

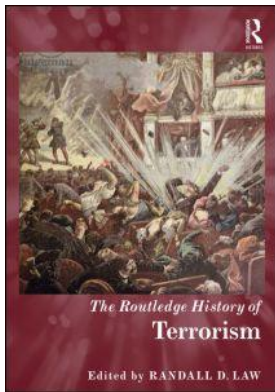
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PRE-MODERN TERRORISM

The cases of the Sicarii and the Assassins

Donathan Taylor and Yannick Gautron

Those searching for the pre-modern roots of modern-day terrorism must usually be content with finding the occasional tactical similarity, the rare parallel strategic consideration, or an intriguing rhetorical construction of violence. More often, the analysis of ancient or medieval violence illuminates the character of modern terror by highlighting the presence or absence of critically important elements, what Steven Isaac in Chapter 4 describes as the utility of a photographic negative of our own time. While the chapters directly preceding and following this one demonstrate the timelessness of killing, they reveal the difficulties associated with analyzing violence that induced terror or mimicked modern tactics – such as assassination – but took place in societies that did not possess modern conceptions of the state, the ideological availability of revolutionary political change, or now-common delineations between public and private acts. Two examples stand out in the pre-modern world, however, for their eerie familiarity to our modern modes of violence: the Sicarii of Judaea and the Assassins of Persia and Syria. This chapter analyzes these two movements, explains their uses of violence within the contexts of their times, and explores the appropriateness of describing them as terrorists within both their contexts and ours.¹

Romans, Jews, and Sicarii in Judaea

In the Southern Levant, a unique set of circumstances arose by the mid-first century of the Common Era that created an environment conducive to a unique expression of violence among the Jewish population which modern society has subsequently identified as terrorism. In the Roman province of Judaea, decades of foreign rule, together with the collaborative acquiescence of the largely Hellenized Jewish social and religious elite, finally compelled certain radical groups within the local community to oppose both in an expression of self-determination. Among these was a band of violent dissidents called the Sicarii whose identity has generated endless debate among modern scholars of Jewish history.

The circumstances which gave rise to the Sicarii found their origin in the social and political events which unfolded within Judaea² during the preceding century. In 63 BCE, the Roman general Pompey (106–48 BCE) undertook to resolve a dispute between rival Hasmonean claimants to the high priesthood of the country as part of his efforts to further secure Rome's control over former Seleukid territories in the Levant. This task ultimately necessitated a three-month siege of Jerusalem, followed by the inexorable application of Roman authority. After a fresh round of internal disorder several years later, an additional reorganization of Judaea occurred during the tenure of Aulus Gabinius, proconsul to Syria (57–55 BCE). Among other things, this involved a reduction in the political authority of the

high priesthood and the rebuilding of several towns, the latter of which subsequently experienced an influx of colonists from various parts of the Mediterranean.³

These and other internal changes administered by Rome, though acceptable to the upper social and economic elite, generated growing agitation within the greater Jewish community. Governed by foreign rulers, subject to the authority of local Hellenized leaders, and surrounded in their ancestral lands by thousands of “Gentiles,” many Jews found recourse in their religious teachings. Given the nature of Israelite cultural tradition, derived largely from the Bible, Jewish resistance to objectionable forms of rulership, whether foreign or domestic, inevitably assumed potent religious overtones.⁴ And by the latter half of the first century CE, Jewish discontent with Roman rule generated a constant tension that provided a fertile environment from which the Sicarii pursued their goal of liberating the Jewish people from Roman authority.

In 6 CE, Rome formally joined the regions of Judea, Idumea, and Samaria into the Roman Province of Judaea and then moved to further consolidate its authority through the application of a tax census by the governor of Syria, P. Sulpicius Quirinius (6–12 CE). Under the subsequent constraining effects of these new changes, relations further deteriorated between the local Jewish population and their foreign overlords, and resistance to Roman authority hardened. For Rome, the matter was not made easier by the fact that a succession of later procurators, such as Ventidius Cumanus (48–52 CE), Lucceius Albinus (62–64 CE), and Gessius Florus (64–66 CE), who were appointed by the emperor to maintain supervision over the province of Judaea, callously mishandled domestic relations with little care shown for the welfare of the Jewish population. These periodic bouts of maladministration paired with the sometimes indiscriminant application of military force only added fuel to the growing civil unrest.⁵

Among the small minority of extremist groups that emerged at this time to oppose Roman authority in Judaea, the Sicarii stood apart. The ability of current scholarship to unravel the character of this elusive sect is complicated by the fact that almost all extant knowledge is derived from a single biased source – the works of the Jewish historian and former general during the opening stages of the First Roman–Jewish War (66–73 CE), Yosef ben Matityahu, later to be called, after his acquisition of Roman citizenship, Flavius Josephus.⁶ Through two of his works, *The Jewish War* and *The Antiquities*, Josephus collectively portrays the Sicarii as an indigenous group of violent religious radicals that emerged in the mid-first century during the governorship of the Roman procurator Antonius Felix (52–60 CE).⁷ Their appearance was the result of a confluence of factors that came together at the interface between Roman authority and Jewish culture.

From certain intertextual evidence in Josephus and lesser Talmudic sources, some modern historians have posited a link between the Sicarii and the Zealots (Kanna'im), the most widely identified opposition group to Roman rule in the events ending with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Since the nineteenth century, the potential existence of this relationship between the two sects has fueled passionate discussion among scholars, although no definitive connection can, in fact, be derived from any of the extant works.⁸

Sicarii violence and terror

In a careful analysis of Josephus, two characteristics can be ascertained that distinguish the sect from all other opposition groups in Judaea: their extreme doctrine of “No lord but God” and their utter commitment to carry out acts of violence against members of the Jewish

community that dared reject this belief.⁹ In essence, the targets of their violence were Jews, particularly prominent leaders in the community – such as priests – who cooperated with Roman authorities or otherwise acquiesced to the foreign influences permeating Jewish society.

The terror inspired by the Sicarii was magnified by the manner in which they intimidated their enemies. Josephus says that unlike the rural bandits common to Judaea, the Sicarii originated in Jerusalem and relied on anonymity as an instrument to instill fear. They

committed murders in broad daylight in the heart of the city. The festivals were their special seasons, when they would mingle with the crowd, carrying short daggers under their clothing, with which they stabbed their enemies. Then, when [the victim] fell, the murderers joined in the cries of indignation and, through this plausible behavior, were never discovered.

Such tactics inevitably resulted in widespread psychological anxiety within the Jewish community.

