



SECTARIANIST WRITINGS IN ISLAM: PREJUDICE AGAINST THE HASHSHASHIN IN 12TH AND 13TH CENTURY MUSLIM HISTORIOGRAPHY

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This paper seeks to present a review and analysis of medieval Muslim historiography – especially that originating in what constitutes modern-day Iran, Iraq, and Syria, or the-then Seljuk Empire – with exclusive reference to its anti-Nizari Isma’ili content. The Nizari Isma’ili sect, also called the “Hashshashin”, was an offshoot of Isma’ilism that was created in 1094 AD after the death of al-Mustansir bi’Allah, the Caliph-Imam of the Fatimid Empire. The sect was primarily founded by Hasan bin Sabah, and was insultingly called the Hashshashin – better known to the English-speaking world as the Order of the Assassins.

A review of Medieval Muslim historiography tells us that the Nizari Isma’ilis were most likely the most hated Muslim sect in the medieval Muslim world, loathed unanimously by Musta’li Isma’ilis, Twelvers Shi’ites, and Sunnis. Some important primary sources of this information include Ibn al-Qalanisi’s *Mudhayyal Tarikh Dimashq (Continuation of the Chronicle of Crusades or The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades)*, Ibn al-Athir’s *al-Kamil f’il Tarikh (The Complete History)*, Usama ibn Munqidh’s *Kitab al-I’tibar (Book of Contemplation)*, Ata Malik Juvaini’s *Tarikh-i-Jahangusha (History of the World-Conqueror)* and Baha al-Din Ibn Shaddad’s *al-Nawadir al-Sultaniyya wa’l-Mahasin al-Yusufiyya (The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin)*.

This paper would attempt to record and reflect upon the hateful opinions presented by the abovementioned writers about the Hashshashin, and would further attempt to relate their hateful rhetoric to intra-faith sectarian violence committed by Muslims in the modern world.

Keywords: Nizari Isma’ili sect, Medieval Muslim historiography.

Introduction

“Hashshashin” is a derogatory name given to the followers of Nizari Isma’ilism, the forerunner of the modern Agha Khani sect of Islam. Nizari Isma’ilism was born after the death of the Fatimid caliph-imam al-Mustansir on the 8th of Zil Haj 487 A.H. or AD 1094¹. Al-Mustansir left behind two sons: Nizar and Abul-Qasim Ahmad². Either because Nizar was not favoured by his father³ or because he was not on

¹ Farhad Daftary, *The Isma’ilis: Their History and Doctrines*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, 2.

² Ata Malik Juvaini, tr. John Andrew Boyle, *The History of the World-Conqueror*, Vol. II, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1958, 661-662.

³ Juvaini, *ibid.*, 662.

good terms with the vizier of the caliphate, Abu'l Qasim Shahanshah⁴, he was ousted from the kingdom and the younger brother, Abul-Qasim Ahmad was made the caliph-imam, instead and given the title of al-Musta'li.

Now, since the rules of imamate primogeniture hold that it is passed on from the father to the eldest son alive, Hasan bin Sabbah – who had previously been to Egypt, developed ill feelings with the vizier Abu'l Qasim Shahanshah, and had been disrespectfully shipped out of the land⁵ – rose up in support of Nizar. Thence, his clan of Isma'ilis, who had by then captured Alamut⁶, began identifying as Nizari Isma'ilis, while the remainder, those who supported al-Musta'li, came to be known as al-Musta'li Isma'ilis.

Reputation as Assassins

Over the years of their activity – c. 1090 AD to c. 1260 AD – the Nizari Isma'ilis gained a reputation of being ruthless assassins, and rightly so. In the approximately 170 years of their military existence, they managed to assassinate many men of power including Nizam al-Mulk Tusi the Seljuk vizier⁷, Al-A'azz Abu'l Mahasin, another Seljuk vizier⁸, Fatimid vizier Al-Afdal ibn Badr al-Jamali¹⁰, and Conrad of Montferrat, the King of Jerusalem¹¹. During Hasan's lifetime, the group spread from northern Iran to the western coast of what is now Syria, extending its influence. By virtue of their expansion to Syria, the group also became actively engaged in the Crusades and had a significant effect upon them.

