

## Oath of Allegiance - Bay'a Bay'ah

### Case study - Ismaili Muslim Faith and Theology

#### Preamble

Oaths of allegiance have long served as pivotal instruments in establishing mutual and legal commitments across religious, political, social economic and legal domains. These oaths often represent a two-way covenant: the individual commits and agrees to, loyalty obedience, and the authority—be it a sovereign, spiritual leader, or state— who reciprocates with protection, guidance, or rights. Far from being merely symbolic, these oaths establish reciprocal two way constitutional and legal frameworks of responsibility, and enforceability.

Bay'ah (Arabic: ببيعة) – Allegiance, In Ismaili Faith is a sacred and binding sacred covenant and agreement between every Ismaili Muslim (murid) and the Imam of the Time (Murshid). It is not merely a symbolic act but a profound lived contract rooted in devotion and an ethical commitment. In this the follower pledges and commits loyalty, and obedience (*walayah*), to Imams Farman's, and makes voluntary contributions of time, and resources. In return, the Imam accepts this allegiance and offers guidance, blessings, and intercession, which are inspired from the Qur'an , and rooted in Allah's light and will. This reciprocal commitment and engagement form the core foundation and cornerstone of the Ismaili faith.

Those who have not offered Bay'ah have not signed to accept our faith.

Just as you sign an agreement in your business and other dealings,

similarly, through Bay'ah, I take a signature from your soul."

Imam Shah Sultan Mohammed Shah Aga Khan III

(Kutch Nagalpur, Nov 27, 1903)

### **Authority of the Imam<sup>6,16</sup> and followers (Murid), right to receive Imams**

#### **Guidance.**

The Imam of the Time is not just a religious leader; He is a bearer of divine spiritual authority and Nur (Light)<sup>15</sup> which has continuing from Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through Hazrat Imam Ali and eternally. Imam provides Qur'anic interpretation relevant to contemporary times, offering guidance towards the right path.

Bay'ah is an active, and a continuous engagement between the murid and the Imam, expressed through Farman's blessings and intercession that emanate from divine light (*Noor*) rooted in the will and light from Allah.

Are you, for all believing Ismailis, a symbol of their Faith?

Aga Khan "Yes. Since My grand-father, the last Aga Khan, died, I have been the bearer of the "NOOR" a word which means "The Light" The NOOR has been handed down in direct descent from the Prophet. But My work and responsibilities overflow into the practical side of life."

Interview Aga Khan 1965<sup>13</sup>

No individual or institution has the right to obstruct or deny a murid access to the guidance given by the Imam, which are all for the benefit of Followers individually and collectively. Institutional custodians – Leaders - entrusted with transmitting Imams Farman's -teachings and interpretations must comply and fulfil this responsibility transparently. If they fail to do so, murids have both a

moral and legal right to ask, and to challenge such obstruction withholding or delays.

Justice, Faith, and the Murid's Empowerment. Bay'ah is not the surrender of logic intellect or freedom—it is an affirmation of faith in the living Imam whose divine authority comes from and is rooted in God's will. The Imam, in turn, gives guidance for both the material and spiritual well-being of all the murids, offering direction with divine knowledge and love. . This sacred relationship and lived engagement —built on trust, love, and duty—provides strength, resilience, and unity for the Ismaili Tariqah in an ever-changing world. Upholding the accessibility of the Imam's guidance is not only a matter of faith but also a matter of justice.

Bayah is a Living Covenant – Imam of the time

*“As your 50th Imam, I accept your Bay'ah, and pledges and submissions from all my spiritual children – Khanavadan, Khanavadan, Khanavadan.”*

*— His Highness the Aga Khan, February 11, 2025*

Bay'ah is more than a ritual; it is a deeply personal and enduring commitment. It affirms a murid's devotion to the Imam's divinely inspired guidance in this life and in the hereafter, eternally

At its core, **Bay'ah** is a living, eternal material and spiritually active engagement between all **murids** and the **Imam of the Time**, whose authority and divine light (**Noor**)—expressed through Farman's intercession and blessings—originate from Allah, rooted in Allah's will, and which is transmitted through Imams - **Hazrat Imam Ali**, was the first Shia Imam after Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Imams have been there before and will be there eternally

*I am the sign of the Most Hight,  
I am the Gnosis of Mysteries,  
I am the Door of the Doors,  
I am the First and the Last.  
I am the Manifest and the Hidden.  
I am the creator.  
I give birth to the world  
and I destroy it as I wish.  
I am the face of God,  
I am the Supreme Kalam."*

***Hazrat Mowlana Imam Ali***

**(Peace be upon him and his progeny)**

Reference: Book:- Khutbat al-Bayan  
(From a total of 70 such declarations,  
partially quoted in Corbin, H. "Historic  
de la philosophie islamique",  
Paris 1954, page 77.)

## **1. Introduction**

The Ismaili Muslim faith and interpretation is based, foundationally on Bayah - every Ismaili Muslim has given an oath of allegiance (Bayah) to the Imam of the Time, presently His Highness Prince Rahim Aga Khan V and the Imam formally accepted the Oath – Bay’ah

## 2. Types of Oaths of Allegiance and Their Covenantal Nature

### a. Political Oaths:

- i. In the United Kingdom, the Oath of Allegiance is a formal declaration of loyalty to the reigning monarch, undertaken by public officials including Members of Parliament and judges. This signifies a reciprocal relationship: the subject pledges loyalty in exchange for the monarch's protection and governance under the rule of law.

### b. Religious Oaths:

- i. Ismaili Tradition: In the Ismaili Muslim community, the *Bay'ah* is an oath of allegiance to the Imam of the time. This spiritual covenant binds the *murid* (follower) to the Imam through loyalty and obedience. In return, the Imam—believed to be divinely ordained—offers spiritual guidance, protection, and intercession.
- ii. Sufi Orders: Many Sufi traditions uphold the *'Ahd*, a sacred pact between a disciple and their spiritual guide (*shaikh*), whereby both commit to a shared journey of spiritual development and mutual accountability.
- iii. Catholicism: Clergy within the Roman Catholic Church take lifelong oaths of obedience and fidelity to the Pope and ecclesiastical law. These vows entail strict adherence in exchange for ecclesiastical authority and sacramental responsibilities.
- iv. Judaism: Although modern Judaism may not involve formal oaths of allegiance, it emphasizes divine covenants—such as those described in the Torah—where mutual responsibilities are established between God and the people of Israel.
- v. Hinduism: Devotees often undertake *vratas* (vows) or become disciples of a guru in relationships grounded in dharma (righteous duty), spiritual service, and mutual ethical commitment.

c. Legal Oaths

- i. In jurisdictions like the UK and US, legal and judicial oaths require officials to affirm loyalty to the Constitution or the Crown and to uphold their duties faithfully. These oaths are legally binding, with violations potentially resulting in removal from office, disqualification, or legal prosecution.

3. Bay'ah (Arabic: بَيْعَة) is a contract and covenant between, every Ismaili Muslim- believer (murid) - and the Imam of the Time (Murshid). It is a commitment of a material and a spiritual allegiance. The murid pledges and commits devotion and obedience (walayah) to the Imam (Murshid). The Imam of the time accepts this offer of commitment with a promise and assurance of guidance (Farman's), blessings, and intercession in this world, and eternally – for ever more

***"As your 50<sup>th</sup> Imam,  
I accept your Bayah, and pledges and  
submissions from all my spiritual children.  
Khanavadan Khanavadan Khanavadan"  
Hazar Imam Aga Khan 11 February 2025<sup>1</sup>***

Leaders & institutions,  
cannot legally or moral  
withhold, obstruct, or  
restrict divinely ordained  
guidance already given  
by the Imam.  
Any claim incl copyright is  
against Imam's guidances  
which come from Quran  
& Allah's will.

**4. Bayah in the Ismaili Constitution of 1986 & 1998<sup>15</sup>.**

- a. The Ismaili Constitution was amended by Aga Khan on 11 February 2025<sup>1</sup>. The full previous, and the amended version is being withheld from the global Jamat by the same group of leaders who have remained in control

for decades. This is despite direct reminders in a Farman, from Mawlana Hazar Imam on 11 February 2025<sup>1</sup> and 18 March 2025. There has been no response, or timeline given by this group to the community—including myself—regarding the release of the amended constitution which took effect of 11 February 2025<sup>1</sup>. This is despite Imam's many earlier Farmans to share<sup>10</sup> and of the goal of pluralism<sup>11</sup> which are also not being respected by this group. This is blatant disregard of Farmans of the Imam of the Time, by the de facto Leaders entrusted with the amended constitution which is a Farman, to share with the entire Jamat - community.

- b. This continued withholding, is not merely a matter of delay or oversight. It constitutes a clear deliberate violation of the moral, legal, and institutional duties entrusted to the leaders in control. The Constitution and the Imam's Farmans are not optional or symbolic—they are binding legal instruments of guidance, and every murid and every Jamat's institution has a right to receive them. Leaders who withhold the constitution and do not implement these foundational directives are in breach of also their own commitment, legal duty, and solemn Bay'ah to the Imam, to obey and act in accordance with Imam's guidance. They also renewed their pledges and Bayah on 11 February 2025<sup>5</sup>
- c. In the Constitution The Imam, explicitly affirms that it must be read together with any subsequent Farmans, which take precedence in case of conflict. Not providing access to either the Constitution or the Farmans is to withhold the very foundation through which the Jamat is meant to understand, and live by the Imam's guidance, which is the very basis of Bayah and the Ismaili faith. This failure is not only a denial by Leaders and of, institutional transparency, but also a serious affront to the faith, and of

obedience and trust that underpins the murid–Imam reciprocal covenant  
- Bayah

- d. The Constitution of 1998, reaffirms several core principles of the Ismaili Tariqah: the Imam's exclusive authority to appoint his successor (Nass); the centrality of Bay'ah as a spiritual and unifying act of allegiance; the historical role of the Imams in guiding both spiritual and temporal matters; and the desire to unify Ismaili communities under a global constitution that promotes unity, ethical governance, and meaningful social contribution.

Quotes from the Ismaili 1998 constitution<sup>14</sup>

- e. **(C)** *Succession to Imamatus is by way of Nass, it being the absolute prerogative of the Imam of the time to appoint his successor from amongst any of his male descendants whether they be sons or remoter issue. (Nass means designation which is divinely ordained and manifested from Allah).*
- f. **(D)** *The authority of the Imam in the Ismaili Tariqah is testified by Bay'ah by the murid to the Imam which is the act of acceptance by the murid of the permanent spiritual bond between the Imam and the murid. This allegiance unites all Ismaili Muslims worldwide in their loyalty, devotion and obedience to the Imam within the Islamic concept of universal brotherhood. It is distinct from the allegiance of the individual murid to his land of abode.*
- g. **(E)** *From the time of the Imamatus of Hazrat Mawlana Ali (A.S.), the Imams of the Ismaili Muslims have ruled over territories and peoples in various areas of the world at different periods of history and, in accordance with the needs of the time, have given rules of conduct and constitutions in*



*conformity with the Islamic concepts of unity, brotherhood, justice, tolerance and goodwill.*

- h. **(F)** *Historically and in accordance with Ismaili tradition, the Imam of the time is concerned with spiritual advancement as well as improvement of the quality of life of his murids. The Imam's Ta'lim lights the murids' path to spiritual enlightenment and vision. In temporal matters, the Imam guides the murids, and motivates them to develop their potential.*
- i. **(I)** *It is the desire and Hidayah of Mawlana Hazar Imam that the constitutions presently applicable to the Ismaili Muslims in different countries be superseded and that the Ismaili Muslims worldwide be given this Constitution in order better to secure their peace and unity, religious and social welfare, to foster fruitful collaboration between different peoples, to optimize the use of resources, and to enable the Ismaili Muslims to make a valid and meaningful contribution to the improvement of the quality of life of the Ummah and the societies in which they live.*
- j. *This Constitution shall be read with any Farman made after the date hereof, and in the event of conflict, the said Farman shall prevail over this Constitution, and a later Farman shall prevail over an earlier.*
- k. "Farman" *Any pronouncement, direction, order or ruling made or given by Mawlana Hazar Imam. Unquote.*
- l. *The Ismaili community and the constitution respect the laws of the land and the allegiance to the country they live in. The law of the land override the constitution in the case of any material conflict.*

## **5. Bay'ah: Sacred Foundation of the Ismaili Faith**

Bay'ah is a sacred, and foundational commitment within the Ismaili Muslim faith, rooted in the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It signifies the

murid's spiritual allegiance and permanent bond and covenant with the Imam of the Time, through whom divine guidance continues in every age. The authority of the Imam—and the legitimacy of Bay'ah—originates from the Unity (*Tawhid*) of Allah and the Qur'an, representing an unbroken continuity of divine light (*Noor*) through the continuum of Imam of the time

*“The Shia Ismaili Imami Tariqah is founded on Islam’s fundamental principle of Tawhid, the Oneness of Allah. It is also founded on Allah’s final message to humankind conveyed by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and on the continuum of Imamat.”* — Mawlana Hazar Imam, 11 February 2025<sup>1</sup>

#### **6. On 11 February 2025, Historic enthronement Takth Nashini and renewal of Bay'ah to His Highness Shah Rahim Aga Khan V <sup>5</sup>**

On 11 February 2025<sup>1</sup>, the Ismaili community participated a historic moment of spiritual renewal and continuity ,as they offered their Bay'ah to Prince Rahim Aga Khan V—the present and living Hazar Imam. This pivotal transition affirms the ongoing guidance of the Imam of the Time, who, though physically mortal, is the bearer of the same divinely inherited *Noor* (Light) that has been within every Imam since Hazrat Ali (A.S.), and which existed even before creation, and will endure eternally.

*“Imam is with you all the time... Feel your Imam’s presence.*

*He is with you now and for evermore.”*—Hazar Imam, 11 February 2025<sup>1</sup>

#### **7. Faith Rooted in Intellect and Understanding**

The Ismaili faith is firmly a *faith of the intellect*, as repeatedly affirmed by the Imams in their Farmans. It is not based on superstition or blind

rituals, but on intellect reason, reflection, and knowledge. Hazar Imam has consistently urged murids to seek, acquire, and share knowledge—including the study and understanding of Farmans, the Ismaili Constitution, and the sacred heritage of Ginans which are also Farmans. Imam has emphasized the need for qualified teachers, scholars, and institutions to help murids understand and interpret these spiritual divinely ordained interpretations & teachings, so they do not remain mystified or misunderstood, but instead become living sources of guidance and understanding.

*“Islam is a thinking, spiritual faith based on knowledge and humility.”*

— Mawlana Hazar Imam, Aga Khan University Convocation, 2006

*“I would like my spiritual children to seek knowledge and to share knowledge. I have always said this is a faith of intellect, and the intellect must be used to serve, to lead, and to illuminate.”*

— Mawlana Hazar Imam, various Farmans

Access to, and Understanding the Imam’s guidance is not the privilege of a select few—it is a shared duty and responsibility across the entire Jamat. True loyalty and Bayah to the Imam, includes making his guidance accessible and comprehensible to all murids.

## **8. The Imam's Noor: Eternal Source of Divine Guidance<sup>16</sup>**

The *Noor* of the Imam<sup>16</sup>—Light of Imam—is not individual or transient; it is a single, eternal light that has continued across all Imams from Hazrat Ali (A.S.) to the present. This *Noor* is divinely ordained by Allah and represents the continuing spiritual authority and responsibility of the Imam to offer *Tawil* (esoteric interpretation), *Talim* (teaching), blessings, and *shafa’ah*

(intercession through prayer). Also referred to as the Rope of Allah and Imam.

Through Imam's Farmans and guidance, murids are led toward spiritual enlightenment and ethical action in this world. This continuum is to lead the Jamat on the *Sirat al-Mustaqeem*—the Straight Path—through every generation, and every context.

*"The Imam of the Time is your guide, your intercessor, your teacher. He is the bearer of the Noor of Imamat, which is one and eternal."*

— Mawlana Hazar Imam, Farman excerpt

This divine light is not just symbolic—it is active, present, and personal, guiding the murids -through Farmans - towards the right path materially and spiritually in this life and eternally

## 9. Meaning of Bay'ah

- a. The word **Bay'ah** originates from the Arabic root **bā-ya-'a**, which means "to sell" or "to clasp hands." In Islamic faiths and tradition, it signifies a solemn **two-way covenant** between a believer and Imam – divinely ordained spiritual authority.

### **A Mutual Covenant**

- b. In the Ismaili faith, **Bay'ah** is a sacred pact:
- c. The **murid** (follower) pledges loyalty, devotion, and obedience to the **Imam of the Time**—a spiritual guide whose authority and **Noor** (divine light) are believed to be ordained by Allah.
- d. In return, the **Imam** accepts the Bay'ah and commits to providing both **spiritual and material guidance, intercession, and blessings**, through the

**continuous transmission of divine knowledge—ta’wil** (esoteric interpretation) and **ta’lim** (teaching)—expressed in the form of **Farmans** (directives from the Imam).

### **The Role and Nature of Farmans**

- e. **Farmans** are sacred, and given by the Imam, and which originate from the Divine. Farmans are:
- f. All Directions, guidance, or rulings in every form from the Imam. Imam in addition may annotate and elucidate them at the time of giving.
- g. Timeless—valid until explicitly amended or replaced by a newer Farman.
- h. Never edited by the Imam after being issued
- i. A later Farmans may **clarify, expand on, or supersede** earlier ones
- j. Also referred to as **Hidayat, Talika, Irshad, messages, and speeches**, among others.
- k. To be read with the **Ismaili Constitution**  
And, any later Farman supersedes and is valid

Farmans are divinely ordained guidance for dissemination to Ismaili Muslims given by Imam of the Time rooted in Quran and Allah’s will. Imam would never restrict or obstruct or withhold Farmans already given by him.

## **10. Intercession through the Imam** <sup>12, 16</sup>

### **The Noor - Light**

- a. In Ismaili faith and Farmans, the Imam—through his Noor and his role as the **“Rope – light of Allah”**—serves as a **spiritual intercessor** between the murid and God. Prayers are all addressed to and *through* the Imam as a means of seeking divine blessing and closeness to Allah, as Allah has stated in the Quran

b. This is supported both in the **Qur'an** and in the teachings of the continuum of all Imams:

c. **Qur'an (33:56):**

*"Indeed, Allah showers His blessings upon the Prophet, and His angels pray for him. O believers! Invoke Allah's blessings upon him, and salute him with worthy greetings of peace."*

d. **Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq** said:

*"We are the Gates of God. We are the medium for His people. He who approaches Him through us is brought near Him. He who seeks our intercession is interceded for. He who seeks His favours through us is favoured by Him. He who turns away from us goes astray."*

*— (Qadi al-Nu'man, Kitab al-Himma, trans. Jawad al-Muscatī and A.M. Moulvi, p. 42)*

**e. The Rights and Responsibilities of the Murid**

i. By giving **Bay'ah**, every murid is granted:

1. The **right to receive** the Imam's guidance, teachings, and blessings through his Farmans.
2. The **responsibility** and commitment to follow these teachings with sincerity of intention—**Niyat**<sup>8</sup>—which is emphasized in Islam as the basis upon which actions are judged.

ii. If a murid acts upon the Imam's Farmans with a pure **niyat**<sup>8</sup> and heart, both **spiritual and material blessings** may be granted—**in this life and the hereafter**. Everyone is born with a soul. The soul is spiritual and eternal. Bay'ah connects and engages with the divine truth and guidance through the Imam of the time

## 11. Bayah According to the Diwan of the “Ismaili Imamat”

This is constitutional entity registered in Portugal - Not to be confused with the person<sup>16</sup> and Noor of the Imam of the time

Quote from their website

“Prince Rahim Aga Khan V Named 50th Hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims - Lisbon, Portugal, 5 February 2025

Prince Rahim Al-Hussaini Aga Khan V was today named the 50th hereditary Imam (spiritual leader) of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, following the unsealing of the Will of his late father, Prince Karim Al-Hussaini Aga Khan IV, who died in Lisbon, Portugal yesterday, aged 88.

Prince Rahim Aga Khan V is a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) through his daughter, Hazrat Bibi Fatima, and the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law, Hazrat Ali, the fourth Rightly Guided Caliph of Islam and the first Shia Imam.

Throughout their 1,400-year history, the Ismailis have been led by a living, hereditary Imam. The Ismailis live in over 35 countries and number approximately 12 to 15 million. 12 May 2025”

There is no more on the website, for example on, Divinely ordained Noor Nur, Bayah, or Niyat nor is the Ismaili constitution uploaded or given in the Aga Khan Libraries

- a. Bayah in the Ismaili constitution – which is a Farman

See under clause 4 above

- b. Bayah defined by the Institute of Ismaili Studies<sup>7</sup>

“In the Shi’i Ismaili tradition, it is the acceptance of the permanent spiritual bond between the Imam and the murid, uniting all Ismaili Muslims worldwide in their loyalty, devotion and obedience to the Imam within the Islamic concept of universal brotherhood” Full definition in note 7 below<sup>7</sup>

- c. Bayah defined by The Ismaili (IIS – Ismaili Imam)

“BAY'AH (BAIYAT) - An Arabic term, referring to an oath of allegiance. In many Muslim traditions, it means to offer oneself to a spiritual master, pir, murshid, or shaykh, from whom one receives spiritual knowledge and guidance. **For Ismailis, it is the acceptance of the permanent spiritual bond between the Imam-of-the-Time and the murid**”

The Ismaili 15 Aug 2022

- d. Farman as defined in the Ismaili constitution<sup>14</sup> by the Imam

*“Any pronouncement, direction, order or ruling made or given by Mawlana Hazar Imam.*

The definition of a Farman by Institute of Ismaili studies (IIS) below.

*“From Persian lit. command, authority, will, permission. At the time of the Ottomans, the word ‘Farman’ was used in Ottoman Turkish to denote any order of the Ottoman sultans. In the 15th century CE, the word was*



*first used in its strict sense of a written document. Typically, such documents would open with an invocation to God and were addressed to a governmental official in the capital cities or in the provinces as well as to dependent/client rulers. **In the Shi'i Ismaili context, it refers to an address by the Imam to his community***

The above Ismaili interpretations of the definition of Bayah by the Ismaili Imamat IIS and TheIsmaili are at best incomplete. In their websites they do not explain and do not have more on, Ismaili constitution, Farman's, Bayah or Niyat. When I asked some time ago IIS – Shiraz Kabani- said Niyat is not a part of the Ismaili faith in writing. He is still part of the top leadership. When he knew the very opposite is true.

## **12. Historical and Qur'anic Foundations of Bayah**

**Bay'ah**, or the *oath of allegiance*, is deeply rooted in Islamic faith and tradition, and it appears in several places in the **Qur'an**, signifying a formal expression of loyalty and commitment:

- **Surah Al-Fath (48:10)**: *"Indeed, those who pledge allegiance to you [O Prophet]—they are actually pledging allegiance to Allah. The Hand of Allah is over their hands."*
- **Surah Al-Fath (48:18)** also references the pledge at Hdaybiyyah as a moment of divine approval.
- **Surah Al-Mumtahina (60:12)**:  
*"O Prophet, when the believing women come to you to pledge allegiance to you..."*
- **Surah Al-Nahl (16:91)**  
*"Fulfil the covenant of Allah when you have pledged it..."*

During the lifetime of **Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)**, *bay'ah* was a significant religious act through which followers declared their loyalty and faith, affirming their commitment to his guidance and to the community of believers. The Qur'an indicates that only after this pledge could the Prophet offer spiritual intercession and blessings, marking *bay'ah* as both a personal and communal covenant with God.

In the **Ismaili Muslim faith**, *bay'ah* continues as a living religious practice. It represents a believer's covenant with the **Imam of the Time**, who is recognized as the divinely appointed spiritual guide. His authority is not self-derived but flows to and from God, and his guidance embodies divine wisdom and light (*Noor*).

This is further illustrated in **The Master and the Disciple**, a pre-Fatimid Ismaili text. In it, a *da'i* (missionary or spiritual guide) facilitates the *bay'ah* of a seeker on behalf of the Imam:

“‘Here is a key to religion,’ the Knower began, ‘which renders it either sacred or profane, like the difference between marriage and fornication.’ ‘Surely that key you have mentioned must be extraordinary in God’s sight,’ remarked the young man, ‘if it is what distinguishes between the sacred and the profane, between truth and falsehood! So, what is it?’

‘That is the **pact of God** (cf. 13:20, 33:15), which confirms His rights, encompasses His obligations, and safeguards His friends (10:62–64); the **rope of God** (3:103) upon His earth and His guarantee of security among

His creatures,' said the Knower. 'I shall repeat (that oath) to you and impose its obligation on you.'"

Thus, in Ismaili faith and thought, *bay'ah* is not merely a historical or ritualistic act. It is a **living, sacred contract and covenant**—the "rope of God"—that connects and engages with the believer to divine guidance through the Imam, ensuring both spiritual and material continuum<sup>6</sup>

### 13. Bay'ah in Ismailism

In Ismaili school of Islam, **Bay'ah** is the **foundational two-way commitment** that defines the spiritual and ethical covenant and engagement between the **Imam of the Time** and each **murid** (follower). It is a **sacred covenant**, - both individual and communal, - that confers access to the Imam's guidance, blessings, and intercession—*in both this life, and in the life hereafter*, eternally

#### a. The Imam-Murid Relationship and Engagement

Through Bay'ah, - offer and acceptance - every murid is entitled to:

1. **Farmans** – Imam's divinely inspired manifestations of the spiritual and material guidance, including the teachings found in **Ginans**, which are devotional hymns of wisdom and interpretation.
2. **Blessings** – Both from following the Imam's Farmans and from the Imam's prayers for the community.
3. **Intercession** – The ability to send personal and collective prayers to the Imam, including for understanding and acting upon Farmans.

4. **Spiritual Purification** – As the Imam’s guidance helps purify the soul and align the believer with divine truth and the right path – Siratul mustaqeem
5. **Religious Participation** – The right to participate in rituals, prayers, and practices within **Jamatkhana’s** (prayer halls), including the most sacred congregation: **Deedar**<sup>p43</sup>, the physical and spiritual prayers and encounter with the Imam (see link below for more).
6. **Community Support** – Assistance from all **Constitutional institutions** of the Ismaili community, which function under the Imam’s authority.
7. **Inclusive Participation** – An equal place within a **pluralistic, and inclusive community**, - one Jamat - One big family.

**b. Teachings excerpts from Imam Sultan Mohammed Shah (Aga Khan III)**

Imam Sultan Mahomed Shah emphasized the significance and sincerity (Niyat) required in the act of offering and acceptance of Bay’ah:

*“You perform Bay’ah, but you must first understand its meaning and then offer Bay’ah. When you offer me Bay’ah, it means that you extend your hand to me with a promise... He who obeys me and promises to follow me after offering me Bay’ah, I also give him my promise that I shall hold his hand in the Hereafter.”*

— (Manjewadi, October 31, 1903; quoted in Kamaluddin Ali, *Practices and Ceremonies*)

He further clarified the spiritual weight of this commitment:

*“It is incumbent upon parents that they should first make their children my murid through the performance of Bay’ah... Those who have not offered Bay’ah have not signed to accept our faith. Just as you sign an agreement in your business and other dealings, similarly, through Bay’ah,*

*I take a signature from your soul.”*

— (Kutch Nagalpur, November 27, 1903)

This affirms the role of Bayah is not merely as a ritual, but as an active, ongoing commitment and engagement that shapes a murid’s entire material and spiritual eternal journey—anchored in trust, divine guidance, and a personal engagement with the divine will, through the Imam of the time.

#### **14. Bay’ah as a Covenant and Sacred Contract**

**Bay’ah** in Ismailism is not merely symbolic or ceremonial—it is a **living, continuous, and binding covenant** that defines the **spiritual relationship between the Imam of the Time and every Ismaili Muslim**, individually and collectively. It is both **a sacred contract and a covenant** of loyalty, love, and obedience, grounded in mutual responsibility—Bayah is both **material and spiritual**.

The Imam is both the **maternal and paternal spiritual head**, and all Ismaili Muslims—**souls in this world and the next**—are his spiritual children.

Through Bay’ah, a murid receives:

- a. **Exclusive and ongoing access to the Imam’s guidance**, especially through **Farmans** (guidance), which provide both spiritual and material guidance
- b. **Participation in private religious practices and rituals**, especially within **Jamatkhana’s** and during all communal and sacred congregations, including **Deedar** (spiritual and physical encounter and congregational prayers with the Imam).

c. **Spiritual protection and intercession**, both in this life and in the Hereafter. The Imam acts as an intercessor whose prayers and guidance connect the soul to Allah's mercy and grace.

d. **Material support and communal welfare**: Ismaili Muslims offer a **voluntary tithe (Dasond)**—traditionally 10% of income—which is used by the Imam unconditionally, for the community through the community constitutional institutions. These institutions are governed by the **Ismaili Constitution**, under the Imam's authority, to ensure good governance, ethical stewardship, and the well-being of the community and the wider society it lives in.

*"The Imamat revenue is given by the community to the Imam. He has a responsibility to manage the Imamat revenue.... **I would say easily 98% of those funds, and in fact at times much more than 98%, in fact probably of the order of 150%, goes back to the community...** I think that if representing an institution which has an income and which manages that income in the interest of the people which it represents is discreditable, then I think practically every institution in the modern world is discredited, because there is no institution in the modern world which does not have its income. The question is, is that income used appropriately? I think the Ismailis today would say that, if you look at the last twenty years of development, there has been more development than ever before. At the present time [1979] and in recent years, we have made an enormous effort in health, education, housing. There is a \$300 million teaching hospital coming up in Karachi; there is a 5-6 million pound Ismaili Centre in London; there is a teaching college which we are envisaging in India, and in fact, as I said, **the Imamat is spending on many occasions more than it actually has.**"*

- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, [BBC Radio 4 Interview, Michael Charlton \(London, United Kingdom\), 6 September 1979](#)

e. Without **Bay'ah**, an individual cannot access the Imam's **interpretation of the faith**, his **Farmans**, or the **spiritual blessings** originating from his divine light (Noor) and guidance.

### 15. Divinely Ordained Farman's - Guidance and Intercession

Bay'ah is much more than an oath of allegiance—it is the channel through which a murid receives the **divinely ordained manifestation of Allah's guidance** through the **Noor of the Imam**.

This truth was beautifully expressed by **Imam Abdus-Salam**, the 34th Imam in the line of succession from **Hazrat Imam Ali**, the first Imam after Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him):

*“Those who believe in the concept of unity should listen to me and be the disciple of my heart because my speech is the speech of Allah. If you want to have real **Deedar** of me, then open your inner eyes, for the physical eyes see only my body which is limited in time. I am a wonderful creation and if I reveal the truth, with the spark of my light, the two worlds will be illuminated. You do not distinguish between my physical body and my Noor, this is due to your weak vision, but with clear vision you will find in the universe none like me.”*

— Imam Mawlana Abdus-Salam

This Farman reaffirms that:

- The **Noor of Imamat is one and eternal**, present in every Imam since creation.
- The **Imam's guidance, authority, and intercession are from Allah**, transcending the physical form.
- The **Bay'ah** is the soul's declaration to receive that divine light and guidance in full trust.

## 16. Bay'ah in the Modern Context

- a. Bay'ah is not just a concept ritual or belief—it is a **living, reciprocal engagement** between every Ismaili Muslim and the **Imam of the Time**. This relationship is affirmed in both the **Holy Qur'an** and in the Imam's **Farmans** (guidance). It is expressed not only in words but through **daily practice, devotion, and obedience**.
- b. On **February 11, 2025<sup>5</sup>**, the global Ismaili community formally **reaffirmed their Bay'ah to Prince Rahim Aga Khan V**, now the **Hazar Imam**. The ceremony, known as the **Takht Nashini**, was held at the **Diwan of the Ismaili Imamat in Lisbon**. In this event, global Ismaili leaders gave the oath of allegiance to the new Imam on behalf of the entire community. Ismailis around the world who participated by livestream in their local **Jamatkhana's**, witnessing and participating this sacred religious moment and affirming their **continued spiritual exchange and connection to the Imam** and the **unbroken line of divine authority** that flows through the Imam of the time
- c. While the Imam is a **human being in physical form**, he is a transitory being who bears the **Noor (Divine Light)**—a sacred, eternal presence that **links every Imam to Allah**. This Noor is a **continuous and a continuum of**



**a lived spiritual reality**, passed from one Imam to the next, and thus Imam's guidance – Farmans continue to be manifested and given in **this life and the hereafter**. Ismaili faith is also both esoteric and exoteric (Din and Dunya)

#### **d. Legal Enforceability and Judicial Perspectives of oaths of allegiance**

##### **i. The legal enforceability of oaths varies by context:**

##### **1. Political and Legal Oaths: These are enforceable under law.**

Breaches—such as perjury or failure to perform public duties—may result in sanctions, removal from office, or prosecution.

##### **2. Religious Oaths: Courts generally refrain from enforcing religious oaths, recognizing them as personal matters of conscience and belief. However, where these oaths intersect with civil obligations—such as employment rights or contractual terms—judicial scrutiny may arise**

##### **3. Notable Cases:**

a. *Buscarini and Others v. San Marino* (1999): The European Court of Human Rights ruled that mandating a religious oath for public office violated Article 9 of the ECHR, which protects freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

b. *Baggett v. Bullitt* (1964): The U.S. Supreme Court held that vague loyalty oaths imposed on state employees infringed on First Amendment rights of free speech and association.

#### **17. Reflections and the Ismaili Case Study**

- a. Oaths of allegiance establish mutual obligation. In religious contexts such as Ismailism and Sufism, the oath is not merely symbolic but a structured, binding lived and practiced covenant in which the follower entrusts

loyalty, time, and resources in return for spiritual and sometimes material guidance. Similarly, in political and judicial contexts, oaths underpin democratic governance and accountability—enforced through law and constitutional mechanisms.