The panic created was more alarming than the calamity itself; every one, as on the battlefield, hourly expecting death. Men kept watch at a distance on their enemies and would not trust even their friends when they approached. Yet, even while their suspicions were aroused and they were on guard, they fell; so swift were the conspirators and so crafty in eluding detection.¹⁰

The first victim of this tactic was the High Priest Jonathan, doubtless selected because he was perceived to be a high profile collaborator with the Romans and his death would serve as a stark warning against such behavior to both the Jewish ruling elite and the common population.¹¹

The instability generated in Jerusalem by this and other such sensational incidents quickly captured the attention of Roman authorities in Judaea who almost certainly assigned the name Sicarii, a Latin term derived from the fact that the assassins carried out their attacks with the use of a distinctive weapon whose design most resembled the curved Roman dagger called a *sica*. This term has no other currency in Greek or Jewish literature before Josephus.¹²

In addition to assassination, the Sicarii also resorted to the kidnapping of prominent Jews for purposes of political extortion. They began this practice during the procuratorship of Albinus when they seized Eleazar, secretary of the temple captain and son of the current high priest, Ananias (63 CE). They then offered his release in exchange for the freeing of their fellow Sicarii currently imprisoned by the Romans. Following Ananias' entreaties, Albinus eventually granted the request, but Josephus notes that "this was the beginning of greater troubles."¹³ Emboldened by their success, the Sicarii continued to employ the abduction of prominent Jews as a means to secure the freedom of their incarcerated associates.

The activities of the Sicarii likewise extended into the countryside where they proved no less significant. In a less furtive manner, they sought to intimidate and punish the rural Jewish elite for willingly acquiescing to Roman authority. Josephus says that the Sicarii moved against those Jews "who consented to submit to Rome and in every way treated them as enemies."¹⁴ To this end, they plundered and destroyed the estates of the wealthy in select acts of reprisal.

In each instance, the tactics of the Sicarii were specific, violent, and calculated to curtail popular collaboration with Imperial officials through the application of terror. By targeting the Jewish social and religious elite, the Sicarii were carefully selecting individuals who were of high symbolic political value in order to discourage pro-Roman grassroots cooperation from among the wider population. At the same time, an immediate tangible result was to disrupt the unchecked flow of information from Jewish leaders who provided the Romans the means to anticipate and thereby control the course of events in the province. Collectively, these actions served to further isolate Roman forces while simultaneously driving a wedge between the Jewish people and their traditional leadership, whom the Sicarii saw as generally corrupt. Perhaps most notable is the fact that Sicarii attacks of this nature targeted only Jews. Extant evidence indicates that Roman civilians and military personnel suffered few direct reprisals in the form of assassination, kidnapping, or property destruction. That the psychological purpose of these attacks was aimed primarily at the Jewish population is further confirmed by the fact that such incidents occurred at religiously significant times and places, such as pilgrimage festivals and the Temple of Jerusalem.¹⁵

Yet the Sicarii were in many ways as much a symptom of the unstable social and political conditions present in Judaea as they were a contributor to its further breakdown in the immediate years prior to the outbreak of the first-century revolt. Faced with a protracted inability to exercise self-determination because of the Roman occupation, a growing segment of the Jewish population became increasingly resolved to free their country by violent means.

The Roman–Jewish War and the end of the Sicarii

When the general uprising finally began in the summer of 66 CE, the Sicarii were only briefly involved in the events in Jerusalem before the tyrannical actions of their leader Menachem, which included the murder of the high priest Ananias, led to his own death by other Jewish rebels who opposed his brutal methods. Because of their perceived extremism, the remainder of the Sicarii in the city were likewise killed in the purge, although a few managed to escape to the isolated Herodian mountain fortress of Masada, roughly 30 miles south-southeast of Jerusalem, overlooking the Dead Sea.¹⁶ There, in the remoteness of the eastern Judaeian Desert, the Sicarii continued to stubbornly proclaim their doctrine of “No lord but God.”

The occupation of Masada was the last significant chapter in the history of the Sicarii in Judaea, and the site of the final event of the First Roman–Jewish War (66–73 CE). In the seventh year of the conflict, the newly appointed Roman governor of Judaea, L. Flavius Silva (73–81 CE), besieged Masada with a single legion, the Legio X Fretensis, and supporting *auxilia*. His purpose was to overcome this last remaining pocket of resistance in the revolt. The leader of the Sicarii atop Masada was Eleazar ben Yair, an individual whom Josephus claims was a descendant of one Judas the Galilean of Gamala in Gaulanitis, who was instrumental in raising the standard of revolt at the time of Quirinius’ census 67 years earlier.¹⁷

At Masada, the terroristic nature of the Sicarii once again fully manifested itself. During the early stages of the fortress’ occupation, they raided neighboring communities for supplies, but in time the manner of their attacks grew more violent. Unlike previous incursions, the Sicarii carried out a vicious assault against the village of Engedi on the shores of the Dead Sea in order to collect needed supplies and foodstuffs. The attack, which occurred on

Passover, ended with the massacre of some 700 villagers, including women and children, and Josephus tells us, “they made similar raids on all the villages around the fortress, and laid waste the whole district.”¹⁸

Josephus does not say why the Sicarii altered their methods from the time of Engedi. The attack may have been nothing more than simple banditry – the exercise of brute violence for personal profit. But given the depth of their ideological convictions which emanated from the doctrine of “No lord but God,” it is reasonable to conclude that the Sicarii believed their actions at Engedi were as virtuous as those in Jerusalem that ended in assassination and kidnapping. Fully inculcated in their beliefs, no moral impediment was allowed to detract from their righteous cause, and certain acts of terror, regardless of how heinous, could be justified as helping to sustain their order’s fanatical resistance to Roman occupation. If need be, anything and anyone could be sacrificed on behalf of their conviction.

When the 10,000-strong legionary force of Silva finally reached Masada, the Sicarii doubtless saw the inevitability of the situation, a certainty made all the more manifest in subsequent weeks as the Romans systematically enclosed the entire plateau in a wall of circumvallation and constructed a siege ramp on a spur of bedrock on the western side of the rock face. In a speech given by Yair to his fellow Sicarii, as related to Josephus by two survivors of the Masada siege, the dissident leader compelled those around him to freely choose suicide rather than submit to Roman slavery.¹⁹

Like terrorists centuries later, the fanaticism of their beliefs persuaded Eleazar ben Yair and his followers to perceive each circumstance of their lives in apocalyptic terms. The righteousness of their beliefs justified each violent act throughout their existence, including their own deaths. For the Sicarii, the mass suicide of 960 people that followed Yair’s exhortations was seemingly stark validation of their mantra.

From Josephus, it is evident that the actions of the Sicarii were unique among the events of the First Roman–Jewish War. They were intended from their inception to incite panic and fear, through acts of internecine assassination and kidnapping, as instruments to destabilize Jewish–Roman relations and provoke broad popular resistance to foreign rule.

