

# AN EXAMINATION OF EDUCATIONAL METHODOLOGY IN ISMĀ'ĪLĪ ISLAM

by

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(Under the Direction of Kenneth Honerkamp)

## ABSTRACT

By looking at the literature, sub-sects, and influential leaders within Ismā'īlism's development I explore the importance of education to the Ismā'īlī community. This work begins with a portrait of the difficulties that have arisen within Ismā'īlī scholarship in the Western World and how those difficulties have created obstacles in scholarship's understanding of the branch. Next I examine the theological teachings and educational methodologies that are represented in major Ismā'īlī literary works as well as how those teachings have been incorporated into modern Ismā'īlī educational practice. Central to all teachings and methods is the role played by the imām as the paramount guide in the Ismā'īlī's journey to acquire knowledge of God and thus salvation.

INDEX WORDS: Ismā'īlī, imām, pedagogy, esoteric, *Kitāb al-Ālim wa'l-ghulām*, *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, Aga Khan, master & disciple, *ẓāhir*, *bāṭin*, Nizārī, Fāṭimid, assassination, assassin, *ḥashīsh(ī)*, *da'wa*, *dā'ī*, Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ, *ta'līm*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The study of religious history is marked by the attempt to attain an accurate understanding of interreligious strife and discord. For example, the development of Ismā'īlī Shī'ism has spanned many centuries and has a multi-faceted history. Western scholarship is well aware of Sunnī and Shī'ī conflict and even Shī'ī against Shī'ī clashes. However, what is less well known are details about the splintering within the Ismā'īlī Shī'ī community. This thesis will examine various theological teachings and pedagogical methodology expressed in the literature, sub-sects, and by leaders of Ismā'īlism. Certain pedagogical methods were employed in order to initiate knowledge of God, which is the ultimate goal of Islamic mysticism and esoteric analysis. In order to realize the truth of God's unity, spiritual educational methodology was practiced to guide the initiate through their understanding of first, the exoteric law, and second, toward an understanding of the esoteric meaning within God's message.

While one of the central themes in Ismā'īlism today is unity, historical records about the Ismā'īlī community tell a volatile history. Beginning as a secreted esoteric doctrine, the teachings of the Ismā'īlīs have come to be accepted among adherents of Ismā'īlism in over twenty-two countries around the world. What started as clandestine teaching on the importance of the imāmate and the unity of God led to the composition of several influential theological texts. Works such as the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (*The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*) and *Kitāb al-Ālim wa'l-ghulām* (*The Master and Disciple*) are

recognized as influential works, and have played important roles in Islamic theological dialogue. Schisms within the Ismā'īlī movement led to the development of factions such as the Qarāmiṭa, the Fāṭimids and the Nizārīs, each movement growing in a unique direction. Today, with spiritual leaders such as the Aga Khan, Ismā'īlism continues its tradition of the individual's connection with God through the imām.

The clandestine beginnings of the Ismā'īlīs were conducive to the development of polemical accounts about the sect that circulated in abundance. It is unfortunate that some of the most common beliefs about the Ismā'īlīs are rooted in the legends that developed about the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs of Persia and Syria in the twelfth century. The Nizārī use of assassination as a political and religious tool serves to perpetuate negative perceptions about the Nizārī community. Polemical accounts outnumber primary works of the Ismā'īlīs themselves, due to the previously clandestine nature of the branch. But recent work in Ismā'īlī study has been able to clear away many misunderstandings about the formative period of the Ismā'īlīs and why they employed the methods they did. By examining the educational methods used by the Ismā'īlīs in their formative period and today a way of understanding an ultimate goal of Ismā'īlī Muslims can be understood. In the Ismā'īlī quest for knowledge of God's unity, educational guidance is key to understanding the eternal truths hidden within their writings that represented God's true message common to all Abrahamic faiths. The concepts of teaching and sacred learning tie the various developments of the sect together, and understanding spiritual education is an important component to understanding Ismā'īlism.

The first chapter of this thesis will serve as an overview of the misunderstandings surrounding the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs and how they hindered scholarship until the nineteenth century. In his book *The Secret Order of Assassins*, Marshall G. S. Hodgson sheds light on what he calls “an aspiring minority group, whose religious and social orientation had been rejected by the bulk of Islamic society; and who were faced with a steadily hardening pattern of orthodox life, hostile to them, and which they could not accept.”<sup>1</sup> In the chapter, I will trace the development of scholarship about the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs, separating fact from fiction, based on the important insights provided by recent scholarship about this society and their employment of violence. The analysis of the myths surrounding the sect, propagated by both the Eastern and Western accounts, delineates on the one hand the identification of the aura of macabre interest in the so-called “Assassins” by Europeans and on the other the condemnation of the so-called *bāṭinīs* perpetuated in the Muslim world.

This chapter represents some of the most notable facets of the work done by key scholars such as Silvestre de Sacy, Farhad Daftary, Marshall Hodgson, Wladimir Ivanow and others, in the field. It was these men who enabled Nizārī Ismāʿīlī scholarship to escape from black legends and rumors that had previously been understood as truth by many. In an age where extremists and other groups justify the use of violence as a political tool, scholarship that reveals the motivations and ideals of a similar group is invaluable. The reaction of extremists today to what they see as a secular threat to their way of life has led them to violent rebellion against the orthodox mainstream and anyone they see as representing opposition to their ideals and values

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<sup>1</sup> Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Secret Order of Assassins: the Struggle of the Early Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs Against the Islamic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 1.

similar to that of the Nizārīs in the twelfth century. The recent and ground-breaking scholarship on this topic illuminates clearly that misunderstanding and misrepresentation of radical tendencies can spiral down into violence that results in societal clashes that may ultimately lead to the near destruction of one or the other.

The second chapter will illustrate the importance of the master and disciple relationship found within the text *Kitāb al-Ālim wa'l-ghulām* (*The Master and Disciple*) written by Ja'far ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century. This text is one of the only surviving works from an Ismā'īlī author illustrating the educational methods within the initiation practices of the sect. It is one of the first influential manifestations of Ismā'īlī thought and a literary classic described as “the initial story of one seeker’s quest for and gradual realization of the ‘truth’ – the spiritual knowledge and eternal life of the true ‘knowers,’ the ‘friends of God’ – and the ongoing story of their necessary return to this world in order to fulfill their responsibility to transmit that divine ‘trust’ and discovery to their fellow human beings, to their family and the other members of their wider community, in the ways that are appropriate to each situation.”<sup>2</sup> His work demonstrates a relationship that has been influential in guiding believers toward salvation in every culture. In Ismā'īlism particularly it was an important methodological component in the *da'wa*, essential in teaching the initiates the secrets of the *bāṭin*, the inner, or esoteric message within the revelations from God. This was done in order to guide their believers toward salvation and knowledge of God.

The third chapter of this thesis examines the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (*The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*). While the authorship and date of origin of this compendium are

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<sup>2</sup> James W. Morris, trans., *The Master and the Disciple: An Early Islamic Spiritual Dialogue*. (London: IB Tauris & Co Ltd, 2001), 1.

debatable, what cannot be argued is the fact that the *Rasā'il* had a monumental effect on a variety of Islamic schools and doctrines. In particular, much of the cosmology and ideals toward *gnosis* contained in the *Rasā'il* mirror those within Fāṭimid Ismā'īlī doctrine. The main themes in the *Rasā'il* are “the purification of the human soul, attainment of knowledge and human brotherhood. The emphasis throughout the *Rasā'il* is to turn from the sleep of negligence and the slumber of ignorance to the awakening of the soul to knowledge and its purification by actions according to the true knowledge before entering Paradise.”<sup>3</sup> It is these goals that are held to be imperative in Ismā'īlism and the Ikhwān intended their epistles to be used as an educational spiritual guide to this purification of the soul. With their unique cosmological doctrines and emphasis on esoterism, it should be no surprise that it was used as such by many Ismā'īlīs for centuries after the epistles were written.

The fourth chapter will study the role of the imām in the evolution of scholarship and spiritual education from the beginnings of Ismā'īlism to today. The imām is the valid guide along the path to knowledge, and without his guidance complete knowledge of God can never be attained. As such, the existence of the imām is invaluable as it assures the authority of religious teachings. Additionally, the imām is the spring from which people can access knowledge and he holds epistemological, ontological, teleological, and methodological roles. The role held by the imām from early Ismā'īlism continues into modern times and recent Ismā'īlī imāms have been actively modernizing components of Ismā'īlism such as education through the works of the Aga Khan Development Network, the institutions created and awards presented by

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<sup>3</sup> Sayyed Hossein Nasr. *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 201.

Aga Khan Foundations as well as the role Ismāʿīlism plays in interfaith and pluralistic dialogue. The activities of modern Ismāʿīlīs, Aga Khan III, and Aga Khan IV have been characterized by a synthesis of spiritual leadership with more modern secular policies. “As a result, the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs have entered the modern world as a progressive and prosperous community with very high standards of education.”<sup>4</sup> The modern imāmate of the Aga Khan represents an embracing of the concepts of compassion, tolerance, and the individual dignity of man in a time when spiritual leaders are speaking out in opposition against religious totalitarianism. Following traditions practiced by early Ismāʿīlīs, Aga Khan IV seeks to “safeguard the individual’s right to personal intellectual search and to give practical expression to the ethical vision of society that the Islamic message inspires.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Farhad Daftary, “Untitled,” review of *Throne of Gold: The Lives of the Aga Khans*, by Anne Edwards, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, October-December, 1996, 788.

<sup>5</sup> The Ismaili, “His Highness the Aga Khan,” Ismaili Muslim Community, <http://www.theismaili.org/cms/14/The-Aga-Khan> (accessed April 7, 2010).

## CHAPTER 2

### THE NIZĀRĪ ISMĀ'ĪLĪS AND WESTERN SCHOLARSHIP

A misunderstanding of the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs has pervaded scholarship about their development for many reasons. Disagreements over doctrinal differences between Sunnī and Shī'ī Muslims have caused strife within many communities; Ismā'īlism<sup>6</sup>, is a product of this strife, often condemned as the arch-heresy (*ilhād*<sup>7</sup>) of Islam by many Muslims. Additionally, no Shī'ī sect has met with more enmity than the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs<sup>8</sup> of Persia and Syria beginning in the twelfth century. Opposed by Sunnī and Shī'ī alike, the Nizārī movement developed clandestinely, keeping their beliefs veiled through precautionary dissimulation (*taqiyya*<sup>9</sup>), often for the protection of the practitioners. Their tenets were primarily focused on the role of the imām in this world and the next,

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<sup>6</sup> On the Ismā'īlīs, see Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Daftary, Farhad. "The Earliest Ismā'īlīs." *Arabica* 38, no. 2 (1991): 214-245; Walker, Paul E. *Fāṭimid History and Ismaili Doctrine*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2008; Daftary, Farhad. "A Major Schism in the Early Ismā'īlī Movement." *Studia Islamica*, no. 77 (1993): 123-139. JSTOR, via Galileo, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1595792>; *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., "Shiism: Ismā'īlism." (by W. Madelung); *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., "Ismā'īliyya." (by W. Madelung); Michael Brett, "The Mīm, the 'Ayn, and the Making of Ismā'īlism," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 57 (1994): 25-39; Azim Nanji, "Ismā'īlism," in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, ed. Sayyed Hossein Nasr, 179-198 (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul Ltd, 1987).

<sup>7</sup> Translated as a deviation from the correct religious path, or a heresy in religion. An individual accused of *ilhād* is called a *mulḥid* (pl. *malāḥida*).

<sup>8</sup> On the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs, see Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Secret Order of Assassins: The Struggle of the Early Nizārī Ismā'īlīs Against the Islamic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955); Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines*; Farhad Daftary, *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Ismā'īlīs* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1994); Silvestre de Sacy, *Mémoire sur la dynastie des Assassins, et sur l'étymologie de leur Nom* [Mémorial on the Dynasty of the Assassins, and on the Etymology of their Name] (Paris: de l'Institut Royal de France, 1818); Lewis, Bernard. *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967; Lockhart, Laurence. "Ḥasan-i-Ṣabbāh and the Assassins." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 5, no. 4 (1930): 675-696. JSTOR via Galileo, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/607014>; Farhad Daftary ed., *Mediaeval Ismā'īlī History and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> "Precautionary dissimulation of one's true religious beliefs, especially in time of danger; used especially by the Twelver (Ithnā'asharī) and Ismā'īlī Shī'īs." Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 522.

enhancing the Ismā'īlī ideal of a powerful spiritual connection to the divine. Keeping their beliefs secret led to a development of a multitude of myths surrounding the sect and nick-names to describe their practices. These names included: the *bāṭinīs*, which denoted their emphasis on esoteric learning, the *Alamūtīs*, which denoted their presence in the fortress of Alamūt, and the *ḥashīshīs*, denoting their supposed consumption of the hallucinogenic drug *ḥashīsh*. Because the methods and doctrines the Nizārīs used in their quest for knowledge and union with God met with hostility and disagreement, they were misrepresented in scholarship and public thought until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, with the recent work of scholars such as Silvestre de Sacy, Marshall G. S. Hodgson, and Farhad Daftary, the Western world has been able to move past the fog of the unknown surrounding Nizārī Ismā'īlism and get an accurate representation of the movement.

### **The Development of Policy and Doctrine in Nizārī Ismā'īlism**

Nizārī Ismā'īlism emerged publically in the Muslim World in 487/1094 due to a succession dispute after the death of the caliph al-Mustaṣṣir.<sup>10</sup> The Nizārī Ismā'īlīs supported the older son of al-Mustaṣṣir named Nizār. After the death of Nizār, the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs were left without an imām and in a period of concealment (*dawr al-satr*) in which the imām was concealed and inaccessible to them. During this time Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ<sup>11</sup> (d. 518/1124) consolidated the movement after taking the fortress of Alamūt, a

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<sup>10</sup> Fāṭimid caliph who had an uncommonly long reign leading to several possible factors for the Nizārī separation from the Fāṭimid state. With a large number of potential heirs (some sources say the minimum number of possible children was 17) left after his death, the lack of definite policy for the choice of a successor led to the conditions for a schism.

<sup>11</sup> Ḥasan i-Ṣabbāḥ was born into a Twelver Shī'ī family in the town of Qumm in western Iran. He studied in Rayy and went to Egypt in 470/1078 as a representative of Shaykh 'Abd al-Malik-i 'Aṭṭāsh. He was designated a *dā'ī* and served the Ismā'īlī *da'wa* from 473/1081 to 482/1090. Travelling around in the lands under Saljūq control, he purchased the fortress at Alamūt, near the coast of the Caspian Sea in the Elburz Mountains, from the lord 'Alid Maḥdī after converting the garrison before his arrival.

mountain fortification located in the current day Rudbar region of Iran. Because of the absence of an imām in this world, “Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ came to be regarded as the imām’s full representative and living proof (*ḥujja*<sup>12</sup>) in the Nizārī community, acting as the custodian of the Nizārī *da’wa*<sup>13</sup> [or call to spread the doctrine] until the time of the imām’s reappearance, when Ḥasan was expected to identify the imām for the faithful.”<sup>14</sup>

Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ, in his rebellion against the ‘Abbāsīd-Sunnī caliphate located in Baghdad, gave assassination a major religio-political role. These assassinations were often carried out in the most public atmosphere possible, increasing the intimidation affect as well as making the missions ultimately suicidal. Often the targets of this assassination were surrounded by people in as public a setting as the city’s mosque. The possibility of death during the missions was accepted as martyrdom was a method believed to purify (*ṭahāra*) the one who was offering himself as a sacrifice, the *fidā’ī*.<sup>15</sup> Daftary explains that “it was in connection with the self-sacrificing behavior of the Nizārī *fidā’īs*, who killed prominent opponents of their community in particular localities, that the main myths of the Nizārīs, the Assassin legends, were developed in

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<sup>12</sup> Translated as “proof” or “testimony.” The term is used to describe the imāms without whom the world would not exist. Daftary explains that the *ḥujjat Allāh* or “God’s proof” was used synonymously with imām in early Imāmī Shī‘ī tradition. In every era there is a *ḥujja* of God, and he may be a prophet, a messenger-prophet, or an imām.

<sup>13</sup> The early Ismā‘īlī community (2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> c.) designated themselves as the “rightly guiding mission” (*al-da’wa al-hādiya*) or simply as the *da’wa*. The *da’wa* culminated in 297/909 in the Fāṭimid State and participated in revolutionary activities challenging the authority of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate and recruiting initiates to Ismā‘īlism. The *da’wa* is the “invitation or call to adopt the cause of an individual or family claiming the right to the imāmate; it also refers to the entire hierarchy of ranks, sometimes called *ḥudūd* within the particular religious organization developed, especially amongst the Ismā‘īlīs.” Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, 515.

<sup>14</sup> Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, 326.

<sup>15</sup> “One who offers his life for a cause; a term used for special devotees in several religio-political Muslim groups; particularly those Nizārī Ismā‘īlīs of Persia and Syria who, during the Alamūt period, risked their lives in the service of the community.” Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, 516.

the Middle Ages.”<sup>16</sup> The purification that came from being a martyr made the *fidā’ī* worthy of entering Paradise. Indeed, the early Ismā’īlī scholar Abū Ya’qūb Ishāq b. Aḥmad al-Sijistānī<sup>17</sup> (d. c. 360/971) best known for his Primordial Rational Principle, wrote about martyrdom’s connection to a soul’s preparation for Paradise. In his work entitled *Kashf al-Mahjūb (Disclosure of the Concealed)* he insisted “on the role of the body as the purifier of the soul – the *nafs*<sup>18</sup> – that it might rejoin the ultimate reason – ‘*aql*’.”<sup>20</sup> Al-Sijistānī’s analysis continues and he explains “that by dying in the line of duty they were using their bodies to purify their souls for the realm of light.”<sup>21</sup> It is most likely the Nizārīs had prepared to make this connection from the beginning. Their last act in life would thus complete the purification that was necessary before entering Paradise.

The assassinations often had motives of defense of their community or retaliation against enemies. It is impossible to know exactly how many were killed by the Nizārī *fidā’īs* as most of the assassinations that occurred in general were attributed to them. The chronicles of Ibn al-Qalānīsī<sup>22</sup> (d. 555/1160) illustrate this fact well. In

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<sup>16</sup> Farhad Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, 34.

<sup>17</sup> Abū Ya’qūb Ishāq b. Aḥmad al-Sijistānī was one of the most eminent early Ismā’īlī scholars and *dā’īs* of Persia. As a philosopher he is well known for his Neo-Platonic viewpoints. He was particularly influential in the philosophical, theological, and cosmological doctrines of Ismā’īlism. In concordance with his ideals of martyrdom as a purification method, he himself died a martyr’s death within a few years after 360/971.

<sup>18</sup> The term *nafs* is typically translated into English with a result of a variety of definitions including “self,” “soul,” “ego” and “lesser ego.” Titus Burkhardt, in his work *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf Publishers, 1959), explains that the spirit (*rūḥ*) and soul (*nafs*) battle for control of the heart (*al-qalb*). He writes that the *nafs* is the psyche, “the centrifugal tendencies of which determine the diffuse and inconstant domain of the ‘I,’” (19). It is thus the originator of our desires and any ego-centered focus in life and thus one facet of humanity that must be cleansed before *theosis* and access to Paradise are possible. The result of the battle between the spirit and the soul determine whether or not the heart will fulfill its ultimate purpose of becoming a “tabernacle (*mishkāṭ*) of the Divine Mystery (*ṣir*) in man,” (20).

<sup>19</sup> Translated as “intellect,” “intelligence,” or “reason.”

<sup>20</sup> Hodgson, *The Secret Order of Assassins*, 83.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>22</sup> Hamza ibn Asad Abū Ya’lā ibn al-Qalānīsī, served as a secretary in the Correspondence Bureau or Chancery (*Dīwan al-Rasā’il*) and eventually rose to head the organization. Additionally he served as *ra’īs* (mayor) of Damascus twice during his lifetime.

515/1121 he writes that as far as the assassination of al-Afḍal, son of the Amīr al-Juyūsh, is concerned, “it was asserted that the *Bāṭinīs* were responsible for his assassination, but this statement is not true...”<sup>23</sup> The policy of assassination had no apparent goal of removing all Sunnī leadership. As Hodgson explains, assassination was typically used against “military chiefs; often they attacked amīrs who led attacks against their strongholds, or viziers who did the like; occasionally they attacked sulṭāns who acted against them.”<sup>24</sup> He also proposes a third category of targets chosen for assassination: someone who had learned of their doctrines and either decided to inform their enemies against them or could not be trusted to keep the secret. Hodgson presents these individuals as ordinary and writes that “such a practice is almost unavoidable for a party in revolt which expects to keep its activities and its beliefs secret.”<sup>25</sup>

Later in their history, it seems the Nizārīs completed political assassinations on behalf of outsiders. While the common perception for a contracted assassination is payment in money, it was unlikely the Nizārīs were paid for their services initially. These contracted assassinations more likely had a strategic value in the beginning and later developed into having monetary value. According to Hodgson, however, assassination played a major role in “that almost unknown aspect of the Nizārī venture, the struggle to prepare various local scenes for the rule of the imām...directed against men, military or civilian, who stood in the way of the local *da’wa*.”<sup>26</sup> This made assassination for the Nizārīs public and political. They lacked the more common

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<sup>23</sup> Ibn al-Qalānisi, *The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades*, 163.

<sup>24</sup> Hodgson, *The Secret Order of Assassins*, 112.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

motive for murder, which is typically a personal connection between murderer and victim. In this light, they were never suspected of using poison, which is a commonly used weapon in a more personal murder.

Assassination was not the only policy employed by the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs that was met with opposition by greater Muslim society. In the formative period of Ismāʿīlism, theology concentrated on the distinctions between the outer or exoteric (*ẓāhir*<sup>27</sup>) and the inner or esoteric (*bāṭin*<sup>28</sup>) aspects of God's message. *Ẓāhir* is described as an aspect that "consists of the apparent, directly accessible meaning of the scriptures brought by the prophets and the religious laws contained in them."<sup>29</sup> These exoteric meanings were more literal and underwent occasional changes. On the other hand, the *bāṭin* "consists of the esoteric, unchangeable truths (*ḥaqāʾiq*<sup>30</sup>) hidden in all scriptures and laws behind the apparent sense and revealed by the method of esoteric interpretation called *taʾwīl*<sup>31</sup>" and is considered the true spiritual meaning of God's message.<sup>32</sup>

The importance of the inner aspect of God's message is well described in the *Kitāb al-ʿĀlim wa'l-ghulām*:

<sup>27</sup> "The outward, literal, or exoteric meaning of sacred texts and religious prescriptions, notably the Qur'ān and the *sharī'a* as distinct from the *bāṭin*." Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 522.

<sup>28</sup> "The inward, hidden, or esoteric meaning behind the literal wording of sacred texts and religious prescriptions, notably the Qur'ān and the *sharī'a* as distinct from the *ẓāhir*; hence, Bāṭinīs, Bāṭiniyya, the groups associated with such ideas. Most of these groups were Shīʿī, particularly Ismāʿīlī." Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 515.

<sup>29</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. "Shiism: Ismāʿīlīyah," 8326.

<sup>30</sup> S. *ḥaqīqa*. Translated as "truths; as a technical term it denotes the gnostic system of thought of the Ismāʿīlīs. In this sense, the *ḥaqāʾiq* are the unchangeable truths contained in the *bāṭin*; while the law changes with every law-announcing prophet, the *ḥaqāʾiq* remain eternal." Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 516-517.

<sup>31</sup> "The educing of the inner meaning from the literal wording or apparent meaning of a text or a ritual, religious prescription; as a technical term among the Shīʿīs, particularly the Ismāʿīlīs, it denotes the method of educing the *bāṭin* from the *ẓāhir*; as such it was extensively used by the Ismāʿīlīs for allegorical, symbolic or esoteric interpretation of the Qur'ān, the *sharī'a*, historical events and the world of nature. Translated also as a spiritual or hermeneutic exegesis, *taʾwīl* may be distinguished from *tafsīr*." Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 522.

<sup>32</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 8326.

