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ON THE TITLES OF THE ISMĀ'ĪLĪ-NIZĀRĪS LEADERS IN THE ALAMŪT PERIOD

The ranks of the Nizārīs da'wa¹, numbering to seven from bāb (or hujja) to sahib-i yaqīn, together with their functions and their significance corresponding to spiritual hierarchy, are elaborated by post-Alamut Nizārī authors, particularly by Abu Ishaq Quhistānī². The fundamental degree in the Ismā'īlī hierarchy was dā'ī who was designated generically the chief authorized representative of the Imām. Under the last Fātimids there were twelve hujjats and the term implied a "bishop-resident", in charge of a large diocese, which usually covered a large province³. In the Nizārī system there is only one hujjat⁴. With the logical point of view he is a kind of diminutive copy of the imām, and stands in relation to the latter the same as that of Imām to God⁵.

¹ On the Nizārīs ('Assassins') and Ismā'īlīs see Hodgson, Marshall G.S., *The Order of Assassins; the Struggle of the Early Nizārī Ismā'īlīs against the Islamic World*. The Hague, 1955; his 'The Ismā'īlī State', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*: Volume 5, pp.422-482 (L.1968). At present especially the works of Professor Farhad Daftary, the **leading contemporary authority** on the Ismā'īlīs, their history and doctrines, see his main book on the same title, first ed. London 1990 and *A Short History of the Ismailis: Traditions of a Muslim Community*, London 1998. Useful is remain *The Assassins. A Radical Sect in Islam* by Bernard Lewis, the outstanding British orientalist (first ed. 1967). The most recent review of the works on Ismā'īlīs is given by Daftary, F. *Ismaili Literature. A Bibliography of Sources and Studies*. London-New York, 2004.

² *Haft bāb-i Abū Ishāq*, ed. and English trans., Wladimir Ivanow. Ismaili Society Series A, no.10. Bombay: Ismaili Society, 1959, pp.48-51.

³ Hamdānī, Abbas, *Evolution of the Organizational Structure of the Fātimi Da'wah. The Yemeni and Persian Contribution*, Arabian Studies, volume III, L.1976, pp.85-98. Appendix pp. 99-114; Hamdānī, Husain F. *The History of the Ismā'īlī Da'wat and its Literature during the Last Phase of the Fātimid Empire*, *JRAS* (1932), pp.126-136.

⁴ Hodgson, Marshall G.S. art. Hudjdja, EI2, III (1986), p.544. Hasan-i Sabbāh was recognized as his hujja or 'proof' and acting head of the Nizārī da'wa and the he is referred to in Nizārī sources as 'Jesus of the dawr-i qiyāma'. See Abū Ishāq Quhistānī, *Haft bāb*, p.63, no 2.

⁵ Ivanow, W. Introduction to *Kalām-i Pīr* as Ivanow's Kalami pir. A treatise on Ismaili Doctrine, also (wrongly) called Haft-Babi Shah Sayyid Nasir. Islamic Research Association No.4,

In pre-Fātimid period (time of the ‘incubation’) the ranks in the da’wa hierarchy were called hudūd. Ordinarily ‘hadd’ would mean “limit” but it has several technical connotations. In philosophy and science the term stands for a “definition” or a “postulate”. For the da’wa, given the early Fātimid preoccupation with philosophy and astronomy, the term hudūd would have meant “defined and graded authorities of different ranks”⁶ both in the Cosmos and in the da’wa religio-political organisation. It was reflected in the apparent vision to write by included in the post-Alamūt Nizārī treatises, for instance *Kalām-i pīr*:

“With the help of Our Lord [i.e. Imam-Qa’im], who shows him the right way, he comes across one of the functionaries (hudūd) of the true religion (dīn), i.e. a dā’ī, or a competent teacher. After the true teacher tries him in many ways, and finds him suitable as a servant to Our Lord, he reveals to him the doctrine of the da’wat, as much as he is capable to understand, and he accepts it with all his heart and soul (jān). Then he becomes subjected to various regulations and restrictions, from which he does not shrink. This new servant who is in possession of pure faith (sāhib yaqīn), receives the name of mustajīb (i.e. one who has the right to ask questions concerning the secret doctrine of the religion), and teacher instructs him in the proofs and principles of the True Faith⁷. [...] When the mustajīb is perfected in his learning, and his learning becomes such as to make of their errors, he receives the title of ma’dhūni asghar, or the “junior licencee”, from the senior ma’dhūn, or from the teacher. He thus becomes licenced to deal with the people of those religions, and the teacher gives him a licence to preach amongst them. When he succeeds in this, and claims a higher degree, the hujjat gives him the title of the ma’dhūni akbar, or senior ma’dhūni; this degree implies absolute freedom to preach amongst any people that he thinks necessary. When he tries to get a still higher degree, he becomes a teacher, mu’allim, by being appointed by the great hujjat in one of the provinces (jazā’ir). He thus becomes one of the twelve lāhiqs, who are in charge of different provinces; every mu’min, or mustajīb who resides in that district or province is under his command”⁸.

Bombay 1135, p.XLI, XLV, compare Stroeve, Ludmila V. *Gosudarstwo ismailitov v Iranie v XI-XIII vv.* Moscow, 1978, p.127.

⁶ *Kalām-i pīr*. English transl. by Ivanow, p.87, Persian text p. 93; compare Abū Ishāq Quhistānī, *Haft bāb*, pp.487.

⁷ *Kalām-i pīr*; English transl. p.88, Persian text, p.93. Speaking of the authorship the *Kalām-i pīr*, W. Ivanow has shown, this treatise is a plagiarized version of Abū Ishāq Quhistānī’s *Haft bāb* produced by Khayrkhwāh-i Harāfī, a Nizārī da’ī who lived in the first half of the tenth/sixteenth century. According to Prof. Daftary: ‘This is apparently a plagiarized version of Abū Ishāq Quhistānī’s *Haft bāb*, wrongly attributed to Nāsir-i Khusraw’; see F. Daftary, *Ismaili literature. A bibliography of sources and studies*, London 2004, p.124, before him W. Ivanow, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliographical Survey*, Tehran 1963, pp.141, 142-143 and 162-163.

⁸ Ivanow, W. *Kalām-i pīr*; p.88, no.1.

According to W. Ivanow such a state belongs to a much earlier period of the Isma'ilis history, and probably "ceased to exist soon after the split. [which means IV-V/XI] The arrangement itself, and the terminology, are very archaic; most probably the author took this from an early Isma'ili work⁹. In addition to these degrees there "is the degree of the dā'ī. This degree gives no special province into his charge, but he has the absolute licence to carry on the propaganda. After this there is the degree of the highest hujjat, and after comes that of the Imam. There is no intermediary between the Imam and the Great Hujjat"¹⁰.

For Mrs Nadia E. Jamal it is evident that the hierarchical structure of the Nizārī da'wa "continued to flourish to the end of the Alamūt period, but in a reconfigured form". She refers to *Rawdat al-taslīm* (Paradise of Submission) from of the foremost Ismaili thinker, Nasir al-Dīn al-Tūsī (d.672/1274). As it is known, he enumerates a hierarchy of seven ranks: mut'alim (learner), mu'allim (teacher), dā'ī, bāb-i bātin (gate of the hidden), zabān-i 'ilm (tongue of knowledge), hujjat-i a'zam (greatest proof) and dast-i qudrat (hand of power)¹¹.

In the Alamūt stage of the Ismā'īlī history hierarchy of spiritual ranks (also organizational) was reduced practically to four degrees: a chief dā'ī, with the title of the dā'ī of Daylam or the hujja of the imām, dā'īs (du'āt) of the lower ranks, mu'allims or religious teachers and comrades (friends) rafīqs (pl. rafīqān), to whom belongs also fidā'īs (or fidāwīs), self-sacrificing devotees, who offer their life for a cause¹². A very important moment was noticed by Professor Daftary: "At many event, towards the end of the Alamūt period, the less formal mu'allim or religious teacher gradually seems to have replaced the dā'ī, as the function of teaching the Nizārī tenets to the members of the sect displaced the function of preaching the da'wa to win new converts"¹³.

The dā'īs (du'āt) were belived each to have been in charge of the district (jazīra, island) where the da'wa was preached. After the greatest split in the Ismā'ili movement the dā'ī became the ordinary title for the chief of the Nizārī branch of Ismā'īlīs, residing from the time of Hasan-i Sabbāh at Alamūt in the name of an unknown imām, until in 559/1164 the then dā'ī proclaimed himself, khalīfa of God, the visible imām.

