Arabic Ismaili Manuscripts

The Zāhid ʿAlī Collection

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Arabic Ismaili Manuscripts: The Zāhid ʿAlī Collection
Previously published catalogues of manuscripts in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies:

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The Zāhid ʿAlī Collection in the Library of
The Institute of Ismaili Studies

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The Institute of Ismaili Studies

The Institute of Ismaili Studies was established in 1977 with the object of promoting scholarship and learning on Islam, in the historical as well as contemporary contexts, and a better understanding of its relationship with other societies and faiths.

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1. Occasional papers or essays addressing broad themes of the relationship between religion and society, with special reference to Islam.
2. Monographs exploring specific aspects of Islamic faith and culture, or the contributions of individual Muslim figures or writers.
3. Editions or translations of significant primary or secondary texts.
4. Translations of poetic or literary texts which illustrate the rich heritage of spiritual, devotional and symbolic expressions in Muslim history.
5. Works on Ismaili history and thought, and the relationship of the Ismailis to other traditions, communities and schools of thought in Islam.
7. Bibliographical works and catalogues which document manuscripts, printed texts and other source materials.

This book falls into category seven listed above.

In facilitating these and other publications, the Institute’s sole aim is to encourage original research and analysis of relevant issues. While every effort is made to ensure that the publications are of a high academic standard, there is naturally bound to be a diversity of views, ideas and interpretations. As such, the opinions expressed in these publications are to be understood as belonging to their authors alone.
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Preface

The Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies in London houses the largest known accessible collection of Ismaili codices in the world, including approximately 750 volumes of Ismaili manuscripts in Arabic. The early history of the formation of this collection pre-dates the foundation of the Library in 1979 and even that of the Institute in 1977. In fact, in 1946 when the Ismaili Society of Bombay succeeded the Islamic Research Association founded in Bombay in 1933, it inherited a collection of Ismaili manuscripts in various languages brought together by the eminent Russian Professor Wladimir Ivanow (1886–1970) and other scholars. During the 1960s the collection of the Ismaili Society was transferred to the Ismailia Association for India in Bombay and the Ismailia Association for Pakistan in Karachi. With the formal establishment of the Institute’s Library, the manuscripts in those two institutions were gradually transferred to London and came to form the basis of the Institute’s current significant collection. Between the early 1980s and mid-1990s the collection was further expanded with the accession of over 160 manuscript volumes coming from India and Syria. Most of the codices from Syria belonged to the late Ismaili scholar Muṣṭafā Ghālib (1923–1981). However, the largest contribution in recent times to the expansion of the Library’s manuscript holdings came with the bequest in 1997 of 226 codices (221 Arabic Ismaili, one Persian Ismaili and four Arabic non-Ismaili) formerly owned by the late Dr Zāhid ‘Ali. The manuscripts, donated to the Institute by the Ali family, now based in California, represent an outstanding record of transmission of Ismaili learning and scholarship through
many generations. The present catalogue is primarily intended as a tribute to Dr Zāhid ‘Alī, the scholar as well as the man, and to his past and present family members, for their exemplary dedication to the preservation and study of Ismaili literature.

Dr Zāhid ‘Alī was born in Hyderabad on 10 Shawwâl 1305/19 June 1888 in a distinguished, learned, Ismaili Bohra family. His father, Fadl ‘Alī, was a prominent leader in the Bohra community and a scholar in his own right, as shown by the fact that a large number of manuscripts in the present collection were copied by him. The young Zāhid ‘Alī received his early education at the madrasa Dâr al-‘ulûm in Hyderabad as well as at the Dâr al-Sayfiyya in Sûrât. He then went on to complete his higher studies at the University of Punjab in Lahore. Subsequently, he returned to Hyderabad where he joined the Department of Education. Finally, he went to the University of Oxford where he first completed a B.Lit. and then obtained a D.Phil. in Arabic Literature under the supervision of Professor D.S. Margoliouth. In 1926, the now Dr Zāhid ‘Alī returned to India to take up the position of Professor of Arabic at the Niúåm College, Hyderabad, which was then affiliated to Madras University. There, his career progressed and he eventually became Vice-Principal of the College. Dr Zāhid ‘Alī retired in 1945 and passed away on 7 Dhu’l-˙ijja 1377/24 June 1958.1

