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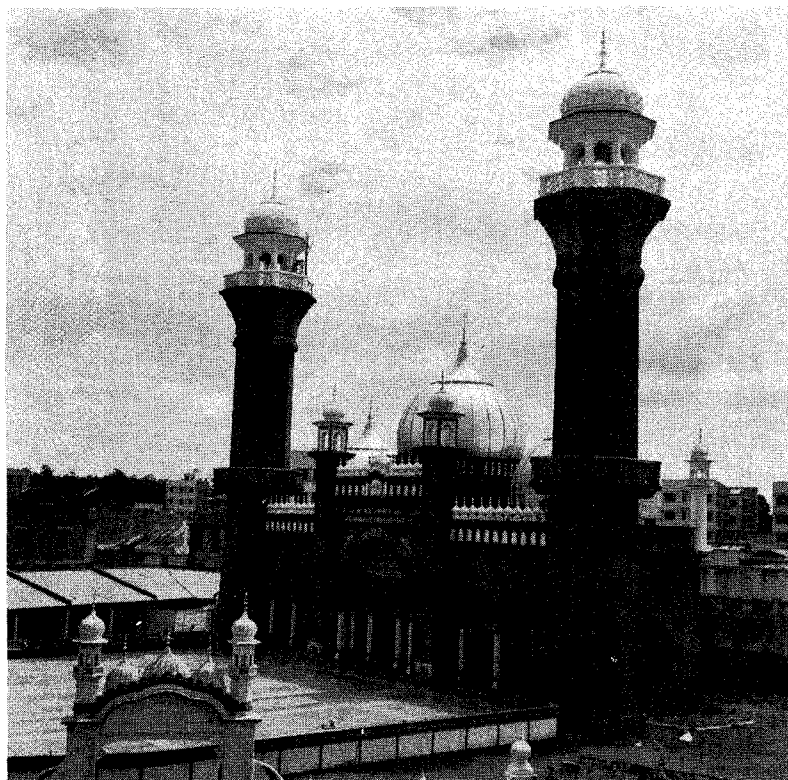
DER - 31 & 32  
Islam in Kenya  
Introduction

November 26, 1954  
c/o Barclays Bank  
Queensway  
Nairobi, Kenya  
(Delayed for revision)

Mr. Walter S. Rogers  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
522 Fifth Avenue  
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

All over the continent of Africa, from Morocco and Egypt to Zanzibar, Cape Town and Nigeria, millions of people respond each day to a ringing cry heard across half the world for 1300 years. La ilaha illa-'llah: Muhammadun rasulu-'llah. There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his



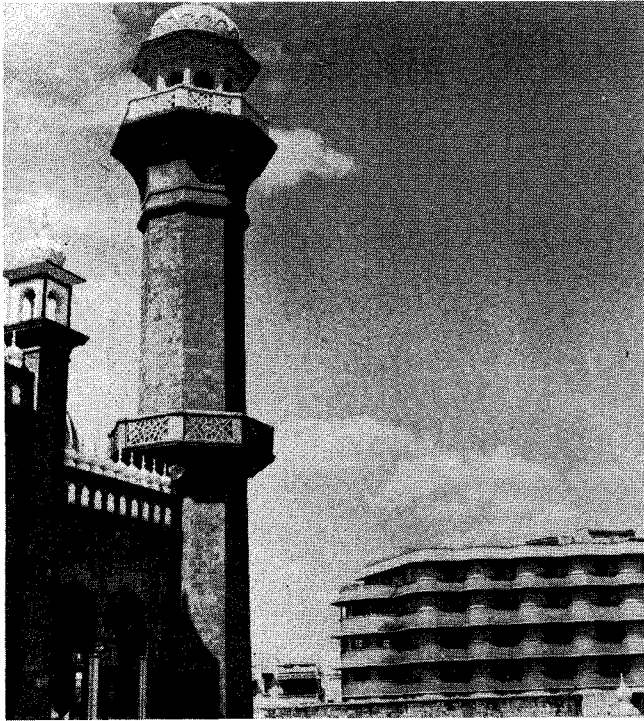
Jamia (Sunni) Mosque,  
Nairobi

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Prophet. By these words, Muslims declare their faith in the teachings of the Arabian Prophet. The religion was born in Arabia and the words of its declaration of faith are in Arabic, but Islam has been accepted by many peoples of various races, nationalities and religious backgrounds, including a diverse number in Kenya. In this colony there are African, Indian, Arab, Somali, Comorian and other Muslims---even a few Englishmen---and they meet each Friday for formal worship in mosques in Nairobi, Mombasa, Lamu and Kisumu, in the African Reserves and across the arid wastes of the northern frontier desert.