The exceptional nature of the Sicarii is further underscored by the fact that such a highly concentrated application of “terror” tactics, especially against one’s own people, is found nowhere else in antiquity. During the first century, other serious Native revolts against Roman authority occurred, most notably in North Africa (17–24 and 45 CE), Britain (60 CE), and Germany (69–70 CE), but any expressions of opposition comparable to that of the Sicarii did not emerge in the midst of these uprisings.²⁰ Both the African and German struggles at some point included episodes of guerrilla warfare, yet neither uprising involved practices intended to drive a wedge between the indigenous population and Roman authorities through the premeditated use of terror by dissidents against their own people. Josephus’ observation in Book 7 of *The Jewish War* emphasizes this overt and unique extremism of the Sicarii. Here he notes that the Sicarii “in every way . . . treated [their Jewish brethren who consented to submit to Rome] as [foreign] enemies.”²¹ Within the context of Jewish religious and cultural tradition, this statement is revealing. In essence, the Sicarii relegated their Jewish opponents to the status of “foreigners” or non-Jewish enemies of no greater intrinsic worth than Roman adversaries.²²

In Judaea, the critical component that provided the conditions necessary for the emergence of such an exceptional form of resistance was religious. Josephus’ accounts make it clear that by the mid-first century, an active perception existed within certain sectors of the Jewish community that Roman authority infringed upon the otherwise unfettered expression of

Mosaic tradition. The sensitive nature of this situation was further aggravated by the prevalence of apocalyptic and messianic–eschatological influences in Judaism, particularly among some of the emerging revolutionary sects in the immediate years prior to the destruction of the Second Temple. Likewise, the prominent acceptance within Israelite cultural tradition of resistance to foreign domination as a precursor to divine deliverance further energized the vociferous nature of Jewish opposition to Roman rule.²³ In the end, the commingling of distinct social, political, cultural, and religious factors in Judaea generated a volatile environment that inevitably moved the situation to open war, a result achieved, in part, by the violence perpetrated by the Sicarii on their fellow Jews.

That the conditions that brought about the First Roman–Jewish War – and in consequence local terrorism – were unique to the place and moment is perhaps further illuminated by the fact that in 73 CE some Sicarii fled from Judaea to Egypt where they again sought to incite the Jewish community in Alexandria to revolt against Roman authority. Using the same tactics, they initially murdered some of the moderate Jews of social rank in the city, but this time the actions of the Sicarii failed less to inflame the Egyptian Jews than alarm the community out of fear of Roman retribution. In response, hundreds of Sicarii were seized and turned over to the Romans, ending the threat of insurrection. A second incident in Cyrene likewise failed in its original purpose.²⁴

Though they were an aberration in their own time, significant parallels can be identified between the character of the Sicarii and more contemporary terrorist movements in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Like many of their modern counterparts, such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Sicarii sought both political and religious outcomes through their actions.²⁵ In order to achieve their ideological goals, the Sicarii deliberately worked to instill fear among the civilian leaders and non-combatant population of Judaea by the application of specific, lethal tactics for the purpose of undermining relations between the general public and their colonial overlords, thereby fomenting broad resistance to Roman rule.

In the end, the ideology of the Sicarii, along with the extreme violence it generated, not only isolated the group from the greater Jewish community but inhibited its exportation. As subsequent events demonstrated, the group's *raison d'être* was proven to be exclusively the result of the rarified social and political environment created in Judaea by events during the century leading up to 70 CE. Without those preconditions, the Sicarii eventually ceased to exist. But the First Roman–Jewish War was not the last time in the pre-modern era that religious and political circumstance combined to inspire the birth of a dissident group that modern anti-terrorism experts would label as terrorists.

The Assassins

As made clear above, the Assassins were hardly the first to use political assassination or the first to support such targeted violence with ideological or religious justifications. Nevertheless, they provide a very instructive case to all who want to understand the historical roots of terrorism. Organized in a tight community with precise objectives, they systematically resorted to assassinations that followed specific methods, as much for the strategic effectiveness as for the significant psychological impact. Many authors like Bernard Lewis regard the Assassins as probably the first terrorists in history.²⁶

Regardless of the ways in which such an assertion might be qualified and as modern as the notion of terrorism is, the Assassins' deep impact remains incontestable: not only their

name passed into common usage, but they left a lasting impression on the Western collective imagination, from medieval myths concerning the “Old Man of the Mountain” to fictional works such as the *Assassin’s Creed* videogaming saga. But this often romantic vision hides much more complex historical, political, religious, and cultural realities.

Those whom the Western Christians referred to as “Assassins” since the twelfth century were in fact the Nizaris, adherents of a radical trend born in Persia from Isma‘ili Shi‘ism at the end of the tenth century. Although the Nizari movement officially originated in 1094, its identity, religious particularism, and its methods of struggle arose from a process of reflection initiated by the founder Hasan-i Sabbah several years earlier.

Cornerstones of the Nizari struggle

A Persian from the city of Qum, Hasan was a *da‘i* ((pl. *du‘at*) literally, in Arabic, “one who summons,” that is, an evangelizing missionary), charged, as the authorized representative of the imam, with spreading Isma‘ili doctrines. The headquarters of the *da‘wa* (“invitation” or “summoning” to the doctrine/mission) was then based with the Fatimid Caliphate of Cairo, the chief political, religious, and military rival of the Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad, the “orthodox” Sunni headquarters defended (in reality, ruled) by the Seljuk Turks. Dispatched by the Fatimid Caliphate, Hasan operated in Persia from 1081 onwards. His assignment was within the core of the Seljuk Empire where Sunnism was the official religion, especially in the towns. Due to their remoteness from the Fatimid Caliphate and its own internal difficulties, Isma‘ili Persian communities could not rely on effective support from Cairo. The strength and talent of Hasan lay in analyzing and taking advantage of certain aspects of Seljuk rule, plus conceiving tactical schemes that could be adapted to the circumstances of the Seljuk empire. He succeeded in making Persian Isma‘ilism, which used to be an underground religious current, into an open and rebellious movement that defied the Seljuks’ overwhelming military strength with a deadly reputation.

Isma‘ilism had already received a favorable response from the populace in Persia. Its adherents showed fervor and a kind of determination that originated from the very nature of Shi‘ism. Deprived of the opportunity to lead the Muslim community by the Sunnis shortly after the death of the prophet Muhammad, the Shi‘ite party has since developed a fervor that draws upon themes of martyrdom, suffering, and, above all, struggle against an iniquitous and usurping governing power. Arising from a schism that shook Shi‘ism in the eighth century, Isma‘ilism was much more radical. It represented both a religious and political opposition movement, coherent and centralized, and secretly spreading even as it was condemned and hounded by Sunni “orthodoxy.”

