



BRILL

JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC MANUSCRIPTS 5 (2014) 1–25



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Ismāʿīlī Manuscripts from Yemen*

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Abstract

The Fāṭimid dynasty was founded in North Africa by the Ismāʿīlī movement in 297/909. Qāʾid Ġawhar, the commander of the Fāṭimid forces conquered Egypt and built the new capital Cairo in 358/969 from where the Fāṭimid imām-caliphs ruled a vast empire until their fall in 567/1171. The Ayyūbids, who succeeded them, ruthlessly destroyed the Ismāʿīlī heritage to such an extent that not a single book dealing with their doctrines survived in Egypt. In fact, the Ismāʿīlī legacy experienced the same fate across North Africa. This paper, therefore, poses the question: How did the Ismāʿīlī works, composed by their *duʿāt* in North Africa, Egypt, Iran and other places come to be preserved in Yemen, having completely vanished from their countries of origin? In response to this intriguing question, this essay seeks to scrutinise the Ismāʿīlī history from the very beginning of its religio-political activities until the present times and its close connection with the history of Yemen. According to a modest estimate, about seventy works belonging to the pre-Fāṭimid and Fāṭimid periods are still preserved, in addition to an equal number of books produced in Yemen following the collapse of the Ṣulayḥid dynasty in 532/1138 and the ensuing Mustaʿlī-Ṭayyibī *daʿwa* before the entire legacy was transferred to India.

Keywords

Dīwān al-Sulṭān al-Ḥaṭṭāb – *Fihrist al-Maġdūʿ* – Ḥarāz – Ibn Ḥawṣab – Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn – *Kitāb al-Azhār* – Lamak b. Mālīk al-Ḥammādī – al-Makārīma – *Mizāġ al-tasnīm* – Muʿayyad fī l-Dīn al-Šīrāzī – Mustaʿlī-Ṭayyibī *daʿwa* – *Qarāṭīs al-Yaman* – *al-Siġillāt l-*

* For research climate and facilities in Yemen, see an old report by Arnold Green & Robert Stookey, “Research in Yemen: Facilities, Climate and Current Projects,” in *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, vol. 8, no. 3 (1974), pp. 27–46.

Mustanşiriyya – Sīrat al-Malik al-Mukarram – Şulayhids – ‘Uyūn al-aḥbār wa-ṣaḥīḥ al-āṭār

1 Introduction

How did the Ismā‘īlī works,¹ written by their *du‘āt* (pl. of *dā‘ī*, i.e. missionaries) in different countries, at distinct times, under diverse circumstances, come to be preserved in Yemen having completely disappeared from their country of origin?² The answer to this intriguing question can be found in Ismā‘īlī history. The Ismā‘īlīs are historically associated with Yemen, as expounded by the Ismā‘īlī Yemenī *dā‘ī* Idrīs ‘Imād al-Dīn, a historian of the *da‘wa*³ and a prolific author, who died in 872/1468 in Shibām (Kawkabān).⁴ The following account is culled from his two major historical works. The first, titled *‘Uyūn al-aḥbār wa-ṣaḥīḥ al-āṭār* [‘Choicest of Reports and authentic traditions’] is in seven volumes.⁵ The first volume consists of the Prophet’s biography. The

1 The words ‘works’ or ‘books’ in the following pages, unless stated otherwise, are used to mean hand written manuscripts.

2 For example, no trace of Ismā‘īlī literature is to be found either in North Africa, from where the Fātimids emerged and founded a dynasty, or in Egypt, which they conquered and ruled for over two centuries. Following their collapse, various libraries, including the Palace Library, and one attached to Dār al-‘ilm, were ruthlessly ransacked. Maqrīzī states that the Palace Library contained over 200,000 volumes, including a number of unique books, many of which were sold over a ten year period. Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz al-hunafā*, ed. Ayman Fu‘ād Sayyid, London/Damascus, The Institute of Ismaili Studies in association with the Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2010, vol. 3, p. 393; idem, *Kitāb al-Mawā‘iz wa’l-‘tibār fī dīkr al-ḥiṭaṭ wa’l-āṭār*, ed. A.F. Sayyid, London, al-Furqān Foundation, 2002, vol. 2, pp. 355ff.

3 *Da‘wa* is a technical term for the Ismā‘īlī religio-political organisation. It has an elaborate hierarchy and is led by an Imām. Marius Canard, “*Da‘wa*,” *EI*².

4 For his life and works, see Ismail Kurban Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismā‘īlī Literature*, Malibu, CA, Undena, 1977, pp. 169–175. For an insight into his contribution to the history of the diaspora, see Samer Traboulsi’s article in this volume.

5 The full title, stated by the author in the introduction, is: *‘Uyūn al-aḥbār wa-ṣaḥīḥ al-āṭār fī dīkr sīrat al-nabī al-muḥtār wa-waṣīyyihī ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, qātil al-kuffār, wa-ālihimā al-aṭhār, ‘alayhim ṣalawāt al-‘Azīz al-Ġaffār. ‘Uyūn al-aḥbār*, vol. 1, ed. Ahmad Chleilat, London/Damascus, The Institute of Ismaili Studies in association with the Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2008, p. 13. It should be noted that the entire set, except vol. v, was republished by the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London in association with the Institut français du Proche-Orient. It is unfortunate that the publishers retained the corrupted title *‘Uyūn al-aḥbār wa-funūn al-āṭār* [‘Choicest reports and variety of impressions’] as the second half of the title

next two volumes are devoted to 'Alī's biography and the major events during his caliphate. The fourth volume contains biographies of the Ismā'īlī Imāms, beginning with Ḥasan b. 'Alī until the last hidden Imām Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad from the progeny of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl b. Ġa'far al-Ṣādiq. The subsequent three volumes deal with the beginning of the Ismā'īlī *da'wa* in Yemen and North Africa leading to the establishment of the Fātimid dynasty and the subsequent conquest of Egypt and the founding of the new capital Cairo. The history of the dynasty is narrated under the rubric of each Imām-Caliph's reign until the assassination of al-Āmir b. al-Musta'īlī, the occultation of his infant son al-Ṭayyib and the commencement of Musta'īlī-Ṭayyibī *da'wa* in Yemen around 524/1130.⁶ The second work, entitled *Nuzhat al-afkār wa-rawḍat al-aḥbār* ['Excursion of thoughts and a meadow of reports'] is in two volumes and deals with the political history of Yemen and the Musta'īlī-Ṭayyibī *da'wa* following the collapse of the Ṣulayḥids and in the period until the year 853/1449.⁷ In short, Yemen has played a crucial role in Ismā'īlī history and in the preservation of their literary heritage.⁸ In order to better understand Yemen's role in this heritage, it

does not make any sense. The quality of editing of each volume varies and the publishers or the editors did not bother to collect all the available mss. It also lacks a critical introduction.

- 6 This date is preferred because Kutayfāt, the son of Badr al-Ġamālī, who was promoted to the office of the vizierate soon after al-Āmir's assassination, issued coins in 525 and 526 AH bearing the name of an imām other than al-Ṭayyib, and on some coins his own name was printed as the representative of the hidden imām. For more details see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, 2nd edn., p. 247.
- 7 It is not edited and its full title is: *Nuzhat al-afkār wa-rawḍat al-aḥbār fī dīkr man qāma bi'l-Yaman min al-mulūk al-kibār wa'l-du'āt al-aḥyār*. It should be noted that the subsequent history until 870/1465 was recorded in a third book entitled *Rawḍat al-aḥbār* and exists in a unique ms. Poonawala, *Bibliography*, pp. 172–173.
- 8 Similarly, it is to be noted that Yemen was the depository of Mu'tazilī and Zaydī works that were discovered around the middle of the last century. For example, 14 of twenty volumes of *al-Muġnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa'l-'adl*, a major work by al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Ġabbār, were discovered in Yemen. Many Zaydī works were recovered in Yemen as this was where the Zaydī imamate, founded in 284/897, continued, with some interruptions, until 1962. These facts have been highlighted in a catalogue of microfilms of Arabic manuscripts obtained from Yemen, entitled *Qā'ima bi'l-maḥṭūṭāt al-'arabiyya al-muṣawwara bi'l-mikrūfilm min al-Ġumhūrīyya al-'Arabiyya al-Yamaniyya*, Cairo, *Wizārat al-ṭaqāfa, Dār al-kutub wa'l-waṭā'iq al-qawmiyya*, 1967, Arabic introduction. It states that this list of microfilms of Yemenī manuscripts is an important treasure trove and a breakthrough for the study of the Ismā'īlīs, Mu'tazilīs, and Zaydīs. In addition, it is rich with the medieval and recent history of Yemen. It states:

is essential to sketch a brief history of the Ismā'īlī *da'wa* in this country during the medieval times.

