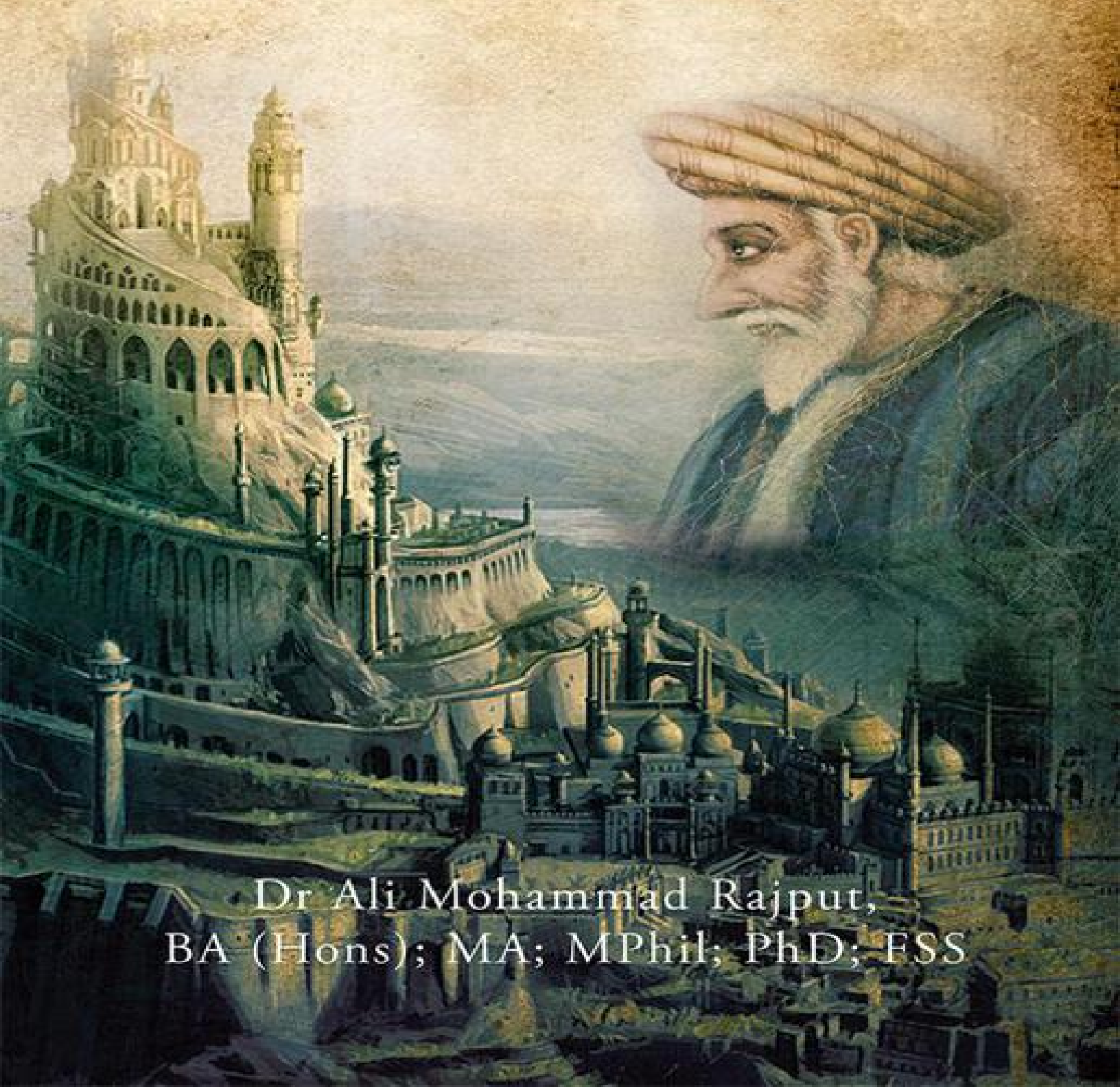


HASAN-I-SABBAH

His Life and Thought



Dr Ali Mohammad Rajput,
BA (Hons); MA; MPhil; PhD; FSS

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Dr Ali Mohammad Rajput
Professor Emeritus University of Khorog

Abbreviations

<i>BIFAO</i>	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale</i>
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>EB</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Britannica</i>
<i>EI</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam</i> (1st edition)
<i>EI₂</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam</i> (2nd edition)
<i>EI (Urdu)</i>	<i>Urdu Encyclopdia of Islam</i> , Punjab University, Lahore
<i>IC</i>	<i>Islamic Culture</i>
<i>JA</i>	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBBRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>OA</i>	<i>Order of Assassins</i>
<i>RHC</i>	<i>Recueil des historiens de croisades</i>

Abstract

This is an account of a remarkable, versatile and fascinating character who lived in the three last quarters of the eleventh and the first quarter of the twelfth century of the Christian era in the Islamic Middle East. It is the story of a struggle between him and his few friends on one side and the rising and most powerful Turkish Seljuk Empire and the Abbasid Caliphate combined together on the other. There was a gulf of differences between the two opponents on the basis of nationalism and faith. He was confident of his stand, and after years of constant struggle, his most powerful adversaries had to come to terms with him and the Ismaili state he founded, which lasted for 171 years and was defeated only by the barbarian Mongols in AD 1256. How could he withstand such formidable powers for so long and what ultimate weapon of war did he use in order to overcome such strong odds? It is an interesting story of Islamic history which has been misrepresented and portrayed unfairly in the past. The author presents the story objectively and quotes from its contemporary writers, taking the modern historians into account, and presents a balanced view of the history.

The present study is about the life and thoughts of Hasan-i-Sabbah (d. AD 1124), who is better known in the West as 'The Old Man of the Mountains', or rather misleadingly as the founder of the 'Order of Assassins'. The present study deals with his early life, his education, his service in the Court of the Seljuk Sultans, his acceptance of the Ismaili faith, and his travels to the Court of the Ismaili Imam and Fatimid Caliph, al-Mustansir, in Cairo. After receiving a mandate to preach from Cairo, Hasan returned home to resume his role as leader of the Ismaili Community in Iran. On his return, he was again busy travelling up and down the country for ten years, enlisting help for his cause, converting likely people to his faith, making friends in general and, above all, looking for a safe and

secure base for his activities. Ultimately, he acquired in AD 1090 the impregnable castle of Alamut in the Alburz Mountain range in the north of Iran and thus laid the foundations of an Ismaili state in Iran which was destined to survive for 171 years. The next thirty-five years (his remaining life) he spent within the walls of his castle and was seen by the Ismaili public only on two occasions, devoting his life completely to his cause, expanding and consolidating his organisation and writing for the Ismaili Dawa. He had to fight several battles with four successive Seljuk Sultans and emerged victorious in the end.

The defence strategy of Hasan, with his small fighting force against the very powerful adversary, is studied in detail. It emerges that he was the pioneer in organising a small but very effective suicide squad called 'the order of Fidayeen', whose duty was to carry out their assignment usually at the cost of their own life. It is interesting to note that in the modern war on terrorism, the suicide bombers have been used by the terrorists, claiming it as their ultimate weapon of defence. One should note, however, that the political activity of modern times is totally different to that of the twelfth-century Islamic Middle East.

Hasan's struggle against his opponents is studied in detail and his religious doctrines, along with its organisation, are explained fully. The sources on which the study is mainly based are the contemporary histories of *Jahan Gusha* of Juvaini (AD 1226-1283) and *Jamia-Tawarikh* of Rashid-ud-Din (AD 1248-1318), but several other primary sources are also consulted, and the works of the modern writers on the subject are taken into account. After a careful and objective study, it is revealed that Hasan combined the rare and diverse qualities of a truly great and remarkable man. He was learned in science, mathematics and philosophy. He was deeply religious and, above all, a very capable and a strict administrator.

To bring the study up to date, two further sections are added. There is a debate going on in recent years in connection with the war on terror organisations as well as the freedom fighters' struggle for their just cause. It seems that most of the radical groups, both in the East as well as in the West, have taken inspiration from Hasan's

model of Fidayeen to further their cause. In the climate of the present-day politics, some connection is investigated between twelfth-century politics and the modern times. Lastly, it includes the most recent information derived from the excavation of the site of the famous castle of Alamut, which is being carried out presently by the Iranian government.

Chapter 1

Introduction

I: Historical Background, Aims, and Scope of Book

The Nizari branch of the Ismailis of Persia and Syria, wrongly named by the western writers as 'the Assassins', was first introduced to the West in the twelfth century by the Crusaders, who were engaged in a long religious war against the Muslims of Syria and Palestine in order to recover the Holy Land in favour of the Christians. The Crusaders brought into Europe the stories of the East, which they transmitted into the West, either by word of mouth or in their written accounts of the Saracens, against whom they fought the wars of Crusaders. Among these opponents, they found a small but powerful adversary living in the mountains of Jabal Bahara in Syria, whom the Crusaders called by a misleading name, 'the Assassins'. They knew very little about the so-called Assassins and seemed to have made no serious attempt to investigate their origin, organisation or beliefs. They did not even seem to know that the so-called Assassins were the provincial branch of the Nizari Ismaili sect of Islam who had established their headquarters in the Castle of Alamut in the Alburz mountain range of Northern Iran. The Crusaders, however, took the unverified local gossip to the West, perhaps, with an imaginative exaggeration. The tales of the Sheikh al-Jabal (the Old Man of the Mountains) spread into Europe with the publication of the travel accounts of Marco Polo (AD 1254-1324), the Venetian traveller to the Far East, and were confirmed by the later western orientalisks such as Sylvestre de Sacy and Joseph von Hammer in the early nineteenth century. The political, scientific,

cultural, and literary supremacy of Europe in the last three centuries gave a boost to the credibility of the western writers and their works were accepted with great authority. Thus, the western stories regarding the 'Old Man of the Mountains' and his followers were accepted at their face value while, in the East, a similar kind of literature appeared as a mixture of legend, fiction and history. The name of Hasan-i-Sabbah and his followers fell into disrepute as a direct result of this sort of literature. It is strange that no major attempt was made to rectify the damage done and to present the real portrait of Hasan-i-Sabbah and his organisation.

It is greatly encouraging to note that the trend has reversed in recent years. Marshall Hodgson published a well-documented historical account of the Nizari Ismailis but, unfortunately, gave a misleading title *The Order of Assassins*,^{[1](#)} which may imply to an ordinary reader that the book is about a band of murderers. Later, Bernard Lewis wrote an historical account of the Ismailis of Persia, but again giving just as misleading a title *The Assassins*.^{[2](#)} Both the books mentioned are serious attempts at presenting the historical account of the Nizari Ismaili sect of Islam, its doctrines and organisation and they briefly cover the history of the Ismaili state of Alamut, which survived for 171 years. Although both these books cover a brief history of Hasan-i-Sabbah, the founder of the Ismaili state in Iran, none have gone into the details of his life and thought, as obviously the purpose of both these books is to cover a much wider period of a span of two centuries. More recently, Farhad Daftary has published a much detailed history of the Ismailis, which is much fuller and covers a long period of time from the beginning to the present times, but it does not treat our subject in detail. It is thus felt that there is a need of a scientifically reconstructed portrait of Hasan-i-Sabbah, known to the world as the 'Old Man of the Mountains', with a fuller and detailed evaluation of both the man and his faith. The present study is one of the modest attempts at filling this need.

We first offer below a general introduction to the Ismaili situation on the eve of the emergence of Hasan-i-Sabbah as the Ismaili leader in Iran. We shall then proceed to refer to and evaluate the primary

sources used and discussed in this study. The limitations of the study are the limitations of the sources which, though close to the subject of the study, are not free from bias. One of the difficult tasks of the study is to identify the bias and reconstruct the life of Hasan-i-Sabbah, both historically and critically.

In order to understand the development of Islamic civilisation, one must study carefully all the factors which have contributed to Islamic thought. One very important factor in this respect has been the Ismaili philosophy. Ismailis have played a significant part in the intellectual development of Islam and have produced philosophers, theologians and scientists of exceptional abilities who have left their mark on history. The Ismailis have produced intellectuals, philosophers and statesmen such as Abu-Ali-Sina, Nasir-i-Khusraw, Nasir-ud-Din Tusi and also many others who did not reveal their identity, such as the authors of the rasail of Ikhwan-al-safa, who had a great impact on the general thinking and development of the Islamic world. Both the Sunni and Shia schools bear imprints of their debates with Ismaili scholars, and the esoteric philosophy of the Ismailis was adopted in one form or the other by various schools of Sufism.³ Indeed, in the words of Louis Massignon, the fourth/tenth century should be called the Ismaili century in the history of Islam.⁴

Professor Wilferd Madelung gives the summary of the earlier Ismaili activities in the following passage:

The Ismaili religious movement appeared first on the stage of the history of Islam in the second half of the third/ninth century and spread with astonishing rapidity. Centered originally in Khuzistan in south-west Iran, its missionaries carried its message throughout the Islamic world from Transoxania and the Indus Valley to the Maghrib, its converts became numerous enough to set-up their own political communities under the sovereignty of the Expected Imam. The Fatimid Caliphs, Imams of the Ismailis, extended their sway over the western half of the Islamic world from the Atlantic to the borders of Iraq and founded the city of Cairo as their capital. In the east, the Qarmatis, dissident Ismailis, controlled much of Arabia, the Persian Gulf and lower Iraq and for a time threatened the Abbasid capital Baghdad itself. Ismaili missionaries like al-Nasafi (d. 331/942), Abu Hatim al-Razi (d. 322/934) and Abu Yaqub al-Sijistani (b. 271/884) elaborated Ismaili religious thought in its

classical form while the Ikhwan al-Safa, an anonymous group of Ismaili authors in Basra, published their encyclopedia of fifty-one popular philosophical treatises which has since remained part of general Islamic literature. Ismailism gained followers among all strata of society, rulers, officials, scholars, merchants, peasants and poor, among the inhabitants of towns and villages as well as the tribes of the desert.⁵

In the fifth/eleventh century, the Ismailis played an important role in the political and cultural history of Iran. During this period, the Seljuk Turks created a new military power which extended from Central Asia to the Mediterranean. The victorious armies which, along with their civil officers formed a new ruling class, displaced the old Arab and Persian aristocracy. The Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad, the focal point of Sunni Islam, was very weak and existed only at the mercy of the new Turkish masters. The institution of the Caliphate served a useful purpose for the Sunni Turks, as it had for the Shiite Buyids before them, because the endorsement of their actions by the Caliphate increased their legitimacy with the general public and, more importantly, with the Ulema. The Caliphate, however, was only a puppet, and the defector rulers of Sunni Islam were really the Seljuks themselves.

An alternative government of Islam was in the hands of Ismailis, who had a flourishing Caliphate of their own, under the Fatimid dynasty based in Cairo. It may be noted that the Fatimid rulers adopted for themselves the title of 'Caliph' instead of a more appropriate 'Imam'. A possible explanation could be sought in the ultimate objective of the Ismailis. Their aim was never to represent only a section of Islam. They were aiming at the Universal recognition of the Imam as the rightful successor of the Prophet of Islam. As the title of Caliph had been accepted by the majority for nearly three centuries and the institution of Caliphate was deeply rooted in Islamic society, the Fatimid preferred to retain the same title for themselves. It may be remembered, however, that for the believing Ismailis, their preferred title always remained that of an 'Imam'.

The Fatimid Caliphate at its height included Egypt, Syria, Palestine, North Africa, Sicily, the Red Sea Coast of Africa, the Yemen, the Hijaz

and Sind. It extended its influence over a large part of the Muslim world and commanded the allegiance of countless followers who were still living in lands governed by the Sunni rulers. Their universities such as Jamia al-Azhar (359/970) and Jamia al-Hakim (395/1005) were turning out extraordinary scholars and teachers who were elaborating the doctrines of Ismaili faith, and their well-trained Dais were preaching these doctrines at home and abroad for the general benefit of the Fatimid Caliphate. At the beginning of the sixth/twelfth century, this remarkable Caliphate went into a sharp decline, losing some of their territorial possessions (Syria and Palestine) to the Seljuk Turks, who were emerging as the new custodians of Islam.

When the Fatimid Caliph al-Mustansir died in 487/1094, a great division occurred in the Ismaili world over the determination of the succession of the Caliphate. A struggle took place between the eldest son Nizar, a mature person of about forty-five years of age, previously nominated by the Caliph as his heir apparent and his younger half-brother al-Mustali, a young prince, hardly twenty years old, supported by his brother-in-law al-Afdal, the commander of the armed forces. Al-Mustali came out of this struggle victorious, and Nizar was defeated and ultimately died in a Cairo prison.⁶ This split in the Ismailis did irreparable damage to the organisation of the Ismaili cause and, subsequently, the Fatimid Caliphate survived only in name. Within a century, a complete reversal took place in Cairo, where the Ismaili state was replaced by a Sunni state, founded in 567/1171 by Salah-ud-Din of the Ayyubia dynasty.⁷

After this split among the Ismailis, however, the Nizaris, though defeated and crushed in Egypt and Yemen, still had many supporters in Iran and Syria. These Ismailis, dominated by their Iranian element, managed to establish another small but active state. It was not as elaborate as the Fatimid Caliphate of Cairo, more a federation of several semi-autonomous principalities chiefly protected by the network of their strongholds and widely scattered throughout different parts of Iran and Syria with their centre of government at Alamut, south of the Caspian Sea in the Rudbar district of Northern Iran. This Ismaili state, though small, was sufficiently strong to hold

the formidable Seljuks at bay. It flourished for 171 years as an independent state until it was finally destroyed by the Mongol invasion in 654/1256. The founder of this Ismaili state was a man by the name of Hasan-i-Sabbah, the subject of discussion of this book.

The purpose of this book is to write a biography of Hasan-i-Sabbah, including discussions on his religious and political thought. It is intended to offer an objective portrait of his life and thought. The task set is, however, not an easy one. There are many obstacles in the way which make it most difficult. The major problem one encounters is the lack of reliable information. Most of the literature preserved by the Ismailis was destroyed,⁸ and we are mainly dependant on the material written by their enemies, whose interest lay in distorting the facts to suit their own purposes.

It may be noted that Hasan founded an Ismaili state within a largely Sunni-dominated society ruled by Sunni Turks. From the earlier days, the Sunnis have looked at the Shiites with suspicion and have never considered them as friends of Islam.⁹ Following the old mutual mistrust, the Sunnis hated the organisation of Hasan; they never, in fact, tried to understand their point of view but simply branded them heretics and enemies of Islam. On the political front, it is easier to understand the hostile attitude of the Seljuk rulers towards Hasan as they could not consider him anybody other than a leader of a rebel group whose aim was to overthrow the ruling power. Thus, from the ruler's point of view, Hasan and his party deserved the harshest punishment prescribed for treason against the state, and hence, following the law of the state, they must be crushed and annihilated. This, the Seljuk tried repeatedly to achieve, but without success.

The Caliphs of Baghdad, the custodians of Sunni orthodoxy, also considered the Ismailis a political threat to their establishment but for centuries, they had been unable to do anything about it effectively. They wholeheartedly supported the view of the general Sunni public and gave the unqualified approval of the action of the Seljuks against Hasan, as they clearly understood that the manifesto of Hasan included a pledge to replace their Caliphate by a righteous one based on the doctrine of Imamatus.¹⁰ It is, therefore, easy to see

the clash of interests, both religious and secular, of both Abbasids and Seljuks against Hasan and his followers, whose aims and objectives were no secret to them. Thus, the ruling parties were extremely vigilant on the Shia activities, and consequently, the Ismailis had to bear great hardship for their existence and generally went underground. The Ismaili movement has an established history of underground activities. The doctrine of *taqiyya*¹¹ allows them to conceal their true identity when oppressed. In the earlier days of their development, they organised and carried out their mission in great secrecy which culminated with success in the foundation of the Fatimid Caliphate in 297/909. During the long span of the Fatimid rule (297-567/909-1171), although there was no need for the Ismailis to observe *taqiyya* at home, the Ismailis living in places under Sunni rule continued to observe *taqiyya* and kept their true identity hidden from the public eye. Indeed, one of the conditions imposed upon the new converts to the faith was to keep their identity hidden and never to divulge the secrets of their mission to anybody outside their own organisation. Thus, during the Sunni rule of the Seljuks in Iraq and Iran, most Ismailis went underground and organised their Dawa in utmost secrecy. They succeeded in winning some position of authority in the government, posing as true and faithful servants of the Sultan, whereas in secret, they were working for the Fatimid Dawa and, some of them later, for the new Dawa preached by Hasan-i-Sabbah. The true identity of some such people was discovered and they were severely punished, while some others escaped punishment as they went into hiding. We note that Sad-ul-Mulk, the Vizier to Sultan Mohammad, the Seljuk ruler, was discovered to be in sympathy with the Ismailis and consequently suffered a painful death,¹² whereas when Abdul-Malik Attash was discovered to be an Ismaili Dai, he had to run away and take refuge in the Castle of Alamut.¹³ Rais Muzaffar acted for many years as a trusted friend of the Seljuks but, in secret, was working for the Ismaili cause.¹⁴ It is conceivable that several other sympathisers to the Ismaili cause were never discovered. They carried on working for the Ismaili Dawa while outwardly posing as the true and faithful servants to the rulers. Such secret Ismaili agents near to the Sultan's

Court were in an ideal position to provide vital information to the Ismaili organisation and, sometimes, influenced the court in their favour. It is clear from the events that followed that Hasan-i-Sabbah took full advantage of such secret Ismailis in advancing his cause. It seems that there were certain parts of Iran and Iraq which were considered as the centres of Shia activities for a long time. Even in these areas, the Shia seems to be observing strict *taqiyya* in general pursuit of their mission. They would mix with the local population in such a manner that no suspicion arose in the minds of the people around them. They would conform to the general public in respect of the performance of their religious duties and would send their children to the local madrasa of the popular faith. Hasan himself was sent to a madrasa of Shafii denomination for his education. Hasan-i-Sabbah appears on the scene about the time when new converts for the Ismaili cause were being enlisted secretly in Iran. The head of the Ismaili Dawa for western Iran and Iraq was Abdul-Malik Attash,¹⁵ whose centre was located in Isfahan, the very capital of the Seljuk Empire. Given ability and aptitude, the new converts were usually given an opportunity to climb up the hierarchy of Dawa, but it seems that Hasan was appointed directly to a high office of deputy to the Chief Dai Attash,¹⁶ which speaks for the outstanding qualities of Hasan. The events of history show that Hasan proved to be worthy of his teacher's evaluation and judgement of his character. On his return from a hazardous journey to the court of the Ismaili Imam and the Fatimid Caliph in Cairo, Hasan seems to have assumed the command of Ismaili Dawa in Iran. It took him ten years to prepare grounds for his ultimate action. During these years of exploring, making new friends, preaching, winning new converts and planning for the future, Hasan would, probably, have prepared a complete strategy for his future actions and was looking for a complete overthrow of the present religio-political order. In this respect, he had only a partial success as he could not convince the general public to stage a total uprising against the existing order. He did, however, achieve a good measure of success in founding an Ismaili state which maintained its independence for a span of 171 years, and this itself is no small achievement. Iran had a great record of its

own tradition and civilisation. They were ruled for centuries by their great Kings and Emperors, and Iranians were proud of their heritage and culture. Ever since their conversion to Islam, they had constantly been under pressure from a foreign culture and had continuously been ruled by foreign powers, first by the Arabs and now by the Turks. The Seljuk Turks bestowed large areas of land under iqta system to their Turkish generals, who exploited the peasants and general workers and left them in a miserable plight.¹⁷ Many Iranians with strong nationalistic feelings resented the foreign rule and wanted a change in favour of a national government. The peasants and the working class had nothing to lose and, in the hope of a better life, would welcome any change. Hasan, who should be looking for help from any quarter, would, perhaps, have exploited this support to strengthen his cause. There were certain areas in Iran which, for many years, were known to have Shii tendencies. Khuzistan had been, for centuries, the home of Shii activities and Karamatia was born and bred there. The regions of Quhistan and Daylaman had long tradition of Shii activities.¹⁸ In the time of Hasan himself, the Ismaili Dawa was active in these as well as several other areas of Iraq and Iran. Being in charge of the Dawa himself, he knew exactly who and where the Ismailis were secretly working and was fully knowledgeable of their strengths and weaknesses. With these pockets of Ismailis serving as a nucleus, he wooed the other extreme Shii and political groups, and it seems that he might have had some measure of success in gathering some people towards his own views.

Hasan's foremost priority now, it seems, was to find a place of security so that he had no longer any fear of arrest or persecution. Once he had established his headquarters in the Castle of Alamut (483/1090) in the Alburz range, south of the Caspian Sea, he put his strategy of defence and expansion into action. It is surprising that Hasan and his followers could keep such secrecy of their mission that the Seljuks did not realise the gravity of the situation until the Ismailis had become master of several impregnable castles located in the mountains. Hasan soon realised that he was surrounded by overwhelming enemies and, to counter their threat, he had to use

ingenious tactics for his defence and survival. He knew that he could not fight with powerful Seljuk armies in an open conflict. He had neither finance nor manpower to raise a matching army. Instead, he used guerrilla warfare for offensives and castling as a defensive strategy. In order to have an edge over his powerful enemy, he founded a small but powerful tactical force, a suicide squad, the order of fidais, which became famous for its spectacular political assassinations aimed at intimidating their enemy's leadership. In the words of B. Lewis follows the below passage:

For their victims, the Assassins were criminal fanatics engaged in murderous conspiracy against religion and society. For the Ismailis, they were a corps d'élite in the war against the enemies of the Imam.¹⁹

Hasan has been severely criticised on account of certain political murders committed by his fidais. If, however, one is prepared to look from the Ismaili point of view, these political assassinations may look justified as the Ismailis were fighting a battle of survival of their cause, faith and freedom. The image of the Ismailis in the West has, for centuries, been a blurred and distorted one. The first encounter of the West with the Ismailis was in Syria, where the Crusaders met them as their adversaries. They brought back to Europe unverified accounts of legendary nature and publicised the fictitious tales in the Christian West which, it seems, were taken by the public as historical facts. Marco Polo, the famous Venetian traveller, wrote fantastic stories regarding the Ismailis, including the tale of the 'Old Man of the Mountains' and his sensual paradise. These stories were later confirmed by great orientalists like de Sacy and von Hammer, thus making the already distorted portrait of the Ismailis more permanent in the mind of the public. However, the recent researches of the orientalists, who have made an objective assessment of the Ismaili sect based on their critical evaluation of the contemporary sources, combined with the study of new evidence based on sectarian literature which has come to light recently, show the emergence of a new and more balanced picture of the sect. Ata-ul-Mulk Juvaini (d. 682/1283) remains the main source of Hasan's biography. He was the first person who picked up Hasan's biography (*Sarguzasht-i-*

Sayyidna) out of the Central Ismaili Library of Alamut, and it was he who wrote the first history of the Persian Ismailis (Nizaris) in the third volume of his famous work, *Tarikh-i-Jahan Gusha*. He was an eyewitness to the destruction of the Ismailis in AD 1256 and had complete access to all the Ismaili literature which was burnt or lost in the subsequent years. Thus, he is the most valuable source to any student of Ismaili history of this period. However, his obvious disagreement with the Ismailis makes him a biased writer. Thus, one should examine his works critically so that one could reach a more objective conclusion.^{[20](#)}

The second major source of our work is Rashid-ud-Din (d. 718/1318), who in his famous book *Jamia-Tawarikh* writes the Ismaili history of the Alamut period. He seems to follow the same sources as Juvaini, his predecessor, but in very much greater details. I have used this source to a great extent in filling the gaps which have not been covered by Juvaini.^{[21](#)}

Other sources include supporting primary sources, secondary and modern sources, including Ibn al-Athir, al-Rawandi, Hamd Ullah Mustawafi, Nasir-ud-Din Tusi, Nasir-i-Khusraw, E. G. Browne, W. Ivanow, M. Hodgson, B. Lewis, and W. Madelung, to name but a few.^{[22](#)}

I have reviewed the literature pertaining to the subject and have critically examined the sources in Appendix III entitled 'Evaluation of Sources'. After the first chapter on Introduction, the book is divided into three sections. The first section includes three chapters devoted to the early life of Hasan, including childhood, education, career, and his conversion to Ismaili faith. The second section commences with a chapter on a background knowledge of the Ismailia sect and organisation of its Dawa and proceeds to Hasan's struggle against the ruling Seljuk Sultans and his establishment of an Ismaili state in Iran. The strategy of Hasan's defence and expansion is elaborated and details of the Ismaili state, including its territorial boundaries, social and political set-up and wars with its powerful enemies, is fully discussed. Finally, the third section includes a chapter on comments, conclusions, and evaluation of Hasan's portrait as it emerged out of my researches and studies, giving as well as the modern orientalists.

In the end, suggestions are made in respect of the scope of further work which could usefully be carried out on the subject. Finally, two documents relevant to the present study are given in the Appendices.

Footnotes

- [1.](#) M. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins*, Mouton & Co., Hague, 1955.
- [2.](#) B. Lewis, *The Assassins*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1967.
- [3.](#) *Cambridge History of Persia*, Vol. 5, p. 296.
- [4.](#) L. Massingnon, 'Mutanabbi devant le siècle ismaélien de l'Islam' in *Mémoires de l'Institut Français de Damas*, 1935, p. 1.
- [5.](#) W. Madelung, 'Aspects of Ismaili Theology' in *Ismaili contributions to Islamic Culture*, ed. S. H. Nasr, Tehran, 1977.
- [6.](#) See section: Hasan's relations with Egypt, p. 114.
- [7.](#) Ibid.
- [8.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 270. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 719.
- [9.](#) *Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 5, pp. 286, 292.
- [10.](#) Hasan's reply to Sultan Malik Shah's letter. See Appendix I.
- [11.](#) *Taqiyya*: Precautionary dissimulation.
- [12.](#) E. G. Browne, 'History of Seljuks by Rawindi', *JRAS*, 1902, p. 608.
- [13.](#) Keshawarz, Karim *Hasan-i-Sabbah*, p. 215.
- [14.](#) See section on Rais Muzaffar, p. 111.
- [15.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 4.
- [16.](#) Ibid.
- [17.](#) *Cambridge History of Persia*, Vol. 5, p. 81-84. For iqta, see p. 59.
- [18.](#) *EI*², 'Karmati', p. 661.
- [19.](#) B. Lewis, *The Assassins*,
- [20.](#) See section on Evaluation of the Sources, p. 224.
- [21.](#) Ibid.
- [22.](#) Ibid., Bibliography, pp. 199-204.

SECTION ONE

Chapter 2

I: Early Life and Career of Hasan-i-Sabbah

Juvaini and Rashid-ud-Din present Hasan's genealogy:

His name was Hasan, son of Ali, son of Mohammad, son of Jaffar, son of Husayn, son of Mohammad, son of Sabbah the Himyar, a descendant of the ancient Himyaritic Kings of Southern Arabia.¹

Hasan's father, Ali, a theologian, was respected for simplicity and humility; he used to clad himself in a cloak made out of coarse cloth common among the abstinent and devout people, and is reported to have secret tendencies towards an esoteric approach in religious matters.² It is said that he came on foot from Yemen to Kufa, Iraq, where he ventured into the trade of precious stones and metals, thus acquiring considerable wealth. Later, he left Kufa and arrived in Qum, Iran. By this time, he seemed to have given up the trade he had embarked upon during his stay in Kufa. He soon left Qum and moved on to the city of Rayy (near the modern city of Tehran), where he established himself as a theologian of the Isna-asheria faith and, at the same time, carried out his trade which did not seem to interfere with his religious role.³ Hasan was born in Rayy,⁴ which had been the centre of activities of Ismaili Dais for a century.⁵

Ali, the father of Hasan, had an Iranian friend in Rayy for whom he had considerable respect. He was an Ismaili Dai⁶ who invited people to the Imamate of the Fatimid Caliph of Egypt. He advised Ali to send his son Hasan to a well-known institute of learning outside Rayy.⁷ The reason for this might be due to the fact that, since the capital of the Seljuk rulers had been shifted to Isfahan, many learned people had left Rayy, and consequently, Rayy was left in decay. He recommended the Shafii school of Nishapur, with a great reputation for scholarships, which was run by a respected and learned professor Imam Muwaffaq.⁸

Imam Abu Mohammad Hibatallah (b. Mohammad al-Muwaffaq) was a Shafii Alim (scholar), son of a qadi and grandson of a famous scholar Abu-Tayyib Sahl (b. Mohammad as-Suluki). Al-Farisi says that his family had been ru'asa (aristocrats) and Imams and leaders of the As-hab al-hadith⁹ for 150 years. In 428/1037, Nishapur was officially still under the rule of Masud, son of Mahmud of Gazana. The Seljuks first appeared in Nishapur in 429/1038. Imam Muwaffaq, although a member of the religious institution, was also involved with the Hadithan and other secular elements in the city, and he threw his weight on the side of peace with the Seljuks. The mention of the Imam Muwaffaq as being the Sahib-Hadithan is particularly interesting for it apparently points to the existence in Nishapur of a body of local vigilantes, whose task was, undoubtedly, the preservation of internal order and defences of the city against bandit and ayyar (vagabond) depredations. Imam Muwaffaq fully realised that the future of Khurasan lay with the Seljuks, and so he welcomed Toghril Seljuk to the city of Nishapur. But when, in 430/1039, Masud of Gazana returned to recover Nishapur, Toghril Seljuk was obliged to retreat. Imam Muwaffaq left with the Seljuks when they evacuated Nishapur, being too compromised with them to stay and face the Ghaznavids again. After the Ghaznavids' conclusive defeat at the hands of the Seljuks in 431/1040 at Dandanqan, Toghril Seljuk entered Nishapur on a permanent basis and installed Imam Muwaffaq as administrator of the city of Nishapur. It was during this period that Imam recommended to Toghril Abu Nasr Kunduri, one of the many former Ghaznavid officials who passed into Seljuk service as his grand Vizier.¹⁰

Now it was common in those days that Seljuk rulers generally considered Shia community as a danger to their government, and most of its members were believed by the Seljuks to be agents of the Fatimids of Cairo. Thus, whenever someone was discovered as an active member of the Shia community, he was kept under constant surveillance¹¹ and was severely punished if caught in any political activity against the interest of the existing rule.¹² So the general practice among the Shias living in a minority was to observe *taqiyya* in keeping their religious views secret. To convince the

general public that they really belonged to the Orthodox Sunni faith, they used to hide their identity completely and would send their children to the Sunni schools of learning. It was probably in this spirit that Ali sent his son, Hasan, to the most famous Sunni institution in Nishapur.¹³

Nishapur was the site of a famous madrasa¹⁴ of the Shafii school of thought, founded and funded by the Seljuk rulers and staffed by distinguished professors of science, mathematics and religious philosophy. The head of the madrasa was a well-known authority on traditions of the Prophet (muhammad), a great and respected religious scholar, Imam Muwaffaq, mentioned earlier, who enjoyed the great respect of the Seljuk rulers and also was honoured by the general public for his piety. The students from every walk of life from all over Iran and Iraq were admitted to this school. Most of the students were in residence where a hostel accommodation was provided, but for students of rich parentage, who could pay higher fees, some single-, double-, and three-bedroom accommodation was provided. Some poor students were paid for by endowments (waqf) made by philanthropists and the rich parents of some of the students. There were also some state scholarships provided to deserving students. Several students who were educated at this school were, in fact, placed at high offices in the government, and it was usually attributed to the petitions of their virtuous teacher Imam Muwaffaq in favour of his pupils. The fact, however, seems to be that, due to the respect enjoyed by Imam Muwaffaq, his recommendations in favour of some of his students were taken very seriously, and so his students were usually successful in holding many key positions in the government.

Hasan settled down in his studies and would probably have made friends with his fellow students. Rashid-ud-Din reports that he formed a close friendship with two particular students who were destined to be very famous persons in history. One of them was the famous Nizam-ul-Mulk Tusi, the grand Vizier of the Seljuk Sultans, Malik Shah and his father, Alp-Arslan, and the second was Omar Khayyam, the famous mathematician, astronomer and poet.

Nizam-ul-Mulk Abu Ali al-Hasan bin Ali bin Ishaq al-Tusi was born in a village called Radkan near Tus in Khurasan. Historians differ with his date of birth, but Tarikh-i-Baihaq, which alone supplies us with the details of his family, places it in 410/1020. His father, Ali, was a revenue officer in Tus on behalf of the Ghaznavid Sultans. Rashid-ud-Din reports that he was educated along with his two friends, Hasan-i-Sabbah and Omar Khayyam, in the famous Shafii Madrasa in Nishapur. After serving the Ghaznavid government for a few years, Nizam-ul-Mulk was ultimately appointed grand Vizier to Sultan Alp-Arslan, the position he continued to hold during the reign of his son and successor Sultan Malik Shah. Towards the later part of his life, he became a bitter enemy of Hasan-i-Sabbah, who had established himself in the Castle of Alamut as the leader of the Ismailis in Iran, and took active part in the Seljuk campaigns against Hasan. Nizam-ul-Mulk was assassinated on 10 Ramadan 485 (14 October 1092) by a person generally thought to be an Ismaili Fidai.¹⁵

Ghiyath-ud-Din Abul Fath Omar ibn Ibrahim al-Khayyam (d. 517/1123) was born in Nishapur. His date of birth is unknown. Probably, he derived the name Khayyam (tent maker) from his father's trade. He is said to have received an annual stipend of 10,000 dinars from his friend Nizam-ul-Mulk, the grand Vizier of the Seljuk Sultan Alp-Arslan, for the pursuit of his mathematical studies in which he made a name for himself by his standard work of algebra, written in Arabic. In AD 1074, he was invited by Sultan Malik Shah to reform the calendar. Omar's fame in the West, however, is due to his poetry, *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, translated by Edward Fitzgerald in AD 1859.¹⁶ Rashid-ud-Din quotes from *Sarguzasht-i Sayyidna* (biography of our master):

Sayyidna (our Master), Omar Khayyam and Nizam-ul-Mulk were at school together in Nishapur. As per custom, of younger days, they inaugurated and pursued a rule of friendship and devotion which culminated in their drinking of each other's blood and swearing a solemn oath that whoever of them attains to high rank and lofty degree should patronize and help the others.¹⁷

According to the usual curriculum of the madrasas in those days, Hasan's education was probably broadly based on studies in Qur'an

and Sunna, along with religions and political history as well as Islamic Jurisprudence. He also seems to have studied science, mathematics, astronomy and philosophy. Referring to his education, he mentions in his *Sarguzasht*:¹⁸

From the very childhood when I was barely seven years of age, I had developed great love for various branches of knowledge and wished to become a theologian. I was active in pursuit of knowledge until I was seventeen years old and followed the Isna-asheria faith which was the faith of my forefathers.¹⁹

Ibn al-Athir, in his *Tarikh al-Kamil*, says that Hasan-i-Sabbah was a very intelligent and gifted person and he was proficient in geometry, astronomy and logic.²⁰ It is said that Hasan's father died during his educational career, but he left his son with sufficient funds to complete his educational programme.²¹

On the defeat of Masud, son of Mahmud of Gazna, at Dandanqan in AH 431, when most of Khurasan fell into the hands of the Seljuks, Nizam-ul-Mulk accompanied his father from Tus to Gazna and appears to have obtained a post in a government office there.²² The sources, however, do not mention the immediate activities of the other two friends, namely Hasan and Khayyam, after completion of their education. It is not quite clear when and how Hasan succeeded in acquiring a position as a hajib (Chamberlain) in the Court of Sultan Alp-Arslan.²³ It is also not so clear whether or not he had any other job at an earlier stage. In those days, it was not uncommon that a senior position could only be acquired through contacts and recommendations. It is quite conceivable that his teacher, Imam Muwaffaq, might have helped him in securing his career, or perhaps, he might have utilised the contacts of his father to find a suitable employment. In the light of the events which happened later, one should not exclude the possibility that if Hasan had already developed any serious relations with Ismaili Dawa or other sympathisers of the Fatimids, then it may well be through their secret agents in the Court, that Hasan made his way to the court himself. Rashid-ud-Din, however, describes the patron of his entry to the court of the Sultan as nobody other than Nizam-ul-Mulk, his old classmate with whom he had drawn a pact of friendship when they

were fellow students in Nishapur. In fact, Nizam-ul-Mulk had already risen to the highest post in the Seljuk administration. He was, now, the grand Vizier to Sultan Alp-Arslan. Rashid-ud-Din writes in *Jamia-Tawarikh* thus:

Now it so happened, by a train of circumstances fully set forth in the History of the House of Seljuk [Tarikh-i-All-i-Seljuk] that Nizam-ul-Mulk attained the position of prime Minister. Omar-i-Khayyam waited upon him and reminded him of the vows and covenants of their school days. Nizam-ul-Mulk, recognizing these old claims, said, 'The government of Nishapur and the surrounding districts is yours.' But Omar who was a great man as well as an eminent philosopher and a man of sense, replied, 'I have no desire for the government of a province or for the restraining of the people by command and prohibition. Rather assign to me an allowance or stipend of the nature of a salary or pension.' So Nizam-ul-Mulk assigned him an allowance of ten thousand dinars from the treasury of Nishapur, to be paid and delivered to him year by year without diminution or charge.²⁴ 'The like manner 'Our Master' (Hasan-i-Sabbah) came from the City of Rayy to wait on him, and said, 'The noble man, when he promises, performs'. 'Take', answered Nizam-ul-Mulk, 'the government of Rayy.' Our Master, being a man of high ambition, was not contented or satisfied with so much and refused to accept it; for he cherished hopes of participating in the office of the Prime Minister. So Nizam-ul-Mulk bade him to attend the King's Court for a while; but perceiving that he was desirous of the post of Prime Minister, and was aiming at his own position and office, avoided him, and continued on his guard against him.²⁵

The story of these school friends presents some difficulties which have been pointed out by several orientalists. Apart from the dramatic and rather unrealistic style in which it is presented, there seems to be a problem of age difference. Nizam-ul-Mulk was born at the latest in AD 1020 and was assassinated in 485/1092.²⁶ The dates of birth of Hasan and Omar are unknown, but the former died in 518/1124²⁷ and the latter in 517/1123. In order that they have the same age group and are hence likely to be schoolmates, Hasan and Omar should both be centenarians. The western orientalists have rejected the story altogether, mainly due to the discrepancy in their groups.²⁸ The objection of incompatible age really does not hold much ground. The dates of birth of Hasan and Omar are absolutely

unknown, and the date of birth of Nizam-ul-Mulk is also not definitely recorded. The dates of death of all three are definitely known. It is also known that, although Nizam was assassinated, Hasan and Omar both died a natural death and both attained an old age. Rashid-ud-Din and Juvaini both say the following:

From the day Hasan first went up into the Castle of Alamut until he departed this world, that is to say, for a period of 35 years, he never descended there from and he only twice came out of the house (sarai) in which he lived. On these two occasions he went up on the roof.^{[29](#)}

This observation of Juvaini and Rashid-ud-Din could also indicate Hasan's old age, apart from other reasons for not appearing in public. One should also note that in those days, it was not absolutely necessary that classmates must have the same age. It was quite in order if the classmates had a difference in age, say up to five years. It is quite possible that they were not even in the same class but only in the same school together, Nizam being a senior student, with the other two being junior to him in age as well as in the class. An important factor in favour of the authenticity of the story is the source which has reported it. Not only *Tarikh-i-Guzeda* and *Wasaya* of Nizam-ul-Mulk have mentioned this story but also the historian of great repute, Rashid-ud-Din, has also reported it. The critics of the story suggest that it might have been fabricated by the Ismailis themselves, and Rashid-ud-Din picked it up from their literature and reported it without verifying its validity. I cannot understand this point of view as the story hardly goes in Hasan's favour. In fact, it could easily be interpreted against Hasan, who was most benevolently helped by his schoolmate Nizam-ul-Mulk and Hasan, instead of being grateful to him, turned against him and disgraced him in the Court of the Sultan and ultimately ordered his assassination. Thus, it would, perhaps, be fair to say that the arguments in favour of the story being true weigh slightly more than the argument against it.

If one accepts the point of view of the critics, then we must investigate the means by which Hasan entered the service in the Court of Seljuk rulers. We know that Hasan's father had some

friends in Ismaili circles, and it is quite logical that Hasan might have sought their help to get into the service of the Sultan. We should not forget that the sources report that at least two important persons, namely Rais Abul Fazal³⁰ and Rais Muzaffar,³¹ both holding important and trusted positions in the Seljuk government, had secretly accepted the Ismaili faith, and it was many years later that they declared themselves Ismailis, even though they had been working for the Ismaili cause throughout the period of their secrecy. One can assume that there were several other important officers in the Sultan's government who might have kept *taqiyya* throughout their lives as they could help the Ismaili cause more effectively in remaining (outwardly) trusted and faithful servants of the King. It is quite conceivable that Hasan might have sought help from some similar secret Ismaili officers in the court of the King.

Authenticated sources are silent about the details of Hasan's activities in the court of Sultan Alp-Arslan.³² It is possible that Hasan might have worked his way up in the court of the King and consequently occupied a senior position and, at the same time, would have made several influential friends like Rais Abul Fazal. Thus, he would have continued to serve his son Sultan Malik Shah after the sudden death of Sultan Alp-Arslan in 465/1072.

Again, the details of his activities do not appear in the sources, but two stories are mentioned which throw some light on the character of Hasan-i-Sabbah. Khwand, Amir narrates the following story in his book *Dastur-ul-Vuzara*.

