

FARHAD DAFTARY

The Ismā'īlis

Their History and Doctrines

SECOND EDITION



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The Ismā'īlīs

Their History and Doctrines

The Ismā'īlīs represent the second largest Shī'ī Muslim community after the Twelvers (Ithnā'asharis), and are today dispersed as religious minorities throughout more than twenty-five countries of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America. The bulk of the Ismā'īlīs recognize the Aga Khan as their imam or spiritual leader. The second edition of this authoritative book, the product of more than twenty years' research, traces the history and doctrinal development of the Ismā'īlīs from their origins in the formative period of Islam to the present day, a period of more than twelve centuries. It is the first comprehensive synthesis of the results of modern scholarship in Ismā'īlī studies and draws on numerous primary sources and secondary studies on the subject, particularly on the Ismā'īlī manuscripts which have only recently become available.

All the major phases of Ismā'īlī history are covered. Beginning at the pre-Fātimid period, Dr Daftary conducts a detailed investigation, moving through the Fātimid 'golden age' and the troubled Ṭayyibī–Musta'īlī period through the glorious age of Nizārī Ismā'īlism in Iran and Syria to the Mongol onslaught. The final part of the book traces the modern development of the Ismā'īlī community, explaining the revival of Nizārī Ismā'īlism, particularly in Iran, Central and South Asia, and the socio-economic progress of the Nizārī communities in modern times.

The new edition has been thoroughly revised and incorporates an expanded bibliography and new illustrations. For all students of Islamic and Middle Eastern history, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* will continue to serve as the most definitive account of the history of the Ismā'īlīs and their teachings.

FARHAD DAFTARY is Associate Director and Head of the Department of Academic Research and Publications at The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London. He is a consulting editor of *Encyclopaedia Iranica* as well as the general editor of the Ismaili Heritage Series and the Ismaili Texts and Translations Series. An authority on Ismā'īlī history, Dr Daftary's publications include *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Isma'ilis* (1994), *A Short History of the Ismailis* (1998), *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliography of Sources and Studies* (2004) and *Ismailis in Medieval Muslim Societies* (2005). Dr Daftary's books have been translated into Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu and numerous European languages.

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Second Edition



FARHAD DAFTARY

Institute of Ismaili Studies



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521850841

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First published in print format 2007

ISBN-13 978-0-511-35281-2 eBook (Adobe Reader)

ISBN-10 0-511-35281-6 eBook (Adobe Reader)

ISBN-13 978-0-521-85084-1 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-85084-3 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-61636-2 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-61636-0 paperback

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To Fereshteh

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Foreword

The study of the history of the Ismāʿīlī religion, which for long had depended largely on the polemical and often distorted accounts of its opponents, has been transformed since the time of the First World War by the discovery of large private collections of authentic Ismāʿīlī works in the Soviet Union and India. Many of the original texts, previously kept secret from outsiders by the Ismāʿīlī communities, have now been published or are accessible in manuscript to scholarly research. Although a relatively small number of scholars in the East and the West have actively pursued such research, progress in uncovering the story of the Ismāʿīlī movement in its various branches and the development of Ismāʿīlī religious thought has been steady. The major aspects and characteristics of this thought and its transformations in the course of often catastrophic events affecting the scattered Ismāʿīlī communities have become evident. There are, to be sure, still large gaps left in our knowledge of these developments, some of which may prove difficult to fill because of a lack of sources. Moreover, on some fundamental questions, especially concerning the early stages of Ismāʿīlism, consensus has not yet been reached among scholars. Yet these problems must not obscure the remarkable advances made in the study of Ismāʿīlism, which provide both a general outline of the history of one of the major branches of Shīʿī Islam and a sound basis for further detailed research.

In the present volume, Dr F. Daftary offers a first comprehensive and detailed synthesis of the complex history of Ismāʿīlism. His presentation fully reflects the progress of recent research, widely scattered in editions of texts, monographs and articles, and integrates it into an evenly readable account. In some areas, especially on the modern developments, entirely new ground is covered. The book will no doubt be widely appreciated as a general reference work by students and by all readers interested in aspects of Ismāʿīlī history from a scholarly point of view.

Wilferd Madelung
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Preface to the first edition

The Ismāʿīlīs constitute the second largest Shīʿī community after the Twelvers in the Muslim world and are now scattered in more than twenty countries of Asia, Africa, Europe and America. This book traces the history and doctrines of the Ismāʿīlī movement from its origins to the present time, a period of approximately twelve centuries.

The origins of Sunnism and Shīʿism, the two main divisions of Islam, may be traced to the crisis of succession faced by the nascent Muslim community following the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, though the doctrinal bases of these divisions developed gradually in the course of several centuries. In time, Shīʿī Islam, the minoritarian view, became subdivided into different groups, many of which proved short-lived. But Imāmī Shīʿism, providing the common early heritage for several Shīʿī communities, notably the Twelvers and the Ismāʿīlīs, was a major exception.

The Ismāʿīlīs have had a long and eventful history. In medieval times, they twice established states of their own and played important parts for relatively long periods on the historical stage of the Muslim world. During the second century of their history, the Ismāʿīlīs founded the first Shīʿī caliphate under the Fāṭimid caliph-imams. They also made important contributions to Islamic thought and culture during the Fāṭimid period. Later, after a schism that split Ismāʿīlism into its two major Nizārī and Mustaʿlian branches, the Nizārī leaders succeeded in founding a cohesive state, with numerous mountain strongholds and scattered territories stretching from eastern Persia to Syria. The Nizārī state collapsed only under the onslaught of the all-conquering Mongols. Thereafter, the Ismāʿīlīs never regained any political prominence and survived in many lands as minor Shīʿī Muslim communities. By the second half of the eighteenth century, however, the spiritual leaders or imams of the Nizārī majority came out of their obscurity and actively participated in certain political events in Persia and, then, in British India. Later they acquired international prominence under their hereditary title of Āghā Khān (Aga Khan).

The Ismāʿīlīs have almost continuously faced the hostility of the majority of Muslim dynasties and groups. Indeed, they have been amongst the most severely

persecuted communities in the Islamic world. As a result, the Ismāʿīlīs have been obliged for the most part to live clandestinely, guarding secretly their religious beliefs and literature.

Under such circumstances, the Ismāʿīlīs were until a few decades ago studied and judged mainly on the basis of the hostile accounts produced by their enemies, including the writings of the majority of the medieval Muslim historians, theologians, heresiographers and polemicists, as well as the fanciful stories related by the occidental chroniclers of the Crusaders. Having had confrontations with the Nizārīs of Syria, the Crusaders were also responsible for making these sectarians, followers of the Old Man of the Mountain, known in Europe as the Assassins; an unfortunate misnomer that is still occasionally applied by some writers to the entire Nizārī branch of Ismāʿīlism. The same anti-Ismāʿīlī sources provided the basis for the studies of the nineteenth-century orientalists on different aspects of the Ismāʿīlī movement.

However, Ismāʿīlī studies have been revolutionized in the twentieth century, especially since the 1930s, mainly by the discovery and study of a large number of Ismāʿīlī manuscripts preserved in India, Central Asia and Yaman (Yemen). Many of these Ismāʿīlī texts, including the classical treatises of the Fāṭimid period, have been gradually edited and published. The new availability of genuine Ismāʿīlī sources has enabled a small group of specialists, initially led by the late Wladimir Ivanow, to produce important studies in the field. As a result of the modern progress in Ismāʿīlī studies, we have now acquired a much better understanding of the true nature of the Ismāʿīlī movement, necessitating a drastic revision of previously held ideas on the subject.

This study aims to present, in a connected manner, the results of modern scholarship on the history and doctrines of the Ismāʿīlīs. Drawing on a large number of Ismāʿīlī texts and other primary sources, as well as the contributions of the modern authorities, it seeks to cover all the major phases and events in the development of Ismāʿīlism.

The genesis of this book dates back to more than [four] decades ago when I was a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, and began to correspond with Wladimir Ivanow, who was the original inspirer of my interest in Ismāʿīlī studies. The bulk of the manuscript was, however, written in Tehran between 1979 and 1987, the turbulent years of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Subsequently, some sections were revised and many additions were made to the notes and references. In conducting my research, I utilized, over the years, the collections of several private and public libraries in Tehran, Paris, London and elsewhere. I am particularly indebted to The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, for placing at my disposal their Ismāʿīlī manuscripts.

Professor Wilferd Madelung of the University of Oxford read the entire typescript of the book and made many valuable suggestions for its improvement, also saving me from several errors and inaccuracies. I owe him a very special debt of gratitude.

A number of friends accompanied me on field trips to Alamūt, Lamasar, Girdkūh, Anjudān, Dizbād, and other Ismāʿīlī sites in Iran, or in different ways contributed to the completion of this book. I am grateful to all of them. I am particularly indebted to Mithra Razmjoo for her literary judgement and keen editing; to Mohammad R. Moghtader for preparing an earlier draft of the (second) map; to Azizeh Azodi for letting me benefit from her profound knowledge of the German and Russian languages; and to Susan van de Ven for carefully preparing the final typescript for the Press. Iradj Bagherzade, extremely busy with his own publishing schedule in London, always found time to advise me on publishing matters. I should like to express my warm thanks to him. And I am deeply thankful to Farideh Agha Khan, who has been a constant source of inspiration and assistance over the years.

Finally, there is Fereshteh who not only encouraged the writing of this book and then bore with me while I was writing it, but who also photographed many Ismāʿīlī sites for me, at times with great risk to her safety, and typed the various drafts of the book. I can never thank her adequately; this book is dedicated to her as a token of my deep sense of appreciation.

Preface to the second edition

The bulk of the original text of this book was completed by the mid 1980s. After some minor additions, the first edition of the book was published in 1990. As the first comprehensive history of the Ismāʿīlīs, synthesizing the scattered results of modern scholarship in the field, this publication was well received by the academic community as well as the Ismāʿīlīs worldwide. As a result, it was reprinted several times, in addition to being translated into Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Turkish and Tajik (Cyrillic). The Persian translation of *The Ismāʿīlīs: their history and doctrines* also received the ‘best book of the year award’ in the Islamic Republic of Iran, an unexpected accolade.

Meanwhile, in 1988 I had joined The Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, which serves as an international forum for Ismāʿīlī studies. The progress in this field of Islamic studies has proceeded at an astonishing pace during the last two decades, as reflected in my *Ismaili literature: A bibliography of sources and studies* (2004), while my own Ismāʿīlī scholarship has moved beyond its initial stages in the 1960s and 1970s. All this has necessitated the production of a second revised edition of this book. In this new edition, many parts of all chapters have been re-written or otherwise revised, and much new material has been incorporated throughout the text of the book. In addition, doctrinal expositions and interpretations have been sharpened to reflect more recent academic perspectives on aspects of Ismāʿīlī thought. In order to improve the accessibility of the book, chapters have also been provided with relevant sub-headings. Finally, a systematic effort has been made to update the endnotes, annotations and references, accounting for the important publications of the last two decades. This second edition also contains an expanded ‘select bibliography’, in addition to new illustrations and another map.

A number of colleagues at The Institute of Ismaili Studies have assisted me in the production of this edition. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude to Nadia Holmes, for meticulously preparing the various drafts of the typescript, to Isabel Miller, for her keen editorial work, and to Patricia Salazar for expediting a variety of production tasks.

Note on the text and abbreviations

The system of transliteration used in this book for the Arabic script is essentially that of the new (second) edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, with two modifications, namely, *j* for *ḍj*, and *q* for *ḵ*. To maintain consistency, the same system is utilized for transliterating Persian names and terms, except that *č* is replaced by *ch*, and sometimes *v* is used for *w*. Furthermore, an attempt has been made to reproduce the more elaborate vowel system of Turkish and Mongol names, thus Hüleḡü and not Hülāḡü. Common geographical names and certain Islamic terms which have acquired standard usage in the English language have not been transliterated.

The lunar years of the Islamic calendar are generally followed throughout the text and the endnotes (with the exception of chapter 1) by the corresponding Gregorian solar years (e.g., 6th/12th century). The years of the Islamic era, initiated by the emigration (*hijra*) of the Prophet Muḡammad from Mecca to Medina in July 622, commonly abbreviated in the Latin form AH (= *Anno Hegirae*), have been converted to the corresponding dates of the Christian era, abbreviated as AD (= *Anno Domini*), on the basis of the conversion tables given in Greville S. P. Freeman-Grenville, *The Muslim and Christian Calendars* (London, 1963). In Iran (Persia), a solar Islamic calendar was officially adopted in the 1920s. The Islamic dates of the sources published in modern Iran are, therefore, solar (Shamsī; abbreviated to Sh. in the Select bibliography), coinciding with the corresponding Christian years starting on 21 March.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for certain frequently cited periodicals and other sources in the Notes and Select bibliography:

AIEO	<i>Annales de l'Institut d'Études Orientales</i>
AIM	D. Cortese, <i>Arabic Ismaili Manuscripts: The Zāhid 'Alī Collection in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies</i>
AI(U)ON	<i>Annali dell' Istituto (Universitario) Orientale di Napoli</i>

APP	<i>An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia: Volume II</i> , ed. S. H. Nasr with M. Aminrazavi
BIFAO	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire</i>
BSO(A)S	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies</i>
EI	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 1st edition
EI2	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , New edition
EII	<i>Encyclopaedia of Iran and Islam (Dānishnāma-yi Īrān va Islām)</i>
EIR	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i>
EJ	<i>Eranos Jahrbuch</i>
ER	<i>Encyclopedia of Religion</i>
ERE	<i>Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics</i>
EWI	<i>Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam (Dānishnāma-yi Jahān-i Islām)</i>
GIE	<i>The Great Islamic Encyclopaedia (Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī)</i>
IJMES	<i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
IMMS	F. Daftary, <i>Ismailis in Medieval Muslim Societies</i>
IOAM	D. Cortese, <i>Ismaili and Other Arabic Manuscripts: A Descriptive Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies</i>
JA	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBBRAS	<i>Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
MIHT	F. Daftary (ed.) <i>Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought</i>
NS	New Series, Nuova Serie
REI	<i>Revue des Études Islamiques</i>
RHC	<i>Recueil des Historiens des Croisades</i>
RHCHO	<i>Recueil des Historiens des Croisades: Historiens Orientaux</i>
RSO	<i>Rivista degli Studi Orientali</i>
SEI	<i>Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>



Introduction: progress in the study of the Ismā‘īlīs

A major Shī‘ī Muslim community, the Ismā‘īlīs have had a long and eventful history dating back to the formative period of Islam, when different communities of interpretation were developing their doctrinal positions. The varying viewpoints of the then nascent Muslim community (*umma*) on certain central theological issues and the question of leadership after the Prophet Muḥammad were eventually elaborated in terms of what became known as the Sunnī and Shī‘ī interpretations of the Islamic message. The Shī‘a themselves, upholding a particular conception of leadership and religious authority in the community, were further subdivided into a number of communities and smaller groups or sects. This was not only because they disagreed over who was to be their rightful spiritual leader or imam from amongst the Prophet’s family, the *ahl al-bayt*, but also because divergent trends of thought and policy were involved.

By the time of the ‘Abbāsīd revolution in 132/750, Imāmī Shī‘ism, the common heritage of the major Shī‘ī communities of the Ithnā‘ashariyya (or Twelvers) and the Ismā‘īliyya, had acquired a special prominence under the leadership of Ja‘far al-Šādiq, their ‘Alid imam. The Imāmī Shī‘īs, who like other Shī‘ī groups upheld the rights of the *ahl al-bayt* to the leadership of the Muslims, propounded a particular conception of divinely instituted religious authority, also recognizing certain descendants of the Prophet’s family from amongst the ‘Alids, the progeny of the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, as their imams possessing the required religious authority. The Ismā‘īlī Imāmī Shī‘īs, named after Ismā‘īl the son of Imam Ja‘far al-Šādiq, acquired their independent existence in the middle of the 2nd/8th century and, in the course of their history, the Ismā‘īlīs themselves became further subdivided into a number of major branches and minor groups. Currently, the Ismā‘īlīs are made up of the Nizārī and Ṭayyibī Musta‘lian branches, and they are scattered as religious minorities in over twenty-five countries in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America. Numbering several millions, they represent a diversity of ethnic groups and literary traditions, and speak a variety of languages, including Arabic and Persian as well as a number of Indic and European languages.

Phases in Ismā'īlī history

The pre-Fāṭimid period of Ismā'īlī history in general and the opening phase of Ismā'īlism in particular remain rather obscure in Ismā'īlī historiography, not least because of the dearth of reliable information. It is a known fact that on the death of Imam al-Ṣādiq in 148/765 his Imāmī Shī'ī following split into several groups, including two groups identifiable as the earliest Ismā'īlīs. By the middle of the 3rd/9th century, the Ismā'īlīs had organized a revolutionary movement against the 'Abbāsids. In 286/899, the unified Ismā'īlī movement, designated by the Ismā'īlīs themselves as *al-da'wa al-hādiya*, the rightly guiding mission or simply as the *da'wa*, was rent by its first major schism over the question of the leadership or imamate in the community. The Ismā'īlīs were now divided into two rival factions, the loyal Ismā'īlīs and the dissident Qarmaṭīs. The loyal Ismā'īlīs upheld continuity in the Ismā'īlī imamate and recognized the founder of the Fāṭimid dynasty and his successors as their imams. The Qarmaṭīs, centred in Baḥrayn, acknowledged a line of seven imams that excluded the Fāṭimid caliphs. By the final decades of the 3rd/9th century, Ismā'īlī *dā'īs* or religio-political missionaries were successfully active over an area stretching from North Africa to Central Asia.

The early success of the Ismā'īlī *da'wa* culminated in 297/909 in the foundation of an Ismā'īlī *dawla* or state, the Fāṭimid caliphate. The Ismā'īlīs had now entered a new phase of their history. The revolutionary activities of the early Ismā'īlīs had resulted in the establishment of a state in which the Ismā'īlī imam was installed as caliph, representing a serious Shī'ī challenge to the authority of the 'Abbāsid caliph, the spokesman of Sunnī Islam. The Ismā'īlīs, who as Shī'ī Muslims had elaborated their own interpretation of the Islamic message, now effectively offered an alternative to Sunnī Islam that was defined as the true interpretation of Islam by the Sunnī religious scholars supported by the 'Abbāsid establishment. The Fāṭimid period was in a sense the 'golden age' of Ismā'īlism, when the Ismā'īlī imam ruled over a vast empire and Ismā'īlī thought and literature attained their apogee. It was during the Fāṭimid period that the Ismā'īlī *dā'īs*, who were at the same time the scholars and authors of their community, produced what were to become the classic texts of Ismā'īlī literature dealing with a multitude of exoteric and esoteric subjects. Ismā'īlī law, which had not existed during the pre-Fāṭimid secret phase of Ismā'īlism, was also codified during the early Fāṭimid period. It was indeed during the Fāṭimid period that Ismā'īlīs made their important contributions to Islamic theology and philosophy in general and to Shī'ī thought in particular. Modern recovery of their literature clearly attests to the richness and diversity of the literary and intellectual traditions of the Ismā'īlīs of the Fāṭimid times.

A new phase in Ismā'īlī history was initiated on the death of the Fāṭimid caliph-imam al-Mustanṣir in 487/1094 and the ensuing Musta'li-Nizārī schism

in Ismā'īlism. The succession to al-Mustaṣṣir was disputed between Nizār, his eldest son and original heir-designate, and the latter's much younger brother Aḥmad who was actually installed as Fāṭimid caliph with the title of al-Musta'li bi'llāh. Subsequently, Nizār rose in revolt to assert his claims, but he was eventually defeated and killed in 488/1095. As a result of these events the unified Ismā'īlī community and *da'wa* of the latter decades of al-Mustaṣṣir's reign was permanently split into two rival branches, the Musta'liyya and the Nizāriyya.

