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ISMAʿILISM I. ISMAʿILI STUDIES
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In its modern and scientific form, dating to the 1930s, Ismaʿili studies represents one of the newest fields of Islamic studies. Before this time, the Ismaʿilis were almost exclusively studied and evaluated on the basis of evidence collected, or often fabricated, by their enemies. As a result, they were persistently misrepresented with a variety of myths and legends circulating about their teachings and practices. The perceptions of outsiders of the Ismaʿilis in the pre-modern period, in both Muslim and Christian milieus, contrast with modern developments in Ismaʿili studies to make the history of this field particularly fascinating.

As the most revolutionary wing of Shiʿism with a religio-political agenda that aimed to uproot the ʿAbbasids and restore the caliphate to a line of ʿAlid imams, the Ismaʿilis from early on aroused the hostility of the Sunnite establishment. With the foundation of the Fatimid state in 297/909, the potential challenge of the Ismaʿilis to Sunnite "orthodoxy" became actualized, and thereupon the ʿAbbasids and the Sunnite ulama launched what amounted to an official anti-Ismaʿili propaganda campaign. The overall purpose of this prolonged campaign was to discredit the entire Ismaʿili movement from its

roots, so that they could be readily condemned by other Muslims as *molḥed*s, heretics or deviators from the true religious path. In particular, several generations of Sunnite polemicists, starting with Abu ʿAbd-Allāh Mo-ḥammad b. ʿAli b. Rezām Ṭāʾi Kufi, known as Ebn Rezām, who lived in Baghdad during the first half of the 4th/10th century, began to fabricate evidence that would provide justification for the condemnation of the Ismaʿilis on specific doctrinal grounds. Ebn Rezām's book on the refutation of the Ismaʿilis has not survived, but it was used extensively by another polemicist and early ʿAlid genealogist Šarif Abu'l-Ḥosayn Moḥammad b. ʿAli, better known as Aḵu Moḥsen, who wrote his own anti-Ismaʿili work to refute the doctrines of the Ismaʿilis and the ʿAlid genealogy of their imams. Aḵu Moḥsen's treatise, too, written around 372/982, has not survived directly. However, the Ebn Rezām-Aḵu Moḥsen accounts have been preserved fragmentarily in the writings of Nowayri (pp. 187-317), Ebn al-Dawādāri (pp. 6-21, 44-156), and Maqrizi (pp. 22-29, 151-202). These polemical writings were used as a major source of information by Sunnite heresiographers, such as Abu Manṣur ʿAbd-al-Qāher b. Ṭāher Bāḡdādi (pp. 265-99), who produced another important category of source material against the Ismaʿilis. The earliest Twelver Shiʿite heresiographers Nowbaḵti and Qomi, who were better informed than their Sunnite counterparts about the internal divisions of Shiʿism, were less hostile toward the Ismaʿilis while upholding the legitimacy of the rival Ḥosaynid line of ʿAlid Imams recognized by the Twelver Shiʿites.

Polemicists also fabricated travesties in which they attributed a variety of shocking beliefs and practices to the Ismaʿilis. These travesties circulated widely in the guise of genuine Ismaʿili works and were used as source materials by later polemicists and heresiographers. Aḵu Moḥsen claims to have read one of these forgeries, the anonymous *Ketāb al-siāsa*, quoted also by Bāḡdādi (pp. 277-79), which expounded the procedures allegedly followed by Ismaʿili *dāʿi*s (missionaries; q.v.) to attract converts and instruct them through seven stages of initiation (*balāḡ*), leading ultimately to libertinism and atheism (see Stern, pp. 56-83). The same book, or another travesty entitled *Ketāb al-balāḡ*, was seen by Ebn al-Nadim (pp. 238, 240). In fact, the Ismaʿili tradition itself only knows these travesties from the polemics of its enemies. Nonetheless, the anti-Ismaʿili polemical and heresiographical traditions, in turn, influenced the historians, theologians and jurists who wished to comment on the Ismaʿilis. By their misrepresentation of the Ismaʿilis, the anti-Ismaʿili authors in fact produced a "black legend" in the course of the 4th/10th century. Thus, Ismaʿilism was portrayed as the arch-heresy of Islam, carefully

designed by some non-ʿAlid impostors, or possibly even a Jewish magician disguised as a Muslim, with the aim of destroying Islam from within (see, for instance, Ivanow, 1946). By the 5th/11th century, this "black legend," with its elaborate details and stages of initiation, had been accepted as an accurate and reliable description of Ismaʿili motives, beliefs and practices, leading to further accusations against the Is-māʿiliya, or Bāṭeniya, another designation coined in reference to the Ismaʿilis by their enemies.

