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FEDĀʾĪ

FEDĀʾĪ (or *fedāwī*), devotee, a person who offers his life for others or in the service of a particular cause. The term has been used of such devotees affiliated to several religious and political communities and organizations in the Islamic world. In particular, it was applied to the young, self-sacrificing devotees of the Nezārī Ismaʿili community of Persia and Syria during the Alamūt period (483-654/1090-1256; see ALAMŪT). The Nezārī *fedāʾī*s, also designated more commonly in Syria and in the Arabic sources as *fedāwī*s (*fedāwīya*), were sent on dangerous missions to remove the prominent enemies of their community, enemies who had posed serious threats to the survival of the Nezārīs in particular localities. It also seems that the Nezārīs occasionally made their *fedāʾī*s accessible to the Mamluks and their other non-Ismaʿili allies (see ʿOmarī, p. 77; Melville).

The Ismaʿili sources recovered in modern times, including the Persian and Arabic writings of the Alamūt period, do not contain any information on the selection and training of the *fedāʾī*s. The Nezārī *fedāʾī*s, however, do not seem to have received any training in languages and other subjects, as suggested by the elaborate accounts of some occidental chroniclers of the Crusades and later European writers. But sometime during the Alamūt period the practice evidently arose of sending *fedāʾī*s, under different guises, into the households of a number of more notorious enemies of the Nezārīs. Such undercover agents were placed in an ideal position of readiness for possible assassination missions, and rumors about their existence would prove rather intimidating.

The Nezārīs praised the courage and devotion of their *fedāʾī*s, who attested

heroically to the importance of Shiʿite martyrology; and evidently rolls of honor of their names and missions were kept at Alamūt and other major Nezārī fortresses (Rašīd-al-Dīn Fażl-Allāh, pp. 133-37, 144-45, 160-61; Abu'l-Qāsem Kašānī, pp. 169-72, 182-82, 198-99, 235-37). It is, however, doubtful whether the Nezārī *fedāʾī*s formed a special corps during the early Alamūt period in Persia, although towards the end of that period they probably did (Jovaynī, ed. Qazvīnī, III, pp. 129, 135, tr. Boyle, II, pp. 631, 635; Hodgson, p. 82). In Syria, the *fedāʾī*s were evidently organized into a special corps in the time of Rāšed-al-Dīn Senān, the most renowned *dāʿī* of the Syrian Ismaʿilis, who stayed in office for some thirty years until his death in 589/1192.

The Nezārīs of the Alamūt period were not the inventors of the policy of assassinating religio-political adversaries in Muslim society, nor were they the last group to resort to such a policy. But confronted by the overwhelmingly superior military power of the Saljuqs and other adversaries, the Nezārīs did assign an important political role to this method of struggle. As a result, almost any assassination of any religious, political, or military significance occurring in the central Islamic lands during the Alamūt period was attributed to the daggers of the Nezārī *fedāʾī*s, who rarely survived their own actual missions. It was under such circumstances that the Crusaders and their occidental chroniclers, surprised by the seemingly irrational behavior of the *fedāʾī*s, began to fabricate a number of legends about these devotees of the Nezārī Ismaʿilis who had become famous in Europe as the "Assassins," the followers of a mysterious "Old Man of the Mountain" (Daftary, 1994, pp. 88-127).

The Assassin legends, or myths of the Nezārī *fedāʾī*s, rooted in the general hostility of Muslims towards the Ismaʿilis and the Europeans' own fanciful impressions of the Orient, consisted of a number of separate but connected tales. These legends developed gradually and systematically from the time of Senān, the original "Old Man of the Mountain" of the Crusaders, in the second half of the 12th century through the 13th century (see, e.g., James of Vitry, pp. 1062-63; Arnold of Lübeck, pp. 178-79). Soon, the seemingly blind obedience of the *fedāʾī*s to their leader was attributed, by their occidental observers, to the influence of an intoxicating drug like hashish (see BANG), which provided a rational explanation for a behavior that otherwise seemed irrational to Westerners. There is no evidence suggesting that hashish, or any other intoxicating drug, was used in any way in order to motivate the *fedāʾī*s; even the non-Ismaʿili Muslim sources which are generally hostile towards the Ismaʿilis remain silent on this subject. It may be noted, however, that the

Muslims did refer to the Nezārī Ismaʿilis with abusive terms such as *ḥašīšīya*, *ḥašīšīn*, etc., without any derivative explanation (Abū Šāma, I, pp. 240, 258; Madelung, ed., pp. 146, 329; Daftary, 1990, pp. 18-19); and these terms, meaning low-class rabble, were picked up by the Crusaders who transformed them into the variants of the term "Assassin" in European languages. In all probability, it was the abusive name that gave rise to the imaginative tale disseminated by the Crusaders. Be that as it may, once the hashish connection was firmly established, it provided ample source material for yet more tales.

The Assassin legends culminated in the version popularized by Marco Polo, who combined a number of such legends in an integrated manner, also adding his own original contribution in the form of a secret "garden of paradise," where the *fedāʾī*s would temporarily enjoy the delights of an earthly paradise; and, hence, they would carry out any commands of their chief in order to experience such delights in perpetuity (Marco Polo, I, pp. 139-46; Daftary, 1990, pp. 11-13). By the 14th century, the Assassin legends had acquired wide currency in Europe and the Latin Orient, and they had come to be accepted as reliable descriptions of the secret practices of the Nezārī Ismaʿilis and their *fedāʾī*s, who were now generally depicted in European sources as a sinister order of drugged and murderous assassins. Meanwhile, the term "assassin" had been adopted in European languages as a common noun meaning murderer. Modern scholarship (Daftary, 1990, pp. 324-34; idem, 1998, pp. 4-18) in Ismaʿili studies has now begun to dispel many of the legends surrounding the Nezārī *fedāʾī*s.

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