2 A Brief History of the Ismā'īlī *da'wa* in Yemen

Yemen, was probably chosen by the pre-Fāṭimid Ismā'īlī movement as a prime arena for its activities due to its peculiar geography, its remoteness from the 'Abbāsīd capital Baghdad and the Shī'ī proclivities of its people.⁹ Hence, in 268/881, two Ismā'īlī *dā'īs*, Abū'l-Qāsim al-Ḥasan b. Farağ b. Ḥawšab (Ibn Ḥawšab), a resident of Kūfa, and 'Alī b. al-Faḍl al-Ġayšānī, from Yemen, were recruited by the *da'wa* and sent to Yemen for the propagation of its mission.¹⁰ They started their activities in the Southern highlands and within a few years had succeeded in establishing a political base from where they launched further military campaigns and extended their sway over the entire country. They publicly proclaimed the imminent appearance (*zuhūr*) of the Mahdī from Yemen.¹¹ The Fāṭimid sources indicate that when the hidden Imām (the future Fāṭimid caliph 'Abd Allāh al-Mahdī) left his hiding place in Salamiyya, in Syria, around 289/902, he intended to go to Yemen.¹² However, it seems likely that doubts about the loyalty of 'Alī b. al-Faḍl to the Fāṭimid cause prompted

وَأَنَّ مَا صُوِّرَ مِنْ تَرَاثِ الْبَاطِنِيَّةِ [الِإِسْمَاعِيلِيَّةِ] يُعْتَبَرُ مِنْ نَوَادِرِ الْمَخْطُوطَاتِ فِي الْعَالَمِ، وَيُحَقِّقُ كَسْبًا عَظِيمًا
لِلْمَكْتَبَةِ الْعَرَبِيَّةِ (...) أَمَا تَرَاثُ الزَيْدِيَّةِ وَالْمَهَادِيَّةِ وَالْمَعْتَزَلَةِ فَتَمَثَّلُهُ، فِي هَذِهِ الْقَائِمَةِ، مَصْنَفَاتٌ فِي فِقْهِ الْإِمَامِ
زَيْدِ بْنِ عَلِيِّ بْنِ الْحُسَيْنِ، وَشُرُوحُ فُرُوعِهِ الَّتِي اشتهر منها اجتهادات الإمام الهادي إلى الحق مجي (...)
وَأَمَّا الْمَخْطُوطَاتُ التَّارِيخِيَّةُ فَمُعْظَمُهَا عَنْ تَارِيخِ الْيَمَنِ (...) وَهِيَ حَقْبَةٌ هَامَةٌ مِنْ حَيَاةِ الْيَمَنِ.

See also Daniel Gimaret, "Mu'tazila," *EI*².

- 9 For details, see Ḥusayn al-Hamdānī, *Al-Ṣulayḥiyyūn wa'l-ḥaraka al-fāṭimiyya fi'l-Yaman*, Cairo, Maktabat Miṣr, 1955, pp. 12–26.
- 10 Both were Twelver Shī'īs and were converted and recruited by the Ismā'īlī *da'wa*. For further details, see al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa*, ed. Farhat Dachraoui, Tunis, 1975, pp. 2–26; English tr. Hamid Haji, *Founding the Fatimid State*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2006, pp. 19–41; Heinz Halm, "Methods and forms of the earliest Ismā'īlī *da'wa*," in Etan Kohlberg (ed.), *Shī'ism*, London, Ashgate/Variorum, 2003, *passim*.
- 11 For the concept of Mahdī, see Wilferd Madelung, "Al-Mahdī," *EI*².
- 12 H. Halm, *Das Reich des Mahdi, Der Aufstieg der Fatimiden*, Munich, C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1991, pp. 74, 87–89; English tr. Michael Bonner, *The Empire of the Mahdi: The Rise of the Faimids*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1996, pp. 74, 90–91 (older Ismā'īlī sources are cited therein).

al-Mahdī, while he was in Egypt, to change his original plan and proceed to North Africa instead.¹³ In 299/911, two years after the foundation of the Fāṭimid dynasty in North Africa, 'Alī b. al-Faḍl publicly repudiated his allegiance to the Fāṭimids, whereas his companion, Ibn Ḥawšab, remained loyal. This internal disagreement developed into open warfare between the two founders of Ismā'īlī success. Ultimately, this proved disastrous and by 303/915 their political power had disintegrated. Thus, the first phase of the Ismā'īlī dominance in Yemen came to an end; however, the religious organisation of the *da'wa* survived this collapse of political power and continued to operate clandestinely.¹⁴

The second phase of the Ismā'īlī political ascendancy in Yemen began in 439/1047, with the rise of 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ṣulayḥī in the highlands of Ḥarāz to the south-west of the capital Ṣan'ā'.¹⁵ He founded a powerful Ṣulayḥid dynasty that lasted, at least nominally, almost a century, until 532/1138. This rule is generally divided into two distinct phases: the first from 439/1047 to 480/1087 when the Ṣulayḥid's ruled from Ṣan'ā' and their authority extended over most of the country; followed by a second phase until 532/1138 during which they ruled from their new capital Dī Ḡibla, in the southern plateaus, and their power and prestige waned. The Ṣulayḥid period is considered a luminous phase in Yemenī history marked by close relations with their coreligionists, the Fāṭimids of Egypt.

What is important for our study in this context is the role of the grand *qāḍī* of Yemen, Lamak b. Mālik al-Ḥammādī al-Hamdānī and his mission to Cairo. On the authority of the *dā'ī* Ḥātim b. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥāmidī (d. 596/1199), Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn narrates that 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ṣulayḥī sent a deputation, headed by Qāḍī Lamak b. Mālik, to the Fāṭimid Imām-Caliph al-Mustanṣir in 454/1062 to obtain the caliph's permission to proceed with his chosen Yemenī troops to Cairo.¹⁶ It must be noted that, during this period, Egypt was experiencing diffi-

13 Independent proclivities of 'Alī b. al-Faḍl became apparent in 294/906–907. Al-Mahdī had arrived in Fustāṭ in February 904 and stayed there for about a year before leaving for North Africa. Al-Hamdānī, *Al-Ṣulayḥiyyūn*, pp. 40–41.

14 Al-Hamdānī, *Al-Ṣulayḥiyyūn*, pp. 27–61; W. Madelung, "Maṣṣur al-Yaman," *EI*². These events are also summarised by Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid, *Tārīḥ al-maḍāhib al-dīniyya fī bilād al-Yaman ḥattā nihāyat al-qarn al-sādis al-ḥiḡri*, Cairo, Dār al-miṣriyya al-lubnāniyya, 1988, pp. 91–96.

15 He was converted to Ismā'īlī faith by the *dā'ī* Sulaymān b. 'Abd Allāh al-Zawāhī. G. Rex Smith, "Ṣulayḥids," *EI*².

16 Ḥātim al-Ḥāmidī, *Risālat tuḥfat al-qulūb wa-furḡat al-makrūb*, ed. Abbas Hamdani, Beirut, Dār al-sāqī in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2012, pp. 105–106. Ḥusain

cult times, while ‘Alī b. Muḥammad was at the peak of his power in Yemen. Consequently, the latter thought of rescuing the Imām-Caliph from the chaos created by armed conflict between the three ethnic components of Fāṭimid troops. The Turks, aided by the North African Berbers, fought the black Sudanese troops.¹⁷ Lamak b. Mālik was confined to Cairo with al-Mu‘ayyad fi’l-Dīn al-Šīrāzī,¹⁸ the chief *dā‘ī*, for five years, because permission to leave Egypt kept being deferred on some unspecified pretext. Meanwhile, ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Šulayḥī was getting impatient with the long delay and decided to make a pilgrimage to Mecca and proceed to Cairo from there; however, he was ambushed on his way in al-Mahḡam, northern Tihāma, by the Naḡāḥid Sa‘īd al-Aḥwal and assassinated in 459/1067.¹⁹

