

SCHOLARSHIP ADVANCEMENT PROGRAMME WORKSHOP SAP (2023)

DEPARTMENT HISTORY & CIVILIZATION

Presenters



AP. Dr. Fauziah Fathil

MIGRANT COMMUNITY, LOCAL POLITICS
& WARFARE: A CASE OF RAWA PEOPLE
IN 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES
MALAYA



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Dr. Mohamad Hazizie
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ADAB AL-QADI IN THE MALAY WORLD: A
STUDY ON SELECTED MALAY LEGAL
TEXTS

27 September 2023

9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

SEMINAR ROOM 8, ISTAC, JALAN DUTA

AHAS KULLIYAH ISLAMIC REVELEAD KNOWLEDGE AND HUMAN SCIENCES





The Ismaili's Violent Approach under Hasan al-Sabbah (d. 1124) and the Implication to His Ismaili State

DR. ALWI ALATAS

The Ismaili Fatimid World

- The Fatimid dynasty, which was founded in the beginning of the 10th century, became more powerful at the end of the century until the first half of the 11th century. However, in the last decades of the 11th century, this dynasty faced serious decline.
 - At the end of 1094, the longest-reigning Fatimid caliph, al-Mustansir Billāh, passed away and his death inherited unending division within the Ismā‘īlī Shia community.
 - The position of al-Mustansir Billāh should have been replaced by his eldest son, Nizār, but the Fatimid vizier al-Afdal forestalled the succession by installing Nizār's younger brother Aḥmad (then al-Musta'li Billāh) to the throne.
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- Nizār resisted and retained the caliphal claim, but was soon defeated and imprisoned by al-Afdal. Nizār's existence instantly faded from history, but not his memory and his cause.
 - This incident had split the Ismā'īlī community in two. The Fatimid government in Egypt supported al-Musta'li's leadership, but many Ismā'īlī communities outside Egypt became Nizārī followers, hence tarnishing Fatimid influence outside Egypt (Cahen, 1969).
 - The Nizārī claimed for Nizār occultism or for the continuation of Ismā'īlī imamate on the line of Nizār's descendants. Ḥasan al-Sabbāh would become the main leader of the Nizārī faction.
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Hasan al-Sabbah

- Hasan al-Sabbāh spent his childhood in Rayy, Iran, with his family who adhered to the Twelver (Ithnā ‘Ashariyah) Shia. In his youth, he was influenced by the Ismā‘īlī *da'wah* and had since become a strong supporter of this ideology.
 - He went to the center of Ismā‘īlī *da'wah* in Cairo between 1078 and 1081, before returning to Iran. A talented preacher and theologian, he spread the Ismā‘īlī *da'wah* until he succeeded in taking control of the Alamut fortress in the Alborz Mountain in northern Iran by 1090.
 - Until his death in 1124, he never left the fortress, in which he lived a life characterized by worship, austerity, and erudition.
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Nizari-Assassin

- Nevertheless, al-Sabbāh would be popularly known as the founder of a legendary organization that used assassination as a method of struggle, namely the Assassins. Emerging and settling in the Sunni Seljuk region, al-Sabbāh and his followers involved in violent confrontations with the Seljuk and strived to weaken the Seljuk-Abbasid government from the beginning.
 - When the Cairene power dispute arose after the death of al-Mustansir Billāh, al-Sabbāh came forward as a defender and a champion of Nizārī imamate, hence a strong and open rival to the Musta'lian Fatimid.
 - In the following years, the Nizārī/Assassins would be involved in many conflicts with the Seljuk-Abbasid government as well as with the Fatimids.
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Violent Approach

- Al-Sabbāh and his followers expanded their movement and founded a Nizārī State by taking over the strategic Alamut fortress, followed with the capture of some other mountain fortresses in Iran and, later, in Syria.
 - These fortresses, and cities, turned into places of emigration (*dār al-hijrah*) for the Nizārīs and at the same time became the targets of the Seljuk attacks.
 - Having limited power to confront the Seljuk openly, they operated assassination method against the enemy's leaders to destabilize their power structure. The Nizārī assassins barely survived the missions, so these could generally be considered as suicide attacks.
 - The Nizārī assassins were held in high esteem by their community, while their names and missions were honorably recorded in Alamut and other fortresses.
 - The method of assassination had already been used before and was also practiced at that time by some other Islamic groups, but “it was the Nizārīs who assigned to targeted assassinations a major political role in their strategy of struggle against an enemy.”
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- The Assassins involved in a number of killings that were usually carried out in a crowd, thus creating terror to the opponent.
 - Some of the victims of assassination in that era are disputed by modern scholars whether they were really carried out by the Nizārīs or by the contending emirs. Whatever the case, they were indeed responsible for a number of assassinations and along with that “any assassination of any importance in the central lands of Islam were readily attributed to the Nizārīs.”
 - These assassinations became legendary and manifested into the Western mind as a popular designation and an adapted vocabulary.
 - It should be noted that this was not the only military approach of the Nizārī of Alamut, as they were also involved in several open battles against the opposing side, such as was the case in the Quhistan region in 1154.
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Victims