While the Sunni follow the exoteric or apparent meaning (*zahir*) of the Qur’an, Isma‘ilism relies on the idea that its texts have esoteric and secret meanings (*batin*) that contain divine truths (the equivalent of what is referred to in Christian tradition as gnostic wisdom). As such, Isma‘ilism offered its adherents several degrees of initiation and interpretation, adapting to all levels of popular understanding as well as responding to intellectual questioning. These divine truths were delivered by the figure of the imam and his *du‘at*; thus Isma‘ilism was based on *ta‘lim*, a concept of absolute authority that requires faithfulness and the unquestioned obedience of followers. Claiming to be the legitimate way of Islam, Isma‘ilism proposed an alternative to the Sunni establishment, which the Isma‘ilis considered liable for the Muslim world’s splintering, and it seemed widespread and strong enough to overthrow the existing order.

As a cradle of older dissident traditions, Persia provided a context favorable to Isma'ili preaching. Many Persian dynasties had already opposed the caliphate of Bagdad and rekindled Persian cultural identity then under Arabic domination. The emergence of Turkish dynasties and especially the Seljuk triumph revived both local people's discontent and a Persian sense of identity. The Isma'ili *da'wa* had been well established in Persia since the tenth century, and from the year 1070, Persian Isma'ilis acknowledged only one *da'i* based in Isfahan. When Hasan, who probably shared this sense of Persian identity and enjoyed his autonomy from Cairo, became the main *da'i* in charge of preaching Isma'ilism in Seljuk territories, he could take advantage of the already vibrant Isma'ili momentum to launch an open revolt against the Seljuk empire.

Hasan gave up Isfahan as a base, ill-suited as it was for open activities against Seljuk power, and turned to the mountainous region of Daylam, to the south of the Caspian Sea. Strongly imbued with a sense of their political and religious identity and autonomy, the region's population was already open to Isma'ili preaching. Hasan was searching for his own *dar al-hijra*, a place of refuge according to the Muslim tradition, that he could use as headquarters for the Persian *da'wa*. The seizure of strongholds in mountainous districts to be used as refuges became one of the cornerstones of Hasan's strategy. He selected the famous citadel of Alamut, a veritable eagle's nest reputed to be impregnable. The *da'wa* revealed its effectiveness on this occasion: Hasan sent his *du'at* to Alamut and its hinterland in order to convert the garrison and local people. In the year 1090, when the newly converted Isma'ilis openly revealed themselves, the lord of the place, who held Alamut from the Seljuk sultan, had to give up the stronghold. The seizure of Alamut was the first direct blow against Seljuk authority and essentially marked the foundation of an Isma'ili (and later Nizari) state. The Isma'ilis subsequently captured many strongholds, sometimes by siege, most of the time by conversion of the local people. Some of these places were recaptured by the Seljuks, but the Nizari state was definitely established by the year 1118. Although scattered among the regions of Rudbar and Qumis in Daylam, as well as far to the southeast in Quhistan, near the frontiers of present-day Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, the Isma'ili network of strongholds operated cohesively due to the central leadership of Alamut, seat of the major *da'i*.

Isma'ili preaching and seizure of strongholds proved that there were alternatives to a direct confrontation with the Seljuk empire. With Hasan now acting in broad daylight, the use of assassination soon became one of his tactics. The declaration of the Isma'ili community and the emergence of a state inevitably led to a reaction from the Seljuks. The vizier Nizam al-Mulk had paid attention to the activities of Hasan in the Daylam since 1088 and became the fiercest opponent of the Isma'ilis. It was likely on his advice that the Seljuk sultan Malik Shah engaged in a military campaign against Isma'ili strongholds. Nizam al-Mulk was therefore targeted by the Isma'ili community, and his death in the year 1092 was the first of the many assassinations that mark the history of the Assassins.

Juwayni, a Persian author of the thirteenth century, provided a detailed account of the assassination of Nizam al-Mulk, basing the story on lost Isma'ili sources. According to Juwayni:

Hasan-i Sabbah spread the snare of artifices in order at the first opportunity to catch some splendid game, such as Nizam-al-Mulk, in the net of destruction and increase thereby his own reputation. With the juggling of deceit and the trickery of falsehood, with absurd preparations and spurious deceptions, he laid the basis of the *fi'da'is* ("those who sacrifice themselves"). A person called Bu-Tahir, Arrani by

name and by origin, was afflicted “with the loss both of this world and of the next,” and in his misguided striving after bliss in the world to come on the night of Friday the 12th of Ramazan 485 [October 16, 1092] he went up to Nizam-al-Mulk’s litter at a stage called Sahna in the region of Nihavand. Nizam-al-Mulk, having broken the fast, was being borne in the litter from the Sultan’s audience-place to the tent of his harem. Bu-Tahir who was disguised as a Sufi, stabbed him with a dagger and by that blow Nizam-al-Mulk was martyred. He was the first person to be killed by the *fidai’s*.²⁷

A further step in the renewal of the Persian Isma‘ili movement led to the very birth of the Nizari community. The Fatimid Caliphate experienced a succession crisis in the year 1094: contrary to the provisions laid down by the caliph al-Mansur designating his elder son Abu Mansur Nizar as successor to the caliphate and thus to the Isma‘ili imamate, vizier Badr al-Jamali installed Nizar’s young brother in power. Hasan upheld the legitimacy of Nizar, however, even as the latter and his supporters were eliminated in Egypt. By refusing to recognize Nizar’s brother as the legitimate Isma‘ili imam, Hasan consequently split the Fatimid *da‘wa*. As undisputed leader of Persian Isma‘ilis and, in reality, of all Isma‘ilis living in the Seljuk empire, Hasan now spearheaded a new and totally independent Nizari *da‘wa*. Since Nizar was executed, Hasan became – according to Isma‘ili doctrines – the *hujja* (“proof”) of the occulted imam, that is, his legitimate representative on Earth and dispenser of the divine knowledge. The authority of Hasan, buttressed by the notion of *ta‘lim*, was naturally accepted and recognized by the whole Persian Isma‘ili community. With the founding of Nizarism achieved, the talent of Hasan showed in how he cultivated and directed their fervor and devotion.