- b. In the Ismaili faith, the *Bay'ah* (oath of allegiance) forms a deeply spiritual and yet formal bilateral contract between the *murid* and the Imam. This relationship contains the essential elements of a legal contract
- c. Offer: The follower's declaration of loyalty and obedience;
- d. Acceptance: The Imam's acknowledgment of the follower's oath;
- e. Consideration: The follower's time, voluntary service, and financial contributions—commonly 10%, of which approximately 2.5% is retained for the Imam's own use.
- f. In return, the Imam, as the spiritual and constitutional authority, pledges to provide guidance, protection, and blessings. The seriousness of this covenant is reinforced by constitutional provisions, including mechanisms like excommunication, which is treated as a consequence of breach.
- g. On February 11, 2024, the Imam reaffirmed his commitment to using community resources for the material and spiritual benefit of the Jamat and encouraged members to bring their concerns to him. He also emphasized that the *Bay'ah* is a serious spiritual and contractual bond—likening it to a business agreement, further emphasizing its bilateral and binding nature.
- h. This raises a critical reflection: while followers face consequences for breaking their part of the covenant, what mechanisms exist when the reciprocal obligations—such as transparency, justice, and responsiveness from leaders—are not fulfilled? – These are Farmans Bayah and the constitution.

- i. In practice, appointed leaders within the Ismaili institutions, who are governed by the Constitution, have in some cases failed to adhere to these obligations. These include
  - i. filtering communication to the Imam, failing to uphold constitutional responsibilities, and
  - ii. withholding guidance and information from the community. A notable legal case—*Aga Khan v. Tajdin and Jiwa*—was filed in Canada in 2010 and settled in 2015<sup>17</sup>, highlighting internal disputes over access, authority, and community rights. This case was limited to copyright claimed over Farmans – Imams guidance to the community - Imam confirmed that these were for the community and to be given and retained and shared within the community. The case did not go to trial and was settled. This issues of copyright and Leaders including evidence filed in court was not tested legally and ruled upon by the court<sup>17</sup>.
  - iii. Historically including at the time of Ismaili Faith Headquartered in Egypt and Iran, many Imams were assassinated by those close to them because of mainly excessive material greed for power and funds. The number assassinate are at least 11 with living under persecution. Leadership of the Ismaili constitutional entities and the community by them is one of the challenges today. Including the sharing of the guidance – Farman's of the Imams.
  - iv. Such examples urge a re-evaluation of how spiritual oaths—especially when supported by constitutional frameworks—should be interpreted not only as acts of faith but also as formal contracts with reciprocal obligations and potential avenues for accountability particularly against Leaders appointed to share follow and implement the guidance and the constitution. Just as breaches by followers may result in disciplinary

measures, the legal mechanisms exist to ensure that authorities honour their commitments—morally, spiritually, and legally. These have not been, but need to be enforced legally against Leaders.

j. Copyright and Scriptures – Legal Precedents and Principles

i. Copyright on Religious Scriptures:

1. Most foundational religious texts—such as the Qur’an, Bible, Torah, Bhagavad Gita, and Guru Granth Sahib—are public domain. This is because legally;

- They were composed centuries ago. In Ismaili Faith before creation and a continue manifestation
- Copyright expires typically 70 years after the death of the author. IN Ismaili context they are a manifestation before creation
- They are treated as shared Guidance cultural and spiritual heritage. – Ismaili case they are guidance divinely ordained

k. Modern translations, annotations, or commentaries may be copyrighted.

For instance:

- The King James Bible (1611) is public domain, but modern versions (like the NIV Bible) are copyrighted by their respective publishers.
- Translations of the Qur’an, though the original Arabic text is in the public domain, carry copyright claims on the translated work.

j. Court Cases Involving Copyright Claims on Scriptures:

- United States v. Martignon (2005): While not directly about scriptures, this case touched on unauthorized distribution of

protected materials and helped affirm that public domain content cannot be retroactively copyrighted.

- There have been disputes involving Bible publishers, especially over modern translations (e.g., Thomas Nelson vs. Zondervan, regarding publishing rights).
- There are No known legal cases involve copyright claims over the original texts of the Qur'an, Torah, or Vedas.

#### I. Divine Authority and e.g. Removal of Clergy – Historical and Legal Evolution

1. In many religious traditions, spiritual leaders are believed to be divinely appointed:

- In Catholicism, priests and bishops are ordained “in persona Christi” (in the person of Christ). Historically, they could not be removed except by Church authority, not civil courts.
- In Islam, particularly in Ismaili theology, the Imam is considered divinely ordained, and his guidance is believed to be inspired by God.

#### 18. Legal and Institutional Reforms:

a. Due to abuse scandals and public accountability, many religious institutions have created legal frameworks to remove clergy:

- Catholic Church Abuse Scandals (e.g., USA, Ireland): Led to thousands of priests being defrocked or removed after civil investigations and lawsuits.

- UK Charity Commission and Church of England: Now require clergy to comply with safeguarding laws; failure can result in removal, even if religious doctrine once deemed them untouchable.
- Ismaili Institutions: Though there is no public precedent of courts removing appointed leaders, there is legal precedent (e.g., Aga Khan v. Tajdin & Jiwa, Canada 2010–2015) recognizing the Imam's institutional control, while questions of accountability remain internal and not tested in civil courts. This case was about sharing Imams guidance (Farmans). Imam agreed they can be shared in a meeting. The case was settled in 2015<sup>17</sup>

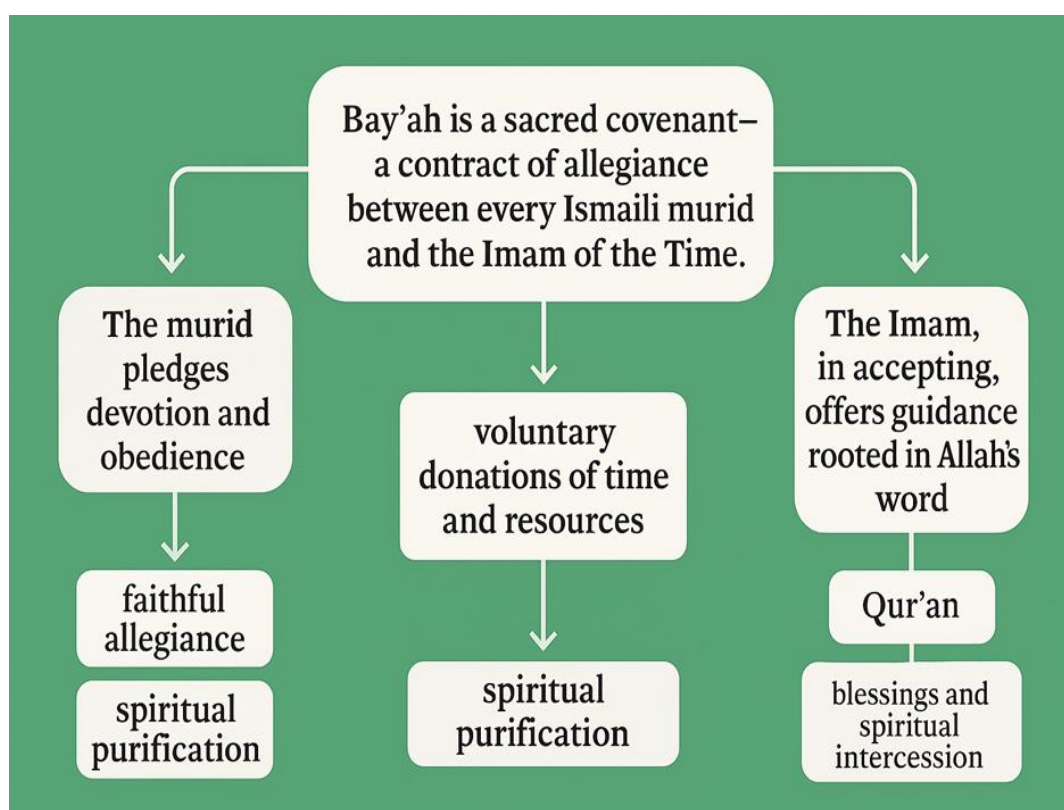
## 19. Conclusion

1. **Bay'ah in the Ismaili Faith** is a sacred and enduring oath of allegiance—more than just a ritual or declaration, it is a reciprocal commitment between the follower and the Imam of the time. This pledge is actively fulfilled through continuous engagement.
2. **Rooted in the Quran**, Bay'ah represents divine guidance, intercession, and the acceptance of prayers, both materially and spiritually. It is a sacred covenant—an exchange of devotion that manifests God's will and creation.
3. **The Imam's mandate**, including Farmans and blessings, is divinely ordained by Allah. Therefore, the Imam does not limit, restrict, or withhold Farmans once they are given. His role remains constant—guiding, interceding, blessings and fulfilling his divine mission. Farmans are for and like the Quran never withheld by Imam from Ismaili Muslims.
4. **Despite Imam's explicit guidance**, the true essence of Bay'ah, Noor, and the Imam's divinely ordained mandate has been diplomatically softened by a group of leaders who have remained in control for decades. This

contradicts the Imam's Farmans, which call for the open dissemination, explanation, and understanding of Farmans, including the Constitution. The amended Constitution of February 11, 2025, is being withheld by these leaders, despite the Imam's specific Farmans on February 11, 2025, and March 18, 2025.

5. **Bay'ah is not just a belief or ritual**—it is a binding reciprocal commitment, actively lived by all Ismaili Muslims. The blessings and guidance stem from the same Noor, the divine light and rope of Allah, which has existed since before creation and continues through the Quran, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and the eternal lineage of Imams.
6. **Bay'ah as a formal contract:** In the Ismaili faith, Bay'ah is both a deeply spiritual and legally binding agreement between the murid (follower) and the Imam. The Imam has likened it to a business contract, containing essential elements of enforceability:
  - **Offer:** The follower's declaration of loyalty and obedience.
  - **Acceptance:** The Imam's acknowledgment of the follower's oath.
  - **Consideration:** The follower's time, voluntary service, and financial contributions—typically 10%, with approximately 2.5% retained for the Imam's own use.
  - **In return,** the Imam provides guidance, protection, and blessings.
  - **The Imam and the Murids – every follower** respect the laws of the land and the allegiance to the country they live in. The law of the land overrides the constitution and Farmans in the case of any material conflict
7. **Enforceability and accountability:** The seriousness of this two-way covenant, agreement and commitment, is reinforced by the Ismaili

constitutional provisions, including mechanisms like excommunication for breaches. Therefore, this agreement is legally enforceable, - particularly against leaders entrusted with managing community resources - in accordance with the constitution, -which is a Farman- and to ensure the dissemination of Imams guidance and the full Ismaili Constitution, which Leaders in de facto control have been withholding from the community for decades despite directions and reminders from the Imam of the time for decades.



Institute of Ismaili Studies ITREBS, and the Leaders of the community have been invited to comment and or clarify. A response has not been received from them to this, and other pending earlier requests

By **M Chatur**  
**18 May 2025**



**About the Author-** Maheeb Chatur is an Ismaili Muslim scholar who graduated from intensive religious and Al Waezeen courses by the Institute of Ismaili studies, in London with ITREB UK Ismaili Council. He has actively participated and served in various capacities within community entities. He has authored many articles on various aspects Ismailism including pluralism. His Interest includes business development and pluralism. He was born in Uganda and moved to the UK as a student. In 2009, for 4 years, he served as a Hon Secretary of Ismaili Tariquah and religious education constitutional Board in the Middle East (6 Countries). He qualified as a Chartered Accountant in the United Kingdom. He is a member of the Association of International Accountants. He is an author of the book Aga Khan Copyright lawsuit – lifting the veil. He has had extensive professional and business experience working in many countries around the world. He has interacted with other faiths and their leaders, and also within many organisations in UK, including Rotary International.

### Bay'ah Chart shared with leaders:

No institution or leader has the moral or legal authority to withhold Farmans—divinely ordained guidance that has already been given by the Imam.

Any claim incl copyright is no legal or moral justification over their sacred and inspired manifestation.

## REFERENCES & SOURCES FOR FURTHER READING & DEEPER EXPLORATION AND UNDERSTANDING OF BAYAH AND RELATED ISMAILI DOCTINES AND THEOLOGY

Including	Notes below
1. Farman 11 Feb 2025	note 1
2. Bayah 11 Feb 2025	note 4
3. Niyat -	note 8
4. Authority and Noor of Imam	note 15
5. Nass designation Video clips	note 6
6. Farmans to share Farmans	note 9
7. Interview 1965 Noor -	note 12
8. Interview 2011 Khaama	note 13
9. Pluralism vital for our existence	note 11
10. Bayah and proofs of Lineage	notes 9, 18 -19 page 55
11. Ismaili constitution	notes 15
12. Deedars – meaning significance	pages 43-44
13. Aga Khan copyright lawsuit	notes 16

### NOTES

1. Farman on 11 February 2025 - Takth Nashini - Acceptance of Bayah - Continuum - Tawhid, amended constitution signed - to be given to the entire Jamat



Farman 11 Feb  
2025.pdf

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/k205cngnii5rhv2z0e8lb/Farman-11-Feb-2025.pdf?rlkey=rz6n3wxz99g9o8iyrmqizkins&st=h4eh1eqe&dl=0>

2. Definition of Bay'ah by "The Ismaili" on Facebook 16 Aug 22  
<https://www.facebook.com/theismailihunza/posts/bayah-baiyat-onejamat-ismaili/429385829251898/>

3. Authority & Nur light of the Imam in Quran Farmans and Ginans which are Farman's – posts on Ismaili net  
<https://forum.ismaili.net/viewtopic.php?t=9224>)

The updated piece is reproduced below – see note 15 below

4. Nass and divine designation - video clip of Imam on X  
*Imam says in an emotional Farman*  
***“It is the rope that carries the light that flows”***  
*(affirmation of a continuum of the Imam's divine link and light - Noor from Allah ),*

(<https://x.com/chaturmahebab/status/1912415024770879537?s=46&t=IL1Fe7Xf2J0RhqfO552USg>)

5. **Bayah and Pledges to Imam of the Time on 11 Feb 2025**

(<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/6p7am204d6uuuumv6sgoi/Pledges-and-Bayah-and-submissions-to-Hazar-Imam-11-feb-25.pdf?rlkey=0vjm06sbznaay3h6lovjtv36i&st=3pa4k000&dl=0>)

6. **Video clip of Imam – on continuum and designation - Nass**

*Video clip The Ismaili - Continuum after 4 Feb 2025*

[https://youtu.be/sLzgwQlzz\\_o](https://youtu.be/sLzgwQlzz_o)

7. **Definition of Bayah by Institute of Ismaili studies on their website.**

Bay'a Baya'h

(Arabic; derived from ba-ya-'a, meaning 'to sell' or 'clasp hands').

A practice rooted in Arab tradition and the practice of Prophet Muhammad. It is also mentioned in the Holy Qur'an (see 48:10, 48:18, and 60:12) and defined as an oath of allegiance, an act by which a

certain number of people, individually or collectively recognise the authority of an individual.

Thus, the bay'a of a Caliph was the act by which an individual was proclaimed and recognised as the head of the Muslim State. In many Muslim traditions, the meaning of bay'a is to offer oneself to a spiritual master, pir, murshid, or shaykh in exchange for spiritual knowledge and guidance.

In Shi'i contexts, the word is used for the oath of allegiance to the Imam by his followers. In the Shi'i Ismaili tradition, it is the acceptance of the permanent spiritual bond between the Imam and the murid, uniting all Ismaili Muslims worldwide in their loyalty, devotion and obedience to the Imam within the Islamic concept of universal brotherhood.

This definition of Ismaili Muslim interpretation and teachings of Bayah by Imams, is at best is incomplete and does not clearly and specifically state the lived reality of Bayah in Farmans and as practiced by Ismaili Muslims today and historically. This raises many questions. Leaders in control do not respond or share with the community Farmans and even the constitution and e.g. the meaning of Bayah and Niyat as the lived and practiced reality despite Imam's guidance to them to do so and to demystify our faith and all related practices. It has been suggested by Leaders in control that this is "sensitive to other Muslims because of the question of Shirk i.e. associating partners to Allah. (Link to sending prayers to Imam). Therefore, the secrecy and for this foundations part of the faith and related to not even taught in religious classes.- May 2025

IIS Definition of Bayah

<https://forum.ismaili.net/viewtopic.php?p=66099#p66099>

## **8. Niyat**

Means a sincerity of Intentions in all actions - The sincerity of intentions behind and aligned with the actions is what Imam and Allah know and look at in all actions and in Prayers. As Imam says Action matters not just words, and all actions need to be aligned with Farmans of the Imam link to full piece <https://ismaili.net/timeline/2018/chatur-nyat.pdf>

**9. Proofs of the divinely ordained Lineage and the authority & Nur of Imams.**

<https://www.ismailignosis.com/p/the-aga-khans-direct-descent-from-prophet-muhammad-historical-proof>

This full article is reproduced below in case the link is not or cannot be accessed see notes 17-18 below

**10. Farmans to give and share Farman's which includes the Ismaili constitution**

*(There have been more Farmans since this write up and piece below, including on 11 Feb 2025<sup>1</sup> and 18 March 2025)*

Links

[Ismaili Muslims have a duty to read & share Farmans](#)

[101-proofs-chatur.pdf](#)

**11. Pluralism is vital for our existence – What is Pluralism and the challenges**

Pluralism is a conscientious choice which enables & fosters, positive responses grounded in respect for, human diversity & the common good."

Actualising [#Pluralism](#) is vital. Its opposite - exclusivism or monoculturalism - fuels corruption, gaps in knowledge and empathy, conflicts, poverty, fragmentation, and can lead to authoritarianism or totalitarianism

More at <https://x.com/chaturmahebab/status/1918917963786113085>

An updated Piece



Pluralism AKDN GCP  
01 Jan 2025 fnl.pdf

## **12. Hazrat Imam Ali on Ali Allah – Unity Tawhid of Allah**

*I am the sign of the Most High,  
I am the Gnosis of Mysteries,  
I am the Door of the Doors,  
I am the First and the Last.  
I am the Manifest and the Hidden.  
I am the creator.  
I give birth to the world  
and I destroy it as I wish.  
I am the face of God,  
I am the Supreme Kalam."*

**Hazrat Mowlana Ali (Peace be upon him and his progeny)**

**Reference: Book:- Khutbat al-Bayan**

**(From a total of 70 such declarations,  
partially quoted in Corbin, H. "Historio  
de la philosophie islamique",  
Paris 1954, page 77.)**

## **13. Interview 1965 Sunday Times - Imam - Noor Light and intercession**

e) <http://www.ismaili.net/intervue/651212.html>

**Am I right that the Ismaili Faith is an esoteric one, that's to say, only real scholars and experts have read all the crucial texts that enable them to understand the inner nature of your religion?**

"Yes, this so."

**Do you consider yourself expert in these?** "Certainly, I think my grandfather ensured that we had a thorough knowledge of the important books."

**Are you, for all believing Ismailis, a symbol of their Faith?**

"Yes. Since My grand-father, the last Aga Khan, died, I have been the bearer of the "NOOR" a word which means "The Light" The NOOR has

been handed down in direct descent from the Prophet. But My work and responsibilities overflow into the practical side of life."

**You have been compared to the Pope. Is your word, like his infallible?**

"The Imam's word on the Faith is taken as an absolute rule. Every Ismaili is expected to accept it. The Community always follows very closely the personal way of thinking of the Imam. It's one of the particularities of Ismailis. An Ismaili who did not obey My word in matters of Faith, would not be excommunicated, he would still be a Muslim. He simply would no longer be a member of the Jamath - the Community of Ismaili Muslims. "One has to make a very careful distinction here between worldly and religious matters. An Ismaili may ask My advice on a worldly problem, then not accept it. But if he were to ignore the Imam's decision on matters of Faith, the Community pressures on him would be very strong."

**Have you used your power to make any radical changes in the Ismaili religion?**

"You don't change the religion. But you might change certain traditions. For instance, My grandfather made it quite clear to the Ismaili Community that women were not to wear the veil, and they no longer do. I have not made any strong directives of this type. But I hope I am modern in My outlook, and I know that in many ways I am a different sort of person from My grandfather. This will necessarily subtly change the character of the Faith."

**Do you feel you've made any mistakes?**

" Yes, of course I have."

**Do you regret any?**

"One is bound to regret mistakes. They have definitely caused damage and one can only hope to put them right. One makes mistakes unknowingly, because one has been ill-advised, because of hasty decisions, because of bad judgment - there are many reasons."

**You have been compared to the Pope. Is your word, like his infallible?**

"The Imam's word on the Faith is taken as an absolute rule. Every Ismaili is expected to accept it. The Community always follows very closely the personal way of thinking of the Imam. It's one of the particularities of Ismailis. An Ismaili who did not obey My word in matters of Faith, would not be excommunicated, he would still be a Muslim. He simply would no longer be a member of the Jamath - the Community of Ismaili Muslims. "One has to make a very careful distinction here between worldly and religious matters. An Ismaili may ask My advice on a worldly problem, then not accept it. But if he were to ignore the Imam's decision on matters of Faith, the Community pressures on him would be very strong."

### **Intercession – Praying to Imam**

#### **In Quran, Ismaili Imam – Farmans & Christianity**

**“Indeed, Allah showers His blessings upon the Prophet, and His angels pray for him. O believers! Invoke Allah’s blessings upon him, and salute him with worthy greetings of peace.” (33:56)**

“ We are the Gates of God. We are the medium for His people. He who approaches Him through us is brought near Him. He who seeks our intercession is interceded for. He who seeks His favours through us is favoured by Him. He who turns away from us goes astray." - Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, (Qadi al-Numan, Kitab al-Himma, trans. Jawad al-Muscati, A.M. Moulvi, 42)”

### **His Holiness The Pope on Intercession**

“Let us entrust ourselves to the maternal intercession of Mary Most Holy so that the Holy Spirit may descend in abundance upon the Church of our time, fill the hearts of all the faithful and kindle in them the fire of his love” 2021

<https://twitter.com/pontifex/status/139...17638?s=21>



14. [An Interview with His Highness the AgaKhan](#) Khaama 2011

Post by **mahebubchatur** » Wed Jun 02, 2021 1:38 pm

**Imam's 3 concerns and two-fold mission**

Question - Jean-Jacques Lafaye:

Your Highness, as spiritual leader of Ismaili communities throughout the world, you exert unquestionable influence on the international scene. Nevertheless, you have no wish to be regarded as a political player...

Aga Khan:

.. or as a politician. From my point of view, even though religious groups and governments have to maintain relationships based on cooperation and mutual respect, religion and politics are two quite different things.

Lafaye:

**You are the embodiment of the Imamat. Your co-religionists see you as their "lord and master." What form does your leadership take?**

Aga Khan:

**In both Sunni and Shia Islam, the Imam is responsible for the quality of life of those who look to him for guidance and for overseeing the practice of the faith. There is no division as there is, for example, in the Christian interpretation, between the material and the spiritual. The Imam's responsibility covers both domains. Hence, his first concern is for the security of his followers; his second is for their freedom to practice their religion; his third is for their quality of life, as I have just mentioned.**

**I repeat, the Imamat is an institution whose two-fold mission is to guarantee quality of life and to interpret the faith.**

**The religious leadership of the Ismaili Imam goes back to the origins of Shia Islam when the Prophet Muhammad appointed his son-in-law, Ali, to continue his teachings within the Muslim community.**

**The leadership is hereditary, handed down by Ali's descendants, and the Ismailis are the only Shia Muslims to have a living Imam, namely myself.**

**The other Shia – the Twelvers – revere a “hidden” Imam who will return on the Day of Judgment to take part in the final judgment.**

**It is the presence of the living Imam that makes our Imamatus unique.**

**The Sunni is completely different in that they do not accept the idea of continuity of religious leadership by members of the Prophet's family.**

**“I think that most conflicts arise out of essentially political problems. I emphasize, it is not about religious but political issues.**

**Religion is often no more than a pretext or, even more so, an instrument manipulated by political forces.”**

Full Interview

<https://www.khaama.com/aga-khan-intervi ... isdom-786/>

9 Jan 2011

## **15. Ismaili Constitution 1998**

Below is a link to the available main global constitution of 1998. The full constitution includes; all Farman's the rules regulations of all entities and amendments and all instruments including all those Leaders acting and or appointed and currently are on the executive and main boards of every entity.

None of these have been provided by the leaders in control for decades, to date

Link to 1998 constitution



Constitution Ismaili  
1998.pdf

**16. Authority Mandate and Noor Nur of Imam of the Time - Pir Noor  
Mawlana Shah Rahim Al Husseini Hazar Imam  
His Highness The Aga Khan V**

**By M Chatur – 2019 – updated**

Who is His Highness the Aga Khan, what is His mandate authority, and how does he exercise his authority,

Without understanding this it is not possible, to understand Ismailism or the Ismaili Muslim faith, practices and prayers which are sent to the Imam of the time.

Authority is a right which comes from a position of leadership. Leadership is much more than giving orders and enforcing them. The Aga Khan is first and foremost a religious Leader, an Imam, guiding over 15 million Ismaili Muslims worldwide. This guidance is called Farmans.

His authority and position are derived from the Quran, which has come from Allah (God), through Prophet Mohammed who confirmed the appointment from Allah, of Imam Ali, as the first Imam after him.

The first Ismaili Imam, was appointed by Prophet Mohammed with a mandate and authority to continue the interpretation, and teaching of the Quran. This is a divinely ordained mandate, to light the way for all those who seek, called believers or murids.

The Imam calls them all his beloved spiritual children and gives them Maternal and paternal blessings. Imam is therefore an inheritor, and intercessor to continue the manifestations of the interpretations (Tawil), and teaching (Talim), of the Qur'an.

This has been explained by the Imam, in the Ismaili constitution, and in many Farmans. An example is;

“The Imam must direct Ismailis on the practice of their religion and constantly interpret the Qur'an for them according to our theology. On the spiritual plane, the Imam's authority is absolute. Ismailis believe therefore that what the Imam says is the only true interpretation possible”

There is a difference between Divinity and Divine or divinely ordained authority. Imams do not claim divinity. Prophet Mohammed never claimed Divinity. According to Ismaili Muslims, Prophet Mohammed passed on authority, by appointing Imam Ali, as the inheritor and a successor. Imam's guidance is for all who seek, and submit to his guidance by giving their Bayah to the Imam. Imams Farman's are given to all Ismaili Muslims and originate from Allah and therefore like the Quran are always accessible to all and never limited withheld restricted by Allah or therefore never by Imams of the time

“You have to be very careful not to confuse the concept of religious authority with divinity. The Prophet himself never claimed any miracle of any sort. The only miracle which you have in Islam is the Qur'an”. (The Aga Khan)

Imam gives his guidance in many forms. He does so by acting, & also by not acting. His spiritual children seek, and submit to and to obey his guidance/Farmans. In return they receive Farmans and blessings. The ultimate for an Ismaili Muslim is receiving material and spiritual enlightenment in this life and in the hereafter. The soul of every individual is eternal. The giving of allegiance and receiving of Farmans is in effect a contract between the Imam of the time and his spiritual children (the seekers, individually and collectively).

The legality of this Bayah, and contract is an unquestionable live reality for all Ismaili Imams and Muslims and has been and will be eternally.

In the Quran, Allah, asks believers to send their prayers, through Prophet Mohammed. Prophet appointed Imams Ali, as the first Imam of Ismaili Muslims. He has said “Truly, ‘Ali is from me and I am from him, and he is the walī (spiritual master) of every believer after me.” Ismaili Muslims send their prayers through their Imam to Allah. Because they believe their Imam is the bearer of the light, as an inheritor, intercessor, and legatee, with divine authority. Imam is present in this world in perpetuity.

The continuity of the authority of Ismaili Imams is by hereditary appointment from one Imam to another. This appointment is twofold. First it is that of the Imam's light (Nur). This has and will remain the same. Secondly and simultaneously is a physical succession, as from a father to a son. This appointment or accession is also referred to as a Nass. His Highness has confirmed he is a bearer of the Nur, which means Light. This Nur, is by direct and linear descent from Prophet Mohammed. He has also confirmed that 2000 years before creation Prophet Mohammed and Imam Ali were one light (Nur). Bearer of the light means, bearer of divinely ordained authority rooted in knowledge, from which emanate blessings of Farmans, which is the Imams Tawil and Talim.

Allah's (God's). guidance on earth, has always been communicated to mankind, through those living amongst them. Guidance/Farmans, from Imams is valid, unless changed with a new Farman, by any Imam.

Imam has the sole prerogative to give, and change Farmans. Imam does not edit a Farman after it is given. A later Farman can change an earlier Farman. Farmans of all Imams are a continuum - Rope of Imam and Allah

The divine Authority of the Imam (Imamat), must not be confused with worldly or religious Institutions bearing the names of Imam, (including Imam's, Office and Imam's secretariat, Ismaili Imamat or Aga Khan)

They bear the name of Imam or Imamat, not the divine authority or Nur of the Imam of the time. . They are constitutional entities for the benefit governance of the Jamat – community. The management, and mandates of these material entities are distinct and separate from the person of the Imam, and his Nur and Farman's. The entities are to be managed under the Ismaili constitution - a Farman

The Ismaili constitutional entities are run by those appointed, under the Ismaili constitution. Not all are appointed personally by the Imam. This is delegated in the Ismaili constitution. These entities are also called "Imamat institutions" or the "Institutions of His Highness the Aga Khan". They are

confused with the Imam, and the exercise of his divine authority as Imam of the time. The senior leadership have given the impression that all they do is personally approved and authorized by the Imam.

Ismaili community Institutions are worldly manifestation of and from Farmans. They are independent of Imam and the making of his Farman's. This is misunderstood and used by some of the senior Leaders to make people believe that their decisions instructions and interpretation equate to Farmans or are authority coming directly from the Aga Khan. That is not true. I have explained this bureaucratisation under the Ismaili constitution. This needs to be understood.

Imams Farmans lights the way of the seeker towards spiritual enlightenment. This is the ultimate goal for every Ismaili Muslim. This is only possible through seeking and sincere submission to Imams Farmans (Guidance). The following is from the Institute of Ismaili studies in London.

"A believer who sincerely submits to the Imam's guidance<sup>2</sup> may potentially attain the knowledge of self. The tradition attributed to both the Prophet and Imam Ali: 'He who knows himself, knows his Lord' (God), conveys the essence of this relationship between the Imam and his follower. The Shia thus place obedience to the Imams after that to God and the Prophet by virtue of the command in the Quran for Muslims to obey those vested with authority\*." (\* Imams for Ismaili Muslims - Ismaili Imamat )

Therefore, having Farmans and understanding them is fundamental, and the very essence of the Ismaili Muslim faith. Imam has given clear guidance to have, read understand, and share knowledge in Farmans. And he has said that If any of his spiritual children have any doubt, then they are to seek Farmans of the Imam.

"Imam" means His Highness the Aga Khan IV (the "Aga Khan") or any of his predecessors depending on the year of reference. There is a variety of understanding of the status of the Imam by his followers depending on their knowledge and personal experience, but the Imam is generally

accepted as the "Mazhar" [Epiphany] of God. (Nagib Tajdin)

The Light-Nur of Imams is one and eternal

**"My words are the words of my father, and the words of my father are the words of my grandfather, and the words of my grandfather are the words of my great grandfathers, Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Husayn, and their words are the words of Imam Ali, and the words of Imam Ali are the words of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and (finally) the words of Prophet Muhammad are the words of God the Almighty, the Great. (Imam al Sadiq) \* Usul al Kafi, Book 2, Chapter 17, Tradition 14**

**"We are the hujjah (proof) of God and His Gate. We are the tongue as well as the Face of God; we are the Eyes of God [guarding] His creation and we are the Guardians of the Divine Command (wulat al-amr) on earth." Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, Arzina Lalani, Early Shi'i Thought (Institute of Ismaili studies.**

Imam In general use by e.g. Sunni Muslims means a leader of prayers in Mosques or a religious leader. For Ismaili Muslims, Their Imam of the time and Imams are their spiritual and hereditary guide who are divinely appointed and ordained and are direct descendants from the family of Hazrat Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib and Prophet Mohammed's (PBUH), daughter, Fatima. (source Institute of Ismaili studies).

[Post](#) by [maheubchatur](#) » Sat Jan 05, 2019 7:13 am

Hazar Imam and Imams have said that every Ismaili Muslim has a commitment – Bayah, and duty to seek, read, understand and share Imam's Farmans - Talim and Tawil - Link to these Farmans to share and Be his Dais

<http://ismaili.net/timeline/2018/101-proofs-chatur.pdf>

[Post](#) by [swamidada1](#) » Mon Jan 07, 2019 10:04 pm

I am re posting my views on the topic as Admin has moved the article posted by Mr. Maheub Chatur from 'Ismaili Law Documents' thread to

Doctrines thread.

I agree with the following 3 paragraphs written by Maheeb Chatur on the topic of Imamah. It is true Imam is Noor of Allah, Mazhar of Allah, Hujjat of Allah, he is true guide, he is intercessor, he is trustee, he is door to Allah (Baabullah), he is shaheed (witness), that's why he is called 'Ainullah. Mowla Ali said, " ANA AINULLAH ". (Koukab Durri)

Maheeb Chatur wrote;

"Imam is therefore an inheritor, intercessor & trustee, to continue the interpretations (Tawil), and teaching (Talim), of the Qur'an. This has been explained by the Imam, in the Ismaili constitution, and in many Farmans.

"There is a difference between Divinity and Divine or divinely ordained authority. IMAMS DO NOT CLAIM DIVINITY. PROPHET MUHAMMAD NEVER CLAIMED DIVINITY. According to Ismaili Muslims, Prophet Mohammed passed on authority, by appointing Imam Ali, as the inheritor and a successor. Imam's guidance is for all who seek, and submit to his guidance".

- [Quote](#)

[Post](#) by [maheebchatur](#) » Sun Feb 02, 2020 7:37 am

**Deedars** are Holy congregational prayers performed in the presence of Hazar Imam of the time , H H The Aga Khan

These holy Prayers are also a reaffirmation and a renewal of the Imam's divinely ordained Authority, & allegiance (Bayah) given to the Imam by his followers.

These congregational prayers and religious ceremony begins with a Recitation of a Ginan (Hymn). This forms a part of the Imam Talim and Tawil (teachings and interpretations of the Quran by Imams after Prophet Mohammed.

This is followed by a recitation of a few verses from the Quran.



Then begins the handing of, and acceptances by the Imam of the Insignias of “Imamat”

First

The Gold Chain of Office of Imamat. This signifies the continuity of the authority and eternal & one Noor (light) of all Imams, in perpetuity

Second

The Holy Qur’an, which are the messages of Allah to Mankind which Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) was asked by Allah to deliver.

Third

The Ismaili Constitution. This was ordained by the Imam of the time for all his Murids to obey, implement and benefit.

Fourth

The Inkwell - a symbol an Alid-Fatimid and Ismaili Muslim tradition of the Intellect and Knowledge to serve Mankind

Fifth

A Ceremonial Sword from the time of the Prophet and Hazrat Ali. This symbolises the defence of the faith and its values, and of the protection of the weak and of dispensation of justice for all.

