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The Medieval Ismā'īlīs of the Iranian Lands

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Reference

Hillenbrand, Carole (ed.) *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth* Vol.II *The Sultan's Turret: Studies in Persian and Turkish Culture*, Brill: Leiden Boston, Köln, 2000 pp. 43-81

Abstract

This article chronicles the main events and personalities associated with the Ismā'īlī *Da'wa* in Persian speaking lands. Beginning with the nascent and divergent Ismā'īlī groups and communities that were established following the death of the sixth Imam Ja'far al-Sādiq in 148/765, the article presents an historical survey of the process by which the *Da'wa* was spread throughout the region.

The founding of the Fātimid state in 297/909; the rivalry between the Fātimids and the Qarāmita; the consolidation and unification of the *Da'wa*; the establishment of the Nizārī Alamūt state by Ḥasan-i Sabbah in 483/1090 – these and other factors are considered in relation to their impact on the extent and influence – political, cultural and intellectual – of the Persian Ismā'īlī communities.

Attention is brought to bear also on the manner in which the Alamūt state both expressed and in turn strengthened the re-affirmation of Persian language and culture as a protest against the political dominance of the Turkish dynasties.

Keywords

Dā'ī, Da'wa, Al-Da'wa al-Hadiya, Al-Da'wa al-Jadida, Al-Da'wa al-Qadima, Nizārī, Mustalis Qiyama, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Nasaḥī, Al-Sijistānī, Ḥāmid al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, Fātimids, Nāsir-i Khusrāw, Ḥasan-i Sabbah, Alamūt, Khurāsān, Transoxania, Qarāmita, Sāmānids, Būyids, Seljuqs, al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, Badakhshan, Rūdbār, Quhistan, Anjudan, Ḥasan 'aladhikrihi'l-salam, Qiyama

A major Shī'ī Muslim community, the Ismā'īlīs have had a long and eventful history dating to the middle of the 2nd/8th century. After obscure beginnings in southern Iraq, the Ismā'īlī *da'wa* or mission spread rapidly to eastern Arabia, Yemen, Syria, and other Arab lands as well as North Africa where the Ismā'īlīs founded their own state, the Fātimid caliphate, in 297/909. Meanwhile, the Ismā'īlī *da'wa* had been extended to many regions of the Iranian lands, from Khūzistan in southwestern Persia and Daylam in the southern shores of the Caspian Sea to Khurāsān and Transoxania in Central Asia. Belonging to a variety of ethnic groupings and socio-cultural milieux, the Ismā'īlīs in time elaborated diverse intellectual and literary traditions in Arabic, Persian and Indic languages. At present, the

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Ismā'īlīs are scattered in more than twenty-five countries of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America.

Of all the Ismā'īlī communities which have survived to our own times, those of the Iranian lands and Yemen have had the longest continuous histories. This study, presented respectfully to Professor C. Edmund Bosworth who has so meticulously studied over several decades the history and cultures of the peoples of the Iranian lands, aims to provide a historical overview of the medieval Ismā'īlī communities of these lands and their prominent *dā'īs* or missionaries, who were also their community's scholars and authors. The Iranian Ismā'īlīs are primarily Persian-speaking and, since 487/1094 have belonged to the majoritarian Nizārī community of Ismā'īlīsm. The Iranian Ismā'īlīs, now situated mainly within the borders of Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan as well as in Hunza and other northern areas of Pakistan, along with the Khoja Ismā'īlīs of Indian origins and other Nizārī Ismā'īlīs of the world, currently acknowledge H.H. Prince Karim Aga Khan IV as their forty-ninth imam or spiritual leader.

On the Imam Ja'far al-Sādiq's death in 148/765, the Imāmī Shi'is who had acquired their prominence in his imamate, split into various groups. Later Imāmī heresiographers identify two of these Kūfan-based splinter groups as the earliest Ismā'īlīs. One group, the so-called “pure Ismā'īliyya”, denied the death of Ismā'īl, Ja'far al-Sādiq's eldest son and original heir-designate, and awaited his return as the Mahdi or *qa'im*. A second group, acknowledging Ismā'īl's death in his father's lifetime, now recognized Ismā'īl's son Muḥammad as their new imam; this group became known as the Mubārakiyya, named after Ismā'īl's epithet of al-Mubārak (the Blessed One).¹ Few details are known about the subsequent history of the early Ismā'īlīs until the middle of the 3rd/9th century. Soon after 148/765, when the bulk of the Imāmiyya recognized the imamate of Ismā'īl's half-brother Mūsā al-Kāzim (d. 183/799, later counted as the seventh imam of the Twelver Shi'is, Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl left the permanent residence of the 'Alids in Medina and went into hiding to avoid 'Abbāsid persecution, initiating the *dawr al-satr* or period of concealment in early Ismā'īlī history. It is certain that Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl spent the latter part of his life in Khūzistan, where he had some following in addition to the bulk of the Mubārakiyya who lived clandestinely in Kufa. In fact, Khūzistan in southwestern Persia remained the scene of the activities of early Ismā'īlī leadership for several decades.

On the death of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, not long after 179/795, the Mubārakiyya themselves split into two groups. A majority, refusing to accept his death, now acknowledged him as the Mahdi, while an obscure group traced the imamate in his progeny. Modern scholarship has revealed that for almost a century after Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, a group of his descendants worked secretly and systematically as the central leaders of the earliest Ismā'īlīs to create a unified and expanding Ismā'īlī revolutionary movement. These leaders, whose Fātimid 'Alid genealogy was in due course acknowledged by the Ismā'īlīs, did not for three generations claim the Ismā'īlī imamate openly in order to safeguard themselves against 'Abbāsid persecution. The first of these leaders, Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl's son 'Abd Allāh, had in fact organized a reinvigorated Ismā'īlī *da'wa* around the central doctrine of the bulk of the earliest Ismā'īlīs, viz., the Mahdiship of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. Leading an anti-'Abbāsid revolutionary movement in the name of a hidden imam who could not be tracked down by the 'Abbāsid agents did indeed hold obvious advantages for 'Abd Allāh and his next two successors, who



took every precaution to hide their own true identities as the central leaders of the Ismā'īliyya. `Abd Allāh, a capable organizer and strategist, spent his youth in the vicinity of Ahwaz in Khūzistān. He eventually settled down in `Askar Mukram, then an economically flourishing town situated some forty kilometres to the north of Ahwāz. Today the ruins of `Askar Mukram, to the south of Shūshtar, are known as Band-i Qīr. `Abd Allāh lived as a wealthy merchant in `Askar Mukram, from where he decided to organize an expanding Ismā'īlī movement with a network of *dā'īs* operating in different regions. Thus, Khūzistān represented the original base of operations for what was to become the successful Ismā'īlī *da'wa* of the 3rd/9th century. Subsequently, `Abd Allāh was forced to flee from `Askar Mukram due to the hostilities of his enemies; he eventually settled down in Salamiyya, in central Syria, where the secret headquarters of the early Ismā'īlī *da'wa* now came to be located for several decades.

Emergence of the Qarāmita

The efforts of `Abd Allāh to reorganize the Ismā'īlī movement began to bear concrete results from around 260/873 when numerous *dā'īs* appeared simultaneously in southern Iraq and in different parts of Persia. Al-Ḥusayn al-Ahwāzī, who converted Ḥamdān Qarmat in the Sawād of Kūfa, was a Persian *dā'ī* and a close associate of `Abd Allāh. Ḥamdān Qarmat, then, organized the *da'wa* in southern Iraq, where the Ismā'īlīs became known as the Qarāmita, named after their first local leader. Ḥamdān's chief assistant, and one of the most learned *dais* of the early Ismā'īlīs, was his brother-in-law `Abdān who himself hailed from Khūzistan. `Abdān recruited and trained numerous *dā'īs*, who were dispatched in due course to various regions around the Persian Gulf. Amongst such *dā'īs*, who were of Persian origins and operated in different parts of Persia, particular mention may be made of Abū Sa'īd Ḥasan b. Bahrām al-Jannābī, a native of the port of Jannāba (Persian, Ganāva) on the northern shore of the Persian Gulf. Abū Sa'īd was initially active with much success in southern Persia, before being dispatched to Baḥrayn in eastern Arabia, where he spread the *da'wa* successfully among the indigenous bedouin tribesmen and the Persians residing there. He eventually founded the independent Qarmatī state of Baḥrayn which lasted for almost two centuries. There was also `Abdān's own brother al-Ma'mūn, who was appointed as *dā'ī* in Fārs, where the Ismā'īlīs were evidently called the Ma'mūniyya after him.²

The initiation of the *da'wa* in the west-central and northwestern parts of Persia, the region designated as the Jibāl by the Arabs, also dates to the early 260s /870s, or possibly earlier, as the Imāmī scholar al-Fadl b. Shādhān who died in 260/873 had already written a refutation of the Ismā'īliyya (Qarāmita) in Persia. The *da'wa* in the Jibāl was initiated by a certain *dā'ī* called Khalaf al-Ḥallāj, who was sent there by the central leader of the Ismā'īlī movement. Khalaf established himself in the village of Kulayn, in the district of Pashāpūya near Rayy (to the south of modern-day Tehran), where an important Imāmī community already existed; and the area of Rayy continued to serve as the base of operations for the *da'wa* in the Jibāl. The earliest Ismā'īlīs of Rayy became known as the Khalafiyya, named after their first local leader. Khalaf was succeeded as the chief *dā'ī* of Rayy by his son Aḥmad and then by the latter's chief disciple Ghiyāth, a native of Kulayn. Ghiyāth extended the *da'wa* to Qumm, another important Imāmī centre in Persia, Kāshān, Hamadān and other towns of the Jibāl. Ghiyāth also initiated the *da'wa* in Khurāsān. However, the efforts of these early *dā'īs* of Rayy to



mobilize rural support for insurrectional purposes, as attempted by Ḥamdān and 'Abdān in Iraq, proved futile. The Persian *dā'īs* soon adopted a new policy, addressing their message to the ruling classes. After its initial success in the Jibāl, this policy was also implemented in Khurāsān and Transoxania. It was in accordance with this policy that Ghiyāth converted al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Marwazī, a prominent *amīr* in the service of the Sāmānids in Khurāsān. As a result, large numbers in the districts of Tāliqān, Maymana, Harāt, Gharjistān and Ghūr, under the influence of this *amīr* who later became a *dā'ī* himself, also converted to Ismā'īlism. Ghiyāth's chief deputy was the learned theologian Abū Ḥātim al-Razī, a native of Ryy, who in time became the fifth *dā'ī* of the Jibāl.³

Al- da'wa al-Hadiya

As a result of the efforts of `Abd Allāh, later designated in the Fātimid sources as al-Akbar (the Elder), and his successors, a unified and dynamic Ismā'īlī movement had by the early 280s/890s completely replaced the earlier Kūfan-based splinter groups. This movement was centrally and secretly directed from Salamiyya. The Ismā'īlī now referred to their religio-political campaign and movement as a *da'wa al-hādiya* (the rightly guiding mission), or simply as the *da'wa* (the mission), in addition to using expressions such as the *da'wat al-ḥaqq* (the summons to the truth). The Ismā'īlīs were then united around the doctrine of the Mahdship of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl whose imminent return was expected. Centred on the advent of the Mahdi, the restorer of true Islam who would establish the rule of justice in the world, the Ismā'īlī movement of the second half of the 3rd/9th century had much messianic appeal for different under-privileged groups. Indeed, Ismā'īlism now appeared as a movement of social protest against the oppressive rule of the `Abbāsids and their social order. The early Ismā'īlī movement achieved particular success among the Imāmī Shī'īs of Iraq and Persia who were left without an imam and in a state of disarray on the death of their eleventh imam, al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, in 260/873-874. At the same time, the fragmentation of the 'Abbāsīd state and the various peripheral challenges posed to the authority of the 'Abbāsīd caliph by number of new dynasties, such as the Saffārids of Sistan, had made it possible for the Ismā'īlīs and others to launch their own insurrectional activities.

