CHAPTER 10

The Iṣmāʿīlīs and Their Traditions

Farhad Daftary

1 Introduction

A major Shiʿi Muslim community, the Iṣmāʿīlīs have had a complex history dating back to the formative period of Islam. In the course of their history, the Iṣmāʿīlīs became subdivided into a number of major branches and minor groups. However, since the end of the fifth/eleventh century, they have existed in terms of two main branches, the Nizāris and the Mustaʿlians, respectively designated as Khojas and Bohras in South Asia. Currently, the Iṣmāʿīlīs are scattered as religious minorities in more than thirty countries in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and North America. Numbering several millions, they also represent a diversity of ethnic groups and literary traditions and speak a variety of languages.

Both Iṣmāʿīlī historiography and the perceptions of outsiders of the Iṣmāʿīlīs in pre-modern times, in both Muslim and Christian milieus, have had a fascinating trajectory. In the course of their long history, the Iṣmāʿīlīs were persistently misrepresented with a variety of myths and legends circulating about their teachings and practices. This state of affairs reflected mainly the fact that until the twentieth century the Iṣmāʿīlīs were almost exclusively studied and evaluated on the basis of evidence collected, or often fabricated, by their detractors. As the most politically active wing of Shiʿi Islam, with a religio-political agenda that aimed to uproot the ʿAbbāsids and restore the caliphate to a line of ʿAlid imāms, from early on the Iṣmāʿīlīs aroused the hostility of the Sunni establishment that led the Muslim majority.

With the foundation of the Fāṭimid caliphate in 297/909, ruled by the Iṣmāʿīlī imām-caliph, the potential challenge of the Iṣmāʿīlīs to the established Sunni order was actualised, and thereupon the ʿAbbāsids and the Sunni ʿulamāʾ or religious scholars launched what amounted to an official anti-Iṣmāʿīlī propaganda campaign. The overall aim of this prolonged literary campaign was to discredit the Iṣmāʿīlī movement from its origins, so that the Iṣmāʿīlīs could be readily condemned as mulḥids, heretics or deviators from the true religious path. In particular, Sunni polemicists fabricated the necessary evidence that would lend support to the refutation of the Iṣmāʿīlīs on specific doctrinal grounds. Muslim heresiographers, theologians, jurists, and historians also
participated variously in the campaign. Through their forged accounts and misrepresentations of the Ismāʿīlīs, the anti-Ismāʿīlī authors in fact produced a ‘black legend’ in the course of the fourth/tenth century. Accordingly, Ismāʿīlīsm was portrayed as the arch-heresy of Islam, carefully designed by mischievous impostors to destroy Islam from within (Ivanow 1946). By the fifth/eleventh century, this ‘black legend’, with its elaborate details and stages of initiation, had been accepted as an accurate description of Ismāʿīlī motives, beliefs, and practices, leading to further accusations against the community.

The revolt of the Persian Ismāʿīlīs, led initially by Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ (d. 518/1124), against the Seljuq (or Seljuk) Turks, the new Sunnī overlords of the ʿAbbāsids, called forth another round of Sunnī reaction against the Ismāʿīlīs in general and the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs in particular. The new literary campaign was initiated by the all-powerful Seljuq vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), who devoted a long chapter in his Siyāsat-nāma (1978: 208–231) to the condemnation of the Ismāʿīlīs. At the same time, Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), the most renowned contemporary Sunnī theologian, was commissioned by the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Mustazhir to write a major treatise against the Ismāʿīlīs, or Bāṭinīs (esotericists), another designation coined in reference to the Ismāʿīlīs by their enemies.

Around the same time, the Crusader circles and their occidental chroniclers began to fabricate and disseminate, in both the Latin Orient and Europe, a number of tales, rooted in their ‘imaginative ignorance’, about the secret practice of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs of Syria, who were thus made famous in medieval Europe as ‘the Assassins’. These so-called assassin legends finally culminated in a synthesis popularised by Marco Polo (Daftary 1994: 88–127). Henceforth, the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs were depicted in medieval European sources as a sinister order of drugged killers bent on senseless murder. The orientalists of the nineteenth century correctly identified the Ismāʿīlīs as a Shīʿī Muslim community, but they were still obliged to study them exclusively on the basis of hostile Sunnī sources and the fanciful tales of the Crusaders. Consequently, the orientalists, too, unwittingly lent their seal of approval to the medieval myths and misrepresentations of the Ismāʿīlīs.

The breakthrough in Ismāʿīlī studies occurred with the recovery and study of genuine Ismāʿīlī texts on a relatively large scale; manuscript sources which had been preserved secretly in private collections in Yemen, Syria, Persia, Central Asia, and South Asia. Modern scholarship in Ismāʿīlī studies was actually initiated in India, where significant collections of Ismāʿīlī manuscripts have been preserved by the Ismāʿīlī Bohra community. The breakthrough resulted mainly from the pioneering efforts of Wladimir Ivanow (1886–1979), a Russian orientalist, and a few Bohra scholars, who were educated in Europe.
and based their original studies on their family collections of manuscripts. In fact, Ivanow compiled the first detailed catalogue of Ismāʿīlī works, attesting to the, hitherto unknown, richness and diversity of Ismāʿīlī literature and intellectual traditions (Ivanow 1933). Subsequently, numerous Ismāʿīlī texts were critically edited and studied, laying a solid foundation for further progress in the field (see Ivanow 1963; Poonawala 1977; Daftary 2004: 106–173).

2 Origins and Early History

The origins of Islam’s two main divisions, Sunnī and Shiʿī, may be traced to the crisis of succession to the Prophet Muḥammad (d. 11/632). A successor was needed to assume his functions not as a prophet, but as leader of the nascent Islamic community (ʿummā). In practice, this choice was resolved by a group of Muslim notables, leading to the historical caliphate. However, it is the fundamental belief of the Shiʿī Muslims that the Prophet himself had designated his cousin and son-in-law, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), married to his daughter Fāṭima, as his successor, a designation believed to have been instituted under divine command. A minority group originally holding to this view gradually expanded and became generally designated as the Shīʿat ʿAlī, party of ‘Alī, or simply as the Shiʿa.