Its Knowledge is well-concealed because of its special excellence, and its secrets are well-guarded for those worthy of them: the special dignity (of those secrets of spiritual knowledge) is the splendid robe of (divine) right guidance, and the most perfect of them is the garment of mindfulness of God, marked out by the light of lights, entrusted safely in the breasts of the best (of men), guardians, protectors, generous and recording! That (knowledge of the inner dimension of religion) is a trust they safely pass on, (divine) ordinances which they do not transgress. It is the law of the Supreme Judge (containing all) the benefits of the All-Merciful: He honored it, so he made it inward (*bāṭin*), and He protected it, so He made it secret. He veiled it with His rights (our obligations to Him), and He crowned it with His covenants.<sup>33</sup>

The understanding of each of these two aspects of reality represented differing levels of knowledge that could be attained by the individual. The first level would be that of attaining a comprehensive knowledge of the *ẓāhir*. This understanding is an important pre-requisite before one can truly understand the *bāṭin*. The outer aspects of reality and religious law should not be forgotten or shunned, as those who only have an understanding of one and not the other cannot reach a full understanding of spiritual reality. The importance of the *ẓāhir* can be understood through the proscriptions for right action (*ādāb*) for knowledge is of no benefit to anyone unless they understand how to put it into correct practice. In *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām* there is further explanation. The author writes that “one can only attain its [the *bāṭin*] essence on the basis of preceding, lower forms of knowledge [*ẓāhir*] which hearts can more quickly assimilate and the understanding can more easily grasp, so that the first stage (of that process of spiritual growth) is established in (people’s) minds and they are humbled enough to carry out the duties (required by that), and so that their hearts come to open up to the essence (of that knowledge) and their intellects are able to bear its goal.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> James W. Morris, trans., *The Master and the Disciple: An Early Islamic Spiritual Dialogue*. (London: IB Tauris & Co Ltd, 2001), 67.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

However, the intellectual pursuits of the Ismā'īlīs in general had changed in the twelfth century and “in particular, the Nizārīs did not retain the earlier interest in cosmology and other esoteric doctrines that had been expounded in the classical works of the Fāṭimid period...the early Nizārīs, on the other hand, showed a particular interest in the doctrine of the imāmate.”<sup>35</sup> Many outsiders got an impression of this “new teaching” (*al-da'wa al-jadīda*) implemented by Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ with his development of the doctrine of *ta'līm*<sup>36</sup> or the authoritative teaching of the imām. Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ expanded on the doctrine of *ta'līm* in his *Fuṣūl-i 'Arba'a* (*The Four Essentials of Ismā'īlism*) which served to reinforce Ismā'īlī polemics. His aim was to prove that only the Ismā'īlī imām was certified to serve as the authoritative teacher (after the Prophet) for the faithful. Weaving logic in regards to humanity's need for this authoritative and ultimately trustworthy teacher, “this doctrine, stressing the autonomous teaching authority of each imām in his time, became the central doctrine of the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs, also serving as a powerful ideological tool in the hands of the Nizārī community of later times.”<sup>37</sup>

While Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ's expansion of the doctrine of *ta'līm* served to reinforce many polemical arguments, the proclamation of the Resurrection (*qiyāma*<sup>38</sup>) years later

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<sup>35</sup> Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 339.

<sup>36</sup> Translated as “teaching” or “instruction” *ta'līm* in Shī'ism is the “authoritative teaching in religion which could be carried out only by an imām in every age after the Prophet.” Ibid, 522.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 342.

<sup>38</sup> Translated as the “resurrection.” When “mankind will be judged and committed forever to either Paradise or Hell; in Ismā'īlī thought, it also came to be used in reference to the end of any partial cycle in the history of mankind, with the implication that the entire hierohistory of mankind consisted of many such partial cycles and partial *qiyāmas*, leading to the final *qiyāma*, sometimes called the *qiyāmat al-qiyāmat*. The Nizārīs of the Alamūt period interpreted the *qiyāma* spiritually as the manifestation of the unveiled truth (*ḥaqīqa*) in the spiritual reality of the current imām, who was also called the *qā'im al-qiyāma*.” Ibid, 520.

by the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Ḥasan II<sup>39</sup> in 559/1164 also stoked the flames of hostility.

Although the news of the proclamation did not reach the outside world until after the Nizārīs began living as if it were here, these doctrines directly related to the designation of the Nizārīs as *malāhida*. Daftary explains that the Nizārīs believed only they were capable of understanding what was not the spiritual reality and the “the immutable truths hidden behind all the religious laws; and, as such, Paradise was made real for them in this world.”<sup>40</sup> Paradise on earth made the religious laws of the *sharʿa* no longer applicable.<sup>41</sup> It was this supposed abrogation of *sharʿa* that caused many to believe the Nizārīs no longer represented a branch of Islam. However, there is no record that this supposed abrogation of the law resulted in the Nizārīs acting out in any way. Seemingly, they carried on their external lives almost as if nothing had changed, as the revealed truths of the *qiyāma* were manifested in the imām. The proclamation of the *qiyāma* ended the time of dissimulation of doctrines as well as the time in which their imām was hidden from the world.

The *qiyāma* placed every faithful Nizārī in Paradise and their detractors in Hell. However, being faithful did not guarantee that every Nizārī was capable of grasping the full truth of this new spiritual reality. Because of this, there developed three categories of persons during the *qiyāma* and “the Nizārī sources define these categories, representing three different levels of existence among mankind, in terms of

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<sup>39</sup> Ḥasan II succeeded Muḥammad ibn Buzurg-Ummīd in 557/1162. He initiated a new phase in Ismāʿīlī history by declaring the arrival of the *qiyāma* in 559/1164. For more information on Ḥasan II see Hodgson, *The Secret Order of Assassins*; Lewis, *Assassins*; Ivanow, *Ismāʿīlī Literature*; Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*.

<sup>40</sup> Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, 41.

<sup>41</sup> Before Ḥasan II's proclamation however, the responsibilities found in the religious laws of Islam had been rigorously upheld.

relationships between the individual and the Nizārī imām.”<sup>42</sup> One’s connection to the imām served as a familiar and understood base for the Nizārī theologians when defining these levels of humanity since one’s relationship with the imām defined their existence in this life. Of these three people, those who were against the Nizārī cause were titled “people of opposition” (*ahl-i taḍādd*).<sup>43</sup> Mankind in this category consisted of Muslims and non-Muslims who were spiritually non-existent as they existed only in the realm of appearances (*ẓāhir*).

The next level of persons was called the “people of gradation” (*ahl-i tarattub*)<sup>44</sup> These ordinary followers of the imām represented the elite of mankind (*khāṣṣa*) and had found partial truth and salvation. They only understood the basics of the *bāṭin*, the inner meaning of religion, and as such had not grasped full comprehension of the new spiritual reality. The last level of persons, called the “people of union” (*ahl-i vaḥdat*)<sup>45</sup> serves to show the highest level of spiritual attainment. These people were considered among the super-elite (*akhaṣṣ-khāṣṣ*) and were able to identify the imām in true spiritual reality, in the realm of *ḥaqīqa*. This was a state of full salvation, an understanding of the *bāṭin* within the *bāṭin*. It was difficult to attain and “the demanding conditions for attaining the status of the ‘people of union’ serve to underline the complexities of the doctrine of the *qiyāma*, and the difficult circumstances confronted by the contemporary Nizārīs.”<sup>46</sup> However, whether in disregard of these complexities, or in ignorance of them, the anti-Nizārī polemicists

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 365.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 365.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 366.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 366.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 366.

equated the declaration of the *qiyāma* with the total and complete abrogation of *sharī'a* law, thus making the Nizārīs no longer Muslim.

### Muslim Polemics and Early Myths

Both the doctrines of Ismā'īlism and the policy of assassination played a major role in the development of Muslim anti-Nizārī polemics. Polemical writings against the Ismā'īlīs already had a long tradition before Nizārī Ismā'īlism influenced the world. Farhad Daftary presents them as a revolutionary branch of Shī'ism that sought to bring the caliphate into an 'Alid genealogy which aroused hostility in the 'Abbāsīd-Sunnī majority. He explains that they held a “religio-political agenda for uprooting the 'Abbāsīds and restoring the caliphate to a life of 'Alid imāms.”<sup>47</sup> As a result of this point of view there seems to have been an official anti-Ismā'īlī literary campaign launched by Ismā'īlī polemicists of both Sunnī and Shī'ī background at the beginning of the Fāṭimid caliphate in 207/909. This campaign aimed to discredit Ismā'īlism as a whole, without regard to the various internal divisions within the sect. All Ismā'īlīs were referred to as deviators (*malāḥida*) from the true religious path of more orthodox Sunnī and Shī'ī doctrine and theology. The polemicists sought to condemn them on doctrinal grounds and, as Daftary explains, they concocted “detailed accounts of the sinister teachings and immoral practices of the Ismā'īlīs while denying the 'Alid genealogy of their imāms.”<sup>48</sup>

The polemical Sunnī accounts culminated into what Farhad Daftary calls the “black legend” of Ismā'īlism, created to condemn all Ismā'īlīs as heretics who seek to destroy Islam from within by claiming to be Muslim. In general the leaders were

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 7.

viewed as diabolically clever and the followers brainless and naïve. In fact, Zakariyā al-Qazwīnī<sup>49</sup> (599/1203-681/1283), a Persian philosopher and astronomer, says of the Alamūtis whom Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ converted, that “they were so dumb they sawed off the limbs they were sitting on...of such men, supposedly, anything might be expected.”<sup>50</sup> This theme of ignorance in the followers of the Nizārīs is found in many Muslim sources addressing the activities of the group. In the chronicles of the First Crusade written by Ibn al-Qalānisī, he describes the methods use by the *bāṭiniya* in their missionary pursuits. He describes that when they gained the castle of Bānyās<sup>51</sup>, they set about fortifying it to make it stronger and sending out missionaries (*dāʿīs*<sup>52</sup>) to gain membership. A number of those converted were, according to al-Qalānisī “the ignorant folk of the provinces and foolish peasantry from the villages and the rabble and scum, persons without intelligence to restrain them from mischief or fear of God to prevent them from wrong-doing.”<sup>53</sup> Additionally, he describes their preparation of the assassination of the Amīr<sup>54</sup> Tāj al-Mulūk<sup>55</sup> (d. 526/1132) in the year 525/1130 in response

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<sup>49</sup> Abū Yaḥya Zakariyā ibn Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī (564-681/1203-1283) was a Persian philosopher, astronomer, and geographer. He was born in the town of Qazvin and held positions of legal advisor and judge in many places in Persia and in Baghdad. He is most well known for his cosmography *ʿAjāʾib al-Makhlūqāt wa-gharāʾib al-mawjūdāt* (*Marvals of Creatures and Strange Things Existing*) and his geographical dictionary *Athār al-bilād wa-ākhbār al-ʾibād* (*Monument of Places and History of God's Bondsmen*).

<sup>50</sup> Hodgson, *The Secret Order of Assassins*, 122.

<sup>51</sup> Now an archaeological site located at the base of Mt. Hermon in Golan Heights, Syria. The castle was taken by European Crusaders in 1148 and it became the principle location of Humphrey of Toron's crusader fiefdom.

<sup>52</sup> The *dāʿīs* were proselytizers or missionaries who travelled and called others to the faith of Ismāʿīlism. The term is typically translated as “missionary” and literally means “he who summons.” A *dāʿī* is a “religious propagandist or missionary of various Muslim groups, especially amongst the Ismāʿīlīs and other Shīʿī groups; a high rank in the *daʿwa* hierarchy of the Ismāʿīlīs. The term *dāʿī* came to be used generically from early on by the Ismāʿīlīs in reference to any authorized representative of their *daʿwa*; a propagandist responsible for spreading the Ismāʿīlī religion and for winning suitable converts.” Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 515.

<sup>53</sup> Hamza ibn Asad Abū Yaʿlā ibn al-Qalānisī, *The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades*, trans. H. A. R. Gibb (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002), 187-188.

<sup>54</sup> A “military commander or prince; many independent rulers also held this title in the Islamic world.” Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 514.

to the Amīr's new policy of attempting to exterminate Ismā'īlī Muslims.<sup>56</sup> Al-Qalānisī writes that those chosen for the task were “deputed emissaries from amongst the ignorant members of their brotherhood and their murderous gang.”<sup>57</sup> His writings make it clear that polemics attempted to represent Ismā'īlīs as fools who were duped into suicidal assassination attempts. This particular attack was a failure and the assassins paid with their lives while Tāj al-Mulūk escaped.

Due to the repetition and broad scope of the early polemical accounts, they became fact and were used as source material for later Muslim scholars. Many of the essential components of this “black legend” can be traced to Ibn Rizām<sup>58</sup>, writing in the first half of the fourth/tenth century. His treatise called *Kitāb radd 'alā'l-Ismā'īliyya* (*Refutation of the Ismā'īliyya*) was dedicated to refuting all Ismā'īlī doctrines and practices. Written shortly after the foundation of the Fāṭimid Caliphate, his treatise was very popular and presented the Ismā'īlī branch of Shī'ism as a threat to Islam. Daftary explains that the work “basically portrayed Ismā'īlism as a secret conspiracy for the abolition of Islam founded by a non-'Alid (Abd Allah b. Maymun al-Qaddah) who was depicted as the progenitor of the Fāṭimid caliphs.”<sup>59</sup> Due to his work's popularity it too became seen as fact, used by the majority of later Muslim authors. Among the best

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<sup>55</sup> Tāj al-Mulūk Būrī ibn Atābek, son of Zahīr al-Dīn Atābek. Reigned in Damascus from 522-526/1128-1132. According to al-Qalānisī, when he came to power he no longer continued his father's practice of giving the Nizārīs protection paying them in order to ‘ward off their malice.’ His intention toward the sect was less benevolent and he re-established Nizārī persecution.

<sup>56</sup> Such policies against the Ismā'īlīs were a common response to their attacks against the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate.

<sup>57</sup> Hamza ibn Asad Abū Ya'lā ibn al-Qalānisī, *The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades*, trans. H. A. R. Gibb (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002), 202.

<sup>58</sup> Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Rizām (or Razzām) al-Ṭā'ī al-Kūfī, lived in Baghdad. He was a Sunnī polemicist toward the Ismā'īlīs and is thought to have had access to some early ‘authentic’ sources.

<sup>59</sup> Farhad Daftary, *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Ismā'īlīs* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1994), 25.

known was Abu'l-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. 'Alī (d. 372/987)<sup>60</sup>, a polemicist from Damascus better known as Akhū Muḥsin who wrote in 372/982. He too focused on the supposed 'Alid genealogy of the Ismā'īlī imāms. However, because Akhū Muḥsin was an 'Alid genealogist himself, his work consisted of historical and doctrinal facets that condemned Ismā'īlism from a Shī'ite perspective. His condemnations focused more on the Ismā'īlī line of imāms, claiming that it was not legitimate.

The works of these two authors influenced many accounts of the practices and doctrines of the Ismā'īlīs and were successful in portraying the sect as heretical. Daftary writes that in sum “the ‘black legend,’ invented by the chief anti-Ismā'īlī polemicists of the fourth/tenth century, came to be accepted as an accurate description by successive generations of the mediaeval Muslim writers and by Muslim society at large; Muslims were now prepared to apply any term of abuse to the Ismā'īlīs, even before the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs themselves became targets for particular defamations.”<sup>61</sup> Additionally, it seems that the polemical treatise written by the Saljūq vizier Niẓām al-Mulk<sup>62</sup> (d. 485/1092) entitled *Siyasat-nama* (*The Book of Government*) signaled a new beginning for the persecution and literary campaign against all Ismā'īlīs. Additionally, polemical accounts written by the Musta'lian Ismā'īlīs<sup>63</sup> were added to the literary mix.

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<sup>60</sup> While the writings of Akhū Muḥsin have not survived, portions of them exist in the works of al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333), Ibn Dawādārī (d. after 736/1335), and al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442). It is in his works that the *Kitāb al-siyāsa* (*Book of Methodology*), a polemical tract against the Ismā'īlīs, was first cited. “This anonymous tract evidently contained all the ideas needed to condemn the Ismā'īlīs as heretics on account of their alleged libertinism and atheism. Akhū Muḥsin claims to have read this book and presents passages from it on the procedures for winning new converts that were supposedly followed by the Ismā'īlī *dā'īs*, instructing them through some seven stages of initiation (*balāgh*) leading ultimately to atheism and unbelief.” (Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 8-9). For more information on the *Kitāb al-siyāsa* see S.M. Stern's “The Book of the Highest Initiation and Other Anti-Ismā'īlī Travesties.” *Studies in Early Ismā'īlism* (Jerusalem: Leiden, 1983), 56-83.

<sup>61</sup> Daftary, *The Assassin's Legends*, 27.

<sup>62</sup> The famous Saljūq vizier who was assassinated in 485/1092. Of Persian descent, he virtually ruled Saljūq domain for two decades until the time of his assassination.

<sup>63</sup> The branch of Ismā'īlīs who remained loyal to the Fāṭimid State after the schism in 487/1094.

Musta'lian polemics were focused on refuting Nizār's claim to the imāmate, as well as that of his descendents. In an epistle issued in 516/1122 by the Fāṭimid chancery in Cairo on behalf of the caliph al-Āmir (d. 524/1130) the term *ḥashīshiyya* was first used without explanation. Meaning "ḥashīsh user," the term *ḥashīshiyya* had been used often previously and was a widely understood reference. Many writers used it interchangeably with *malāḥida* and *bāṭiniyya*, pejorative terms that were used to reference the esoteric aims of the Ismā'īlīs.

In contradiction to the literal definition of the word, Daftary explains that "it is important to note that in all the Muslim sources in which the Nizārīs are referred to as *ḥashīshīs*, this term is used only in its abusive, figurative sense of 'low-class rabble' and 'interreligious social outcasts'."<sup>64</sup> Many Muslims believed that the constant use of *ḥashīsh* had purely negative affects as it would relax one's commitment toward his moral and religious duties. As many twentieth century scholars have explained, no Ismā'īlī texts have been recovered that give proof to the actual use of *ḥashīsh*. Many European authors attributed its use to the *fidā'īs* of the Nizārīs and used it as an explanation for their irrational behavior. However, it seems the use of *ḥashīsh* by the *fidā'īs* might have been counter-productive, as the affects of the drug would have undermined their intentions. While out in the field they needed to remain vigilant, prepared for the exact moment in which they would need to strike. As Bernard Lewis explains, it was believed that the drug was also used for control of the *fidā'īs* by their leaders. The use of the term *ḥashīshī*, and its various etymological brethren, in Syria was

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<sup>64</sup> Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 10.

heard by many Crusaders and entered many western languages as the term ‘assassin’, a synonym for a professional murderer.

One of the most widely circulated of the polemics against the doctrines of the Ismāʿīlīs was *al-Mustaẓhirī*, which was written by the Sunnī theologian al-Ghazālī<sup>65</sup> (d. 504/1111) shortly before 488/1095, in order to refute the claims of the Ismāʿīlīs. Commissioned by the ‘Abbāsīd caliph al-Mustanẓir (d. 512/1118) the work was formulated to accuse the Ismāʿīlīs of no longer following exoteric Islamic practices, and thus they verged on atheism. As one of the most widely circulated polemics against the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs, this text had great affect on the atmosphere of opposition to the Nizārīs in general as well as on the opposition of the doctrine of *taʿlīm*. The goal of al-Ghazālī was to answer Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ’s claim for the necessity of the imām with proof of the fact that there is no substitute for the general experience of the community. Al-Ghazālī seems to recognize the logic behind the idea that the reason of the community was supplemented by an imām and only differed from Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ in “the qualifications of the imām and the relative positions of imām and reason.”<sup>66</sup> However, he proposed that the “true imām representing the authority of Muḥammad was the personification of the community tradition, the Caliph at Baghdad.”<sup>67</sup> He compares true Sunnī teachings with the falsehoods found in Ismāʿīlism and solves the problem of authority in terms of history.

Al-Ghazālī’s writings also influenced later authors. Others built upon his arguments and declared that the doctrine of *taʿlīm* makes the authority of the Prophet

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<sup>65</sup> Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī is viewed as perhaps the greatest theologian in Islam. He showed increasing respect for Sufi methodology in his later writings and was explicit as respecting Sufism as a path to knowledge in Islam.

<sup>66</sup> Hodgson, *The Secret Order of Assassins*, 128.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

unessential as all authority was given to the imām. This was viewed as a fatal flaw in the policy, as the authority of the Prophet was representative of the life of a perfect man. Additionally, Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī<sup>68</sup> (d. 548/1153) writes soon after al-Ghazālī and is the first heresiologist to describe the Nizārī Ismā’īlīs as their own distinct sect. He was extremely well informed about the Ismā’īlīs, and as a result many of his contemporaries believed he had converted to Ismā’īlism and was secretly working for the Nizārī *da’wa*. This reference is a milestone in anti-Nizārī polemics, as previously all Ismā’īlīs had been condemned as one without regard to internal divisions. In general, all the responses to al-Ghazālī’s work shared the same historical point that al-Ghazālī had used, that the “cumulative experience of the community was given no significance by the doctrine; the community must therefore reject the doctrine.”<sup>69</sup>

Al-Ghazālī’s contribution to anti-Ismā’īlī polemics does not end with this work however. He played a major role in the legal debate of if the Ismā’īlīs should even be recognized as fellow Muslims. The political and judicial aspects of this argument focused on the doctrine of *ta’līm* as it threatened current religious law, as the law in *ta’līm* was based solely on the word of the imām. He proposed that Ismā’īlīs in general could not be considered Muslims because they did not meet the minimum of what the *shahādah* was supposed to mean. He argued that “by rejecting the plain meaning of the Prophet’s teachings, the Ismā’īlīs rejected in fact Muḥammad’s prophethood; and were

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<sup>68</sup> Prominent Ash’arī theologian, who was known for having an open mind in regards to learning about different religions, belief systems, and philosophies. Daftary explains in *The Ismā’īlīs* that “several of his extant works do bear strong Ismā’īlī imprints and attest that at least during the final decades of his life he espoused Ismā’īlī terminologies and methods of interpretation, even if he was not in fact an Ismā’īlī.” *The Ismā’īlīs*, Daftary (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 340.

<sup>69</sup> Hodgson, *The Secret Order of Assassins*, 132.

therefore beyond the pale.”<sup>70</sup> The Ismā’īlīs were rejecting the plain meaning of the Prophet’s teachings by placing more emphasis on *bāṭin* than *ẓāhir*, another Ismā’īlī practice that was frowned upon.

After this debate was settled the next logical argument, what happens to a repentant Ismā’īlī, arose. The Arabian mathematician al-Baghdādī<sup>71</sup> (d. 428/1037) questioned whether an Ismā’īlī was still required to respect the oath of secrecy previously sworn by them. In response, Al-Ghazālī is not very lenient and writes that the oath is not binding only in the instance that reservations were made with it, such as the phrase *inn shā Allāh* (“God willing”). But al-Ghazālī’s analysis on the topic did not end there, as he adds information on whether the claim of repentance from an Ismā’īlī should even be accepted at all. He writes that without incriminating evidence of falseness the repentance should be accepted. Additionally, al-Ghazālī seems never to waver in his “decision that all Ismā’īlīs are to be regarded as personally apostate, and hence subject to the death penalty if they do not repent – including here even the children brought up to the faith by their parents.”<sup>72</sup>

Under siege by their detractors, the question arises of why the Nizārīs did not vehemently defend themselves with their own literary works. While they did produce writings, the major concern of the Nizārī Ismā’īlīs was physical survival, not defense through literature. And in theme with physical survival, many of the writings produced by the Nizārīs were in reference to the practical needs of their state. In the later period of the Nizārī control of Alamūt the Nizārīs were under siege, so they had

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>71</sup> Abū Mansūr ‘Abd al-Qāhir ibn Tāhir ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdāllah ibn al-Tamīmī al-Shāfī al-Baghdādī was a mathematician from Baghdad who is best known for his work entitled *al-Takmila fi’l-Hisab*. In it he discusses number theory and comments on works by al-Khwarizmī, which have not survived.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 125.

abandoned any previous interest in historiography. It was not just the writings of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs that faltered, Daftary explains that many writings from earlier times were not preserved and “only the Syrian Nizārīs preserved a certain number of the classical Ismāʿīlī texts of the Fāṭimid period.”<sup>73</sup> Additionally, the literature that was composed by the Nizārīs was not accessible to outsiders due to the clandestine ways of the group. The Nizārīs worked to keep their teachings secret from the outside world and were very successful. Their silence was maintained even after the Nizārīs lost political influence in Persia and Daftary writes that for “the first five centuries after the collapse of the Nizārī state and the fall of Alamūt represent the longest obscure phase in the entire history of the Ismāʿīlīs.”<sup>74</sup> Because of a lack of primary sources as well as a variety of other factors, this period in Ismāʿīlī history has not been adequately studied. It seems that by failing to produce public writings in their defense, the Nizārīs themselves unwittingly encouraged the fabrication of tales about them. The use of *taqiyya* also put a barrier up, preventing the outside world from sufficiently understanding their practice and doctrine. The problems in scholarship arising from *taqiyya* have caused more complex research difficulties in the modern era as well.

### **The European Cultivation of Legend**

The influence of the anti-Nizārī polemicists has extended beyond the Muslims in the Middle East. As Farhad Daftary relates, “Mediaeval Europeans, who remained ignorant of Muslim beliefs and practices, also transmitted a number of interconnected tales about the secret practices of the Assassins and their leader, a mysterious Old Man

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<sup>73</sup> Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 405

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 403.

of the Mountain.”<sup>75</sup> It was often the least informed who were generating these legends, and it seems that the Europeans were initially ignorant of a group of ‘assassins’ in Persia as well as the group in Syria they had interactions with. The Crusaders spent much more time in Syria as opposed to Persia and thus would have more likely come across the term in colloquial use. One key difference remained between the myths fabricated about the Nizārīs from Muslim sources and European sources. While Muslim sources had no desire to explain the practices of the Nizārīs, Europeans seemed to be consumed with the need to provide a reason for the suicidal assassination attempts. They focused on the unwavering devotion of the *fidā’īs* to their leaders, primarily Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ in Persia and Rāshid al-Dīn Sinān<sup>76</sup> in Syria, also known as the infamous ‘Old Man of the Mountain.’

These reasons included intoxication by *hashīsh*, a seemingly rational explanation for irrational behavior. In fact this ‘Old Man’ was said to control the behavior of his assassins and trainees “through regulated and systematic administration of some intoxicating potion like *hashīsh*, in conjunction with a secret ‘garden of paradise’ in which the drugged devotees would temporarily enjoy the delights of an earthly paradise.”<sup>77</sup> After this experience, the *fidā’īs* were said to perform anything asked of them for a chance to return to the paradise on earth, the entrance of

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<sup>75</sup> Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, vii.