'Abd Allāh al-Mahdī claims Imamate

The Ismā'īlī movement was rent by a major schism in 286/899. In that year, the then central leader of the movement, the future founder of the Fātimid state 'Abd Allāh al-Mahdī, claimed the imamate openly for himself and his ancestors, the same individuals who had actually led the Ismā'īlī movement after Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. 'Abd Allāh al-Mahdī had now in effect introduced continuity in the Ismā'īlī imamate. He also explained that the same leaders had always regarded themselves as the true imams, but as a form of *taqiyya* or dissimulation they had not divulged their true status in order to safeguard themselves against 'Abbāsīd persecution. In other words, the propagation of the Mahdship of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl had been, we are told, no more than a decoy adopted by the central leaders of early Ismā'īlism, who evidently also used various pseudonyms and posed as the *hujjas* or chief representatives of the hidden Mahdī.⁴



The reform of ‘Abd Allāh al- Mahdī split the unified Ismā‘īlī movement of the time into two rival factions in 286/899. The loyal Ismā‘īlīs, later known as Fāṭimid Ismā‘īlīs, accepted the reform and maintained continuity in the imamate. This loyalist camp included the bulk of the Ismā‘īlīs of Yemen, as well as those of North Africa and Egypt. On the other hand, a dissident camp rejected ‘Abd Allāh al-Mahdī’s declarations, and retained their original belief in the Mahdīship of Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl. Henceforth, the term Qarmatī came to be applied specifically to the dissident Ismā‘īlīs, who did not acknowledge ‘Abd Allāh al-Mahdī and his predecessors, as well as his successors in the Fāṭimid dynasty, as their imams. Centred in Baḥrayn, the dissident Qarmatī faction initially also comprised the communities of Iraq and most of those situated in the Jibāl, Khurāsān and Transoxania.⁵

The Fāṭimid Period

The foundation of the Fāṭimid caliphate in 297/909 in North Africa marked the crowning success of the early Ismā‘īlīs. The religio-political *da‘wa* of the Ismā‘īlīyya had finally led to the establishment of a state or *dawla*, which lasted for more than two centuries until 567/1171. The Fāṭimid victory, indeed, represented the long-awaited fulfilment of a Shī‘ī ideal which had been frustrated by numerous defeats after the brief rule of ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (d. 40/661), the first Shī‘ī imam. In line with their universal aspirations, the Fāṭimid caliph-imams did not discontinue their *da‘wa* upon assuming power. But it was not until the second half of the 5th/11th century that the Fāṭimid *dā‘īs* working in the central and eastern lands of Islam succeeded in winning a growing number of converts within the dominions of the ‘Abbāsids, and their Būyid and Seljuq overlords, as well as in territories ruled by the Saffārids, Ghaznawids and other dynasties emerging in the eastern Iranian lands. These converts acknowledged the Fāṭimid caliph as the rightful Shī‘ī imam of the time. All the surviving Qarmatī communities, outside of Baḥrayn, too, had by then either disintegrated or switched their allegiance to the Fāṭimid Ismā‘īlī *da‘wa*, whose central headquarters were located in the royal city of Cairo founded by the Fāṭimids themselves.

Educated as theologians at special institutions of learning in Cairo the Fāṭimid *dā‘īs* were at the same time the scholars and authors of their community. They produced the classical texts of the Ismā‘īlī literature on a multitude of exoteric (*zāhirī*) and esoteric (*bāṭinī*) subjects, also developing the Ismā‘īlī *ta‘wīl* or esoteric exegesis to its fullest extent. The *dā‘īs* of the Fāṭimid period, especially those operating secretly in the Iranian lands, also elaborated distinctive intellectual traditions, and made important contributions to Islamic civilization.

Consolidating the *Da‘wa*

‘Abd Allāh al- Mahdī (d. 322/930) and his next two successors in the Fāṭimid dynasty were preoccupied with establishing and consolidating the Fāṭimid state in North Africa. It was only with the fourth caliph-imam al-Mu‘izz, who conquered Egypt in 358/969 and transferred the seat of the Fāṭimid state there, that the Fāṭimids could begin to concern themselves effectively with their *da‘wa* activities. At any rate, before leaving Salamiyya permanently in 289/902, al- Mahdī had already dispatched a certain Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Khādīm to Khurāsān as the first chief *dā‘ī* there. The *dā‘ī* al-Khādīm established his secret headquarters at Nīshāpūr sometime during 290-300/903-913. He



propagated the *da'wa* on behalf of `Abd Allāh al-Mahdī, while Ghiyāth had earlier introduced Ismā`īlism to Khurāsān on behalf of the hidden Mahdi Muḥammad b. Ismā`īl. It was under such confusing circumstances that both factions of Ismā`īlism came to be represented in Khurāsān. Be that as it may, al-Khādīm was succeeded, around 307/919, by the *dā`ī* Abū Sa`īd al-Sha`rānī who converted several notables of the province. The next chief *dā`ī* of Khurāsān was the already-noted al-Ḥusayn b. `Ali al-Marwazi, who is a well-known *amīr* in the annals of the Sāmānid dynasty.⁶ In his time, the provincial seat of the *da'wa* was transferred from Nīshāpūr to Marw al-Rūdh (present-day Bālā Murghāb in northern Afghanistan).

The *dā`ī* al-Marwazī appointed as his successor Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Nasafī, a learned theologian and philosopher who hailed from the vicinity of Nakhshab (Arabicized, Nasaf), a town in Central Asia. The *dā`ī* al-Nasafī, who is generally credited with having introduced a form of Neoplatonic philosophy into Ismā`īlī thought, transferred the seat of the *da'wa* to Transoxania, where he had been advised to go by his predecessor in order to convert the dignitaries of the Sāmānid court. After a brief period in Bukhārā, the Sāmānid capital (in present-day Uzbekistan), al-Nasafī retreated to his native Nakhshab, from where he was more successful in penetrating the inner circles of the Sāmānid regime. Subsequently, al-Nasafī settled down in Bukhārā and, with the help of his influential converts at the court, including Ash'ath, the private secretary, won over the young Sāmānid *amīr* Naṣr II b. Aḥmad (301-331 /914-943). Encouraged by his successes, al-Nasafī now began to preach openly in Bukhārā, while extending the *da'wa* also to Sīstān (Arabicized, Sijistān) through one of his subordinate *dā`īs*. The *dā`ī* al-Nasafī reaffirmed the Mahdiship of Muḥammad b. Ismā`īl in his *Kitāb al-maḥṣūl*, which also contained a new emanational cosmological doctrine based on Neoplatonic philosophy. It seems that al-Nasafī's *al-maḥṣūl* gained widespread acceptance within the various Qarmaṭī circles and it played a major part in unifying the Qarmaṭīs of the Iranian lands who, by contrast to the Qarmaṭīs of Baḥrayn, lacked central leadership.

Sāmānid Jihād against the Qarāmīta

The fortunes of the *dā`ī* al-Nasafī and the *da'wa* in Khurāsān and Transoxania were reversed in the aftermath of the revolt of the Turkish soldiers who were in alliance with the Sunnī `ulamā' of the Sāmānid state. Under the *amīr* Naṣr II's son and successor, Nuḥ I b. Naṣr (331-343/943-954), al-Nasafī and his close associates were executed in Bukhārā in 332/943, and their co-religionists were severely persecuted. The Sunnī `ulamā' of the Sāmānid state had now in fact declared a *jihād* or holy war against the Qarmaṭī "heretics". Despite these setbacks, however, the *da'wa* survived in Khurāsān and Transoxania under the leadership of al-Nasafī's son Mas`ūd, nicknamed Dihqān, and then other chief *dā`īs*, notably Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī.

In the meantime, Abū Ḥatīm al-Rāzī had assumed office during 300-310/912-923 as the fifth *dā`ī* of Rayy. He extended the *da'wa* to Ādharbāyjān and Daylam, which in medieval times referred to a number of Caspian provinces including Daylamān, Gīlān, Tabaristān (Māzandarān) and Gurgān. Abū Ḥatīm was particularly successful in converting several local rulers, starting with Aḥmad b. `Alī, the governor of Rayy during 307-311/919-924. In the aftermath of the conquest of Rayy by the Sunnī Sāmānids, however, Abū Ḥatīm went to Tabaristān where he sided with Asfār b. Shirawayh (d.



319/931) against the local Zaydī Imam al-*Dā'ī* al-Saghīr. Abū Ḥatīm converted Asfār and soon acquired many followers in Tabaristān and other regions of northern Persia which were then ruled by this Daylamī *amīr*. Abū Ḥatīm also converted Asfār's chief lieutenant Mardāwīj b. Ziyār (d. 323/930), who later rebelled against his master and founded the Ziyārid dynasty of Tabaristān and Gurgān. The famous disputations between the *dā'ī* Abū Ḥatīm and the physician-philosopher Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā' al-Rāzī reportedly took place in the presence of Mardāwīj.⁷

Abū Ḥatīm, like al-Nasafī, evidently belonged to the dissident Qarmatī branch and did not recognize the imamate of his contemporary –‘Abd Allāh al- Mahdī. Indeed, he corresponded with Abū Tāhir al-Jannābī, the leader of the Qarmatī state of Bahrayn, and like the latter was expecting the appearance of the Mahdī in the year 316/928. Abū Ḥatīm may even have claimed to have been the lieutenant of the hidden Mahdī. At any rate, as Abū Ḥatīm 's date for the emergence of the Mahdī proved wrong, Mardāwīj turned against the *dā'ī* and his community. Subsequently, Abū Ḥatīm sought refuge with Mufliḥ, a local ruler, in Ādharbāyjān, and died in that northwestern region of Persia in 322/934. On Abū Ḥatīm 's death, the Qarmatīs (Ismā'īlīs) of the Jibāl were thrown into disarray and their leadership eventually passed to ‘Abd al-Malik al-Kawkabī who resided in Girdkūh, near Dāmghān, the future Nizārī Ismā'īlī stronghold, and a certain Ishāq residing in Rayy. The latter *dā'ī* may perhaps be identified with Abū Ya'qūb Ishāq b. Aḥmad al-Sijistānī, the *dā'ī* al-Nasafī's disciple and successor in Khurāsān.

***Da'wa* Spreads to the Rūdbār of Alamūt**

It was due to Abū Ḥatīm al-Rāzī's successes in Daylam that the *da'wa* also spread to the Rūdbār of Alamūt or Daylamān, the traditional seat of the obscure Justānid dynasty. One of the earlier Justānid rulers, Wahsūdān b. Marzubān had built around the middle of the 3rd/9th century the fortress of Alamūt, which was to become the central headquarters of the Nizārī Ismā'īlī *da'wa* and state. The Justānids traditionally supported the Shī'ism of the Zaydī `Alid rulers of Tabaristān. Mahdī b. Khusraw Fīrūz, known as Siyāhchashm, who succeeded his father at Alamūt soon after 307/919, was the first Justānid to embrace Ismā'īlism of the dissident Qarmatī kind.⁸ After being defeated by Muḥammad b. I Mūsāfir, the founder of the powerful Musāfirid dynasty of Daylam, Siyāhchashm sought refuge in 316/928 with his co-religionist Asfār b. Shirawayh. But he was soon murdered by Asfār who aspired to add Rūdbār to his own dominions. After Siyāhchashm the Justānids came to be eclipsed by the vigorous dynasty of the Musāfirids or Sallārids, who ruled over parts of Daylam as well as Ādharbāyjān and Arrān.