Muslim perceptions of the Nizaris

The Nizari phenomenon was unequivocally and fiercely condemned by the whole Muslim world: by Sunnis and the Fatimid Isma‘ilis, as well as other Shi‘ite movements. In 1091, the year before he became the Nizaris’ first victim, Nizam al-Mulk had written *Siyar al-Muluk* (“Rule for Kings”), a treatise of governance intended for Sultan Malik Shah. Grounded in the history of both Persia and Islam, it vehemently condemned heresies:

Seceders have existed in all ages, and from the time of Adam (upon him be peace) until now in every country in the world they have risen up in revolt against kings and prophets. Never has there been a more vile, more perverted or more irreligious crowd than these people, who behind walls are plotting harm to this country and seeking to destroy the religion. Their ears are alert for the sounds of sedition and their eyes are open for signs of the evil eye.²⁸

Nizam al-Mulk devoted long sections to denouncing Isma‘ilis, named Batinis (from *batin*), as he worried about their increasing importance and the danger that they represented: “their whole purpose is only to abolish Islam and to lead mankind astray.”²⁹

There was no better exemplar of the official view than the treatise of Nizam al-Mulk, and it doubtless guided Sunni religious and political orthodoxy towards the Nizaris. Subsequent Sunni and Shi‘ite treatises aggressively denigrated the Nizaris as the *malahida* (“heresy”) par excellence, undermining Islam from within. Sunnis already regarded Shi‘ism as a religious

error, since it dared to interpret the Qur'an via *batin*. But both Sunni and Shi'ites believed that Isma'ilism threatened religious law and Islam by extending even further the interpretation of the Qur'an and placing exclusive emphasis on *ta'lim*, thereby giving the imam too important a place. One key issue in these treatises was to determine if Nizaris could be regarded as true Muslims – or even Muslims of any sort.

In addition, some texts ascribed licentious habits to the Nizaris in violation of the religious prohibitions. One expression of contempt appeared first in 1123 and then again from time to time: during an ideological dispute, the Fatimid caliph al-Amir described the Nizaris as *hashishiyya* ("hashish users"), without any justification but undoubtedly in a very pejorative way.³⁰ This fairly rare term was repeated by the Shi'a Zaydis of Persia, in the thirteenth century, when they mention the Nizaris as *hashishis*. Hashish use was severely condemned by Islam, owing to its adverse effects on the integrity and morality of the faithful, to the point that hashish abusers were considered criminals by Muslim society.³¹ Characterizing a community as *hashishiyya* was therefore particularly offensive and infamous, a virulent way of casting the Nizaris as outlaws from the Muslim community. However, it is quite doubtful that they used hashish; they practiced, to the contrary, asceticism and moral discipline. Although rare, the use of the term *hashishiyya* seems to have come to the knowledge of Crusaders: the first historical mentions of the Nizaris among Westerners took the form "Al-Hachichine," "Heyssessini," etc., which eventually became "Assassins" over time.

Never was a Muslim community more severely condemned, nor subject to such unanimous feelings of hostility. What most astounded the Muslim world was not so much the dangerous emergence of the Nizaris in the heart of the Seljuk Empire but their systematic use of assassinations. As stated above, the Assassins did not invent this. Physical elimination of an opponent is as old as humanity itself. Ideological, religious, or political justifications of such acts were not the preserve of the Nizaris either: several groups have used it since antiquity, starting with the Sicarii and, in the eighth century, several radical Muslim groups (like the Kharijites) had made it a religious duty, justifying their deeds by an antinomian sense of rectitude.³² But recurring assassinations played an essential part in the Nizaris' methods of struggle. They used it often enough and in an identifiable manner that medieval sources attributed all similar acts to them.

The use of assassination

It is virtually impossible to analyze the thinking of Hasan regarding assassination, as most of the Nizaris' sources were destroyed during the fall of Alamut in the thirteenth century. Nevertheless, the use of assassination seems to have come about in a natural and logical way. On the one hand, Isma'ilis and Nizaris, as radical Shi'ite traditions, were nurtured by allied concepts of legitimate revolt and martyrdom. Bernard Lewis goes further, saying that the concept of tyrannicide, as a religious obligation to rid the world of an illegitimate ruler, could have justified these methods.³³ Rashid al-Din, a Persian chronicler of the thirteenth century who, like Juwayni, relied on Nizari sources, thus had Hasan say, about Nizam al-Mulk's assassination, "the murder of this demon is the beginning of bliss."³⁴ On the other hand, any consideration of the very nature of the Seljuk power must recognize that the unity of the empire was based on personal ties of loyalty. Since direct confrontation with Seljuk military might was virtually impossible, assassinating key characters seemed the best option for keeping opposing forces off-balance. The killing of Nizam al-Mulk, who was an outstanding administrator and a fierce opponent of the Isma'ilis, considerably undermined the

empire. The death soon after of Sultan Malik Shah led to the withdrawal of the troops besieging Alamut and opened a period of civil war among his potential successors.

The ultimate purpose of the assassinations carried out by the Nizaris was therefore strategic, whether in a defensive or a repressive way. Their most symbolically meaningful victims besides Nizam al-Mulk were the Fatimid caliph al-Amir in 1130 and the Sunni Abbasid caliphs al-Mustarshid and al-Rashid, in, respectively, 1135 and 1138. Nizaris mostly targeted political and military dignitaries, such as viziers, emirs, or other officials, and religious figures such as *qadis* (Judges with religious, civil, and judicial functions) involved in ideological campaigns against the Nizaris. They aimed occasionally at civilian officials, such as prefects or jurists, but they never aimed randomly and blindly with terror itself as the sole justification.

While it was not, properly speaking, a religious duty, Lewis notes, “The killing by the Assassin of his victim . . . had a ritual, almost a sacramental quality.”³⁵ Nizaris involved in such deeds were designated by the term *fida’i* (pl. *fida’iyin*), “he who devotes, sacrifices himself,” as a signal of their commitment or even their sacrifice in the interests of the community. Kamal al-Din, a Syrian chronicler of the thirteenth century, recounted an anecdote that underlines this exaltation. In 1126, several *fida’iyin* stabbed to death Bursuqi, the *atabeg* (governor) of Mosul, in a mosque; although most of his attackers were slaughtered on the spot, one of these managed to escape. Kamal al-Din then tells us:

This young man, who managed to escape, had a mother of an advanced old age; when she learned of the death of both Bursuqi and his murderers, and knowing her son was a part of them, she showed great satisfaction and made up her eyes with kohl as a token of gladness. When she saw him back safe and sound a few days later, she was distressed by this and, in her pain, she shaved her hair and blackened her face.³⁶

Although it is difficult to assess the veracity of this story, Juwayni and Rashid al-Din do confirm the existence at Alamut of a roll of honor featuring the names of the *fida’iyin* and their victims. A poem written by Hasan Ibn Salah Birjandi, a Nizari historian of the thirteenth century, for the glory of three *fida’iyin* who eliminated Qizil Arslan, governor of Azerbaijan in 1191, has also come to us: “Praise, glory, and thousands of benedictions be upon the three heroes, the brave swordsmen, capturers of kings!”³⁷