<sup>76</sup> Sinān b. Salmān (Sulaymān) b. Muḥammad Abu’l-Ḥasan al-Baṣri. He is one of the most prominent figures in Nizārī history, born to an Imāmī Shī’ī family during the 520s/1126-35 in a village near Baṣra. He was converted to Nizārī Ismā’īlism in his youth, attended school in Alamūt, and was a companion of Muḥammad ibn Buzurg-Ummīd’s heir Ḥasan II. After Ḥasan II’s succession in 557/1162 he was sent to Syria by Ḥasan II where he assumed leadership of the fortress of Alamūt after the death of the dā’ī Abū Muḥammad.

<sup>77</sup> Daftary, *The Assassin’s Legends*, 4.

which being controlled by their lord. Burchard of Strassberg<sup>78</sup> is one of the first Europeans to attempt to explain this self-sacrificing behavior writes that the “would be *fidāʿīs* were allegedly recruited in childhood and then trained by special teachers in complete isolation until they were ready to be dispatched on their missions.”<sup>79</sup> This isolation supposedly prepared them for complete surrender to the will of their leader. The Crusaders of the late twelfth century began to fabricate myths about the practices of the Nizārī “Assassins,” some based on stories from Syrian Sunnī Muslims they met, some based on other rumors floating around during the time period. These accounts soon became elaborated and, just like the Muslim sources, eventually accepted as authentic sources describing the sinister activities of a secret order of drugged assassins. Their influence lasted throughout the Middle Ages as these “popular legends were handed down from generation to generation, providing important source materials even for more scholarly *Ismāʿīlī* studies of the nineteenth-century orientalists.”<sup>80</sup>

These myths were sophisticated over time to include details about the different practices of the Nizārīs that were said to have been performed at the crook of Sinān’s finger. Based on a negative perception of Islam in general, the Europeans fear and ignorance further served to distort the actual picture of what was going on. Similar to the Muslim accounts, some of these distorted reports had polemical aims. William, the

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<sup>78</sup> Served as an envoy for Frederick I Barbarossa (1152-90), the Hohenstaufen emperor of Germany. He traveled to Syria toward the end of 1175, reporting his associations with Saladin back to Frederick Barbarossa. His accounts have been preserved in the *Chronicle* of Arnold of Lübek.

<sup>79</sup> Lewis, *The Assassins*, 97.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

Archbishop of Tyre<sup>81</sup> (524-579/1130-1184) is the earliest Crusader chronicler to write about the Syrian Nizārīs. For his work, entitled *Historia*, he used oral Arabic traditions gathered from his time in the Middle East, his own experiences in Syria, and the earlier Christian narratives of the First Crusade. His work sought to prove that the Crusades were primarily holy wars against the infidels, as it was understood that Muslims were idolaters who worshipped a false Trinity in a perversion of Christianity. Like William of Tyre, who was incidentally one of the most informed observers of his time, the authors who sought to supplement their fabrications with observations and analysis were few and far between but still aimed to condemn.

In the Muslim world the rumors about the Nizārīs had culminated into the “black legend” of Islam. The many European accounts seemed to have lives of their own, revolving entirely around the *fidā’īs* as the so-called “assassins.” One of the most popular facets in the European rumors was the “paradise legend” or the “legend of the garden.” One of the first attempts to describe this legend is by Burchard. He describes the sensual nature of this paradise and Sinān’s role as gatekeeper that was based on a distorted image of the Nizārī Paradise and view of the imāms. In this garden it was said that any desire, carnal or otherwise, would be fulfilled. Additionally, these gardens were said to have served as secret training areas, called *locis secretis et delectabilibus* or “the secret and delightful places” by James of Vitry<sup>82</sup> in his accounts on the Nizārīs.

Travelling around Syria preaching the word of Christianity, James became one of the

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<sup>81</sup> Sometimes referred to as William II, he was a mediaeval chronicler who grew up in Jerusalem after the First Crusade. In addition to being the chancellor and archbishop of Tyre, he was also the ambassador to the Byzantine Empire. He is known for writing an account of the Lateran Council as well as a history of the Islamic states from the time of Muḥammad onward.

<sup>82</sup> A cleric from Paris and a vehement supporter of the Crusading movement. He was appointed Bishop of Acre by Pope Honorius III (1216-27) and was active in missionary activities. Although he was seemingly well informed due to his observations, Daftary writes that he remained hostile toward Islam and did not seem to make any efforts to learn about it.

best informed Western observers of the Ismā'īlīs. In general, his account is more accurate than Burchard's, and he was the first author to refer to these gardens as such delightful areas. Additionally he is one of the first European sources to connect the Persian and Syrian Nizārīs and as such may “rightfully be regarded as one of the major early proponents of the Assassin Legends [as] his account represents an important milestone in the early formation of the legends.”<sup>83</sup>

The “paradise legend” fit hand in hand with the other legends that developed, one being the ‘training legend’ formulated about the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs training to become *fidā'īs*. An outline of the general method of training can be found in Burchard's account, in which he describes their recruitment from local villages, learning languages, and learning to obey their master in all things in order to receive the pleasures of paradise. All training is finalized when the *fidā'ī* was offered a gold dagger with which they were expected to go and kill their target. Another legend directly related to the idea of paradise was the “*ḥashīsh* legend.” The German abbot and historian Arnold of Lübek<sup>84</sup> (d. 608/1212) wrote a text entitled *Chronicle* before 1210 that is the earliest source referring to an intoxicating potion administered to the devotees. While a logical assessment of the long term affects of drugs on the body should show that the aims of these so-called “assassins” would not have been completed if this were the case, many writers contain accounts of a drug of some form being used to control the actions of the *fidā'īs*.

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<sup>83</sup> Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, 104.

<sup>84</sup> A German writer who wrote *Chronicle* as a continuation of Helmond of Bosau's *Chronicle of the Slavs*. Daftary explains that he is a prime example of someone who based much of his work on the supposed authenticity of the Crusader accounts on the Nizārī *fidā'īs*.

Another popular legend regarding the Nizārīs circulating in Mediaeval Europe was the “death-leap legend.” Arnold of Lübek also refers to this, saying that the Nizārī *fidā’īs* would leap to their death at the command of their leader. Supposedly this “death-leap” was used to show outsiders of the unwavering devotion of the *fidā’īs* and thus served as a method of intimidation to gain survival. In European minds, this action also made sense of one under the influence of *hashīsh*. Additionally, a popular legend about three school fellows was developed to explain the beginnings of the Nizārī Ismā’īlīs. It sought to prove that Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ’s rivalry with Niẓām al-Mulk led to Ḥasan’s desire to overthrow the Abbasid-Sunnī Caliphate. Omar Khayyam is the third school fellow in this legend and he seems to play only a small role on Ḥasan’s track of revenge. In this version of the Nizārīs’ beginning “Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ represents in a very personal way that injured justice which it was the role of the imām to avenge; but it is the sheer scale of the conception of context which in giving this tale its thrill most faithfully reflects, surely, the sanguine Nizārī imagination.”<sup>85</sup>

All of the legends floating around in the European world culminated in the account of Marco Polo. In his account, the “paradise legend” dominates. Polo writes that the Nizārī leader Alaodin<sup>86</sup> had a large garden that was the “most beautiful that ever was seen in this world.”<sup>87</sup> After the *fidā’īs* had been given a drink of opium they were transported to this garden and convinced it was an actual representation of Paradise on earth. He explains to his readers that “those to whom this [an

<sup>85</sup> Hodgson, *The Secret Order of Assassins*, 138.

<sup>86</sup> Ala al-Din Muḥammad III succeeded his father Jalāl al-Dīn Ḥasan II as Nizārī imām in 618/1221. During his imāmate, he further explained the doctrine of the *qiyāma* previously proclaimed by Ḥasan II and made an effort to explain differing doctrines within Nizārī Ismā’īlism. During his imāmate, the “intellectual life of the Nizārī community now received a special impetus from the continuing influx of outside scholars who were fleeing Mongol invasions and taking refuge in Nizārī strongholds” (Daftary, *The Ismā’īlīs*, 378).

<sup>87</sup> Marco Polo, *Marco Polo: The Description of the World*, in Daftary’s *The Assassin Legends*, 110.

assassination attempt] was commanded by the Old Man did it very willingly, more than anything that they could do; and they went and did all that the Old Man commanded them for the great desire that they might come back to Paradise.”<sup>88</sup> This “paradise” was supposedly fashioned after the descriptions of Paradise in the Qur’ān and Sinān himself fashioned to seem like Muḥammad in order to be more convincing to the *fidā’īs*. Marco Polo’s account is the most elaborate synthesis of the various myths about the Nizārīs connecting the legends of the Syrians to the Persians and seeming only to leave out the famous “death-leap legend.” Farhad Daftary writes that by “the middle of the thirteenth century, many of these sources claimed to possess intricate details about the secret practices of the Ismā’īlīs and their chief, the Old Man of the Mountain; the Assassin legends had by then truly come into being.”<sup>89</sup>

### **The Rise and Impact of Modern Western Scholarship**

It wasn’t until the eighteenth century that the trend in scholarship surrounding the Nizārī Ismā’īlīs began to change. With the rise of Orientalism in France around 1795, the imaginative ignorance that surrounded Islam began to be cleared away. Baron Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy<sup>90</sup> (1758-1838) broke through the barrier of fabrications surrounding the Nizārīs when he gave insight into the origins of the name ‘Assassin’ in his *Memoir* he read to the *Institut de France* in May of 1809. De Sacy writes that he has “to show two things: first, that the Ismā’īlīs or Bāṭinīs also bore the name

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>89</sup> Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, 84.

<sup>90</sup> One of the most influential Orientalists, de Sacy was the first professor of Arabic at the School of Oriental Languages, of which he also became director. He served as the Chair of Persian at the Collège de France and the first president of the Société Asiatique founded in 1822.

*Hashishin*; secondly, what the reason for this designation was.”<sup>91</sup> After discussing various etymologies of the word throughout previous scholarship, he connects the term to the Arabic word *ḥashīsh* and explains that the variations of the name, such as *Assissini* and *Assassini*, came from variations of the word *ḥashīsh*, such as *ḥashīshī/ḥashīshiyya* or *ḥashshāsh/ḥashshāshīn*. De Sacy tells his reader that there should not be “any doubt, in my opinion, that the word *hashishi*, plural *hashishin*, is the origin of the corruptions *heisessini*, *assassini*, and *assissini*.”<sup>92</sup>

Lewis’ writings clarify the etymology of the word ‘assassin’ by suggesting that because de Sacy was unable to find any sources in Arabic in which the Nizārīs were referred to as *ḥashshāsh* that “it would therefore seem that this part of Silvestre de Sacy’s explanation must be abandoned, and all the European variants derived from the Arabic *ḥashīshī* and its plural *ḥashīshiyyīn*.”<sup>93</sup> De Sacy’s account however has no doubts that *ḥashīsh* was used in some form. His *Memoir* discusses the various uses and preparations of hemp and *ḥashīsh* in the Middle East gathered from sources Kaempfer, Forskal, Lemoine, and Chardin. He ends this analysis with stating that, “after all that has been said, it is no doubt easy to believe that the Ismā’īlīs were called *Hashishis* because of their using *ḥashīsh*, in the same way as those who use *bang* (whether *bang* is also an electuary made of hemp leaves, as Kaempfer says, or rather an extract of the narcotic plant called *datura*, as other authors maintain), opium, called *afyun*, and other drugs known by the general term *tariak*, are called *bangi*, *afyuni*, *tariaki*.”<sup>94</sup> In this way,

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<sup>91</sup> Silvestre de Sacy, *Mémoire sur la dynastie des Assassins, et sur l’étymologie de leur Nom* [Memoir on the Dynasty of the Assassins, and on the Etymology of their Name] (Paris: de l’Institut Royal de France, 1818); in *The Assassin Legends* by Farhad Daftary, 155.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>93</sup> Lewis, *The Assassins*, 11.

<sup>94</sup> de Sacy, *Mémoire*, 165.

even though the work of de Sacy was a milestone for its time, he still perpetuated some aspects of the ‘black legend’ begun centuries earlier.

The next orientalist to produce groundbreaking research on the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs was an Austrian named Joseph Von Hammer-Purgstall<sup>95</sup> (1774-1856). Using Crusader chronicles and Eastern manuscript sources from various libraries such as the *Sirat amir al-muʿminin al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah*<sup>96</sup>, Von Hammer-Purgstall was able to write the first account of the Nizārīs during the Alamūt period. However, because of the Crusader point of view in his work that was primarily polemical and not very well informed, Hodgson has called this work the “Western Legend of the Assassins.”<sup>97</sup> Hodgson explains that Von Hammer-Purgstall’s work attempts to condemn revolutionary movements and lacked an objectivity needed in the field. In his writings he treated the Nizārīs as, “that union of imposters and dupes which, under the mask of a more austere creed and severer morals, undermined all religion and morality; that order or murderers, beneath whose daggers lords of nations fell; all powerful because, for the space of three centuries, they were universally dreaded, until the den of ruffians fell with the khalifate, to whom, as the centre of spiritual and temporal power, it had at the outset sworn destruction.”<sup>98</sup> And as his text became the standard and most widely read interpretation of Nizārī Ismāʿīlism until the twentieth century, the tone used to warn “against the pernicious influence of secret societies in weak governments, and of the

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<sup>95</sup> Was a dragoman in Istanbul and a consul in the Balkans during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

<sup>96</sup> Farhad Daftary claims that the authorship of this work has been wrongly attributed to Ibn Khallikan (d. 1282), possibly to facilitate greater prestige and circulation. He asserts that instead, it was most likely written in the Mamlūk period by a Sunnī Muslim or Arab Christian who was familiar with the Assassin legends, especially the version handed down by Marco Polo and Ordoric of Pordenone.

<sup>97</sup> Hodgson, *The Secret Order of Assassins*, 26.

<sup>98</sup> Joseph Von Hammer-Purgstall, *History of the Assassins*, 136-138.

dreadful prostitution of religion to the horrors of unbridled ambition” seems to have been relatively agreed with.<sup>99</sup>

In the 1930s an important number of Ismāʿīlī texts were discovered in India, enabling another breakthrough in Ismāʿīlī studies. From these, Wladimir Ivanow<sup>100</sup> (1886-1970) was able to compile the first catalogue of Ismāʿīlī works. All other initiations of modern scholarship in the field can be traced to his compendium and it also provided an intellectual and scientific framework for further research. Because Ivanow was able to translate a large number of Arabic and Persian sources, “he stands unchallenged as the founder of modern Nizārī Studies.”<sup>101</sup> His writings on the Nizārīs serve to contrast those of Von Hammer-Purgstall. Additionally the works have an apologetic position as he “makes a persistent effort to ‘decontaminate’ Ismāʿīlism from its two most notorious figures – Ibn Maymūn and Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ: the former by making him on the one hand perfectly innocent, and on the other hand no Ismāʿīlī anyway; the latter by reducing him to an inarticulate non-entity.”<sup>102</sup> It is because of the modern studies initiated by Ivanow, scholarship now has more accurate knowledge of post-Alamūt Ismāʿīlism. Ivanow designated three main periods that span the first two centuries after the fall of Alamūt. While the earliest period still remains obscure, scholarship now recognizes the split between the Muḥammad-Shāhī and Qāsim-Shāhī lines to the imām. The second period is designated by Ivanow as “the Anjudān revival,

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<sup>99</sup> Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 26.

<sup>100</sup> Russian orientalist from St. Petersburg who served as a member of the faculty of Oriental Languages at the University of St. Petersburg. He founded the Islamic Research Association in Bombay in 1933 which was transformed into the Ismāʿīlī Society of Bombay in 1946.

<sup>101</sup> Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 31.

<sup>102</sup> Hodgson, *The Secret Order of Assassins*, 31.

a renaissance in Nizārī thought and *da'wa* activity.”<sup>103</sup> Lastly, he designated the third period as the modern phase of Nizārī Ismāʿīlism, when the seat of the present-day imām, the Aga Khan, is transferred to India.

In the 1950s Marshall G. S. Hodgson<sup>104</sup> (1922-1968) produced a comprehensive history of the Nizārīs during the Alamūt period of their history titled *The Secret Order of Assassins: The Struggle of the Early Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs Against the Islamic World*. His scholarly study is the first of its kind and he only uses the misnomer ‘assassin’ in the title of his work. This deviates from previous scholarship which had used the names *Ḥashīshī* and ‘Assassin’ interchangeably in reference to the Nizārīs. The term had become fairly derogatory, and Hodgson’s work is of the first in which it seems to have fallen out of favor. He also uniquely splits up Nizārī history into three groups of reigns in his section entitled *Tableau of Nizārī Times*<sup>105</sup>, each seeking a new goal. He writes that from 1090-1162 is the first reign which “serves to establish the community as an independent power: the effort to overthrow the Sunnī pattern is made, and fails; and the more restricted sphere of subsequent Nizārī activity is marked out.”<sup>106</sup> From 1162-1210 the Nizārīs have new imāms and reconstruction as well as implementing the rejection of the idea of Islamic society turning instead to a world within itself. The last period, from 1210-1256, shows a time in which the Nizārīs are seeking to fit in with Sunnī society and as such have seeming admitted defeat in their efforts to control the outside society by their beliefs.

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<sup>103</sup> Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 405.

<sup>104</sup> One of University of Chicago’s Islamic Studies academics. He was the chairman of the interdisciplinary Committee on Social Thought and is the author of many notable works including *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*.

<sup>105</sup> Hodgson, *The Secret Order of Assassins*, 41.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

Hodgson also makes a unique contribution to scholarship in his analysis of the merit behind assassination as a weapon. He discusses its political and religious values but also suggests that it holds another purpose. While connecting the methods of assassination with the guerrilla like warfare implemented by the Prophet Muḥammad in the early years of the first community of Muslims, he also proposes that one Nizārī view of assassination was that it was just, human, and heroic. By going out on their own and eliminating high ranking members in their enemies' forces, the *fidā'īs* were preventing the deaths of many in a bloody battle. However, he does not believe this viewpoint could have been held by many. He writes that although the "Muslims at large were commonly not backward in using assassination as an expedient, the adoption of such a means as a regular and admitted policy horrified them, and has horrified men ever since."<sup>107</sup>

However, Hodgson does not agree with the previous suggestions that the *fidā'īs* made up a special ranking in the Nizārī community. He explains that "there seems little reason to suppose the *fidā'īs* in any case formed a bottom rank in the Nizārī hierarchy below the *rafiqs*, or 'comrades', as the bulk of the Nizārīs call themselves; nor that they received special training in languages, or wore special garb, as has been suggested. At the beginning, probably, any able Nizārī might be asked to undertake an assassination, in the line of duty."<sup>108</sup> An additional disagreement Hodgson holds to previous scholarship is in regards to the use of *ḥashīsh* by the *fidā'īs*. Hodgson explains to his readers that evidence of the use of *ḥashīsh* has not been found in any Nizārī sources, and as such the claim should be considered fictitious.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 83.

Following Hodgson's scholarship, the British historian and orientalist Bernard Lewis<sup>109</sup> (1916- ) wrote a book entitled *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam* in 1967. Lewis too looks at the use of *ḥashīsh* by the Nizārīs, and finding no proof of such in Arabic sources, surmises that the accounts of their use have been fabricated by outsiders. While his work is very well written and has a wide variety of source material, he digresses to the tradition of calling the Nizārīs 'assassins' in reference. It is surprising that in this historical work that has been very well done, the author reverts back to a more derogatory term used in reference. Even in the title of the work is glaringly obvious that, either because of a desire for publicity or the temptation of using previous scholarly terminology, the author seems to have disregarded the uninformed history behind the name. Bernard Lewis' work on the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs is concise and short, but gives a logical and coherent overview of the history of the sect. He begins with a discussion on the impact of the 'Assassins' on European scholarship and perception and traces their history from the early centuries down to the Aga Khans of more current times. Like Hodgson's work, Lewis also includes a discussion on assassination in Islam, its background for the movement, and the origins of its use. He discusses how a relatively small and widely scattered sect was able to hold its cohesiveness throughout a series of upheavals and endless enmity from the outside Muslim community.

In 1973, Wilferd Maedlung<sup>110</sup> (1930- ) published an article on the "Ismā'īliyya" in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* that served as the model summary of all that had been

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<sup>109</sup> Currently working as the Cleveland E. Dodge Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University, specializing in the history of Islam and the interaction between Islam and the West.

<sup>110</sup> A scholar of Islam who was born in Germany and studied at Georgetown University. He has taught at the University of Chicago and the University of Oxford. Additionally, Maedlung has written extensively

previously discovered about this sect. His work was the one of the most accurate sources of information about the Ismāʿīlī sect that had been produced in the modern era. However, all previous modern scholarship seems to have been added to new continued analysis in the works of Farhad Daftary<sup>111</sup> and his research on the Nizārīs. In his books *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Ismāʿīlīs* and *The Ismāʿīlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, Daftary goes beyond the scholarship of his predecessors. In the latter, he includes more than just history on the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs in Persia and Syria, Daftary begins his account with an explanation of the origins of Shīʿism in general. His work is an entire history of Ismāʿīlism in general, going into the history and impacts of the various internal divisions within the denomination. To do this he used the previous scholarship of the Western world as well as innumerable Arabic sources regarding the history of Ismāʿīlism. In his preface that serves as a note to the reader, Daftary writes that his “study aims to present, in a connected manner, the results of modern scholarship on the history and doctrines of the Ismāʿīlīs.”<sup>112</sup>

He also seems to seek to correct any inaccuracies in scholarship, in both works, such as with Lewis’ claim that the term *Ḥashīshī* was never used to describe the Persian Nizārīs. In *The Assassin Legends*, Daftary explains that while it is true that the term was used to explicitly refer to the *fidāʿīs*, Lewis’ claim is incorrect in its assumption that the term was not used in Persia. To prove this he looks at Persian Zaydī Ismāʿīlī sources from the thirteenth century pointing out the use of the term. However he does

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on the early history of Islam and the sects of Shīʿism such as Ismāʿīlism. He has served on editorial boards of academic journals such as the *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*.

<sup>111</sup> Received his doctorate at Berkley and since 1988 has been the Co-Director and Head of the Department of Academic Research and Publications of the Institute of Ismāʿīlī studies. He is co-editor (with W. Madelung) of *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, consulting Editor of *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, a member of the Advisory Board of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (3rd edition), as well as the General Editor of the Ismaili Heritage Series and the Ismaili Texts and Translations Series.

<sup>112</sup> Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, xvi.

concede that it most likely was not used very often in Persia, as the word originated in Arabic not Persian, and most Persians would have preferred to use the term *mulḥid* instead. Daftary's work on the legends of the 'Assassins' traces their development through Mediaeval Muslim and European writings as well as more modern sources. He explains the origins of the "black legend" of Islam in which the Nizārīs play the role of the arch heretics of Islam seeking to destroy it from within. Additionally, he continuously claims that over time the legends acquired a life of their own as if their development had spiraled out of control or as if the European sources started an avalanche that could not be stopped.

### Conclusion

Modern scholarship on the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs has been able to continue successfully. As such, this thesis by no means includes a comprehensive listing of the contributing scholars of Ismā'īlism. However, the aforementioned intellectuals have significantly shifted the academic world's conception of the development and practices of the Nizārīs. The Nizārī Ismā'īlīs fought many physical, spiritual, and intellectual battles with their neighbors, enemies, and between themselves throughout their development. Because of their clandestine and dangerous ways, the Nizārī community touched the European imagination that had a lasting impact<sup>113</sup>. The luster of the "Assassin" legends has faded because of modern scholarship's ability to do objective research with recently uncovered primary sources. The Nizārī's desire for an

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<sup>113</sup> With the worldwide release of the video game entitled *The Assassin's Creed* in November of 2007, it is clear that the legend still speaks to the human imagination. Players are able to transform into one of the infamous *fidā'īs* and fight against the Knights Templar during the Third Crusade, performing every command imaginable from their lord, the Old Man of the Mountain. The game was so successful, that *Assassin's Creed II* and *Assassin's Creed: Revelations* have since been released, received in the same positive way as the first.

immediate spiritual connection with God through the imām was lost in a sea of opposition, deceit, and ignorance. However, with modern scholars shedding more light on the beginnings, basic teachings, and practices of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs, the branch can be seen as seeking to exist and grow within a hostile environment.

### CHAPTER 3

#### JA'FAR IBN MANŠŪR AL-YAMAN'S KITĀB AL-'ĀLIM WA'L-GHULĀM AS A MANIFESTATION OF THE MASTER-DISCIPLE RELATIONSHIP IN THE EARLY ISMĀ'ĪLĪ DA'WA

The *Kitāb al-'Ālim wa'l-ghulām*<sup>114</sup> (*The Master and Disciple*) is one of the first influential textual manifestations of Ismā'īlī thought. The text is an important work describing the initiation process of Ismā'īlīs and is one of the few texts that has survived to be analyzed by modern scholars. It is a literary classic described by James W. Morris<sup>115</sup> as:

the initial story of one seeker's quest for and gradual realization of the 'truth' – the spiritual knowledge and eternal life of the true 'knowers,' the 'friends of God' – and the ongoing story of their necessary return to this world in order to fulfill their responsibility to transmit that divine 'trust' and discovery to their fellow human beings, to their family and the other members of their wider community, in the ways that are appropriate to each situation. Like its models and constant source of inspiration in the Qur'ān and ḥadīth, this story is only a sort of map – a guide and reminder – that readers must follow and interpret in their own way, in the light of their own experience and insight.<sup>116</sup>

*Kitāb al-'Ālim wa'l-ghulām* was written by Ja'far ibn Manšūr al-Yaman in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century. This work deals with the relationship between a master and his disciple that has been influential in guiding believers toward salvation in every culture.

