

Manuscripts of Ahmad al-Naysaburi



An important Shi'i Ismaili scholar and writer of the early 5th/11th century, Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Naysaburi flourished during the reigns of Fatimid [imam](#) [1]-caliphs al-'Aziz (AH 365/975-386/996 CE) and al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (AH 386/996-411/1021 CE). Very little information about his personal life is available, but a great deal of talent, character and cultural background can be gleaned from his works. His [nisba](#) [2] Nishapuri (Naysaburi in Arabic) suggests he came from Nishapur, the centre of the Ismaili [da'wa](#) [3] in [Khurasan](#) [4], particularly noted for its dialectic outlook. It was in a social and intellectual milieu such as this that al-Naysaburi was to develop his own thought with a particularly heightened interest in philosophical learning. His works reveal that he was a versatile scholar writing on history, theology, eschatology as well as literature. The fact that several of his works have survived portrays the appeal and significance of his thought, allowing us also to understand the beliefs of his own time.

Istitar al-imam



[5]

Among al-Naysaburi's many works is the [Istitar al-imam](#) [5], an important historical work which reveals names of the three succeeding Ismaili imams after Muhammad b. Ismail b. Ja'far al-Sadiq. The Russian scholar, Wladimir Ivanow (d. 1970), observes that in it "we have precious crumbs of information about a period which is a lost world in history, information which cannot be found anywhere else." ¹

Risala al-mujiza al-kafiya



[6]

Naysaburi's *Risala al-mujiza* [6] belongs to a genre of literature called *adab* [7] (meaning appropriate behaviour) and gives a detailed description of the characteristics and duties of a *da'i* [8]. Ivanow's article on the organisation of the *da'wa* in Fatimid times was based on this treatise.²

Ithbat al-imama [9]



[10]

Al-Naysaburi's theological works include the *Ithbat al-imama* [10] where the author uses philosophy as a tool to explain his theology. He affirms the *Imamat* [11] on the basis of rational and philosophical arguments in addition to his use of the *Qur'an* [12] and *hadith* [13]. The work is an Ismaili representative of a genre of works on the subject of the *Imamat*.

An Arabic edition and an English translation of the *Ithbat al-Imama* by [Dr Arzina R Lalani](#) [14], a Research Associate at The Institute of Ismaili Studies, is now published by the Institute.

¹ W Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids* [15] (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1942), 157-183. The Arabic text of the *Istitar* along with the *Sirat Ja'far al-Hajib* is available in the *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Egyptian University* 4 (1936): 89-133.

² See W Ivanow, "The Organisation of the Fatimid Propaganda," *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1939): 1-35. The work *al-Mujiza* is preserved in the quotations of H Hamidi's *Tuhfat al-qulub* and Hasan b. Nuh al-Bharuchi's *Kitab al-azhar* [16], vol 2. See Verena Klemm's work, *Die Mission des fatimidischen Agenten al-Mu'ayyad fi d-din* [17] in *Siraz* 2(Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Hochschulschriften, 1989) where a facsimile edition of the text is available.

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