

Surviving the Mongols: Nizari Quhistani and the Continuity of Ismaili Tradition in Persia, Nadia Eboo Jamal, London: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2002, ISBN 1-86064-432-5, (cloth), xvi + 190 pp.

When the Mongol hordes swept through the Near East in the seventh/thirteenth century, they succeeded in devastating the mini-state of the Isma'ilis, centered at the mountain fortress of Alamut. Thousands of the sectarians were put to the sword and it was long thought that the community had ceased to exist. Ata Malik Juwayni, the Persian historian who accompanied the Mongols at this time, records how he requested his master for permission to visit the celebrated library of Alamut, "the fame of which had spread throughout the world." There he found "multitudes" of books relating to the religion of the Ism'ilis, which he condemned to be burned, saving only copies of the Quran and a few other treatises. Thus, at one fell swoop, the rich literary production of two centuries was almost completely destroyed.

While the community somehow managed to survive complete annihilation, the military defeat ushered in a period of almost complete anonymity. We know next to nothing of the Nizari Isma'ilis in the immediate aftermath of the Mongol invasions or of their subsequent literary production. Nadia Eboo Jamal's study of Nizari Quhistani, an Isma'ili poet who witnessed the destruction of his community's central headquarters as well as the depredations visited upon the general populace; who managed to clandestinely maintain his religious identity while holding a number of government posts; and who wrote a versified travelogue suggestive that he met a very high Isma'ili dignitary, possibly the Imam himself, while in Azerbaijan, is thus a very welcome addition to the field.

Nizari's importance as a Persian poet of remarkable talent as well as one of the few identifiable Isma'ilis of this period has long been recognized by literary historians. E.G. Browne, author of the celebrated *Literary History of Persia*, for example, considered him a poet of "genius." However, it was not until Chengiz G. Baiburdi's *Zhizn i tvorcestvo Nizari-Persidskogo poeta* appeared in Moscow in 1966 that a major scholarly study was dedicated to the subject. Being written in Russian, however, Baiburdi's book was not easily accessible to much of the scholarly community. Finally, it was translated into Persian in 1991 as *Zindigani va atbar-i Nizari*. In her own book, Jamal readily acknowledges her great debt to the pioneering work of her predecessor (pp. 6, 62).

In Part I of her study, Jamal sets the stage for her main subject by sketching the political and intellectual history of the Isma'ilis. She touches upon the conceptual framework of this Shi'i Muslim community by examining its unique vision of time and history and the development of the *da'wab* (invitation to accept the Imams) as it existed in early Islam, at the time of the nascent Isma'ili community and later under the Fatimids. The period after the split in the Fatimid Caliphate is dealt with in more detail in a separate chapter dedicated to the Nizari

Isma'ili *da'wab*, which also explores the importance of the declaration of the *qiyamah*, or resurrection, and its influence on Isma'ili thought. The last chapter of this part of the book describes the Mongol catastrophe and the destruction of the Isma'ili state.

After developing this framework, Jamal begins Part II of her book, which leads her to the heart of her subject, the poet Nizari Qubistani. She traces references to him in Persian works, including those of authors such as Jami, Katibi, Dawlatshah, Mirkhwand, Khwand Mir, Lutf Ali Beg Adhar and others, and also touches on modern views of the poet, both by scholars writing in Persian as well as those writing in western languages. There follows an account of Nizari's early life and education, his career in Herat and later Birjand, and his final years. In the ensuing chapter, Jamal examines the poet's religious identity in depth, discussing the interplay of relationships between Isma'ilism and Sufism and the author's practice of *taqiyyah*, or pious dissimulation. The final chapter is one of Jamal's most original contributions to the subject. In it she provides a detailed analysis of Nizari's poetic *Safarnamah*, or travelogue, teasing out oblique references and allusions that provide information on the Isma'ili *da'wab* of the time.

