

THE FATIMID CALIPHATE

DIVERSITY OF TRADITIONS

EDITED BY FARHAD DAFTARY
AND SHAINOOL JIWA



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The Institute of Ismaili Studies

The Institute of Ismaili Studies was established in 1977 with the object of promoting scholarship and learning on Islam, in the historical as well as contemporary contexts, and a better understanding of its relationship with other societies and faiths.

The Institute's programmes encourage a perspective which is not confined to the theological and religious heritage of Islam, but seeks to explore the relationship of religious ideas to broader dimensions of society and culture. The programmes thus encourage an interdisciplinary approach to the materials of Islamic history and thought. Particular attention is also given to issues of modernity that arise as Muslims seek to relate their heritage to the contemporary situation.

Within the Islamic tradition, the Institute's programmes promote research on those areas which have, to date, received relatively little attention from scholars. These include the intellectual and literary expressions of Shi'ism in general, and Ismailism in particular.

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These objectives are realised through concrete programmes and activities organised and implemented by various departments of the Institute. The Institute also collaborates periodically, on a

programme-specific basis, with other institutions of learning in the United Kingdom and abroad.

The Institute's academic publications fall into a number of inter-related categories:

1. Occasional papers or essays addressing broad themes of the relationship between religion and society, with special reference to Islam.
2. Monographs exploring specific aspects of Islamic faith and culture, or the contributions of individual Muslim thinkers or writers.
3. Editions or translations of significant primary or secondary texts.
4. Translations of poetic or literary texts which illustrate the rich heritage of spiritual, devotional and symbolic expressions in Muslim history.
5. Works on Ismaili history and thought, and the relationship of the Ismailis to other traditions, communities and schools of thought in Islam.
6. Proceedings of conferences and seminars sponsored by the Institute.
7. Bibliographical works and catalogues which document manuscripts, printed texts and other source materials.

This book falls into category five listed above.

In facilitating these and other publications, the Institute's sole aim is to encourage original research and analysis of relevant issues. While every effort is made to ensure that the publications are of a high academic standard, there is naturally bound to be a diversity of views, ideas and interpretations. As such, the opinions expressed in these publications must be understood as belonging to their authors alone.

Ismaili Heritage Series

A major Shi'i Muslim community, the Ismailis have had a long and eventful history. Scattered in many regions of the world – in Asia, Africa and now also in Europe and North America – the Ismailis have elaborated diverse intellectual and literary traditions in different languages. On two occasions they had states of their own, the Fatimid caliphate and the Nizari state of Iran and Syria during the Alamut period. While pursuing particular religio-political aims, the leaders of these Ismaili states also variously encouraged intellectual, scientific, artistic and commercial activities.

Until recently, the Ismailis were studied and judged almost exclusively on the basis of the evidence collected or fabricated by their detractors, including the bulk of the medieval heresiographers and polemicists who were hostile towards the Shi'is in general and the Ismailis among them in particular. These authors in fact treated the Shi'i interpretations of Islam as expressions of heterodoxy or even heresy. As a result, a 'black legend' was gradually developed and put into circulation in the Muslim world to discredit the Ismailis and their interpretation of Islam. The Christian Crusaders and their occidental chroniclers, who remained almost completely ignorant of Islam and its internal divisions, disseminated their own myths of the Ismailis, which came to be accepted in Europe as true descriptions of Ismaili teachings and practices. Modern orientlists, too, studied the Ismailis on the basis of these hostile

sources and fanciful accounts of medieval times. Thus legends and misconceptions have continued to surround the Ismailis through the 20th century.

In more recent decades, however, the field of Ismaili studies has been revolutionized owing to the recovery and study of genuine Ismaili sources on a large scale – manuscript materials which through different means survived the destruction of the Fatimid and Nizari Ismaili libraries. These sources, representing diverse literary traditions produced in Arabic, Persian and Indic languages, had hitherto been secretly preserved in private collections in India, Central Asia, Iran, Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen.

Modern progress in Ismaili studies has already necessitated a complete rewriting of the history of the Ismailis and their contributions to Islamic civilisation. It has now become clear that the Ismailis founded important libraries and institutions of learning such as al-Azhar and the Dar al-'Ilm in Cairo, while some of their learned *da'is* or missionaries developed unique intellectual traditions amalgamating their theological doctrine with a diversity of philosophical traditions in complex metaphysical systems. The Ismaili patronage of learning and the extension of hospitality to non-Ismaili scholars was maintained even in such difficult times as the Alamut period, when the community was preoccupied with its survival in an extremely hostile milieu.

The Ismaili Heritage Series, published under the auspices of the Department of Academic Research and Publications of The Institute of Ismaili Studies, aims to make available to a wide audience the results of modern scholarship on the Ismailis and their rich intellectual and cultural heritage, as well as certain aspects of their more recent history and achievements.

Notes on the Contributors

Daniel Beben is an Assistant Professor of History at Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan. He is preparing an edition and translation of the *Ibrat-afzā* as well as a monograph on the history of the Ismailis in Central Asia.

Simonetta Calderini is a Reader in Islamic Studies at the University of Roehampton, London. She is at present completing a monograph on *Women as Imams: Classical Islamic Sources and Modern Debates on Leading Prayer*.

Delia Cortese is a Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at Middlesex University, London. Her recent publications include *Women and the Fatimids in the World of Islam* (with S. Calderini, 2006).

Farhad Daftary is the Director of The Institute of Ismaili Studies. His recent publications include *A History of Shi'i Islam* (2013) and *Fifty Years in the East: The Memoirs of Wladimir Ivanow* (2015).

Maribel Fierro is a Research Professor at the Centre of Human and Social Sciences at the Council for Scientific Research (CSIC), Spain. Her recent publications include the second volume of *The New Cambridge History of Islam* (2010), of which she is the editor.

Shainool Jiwa is a Senior Faculty Member at The Institute of Ismaili Studies. Her publications include *The Founder of Cairo: The Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Mu'izz and his Era* (2013).

Paul E. Walker is Deputy Director for Academic Programs, Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Chicago. His publications include *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs: Festival Sermons of the Ismaili Imams* (2009).

Note on Transliteration and Abbreviations

The system of transliteration used in this book for the Arabic and Persian scripts is essentially the same as that adopted in the second edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, with a few modifications, namely, ch for č, j for dj and q for ҡ.

There are no abbreviations in this book other than *EI* and *EI2* for the first and second editions, respectively, of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

Contents

<i>Notes on the Contributors</i>	xi
<i>Note on Transliteration and Abbreviations</i>	xiii
Introduction	1
<i>Farhad Daftary and Shainool Jiwa</i>	
1. The Early Ismaili Imamate: Background to the Establishment of the Fatimid Caliphate	10
<i>Farhad Daftary</i>	
2. The Baghdad Manifesto (402/1011): A Re-Examination of Fatimid-Abbasid Rivalry	22
<i>Shainool Jiwa</i>	
3. Was the Fatimid <i>Amīr al-Juyūsh</i> in fact a <i>Wazīr</i> ?	80
<i>Paul E. Walker</i>	
4. 'Leading from the Middle': Qāḍī al-Nu'mān on Female Prayer Leadership	94
<i>Simonetta Calderini</i>	
5. Al-Ṭurṭūshī and the Fatimids	118
<i>Maribel Fierro</i>	

6.	Transmitting Sunni Learning in Fatimid Egypt: The Female Voices	164
	<i>Delia Cortese</i>	
7.	The Fatimid Legacy and the Foundation of the Modern Nizārī Ismaili Imamate	192
	<i>Daniel Beben</i>	
	<i>Bibliography</i>	217
	<i>Index</i>	000