Opinion of Muslim Historiographers about the Hashshashin

Despite their small number and secluded living, the Nizari Isma'ilis were well-known in the medieval world, but they were not quite popular. If their reputation is to be judged by the content of medieval Middle Eastern historiography, the Hashshashin were some of the most hated people in the Muslim world of the time. Let us look at some of the books written by Muslim chroniclers contemporary to the Hashshashin to ascertain the view that they and the people of the time held about the group:

Juvaini on the Hashshashin in his *Tarikh-i-Jahangusha*

Ata Malik Juvaini's *Tarikh-i-Jahangusha* is considered to be the most important source on the history of the Hashshashin. The importance of the source lies in the fact that its writer was the court historian of Ilkhan Hulagu, who sacked Alamut in 1256 AD, luckily in Juvaini's presence. He also lived most likely between 1226 AD¹² and 1283 AD¹³, so he was alive during the latter part of the Hashshashin's activity and lived to see their fall, as well as its aftermath. After the sack of the Nizari Isma'ili stronghold, Juvaini

⁴ Daftary, *ibid.*, 106.

⁵ Juvaini, *ibid.*, 668

⁶ Juvaini, *Ibid.*, 670

⁷ Juvaini, *ibid.*, 677.

⁸ Izz al-Din Ibn al-Athir, tr. D. S. Richards, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period from al-Kamil fi'l-Ta'rikh Part 1: The Years 491-541/1097-1146: The Coming of the Franks and the Muslim Response*, Surrey, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 201024

⁹ Abdur Rehman Ibn-e-Khaldun, tr. Hakeem Ahmed Hussain Allahabadi & Hafiz Syed Rashid Ahmed Arshad, *Tarikh Ibn-e-Khaldoon*, Vol. 7, Karachi, Nafees Academy, 2003, 72.

¹⁰ Ibn Al-Qalanisi, tr. H. A. R. Gibb, *The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades*, Mineola, Dover Publications Inc., 2013, 163.

¹¹ Bahā' al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād, tr. D.S. Richards, *al-Nawādir al-Sultāniyya wa'l-Mahāsīn al-Yūsufiyya*, "The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin", Surrey, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014, 396.

¹² Juvaini, *ibid.*, Part I, xv.

¹³ *Ibid.*, xxv.

was – according to himself – allowed to look at the castle’s library before it was burnt down¹⁴. Here he found a biography of Hasan bin Sabbah, called *Sarguzasht-i-Sayyidna*, in which was recorded a short history of the Hashshashin. Juvaini used this book to carve out a chapter in his book, *Tarikh-i-Jahangusha*, which is the most important source for the history of the Hashshashin till date.

Juvaini’s negative opinion of the Nizari Isma’ilis reflects very clearly in his writing, as we shall now see. As mentioned above, the Ilkhan’s court historian had dedicated four entire chapters in his book to the history of the Hashshashin. The first of these, falling at number twelve in the second volume of his book’s translation in English, is entitled, “Of Hasan-i-Sabbah and his innovations (Tajdid) and the propaganda of the *Heretics* which they call ‘The New Propaganda’ (May God Not Renew It!)”¹⁵. The title itself shows how lowly Juvaini believed the Nizari Isma’ilis to be, especially in his naming them “the Heretics”. The writer continues to call the sect by the same derogatory name throughout his chronicle.

The opening lines of the said chapter state: “After God Almighty through the resolve and action of the World-Prince Hulegu had uprooted the castles and dwelling places of those *accursed ones*(author’s italics) had put an end to their *wickedness*(author’s italics),[...].”¹⁶ Later, in the same paragraph, he states, “Now I was examining the library which they had gathered together over a period of many years, and from amongst the multitude of *lying treatises*(author’s italics) and *false teachings*(author’s italics) touching *their*(author’s italics) religion and belief (which they had mingled with copies of the noble Koran and all manner of choice books, interweaving good and evil)[...]”¹⁷ In this paragraph, the author seems to have moved on from name-calling to accusing the Nizari Isma’ilis of lying and fabricating religious teachings. Importantly, his use of the word “their” indicates that the Muslim historian did not consider Nizari Isma’ilis to share his religion, i.e. Islam, which in turn, can be classified as Takfirism¹⁸.

Regarding Hasan bin Sabbah, the founder of Nizari Isma’ilism, Juvaini writes: “Once Hasan-i-Sabbah (*may God confound him!*) was firmly established in Alamut and had gained full control there he dispatched *dai’s* in all directions and devoted the whole of his time to spreading his propaganda and *perverting the short-sighted*(author’s italics).”¹⁹ In this particular excerpt, Juvaini’s use of “may God confound him” with Hasan bin Sabbah’s name indicates the strength of the loathing he felt for the man, especially since Muslims are generally accustomed to using words of praise when taking the name of important figures of Islam, and only use such strongly negative words with the names of those whom they consider the very worst amongst men. And the fact that Juvaini not only avoided using a complimentary phrase for Hasan, but chose to use a curse, instead, is a useful indicator of his opinion of the founder of the Hashshashin. Furthermore, his opinion of Hasan’s message – that is, the message of Nizari Isma’ilism – is also clear when he states that Hasan used it to “pervert” the minds of the “short-sighted” – Juvaini evidently did not think much of Hasan’s or Nizari Isma’ilism’s message. Later in the same chapter the chronicler calls the Nizari Isma’ili faith “the pus of the Sabbahian rebellion”²⁰ which is more or less self-explanatory.

