

Part One

The Ismaili Imamate in History

The Ismailis represent the second largest Shi‘i Muslim community, after the Twelver (or Ithna‘ashari) Shi‘is, and today they are scattered as religious minorities throughout more than thirty countries of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America. The Ismailis have had their own complex and highly eventful history dating back to the formative period of Islam, when different communities of interpretation elaborated their distinctive doctrinal positions. One of these early Shi‘i communities, the Imamis, propounded a doctrine of the Imamate that subsequently served as the central teaching of the Ismailis who, together with the Twelvers, evolved out of the early Imami Shi‘i community.

The Shi‘i doctrine of the Imamate was based on the belief in the permanent need of humankind for a divinely guided, sinless and infallible Imam who, after the Prophet Muhammad, would act as the authoritative teacher and guide of men in all their spiritual affairs. This Imam would be entitled to temporal leadership as much as to religious authority. However, his mandate would not depend on his actual rule over any portion of the Muslim society (*umma*). This doctrine further taught that the Prophet himself had designated his cousin and son-in-law, ‘Ali b. Abi Talib, as his legatee (*wasi*) and successor, by an explicit designation (*nass*) under divine command. After ‘Ali, the

Imamate would be transmitted from father to son by the rule of *nass*, among the descendants of 'Ali and his spouse Fatima, the Prophet's daughter. And after his son Husayn b. 'Ali, it would continue in the Husaynid 'Alid line until the end of time. Indeed, the Prophet himself is reported to have said: 'Verily I am leaving among you two weighty things, and if you hold on to them you will not go astray after me: the book of God and my progeny.'

This 'Alid Imam belonging to the *ahl al-bayt*, or the Prophet's family, is the sole legitimate Imam at any time. Indeed, the world could not exist for a moment without such an Imam who is the 'proof of God' (*hujjat Allah*) on earth. The Imam's existence in the terrestrial world was viewed as so essential that the recognition of the 'Imam of the time' and obedience to him were made the absolute duty of every believer (*mu'min*). This book is the first attempt of its kind to compile brief biographies of all the Imams acknowledged by the Ismailis throughout the course of their history.

The Ismailis share their earliest history with the Twelvers, and some other Shi'i groups who are no longer in existence. This period, from 'Ali b. Abi Talib (d. 661) to his great-great-grandson Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 765), coincided with the early history of Imami Shi'ism when the doctrine of the Imamate was also formulated. It was in the aftermath of Imam al-Sadiq's death that the consolidated Imami Shi'is, then concentrated in southern Iraq, split into a number of groupings each one recognising a different one of his sons as their new Imam. Under the circumstances, the Ismailis recognised Isma'il, Imam al-Sadiq's original heir-designate, and separated from the rest of the Imami Shi'is. Named after Isma'il, the Ismailis then commenced their independent existence as a distinct Imami Shi'i community.

The opening phase of Ismaili history, lasting until the foundation of the Fatimid caliphate in 909, remains rather obscure as we do not have any reliable sources from this period when the Ismaili Imams remained in concealment to protect themselves against the Abbasids' rampant persecution of the 'Alids. Indeed, during this *dawr al-satr* or period of concealment in early Ismaili history, the Imams made every effort to hide their true identity and places of residence, also adopting a variety of pseudonyms, all as *taqiyya* or precautionary dissimulation tactics. However, it is known with certainty that the early Ismaili Imams successfully organised a revolutionary, dynamic movement designated as *al-da'wa al-hadiya*, 'the rightly guiding mission', or simply as the *da'wa*, 'mission'. The religio-political message of the pre-Fatimid Ismaili *da'wa* revolved around uprooting the Abbasids, who had usurped the legitimate rights of the 'Alids, and installing the Ismaili Imam to a new Shi'i caliphate. This message was disseminated by a network of *da'is*, or summoners. The secret central headquarters of the *da'wa*

organisation were eventually located in Salamiyya, Syria. By shortly after the middle of the ninth century, Ismaili *da'is* were active in almost every important region of the Muslim lands, from Central Asia to North Africa.