It is certain that Hasan-i Sabbāh, designated as the hujja of the Qā'im al-qiyyāma, that had prepared the way, for the qiyyāma. Hasan II 'alā dhikrihi'l-

⁹ *Kalām-i pīr*, English transl. p.88, Persia text, p.94.

¹⁰ *Kalām-i pīr*; below.

¹¹ Nasir al-Dīn al-Tūsī, *Rawdat al-taslīm*, ed. and tr. W. Ivanow, Leiden, 1959, text pp. 122-124, translation pp.143-144; comp. Jamal, Nadia E. *Surviving the Mongols. Nizārī Quhistānī and Continuity of Ismaili Tradition in Persia*, London-New York, 2002, p.42 [ed. by The Institute of Ismaili Studies. Ismaili Heritage Series, 8. General Editor: Farhad Daftary].

¹² Daftary, *Ismailis*, p.394. The Nizārī Ismā'īlī leaders where ruled fortress at Alamūt, are generally referred to as the Lords (Khudāwands) of Alamūt in Persian sources.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.388.

salām, ‘on whose mention be peace’, visible successor of Nizār’s imāmate, the 17th Ramadān 559/8 August 1164 underneath the fortress Alamūt, delivered a sermon in Arabic in which he announced the advent of the qiyāma, the long-awaited Day of Resurrection¹⁴. A similar proclamation was held later at the fortress of Mu’minābad, where the same sermon was repeated with the additional formula that Hasan was the khalīfat Allah, God’s vicegerent on earth¹⁵. This resource was reserved only for the Imāms in Shi’i theology, as well as being the Qā’im-i qiyāmat (Lord of the Resurrection)¹⁶. New titles of the fourth leader of the Nizārī state and da’wa were applied pro foro interno to Nizārī community, but all alone Nizārī imām was pro foro externo impersonal figure. Soon after, in his decrees and epistles, Hasan II hinted that he himself was the imām and the Qā’im al-qiyāma, the son of an imām from the descendants of Nizār b. al-Mustansir, and as Professor Daftary remarks further: “it seems that Hasan II claimed the imāmate in some sense towards the end of his life”. It’s was not reflected in formal titulature of the Nizārī imāms.

The proclamation of the qiyāmat-i qiyāmāt (Great Resurrection) was to initiate a new phase in the history of Nizārī Ismā’īlism. The khutba named Hasan II b. Muhammad not only as the imām’s dā’ī and hujja or proof like Hasan-i Sabbāh, “but also his khalīfa, or deputy, with plenary authority, a higher rank yet”¹⁷. Hasan II toward the end of his not long reign claimed that the himself was the imām and the Qā’im al-qiyāma, the of an imām from the mysterious successors of Nizār b. al-Mustansir. It was not reflected in his formal titulature as religious and ruling leader.

Some of the materials on our subjects are given in numismatic sources¹⁸. The mint was never called by the name ‘Alamūt’ but by its honorific name Kursī al-Daylam (Throne of the Daylam), in later years often extended by the epithet

¹⁴ See for instance Hodgson, *Order*, pp.148 ff.; Lewis, *Assassins*, pp.72 ff.; Daftary, *The Ismā’īlīs*, pp.386 ff.; also his *A short history of the Ismailis*, pp.138 ff.

¹⁵ Daftary, *Ismā’īlīs*, p.387.

¹⁶ Madelung, Wilferd art. *Imāma*, EI2 volume III, Leiden – London 1986, p.1169; in detail see Hodgson, *Order*, p.160-175.

¹⁷ Daftary, *Ismā’īlīs*, p.390.