In 330/941, the founder of the Musāfirid dynasty, Muḥammad b. Musāfir who had held the castle of Shamīrān in Tārum, was deposed by his sons Wahsūdān and Marzubān. Both of these Musāfirids were converted by the *dā'īs* of Rayy, and numismatic evidence from the year 343/954-955 confirms that they adhered to Qarmatīsm and acknowledged the Mahdiship of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl rather than the imamate of their contemporary Fātimid caliph-imam, al-Mu'izz.⁹ Wahsūdān b. Muḥammad (330-35/941-966) remained at Shamīrān and governed Tārum, while his more influential brother Marzubān (330-346/941-957) soon conquered Ādharbāyjān and Arrān, as well as Armenia and other



parts of Transcaucasia as far as Darband, and began to rule over the expanding Musāfirid dominions from his own seat at Ardabīl in northwestern Persia.

After the demise of the Sājids in 317/929, who governed on behalf of the ‘Abbāsids, Ādharbāyjān had become the scene of rivalries among various independent local rulers, including Muflīḥ, a former Sājid officer who gave refuge to Abū Ḥatim al-Rāzī and who may have been one of the *dā’īs* converts. By 326/938, the Khārijī Daysam b. Ibrāhīm al-Kurdī had established his own control over Ādharbāyjān. In the aftermath of a rupture between Daysam and his vizier Abū’l-Qāsim ‘Alī b. Ja’far, the latter fled to Tārum in 330/941 and entered the service of the Musāfirids. Originally serving the Sājids as a financial administrator, Abū’l-Qāsim had also been active secretly as a Bāṭinī (Qarmaṭī) *dā’ī* in northwestern Persia. He was instrumental in encouraging his co-religionist Marzubān b. Muḥammad's conquest of Ādharbāyjān, where he had earlier converted numerous Daylamī notables and army officers in the service of Daysam. It was also at Abū’l-Qāsim's instigation that the bulk of Daysam's army, including many Qarmaṭī converts, deserted him and switched their allegiance to Marzubān. Soon, Marzubān appointed the *dā’ī* Abū’l-Qāsim as his own vizier; and he was now permitted to preach the *da’wa* openly with much success throughout the Musāfirid dominions. The well-informed Ibn Ḥawqal, who may himself have been a secret Fāṭimid *dā’ī* and who visited Ādharbāyjān around the year 344/955, reports on the existence of a large Bāṭinī (Qarmaṭī) community there.¹⁰ Qarmaṭism evidently survived under the later Musāfirids, who were eventually obliged to withdraw to Tārum. After submitting to the Saljuqs, the Musāfirid dynasty was finally overthrown by the Nizārīs of Alamūt who incorporated Shamīrān and other fortresses of Tārum into their own network of mountain strongholds in Rūdbār.

Qarmaṭism in Khurāsān and Transoxania

In the meantime, Qarmaṭism had persisted in Khurāsān and Transoxania in the dominions of the later Sāmānids. The sources have preserved some fragmentary information on the *dā’ī*-authors operating secretly in the eastern Iranian lands after al-Nasafī and his son. There were the *dā’īs* Abū’l-Fadl Zangurz and ‘Atiq, as well as Abū’l-Haytham Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Jurjānī, an Ismā’īlī philosopher and poet from Gurgān, and his disciple Muḥammad b. Surkh al-Nīsābūrī. There was also Abū Tammām, an obscure *dā’ī* from Khurāsān who belonged to al-Nasafī's dissident school. Paul Walker in his recent studies has shown that Abū Tammām, in fact, produced what may well be the only Ismā’īlī heresiography on Muslim sects.¹¹ Above all, mention should be made of Abū Ya’qūb Ishāq b. Aḥmad al-Sijistānī who led the *da’wa* in Khurāsān, and Sīstān, his original base of operations.¹² He may also have headed the *da’wa* in the Jibāl, in succession to Abū Ḥatim al-Rāzī, as well as in Iraq.¹³ A contemporary of the Fāṭimid caliph-imam al-Mu’izz, the *dā’ī* al-Sijistānī was executed as a heretic by the order of the Saffārid *amīr* of Sīstān, Khalaf b. Aḥmad (352-393/963-1003),¹⁴ not long after 361/971, the date of completion of one of his last books.

Al- Sijistānī

A learned theologian and philosopher, the *dā’ī* al-Sijistānī was also a prolific writer; and it is mainly on the basis of his numerous extant works that modern scholars have now begun to study an



important tradition of philosophical theology developed by the *dā'īs* of the Iranian lands, particularly in Khurāsān, during the 4th/10th century.¹⁵ This tradition of learning, which in fact represented a distinctive "Iranian school" of philosophical Ismā'īlism, was evidently initiated by al-Nasafī. The *dā'ī* al-Nasafī, and his successors, wrote for the ruling elite and the educated strata of Muslim society in Khurāsān, and this may explain why they attempted to express their theology in terms of the then most modern and intellectually fashionable philosophical terminologies and themes, without however compromising the Shī'ī essence of their religious message. Drawing on a type of Neoplatonism then current among the educated circles of Khurāsān, these *dā'īs* of the Iranian lands elaborated complex metaphysical systems of thought, amalgamating in an original manner their Shī'ī theology with a Hellenized system of emanational Neoplatonic philosophy. A Neoplatonic cosmology, with the universal intellect (*'aql*) and soul (*nafs*) as the first and the second originated beings created by the command of an unknowable God, was an important part of their systems; and this new cosmological doctrine gradually superseded the earlier mythological cosmogony of the pre-Fātimid Ismā'īlīs. Al-Sijistānī was perhaps the foremost Shī'ī Neoplatonist of his time, and his writings are extremely valuable not only for understanding philosophical Ismā'īlism but also for discovering how Neoplatonic themes came to be originally adopted by Muslim thinkers.

It is interesting to note that the leading Iranian *dā'īs* of the early Fātimid times wrote on a multitude of theological issues; they also disagreed among themselves and engaged in a long-drawn disputation over certain aspects of their doctrines. Abū Hātim al-Rāzī, who himself adopted Neoplatonism, wrote his *Kitāb al-islāh (Book of the Correction)* to correct certain ideas found in al-Nasafī's *Kitāb al-mahṣūl (Book of the Yield)*, while al-Sijistānī wrote his *Kitāb al-nusra (Book of the Defence)* to defend al-Nasafī against Abū Hātim's criticisms. Subsequently, Hamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, another learned *dā'ī* belonging to the same "Iranian school" of philosophical Ismā'īlism, acted as an arbiter in this disputation in his *Kitāb al-riyād (Book of the Meadows)*.¹⁶

The Fātimid caliph-imam al-Mu'izz (341-365/953-975), as noted, was the first member of his dynasty who found it possible to concern himself with the affairs of the Fātimid Ismā'īlī *da'wa* outside the Fātimid dominions, where Qarmaṭī communities had continued to flourish with their own *dā'īs* undermining the success of the Fātimid *dā'īs*. In this connection, and in order to win the support of the eastern Qarmaṭīs, al-Mu'izz also attempted a limited doctrinal rapprochement with the Qarmaṭīs, including a partial endorsement of the Neoplatonic cosmological doctrine propounded by the Iranian *dā'īs*. As a result of these efforts, al-Sijistānī was won over to the side of the Fātimid *da'wa*, which henceforth began to preserve his books. At the same time, the dissident communities under the leadership or influence of al-Sijistānī also switched their allegiance to the Fātimid al-Mu'izz, recognizing him as the rightful imam of the time. These developments marked a turning point in the stagnating fortunes of the Fātimid *da'wa* throughout Khurāsān, Sīstān, Makrān and other eastern parts of the Iranian world.

Ismā'īlī State of Sind 347/958

Al-Mu'izz won an important victory also in Sind, where through the conversion of a local ruler an Ismā'īlī state was established around the year 347/98. The rulers of this state, centred at Multān, rec-



ognized the suzerainty of the Fāṭimid caliph and recited the *khutba* in his name rather than for the 'Abbāsīd caliph. Large numbers of Hindus converted to Ismā'īlīsm in this state which was effectively uprooted in 396/ 1005, when Sultan Mahmūd of Ghazna invaded Multān and made its Ismā'īlī ruler a tributary. Soon afterwards, Sultan Maḥmūd began to massacre the Ismā'īlīs of Multān and other parts of his domains, also frustrating renewed Ismā'īlī attempts to re-establish their local rule in Sind.¹⁷ However, Ismā'īlīsm survived clandestinely the Ghaznawid persecutions in northern India, where the Ismā'īlīs later received the protection of the Sūmrās, an Ismā'īlī dynasty which ruled independently in Sind from Thatta for almost three centuries. Despite the efforts of al-Mu'izz and the Fāṭimid *da'wa*, Qarmaṭism persisted for a while longer in certain parts of the Iranian lands, notably Daylam, Ādharbāyjān, and western Persia, as well as in Iraq. Above all, al-Mu'izz failed to win the support of the Qarmaṭīs of Baḥrayn, who were to pose a serious obstacle to the extension of Fāṭimid rule to the central and eastern lands of Islam, beyond Syria and Palestine.

The Fāṭimid *da'wa* was systematically intensified in the Iranian lands under al-Mu'izz's next two successors in the Fāṭimid dynasty, al-Azīz (365-386/975-996) and al-Ḥākim (386-411 /996-1021). By this time, the Fāṭimids had realized the difficulty of extending their rule over the eastern regions of the Muslim world, and in fact a stalemate had by then developed between them and the Būyids, who were still the real masters of the 'Abbāsīd state. Nevertheless, the Fāṭimids did not abandon their universal aspirations, aiming to be acknowledged as imams by all Muslims. It was in the pursuit of this objective that the Fāṭimids retained and, indeed, intensified their *da'wa* activities in the Iranian lands, especially under al-Ḥākim who also concerned himself with the organization of the *da'wa* as well as the training of the *dā'īs*. The Fāṭimid *dā'īs*, including many from Persia and other eastern lands, now received elaborate instructions at the "House of Knowledge" (Dār al-'Ilm), founded by al-Ḥākim in a section of the Fāṭimid palace in 395/1005, and other institutions of learning in Cairo. Among the lesser known Iranian *dā'īs* of this period mention may be made of Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Nīsābūrī who wrote the only known Ismā'īlī treatise of the genre of *adab al-dā'ī* on the ideal *dā'ī* and his attributes.¹⁸

Al-Kirmānī

By far the most eminent Ismā'īlī theologian and *dā'ī* of this period was Ḥāmid al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Kirmānī, who was also the most accomplished Ismā'īlī philosopher of the entire Fāṭimid period. As his *nisba* indicates, al-Kirmānī was probably born in the Persian province of Kirmān. He later maintained his contacts with the Ismā'īlī community of Kirmān, addressing at least one of his treatises to a subordinate *dā'ī* in Jīruft in that province. In time, al-Kirmānī became the chief *dā'ī* in Iraq, in addition to heading the *da'wa* in central and western parts of Persia, known as the 'Irāq-i 'Ajam; hence his honorific title of *hujjat al-'Irāqayn*, the *hujja* or chief *dā'ī* of both Iraqs. As the most learned theologian of the time, al-Kirmānī was called to Cairo in 405/1014 to refute on behalf of the Fāṭimid *da'wa* the extremist doctrines propounded by the founders of the Druze movement and religion. Later, he returned to Iraq where he composed his principal work, the *Rāḥat al-'aql* (*Quietude of the Intellect*), in 411/1020 and where he died soon afterwards. It was mainly due to al-Kirmānī's efforts that several influential local *amīrs* of Iraq were won over to the side of the Fāṭimids, preparing the ground for later successes of the Fāṭimid *da'wa* in the East.¹⁹



A prolific writer, al-Kirmānī produced some forty treatises.²⁰ He expounded the Ismāʿīlī Shīʿī doctrine of the imamate in several of his works. He also defended the Fāṭimids against the polemical attacks of the Zaydīs of Persia and other adversaries. As a philosopher, al-Kirmānī was fully acquainted with Aristotelian and Neoplatonic philosophies as well as the metaphysical systems of the Muslim philosophers (*falāsifa*), notably al-Fārābī and his own contemporary Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), whose father and brother had converted to Ismāʿīlīsm in their native Transoxania. It was in al-Kirmānī's metaphysical system that philosophical Ismāʿīlīsm attained its summit, reflecting a distinctive synthesis of Shīʿī theology, Hellenistic traditions and gnostic doctrines. In his system, fully elaborated in the *Rāḥat al-ʿaql*, al-Kirmānī also propounded what may be regarded as the third stage in the development of Ismāʿīlī cosmology in medieval times.²¹ In his cosmogonic doctrine, al-Kirmānī replaced the Neoplatonic dyad of the intellect and soul in the spiritual world, which had been adopted by his predecessors in the Iranian school of philosophical Ismāʿīlīsm, by a series of ten separate intellects in partial adoption of al-Fārābī's Aristotelian cosmic system.

Seljuqs replace Būyids 447/1055

The Fāṭimid *daʿwa* continued to be propagated successfully in the eastern lands, even after the ardently Sunnī Seljuqs had replaced the Shīʿī Būyids in 447/1055 as the effective rulers of the ʿAbbāsīd state. Indeed, by the early decades of the reign of the Fāṭimid caliph-imam al-Mustanṣir (427-487/1036-1094), Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlīsm had been established in many parts of the Iranian world, where Qarmaṭī communities had almost completely ceased to exist. The Fāṭimid *dāʿīs* were now particularly active in Iraq and various parts of Persia, notably Fārs, Iṣfahān, Rayy, and other areas of the Jibāl. In Khurāsān and Transoxania, too, the *daʿwa* had become more successful after the downfall of the Sāmānids in 395/1005, when the Turkish Qarakhānids and Ghaznawids divided the former Sāmānid dominions between themselves. This is attested by the fact that in 436/1044 Bughrā Khan, the ruler of the eastern Qarakhānid kingdom established over the lands of the middle Syr Daryā valley, ordered the massacre of a large number of Ismāʿīlīs who had been converted by the Fāṭimid *dāʿīs* operating in his territories. The Fāṭimid *daʿwa* had been active also in the western territories of the Qarakhānids, in Bukhārā, Samarqand, Farghāna and elsewhere in Transoxania. There, Aḥmad b. Khidr, the local Qarakhānid ruler, was executed in Samarqand in 488/1095 (or earlier in 482/1089) on the accusation of having converted to Ismāʿīlīsm.²²

Successes of al-Shīrāz

The most prominent Fāṭimid *dāʿī* of al-Mustanṣir's time was al-Muʿayyad fi'l-Din al-Shīrāzī. He was born around 390/1000 in Shīrāz, in the province of Fārs, into a Daylamī Ismāʿīlī family. His father had acquired some influence in the Būyid circles of Fārs where he eventually seems to have headed the *daʿwa*. Al-Muʿayyad succeeded his father, and in 429/1037 entered the service of the Būyid Abū Kālījār Marzubān (415-440/1024-1048), who ruled over Fārs and Khūzistan from his capital at Shīrāz. The subsequent decades until 451/1059 in al-Muʿayyad's career are well-documented in his autobiography.²³ At any rate, he soon converted Abū Kālījār himself and many of his courtiers as well



as a large number of the Daylamī troops in, the service of the Būyids. Al-Mu'ayyad's success in Fārs brought about hostile reactions spurred on by the caliph at Baghdad, obliging the *dā'ī* to emigrate permanently from Shīrāz in 435/1043. He arrived in Cairo in 439/1047, and soon began to play an active part in the affairs of the Fātimid state and *da'wa*. Later, al-Mu'ayyad played a key role as an intermediary between the Fātimids and Arslān al-Basāsīrī, the Turkish military commander who briefly led the Fātimid cause in Iraq against the Seljuqs. Al-Mu'ayyad delivered the crucial material and financial support of the Fātimids to al-Basāsīrī who, in 450/1058, succeeded to seize Baghdad, where he had the *khutba* read for one full year in the name of al-Mustanşir while the "Abbāsīd caliph remained a captive in his own capital. In the same eventful year 450/1058, al-Mu'ayyad was appointed as the chief *dā'ī* (*dā'ī al-du'āt*), the administrative head of the Fātimid *da'wa* organization in Cairo, a post he held with the exception of one brief period until shortly before his death in 470/1078. Al-Mu'ayyad's principal work, the *Majālis al Mu'ayyadiyya*, eight volumes containing a hundred "sessions" (*majālis*) each and representing the apogee of Ismā'īlī thought, is based on the lectures he had delivered at the "sessions of wisdom" (*majālis al-hikma*) for the instruction of *dā'īs* and other Ismā'īlīs.²⁴

Nāşir-i Khusraw

Another prominent Iranian *dā'ī* of al-Mustanşir's time was Nāşir-i Khusraw. A learned theologian, a traveler, and a renowned poet of the Persian language, Nāşir-i Khusraw was also the last major proponent of philosophical Ismā'īlīsm in the Iranian lands. Nāşir was born in 394/1004 near Balkh, which at the time was a part of the district of Marw in Khurāsān. In his youth, Nāşir held administrative posts at Marw (now in Turkmenistan) under the Ghaznawids and their Seljuq successors. At the age of forty-two, however, Nāşir experienced a spiritual upheaval which may have been connected to his conversion to Ismā'īlīsm. Soon afterwards in 437/1045, he resigned from his post and set off on a long journey for the apparent reason of making pilgrimage to Mecca. But this seven-year journey, described vividly in his *Safar-nāma (Travelogue)*, took Nāşir to the Fātimid capital where he arrived in 439/1047, the same year in which the *dā'ī* al-Mu'ayyad had arrived there. Nāşir stayed in Cairo for three years and received intensive training as a *dā'ī*. During this period, he saw al-Mustanşir and also established close relations with al-Mu'ayyad, who was to remain his mentor at the central headquarters of the Fātimid *da'wa* and to whom he later dedicated several of his poems. In 444/1052 Nāşir-i Khusraw returned to Balkh (near today's Mazār-i Sharīf in northern Afghanistan), and began his career as a Fātimid *dā'ī*, or according to himself as the *hujja* or chief *dā'ī* of Khurāsān.²⁵ At any rate, he established his secret headquarters at Balkh, from where he extended the *da'wa* to Nīshāpūr and other districts of Khurāsān as well as to Tabaristān (Māzandarān) in northern Persia. By 452/1060, however, the hostility of the Sunnī 'ulamā' who denounced Nāşir as a heretic (*mulhid*) and an irreligious person (Persian, *bad-dīn*) and destroyed his house²⁶ had obliged the *dā'ī* to flee to the valley of Yumgān, in the region of Badakhshān in the Pamirs. There, he sought refuge with his friend Abu'l-Ma'ālī 'Alī b. al-Asad, an autonomous Ismā'īlī *amīr* of Badakhshān. This obscure Yumgān period in Nāşir's life lasted until his death, sometime after 465/1072.

Extension of the *Da'wa* to adakhshan by Nāşir



Like other Fāṭimid *dais* of the Iranian lands and elsewhere, Nāṣir-i Khusraw maintained his contacts with the *da'wa* headquarters in Cairo, receiving books and his general instructions from there. Even in the remote Yumgān, Nāṣir had ready access to earlier Ismā'īlī literature; and he was particularly influenced by al-Sijistānī, many of whose ideas are paraphrased in Nāṣir's writings. It was probably during this period of exile, if not earlier, that Nāṣir extended the *da'wa* throughout Badakhshān (divided in modern times by the Oxus or Āmū Daryā between Afghanistan and Tajikistan). At any event, the Ismā'īlīs of Badakhshān, and their offshoot community in the Hindukush region (now situated in Hunza and other northern areas of Pakistan) regard Nāṣir as the founder of their communities, and they still revere him under the name of Pīr or Shāh Sayyid Nāṣir. It was also in Yumgān that Nāṣir produced the bulk of his poetry and philosophico-theological works, including the *Zād al-musāfirīn* written in 453/1061 and the *Jāmi' al-hikmatayn*, his last known work completed in 462/1070 at the request of his Ismā'īlī protector in Badakhshān.²⁷ The Ismā'īlīs of Badakhshān have continued to preserve Nāṣir-i Khusraw's genuine and spurious works, all written in the Persian language. Nāṣir-i Khusraw's mausoleum is still in existence on a hillock near the village of Jarm in the vicinity of Faydābād, the capital of Afghan Badakhshān.

By the early 460s/1070s, the Ismā'īlīs of Persia in the Seljuq dominions had come to own the authority of a single chief *dā'ī*, `Abd al-Malik b. `Attāsh, who had his secret headquarters at Isfahān, the main Seljuq capital. A learned *dā'ī*, Ibn `Attāsh seems to have been the first *dā'ī* to have centrally organized the *da'wa* and the various Ismā'īlī communities of the Seljuq territories in Persia, from Kirmān to Ādharbāyjān. He may have been responsible for the *da'wa* activities in Iraq as well; but his central supervision does not seem to have been extended to northern Khurāsān, Badakhshān and adjacent regions in Central Asia. Ibn `Attāsh, who received his own instructions from Cairo, was also responsible for launching the career of Ḥasan-i Sabbāh, his successor and the future founder of the independent Nizārī Ismā'īlī *da'wa* and state centred at Alamūt.

Split between Nizārīs and Musta'lis 487/1094

Al-Mustanshir died after a long reign in 487/1094. The dispute over his succession split the then unified Ismā'īlī *da'wa* and community into the rival Nizārī and Musta'li branches. By that time, Ḥasan-i Sabbāh was already following an independent revolutionary policy as the leader of the Persian Ismā'īlīs; and he did not hesitate to support the cause of Nizār, al-Mustanshir's original heir-designate who had been deprived of his succession rights through the machinations of the all-powerful Fāṭimid vizier al-Afdal. The vizier had swiftly installed Nizār's younger brother to the Fāṭimid caliphate with the title of al-Musta'li. However, Ḥasan recognized Nizār as al-Mustanshir's successor to the Ismā'īlī imamate and severed his relations with the Fāṭimid *da'wa* headquarters in Cairo, which had transferred their own allegiance to al-Musta'li, recognizing him and, later, some of his descendants as their imams after al-Mustanshir. Henceforth, the Ismā'īlīs of the Iranian lands, who recognized the imamate of Nizār and his progeny and became known as the Nizāryya, developed independently of the Ismā'īlīs of Egypt and the communities in Yemen and Gujarāt dependent on the Fāṭimid regime; the latter communities comprised the Musta'liyya branch of Ismā'īlism.



