

**Ismaili Literature: A Bibliography
of Sources and Studies**

Farhad Daftary

*London and New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, in association with The
Institute of Ismaili Studies (London), 2004. 469 pages.*

This compilation of Ismaili literature is the result of over thirty years of research, put together by one of the world's leading experts on Ismaili thought and history. Previous attempts to take account of Ismaili literature have been carried out by such noteworthy scholars as W. Ivanow and I. Poonawala. But as the author notes, their compilations were essentially

inventories of manuscripts, whereas the present bibliography is solely concerned with those materials, both primary sources and secondary studies, which have been published.

This bibliography contains an important survey of medieval and contemporary developments in Ismaili studies. Particular attention is paid to the early polemical assaults (and many outright fabrications) to which the Ismaili image collectively fell victim and which caused numerous misunderstandings concerning key Ismaili doctrines. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the Ismaili “black legend” that surreptitiously came to the fore by the tenth century CE (see p. 87). This image, which severely distorted Ismaili teachings with regard to both its faith and practice, resulted in increased Ismaili polemics and hostilities. In addition, this image also suffered defamation from outside the house of Islam, for distortions spread by the Crusaders and other European travelers resulted in a slew of embellished tales – the “Assassin legends.”

Needless to say, these products of the European popular imagination came along with the European encounter with the “Other.” If Islam, in general, suffered its share of distortions, the Ismaili image, already obscured by centuries of anti-Ismaili polemical activity, felt the brunt of it. Alongside this was the problem of the Orientalists who studied the Ismailis through the medium of hostile Muslim sources.

In the nineteenth century, thanks to discoveries of original Ismaili manuscripts, things started to change. But only in the early part of the twentieth century did the most significant body of manuscripts come to light. Since then, such noteworthy scholars as W. Ivanow, B. Lewis, M. Hodgson, A. Fyzee, H. Corbin, L. Massignon, W. Madelung, P. Walker, I. Poonawala, A. Asani, A. Nanji, and F. Daftary have carried out many studies. These more recent findings have allowed a clearer picture of the Ismailis’ self-perception to emerge.

The bibliography compiled in this book (pp. 104-439) is conveniently divided into three sections: primary sources, studies, and selected theses. The “primary sources” section, comprised of entries in Arabic and Persian along with their translations into modern languages (if applicable), is further divided into five subcategories: works by Ismaili authors, collective Ismaili works, anonymous Ismaili and pseudo-Ismaili works, the *Epistles* of the Brethren of Purity, and selected works by non-Ismaili Muslim authors. The primary source materials are arranged alphabetically, and each entry is accompanied by useful descriptive annotations. The “studies” section covers a wide range of modern academic work devoted to many facets of Ismailism, from articles

on Ismaili law and cosmogonic doctrines to monographs on Nasr-i Khusraw and Ismaili history. The “selected theses” section presents a selection of some of the more important published and non-published theses written in the field of Ismaili studies (mostly in English, but also in French, Italian, Farsi, and Arabic). Here, one will notice several interesting studies devoted to Ismaili communities in the West, Ismaili history, Ismaili devotional literature, and important dissertations on Ismaili theology and philosophy.

Not only does *Ismaili Literature* contain a wealth of information pertaining to many significant aspects of Ismaili studies, but it also comes with a comprehensive account of Ismailism’s origins and development with respect to both its history and doctrines. This introduction is, in fact, a condensed version of the author’s well-received books on Ismailism: his long and thoroughly documented *The Isma`ilis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge University Press: 1990) and his more recent *A Short History of the Isma`ilis* (Markus Wiener Pub.: 1998). *Ismaili Literature* is appended with two genealogical tables. The first table deals with the early Imami and Ismaili imams, and the second one with the long succession of Fatimid caliphs. This is certainly a useful tool, given their complicated genealogies, which date from the early part of the tenth century, extend to the present day, and cover a wide geographical expanse comprising Africa, Asia, and Europe.

Mohammed Rustom
Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations
University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada