

(Download pdf) A Short History of the Ismailis: Traditions of a Muslim Community (The New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys)

## **A Short History of the Ismailis: Traditions of a Muslim Community (The New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys)**

*Farhad Daftary*

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**Farhad Daftary : A Short History of the Ismailis: Traditions of a Muslim Community (The New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Short History of the Ismailis: Traditions of a Muslim Community (The New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys):

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Yet Daftary has made a good fist of doing so here and gets top

marks ...By Bruce McLaren In the mind-bogglingly complicated world of Islam there is perhaps no more difficult group to understand than the Ismailis. Yet Daftary has made a good fist of doing so here and gets top marks for his efforts. Make no mistake, this is an extremely dense book with a wealth of academic detail. It would be easy to lose the reader with a subject such as this, but Daftary has that rarest of skills - he writes extremely well and has great style, even though this is most definitely a scholarly work. That combination alone is a rare thing indeed...The Ismailis are one of many Shiite groups and one of the smaller and less understood Shiite groups at that. The majority of Shiites today are to be found in Iran, where the so-called "Twelver" system prevails. What this means is that most Shiites believe that there were twelve Imams, the first being Ali, the twelfth being the Mahdi, who is currently in a state of occultation and will return on the day of judgement. By contrast, the Ismailis are known as "Seveners", after a schism within the Shiite sphere following a disagreement about who should be the seventh Imam. The "Seveners" proclaimed Ismail to be the rightful Imam, hence their name. Another major group within the Shiite world are the "Fivers", who also disputed the succession of Imams and followed Zayd - hence their being known as the Zaydis. The Zaydis are still commonly found today in Morocco and Yemen, but up until the time of the Safavids, some 500 years ago, they were the largest Shiite group. Of these major Shiite denominations the "Ismaili Seveners" have the most colorful history. The epicenter of Ismailism migrated around the countryside in the most unusual way, first to Syria and then Tunis, before conquering Egypt and establishing Cairo as their capital. From Cairo the "Ismaili Fatimids" ruled as the most powerful dynasty in Islam, the only time that a Shiite dynasty has been the foremost power in the Islamic World. From this peak the Ismaili movement suffered a series of setbacks, including a major schism once again over who should be the Imam - Nizar or Mustaali. The Nizaris established themselves in the mountains northern Iran and Syria, and it is from them that we get the Assassin legends. The Egyptian Fatimids broke down into ever smaller groups, and now exist mainly in northern India as the Bohras. There is no doubt that this is a great book but the funniest part of it is found in the title "Short History" for it is anything but that. In fact, I would only recommend this book for readers who already have a fairly fundamental grasp of Islamic history. To dive into this book without it might just leave you shaking your head. Explanations of Ismaili belief systems, such as Neo-Platonic cosmology can be difficult to understand at the best of times. Background reading required first. That being said, I loved reading this book. 4 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Good work of an historian, but ...By xull If one knows it, one cannot fail to compare this book to Dr. Momen's introduction to Twelver Shi'ism: An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism that sets the standards in works of this kind. F. Daftary's book does not meet the standard in several respects, e.g.:- missing comparison of Ismaili jurisprudence to for example the Twelver Shi'ite and Maliki schools- missing tables showing the synchronicity of political and theological developments- missing maps of regions other than Persia - Iraq (e.g. the Fatimide caliphate) The author's perspective of an exoteric historian leads him to mistaken explanations of some Ismaili doctrines, e.g. the cyclical nature of time. He tends to relegate the ulama (theologians) to a role of ideological support for those holding political power. The outer (zahiri) perspective contrasts with the balanced view of the Ismailis, e.g. as exhibited in the epistles of the Brethren of Purity. In spite of many historic details, F. Daftary fails to explain or demonstrate what the essential specificity of Ismaili Shi'ite Islam is or purports to be. 7 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Great book, by a worthy Scholar By toby h greer Farhad Daftary is a noted international scholar, who has researched many publications with such noted institutions as Oxford and Cambridge, this Book is a great testament to scholarship, and as such is objective throughout, mixing Glory with Disaster and even controversy, this is recommended for those who want a true picture of ismailis and their beliefs, instead of some of the bias and emotional conjecture that is also available.

Despite being one of the key Shi'i Muslim communities, the Ismailis were until recently studied primarily on the basis of the accounts of their enemies. This new introduction is the first to be based on modern scholarship, taking account of recently recovered Ismaili texts. It covers all the main developments in the major phases of Ismaili history, from the early formative period, through the Fatimid golden age and the Alamut and post-Alamut periods, to more recent history. Dealing only with the most important historical developments, this is a comprehensive and accessible survey for all newcomers to the subject.

The author is to be congratulated on a text that compresses a great deal of authoritative information and yet remains very readable. The author focuses on major themes and developments, as well as the historical background from which they arose. His writing is succinct and lucid, making use of primary and secondary sources, in which he shows a remarkable range of scholarship...Daftary's book provides an excellent overview of the history of the Ismailiyya from its inception to the present. Its particular focus is the sect's history, but its doctrines also receive ample treatment. The reader is introduced both to the primary sources and to the scholarly literature- eloquent proof of the author's great erudition. The chapters of the book complement one another to form a fascinating tale that is readable and fluent; at the same time they stand as independent units, any of which can be read on its own. Daftary deserves high praise for this exemplary project, which will be eminently useful for both scholars and students. The author is to be congratulated on a text that compresses a great deal of authoritative information and yet remains very readable. The author focuses

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About the Author Farhad Daftary, Institute of Ismaili Studies, London is the author of several books, including *The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrines* and *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Isma'ilis*.