The Alamūt Period

During the Alamūt period of their history (488-654/1090-1256), the Ismā'īlīs of Persia came to possess a state of their own, with a subsidiary in Syria. This state, with its central headquarters at the mountain fortress of Alamūt, was founded in the midst of the Seljuq sultanate by Ḥasan-i Sabbāh, and it lasted for some 166 years until it collapsed under the onslaught of the Mongol hordes in 654/1256. The Persian Ismā'īlīs themselves produced official chronicles recording the events of their state, starting with the *Sargudhasht-i Sayyidnā (Biography of our Master)*, which covered the life and career of Ḥasan-i Sabbāh as the first lord of Alamūt.²⁸ These chronicles, as well as the bulk of the meagre religious literature produced by the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs of the Alamūt period, have not survived. However, the Nizārī chronicles were seen and utilized by three Persian historians of the Īlkhānid period, namely, Juwaynī (d. 681/1283), Rashīd al-Dīn Fadl Allāh (d. 718/1318) and Abu'l-Qāsim Kāshānī (d. ca. 738/1337), who are our primary sources on the history of the Persian Ismā'īlīs during the period.²⁹

The mission of Ḥasan-i Sabbāh

Ḥasan-i Sabbāh was born in the mid-440s/1050s into a Twelver Shī'ī Family in Qumm, a traditionally Shī'ī town in central Persia. Subsequently, the Sabbah family moved to the nearby town of Rayy another important centre of Shī'ī learning and an area of Ismā'īlī activity. Soon after the age of seventeen, Ḥasan was introduced to Ismā'īlī doctrines and was converted through the efforts of some local *dā'īs*. In 464/1072, the newly initiated Ḥasan was brought to the attention of Ibn 'Attāsh, who was then staying in Rayy. Ibn 'Attāsh recognized Ḥasan's talents and appointed him to a post in the *da'wa*, also instructing him to go to Cairo to further his Ismā'īlī education. Ḥasan finally arrived in Fāṭimid Egypt in 471/1078, and spent some three years in Cairo and Alexandria. In Egypt, Ḥasan seems to have come into conflict with Badr al-Jamālī (d. 487/1094), the all-powerful Fāṭimid Vizier and "commander of the armies", who had shortly earlier also succeeded al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī as the *dā'ī al-du'āt*. At any rate, Ḥasan seems to have been banished under obscure circumstances from Egypt: he returned to the Persian *da'wa* headquarters at Iṣfahān in 473/1081. He seems to have learned important lessons in Fāṭimid Egypt. Beset by numerous difficulties, the Fāṭimid regime was by then well embarked on its rapid decline. Ḥasan was now fully aware of the inability of the Fāṭimid state to support the Persian Ismā'īlīs, taking this reality into account in his own subsequent revolutionary strategy.

In Persia, Ḥasan travelled for nine years in the service of the *da'wa* to different localities, in Kirmān, Khūzistān, Qūmis, as well as the Caspian provinces in Daylam. It was during this period that Ḥasan formulated his revolutionary strategy against the Seljuqs, also evaluating Seljuq military strength in different parts of Persia. By 480/1087, he seems to have chosen the inaccessible mountain fortress of Alamūt, in the region of Rūdbār in Daylam, as a suitable site to establish his headquarters. Ḥasan, who was later appointed *dā'ī* of Daylam, now began to reinvigorate the *da'wa* activities throughout Rūdbār. Ḥasan's activities were soon brought to the attention of Nizām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), who remained vizier for thirty years under the Great Seljuq Sultans Alp Arslān and Malik Shāh. However,



Nizām al-Mulk failed to capture Ḥasan, who in due time arrived in Rūdbār. In 483/1090, with his supporters infiltrating Alamūt and its surroundings, Ḥasan seized that impregnable fortress in the Alborz mountains according to a clever plan, signalling the open revolt of the Persian Ismāʿīlīs against the Seljuqs. The seizure of Alamūt also marked the foundation of what was to become the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī state in Persia. It is certain that Cairo had played no part in the organization or direction of this revolt, which was planned and carried out by Ḥasan on his own initiative.

Reaffirmation of Persian identity

Ḥasan-i Sabbāh seems to have had a complex set of religio-political motives for his revolt against the Seljuq Turks. As an Ismāʿīlī, he could not have tolerated the anti- Shīʿī policies of the Seljuqs, who as the new champions of Sunnī "orthodoxy" had sworn to uproot Fāṭimid Shīʿī rule from the Muslim world. Less conspicuously, Ḥasan's revolt was also an expression of Persian "national" sentiments, which accounts for its early popular appeal and success in Persia. By the opening decades of the 5th/11th century, a number of Turkish, dynasties had established their rule over the Iranian lands, starting with the Ghaznawids and the Qarakhānids. A new alien age, with the Turks replacing the Arabs, in the Islamic history of the Iranian world was definitely initiated by the coming of the Seljuqs, who threatened the revival of Persian culture and national sentiments. This renaissance of a specifically Irano-Islamic culture had been based on the sentiments of the Islamicized Persians who had continued to be consciously aware of their Persian identity and cultural heritage during the centuries of Arab domination. This process, pioneered by the Saffārids and maintained under the Sāmānids and the Būyids, had become quite irreversible by the time of the Turkish domination of the region.³⁰ At any rate, the Turkish Seljuqs were aliens in Persia and their rule was intensely detested by the Persians of different social classes. The anti-Turkish sentiments of the Persians were further aggravated due to the depredation caused in towns and villages by the Turks and their unruly soldiery, who were continuously attracted in new waves to Persia from the steppes of Central Asia by the successes of the Seljuqs. Ḥasan himself is reported to have expressed his resentment of the Turks and their rule over Persia.³¹ It was, indeed, to the ultimate goal of uprooting Seljuq rule in Persia that Ḥasan dedicated himself and organized the Persian Ismāʿīlīs into a revolutionary force. In this connection, it is also significant to note that Ḥasan, as an expression of his Persian awareness and in spite of his uncompromising Islamic piety, substituted Persian for Arabic as the religious language of the Ismāʿīlīs of Persia. This was the first time that a major Muslim community had adapted Persian as its religious language; it also explains why the Ismāʿīlī literature of all the Persian-speaking (Nizārī) Ismāʿīlī communities of the Alamūt period and subsequent times was produced entirely in the Persian language.

Extension of Alamūt influence

After firmly establishing himself at Alamūt, Ḥasan-i Sabbāh extended his influence throughout Rūdbār and adjacent areas in Daylam, by winning converts and gaining possession of more strongholds which he fortified systematically for withstanding long sieges. There is evidence suggesting that Ḥasan also attracted at least some of the remnants of the Khurramiyya in Ādharbāyjān



and elsewhere who, as an expression of their own Persian sentiments, referred to themselves as Pārsiyan.³²

Seljuq- Ismāʿīlī clashes begin 484/1091

Soon, Alamūt came to be raided by the forces of the nearest Seljuq *amīr*, marking the initiation of an endless series of Seljuq-Ismaʿīlī military encounters in Persia. In 484/1091, Ḥasan sent the *dāʿī* Ḥusayn-i Qāʾinī to his native Quhistān to mobilize support there. This capable *dāʿī* met with immediate success in Quhistān, a barren region in southeastern Khurāsān, where the Ismāʿīlīs soon rose in open revolt against the Seljuqs and seized numerous castles as well as several major towns, including Tūn, Tabas, Qāʾin and Zūzan. As a result, Quhistān became the second major territory, after Rūdbār, for the activities of the Persian Ismāʿīlīs.

By 485/1092, Ḥasan had founded an independent territorial state for the Persian Ismāʿīlīs. Having become aware of the growing power of the Ismāʿīlīs, Sultan Malik Shāh had meanwhile sent major Seljuq expeditions against the Ismāʿīlīs of both Rūdbār and Quhistan. However, on Malik Shāh's death in 485/1092, the Seljuq forces dispersed, and the sultanate was thrown into civil war for more than a decade until 498/1105, when Muḥammad Tapar emerged victorious as the undisputed sultan while his brother Sanjar remained at Balkh as his viceroy in the East. During this period of strife in the Seljuq camp, Ḥasan-i Sabbāh readily consolidated and extended his power to other parts of Persia, including especially the medieval province of Qumis where the Ismāʿīlīs seized Girdkūh and a number of other strongholds near Dāmghān. The Ismāʿīlīs also captured several fortresses in Arrajān, in the border region between the provinces of Khūzistān and Fārs. The Ismāʿīlī leader in Arrajān was the *dāʿī* Abū Ḥamza, who like Ḥasan, had spent some time in Egypt to further his Ismāʿīlī education. In Daylam itself the Ismāʿīlīs had repelled intermittent Seljuq offensives;³³ they had also acquired more strongholds in northern Persia, including the key fortress of Lamasar (or Lanbasar) to the west of Alamūt. Kiyā Buzurg-Ummīd, who had seized Lamasar by assault, stayed there as commander four more than twenty years until he was called to Alamūt to succeed Ḥasan-i Sabbāh. In addition, the Ismāʿīlīs were now spreading their activities to numerous towns throughout Persia, also directing their attention closer to the seat of Seljuq power, Iṣfahān. In this area, the Ismāʿīlīs, under the leadership of Ibn ʿAttāsh's son Aḥmad, attained a major political success by seizing in 494/1100 the fortress of Shāhdiz, which guarded the main routes to the Seljuq capital. It is reported that the *dāʿī* ʿAḥmad succeeded in converting some 30,000 persons in the Iṣfahān area, where he also collected taxes in the districts around Shāhdiz. There is no evidence suggesting that the activities of Ḥasan and his immediate successors at Alamūt extended to Badakhshān and elsewhere in Transoxania. The remote and small Ismāʿīlī communities of these regions in Central Asia seem to have developed independently of Alamūt until sometime in the 7th/13th century. By the early years of the 6th/12th century, Ḥasan-i Sabbāh had also extended his activities into Syria by dispatching a number of Persian *dāʿīs* there. However, almost half a century of efforts were required before the Ismāʿīlīs could finally acquire a network of strongholds in Syria. Other than Ḥasan himself, the leading Persian Ismāʿīlī personalities of the early Alamūt period, such as Buzurg-Ummīd, Ḥusayn-i Qāʾinī and Raʿīs Muzaffar, the governor of Girdkūh, were all capable commanders and military strategists suited to the



task at hand, rather than learned theologians and philosophers like the earlier Iranian *dā'īs* of the Fāṭimid times.

Anti-Seljuq strategy of Ḥasan-i Sabbāh

Soon, the anti-Seljuq revolt of the Persian Ismā'īlīs acquired its distinctive pattern and methods of struggle, which were appropriate to the times. Ḥasan-i Sabbāh had recognized the decentralized nature of Seljuq rule as well as their vastly superior military power. As a result, he designed an appropriate vastly superior aiming to subdue the Seljuqs locality by locality through acquiring a multiplicity of impregnable strongholds. He also resorted to the technique of assassinating prominent adversaries for attaining military and political objectives. In subsequent times, this policy became identified in a highly exaggerated manner with the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs to the extent that almost any assassination of any significance in the central and eastern Islamic lands during the Alamūt period was attributed to the daggers of the Ismā'īlī *fidā'īs*, the young self-sacrificing devotees who carried out the actual sectarian missions. And in time, a number of myths came to be fabricated and disseminated regarding the recruitment and training of these *fidā'īs*.³⁴ From early on, the assassinations led to the massacres of Ismā'īlīs, and the massacres in turn provoked further assassinations of their instigators.

Consequences of the Nizārī-Musta'li split

In the meantime, the Nizārī-Musta'li schism of 487/1094 had split the Ismā'īlīs into two rival factions. By that time, Ḥasan-i Sabbāh had emerged as the undisputed leader of the Persian Ismā'īlīs, and perhaps of the Ismā'īlīs of the entire Seljuq realm. He had already been following an independent revolutionary policy for several years, and now he supported Nizār's cause and broke off his relations with Cairo. Ḥasan had now in effect founded the independent Nizārī *da'wa*. In this decision, he was supported by the entire Ismā'īlī community of Persia, while the Ismā'īlīs of Central Asia seem to have remained uninformed about this schism for quite some time. Nizār, who had led an abortive revolt in Egypt, was captured and executed by the Fāṭimid regime in 488/1095. Nizār did have male progeny and some of them revolted against the later Fāṭimids. But Ḥasan-i Sabbāh did not divulge the name of Nizār's successor to the imamate. Numismatic evidence shows that Nizār's own name had continued to be mentioned on the coins minted at Alamūt for some seventy years after his death until the Nizārī Ismā'īlī imams emerged at Alamūt and took charge of the affairs of their community and State.³⁵ In the absence of a manifest imam, Ḥasan continued to be obeyed as the supreme leader of the Nizārī Ismā'īlī movement. Soon after 487/1094, Ḥasan was also acknowledged as the *hujja* or chief representative of the inaccessible imam, in the same manner that the central leaders of the early Ismā'īlī movement had been recognized as the *hujjas* of the hidden imam.