Importantly, Juvaini’s negative opinion of Hasan and his message is despite the fact that he acknowledges Hasan’s quintessentially Islamic piousness when he states, “Now Hasan-i-Sabbah had founded his cause and his law (*namus*) upon asceticism, continence and ‘the enjoying of righteousness and the forbidding of unrighteousness’, and during the 35 years that he dwelt in Alamut nobody drank wine openly nor put it in jars. Indeed such was his austerity that a certain person having played the flute in the castle, he expelled him therefrom and would not re-admit him.”²¹ He goes on to state that Hasan

¹⁴ Juvaini, *ibid.*, 666.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Takfirism is the act of branding someone a “kafir” or unbeliever, or non-Muslim.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 671.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 676.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 680.

followed the Islamic code strictly enough to put both of his sons to death for drinking wine²², a la Umar ibn Khattab, who is believed to have had his son flogged to death when he was accused of drinking wine.

Then how does Juvaini justify his hatred of Hasan and his religion? The answer, perhaps, is in the innovations brought into the religion by the fourth lord of Alamut, Hasan bin Muhammad bin Buzurg-Umid, who also declared himself as the first Imam of the Nizari Isma'ilis²³. Hasan declared himself caliph on the 17th of Ramadan 559 AH (July-August 1164 AD) and announced that an era of Resurrection had thence begun from the said date, in which all that was declared unlawful in the era of the Shariah became not only lawful but also obligatory upon all Nizari Isma'ilis²⁴. Although this event predated Juvaini's birth (c. 1226 AD²⁵), it must still have had a strong and lasting impact on the opinion that the Muslim world held about the Hashshashin. It is likely, then, that Juvaini, being a practicing Muslim, readily accepted the general, negative perception that his contemporaries had of Hashshashin. However, the actions of one descendant cannot be used to judge his predecessors or all the followers of his particular faith, no matter what the faith. This, especially, since Juvaini himself acknowledges the fact that many Nizari Isma'ilis disapproved of Hasan bin Muhammad's actions to the extent that they abandoned the faith and relocated to "Muslim" lands following Hasan's declaration of Resurrection²⁶. Therefore, the only tangible reason behind Juvaini's hatred of the Nizari Isma'ilis is his allegiance with the Ilkhan Hulagu who detested the Nizaris, seemingly through no tangible fault of the Isma'ili sect.

One of the reasons why Juvaini's account of the Hashshashin's history is so important is that he not only expresses his own views about the group, but also reveals what others during his time thought of them. Most importantly, he exposes the extremity of the Mongols' opinion of the Nizari Isma'ilis. According to Juvaini, when Hulagu's men had taken almost all of the Nizaris' castles, there rose a dispute among them about the fate of the common followers of the faith that inhabited the castles, to which the solution was arrived at as follows: "[I]t had been laid down in the original *yasa*²⁷ of Chingiz-Khan and also in the decree of Mengu Qa'an that none of that people [Nizari Isma'ilis] should be spared, *not even the babe in its cradle* (author's italics)."²⁸ Now, the Mongols were not Sunni Muslims who could possibly have believed that the Nizari Isma'ilis were polluting their faith, nor were they Shi'ites who might have thought that the sect was bringing a bad name to Shi'ism as a whole. Nor were they Christian Crusaders who could have opposed the sect because of their antagonism of Muslims in general. The Mongols were most likely Buddhists or followers of the Church of the East, hailing from the grasslands of Central Asia, who had barely any connection with the Hashshashin – and yet they loathed those people enough to believe that not even the life of a "babe in its cradle" who belonged to the sect, was worthy of being spared.

Juvaini goes on to describe the manner in which the last of the lords of Alamut, Rukn-ad-Din, and his followers were murdered by Hulagu's men: "When they came to the edge of the Qanghai the *elchis* led him [Rukn-ad-Din] away from the road on the pretext of a feast they had prepared for him, and then caused him to *taste the punishment for all that his forefathers had done to the people of God. He and his followers were kicked to a pulp and then put to the sword; and of him and his stock no trace was left, and he and his kindred became but a tale on men's lips and a tradition in the world. So was the world cleansed which had been polluted by their evil* (author's italics)."²⁹ The manner in which Rukn-ad-Din and his followers were mass murdered by Hulagu's men shows how much they loathed the Nizari Isma'ilis, and the manner in which Juvaini celebrates this genocide indicates how much *he* detested them.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 686.