The success of the early Ismaili *da'wa* culminated in the establishment of the Fatimid caliphate in 909 in North Africa, in a region then known as Ifriqiya (now covering Tunisia and eastern Algeria). The establishment of the Fatimid caliphate represented not only a great success for the Ismailis, who now for the first time possessed an important state (*dawla*) under the leadership of their Imam, but for the entire Shi'a as well. Not since the time of 'Ali had the Shi'i Muslims witnessed the succession of an 'Alid from the *ahl al-bayt* to the actual leadership of a major Muslim state. The Fatimid victory, thus, heralded the fulfilment of a long-awaited Shi'i ideal.

The ground had been meticulously prepared for Fatimid rule in North Africa by the *da'i* Abu 'Abd Allah al-Shi'i, who had been active amongst the Kutama Berbers of Ifriqiya since 893. He converted the bulk of the Kutama tribal confederation and transformed them into a disciplined army. It was with the help of his Kutama tribal warriors that Abu 'Abd Allah achieved his speedy conquest of Ifriqiya, which was then ruled by the Sunni Aghlabids on behalf of the Abbasids. Meanwhile, after a long and eventful journey from Salamiyya, which commenced in 902, the contemporary Ismaili Imam, 'Abd Allah al-Mahdi (d. 934) had settled in the remote trading town of Sijilmasa (in today's south-eastern Morocco). In 909, the *da'i* Abu 'Abd Allah handed over the reins of power to his Imam in Sijilmasa.

On 4 January 910, 'Abd Allah al-Mahdi made his triumphant entry into Qayrawan, the capital of Ifriqiya, and was proclaimed caliph. The new Shi'i dynasty came to be known as Fatimid, derived from the name of the Prophet's daughter Fatima, to whom al-Mahdi and his successors traced their Husaynid 'Alid ancestry. An important aspect of the Fatimid caliphate was the recognition of the Fatimid caliphs as Ismaili Imams also, though after 1094 not by the entire Ismaili community. The Fatimids were, indeed, Imam-caliphs.

'Abd Allah al-Mahdi and his next three successors ruling from Ifriqiya, al-Qa'im (r. 934–946), al-Mansur (r. 946–953) and al-Mu'izz (r. 953–975), encountered numerous internal and external difficulties while they were consolidating their power in that remote part of the Muslim world. In addition to the persistent hostility of the Abbasids and of the Umayyads of Spain (al-Andalus), the Fatimids had intermittent military encounters with the Byzantines in Sicily and elsewhere in the Mediterranean. Soon, the early Fatimids also confronted internal dissent and animosity from the indigenous Khariji Berbers and the Sunni Arab inhabitants of the cities of Ifriqiya led by their influential jurists, who mainly followed the Maliki school of jurisprudence.

Fatimid rule was consolidated firmly only under the fourth member of the dynasty, al-Mu‘izz, who succeeded in transforming the Fatimid caliphate from a regional state into a flourishing empire. He was also the first Fatimid Imam-caliph to concern himself distinctly with the propagation of the Ismaili *da‘wa* outside the Fatimid dominions. Unlike the Abbasids, the Fatimid Imam-caliphs had not abandoned their *da‘wa* activities on assuming power.

After subduing the entire Maghrib, al-Mu‘izz started making meticulous plans for the conquest of Egypt, an important objective in the Fatimid policy of eastern expansion. It fell to Jawhar to successfully lead the Egyptian expedition on behalf of al-Mu‘izz. Jawhar, one of the ablest of Fatimid commanders, entered Fustat in 969, and declared a general amnesty for the Egyptians, also tolerating religious freedom, a general attribute of Fatimid rule. Jawhar immediately proceeded to build a new capital city, later named al-Qahira al-Mu‘izziyya (the Victorious One of al-Mu‘izz), and al-Qahira (Cairo) for short. He also built two royal palaces there, for the Fatimid Imam-caliph and his heir-designate, separated by a broad open space, later used for public ceremonies and parades, all in accordance with plans drawn up by al-Mu‘izz himself. Shortly afterwards, Jawhar laid the foundations of al-Azhar. In 988, this mosque also became an academic institution. Under the Fatimids, al-Azhar played a key role in disseminating knowledge and Ismaili doctrines, with a variety of students and scholars participating in its lecture sessions. On the demise of the Fatimids, this institution of teaching and learning, too, lost much of its earlier academic standing and impact.