Sixth

Parasol of Fabric, matching the Imam’s ceremonial attire & Robe. This represents Imam’s Divinely Ordained Authority

Seventh

A Farman given by the Imam to the congregation (Guidance and blessings). This Is for and to be relayed to all Ismaili Muslims.

The following renewal and reaffirmation of allegiance were given to the Imam of the Time during Jubilees and the change of Imam – Takth Nashini

as on 11 Feb 2025<sup>5</sup>

“Oh Imam e Zaman, We and the Jamat all over the world stand before you, and we make these solemn pledges;

- 1           We pledge our unreserved spiritual allegiance.
- 2           We pledge our absolute loyalty and we submit to you as our Imam, Pir, and Murshid to lead us along siratul mustaquim
- 3           We pledge and submit our entire love devotion and dedication
- 4           We pledge our obedience, Oh bearer of true authority in direct succession to Prophet Muhammed Hazrat Ali and Bibi Fatima (PBUT)
- 5           We pledge to extend our unreserved and unconditional support to all your endeavours for the Jamat’s spiritual and material progress, and wellbeing
- 6           We pledge our total support for your work in the cause of Islam, our faith of peace love compassion and human dignity.”

(These were given by the appointed Chairman who also presented a Scroll of these affirmations to the Imam) (GJ - LIF speech at start of GJ)

These religious prayers were performed at the start of the Golden Jubilee (and of the Diamond Jubilee)

During other Deedars in Diamond Jubilee, Hazar Imam comes to the religious hall where there is a special suite, to change into ceremonial attire. The following are the Deedar prayers Which are then performed.

1. Recitation of Religious Invocations & Prayers
2. Ginan recitation
3. Recitation of Quran - few verses
4. Farman - blessings and guidance given by Imam
5. mehmanis and Abe Shifa offerings prayers and blessings from Imam
6. Nazrana- collective offering for blessings and guidance to the Imam
7. Farman - blessings and Guidance from Imam

## 8. Recitation of Religious invocations & prayers

### Meaning of Deedars



Deedar DJ fnl 4 nov  
17.pdf

Joined: Mon Jan 13, 2014 7:01 pm

### [Authority -Inclusive Governance Fatimid empire-rise & fa](#)

- [Quote](#)

[Post](#) by [maheubchatur](#) » Sat Jul 04, 2020 12:38 am

The Fatimid empire was successful and flourished because of the guidance (Farman's) of the Ismaili Imams (Caliphs-Rulers), which were inclusive & plural. Most importantly these were followed & implemented by Leaders (Vazirs). Today this title is given by Imam (#AgaKhan)

There was freedom to practice religion, for Muslim Sects, (Ummah) & other faiths. Shia Ismaili Muslims, were, and remained a very small minority, during their rule of about 200 years.

Over time, division tribalism, and corruption increased within the Leadership, elites and the army. That progressively led to the downfall of the Fatimid rule-dynasty. It was not the inclusive Farman's (directions) of Imams, but their effective implementation by Leaders/Army

The Ismaili Dawa (Dais) were not able to bridge the increasing division which was driven & motivated by greed & corruption.

"...Pluralist ethos in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire was not without its challenges. One example was the recurring conflict between key stakeholders in the Fatimid court, notably the maghariba (western Berber troops) and the mashariqa (eastern Turkish soldiers). Not surprisingly, this factionalism came in the way of effective governance. It

was to contribute to the eventual dissipation of Fatimid sovereignty, which yielded in 1171 CE to the Ayyubid dynasty, with its less inclusive ways of governance. Yet the cosmopolitan culture that was engendered during the quarter-millennial reign of the Fatimids fed a vibrant social and intellectual discourse which echoed long after across the Mediterranean and beyond.” (Institute of Ismaili Studies - S Jiwa)

Link Pluralism<sup>11</sup>

### [Authority -Inclusive Governance Fatimid empire-rise & fa](#)

[Post](#) by [maheubchatur](#) » Sat Jul 04, 2020 12:39 am

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The Ismaili Dawa (Dais) were not able to bridge the increasing division which was driven & motivated by greed & corruption.

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quarter-millennial reign of the Fatimids fed a vibrant social and intellectual discourse which echoed long after across the Mediterranean and beyond.” (Institute of Ismaili Studies - S Jiwa) link <https://prod-static-iis.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/746009.pdf>

[Top](#)

[mahebubchatur](#)

[Post](#) by [mahebubchatur](#) » Mon Apr 19, 2021 10:34 pm

### **ISMAILIS SEND THEIR PRAYERS TO AND THROUGH THEIR IMAM WHOSE DIVINELY ORDAINED APPOINTMENT & AUTHORITY COMES FROM PROPHET MUHAMMED & ALLAH - QURAN**

The light (Nur) of every Imam & Prophet in the past is one, & the same.

“I have been the bearer of the "NOOR" a word which means "The Light" The NOOR has been handed down in direct descent from the Prophet. But My work and responsibilities overflow into the practical side of life.” (Aga Khan)

Ismailis give their allegiance (Bayah) to Imam and believe in the Unity & Oneness of Allah (Shahada & Tawhid). These are a part of sending their prayers to Imam and through them to Allah. Imam Prays to Allah for the believers, and guides them by giving the Tawil and Talim of the Quran-Allah. AS Prophet Mohammed did (Quran - Hadiths)

Sending prayers to Imams, like to Prophet Mohammed, and to obey Prophet Mohammed, & Quran, is what Allah has ordained in the Quran. Prophet Mohammed confirmed and declared appointment of Imam Ali.

Many misinterpret and or misunderstand sending of prayers to Ismaili Imams

\* enlightenment knowledge & Intellect (Tawil & Talim from Quran - Allah)

Links/ref

- a) <http://www.ismaili.net/html/modules.php ... pic&t=9411>.
- b) <http://www.ismaili.net/html/modules.php ... pic&t=9224>
- c) Video Clip – Deedar Congregation and Farman  
<https://twitter.com/chaturmahebub/statu ... 83940?s=12>
- d) Related Quran verses 9.103 , 4.64 3.59 48.10
- e) Interview 12 Dec 1965 <http://www.ismaili.net/intervue/651212.html>

Post 2 June 2021 [Re: Sending Prayers to Prophet Mohammed and Imams](#)

#### **17.Aga Khan Copyright lawsuit**

- a. Link to the Book by M Chatur [copyright lawsuit book size calibri font fnl no covers 20 may 2019fnl](#)

#### **18.Bayah – By Ismaili Gnosis**

**Why do Ismailis offer Bay'ah to the Imam of the Time?**



*Bay'ah* is the spiritual contract or covenant that every Ismaili Muslim or *murid* has made with the Ismaili Imam of the Time. *Bay'ah* gives the *murid* the right to access the Imam's teachings, guidance, blessings, and spiritual medicine, and the *Jamatkhanah* is the private space where the Imam makes these available to his *murids*. The *bay'ah*, an Arabic word which means "buying/selling", is a two-way contract that includes a commitment from the *murid* and a commitment from the Imam. Thus, the *bay'ah* between the *murid* and the Imam is a spiritual "transaction" or "contract" in which the *murid* commits his allegiance, devotion, and obedience in exchange for the Imam's spiritual guidance, intercession, blessings, and purification – in this world and in the afterlife.

*You perform bay'ah, but you must first understand it's meaning and then offer bay'ah. When you offer me bay'ah it means that you extend your hand to me with a promise...He who obeys me and promises to follow me after offering me bay'ah I also give him my promise that I shall hold his hand in the Hereafter. The trials and tribulations of the Day of Judgment are very frightening and painful. I will keep him away from this.*

*– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, (Manjewadi, October 31, 1903, quoted in Kamaluddin Ali, Practices and Ceremonies)*

The act of *bay'ah* indicates that a person accepts the Ismaili Imam as his or her spiritual master and guide:

*It is incumbent upon the parents that they should first make their children my murid through the performance of bay'ah... Those who have not offered bay'ah they have not signed to accept our faith. Just as you sign on an agreement in your business and in other dealings, similarly, through bay'ah, I take signature from your soul.*

– Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, (Kutch Nagalpur, November 27, 1903)

Bay'ah as a religious practice goes back to the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an mentions it in numerous verses (48:10, 16:91, 48:18, and 60:12) in which the believers give bay'ah to the Prophet Muhammad when they become his followers or reaffirm their loyalty to him. In Qur'an 48:10 – referring to the Believer's placing their hands under the Prophet Muhammad's hands in the act of bay'ah, the Qur'an states that "the Hand of God is upon their hands." This is significant because in physical terms, it was the Prophet Muhammad's hand which was placed upon the hands of the Believers. But the Qur'an attributed to entire affair to God.

The Qur'an stipulates that the Prophet should only provide guidance, blessings, and intercession to people after they give him their bay'ah. The Ismailis have continued this Qur'anic protocol of bay'ah throughout their history:

*The custom of meeting in closed sessions, at specially designated places, to learn about and practice their own interpretations of faith, has been part of the Ismaili tradition from pre-Fatimid times. During the Fatimid period, the Ismailis used to participate in majalis al-hikma (sessions of wisdom), which were accessible only to those who had pledged their allegiance to the Imam-of-the-time.*

– Karim Jiwani, (Muslim Spaces of Piety and Worship, [Read at IIS Website](#))



## 19. Bayah - Imam of the time on 11 February 2025<sup>1</sup>

By Ismaili Gnosis

On Tuesday February 11, 2025, the global Ismaili Jamat will collectively offer *bay'ah* to the new Imam of the Time, Mawlana Shah Rahim al-Husayni Aga Khan V during a special Takht-Nishini ceremony.



***Bay'ah*** is the spiritual contract or covenant that every Ismaili Muslim or *murid* makes with each [Ismaili Imam of the Time](#). When a *murid* offers *bay'ah* to the Imam, they formally accept the permanent spiritual bond that exists between the Imam and the *murid*. In Ismaili history, the act of *bay'ah* is also known as *'ahd* (oath) and *mithaq* (covenant). *Bay'ah* gives the *murid* the right to access the Imam's *farmans*, guidance, blessings, and spiritual medicine, and the *Jamatkhanah* is the private space where the Imam makes these available to his *murids*. The *bay'ah*, a word which means "buying/selling," is a two-way contract that includes a commitment from the *murid* and a commitment from the Imam.

“It is incumbent upon the parents that they should first make their children my *murid* through the performance of *bay’ah*... Those who have not offered *bay’ah* they have not signed to accept our faith. **Just as you sign on an agreement in your business and in other dealings, similarly, through *bay’ah*, I take signature from your soul.**”

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,  
(Kutch Nagalpur, November 27, 1903, quoted in Kamaluddin Ali, *Practices and Ceremonies*, 71)

*Bay’ah* as a religious practice goes back to the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad and the Qur’an mentions it in numerous verses (48:10, 16:91, 48:18, and 60:12) in which the believers give *bay’ah* to the [Prophet Muhammad](#) when they become his followers or reaffirm their loyalty to him. The Qur’an stipulates that the Prophet should only provide guidance, blessings, and intercession to people after they give him their *bay’ah*.

One of the earliest descriptions of *bay’ah* in Ismaili history can be found in the pre-Fatimid text *The Master and the Disciple*. In this work, an Ismaili *Da’i* (‘the Knower’) on behalf of the Imam of the Time facilitates the *bay’ah* of a new Ismaili *murid* (‘the young man’) as follows:

**‘There is a key to religion,’ the Knower began, ‘which renders it either sacred or profane, like the difference between marriage and fornication.’**

‘Surely that key you have mentioned must be extraordinary in God’s sight,’ remarked the young man, ‘if it is what distinguishes between the sacred and the profane, between truth and falsehood! So, what is it?’

‘That is *the pact of God* (13:20, 33:15, etc.) which confirms His rights, encompasses His obligations and safeguards *His friends* (10:62-64); *the rope of God* (3:103) upon His earth and His guarantee of security among His creatures,’ said the Knower. ‘I shall repeat (that oath) to you and impose its obligation on you.’

‘Yes,’ said the young man. ‘Ask (of me) whatever you would like. I am not hesitant about your opinion, nor will I violate your tradition.’

The narrator continued: **So, the Knower began to recite the oath to the young man, and he slowly repeated it and bound himself by it. The young man couldn't control himself because of his emotions, and his tears were streaming down because of the intensity of that moment, until (the Knower) brought him to the end of the oath.** So, he praised God and glorified Him and gave thanks for all that had reached him, knowing with certainty that he was henceforth part of the *party of God* (5:56; 58:22) and the party of *God's friends* because he had accepted the obligations of their oath.

Sayyidna Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman, *The Master and the Disciple*, 78-79

According to Ismaili teachings, it is obligatory for Ismaili *murids* to give *bay'ah* to the new Imam of the Time after he succeeds to the office of Imamat:

"From the time of Hazrat 'Ali and Prophet Muhammad this ritual of offering *bay'ah* continues. Even at that time people were becoming *murids*. **This is the rule in this Satpanth Ismaili *tariqah* that each *murid* must once offer *bay'ah* to the new Imam.** Each new Imam must be offered *bay'ah* at least once in life. It is up to the *murids* if they wish to offer *bay'ah* more than once to the Imam."

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,  
(Kutch Nagalpur, November 27, 1903, quoted in Kamaluddin Ali, *Practices and Ceremonies*, 70)

Thus, the *bay'ah* between the *murid* and the Imam is a spiritual "transaction" or "contract" in which the *murid* commits his [allegiance, devotion, and obedience \(walayah\)](#) in exchange for the Imam's spiritual guidance, intercession, blessings, and purification – in this world and in the afterlife. The *bay'ah* includes the explicit promise to steadfastly follow the *Farman's* of the Imam of the Time.

"You perform *bay'ah*, but you must first understand it's meaning and then offer *bay'ah*. **When you offer me *bay'ah* it means that you extend your hand to me with a promise. The promise is that during your lifetime my *Farman* will be around your neck and you will obey me. Like a rope around your neck, keep my *Farman's* around your neck with**

**intelligence.** Only understanding this and being content is not enough, you should also understand the meaning of this act and the *Farman*. But if you forget the meaning of this act and the *Farman*, then what is the use of doing this work? When you do this work then do realize that you have given your promise to your master that as long as you are alive you will not go out of my *Farman*. He who offers *bay'ah* with such intentions I will not abandon him in the next world. I also give him my words. I never break my promise. If you never go out of my *Farman* only then I give you, my words. He who obeys me and promises to follow me after offering me *bay'ah* I also give him my promise that I shall hold his hand in the Hereafter. **The trials and tribulations of the Day of Judgment are very frightening and painful. I will keep him away from this."**

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,  
(Manjewadi, October 31, 1903, quoted in Kamaluddin Ali, *Practices and Ceremonies*, 68-69)

*"Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV is the 49th hereditary Imam of the Shi'i Ismaili Muslims. By defining himself as the hereditary Imam of the Ismailis, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni claims the following roles and status:*

- ***the holder of a divinely-ordained leadership office***, called the *Imamat*, which succeeds to the spiritual and moral authority of the Prophet Muhammad
- ***responsible for providing an infallible interpretation of Islam*** with respect to any time/context of human history and with respect to the esoteric meaning of the Revelation to Muhammad.
- ***the spiritual intercessor/intermediary between humanity and God*** with respect to divine guidance, authority, blessings and purification (the Prophet himself performed this function)
- ***the direct descendant of Prophet Muhammad through an unbroken line of descent*** going back to Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (the paternal cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad) and the Prophet's daughter Hazrat Fatimah al-Zahra.

*A pivotal issue discussed today among both Ismailis and non-Ismailis is the question of “proof” for the Imamate of Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV. In general, there are several ways or methods of establishing evidence to prove that the Aga Khan’s claim to Imamate is true and legitimate. Ismaili Gnosis’ contemporary reconstruction of the traditional “Proof of Imamate” is as follows:” Ismaili Gnosis Full Article below*

## **20.The Aga Khan’s Direct Descent from Prophet Muhammad: Historical Proof**

**By Ismaili Gnosis Jul 09, 2016**

“I am the 49th hereditary Imam in direct lineal descent from the first Shia Imam, Hazrat ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib through his marriage to Bibi Fatimat-az-Zahra, our beloved Prophet’s daughter.”

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,  
(Letter to International Islamic Conference, Amman, July 2005, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

**The purpose of this article is to present the independent historical documentation that proves (as far as the historical method can show) that Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni is the direct lineal descendant of Prophet Muhammad and Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib in an unbroken line of descent.**





Today there are many Muslims known as Sayyids and Shariffs who claim direct descent from Prophet Muhammad. The “proof” that a Sayyid or Shariff family provides for their lineage usually consists of just a family tree. Sometimes, a small village or community or scholar(s) also testify to the Sayyid’s or Shariff’s lineage. But beyond the family tree, the Sayyids and Shariffs do not offer any more evidence. In comparison, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni has a full family tree of his ancestry (the 49 Imams) – which appears in numerous centuries-old Ismaili texts from Persia, Central Asia, and India. Secondly, in addition to the family tree, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni and each of his ancestors have had an Ismaili community in every generation that testifies to and recognizes their Fatimid ‘Alid lineage. Thirdly, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni’s lineage can be independently historically corroborated through third-party historical documentation (centuries-old texts, documents, tombstones, genealogy trees, treatises, histories, etc.), much of which has been produced by non-Ismailis. **Much of this independent historical documentation for each generation of the lineage of 49 Ismaili Imams is presented and summarized in this article. The article provides a historical summary of the life of each of the 49 Imams and lists the major primary historical sources that mention the existence of each Imam in the lineage up to the present day, followed by citing the academic secondary studies that document these primary sources.** This is the first article that presents a historical documentation of

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayn's lineage and we reference major academic publications on Ismaili history throughout. Before going into the historical documentation of the Imam's lineage, we will first present a theological "proof" of Shah Karim al-Husayni's Imamatus that does not require independent historical documentation for the Imam's entire lineage.

### **A. The Theological Proof of the Imamatus**

The Muslims are divided into two main branches: the Shia Muslims and the Sunni Muslims. I suppose one could compare it to the division in the Christian Church between Protestants and Catholics. The main difference is that the Shi'a accept the members of the Prophet's family as the rightful successors to the Prophet in his religious heritage...My family and myself trace our family line back to the Prophet and are accepted therefore by the community as the Imams.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,  
(Pacemakers – A Man of the World: The Aga Khan 1967, Read  
at [NanoWisdoms](#))

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV is the 49th hereditary Imam of the Shi'i Ismaili Muslims. By defining himself as the hereditary Imam of the Ismailis, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni claims the following roles and status:

- **the holder of a divinely-ordained leadership office**, called the Imamatus, which succeeds to the spiritual and moral authority of the Prophet Muhammad
- **responsible for providing an infallible interpretation of Islam** with respect to any time/context of human history and with respect to the esoteric meaning of the Revelation to Muhammad.
- **the spiritual intercessor/intermediary between humanity and God** with respect to divine guidance, authority, blessings and purification (the Prophet himself performed this function)
- **the direct descendant of Prophet Muhammad through an unbroken line of descent** going back to Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (the paternal cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad) and the Prophet's daughter Hazrat Fatimah al-Zahra.

A pivotal issue discussed today among both Ismailis and non-Ismailis is the question of "proof" for the Imamatus of Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV. In general, there are several ways or methods of establishing evidence to

prove that the Aga Khan's claim to Imamatus is true and legitimate. Ismaili Gnosis' contemporary reconstruction of the traditional "Proof of Imamatus" is as follows:

### **A. Establishing the Existence of God and the Revelation to Prophet Muhammad:**

**Step 1:** There is one absolutely transcendent and eternal God who originates and continuously sustains all realities ([Read a Proof for God's Existence](#)).

**Step 2:** God continually bestows divine guidance upon all created beings; there is always at least one divinely-inspired human being in every generation who, by this divine inspiration, comprehends ALL of God's guidance for human wellbeing and communicates this guidance to humanity; Prophet Muhammad was the possessor and transmitter of divine guidance during his lifetime and the Qur'an, which is inimitable and miraculous speech, is the outward public sign of his divine inspiration ([Read the Proof of Muhammad's Prophethood](#)). For evidence that Prophet Muhammad was a real historical figure and that the Qur'an as it exists today contains his utterances, [Read the Historical Evidence for Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an](#).

**Step 3:** Prophet Muhammad's spiritual functions and duties, as laid out in the Qur'an, include being: the holder of divine authority on God's behalf, the mediator and intercessor between God and humanity, the channel of God's blessings, favours, and purification, and the locus of manifestation of God's names and attributes; by logical necessity, there must be a divinely-inspired successor to the Prophet's religious authority and spiritual functions that he performed over his 23 year mission ([Read on Muhammad's Special Theological Status per the Qur'an](#)).

### **B. Establishing Hereditary Imamatus in the progeny of Prophet Muhammad and Imam 'Ali:**

**Step 4:** Prophet Muhammad's successors must be divinely-appointed from his family and line of descendants, just as God appointed the successors of past Prophets and Messengers discussed in the Qur'an, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Imran, Zakariyyah, etc. from among their family members and descendants ([Read on the Qur'anic Concept of Hereditary Leadership & Succession in Prophets' Families](#)).

**Step 5:** Prophet Muhammad appointed his paternal cousin and son-in-law 'Ali



ibn Abi Talib to be his successor as the master of all the believers after him ([Read the Proof that Prophet Muhammad Appointed Imam 'Ali as his Successor](#)).

**C. Establishing the Imamatus of the lineage of Isma'il ibn Ja'far al-Sadiq and Nizar ibn al-Mustansir:**

**Step 6:** Among the descendants of Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the succession to the Prophet or the Imamatus, continues in the line of Isma'il ibn Ja'far al-Sadiq ([Read Seven Arguments for the Succession of Imam Isma'il](#)).

**Step 7:** Among the descendants of Imam Isma'il ibn Ja'far al-Sadiq, the Imamatus continues through Nizar ibn al-Mustansir because Nizar was officially designated as the Imam by his father Imam Mustansir bi'llah (as attested to in multiple historical sources including Nuwayri, Ibn Athir, Maqrizi, etc. and academic studies, viz. Daftary, Walker, Wiley, Fyzee, etc.).

**D. Establishing the Imamatus of Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan:**

**Step 8:** *If* the hereditary Imamatus in the progeny of Prophet Muhammad and Imam 'Ali is true, and *if* this hereditary Imamatus was designated to the line of Isma'il ibn Ja'far and Nizar ibn al-Mustansir, **then, the true Imam in any given period of human history must claim and trace his descent and Imamatus from both Isma'il ibn Ja'far and Nizar ibn al-Mustansir.** Consequently, any Imamatus claimant who does not trace his Imamatus to both Isma'il ibn Ja'far and Nizar ibn al-Mustansir is not the true Imam.

**Step 9:** In the present day and time, Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV is [the only claimant to the Imamatus](#) who traces and claims his Imamatus from both Isma'il ibn Ja'far and Nizar ibn al-Mustansir. Meanwhile the hidden Imam of the Ithna 'Ashari Shi'a descended from Musa Kazim instead Isma'il, and the concealed Imam of the Bohras descended from Must'ali instead of Nizar. Neither the Ithna 'Ashari nor the Bohra Imams claimed their respective Imamatus through both Isma'il ibn Ja'far and Nizar ibn al-Mustansir.



**Step 10:** Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV, the only claimant to the Imamate who traces his lineage through both Isma'il ibn Ja'far and Nizar ibn al-Mustansir, is the true and legitimate Imam in direct lineal descent from Prophet Muhammad and Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.

### Related Questions about Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV and Ismaili Doctrine:

- To learn about the personal life and daily schedule of the Aga Khan, including the many sacrifices he has made in performing the duties of the Imamate, read [here](#).

- To see how Ismaili Muslims understand Tawhid (the Oneness of God), read [here](#).
- To understand the concept and basis of Ismaili Muslim interpretation (*ta'wil*) of the Qur'an, read [here](#).
- To understand why Ismaili Muslim prayers seek the help and blessings of the Imams, read [here](#).
- To get an idea of the 1,400 year history of persecution faced by the Ismaili Imams and the Ismaili communities, read [here](#).

Please note that the above proof does not require you to independently historically corroborate the Aga Khan's claim to direct lineal descent from Prophet Muhammad. Once it is established theologically that there must always be a hereditary Imam in the world from the direct lineal descent of Prophet Muhammad (whose descendants only come through Imam 'Ali), it is simply a matter of confirming who the legitimate holder of this Imamat actually is – since it is not possible for the line of Imamat to just cease to exist. The above proof only requires you to historically corroborate and substantiate the specific Imamat designation of Isma'il ibn Ja'far and Nizar ibn al-Mustansir by their own fathers. Once these two designations are historically substantiated (which they are as per all the historical evidence), then the true Imam at any time (and this Imam always physically exists in the world) will always be a descendant of both Isma'il and Nizar. **Because there is only one person claiming Imam at the line of both Isma'il and Nizar and no other person in the world makes a counter-claim to the same Imam lineage, it logically follows that this one claimant – Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV – is the true Imam by logical necessity.** (If there were two or more claimants to the Ismaili-Nizari Imam, then the matter would be more complicated – but this is not the case). From this proof, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni's Imam becomes established without the need to independently corroborate and confirm every single generation in his unbroken lineage back to Prophet Muhammad.

Nevertheless, for those who do not like “theological demonstration” and prefer **a purely historical approach to the Ismaili Imam's lineage**, the historical documentation for the unbroken Fatimid 'Alid lineage of Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan is presented below.

## **B. The Historical Proof for Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni's Unbroken Fatimid Lineage**

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni consistently makes the public claim that he comes from an unbroken lineage of hereditary Imams going back to Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. For example, the following quotes from the Imam's speeches and interviews (and those of his grandfather) present this claim:

Our family claims direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and his beloved son-in-law Ali: and we are also descended from the Fatimite Caliphs of Egypt.

(Memoirs of the Aga Khan, 1954, 7)

This Imamatus, which was Hazrat 'Ali's, descended through him in the sixth generation to Isma'il from whom I myself claim my descent and my Imamatus.

(Memoirs of the Aga Khan, 1954, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

I have been the bearer of the "Nur" a word which means "The Light". The Nur has been handed down in direct descent from the Prophet.

(1965: The Sunday Times Interview, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

My family and myself trace our family line back to the Prophet and are accepted therefore by the community as the Imams.

(1967: Documentary – Pacemakers: A Man of the World, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

Ismailis are Shi'ite Muslims and my family descends from Ali. I am the forty-ninth Imam after him.

(1975: L'Expansion Interview, Roger Priouret, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

There is a living Imam who traces his family back to Hazrat Ali.

(1985: Independent Television (ITV) Interview, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

Ismailis are united by a common allegiance to the living hereditary Imam of the time in the progeny of Islam's last and final Prophet Muhammad.

(2005: The Delegation of the Ismaili Imamatus Foundation Stone Ceremony, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

I am the 49th hereditary Imam in direct lineal descent from the first Shia Imam, Hazrat Ali ibn Abi Talib through his marriage to Bibi Fatimat-az-Zahra, our beloved Prophet's daughter."

(2005: Message to The International Islamic Conference, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

I was born into a Muslim family, linked by heredity to Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him and his family).

(2007: Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris (Sciences Po), Graduation Ceremony, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

The leadership is hereditary, handed down by Ali's descendants, and the Ismailis are the only Shi'a Muslims to have a living Imam, namely myself...It is the presence of the living Imam that makes our Imamatus unique.

(2010: Interview – The Power of Wisdom, Read at [Simerg](#))

Today the Ismailis are the only Shia community who, throughout history, have been led by a living, hereditary Imam in direct descent from the Prophet.

(2014: Speech to Canadian Parliament & Senate, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

The Ismailis are the only Muslim community that has been led by a living, hereditary Imam in direct descent from Prophet Muhammad.

(2015: Harvard University Jodidi Lecture, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

For each Imam, this article offers some information about their life and then lists the major primary historical sources and sometimes archaeological sources that document the existence of that Imam. **In general, this article summarizes historical documentation that confirms the historical existence of each of the 49 Imams in Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni's unbroken lineage to Prophet Muhammad.** We have divided the history of the 49 Ismaili Imams into the below **ten periods**. Readers can *click* on each period or skip to a specific Imam, or they may scroll and skim through each Imam in historical order.

### **1. The Period of the Early Shi'i Imams:**

Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib (632-661); Imam al-Husayn (661-680); Imam 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin (680-713); Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (713-743); Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (743-765); Imam Isma'il b. Ja'far (765-ca. 775); Imam Muhammad b. Isma'il

(775-ca.806)

## **2. The Pre-Fatimid (First) Period of Concealment:**

Imam ‘Abdullah b. Muhammad al-Wafi (ca. 806-828); Imam Ahmad b. ‘Abdullah al-Ta’i (828-ca. 870); Imam al-Husayn b. ‘Ahmad al-Radi (ca. 870-ca. 880-81)

## **3. The Fatimid Period of the Imam-Caliphs:**

Imam al-Mahdi bi’llah (881-934); Imam al-Qa’im bi-amr Allah (934-946); Imam al-Mansur bi’llah (946-953); Imam al-Mu’izz li-Din Allah (953-975); Imam al-‘Aziz bi’llah (975-996); Imam al-Hakim bi-amr Allah (996-1021); Imam al-Zahir li-‘izaz Din Allah (1021-1036); Imam al-Mustansir bi’llah (1036-1094); Imam Nizar al-Mustafa Din Allah (1094-1095)

## **4. The Post-Fatimid (Second) Period of Concealment:**

Imam al-Hadi (1095 – ca. 1132); Imam Muhammad al-Muhtadi (ca. 1132-ca. 1161-62); Imam al-Qahir (ca. 1161–ca. 1164)

## **5. The Alamut Period in Persia:**

Imam Hasan ‘ala-dhikrihi al-salam (1164-1166); Imam ‘Ala Muhammad (1166-1210); Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan (1210-1221); Imam ‘Ala’ al-Din Muhammad (1221-1255); Imam Rukn al-Din Khurshah (1255-1257)

## **6. The Post-Alamut (Third) Period of Concealment:**

Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad (1257-1310);  
Imam Qasimshah (1310-1368); Imam Islamshah (1368-1424); Imam Muhammad b. Islamshah (1424-1464)

## **7. The Anjudan Period of Revival:**

Imam Mustansir bi’llah II (1464-1480); Imam ‘Abd al-Salam Shah (1480-1494); Imam Gharib Mirza Mustansir bi’llah III (1494-1498)

## **8. The Safavid Period (Fourth) Period of Concealment:**

Imam Abu Dharr ‘Ali (1498 – ca. 1509); Imam Murad Mirza (ca. 1509-1574); Imam Dhu’l-Faqar ‘Ali Khalil Allah I (1574-1634); Imam Nur al-Din ‘Ali (1634-1671); Imam Khalil Allah II (1671-1680); Imam Shah Nizar II (1680-1722); Imam Sayyid ‘Ali (1722-1754)

## **9. The Post-Safavid Period of Re-Emergence:**

Imam Hasan ‘Ali (ca. 1736-ca. 1747); Imam Qasim ‘Ali (ca. 1747-ca. 1756); Imam Abu’l-Hasan ‘Ali (ca. 1756-1792); Imam Khalil Allah III (1792-1817)

## **10. The Modern Age of the Aga Khans:**

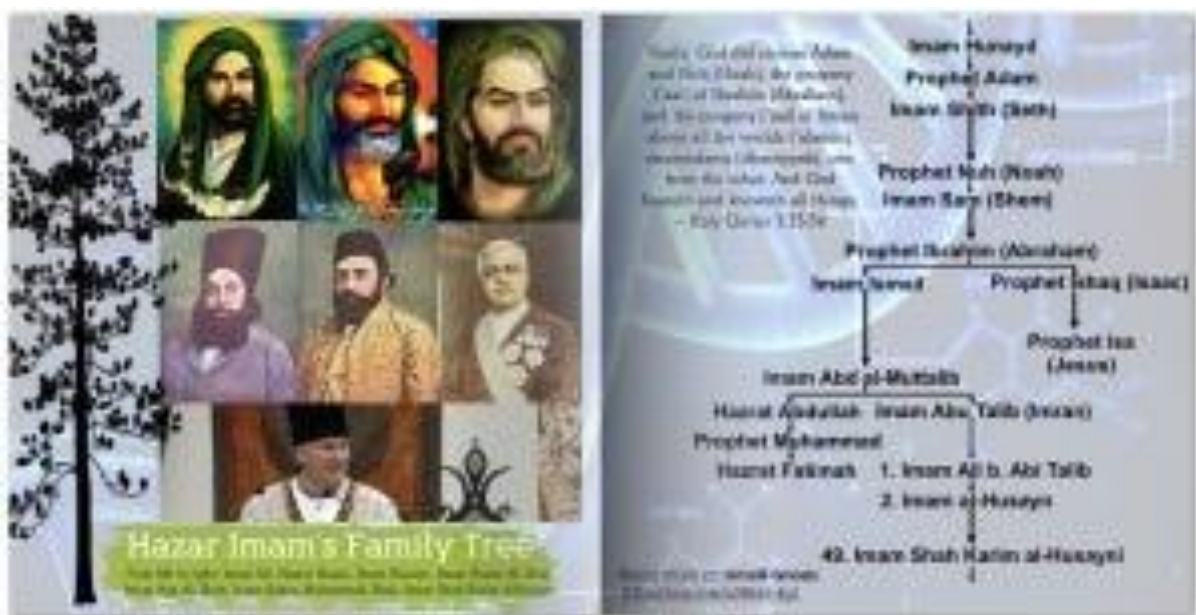
Imam Hasan ‘Ali Shah Aga Khan I (1817-1881); Imam Aqa ‘Ali Shah Aga Khan II



(1881-1885); Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III (1885-1957); Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV (1957-present)

Please note that out of the 49 Ismaili Imams, **at least 11 Imams were killed or murdered [along with many family members]** (Imam 'Ali, Imam al-Husayn, Imam al-Hakim, Imam Nizar, Imam Hasan ala-dhikrihi al-salam, Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad, Imam Rukn al-Din Kurshah, Imam Qasimshah, Imam Murad Mirza, Imam Khalil Allah III), **3 Imams are suspected to have been murdered** (Imam Zayn al-Abidin, Imam al-Baqir, Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq), **1 Imam survived an assassination attempt** (Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah), and **8 Imams faced the prospect of being killed** (i.e. in combat, execution), and 18 Imams lived under persecution. **This means a total of at least 44 out of 49 Imams, that is 88% of the Ismaili Imams, lived through considerable danger and only about 5 Imams have lived in total safety.** Inevitably, this means that many of the Imams had to conceal themselves from the public for their own safety and continuation of the Imamate lineage. Thus, some Imams' lives are better documented than others and for many Imams there is little available on their life events. However, as you will see, there are historical sources testifying to the specific existence of the more clandestine Imams as well.

