



DA'Ī

DA'Ī (he who summons), a term used by several Muslim groups, especially the Isma'ilis, to designate their propagandists or missionaries. It was adopted by the 'Abbasid *da'wa*, or mission, in Khorasan (see ['ABBASID CALIPHATE](#)) and by the early Mu'tazilites, but it soon became particularly identified with certain Shi'ite groups, for example, the Zaydīs and some Shi'ite extremists (*ḡolāt*), notably the *Ḳaṭṭābiya* (see [ABU'L-ḲAṬṬĀB ASADĪ](#)). The term acquired its widest application in connection with the Isma'ilis, though early Isma'ili authors in Persia sometimes substituted other designations, like *janāḥ* (plural, *ajneḥa*; see the excerpt from Abū Ḥātem Rāzī, *Ketāb al-eṣlāḥ*, in Hamdani, p. 109; Sejestānī, pp. 91, 100, 128). The term *dā'ī* (pl., *do'āt*) came to be applied to any authorized representative of the Isma'ili *al-da'wa al-hādīya* (rightly guiding mission), a propagandist responsible for spreading the Isma'ili doctrine and winning followers for the imam. Different ranks of *dā'īs* emerged during the history of the Isma'ilis and among different branches. In fact, the *dā'ī* was the unofficial agent of the Fatimid state (297-567/909-1171), operating secretly in many territories outside Egypt and Syria in efforts to promote recognition of the Isma'ili Fatimid caliph as the Isma'ili imam.

No information is available on the organization of the pre-Fatimid Isma'ilism *da'wa*, but it is known that the movement was reorganized in about 260/873-74 around a hereditary line of leaders, later recognized as imams, who were then residing at Salamīya, in central Syria. During the second half of the 9th century these leaders initiated the Isma'ili *da'wa* through a network of propagandists in a number of regions of the Muslim world. In Jebāl, Khorasan,



and Transoxania, as elsewhere, a chief *dā'ī* appointed subordinate *dā'īs* to the various districts under his jurisdiction. The chief *dā'īs* of Jebāl resided at Ray, of Khorasan and Transoxania initially at Nīšāpūr and later at Marv-al-Rūd. Some of the early Persian *dā'īs*, notably [Abū Ḥātem Rāzī](#) and [Abū Ya'qūb Sejestānī](#), were among the foremost early Isma'ili theologians and provided important doctrinal links between the pre-Fatimid Isma'ilis and the Fatimids.

The hierarchical Fatimid *da'wa* organization (*ḥodūd al-dīn* or *marāteb al-da'wa*) was fully developed by the time of Mo'ayyad fi'l-Dīn Šīrāzī, chief *dā'ī* in Cairo for twenty years until his death in 470/1078. It mirrored the ideal situation when the Isma'ili imam would have come to rule the world, and thus many of the ranks mentioned in Fatimid sources were not actually filled at all times. After the imam himself the administrative head was the chief *dā'ī*, designated *bāb* or *bāb al-abwāb* but *dā'ī al-do'āt* in non-Isma'ili sources, with his headquarters in Cairo. He was responsible for appointing the provincial *dā'īs* within the Fatimid domain and also outside it and was assisted by a number of subordinate local *dā'īs*.

According to Fatimid Isma'ili authors, for purposes of the *da'wa* the world outside direct Fatimid control was divided into twelve *jazīras* (lit., “islands”), one of which was Persia, designated as Deylam (see Qāzī No'mān, 1967-72, II, p. 74, III, pp. 48-49; Sejestānī, p. 172). Ebn Ḥawqal (p. 310; cf. Nāṣer-e Kōsrow, 1341/1923, p. 397), however, mentioned Khorasan as a separate *jazīra* of the Fatimid *da'wa*, adding that the Isma'ili Baluchis of eastern Persia belonged to it. Each *jazīra* was in charge of a chief *dā'ī*, called *ḥojja*.

In each *jazīra* the *ḥojja* was assisted by varying ranks of *dā'īs*, as many as thirty in some instances (Nāṣer-e Kōsrow, 1356 Š./1977, p. 178). Three different categories of such *dā'īs* were distinguished in the Fatimid sources: *dā'ī al-balāḡ* (lit., *dā'ī* of initiation), *dā'ī moṭlaq* (lit., *dā'ī* with absolute authority), and *dā'ī maḥdūd* (or *maḥṣūr*; lit., *dā'ī* with limited authority), apparently in that order. It is not clear what their specific functions were, though the *dā'ī al-balāḡ* apparently acted as liaison with the *da'wa* headquarters in Cairo. There were also two categories of assistant *dā'īs*, or *ma'dūn*, who might eventually rise to the rank of *dā'ī* (for this hierarchy and the idealized functions associated with its ranks, see Kermānī, pp. 134-39, 224-25, reproduced with commentary in Corbin, pp. 90-95).