In 973, the Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Mu‘izz arrived in Cairo and took up residence in his new capital city. It was also in al-Mu‘izz’s reign that an Ismaili school of jurisprudence (*madhhab*) was finally established. This came about mainly through the work of al-Qadi al-Nu‘man (d. 974), the foremost Fatimid jurist. His efforts in preparing legal compendia culminated in the compilation of the *Da‘a’im al-Islam* (The Pillars of Islam), which was endorsed by al-Mu‘izz as the official code of the Fatimid state. Ismaili law accorded special importance to the central Imami Shi‘i doctrine of the Imamate. Indeed, the authority of the infallible ‘Alid Imam and his teachings became the third and most decisive principal source of Ismaili law, alongside the Qur’an and the *sunna* of the Prophet, which are accepted as the first two sources by all Muslims.

In 975, al-Mu‘izz was succeeded by his son al-‘Aziz, who became the first Fatimid Imam-caliph to commence his reign in Egypt. By the end of al-‘Aziz’s reign in 996, the Fatimid empire had attained its greatest extent, with its suzerainty acknowledged from the Atlantic to the Red Sea, the Hijaz, Yemen and Palestine. At the same time, the Fatimid *da‘is* continued to be active in Syria, Iraq, Persia and other eastern regions

beyond the frontiers of the Fatimid state. Countless individuals in these regions now recognised the Fatimid caliph as the rightful 'Imam of the time'. In 977, al-'Aziz made Ibn Killis, a Fatimid administrator, his vizier, and as such he was the first of the Fatimid viziers. Originally a Jew, Ibn Killis was noted for his patronage of scholars and poets. Later, al-'Aziz appointed a Coptic Christian, 'Isa b. Nasturus, as vizier. He was the first of several Christians to occupy the vizierate under the Fatimids. The policy of assigning high administrative posts to Christians and Jews, as well as Sunni Muslims, in a Shi'i state was basically in line with the religious tolerance and meritocracy practised by the Fatimids.

Al-'Aziz was succeeded by his son al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, who was only eleven years old at the time of his accession in 996. One of his most important achievements was the foundation of the Dar al-'Ilm (House of Knowledge), sometimes also called the Dar al-Hikma (House of Wisdom), which was set up in 1005 in a section of the Fatimid palace. A wide range of religious and other subjects were taught at this institution of learning, which was also equipped with a major library. Many Ismaili *da'is* received at least part of their training there.

The Ismaili *da'wa* was greatly expanded under al-Hakim, acquiring the distinctive features of its organisation. It now became particularly active in Iraq and Persia, where Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani (d. after 1020), among many others, was operating as a *da'i*. An eminent philosopher, al-Kirmani was perhaps the most learned theologian of the entire Fatimid period. He produced several theological treatises on the doctrine of the Imamate. Additionally, similarly to earlier *da'is* of the Iranian lands, such as Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani (d. after 971), he amalgamated his theology with Neoplatonism and other philosophical traditions. These Ismaili *da'is* of the Iranian world, in fact, elaborated the distinct Ismaili intellectual tradition of philosophical theology. Nasir-i Khusraw (d. after 1070), the Central Asian *da'i*, was the last great proponent of this 'Iranian school of Ismailism'.

The Ismaili *da'wa* activities, especially outside the Fatimid dominions, reached their peak in the long reign of the eighth Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Mustansir (r. 1036–1094), even after the Sunni Saljuqs replaced the Shi'i Buyids as overlords of the weakened Abbasid caliphs in 1055. The Fatimid *da'is* won many converts in Iraq, Persia and Central Asia as well as in Yemen, where the Sulayhids ruled as vassals of the Fatimids from 1047 until 1138. The most prominent *da'i* of al-Mustansir's period was al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi, who had originally succeeded his Persian father as the chief *da'i* of Fars in southern Persia. In due course, he converted Abu Kalijar Marzuban (r. 1024–1048), the Buyid ruler of Fars and Khuzistan in Persia. Fleeing from Abbasid

persecution, in 1047 al-Mu'ayyad fī'l-Din arrived in Cairo and played an active part in the affairs of the Fatimid state and *da'wa*.