The Musta'lian Ismā'īlīs themselves split into Ḥāfiẓī and Ṭayyibī factions soon after the death of al-Musta'li's son and successor on the Fāṭimid throne, al-Āmir, in 524/1130. The Ḥāfiẓī Musta'lians, who acknowledged the later Fāṭimids as their imams, disappeared soon after the collapse of the Fāṭimid dynasty in 567/1171. The Ṭayyibī Musta'lians recognized al-Āmir's infant son, al-Ṭayyib, as their imam after al-Āmir, and then traced the imamate in al-Ṭayyib's progeny. However, all Ṭayyibī imams after al-Āmir have remained in concealment, and in their absence the affairs of the Ṭayyibī community and *da'wa* have been handled by lines of *dā'īs*. Ṭayyibī Ismā'īlism found its permanent stronghold in Yaman, where it received the initial support of the Ṣulayḥid dynasty. By the end of the 10th/16th century, the Ṭayyibīs had divided into the Dā'ūdī and Sulaymānī branches over the issue of the rightful succession to the position of the *dā'ī*. By that time the Ṭayyibīs of South Asia, known locally as Bohras and belonging mainly to the Dā'ūdī branch, had come to outnumber their Sulaymānī co-religionists centred in Yaman. The Ṭayyibīs in general maintained the intellectual and literary traditions of the Ismā'īlīs of the Fāṭimid period, as well as preserving a good portion of that period's Ismā'īlī Arabic literature. The Ṭayyibīs, representing the only extant Musta'lian community, nowadays account for a minority of the Ismā'īlīs. The history of Ṭayyibī Ismā'īlism, in both Yaman and India, revolves mainly around the activities of different *dā'īs*, supplemented by polemical accounts of various disputes and minor schisms in the Dā'ūdī Bohra community.

The Nizārī Ismā'īlīs, concentrated originally in Persia and Syria, have had a completely different historical evolution. The Nizārīs acquired political prominence within the Saljūq dominions, under the initial leadership of Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ, who founded the independent Nizārī state and *da'wa* in Persia. The Nizārī state, centred at the mountain fortress of Alamūt in northern Persia, lasted some 166 years until its destruction by the Mongols in 654/1256. After Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ (d. 518/1124) and his next two successors, who ruled as *dā'īs* and *ḥujjās*, the Nizārī imam's chief representatives, the imams themselves emerged at Alamūt to lead their state, community and *da'wa*. Preoccupied with their revolutionary activities and living in hostile surroundings, the Nizārīs of the Alamūt period did not produce a substantial body of religious literature. They produced mainly military commanders and governors of fortress communities rather than outstanding religious scholars. Nevertheless, they did maintain a literary tradition,

and elaborated their teachings in response to the changed circumstances of the Alamūt period.

The Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs survived the Mongol destruction of their fortress communities and state, and this marked the initiation of a new phase in their history. The post-Alamūt period in Nizārī Ismāʿīlism covers more than seven centuries, from the fall of Alamūt in 654/1256 to the present time. The Nizārī communities, scattered from Syria to Persia, Central Asia and South Asia, now elaborated a diversity of religious and literary traditions in different languages. Many aspects of Ismāʿīlī activity in this period have not been sufficiently studied due to a scarcity of primary sources. More complex research difficulties arise from the widespread practice of *taqiyya* (precautionary dissimulation of one's true religious beliefs and identity) by the Nizārī groups of different regions during most of this period when they were obliged to safeguard themselves under a variety of disguises against rampant persecution.

The first two post-Alamūt centuries of Nizārī history remain particularly obscure. In the aftermath of the destruction of their state, the Nizārī imams went into hiding and lost their direct contact with their followers. The scattered Nizārī communities now developed independently under local leaderships. By the middle of the 9th/15th century, the Nizārī imams had emerged in Anjudān in central Persia, initiating what has been designated as the Anjudān revival in Nizārī *daʿwa* and literary activities. During the Anjudān period, lasting some two centuries, the imams reasserted their central authority over the various Nizārī communities. The Nizārī *daʿwa* now proved particularly successful in Badakhshan in Central Asia, and in the Indian subcontinent where large numbers of Hindus were converted, the Indian Nizārīs being called locally Khojas. The modern period in Nizārī history, representing the third sub-period in post-Alamūt Nizārī Ismāʿīlism, may be dated to the middle of the 13th/19th century when the residence of the Nizārī imams was transferred from Persia to India and subsequently to Europe. Benefiting from the modernizing policies and the elaborate network of institutions established by their last two imams, known internationally by their hereditary title of the Aga Khan, the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs have emerged as an educated and progressive Muslim religious minority. The chronological categorization discussed in this section provides the general framework for the structure of this book.

Ismāʿīlī historiography

Ismāʿīlī historiography and the perceptions of the Ismāʿīlīs by others, as well as stages in modern Ismāʿīlī studies, have had their own fascinating evolution, of

which we shall present a brief survey in this chapter. Ismāʿīlī historiography in particular has had its own distinctive features, closely related to the very nature of the Ismāʿīlī movement. The Ismāʿīlīs were more often than not persecuted as ‘heretics’ or ‘revolutionary activists’, which necessitated the observance of the Shīʿī principle of *taqiyya* or precautionary dissimulation. The Ismāʿīlī authors, who were for the most part theologians, served as *dāʿīs* in hostile environments. Owing to their training as well as the necessity of observing secrecy in their activities, the Ismāʿīlī *dāʿī*-authors were not particularly keen on compiling any type of historical account. This is attested by the fact that only a few works of a historical nature have come to light in the modern recovery of Ismāʿīlī textual materials. These include al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān’s *Iftitāḥ al-daʿwa* (*Commencement of the Mission*), completed in 346/957, which is the earliest known historical work in Ismāʿīlī literature covering the background to the establishment of the Fāṭimid caliphate. In the later medieval centuries, only one general Ismāʿīlī history was written by an Ismāʿīlī author, the *ʿUyūn al-akhbār* (*Choice Stories*) of Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn (d. 872/1468), the nineteenth Ṭayyibī *dāʿī* in Yaman. This is a seven-volume history running from the time of the Prophet and the early Shīʿī imams until the commencement of the Ṭayyibī Mustaʿlian *daʿwa* in Yaman and the demise of the Fāṭimid dynasty. It is noteworthy that the pre-Fāṭimid period of Ismāʿīlī history in general and the initial phase of Ismāʿīlism in particular remain rather obscure in Ismāʿīlī historical writings. There are also a few brief, but highly valuable, historical narratives of specific events, such as the *dāʿī* Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Nisābūrī’s *Istīṭār al-imām*, dealing with the settlement of the early Ismāʿīlī imam, ʿAbd Allāh, in Salamiyya in the 3rd/9th century, and the eventful journey of a later imam, the future founder of the Fāṭimid state, ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdī, from Syria to North Africa.

There were, however, two periods in Ismāʿīlī history during which the Ismāʿīlīs concerned themselves particularly with historiography, and they produced or commissioned works which may be regarded as official chronicles. During the Fāṭimid and Alamūt periods, the Ismāʿīlīs possessed their own states and dynasties of rulers whose careers and achievements needed to be recorded by reliable chroniclers. In Fāṭimid times, numerous histories of the Fāṭimid state and dynasty were compiled by contemporary historians. With the exception of a few fragments, however, the Fāṭimid chronicles of Ismāʿīlī and non-Ismāʿīlī authors did not survive the downfall of the dynasty in 567/1171. The Sunnī Ayyūbids who succeeded the Fāṭimids in Egypt systematically demolished the renowned Fāṭimid libraries of Cairo, persecuting the Ismāʿīlīs and destroying their religious literature.

The Ismāʿīlīs of the Fāṭimid period also produced a few biographical works of the *sīra* genre with significant historical value. Amongst the extant works of this

category mention may be made of the *Sīra* of Ja'far b. 'Alī, chamberlain to the founder of the Fāṭimid dynasty, the *Sīra* of Ustādh Jawdhar (d. 363/973), a trusted courtier who served the first four Fāṭimid caliph-imams, and the autobiography of al-Mu'ayyad fī'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078), who held the office of chief *dā'ī* in Cairo for almost twenty years. Other biographical works, such as the *Sīra* of the *dā'ī* Ibn Ḥawshab Maṣṣūr al-Yaman (d. 302/914) written by his son Ja'far, or the autobiography of the *dā'ī* Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'ī (d. 298/911) quoted in al-Nu'mān's *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa*, have not survived. The Fāṭimid period was also rich in archival material of historical value, including a variety of treatises, letters, decrees and epistles (*sijillāt*) issued through the Fāṭimid chancery of state, the *dīwān al-inshā'*. Many of these documents have survived directly, or have been quoted in later literary sources, notably the *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā'* of al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418).

The Nizārī Ismā'īlīs of the Alamūt period, too, as we shall see, maintained a historiographical tradition. In Persia, at least, they compiled chronicles in the Persian languages recording the events of the Persian Nizārī state according to the reigns of the successive lords of Alamūt. All the official chronicles, held at Alamūt and other major Nizārī strongholds in Persia, perished in the Mongol invasions that destroyed the Nizārī state in 654/1256, or soon afterwards during the Īlkhānid period. However, the Nizārī chronicles and other documents were used extensively by a small group of Persian historians of the Īlkhānid period, notably Juwaynī (d. 681/1283), Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍl Allāh (d. 718/1318) and Abū'l-Qāsim Kāshānī (d. ca. 738/1337). These remain our major sources for the history of the Persian Nizārīs of the Alamūt period. The Syrian Nizārīs, unlike their Persian co-religionists, did not compile chronicles and instead they are treated in various regional histories of Syria, such as those produced by Ibn al-Qalānīsī (d. 555/1160) and Ibn al-'Adīm (d. 660/1262). Much valuable information on the Ismā'īlīs of different periods is contained in the universal histories of Muslim authors, starting with that of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and its continuation by 'Arīb b. Sa'd (d. 370/980). The Ismā'īlīs of the Fāṭimid and Alamūt periods are also treated extensively in the universal history, *al-Kāmil*, of Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233), who represents the culmination of the Muslim annalistic tradition.

The religious literature of the Ismā'īlīs, which was not generally available to outsiders, is indispensable for tracing the doctrinal history of the community. The doctrinal treatises of the Fāṭimid period are also invaluable for understanding aspects of the teachings of the earlier times when the Ismā'īlīs evidently propagated their ideas mainly by word of mouth. In addition, some of the Ismā'īlī texts of the Fāṭimid period, such as the *majālīs* collections of different authors, contain historical references not found elsewhere. Similarly, the Nizārī Ismā'īlī teachings of the Alamūt period may be studied on the basis of the meagre extant literature

of that period, in addition to the accounts found in later Nizārī sources as well as those of the Persian historians of the Īlkhānid period. In the unsettled conditions of the early post-Alamūt centuries, following the Mongol destruction of the Nizārī state, the Nizārīs engaged in very limited literary activities. These were revived during the Anjudān period in Nizārī history, and the doctrinal works of that period, such as the writings of Abū Ishāq Quhistānī (d. after 904/1498) and Khayrkhwāh-i Harātī (d. after 960/1553) do contain important historical details. Meanwhile, Persian Nizārī works had become permeated with Sufi ideas and terminologies. Other Nizārī regions, notably Central Asia and South Asia, developed their own indigenous literary traditions during the post-Alamūt centuries.

Anti-Ismāʿīlī writings of other Muslims

In the course of their history the Ismāʿīlīs were often accused of various ‘heretical’ teachings and practices and, at the same time, a multitude of myths and misrepresentations circulated about them. This state of affairs was a reflection of the unfortunate fact that the Ismāʿīlīs were, until the middle of the twentieth century, perceived and judged almost exclusively on the basis of evidence collected or often fabricated by their enemies. As the most revolutionary wing of Shīʿism with a religio-political agenda for uprooting the ‘Abbāsids and restoring the caliphate to a line of ‘Alid imams, the Ismāʿīlīs from early on aroused the hostility of the ‘Abbāsīd–Sunnī establishment of the Muslim majority. With the foundation of the Fāṭimid state in 297/909 the Ismāʿīlī challenge to the established order had become actualized, and thereupon the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs and the Sunnī ‘ulamā’ launched what amounted to an official anti-Ismāʿīlī propaganda campaign. The overall aim of this systematic and prolonged campaign was to discredit the entire Ismāʿīlī movement from its origins onward so that the Ismāʿīlīs could be readily condemned as *malāḥida*, heretics or deviators from the true religious path. Muslim theologians, jurists, historians and heresiographers participated variously in this campaign.

In particular, Sunnī polemicists fabricated the necessary evidence that would lend support to the condemnation of the Ismāʿīlīs on specific doctrinal grounds. They concocted detailed accounts of the sinister teachings and immoral practices of the Ismāʿīlīs while denying the ‘Alid genealogy of their imams. A number of polemicists also fabricated travesties in which they attributed a variety of abhorrent beliefs and practices to the Ismāʿīlīs. These forgeries were circulated widely as genuine Ismāʿīlī treatises and, in time, they were used as source material by subsequent generations of Muslim authors writing about the Ismāʿīlīs.

By spreading these defamations and forged accounts, the polemicists and other anti-Ismāʿīlī authors gradually created, starting in the 4th/10th century, a 'black legend'. Accordingly, Ismāʿīlism was depicted as the arch-heresy, *ilhād*, of Islam, carefully designed by a certain ʿAbd Allāh b. Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ, or some other non-ʿAlid impostors, or possibly even a Jewish magician disguised as a Muslim, aiming at destroying Islam from within.¹ By the 5th/11th century, this fiction, with its elaborate details and stages of initiation towards atheism, had been accepted as an accurate and reliable description of Ismāʿīlī motives, beliefs and practices, leading to further anti-Ismāʿīlī polemics and heresiographical accusations as well as intensifying the animosity of other Muslim communities towards the Ismāʿīlī Muslims. The components of the anti-Ismāʿīlī 'black legend' continued to fire the imagination of countless generations of Sunnī writers throughout the medieval era.

Many of the essential components of the anti-Ismāʿīlī 'black legend', relating especially to the origins and early history of Ismāʿīlism, may be traced to a certain Sunnī polemicist called Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Rizām (or Razzām) al-Ṭāʾī al-Kūfī, better known as Ibn Rizām, who lived in Baghdad during the first half of the 4th/10th century. He wrote a major treatise in refutation of the Ismāʿīlīs. Ibn Rizām's anti-Ismāʿīlī tract, *Kitāb radd ʿalāʾl-Ismāʿīliyya* (or *Naqd ʿalāʾl-Bāṭiniyya*), does not seem to have survived, but it is quoted in Ibn al-Nadīm's *al-Fihrist*, completed in 377/987.² More importantly, it was used extensively a few decades later by another polemicist, the Sharīf Abuʾl-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. ʿAlī, an ʿAlid from Damascus better known as Akhū Muḥsin. An early ʿAlid genealogist, Akhū Muḥsin wrote his own anti-Ismāʿīlī tract, consisting of both historical and doctrinal parts, around 372/982. This work, too, has not survived. However, long fragments from the Akhū Muḥsin account have been preserved by several later authors, notably the Egyptian historians al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333), Ibn al-Dawādārī (d. after 736/1335), and al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), who was the first authority to have identified Ibn Rizām as the principal source of Akhū Muḥsin while condemning both as unreliable.³ The unreliability of Ibn Rizām had already been pointed out by his contemporary, the chronicler al-Masʿūdī.⁴

It was also in Akhū Muḥsin's polemical tract that the *Kitāb al-siyāsa* (*Book of Methodology*), one of the most popular early travesties attributed to Ismāʿīlīs, came to be cited. Used by several generations of polemicists and heresiographers as a major source on the secret doctrines of the Ismāʿīlīs, this anonymous tract evidently contained all the ideas needed to condemn the Ismāʿīlīs as heretics on account of their alleged libertinism and atheism. Akhū Muḥsin claims to have read this book and presents passages from it on the procedures for winning new converts that were supposedly followed by Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs*, instructing them

through some seven stages of initiation (*balāgh*) leading ultimately to atheism and unbelief.⁵ The same book, or another forgery entitled *Kitāb al-balāgh*, was seen shortly afterwards by Ibn al-Nadīm.⁶ The heresiographer al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037), who used polemical materials in his own defamatory account of the Ismāʿīlīs, even claims that the *Kitāb al-siyāsa* was sent by the founder of the Fāṭimid dynasty to Abū Ṭāhir al-Jannābī (d. 332/944), the leader of the Qarmaṭī state of Baḥrayn.⁷ By this claim al-Baghdādī not only attempted to accord authenticity to this forgery, but also made the Qarmaṭīs subservient to the Fāṭimids in order to further defame the latter. Needless to add, the Ismāʿīlī tradition knows of these fictitious accounts only from the polemics of its enemies. At any rate, anti-Ismāʿīlī polemical writings provided a major source of information for Sunnī heresiographers who produced another important category of writings against the Ismāʿīlīs. The polemical and heresiographical traditions, in turn, influenced the Muslim historians, theologians and jurists who had something to say about the Ismāʿīlīs. The Sunnī authors, who were generally not interested in collecting accurate information on the internal divisions of Shīʿism and treated all Shīʿī interpretations of Islam as ‘heterodoxies’ or even ‘heresies’, also availed themselves of the opportunity of blaming the Fāṭimids and indeed the entire Ismāʿīlī community for the atrocities perpetrated by the Qarmaṭīs of Baḥrayn. On the other hand, the Imāmī Shīʿī heresiographers, such as al-Nawbakhtī (d. after 300/912) and al-Qummī (d. 301/913–914), who like their Sunnī counterparts were interested in defending the legitimacy of their own community, were better informed on the internal divisions of Shīʿism and were also less hostile towards the Ismāʿīlī Shīʿīs. In fact, these earliest Imāmī heresiographers provide our main source of information on the opening phase of Ismāʿīlism.

By the end of the 5th/11th century, the widespread literary campaign against the Ismāʿīlīs had been quite successful throughout the central Islamic lands. The revolt of the Persian Ismāʿīlīs led by Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ against the Saljūq Turks, the new overlords of the ʿAbbāsids, called forth another prolonged Sunnī reaction against the Ismāʿīlīs in general and the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs in particular. A new literary campaign, accompanied by military attacks on the Nizārī strongholds in Persia, was initiated by Nizām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), the Saljūq vizier and virtual master of their dominions for more than two decades, with the full endorsement of the ʿAbbāsid caliph and the Saljūq sultan. Nizām al-Mulk devoted a long chapter in his own *Siyāsat-nāma* (*The Book of Government*) to the condemnation of the Ismāʿīlīs who, according to him, aimed ‘to abolish Islam, to mislead mankind and cast them into perdition’.⁸

However, the earliest polemical treatise against the Persian Ismāʿīlīs of the Alamūt period was written by al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), the most renowned contemporary Sunnī theologian and jurist. He was, in fact, commissioned by the

ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Mustazhir (487–512/1094–1118) to write a treatise in refutation of the Bāṭinīs, another designation meaning ‘esotericists’ coined for the Ismāʿīlīs by their detractors who accused them of dispensing with the *ẓāhir*, or the commandments and prohibitions of the *sharīʿa* or the sacred law of Islam, because they claimed to have found access to the *bāṭin*, or the inner meaning of the Islamic message as interpreted by the Ismāʿīlī imam. In this widely circulated book, commonly known as *al-Mustazhirī* and completed shortly before al-Ghazālī left his teaching post at the Nizāmiyya Madrasa in Baghdad in 488/1095, the author elaborated his own notion of an ‘Ismāʿīlī’ system of graded initiation leading to the ultimate stage (*al-balāgh al-akbar*) of atheism.⁹ The defamations of al-Ghazālī were adopted by other Sunnī writers who, like Nizām al-Mulk, were also familiar with the earlier ‘black legend’. Sunnī historians, including especially Saljūq chroniclers and the local historians of Syria, participated actively in the renewed literary campaign against the Ismāʿīlīs, while the Saljūqs’ persistent failure to dislodge the Nizārīs from their mountain fortresses belied their far superior military power.