Following this tragedy, the Qāḍī Lamak returned to Yemen with special instructions. It was this close association between him and al-Mu‘ayyad that changed the future course of the *da‘wa* in Yemen and paved the way for the preservation of its literary and religious heritage. Al-Mu‘ayyad’s understanding of what was happening in Cairo resulted him in instructing Lamak b. Mālik about the future policy of the *da‘wa* to be followed in Yemen. He was also instrumental in the transfer of the *da‘wa* literature produced in North Africa, Egypt and elsewhere to Yemen, which was considered a safe haven due to the political power wielded by the Šulayḥids and where the *da‘wa* organisation was strong and vigorous.²⁰ The Yemenī *da‘wa* archives preserved a collection of royal decrees (*siḡillāt*) issued by the Fāṭimid Imām-Caliph al-Mustansīr to the Šulayḥid rulers of Yemen. A recent copy of this valuable archival document, transcribed in India and discovered by Husayn al-Hamdani, was presented to the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London in the 1930s.²¹ Regrettably, there is no information about its compiler and the whereabouts of the original Yemenī manuscript, or about how it was

Fayḍ Allāh al-Hamdānī, “Some Unknown Ismā‘īli Authors and their Works,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1933, pp. 361–362.

17 For details, see Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, pp. 193 ff.

18 For the life and works of al-Šīrāzī, see Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, pp. 103–109.

19 Smith, “Šulayḥids.”

20 The story of the transfer of the Ismā‘īli *da‘wa* literature from Egypt to Yemen is further discussed in details by al-Hamdānī, *Al-Šulayḥīyyūn*, pp. 175–183; Sayyid, *Tārīḡ al-maḡāhib*, pp. 130–138; I.K. Poonawala, *Al-Sulṭān al-Khaṭṭāb: Ḥayātuhu wa-shi‘ruhu*, Beirut, Dār al-ḡarb al-islāmī, 1999, 2nd edn., pp. 10–14.

21 The exact date is unavailable; however, judging from Hamdani’s article based on this manuscript (see the following note) it must have been donated by him after the completion of his study.

transferred and copied in India. It contains 66 letters issued from the Fāṭimid chancellery in Cairo covering a period of 44 years, from 445/1053 to 489/1095.²² It is rich with historical information and indicates frequent communications between the two countries.

The third phase of Ismā'īlī history in Yemen begins a few years before the collapse of the Ṣulayḥids. In 524/1130, the Fāṭimid Imām-Caliph al-Āmir b. al-Musta'li was assassinated by a Nizārī.²³ Prior to his death, al-Āmir appointed his cousin 'Abd al-Mağīd as a regent for his infant son al-Ṭayyib.²⁴ Soon after assuming power, 'Abd al-Mağīd claimed the imamate for himself and assumed the regal title of *al-Ḥāfiẓ li-Dīn Allāh*. The Ṣulayḥid queen, Sayyida Arwā bt. Aḥmad, who had previously acknowledged the imamate and succession of al-Musta'li b. al-Mustanṣir and his son al-Āmir, severed her relations with the new caliph al-Ḥāfiẓ in Cairo by upholding the right of al-Ṭayyib to the imamate. She appointed the *dā'ī* Du'ayb b. Mūsā al-Wādī'ī, who had succeeded Yaḥyā b. Lamak al-Ḥammādī in the headship of the *da'wa*, as the *dā'ī muṭlaq* (with unlimited authority) to manage the affairs of the *da'wa* and the community in the absence of the Imām al-Ṭayyib b. al-Āmir, who had gone into occultation.²⁵ Thus, the Yemenī Ṭayyibī *da'wa* became independent of Egypt and did not recognise al-Ḥāfiẓ and the subsequent Fāṭimid caliphs in Cairo. The chain of the *dā'ī muṭlaqs* continued uninterrupted until 946/1539 when the *dā'ī*ship passed to Yūsuf b. Sulaymān of India.²⁶ After the latter's death in 974/1567, both the *dā'ī*ship and the headquarters of the *da'wa* were transferred to the West coast of India where the community was burgeoning.

22 Ḥ.F. al-Hamdānī, "The Letters of Al-Mustanṣir bi'llāh," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 7 (1933–1935), pp. 307–324; *Al-Siğillāt al-mustanṣiriyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Mun'im Māğīd, Cairo, Dār al-fikr al-'arabī, 1954.

23 Following the death of al-Mustanṣir in 487/1094 the Ismā'īlīs split into two branches over the issue of succession: the Musta'lis and the Nizārīs. Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, p. 238.

24 Al-Hamdānī, *Al-Ṣulayḥiyyūn*, pp. 182–193; Samuel Miklos Stern, "The succession to al-Āmir, the claims of the later Fatimids to the imamate, and the rise of Ṭayyibī Ismailism," *Oriens*, vol. 4 (1951), pp. 193–255. The Ṣulayḥid queen Arwā had also received an official *siğill* (decree) from al-Āmir giving her good tidings following the birth of his son, al-Ṭayyib.

25 Al-Hamdānī, *Al-Ṣulayḥiyyūn*, pp. 182 ff.; idem, "The Life and Times of Queen Saiyidah Arwā the Ṣulayḥid of the Yemen," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1933, pp. 505–517; Sayyid, *Tārīḥ al-maḍāhib*, pp. 150–203.

26 Yūsuf b. Sulaymān, a native of Sidhpur, in Gujarat, was selected by the *da'wa* organisation in India to go to Yemen for further training in the *'ulūm al-da'wa* (the religious sciences of the *da'wa*). There, he initially studied under Ḥasan b. Nūḥ al-Bharūchī (al-Hindī) and distinguished himself as a student. Consequently, he was nominated by the twenty-third *dā'ī* Muḥammad b. Ḥasan to succeed him. Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, p. 184.

3 Production and Survey of the Yemenī Manuscripts of the Ismāʿīlīs

It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with the precarious circumstances under which the Ismāʿīlī community lived in Yemen. Despite being surrounded by hostile Sunnī and Zaydī political forces, they managed to survive in their mountain strongholds in the Ḥarāz region. It was during the third phase, lasting for four centuries, that the learned *dāʿīs* and other *daʿwa* dignitaries vigorously continued the Ismāʿīlī tradition of learning by studying and copying earlier manuscripts. In addition to preserving the legacy, they added an enormous corpus of their own, further enriching the Ismāʿīlī heritage in various branches of knowledge, such as the fields of literature, theology, *taʿwīl* (allegorical interpretation of the Qurʾān and the *ṣarīʿa*), philosophy and history. One can get a glimpse of their labours and literary output by glancing at the *Biobibliography of Ismāʿīlī Literature*.²⁷

The *daʿwa* literature produced during the Fāṭimid times in North Africa, Egypt, Iran, and Iraq completely vanished from those countries. Some literature remained in Syria, but only a fraction of this was preserved by the country's Nizārī Ismāʿīlī communities in their strongholds, such as Salamiyya or Maṣyāf.²⁸ With the transfer of the *daʿwa* headquarters from Yemen to the west coast of India, where the community was flourishing, Yemenī manuscripts also began their eastward journey to a new safe haven. The process of transfer must have been slow and undertaken with meticulous care and caution given the hostility of the Ottomans and the Zaydīs who ruled Yemen for a long time. Unfortunately, there are no remaining historical accounts to shed more light on this issue. One can occasionally surmise this movement of manuscripts through direct or indirect references in the correspondence exchanged between the two *daʿwa* centers in Yemen and India. The two volumes of *Qarātīs al-Yaman*, originally preserved in the Hamdani collection, consist of letters written by the *daʿwa* dignitaries from Yemen to their counterparts in India and

²⁷ Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, pp. 133–183.