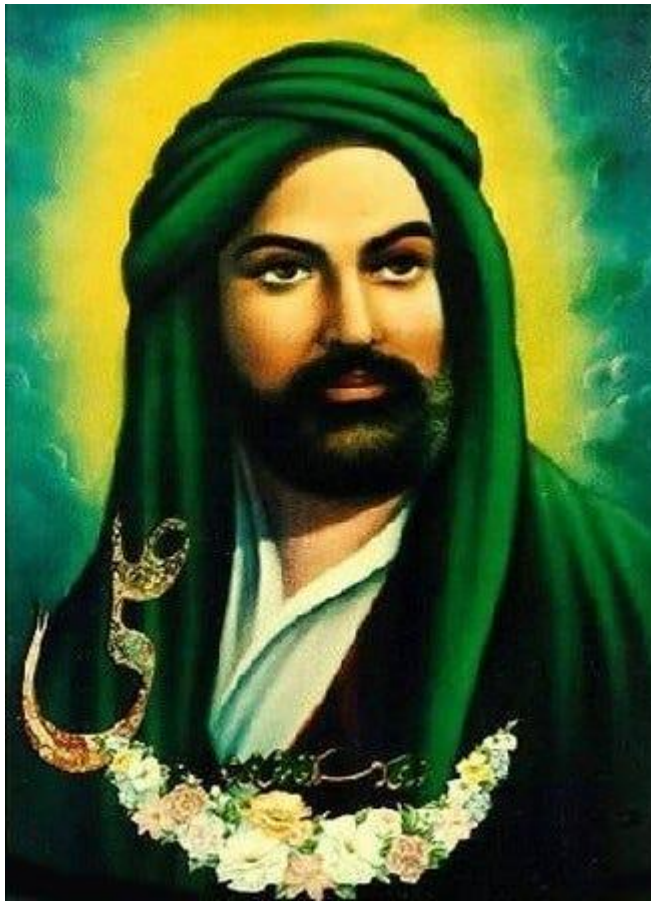
## 1. The Period of the Early Shi'i Imams:



Shi'ites believe that the religious authority of the Muslims goes back to Ali, who was the nephew of Muhammad and also his son-in-law. This authority has descended through Ali's descendants on the male side. Among the Shi'ite Muslims there have been controversies over the genealogy and the true succession over the centuries. Ismailis are Shi'ite Muslims and my family descends from Ali. I am the forty-ninth Imam after him.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,  
(L'Expansion Interview March 1975, Read at NanoWisdoms)

**1. Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib (632-661):**



I swear by the Lord that I know fully well all the messages of God that the Holy Prophet (may the peace of God be upon him and his descendants) has received, the ways of fulfilment of promises made by God and of all the



knowledge that science or philosophy could disclose. We, the progeny of the Holy Prophet (may the peace of God be upon him and his descendants), are the doors through which real wisdom and true knowledge will reach mankind: we are lights of religion.

Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib,  
(Nahjul Balagha: Sermons, letters and saying of Hazrat Ali, tr. Jafery, Syed Mohammed Askari, Khutba 123, 91)

Both Prophet Muhammad and Imam 'Ali, according to Arabian traditions and genealogy, are the direct descendants of Prophet Abraham through his son Mawlana Isma'il (see above image). Abraham himself is the direct descendant of Prophet Adam and Prophet Noah according to Islamic and Biblical sources. Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib was the first cousin of the Prophet Muhammad – their fathers were brothers and they had the same grandfather. **Imam 'Ali later married Hazrat Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter, and their children Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Husayn were the only surviving male descendants of Muhammad.** Today, all living descendants of Prophet Muhammad trace their ancestry back to al-Hasan or al-Husayn. For example, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan traces its lineage back to Imam al-Hasan. **Today, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV is called *al-Husayni* because his ancestry and lineage goes back to Imam al-Husayn.**

Imam 'Ali rendered a number of unique and matchless services during the Prophet's mission and he was first appointed by Muhammad as his successor before the Banu Hashim clan when 'Ali was about ten years old. The Prophet designated Imam 'Ali as his successor and the legitimate authority over the community after him on several occasions (reported by numerous Sunni sources as shown [here](#)), the last of which was at Ghadeer Khum when the Prophet Muhammad proclaimed:

The Messenger of God, may God's peace and benedictions be upon him and his progeny, said: **"O people! Verily, I am leaving behind two matters (*amrayn*) among you – if you follow them (the two) you will never go astray. These two are: the Book of God and my Ahlul Bayt, my 'itrah."**

Then he said thrice: "Do you know that I have more right over the believers (inni awla bi al-mu'minin) than they over themselves?"

The people said, "Yes."

Then the Messenger of God, may God's peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny said, **"He whose *mawla* (master) I am, 'Ali also is his *mawla* (master)."**

(al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, al-Mustadrak 'ala al-Sahihayn [Dar al-Ma'rifah li al-Tiba'ah wa al-Nashr: Beirut), vol. iii, pp. 109-110; For Sunni sources reporting this, see [here](#))

Following the death of Prophet Muhammad, Shi'i and Sunni Muslims came to differ about the nature of religious authority and its legitimate possessors. Imam 'Ali claimed to be the rightful temporal and religious leader after the Prophet despite the political authority being assumed by Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and later Uthman. **Even some of Imam 'Ali's early followers regarded him as "an absolute and divinely guided leader who could demand of them the same kind of loyalty that would have been expected for the Prophet"** (Maria Masse Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*, 57). For example, one of Ali's supporters who was also devoted to the Prophet said to him: "our opinion is your opinion and we are in the palm of your right hand" (Dakake 58). The early followers of 'Ali saw his guidance as "right guidance" deriving from Divine support. In other words, 'Ali's guidance was seen as the expression of God's will and the Qur'anic message. The expression Din 'Ali (the religion of 'Ali) was also used during his own lifetime by his followers. **This spiritual and religious authority of 'Ali was known as *walayah* and it was inherited by his successors, the Imams.** Imam 'Ali eventually became the fourth Caliph during which he faced great opposition from the A'isha, the Prophet's wife and the Umayyad family led by Mu'awiyah, which led to the first civil wars. Imam 'Ali was murdered by a Kharijite while he prayed in the mosque of Kufa.

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Ibn Ishaq (704-770), *Sirat Rasul Allah*, original copy lost but extracts preserved in Ibn Hisham (d. 833), *al-Sirat al-Nabawiyyah*, and al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari*
- Kumayt (d. 743), *al-Hashimiyyat*
- Malik b. Anas (711-795), *Muwatta Imam Malik*
- Ibn Sa'd (784-845), *Kitab Tabaqat al-Kubra*
- Ahmad b. Hanbal (780-855), *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*
- Muhammad b. Ismail al-Bukhari (810-870), *Sahih Bukhari*

- Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (821-875), *Sahih Muslim*
- Al-Masudi (896-956), *Muruj al-dhahab wa ma'adin al-jawhar*
- Ahmad b. Yahya al-Baladhuri (d. 892), *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan; Ansab al-Ashraf*
- Ahmad b. Abu Yaqub al-Ya'qubi (d. 898), *Tarikh ibn Wadih*
- Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari; Tafsir al-Tabari*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 533; Arzina R. Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 132-134)

## 2. Imam al-Husayn ibn 'Ali (661-680)



This painting commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the grandson of the prophet Muhammad and the third imam, or leader, of the Shia Muslims.

Source [brooklynmuseum.org](http://brooklynmuseum.org).

God gave preference to Muḥammad before all His creatures. He graced him with prophethood and chose him for His message. After he had warned His servants and informed them of what he had been sent with, God took him for Himself. **We are his family (*ahlihi*), those who possess his authority (*awliya'*), those who have been made his trustees (*awsiya'*), and his inheritors (*wuratha*);** we are those who have more right to this position among the people than anyone else.

Imam al-Husayn ibn 'Ali,

(al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, in Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 30)

Mu'awiya openly opposed and fought against the Caliphate of Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. After the death of Imam 'Ali, his son Pir Imam al-Hasan succeeded to the Caliphate but – due to the weakness of his support and resources – had to abdicate the Caliphate to Mu'awiya on the condition that Yazid would not succeed to the Caliphate after him. However, Mu'awiya ibn Abu Sufyan ensured that his son Yazid succeeded him as Caliph – an event which directly contradicted the agreement that Pir Imam al-Hasan had made with Mu'awiya earlier. Unlike Mu'awiya, who was unrighteous but tried to keep the appearance of dignity to the Caliphate, Yazid was an open sinner and disgraced the position by his drinking of wine and many other sinful activities. **When Yazid succeeded as Caliph, he sought to gain the allegiance of Imam al-Husayn to legitimize his succession but the Imam refused to do so.** Meanwhile, the people of Kufa invited Imam al-Husayn to lead them.



Imam al-Husayn's family and companions surrounded by an Umayyad army numbering over 40,000 troops.

The Imam and his close family and companions were journeying from Makkah to Kufa and were intercepted by the Umayyad armies sent by Yazid and surrounded at the plains of Karbala. After cutting off their water supply for

several days, the Umayyad armies engaged the Imam and his supporters in battle. **Outnumbered by an army of over twenty thousand men, Imam al-Husayn, his family, and supporters were inhumanly massacred and martyred in what became known as the Battle of Karbala.** The dead included the sons of Imām al-Ḥusayn – among them a six month old infant ‘Ali Asghar, the sons of Imam ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib, and the children of Imam al-Hasan. The only surviving male member of the Imam’s family was his son Imam ‘Ali Zayn al-‘Abidin – who was sick during the battle and saved from execution due to the intervention of [Hazrat Zaynab](#) – the sister of Imam al-Husayn.

### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Ibn Ishaq (704-770), *Sirat Rasul Allah*, original copy lost but extracts preserved in Ibn Hisham (d. 833), *al-Sirat al-Nabawiyah*, and al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari*
  - Abu Miknaf (d. 774), *Kitab Maqtal al-Husayn*
  - Malik b. Anas (711-795), *Muwatta Imam Malik*
  - Ibn Sa’d (784-845), *Kitab Tabaqat al-Kubra*
  - Ahmad b. Hanbal (780-855), *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*
  - Muhammad b. Ismail al-Bukhari (810-870), *Sahih Bukhari*
  - Muslim b. al-Hajjaj (821-875), *Sahih Muslim*
  - Al-Masudi (896-956), *Muruj al-dhahab wa ma’adin al-jawhar*
  - Ahmad b. Yahya al-Baladhuri (d. 892), *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan; Ansab al-Ashraf*
  - Ahmad b. Abu Yaqub al-Ya’qubi (d. 898), *Tarikh ibn Wadih*
  - Abu Ja’far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 533; Arzina R. Lalani, *Early Shi’i Thought*, 132-136)

### **3. Imam ‘Ali b. al-Husayn Zayn al-‘Abidin (680-713)**

It is because of us, the initiated Guides  
 That the sky does not come crashing down to earth,  
 That the beneficent rain falls from the sky  
 That mercy is spread...  
 The earth will engulf its inhabitants  
 If one of us is not upon it.

Imam ‘Ali Zayn al-‘Abidin,  
 (Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Sh’ism*, 61)



Imam ‘Ali Zayn al-‘Abidin was the only surviving male member of Imam al-Husayn’s family at Karbala. Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin lived a low-key life and stayed out of politics. He was exempt from giving allegiance to Yazid and stayed with his family in Madinah. On one occasion, this Imam went to Makkah for pilgrimage. The Ummayyad prince Hisham ibn ‘Abd al-Malik was also present and he was unable to perform the circumambulation of the Ka’bah due to the large crowd. However, when the crowd saw Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin approach, they saw his face – recognizing the light and aura of the Prophet and Mawlana ‘Ali – and respectfully moved out of the way so the Imam could walk toward the Ka’bah. On seeing this, one of Hisham’s companions exclaimed, “*who is this man?*” Hisham denied knowing who the Imam was, and on that occasion the poet al-Farazdaq approached and recited the following poem on the spot:

This is the son of Husayn and the grandson of Fatimah the daughter of the Apostle through whom the darkness dispersed.

This is he whose ability the valley (of Mecca) recognizes, He is known by the (Sacred) House and the Holy sanctuary and the lands outside the sanctuary. This is the son of the best of God’s servants.

– Al-Farazdaq, (*Diwan al-Farazdaq*, Read the Entire Poem at [Ballandalus](#))/p>

Imam ‘Ali Zayn al-‘Abidin was also known for being in continuous prayer and he composed a series of spiritual prayers called *al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyyah*. The prayers in this text also speak to the concept of Imamah, such as the supplication below:

**O God, surely Thou hast confirmed Thy religion in all times with an Imam whom Thou hast set up as a guidepost to Thy servants and lighthouse in Thy lands**, after his cord has been joined to Thy cord! Thou hast appointed him the means to Thy good pleasure, made obeying him obligatory, cautioned against disobeying him, and commanded following his commands, abandoning his prohibitions, and that no forward-goer go ahead of him or back-keeper keep back from him!

Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin, (*al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyyah*, [Read Here](#))

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- ‘Ali Zayn al-‘Abidin (d. 713), *al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyyah al-Kamilah*
- Al-Farazdaq (d. 730), *Diwan al-Farazdaq*

- Abu Miknaf (d. 774), *Kitab Maqtal al-Husayn*
  - Ibn Sa'd (784-845), *Kitab Tabaqat al-Kubra*
  - Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (821-875), *Rijal 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr*
  - Ahmad b. Yahya al-Baladhuri (d. 892), *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan; Ansab al-Ashraf*
  - Ahmad b. Abu Yaqub al-Ya'qubi (d. 898), *Tarikh ibn Wadih*
  - Al-Mubarrad (826-898), *Kitab al-Kamil*
  - Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Barqi (d. 894), *Kitab al-Mahasin*
  - Al-Saffar al-Qummi (d. 903), *Basa'ir al-Darajat*
  - Sa'd b. 'Abdullah al-Qummi (d. 911), *al-Maqalat Firqat al-Shi'ah*
  - 'Ali b. Ibrahim al-Qummi (d. 919), *Tafsir al-Qummi*
  - Al-Hasan b. Musa al-Nawbakhti (d. before 922), *Firqat al-Shi'ah*
  - Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari; Tafsir al-Tabari*
  - Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni (d. 941), *Usul al-Kafi*
  - Al-Masudi (896-956), *Muruj al-Dhahab wa Ma'adin al-Jawhar*
  - Abu Amr Muhammad b. 'Umar al-Kashshi (d. 961), *Rijal al-Kashshi (Ikhtiyar ma'rifat al-rijal)*
  - Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), *Sara'ir wa Asrar al-Nutuqa*
  - Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man (d. 974), *Da'aim al-Islam; Sharh al-Akhbar*
  - Al-Mufid (d. 1022), *Kitab al-Irshad*
  - Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 540; Arzina R. Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 132-136)

#### **4. Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (713-743)**



(Imam Muhammad al-Baqir [A.S.] teaching in Medina. Painting by Qasim Ali, ca. 1525)

We are the *hujjah* (proof) of God and His Gate. We are the tongue as well as the Face of God; we are the Eyes of God [guarding] His creation and we are the Guardians of the Divine Command (*wulat al-amr*) on earth.

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir,  
(Arzina R. Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 83)

On the death of Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, he was succeeded by Imam Muhammad al-Baqir. Imam al-Baqir was known as "*Baqir al-'ilm*" – the one who splits open



knowledge – because of his deep spiritual and religious knowledge. In al-Baqir's time, there were many other claimants to the Imamate from other Shi'i groups – including the Hasanid line, the 'Abbasid line, and the descendants of Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyyah (a third, non-Fatimid son of Imam 'Ali). In the midst of these counter-claimants to authority, Imam al-Baqir taught the key concepts of the formalized doctrine of Imamate: **the concept of *nass* (designation of one Imam by the prior Imam), which Imam al-Baqir used to prove his own Imamate against the counter-claimants; the concept of *'ilm* (spiritual knowledge) that each Imam must possess to be the Imam; the Holy Spirit (*ruh al-qudus*) which is the spiritual inspiration by which God guides and supports the intellect and soul of the Imam; the concept of *nur* (light), which is the original form of the Imams' existence before the creation of the world and which is spiritually manifest in the soul of every Imam; and the concept of *'ismah* (protection) which means the true Imam is protected by God from committing sins and errors.** Imam al-Baqir was also highly respected in Sunni Muslim scholarly circles and many Sunni hadith narrators transmitted hadiths from al-Baqir: ***"The evidence suggests that al-Baqir's position among his contemporaries was such that many scholars felt inferior to him; even the most eminent regarded him with awe and reverence on account of his outstanding knowledge"*** (Arzina Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 96). Imam al-Baqir provided commentaries on the verses of the Holy Qur'an about various subjects including *tawhid* and Imamate, through which he showed how the Qur'an in numerous places testifies to the authority of the hereditary Imams. Imam al-Baqir also gave many esoteric and spiritual teachings on metaphysics and cosmology. Imam al-Baqir would often travel in scholarly circles with his son, Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq.

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri (d. 741), in Abu al-Hajjaj Yusuf al-Mizzi (d. 743), *Tahdib al-Kamal*
- Kumayt (680-745), *Hashimiyyat*
- Malik b. Anas (711-795), *Muwatta Imam Malik*
- Ibn Sa'd (784-845), *Kitab Tabaqat al-Kubra*
- Ahmad b. Hanbal (780-855), *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*
- Ahmad b. Yahya al-Baladhuri (d. 892), *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan; Ansab al-Ashraf*
- Ahmad b. Abu Yaqub Al-Ya'qubi (d. 898), *Tarikh ibn Wadih*

- Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Barqi (d. 894), *Kitab al-Mahasin*
- Al-Saffar al-Qummi (d. 903), *Basa'ir al-Darajat*
- Sa'd b. 'Abdullah al-Qummi (d. 911), *al-Maqalat Firaq al-Shi'ah*
- 'Ali b. Ibrahim al-Qummi (d. 919), *Tafsir al-Qummi*
- Al-Hasan b. Musa al-Nawbakhti (d. before 922), *Firaq al-Shi'ah*
- Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari*; *Tafsir al-Tabari*
- Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni (d. 941), *Usul al-Kafi*
- Al-Masudi (896-956), *Muruj al-Dhahab wa Ma'adin al-Jawhar*
- Abu Amr Muhammad b. 'Umar al-Kashshi (d. 961), *Rijal al-Kashshi (Ikhtiyar ma'rifat al-rijal)*
- Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), *Sara'ir wa Asrar al-Nutuqa*
- Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man (d. 974), *Da'aim al-Islam*; *Sharh al-Akhbar*
- Al-Mufid (d. 1022), *Kitab al-Irshad*
- 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (d. 1153), *Kitab al-Milal wa'l-Nihal*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Ibn Hajar (d. 1449), *Tahdib al-Tahdib*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 536-39 Arzina R. Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 136-166)

## **5. Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (743-765)**



Portrait of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq embracing his student. Source British Library.

He who knows us knows God, and he who does not know us does not know God. It is because of us that God is known and because of us that He is worshipped. Without God, we would not be known, and without us, God would not be known.

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq,

(Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, 46)

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq succeeded his father Imam Muhammad al-Baqir to the Imamate. The first twenty-years of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq's Imamate saw a number of key events including the revolt of his uncle Zayd and the 'Abbasid overthrow of the 'Umayyads. Even when the new 'Abbasid revolution had succeeded, the 'Abbasids offered the caliphate to Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq and he rejected it, as he did not want to be a mere puppet. However, in due time, the 'Abbasid Caliphs became hostile to the Imam and his family and saw the Shi'i Imams as their rivals. **Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq devoted much of his time to teaching and**

**acquired a following of some of the best minds of his time. The Imam continued to systematize and consolidate the Imamate doctrine taught by Imam al-Baqir – including the concepts**

**of *taqiyyah*, *zahir* and *batin*, *nass*, *'ismah*, *nur*, etc.** Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq gained more prominence in the last ten years of his life because many of the 'Alid counter-claimants had been killed and their movements wiped out. Most of the Shi'ah began to rally around Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, including a diverse group of thinkers such as the famous alchemist Jabir ibn Hayyan. **Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq was also revered in Sunni circles – he was in fact the teacher of Abu Hanifa and Malik ibn Anas – the two scholars whom the Hanafi and Maliki schools of Sunni law are named after. The Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq also stressed how the Imam's knowledge and role was spiritual and not political, due to the 'ilm and the Holy Spirit that inspired the Imam's thoughts and deeds.** He also stressed the importance of *taqiyyah* – of concealing one's faith and beliefs when in danger and of the importance of keeping the *batin* hidden from the unworthy. Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq [designated his elder son Isma'il as his successor](#) to the Imamate and died in 765 – according to some reports, the Imam was poisoned on the 'Abbasid Caliph's orders.

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Malik b. Anas (711-795), *Muwatta Imam Malik*
- Ibn Sa'd (784-845), *Kitab Tabaqat al-Kubra*
- Ahmad b. Hanbal (780-855), *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*
- Ahmad b. Yahya al-Baladhuri (d. 892), *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan; Ansab al-Ashraf*
- Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Barqi (d. 894), *Kitab al-Mahasin*

- Ahmad b. Abu Yaqub al-Ya'qubi (d. 898), *Tarikh ibn Wadih*
- Al-Saffar al-Qummi (d. 903), *Basa'ir al-Darajat*
- Sa'd b. 'Abdullah al-Qummi (d. 911), *al-Maqalat Firaq al-Shi'ah*
- 'Ali b. Ibrahim al-Qummi (d. 919), *Tafsir al-Qummi*
- Al-Hasan b. Musa al-Nawbakhti (d. before 922), *Firaq al-Shi'ah*
- Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari; Tafsir al-Tabari*
- Abu'l-Hasan al-Ash'ari (847-936), *Maqalat al-Islamiyin*
- Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni (d. 941), *Usul al-Kafi*
- Al-Masudi (896-956), *Muruj al-Dhahab wa Ma'adin al-Jawhar*
- Abu Amr Muhammad b. 'Umar al-Kashshi (d. 961), *Rijal al-Kashshi (Ikhtiyar ma'rifat al-rijal)*
- Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), *Sara'ir wa Asrar al-Nutuqa*
- Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man (d. 974), *Da'aim al-Islam; Sharh al-Akhbar*
- Al-Mufid (d. 1022), *Kitab al-Irshad*
- 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (d. 1153), *Kitab al-Milal wa'l-Nihal*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Ibn Hajar (d. 1449), *Tahdib al-Tahdib*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 543-545)

## **6. Imam Isma'il ibn Ja'far (765-ca. 775)**



Inside Maqam al-Imam, Salamiyyah, Syria. It is believed to contain the tomb of Imam Isma'il ibn Ja'far

We narrate [the tradition] and you narrate [the tradition] that **when Isma'il the son of the Imam Ja'far completed seven years of age, the Master (*sahib*) of the Time (*waqt*) declared him the Master of Religion (*sahib al-din*) and his heir apparent among sons.** And he guarded him from his other of his sons, kept him away from the contact with the public, and his education went on under his own supervision.

Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman [d. 960], (*Asrar al-Nutuqa*, tr. Ivanow in *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*, 296)

Imam Isma'il was one of the two elder sons of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq born of his first wife Fatimah, the granddaughter of Imam al-Hasan. Isma'il was born between 699-702 and his full-brother was 'Abdullah. On several occasions, Isma'il acted as the head of the family in the absence of his father Imam al-Sadiq to protest the killing of one of the Imam's followers. Some sources, mainly Twelver texts, report that Isma'il passed away during the lifetime of



Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq – but those same sources also report that Isma'il was seen several days later in Basra, suggesting that he did not really die but was sent away out of Madinah. **But the majority of sources – Sunni, Twelver, and Ismaili – agree that Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq appointed and designated Isma'il as the next Imam (as documented [here](#)).**

According to the majority of the available sources, he [Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq] had designated his second son Isma'il (the eponym of the *Isma'iliyya*) as his successor, by the rule of the *nass*. There can be no doubt about the authenticity of this designation, which forms the basis of the claims of the Isma'iliyya and which should have settled the question of al-Sadiq's succession in due course.

Farhad Daftary, (*The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrines*, 88)

However, because Isma'il was absent from Madinah when Imam Ja'far passed away, the Shi'a split into numerous groups, with the majority first following his brother 'Abdullah, and then later following his half-brother Musa al-Kazim. Meanwhile, the minority continued to follow the Imamate of Isma'il and his descendants. This latter group became known as the Ismailis.

**Our branch of Shia Islam, in that particular generation of the family, accepted the legitimacy of the eldest son, Isma'il, as being the appointed Imam to succeed** and that is why they are known as Ismailis. And that branch of the family has continued today hereditarily and that is why there is a living Imam for the Ismaili Muslims.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,  
(CBC Man Alive Interview, October 8, 1986, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Sa'd b. 'Abdullah al-Qummi (d. 911), *al-Maqalat Firq al-Shi'ah*
- Ibn al-Haytham (d. after 909), *Kitab al-Munazarat*
- Al-Hasan b. Musa al-Nawbakhti (d. before 922), *Firq al-Shi'ah*
- Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari; Tafsir al-Tabari*
- 'Abdullah al-Mahdi (d. 934), *Letter to the Ismailis of Yemen*, in Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), *Kitab al-Fara'id wa Hudud al-Din*
- Abu'l-Hasan al-Ash'ari (847-936), *Maqalat al-Islamiyin*

- Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni (d. 941), *Usul al-Kafi*
- Abu Amr Muhammad b. 'Umar al-Kashshi (d. 961), *Rijal al-Kashshi (Ikhtiyar ma'rifat al-rijal)*
- Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), *Sara'ir wa Asrar al-Nutuqa*
- Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man (d. 974), *Da'aim al-Islam; Sharh al-Akhbar*
- Abu Ya'qub al-Sijstani (d. after 971), *Sullam Najat; Ithbat al-Nabuwwat*
- Ibn Babawayh (d. 991), *Kitab al-Tawhid; Kamal al-Din*
- Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, *al-Masabih fi Ithbat al-Imamah*
- Al-Mufid (d. 1022), *Kitab al-Irshad*
- Ahmad b. 'Ali al-Najashi (d. 1058), *Kitab al-Rijal*
- Hatim b. Imran b. Zuhra (d. 1104), *al-Usul wa'l-Ahkam*
- 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (d. 1153), *Kitab al-Milal wa'l-Nihal*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 546-548)

## 7. Imam Muhammad b. Isma'il (775-ca.806)





This is believed to be the secret underground tunnel in Maqam al-Imam used by the Isma'ili Imams and their da'is to escape 'Abbasid persecution

Then came Muhammad b. Isma'il by the command of God and His Inspiration of him. His *da'is* dispersed, travelling in different provinces (*jaza'ir*), and ordering the local people to carry on the da'wah in his favour. The world became alive with his *da'wah* and his influence spread.

Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman, (*Asrar al-Nutuqa*, tr. Ivanow in *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids*, 297)

Imam Muhammad b. Isma'il was the eldest son of Imam Isma'il and also the eldest grandson of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq. After the death of 'Abdullah, Muhammad was the senior most member of this Fatimid branch of al-Husayn's descendants. However, due to the rival group that recognized Musa al-Kazim and the 'Abbasid persecution of all Fatimids, Imam Muhammad b. Isma'il fled Madinah with his sons for the east. For this reason, Muhammad b. Isma'il was known as al-Maktum (the veiled one). Different sources report that Imam Muhammad and his sons first went to Iraq and then to Khuzistan in southwestern Persia. Imam Muhammad b. Isma'il had two sons when living in Madinah and then four more sons after his emigration, among whom was his successor Imam 'Abdullah al-Wafi.

Thenceforward the story of the Ismailis, of my ancestors and their followers, moves through all the complexities, the ebb and flow, of Islamic history through many centuries...**there is, however, endless fascination in the study of the web of characters and of events, woven across the ages, which unites us in this present time with all these far-distant glories, tragedies and mysteries. Often persecuted and oppressed, the faith of my ancestors was never destroyed;** at times it flourished as in the epoch of the Fatimite Khalifs, at times it was obscure and little understood.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,  
(*Memoirs of the Aga Khan: World Enough and Time*, 1954, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Sa'd b. 'Abdullah al-Qummi (d. 911), *al-Maqalat Firaq al-Shi'ah*
- Ibn al-Haytham (d. after 909), *Kitab al-Munazarat*

- Al-Hasan b. Musa al-Nawbakhti (d. before 922), *Firaq al-Shi'ah*
  - Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari*; *Tafsir al-Tabari*
  - 'Abdullah al-Mahdi (d. 934), *Letter to the Ismaili Community of Yemen*, in Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), *Kitab al-Fara'id wa Hudud al-Din*
  - Abu'l-Hasan al-Ash'ari (847-936), *Maqalat al-Islamiyyin*
  - Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni (d. 941), *Usul al-Kafi*
  - Abu Amr Muhammad b. 'Umar al-Kashshi (d. 961), *Rijal al-Kashshi (Ikhtiyar ma'rifat al-rijal)*
  - Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), *Sara'ir wa Asrar al-Nutuqa*
  - Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man (d. 974), *Da'aim al-Islam*; *Sharh al-Akhbar*
  - Abu Ya'qub al-Sijstani (d. after 971), *Sullam Najat*; *Ithbat al-Nabuwwat*
  - Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, *al-Masabih fi Ithbat al-Imamah*
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  - Ahmad b. 'Ali al-Najashi (d. 1058), *Kitab al-Rijal*
  - Hatim b. Imran b. Zuhra (d. 1104), *al-Usul wa'l-Ahkam*
  - 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (d. 1153), *Kitab al-Milal wa'l-Nihal*
  - Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
  - Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
  - Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
  - Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
  - Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *'Uyun al-Akhbar*; *Zahr al-Ma'ani*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 550-551)

## **2. The Pre-Fatimid (First) Period of Concealment (*Dawr al-Satr*)**



Jabal Mashad in Masyaf, Syria. Jabal Mashad is believed to hold the tombs of Imam Muhammad ibn Isma'il and the three Isma'ili Imams who succeeded him : Imam 'Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Radi [Imam Wafi Ahmad], Imam Ahmad ibn 'Abdullah al-Wafi [Imam Taqi Muhammad], and Imam al-Husayn ibn Ahmad al-Taqi [Imam Radi al-Din 'Abdullah].

Those people (the concealed Ismaili Imams) were constantly on the move because of the suspicions various governments had concerning them. They were kept under observation by the tyrants, because their partisans were numerous and their propaganda had spread far and wide. Time after time they had to leave the places where they had settled. Their men, therefore, took refuge in hiding, and their (identity) was hardly known, as (the poet) says: *If you would ask the days what my name is, they would not know, And where I am, they would not know where I am.*

Ibn Khaldun, (Sunni Historian, *Muqaddimah*, tr. Frank Rosenthal, [Read Here](#))

## 8. Imam 'Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Wafi (ca. 806-828)



Sign outside Jabal Mashad in Masyaf, Syria. Jabal Mashad is believed to hold the tombs of Imam Muhammad ibn Isma'il and the three Isma'ili Imams who succeeded him : Imam 'Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Radi [Imam Wafi Ahmad], Imam Ahmad ibn 'Abdullah al-Wafi [Imam Taqi Muhammad], and Imam al-Husayn ibn Ahmad al-Taqi [Imam Radi al-Din 'Abdullah]. The first line of the sign reads: 'God, the Exalted said: "We made them Imams guiding by Our Command" [Qur'an: 21:73 and 32:24], God speaks the truth.' The second line is translated below it.

The lives of the next three Imams are generally shrouded in mystery because they were constantly fleeing persecution by the 'Abbasid Caliphs and their agents. Imam 'Abdullah succeeded his father Imam Muhammad and traveled throughout Persia and the Middle East. He did not reveal his true identity publicly and only a few high ranking Ismaili *hujjats* and *da'is* were aware of his whereabouts. Imam 'Abdullah was known by the surnames al-Radi and al-Wafi,



along with several other names. During this period, the Imam guided the Ismailis through a vast underground *da'wah* network and the *da'is* simply referred to the Imam of the time by the name “Muhammad b. Isma'il” to trick their enemies into searching for the seventh Imam who had already died and to conceal the true Imam's identity. Imam 'Abdullah's life story is reported mainly in the book *Istitar al-Imam* by Ahmad al-Naysaburi and later by Idris Imad al-Din. However, many non-Ismaili authors like Ibn Rizam, Akhu Muhsin, and Tabari also report his activities. According to these various sources, Imam 'Abdullah first went to Askar Mukram in Khuzistan where he posed as a Hashimite 'Aqilid merchant. Later he fled to Basra and then settled in Salamiyya where he set up the headquarters of the Imamate and the *da'wah*. Imam 'Abdullah designated his son Ahmad (known also as Taqi Muhammad) as his successor and died around 828. For more on Salamiyyah as the headquarters of the Ismaili Imams, see the article by Nimira Dewji, [here](#).

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Sa'd b. 'Abdullah al-Qummi (d. 911), *al-Maqalat Firqat al-Shi'ah*
- Ibn al-Haytham (d. after 909), *Kitab al-Munazarat*
- Al-Hasan b. Musa al-Nawbakhti (d. before 922), *Firqat al-Shi'ah*
- Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Tarikh al-Tabari*; *Tafsir al-Tabari*
- Imam 'Abdullah al-Mahdi (d. 934), *Letter to the Ismaili Community of Yemen*, in Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman (d. 960), *Kitab al-Fara'id wa Hudud al-Din*
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- 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (d. 1153), *Kitab al-Milal wa'l-Nihal*
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*zamān* (Biographical Dictionary)

- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
  - Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
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- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 551-557)

## 9. Imam Ahmad ibn 'Abdullah al-Taqi (828-ca. 870)



Inside Jabal Mashad in Masyaf, Syria. Jabal Mashad is believed to hold the tombs of Imam Muhammad ibn Isma'il and the three Isma'ili Imams who succeeded him : Imam 'Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Radi [Imam Wafi Ahmad],

Imam Ahmad ibn ‘Abdullah al-Wafi [Imam Taqi Muhammad], and Imam al-Husayn ibn Ahmad al-Taqi [Imam Radi al-Din ‘Abdullah].

Imam Ahmad (Taqi Muhammad) lived mainly in Salamiyya and oversaw a resurgence in the Ismaili *da‘wah* during his Imamate. While not much is known about his life activities, various Ismaili and non-Ismaili sources mention him as the leader of the Ismaili movement after Imam ‘Abdullah.