By the opening decades of the 6th/12th century, the Ismāʿīlī community had become divided and embarked on its own internal, Nizārī versus Mustaʿlian, feuds. In the event, the Mustaʿlian Ismāʿīlīs, supported by the Fāṭimid state, initiated their anti-Nizārī campaign to refute the claims of Nizār (d. 488/1095) and his descendants to the Ismāʿīlī imamate. In one such polemical epistle issued in 516/1122 by the Fāṭimid caliph al-Āmir, the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs of Syria were for the first time referred to with the designation of *ḥashīshiyya*, without any explanation.¹⁰ This term was later applied to Syrian Ismāʿīlīs in a derogatory sense, without actually accusing them of using hashish. The Persian Nizārīs, too, were designated as *ḥashīshī* in some Zaydī Arabic sources produced in northern Persia during the Alamūt period.¹¹ It is important to note that in all the Muslim sources in which the Nizārīs are referred to as *ḥashīshīs*, this term is used only in its abusive, figurative sense of ‘low-class rabble’ and ‘irreligious social outcasts’. The literal interpretation of the term for the Nizārīs is rooted in the fantasies of medieval Europeans and their ‘imaginative ignorance’ of Islam and the Ismāʿīlīs.

Medieval European perceptions of the Ismāʿīlīs

Christian Europe was alarmed by the expanding fortunes of the Muslims and their military conquests. Islam was to become a lasting trauma for Europe, an expression of the ‘other’. This fundamentally negative perception of Islam was retained for almost a thousand years, well into the seventeenth century when the Ottoman Turks, who had rekindled the past aspirations of the Muslims,

still represented a serious military threat to Christendom and Europe. For several centuries, European perceptions of Islam were essentially rooted in fear and ignorance, resulting in a highly distorted and absurd image in Western minds.¹² Indeed, during the first few centuries of Christian-Muslim encounters, lasting until around the end of the eleventh century when the Crusading movement began, knowledge about Islam was extremely limited in Europe, as were the scattered sources of this knowledge. During this period, designated by R. Southern as the 'age of ignorance', Europeans attempted variously to understand Islam and the Muslims, or the Saracens as they came to be incorrectly called in medieval Europe, in the light of the Bible.

Meanwhile, the Crusading movement for fighting the enemies of Christendom in the Holy Land had been launched in Europe in 1095. By 1097, the Christian pilgrim-soldiers of the First Crusade had already entered Syria. The Crusaders easily defeated the local Fāṭimid garrison and took Jerusalem, their final destination, in July 1099. Thus, Ismāʿīlīs had now found a common enemy in the Christian Crusaders, who founded four principalities in the Near East and engaged in extensive military and diplomatic encounters with the Fāṭimids in Egypt and the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs in Syria. The Crusaders, who remained for more than two centuries in the Levant, were never interested in gathering accurate information about the Muslims and their religion, even though they had extensive military, diplomatic, social and commercial contacts with them. As a result, close proximity to the Muslims did not result in improved European perceptions of Islam, either in the Latin East, the Greek East or the Latin West, and only in a general sense did the Europeans become more aware of the presence of Islam.

The Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs and the Crusaders had numerous confrontations in Syria, which had important consequences and repercussions in terms of the distorted image of the Nizārīs in Europe. The first of such encounters dates back to the opening decade of the twelfth century. Later, the Nizārīs and the Crusaders sporadically fought each other over various strongholds in central Syria. But it was not until the second half of that century that occidental travellers, diplomatic emissaries and chroniclers of the Crusades began to write about these strange sectarians, the followers of a mysterious 'Old Man of the Mountain', or 'le Vieux de la Montagne', who were designated by them in different European languages by variant forms of the term 'Assassins'. This was the time of Rāshid al-Dīn Sinān, who led the Syrian Nizārīs to the peak of their glory for three decades until his death in 1193. The very term Assassin, based on a variant of the Arabic word *ḥashīshī* that was applied to the Nizārīs in a derogatory sense by other Muslims, was picked up locally in the Levant by the Crusaders and the European observers of the Middle East. At the same time, the Frankish circles and their occidental chroniclers remained completely ignorant of general Muslim beliefs and those of

the Ismāʿīlīs amongst them. It was under such circumstances that the Frankish circles themselves began to fabricate and circulate, both in the Latin East and in Europe, a number of tales about the secret practices of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs. It is important to note that none of the variants of these tales are to be found in contemporary Muslim sources.

The Crusaders were particularly impressed by the highly exaggerated reports and rumours of the Nizārī assassinations and the daring behaviour of their *fidāʾīs*, the devotees who carried out targeted missions in public places and normally lost their own lives in the process. This explains why these fictions came to revolve around the recruitment and training of the *fidāʾīs*, fictions that were meant to provide satisfactory explanations for behaviour that would otherwise seem irrational or strange to the medieval European mind. These so-called Assassin legends consisted of a number of separate but interconnected tales, including the 'training legend', the 'paradise legend', the 'hashish legend', and the 'death-leap legend'.¹³ The legends developed in stages culminating in a synthesis popularized by Marco Polo.

Benjamin of Tudela, the Spanish rabbi and traveller who was in Syria in 1167, is one of the very first Europeans to have written about the Ismāʿīlīs.¹⁴ He noted that in Syria there existed a people strongly devoted to their chief or elder, whom they also regarded as their prophet. These people, whom he called the *Hashishin*, had their principal seat at Qadmus and were dreaded by their neighbours, he added, because they would kill even kings at the expense of their own lives. Benjamin also referred, again for the first time, to the Persian Ismāʿīlīs who, according to him, lived in the mountainous district of *Mulhet*,¹⁵ obviously a corruption of the Arabic *mulḥid* (plural, *malāḥida*), a Muslim term of abuse for a religious deviant or heretic and the most common anti-Ismāʿīlī epithet. It is interesting to note, however, that Benjamin failed to realize that the people he was describing were actually Muslims.

Another early description of the group is contained in a diplomatic report dated 1175 of an envoy sent to Egypt and Syria by the Holy Roman emperor Frederick I Barbarossa.¹⁶ The envoy, a certain Burchard or Gerhard, reports that,

. . . on the confines of Damascus, Antioch and Aleppo there is a certain race of Saracens in the mountains, who in their own vernacular are called *Heyssessini* and in Roman *seignors de montana*. This race of men live without laws . . . They dwell in the mountains and are quasi impregnable, because of their fortified castles . . . They have among them a lord, who inspires the greatest fear in the Saracen princes near and far, and also in the neighbouring Christians, because he is accustomed to killing them in a strange manner.

The report then goes on to explain how the chief of the sect trained the many sons of his peasants, raised from childhood in his mountain palaces, in strict

obedience to his commands for the exclusive purpose of carrying out these killing missions. This is the earliest evidence of the 'training legend'.

William, Archbishop of Tyre, the famous historian who spent the greater part of his life in the Latin East and died in Rome in or about 1184, is the first occidental chronicler of the Crusades to have described the Ismāʿīlīs. He included a general account of them in his history of Palestine, which also covers the Crusader events from their very inception in 1095 up to 1184. He states that these sectarians, living in the diocese of Tortosa, numbered some 60,000 and possessed ten castles with their surrounding villages. Emphasizing the high degree of obedience of these people towards their chief, William of Tyre further notes that both the Christians and Muslims called these sectarians *Assissini*, the origin of which name admittedly remained unknown to him.¹⁷

In 1192, Conrad of Montferrat, the titular ruler of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem, fell victim in Tyre to the daggers of two apparent monks, who were allegedly Nizārī emissaries in disguise, sent by the Old Man. This event, occurring just before the death of Rāshid al-Dīn Sinān himself, the original Old Man of the Mountain, greatly impressed the Frankish circles. It came to be discussed, usually with some explanatory notes on the Ismāʿīlīs, by most of the occidental historians of the Third Crusade (1189–1192).¹⁸ The narrative of the German chronicler Arnold of Lübeck (d. 1212) is of particular interest because it also seems to be the earliest Western source referring to an intoxicating potion administered by the Old Man to the would-be *fidāʾīs* from amongst the Syrian sectarians, and as such may be taken to represent the first statement of the 'hashish legend'; Arnold adds that these Saracens are called *Heissessin* in their own language.¹⁹ Soon afterwards, in 1194, a meeting reportedly took place between Henry of Champagne (d. 1197), the effective ruler of the kingdom of Jerusalem after Conrad, and the 'Old Man' who had just succeeded Sinān in the latter's castle at Kahf. A most impressive story, first related by the continuators of William of Tyre and repeated by many later European writers, such as the Venetian historian Marino Sanudo Torsello and the Dominican friar Francesco Pipino of Bologna, of how the Ismāʿīlīs would leap to their death from high towers in a show of loyalty to their chief, dates back to this meeting.²⁰

Gradually, contacts increased between the Franks and the Ismāʿīlīs, including those arising from the payment of tributes by the Syrian Ismāʿīlīs to the military orders of the Crusades, the Templars and the Hospitallers. However, Western historians of the first half of the thirteenth century added few new details to the knowledge of the Ismāʿīlīs then held by the Europeans. James of Vitry (d. 1240), who was bishop of Acre during 1216–1228 and also participated in the Fifth Crusade (1217–1221), while discussing the Syrian Ismāʿīlīs and putting their number at 40,000, merely noted that they had originated in Persia.²¹ However, he

committed an error of his own by contending that the Ismā'īlīs were descended from the Jews. The same point was repeated by Thietmar, a German traveller who visited the Holy Land in the first quarter of that century.²² James of Vitry is also the earliest European author to refer to the training places of the would-be *fidā'īs* as the *locis secretis et delectabilibus*, the secret and delightful places, as if vaguely anticipating the terrestrial 'secret garden of paradise' elaborated later by Marco Polo. Shortly thereafter, Matthew Paris (d. 1259), the English monk and historian who is noted for his knowledge of European events between 1235 and 1259, made several references to the Ismā'īlīs. Of particular importance is his account of the arrival in Europe in 1238 of a mission sent by the Old Man of the Mountain to ask the assistance of Louis IX and Henry III, the kings of France and England, against the imminent threat of the Tartars, as the Mongols were to be called for a long time to come.²³

By the middle of the thirteenth century, however, more direct information began to appear about the Ismā'īlīs of both Syria and Persia, mainly as a result of the activities and the diplomatic designs of Louis IX, better known as Saint Louis (d. 1270). St Louis, the same king who had been approached earlier in Europe by an Ismā'īlī mission, now led the Seventh Crusade (1248–1254) to the Holy Land. But after his early defeat in Egypt, he went to Acre and remained in Palestine for almost four years (May 1250–April 1254). It was during this period that the French king exchanged embassies with the Old Man of the Mountain and established friendly relations with the Ismā'īlīs. We have an invaluable account of his dealings with the Syrian Nizārīs from the vivid pen of the French chronicler John of Joinville (d. 1317), who accompanied the king on his Crusade and became his intimate companion in the Holy Land.²⁴

John of Joinville, who interestingly enough refers to the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs as both the *Assacīs* and the Bedouins, relates that 'during the king's residence at Acre, there came likewise to him ambassadors from the prince of the Bedouins, called the Old Man of the Mountain', demanding of him gifts, 'in like manner as the emperor of Germany, the king of Hungary, the sultan of Babylon, and many other princes, have yearly done; for they know, that they would not be allowed to exist or reign, but during his good pleasure'. The ambassadors made it known, however, that their chief (*seigneur*) would be equally satisfied if the king were to 'acquit him of the tribute he pays annually to the grand master of the Temple, or the Hospital'. On the intervention of the said Grand Masters, the Nizārī emissaries failed to win the king's approval for either of their requests, notwithstanding a second meeting which took place a fortnight later. St Louis, in his search for new alliances, encouraged these contacts and reciprocated by sending his own envoys, accompanied by an Arabic-speaking friar, Yves le Breton, to the Nizārī chief. During their meetings, which probably took place in 1250 at

the main Nizārī stronghold of Maşyāf in central Syria, Yves conversed with the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī chief on ‘the articles of his faith’. According to John of Joinville, Yves later reported to the king some details on the religious beliefs of the Nizārīs, as he had understood them. The Old Man, he said, ‘did not believe in Mahomet, but followed the religion of Aly’. They also maintained, Yves related, that ‘when any one is killed by the command or in the service of his superior, the soul of the person so killed goes into another body of higher rank, and enjoys more comforts than before’. Yves cited this belief in metempsychosis as the main reason why the Nizārīs were eager to be killed in the service of their chief. John of Joinville himself collected some information about the Ismāʿīlīs, and notes that ‘their numbers are not to be counted; for they dwell in the kingdoms of Jerusalem, Egypt, and throughout all the lands of the Saracens and infidels’.²⁵

The main diplomatic ambition of Louis IX of France, however, was to secure an alliance with the Mongols against the Muslims. In pursuit of this objective and encouraged by the news of the Mongols’ tendencies towards Nestorian Christianity, the king entrusted William of Rubruck (Rubruquis), a Franciscan friar at his court, with an informal mission to the Great Khan in Mongolia. We have several references to the Persian Ismāʿīlīs in William’s account of his journey, which he embarked upon in 1253.²⁶ He also seems to have been amongst the first Europeans to have designated the Persian Ismāʿīlīs by names such as *Axasins* and *Hacsasins*, hitherto used only in connection with the Syrian Ismāʿīlīs. Doubtless, William had heard these terms from the Crusaders and was himself aware of the ties between the Syrian and the Persian Nizārīs. William of Rubruck passed the first half of 1254 at the court of the Great Khan Möngke (d. 1259), in and near his capital at Karakorum. There, he noticed strict security measures against foreigners, because ‘it had been reported to Mangu Chan that forty Hacsasins had entered the city under various guises to kill him’. This, as William learned, might have been in reprisal for the fact that the Great Khan had already sent one of his brothers ‘to the country of the Hacsasins, whom they call Mulidet, and he ordered him to put them all to death’. The brother in question, it will be recalled, was Hülegü, who had left Mongolia in 1253 at the head of a major expedition.

Meanwhile, the most celebrated of all the medieval European travellers, the Venetian Marco Polo (1254–1324), had embarked on his famous journey to China. According to his travel accounts, the youthful Marco accompanied his father and uncle on their second journey to the court of Qubilai (1260–1294), Möngke’s brother and successor. The Polos started from Acre in 1271, and on their way passed through Persia in 1272, about fifteen years after the collapse of the Nizārī state there. Marco Polo, who committed his itinerary to writing in 1298, after having spent some seventeen years in China and finally returning to Venice in 1295, relates what he had heard in Persia from several natives of that

country concerning the Old Man of the Mountain and the Persian Ismā'īlīs,²⁷ whom he calls the *Mulehet*, *Mulcete*, etc.²⁸

The Old Man was called in their language ALOADIN. He had caused a certain valley between two mountains to be enclosed, and had turned it into a garden, the largest and most beautiful that ever was seen, filled with every variety of fruit. In it were erected pavilions and palaces the most elegant that can be imagined, all covered with gilding and exquisite painting. And there were runnels too, flowing freely with wine and milk and honey and water; and numbers of ladies and of the most beautiful damsels in the world, who could play on all manner of instruments, and sung most sweetly, and danced in a manner that it was charming to behold. For the Old Man desired to make his people believe that this was actually Paradise. So he had fashioned it after the description that Mahommet gave of his Paradise, to wit, that it should be a beautiful garden running with conduits of wine and milk and honey and water, and full of lovely women for the delectation of all its inmates. And sure enough the Saracens of those parts believed that it *was* Paradise!

Now no man was allowed to enter the Garden save those whom he intended to be his ASHISHIN. There was a Fortress at the entrance to the Garden, strong enough to resist all the world, and there was no other way to get in. He kept at his Court a number of the youths of the country, from 12 to 20 years of age, such as had a taste for soldiering, and to these he used to tell tales about Paradise, just as Mahommet had been wont to do, and they believed in him just as the Saracens believe in Mahommet. Then he would introduce them into his garden, some four, or six, or ten at a time, having first made them drink a certain potion which cast them into a deep sleep, and then causing them to be lifted and carried in. So when they awoke, they found themselves in the Garden.

It is then related, in respect to the training of these Assassins or *Ashishin*, which is the English rendering of *Asciscin* adopted by Sir Henry Yule (1820–1889),²⁹ the learned translator and commentator of Marco Polo, that

Now this Prince whom we call the Old One kept his Court in grand and noble style, and made those simple hill-folks about him believe firmly that he was a great Prophet. And when he wanted one of his *Ashishin* to send on any mission, he would cause that potion whereof I spoke to be given to one of the youths in the garden, and then had him carried into his Palace. So when the young man awoke, he found himself in the Castle, and no longer in that Paradise; whereat he was not over well pleased. He was then conducted to the Old Man's presence, and bowed before him with great veneration as believing himself to be in the presence of a true Prophet. The Prince would then ask whence he came, and he would reply that he came from Paradise! and that it was exactly such as Mahommet had described it in the Law. This of course gave the others who stood by, and who had not been admitted, the greatest desire to enter therein.

So when the Old Man would have any Prince slain, he would say to such a youth: 'Go thou and slay So and So; and when thou returnest my Angels shall bear thee into Paradise. And shouldst thou die, natheless even so will I send my Angels to carry thee back into Paradise.' So he caused them to believe; and thus there was no order of his that they would not affront any peril to execute, for the great desire they had to get back into that Paradise of his. And in this manner the Old One got his people to murder any one whom he desired to get rid of. Thus, too, the great dread that he inspired all Princes withal, made them become his tributaries in order that he might abide at peace and amity with them.

At the end of his narrative, Marco Polo states that the Old Man had his deputies in the territories of Damascus and Curdistan, who copied him exactly in the same manner. And that the end of the Old Man came when, after being besieged for three years, he and all his men were put to death by the Mongols who also destroyed his castle with its garden of paradise. Several points are noteworthy in connection with Marco Polo's narrative, which has been read and often repeated by generations of Westerners during the last 700 years.

Marco Polo's description of the Old Man's castle may appear to refer to one of the Nizārī fortresses in the Alamūt valley. But, as Yule was perhaps the first person to point out, 'there is no reason to suppose that Polo visited Alamūt, which would have been quite out of the road that he is following'.³⁰ The then eighteen-year-old traveller may actually have heard some details about the locality of Alamūt, as his entire account of the Persian Ismāʿīlīs is admittedly not based on personal observation. It is possible, however, that he did visit a ruined Nizārī castle somewhere in Persia,³¹ although it has not been possible to identify the site. It is in eastern Persia, around Ṭabas and Tūn in Quhistān, the barren region in the south of Khurāsān, that Marco Polo interrupts his itinerary to discuss the Old Man, a digression probably triggered by seeing a Nizārī fortress.³² It may, therefore, be inferred that the castle in question was either the mountainous stronghold of Girdkūh near Dāmghān, which had finally surrendered to the Mongols in 1270, about two years before the Polo party crossed Khurāsān into northern Afghanistan, or, more probably, some fortress in eastern Quhistān. It will be recalled that the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs had previously controlled several main towns in that region, where they had also developed an elaborate network of fortresses.

Marco Polo, like William of Rubruck before him, uses various forms of the name *Assassin* in reference to the Persian Ismāʿīlīs.³³ However, he adopts this name only in connection with those sectarians to be sent on missions, as distinct from the Ismāʿīlīs in general, whom he designates by the corrupted forms of *mulḥid* and *malāḥida*. In this exclusive sense, the term *Assassin* denotes those

sectarians who were called *fidāʾīs*, or *fidāwīs*, by the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs. At any rate, Marco Polo's description of the 'Old Man and his Assassins' represents the most elaborate synthesis of the Assassin legends, and he added his own original contribution in the form of the Old Man's 'secret garden of paradise'. Finally, it may be noted that Marco Polo also uses, perhaps in the first instance of its kind, the Syrian title 'Old Man of the Mountain' in reference to the chief of the Persian Ismāʿīlīs whose supremacy over their Syrian co-religionists he had distinctly acknowledged. Needless to add, 'Alā' al-Dīn Muhammad III (d. 653/1255), Marco Polo's Old Man Aloadin, was only the penultimate ruler of the Nizārī state centred in Persia. The last ruler was his son Rukn al-Dīn who surrendered to the Mongols in 1256 and was killed by them shortly afterwards on Möngke's orders.