²⁸ There is no reliable and comprehensive information about the Ismāʿīlī manuscripts preserved in Syria, other than that some short treatises discovered there were edited either by ʿĀrif Tāmīr or Muṣṭafā Ġālib. Both editors refer to other extant manuscripts in their works; however, neither their editions, nor their references are trustworthy. For example, *al-Risāla al-muḏhiba*, ascribed to al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, was published by ʿĀrif Tāmīr in *Ḥams rasāʾil ismāʿīliyya*, Salamiyya, 1956; a few years later he found the exact same manuscript ascribed to Ibn Killis, which he published separately in Beirut in 1988. This type of lopsided scholarship has a great deal of damage to Ismāʿīlī studies as some Western scholars took it for granted that it was an authentic work of Nuʿmān.

vice versa. One volume, which is still in the Hamdani collection, covers the period between 800/1397 and 1100/1688–1689, while the second, known as the Tübingen manuscript (which was originally from the Hamdani collection but was stolen and sold to the Library of the University of Tübingen along with a number of other Ismā'īlī manuscripts) covers the period between 904/1498–1499 and 982/1574.²⁹

The inventory of extant Ismā'īlī manuscripts in Yemen until the time of the *dā'ī* Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn can be compiled from his surviving works. The next stage, to measure the extant Yemenī manuscripts and assess how many were lost during the intervening period of little over half a century is undertaken from *Kitāb al-Azhār* ['Book of Flowers'] by Ḥasan b. Nūḥ al-Bharūchī (al-Hindī, d. in 939/1533). The author selected passages and small epistles from earlier Ismā'īlī literature and collected them in seven volumes. Thanks to this anthology, many earlier works, otherwise lost, are preserved, either in full or in part.³⁰ According to his own statement, al-Bharūchī was born and brought up in Khambhāt (Cambay), a port city in Gujarat, where he received his early Ismā'īlī education. Urged on by a thirst for more knowledge after he had exhausted all the avenues available in India, he left his native town and sailed to Yemen at the dawn of the tenth/sixteenth century. There, he settled in Masār (in Ḥarāz) and devoted himself to the study of the whole range of *da'wa* literature with Ḥasan b. Idrīs, the twentieth *dā'ī*. After Ḥasan b. Idrīs' death in 918/1512, al-Bharūchī moved with Ḥusayn b. Idrīs, the twenty-first *dā'ī*, to Shibām (Kawkabān), to complete his studies. In the introduction to his *Kitāb al-Azhār*, he recounts in full, and in sequential order, the books from various branches of the *'ulūm al-da'wa* (the religious sciences of the Ismā'īlīs) that he studied with the two *dā'īs*.

Ismā'īl b. 'Abd al-Rasūl al-Mağdū's (d. ca 1184/1769–1770) *Fihrist* (Bibliography) of Ismā'īlī works compiled in India, where the bulk of the Yemenī-Ismā'īlī manuscripts had migrated, is another benchmark to measure the scope of available manuscripts. He fully describes the contents of works accessible to him without giving the specifics about whether the manuscripts he consulted were

29 I was unable to check the Hamdani ms. because it is still in Abbas Hamdani's possession and not in the Hamdani collection, which he donated to the Institute of Ismaili Studies. For details of the Tübingen ms., see Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, pp. 326–328. The Tübingen ms. is preserved in the library of the Orientalische Seminar der Universität Tübingen. For its detailed contents, see Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, pp. 326–328; see also the article by Samer Traboulsi in this volume.

30 Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, pp. 178–183; I.K. Poonawala, "Ḥasan b. Nūḥ al-Bharūchī al-Hindī," *ET*³.

transcribed in Yemen, or were from Yemenī exemplars copied in India. He has enumerated approximately 70 works belonging to the pre-Fāṭimid and Fāṭimid periods and another 71 works from the third phase of Ismāʿīlī history in Yemen. It is worth noting that Maḡdūʿs list is quite extensive. If one compares and contrasts his list with that of Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn, one discovers that many works were lost during the intervening period of three centuries.

For example, in his *Fihrist*, al-Maḡdūʿ states that with the exception of a small fragment from the beginning of the chapter on ritual prayer, the entire book of al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān's *Kitāb al-Īdāh* [‘The Book of Elucidation’] is lost.³¹ However, in his *Kitāb al-Ḥawāšī* [‘The Book of Marginal Notes’], Amīnḡī b. Ġalāl (d. 1010/1602), an eminent Ismāʿīlī jurist from India, cites extensive quotes from the *Kitāb al-Īdāh*. The last citation from the latter work is taken from the *kitāb al-diyāt* (the chapter on Blood Money is the 16th chapter in the *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*, vol. 2). This would imply that perhaps the whole book, or at least a major part of it, was still available to the author of the *Ḥawāšī* in India. It leads us to conclude that within the span of less than two centuries, the bulk of *Kitāb al-Īdāh* disappeared from the *hizāna* (library) of the *daʿwa*. The reason could be that very few copies were left by that time and, given its voluminous size, no additional copies were produced.

Unfortunately, the religious establishment of the Ṭayyibī-Dāʿūdī community (also known as Dāʿūdī Bohras in India) does not allow access to the *daʿwa* collection of manuscripts, even to the learned members of its own community. The policy of guarding the *daʿwa* books from non-Ismāʿīlīs, strictly enforced during the Yemenī period, does not make any sense these days. During the last half century, several Ismāʿīlī manuscripts were acquired by public and private libraries. Moreover, a substantial number of them are published and translated. Yet, the Bohra religious leadership remains adamant and refuses to review this outdated policy and adapt it to the changed circumstances. The obstinacy of these authorities, who are keeping the community ignorant by maintaining their monopoly over religious learning, and their uncooperative attitude towards scholars is illustrated by their conduct with regard to the late Asaf A.A. Fyze, an eminent scholar of Islamic law in India. In the introduction to his critical edition of Nuʿmān's *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*, Fyze writes:

31 Ismāʿīl b. ʿAbd al-Rasūl al-Maḡdūʿ, *Fahrasat al-kutub waʾl-rasāʾil*, ed. ʿAlī Naqī Munzawī, Tehran, Chāpḥāna-i Dānīshgāh-i Tehrān, 1966, p. 33; I.K. Poonawala, “Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān and Ismāʿīlī jurisprudence,” in F. Daftary (ed.), *Mediaeval Ismāʿīlī History and Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 137, n. 27.

It is significant that I commenced work on the edition of the first volume of the *Da'ā'im* on the first [of] January 1944, and that I was able merely to have a look at the most valuable ms. of the *Da'ā'im* extant after some five and a half years, although I lived in the same city and had the pleasure of the acquaintance of the owner. That is not surprising, however; in fact, I am grateful to the Mullaḡi Saheb for allowing me to have a look at the book in the presence of his son for about an hour in his office, Badri Mahall, Bombay. It is to be hoped that, in the course of time, this attitude will change and give place to the spirit prevalent among scholars in Europe [...] Similarly I am unable to offer adequate thanks to Shaykh Fayḍu'l-lāh Bhā'ī [Hamdānī] who is always ready to lend the most valuable MSS. and help out of the profundity of his learning [...] in spite of the handicaps of age and weakness.³²

Hence, there is no way to ascertain exactly how many books or Yemenī exemplars are still preserved in the collection of the *da'wa*, let alone the hundreds of manuscripts seized during the last century from the families of deceased learned *shaykhs* and *mullās*.³³

Let me cite another example of a book that was presumed lost, but was actually preserved in the private collection of the *da'wa*. The recently rediscovered book is *Sīrat al-malik al-Mukarram* ['Biography of King al-Mukarram'], an anonymous biography of al-Amīr Aḥmad al-Mukarram al-Ṣulayḥī, who succeeded his father 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ṣulayḥī, the founder of the dynasty, in 459/1067.³⁴ The biographical account ends with the events of Dū'l-Ḥiḡḡa

32 Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, vol. 1, ed. Asaf Ali Asghar Fyze, Cairo, Dār al-ma'ārif, 1961, 2d reprint, pp. 14–15 (English introduction). There seems to be either a printing error, or a discrepancy in copying the colophon of the Yemenī manuscript of the *Da'ā'im*, because the date of copying is stated to be 4, Ğumādā 1, 989, and the name of the copyist is Ḥasan b. Idrīs b. 'Alī, whom Fyze has incorrectly identified as the twenty-second *dā'ī*. The twenty-second *dā'ī* was 'Alī b. Ḥusayn b. Idrīs who died in 933/1527, while Ḥasan b. Idrīs was the twentieth *dā'ī* who died in 918/1512. Thus, if it was copied by the twentieth *dā'ī* it must have been before 918/1512. On the other hand, if the date is correctly copied then the copyist could not be the twentieth *dā'ī*. Fyze adds that the abovementioned manuscript, a Yemenī exemplar and fully vocalized with copious marginal notes, is constantly consulted by the Mullāḡi; hence, it never leaves the possession of the *dā'ī*.

