



ISMA'ILISM II. ISMA'ILI HISTORIOGRAPHY

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Isma'ili historiography has been closely related to the very nature of the Isma'ili mission, or *da'wa*, and the changing fortunes of the Isma'ilis during the various phases of their history. The Isma'ilis were usually persecuted by their numerous enemies, necessitating the observance of *taqiya* by them. The Isma'ili *dā'īs*, who were at the same time the scholars and authors of their community, often operated in hostile territories and were obliged to observe utter secrecy in their activities. These *dā'i*-authors were, moreover, normally trained as theologians and as such, they were not interested in compiling annalistic or other types of historical accounts. The general lack of Isma'ili interest in historiography is well attested by the fact that only a few works of historical nature have been found in the rich corpus of Isma'ili literature recovered in modern times, which comprises mainly of theological works, with a substantial number of treatises related to the so-called esoteric, or *ḥaqā'eq*, subjects, as well as numerous titles utilizing the methodology of esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil*), the hallmark of Isma'ili thought (see Majdu'; Ivanow, pp. 17-173; Poonawala, pp. 31-297). It should be added, however, that the religious works of the Isma'ilis, written in Arabic, Persian and Indic languages, do occasionally shed light on aspects of Isma'ili history, while at the



same time they serve themselves as sources for understanding the nature and development of the intellectual and literary traditions of the Isma'ilis.

Among the few historical works produced by Isma'ili authors mention may be made of Qāzi No'mān's *Eftetāh al-da'wa* (Beirut, 1970; Tunis, 1975), completed in 346/957, which is the oldest known Isma'ili history covering the background to the establishment of the Fatimid state in North Africa. In later medieval times, only one general history of Isma'ilism, covering from the earliest period until the mid-6th/12th century, was written by an Isma'ili author, namely, the seven-volume *'Oyun al-aḳbār* (Beirut, 1973-84) of Edris 'Emād-al-Din (d. 872/1468), the 19th *dā'i-e moṭlaq* of the Mosta'li-Ṭayyebi Isma'ilis in Yemen. This *dā'i* produced two more historical works, the *Nozhat al-afkār* and the *Rawzat al-aḳbār* (Sanaa, 1995), which continue the history of the Ṭayyebi *da'wa* until 870/1465. There are also certain brief, but highly significant, accounts of particular events in Isma'ili history, notably the *Estetār al-emām* (ed. W. Ivanow, 1936a), written by the *dā'i* Nisāburi, relating the settlement of the early Isma'ili imam 'Abd-Allāh al-Akbar in Salamiya, and the subsequent prolonged journey of 'Abd-Allāh al-Mahdi from Syria to North Africa where he was installed to the Fatimid caliphate in 297/909.

In spite of the general absence of an Isma'ili historiographical tradition, there were two periods during which the Isma'ilis concerned themselves with historical writings and produced or encouraged works which in a sense served as official chronicles. During the Fatimid and Alamut periods of their history, the Isma'ilis possessed states of their own and ruling dynasties whose achievements needed to be recorded by reliable chroniclers. In Fatimid times (297-567/909-1171), especially after the transference of the seat of the Fatimid state to Cairo in 362/973, numerous histories of the Fatimid caliphate and dynasty were written by contemporary historians, both Isma'ili and non-Isma'ili, such as Ebn Zulāq (d. 386/996), Mosabbēhi (d. 420/1029) and Qazā'i (d. 454/1062). With the exception of a few fragments, however, none of these chronicles survived the demise of the Fatimid dynasty. The Sunnite Ayyubids who succeeded the Isma'ili Shi'ite Fatimids, systematically destroyed the renowned Fatimid libraries, including the collections of the Dār al-'Elm in Cairo, also persecuting the Isma'ilis of Egypt (see Daftary, 1990, pp. 144-52; Walker, pp. 152-69).

In addition to historical writings, the Isma'ilis of the Fatimid period who enjoyed the protection of their own state, also produced certain biographical works of the *monāzara* and *sira* genres with great historical value. Among the



extant examples of such works, special mention may be made of the *Ketāb al-monāzarāt* (ed. and tr. W. Madelung and P. E. Walker, London, 2000) of the dā'i Ebn Hayṭam, containing unique details on the first year of Fatimid rule in Efriqiya; the *Sira* of Ja'far b. 'Ali (ed. W. Ivanow, 1936b), chamberlain (*ḥājeb*) to the first Fatimid caliph-imam al-Mahdi; and the *Sira* (Cairo, 1954) of Ostaḍ Jawḍar (d. 363/973), who served the first four Fatimid caliph-imams. There is also the important autobiography of al-Mo'ayyad fi'l-Din Širāzi (d. 470/1078), who held the office of the chief dā'i in Cairo for almost twenty years (Walker, pp. 131-51).