In time, the Shiʿa themselves split into a number of major communities, notably the Ismāʿīlīs, the Ithnā ʿAsharī or Twelvers, and the Zaydis. However, initially Shiʿism represented a unified community. The Shiʿa then recognised successively ‘Alī and his sons al-Ḥasan (d. 49/669) and al-Ḥusayn (d. 61/680) as their imāms or spiritual leaders. The martyrdom of the Prophet’s grandson al-Ḥusayn at Karbalāʾ, Iraq, infused a religious fervour in the Shiʿa, also leading to radical trends in Shiʿism. The situation of the early unified Shiʿa changed soon after the Umayyads established their rule. Henceforth, different Shiʿi communities and lesser groups came to coexist, each with its own line of ‘Alid imāms, descendants of ‘Alī, and elaborating its own ideas. Under the circumstances, the Shiʿism of the later Umayyad period developed mainly in terms of two branches, the radical Kaysānīs and the quiescent Imāmis. The Kaysānī Shiʿis were mainly absorbed into the ʿAbbāsid movement and they disintegrated after the ‘Abbāsid victory of 132/750 over the Umayyads.

Meanwhile, Imāmi Shiʿism had continued to develop under the leadership of a particular line of ‘Alid imāms, descendants of al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī. By contrast to the Kaysānīs, the Imāmis remained completely removed from any political activity. It was with Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. ca. 114/732), their fifth imām, that the Imāmis branch of Shiʿism began to acquire prominence among the early
Shī‘a. It was, however, during the long and eventful \textit{imāmate} of al-Bāqir’s son and successors, Ja‘far al-Šādiq, that Imāmis Shī‘ism expanded significantly and became a major religious community with a distinct identity. Above all, Ja‘far al-Šādiq and his circle of prominent scholars now elaborated the basic conception of the doctrine of the \textit{imāmate} (\textit{imāma}), which was essentially retained by the later Ismā‘īlis and Twelver Shī‘īs. Ja‘far al-Šādiq, the last \textit{imām} to be recognised by both the Ismā‘īlis and the Twelvers, died in 148/765. The dispute over his succession led to historic divisions in Imāmis Shī‘ism, marking the emergence of the earliest Ismā‘īlis (al-Nawbakhtī: 34, 53–55; al-Qummī: 76–78).

\textit{Imām} al-Šādiq had originally designated his second son Ismā‘īl, the eponym of the Ismā‘īliyya, as his successor to the \textit{imāmate}. As related in the majority of the sources, however, Ismā‘īl apparently predeceased his father. At any rate, Ismā‘īl was not present in Medina or Kufa, the centre of Imāmi Shī‘ism, on al-Šādiq’s death, when three of Ismā‘īl’s brothers laid claim openly to the \textit{imāmate}. Be that as it may, al-Šādiq’s Imāmi Shī‘ī followers now split into six groups, two of which may be identified as the earliest Ismā‘īlis. One of these two splinter groups, based in Kufa, denied the death of Ismā‘īl and awaited his return as the \textit{mahdī}. The members of this group are designated as the “Pure Ismā‘īliyya” by the earliest Imāmi heresiographers, al-Nawbakhtī (57–61) and al-Qummī (80–81, 83), who are our main sources for the opening phase of Ismā‘īlism. A second group, designated as the Mubarakiyya, affirmed Ismā‘īl’s death in the lifetime of his father and now acknowledged his eldest son Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl as their \textit{imām}. It is certain that both these groups, as well as the extremist Khattabi Shī‘īs, were politically active against the ‘Abbāsids and they represented the radical fringes of Imāmi Shī‘ism in Kufa.

On the death of Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl, not long after 179/795, the Mubarakiyya themselves split into two groups. A majority, identified by Imāmis heresiographers as the immediate predecessors of the dissident Qarmatīs, refused to accept his death; they recognised Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl as their seventh and last \textit{imām}, and awaited his return as the \textit{mahdī} or \textit{qā‘īm} (riser), terms which were synonymous in their early usage by the Ismā‘īlis and other Shī‘īs. A second, small and obscure group, acknowledged Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl’s death and now began to trace the \textit{imāmate} in his progeny. Almost nothing is known with certainty regarding the subsequent history of these earliest Ismā‘īli groups until shortly after the middle of the third/ninth century, when a unified Ismā‘īli movement appeared on the historical stage (al-Nawbakhtī: 61; al-Qummī: 83; Daftary 2007: 95–96).

It is certain that for almost a century after Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl, a group of his descendants worked secretly for the creation of a unified, revolutionary Shī‘ī movement against the ‘Abbāsids. These leaders did not openly claim
the Ismāʿīlī imamate for three generations. They had, in fact, hidden their true identity in order to escape ʿAbbāsid persecution. ʿAbd Allāh al-Akbar, the first of these hidden leaders, had organised his campaign around the central doctrine of the majority of the earliest Ismāʿīlīs, namely, the Mahdism of Muhammad ibn Ismāʿīl. At any rate, ʿAbd Allāh al-Akbar eventually settled in Salamiyya, in central Syria, which served as the secret headquarters of the Ismāʿīlī movement for several decades. The early Ismāʿīlīs now referred to their movement as the daʿwa, the mission, or the daʿwa al-hādiya, the rightly guiding mission. The religio-political message of the Ismāʿīlī daʿwa was disseminated by a network of dāʿīs, summoners or missionaries (Daftary 2007: 98–116).

The efforts of ʿAbd Allāh al-Akbar, and his next two successors, began to bear fruit in the 260s/870s, when numerous dāʿīs appeared in southern Iraq and other regions. In 261/874, Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ was converted to Ismāʿīlism. He organised the daʿwa in Kūfa and other districts of southern Iraq. The Ismāʿīlīs of southern Iraq became generally known as Qarmaṭī, after their first local leader. Ḥamdān's chief assistant was his brother-in-law ʿAbdān, a learned theologian. ʿAbdān was responsible for training and appointing numerous dāʿīs, including Abū Saʿīd Ḥasan ibn Bahram al-Jannābī, who later founded the Qarmaṭī state of Bahrayn. In the meantime, the Ismāʿīlī daʿwa had appeared in many other regions. Centred on the expectation of the imminent return of Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl as the Mahdī who would establish justice in the world, the revolutionary and messianic Ismāʿīlī movement appealed to underprivileged groups of different social strata. It achieved particular success among those Imāmi Shiʿīs (later designated as Twelvers) who were disillusioned with the quietist policies of their imāms and were left without a manifest imām after the death of their eleventh imām in 260/874.

The daʿwa in Yemen was initiated by Ibn Ḥawshab, later known as Manṣūr al-Yaman, where he arrived in 268/881, accompanied by his collaborator ʿAlī ibn al-Faḍl. By 293/905, the Ismāʿīlī dāʿīs were in control of almost all of Yemen. South Arabia also served as a base for the extension of the daʿwa to other regions, such as Egypt and Sind. By 280/893, on Ibn Ḥawshab's instructions, the dāʿī Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī was already active among the Kutāma Berbers of the Lesser Kabylia mountains in North Africa. It was in the same decade of 260s/870s that the daʿwa was taken to the region of the Jibāl in Persia. Later, the daʿwa spread to Qumm, Kāshān, Iṣfahān, and other towns of that region. Somewhat later, the daʿwa was formally established in Khurāsān and Transoxania (Stern 1960: 56–90; Daftary 2007: 98–116).

By the early 280s/890s, a unified Ismāʿīlī movement had replaced the earlier Ismāʿīlī splinter groups. However, in 286/899, soon after ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdī, the future Fāṭimid caliph, had succeeded to the central leadership of the daʿwa.
in Salamiyya, Ismā‘īlism was rent by a major schism (Daftary 1993: 123–139; Daftary 2007: 116–126). ‘Abd Allāh al-Mahdī now claimed the Ismā‘īlī imāmate openly for himself and his ancestors, the same leaders who had organised and led the early Ismā‘īlī da‘wa. Later, he explained that as a form of taqiyya, or precautionary dissimulation, the central leaders of the da‘wa had adopted different pseudonyms, also assuming the rank of hujja, proof or full representative, of the absent mahdī, Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl. He further explained that the earlier propagation of the Mahdism of Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl was itself another dissimulating tactic, and that this was in reality another collective code-name for every true imām in the progeny of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (Hamdani and de Blois 1983: 173–207).

‘Abd Allāh al-Mahdī’s doctrinal reform, which allowed for continuity in the Ismā‘īlī imāmate after Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl, split the Ismā‘īlī da‘wa and community into two rival factions. One faction remained loyal to the central leadership and now acknowledged ‘Abd Allāh al-Mahdī and his ‘Alid ancestors as their imāms, which in due course became the official Fāṭimid Ismā‘īlī doctrine of the imāmate. This loyalist faction included the bulk of the Ismā‘īlīs of Yemen and those communities in Egypt, North Africa and Sind founded by the dā‘īs dispatched by Ibn Ḥawshab. On the other hand, a dissident faction, originally led by Ḥamdān and ‘Abdān, rejected ‘Abd Allāh’s reform and maintained their belief in the Mahdism of Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl. Henceforth, the term Qarmaṭī came to be applied more specifically to the dissidents who did not acknowledge ‘Abd Allāh al-Mahdī, as well as his predecessors and successors in the Fāṭimid dynasty, as their imāms. The dissident Qarmaṭīs soon acquired their most important stronghold in Bahrayn, in eastern Arabia, where a Qarmaṭī state was founded in the same eventful year, 286/899, by al-Jannābī. The Qarmaṭī state of Bahrayn survived until 470/1077. There were also Qarmaṭī communities in Iraq, Yemen, Persia, and Central Asia (Daftary 1993: 129–139).

The early Ismā‘īlīs elaborated the basic framework of a system of religious thought, which was further developed or modified in the Fāṭimid period of Ismā‘īlī history. Central to this system was a fundamental distinction between the exoteric (ẓāhir) and the esoteric (bāṭin) aspects of the sacred scriptures and the religious commandments and prohibitions. Accordingly, the Ismā‘īlīs held that the Qur‘an and other revealed scriptures, and their laws (sharī‘a), had their apparent or literal meaning, which had to be distinguished from their inner meaning hidden in the bāṭin. They further held that the ẓāhir, or the religious laws enunciated by the prophets, underwent periodical changes while the bāṭin, containing the spiritual truths (ḥaqā‘iq), remained immutable and eternal. The hidden truths, representing the message common to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, were explained through the methodology of ta‘wil or
esoteric exegesis, which often relied on the mystical significance of letters and numbers.

The esoteric truths or ḥaqāʾiq formed a gnostic system of thought for the early Iṣmāʿīlīs, representing a distinct worldview. The two main components of this system were a cyclical history of revelations or prophetic eras (dawrs), each one inaugurated by a speaker or enunciator (nāṭiq) of a divinely revealed message which in its exoteric (ẓāhir) aspect contained a religious law (ṣharīʿa). The nāṭiqs of the first six eras were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. Each nāṭiq was, in turn, succeeded by a spiritual legatee (waṣī), who explained to the elite the esoteric truths (ḥaqāʾiq) contained in the bāṭin dimension of that era’s message. Each waṣī was succeeded by seven imāms, who guarded the true meaning of the sacred scriptures and laws in their ẓāhir and bāṭin aspects. The seventh imām of every era would rise in rank to become the nāṭiq of the following era. This pattern would change only in the seventh and final era of history; the eschatological era of the qāʾim when the esoteric truths of all the preceding revelations would be made apparent before the consummation of the physical world (Corbin 1983: 30–58; Daftary 2007: 128–136).

3 The Fāṭimid Period

The Fāṭimid period in Iṣmāʿīlī history represents the ‘golden age’ of Iṣmāʿīlism, when the Iṣmāʿīlīs possessed an important state of their own and Iṣmāʿīlī thought and literature attained their summit. It was during this period that the learned Iṣmāʿīlī dāʿīs, who were at the same time the scholars and authors of their community, produced what were to become the classical texts of Iṣmāʿīlī literature dealing with a variety of exoteric and esoteric subjects, as well as taʾwil which became the hallmark of Iṣmāʿīlī thought.