Marco Polo's version of the Assassin legends was reiterated to various degrees by subsequent European writers as the standard description of the subject. However, it did not occur to anyone in Europe that Marco Polo may have actually heard the tales in Italy after returning to Venice in 1295 from his journeys to the East (tales that were by then widespread in Europe and could be traced to European antecedents on the subject), or that the Assassin legends found in Marco Polo's travelogue may have been entirely inserted, as a digressionary note, by Rustichello of Pisa, the Italian romance writer who was actually responsible for committing the account of Marco Polo's travels to writing. No more can be said on this subject at the present state of our knowledge, especially as the original version of Marco Polo's travelogue written by Rustichello in a peculiar form of old French mixed with Italian has not been recovered. In this connection, it may also be noted that Marco Polo himself evidently revised his travelogue during the last twenty years of his life, at which time he could have readily appropriated the Assassin legends regarding the Syrian Nizārīs then current in Europe. In fact, it was Marco Polo who transferred the scene of the legends from Syria to Persia. The contemporary historian Juwaynī, an avowed enemy of the Nizārīs who accompanied Hülegü to Alamūt in 1256 and personally inspected the fortress before its destruction by the Mongols, does not report discovering any 'secret garden of paradise' there, as claimed in Marco Polo's popular account.

By the end of the thirteenth century, the Mamlūks had ended the political prominence of the Syrian Nizārīs, and had also reduced the dominion of the Crusaders in the Levant to a small strip of coastland in Syria. By 1291, Acre, the last outpost of Christendom in the Holy Land, had fallen into Mamlūk hands. These developments also marked the end of relations between the Crusaders and the Syrian Nizārīs. By that time, the name *Assassin* in its different forms, and the tales about the sectarians who bore it, had been disseminated in Europe by the Crusaders and other Europeans returning from the Near East.³⁴ Indeed, by the turn of the thirteenth century, Provençal poets had already made comparisons

between their own romantic devotion and the fanatical loyalty of the Assassins to the Old Man of the Mountain.³⁵ But it was the tactics of the *fidāʿīs* against the enemies of their community, rather than their self-sacrificing devotion to their leader, that eventually impressed the Europeans and gave the word *Assassin* a new meaning. By the first half of the fourteenth century, instead of signifying the name of a group in the Near East, the word had come to mean a professional killer. The earliest European examples of this usage, retained to the present day, apparently occurred in Italy. The great Italian poet Dante (1265–1321) speaks of the treacherous assassin (*Le perfido assassin*) in his *La Divina Commedia*; and Giovanni Villani (d. 1348), the Florentine historian, relates how the lord of Lucca sent his assassins (*i suoi assassini*) to Pisa to kill an enemy.³⁶ The occidental observers of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs had thus introduced a new common noun to most Western European languages.

When the Crusaders spoke of the Assassins, they originally referred to the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs of Syria. Later, the term was also commonly applied to the Persian Nizārīs by European travellers and chroniclers. ‘Old Man of the Mountain’ had a similar history. It was initially used by the Crusaders only in respect to the Syrian leader of the Nizārīs. As Bernard Lewis has observed, it would not be unnatural for the Ismāʿīlīs to use the common Muslim term of respect, *shaykh*, also meaning ‘Old Man’ or ‘Elder’, in reference to their leader.³⁷ However, the Crusaders misunderstood the term *shaykh*, rendering it on the basis of its secondary meaning into Latin as *Vetus*, *Vetulus* or *Senex*, rather than by its more relevant equivalents *Senior* or *Dominus*. In any event, the meaning of this title was also linked with the mountainous fortresses in which the Syrian Nizārī leaders lived. It should be added, however, that the Syrian title ‘Old Man of the Mountain’ seems to have been used only by the Crusaders and other occidental sources, since thus far it has not come to light in any contemporary Arabic or Persian sources. Consequently, the full Arabic equivalent of this title, *Shaykh al-Jabal*, may represent a later translation from the Latin forms used by the occidental chroniclers of the Crusades, forms such as *Vetus de Montanis*.

Be that as it may, Europeans continued to maintain an interest in the Ismāʿīlīs. Marco Polo particularly stirred the imagination of his contemporaries, and his garden of paradise story was adopted by several writers in the early fourteenth century. In this connection, the account of Odoric of Pordenone (d. 1331), the Franciscan missionary from northern Italy who visited China during 1323–1327, is of particular importance. On his return, Odoric apparently passed, around 1328, through northern Persia along the coast of the Caspian Sea where he visited a certain country called *Melistorte* or *Millistorte* (probably corruptions of *malāhida*).³⁸ In his account,³⁹ which may refer to the Alamūt valley, Odoric repeats Marco Polo’s narrative almost in its entirety.

By the sixteenth century, when the centres of the Ismā'īlī movement had moved farther away to Yaman and India, the greatly reduced number of Nizārīs of the Near East were now either living in secrecy, as in Persia, or had become obedient subjects of the Ottoman empire. As a result, European documentations of the Ismā'īlīs during the Renaissance became few and far between. They were now referred to mainly by an occasional missionary or traveller to the Holy Land. But Western scholarship continued to be based on the earlier impressions of the Crusaders. For instance, the Dominican friar Felix Fabri, who visited the Holy Land twice between 1480 and 1484, mentions the Assassins amongst the peoples of the region, and fancifully repeats that

their captain causes their young men to be taught diverse languages, and sends them out into other kingdoms to serve the kings thereof; to the end that, when the time requires it, each king's servant may kill him by poison or otherwise. If after slaying a king the servant makes good his escape to his own land, he is rewarded with honours, riches and dignities; if he is taken and put to death, he is worshipped in his own country as a martyr.⁴⁰

Soon, first-hand accounts came to be supplemented by more scholarly investigations. The first Western monograph devoted entirely to the subject of the Ismā'īlīs seems to be that of Denis Lebey de Batilly, a French official at the court of Henry IV.⁴¹ The author had become deeply concerned about the revival of political murders in Europe, after the 1589 stabbing of Henry III of France at the hands of a Jacobin friar, whom he refers to as '*un religieux assassin-porte-couteau*'. Apprehensive about the existence of would-be assassins in the religious orders of Christendom, he set out, in 1595, to compose a short treatise on the true origin of the word *assassin*, which had acquired new currency in France, and the history of the Muslim sect to which it originally belonged, calling these sectaries '*les premiers et anciens assassins d'entre les Sarrasins et Mahometans*'. This work, however, was based almost exclusively on the occidental chronicles, the accounts of which were combined in a confusing manner with Marco Polo's narrative, and it did not add any new detail to what had been known on the subject in Europe some three centuries earlier.

The next important publication appeared in 1659, when Henricus Bengertus produced his edition of the *Chronicle* of Arnold of Lübeck. In his explanatory notes, the learned German editor briefly discusses the Ismā'īlīs and enumerates the name of almost every Latin author who, to his knowledge, had mentioned the Assassins.⁴² However, Bengertus, too, thought that it was the Mongols who destroyed the power of the Syrian Nizārīs. For some time, this error was repeated by many scholars, including the prodigious Johann Philipp Baratier (1721–1740). But in his French translation of Benjamin of Tudela's itinerary, he rectified that

traveller's erroneous notion of making the Persian Nizārīs subservient to the chief of the Syrian sectaries.⁴³ It should be added that, by the seventeenth century, the etymology of the word *Assassin* had long been forgotten in Europe. Consequently, an increasing number of philologists and lexicographers now started to collect the variants of this term used in occidental sources, such as *Accini*, *Arsasini*, *Assassi*, *Assassini*, *Assessini*, *Assissini*, *Hesesin*, *Heyssessini*, etc., as well as the form *Hashishin* mentioned only by Benjamin of Tudela. Many additional etymologies were also proposed. Charles du Fresne du Cange (1610–1668), who discussed *Assassini* in his glossary of medieval Latin⁴⁴ first published in 1678, is one of the most famous pioneers in this respect. In this study he was joined by several contemporaries, such as Gilles Ménages (1613–1692), and a host of later scholars who included similar entries in their etymological dictionaries.

The first important advance in the study of the Ismāʿīlīs however appeared in 1697, with the posthumous publication of the encyclopaedic work of Barthélemy d'Herbelot (1625–1695).⁴⁵ This pioneer work of Western orientalism, which covered all fields of the Muslim East, was to remain the standard reference work in Europe until the early nineteenth century. The noted French orientalist d'Herbelot (who never visited the orient) had read and utilized in his encyclopaedia a variety of Arabic, Persian and Turkish sources. As a result, he now offered details on the history and religion of Islam hitherto unknown to Europeans. He was also able to identify the Ismāʿīlīs more correctly, studying them within the broader context of Islam. In a number of entries, such as 'Bathania', 'Carmath', 'Fathemiah', 'Ismaelioun', 'Molahedoun', and 'Schiah', d'Herbelot showed clearly that the Ismāʿīlīs were in fact one of the main divisions of Shīʿī Islam, and that they themselves had been further subdivided into two main groups: the Ismāʿīlīs of Africa and Egypt (Fatémities) and those of Asia (also called Melahedah Kouhestan). The latter group, he noted, had its seat at Alamūt and was founded by Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ, who was succeeded by seven more princes.

During the eighteenth century, European scholarship made little further progress in the field. Thomas Hyde of Oxford, whilst discussing his own etymology of *Assassini*, assured his readers that the Mount Lebanon used to be inhabited by many sectarians coming from the region of Kurdistān, and that the so-called *Assassins* were in fact of Kurdish origin.⁴⁶ Joseph Simon Assemani (1687–1768), belonging to the Syrian Maronite al-Simʿānī family of orientalist and a custodian of the Vatican Library, made brief references to the Assassins and suggested his own peculiar etymology.⁴⁷ There were other incidental references to the sectarians by the European missionaries, travellers and historians of that century.⁴⁸ A more detailed account was produced by Pierre Alexandre de la Ravalière (1697–1762), a French bishop who, however, concerned himself exclusively with the murder of Conrad of Montferrat and the two unsuccessful

assassination plots alleged to have been planned by the Syrian Nizārīs against kings Philip II Augustus and St Louis of France.⁴⁹ The Druzes, an offshoot of the Ismā'īlīs, were now also investigated for the first time.⁵⁰ But the most important contribution of the eighteenth century was contained in two memoirs read in 1743 by a French non-orientalist, Camille Falconet (1671–1762), to the Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres. In these memoirs, Falconet, after reviewing the works of his predecessors, presented a summary account of the history and religion of the Persian and Syrian Nizārīs with references to the origins of the Ismā'īlīs and yet another etymology of the name *Assassin*.⁵¹

By the early years of the nineteenth century, the Ismā'īlīs were still being investigated almost strictly from the limited and biased viewpoint of the Crusaders and their Assassin legends, mainly because Eastern sources had not yet started to be utilized on any meaningful scale in Europe. Joseph Assemani's great-nephew, Abbot Simone Assemani (1752–1821), who had spent the earlier part of his life in Tripoli where he had heard about the contemporary Syrian Ismā'īlīs, and who later became a professor of oriental languages at a seminary in Padua, published in 1806 a hostile article on the sectarians.⁵² He also proposed an etymology for *Assissana*, which he believed to be the original name of the Nizārīs. According to him, the word *Assassini*, a corruption of *Assissani*, was connected with the Arabic word *assissath* (*al-ṣīṣa*), meaning rock or fortress; thus, *Assissani* (*al-ṣīṣānī*) referred to someone who dwelt in a rock fortress.

Orientalist perspectives

Meanwhile, scientific orientalism had begun in France with the establishment in 1795 of the École des Langues Orientales Vivantes in Paris. Baron Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy (1758–1838), the most distinguished orientalist of his time, became the first professor of Arabic in the newly founded School of Oriental Languages and was appointed in 1806 to the new chair of Persian at the Collège de France; later, he became the director of both these institutions as well as the president and permanent secretary of the Académie des Inscriptions. With an ever-increasing number of students and a wide circle of correspondents and disciples, de Sacy also acquired the distinction of being the teacher of the most prominent orientalists of the first half of the nineteenth century. At the same time, oriental studies had received an important boost from the Napoleonic expedition of 1798–1799 to Egypt and Syria. In the aftermath of these developments there were significant increases in the number of orientalists, particularly in France and Germany, and oriental chairs in European universities. This enhanced interest in orientalism found expression also in the publication of specialized periodicals,

beginning in 1809 with the *Fundgruben des Orients*, and also in the foundation of learned societies. The Société Asiatique was formed in 1822 with de Sacy as its first president, and was followed by other societies which played important roles in facilitating the research activities of the orientalists. The orientalists of the nineteenth century produced more scholarly studies of Islam on the basis of the Arabic manuscripts written mainly by Sunnī authors. As a result, they studied Islam according to Sunnī perspectives and, borrowing classifications from Christian contexts, treated Shīʿism as the ‘heterodox’ interpretation of Islam by contrast to Sunnism, which was taken to represent ‘orthodoxy’. It was mainly on this basis, as well as the continued attraction of the seminal Assassin legend, that the orientalists launched their own study of the Ismāʿīlīs.

It was Silvestre de Sacy, who maintained a life-long interest in the religion of the Druzes,⁵³ who finally solved the mystery of the name *Assassin*. Utilizing the collection of Arabic manuscripts at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, de Sacy prepared an important memoir which he read before the Institut de France in May 1809.⁵⁴ In this memoir, he examined and rejected previous explanations and showed, once and for all, that the word *Assassin* was connected with the Arabic word *ḥaṣhīsh*, referring to Indian hemp, a narcotic product of *cannabis sativa*. More specifically, he suggested that the main variant forms (such as *Assissini* and *Assassini*) occurring in base-Latin documents of the Crusaders and in different European languages were derived from two alternative Arabic forms, *ḥaṣhīshī* (plural, *ḥaṣhīshiyya* or *ḥaṣhīshiyyīn*) and *ḥaṣhshāsh* (plural, *ḥaṣhshāshīn*). While de Sacy was able to cite Arabic texts, notably by the Syrian chronicler Abū Shāma (599–665/1203–1267), in which the sectarians are called *ḥaṣhīshī*, he was unable to do the same for the second Arabic form of his suggested etymology. Nor have any texts come to light since then employing the form *ḥaṣhshāsh*, the common epithet for a hashish-consumer. Therefore, as Bernard Lewis has argued, this part of de Sacy’s theory, with all that it implies, must be abandoned, and it would seem that all the European variants of the name *Assassin* are corruptions of *ḥaṣhīshī* and its plural forms.⁵⁵

De Sacy also made some conjectures on the reason for the application of the name to the Nizārīs. He had no doubt that hashish, or rather a hashish-containing potion was, in some manner, used by the Nizārīs. But, unlike some other orientalists, he did not subscribe to the opinion that the sectarians were called the Assassins because they were addicts to the euphoria-producing potion. Similarly, he excluded the possibility of any habitual use of this debilitating drug by the Nizārī *fidāʾīs* to whom alone he thought the term originally applied. De Sacy believed that hashish was, at the time, the secret possession of the Nizārī chiefs who used it in a regulated manner on the *fidāʾīs* to inspire them with dreams of paradise and blind obedience. In other words, while not necessarily

accepting the reality of a garden of paradise into which the drugged devotees would be led, de Sacy nevertheless linked his own interpretation to the famous tale told by Marco Polo and others about the alleged practices of the Nizārīs.

The tale of how the Nizārī chiefs secretly administered hashish to the *fidāʿīs* in order to control and motivate them has been accepted by many scholars since Arnold of Lübeck. But the fact remains that neither the Ismāʿīlī texts which have come to light in modern times nor any serious contemporary Muslim source in general attest to the actual use of hashish, with or without gardens of paradise, by the Nizārīs. Therefore, following Lewis and Hodgson's summaries of the relevant arguments, it would seem that the various versions of this once popular tale should now be dismissed as fictitious.⁵⁶

The use and effects of hashish were known at the time, as best witnessed by the existence of the name *ḥashīshiyya*. Therefore the drug could not have been the secret property of the Nizārī chiefs, as suggested by de Sacy. Furthermore, the name is rarely used by the Muslim authors who, in contrast to the Crusaders and other Europeans, prefer to designate the sectarians by religious names such as Bāṭiniyya and Taʿlīmiyya, or simply as the Ismāʿīliyya and Nizāriyya, if not using terms of abuse like *malāḥida*. However, a few contemporary Muslim historians, mainly from the thirteenth century, occasionally use the term *ḥashīshiyya* in reference to the Nizārīs of Syria (al-Shām);⁵⁷ while the Nizārīs of Persia, as noted, are also called *ḥashīshī* in some Caspian Zaydī texts. But in all these Islamic sources, the terms *ḥashīshī* and *ḥashīshiyya* are used in reference to the Nizārīs without any derivative explanation.

In all probability, the name *ḥashīshiyya* was applied to the Nizārīs as a term of abuse and reproach. The Nizārīs were already a target for hostility by other Muslims and would easily qualify for every sort of contemptuous judgement on their beliefs and behaviour. In other words, it seems that the name *ḥashīshiyya* reflected a criticism of the Nizārīs rather than an accurate description of their secret practices. And it was the name that gave rise to the imaginative tales which supplied some justification of the behaviour that would otherwise seem rather incomprehensible to ill-informed Westerners.

Be that as it may, by drawing on generally hostile sources and the fanciful accounts of the Crusaders, de Sacy inevitably endorsed at least partially the anti-Ismāʿīlī 'black legend' of the Sunnī polemicists and the Assassin legends of the Crusader era. Despite its deficiencies, however, de Sacy's memoir was a landmark in Ismāʿīlī studies in Europe, and it paved the way for more systematic endeavours based on Eastern sources and a number of more strictly historical studies during the next few decades. Étienne Marc Quatremère (1782–1857) published a few short works on the Fāṭimids and the Nizārīs.⁵⁸ This great orientalist, it will be recalled, also made available for the first time in printed form a portion of

Rashīd al-Dīn's famous history which, together with that of Juwaynī, represents the earliest Persian historical sources on the Nizārīs. Another French orientalist, Jourdain, who in 1813 had edited and translated the section on the Persian Nizārīs contained in another important Persian history by Mīrkhwānd, produced a summary account of the Nizārīs.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, de Sacy had continued his broader investigation of the Ismāʿīlīs. In what was to be his final work, and the result of over thirty years' study of the Druze religion, he devoted a long introduction to the origins and the early history of the Ismāʿīlī movement.⁶⁰ It was there that de Sacy also discussed at some length Ismāʿīlī doctrine, including a so-called seven-degree initiation process for the adepts, and presented the controversial ʿAbd Allāh b. Maymūn al-Qaddāh as the real 'founder' of Ismāʿīlism, basing his case mainly on the lost, anti-Ismāʿīlī polemical work of Akhū Muḥsin as preserved in excerpts by al-Nuwayrī, as discussed earlier. Indeed, de Sacy's treatment of early Ismāʿīlism continued to be maintained by the bulk of the subsequent orientalist studies up to more recent times.