A special variety of marble was mined in Aleppo in the Northern Syria. This stone was also widely used in making a variety of items such as useful and decorative vases and vessels by the local craftsmen and stonemasons.³³ Once, during a Journey to Aleppo, Sultan Malik Shah casually expressed his wish that a quantity of this special stone be brought over to his capital, Isfahan. Now one military officer connected with the transportation of the Seljuk Army took notice of the Sultan's wishes and hastened to carry them out. After the Sultan had left Syria, he hired two Arab transporters to take a quantity of stone to Isfahan. Now it so happened that each of these two Arabs already had 500 'mans'³⁴ of their own goods, which

they were transporting to Isfahan, and they had at their disposal six- and four-pack camels, respectively. The army officer urged these two Arabs to carry a further load of 500 'mans' of the marble on behalf of the Sultan. They agreed, and the stone was distributed amongst the ten-pack camels so that each animal carried a total weight of 150 'mans'. On their arrival in Isfahan, the army officer reported the matter to the Sultan, who was pleased with the officer and bestowed upon him a robe of honour. The Sultan also instructed Nizam-ul-Mulk, his grand Vizier, that a thousand *dinars* be paid to the transporters. When these Arabs approached the grand Vizier, he paid 600 dinars to the person with six camels and 400 dinars to the one who had four camels. When the news reached Hasan-i-Sabbah, he said that Nizam-ul-Mulk had made a gross error in the distribution of the Sultan's money by overpayment to one party, whereas the other was deprived of his rightful share. Hasan asserted that the correct distribution was of course that 800 dinars should have been paid to the owner of six camels and 200 dinars to that of four camels.³⁵

This instance was at once reported to the Sultan, who summoned his grand Vizier, and when he arrived in the Court of the Sultan, Hasan was already present. The Sultan, in a jovial mood, enquired into the incident, and Hasan, in a serious tone, reasserted his claims. The courtiers and the advisers of the Sultan asked Hasan to explain his point. Hasan then replied that as there were ten camels and 1500 'mans', weight was distributed equally among them; each animal carried 150 'man' weights. The owner of four camels was carrying an overall total of 600 'mans' weight, including 500 'mans' of his personal goods and so he was carrying only 100 'mans' of the Sultan's stone, whereas the remaining 400 'mans' of the Sultan's stone was carried by the owner of six camels. Out of 1000 dinars of the Sultan's money, every 100 'mans' weight carried deserved 200 dinars. Thus, the owner of four camels should have been paid 200 dinars, whereas the owner of six camels deserved 800 dinars. Hasan asserted that if the fair distribution was intended, it could not be anything else other than stated. If, however, it was considered as a reward or a gift from the Sultan, then it should have been divided equally between the two recipients, and hence, Hasan established

that the distribution made by the grand Vizier was unfair on either account.³⁶ The Sultan dismissed the whole affair outwardly as a joke, but internally, Hasan's sharp ability in mathematics made a deep impression on the Sultan's mind, which proved favourable to Hasan's position in the Court, and the Sultan began to consult Hasan on state matters more often.³⁷

The second story which follows is reported by Rashid-ud-Din, Mirkhwand, and Hamd Ullah Mustawafi, and the incident is placed towards the end of Hasan's career in the Court of Sultan Malik Shah. Once the Sultan desired to look at the complete accounts of the revenue of his empire and asked Nizam-ul-Mulk, his grand Vizier, to prepare the accounts of all the receipts and expenditure of every province in his kingdom. The Vizier demanded a period of two years for preparation of such an extensive record. When Hasan received this news, he confided in a senior officer of the Court, who was not on good terms with the Vizier, that he could complete the same task in forty days, provided he was given the facilities of the entire secretariat of the revenue department. The Sultan was informed of Hasan's claim, and as he was already impressed by his abilities,³⁸ he readily agreed and entrusted him with the task of preparation of the accounts of the exchequer of the government. While acceding to his request, the entire secretariat of the state treasury was put at his disposal. Hasan completed the accounts in the specified time and prepared a comprehensive report to be presented to the Sultan. When Nizam-ul-Mulk learnt about this, he was greatly disturbed as he feared that Hasan's success might bring his own downfall, and so he prepared a careful scheme to counter the imminent threat to his own interests. Now, Nizam-ul-Mulk had a faithful and trusted slave who was on good terms with Hasan's servant. He made an offer to his slave that if he, with the help of Hasan's servant, was able to disturb the order of Hasan's papers pertaining to the accounts, then, in exchange, he would grant him freedom as well as a reward of 1000 dinars.³⁹

On the appointed day, when Hasan was due to present his accounts to the Sultan, Nizam's slave threw Hasan's servant off his guard and found an opportunity to disturb the order of his papers.

According to another version, on the appointed day for the presentation of the accounts, Nizam-ul-Mulk himself stayed outside the Court of the Sultan where Hasan's servant, along with all the papers pertaining to the said accounts, was waiting. Nizam demanded from him the papers just to glance at them, and the servant, due to his inferior position, could not refuse the request of the grand Vizier and so handed the papers to him. Nizam, after a quick glance, found out that the accounts were in proper order and well-prepared and deliberately dropped the papers on the ground so that the papers were scattered, disordered, and mixed up. The servant picked up the papers quickly and arranged them in a random order and, due to fear, did not disclose the incident to his master, Hasan-i-Sabbah. Hasan, ignorant of this, believed that the pile of his papers were in proper order and went before the Sultan for presentation. When the Sultan demanded the accounts of certain provinces of his Kingdom, he started shuffling through the papers and could not answer promptly but, instead, uttered 'yes sir, yes sir', without making a satisfactory reply. The Sultan, well known for his temper, became furious at Hasan and dismissed him forthwith. Nizam-ul-Mulk, who was present in the Court, took the opportunity and remarked that when the wise demanded two years to complete a task and a fool claimed that he could accomplish the same in forty days, his reply to the Sultan could not be expected to be anything other than 'yes sir, yes sir'. Nizam continued and addressed the Sultan, 'Did I not warn, Your Majesty, that this man was quite unreliable and that his words were not trustworthy?' After this incident, the Sultan wanted to punish Hasan, and Nizam-ul-Mulk approved it wholeheartedly, and so Hasan had no alternative course left open to him, other than to run away and go into hiding.⁴⁰

Rashid-ud-Din narrates that Hasan went firstly to his native city Rayy, where he had many friends, but afterwards returned to Isfahan and stayed under the protection of his trusted friend Rais Abul Fazal.⁴¹ The story has a dramatic setting and is difficult to be accepted in its present form. It is, however, reported by several sources,⁴² and thus cannot be discredited altogether.

A more convincing explanation of Hasan's departure is given by Ibn al-Athir, who reports that he fell foul of the authorities in Rayy, who accused him of harbouring Egyptian agents and of being a dangerous agitator. To escape arrest, he fled from the city and embarked on a series of of journeys, ultimately travelling to Egypt, disguised as a merchant.⁴³ It is desirable at this stage to give an account of an early friend and confidant of Hasan's, a secret Ismaili by the name of Rais Abul Fazal, mentioned earlier.

II: Hasan and Rais Abul Fazal

It is difficult to say the exact date and circumstances when Rais Abul Fazal met Hasan. Most historians, including Rashid-ud-Din and Juvaini, agree that Rais Abul Fazal was a rich Iranian aristocrat who lived in Isfahan and was probably connected with the Seljuk Court in a senior capacity. He was secretly converted to the Ismaili faith by Hasan himself.⁴⁴ Most probably, Hasan made friends with Rais Abul Fazal during his service in the Court of the Seljuk Sultans in Isfahan. Rashid-ud-Din that, after his expulsion from the Court of Sultan Malik Shah, Hasan took refuge in the house of Rais Abul Fazal and enjoyed his protection prior to his journey to Egypt.⁴⁵ When Hasan returned from Egypt as an agent for the Fatimids, equipped with a mandate to preach the doctrines of Ismaili faith, he was considered as an enemy of the state and was being followed by the agents of Nizam-ul-Mulk in order to secure his arrest. In order to avoid the attention of the state police, he went into hiding and, for some time, took refuge in the house of Rais Abul Fazal, a secret convert and an old friend of Hasan who was a respected and prominent citizen of Isfahan.⁴⁶ Hasan had a great trust in his friend and often used to discuss his problems with him. One day, whilst bemoaning his lot and speaking of the fanatical attitude of the Sultan and his minister, Hasan-i-Sabbah heaved a sigh and said, 'Alas! Had I but two men of one mind with me, I should turn this realm upside down.'⁴⁷ Rais Abul Fazal concluded that, from much thought and fear and the undertaking of dangerous journeys, Hasan had been attacked with melancholia; otherwise, how could he imagine that with two persons of one mind, he could turn upside down the realm of a monarch, in whose name the khutba was recited and coin struck from Egypt to Kashghar and under whose banner so many thousands of horse and foot could, at one sign from him, break up a whole world? He pondered over this and said to himself, 'He is not a man to boast or use extravagant language. There is no doubt that he is affected with a disease of the brain.' Acting on his belief, he adopted the treatment for melancholia without speaking a word to Hasan. He prepared

perfumed drinks and food to fortify the constitution and moisten the brain such as is suitable for the sufferers of such a malady; at the usual mealtime, he laid this food and drink before him. As soon as Hasan saw it, he knew what was in the mind of his friend, and he immediately prepared to depart. The Rais begged and pleaded with him, but he refused to stay.⁴⁸ It is said that he went to Kirman. Upon his return from thence, he established himself in Alamut and caused Nizam-ul-Mulk to be slain by his fidais. Forty days later, Sultan Malik Shah died, and the affairs of the realm were thrown into confusion. There was chaos in the provinces. Hasan seized his opportunity and his cause flourished, and those who had some reason for fear took refuge with him. The aforesaid Rais Abul Fazal sought an opportunity and went to Alamut, where he was enrolled amongst his followers.⁴⁹ One day, Hasan turned to him and said, 'Does it seem now that I had melancholia or you? You have seen that when I found two friends to help me, I kept my words and proved my claim.'⁵⁰

Sometime after the death of Nizam-ul-Mulk, two of his sons (Ahmed and Fakhr-ul-Mulk) were stabbed in Baghdad and Nishapur, respectively, and the former was paralysed on its account. From then onwards, Hasan used the weapon of assassination, and the threat of his fidais more frequently against his enemies, and on this account, the local rulers, Amirs, Commanders, and the notables were all exposed to danger of his reprisals.⁵¹ After the death of Malik Shah, a quarrel broke out between his sons, Berkyark and Mohammad, and there was turmoil and confusion in the kingdom. Hasan took full advantage of the situation and successfully carried on his policy of expansion, conquering the Castle of Lamasar in 489/1096.⁵²

Footnotes

1. Rashid-ud-Din *Jamia-Tawarikh*, edited by Mohammad Dabir Sayyaqi, Tehran, 1958, p. 1; Juvaini *Jahan Gusha*, Vol. III, p. 188. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 667.
2. Abdur-Rehman Saif Azad, *Tarikh-i-Khulafa-i-Fatimi*, Tehran, AH 1382, p. 148. He refers to the history of Umar Abu Nasr the Egyptian. There is also a reference to Hasan's fathers tendencies to esoteric philosophy in Nizam-ul-Mulk's *Wasaya*, see Appendix II.
3. Ibid.
4. Rashid-ud-Din, p. 1; Juvaini, Vol. III, p. 187. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 667. According to some sources, e.g. Ibn al-Athir Hasan was born in Qum and was taken to Rayy as a child (B. Lewis, *The Assassins*, p. 38). According to Ibn-al-Jauzi (d. AD 1201), Hasan came originally from Merv.
5. B. Lewis, *The Assassins*, p. 38.
6. Abdur Rehman, *Tarikh-i-Khulafa-i-Fatimi*, p. 148. Sources do not mention the name of this Dai. It could be Amira Zarrab or Abu Najam Sarraj. Both of these Dais were centred in Rayy and were operating under the instructions of their Chief Dai Abdul-Malik Attash whose headquarters were in Isfahan.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid. Rashid-ud-Din and Juvaini, neither go into the details of the family of Hasan nor of Khawja Muwaffaq or Imam Muwaffaq.
9. The term 'Hadithan' (pl. Ahdath) was much used in the eleventh century for the para-military vigilante and police bands of citizens of the Syrian and Mesopotamians towns. Imam Muwaffaq seems to be a member of this para-military (Sahib-Hadithan) organisation in Nishapur.
10. al-Farisi, *Kitab as-Siyah* Arabic MS. Cited by Bosworth in *The Ghaznavids*, Chapter IX, pp. 994-1040.
11. Nizam-ul-Mulk, *Siyasat Nama*, Urdu, trans. by Shah Hasan Ata, Karachi, 1926.
12. Ibid.
13. Nasir-i-Khusraw (d. AD 1090) narrates in his *Safar Nama*: 'On Saturday 11 Shawal I arrived in Nishapur. The last Wednesday of the month was an eclipse and the ruler of the time was Toghril Beg Mohammad brother of Chagri Beg who had laid the foundation of the Madrasa near the bazar of saddlers. This school was being built where as he had gone to his government in Isfahan. On 2 Zul-Qada, I went out from Nishapur accompanied by Khawja Muwaffaq who was greatly respected by the Sultan (Khawja-i-Sultan bood). We reached Kumas via Kawan and paid respect to the tomb of Ba-Yazid Bastami'.
14. See G. Makdisi, 'Muslim institution of learning in the eleventh century,' *BSOAS*, pp. 1-56, 1961. Tibawi, *Origin and Character of al-Madrasa*, *BSOAS*, pp.

225-38, 1961. Also *Cambridge History of Persia*, Vol. 5, pp. 214-5. Khawja Muwaffaq or Imam Muwaffaq: no detailed biography is available, although he is mentioned by Nasir-i-Khusraw (see footnote 13). Also in *Siyasat Nama* by Nizam-ul-Mulk.

- [15.](#) Nizam-ul-Mulk, *EI*₁, p. 932.
- [16.](#) *EB*. Omar Khayyam.
- [17.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 20.
- [18.](#) Ibn al-Athir, anno 494, X, 216/VIII, 201. 'The teaching programme of the Baghdad Nizamiyya comprised the *Qur'an*, *hadith* (traditions), *usul-al-fiqh* (Jurisprudence), *kalam* (scholastic theology), *Aribiyya* (Arabic language and literature), *adab* (belles letters), *riyadiyya* (mathematics) and *fara'id* (Laws of inheritance).' *Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 5, p. 216.
- [19.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 1.
- [20.](#) Ibn al-Athir, anno 494, X, 216/VIII, 201.
- [21.](#) Omar Abu-al-Nasr Misri quoted by Abdul Rehman Saif Azad in *Tarikh-i-Khulafa-i-Fatimi*, p. 152.
- [22.](#) Nizam-ul-Mulk, *EI*₂.
- [23.](#) Hamd Allah Mustawafi Qazvini: *Tarikh-i-Guzeda*, edited by E. G. Browne, 1910, p. 439.
- [24.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 20.
- [25.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 21.
- [26.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- [27.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- [28.](#) E. G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. II, p. 190; E. G. Browne, 'Yet more Light on Umar-i-Khayyam', Part XXXI, *JRAS* 1899; H. Bowen, 'The Sargudhasht-i-Sayyidna: The Tale of Three Schoolfellows and the Wasaya of the Nizam-ul-Mulk', Part IV, *JRAS* October 1931.
- [29.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 215. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 683, Rashid-ud-Din, pp. 56-57.
- [30.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 205. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 677.
- [31.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 194. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 670.
- [32.](#) Hamd Ullah Mustawafi in his works *Tarikh-i-Guzeda* (pp. 517 and 445) records that Hasan took up a post of Chamberlain (Hajib) to Sultan Alp-Arslan. A quarrel took place between him and the grand Vizier Nizam-ul-Mulk which resulted in Hasan's expulsion from the Court in AH 464. Some other writers, e.g. Rashid-ud-Din, are of the opinion that he was expelled in the reign of Sultan Malik Shah, son of Sultan Alp-Arslan.
- [33.](#) Khwand, Amir, *Dastur-ul-Vuzara* quoted by Karim Kashawarz.
- [34.](#) 'man' (*pl'mans*) is a unit of weight. 'Man' differs in weight from region to region and from country to country. What it was equivalent to, in modern terms is not certain.

- [35.](#) Khwand, Amir, op. cit.
- [36.](#) Ibid.
- [37.](#) Ibid.
- [38.](#) This points out that probably there were earlier incidents which impressed the Sultan in favour of Hasan, e.g. the story stated earlier.
- [39.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, pp. 21-22. Hamd Ullah Mustawafi *Tarikh-i-Guzeda*, p. 445, places the story in the time of Sultan Alp-Arslan, father of Sultan Malik Shah and dates the incident in AH 464.
- [40.](#) Ibid.
- [41.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 22.
- [42.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, *Jamia-Tawarikh*, pp. 21-22; Hamd Ullah Mustawafi. *Tarikh-i-Guzeda*, p. 445.
- [43.](#) Ibn al-Athir, anno 494, pp. X, 215-16/viii, 201.
- [44.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 205. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 677, Rashid-ud-Din, p. 22.
- [45.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 22.
- [46.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 205. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 677.
- [47.](#) In Rashid-ud-Din's version Hasan's prophecy to Abul Fazal had been before his visit to Egypt. Juvaini placing the story, where it fits in comfortably, after his return. Rashid-ud-Din gives virtually the same story with slight variation in its wording. Here R. D. reports Hasan saying 'Alas! had I but two men with one heart, I will reply that Turk and this Peasant', meaning Sultan Malik Shah who was Seljuk Turk and Nizam-ul-Mulk who came from a peasant family of Tus (Rashid-ud-Din, p. 23).
- [48.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 205. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 677, Rashid-ud-Din, p. 23.
- [49.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 206. trans. Boyle, pp. 677-8, Rashid-ud-Din, p. 25.
- [50.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 206. trans. Boyle, pp. 677-8, Rashid-ud-Din, p. 25.
- [51.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 25.
- [52.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 29.

Chapter 3

Hasan's Conversion to Ismaili Faith and Visit to Egypt

I: Hasan's Conversion to Ismaili Faith

It is difficult to say exactly when Hasan actually embraced the Ismaili faith. Rayy had been the home of pro-Egyptian Ismailis and the centre of Shia activities for nearly a century. It was here that Sayyidna Abu Hatim al-Razi (260-322/873-934), the famous Ismaili Dai, was born and later worked in the capacity of 'Hujjat-e-Jazira' (the Chief of Ismaili Dai for Iraq and western Iran) and is particularly known for his activities in Rayy, Tabaristan, Isfahan and Azerbaijan. He was able to convert several people to the Ismaili faith, including the ruler of Rayy, Ahmed bin Ali (304-311/916-923).¹

Hasan's father might have selected his place of residence in Rayy because of his sympathies with such an organisation. There are further suggestions that Ismaili Dawa was operating in a much wider area and was having success in its mission. Rashid-ud-Din observes the following:

'In the time of Sultan Mahmud, Abu Ali Simjur,² a large group of people had taken up that path. Nasr bin Ahmed al-Samani³ and a section of very important persons of Bokhara had also accepted this faith.'⁴ It has been said that Hasan's father, although a theologian of the Isna-asheria faith, did have tendencies towards esoteric philosophy and that he was friendly with an Ismaili Dai.⁵

It is probable that Hasan may have got into contact with an Ismaili Dai when he was a young boy, although it would probably have

taken several years before he actually accepted the Ismaili faith. He mentions in his *Sarguzasht*⁶ (biography) that:

In Rayy I saw rafiq (comrade)⁷ Amira Zarrab (coiner) who was a believer and follower of the Egyptian Caliph.⁸

The date of the first meeting with Amira Zarrab is unknown. It is likely that even in his school days, he might have known about the Ismailis and might have been familiar with their doctrines, but it seems that a serious encounter with the Ismaili Dais took place after he had completed his education.⁹ He mentions in his *Sarguzasht* that after meeting Amira Zarrab, he used to have frequent discussions with him. He describes Amira Zarrab as a man of very good character and charming manners who always advocated support of the Ismaili faith and put forward many arguments in favour of his claims. Hasan, however, would not accept his point of view, counter-arguing 'that Ismailis are outside the pale of Islam and their Imam is only a philosopher and thus their point of view in connection with the Islamic religion has no value'.¹⁰

I never had any doubt in the truth of Islam, that there is a God, Unique and all powerful, who sees and hears everything. I believed in Prophets and Imams, that there are legitimate and illegitimate things, there are commandments and prohibitions. I thought that the faith and belief is what majority adhere to particular the shia faith and I never imagined that the truth could ever be sought outside the pale of Islam and Ismaili faith was but a Philosophy.¹¹

The period of his association with Amira Zarrab seems to have lasted quite some time, during which he was able to shatter Hasan's original belief and persuade him to look into the Ismaili faith more seriously.

During our conversation on various occasions we had debates and discussions and he did succeed in wounding and breaching my belief, although I remained stubborn in refusing to accept his arguments, however, in my own heart, these arguments did leave a permanent and lasting impression.¹²

Hasan narrates that at this time a separation took place between Amira Zarrab and himself.¹³ It could be due to the transfer of Amira

Zarrab to a distant station of an Ismaili Dawa. Hasan, however, in search of truth, made a deeper study of the Ismaili literature and found convincing arguments in favour of the Imamatus of Ismail. When he thought of the principle of hidden Imams,¹⁴ he was confused as he believed that Imam was designated by *nass*,¹⁵ which was impossible to verify when he was underground. Sometime later, Hasan fell into an arduous and frightful illness¹⁶ and lost any hope of recovery. During this illness, he deliberated over his religious beliefs (which were already shaken) and arrived at a decision that Ismaili faith was the right one and, should he die without accepting it, he would perish in unbelief. Ultimately, he got out of this terrible illness and recovered.¹⁷ Now, Hasan began an earnest search for an Ismaili Dai and ultimately he found one. Thus, he says:

I found another person from the Ismailis. His name was Bu-Najam Sarraj. I made inquiries from him regarding this religion and he explained and elaborated the faith to me until I understood completely even the abstruse matters of the faith. And there was another person whose name was Mumin who had been delegated proper authority for Ismaili Dawa by the chief Dai Abdul-Malik Attash.^{18, 19}

It was probably Bu-Najam Sarraj who introduced and recommended Hasan to Mumin, the official representative of the Ismaili Dawa in Rayy. Hasan might have had several meetings with Mumin, and they would have known each other very well. The sources say that Mumin began to respect Hasan for his piety and spiritual advancement to such an extent that, when Hasan requested Mumin to administer his oath of allegiance to the Ismaili Imam al-Mustansir, the Fatimid Caliph of Egypt, Mumin refused his request at first, saying that Hasan's status was higher than that of his own, so then how could he administer an oath of allegiance and baya on behalf of the Imam? Later on, after great persuasion and some soliciting, Mumin agreed to administer an oath from Hasan and formally accepted him to enter into the Ismaili faith.²⁰

In the month of Ramadan 464/1072, Abdul-Malik Attash, who held the position of a Chief Dai and head of the Ismaili Dawa in Iraq and

western Iran, came to Rayy and stayed in this important provincial centre for a period of three years. During his stay in Rayy, he would have received a complete progress report of the activities and the achievements of this centre by his deputy, probably Mumin himself. He would also have been briefed regarding the qualities and potentials of the newly converted Hasan who was formally presented to him. Hasan recalls his meeting with Dai Attash in the following words:

He liked me and authorised me to work as his deputy in the Ismaili Dawa and advised me to make a visit to the Imam.^{[21](#)}

Reviewing the situation at this stage, it appears that Hasan formally accepted the Ismaili faith sometime before Sheikh Abdul-Malik Attash arrived in Rayy in 464/1072, which falls in the last year of Sultan Alp-Arslan's rule, as the Sultan died in 465/1072. Thus, it becomes clear that Hasan must have accepted the Ismaili faith when he was actually in the service of Sultan Alp-Arslan where he was holding a senior post of Hajib (Chamberlain) to the Sultan. It was, however, impossible to stay in the service of the government and be a declared member of the Ismaili community. Thus, one is led to the conclusion that Hasan's conversion must have been a secret one. Hasan, by virtue of his senior position close to the Sultan, must have been of immense value to the Ismailis, who would have urged him to stay as a trusted friend of the Sultan, observing strict *taqiyya* of his real feelings.

It might be just due to Hasan's high office in the Court of the Sultan that Dai Mumin remarked that his status was higher than that of his own and thus was reluctant to accept from him his baya to the Imam. It may again be due to his status in the Court that Sheikh Attash made him his deputy straight away without climbing up in the hierarchy of the Dawa. And again, it might be true (as Ibn al-Athir has reported)^{[22](#)} that his allegiance to the Fatimid Caliph was discovered and that this was the real cause of his expulsion from the Court of the Sultan Malik Shah. Thus, he had to hide and run for his life because, once discovered as a supporter of the Fatimids, he

would not be allowed to live. He was always on the run, avoiding his own arrest at the hands of the Seljuks.

It was, in fact, common practice for every government employee with Shiite belief to observe strict *taqiyya* because, if his real identity became public, he would be thrown out of employment and, possibly, face more severe punishment, including death. It is thus no surprise that Hasan kept the secrecy of his new faith as long as he stayed in the service of the government. We know several other secret converts, such as Rais Abul Fazal, Rais Muzzafar, and Husain Qaini, who were holding important positions in the Seljuk government, and they did not declare their true identity until time was favourable to them. There might be several other secret converts who did not divulge their true identity throughout their life because they could serve the cause of their faith best in observing a strict *taqiyya* of their religious views.

II: Hasan's Visit to Egypt

It was from Isfahan in 469/1076 that Hasan undertook a long and dangerous journey to Egypt, according to Rashid-ud-Din, at the suggestion of his superior Dai Sheikh Attash.²³ Hasan left Isfahan by way of Azerbaijan. After experiencing risks and stopping at various places, he ultimately reached Mayyafariqin.²⁴ Rashid-ud-Din gives the details of an incident that took place here, which refers to Hasan's involvement in a theological debate with the elite of the city on the subject of *ijtihad*. Hasan asserted the exclusive right of the Imam to interpret religion, thus denying the authority of the Sunni Ulema. Hasan's views on the subject were considered so radical that the people participating in the debate were outraged and the matter was referred to the Qadi of the city. The Qadi was alarmed and, on account of a real danger to the peace of the city, gave orders for Hasan's expulsion from the city. So Hasan left Mayyafariqin and, in due course, arrived in Mosul. He then took an open track through Sanjar to Rahba and then onwards through the desert of Samava, arriving at Damascus on the day of Eid.²⁵ Rashid-ud-Din, however, does not specify further details regarding the Eid.

A Turk named At-Siz²⁶ had gone to Cairo for a battle but was defeated and put to flight, from where he returned to Damascus, and this was the cause of disturbances in the city. The overland route to Egypt was blocked by military disturbances, and for this reason, Hasan changed his originally planned land route and arrived instead in Beirut and from there to Saida (Sidon), Sur (Tyre), Akka (Acre), and Qaysariyya (Caesarea). Here he went to the harbour and sailed in a ship heading for Egypt.²⁷ The sea was very rough and it took him seven days to reach Tinnis, and then from there, he arrived at the city of Makees, which is in the vicinity of Cairo.²⁸

A party of representatives of the Caliph comprising Bu-Daud, *Dai-al-Duat* (Chief Dai), and Sharif Tahir Qazvini came to receive him. On Wednesday, seventeenth of Safar in 471/1078, Hasan reached Qahira (Cairo). Al-Mustansir, the Fatimid Caliph, sent his nobles and courtiers to receive Hasan and to provide him with all the comforts during his stay in Egypt. He stayed in Cairo for a period of one and a half years, and during this period, although he was not formally presented to the Caliph in person,²⁹ the Caliph knew all about him and his circumstances and praised him repeatedly, so much so, that some courtiers became jealous of him and were apprehensive of his position and status. Amir-al-Juyush Badr-al-Jamali (the Commander of the armed forces) who was also the grand Vizier to the Caliph, was virtually the sole controller of the state affairs and indeed was the de facto ruler of the country. He supported the cause of Mustali, the younger son of the Caliph, al-Mustansir, and wanted him as his wali Ahad (heir apparent).³⁰ Hasan, however, according to the principles of the Ismaili Dawa, supported the first designation (*nass*) which had been made in favour of Nizar, the eldest son of the Caliph, as his successor. Due to this clash of basic and fundamental views and principles, Badr-al-Jamali hated Hasan and wished to deport him to an offshore Island of Damyat (Damietta),³¹ where he could be put in a security prison for life, but the Caliph would not consent to this proposal. The Dailamites³² offered Hasan some help against Badr-al-Jamali, but he declined their assistance. During the time of this dispute it so happened that, in the same week, the towers and walls

of the Castle of Damiyat (Damietta), which were raised on water, collapsed and were destroyed.³³

Prominent persons considered it quite an astonishing coincidence and attributed it to the *mujazat* (miracles) of al-Mustansir and *karamat* (miracles) of Sayyidna Hasan-i-Sabbah.³⁴

Due to this incident, people showed great generosity towards Hasan, and in the company of prominent persons, he took a boat and sailed to the west (Magrib) by sea, arriving in Alexandria in the month of Rajab 472/1079.³⁵

Rashid-ud-Din mentions Hasan's stay in Alexandria but does not give any details. He then mentions Hasan taking a boat from Alexandria and describes the voyage as follows:

During this voyage, an unexpected storm of violent gales arose and the boat was damaged. People fell into panic and despair, but Sayyidna (Hasan) remained cool and calm. Someone asked him, how was he so calm in such a situation? To this he replied that Mustansir has informed him regarding this situation advising him to stay calm as no harm will come to him.³⁶

As the sea was very rough, it forced the boat towards the Syrian Coast and ultimately Hasan reached the port of Jabla,³⁷ which was a Christian city. The Qadi of Jabla³⁸ came out to receive him and showed his hospitality towards him. From there, he took another boat to Suvidia, and from there, he reached the city of Haleb (Aleppo). From Haleb, he came by way of Baghdad and Khuzistan to Isfahan at the end of the month of Zul-Hijja in 473/1080.³⁹

III: Itinerary of Hasan's Travels

Hasan presented to Sheikh Abdul-Malik Attash AH 464, Ramadan
who visits Rayy,

Hasan, presumably accompanies Sheikh Attash, AH 467
who leaves Rayy for Isfahan,

Hasan embarking on a journey to Egypt leaves AH 469
Isfahan for Azerbaijan,

Hasan goes from Azerbaijan to Mayyafariqin
Hasan leaves Mayyafariqin and arrives in Mosul
to Sanjar to Rahba to Damascus to Beirut to
Saida (Sidon) to Sur (Tyre) to Akka (Acre) to
Qaysariyya (Caesarea) by boat to Tinnis to
Makees (Egypt)

Hasan arrives in Qahira (Cairo), AH 471, 17 Safar

After a stay of seventeen months in Cairo, Hasan
commences his return journey

Hasan arrives in Alexandria, Rajab AH 472

Then by boat to Jabla, then to Suvidia, and then
to Haleb (Aleppo).

From Aleppo to Baghdad to Khuzistan, and then AH 473, Zul-Hijja
Hasan arrives in Isfahan,

Footnotes

- [1.](#) Abu Hatim al-Razi, *EI*.
- [2.](#) Abu Ali Simjur was head of Nishapur under the late Samanids.
- [3.](#) Nasr (301-31/913-42) was the last Samanid King who lost his Kingdom because of his inclinations towards Ismailism. *Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 1, p. 146.
- [4.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 2.
- [5.](#) Nizam-ul-Mulk, *Wasaya*, see Appendix II.
- [6.](#) *Sarguzasht-i-Sayyidna (the biography of Hasan-i-Sabbah)* was a book picked up by Juvaini from the library of Alamut at its fall at the hands of the Mongols in AD 1256. Juvaini and Rashid-ud-Din have quoted frequently from this book.
- [7.](#) Rafiq (Comrade) was the usual word that the Ismailis used when addressing each other. It was the lower stage in the hierarchy of Ismaili *Dawa*.
- [8.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 2.
- [9.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 2. He says that up to the age of seventeen, he was absorbed in full time education.
- [10.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 2.
- [11.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, pp. 2-3.
- [12.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 3.
- [13.](#) Ibid.
- [14.](#) After Imam Ismail, four generations of Imams went underground (Mohammad, Wafi Ahmed, Taqi Mohammad, Razi-ud-Din Abdullah) and their whereabouts were known only to the selected and trusted *Dais* until Ubaid Ullah al-Mahdi came out in the open as an Ismaili Imam and founded the Fatimid Caliphate. This period of underground Imams is known as the period of *Satar* in the Ismaili History, from AD 765 to AD 908.
- [15.](#) *Nass* (explicit, unequivocal declaration of succession to the imamat).
- [16.](#) Hasan might be talking metaphorically refer to his spiritual illness.
- [17.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 3.
- [18.](#) Sheikh Abdul-Malik Attash was the Chief-in-charge of the Ismaili Dawa for Iraq and Western Iran. He lived in Isfahan and worked as a physician. He was also a fine calligrapher and a well-known man of letters. Several books were seen in Isfahan in his hand (al-Rawandi, *Rahat al-Sudur wa Ayat al-Surur* edited by Mohammad Iqbal, p. 156). According to Ibn al-Athir, he was respected for his scholarship even in the Sunni circles.
- [19.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 4.
- [20.](#) Ibid.
- [21.](#) Ibid. Here Rashid-ud-Din quotes from the *Sarguzasht*.

- [22.](#) Ibn al-Athir, anno 494, X, 110 who says that Hasan was suspected of frequenting the assemblies of the 'Egyptian Propagandists' (*Duat-ul-Misriyyin*) in Rayy on account of which suspicion he was compelled to flee from thence.
- [23.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 4. Hasan, probably, was in possession of letters of introduction to various Ismaili contacts on the way to Egypt, who would look after him on his long journey. Ibn al-Athir reports that Hasan travelled in the guise of a merchant (anno 494, X, 110).
- [24.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 4.
- [25.](#) Ibid.
- [26.](#) It is confirmed by Ibn al-Athir that At-Siz had in fact been defeated and driven back into Syria by the Fatimids in 469/1076-7, the year of Hasan's departure from Iran; and the Damascus district continued in a state of disturbance till the city was taken over early in 471/1078-9 by Sultan Malik Shah's brother Tutush soon after Hasan's arrival in Cairo (Ibn al-Athir, Vol. X years 469, 471).
- [27.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 5.
- [28.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 6.
- [29.](#) Here Ibn al-Athir differs from Rashid-ud-Din. He says that Hasan met the Caliph in person, and during their meeting asked him as to who would follow him as the Imam and to this he answered 'My son Nizar who is the eldest'. (Ibn al-Athir year 487, Vol. X).
- [30.](#) Mustali was hardly 10 years of age at this time. There is no evidence that at this time any public designation was made in his favour as a future Imam. It was in fact at his deathbed that al-Mustansir is said to have left his nomination in Mustali's favour. See S. M. Stern, 'The Epistle of the Fatimid Caliph al-Amir', *JRAS*, 1950.
- [31.](#) Damiyat (Damietta): a town of Lower Egypt situated on the eastern branch of the river Nile near the sea. In 238/853, a castle was built for the defence of the entrance to Egypt.
- [32.](#) People of Daylaman, north of Iran, south of the Caspian Sea. Daylaman has been noted for the Shii tendencies since the early history of Islam in Iran. Some Daylamites with Ismaili faith must have settled in the Fatimid capital and would have natural sympathy with Hasan who also came from Iran.
- [33.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 7.
- [34.](#) Ibid., p. 7. *mujaza*, pl. *mujazat* is a miracle attributed to the prophets and Imams, whereas *karamat* is a miracle attributed to the saints or people of rank lower than that of an Imam in Ismaili hierarchy.
- [35.](#) Ibid, p. 7.
- [36.](#) Ibid.
- [37.](#) Jabla is a small harbour on the Syrian coast about 30 km south of Latakia.

[38.](#) It is possible that the city had a Muslim population as well, and Qadi might be responsible for that section only. It is also possible the Rashid-ud-Din has used a familiar Muslim title for a Christian Judge of the city.

[39.](#) Rashid-ud-in, p.8.

Chapter 4

I: Hasan in Search of a Centre of Dawa

Hasan returned to Isfahan after a long absence in the end of Zul-Hijja AH 473. His journey abroad had lasted nearly four years. During his travels, he would have made many observations, witnessed many events, and would have gained first-hand information on the society in which he was living. He had an opportunity to study from close quarters the three political powers dominating the world of Islam, namely the Seljuk Turks, the Abbasid Caliphs,¹ and the Fatimid Caliphs. He experienced hardships due to his beliefs and principles, and sometimes, he was forced to run for his life, but it is likely he made some good friends who would have agreed with his ideals and convictions. He had already received a mandate to preach in Iran on behalf of the Ismaili Imam al-Mustansir, the Fatimid Caliph in Cairo, who also commanded him to carry the Dawa in the name of his eldest son Nizar, the Imam designate, after he himself had died. This made Hasan virtually in charge of the Ismaili Dawa in Iran, which was previously run by his teacher, Sheikh Abdul-Malik Attash. He took his new responsibility very seriously and commenced his work without wasting any time.

A problem remains concerning the ten-year period from AD 1080 (Hasan's arrival in Isfahan) to AD 1090 (Hasan's occupation of the Castle of Alamut). The question is to decide the aims and purpose of Hasan's extensive travels during the said period. We know this much- that he has been travelling in various districts of Iran, including Khuzistan in the south, Quhistan in the east, Daylaman and the Alburz mountain range in the north. Rashid-ud-Din has given dates and places of his movements but is silent regarding Hasan's activities during his travels, which is quite understandable as the Ismaili organisation was totally banned throughout the Seljuk Empire

and Hasan had to observe an absolute secrecy regarding his activities. One way to handle this situation is to establish a link between the places Hasan visited, along with their geographical positions, and the inhabitants of these places, including their religious and political tendencies, with proper references to these areas after the establishment of the Ismaili state in Iran. As it became clear later, Hasan must now be planning to establish a religio-political state in Iran affiliated to the Ismaili centre in Egypt. In order to realise his objective, he needed many sincere friends, sympathetic to his cause, who in turn would help him in mobilising the opinion of the masses in his favour.

Indeed, some of his friends, such as Rais Muzaffar, Rais Abul Fazal, Hussain Qaini, and Ahmed Attash, rendered valuable services to the Ismaili cause. For many years they remained, outwardly, as the trusted friends and supporters of the Seljuk rulers, but in secret, they were devoted friends of the Ismaili cause. There must be several others who, in the best interests of the Ismaili faith, were to observe a permanent *taqiyya* for the whole of their lives. They were allowed to stay in their outward role as the friends and hands of the Seljuk rulers while secretly rendering valuable services to Hasan's mission. Hasan valued these secret agents tremendously as they were not exposed to the persecution of their enemies. Hasan wanted to make more contacts with influential people who could agree to his religious views and political aspirations. However, this was not sufficient. It seems that he wanted to present his case so that it would have general appeal to the masses. Iran was under the domination of the foreign Turks. The country was run on a feudal system. Various prominent military lords, usually Turkish Amirs, were given big parcels of land and strongholds under *Iqta*.² These lords taxed their subjects heavily, had their own army and castles and lived in style at the expense of their subjects, who led poor and miserable lives. It was natural for Hasan to enlist the support of such subjects if he could offer them a better alternative. He could also arouse their national pride against the occupation of a foreign oppressor, whereas he could gain the sympathy of the peasants who led a life of injustice at the hands of the ruling lords, and he also

wanted to convert sections of people with known Shii inclinations to his own faith.

Khuzistan had a long tradition of Shiite sympathies, and the militant Karamatias had been active there for a long time in the past. Indeed, the Ismaili Dawa was still active in the time of Hasan in this area. In the search of a centre, Hasan's first choice might have been the province of Khuzistan, south-west of Iran, and the Zagros mountain range, which provided a natural refuge from the attacks of the ruling power. Rashid-ud-Din reports that on his return journey from Egypt, Hasan stopped in Khuzistan before reaching Isfahan. Soon after his arrival in Isfahan, he travelled again southwards to Yazd and Kirman and was engaged in his mission for some time before he returned to Isfahan. He then headed for Frim and Sheryar-i-Koh and stayed there for four months. Later, he went to Khuzistan again and, after a three-month stay, came back to Isfahan again.³ It seems possible that Hasan might have shortlisted Khuzistan as a possible centre of his future activities. It had all the ingredients he was looking for. The country was mountainous, it had some impregnable castles located in the district and it was populated by people of Shii inclinations, who could be persuaded to accept his doctrines readily. There was, however, one big drawback in its selection; this was its close proximity to Baghdad, the seat of the Sunni Caliphate. Thus, during this trip, although he might have gained new converts and supporters to his cause, this area was destined to remain only a provincial centre of Ismaili Dawa.

He then travelled through the desert route, hard and dangerous, and came to the city of Damghan where he remained busy in a search for a period of three years, going to and fro between Damghan, Gurgan, and Junashik.⁴ From there, he came to Sheryar Koh and sent a team of missionaries to the Andaj-rud⁵ and the district of Alamut.⁶ The missionaries, such as Hasan-Ka-Kasrani, Khawaja Ali Khaldan Qazvini, Khawaja Ismail Qazvini, Mohammad Jamal Razi, Kiya Bu-Cassum Larjani, Ali Namadgar Damavandi and Padshah Alvi Razi were sent forth so that they may bring the people into the fold of their mission. For the same purpose, he himself went to Jurjan, Taraz, Suhd and Junashik; he wanted to go to Daylaman,

but as he did not wish to pass through Rayy, he decided to turn back. The reason for his avoiding Rayy was that Nizam-ul-Mulk had instructed Abu Muslim Razi (governor of Rayy) to arrest Hasan. Abu Muslim tried his best to achieve his objective but without any success.⁷ Hasan then came to Sari and wished to travel by way of Damavand but he had to stop at night outside a village on the way to Astar as they had lost their way. However, in the morning, he resumed his journey by way of Kazi Basham and reached Damavand.⁸ It is said that Abu Muslim Razi, who was in pursuit of Hasan, was accidentally stationed on the same route that night.⁹ From there, he reached Khar near Rayy and then to Qazvin. Now he had separated himself from others in the vicinity of Rayy and stayed in Qazvin for a few days, and a team of persons who accompanied him were sent individually to Alamut. Then afterwards, he himself also came to Alamut.¹⁰

It is evident from the above account that Hasan had begun to concentrate on the far north of Iran. Establishing himself in Damghan, where he stayed for three years, he dispatched Dais to work among the mountain dwellers, and he himself travelled tirelessly to direct and assist their efforts. He would probably have explored the districts of Mazanderan and Daylaman intensively. The mountain dwellers of this area were known for their hardy and independent attitude towards life and were already sympathetic to the Ismaili cause. His final choice for his centre of activities fell on the fortress of Alamut, built on top of a high rock and situated in a difficult and dangerous terrain at an altitude of over 6000 feet in the Alburz mountain range, south of the Caspian Sea. The castle could be reached by a narrow and winding path through the narrow gorge of Alamut River between very steep and sometimes overhanging cliffs and was ideally situated for its defences.¹¹

In those days, the governor of Alamut was a man named Alvi Mahdi who was holding the castle on behalf of Sultan Malik Shah. Hasan sent one of his assistants, Hussain Qaini, to Alamut on a religious mission. The people of Alamut accepted the Ismaili faith. The governor of the castle also accepted the faith by the words of his mouth, although, in his heart, he wanted to cheat the Ismailis.

One day, he persuaded the inhabitants to leave the castle and then closed the gates, saying that the castle was the property of the Sultan and that he would not tolerate the inhabitants to be followers of Hasan. After a long persuasion, he allowed them to re-enter the castle, and after this incident, the inhabitants never obeyed Alvi's request to leave the castle again.¹² Hasan sent Abul Cassam to Shah Koh but he himself, accompanied by Dh-Khuda-i-Khusraw, who had come to join Hasan from Junashik, proceeded from Qazvin to Daylaman by way of Bira and Anbah. He then, by way of Silsiko Ashkot, reached Andaj-rud in the month of Rajab AH 483. Hasan stayed here for some time, and due to his piety and asceticism, a large number of people were attracted towards him and accepted his Dawa (mission). On the night of Wednesday, 6 Rajab AH 483, he came to the gates of Alamut and gave his name as Dh-Khuda¹³ entering anonymously.¹⁴ In the olden days, the castle was named 'Aluh Amut' (the Eagle's Nest). It turned out to be an exceptional and strange coincidence that the letters of Aluh Amut in the account of Abjad¹⁵ total up the year of Hasan's ascent (AH 483) when he entered the castle in secrecy. When Alvi Mahdi came to know the reality of the situation, that he was no more in control of the castle, he was allowed to leave the castle, and the price of the castle was fixed at 3000 golden dinars. A draft of this amount was written and addressed to the governor of Gird-i-Koh and Damghan Rais Muzaffar Mustawafi,¹⁶ who, in private, had accepted Ismaili faith. Hasan, due to his simplicity and austerity, wrote a note which was brief and comprehensive, and it evidently supports the simplicity of character. The lines in casual handwriting¹⁷ were as follows:

Rais Muzaffar (May God protect him!) is to pay 3000 dinars, the price of Alamut to Alvi Mahadi. Blessing upon the Elect Prophet and his family!

Our sufficiency is Allah and He is an excellent protector.^{18,19}

Alvi took the draft and thought to himself that Rais Muzaffar was a great man and was deputy to Amirdad Habashi,²⁰ the son of Altun-Taq. How would he give him something in exchange for a note of an ordinary man? Some time later, Alvi happened to be in Damghan, and being in needy circumstances, he put the matter to the test and

took the note to Rais Muzaffar, who kissed the writing and paid him the gold.²¹ Alamut was an impregnable castle, although its buildings were old and worn out and its atmosphere was not quite cheerful, being mainly due to the lack of sufficient water supply. There was only a small water spring available, which was quite inadequate for its needs.²² Hasan ordered that a canal (Ju) be brought from the mountains of Anjad-rud and Mah-rud. Many villages in the vicinity of Alamut were founded along this canal and willow trees were planted on its banks and for this reason, the atmosphere of the place became cheerful. He also ordered several buildings be made on the top of the castle. In the time of Kiya Buzurg Ummid (518-532/1124-1138),²³ a water canal was brought inside the castle, and ever since, the water flow has been maintained continuously inside the castle throughout the year.²⁴

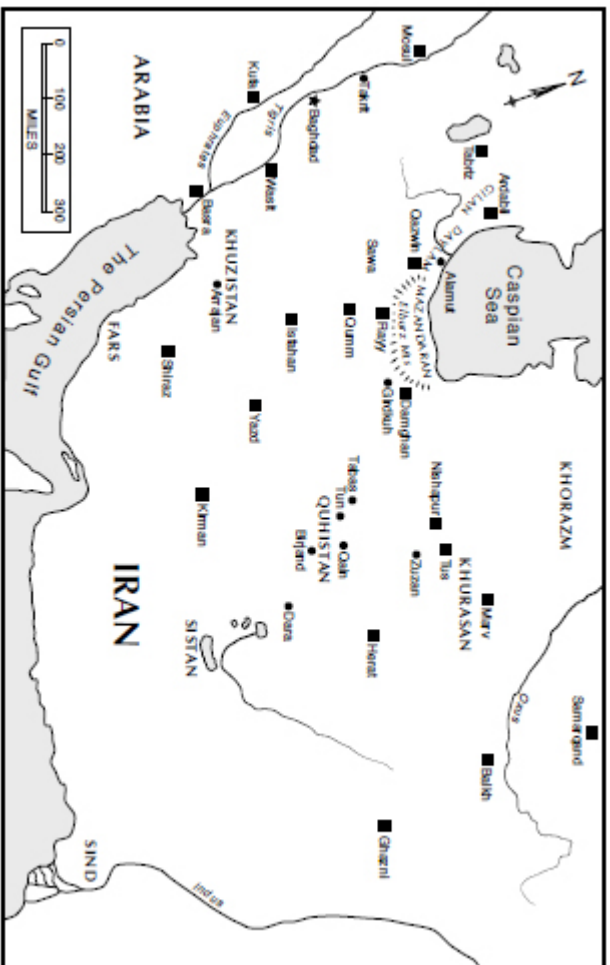
At the fall of Alamut (654/1256), Ata-ul-Mulk Juvaini was allowed to go up and examine the famous central Ismaili library. He got a rare opportunity to make detailed observations and has supplied us with most valuable information about Alamut.²⁵

He writes:

'Alamut is a mountain which resembles a kneeling camel with its neck resting on the ground. Now whilst examining this library, I found the history of Jil²⁶ and Daylam that was written for Fakhr-ad-Daula the Buyid.²⁷ In the section on Alamut, it is stated that one of the Kings of Daylam, whom they called al-i-Justan²⁸ began to construct a castle on this mountain in the year 246/860-1. It was the pride of the Kings of Daylam and a source of encouragement to the sect of Ismailis. In the history of Sallami,²⁹ it is stated that, at the time of the Daylami's domination of Iraq, the governor (Kutval) of that place was called Siyah-Chashm,³⁰ a convert of the Ismailis of Egypt. In truth, it was a castle whereof the entries and exits, ascents and approaches, had been so strengthened by plastered walls and lead-covered ramparts (bunyan) that when it was being demolished, it was as though the iron struck its head on a stone and it had nothing in its hand yet still resisted. And in the cavities of these rocks, they had constructed several long, wide, and tall galleries (sabat) and deep tanks, dispensing with the use of stone and mortar as in the verse 'And hew out houses in the hills'.³¹ So too, they had dug magazines and tanks for wine,³² vinegar, honey, and all

sort of liquids and solids ... when the stones therein were being pillaged and removed, a man waded in the honey tank without realising how deep it was, and before he was aware, he was immersed in the honey like Jonah 'Had not favour from his Lord reached him, cast forth would he have been on the naked shore, overwhelmed with shame'.³³ And from the river Bah-rw,³⁴ they had brought a conduit to the foot of the castle, and from thence, a conduit was cut in the rock halfway round (*bar madar-i-nima*) the castle, and ocean-like tanks, also of rock, were constructed beneath so that the water would be stored in them by its own impetus and was continuously flowing on. Most of these stores of liquids and solids, which they had been laying down from the time of Hasan-i-Sabbah,³⁵ that is over a period of more than 170 years, showed no signs of deterioration, and this they regarded as a result of Hasan's sanctity.³⁶

The king appointed an amir with a large force of soldiers and levies to demolish the castle. Picks were of no use; they set fire to the buildings and then broke them up, and this occupied them for a long time.³⁷



Footnotes

[1](#) Abbasid Caliphate was not a great military power in those days, but as the theoretical head of the followers of Sunni Islam, it had a lot of respect with the Muslim majority. The ulema still supported the caliphate, which commanded a measure of authority even among the powerful Seljuks, whose sultanate was endorsed by the caliphs themselves.

