

Ismaili.net: Genesys

How it all started!

In the beginning there was a dream. And the dream took shape, and the dream became reality.

The dream was to share knowledge and inspire other Ismailis to share knowledge. The dream was to collect and preserve the Ismaili Heritage for future generations; the dream was to become an inspiration for other Ismailis to be a pioneer and an example in leveraging new technologies to bring our history, our literature, our faith to the community.

In the 1960s, the Internet which was invented for military purposes, expanded to the scientific communities and remain contained within those two groups for many years. When the home computers and modems were invented and started being produced in large quantities in the 1980s the concept of bulletin Board (BBS) was thriving. The BBS was a system of servers where files would be accessible through phone lines. A short time thereafter the chat appeared in the BBS community.

1983 was when the first commercial ISP appeared but it took almost 10 years for the internet to be used outside the scientific communities and universities. Meanwhile some Ismailis were preparing for that time when communication through internet would become widely available to other ismailis in the world. It was the time when the debate was to ascertain if the concept of the web would win over the Gopher, Archie, Veronica and other way to access the information. Modems speed was half K not Gygabytes as it is in 2020. In the Canadian province where the dream was born, Bell Canada total bandwidth in the year 1992 was 64K and they were renting a shared 56K to 4 different Internet Providers (ISP)

Early years

Material on subjects of interest to Ismailis was gathered from history books in various languages, Ismaili magazines, books and articles, news going back to the previous century and much more. The scanners in that time had low resolution and disk space was costly, but scanning was added to the tasks. The plan was to setup a BBS file-server where one could have access to all info on Ismailism.

In the late 1980s the Ismaili Heritage group organised itself under the Heritage Society banner, later to become the Ismaili Heritage Society. The first conferences organised by the Heritage Society was in 1990 in Toronto, it was named "SOS Khojki" with the aim to save Ismaili manuscripts in Khojki script, a second conference under the same name was organised in 1991 and it was decided to expand the scope of the Heritage Society to include all historical documents in any script from the ancient Ismaili heritage. An effort was made to scan about 100 Ismaili manuscripts in low resolution. With the jump in new scanning technology, several different models of scanners were bought and previous and new manuscripts had to be re-scanned in high resolution many years later.

Jumping on the web:

In 1992 a meeting was held by the team to draw a road map for reaching other Ismailis through the nascent internet

So in 1993, a website, the first Ismaili web site was launched under the internet address *globale.net/~heritage* and called the FIELD project for “First Ismaili Electronic Library and Database”. It contained texts on Ismailism, speeches, interview, extensive lists of books, reviews, thesis and articles published on Ismailism, definitions of common Ismaili words and names as well as an Ismaili History, ginans and translations among other material. Very few Ismailis were using the Internet at that time. We were lucky that at that time that the owner of one of the first ISPs in Canada was an Ismaili and therefore hosting of the server was facilitated at his data center.

In 1996 major additions such as the Timeline sections and Today in History depicting all the events, speeches, interviews of the Imams and so on. The website was still in html. From that date, Ismaili.net soars like a rocket. More material is regularly added and the site is well known in the Ismaili community worldwide.

Means of communication other than websites were also being used by Ismailis, one such popular listserv which was a messaging system was ilm-net which encouraged conversations between Ismailis the other was ummah-net. Other Ismailis started also their own websites, many of whom unfortunately closed over time for various reasons.

Traveling the world to gather the Heritage:

An important step to inform the community about contemporary events of importance to Ismailis was to travel to various places where the Imam was travelling, and to other places in exploratory mission to find and save old manuscripts and precious documents. Trips to historical Ismaili places and dozens of such trip were undertaken by the Heritage team in Asia, Africa, Europe and North America between 1980 and 2020. These 40 years of sustained research resulted in an enormous number of old books, magazines, manuscripts, images, sound tracks and videos been collected for the website. Half still remains to be scanned.

Registering a Domain:

In 1997 a domain name was registered and all data from the old web site under the name *globale.net/~heritage* were transferred to www.ismaili.net – The web site was redesigned in 2003 as a PHP web site and the old way of doing things lasted up to 2006 when the website was redesigned on a new Drupal platform.