Of all the Western works on the Ismāʿīlīs produced during the first half of the nineteenth century, however, the most widely read came from the pen of the Austrian orientalist and diplomat Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856). Like many other orientalists of his time, especially in Germany and Austria under the Habsburg monarchy, von Hammer had started his career in the diplomatic service, as a dragoman in Istanbul and a consul in the Balkans. In 1818, by utilizing the various chronicles of the Crusades as well as the Eastern manuscript sources in the Imperial Library, Vienna, and in his own private collection, he published a book in German devoted entirely to the Nizārīs of the Alamūt period.⁶¹ This book traced for the first time, in a detailed manner, the entire history of the Nizārī state in Persia, with briefer references to the Syrian Nizārīs. Von Hammer's book achieved great success and it was soon translated into French and English,⁶² continuing to serve, until as recently as the 1930s, as the standard interpretation of the subject.⁶³

It should be noted that von Hammer was strongly biased against the Nizārīs and had accepted Marco Polo's narrative in its entirety, together with all the defamations levelled against the Ismāʿīlīs by their Sunnī enemies.⁶⁴ Thus, he treated the Nizārīs as 'that union of imposters and dupes which, under the mask of a more austere creed and severer morals, undermined all religion and morality; that order of murderers, beneath whose daggers the lords of nations fell; all powerful, because, for the space of three centuries, they were universally dreaded, until the den of ruffians fell with the khaliphate, to whom, as the centre of spiritual and temporal power, it had at the outset sworn destruction'.⁶⁵ This view, in turn, reflected a tacit purpose. Writing not too long after the French revolution, von Hammer apparently wanted to use the Nizārīs as an example to produce a tract

for the times that would warn against 'the pernicious influence of secret societies in weak governments, and of the dreadful prostitution of religion to the horrors of unbridled ambition'.⁶⁶ In line with this scheme, he drew close analogies between the 'order of the Assassins' on the one hand, and the European secret orders of his time, which he detested, such as the Templars, the Jesuits, the Illuminati, and the Freemasons, on the other. He emphasized parallels in terms of their 'various grades of initiation; the appellations of master, companions, and novices; the public and the secret doctrine; the oath of unconditional obedience to unknown superiors, to serve the ends of the order'.⁶⁷

With a few exceptions, European scholarship made little further progress in Ismāʿīlī studies during the second half of the nineteenth century. The outstanding exception was provided by the contributions of the French orientalist Charles François Defrémery (1822–1883) who collected a large number of references from various Muslim chronicles on the Nizārīs of Persia and Syria. Having already translated the section on the Persian Nizārī state, contained in the fourteenth-century Persian history of Ḥamd Allāh Mustawfī,⁶⁸ Defrémery then published the results of his Nizārī studies in two long articles.⁶⁹ A few years later, the Dutchman Reinhart Dozy (1820–1883) investigated the early history of the Ismāʿīlīs,⁷⁰ a subject that was more thoroughly pursued, especially with respect to the Carmatians or Qarmaṭīs, by another Dutch orientalist, Michael Jan de Goeje (1836–1909), whose erroneous interpretation of Fāṭimid–Qarmaṭī relations was generally adopted.⁷¹ There also appeared for the first time a history of the Fāṭimids, which was, however, a compilation from various Arabic chronicles,⁷² and several new works on the Druzes also appeared.⁷³

De Sacy's treatment of early Ismāʿīlism and the Nizārīs and von Hammer's interpretation of Nizārī history continued to determine the perspective within which European orientalists set any reference they collected on the Ismāʿīlīs. Orientalism, thus, gave a new lease of life to the myths surrounding the Ismāʿīlīs. As a result, though some progress was slowly being made, the distorted image of Ismāʿīlism, reflecting the earlier misrepresentations, was nevertheless maintained through the opening decades of the twentieth century by anyone interested in the subject, including even the eminent Edward Granville Browne (1862–1926), who summarized the contributions of his predecessors.⁷⁴ This should not cause any particular surprise since very few Ismāʿīlī sources had been available to the orientalists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The earliest Ismāʿīlī-related sources known to the West were the Druze manuscripts which found their way in the eighteenth century from the Levant to the Bibliothèque Royale and then to other major European libraries.⁷⁵ Similarly, the first Ismāʿīlī manuscripts to become known to orientalists came from Syria, the first area of Western interest in the Ismāʿīlīs. Jean Baptiste L. J.

Rousseau (1780–1831), the French consul-general in Aleppo from 1809 to 1816 and a long-time resident of the Near East, who was also interested in oriental studies and maintained a close professional relationship with Silvestre de Sacy, was the first person to draw the attention of European orientalists to the existence of the contemporary Ismāʿīlīs as well as to their local traditions and literature. In 1810, he prepared a memoir on the Syrian Nizārīs of his time, which contained many interesting historical, social and religious details obtainable only through direct contact with the Nizārīs themselves.⁷⁶ This memoir received much publicity in Europe, mainly because of de Sacy's association with it. Rousseau also supplied information to Europe about the Persian Nizārīs. He had visited Persia in 1807–1808 as a member of an official French mission sent to the court of the second Qājār monarch, Faṭḥ ʿAlī Shāh (1797–1834), and whilst there he had enquired about the Ismāʿīlīs of that country. Rousseau was surprised to find out that there were many Ismāʿīlīs in Persia and that they still had their imam (a descendant of Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar), whose name was Shāh Khalīl Allāh. This imam, he was further told, resided at Kahak, a small village near Maḥallāt, and was revered almost like a god by his followers, including those Indian Ismāʿīlīs who came regularly from the banks of the Ganges to receive his blessings. In 1825, Rousseau's account was confirmed, and new details were added to it by James Baillie Fraser (1783–1856), the Scottish traveller who in the course of a journey through Persia had heard, in 1822, about the Ismāʿīlīs there.⁷⁷

Rousseau played another pioneering role in supplying direct evidence of the Ismāʿīlīs to contemporary Europe. This diplomat, who was an avid collector of oriental manuscripts and who, in the 1820s, sold 700 such manuscripts from his private collection to the newly-founded Asiatic Museum in St Petersburg, had obtained an anonymous Ismāʿīlī work from Maṣyāf, one of the main Ismāʿīlī centres in Syria. This Arabic manuscript, containing a number of fragments bearing on the religious doctrines of the Nizārīs, had been actually procured for Rousseau, soon after the Ismāʿīlīs were attacked and pillaged by their Nuṣayrī neighbours in 1809, by the noted Swiss orientalist and explorer John Lewis Burckhardt (1784–1817), who also produced some travel notes of his own on the Syrian sectaries.⁷⁸ In 1812, as the first instance of its kind, some extracts from this manuscript, as translated by Rousseau and communicated to de Sacy, were published in Paris.⁷⁹ Rousseau later sent this Nizārī source to the Société Asiatique and the full text of it was, in due course, printed and translated into French by Stanislas Guyard (1846–1884).⁸⁰ A few years later, this young orientalist published, together with a valuable introduction and notes, the text and translation of yet another Nizārī work, which was the first source containing historical information to find its way to Europe.⁸¹ This Arabic manuscript on the life and the miraculous deeds of Rāshid al-Dīn Sinān, composed around 1324, had been discovered in Syria

in 1848 and then donated to the library of the Société Asiatique, where it was re-discovered some thirty years later by Guyard himself.⁸² Meanwhile, a few other Ismā'īlī texts of Syrian provenance had been sent by a Protestant missionary to distant America.⁸³ These early discoveries of Ismā'īlī sources were, however, few and far between, and it was largely scholars in Paris, the capital of orientalism in the nineteenth century, who had access to them.

Direct information about the Ismā'īlīs reflecting their own viewpoint continued to become available. The travelogue of Nāṣir-i Khusraw was published for the first time, accompanied by a French translation, as were some other Persian works of this famous traveller, poet and Ismā'īlī *dā'ī* of the 5th/11th century.⁸⁴ In 1898, Paul Casanova (1861–1926) announced his discovery at the Bibliothèque Nationale of a manuscript containing the last section of the famous encyclopaedic work, *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (*The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*).⁸⁵ This French orientalist, who later produced some important studies on the Fāṭimids and had already published some numismatic notes on the Nizārīs,⁸⁶ was the first European to recognize the Ismā'īlī affiliation of this work. Before this, several copies of the *Epistles* had been known to Europe, and the German orientalist Friedrich Dieterici (1821–1903) had published many portions of the *Rasā'il*, without realizing their Ismā'īlī character.⁸⁷

Other types of information about the Ismā'īlīs had now started to appear. Earlier in the nineteenth century, some brief notes had been published on Alamūt by British officers who had visited the ruins of the fortress or its vicinity,⁸⁸ but Max van Berchem (1863–1921), while travelling in Syria in 1895, read and studied almost all of the epigraphic evidence of the Syrian Nizārī fortresses.⁸⁹ Different types of archaeological evidence from the Fāṭimid period had already been presented by van Berchem himself.⁹⁰ Much information on the Khojas and the first of the modern Nizārī imams to bear the title of the Āghā Khān (Aga Khan) also became available in the course of a peculiar case investigated by the High Court of Bombay, culminating in the famous legal judgement of 1866.⁹¹ All these developments, together with progress in the publication of new Muslim sources and the reinterpretation of the old ones, were paving the way for a revaluation of the Ismā'īlīs.

In the opening decades of the twentieth century, Ismā'īlī manuscripts began to be recovered from other regions and, though still on a limited basis, more systematically. In 1903, Giuseppe Caprotti (1869–1919), an Italian merchant who had spent some thirty years in Yaman, brought a collection of sixty Arabic manuscripts from Ṣan'ā' to Italy. Between 1906 and 1909, he sold these and more than 1500 other manuscripts of south Arabian origin to the Ambrosiana Library in Milan. While being catalogued, the Caprotti Collection was found by Eugenio Griffini (1878–1925), the Milanese Islamicist, to contain several works

on Ismāʿīlī doctrine.⁹² Of greater importance were the efforts of some Russian scholars and officials who, having become aware of the existence of Ismāʿīlī communities within their own domains in Central Asia, now tried to establish direct contact with them. The Central Asian Ismāʿīlīs, it may be noted, belong to the Nizārī branch and are to be found mainly in western Pamir in Badakhshan, an area lying north and east of the Panj river, a major upper headwater of the Āmū Daryā (Oxus). Since 1895, this area had come under the effective control of Russian military officials, although an Anglo-Russian boundary commission in that year had formally handed the region on the right bank of the Panj to the Khanate of Bukhārā, while designating the left-bank region as Afghan territory. Indeed, in the 1860s the Russians had secured a firm footing in Bukhārā and other Central Asian Khanates and this was officially recognized during the reign of ʿAbd al-Aḥad (1885–1910) who, as the *amīr* of Bukhārā, had to submit to Russian imperial power. At present, Badakhshan is divided by the Oxus River between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, with Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs living in both regions.

It was under these circumstances that Russians travelled freely in the upper Oxus region. Count Alexis A. Bobrinskoy (1852–1927), a Russian scholar who studied the inhabitants of Wakhān and Ishkāshim, and visited these districts of western Pamir in 1898, published in 1902 a short account of the Ismāʿīlīs living in the Russian and Bukhārā districts of Central Asia.⁹³ In the same year, A. Polovtsev, an official in Turkistān who was interested in Ismāʿīlism and later became the Russian consul-general in Bombay, while travelling in the upper Oxus acquired a copy of the *Umm al-kitāb*, preserved by the Central Asian Ismāʿīlīs. This manuscript was taken to St Petersburg and deposited in the Asiatic Museum of the Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences, an institution which by that time, despite its name, had become a library.

Later, in 1914, Ivan I. Zarubin (1887–1964), the well-known Russian ethnologist and specialist in Tajik dialects, acquired a small collection of Ismāʿīlī manuscripts from the western Pamir districts of Shughnān and Rūshān, which in 1916 he presented to the Asiatic Museum. In 1918, the Museum came into the possession of a second collection of Nizārī Ismāʿīlī texts written in the Persian language. These manuscripts had been procured a few years earlier, again from districts in the upper Oxus region, by the orientalist Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov (1873–1958), the Russian pioneer in Ismāʿīlī studies from Tashkent. He had already investigated certain beliefs of the Shughnānī Ismāʿīlīs whom he had first visited in 1901.⁹⁴ It is interesting to note that the Zarubin and Semenov Collections of the Asiatic Museum, though altogether comprising less than twenty genuine items, then constituted the largest holding of Ismāʿīlī manuscripts in any Western library.⁹⁵ The generally meagre number of Ismāʿīlī titles known to orientalists by 1922 is well reflected in the first Western bibliography of Ismāʿīlī works,

both published and unpublished, which appeared in that year.⁹⁶ Little further progress was made in Ismā'īlī studies during the 1920s, aside from the publication of some of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's works, including his *Wajh-i dīn* from the manuscript in the Zarubin Collection, and a few studies by Semenov and Ivanow.⁹⁷ Indeed, by 1927, when the article 'Ismā'īliya' by Clément Huart (1854–1926) appeared in the second volume of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, European orientalist studies on the subject still displayed the misrepresentations of the Crusaders and the defamations of the medieval Sunnī polemicists.

Modern progress in Ismā'īlī studies

Modern scholarship in Ismā'īlī studies was made possible by the recovery and study of genuine Ismā'īlī texts on a large scale – manuscript sources which had been preserved in numerous private collections in Yaman, Syria, Persia, Central Asia, Afghanistan and South Asia. The breakthrough in the field occurred in the 1930s in India, where significant numbers of Ismā'īlī manuscripts were to be found. This resulted mainly from the pioneering efforts of Wladimir Ivanow (1886–1970), and a few Ismā'īlī Bohra scholars, notably Asaf A. A. Fyzee (1899–1981), Ḥusayn F. al-Hamdānī (1901–1962) and Zāhid 'Alī (1888–1958), who based their original studies on their family collections of manuscripts. Subsequently, parts of these collections were donated to academic institutions and, thus, made available to scholars at large.⁹⁸ Asaf Fyzee, who studied law at Cambridge University and belonged to the most eminent Sulaymānī Ṭayyibī family of Bohras in India, made modern scholars aware of the existence of an independent Ismā'īlī school of jurisprudence through many of his publications,⁹⁹ including the critical edition of al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, the legal code of the Fāṭimid state which is still used by the Ṭayyibī Ismā'īlīs. Ḥusayn al-Hamdānī, belonging to a prominent Dā'ūdī Ṭayyibī family of scholars with Yamanī origins and who received his doctorate from London University, was a pioneer in producing a number of Ismā'īlī studies based on family manuscripts preserved in Gujarāt, and calling the attention of scholars to this unique literary heritage.¹⁰⁰ Zāhid 'Alī hailed from another learned Dā'ūdī Bohra family and was for many years the principal of the Nizām College at Hyderabad after receiving his doctorate from Oxford University, where he produced a critical edition of the *Dīwān* of the Ismā'īlī poet Ibn Hānī' (d. 362/973) as his doctoral thesis. He was also the first author in modern times to have produced, in Urdu, a scholarly study of the Fāṭimids' history on the basis of a variety of Ismā'īlī manuscript sources.¹⁰¹

Wladimir Ivanow, originally trained in Persian dialects, joined the Russian Asiatic Museum in 1915 as an assistant keeper of oriental manuscripts, and in

that capacity he travelled widely in Central Asia acquiring more than a thousand Arabic and Persian manuscripts for the Museum. Ivanow, who eventually settled in Bombay after permanently leaving his native Russia in 1917, collaborated closely with the above-mentioned Bohra scholars and succeeded, through his own connections within the Nizārī Ismā'īlī Khoja community, to gain access to Persian Nizārī literature as well. Consequently, he compiled the first detailed catalogue of Ismā'īlī works, citing some 700 separate titles which attested to the hitherto unknown richness and diversity of Ismā'īlī literary and intellectual traditions.¹⁰² The initiation of modern scholarship in Ismā'īlī studies may indeed be traced to this very publication in 1933, which provided for the first time a scientific framework for further research in this new field of Islamic studies. In the same year, Ivanow founded in Bombay the Islamic Research Association with the collaboration of Asaf Fyzee and other Ismā'īlī friends. Several Ismā'īlī works appeared in the series of publications sponsored by this institution, which was in 1946 transformed into the Ismaili Society of Bombay.¹⁰³ Ismā'īlī scholarship received a major boost through the establishment of the Ismaili Society under the patronage of Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, Aga Khan III (1877–1957), the forty-eighth imam of the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs. Ivanow played a crucial role also in the creation of the Ismaili Society, whose various series of publications were mainly devoted to his own monographs as well as editions and translations of Persian Nizārī Ismā'īlī texts.¹⁰⁴ He also acquired a large number of Arabic and Persian manuscripts for the Ismaili Society's Library. Ivanow indefatigably recovered, studied and published a good portion of the extant literature of the Persian-speaking Nizārī Ismā'īlīs, and he stands unchallenged as the founder of modern Nizārī studies.

By 1963, when Ivanow published an expanded edition of his Ismā'īlī catalogue,¹⁰⁵ many more sources had become known and progress in Ismā'īlī studies had accelerated. In addition to many studies by Ivanow and the Bohra pioneers, as well as by other early scholars such as Rudolf Strothmann (1877–1960), Louis Massignon (1883–1962), Marius Canard (1888–1982) and Paul Kraus (1904–1944), numerous Ismā'īlī texts now began to be critically edited, preparing the ground for further progress in the field. In this connection, particular mention should be made of the texts of Fāṭimid and later times edited together with French translations and analytical introductions by Henry Corbin (1903–1978), published simultaneously in Tehran and Paris in his 'Bibliothèque Iranienne' series, as well as the Fāṭimid Ismā'īlī texts edited by the Egyptian scholar Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn (1901–1961) and published in his 'Silsilat Makhtūṭāt al-Fāṭimiyyīn' series in Cairo. Meanwhile, a number of Russian scholars, notably Andrey E. Bertel's (1926–1995) and Lyudmila V. Stroeva (1910–1993), had maintained the earlier interests of Semenov and their other compatriots in

Ismāʿīlī studies, though often limiting themselves to a Marxist class struggle framework.

In Syria, ʿĀrif Tāmīr (1921–1998), of the small Muḥammad-Shāhī Nizārī community there, made the Ismāʿīlī texts of Syrian provenance available to scholars, albeit often in faulty forms, as did his Qāsim-Shāhī Nizārī compatriot Muṣṭafā Ghālib (1923–1981). At the same time, several Egyptian scholars, such as Ḥasan Ibrāhīm Ḥasan (1892–1968), Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl (1911–1967), Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn Surūr (1911–1992) and ʿAbd al-Munʿim Mājīd (1920–1999), made further contributions to Fāṭimid studies. Ivanow himself, as well as Bernard Lewis, had earlier produced important studies on the Ismāʿīlī background to Fāṭimid rule. Meanwhile, Yves Marquet had embarked on a lifelong study of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ and their *Rasāʾil*. Later, Alessandro Bausani (1921–1988) and his student at Naples University, Carmela Baffioni, among others, contributed to the study of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, while Abbas Hamdani expounded his own distinct hypothesis on the authorship and dating of the *Rasāʾil* in a corpus of articles.

By the 1950s, progress in Ismāʿīlī studies had enabled Marshall G. S. Hodgson (1922–1968) to produce the first comprehensive and scholarly study of the Nizārīs of the Alamūt period, unfortunately mistitled as *The Order of Assassins*. Soon, others representing a new generation of scholars, notably Samuel M. Stern (1920–1969) and Wilferd Madelung,¹⁰⁶ produced major original studies, especially on the early Ismāʿīlīs and their relations with the dissident Qarmaṭīs. Madelung also summed up the present state of scholarship on Ismāʿīlī history in his article ‘Ismāʿīliyya’ published in 1973 in the new edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Progress in Ismāʿīlī studies has proceeded at a rapid pace during the last few decades through the efforts of yet another generation of scholars, including Ismail K. Poonawala, Heinz Halm, Paul E. Walker, Azim Nanji, Thierry Bianquis, Christian Jambet, Michael Brett, Yaacov Lev, Farhat Dachraoui and Mohammed Yalaoui, some of whom have specialized in Fāṭimid studies. The modern progress in the recovery and study of Ismāʿīlī texts is well reflected in Professor Poonawala’s monumental catalogue, which identifies some 1300 titles written by more than 200 authors.¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, the Satpanth tradition of the Nizārī Khojas, as reflected in their *gīnān* devotional literature, provided another specialized area of research within Ismāʿīlī studies. Many Ismāʿīlī texts have now been published in critical editions, while an increasing number of secondary studies on various aspects of Ismāʿīlism have been produced by at least three successive generations of scholars, as documented in this author’s bibliography.¹⁰⁸

Modern progress in Ismāʿīlī studies has received steady impetus from the recovery, or accessibility, of more Ismāʿīlī manuscripts, including the library holdings at the American University of Beirut and Tübingen University, amongst others. The vast Arabic manuscript collections of the Dāʿūdī Ṭayyibī Bohra libraries at

Sūrat, in Gujarāt, and Bombay (Mumbai), which remain under the strict control of that community's leader, have generally remained inaccessible to scholars. The bulk of the extensive manuscript sources preserved by the Central Asian Ismāʿīlīs have now become accessible. For instance, hundreds of Ismāʿīlī manuscripts held privately by the Nizārīs of Tajik Badakhshan were recovered during 1959–1963,¹⁰⁹ and in the 1990s many more manuscripts were identified in Shughnān and other districts of Badakhshan through the efforts of The Institute of Ismaili Studies, which now holds the largest collection of Ismāʿīlī manuscripts in the West.¹¹⁰ Scholarship in Ismāʿīlī studies promises to continue at an even greater pace as the Ismāʿīlīs themselves are becoming increasingly interested in studying their history and literary heritage. In this context, a major contribution is being made by The Institute of Ismaili Studies, established in 1977 in London by H. H. Prince Karim Aga Khan IV, the forty-ninth and present imam of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs. This institution is already serving as a point of reference for Ismāʿīlī studies, while making its own contributions through a variety of research and publications programmes, including its 'Ismaili Heritage Series' and 'Ismaili Texts and Translations Series', as well as making its Ismāʿīlī materials accessible to scholars worldwide.¹¹¹



Origins and early development of Shī'ism

The Prophet Muḥammad laid the foundations of a new religion which was propagated as the seal of the great monotheistic religions of the Abrahamic tradition. Thus, Islam from early on claimed to have completed and superseded the messages of Judaism and Christianity, whose adherents were accorded a special status among the Muslims as the 'people of the book' (*ahl al-kitāb*). However, the unified and nascent Muslim community (*umma*) of the Prophet's time soon divided into numerous rival groups, as Muslims disagreed on a number of fundamental issues.