In 1058, al-Mustansir appointed al-Mu'ayyad as chief *da'i* (*da'i al-du'at*), a post he held for twenty years until shortly before his death in 1078. In this capacity, al-Mu'ayyad established close relations with the *da'wa* leadership in both Yemen and Badakhshan. The latter region was then in the general charge of Nasir-i Khusraw, another eminent *da'i* of al-Mustansir's reign. A learned theologian, philosopher, traveller and renowned poet of the Persian language, Nasir arrived in Cairo in 1047, the same year as al-Mu'ayyad. After training as a *da'i* for three years in Cairo, Nasir returned to his native Badakhshan and began his career as the chief *da'i* or *hujja* of Khurasan. Later, he sought refuge from persecution in the remote valley of Yumgan in the midst of the Pamir mountains. Nasir remained in contact with the *da'wa* headquarters in Cairo and the chief *da'i* al-Mu'ayyad, who remained his mentor. It was mostly during his long period of exile in Yumgan that Nasir-i Khusraw extended the *da'wa* throughout Badakhshan, nowadays divided between Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the Ismaili *da'wa* had continued in many parts of Persia, then incorporated into the Saljuq sultanate. By the early 1070s, the Persian Ismailis of the Saljuq dominions were under the authority of a single *da'i*, 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Attash, with secret headquarters in Isfahan, the main Saljuq capital. This learned *da'i* was also responsible for launching the career of Hasan-i Sabbah, the future founder of the Nizari Ismaili state and *da'wa* in Persia.

By the final decades of al-Mustansir's reign, the Fatimid caliphate had already embarked on its decline. Racial rivalries in the Fatimid armies continuously provided a major source of unrest in Fatimid Egypt. Matters came to a head in 1062 when open warfare broke out near Cairo between Turkish regiments, aided by Berber soldiers, and black regiments. The victorious commander of the Turks rebelled against al-Mustansir in 1070 and had the *khutba* pronounced in the name of the Abbasids in Alexandria and elsewhere. At the same time, Egypt was plagued by a serious economic crisis marked by famine caused by the low level of the Nile for seven consecutive years (1065–1072). The atrocities of the Turkish troops eventually led to a complete breakdown of law and order.

It was under such circumstances that al-Mustansir finally appealed for help to Badr al-Jamali, an Armenian general in the service of the Fatimids in Syria. In 1074, Badr arrived in Cairo with his Armenian troops, quickly subduing the rebellious Turkish troops, and then restoring relative peace and stability to the Fatimid state. Badr al-Jamali acquired all the highest positions in the Fatimid state, also becoming the first person to

be designated as the 'vizier of the pen and the sword', with full delegated powers, in addition to being the supreme commander of the armies (*amir al-juyush*), his best-known title. Henceforth, it was viziers, who were often military commanders, who were the effective authority in the Fatimid state. By the end of al-Mustansir's rule, of the Fatimid possessions in Syria and Palestine only Ascalon and a few coastal towns such as Acre and Tyre still remained intact, while in North Africa the Fatimid dominions were practically reduced to Egypt proper.

The eighth Fatimid Imam-caliph, Abu Tamim Ma'add al-Mustansir bi'llah, died in 1094. The dispute over his succession led to a permanent split in the Ismaili *da'wa* and community with lasting consequences. Al-Mustansir had initially designated one of his eldest sons Abu Mansur Nizar (1045–1095) as his successor by the rule of *nass* or designation. However, al-Afdal, who a few months earlier had succeeded his own father Badr al-Jamali as the all-powerful vizier and 'commander of the armies' had his own designs. Accordingly, he deprived Nizar of his succession rights and placed his much younger half-brother Ahmad on the Fatimid throne with the caliphal title al-Musta'li bi'llah. The new caliph, who was, furthermore, married to al-Afdal's sister, would be entirely dependent on his vizier. Supported by the Fatimid armies, al-Afdal quickly obtained for al-Musta'li the allegiance of the leading figures of the Fatimid court and the Ismaili *da'wa* in Cairo. Nizar refused to endorse al-Afdal's designs and fled to Alexandria, where he led a revolt. There, he was declared caliph with the title al-Mustafa li-Din Allah. This declaration is attested to in a gold dinar minted in Alexandria on that occasion, and currently preserved at The Institute of Ismaili Studies. Nizar was initially successful in his confrontations with the Fatimid forces. However, by the end of 1095, he was obliged to surrender. He was taken to Cairo and executed there.