Assassinations committed by the Nizaris had their own *modus operandi*, which, aside from reinforcing the ritual character of these deeds, had a significant psychological impact. Lewis emphasizes that “Assassins always used a dagger; never poison, never missiles.”³⁸ They approached their victims, sometimes disguised as Sufis or beggars, and generally acted in full daylight, in a public place: at the court, in military camps, or, in a more striking way, in the heart of mosques, during the days of prayer or the month of Ramadan. It would be an overstatement to call these suicide missions, as chroniclers often mention *fida’iyin* trying to flee the scene and sometimes succeeding. Although they had little chance to live through their mission in such circumstances, the primary intention was more a display of boldness without any limit than a search for death; they aimed to impress the popular imagination and to discourage the potential adversaries of the community. Birjandi perfectly epitomized this in his poem: “Brothers, when the blessed time arrives, and the good luck of both worlds accompanies us, the king, who possesses more than a hundred thousand cavalry, would be frightened by a single warrior.”³⁹

Initial reactions to the acts carried out by the *fiḍa'iyin* were the slaughter of Nizari communities in many towns through popular uprisings driven by uncontrollable fear or by orders from authorities. The Damascene al-Dahabi relates that in 1129, the lord of Damas “put to death six thousand people accused of following Nizari doctrines.”⁴⁰ Mistrust was such that opponents of the Assassins adopted hyper-elaborate protections. The Fatimid vizier al-Afdal was “extremely distrustful and precautious, was always standing on guard and alert, especially against the sect of the Batinis, and surrounded himself against them with weapons of all types, a large number of servants, slaves, and black guards, plus various tools and sharpened sabres.”⁴¹ Bursuqi, killed in 1126 by the Nizaris, “kept his mind alert and stood on guard against an attempt on their part [the Batinis]; he surrounded himself with squires and bodyguards, with soldiers armed from head to toe. . . . He wore chain mail in addition which neither the point of the sabre nor the blade of the dagger could penetrate.”⁴²

Western perceptions of the Nizaris

The Western medieval reaction to the Nizaris and their assassinations was out of proportion with that of the Muslim world. At the beginning of the twelfth century, Nizari activity spread to Syria. The geographic context, unlike in Iraq, plus its political and religious fragmentation offered advantageous conditions. Isma'ili doctrines had been disseminated by the Fatimid Caliphate since the tenth century and communities with strong religious identities (Druzes, Nosayris) were potentially open to the Nizari *da'wa*. They lived in the mountain range that provided a natural boundary between, on the one hand, the Seljuk governors of Aleppo and Damascus and, on the other, the four Crusader states along the coastline. After settlement attempts in Aleppo and Damascus failed, Nizaris began seizing a network of strongholds in the Jabal Bahra (near the northwestern coast of present-day Syria) after 1130. The Syrian Nizaris originally depended on Alamut, and its leaders were appointed by the Persian headquarters, but they asserted their independence after 1169, under Rashid al-Din Sinan's reign, known through Western sources as the first “Old Man of the Mountain.”

The first Western figure assassinated by the Nizaris was Count Raymond of Tripoli in 1152. But Western chroniclers did not mention the community until the last third of the twelfth century. Unaware of the terms “Nizaris,” “Batinis,” or “Mulahid,” they identified the Assassins only with great difficulty as belonging to the Muslim world, sometimes recounting in vivid contrast licentious habits that went against Muslim laws.

Nizari religious practice or identity were not the focus of Western writers. Instead, it was their use of assassination and particularly the recruitment, training, and indoctrination of the *fiḍa'iyin*. As Benjamin of Tudela pointed out in a simple summation: “they are feared everywhere because they kill kings with disregard for their own life.”⁴³ Burchard of Strasbourg, who traveled through the Holy Land around 1175 on behalf of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, reported that the Assassins were brought up from a very young age in palaces cut off from the world, where they learned several languages such as Latin, Greek, and Arabic; once they reached adulthood and were fully imbued with the idea that their salvation depended on their unquestioning obedience to their lord, they were ordered by the latter to kill princes with a golden dagger.⁴⁴ At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Arnold of Lübeck was the first to report that the Old Man of the Mountain administered a narcotic beverage to his followers; he afterwards promised them

eternal possession of the delights they had seen in their drug-induced dreams, provided that they fulfilled his command.⁴⁵

“The Old Man of the Mountain” quickly became the central figure of the Western stories about the Assassins. The first mentions of him coincided with the reign of Rashid al-Din Sinan, who played an important role on the Syrian political chessboard, alternating diplomacy and confrontation with neighboring powers, including the Crusaders. The title of “Old Man of the Mountain” had first been a local designation for him before it became a generic title adopted by the Western sources to refer to the successive leaders of the Syrian Nizari community. It seems to have been a purely Western creation, as it is absent from the Arab–Muslim sources. Lewis proposes that Nizaris naturally referred to their leader as *Shaykh* (“wise person” or “elder” with a connotation of intellectual and moral authority). Westerners seem to have only retained the meaning of “elder” and to have combined it with the entrenched mountainous location of the Assassins.⁴⁶

In 1192, near the end of Rashid al-Din Sinan’s leadership, Conrad of Montferrat, a claimant to the kingship of Jerusalem, was murdered by two Assassins who had infiltrated his entourage over several months. This event made a deep impression on Westerners and sparked a wave of political anguish built on wild rumors. The English king Richard the Lionheart was accused of having contracted with the Old Man of the Mountain to kill Conrad. French chroniclers even claimed that he sent Assassins into France in order to kill King Philip Augustus, who kept himself protected by sergeants-at-arms, both day and night, in fear for his life. The accusations got so out of hand that the English chancery forged a letter from the Old Man of the Mountain proclaiming Richard’s innocence.⁴⁷ And the rumors persisted so long that at the beginning of the thirteenth century, Guillaume Guiart claimed in a poem that Richard the Lionheart himself had raised and indoctrinated young men, aiming to send them to assassinate his opponents.⁴⁸

The disproportionate reaction of Westerners is quite notable, especially in view of the small number of Christians who fell victim to the Assassins: while Nizaris claimed several dozen Muslim victims throughout their history, they only killed five Crusaders (not counting some of the unsuccessful attempts). Indeed, although the Muslim world knew well with whom it was dealing, Westerners were still assessing the Nizari community, along with its murderous reputation, striking behavior, and unheard-of methods, all of which represented a constant threat. Rumors spread throughout the thirteenth century, and Western authors involved the Old Man of the Mountain in many political cases in Europe. While some lords and sovereigns were alleged to have paid tribute to the Old Man so as to be spared by the Assassins’ daggers, others were accused of infiltrating Assassins into their opponents’ entourages. Whatever the truth, these stories had such an impact that in 1245, during the Council of Lyon, Pope Innocent IV provided provisions in the decree *De sententia et re iudicata* (“Of Sentencing and Judicial Matters”) that anyone who killed another on his own or by sending Assassins was to be sentenced to excommunication and the loss of any dignity, order, office, or benefice.⁴⁹