Modern scholarship has indeed shown that at least during the first three centuries of their history, marking the formative period of Islam, Muslims lived in an intellectually dynamic and fluid milieu characterized by a multiplicity of communities of interpretation, schools of thought, and a diversity of views on a range of religio-political issues. The early Muslims were confronted by many puzzles relating to their religious knowledge and their understanding of Islam, which revolved around major issues such as the attributes of God, the nature of authority and definitions of believers and sinners. It was during this formative period that different groups and movements began to formulate their doctrinal positions and gradually acquired their distinctive identities and designations. In terms of theological perspectives, which remained closely intertwined with political loyalties, diversity in early Islam ranged from the stances of those, later designated as Sunnīs, who endorsed the historical caliphate and the authority-power structure that had actually evolved in the Muslim society, to various religio-political communities, notably the Shī'a and the Khawārij, who aspired toward the establishment of new orders and leadership structures.

The Sunnī Muslims of medieval times, or rather their religious scholars ('*ulamā'*'), however, produced a picture of early Islam that is at variance with the findings of modern scholarship on the subject. According to this perspective, endorsed by earlier generations of orientalists such as Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) and Ignaz Goldziher (1850–1921), Islam from early on represented a monolithic phenomenon with a well-defined doctrinal basis from which different groups then deviated over time. Sunnī Islam was, thus, portrayed by its

proponents as the 'true' interpretation of Islam, while all others, especially the Shī'ī ones among them, who had 'deviated' from the right path, were accused of heresy (*ilhād*), innovation (*bid'a*) or even unbelief (*kufṛ*). The same narrow sectarian perspectives and classifications of medieval Sunnīs and their heresiographers were adopted by the orientalist, who studied Islam mainly on the basis of Sunnī sources. As a result, they, too, endorsed the normativeness of Sunnism and distinguished it from Shī'ism, or any other non-Sunnī interpretation of Islam, with the aid of terms such as 'orthodoxy' and 'heterodoxy' – terms borrowed inappropriately from their Christian experience. Indeed, the study of Shī'ism remained, until recent times, one of the most neglected branches of Islamic studies.

The Shī'a, too, elaborated their own paradigmatic model of 'true' Islam, based on a particular interpretation of early Islamic history and a distinctive conception of religious authority vested in the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*). There had also developed disagreements within the Shī'a regarding the identity of the legitimate spiritual leaders or imams of the community. As a result, the Shī'a themselves subdivided into a number of major communities, notably the Imāmī Ithnā'asharīs or Twelvers, the Ismā'īlīs and the Zaydīs, as well as several minor groupings. There were also those Shī'ī communities, like the Kaysāniyya, who did not survive even though they occupied important positions in early Shī'ism. In such a milieu of pluralism and diversity of interpretations of the Islamic message, abundantly documented in the heresiographical traditions of Muslims, general consensus could not be attained on designating any one interpretation as 'true Islam', as different doctrinal positions were also legitimized by different states and their 'ulamā'. Needless to add, many of the original and fundamental disagreements among Sunnīs, Shī'īs and other Muslims will probably never be satisfactorily explained and resolved, mainly because of a lack of reliable sources, especially from the earliest centuries of Islamic history. As is well known, almost no written records have survived directly from the formative period of Islam, while the later writings of historians, theologians, heresiographers and other categories of Muslim authors display a variety of communal biases.

It is within such a framework that this chapter concentrates on the origins and early history of Shī'ism until the middle of the 2nd/8th century. More specifically, the findings of modern scholarship on early Shī'ism will be presented with special reference to certain events of early Islam and the Shī'ī tendencies and movements that eventually evolved, in the middle of the 2nd/8th century, into what retrospectively came to be designated as the Ismā'īlī movement. This survey of the formative period of Shī'ism is indispensable for understanding early Ismā'īlism, not only because the Ismā'īlīs adopted much of the heritage of the early Shī'īs but also because it explains the religio-political milieu within which early Ismā'īlism

originated. It is also to be recalled that the earliest history of Shīʿism, especially Imāmī Shīʿism, until the death of Imam Jaʿfar al-Šādiq in 148/765, is shared by the Ismāʿīlī and Twelver Shīʿīs, who recognize the same early ʿAlid imams, though with a somewhat different enumeration.

Origins of Shīʿism

Muḥammad, the Messenger of God (*rasūl Allāh*), from the time of his emigration (*hijra*) from Mecca to Medina in the September of 622, which marks the initiation of the Islamic era (Latin, *Anno Hegirae*), until his death after a brief illness on 13 Rabīʿ I 11/8 June 632, succeeded in founding a state of considerable power and prestige according to Arabian standards of the time. It was during this ten-year period that most of the desert-dwelling bedouin tribes of Arabia pledged their allegiance to the Prophet, who thus laid the foundation for the subsequent expansion of the new religion of Islam beyond the Arabian peninsula. The death of the Prophet, however, confronted the nascent Islamic community (*umma*) with its first major crisis. The origin of Islam's divisions into Sunnism and Shīʿism may, indeed, be broadly traced to the crisis of succession to the Prophet Muḥammad.

The successor to the Prophet could not be another prophet or *nabī* (though several persons appeared soon with such claims), as it had already been made known through divine revelation that Muḥammad was the 'seal of the prophets' (*khātim al-anbiyāʾ*). Aside from delivering and interpreting the message of Islam, Muḥammad had also acted as the leader of the Muslim community. It was, therefore, essential to choose a successor in order to have effective leadership and ensure the continuation of the Islamic community and state. According to the Sunnī view, the Prophet had left neither formal instruction nor a testament regarding his successor. Amidst much ensuing debate, mainly between the Meccan emigrants (*muhājirūn*) and the Medinese Helpers (*anṣār*), Abū Bakr, one of the earliest converts to Islam and a trusted Companion of the Prophet, was elected as the successor. Abū Bakr's election was effectuated on the suggestion of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, another of the *muhājirūn*, and by the acclamation of other leading Companions of the Prophet (*ṣaḥāba*), who accorded Abū Bakr their oath of allegiance (*bayʿa*).

Abū Bakr, as the new leader of the Islamic community, took the title of *khalīfat rasūl Allāh*, 'successor to the messenger of God', a title which was soon simplified to *khalīfa* (whence the word *caliph* in Western languages). Thus, by electing the first successor to the Prophet, the unique Islamic institution of the caliphate (*khilāfa*) was also founded. From its very inception, the caliphate came to embody both the religious and the political leadership of the community.¹ This unique

arrangement was to be expected from the very nature of Islam's teachings and the limited experience of the early Islamic community under the leadership of the Prophet. The early Muslims recognized a distinction neither between religion and state nor between religious and secular authorities and organizations, distinctions so familiar to the modern world. Indeed, a strictly theocratic conception of order, in which Islam is not merely a religion but a complete system ordained by God for the socio-political as well as the moral and spiritual governance of mankind, had been an integral part of Muḥammad's message and practice.

Abū Bakr's caliphate lasted just over two years, and before his death in 13/634, he personally selected 'Umar as his successor. This selection, however, was preceded by an informal consultation with several of the leading Muslims and followed by the acclamation and *bay'a* of the community. 'Umar, who was assassinated in 23/644, introduced a new procedure for the election of his successor. He decided that a council (*shūrā*) of six of the early Companions was to choose the new caliph from amongst themselves. In due time, 'Uthmān b. 'Affān, a member of the influential Banū Umayya clan, was selected, and, upon receiving the customary *bay'a*, became the third caliph. These early caliphs all belonged to the Meccan tribe of Quraysh and were among the early converts to Islam and the Prophet's Companions. The early caliphate was, thus, established on the basis of a privileged position for the Quraysh as a whole, while the Prophet's clan of Banū Hāshim within the Quraysh was deprived of the special religious status they evidently enjoyed in the lifetime of the Prophet.

In the meantime, immediately upon the death of the Prophet, there had appeared a minority group in Medina who believed that 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, first cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet and bound in matrimony to his daughter Fāṭima, was better qualified than any other candidate, including Abū Bakr, to succeed the Prophet. This minority group, originally comprised of some of 'Alī's friends and supporters, in time came to be known as the *Shī'at 'Alī*, or the party of 'Alī, and then simply as the Shī'a. 'Alī eventually succeeded as the fourth caliph, instead of fulfilling the aspiration of the Shī'a in becoming the immediate successor to the Prophet. The powers of authority exercised by the first four caliphs, known as *al-khulafā' al-rāshidūn* or the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, essentially seem to have consisted of the implementation of the all-embracing regulations of the message of Islam, as expressed in the revelations contained in the Qur'ān. When necessary, however, the Qur'ān, the standard written text of which came to be issued first during 'Uthmān's caliphate, was to be supplemented in the governing affairs of the community by the *sunna*, or practice, established in the nascent Islamic community during the lifetime of the Prophet.

Meanwhile, the Banū Hāshim had protested in vain against the loss of their position, while 'Alī was firmly convinced of the legitimacy of his own claim to

Muḥammad's succession, based on his close kinship and association with him, his intimate knowledge of Islam as well as his early merits in the cause of Islam. Indeed, 'Alī had made it plain in his speeches and letters that he considered the Prophet's family or the *ahl al-bayt* to be entitled to the leadership of the Muslims.² As noted, from early on 'Alī also had a circle of supporters who believed he was better qualified than any other Companion to succeed the Prophet. Matters are confused, however, as after a delay of about six months, 'Alī finally recognized Abū Bakr's caliphate, a lapse of time which also coincided with Fāṭima's death. It should be added parenthetically that Fāṭima had been involved in a rather complicated inheritance dispute with Abū Bakr over an estate held by the Prophet.³ Regardless, 'Alī's candidacy continued to be supported by his partisans in Medina, both among the *muhājirūn* and the *anṣār* and, in due time, the Shī'a developed a doctrinal view and their cause received wider recognition. According to non-Shī'ī sources, the chief consideration initially underlying the position of the Shī'a was basically related to the special significance they attached to 'Alī's being the foremost member of the *ahl al-bayt*, the Prophet's family.

The view on the origins of the caliphate and Shī'ism outlined above is essentially that held by the Sunnī Muslims and accepted by the majority of Western Islamicists. But there is also the Shī'ī version, which significantly differs from that of the Sunnīs. It may be pointed out that Shī'ism, which is now the minority position, should not be regarded as a 'heterodoxy', a late revolt against, or a deviation from, an established 'orthodoxy'. In fact, both Sunnism and Shī'ism constitute an integral part of Islam and they should more correctly be regarded as different interpretations of the same Islamic message.⁴ Needless to say, the objective validity of one or the other perspective, as in most religious controversies, is hardly a debatable matter. The differences cannot be resolved on the basis of the various categories of primary sources, notably the theological, historical and the so-called heresiographical works. This is not only because these sources reflect Sunnī or Shī'ī biases, but also because according to the Shī'a, the possibility of the Shī'ī perspective in Islam existed, as shall be seen, from the very beginning.

There are, however, those Western Islamicists who are of the opinion that the Shī'ī point of view, in time, led to a re-writing of the early history of Islam. They argue that the Twelvers in particular, from the last quarter of the 3rd/9th century onwards when Twelver Shī'ism started to acquire its now familiar form, attempted to present a version of events relating to the period from the death of the Prophet until 260/874, the date of the occultation of their twelfth imam, which supported their doctrinal position but was not necessarily in accordance with the facts.⁵ The purpose here is not to indulge in polemics or defend either of the two major divisions of Islam. After all, the main points have already been debated throughout the centuries, leading to an abundance of theological

treatises supporting one view or refuting the other. Rather, the purpose here is to present now the Shī'ī view on the origins of Shī'ism,⁶ irrespective of the possibility that some of the beliefs involved might not have been entertained by the earliest Shī'īs.

The Shī'īs of all branches, on the basis of specific Qur'ānic verses and certain *ḥadīths*, have maintained that the Prophet did in fact appoint a successor, or an imam as they have preferred to call the spiritual guide and leader of the *umma*. The central Shī'ī evidence of 'Alī's succession legitimacy is, however, the event of Ghadīr Khumm.⁷ On 18 Dhu'l-Ḥijja 10/16 March 632, when returning from his Farewell Pilgrimage, the Prophet stopped at a site by that name between Mecca and Medina to make an announcement to the pilgrims who accompanied him. Taking 'Alī by the hand, he uttered the famous sentence *man kuntu mawlāhu fa-'Alī mawlāhu* (He of whom I am the master, of him 'Alī is also the master), which, according to the Shī'a, made 'Alī his successor. Furthermore, it is the Shī'ī belief that the Prophet had received the designation (*naṣṣ*) in question, nominating 'Alī as the imam of the Muslims after his own death, through divine revelation. This event of the spiritual investiture of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib continues to be celebrated as one of the most important Shī'ī feasts.

As a result, after the Prophet's death, a number of pious Muslims, including especially Salmān al-Fārisī, Abū Dharr al-Ghiffārī, al-Miqdād b. al-Aswad al-Kindī and 'Ammār b. Yāsir, four of the *ṣaḥāba* who came to be known collectively as the four pillars of the early Shī'a, zealously maintained that the succession to the Prophet was 'Alī's legitimate right. This contention was opposed by the Muslim majority who supported the caliphate of Abū Bakr. The latter group, while refusing to concede that the Prophet had specified a successor, considered the decision on the caliphate to be a matter for the *ijmā'* or consensus of the community. Consequently, 'Alī and his partisans were obliged to protest against the act of choosing the Prophet's successor through elective methods. It was this very protest, raised by the pious circle supporting 'Alī, which separated the Shī'a from the majority of Muslims.

The case of the Shī'a was ignored by the rest of the community, including the majority of the Companions, but the Shī'a persisted in holding that all religious matters should be referred to 'Alī, who in their opinion was the sole person possessing religious authority. Indeed, the Shī'a did hold a particular conception of religious authority and one that occupies a central position in Shī'ī thought, but which should not be taken to imply any intended separation between the religious and political domains in Shī'ī Islam. Such a distinction, as already noted, was meaningless to the early Muslims. According to the Shī'ī view, from the very beginning the partisans of 'Alī believed that the most important question facing the Muslims after the Prophet's death was the elucidation of the Islamic teachings

and religious tenets. This was because they were aware that the teachings of the Qur'ān and the sacred law of Islam (*sharī'a*), having emanated from sources beyond the comprehension of the ordinary man, contained truths and inner purposes that could not be grasped directly through human reason. This being so, in order to understand the true meaning of the Islamic revelation, the Shī'a had realized the necessity of a religiously authoritative person, namely the imam. According to this view then, the very possibility of a Shī'ī perspective existed within the original message of Islam, and the possibility was only actualized by the genesis of Shī'ism.

It was due to such Shī'ī ideas that there eventually arose in the Muslim community two different conceptions of succession to the Prophet. The majority came to consider the *khalīfa* as being the administrator of the *sharī'a* and leader of the community. The Shī'a, on the other hand, while also holding that the successor must rule justly over the community, saw in the succession an important spiritual function, a function connected with the interpretation of the Islamic message. As a result, the successor would for them also have to possess legitimate authority for elucidating the teachings of Islam and for providing spiritual guidance for the Muslims. A person with such qualifications, according to the Shī'a, could come only from amongst the *ahl al-bayt*, as they alone possessed religious authority and provided the sole channel for transmitting the original message of Islam. There were, of course, differences regarding the precise composition of the *ahl al-bayt*, later defined to include only certain members of the Prophet's immediate family, especially 'Alī and Fāṭima and their progeny. Nevertheless, 'Alī was from the beginning regarded by his devoted partisans as the most prominent member of the Prophet's family, and as such, was believed to have inherited the Prophet's undivulged teachings and religious knowledge or *'ilm*. He was, indeed, held to be the Prophet's *waṣī* or legatee. In the eyes of the Shī'a, 'Alī's unique qualifications as successor held yet another important dimension in that he was believed to have been nominated by divine command (*amr*) as expressed through the Prophet's testament. This meant that 'Alī was also divinely inspired and immune from error and sin (*ma'ṣūm*), thus making him infallible both in his knowledge and as a teaching authority after the Prophet. As a result of such beliefs, the Shī'a maintained that the two ends, of governing the community and exercising religious authority, could be accomplished only by 'Alī.

The Shī'ī point of view on the origins of Shī'ism contains distinctive doctrinal elements that admittedly cannot be attributed in their entirety to the early Shī'īs, especially the original partisans of 'Alī. Needless to say, many Western Islamicists are of the opinion that Shī'ism, during its first half-century when it appears to have been a purely political movement, did not maintain any religious beliefs different from those held by the non-Shī'ī Muslims. The fact remains that very

little is known with historical certainty concerning the earliest Shī'ī ideas and tendencies. But, taking once again the Shī'ī sources and traditions as points of reference, it may be said that perhaps the earliest Shī'ī ideas centred broadly around a particular notion of religious knowledge connected with the Prophet's own *ʿilm*. There were probably also ideas about the possession of this knowledge being regarded as a qualification for leading the community. Moreover, it may be added that the partisans of ʿAlī, by contrast to the majority, seem to have been more inclined in their thinking towards the hereditary attributes of individuals. The idea that certain special qualities were hereditary was, of course, in line with the pre-Islamic Arab notion that outstanding human attributes were transmitted through tribal stock. It was, therefore, rather natural for ʿAlī's religiously learned followers, who also had special respect for the Prophet's family, to believe that some of Muḥammad's special attributes, notably his *ʿilm*, would be inherited by the members of his clan, the Banū Hāshim, and his immediate family. Such beliefs might have been particularly held by those Shī'īs with south Arabian origins, since they had been accustomed to the Yamanī traditions of divine and semi-divine kingship and its hereditary sanctity.

Early history of Shī'ism

The earliest Shī'ī currents of thought, whatever their precise nature, developed gradually over time, finding their full expression and consolidation in the doctrine of the imamate.⁸ The stages through which this doctrine passed remain rather obscure. But it is generally known that the basic conception of this distinctive Shī'ī doctrine, which embodies the fundamental beliefs of Shī'ī Islam, came to be postulated in the time of the Imam Jaʿfar al-Šādiq.

After their initial defeat, the Shī'a lost much of their enthusiasm. Shī'ism remained in a practically dormant state during the caliphates of both Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, when ʿAlī himself maintained a passive and secluded attitude. During this early period (11–23/632–644), ʿAlī's behaviour is best illustrated by his lack of participation in the affairs of the community and in the ongoing wars of conquest. This was a marked departure from his earlier active role in the community, and his appearance in the forefront of all the battles fought in the Prophet's time, except the battle of Tabūk. He actually retreated, during this period, to his house in Medina. This behaviour should not however be taken as an indication of ʿAlī's reluctance to be involved in public affairs, since the first two caliphs did in fact attempt to exclude him from any position of importance. He was, nevertheless, appointed along with ʿUthmān, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr, to the six-member council of the Companions that was to select ʿUmar's successor.⁹

These stagnating conditions changed rather drastically for ʿAlī and his partisans in the caliphate of ʿUthmān (23–35/644–656). During this period of strife and discontent in the community, the turn of events was such as to activate Shīʿī aspirations and tendencies. The mounting grievances against ʿUthmān, which related mainly to economic issues, evolved around the opposition of the provincials and the Medinese *anṣār* whose earlier position of influence had now been curtailed.¹⁰ ʿUthmān distributed the governorships of all the major provinces, as well as the important garrison towns (singular, *miṣr*) of Kūfa and Baṣra, amongst his close relatives. These governors, in turn, adopted policies aimed at enhancing the power and financial interests of the Umayyads and their wealthy Meccan allies. As a result, the tribal leaders, whose claims were mainly based on the strengths of their tribes, having been kept in check under ʿUmar’s caliphate, were now restored to positions of influence in the provinces. As a corollary to this, many of the early Muslims who lacked tribal stature came to be displaced by the so-called traditional tribal aristocracy or the *ashrāf al-qabāʾil*. This policy created discontent among the *anṣār* and the lesser tribal groups of the provinces, groups which had developed claims of their own based on the principle of Islamic *sābiqa* or priority, viz., priority in acceptance of and service to Islam.