This succession dispute permanently split the Ismailis into two rival factions, later designated as Nizari and Musta'lian, named after al-Mustansir's sons who had claimed his heritage. The Imamate of al-Musta'li, installed to the Fatimid caliphate, was acknowledged by the official *da'wa* establishment in Cairo, as well as the Ismaili communities of Egypt, Yemen and western India. These communities, which depended on the Fatimid regime and later traced their Imamate in the progeny of al-Musta'li, maintained their relations with Cairo, henceforth serving as the headquarters of the Musta'lian Ismaili *da'wa*. On the other hand, the Persian Ismailis, who were already under the leadership of Hasan-i Sabbah (d. 1124), upheld Nizar's right to the Imamate. In fact, Hasan now founded the independent Nizari Ismaili *da'wa*, and severed relations with the Fatimid regime. In the rest of this introduction we shall discuss the subsequent history of the Nizari Ismailis, who may generally be referred to simply as the Ismailis.

Hasan-i Sabbah's seizure of the fortress of Alamut in the Alburz mountains of northern Persia in 1090 had marked the foundation of what would become the Ismaili state of Persia and Syria. As the undisputed leader of the Persian Ismailis, Hasan was already following an independent policy against the Saljuq Turks when the Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Mustansir died in 1094. As noted, he readily upheld the cause of Nizar and severed his ties with the Fatimid regime. Hasan had thus founded the independent Nizari Ismaili *da'wa* on behalf of the Nizari Imam, who was then inaccessible.

The Ismaili state, centred at Alamut with a network of fortresses and territories scattered in different regions of Persia and Syria, usually though not always in remote mountain localities, lasted some 166 years until its demise in 1256 under the onslaught of the Mongol hordes. This initial Alamut phase in Nizari Ismaili history was marked by numerous political vicissitudes. Hasan-i Sabbah designed a strategy against the Saljuqs, whose alien rule was detested throughout Persia. He aimed to defeat them locality by locality from numerous impregnable fortresses. He did not realise his objective of uprooting Saljuq rule, nor did the Saljuqs, despite their much greater military strength, succeed in dislodging the Ismailis from their mountain strongholds. By his final years, a stalemate had developed between the Ismailis and the Saljuqs, and despite the incessant hostilities of the Saljuqs and their successors, the Ismaili state survived until 1256. Meanwhile, the *da'is* dispatched from Alamut to Syria had organised an expanding Ismaili community there. The Syrian Ismailis, too, acquired a network of castles while pursuing policies of both defensive struggle and diplomacy towards various Muslim rulers and towards the Crusaders, who made them famous in Europe in their imaginary tales as the Assassins.

After Nizar's execution in Cairo in 1095, the name of his successor was not divulged by Hasan-i Sabbah. The early Nizari Ismailis were thus left without an accessible Imam in another *dawr al-satr*, or period of concealment, as had occurred in the pre-Fatimid period in Ismaili history. The concealed Ismaili Imam was now once again represented in the community by a *hujja*, his chief representative. Indeed, Hasan and his next two successors at Alamut ruled as *hujjas* of the inaccessible Imams. Numismatic evidence from this period indicates that Nizar's own name and caliphal title (al-Mustafa li-Din Allah) continued to be mentioned on coins minted at Alamut for about seventy years after his death. On these coins, Nizar's progeny are blessed anonymously.

Nonetheless, it is a historical fact that Nizar did have male progeny, and some of them even launched abortive revolts in Fatimid Egypt. And some of his descendants sought refuge in Persia, as related in a recently recovered manuscript of Hasan-i Muhmud-i Katib's *Haft bab*, written a few decades after the declaration of *qiyama* at

Alamut in 1164. At the same time, already in Hasan-i Sabbah's time many Nizari Ismailis believed that a son or grandson of Nizar had been brought secretly from Egypt to Persia. This Fatimid would become the progenitor of the line of the Nizari Imams, who initially remained inaccessible, but eventually emerged openly at Alamut, starting with the fourth lord of Alamut, Hasan 'ala dhikrihi'l-salam (r. 1162–1166), and took charge of the affairs of their *da'wa* and state. Hasan 'ala dhikrihi'l-salam declared the *qiyama* or Resurrection in 1164, initiating a new era in the history of the Nizari Ismailis. Relying on expounding Ismaili *ta'wil*, or esoteric exegesis, however, he interpreted this long-awaited Last Day symbolically and spiritually for his community. Accordingly, *qiyama* meant the manifestation of unveiled truth (*haqiqah*) in the person of the 'Imam of the time'; and this was a spiritual resurrection only for those who acknowledged the rightful Imam and were thus capable of comprehending the esoteric, immutable essence of Islam. It was in this sense that Paradise was actualised for the Nizari Ismailis in this world, while the outsiders were rendered spiritually non-existent.

