



that the *jazira* or district in which he was active, included Iraq and parts of Iran known as "*Iraq-al-Ajami*".<sup>6</sup>

It may be helpful at this point to provide a description of what was a *da`i*. Professor Azim Nanji and Dr. Aziz Esmail have succinctly done this as follows:

"The ideal *da`i* ... was expected not only to lead an ethically exemplary life, but also to be in possession of a keen knowledge of the highest intellectual sciences of the day. Logic, rhetoric, jurisprudence were all numbered amongst his intellectual accomplishments which combined with a knowledge of diplomacy and public relations, constituted the personality of the *da`i*. Thus equipped, the *da`i* went out not only to summon the people to allegiance to the rightful Imam, but also to promote the social, moral and spiritual welfare of the Imam's followers. Ultimately, the *da`is* were charged with hastening not only the establishment of the Ismaili state but also articulating the fundamental doctrinal and moral ends that the state was meant to serve."<sup>7</sup>

Daftary has provided definitions of the terms *da`wa* and *hujja* which the reader may find helpful.<sup>8</sup>

"[the *da`wa* was a] mission or propoganda; in the religio-political sense, *da`wa* is the invitation or call to adopt the cause of an individual or family claiming the right to the *imamate*; it also refers to the entire hierarchy of ranks, sometimes called *hudud* ... within the particular religious organization developed for this purpose...[this movement was] often referred to ... simply as *al-da`wa*, or more formally as *al-da`wa al-hidaya*, 'the rightly-guiding mission'."

"The *hujja* was ... a high rank in the *da`wa* ... hierarchy of the Fatimid Ismailis; there were twelve such *hujja*, each one in charge of a separate *da`wa* region called *jazira*."

Al-Kirmani was one of the first eastern Iranian *da`is* to live in the Fatimid capital of Cairo coming there on the Imam's invitation

“When as an immigrant [*muhajir*] I reached the Prophetic Presence, ... I beheld there a sky that had become dark with pervasive clouds, the people under the weight of a great tribulation, the observance of previous practices had been cancelled, and the faithful saints were kept from what they had earned.”

Furthermore, the Tayyibi authorities collected and preserved many of the older Arabic works. In addition to the evidence from al-Kirmani's own works then, Idris (died 872/1468), the chief Tayyibi *da'i*, provided a vital list of al-Kirmani's works.

On the basis of this evidence, and Idris' list, Walker states that al-Kirmani wrote twenty-nine books and treatises. His most ambitious work is the *Rahat al-`aql* or "Comfort of Reason" and Walker dedicates an entire chapter to a discussion of this work alone. His other treatises include *the Kitab al-Riyad*, *Risalat al-nuzum*, and some smaller treatises including *al-Risala al-hawiya* and *al-Risala al-Lazima*.

Walker states:

"In that era of creative and profound contributions to Islamic thought, this one work [*Rahat al-`aql*] represents the intellectual high point and summit of Ismaili achievement."<sup>14</sup>

### **Al-Kirmani's Legacy**

Al-Kirmani must be recognised for two reasons, of which the first was his contribution to the *da'wa*:

"... in the literature of thought and of the sciences of this period, no other figure in the *da'wa* came even remotely close to him [al-Kirmani]. It is thus certainly proper to regard him as its spokesman and his works as its finest achievements."<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, "Much later Ismailis who looked back on that period tended to see it primarily in terms of al-Kirmani's contributions."<sup>16</sup>

Secondly, he must also be acknowledged as a scholar on a par with such contemporaries as Ibn Sina (Avicenna).<sup>17</sup> Al-Kirmani had mastered the philosophical, scientific and theological discourse of his time and was able to translate it into a form which could be used in the work of the *da'wa* both fly, cb1t i5-6..029ky 0h(e)5memberhdae

In chapter two of this book, Walker discusses the works of al-Kirmani and the difficulty in establishing both their authenticity and chronology. Walker also places al-Kirmani's works in their historical context, offering an explanation as to why, and for whom, they were written.

In the third chapter Walker discusses the structure or hierarchy of the *da'wa* and looks at al-Kirmani as a member of it. What were the relations between different *da'is* and what role did each of them play? Walker also aims to establish what were al-Kirmani's sources and to what extent was his philosophy different from, or similar to that of other *da'is* such as al-Sijistani.<sup>18</sup>

Chapter four is dedicated to a detailed discussion of al-Kirmani's doctrine of "double observance" which states that true faith is characterised by both works and knowledge.<sup>19</sup> The fundamental question "What is faith?" thus presents itself again and given that this has constituted one of the major theological and philosophical questions throughout

The first is the concept of “double observance”. Al-Kirmani states that true faith, according to the Ismaili doctrine, is a combination of knowledge and practice. It must be a balance between the *zahir* and the *batin*, outward observance of the *Shari`a* or Islamic law and *`ilm* or the inward knowledge of God. Faith cannot be characterised by works or ritual alone but must also contain an intellectual aspect. The performance of rituals and an observance of the *Shari`a* must be informed by an understanding of those laws and rituals.<sup>23</sup>

The second theme, which al-Kirmani writes about at length and which is relevant to the contemporary Ismaili reader, is the role of the living Imam. Al-Kirmani states that believers are obliged to know and understand God. Knowledge of God must form a part of true religious faith.

This begs the question: are all believers intellectually capable of understanding God and accessing sources such as The Qur`an and various theological and philosophical texts? Does this not render faith, of necessity, something which only the intellectual can possess? If this were the case we may have found al-Kirmani needing to redefine faith in terms of a mere subjectivity which places all believers in a position to know God, since faith is not a privilege of the learned alone.<sup>24</sup>

Instead, this provides the basis for al-Kirmani’s articulation of the idea that a living Imam is necessary as an interpreter and preserver of the sacred message, which was revealed to Prophet Muhammad. The *da`is* worked directly under the Imam’s direction in articulating to believers this message and the concepts therein, in an intellectually sincere yet accessible form. How then, is this knowledge transmitted from God, the All-knowing, whom believers cannot directly know or understand, to the believer whose religious obligation it is to understand the fundamental concepts of the faith?

Walker explains al-Kirmani’s philosophy regarding the need for a living Imam:

“..in the absence of either the last messenger or of the coming messiah, reason demands that human souls have access to the knowledge they require for that final perfection and salvation. If they cannot seek their own way to God because

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<sup>23</sup> Walker, Chapter 4.

<sup>24</sup> This gives rise to an important philosophical



What is the nature of faith?

Who were the Fatimid *da`is* and what role, in particular, did al-Kirmani play in the work of the *da`wa*?

What particular challenges did al-Kirmani face whilst working in the *da`wa*?