Despite the importance of the *dā'īs*, almost nothing seems to have been written about them by Isma'ilis. Qāzī No'mān (d. 363/974), the most prolific author of



the Fatimid period, devoted only a short chapter in one of his books ([1948], pp. 136-40) to explaining the virtues of an ideal *dā'ī*. A more detailed discussion of the qualifications required of a Fatimid *dā'ī* is contained in what is evidently the only independent Isma'īli treatise on the subject, *al-Resāla al-mūjaza al-kāfiya fī ādāb al-do'āt*, written toward the end of the 10th century by the *dā'ī* Aḥmad b. Ebrāhīm Nīšābūrī. No manuscript of this treatise has survived, but the work was quoted extensively in some later and still unpublished Isma'īli works by Ḥātem b. Ebrāhīm Ḥāmedī (d. 596/1199) and Ḥasan b. Nūḥ Bharūcī (d. 939/1533). He could be appointed only with the imam's permission, or *edn*, and, once dispatched to a locality, he was to operate fairly independently of the central headquarters, which would provide only general guidance. Both authors emphasized that the *dā'ī* had to be personally acquainted with the individual initiates; the Isma'īlis never aimed at mass proselytization and indeed sought to maintain utmost secrecy in their activities. Only those candidates possessing advanced educational qualifications and moral and intellectual attributes were to be designated as *dā'īs*. Beside being familiar with the teachings of different religions (i.e., Judaism, Christianity, and other non-Islamic religions, as well as non-Isma'īli branches of Islam), the *dā'ī* was expected to know the language and customs of the region to which he was assigned. Many *dā'īs* received extensive training in such specialized institutions as the Dār al-ḥekma and al-Azhar in Cairo. As a result they often became outstanding scholars in theology, philosophy, jurisprudence, and other fields of learning.

Because of the self-imposed secrecy, almost nothing is known about the actual methods by which Fatimid Isma'īli *dā'īs* won new converts (*mostajīb*s). Many Sunnite authors, deriving their information mainly from anti-Isma'īli polemical works by Ebn Rezām and Aḳū Moḥsen, mentioned a system of seven or nine distinctly named stages of detaching the initiate from his previous religion and initiating him into Isma'īlism (e.g., Nowayrī, pp. 195-225; Ġazālī, pp. 21-32). There is, however, no evidence of such stages in the extant Isma'īli literature, though certainly the preparation of the new converts must have been gradual (see Daftary, pp. 188, 189, 192-93, 224-32).

In 487/1094 the Isma'īlis split into the Mosta'lī and Nezārī branches. The Ṭayyebī Mosta'līs inherited control of the Fatimid *da'wa* hierarchy and after the collapse of the dynasty transferred their base to Yemen, where they remained for several centuries, also expanding into Gujarat (Daftary, pp. 298-99, 315-16, 321-22). The Nezārī, on the other hand, succeeded the Fatimid



Isma'īlis in Persia and other eastern lands. For some time before the schism Isma'īlis in the domain of the Great Saljuqs (429-552/1038-1157) had been led by a single chief *dā'ī* at Isfahan. In the early 1070s and perhaps earlier 'Abd-al-Malek b. 'Aṭṭāš (q.v.) filled this role. The *dā'ī* at Isfahan may also have supervised the *dā'īs* operating in Khorasan and Iraq, though he received his own general instructions from Cairo. After the schism the Persian Isma'īlis, the Nezārīya, severed relations with the Fatimid *da'wa* centered in Cairo and established a separate *da'wa* led by the *dā'ī* of Deylam, who resided in the mountain fortress of Alamūt (q. v.). Ḥasan Šabbāḥ, founder of the Nezārī state in Persia, and his two successors at Alamūt were also regarded as the *ḥojjas* of the concealed Nezārī imams.