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<sup>114</sup> The copy of *Kitāb al-'Ālim wa'l-ghulām* used for this thesis is the New Arabic Edition and English Translation that was edited and translated by James W. Morris published in 2001. The volume includes a completely annotated English translation and the critical edition of the Arabic text.

<sup>115</sup> James W. Morris is a Professor and the Chair of Islamic Studies and the Director of Graduate studies at the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom. He received his Ph.D from Harvard University and is a well respect scholar of Islamic Studies. He has published many works on various topics relating to Islamic thought and practice including *The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra* in 1981, *Ibn 'Arabī: the Meccan Illuminations* in 1989, and *Orientations: Islamic Thought in a World Civilization* in 2001.

<sup>116</sup> James W. Morris, trans., *The Master and the Disciple: An Early Islamic Spiritual Dialogue*. (London: IB Tauris & Co Ltd, 2001), 1.

The master-disciple relationship<sup>117</sup> prominently comes to mind through images of individuals such as the Buddha, Jesus, or the Prophet Muḥammad, but the relationships existed on levels with less prominent individuals as well. In Ismāʿīlism particularly it was an important methodological component in their missionary work (*daʿwa*<sup>118</sup>), essential in teaching the initiates the secrets of the *bāṭin*<sup>119</sup>, the inner, or esoteric message within the revelations from God, in order to guide their believers toward salvation and a connection with God. Joachim Wach writes that it is through the characteristic of guidance that we “understand the relationship in the ancient mysteries, in Sufistic union, and in the Hindu, especially in the Shivaistic, *guru*-practice. The *πατήρ* (father) [in Christianity], the sheikh [in Islam], the *guru* [in Hinduism], the zaddick [in Hasidism]: as a guide of souls, as a door to salvation, they demand the complete devotedness of the disciple, of the ‘son’.”<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> On the master-disciple relationship see: Wach, Joachim. “Master and Disciple: Two Religio-Sociological Studies.” *The Journal of Religion* 42, no. 1 (1962): 1-21; Smith, Huston. “The master-disciple relationship. Part 1.” *Sufism* 11, no. 3 (2005): 7-12; Chaudhry, Hafeez-ur-Rehman. “Master-disciple relationship (a mystical perspective).” *Journal of Central Asia* 19, no. 1 (1996): 170-180; Honerkamp, Kenneth L. “The Ethical-Mystical Foundations of the Master-Disciple Relationship in Formative Sufism in Ninth and Tenth Century Nishapur.” in *Actes de Colloque International sur: Maîtres et disciples dans le soufisme des 3eme et 4eme siècles de l’Hégire (9eme – 10eme siècles)*. Institute Francais de Proche Orient (IFPO), 1-29. Paris, 2011; Meier, Fritz. “Khurāsān and the End of Classical Sufism.” In *Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts*, edited by Ulrich Haarmann and Wadad Kadi, 189-219. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 1999; Silvers-Alario, Laury. “The Teaching Relationship in Early Sufism: A Reassessment of Fritz Meier’s Definition of the *shaykh al-tarbiya* and the *shaykh al-ta’līm*.” *The Muslim World* 93 (2003): 69-97; Nasr, Sayyid Hossein. “The Sufi Master as Exemplified in Persian Sufi Literature.” *Iran* 5 (1967): 35-40.

<sup>118</sup> The early Ismāʿīlī community (2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> c.) designated themselves as the “rightly guiding mission” (*al-daʿwa al-hādiya*) or simply as the *daʿwa*. The *daʿwa* culminated in 297/909 in the Fāṭimid State and participated in revolutionary activities challenging the authority of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate and recruiting initiates to Ismāʿīlism. The *daʿwa* is the “invitation or call to adopt the cause of an individual or family claiming the right to the imāmate; it also refers to the entire hierarchy of ranks, sometimes called *ḥudūd* within the particular religious organization developed, especially amongst the Ismāʿīlīs.” Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 515

<sup>119</sup> “The inward, hidden, or esoteric meaning behind the literal wording of sacred texts and religious prescriptions, notably the Qurʾān and the *sharīʿa* as distinct from the *zāhir*; hence, Bāṭinīs, Bāṭiniyya, the groups associated with such ideas. Most of these groups were Shīʿī, particularly Ismāʿīlī.” Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 515.

<sup>120</sup> Joachim Wach, “Master and Disciple: Two Religio-Sociological Studies.” *The Journal of Religion* 42, no. 1 (1962): 18.

### An Overview of Ja'far ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman and His Work

The author of the *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām* was the son of the Yemeni Ismā’īlī dā’ī Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥasan b. Faraj b. Ḥawshab b. Zādān al-Kūfī, also known as ibn Ḥawshab, Ja’far ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman left Yemen after the death of his father and the massacre of the rest of his family. He immigrated to the court of the second Fāṭimid caliph al-Qā’im in Ifrīqiya, modern day Tunisia, and wrote poems and other doctrinal works. His writings reflect the political and theological atmosphere of the times and “at least two of Ja’far’s later doctrinal works demonstrate the reworking of the Fāṭimid genealogy and corresponding theories of succession of the Shī’ī imāms which took place under the patronage of the Imām al-Mu’izz.”<sup>121</sup> The birth and death dates of Ja’far ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman can only be assumed from fragments of biographical information found in works such as al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān’s *Iftitāḥ al-da’wa*<sup>122</sup> which dedicates its early sections to Ja’far’s father and his mission in Yemen. James W. Morris, in the introduction to the English translation of *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām*, hypothesizes these dates may be ca. 270/883-346/957.

Al-Yaman’s early writings seem to be set in the time of the early *da’wa* while his later writings were closer to teaching manuals for those already converted to Ismā’īlism. Morris proposes that these later writings were influenced by his time in the Fāṭimid court in which he served as a theologian and religious dignitary. Remarkably, his biography written of his father entitled *Sīrat Ibn Ḥawshab (The Life of Ibn Ḥawshab)* can be seen as parallel to the outline of *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām*. Morris says of this

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>122</sup> Described as a triumphalist account of the early Fāṭimids by James Morris, the work became the primary historical source for the Fāṭimid dynasty. It was used chiefly by ibn Khaldūn and most other later Muslim historians. Contains several eyewitness accounts of the period.

work that it is “even more openly conceived as a sort of indirect, archetypal spiritual autobiography.”<sup>123</sup> In both works, Ja’far ibn Maṣṣūr al-Yaman emphasizes the importance of a living imām for the spiritual understanding and growth of the people emphasized in much Shī’ī theological discourse. In consensus with early Ismā’īlī thought, al-Yaman emphasizes the importance of esoteric knowledge over exoteric knowledge in his writings, as well as an importance on the role of *dā’īs* as the spiritual guides of the community.

In *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām* this esoteric emphasis on one’s personal spiritual journey is a major theme. As is described by Morris at the beginning of the text, “this book is about both the proper behavior of those who are seeking the truth and the ‘ways of proceeding’ – through appropriate action, teaching, and belief – of ‘the righteous’ of those who are spiritually receptive, prepared and suited for those ways.”<sup>124</sup> The text is composed as a “three-part dialectical discussion involv[ing] the personalities, events, and dialogues in the text itself.”<sup>125</sup> These dialogues between the different characters, the Knower (‘Abdullāh), his disciple called Ṣāliḥ<sup>126</sup>, Ṣāliḥ’s father (al-Bakḥṭārī), Abū Mālīk the town’s shaykh, and other various religious members of the society, serve as a guide to the reader which must be interpreted using their own

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<sup>123</sup> Wach, 25.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>125</sup> Andrew J. Newman, [Untitled], review of *The Master and the Disciple: An Early Islamic Spiritual Dialogue*, by Ja’far ibn Maṣṣūr al-Yaman, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 2004.

<sup>126</sup> The naming of the young man in the text is an interesting development. Through the first part of the text he is solely referred to as the young man and nothing else. Upon travelling with ‘Abdullāh to visit a Shaykh, the young man is asked what is name is by the Shaykh (p. 118). He replies with the name ‘Ubayd Allāh meaning the “little servant of God.” When the Shaykh denies him that name the young man replies again with the name *Ḥurr* meaning “freed-man,” a reference to his newly granted freedom from ignorance because of his recent spiritual instruction. Upon the denial of this name to the young man is at a loss as to what he should call himself. It is only later in the text when the young man himself attains full spiritual knowledge that he is referred to as Ṣāliḥ meaning “righteous.” The fact that the young man in the text is given a new name represents the idea that initiation into Ismā’īlism is like a rebirth. The initiate leaves who they once were and begins their new life along the path of Ismā’īlism that leads to true spiritual knowledge.

personal experiences. The characters are seeking to move through the levels of spiritual awareness that correspond to the earthly and spiritual hierarchies of religious guidance. Because the nature of the work is to serve as a guide, it requires demanding and active participation from the reader. In the book there is interplay between spiritual awareness and the correct action to achieve awareness and Morris explains that this theme “constantly underlies the dramatic development of this work.”<sup>127</sup>

While stories about the master and disciple relationship have been produced in many cultures, the literary form of *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām* is unique and creative, giving the reader a glimpse into the significance of the work. Structured as a dramatic dialogue, there is a contrast between the different meanings that each character gets from the same religious terms. Interestingly, this dialogue is not split up into chapters, sections, or any distinct literary format. The text is arranged by line and paragraph, giving it a noticeably poetic air. In this way, the reader can recognize that this work is not an organized presentation of Ismā‘īlī doctrine. The reader must create their own centralized format that lends to the relevance of the doctrines and essential meanings proposed in the narrative. One’s own interpretation of the text becomes more important based on the fact that no introductory note written by the author at the beginning of the text.<sup>128</sup> A lack of an explanatory note to introduce the text serves to reinforce the idea that it is the reader who must understand the purpose of the text and access the goal of the spiritual journey alone. Whether or not this text was intended to be used by the author as the sole guide for the journeyer still remains to be seen. Based on the fact that the individual Ismā‘īlī was always to have contact with the

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<sup>127</sup> Morris, 4.

<sup>128</sup> This note would be common in many works of literature, seeking to explain the importance of certain aspects of the work to the reader before they begin reading.

imām, be it direct contact or indirect contact with a *dā'ī*<sup>129</sup> as a medium, a reasonable assessment is that this book was originally intended to be supplemental. However, when the reach of the Ismā'īlī *dā'īs* and imām was under threat and periods of concealment were underway, it is possible that individual believers relied on the text as a way to continue the initiation's quest for knowledge by reading alone. The detailed and various examples of pedagogy as well as the continual propagation of core Ismā'īlī beliefs would have enabled the reader to connect intellectually and spiritually with the Ismā'īlī *da'wa* through the lens of a literary work.

The text also gives insight into many historical aspects regarding the development of Ismā'īlism. *Kitāb al-Ālim wa'l-ghulām* presents alternative perspectives on “certain widespread myths or stereotyped conceptions concerning those influential historical movements, prejudices which in many cases extend to the treatment of Ismā'īlism and Shī'ism much more generally.”<sup>130</sup> Especially affected is the myth that early Ismā'īlism was monolithic. The text serves as a clarifier of sorts about the aims and structure of the early Ismā'īlī *da'wa*. One myth concerning the early *da'wa* was that its aims were predominately political. However, *Kitāb al-Ālim wa'l-ghulām* shows a wide variety of motives, most of which appear in the writing of the book. “The range of pedagogical procedures illustrated here...do actually correspond to the wide range of Ismā'īlī thought and ‘doctrines’ to be found in different settings at this and later

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<sup>129</sup> The *dā'īs* were proselytizers who travelled and called others to the faith of Ismā'īlism. The term is typically translated as “missionary” and literally means “he who summons.” A *dā'ī* is a “religious propagandist or missionary of various Muslim groups, especially amongst the Ismā'īlīs and other Shī'ī groups; a high rank in the *da'wa* hierarchy of the Ismā'īlīs. The term *dā'ī* came to be used generically from early on by the Ismā'īlīs in reference to any authorized representative of their *da'wa*; a propagandist responsible for spreading the Ismā'īlī religion and for winning suitable converts.” Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 515.

<sup>130</sup> Morris, 15.

periods.”<sup>131</sup> The book shows more spiritual aims of the *da’wa* as well as pointing out the limits of central political control. Also seen in the text is the number of motivations for the support of an imām, which include the political, economic, social, spiritual, and philosophic as well as many others.

The text also debunks the myth that the writings of the early Ismā’īlīs were primarily focused on propagating the formation of a central political authority and/or doctrine. In contrast, this text seeks to propagate unique Ismā’īlī theological doctrines and “any exclusive focus on this aspect of ‘political theology’ and ‘ideology’ – an element which is inevitably present in Islamic writing of any period – inevitably tends to obscure the immensely wider set of common Qur’anic and Islamic conceptions and problems dealt with in virtually every known Ismā’īlī writing.”<sup>132</sup> Other myths follow the ideas that Ismā’īlism formatted an almost heretical innovation (*bid’a*<sup>133</sup>) of implementing Gnostic lines of thought. However, closer examination of the text shows that Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* sources predominate, not those of Greek and other philosophies. One of the last prejudices that overarches the others is that Ismā’īlism taught an eventual transcendence of Islamic law whether in “an eventual messianic or eschatological context for a special initiatic elite.”<sup>134</sup> On examination of *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām* one finds references to the idea that while only certain people can attain the highest level of spiritual knowledge, rising to the highest of your capability is more

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>133</sup> Translated as “innovation,” *bid’a* is frowned upon by many Muslims. The concern with innovation comes from the fact that to innovate something you have to make changes to something that is already established. Innovations to theology meant that the original Qur’anic message would be changed.

<sup>134</sup> Morris, 20.

important than reaching the top of the ranks in that “special initiatic elite.”<sup>135</sup>

Incredibly, a rising theme is a critique of the temptation of this idea and it calls for many different methods to be used for the spiritual awareness of each individual depending on what works best for them.

### **Ismāʿīlī Doctrine and *Kitāb al-ʿĀlim waʾl-ghulām***

Wrapped within the framework of the instructional dialogue found within the *Kitāb al-ʿĀlim waʾl-ghulām* is the essence of Ismāʿīlī theological doctrine. Three key Ismāʿīlī principles are prominent: 1) cosmology; 2) *ẓāhir*<sup>136</sup> vs. *bāṭin*; and 3) the importance of *taʾwīl*.<sup>137</sup> These are interwoven in the text, enabling the reader to gain their essential meanings with study. The presentation of these key theological details throughout the text also serves as a pedagogical means to enable the teachings of the Ismāʿīlī *daʾwa* to reach more people through alternative measures.

Early Ismāʿīlī cosmology developed into what Farhad Daftary terms a “cyclical interpretation of hierohistory” with a “gnostic cosmological doctrine.”<sup>138</sup> He continues to describe the model as original, explaining that it “developed on its own in an Islamic milieu relying on qurʾānic terminology and Shīʿī doctrines while apparently drawing on the overall pattern of an earlier type of Gnosticism.”<sup>139</sup> An understanding of this cosmological doctrine enables an understanding of one’s place in the world, due to its

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>136</sup> “The outward, literal, or exoteric meaning of sacred texts and religious prescriptions, notably the Qurʾān and the *sharīʿa* as distinct from the *bāṭin*.” Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 522.

<sup>137</sup> “The educing of the inner meaning from the literal wording or apparent meaning of a text or a ritual, religious prescription; as a technical term among the Shīʿīs, particularly the Ismāʿīlīs, it denotes the method of educing the *bāṭin* from the *ẓāhir*; as such it was extensively used by the Ismāʿīlīs for allegorical, symbolic or esoteric interpretation of the Qurʾān, the *sharīʿa*, historical events and the world of nature. Translated also as a spiritual or hermeneutic exegesis, *taʾwīl* may be distinguished from *tafsīr*.” Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 522.

<sup>138</sup> Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 129.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 129.

detailed hierarchies within humanity and the purpose of the ranks held by certain individuals. This hierarchical system represents a milestone of understanding that one must achieve before the ultimate truths within spiritual knowledge can be revealed to them. The cosmology within the *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām* offers knowledge of creation, humanity’s origins and the reason for their distance from God –and understanding these aspects guides one toward salvation. It is a system of an esoteric spiritual world and is determined by the eternal truths (*ḥaqā’iq*<sup>140</sup>) which are hidden within the exoteric message of the Qur’ān and God’s other divinely revealed texts. This cosmological system is represented in its entirety in the *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām* beginning on page 79 through a conversation between ‘Abdullāh and the young man (Ṣāliḥ).

‘Abdullāh begins his discussion of cosmology by explaining that God is the Originator<sup>141</sup> of all things. God existed in the beginning when there was no space, no eternity, and no time. ‘Abdullāh proceeds to explain the creation of the world, both the higher and lower. Through God’s intention and will he created a light (*nūr*) and addressed it with the imperative “be!” (*kun*) which called all creation into being. God then duplicates the letters of *kun* and creates the first feminine creature, *kūnī*, also called the preceder (*sābiq*). From the light of *kūnī* God creates the second creature called *qadar*, which translates as “determination,” who acts as a sort of vizier and assistant to *kūnī*. *Kūnī* and *qadar* are the first two principles of creation and are

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<sup>140</sup> S. *ḥaqīqa*. Translated as “truths; as a technical term it denotes the gnostic system of thought of the Ismā’īlīs. In this sense, the *ḥaqā’iq* are the unchangeable truths contained in the *bāṭin*; while the law changes with every law-announcing prophet, the *ḥaqā’iq* remain eternal.” Daftary, *The Ismā’īlīs*, 516-517.

<sup>141</sup> God being referred to as the Originator implies the doctrine that if God exists then He must have a Will. Therefore, all of existence was caused by the Will of God, and as such he is the Originator of all of creation. He is also considered the Caused because he moves the primordial cause to act and interact without being himself affected by this primordial cause.

identified with the Qur’ānic terms “pen” (*qalam*) and “tablet” (*lawḥ*). God’s creating activities are intermediated by the pair. God does not move the world directly, but indirectly through this pair. The spiritual world is brought forth first. This includes the *karūbiyyūn*, which correspond to the Cherubim of Judaeo-Christian angelology, and the twelve *rūḥāniyyūn*, which are spiritual beings, some of whom correspond to Islamic angelology.

The Arabic names of this first pair in creation are comprised of seven consonantal letters (KUNI-QDR) which are the seven root-principles from which all things derive. The seven levels of Heaven and Earth come from the seven root-principles established at the moment of creation with God’s first willing of an originating command. In the text ‘Abdullāh declares that “there came, ‘Be!,’ which is two letters and ‘so it comes to be,’ which is five more letters [in Arabic]. Hence those seven letters were the root-principles from which were derived seven things.”<sup>142</sup> This cabalistic mythical cosmogony uses letters of words to provide an explanation for the creation of the universe. ‘Abdullāh explains to his new student that these aspects of creation are all “outward aspects of His [God’s] command/affair, symbols for His religion and signs pointing to His power.”<sup>143</sup>

After this, ‘Abdullāh continues his discussion of the origins of creation with an analysis on the different ranks of humanity. Ismā’īlī cosmology places man at the end of creation representing the soteriological purpose of mankind. Being far from his origin and Creator, man uses his understanding of the cosmological system to remove the distance between he and God and bring about his own salvation. This can only be

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<sup>142</sup> Morris, 80.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 81.

achieved if man acquires knowledge (*gnosis*) of his origin and the reason he is so far from God. Additionally, it is here in the text that Ismāʿīlism's understanding of mankind within the cyclical hierohistory comes in to play. The first aspect of this cyclical history represents a conception of time in which there will be seven eras (*dawr*). The first five of these eras have come and gone, the sixth is the era in which we live now, and the seventh and final cycle will be initiated by the Resurrector (*qā'im*<sup>144</sup>). Within each era God has sent forth "certain distinguished personalities, guiding figures and wise judges...He made them His viceroys on His earth, guideposts pointing to the pathway of salvation in both the outer and inner, spiritual aspects."<sup>145</sup> This represents the fact that not all members of humanity are the same and the House of Prophethood holds the guiding personalities that will lead others to salvation. 'Abdullāh explains that among these personalities is the particular position of the speaker-prophet (*nāṭiq*<sup>146</sup>), each followed by his legatee or executor (*waṣī*<sup>147</sup>) who is also called a foundation (*asās*) or the silent one (*ṣāmit*). The *nāṭiqs* of each age reveal the message from God, which is typically exoteric in nature containing aspects of religious law (*sharī'a*). The *waṣī* then follows the *nāṭiq* and his function is to "interpret the esoteric

<sup>144</sup> Also translated as "riser," this is the eschatological Mahdī. In pre-Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlism, the terms Mahdī and *qā'im* "were both used, as in Imāmī Shīism, for the expected messianic imām. After the rise of the Fāṭimids, the name al-Mahdī was reserved for the first Fāṭimid caliph-imām, while the eschatological imām and seventh *nāṭiq* still expected for the future was called the *qā'im* by the Ismāʿīlīs." Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 520.

<sup>145</sup> Morris, 82.

<sup>146</sup> Literally translates as "speaker" or "one gifted with speech." In Ismāʿīlī thought, "a speaking or law-announcing prophet who brings a new religious law (*sharī'a*), abrogating the previous law and, hence, initiating a new *dawr* in the religious history of mankind." Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 520. The first six *nāṭiqs* were Ādam, Nūḥ, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, 'Īsā, and Muḥammad.

<sup>147</sup> Translated as "legatee" or "executor of a will", the *waṣī* was the immediate successor to a prophet in Ismāʿīlism. "In this sense, it was the function of *awṣiya'* to interpret and explain the messages brought by prophets, *anbiyā'*." Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 522. The first six *awṣiya'* were Shīth, Sām, Ismāʿīl, Hārūn, Sham'un al-Ṣafā', and 'Alī.

truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) contained in the inner (*bāṭin*) dimension of that era's revealed messages to the elite."<sup>148</sup> It is within these ranks that humanity receives its true spiritual guides.

'Abdullāh's eloquent use of simile during this conversation likens the ranks of humanity with the heavenly bodies (stars) to represent the importance of the Imām within this hierarchy. He explains that the "imām is like the immensity of the sun in comparison with the (other heavenly) lights: it is impossible for it to be veiled from (people's) vision –indeed the sun is his symbol and outer aspect."<sup>149</sup> He can never be veiled because the imām is the manifestation of God's divine Will in the physical world, to serve as the "ever living guide"<sup>150</sup> for humanity. The centrality and importance of the imāmate was a primary doctrine proclaimed by the early Ismā'īlī *da'wa*. The place of the imām in the hierarchy of mankind follows the *waṣī*. Seven imāms followed after each *waṣī* who guarded the true meaning of the scriptures and laws, this comprised of both the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*. The seventh imām of each era is exceptional however, in that his role is to become the *nāṭiq* of the following era, abrogating the *sharī'a* of the previous *nāṭiq* and starting anew. Following suit, the seventh imām of the seventh era holds a rank whose purpose is unique as he will ascend as *al-qā'im* ending the cyclical pattern of time in the lower world and ushering in a final eschatological era, an era of pure spiritual knowledge. This proposes that the series of cycles of humanity would end with seven, however later Ismā'īlī cosmological doctrine had developed to allow the idea of a greater, endless series of cycles that would end with the "Grand

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<sup>148</sup> Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 132. This, too, represents the idea that the spiritual instruction given by the Ismā'īlī *dā'īs* was available to only a few, the spiritual elite of society who had the capacity to attain knowledge of the true spiritual message the *bāṭin* that itself was hidden within the *bāṭin* of the exoteric messages of the Qur'ān.

<sup>149</sup> Morris, 82.

<sup>150</sup> Sami N. Makaremi, "The Philosophical Significance of the Imām in Ismā'īlism." *Studia Isalmica*, no. 27 (1967): 43.

Resurrection”<sup>151</sup> a Final Judgment Day. Until that time the “cycles of time were held to progress through the epochs of concealment (*dawr al-satr*), when appearance and true reality were essentially different, and epochs of epiphany or revelation (*kashf*), when truth was manifest and there was no need for external law.”<sup>152</sup>

Interwoven in ‘Abdullāh’s discussion of the Ismā’īlī cosmological system, is the reference to symbols, both inner and outer, that represent important aspects of God’s creation. These symbols and their counterparts (that which is symbolized) are representations of the higher and lower aspects of creation. Each symbol can be understood according to the essential meaning it symbolizes. As ‘Abdullāh explains, “everything has its essential meaning, and the meaning of the symbols is that in their outward aspect are signs pointing toward the inner, spiritual aspect.”<sup>153</sup> There are symbols for each aspect of creation, for example, ‘Abdullāh explains that salt water is the symbol for knowledge of the outward aspect of things and fresh water is the symbol for knowledge of the inner aspect of things. Included in this tradition of symbolism are the ranks of humanity and for each ranking, especially that of the Imām, *ḥujja*<sup>154</sup>, or even each *dā’ī*, “their symbols have become signs pointing to them and to their respective dignities.”<sup>155</sup>

The discussion of symbols and their essential meanings (that which is symbolized) is one example of the second theological concept propagated in the *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām*, the difference between the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of

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<sup>151</sup> Daftary, *The Ismā’īlīs*, 132.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>153</sup> Morris 91.