Zāhid ‘Alī was one of the most outstanding Ismaili scholars of his generation and, in his role of ‘âmil, a high-standing religious authority within the Bohra community. Fluent in English as well as several Oriental languages including Arabic, Persian and Urdu, he showed a rare ability in combining effectively traditional and modern research methods. It was ultimately his access to an extensive range of Ismaili primary sources found in manuscripts in his possession, and now catalogued here, that enabled him to produce his widely acclaimed academic works. His main publications include Tabyín al-ma™âní fí shar˙ Dîwân Ibn Hâni¢ (Cairo, 1352/1933), being a critical Arabic edition with commentary of the Dîwân of the Fâtimid poet Ibn Hâni¢ al-Andalusî [cat. no. 19]. This book was the outcome of the research work produced by Zāhid ‘Alī to obtain his D.Phil. from the University of Oxford. His second major work was Târîkh-i Fâtimiyyîn-i Mi˚r, written in Urdu (Hyderabad, 1948) in two volumes. Zāhid ‘Alī was commissioned to write this book after winning a competition promoted by the Osmania University inviting
candidates to submit an abstract as proposal for the compilation of a history of the Fāṭimids of Egypt. Perhaps his most important and significant contribution to Ismaili studies was entitled *Hamāre Ismā‘īlī madhhab kī ḥaqiqat awr us kā niżām* (Hyderabad, 1954), a compendium in Urdu of Ismaili doctrines and teachings as professed among the Ismaili Bohras. This work, published at a time when the Bohra leadership was demanding the strictest doctrinal secrecy from members of the community, encountered much hostility because of its ‘expository’ nature. The outcome of its publication was the excommunication of Zāhid ‘Alī and his family from the Bohra community. In spite of this setback, Dr Zāhid ‘Alī maintained a high status as a reputed scholar within the wider Ismaili and non-Ismaili learned circles, and, as a humanitarian, he is particularly remembered for his involvement in promoting education for women.

It was Dr Zāhid ‘Alī’s utmost aspiration to see his *Hamāre Ismā‘īlī madhhab* translated into English, for the benefit of non-Urdu speaking Bohras and other Ismailis in general. Regrettably, this wish was never fulfilled. However, his *Tārīkh-i Fāṭimīyin-i Miṣr* was translated into English by his son, the late Professor ‘Abid ‘Alī, and plans are in place to see this work published in the near future. Professor ‘Abid ‘Alī, as the only surviving son of Zāhid ‘Alī, inherited the collection of manuscripts formerly owned by his father and forefathers. It was ‘Abid ‘Alī who identified the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies as the most suitable venue for the preservation of such a valuable literary heritage. He set out to donate the collection to the Institute but passed away before achieving his goal. His wishes, reiterated in his will, were finally fulfilled in 1997.²

This catalogue is dedicated exclusively to the Zāhid ‘Alī corpus. The rest of the Arabic Ismaili collection in the Library is featured in the first volume of A. Gacek, *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies* (London, 1984–1985) in two volumes, and in D. Cortese, *Ismaili and Other Arabic Manuscripts* (London, 2000). The present volume lists 179 title entries of Arabic Ismaili texts featured in a total of 221 manuscript volumes. Five codices of Ismaili non-Arabic and non-Ismaili Arabic material are listed in an appendix, together with other miscellaneous fragments of texts. With these exceptions, all the works cited in this
catalogue belong to the tradition of legal, theological, philosophical and historical Ismaili literature produced over a period of nearly ten centuries, from pre-Fāṭimid to modern times. While featuring a substantial number of previously unrecorded works and possibly unique manuscripts, a large portion of the titles listed here duplicate entries already included in the published catalogues mentioned above. However, the opportunity has been taken to often expand and, occasionally, amend those same entries in the present volume. The oldest dated Ismaili codex in the collection is a copy of vol. 1 of the legal treatise Kitāb al-Hawāshī by Amīnjī b. Jalāl, dated 1145/1733 [cat. no. 55]. Apart from some six manuscripts dating back to the 12th/18th century, the material is relatively recent, dating mainly from the middle of the 19th to the first half of the 20th century. Except for three manuscripts written respectively in Yemen [cat. no. 79], Makka [cat. no. 14(B)] and Madina [cat. no. 88], the codices were primarily copied in India. The manuscripts in the collection consist of what one can, generally speaking, call ‘provincial’ copies, having been mainly produced for practical purposes, i.e. personal or didactic use. In many instances, the copyists were members of Dr Zāhid ‘Ali’s family and, as the titles or dedications in the colophons often suggest, learned men, either occupying high positions in the Bohra religious-administrative hierarchy or working for its members.³