It was under such circumstances that the outsiders from early on had acquired the impression that the movement of the (Nizārī) Ismā'īlīs of Persia represented a "new preaching" (*al-da'wa al-jadīda*), by contrast to the "old preaching" (*al-da'wa al-qadīma*) of the Fāṭimid Ismā'īlīs. Be that as it may, the "new preaching", expressed in the Persian language, was essentially the reformulation of an old Shī'ī doctrine of long standing among the Ismā'īlīs, viz., the doctrine of *ta'lim* or authoritative teaching by the imam. Ḥasan restated this doctrine rigorously in a treatise which has not survived, but it has been



preserved fragmentarily by our Persian historians as well as the contemporary theologian al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) who may have been an Ismāʿīlī himself.³⁶ The doctrine of *taʿlim*, emphasizing the autonomous guiding authority of each imam in his time, provided the foundation of the Nizārī teachings of the Alamūt period and subsequent times. The intellectual challenge posed by the doctrine of *taʿlim*, which also refuted the legitimacy of ʿAbbāsīd rule, called forth the official reaction of the Sunnī establishment, led by al-Ghazālī who attacked the Ismāʿīlīs in several polemical works.

Nizārī setback then consolidation

Alarmed by the Nizārī successes, Sultan Barkiyāruq in western Persia and Sanjar in Khurāsān agreed in 494/1101 to deal more effectively, in their respective territories, with the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs who were then posing a general threat to the Seljuqs. Despite new Seljuq offensives and massacres, however, the Nizārīs managed to retain all their strongholds. But the Nizārī fortunes began to be reversed with the accession of Muḥammad Tapar (498-511/1105-1118) to the sultanate, which marked the termination of dynastic disputes and factional rivalries among the Seljuqs. During his reign, the Persian Nizārīs lost most of their fortresses in the Zagros mountains; with the loss of Shāhdiz in 500/1107, the Nizārīs also lost their influence in the Isfahān region. Despite their superior military power and a prolonged war of attrition, the Seljuqs did not succeed in seizing Alamūt, where Ḥasan-i Sabbāh had continued to stay; and, the Persian Ismāʿīlīs by and large retained their regional positions in Rūdbār, Qumis, and Quhistān. Nevertheless, by the time of Ḥasan's death in 518/1124, the armed revolt of the Persian Ismāʿīlīs against the Seljuqs had lost its effectiveness, much in the same way that Muḥammad Tapar's offensive against them had failed to realize its objectives. The Seljuq-Ismaʿīlī relations had now entered a new phase of "stalemate".

Kiyā Buzurg-Ummīd (518-532/1124-1138), the second lord of Alamūt, maintained the policies of his predecessor and further strengthened the Nizārī state, despite renewed Seljuq offensives against Rūdbār and Quhistān. Meanwhile, the Nizārī *daʿwa* was revived in southern Syria through the efforts of Bahrām (d. 522/1128) and other Persian *dāʿīs* sent from Alamūt, and by 527/1132, they began to acquire their permanent strongholds in central Syria. The scattered territories of the Nizārī state now stretched from Syria to eastern Persia, and possibly parts of adjacent areas in Afghanistan, and yet this state maintained a remarkable cohesion and sense of unity amidst extremely hostile surroundings and despite suffering uninterrupted persecution. Indeed, the stability of this state and the unwavering obedience of the Nizārīs towards their leaders never ceased to amaze the Seljuqs and other Nizārī adversaries, including the European Crusaders. Comprised of mountain dwellers, villagers, and inhabitants of small towns, the Persian Nizārīs also maintained a sophisticated outlook and encouraged learning. They established impressive libraries at Alamūt and their other major strongholds in Persia, as well as Syria. In later Alamūt times, numerous Muslim scholars availed themselves of the Nizārī libraries and patronage of learning.

Buzurg-Ummīd was succeeded by his son Muḥammad (532-557/1138-1162). In his time, the Persian Nizārīs extended their activities to Georgia (Gurjistān). They also made a major effort through their *dāʿīs* to penetrate a new region, Ghur, to the east of Quhistan, in present-day central Afghanistan. The



Nizārī Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa* seems to have been established in that region around 550/1155 at the request of the Ghūrid ruler ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Ḥusayn Jahānsūz. In Daylam, the Nizārīs had continued to confront the enmity of the Zaydīs as well as other local dynasties such as the Bāwandids of Tabaristān and Gīlān.

Proclamation of the Qiyāma 559/1164

The fourth lord of Alamūt, Ḥasan II *ʿalāʾ dhikrihi ʿl-salām* (557-561/1162-1166), proclaimed the *qiyāma* or the Great Resurrection, the long-awaited Last Day, in 559/1164 at special ceremonies held at Alamūt and Quhistān. Relying heavily on Ismāʿīlī *taʿwil* or esoteric exegesis however, the *qiyāma* was interpreted spiritually to mean the manifestation of unveiled truth in the person of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī imam. Accordingly, for the Nizārīs, who alone were capable of understanding the spiritual reality of the immutable religious truths (*haqāʾiq*), hidden in the *bāṭin* of the positive laws, Paradise had now been actualized in this world. As a corollary, the outside world, comprised of non-Ismāʿīlīs, was relegated to the realm of spiritual non-existence. The declaration of the *qiyāma* was tantamount to the Nizārī declaration of independence from the "other". The Nizārīs of the *qiyāma* times did in fact practically ignore the outside world, refraining from any major campaign against their adversaries. As the person who had declared the *qiyāma*, Ḥasan II was also acknowledged by the Nizārī community as the *qāʾim* and the rightful imam from the progeny of Nizar b. al-Mustansir Ḥasan II's son and successor, Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad II (561-607/1166-1210), devoted his own long reign to a systematic elaboration of the doctrine of the *qiyāma*.³⁷ This period also coincided with the career of Rāshid al-Dīn Sinān, the original "Old Man of the Mountain" of the Crusaders. Sinān had spent his youth at Alamūt, where he had furthered his Ismāʿīlī education before being sent by Ḥasan II to Syria soon after 557/1162. He led the Syrian Nizārīs for thirty years to the peak of their power and glory, until his death in 589/1193.

Decline of the Seljuqs

Meanwhile, the Great Seljuq sultanate had been disintegrating in Persia and elsewhere after Sanjar's death in 552/1157. The Seljuqs were replaced by a number of Turkish dynasties in different regions. At the same time, a new power based on Khwārazm, the region on the lower Oxus, had emerged in the East. The hereditary rule of this region had passed earlier into the hands of a Turkish dynasty acting as vassals of the Seljuqs and carrying the region's traditional regnal title of Khwārazm Shāh. After Sanjar, the Khwārazm Shāhs began to assert their independence and expanded their territories into Khurāsān and other Iranian lands. Subsequently, the Khwārazm Shāhs expanded their empire westward across Persia, clearing away the remnants of Seljuq rule. As the successors of the Seljuqs, the Khwārazm Shāhs developed their own hostile relations with the Nizārīs of Rūdbār and elsewhere in Persia. In Quhistān, the Nizārīs had continued to have military encounters with the Ghūrids and the Maliks in the neighbouring Sīstān or Nīmruz.³⁸ It was in the aftermath of the decline of the Seljuqs that the "Abbāsīd caliph al-Nāṣir (575-622/1180-1225) found the long-awaited opportunity to revive the power and prestige of his dynasty. During this period, the new ruler of Alamūt, Jalāl al-Dīn Ḥasan, III (607-618/1210-1221), attempted a daring rapprochement with the Sunnī establishment, ordering his followers to observe the *shariʿa* in its Sunnī form. Later, this policy was explained as having represented a form of *taqiyya* or dissimulation to safeguard the survival of the community and



improve its relations with the rest of the Muslim society. At any rate, by contrast to the *qiyāma* times, the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī imam had now boldly accommodated his community to the outside world. The new Nizārī policy proved very successful; Jalāl al-Dīn Ḥasan was acknowledged by the caliph al-Nāṣir and other leading Sunnī rulers as an *amīr* in the Muslim world, and his rights to the Nizārī territories were officially recognized. Jalāl al-Dīn Ḥasan also participated in the caliph al-Nāṣir's intricate alliances. As a result of these developments, the Ghūrīd attacks against the Nizārīs of Quhistān ceased, while the Nizārīs of Syria received timely help from the Ayyūbids in their conflicts with the Crusaders; and many Sunnīs, including scholars, who were then fleeing from the first Mongol invasions of Khurāsān, began to find refuge in the Nizārī towns and strongholds of Quhistān. Later in the 7th/13th century, the Nizārī *daʿwa* began to be actively propagated in Badakhshān where the Ismāʿīlīs had survived in small Pamiri communities. At the same time, Nizārī *dāʿīs*, later also called *pīrs*, were dispatched from Alamūt to spread the *daʿwa* in Multān and other areas of Sind.

Chingiz Khan and the impact of the Mongol invasions

The final decades of the Nizārī state in Persia, under ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Muḥammad III (618-653/1221-125), coincided with a most turbulent period in the history of the Iranian, and indeed Islamic, lands. By 617/1220, Chingiz Khan, ruler of the new Mongol empire, had captured Bukhārā and Samarqand. In the following year, he crossed the Oxus and seized Balkh. Then, the Mongols conquered Khurāsān, destroying Marw and Nīshāpūr. It was in the early years of Alāʾ al-Dīn Muḥammad's reign that an increasing number of Muslims, both Sunnī and Shīʿī, found refuge among the Nizārīs of Quhistān who were still enjoying their stability and prosperity. The enviable contemporary conditions of the Quhistani Nizārīs are described vividly by Minhāj-i Sirāj Jūzjānī, the Ghūrīd historian and ambassador who visited Quhistān several times during 621-623/1224-1226 and met with the *muḥtasham* or chief of the Ismāʿīlīs there.³⁹

The most prominent of the outside scholars who now availed themselves of the Nizārīs' patronage of learning was the Shīʿī philosopher, theologian and scientist Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Tūsī, (597-672/1201-1274). It was around 624/1227 that al-Tūsī entered the service of Naṣīr al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥīm b. Abi Manṣūr (d. 655/1257), the learned *muḥtasham* of the Nizārīs of Quhistān. Al-Tūsī developed a close friendship with Naṣīr al-Dīn, to whom he dedicated his great work on ethics, the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*. The period of his Ismāʿīlī connection, lasting some thirty years until 654/1256, was particularly productive for al-Tūsī, who also embraced Ismāʿīlīsm.⁴⁰ During this period, spent first in the Nizārī strongholds of Quhistān and later at Alamūt and Maymūndiz fortresses in Rūdbār, al-Tūsī also wrote a number of Ismāʿīlī works, including the *Rawdat al-taslīm (Meadow of Submission)* which is the most comprehensive extant treatise on the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī teachings of the Alamūt period after the declaration of the *qiyāma*.⁴¹

With the demise of Jalāl al-Dīn Mingūbirtī (617-628/1220-1231), the last of the Khwārazm Shāhs who had also been engaged in war and diplomacy with Alamūt, the Nizārīs of Persia came to be confronted directly by the Mongols. The efforts of the Imam ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Muḥammad to forge an alliance with the kings of France and England, in collaboration with the ʿAbbāsīd caliph, against the Mongols proved futile; and all the Nizārī attempts to reach a peaceful accord with the Mongols



themselves proved equally ineffective. At any event, when the Great Khan Möngke (649-657/1251-1259) decided to complete the Mongol conquest of western Asia, he assigned first priority to the destruction of the Nizārī state in Persia, entrusting the mission to his brother Hülegü.