<sup>154</sup> Translated as “proof” or “testimony.” The term is used to describe the imāms without whom the world would not exist. Daftary explains that the *ḥujjat Allāh* or “God’s proof” was used synonymously with imām in early Imāmī Shī’ī tradition. In every era there is a *ḥujja* of God, and he may be a prophet, a messenger-prophet, or an imām

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

reality and knowledge. ‘Abdullāh explains that “the inner aspect (*al-bāṭin*) is the religion of God through which the friends of God rightly worship Him, while the outer aspect (*al-ẓāhir*) is the revealed paths of religion and its symbols.”<sup>156</sup> The symbol thus represents the exoteric or outer aspect while the essential meaning that the symbol points to represents the esoteric or inner aspect. In this context, it is understood that that which is symbolized thus lends the necessity of its existence to the symbol and vice versa. The outer aspects of the religious path exist because of their internal spiritual meanings, while the outer aspect is the covering and sign that points to the inner.

The religious doctrine of the early period concentrated on the distinctions between outer and inner aspects of reality. While the aspects of *bāṭin* were focused on more in Ismā’īlī theological dialogue, as understanding them led to a true understanding of reality, *ẓāhir* played an important role for Ismā’īlīs as well. The *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām* expands on the early Ismā’īlī focus on the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* with an analysis of the existence of a third level of knowledge – the *bāṭin al-bāṭin*, the inner dimension of the inner dimension. The existence of this third level is proposed by Ṣāliḥ after a stimulating conversation with ‘Abdullāh. Incidentally the master is supposed to only provide a stimulus for the disciple as the disciple must come to the next level of knowledge by his own accord.

After the existence of the *bāṭin al-bāṭin* is revealed, ‘Abdullāh further explains the concept. He describes this level of knowledge as “an inner aspect of [the] inner one: it is the very highest of (spiritual) stations, more extensive than this inner aspect

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 83.

in its power and more perfect than it is a guide. For it is the goal of all signs pointing to the way of salvation.”<sup>157</sup> It is with this key revelation that the true goal of a quest for spiritual knowledge is presented. Spiritual instruction with a master stimulates the mind and soul of the disciple, guiding him/her to the highest level of his/her capacity. The ultimate goal of this journey is thus to attain the highest level of knowledge, a level held by the friends of God (*awliyāt Allāh*), the true believers who have reached their gateway that leads to salvation. And it is with a verse from the Qur’ān that ‘Abdullāh confirms and verifies God’s creation of these three levels of knowledge, the *ẓāhir*, *bāṭin*, and *bāṭin al-bāṭin*. His speech of explanation refers to verse 26 in *Surāt al-A’rāf* which is translated by Muhammad Asad to say, “O Children of Adam! Indeed, We have bestowed upon you from on high (the knowledge of making) garments to cover your nakedness, and as a thing of beauty: but the garment of God-consciousness is the best of all. Herein lies a message from God, so that man might take it to heart.” ‘Abdullāh reiterates the verse saying, “O children of Adam. We have sent down for you clothing to cover your private parts, and splendid attire, and the garment of mindfulness (of God) – that is best! So that makes three (levels of revealed knowledge): the outer aspect (*ẓāhir*), its inner dimension (*bāṭin*), and the inner aspect of that (*bāṭin al-bāṭin*).”

There is a continual reference to qur’ānic passages, verses, and interpreted meanings is throughout the text, which is the third principle of Ismā’īlī theological practice that is prominent in the *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām*. Through a system of qur’ānic commentary unique to the Ismā’īlīs called *ta’wīl*, truths hidden in the essential meanings of the *bāṭin* could be made apparent. Daftary explains *ta’wīl* as being “the

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 92.

symbolical, allegorical, or esoteric interpretation [of the Qur'ān] that came to be the hallmark of Ismā'īlism.”<sup>158</sup> This tradition of *ta'wīl* which was to lead to the *bāṭin* and enable a believer to differentiate it from the *ẓāhir* differs from traditional Sunnī Qur'ānic commentary, called *tafsīr*, which comments and explains the apparent and exoteric meaning of the text. Additionally, it is also inherently different from the tradition of *tanzīl*, “which refers to the revelation of the religious scriptures through angelic intermediaries.”<sup>159</sup> As can be deduced from the seven root-principles influential in Ismā'īlī cosmology, the *ta'wīl* of the early Ismā'īlīs focused primarily on the essential meanings behind letters and numbers. Explained as having a “cabalistic form” by Daftary, he writes that “the purpose of *ta'wīl* was to manifest the hidden so as to unveil the true spiritual reality.”<sup>160</sup> As such, studying *ta'wīl* could enable a spiritual journey for the believer, moving from the *ẓāhir* to the *bāṭin*, from their exoteric appearance to their internal and original meaning. One moves along a “passage from the appearance of true reality, from the letters of the revelation to the inner message behind them, and from the symbol to the symbolized.”<sup>161</sup> As such *ta'wīl* was used to enable a spiritual initiation into the *ḥaqā'iq*, the eternal truths that were hidden in the *bāṭin*. Because of the significant nature of utilizing *ta'wīl*, it is a genre that makes up the majority of Ismā'īlī literature, and the *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām* is no exception.

Additional sources for the work seem to not only come from the Qur'ān but also from the *ḥadīth*, the tales of the prophet (*qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*), and textual commentary.<sup>162</sup> One can also compare the work to other theological texts such as the *Risā'īl Ikhwān al-*

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<sup>158</sup> Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 130.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>162</sup> Morris, 7.

*Ṣafā'* as well as Arabic tales and fables, the *kalilah wa'dimna* or "folk stories." However, a comparison with other works only serves to emphasize the uniqueness of this particular work. "Those distinctive literary characteristics are especially evident in his constant maintenance of the inner thematic coherence and philosophic unity of the work, despite its length, shifting settings and the considerable diversity of its cast of characters."<sup>163</sup> With the wide variety of literary influences on this work, it is remarkable that the author has interwoven them into a uniquely Ismā'īlī work of art. Like the commentary of the *ta'wīl*, Ja'far ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman is not simply borrowing the ideas within the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, or the *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (stories of the prophets), he bases his work on their non-literal interpretation, holding true to his Ismā'īlī roots.

### **The Master-Disciple Relationship and the Early Ismā'īlī *Da'wa***

The text is also an early and possibly the only existing example of the importance of the master and disciple relationship as existing in Ismā'īlism. Farhad Daftary explains that the necessity of the relationship in Ismā'īlism is rooted in the obligation of the *da'wa*. The individual *dā'īs* were required to keep the truth of the *bāṭin* veiled to all, through the Shī'ī doctrine of *taqiyya*<sup>164</sup>, except the select few who were initiated into Ismā'īlism in addition to dissimulating their doctrines when in the face of danger. He explains that the process of initiation into the sect was a gradual one, and that the *Kitāb al-Ālim wa'l-ghulām* is one "of the few surviving texts that contains valuable details of this process."<sup>165</sup> Sadly, the initiation process is one of the least understood areas regarding the early Ismā'īlī community. It would be reasonable to

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>164</sup> "Precautionary dissimulation of one's true religious beliefs, especially in time of danger; used especially by the Twelver (Ithnā'asharī) and Ismā'īlī Shī'īs." Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 522.

<sup>165</sup> Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 129.

assume that it held similarities to initiatory rituals found within Sufism, and indeed the “Knower” in the *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām* stipulates character expected of a disciple on a Sufī *tariqah*. However, the extent of any similarities or differences between the rituals of Ismā’īlī and Sufī initiatory practice is still unknown. What can be seen in the text however, is not just an introduction of the relationship, nor an extended explanation of it to the reader, but a way to capture the essence of that relationship in writing.

Pedagogy plays a key role in many Islamic sects, as well as other traditions, but the master-disciple relationship is inherently different from another common pedagogical relationship – the student-teacher relationship. As opposed to the student-teacher relationship, the master-disciple relationship plays a key role within the “process of spiritual transformation or individual and collective orientation” and holds an “inherently ethical nature.”<sup>166</sup> It is here that the unique aspect of the pedagogical relationship becomes clear. This spiritual relationship serves to continue the passage of the light of spiritual guidance throughout the community, a practice that was begun by Muḥammad himself who passed his spiritual knowledge on to his Companions. The necessity of spiritual knowledge being passed down through the ranks of humanity thus necessitates the master-disciple relationship – without it one cannot hope to attain the highest level of knowledge.

The relationship between master and disciple also holds each side in a much more personal grasp, tying each together in a stronger way. Where both the student and the teacher are replaceable in their relationship, neither the master nor disciple

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<sup>166</sup> Kenneth L. Honerkamp, “The Ethical-Mystical Foundations of the Master-Disciple Relationship in Formative Ṣūfism in Ninth and Tenth Century Nishapur.” in *Actes de Colloque International sur: Maîtres et disciples dans le soufisme des 3eme et 4eme siècles de l’Hégire (9eme – 10eme siècles)*. Institute Francais de Proche Orient (IFPO), 1 (Paris, 2011).

will ever be equaled by another. Additionally, they will never equal each other as the disciple will never rise to the exact rank of his/her master. This is because the master can never be fully understood as what he speaks of is through his own personal existence and what he has become through his own personal development. Thus the “disciple understands the master only when he understands him in the context of existence.”<sup>167</sup> Additionally, the master is simultaneously a disciple himself, to his own master. This represents the fact that a disciple will never become a master, as he himself will always inherently be a disciple.

The irreplaceability of both parties is at the core of the master-disciple relationship as it binds them together personally, ethically and spiritually. This relationship could be seen as developing into a cosmos within itself, as Wach writes, “the master and disciple in themselves represent the beginning and the end, a cosmos in itself.”<sup>168</sup> The difference between the relationships of the student-teacher and the master-disciple is inherently held within the level of power and charisma that flows out of the master. It is the master’s charisma and outward grace that attracts the disciples to him, his significance rests in his “personality, [his] very character and activity are individual and irreplaceable.”<sup>169</sup> Upon hearing the first words of ‘Abdullāh, Ṣāliḥ is drawn to these character traits exclaiming that the excellence exhibited by ‘Abdullāh “could only become manifest through someone whose knowledge had become perfected inwardly and whose good character had become fully developed outwardly, so that he has become a source of wisdom.”<sup>170</sup> However, the teacher attracts students

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<sup>167</sup> Wach, 2.

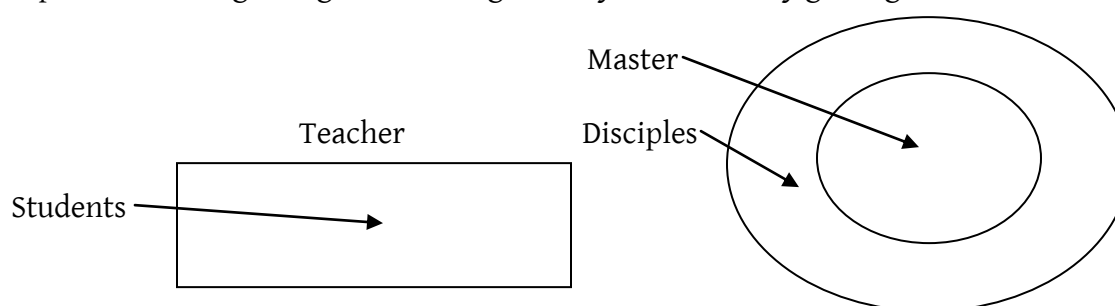
<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>170</sup> Morris, 69.

to him/her based on the level of learning they have attained and his ability and willingness to pass on that knowledge. As Wach explains, “this entire relationship is born and lives by means of the common interest in the object of study.”<sup>171</sup> This difference is explained by Frederick Denny when he writes that the master-disciple relationship is “one of spiritual grafting, as it were, with a peculiar shared quality existing between the master and each disciple.”<sup>172</sup>

The different significance held by each the master and teacher can be represented using a diagram showing the way the ones they guide gather around them:



Unlike to the student-teacher relationship, the master-disciple relationship is more of a social experience than simple instruction. Students gather before a teacher, the square depicting their number as being separate from the teacher. The teacher and student may rely on each other for the transference of knowledge, but still remain apart from each other. However, as represented by the circular depiction of the disciples surrounding the master, this relationship shows the “humanity” and “the union of friends in which the master finds comfort and strength which allows [him] to experience human fellowship. The circle is the supporting and nourishing ground out of which everyone who belongs gains his strength; it is the concrete revelation of the ‘power’ of the master. Attracted by this power, moved by it, and defined through it, the

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>172</sup> Frederick M. Denny, ed., “Joachim Wach’s ‘Master and Disciple’ Revisited: A Contemporary Symposium.” *Teaching, Theology and Religion* 1, no. 1 (1998): 13.

disciples assemble in a circle around the master; followers and helpers assemble in ever wider circles.”<sup>173</sup>

The circle that surrounds the master not only gives him support and comfort, it also represents the significance of the disciples to the master. To him they represent all of mankind, as all of mankind is ignorant. ‘Abdullāh knows that he must guide another to higher levels of spiritual knowledge, as when he was ignorant his master guided him. Thinking to himself he realizes, “I am not the first person to be ignorant, so that I attained knowledge before everyone else; nor am I the last one to be ignorant, so that the process of (spiritual) teaching will come to an end.”<sup>174</sup> The ignorant of the world remain in need of instruction. When the formerly ignorant begin their discipleship they develop into the master’s community and source for companionship. Additionally, “they are always in readiness, and in some particularly high and choice hours we find them in closet association with the master.”<sup>175</sup> This close association brings us to the third significance of the disciple to the master: the fact that they are apostles to the master, they later proclaim his teaching to others. In the text, Ṣāliḥ later instructs his community’s shaykh, being a representative of his newly attained knowledge for another individual who is in need of instruction, an individual who not only recognizes that need, but seeks out his master to follow a call.

Within the narrative of *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām* one sees the foundation of the master-disciple relationship as represented in the *Ismā’īlī da’wa*. The influence of the *da’wa* is noticeable from the very beginnings of the work, when ‘Abdullāh is searching for someone worthy that he may pass his spiritual knowledge on to. ‘Abdullāh travels

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<sup>173</sup> Wach, 21.

<sup>174</sup> Morris, 64.

<sup>175</sup> Wach, 14.

across the “Jazīra,” which Morris explains may refer “specifically to one of the ‘twelve regions’ into which the Ismā’īlī *da’wa* was divided, with a different *ḥujja* in charge of each region. [However] the geographic reference is probably to the region of the same name, between the Tigris and Euphrates in the north of present-day Iraq.”<sup>176</sup> While searching, ‘Abdullāh is well aware that he must look for a specific type of person to become his disciple. Not everyone has received a call to discipleship nor has reached the level of knowledge necessary before beginning such a discipleship. In order for someone to be a worthy disciple they must “first [have] a knowledge of the essence of things and the destiny of the world, and, second, a knowledge of his personal mission, the activity through which the chosen one should influence human destinies.”<sup>177</sup> With this knowledge in mind, ‘Abdullāh looks at the people in the village and scrutinizes “their faces (for signs of the right spiritual aptitude) and present[s] the (religious) questions.”<sup>178</sup>

The understanding that not everyone can attain the highest level of spiritual knowledge is a prominent viewpoint in Ismā’īlism. Humanity is ranked according to the degree of knowledge one can achieve, with higher rankings according to higher levels of knowledge. Additionally, because of the process of *taqiyya*, not everyone is authorized to receive information regarding Ismā’īlī doctrine. Revealed early on is how to distinguish those who are knowledgeable from the ignorant, thus those who should be initiated into Ismā’īlism with the *bāṭin* revealed to them and those who should not be. ‘Abdullāh explains to Ṣāliḥ that the spiritual “knower will reveal himself plainly through his seeking (of that knowledge), while the (spiritually) ignorant person will be

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<sup>176</sup> Morris, 173.

<sup>177</sup> Wach, 7.

<sup>178</sup> Morris, 65.

distinguished by his falling behind.”<sup>179</sup> Just the fact that one is seeking knowledge sets them above others as they have realized that they are ignorant and need someone to guide them toward the divine light of awareness, this being the core of their personal mission.

This same lesson is later given in the text by the young man himself, later referred to as Ṣāliḥ, when speaking with his community’s shaykh Abū Mālīk. This time the spiritually knowledgeable and ignorant are referenced in terms of their superiority to each other in their rankings on earth, which would in turn serve as reflection on their spiritual ranking. Those who are superior to others are thus because of God’s justice. Those who are knowledgeable have received revelation from God. The ability to accept this revelation is not only awarded to those of superior ranks however, the subordinate can also distinguish himself from others with true knowledge of spiritual reality. The subordinate can thus also receive “revealed inspiration” from God and, as Ṣāliḥ explains, this “is why obedience to him [the higher ranking –the imām] is obedience to God.”<sup>180</sup> This lesson is one of the places in the text in which religious doctrine is explained differently to two different disciples according to how they will best be able to comprehend the information.

However, even with the understanding that it may be hard to find a worthy student, ‘Abdullāh is still duty bound to pass his knowledge on to someone else. He knows that “his obligation (to pass on his spiritual understanding to others) [is] now like the duty (of his own master) toward him, and that his duty in the end was like it

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 155.

had been in the beginning.”<sup>181</sup> It is in this way that he can show his thankfulness to God for enabling him to reach the level of knowledge that he has. The master is thus bound by this obligation, his task is of ultimate proportions from God. As all aspects of life have come from God, all aspects of life should show their thankfulness. In the text, it is explained that spiritual ignorance “cuts off thankfulness and leads to ingratitude and rejection (of God) –and God does not love every ungrateful one.”<sup>182</sup> Leaving those who are ignorant in this state thus prevents them from fully embracing God’s love placing a chasm between humanity and the divine.

By passing knowledge to another soul he is bringing them life, where before their ignorance kept them among the ranks of the dead. As giving life to the dead is among one of the best good deeds, ‘Abdullāh reflects on his former station as dead and ignorant as well as on the fact that someone had given him life. He comes to the realization that, “it is only right for me, because of my gratitude for this blessing, to pass on this (divine) trust to those who come after me, just as those who have handed it down to me.”<sup>183</sup> The teaching of spiritual knowledge makes intermediaries between someone and God no longer applicable, as the veil of ignorance no longer surrounds them. They can thus have a direct experience of the divine, having reached a full understanding of the spiritual knowledge presented to them.

Passing knowledge on to others is one of the first duties of a master that the reader encounters in *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām*. However, the duties of the disciple are much more prevalent in the narrative. One could assume that this is because the work itself could be a master to the reader who becomes the disciple. Thus, it is more

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 64.

important to stress the role that is played by the student in order to enable a stronger connection to the work by the reader. In this case, limits are set for the young man, which could in turn then be carried over to the reader of the text. Within these limits, Ṣāliḥ is to hold true to the teachings of God's books, primarily the outward aspect (*ẓāhir*) of the last book<sup>184</sup>. Holding strong to God's third book (the Qur'ān) is rationalized by the idea that even if you were to follow the teachings of all of God's revealed books (the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Qur'ān) the first of them leads to the second which in turn leads to the third, which replaces the necessity of the other two. Additionally, those communities who have not recognized the need to replace previous revelation with that in the Qur'ān have proven their ignorance and willingness to be led astray by the devils among them. Ṣāliḥ explains to Abū Mālik later in the text that this fall into temptation is rooted in the communities' desire to hold on to their own prophet, denying the messages of those who came after. He proposes that:

[T]his community of the Magians are (still) clinging to their excesses and worshipping their idols, devoting themselves to their fire-temples and declaring their claim that God will never send a messenger after their messenger. And this community of the Torah are clinging devotedly to their Psalms, tending to their calf, upholding the ordinances of their prophets and submitting to their judges, and declaring their claim that God will never send another messenger after Moses. And this community of the Gospels is declaring their anthropomorphism, claiming that their prophet is their God, worshipping with their crosses and venerating their priests, and declaring (likewise) that God will never send another messenger after Jesus.<sup>185</sup>

The communities of Muslims who focus primarily on the exoteric messages of Muḥammad have also fallen into this trap of temptation according to Ṣāliḥ. Their claim that there will be no "warner" after Muḥammad is against Ismā'īlī doctrine which propagates the coming of al-Qā'im, a final spiritual guide in the final eschatological era.

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 158.

It follows the logic of God's justice that each era of humanity deserved to receive a spiritual guide, whether it be the imām, his *ḥujja*, or al-Qā'im, as each member of humanity is obliged to obey and follow that guidance on the highest level attainable. These guides, through God's justice, are never veiled to humanity – a lesson revealed in both the young man's conversation with 'Abdullāh and Ṣāliḥ's discussion with Abū Mālīk. The doctrine of the imāmate is explained in each lesson of the text, reflecting the importance placed on having God's will manifestation in the world at all times in Ismā'īlī doctrine and theology. Ṣāliḥ explains that the "earth is never without a just witness from God for a single blink of the eye, either publicly and openly, or in fear and concealment."<sup>186</sup> The imām also has an important role in the type of message he brings to the people. Particularly, they as masters (as well as those masters who follow them) carry a particular "metaphysical meaning" with them. Thus in the "view of the continual process of the world, more people are dependent on the master than on the prophet, in whose place – according to even his own conviction – another person could have been called just as well" whereas the master's calling is unique.<sup>187</sup>

After imposing the first limit on the young man (and thus, in a sense, the reader), 'Abdullāh proceeds in laying out five conditions, that Ṣāliḥ must adhere to in order to begin his teaching, saying, "[d]on't neglect anything I've entrusted you with; don't conceal anything from me if I ask you about it; don't come looking for me to give you an answer (whenever you have a question); don't ask me about anything until I bring it up with you; and don't speak about my concerns with your father."<sup>188</sup> These proscriptions echo those given to disciples of Ṣūfism by their masters, and are another

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>187</sup> Wach, 8

<sup>188</sup> Morris, 77.

aspect in the text that one can use to see the connection between the two traditions. These rules and obligations on the part of both the master and disciple are an important aspect to the relationship. The master's obligations are because of his duty to pass on the divine light to those who come after him. The disciple's obligations are a way for him to recognize, respect, thank, and embrace the necessity for the master who has received the divine light before him. Ṣāliḥ explains the duty of all God's creatures in a discussion with Abū Mālik, the community's shaykh, about God's justice and wise judgment. He explains to Abū Mālik that the "continuous succession of those (messengers) from God to His creatures necessarily impose[s] on the creatures the obligation to willingly obey them, as their religious duty."<sup>189</sup> The other members of creation are thus duty bound to obey them and "bear witness against those who disobey them, so that He [God] might turn away from them."<sup>190</sup>

Ṣāliḥ's conversation with Abū Mālik echoes a former lesson taught by 'Abdullāh in the first dialogue session of the text. The obedience of both the master and disciple was divinely determined, as God, "in His justice (God) has preferred some of them over others, so that the subordinate is joined through obedience to the superior, and the superior to one more superior to him, until through them their obedience and service eventually reaches the final stage of what God has intended."<sup>191</sup> For even if humanity is not necessarily on equal footing when it comes to their levels, those who follow Gods' ordinance for them will all be judged equally for "He does not ask about the level of the superior or the subordinate."<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 154-155.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 155.

## Conclusion

The *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām* is an irreplaceable example of the influential master-disciple relationship as it was manifested in Ismā’īlī Islam. Representing theological doctrine unique to the sect, such as their emphasis on learning cosmological hierarchy, following the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin* within the revealed texts, and using *ta’wīl* to enable a believer to embark on that spiritual journey, the text is a manifestation of the ideals held dear to the early Ismā’īlī *da’wa*. Whether intending to or not, Ja’far ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman created a work that brought the *da’wa*’s representation of this timeless relationship to the world. The text represents the unique and secret communication that occurs between a master and his disciple(s) that holds true in every tradition. Al-Yaman explains at the end of the text that the work is not a “made up story, but rather the confirmation of what God has commanded. For it is in the confirmation of the (divine) messengers, the signs of their trustees (the imāms), and the proper behavior of those who are seeking.” The master-disciple relationship was essential in Ismā’īlism as the master was a key figure in directing seeking believers toward salvation and their ultimate desire to connect with God. Interestingly, the cosmological system proposed in this early text underwent dramatic changes during the fourth/tenth centuries where it is superseded with new Neoplatonic attributes. These new attributes resonate within the *Rasā’il* of the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* an important work that also enables readers to understand the cosmological system that leads to their salvation.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE RASĀ'IL IKHWĀN AL-ŞAFĀ' AND THE IMPORTANCE OF COSMOLOGY IN

### FĀṬIMID ISMĀ'ĪLISM

Like the *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa’l-ghulām*, the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Şafā’*<sup>193</sup> are an important textual source that serve as an intellectual guide for the reader. This text represents the Ismā’īlī cosmological system, of which it was particularly important for the Ismā’īlī initiate to gain an understanding of. Knowledge of the spiritual and physical worlds, as well as the importance of mankind within creation will lead the Ismā’īlī initiate to salvation and Paradise. It is the goal of every initiate to reach knowledge of the unity of God as this is how to attain eternal happiness. Mankind’s creation at the end of created existence represents his distance from God and only by attaining knowledge of his existence will he close the gap between God and himself. As an excellent primary source that focuses on these Ismā’īlī ideals, the *Rasā’il* of the Ikhwān al-Şafā’ have been the focal point of many scholarly debates since the time of their composition in either the third/ninth or fourth/tenth centuries. Controversies exist over their authorship, an exact date on which they may have been written, and which Islamic intellectual tendency the Ikhwān may have been affiliated with. However, what cannot be argued is the fact that the *Rasā’il* have affected a variety of Islamic schools and doctrines. As

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<sup>193</sup> The copy of *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Şafā’* used in this thesis was within the two volume work entitled *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia* edited and translated by Mehdi Aminrazavi and Sayyed Hossein Nasr in 2001. Published by Oxford University Press the work includes translations and Arabic script as well as bibliographical references and an index. This work includes a translation of several of the epistles, however it does not include a complete translation.

such, Nader el-Bizri<sup>194</sup> writes that they have “acted as a significant intellectual prompt and catalyst in the unfurling of the history of ideas in Islām and it rightfully deserves the station that has been assigned to it among the distinguished Arabic classics and the high literature of Islamic civilization.”<sup>195</sup>

The *Rasā'il* are relevant to our discussion of Ismā'īlism because many of the themes and ideals proposed in the epistles mirror those found in Ismā'īlī thought. The main themes in the *Rasā'il* are “the purification of the human soul, attainment of knowledge and human brotherhood. The emphasis throughout the *Rasā'il* is to turn from the sleep of negligence and the slumber of ignorance to the awakening of the soul to knowledge and its purification by actions according to the true knowledge before entering Paradise.”<sup>196</sup> The Ikhwān intended their epistles to be used as an educational guide toward this purification of the soul and, with their hierarchical cosmological doctrines and emphasis on esoterism, it should be no surprise that it was used as such by many Ismā'īlīs centuries after the epistles were written. The work enabled readers to have a connection with Ismā'īlī doctrine and develop an understanding of key tenets necessary to attain salvation. Cosmology was used as a guide and was aimed to show the way for removing the distance between mankind and God and bringing about man's salvation.

