

of the cuneiform texts in usable form to the scholarly world at large. Some idea of the task at hand can be gained from considering that these twenty-seven tablets, which occupy a book of nearly 600 pages, including cuneiform copies, are only a fraction of the material at hand. Not only does the rest of the series of Nineveh tablets await the same treatment but, in addition, sources from other sites will come eventually to be included. For the finds of Nineveh were only the first of an avalanche of tablets that has filled the storerooms of museums and private collectors all over Europe, North America and the Middle East.

This magnificent volume is only the beginning of the process of transmitting to the modern world the most characteristic intellectual activity of the first high civilization in human history. Its appearance is truly an important event in the study of the ancient world, to be welcomed by Assyriologists, historians of intellectual life and students of other ancient cultures alike. More please.

A. R. GEORGE

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THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

FARHAD DAFTARY (ed.):

*Mediaeval Ismā'īlī history and thought.*

xviii, 331 pp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Since it first appeared in 1996, Daftary's collection of scholarly articles on the medieval Ismailis has drawn consistently good reviews. The themes selected in this collection are drawn from the pre-Fatimid, Fatimid and Nizārī periods of Ismaili history and the contributors represent the full range of modern scholarship. This affordable edition of what has already become an indispensable volume for any Islamic history collection is to be applauded.

Daftary provides a useful introduction which not only outlines the history of the *da'wa*, the principal *dā'īs*, and Ismaili *dawla* but also details more modern Ismaili scholarship and the backgrounds of his book's contributors. He later contributes a chapter himself on Ḥaṣan-i Ṣabbāḥ and the origins of the Nizārīs.

The first part of this Ismaili collection is concerned with the pre-Fatimid and Fatimid periods of history. Wilferd Madelung offers an update of his 1959 landmark study of the Qaramaṭīs of Baḥrayn and the Fatimids, dispelling the myth of their collaboration, and he also submits a study of Sijistānī and the Ismaili attitude to the Intellect (*al-'aql*). Heinz Halm contributes two chapters, one dealing with early Ismaili cosmology and the second examining the controversial subject of initiation into the fold of the faithful. The process of legal codification and the work of the early Fatimid jurist, al-Qādī al-Nu'mān, is the subject of the chapter by Ismail Poonawala, while Abbas Hamdani returns to a favoured area, the dating and authorship of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*. The two remaining chapters deal with the Ismaili attitude towards the 'other' during the Fatimid period, Azim Nanji uses the same *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* as a principal source to illustrate the Ismailis' 'pluralistic and non-dogmatic approaches' (p. 14) to other religions, while

Paul Walker introduces a unique Ismaili heresiography, the *kitāb al-Shajara*, the work of Abū Tammām, an obscure early tenth-century C.E. *dā'ī*.

The second part of the book focuses on the Alamūt period of Ismaili history, opening with Daftary's own account of the origins of the Nizārīs. He portrays the movement in part as an 'Iranian' protest against the Saljuqs with social roots pre-dating this period, rather than as a schismatic reaction to events in Egypt, as it is traditionally presented. Also examined are the doctrinal and political developments which occurred in the early years of Alamūt, particularly under Haṣan-i Ṣabbāh, whose role was so crucial in the establishment of this independent *da'wa* and quasi-state. Carole Hillenbrand examines the same period from the point of view of the Saljuqs, drawing on evidence of Saljuq-Nizārī encounters found in the work of Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn al-Jawzī and other chroniclers openly hostile to the Ismailis.

The Saljuqs were not the only enemies of the Ismailis. In the mountainous region of what is today eastern Iran, the medieval Ismailis had established a stronghold in the area called Quhistan. Heterodoxy had a long history here and the Saljuq administration had never been popular. But after the Ismailis became firmly entrenched in the region's inaccessible valleys, they found that their neighbours to the south, the Naṣrid Maliks of Sīstān or Nīmruz, were as hostile to their presence as the Saljuqs themselves, especially after Ismaili attempts to extend their power and influence south. It is the relationship between the Quhistani Nizārīs and the Naṣrid Maliks that C. E. Bosworth explores in the twelfth chapter. The controversial role of the one-time resident of Quhistan, Naṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī, is the subject of the following chapter by Hamid Dabashi. He portrays Ṭūsī as a philosopher/vizier, a traditional Persian figure whose role stands above the sectarian intrigues and affiliations into which Ṭūsī's name has sometimes been dragged.