The early success of the Iṣmāʿīlī daʿwa culminated in the foundation of an Iṣmāʿīlī state or dawla, the Fāṭimid caliphate, in 297/909. The new dynasty was named Fāṭimid after the Prophet Muḥammad’s daughter Fāṭima, to whom the Fāṭimid imām-caliphs traced their ‘Alid ancestry. The ground for the establishment of the Fāṭimid caliphate in Ifrīqiya, in North Africa, was meticulously prepared by the dāʿī Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī (d. 298/911), who had been active among the Kutāma Berbers of the region for almost twenty years. Meanwhile, ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdī had been obliged to flee from Salamiyya in 289/902. After spending some time in Egypt and southern Morocco, he was brought to Qayrawān, the former Aghlabid capital in Ifrīqiya, by Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī who had successfully uprooted the Aghlabids shortly before. On 20 Rabīʿ I 1 297/4 January 910, ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdī (d. 322/934) was acclaimed as caliph,
also marking the end of the *dawr al-satr*, or period of concealment, in early Ismāʿīlī history.

The Fāṭimids did not abandon their Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa* on assuming power, as they aimed to extend their rule over the entire Muslim community and beyond. However, the early Fāṭimid *imām*-caliphs, ruling from Ifrīqiya in North Africa, encountered numerous difficulties while consolidating their power with the help of the Kutama Berbers, who were converts to Ismāʿīlism and now provided the backbone of the Fāṭimid armies. In particular, they confronted the hostility of the Khariji Berbers and the Sunnī inhabitants of the cities of Ifrīqiya, in addition to conflicts with the Umayyads of Spain, the ‘Abbāsids and the Byzantines. Fāṭimid rule was firmly established in North Africa only under the fourth Fāṭimid *imām*-caliph, Abū Tamīm Maʿadd al-Muʿizz li-Dīn Allāh (341–365/953–975), who succeeded in transforming the Fāṭimid caliphate from a regional state into a great empire. He was also the first member of the Fāṭimid dynasty to concern himself significantly with the propagation of the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa* outside the Fāṭimid dominions, especially after the transference of the seat of the Fāṭimid caliphate in 362/973 to Egypt, where he founded Cairo as his new capital city.

The *imām*-caliph al-Muʿizz also permitted the assimilation of the Neoplatonic cosmology elaborated by the *dāʿīs* of the Iranian lands into the teachings of the Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa*. In the course of the fourth/tenth century, Muḥammad al-Nasafi (d. 332/943), Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (322/934), and al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971) had set about harmonising their Ismāʿīlī Shīʿī theology, revolving around the central Shīʿī doctrine of the *imāmate*, with Neoplatonic philosophy. This led to the development of a unique intellectual tradition of philosophical theology in Ismāʿīlism. The last major proponent of philosophical Ismāʿīlism was the eminent Persian poet and traveller Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. after 462/1070), who successfully propagated Ismāʿīlism throughout the region of Badakhshān, now divided between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. These Iranian *dāʿīs* elaborated complex metaphysical systems of thought with a distinct Neoplatonised emanational cosmology (Walker 1993: 67–142). It was also in al-Muʿizz’s time that Ismāʿīlī law was finally codified and its precepts began to be observed by the judiciary throughout the Fāṭimid state. The promulgation of an Ismāʿīlī *madhhab*, or school of jurisprudence, resulted mainly from the efforts of al-Qāḍī Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nuʿmān ibn Muḥammad (d. 363/974), the foremost jurist of the Fāṭimid period (Poonawala 1996: 117–143).

The Ismāʿīlīs had high esteem for learning and under the Fāṭimids they elaborated distinctive traditions of learning. The Fāṭimid *daʿwa* was particularly concerned with educating the Ismāʿīlī converts in the esoteric doctrine known as the *ḥikma* or ‘wisdom’. As a result, a variety of lectures or ‘teaching
sessions’, generally designated as majālis, were organised. The private lectures on Ismāʿīlī esoteric doctrine, known as majālis al-ḥikma, or ‘sessions of wisdom’, were reserved exclusively for the Ismāʿīlī initiates who had already taken the oath of allegiance and secrecy (Halm 1996: 91–115). The lectures delivered by the dāʿī al-duʿāt or chief dāʿī, were approved beforehand by the imām. Many of these majālis were in due course collected and committed to writing. This Fāṭimid tradition of learning culminated in the 800 lectures of the dāʿī al-Muʿayyad fi l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078), who served as the chief dāʿī for twenty years. Another main institution of learning founded by the Fāṭimids was the Dār al-ʿIlm, the House of Knowledge, sometimes also called the Dār al-Ḥikma. Established in 395/1005 by the imām-caliph al-Ḥākim (386–411/996–1021), a variety of religious and non-religious subjects were taught at this academy which was also equipped with a major library. Many Ismāʿīlī dāʿīs received at least part of their training at the Dār al-ʿIlm (Halm 1997: 71–77).

The Ismāʿīlī daʿwa organisation developed over time. The dāʿīs were active both within the Fāṭimid dominions as well as in other regions referred to as the jazāʾir or islands. Organised in a strictly hierarchical fashion, the Fāṭimid daʿwa was under the overall supervision of the imām and the dāʿī al-duʿāt, also known as the bāb, who acted as its administrative head. All in all, it was in non-Fāṭimid regions, the jazāʾir, especially Yemen, Persia, and Central Asia, that the Fāṭimid daʿwa achieved lasting success. The daʿwa was particularly intensified in Iraq and Persia under al-Ḥākim. Foremost among the dāʿīs of this period was Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020), who elaborated his own unique tradition within the Iranian school of philosophical Ismāʿīlism (Walker 1999: 80–124). Al-Ḥākim’s reign also coincided with the opening phase of what was to become known as the Druze religion, founded by a number of dāʿīs who proclaimed the end of the era of Islam and advocated the divinity of al-Ḥākim.