Considerable attention has been given to the role of Christianity in Kenya and elsewhere in East Africa, and rightly so. But it is sometimes overlooked that another great monotheistic religion is at work as well. Islam arose

later in history than Christianity, but it was firmly planted in Kenya centuries before the first Christian missionaries stepped ashore at Mombasa. The port of Mombasa itself once was part of a Muslim Sultanate. Today there probably are more followers of Christ than followers of Muhammad in Kenya, but the number of Muslims still is considerable. Islam is the only rival of Christianity for the faith of the pagan African today.



The East and West...  
Jamia Mosque minaret  
with modern office  
building in background

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As a religion, Islam has striking similarities to Christianity. In his youth, Muhammad had been influenced by Christians and Jews in his native Mecca. Many Biblical figures appear in the Koran (it means "Discourse"). Adam, Noah, Moses, John the Baptist, Jesus and Mary are all mentioned, some a number of times. Christ is recognized by Muslims as one of a series of prophets, but they add that Muhammad was the last and greatest of them. Both Muhammad and Jesus are regarded as mortal men, though divinely-inspired. The religious message of the Koran is a lengthy one, but its chief point is one with which many Christians would agree: man must surrender himself to the will of God.

In Kenya as elsewhere, Islam has a strong secular side. Muslims are presented with a large number of laws governing marriage, divorce, inheritance, charity, diet and countless other matters. Kenya Muslims are guided by these laws, though in varying degrees, every day of their

lives. Like Christianity, Islam is split into a number of competing denominations or sects and several are found in Kenya: Sunnis, Ibadis, Ismailis, Musteallians, Ithna 'Ashariyas and Ahmadiyyas.

This and the following newsletter are devoted to some observations on Islam in Kenya. The first deals with one Muslim denomination here, the Khoja Ismailis or followers of the Aga Khan. They are far from orthodox in their approach to Islam (though they do have a rigid orthodoxy of their own). But they merit attention as they are the best organized of all the many Muslims here.

The second newsletter is devoted to a general review of Islam in the colony. Its expansion and current position are discussed, various Muslim denominations in the colony are described and other observations are made.

Sincerely,

David E. Reed

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DER - 31  
Islam in Kenya  
The Khoja Ismailis

November 26, 1954  
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Mr. Walter S. Rogers  
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522 Fifth Avenue  
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Dear Mr. Rogers:

There is an old story that points up the peculiarities of the Ismaili sect of Islam. A Frenchman, touring Syria, came upon a wayside shrine and found a group of people busy at their devotions before a photograph of a man. "Why I know him," the Frenchman exclaimed. "That's the Aga Khan of the Paris Ritz. I've often met him at the races."

One of the worshippers turned around and snapped: "Why shouldn't a god go to the races if he wishes?"

The Aga Khan, who is regarded by his followers as the 48th Iman in direct descent from Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, has for more than half a century been a familiar figure at the race tracks, casinos, palaces and salons of Europe. He rules not an inch of territory, but his word is law to millions of people in Asia, Africa and the Near East. His personal fortune, eagerly supplied by his followers, is said to run into millions of pounds sterling. One story---vigorously denied---is that his bath water has been bottled for sale to his enthusiastic followers.

A personal friend of all English monarchs since Queen Victoria, the Aga Khan is the former father-in-law of Rita Hayworth. A one-time president of the League of Nations, he has carried away several winner's cups from the annual Derby in England. He claims as his ancestors a dynasty that once ruled Egypt and he regards himself as the descendant of Persian fanatics who are credited with introducing the word "assassin" into our languages.

