



RĀŠĒD-AL-DIN SENĀN

RĀŠĒD-AL-DIN SENĀN b. Salmān (or Solaymān) b. Moḥammad Abu'l-Ḥasan Baṣri (b. near Basra, 520s/1126-35; d. Kahf, Syria, 589/1193), the greatest of the chief *dā'īs* of the Nezāri Isma'īlis in Syria and one of the most prominent figures in their entire history. Rāšed-al-Din was born into an Imāmi Shi'ite family during the 520s/1126-35 in 'Aqr al-Sudan, a village near Baṣra in southern Iraq, where he converted to Nezāri Isma'īlism in his youth. Subsequently, he went to **Alamut**, the central headquarters of the Nezāri Isma'īli state (see **ISMA'ILISM iii. ISMA'ILI HISTORY**) and *da'wa*, to further his Isma'īli education. In Alamut, Senān became a close companion, and possibly also a schoolfellow, of the then heir-apparent to the lord of Alamut, the future **Ḥasan II**, to whom the Nezāris referred with the expression '*alā dekrehe'l-salām* (on his mention be peace).

Soon after his accession in 557/1162 to the leadership of the Nezāri state and *da'wa*, Ḥasan II sent Senān to the Nezāri community in Syria, where he was to remain for the rest of his life. Initially, Senān spent some time at Kahf, a major Nezāri fortress in the Jabal Bahrā' region of central Syria, making himself very popular as a schoolmaster with the local Nezāris. The death of Shaikh Abu Moḥammad, who had led the Syrian Nezāris for some years, resulted in unprecedented succession disputes. Soon Senān assumed the leadership of the Syrian *da'wa* and community on the orders of Alamut (Daftary, 2007, pp. 367-68); he held on to this post without any challenges to his authority for some three decades until his death in 589/1193.

Once established, Senān began to consolidate the deteriorating position of his



community while adopting suitable policies towards the neighboring Sunni rulers and the [Crusaders](#), both posing constant threats to the Syrian Nezāris. He entered into an intricate web of shifting alliances with the major neighboring powers and rulers, especially the Crusaders, the Zangids, and Ṣalāḥ-al-Din Ayyubi (see [Ayyubids](#)), who uprooted the [Fatimids](#) and founded the Ayyubid state comprising Egypt and parts of Syria and Iraq. Indeed, Senān played a prominent role in the regional politics of Syria and succeeded in maintaining the independence of his community under the most adverse circumstances.

Initially Senān concentrated his efforts in reorganizing the Nezāri *da'wa* and community in Syria, also fortifying the existing Nezāri strongholds and acquiring new ones in the Jabal Bahrā'. Senān also paid attention to creating a corps of *fedā'is*, more commonly referred to in Syria as *fedāwis*, the self-sacrificing devotees who embarked on missions to remove prominent enemies of their community. The absolute obedience of the *fedā'is* and the much exaggerated reports about their missions provided the basis for a number of imaginative tales. These so-called [Assassin](#) legends, circulating in the Crusader circles of the Near East and Europe, related to the alleged secret practices of the Nezāris, known to medieval Europeans as the Assassins, and their awe-inspiring chief, Senān, who became famous in the occidental sources as the "Old Man of the Mountain" (see Daftary, 1994, pp. 88-127).

When Ḥasan II proclaimed the *qiāma* (resurrection) at Alamut in 559/1164, it fell upon Senān to introduce the new dispensation in Syria. Senān did ceremonially announce the spiritual resurrection for the Syrian Nezāris; and he evidently taught his own version of the *qiāma* (resurrection) doctrine, which never acquired any deep roots in the Syrian community (Ebn Faḏl-Allāh, pp. 77-78; Lewis, 1966, pp. 230, 241, 261; Daftary, 2007, pp. 357-61).

Senān enjoyed an unprecedented popularity within the Syrian Nezāri community, which enabled him to act somewhat independently of Alamut during the reign of [Nur-al-Din Moḥammad II](#), the fifth lord of Alamut. There are reports that, as a result of the growing rift between Senān and Nur-al-Din Moḥammad, the Nezāri imam attempted several times to remove Senān (Lewis, 1966, pp. 231, 248-49, 262). However, Senān avoided a complete break with Alamut.

An outstanding organizer, strategist, and statesman, Rāšed-al-Din Senān led the Syrian Nezāri Isma'īlis to the peak of their power and fame. It was indeed



Senān who laid the foundations for the continued existence of the Nezāri Ismaʿili community and *daʿwa* in Syria. He died in 589/1193, or less probably a year earlier, in the fortress of Kahf.

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