The provincial grievances against ʿUthmān’s rule had other causes too. By the time of ʿUthmān, Islam’s period of rapid expansion had effectively ended. But the Arab soldier-tribesmen (*muqātila*) of the garrison towns that had hitherto served as military bases for numerous conquests were now to remain permanently in their encampments, even though there was no longer a lucrative source of income from booty on the battlefield. These changed realities of the post-conquest period, by themselves, created dissatisfaction with the regime. To make matters worse, the central authority of the caliphate in Medina, itself no longer satisfied with the diminishing size of its customary one-fifth of the movable booty (*ghanīma*), became compelled to seek new provincial sources of revenue to compensate for the falling receipts of the Muslim state treasury, the *bayt al-māl*.

Another particular grievance related to the abandoned Sāsānid lands in Mesopotamia. Of the various groups aspiring to the ownership of these agriculturally rich lands in the Sawād district of Kūfa, the so-called *qurrāʾ* posed the strongest claim. The *qurrāʾ* evidently represented those participants in the early wars (*ahl al-ayyām*) against the Sāsānid empire who had occupied the vacated estates of southern ʿIrāq, but some later Muslim historians referred to these groups of villagers as ‘reciters of the Qurʾān’, which, in time, became the widely adopted definition of the term *qurrāʾ*. ʿUthmān’s policy of gradually allocating the disputed lands to those enjoying his favour, therefore, came to be particularly resented by the *qurrāʾ*, whose leaders had furthermore lost their positions of influence to the strong tribal leaders of Kūfa. The Kūfan *qurrāʾ*, in response to this

double assault, generated the first provincial opposition to 'Uthmān's caliphate. As noted, the provincial opposition was centred in the garrison towns, especially in Kūfa and Baṣra. Kūfa also soon came to acquire a special place in the annals of early Shī'ism. It would, therefore, be in order to say a few words on certain aspects of these garrison towns.¹¹ The Islamic empire, during its phase of rapid expansion in the caliphate of 'Umar, came into possession of many ancient cities within the domains of the Byzantine and Sāsānid empires. Numerous new towns were also founded by the conquering Arabs. These towns were originally conceived as military camps for the invading Arab warriors, who were not allowed to settle in the old cities of the conquered lands and mingle with the non-Arab natives. As the main advances of the Arab armies had been directed towards the Sāsānid territories, the most important garrison towns had now come to be located in the eastern lands of the caliphate, particularly in 'Irāq. Kūfa, in the region of Ctesiphon (Madā'in), the capital of the Sāsānids, and Baṣra, situated strategically between the desert and the Persian Gulf ports, were the two main garrison towns in that region, both having been founded in or about 17/638. It was, therefore, to these two towns that the bulk of Arab migration from all parts of northern and southern Arabia, later supplanted by non-Arabs, had gone to join the victorious armies, especially after 20/641 when the conquest of Mesopotamia had been assured.

The organization of Kūfa and Baṣra was strongly based on the tribal pattern prevailing in the Arab society. This meant that their inhabitants were divided into a number of tribal groups, each having its own separate military district and tribal leader. In Kūfa, in contrast to Baṣra, the tribal composition of the population was extremely heterogeneous with a predominance of southern Arabs, or Yamanī tribal groups. This was among the chief factors that made Kūfa an important recruiting ground for the Shī'a, while non-Shī'ī sentiments prevailed in Baṣra. The soldier-tribesmen of the garrison towns, aside from receiving booty of conquest, lived on stipends allotted to them on the basis of an elaborate system of distribution created under 'Umar. According to this system, itself based on a registry or stipend-roll (*dīwān*), the size of the stipend ('*aṭā*') would be determined by the already-noted criterion of *sābiqa*, reflecting 'Umar's desire to displace traditional Arab claims, based on tribal affiliation and authority, by Islamic ones.

As the opposition to 'Uthmān's policies gained momentum during the latter years of his caliphate, the partisans of 'Alī found it opportune to revive their subdued aspirations. The Shī'is were still led at this time by some of the original partisans of 'Alī, such as Abū Dharr who died in 31/651–652 in exile under 'Uthmān as punishment for his protests, and 'Ammār who would be killed soon afterwards in 37/657 in the battle of Ṣiffīn. But a number of new partisans were

now appearing and the Shīʿa drew general support also from the Banū Hāshim, whose interests had been ignored by the Umayyads. While the Shīʿa were emerging as a more active party, ʿAlī found himself being approached by the various discontented provincials, groups that started becoming more systematically organized around 34/654 and, as such, needed an effective and acceptable spokesman in the capital. The Shīʿa and the discontented provincials, two groups differing in the nature of their opposition to ʿUthmān's rule but with similar objectives, thus found themselves joining forces. As a result of this complex alliance, the unpopularity of ʿUthmān grew side by side with the pro-Shīʿī sentiments and the partisanship for ʿAlī, who at the same time mediated with the opposition on behalf of the distressed caliph. The situation deteriorated rapidly, soon exploding into open rebellion, when rebel contingents from Kūfa, Baṣra and Egypt converged on Medina under the overall leadership of the Kūfan *qurrāʾ*. This chaos finally culminated in the murder of ʿUthmān in 35/656, at the hands of a group of mutineers from the Arab army of Egypt.

In the aftermath of this murder, the Islamic community became badly torn over the question of ʿUthmān's guilt and hence over the justification of the mutineers' action. In an emotionally tense and confused atmosphere, ʿAlī was acclaimed as the new caliph in Medina. This was a notable victory for the Shīʿa whose imam had now succeeded, though with a delay of some twenty-four years, to caliphal authority. ʿAlī drew support from virtually every group opposed to conditions under ʿUthmān. The emergence of the new coalition of groups supporting ʿAlī, together with the austere state of affairs expected under his rule, were naturally alarming to the traditional tribal aristocracy, particularly the Banū Umayya and other influential Meccan clans. Due to such conflicts of interest, ʿAlī was confronted from the start with difficulties which soon erupted into the first civil war or *fitna* in Islam, lasting through his short-lived caliphate. He never succeeded in enforcing his caliphal authority throughout the Islamic empire, especially in the territories of ʿUthmān's relative, Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān, who had governed Syria for almost twenty years.

The first challenge to ʿAlī came in the form of a revolt led, under the pretext of demanding vengeance for ʿUthmān, by Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr, two of the most influential of the Companions. They were joined by ʿĀʾisha, Abū Bakr's daughter and the Prophet's widow, who nurtured a long-felt hatred for ʿAlī. The three rebel leaders, along with a contingent of the Quraysh, went to Baṣra to organize support for their rebellion. ʿAlī reacted swiftly and left Medina to gather support for his own forces at Kūfa, whose inhabitants had shown their inclinations towards him. The rebels were easily defeated in 36/656, at the battle of the Camel (al-Jamal) near Baṣra, in which Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr were killed. This rebellion had two significant and enduring consequences, however. Henceforth, the

Muslims were to fight amongst themselves, and the central authority of the caliphate came to be transferred from Medina to the provinces of 'Irāq and Syria, where the military effectiveness of the empire was now concentrated. It was in this new setting that the Umayyad challenge to 'Alī's authority unfolded.

Almost immediately upon 'Alī's rise to power, Mu'āwiya, at the head of a pro-'Uthmān party, had launched a campaign against the new caliph to whom he refused to give his allegiance. He, too, particularly as 'Uthmān's kinsman, had found the call for avenging the slain caliph a convenient pretext for covering his real intention of seeing Umayyad rule established throughout the Islamic state. 'Alī was trapped in an unenviable situation. The actual murderers had fled Medina, while many of the *qurrā'* surrounding him were equally implicated. As 'Alī was either unable or unwilling to punish those directly responsible, Mu'āwiya rose in rebellion and challenged the very legitimacy of his caliphate.

'Alī had, in the meantime, entered Kūfa to mobilize support for the anticipated confrontation with Mu'āwiya. As an important measure towards consolidating his power base there, 'Alī reorganized the Kūfan tribal groups with a two-fold result. First, by reshuffling tribes and clans from one group to another, he changed the composition of the then existing seven tribal groups in favour of the Yamanīs who, unlike the northern or Nizārī Arabs, were more disposed towards him and the Shī'ī ideal of leadership. Second, and more important, through this very reshuffling he in effect attempted to re-establish the Islamic leadership in Kūfa at the expense of the tribal leadership that had emerged there under 'Uthmān. Accordingly, men like Mālīk al-Ashtar, Ḥujr b. 'Adī al-Kindī and 'Adī b. Ḥātim, leaders of the early Kūfan *qurrā'* who had been eclipsed by the *ashrāf al-qabā'il*, were restored to positions of authority. These men, with similarly situated Kūfans, along with their following, provided the backbone of 'Alī's forces and became the new leaders of the Shī'a.¹² The Shī'ī leaders urged 'Alī to attack Mu'āwiya's forces without any delay. On the other hand, the Kūfan *ashrāf* advised against such haste since they were more interested in seeing a stalemate between the contending parties. Doubtless, 'Alī's victory and egalitarian policies would undermine their privileged positions, while Syrian domination would deprive them of their independent status in 'Irāq. It was under such circumstances that, after the failure of lengthy negotiations, 'Alī eventually set out from Kūfa and encountered the Syrian forces at Ṣiffīn on the upper Euphrates, in the spring of 37/657. A long battle ensued, perhaps the most controversial one in the history of early Islam.

The events of the battle of Ṣiffīn, the Syrian arbitration proposal and 'Alī's acceptance of it, and the resulting arbitration verdict of Adhruḥ issued about a year later, have all been critically examined by a number of modern scholars, as have the intervening circumstances leading to the secession of different groups

from 'Alī's forces, the seceders being subsequently designated as the Khawārij.¹³ These events irrevocably undermined 'Alī's political position. His popularity was particularly damaged when he finally decided to check the growing menace of the Khawārij by attacking their camp along the canal of al-Nahrawān in 38/658, inflicting heavy losses on the dissenters. This action, far from destroying the Khawārij, caused large scale defections from 'Alī's already faltering forces. Failing in his efforts to mobilize a new army, 'Alī was compelled to retreat to Kūfa and virtually ignore Mu'āwiya's mounting military campaign. During the final two years of the civil war, while many Muslims continued to be hesitant in taking sides, 'Alī rapidly lost ground to his arch-enemy. Finally, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, Commander of the Faithful (*amīr al-mu'minīn*), fourth caliph and first Shī'ī imam, was struck with the poisoned sword of a Khārijī in the mosque of Kūfa. He died a few days later, on 21 Ramaḍān 40/25 January 661.

The Islamic community emerged from its first civil war severely tested and split into factions that were to confront one another throughout subsequent centuries. The main factions had already begun to take shape during the final years of 'Uthmān's rule. But they crystallized more explicitly into two opposing parties in the aftermath of the murder of 'Uthmān and the battles of the Jamal and Ṣiffin. Henceforth, these parties acquired denominations which, in an eclectic sense, revealed their personal loyalties as well as their regional attachments. The supporters of 'Alī came to be called the *Ahl al-'Irāq* (People of 'Irāq) as well as the *Shī'at 'Alī* (Party of 'Alī) and 'Alawī, while their adversaries were designated the *Shī'at 'Uthmān* (Party of 'Uthmān), or more commonly the 'Uthmāniyya. The latter party, after Ṣiffin, constituted mainly the *Ahl al-Shām* (People of Syria), also referred to as the *Shī'at Mu'āwiya* (Party of Mu'āwiya). From the time of the first civil war onwards, the partisans of 'Alī, the Shī'a *par excellence*, also referred to themselves by terms which had more precise religious connotations such as the *Shī'at ahl al-bayt* or its equivalent the *Shī'at āl Muḥammad* (Party of the Prophet's Household). Starting with the battle of Ṣiffin, a third faction, the Khawārij, appeared in the community. The Khawārij, seriously opposed to the other two factions, were initially also called the Ḥarūriyya, after the locality Ḥarūrā' to which the first seceders from 'Alī's forces had retreated, as well as the Shurāt (singular, *shārī*, the vendor), signifying those who sold their soul for the cause of God. They managed to organize a rapidly spreading movement that many times in the later history of Islam challenged any form of legitimacy and dynastic privilege.¹⁴

It was during 'Alī's caliphate that important changes occurred in the composition and influence of the Shī'a. At the time of 'Alī's accession to power, the Shī'a still represented a small personal party comprised chiefly of the original partisans. But during the next few years, the Shī'a expanded by absorbing some

of the most pious Muslims, such as the leaders of the early Kūfan *qurrā'* who were to persist in their devotion to 'Alī. The new partisans were not numerically significant, but they made much difference, as subsequent events showed, to the cause of the Shī'a, in terms of their unwavering loyalty to 'Alī and his descendants, the 'Alids. These devout partisans are, indeed, amongst those reported to have sworn to 'Alī that they would be 'friends of those he befriended, and enemies of those to whom he was hostile',¹⁵ reminiscent of the very words used by the Prophet himself with regard to 'Alī at Ghadīr Khumm.

As a possible explanation of this deep devotion, W. M. Watt has suggested an interesting hypothesis, arguing that the attachment of the Shī'a to 'Alī had acquired a more strictly theological dimension precisely during this same period of his caliphate. The civil war, according to this hypothesis, was a period of crisis and general insecurity in the community, when the nomadic tribesmen of Arabia were experiencing the strains of their new lives in the unstable conditions of Kūfa and other rapidly growing garrison towns. These displaced and insecure Arabs naturally tended to search for salvation, which could be attained through different channels. In the case of the Shī'a, they were already exposed to the idea of the hereditary sanctity of the Prophet's family, while the Yamanī partisans amongst them were particularly familiar with the tradition of divine kingship and the superhuman qualities of kings. It was, therefore, not difficult for them to develop the distinct feeling that their salvation and delivery from distress might best be guaranteed by following a charismatic leader, a person possessing certain superhuman, or divinely ordained, attributes. Thus, the Shī'a came to find the charismata of inerrancy and infallibility in 'Alī, and he became the charismatic leader to whom his partisans were deeply attached for their salvation.¹⁶

The very existence of this zealous party of supporters largely explains how Shī'ism managed to survive 'Alī's death and numerous subsequent tragic events and defeats. The Shī'a proper should, however, be distinguished from the other groups in 'Alī's following. In the confusing milieu of the civil war, several heterogeneous groups, devoid of any particular spiritual devotion to 'Alī, had rallied behind him. They were united in their opposition to 'Uthmān and other mutual adversaries, and in the hope of receiving a variety of politico-economic benefits. As a result, the *Shī'at 'Alī* came to be loosely and temporarily aligned with all those more appropriately considered the pro-Shī'ī or non-Shī'ī supporters of 'Alī. It was in this broader sense that Shī'ism was established among the mixed population of southern 'Irāq, especially in Kūfa. In effect, 'Alī embodied the symbol of the 'Irāqī opposition to Syrian domination, and for a long time the 'Irāqīs continued to consider his brief rule as a 'golden age', when Kūfa and not Damascus was the capital of the caliphate. But, starting with the events of Şiffin, the situation changed, turning against the hitherto spreading form of broad Shī'ism.

Different non-Shīʿī groups in ʿAlī's following, including the Kūfan *ashrāf* who had earlier found it expedient to support him after a dubious fashion, now began to desert him. However, by the time of his murder, the Shīʿa still drew support from certain non-Shīʿī groups. Furthermore, while the ʿIrāqīs in general had remained hesitant in taking sides during the civil war, the Arab settlers of Kūfa, being dominated by the Yamanīs, remained sympathetic towards the Shīʿī ideal of leadership. As we shall see, the Persians too, who soon came to account for an important proportion of Kūfa's non-Arab population, were to express similar pro-Shīʿī inclinations.

It was in these circumstances that al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī, the elder son of ʿAlī and Fāṭima, was acclaimed as caliph by some 40,000 Kūfans, immediately after his father's death. But the young grandson of the Prophet was no match for the shrewd Muʿāwiya who had endeavoured for many years to win the office for himself. Indeed, Muʿāwiya's power had now become quite unchallengeable, and he easily succeeded in forcing al-Ḥasan to abdicate from the caliphate. The chronology of the events and the circumstances surrounding the brief struggle between al-Ḥasan and Muʿāwiya, as well as the terms under which al-Ḥasan abdicated and retired to Medina, remain rather obscure.¹⁷ The fact remains, however, that after al-Ḥasan's withdrawal, the caliphate easily fell to the Umayyad contender, who was speedily recognized as the new caliph in all provinces and by the majority of the Muslims, except the Shīʿīs and the Khawārij. Having skilfully seized power under the pretext of avenging ʿUthmān, Muʿāwiya also succeeded in founding the Umayyad caliphate that was destined to rule the Islamic empire on a dynastic basis for nearly a century (41–132/661–750). With these developments, Shīʿism entered into the most difficult period of its early history, being severely persecuted by the Umayyads.

With Muʿāwiya's final victory, the remnants of the non-Shīʿī supporters of ʿAlī and his family either defected to the victorious party, or else scattered. Consequently, the eclectic Shīʿism of ʿAlī's time was now reduced to the true Shīʿīs who continued as a small but zealous opposition party in Kūfa. On the other hand, it was the expanding party of Muʿāwiya that eventually came to represent the central body of the community, also called the 'assembly of the believers' (*jamāʿat al-muʿminīn*). By the early ʿAbbāsīd times, the majority of the Muslims upholding the caliphates of the Umayyads and the ʿAbbāsīds became known as the *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jamāʿa* (People of the *sunna* and of the Community), or simply as the Sunnīs. This designation was used not because the majority were more attached than others to the 'sunna of the Prophet', but because they claimed to be the adherents of correct Prophetic practice, and as such they stood opposed to those who, in their view, deviated from the common ways and principles of the *Jamāʿa*.¹⁸

In the eyes of the Shī'a, al-Ḥasan's abdication from the caliphate did not invalidate his position as their imam. The Shī'a indeed continued to regard him as their leader after 'Alī, while the 'Alids considered him the head of their family. However, now the visible spokesman for the Shī'a was not to be al-Ḥasan, who in accordance with his treaty with Mu'āwiya abstained from all non-personal activities, but rather Ḥujr b. 'Adī al-Kindī. This loyal 'Alid partisan became the moving spirit behind Shī'ī sentiments in Kūfa and never ceased to protest against the official cursing of 'Alī from the pulpits after the Friday prayers, a policy instituted by Mu'āwiya. On a few occasions, the Shī'īs from Kūfa visited al-Ḥasan in Medina, the permanent domicile of the 'Alids, attempting in vain to persuade him to rise against Mu'āwiya. The latter, who was ruling with an iron fist, had meanwhile taken various precautionary measures, including his own reorganization of the Kūfan tribal groups, to prevent any serious Shī'ī insurrection. On the whole, the Shī'ī movement remained rather subdued until al-Ḥasan's early death in 49/669.

After al-Ḥasan, the Shī'īs revived their aspirations for restoring the caliphate to the 'Alids, now headed by al-Ḥasan's younger and full-brother, al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī. Soon, they invited their new imam to rise against the Umayyads. However al-Ḥusayn made it known that, in observance of his brother's agreement, he would not respond to such a summons so long as Mu'āwiya was still alive. Yet the most zealous Shī'īs could no longer remain inactive. In 51/671, soon after Mu'āwiya's adopted brother Ziyād b. Abīhi had become the governor of both Kūfa and Baṣra, Ḥujr and a handful of diehard Shī'īs attempted to instigate a revolt in Kūfa.¹⁹ The revolt never actually materialized as the Shī'īs were not yet sufficiently numerous and organized, and as the Kūfan tribal support they had relied on was not forthcoming. Ḥujr and his associates were arrested, and they chose to sacrifice their lives rather than denounce 'Alī and be pardoned. The death of Ḥujr in effect initiated the Shī'ī martyrology and became the prelude to that of the principal Shī'ī martyr al-Ḥusayn, called *Sayyid al-shuhadā'*, or Lord of the Martyrs.