But in the end, Western fascination outpaced Western fear. Legends built around the Old Man of the Mountain and his Assassins fed a fantasized vision of the Middle East and the Holy Land, far exceeding the mundane realities of the Nizari community. The unquestioned loyalty of the Assassins toward the Old Man of the Mountain attracted as much attention from authors as did their methodical use of assassination. One chronicler reported that in 1194, as Henri of Champagne visited him, the Old Man ordered some of his Assassins to throw themselves from the top of a tower to certain death on the rocks below in order

to prove their obedience. They reportedly did so without the slightest hesitation.⁵⁰ The term “Assassin” thus seemed for a while synonymous with absolute faithfulness. Several Provençal troubadours used this theme as ornaments in their courtly poetry near the end of the thirteenth century, delivering some surprising verses, such as: “You have me more fully in your power than the Old Man his Assassins”; “Just as the Assassins serve their master unflinchingly, so I have served Love with unswerving loyalty”; and “I am your Assassin, who hopes to win Paradise through doing your commands.”⁵¹

The Western slant on the story of the Assassins allows us to fully assess the psychological impact of the assassinations carried out by the Nizaris, an impact strong enough to have occluded most other aspects of the sect. But assassination was not an exclusive weapon for the Nizaris; they were not above establishing alliances and diplomatic relations, according to the potential benefits for their cause or their territorial consolidation. They thus supported certain emirs against others in the heartlands of the Seljuk empire; they approached the governors of Aleppo and Damascus when they wanted to begin their mission in Syria; and they exchanged embassies and maintained relationships with certain Frankish lords and even with King Louis IX of France. Furthermore, political assassination was only truly effective if the edifice of power was susceptible to collapse with the death of the figure on whom it relied. Thus it is not surprising that the Orders of the Temple and of the Hospitaliers in Syria were able to exact tribute from the Assassins. Jean de Joinville explained this when he told the story of the embassy sent by the Old Man of the Mountain to Saint Louis, in 1253: “[The Old Man of the Mountain] paid a tribute to the Temple and to the Hospitaliers, because these orders dreaded nothing from the Assassins, because he would gain nothing if he had the master of the Temple or of the Hospitaliers killed. He knew that, if he killed one, another one as good as the former would be brought back in place; and for this, he did not want to lose Assassins where there is nothing to be gained.”⁵²

Born as a rebel movement in the very heart of the Sunni establishment and perfectly suited to its environment, Nizari Isma‘ilism launched a serious threat to the established order. Although considered both a religious and political danger by the powers of the day, the Nizaris failed to overthrow their rivals. They were reduced over time to one faction among many on the complex and unsettled, always moving, chessboard of Persia and Syria. Their influence and their methods of struggle proved ineffective against the two conquering powers that swamped the Middle East in the second half of the thirteenth century. The Nizaris were eliminated from Persia by the Mongols and then dispersed after the capture and destruction of Alamut in 1256. In Syria, the Mamluks forced them to submit once and for all in 1271. They were reduced to being used for a short while by Sultan Baybars for one-off assassinations. In any event, the Nizaris had lost their substance and their way.

Their terrifying reputation nevertheless outlasted them. While the account of Marco Polo at the very end of the thirteenth century proved to be the most accomplished mythification of the Old Man of the Mountain, of his gardens of Paradise, and of the mystical Assassins, Guillaume Adam warned King Philippe VI of France, in 1332, in his treatise on how to recapture the Holy Land:

I name in sixth place the Assassins, cursed and to be avoided, who sell themselves, who lust after human blood, who kill an innocent for a certain price and do not take into account salvation of the soul. They transfigure themselves into angels of light, as the devil does, when they adopt the gestures, language, lifestyle and facts of various nations, people and specific individuals; thus covered with sheep skins, they

kill before being recognized. . . . And the only cure that I know for the guard and the protection of the king is that in his household, for whatever service, however fleeting or vile it may be, we do not receive anybody except those whose country, place, lineage, condition and person are completely known.⁵³

Hasan-i Sabbah doubtless never imagined that the reputation of his *ḥida'iyin* would have such an impact: despite the disappearance or withdrawal of the Nizari communities, the myth of the Assassins not only remained very much alive in Europe, but it still represented a tangible threat, as we see from the treatise of Guillaume Adam. His recommendations let us measure the extent to which the strategy of political assassination and its psychological impact, developed by Hasan-i Sabbah 250 years earlier, was effective.

Conclusion

As described throughout this chapter, the Sicarii and the Assassins were each unique in their respective eras. No other groups of their times used the tactic of assassination so extensively nor promoted terror so actively. Historians today can endlessly debate whether these two groups warrant being called terrorists, but in an important way, the application of such terminology is beside the point. With the invention of the word “terrorism” and the recognition of it as a distinct category of violence still hundreds of years away, its invocation in the first and twelfth centuries cannot help but be anachronistic. After all, the application of a modern rhetorical device to pre-modern behaviors and actors unavoidably calls forth misleading connotations. Nonetheless, the identification of key similarities between the Sicarii, the Assassins, and many modern terrorists is illuminating. At the least, it demonstrates that groups could use terror tactics to great effect without modern media, weapons, or ideologies. But the rarity of such tactics in the pre-modern world also suggests that terrorism was still an idea whose time had not quite yet come. That no other groups – at least as far as we know – mimicked the Sicarii or the Assassins reveals the existence of a significant divide between the pre-modern and modern worlds, for, as we know, the sheer mutability and vast applicability of terrorist tactics is one of its more important contemporary hallmarks.

Notes

- 1 Yannick Gautron and Randall D. Law would like to thank Steven Isaac for his invaluable aid in translating the section on the Assassins into English.
- 2 Throughout this chapter, the region is referred to as “Judea” until it was incorporated into a new Roman province in 6 CE, at which time it becomes the Roman province of “Judaea.”
- 3 Josephus, *Jewish War*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray et al. (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press/Loeb Classical Library, 1926–8), 1.127–57, 160–70; and Josephus, *Antiquities*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray et al. (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press/Loeb Classical Library, 1930–65), 14.28–79, 91.
- 4 Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 37–8, 81.
- 5 Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2.223–57, 271–84, 301–9; and Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.
- 6 Josephus, *Jewish War*, 1.3.
- 7 Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2.252–4.
- 8 Morton Smith, “Zealots and Sicarii, Their Origins and Relation,” *Harvard Theological Review* 64, no. 1 (1971): 18; and Solomon Zeitlin, “The Sicarii and Masada,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 57, no. 4 (1967): 263–4. Reference is made to the Sicarii in a select number of Talmudic passages.