Moving to the western reaches of the Ismaili *da'wa*, Charles Melville considers the Nizārīs as assassins, and illustrates the transformation of the Nizārī *fidāwī* into the paid assassins of the Mamluks with the curious case of the defector Qarāsunqur and the attempts by Sultan al-Nāṣir Moḥammad to have him killed. For the chroniclers, the Syrian Nizārī Ismaili community were the sole suppliers of assassins for the Mamluk sultans even though at the time there were very few actual *fidāwī* left which, concludes Melville, 'reveal the persistence of the distorted image of the Ismā'īlīs and hostile rumours surrounding their community.' (p. 258).

The two final chapters move away from Alamūt to the post-Mongol period. Ali Asani re-examines the South Asian *gināns*, devotional poems that have acquired 'sacred' status within the Nizārī Khoja community. The authorship and provenance of these orally transmitted *gināns* seems at odds with traditional belief, and their transmission more complex than previously assumed. Often these poems appear to be about rather than by the *pīrs* who arose among the original Hindu converts of the emerging Ismaili community. Abbas Amanat's contribution on the Nuṣṭawīyya, an esoteric off-shoot of the Ḥurūfīs, is the first scholarly investigation of this ghulat sect also known as Ahl-i Nuṣṭa, the Pasīkhāniyya, or the Maḥmūdiyya. Founded by Maḥmūd Pasīkhānī (d. 1427–8), the sect was well established in Qazvin, Shiraz, Kashan, Isfahan and the Caspian region during the early Safavid period even though its adherents were the objects of often severe persecution. Amanat's study shows that despite the sect's belief in materialist metempsychosis, its denial of the Imamate, and Pasīkhānī's claims to prophethood, the core doctrines of the Nuṣṭawīyyam, espousing a cyclical view of time and hierohistory and the

sect's reliance on *bāṭinī* (esoteric) exegesis demonstrate the underlying Ismaili roots.

Farhad Daftary is head of the department of Academic Research and Publications at the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London and has published many books and papers on Ismaili thought and history, subjects on which he is a widely recognized authority. The appearance in paperback of this absorbing and scholarly collection of essays should do much to advance the cause of Ismaili studies to a widening audience.

GEORGE LANE

D. S. RICHARDS (trans.):

*The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin.*

(Crusader Texts in Translation 7.) 265 pp. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2001. £42.50.

The work under review is a translation of Ibn Shaddād's (d. 632/1234) *al-Nawādir al-sultāniyya wa'l-mahāsīn al-yūsufiyya*, a partly annalistic biography of the Ayyubid ruler Saladin (d. 589/1193). Written by a member of Saladin's immediate entourage, the text is of outstanding importance for students of the history of this period, both within the Middle Eastern context and, more specifically, for the history of the Crusades. The work has been well known in Europe since the French translation of extracts in the *Receuil des Historiens des Croisades* at the turn of the last century and the English translation by C. W. Wilson, *Saladin; or what befell Sultan Yūsuf* (London, 1897). The Arabic text was published by Gamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl in 1964.

Richards bases his translation on the 1964 edition and the Berlin manuscript (Ahlwardt no. 9811) of the work, which al-Shayyāl did not consult for his edition. The differences between the Berlin manuscript and those used for the edition are of minor importance. Consequently, the additions to the text on this basis are of interest only to a specialized audience. The introduction offers a short overview of the author's life, his works and existing manuscripts, editions and translations. This brief section, in addition to the maps in the annex, helps the non-specialist reader to situate the process of writing of the *al-Nawādir* and its content. The index lists names of persons and places, while sadly omitting termini technici.

The importance of Richards' translation lies in the fact that this crucial text of the Crusading period has now been updated and decisively improved in its English version compared with the 1897 translation, which was rather unreliable. Richards succeeds in rendering the original into an English text which is at the same time a pleasure to read and largely reliable. Compared to the patchy quality of previous translations the author is to be congratulated for this fine piece of Arabist scholarship. The translation gains in significance because it is published in the framework of the Crusade Texts in Translation series as the first Middle Eastern source, which decisively widens the breadth of this series.

However, some points remain to be made which are more relevant for students of Middle Eastern history. The introduction is based mainly on al-Shayyāl's introduction to the 1964 edition without the addition of new information. It cites for example works by Ibn Shaddād in manuscript form which have since been published, such as his *Dalā'il al-aḥkām* (M. Shaykānī and Z. Ayyūbī, Damascus: Dār Qutayba, 1992/93). Secondary literature on