33 It was required that the family of the deceased *shaykh* or *mullā* must submit all manuscripts to the local 'Āmil before the third day of the *fātiha* recitation for the departed soul, otherwise the permission for that rite would not be granted. Very few families had the courage to defy the local religious authority and other societal pressures.

34 See Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, p. 323, no. 50.

460/October 1068. At the end, the author has reproduced the *siġill* (official document) of the Fāṭimid Imām-Caliph al-Mustansir addressed to al-Mukarram, dated Ša'bān 460/June 1068. Hence, it is assumed that the biography was probably composed around 461–462/1068–1070. Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn cites it, i.e. *Sīrat al-Mukarram*, thrice in his *'Uyūn al-aḥbār*, while narrating the history of the Ṣulayhids.³⁵ It is an important historical document that sheds new light on the appointment of the Amīr Muḥammad, the eldest son of 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ṣulayhī, as *waliyy al-'ahd* (successor to the throne) and his untimely death in Zabīd in Muḥarram 458/December 1065. It also reports the assassination of 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ṣulayhī and hostile behaviour of the tribes, such as Kaḥlān, Hirrān, 'Ans, Zubayd and Yaḥṣub.³⁶ Its critical edition with introduction was presented as a PhD thesis to the London University in 1999 by Mohammed Shakir [Shukri], but has not been published.³⁷ A cursory perusal suggests that it is adequately edited from two manuscripts preserved in the private collection of the *dā'ī*'s family. The editor states in the introduction that one of the manuscripts was transcribed from an older Yemenī copy.³⁸

Another well-documented case concerning the movement of Ismā'īlī manuscripts from Yemen to India is that of 'Alī b. Sa'īd b. Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Ya'burī al-Hamdānī. He was born ca. 1132/1718 in Ḥarāz and became a renowned scholar.³⁹ This prompted the thirty-ninth *dā'ī*, Ibrāhīm Waġīh al-Dīn (d. 1168/1754), to invite him to India. Consequently, he migrated with his family and settled in the port city of Sūrat in Gujarat. He was also a good calligrapher. The Hamdani collection has preserved a copy, in his hand, of al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, vol. 2, with copious marginal notes, often from other law works of Nu'mān, transcribed in 1161/1748 (see Figure 1), and a copy of al-Sulṭān al-Ḥaṭṭāb's *Dīwān* also transcribed in Ḥarāz in 1162/1749 (see Figure 2).⁴⁰ He also

35 Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, p. 323; Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn, *'Uyūn al-aḥbār*, vol. 7, ed. Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid, London, I.B. Tauris, 2002, pp. 102, 125, 134.

36 See also al-Hamdānī, *Al-Ṣulayhiyyūn*, pp. 113–114.

37 On a personal note, I would like to record that the late Mohammed Shakir [Shukri] was my classmate at the Ismail Yusuf College in Bombay. We were also together in Cairo for one year, but he did not finish his MA there. He served as a personal secretary to Yūsuf Naġm al-Dīn, the son of the fifty-first *dā'ī* Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn. The dissertation is therefore dedicated to the memory of his patron.

38 Mohammad Shakir, "Sīrat al-Malik al-Mukarram: An edition and study," dissertation presented to the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1999.

39 Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, pp. 208–209.

40 Al-Sulṭān al-Ḥaṭṭāb, *Ḥayātuhu wa-šī'ruhu*, pp. 30–33; copies of a few pages are reproduced. On the outside title page there are some stamps of possession relating to the Hamdani

brought with him a large collection of Ismā'īlī and non-Ismā'īlī manuscripts that were preserved and copied by his learned sons and grandsons. The Hamdani collection was originally built around the corpus of 'Alī b. Sa'īd and augmented by his learned descendants. A sizeable part of this valuable family collection was preserved by Shaykh Fayḍ Allāh b. Muḥammad 'Alī al-Hamdānī in Sūrāt. The scattered copies in different places were collected by his grandson Abbas Hamdani and donated to the library of the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London.⁴¹

In 1915, Griffini published an account of the Yemenī manuscripts acquired by the Ambrosiana Library in Milan, Italy.⁴² This acquisition contained 180 manuscripts. Griffini's description is of a random selection; however, he notes a few Ismā'īlī works, such as Abū'l-Qāsim al-Bustī's refutation of the Ismā'īlīs,⁴³ *Kitāb Mizāğ al-tasnīm* [The Book of Admixture of Tasnīm] by the Sulaymānī *dā'ī* Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Ismā'īl,⁴⁴ dealing with the *ta'wīl* (allegorical interpretation) of

family and it states: *Bi-ḥaṭṭ sayyidī al-'allāma al-ṣayḥ 'Alī b. Sa'īd al-Hamdānī al-maktūb fī rābī' aṣar min Rağab sanat n62 al-hiğriyya.*

- 41 François de Blois, *Arabic, Persian and Gujarati Manuscripts: The Hamdani Collection*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2011, esp. pp. 22–23, 98.
- 42 Eugenio Griffini, "Die jüngste ambrosianische Sammlung arabischer Handschriften," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 69 (1915), pp. 63–88; review by Rudolf Strothmann in *Der Islam*, vol. 21 (1933), pp. 292–311. It is noteworthy that in 1919 the Ambrosiana Library acquired another collection of 1,610 Yemenī manuscripts, collected by an Italian merchant who lived in Ṣan'ā'. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munağğid selected some important works from the latter group and published his listing in *Fihris al-maḥṭūṭāt al-'arabiyya fī'l-Ambroziyānā bi-Milānū*, Cairo, Ma'had al-maḥṭūṭāt, 1960. Al-Munağğid, the director of the Institute of Manuscripts, The Arab League in Cairo, noted that the Ambrosiana Library possesses the largest number of Yemenī manuscripts in Europe. These have been the object of an extensive cataloguing project by Otto Löfgren (vols. 2, 3) and Renato Traini (vols. 2, 3, 4), which was completed in 2011 (*Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana*, vol. 2 (1981), vol. 3 (1995), vol. 4 (2011), all published on behalf of the Ambrosiana Library).
- 43 It is a unique manuscript and bears the following title: *Min kaṣf asrār al-Bāṭiniyya wa-'iwār maḍhabihim*. It is edited by 'Ādil Ṣalīm al-'Abd al-Ġādir under the title *Kaṣf al-asrār wa-naqd al-afkār*, Kuwait, 2002. See also S.M. Stern, "Abū'l-Qāsim al-Bustī and his refutation of Ismā'īlism," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1961, pp. 14–35; reprinted in Stern, *Studies in Early Ismā'īlism*, Jerusalem, The Magnes Press, 1983, pp. 299–320.
- 44 It deals with the exegesis of the Qur'ān and its title is derived from the Qur'ānic verse 83:27. The word *tasnīm* is problematic. Most of the classical exegetes regard it as the proper name of one the allegorical "fountains of paradise;" however, in his *The Message of the Qur'ān*, Gibraltar, Dar al-Andalus, 1980, p. 939, Muhammad Asad offers a new explanation. He states that *tasnīm* is derived from the verb *sannama*, meaning he raised something or

the Qur'an. It is worth noting that the latter manuscript, an autograph copy, and a few other books came from Nağrān. Griffini states that the Ismā'īlī books [from Nağrān] were seized during the Zaydī raid near the Ġabal Lahāb in 1905. A note signed on one of the books by the Imām al-Mutawakkil 'alā'llāh Yaḥyā [b. Muḥammad Ḥamīd al-Dīn, the founder of the Mutawakkiliyya dynasty of Zaydī Imāms] states:

هذا الكتاب من كتب الباطنية مما أخذ عليهم من لهاب من جملة كتب تنيف على أربع مائة
مجلد، والله الحمد. فلقد اطلعنا كتبهم على كثير من كفرهم. شهر ربيع الأول سنة ١٣٣١. كتب
أمير المؤمنين المتوكل على الله يحيى أن يُجاهد هؤلاء الكفار كما قال تعالى: ﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ جَاهِدِ
الْكُفَّارَ وَالْمُنَافِقِينَ﴾ [سورة التوبة 73/9].⁴⁵

It is also reported by the Yemenī historian al-Ġarāfi that, in 1902, the Zaydī Imām Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā (d. 1904) managed to capture several Ismā'īlī books; however, the fate of those books is unknown.⁴⁶ Let us now turn to Cairo where microfilms of several Yemenī Ismā'īlī manuscripts are preserved.