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- Ibn ‘Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*



- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *'Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma'ani*  
(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 551-557)

#### 10. Imam al-Husayn ibn Ahmad al-Radi (ca. 870-ca. 880-81)



Inside Jabal Mashad in Masyaf, Syria. Jabal Mashad is believed to hold the tombs of Imam Muhammad ibn Isma'il and the three Isma'ili Imams who succeeded him : Imam 'Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Radi [Imam Wafi Ahmad], Imam Ahmad ibn 'Abdullah al-Wafi [Imam Taqi Muhammad], and Imam al-Husayn ibn Ahmad al-Taqi [Imam Radi al-Din 'Abdullah].

Imam al-Husayn b. Ahmad, known as Radi al-Din 'Abdullah, led the Ismaili *da'wah* for a very short period in which it started achieving success in various parts of 'Abbasid territory. Before he passed away, the Imam entrusted the care of his son and successor, 'Abdullah 'Ali al-Mahdi who was then around 7 years old to his full brother, Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Shalagha. While Imam



al-Mahdi was growing up, Muhammad b. Ahmad served as his Trustee (*mustawda*) and directed the Ismaili da'wah for some years.

### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

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  - Hatim b. Imran b. Zuhra (d. 1104), *al-Usul wa'l-Ahkam*
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  - Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
  - Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
  - Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *'Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma'ani*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 551-557)

### **3. The Fatimid Period of the Imam-Caliphs:**

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,  
(Restored Monuments in Darb al-Ahmar Address, October 26, 2007, Read  
at [NanoWisdoms](#))

The Fatimid period is one of the best documented periods in Islamic history. As noted, almost the entire corpus of the histories of the Fatimid dynasty and Fatimid Egypt, written in the time of the Fatimids themselves, did not survive directly. This material was, however, at least partially preserved by later authorities, especially by the Mamluk historian al-Maqrizi (d. 845/1442), who produced the most extensive account of the Fatimids in several of his works. Indeed, many medieval Muslim historians and chroniclers wrote about the Fatimids, who are also discussed in the universal histories of Miskawayh (d. 421/1030) and Ibn al-Athir (d. 630/1233), amongst many others, as well as in a variety of regional histories of Egypt and Syria. (Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 139)

Before the rise of the Fatimids with Imam ‘Abdullah al-Mahdi, the Ismaili Imams lived in concealment from the public. This allowed pro-‘Abbasid Sunni Muslim polemicists such as Ibn Rizam, Akhu Muhsin, and the ‘Abbasids themselves to pen numerous lies and slanders about the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs. **However, a large number of Egyptian, North African, Persian, and Arab Muslim scholars in history recognized the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs as genuine and legitimate descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, Imam ‘Ali, and Hazrat Fatimah through the lineage of Imam Ja‘far al-Sadiq. For example, the prominent Twelver Shi‘i scholar and genealogist, Shariff al-Radi (d. 1015), who was himself a descendant of Imam ‘Ali, declared in a poem before the ‘Abbasid Court that Imam al-Hakim bi Amr Allah was the legitimate descendant of Prophet Muhammad and Imam ‘Ali.** To quote al-Radi’s own poem from his Diwan:

Why am I treated with contempt when I have  
A sharp tongue and a fierce disposition?  
Am I subjected to injustice in the land of the enemy  
**While in Egypt is the ‘Alid Caliph?**  
**His ancestors are also mine and his master is mine but**  
The great distance treats me with injustice;

**My roots are intertwined with his: the lords of  
All people, [Prophet] Muhammad and [Imam] 'Ali.**

– Sharif al-Radi (Twelver Shi'i scholar and 'Alid genealogist)  
(*Diwan*, Beirut, 1309 A.H., 972; tr. Idris El-Hareir, Ravene MBaye, *The Spread of Islam throughout the World*, 252)

**The following non-Ismaili Muslim scholars, historians and theologians  
recognize the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs as direct legitimate descendants of Imam  
'Ali b. Abi Talib through Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq:**

- 'Adud al-Dawla (Buyid Amir) (944-983), Letter to Imam al-'Aziz in which the Bu'iyid Amir addresses the Fatimid Caliphs as "al-Hazrat al-Sharifah," preserved in Ibn Taghri Birdi (1410-1470), *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa'l-Qahirah*
- Ibn al-Jazzar (d. ca. 1004), *Kitab Akhbar al-Dawlah*
- Sharifs of Egypt and Hijaz (late 10th century), as reported in several historical chronicles including al-Maqrizi
- Sharif al-Radi, *Diwan* (Poetry, quoted above) (d. 1015), also reported by Ibn Athir.
- Ibn al-Raqq (d. 1027), *Tarikh Ifriqiyya wa'l-Maghrib*
- Ibn Miskawayh, (d. 1030), *Tajarib al-Umam*
- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh*: "He himself and his partisans who declare his Imamate hold that his lineage is authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) according to what we mentioned. Many among the 'Alid scholars of genealogy are also in agreement with them. This statement that al-Sharīf al-Raqq uttered bears witness to its authenticity" (al-Kamil, vol. 6, 446)
- Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati'a*
- Ibn Hammad (1153-1230), *Akhbar muluk Bani 'Ubayd wa siratuhum*
- Ibn al-Tuwayr (d. 1220), reported in Maqrizi, *Itti'az al-Hunafa* and Ibn al-Zayyat (15th century), *Al-Kawakib al-Sayyarah fi Tartib al-Ziyarah*
- Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamān* (*Biographical Dictionary*)
- Muhyi al-Din b. 'Abd al-Zahir (d. 1292), *al-Rawdah al-Zahirah fi Khitat al-Mu'izziyyah al-Qahirah*
- Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-*

*khulafa*

(See Abu Izzedin, *History of Druzes*; Walker, *al-Maqrizi and the Fatimids*; Shainool Jiwa, "Fatimid-Buyid Diplomacy during the reign of al-Aziz bi'llah"; Maqrizi, tr. Shainool Jiwa, *Towards a Shi'i Mediterranean Empire*; Prince P. H. Mamour, *Polemics on the Origins of the Fatimi Caliphs*)

### **11. Imam 'Ali b. al-Husayni Abu Muhammad 'Abdullah al-Mahdi bi'llah (881-934)**

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. We seek His Help. From the Servant of God, Abu Muhammad al-Imam al-Mahdi bi-illah, Commander of the Faithful, to his followers among the faithful and all the Muslims. Peace be with you. The Commander of the Faithful praises God before you. There is no god except Him... Therefore praise God who has let you attain the time of the Commander of the Faithful, and distinguished you with the blessing of his reign and good fortune of his dominion. May your hopes be high and your optimism grow with confidence in his justice.

Imam 'Abdullah Muhammad al-Mahdi,  
(Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man, *Iftah al-Da'wah*, tr. Hamid Haji, *Founding the Fatimid State*, 207-208)

Imam Abu Muhammad 'Ali b. al-Husayn 'Abdullah al-Mahdi was born in 873 in Askar-i Mukram. His father, the previous Imam, died when he was 7 years old and the affairs of the Ismaili *da'wah* were entrusted to al-Mahdi's paternal uncle, Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Shalagha, for about 20 years. Al-Mahdi then married the daughter of his paternal uncle, who gave birth to his son and successor, Imam Abu'l-Qasim Muhammad al-Qa'im bi-amr Allah. According to the *Sirat Ja'far*, the memoirs of al-Mahdi's chamberlain, al-Mahdi lived in Salamiyyah and was known as a wealthy noble person. There was a secret underground passage under the Imam's residence through which Ismaili *da'is* came and went safely.

When the Abbasid began their manhunt for the Ismaili Imams, Imam al-Mahdi and his partisans were forced to move out of Salamiyyah. One Ismaili *da'i*, al-Husayn b. Zikrawayh, who was captured by the 'Abbasids and "interrogated under torture," revealed Imam al-Mahdi's identity and whereabouts. This allowed the Abbasids to intensify and expand their chase for the Imam. In 904,

starting in Syria, Imam al-Mahdi traveled to Palestine and then, after the 'Abbasids executed his *da'is*, to Egypt. However, when the Abbasid army once again advanced on Imam al-Mahdi's location, he was forced to relocate again. While many of the Imam's companions expected him to move to Yemen, Imam al-Mahdi instead traveled deeper into North Africa to avoid potential military conflicts with the 'Abbasids. Not surprisingly, North Africa was also not safe for the Imams, after the Sunni Aghlabids ruling North Africa, were instructed by their 'Abbasid overlords to search for the Ismaili Imam and his companions. Still under the guise of merchants, Imam al-Mahdi, his brother Ja'far, and son, the future Imam al-Qa'im, took refuge on the far west coast of Africa in Morocco. One of the head *da'is* of the Isma'ili *da'wah* in North Africa during this time was Abu 'Abdullah al-Shi'i. Still in contact with Imam al-Mahdi, it was Abu 'Abdullah al-Shi'i who was largely responsible for establishing the base of the Fatimid Caliphate. This Ismaili *da'i* had targeted his instruction towards the warlike Berber clans of North Africa, slowly getting them to pledge allegiance to the Imam. Using these new forces, the Ismaili *da'is* overthrew various *amirs* in North Africa, including the Aghlabid Amir, clearing the way for the Imam to establish the *dawlat al-haqq* or the "the kingdom of the truth." After years of warfare, al-Shi'i minted new coins heralding the arrival of the *hujjat Allah* or "proof of God", and escorted the Ismaili Imam and his family from Morocco to Raqqada with the Berber army. Raqqada became the new capital of the young Fatimid State. Upon meeting and seeing the Imam, his *Mawla*, al-Shi'i was "bathed in tears" and reaffirmed his bay'ah. The following day, in his tent, the Imam granted an audience to each and every individual troop member who also pledged their *bay'ah*. Then on Friday January 5th, 910 CE, Imam al-Mahdi was declared the "Commander of the Faithful" and the first Caliph of the newly found Fatimid Caliphate and his opening message (quoted above) was sent to all the local towns. An Ismaili eyewitness, the *da'i* Ibn al-Haytham, recounts the arrival of the Imam to his new North-African kingdom meeting with the two *da'is* Abu 'Abdullah and Abu'l-'Abbas:

It was he whose excellence could not be hidden and '*the truth has now arrived and falsehood has perished*' [Qur'an 17.81]. The stars declined and the *Alive and Self-subsistent* appeared. Abu'l-'Abbas went out and we went out with him and met the lord on the mountain pass of Sabiba. **I cannot forget his**

auspicious appearance, the splendor of his light, the brightness of his face, the elevation of his rank, the perfection of his build, and the resplendent beauty in his dawn. If I were to say that the lights that shine were created from the surplus of his light, I would have voiced the truth and the manifest reality. Abu'l-'Abbas dismounted before him, may the blessings of God be upon him, and kissed the earth. He lay on the ground in front of him, and his brother Abu 'Abdallah dismounted for him, as did all of the friends from the Kutama and the others of their followers. **No one was left riding except the Commander of the Faithful, may the blessings of God be upon him, the sun most radiant, and [his son] the shining moon and glittering light, Abu'l-Qasim [Imam al-Qa'im]. These two, may the blessings of God be on them both, were the light of the world...** The earth began to shine with his light and the world was illuminated by his advent, and the Maghrib excelled because of his presence in it and his having taken possession of it.

Ibn al-Haytham, (*Kitab al-Munazarat*, tr. Wilfred Madelung & Paul Walker, *The Advent of the Fatimids – A Contemporary Shi'i Witness*, 167)

For more information on Imam al-Mahdi and the Fatimids, see [this article](#) by Nimira Dewji.

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

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- Ibn al-Haytham (d. mid. 10th century), *Kitab al-Munazrat* – an eyewitness memoir of al-Mahdi and his son al-Qa'im.
- Anonymous Fatimid author, *Sirat Imam al-Mahdi*, written in mid-tenth century
- Ustadh Jawdhar (Abu 'Ali Mansur al-'Azizi al-Jawdhari) (d. 972), *Sirat al-*

### *Ustadh Jawdhar*

- Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man (d. 974), *Urjuza al-mukhtarah; Iftah al-Da'wah; Sharh al-Akhbar; Majalis al-Musayarat; Da'a'im al-Islam*
  - Al-Khushani (d. 981), *Kitab Tabaqat 'ulama Ifriqiyyah*
  - Akhu Muhsin (d. 982), excerpts preserved in al-Nuwayri (d. 1333), Ibn Dawadari (d. 1335), and al-Maqrizi (d. 1442)
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  - Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *'Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma'ani*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 565-599; Paul Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, 93-169 for discussion of coins, buildings, inscriptions, letters, eyewitness accounts, and histories about the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs)

### **12. Imam Abu'l-Qasim Muhammad al-Qa'im bi-amr Allah (934-946)**

O people, I reach out to this community of yours just as the Messenger of God, may God bless and keep him, reached out to the Jews and the Christians, who had with them the Torah and the Gospels, churches and synagogues. He, may

God bless and keep him, summoned them to the fulfilment of the knowledge that was in the Torah and the Gospels but they would not believe it... In the same way I reach out to this community of yours which has taken your Qur'an in vain.

Imam al-Qa'im bi-amr Allah,

('Id Sermon, April 19, 915, tr. Paul Walker, *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, 87)

Imam Abu'l-Qasim Muhammad al-Qa'im bi-amr Allah was born in 893 in Salamiyya. He became the Imam in 934 upon the death of his father Imam al-Mahdi. Imam al-Qa'im also travelled with Imam al-Mahdi and received the nass and the title of wali 'ahd from his father early on. After the establishment of the Fatimid Caliphate, Imam al-Qa'im commanded the Fatimid armies and the naval forces. The coastal city of al-Mahdiyya became the main point of operations of the Fatimid navy led by Imam al-Qa'im. The reign of the Imam al-Qa'im was threatened by Abu Yazid's Khariji revolt in 944-945. With the Berbers swarming quickly to his side, Abu Yazid launched his revolt against the Fatimids in 943-944. He swiftly conquered almost all of southern Ifriqiya, seizing Qayrawan in Safar 333/October 944. Subsequently in Jumada I 333/January 945, the rebels began their siege of Mahdiyya, where al-Qa'im was now staying. But Mahdiyya put up a vigorous resistance for almost a year, repelling Abu Yazid's repeated attempts to storm the capital and mounting its own counter-offensive, aided by the new reinforcements sent by Ziri b. Manad, the *amir* of the Sanhaja (Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 146). The Imam al-Qa'im died in 946 while the Fatimid armies, led by his son and successor Imam al-Mansur bi'llah (946-953), were fighting the Khariji rebellion. It was as the head of the Fatimid army in the midst of a military victory over the rebels that the Imam al-Mansur disclosed his father's death and assumed the role of the Imam as the new Imam of the time.

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

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- Ja'far al-Hajib (Imam al-Mahdi's servant in late-ninth century – early tenth century), *Sirat Ja'far (Memoirs)*
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  - Anonymous Fatimid author, *Sirat Imam al-Mahdi*, written in mid-tenth century
  - Ibn al-Haytham (d. mid. 10th century), *Kitab al-Munazrat* – an eyewitness memoir of al-Mahdi and his son al-Qa‘im.
  - Ibn al-Muhadhdhab (fl. mid tenth century), *Siyar al-A‘immah*
  - Ustadh Jawdhar (Abu ‘Ali Mansur al-‘Azizi al-Jawdhari) (d. 972), *Sirat al-Ustadh Jawdhar*
  - Abu Hanifah al-Nu‘man (d. 974), *Urjuza al-mukhtarah; Iftah al-Da‘wah; Sharh al-Akhbar; Majalis al-Musayarat; Da‘a‘im al-Islam*
  - Akhu Muhsin (d. 982), excerpts preserved in al-Nuwayri (d. 1333), Ibn Dawadari (d. 1335), and al-Maqrizi (d. 1442)
  - Ibn al-Jazzar (d. ca. 1004), *Kitab Akhbar al-Dawlah*
  - Ibn al-Raqiq (d. 1027), *Tarikh Ifriqiyya wa’l-Maghrib*
  - Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi’l-Tarikh*
  - Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati‘a*
  - Ibn Hammad (1153-1230), *Akhbar muluk Bani ‘Ubayd wa siratuhum*
  - Ibn Muyassar (1231-78), *Ta’rikh Misr*
  - Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a‘yān wa-anbā’ abnā’ az-zamān (Biographical Dictionary)*
  - Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
  - Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami‘ al-Tarawikh*
  - Ibn al-Dawadari (d. 1313), *Kanz al-Durar wa jam‘i al-Ghurar*
  - Al-Marrakushi, (fl. early 14th century), *al-Bayan al-Mughrib*
  - Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
  - Ibn ‘Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
  - Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti‘az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a‘imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
  - Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *‘Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma‘ani*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 565-599; Paul Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, 93-169 for discussion of coins, buildings, inscriptions, letters, eyewitness accounts, and histories about the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs)

### **13. Imam Isma‘il Abu’l-Tahir al-Mansur bi’llah (946-953)**

O God, most certainly I am Your servant and Your friend. On me You have bestowed such favours that I am by You made mighty; You made me superior and thus You made me most generous. You have raised me and made me honoured by what You had me attain of the deputyship (*khilāfa*) from esteemed forefathers, the imams of right guidance, and You appointed me the flag of religion. You raised me to the imamate of the believers.

Imam al-Mansur bi'llah,

(‘Id Sermon, April 25, 947, tr. Paul Walker, *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs*, 105)

Imam Isma‘il Abu’l-Tahir al-Mansur was born in 914 in North Africa (Qayrawan). His first name was Isma‘il – recalling Isma‘il son of Prophet Abraham who is the ancestor of Prophet Muhammad and the Shi‘i Imams and also recalling Isma‘il ibn Ja‘far al-Sadiq, the progenitor of the Ismaili Imams. He was designated as the next Imam by his father Imam al-Qa‘im on several occasions. He assumed the position of Imam in 946 while he led the Fatimid armies in resisting the rebellion of Abu Yazid during the siege of al-Mahdiyya. Imam al-Mansur built a new Fatimid capital called Mansuriyyah. He also authored a book called *Tathbit al-Imamah* (“The Proof of Imamat”) in which the Imam lays out several arguments from the Qur’an and logic to argue the necessity of a living Imam from the progeny of Prophet Muhammad. Below is a quotation from Imam al-Mansur’s book:

[Quoting the Qur’an:] “If they had referred it to the Messenger and the possessors of authority (*ulu’l-amr*) among them, those of them whose task it is to investigate would have known the matter” (Holy Qur’an 4:83). **[Imam al-Mansur said]: this leads us to say: the possessors of authority (*ulu’l-amr*) among us are the knowledgeable among us. They are our Imams and the Prophet’s vicegerents over us. They are the Ark of Noah. He who boards it is saved.** God has ordered us to follow them and to acquire knowledge from them... Our Prophet Muhammad (God’s blessing be in him) told us that they would not depart from his Book until they come to him together at the Paradiscal Pool and that as long as we cling to them we will never go astray.

Imam al-Mansur bi'llah,

(*Tathbit al-Imamah*, tr. Sami Makarem, *The Shi‘i Imamate*, 65)

Imam al-Mansur died in 953 “after having reasserted the Fatimid domination in North Africa and Sicily” (Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 147) and was succeeded by Imam al-Mu’izz who had been designated as his successor on several occasions.

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

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- Ustadh Jawdhar (Abu ‘Ali Mansur al-‘Azizi al-Jawdhari) (d. 972), *Sirat al-Ustadh Jawdhar*
- Abu Hanifah al-Nu‘man (d. 974), *Urjuza al-mukhtarah; Iftah al-Da’wah; Shah al-Akhbar; Majalis al-Musayarat; Da’a’im al-Islam*
- Ibn al-Jazzar (d. ca. 1004), *Kitab Akhbar al-Dawlah*
- Ibn al-Raqiq (d. 1027), *Tarikh Ifriqiyya wa’l-Maghrib*
- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi’l-Tarikh*
- Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati’a*
- Ibn Hammad (1153-1230), *Akhbar muluuk Bani ‘Ubayd wa siratuhum*
- Ibn Muyassar (1231-78), *Ta’rikh Misr*
- Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a’yān wa-anbā’ abnā’ az-zamān* (*Biographical Dictionary*)
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami’ al-Tarawikh*
- Ibn al-Dawadari (d. 1313), *Kanz al-Durar wa jam’i al-Ghurar*
- Al-Marrakushi, (fl. early 14th century), *al-Bayan al-Mughrib*
- Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
- Ibn ‘Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti’az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a’imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *‘Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma’ani*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 565-599; Paul Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, 93-169 for discussion of coins, buildings, inscriptions, letters, eyewitness accounts, and histories about the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs)

#### **14. Imam Ma’add Abu Tamim al-Mu’izz li-Din Allah (953-975)**



### Imam al-Mu'izz Street in Cairo

We are the everlasting words of God and His perfect names, His radiant lights, His luminous signs, His evident lamps, His created wonders, His dazzling signs and His effective decrees. No matter passes us by and no age is devoid of us.

Imam al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah,

(Letter to the Qaramita, tr. S. Jiwa, *Towards a Shi'i Mediterranean Empire*, 172)

Imam al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah (Fortifier of the Religion of God) was born in 931 and was the 14th Ismaili Imam and the 4th Imam-Caliph of the Fatimid Empire. Through the help of Jawhar as-Siqilli, he extended the Fatimid domains from Ifriqiya (northern Egypt) to Egypt, ushering a Golden Age for the Ismaili community (read more about the establishment of Cairo [here](#)). He was known as one of the greatest political leaders of his time; under his reign, Cairo – originally named al-Qahirah al-Mu'izziyyah, the Fatimid capital, began to surpass the Abbasid capital, Baghdad. Moreover, during this time, Sunnis, Christians, Jews, Twelver Shi'is, and Ismailis all lived together peacefully and Imam al-Mu'izz sent a Guarantee (*Amaan*) allowing all faiths and traditions to be practiced in security. He expanded the Ismaili *da'wah* and commissioned Qadi al-Nu'man, the chief jurist and *da'i*, to establish an official Ismaili law which led to the development of the "Seven Pillars of Ismaili Islam." The Imam is also credited with resolving a bitter dispute between the two noble Hashimid families in Makkah: **"His successful resolution of a feud between two of the leading Hashimid clans in the Hijaz, the Banu Hasan (descendants of al-Hasan**

**b. ‘Ali b. Abi Talib) and the Banu Ja’far (descendants of Ja’far b. ‘Ali b. Abi Talib), highlights al-Mu’izz recognized status as a leading member of the Prophet’s family”** (Shainool Jiwa, *Towards a Shi’i Mediterranean Empire*, 13).

Lastly, the Imam is credited for the invention of the first fountain pen that avoids stains on the writer’s hands and clothes.

In the below quote, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni declared at the opening of Al-Azhar Park in Cairo – before Muslim leaders and the Egyptian government – that he was the direct descendant of the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs and of Imam al-Mu’izz in the 35th generation and had finally returned to Cairo to build on the Fatimid legacy.

In our excavations and our historical investigations, I constantly have been reminded that we were touching the very foundations of my ancestors, the Fatimids, and the pluralistic history and intellectual profile of this city and this country to which they contributed so profoundly. I am very humbled by the opportunity to return to Cairo, founded over a thousand years ago by the Fatimid Caliph al-Mu’izz, to build on that history. Thirty-five generations later, through the work done here by my institutions, it is my prayer that this park will be a continuing contribution to the people of this great city.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,  
(Al-Azhar Park Opening Ceremony, March 25, 2005, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Ibn al-Muhadhdhab (fl. mid tenth century), *Siyar al-A’immah*
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- Abu Hanifah al-Nu‘man (d. 974), *Urjuza al-mukhtarah; Iftah al-Da’wah; Shah al-Akhbar; Majalis al-Musayarat; Da’a’im al-Islam*
- Ibn Zulaq (d. 996), *Akhbar Sibawayh al-Misri*
- Ibn al-Jazzar (d. ca. 1004), *Kitab Akhbar al-Dawlah*
- Ibn al-Raqiq (d. 1027), *Tarikh Ifriqiyya wa’l-Maghrib*
- Ibn Qalanisi (d. 1160), *Dhayl Tarikh Dimashq*
- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi’l-Tarikh*
- Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati’a*
- Ibn Hammad (1153-1230), *Akhbar muluuk Bani ‘Ubayd wa siratuhum*
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- Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamān* (*Biographical Dictionary*)
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jamī' al-Tarawikh*
- Ibn al-Dawadari (d. 1313), *Kanz al-Durar wa jam'i al-Ghurar*
- Al-Marrakushi, (fl. early 14th century), *al-Bayan al-Mughrib*
- Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *'Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma'ani*
- Ibn Taghri Birdi (1410-1470), *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa'l-Qahirah* (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 565-599; Paul Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, 93-169 for discussion of coins, buildings, inscriptions, letters, eyewitness accounts, and histories about the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs)

### **15. Imam Nizar Abu'l-Mansur al-'Aziz bi'llah (975-996)**

From the slave and Friend (*wali*) of God, Nizar Abu'l-Mansur al-Imam al-'Aziz bi'llah, Commander of the Faithful to 'Adud al-Dawla, al-imam the protector of the community of Islam, 'Abi Shuja b. Abi 'Ali, greetings to you. The Commander of the Faithful praises God – there is no god but He – to you and asks Him to bless his [own] forefather Muhammad, the Messenger of the Lord of both worlds and the proof of God for all creation, continuous, increasing and everlasting prayers through his right guiding, pious and pure progeny.

Imam al-'Aziz bi'llah,

(Letter to Buyid Amir 'Adud al-Dawla, 979, preserved in Ibn Taghri Birdi (1410-1470), *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa'l-Qahirah*, tr. Shainool Jiwa, [“Fatimid-Buyid Diplomacy in the Reign of al-'Aziz”](#))

Imam Nizar al-'Aziz bi'llah was born in 944 in North Africa and succeeded his father, al-Mu'izz. Imam al-'Aziz introduced financial and social reforms within the Fatimid Empire. He expanded the Fatimid Empire to Palestine and Syria and often appointed Jews and Christians into important administrative posts.

During his reign and through the help of his grand Vizir Ya'qub ibn Killis, al-'Aziz founded the al-Azhar University (988), generally known as the oldest university

in the world. Imam al-‘Aziz also exchanged letters with the Buyid Amir al-Umara ‘Adud al-Dawlah – who had control of the ‘Abbasid Caliphate in this period – and the Buyid Amir addressed Imam al-‘Aziz as the *Ahl al-Bayt* and as “thy noble presence” (*al-hadrat al-sharifah*). These names and titles used by the Buyid Amir clearly acknowledge the Fatimid ‘Alid lineage of Imam al-‘Aziz and the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs (see S. Jiwa, [“Fatimid-Buyid Diplomacy during the Reign of al-‘Aziz”](#)).

#### Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

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- Abu Hanifah al-Nu‘man (d. 974), *Urjuza al-mukhtarah; Iftah al-Da‘wah; Shah al-Akhbar; Majalis al-Musayarat; Da‘a‘im al-Islam*
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- Ibn al-Jazzar (d. ca. 1004), *Kitab Akhbar al-Dawlah*
- Al-Rudhbari (d. early eleventh century), *Balashkar al-‘udaba’*
- Ibn al-Raqiq (d. 1027), *Tarikh Ifriqiyya wa’l-Maghrib*
- Al-Musabbihi (d. 1029), *al-Juz’ al-arba‘un min Akhbar Misr*
- Ibn Qalini (d. 1160), *Dhayl Tarikh Dimashq*
- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi’l-Tarikh*
- Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati‘a*
- Ibn Hammad (1153-1230), *Akhbar muluk Bani ‘Ubayd wa siratuhum*
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- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami’ al-Tarawikh*
- Ibn al-Dawadari (d. 1313), *Kanz al-Durar wa jam‘i al-Ghurar*
- Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
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- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti‘az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a‘imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *‘Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma‘ani*
- Ibn Taghri Birdi (1410-1470), *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa’l-Qahirah* (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 565-599; Paul Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, 93-169 for



discussion of coins, buildings, inscriptions, letters, eyewitness accounts, and histories about the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs)

#### 16. Imam Abu 'Ali Mansur al-Hakim bi-amr Allah (996-1021)



The al-Hakim Mosque in Cairo

O people, surely God has made us superior by the Word of Imamate. He has eternalized it in us so that it may last until the Day of Doom. The one of us receives it from the other and the son inherits it from the father. This is the bounty of God, He gives it to whomever He wishes, 'and God is of bounty abounding.

Imam al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah,  
(Sermon in Cairo Mosque, al-Maqrizi, *Itti'az al-Hunafa*, 133-143, tr. Sami Makarem, *The Doctrine of the Ismailis*, 32)

Imam al-Hakim bi-amr Allah was born in 985 and he was the first Imam to be born in Cairo, the official capital of the Fatimid Empire. Ascending to the role of the Imam at the age of seven, he was known for his generosity, bravery, and kindness. Despite his unique charisma, al-Hakim was feared by his enemies



who circulated false rumours about him. However, these alleged claims are based on Christian and Sunni polemics which hardly have any basis in history or reality. In fact, al-Hakim was known for his reputation for incorruptible justice and went further than any other Imam to establish a rapprochement between the Christians, the Twelver Shi'is, the Sunnis, and the Ismailis. A strong advocate for education and intellectual search, he built the Dar al-'Ilm, "House of Knowledge", which further developed fields of mathematics, medicine, and astronomy. Imam al-Hakim used to take long solitary walks and donkey rides and in 1021 he was murdered during one of his excursions. Read more on Imam al-Hakim [here](#).

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

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- Al-Rudhbari (d. early eleventh century), *Balashkar al-'udaba'*
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- Yahya of Antioch (d. 1066), *Tarikh*
- Ibn Qalini (d. 1160), *Dhayl Tarikh Dimashq*
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- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Ibn al-Dawadari (d. 1313), *Kanz al-Durar wa jam'i al-Ghurar*
- Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*

- Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *‘Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma‘ani*  
(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 565-599; Paul Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, 93-169 for discussion of coins, buildings, inscriptions, letters, eyewitness accounts, and histories about the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs)

### 17. Imam ‘Ali al-Zahir li-‘izaz Din Allah (1021-1036)

Let all-our friends, governors, financial and taxation officials and all the other servants and employees of the empire according to their different states and several ranks who read this, or to whom this is read, take cognizance of this order and command of the Commander of the Faithful and act accordingly and in conformity with it, if God wills. Written in Muharram, the year Four hundred and Fifteen. **May God bless our ancestor Muhammad, the seal of the prophets and lord of the messengers, and his pure family, the right-guided Imams, and give them peace.** God is sufficient for us; how excellent a Keeper is He.

Imam al-Zahir li-‘izaz Din Allah,  
(Letter to Monks and Karaite Jews of Cairo, Muharram 415/March-April 1024,  
tr. S.M. Stern in *Fatimid Decrees*, London, 1964, 15-20)

Imam ‘Ali al-Zahir assumed the Imamate in 1021 after the murder of his father, Imam al-Hakim. At first, al-Zahir was under the guardianship of al-Hakim’s sister, Sit al-Mulk. Under this reign, the Fatimid Empire fell into a state of crisis: famine and plague in Egypt lead to years of anarchy and the Bedouin revolt in Palestine and Syria led to enormous political strife. Despite these challenges, the Imam assured the citizens were fed and protected. He rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem after a devastating earthquake and restored the Aqsa Mosque along with its mosaics. Stricken by an illness, al-Zahir died on 15th of Shaban, June 13th, 1036.

*Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:*

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  - Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
  - Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
  - Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
  - Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *'Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma'ani*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 565-599; Paul Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, 93-169 for discussion of coins, buildings, inscriptions, letters, eyewitness accounts, and histories about the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs)

## 18. Imam Ma'add Abu Tamim al-Mustansir bi'llah (1036-1094)



Marble panel bearing the name of the Fatimid Caliph al-Mustansir bi'llah, in Kufic script, dated 1084–5, Egypt. Image: British Museum

Follow the clearest path—may God grant you success in bringing together what we recite to you from the exoteric (*zahir*) and the esoteric (*batin*)—and whenever you face difficulties, return to the one whom God chose as the best guardian for your guidance. As the exoteric and the esoteric are like body and soul, when they come together benefits are accrued, goals are realized and, by means of the senses the soul comprehends the marvels of the world and deduces gnosis of the Creator from the existence of the creation.

Imam al-Mustansir bi'llah,

(Majalis al-Mustansiriyyah, comp. al-Maliji, tr. Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 177)

Imam Ma'add Abu Tamim al-Mustansir bi'llah succeeded his father at the age of seven and administered the Fatimid Empire with the help of his mother Sayyida Rasad. His Caliphate lasted for 60 years, the longest reign of all the Imams. **During the 1050s, al-Mu'ayyad Shirazi's cowboy diplomacy led to the general al-Basasiri taking over 'Abbasid Baghdad and for one year the Khutbah in the 'Abbasid capital was read in the name of Fatimid Imam-Caliph.** This one year marked the zenith of Fatimid rule, but this was short lived and soon famine and political dissatisfaction degraded conditions in the Fatimid state. In the midst of this chaos, the Imam had little choice but to invite the Armenian general Badr al-Jamali to deal with the internal state affairs. With swift and decisive actions, Badr al-Jamali restored order to Egypt. Ultimately, however, Badr al-Jamali became the Fatimid vizier and his military seized control of the Fatimid empire. When Imam al-Mustansir passed away after a brief illness in 1094, Badr's son al-Afdal (the new vizier) bypassed the Imam's official heir-designate, Imam Nizar, and installed a younger brother of Imam Nizar on the Fatimid throne.

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Al-Mustansir bi'llah (d. 1094), *Sijilat (Letters)*
- 'Ali b. Khalaf (d. after 1045), *Mawadd al-Bayan*
- Al-Quda' (d. 1062), *al-Mukhtar fi dhikr al-Khitat wa'l-Athar*
- Yahya of Antioch (d. 1066), *Tarikh*
- Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirazi (d. 1077), *Sirat; Diwan al-Mu'ayyad*
- Nasir-i Khusraw (d. 1088), *Shish Fasli; Gushayish va Rahayish; Wajh-i Din; Khwan al-Ikhwan*

- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh*
- Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati'a*
- Ibn Hammad (1153-1230), *Akhbar muluk Bani 'Ubayd wa siratuhum*
- Ibn Muyassar (1231-78), *Ta'rikh Misr*
- Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamān* (*Biographical Dictionary*)
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Ibn al-Dawadari (d. 1313), *Kanz al-Durar wa jam'i al-Ghurar*
- Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *'Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma'ani*
- Ibn Taghri Birdi (1410-1470), *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa'l-Qahirah* (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 565-599; Paul Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, 93-169 for discussion of coins, buildings, inscriptions, letters, eyewitness accounts, and histories about the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs)

## 19. Imam Nizar al-Mustafa Din Allah (1094-1095)



Nizari Coin: The Coin refers to Imam Nizar by his caliphal title “Al-Mustafa li-Din Allah” and invokes God’s blessings upon the ancestors and progeny of Imam Nizar.