¹⁸ The first mention on the ‘Assassins’ coins see Bartholomae, I. *Lettre à M. Soret sur des monnaies Konfiques inédites rapportée de Perse*, *Revue Numismatique Belge*, 3 (1859), pp.432-434. The following works : Casanova, P., *Monnaie des Assassins de Perse*, *Revue Numismatique*, 3 série (1893), pp.343-352 ; Miles, George C., *The coins of the Assassins of Alamūt*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica*, 3 (1972), pp.155-162 ; Ilisch, L. *Goldmünzen aus dem Gibal um 600 H.*, *Jahresbericht 2000, Forschungsstelle für Islamische Numismatik*, Tübingen 2001, pp.14-16 ; Zambaur, E. *Münzprägungen des Islams*, Wiesbaden 1968, pl.12, lists a copper coin struck in Rudbar in 604 AH with a reference to the Fonrobert collection ; Dobrovol’ skiy, I. *O monetakh ismailitow Alamuta*, *Soobscheniya Gosudarstviennogo Ermitazha* 45 (1980), pp.66-68. My remarks are based on the Catalogue Ismaili Coins, in : Willey, P. *Eagle’s Nest. Ismaili castles in Iran and Syria*, London 2005, pp.294-307 (nos.1-43).

Baldat al-Iqbāl, the 'City of Good' (Happiness, Prosperity)¹⁹. This use of an official rather than popular name may be paralleled by the Abbāsīd practice, where coins were minted in Baghdad. From the very beginning the name Madīnat as-Salām appeared on the coins minted in Baghdad²⁰.

The inscriptions on Nizārī coins are primarily religious as on all medieval Islamic coins. They follow the Fātimīd coinage with the addition of the phrase 'Alī walī Allāh' typical for the Shi'is. A splendid large gold coin of uncertain attribution with the name of Muhammad b. al-Hasan bears the phrase 'lā imām illā amīr az-zamān Nizār' (There is no Imām except the Commander of the Age, Nizār)²¹. The numismatic evidence from the early Alamūt period shows that Nizār's own name and caliphal title, at Mustafā li-Dīn Allāh, was mentioned on coins minted at Alamūt for about seventy years after his death in 488/1095 and through the reign of the third lord of Alamūt, Muhammad b. Buzurg-Ummīd (532-557/1138-1162)²². In the inscriptions of these coins, Nizār's descendants are blessed anonymously.

The titulature of the lords of Alamūt as mirrored by their coins underwent a drastic evolution. Initially, Muhammad b. Buzurg-Ummīd presented his name, as mentioned already, devoid of any titles, while the subsequent lords of Alamūt (who were afterwards recognised as Imāms) were, at least until 574/1178-79 unpretentious and allowed only the name of Nizār on the coinage²³.

Along with the sixtieth imām of Alamūt Jalāl al-Dīn Hasan's (607 – 618/1210 – 1221) apparent reconciliation with orthodoxy of Nizārī leaders took place, similarly to other Muslim rulers, begun to use specific Islamic titles – laqabs. During the reign of this Nizārī imām in the possessions of the 'Assassins' the restoration of the Sunni ritual laws and their accommodations with Abbāsīd Caliphate took place²⁴.

With the rapprochement with the Sunni world, the lords of Alamūt adopted worldly titles and styled themselves as-sultān al-a'zam, 'the great sultan'. This

¹⁹ Miles, G.C. *Coins of the Assassins*, p.160. Catalogue no.30: (Date illegible; gold). Outer marginal legend: Bismillāh al-rahman al-rahīm duriba hādhā al-dīnār **bi-baldat al-iqbāl** bi-Kursī al-Daylam; no 37 (619 AH; silver): hādhā al-dirham bi-baldat al-iqbāl sanat tis'wa 'as asharat wa sittami'a.

²⁰ See, for instance Czapkiewicz, M., Gupieniec, A., Kmietowicz A., Kubiak W., *Skarb monet arabskich z Klukowicz – powiat Siemiatycze*. Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków, 1964, nos. 5,6,7, 11,13, 16, 17, 18, 19 etc.

²¹ Catalogue no 30, rev: Lā imām ill amīr al-zamān /' Abd Allāh wa walīhi Nizār Abū al-Mansūr/ al-Imām al-Mustafā li-dīn Allāh/ amīr al-mu'minīn.

²² Dobrovl'skiy, *O monetakh ismailitov Alamuta*, pp.67f.

²³ Catalogue no.22. Rev: Alī walī Allāh / al-Mustafā / li-dīn Allāh / Nizār. Marginal legend: Amīr al-mu'minīn salawāt Allāh 'alayhī wa'alā abā'ihī al-tāhirīn wa abnā'ihī al-akramīn.