The revolt of the Persian Ismaʿilis led by Ḥasan-e Ṣabbāḥ (q.v.) against the Saljuq Turks provoked another round of Sunnite reaction against the Ismaʿilis in general and the Nezāri Ismaʿilis in particular. The new literary campaign was initiated by the all-powerful Saljuq vizier Neẓām-al-Molk, who devoted a long chapter in his *Siāsat-nāma* (pp. 282-311; trans., pp. 208-31) to the condemnation of the Ismaʿilis. At the same time, Ḡazāli was com-missioned by the ʿAbbasid caliph al-Mostaẓher to write a major polemical tract against the Bāṭenis and their doctrine of *taʿlim* (authoritative instruction from the Imam; see Ḡazāli, *Fażāʾeḥ al-Bāṭeniya*). It was under such circumstances that the Nezāri Ismaʿilis of Syria were referred to by the term of abuse *ḥašišiya* (Abu Šāma, I, pp. 240, 258; Ebn Moyassar, p. 102). The Persian Nezāris, too, were designated as *ḥašiši* in some contemporary Zaydi sources written in northern Persia (Madelung, pp. 146, 239). However, it should be pointed out that all Muslim sources which refer to the Nezāris as *ḥašišis* use this term in its pejorative sense of "low-class rabble," without accusing the Nezāris of actually using the narcotic hashish.

It was in the time of Rāšed-al-Din Senān, who led the Syrian Nezāris for three decades until his death in 589/1193, that occidental chroniclers of the Crusades and a number of European travelers began to write about the Nezāri Ismaʿilis, better known in medieval Europe as "the Assassins." The very term "Assassin" was evidently based on local variants of the Arabic word *ḥašiši* (plural, *ḥašišiya*) picked up in the Levant by the Crusaders and their European observers. The Crusader circles, who remained completely ignorant of Islam and the Ismaʿilis, now began to produce reports about the alleged secret practices of the Nezāri Ismaʿilis, with whom they had come into contact in Syria. Eventually, medieval Europeans themselves began to fabricate and put into circulation both in the Latin Orient and in Europe a number of tales, rooted in their "imaginative ignorance," about the secret practices of the Assassins and their leader, the so-called "Old Man of the Mountain—"another term coined by the Crusader circles and originally applied to Senān (see, e.g.,

Arnold of Lübeck, pp. 178-79, 240; Daftary, 1994, p. 116). These imaginative tales revolved around the recruitment and training of the Nezāri *fedāʾi*s (q.v.). The so-called Assassin legends consisted of a number of interconnected tales which developed in stages and finally culminated in a synthesis popularized by Marco Polo (I, pp. 139-46). Different Assassin legends were "imagined" independently and at times concurrently by different authors, such as Arnold of Lübeck (d. 1212) and James of Vitry (d. 1240); and by the 8th/14th century, these legends had acquired wide currency and were accepted as reliable descriptions of secret Nezāri practices (Daftary, 1994, pp. 88-127). Henceforth, the Nezāris were portrayed in medieval European sources as a sinister order of hashish-crazed "assassins" bent on senseless murder and mischief.

The orientalists of the 19th century, led by A. I. Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838), correctly identified the Ismaʿilis as a Shiʿite Muslim community, but they were still obliged to study them exclusively on the basis of the hostile Sunnite sources and the fanciful tales of the Crusader circles. Consequently, the orientalists, too, lent their seal of approval to the medieval myths about the Ismaʿilis, including the anti-Ismaʿili "black legend" of the Sunnite polemicists and the Assassin legends of the Crusaders. It was under such circumstances that von Hammer-Purgstall (q.v.; 1774-1856) wrote the first Western book on the Persian Nezāris of the Alamut period. This book, permeated with misconceptions and misrepresentations, received much acclaim in Europe and continued to be treated as the standard history of the Nezāris until the 1930s. With rare exceptions, notably the studies of Charles F. Defrémery (1822-83) on the Nezāris of Syria and Persia and those of Michael J. de Goeje (1836-1909) on the Carmatians (q.v.), the Ismaʿilis continued to be misrepresented to varying degrees by later orientalists. Even a distinguished scholar like Edward Browne (q.v.) could not resist reiterating the orientalistic tales of his predecessors about the Ismaʿilis (I, 391-415; II, 190-211, 453-60). Meanwhile, Westerners retained the habit of referring to the Nezāri Ismaʿilis of the Alamut period as the Assassins, a misnomer rooted in a medieval pejorative appellation.