- Nizām al-Muluk who was killed by a youth from Dailam in 1092 is cited as one of the earliest victims of this group.
 - The victims were mainly of the Sunni Seljuk, but some Musta'lian leaders and crusaders had likewise become the victims.
 - Just to name a few examples, the Seljuk vizier Mu'īn al-Dīn Abū Naṣr was assassinated by the Nizārī Assassins in 1127, while the Abbasid Caliph al-Mustarshid was assassinated in 1135; the latter was probably with the tacit support of the Seljuk Sultan.
 - The Assassins claimed responsibility for the assassination of al-Afdal, the Fatimid vizier who had sparked the division in the Ismā'īlī community, while the Fatimid Caliph al-Amir was assassinated by the Assassins nine years later in 1130.
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Terror

- The terror and chaos wrought by the Assassins may be reflected in the murder of Emir Homs Jannah al-Dawlah in 1103.
 - As narrated by Ibn al-Qalānisī, he attended Friday prayers surrounded by officials wearing full armor.
 - Following the instruction of certain sheikh, three Persians masqueraded as Sufis suddenly stabbed the Emir. Jannah al-Dawlah and several other officials around him died suddenly, while the other emirs swiftly avenged the murder.
 - Not only those involved in the murder became the target of revenge, but also a few innocent Sufis who attended the Friday prayer at the mosque.
 - The incident caused confusion and panic among the residents of Homs, while the Turks immediately fled to Damascus.
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Idea and method

- Al-Sabbāh's new approach is outlined in his work, *al-Da'wah al-Jadidah*, which is a reformulation of the doctrine of *ta'lim* (teaching/instruction) in the Ismā'īlī belief.
 - The doctrine of *ta'lim* requires authoritative teaching represented at the head by no other than a true imam, the Ismā'īlī imam, that existed in each era, hence denouncing other authorities as unreliable for proper religious and spiritual guidance.
 - The assassination method that has been previously mentioned is not part of this focal idea.
 - Assassination seems to have been chosen as an assisting strategy to weaken the opponent, to protect the recently established Ismā'īlī state in the midst of the enemy's region, and finally to facilitate the spread of the Nizārī *da'wah* and *ta'lim*.
 - However, this assassination strategy would later become the most striking image of the Nizārīs in that era.
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Initial Success

- The Nizārī movement initially thrived and drew a lot of support in Persian environment.
 - A number of fortresses and territories fell into the hands of the Nizārīs and their influence also spread from Persia to Syria.
 - The acceptance of Nizārī *da'wah* was partly influenced by local nationalism against the Turkish Seljukid government.
 - The Assassins' ability to disguise, infiltrate and kill had created fear among the Sunni leaders, forcing them to wear armor under their clothes in peaceful times.
 - The Nizārī movement and state continued until after al-Sabbāh passed away and succeeded by the subsequent Nizārī imams.
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Repercussion

- However, Nizārī influence and expansion stagnated after several decades. The Nizārīs often experienced grave repercussions from non-Nizārī leaders and communities, especially the Sunnis.
 - In Aleppo, for example, the Nizārī community had a great influence because of the support of Riḍwān, the city's ruler from 1095 to 1113. However, when Riḍwān passed away, his son's policy changed and the Nizārī in the city were arrested and killed.
 - In 1114, the Nizārīs tried to capture the fort of Shayzār when its leader from Banū Munqidh was absent. But on his return, with the help of the townspeople, the emir of Shayzār combed and killed all the Nizārī members existed in the area.
 - In 1129, there was an incident in Damascus similar to that in Aleppo. The Nizārīs who previously had a secured and strong position under the protection of the ruler of Damascus, then became the target of the succeeding ruler. The new ruler, supported by the townspeople, eradicated the Nizārīs from that city. Thousands of members of the Nizārī community were massacred at that time.
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- This situation forced the Syrian Nizārīs to use a typical al-Sabbāh strategy, namely to have a secluded network of fortresses in the mountain, centered in Masyaf.
 - The Nizārī region of Persia, such as in Quhistan, was also repeatedly attacked by the Seljuks and its people were killed.
 - In places where the Ismā‘īlīs were a minority, they sometimes became the target of community attacks.
 - An Ismā‘īlī couple in Isfahan, for example, were burned alive by the local people in 1093 because they were accused of torturing and killing several passers-by in their home.
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Problem of violent approach