²⁴ Hodgson, *Order*, pp.217-225; also his 'State', pp.468-472; Lewis, *Assassins*, pp.78-81; see also Daftary, *Isā'īlīs*, pp.405-407; also his 'Short history', pp.145-147.

can be regarded as an arrogation of the position which had passed from the Saljuq sultans to the Khwarāzmshāhs²⁵.

At various times the later lords of Alamūt replaced the sultanic title with their proper religious title of al-mawlā²⁶, but they never used the designation of imām on the coins. Some of the Nizārī silver coins bear figural representations, such as birds or lions formed out of the names of Imāms²⁷.

At last, the specific designation is 'Old Man of the Mountain' – variously rendered as *vetus* or *vetulus de montanis*, *senex de monte*. It should be also mentioned that the Arabic shaykh al-jabal is a later translation from the Western form²⁸. The term, as used by the Crusaders, may have been a rendering of a popular Arabic expression encountered in the Syrian territories²⁹. In all probability, 'Old Man of the Mountain' is based on a misunderstanding of the Arabic word shaykh, frequently used of the Nizārī Isma'īlī leader, and fortuitously linked with the mountains in which he lived. This term originally referred to a Nizārī chief dā'ī of Syria, the famous Rāshid al-Dīn Sinān (ruled 1163 – 1193 A.D.)³⁰. The term Old Man is thus purely Syrian, and was first applied to the 'Assassins' of Persia by European travellers with Marco Polo at the head. It should be assumed that representatives of Europe turned to chief dā'ī of Syria in diplomatic relations using the title mawlā or sāhib³¹, while the latter was practised by Muslim rulers.

The above remarks lead to the following conclusions. The disputable issue of hierarchy in the internal structure of Nizārism points of the number of seven degrees, several of which could balance the titles based on competence (hujja, dā'ī, mu'allim / mustajīb).

Three first leaders, controlling both the religious community and the Ismā'īlī-Nizārī state, did not use, as it was said, distinct titles as rulers. They appeared anonymously in the name of concealed Imām, but they were recognized by their followers as hujjas i dā'īs. Four next leaders acted as visible Imām, although they could not use this title officially in the Islamic space. In order

²⁵ Aykut, N. *Türkiye Selçuklu Sikkeleri*, vol.I Istanbul, 2000, pp.158-162. Title: Al-sultān al-a'zam'alā al-dunya wa al-dīn see Catalogue, for instance nos.23, 24, 26, 28; compare alone element: 'alā al-dunya wa al-dīn on the walls of the castles Masyād and Al-Kahf in Syria see Berchem, Max van, *Épigraphie des Assassins de Syrie*, JA, 9 série (1897), pp.482, 485ff., 499.

²⁶ See Catalogue nos.27, 35, 40.

²⁷ Catalogue nos.38, 41, 42.

²⁸ Tāmir, 'Arif, *Lamha min al-ta'rīkh al-Isma'īlī :Sinān Rāshid al-Dīn aw Shaykh al Jabal*, al-Adīb, 12, no.5 (1953), pp.43-45.

²⁹ Lewis, B. *Assassins*, pp.5-9 ; Daftary, F. *The Assassins Legends. Myths of the Isma'ilis*, London-New York 1995: Old Man of the Mountain, see Index p.209; Hauziński, Jerzy *Muzułmańska sekta asasynów w europejskim piśmiennictwie wieków średnich*. Poznań, 1978, passim.

³⁰ See Daftary, art. Rāshid ad-Dīn Sinān, EI2, vol.VIII, Leiden, 1995, p.442f.

³¹ 'Mawlā' and 'sāhib' as exchangeable titles Nizārīs leaders in Syria, see Berchem, M. van, *Épigraphie des Assassins*, p.495. The title sāhib was best owed to the lord of Alamūt, see Nasawi (Nesawi), *Histoire de sultan Mankobirti*, ed. Houdas, O. vol. I, Paris 1891, p.12.

to become similar to Sunni leaders they began to use honorary Islamic titles – laqabs, and partially, as it can be seen in numismatic materials (and in rare inscriptions) sultan's titles. In narrative sources, whose content is better known, the sect leaders usually called *sāhib*, *mawlā* in Persian: *Khudāwand*. “Official” terminology of Nizārī administration would be another subject, which deserves a separate monograph.