In 1951–1952, the Egyptian Ministry of Education (*wizārat al-tarbiya wa'l-ta'līm*) sent a delegation to Yemen, led by Ḥalīl Yaḥyā Nāmī, a specialist in South Arabian script, with the express purpose of microfilming unique Arabic manuscripts. The report states that Fu'ād Sayyid, a member of the delegation

made it lofty. Hence, *tasnīm* means *tašrīf* (that which is ennobling or exalting). It is an autograph copy written in Nağrān and edited by R. Strothmann in *Ismā'īlischer Koran-Kommentar*, Göttingen, Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1944–1955, Lieferung 1–4. Strothmann also edited four more epistles from the Ambrosiana collection: *Risālat al-īdāh wa'l-tabyīn* and *Risālat tuḥfat al-murtādd*, both by 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Walīd, and the remaining two anonymous treatises: *Masā'il mağmū'a min al-ḥaqā'iq* and *Risālat al-ism al-a'zam*, in R. Strothmann, *Gnosis Texte der Ismailiten*, Göttingen, Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1943.

45 Griffini, "Die jüngste ambrosianische Sammlung arabischer Handschriften," p. 84. The translation reads: This book is among the books of *al-Bāṭiniyya* [lit. means esotericists, one of the designations used derogatorily by the detractors of the Ismā'īlis] numbering more than four hundred volumes, seized from them at Lahāb—God is to be praised. Indeed their book informs us a lot about their infidelity. [Transcribed] in the month of Rabī' 1, 1323 [May 1905]. Amīr al-mu'minīn al-Mutawakkil 'alā'llāh Yaḥyā wrote that those infidels [i.e. the Ismā'īlis] must be fought against as God states: *O Prophet, strove against the unbelievers and the hypocrites*. [Q 9:73].

46 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Ġarāfi, *al-Muqtaṭaf min tāriḥ al-Yaman*, Cairo, Dār iḥyā' al-kutub al-'arabiyya, 1951, p. 233; Manfred W. Wenner, *Modern Yemen, 1918–1962*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967, pp. 34–35.

and the keeper of the manuscripts in Dār al-Kutub, selected approximately three hundred volumes: 260 from the Library of the Great Mosque in Ṣan'ā' and the remainder from the private collections of the Imām Yaḥyā, the prince Sayf al-Islām 'Abd Allāh and certain private *ḥizānas* of the 'ulamā'. The most significant achievement of this mission was the discovery of valuable Mu'tazilī and Zaydī works. Among this rich harvest were eight books belonging to the Ismā'īliyya and other Shī'ī *ḡulāt* (extreme) sects, but the report does not specify their titles.⁴⁷

In the introduction to his critical edition of *Kitāb al-Zīna* by Abū Ḥātim Aḥmad al-Rāzī (d. 322/934–935), Ḥusayn al-Hamdānī states that three copies of this book were obtained from Yemen by the aforementioned deputation.⁴⁸ The copy from the private collection of the Imām bears an ownership stamp of the Imām on the title page that states:

كتاب الزينة لأبي حاتم الرازي رضي الله عنه. بسم الله. من خزانة مولانا أمير المؤمنين المتوكل
على الله رب العالمين، حفظه الله وأدام نصره، بتاريخ شهر شعبان ٥٤٣١هـ.⁴⁹

The other two copies came from the Library of the Great Mosque.⁵⁰ All three were transcribed in Yemen during the tenth and eleventh centuries of the Islamic era.

The second Egyptian delegation to Yemen was sent by the Ministry of Culture (*wizārat al-taqāfa*) in 1964. It microfilmed the manuscripts confiscated from the royal palaces and other private collections in and around the capital Ṣan'ā' following the 1962 revolution and deposited them in the library of

47 Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid, *Maṣādir tāriḥ al-Yaman fi'l-'aṣr al-islāmī*, Cairo, Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire, 1974, pp. 419–426.

48 Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Zīna fi'l-kalimāt al-islāmiyya*, ed. Ḥusayn al-Hamdānī, Cairo, Dār al-kitāb al-'arabī, 1957, 2nd reprint, p. 36.

49 English translation reads: *Kitāb al-Zīna* ['The Book of Ornament'] by Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī—may God be pleased with him! In the name of God. From the *ḥizāna* of our master, the Prince of the Faithful, Mutawakkil 'alā'llāh, [Allāh is] the Lord of the two worlds—may God protect him and continue his assistance. [Transcribed] in the month of Ṣa'bān 1345 [Feb. 1927].

50 Al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Zīna*, pp. 35–36. The first is incomplete at both ends and the editor thinks that it was copied either in the tenth or the eleventh century of the Islamic era. The colophon of the second states that it was collated with the master copy on the 8th of Raḡab 924[1518]. See also the (forthcoming) article by Cornelius Berthold, 'The Leipzig manuscript of the *Kitāb al-Zīna* by the Ismaili author Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/933–934)', in *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 5/1 (Spring 2014).

the Great Mosque. The report states that 225 books were microfilmed, including rare Ismā'īlī, Mu'tazilī and Zaydī works, without giving any specific information.⁵¹ In 1967, the Ministry of Culture and the National Library Archives' Department of Manuscripts published *A List of Arabic Manuscripts Microfilmed from the Yemen Arab Republic*.⁵² It contains the list of all the microfilms obtained from Yemen by both delegations. Among the 464 volumes listed are approximately 63 Ismā'īlī books, some with more than one copy. On my visit to Yemen in 1968 I was informed by the keeper of the Great Mosque library that all the books appropriated in 1962 were returned to their respective owners and that there is no way to retrace them. Thus, the microfilms in the National Library of Egypt are extremely valuable. Because the colophons are not cited, it is not easy to determine the place where it was copied. Since the transference of the Musta'li-Ṭayyibī *da'wa's* headship and its headquarters to India, many Yemenī students used to come to India for further study of the *da'wa* literature. While they were studying they would transcribe copies of some Ismā'īlī works for their own use and would take these copies with them on their return to Yemen. A copy of *Kitāb al-Iftihār* of Abū Ya'qūb al-Siġistānī seized after the revolution of 1962 was, in fact, transcribed by a Yemenī student in India.⁵³

The majority of the Ismā'īlī manuscripts microfilmed from Yemen in the above list are of recent times and were transcribed between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries of the Muslim era. There are three manuscripts that were copied during the tenth century and another three transcribed during the eleventh century of the Hijra. Most of them were confiscated by the Zaydī raids into the Ismā'īlī territories during the first quarter of the last century.

The question arises: Are there any more Ismā'īlī manuscripts left in Yemen? There is no easy answer to this question. Recently, the Bohra religious estab-

51 Sayyid, *Maṣādir tāriḥ al-Yaman*, pp. 427–429.

52 *Qā'ima bi'l-maḥtūṭāt al-'arabiyya al-muṣawwara bi'l-mikrūfilm min al-Ġumhūriyya al-'Arabiyya al-Yamaniyya*. Unfortunately, it is merely a listing of the titles and their authors, with numerous errors and without pertinent details, such as the contents, paper, colophon, etc. For example, the name of the author of *Kitāb al-Zīna* (p. 34, no. 307) is incorrectly given and the date of his death is also wrong. The author of *Kitāb al-Azhār* is Ḥasan b. Nūḥ al-Bharūchī and not Aḥmad Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Širāzī al-Kirmānī (p. 2, no. 13). The author of *al-Īdāḥ wa'l-tabṣīr* (p. 6, no. 50) is al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī and not al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī. *Al-Risāla al-ġāmi'a* (p. 20, no. 185), listed as anonymous, is part of *al-Risāla al-ġāmi'a* of the *Rasā'il Iḥwān al-Šafā'*.