"The Aga Khan tells us, 'Don't do as I do; do as I tell you,'" a young Ismaili in Nairobi said to me. Not only do his followers hold him in unquestioned reverence, but they are quick to do his bidding. They live under two governments, one the civil government and one the shadow government presided over by their portly Imam.

Whatever the dispute---marital, one of inheritance or a feud between Sadruddin and Hassan---the case goes before the Aga Khan's agents and few followers would ever go against a final decision by the Imam. When the Aga Khan goes off to France or England, they know they may not see him again for years, if ever. But they continue to obey his orders and to cough up sizeable portions of their incomes in the hope of being allowed to weigh him in precious metals if and when he returns.

The origins of this movement are just as curious as its present position. A major schism gradually took shape in the Muslim world in the decades following the death of Muhammad in A. D. 632. It had

other causes originally, but eventually sharp doctrinal differences crystallized.

One group, called the Shias, maintained that Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law and cousin, should have become his successor. Ali had finally become the fourth Caliph, or secular and spiritual leader of the Muslim world, but was slain five years later.

The Shias reject the orthodox or Sunni Caliphs and continue to regard Ali and his descendants as the only rightful successors to the Prophet. For the Shias, Ali and his descendants are the Imams--- "leaders" and roughly equivalent to Caliphs. The Shias have invested the Imams and even Ali's wife and sons with a degree of divinity. The Sunnis say: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his Prophet," and to this the Shias add: "and Ali the companion of Muhammad is the Vicar of God."

A quarrel over the succession to the Imamate occurred at the time of Ismail, a later Imam. One group of Shias backed Ismail's brother as Imam. The present day followers of the Aga Khan were among those who sided with Ismail and it is to him that they owe their name.

One of Ismail's successors established the Fatimite Caliphate in Egypt in the 10th century. That dynasty owed its name to Fatima, the wife of Ali and daughter of Muhammad. In Egypt, Ismailism incorporated Egyptian ideas into its thought. It also has borrowed from Zoroastrianism and Hinduism. The Fatimite Caliphate was overthrown by Saladin of Crusades fame.

After the destruction of the Fatimite Caliphate, Ismailism continued to flourish, but had to go underground due to orthodox persecution. Ismailis adopted the practice of tadaya or dissimulation of one's true feelings so as to avoid inviting persecution. Ismailism remains even in Kenya today something of a secret society.

Egypt was not the only Ismaili stronghold. In 1090 of our era, an Ismaili fanatic established a mountain redoubt in Persia called Alamut---The Vultures' Nest. From there his underlings carried out a reign of terror against the non-Ismaili Persian rulers. They are said to have been drunk from hashish and that the word assassin derived from this. As one of the commanders of Alamut was named Hasan, it also is suggested that "assassins" resulted from the use of Hasnins, or followers of Hasan. Whatever the origin of the word, Ismailism has been marked through the centuries by violence and murder. It is charged that violence or the threat of it has occurred even in East Africa today.

The fourth commander of Alamut was one who claimed to be a descendant of Ismail. His lineage is considered obscure, but he is regarded as an ancestor of today's Aga Khan. Alamut fell before the Mongols in the 13th century. The next several centuries were to be the "Dark Ages" of Ismailism, with its Imams living more or less in obscurity in Persia.

It took many centuries for Ismailism to reach East Africa, and it was to come through India. Ismaili Imams living in Persia sent missionaries to India during the "Dark Ages" and succeeded in converting numbers of Hindu traders of the Lohana caste several centuries ago.

On conversion they took on the name Khwaaja, which became Khoja and which is said to mean "the honorable or worshipped converts." As with other Hindu converts to Islam, they did not abandon their caste type of living, but continued along caste lines as Khoja Ismailis. Thus Khoja refers to their caste/community---a result of Hindu influence---while Ismailism is their faith---a faith also held by large numbers of people of various nationalities elsewhere in the world. Anyone can become an Ismaili. But it would be difficult, if not impossible, to be accepted into the Khoja Ismaili community unless one were born into it.

Hindu influence is seen in a number of other respects in the Khoja Ismaili community. This is anathema to more orthodox Muslims and one Nairobi Muslim of another Shia faith once declared contemptuously: "They even worship Krishna!"