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<sup>194</sup> Nader el-Bizri is a Lebanese philosopher, historian of science, and architect living in the United Kingdom. He serves as a Visiting Professor of Visual Studies at the University of Lincoln as well as a senior Research Associate in Philosophy at the Institute for Ismā'īlī Studies in London. He is acting as General Editor of the book series titled *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity Series* being published by the Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismā'īlī Studies.

<sup>195</sup> Nader el-Bizri. “Prologue” in *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and their Rasā'il An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 16.

<sup>196</sup> Sayyed Hossein Nasr. *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 201.

### An Overview of Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī Cosmology

By the time of the Fāṭimid Empire the cosmological doctrine of the Ismāʿīlīs had been expanded to incorporate ideas from the writings of Plotinus (d. 270) and Porphyry of Tyre (d. 303) that resonated with Ismāʿīlī thought. The philosopher Plotinus “postulated a hierarchy of three hypostases or principles above Matter, comprising The One or The Good, Intelligence or Intellect, and Soul.”<sup>197</sup> It is on this theory that the Ismāʿīlīs have seemingly based their emanationist Hierarchy of Being after with the first three ranks corresponding to the Plotinian Triad. The schemes of emanationism found in the *Rasāʾil* directly connect to those found in both Neoplatonic and Ismāʿīlī thought and the reader can see that the Ikhwān have incorporated the sciences of the ancients into their goal of expounding eternal wisdom to the world. Plotinus’ work also proposed the theme of the purification of the soul, which could only be done through the study of philosophy. However, the Ikhwān expanded sources of purification to include the pursuit of wisdom of the Socratic type, Christian asceticism and Muslim religious dedication, effectively incorporating more spheres of human life other than just philosophical pursuits.

Translations of many Greek writings had begun to appear in the Muslim World around the second/eighth century and various motifs from them were combined in Ismāʿīlism to create a mythical cosmogony. This cosmogony described the creation of the universe with analogies between the celestial and terrestrial worlds. Ismāʿīlī cosmological doctrine has distinctly hierarchal characteristics and a focus on a cyclical history of revelation. The hierarchal cosmology expounded by the Ikhwān is extremely

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 34.

similar and would have been recognized as such by many Ismā'īlī readers. In Epistle 32, entitled “The Intellectual Principles of Existing Beings According to the Pythagoreans,” and Epistle 49, entitled “The Modalities of the States of Spiritual Beings,” the Ikhwān “conceived of the world we know as a result of a process whereby all things flowed or ‘emanated’ (*fada*), like a light, from the original principle, namely the Primeval Unity, or more simply still, the One.”<sup>198</sup> The concept of emanation in Ismā'īlism was based on the new Neoplatonic provenance found in many Ismā'īlī writings in which the Supreme Being was both completely unified and transcendent who generated, through the process of emanation, a hierarchical order of beings that ends with the material world. And in both orthodox Ismā'īlī thought and the *Rasā'il*, the One is absolute in its unity, eternal, permanent, and is beyond description and cognizance.

To the Ismā'īlīs, the emanation of existence from the One, (also deemed The Good, or the Creator (*al-Bārī*), created a hierarchy of being in which everything was ceaselessly generated by, and ultimately related back to, the One. The overall hierarchy within the Fāṭimid Ismā'īlī cosmological system was very elaborate and they developed an Intelligible World (also called the World of Origination) consisting of ten Intellects and a Physical World which consists of ten spheres. Ismā'īlī scholars such as the Fāṭimid *dā'īs* Aḥmad Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī<sup>199</sup> (d. 363/947) and Abū Ya'qūb Ishāq al-Sijistānī<sup>200</sup> (d. c. 360/971) have explained this system in detail. Within this hierarchy

<sup>198</sup> Godefroid de Callatāy. *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā': A Brotherhood of Idealists on the Fringe of Orthodox Islām* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 17-18.

<sup>199</sup> Served under the caliph-imām al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (r. 996-1021). Of Persian descent was a prominent scholar, theologian, and philosopher in Fāṭimid Ismā'īlism. His prominent works include *Raḥat al-'Aql* and *Kitāb al-riyad*. In his writings he seeks to guide the reader toward Paradise that comes from knowledge.

<sup>200</sup> Prominent Persian Ismā'īlī *dā'ī* and Neo-Platonic philosopher. For more on al-Sijistānī see Paul Walker. *Early Philosophical Shiism: the Ismaili Neoplatonism of Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

God sits at the top and holds the same roles as he does in traditional Islam. He is referred to as the Causer or Creator because God moves the primordial cause in the world to act and interact without himself being affected by this cause. While the universe is related to God, it is also distinct from God because of God's divine unity. Mirroring earlier Ismā'īlī cosmological doctrine, Fāṭimid doctrine held that the will of God was transubstantiated into the divine word "be" (*kun*) which is the First Intellect and is inclusive of all existing beings. The First Intellect is both active and passive and as al-Kirmānī explains, it "is knowing in himself and thinking in himself, he is both contemplating and being contemplated. He is contemplating because he contemplates himself; he is being contemplated, in the sense that his own self is being contemplated by him."<sup>201</sup>

The active process of knowing that the First Intellect participates in illuminates a light that radiates from him which is the Second Intellect. The Second Intellect (also called the Universal/Inclusive Soul) is distinguished by the act of producing as it gives form to the things created by the First Intellect. The passive process of being known that the First Intellect participates in results in First/Prime Matter which is passive by nature and passive to the activity of the Second Intellect. The First/Prime Matter brings the physical world into being. Additionally, the Third Intellect emanates from the Second Intellect and is distinguished by the act of fashioning the external image of aspects of creation. After these Intellects follow a Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth. Each superior intellect is inclusive of the lower one, each incorporating the knowledge held by the lower Intellects into itself.

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<sup>201</sup> Al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'Aql*, trans. Sami Makaremi, in *The Doctrine of the Ismā'īlīs* (Beirut: the Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 1972) 19.

This hierarchical system is mirrored in the writings of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. They developed their categorization of the different aspects of created existence by dividing all beings into the categories of particular and general. In this system of organization numbers were the most important aspect of symbolism used. The Ikhwān held a very esoteric viewpoint of the importance in numbers and their last category was divided into "nine 'stages of being' since 9, by virtue of coming at the end of the decimal cycle, closes that cycle, and symbolically brings to an end the series of numbers."<sup>202</sup> Believing that mathematical principles were at the root of everything, the Ikhwān followed the tradition laid out by the Pythagoreans. Both in the traditions of Pythagoras and that laid out by the Ikhwān certain numbers contain special significance, to the Ikhwān specifically important numbers were the number four and the number seven. Four was the number of elements, seasons, natures, and humors in the human body (those being the traditionally recognized humors of yellow and black bile, phlegm, blood, and chime). Seven was viewed as a number in connection with the spheres in the heavens, cycles of prophetic history and, for a distinctly Ismā'īlī connection, the number of recognized legitimate imāms. The significance of this numerology came from the idea that the whole universe was modeled after this theory of numbers and an understanding of them would aid in an understanding of God's unity.

The hierarchy proposed by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' mirrors that of Ismā'īlī theologians and is presented by Sayyed Hossein Nasr in *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*. He explains that it developed in the following manner:

1. Creator – who is one, simple, eternal, permanent.
2. Intellect ('aql) – which is of two kinds: innate and acquired.

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<sup>202</sup> Sayyed Hossein Nasr. *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 51.

3. Soul (*nafs*) – which has three species: vegetative, animal, and rational.
4. Matter (*hayūlā'*) – which is of four kinds: matter of artifacts, physical matter, universal matter, and original matter.
5. Nature (*ṭabī'ah*) – which is of five kinds: celestial nature and the four elemental natures.
6. Body (*jism*) – which has six directions: above, below, front, back, left, and right.
7. The sphere – which has its seven planets
8. The elements – which have two qualities, these being in reality the four qualities combined two by two:
  - a. Earth – cold and dry
  - b. Water – cold and wet
  - c. Air – warm and wet
  - d. Fire – warm and dry
9. Beings of this world – which are the mineral, plant, and animal kingdoms, each having three parts<sup>203</sup>

Each level's number of kinds or qualities corresponded with the number of the level itself. Thus the Intellect, on the second level of Being is comprised of two kinds.

For the Ismā'īlīs, the first four levels of this hierarchical system were particularly active in the formation of created existence. The Universal Intellect (*al-Aql*) was related back to the One, God, by its very existence and by the fact that its Being continued that existence. Its position served as a barrier to the members of humanity seeking enlightenment of God, but it also served as a gateway to his unity when man's soul was purified and along the straight path. This was a wall that had to be climbed because humans have a natural desire to seek the love of the Creator. The Universal Intellect is also distinct from God, although that did not mean communication was impossible. The purpose of the Intellect in fact was that communication for the momentary and imperfect nature of it needed guidance from the absolute perfection of God. The Intellect provided a river of God's qualities flowing into the Soul (*al-Nafs*) which is the prime-mover and the cause of all activity in this

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<sup>203</sup> *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* in Nasr, 51-52.

universe and played a role in the creation of all the other levels of Being. Like the Ismā'īlī cosmological doctrine proposed in other sources, in the *Rasā'il* “the Soul was created through the medium of the Intellect and then God ‘created the rest of the living creatures from Matter and arranged them by means of the Intellect and the Soul’.”<sup>204</sup>

The movement of creation by the Soul was a duty entrusted to it by God. Just like in earlier Ismā'īlī cosmological doctrine, later doctrine held that the Creator did not move the world directly, but indirectly. The movement of the universe and each individual soul as directed by the Soul is according to “three motions: (1) away from the outer sphere (*muḥīt*) toward the world of generation and corruption and ultimately hell; (2) upwards toward heaven; and (3) horizontal oscillation without knowledge of where to go, as in the souls of animals.”<sup>205</sup> In order to understand the Soul in reference to the universe, the Ikhwān related its purpose to that of the human soul in the human body. They believed the Soul moved the universe like a rower does a boat or, for a more modern example, like a driver maneuvers a car. This analogy was applied to the human body as well, for in Epistle 26 they write that if one views the body as if it were a ship then the soul would be “like the captain, works like the goods of traders, this world like the ocean, death like the shore, the next world like the city of merchants, and God the Exalted like the king who gives recompense there.”<sup>206</sup> The Ikhwān also attributed a more personal purpose to the Universal Soul in reference to its effect on each human soul. They write that “each man’s soul is, in fact, part of a great kingdom

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<sup>204</sup> *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* in Ian Richard Netton. *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity* (London: George Allen & Unwin (Publishers), Ltd, 1982), 38

<sup>205</sup> Nasr, 57.

<sup>206</sup> “*Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*,” in *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, vol. 2, ed. Sayyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 205.

of souls, human, super-human and sub-human, all drawing their power from the same Universal Soul which moves within the universe.”<sup>207</sup>

### **The Importance of Mankind**

The individual souls of humanity are part of the ninth level on the Great Chain of Being, along with animal and vegetative souls. However, man’s soul is unique because it is the only soul categorized as rational. This idea mirrors that of the role of reason in Ismā’īlī thought, in which the capacity to reason is what leads mankind to knowledge of God. This represents the fact that a human soul is of a finer quality than those of minerals, plants and animals. Additionally, mankind’s rational soul and superior standing mean that humanity fulfills the whole purpose of creation because he can return to his maker which is his origin. From a teleological standpoint, man’s creation on the Great Chain of Being was so that the desire of creation to return to God could be fulfilled. As to how he can fulfill this purpose, the Ikhwān propose extensive education to gain an understanding of the macrocosm, God, and purify the soul from the confines of the material world.

Man must enlighten himself as he is the only link between heaven and the kingdoms of minerals, plants and animals. Basically, mankind forms a channel that the souls will eventually be able to use to rise through. The Ismā’īlī ideal of gaining knowledge to attain salvation are reflected within the *Rasā’il* of the Ikhwān. They write that man is able to gain knowledge in three ways: “(1) by considering the states of his body, the composition of its structure, and the attributes related to it without [considering] the soul; (2) by considering the states of his soul and the attributes

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<sup>207</sup> Netton, 42.

pertaining to them without [considering] the body; and (3) by considering the states of both [the soul and the body] as connected to each other and the attributes related to the totality [of the two].”<sup>208</sup> To attain knowledge about the cosmos humankind should study the nature of the world and that of himself. Along this chain of thought the scholar and theologian al-Ghazālī writes that “the knowledge of anatomy is the means by which we become acquainted with the animal life: by means of knowledge of animal life we may acquire a knowledge of the heart, and the knowledge of the heart is a key to the knowledge of God.”<sup>209</sup>

The Ikhwān explain that nowhere in the entirety of the cosmos is there a part “more complete in structure, more perfect in form, and more corresponding in its totality to the cosmos than man. For verily man is a totality brought together from a corporeal body and a spiritual soul.”<sup>210</sup> Thus, man was a microcosm to the macrocosm God. As Nasr explains, “the purpose of the study of nature is to see these ‘vestiges of God’ – the *vestigial Dei* as the medieval Latins used to express it – so that, thanks to the analogy existing between the universe and man, the soul through this knowledge of cosmic realities can come to know itself better and ultimately be able to escape from the earthly prison into which it has fallen.”<sup>211</sup>

Epistle 26, entitled “The Claim of the Sages that Man is a Microcosm,” of the *Rasā’il* is about this relationship between microcosm and macrocosm. In essence, man is a miniature model of the universe. Because the infinite nature of the universe makes it impossible for human beings to attain complete knowledge of it man can learn about

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<sup>208</sup> “*Rasā’il*,” 207-208.

<sup>209</sup> Al-Ghazālī. *Alchemy of Happiness in An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, Nasr, 98.

<sup>210</sup> “*Rasā’il*,” 203.

<sup>211</sup> Nasr, 74.

himself instead since it is a representation of that universe. The Ikhwān explain that: “there is a likeness between the composition of the human body and the composition of the spheres. The spheres have seven levels which lie within the cavity of each, as we explained in the epistle on ‘Introduction to Anatomy.’ In the same way nine substances are found in the composition of the human body which lie within the cavity of each other, enveloping [each other] in the likeness of [the spheres].”<sup>212</sup> The authors go on to explain the many connections between the constellations and the human body, as well as those between the heavens and the sensible faculties comprising human nature.

The Ikhwān’s explanation of man as the microcosm leads into consideration of each individual human soul and the role the soul plays within humans themselves. Mirroring Ismā’īlī teachings, the authors stress the fact that if humanity is able to awake from this metaphorical slumber of ignorance they will be able to attain salvation in the next life. The pedagogical methodology used by the Ismā’īlīs had this purpose of giving new life to their initiates who had previously been dead, or asleep, from their ignorance. Complimenting Ismā’īlī teachings, the Ikhwān advise their readers to “meditate on this [human] frame [or body] which is based on wisdom, ponder on this ‘Book’ which is full of knowledge, and reflect on this ‘straight path’ which is stretched between paradise and hell so that you succeed in [doing] good deeds (*kahyrāt*) through it, and are able to cross on the straight path.”<sup>213</sup> The only way to ascend into Paradise is through purity of the soul and the straight path. Purification involves an awakening of the state of the soul in which man must prevent himself from being blinded by material gains in this world. The material aspects of this world, including our own bodies, are

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<sup>212</sup> “Rasā’il,” 208

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, 216.

prisons that are used to trap the soul away from the spiritual world. In fact, if the soul remains blind to the matters of the spiritual realm, then the greed of the soul will condemn it to remain in this world forever. However, if the soul is “learned and ignorance is not accumulated in it, if it is pure in substance not defiled by evil deed, if it is clear in its essence [or self] not turbid by vicious character-traits, if its aspiration is sound and has not swerved by corrupted opinions, then it will see in itself the spiritual forms of things which are in its realm.”<sup>214</sup>

After the soul has been purified, the Ikhwān propose the following of the straight path. The Ikhwān stress to their readers that if they attempt to walk along this path without adequately purifying themselves they will be misled onto false pathways. They use what they call ‘clear proofs’ in their writing to enable a person to cleanse ‘evil character traits’ from their soul with the use of discipline and their guidance, should that person desire it.<sup>215</sup> The Ikhwān explain that the only reason these evil habits have descended upon the souls of humanity is because they have forgotten the concepts concerning humanity’s origin and return. The allusions provided by the Ikhwān in their *Rasā’il* are regarded by the authors as gentle reminders of “what has been neglected by it [the soul] in the matter pertaining to its origin and return, [they include] the specific number and amount of duties, the prophetic laws according to their known conditions, [and] their execution at the stipulated time, facing toward different directions [in worship], and worshipping in different ways.”<sup>216</sup> They describe healthy souls as those who have not been tainted by evil and ignorant opinions, these are the ones who will benefit from the teaching of the Ikhwān and gain

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid, 220.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, 222.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 223.

their admission to Paradise. The Ikhwān write of these healthy people that “when their souls become cultivated and their minds purified, and their reflections powerful, then they should be given the answers to these issues with demonstrations, as we explained in five epistles which we patterned on the human form, and elucidated their proofs by similitudes which are in the human form.”<sup>217</sup>

In their discussion of man’s role on earth, the Ikhwān propose additional hierarchies that resonate with Ismā’īlī teachings. They describe there are three categories of believers in this world and the members of the higher levels are the ones who will be able to achieve the salvation they seek. These categories surround the ideas found in the *sharī’a*, which the Ikhwān explain as the basest level of religious knowledge. They describe that the common mass of people are purely exoteric and the knowledge that suites them is that of *ẓāhir*.<sup>218</sup> They will not be able to rise above the literal meaning of the law and thus enlightenment is unattainable for them in this life. On an intermediate level are the learned people who have studied jurisprudence, just conduct, and the meaning of words on the basis of their research in exegesis and revelation. The intermediate people would be very learned in studying revelation guided by reason, but would not have gone so far in their studies as to the level of philosophy. It is with the study of philosophy that the Ikhwān propose the third and final category of humanity. To this level they themselves belong, and the believers in this category are “the ‘chosen few’ (*khawass*) who have become strong in both the religious and the rational sciences, so that they are in a position to study the hidden

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid, 223-224.

<sup>218</sup> “The outward, literal, or exoteric meaning of sacred texts and religious prescriptions, notably the Qur’ān and the *sharī’a* as distinct from the *bāṭin*.” Daftary, *The Ismā’īlīs*, 522.

secrets of religion, which can only be touched by those purified of filthy desire, arrogance, and hypocrisy.”<sup>219</sup>

The Ikhwān themselves are members of this third level of believers and they have a hierarchal system amongst themselves as well. The members of the Brethren were divided into four ranks each reached at a certain age and at a certain level of education. ‘Craftsmen’ were those members who were at least fifteen years of age and were described as “pious and compassionate (*al-abrār wa ‘l-ruḥamā*).”<sup>220</sup> Next were the political leaders who had reached at least thirty years old and held titles of “good and excellent (*al-akhyār wa ‘l-fuḍalā*).”<sup>221</sup> The level that followed was those of kings who were at least forty years old and were described as “excellent and noble (*al-fuḍalā’ al-kirām*).”<sup>222</sup> The final rank was that of the great prophets and philosophers of the world such as “Abraham, Joseph, Jesus, Muḥammad, Socrates, and Pythagoras. Their rank could justly be labeled ‘the angelic rank (*al-martabat al-malakiyya*)’ and it was not reached before the age of fifty. It was the final rank to which all the Brethren were to aspire.”<sup>223</sup> Each rank in the hierarchy denotes a check point of sorts that the members of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ had attained in their lifetime. With the attainment of the final rank they would have achieved full enlightenment and spiritual maturity, effectively freeing themselves from the prison of the material world in order to gain their *theosis* with God. These people had fully surrendered to God and were able to receive Divine help and a direct vision of the Truth (*al-ḥaqq*) because of it.

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<sup>219</sup> Callataÿ, 93.

<sup>220</sup> Netton, 36

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid, 36.

The hierarchy of humanity proposed by the Ikhwān held another aspect that would have spoken to the Ismāʿīlīs of the time, the central role of the imām. Both the Ikhwān and the Ismāʿīlīs divided believers up into categories according to their level of belief in the true imām. This key aspect in the Ikhwān's description of humanity is one that affirms their Ismāʿīlī affiliation. Using the term the "true Imām" the Ikhwān have propose that the imām typically recognized by many branches of Shī'ism was not necessarily correct. The true directive of all Shī'īs is to recognize this imām, regardless of which sect believers belonged to, as he was the true leader of all Shī'ites. After identifying their imām as the true leader of the party of 'Alī, Ikhwān then divide the believers into three categories. The first are members who have become well learned in the field of religion and have realized the sciences and secrets of the prophecies and philosophical sciences. This group is the one in which the Brethren reside. Next they describe a group composed of members who "are in 'doubt about our [i.e. the imām's] existence and perplexed with regard to the question whether we are alive' while 'others are convinced of the fact that we are alive yet neglectful of our cause and ignorant of our secrets'."<sup>224</sup> This description was in reference to the Shī'ites who either were unconvinced that the imām was alive and just in hiding or were convinced of that fact yet they failed to support that cause.

The last group held the membership of the general human populace. This group is described by the Ikhwān as "those from our confession who admit our excellence and also the excellence of the people from our house, but who ignore our sciences and pay no attention to our secrets and wisdom; among other things, they deny our existence,

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<sup>224</sup> *Rasā'il* in Callataj, 97.

refuse to believe that we are still alive, and on top of that they revile our followers who affirm our existence and expect the manifestation of our cause; the oppose with these latter and gang up against them, detesting [them].”<sup>225</sup> It is in these statements that the possible Ismā’īlī aims of the Ikhwān can be seen. They write about other Shī’īs who accept the virtue of ‘Alī and his family, but do not follow the imām and path laid out by the Brethren. Their claims that these people revile the followers of the Ikhwān and gang up against them are easy to connect with the persecution that faced many Ismā’īlī communities by Shī’ī and Sunnī alike, as well as the idea that their teachings should be eradicated or ignored. Here one can also see the basic outline of the doctrine of *ta’wīl*<sup>226</sup> that was so emphasized by later Ismā’īlīs, in which the Ikhwān provide the teaching authority that was missing in the time of an absent imām or *dawr al-satr*.

### Historical Eras and Their End

An additional aspect of the cosmological system proposed by the Ikhwān that would have attracted Ismā’īlī scholars is their emphasis on cycles of prophetic eras in history. Deemed the theory of prophetic cycles by Yves Marquet, this theory is not fully explained by the Brethren but alluded to throughout their work. It seems to be a synthesis of their assumption that the planets have an affect the course of history and that history in general is cyclical in nature and has been divided into seven prophetic eras. In this second proposal the Ikhwān share a direct link with the cosmological doctrine in Ismā’īlism. In Ismā’īlī cosmology, each era had a prophet to come and share

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>226</sup> “The educing of the inner meaning from the literal wording or apparent meaning of a text or a ritual, religious prescription; as a technical term among the Shī’īs, particularly the Ismā’īlīs, it denotes the method of educing the *bāṭin* from the *zāhir*; as such it was extensively used by the Ismā’īlīs for allegorical, symbolic or esoteric interpretation of the Qur’ān, the *sharī’a*, historical events and the world of nature. Translated also as a spiritual or hermeneutic exegesis, *ta’wīl* may be distinguished from *tafsīr*.” Daftary, *The Ismā’īlīs*, 522.

the exoteric (*zāhir*) secrets of the divine with the common man. While similar to Ismā'īlī doctrine, the cosmological system found in the *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' was slightly different. They attributed each prophetic cycle with one thousand years, making the total number of years in history to equal seven thousand. The authors of the *Rasā'il* also proposed that at the end of each cycle “all the incarnated souls of this cycle would be assembled and faced with a sort of minor collective day of judgment.”<sup>227</sup> Each soul would be judged on his own actions. If the good actions outweighed the bad they would ascend to Paradise and if the bad outweighed the good they would descend to Hell.