The Ismāʿīlī daʿwa activities outside the Fāṭimid state reached their peak in the long reign of al-Mustanṣir (427–487/1036–1094), continuing even after the Sunnī Seljuqs replaced the Shīʿī Būyids as overlords of the ʿAbbāsids in 447/1055. Meanwhile, the leadership of the daʿwa in Yemen had come into the hands of ‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Ṣulayḥī, an important chieftain of the Banu Hamdān. The dāʿī ‘Ali al-Ṣulayḥī rose in the mountainous region of Ḥarāz in 439/1047, marking the effective foundation of the Ṣulayḥid dynasty ruling over different parts of Yemen as vassals of the Fāṭimids until 532/1138. The Ṣulayhids also played an active part in the renewed efforts of the Fāṭimids to spread the daʿwa on the Indian subcontinent. The Ismāʿīlī community founded in Gujarāt by dāʿīs sent from Yemen evolved into the modern Ṭayyibī Bohra community.
Meanwhile, the Ismāʿīlī daʿwa had continued to spread in many parts of the Iranian world, now incorporated into the Seljuq sultanate. By the early 460s/1070s, the Persian Ismāʿīlīs were under the leadership of ʿAbd al-Malik ibn ʿAṭṭāsh, who had his secret daʿwa headquarters in Iṣfahān, the main Seljuq capital. He was also responsible for launching the career of Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ, who in due course led the Ismāʿīlī cause in Persia. In Badakhshān and other eastern parts of the Iranian world, too, the daʿwa had continued to spread after the downfall of the Sāmānids in 395/1005. As noted, Nāṣir-i Khusraw played a key role in propagating Ismāʿīlism in Central Asia, while maintaining his contacts with the chief dāʿī al-Muʿayyad and the central daʿwa headquarters in Cairo (Hunsberger 2000: 220–254). By the time the Qarmaṭī state of Bahrayn was finally uprooted in 470/1077 by some local tribes, other Qarmaṭī groups in Persia, Iraq, and elsewhere too, had either disintegrated or switched their allegiance to the Ismāʿīlī daʿwa of the Fāṭimids. There was now, once again, only one unified Ismāʿīlī daʿwa under the supreme leadership of the Fāṭimid imām-caliph.

In the course of al-Mustanṣir’s long reign the Fāṭimid caliphate had already embarked on a decline resulting from factional fighting in the Fāṭimid armies and various political and economic problems (Thompson 2016: 40–72). Under the circumstances, al-Mustanṣir appealed to Badr al-Jamālī, an Armenian commander in the service of the Fāṭimids, who succeeded to restore peace and stability to the state. Badr soon assumed leadership of civil, judicial, and religious administrations in addition to being the ‘commander of the armies’ (amir al-jūyūsh), his main source of power. Badr died in 487/1094 after having arranged for his son al-Afḍal to succeed him in the vizierate. Henceforth, real power in the Fāṭimid state remained in the hands of the viziers who also commanded the armies, and were often in charge of the daʿwa organisation and activities as well.

Al-Mustanṣir, the eighth Fāṭimid caliph and the eighteenth Ismāʿīlī imām, died in Dhu'l-Ḥijja 487/December 1094, a few months after Badr al-Jamālī. Thereupon, the unified Ismāʿīlī daʿwa and community split into two rival factions, as al-Mustanṣir’s son and original heir-designate Nizār was deprived of his succession rights by al-Afḍal, who installed Nizār’s younger half-brother on the Fāṭimid throne with the title of al-Mustaʿlī bi-llāh (487–495/1094–1101). The two factions were later designated as Mustaʿlian and Nizārī, after al-Mustanṣir’s sons who had claimed his heritage. Nizār refused to pay homage to al-Mustaʿlī and rose in revolt, but was defeated and killed in 488/1095. The imāmate of al-Mustaʿlī was recognised by the Ismāʿīlī communities of Egypt, Yemen, and western India. These Ismāʿīlīs, who were dependent on the Fāṭimid regime, later traced the imāmate in the progeny of al-Mustaʿlī. On the other hand, the
Ismāʿīlīs of Persia, who were already led by Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ, supported the succession rights of Nizār. The Central Asian Ismāʿīlīs remained uninvolved for quite some time in the Nizārī-Mustaʿlī schism.

4 Mustaʿlian Ismāʿīlīs

The Fāṭimid state survived for another seventy-seven years after the Nizārī-Mustaʿlī schism of 487/1094. These decades witnessed the rapid decline of the Fāṭimid caliphate. Al-Mustaʿlī and his successors on the Fāṭimid throne continued to be recognised as imāms by the Mustaʿlian Ismāʿīlīs who themselves soon split into Ḥāfiẓī and Ţayyībī branches. After al-Mustaʿlī, the all-powerful vizier al-Afḍal placed his minor son on the Fāṭimid throne with the caliphal title of al-ʿĀmir bi-Aḥkām Allāh. On al-ʿĀmir’s assassination in 524/1130, the Mustaʿlian Ismāʿīlīs were confronted with a major crisis of succession. A son, named al-Ṭayyīb, had been born to al-ʿĀmir a few months before his death; and, he had been designated as al-ʿĀmir’s heir-apparent. But after al-ʿĀmir, power was assumed initially as regent, by his cousin, who later proclaimed himself as caliph and imām with the title of al-Ḥāfiẓ li-Dīn Allāh (526–544/1132–1149).

The irregular succession of al-Ḥāfiẓ to the Mustaʿlian Ismāʿīlī imāmate led to a major split in the Mustaʿlian community. Similar to the earlier case of the Nizārī-Mustaʿlī schism, the Mustaʿlian daʿwa headquarters in Cairo endorsed the imāmate of al-Ḥāfiẓ, which was also acknowledged by the Mustaʿlīs of Egypt and Syria as well as a portion of the Mustaʿlīs of Yemen. These Mustaʿlian Ismāʿīlīs, who recognised al-Ḥāfiẓ and the later Fāṭimid caliphs as their imāms, became known as Ḥāfiẓī. Ḥāfiẓī Ismāʿīlism disappeared completely soon after the collapse of the Fāṭimid dynasty in 567/1171. On the other hand, Sayyida Arwā (d. 532/1138), then the effective ruler of Ṣulayḥīd Yemen, upheld al-Ṭayyīb’s cause and recognised him as al-ʿĀmir’s successor to the imāmate. As a result, the Mustaʿlīs of Ṣulayḥīd Yemen as well as those of Gujārāt also acknowledged al-Ṭayyīb’s imāmate; they became known as the Ŧayyībīs (Stern 1951: 193–255). Mustaʿlian Ismāʿīlism has survived only in its Ŧayyībī form.

