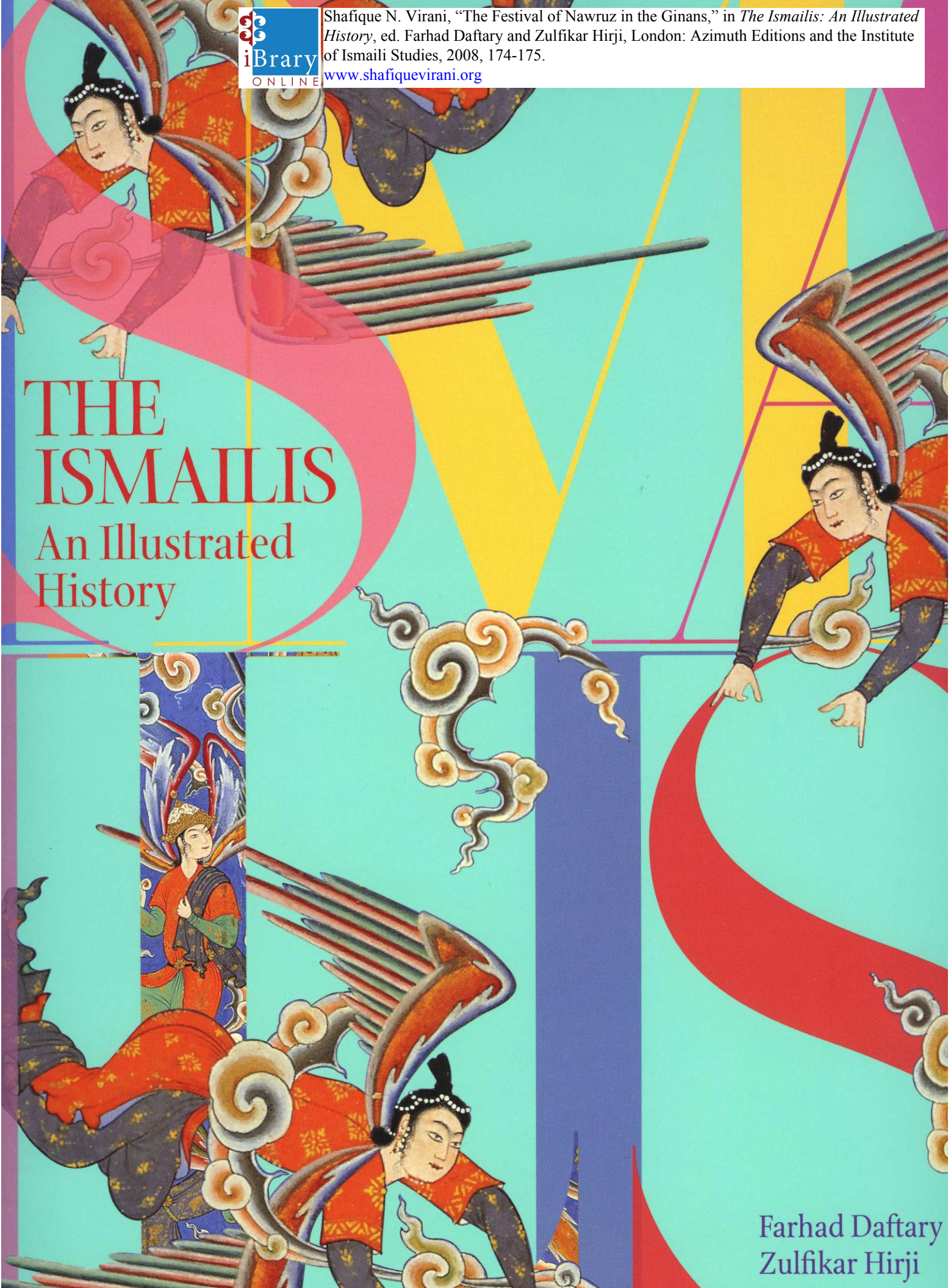


# THE ISMAILIS

An Illustrated History

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was probably motivated by the Imam's desire to be yet closer to his Khoja followers, who continued to make the hazardous journey for the *didar* of their Imam in Persia. The importance of the *didar* is exemplified in a poem, written about a century after Husayn b. Ya'qub Shah wrote his treatise on Nawruz discussed earlier, by a South Asian Ismaili by the name of Sayyid Fath 'Ali Shah Shamsi. The composition describes his encounter with Imam Shah Khalil Allah on Nawruz:

*On the glorious day of Nawruz  
The most luminous Imam, Lord of the  
Resurrection, had gone hunting  
This humble servant's heart was filled with longing  
His very life-breath remained at the feet of the  
Imam*

In the first verse, the Imam is described as lord of the resurrection. Given the association of

Nawruz and spring with the revival of souls at the end of time, this epithet carries profound symbolic value, and is a subtle indication of the sublimation of meaning that occurs throughout the poem. Learning that the Imam had gone hunting, he went in search of Shah Khalil Allah:

*I was bound to my lord in rapture by love  
Being dyed in the master's eternal colour  
Such was the absorption of my thoughts in the  
lord of the resurrection  
That the treasuries of truth overflowed with  
pearls*

*I walked joyfully with the lord  
Obtaining the riches of both matter and spirit  
The souls shall be saved  
Of those who listen wholeheartedly to these  
words of gnosis  
When a soul attains the mystic way  
Its life-breath blossoms like a flower*



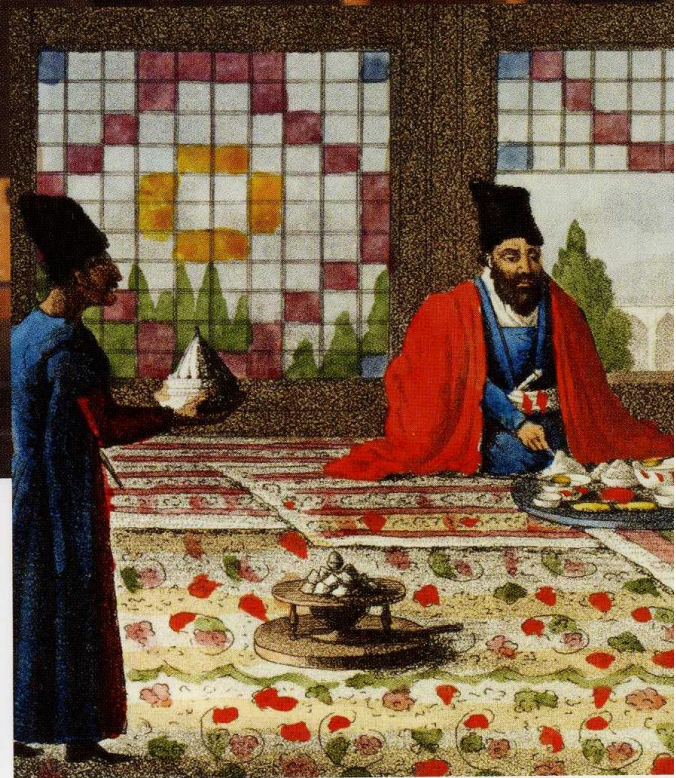


*Love envelops it in the fragrance of aloes and  
sandalwood  
Pure as a swan, it lovingly glides along the lake*

*Shah Khalil Allah was hunting near the citadel  
at the ring of fortresses  
And graciously called for Fath 'Ali  
My untold hopes were realized  
The lord appeared eternally as light*

*Faithful brethren, venerate the lord with all  
your heart  
Listen, O saints, such is the teaching of  
Sayyid Shamsi  
Those who forget not the lord's bounties  
Shall never be touched by sorrow*

While the poem describes a temporal encounter, it is evident that the writer wishes, at the same time, to convey the sense of a profound spiritual experience. Symbols of transformation abound,



including that of the coming of spring. The author is dyed in the eternal colour of the master, his life-breath blossoms like a flower and empty caskets are filled with pearls, which are symbols of supreme knowledge in the Indian poetic imagination. Most importantly, the writer's ultimate desire is fulfilled when he is blessed with a vision of the lord in the form of pure light. [SV]

It was at Yazd that two years later, in 1232/1817, the Nizari Imam became a victim of the intrigues of certain Ithna'ashari 'ulama and was killed in the course of a dispute between some of his followers and local shopkeepers.