²⁴ Ibid., 688.

²⁵ Ibid., Vol. I, xv.

²⁶ Ibid., 697.

²⁷ The "yasa" was a secret code or decree written by Chingiz Khan, or Genghis Khan. It was a rulebook that the Mongols were bound to follow.

²⁸ Ibid., 723.

²⁹ Ibid., 724-725.

Ibn Al-Qalanisi on the Hashshashin in his *Mudhayyal Tarikh Dimashq*

Another important primary source of the Nizari Isma'ilis' history is Ibn Al-Qalanisi's *Mudhayyal Tarikh Dimashq* or "Continuation of the Chronicle of Crusades or The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades", translated by H. A. R. Gibb. Ibn Al-Qalanisi was an important figure in Damascus during the time of the Crusades, having served as the mayor of the city of Damascus twice in his lifetime³⁰. Considering that he died on 18th March 1160 AD and lived for approximately ninety lunar years³¹, his mature years were spread over some of the most important years in the history of the Nizari Isma'ilis. Therefore, his chronicle is undoubtedly one of the most important sources on the history of the sect.

Ibn Al-Qalanisi displays a somewhat milder level of hate towards the Nizari Isma'ilis as compared to Ata Malik Juvaini. In fact, the first observation that the Syrian chronicler makes of the Hashshashin is positive, stating that the "Batiniya [another name for the Isma'ilis] [were] noted for courage and gallantry"³². However, he soon changes course and begins to use offensive language for them.

Speaking of Bahraam, one of the leaders of the Nizari Isma'ilis in Syria, Ibn Al-Qalanisi states: "He moved about from place to place and *gained a following among the ignorant and witless mob, and foolish peasantry, men lacking both intelligence and religion, who sought in him and his party a means of protecting themselves and injuring others* (author's italics)."³³ He goes on to allege that "they [Nizari Isma'ilis] set about killing all those who oppose them, and supporting all who gave them assistance in their *impious* (author's italics) ways."³⁴ A few pages further down he states of the same Bahraam that he "*enticed a great multitude of the ignorant folk of the provinces and foolish peasantry from the villages and the rabble and scum, persons without intelligence to restrain them from mischief or fear of God to prevent the, from wrong-doing*(author's italics)."³⁵

In sum, then, Ibn Al-Qalanisi believed that the Nizari Isma'ilis were an ignorant folk, "foolish peasantry", a mob of vile villagers who knew no better than to be misled by some immoral tricksters. His statements not only reflect his negative opinion of the Nizari Isma'ilis but also his classist mind-set that led him to use terms like "peasantry" as an insult. Interestingly enough, he is not the only medieval Muslim historiographer to use classicist terms as an insult for Nizari Isma'ilis.

Ibn Al-Athir on the Hashshashin in his *al-Kamil f'il Tarikh*

Although not as important as the previous two sources when it comes to Nizari Isma'ilism, Ibn al-Athir's *al-Kamil f'il Tarikh* is considered is one of the most important Eastern sources of the Crusades. Being born on 13 May 1160 AD³⁶ and died in June 1233³⁷, Ibn Al-Athir belonged to a generation between Ata Malik Juvaini and Ibn Al-Qalanisi. However, he served primarily in the Zankid house, and had no direct confrontation with the Nizari Isma'ilis, which is why his word on the Isma'ili sect is not as reliable as that of the previous two sources³⁸. Furthermore, some grave factual errors in his book (e.g. calling Jalal ad-Din Hasan, the Third Nizari Imam, a descendant of Hasan bin Sabbah³⁹, which he was not) render his word further unreliable.

³⁰ Ibn Al-Qalanisi, *ibid.*, 8

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 175.

³³ *Ibid.*, 179.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 187-88.

³⁶ Ibn Al-Athir, *ibid.*, Part I, 1

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1

³⁹ Izz al-Din Ibn al-Athir, tr. D. S. Richards, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period from al-Kamil fi'l-Ta'rikh Part 3: The Years 589-629/1193-1231: The Ayyubids after Saladin and the Mongol Menace*, Surrey, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008, 236.

Nevertheless, what remains in sync with the previous two sources is his prejudice against the Nizari Isma'ilis.