Jamal's work is valuable for sifting the disparate and often difficult-to-access findings of modern scholarship on Nizari and bringing them together into a highly readable volume. In addition, through her book, many of Baiburdi's findings are now accessible to a non-Russian reading audience. To this she adds numerous new insights, particularly those drawn from Nizari's *Safarnamah* and parts of his *Divan*.

As in any work of this nature, there are a few issues that should be addressed. Reliance on secondary works is rather heavy at times. Statements such as those about Nizari's "detailed" studies of Isma'ili thinkers including Abu Yaqub al-Sajistani, Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, Nasir-i Khusraw and Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (p. 67) and his having a cousin called Sad Akbar whose high position in the Kart court may have been helpful in procuring his position in government service (p. 71) are dealt with in a summary fashion, culled primarily from modern literature on the subject. However, as important aspects of Nizari's biography, such facts should have been established, substantiated and explored in greater detail from the original sources. Jamal also states that the earliest references to Nizari in Persian literature come over "a century after his death" (p. 58). In fact, that he hailed from Birjand bestowed on that provincial town a claim to fame, this being memorialized within twenty years of his death in the geographical portion of Hamd-allah Mustawfi Qazwini's *Nuzhat al-Qulub*. Jamal does seem to be aware of this work though, mentioning it on p. 64 of her book.

Copy errors are few, for which the author and editor should be congratulated. However, the reader may smile when s/he reads that according to Ivanow, "the purpose of Nizari's journey was...to offer *didar* (homage) to the Imam of the time" (p. 135). It is, of course, the Imam who offers the *didar*, or beatific vision, to the believer, not the reverse. The incorrect gloss, "homage," of course, indicates that

the author intended something else here, this being a simple, though amusing, slip. Similarly, on p. 70 we learn that Rukn al-Din Kart retired to Khaysar in 1282/1865, which I suspect should read 680/1282, the Kart dynasty having crumbled long before the nineteenth century of the Christian era.

Surviving the Mongols is the best introduction to Nizari Quhistani available in English. As the first major study of this subject in the language, Jamal's book also brings into relief the tremendous amount of research that still needs to be undertaken, which she and other scholars will hopefully take up. In the author's original doctoral thesis, submitted to the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures at New York University in 1996, which formed the basis of this present study, Jamal included an edition of Nizari's *Safarnamah*. It is hoped that she will soon publish this valuable aspect of her research, perhaps with a translation. Besides the *Safarnamah*, Nizari's major *mathnavis*, *Munazarab-yi shab va ruz* (a metaphorical debate between Sunnism, represented by the darkness of night, and Shi'ism, represented by the light of day) and *Azhar va mazhar*, or "Revelation and Manifestation," still need to be scoured for further information, as they contain valuable insights into Nizari's Isma'ili leanings. Jamal has investigated Nizari primarily through the lens of his faith. This, in itself, is an important aspect of his persona. Now that she has laid the groundwork for further studies, it would be worthwhile to study this author as a poet as well, for he was certainly a Persian poet of remarkable abilities who is worthy of attention.

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A Diplomatic History of the Caspian Sea: Treaties, Diaries, and Other Stories, Guive Mirfendereski. With a foreword by H.E. Chehabi. New York: Palgrave, 2001 ISBN 0-312-24005-8, 261pp.

Until recently, Iran's position vis-à-vis the Persian Gulf interested Western audiences more than her role in the Caspian Sea. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the independent Central Asian and Caucasian republics, however, the attention of decision-makers and scholars has shifted northward. Consequently, Guive Mirfendereski's study, *A Diplomatic History of the Caspian Sea: Treaties, Dairies, and Other Stories*, is most welcome.

Blending the best of biography, travel memoirs, and legal analysis, the author captures the reader's gaze with 42 vignettes about the alliances, ententes, conflicts, conspiracies, resources, and rapprochements that have marked this region since the 1720s. The virtues of these vignettes are numerous—among them, lyrical