**Imam Nizar was the designated successor-Imam to his father Imam al-Mustansir bi’llah, as mentioned in numerous historical sources – including Sunni, Nizari Ismaili, and even Tayyibi Ismaili sources. For this reason, nearly all historians of the Fatimids accept that Nizar was the heir-designate of Imam al-Mustansir bi’llah.** The Imam al-Mustansir bi’llah passed away in 1094. Upon his death, Imam Nizar was opposed by the all-powerful Fatimid vizier al-Afdal, who put another son of Imam al-Mustansir, Ahmad al-Musta’li on the Fatimid throne in a coup d’etat. Imam Nizar and those who followed him – the Nizari Ismailis – refused to acknowledge Musta’li as the Imam-Caliph and maintained the original designation made by Imam al-Mustansir bi’llah. Imam Nizar initially received military support from Alexandria but was eventually defeated by the more powerful Fatimid armies in 1095. Al-Afdal imprisoned the Imam Nizar and had him executed. **However, the sons and grandsons of Nizar survived and fled Cairo and several sources report that the next two Nizari Imams – the son and the grandson of Imam al-Nizar – led revolts against the Fatimid forces.** The Imams after Imam Nizar had to operate in strict secrecy and therefore few details are recorded about their lives.

Al-Maqrizi notes in his comments on the death of Nizar that the Ismailis of both Persia and Syria accepted his imamate and claimed that al-Mustansir had, in fact, made the designation in his favor. **Al-Mustansir had, after all, told Hasan b. al-Sabbah that Nizar would be his successor...**Several members of the caliphal family, however, fled to the far West, among them specifically three of Nizar’s brothers, Muhammad, Isma’il, and Tahir, and a son of his named al-Husayn...Thus a small coterie of dissidents and Nizari supporters gathered somewhere in the West (the Maghrib) waiting for an opportunity to reassert their claim(s) to the imamate.

Paul E. Walker,

(“Succession to Rule in the Shiite Caliphate”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 255)

#### **Historical Sources that mention this Imam:**

- al-Musta’li (d. 1101) and his mother in *Sijilat al-Mustansiriyyah*

- Imam Muhammad al-Muhtadi (d. ca 1161-62), Letter, recorded in Ibrahim b. Abu'l-Fawaris (ca. 1502) tr. Mustafa Ghalib, *Tarikh ad-Daw'ah al-Ismailiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1975) pp. 255-256.
  - Ibn Qalanisi (d. 1160), *Dhayl Tarikh Dimashq*
  - Hasan-i Mahmud (ca. 1200), *Haft Bab Baba Sayyidna*
  - Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh*
  - Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati'a*
  - Ibn Muyassar (1231-78), *Ta'rikh Misr*
  - Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamān* (*Biographical Dictionary*)
  - Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
  - Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
  - Ibn al-Dawadari (d. 1313), *Kanz al-Durar wa jam'i al-Ghurar*
  - Hamd Allah Mustawfi (1281-1349), *Ta'rikh-i Guzida*
  - Syrian Ismaili Manuscript (dated to 14th century)
  - Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), *Muqaddimah*
  - Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
  - Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
  - Idris Imad al-Din (d. 1468), *'Uyun al-Akhbar; Zahr al-Ma'ani*
  - Ibn Taghri Birdi (1410-1470), *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa'l-Qahirah*
  - *Irshad al-Talibin*, comp. Muhibb 'Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
  - Khwand Amir (d. 1534), *Habib Siyar*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 600; For Nizari coins in the name of Nizar and his progeny, see Peter Willey, *Eagle's Nest*, 288-307)

#### **4. The Post-Fatimid (Second) Period of Concealment (*Dawr al-Satr*):**





The Valley of Alamut, Source: Simerg Photos

After the loss of the Fatimite Khalifat in Egypt, my ancestors moved first to the highlands of Syria and the Lebanon; thence they journeyed eastward to the mountains of Iran. They established a stronghold on the craggy peak of Alamut in the Elburz Mountains, the range which separates from the rest of Persia the provinces lying immediately to the south of the Caspian.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,  
(Memoirs of the Aga Khan, 1954, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

## **20. Imam ‘Ali al-Husayn b. Nizar al-Hadi (1095 – ca. 1132)**

Imam Nizar was survived by male progeny in the form of sons and grandsons. His successor was al-Husayn (some sources give his name as al-Hasan) and known by the title ‘Ali al-Hadi in Persian sources (the concealed Imams generally went by several aliases). According to some sources, al-Husayn and other members of Nizar’s family fled to North Africa (Maghrib) following Nizar’s failed revolt. Hasan-i Sabbah continued to send *fida’is* and provide support from Persia and successfully assassinated al-Afdal, the Fatimid vizier who opposed Imam Nizar. Some historical sources including al-Maqrizi and Hamid



Allah al-Mustawfi report that this Imam launched an unsuccessful revolt against the Musta'lian Fatimid caliphs.

### Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Ibn Qalanisi (d. 1160), *Dhayl Tarikh Dimashq*
- Imam Muhammad al-Muhtadi (d. ca 1161-62), Letter, recorded in Ibrahim b. Abu'l-Fawaris (ca. 1502) tr. Mustafa Ghalib, *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1975) pp. 255-256.
- Hasan-i Mahmud (ca. 1200), *Haft Bab Baba Sayyidna*
- Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati'a*
- Ibn Muyassar (1231-78), *Ta'rikh Misr*
- Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamān* (*Biographical Dictionary*)
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Hamd Allah Mustawfi (1281-1349), *Ta'rikh-i Guzida*
- Syrian Ismaili Manuscript (dated to 14th century)
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da'i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Ibn Taghri Birdi (1410-1470), *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa'l-Qahirah*
- *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb 'Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
- Khwand Amir (d. 1534), *Habib Siyar*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 614-642; For Nizari coins in the name of Nizar and his progeny, see Peter Willey, *Eagle's Nest*, 288-307)

### 21. Imam Muhammad b. al-Husayn al-Muhtadi (ca. 1132 – ca. 1161-62)

I am your Master Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Nizar. The Truth has arrived, and falsehood is destroyed. We have sent down to you our Mercy, and encompassed you with the eye of concern.

Imam Muhammad al-Muhtadi,

(Letter recorded in Ibrahim b. Abu'l-Fawaris (ca. 1502) tr. Mustafa Ghalib, *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*, 1975, 255-256)

The next Imam, the grandson of Imam Nizar, is known in various sources as Muhammad and had the title of al-Muhtadi. Mustafa Ghalib shows a letter (quoted above) from this Imam that was preserved in Syrian sources in which Imam Muhammad al-Muhtadi declares his lineal descent from Imam Nizar four times. In this same letter, the Imam specifies that a later Imam from his descendants will publicly reveal himself to the community in 40 years and that the total period of concealment from Imam Nizar's death will be 70 years (these predictions came true with the 23rd Imam). Persian Nizari traditions report that the Nizari Da'i Abu'l-Hasan Sa'idi helped escort this Imam from Egypt to Alamut. Some Egyptian sources also record that this Imam organized an unsuccessful revolt against the Musta'lian Fatimid caliphate in around 1161-62.

Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Imam Muhammad al-Muhtadi (d. ca 1161-62), Letter, recorded in Ibrahim b. Abu'l-Fawaris (ca. 1502) tr. Mustafa Ghalib, *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1975), pp. 255-256.
- Ibn Zafir (d. 1216), *Akhbar al-Duwwal al-Munqati'a*
- Ibn Muyassar (1231-78), *Ta'rikh Misr*
- Ibn Khallikan (d. 1211-1282), *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' az-zamān* (*Biographical Dictionary*)
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Hamd Allah Mustawfi (1281-1349), *Ta'rikh-i Guzida*
- Syrian Ismaili Manuscript (dated to 14th century)
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da'i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Hafiz Abru (d. 1430), *Majma' al-tawarikh*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Ibn Taghri Birdi (1410-1470), *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa'l-Qahirah*
- Mir Khwand (d. 1498), *Rawdat al-Safa'*
- *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb 'Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
- Khwand Amir (d. 1534), *Habib Siyar*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 614-642; For

Nizari coins in the name of Nizar and his progeny, see Peter Wiley, *Eagle's Nest*, 288-307)

## **22. Imam Hasan b. Muhammad al-Qahir (ca. 1161 – ca. 1164)**

Imam al-Qahir executed the affairs of *da'wah* and state together with great deal of intelligence and skill, whom he dealt by his own excellent hands. He issued official orders in all the Ismaili territories, informing Muhammad bin Kiya Buzurg as his *hujjat* and the supervisor in political and martial affairs as well.

Mustafa Ghalib, (*A'lam al-Ismailiyya*, Beirut, 1964, 244)

Imam al-Qahir is said to be the first Imam to be established at Alamut but he did not announce his presence openly nor was he known publicly. It is reported that Imam al-Qahir settled in Alamut around 1160/61 and received *bay'ah* from his *hujjat*, Muhammad b. Kiya Buzurg Ummid and Nizari leaders in a private ceremony. Dr. Mustafa Ghalib writes in *A'lam al-Ismailiyya* (Beirut, 1964. p. 244) that Imam al-Qahir also announced that, "Muhammad b. Kiya Buzurg is my *da'i*, *hujjat* and special representative. Those who adhere to our doctrines should obey him unitedly in the worldly matters, and comply with his orders, and consider his instructions as if the divine revelation. None should disobey his orders, and remain steadfast therewith, and enforce it as if they are acting for me."

**Various non-Ismaili sources allude, in different forms, to the existence of an unnamed Imam at that time in Alamut:** see, for instance, Juwayni, vol. 3, pp. 180–181, 231–237; tr. Boyle, vol. 2, pp. 663, 691–695; Rashid al-Din, pp. 79, 166–168; Kashani, pp. 115, 202–204; Ibn al-Qalanisi, *Dhayl*, pp. 127–129, with a quotation on the subject from al-Fariqi, a historian writing shortly after the capture of Alamut, and Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbar*, p. 102. Al-Ghazali, in his *al-Munqidh*, ed. and tr. Jabre, text p. 33, translation pp. 93–94, ed. Saliba, p. 127, tr. Watt, pp. 52–53, speaks of the Imamas being hidden and yet accessible to his followers.

Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 621)

### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Nasir al-Din Tusi (d. 1274), genealogy chart of the Imams prepared at Alamut
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*

- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Jamal al-Din Kashani (d. ca. 1337), *Zubdat al-Tawarikh*
- Syrian Ismaili Manuscript (dated to 14th century)
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da'i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Hafiz Abru (d. 1430), *Majma' al-tawarikh*
- Mir Khwand (d. 1498), *Rawdat al-Safa'*
- *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb 'Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
- Khwand Amir (d. 1534), *Habib Siyar*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 614-642; For Nizari coins in the name of Nizar and his progeny, see Peter Wiley, *Eagle's Nest*, 288-307)

## 5. The Alamut Period in Persia

### 23. Imam Hasan 'ala-dhikrihi al-salam (1164-1166)



In this Nizari Coin, the inscriptions state the Shahadah and also add that: Aliyyun Wali Allah (Ali is the Friend of God) and Nizar Mustafa li-Din Allah (Nizar is the Chosen One of the Religion of God)

Know that this Imamate is a reality which will never cease, change or be altered. It will continue forever to be transmitted through the progeny of our

Lords (*Mawalina*). It will never leave them, whether in form, meaning or reality...The Imams, both outwardly and inwardly, both exoterically and esoterically, issue from the pure line and loins of the Imam, one after another. The Imam is perfect when still in the form of sperm in the loins of his father and the pure womb of his mother. An Imam is always an Imam and always perfect.

Imam Hasan *‘ala-dhikrihi al-salam*,

(Nasir al-Din Tusi, *The Paradise of Submission*, tr. Sayyid Jalal Badakhchani, 122-125)/p>

Imam Hasan *‘ala-dhikrihi al-salam* was the first Imam in the Alamut period to openly and publicly declare his Imamatus to the community. In 1164, Imam Hasan declared the *qiyamah* – which is a special period of history in which the exoteric religious practices of the *shari‘ah* are abrogated and their esoteric meanings are unveiled and practiced. **Numerous Fatimid Ismaili authors including Sijistani, Kirmani, and Nasir-i Khusraw had written about and foretold the arrival of the *qiyamah* period.** For the *qiyamah* declaration, Imam Hasan gathered representatives of the Ismaili Jamats from various regions at the valley of Alamut. A great pulpit was erected with four pillars attached to four banners – white, red, yellow and green. The murids from Rudbar and Daylan stood to the front of the pulpit, the murids from Khurasan and Quhistan were stationed on the right side, and the murids from central and west Persia were positioned on the left. At midday, Mawlana Hasan *‘ala-dhikrihi al-salam*, adorned in a white garment and wearing a white turban, descended from the castle and ascended the pulpit. The Imam greeted the dignitaries and sat down for a moment. Suddenly, he rose and drew his sword and made one of the most important declarations in Isma‘ili history. The Imam first read out Arabic letters from his father, the previous Imam, declaring him as the successor (*khalifah, qa‘im maqam*) of his father (the prior Imam). He then declared the *qiyamah*:

*“The Imam of the Time has sent you his blessings and compassion. He has called you his specially selected servants. He has relieved you of the duties and burdens of the shari‘ah and has brought you to the qiyamah (the resurrection).”*

Following this declaration, the Imam invited everyone to feast and to break their fast – at midday during the month of Ramadan. Thereafter, this day was

celebrated as *‘Id al-Qiyamah* (The Festival of Resurrection) or the Great Resurrection (*qiyamat al-qubra*). The *qiyamah* had freed the *murids* from the burdens of the religious law (*shari‘ah*) and summoned them to the spiritual reality (*haqiqah*) of the Imam. **During this time, the focus of practice was shifted toward the esoteric dimensions of the religious law (*shari‘ah*) – for example, instead of praying five times per day, the Ismailis aspired to remain in a state of continuous prayer; instead of fasting from food and drink for one month, the Ismailis aspired to perform the spiritual fast from all evil throughout their whole lives; instead of pilgrimage to the inanimate Ka‘bah in Makkah, the Ismailis sought to make the esoteric pilgrimage to the presence of the Imam.** They were invited to experience the spiritual Paradise on earth and be blessed with the Imam’s luminous vision (*nurani didar*). Because of this declaration, Imam Hasan is known as the *Qa‘im* or *Imam-Qa‘im*, which is a special rank and function in the chain of Imamatus. Imam Hasan *‘ala-dhikrihi al-salam*’s esoteric teachings disclosed the spiritual reality of the Imamatus in a quite unprecedented manner and he emphasized the believer’s quest to recognize the spiritual reality or Light (*nur*) of the Imamatus.

Imam Hasan *‘ala-dhikrihi al-salam* was murdered by his brother-in-law, a member of a Buyid family, in 1166 and was succeeded by his sixteen year-old son Imam ‘Ala Nur al-Din Muhammad.

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Hasan-i Mahmud (ca. 1200), *Haft Bab Baba Sayyidna*
- Hasan-i Mahmud (ca. 1200), *Diwan al-Qa‘imiyyah*
- Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274), *Sayr wa Suluk; Rawda-yi Taslim; Matlub-i Mu‘minin*
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami‘ al-Tarawikh*
- Jamal al-Din Kashani (d. ca. 1337), *Zubdat al-Tawarikh*
- Hamd Allah Mustawfi (1281-1349), *Ta‘rikh-i Guzida*
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da‘i Anjudani (fl. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Ibn ‘Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Hafiz Abru (d. 1430), *Majma‘ al-tawarikh*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti‘az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a‘imma al-Fatimiyyin al-*

*khulafa*

- Ibn Taghri Birdi (1410-1470), *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa'l-Qahirah*
- Mir Khwand (d. 1498), *Rawdat al-Safa'*
- *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb 'Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
- Khwand Amir (d. 1534), *Habib Siyar*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 614-642; For Nizari coins in the name of Nizar and his progeny, see Peter Wiley, *Eagle's Nest*, 288-307)

#### **24. Imam Muhammad b. Hasan 'Ala Nur al-Din Muhammad (1166-1210)**

Today the Mosque of Mosques, the Sun of Suns is that divinity which is the Mosque of God for the Souls, the noblest of holy Mosques, the Qa'im from the family of Muhammad, Mawlana, the Qa'im by the command of God, the Commander of the Faithful, son of Qahir, son of Muhtadi... Today for the truthful Ismaili community, that person of the knowledge of God, that manifestation of the Light of unity is the Qa'im from the family of the Prophet and I, Muhammad b. Hasan (*'ala-dhikrihi al-salam*), I am the Caliph of the Caliph of God, the *hujjah* of the *hujjah* of God and of the person of the knowledge of God. I make the call through the *hujjah*...because I am the vicegerent (*niyabat*) of the Qa'im from the family of Muhammad.

Imam 'Ala Muhammad b. al-Hasan *'ala-dhikrihi al-salam*,  
(Persian Manuscript No. 32, Institute of Ismaili Studies, in Delia Cortese, PhD Dissertation, "Eschatology and Power in Medieval Persian Ismailism", SOAS – University of London, 1993, 142)

Imam 'Ala Muhammad, also known as Nur al-Din, was born sometime in the 1150s. He had a long Imamatus during which he expanded and implemented the *qiyamah* teachings of his father. This Imam was greatly engaged in philosophy and esoteric doctrines. In the above statement, this Imam describes himself as the successor of his father, Imam Hasan *'ala-dhikrihi al-salam* who was known as the Qa'im of his period.

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Hasan-i Mahmud (ca. 1200), *Haft Bab Baba Sayyidna*
- Hasan-i Mahmud (ca. 1200), *Diwan al-Qa'imiyyah*
- Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274), *Sayr wa Suluk; Rawda-yi Taslim; Matlub-i*



### *Mu'minin*

- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Jamal al-Din Kashani (d. ca. 1337), *Zubdat al-Tawarikh*
- Hamd Allah Mustawfi (1281-1349), *Ta'rikh-i Guzida*
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da'i Anjudani (fl. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Hafiz Abru (d. 1430), *Majma' al-tawarikh*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Mir Khwand (d. 1498), *Rawdat al-Safa'*
- *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb 'Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
- Khwand Amir (d. 1534), *Habib Siyar*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 614-642; For Nizari coins in the name of Nizar and his progeny, see Peter Wiley, *Eagle's Nest*, 288-307)

### **25. Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan b. Muhammad (1210-1221)**



Nizari Coin minted in Alamut. The coin refers to Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan as the “Great Sultan” (sultan al-mu’azzam) and as “the Majesty of the world and the faith” (Jalal al-dunya wa’l-din).

Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan was born in 1187 and received the designation (*nass*) of the Imamate from his father as a child. The Syrian scholar, Arif Tamir, cites a letter of the Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan, in which he declares his Imamate and traces his descent from al-Nizar through Hasan ‘ala-dhikrihi al-salam, see his *Sinan Rashid al-Din aw Shaikh al-Jabal* (al-Adib, 23rd vol., May, 1953, 45). According to John Malcolm in *History of Persia* (London, 1815, 1st vol., p. 405), “He is celebrated in Persian history for the kindness and generosity of his disposition; and we are informed that this prince of the Ismailis was the handsomest man for his age.” (See Mumtaz Ali Tajuddin Saddik Ali, *The Ismailis through History*, 1995)

The proclamation of *qiyamah* meant that the exoteric ritual practices of the *shari’ah* were no longer mandatory for Nizari Ismailis. However, this doctrine was quite misunderstood amongst many including the Sunni majority and their territories surrounding the Ismaili state. As a measure of prudence and *taqiyyah*, Imam Jalal al-Din reinstated the practice of the *shari’ah* according to the Sunni form in Ismaili territories, including Alamut. Dr. Nasseh Ahmed Mirza writes that: “*This misunderstanding of the spiritual aims of the qiyama, which very likely were only understood by the most learned dais, may together with political consideration have been the factor which prompted the grandson of Hasan ‘ala dhikrihi al-Salam to reinstate the observance of the ordinary rituals of the Shariah*” (*Syrian Ismailism*, 158-9). As a result of this, the Imam invited Sunni scholars to inspect Alamut and red flag any books they found problematic. During this time, as the Mongol incursions into Muslim territory had begun, many Muslim scholars found refuge in Alamut including Nasir al-Din Tusi, who became Ismaili.

As a result of re-adopting the *shari’ah*, Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan was accorded full recognition and autonomy by the ‘Abbasid Caliph al-Nasir and the Nizaris entered into a formal alliance with the ‘Abbasid Caliphate. Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan sent his envoys to the Abbasid caliph al-Nasir, Muhammad Khwarazmshah, the rulers of Iraq and Adharbayjan to notify them of his religious policy, making them aware that the Ismailis were the true Muslims.

Very rapidly, the Ismailis restored the lost prestige and began to spread in the Muslim cities. The Abbasid caliph al-Nasir also a decree in Baghdad in Rabi I, 608/August, 1211, proclaiming his close ties with Alamut. The Sunni rulers of Gilan also married some of their daughters to Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan.

According to *The Cambridge History of Iran* (London, 1968, 5th vol., p. 470) that, “From an Imamate point of view, he (Jalal al-Din Hasan) was undeniably the Imam: he had received the irrevocable designation by the preceding Imam and whatever he ordered was to be received in faith.”

The Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan, after his great efforts to make peace with the surrounding Sunni territories, died after being poisoned by one of his Sunni Muslim wives.

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Hasan-i Mahmud (c. 1200), *Haft Bab Baba Sayyidna*
- Hasan-i Mahmud (ca. 1200), *Diwan al-Qa’imiyyah*
- Letter of Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan (d. 1221) cited in Arif Tamir, *Sinan Rashid al-Din aw Shaykh al-Jabal*
- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi’l-Tarikh*
- Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274), *Sayr wa Suluk; Rawda-yi Taslim; Matlub-i Mu’minin;*
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami’ al-Tarawikh*
- Jamal al-Din Kashani (d. ca. 1337), *Zubdat al-Tawarikh*
- Hamd Allah Mustawfi (1281-1349), *Ta’rikh-i Guzida*
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da’i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Ibn ‘Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Hafiz Abru (d. 1430), *Majma’ al-tawarikh*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti’az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a’imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Mir Khwand (d. 1498), *Rawdat al-Safa’*
- *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb ‘Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
- Khwand Amir (d. 1534), *Habib Siyar*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 614-642; For

Nizari coins in the name of Nizar and his progeny, see Peter Wiley, *Eagle's Nest*, 288-307)

## 26. Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad b. Hasan (1221-1255)



The highest station [of gnosis] is that one knows God through God: 'God bears witness that there is no God but He' (3: 18). This station can only be that of the man of God, who is the locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) of the Divine Command (*amr*) and the Word (*kalimah*) of God and the mediator (*mutawwasit*) between God and creation – such that, with the aspect that he has towards God, he can recognise God, and with the aspect that he has towards people, he can cause people to reach God, so that through his gnosis they become cognisant of God.

Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad,  
(Nasir al-Din Tusi, *Rawda-yi taslim*, tr. Sayyid Jalal Badakhchani, *The Paradise of Submission*, 176)

Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad was born in 1213 and succeeded to the Imamate upon his father's death at the tender age of 9 years old. For about six years (618/1221 to 624/1227), the administration of the state affairs had been governed by his gifted mother, which was the first time a woman administered at Alamut. During this time, the Imam's mother seems to have deposed many incapable governors in Rudhbar and Kohistan. It seems that some governors and officers had misused their powers in that period. In 624/1227, Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad assumed governance of Nizari Ismaili territories at the age of 15-16 years upon the death of his mother. The writings of Nasir al-Din Tusi record a number of answers (example quoted above) given by Imam 'Ala al-Din

Muhammad to certain theological and spiritual questions submitted by certain murids. These questions and answers are about how Ismailis observe esoteric forms of prayer and fasting, the meaning of attaining spiritual union with the Imam, and the hierarchies of the spiritual world and the *da'wah*. Imam 'Ala al-Din Muhammad died after being stabbed by one of his servants, Hasan Mazandarani, in his tent.

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Hasan-i Mahmud (ca. 1200), *Haft Bab Baba Sayyidna*
- Hasan-i Mahmud (ca. 1200), *Diwan al-Qa'imiyyah*
- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh*
- Shams al-Din b. Ahmad al-Tayyibi (d. 1254), *Risalat al-dustur wa da'wat al-mu'minin li'l-hudur*
- Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274), *Sayr wa Suluk; Rawda-yi Taslim; Matlub-i Mu'minin*
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami' al-Tarawikh*
- Jamal al-Din Kashani (d. ca. 1337), *Zubdat al-Tawarikh*
- Hamd Allah Mustawfi (1281-1349), *Ta'rikh-i Guzida*
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da'i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Ibn 'Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Hafiz Abru (d. 1430), *Majma' al-tawarikh*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti'az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a'imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Mir Khwand (d. 1498), *Rawdat al-Safa'*
- *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb 'Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
- Khwand Amir (d. 1534), *Habib Siyar*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 614-642; For Nizari coins in the name of Nizar and his progeny, see Peter Wiley, *Eagle's Nest*, 288-307)

#### **27. Imam Rukn al-Din Khurshah (1255-1257)**





May it not remain hidden from all the servants that as Mawlana 'Ali and Mawlana Husayn (on whose mentions be peace) have said, *'We will have to pass through Jabalistan (i.e., Gilan) and Daylam, which will be the final Karbala. The palace of Caesar and the fortress of Alamut [will be reduced to such straits] that were they given to even a poor old woman, she would not accept them.'* All of this came to pass and was seen by the people of the world.

Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad,  
(tr. Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 54)

Imam Rukn al-Din Khurshah was the final Imam to rule at Alamut, which fell to the Mongol emperor Hulegu Khan in 1256. In the year's final months, this 26 year-old Imam assembled and consulted with his senior *da'is* and advisors at the fortress of Maymundez, to decide whether or not to surrender or continue resisting the Mongol invasions. Earlier that year, the Mongols executed every adult male in Tun and also murdered every Ismaili envoy the Imam had sent to meet with Hulegu Khan. While deliberating, the fighting continued unabated.

The Mongols relentlessly battered down the Ismaili defenses, vowing to continue massacring Ismailis if the Imam did not surrender. Ultimately, a group of *da'is* and advisers, led by the pre-eminent scholar and *da'i* Nasir al-Din Tusi, prevailed and the Imam agreed to surrender. As Ismailis dismantled their defences, the Imam appeared before Khan, defenceless, in the name of peace, and surrendered himself to prevent further slaughter of his followers. Escorting the Imam from one Ismaili fortress to another, Khan demanded each Ismaili stronghold surrender at the order of their Imam he held hostage. And so, one by one, Ismaili castles and fortresses were taken and destroyed. Ismailis were massacred and others sold as slaves. Finally, the Mongol horde set fire to Alamut, forever destroying nearly all of the Ismaili literary and intellectual treasures in its renowned library. Once the surrender was complete, Khan had no further use for the Imam and sent him to Mongolia.

**After the Imam Rukn al-Din Khurshah had left for Mongolia, the Mongols massacred thousands upon thousands of Nizari Isma'ilis in Persia: the Imam's family and dependents (including infants) were summarily executed in violation of the peace treaty the Mongols had committed to with the Imam; the Mongol commander summoned the Nizaris of Quhistan – in the guise of a social gathering – and massacred them (akin to the “red wedding” in *Game of Thrones*). All of this took place under the general order of Genghis Khan to destroy all of the Ismailis. Some estimates place the total number of Nizari Ismailis killed in these massacres at 100,000.** Finally, while the Imam's group rested for the night in the Khangay mountains of north-western Mongolia, Mawlana Rukn al-Din and his companions were led away, one by one, off the main road and brutally murdered and drowned by their Mongol guards. In the words of Juwayni himself: *'He and his followers were kicked to a pulp and then put to the sword, and of him and his stock no trace was left, and his kindred became but a tale on men's lips and a tradition in the world.'* (Ata Malik Juwayni, History of the World Conquerer).

Although the Mongol propagandist Juwayni loudly proclaimed that the Ismaili Imam and all Ismailis had been destroyed in perhaps the most painful and horrific period of Ismaili history, it was not so. Before the Imam was murdered, even before the surrender of the fortresses, **Imam Rukn al-Din Khurshah's young son and successor, Mawlana Shams al-Din Muhammad (“the Sun of**



the Faith”) had, on the orders of his father, been concealed and secreted away to Azarbayjan by a small cadre of Ismaili *da’is* led by his uncle **Shahanshah**. So while the situation was dire, it was not hopeless. The Imam had ensured the Imam’s continuity knowing that, though hidden for the present, his successor would rise again. (see Nadia Eboo Jamal, *Surviving the Mongols*)

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Ibn Athir (1160-1233), *al-Kamil fi’l-Tarikh*
- Ata Malik al-Juwayni (1226-1283), *Tarikh-i Jahan-Gushah*
- Rashid al-Din (1247-1318), *Jami’ al-Tarawikh*
- Jamal al-Din Kashani (d. ca. 1337), *Zubdat al-Tawarikh*
- Hamd Allah Mustawfi (1281-1349), *Ta’rikh-i Guzida*
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- *The Epistle of the Right Path* (15th century)
- Da’i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Ibn ‘Inaba (d. 1424), *Umdat al-Talib*
- Hafiz Abru (d. 1430), *Majma’ al-tawarikh*
- Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), *Al-Itti’az al-hunafa bi-akhbar al-a’imma al-Fatimiyyin al-khulafa*
- Mir Khwand (d. 1498), *Rawdat al-Safa’*
- *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb ‘Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
- Khwand Amir (d. 1534), *Habib Siyar*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 614-642; For Nizari coins in the name of Nizar and his progeny, see Peter Wiley, *Eagle’s Nest*, 288-307)

#### **6. The Post-Alamut (Third) Period of Concealment (*Dawr al-Satr*):**

Know that from [the time of the Imam] Rukn al-Din Muhammad onwards, the annals of this illustrious family do not appear in a single history that the eyes of this pauper have perused. This is because the family no longer possessed a worldly kingdom as in bygone times...**Hence it must be known that the Master of the House knows better than outsiders what goes on in his own household.**

Fida’i Khurasani, (*Guidance for the Seeking Believers*, tr. Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 19)

Clearly, one of the reasons that we know so little of the Imams of this period is precisely because they didn't want their existence to be commonly known. **Attracting unwanted attention in such a hostile environment would have been exceedingly dangerous, even fatal, and success in concealing the identity of the Imams contributed to the survival of the lineage.** Faithful members of the community in areas in which the threat was most acutely felt would have been loath to reveal the names and whereabouts of their Imams, or indeed their own identity.

Shafique Virani, (*The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 56)

## **28. Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad (1257-1310)**

Now I have left the land of Iran for Turan and traveled through its cities to see them. I passed through Samarqand, Bukhara, Cathay, Scythia, Balkh, China and the land beyond China (Chin wa-Machin), Tibet and Kashmir. I also passed through the land of the Franks. In short, I actually beheld the world from one end to the other. I clearly manifested myself in the cities of Uch and Multan and fulfilled the promise that I had made to the loving devotees. [After experiencing] the kindness of the loving devotees and friends of Hindustan, I returned to Iran. In all these lands through which I traveled, in every place I practiced taqiyya for taqiyya is my religion and the religion of my ancestors. That is to say, "*dissimulation (taqiyyah) is my religion and the religion of my ancestors.*" In every place we portrayed ourselves in a manner and form that we deemed prudent for the task of the people.

Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad,  
(tr. Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 54)/p>

The Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad was born in the fortress of Maymundaz in the presence of his father, Imam Rukn al-Din. Contrary to Sunni and Mongol propaganda, the line of Nizari Ismaili Imams survived the Mongol invasion of Alamut as Imam Shams al-Din was escorted by his uncle Shahanshah to Adharbayjan. It is worth noting that Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan, many decades earlier, used to visit Adharbayjan for long periods of time and cultivated relations with its rulers. Hodgson also writes in *The Order of Assassins* ( 1955, 270-275) that, "*Juwayni assures himself that every Ismaili was killed; yet even if all the members of garrison were in fact killed, a great many other will have*

*escaped.” He further adds, “but their spirit was more nearly indomitable; as it is from among them that the great future of Nizari Ismailism sprouted again. It is said the child Imam was carried to Adharbayjan, where the Imams lived for some time.” According to W. Montgomery Watt, *Islam and the Integration of Society* (London, 1961, 77), “In 1256, Alamut was surrounded, and was destroyed and in the following year the Imam met his death and there was a widespread massacre of the Nizaris. It may be further mentioned that, despite this catastrophe and the fact that it has never since had a territory of its own, the community was not exterminated and the line of Imams was maintained unbroken.” Farhad Daftary (*The Ismailis*, 435) writes that **“while Rukn al-Din Khurshah was spending the last few months of his life amongst the Mongols, the Nizari leadership evidently managed to hide his son and designated successor, Shams al-Din Muhammad, who became the progenitor of the Nizari Imams of post-Alamut period. The Nizari Imamate was thus preserved.”***

The Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad is reported to have traveled widely and visited a number of Nizari Ismaili centres across Persia, the Middle East and even India. A fragment of one of his writings is quoted above where the Imam outlines his travels. Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad lived secretly and clandestinely and only the highest ranking members of the Nizari Ismaili leadership were aware of his whereabouts.

The Ismaili *da’i* and poet Nizari Quhistani was one of the lucky few who was able to find the Imam. He lovingly describes his *didar* in beautiful, mystical poetry that suggests the location or identity of the Imam without disclosing either. He describes a “handsome young man of exceptional spiritual authority with a large following in the city.” Nizari then discovered that the Imam was to visit a “house of healing” – a common Sufi and Ismaili term for a place of worship. Feigning an illness, Nizari met the Imam whom he calls “the intoxicated one”, a common Sufi and Ismaili metaphor for the Imam. The Imam *“reprimand[ed] Nizari for coming all the way from Khurasan to meet him. He told the poet that the lover and the beloved are in reality never apart: ‘When was Qays ever without the face of Layla?’ he asked.”* (Nadia Eboo Jamal, *Surviving the Mongols*, 132).

### Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad (d. 1310), *Alfaz-i Guharbar (The Pearl Scattering Words)*, preserved in 4 manuscripts at the Institute of Ismaili Studies
- Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad (d. 1310), Untitled Passage, preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscript, copied in Ishkashim in 1895.
- Nizari Quhistani (d. 1320), *Diwan-i Hakim Nizari Quhistani; Safarnamah* (describing his meeting with Imam Shams al-Din in 1280-81 in Adharbayjan)
- Pseudo-Abu Firas (fl. 14th century), *Qasidah al-Shafiyyah* (mentions the Imam living in the village of Qusur)
- Pir Shams al-Din (fl. 13th-14th centuries), various Ginans mention the Imam arriving in Multan: “E sabhaga har puchh nind [sic] niravan pan~jetan”; “Jiv tum java de”; “Shahani sarevae tame jagajo”; “Evi: garabi: sampuran: sar”; “Tiyam thi ame aveva un~chamam”
- *The Epistle of the Right Path* (ca. 14th-15th century)
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da’i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb ‘Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
- Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah (d. 1534), *Sat Varani Moti ni Vel (Offspring of the Tales of the Truth)*
- Muhammad Qasim Firishta (ca. 1606), *Ta’rikh-i Firishta (Gulshan-i Ibrahimi)*
- Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and ‘Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- *Lama’at al-Tahirin* (comp. 1697)
- Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i ‘Aliyyah*
- Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
- Fida’i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu’minin al-Talibin*  
(See Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 217-226)

### 29. Imam Qasimshah (1310-1368)

O Careless Ones! Believe in the Light (*nur*) of Qasim Shah!

He is the legitimate heir, the true progeny of the Imam (*ala imam*) in this age of Kalyug.

Pīr Shams al-Din,

(*satagura shamasa ema kahere gāfalo kema utaraso pāra*, tr. Tazim R.

Kassam, *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance*, 345)

The Imam succeeding Shams al-Din Muhammad was Imam Qasimshah (1310 – 1368). Nizari Quhistani, the Nizari poet, alludes to meeting Qasimshah and his father Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad in Azarbayjan.

Several *Ginans* and *Garbis* attributed to Pir Shams name Imam Qasimshah as the Imam of the time – also referring to this Imam by the name “Shah Nizar.” According to the few available sources that shed light on this obscure period, the Imam Qasimshah’s life was constantly in danger and he was ultimately murdered by a member of his family – likely Muhammad Shah – who also claimed the Imamatus for himself. This resulted in a schism between the Qasimshahi Nizari Ismailis and the Muhammadshahi Nizari Ismailis. By the time of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, almost all of the Muhammadshahi Nizari Ismailis transferred their allegiance to the Qasimshahi Nizari Ismaili Imams.

**That the Imams in this period were in real danger is confirmed in an ode (*qasida*) of a certain Da’i Anjudani, who informs us that the Imam Qasimshah (and here his reference is to the first Qasimshah) was murdered.** It appears from these verses that there were numerous attempts to have him poisoned, one of which finally succeeded. Unfortunately, this poet provides us no further details regarding the perpetrators of the crime, nor any information about their identities, referring to them simply as “his enviers, worthy of hellfire” and “the accursed.” The murder of Qasimshah is also alluded to in the work *Seven Aphorisms (Haft Nukta)*, which is associated with one of the Imams by the name Islamshah, perhaps the first. While not explicit, this work is highly suggestive that the murderer was from the Muhammadshahi line, which, however, is never mentioned. Nevertheless, it is very clear that a family member was involved.

Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 57)

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Nizari Quhistani (d. 1320), *Diwan-i Hakim Nizari Quhistani; Safarnamah* (describing his meeting with Imam Shams al-Din in 1280-81 in Adharbayjan and alluding to his successor)
- Imam Islamshah (d. 1424), *Haft Nukta*, preserved in Institute of Ismaili

### Studies manuscripts

- Pir Shams al-Din (fl. 13th-14th centuries), various Garbis mention Mawlana Qasimshah as the Imam of the time: “Bhula: ma: bhule: bhamajore: hinduo”; “Ke: tame: amiras: pijo: din: ne: rat”; “Nar: kasham na: pharaman thi,”; “Satagur: samash: em: kahere: gaphalo: kem: utaraso: par,”; “Gur: avata: sarave: rat,”; “Avomara munivar bhaida hoji”
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da’i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- *Irshad al-Talibin* (ca. 1509), comp. Muhibb ‘Ali Qunduzi (ca. 1523)
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- Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
- Fida’i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu’minin al-Talibin*  
(See Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 228-223)

### 30. Imam Islamshah (1368-1424)

Brother, build a raft of truth, believer, steady your heart, for in the land of Daylam the great king, my lord has descended.

O king, the earth’s nine continents are your vassalry. You are our lord, the Mahdi.

**O lord Islamshah, the granter of boons! Be pleased, O great Mahdi.**

O king, bestow on the faithful salvation, deliverance and your beatific vision. How blessed is the region of Alamut where you have established your physical residence!

Pir Shihab al-Din,

(tr. Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 41)

The Imam Qasimshah was succeeded by his son, Imam Islamshah (1368 -1426). According to Mumtaz Ali Tajuddin (*The Ismailis through History*, 1995), Imam Islamshah “visited Daylam several times in disguise, where he had erected a temporary mission centre for different regions...it appears that Islamshah was a man of middle height, radiant face having piercing eyes. He was a gifted man of sweet disposition and engaging manner. His mole on right cheek was an eye-

catching mark. He was generous, fond of hunting and passed sometimes a few months in woods on hunting excursion.” While little is known about this Imam’s life due to the fact that he was living in precaution and secrecy, there is a work called Seven Aphorisms (*Haft Nukta*) that is attributed to him and quotations from him appear in other Nizari texts. Some sources relate that Imam Islamshah left Adarbayjan and migrated to Iran. Numerous *Ginans* of Pir Sadr al-Din name the Imam of the Time as Islamshah and Pir Hasan Kabir al-Din describes going to have the didar of the Imam in his *Ginans*, especially *Anant Akhado*. According to various specimens of evidence including the *Ginans*, Imam Islamshah transferred the residence of the Ismaili Imams to Kahek in central Persia – near Qumm and Mahallat – and enjoyed a long Imamatus of nearly 55 years

In Qazwin, the prominent Khushayji family faced opposition from ‘Ali Kiya for their adherence to the Nizari Isma‘ili Imamatus and had to defend themselves. In the course of these battles, the Nizari Imam known as Khudawand Muhammad – who was likely the Imam Islamshah – rallied the Nizaris of the area and opened up a second front against ‘Ali Kiya. The Nizari Imam and his forces even retook Alamut for short periods. However, ‘Ali Kiya joined up with Timur (Tamerlane) and his superior armies defeated the Nizari forces. The Nizari losses were massive due to Tamerlane’s massacres. In 1416, there was a mass execution of Nizari Isma‘ili leaders such that “the waters of the White River turned red with the blood of those killed.”

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Imam Islamshah (d. 1424), *Haft Nukta*, preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscripts
- Imam Islamshah (d. 1424), *Risalat al-Huzn*, quoted in contemporary Nizari literature
- Tombstone of Imam Islamshah (as per local Ismaili tradition) in Shahr-i Babak witnessed by Iranian scholar Maryam Mu‘izzi
- *The Epistle of the Right Path* (ca. 14th-15th century)
- Pir Shihab al-Din (fl. 14th century), *Ginan* mentioning the Imam in Alamut: “Ao gatiure bhandhe”
- Pir Sadr al-Din (fl. 14th century), various *Ginans* mention the Imam of the time as Islamshah: “Aj sahi mahadin bujo bhev”; “Ashaji sacho tum alakh nirijan



agam agochar”; “Des delamame shaha hari avatareo”; “Dhan dhan ajano dadalore ame harivar payaji”; “Juga jug shaha avataraj dharea [a.k.a. Sen Akhado]”; “Payalore nam sahebajo vado lije”; “Sansar sagar madhe van apana satagure noriyamre”; “Shahake hek man amhi sirevo”; “Thar thar moman bhai koi koi raheseji”; “Yara anat kirodie vadhaium.”

- Pir Sadr al-Din (fl. 14th century), describes meeting the Imam of the Time in two *Ginans*: “Sirie salamashaha amane maliya”; “Alamot gadh patan delam des bhaire”.
  - Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
  - Da’i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
  - Zahir al-Din (d. 1498), *Ta’rikh-i Gilan wa Daylamistan*
  - Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah (d. 1534), *Sat Varani Moti ni Vel (Offspring of the Tales of the Truth)*
  - Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and ‘Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
  - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i ‘Aliyyah*
  - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
  - Fida’i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu’minin al-Talibin*
- (See Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 234-240)

### **31. Imam Muhammad b. Islamshah (1424-1464)**

O Careless Ones! The Divine Light shines in Sri Islam Shah!  
Recognize the Lord (*nāra*) when you see him!

Pir Shams al-Din,

(*satagura shamasa ema kahere gāfalo kema utaraso pāra*, tr. Tazim R. Kassam, *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance*, 345)

Imam Muhammad b. Islamshah was a child when he and his father migrated to Kahek and established a new residence of the Nizari Ismaili Imamatus in that town. Both Imam Islamshah and Muhammad b. Islamshah shared the same first name “Muhammad, Ahmad.” This was also the period in which Tamerlane and his son Shahrukh massacred thousands of Ismailis. While not much is known about this Imam’s life and activities, there is an area in Shahr-i Babak which the local Ismaili tradition named after this Imam – it is called “Muhammad Imamzada” meaning “Muhammad, the son of the Imam.”

### Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

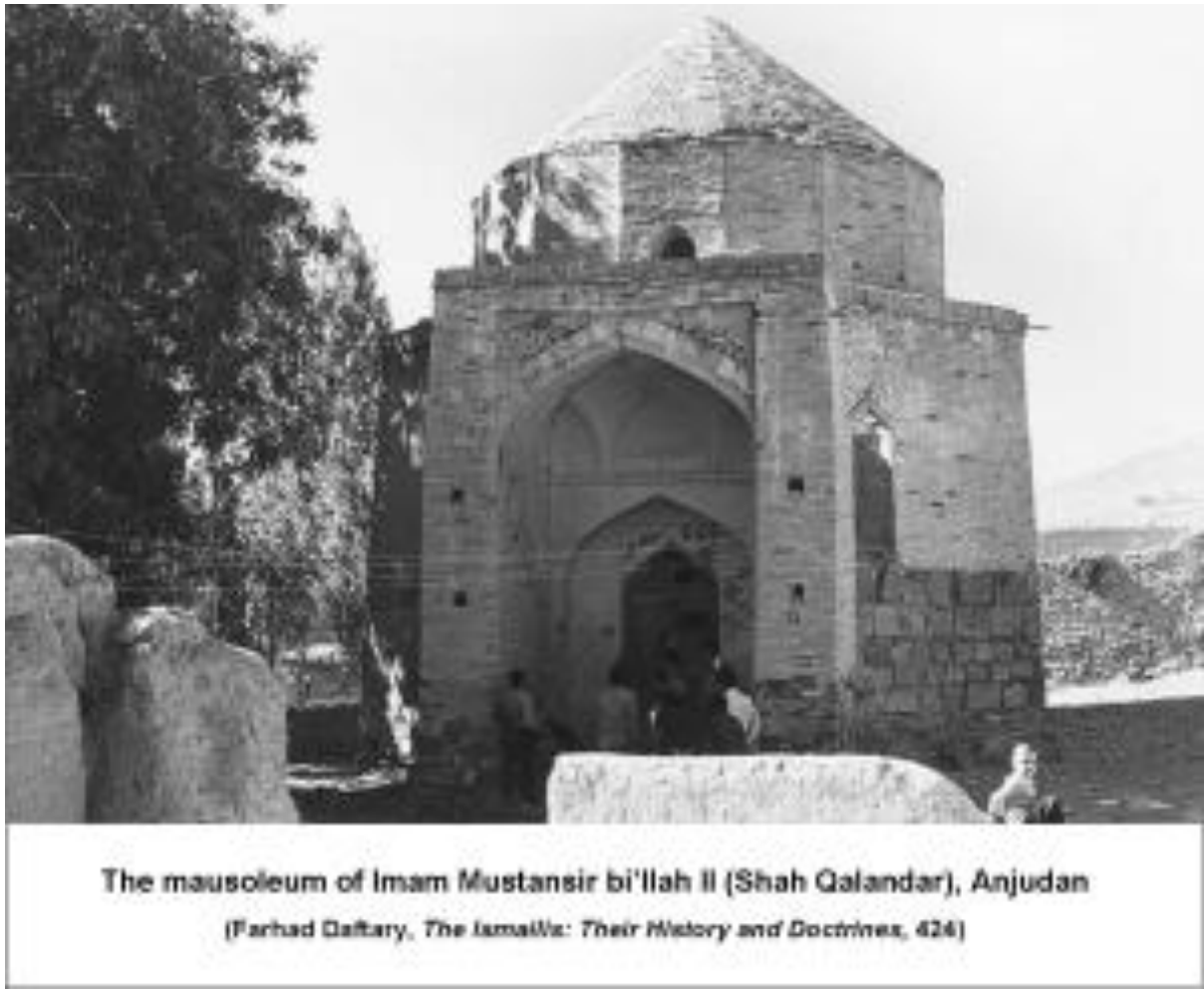
- Tombstone of Imam Muhammad b. Islamshah (as per local Ismaili tradition) in Shahr-i Babak witnessed by Iranian scholar Maryam Mu'izzi
  - Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
  - Da'i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
  - Zahir al-Din (d. 1498), *Ta'rikh-i Gilan wa Daylamistan*
  - Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah (d. 1534), *Sat Varani Moti ni Vel (Offspring of the Tales of the Truth)*
  - Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
  - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
  - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
  - Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
- (See Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 234-240)

### 7. The Anjudan Period of Revival:

In the early Anjudan period, the Nizaris adopted a new communal organisation, which played a key role in reasserting and re-articulating (at least secretly) their religious identity...But the Nizaris still found it necessary, in predominantly Sunni Persia, to practise *taqiyya* in the guise of Sufism. In addition, the Nizari imams often added, similarly to Sufi masters, terms such as Shah and 'Ali to their names. For all practical purposes, the Persian Nizaris now appeared as a Sufi *tariqa*, and they continued to use the master-disciple (*murshid-murid*) terminology of the Sufis. **To the outsiders, the Nizari imam living in Anjudan appeared as a Sufi *murshid*, *pir* or *shaykh*. They were also regarded as pious 'Alid Sayyids, descendants of the Prophet.**

Farhad Daftary, (*A Short History of the Ismailis*, 172)/p>

### 32. Imam 'Ali Shah Qalandar Mustansir bi'llah II (1464-1480)



“This is the purified, hallowed and luminous grave of the noble Shah Mustansir bi'llah, [erected] by the command and direction of the noble Shah ‘Abd al-Salam.” (Inscription of the Gravestone of Imam Mustansir bi'llah)

Imam Mustansir bi'llah was the first Nizari Ismaili Imam to settle and live in the village of Anjudan. This Imam (or his mausoleum) was also known as Shah Qalandar, which is a common Sufi epithet since the name “Qalandar” evokes the wandering spiritual guide who has no need for any spiritual guide himself. Some of the later Satpanth compositions by Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah (d. 1534), the *Sat Veni Moti* and the *Sacho Tun Moro Sanhian*, mention Imam Mustansir bi'llah as the Imam of the time. This period began what scholars call the “Anjudan revival” in which the Nizari Ismaili Imamate was able to reestablish more direct ties with many Nizari communities. The mausoleum of Imam Mustansir bi'llah still exists in Anjudan and it was visited and documented by the historian Wladimir Ivanow, who provides a description of the Imam’s gravestone.

### Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Tombstone of Imam al-Mustansir bi'llah with full inscription documented by Wladimir Ivanow
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da'i Anjudani (fl. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah (d. 1534), *Sat Varani Moti ni Vel (Offspring of the Tales of the Truth)*
- Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
- Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
- Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*  
(See Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 241-264)

### 33. Imam 'Abd al-Salam Shah (1480-1494)

Harken ye who quest for union, who boasts that he seeks. Heed my words, for I am the Book of God that speaks! If you desire that I open for you the door of mysteries, then enroll in the school of submission and attend to my teachings with all your heart. If you desire the Commander in this world of divinity, then gird yourself with my command and harken to my words. Now I am 'Abd al-Salam, but if with this company I am grieved, to this assembly I'll bid adieu, once again to return to it.

Imam 'Abd al-Salam,

(Ode to the Seekers of Union, tr. Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 177)

Imam 'Abd al-Salam, also known as Salamshah, resided in Anjudan like his predecessor. **Several compositions of this Imam have survived including the *Panj Sukhan* and three *farmans* bearing his signature sent in 1490 to the Muhammadshahi Nizari Ismailis, calling for them to recognize the rightful Imams from Qasimshah's progeny.** This Imam is also mentioned by name in the *farmans* recorded in *Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi* composed by his son Imam Shah Gharib Mirza (also known as Mustansir bi'llah). Several Nizari Ismaili poets of this period including Da'i Anjudani, 'Abd Allah Ansari, Zamani, Darvish, and Husayn refer to Imam 'Abd al-Salam and his successor Shah Gharib. There is a unique *qasidah*, known as "The Ode to the Seekers of Union" composed by

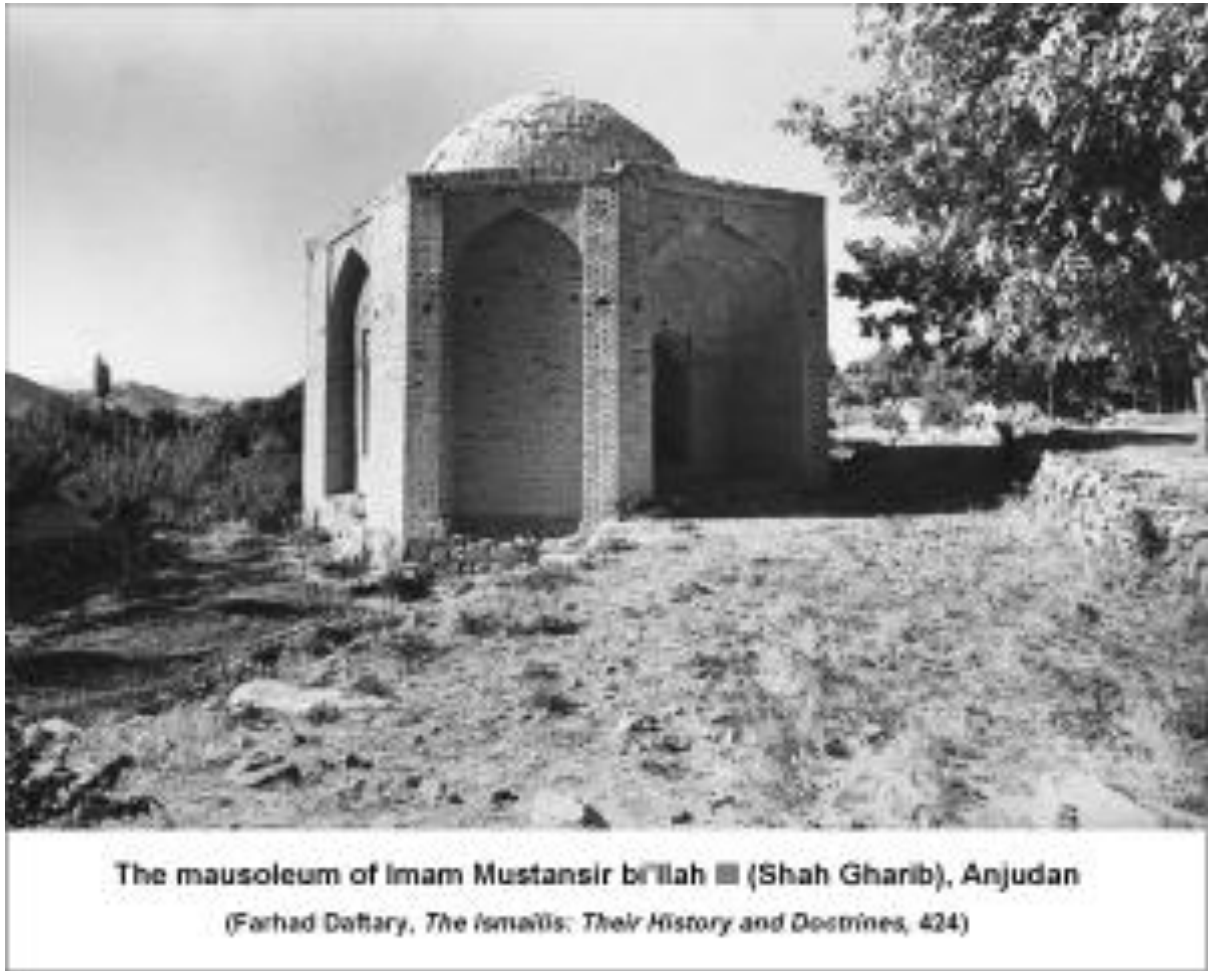
Imam 'Abd al-Salam where he reveals the spiritual reality of the Imams in rhythmic and rhyming poetry.

### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Imam 'Abd al-Salam (d. 1494), *Panj Sukhan (Five Discourses)*
- Imam 'Abd al-Salam (d. 1494), *Farman-i Shah 'Abd al-Salam* (Farman addressed to the Ismailis of Badakhshan and Kabul) bearing the Imam's signature (dated 1490) documented by W. Ivanow
- Imam 'Abd al-Salam (d. 1494), *Ode to the Seekers of Union (Ala ay Talib-i Wahdat)*
- Imam 'Abd al-Salam (d. 1494), *Bandi az Shah 'Abd al-Salam b. Shah Mustansir bi'llah*
- Imam Shah Gharib Mirza (d. 1498), *Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi* in which 'Abd al-Salam is named as the Imam of the time
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da'i Anjudani (f. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Khwaja 'Abd Allah Ansari (fl. late 15th century), poem titled "Har kih az 'ilm-i laduni shammai agah shud", preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscripts and quoted in Haft Bab Abu Ishaq and Kalam-i Pir refers to Imam Salamshah and Imam Mustansir.
- Husayn (fl. 15th century), poem titled "Amad Zaman", preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscript
- Zamani (fl. 15th century), poem titled "Ay dar miyan-i jan", preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscript
- Darwish (fl. 15th century), poem titled "Dila az manil-i in tirah khakdan bar khiz", preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscript
- Nizari Ismaili pilgrim (ca. 15th century), *Greetings O Emperor of the realm of faith and world*, refers to Shah Salam and Shah Gharib as successive Imams, preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscript
- Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah (d. 1534), *Sat Varani Moti ni Vel (Offspring of the Tales of the Truth)*
- Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
- Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*

- Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*  
(See Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 241-264)

#### 34. Imam 'Abbas Shah Gharib Mirza Mustansir bi'llah III (1494-1498)



O, truly-faithful believers, Mawlana Shah Mustansir bi'llah says: do not mention myself and the name of your Imam, Shah 'Abd al-Salam Shah, in the presence of the ignorant and unbelieving people who have an innate hatred of the prophethood and Imamat. You must, however, appeal to him in your heart and with your tongues. Conceal my whereabouts from the irreligious people of to-day so that you may for this attain the perfect reward and a righteous life.

Imam Shah Gharib Mirza Mustansir bi'llah III,  
(*Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi*, tr. Wladimir Ivanow, 21)

Imam Shah Gharib Mirza (also known as Mustansir bi'llah III), whose personal name was 'Abbas Shah, became known as "the Exiled Prince" (Shah Gharib) because he had to leave his homeland for a while due to persecution. There are several writings of this Imam that are extant today: these include the farman book *Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi*, whose sermons were given by Imam Shah Gharib Mirza during the lifetime of his father, Imam 'Abd al-Salam. This is why the *Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi* states that its author is Imam Mustansir bi'llah while the reigning Imam was 'Abd al-Salam. There is also another set of *farmans* known as *Kalam* that record the guidance of this Imam. Several Nizari Ismaili poets at the time mention the name of "Shah Gharib" and suggest that he assumed the office of Imamate when he was already quite old. Abu Ishaq Quhistani wrote his famous *Haft Bab* during this Imam's lifetime. The tomb of Imam Shah Gharib Mirza, shown above, was visited and documented by the historians Ivanow and Ibrahim Dihgan. The casket of his grave states:

This is the wooden box (*sandug*) of Shah Mustansir billah, the son of Shah Abd al-Salam. Written on the 10th of Muharram, 904/August 29, 1498.

*O King, certainly, in the way of the path  
The threshold of your court became the qibla of the world*

(Inscriptions on the Casket of Imam Shah Gharib Mirza, documented by Ibrahim Dihgan, tr. Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*)

### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Imam Shah Gharib Mirza (d. 1498), *Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi*
- Imam Shah Gharib Mirza (d. 1498), *Min Kalam-i Shah Gharib Mirza*
- Casket and grave of Imam Shah Gharib Mirza documented by Ibrahim Dihgan (d. 1948)
- Abu Ishaq Quhistani (fl. 15th century), *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq*
- Da'i Anjudani (fl. 15th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Khwaja 'Abd Allah Ansari (fl. late 15th century), poem titled "Har kih az 'ilm-i laduni shammai agah shud", preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscripts and quoted in *Haft Bab Abu Ishaq* and *Kalam-i Pir* refers to Imam Salamshah and Imam Mustansir.
- Husayn (fl. 15th century), poem titled "Amad Zaman", preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscript
- Zamani (fl. 15th century), poem titled "Ay dar miyan-i jan", preserved in



Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscript

- Darwish (fl. 15th century), poem titled “Dila az manil-i in tirah khakdan bar khiz”, preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscript
  - Nizari Ismaili pilgrim (ca. 15th century), *Greetings O Emperor of the realm of faith and world*, refers to Shah Salam and Shah Gharib as successive Imams, preserved in Institute of Ismaili Studies manuscript
  - Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah (d. 1534), *Sat Varani Moti ni Vel (Offspring of the Tales of the Truth)*
  - Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and ‘Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
  - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i ‘Aliyyah*
  - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
  - Fida’i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu’minin al-Talibin*
  - Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da’wah al-Isma’iliyyah*
- (See Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 241-264)

## **8. The Safavid (Fourth) Period of Concealment**

It seems that the true religious identity of the Nizari imams and their followers had become somewhat better known after the establishment of Safawid rule, despite their continued use of the Sufi guise. The increased and more overt activities of the Nizari Isma’ilis soon came to the attention of the earliest Safawid monarchs and their Twelver ‘*ulama*’ who reacted by subjecting them to renewed persecution. We have records of two particular instances of such persecution taking place during the first Safawid century.

Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 436)

### **35. Imam Abu Dharr ‘Ali (Nur Shah) (1498 – ca. 1509)**

Glorify Nur Shah as the Imam.

O brothers! Nur Shah is the manifestation of the Imam

And resides in the land of Kahak.

Sayyid Imamshah (d. 1513), (*Ginan: Jirebhaire amar fal che gurajine hath*, tr. Shafique Virani, *The Voice of Truth: The Life and Teachings of Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah*, MA Thesis, 21)

Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali was known as Nur Shah. Sayyid Imamshah, the leader of the Nizari Ismaili *da'wah* in India was summoned by the Imam and visited him in Anjudan. This Imam invested Sayyid Imamshah with a mission to guide the Jamat in South Asia, after several of Pir Hasan Kabir al-Din's children apostatized and became Sunnis. Sayyid Imamshah mentions visiting Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali, called Nur Shah, in several of his Ginans. Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali is the one who sent the *Pandiyat-i Jawanmardi* as guidance to the South Asian Ismailis, giving this *farman* book the status of Pir. It is also reported that Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali had to go into hiding for several years due to persecution. The Persian *hujjat* Khayrkhwah-i Harati also describes visiting this Imam in Anjudan while the poet Amir Shirazi eulogized Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali and his successor in his poetry. There is also evidence that Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali later cultivated good relations with the Safavid Shah Isma'il I and possibly married a Safavid princess. According to Muhammad Taqi, "*Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali had been invested the honorific title of Amir al-Umra, whose description is still preserved on the marble slab of Imam's grave.*" (*Athar-i Muhammadi*, 65-66).

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Tombstone and grave of Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali in Anjudan witnessed in 1842 by Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893)
- Sayyid Imam Shah (d. 1513), mentions visiting Imam Abu Dharr 'Ali (called Nur 'Ali) in several Ginans: "Jirebhaire sirabadh shahane kaje laviya"; "Jirebhaire amar fal che gurajine hath"; "Jirehbhai viracha sheheramen shaha more takhat e rachaeaji";
- Sayyid Nur Muhammad Shah (d. 1534), *Sat Varani Moti ni Vel (Offspring of the Tales of the Truth)*
- Khayrkhwah-i Harati (d. 1553), *Risalah*, in which he describes visiting the Imam of his time in Anjudan
- Amir Shirazi (d. 1591), *Diwan*; this poet was executed by the Safawids for eulogizing the Nizari Imams
- Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
- Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
- Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
- Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*

(See Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 241-264; Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 652-653)

### **36. Imam Murad Mirza (ca. 1509-1574)**

Farhad Daftary (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 437) writes regarding Imam Murad Mirza that: Shah Tahmasp persecuted the Qasim-Shahi Nizaris in the time of their thirty-sixth imam, Murad Mirza, the son and successor of Abu Dharr 'Ali. The *Tarikh-i Alfi*, an extensive history of the Muslim world from the death of the Prophet to around the year 1000/1591–1592, which was compiled in India by several authors at the request of the emperor Akbar, refers under the same year 981/1573–1574 to the persecution of the Nizaris of Anjudan in the time of a certain Murad who claimed their imamate. Sources relate that Murad also had numerous followers in India, who sent him large sums of money from Sind and elsewhere. Murad Mirza and his predecessor evidently did not reside permanently at Anjudan, where the headquarters of the Qasim-Shahi Nizari *da'wah* had been located. Murad Mirza was engaged in political activity outside Anjudan, possibly in collaboration with Nuqtawis, and he had acquired supporters in Kashan and elsewhere in central Persia. Being alarmed by the activities of Murad Mirza, early in 981/1573 Shah Tahmasp ordered Amir Khan Musilu, the governor of Hamadan, to proceed to the Anjudan area to capture Murad and deal with his followers (*muridan*). Amir Khan killed a large number of the Nizaris of Anjudan and its surroundings and took much booty from them, but Murad Mirza himself, who was then staying at a fortress in the district of Kamara around Anjudan, managed to escape. Soon afterwards, he was captured and imprisoned near the royal quarters. In Jumada II 981/October 1573, Murad Mirza escaped from prison with the assistance of Muhammad Muqim, a high Safawid official who had come under the influence of the Nizari Imam. Murad proceeded to the vicinity of Qandahar, receiving help on the way from his followers in Fars, Makran and Sind. A few months later, he was recaptured in Afghanistan by a contingent of Safawid guards commanded by Didar Beg. Murad was brought before Shah Tahmasp, who had him executed along with Muhammad Muqim. It is interesting to note that Khayrkhwah, a contemporary of Tahmasp I as well as Murad Mirza and the latter's predecessor, states that one of the Nizari Imams of his time went into hiding (*satr*) for seven years, probably making reference to Murad Mirza. There

is also a famous poet, Amir Shirazi, who mentioned Imam Murad Mirza in his poetry and was executed by the Safavids.

**Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Khayrkhwah-i Harati (d. 1553), *Risalah*, in which he describes visiting the Imam of his time in Anjudan
  - Amir Shirazi (d. 1591), *Diwan*; this poet was executed by the Safawids for eulogizing the Nizari Imams
  - Qadi Ahmad al-Qummi (d. after 1606), *Khulasat al-Tawarikh*
  - Qadi Ahmad Tatawi and Jafar Beg Asaf Khan (d. 1612), *Tarikh-i Alfi*
  - Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
  - Riza-Quli Khan Hidayat (d. 1871), *Rawdat al-Safa-yi Nasiri*
  - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
  - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
  - Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
  - Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 652-653)

**37. Imam Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali Khalil Allah I (1574-1634)**



1627 epigraph of the edict of the Safawid Shah 'Abbas I to Imam Amir Khali Allah Anjudani (Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali )

Farhad Daftary, *(The Isma'ili: Their History and Doctrines)*, 438

“According to this edict, originally installed in the main mosque of Anjudan and addressed to Amir Khalil Allah Anjudani, the current Qasim-Shahi Imam, the Shi’is of Anjudan, named as a dependency of the dar al-mu’minin of Qumm, were exempted, like other Shi’is around Qumm, from paying certain taxes.”  
(Daftary)

You must know that the knowledge of the Imam is one of the principles which should be accepted. As the Imam is permanent and an ever existing truth, the world could not be vacant of him for a single hour. And he, who does not know the Imam of his time, he would die a pre-Islamic death. The Imams are ever existing and permanent. They are continuous dynasty coming out the one from the other. The Imam is known from his original nucleus. If he has nominated and appointed for the post of Imamate, any one of his sons, he should be considered the right Imam.

Imam Dhu’l-Faqar ‘Ali Khalil Allah I,  
(Letter to Syrian Ismailis, tr. Mumtaz Aly Tajuddin Saddik Ali, *The Ismailis in History*, 1995)

After the Safavids started persecuting the Nizari Ismailis of Persia and executed Imam Murad Mirza, his successor Imam Dhu’l-Faqar ‘Ali, known as Khalil Allah, lived quietly in Anjudan. The Imam and the Nizaris of this time seem to have practiced taqiyyah in the guise of Twelvers. The Imam Dhu’l-Faqar ‘Ali formed close relations with the Safavid monarch Shah ‘Abbas I and possibly married one of his sisters. There is an epigraph (shown above) from Shah ‘Abbas dated 1627 which recognizes Imam Dhu’l-Faqar ‘Ali as the Amir of Anjudan and exempts the Shi’is of Anjudan from certain taxes. This Imam’s tombstone dated 1634 is in Anjudan and it names the Imam as Khalil Allah. Several Nizari poets including Khaki Khurasani and Azizullah Qummi eulogized the Imam Dhu’l-Faqar ‘Ali in their poetry, such as the following verses of Azizullah Qummi:

There will have been not a single sign of the creature on earth, had the world remained without the existence of an Imam.

He, the Imam is apparent and hidden, and shall remain so all the times, and will be perpetual for ever. The compass of the universe is revolving under his command.

None can recognize God in person and even cannot perceive God with his physical eyes, be he talented like Ibn Sina in knowledge and excellence.

Acquire the recognition of God through the *hujjat* and *mu'allim* for they are the seekers of the path of the *tariqah*.

