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THE ISMAILIS

An Illustrated History

Farhad Daftary
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Ismailis of Central Asia: Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Xinjiang (Northwestern China)

During the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century, the Ismailis of various parts of Central Asia, including present-day Afghanistan, Tajikistan and the northwest border region of China, had only sporadic contact with their Imams. Deputations were sent from some of these communities to Aga Khan I when he was staying in Qandahar in 1842, the year the British were forced out of Afghanistan. Contact with the Imamate and the opportunity to travel to see the Imam was greatly prized by the Ismailis of Badakhshan. As Mubarak-i Wakhani (d.1903), an Ismaili poet of Badakhshan, wrote:

*For the seeker, in both the worlds, you are
what is sought*

*For in the realms of time and place, besides
you all is naught [sv]*

But the broader conflict in which the British were now involved, known as the 'Great Game', a conflict in which the British, Russians and local leaders fought for domination over the regions of Central Asia, impinged more and more on the life of this remote community. The increasingly limited contact between the Ismailis in the various parts of Central Asia and the Imamate, as well as between each other, was affected by the manner in which the 'Great Game' developed.