Today as we prepare for a major upgrade of our platform, we still have the old website under the name Ismaili.net with almost 200 million hits on that main page since 2003. We also operate the Drupal website under Ismaili.net/heritage

Michel Boivin writes that it is evident that the site (Ismaili.net) fills an important void, therefore its success is important, in March 2003, it celebrated its millionth visitor. (p. 277 L'âghâ khân et les Khojah, KARTHALA Editions, 2013) - The several reasons Boivin gives for the success of Ismaili.net are in Annex 2 below. But the main reason he missed was the dedication of the team with all members working at their own expenses and anonymously without need of recognition.

Challenges:

Several challenges steamed from the decision to keep our own servers. These challenges were about constant growth of hardware and software, new technologies changing at a fast pace and constant cyber attacks and hacking.

An institutional domain Theismaili.org was registered in 2004 for the Ismaili magazine named “The Ismaili” with very limited religious content of interest to Ismailis as it choose instead to cover social aspects, community and institutional events and other subjects not necessarily related to the community, such as food recipes. Though “official” and with enormous resources available, it did not have the growth of Ismaili.net. But frustration was growing among institutions not understanding why a private website would have more success than an official web site.

So a great challenge to Ismaili.net came from the community institutions that did want to control communication within the Ismaili community. The challenge came in a meeting held in Toronto on 15 October 2010 morning in the form of an attempt by Mohamed Manji, the then President of the National Aga Khan Council for Canada to give instruction to the Imam, H.H. The Aga Khan to tell Admin to close Ismaili.net – The Imam looked at the Admin, looked at Manji and immediately said there is no issue with the website. And the Imam gave instructions to the Council President to work on the contrary with the Admin. But the institutional frame of mind did not change even after the Imam issued them his instruction to the Council.

Expanding to Social Media:

In March 1997, the Facebook platform appeared and it created an interest among the Ismailis as its simplicity allowed anyone to reach anyone and it allowed people to create their own content easily. Various Ismaili Blogs appeared also but our aim here is not to study them. Their success was also limited. A couple of them made it with presence on Facebook and Wordpress. Many of the AKDN and Ismaili Institutional pages also made it with over 50,000 followers on FB.

A Facebook account was created by Ismaili Heritage Society in February 2015, some 6 years ago. The page under facebook.com/IsmailiHeritage soared to 600,000 subscribers by the end of 2020 becoming the premier Ismaili page on Facebook in term of number of likes, followers and engagements (See comparison in Annex 1). Many pages appeared and disappeared for lack of commitment by their founders or because of their limited success, such pages that could not reach any decent numbers in term of subscribers closed as fast as they appeared. Perhaps their need for personal recognition, instead of recognising themselves the community needs, was the reason of their failure. Anti Ismaili pages also appeared on social media misusing names related to the community or to their Imam, misleading the Ismailis. One such page on Facebook has almost reached the 50,000 followers mark recently, sadly, leaving behind, many other honest Ismaili Facebook pages.

Expanding the scope:

With time, the Heritage manuscript collections as well as books in Khojki, English, Gujarati, French and other scripts, around 135,000 pages, were scanned in the last three years. A document server is in the making to host this material. The Juilee project was delayed because of the scale, complexity of the project and extraordinary need of time and resources to complete it. The coming update will integrate current data and new scans with a powerful document server expected to be functional in 2021.

Bringing knowledge through APPs:

With the wide spread use of intelligent phones, three Apps were developed by the Heritage team starting 2019, the Dua App, the Ginan App and the Waez App, all of them for Android. More Apps are being developed in 2021 including some for the Iphone. While these Apps are not available on the Android Play Store, a total of 171,000 copies have been downloaded to date directly from Ismaili.net.

Yes, in the beginning there was a dream.

Admin

11 January 2021

www.ismaili.net


































heritage@ismaili.net

[Facebook.com/IsmailiHeritage](https://www.facebook.com/IsmailiHeritage)













[Twitter.com/IsmailiHeritage](https://twitter.com/IsmailiHeritage)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeCeHy9KKq2cTO0Rt4kuGVg/videos>

Annex 1: FB statistics for well known Ismaili and anti-Ismaili pages

Page	Total Page Likes	From Last Week	Posts This Week	Engagement This Week
YOU 1  Ismaili Heritage	599.2K 	▲0.2%	37	421.5K 
2  The Ismaili	167.9K 	▲0.1%	8	23.2K 
3  Ismaili Info	136K 	0%	78	53.6K 
4  Aga Khan Development ...	133.7K 	▲0.1%	15	8.6K 
5  Aga Khan Award for Arc...	113.4K 	0%	0	20 
6  Ismaili Muslims All Over...	92.5K 	▲0.1%	3	43K 
7  Aga Khan Foundation	71.1K 	▲0.1%	2	484 
8  Aga Khan University	61.9K 	▲0.7%	1	6.5K 
9  Ismaili Gnosis	60.7K 	0%	1	8.8K 
10  Aga Khan Museum	60.3K 	▲0.1%	11	2.3K 
11  Shah Karim al-Husayni, ...	56.9K 	0%	5	17.7K 

12		Diamond Jubilee Celebr...	56.6K 	▲0.1%	55	187.5K 
13		Ismailimail	50.5K 	0%	0	139 
14		Noor Mawlana Shah Kar...	49.8K 	0%	27	32.1K 
15		World Ismaili Muslims	45K 	▲0.2%	1	21.4K 
16		Aga Khan III	43.8K 	0%	0	16 

17		Karachi Ismaili	39.1K 	0%	0	269 
18		Ismaili Ginan	30K 	0%	0	603 
19		The Ismaili Syria	21.6K 	0%	4	2.6K 
20		His Highness the Aga K...	16.3K 	0%	0	1 

Stats on 10 January 2021 for likes and followers. The number of monthly engagement on the IsmailiHeritage page on FB varies between 1.5 M and 2.2 Millions.

-  599,156 people like this
-  601,893 people follow this
-  <http://www.ismaili.net/html>

Ismaili.NET WEB access statistics

We've received **196623171** pages views since 21 March 2003,

Si plusieurs facteurs peuvent expliquer le succès remporté par Ismaili.net, le premier est sans doute le fait que le site s'intéresse à tout ce qui touche de près ou de loin le problème de l'identité ismaélienne. Une fois encore, l'évolution des noms que ses gestionnaires ont choisis est limpide. Le premier, Heritage, indiquait qu'il s'agissait de préserver un héritage ismaélien⁵³. Le second élargissait la notion d'héritage en fournissant une bibliographie ismaélienne⁵⁴, mais aussi des textes en ligne. Le dernier nom indique la volonté d'embrasser l'ensemble du fait ismaélien, mais aussi d'en être le représentant reconnu. Les faits et gestes de l'*imâm* sont relatés quasi quotidiennement, et ses discours sont systématiquement reproduits. On trouve aussi sur le site des chronologies de la vie des derniers *imâm*. Malgré la diversité des propositions, le principal intérêt du site concerne l'héritage littéraire. Plusieurs ouvrages sur la littérature ismaélienne sont disponibles en ligne sur des sites comme ismaili.net. La partie la plus importante est cependant consacrée aux *ginân*. Ils sont

lisme. Cela dit, il ne faut pas perdre de vue que cette représentation est celle de la diaspora nord-américaine, qui est largement plus éduquée que le reste de la communauté, et qui répond avant tout aux problèmes qui la touchent directement. Un dernier point est important à cet égard. Le Canada a connu ces dernières années un afflux de réfugiés ismaéliens originaires d'Afghanistan et du Tadjikistan, qui ont souvent transité par Karachi. Ismaili.net a commencé à prendre en compte cet élément de la culture ismaélienne en proposant des *qasîda* en persan. On observe enfin qu'un nombre croissant de visiteurs du site est originaire du sous-continent indien, principalement du Pakistan. Il est évident que le site comble un vide tant son succès est important : en mars 2003, il fêtait son millionième visiteur.