In the English translation of his *al-Kamil fi'l Ta'rikh*, "The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir" – which spans three volumes – there are many instances on which the Arabic historiographer displays prejudice against Nizari Isma'ilis. He begins mildly, calling Nizari Isma'ilism an "affliction"⁴⁰ that had befallen the people of Isfahan. A page later, speaking of Ahmad ibn Attash, one of the leaders of the Nizari Isma'ilis, he states: "The *Muslims* (author's italics) suffered a lot from him, from seizure of their good, murder, brigandage and constant fear"⁴¹, dispelling him, ibn Attash, and other Nizari Isma'ilis from within the folds of Islam, and therefore indulging in Takfirism. Further down the account, the chronicler praises the Seljuk Sultan Muhammad for taking it upon himself to constantly harass the Nizari Isma'ilis⁴², which shows that Ibn al-Athir took pleasure in the sect's harassment.

Importantly, the writer also records events from the history of the Hashshashin, which more often than reflect the hatred of the Muslim empires of the time – the Seljuks and Abbasids – toward the Hashshashin. One such event was the taking of the castle of Shahdiz from the Hashshashin by the Seljuk Sultan Muhammad I on the 25th of June, 1107 AD⁴³. Ibn al-Athir tells us what Sultan Muhammad did to the "Batini"⁴⁴ inhabitants of the castle and its commander, Ahmed ibn Attash, after capturing it: "Most of the Batinis were slain. Some mingled with those who gained entrance and then left with them. However, Ibn Attash was taken prisoner. He was left for a week and then orders were given for him to be paraded through the whole town. He was flayed and after surviving [a while] he died. His skin was stuffed with straw. His son was also killed and their heads were taken to Baghdad. His wife threw herself from the top of the castle and perished."⁴⁵ Even though the medieval era is not a period particularly renowned for upholding the highest of humanitarian values and war ethics, yet the treatment meted out by the Seljuk Sultan to the Nizari Isma'ili commander and his family is brutal even for the 12th century and also not in keeping with Islamic teachings.

Later in the first volume, Ibn al-Athir seems to resonate the views of Ibn Al-Qalanisi when he writes about Bahraam – the leader of the Isma'ilis in Syria – that: "He travelled all over the country, calling the *riff-raff* (author's italics) and the *lowly* (author's italics) to his creed."⁴⁶ He also states that Ilghazi, a Turkmen ruler, wanted to "gain his [Bahraam's] backing because the people *feared his and his men's wickedness, for they would kill all who opposed them and attacked their allies* (author's italics)"⁴⁷ and again calls the sect and its followers wicked in the second volume of the same chronicle⁴⁸. Needless to say, these words of Ibn al-Athir suggest that the perception of the Nizari Isma'ilis among the high and low of the Muslim world of the time was not very good: not only were they considered socially unacceptable, they were also considered to be malicious.

In the second volume, Ibn al-Athir differentiates between Muslims and Nizari Isma'ilis –implying that Nizari Isma'ilis were not Muslims – on several occasions, hence, like Juvaini, practicing Takfirism against the sect. Ibn al-Athir states that in the year 1050-51 AD a man named Ala' al-Din Mahmud ibn Mas'ud, who was seemingly a Nizari Isma'ili, called for the *khutbah* to be read in the name of the

⁴⁰ Ibid., Part I, 41.

⁴¹ Ibid., 42.

⁴² Ibid., 184

⁴³ Ibid., 119.

⁴⁴ "Batini" is (primarily *was* in the Medieval times) a term used for Shi'ites. It is derived from the word "batin" which means esoteric in Arabic, and is drawn from Shi'ites' belief in the superior importance of the esoteric as opposed to the exoteric.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 261.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Izz al-Din Ibn al-Athir, tr. D. S. Richards, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period from al-Kamil fi'l-Ta'rikh, Part 2: The Years 541-589/1146-1193: The Age of Nur al-Din and Saladin*, Surrey, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007, 158.

Abbasid caliph in Turaythith (his area of control, where Nizari Isma'ilis had an influential presence)⁴⁹. For the *khutbah* to be read in the name of the Abbasid caliph in any region meant that the said region pledged allegiance to the caliph and his religion – Sunni Islam. Ibn al-Athir further states that Ala' al-Din took this step because his father was actually a *Muslim* who feigned being a Nizari Isma'ili but in reality followed the Shari'ah⁵⁰ – indicating that he could not have been both Muslim and Nizari Isma'ili at the same time. Later, in the same account, the chronicler states that when the Seljuk Emir Muhammad ibn Unur engaged in battle with the Nizaris, “God gave victory to the Muslims and the Isma'ilis were routed”⁵¹ thereby clearly drawing a line between Muslims and Isma'ilis.