53 See al-Siġistānī, *Kitāb al-Iftihār*, ed. Ismā'il K. Poonawala, Beirut, Dār al-ġarb al-Islāmī, 2000, pp. 52–55.

lishment in India has built a new white marble mausoleum on the tombs of the third *dā'ī* Ḥātim al-Ḥāmidī, in Ḥuṭayb, and the thirtieth *dā'ī* 'Alī Ṣams al-Dīn b. Ḥasan b. Idrīs b. al-Walīd (d. 1042/1632) in Ṭayba, and lodging facilities for the Bohra *zuwwār* (pilgrims, visitors to holy places). Hence, I suspect that the *dā'īs*' agents must have collected whatever they were able to get their hands on. During my visit to Yemen in June 2012, I was able to contact some knowledgeable Ismā'īlīs living in Ḥarāz and Ṣan'a' who told me that a few families still hold on to their precious books. However, I was told that it would take quite a long time to get precise information on and access to these; hence, I abandoned the idea to pursue it.

A yet untapped source for the Ismā'īlī manuscripts in Yemen is the Sulaymānī community living in the province of Naḡrān and the adjacent region of northwest Yemen. They acquired the name because they followed Sulaymān b. Ḥasan, who claimed succession for himself after the death of the twenty-sixth *dā'ī*, Dā'ūd b. 'Aḡabšāh in 997/1591.⁵⁴ Sulaymān b. Ḥasan, the grandson of the first Indian *dā'ī*, Yūsuf b. Sulaymān, was a deputy of Dā'ūd b. 'Aḡabšāh in Yemen from where he received initial support. However, to assert his claim he had to go to India. Having lost his case before the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar, Sulaymān left India for Yemen where he was acknowledged as the rightful successor by a segment of the Ismā'īlīs.⁵⁵ Before his death, he appointed Ṣafī al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Fahd, the progenitor of the Makramī (pl. al-Makārīma) family as the acting *dā'ī* to manage the affairs of the *da'wa* when his son Ġa'far was still a minor. Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Makramī lived first in an old Ismā'īlī stronghold Ṭayba, in Ḥarāz, then migrated to Naḡrān where he succeeded in winning the confidence of the most influential Yām tribe settled in that region. Here he took Badr, located on a mountain ridge of the Badr valley, as his residence and it became the Makramī capital. He died there in 1042/1633.⁵⁶

Following the death of 'Alī b. Sulaymān, the twenty-ninth *dā'ī*, in 1088/1677, Ṣafī al-Dīn's son Ibrāhīm became the leader of the Sulaymānī community as thirtieth *dā'ī*. Since then, the leadership of the *da'wa* has remained in this family with few interruptions. Subsequently, the Sulaymānī community in Yemen became known as al-Makārīma. At the peak of their power they asserted authority over the entire Ismā'īlī community in Yemen. The Makramī *dā'īs* retained their political independence as rulers of Yām until Naḡrān was

54 For details of this internal split see Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, pp. 280–282.

55 Ibid., p. 281.

56 I.K. Poonawala, "Al-Makramī, Ṣafī al-Dīn," *ET*².

annexed by the Saudis in 1934.⁵⁷ Thus, the fate of Nağrān was sealed by the Yemenī-Saudi treaty of the same year. Under Saudi rule, the Ismā'īlīs of Nağrān face increasing threats to their identity as a result of official discrimination against them.⁵⁸ Very little is known about the Sulaymānīs since then. In my private correspondence with some Sulaymānīs living in Saudi Arabia I was given the impression that they have preserved the Ismā'īlī heritage, but, given the difficult circumstances, they were unable to provide me with more information.

4 Paper, Ink, Script and Binding

Almost all the extant Ismā'īlī manuscripts, with very few exceptions, are transcribed in India; however, they were originally derived from Yemenī exemplars that did not survive. A large number of them are of good to excellent quality, with a high level of accuracy as the scribes were well-trained and had fair knowledge of Arabic. It is worth noting that despite living far away from the Arab world, the level of Arabic scholarship among the religious elite of the Musta'li-Ṭayyibī community, known as the Bohras, was excellent. The Indian scribes followed the general conventions of copying a manuscript and the art of book making observed by their Yemenī predecessors. It seems that there were certain established universal formal rules that were followed throughout the Muslim world. In this respect, the Ismā'īlī manuscripts do not differ from their counterparts in Arabic or Persian. Numerous copies were collated either with the exemplar or a different copy through a direct comparison of the two texts or by having the text of the original manuscript read by the *shaykh* during the teaching session(s). A few lines of the text missed by the scribe in the process of transcription were added in the margins and properly indicated. Omission of one or two words, on the other hand, was written in the margin at the same level of the line, indicating the exact place where they were to be added. Marginal corrections, comments and variants were pointed out. Transposed words were

57 In 1764, the Makārīma had invaded Najd and inflicted a crushing defeat on the rising power of the Wahhābīs. Since then, there have been frequent encounters between them for the control of Nağrān and the adjacent region. In 1805 Sa'ūd b. 'Abd al-'Azīz tried but failed to conquer Nağrān. Given the situation in Yemen in the 1930s the Saudis seized the opportunity and took control of Nağrān. W. Madelung, "Makramids," *ET*².

58 For more details, see the Human Rights Watch report entitled "The Ismailis of Najran: Second-class Saudi Citizens," issued in Sept. 2008. It is extremely difficult to travel to Nağrān due to the Saudi government's restrictions and strict surveillance. Very little is known about the Sulaymānīs since they separated from their Dā'ūdī brethren.

indicated by the letters (س) placed over those words. In short, the scribes follow the standard practices of sign letters.⁵⁹

The copies were written either on locally made paper or on paper imported from Europe. A fair number of them bear watermarks that indicate that the paper was manufactured at a particular place or country, but all cataloguers of Ismā'īlī manuscripts in the library of the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, except Adam Gacek,⁶⁰ have neglected this and other important codicological aspects. A vast majority of manuscripts were transcribed on a single kind of paper and only rarely two or more varieties were combined. The paper was usually of white or yellow colour and, occasionally, light blue. Generally, the paper was untrimmed during the process of copying and before a copy was bound between covers; however, in some cases this trimming at the time of binding resulted in some marginal notes being cut off. The manuscript generally consists of quires, called *al-ǧuz'*, often indicated at the top of the next quire as *al-ǧuz' al-tānī* or *al-ǧuz' al-tālīt min kitāb kādā wa-kādā*. The sequence of folios in each *ǧuz'* of eight folios or sixteen pages was ensured by using catchwords. Pagination was a much later phenomenon. The size of the codex varies depending on the length of the book. The thicker the volume, the larger the size of the codex. Epistles of less than thirty or forty pages are written on smaller size paper, or, occasionally, more than two epistles are bound together.

The majority of the codices of various sizes (large, medium and small), are leather bound. The production of such handmade books continues uninterrupted until today, although not as dynamically as it used to be in the past. The reason for the survival of this old institution of book making among the Bohras, despite the introduction of the printing press in India, is that these books were kept secret among the learned of the community. They believed that they could not be entrusted to the public, who might misunderstand the doctrine. They also feared that the book might fall into hostile Sunni hands and would be misused for polemics.

The text was written in black ink, whereas red ink was used for rubrics and, at times, for punctuation signs. In some manuscripts, the title page is decorated with floral or geometrical designs and, occasionally, the text is enclosed within a frame. The text generally begins on the verso side of the first folio. The title of the book and the author's name is written on the recto side of the first folio.

59 These conventions are explained in *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, translated from the German of Caspari, and ed. with numerous notes and corrections by W. Wright, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 3rd edition, reprint, vol. 1, pp. 25–26.

60 Adam Gacek, *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of the Institute of Ismaili Studies*, vol. 1, London, Islamic Publications, 1984, 2 vols.

A vast majority of codices are written in clear and legible *nash* script. In some, the *nash* tends towards cursive *tulu*. It is worth noting that some works of *ḥaqāʾiq* (a term used for the ultimate cosmological and eschatological system) were written with a secret script.⁶¹ Ibrāhīm al-Ḥāmidī's (d. 557/1162) *Kanz al-walad* was copied by Muḥammad ʿAlī Hamdānī in this secret script.⁶²

5 Some of the Oldest Extant Yemeni Manuscripts

Among some of the oldest extant Yemenī manuscripts are the following titles:⁶³

1. *Kitāb al-Riyāḍ* by Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020). Its major part was transcribed before 760/1359 and it is preserved in the Hamdani Collection (see Figure 3).⁶⁴
2. *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*, vol. 2 by al-Qādī al-Nuʿmān (d. 363/974), copied in 865/1461 and preserved by the Sulaymānī *daʿwa* in Bombay. It was used by Asaf Fyzee for his critical edition.⁶⁵

61 This script is discussed and a table of conversion is prepared by R. Strothmann in his *Gnosis Texte der Ismailiten*, Göttingen, 1943.

