



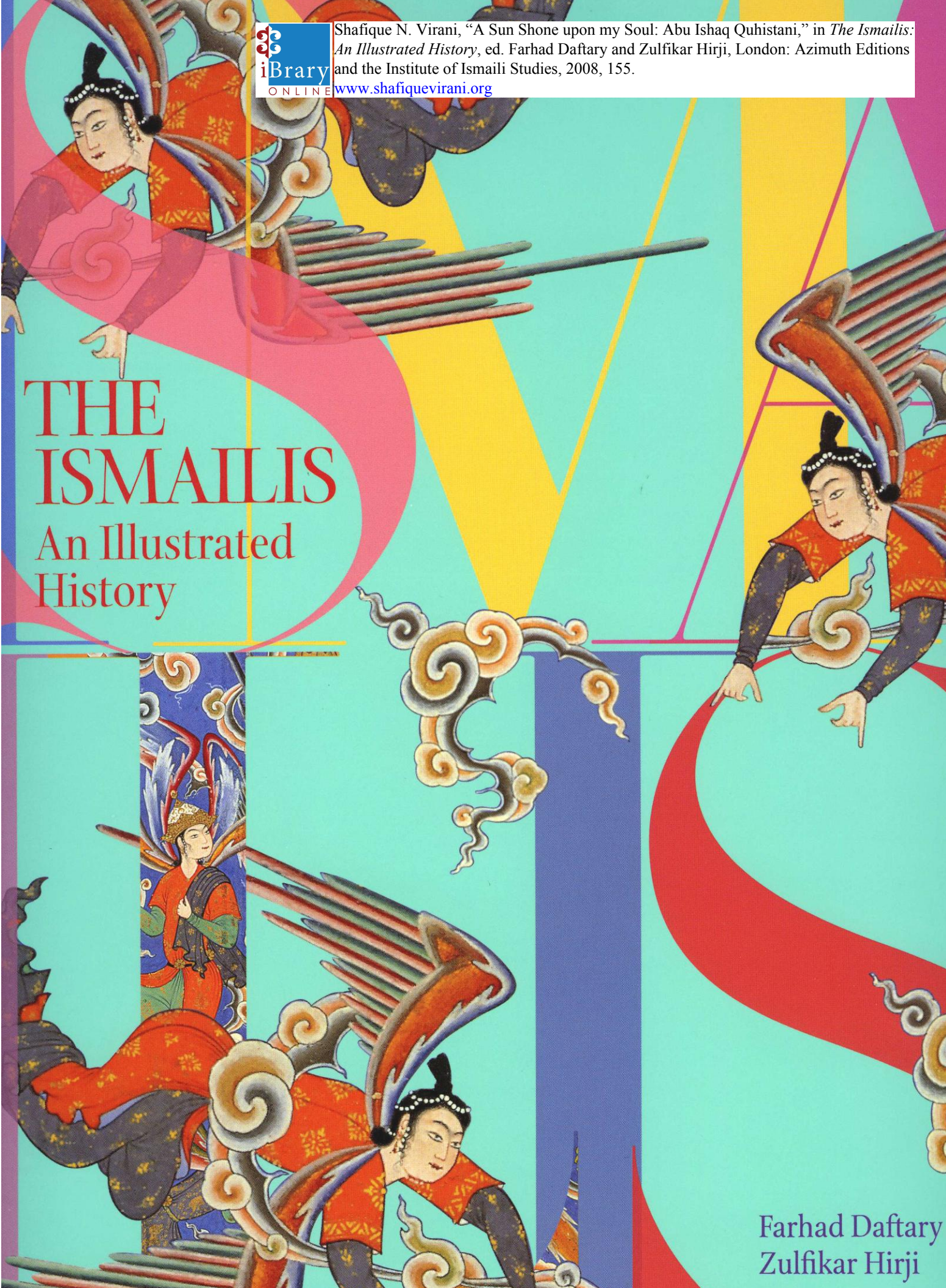
Shafique N. Virani, "A Sun Shone upon my Soul: Abu Ishaq Quhistani," in *The Ismailis: An Illustrated History*, ed. Farhad Daftary and Zulfikar Hirji, London: Azimuth Editions and the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2008, 155.

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THE ISMAILIS

An Illustrated History

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It was in the early post-Alamut times that Persian Nizaris, as part of their dissimulating practices, concealed themselves under the mantle of Sufism without establishing formal affiliation with any of the Sufi orders or *tariqas* then spreading throughout Persia and Central Asia. The practice soon gained wide currency among the Nizaris of Central Asia and Sind as well. The origins and early development of this phenomenon remain very obscure. The earliest recorded manifestation of it is found in the writings of Nizari Quhistani, who may in fact have been the very first post-Alamut Nizari author to have chosen poetic and Sufi forms of expression for voicing Ismaili ideas, a model followed by many later Nizari authors in Persia, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Nizari Quhistani, who occasionally refers to himself as a *da'i*, discreetly praises the Imam of the time in many of his poems, with countless references to Ismaili idioms and concepts like *zahir*, *batin*, *ta'wil*, *qiyama* and *qa'im*. He is also the first Nizari author of this period to use Sufi terminology such as *khanqaqah*, *darwish* (dervish), *'arif* (gnostic), *qalandar* (wandering dervish), as well as *pir* and *murshid*, terms commonly used by Sufis in reference to their spiritual guide. Yet, whatever the terms used to describe him, it was the figure of the Imam that remained central to Ismaili beliefs and the survival of the line of Imams was

of central importance. Like the young acolyte in *The Master and the Disciple* and like the *da'i* of Badakhshan, Nasir-i Khusraw, so in the late 9th/15th century Abu Ishaq Quhistani (d. after 904/1498), after vainly pursuing the study of the exoteric sciences in the hope that it would satisfy him, wrote in his *Seven Chapters*:

*I then knew that we [human beings] know nothing.
But when my wretchedness and plight reached
such an extent and resulted in such an extreme,
the following [verse from the Qur'an] kept
repeating itself on my tongue and reverberating
in my heart and soul:*

*'Is God not the one who responds to the afflicted
one when he cries out to him?' [27:62]*

*Then the sun of benevolence and the mercy of
Hazrat-i Mawlana [the Imam] – upon whose
mention be prostration and exaltation! – shone
from the horizon of bounty and perceived this
bewildered atom in the zephyr of its love:
A sun shone upon my soul from the throne
of its majesty*

*Taking up my soul like an atom in its own gentle
winds [SV]*