The third volume of Ibn al-Athir's chronicle records instances on which his contemporary “Muslim” commanders, especially Shihab al-Din Ghauri, routed the Nizari Isma'ilis and their dwellings repeatedly⁵². He also records an incident on which a misunderstanding between a Nizari Isma'ili, called Hasan al-Sabuni, and a Muslim carpenter led to a mass massacre of Nizari Isma'ilis in the town of Wasit⁵³. The carpenter had confronted Hasan al-Sabuni about his faith, to which al-Sabuni replied in a rough manner. In answer to his rude reply, the carpenter struck al-Sabuni and killed him. When the news of this incident spread in the vicinity, more people gathered to kill the Nizari Isma'ilis and succeeded in their mission⁵⁴.

It is therefore obvious that the prejudiced views that we have seen expressed by medieval Muslim writers in their literature about the Nizari Isma'ilis, were shared with equal intensity by the common public of the time.

Other Medieval Middle Eastern Writers on the Hashshashin

The fourth book analysed for this research paper was Baha al-Din Ibn Shaddad's *al-Nawadir al-Sultaniyya wa'l-Mahasin al-Yusufiyya* or, “The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin”. As is indicated by the title, Baha al-Din's book is a biography of Salah ad-Din, the founder of the Ayubbid dynasty of Egypt and Syria, and perhaps the most important of the Muslim counter Crusaders.

Although the book does not discuss the Nizari Isma'ilis in thorough detail, yet it does present a couple of incidents on which Salah ad-Din encountered the group. One such incident was an assassination attempt, and the author narrates the incident as follows: “He [Salah ad-Din] then went to the castle of A'zaz to put it under siege. This was on Dhu'l Qa'da 571 [15 May 1176] and while he was there, the Isma'ilis tried to assassinate him, but *God delivered him from their plots* (author's italics) and gave them into his hands.”⁵⁵ Although this sentence may not seem much compared to what the previously discussed writers wrote about the Hashshashin, yet Ibn Shaddad's words “God delivered him from their plots” reveals a subconscious rejection of the Nizari Isma'ili group. Why would a staunch Muslim believe that God was working against a certain group of people if he or she did not think that that particular set of people was in some way an “evildoer”, hence warranting an interjection against their activities by God? Therefore, even though Ibn Shaddad did not go out of the way to abuse the Hashshashin, nevertheless his work does express a smug rejection – possibly Takfirism – of the group.

Rather surprisingly, our last source, Usama ibn Munqidh's *Kitab al-I'tibar* or “Book of Contemplation” does not contain any derogatory remark against Nizari Isma'ilis. It is surprising because Usama was a Muslim knight who had fought the Isma'ilis on various occasions, and therefore could have

⁴⁹ Ibid., 37.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 38.

⁵¹ Ibid., 72

⁵² Ibn al-Athir, Ibid., Part III, 58

⁵³ Ibid., 81

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Baha al-Din Ibn Shaddad, tr. D.S. Richards, *al-Nawadir al-Sultaniyya wa'l-Mahasin al-Yusufiyya* or “The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin”, Farnham, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002, 53.

been expected to hold a stronger grudge against the sect than Ibn Al-Qalanisi and Ibn al-Athir, neither of whom were ever reported to come face-to-face with a member of the group.

This phenomenon indicates that not all mainstream Muslim writers nurtured an extreme dislike for the Nizari Isma'ili sect. However, it does not negate the fact that most of them – especially those in positions of importance – did consider the sect and its followers despicable, for lack of a better word.

Relevance to the Modern World: ISIS's Terrorism of the Shi'ite

Though the study of history may be deemed fruitless by some, yet even the strongest of the subject's critics might observe that it is rendered very important by one of its most annoyingly incessant qualities: its repetition. The hatred for the Nizari Isma'ilis recorded in the works of the worthy writers discussed above – both in letter and in action – is something that has seen its reappearance in the modern world in one of the ugliest and most brutal forms imaginable: that of so-called Islamic terrorism, and, in particular, in the beliefs and actions of one Islamic State.

Those who like to remain in touch with contemporary politics, and even those who do not, would likely be aware of this terrorist group variously called ISIS, ISIL, or, simply, the Islamic State. This self-proclaimed pan-Islamist group has been known to terrorise the world with its murderous attacks since it declared the beginning of the Islamic Caliphate on June 29, 2014⁵⁶. Since then, the terrorist organization has claimed responsibility for the Paris attacks conducted on November 13, 2015⁵⁷, the attack on the Brussel's airport on March 22, 2016⁵⁸, the Nice truck carnage, which took place on July 14, 2016⁵⁹, as well as for the suspected “lone wolf” carnage on a Munich train conducted on July 18, 2016⁶⁰, which together claimed the lives of many hundreds of people. However, these are only the more prominent attacks: the ones that took place on European soil, and, hence, the ones that manage to attract most global attention. Although, in light of the sudden increase in the incidents of terrorism in Europe, the western world has developed a general perception that the Islamic State is bent upon terrorizing the west and people who do not identify as Muslim. While terrorizing and murdering non-Muslims may be one of the targets of the terrorist group, it is by no means their sole, or even primary, purpose of existence.