When the Nezārī imam emerged at Alamūt in 559/1164 he supplanted the *ḥojjas* as supreme leader of the Nezārī *da'wa* and state. The supreme Nezārī leader, whether *dā'ī* or imam, selected the local chief *dā'īs* to serve in the main Nezārī territories: Kūhestān (Qohestān) in southern Khorasan and Syria. The chief *dā'ī* (often called *moḥtašem*) of the Kūhestān Nezārīs usually lived in Tūn, Qā'en, or the fortress of Mo'menābād, near Bīrjand. His counterpart in Syria normally lived in the castle of Mašyāf or Kahf in central Syria. The *dā'īs* of Deylam and the chief *dā'īs* of the Nezārī territories, who often functioned as military commanders, were supported by subordinate *dā'īs* and assistants, though no details are available. It is clear, however, that the scattered Nezārī communities of the Alamūt period, which were often engaged in battles with Saljuqs and other enemies, had no use for the elaborate *da'wa* structure developed by the Fatimid Isma'īlis; there were apparently only a few ranks between the imam and his ordinary followers; in Persia the latter addressed one another as *rafīq*, or "comrade" (Daftary, pp. 335-36, 350-51, 381, 394-95).

After the fall of the Nezārī state in 654/1256 the imams again went into hiding in different parts of Persia, and for two centuries the various local Nezārī communities developed independently of one another. During this period the Nezārīs observed the strictest form of *taqīya* (dissimulation), in Persia often disguising themselves under the mantle of Sufism. *Da'wa* activities seem to have been suspended almost completely, and only local chief *dā'īs*, often called *pīrs*, continued to operate. In most communities the position of *pīr* gradually became hereditary.

When the imam of the Qāsemšāhī branch of Nezārī Isma'īlism emerged at [Anjedān](#), in central Persia, during the second half of the 15th century, there was a significant revival in *da'wa* activity. During the two centuries of the



Anjedān revival the imams, who developed close relations with the Ne‘mat-Allāhī order of Sufis, successfully extended their control over the Nezārī communities of Persia, Afghanistan, Central Asia, India, and Syria. They dispatched trusted *dā’īs* to all those regions, in order to reassert central authority and undermine the hereditary position of the local *pīrs*. For the purpose of *taqīya*, the Nezārīs had readily adopted the master-disciple (*moršed-morīd*) relationship of the Sufis, along with the associated terminology. To outsiders the Nezārī imams thus appeared as Sufi *moršeds*, or *qoṭbs*, and their followers as *morīds*. The imams were further encouraged by more favorable conditions after the Safavids’ adoption of Twelver Shi‘ism as the state religion of Persia at the beginning of the 16th century. They adopted the guise of Twelver Shi‘ites, as well as that of Sufis.

Under these circumstances the Nezārī *da‘wa* organization remained rather simple throughout the Anjedān period; there appear to have been only five ranks below the imam. The highest was the supreme *dā’ī*, or *ḥojja*, selected from among the close relatives of the imam. Next were the *dā’īs*, chosen from the better-educated Nezārīs. They were no longer restricted to particular regions but were responsible for periodic inspections of the different communities, with reports to *da‘wa* headquarters in the imam’s residence, and for conveying directives from the imam to local leaders. Furthermore, they were expected to propagate the *da‘wa* in areas beyond the jurisdiction of particular Nezārī communities. The next lower rank was that of *mo‘allem*, or religious teacher, who was normally attached to a particular community or region, corresponding to the *dā’īs* of the *jazīras* in the Fatimid period. The *mo‘allems* were appointed by the *ḥojja* in consultation with the imam, and every *mo‘allem* was assisted by two categories of *ma’dūn*. By the middle of the 16th century, however, the term *pīr* had replaced all these titles in the Nezārī organization. It fell into disuse in Persia after the Anjedān period, though it has remained in use until modern times among the Nezārīs of Badaḳšān and adjacent regions (Mostanšer be’llāh, text pp. 41ff., 62ff.; Qohestānī, text pp. 49-50, 59; Ḳayrḳvāh Herātī, 1935, text pp. 44, 76-77, 93-94, 101, 110; idem, 1961, pp. 3, 23, 58, 113ff.; Daftary, pp. 467-68, 475-76).

By the end of the 19th century the proselytizing activities of the Nezārīs had begun to lose their importance. The title *mo‘allem* thus came to replace the generic title *dā’ī*, as the function of teaching Nezārī doctrines to members of the community displaced that of spreading the *da‘wa* and winning new converts. At present *mo‘allems* and *wā‘eẓīn*, or preachers, are active in Nezārī



communities in Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America; selected groups receive regular training at the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London.

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