[2](#) *Iqta* of the Islamic rules differs from the feudal system of Europe, but both systems had a lot in common. *Iqta* lords of the East and feudal lords of the West both were strong hands of the kings and their own powers were limited.

Iqta system in Islam originated from the principle that lands should remain cultivated and productive. So an Islamic government would grant ownership of a parcel of uncultivated state land or unclaimed cultivated land to some Muslims so that they could keep the land productive. An *iqta* holder was thus subject to the state land tax and the land itself was his personal property and he had power to dispose of it as he pleased. In some cases, the land was granted to him only for his lifetime and was not transferable to his family after his death. Sometimes, the state lands were distributed among the people in recognition of their civil or military services. In case of territorial conquests, the unclaimed or confiscated lands were usually distributed under *iqta* system to the army officers and civil dignitaries in exchange for their military or civil services either for their own lives only or on a more permanent hereditary basis, but the main principle involved was to keep the lands productive and at the same time reward the services of the people concerned. Later on, the *iqta* system was modified and the original principle of maximum utilisation of the land was really forgotten. During the Seljuk period (which concerns us), big parcels of lands, sometimes whole districts or a province, were granted under the *iqta* system to the Seljuk military officers in lieu of their previous service and promise of future assistance to the rulers. The purpose of these grants was not to increase the efficiency of lands, but it was wholly to reward the army officers and to ensure future help from these grateful beneficiaries. For detailed discussion on *iqta*, see *Ikta, EI, EI (Urdu)*, A. N. Poliak, *Feudalism in Egypt, Syria, Palestine and the Lebanon* (1939). A. K. S. Lambton, *Reflection on Iqta in Medieval Iran*.

[3](#). Rashid-ud-Din, p. 8.

[4](#). Junashik, a sub-district of Kushar in eastern Astarabad, see Mohammad Qazvini, *Jahan Gusha*, Vol. 3, pp. 399-400.

5. Anjadrud is today one of the four sub-districts of Alamut.

6. Rashid-ud-Din, p. 9.

7. Rashid-ud-Din, p. 9.

Abu Muslim Razi was governor of Rayy and the son-in-law of Nizam-ul-Mulk (Ibn al-Athir—discussion of the events in 494 AH, Vol. X). Also given by Rawandi in *Rahat al Sadur*, pp. 140-1.

8. Ibid., p. 9.

9. Ibid., p. 9.

10. Ibid., p. 9.

11. Manuchihr, Sutuda. *Qala-i-Ismailia*, Pub. Tehran University, Pub. No. 1090, Tehran, 1967.

12. Rashid-ud-Din, p. 10.

13. Dh-Khuda: lit. Headman of a village but here used as a proper name. It seems that Alvi Mahdi knew Hasan but had not seen him and would probably not allow him to enter the castle if Hasan's true nature was exposed. Thus, Hasan used an anonymous name.

14. Rashid-ud-Din, p. 10.

15. The *abjad* is the Arabic alphabet arranged in its ancient order as still used for numeration. The values of the letters of Aluh-Amut (ALH AMWT) are 1 + 30 + 5 + 1 + 40 + 6 + 400 = 483. It is noted that Alamut the name derived from the old name Aluh-Amut. Aluh = Eagle, Amut = Nest. For more details see Abjad in *EI (Urdu)*.

E. G. Browne in footnote p. 203 in Vol. 2 of *Literary History of Persia*, remarks that he does not know any word in old Persian resembling amut, which would mean 'nest'. Browne agrees with Ibn al-Athir's explanation. Ibn al-Athir (X, 110) says that its old name was Aluh-Amukht (the teaching place of eagles) and amut is a provincial word for amokht. Thus it should correctly mean teaching place of eagles.

16. Rais Muzaffar became governor of Gird-i-Koh only in AH 489, thus the title 'Governor of Gird-i-Koh' at the time of writing of *Sarguzasht*.

17. Shows intimate and sincere friendship without any formalities.

18. Qur'an (III, 173).

19. Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 195. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 670.

20. One of the Seljuk Amirs.

21. Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 195. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, pp. 670-71. Rashid-ud-Din, pp. 11-12.

22. One presumes that the outer defences of the castle were in a satisfactory state. Otherwise, it could not have stood against the attacks of Yurun Tash in its first year of Ismaili possession. However, there were several improvements

made by Hasan in the subsequent years to make Alamut worthy of being an Ismaili centre.

- [23.](#) Kiya Buzurg Ummid, the Governor of Lamasar, who later succeeded Hasan as head of the Ismaili state in AD 1124.
- [24.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 12.
- [25.](#) Juvaini, *Jehan Gusha*, Vol. 3, p. 269. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 719.
- [26.](#) i.e. Gilan [Barthold-Turkistan, 8].
- [27.](#) Barthold-Turkistan, pp. 976-97.
- [28.](#) On the Al-JSTAN for the ARJSTAN of the text, Qazvini suggests: On the al-i-Justan or Justanids, who reigned in Daylam from the beginning of the ninth till the middle of the tenth century, see *Jahan Gusha*, edited by Qazvini, Vol. 3, pp. 432-45.
- [29.](#) On Abu-Ali al Hussain b. Ahmed b. Mohammad as-Sallami, whose book undoubtedly served as the main source for those authors in whose works we find the most detailed accounts of the history of Khurasan and Transoxiana, namely Gardizi and Ibn al-Athir; see Barthold, Turkistan, 10-11. *Jahan Gusha*, edited by Qazvini, Vol. 3, pp. 446-49.
- [30.](#) The son of Malik, according to Ibn al-Athir sub anno 316/928-9, was called Siyah-Chashm (Black Eye) because he had a black spot in one of his eyes (Qazvini).
- [31.](#) Qur'an, VII, 72.
- [32.](#) Hasan was strictly against wine. It may be that the stories of wine were added at a later date.
- [33.](#) Qur'an, LXVIII, 49.
- [34.](#) M. Qazvini thinks BAHROW may be a corruption of SAHRWD, i.e. Shah-Rud. Perhaps the name was erroneously applied to a tributary of the Shah-Rud.
- [35.](#) It obviously seems to be an exaggeration. The stores would have been replenished several times during 170 years.
- [36.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, pp. 269-73. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, pp. 719-21.
- [37.](#) Ibid.

SECTION TWO

Chapter 5

I: The Ismailia Sect of Islam and the Organisation of the Ismaili Dawa

The Ismailia Sect of Islam

Mohammad the Prophet of Islam died in Medina on 13 Rabi I, AH 11 (8 June, AD 632) after completing his mission successfully as an Apostle and a Law giver. The Muslim majority believed that the Prophet did not leave any clear instructions as to who was to succeed him as the spiritual and political leader of the Islamic community.^{1,2} While his close relatives, including Ali (his cousin and son-in-law) and Abbas (his uncle) were busy in his funeral, some of the Muslims had gathered in the Saqifa (hall) of the Banu Saida in order to select a successor to the Prophet. Abu-Bakr, an old and respected companion of the Prophet, was selected as the khalifa (successor) of the messenger of God, and in this way created, almost instantaneously, the historic institution of caliphate.³ The selection of the first caliph was, however, not unanimous. There was one group of Muslims who sincerely believed that the Prophet had hinted on several occasions during his lifetime as to who ought to succeed him, and that he favoured Ali-bin-Abu-Talib, his cousin and son-in-law, who was brought up by him from a very young age. This group argued that Ali's claim to the caliphate outweighed that of any other living Muslim. It was due to Ali's close relationship with the Prophet as well as his personal merits, which added to his credibility during his whole life which he spent under the close supervision of the messenger of God. They also believed that on the Prophet's last journey from Mecca, at a place called Gadir-Khum, before a large audience, he announced the appointment of Ali by divine decree (*nass*) as the Imam and the successor of his mission.⁴ This group of Muslims are known in history as shia-tul-Ali (supporters of Ali) or

simply as 'shia'. The majority party who supported the election is known as ahal-i-sunnat-wa-jamat or simply Sunnis.⁵

Sunni Islam views the institution of caliphate as being primarily a temporal office. The caliph is chosen as the most competent and pious among the Muslim community, to create a central political authority in order to execute the Sharia (Qur'anic Law). He possesses no particular spiritual powers that distinguish him from the rest of the believers. He can neither judge nor resolve the issues of faith or dogma, which are determined by recognised jurists and legitimised by the consensus (ijma) of the community. Therefore, the Caliph is primarily a political and legal executive whose foremost function is the defence of the faith and the faithful.⁶

Shia, on the other hand, believes that Ali was nominated by the Prophet according to the express Command of Allah as the 'Imam' and the successor of the Prophet and his mission, and it is a duty incumbent upon every Imam in turn to appoint his successor from his line by the divine consent (*nass*). Thus, there always is a divinely appointed Imam in every age who is the sole interpreter of the words of God (Sahib-i-Tawil). He is the Vicar of God on this earth and is truly the successor of the Prophet, both as the defender of the faith and of the faithful and at no time can this earth exit without the person of the Imam. In this light, the Shia considered Ali to be the wasi (the executor of his will) of the Prophet's mission, and they believed that the line of Imamate must continue from his progeny through Fatima, his wife and the Prophet's daughter. Thus, after Ali, his son Hasan⁷ succeeded him as Imam, who in turn passed the Imamate to his brother Husain. Afterwards, the Imamate passed from father to son to Zain-al-Abadin, to his son Mohammad Baqir, and to his son Jaffar-i-Sadiq, who was the sixth Imam of the Shia. The Shia belief rests upon the central figure of the Imam, and as it is a hereditary institution, confusion was bound to arise at some stage on the point of succession. Thus, the Shia was divided into several sections on the point of succession of the Imamate.

The first division among the Shia appeared during the life of Imam Zain-al-Abadin, who died in 94/712-713. He lived thirty-four years after the martyrdom of Husain, a sufficiently long period to leave an

impression of his personality on his followers. He was the only one of the sons of Husain whose life was spared during the massacre of Karbala, since he did not take part in the fighting due to illness. During the tragedy of Karbala, he was lying in his tent, watching hopelessly, as his entire family was butchered along with their most loyal followers. This left a permanent mark on his mind, and he chose to live the rest of his life in seclusion and prayer in Medina, his ancestral home, avoided public appearances and had nothing to do with the political activities. When Mukhtar approached him to lead the Shia's avenger of the tragedy of Karbala, he categorically refused to take any part in it. Thus, the Shia approached another son of Ali, a half-brother of Husain by the name Mohammad Hanifiya, who reluctantly agreed to lead the Shia, thus shifting the Imamate from the descendants of the Prophet through Fatima to a son of Ali from his second wife Hanifiya. The Shia who accepted the Imamate of Mohammad Hanifiya came to be known as 'Kaysaniya'. This created the first deviation from the legitimate body of the Shia, where the Imamate remained strictly restricted to the line of Ali and Fatima through Husain and his progeny. According to the Shia tradition, Zain-al-Abidin, before his death, nominated Mohammad al-Baqir, his elder son, as his wasi and successor, who followed the policy of his father strictly and would not indulge in any political activity, whereas his younger brother Zaid was politically very active and had close associations with the Mutazilites. When the Shias of Kufa approached Baqir for leadership to rise against the government of the day to avenge the blood of Husain, he rejected their demand totally. A good majority of Shia preferred the leadership of Zaid, the half-brother of Baqir, for his activist policy and his bold attitude. When they approached Zaid for leadership, he agreed; then a faction known as the Zaidiya sect was born.⁸

A major crisis arose among the Shia after the death of Imam Jaffar-i-Sadiq, who had five sons. Abdullah and Ismail were the eldest sons by his first wife Fatima, a granddaughter of Imam Hasan ibin Ali. Imam Sadiq did not take a second wife as long as Fatima was alive. Thus, there was a considerable gap in the ages of Abdullah and Ismail on one hand, and Musa, Ishaq, and Mohammad,

Imam Sadiq's three other sons from a Sudanese slave concubine, called Hamida, on the other. Ismail was probably the second son of Imam Sadiq, born around 80-83/699-702. He was about twenty-five years older than Musa, his younger half-brother. The exact date and circumstances of Ismail's death also remain obscure. Some Ismaili authors relate that he survived his father, but the majority of the sources report that he predeceased his father by five years. According to the majority of the available sources, Imam Jaffar-i-Sadiq designated Ismail by *nass* (divine decree) as his successor in Imamate. After the death of Imam Sadiq, a great confusion arose amongst his sons. Each of his surviving sons claimed the Imamate but could not produce sufficient credentials, and so their followers melted away in a short period, except for two candidates, Ismail and Musa. Ultimately, the majority of the Shia favoured Musa-al-Kazim, a younger son of Imam Sadiq and half-brother of Ismail. The twelvers Shii, however, believe that Imam Sadiq did revoke his first *nass* in favour of Ismail and made a second *nass* in favour of his son Musa-al-Kazim.⁹ Thus, after the death of Imam Jaffar-i-Sadiq (148/765), a major split came about among the Shia community. One section of Shia recognised the Imamate of Musa-al-Kazim (d. 182/798) as their Imam and followed the future Imams from his progeny. The line of Musa-al-Kazim continued until the twelfth Imam Mohammad-al-Mahdi, who is said to have disappeared at a very young age in Samara (Iraq) in 260/873, and is still awaited Imam by the great majority of Shias at the present time. This group of Shia, the followers of the twelve Imams, known as Isna-ashri or Twelvers constitute the great majority of the Shias of today.¹⁰

The second group of the Shia recognised Ismail as the legitimate Imam. They argued that the Imam being masum (infallible) could not make an error of judgement and therefore the first *nass* (designation) of Imam Jaffar-i-Sadiq was the correct one and was not reversible. Thus, this group accepted Ismail as their Imam and are known as Ismailia. They follow the future Imams from the line of Ismail who went underground for four generations due to great fear of persecution at the hands of the Abbasi Caliphate, who considered the Ismailia Imams as their political rivals and enemy number one.

Although the whereabouts of the Ismaili Imams was unknown, their Dais were actively busy in Dawa on behalf of their Imams and were busy in the development of the Ismailia doctrines. This period of concealment is known in their history as dawr-i-satar (period of concealment). Ultimately, the Ismaili Imam al-Mahdi came out of hiding and founded a powerful state in North Africa, known in history as the Fatimid Caliphate, in 279/909. The Ismaili Caliphate lasted for 285 years with their purpose-built capital al-Qahyra (Cairo), with a majestic Cathedral Mosque Jamia-tul-Azhar and the very first University of the world, long before Oxford or Cambridge were planned. The Imam of the present age of the Ismailia community is Shah Karim al-Husseini, Aga Khan IV, who is the 49th Imam in the direct unbroken chain from the progeny of Imam Husain and Imam Ismail. This group is known in history as the Ismailia (followers of Ismail).^{[11](#)}

The Ismailis believe that Imam Jaffar observed *taqiyya* (dissimulation) in declaring a second appointment and gave a chance to his real successor to go underground so that their enemy (Abbasids) did not pursue Ismail, the real Imam and his activities went unnoticed.^{[12](#)} Thus, his second appointment Musa-al-Kazim, who was believed to be poisoned by the Abbasid Caliph Harun, was in fact a veil (hijab) for his elder brother Ismail. Ismailis believe that Musa-al-Kazim gave his own life as a sacrifice for the sake of his brother Ismail, the true Imam.^{[13](#)}

Strong Abbasid persecution had put the entire Shii movement on guard and had indeed driven most of the Shias, particularly the Ismailis, underground. The Abbasid authorities, in spite of their organised intelligence service, could not catch up with the Ismaili Imams, and their whereabouts remained unknown to them for a very long time. This was mainly due to the strict secrecy on the part of Ismaili Dawa, although the fact that their centres of activities were mainly located away from Baghdad, the Abbasid capital, could have helped the Ismaili underground movement considerably. The Ismaili Imams carried out their mission from their secret hideouts from the year 148/765, from the time that Imam Jaffar-i-Sadiq died, until the time of Ubayad-Ullah al-Mahdi (the fifth generation of

Ismail), who emerged as the rightful Imam and established the Fatimid Caliphate in North Africa in AH 297/AD 909.^{[14](#)}

According to Ismaili sources, the four Imams who succeeded Ismail, while maintaining anonymity, were engaged in organising the Ismaili dawa so that when it finally emerged into the public eye in the ninth century AD, it was armed with a remarkable doctrinal sophistication and political structure. This, no doubt, shows that it had retained its vitality in this period, during which the identities of the Imams remained protected, living as they were in hazardous circumstances. This period has been described as *dawr-i-satar* (period of concealment). During this period, the Imams settled in Salamiyya, near Hamma in Syria, but their identity and whereabouts were known only to a few completely trusted disciples. During this period, the Imams were engaged in the creation of a remarkable network of mission centres equipped with a very well developed and organised religious philosophy which came to be known as dawa.^{[15](#)} The term '*dawa*', although also used by some non-Ismaili circles, to designate the skilful organisation and the elaborate and highly effective network of communication within the general structure of the dawa, is certainly unique to the Ismailis.^{[16](#)}

Ubayd Ullah al-Mahdi, the founder of the Fatimid Caliphate, claimed to be the true Imam from the line of Ismail and was a very capable statesman indeed. He laid down the foundations of a durable Ismaili state in a predominant Sunni population, and this required abilities of a very high order, which undoubtedly he richly possessed. He founded his new capital Mahdia (named after his own title al-Mahdi) in 304/916 and founded his Caliphate on tolerance, never displaying the fanaticism of a sectarian ruler.^{[17](#)}

The emergence of the Fatimid Caliphate is a major event in Islamic history. For the first time, a large part of the Islamic world had passed under the control of a sect which not only rejected the spiritual claims of the Abbasids but also declared its resolve to replace them by a new Universalistic Imamate. The progeny of Ali and Fatima were to govern the whole Muslim world, not as secular rulers but as the sinless and infallible (*masum*) spokesmen of God. To the Fatimids, North Africa was only a base of operations from

which to conquer all Islamic lands, as previously the Abbasids had started out from Khurasan in AD 747. Indeed, the Fatimids followed the example of the Prophet of Islam, who used Medina as a base of operation to conquer Mecca. They proceeded to put their plans in action with a great speed. Thus, during the reign of al-Mahdi (d. AD 934), they ruled over considerable parts of North Africa and Sicily and launched two expeditions against Egypt.^{[18](#)}

Under al-Muizz (AD 953-975), the Fatimids reached the height of their glory, and the universal triumph of Ismailis appeared not far distant. The fourth Fatimid Caliph is an attractive character: humane and generous, simple and just, a good administrator, tolerant and conciliatory. He was served by one of the greatest generals of the time, Jawahar al-Saqli, who in AD 969, at the head of an army, claimed to be 100,000 strong, conquered Egypt and laid the foundation of a new capital city to be called al-Qahira (the Victorious) which the West has corrupted to Cairo. The great and well-known University-Mosque Jamia-tul-Azhar (361/972.) was built in the middle of the city, which subsequently played an important role in advancing the Ismaili dawa. The Mediterranean islands such as Crete, Corsica, Malta and Sicily were brought under Fatimid control, and they were to play a crucial role in the naval power of the Fatimids. Their direct political power could now be seen far beyond Egypt and North Africa and, in fact, included important Islamic countries such as Palestine, Syria, Hijaz, Yemen and as far as Sind, thus influencing the entire Islamic world.^{[19](#)}

The reign of the eighth Caliph al-Mustansir bi Allah (AD 1035-1094) is noted as being the longest Caliphate in Muslim history, and it is full of very significant events. During this period, the Fatimid Empire touched its highest peak and then fell into a sharp decline. When al-Mustansir died in AD 1094, the Ismaili mission saw its greatest rift and division in its entire history and was unable to pick up its past glory any more.^{[20](#)}

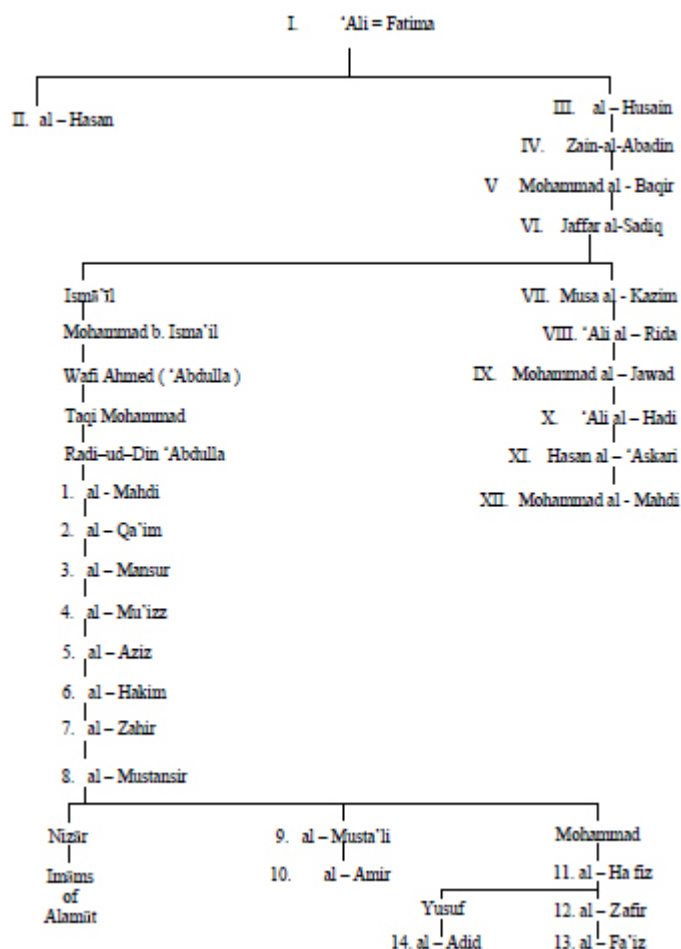
Ordinarily, the Fatimid Caliphs kept a personal control on the three most important offices of their government, namely 'Civil Administration', 'Dawa', and the Armed Forces. In AD 1074, however, al-Mustansir invited Badr-al-Jamali, his military governor of Palestine,

to come over to Cairo and bestowed upon him all the three key offices of the State mentioned above. Thus, Badr-al-Jamali became the most powerful person and de facto ruler of Egypt, whereas the Caliph himself remained merely a figurehead. The real power was wielded by the commander-in-chief of the armed forces (Amir-al-Joshen), and this office came to be associated with the family of Badr, who was succeeded by his son al-Afdal. Now, al-Mustansir had already designated (*nass*) his eldest son Nizar as his successor, and this was wholeheartedly accepted by most Ismaili circles. On the death of al-Mustansir (AD 1094), however, his prime minister and commander of the army, al-Afdal, proclaimed his brother-in-law al-Mustali, a teenaged son of al-Mustansir, as the successor to his father as Imam and the Fatimid Caliph. It is easily seen that al-Afdal had a vested interest in the appointment of a young boy as a Caliph as he had no public following and who would consequently be dependent on his powerful patron. It seems that he had already figured it out before the death of al-Mustansir, as he gave his sister in marriage to this young prince and made the ties with him absolutely firm. On the other hand, if Nizar, the eldest son of al-Mustansir, a mature person over forty years of age and already nominated as a successor and accepted by the public, was to become the Caliph, then al-Afdal's position would be on a very shaky ground indeed. Thus al-Afdal explained to the public that the deceased Imam and Caliph, on his deathbed, had changed his nomination in favour of his younger son al-Mustali and cancelled his earlier nomination of his eldest son Nizar. He produced a few witnesses to certify the new nomination and thus put al-Mustali on the throne of the Fatimid Caliphate.^{[21](#)}

This decision, however, had far-reaching effects on the future aspiration of the Ismailis, who were totally split on this point of succession. Ismailis loyal to Nizar argued that the first nomination could not be cancelled and that it contradicted the basic principles and traditions of the Ismailis. By the same principle, they had not accepted the second nomination of Imam Jaffar-i-Sadiq and remained faithful to his first nomination in favour of Ismail. The whole matter rested on the infallibility of the Imam and the fact that

the nomination of the successor of an Imam is by divine decree (*nass*), which is irrevocable. Most Ismailis living within the countries under direct rule of the Fatimids accepted the Imamate of al-Mustali. Those who supported Nizar as their Imam were forced to accept the Imamate of al-Mustali, who was duly installed as the ninth Fatimid Caliph in Cairo. Nizar fled to Alexandria, where he had a substantial following, but after an armed struggle, he was defeated by the armies of al-Afdal. He was arrested, brought to Cairo, and imprisoned till his death. There were four more Fatimid Caliphs ruling in Cairo, but they could not be considered more than a local Egyptian dynasty without power or influence. The Ismaili dream of a Universal Caliphate of God was lost forever. The supporters of Nizar managed to develop an Ismaili state in Iran and Syria. Its founder and main architect was Hasan-i-Sabbah, who is the subject of this book, and who laid the foundations of a small but strong Ismaili state.^{[22](#)}

[1. Table of Isna-asheria \(Twelver\) Imams and Fatimid Caliphs](#)



2. Chronological list of Ismaili Imams²³

(The Ismaili Imams follow a continuous line from father to son with the exception of the 49th Imam Shah Karim who instead is the grandson of the previous 48th Imam, Sultan Mohammad Shah)

	Name of Imam	Year of Death (AH/AD)
1.	Ali	61/680
2.	Hussain (the Martyr of Karbala)	40/661
3.	Zain al-Abadin	94/712*
4.	Mohammad al-Baqir	118/736*
	His brother Zayd is the progenitor of the Zaydia sect.	
5.	Jaffar al-Sadiq	148/765
6.	Ismail	145-158/762-774*

	His brother Musa al-Kazim continues the Isna-asheri line	
7.	Mohammad b. Isma'il	193/808
8.	Wafi Ahmed ('Abdulla)	212/827
9.	Taqi Mohammad (Ahmed b. 'Abdulla)	229/843
10.	Radi-u-din 'Abdulla (Husain)	289/901
11.	al-Mahdi ('Ubayd-u-Allah) Founder of the Fatimid Caliphate	322/933
12.	al-Qa'im (Mohammad)	334/945
13.	al-Mansur (Isma'il)	341/952
14.	al-Mu'izz (Ma'd) He conquered Egypt and founded the city of Cairo	365/975
15.	al-Aziz (Nizar)	386/996
16.	al-Hakim bi Amr Allah (Mansur)	411/1020
	Druz sect separates from the main body	
17.	al-Zahir ('Ali)	427/1035
18.	al-Mustansir bi Allah	487/1094
19.	Nizar (his younger half brother al-Mustali continues the Mustalia line of Imamat and the Fatimid Caliphate of Egypt)	488/1095
20.	Hadi ('Ali)	530/1135*
21.	Muhtadi (Mohammad)	552/1157
22.	Qahir	557/1161
23.	Ala dhikrihi al-salam (Hasan)	561/1166
24.	A'la Mohammad	607/1210
25.	Jalal al-din (Hasan)	618/1221
26.	Ala-ud-Din (Mohammad)	653/1255
27.	Rukn-ud-Din Khurshah (surrendered to Halagu Khan in AD 1256.)	654/1256
28.	Shams al-Din (Mohammad)	710/1310
29.	Qasim Shah	771/1369*

30.	Islam Shah	827/1423
31.	Mohammad b. Islam Shah	868/1463
32.	al-Mustansir bi Allah ('Ali)	880/1475
33.	Abd al-Salam (Mohammad)	899/1493
34.	Gharib Mirza (Abbas)	902/1496
35.	Abu al-Dhir 'Ali (Mohammad)	915/1509
36.	Murad Mirza	920/1514
37.	Dhu al-Fiqar 'Ali	933/1516
38.	Nur al-Din 'Ali	957/1550
39.	Khalil Allah 'Ali	993/1585
40.	Nizar II	1038/1628
41.	Sayyid 'Ali (Ismail)	1071/1660
42.	Hasan 'Ali	1105/1693
43.	Qasim 'Ali	1143/1730
44.	Abu al-Hasan 'Ali	1194/1780
45.	Khalil Allah 'Ali	1233/1817
46.	Hasan 'Ali Shah (Aga Khan I) (migrated to India)	1299/1881
47.	'Ali Shah (Aga Khan II)	1303/1885
48.	Sultan Mohammad Shah (Aga Khan III)	1377/1957
49.	Shah Karim al-Husseini (Aga Khan IV) (grandson of Aga Khan III) born	1355/1936

*Approximate dates.

[3. The Organisation of Ismaili Dawa](#)

The Ismaili organisation owes much of its success to the competence and efficiency of its Dawa. The Ismaili rulers of North Africa and Egypt, known in history as the Fatimid Caliphs, are noted for having instituted a ministry of dawa as an important wing of their government. Thus, after the prime minister, who was the head of the civil administration and Amir-al-Jeush, (the commander of the armies), there existed, in order of importance, the office of *Dai-al-*

Duat, who was the head of Ismaili Dawa.^{24, 25} He was responsible for its organisation, including the appointments of the office bearers of the ministry of Dawa, Research, Publication, Propagation of Ismaili doctrines, Establishment and running of the *Dawa* centres at home and abroad.²⁶

In its Pre-Fatimid phase, due to reasons both political and sectarian (intra-Shiite), the Ismaili Imams went underground and organised their Dawa from hidden centres, aided by a hierarchy of sincere, capable, and devoted Dais headed by the Imam himself. The hierarchy consisted of senior and junior Dais who were dispatched throughout the Islamic lands and who put forward the claim of the Fatimid Imam, the descendant of the Imam Ismail, as the rightful and lawful leader designated as such through a clear '*nass*'.²⁷

Ismailism entered its open phase when the Ismaili Imam, Ubaid Ullah al-Mahdi, succeeded in founding the Fatimid Caliphate (296/908) in North Africa, which was destined to flourish for two and a half centuries. Once the political centre was established, the Ismaili Dawa came out from its hidden centres and established itself openly without any fear of persecution. As a result, most efficient and effective Dawa centres were founded and learned Dais developed and perfected the Ismaili doctrines and the religious mission was put to action.

4. The Doctrine of Imama²⁸

The doctrine of Imama remains the most central doctrine of the Ismailis. Imamat, unlike the Prophethood, is a permanent institution. Anbiya (Prophets) are the people of tanzil (revelation), whereas Imams are the people of *tawil* (interpretation). The Imam is the heir of the Prophet with regard to the Sharia and the knowledge left by the Prophet. He is the legitimate guardian of the umma (community), and it is obligatory upon every mumin (believer) to swear allegiance (*baya*) to the Imam of the Age and abide by his commands. The world will never exist without Hujjat-Ullah (Proof of God) (either a Prophet or his deputy, Imam).

The Ismailis believe that there is a permanent need of a divinely guided teacher (*muallim*) among mankind to guide them according to the command of God, who has in turn never deprived mankind of His guidance, ever since the creation of this world.²⁹ From time to time God revealed his message to his chosen messenger (*natiq*) who was commissioned to deliver his revelation to mankind. This *natiq* (prophet or messenger) was invariably followed by his *wasi* (executor of his will), whose task was to interpret the revealed word of God and to expose its (*batin*) truth to those few who were capable and deserving of receiving it. The *wasi* in turn was followed by a chain of divinely appointed (by the institution of *nass*) Imams who continue to guide mankind, exposing the inner truth of the revealed message of God progressively, according to the capacity of the people and the need of the time.³⁰

The Ismailis divide the entire span of time since the creation of this world into seven eras (*adwar*). Each era (*dawr*) commences with a messenger-prophet (*natiq*) followed by his *wasi* (*asas*), who is likewise followed by a chain of Imams till the end of the era. The new era, then commences with another *natiq*, and the cycle of eras (*adwar*) continues until the end of this world.³¹ Thus, the *natiq* of the first era (*dawr*) was Adam who was followed by his son Abel as his *wasi* (*asas*) and subsequently succeeded by a chain of Imams until the era ended. The second era started with Noah as the *natiq*, who brought a new law (*sharia*), abrogating the old law of Adam, and was succeeded by Shem as his *wasi*. Similarly, the third era started with Abraham as a *natiq* and followed by Ishmael as his *wasi*; the fourth era commenced with Moses as a *natiq* and Aaron as his *wasi*, and the fifth era had Jesus as its *natiq* and Peter was his *wasi*. The present era is the sixth *dawr* which began with Mohammad as a messenger-prophet and *natiq* who brought a new law, replacing the old one, and Ali-bin-Abu-Talib followed him as his *wasi* and *asas* of the present era.³² Ali was succeeded in the usual manner by a chain of Imams, and this chain will continue until the end of the present era. The function of the *wasi* to each *natiq* is to be the interpreter of the revealed law (*sharia*). The esoteric truths, unlike the changeable nature of *sharia*, are eternal and constant throughout all eras. This

pattern would change only in the seventh and final era. The natiq of the final era, the expected *Qaim* or *Mahdi*, would not reveal a new sharia but would uphold the sharia of Mohammad the last prophet of God and make public the esoteric truths which had so far been revealed to only a few under the seal of secrecy. The *Qaim* would thus inaugurate towards the end of the world an era of pure spiritual knowledge unshackled by the ritual law.³³

Great Ismaili Dais such as Qadi Abu Hanifa an-Numan (d. 363/974), Sayyidna Hamid ad-Din al-Kirmani (d. 411/1020), al-Muhyad fi-Dil Shirazi (d. 470/1077), Sayyidna Nasir-i-Khusraw (d. 481/1088), and several others contributed towards the refinement of Ismaili philosophy, and Ismaili Dawa progressed smoothly and successfully for nearly two centuries (AD 908-1094). In AD 1094, however, a great split came about amongst the Ismailis on the question of the succession to the Imamate after the death of the Fatimid Caliph-Imam, al-Mustansir and it had a considerable adverse effect on the Ismaili Dawa.

5. The Universal Divine Order

Cycle	<i>Natiq</i> = messenger or prophet	<i>Asas</i> = <i>Wasi</i> (Executor)
1.	Adam	Abel
2.	Noah	Shem
3.	Abraham	Ishmael
4.	Moses	Harun
5.	Jesus	Peter
6.	Mohammad	Ali
7.	<i>Qaim</i> = <i>Mehdi</i>	(Expected)

6. The Doctrine of Talim

Declaring support for Nizar, the eldest son of al-Mustansir as the rightful Imam, the Iranian and Syrian Ismailis under the leadership of Hasan-i-Sabbah separated from Cairo and established their new centre of *Dawa* in Alamut. They rephrased the terminology of the order of their organisation and restated their case with new vigour and enthusiasm. The need of the human mind for a divinely guided teacher (muallim) and the inadequacy of reason were restated in

ardent argumentation in *Fusul-i-Araba*,³⁴ the Four Chapters ascribed to Hasan. The thesis of divinely guided teaching (*talim*), though obviously rooted in earlier Ismaili thought, became so central in Nizari doctrine that the followers of Hasan's Dawat-i-Jadida (New Summons) came to be known as the Talimiyya. As if to underline the specific relevance of the necessity of *talim* to theology, Hasan speaks of the failure of reason in respect to the knowledge of God and of the need of prophecy for the true confession of *tawhid* (unity). In order to prove the insufficiency of human intelligence and to establish the necessity of referring to the decision of the infallible Imam, the only source of certain knowledge, Hasan proposes the following thesis³⁵ of the two alternatives: either human reason in the pursuit of truth suffices to itself, or it does not. If it does suffice, we must allow everyone to act according to his own reasoning (which would mean the acceptance of intellectual anarchy). If, on the other hand, human reason does not suffice one must always search for truth and refer to the infallible master who dispenses it. Al-Gazali (d. AD 1111), one of the greatest opponents of this doctrine, wrote a book in refutation of the Ismaili doctrine. Al-Gazali, though imitating his opponent's dialectic form of assertion, opposed it by the following thesis.³⁶ Of the two things: one, either a pretension suffices to itself or it does not. If the pretension suffices to itself, it is better to stick to a single pretension rather than to several. If, on the contrary, a pretension does not suffice to itself, we have always the means to refer to well-informed reason (which will solve the dilemma of two different pretensions). Fakhr-ud-Din Razi (AD 1149-1209) in his discussions and debate with Sharaf-ud-Din al-Masudi remarks that al-Ghazali's argumentation could not stand on its feet because all that he has proved is that the intelligence is necessary for distinguishing between the true and the false. But the Ismailian thesis never denied it. Intelligence is surely indispensable, but as it is not infallible, it is insufficient for the knowledge of truth; therefore, it must be led by the Imam, the hereditary holder of divine wisdom. Razi compares intelligence to the organ of sight, which makes us see the visible objects. But the organ of sight is not sufficient unto itself; its functioning depends on the light which illuminates the visible

object. Just as the eye cannot see without the material light, in the same way, human intelligence cannot reach knowledge without the spiritual light dispensed by the Imam.³⁷

The arguments of Hasan-i-Sabbah are quoted most extensively by al-Shahrastani (d. 548/1153) in his book *al-Milal wal-Nihal*. Al-Shahrastani is evidently keenly interested in them. Though widely renowned as an outstanding Ashari theologian with an open-minded interest in all religions and philosophies, he is known by some of his contemporaries³⁸ to incline secretly to Nizari Ismailism. He himself mentions in his unpublished Qur'anic commentary, in which he employed specific Ismaili terminology and methods of interpretation, how his teacher in exegesis had revealed to him certain 'noble words of the family of the Prophet and their followers' which 'pointed to hidden mysteries and solid foundation of Qur'anic sciences'.³⁹ He searched then for the 'truthful ones' (al-sadiqin) and found 'a righteous servant of God' (abd-min-i-bad Allah al-Salikin) who taught him the true principles of Qur'anic exegesis. The latter teacher, whose name al-Shahrastani does not mention, was probably an Ismaili, though nothing more is known about his concrete relations with Alamut. Several of his extant works attest that he espoused Ismaili views during all his mature life and in substance, his own position agreed fully with traditional Ismaili theology.⁴⁰

Ismaili teaching from its beginnings offered a comprehensive and coherent view of God, the universe, and the meaning of history. While its core embodied general Islamic and Shii tenets and ideals, it integrated some of the Hellenistic spiritual and intellectual heritage which, though mostly condemned or shunned by more conservative Sunni scholars, had indubitably become part of Islamic civilisation. The anti-Ismaili polemics might well accuse Ismaili missionaries of trying to insinuate themselves amongst people of the most varied backgrounds by deceptively catering to their particular beliefs and sentiments. In fact, however, Ismaili doctrine did not borrow indiscriminately but rather selected what it found congenial to its basic convictions and amalgamated it into a coherent synthesis of its own. Thus, the devotion and success of the Ismaili missionaries must have been due in large part to the intrinsic appeal of the

message itself, although much of its success could be credited to the organisational capabilities of the Ismaili Dawa.

The Hierarchy of the Ismaili Dawa⁴¹

Most of the Ismaili sources tend to give an ideal or Utopian picture of the Ismaili organisation and all the evidence provided by the general Arabic sources is very scrappy. However there is no doubt that the Ismaili organisation of Dawa was extremely efficient and highly disciplined. All the Ismaili sources, irrespective of the period in which they were written, give similar descriptions of the top level of the Ismaili leadership in which the Imam, who does not himself usually preach, is assisted by twelve of his missionaries who should be fully qualified to carry out the propagation of the Ismaili doctrine in the twelve 'climes' (Jazira, pl. Juzur).⁴² The number of these twelve missionaries was increased to twenty-four, divided evenly between those who preach the 'zahir' of the Dawa and those who had the custody of its '*batin*'. Among these twelve or twenty-four, the Ismaili sources mention two high dignitaries who, together with Natiq (Nabi), Asas (wasi), and Imam (wali) constitute the five ranks ('limits') of religion (hudud-al-din). The first of the two high dignitaries is the one who receives instructions directly from the Imam; he is usually given the title held by the Imam. Thus, he is called in the pre-Fatimid sources the Hujja or evidence, of the Imam, who in his turn is the Hujja of God (Hujja-tul-Haq). The Fatimid sources call him the '*Bab*' (gate) of the Imam, who in his turn is considered to be the *Bab* of the city of knowledge (i.e. of the Prophet Mohammad).⁴³ In fact, these two terms are quite interchangeable and need not constitute a hindrance to understand the order of the Ismaili hierarchy. It is noted, however, that the term '*Bab*' was used in the Fatimid period when the Imams were acknowledged rulers of a great empire while the term 'Hujja' was used when the Ismaili Imams were underground. In such circumstances, the term 'Hujja' meaning evidence or proof may have been more appropriate for the trusted first auxiliary of the Imam. Thus, during the period of 'Satar', preceding the rise of the Fatimids, it is reported that each one of the Imams had three or four Hujjas⁴⁴ who acted on behalf of the Imams and presented their case to the

public while under the Fatimids, the term '*Bab*' was given to the head of the *Dawa* known in the general historic works as the chief dai (*Dai-al-Duat*). The *Bab* was then assisted by a council of twelve hujjas, one of each geographical region (Jazira) where the Ismaili dawa was active.

7. The Hierarchy of Ismaili Dawa (Fatimid Period) 'Hudud-al-Din'⁴⁵

	Hudud or Degrees of the Terrestrial world	Their Function
1. Natiq	Nabi = The station of revelation (wahi) = Sahib-i-Tanzil	Tanzil. Literal or exoteric (zahir) Statement of positive religion (shria'at)
2. Asas	Wasi = Executer of Nabi's will)	Ta'wil. Exegesis of the esoteric (<i>batin</i>) meaning.
3. Imam	Wali = Interpreter of the word of God = Sahib-i-Tawil	Personal mastery over the community: zahir-batin
4. <i>Bab</i>	Gate = interpreter of the Imam = The executive head of the Ismaili Dawa	Fasl al-Khitab
5. Hujja	The Proof= <i>Dai-al-Duat</i>	Hukm (authority of decision) cf Mizan = principle of Balance in Tawil
6. Dai al Balag		Preaching, Initiation into the Ma'ad.
7. Dai al-Mutlaq		Initiation into the esoteric meaning
8. Dai-Mahisur		Esoteric eleborations
9. Madhun Mutlaq		To receive the undertaking of the new adept
10. Madun Mahisur		To attract neophytes.