Contrary to popular belief, in its two years of existence, the Islamic State has targeted and killed much more Muslims than non-Muslims, especially those belonging to the Shi'ite sect of Islam – the sect to which the Hashshashin also belonged.

Among the many occasions on which the Islamic State has massacred Shi'ites are the following: the murder of 670 Shi'ite prisoners in Mosul, Iraq in August 2014⁶¹, killing of 90 people in the Shi'ite majority region of Sadr City in Baghdad on May 11, 2016⁶², an attack on a Shi'ite mosque in Saudi

⁵⁶ Cole Bunzel, “From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State”, *The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World*, No. 19, March 2015, 31. Available at: <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/03/ideology-of-islamic-state-bunzel/the-ideology-of-the-islamic-state.pdf>

⁵⁷ Vivienne Walt, “ISIS Claims Responsibility for Paris Attacks as Arrests Are Made”, *TIME*, November 14, 2015. Web. Available at: <http://time.com/4112884/paris-attacks-isis-isil-france-francois-hollande/>

⁵⁸ Natalia Drozdziak, Gabriele Steinhauser & Matthias Verbergt, “ISIS Claims Responsibility for Brussels Attacks; More Than 30 Dead”, *Wall Street Journal*, March 22, 2016. Web. Available at: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/people-injured-after-explosion-at-brussels-airport-police-say-1458632527>

⁵⁹ “Nice truck attack: Islamic State claims responsibility”, *The Guardian*, July 16, 2016. Web. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/16/islamic-state-claims-responsibility-for-nice-truck-attack>

⁶⁰ Yaron Steinbuch, “ISIS claims responsibility for German train ax attack”, *New York Post*, July 19, 2016. Web. Available at: <http://nypost.com/2016/07/19/isis-claims-responsibility-for-german-train-ax-attack/>

⁶¹ *The Guardian*, *Isis Accused of Ethnic Cleansing as Story of Shia Prison Massacre Emerges*, August 25, 2014, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/25/isis-ethnic-cleansing-shia-prisoners-iraq-mosul>

⁶² Martin Chulov, “Car bomb attacks in Baghdad kill at least 90”, *The Guardian*, May 11, 2016. Web. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/11/baghdad-car-bomb-kills-dozens-sadr-city>

Arabia in May 2015 killing 21⁶³ opening fire on worshippers at a Shi'ite mosque in Bangladesh in November 2015⁶⁴, a double bombing on a Shi'ite mosque in Baghdad in February 2016⁶⁵, a bombing on a Shi'ite suburb in Damascus on June 11, 2016⁶⁶ and attacking a Hazara procession in Afghanistan's capital that killed 80 and wounded 231 as recently as on July 23, 2016⁶⁷. This indicates that the group is deliberately targeting Shi'ites whenever they can.

Furthermore, in a video posted by *Independent*, the Islamic State's militants are shown killing and humiliating Iraqi Shi'ite soldiers⁶⁸. The video shows three handcuffed men sitting somewhere in a desert and a man asking them questions and grabbing each of them by the hair by turns. *Independent* claims that the man, presumably an Islamic State militant, asks the handcuffed men to repeat after him that "Isis will remain in existence"⁶⁹. He later shoots one of them, and asks one of the remaining soldiers, "This dog I killed, where is he from?"⁷⁰ The soldier tells him that the dead man was from Sinjar, Iraq, and was a Shi'ite⁷¹. To this, the Islamic State militant says, "He is a Shia, praise to Allah, the lord of the universe! Praise to Allah, whether he is a believer or not, I killed him. I killed a Shia! I killed a Shia!"⁷²

If the events recorded in the said video are not successful in showing the true extent of the Islamic State's hatred for Shi'ites, their magazine can achieve the task without much trouble. *Dabiq*, reportedly the Islamic State's official magazine, presents a good insight into the terrorist outfit's anti-Shi'ite ideology. Issue number 13 of the magazine, for instance, depicts a Shi'ite procession on its cover and labels it "The Rafidah", which means those who reject the Islamic faith, or apostates⁷³. Inside the same issue, there is a picture of Ayatollah Khamenei, the current Supreme Leader of Iran, with his face on a target's bull's eye⁷⁴. Underneath his picture is written, "Know Your Enemy", implying that the Shi'ite are "the enemy" for "orthodox" Muslims⁷⁵. The magazine, in its attempt to hold the Shi'ite responsible for the spread Rafidism, states: "[T]he Safawi State [a Shi'ite state] was a political cult of the Ithna-Ashriyyah (Twelver) Rafidah, whose state was founded by Isma'il Ibn Haydar in 906AH and officially fell in 1148 AH. In addition to their atrocious revival of Rafid (the religion of Rafidah), they laid great emphasis on the Persian language (Farsi) and culture. Today's Rafidah are undoubtedly a continuation of this cult as they practice the same Rafid, implement the same policies towards Ahlus-Sunnah, and propagate the same Persianism"⁷⁶. The hatred of the Islamic State for the Shi'ites is evidently so strong