Ṭayyībī Ismāʿīlīsm found its permanent stronghold in Yemen, with the initial support of the Ṣulayḥīd queen. It was soon after 526/1132 that she broke off relations with Cairo and declared Dhuʿayb ibn Mūsā al-Wādiʿī (d. 546/1151) as the dāʾī al-muṭlaq, or dāʾī with supreme authority, to lead the affairs of the Ŧayyībī Mustaʿlian daʿwa on behalf of al-Ṭayyīb, who was thought to be in hiding. This marked the foundation of the Ŧayyībī daʿwa independently of the Fāṭimid regime as well as the Ṣulayḥīd state. The Ŧayyībīs are of the opinion
that since the time of al-Ṭayyib, their *imāmate* has continued in his progeny to the present time. However, all these Ṭayyibi *imāms* have remained in concealment, and in their absence the *dā‘ī muṭlaqs* have led the affairs of the Ṭayyibi *da‘wa* and community. As in the case of *imāms*, every *dā‘ī muṭlaq* has appointed his successor. In the doctrinal field, the Ṭayyibis maintained the Fāṭimid traditions, also preserving a good portion of the Ismā‘īlī texts of the Fāṭimid period (Daftary 2007: 269–276).

Meanwhile, the Ṭayyibi *dā‘īs* in Yemen maintained close relations with the rapidly growing Ṭayyibi community in western India, where these Ismā‘īlīs became designated as Bohras. Towards the end of the tenth/sixteenth century, the succession to Dā‘ūd ibn ‘Ajab Shāh (d. 997/1589), the twenty-sixth *dā‘ī*, was disputed, leading to the Dā‘ūdī-Sulaymānī schism in the Ṭayyibī *da‘wa* and community. Henceforth, the Dā‘ūdī and Sulaymānī Ṭayyibis followed separate lines of *dā‘īs*. The Dā‘ūdī *dā‘īs* continued to reside in India, where the bulk of the Ṭayyibi Dā‘ūdī Bohras were located. On the other hand, the Sulaymānīs, accounting for a minority of the Ṭayyibīs, remained concentrated in Yemen, where their *dā‘īs* resided until recent times. In time, the Dā‘ūdī Bohras were further subdivided in India due to periodical challenges to the authority of their *dā‘ī muṭlaq*. The total Dā‘ūdī population of the world is currently estimated at around one million. Since the 1920s, Bombay (Mumbai), with the largest single concentration of Dā‘ūdī Bohras, has served as the permanent administrative seat of the Dā‘ūdis (Daftary 2007: 282–295; Qutbuddin 2011: 331–354).

In Yemen, the leadership of the Sulaymānī Ṭayyibis has remained hereditary in the same Makrami family. The Sulaymānī *dā‘īs* established their headquarters in Najrān, in northeastern Yemen, and ruled over that region with the military support of the local Banū Yām. In the twentieth century, the political prominence of the Sulaymānī *dā‘īs*, checked earlier by the Zaydis and the Ottomans, was further curtailed by the Saudi family, adherents of austere Wahhābī Sunnism. Najrān was, in fact, annexed to Saudi Arabia in 1934. Thereafter, the Sulaymānī *dā‘īs* and many of their followers have been persecuted intermittently by the Saudis, who persecute Shi‘ī Muslims generally as ‘heretics’. The total Sulaymānī Ṭayyibi population is currently estimated officially at around 200,000 persons (Daftary 2007: 295–300). Similar to the Dā‘ūdis, the Sulaymānīs withhold their religious literature from outsiders.

### 5 Nizārī Ismā‘īlis

By the time of the Nizārī-Musta‘lī succession dispute of 487/1094, Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ, who preached the Ismā‘īlī *da‘wa* on behalf of the Fāṭimids within the
Seljuq dominions in Persia, had emerged as the leader of the Persian Ismāʿīlīs. He had already been following an independent policy, and his seizure of the mountain fortress of Alamūt in 483/1090 signalled the commencement of the Persian Ismāʿīlīs’ open revolt against the Seljuq Turks as well as the foundation of what would become the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī state. The Nizārī state, centred at Alamūt, with its territories and network of fortresses scattered in different parts of Persia and Syria, lasted some 166 years until its destruction by the Mongols in 654/1256.

As an Ismāʿīlī, Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ could not tolerate the anti-Shīʿī policies of the Seljuqs, who being the new champions of Sunnī Islam aimed to uproot the Fāṭimids. Hasan's revolt was also an expression of Persian ‘national’ sentiments, as the alien rule of the Seljuq Turks was intensely detested by the Persians of different social classes. This may explain why he substituted Persian for Arabic as the religious language of the Persian Ismāʿīlīs, also accounting for the early popular success of his movement (Daftary 1996: 181–204). It was under such circumstances that in al-Mustanṣir’s succession dispute Ḥasan supported Nizār's cause and severed his relations with the Fāṭimid regime and the daʿwa headquarters in Cairo which had supported al-Mustaʿlī. By this decision, Ḥasan had founded the independent Nizārī Ismāʿīlī daʿwa on behalf of the Nizārī imāms, who remained in concealment for several generations after Nizār. In fact, numismatic evidence shows that Nizār’s own name appeared on coins minted at Alamūt for about seventy years after his death in 488/1095, while his progeny was blessed anonymously (Miles 1972: 155–162).

The early Nizārīs were thus left without an accessible imām in another dawr al-satr, or period of concealment; and, as in the pre-Fāṭimid period of concealment, the absent imām was represented in the community by a ḥujja, his chief representative. Hasan and his next two successors as heads of the Nizārī daʿwa and state were, indeed, recognised as such ḥujjas. It seems that already in Hasan's time many Nizārīs believed that a son or grandson of Nizār had been secretly brought from Egypt to Persia, and he became the progenitor of the line of the Nizārī imāms who later emerged at Alamūt.