8. Alamut and the Militant Nizari Organisation

Although Ismaili Dais had been active in north-west Iran, Khurasan and Transoxania since the ninth century AD,⁴⁶ those who worked for Hasan-i-Sabbah's Dawa found themselves facing quite different problems. With the Ismailis now established in various strongholds surrounded by numerous enemies, most Dais now had to act also as military commanders, ready to repel any invading army sent by the powerful Seljuk Sultans and other enemies. Consequently, in appointing Dais, Hasan-i-Sabbah took account of their potentialities not only as religious scholars or as persuasive preachers but also as military commanders. It appears that Hasan-i-Sabbah made use of the abilities of all his followers and mobilised all the talent available to further their cause. Taking the position of an administrative head and representative of the Imam, Hasan-i-Sabbah completely reorganised the Dawa, changing the terminology from Arabic to Persian terms. He himself ranked as the head of the Dawa, with titles such as Shaykh, Hujjat, Sayyidna (our master), etc. Second in rank came three senior Dais, who were in charge of the three main outlying districts, namely Khuzistan, Quhistan, and Syria. These three Dais were in principle responsible to Hasan-i-Sabbah, although in practice, and especially in the later period, they often acted on their own initiative rather than on any standing orders or dispatched instructions, whereas Hasan-i-Sabbah acted in the name of the hidden Imam from the line of Nizar. The senior Dais were highly talented and greatly qualified men. They were usually religious scholars and well qualified in preaching the Ismaili doctrines. They were also capable administrators who could look after the political and social affairs of their own respective districts.⁴⁷

The third in the hierarchy of the Dawa ranked the ordinary Dais, who must have been several in numbers. These Dais were classified into two categories. The top category 'Dai-i-Kabir' had the responsibility to preach and take the oath of allegiance from a new convert. They were also responsible for some ambassadorial appointments. They were sometimes sent on special political missions such as to negotiate with a ruler or to try to convert a

prince or to take an important message from the Ismaili head of state to another ruler. The second category of Dais were given the jobs as deputies to their senior colleagues and were promoted to the higher category if a vacancy arose.⁴⁸

The fourth rank of dawa consisted of the Rafiqs (comrades). Having joined the Ismaili dawa, they received a substantial education and training in the Ismaili doctrine before taking an oath in the presence of a Dai, to whom they owed absolute obedience in both religious and temporal matters.⁴⁹

The last two categories, the sixth and the seventh of the order, are sometimes treated as one. They consisted of the beginners or aspirants (lasiques) who were not permitted to preach. Among the final class were the mustajibs (those who had 'responded' sufficiently to proceed into the stages of the Dawa).⁵⁰

Following the Rafiqs, in the fifth rank, came a section of the Ismailis whose names left fearful echoes in the courts of the most powerful rulers. These were the fidais (self-devoted ones) who pledged themselves to strike against any actual or potential threat to the Dawa. They were directly responsible to the Imam or his hujjat, to whom absolute obedience was essential if they were to prove their devotion and loyalty to the Dawa as personified in the Hujjat, who initially was Hasan-i-Sabbah himself. Although they were not initiated in the Dawa as were the Dais and the Rafiqs, they were aware of the basic Ismaili principles, though unlearned in the esoteric mysteries of their religion. They were, on the other hand, carefully trained not only in the use of arms, the endurance of fatigue, and the art of disguise, but also, in some cases at any rate, in foreign and even European languages. The fidais deputed to assassinate Conrad, Marquis of Montferrat, were sufficiently conversant with the Frankish language and customs to pass as Christian monks during the six months which they spent in the Crusader's camp awaiting an opportunity for the accomplishment of their mission.⁵¹ It was seldom that they survived their victims. They were instructed to carry out their mission to get maximum publicity. They carried out their work in the most dramatic style, striking down a Muslim Amir on a Friday in the Mosque, or a Christian Prince or

Duke on a Sunday in the Church, in sight of the assembled congregation. It was considered so honourable a death, that we read of the mothers of fidais who wept to see their sons return alive.⁵² Sometimes, they only threatened, if thus they could achieve their end. The King or General who marched to attack one of their strongholds would wake up some morning in his tent to find stuck in the earth beside him a dagger, on which was transfixed a note of warning which might well turn him back from his expedition, as is said to have happened to Sultan Sanjar and later to Sultan Saladin. And a theologian professor⁵³ confronted by a quasi-student whose diligent attendance and close attention to his lectures had favourably attracted his notice, with a choice between a purse of gold and a dagger as an alternative inducements to him to cease reviling the 'heretics' of Alamut, wisely chose the former, and thereafter, when rallied on his avoidance of all disrespectful allusion to them, was wont to reply, with some humour, that he had been 'convinced' by arguments both weighty and trenchant that he had been wrong to indulge in such uncharitable utterances. In short, the fidais or 'self-devoted ones' were the 'destroying angels' and ministers of vengeance of the order and the cause of that far-reaching terror which it inspired, a terror which made kings tremble on their thrones and kept their enemies at bay.⁵⁴

9. Hierarchy of Ismaili Dawa (Nizari School)

1	Natiq	Prophet of God
2	Wasi	The executor of the Prophet' will
3	Imam	The later successor of the Prophet after the first generation
4	Hujjat	Sheikh = Sayyidna
5	Dai-al Kabir	Provincial head and in charge of Dawa
6	Dai	Naqib = Janah (wing) = Nazar (keeper or inspector)
7	Rafiq	Licence to preach the Ismaili doctrines
8	Fidais	Self-sacrifice in the line of duty
9	Lasiques	Newcomers

10	Mustajibs	Newcomers
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Footnotes

1. M. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins*, The Hague, 1955; B. Lewis, *The Origin of Ismailism*, London, 1952; H. Corbin, 'Nasir-i-Khusran and Iranian Ismailism' in *Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. IV, Cambridge, 1975.
W. Madelung, 'Ismailiyya', *EI*₂, IV, pp. 198-20; W. Ivanow, 'Ismailiyya' in *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, pp. 179-83.
For Ismaili literature, see I. K. Poonawala, *History of Ismaili Literature*, Los Angeles, 1977, which goes much further than Ivanow's *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliographical Survey*, Tehran 1963.
2. Ibn Ishaq's *Sirat Rasul Allah*. trans. A. Guillaume. *The Life of Muhammad*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978, p. 682.
3. Ibid., p. 683.
4. See L. Voccia Vagliere, 'Gadir-Khum' in *EI*, pp. 993-4; S. H. M. Jafri, *The Origin and Early Development of Shia Islam*, Longman, London, 1979, p. 19.
5. The general Shiite and also Fatimid translation quoted in Ivanow, *Rise of the Fatimids*, Calcutta 1942, pp. 95-127 and his article 'Early Shiite Movements', *JBBRAS*, 17, 1941, pp. 1-23 discusses the variety of tendencies within the Shia.
6. In earlier Islam, 'ijma' were the Companions of the Prophet. Later, they were the Companions of the Companions, some times they were the people of Medina, *EI* (Urdu).
7. Ismailis consider Hassan as Imam-i-Mustawada (temporary) as compared to Hussain who is Imam-i-Musta'war (permanent). See Nasir-ud-Din Tusi: *Tasawwurat* edited by W. Ivanow, pp. 149-50. Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 149. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 646.
8. For example, Zaydiya Sect who accepted the Imamate of Zayd, son of Zain-al-Abidin, half brother of al-Baqir who was accepted as Imam by the majority of Shias. S. H. M. Jafri, *The Origin and Early Development of Shia Islam*, p. 247.
9. R. Levy, 'The Account of the Ismaili Doctrines', *JRAS*, III, 1930. Juvaini, Vol. 3, pp. 144-8. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, pp. 642-7.
10. R. Levy, 'The Account of the Ismaili Doctrines', *JRAS*, III, 1930. Juvaini, Vol. 3, pp. 144-8. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, pp. 642-7.
11. Ivanow, 'Early Shiite Movements', *JBBRAS*, 17, 1941.
12. *Taqiyya* is a Shiite doctrine which allows dissimulation under compulsion or threat.
13. Juvaini, Vol. 3, pp. 144-8. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, pp. 642-4.
W. Ivanow, 'Early Shiite Movements', *JBBRAS*, 1941.
14. W. Ivanow, *Rise of the Fatimids*, Calcutta, 1942. E. G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 2, pp. 194-205.

- [15.](#) *Dawa* has very broad meaning in the context of Ismaili movements. Primarily it means the organisation with its complicated structure which preached the Ismaili doctrines and invited people to join the Ismaili cause but it also began to be known as the Ismaili philosophy itself along with its propagational organisation.
- [16.](#) H. Hamadani, 'The History of the Ismaili Dawat', *JRAS*, 1932, pp. 126-36.
- [17.](#) *Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 2, pp. 218-21, 714; *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 2, pp. 194-200; Juvaini, Vol. 3, pp. 154-82. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, pp. 648-62.
- [18.](#) Dr. Zahid Ali, *Tarikh-i-Fatimiyya-i-Misr*, Hyderabad, India, 1948 (in Urdu).
- [19.](#) M. Canard's article on the Fatimids in *EI₂*, pp. 850-62; A. Hamadani, *The Fatimids*, Karachi, 1964; P. J. Vatikiotis, *The Fatimid Theory of State*, Lahore, 1957.
- [20.](#) Ibid.
- [21.](#) S. M. Stern, 'The Epistle of the Fatimid Caliph al-Amir (al-Hidaya al-Amiriya) Its Date and Its Purpose', *JRAS*, 1950.
- [22.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, pp. 180-81. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, pp. 662-3.
- [23.](#) A. Esmail, 'The Ismailis in History', a chapter in Nanji, A. *Ismaili Contributions to Islamic Culture*, edited by S. H. Nasr, pp. 259-60.
- [24.](#) The head of the Ismaili Dawa: The top position below Imam in the hierarchy of Ismaili Dawa, see p. 79.
- [25.](#) R. Levy, 'The account of the Ismaili doctrines in Jamiah Tawarikh of Rashid-ud-Din', *JRAS*, part III, July 1930.
- [26.](#) Ibid. B. Lewis, *The Assassins*, p. 27.
- [27.](#) Express designation with the consent of Allah, it is the nomination of the future Imam by the present Imam himself.
- [28.](#) Nasir-ud-Din Tusi, *Roza-tul-Taslim or Tassawurat*. Edited by Ivanow, Bombay 1950. pp. 101-124 Trans. p. 115-145; W. Ivanow, *A creed of the Fatimids*, p. 39; S. H. M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shia Islam*, 1979, Chapter II, 'The Doctrine of Imamate'.
- [29.](#) W. Madelung, 'Aspects of Ismaili theology, the Prophetic Chain and God beyond Being' given in *Ismaili Contribution to Islamic Culture* edited by S. H. Nasr, Tehran, 1977.
- [30.](#) Ibid.
- [31.](#) Ibid.
- [32.](#) Ibid.
- [33.](#) Ibid.
- [34.](#) Al-Shahrastani, *Al-Milal wal-Nihal* edited by Isfahani, Tehran, p. 155.
- [35.](#) Ibid. Also see, Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 196. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 671.
- [36.](#) Paul. Kraus, 'The Controversies of Fakhr-ud-Din Razi', *IC*. No. 2, 1938.

- [37.](#) Ibid.
- [38.](#) M. T. Daneshpajhuh, 'Dai-al-Duat Taj-al-Din Shahrastani' in Nama-yi Astan-i-Quds, VII/2, 1346 71 ff VIII/4, 1347, 61 ff Nasr S. H. *Ismaili Contributions to Islamic Culture*, pp. 59.
- [39.](#) Ibid., pp 59-60.
- [40.](#) Ibid.
- [41.](#) N. A. Mirza, 'The Syrian Ismailis at the time of the Crusades.' Ph.D. thesis. Durham University, 1963. Chapter VI, p. 164 of the thesis deals with organisation of the Ismaili Dawa.
- [42.](#) Literally Jazira means Island. Apparently the Ismaili authors meant by Jazira a region comparable with ecclesiastical province. The regions were determined with the language or race of their inhabitants Persian, Arabs, Berbers, etc., See S. M. Stern, 'Abul Casim al-Busti and refutation of Ismailism', *JRAS*, 1961.
- [43.](#) Jawad al-Masqati *Selections from Qadi Noman, Kitab-al-Himma*, Karachi, 1950, p. 42.
Life and lectures of al-Muayyid-fid-Din. Karachi, 1950, p. 162. According to tradition (Bokhari) the Prophet Mohammad said 'I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its Bab (gate).'
- [44.](#) Ibn Khaldun, *al-Ibar-Bulaq*, 1867, Vol. 4, p. 30; Arif Tamir, 'Haqiqat' in *al-Mashriq*, 1957, p. 135.
- [45.](#) Hamid-ud-Din al-Kirmani, *Rahat al-Aql*, edited by Hussain, Cairo, 1952.
- [46.](#) S. M. Stern, 'The early Ismaili Missionaries in North West Persia, Khurasan and Transoxania', *BSOAS*, Vol. XXIII, Part I, 1960, pp. 56, 60, 77-820.
- [47.](#) E. G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 2, p. 206.
- [48.](#) Ibid., p. 209. See also N. A. Mirza, 'The Syrian Ismailis at the time of the Crusades,' Ph.D. thesis, Durham University, 1963.
- [49.](#) Ibid.
- [50.](#) Ibid.
- [51.](#) Ibid.
- [52.](#) E. G. Browne, op. cit. 'Sheikh-ul-Jabal' or 'Chief of the Mountain' was the title of the head of the Ismaili state. This title was mistranslated by the Crusaders as 'old man of the mountain', due to the secondary meaning of the word Sheikh (Chief) which is the 'old man' or simply the 'old one'.
- [53.](#) The reference is to Fakhar-ud-Din Razi, E.G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 2, pp. 209-10.
- [54.](#) Ibid.

Chapter 6

Expansion and Consolidation of Dawa *Establishment of an Ismaili State*

I: Hasan During the Reign of Sultan Malik Shah (1072-1092)

1. Strategy of Struggle (Dar-ul-Hijra)

During the ten years of looking around, thinking, and planning since his arrival from Egypt, Hasan might have thought out a strategy for his struggle against the political and religious order of Iran. His aims were probably to convert the whole of Iran and Iraq to his own faith and cause and to establish a universal rule of the Imam, who was the Fatimid Caliph al-Mustansir in his time. Hasan's expectations appear to have been modelled upon the story of the Prophet himself, modified in terms of the current circumstances and, in his case, initially, the pattern of action and reaction followed that model to a considerable degree. The Prophet, when not successful in his mission at home, had to migrate to Medina (Dar-ul-Hijra) so that he could deliver his message from the safety of his refuge. Similarly, North Africa had been Dar-ul-Hijra for the early Fatimids, who used it as a base for conquering Egypt and the holy cities of Arabia. Ismailis in Iran did not have one, but scores of Dar-ul-Hijra (their castles which were scattered around), and they hoped to come back from the safety of these refuges and win over the entire population of the cities. Ismailis could indeed congratulate themselves that their opponents treated them with an indignation and vengefulness that suited well the traditional picture of the Meccans' response to the Prophet in Medina.

Once Hasan-i-Sabbah was firmly established in Alamut and had gained complete control over the situation, he dispatched Dais in all directions and devoted himself completely to the spread of his mission.¹ The doctrines and principles of his Dawa are fully explained in Chapter 5, 'The Ismaili Sect of Islam and the Organisation of Ismaili Dawa'. Hasan exerted every effort to capture the places adjacent to Alamut or in that vicinity. His task was twofold: to win converts and to gain possession of more castles. Where possible, he won them over to his cause by peaceful means and by the force of his arguments in favour of his Dawa, while those places which were unaffected by his Dawa, he took by force. He took as many castles as he could, and whenever he found a suitable rock, he built a castle upon it and an adequate water supply was arranged.²

2. Balad-al-Iqbal's Expansion and Consolidation³

Amongst the officers of Sultan Malik Shah was an Amir called Yurun Tash, who held the district of Alamut as fief (iqta).⁴ He used to attack constantly the country at the foot of Alamut. He laid waste wherever the followers of Hasan were to be found and massacred them. Since as yet, no stores had been laid up in Alamut, the occupants were caused great distress and reduced to impotence and decided to hand over the castle to a few unencumbered (Jarida) men and to depart elsewhere to safety. Hereupon, Hasan-i-Sabbah claimed to have received a message from his Imam al-Mustansir to the effect that they should not quit that place because good fortune awaited them there and thus persuaded his followers to resign themselves to the endurance of hardships. So they remained in Alamut, which, on account of those words, they named Balad-al-Iqbal.⁵ The province of Quhistan lay in the barren, mountainous country situated in the south-east of Iran, where its population lived in scattered townships surrounded by the great salt desert of the central plateau. It had been the last refuge of the Zoroastrians when Iran was converted to Islam, and subsequently, it became a resort of Shiites and other religious dissidents. During his travels, Hasan had already visited the region and probably had made contacts and was hopeful of its support for his cause. Rashid-ud-Din reports that

Ismaili missionaries had been operating in this area since several decades earlier. He mentions that the chief Dai, Khawja Adib Mohammad bin Tahir Sajazi, followed by Mohammad bin Abdur Rehman and his deputy Rais Hasan bin Ahmed, had operated in this area in 412/1021.⁶

In 484/1091-2, Hasan sent his trusted Dai, Hussain Qaini, to Quhistan to mobilise and extend Ismaili support. We recall that Hussain Qaini had already taken a leading part in the delicate operation of the conversion of the garrison of Alamut. He, in fact, came from Qain, a well-known town in the province of Quhistan and, being a native of the area, he was very well acquainted with the district. Hamd Allah Mustafawi informs us that, previously, Hussain Qaini had been the governor of the castle of Turshiz in Quhistan, which he held on behalf of Sultan Malik Shah.⁷ His mission was completely successful, and the people of Quhistan came to his fold in great numbers. Zahir ad-Din reports an incident which further helped the Ismaili cause. He informs us that an oppressive Seljuk officer demanded the sister of a highly respected local lord, who thereupon defected to the Ismailis.⁸ It was not a secret subversion as had happened in Alamut; it was an open revolt against the military domination of the foreign Turks. Most of the local chiefs, previously loyal to Sultan Malik Shah, accepted the mission of Hussain Qaini.⁹ Ismailis took control of several towns: Tabas, Qain, Tun, Zuzan, and others. Hasan appointed Hussain Qaini as the Chief Dai and head of the provincial Ismaili government in Quhistan. Hussain consolidated his new position and expanded his mission to the surrounding areas.¹⁰

Another area of Ismaili activity lay in south-western Iran between Khuzistan and Fars and located in the Zargos mountain range with a few scattered castles guarding the population against possible attacks. There were all the necessary ingredients available for the defence and expansion of Ismaili ideas. The inhabitants had a long tradition of Shiite sympathies and Ismailis, in the past, had been quite successful in spreading their doctrines in this land and from this base to the surrounding areas. It has already been said that Hasan had visited this area several times during his earlier travels

and must have made contacts and enlisted active support for his cause. The Ismaili leader in this area was Abu Hamza Kafshger (shoemaker) who came from Arrajan. Like Hasan himself, he had also visited Cairo and returned as a Fatimid Dai to work in his own country. Kafshger seized two castles in the vicinity of Arrajan and used them as a base for further expansion of the Ismaili Dawa, thus adding another province to the Ismaili state with its centre in Alamut.^{[11](#)}

3. Sultan Malik Shah's Correspondence with Hasan

Sultan Malik Shah and Nizam-ul-Mulk, his Grand Vizier, both knew Hasan well as he had served in the court of the Sultan for several years before he was outcast and expelled from his post. He had then accepted the Ismaili faith and commenced his work for the cause of the Fatimid Caliphs of Egypt, the declared enemy of the Seljuk Turks and the Abbasid Caliphs of Baghdad. Nizam-ul-Mulk 'might even have a personal grudge against Hasan'.^{[12](#)} In order to settle the score, he used all means at his disposal to arrest Hasan while he was on the run, immediately after his expulsion from the Sultan's court and after his return from Egypt, and when he was travelling for ten years, converting people to his cause and soliciting help from friends until he found a secure refuge in the impregnable castle of Alamut. Now it was not an easy matter to arrest him as he had the security of a castle as well as the support of many people who were prepared to die for his cause. It was probably during this time in 484/1091 that Sultan Malik Shah gave Hasan an ultimatum to surrender, to abandon his evil ways and return to Islam, failing which his castle would be rased to the ground and he and his followers destroyed. In a letter,^{[13](#)} he accused him of starting a new religion, misleading some ignorant mountain dwellers and renouncing the rightful Abbasid Caliphs of Islam. In a polite and elegantly expressed reply, Hasan defended his faith as the true faith of Islam, accused the Abbasid Caliphs as usurpers and evil doers, and asserted the Fatimid Imams as the true Caliphs of Islam. He warned the Sultan against the false claims of the Abbasids, the intrigues of Nizam-ul-Mulk and misdeeds of various oppressors, and

urged him to take action against them because if he did not, another, more just ruler, would arise and do the job in his place. The Sultan might have thought that a strong letter, including an ultimatum forcing him to surrender, might work, but Hasan's reply must have disappointed him. The Sultan, so far, had not used his army to defeat Hasan, but now he seems to have made up his mind to suppress the rebellion of Hasan by armed force before it took stronger roots.

4. Sultan Malik Shah's Offensive Against Hasan

At the beginning of 485/1092, Sultan Malik Shah dispatched an Amir called Arslan-Tash to expel and extirpate Hasan-i-Sabbah and all his followers. This Amir sat down before Alamut in Jumadi I of the said year (June-July AD 1092).¹⁴ At that time, Hasan had with him in Alamut no more than sixty or seventy men,¹⁵ and they had but few stores. They lived on the little they had, a bare subsistence, and kept up the battle with the besiegers. Now one of Hasan's Dais, a man called Dihdar Bu-Ali, who came from Zuvara¹⁶ and Ardistan, had his residence in Qazvin, some of whose inhabitants were his converts. Likewise in the district of Talaqan and Kuh-i-Bara¹⁷ and the district of Rayy, many people had accepted the Dawa of Hasan, and they all resorted to the man who had settled in Qazvin. Hasan-i-Sabbah now appealed to Bu-Ali Dihdar for help, and he stirred up a host of people from Kuh-i-Bara and Talaqan and sent arms and implements of war from Qazvin. Some 300 of these men came to the aid of Hasan. They threw themselves into Alamut and, with the assistance of the garrison and the support of some of the people of Rudbar, who were in league with them outside the castle, one night at the end of Shaban of that year (September-October AD 1092), they made a surprise attack upon the army of Arslan-Tash. They killed some, and the rest of the army was put to flight.¹⁸ The Ismailis got a lot of booty, including weapons, grain, cloth, provisions and drinks, and everything became abundant and plentiful inside the castle.¹⁹

At the beginning of AD 485/1092, the Sultan had also sent another of his chief Amirs called Kazal-Sarigh, upon whom he bestowed the

district of Quhistan as fief (iqta), to expel the Ismailis from Quhistan. He had ordered the armies of Khurasan to follow and assist him. At this time, the Ismailis did not have any castle (hisar) except the castle of Dara,²⁰ which is adjacent to Sistan and is one of the dependencies of Muminabad.²¹ Kazal-Sarigh besieged the Castle (Dara) and joined battle with them. Before he could take the castle, however, he received the news of Malik-Shah's death, whereupon he raised the siege and his army dispersed.²²

5. The Assassination of Nizam-ul-Mulk²³

Sultan Malik Shah was greatly disappointed at his defeat in the battle against Hasan and consulted his advisers regarding the situation. Nizam-ul-Mulk knew the potential of Hasan very well; indeed, he could see clearly that if Hasan was not checked at this stage, he could grow into a serious threat to the Seljuk Empire. So Nizam advised the Sultan to prepare for an all-out offensive at Hasan's castles and get rid of the rebellious elements once and for all. They were, thus, preparing for a decisive attack on Hasan's strongholds, but due to the untimely death of both Nizam-ul-Mulk and Malik Shah, it was never put into action.²⁴

Now, Hasan created a cell in his organisation known as fidais (Fidayeen), which is fully discussed in Chapter 5. These fidais constituted a crack force or a suicide squad whose duty was just to obey the orders of the superiors and sacrifice their own lives if required in the execution of their assignment. Hasan assembled a group of fidais in Alamut and explained to them how Nizam-ul-Mulk posed an imminent threat to the Ismaili cause which would be well served if this threat was eliminated. A volunteer called Abu Tahir Arrani came forward and accepted the challenge. He was given the dangerous assignment of the assassination of Nizam-ul-Mulk. He was sent out of the castle secretly in order to carry out his mission. He made a lot of inquiries regarding the whereabouts of Nizam and was ultimately successful in locating him. Nizam-ul-Mulk was accompanying the Sultan along with their entourage, who were enjoying their vacation in the hunting grounds in the forest south of the Caspian Sea. He now gave deep thought to his plan of executing

his assignment. He knew full well that a strong military guard would be protecting the chief minister of the Sultan, and it would be impossible to come close to him. Therefore, a very ingenious plan was needed. He decided that he would approach his target in the guise of an old man appealing for justice against a local government official. He was a young man in his early twenties, and he decided to act as an old man of over sixty. It needed a perfect disguise. He must have rehearsed many times until he was satisfied with its perfection. On the night of Friday, 12 Ramadan 485 (16 October 1092), he went up to Nizam-ul-Mulk's litter at a place called Sahna²⁵ in the region of Nihavand, while he was being borne from the Sultan's audience place to the tent of his harem. Abu Tahir was disguised as a Sufi, an old man with a staff in his right hand and papers of petition in his left. He shouted at the top of his voice, 'Justice, Justice, the Great One.' The guards pushed the old man away saying, 'Go away, this is not the time for audience.' But Nizam who had overheard the words of the old Sufi, commanded, 'Let him approach, he must be heard and his grievances redressed.' So the Sufi was allowed to come near Nizam-ul-Mulk, who asked him, 'What is the matter?' The Sufi bent down and took out a lethal dagger, which he had hidden in the long socks (Jareeb) he was wearing. He stabbed him with his dagger through the heart, and by that blow, Nizam-ul-Mulk died, shortly after the attack.²⁶ After accomplishing his mission, the Sufi made a run for his life, but his foot was caught up in a tent's rope (tannab) and he fell down. The guards at once caught him and cut him into pieces. Nizam-ul-Mulk was the first person to be killed by a fidais. Hasan, on hearing this news in Alamut, said, 'The killing of this devil is the beginning of bliss' and declared a seven-day holiday. Juvaini reports that, after the fall of Alamut, he went up to examine the famous Ismaili library and saw a Roll of Honour in letters of gold and the name of Abu Tahir Arani written at the top of the list.²⁷

6. Hasan's Relations with Egypt

In 487/1094, the Ismailis faced a major crisis. The Fatimid Caliph al-Mustansir, Imam of the time and head of the faith, died in Cairo,

leaving a disputed succession. The Ismailis of Iran refused to recognise his younger son, al-Mustali, as the new Imam and declared their belief that the rightful heir was his ousted elder brother, Nizar. Until the split, the organisation of Ismaili Dawa was under the supreme authority of the Imam al-Mustansir, and Hasan had been working first in the capacity of a Dai, deputy to Abdul-Malik Attash, and then as his successor, Chief Dai for Iraq and Iran. There was now a complete break from Cairo, and henceforward, the Iranian Ismailis had to manage their affairs without any support or direction from Cairo.

Nizar, the Imam of the Ismailis of Iran, along with his two sons, was put in prison in Cairo, where ultimately he died.²⁸ Hasan's first concern was to bring the successor of Nizar to safety. Juvaini reports that Ismailis were unanimous in their belief that a person from Egypt called Qadi Abul Hasan Saidi, a close kinsman and confidant of al-Mustansir who in 488/1095 (a year after Mustansir's death) came to Hasan-i-Sabbah in Alamut and remained there for six months and in Rajab of the same year (July-August AD 1095) returned to Egypt.²⁹ Hasan gave strict instructions that he should be treated with honour and respect and went to great pains to see that it was done so. He was brought to Alamut in disguise and in the dress of concealment, a grandson of Nizar, who was one of their Imams. Abul Hasan Saidi told that secret to none but Hasan-i-Sabbah, and it was not divulged; they caused him to dwell in a village at the foot of Alamut.³⁰

The Nizaris regarded al-Afdal, the prime minister and commander of the forces of Egypt, as responsible for usurping the rights of Nizar and giving it to al-Mustali, his brother-in-law, which made him a prime target of their revenge. Rashid-ud-Din reports that three fidais from Aleppo were dispatched to Cairo to carry out this mission, and they assassinated al-Afdal in the month of Ramadan 515/1121.³¹ To celebrate the incident, Hasan ordered a feast for seven days and nights. A contemporary chronicler from Damascus, however, attributes the murder to an estrangement between al-Afdal and al-Amir, the Fatimid Caliph who succeeded his father al-Mustali in

495/1101. Al-Amir had resented the tutelage of his powerful Vizier and openly rejoiced at his death.^{[32](#)}

The death of al-Afdal was welcomed both in Alamut and Cairo, and it was an ideal time to reconcile the differences between the two branches of Ismailis. In 516/1122, a public meeting was called in Cairo at which the case of al-Mustali and Nizar was presented. On the orders of the Caliph al-Amir, Ibn al-Sayrafi, the secretary of the chancery of Dawa, prepared a Sijil (Royal proclamation), including the testimony of Nizar's real sister in favour of her half-brother, al-Mustali, as the legitimate Fatimid Caliph, which was given wide publicity throughout the Fatimid Empire. The document is known as al-Hidaya al-Amiriyya (The Epistle of the Fatimid Caliph al-Amir).^{[33](#)} Another move for reconciliation was made in an open letter of pardon addressed primarily to the Nizaris written by the Caliph al-Amir, inviting them to join their brethren in Cairo. Al-Mamun, the prime minister of al-Amir, himself an Isna-ashri, instructed the secretary, Ibn-Sayrafi, to write a letter to Hasan, urging him to abandon his belief in the Imamate of Nizar and return to the true path. This letter, we are told, was never dispatched to Hasan.^{[34](#)}

A Fatimid Dai of Damascus reports the reaction of the Nizaris living there. He tells us that one of the Nizari read the Hidaya (Epistle) and was so impressed by its contents that he found it necessary to forward it to Hasan-i-Sabbah. The latter wrote his refutation of the Hidaya on the blank space at the end of the copy sent to him and returned the document back to Damascus. The Nizari then appeared at a meeting of the orthodox Fatimid Ismailis of Damascus and read out his master's refutation. The Fatimid Dai then asked the Caliph for guidance to silence their opponents.^{[35](#)}

The friendly approaches of Cairo towards Alamut, however, did not produce any conciliatory results. On the other hand, the relationship between them deteriorated rapidly. When al-Mamun found out that the Nizaris were planning to assassinate him as well as al-Amir, the Caliph, and had sent men and funds to Egypt to accomplish their mission, he took very stern measures to counter that threat. He ordered the most elaborate security precautions at the frontiers and in Cairo, to prevent the infiltration of fidais. A thorough examination

of all merchants and other persons entering Egyptian territory was instituted.³⁶ The governor of Cairo was ordered to register the names of all the inhabitants street by street and quarter by quarter and not to permit anybody to escape registration. Consequently, several suspects, including the tutor of the Caliph's children, were arrested. So successful were the Vizier's policemen and spies, says an Egyptian chronicler, that from the very moment when a Fidai left Alamut, his movements were known and reported. In spite of all these precautions, al-Amir the Caliph was assassinated in Cairo by a Fidai in 594/1130.³⁷

7. Ismaili Dawa Extended to Syria

It was not long after the acquisition of Alamut by Hasan-i-Sabbah that his followers became strong in Syria too. Whether these Syrian Ismailis at first recognised the authority of Hasan is not certain, although it seems likely that Hasan's recognition as their leader came about after AD 1094, when the split in the Ismaili world was established. A detailed account of their history is given by Quatremere to which something is added by Defremery in *JA*, 1854-1855.³⁸ Ten years after the seizure of Alamut, we hear of Ismailis establishing themselves at Aleppo, and for a time, they enjoyed the almost unconcealed favour of Ridwan the Seljuk prince of Aleppo. The leader of the Ismailis in Syria was a Persian physician and astronomer by the name of al-Hakim al-Munajjim, who had been sent by Hasan from Alamut to lead the Nizari Dawa in Syria. Al-Munajjim settled down in Aleppo and was able to convert Ridwan, the Seljuk lord of Aleppo, to the Nizari faith. For a few years at least, the Nizaris moved about fearlessly in Aleppo and were able to preach their doctrines openly to the public around them. Ridwan even built for them the centre of their preaching known as Dar-al-Dawa (the mission house).³⁹

The advent of crusaders in AD 1097 at first looked like a transient raid from the Byzantines, but when they settled down to stay, their presence in several coastal towns complicated the jealous quarrels of the Seljuk princes over their remaining territorial possessions. Towards AD 1101, Ridwan was faced with a difficult situation. On the

one hand, his old rival Seljuk Amirs threatened his nominal supremacy which he enjoyed among the princes, and on the other hand, there was a genuine threat from the Franks (crusaders) who had a strong foothold in the coastal towns of Antioch and Edessa and who wanted to annex the Aleppine territories. It is conceivable that, apart from religious conviction, Ridwan might have had some political motives for making friends with the Ismailis.⁴⁰ The course of events certainly suggest that, whereas Ridwan protected the Ismailis wherever he could easily do so, he made use of them frequently in his own political battles. The atmosphere of the time may be illustrated by a contemporary report from Damascus regarding the death of the crucial opponent of Ridwan among the Seljuk Amirs.

And in that year (496/1103) arrived the news from Hims that its lord, Amir Janah al-Dawla Hussain Atabak, came down from the fortress to the mosque for the Friday prayers, with his men around him fully armed; and when he arrived at his place of prayer according to his custom, some three Persian batinis⁴¹ attacked him. With them was an old man, whom they blessed and listened to in the manner of ascetics. He (Janah al-Dawla) threatened them and they stabbed him with their knives, and killed him; and killed with him many of his men.⁴² There were in the mosque at that time, several Sufis, both Persians and others, who were suspected and killed unresistingly, unjustly, right away to the last person.⁴³

It may be noted that it was again Ismailis who helped Ridwan in his battle against the Franks, who attacked the Jazr lands south-west of Aleppo. Ridwan ordered a general uprising of the population, who, incidentally, were Ismailis and achieved a feat of which the Turkish-occupying armies seemed incapable by themselves.⁴⁴

Al-Hakim al-Munajjim died (AD 1103) a few weeks after the assassination of Janah al-Dawla. He was succeeded by another Persian by the name of Abu Tahir al-Saigh Zargar (goldsmith) sent by Hasan-i-Sabbah as his deputy in Syria. Abu Tahir continued to enjoy the favours of Ridwan and made several attempts to seize strategic positions in the mountains south of the city but without much success.⁴⁵

The first success of the Ismailis is recorded in the account of their attack against Afamiya in 500/1106. Khalaf Ibn Mulaib, probably a Mustalian Ismaili,⁴⁶ its present ruler, had seized Afamiya from Ridwan in 490/1096. Abu Tahir devised an ingenious plan to seize the citadel. Some of the inhabitants of Afamiya were local Ismailis,⁴⁷ and with the help of their leader Abul Fath,⁴⁸ a qadi from the nearby Sarmin, the plot was carried out successfully. A group of six Ismailis from Aleppo also joined in the attack. They got hold of a Frankish horse, a mule, and accoutrements with a shield and armour, and they came to Afamiya, and said to Khalaf the following:

'We have come to enter your service. We have killed a Frankish knight and have brought you his horse, mule and accoutrements.'⁴⁹ They were accepted and honourably received and installed in the citadel, in a house adjoining the outer wall. They made a hole through the wall, admitting their friends who were waiting outside and all together seized the castle by a surprise attack, killing Khalaf, the governor of the castle.

Soon after the surrender of Afamiya, Abu Tahir himself arrived from Aleppo to take charge,⁵⁰ but this victory was only short-lived. Tancred, the crusading prince of Antioch, who was well informed of the situation, took the opportunity to attack Afamiya. At first, he was content to levy tribute from the Ismailis and leave them in possession of the city, but later in the same year, he returned and blockaded the town, forcing its surrender. Abul Fath was captured and put to death by torture. Abu Tahir and his companions were taken prisoner but allowed to ransom themselves and return to Aleppo.⁵¹

In AD 1111, Sultan Mohammad sent Mawdud, the Seljuk lord of Mosul, as the commander of an eastern expeditionary force to Syria in order to fight the crusaders. Tughtigin the Seljuk lord of Damascus gave him a lavish welcome, whereas Ridwan considered the stationing of the eastern army in his territory against his interest and closed the gates of the city against them when they reached Aleppo. Ismailis rallied to support Ridwan. Two years later, Mawdud was assassinated in Damascus in AD 1113, and the blame was put on

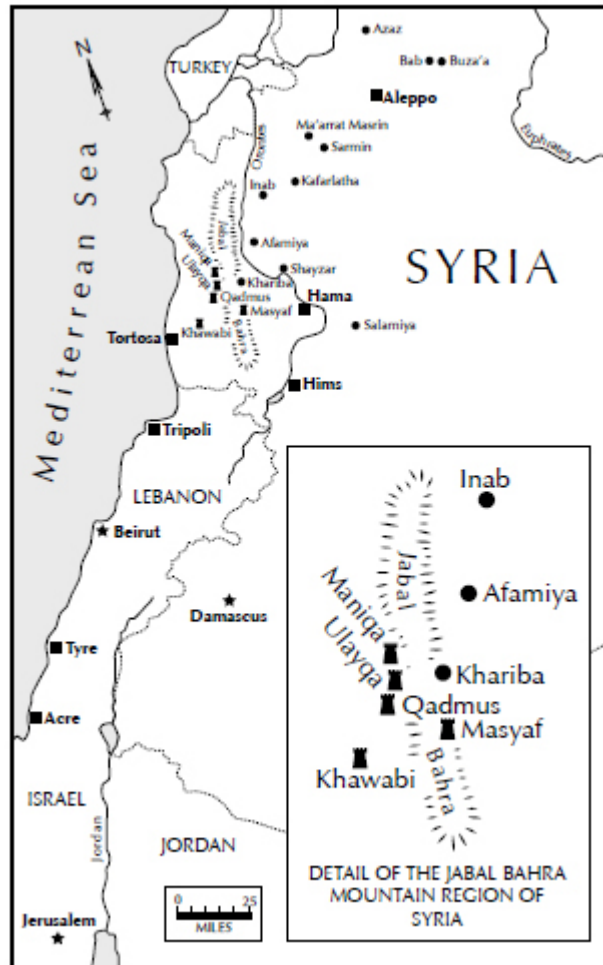
an Ismaili Fidai, perhaps inspired by Ridwan, although Ibn al-Athir and William of Tyre suggest that Tughtigin had a hand in it.⁵²

The Ismaili activities in Aleppo had made them unpopular with the public. An abortive attempt on the life of a wealthy Persian merchant, Abu Harb Isa bin Zayd in AD 1111, who was travelling through Aleppo and who happened to be an enemy of the sect, caused a wave of anger among the inhabitants of the city. Ridwan himself was suspected of having a hand in the attempt to assassinate Abu Harb. Abu Harb and his friends fought back against his assailants, and the city was aroused into general massacre of the Ismailis which Ridwan was forced to condone.⁵³

Most historians, including Aleppine Ibn al-Adim, have depicted Ridwan as a bad character, devoid of loyalty or honour. He is accused of non-cooperation with other Muslims, and particularly with his Seljuk cousins, against the crusaders. His relationship with the Ismailis had always been a dubious one. He made use of the Ismailis whenever he needed them but did not render solid help to strengthen their cause by providing them with a secure and independent centre. From the Ismaili point of view, however, any help from any source was welcome, and they were thankful to Ridwan in this respect. Thus, we see that the Ismailis tolerated Ridwan's insults and snubs and still were thankful to him for whatever protection he could offer them. Due to the pressure of public opinion and the Seljuk Amirs, Ridwan was led to repudiate the Ismailis. Having executed a few of them, he expelled a number of them from Aleppo.⁵⁴

The threat of the eastern Seljuk high command against the Ismailis became clear after the death of Ridwan on 10 December 1113. His son, Alp-Arslan, who succeeded Ridwan, at first followed his father's policy and even ceded them a castle on the road to Baghdad. However, soon a word of warning came from Sultan Mohammad, urging him to destroy the Ismaili menace completely. Saeed Ibn Badi, a Rais of Aleppo and commander of the militia, persuaded Alp-Arslan to issue a warrant for the execution of Abu Tahir and other leaders of the Ismailis, including Dai Ismail, the brother of the late al-Munajjim. It was followed by riots and

massacre of Ismailis by the populace of Aleppo. Many Ismailis, however, escaped death either by going underground or, according to al-Qalanisi, by fleeing to the protection of the Franks. Within six years of this setback, however, the Ismailis were able to take revenge from Ibn Badi. The Ismaili fidais caught up with Ibn Badi on the crossing of the Euphrates in AD 1119 and killed him, together with his two sons.⁵⁵ The new Ismaili leader, after the execution of Abu Tahir, was another Persian by the name Bahram, who transferred the main activities of the sect to the south and was soon playing an active role in the affairs of Damascus. Al-Qalanisi informs us that Bahram stayed secretly as an Ismaili Chief Dai in various parts of Syria and was able to acquire a position of power in Damascus with the help of Vizier Abu Ali Tahir Ibn Said al-Mazdaghani, who was not himself an Ismaili. Tughtigin, the ruler of Damascus, was persuaded by his vizier to hand over to the Ismailis, in November AD 1126, the frontier fortress of Banyas (Banu As), which was menaced by the Franks. Tughtigin hoped to make good use of the Ismaili energies on the one hand, and to avoid any danger from them on the other. Bahram refortified the castle and gathered all his followers around him. In 522/1128, according to al-Qalanisi, the activities of Bahram and his followers were so formidable that nobody dared to say a word against them openly, and the Ismaili Dar-al-Dawa (mission house) was openly functioning in Damascus itself.⁵⁶ The real centre, however, was acquired ten years later in Jabal Bahara when the Ismailis purchased the castle of Qadmus. A few years later, more castles were added to their collection and thus the Ismailis were able at last to achieve their objective of establishing a secure and independent centre comprising a chain of castles, including al-Kahf, Qadmus, Masyaf, Khawbi, Rusafa, Ulayqa, and Maniqa, all in the mountains of Jabal Bahara. The climax of the Syrian Ismaili activity is seen under the leadership of Rashid-ud-Din Sinan (d. 589/1193), who played a leading part in the local politics as well as in opposition to the crusaders. These events, however, are outside the scope of this work.⁵⁷



II: Hasan During the Reign of Sultan Berkyark (1095-1104)

1. Expansion and Consolidation

After the death of Sultan Malik Shah, the Seljuk armies started to quarrel amongst each other, and there was confusion and disorder in the Kingdom. During these days of unrest, militant Ismailis took advantage and seized widely scattered fortresses. Among the rival heirs of Malik Shah, the most prominent was his eldest son Berkyark, who generally operated around Rayy or Isfahan. While independent Seljuk lords operated in Turkey and Syria in the west and Kirman and Khurasan in the east on their own account. Berkyark struggled with one or another relative for the control of western Iran and Iraq. His chief enemy happened to be his half-brother Mohammad Tapar,

supported by the latter's real brother Sanjar, although he had first to settle with his stepmother Turkan Khatun. She, with the help of her advisers Majd-ul-Mulk of Qum, Taj-ul-Mulk, Amir Urnu Bulka, and other rivals of late Nizam-ul-Mulk, and with the approval of the Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad, had declared her own son Mahmud, a child of four years old, as the new sultan and was in possession of the capital Isfahan. Berkyark marched against Isfahan, but for a sum of 500,000 dinars, he agreed to retreat to Hamadan. Soon after, Mahmud died of smallpox, and Berkyark was placed on the throne of Isfahan.^{[58](#)}

Berkyark was so preoccupied with his own struggle for power that he had neither time nor spare soldiers to deal with the Ismailis, who were increasing in strength every day. During the first decade, Ismaili activity was mainly confined to the acquiring of fortresses, for the most part in relatively inaccessible areas; the Rudbar and Alburz mountains south of the Caspian Sea, the wilderness of Quhistan, and the mountainous border between Fars and Khuzistan. As the troubled reign of Berkyark continued, the Ismailis attempted action nearer to the centre of Seljik power, Isfahan itself. Berkyark and his supporting Amirs were prepared to tolerate Ismaili expansion and, on occasion, the Sultan even sought their physical help to further his cause. Thus in AD 1100, Ismaili soldiers, under the command of al-Kulkuli from Tabas, were sent to help Berkyark in his battle against Sanjar, who was supporting his brother Mohammad Tapar against Sultan Berkyark.^{[59](#)} In the Fida'i's Roll of honour in the Chronicle of Alamut, nearly fifty assassinations were recorded during the reign of Hasan-i-Sabbah; half of them belonged to the period of Berkyark, and some victims were in fact supporters of Mohammad Tapar and opponents of Berkyark.^{[60](#)}

Under the tolerant rule of the Sultan, the Ismailis became bolder and more assertive, and even infiltrated the Sultan's court and army, winning over many of the troops and threatening those who opposed them with assassination. No commander or officer, says Ibn al-Athir, dared to leave his house unprotected. They wore armour under their clothes, and even his Vizier Abul Hasan wore a mail shirt under his robes. The Sultan's senior officers asked him for

permission to appear before him armed for fear of attack, and the request was granted.⁶¹

The growing activity and arrogant behaviour of the Ismailis and the mounting anger of his own supporters at his complacency at last forced Berkyark to take action. In AD 1101, he appears to have reached an agreement with Sanjar, who was still ruling in Khurasan for a combined action against the Ismailis. Consequently, Sanjar launched a campaign against Ismaili centres in Quhistan,⁶² but he did not take matching action in his own kingdom of western Iran and Iraq to curb their power. Instead, he appeased the anger of his officers and the common public by permitting a massacre of Ismaili sympathisers in Isfahan. Soldiers and citizens joined in the hunt for suspects who were rounded up and killed in the city square. A simple accusation was enough, and many innocents, says Ibn al-Athir, died by private vengeance.⁶³

Rawandi⁶⁴ reports an incredible story and rumours that terrified Isfahan. There was a person acting as a blind man, an Ismaili by the name of Alvi Madni, who used to stand for alms in a city square leading to a narrow lane. At nightfall, he would ask some passer-by to lead him to his home at the end of a narrow lane. The person, taking pity on the blind man, would hold him by the hand and lead him to his house. When they reached there, with the help of the inmates of the house, the stranger would be thrown down into a well connected with the cellar of the house below. Here they would torture the person and, after untold miseries, would put him to death. Now, innumerable young men had gone missing from day to day and never been found. The whole city was in a state of alarm, but after some days, a strange plot was discovered. One day, an old beggar woman, who went from door to door begging, heard groans coming from a house and reported the matter to the people in the city square. The people came and searched the house and found about 400 or 500 persons in the cellar of the house; some already dead and some in the state of dying, some crucified against the wall and two or three still alive. After this discovery, vengeance swiftly followed, and Alvi Madni, his wife, and some of his accomplices were burnt to death in the marketplace. Subsequently, riots broke out in

the city, and every one suspected of being an Ismaili was put to the sword.⁶⁵

The story itself is quite unbelievable, although it does depict the mood of the people at that time. After all, it was not the North Pole, where hundreds of dead bodies would not rot; to hide so many corpses in the climate of Isfahan without the neighbours finding out is unimaginable. Another argument for not accepting the story at its face value is the lack of motivation on the part of Ismailis for such a horrible crime of indiscriminate killing. It has never been an Ismaili practice to assassinate without a suitable political or religious motive. It seems that such rumours were spread by the enemies of the Ismailis to paint them black in the eyes of the general public. Rashid-ud-Din's version is, perhaps, more realistic. With reference to the riots in Isfahan, he says:

The reason for this was that one day a woman saw clothes and socks in an Ismaili house and informed the people. Upon this information, a party of the citizens of Isfahan came and ransacked the house.⁶⁶

As has been already said, the civil wars which prevailed during this period enabled the Ismailis to establish and consolidate their power in a way which would otherwise have been impossible. Berkyark, indeed, was accused of being in sympathy with them, or at least of allowing them a large measure of toleration in return for their support or benevolent neutrality. Ibn al-Athir tells us that, having taken prisoner Muayyid-ul-Mulk, one of the sons of Nizam-ul-Mulk, Berkyark reviled him for having made this assertion, and then slew him with his own hands.⁶⁷ In the same year, when he marched against his half brothers Sanjar and Mohammad at Baghdad, and the two armies confronted one another across the Tigris, the enemy taunted him and his soldiers with cries of 'Ya Batiniyya' (O Batinis = Ismaili).⁶⁸

A prominent Ismaili, Abu Ibrahim Asad-abadi, had been sent to Baghdad by the Sultan himself on an official mission. The Sultan now sent orders for his arrest. When the jailers came to kill him, Asadabadi said, 'Very well, you can kill me, but can you kill those who are in the safety of the castles?'⁶⁹

The massacre of the Batanis, which he ordered about this time in Baghdad, was probably intended to dispel from the minds of his subjects this dangerous belief which might easily have led to his murder or deposition. This happened in the case of Ahmed Khan, the ruler of Samargand, and Iranshah, the Seljuk prince of Kirman, both of whom, not to mention numerous ministers and statesmen, like Majd-ul-malik, suffered this fate because they were suspected of being in sympathy with the so-called heretics.⁷⁰ Even when captured and put to death, often with torture, Ismaili Fidais often managed to wreak further vengeance on their foes, thus the murder of Fakhr-ul-Mulk being brought before Sanjar and interrogated, denounced as confederates of his order a number of prominent Amirs and officers of the court who, probably innocent, shared his fate.⁷¹

