two decades. This second edition also contains an expanded ‘select bibliography’, in addition to new illustrations and another map.

A number of colleagues at The Institute of Ismaili Studies have assisted me in the production of this edition. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude to Nadia Holmes, for meticulously preparing the various drafts of the typescript, to Isabel Miller, for her keen editorial work, and to Patricia Salazar for expediting a variety of production tasks.

Note on the text and abbreviations

The system of transliteration used in this book for the Arabic script is essentially that of the new (second) edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, with two modifications, namely, *j* for *dj*, and *q* for *k*. To maintain consistency, the same system is utilized for transliterating Persian names and terms, except that *č* is replaced by *ch*, and sometimes *v* is used for *w*. Furthermore, an attempt has been made to reproduce the more elaborate vowel system of Turkish and Mongol names, thus Hülögü and not Hülägü. Common geographical names and certain Islamic terms which have acquired standard usage in the English language have not been transliterated.

The lunar years of the Islamic calendar are generally followed throughout the text and the endnotes (with the exception of chapter 1) by the corresponding Gregorian solar years (e.g., 6th/12th century). The years of the Islamic era, initiated by the emigration (*hijra*) of the Prophet Muḥammad from Mecca to Medina in July 622, commonly abbreviated in the Latin form AH (= *Anno Hegirae*), have been converted to the corresponding dates of the Christian era, abbreviated as AD (= *Anno Domini*), on the basis of the conversion tables given in Greville S. P. Freeman-Grenville, *The Muslim and Christian Calendars* (London, 1963). In Iran (Persia), a solar Islamic calendar was officially adopted in the 1920s. The Islamic dates of the sources published in modern Iran are, therefore, solar (Shamsī; abbreviated to Sh. in the Select bibliography), coinciding with the corresponding Christian years starting on 21 March.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for certain frequently cited periodicals and other sources in the Notes and Select bibliography:

AIEO	<i>Annales de l'Institut d'Études Orientales</i>
AIM	D. Cortese, <i>Arabic Ismaili Manuscripts: The Zāhid 'Alī Collection in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies</i>
AI(U)ON	<i>Annali dell' Istituto (Universitario) Orientale di Napoli</i>

Note on the text and abbreviations

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APP	<i>An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia: Volume II</i> , ed. S. H. Nasr with M. Aminrazavi
BIFAO	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire</i>
BSO(A)S	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies</i>
EI	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 1st edition
EI2	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , New edition
EII	<i>Encyclopaedia of Iran and Islam (Dānishnāma-yi Īrān va Islām)</i>
EIR	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i>
EJ	<i>Eranos Jahrbuch</i>
ER	<i>Encyclopedia of Religion</i>
ERE	<i>Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics</i>
EWI	<i>Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam (Dānishnāma-yi Jahān-i Islām)</i>
GIE	<i>The Great Islamic Encyclopaedia (Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī)</i>
IJMES	<i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
IMMS	F. Daftary, <i>Ismailis in Medieval Muslim Societies</i>
IOAM	D. Cortese, <i>Ismaili and Other Arabic Manuscripts: A Descriptive Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies</i>
JA	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBBRAS	<i>Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
MIHT	F. Daftary (ed.) <i>Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought</i>
NS	New Series, Nuova Serie
REI	<i>Revue des Études Islamiques</i>
RHC	<i>Recueil des Historiens des Croisades</i>
RHCHO	<i>Recueil des Historiens des Croisades: Historiens Orientaux</i>
RSO	<i>Rivista degli Studi Orientali</i>
SEI	<i>Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>