The early Nizārīs were also active in the doctrinal field. Hasan-i Ṣabbāḥ himself is credited with having reformulated the old Shīʿī doctrine of taʿlīm, or authoritative teaching by the imām of the time. This doctrine, emphasising the autonomous teaching authority of each imām in his own time, became the central doctrine of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs. The intellectual challenge posed to Sunnī Islam by the doctrine of taʿlīm, which also refuted the legitimacy of the ‘Abbāsid caliph as the spiritual spokesman of all Muslims, called forth the reaction of the Sunnī establishment. Many Sunnī scholars, led by al-Ghazālī, attacked the Ismāʿīlī doctrine of taʿlīm. Soon the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs possessed
networks of fortresses in several regions of Persia, including Daylamān and Quhistān (Willey 2005: 103–203); and, in the opening decade of the sixth/tenth century, Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ also extended his activities to Syria by sending dāʿīs there from Alamūt. Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ died in 518/1124 and was succeeded by the dāʿī Kiya Buzurg-Umid (518–532/1124–1138). However, by the final years of Ḥasan’s life, the anti-Seljuq revolt of the Persian Nizārīs had already lost its momentum, much in the same way that the Seljuqs had failed in their prolonged military campaigns to dislodge the Persian Nizārīs from their fortress communities. Ismāʿīlī-Seljuq relations had now entered a new phase of ‘stalemate’ (Hillenbrand 1996: 205–220; Daftary 2015: 41–57).

Meanwhile, the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs had been eagerly expecting the appearance of their imām. The fourth lord of Alamūt, Ḥasan II, succeeded to the leadership in 557/1162, and soon after, in 559/1164, declared the qiyāma or resurrection, initiating a new phase in the religious history of the Nizārī community. Ḥasan II relied heavily on Ismāʿīlī taʾwīl and earlier traditions, interpreting qiyāma symbolically and spiritually for the Nizārīs. Accordingly, qiyāma meant nothing more than the manifestation of unveiled truth (ḥaqīqa) in the person of the Nizārī imām. It was a spiritual resurrection only for the Nizārīs who acknowledged the rightful imām of the time, and were now capable of understanding the truth, the esoteric essence of Islam. It was in this sense that Paradise was actualised for the Nizārīs in this world. The Nizārīs, like the Sufis, were now to rise to a spiritual level of existence, transcending from ẓāhir to bāṭin, from shariʿa to ḥaqīqa, or from the literal interpretation of the law to an understanding of its spiritual essence and the eternal truths of religion. On the other hand, the ‘outsiders’, the non-Nizārīs who were incapable of recognising the truth, were rendered spiritually non-existent (Daftary 2007: 358–367). The imām proclaiming the qiyāma would be the qāʾim al-qiyāma, or ‘lord of resurrection’, a rank which in Ismāʿīlī religious hierarchy was always higher than that of an ordinary imām.

Ḥasan II’s son and successor Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad devoted his long reign (561–607/1166–1210) to a systematic doctrinal elaboration of the qiyāma. The exaltation of the autonomous teaching authority of the present Nizārī imām now became the central feature of Nizārī thought. Nūr al-Din Muhammad also made every Nizārī imām potentially a qāʾim, capable of inaugurating an era of qiyāma. Furthermore, he explicitly affirmed the Fāṭimid descent of his father and, therefore, of himself. He explained that Ḥasan II was, in fact, an imām and the son of a descendant of Nizār ibn al-Mustanṣir, who had earlier found refuge in Alamūt. Henceforth, the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs recognised the lords of Alamūt, beginning with Ḥasan II, as their imāms (Hodgson 1955: 160–184, 210–217).
Meanwhile, the Syrian Nizārīs had entered into an important phase of their own history under the leadership of Rāshid al-Dīn Sinān, their most famous chief dāʿī and the original ‘Old Man of the Mountain’ of the Crusader sources. He reorganised and strengthened the Syrian Nizārī daʿwa, also consolidating the Nizārī network of castles (Willey 2005: 216–245). Aiming to safeguard his community, Sinān entered into intricate and shifting alliances with the major neighbouring powers, notably the Crusaders, the Zangids and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (Saladin of the Crusader sources). Sinān led the Syrian Nizārīs for almost three decades, when they attained the peak of their power and fame, until his death in 589/1193 (Hodgson 1955: 185–209; Daftary 2007: 367–374).

Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad’s son and successor Jalāl al-Dīn Ḥasan (607–618/1210–1221), who had become concerned with the isolation of the Nizārīs from the larger world of Sunnī Islam, successfully attempted a daring rapprochement with the ‘Abbāsid caliph. He ordered his followers to observe the sharīʿa in its Sunnī form; this was interpreted by the Nizārīs as a dissimulating tactic. Be that as it may, the rights of Jalāl al-Dīn Ḥasan to Nizārī territories were now officially recognised by the Sunnī establishment. The Nizārī imām had achieved much-needed peace and security for his community and state.

Nizārī fortunes in Persia were rapidly reversed after the collapse of the Khwārazmian empire which brought them into direct conflict with the invading Mongols. Indeed, the Mongols had assigned a high priority to the destruction of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī state, a task completed with much difficulty by Hūlāgū who led the main Mongol expedition into Persia. Rukn al-Dīn Khurshāh, the last lord of Alamūt who reigned for only one year, entered into a complex and ultimately futile series of negotiations with Hūlāgū. The fall of Alamūt in the autumn of 654/1256 marked the end of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī state. Along with many other fortresses it was demolished by the Mongols, who also massacred countless Nizārīs. In the spring of 655/1257, Khurshāh himself was killed by his Mongol guards in Mongolia, where he had gone to see the Great Khan. Shortly afterwards, the Nizārī castles in Syria submitted to the Mamlūks. Having lost their political prominence, the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs henceforth lived secretly as religious minorities in numerous scattered communities in Syria, Persia, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent.

In the aftermath of the Mongol debacle the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs survived the downfall of their state centered at Alamūt; and the Nizārī imāmate continued in the progeny of Rukn al-Dīn Khurshāh. However, the Nizārī imāms remained in hiding for several generations, and their centralised daʿwa organisation had also disappeared. Under the circumstances, various Nizārī communities developed independently under the local leadership of dynasties of dāʿīs, pīrs, and
They also resorted to the strict observance of *taqiyya* and adopted different external guises. In Persia, many Nizârî groups disguised themselves under the cover of Sufism. Thus, the *imâms* appeared to outsiders as Sufi masters or *pîrs*, while their followers adopted the typically Sufi guise of disciples or *murîds* (Daftary 1999: 275–289). This practice gained wide currency among the Nizârîs of Central Asia and Sind as well. By the middle of the ninth/fifteenth century, in fact, a type of coalescence had emerged between Persian Sufism and Nizârî Ismâ‘îlîsm, as these two independent esoteric traditions in Islam shared common doctrinal grounds. All in all, the first two post-Alamût centuries in Nizârî history are shrouded in obscurity, mainly due to *taqiyya* practices and lack of sources of information.