The breakthrough in Ismaʿili studies occurred with the recovery and study of genuine Ismaʿili texts on a relatively large scale—manuscript sources which had been preserved secretly in scattered private collections. A few Ismaʿili manuscripts of Syrian provenance had already surfaced in Paris during the nineteenth century, and some fragments of these Arabic texts were published by S. Guyard among others. At the same time, Paul Casanova (1861-1926), who produced important studies on the Fatimids, was the first European orientalist

to recognize the Ismaʿili connection of the *Rasāʾel Eḵwān al-Ṣafāʾ*. More Ismaʿili manuscripts preserved in the Yemen and Central Asia were recovered in the opening decades of the twentieth century (see Griffini, pp. 80-88; Ivanow, 1917, pp. 359-86). However, by 1922, when the first Western bibliography of Ismaʿili works was compiled by Louis Massignon, who erroneously used the terms Carmatian and Ismaʿili interchangeably, scholars clearly still possessed only a very limited knowledge of Ismaʿili literature.

Modern scholarship in Ismaʿili studies was initiated in the 1930s in India, where significant collections of Ismaʿili manuscripts are preserved within the Ṭayyebi Ismaʿili Bohra community. The breakthrough resulted mainly from the pioneering efforts of Wladimir Ivanow (1886-1970; q.v.) and a few Ismaʿili Bohra scholars, notably Asaf A. A. Fyzee (1899-1981), Ḥosayn F. Ham-dāni (1901-62) and Zāhed ʿAli (1888-1958), all of whom possessed family collections of important manuscripts. It was indeed Fyzee who through his studies of Qāżi Noʿmān's legal treatises made modern scholars aware of the existence of an independent Ismaʿili school of jurisprudence (see Daftary, 1984, pp. 49-63). Ivanow found access not only to the Arabic manuscripts preserved by Ṭayyebi Ismaʿili Bohras but also to the Persian Ismaʿili literature of the Nezāris of Persia, Afghanistan and Central Asia. As a result, he compiled the first detailed catalogue of Ismaʿili works, attesting to the hitherto unknown richness and diversity of Ismaʿili literature and intellectual traditions. This catalogue (Ivanow, 1933) provided a scientific framework for modern Ismaʿili studies. Ismaʿili scholarship received another major impetus through the establishment in 1946, in Bombay, of the Ismaili Society, or Anjoman-e Esmāʿili (q.v.).

By 1963, when Ivanow published a revised edition of his catalogue, many more Ismaʿili sources had been discovered and progress in Ismaʿili studies had been astonishing. Numerous Ismaʿili texts had now begun to be critically edited and studied, laying a solid foundation for further progress in the field. In this connection, other than the Persian Nezāri texts edited and translated by Ivanow and published by the Ismaili Society, mention should be made of the editions and translations of the texts of the Fatimid and later times by Henry Corbin (q.v.), published in his *Bibliothèque Iranienne* series, and the Arabic Ismaʿili texts edited by the Egyptian scholar Moḥammad Kāmel Ḥosayn (1901-61) in his *Selselat Maḵṭuṭāt al-Fāṭemiyin* series. At the same time, ʿĀref Tāmer (1921-98) published numerous Ismaʿili texts of Syrian provenance, though often in flawed editions. Meanwhile, a group of Egyptian scholars,

notably Ḥasan Ebrāhim Ḥasan (1892-1968), Jamāl-al-Din al-Šayyāl (1911-67) and ʿAbd-al-Monʿem Mājed (1920-99) made important contributions to Fatimid studies, while in the West, Bernard Lewis, Samuel M. Stern (1920-69), Wilferd Madelung and Abbas Hamdani produced important studies on the early history of the Ismaʿilis and their relations with the Carmatians; and Marshall Hodgson (1922-68) produced the first scholarly study of the Nezāris of the Alamut period.

The rapid progress in the recovery and study of Ismaʿili literature in the course of the 20th century is reflected well in I. K. Poonawala's *Biobibliography* (1977), which identifies some 1300 titles written by more than 200 authors. Progress in Ismaʿili studies promises to continue at an even greater pace as many Ismaʿilis themselves are now becoming interested in the study of their own history and literary heritage, and as The Institute of Ismaili Studies (q.v.), with its unique collection of manuscripts (see Gacek; Cortese), continues to serve as a central forum for furthering progress in this field of Islamic studies.

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