Apart from the massacre of the Ismailis in Baghdad and Isfahan and Sanjar's expedition against Quhistan, their overall position during Berkyark's reign had been quite sound. During this period, they were able to consolidate and strengthen their position and managed to expand their possessions at a considerable rate. They were able to develop and strengthen their hold in Isfahan itself, the centre of Seljuk power. They were able to penetrate all levels of society, making many converts amongst the civilian population and several in the court and army of the Sultan. The greatest achievement of the Ismailis of Isfahan was due to their leader Ahmed, son of the celebrated Ismaili Dai Abdul-Malik Attash who could secure the castles of Shah Diz and Khalinjan very close to the Seljuk capital.⁷² During this period, Hasan-i-Sabbah sent his Dai al-Hakim al-Munajjim to organise the Ismaili Dawa in Syria, where he was able to convert Ridwan, the Seljuk lord of Aleppo who helped the Ismaili cause in Syria considerably.⁷³ Nearer to their own centre of Dawa in Alamut, several castles were acquired and strengthened. Two castles, impregnable and strategically situated, were the castles of Lamasar and Gird-i-Koh. The acquisition of these castles improved the position of the Ismailis in Northern Iran appreciably. The stories of these castles and their conquerors are reported by Rashid-ud-Din in detail.⁷⁴

2. Kiya Buzurg Ummid and the Castle of Lamasar⁷⁵

Lamasar, the stronghold conquered and rebuilt by Kiya Buzurg Ummid (the successor to Hasan-i-Sabbah), is situated in Rudbar at the point where the stream Nine-rud comes out of the gorge, about a twenty-five-minute walk from village of Mansur-Bag.⁷⁶ Rashid-ud-Din gives the following account of the story of Lamasar:

The position of Lamasar is also called Rudbar-i-Alamut. There were two persons, a certain Rasmusuh and Lamasalar, who were staying in the castle.⁷⁷ They originally were devoted Ismailis, but about that time, they rebelled and wanted to hand over the castle to Ali-Nawishtegin (the local iqta holder). Hasan was ready to supply the owner of the place with ammunition provided they kept the castle in their own possession, but Rasmusuh did not accept the offer. Hasan then sent Kiya Jaffar, Kiya Bu-Ali, and Kiya Garshaf on a mission to take over the stronghold. On the night of Wednesday, 20 Zul-Qada 489/11 November 1096, they came up to the fort and rushed in. Rasmusuh and his partner came out with arms and, in the scuffle which ensued, both were killed at the hands of Kiya Buzurg. Without any injury to the Comrades (Ismailis), the castle was taken.⁷⁸ The place was a desolate hill, with a few decayed houses on it, with no vegetation nearby, and the climate of the place was very hot.⁷⁹ Hasan ordered a rock-cut canal to be built from a point on the Nine-rud (Nine River), two and a half farsakhs away, which could supply water to the castle. The fort was thus irrigated, and trees were planted so that the Qala (Castle) began to look like a Kushk (royal rest house) in a garden.⁸⁰

The climate of the place became pleasant, and the castle was fortified so that there was no castle more prosperous than this. The people in the vicinity of Lamasar, however, were not Ismailis, but with determined effort of the Ismaili Dais, all the inhabitants of the locality were brought to the fold of Dawa and everything put in proper order. ⁸¹ Hasan put the castle in charge of Kiya Buzurg Ummid, who never left it in the course of twenty years, until he was summoned by Hasan himself (at his deathbed in AD 1124).⁸²

In the history of the Alamut enclave, the events usually developed in and around the 'Rock' and Lamasar played the part of a shield to the rear. Standing not far from the main range, separating these villages from Mazandran and quite impassable for military forces, it threatened two important directions: one, that of the westward road by the bed of the Shahrud and the other, the passes leading in the direction of Qazvin. The military force stationed in Lamasar could easily seal the passage of Duruvon and cut communications with the chief base of the attacker (Qazvin itself).⁸³

By itself, Lamasar was for more spacious than Alamut. If we take only the fortress portion of the latter, the area of Lamasar was many times bigger than that of Alamut. Due to the long perimeter, an enemy could not deliver a series of powerful blows at different places in quick succession, while the defenders, operating over short internal lines of communication, could easily concentrate sufficient force at the point of attack.⁸⁴ But Lamasar had also serious faults in comparison with Alamut, where, at the time, being in a state of full military preparedness, it was probably possible always to have a general picture of the operation from one commanding post.⁸⁵ Lamasar, situated on a general steep slope of about seventeen degrees, in fact, consisted of several 'steps' or 'terraces', each of which screened one another.⁸⁶ What it badly needed was a complex signalling system, which was difficult at the time. Another drawback was the north-east side. However steep and rocky, it could not be regarded as unassailable, and, in addition, it included fairly large areas of soft soil, overgrown with grass, which permitted the enemy respite and concentration of forces, while providing to the rear the inexhaustible supply of good water from the river.⁸⁷

3. Rais Muzaffar and the Castle of Gird-i-Koh

Rais Muin-ud-Din Muzaffar bin Ahmed bin Cassam al-Makni Babi-al-Raza was known as Mustawafi, whose family came from Isfahan, where he worked as a revenue officer in the time of Sultan Malik Shah. He had accepted the Ismaili faith at the hands of Sheikh Abdul-Malik Attash. The army personnel came to know of his faith, and due to the fear of public taunts and slander, he migrated to

Damghan and purchased land and property in Qumas, Mazanderan, Saveh, and Khurasan and settled there.⁸⁸ The castle of Gird-i-Koh, which was known as the castle of Gunbadan in the olden days, was in ruins and disrepair, and in AH 429, a few buildings were made. A water tank and a few houses fell into the hands of the Sultan and were put in the care of his servant named Khurdak, who looked after the property on behalf of Sultan Malik Shah and his deputies.⁸⁹ Amir Dad-Habashi bin al-Tuntaq,⁹⁰ who had a high position in the government of Berkyark, made a request for Gird-i-Koh from the Sultan who commanded his secretary to write an order to that effect.⁹¹ The servant, Khurdak, warned the secretary that he would cut his head off if he wrote such an order, and due to this fear, the secretary delayed the matter until the Vizier was very angry with the secretary and commanded him to write the order at once. The secretary then wrote the order but due to fear of Khurdak went into hiding.⁹² Two days later, Khurdak was killed at the hands of Berkyark, and Amir Dad came to the foot of the castle in the month of Jumadi al-Akhar 489/1095. He had negotiations lasting one week with the deputy of Khurdak, who was the keeper of the castle, but to no avail. He came back frustrated and assembling the army went back on 5th Rajab. As the keeper had come to know of the death of his master, and also had no stores, he made peace, came down and surrendered the castle in the middle of the month of Shaban. Amir Dad put the castle in the custody of his deputy and himself returned to Damghan. He sent for an engineer so that at an opportune moment the foundation of new buildings could be laid.⁹³

Rais Muid-ud-Din Muzaffar, with his noble ancestry and high aristocracy, possessed great wealth and property, and all the senior Seljuk officials were in his favour, in particular Amir Dad, who had acquired a lot of property in Damghan, which was mostly paid for in cash by himself.⁹⁴ Viziers and nobles were all favourably disposed towards him, and each one of them hoped for a lease on his property and a share of his fortune so that there was none who would not speak well of him in the court of the Sultan. Amir Dad had grown up under the protection of the Sultan who accepted him as his own son.⁹⁵ He took help from Rais in his affairs, who faithfully

organised his interests and consolidated his scattered soldiers. Amir Dad commanded that his treasures of Damghan be transferred and buildings be made so that his aristocratic splendour would become fully visible.⁹⁶

Muzaffar accepted work as deputy to Amir Dad in Gird-i-Koh and transferred all his personal treasures to the castle. He did not take any advantage of the money of Amir Dad, but paid from his own purse the cost of the erection of buildings and other expenses involved in the repairs of the castle. Amir Dad was killed in Poozgan by Bergish Khas in 493/1099.⁹⁷ In the same year, Rais Muzaffar dug a well 300 metres deep in the solid rock in Gird-i-Koh and abandoned the effort when they could not reach water, but years later, after his death, a spring came out from the same well due to a great earthquake.⁹⁸ Apart from property and precious gifts which Rais had sent to Alamut, he spent a total of 36,000 dinars on the Nizari Mission: 12,000 dinars were sent to Alamut in cash, 12,000 dinars spent on a state guest house, 12,000 dinars were spent on two wells, and the price of the castle of Alamut was 3000 dinars.⁹⁹

When the lord of the castle (Amir Dad) was killed (493/1099), Rais Muzaffar handed over the castle to the Nizaris and was himself resident on behalf of Hasan-i-Sabbah for a period of forty years,¹⁰⁰ and with the support and assistance of a friend like Rais Muzaffar, the mission of Hasan-i-Sabbah became prosperous and stronger.¹⁰¹

When Sultan Sanjar went to Iraq from Khurasan, Rais Muzaffar came out of the castle to pay his respects to the Sultan, who returned well pleased. The Sultan was in a hurry and did not ask him any searching questions regarding the castle. On his return journey to Khurasan, he reached Damghan, where a reception feast in his honour was arranged by Rais Muzaffar on the suggestion of Hasan, and many gifts were presented and messages of goodwill were made to the Sultan.¹⁰² All the Viziers, Amirs, and nobles of certain grades were likewise treated, in a manner befitting their rank and status. Rais was brought to the Sultan in a litter due to his old age and was very kindly received by the Sultan, who honoured him with a status higher than all the nobles of his entourage.¹⁰³ The Vizier scornfully and sarcastically addressed Rais Muzaffar saying, 'was it

not a mistake to bow before the Mulahida (heretics) in this old age and you gave away the property of Amir Dad to them?' To this Rais replied instantly, 'It was because I saw that right was on their side. Otherwise, I have never desired wealth or status, neither in the past nor at present. You look how I am addressed with exalted titles and great honour in these letters from the court of the Sultan, compared to their (Ismaili) correspondence, which is so simple and without any formalities.¹⁰⁴ If, in following them, I had any motive of securing money or status, I would certainly have not left the court of the Sultan.' And his secretary put before the Vizier, letters and royal documents of the Sultans full of titles and respects and the papers of Alamut, brief and to the point such as Muzaffar, may God increase his virtues may do this or that! Vizier was astonished and said, 'Bravo! Order issuing and Order learning, how could you say that, and the officials of the Sultan's government may ask back the money and property of Amir Dad?'¹⁰⁵ Rais Muzaffar said, 'I and all the inhabitants of the castle are humble servants of the Sultan, and we have been living on his benevolence and generosity and have lived a comfortable life under his kind protection.' The Sultan shouted at them and received Rais with great honour and special favours.¹⁰⁶ Rais Muzaffar died in the beginning of Shawal 498/110, having lived for 101 years and 5 months. His son Rais Sharaf-ud-Din, who was a secretary in the court of the Sultan, succeeded to the position of his father and became the keeper of the castle of Gird-i-Koh on behalf of the Ismailis.¹⁰⁷

III: Hasan During the Reign of Sultan Mohammad (1099-1118)

1. Seljuk Offensive Against Ismailis

Sultan Berkyark and Sanjar might have checked the Ismaili sweep in Iran and Iraq, but their power still remained intact. After the death of Berkyark in 499/1105, his successor, Mohammad Tapar, made a new and determined effort to deal with them. In fact, he had an obsession against the Ismailis and aimed at their total destruction. Indeed, we find that he was occupied with wars against

the Ismailis throughout his reign as Sultan. Thus, when the Sultanate was firmly in his hands without any rival in sight, he had no more urgent task than to seek out and fight the Ismailis.

Almost the only open stronghold placed in Ismaili hands was the riverside town of Takrit, on the Tigris, north of Baghdad. Here, a Seljuk Vizier, Balasani,¹⁰⁸ who was Isna-ashari (twelver) Shia, gave the citadel to an Ismaili officer, Kaiqubad. Sultan Mohammad charged one of his Amirs to capture Takrit from Ismaili hands. The expedition was not totally successful because the Ismaili commander preferred to surrender it to Saif al-Daula Sadaqa bin Mansur bin Mazid, an Isna-ashari Arab, rather than to the Sunni Turks.¹⁰⁹ The Ismaili power was reduced further when the Ismaili castles near Arrajan were also lost, but there is an indication that the Ismailis were not altogether finished. Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela mentions in his writings that Ismailis lived in the mountainous region between Susa and Hamadan and that there were four Jewish congregations living among them who joined them in their warfare.¹¹⁰ The chief campaign which Sultan Mohammad led in person, however, was against the castle of Shah Diz near Isfahan, the capital centre of the Seljuk power.¹¹¹

2. Ahmed Ibn Attash

In all the Ismaili activities in Isfahan, the capital of the Seljuk Empire, Ahmed Ibn Attash was the most prominent figure during the later part of Malik Shah's reign and the fifteen years following his death. Regrettably, historians have not given a balanced view of his character. They have accused him of heresy, lawlessness, pillage, torture, and murder and have tried to debase him by all slanderous means, although their statements are contradictory and confusing.

He was the son of Shaikh Abdul-Malik b. Attash, the celebrated chief Dai of the Ismailis in Iraq and western Iran, who was regarded as a learned man even by his opponents. Sheikh Abdul-Malik was born in Isfahan, but due to religious sectarian quarrels and general public dissatisfaction leading to mob disturbances, he was accused of heresy and had to flee to Rayy.¹¹²

His son Ahmed, at first, during his father's time in Isfahan, posed as a cotton cloth merchant (*kirbas furush*) and showed no adherence to his father's religious views. It was, in fact, a precautionary measure under the cloak of *taqiyya*, but otherwise, he conducted his underground activities and thus was left unmolested. With great tact and subtlety, he gained access to Shah Diz as a peddler and later as a teacher of children and young court girls, residing in the castle. He succeeded in gaining the full confidence of the keeper and also men in the Daylamite garrison and, eventually, took control over the affairs of the fortress.^{[113](#)}

In due course, he became so powerful that he even built a large Dawat Khaneh (Mission Hall) outside the town to the south, where he used to descend from the castle in the evening and preach to his followers who had grown to some 30,000 people. As a dominant figure, he planned, ordered, and conducted the Ismaili activities in Isfahan and the surrounding area before and during the siege of the stronghold.^{[114](#)}

Ibn al-Athir informs us that the Ismailis of Isfahan respected him to such an extent that they crowned Ahmed Ibn Attash, collected much wealth for him, and chose him as their leader. It was perhaps due to the great respect of the public for his father Abdul-Malik Attash, who had been the chief Dai of the Ismaili Dawa in western Iran and Iraq.^{[115](#)} Ibn al-Athir evaluates him as a learned man, an eloquent speaker and a good writer but unfortunately, very fond of the heretical religion and that his son, Ahmed, was an ignorant man who knew nothing of religion and science.^{[116](#)} It is said that someone asked Hasan-i-Sabbah, why he so greatly honoured and respected Ibn Attash, who was an ignorant man and good for nothing. 'He was my teacher and tutor,' he answered.^{[117](#)} I believe that Ibn al-Athir's remarks must be referring to Ahmed's father Abdul-Malik Attash and not to Ahmed.

[3. The Castle of Shah Diz](#)

Shah Diz was a stronghold built on top of S'phan mountain at an altitude of 2285 m (7500 ft.) and at a distance of about eight kilometres to the south of Isfahan.^{[118](#)} Ibn al-Athir reports that a

Roman noble had come to Sultan Malik Shah and gained his close friendship. One day, they both went hunting, having with them a skilled hound that escaped and ran up the mountain. Following the hound, the Sultan and the Roman reached the top. Looking around, the Roman said to the King, 'If we had such a site on such a great and inaccessible mountain, we would have built a great fortress to save us from imminent danger.' The King immediately gave orders for a castle to be built there and it was named Shah Diz (King's Castle).¹¹⁹

After the death of Sultan Malik Shah, there were intrigues and confusion for the struggle of succession amongst his sons, and Hasan-i-Sabbah took full advantage of the situation. During this time, Ismailis were able to take over two strongholds, Shah Diz and Khulinjan, very close to the Seljuk capital, Isfahan. After the death of his brother Sultan Berkyark, Mohammad emerged as an undisputed Sultan of Seljuks. He gave his immediate attention to the Ismailis, who were considered as a major threat to his political power. His foremost concern was the castle of Shah Diz overlooking his capital Isfahan, which had been the centre of Ismaili activities for some years. The castle was strong and impregnable, and the only practical solution was a prolonged siege which would force the Ismailis to surrender.¹²⁰

4. Siege and Fall of Shah Diz

Sultan Mohammad initially delayed the siege and the conquest of the castle of Shah Diz for some weeks.¹²¹ It was due to the reports of danger elsewhere which proved to be just false rumours spread by the Ismaili sympathizers in the Sultan's camp.¹²² At last, on 6 Shaban 500/2 April 1107, the Sultan came out in person to besiege the castle of Shah Diz. The Ismailis had abundant supplies of food and arms, and Ahmed had been strengthening his defences and adding to his stocks for the last several years and was well prepared¹²³ for the King's blockade of the castle. The duration of the siege is not recorded in the sources but presumably it was a long one. When Ahmed found himself hard-pressed, he gained a breathing spell by starting a religious controversy. In a message to

the Sultan, the Ismailis claimed that they were good Muslims, believers in God and the Prophet and observers of the Holy Law. They differed from the Sunnis only concerning the Imamatus, and it would therefore be proper for the Sultan to grant them a truce and terms and accept their allegiance.¹²⁴ This initiated a religious debate between the attackers and the defenders and between different schools of thought in the Sultan's camp. Many of the Sultan's theological advisers were willing to accept the Ismaili argument, but a few stood firm for a more rigorous attitude.¹²⁵ 'Let them answer this question,' said one of them. 'If your Imam were to permit you what the Holy Law forbids, and forbid you what the Holy Law permits, would you obey him? If their answer is in the affirmative, then their blood is lawful.'¹²⁶ Thanks to the rigorists, the debate came to nothing, and the siege continued. The Ismailis, obviously, wanted to gain time as they had friends among the King's army and in his court and also had sympathisers in the civilian population and expected help from them.¹²⁷ So when the religious debates came to an inconclusive end, the Ismailis tried a different strategy, proposing a compromise whereby they would be given another fortress in the vicinity for the protection of their lives and property from the mob.¹²⁸ The negotiations dragged on, while the Sultan's vizier Sad al-Mulk himself arranged for supplies of food to be sent into the castle.¹²⁹ During this respite, the Ismailis commissioned a Fidai to assassinate one of the King's generals who was more eager than any other to continue the war. He was attacked and wounded but not killed, but as a result, the Sultan once again renewed the fight and ordered the fortress of Khulinjan to be destroyed.¹³⁰

Concerning Khulinjan (or Khan-i-Lenjan), Ibn al-Athir states the following:¹³¹

It is at a distance of 5 farsakhs (30 km) from Isfahan and belonged to Muid-ul-Mulk son of Nizam-ul-Mulk and was handed over to Javoli Saqavu (a great General of Sanjar) and his sons. Javoli Saqavu appointed a Turk to guard the fortress. An Ismaili carpenter approached the Turk, became his friend by presenting him with precious gifts and did him such great service that eventually he gained the perfect confidence of the Turk, who delivered him the keys of the fortress.¹³²

The carpenter, then, prepared a banquet for the Turk and his friends and made them drunk, having asked Ahmed Ibn Attash to come and take the fort by surprise. The latter came accompanied by his fighters and put to sword the Turk's friends save only the Turk who escaped. This is how Ahmed brought this second castle so close to Isfahan under the Ismaili rule.^{[133](#)}

After the destruction of their castle of Khulinjan, the Ismailis proposed a negotiated surrender. Before long, terms were agreed. Part of the garrison was to be allowed to leave and go under the Sultan's protection, to the Ismaili castles of Nazir near Arrajan and Tabas in Quhistan. The remainder was to move into one wing (Dandaneh) of the fortress and abandon the rest to the Sultan. When the news was received of the safe arrival of their comrades, they too would come down and would be permitted to go to Alamut.^{[134](#)}

Under the agreed treaty, two batches were allowed to leave Shah Diz under the Sultan's protection and travel to their respective destinations. In due course, news was received of the safe arrival of those who had left, but Ahmed declined to fulfil his part of the bargain. Taking advantage of the respite, he had concentrated his arms and men in the remaining wing of the castle and prepared for a fight to the death.^{[135](#)}

The Sultan, furious at Ahmed's double-cross, ordered a stronger onslaught on 2 Zul-Qada, which the people of Isfahan took part on behalf of the Sultan. Few men had remained with Ahmed to fight, but those who stayed fought with extreme courage and determination, and at first, the siege was going well in Ahmed's favour but due to an Ismaili deserter, the Ismaili victory turned into a disastrous defeat.^{[136](#)} He gave out the secrets of Ahmed's strategy to the king, disclosing that there were only eighty defenders in Ahmed's garrison and most of the visible forces on the castle's battlements were, in fact, dummies dressed in fighters' uniform. Consequently, the castle was overwhelmed by the numerous forces of the Sultan, and most of the Ismaili garrison were killed in action, though some mixed themselves with the invading force and thus escaped. Ahmed's wife, to avoid falling into the enemy's hands, threw herself

down from the ramparts, decked in her precious jewels, and was killed instantaneously.¹³⁷ Ahmed himself was captured and led around the town in humiliation for a whole week, cursed and tortured and then flayed until he was dead. His skin was stuffed with straw and his head along with that of his son, who was also killed with him, were sent to Baghdad in the court of the Abbasid Caliph.¹³⁸ Altogether, the castle of Shah Diz stayed in the hands of the Ismailis for twelve years.¹³⁹ The story of Ahmed and Shah Diz given above is narrated by Ibn al-Athir, but al-Rawandi differs from him in certain details and his version seems to be quite convincing. After preliminaries, al-Rawandi¹⁴⁰ brings in Sad-ul-Mulk, the Vizier of Sultan Mohammad. He alleges that the Vizier was secretly in league with the Ismailis and reports that Ahmed sent someone to him with a request, 'Send us provisions' (Ke mara Zakhierah be rasidi and a footnote to this by the editor adds 'Yani tamam shud') 'as ours are exhausted'. This coded message meant that 'Our men have lost hope and we have to hand over the fortress'. To this, Sadul-Mulk replied, 'wait one more week and do not give up the fortress till we kill this dog (i.e. the King).'¹⁴¹

The Sultan was in ill health and was bled once a month. Sad-ul-Mulk had planned and bribed the barber-lancer, paying him 1000 dinars to use a poisoned lancet in letting blood and thus to make the King die instantly. The plan was ingenious, because if the King had died, then it would be normal for the army to disperse.¹⁴² The King had, however, previously been informed about the Vizier's disloyalty, but he would not take any action against him without solid proof. The King, on being informed, ordered the barber-surgeon to be bled by the same lancet, which killed him instantaneously. Sad-al-Mulk was consequently put to death along with his adherents, and the Sultan appointed Ahmed bin Nizam-ul-Mulk as his new Vizier in his place.¹⁴³

Two days later, the fortress was taken and Ahmed captured, brought to town, paraded, tormented and tortured by a mob of over 100,000 for seven days, and at the end 'shot at with arrows' and 'burnt', and the King ordered the fortress to be destroyed.¹⁴⁴

The Seljuk view is expressed in the Fateh Nama (the Victory letter) published to celebrate the success of the Sultan in his battle against Shah Diz. It is given in a boastful and inflated language as follows:

In this castle of Shah Diz... falsehood was laid and hatched... there was Ibn Attash, whose reason flew away on the path of error and went astray, who told men that the way of Right Guidance was a false track, and took as his guide a book loaded with lies, and gave license to shed the blood and leave to take the property of Muslims. Even had they done no more than what they did when first they came to Isfahan, in multiple murder beginning with the notables of the court and the elite of the Ulema, in shedding more than can be counted or measured of inviolable blood, it would have been our duty to fight in defense of religion and rid both the docile and the headstrong steed in holy warfare against them, even as far as China...¹⁴⁵

The siege of Shah Diz must have brought home to the Sultan that Ismailis not only lived behind the castle walls, but also that there lived many behind the safety of *taqiyya*. Under the garb of secrecy, they were living everywhere, including his own army as well as his court, and there were many more mingled in the general public. It would thus be impossible to hit an enemy who was not identified. He must have been pleased at the outcome of his campaign against Shah Diz and the destruction of the visible centre of Ismailis so close to his capital. He must also have known that even though their strength had been crippled in Quhistan and Khuzistan, and somewhat in Syria, their real strength was not broken. The main Ismaili power was in none of these places. It was in the north, in the castles of Rudbar and Gird-i-Koh, and above all, in the great castle of Alamut, the seat of Hasan-i-Sabbah himself. Thus, his next plan was to conquer the centre of Ismaili power. His war against Alamut is given in detail by Rashid-ud-Din, who would be our main reference to cover that part of the history.¹⁴⁶

5. Siege of Alamut

When the dominance of the Ismailis continued for a long time, Ali Nawishtegin went to Sultan Mohammad, imploring protection and seeking his help against the high-handedness of the Ismailis.¹⁴⁷ The Sultan, who had already destroyed their organisation in his capital

city of Isfahan, was now determined to wipe them out of the entire country, so he appointed his Vizier, Ahmed bin Nizam-ul-Mulk, who, in revenge of his father's blood, should destroy their headquarters.¹⁴⁸ He equipped him with a large army and many volunteers to besiege their castle, and he himself, along with his courtiers and nobles, stayed behind at Juzbadkan, awaiting the news of their victory. Ahmed besieged the castle of Alamut from the beginning of spring until autumn and burnt their crops but to no avail. In winter, due to heavy rain and snowfall, he returned and came out of the district of Rudbar. When he reached Baghdad, a Fidai stabbed him with a knife, in the mosque.¹⁴⁹

In the month of Jumadi I in 500/1106, Sultan Mohammad appointed Qarin bin Shehryar, the ruler of Tabaristan, with an army from Gilan and Dailam, along with his own army, to get rid of the Ismailis. He, along with Ali-Nawishtegin and others with 12,000 soldiers, came to the district of Rudbar and deployed their forces in readiness for a battle. The Ismailis came to confront them, and the battle commenced in earnest. When the sun rose up, its heat and light went directly into the eyes of the soldiers, and so they suspended the battle temporarily, but when the sun was unfavourable to the Ismailis, they resumed the battle.¹⁵⁰ When the battle was being fought at its pitch, the heat of the sun was the main difficulty, and a northern wind was blowing towards the Ismailis. To take advantage of the direction of the wind, the soldiers put some grain in a bonfire and its thick smoke was driven towards the Ismailis, but, in the meanwhile, Faqih Mohammad Haskani shot an arrow which hit the eye of the commander of the army and killed him.¹⁵¹ At this incident, all other soldiers dispersed and went out of the Rudbar district. Ali-Nawishtegin himself went into hiding due to the fear of Sultan Mohammad but was discovered and brought down from his castle to meet a miserable death.¹⁵² When the Sultan realised the defeat of his army, he was utterly disappointed. He called a meeting of his advisers, courtiers and nobles and impressed upon them his desire to annihilate the Ismailis in his kingdom and sought their advice and help to meet his objective. All the noble and intelligent remained silent, as they knew that it was not possible.

Atabeg Nawishtegin¹⁵³ Shirgir must have been crazy that he accepted the challenge. The Sultan put his entire armed forces at his command. He also put at his disposal, his treasury, and hidden wealth to be spent on the army.¹⁵⁴ His nobles were given every facility and unlimited supply of provisions for the army provided at the foot of the castle of Alamut.¹⁵⁵

On the first of Muharrum AH 503, Shirgir came to Qazvin in order to assemble the soldiers who converged from all directions. After arranging and organising the army in a military discipline, he first marched to the foot of the castle of Lamasar but without any success.¹⁵⁶ He came back to Qazvin again and rearranged his troops, and then in the month of Safar AH 503, he, along with his son Umar, Amir al-Naqshat bin Amad Ullah, Ahmedal, Muraghi, Birsaq, Javoli Saqavu, Qaracha Saqi, Aram, son of Tagabuk, Asfand Yar bin Bugra, and Ayas, who were all the nobles of the Sultan, accompanied by the army of Gilan and Daylaman first besieged the castle of Lamasar and subsequently, on 11th of Rabi I, they besieged the castle of Alamut.¹⁵⁷ They put up the catapults and the battle commenced in earnest. One night, the comrades (Ismailis) made a surprise attack and killed eighty soldiers.¹⁵⁸ They also killed Mardawig's seventy-year-old mother¹⁵⁹ and made a great feast and social entertainment in honour of their victory.¹⁶⁰

Evidently, after the first defeat in Alamut, Shirgir must have realised that an assault on Alamut would be of little use, so he tried the long war of attrition. Each year, according to Juvaini, his troops destroyed all the crops or other supplies in Rudbar that they could.¹⁶¹ It was during this period that Hasan-i-Sabbah, as well as many Ismailis, temporarily sent their womenfolk to happier places such as Gird-i-Kuh.¹⁶² During these times, a number of weaker castles were taken by the Sultan's soldiers, and in some cases, the garrisons were allowed to go to Alamut itself. The surrender of the castle of Bira is described by Rashid-ud-Din as follows.

6. Fall of the Castle of Bira

The Ismaili fortress of Bira is situated in the district of Rudbar, about twenty miles from Qazvin, and was being governed by Amir

Ishaq on behalf of Hasan-i-Sabbah.¹⁶³ Soon after their initial defeat in Alamut, Shirgir decided to deal with the weaker castles of the Ismailis and marched against Bira.¹⁶⁴ Now one of the Sultan's nobles by the name of Ahmedale was an old friend of Amir Ishaq, whom he tricked by giving false promise that if he surrendered the castle to the Sultan's soldiers, then he would get from the Sultan an iqta of a handsome estate along with several other favours for him.¹⁶⁵ On this personal guarantee and assurances of a favourable and generous treatment, he surrendered the castle.¹⁶⁶ When they came to the court, the Sultan confirmed that he would honour the promises of his nobles and that iqta of an estate would be granted to Amir Ishaq, but in secret, he told his officers to remove him to Qazvin and do away with him.¹⁶⁷ So they took him to Qazvin, where he was rebuked and insulted, and against all assurances and promises, he was brought to the foot of the castle of Bira and was killed along with his friends.¹⁶⁸

7. The Final Assault on Alamut and Lamasar

Juvaini gives the date of the final assault on Alamut and Lamasar in the following words:

For eight consecutive years, the troops came to Rudbar and destroyed the crops, and the two sides were engaged in battle. When it was known that Hasan and his men were left without strength or food, Sultan Mohammad, at the beginning of the year 511/1117-8, appointed Atabeg Newishtgin Shirgir as commander of the troops and ordered him to lay siege to the castle from then onward. On 1 Safar (4 June 1117) they invested Lamasar and on 11 Rabi I (13 July) besieged Alamut. Setting up their mangonels they fought strenuously and by Zul-Hijja of that year (March-April 1118) were on the point of taking the castles, when they received the news that Sultan Mohammad had died in Isfahan.¹⁶⁹

Rashid-ud-Din gives a much detailed account of the long siege. He gives the details of the debates which took place between the scholars like Abu Abbas Ruhani and Abu Nasr on behalf of the Sultan and Hasan-i-Sabbah, Kiya Buzurg Ummid, and other Dais. The Ismaili point of view was expounded and their doctrines elaborated with reference to the Qur'anic citations, and Rashid-ud-Din devotes

five pages of his history, giving arguments and counter-arguments of both sides to justify their claims.¹⁷⁰ He also describes the plight of the besieged garrison and their endurance of the growing hardship. The final stages of the battle between Seljuks and Hasan is summed up by Rashid-ud-Din in the following paragraph.

‘In the same fashion continuously for eight years the Sultan’s troops burnt their crops and besieged the castles. The Rafiqs (Ismailis) fought back in a similar way showing perseverance against hardship and were steadfast against affliction and passed their days in utter poverty. They were allowed a fixed quantity of day’s ration of food amounting to a small quantity of oats which they ate at the battlements of the castle and did not leave their duty station.¹⁷¹ In fact they lived on grass and wood dust and considered it as the fruits of the world to Come and they congratulated each other saying that the hardships were being borne for the sake of God, His Prophet, the Imam and the righteous faith and that the victory of the religion was easy because all the prophets have borne more hardship as compared to a common man so that they could please Allah.¹⁷² Every day they came out stronger, more determined, more courageous and victorious and at nights they used to attack the enemy unexpectedly. When the opponents witnessed such perseverance, steadfastness, modesty and self-respect on the part of the Ismailis, they wondered and used to shout loudly, ‘Bravo! well done, O steadfast people.’¹⁷³

During these days, Sultan Mohammad died of Kulanj (colic). The army besieging Lamasar came to know the news on 1 Muharrum 511. A quarrel and opposition took place between them and they dispersed, leaving behind the tents, weapons, the animals, sheep, grain and all the provisions that they had brought to the foot of the castle.¹⁷⁴ In the past, the enemy used to shout, mocking, ridiculing, and saying, ‘Maulana has sent provisions and sheep for you, come and take it.’ A comrade named Suleman used to say in reply, ‘Insha Allah’ (God willing).¹⁷⁵ In this situation of defeat, Shirgir hit his thigh and shouted ‘Destitute! You are right.’ The Ismailis, making an intelligent guess, deduced that Sultan Mohammad existed no more.¹⁷⁶ The messengers were dispatched to the other castles to

spread the news, and the enemy was put to flight, leaving behind their arms and belongings. The Ismailis killed a few, drowned some and pursued the remainder up to the city of Talqan.¹⁷⁷ Afterwards the strength of the Ismailis increased day by day and vast lands and people came under their influence, including the territories of Iraq, Azerbaijan, Khurasan, Mazandran, Rastamdar, Saweh, Suhan, Gurgistan, and Gilan. In the end, there was peace between them and their neighbours.¹⁷⁸

IV: Hasan During the Reign of Sultan Sanjar (1118-1156)

1. Hasan Signs a Peace Treaty with Sultan Sanjar

In 495/1101, Sultan Berkyark reached an agreement with Sanjar, who was still ruling Khurasan, for a combined action against the Ismailis, their common enemy who threatened both of them. Sanjar sent a large and well-armed expedition under the command of Sanjar's senior Amir named Buzgash against the Ismailis of Quhistan, where they devastated the countryside and then laid siege to Tabas, the main Ismaili stronghold. Using mangonels, they destroyed most of the walls and were on the point of capturing it, when the Ismailis bribed the Amir to raise the siege and go away.¹⁷⁹ They were then able to repair, refortify, and reinforce Tabas to meet the next attack. This came three years later, when the Amir led a new army to Quhistan, including, in addition to his own regulars, a number of volunteers.¹⁸⁰ This time, their campaign was successful but inconclusive. The Seljuk troops conquered and destroyed Tabas and other Ismaili castles, pillaged the Ismaili settlements and enslaved some of their inhabitants and then withdrew.¹⁸¹ However, it was not very long before the Ismailis were once again solidly established in Quhistan. In fact, a year later, the Ismailis in the neighbourhood of Turshiz in Quhistan became so bold that they took their revenge by attacking, killing and plundering a caravan far distant in the vicinity of Rayy, without any decisive results.¹⁸²

Because of his political struggle with his nephew,¹⁸³ Sultan Sanjar was unable to deal with the Ismailis decisively, but when he had

restored the kingdom to order, he sought to put an end to them and began by sending an army to Quhistan. Hasan sent his ambassadors repeatedly to seek peace, but his offers were not accepted. As a last resort, his secret service units, who kept a constant watch on such matters, designed a plot with their special agents in the court of the Sultan and, consequently, a dagger was planted in the ground beside the Sultan's bed one night when he was drunk and fast asleep.¹⁸⁴ When the Sultan awoke and saw the dagger, he was filled with alarm, but not knowing whom to suspect, he ordered the matter to be kept secret.¹⁸⁵ Hasan then sent an ambassador with a message to the Sultan saying that if it was not due to the good intentions and considerate attitude towards the Sultan, they could have planted the dagger into the soft breast instead of the hard ground.¹⁸⁶ The Sultan took fright and, from then on, he inclined towards peace with them and consequently a peace treaty was concluded between them subject to the following three conditions:¹⁸⁷

- 1 That the Ismailis do not build any new castle.
- 2 That the Ismailis do not purchase any more arms and ammunition of war.
- 3 That the Ismailis do not convert people to their faith.

The clergy (Fuk-ha) did not like the terms of the truce, and they alleged that the Sultan was a friend of the Ismailis. Due to this conciliatory attitude of the Sultan, the Ismailis had a run of good fortune, their state thrived and their Dawa flourished. The Sultan allowed them a pension (idrar) of 3000 dinars from the taxes on the lands belonging to them in the region of Qumis and also permitted them to levy a small toll on travellers passing beneath Gird-i-Koh, a custom which survived until they were defeated by the Mongols in AD 1256.¹⁸⁸ Juvaini saw several of Sanjar's firmans (manshur) which had been preserved in their library and in which he conciliated and flattered them, and from those documents, he was able to deduce the extent to which the Sultan connived with their actions and sought to be on peaceful terms with them.¹⁸⁹ In short, during his reign, they enjoyed ease and tranquility, and indeed, Rashid-ud-Din reports that in the month of Zul-Hijja AH 511, Sultan Sanjar sent his

ambassador Ibrahim Sehlavi to Alamut to renew the ties of friendship with the Ismailis.^{[190](#)}

2. Death of Hasan-i-Sabbah

It was in the month of Rabi II 518 (May-June 1124) that Hasan-i-Sabbah fell ill.^{[191](#)} For some time, he did not show his illness and worked according to his usual routine, but when it became serious, he sent for Kiya Buzurg Ummid from Lamasar and appointed him as his successor. He made Dihdar Abu-Ali Ardistani sit on his right and entrusted him in particular with the Chancery of Dawa and Finance. He made Hasan Adam Qasrani sit on his left and Kiya Ba-Jafar, who was the commander of his forces, in front of him, and charged them, until such time as the Imam came to take possession of his kingdom, to act in concert and agreement. On the night of Wednesday 6 Rabi II 518 (23 May 1124), Hasan-i-Sabbah died peacefully in the castle of Alamut.^{[192](#)} From the day Hasan first went up to the castle of Alamut until he departed from this world (for a period of thirty-five years), he never descended there from and only twice came out of the house (sarai) in which he lived. On these two occasions, he went up on the roof to look at the new moon. The rest of his time, he remained inside his house, fasting and praying, reading books, committing the doctrines of his Dawa to writing, and administering the affairs of his kingdom.^{[193](#)}

Regarding Hasan's writings, nothing is preserved except a mention of his famous doctrine of Talim put forward in his *al-Fusul al-Arabaa* (The Four Chapters), which summarises Hasan's politico-religious doctrines and which Shahrastani (d. AD 1153) has described in detail in his book *al-Milal wal-Nihal*.^{[194](#)} Fakhr-ud-Din Razi (AD 1149-1209) confirms that Shahrastani merely translated Hasan's *al-Fusul al-Arabaa* from the original Persian into the Arabic language and incorporated it in his book *al-Milal wal-Nihal*. His doctrine of Talim, subsequently, became a topic of great discussion and controversy among theologians, and al-Gazali (d. AD 1111) wrote a book in refutation of the doctrine of the Ismailis.^{[195](#)}

3. Hasan's Household

Hasan-i-Sabbah had two sons, Ustad Hussain and Mohammad. Now, there lived an Alid called Zaid Hussaini in the castle of Alamut. He was secretly conducting the mission on his own behalf, claiming himself to be Imam-i-Mustawada (temporary Imam) and thus was doing great harm to Hasan's cause.¹⁹⁶ He engineered the murder of Hussain Qaini, a famous Dai for Quhistan, at the hands of Ahmed Damawandi, and put the blame on Ustad Hussain. Hasan ordered that his son Hussain and Ahmed both be executed. A year later, the real truth came to light, and Hasan put Zaid Hussaini and his son to death.¹⁹⁷ His second son Mohammad was accused of drinking, and Hasan ordered him to be put to death.¹⁹⁸ Hasan used to point to the execution of both his sons as reason against anybody imagining that he had conducted the mission on their behalf and had that object in mind.¹⁹⁹ He had founded his cause and his law (namus) upon asceticism, continence, the enjoyment of righteousness, and forbidding of unrighteousness, and during the thirty-five years that he dwelt in Alamut, nobody drank wine openly nor put it in jars.²⁰⁰ Indeed such was his austerity that a certain person played the flute in the castle, and for that reason, he was expelled therefrom. In conformity with his law (namus), it happened on another occasion at the time of the siege of Alamut that he sent his wife and two daughters to Gird-i-Koh and wrote to Rais Muzaffar (the governor of the castle):

'Since these women work the spindle on behalf of our Dawa, give them their needs as wages therefore.'²⁰¹ And from that time onwards their governors (muhtasham), so long as they held that office, would have no women with them.²⁰² Rashid-ud-Din mentions the name of Hasan's sister's son by the name of Abu-al-Fateh, who was the governor of the castle of Ardahn, an Ismaili stronghold situated in the mountains between Damavand and Mazandaran, three days journey from Rayy.²⁰³

Footnotes

- ^{1.} Rashid-ud-Din, p. 12. Also Juvaini, Vol. 3, pp. 195-200. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, pp. 671-77.
- ^{2.} Rashid-ud-Din, p. 15. Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 200. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 674.

- [3.](#) Ibid.
- [4.](#) A note on 'Iqta' is given on p. 59.
- [5.](#) Rashid-ud-Din Juvaini, pp. 15 and 200. trans. Boyle, p. 674.
- [6.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 15.
- [7.](#) Hamd Allah Mustawaf, *Tairkh-i-Guzeda*, p. 518.
- [8.](#) Zahir ad-Din Marashi (d. 1476) *Tarikh Tabaristan*, edited by B. Dorn, Muhammadanische Quellen St. Petersburg, 1850, p. 200.
- [9.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 15.
- [10.](#) Zahir ad-Din, p. 200.
- [11.](#) Ibn al-Athir, anno 494, X, 217/viii.
- [12.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 9 records that Nizam-ul-Mulk had appointed his son-in-law, the ruler of Rayy, Abu Muslim Razi to arrest Hasan-i-Sabbah.
- [13.](#) Qadi Noor Ullah Shustari (1073/1604): *Majalis al-Muminin*. The full text of Malik Shah's letter and Hasan's lengthy reply is given in Appendix I. The date of this correspondence is not given, but it should fall in AH 484, soon after the Ismaili occupation of Alamut and before the actual attack on Alamut (i.e. in AH 485 when the threat implied in the letter was executed).
- [14.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, pp. 201-2. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 675; Rashid-ud-Din, pp. 16-17, identical in text except in note 15 below.
- [15.](#) Rashid-ud-Din says 'no more than 70 men'.
- [16.](#) Zuvara was situated to the north-east of Ardistan in central Iran (Mujam-al-Buldan).
- [17.](#) Identified by Qazvini, it was the present-day Manjib at the confluence of the Shah-rud and Safid-rud (Qizil-Uzan).
- [18.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 17. Juvaini, Vol. 3, pp. 201-2. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 675.
- [19.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 17. Juvaini, Vol. 3, pp. 202-3. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 675-6.
- [20.](#) The village of Dara lies to the south of Tabas and the south-east of Birjand, and there is still an old castle in the neighbouring hills (Qazvini). Hamdallah translation le Strange describes Dara as a very strong fortress and on the summit of the hill within the castle is a spring of water.
- [21.](#) The district of Mumminabad lies a day's journey to the east of Birjand.
- [22.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 16. Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 204. trans. Boyle, p. 676.
- [23.](#) All sources are unanimous in the following account leading to the assassination of Nizam-ul-Mulk.
- [24.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 16. Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 204. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 676.
- [25.](#) The present-day village of Sahna is situated on the road between Bisutun in the west and Kangavar in the east and almost equally distant from both places. Qazvini, Vol. 3, p. 405.
- [26.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 204. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 676. Rashid-ud-Din, p. 19.
- [27.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 19.

- [28.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 180. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 663. The circumstance of Nizar being accompanied by two sons is not mentioned by the usual authorities and Qazvini, Vol. 3, pp. 364-5 is inclined to think that Juvaini found this detail in some Ismaili work. That Nizar was in fact the father of two sons is attested by *Dustur-al-Munajjam*, which gives their names as the Amir Abu-Abdullah Hussain and Amir Abu-Ali Hasan (ms. Paris, p. 343).
- [29.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 96. Qazvini: *Jehan Gusha*, Vol. 3, p.231. Footnote: makes observation that al Mustansir died on 18th Zil Haj 487. If Saidi came to Alamut in 488 and stayed 6 months in Alamut and returned in Rajab 488, he should have left Egypt at the most 2 months after the death of al-Mustansir and not one year as stated. There is a discrepancy in the count.
- [30.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 231. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 692.
- [31.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 56.
- [32.](#) Ibn al-Qalanisi, p. 203. trans. Gibb, *The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades*, p. 163, London, 1932.
- [33.](#) S. M. Stern, 'The Epistle of the Fatimid Caliph al-Amir (al-Hidaya al-Amiriyya) Its Date and Purpose', *JRAS*, 1950.
- [34.](#) Ibid.
- [35.](#) Ibn Muyassar, *Annales d'Egypte*, pp. 65-66. and Ibn al-Sayrafi, '*al-Ishara ita man nala l-wazara*' edited by Ali Mukhli in *BIFAO*, XXV (1925), p. 49.
- [36.](#) *Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 5, p. 450.
- [37.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 66.
- [38.](#) Quatremere 'Memoire sur les Assassins' *Mines de l'orient* IV, 1814; Defréremy 'Recherches sur les Assassins' *JA*, 1854, 1855.
- [39.](#) D. S. Margoliouth, 'Assassins', *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. II, pp. 138-41; B. Lewis, 'al-Munajjam came along with his friends from Persia', *The Assassins*, p. 100.
- [40.](#) Schaffer, David, *Relations of the order of Assassins with the Crusaders during the Twelfth Century*, unpublished thesis, Department of History, University of Chicago, 1939, p. 14.
- [41.](#) Batinis: a name given to the Ismailis on account of their belief in Batinis (esoteric) knowledge, the inner meaning of the Qur'an and Sharia.
- [42.](#) B. Lewis, *The Assassins*, p. 100 gives the date of the murder as 1 May AD 1103.
- [43.](#) Ibn al-Qalanisi *Tarikh-i-Damishq*, edited by Amedroz, p. 142, year 496. For a translation, see H. A. R. Gibb, *The Damascus Cronicler*, London, 1932, p. 57.
- [44.](#) Kamal-al-Din Ibn-al-Adim (d. 1262) *Zubdat al-Halab min tarikh Halab*, edited by Sami Dahan II, Damascus, 1954, pp. 532, 533, and 577.
- [45.](#) Ibid.