The Nezāri Isma'īlis, too, maintained a historiographical tradition during the Alamut period of their history (483-654/1090-1256), when they had a territorial state in Persia centered at the mountainous fortress of Alamut (q.v.), with a subsidiary branch in Syria. During this turbulent period, they compiled chronicles in Persian recording the events of their state according to the reigns of the successive lords of Alamut (Daftary, 1990, pp. 324-33; idem, 1992, pp. 91-97). This historiographical tradition commenced with the *Sargodašt-e Sayyednā*, a work describing the life and the events of the reign of Ḥasan-e Šabbāḥ (q.v., d. 518/1124) as the first lord of Alamut. The first part of this work, which has not survived directly, may have been autobiographical. The reign of Kiā Bozorg-Omid (518-532/1124-1138), Ḥasan's successor as the leader of the Nezāri state and da'wa, was covered in another chronicle entitled *Ketāb-e Bozorg-Omid*. The events of the Persian Nezāri state during the subsequent times until the reign of the eighth and final lord of Alamut, Rokn-al-Din Ḳoršāh and the Mongol destruction of that state in 654/1256, were narrated by other Nezāri chroniclers such as Deḥḳodā 'Abd-al-Malek b. 'Ali Fašandi and Ra'is Ḥasan Šalāḥ-al-Din Monši Birjandi. All these chronicles held at the libraries of Alamut and other Nezari castles in Daylamān and Qohestān perished in the Mongol invasions or soon afterwards, during the period of Ilkhanid rule over Persia. However, these chronicles as well as other Nezāri writings and documents were seen and used extensively by three Persian historians of the Ilkhanid period, namely, Joveyni (d. 681/1283), Rašid-al-Din Fażl-Allāh (d. 718/1318) and Abu'l-Qāsem Kāšāni (d. ca. 736/1335), in their own histories of the Isma'īlis. Indeed, these histories remain our most important primary sources on the Nezāri Isma'īli state in Persia; and they provided the main sources of reference for later Persian historians, like Ḥamd-Allāh Mostawfi (d. after 740/1339) and Ḥāfeẓ-e Abru (d. 833/1430), writing on the subject. Unlike their Persian co-religionists, the Syrian Nezāris and the Nezāri Ḳojas of the Indian subcontinent did not elaborate historiographical traditions.



In the turbulent conditions of the post-Alamut period, when the Persian Nezāris often had to resort to practicing taqiya, and the Nezāri imams remained in hiding for several generations, their literary activities almost ceased to exist and the Nezāris of different regions, who now developed independently of each other, remained largely ignorant of their historical heritage. The situation ameliorated somewhat during the Anjedān (q.v.) revival in Nezāri da'wa and literary activities, which coincided almost exactly with the Safavid period in Persian history. However, the Nezāri works of this period, such as those produced by Abu Eshāq Qohestāni (d. after 904/1498) and Kayrkvāh-e Harāti (d. after 960/1553), although doctrinal in nature, do contain some historical information. In Badaqshān and other regions of Central Asia, the Nezāris of later medieval times elaborated a distinctive literary and doctrinal tradition, based especially on the teachings of Nāṣer-e Qosrow as well as certain Sufi traditions. However, the Central Asian Nezāris, too, did not develop any interest in historiography. Indeed, in the entire extant literature of the Nezāris of Persia and Central Asia, written in the Persian language and preserved mainly in private libraries of Badaqshān now divided between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, there are no historical works worth mentioning, with the major exception of the *Hedāyat al-mo'menin* of Fedā'i Qorāsāni (q.v; d. 1342/1923).

On the other hand, the Mosta'li-Ṭayyebi Isma'ilis, especially those belonging to the majority Dā'udi branch, have produced a number of works in Arabic on the history of their da'wa and the dynasties of their dā'is in Yaman and India. In order to make them more accessible to the Dā'udi Bohra community, some of these histories produced in modern times have been written in Gujarati and transcribed in Arabic (Daftary, 1990, pp. 256-61). Amongst more reliable histories of this kind, mention may be made of the *Montaza' al-aq̄bār* (Beirut, 1999) of Qoṭb-al-Din Solaymānji Borhānpuri (d. 1241/1826), and the *Mawsem-e bahār* (Bombay, 1301-1311/1884-93) of Moḥammad-'Ali Rāmpuri (d. 1315/1897). In more recent times, a number of learned Dā'udi Bohras such as Zāhed-'Ali (1888-1958) and members of the scholarly Hamdāni family have produced historical works in Arabic, Urdu and English on the basis of their ancestral collections of Isma'ili manuscripts. Since the 1960s, a growing number of Isma'ilis, belonging mainly to the Nezāri community, have written doctoral dissertations on aspects of Isma'ili history.



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