To the Ikhwān four cardinal virtues will be weighed on the day of judgment, “namely: (1) knowing the realities of existing beings; (2) believing in valid opinions; (3) having good manners and praiseworthy character traits; and (4) acting properly and behaving well.”<sup>228</sup> Interestingly, to the Ikhwān the two options of Heaven and Hell were not the only ones. They view the Qur'ānic Barrier (*barzakh*) as described in some *ḥadīth* as the third possibility to each soul. This idea was traditionally used as an intermediary space between death and judgment where souls who die before the Hour will wait. However the Ikhwān see it as “a metaphor for the cycle of successive reincarnations that an imperfect soul must endure to complete its purification before it is allowed to share the blissful status of those who have already arrived in Paradise.”<sup>229</sup>

### Conclusion

The *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' are unparalleled with any other work of their day. While the universality of their message held by the Ikhwān does not compliment the

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, 30.

clandestine ways of the Ismā'īlīs, they do connect with Ismā'īlī cosmology and pedagogical methodology. Both the Ikhwān and the Ismā'īlīs held that only an elect few could understand the highest levels of spiritual knowledge and both sought to teach initiates how to gain knowledge of God. The Ikhwān sought to integrate religious, natural and philosophical sciences in a way that would enable man to attain the highest level of enlightenment possible while on this earth. It is obvious that their hierarchal categorization of cosmology and a stress on the true teaching authority rings true with many of the themes found in Ismā'īlism and it is obvious that these facts were viewed favorably by Ismā'īlī readers. This true teaching authority was the imām, who holds a central role in Ismā'īlī educational methodology. The role and the importance of the imām has remained unchanging throughout Ismā'īlī history, and is central to understanding pedagogical methodology and spiritual education in Ismā'īlism.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE NECESSITY OF THE IMĀM AS AN EDUCATIONAL AND SPIRITUAL GUIDE

Educational practices have continued to evolve throughout Ismāʿīlī history. However, what has not changed is the fact that scholarship and spiritual education has remained at the forefront of Ismāʿīlī development and practice. The role played by the imām in the education of the community is invaluable, as he is the sole individual that can lead the believers to true knowledge of the unity of God. The necessity of the imām is centered in this ultimate goal sought by humanity. He is to work with the community throughout the ages according to each individual's ability to attain this knowledge. The Ismāʿīlī imām has continued to serve this role into modern times and he is now called the Aga Khan. Recent Ismāʿīlism has been characterized by a synthesis of spiritual leadership with more modern secular policies. As a result, Farhad Daftary writes that "the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs have entered the modern world as a progressive and prosperous community with very high standards of education."<sup>230</sup> The imāmates of the Aga Khans represent an embracing of the concepts of compassion, tolerance, and the individual dignity of man in a time when spiritual leaders are speaking out in opposition against religious totalitarianism. Following the tradition of the Shīʿīs, Aga Khan IV states that he seeks to "safeguard the individual's right to personal intellectual search and to give practical expression to the ethical vision of society that the Islamic

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<sup>230</sup> Farhad Daftary, "Untitled," review of *Throne of Gold: The Lives of the Aga Khans*, by Anne Edwards, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, October-December, 1996, 788.

message inspires.”<sup>231</sup> Thus, the imām plays an invaluable role in the Ismā’īlī community and has been able to evolve educational practices according to the level of preparedness of mankind from the beginnings of Ismā’īlism well into the modern era.

The necessity of the imām can be understood by looking at the first pillar of Ismā’īlism, which is the necessity of belief (*īmān*). Ismā’īlīs distinguish this from *islām* or “surrender” by explaining that it is more than just acknowledging the divine unity of God, it is also gaining knowledge of that unity. *Islām* is a pre-requisite for knowledge; one must surrender to the truth of God before they will be able to learn about his true nature. Recorded in the writings of the Ismā’īlī chief *dā’ī* al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān<sup>232</sup> (d. 363/974) is the Ismā’īlī *shahādah* which is “to witness that there is no God but God and Muḥammad is His servant and Messenger; to believe in Heaven, Hell, Resurrection, and Doomsday, in God’s Prophets and Messengers and in the Imāms, to know and acknowledge the Imām of the time (*imām az-zamān*) and to submit to his will; to comply with God’s command’s; and to obey the Imām and accept his commands.”<sup>233</sup> It is here that the importance of knowing the imām is introduced and it becomes clear that through him one can attain perfection in belief. Dr. Sami Makaremi<sup>234</sup> explains that this is because “the imām in Ismā’īlism is the one who guides the believers to knowledge

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<sup>231</sup> The Ismaili, “His Highness the Aga Khan,” Ismaili Muslim Community, <http://www.theismaili.org/cms/14/The-Aga-Khan> (accessed April 7, 2010).

<sup>232</sup> An Ismā’īlī jurist and historian during the period of Fāṭimid Ismā’īlism. He began his career in Ifrīqiya and quickly rose to be the most prominent judge of his time in the Fāṭimid Empire. He wrote a vast number of books on the history of Ismā’īlism, biographies of caliphs, and on jurisprudence and *ta’wīl*.

<sup>233</sup> Al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān’s *Da’ā’im al-Islām*, vol. 1, p. 5. in Sami Nasib Makaremi, *The Doctrine of the Isma’ilis* (Beirut: the Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 1972), 13.

<sup>234</sup> A Lebanese scholar, writer, poet, and artist. He obtained his Bachelor’s Degree in literature and philosophy as well as his Master’s Degree in Arabic literature at the American University of Beirut. He received his Ph.D. in 1963 in Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Michigan.

(*ma'rifa*) and it is only through knowledge that the Muslim (who is such by mere acknowledgement (*iqrār*) of the divine Message) becomes a true believer (*mu'min*).”<sup>235</sup>

### The Doctrine of the Imāmate in Ismā'īlī Islam

The doctrine of the imāmate is an important concept for all Shī'īs, not just Ismā'īlīs specifically. Within Shī'ism in general, believers felt that the Prophet's successor must also hold his charisma which had a religious basis at its core. This religious charisma had been endowed upon the successors within the Prophet's family who also possessed the prophetic core innately held by the imām. Within Ismā'īlism specifically, the imāmate can be traced to the dispute over succession after the death of the sixth Shī'ī Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq in 148/765. Before his death he had designated his son Ismā'īl ibn Ja'far as his successor by *naṣṣ*<sup>236</sup>. However, Ismā'īl died before his father throwing the Imām's choice under scrutiny. A faction of believers that are forerunners to Twelver Shī'ism believed that Ja'far al-Ṣādiq then designated his son Mūsā ibn Ja'far<sup>237</sup>, Ismā'īl's younger half-brother, to be the next imām. This belief was not held by all however, and at his death three of his sons claimed succession. While his son Mūsā ibn Ja'far gained the allegiance of the majority of Shī'īs two groups within their ranks supported the claims of Ismā'īl ibn Ja'far and his son Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl. The supporters of Ismā'īl ibn Ja'far claimed that he had not in fact died, the announcement of his death was only a ruse to protect him and he would return at the end of the age as

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<sup>235</sup> Makaremi, 14.

<sup>236</sup> *Naṣṣ* is the “explicit designation of a successor by his predecessor, particularly relating to the Shī'ī view of succession to the imāmate, whereby each imām, under divine guidance, designates his successor.” Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 520.

<sup>237</sup> Later known as Mūsā al-Kāẓim.

the Mahdī or *qā'im*.<sup>238</sup> The Mahdī would guide the community in the final era of mankind's history. This group has been termed the "pure Ismā'īliyya."<sup>239</sup>

It is the second group however, the supporters of Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl (later called the Mubārakiyya), who can be called the forerunners of today's Shī'a Imāmī Ismā'īlism. Claiming that Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl was actually the true successor to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, they eventually split into two separate groups upon his death. The larger of these two sects refused to acknowledge the death of Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl and claimed he had not died and was actually waiting to reappear as the Mahdī. When he re-appeared to mankind he would abrogate the previous exoteric laws brought by the Prophet Muḥammad and an age of true spiritual knowledge and reality would be ushered in.

Justification for the imām's role can be found within the cosmology of Ismā'īlism as well as in the Qur'ān. Within cosmological doctrine, man appears at the end of creation and he is very far from his origin and his Creator. The cosmological doctrines espoused by the Ismā'īlīs (explained in Chapters 2 and 3) clarify that the only way to bring about man's salvation is to close his distance from God, which is achieved through knowledge of his origins and knowledge of the reasoning behind his distance from God. Certain people belonging to the House of Prophethood, such as imāms, prophets, and chiefs, guide humanity in the attainment of this knowledge. The imāmate, aided by the *dā'īs* who summon others with the call of Ismā'īlism, is the

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<sup>238</sup> Also translated as "riser," this is the eschatological Mahdī. In pre-Fāṭimid Ismā'īlism, the terms Mahdī and *qā'im* "were both used, as in Imāmī Shīism, for the expected messianic imām. After the rise of the Fāṭimids, the name al-Mahdī was reserved for the first Fāṭimid caliph-imām, while the eschatological imām and seventh *nāṭiq* still expected for the future was called the *qā'im* by the Ismā'īlīs." Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 520.

<sup>239</sup> Daftary, 90.

culminating office that is filled by God's representatives to fulfill this duty and his existence is thus imperative. Without the imām, "the purity of religious truth would be jeopardized and the world would be plunged into anarchy and chaos."<sup>240</sup>

As a culminating office, evidence for the nature of the imāmate is found within the Qur'ān. Within Sūra 2 is an explanation of how God honored Ibrāhīm with the office of the imāmate. Verse 124 states: "And [remember this:] when his Sustainer tried Abraham by [His] commandments and the latter fulfilled them, He said: 'Behold, I shall make thee a leader of men.' Abraham asked: 'And [wilt Thou make leaders of] my offspring as well?' [God] answered: 'My covenant does not embrace the evildoers'." He received this additional station because of the strength of his belief and faith in God. Ibrāhīm is already a prophet at this point and he already has the responsibility of guiding the community, however the additional station of imām provides Ibrāhīm with the role of influencing the community he was set to guide. He receives this appointment after he is already a friend of God; and this is an additional element to the divine covenant between Ibrāhīm and God.

Additional basis for the necessity of the imām can be found within the Qur'ān. Sūra 4 verses 58-59 of the Qur'ān refer to whoever holds the authority of God. These people can be interpreted as being "those persons to whom the ruling governmental functions peculiar to the Prophet have been transferred, to whom the leadership of Islamic society has been entrusted by God and His Messenger, and who are the guardians of the religious and worldly affairs of the people."<sup>241</sup> These guardians are not

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<sup>240</sup> Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997), 12.

<sup>241</sup> Sayyid Mujtaba Musavi Lari, *Imāmate and Leadership: Lessons of Islamic Doctrine Book 4*, trans. Hamid Algar (Qum: Foundation of Islamic Cultural Propagation in the World, 1996), 121.

just any ruler, for God would not allow the conveyance of his message to rely on a tyrant or corrupt leader. The holders of authority are in fact the members of the Prophet's family who have been cleansed of all their sins, those imāms who have continued the leadership of the Shī'ī community. The sinlessness of this guide is also imperative as this is the only way he will be able to remain the divinely appointed intermediary between humanity and God. Sayyid Mujtaba Musavi Lari<sup>242</sup> explains that "were human society to lack such a divinely chosen person, man would be unable by the efforts of his own intellect alone to find his directions, no link would exist between the human race and the world of the unseen, and man's efforts to attain perfection would falter and fail."<sup>243</sup> The straight path of Islam can only remain open with a divinely appointed guide showing the way.

But it is not enough to just believe in the necessity of the imām, one must also believe in his inerrancy. This too has Qur'ānic backing. It is not that the imāms no longer have the ability to sin or disobey, but the "possessor of inerrancy, while having freedom to choose and to act, is prevented by his awareness of the majesty and constant presence of God from approaching the sphere of sin. He has had such success in establishing the dominion of piety over his soul that he cannot even conceive of sin in the purified sanctuary of his mind, so that the possibility of his actually committing a sin is reduced to zero."<sup>244</sup> The inerrancy of the imām provides him with additional credibility, protected from sin by his knowledge of God's unity and his observations of the true nature of the world. The confidence given to believers because of this

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<sup>242</sup> An Ithnā'ashari Muslim scholar who has composed works on topics such as the imāmate, God and his attributes, ethics, spiritual growth, resurrection, and judgment.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 166.

character is invaluable. They know the message that came from God has not been allowed to decay or be distorted in the hands of their imām and their guidance along the straight path of Islam is true.

The doctrine of the imāmate is based on this necessary role. Makaremi writes that “as the Messengers are necessary to proclaim the divine Message (the plain revelation of which was finally conveyed to mankind in full by the Prophet Muḥammad), so an [i]mām is necessary in every time to guide the believers in the right path indicated in the divine Message. He is also necessary to teach those believers the esoteric (*bāṭin*) meaning of this revelation and the real sense of the divine Message, i.e. the knowledge of the unity of God.”<sup>245</sup> The successor of the Prophet is required to fulfill this important spiritual function that is connected to his role as an infallible interpreter and teacher of the Islamic message. The imām must carry on teaching the exoteric message and esoteric meaning of the Qur’ān and his teaching will be necessary until the final age of humanity. It is the *ta’līm*<sup>246</sup>, or divinely inspired authoritative teaching, of the imām that is a focal point of the Ismā’īlī Imāmate. The existence of the imām is what has enabled Islamic learning to continue throughout time. Lari writes that “even in the lands ruled by harsh and savage rulers, at a time when the caliphs were sunk in corruption and transgression and strove to prevent society from imbibing in Islamic knowledge, the numerous utterances and traditions of the imāms, rich in learning and wisdom and pertaining to all aspects of faith, served to preserve religion and give the necessary guidance to society.”<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Makaremi, 40.

<sup>246</sup> Translated as “teaching” or “instruction” *ta’līm* in Shī’ism is the “authoritative teaching in religion which could be carried out only by an imām in every age after the Prophet.” Daftary, *The Ismā’īlīs*, 522.

<sup>247</sup> Lari, 145.

### The Conveyance of Knowledge through the Imām and the *Da'wa*

The knowledge that the imām has been entrusted with conveying has appeared to mankind in stages. The cycles within Ismā'īlism's hierohistory have provided mankind with new aspects of God's message, each coming according to the level of spiritual preparedness that humanity has reached. The exoteric messages proclaimed by the prophets of each age have been bringing mankind one step closer to the knowledge of God's unity. In this way, mankind has been participating in spiritual and intellectual development throughout the cycles within time. In the work entitled *Rāḥat al-'Aql* written by the al-Kirmānī the hierarchy of God's messengers within each cycle is explained. The author writes that the first three ranks within this hierarchy of individuals are the Proclaimer (*al-nāṭiq*<sup>248</sup>), the Foundation (*al-asās*<sup>249</sup>), and the Imām. About the imām he writes that "his function is to carry on this inner knowledge and guide the Community along its line. These upper functions are in fact three aspects of one single function, namely that of imāmate in its broader sense, that is, the teaching of the divine Message."<sup>250</sup>

The teaching and learning of this divine message has been a characteristic mark within Ismā'īlism from the very beginnings of the movement. However, a schism early within the sect signaled a change in the role of the imām. In 286/899 a prominent *dā'ī*<sup>251</sup>

<sup>248</sup> Literally translates as "speaker" or "one gifted with speech." In Ismā'īlī thought, "a speaking or law-announcing prophet who brings a new religious law (*sharī'a*), abrogating the previous law and, hence, initiating a new *dawr* in the religious history of mankind." Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 520. The first six *nāṭiqs* were Ādam, Nūḥ, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, 'Īsā, and Muḥammad.

<sup>249</sup> Literally translates as "foundation," the *asās* typically serves as a successor to the *nāṭiq*.

<sup>250</sup> Al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'Aql*, p. 252 in Makaremi, 30.

<sup>251</sup> The *dā'īs* were proselytizers or missionaries who travelled and called others to the faith of Ismā'īlism. The term is typically translated as "missionary" and literally means "he who summons." A *dā'ī* is a "religious propagandist or missionary of various Muslim groups, especially amongst the Ismā'īlīs and other Shī'ī groups; a high rank in the *da'wa* hierarchy of the Ismā'īlīs. The term *dā'ī* came to be used generically from early on by the Ismā'īlīs in reference to any authorized representative of their *da'wa*; a

named Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ<sup>252</sup> who had organized the *da'wa*<sup>253</sup> in villages around Kūfa and other areas of Southern Iraq, noticed a change in the instructions he was receiving from Ismā'īlī headquarters, at the time located in Salamiyya. After learning that the new leader, Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh al-Mahdī<sup>254</sup>, was claiming the imāmate for himself and his ancestors Ḥamdān renounced his allegiance to central leadership and suspended *da'wa* activities in the areas under his control. Until this time in Ismā'īlī history, it was believed that the office of the imāmate still rested with Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl who was waiting to return as the Mahdī at the end of times. The claim of 'Abd Allāh al-Mahdī meant that he and his ancestors were not actually *ḥujjas*<sup>255</sup> standing in for the Imām in his absence, but true imāms who were continuing the line of Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl.

The previous belief in the Mahdīship of Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl had left no room for any imāms after him. He would return to provide deliverance in this world and salvation in the next and in his absence the *da'wa* would continue his teachings. 'Abd Allāh al-Mahdī explained that the belief in the continuance of the imāmate by

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propagandist responsible for spreading the Ismā'īlī religion and for winning suitable converts.” Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 515.

<sup>252</sup> Converted to Ismā'īlism around 264/877-8. From the Sawād in Kūfa (S. Iraq), Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ was an influential figure in the organization of the *da'wa* in Southern Iraq. The converts that he won over to the Ismā'īlī cause were referred to as the Qarāmiṭa (s. Qarmaṭī), a term that came to be applied to many sections of the Ismā'īlī movement.

<sup>253</sup> The early Ismā'īlī community (2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> c.) designated themselves as the “rightly guiding mission” (*al-da'wa al-hādiya*) or simply as the *da'wa*. The *da'wa* culminated in 297/909 in the Fāṭimid State and participated in revolutionary activities challenging the authority of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate and recruiting initiates to Ismā'īlism. The *da'wa* is the “invitation or call to adopt the cause of an individual or family claiming the right to the imāmate; it also refers to the entire hierarchy of ranks, sometimes called *ḥudūd* within the particular religious organization developed, especially amongst the Ismā'īlīs.” Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 515.

<sup>254</sup> The Ismā'īlī Imām in power during the Ismā'īlī-Qarmaṭī Schism of 286/899. His assumption of the role of imām changed the eschatological function previously held by the Mahdī removing the previous messianic role of the title. Additionally, he was proclaimed the first Fāṭimid caliph-imām in 297/910.

<sup>255</sup> Translated as “proof” or “testimony.” The term is used to describe the imāms without whom the world would not exist. Daftary explains that the *ḥujjat Allāh* or “God’s proof” was used synonymously with imām in early Imāmī Shī'ī tradition. In every era there is a *ḥujja* of God, and he may be a prophet, a messenger-prophet, or an imām.

Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl was in fact a misunderstanding based on something as simple as a name. He explained to his followers that Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl was in fact a pseudonym used by all the imāms in the line of Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl. The term then acquired a new collective meaning that applied to every imām after him until the advent of the Mahdī. This new information was proposed as a lifting of *taqiyya*<sup>256</sup> which had been previously required of the community. Two rival factions developed from this reform, one accepting the claims of ‘Abd Allāh al-Mahdī and one not. Those who accepted the reform were later incorporated into the official Fāṭimid Empire and its doctrine, which professes the necessity of a visible imām as the head of the community. The second group called the Qarāmiṭa did not recognize the Fāṭimid caliphs as imāms and survived well into the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century in places such as Southern Iraq.

With the establishment of the Fāṭimid Caliphate in the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century the clandestine teachings of the Ismāʿīlī movement were moved into the light. The imāms were able to spread their message openly through their network of *dāʿīs* who helped continue the instruction of initiates to Ismāʿīlism. Heinz Halm<sup>257</sup> explains that the *dāʿī* as a teacher “is the most characteristic figure of the Ismāʿīlī movement.”<sup>258</sup> Until they were able to practice openly in Fāṭimid times, the *dāʿīs* had been itinerant ministers traveling under the guise of anything inconspicuous, including tailor and date harvester. They helped new Ismāʿīlī initiates take the oath of allegiance close to home as well as in areas where the reach of the Imām was strained. They taught “sessions of

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<sup>256</sup> “Precautionary dissimulation of one’s true religious beliefs, especially in time of danger; used especially by the Twelver (Ithnā’asharī) and Ismāʿīlī Shīʿīs.” Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 522.

<sup>257</sup> Heinz Halm is a leading German scholar and specialist in Ismāʿīlī and Islamic Studies. He is a professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Tübingen and the author of numerous works on Islam, Shīʿism and Ismāʿīlism. His shorter works have appeared in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, the *Encyclopedia Iranica*, and numerous scholarly journals such as *Studica Islamica*.

<sup>258</sup> Heinz Halm, *The Fatimids and their Traditions of Learning* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1997), 18.

wisdom” (*majālis al-ḥikma*) in areas ranging from Ifrīqiya to Iran. While there is only one surviving Ismāʿīlī text that is complete and explains fully the initiation of individuals into Ismāʿīlism, the *Kitāb al-ʿĀlim waʾl-ghulām*, evidence of the sessions of wisdom also come from the writings of Niẓām al-Mulk such as the *Siyāsat-nāma* (*The Book of Government*) and those of al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān such as the *Kitāb iftitāḥ al-daʿwa* (*Book of the Commencement of the Mission*).

Early texts illustrating the sessions of wisdom propagated by the *dāʿīs* show how great their pedagogical skill was. They were able to adapt their message accordingly for each individual’s learning style and spiritual aptitude showing an early priority in the effectiveness of spiritual education. Halm writes that “the *dāʿī* should not withhold from the initiate the knowledge he is entitled to, but he should not overfeed him lest this cause confusion in his head which might lead to doubts or even apostasy.”<sup>259</sup> During the Fāṭimid period, midday teaching sessions espousing the *bāṭin*<sup>260</sup> of God’s message were held for special initiates by the chief *dāʿīs*, such as al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān. These sessions were held within the palace and were separate from the teaching sessions regarding right practice and belief that were open to the public in the Azhar Mosque. While the sessions of wisdom may have been held by the *dāʿīs* and not the imām himself, it was well known that the imām was “the source of wisdom, the *dāʿī* was merely his mouthpiece.”<sup>261</sup> The *dāʿīs* would write out their weekly lectures and then submit them for review to the imām who would correct them if necessary and then

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>260</sup> “The inward, hidden, or esoteric meaning behind the literal wording of sacred texts and religious prescriptions, notably the Qurʾān and the *sharīʿa* as distinct from the *ẓāhir*; hence, Bāṭinīs, Bāṭiniyya, the groups associated with such ideas. Most of these groups were Shīʿī, particularly Ismāʿīlī.” Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 515.

<sup>261</sup> Halm, *The Fatimids and their Traditions of Learning*, 29.

sign the lessons thereby authorizing them. Halm explains that it is probable that these lessons were sent to other *dā'īs* throughout the empire ensuring uniform instruction of the Ismā'īlī doctrine.

The system of mission work was set up in a hierarchal structure. The imām remained at the head of course, as he is the only true store of knowledge and wisdom. Next was the chief *dā'ī* who was usually the supreme judge as well so that the exoteric form of law and the esoteric meaning within that law were entrusted to the same person. Throughout the empire other *dā'īs* worked under the chief *dā'ī*. They recruited initiates, administered the oath of initiation to them, and performed sessions of wisdom. Because not much is mentioned about the organization of the Ismā'īlī *da'wa* in Ismā'īlī sources, Halm hypothesizes that “the *da'wa* organization in the Fāṭimid empire must have been something so commonplace and familiar that the chroniclers did not find it necessary to mention it.”<sup>262</sup> With this in mind, it becomes clear just how important the Ismā'īlī *da'wa* was as a core to the movement.

Outside the empire Ismā'īlī communities were organized into “islands” (*jazā'ir*) each of which was under the control of a highly ranked *dā'ī* called the *ḥujja*. In his book *Rāḥat al-'Aql (The Peace of the Intellect)* al-Kirmānī refers to himself as the *dā'ī* of the island of Iraq and alludes to the existence of other islands in places such as Sind and Yemen. Under each *ḥujja* were several regional and local *dā'īs* who each had assistants called the *adlati*, which literally translates as “deputy.” The responsibilities of these *dā'īs* were to inspect districts as well as the training and appointment of individual *dā'īs*. The *dā'īs* of higher ranks, such as *ḥujjas* were required to go to Cairo if at all possible for

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 57.

their training. There they would meet the chief *dā'ī* and possibly the imām while they were schooled in the ways of the movement.