- [46.](#) N. A. Mirza, 'The Syrian Ismailis at the time of Crusades,' Ph.D. thesis, Durham University, 1963, p. 16.
- [47.](#) Ibn al-Qalanisi in *Tarikh Damishq* notes that the population of Afamiya being Ismaili had requested a governor from Egypt soon after Mustali's succession; now at least many of them welcomed the Sarmin Nizaris and proclamation of Ridwan's rule.
- [48.](#) Abul Fath: Probably not the nephew of Hasan-i-Sabbah by that name who is mentioned as the governor of the castle of Ardahan (Rashid-ud-Din, p. 39).
- [49.](#) Kamal-al-Din Ibn-al-Adim, *Zubdat al-Halab min tarikh Halab*, edited by Sami Dahan II Damascus, 1954, pp. 532-3.
- [50.](#) Ibid. Ibn al-Adim implies that Abu Tahir, the new Nizari chief at Aleppo, was not admitted to Afamiya as a ruler as readily as had been expected because the local Ismailis were jealous of the outsiders.
- [51.](#) Ibid.
- [52.](#) Ibn al-Qalanisi, p. 187. trans. Gibb, pp. 137-42. B. Lewis's views on this section, see 'The Ismailites and the Assassins', *History of Crusades*, Vol. I, p. 113. Ridwan and Ismailis have been suspected of more assassinations than they were actually responsible for. Defrémery lists among their assassinations the case where none could identify the killer's head and the murder remained unsolved. Defrémery, 'Recherches sur les Assassins', *JA*. 1854, 1855.
- [53.](#) Kamal-al-Din Ibn-al-Adim, pp. 532-3; N. A. Mirza, 'The Syrian Ismailis at the time of the Crusades,' Ph.D. thesis, Durham University, 1963.
- [54.](#) Ibid.
- [55.](#) Ibid.
- [56.](#) Ibn Al Qalanisi, pp. 215, 221-2. trans. Gibb, pp. 179, 180, 187-91; N. A. Mirza, 'The Syrian Ismailis at the time of the Crusades,' Ph.D. thesis, Durham University, 1963.
- [57.](#) B. Lewis, On aquisition of Masyaf, Qadmus and other Ismaili strongholds, see 'The Ismailites and Assassins', *A History of the Crusades*, Vol. I, edited by Marshall W. Baldwin, Philadelphia, 1955, pp. 119-20.
- [58.](#) M. Iqbal, *Akhbar al-Dawlat As-Seljuqiyya* (AD 1264), Lahore, 1933.
- [59.](#) Ibid.
- [60.](#) Ibn al-Athir, year 494, Vol. X.
- [61.](#) Ibid.
- [62.](#) Sanjar's campaign against Quhistan will be considered later under the heading 'The Reign of Sanjar', p. 146.
- [63.](#) Ibn al-Athir, year 494, Vol. X.
- [64.](#) Rawandi, quoted by E. G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 2, p. 314.
- [65.](#) Ibid.

- [66.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 35.
- [67.](#) Ibn al-Athir, year 494, Vol. X.
- [68.](#) Ibid., Batini = believer in esoteric interpretation of the Holy Qur'an. A name for Ismailis in Iraq.
- [69.](#) E. G. Browne, 'Rahat-u-Sudur', *JRAS*, 1902, pp. 603-4.
- [70.](#) Mulhid (heretic) another word of hate which the Sunni Ulema used for Ismailis.
- [71.](#) E. G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 2, p313.
- [72.](#) The story of Ahmed b. Attash and castles of Shah Diz and Khalinjan is given in details under the reign of Sultan Mohammad, p. 133.
- [73.](#) The history of Ridwan and the Ismaili Dawa in Syria is given under a heading 'Ismaili Dawa extended to Syria', p. 117.
- [74.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, pp. 27-30.
- [75.](#) W. Ivanow, *Alamut and Lamasar*, Tehran, 1960, pp. 60-74.
- [76.](#) Ibid. See also Rashid-ud-Din, pp. 27-28.
- [77.](#) Ibid.
- [78.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 27. Juvaini gives a different date: it narrates Hasan sent Kiya Buzurg Ummid with a party of Ismailis who stealthily entered the castle on Tuesday evening, 20 Zul-Qada 495/5 September 1102, which is likely to be nearer to the truth due to the reasons explained in the footnote 82 (Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 208).
- [79.](#) Ibid., p. 28.
- [80.](#) Ibid.
- [81.](#) Ibid.
- [82.](#) Ibid. Hasan died AD 1124, twenty years after the capture of Lamasar, then Juvaini's date of capture AD 1102 is likely to be nearer to the truth than Rashid-ud-Din's AD 1095.
- [83.](#) W. Ivanow, *Alamut and Lamasar*, Tehran, 1960.
- [84.](#) Ibid.
- [85.](#) Ibid.
- [86.](#) Ibid.
- [87.](#) Ibid.
- [88.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 29.
- [89.](#) Ibid. Ibn al-Athir describing the history of the year AH 456 says that it was Sultan Alp-Arslan who took the castle from Shahab-ul-Dowla Qutalamash (Ibn al-Athir, year 456, Vol. X).
- [90.](#) Amir Dad Habshi was a well-known Seljuk Amir and was appointed governor of Khurasan on behalf of Berkyark and was killed in the year AH 493 during the battle between Berkyark and Sanjar (Juvaini—Vol. 2, pp. 2-3).

- [91.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 30. It is conceivable that Hasan-i-Sabbah might have urged Rais-Muzaffar, a secret Ismaili convert but a trusted Seljuk governor of Damghan to acquire Gird-i-Koh from the Seljuks, which was very well suited by its strength and position for the Ismaili defences.
- [92.](#) Ibid.
- [93.](#) Ibid.
- [94.](#) Ibid.
- [95.](#) Ibid.
- [96.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 31.
- [97.](#) Ibid., p. 32.
- [98.](#) Ibid.
- [99.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 32. It seems an exaggerated estimate of his wealth.
- [100.](#) Muzaffar, according to Rashid-ud-Din died in AD 1104. He took charge of the castle in AD 1095. It makes only nine years. Forty years therefore seems to be a mistake.
- [101.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 33.
- [102.](#) Ibid.
- [103.](#) Ibid.
- [104.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 34.
- [105.](#) Ibid.
- [106.](#) Ibid.
- [107.](#) Ibid.
- [108.](#) It is possible that Balasani might have been a secret convert, as we have many examples of Ismailis not declaring their true faith particularly when we see that later on he was lynched as an Ismaili by the army chiefs despite the Sultan Berkyark's efforts. However, Ibn al-Athir assures us that he was not Ismaili (Ibn al-Athir, year 492, Vol. X).
- [109.](#) Ibn al-Athir, year 500, Vol. X. Jawali Saqawa was sent by Sultan Mohammad against the Ismailis of Arrajan.
- [110.](#) A. Asher, (trans.) *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, London, 1840-1, p. 120.
- [111.](#) Rashid-ud-Din. p. 36.
- [112.](#) Al-Rawandi. *Rahat al-Sudur*, edited by M. Iqbal, Tehran, 1954, p. 156 See also E. G. Browne, *JRAS*. 1902 PP.606-9.
- [113.](#) Ibid.
- [114.](#) Ibid.
- [115.](#) Ibn al-Athir, year 500, Vol. X.
- [116.](#) Ibid.
- [117.](#) Ibid. This must be his father.
- [118.](#) C. D. Minasian, *Shah Diz of Ismaili Fame*, Luzac & Co., London, 1971.

- [119.](#) Ibn al-Athir, year 494, Vol. X. 'The Fortresses which the Batinis captured in Persia.' It is possible that there was already a rundown fortress at the site and Sultan rebuilt and strengthened it. Al-Rawandi says: 'Qala Diz Kuh which Malik Shah had built and managed named it Shah Diz...' This suggests that the mountain was already known as a 'fortess mountain' before Malik Shah had any building (al-Rawandi 'Rahat al-Sudur', p. 156).
- [120.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, pp. 35 and 39.
- [121.](#) Al-Rawandi, *Rahat al-Sudur*, p. 156. Also Ibn al-Athir, year 494, Vol. X, title 'About the fortresses which the Batinis captured in Persia'.
- [122.](#) False rumours were spread that General Qalij Arslan Ibn Daud was waring west of Baghdad (Ibn al-Athir referred above).
- [123.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 36.
- [124.](#) Ibid., p. 37.
- [125.](#) Ibid. Famous Shaffi leader Abul Hasan Ali bin Abdur-Rehman al-Samanjani raised the objection.
- [126.](#) Ibid., p. 37. Rashid-ud-Din mentions the name 'Qazi Abu Alia Sad bin Yahya Hanafi', who was sent up to the castle on behalf of the King to take part in the debate against the Ismailis.
- [127.](#) Ibn al-Athir, year 500, Vol. X.
- [128.](#) Ibid.
- [129.](#) Ibid.
- [130.](#) Ibid.
- [131.](#) Ibn al-Athir, year 494, Vol. X, title 'About the fortresses which the Batinis captured in Persia'.
- [132.](#) Ibid.
- [133.](#) Ibid.
- [134.](#) Ibn al-Athir, year 500, Vol. X.
- [135.](#) Ibid.
- [136.](#) Ibid.
- [137.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 38. See also Ibn al-Athir, year 500, Vol. X.
- [138.](#) Ibid.
- [139.](#) Ibid.
- [140.](#) Al-Rawandi, *Rahat al-Sudur*, p. 158.
- [141.](#) Ibid.
- [142.](#) Ibid.
- [143.](#) Ibid.
- [144.](#) The castle was destroyed. Perhaps the Sultan was not sure that he could prevent it falling into the Ismailis hands again.
- [145.](#) Ibn al-Qalanisi, *History of Damascus*, edited by Amedroz, Beirut 1908, p. 153. French translation by Tournau, *Damascus*, 1952, pp. 68-69 quoted by

- B. Lewis in *The Assassins*, p. 55.
- [146.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 44. Main source regarding this section is Rashid-ud-Din who describes the events in very great details, pp. 43-55. Juvaini covers this part of history very briefly and references are made appropriately; Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 212. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 681; M. Hodgson, *Order of Assassins*, pp. 95-6; B. Lewis, *The Assassins*, pp. 55-7.
- [147.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 44.
- [148.](#) Ibid.
- [149.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 44. Ibn al-Qalanisi, year 501, Ibn al-Athir has Mohammad himself go with his Vizier in 503: Perhaps there were two expeditions. (Hodgson, OA p. 97, footnotes) Ibn Isfandiyar (p. 241) states that due to Sultan Mohammad's arrogance, the Bawandid neighbours of Ismailis refused to give help to Ahmed against the Ismailis. Later Ahmed was attacked but survived.
- [150.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, pp. 44-45. It is surprising that heat of the sun should be such an important factor at an altitude of 6000 ft. It should be pretty cool over there even in summer.
- [151.](#) Ibid.
- [152.](#) Ibid. Rashid-ud-Din does not name the castle where Ali was hiding.
- [153.](#) Shirgir was the Amir of Sawa not too far from Alamut.
- [154.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 46.
- [155.](#) Ibid.
- [156.](#) Ibid.
- [157.](#) Ibid.
- [158.](#) Ibid.
- [159.](#) What was an old lady of seventy doing at the battle field?
- [160.](#) Ibid.
- [161.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 212. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, pp. 680-1.
- [162.](#) Ibid.
- [163.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 47.
- [164.](#) Ibid.
- [165.](#) Ibid.
- [166.](#) Ibid.
- [167.](#) Ibid.
- [168.](#) Ibid.
- [169.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 212. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 681.
- [170.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, pp. 47-52.
- [171.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 53. Rashid-ud-Din mentions 'sad' Diram oats (300 grams approximately).
- [172.](#) Ibid.

- [173.](#) Ibid., p. 54.
- [174.](#) Ibid.
- [175.](#) Ibid., p. 55.
- [176.](#) Ibid.
- [177.](#) Ibid.
- [178.](#) Ibid.
- [179.](#) Ibn al-Athir, year 494, Vol. X.
- [180.](#) Ibid.
- [181.](#) Ibid.
- [182.](#) Mirkhwand, *Raudat as-Safa*, p. 160.
- [183.](#) That is, Sultan Mahmud, son of Sultan Mohammad Tapar.
- [184.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 40. Juvaini reports that the Sultan's eunuchs were heavily bribed to plant the dagger. Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 214. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 682.
- [185.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 40. Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 214. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 682.
- [186.](#) Ibid., Syrian Ismaili authors tell the story of the dagger and the message in relation to Saladin and Rashid-ud-Din Sinan.
- [187.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 41.
- [188.](#) Ibid.
- [189.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 214. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 682.
- [190.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 55.
- [191.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 56. Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 215. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 682.
- [192.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 57. Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 215. trans. Boyke, Vol. 2, p. 682.
- [193.](#) Ibid.
- [194.](#) Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*. trans. Afzal-al-din, Tehran, 1956, p. 155. See also P. Kraus, 'Controversies of Fahkar-ud-Din Razi', *IC*, Vol. XII, 1938, p. 131.
- [195.](#) That is, Kitab fidaih al batiniyya wa fadail al-Mustazhiriyya (The shames of the Batinites and the excellences of the supporters of al-Mustazhir). See an account of the Ismailis response to al-Ghazali's allegations in Henry Corbin's. 'The Ismaili response to the polimic of al-Ghazali', in *Ismaili contribution to Islamic Culture*, S. H. Nasr, Tehran, 1977.
- [196.](#) Imam-i-Mustawada (temporary Imam) against Imam-i-Mustaqqar (permanant Imam). According to Ismaili doctrine, Imam-i-Mustawada cannot pass the Imamatus to his progeny. He is Imam for his life like Imam Hasan, who was Imam-i-Mustawada in Ismaili belief as against Husain who was Imam-i-Mustaqqar.
- [197.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 42. Juvaini, Vol. 3, pp. 209-10. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, pp. 679-80.
- [198.](#) Ibid.

[199.](#) Ibid. In Islamic Sharia, wine drinking is a crime which carries a lesser penalty. Sentence of death was a very harsh sentence for this crime. Most probably, Hasan wanted to show to the Ismailis that his son is subject to even harder standards.

[200.](#) Ibid.

[201.](#) Ibid. Reference is to the siege of Alamut at the command of Sultan Mohammad in the year 511/1117 which lasted for eight years.

[202.](#) Ibid.

[203.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 39.

Chapter 7

I: Social and Political Order of the Ismaili State¹

1. The Territorial Limits of the Ismaili State

The Ismaili territory was comprised of widely scattered tracts of lands consisting mainly of five different regions connected together with the common religious bond, guarded by a network of castles and governed centrally from the castle of Alamut, the seat of the central government and the residence of the head of the state. The different regions of the Ismaili state are enumerated as follows:

1. In Northern Iran, the district of Rudbar, dominated by the Castle of Alamut, a small mountain tract with several fortresses and villages.
2. In north-east Iran, the district of Qumis, a small but strategic area dominated by the Castle of Gird-i-Koh.
3. A section of Quhistan in eastern Iran, a large tract with many towns and villages protected by several strongholds and Tabas as the provincial centre.
4. In south-western Iran in the region between Khuzistan and Fars, in Arrajan and the surrounding area.
5. In Syria in the southern Jabal Bahara, a region similar to Rudbar of Iran, full of hills and valleys and protected by a dozen strongholds.

There were, in addition, some areas (notably the Jazr) largely or in part Ismaili but not regularly incorporated in the Ismaili state. Within each of the principalities, there seems to have been a continuity of territory where Sunnis had no bases, with the possible exception of Arrajan, where Ismaili hold had never been strong.

The most important region was in the district of Rudbar in Northern Iran. It comprised narrow valleys with several villages and a number of castles commanding strategic positions usually situated on top of the hills protecting the valleys below. The outstanding and most important of these castles was the castle of Alamut, the seat of central headquarters of the state. Sources have mentioned thirty-five Ismaili castles in the district of Rudbar, but the following names are worth mentioning.²

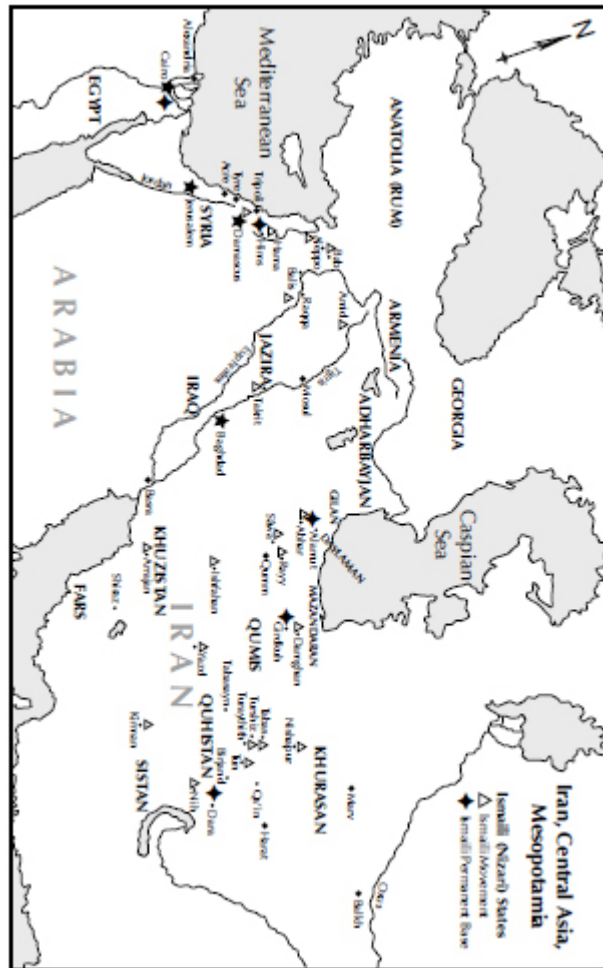
- I. In the district of Tarim, three castles are mentioned.³ The castle of Diz Taj, north of Zinjan commanding about 100 villages; the castle of Shimaran situated on the bank of a river in the country of Tarim and accommodating about 2850 rooms (small and large) in the castle; and the castle of Diz Kallat situated in Tarim mountains between Qazvin and Khalkhal.
- II. Castles in the district of Rudbar Ba Mansuri and Radbar Mohammad Zaman Khani:⁴ The Castle of Lamasar or the Key to the mountains of Gilan, the castles of Farab Amarlu, Jeenin (near the village Jeenin), Dagasar (in the south of the village of Jeenin), Yokonom, Kelishom, Kolasi, Chamarud, Hauda and Vartaban.⁵
- III. In the district of Rudbar-i-Alamut: The castle of Alamut and the castle of Maimun Diz.⁶ Other castles were Diz Sher Koh, Diz Shams Kallaia, Diz Astaband,⁷ Diz Andaj, and Qala Gardan Ava.
- IV. The castles in the district of Talaqan: Qala-i-Arzang,⁸ Diz Falis (Palis),⁹ Diz Mansura,¹⁰ Diz Chang, Diz Yark, Diz Harranj, Diz Dizan, Diz Mehran, Diz Parachan, Diz Dar Band and Dukhtar-i-Qala.¹¹
- V. In the district of Lora, Pusht-i-Koh and Rastamdar: The castle of Lora commanding the village of Kasil, Gashna-dar, Deraz-miyan, Meydanak, Garmab, Sorex-e-dar, Hasangdar, Marge-valis, Neas, Kuchkak, Asiyo-derga, Kane-deh, Azavar, Vele, Shah-pol, Gachesar, Velatru, Gajire, Varangeru, Qali-i-Ray Zamin, Qala-i-Ustavar, Qala-i-Arnama, Qala-i-Sarband, Qala-i-Dukhtar, Qala-i-Now and Qala-i-Pushmalush.¹²
- VI. The castles in the locality of Dumavand and Feroz-i-Koh: Diz Ardahan, Qala-i-Ustunavand, the castle of Gird-i-Koh or Diz

Gumadan, Qala-i-Mehrin or Mehr Nigar, Qala-i-Mansura Koh, Diz Lagvardi, Diz Sher Qala, Diz Saru-i-Buzurg and Kochak and Kafar Qala.¹³

The Ismaili Castles in Quhistan and Khuzistan

Minhaj-i-Sirraj¹⁴ says that there were altogether seventy castles situated in Quhistan, but we will mention a few which have been noted during my study of the literature. Juvaini mentions the castles of Aluh-Nishan and Mansuriya in the vicinity of Kirman.¹⁵ The castle of Dara, which is adjacent to Sistan and lies to the south of Tabas and south-east of Birjand, and the castle of Muminabad, which lies a day's journey to the east of Birjand.¹⁶ The castle of Tabas was one of the main Ismaili strongholds east of present-day Birjand.¹⁷ The castle of Seemin-i-Koh in the vicinity of Abhar and the castle of Khan Langan near Isfahan and the castle of Ardahn whose governor was Abu-al-Fateh, Hasan's sister's son, and the castle of Nazir in Khuzistan and the castle of Tunburak near Arrajan.¹⁸ The castle of Turshiz, where Hussain Qaini was the governor.¹⁹ E. G. Browne mentions a few more Ismaili castles, including Khur, Khusaf, Zawzan, Qain, and Tun.²⁰

The Ismaili castles in Syria were mainly in the mountains of Jabal Bahara, and the most famous castles were Qadmus, al-Kahf, Masyaf, Khariba, Khawabi, Rusufa, Ullayqa, and Maniqa with the seat of the provincial government at the castle of Masyaf, where the head of the Syrian Ismailis had his residence.²¹



2. The Social and Political Structure

Social and political policies of the Ismaili state were dictated mainly by the geographical position it occupied. Most other states, usually with vast territories, had borders only at the outer perimeter boundary of the region, and every part of the state connected with the centre so that the communication and supply line could be kept open at all times, particularly in the time of war. The Ismaili state, on the other hand, was broken into several small principalities, widely scattered and separated by enemy country. These principalities had no corridors connecting them either with each other or with the centre. In the event of an emergency, such as in the time of war with the neighbouring states, they were totally cut off and were left entirely on their own, virtually with neither help from other Ismaili provinces nor from the Ismaili centre. Thus, the only practical way to

administer the state centrally was to work on the principle of a federation with the basic policies controlled and dictated by the centre, leaving a certain amount of freedom and discretion in the hands of the provincial governors. For example, it seems that the Ismaili Dawa was organised from the centre, the castle of Alamut, where Dai al-Duat or Hujjat as well as the Ismaili Imams resided. It was here that the Ismaili doctrines, including the famous doctrines of 'Talim'²² and later the doctrine of 'Qiyama'²³ were developed and exported for publication. It was again from here that Dais were appointed and dispatched to preach the Ismaili doctrine within the Ismaili state and abroad. The governors of various provincial centres as well as the ambassadors to different embassies were also appointed by the Ismaili centre. It may be noted that the Ismaili Dawa included both religious as well as political organisations, and the Ismaili principality in Syria was indeed known in history as Qila al-Dawa (castles of the mission).²⁴ The provincial governors and ambassadors were Dais of comparable seniority and other suitable qualifications, and their appointments were usually made directly by the centre in Alamut. Generally, all Ismaili Dais were very well acquainted with the Ismaili doctrines and were qualified missionaries, but those Dais who were trusted with an administrative post were specially qualified in their administrative and diplomatic abilities. We note that the heads of the administration, both political and religious, even in the distant Arabic-speaking land of Syria were appointed directly by the centre of Alamut, and most of the governors of the Ismaili principality of Syria were Dais of Persian origin; notable examples are al-Hakim al-Munajjim, Abu Tahir al-Saigh Zargar, Bahram, and later the most well known of them all, Rashid-ud-Din Sinan. Likewise, the governors of the other principalities, such as Quhistan, Arrajan, and Qumas, were also appointed by the centre Alamut. In fact, for all major issues of policy, the Ismaili state was centrally governed either by the Hujjat of the Imam, as in the case of the first three rulers, or by the Imam himself, as in the case of the last five rulers. The centre of power for the most part was situated in the castle of Alamut,²⁵ the residence of the head of the state who was an absolute ruler of an independent

state. They made their own laws, their own taxation, their own foreign policy as well as their own defence and army. They remained independent and true to their cause up to their last days and endured many assaults against them for over 171 year; their unity was never broken, which is a good indication of the robustness of the Ismaili state. As we have already noted that it consisted of several principalities situated widely apart, their geographical position made it necessary that each province should have as much autonomy as possible without breaking the unity of the state. Each state within this federation was self-sufficient in respect of its economy as well as its defence, and it was very rare that soldiers were dispatched from Alamut to aid one of their provincial states against aggression by an enemy. If some Ismaili province or individual was attacked by the enemy, the possible reprisals were directed by the centre. Although the head of the Ismaili state was an absolute monarch, he did have an advisory committee. Thus, Hasan-i-Sabbah nominated his successor along with a body of three other ministers with allocated portfolios. Again Juvaini²⁶ mentions Hasan Mazandarani as the chief minister of Ala-ud-Din, the seventh ruler of Alamut,²⁷ and that the last Ismaili ruler Rukn-ud-Din Khurshah had as his adviser and minister, the famous Nasirud-Din Tusi. It is a great pity that sources available are silent with respect to the economic and social life of the Ismailis, but a picture can be drawn from the fragmentary information available to us in this respect.²⁸

It may be noted that the bulk of the Ismaili population consisted of agricultural peasantry with small parcels of land in the mountain valleys, and one assumes that they could not accumulate a great amount of wealth from their agricultural produce to afford a life of luxury. The eastern Ismaili province of Quhistan, no doubt, had large tracts of land, but it was mainly a desert land with a few oases sustaining populations of moderate-size towns, such as Tabas, Qain, Tun, and so on. Here some Ismailis are likely to have taken up trade and business as their profession, but the majority in Quhistan also were the peasants and artisans and those who took up trade and business should not be compared with the rich traders of Isfahan or Shiraz. Ismaili traders were unable to trade openly in the flourishing

Seljuk markets. During the days of Hasan-i-Sabbah, history mentions two very influential and rich persons, namely Rais Abul Fazal and Rais Muzaffar, who later came to the side of the Ismailis openly. They could not have accumulated vast amounts of wealth if they had not kept their Ismaili beliefs hidden from the general public and have been accepted as members of the aristocracy in the court of the Seljuk rulers.

It is evident from history that the Ismaili rulers led a very simple life, which is a good indication of the mode of life led by their subjects. Hasan himself led the life of a puritan and did not tolerate even someone playing a flute in the castle.²⁹ Indeed, Hasan had founded his cause and his law on asceticism and continence, and he himself led a very simple life throughout his rule for thirty-five years. Again, Juvaini notes the simplicity of Ala-ud-Din Mohammad, the seventh ruler of Alamut, and reports that his clothes were made of wool and coarse linen, and he was usually seen following the flock of sheep on foot, and only rarely enjoyed the luxury of riding a donkey. Thus, one can assume that the general pattern of life was based on simple living.³⁰

Most of the lands and castles under the rule of Ismailis had originally belonged to the Turkish feudal lords for whom the peasants worked under unfavourable conditions. It seems that most of the land thus acquired came under state ownership and that the feudal system ceased to exist under the Ismaili rule. Instead, the dignity of labour was restored and fair wages were paid to the worker. In this respect, both men and women worked hard with dignity and pride, which made their lives happy and strengthened the state at the same time. The dignity of labour was not only confined to the lower working class, as we note that Hasan's own wife and daughters worked on the spinning wheel³¹ and when in emergency, they were transferred to the castle of Gird-i-Koh; Hasan instructed the governor of the castle to provide them with food and clothing in exchange for the work they produced and no favour be made to them in the capacity of their relationship to the head of the state.³²

On the whole, the general life of the people under Ismaili rule seems to have been satisfactory. The history has not recorded any famine or unrest among the people during their long rule of 171 years, and this is a good sign of people's cooperation and contentment. There are examples when Ismailis have offered refuge to people in distress. Naswi, the author of the history of Sultan Jalal-ud-Din Khorazmshah, writes that at the time when there was an acute shortage of meat in the whole of Khurasan, Ismailis had large flocks of sheep available to them; in fact, he was presented with 400 sheep as a gift.

Although Ismailis made their own weapons of war, they could not completely satisfy their requirements, so they purchased some from abroad. This is evident from one of the conditions of a truce between Hasan and Sultan Sanjar that in future Ismailis would not purchase any new weapons.^{[33](#)}

History does not record the details of the sources of revenue for the government treasury of the Ismaili state. It seems likely that the main source of revenue was based on the usual land taxation, similar to the system adopted by the other Islamic states, with perhaps slight variation in the tax percentage of the yield of the landowner or the peasant. The Ismaili state treasury was not very rich as the Mongols found out at their surrender. Rashid-ud-Din remarks that the Mongol chief, at the surrender of Alamut, did not find the accumulated wealth of the Ismaili state up to his expectation and ordered it to be distributed amongst his soldiers.^{[34](#)}

It is noted that most of the lands now under Ismaili rule formerly belonged to the Turkish Iqta holders, who heavily taxed the peasants working as their tenants. Juvaini reports that the district of Alamut was held by a Turkish Amir by the name of Yuran Tash to whom the Iqta was granted by Sultan Malik Shah.^{[35](#)} The Ismaili state should have substantial revenue from such large estates acquired from its previous owners. There is evidence of another type of tax which is payable only by the Ismailis, and non-Ismailis living in the state must be exempted from this religious tax. It is a part of an Ismaili belief that the Imam of the time is entitled to usher (10 per cent) of the income of the believer, and it is obligatory on every

believer to pay usher quite voluntarily and present it to the Imam of the age or his representative for the personal use of the Imam. Muin-ud-Din Asfzari writes in his book *Rozat-al-Janat* (AH 897-899) that 'the people of Quhistan are associated with the heretics and that old women who work on the spinning spindle separate usher (10 per cent) in the name of Hasan-i-Sabbah', and this was nearly 400 years after the death of Hasan.³⁶ This voluntary payment of usher has been observed throughout the ages as an obligation on the part of every Ismaili and, indeed, is observed at the present time by conscientious believers of Ismaili faith. It is not enough; some Ismailis would give up all their worldly possessions on the bidding of their Imam. I believe that there lay the greatest financial strength of the Ismaili state, for which the Ismailis were prepared to sacrifice all their worldly property including their own life. Rashid-ud-Din records a cash contribution of Rais Muzaffar alone to the tune of 63,000 dinars given to Hasan for the use of the state.³⁷

3. The Establishment of the Ismaili Organisation

The Ismaili state founded by Hasan-i-Sabbah, quite unlike the Fatimid Caliphate, was very small and scattered with very limited resources, both in terms of finance and manpower. They could not afford to raise nor maintain a large army for their defence and expansion, yet they faced a formidable enemy who could challenge any major power of the time on the battlefield and indeed could very easily wipe out the entire Ismaili strength in a straight battle in an open field. Hasan realised the weakness of his position very well and that must have been a major factor in his choice of the difficult mountainous region as their country of residence so that they could take sanctuary behind the castle walls for their defence. On some occasions, they had to despatch a contingent of a task force in a military encounter or perhaps on an offensive mission, and for this purpose, they had to maintain a small army. Their whole strategy of war was hit-and-run, and they could never afford to face a large Seljuk army face-to-face on an open battlefield.

Assassination as an instrument of revenge and reprisal and, sometimes, a threat of assassination to stall an imminent attack had

been used in the past as an effective instrument, but nobody in the history of mankind organised it to the extent of the fidais, established and organised by Hasan-i-Sabbah. Hasan regarded this organisation as no more than a strategic military wing which could produce the desired results without too much bloodshed. Indeed, if a sacrifice of a couple of lives could stop bloodshed of thousands of innocent lives, it could be considered both humane and justified. Thus, the assassination of Nizam-ul-Mulk resulted in lifting the sieges against the Ismaili castles in Quhistan and Rudbar districts. Hasan established an action group of highly motivated young Ismaili volunteers who were willing to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of their faith, their political freedom and for the sake of many more Ismaili lives which could be saved in exchange for the sacrifice of their own life. Members of this action group or suicide squad were called fidais (those who sacrifice their life). Such examples can easily be found at the present time in extreme organisations in Palestine, Israel, Iran, Ireland, Afghanistan, Iraq, and several other countries. Hasan founded and organised the squad of fidais to such perfection that very few similar examples are to be found in human history. It proved very effective and helped his cause considerably. The fidais were given adequate training in the art of assassination and confrontation with their enemy. Sometimes, they had to learn some foreign language if they were to operate in a foreign environment.³⁸ They had also to be perfect in the art of disguise as, in certain assignments, they were in the guise of a Sufi, a beggar, a merchant, a teacher or a student.³⁹ The main force which drove a Fidai to the sacrifice of his own life was his faith and service to his holy cause. He knew for certain that if he was killed in action, he would be rewarded as a martyr in Paradise. A Fidai was prescribed to carry out a particular assignment, and tried his level best to discharge his duty faithfully and honourably, usually at the cost of his own life. The target allocated to a Fidai was normally a great man surrounded and protected by his bodyguard, such as a King or a Vizier or a Qadi, and to come close to such a target could be very difficult indeed. To hit such a target surrounded by a protective ring called for great courage and presence of mind, and after discharging their duty, they

were more often caught and lynched, and only on very rare occasions could they come out alive. Fidais were accused of being bloodthirsty, ruthless killers, which seems to be a totally baseless accusation.⁴⁰ They were neither attracted by money nor any other material gains. They were soldiers par excellence of a special branch, the crack force who would gladly lay down their own lives in the discharge of their duty. They followed orders strictly and acted under a strict military discipline. It may be noted that fidais attacked their chosen target in the greatest publicity and without any fear for their own lives. The place of action was usually a public place, in a mosque, or in a city square, where they could be seen by a multitude of people. There is no evidence of a Fidai's cowardly behaviour in the performance of his duty. He seldom violated the general principles of chivalry and did not use a poisoned dagger. When faced with his own death, he showed great integrity and pride.⁴¹

The blind obedience of the fidais, who were chosen with special regard to this quality, combined with courage and adroitness, is well illustrated by an anecdote preserved to us by Fra Pipino and Marino Sanuto:

When, during a period of truce, Henry, Count of Champagne (titular King of Jerusalem) was on a visit to the Old Man of Syria,⁴² one day, as they walked together, they saw some lads in white sitting on top of a high tower. The Sheikh,⁴³ turning to the Count, asked if he had any subjects as obedient as his own; and without waiting for a reply, made a sign to two of the boys, who immediately leaped from the tower and were killed on the spot.⁴⁴

It is noted that a Fidai never assassinated any commoner. His target belongs to the following categories:

- 1 The notable Seljuk Amirs, Viziers, or the Kings, who were their own enemies (e.g. Nizam-ul-Mulk, the grand Vizier of Sultan Malik Shah or his son Fakhr-ul-Mulk Vizier of Sultan Berkyark).⁴⁵
- 2 The Abbasid Caliphs who were also the declared enemy of the Ismailis. It is recorded that two Abbasid Caliphs al-Mustarshad and Ar-Rashid were assassinated by the fidais.⁴⁶

- 3 The Qadis and Sunni ministers of religion who made constant propaganda against the Ismailis (e.g. Qadi Abdullah Isfahani).⁴⁷
- 4 Fatimid Caliphs and ministers who had an ideological difference with the Nizari Ismailis of Alamut (e.g. al-Amir and al-Afdal, his Vizier).⁴⁸
- 5 Those who betrayed them to the enemy (e.g. Muazzan of the mosque of Sawa).⁴⁹
6. Sometimes, the enemy of Ismaili's political allies (e.g. Amir Sapahdar Anar, who fought against Sultan Berkyark, an Ismaili friend).⁵⁰
7. On some occasions, Ismailis attributed to themselves the assassination committed by a third party in order to add further terror in the hearts of their enemy.

4. Assassinations Attributed to the Ismaili Fidais⁵¹

Attributed Target	DATE (AD)
Nizam-ul-Mulk grand Vizier of Sultan Malik Shah	1092
Abd-ur-Raham as-Sumayrami, Berkyark's mother's Vizier	1097
Unru Bulka	1100
Janah-u-Dawla, in the mosque at Hims	1102
Abul-Ala Said Qadi of Nishapur	1105-6
Fakhr-ul-Mulk s/o Nizam-ul-Mulk	1106-7
The Qadis of Isfahan and Nishapur and Abdul-wahid of Ruyan in Tabaristan	1108-9
Mawdud, in the mosque of Damascus	1113-4
Ahmedil b. Wahsudan, in Baghdad	1116-7
Qadi al-Hirawi at Hamadan	1125-6
Abdul-Latif b. al-Khujandi	1129
Fatimid Caliph al-Amir	1130

Abu Ali b. Afdal Vizier of Fatimid al-Hafiz	1135
Abbasid Caliph al-Rashid	1137-8
Jawhar, a favourite courtier of Sanjar	1139-40

5. The Legend of Paradise and Hashish

It is appropriate that we give some space to the legends and rumours, regarding Hasan's conduct, which have persisted to appear in the history books up to the present time and which are believed by a great many people as historical facts. It is the duty of Hasan's biographers to dispel rumours based upon myth and legends and present him as he actually was. One such legend came about in order to explain the absolute devotion and phenomenal courage of the fidais who were prepared to sacrifice their own lives in the execution of their duty. The origin of the legend goes back to Marco Polo (AD 1254-1324), a Venetian traveller who makes a reference to the legend thus:⁵²

He (the Old Man of the Mountain)⁵³ had caused a certain valley... 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 ... And there were runnels too, flowing freely with wine and milk and honey and water; and a number of ladies and of the most beautiful damsels in the world, who could play well on all manner of instruments and sing most sweetly, and dance in a manner that it was charm to behold. For the Old Man desired to make his people (i.e. The fidais) believe that this was actually Paradise. So he had fashioned it after the description that Mohammad (The Prophet) gave of his Paradise... And sure enough the Saracens of those parts believed that it was Paradise!⁵⁴

For no man was allowed to enter the Garden save those whom he intended to be his Ashishin.⁵⁵ 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 Mohammad (The Prophet) had told his disciples and they believed in him just as the Saracens believe in Mohammad. 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 (hashish) 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... a place so charming that they deemed it was Paradise in very truth. And the ladies and damsels dallied with them to their hearts' content ... and with their own good will they never would have quitted the place.⁵⁶ Now this Prince whom we call the Old One ⁵⁷ kept his court in grand and noble style; and made the simple hill-folks about him believe firmly that he was a great Prophet. And when he wanted one of his Ashishin to send away on any mission, he would cause that potion... 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; 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 in the presence of the Prophet. The Prince would then ask whence he had come, and he would reply that he had come from Paradise! . . .⁵⁸

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.' 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 anyone whom he desired to get rid of. Thus, too, the great dreads that he inspired in all Princes withal made them become his tributaries.⁵⁹

The truth of the matter seems to be that after consolidating his position, Hasan adopted an extensive programme of public works to improve the position of Alamut. He had a canal dug to bring water from a distance to the foot of the castle and saw to it that fruit trees were planted around his fortress.⁶⁰ All this was taken with a utilitarian purpose and was easy to understand. Alamut was now the capital of a state, so it must maintain a large population and be ready at any time to withstand a siege. Muslim writers who used contemporary or almost contemporary sources, knew the purpose behind these improvements and described them in matter-of-fact terms. But later generations missed the point entirely and built fantastic legends about the function and purpose of Alamut.⁶¹ European writers such as Marco Polo helped propagate these stories in the West. Marco Polo was probably convinced that something akin to the delights of Muslim paradise flourished within the rock citadels

of the Ismailis. Whether he referred in his travel accounts to Alamut or some other Ismaili stronghold does not matter greatly, because later tradition ignored the other places and concentrated on Hasan's capital castle of Alamut. But ideas of oriental luxury simply will not fit with the castles of north-western Persia or with the rigid austerity of Hasan, which was forced on all his disciples.

The above tale when critically examined shows itself resting on unreal foundations and thus should be dismissed as having little historical value. The arguments against the validity of the above tale are listed as follows:

1. Marco Polo passed through Persia in AD 1273, seventeen years after the destruction of the Ismaili castles at the hands of the devastating Mongols of Hulagu Khan in AD 1256, and the subsequent massacre of the surviving Ismailis. Thus, he could not have come in direct contact with the Ismailis and certainly was not an eyewitness of the story he describes. It is not certain which castle he is referring to in this context, but it is unlikely to be Alamut as it did not lie directly on his route to China.

He appears to have taken an overland route from Tabriz to Yazd, to Kirman, to Balkh, and on to China, to the court of Kublai Khan. On his return journey, after fifteen years' stay in China, he came by sea to the Persian port of Hormuz in AD 1294. He stayed for several months in Persia as the guest of the Mongol emperor Ghazan Khan. He resumed his homeward journey through Kirman, Yazd, and Tabriz.⁶² None of the Ismaili centres was located on his direct route, although it really did not matter as the Ismailis were virtually destroyed and the surviving Ismailis were completely underground. It seems likely that during his travel through Iran, he might have heard some rumours from people who were generally hostile to the Ismailis, and without verification, he recorded these stories in his book of travels, perhaps with a little imaginative exaggeration.

2. If there was any basis for this story, the Mongols would have known it and would have wished to inspect such a garden of Paradise. On the contrary, there is no mention of the Paradise or Hashish, either by Khawja Nasir-ud-Din Tusi (d. 673/1274), who

held a prominent position with the Ismailis and knew all the secrets of the community, or by Ata-ul-Mulk Juvaini (d. AD 1283), when investigating the history of Alamut on the spot after its fall, look for such a garden as Marco Polo describes. Indeed, none of the other contemporary oriental sources make any reference to the Paradise or use of drugs by the fidais, including the well-known writers of the Seljuk period such as Zahir-ud-Din Nishapuri (d. AD 1476), the author of *Seljuk Nama*, and Rawandi (599/1203), the author of *Rahat al-Sudur*.

3. Extraordinary bravery, unflagging determination, and endless patience were the essential qualities of the fidais, which should exclude the use of hashish as it would produce quite the opposite effect on its subjects. Its use causes a lethargy, negligence, and mental weakness which would have fatally disqualified those to whom it was administered from the effective performance of the delicate task with which they were charged.
4. The ascetic approach of Hasan-i-Sabbah would never have allowed his fidais the abuse of drugs and the mock-Paradise. We know that Hasan was strict in observing Sharia to such an extent that he would not even allow a person to play a flute inside the castle and gave orders of his expulsion, then how could he base his cause on deception and drugs. The real explanation of the courage and conduct of a Fidai should be sought in his love and devotion to his cause, which he valued more than his own life.

It had apparently occurred early to the Sunni Islam that a Fidai must somehow have been artificially prepared for his deeds as no man in his proper senses would risk his own life as they did, Ibn al-Jauzi (510-597/1116-1200) explains as follows:⁶³

His (Hasan's) method of propagating his system was only to invite some simpleton who could not know his right hand from his left, or was unacquainted with affairs. He would feed the man on walnuts, honey and coriander, so that his brain would expand. Then he would recount to him the wrongs and injuries which the family of the Prophet had sustained till that got fixed in his mind. Then he would say to him: 'If the Azraqites and Dissidents sacrificed their lives in fighting against the

Umayyads, why should you grudge your life in defence of your Imam?
By this language he would leave the man fodder for the sword.⁶⁴

In an Arabic historical novel, which von Hammar discovered and was inclined seriously to believe, despite its admittedly fictional character, we find a far more elaborate concept. In the *Sira Hakim*, we read of an Ismaili in the time of the pre-Nizari Fatimid ruler Zahir explains as follows:

Who landed at Tripoli laden with plundered jewels and surrounded by his fidais. He then went to Masyaf⁶⁵ and built a vast garden, with a four story pleasure building in the midst; the windows painted with stars, and the rooms filled with luxuries. He brought finely dressed and perfumed slaves of both sexes to the house; he filled the garden with all sorts of tasty or beautiful plants, and with graceful animals, like gazelles. He then dug a tunnel between the pleasure building and his own residence, where he entertained all day men attracted by his magnificence. In the evening he chose some to sit by his side, and told them of the excellence of 'Ali'; then drugged them, and carried them to the garden. When they awoke, they were assured that they were now dreaming and seeing their places in paradise in the dream; but when on being drugged again they returned to Ismail's house, Ismail assured them it was no dream, but a miracle of 'Ali' that if they kept it secret and served Ismail they would receive that place in Paradise permanently; but if they divulged the secret they would suffer terribly.⁶⁶

It seems likely that similar tales must have been current in Iran, for it was there that Marco Polo picked up a very similar tale which he described in his writings and his story came to be given all the more credit, since De Sacy's scholarship seemed to confirm it.

The legends and unverified stories helped the false image of the Ismailis spread throughout Europe. To cite a typical example note the following: In AD 1332, when King Philip VI of France was contemplating a new crusade, a German priest Brocardus wrote a guide book for the King's benefit where he says,

Among these dangers I name the Assassins (Ismailis) who are to be cursed and fled. They sell themselves, are thirsty of human blood, kill the innocent for a price and care nothing for either life or salvation. Like

the devil, they transfigure themselves into angels of light, by imitating the gestures, garments, languages, customs and acts of various nations and people; thus hidden in sheep's clothing they suffer death as they are recognised. Since indeed I have not seen them but know this of them only by repute or by true writings, I cannot reveal more nor give fuller information.⁶⁷

C. E. Nowell sums up his assessment of the character of Hasani-Sabbah in the following words:

Hasan-i-Sabbah was an ascetic but the Old Man of the Mountains known to literature became a debaucher of youth and proprietor of a mock-paradise. The fidais killed in what they believed was a holy cause, but popular tradition made them terrorists and gave them no motive other than murder for murder's sake.⁶⁸

Recently, more than one student has suggested an alternative explanation of the name 'Hashishin' or 'Hashishiyya'.⁶⁹ To the Nizaris, the behaviour of a Fidai was heroic; to the opponents, it was both mad and base. Nothing prevents us from supposing, therefore, that a popular name for them would be less likely to describe a secret practice of theirs, than to express the loathing and the fear felt for them. The name 'Hashishin' would suggest not only a loathsome habit but also a comparison with men made berserk by drugs. The comparison might be strengthened by an uncritical tendency to suppose the fidais were actually drugged. The term was used specially in Syria, we are informed.⁷⁰ Probably, it was a local popular term, and hence was especially picked up by Christians and Jews, who got their information orally.⁷¹

Footnotes

- [1.](#) See M. Sutuda, *Ismaili Castles*, published by the University of Tehran, 1967. Also W. Ivanow, *Alamut and Lamasar*, Tehran, 1960. Treatment in both these books is scholarly based upon the primary and secondary sources, including Juvaini, Rashid-ud-Din Ibn al-Athir, and several others contemporary local histories. See also Peter Willey, *The Castles of the Assassins*, London, 1963.
- [2.](#) Minhaj-i-Sirraj in *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*. M. Hodgson, *OA*, footnote 44, p. 115. Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 266 mentions forty Ismaili castles in the district of Rud-bar.
- [3.](#) *Tarikh-i-Guzida*, pp. 527, 537; Nuzhat-ul-Qulub, p. 65; Mujmal-Buldan, Vol. 4, p. 156; Le Strange, *Land of the Eastern Caliphate*, p. 227.
- [4.](#) M. Sutuda, *Ismaili Castles*, p. 71.
- [5.](#) Ibid.
- [6.](#) The last ruler of the Ismailis, Rukn-ud-Din Khurshah, was in residence in Maimun Diz (Juvaini).
- [7.](#) Astavand (Juvaini).
- [8.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, pp. 80-1.
- [9.](#) Ibid., p. 83.
- [10.](#) Ibid., p. 59. Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 119.
- [11.](#) M. Sutuda, *Qala-i-Ismailia*, pp. 127, 128, and 165.
- [12.](#) Ibid.
- [13.](#) Ibid.
- [14.](#) Minhaj-i-Sirraj, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*. trans. H. G. Raverty, London, 1881, pp. 1205-06.
- [15.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 119. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 626.
- [16.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 203. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 676.
- [17.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, pp. 38-9.
- [18.](#) Ibid.
- [19.](#) Hamad Ullah Mustawafi, *Tarikh-i-Guzeda*, p. 518. Edited by E. G. Browne, Tehran AD 1910.
- [20.](#) E. G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 2, p. 316.
- [21.](#) B. Lewis, On aquisition of Masyaf, Qudmus and other Ismailis strongholds. See 'The Ismailites and Assassins'. *A History of the Crusades*, Vol. I (ed. Marshall W. Baldwin, Philadelphia, 1955), pp. 119-20.
- [22.](#) Doctrine of Talim was developed by Hasan-i-Sabbah himself and is explained in detail in Chapter 5.
- [23.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 92. The doctrine of 'Qiyama' was developed and adopted by the Fourth ruler of the Ismaili state Hasan II who himself claimed to be the 'Imam' and who ruled for four years (557-561/1162-1166) The doctrine of

'Qiyama' lifted the burden of Sharia from the believers and the esoteric interpretation, which had been kept secret so far, was now made public.