If you recognized the Imam, it means you have recognized God (through his channel), otherwise you will be caught in hell-fire.

**Seek the recognition of Shah Dhu'l-Faqar, the Imam of the Age for he is the depository of glories.**

**He is like a man among the people, and sends the seekers of the path of religion towards God.**

**May I disclose you the interpretation of the "Mahdi in the cave?"**

**(It means that) the reality of the Imam is concealed in the cave of his heart from the hypocrites.**

He is manifest by rule of *nass* (investiture), which is like a point, and all the affairs are in motion on the way to that point.

Sometimes, he appears as a father, or a son. Sometimes he is seen engaged in the polemics of knowledge like the orthodox people.

Sometimes, he sits on the throne, governing as a sovereign. Sometimes, he is like a darwish, an emperor or as a Lord of the lords.

No changes takes place in his essence (*dhat*), therefore, you ponder over the world of reality from the physical world.

Azizullah Qummi, (tr. Mumtaz Ali Tajuddin Saddik Ali, *The Ismailis through History* 1995, [Read Here](#))/p>

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- *Epigraph*, dated 1627, of a royal edict of Shah Abbas I addressed to Imam Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali (Amir Khalil Allah Anjudani)
- Letter of Imam Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali sent to Syria, quoted in Mumtaz Aly Tajuddin Saddik Ali, *The Ismailis through History* (1995)
- Tombstone and grave of Imam Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali, stating his name and death date, documented by Wladimir Ivanow
- Azizullah Qummi (contemporary with the Imam), poetry quoted in Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
- Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646), *Diwan*, contains eulogies of Imam Dhu'l-Faqar 'Ali
- Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*



- Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
- Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
- Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
- Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 653)

### **38. Imam Nur al-Din 'Ali (1634-1671)**

Imam Nur al-Din 'Ali, known also as Nur al-Dahr, lived in Anjudan but also travelled to see the Nizari Ismailis in different parts of Persia. There is a famous event in which the Imam met Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani when the latter was just a young boy. The poetry of Khaki Khurasani also eulogizes Imam Nur al-Din 'Ali. While not much is known about the Imam's life, his tombstone is in Anjudan and was documented by the historian Ivanow.

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Tombstone and grave of Imam Nur al-Din 'Ali, stating his name and death date, documented by Wladimir Ivanow
- Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646), *Diwan*, contains eulogies of Imam Nur al-Din 'Ali
- Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
- Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
- Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
- Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
- Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 653-654)

### **39. Imam Khalil Allah II (1671-1680)**

Imam Khalil Allah II was the successor of Imam Nur al-Din 'Ali. According to Mumtaz Aly Tajuddin Saddik Ali (*The Ismailis through History*), this Imam examined the economic conditions of the poor Ismailis residing in Iran, India, Syria, Badakhshan and Central Asia, and sent necessary aid through his family members. He also reviewed the system of the Ismaili *da'wah* of different regions, and made vital changes specifically in the religious practices in India. The Imam Khalil Allah also held a conference of the *da'is* and missionaries of different regions in Anjudan to review the mission activities. He made few key

changes in the da'wah system in Syria and India, and issued necessary orders abreast of time in various regions. The tombstone and grave of Imam Khalil Allah is located in Anjudan as documented by Ivanow.

**Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Tombstone and grave of Imam Khalil Allah, giving his name and deathdate, documented by Wladimir Ivanow
  - Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
  - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
  - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
  - Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
  - Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 653-654)

**40. Imam Shah Nizar II (1680-1722)**



Portrait of Imam Shah Nizar from his Mausoleum. Image Courtesy of The Essential Ismaili

In the eyes of the people I am only a person by the name of Nizar, but in reality I am the one who sees everything in the world of reality.

While I am present, the people with wisdom and intellect do not take

advantage of my presence, and once I leave this world they make my tomb a sanctuary for the fulfillment of their wishes.

Imam Shah Nizar II,

(Qasidah: *Har Chand Ke Man*, Listen on [Youtube](#))

Imam Shah Nizar (d. 1722) was the fortieth Imam and moved his headquarters to the town of Kahak where his mausoleum can still be found today. This mausoleum also contains several tombstones with inscriptions of Khojki Sindhi characters – which attests to the fact that Khojah pilgrims regularly visited this Imam. Satpanth manuscripts and sources among the Imamshahis, including the prayers recited by the Imamshahi group, contain a genealogy of the Nizari Imams up to this Imam Shah Nizar. The Persian historian Ahmad ‘Ali Khan Vaziri (ca. 1876) in his *Tarikh-i Kirman* also refers to certain personal followers of Shah Nizar known as Ata’ullahis, who revered this Imam because they **“maintained complete faith and sincerity in the Sayyids of the line of Isma’il, son of Hadrat-i Imam, to speak correctly, Ja’far Sadiq.”** This quotation shows how the Nizari Ismaili Imams of this period were regarded, even by non-Isma’ilis, as “Sayyids” or direct descendants of Prophet Muhammad. Some of the ginans of South Asia actually mention this Shah Nizar as the Imam of the time residing in Kahak:

The ever-living Lord (*swami*) and Master (*shah*) has his seat in Kahak, manifest in the form (*avatara*) of ‘Ali.

He is the seventy-seventh vessel (*patra*) and fortieth Imam, made manifest as Shah Nizar.

Those who have met Shah Nizar became everlasting in form.

The sins of all their existences disappear, and then their bodies are purified.

The Master (*sahib*) has fulfilled all the hopes of His imperfect handmaiden, for it is the age of the Lord Shah Nizār.

Sayyid Abdu’l-Nabi, (*Ginan*, tr. Shackle and Moir, *Ismaili Hymns of South Asia*, 98-101)

Imam Shah Nizar is also known for a famous ode (*qasidah*) that he composed, which has been preserved by the Iranian Ismailis. A line from this *qasidah* is quoted above.

### Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Portrait of Imam Shah Nizar from his mausoleum
  - Imam Shah Nizar, *Qasidah*, still recited by contemporary Nizari Ismailis
  - Tombstone and mausoleum of Imam Shah Nizar in Kahak, giving his name and death date, documented by Wladimir Ivanow
  - Imam-Quli Khaki Khurasani (d. after 1646) and 'Ali-Quli Raqqami Khurasani (fl. 17th century), *Qasidah-yi Dhurriyyah*
  - Ahmad 'Ali Khan Vaziri (ca. 1876), *Tarikh-i Kirman; Jughrafiya-yi Kirman*, describes Shah Nizar as a sayyid and direct descendant of Isma'il b. Ja'far al-Sadiq.
  - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
  - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
  - Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
  - Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 657-661)

### 41. Imam Sayyid 'Ali (1722-d. ca. 1736)

Shah Nizar was succeeded by his son Imam Sayyid 'Ali (d. ca. 1736). While not much is known about this Imam's life, his tombstone is located in the mausoleum of his father Imam Shah Nizar. Imam Sayyid 'Ali is also mentioned in the *Silk-Guhar-Riz* as the father of Imam Hasan 'Ali in an account of a Central Asian Ismaili pir's meeting with the Imam (see below).

### Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:

- Tombstone and grave of Imam Sayyid Ali in the mausoleum of Imam Shah Nizar, giving his name, documented by Wladimir Ivanow
  - Eyewitness account of Central Asian Ismaili Pir, Muhammad Salih, meeting this Imam's son in *Silk-Guhar-Riz* (comp. ca. 1830)
  - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
  - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
  - Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
  - Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 657-661)

### 9. The Post-Safavid Period of Re-Emergence:

With the improved flow of the tithes of the Khojas, Imam Hasan Ali soon acquired extensive properties in Shahr-i Babak, also establishing a winter residence in the city of Kirman itself. **He was, indeed, the first Imam of his line to emerge from concealment and obscurity.**

Farhad Daftary, (*The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 459)

#### **42. Imam Sayyid Hasan ‘Ali Beg (ca. 1736-ca. 1747)**

As the wine of divine unity (*wahdat-i ilahi*) was handed to Khwaja Muhammad Salih, he began to look for the sun-face of Mawlana. After some quests, he finally reached the Sun [Imam] and drank a cup of wine of divine unity in his session (*majlis*), whose pure name was Mawlana Shah-i Din Hasan b. Mawlana Sayyid ‘Ali.

Silk-Guhar-Riz, (comp. ca. 1830 in Central Asia, tr. Abdulmamad Iloliev, *The Ismaili-Sufi Sage of Pamir*, 38)

**The Persian historian Vaziri introduces Imam Hasan ‘Ali, known as Sayyid Hasan Keheki, as being “from the lineage of Nizar who was, by several degrees removed, among the ancestors of Isma‘il b. Imam Ja‘far al-Sadiq.”** This quotation also shows how the Ismaili Imams of this period were recognized by their contemporaries as direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through the line of Isma‘il b. Ja‘far al-Sadiq and the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs through Nizar b. al-Mustansir. More importantly, as summarized by Daftary, Imam Hasan ‘Ali moved his headquarters to Shahr-i Babak because he was concerned for the safety of “the Khojas who regularly travelled to the Anjudan and Mahallat areas to visit their imam and remit to him their religious dues were often plundered and killed between Na‘in and Yazd by the Bakhtiari tribesmen” (Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 459). **Many sources suggest that Imam Hasan ‘Ali also had warm relations with Nadir Shah (1688-1747), who actually recognized him as the Nizari Ismaili Imam and direct descendant of Isma‘il b. Ja‘far al-Sadiq and the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs through Nizar b. al-Mustansir.** The *Athar-i Muhammad* (a chronicle written by a non-Ismaili servant of the Imams) reports that Nadir Shah appointed the Imam as the governor of Kiyab near Mahallat and that the Imam later helped Nadir Shah in the conquest of Isfahan. The Central Asian Ismaili pir Muhammad Salih, as

recorded in the *Silk-Guhar-Riz* actually visited Imam Hasan ‘Ali Shah in Kabul (as quoted above).

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Muhammad Kazim Marvi (comp. after 1747), ‘*Alamara-yi Nadiri*
  - Eyewitness account of Central Asian Ismaili Pir, Muhammad Salih, meeting this Imam’s son in *Silk-Guhar-Riz* (comp. ca. 1830)
  - Riza-Quli Khan Hidayat (d. 1871), *Rawdat al-Safa-yi Nasiri*
  - Ahmad ‘Ali Khan Vaziri (ca. 1876), who introduces this Imam as the direct descendant of Imam Nizar and Imam Isma‘il b. Ja‘far al-Sadiq, *Tarikh-i Kirman; Jughrafiya-yi Kirman*
  - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i ‘Aliyyah*
  - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
  - Fida‘i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu‘minin al-Talibin*
  - Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da‘wah al-Isma‘iliyyah*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 657-661)

#### **43. Imam Qasim ‘Ali (ca. 1747-ca. 1756)**

Imam Qasim ‘Ali, also known as Sayyid Ja‘far in some sources, was the son and successor of Imam Hasan ‘Ali. Imam Qasim ‘Ali did not have a long period of Imamate and little is known about his life. According to Mumtaz Ali Tajuddin Saddik Ali (*The Ismailis through History*, 1995), Imam Qasim ‘Ali was active in politics like his father and was also the governor of Kirman.

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Pamiri Ismaili authors descended from Sayyid Suhrab Wali (d. after 1452), *Silk-Guhar-Riz* (comp. ca. 1830)
  - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i ‘Aliyyah*
  - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
  - Fida‘i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu‘minin al-Talibin*
  - Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da‘wah al-Isma‘iliyyah*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 657-661)

#### **44. Imam Sayyid Abu’l-Hasan ‘Ali (ca. 1756-1792)**

Imam Abu’l-Hasan ‘Ali was also known as Sayyid Abu’l-Hasan Kahaki and became the governor of Kirman during the Zand period (1750-1794). John R. Perry writes in *Karim Khan Zand* (Chicago, 1979, 135-6) that, “*Abu’l-Hasan*



*enjoyed the respect of all the leading citizens and even the provincial warlords and would seem the perfect choice for beglerbegi (governor-general) now that Kirman was relatively settled."* This Imam played an active role in politics during the turbulent rule of the Zands. Imam Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali passed away in 1792 and was succeeded by his son Imam Khalil Allah III. The tombstone and grave of Imam Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali exists in Persia and was documented by the historian Ivanow.

#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Tombstone and grave of Imam Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali, stating his name and deathdate, documented by Wladimir Ivanow
- Mirza Muhammad Sadiq Musawi Isfahani (d. 1789), *Tarikh-i Gitigushay*
- Several letters of Imam Khalil Allah III in 1792 and 1794, presented as evidence in the Aga Khan Case of 1866
- Riza-Quli Khan Hidayat (d. 1871), *Rawdat al-Safa-yi Nasiri*
- Ahmad 'Ali Khan Vaziri (ca. 1876), *Tarikh-i Kirman; Jughrafiya-yi Kirman*
- Numerous Persian chronicles document events of this Imam's life
- Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i 'Aliyyah*
- 'Ali Rida 'Abd al-Karim Shirazi (ca. 1888), *Tarikh-i Zandiyyah*
- Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
- Fida'i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu'minin al-Talibin*
- Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da'wah al-Isma'iliyyah*

(See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 657-661)

#### **45. Imam Shah Khalil Allah III (1792-1817)**

There were still many Ismailis in the country who owed allegiance to an Imam of the line of Ismail. His name was Shah Khalil Allah, and he resided in a village called Kehek near Qumm, half-way between Tehran and Isfahan.

Jean Baptiste L. J. Rouseeau (1780-1831), (French consul-general in Aleppo, *Memoire sur les Ismaelis et les Nosairis de Syrie*, Vol. XIV, 1811, Paris, 279-80)

Imam Shah Khalil Allah moved from Kirman to Yazd – also in order to be closer to the Khoja Ismaili pilgrims who made dangerous journeys to see the Nizari Isma'ili Imams. E.I. Howard presented a few letters of written by this Imam in *The Shia School of Islam and its Branches* (Bombay, 1906, p. 85). On May 23,

1792, when Imam Shah Khalil Allah assumed the Imamatus, he wrote a letter addressed to the community of Bhavnagar, stating that he had been so fortunate as to have assumed his seat on the throne of the Imamatus, and directed them to remit the religious dues. Another letter dated July 1794 also addressed the Jamats of Sind, Kutchh, Surat, Bombay, Mahim, Bhavnagar, etc. Both of these letters were presented as evidence in the Aga Khan Case of 1866 to show how the Khojah Ismailis recognized the Nizari Ismaili Imams as the spiritual masters for a long time. Jean Baptiste L. J. Rouseeau (1780-1831), French consul-general in Aleppo (1809-1816), directly learned about Imam Khalil Allah from his visit to the Persian Qajar court of Fath 'Ali Shah and published his account as "Memoire sur ladynastie des Assassins, et sur l'etymologie de leur Nom."

I have collected some fairly exact notions about the Batinis or Ismailis commonly called Melahedehs, a sect which still survives and is widespread and tolerated, like many others, in the provinces of Persia and in the Sind...**Meanwhile, it may be useful to tell you that the Melahedehs even today have their Imam or pontiff, descending, as they claim, from Ja'far Sadiq, the chief of their sect, and residing at Kehek, a village in the district of Qom. He is called Sheikh Khalil Allah...**The Persian government does not bother him. On the contrary, he receives annual revenues from it. This person, whom his people grace with the pompous title of caliph, enjoys a great reputation and is considered to have the gift of performing miracles. They assure me that the Muslim Indians regularly come from the banks of the Indus to receive his blessings in exchange for the rich and pious offerings they bring him. He is more specifically known to the Persians by the name of Seid Keheki.

Jean Baptiste L. J. Rouseeau (1780-1831), (French consul-general in Aleppo, "Memoire sur la dynastie des Assassins," *Memoirs de l'Institut Royal de France* 4 (1818), tr. Shafique Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 10)

The local Twelver Shi'i 'ulama' were extremely jealous of the Imam because of his popularity and the reverence shown by his Nizari Ismaili followers. In 1817, a mob led by a Twelver Shi'i mullah stormed the Imam's home – they murdered the Imam and several Nizari Ismailis.

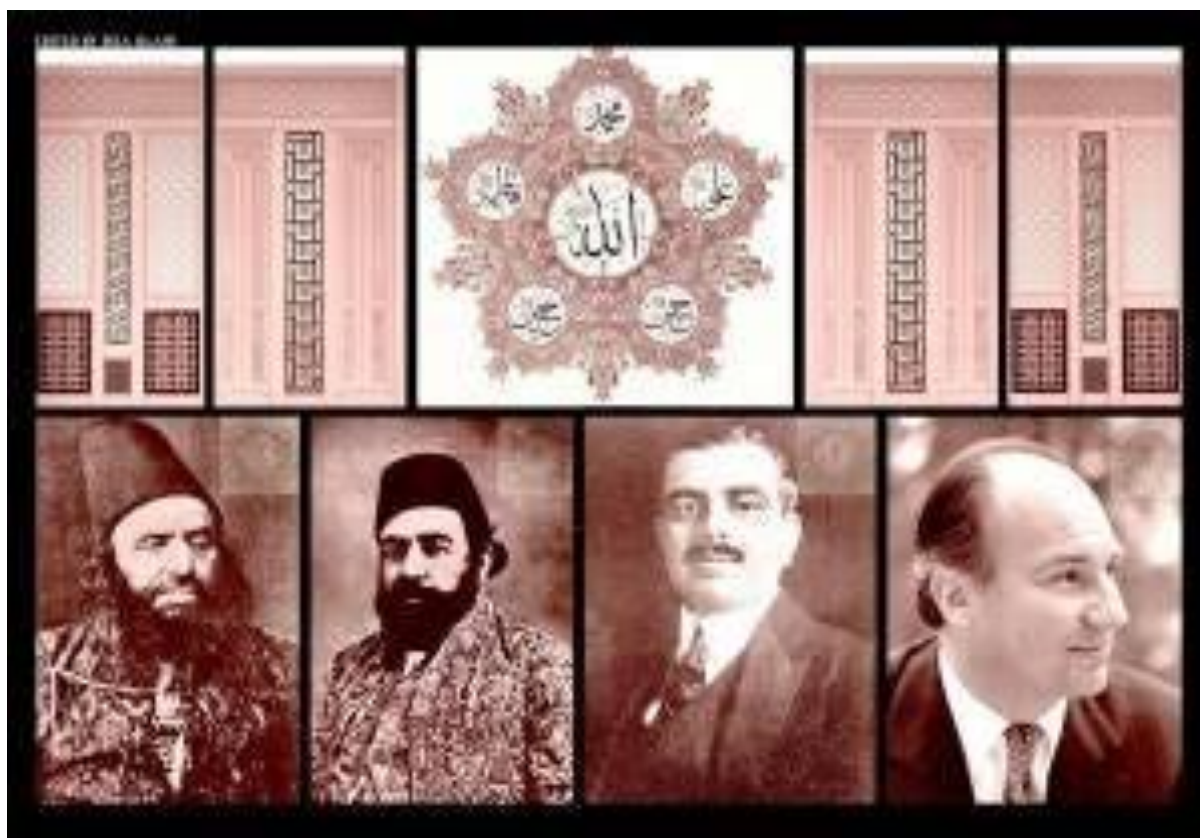
#### **Historical Sources mentioning this Imam:**

- Several letters of Imam Khalil Allah III in 1792 and 1794, presented as

evidence in the Aga Khan Case of 1866

- Two *Ginans* of Sayyid Fateh Ali Shah (1733-1798), including the famous Nawruz Ginan
  - Jean Baptiste L. J. Rouseeau (1780-1831), “Memoire sur la dynastie des Assassin” (1818)
  - Riza-Quli Khan Hidayat (d. 1871), *Rawdat al-Safa-yi Nasiri*
  - Pir Shihab al-Din Shah al-Husayni (d. 1884), *Kitab-i Khitabat-i ‘Aliyyah*
  - Muhammad Taqi (d. 1893), *Athar-i Muhammadi*
  - Fida’i Khurasani (d. 1923), *Kitab-i Hidayat al-Mu’minin al-Talibin*
  - Mustafa Ghalib (ca. 1964), *Tarikh al-Da’wah al-Isma’iliyyah*
- (See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*, 657-661)

## 10. The Modern Period: The Age of the Aga Khans



Left to Right: Aga Khan I, Aga Khan II, Aga Khan III, & Aga Khan IV

My grandfather was as I am and have been for close on seventy years, the hereditary Imam or Spiritual Chief of the Ismaili sect of the Shia Muslims. He was a Persian nobleman, closely related to the then reigning dynasty in Persia,

**but also in his own right the most princely blood in the Islamic world, for our family claims direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and his beloved son-in-law Ali: and we are also descended from the Fatimite Caliphs of Egypt.**

Imam Sultan Muhammad Aga Khan III,  
(*Memoirs of the Aga Khan*, 1954, 7)

The life and activities of the four Imams who held the title of “Aga Khan” – Imam Hasan ‘Ali Shah, Imam Aqa ‘Ali Shah, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah and Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Hazar Imam are well documented in a plethora of historical sources. Therefore, for these 4 Imams, our article will simply summarize certain events and happenings in their lives, as there is zero historical doubt that these four Aga Khans actually existed.

#### **46. Imam Shah Hasan ‘Ali Shah Aga Khan I (1817-1881)**



Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah Aga Khan I

**And it is known that my ancestors were from the Family of the Prophet, peace be upon him and upon his Family.** Yet despite all this, I am not attached in the slightest detail to this world and what is in it. Indeed, efforts have been

exerted to the utmost extent to spread the faith and the sacred law of the final Prophet in imitation of my pure ancestors. **Likewise, is it evident that in Egypt several generations of my ancestors held kingship and the caliphate...I am a descendant of that family.**

Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah Aga Khan I,  
(*Tarikh-i 'Ibrat-afza*, tr. Daniel Beben, Bombay, 19)

Imam Khalil Allah was succeeded by his thirteen year-old son, Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah. After Imam Khalil Allah was murdered, the family was left unprovided for and nearly destitute. The late Imam's wife, Bibi Pir Sarkar Mata Salamat went to the Qajar court, demanding justice for the new Imam and his family. The pleas were successful: Fateh 'Ali Shah Qajar brought the murderers to justice, bestowed the title of "Aga Khan" on Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah, gave one of his daughters in marriage to the Imam, granted the Imam land and appointed him as the governor of Qumm in 1835.

After the death of Fateh Ali Shah and the accession of Muhammad Shah Qajar, Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah Aga Khan I was made governor of Kirman. He returned to Kirman and restored law and order to the area using his personal military, fighting off Baluchi and Afghan rebels and raiders on behalf of the Qajars. He was expecting to receive compensation for his services from the new Shah, Muhammad Shah Qajar, but this was never granted. This mistreatment of the Imam was due to Qajar Court politics instigated by one Hajji Mirza Aqasi. This Qajar minister held a grudge against the Imam because Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah refused to marry his daughter (of royal blood) to a lowborn son of Aqasi's friend – a request that was a grave insult to the Imam. Mirza Aqasi's anger resulted in the Imam being deposed as governor of Kirman in 1837 and never compensated for his services. After an unsuccessful rebellion against the more powerful Qajar forces, for which Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah was held captive in Kirman and Tehran, the Imam was eventually pardoned and allowed to retire in Mahallat.

After again opposing the Qajars and fighting several minor battles, the Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah, his brother and their party found themselves greatly outnumbered and escaped to Qandahar in Afghanistan. Here the Imam formed an alliance with the British, with whom he likely had prior contact. In 1842, when the British decided to retreat from Afghanistan, their entire British-Indian

garrison was killed by Muhammad Akbar Khan's forces. The Imam's forces then assisted in the evacuation of the British forces from Qandahar. The Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah and his party then went to Sind where they helped defend the British from night attacks. The Imam also intervened diplomatically with the Baluchi chiefs to avoid further fighting with the British. The Imam and his family also survived a Baluchi raid where their possessions were plundered. Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah and his party eventually settled in Bombay, to the great joy of the Khoja Isma'ili Muslims, where he was joined by family members and attendants who migrated from Persia. The Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah wrote a personal memoir called *'Ibrat-Afza*, which is quoted above.

However, in 1848 Muhammad Shah's reign came to an end, and my grandfather settled peaceably in Bombay and there established his *durkhana* or headquarters. **Not only was this a wise and happy personal decision, but it had an admirable effect on the religious and communal life of the whole Ismaili world. It was as if the heavy load of persecution and fanatical hostility, which they had had to bear for so long, was lifted.** Deputations came to Bombay from places as remote as Kashgar, Bokhara, all parts of Iran, Syria, the Yemen, the African coast and the then narrowly settled hinterland behind it.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,  
(*Memoirs of the Aga Khan*, 1954, Read on [NanoWisdoms](#))

#### **47. Imam Aqa Shah 'Ali Shah Aga Khan II (1881-1885)**





Imam Hasan Ali Shah Aga Khan I next to Imam Aqa 'Ali Shah Aga Khan II.

We, the Imams in descent from Imam Husayn, are present until today and we shall remain until the Qiyamah and even after the Qiyamah.

Imam Aqa 'Ali Shah Aga Khan II,  
(Address made in Bombay, 1878)

Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah Aga Khan I was succeeded by his son Imam 'Aqa 'Ali Shah Aga Khan II (1881-1885), who also served as the *Pir* during his father's Imamate. Beginning with the Imamate of 'Aqa Ali Shah, the Nizari Ismaili Imams – no longer persecuted for their faith – were able to render immense services to Muslims of all persuasions and interpretations, beginning with the Muslims of India. "The growing prosperity of the Nizari Khoja community and his own policies earned Agha Khan II prestige among the Muslim population of India. He was elected president of a body called the Muhammadan National Association. In that position, which he held until his death, Agha Khan II promoted educational and philanthropic projects for the benefit of all Indian Muslims." (Daftary, *The Ismailis*, 477)

#### **48. Imam Shah Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III (1885-1957)**



### Enthronement of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III

O Jamats, do not consider me small. I am the descendant of the Prophet and my grandfather is Hazrat 'Amir al-Mu'minin (Hazrat 'Ali) and my grandmother is *Khatun-i-Jannat* (Lady of Paradise) Hazrat Bibi Fatima. **I am the Light (*nur*) of both Hazrat 'Ali and the Holy Prophet (Muhammad).** Though young in age, I am exalted.

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III,  
(Bombay, September 1, 1885, Jonah Steinberg, *Ismaili Modern*, 211)

Imam Aga 'Ali Shah Aga Khan II was succeeded by Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, who became the new Imam at the tender age of 7 years. Upon his installation, many of the members of the Community were distraught and concerned about the Imam being a small boy. To comfort his murids and remind them of his spiritual authority, the Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah told the Jamat in his first address (quoted above): "do not consider me small."

Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah lived an illustrious life and his countless accomplishments exceed all enumeration. An examination of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah's life shows that he was the most publicly renowned and prominent Imam in all of world history. His great and unprecedented role in world history was foretold by his grandfather, Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah Aga Khan I, who said: *"Name him Muhammad Sultan, for he will be a sultan in the world and his period will see wonderful events."* **Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah worked and advocated in the interest of all Muslims worldwide: in the 1910s, he successfully worked to get Indian Muslims separate electorates; in the 1920s, he fought the British using all media and diplomatic channels to get Turkey a good deal after World War 1 and even endeavoured to preserve the Sunni Ottoman Caliphate.** In the 1930s, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah led the Indian Muslim Independence movement at the Round Table Conferences. [Read more at [The Imamat and Service of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III](#)]

An abbreviated timeline of some of his great accomplishments is given below:

- 1897 – Knight Commander of the Indian Empire by Queen Victoria
- 1899 – Star of Persia by the Shah of Persia
- 1907-1914 – Founding Member and President of the All-India Muslim League
- 1921 – Founding Member and Vice Chancellor of Aligarh University
- 1923 – Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order by King George
- 1924-25 – Nominated for Nobel Peace Prize
- 1930 – Chairman of the British-Indian section to the Round Table Conference
- 1932 – Delegate of India to the League of Nations
- 1937-38 – President of the League of Nations



The worldly career of Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah culminated in his role as President of the League of Nations. This effectively meant that the Imām, the direct descendent of the Prophet Muḥammad, sat as the “leader of the nations of the world.” Even from an esoteric and spiritual perspective, Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah was, in the words of his grandson the present Imam, “the finest Imam we have had,” (July 26, 1957) and his holy personality is the living “Night of Power” (layat al-qadr) as foretold one thousand years ago by Fatimid thinkers – including Qadi al-Nu‘man, al-Mu‘ayyad al-Shirazi, and Nasir-i Khusraw (read more about that [here](#)).

#### **49. Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV (1957-present)**



Historically, Ismailis are united by a common allegiance to the living hereditary Imam of the time in the progeny of Islam's last and final Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) through his daughter Fatimah and her husband, Hazrat Ali, the Prophet's cousin and the first Shia Imam.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,  
(The Delegation of the Ismaili Imam Foundation Ceremony, Ottawa, June 6, 2005, [NanoWisdoms](#))

His Highness Imam Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV (b. 1936) is the present and 49th hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims and succeeded his grandfather to the office of Imamat in 1957. Born in Geneva and educated at Harvard, **the present Imam is the direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad in an unbroken hereditary lineage going back to Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib in the line of Imam Isma'il b. Ja'far al-Sadiq and Imam Nizar b. al-Mustansir bi'llah. Today, Hazar Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV is the only living claimant to the Shi'i Imam and he embodies the entire succession of the Shia Ismaili Imams going back thousands of years. The present Imam has declared this in his own words that:**

**I have the great privilege of representing the Ismaili Imam — this institution which has stretched beyond borders for more than 1400 years and which defines itself and is recognised by an increasingly large number of states, as the succession of Shia Imami Ismaili Imams...The Ismaili Imam is a supra-**



national entity, representing the succession of Imams since the time of the Prophet. But let me clarify something more about the history of that role, in both the Sunni and Shia interpretations of the Muslim faith. The Sunni position is that the Prophet nominated no successor, and that spiritual-moral authority belongs to those who are learned in matters of religious law. As a result, there are many Sunni imams in a given time and place. But others believed that the Prophet had designated his cousin and son-in-law, Ali, as his successor. From that early division, a host of further distinctions grew up, but the question of rightful leadership remains central. **In time, the Shia were also sub-divided over this question, so that today the Ismailis are the only Shia community who, throughout history, have been led by a living, hereditary Imam in direct descent from the Prophet.**

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,  
(Address to Joint Session of Canadian Parliament, February 27, 2014, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

Today, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni spends 95% of his time and life leading the 15 million strong Ismaili Muslim Community spread through 35 countries in the interpretation of Islam and working to improve the quality of life of all human beings (read about his daily life [here](#)). [Read about the Aga Khan's views and interpretations of Islam at [NanoWisdoms](#)]

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni is the Founder and Chairman of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) – a collection of development agencies which seek to improve quality of life and provide relief in the areas of poverty, health, architecture, media, governance, education, finance, economic development, building, environment, etc. [Read more on the AKDN [here](#)]





The Ismaili Imam has been widely recognized for his efforts in providing spiritual guidance and material assistance to the Ismaili Muslims, who are today spread over 25 countries, and for his vast contributions to quality of life in various communities worldwide. These include (courtesy of [Ismailmail](#)):

- 28 Title and State Decorations;
- 21 honorary degrees, from universities representing the US Ivy League, Canadian Group of 13, UK's Russell Group, and others;
- 16 civic honours, representing 9 investitures as Foreign Member to several state academies (for the creation of new knowledge – promoting research and stimulating the enhancement of thought, literature, language and other forms of national culture) and 3 Leadership posts at influential European Institutions to promote diplomacy, culture and development;
- 30 awards spanning domains such as architecture and the built environment, restoration and the revival of culture, education, health, diplomacy and peace, philanthropy, sports, corporate enterprise
- 70+ high profile keynote addresses delivered.

Most recently, Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni established the [first Global Seat of the Ismaili Imamat in Portugal](#). **According to this landmark Agreement, the Ismaili Imamat is also “a legal entity, [which] means the institution or office**

**of the Imam of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims [is] established in accordance with the applicable customary law.” Furthermore, the agreement states that the “Portuguese Republic acknowledges the legal personality and capacity of the Ismaili Imamat to act in international relations.”**

In terms of Ismaili history and theology, this means that the spiritual-religious office of the Ismaili Imamat now has a “legal manifestation” in the exoteric (*zahir*) realm of socio-international affairs – this manifestation being the “legal entity of the Ismaili Imamat” now recognized by Portugal. Just as in past eras, the Ismaili Imams publicly presented themselves and acted as Fatimid Caliphs (the Fatimid Caliphate), Sufi Shaykhs, or Persian governors in the public-exoteric (*zahir*) and socio-public realm, today, the Ismaili Imams are engaging in the public realm today through a formal legal-institutional structure with the formal name “Ismaili Imamat.” **Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the spiritual-religious office of the Imamat truly belongs to the esoteric realm, the World of Faith (*din*) – regardless of whether there is a legal institution of the Imamat in the public exoteric realm (*dunya*).** In the highest spiritual realm, there always remains the spiritual Light (*nur*) of Imamat that transcends time and space and which manifests in the person of each individual Ismaili Imam who occupies the spiritual-religious office of Imamat in the World of Faith (*din*).

Just as the lineage of Ismaili Imams has continued in an unbroken lineage from Imam ‘Ali b. Abi Talib to Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni today, it shall continue in the progeny of Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni evermore until the end of time:



**“You know, my role is only transitory.  
And from one Imam to the next, our  
first concern is the Ismaili community.”**

**- Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV**

*Jeune Afrique Interview, 19 September 2005*

[WWW.ISMAILIGNOSIS.COM](http://WWW.ISMAILIGNOSIS.COM)

**When you inherit an office, which is a life office, you are simply a link in the chain.** And, yes, you therefore look at life somewhat differently than if you were, I suppose, a professional who moves around and is free to do what he wishes. In my case, my concern is, I inherited an office, I would like the next Imam to have a structure and a system which enables him to be effective in the ethical and the human terminology of this institution. And that is the nature of what I seek. Now some things are impossible to achieve, I well know that. And if that is the case, I simply have to try and move the issues forward as much as I can. **The next Imam will then decide how he wishes to handle the issues. But, it is the continuum which is at the back of my mind, which in a sense, affects**

**the way I look at things. And that's why perhaps my time dimension appears different than it might for other people.** If I have to wait 12, 15, 20 years to achieve goals which I think are important, I will wait 12, 15, or 20 years. That simply is the nature of the issues that we have to address.

Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV,  
(Pranay Gupte Interview 1999, Read at [NanoWisdoms](#))

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