The time of the Fāṭimid Empire was one in which Ismā'īlī developed specific educational methodology in order to pass their doctrines onto new initiates as well as explaining them to current believers. In addition to the sessions of wisdom held by individual *dā'īs*, a “House of Knowledge” was established during the reign of Caliph al-Ḥākim (r. 373-412/996-1021). This university-like institution had a wide range of disciplines, such as Qur'ān reading, law, tradition, philology and grammar, medicine and logic, mathematics and astronomy. Lecturers at the institution were paid from a new economic endowment created by al-Ḥākim. While the House of Knowledge was destroyed around 452/1060, the diversity of disciplines it taught shows the range of knowledge expected to be held by each Ismā'īlī *dā'ī*. *Dā'īs* were expected to have a thirst for knowledge and learning and it was believed that debating with other scholars, Ismā'īlī and non-Ismā'īlī alike, would increase the knowledge held by the *dā'ī*. These debates would make the *dā'ī* more intelligent and it was believed that “the ignorant man should not be ashamed to ask questions, and even the knowledgeable, when there is something he has ignored, should admit it.”<sup>263</sup> Only then could the individual continue along the path toward knowledge of God's unity.

### **The Nizārī-Musta'li Schism and a New Focus on the Imāmate**

The unified message spread by the Fāṭimid Ismā'īlīs did not remain unified for long. The reign of the caliph al-Mustaṣṣir<sup>264</sup> (d. 487/1094) ended in another major

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>264</sup> Fāṭimid caliph who had an uncommonly long reign leading to several possible factors for the Nizārī separation from the Fāṭimid state. With a large number of potential heirs (some sources say the

schism in the sect. Before his death, al-Mustanşir's reign was blemished by an economic collapse in Egypt around 454/1062. Order was regained about five years later by Badr al-Jamālī<sup>265</sup> (d. 487/1094), who had been invited to Egypt to ensure this process occurred. He was able to gain control of the caliphate for about twenty years and "restored the financial base of the Imām's position by ensuring conditions that allowed Ismā'īlī organizations to function."<sup>266</sup> Upon his death, Badr al-Jamālī's son al-Afḍal gained his father's position and was then able to ensure the succession of Abu'l-Qāsim Aḥmad, later known as al-Musta'li, on the death of al-Mustanşir, who was the husband of al-Afḍal's sister. With the appointment of al-Mustanşir's youngest son as the new caliph his older sons, namely Nizār, 'Abdullah, and Ismā'īl, showed discontentment. From here the Nizārī schism occurred leading to another major group in Ismā'īlī history. The Nizārī Ismā'īlīs recognized validity in the claims made by al-Mustanşir's son Nizār, not by the son who was actually appointed as imām. After the death of Nizār in 488/1095 the Nizārīs believed his imāmate was continued in hiding through his descendents. Nizārī Ismā'īlism gained support in Iran and northern Syria.

The Nizārī schism begins what is considered the Post-Fāṭimid era of Ismā'īlī development with the caliphate ending during the height of Nizārī power. The Nizārīs captured many fortresses in Persia and Syria such as Alamūt, Quhistān, and Qadmūs. The leading *dā'ī* within the Nizārī movement was Ḥasan- Ṣābbāḥ who was born into a Twelver Shī'ī family in the town of Qumm in western Iran. He studied in Rayy and went

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minimum number of possible children was 17) left after his death, the lack of definite policy for the choice of a successor led to the conditions for a schism.

<sup>265</sup> Originally from outside Cairo, he hosted the son of al-Mustanşir 'Abdullah during the period of economic distress in Egypt. He returned to the city with the caliph's son in 459/1067. He and his son were blamed for the ills in Egypt by the Nizārīs and their supporters after the schism.

<sup>266</sup> Paul E. Walker, *Fāṭimid History and Ismaili Doctrine* (Burlington: Ashgate, 1988), 25.

to Egypt in 470/1078 as a representative of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Malik-i ‘Aṭṭāsh. He was designated a *dā’ī* and served the Fāṭimid Ismā’īlī *da’wa* from 473/1081 to 482/1090. Travelling around in the lands under Saljūq control, he purchased the fortress at Alamūt, near the coast of the Caspian Sea in the Elburz Mountains, from the lord ‘Alid Mahdī after converting the garrison before his arrival. Ḥasan’s primary objectives in his time at Alamūt were defensive, “strengthening the stronghold; and alternately provisioning it, and holding it against the Saljūq power; yet meanwhile he helped to direct an uprising throughout the Saljūq realms, all from within his four walls.”<sup>267</sup>

As can be seen by their estrangement from the Fāṭimid Caliphate over the succession of the next imām, the Nizārīs “showed particular interest in the doctrine of the imāmate. From the time of Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ the Persian Ismā’īlīs concentrated their doctrinal speculations on the reality of the imām and the imāmate as transcending history and the physical world.”<sup>268</sup> This focus was a shifting away from the traditional focus of the Fāṭimid Caliphate and early Ismā’īlī thought, in which the doctrines of esoterism and a Neoplatonic cosmological system predominated. Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ’s writings (namely the *Fuṣūl-i arba’a*) focused on the Shī’ī doctrine of *ta’līm*, in which declared that an individual Muslim did not have the authority to decide upon the truths of spiritual teachings, but must rely on the decisions of the proper authorities, the true imāms. Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ set about critiquing the doctrine in a statement with four propositions, each one “aimed to prove that only the Ismā’īlī imām fulfilled the role of the authoritative teacher after the Prophet.”<sup>269</sup> Since God sent a Prophet to tell and judge the things of God to men, then it stood to reason that divine aid would also

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<sup>267</sup> Hodgson, 50.

<sup>268</sup> Daftary, “The Ismā’īlīs,” 339.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 341.

have been sent to preserve the religion upon his death. Therefore knowledge came from *ta'lim* and not from the opinions of scholars (*ra'y*).

Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ's first proposition sought to eliminate the rationalistic views of the individual in favor of one authoritative view, in order to keep Islam unified. He refuted the positions of scholars, particularly philosophers, who believed that individual reasoning and judgment was a pathway to the comprehension of ultimate truth. In the next two propositions he set out to prove that Sunnī and other Shī'ī traditions failed to follow this principle of a single authority. He opposed the Sunnī view of the possibility of many teachers, as this made no one any more authoritative than the next. Additionally, other Shī'ī positions were flawed even though they focused on a single trustworthy figure. For this single trustworthy figure, the other Shī'īs required a demonstration of divine guidance which was then required to be confirmed by the previously proven figure, and so on. In this case we are brought back to our starting point of inadequacy for "either the authority of the teacher must be demonstrated, or any teacher must be accepted as authoritative."<sup>270</sup>

It is in his fourth proposition that he seeks to solve this dilemma. Using a dialectical principle for all true knowledge, he claimed that knowledge required the relationship be formed by a contrast between two opposites. This relationship was "between the individual person who wished to know and the authoritative teacher whom he must discover."<sup>271</sup> The individual uses his own reasoning to realize that a teacher is needed, and the imām's very existence fulfills the individual's need for authority. In the first three propositions we can see that not only are the results of

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<sup>270</sup> Hodgson, 54.

<sup>271</sup> Daftary, "The Ismā'īlīs," 341.

reason incomprehensible without the imām, but likewise the imām is unintelligible without the direction of reason. Our reasoning leads us to recognize the ultimate truth of the imāmate for “the only true imām must be that imām who depends on this dialectical process for his demonstration.”<sup>272</sup> Therefore, both halves of this relationship are necessary for the existence of either one.

There is more than one way to reach the ultimate calling, but it is our reasoning that tells us of the need we have to search for a universal finality. However, the use of reason should be limited to the search for an ultimate authority. Recognition must be made of the falsehood in plurality and the truth in unity. To enforce this point, Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ uses the ideal of *‘ijma*, claiming that it “implies that somewhere in the community the truth must be available; but the others have been proved wrong; therefore the truth must remain with Ḥasan, by the Sunnī’s own doctrine.”<sup>273</sup> Human rationality brings one to the inherent truth of the imām and his absolute authority. This idea focused much of the theological teaching of the Nizārī Ismā’īlīs and was further developed by his successors.

### **The Work of the Modern Qāsim-Shāhī Imāms**

The imāms in modern Shī’a Imāmī Ismā’īlism are descended from the line of Nizārī Imāms. Nizārī tradition holds that there was an unbroken line of succession to the Nizārī imāmate in the post-Alamūt period. This line is called the Qāsim-Shāhī line of imāms and continues to the present day. The forty-sixth Nizārī Imām, Ḥasan ‘Alī Shāh was bestowed the honorific title of Aga Khan, meaning lord and master, by the Iranian leader Fatḥ ‘Alī Shāh, a title that has remained hereditary amongst his

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<sup>272</sup> Hodgson, 56.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 59.

successors. Appointed as governor of places such as Kirmān, Maḥallāt, and Qum, he was eventually forced to leave Iran arriving in British India in the summer of 1257/1841 settling in Bombay.

With the establishment of the Nizārī imāmate in Bombay, the modern period of Nizārī history began. Farhad Daftary explains that “this period in Nizārī history has been characterized by the progressive leadership of the Nizārī Imāms, who introduced numerous policies together with appropriate institutional reforms for socio-economic and educational development of the Nizārī Ismā’īlīs.”<sup>274</sup> Upon the death of Aga Khan I in 1298/1881, Ḥasan ‘Alī Shāh was succeeded by his son Āqā ‘Alī Shāh. Aga Khan II maintained the relations his father developed with the British and spent much of his time concerned with the care of the Nizārī Khojas<sup>275</sup> in Bombay. During his life he worked on promoting many educational and charitable projects that would benefit all Indian Muslims, not just Ismā’īlīs.

After a brief imāmate of only four years Aga Khan II was succeeded by his son Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh al-Ḥusaynī in 1302/1885, the forty-eighth Imām and Aga Khan III. Offering his services to the British government at the outbreaks of World War I and II, he urged his territories to aid the British during the war. For his services, Aga Khan III was “accorded in 1916 the status of a first class prince of the Bombay Presidency.”<sup>276</sup> He devoted most of his time after the wars away from the international political scene focusing again on the Nizārī Ismā’īlī community. A primary concern was that of

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<sup>274</sup> Daftary, *The Ismā’īlīs*, 406.

<sup>275</sup> The term *khoja* is the Indian transformation of the term *khwāja*, a term meaning “master” and is “a title used in different senses in Islamic lands; it was frequently accorded to scholars, teachers, merchants, and *wazīrs*.” In India it denotes “an Indian caste consisting mostly of Nizārī Ismā’īlīs. In a looser sense, Khoja is used in reference to an Indian Nizārī, or a Nizārī of Indian origins, in general.” Ibid, 518.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 482.

education and “Aga Khan III campaigned most energetically for various educational projects, for Khojas and other Indian Muslims.”<sup>277</sup> Additionally, he encouraged his followers to assimilate socially and culturally into their countries trying to reduce difficulties for Nizārīs who lived as minorities.

Aga Khan III spent much of his time trying to modernize his followers with high standards of education and welfare. In order to do this, an appropriate administrative organization must be complete, thus he set up many institutional and administrative reforms. While he sought to modernize the communities of his followers, the Imām was also concerned with the preservation of Nizārī culture and the new reforms and policies were set in a way that would not destroy the traditions and identities of the Nizārī community. In 1905, after his second visit to East Africa, Aga Khan III “issued a set of written rules and regulations that in effect comprised the first constitution of the East African Nizārī community. This constitution foresaw a new administrative organization in the form of a hierarchy of councils, and it also established rules for governing the personal relations of the community.”<sup>278</sup> These first steps to modernize and reorganize the East African Nizārī community were soon adapted to other Nizārī Ismā’īlī communities in need. All of these constitutions revolve around the Aga Khan who is recognized as the religious and administrative head of all Nizārī communities.

Throughout his reign, Aga Khan III was in direct contact with the communities of his followers and guided them through written directives (*firmāns*<sup>279</sup>). Many of these *firmāns* focused on spiritual matters, education, and social welfare. In particular “the

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 482.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 486.

<sup>279</sup> Translates as “royal decree” or “written edict.” For the Nizārī Ismā’īlīs “it refers to any pronouncement, order or ruling made by their imām.” Ibid, 516.

education of Ismāʿīlīs, both male and female at different levels, and their health standards, as well as the participation of women in communal affairs, received high priority in the Imām's reforms."<sup>280</sup> Because the focus of the Nizārī reforms was concerned with things like social/economic welfare, healthcare, and education many Nizārī communities have enjoyed higher standards of living than other communities. They have benefited from the educational reforms of Aga Khan III and have greater access to good educational services and knowledgeable religious instructors. In addition to areas such as East Africa and South Asia, the Imām's modernization policies have extended to places such as Khurāsān in Persia where the Nizārīs have launched a program that sets out to build a school in every Ismāʿīlī village in the region. After an imāmate that lasted seventy-two years, Aga Khan III died in 1376/1957. As a spiritual leader and reformer, "Aga Khan III responded to the challenges of a rapidly changing world and made it possible for his followers in different countries to live in the twentieth century as a progressive community with a distinct Islamic identity."<sup>281</sup> He was succeeded by his grandson Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī, who was the forty-ninth Imām and Aga Khan IV.

The imāmates of Aga Khan III and Aga Khan IV have been characterized by a synthesis of spiritual leadership with more modern secular policies. In order to uphold the reforms concerning the well-being of both Nizārī and non-Nizārī Muslims, several institutions and organizations have been created during his imāmate. The goals of these organizations can be surmised from the Aga Khan IV's description of Islam's inner quest for each believer. That inner quest is only "meaningful in tandem with the

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 488.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 496.

effort to do good for the kin, the orphan, the needy, the vulnerable; to be just, honest, humble, tolerant, and forgiving.”<sup>282</sup> Holding a view of religious pluralism and spiritual tolerance, Aga Khan IV seeks to aid mankind in many realms. By 2007, “Aga Khan IV had established an impressive record of achievement not only as the Ismā’īlī Imām but also as a Muslim leader deeply aware of the demands and challenges of modernity, and dedicated to promoting a better understanding of Islamic civilization with its diversity of expressions and interpretations.”<sup>283</sup> He has continued the modernizing reforms started by his grandfather, Aga Khan III, with new organizations and institutions created. One of the most progressive of the organizations developed to further this goal is the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) which focuses on “health, education, culture, rural development, institution-building, and the promotion of economic development.”<sup>284</sup> The AKDN seeks to provide educational, cultural, and socio-economic benefits for areas populated by Ismā’īlīs as well as those populated by non-Ismā’īlīs in parts of Africa and Asia. Currently working in over twenty-five countries, the AKDN preaches pluralism as a central pillar of their ethical framework, bringing aid to those in need regardless of their cultural backgrounds.

Continuing on the framework laid out by his grandfather, Aga Khan IV also established several educational institutions. The role of the intellect in Ismā’īlism has always been considered and in more modern times it is the responsibility of the individual to cultivate their own. Expanding the council and constitutional system developed by his grandfather, the Imām wrote additional constitutions for Nizārī

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<sup>282</sup> The Aga Khan Development Network, “About Us: Ismaili Imāmat,” The Aga Khan Development Network, [http://www.akdn.org/about\\_imamat.asp](http://www.akdn.org/about_imamat.asp) (accessed April 7, 2010).

<sup>283</sup> Daftary, *The Ismā’īlīs*, 497.

<sup>284</sup> The Aga Khan Development Network, “About Us,” The Aga Khan Development Network, <http://www.akdn.org/about.asp> (accessed April 7, 2010).

communities in areas such as Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda among others. In each of these states an Education and Health Administration was established. The religious matters that are “of general interest to the community, including especially the religious education of the Nizārīs themselves, are the responsibility of an Ismā’īliyya Association, now called the Ismā’īlī Tariqah and Religious Education Board (ITREB) which operate independently of the secular councils and are accountable directly to the Imām.”<sup>285</sup> The ITREB’s accountability only to the Imām represents Ismā’īlism’s trust in the Imām as the ultimate guide toward true knowledge and its system of religious teachers instructing members of the community is reminiscent of the network of *dā’īs* who spanned empires preaching Ismā’īlī doctrine.

In 1977 The Institute of Ismā’īlī Studies was founded in London “for the promotion of general Islamic, Shī’ī, and Ismā’īlī studies.”<sup>286</sup> The focus of the Institute is the Ismā’īlī community’s interests in its history and its relationship with the larger genre of Islamic scholarship and contemporary thought. Its stated mission is “to promote the investigation of Muslim cultures and societies, both of the past and of the present, to explore the interaction of religious ideas within the broader aspects of modern life, but to do so with special attention to often neglected fields that contain the intellectual and literary expressions of esoteric Islam, including Shī’ism in general and Ismā’īlism in particular, in the full richness of their diversity.”<sup>287</sup> The Institute collaborates with many prominent organizations in both the East and West as well as maintaining a close relationship with the AKDN. The Institute has established both a

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<sup>285</sup> Daftary, *The Ismā’īlīs*, 499.

<sup>286</sup> Daftary, *The Ismā’īlīs*, 503.

<sup>287</sup> Paul E. Walker, “The Institute of Ismaili Studies,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Online Edition, 2004, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/institute-of-ismaili-studies>.

Graduate Program in Islamic Studies and Humanities and a Department of Education which “produces a range of multimedia teaching and learning materials in eight different languages on religious and cultural education for the Ismā’īlī community at all educational levels...these innovative materials are intended to make religious learning a creative and appealing process for young minds, as well as to bridge the gap between religious and secular education.”<sup>288</sup> To this end, the Aga Khan University in Pakistan was founded in 1405/1985 and has “faculties of medicine, nursing and education, an affiliated hospital, as well as its Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilizations, set up later in London.”<sup>289</sup> Many of these faculties have created new professional opportunities for Pakistani women, particularly in the fields of nursing and education.

Additionally, Aga Khan IV “has devoted much of his time and resources to promoting a better understanding of Islam, not merely as a religion but as a major world civilization with its plurality of social, intellectual, and cultural traditions.”<sup>290</sup> Continuing this theme of progressivism, Aga Khan IV has developed the Aga Khan Trust for Culture recognizing the “central role that culture plays in human and social development.”<sup>291</sup> He also respects the artistic talents of Muslims creating the Aga Khan Award for Architecture which “recognizes architects who use the Islamic heritage in creative ways to improve the built environment in a culturally appropriate and respectful manner.”<sup>292</sup> Many of these programs are funded or promoted through the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) created in 1969 which “collaborates with over thirty

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Daftary, *The Ismā’īlīs*, 503.

<sup>290</sup> Daftary, *The Ismā’īlīs*, 503.

<sup>291</sup> Eboo Patel, “On Nurturing a Modern Muslim Identity: The Institutions of the Aga Khan Development Network,” *Cross Currents* 53, no. 2 (2003): 212.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 212.

national and international organizations for the implementation of a variety of programs in the Third World.”<sup>293</sup> Through several institutions, organizations, and networks Aga Khan IV is continuing the humanitarian aims started by his predecessors, bringing aid to many through a pluralistic outlook of cultures and religious backgrounds.

The cause of understanding and promoting religious pluralism promoted by the Aga Khans has been taken up passionately by his followers. The importance of understanding and peaceful coexistence is a goal held by many, Ismā’īlī and non-Ismā’īlī alike, but Tayseir M. Mandour<sup>294</sup> writes that this “goal will not be achieved by declarations and recommendations only, particularly at the elite level, but primarily through institutional work of the international organizations, the civil societies, and governments.”<sup>295</sup> Answering the call for these organizations are individual Ismā’īlīs, such as Eboo Patel<sup>296</sup> who started the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) in 2002. The movement does work that starts “from a faith base or interfaith base and intentionally incorporates youth voices and activities into them as well as youth-oriented programs that develop interfaith elements.”<sup>297</sup> The IFYC seeks to call young people to respond to the world’s diversity of faith along lines of mutual respect toward each other. The dialogue that the youth of the IFYC participate in establishes trust and tolerance

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<sup>293</sup> Daftary, *The Ismā’īlīs*, 503.

<sup>294</sup> Dr. Tayseir M. Mandour graduated from the Kasr Al Aini School of Medicine of Cairo University as well as obtaining her doctorate degree from London University. She is currently a professor at Al Azhar University’s Department of Medicine in Cairo. She has served as a USAID Consultant as well as serving on the Interreligious Dialogue and Foreign Relations committee of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs.

<sup>295</sup> Tayseir M. Mandour, “Islam and Religious Freedom: Role of Interfaith Dialogue in Promoting Global Peace” in the *Brigham Young University Law Review* 2010, no. 3 (2010): 886.

<sup>296</sup> Eboo Patel is a member of President Obama’s Advisory Council on Faith-Based Neighborhood Partnerships as well as being the founder of the IFYC. He obtained his doctorate in the sociology of religion from Oxford University and was a Rhodes Scholarship recipient.

<sup>297</sup> Christy Lohr, “Building the Interfaith Youth Movement: Beyond Dialogue into Action – Edited by Eboo Patel and Patrice Brodeur” in *Reviews in Religion and Theology* 14, no. 4 (2007): 531.

between the developing generations of differing faith promoting cooperation between the differing parties.

Patel writes that, currently, we live in a time of religious totalitarianism which is the belief that only one interpretation of a religion is correct and everyone should practice that interpretation. Why are the religious totalitarians dominating? Patel writes that it is because “they are building powerful institutions that propagate their interpretation of Islam. [These institutions include] lobbying groups that pass policies, political organizations that get people elected, television and radio and magazines and publishing houses which articulate ideas, schools and universities, youth organizations and women’s groups, [and] bodies which raise and distribute money.”<sup>298</sup> Patel explains that this can be battled with progressive institutions, such as the AKDN, which seek to “nurture a progressive Muslim identity.”<sup>299</sup> He explains:

In areas of Pakistan where militant *madrassas* turned out the likes of the Taliban, Aga Khan schools give both boys and girls a broad and liberal education. They take pride in their Muslim heritage, learning that Muslims made significant advances in mathematics, optics, urban development, geography, and navigation; that Islam inspired the poetry to Rumi and the science of Avicenna and the philosophy of al-Hallaj. They learn that Muslim states in the past such as the Fāṭimid Empire protected minorities such as Christians and Jews, and that religious pluralism is one of the glorious creations of Allah. They learn that jihad means trying to be a better person, which means being more generous and honest and kind.<sup>300</sup>

It is with institutions such as the IFYC and educational organizations created by the Aga Khans that Ismāʿīlism has continued along the lines of progressivism and modernization to promote pluralistic, secular, religious, and tolerant educational programs for members of any faith around the world.

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<sup>298</sup> Patel, 210-211.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 211-212.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 212.

### Conclusion

Beginning with their emergence as a clandestine organization with a secret doctrine of esoterism in the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century, the development of Ismā'īlī Shī'ism shows a continually fluctuating movement. Several theological texts guide the individual to a growth in their spiritual awareness while charismatic and divinely guided leaders preached a new theological doctrine to the masses. Because this doctrine was at times very controversial, Ismā'īlīs have struggled in their growth in Muslim society. And perhaps because of the early need to justify their tenets to Sunnī and Shī'ī alike, the Ismā'īlīs have had a unique doctrinal history. Teaching tolerance as well as intolerant self preservation to its followers, Ismā'īlī Shī'ism has fluctuated between pluralism and totalitarianism. As Daftary explains, “the fact that the Nizārīs have emerged in modern times as a progressive community with a distinct religious identity attests to the resiliency of their traditions as well as their adaptability under the capable and foresighted leadership of their last two imāms, the Aga Khans.”<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 504.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite the fact that Ismā'īlism has been a movement in continuous evolution, the Ismā'īlī community has been able to remain unified around central beliefs held by all. Foremost among these are: 1) the importance of completely understanding and utilizing both the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*, the facets of God's message; 2) the importance of understanding cosmology as a path toward salvation; 3) the importance of the imām as a spiritual and educational exemplar; and 4) the importance of pedagogy and education in the initiate's quest toward knowledge of God. By looking at the pedagogical methodology and the doctrines taught within the educational system of the Ismā'īlīs an understanding of their path toward salvation can be obtained. The methods used by the Ismā'īlīs have been utilized by other communities of Muslims as well, and it is possible that had it not been for outside forces, such as the 'Abbāsids, Saljuq Turks, and Mongols who eventually destroyed their Persian and Syrian outposts, the Ismā'īlīs may have been able to reform educational practices in Islam in general. Today the tolerant and modernizing methods employed by the Aga Khan and other Ismā'īlīs serve as a model for the success of Islam on the modern stage.

Continuing the analysis started in this thesis, additional work in the field of Ismā'īlism's pluralistic viewpoints and practices of intrafaith (as well as interfaith) dialogue would add to scholarship's understanding of the Ismā'īlī position in the modern world. The Ismā'īlī approach to pluralism is relatively unique as they come from a heavily persecuted background. However, future scholarship could reveal

possible parallels between Ismā'īlī pluralistic efforts and those of other persecuted and misunderstood communities, such as that of the Jewish community between the 1940s and 1970s. Additional analysis of the mentality of a group such as the Ismā'īlīs in regards to members of their own community could also shed light on whether or not interfaith liberalism inherently leads to intrafaith liberalism. Understanding if rigidity or control of the members within a community is an aspect to how minority groups relate to outsiders, in regards to their levels of pluralism or liberalism, would aid in the quest to realize particular factors that lead to tolerance or intolerance. The degree of Ismā'īlī secrecy in regards to protecting their group identity has changed in modern times. They no longer have persecution or blatant misunderstanding of their teachings spurring them toward secrecy. Modern times have brought a call for openness with modern scholarship willing and able to reassess their previous impressions of Ismā'īlī practice and replace them with a clearer understanding of both Ismā'īlī history and their emergence into the modern world.

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