- [24.](#) B. Lewis, *The Assassins*, p. 123.
- [25.](#) Towards the end of the Ismaili rule, there is an indication that the capital was shifted to the nearby castle of Maymun Diz. It was in fact here that the last ruler Rukn-ud-Din Khurshah surrendered to the Mongols. Juvaini, Vol. 3, pp. 116 and 123. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, pp. 624 and 627.
- [26.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 256.
- [27.](#) That is, Rukn-ud-Din Khurshah who surrendered to Halagu Khan, the Mongol in AD 1256.
- [28.](#) Nasir-ud-Din Abu Jaffar Mohammad b. Hasan Tusi, nicknamed Khawja (597-672/1201-1274), the famous astronomer, philosopher, moralist, and theologian. Although he was not, at least during the whole life, an Ismaili, he had some very strong ties with the Ismailis which he, out of career considerations, always tried to deny, sticking to the rather naive story of his being 'forced' by the Ismailis to compose certain books 'for them'. The nature of such ties remains a mystery. He was the minister and adviser to the last ruler of Alamut, and it was Tusi who persuaded him to surrender to the Mongols in AD 1256.
- [29.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 210. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 580.
- [30.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 257. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 710.
- [31.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 211. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 680.
- [32.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, pp. 210-11. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 680.
- [33.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 41.
- [34.](#) Ibid., p. 132.
- [35.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 200. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 674.
- [36.](#) I believe this usher was for the Imams of the time who were living in Anjdan near modern Qum.
- [37.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 32.
- [38.](#) E. G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 2, p. 209.
- [39.](#) Ibid.
- [40.](#) Brocardus, 'Directorium ad passagium faciendum' in *RHCE*, Documents arméniens, ii, Paris, 1906, pp. 496-7.
- [41.](#) E. G. Browne, op. cit.
- [42.](#) Referred to Rashid-ud-Din Sinan (Sheikh al-Jabal), the Old Man of the Mountain, the Ismaili chief of Syria.
- [43.](#) Sheikh al-Jabal was the title of Rashid-ud-Din Sinan.
- [44.](#) E. G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 2, pp. 208-9.
- [45.](#) E. G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 2, pp. 311-12.
- [46.](#) Ibid.
- [47.](#) Ibid.

- [48.](#) Ibid.
- [49.](#) Ibn al-Athir, year 494, Vol. X.
- [50.](#) Rawandi, *Rahat al-Sudur*, p. 145. Karim Kishawarz, *Hasan-i-Sabbah*.
- [51.](#) Ibn al-Athir quoted by E. G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 2, pp. 311-12.
- [52.](#) Marco Polo undertook a journey in AD 1271-75 from Venice to the court of Kublai Khan in China. On his return home, he wrote an account of his travels in a book widely publicised and translated in several languages (see biographical account in *EB*). For a full account, see *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, translated and edited by Sir Henry Yule, 3rd. ed., revised by Henri Cordier, London, 1903.
- [53.](#) The head of the Ismaili state was sometimes styled in Arabic the 'Sheikh al-Jabal' or 'chief of the mountains'. This title was mistranslated by the Crusaders as 'the old man of the mountains' due to the secondary meaning of the word sheikh (Chief) which is 'old man'. The Crusaders, however, merely referred as such to the Ismaili chief in Syria and probably were unaware of their real head at Alamut.
- [54.](#) Marco Polo, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, translated by Sir Henry Yule, published, London, 1871. The relevant sections of above are also given in L. Lockhart's paper, 'Hasan-i-Sabbah and the Assassins', *BSOAS*, Vol. V, 1930.
- [55.](#) 'Ashishin' from which our word 'Assassin' is derived as a corruption of the Arabic word 'Hashishiyyun' or 'takers of hashish'.
- [56.](#) Marco Polo, op. cit.
- [57.](#) sheikh = old one.
- [58.](#) Marco Polo, op. cit.
- [59.](#) Ibid.
- [60.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 12.
- [61.](#) C. E. Nowell, 'The Old Man of the Mountains', *Speculum*, 1947. p 499, refers to the original source Mirkhwand, *Notices et Extraits des Manuscrits*, Vol IX, 1813, p.155.
- [62.](#) Marco Polo, op. cit.
- [63.](#) Ibn al-Jauzi *Talbis-i-Iblise (The Devils' Delusion)*; Cairo, 1927. trans. D. S. Margoliouth, *I.C.*, 1935, IX, p. 556.
- [64.](#) Ibid.
- [65.](#) Masyaf was an Ismaili castle in Jabal Bahara in Syria.
- [66.](#) J. von Hammer, 'Min al-Juz ath-tham min Sirati amir al muminin al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah', *Fundgruben Des Orients*, III, 1813, pp. 201-6 quoted in M. Hodgson, *OA*, pp. 134-5.
- [67.](#) Quoted by B. Lewis in *The Assassins*, p. 1.
- [68.](#) C. E. Nowell, 'The Old Man of the Mountains', *Speculum*, October 1947, p. 519.

- [69.](#) C. F. Schaffner, 'Relations of the Order of Assassins', p. 18 ff. Who notes some of the inadequacies of de Sacy's interpretation. Margoliouth, 'Assassins', *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, also suggests that the term 'Hashishi' was scornful rather than descriptive.
- [70.](#) Ibn Muyassar, p. 68.
- [71.](#) S. Pine, *Rev. Hist.* 'Juive en Egypte', 1947, p. 22 notes a Jewish writer of the year AD 1148. Who discussed a religion of al-hashish, born in his times: that life is as the perishing herbs (hashish), God not caring for it; that souls transmigrate into grass (again hashish) to be purified. This is probably reference to the Nizaris, and seems to include two different attempts at explaining their popular name, on the basis of a misunderstanding of their doctrine. M. Hodgson. *OA*, pp. 136-7.

SECTION THREE

Chapter 8

Conclusion and Comments

History records several persons whose true personality is camouflaged by a web of mysteries and legends to such an extent that they are transformed into something quite different from what they actually were. The responsibility of such a distortion falls mainly on the shoulders of the reporters and writers who either suppress their shortcomings and highlight their virtues or make a devil of quite a decent character. Hasan-i-Sabbah seems to be a victim of such a tragedy. History has been treating him unfairly for the last 900 years, only on the basis of the testimony given by his enemies. No historian examined the sources objectively and critically in order to arrive at a fair and objective assessment of the life and teaching of Hasan. It seems obvious that the major cause of the distorted picture of Hasan is sectarian prejudice. Juvaini, a Sunni sectarian, the earliest historian of Nizari Ismailis, expresses his prejudice regarding the general Ismaili beliefs in the following words:

In the early days of Islam after the time of 'Khulafa-i-Rashida'¹ (the rightly guided Caliphs), 'God's blessing upon them all', there appeared amongst the Muslims a sect of people whose mind had no sympathy with Islam and in whose heart there was rooted a fellow-feeling with the Magians.² In order to spread doubt and confusion, they put about among the people a saying to the effect that in addition to the apparent (*zahir*) meaning, the Sharia bears also the inner (*batin*) meaning which is concealed from the majority of mankind. And in support of these lies they deduced propositions that had come down to them from the Greek Philosophers and in which they also incorporated several points from the tenets of the Magians.³

Juvaini's prejudice is again obvious from his remarks about Hasan in the following words:

Hasan-i-Sabbah spread the snare of artifices in order at first opportunity to catch some splendid game, such as Nizam-ul-Mulk, in the net of destruction and increase thereby his own reputation. With the juggling of deceit and trickery of falsehood, with absurd preparation and spurious deceptions, he laid the basis of the 'fidais'.⁴

Reporting the death of Hasan, Juvaini writes:

And in the night of Wednesday 6 Rabi II, 518, he hastened off to the fire of God and His hell.⁵

It was, in fact, in the first place, Sunni prejudice against the Ismailis, which was the main cause of the destruction of the Ismaili archives. Juvaini, a Sunni sectarian himself, comments that the whole collection of books and official papers, with the exception of the copies of Holy Qur'an, which were preserved in the central Ismaili library, were based on heretic teaching and thus nonsense and useless, and so they were put to flames.⁶ A brief history of the Ismailis was then rewritten by Juvaini himself, who had already destroyed the Ismaili archives, making sure that no Ismaili evidence was left to challenge his version of Ismaili history. The other primary sources,⁷ which mainly depend on Juvaini himself, were also Sunni and so were not free from sectarian bias. In the absence of the Ismaili's own version, the only sources with respect to the Ismaili history now available to us are the above-mentioned sources based on sectarian writers. Now, after the fall of Alamut in 654/1256⁸ and the general massacre of the Ismailis at the hands of Mongols in 455/1257,⁹ the Ismailis could never regain their past prominence and have existed as a little known minority; their voice was not heard outside their own community and they were never in a position to challenge the official Sunni version of their own Ismaili history. Ismailis, however, did produce their own monographs for internal community circulation, but these were not available to the public at large. The Sunnis, who have enjoyed a great majority in most Islamic countries, have usually patronised the anti-Ismaili literature, especially the literature based on the authority of Sunni authors. Ismailis themselves, who have always been sympathetic to the cause of Hasan and who considered Hasan as their outstanding hero, have never been in a position to challenge the accepted view of the

majority due to the fear of persecution. However, in recent times, the historians have started to re-examine the case of Ismailis on the basis of a fair and objective assessment. The scientific way of re-examination of the whole Ismaili history would amount to sifting the realities through the dust of sectarian abuse. Thus, in order to make an objective and critical assessment of Juvaini's historical works, one must learn not to pay any attention to his abuses and curses, which he frequently inflicts on the Ismailis. One should also look for contradictions present in his own writings and, in the light of other available historical evidence, should support one or the other aspect of the contradiction. It is interesting to note that Juvaini is full of contradictory remarks regarding Hasan. We have already quoted some examples of his unfavourable remarks in the preceding pages. Now I present an example of his favourable remarks regarding Hasan-i-Sabbah, which obviously are diametrically opposite to his earlier remarks. At one point, Juvaini remarks:

Now Hasan-i-Sabbah had founded his cause and his law (namus) upon asceticism, continence and the enjoying of righteousness and forbidding of unrighteousness, and during the 35 years that he dwelt in Alamut, nobody drank wine openly nor put it in jars.^{[10](#)}

Juvaini further goes on to describe the severity of Hasan; that once during the time of a siege, he transferred his wife and two daughters to the castle of Gird-i-Kuh with his express orders to the governor of the castle to provide them with food and shelter in exchange for the wages which they would earn by working on the spindle and that no consideration for their relationship with Hasan be taken into account.^{[11](#)} Similarly, Juvaini reports that Hasan passed a harsh sentence of death against his only two sons against their crimes of murder and drinking, respectively.^{[12](#)}

It is obvious from the foregoing narrative of Juvaini that he seems unable to reconcile in his own account the negative attitude towards the religion and politics of Hasan and the appreciation of his ascetic and puritanic conduct. As history moved on, the negative emphasis was taken up by most Sunni historians, which became the sources of the western accounts of the so-called 'mystery' of Alamut. However,

Ibn al-Athir, by no means generally friendly to the Ismaili cause, pays tribute to Hasan and Juvaini describes him as perspicacious, capable, learned in geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, magic and other things.^{[13](#)}

Europe had its first contact with the Ismailis in the twelfth century AD when the Christian western Europe launched a continued war (crusades) against the Muslims in order to recover the Holy Land of Palestine for the Christians. Here they were confronted in Syria for the first time by a small but active state of Ismailis. All sorts of unverified stories mixed with fiction and imagination were brought back to Europe, and consequently, an ambiguous portrait of the sect was painted in the earlier writings of European authors. Again, Marco Polo passed through Iran in AD 1273, on his way to the court of Kublai Khan in Mongolia, and in his writings, he mentioned strange, fictitious and fantastic stories regarding the Ismailis in Iran. His writings influenced Europeans who accepted his words uncritically, and hence a false image of the Ismailis spread throughout Europe.

The first scholarly approach was made in the West by the great Oriental scholar De Sacy who, in his *Memoire sur la Dynastie des Assassins* (1818), consulted the oriental sources for the first time. This was followed by von Hammer's *The History of Assassins* (1835), but their writing still remained biased. They did not contradict the legends, which were widespread in Europe, but on the other hand seemed to confirm them. The reputation of these great scholars convinced the readers at large that their version of Ismaili history was authoritative and must be accepted as such. However, it was not the case, and it is quite recently that western scholars have tried to re-evaluate their earlier writings. Bernard Lewis sums it up thus:

Most important of all, our whole knowledge of the Ismaili Sect was revolutionized by the discovery and partial publication and study of a rich Ismaili literature preserved by the surviving followers of the sect in India, Pakistan and, to a lesser extent, in Yemen, Persia and Central Asia.^{[14](#)} Though this literature has thrown little or no light on the history of the Assassins in Syria, it has added much to our knowledge of the parent centre in Persia, and, most important, has made necessary a complete

revision of our ideas of the doctrines and the historical and religious significance of Ismailism in the Islamic world, differing radically from the hostile and distorted picture taken by the nineteenth-century orientalists from the writing of the Orthodox theologians and historians whose main concern was to refute and condemn, not to understand and explain.¹⁵

If one is prepared to look at things impartially, the case of Hasan-i-Sabbah is simple and straightforward. After careful thought, he accepted the truth of the Ismaili belief, and once he was completely convinced in his own mind that the path he was following was absolutely right, then he devoted all his energies to supporting and strengthening his cause. Being a man of exceptional qualities, he soon attained the highest position of 'Hujjat' in the hierarchy of the Ismaili Dawa. In his new position as leader of the Ismailis in western Iran and Iraq, he discharged his duties extremely efficiently and successfully and was able to establish an independent Ismaili state in Iran. Both religious and political views of Hasan, however, clashed violently with the interests of Sunni Orthodoxy as well as the political authority of the ruling Turks. By his actions, Hasan made not only the powerful Seljuk Turks his bitter enemy but also the entire Sunni world went against him. Thus, Hasan, with limited resources, had to face the most powerful opponents in order to preserve his own political and religious freedom and, as it turned out, he came out victorious in his fight against such a formidable enemy. Hasan was fully aware of his very limited resources, both financial as well as military, and so adopted a strategy which would ensure his success. For his strategy of defence, he chose castles usually situated in the remote and inaccessible mountains, which were easy to defend and protected by a small garrison. He also trained a limited strike force in the form of the most feared 'Fidai' squads which have been discussed fully in Chapter 7.

As no exclusive and detailed study of Hasan-i-Sabbah and his cause is available in any western language, the present study may be considered as one of the first attempts in this direction.

The present study rests mainly on the two primary sources (i.e. Juvaini and Rashid-ud-Din), although references are made to several other primary and secondary sources. Juvaini's translation into the

English language is now available, but Rashid-ud-Din has not been translated into English language so far. Now Rashid-ud-Din goes into several details pertaining to the present study, and thus, most of its relevant part has either been paraphrased or translated and given at the appropriate places in the book. It is, however, regretted that no confirmation of certain details given by Rashid-ud-Din is available by any other independent source, but due to the overall reliability of Rashid-ud-Din, his details regarding Hasan's life are considered authoritative.

Some controversial events with disputed authenticity are recorded in the study and relevant comments pertaining to their authenticity are made. Some legends and hearsay associated with Hasan and Ismailis, which have long been proved to have no historical foundation, have also been mentioned.

Juvaini and Rashid-ud-Din both have left certain gaps in the biography of Hasan. Regrettably some gaps remain unfilled, though some have been filled by other sources. For example, the sources are silent about Hasan's activities in Egypt, where he is reported to have stayed for one and a half years. The sources do not even agree on the vital question of whether Hasan was able to see his Imam, al-Mustansir the Fatimid Caliph. Rashid-ud-Din and Juvaini both agree that the meeting did not take place, although the Caliph knew of Hasan and praised him.¹⁶ Ibn al-Athir, however, differs and reports that the meeting did take place, where Hasan was told by the Imam himself to preach on behalf of his son Nizar after him and sent him back to Iran as his deputy (Hujjah).¹⁷ Now there is no way to establish what actually happened between Hasan and al-Mustansir or Nizar and indeed between Hasan and the officers of the Ismaili Dawa in Cairo during his stay in Egypt.

Another problem which remains unsolved is the precise relationship of Hasan with the Ismaili Imam. Up until the death of al-Mustansir, the Fatimid Caliph, the situation seems clear. Hasan was acting as a Hujjat in Iran within the framework of the Ismaili Dawa in Cairo and considered al-Mustansir as the Ismaili Imam and head of the Ismaili community. The difficulty arose after the death of al-Mustansir (d. AD 1094) when the major split among the Ismailis

occurred and when Hasan, supporting the Imam of Nizar, completely cut his ties with Cairo and became absolutely independent. Nizar, the Imam of the Persian Ismailis, died in a Cairo prison along with his son Hadi. Juvaini and Rashid-ud-Din both mention that Qadi Abul Hasan Saidi secretly brought from Egypt a young boy, presumably al-Muhtadi, the grandson of Nizar and the new Imam of the Ismailis, to Alamut and Hasan installed him in a village at the foot of Alamut.¹⁸ The problem remains to establish the precise relationship of Hasan with Imam al-Muhtadi about which sources are silent, although the problem of keeping absolute secrecy about the Imam can be explained; perhaps Hasan wanted to protect his Imam by keeping him anonymous. It is certain that Hasan never claimed himself to be Imam. He was completely satisfied as the Hujjat of the Imam and remained as such throughout his life. Juvaini informs us that once his followers wrote an account of his forefathers and brought it to him, but he would not sanction it and washed the pages in water.¹⁹ Rashid-ud-Din informs us that Hasan, pointing to his pronouncement of death sentences to both of his sons for the crimes committed, used to explain to the public not to remain in any doubt that he had conducted the Dawa for his own benefit or that of his family.²⁰ He always claimed that the Dawa was on behalf of the Imam who would take over the reins of the government at the time of his choice.

The present study of Hasan's life and thought is by no means a complete one. One question to improve the present study would be to make a detailed and thorough examination of local histories and the chronicles of various districts of Iran and Syria. It is recommended to study some manuscripts connected with the subject which have not been studied so far, including certain reported manuscripts preserved in the libraries of Central Asian academies in former Soviet States. There is still a certain amount of sectarian literature not exposed to the public, and this literature might reveal some new information previously unknown to scholars. Although the sectarian literature is mainly of a theological nature and very useful for understanding the doctrinal problem, it also might contain certain information of historical value, and the Ismailis

should be encouraged to expose their guarded literature to the world of scholarship. Further historical knowledge on the subject can be gained by extensive excavation of the prominent sites of the castles in Iran and Syria associated with the Ismailis.

However, the present study is intended to offer an introductory framework to reconstruct the life and work of Hasan-i-Sabbah involving a following threefold task of:

- 1 disengaging facts from fiction as far as the sources under consideration allow
- 2 emphasising the complexity of historical reconstruction in the face of the sectarian prejudices given in the historical narratives, and
- 3 underlining the Ismaili reticence in sharing their archives with the world of scholarship, which would go a long way towards throwing a fresh and new light on the times when the Ismaili doctrine was in the centre of the Islamic thought, both as an influence and as a threat to both Shia and Sunni orthodoxy.

Footnotes

- [1.](#) The four immediate successors of Prophet Mohammad (i.e. Abu Bakr (632-4), Umar (634-44), Uthman (644-56), and Ali (656-61).
- [2.](#) 'Magians' were the ancient Persian religious cult associated with Zoroastrians. See E. B. under heading 'Magi'.
- [3.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 143. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 641.
- [4.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 204. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 676.
- [5.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 215. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, pp. 682-83.
- [6.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 270. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 719.
- [7.](#) For example, Rashid-ud-Din, Abul Qasim Kashani, Hamd Ullah Mustawafi, and others.
- [8.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 267. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 717.
- [9.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 276. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 723.
- [10.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 210. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 680.
- [11.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, pp. 210-1. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 680.
- [12.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 209. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 679.
- [13.](#) Ibn al-Athir, anno 494, X.
- [14.](#) See I. K. Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismaili Literature*, Undena Publication, California, 1977.
- [15.](#) B. Lewis, 'The Sources for the History of the Syrian Assassins', *Speculum*, XXVII, 1952, p. 479.
- [16.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 6.
- [17.](#) Ibn al-Athir, year 487, Vol. X.
- [18.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 231. trans. Boyle, vol. 2, p. 692, Rashid-ud-Din, p. 96.
- [19.](#) Juvaini, Vol. 3, p. 187. trans. Boyle, vol. 2, p. 667.
- [20.](#) Rashid-ud-Din, p. 42.

Glossary of Ismaili Terms

AHL AL-BAYAT: The people of the House, family of the Prophet, including the Prophet, Ali, Fatimah, Hasan, Hussain and their progeny.

AMR: Divine Command.

AQL: Intellect.

ASAS (lit. foundation): One who succeeds the Natiq/Prophet and possesses the knowledge of the esoteric truths (batin); the wasi/Imam.

BAB (lit. door): The highest rank after that of the Imam in Dawa hierarchy.

BATIN: Esoteric knowledge, inner true meaning of the Qur'an and the sharia.

DAI (pl. duat): One who invites people to the Dawa, a term used for Ismaili religious and political agents.

DAI BALAGH: A rank in the Dawa hierarchy higher than that of Dai mutlaq.

DAI AL-DUAT: The chief Dai, a popular name for higher ranks in Dawa hierarchy. Sometimes he is head of Dawa.

DAI MUSTAWADA: Acting Dai.

DAI MUTLAQ (pl. duat mutlaqin): A rank in the Dawa hierarchy following that of Dai balagh.

DAWA: Religious mission; in the religio-political sense it meant an invitation to uphold the cause of an individual or family claiming the right to Imamatus; Dawa consisted of a council of Dais and it also meant the hierarchy of ranks within the organisation.

DAWR (pl. adwar): Period of cosmic history.

DAWR AL-KASHF: During this period, the good (khair) prevails, batin is promulgated openly and there are no external laws (sharia) to be obeyed.

DAWR AL-SATAR: A period of occultation during which the Imam goes into hiding because of adverse circumstances and Dawa is

carried secretly.

HUJJAH (lit. proof): 'Hujjat' in Persian, presentation of proof; assumed a technical meaning with the Ismailis and refers to a particular figure in Dawa hierarchy who serves at a given time as evidence, among mankind, of God's will. Thus, Prophet was a hujjah of God; also means a rank following that of the Imam.

IJTIHAD: Technical term in Jurisprudence for the use of individual reasoning, method of reasoning by analogy; the one qualified to use it is called mujtahid.

IMAMA: The Imamat, the supreme leadership of the Muslim community after the death of the Prophet.

IMAM MUSTAQARR: Permanent Imam.

IMAM MUSTAWADA: Trustee, acting Imam.

MADHUN: Licentiate; a rank in Dawa hierarchy following that of Dai.

MAHDI: Divinely guided one; the term with its messianic connotation was used of certain individuals in the past and of an eschatological individual in the future.

NASS: Explicit, unequivocal declaration of succession to the Imamat. Also refers to the explicit Qur'anic verse or the utterance of the Imam.

NATIQ (pl. Nutaqa): The Prophet, the lawgiver who brings revelation and promulgates sharia.

QAIM: Eschatological Mahdi.

QIYAMAH: Doctrine, meaning spiritual resurrection when the Sharia is abolished and the truth (batin) is unveiled by the Imam.

RAN-I-NATIQ: The speaking Qur'an; term used for the Imam, the authoritative interpreter of the Book.

QURAN-I-SAMIT: The silent Qur'an, an indication that the Book cannot speak for itself and needs an interpreter.

SAMIT: One who remains silent.

SHARIA: Canon Law of Islam. The totality of Allah's commandments given to the Prophet.

SUNNAH (lit. custom, practice): Usually used as sunnah of the Prophet, meaning his deeds, utterances, and unspoken approval of something.

TAFSIR (lit. explanation, commentary): Particularly the commentaries of the Qur'an; in contradistinction to tawil, it means external philological exegesis with obvious, literal meaning of the Qur'an.

TALIM: Authoritative teaching; the doctrine of Talim is associated with Hasan-i-Sabbah.

TAQIYYA Precautionary dissimulation, dispensation from the requirements of religion under compulsion or threat; considered a distinguishing mark of the Shia.

TATIL: Suspension; tatil al-sharia means abrogation of sharia.

TAWHID: Oneness, Unity of God. A doctrine of strict monotheism.

TAWIL: Interpretation, exposition, became a technical term for the esoterical interpretation and allegorical exposition of the Qur'an and the Sharia.

WALAYA: The principle of succession/trusteeship associated with the Wasi/Imam.

WASI (pl. awsiya): Executor of the Prophet's will.

ZAHIR: Exterior aspect of religion as laid down in the Sharia; the apparent meaning of the Qur'an.

Important Events in Chronological Order

- 455/1063: Alp-Arslan declared as Sultan of Seljuk Empire.
(Date not certain) Hasan-i-Sabbah accepts Ismaili faith in Rayy at the hand of Dai Mumin, a deputy to the Chief Dai Abdul-Malik Attash
- 464/1072: (i) Chief Dai Attash visits Rayy and Hasan is introduced to him as a new convert.
(ii) Sultan Alp-Arslan killed.
(iii) Malik Shah S/O Sultan Alp-Arslan succeeds his father as Seljuk Sultan.
- 469/1076: Hasan leaves Isfahan and embarks on a journey to Egypt.
- 471/1078: Hasan reaches Cairo.
- 472/1079: Hasan leaves Egypt on his return journey.
- 473/1080: Hasan returns to Isfahan.
- 473-483/ 1080-1090: Hasan's travels in Iran, including Khuzistan, Quhistan, Daylaman, and the Alburz mountain range.
- 483/1090: Hasan acquires the castle of Alamut and establishes his headquarters at Alamut.
- 485/1092: (i) Amir Arslan-Tash (on behalf of Sultan Malik Shah) besieges the castle of Alamut. The Siege proves unsuccessful.
(ii) Nizam-ul-Mulk is assassinated by an Ismaili Fidai.
(iii) Sultan Malik Shah dies.
(iv) Berkyark, son of Sultan Malik Shah becomes Seljuk Sultan.
- 487/1094: al-Mustansir (The Imam of Ismailis), the Fatimid Caliph of Egypt dies. Dispute of succession took place between his two sons. Nizar the eldest lost and was imprisoned and died later. The younger son al-Mustali won and succeeded as the Fatimid Caliph of Egypt. The Ismaili community splits into two sections. One section follows

the line of Mustali as their legitimate Imams. The second section known as Nizari follow the line of Nizar as their legitimate Imams. Hasan-i-Sabbah and his followers follow the Nizari line.

488/1095: Qadi Abul Hasan Saidi brings the grandson of Nizar from Egypt to Alamut in great secrecy.

489/1096: Kiya Buzurg Ummid conquers the castle of Lamasar for the Ismailis.

492/1098: Ahmed bin Abdul-Malik Attash occupies the castle of Shah Diz near Isfahan.

493/1099: Rais Muid-ud-Din Muzaffar acquires the castle of Gird-i-Koh near Damghan.

498/1104: Rais Muzaffar dies.

499/1105: (i) Death of Sultan Berkyark.

(ii) Mohammad Taper succeeds as Seljuk Sultan.

500/1107: Fall of Shah Diz. Ahmed bin Abdul-Malik Attash put to death by torture.

503/1110: (i) First assault on Alamut by Shirgir, which proves unsuccessful.

(ii) Sultan Mohammad Taper commences an eight-year siege of the Ismaili castles of Alamut and Lamasar.

504/1111: al-Gazali dies.

511/1118: (i) Sultan Mohammad Taper dies.

(ii) The siege of Alamut and Lamasar lifted.

(iii) Sanjar succeeds as Seljuk Sultan.

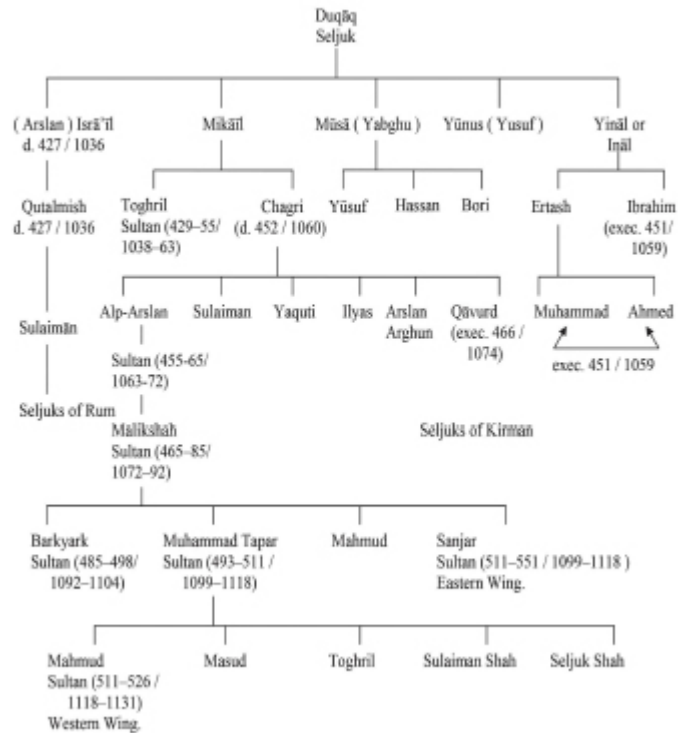
(iv) A peace treaty is concluded between Sultan Sanjar and Hasan-i-Sabbah.

517/1123: Omar Khayyam dies.

518/1124: (i) Hasan-i-Sabbah dies.

(ii) Kiya Buzurg Ummid succeeds as the ruler of Alamut.

GENEALOGICAL TABLE OF THE SELJUKS



Appendix I

Exchange of Letters Between Sultan Malik Shah and Hasan-i-Sabbah

Introduction

Two documents of disputed authenticity are cited in later Persian collections. It is reported that an exchange of letters took place between Sultan Malik Shah and Hasan-i-Sabbah. The texts of these letters, in slightly variant forms, were published by Mehmed Serefud-Din (Yaltkaya) in *Darulfumun Ilahiyat Fukultesi Mecmuast* (Istanbul), vii/4 (1926), pp. 38-44, and again independently, by Nasrullah Falsafi in *Ittila at-i-Mahana* (Tehran) 3/27 (1950), pp. 12-16 (reprinted in *idem, Falsafi Hasht Maqala* (Tehran) 1963, pp. 415-25) edited from two anonymous manuscripts (of majmu'ah): (i) Collection of Mahdi Bayani and (ii) Collection of Mu'ayyad Sabiti. Translations Arabic, Falsafi, in *Arba rasail tarikhiyah* (Lebanon University) 1965, pp. 270-302. The authenticity of the documents is open to question. The letters are, however, considered authentic by both editors and, more cautiously, by Ostnan Turan (*Seleuklular tarihi ve Turk-Islam medeniyeti*, Ankara 1965, pp. 227-30), but their authenticity is rejected by Kafesoglu (*Sultan Malikshah...*, pp. 134-5, nn). The text was reproduced in Persian by Abdur Rehman Saif Azad in his book *Khulafa-i-Fatimiya*, Tehran 1962 (pp. 178-84) and again in Persian by Karim Kashawarz in his book *Hasan-i-Sabbah*, Tehran, 1965 (pp. 153-63). The text has been translated from Persian into English and is given in the following pages of the book.

Contrary to most historical reports, Hasan-i-Sabbah, in his letter to the Seljuk Sultan Malik Shah, states that his father was a shafii. The possible explanation of this statement may be that he was observing

taqiyya, shafii being the most popular religion in Iran at the time. The long and informative letter also asserts the following two points generally discredited by some historians: firstly while he was in Rayy, he fell foul of the authorities and incurred the enmity of Nizam-ul-Mulk and secondly, in Egypt, he came into conflict with the Vizier Badr-al-Jamali, who was turned against Hasan by the Abbasid agents. Relevant comments and observations are to be found in the footnotes of the text. The most likely date of these letters is AD 1091, as it was in AD 1090 that Hasan occupied the castle of Alamut, and it had taken him at least one year to acquire those fortresses in Tabaristan, Quhistan, and other mountains to which Hasan makes reference towards the end of his letter. However, it would appear that these particular letters should be dated earlier than AD 1092, the year of the first Seljuk assault, and certainly before the assassination of Nizam-ul-Mulk in AD 1092.

Sultan Malik Shah's Letter to Hasan-i-Sabbah

O, you Hasan-i-Sabbah, you have invented a new religion and faith and have enticed people into it by various means. You have been a traitor to the rulers of the land. You have beguiled many simple-minded hill dwellers and having gathered them around you have trained them to kill innocent people who have become the targets of their daggers. You make accusations against the Abbasid Caliphs who are the (rightful) Caliphs of Islam and who are responsible for the maintenance of peace and order and are the protectors of the faith of Islam. You are urged to desist from following this erroneous path and become a true Muslim; otherwise, our military might is in readiness to strike. We will, however, wait until you present yourself in person, or an immediate reply to our letter is received.

Consider well and have mercy on yourself and on your followers and do not unnecessarily precipitate them towards disaster. Do not be deceived by the defences of your castle and accept the realities of the situation. Indeed, even if your castle 'Alamut' was a fortress of heaven, I would level it to the ground by the grace of Allah.

Hasan-i-Sabbah's Reply to the Letter of Sultan Malik Shah

When the chief minister (Sadar-i-Kabir) Zia-ud-Din Khakan arrived here and delivered the Sultan's letter, I welcomed him and was greatly honoured by the Sultan's favours. Since the Sultan has so graciously remembered me, I feel greatly flattered and uplifted.

Now I will elaborate and explain all those facts regarding our activities and our beliefs. We hope that the Sultan will place these facts before his court for discussion and deliberation. I wish, however, to make a petition regarding these consultations, namely that the Sultan should avoid those courtiers whose malice towards me is well known to him, in particular Nizam-ul-Mulk. Afterwards, whatever shall be the Sultan's judgement (in the light of my comments and explanations), it shall be completely binding upon me. If then, I (Hasan) find that judgement unacceptable, and then it shall mean that I have betrayed Islam and have disobeyed God Almighty and his Prophet. But if, however, the Sultan listens to the slanderous talk of my enemies regarding myself and my activities, then I shall have a full right to defend my views. I have some formidable enemies in the court of the Sultan who never desist from their attempts to make truth appear false and falsity appear as truth and have frequently been successful in achieving their objectives. I personally have been victimised by these people and probably this is no secret to the Sultan.

Now allow me to detail my early career. My father was a true Muslim belonging to the Shafii school of thought.¹ At the age of four, my father sent me to school where I occupied myself in the acquisition of knowledge. I diligently pursued my studies from the fourth into the fourteenth year² of my life, mastering many branches of knowledge, in particular Qur'anic exegesis and the Apostolical traditions. Since then, I have developed a particular interest in religion. While studying the works of Imam Shafii, I found numerous references regarding the exalted qualities of the descendants of the Prophet and their claim to the Imamate. I was so profoundly impressed that I started, in all seriousness, my continued search for

the Imam of the Age. However, repression and tyranny of the circumstances forced me to consider my worldly affairs. I began losing interest in my religious research, devoting myself wholeheartedly towards the affairs of this world and its people, thereby forsaking my duty to the Creator of this world. My behaviour did not meet with God's approval and consequently he set up enemies against me who attempted to drive me from my work. Forced to flee, I wandered through towns and deserts where I encountered a great many hardships and difficulties. The Sultan must be aware of the dispute and subsequent estrangement between me and Nizam-ul-Mulk. The grace of God Almighty delivered me from this whirlpool of life, and thus I was convinced that all those calamities, which beset me, were the direct consequence of my preference for the affairs of this world at the expense of those of my Creator. Thus, I resolved manfully to devote my energies to the service of the faith and to work diligently for the world to come.

I left Rayy for Baghdad, where I remained for some time, and there became acquainted with the affairs of the people in general, and the Caliphs in particular. It became apparent to me that the activities of these Abbasid Caliphs, the so-called pontiffs of the Islamic faith, were far removed from the Islamic ideals of justice and truth. I became convinced that if the foundations of the edifice of Islam and its faith were those embodied in these Caliphs and Imams, then heresy and atheism would be superior to such a faith. I then left Baghdad for Egypt, the Caliph there being Imam al-Mustansir. I investigated his affairs and found that his rightful Caliphate was superior to that of the Abbasids and his Imamate superior to that of the Abbasids. The Abbasid Caliph came to know of my conviction and a directive was issued authorising my arrest. Once again, God Almighty saved me from this whirlpool, and I reached Egypt safely. Following this incident, the Abbasid Caliph sent three mules laden with gold and other precious gifts to the Commander of the Egyptian armed forces in exchange for delivering 'Hasan' alive, or his severed head.³ As the blessing of the rightful Caliph and the permanent (mustaqar) Imam al-Mustansir were in my

favour, I escaped from this whirlpool unscathed. However, as the Abbasid Caliph had incited the Commander in Chief against me, the latter appointed me to work among the Frankish Infidels. When this information reached the ears of the rightful Imam, he took me under his protection and subsequently gave me a document to the effect that I should pursue the work of bringing Muslims to the right path, and in so doing, I was free to adopt any such method that seemed appropriate to the undertaking.⁴ My instructions were to acquaint the people with the legitimacy and the divine nature of the Imamate of the Caliphs of Egypt. If the Sultan has the good fortune to obey the Qur'anic injunction, 'Obey Allah, the Messenger and the people in authority among you (ul-il-amr)', then he cannot refute what I say.⁵ In the same way that Sultan Mahmud Gazi Sabuk-tagin was ready to crush them (the Abbasids), so similarly he should rise up in order to save the Muslims from the evildoers, lest a time comes when another effects this work and reaps all the benefit for it.

As for the second point concerning the Sultan's accusation of my originating a new faith and religion, may a curse fall upon Hasan if this is true. The faith to which I have always adhered is that same faith which the Companions of the Prophet followed in the time of the Prophet, and which will remain the true faith until the Day of Judgement. At this present time, my faith is the faith of a Muslim, namely, 'I testify that there is no god but God and Mohammad is the Messenger of God'.⁶ I have no attachment to this world and its concerns. The work that I have undertaken and the arguments that I am presenting are all in the interest of the promotion of the true faith. It is my sincere belief that the children of the Prophet have a more legitimate claim to the Caliphate as the successors of the Prophet than the children of Abbas. You, Sultan Malik Shah, after encountering trials and tribulations, have acquired your empire which extends from the West to the East and from the North Pole to the bounds of India. Should these lands now fall into the hands of the children of Harun and your own children be hunted down, where ever they are found, would you then consider their Caliphate to be justified? Indeed, the children of Abbas are a people in whom I have witnessed an evil so extensive that it would not be tolerated by any

faith or religion. There are, however, some people who in their ignorance of the facts still believe their (the Abbasid's) actions to be justified. Such people believe that the Caliphate is their unquestionable right. However, being acquainted with the work and deeds of the Abbasids, I cannot believe this to be so. If Hazarat Sultan now becomes aware of their true nature and does not take immediate action to eradicate their evil, how then will he answer and hope for salvation on the Day of Judgement? In the past, my faith has been constant and it will always remain so unto my last day. I have never denied this in the past, nor will I ever do so in future. I have always revered the four pious Caliphs and the ten blessed companions and will continue to revere them in future. I have not invented a new faith but have followed that same faith and religion which existed before. The religion that I adhere to is that same religion which was followed by the companions of the Prophet in their time. This has always been and will continue to be the true and correct religion until the Day of Judgement.^{[7](#), [8](#)}

With regards to your inquiry as to why my followers and I criticise and oppose the Abbasids, I maintain that whoever is a true Muslim and is conscious of his faith and sincerity, cannot but criticise those people whose career is and shall always remain, from beginning to the end, full of deceit and treachery. In short, their affairs are exposed to the whole world, but let me yet narrate a few instances in order that the Sultan remains in no shadow of doubt. Let us examine the affairs of Abu Muslim.^{[9](#)} He worked diligently in the face of great difficulties until such time as he had eradicated the high-handedness and tyranny of the Bani-Marwan^{[10](#)} and brought peace and justice to the world of Islam. They have used the curse they so richly deserved themselves, for the people of the household of the Prophet, when they gathered several thousand descendants of the children of the Prophet and put them to death. They habitually indulged in wine-drinking, in such evils as adultery and the free use of sex, and their evil reached unlimited extents. Harun^{[11](#)} who is considered as the great patron of learning had two sisters. On one occasion during a wine-drinking party, he called one of his sisters and encouraged his courtiers to join in the frivolities. So excessive

was their behaviour that Jaffar Yahyah, who was present in the party, committed adultery with her. Consequently, she bore a child which in fact was conceived from Harun. Some years later, when Harun went to perform Haj, he discovered the secret and, as a direct result, killed Jaffar there and then. Harun's younger sister, whose name was Muhsina, was exceedingly pretty. She attracted her brother Harun and incest took place between them. But the irony is that after the death of Harun, his son Amin committed incest with this same Muhsina, who was in point of fact his real aunt. He was under the mistaken impression that she was a virgin. Amin subsequently asked his aunt why it was that she had not retained her virginity. To this question she replied, 'whom did your father leave out as virgin in Baghdad that he might have spared me.' Second, a punishment amounting to a hundred lashes was pronounced against a great and respected man namely Abu Hanifa Kufi, who is considered as a pillar of Islam.^{[12](#)}

Similarly, they crucified a saint like Mansur Hallaj.^{[13](#)} If I should start to enumerate their actions, even a lifetime would not be sufficient. These were your rightful Caliphs and the pillars of Islam who were the pivot of the so-called Islamic state and religion. If I or anybody else adopt a critical attitude and in consequence of this attitude appear disobedient, would not that disobedience be justified?

As to the charge against me that I have been inciting simple-hearted people to kill and raid, it is clear to any fair-minded and impartial person that one's own life is the most precious human possession. In the light of this fact, it would appear unreasonable that any person would risk his own life at the bidding of a poor man like me, and why on earth should I issue such a command? In Khurasan and around it, the employees and administrators of the government have abandoned the correct path which was followed in the past by the Muslims. Some have indulged in dishonouring the Muslim women and wives of the pious people. When a complaint is lodged with government officials, it is usually turned down and not infrequently the plaintiff himself carries the entire blame. Nizam-ul-Mulk, the chief administrator of the government, under the pretext

of mis-appropriating the government funds, killed Khawja Abu Nasr Kunduri,¹⁴ who was an extremely capable and honest minister. No king in any country either at present or in the past had the good fortune of having such a capable person as his administrator. At this present time, Nizam-ul-Mulk has joined forces with other government officials to the extent that if Khawja Abu Nasr collected ten dirhems in government taxes and faithfully deposited them in the treasury, Nizam-ul-Mulk collects fifty dirhems of which not even half a dirhem is spent on the Sultan's behalf. After paying an insignificant amount to his assistants and collaborators, the rest is spent entirely on his own sons, daughters, and sons-in-law. He squanders public funds, erecting worthless buildings of brick and sand throughout the kingdom, a fact which is abundantly clear to every observer. Where were the sons and daughters of Kwaja Abu Nasr and on which day did he spend even one dinar on clay and timber. At this present time, people are in such a state of helplessness and despair that they feel they are without any hope of salvation. It is no wonder that people in this plight put their own lives at risk in order to destroy the forces of evil, and, if in this process they are themselves killed, they feel complete justification in their personal sacrifice. Why should Hasan-i-Sabbah interfere in these matters and why should he incite anyone in this respect? Every event happens at a particular moment in time and in a particular manner as predestined by the Heavens.