Among the miscellaneous material listed in the appendix of particular importance is the Persian translation [cat. no. B1)] by al-Mu‘ayyad fi’l-Dīn al-Shirāzī of al-Qādī al-Nu‘mān’s Asās al-ta’wīl [cat. no. 11]. Also of interest is a 10th/16th-century copy of a Zaydī summary of al-Zamakhshārī’s Qur’ānic commentary [cat. no. C7].

The catalogue is arranged by title, according to the Latin alphabetical order. Wherever there is more than one copy of the same text, copies are arranged chronologically from the oldest to the most recent, with undated copies listed last. Each catalogue entry is subdivided as follows:

1. Catalogue entry number where (*) indicates the presence of a matching illustration included in the volume.
2. Full title of the work, occasionally followed by variants.
3. Name of the author followed by the date of death in brackets.
4. A paragraph detailing the contents of the work and relevant
information concerning its composition.

5. Indication of volume number, where applicable.

6. *Incipit* (or ‘Begins’ in the case of acephalous manuscripts).

7. Manuscript call number. This is preceded by (A), (B), (C), etc., where more than one copy of the same manuscript is listed under the same entry.

8. Name of the copyist (when known). At times this is followed by the name of the place where the copy was made or details of circumstances relating to the copying and other information given in the colophon.

9. Date according to both Islamic and Christian calendars or an estimate when the manuscript is not explicitly dated. The names of the months of the Islamic calendar are reported in the same way as they appear in each colophon. The abbreviations n.d and n.y. stand respectively for ‘no date’ and ‘no year’.

10. Physical description, including: foliation (or pagination if given) in *recto* and *verso*, number of lines per page, measurement in millimetres of both folio size and text area, type of script, details on use of different inks, illumination, notes in the margins, diagrams, etc.

11. References to other copies or volumes of the same work in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies as well as to those listed in catalogues of other collections, followed by details of main editions, translations and studies where appropriate.

No details are given of the quality and type of paper which, with few exceptions, is generally of the western style. Also, details about bindings are not given, except in a few instances, where they are of academic or artistic interest. The transliteration of words and names in Arabic script follows the style adopted in the new edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* with a few exceptions: j for dj, q for k and no use of ligatures. Diacritical marks have been used throughout except for certain names (e.g. Ismaili, Yemen) which are commonly known in English.
Notes

1. Most of the information on the life and work of Dr Zāhid ʿAlī reported here is derived from Ghulām Muḥammad Ṣāhib and Ghulām Dastghīr Rashīd, ʿAlāmah Dāktur Zāhid ʿAlī, published by Ḥabīb Aḥmad ʿAlī (Hyderabad, 1975). I am also indebted to Dr Sajid Ali for providing me with valuable additional biographical details regarding both his father and grandfather.

2. In honour of Dr Zāhid ʿAlī, and in appreciation of the donation of his collection of manuscripts by his family, The Institute of Ismaili Studies has established the Zāhid ʿAlī Scholarship, which is awarded every five years to an eminent scholar to undertake studies in classical Arabic literature.

Acknowledgements

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I wish to acknowledge my appreciation for the contributions of the Institute’s Department of Academic Research and Publications. In particular I owe thanks to Dr Farhad Daftary who was instrumental in facilitating the Library’s acquisition of the collection in the first place and who added precious information to the catalogue and ensured its publication; to Kutub Kassam, Nadia Holmes and Patricia Salazar who gave their editorial expertise to the project; and to Hamid Haji for his careful scrutiny of the English text and Arabic incipits. My deep-felt thanks also go to Salma Baig and Farid Panjwani of the Institute’s Education Department for their