- For examples, see *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* and the *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*. In *Jewish War*, 7.253–74, Josephus makes a deliberate effort to differentiate between the Sicarii and Zealots by describing each separately. For further insight into the distinctions between “Zealots” and “Sicarii” see the chapter, “Fourth Philosophy, Sicarii, Zealots,” in Richard A. Horsley and John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999); and David M. Rhoads’ balanced assessment in “Zealots” in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:1043–54.
- 9 Mark A. Brighton, *The Sicarii in Josephus’s Judean War: Rhetorical Analysis and Historical Observations* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 148–9.
 - 10 Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2.254–7.
 - 11 *Ibid.*, 2.240, 256; and Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.164–5.
 - 12 Brighton, *Sicarii in Josephus*, 144; and Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.186.
 - 13 Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.210.
 - 14 Josephus, *Jewish War*, 7.254. The Latin term *sicarius* (Gr. σικάριος) is commonly used in Roman sources to identify an assassin or murderer. A notable example of such use is the *Lex cornelia de sicariis et veneficis* [Cornelian Law of Assassins and Poisoners] (*Institutes* 4.18.5 and *Digesta* 48, Title 8). This law was enacted in 81 BCE by the dictator Lucius Cornelius Sulla.
 - 15 Richard A. Horsley, “The Sicarii: Ancient Jewish ‘Terrorists,’” *Journal of Religion* 59, no. 4 (1979): 439–41; and Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 44.
 - 16 Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2.433–8.
 - 17 *Ibid.*, 2.118; and Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.4.
 - 18 Josephus, *Jewish War*, 4.398–405.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, 4.323–6.
 - 20 Tacitus, *Annals*, trans. J. Jackson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press/Loeb Classical Library, 1925–37), 2–4, 14.29–39; and Tacitus, *Histories*, trans. C. H. Moore (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press/Loeb Classical Library, 1925–37), 4–5.24.
 - 21 Josephus, *Jewish War*, 7.254–5.
 - 22 The Greek word Josephus selects to use in 7.255 is ἀλλοφύλοι, *allophyloi*, “foreigners” (literally, “of another tribe”).
 - 23 David C. Rapoport, “Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions,” *American Political Science Review* 78, no. 3 (1984): 669; and Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 37, 81–5. Aside from allusions in Josephus, evidence for the prevalence of apocalyptic and messianic–eschatological influences in Judaism before the First Roman–Jewish War can be found in the corpus of intertestamental literature from the period. For examples, see the books of Ethiopic Enoch and 2 Esdras.
 - 24 Josephus, *Jewish War*, 7.409–17, 436–50.
 - 25 ISIS is also sometimes identified by government, international aid, and media sources as the Islamic State (IS) or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). For more on ISIS, see Chapter 22 by Daveed Gartenstein-Ross on the history of al-Qaeda in this volume.
 - 26 Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 129.
 - 27 Juwayni, *The History of the World-Conqueror*, trans. John Andrew Boyle (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 2:676–7. For more on the term *fida’i*, see later in this chapter.
 - 28 Nizam al-Mulk, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings*, trans. Hubert Darke (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), 193.
 - 29 *Ibid.*, 238.
 - 30 Al-Amir, *Al-Hidaya al-Amiriyya*, trans. A. A. A. Fyzee (Calcutta: P. Knight, 1938).
 - 31 Franz Rosenthal, *The Herb: Hashish versus Medieval Muslim Society* (Leyde: E. J. Brill, 1971).
 - 32 For more on the Kharijites, see Chapter 17 by John Calvert on the origins of modern Islamism and salafi jihadism.
 - 33 Lewis, *The Assassins*, 125–7.
 - 34 Rachid al-Din, *Jami al-Tawarikh; qismat-i Isma’iliyyan*, ed. Muhammad Taqi Danichpazhuh and Muhammad Mudarrisi Zanjani (Teheran, 1960), 110. Translation by Yannick Gautron.
 - 35 Lewis, *The Assassins*, 127.
 - 36 Kamal al-Din, “Extraits de la chronique d’Alep par Kemal al-Din,” in *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades. Historiens orientaux* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1884), 3:654. Translation by Yannick Gautron.

- 37 Wladimir Ivanov, "An Ismaili Poem in Praise of Fidawis," *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 14 (1938): 66.
- 38 Lewis, *The Assassins*, 127.
- 39 Ivanov, "An Ismaili Poem," 67.
- 40 Al-Dahabi, *Kūtab duwal al-Islam*, ed. and trans. Arlette Nègre (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1979), 93. Translation by Yannick Gautron.
- 41 Ibn al-Qalanisi, *Damas de 1075 à 1154*, ed. and trans. Roger Le Tourneau (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1952), 153. Al-Afdal was assassinated in 1121 by order of the Fatimid caliph, but the Assassins were accused of it. Translation by Yannick Gautron.
- 42 Ibn al-Qalanisi, *Damas*, 167. Translation by Yannick Gautron.
- 43 Benjamin de Tudèle, *Les voyageurs juifs du XIII^e siècle: Benjamin de Tudèle*, ed. and trans. Haïm Harboun (Aix-en-Provence: Massoreth, 1998), 209–10.
- 44 Burchard de Strasbourg, *Itinera Hierosolymitana cruce signatorum*, ed. Sabino Sandoli (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1980), 2:407.
- 45 Arnold de Lübeck, "Chronica Slavorum," in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptorum* (Hanover, 1884), 21:178–9.
- 46 Lewis, *The Assassins*, 8.
- 47 Matthieu Paris, *Grande Chronique de Matthieu Paris*, trans. A. Huillard-Bréholles (Paris: Paulin, 1840), 2, 207–9.
- 48 Charles E. Nowell, "The Old Man of the Mountain," *Speculum* 22, no. 4 (1947): 510.
- 49 "Chronica Minor Auctore Minorita Erphodiensi," in *Monumenta Germaniae Scriptorum* (Leipzig, 1925), 24:200.
- 50 "L'Estoire de Eracles Empereur," in *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades: Historiens occidentaux* (Paris, 1859), 2:210 and 230–1.
- 51 F. M. Chambers, "The Troubadours and the Assassins," *Modern Language Notes* 64 (1949): 245–51.
- 52 Jean de Joinville, *Vie de Saint Louis*, ed. and trans. Jacques Monfrin (Paris: Garnier, 1995), 222.
- 53 Guillaume Adam, "Directorium ad passagium faciendum," in *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades: Documents Arméniens* (Paris, 1906), 2:496–7.

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