⁶³ "Saudi Araba attack: Islamic State claims Shia mosque bombing", *BBC*, May 22, 2015. Web. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32843510>

⁶⁴ "Islamic State claims attack on Shia mosque in Bangladesh: SITE", *The Express Tribune*, November 27, 2015. Web. Available at: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/999456/islamic-state-claims-attack-on-shia-mosque-in-bangladesh-site/>

⁶⁵ Agence France-Presse, "Islamic State claims responsibility for fatal Baghdad mosque blasts", *The Guardian*, February 25, 2016. Web. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/25/islamic-state-claims-responsibility-for-fatal-baghdad-mosque-explosion>

⁶⁶ William Watkinson, "Isis claims responsibility for twin bombings that killed at least 20 in Damascus Shia suburb of Sayyida Zeinab", *IBTimes UK*, June 11, 2016. Web. Available at: <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/isis-claims-responsibility-twin-bombings-that-killed-least-20-damascus-shia-suburb-sayyida-1564935>

⁶⁷ Sune Engel Rasmussen, "Isis claims responsibility for Kabul bomb attack on Hazara protesters", *The Guardian*, July 24, 2016. Web. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/23/hazara-minority-targeted-by-suicide-bombs-at-kabul-protest>

⁶⁸ Adam Lusher, "Iraq crisis: The footage that shows Isis militants taunting and killing Shia soldiers", *Independent*, June 17, 2014. Web. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/iraq-crisis-the-footage-that-shows-isis-militants-taunting-and-killing-shia-forces-9541929.html>

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Islamic State, *Dabiq*, no. 13, Rabi' al-Akhir 1437 AH/January-February 2016, cover.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

that it has led them to loathe Persianism as a whole, for Iran (formerly, Persia) is the strongest Shi'ite state in the world.

Most people who are unaware of the history of Islam's brutal sectarian violence would believe the Islamic State's extremely violent views about the Shi'ite something unusual. However, as shown previously in this paper, inter-sectarian violence is not something new to Islam, at all – it has existed for over a millennium. Indeed, the ruthless killing of Shi'ites by terrorist outfits like the Islamic State, today, and the hate that gives birth to such actions is, unfortunately, not at all unprecedented.

Conclusion

Often while studying history one comes across events, incidents, and atmospheres that are startling reminders of the present world. The Muslim world of the time of the Crusades is one such period, and not just because of the mirroring inter-religious tension that is rife in the world today, but also because of the replicated intra-faith tension within Islam. The words of Ata Malik Juvaini, Ibn Al-Qalanisi, and Ibn al-Athir for the medieval Nizari Isma'ilis, and the words of the Islamic State for the Persian Shi'ites today are not very different, if not shockingly similar. While Juvaini called the Nizaris the "Heretics", the Islamic State calls the Shi'ite the Apostates. While Ibn al-Athir terms them an "affliction", the Islamic State celebrates their massacre. The genocide of the Nizari Isma'ilis at the hands of the Mongols and the Seljuks is not very different from the genocide of the Shi'ites conducted by the Islamic State, today. In fact, we can safely conclude from the research presented in this paper that the sections in the Muslim community – terrorist or otherwise – that genuinely believe Shi'ites to be non-Muslims, feed off of the hatred for the sect so blatantly presented in historical accounts like those of Juvaini, Ibn al-Athir, and Ibn Al-Qalanisi.

Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that the negative sentiments nurtured by terrorist organizations like Islamic State towards fellow Muslims as well as non-Muslims, have their roots in centuries old prejudices and loathing that mainstream Muslim sects have been cultivating in Islam ever since the first schism occurred in the religion. However, finding the root of intra-faith violence in Islam is not the answer, any longer. The answer to this discussion is to find out ways in which the two most important sects in Islam can be brought together so that hate and fearmongering groups like the Islamic State never find the backing in Islamic circles that they require to exist – this, not just in the best interests of Islam and the Muslim world, but of the world, as a whole. Without peace within Islam, global peace is unachievable.

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