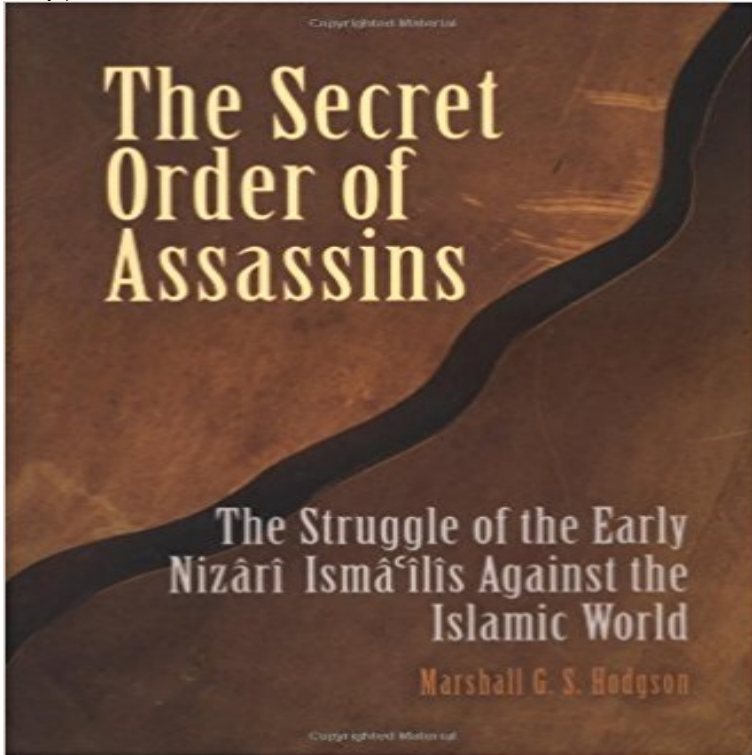


The Secret Order of Assassins: The Struggle of the Early Nizari Ismailis Against the Islamic World



The sect known as the Assassins, a corruption of an Arabic word that means hashish smoker, is familiar to the West as a mystical cult of killers led by the Man in the Mountain encountered by the Crusaders. But it was not defeat at the hands of Christians that ended more than a century of Assassin rule; it was the massive and brutal invasion of Mongols from the East who conquered Assassin strong points and mountain fortifications one by one, crushing nearly all traces of this once fearsome sect. For nearly two centuries the Fāṭimids, Shiite Muslims who believed Mohammeds daughter Fāṭimah was his successor, attempted to control the Islamic world from their seat in Cairo. Following the death of the Fāṭimid caliphate al Mustansir in 1094, members of a faction in Persia that supported a deposed claimant to the caliphate, Nizār, believed they now represented Fāṭimid interests. These Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs ended up separating themselves from mainstream Islam and creating their own state in parts of present-day Syria, Iraq, and Iran. In order to establish and maintain regional control, the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs used political murders and spies to subjugate or influence rival caliphates and the dominant Saljuqs. Marshall Hodgsons first major book, *The Secret Order of the Assassins* remains the most complete history of the Assassins. Beginning the story with the separation of Sunnis and Shiites and the rise of Ismāʿīlīsm, an offshoot of Shiism, Hodgson traces the long and complex

history of power struggles within Islam that led ultimately to the separation of the Nizari Ismailis and their direct challenge to Muslim leadership. Hodgson goes on to explain the principles of the movement, provides an examination of their sacred texts, and follows the history of the group from the pinnacle of power in the mid-eleventh century to its legacy in the form of small pockets of followers in parts of contemporary Syria and India. Long out of print and appearing for the first time in paperback, this book is an illuminating study in the history of Islam.

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