- A combination of violence (assassination), secrecy and terror seemed to have created disgust and rage among the population, especially the Sunni community.
 - The slain was limited to certain leaders and the assassination might be intended to weaken the enemy without threatening or causing many civilian casualties. However, it generated horror within the non-Ismā'īlī masses.
 - Capitulation might be expected from the society as a result of such fear, but this was not the case in a region in which the Nizārīs were a minority. Even when they were protected by the local ruler, their influence and control would not be permanent.
 - To the non-Nizārī people, the illustrated assassination brought certain message: it can be happened anytime, anywhere, to any non-Nizārī figures, by any ordinary Nizārī. This made the whole members of the Nizārī community were suspected to be part of the conspiracy. All of them were now perceived as potential assassins and, therefore, deserved retaliation. Therefore, the Nizārīs were chased and killed by their opponents and their audacious endeavours generally failed.
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Turn of approach

- Later on, the fourth lord of Alamut claimed himself as the direct descendant of Nizār and he declared a new phase of Nizārī history – being implemented by two Nizārī Imams from 1162 to 1210 – guided by the doctrine of *qiyāmah* (resurrection).
 - Since then, the Nizārī community lived in a symbolic spiritual realm independent of the non-Nizārī communities.
 - Though they might not really neglect the sharia as some people suggest and to a certain degree they still involved in conflicts with the outside communities, this doctrine basically provided a significant turn from active expansion of Nizārī *da'wah* and state to a more inward-looking socio-political stance.
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The following stage

- In the next phase, applied by the last three lords of Alamut from 1210 to 1256, the Nizārīs even turned to Sunni Islam and pursued recognition from the Abbasid Caliphate and the Sunni community for their formal conversion.
 - These last two phases represented the Nizārī setback from the initial accomplishment of the formation and enlargement of their socio-political entity.
 - The Alamut chapter would be concluded with the conquest of that mountain fort by the Mongols in 1256. The Nizārī community survived to the next centuries, but it has never regained its previous success.
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Al-Sabbah's Strategy and Its Weakness

- Ḥasan al-Sabbāh focused on socio-political aspect and used certain method of violence against the enemy. Ḥasan al-Sabbāh seemed to see outside community (Sunni-Seljuk/Abbasid) as the main hindrance for the Nizārī development. The annihilation or weakening of that hindrance would facilitate the victory for the Nizārī society.
 - Al-Sabbāh and his movement underlined on the importance of organized action, with full obedience of its members, and effective operations to eliminate enemy's political structure.
 - The *da'wah* of al-Sabbāh did not unite the society. It had augmented division even within the Ismā'īlī society, particularly with the Musta'lian Fatimids.
 - Al-Sabbāh's violent method had caused the expulsion of many Nizārīs from cities in which they were the minority, made them secluded in the mountainous regions that difficult to develop into a significant center of civilization.
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Not good in the long run

- Ḥasan al-Sabbāh's *da'wah* was initially quite successful. The Nizārī network was growing rapidly, a number of strategic fortresses in the mountains could be taken and used as bastions and as centers of the Nizārī state.
 - Even the assassination method used by the Nizārīs was quite rewarding at the beginning. It eliminated figures in the opposing parties, thus weakening their leadership and creating great terror and fear to the enemy.
 - However, in the long run al-Sabbāh's *da'wah* turned into a boomerang for the Nizārīs. The method of assassination appears to be one of the main causes for the later decline of the Nizārī community. This method rendered no clear separation between military members and civilians in the Nizārī community, as well as no clear definition for the time and place of physical combat. In other words, all members of the Nizārī community could at any time become perpetrators of assassination.
 - This caused all members of the Nizārī community to end up being the target of suspicion and the target of persecution by the opposing groups. For that reason, the Nizārīs were driven out of several cities and they became more concentrated in the regions under Alamut control. Their violent method made them infamous and possibly made their preaching more difficult to be accepted by the others. **In other words, they gradually lost popular support.**
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