The Fall of Alamūt 654/1256

The Mongol hordes had already started to exert constant pressures on the Nizārīs of Quhistān and Qūmis when ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad was succeeded by his youthful son, Rukn al-Dīn Khurshāh, in Shawwāl 653/December 1256; he would be the last lord of Alamūt. A few months later, in the spring of 654/1256, the main Mongol expedition led by Hülegü himself entered Persia through Khurāsān. In the final year of the Nizārī state, Khurshāh and Hülegü exchanged countless embassies and negotiated endlessly in vain.⁴² Vacillating between resistance and surrender, Khurshāh seems to have hoped to save at least the major Nizārī strongholds of Persia from Mongol destruction, while Hülegü demanded nothing less than total Nizārī submission. Finally, Khurshāh surrendered on 29 Shawwāl 654/19 November 1256, after the main Mongol armies had converged on Maymūndiz, where the imam was then staying, and engaged the Nizārīs in fierce fighting. This marked the end of the Alamūt period in the Ismā‘īlī history of the Iranian lands. Alamūt itself was surrendered to the Mongols a month later, while Lamasar held out for another year, and Girdkūh, as the last Nizārī outpost in Persia, resisted its Mongol besiegers until 669/1270. Early in the following year, 655/1257, Möngke sanctioned a general massacre of the Nizārīs of Persia. Rukn al-Dīn Khurshāh's own tragic end came in the spring of 655/1257 when he was murdered by his Mongol guards somewhere in central Mongolia, whither he had gone in vain to see the Great Khan.

The Early Post- Alamūt Centuries

The collapse of the Nizārī state in 654/1256 marked the initiation of a new phase in the medieval history of the Iranian Ismā‘īlīs, who had now permanently lost their political prominence. Henceforth, the Ismā‘īlīs of the Iranian lands, all belonging to the Nizārī branch survived as minority religious communities in Persia, Afghanistan and Central Asia. The first two centuries in the post- Alamūt history of these communities remain rather obscure. Only the major developments of this period have been recently clarified by modern scholarship on the basis of numerous regional histories and other primary sources as well as the oral traditions and the meagre writings of the Nizārīs themselves.⁴³

In Persia, the Nizārīs were left in an utterly confused and devastated state in the aftermath of the Mongol catastrophe. Large numbers were put to the Mongol swords in Rūdbār and Quhistān; and in both regions the surviving groups were displaced from their traditional abodes, the mountain strongholds and their surrounding villages and a few towns. Many of the Nizārīs who had survived the Mongol massacres migrated to adjacent regions in Afghanistan and Badakhshān as well as Sind, while numerous groups, isolated in remote places or towns, soon began to disintegrate or gradually assimilated themselves into the religiously dominant communities of their surroundings. The Nizārīs were now also deprived of any form of central leadership, provided earlier from Alamūt. It was under such circumstances that the highly disorganized and scattered Nizārī communities were once again obliged to observe *taqiyya* very strictly. For about two centuries after the fall of Alamūt, the Nizārī



communities of Persia, Afghanistan and Badakhshan, and elsewhere in Syria and India, developed on a local basis and independently of one another under the local leadership of their own *dā'īs*.

Meanwhile, a group of Nizārī dignitaries had managed to hide Rukn al-Dīn Khurshāh's minor son Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad, who had succeeded to the Nizārī imamate. He was evidently taken to Ādharbāyjān where he spent the rest of his life disguising himself as an embroiderer. These facts are attested by certain allusions in the unpublished versified *Safar-nāma* of Sa'd al-Dīn b. Shams al-Dīn Nizārī Quhistānī (d. 720/1320). A native of Bīrjand in Quhistān, and the first post- Alamūt Nizārī poet, Nizārī Quhistānī served for a while at the court of the Kart rulers of Harat. Nizārī Quhistānī travelled widely, and he seems to have seen the Imam Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad around 678/ 1280 in Ādharbāyjān, possibly at Tabrīz. Practically nothing is known about the imams who succeeded Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad in Persia until the second half of the 9th /15th century.

Split between Muḥammad -Shāhī and Qāsim-Shāhī branches

Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad, the twenty-eighth-Nizārī imam, died around 710/1310. An obscure dispute over his succession split the line of the Nizārī imams and their following into what became known as the Muḥammad-Shāhī and Qāsim-Shāhī branches. The Muḥammad-Shāhī line of Nizārī imams, who initially had numerous followers in Daylam and Badakhshān, was discontinued soon after 1201/1786. On the other hand, the Qāsim-Shāhī line has persisted to our times, and since the early decades of the 13th/19th century, the imams of this line have become better known under their hereditary title of Aga Khan. At any rate, this schism provided another serious blow to the already devastated Nizārī *da'wa* of the early post-Alamūt period.

Meanwhile, the Nizārīs had managed to regroup in Daylam, where they remained active throughout the Īlkhānid and Tīmūrid periods. At the time, Daylam was ruled by different local dynasties, and the political fragmentation of the region permitted the Nizārīs there to make periodic attempts to regain Alamūt and Lamasar, which had not been completely demolished by the Mongols. They also succeeded in winning several local rulers of northern Persia to their side. For instance, some of the Kushayjī *amīrs*, including Kiyā Sayf al-Dīn, who by 770/1368 controlled much of Daylam, adhered to Nizārī Ismā'īlism.⁴⁴ A certain Nizārī leader known as Khudāwand Muḥammad, who may perhaps be identified with the Muḥammad-Shāhī Nizārī Imam Muḥammad b. Mu'min Shāh (d. 807/1404), had also appeared in Daylam, where he played an active part in local conflicts and alliances. Khudāwand Muḥammad established himself at Alamūt for a while, but was eventually obliged to seek refuge with Tīmūr who exiled him to Sultāniyya.⁴⁵ Later, the Banū Iskandar who ruled over parts of Māzandarān supported the Nizārī cause in Daylam.⁴⁶ The Nizārīs retained some importance in northern Persia until the end of the 10th/ 16th century, when the Caspian provinces were annexed to the Safawid dominions. It is interesting to note that the Safawids themselves used Alamūt as a royal prison for the rebellious members of their own household before the fortress was permanently abandoned.

Nizārīs of Quhistan and Badakhshan



The Nizārīs of Quhistān never really recovered from the Mongol onslaught, which left all of Khurāsān with its great cities in ruins. Subsequently, they survived in scattered villages around some of their former towns in Khurāsān, without acquiring any political prominence. The Nizārīs of Badakhshān, who were particularly devoted to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, had essentially remained outside of the confines of the Nizārī state. But, as noted, the Nizārī *da'wa* had been propagated actively there during the later Alamūt period. According to the local tradition of the Nizārīs of Badakhshān, the Nizārī *da'wa* was introduced to Shughnān by two *dā'īs* sent from Alamūt. These *dā'īs*, Sayyid Shāh Malang and Sayyid Shāh Khāmūsh, founded dynasties of *mīrs* and *pīrs* who ruled on a hereditary basis over Shughnān, Rūshān and adjacent districts of Badakhshān in the upper Oxus region.⁴⁷

Subsequently, Badakhshān was fortunate to escape the Mongol debacle. The region was eventually annexed to the Tīmūrid empire in the middle of the 9th/15th century. Early in the 10th/16th century, Badakhshān was briefly conquered by the Özbegs, whose hegemony was persistently resisted by different local rulers. It was under such chaotic conditions that Shāh Rādi al-Dīn, a Muḥammad-Shāhi Nizārī imam, came from his original base of operations in Quhistān and Sīstān to Badakhshān, where he established his own rule with the help of the local Nizārīs. Shāh Rādi al-Dīn was, however, killed in battle in 915/1509, and, subsequently, Mīrzā Khan, a local Tīmūrid *amīr* severely persecuted the Nizārīs of Badakhshān.

The Anjudān Revival

Meanwhile, the Nizārī imams of the Qāsim-Shāhi line had emerged at Anjudān, a large village in central Persia near Qumm and Maḥallāt, initiating the Anjudān revival in the post-Alamūt history of the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs.⁴⁸ Imam Mustanṣir bi'llāh, who died in 885/1480, is the first imam of his line to have definitely established himself at Anjudān, where a Nizārī community already existed. By that time, Nizārī Ismā'īlīsm had become infused in Persia with Sufī teachings and terminology, while Sufī *pīrs* themselves had begun to use ideas which had been more widely attributed to the Ismā'īlīs. As a part of this coalescence between Nizārī Ismā'īlīsm and Sufism in Persia, the Nizārīs had also adopted certain external features of the Sufī orders (*taīqas*), referring to their imams and themselves as *pīrs* (or *murshids*) and *murīds*. This disguise was partly adopted for the purposes of *taqiyya* to ensure the safety of the Nizārīs in predominantly Sunnī surroundings. However, the esoteric nature of the teachings of both communities, too, had made its own important contribution to bringing about this coalescence which left permanent imprints on the Nizārī community. This also explains why the Nizārīs of the Iranian lands, especially in Badakhshān, have continued to regard some of the great mystic poets of Persia, such as Farīd al-Dīn 'Attār and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, as their co-religionists. Later in Safawid times, the Persian Nizārīs also adopted the guise of Twelver Shī'īsm, then the official religion of the Safawid realm, as another *taqiyya* practice.

Anjudān served as the residence of the Qāsim-Shāhi Nizārī imams and the headquarters of their *da'wa* for some two centuries, coinciding with the period of Safawid rule over Persia. The tombs of the Imam Mustanṣir bi'llāh, who carried the Sufī name of Shāh Qalandar, and several of his successors are still preserved in Anjudān.⁴⁹ The Anjudān period ushered a revival in the *da'wa* activities of the Nizārīs of the Iranian lands. This revival also resulted in the assertion of Anjudān's



control over the various Nizārī communities which had hitherto developed on a local basis. The ground for the Anjudān revival had already been prepared by the spread of Shī'ī tendencies in Persia mainly through the activities of a number of Sufi orders; and this process eventually culminated in the adoption of Twelver Shī'ism as the religion of Safawid Persia in 907/1501. The Safawiyya themselves represented one of the most militant Sufi orders through which Shī'ī tendencies and `Alid loyalism had permeated Persia.

Reorganization of the *Da'wa* of Qāsim-Shāhi s

During the Anjudān period, the Qāsim-Shāhi Nizārī *da'wa* was reorganized and reinvigorated under the direct leadership of the imams at Anjudān, not only to win new converts but also to gain the allegiance of those Iranian Nizārīs, especially in Badakhshān, who had hitherto supported the Muḥammad-Shāhi line of imams. By asserting their own leadership, the imams also succeeded in undermining the position of the hereditary dynasties of *dā'īs*, *mīrs*, or *pīrs*, which had emerged in different Iranian Ismā'īlī communities. The imams now began to appoint their own trusted representatives to administer the affairs of these communities, especially in Khurāsān, Afghanistan and Badakhshān. These agents visited Anjudān on a regular basis, to report on the affairs of their community and to deliver the much needed religious dues they had collected.

By the second half of the 11th/17th century, the Anjudān revival had led to significant achievements. Rapidly expanding and reorganized Nizārī communities had now emerged throughout the Iranian world, in central Persia, Kirmān, Khurāsān, Afghanistan, and Badakhshān. The Nizārī *da'wa* directed from Anjudān had been particularly successful also in Sind, Gujarāt and other regions of the Indian subcontinent. At the same time, the bulk of the Muḥammad-Shāhi Nizārīs had switched their allegiance to the imams residing at Anjudān. The literary activities of the Iranian Nizārīs, too, were revived during the Anjudān period, starting with the writings of Abū Ishāq Quhistānī, and Khayrkhwāh-i Harātī who died after 960/1553.⁵⁰ The Nizārīs of the Iranian lands, especially in Badakhshān, also preserved a substantial portion of the literary heritage of their community, produced in the Persian language during the Alamūt and post-Alamūt centuries.

The Ismā'īlīs of the Iranian lands were not destined to regain the prominence they had acquired during the Alamūt period of their history, a religio-political prominence that was abruptly ended by the all-conquering Mongols. Nevertheless, by the end of the Middle Ages the Anjudān revival had already started to compensate at least partially for the Mongol debacle, permitting the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs to survive in Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia, as well as in many other regions of the world, as peaceful and prosperous religious communities.



¹ See Nawbakhtī. *Kitāb firaq al-Shī'a*, 57-58. (60-61) al-Qummī, *Kitāb al-maqālāt* 80-81. 83, and Daftary, "The Earliest Ismā'īlīs", 214-245

² Al-Daylamī, *Bayān*, 21.

³ The most detailed account of the initiation of the Ismā'īlī *da'wa* in the Jibāl, Khurāsān, and Transoxania is contained in Nizām al-Mulk, *Siyar*. ed. Darke, 282-295, 297-305; English trans., Darke, 208-218, 220-226. See also Stern. "The Early Ismā'īlī Missionaries", 56-90, reprinted in Stern, *Studies in Early Ismā'īlism*, 189-233.

⁴ On 'Abd Allāh al-Mahdī's reform and its consequences, see Madelung, "Das Imamāt", 43-65, 69 ff., and Daftary "A Major Schism", 123-139.

⁵ On the early history of these Qarmaṭī communities, and their relations with the Fāṭimids, see Madelung, "The Fatimids and the Qarmaṭīs of Baḥrayn", 21-73; Madelung, "Karmatī". *El²*, vol. 4, 660-665, and Daftary, "Carmatians", 823-831.

⁶ Gardīzī, *Zayn al-akhbār*, 148-149; *Ta'rīkh-i Sīstān*, ed. Bahār, 290-294, 300-302; ed. Sādiqī, 158-160, 165-166; English trans., *The Tārīkh-e Sīstān*, tr. M. Gold, 233-237., 243-244; Mirkhwānd, *Rawdat al-safā'*, vol. 4, 40-42, and Barthold, *Turkestan*, 241-245.

⁷ Al-Kirmānī, *al-Aqwāl*, 2-3.

⁸ On the Justānids, who are variously treated by a few medieval chroniclers of the Caspian provinces, including Ibn Isfandiyār, Awliyā' Allāh Āmulī and Zahīr al-Dīn Mar'ashī, see Madelung, "Abū Ishāq al-Sābī", especially 52-57 reprinted in his *Religious and Ethnic Movements*, article VII, and Bosworth, *the New Islamic Dynasties*, 145-146.

⁹ See Stern, "Early Ismā'īlī Missionaries", 70-74. On the Musafirids, see the following works by Minorsky: *Studies in Caucasian History*, 159-166; *History of Sharvān and Darband*, 27, 60-62, 71, 76, 85, 112, and "Musāfirids". *El²*, vol. 7, 655-657. See also Madelung, "The Minor Dynasties", 224-225, 231 ff., and Bosworth, *New Islamic Dynasties*, 148-149.

¹⁰ Ibn Ḥawqal. *Sūrat al-ard*, 348-349, 354. See also Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, ed. and trans. Amrdroz and Margoliouth, Arabic text, vol. 2, 31-37, 62-67, 115, 135-136, 148-154, 166-167, 177-180, 219-220, English translation, vol. 5. 33-41, 67-74, 118, 140-142, 156-164, 178-180, 192-195, 233.

¹¹ See Walker, "Abū Tammām", 343-352, and his "An Isam'ili Version", 161-177. See also Bosworth, *The History of the Saffarids*, 292-293

¹² For the most comprehensive modern studies of al-Sijistānī's thought and intellectual contributions, see Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, and his *Abū Yaqūb al-Sijistānī*.

¹³ Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist*, 240-241; English trans. 472.

¹⁴ See Bosworth, *Saffarids*, 301, 337.

¹⁵ For al-Sijistānī's writings, see Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, 82-89, and Walker, *al-Sijistānī*. 104-118. Only one of al-Sijistānī's books, the *Kitāb al-yanābi'*, containing the major components and themes of his metaphysical system, has been translated into English; see Walker, *Wellsprings*, 37-111; for the Arabic text and partial French translation of this work, see Corbin, *Trilogie ismaélienne*. text 1-97, translation 5-127.

¹⁶ See Corbin, *Cyclical Time*, 151-193; Madelung, "Aspects of Ismā'īlī Theology". 53-65, reprinted in Madelung, *Religious Schools*, article XVII, and Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*. 234-246.

¹⁷ See Stern, "Ismā'īlī i Propaganda", 298-307, reprinted in his *Studies*, 177-188; Hamdani, *The Beginnings*, 3 ff.; Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, 52-53, 76, 199-200, 235, and Haim *The Empire of the Mahdi*, 385-392.

¹⁸ Al Nīṣābūrī's treatise entitled *al-Risāla al-mūjaza al-kāfiya fī ādāb al-du'āt* has not survived directly, but it has been preserved in full in later Ismā'īlī sources; see Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, 91-92

¹⁹ See Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 186-197; Walker, "The Ismaili Da'wa", 161-182, and Halm, *The Fatimids and their Traditions*, 35 ff., 53-54, 71-78.

²⁰ Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, 94-102 and van Ess, *Bibliographische Notizen*", 255-261.

²¹ For a comprehensive study of al-Kirmānī's thought, as expounded mainly in his *Rāḥat al-'aql*, see De Smet, *La Quiétude de l'Intellect*.



- ²² Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz al-hunafā'*, vol. 2, 191-192; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, 211, 358, and vol. 10, 112 ff., 165-166, and Barthold, *Turkestan*, 251, 304-305, 316-318.
- ²³ See al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *Sīrat al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn*. See also Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn b. al-Ḥasan, *'Uyūn al-akhbār*, vol. 6, 329-359. For a modern study based on al-Mu'ayyad's *Sīra*, see Klemm, *Die Mission des faṭimidischen Agenten*.
- ²⁴ For a list of al-Mu'ayyad's writings, see Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, 103-109. See also Halm, "The Oath of Allegiance ('*ahd*)", in Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Isma'ili History*, especially 99, 115.
- ²⁵ See for instance, Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfirīn*, 397, and his *Dīwān*, 8, 10, 17, 51, 56, 86, 92, 366, 416, 459, 490.
- ²⁶ Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfirīn*, 3, 402, and his *Dīwān*, 162, 234, 287, 436.
- ²⁷ Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Kūṭāb jāmi' al-hikmatayn*, 16-17; trench trans., *Le Livre réunissant les deux Sages*, 48. On Nāṣir-i Khusraw's life and writings, see Ivanow, *Problems in Nasir-i Khusraw's Biography*; Corbin, "Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Iranian Ismā'īlism", 520-542; Bertle's, *Nasir-i Khosrov i ismailizm* 148-264; Nāṣir-i Khusraw *va Ismā'īliyan*, 149-256, and Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, 111-125, 430-436.
- ²⁸ F. Daftary, "Persian Historiography", 91-97.
- ²⁹ Juwaynī, *Ta'rīkh-i jahān-gushāy*, vol. 3, 186-278; English trans., vol. 2, 666-725; Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh*, 97-195; Kāshānī, *Zubāt al-tawārīkh*, 133-233. For modern studies on the Persian Ismā'īlīs and their state during the Alamūt period, see Hodgson, *Order*, 37-278, and his "The Ismā'īlī State", 422-482; Lewis, *The Assassins*, 38-124; Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 324-434, 669-699, and his "Ḥasan-i Sabbāh and the Origins of the Nizārī Isma'ili Movement", in his *Mediaeval Isma'ili History*, 181-204.
- ³⁰ Professor Bosworth has studied the Persian revival under Arab and Turkish rule in numerous studies; see, for instance, his "The Development of Persian Culture", 33-34, reprinted in his *The Medieval History*, article XVIII; "Interaction of Arabic and Persian Literature and Culture", 59-73, reprinted in his *Medieval Arabic Culture*, article VIII, and his *Saffarids*, 168-180. See also Stern, "Ya'qūb the Coppersmith", 535-553.
- ³¹ See Rashīd al-Dīn, 112, and the anonymous Nizārī treatise from the Alamūt period entitled *Haft bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā*, 30; English trans., in Hudson. *Order*, 314.
- ³² See Rashīd al-Dīn, 149, 153; Kāshānī, 186-190, and Madelung, *Religious Trends*, 9-12. On the Khurramiyya, who were active in different parts of the Iranian world throughout the 'Abbāsīd times, and manifested anti-Arab, anti-Turkish or even anti-Islamic sentiments, see Madelung, "Khurramiya", *EL*², vol. 3, 63-65.
- ³³ For a detailed analysis of these campaigns and the biased reports of the chroniclers favouring the Seljuqs, see Hillenbrand, "The Power Struggle", 203-220.
- ³⁴ For the origins and early development of these legends, which found their culmination in the tales recounted by Marco Polo, see Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, especially 88-127.
- ³⁵ See, for instance, Miles, "Coins of the Assassins of Alamūt", 155-162.
- ³⁶ A1-Shahrestānī, *Kūṭāb al-milāl*, 150-152; partial English trans., 167-170, English trans. also in Hodgson, *Order*, 325-328. See also G. Monnot, "al-Shahrestānī", *EL*², vol. 9, 214-216.
- ³⁷ The doctrine of the *qiyāma*, as elaborated under Muḥammad II, is expounded in the *Haft bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā*, 4-42; English trans., with commentary, in Hodgson, *Order*, 279-324. For the best modern exposition of this doctrine, see Hodgson, *Order*, 162-170, while an interesting phenomenological account is contained in Jambet, *La grande résurrection*.
- ³⁸ See Bosworth, "The Isma'īlis of Quhistān", in Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Isma'ili History*, 221-229, and his *Saffarids*, 387-410, 418 ff.
- ³⁹ Jūzjānī, *Tabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, 182-183; English trans., vol. 2, 1197-1205, 1212-1214.
- ⁴⁰ On the controversy surrounding al-Tūsī's religious affiliation, see Dabashi, "The Philosopher/Vizier", 231-245, and also Madelung, "Nāṣir ad-Dīn Tūsī's Ethics", 85-101.
- ⁴¹ Al-Tūsī, *Rawdat al-taslīm*; French trans., *La Convocation d' Alamūt*. For al-Tūsī's Ismā'īlī writings, see Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, 260-263.
- ⁴² See Boyle, "The Ismā'īlīs and the Mongol Invasion", 7-22; Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 416-430 and his "Rukn al-Dīn Khurshāh", *EL*², vol. 8, 598-599.
- ⁴³ For the details and the relevant sources, see Daftary *The Ismā'īlīs*, 435-451.
- ⁴⁴ See Mar'ashī, *Ta'rīkh-i Gīlān*, 66-68.



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- ⁴⁵ Mar'ashī, *Ta'rikh-i Gīlān*, 52-66, 123-124.
- ⁴⁶ See Gīlānī, *Ta'rikh-i Māzandarān*, 88-89, 100, and Fūmanī, *Ta'rikh-i Gīlān*, ed. Dorn, 127-129, 192-195; ed. Sutūda, 164-166, 241-244
- ⁴⁷ Badakhshī, *Ta'rikh-i Badakhshān*, ed. Boldyrev, 227-253 and Semenov, "Shughnanskikh Ismailitov", 523-561
- ⁴⁸ Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 451-478
- ⁴⁹ See Ivanow, "Tombs", 49-62, and Daftary, "Anjedān", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol.2, 77.
- ⁵⁰ See Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, 268-277.

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