Muhammad, son and successor of Hasan 'ala dhikrihi'l-salam, devoted his long reign (1166–1210) to a systematic elaboration of the *qiyama* in terms of a doctrine. The exaltation of the autonomous teaching authority of the current Imam, which had already been explained according to Hasan-i Sabbah's doctrine of *ta'lim*, now became the central feature of Ismaili thought. And the *qiyama* came to imply a complete personal transformation of the Ismailis who were expected to fully apprehend their Imam in his true spiritual reality.

The sixth lord of Alamut, Muhammad's son and successor Jalal al-Din Hasan (r. 1210–1221), who had become particularly concerned with the isolation of his community from the larger Muslim world, attempted a daring rapprochement with the Sunni Muslims. He repudiated the doctrine of the *qiyama* and instructed his community to observe the *shari'a* in its Sunni form. Henceforth, the rights of Jalal al-Din Hasan to Ismaili territories in Persia and Syria were officially recognised by the Abbasids and other Sunni rulers. The Ismailis evidently interpreted their Imam's new policies as the re-imposition of *taqiyya*, which had been lifted in the *qiyama* times. The observance of *taqiyya* could, indeed, imply any type of accommodation to the outside world as deemed necessary by the infallible 'Imam of the time'. The rapprochement with Sunni Muslims had obvious advantages for the Ismaili community, who had been marginalised as 'heretics' (*malahida*) for a long time. Above all, the Imam had now achieved the peace and security that his community and state much needed.

In the long reign of Jalal al-Din Hasan's son and successor, 'Ala al-Din Muhammad (r. 1221–1255), the observation of the Sunni form of the *shari'a*, which had been

adopted previously for *taqiyya* purposes, was gradually relaxed within the community and the traditions associated with *qiyama* were once again revived. The Ismaili leadership now also made systematic efforts to explain the different religious policies of the earlier lords of Alamut, setting them within a coherent theological framework. In this connection, it is mainly through the Ismaili works written or supervised by the eminent Shi'ī philosopher and theologian Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274) that we have a clear exposition of the Ismaili thought of the Alamut period. Foremost among the scholars who were then fleeing before the Mongol invasions, al-Tusi had sought refuge in the Ismaili fortresses of Persia and, in fact, converted to Ismailism in the course of the three decades or so that he spent in their fortress communities. Be that as it may, the Ismaili teachings of the Alamut period brought them even closer to the esoteric traditions more widely associated with Sufism, also enabling them to maintain a distinct identity and spiritual independence under changing circumstances.

The Persian Ismailis, who had successfully struggled against too many formidable adversaries and for so long, were finally overwhelmed by the all-conquering Mongol armies led by Hülegü himself. Subsequently, the Mongols uprooted the Abbasid caliphate while continuing to massacre large numbers of the local inhabitants of their conquered territories. Meanwhile, the surrender of the chief Ismaili stronghold of Alamut to the Mongols in 1256 had sealed the fate of the Ismaili state of Persia, although some individual castles, like Lamasar and Girdkuh, held out against the Mongols for a while longer. A year later, Rukn al-Din Khurshah, the Ismaili Imam and the last lord of Alamut who had ruled for exactly one year, was murdered in Mongolia, where he had been taken to see the Great Khan. The Mongols massacred large numbers of Ismailis in Persia. Many of the survivors then migrated to Central Asia, Afghanistan and Sind, where Ismaili communities already existed. But in Syria, the Ismailis attained the peak of their power and glory in the second half of the twelfth century under their most eminent *da'ī*, Rashid al-Din Sinan (d. 1193), who successfully led them for three decades. The Syrian Ismailis were spared the Mongol debacle, but by 1273 all their castles had fallen into the hands of the Mamluks, then ruling over Egypt and Syria. The Syrian Ismailis were permitted to live in their traditional abodes as loyal subjects of the Mamluks, and then of their Ottoman successors.

In the early centuries after the demise of the Ismaili state in 1256, the various Ismaili communities, scattered from Persia to Central Asia and South Asia as well as in Syria, elaborated a diversity of religious and literary traditions in different languages. Many aspects of Ismaili history during these early post-Alamut centuries are still shrouded in obscurity due to a scarcity of primary sources. Additional difficulties in research stem