As far as your warning that I should give up my activities or risk incurring your punishment and the destruction of my castle, God forbid! I Hasan could never be guilty of any act which would displease the Sultan. There is, however, a clique at the Sultan's court which is so bent upon misrepresenting and persistently pursuing me that I have acquired this retreat in order to be beyond their reach. My followers are, however, willing to render any service to the Sultan. After I have dealt with my opponents, I shall personally present myself in the court of the Sultan and, like many others, enter the service of the King. I will then devote myself to the best of my ability to the improvement of the material as well as the spiritual welfare of the Sultan. If after this, I am found guilty of any action

contrary to my promises and I fail to carry out the orders of the Sultan, then I should doubtless deserve punishment in this world and should invite the curses of the people from far and near who would say that I had revolted against the established authority of the time and that I had disobeyed the Qur'anic injunction, 'Obey Allah, His Messenger and whoever is in authority from among you.'¹⁵ This would no doubt greatly increase and strengthen the case of my enemies and advance their cause. This would then enable them to concoct all sorts of spurious stories about me, of which I would remain unaware. Irrespective of whatever I do in the service of my faith and Dawa, they would distort the facts and brand my actions as evil, so dishonouring my good name. If, instead, I present myself now in the court of the Sultan and offer my services to the King, while my sworn enemy Nizam-ul-Mulk is in office and who has in fact done me great wrong in the past and at the present time, there are other factors which require my consideration. Even were I able to keep my heart at peace, free from the fear of Nizam-ul-Mulk, there is yet one formidable enemy who cannot be ignored. The Sultan is obliged to carry out the orders of the Abbasid Caliph, and the Sultan also knows full well their attitude towards me. To recapitulate— was it not so that the agents of the Abbasid Caliph attempted to arrest me? After their failure to arrest me during my travels, they sent many precious gifts to the commander-in-chief of the Egyptian armed forces in order to secure my arrest. If I had not enjoyed the protection of the true Caliph al-Mustansir, I would never have been extricated from these difficulties. Nevertheless, the commander-in-chief succeeded in sending me amongst the Franks on a sea voyage with the instruction that I should preach the faith amongst Frankish infidels in their country. By the grace of God Almighty, I came out even from this whirlpool successfully. After a considerable suffering and hardship endured over several years, I ultimately reached Iraq, where they (the Abbasids) yet persisted in my pursuit. Having reached this stage, I now maintain Dawa on behalf of the Alid Caliphs, and I have acquired certain strongholds in Tabaristan, Quhistan, and in the mountains, where I am surrounded by many comrades and friends and the Partisans of the Alids. It is on this

account that the Abbasids fear me. They try their utmost to poison the Sultan's ears against me, and they never cease to desist in the pursuit of my life. It is quite possible that they would make demands on the Sultan to secure my arrest. Under such circumstances, it is impossible to foresee how the matter could be resolved. Whichever way the situation was dealt with, it would be open to criticism. If the Sultan accepts their imperative, he will never be able to execute it, which would be considered a slur on his manliness. On the other hand, if he does not meet their request, those ill-informed amongst the people will be critical of his actions, saying that his decision was 'just like walking on foot when there was a horse available to ride'. They would, no doubt, ask, why was not Hasan-i-Sabbah simply handed over instead? It is quite probable that the conflict between the two parties would be aggravated and it would remain unclear as to how best the conflict could be resolved.

The Sultan has said that even if this fortress is a fortress of Heaven, he will level it to the ground. With regard to this statement, the inhabitants of this fortress have complete faith in the people of the truth of the time (Imam), and believe that this fortress will remain secure for a long time, its safety resting upon the grace of God. Now, having found refuge in this place, I am carrying out all my duties as charged. I seek help from God and His messenger that the Sultan and his courtiers may come to the right path and that God Almighty may show them the true path, and that the oppression, tyranny, and evil of the Abbasids may disappear from the face of the Earth. If the Sultan is destined to achieve peace in faith as well as in worldly affairs, then he must rise against the Abbasids in the same way as the Sultan of Islam, Mahmud Gazi 'God's Blessings on him', who similarly tried to eradicate their evil when he called Sayyid Ala-al-Mulk from Tirmadh and entrusted the caliphate to him. The Sultan must also support this great cause so that their evil may be abated amongst the people of God Almighty. Otherwise, another just King will rise up one day and accomplish this task and save the Muslims from this tyranny. Lastly, I pray that God may guide those who follow the right path.

Footnotes

- [1.](#) Most historians, including Juvaini and Rashid-ud-Din, report that Hasan's father was an Isna-asheria (twelver). This statement seems to be *taqiyya* on the part of Hasan.
- [2.](#) Juvaini and Rashid-ud-Din both report that by the testimony of *Sarguzasht*, Hasan studied up to the age of seventeen years.
- [3.](#) This reference is made to Badr-al-Jamali, who was the grand Vizier, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and head of the Ismaili Dawa in the time of al-Mustansir, the eighth Fatimid Caliph of Egypt. Badr was Armanian by origin and was the previous Fatimid Military Governor of Palestine.
- [4.](#) Hasan is probably referring to the Document of the Mandate of Ismaili Dawa (e.g. making Hasan as Hujjat or 'Chief Dai').
- [5.](#) Qur'an, IV: 59.
- [6.](#) First article of Muslim Faith.
- [7.](#) Reference is to Khulafa-i-Rashida, Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman, and Ali.
- [8.](#) Reference is to Ashara-mubashara Ten Companions whom the Prophet gave the tidings of Paradise.
- [9.](#) Abu Muslim Khurasani defeated the last Umayyad Caliph Marwan II and installed the first Abbasid Caliph Abul-Abbas in Baghdad (132/750).
- [10.](#) Bani-Marwan = Bani-Ummayya.
- [11.](#) Harun al-Rashid the famous Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad.
- [12.](#) Imam Abu Hanifa al-Numan bin Sabat (80-150/699-767) is one of the four Imams of ahal-i-Sunat wa Jamat and is the founder of the Hanifia School in Sunni Islam. The other three Sunni Imams are Imam Shafii, Imam Malik, and Imam Ahmed bin Hambal. See *EI* for details.
- [13.](#) Hussain bin Mansur Hallaj (244-309/858-922) was a famous Sufi who was crucified in Baghdad by the orders of the Abbasid Caliph al-Muqtadar.
- [14.](#) Amid al-Mulk Abu Nasr Kunduri was the famous Vizier to Sultan Toghril Seljuk uncle of Sultan Alp-Arslan. After Toghril's death Alp-Arslan became the Sultan with Nizam-ul-Mulk as his grand Vizier. At Nizam-ul-Mulk's orders, Kunduri was put to death in AD 1063.
- [15.](#) Qur'an, IV: 59.

Appendix II

Extract from Wasaya of Nizam-ul-Mulk *With Reference to the 'Three* *Schoolmates'*

Introduction

Wasaya or Nasaih of Nizam-ul-Mulk¹ appears to be an early ninth/fifteenth century or even earlier compilation. Mirkhwand (d. 903/1499) quotes from it word by word in his works *Rawdat al-Safa*.² It is a work of disputed authenticity, supposed to have been written by or on behalf of Nizam-ul-Mulk as teaching or advice for the benefit of his children. It looks evident that the work was, in fact, not written by the pen of Nizam-ul-Mulk himself but by someone on his behalf. The author actually remarks in the introduction that he had compiled it partly from the books and partly from oral tradition handed down in his own family, which was descended from Nizam-ul-Mulk. Moreover, most of the anecdotes begin with the phrase 'Khwaja Nizam-ul-Mulk mi-guyad' (thus says Khwaja Nizam-ul-Mulk). There is reason to think that the material used in the writings goes much further back (at least 200 years) than the date of its completion as it is cited in *Jawami al-hikayat* written by Aufo, who makes reference to *Wasiyyat nameh* written by Nizam-ul-Mulk.³

There seems to be an air of truth in the story of 'Three Classmates' in the *Wasaya* version when the author begins the story with the mention of Imam al-Muwaffaq as head of the institution of learning associated with the Shafii persuasion in Nishapur, Imam al-Muwaffaq being the most likely teacher chosen by Nizam's father, himself a

Shafii. The fact that Imam al-Muwaffaq was indeed the head of the Shafii Institution in Nishapur is supported by an independent historian al-Dhahabi.⁴ The second point supporting the credibility of the story is that it mentions the early life of Nizam-ul-Mulk on the authority of a certain Abdul Samad al-Funduraji, who is described as a pious person and who acted as a tutor to Nizam-ul-Mulk in his early childhood and later as being in charge of Nizamia waqf in most provinces under Seljuk rule. Now this Abdul Samad has been mentioned repeatedly by al-Bakharzi in his anthology the *Dumyat al-Qasr*. Al-Bakharzi calls him 'al-shaykh al-Faqih Abu Mohammad al-Funduraji', the *Nasih al-Dawlah* and founder of a library in 'Uqayl Mosque in Nishapur'.⁵ So we may safely consider the part of *Wasaya* connected with the childhood and the school days of Nizam as of an early date. The *Wasaya* version of the story of 'Three Schoolmates' differs to some degree from that of the *Sarguzasht* given by Rashid-ud-Din and other historians, although the three actors of the story remain the same, namely Nizam-ul-Mulk, Omar Khayyam and Hasan-i-Sabbah. In the *Wasaya* version, it seems very convincing when the author mentions fiqh Abdul Samad, evidently al-Funduraji himself, who takes the young Nizam to the school in Nishapur.⁶ A section of *Wasaya* of Nizam-ul-Mulk relating to the story of the 'Three Schoolfellows' is reproduced as follows:

One of the greatest of the wise men of Khurasan was Imam al-Muwaffaq of Nishapur, a man highly honoured and revered, may God rejoice his soul. His illustrious years exceeded eighty-five, and it was the universal belief that every boy who read the Qur'an or studied the tradition of the Prophet in his presence, would assuredly attain to honour and happiness. For this reason my father sent me from Tus to Nishapur with Abdul Samad fiqh (the doctor of law) that I might employ myself in studies and learning under the guidance of that illustrious teacher. Towards me he always turned an eye of favour and kindness, and as a pupil I felt for him extreme affection and devotion, so that I passed four years in his service. When I first came there, I found two other pupils of my own age newly arrived, Hakim Omar Khayyam, and the ill-fated Hasan bin Sabbah. Both were endowed with sharpness of wit and the highest natural power and we three formed a close friendship together. When the Imam rose from his lectures, they used to join me and we

repeated to each other the lesson we had heard. Now Omar Khayyam was a native of Nishapur, while Hasan bin Sabbah's father was one Ali, a man of austere life and practice, but heretical in his creed and doctrine. One day Hasan said to me and to Khayyam, 'It is universal belief that the pupils of the Imam Muwaffaq will attain a fortune. Now, even if we all do not attain thereto, without doubt one of us will. What then shall be our mutual pledge and bond? we answered, 'Be it what you please'. 'well', he said, 'Let us make a vow, that to whomsoever this fortune falls, he shall share it equally with the rest, and reserve no pre-eminence for himself.' 'Be it so', we both replied, and on those terms we mutually pledged our words. 'Years rolled on, and I went from Khurasan to Transoxiana, and wandered to Ghazni and Kabul and when I returned, I was invested with an office and rose to be the administrator of government affairs during the Sultanate of Alp-Arslan.'

He goes on to state that years passed by, and both his old school friends found him out, and came and claimed a share in his good fortune, according to the school-day vow. The Vizier was generous and kept his word. Hasan demanded a place in the government, which the Sultan granted at the Vizier's request but, discontented with a gradual rise, he plunged into the maze of intrigue of an oriental court and, failing in a base attempt to supplant his benefactor, he was disgraced and fell. After many mishaps and wanderings, Hasan became the head of the Persian sect of the Ismailis, a party of militants who rose to eminence under the guidance of his strong will. In AD 1090, he seized the castle of Alamut, in the province of Rudbar, which lies in the mountain tract south of the Caspian Sea.

Footnotes

- [1.](#) There are two B. M. codices of this work, OR. 256, 267.
- [2.](#) Mirkhwand, *Rawdat al-Safa*, Tehran, 1853.
- [3.](#) Aufo, *Jawami al-Hikayat wa Lawami al-Riwayat*, ed. Mohammad-i-Bahar, Vol. I, Tehran, 1945. See also the 'Introduction' to this work by Mohammad Nizam-ud-Din, London, 1929. Another possible source for the *Wasaya* is a book still in existence in the seventh-twelfth century, compiled by one of Nizam's chief officials, dealing with the 'excellences of his conduct'. It was consulted by the author of the Arabic history *Zubdat al-tawarikh* who quotes from it. See B. M. Codex Stowe 7, f. 40a sq.
- [4.](#) Al-Dhahabi *Tarikh al-Islam*, supplies a short note on al-Muwaffaq (B. M. Codex Or. 49, f. 1896) and a longer note on his son Abu Sahl (B. M. Codex Or. 50, f. 616 sq.).
- [5.](#) See the unpublished D. Litt., thesis of S. J. Hussain, London University, 1926.
- [6.](#) Harold Bowen discusses in very great details the credibility of *Wasaya* and the story of 'Three School Fellows' in his paper 'The Sar-gudhast-i-Sayyidna', 'The Tale of the Three School fellows', and the 'Wasaya of the Nizam al-Mulk', *JRAS*, 1931.

Appendix III

Evaluation of the Sources

I: Ata-ul-Mulk Juvaini: *Tarikh-i-Jahan Gusha*

The most important single source on Hasan-i-Sabbah's life and thought is his famous biography *Sarguzasht-i-Sayyidna* (The biography of our Lord) by an anonymous author, discovered by Ata-ul-Mulk Juvaini in the central library of Alamut during the fall of Alamut before the library was put to flames.¹ No copy of *Sarguzasht* has come to light so far, although references have been made to this book by other Persian historians of the Mongol period who might also have had access to the libraries of the other Ismaili castles.² The information available in the *Sarguzasht* was used and some portions of it are actually quoted by three Persian historians of that period, giving a detailed account of Hasan's life and that of his successors based largely on the captured Ismaili literature.³ The earliest and the best known is Ata-ul-Mulk Juvaini (AD 1226-1283). This history, written in Persian, was edited by Mirza Mohammad Qazvini (*Tarikh-i-Jahan Gusha* in three volumes, London, AD 1912-1937) and translated into English by J. A. Boyle (*The History of the World Conqueror* in two volumes, Manchester 1958). The history of the Ismailis is to be found in the third volume of text and second volume of the English translation. Part of the section dealing with the Ismailis was translated into French from a Persian manuscript by Charles Defrémery. Juvaini describes how he found the Ismaili Chronicles in the library of the captured Castle of Alamut. He writes:

Now I was examining the library which they had gathered together over a period of many years, and from amongst the multitude of lying treatises and false teachings touching their religion and belief which they had mingled with copies of the noble Koran and all manner of choice

books interweaving good and evil was extracting whatever I found in the way of rare and precious volumes after the manner of 'He bringeth forth the living out of the dead',⁴ when I came upon a book containing the life and adventures of Hasan-i-Sabbah, which they call *Sar-Guzasht-i-Sayyidna*. From this work I have copied whatever was to the point and suitable for insertion in this history, incorporating whatever was confirmed and verified.⁵

Juvaini seems to follow his sources closely but always curses the Ismailis and mentions them with contempt and hatred, whereas he refers to his masters, the Mongols, with utmost respect and justifies their every action without any reservation. He does admit that Hasan's cause was founded on ascetism, continence and righteousness; during his entire rule, nobody drank wine or put it in jars⁶ and describes him as a puritan who followed and enforced the Islamic sharia very strictly, but at the same time insists that Hasan and his followers were heretics and enemies of Islam. To give a couple of examples: the fall of the Ismaili state is expressed by Juvaini in the following terms:

In the breeding-ground of heresy in the rudbar of Alamut the home of the wicked adherents of Hasan-i-Sabbah and the evil followers of the practice of *ibaha* (libertinism), there remains no one stone of the foundations upon another: Their 'maulana' (Imam) to whom they addressed the words: O God, our Protector (maulana), dust in their mouth! (and yet 'the infidels' have no protector) has become the serf of bastards.⁷

However, Juvaini considers the heathen Mongols as the blessing of Almighty God. He continues:

Today, thanks to the glorious fortune of the world-Illuminating King, if an Assassin (Kard-Zan) still lingers in a corner; he plies a woman's trade.⁸

Juvaini, being a strict Sunni, seems to loathe the Ismailis and so one can well understand his jubilation over the complete destruction of the Ismailis. What one does not understand is his unreserved praise for every action of the heathen Mongols, who also struck a death blow to the very heart of the Sunni centre of Baghdad. The Sunni Caliphate was ruthlessly destroyed; the Caliph and his family, along with hundreds of thousands of Muslims of Baghdad, were put

to the sword in AD 1258. The Mongols inflicted more suffering on Islam than any other people in world history of which records are preserved to us, and the after-effects of their aggression were innumerable on the Islamic history.⁹

Having said all this, Juvaini remains the best single source available to us on the history of the Mongols as well as on that of the Nizari Ismailis, although the reader is advised not to pay any attention to Juvaini's abusive language, reserved for the Ismailis, and only consider the historical facts expressed in his famous history. We may notice that Juvaini leaves a good many gaps in his description of Ismaili history and particularly that of the life and thought of Hasan-i-Sabbah, the founder of the Ismaili state in Iran, although he had access to all the Ismaili literature accumulated over the past two centuries before it was destroyed by Juvaini himself. Sometimes, these gaps are important to paint a true picture of the Ismailis of that time. It is due to Juvaini's prejudice against the Ismailis that he believed them to be really heretics. The details which he has left out have importance neither to Islam nor to the world at large and thus he considers them not relevant to be included in his book. The gaps left out by Juvaini are, however, relevant to our subject and are filled to a great extent by Rashid-ud-Din, a second primary source in order of importance.

II: Rashid-ud-Din Fadal-Allah: *Jamia Tawarikh*

The second major source is the slightly later historian Rashid-ud-Din Fadal-Allah¹⁰ (AD 1247-1318) who included in his universal history (*Jamia Tawarikh*) a detailed account of the Ismailis which was clearly based directly or indirectly on the same sources as were used by Ata-ul-Mulk Juvaini (d. 682/1283). Rashid-ud-Din gives complete and more detailed information regarding Ismaili history than Juvaini. Despite some omissions, Rashid-ud-Din seems to follow the text of the Ismaili sources in greater detail and with greater openness than did Juvaini and he preserves many details omitted by his predecessor. He, for example, narrates the story of the three fellow students, whereas Juvaini does not mention them at all.¹¹ He further mentions Hasan's career in the court of Sultan Malik Shah Seljuki

and under what circumstances he was thrown out of his court. He also gives detailed information regarding his wars with the Seljuk Sultans. Most of these details are missing in Juvaini's work. One, however, notices a few oversights on the part of Rashid-ud-Din. For example, relating to the conversion of Hasan to the Ismaili faith, he narrates that Hasan said, 'I saw a section of Nizaris who were righteous people...' ¹² Now at the time of Hasan's conversion, there was no question of Ismailis being called Nizaris as the Ismailis split into two sections, Nizaris and Mustalian, occurred several decades later in AD 1094, after the death of al-Mustansir, the Fatimid Caliph. Again, describing the stay of Hasan in Egypt, Rashid-ud-Din remarks that Mustali the younger son of the Caliph said, 'It is advisable that Hasan be sent to Damyat (Damietta) Castle (for imprisonment).' Now at this time, Mustali was hardly a ten-year-old child, and it seems unlikely that he would have expressed his opinion on such serious matters.

We have already noted that the biography of Hasan-i-Sabbah known as *Sarguzasht-i-Sayyidna* was first discovered by Ata-ul-Mulk Juvaini at the fall of Alamut in AD 1256. Four years later in AD 1260, Juvaini completed his famous work *Tarikh-i-Jahan Gusha*. In its third volume, he gives the history of the Ismailis and has incorporated some sections of the *Sarguzasht* in this history. Rashid-ud-Din finished his work *Jamia Tawarikh* half a century later in AD 1310. Rashid-ud-Din gives many details which Juvaini has missed, but both have used the same words when they describe some part of history common to both the works. This can be explained in more than one way. It is quite possible that Juvaini first prepared a detailed draft of his work. Later on, he condensed and trimmed his material, leaving out what he considered as offensive or unimportant, and in the final completed version, such material did not appear. Now it is possible that Rashid-ud-Din had access to the first version of Juvaini's draft and has incorporated these first detailed notes in his history. On the other hand, it is equally possible that he had access to the very original source (*Sarguzasht* and other Ismaili material). Juvaini and Rashid-ud-Din both miss out several important points (e.g. neither of them, nor any other historian, gives the details of his one and a half

years stay in Egypt). One, however, notices with interest that Rashid-ud-Din includes many valuable details which Juvaini omits and excludes practically nothing included by Juvaini.¹³

Rashid-ud-Din's history of the Ismailis has been known in manuscript form for quite some time, but unfortunately, it was not published for many years. Mohammad Dabir Sayyaki edited and published, in Tehran in AD 1958, this history under the title *Fasal-i az Jamia Tawarikh* by Khawja Rashid-ud-Din Fadal-Allah Tabib Hamadani. I have made use of this book to a great extent as this authoritative work contains most information available for the life and thought of Hasan-i-Sabbah. Rashid-ud-Din indeed at times goes into such details of the events which are not covered by any other historian and thus no critical comparison is possible. I had to deal with some sections of Hasan's history where Rashid-ud-Din is the only source available, and in such a case, I had no alternative except to paraphrase Rashid-ud-Din's accounts with critical remarks wherever it was found necessary.

III: Abul Qasim Kashani: *Biography of Hasan*

A third version of Hasan's biography came to light as recently as in 1964. The history was written by one Abul Qasim Kashani, a contemporary of Rashid-ud-Din (early fourteenth century). The text has been edited by Muh Taqi Danishpazhuh (*Tarikh-i-Isma'ilia*, Tabriz, 1965). Kashani's text is very similar to that of Rashid-ud-Din and most likely connected with it and thus does not offer anything new to us which is not already given by Juvaini and Rashid-ud-Din.

IV: al-Shahrastani: *Chahar Fasul*

Apart from the *Sarguzasht*, which has been quoted by both Juvaini and Rashid-ud-Din, Hasan seems to have written some religious and philosophical works which have not survived in their original form. However, one particular work, *Chahar Fasul* associated with Hasan-i-Sabbah has been reproduced by al-Shahrastani (d. 548/1153) in his work *al-Milal wal-Nihal* edited by W. Cureton, London, 1846. The work is particularly useful in understanding the doctrine of Talim advanced by Hasan-i-Sabbah.

V: Hasan-i-Sabbah and Sultan Malik Shah: Correspondence

An exchange of correspondence between Hasan-i-Sabbah and Sultan Malik Shah is cited in a later Persian collection and is considered of disputed authenticity. However, the letters are considered and commented upon in the appropriate section of Hasan's relation with Sultan Malik Shah, and the complete text is given in Appendix II.

VI: Ibn al-Athir: *al-Kamil: fil-Tarikh*

Much valuable information regarding Hasan-i-Sabbah and Ismailis can be usefully gathered from the contemporary or near-contemporary Chronicles of the Seljuk Empire and the local histories. One of the best is the famous Arabic historian Ibn al-Athir (AD 1160-1234), whose history *al-Kamil fil-Tarikh*, fourteen volumes, Dar Sader Publishers, Beirut, AD 1864, deals with Hasan and the Ismailis mainly in Vol. 10 covering the events during AH 451-527. Some events have been quoted from Ibn al-Athir in various sections of the book. It may be noted that whereas Juvaini and Rashid-ud-Din were both in the service of the Mongol rulers and could be under some pressure from the rulers to project their ideas in the works, Ibn al-Athir is independent from that point of view. However, being a Sunni, he also considered Ismailis as the enemy of Islam and could easily be prejudiced against them.

VII: Hamd Ullah Mustawafi Qazwini : *Tarikh-i-Guzida*

Hamd Ullah Mustawafi Qazwini's (d. AD 1340) historical works known as *Tarikh-i-Guzida* written in 730/1330 was edited by E. G. Browne and published by Luzac & Co., London, 1910. The relevant sections of this work were consulted specially for comparison of the events narrated by other historians, and I have quoted from this reputable historical work in some sections of the book.

Footnotes

- [1](#) Ala-ud-Din Ata-ul-Mulk Juvaini was born in AD 1226. He was in the services of Halagu Khan as his secretary. He took part in the surrender of Ismailis of Alamut and other Castles in AD 1256. He accompanied Halagu to Baghdad and saw the overthrow of the Abbasid Caliphate. In AD 1259, he was appointed governor of Baghdad. He completed his book *Tarikh-i-Jahan Gusha* in AD 1260. In his later life, he fell from the favour of his Mongol masters and died AD 1283. For detailed account, see *History of the World Conqueror*, Vol. I, pp. XV-XXXV.
- [2](#) For example, Rashid-ud-Din (d. AD 1318); Hamd Ullah Mustawafi (d. AD 1340).
- [3](#). Juvaini, Rashid-ud-Din, Abul Qasim Kashani.
- [4](#). Qur'an, XXX: 18.
- [5](#). Juvaini Vol. 3, pp. 186-7. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 666.
- [6](#). Juvaini Vol. 3, p. 210. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, p. 680.
- [7](#). Juvaini Vol. 3, pp. 140-1. trans. Boyle, Vol. 2, pp. 639-40.
- [8](#). Ibid.
- [9](#). E. G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 2, Chap. VII.
- [10](#). Rashid-ud-Din Fadal-Allah was born in Hamadan (Iran) in AH 645 = AD 1248. He was the personal physician to Abaqa Khan, the Mongol ruler of Iran. During the rule of Gazan Khan, he was made Sadar (Minister) (AD 1298). He accompanied the King as his secretary on his Syrian military expedition in AD 1303. In the days of the next King Uljayto again, he kept his position in the State. He resigned from the office of the State in AD 1317 but was put to death on a charge of poisoning the previous King in AD 1318. He was commissioned to write the history *Jamia Tawarikh* by Gazan Khan. His historical works completed in the year AD 1310.
- [11](#). Hasan-i-Sabbah, Omar Khayyam, and Nizam-ul-Mulk were fellow students during their school days at Nishapur. Rashid-ud-Din narrates this in *Jamia Tawarikh*. *Fasali az Jamia Tarikh*, Mohammad Dabir Sayyaki, Tehran, 1958, p. 20.
- [12](#). Rashid-ud-Din, p. 3.
- [13](#). See Harold Bowen's comments on *Jamia Tawarikh* in his paper 'The Sar-gudhasht-i-sayyidna', the 'Tale of the three Schoolfellows' and the 'Wasaya of the Nizam-ul-Mulk', *JRAS*, part IV, October 1931, pp. 771-82.

Appendix IV

Self-sacrifice as an Ultimate Weapon of Defence

It is interesting to examine all the aspects of the argument and gather the views of the general public regarding the justification of such a weapon. Let me explain at the very outset what I mean by self-sacrifice in our context. In general, self-sacrifice is considered a commendable virtue by every rational human being. It means sacrificing one's interests for the benefit of others. However, when this self-sacrifice moves up to the highest level (i.e. sacrifice of one's own life itself), then the respectability associated previously with the term 'self-sacrifice' is instantly perceived by a large section of public to be an act of hatred and contempt. The new name given to this self-sacrifice is suicide, the ultimate weapon of terrorism. In recent times, a lot has been said against the justification of the use of such a weapon. We would like to examine the historical background of this practice and also examine in detail the arguments both in favour as well as against and come to a rational and logical conclusion.

There are basic truths accepted by most rational thinkers, and it is logical to follow and observe certain principles set by the human society. One basic rule accepted by civilised society unanimously is the right of self-preservation and, consequently, the right of self-defence. Thus, although to kill a human is a capital crime punishable by capital punishment, if a person is killed by you in the process of defending your own life, then you have used the basic right of self-defence and so no crime is committed by you and most legal systems of the world would acquit you in a court of law. Similarly, there are several other universally established rights enjoyed by

human beings and the law allows defence of such rights. You have the right of self-preservation, the right of self-expression and the right of civil liberties (i.e. to defend your faith, your family, your property, etc). Just as an individual has certain rights which he is allowed to defend, so a sovereign state has certain rights which she is allowed to defend with all the power at her disposal. These rights are usually recognised by all the independent states of the world, and it is binding on every state to honour and respect this pledge given by each state to the other for the sake of the peace of the world as a whole. The United Nations (UN), the organisation of the world states, must supervise that such a pledge is observed by all member states. If some rogue state violates this fundamental pledge, then such a rogue state is theoretically brought to task by the combined force of the world states. This is very well said but to see it observed in practice is quite a different matter. The reason is very obvious if you look at the member states and examine their political, economic and military strength. You will notice clearly that about half a dozen states really control the UN. All other states are either dictated to by the powerful partners or are considered insignificant and are not heeded by the powerful ones. The only option left to a weaker state to get her grievances redressed is to seek the support of a powerful state in the UN, and this is not always forthcoming, especially if it works out against the interest of the power states.

The original purpose of the UN was really to solve the problems of the weaker members and help them in raising the standards of their population, but we have seen since its creation that the UN has been used as an instrument to make the powerful more powerful and the weaker more weak. The UN has failed utterly in the duties for which it was created. We can clearly notice that a weak state can exist either as a puppet in the hand of the powerful ones or suffer and remain behind in the race of advancing nations. After the Second World War, two powerful power 'Blocs' came into existence, each one afraid of the other's strength, both loaded with atomic weapons and both progressing increasingly in their military capabilities. Each power Bloc made great efforts to befriend weaker states, listen to

them and assist them in the development of their countries. This was to gain their vote in the UN assemblies and increase their general support of the Bloc support. If the Western Bloc was unwilling to help, the Soviet Bloc was always ready to help. After the Second World War, many countries gained their freedom from their colonial rulers. These new emerging states were non-aligned states which would take advantage of each of the power Blocs in order to serve their own interests. They were ambitious and wanted to develop their own industry with the most modern industrial machinery, and the West was not always willing to help as it clashed with their own trade interest. The industrial nations' consuming markets were indeed the same emerging states; however, these countries approached other industrial nations, including the Soviet Bloc, to meet their demands. Even more difficult for the liberated new states was to purchase arms for their defence industry. The West was extremely reluctant to sell arms to the non-aligned states and was unwilling to allow its old colonies to become militarily strong. The world balance of power again came to the rescue of these newly emerging states, and they were able to buy arms to equip their armed forces, including the secrets of the forbidden knowledge of the defence technology.

I have lived in UK for the last fifty years as a university teacher. I recall that before the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, we believed that if there was a war between the two Blocs, the chance of winning the war was only 50 per cent by either Bloc. Now, for six months of every year for the past fifteen years, I live in Tajikistan, an old state of the Soviet Union, and I am fully aware of the military power of the Soviet Bloc. I look back and am amazed how wrong I was in my assessment of the strength of the Soviet Bloc, how it collapsed, and fell into the lap of the West like an overripe fruit which falls down by a slight wave of the morning breeze. It is, however, immaterial whether the Soviet Union was strong or weak; what is significant is that the West was scared of its strength, and this was a blessing in disguise for the emerging non-aligned states as the balance of world powers was in equilibrium. Such a state of balance is especially beneficial to the weaker, underdeveloped, and non-aligned states of

the world. Many statesmen might agree with me that if the Soviet Bloc was in place today, then the recent wars which are waged in the name of world peace, and are claimed by the powerful states as just wars, would not have taken place and millions of innocent lives would not have been lost in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, and several other countries.

To return to the main topic, let us consider the hypothetical situation of a young man, twenty years of age, so desperate that he decides to sacrifice his own life for his cause which is more valuable to him than his own life. Why is he so desperate that he wants to end his life? Is he terminally ill, suffering from an incurable disease so that by killing himself, he will be free from a miserable life and, at the same time, save his loving friends and relations the task of looking after a terminally ill friend? No, it is none of these. His mother, who has nurtured him lovingly for twenty years, gives him a last farewell kiss and embrace. She gives him permission to sacrifice his most precious life for the sake of many who will follow and breathe the sweet air of freedom. He would not have taken this route if he could help it. He would also like to enjoy life like his friends and have a family as all of us hope for, but he took a brave choice to defeat his enemy. This was the choice of desperation, the choice to defeat his enemy with the price of his blood. He could not pick a choice out of many. He had no choice left to him. This was the only choice left, the last weapon, the only weapon at his disposal which he was prepared to use. This was a weapon of David against Goliath—the sacrifice in a battlefield which deserves a hundred Victoria Crosses, the ultimate sacrifice given willingly, and with pride and honour. It would be a madman's choice if he had weapons at his disposal, tank against tank and gun against gun. He has neither tanks nor guns, neither fighter planes nor missiles. He has only his bare hands and some stones he picked up on the roadside. What should he do? How does he defend his cause? He has knocked at the door of friends but without any success. They have suggested a way out: 'Leave your home and country to your enemy and live comfortably ever after'. Is such a life worth living? Honourable death is a hundred times preferable to a shameful life. A freedom-loving

person would never accept a shameful alternative option but would go for his natural right and demand that his point of view be accepted and recognised by every person who values his own freedom. If the West is scared of suicide bombers, it can be avoided if they are willing to act as honest broker. They have to provide a fair and honourable solution between the parties. If, however, the West is unwilling to be an impartial mediator, it could perhaps provide some basic arms to those who have none so that the parties could fight a conventional battle with their adversaries. Failing this, the suicide bomber has no other alternative but to sacrifice his own dear life, the ultimate weapon in his arsenal, to defeat his enemy, and he firmly believes that ultimately he will win.

Some people suggest that suicide is a criminal act and nobody willingly should take his own life. Surely such a person is under the effect of a potent drug and does not know what he is doing. Others suggest that he has been hypnotised and has committed suicide under its influence. Yet others say that he is indoctrinated by a cleric in a madrasa, and it is a religious fanaticism which is responsible for his suicidal tendencies. People look for various causes for his self-sacrifice, but none looks at the obvious one, which, if removed, the suicidal tendency will automatically vanish.

Let us now examine the viewpoint of the opposite party whose thinking is totally different. They consider a weapon of self-sacrifice absolutely unacceptable. They would classify a suicide bomber as a terrorist and a brutal murderer who deserves a punishment of the highest order. They argue that by giving his own life, he has no right to take the life of half a dozen or so innocent people who happen to be in the vicinity when he blows himself up, and so a revenge action is totally justified. The difference is that the state takes over the revenge and orders the army to send tanks and missiles in order to destroy the whole area from which this terrorist has sprung. It is considered a successful operation if they in their turn kill twice as many more innocent people during their military operation. Thus, in order to avenge the action of a desperate mujahid, his whole village is indiscriminately wiped out, destroying many innocent lives as a result. An act of desperation was committed by an individual and the

response was undertaken by a sovereign state with the full approval of its parliament.

Both sides were guilty of innocent killing, although both parties justify their action and consider victory in the outcome. The state which is armed to the hilt and supported by the powerful political allies feels sure that their opponents must be hurt so hard that they are ultimately forced into submission and this should strengthen their cause. The mujahids are just as sure of their ultimate success because their cause is right, and life without freedom is not worth living. A mujahid sacrifices his life for a cause so dear to him that he feels that life without freedom is really not worth living. He is not really interested in killing innocent lives; his motive for his action is one and only one. He wants to convince his opponents that unless a just solution is offered to them, there will never be peace in their country. It is immaterial if, in the process, many innocent lives are lost and their enemy suffers fewer casualties. The mujahid wants to convince their enemy that peaceful coexistence is possible only on the basis of justice and fair play; otherwise, the war will not end. There are two sides of the argument in the debate, whether self-sacrifice is justified or is considered a crime to humanity. It depends from which viewpoint you are looking at the situation and from which prospect you are making your judgement. It is very difficult to remain unbiased, but one must not be carried away by one's own prejudices and pass a fair judgement as far as possible.

Self-sacrifice or the so-called suicide killing is not a new phenomenon, although it has come to our notice in recent times in connection with Israel, Palestine, Osama bin Ladin, Afghanistan, Iraq invasion, and September 11 attack. I remember that during the Second world war, Japanese suicide pilots dived their warplanes into the chimney of the American navy ships, sinking them at the cost of their own sure death. The Japanese state took pride in their 'kamikaze' or suicide squads, whose motto was to sacrifice their personal life if it was considered useful in the cause of their country. Nobody called the suicides of the Japanese pilots as an act of terrorism, but even the Allied press named them as an act of heroism. The new words and phrases are really the inventions of the

modern times although suicide and self-sacrifice has been practised throughout the history of mankind, and in most situations, it has been considered a heroic act. The Crusaders, who came in contact with the East for the first time during the Middle Ages, bring us an extraordinary story of the 'the Old Man of the Mountains' and, consequently, the word 'assassin' was added to the English dictionary.

According to my knowledge, the very first organised suicide squad formed to further their political and religious aspirations was by the great genius Hasan-i-Sabbah (the subject of this book), who organised the famous order of the Assassins or the order of 'Fidayeen' in their own language. The cults and fanatical organisations, both in the East and the West, have ever since used his established role model as guidance to enlighten them and strengthen their organisations.

Hasan-i-Sabbah and Fidayeen

The story of Hasan-i-Sabbah is both fascinating and extremely interesting, how he could lay down the foundations of an independent sovereign state which lasted for 171 years. It survived the most powerful Seljuk Turks and the Abbasid Caliphate put together and was defeated finally only by the most powerful Mongols, who swept through most of the Islamic lands. He was able to defend his country and safeguard his borders with a tiny army of no more than 5000 against the Seljuks with an army 250,000 strong. How could he do it? And what was the secret of his success? I found it a very interesting subject for my study. I took early retirement from my position as head of the Statistics Department at the University of Aston and then studied full-time at Birmingham University for three years. I successfully completed my studies and was awarded a master's degree in 1985. The subject of my study was 'Hasan-i-Sabbah, his life and thought'. I found many obstacles in my way in order to reach the truth of the matter. There were many prejudices to overcome. To reach the accounts of the tenth century, I had to learn the Persian language in order to read the contemporary accounts directly. I found the old sectarian prejudice

was obvious in most of the Sunni reporters as Hasan founded a Shii state. The Seljuk Turks and the Abbasid Caliphate were both writing against Hasan and his policies. The Ismailis of North Africa were now broken up into two parts and Fatimids of Cairo were very critical of Hasan. Thus, my study was a challenge to separate truth from prejudice and present Hasan in his true colours.

Hasan was brought up in a cultured household and was given the best education possible in his times. He selected the best and most famous institution in Neshapur, and his schoolmates were the famous poet and astronomer Omar Khayyam and the famous Seljuk Vizier Nizamulmulk Tusi. He was born in an Isna-asheria family, but later converted to the Ismaili faith and travelled to Cairo to see the Imam of the age who happened to be the Fatimid Caliph. Here he was given the mandate of a Hujjat of Iran and Khurasan. In other words, he was made the head of the Ismaili Dawa in his country. He was also instructed to preach on behalf of his eldest son Nizar after his death and was sent back to organise the dawa in his jurisdiction. He came back and started his mission in earnest. He chalked out a master plan to execute his most ambitious programme. He gave a great deal of thought to realise his dream. The very first objective was to gather a circle of trustworthy, capable and sincere friends who could help him in the design of a master plan. With the help of half a dozen colleagues, they together decided to appeal to the masses on two fronts; first, on religious grounds, supporting the cause of ahl-al-bait and second, on the grounds of nationalism, pointing out that Iran, an old civilisation, had been under the occupation of foreign powers for the last 600 years, first by the Arabs and now by the Turks, and it was high time for the nation to wake up. It took ten years for Hasan to gather the courage to put his plans to action. He calculated that the following he had at his disposal could not face his enemy in a straight fight and so must go underground. He must choose his own time and his own battlefield in order to have a fair chance to win. He decided that he could take advantage of the castles, a haven for the fugitives for many years. He selected the slopes of the Alburz range south of the Caspian Sea. He was able to purchase his first castle for a price of 3000 dinars. He

entered the castle on Wednesday the 6th of Rajab AH 483. He went up to the castle and stayed on the top for the next thirty-five years of his entire life and never came down. He had reportedly been seen only in public on two occasions. This castle was the world-famous Alamut, meaning Eagle's Nest in their local dialect. I went to look at this famous unconquerable castle in 2007 in connection with my researches and stood dumbfounded for half an hour standing on the rock with tons of debris scattered around. There were no buildings to be seen.

He consolidated his position with the help of very capable comrades and, in a short period of time, was able to acquire a chain of 100 castles strategically located and supported by a sympathetic population. The Nizari Ismaili state founded by Hasan constituted three regions separated by hostile territory governed by the powerful Seljuks and so was impossible to defend. The Ismaili state had its central power in the region in the Alburz mountain range with headquarters in the castle of Alamut. Their second wing was the vast region of Quhistan and Khurasan populated with flourishing cities like Tabas, Dara, Tun, Qain, Birjand and Momin-abad. The third wing was situated in Syria, in Jabal-Bahara. As I pointed out earlier, it was extremely difficult to defend the various sections of the state, so Hasan decided that, although the central commands were issued from Alamut, each province must take decisions individually, especially during times of conflict, and not depend on a central help which was not possible to send. The resources of the state were very limited and a large army could not be supported, and so an ingenious and a novel approach was needed in order to survive; otherwise, such a state could not exist. Hasan came out with an idea which proved to be very effective for the given situation, and which was destined to serve his cause for the following 171 years.

The part relevant to our history is the defence policy of Hasan, which he used successfully against the aggression of his most powerful enemy. Hasan thought of a weapon which was known to the world in earlier times but nobody developed it to its perfection as he did. This was the weapon of fear in the heart of your enemy. How would you put genuine fear in the heart of the enemy, that if he hits

you, he would surely pay dearly with his own life? He had learned this golden rule in the game of chess. Thus, when Sultan Sanjar Seljuk sent his ambassador to Hasan, demanding his surrender, Hasan laughed and said, 'Tell your king to remember that the dagger that pierced the hard ground beside his bed could easily have pierced his soft heart, but we have no ill feeling towards the king and want to live in peace and harmony with him.' He was referring to an incident that occurred when the King Sanjar was camping and a full-armed guard of a dozen trusted bodyguards were put on night guard duty. The king woke up in the morning and found a dagger beside his bed. He was surprised and terribly afraid. The king could not relate the incident to anybody and was terribly shaken. He was convinced that some fidais were working within the ranks of his own trusted bodyguards. Rashid-ud-Din, in his famous book *Jamia-Tawarikh*, reports that when Hasan's message was brought to the king, he readily agreed to a truce and, ever after, they lived in peace and harmony with each other.

A famous Sunni cleric by the name of Fakhar-ud-Din Razi was a very strong critic of the Ismailis. He always abused the Ismailis from the pulpit of the mosque, calling them unbelievers and showing them in a very bad light. Hasan knew that the cleric's propaganda from the pulpit was doing great harm to his cause and wanted to stop him. He nominated an intelligent young boy for this mission. The boy went to the Sunni mosque and registered himself as a student of the cleric and took lessons from him in theology. He took a great interest in the teaching of the cleric, so much so that he became his favourite pupil and the cleric started trusting him like his own son. Then one day, the boy found his teacher all alone in his study. The boy bolted the door of the study and threw his teacher on the ground and, jumping on his chest, said to his teacher, 'Now face the assassin's dagger for all the abuse you threw at us from the holy pulpit.' The cleric was trembling as he faced certain death.

He said in a trembling voice, 'I swear by God, I will never do it any more.'

'I trust you, my dear teacher!' the pupil said and took out a purse full of 100 gold pieces and gave it to him. 'Every year, on the day of

Nau-rose, a similar purse full of 100 pieces of gold will in future be delivered to you without fail as a gift from our lord Hasan-i-Sabbah for keeping your promise, but if you did not, then you know what you know and now we part. The last six months were well spent, and now I take your leave to report to my master.'

Fakhar-ud-Din Razi shook hands with his trusted pupil and said, 'I escaped my death today.'

'No', the pupil remarked, 'My master did not sanction that, and I am not allowed to exceed his command. He wanted me only to put fear into you. He doesn't sanction death if the job can be done peacefully.'

Hasan organised an elite brigade of his armed forces, which he named, 'Fidayeen'. A fidai should be prepared to sacrifice his own life, if needed, in order to execute a particular task assigned to him. He had no right to refuse or question the order of his superior. The hierarchy of the Ismaili Dawa starts with the fountainhead as the Imam being the head of the state and the ranks below go in their reducing orders as Hujjat, Dai-i-Kabir, Dai-i-Mutlaq, Dai, Rafiq, Mustajib, and the last rank, whose name left fearful echoes in the courts of the most powerful rulers, were the fidais. The Ismaili state was small and scattered with very limited resources, both in terms of finance and manpower. They could not afford to raise nor maintain a large army for their defence, yet they faced a formidable enemy who could challenge any major power of the time on the battlefield and, indeed, could very easily wipe out the entire Ismaili strength in a straight battle in an open field. Hasan realised the weakness of his position very well and that was a major factor in his choice of the difficult mountainous region as their country of residence, so that they could take refuge behind the castle walls for their defence. On some occasions, they had to dispatch a contingent of a task force in a military encounter, or perhaps on an offensive mission, and for this purpose, they had to maintain a small army. Their whole strategy of war was hit-and-run, and they could never afford to face a large Seljuk army face-to-face on an open battlefield.

Assassination as an instrument of revenge and reprisal and, sometimes, a threat of assassination to stall an imminent attack had

been used in the past as an effective instrument, but nobody in the history of mankind organised it to the extent of the fidais, established and organised by Hasan-i-Sabbah. Hasan regarded this organisation as no more than a strategic military wing which could produce the desired results without too much bloodshed. Indeed, if a sacrifice of a couple of lives could stop bloodshed of thousands of innocent lives, it could be considered both humane and justified. Thus, the assassination of the Vizier Nizam-ul-Mulk resulted in lifting the sieges against the Ismaili castles in Quhistan and Rudbar districts. Hasan established an action group of highly motivated young Ismaili volunteers who were willing to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of their faith, for their political freedom, and for the sake of many more Ismaili lives which could be saved in exchange for the sacrifice of their own life. Members of this action group or suicide squad were called fidais, 'those who sacrifice their lives'. Such examples can easily be found at the present time in extreme organisations in Palestine, Israel, Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, and, indeed, all over the world.

Hasan founded and organised the squad of fidais to such perfection that very few similar examples are to be found in human history. It proved very effective and helped his cause considerably. The fidais were given adequate training in the art of assassination and confrontation with their enemy. Sometimes, they had to learn some foreign language if they were to operate in a foreign environment. They had also to be perfect in the art of disguise as in certain assignments they were in the guise of a Sufi, a beggar, a merchant, a teacher or a student. The main force which drove a Fidai to sacrifice his own life was his faith and service to his holy cause. He knew for certain that if he was killed in action, he would be rewarded as a martyr in Paradise. A Fidai was prescribed to carry out a particular assignment honourably, usually at the cost of his own life. The target allocated to him was normally a great person surrounded and protected by his bodyguards, such as a king or a vizier or a qadi, and to come close to such a target could be very difficult indeed. To hit such a target surrounded by a protective ring called for great courage and presence of mind and, after discharging

their duty, they were more often than not caught and lynched. Only on very rare occasions, they could come out alive. Fidais were accused by their enemies as being bloodthirsty, ruthless killers, which is a totally baseless accusation. They were attracted neither by money nor by any other material gain. They were soldiers par excellence of a special branch, a crack force who would proudly lay down their own lives in discharge of their duty. They followed orders strictly and acted under a strict military discipline. It may be noted that fidais attacked their chosen target with the greatest publicity and without any fear for their own lives. The place of action was usually at a public place, in a mosque or in a city square, where they could be seen by a multitude of people. There is no evidence of a Fidai's cowardly behaviour in performance of his duty. He seldom violated the general principles of chivalry and did not use a poisoned dagger. When faced with his own death, he showed great integrity and pride. The blind obedience of the Fidai, who were chosen with special regard to this quality, combined with courage and adroitness, is well illustrated by an anecdote preserved for us by Fra Pipino and Marino Sanuto:

'when, during a period of truce Henry Count of Champagne (titular King of Jerusalem) was on a visit to the Old Man of the Mountains, one day as they walked together, they saw some lads in white sitting on top of the high tower. The Shaykh, turning to the Count asked if he had any subjects as obedient as his own; and without waiting for a reply, made a sign to the two boys who immediately leaped from the tower and died on the spot.'

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