62 See de Blois, *Arabic, Persian and Gujarati Manuscripts*, p. 129.

63 It is to be noted that a copy of *Kitāb al-Zīna* by Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/934), transcribed by Aḥmad Ibn Saʿd al-Bayhaqī in 544/1149, in 1995 was acquired by the Leipzig University Library from a dealer in Amman. Hence, it is the oldest extant copy of an Ismāʿīlī manuscript, copied only 222 years after al-Rāzī's death in the immediate vicinity of where he lived. See Verena Klemm, "Obvious and Obscure Context: The Leipzig Manuscript of the *Kitāb al-Zīna* by Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/934)," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Supplement 26 (2009), pp. 55–67. See also on this manuscript the article by Cornelius Berthold, "The Leipzig manuscript of the *Kitāb al Zīna* by the Ismaili author Abū Ḥātim al Rāzī (d. 322/933–934)," in *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 5/1 (Spring 2014). Sayyid, *Maṣādir tāriḥ al-Yaman*, pp. 427–429.

64 This copy was donated by the fifteenth *dāʿī*, Šams al-Dīn ʿAbbās to ʿAlī b. Aḥmad in 760/1359; hence, it is presumed that it was transcribed before that date. This copy was transferred to India and the damaged or missing last pages were recopied by Dāʿūd b. Quṭbšāh who later became the twenty-seventh *dāʿī*. See Klemm, "Obvious and Obscure Context," pp. 60–66, and François de Blois, "The oldest known Fatimid manuscript from Yemen," in *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, 14 (1984), pp. 1–7.

65 It is very carefully copied and fully vocalized. Fyzee states that its paper was handmade in India. He further adds that there are some marginal notes of explanation in Gujarati written in Arabic script. I think that the marginal notes might have been written later, after the manuscript had arrived in India. Unfortunately, the original introduction in English written by Fyzee is not printed, unlike the first volume; hence, certain things are not

3. *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, vol. 2 by al-Qādī al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974), in the hand of 'Alī b. Sa'īd al-Ḥarāzī al-Hamdānī in Ḥarāz in 1161/1748, and preserved in the Hamdani Collection.⁶⁶
4. *Dīwān al-Sultān al-Ḥaṭṭāb* (d. 533/1138), copied by 'Alī b. Sa'īd al-Ḥarāzī al-Hamdānī in 1162/1749 in Ḥarāz and preserved in the Hamdani Collection.

According to Fyzee, two copies of vol. 1 of the *Da'ā'im*, the first copied in 961/1554 and the second copied in 989/1581, are also Yemenī copies. The latter is fully vocalized and considered the "Yemenī exemplar". It is in the possession of the Dā'ūdī *dā'ī*. The name of the scribe, from al-Walīd family, reads as follows:⁶⁷

رقمه لنفسه أقلّ عميد حدود الدين حسن بن إدريس بن علي بن حسين بن إدريس بن حسن
بن عبد الله بن علي بن محمد بن حاتم بن الحسين بن الوليد الأنف القرشي، عفى الله عنه.

6 Conclusion

One can state that, in comparison with the thousands of non-Isma'īlī manuscripts that have survived, especially those belonging to the Mu'tazilī and Zaydī schools of thought, the fate of Isma'īlī books has not been fortunate. Furthermore, if those books had not been transferred to a new safe haven on the West coast of India, their rich intellectual legacy and contribution to Islamic civilisation and culture might have been totally forgotten.

After the fall of the Ṣulayḥids, the destiny of the Isma'īlī community in Yemen fluctuated widely and their numbers shrank rapidly. Moreover, they lacked the protection of influential and powerful tribes; hence, they were unable to protect themselves in their own fortresses against the Zaydīs. The Zaydī religious hostility against them was further compounded by the fact that the Isma'īlīs were their redoubtable political rivals. There was no *modus vivendi* possible between the two. The Isma'īlīs were considered heretics par excellence and simply not tolerated. During the Zaydī imamate, their strongholds were often raided, books plundered and destroyed. Naḡrān, the last Isma'īlī stronghold, which is now under Saudi control, is beyond reach.

clear from its Arabic translation. I am unable to get a copy of Fyzee's article "The oldest manuscript of the *Da'ā'im*, vol. 2," in the *Journal of the Bombay University*, 1934, as cited in al-Qādī al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, vol. 2, 2nd edn., p. 7. Al-Qādī al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, vol. 2, pp. 5–6.

66 De Blois, *Arabic, Persian and Gujarati Manuscripts*, pp. 22–23.

67 Al-Qādī al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, 1969, 2d reprint, vol. 1, pp. 9 ff.



FIGURE 1 Da'ā'im al-islām by al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān. Hamdani Collection, MS 1413, vol. 2, p. 43. It was transcribed by 'Alī b. Sa'īd al-Ḥarāzī al-Hamdānī in n61/1749 in Ḥarāz. Courtesy of the Institute of Ismailī Studies, London.



FIGURE 2 *Dīwān of al-Ḥaṭṭāb*. Hamdani Collection, MS 1492, ff. 1^a-1^b. Transcribed in Ḥarāz in 162/1749. Courtesy of the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London.



FIGURE 3 Kitāb al-Riyāḍ by Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī. Hamdani Collection, Ms. 1458, p. 1. The manuscript is in two hands: the larger part was transcribed before 760/1359. Courtesy of the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London.

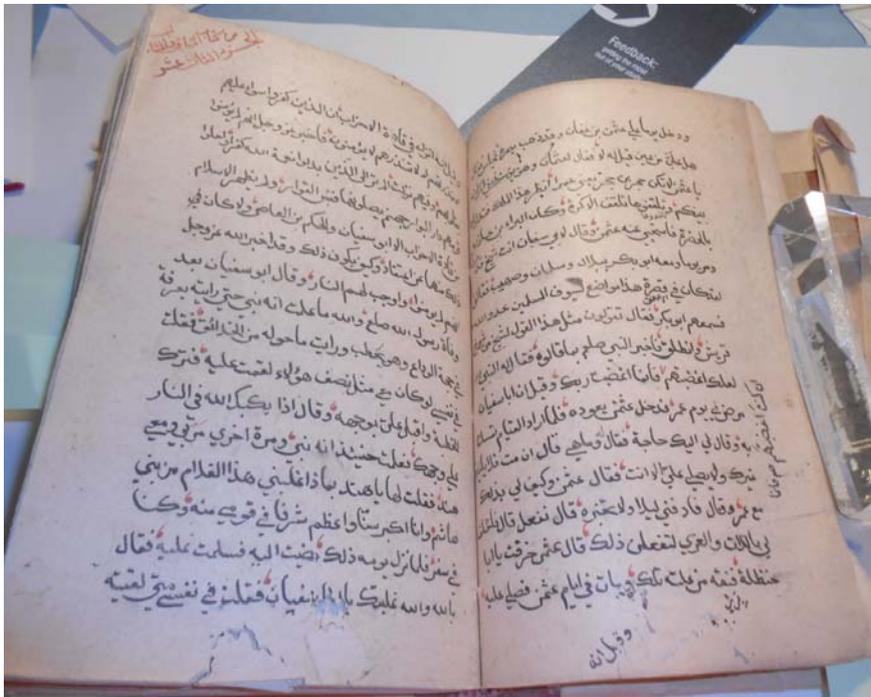


FIGURE 4 An opening in the manuscript of *al-Qādī al-Nu'mān's Kitāb al-manāqib li-ahl bayt Rasūl Allāh al-nuḡabā' wa'l-matālib li-banī Umayya al-lu'anā'* (generally known as *Kitāb al-manāqib wa'l-matālib*) in the collection of *Mullā Qurbān Ḥusayn Poonawala*, transcribed by *Muḥammad Bāqir b. Malūkbhā'ī b. Muḥammad 'Alī*. No date is given, but the manuscript could be over three centuries old. Many *Ismā'īlī* manuscripts are divided into *aḡzā'*, each *ḡuz'* about eight folios and the 'quire marks' are indicated in red ink on the top left corner of the recto side. In this image the quire mark reads: *الجزء الثالث عشر من كتاب المناقب والمثالب*. Courtesy of *Mullā Qurbān Ḥusayn Poonawala*.