Mu'āwiya died in 60/680 and, according to his unprecedented testament for which he had previously obtained the consent of the notables of the empire, his son Yazīd succeeded to the caliphate. The Shī'ī leaders of Kūfa, such as Sulaymān b. Ṣurad al-Khuzā'i, Ḥabīb b. Muḏāhir and Muslim b. 'Awsaja, loyal partisans who had fought on 'Alī's side at the battles of the Camel and Ṣiffin, wrote to al-Ḥusayn inviting him to lead his Kūfan followers in wresting the caliphate from Yazīd. Similar invitations were sent out by other Kūfans, especially the Yamanīs, in the hope that al-Ḥusayn would organize a revolt against Umayyad rule and end the Syrian domination of 'Irāq. Before making a decision, however, al-Ḥusayn, who had already refused to accord his *bay'a* to Yazīd and had withdrawn to Mecca,

thought it prudent to assess the situation through his cousin Muslim b. 'Aqīl. On his arrival in Kūfa, Muslim soon collected thousands of pledges of support, and, assured of the situation, advised al-Ḥusayn to assume the active leadership of the Shī'īs and their sympathizers in Kūfa. Finally, al-Ḥusayn decided to respond to the pressing summons.

Yazīd, on his part, having become weary of mounting Shī'ī sentiments, reacted swiftly. He appointed his strongman, 'Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād, then governing Baṣra, also to take charge of Kūfa, with strict orders to crush any pro-Ḥusayn disturbances there. Ibn Ziyād's severe retaliatory measures and punishments soon terrified the Kūfans, including the Yamanīs and other Shī'ī sympathizers. This is not surprising, since the Kūfans had time and again shown a characteristic lack of resolve. Thus abandoned by the Kūfans, and failing in his efforts to start an immediate uprising, Muslim was arrested and executed. Kūfa was once again brought under the full control of the Umayyads. But al-Ḥusayn had already embarked on the route to Kūfa.

On his fatal journey, al-Ḥusayn was accompanied by a small group of relatives and companions. Before reaching their destination, they were intercepted in the plain of Karbalā', near Kūfa, by an Umayyad army of 4,000 men. It was there that, refusing one last time to yield to Yazīd, al-Ḥusayn and his company of some 72 men were brutally massacred on 10 Muḥarram 61/10 October 680. Only women and some children were spared. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, who was to receive the honorific title Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, being sick and confined to his tent, was one of the survivors. Amongst the 54 non-ʿAlid martyrs of Karbalā', there were only a few of the Kūfan Shī'īs who had somehow managed to penetrate Ibn Ziyād's tight blockade of Kūfa to be with their imam in his hour of need. The Shī'īs have particular reverence for these martyrs (*shuhadā'*), notably the aged Muslim b. 'Awsaja, 'Ābis b. Abī Ḥabīb, Sa'īd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥanafī, and Ḥabīb b. Muẓāhir, who commanded the left flank of al-Ḥusayn's company, the right one having been held by Zuhayr b. al-Qayn, a faithful companion. Thus concluded the most tragic episode in the early history of Shī'ism, and indeed, of Islam.²⁰ This event is still commemorated devoutly in the Shī'ī world, by special ceremonies and a type of popular religious play (*ta'ziya*).

The heroic martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson infused a new religious fervour in the Shī'a. The event, solidly establishing the Shī'ī martyrology, was destined to play a significant role in the consolidation of the Shī'ī identity. In the immediate aftermath of Karbalā', the Shī'īs and many other Kūfans who had so persistently invited al-Ḥusayn into their midst, were deeply moved. A sense of repentance set in, and they felt the urge to avenge the murder of al-Ḥusayn and to expiate their own failure to support him. Hence, these people called themselves the Tawwābūn or the Penitents. Towards the end of 61/680, they formally began

to organize a movement, with an original membership of one hundred diehard Shī'īs of Kūfa, none of whom was under sixty years of age. Old and devoted, these partisans were doubtless reacting on the basis of their conscience. The Tawwābūn did not evidently proclaim any of the 'Alids as their imam. Sulaymān b. Ṣurad, then in the forefront of all the Shī'ī activities in Kūfa, was selected as their leader, and for three years, while Yazīd was alive, the movement proceeded with extreme caution and secrecy.

With Yazīd's sudden death in 64/683, the Tawwābūn found it opportune to come into the open and expand their recruiting efforts. This was mainly because the unrest of Yazīd's rule had now erupted into outright civil war, the second one for Islam. Yazīd was succeeded by his sickly son, Mu'āwiya II, and when the latter died some six months later, the aged Marwān b. al-Ḥakam (d. 65/685), the most prominent member of the ruling family, became the new caliph. This immediately led to a serious conflict between the two major rival tribes of Syria, Kalb and Qays, making it impossible for the Umayyads to maintain their control over 'Irāq. Meanwhile, in the Ḥijāz, 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, who like al-Ḥusayn had refused to pay homage to Yazīd and had revolted, was now successfully claiming the caliphate for himself. In particular, he had gained general recognition by the 'Irāqīs who were attempting to acquire their independence from Syria. They expelled Ibn Ziyād, the Umayyad governor of both Kūfa and Baṣra, who bore chief responsibility for the massacre at Karbalā'. In the prevailing chaos, the Tawwābūn managed to solicit pledges of support from some 16,000 persons, not all of whom were Shī'īs. Sulaymān b. Ṣurad, contrary to the advice of some of his associates, decided to attack the Umayyad forces of Ibn Ziyād, who was then near the Syrian border poised to reconquer 'Irāq for Marwān. The Tawwābūn congregated at Nukhayla, near Kūfa, in Rabī' II 65/November 684, as planned. But to their disappointment, only 4,000 men showed up. Regardless, they proceeded, and some two months later met Ibn Ziyād's much larger army at 'Ayn al-Warda. By the end of the three-day battle, the majority of the Tawwābūn, including Sulaymān himself, had fulfilled their pledge of sacrificing their lives for al-Ḥusayn.

The movement of the Tawwābūn, representing yet another defeat for the Shī'a, marks the end of what may be regarded as the Arab and the unified phase of Shī'ism. During its first half-century, from 11/632 until around 65/684, Shī'ism maintained an almost exclusively Arab nature, with a limited appeal to non-Arab Muslims. The Tawwābūn who fell in battle were all Arabs, including a significant number of the early Kūfan *qurrā'* who provided the leading personalities of the movement. These Arabs belonged mainly to various Yamanī tribes settled in Kūfa, although northern Arabs were also amongst them. In addition, during this initial phase, the Shī'ī movement consisted of a single party, without any internal

division. These features were to change drastically with the next event in the history of Shīʿism, the revolt of al-Mukhtār.

al-Mukhtār and the *mawālī*

Al-Mukhtār b. Abī ʿUbayd al-Thaqafī was an ambitious and controversial man devoted to the cause of the ʿAlids. He had participated in the premature insurrection of Muslim b. ʿAqīl. He had then gone to the Ḥijāz, hoping in vain to collaborate with Ibn al-Zubayr. Subsequently, with the rising Shīʿī sentiments in Kūfa, he again appeared there in 64/684, a few months after Yazīd's death. There, he strove to acquire a leading position among the Shīʿīs, who lacked an active imam. However, he did not have much success while Sulaymān b. Ṣurad was still alive. The latter refused either to join forces with al-Mukhtār or to pay heed to his warnings against the futility of any poorly-organized entanglement with the Umayyads.

With the demise of the Tawwābūn, the long-awaited opportunity finally arose for al-Mukhtār's own plans. He launched a vigorous campaign, again with a general call for avenging al-Ḥusayn's murder, in the name of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya, ʿAlī's son by Khawla, a woman from the Banū Ḥanifa.²¹ Al-Mukhtār tactfully claimed to be the trusted agent and representative, *amīn* and *wazīr*, of Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya. It is not clear to what extent such claims had the prior approval of Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya, who resided in Medina and remained a mere figurehead in the unfolding revolt. Of greater consequence was al-Mukhtār's proclamation of Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya as al-Mahdī, 'the divinely-guided one', the saviour-imam who would establish justice on earth and thus deliver the oppressed from tyranny (*ẓulm*). This title had already been applied in a purely honorific sense to ʿAlī, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, but its first use in a messianic sense now derived from al-Mukhtār. The concept of the Imam-Mahdī was a very important doctrinal innovation, and it proved particularly appealing to the non-Arab Muslims, the so-called *mawālī* who constituted the bulk of the oppressed masses of Kūfa.

Al-Mukhtār soon won the support of the Shīʿī majority, including the survivors of the Tawwābūn and the influential Ibrāhīm b. al-Ashtar (d. 72/691), the leader of the hard-core Shīʿīs who, like his father, was a loyal ʿAlid partisan. Sufficient forces were collected, and the open revolt took place in Rabīʿ I 66/October 685. Without much bloodshed, al-Mukhtār speedily won control of Kūfa. The *ashrāf* who had not sided with the revolt surrendered and paid homage to al-Mukhtār, as did other Kūfans. Initially, al-Mukhtār adopted a conciliatory policy. He chose his officials primarily from amongst the Arab ruling class, while concern for the weak and the oppressed, which in fact meant the *mawālī*, constituted an important part

of his socio-economic programme. For instance, he accorded the *mawālī* rights to booty and also entitled them to army stipends. But the Arab Muslims were reluctant to see their privileged positions curbed for the benefit of the *mawālī* whom they considered to be of an altogether inferior status. Consequently, the Arabs, especially the Kūfan tribal chiefs who were never inclined towards Shī'ism in the first place, soon came to resent al-Mukhtār's policies, and began to desert him. Al-Mukhtār's forces were subjected to a triple assault by the Kūfan *ashrāf*, the Umayyads and eventually the Zubayrids, and al-Mukhtār's victory was to be short-lived.

The Syrian forces, now under the caliphate of 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (65–86/685–705), the most celebrated member of the Umayyad dynasty, were once again directed against 'Irāq towards the end of 66/685. But Ibrāhīm b. al-Ashtar, leading al-Mukhtār's army, succeeded in defeating them in a fierce battle in Muḥarram 67/August 686, in which their commander, the famous Ibn Ziyād, was slain. In the meantime, the Kūfan *ashrāf* had risen against al-Mukhtār, but they, too, were easily defeated by Ibn al-Ashtar. After this episode, al-Mukhtār gave free rein to the hitherto restrained Shī'is to take their revenge on the *ashrāf*. Most of those guilty for the tragedy of al-Ḥusayn, including Shamir b. Dhī'l-Jawshan and 'Umar b. Sa'd, were apprehended and beheaded. Many of the *ashrāf*, however, managed to flee to Baṣra, seeking protection from its governor, Muṣ'ab, the younger brother of the Meccan anti-caliph. With these developments, many of the Kūfan Arabs who until then had supported al-Mukhtār, defected to the side of the *ashrāf*. The tribal leaders, on their part, were now openly aligning themselves with Ibn al-Zubayr in order to re-establish their position *vis-à-vis* al-Mukhtār and the Syrians. Henceforth, al-Mukhtār was forced to rely almost completely on the *mawālī*, who now called themselves the *Shī'at al-Mahdī*.

The *ashrāf* finally induced Muṣ'ab to fight against the Kūfan Shī'is. The Baṣran forces, in the company of the Kūfan tribal leaders, defeated al-Mukhtār's army in two encounters, the second one taking place in Jumādā I 67/December 686 in which many *mawālī* were killed. Al-Mukhtār retreated to the citadel of Kūfa where he and the remnants of his *mawālī* soldiers were besieged by Muṣ'ab's troops for about four months. Finally, al-Mukhtār and a group of his most devoted supporters, refusing to surrender unconditionally, were killed whilst attempting a sortie in Ramaḍān 67/April 687. Kūfa was brought under the control of Ibn al-Zubayr to the satisfaction of the *ashrāf* who took their own revenge on the *mawālī*.

With al-Mukhtār out of the way, the two claimants to the caliphate, 'Abd al-Malik and Ibn al-Zubayr, found themselves in direct confrontation. 'Abd al-Malik's most trusted lieutenant, al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf, after defeating Muṣ'ab in 72/691, conquered Mecca and killed Ibn al-Zubayr in battle in 73/692. The

collapse of the Zubayrid anti-caliphate also ended the second civil war, and unity was again restored to the Islamic state. In 75/694, al-Ḥajjāj became the governor of ʿIrāq and ruled that province and its eastern dependencies with an iron fist for the next twenty years, using Syrian troops when necessary. He built the fortified garrison town of Wāsiṭ, midway between Kūfa and Baṣra, in 83/702, as the new provincial seat of government where he stationed his loyal Syrian militia. Al-Ḥajjāj's efforts brought peace and economic prosperity to ʿIrāq and also resulted in new Islamic conquests in Transoxania and the Indus valley, during the caliphate of ʿAbd al-Malik's son and successor al-Walīd (86–96/705–715), who gave still greater authority to this most able Umayyad governor. Al-Ḥajjāj died in 95/714, almost a year before al-Walīd's own death. This brief digression explains why there were no Shīʿī revolts in Kūfa during al-Ḥajjāj's long rule. Indeed, with the strong grip of the Umayyads restored in ʿIrāq in 72/691, the Shīʿīs, who now lacked effective leadership, were deprived of any opportunity for open activity for about the next fifty years. Nevertheless, Shīʿī ideas and tendencies continued to take shape, especially amongst the *mawālī*. It is, therefore, useful to take a closer look at the *mawālī* and their grievances, which provided the necessary motivation for their participation in the Shīʿī movement.

The *mawālī* (singular, *mawlā*) essentially comprised of the non-Arab Muslims who, in early Islam, represented an important intermediary class between the Arab Muslims and the non-Muslim subjects of the empire.²² By the third Islamic century, however, with their greater integration within Islamic society established under the ʿAbbāsids, the *mawālī* could no longer be identified as a distinct social class, and consequently the term lost its significance and disappeared.

In the wake of the Islamic conquests, a need had been felt for a term to describe the new converts from amongst the Persian, Aramaean, Berber and other non-Arab natives of the conquered lands. For this purpose, the old term *mawlā*, which was originally used in Arab society in reference to certain types of kinship as well as a relationship by covenant particularly between individuals and tribes, was adopted. In its new sense, *mawlā* meant a Muslim of non-Arab origin attached as a client to an Arab tribe because, on embracing Islam, non-Arabs were expected to become affiliated as clients to Arab tribes. This requirement was indicative of the fact that the tribal pattern characterizing the pre-Islamic Arab society had continued to shape the social structure of the Islamic state. According to this type of clientage, or *walāʾ*, a special relationship would be established between the protected client, often a liberated prisoner of war or slave, and his protector, normally his former patron or an influential Arab.

The *mawālī* represented different cultures and religious traditions. In ʿIrāq, they were comprised mainly of Aramaeans, though Persians and other non-Arabs representing the older strata of the province's population were also amongst

them. Upon the destruction of the Sāsānid empire, Aramaeans and Persians had flocked in large numbers to the 'Irāqī garrison towns, as these were the most rapidly growing administrative, economic and urban centres of the new Islamic empire. Kūfa in particular, as the foremost of such centres in the east, was the recipient of the bulk of these uprooted emigrants who came from different socio-economic backgrounds and, in due course, formed various *mawlā* categories.²³ First, there were those craftsmen, tradesmen, shopkeepers and other skilled persons, who had swarmed into the prospering new towns to offer their services to the Arab garrisons. These *mawālī*, probably the largest *mawlā* category in Kūfa, were subject to a special type of clientage whereby they were virtually independent members of the tribes with which they were associated. Second, there were the freed slaves, the original non-Arab *mawālī*, who had been brought to the garrison towns in successive waves as prisoners of war and as part of the Arabs' spoils. They had acquired their freedom upon conversion to Islam, but as *mawālī* they continued to be affiliated to their former patrons. In Kūfa, these freed slaves constituted the second largest *mawlā* category. In the third largest category were those petty landowners and cultivators who, with the collapse of the Sāsānid feudal system and the destruction of their villages by the invading Arabs, had found the cultivation of their lands no longer economic. The problems of these rural people, including those engaged in the villages and estates around Kūfa, were further aggravated due to the high level of the land tax, or *kharāj*. Consequently, an increasing number of them were continuously obliged to abandon the fields in search of alternative employment in the garrison towns. Finally, there was the numerically insignificant group of Persian *mawālī* who claimed noble extraction and were permitted to share some of the privileges reserved for the Arab ruling class.

In line with the spread of Islamization, the total number of the *mawālī* increased very rapidly. In fact, within a few decades, they came to outnumber the Arab Muslims. As Muslims, the *mawālī* expected the same rights and privileges as their Arab co-religionists. After all, the Prophet himself had declared the equality of all believers before God, despite their differences stemming from descent, race and tribal affiliation. But the Islamic teaching of equality was not conceded by the Arab ruling elite under the Umayyads, although in the earliest years of Islam and prior to 'Umar's caliphate, when the *mawālī* were still a minority group, the precepts of Islam had been observed more closely.

In all its categories, a *mawlā* had come to represent a socially and racially inferior status, a second-class citizen as compared to an Arab Muslim. The *mawālī* were, however, set apart from the non-Muslim subjects of the Islamic state who were accorded an even more inferior status. These so-called people of protection, *ahl al-dhimma* or simply *dhimmīs*, were the followers of certain recognized

religions, notably Judaism, Christianity and, later, Zoroastrianism. They received the protection (*dhimma*) of the Muslim state in return for the payment of a distinguishing tribute called *jizya*, which later developed into a precise poll tax. A *dhimmī*, who was subject to certain social restrictions as well, would acquire *mawlā* status by converting to Islam and becoming duly attached to an Arab tribe. However, the Arabs discriminated, in various ways, especially economically, against the *mawālī*. The *mawālī* were often deprived of any share of the booty accruing in wars to the tribes with which they were associated, nor were they entitled to the customary army stipends. More significantly, the taxes paid by the new converts were often similar to the *jizya* and *kharāj*, required of the non-Muslim subjects. This provided perhaps the most important single cause of their discontent, since many of them had converted precisely in order to be less heavily taxed.

As a large and underprivileged social class concentrated in the urban milieu, and aspiring to a state and a society which would be more sensitive to the teachings of Islam, the *mawālī* provided a valuable recruiting ground for any movement opposed to the exclusively Arab order under the Umayyads. They did, in fact, participate in the Khārijī revolts and some 100,000 of them joined Ibn al-Ash'ath's unsuccessful rebellion against al-Ḥajjāj in 82/701. But above all, they were to be involved in the more important Shī'ī opposition centred in Kūfa, not only because Shī'ism proved to have a greater appeal to the oppressed masses but also because the backgrounds of some *mawālī* made them more inclined towards the Shī'ī ideal of leadership. For instance, the Persian *mawālī* of southern 'Irāq had had a religio-political tradition of divine kingship and hereditary leadership almost similar to that of the Yamanīs. Consequently, they were readily responsive to the summons of the Shī'a and to their promise to overthrow the impious Umayyads and install the *ahl al-bayt* to the caliphate, so as to fulfil the egalitarian teachings of Islam.²⁴

As noted previously, al-Mukhtār was the first person who identified the growing political importance of the *mawālī* and their potential receptivity to the cause of the Shī'a. By attempting to remove their grievances, and through the appeal of the idea of the Mahdī, he easily succeeded in mobilizing them in his revolt. But more significantly, al-Mukhtār had now drawn these discontented non-Arabs into the Shī'ī movement, so that Shī'ism acquired a much broader base of social support. As a result of this development, representing a vital turning point in the history of Shī'ism, the superficially Islamized *mawālī* brought many ideas into Shī'ī Islam from their old Babylonian, Judaeo-Christian, and Irano-Zoroastrian backgrounds, including those derived from the Iranian religions such as Manichaeism and Mazdakism, ideas foreign to early Islam. In terms of their numbers, ideas and revolutionary zeal, the *mawālī* played a major role