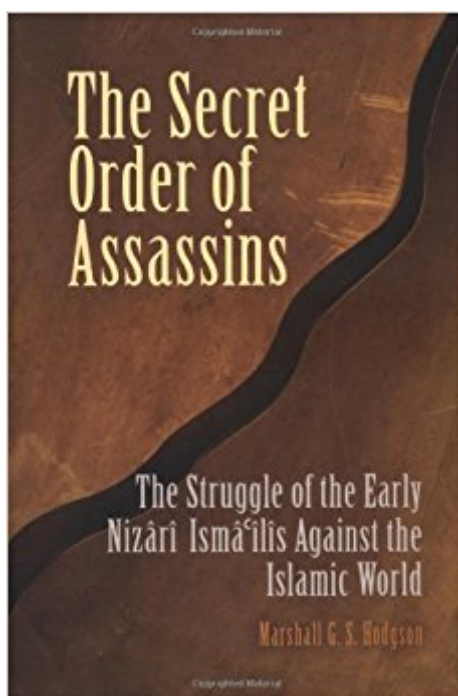


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The Secret Order Of Assassins: The Struggle Of The Early Nizari Ismai'lis Against The Islamic World



Synopsis

The sect known as "the Assassins," a corruption of an Arabic word that means hashish smoker, is familiar to the West as a mystical cult of killers led by the "Man in the Mountain" encountered by the Crusaders. But it was not defeat at the hands of Christians that ended more than a century of Assassin rule; it was the massive and brutal invasion of Mongols from the East who conquered Assassin strong points and mountain fortifications one by one, crushing nearly all traces of this once fearsome sect. For nearly two centuries the Fāṭimids, Shi'ite Muslims who believed Mohammed's daughter Fāṭimah was his successor, attempted to control the Islamic world from their seat in Cairo. Following the death of the Fāṭimid caliphate al Mustansir in 1094, members of a faction in Persia that supported a deposed claimant to the caliphate, Nizār, believed they now represented Fāṭimid interests. These Nizārī Ismā'īlīs ended up separating themselves from mainstream Islam and creating their own state in parts of present-day Syria, Iraq, and Iran. In order to establish and maintain regional control, the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs used political murders and spies to subjugate or influence rival caliphates and the dominant Saljūqs. Marshall Hodgson's first major book, *The Secret Order of the Assassins* remains the most complete history of the Assassins. Beginning the story with the separation of Sunnis and Shi'ites and the rise of Ismā'īlism, an offshoot of Shi'ism, Hodgson traces the long and complex history of power struggles within Islam that led ultimately to the separation of the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs and their direct challenge to Muslim leadership. Hodgson goes on to explain the principles of the movement, provides an examination of their sacred texts, and follows the history of the group from the pinnacle of power in the mid-eleventh century to its legacy in the form of small pockets of followers in parts of contemporary Syria and India. Long out of print and appearing for the first time in paperback, this book is an illuminating study in the history of Islam.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Marshall G. Hodgson's *The Secret Order of Assassins: The Struggle of the Early Nizari Ismailis Against the Islamic World* investigates the origins of Nizari Ismailis and how they became a formidable threat to Sunni and Shia sects of Islam. As most histories centered on the Muslim world tend to do, the account commences at the formation and rise of Islam on the Arabian Peninsula, and the schism that occurred with the murder of Ali, the fourth Caliphate, in 661 C.E. From this schism emerged the division of Islam into two sects: Sunni and Shia. This partitioning of Islam led to further fissures in the religion, giving rise to various sub-sects. Hodgson notes that there is no clear picture of the rise of Ismailism, but, after 900 C.E., a clear structure and organization became evident. The sect erected a power structure known as the Ismaili Dynasty of Egypt, also known as the Fatimid Caliphate. Within this empire, the doctrinal foundations of the sect are further elaborated and solidified; however, another schism occurred over the succession of the imam. The setting aside of Nizar, in his rightful ascendancy to the position of imam, led al-Basasim al-Basasimi to set out on his own with his followers to establish their sect: Nizari Ismailis. Under al-Basasimi, the sect underwent a reformation of the original Ismaili doctrines and practices. Hodgson pieces together the history of the sect's exodus from Fatimid Egypt, indicating that al-Basasimi initiated a military campaign simultaneously with their alienation away from their former home. The military operations were aimed at both Fatimid Egypt and the Seljuk Turks, who occupied Sunni lands. They seized Alamut in 1090 C.E., an inaccessible, rough terrain location, which provided short routes between the important city of Qazwin and the Caspian Sea.

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