By the middle of the ninth/fifteenth century, the Nizârî *imâms* had emerged in the village of Anjudân, in central Persia, still dissimulating as Sufi *pîrs*, initiating the so-called Anjudân revival in Nizârî Ismâ‘îlî *da‘wa* and literary activities that lasted some two centuries (Daftary 2007: 422–442). With the advent of the Šafavîs, who proclaimed Twelver Shi‘ism as their state religion in 907/1501, the Nizârî *imâms* and their followers in Persia and adjacent lands also adopted Twelver Shi‘ism in addition to Sufism as a *taqiyya* measure. By the end of the eleventh/seventeenth century, the revived Nizârî *da‘wa* had been particularly successful in Central Asia and several regions of the Indian subcontinent. In South Asia, the Hindu converts, who became known as Khojas, developed an indigenous religious tradition known as Satpanth or the ‘true path’ (to salvation), as well as a devotional literature, the *ginâns*, containing a diversity of mystical, mythological, eschatological, and ethical themes (Nanji 1978: 50–83; Asani 2011: 95–128; Daftary 2007: 442–451).

With the fortieth Nizârî *imâm*, Shâh Nizâr (d. 1134/1722), the seat of the Nizârî *da‘wa* was transferred from Anjudân to the nearby village of Kahak, near Maḥallât. By the middle of the twelfth-eighteenth century, the Nizârî *imâms* had moved to the Persian province of Kirmân, where they acquired political prominence. The modern period in Nizârî Ismâ‘îlî history commenced with the long *imâmate* of Hasan ‘Alî Shâh (1232–1298/1817–1881), the forty-sixth *imâm*, who received the honorific title of Aga Khan (Āghâ Khân), meaning lord and master, from the Qâjâr monarch of Persia; this title has remained hereditary among his successors to the Nizârî Ismâ‘îlî *imâmate*. After some prolonged confrontations between this Nizârî *imâm* and the Qâjâr establishment, Aga Khan 1 permanently left Persia in 1257/1841. He finally settled in Bombay in 1265/1848, and received the protection of the British in India (Daftary 2007: 463–476).

Aga Khan 1’s grandson, Sulṭân Muḥammad Shâh, Aga Khan III (1302–1376/1885–1957), who led the Nizârîs for seventy-two years as their forty-eighth
imām, established his residence in Europe. He made systematic efforts to set
the religious identity of the Nizārīs apart from other religious communities,
especially that of the Twelver Shīʿīs, which for centuries had provided dis-
simulating covers for the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs. Large numbers of Nizārīs had, in
fact, been assimilated into the dominant Twelver Shīʿī community. Known as
a Muslim reformer, Aga Khan III worked vigorously to reorganise the Nizārīs
into a modern community with high standards of education, health, and social
well-being, also developing a new network of councils for administrating the
affairs of his community. The education of women and their full participation
in communal affairs received high priority in Aga Khan III’s reforms.

In 1957, Aga Khan III was succeeded by his grandson Shah Karim al-Husayni,
Aga Khan IV, the present Harvard-educated forty-ninth Nizārī Ismāʿīli imām.
He has substantially expanded the modernisation policies of his predeces-
sor, also initiating numerous programmes and institutions of his own. Aga
Khan IV has created a complex institutional network generally referred to as
the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), which implements projects in
a variety of social, economic, and cultural areas. In the field of higher edu-
cation, his major initiatives include The Institute of Ismaili Studies, the Aga
Khan University, and the University of Central Asia (Ruthven 2011: 189–220).
Numbering several millions, the global Nizārī Ismāʿīlī community, with signifi-
cant groups in Europe and North America, has emerged as a progressive Shīʿī
Muslim minority with high standards of living.

6 Conclusion

As this chapter has touched on, the Ismāʿīlīs have had a very eventful history
stretching back to the formative period of Islam when a diversity of communi-
ties of interpretation and schools of thought were articulating their doctrinal
positions. Due to their revolutionary anti-establishment stances, the Ismāʿīlīs
were from early on targeted for persecution and defamation. As a result, a host
of myths and legends were fabricated and disseminated by their numerous
adversaries, including the Crusaders who made the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī famous
in medieval Europe as Assassins. The misrepresentations of the Ismāʿīlīs have
been largely corrected by modern scholarship in Ismāʿīlī studies based on the
study of a large number of primary Ismāʿīlī manuscript resources.

After the downfall of their Fāṭimid caliphate and the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī state of
Persia, the Ismāʿīlīs lost forever their political prominence, surviving precari-
ously in many lands merely as religious minorities. However, their earlier con-
tributions to Islamic thought and culture had proved enduring. In this context,
particular mention should be made of two examples. In the Fāṭimid period of their history, the Ismāʿīlī ḏāʿīs of the Iranian lands elaborated an original intellectual tradition of philosophical theology, the earliest such tradition in a Shiʿī community, anticipating the contributions of Twelver Shiʿī scholars, notably Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040/1630) and Mullā Šadrā (d. 1050/1640), belonging to the so-called ‘school of Iṣfahān’. Meanwhile, a distinctive Ismāʿīlī school of jurisprudence (madḥhab) was founded through the efforts of al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, the foremost jurist of the Fāṭimid period.

All in all, despite numerous odds and rampant persecution, the Ismāʿīlīs have indeed stood the test of time. They have closely guarded their distinctive religious identity. The majoritarian NizĀrī branch of Ismāʿīlism is the only current Shiʿī community with a continuous line of present imāms. As enlightened Muslim leaders, the last two Ismāʿīlī imāms, Aga Khan III and his grandson Aga Khan IV, have devoted much time and resources to promoting a better understanding of Islam, not merely as a major religion but as a world civilisation with its plurality of social, intellectual and cultural traditions. Under the circumstances, the NizĀrī Ismāʿīlīs have emerged as a progressive global community of Shiʿī Muslims. In every country where the NizĀrī Ismāʿīlīs live as indigenous religious minorities, they enjoy good standards of living with full emancipation of their women, and those who have migrated to Western countries have successfully adapted to their new environments.

References