Various writers have noted that the Ismailis, in addition to practicing tagiya, used to win converts, whether they were Christians, Jews or other Muslims, by the technique of agreeing with them on all of their beliefs. The disarmed listeners would then be told: "Now, Ismailism goes beyond that to the deeper meaning."

Accordingly it is said that an early missionary to the Hindus of India, Pir Sadruddin, would shake his head in agreement while the Hindus talked of Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu. Then Pir Sadruddin would proceed to correlate Brahma with Muhammad and Adam with Shiva. Ali, he declared, was the long-expected 10th incarnation of Vishnu!

Little contact seems to have been maintained between the newly-converted Khoja Ismailis and their Imams until the 1840s. Then the present Aga Khan's grandfather, the Aga Khan I, who had been something of a feudal warlord in Persia, was driven out and settled in Bombay. He always hoped to return to Persia some day and depose the King, but the opportunity never presented itself.

In Bombay, the Aga Khan I was welcomed by the Khoja Ismailis. They supplied him with large contributions by way of tithes. At that time, some Khoja Ismailis had already settled in Zanzibar and along the East African coast. They too rallied to their newly-arrived Imam.

Kenya leaders say there are 150,000 Khoja Ismailis today---110,000 of them in India-Pakistan and the remaining 40,000 in East Africa. They estimate that 15,000 are in Kenya. The Khoja Ismailis here and in India-Pakistan seem to be among the most active supporters, if not the most active, of the Ismaili Imams---from the time of the Aga Khan I till today.

The Aga Khan, however, has a large number of followers who are not Khojas. They are found in Persia, throughout Central Asia and in such places as Syria and Burma. Estimates of their numbers vary

considerably. The Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam (\*1) puts the number of Ismailis in the world as something on the order of half a million. Ismaili sources estimate the number at anything up to 20 million. Because of the tradition of taqiya, difficulties have been encountered in enumerating Ismailis in India.

In the past, not much contact existed between these far-flung Ismailis and their Imams in Bombay, but Ismailis say the situation has improved in recent decades. When the East African Khoja Ismailis matched the Aga Khan's bulk in precious metals on two occasions, some non-Khoja Ismailis journeyed here from Syria and Persia for the ceremonies.

Local Khoja Ismailis say to their knowledge there are no non-Khoja Ismailis living in East Africa.

The present Imam, the Aga Khan III, succeeded to the throne on the death of his father in 1885. He was only seven. During his nearly 70 years as Imam, a tremendous organization has been built up among his Khoja Ismailis. Their community organization shows strong Hindu influence on caste lines. In his memoirs, the Aga Khan describes the East African Khoja Ismaili organization as "highly developed and civilized" and says the organizations in India and Pakistan are in a "less developed and looser form." (\*2)

It is often said that the Kenya followers have built up a "government within a government." It begins with the Provincial Councils, of which there are three (Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu). The next step above them is the Supreme Council of Kenya. Above that is the Federal Council for the East African territories.

If Ahamed Mohamed, a Nairobi Ismaili, wants a divorce, he files a complaint with the Nairobi Provincial Council, just as an Englishman would do in a court. A copy of the complaint is sent to the wife and a hearing is set. Then the council, composed of about 20 leading Khoja Ismailis, hears the arguments and hands down a decision.

Should Ahamed be dissatisfied with the ruling, he can appeal to the Supreme Council and then, if he chooses, to the Federal Council for East Africa. A final appeal, should he care to pursue the matter that far, would be to the Imam. There is no appeal from a decision by the Imam.

As Kenya Muslims are free to follow their own marriage and divorce customs, without having to observe English-Christian procedures, Ahamed has no need to confirm the divorce in a British court. As far as British law is concerned, he is not obliged to consult anyone---not even the Ismaili councils.

But as a Khoja Ismaili, he feels bound to seek a decision from the councils and once a final ruling is handed down, he would rarely if ever go against it. If he did, he probably would be ostracized by his community/caste. The power of the councils is backed by the threat of ex-communication. Although an ex-communicated person can be re-admitted to the community, it is said to be a long and expensive process---one that is carefully avoided.

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(\*1) By Gibb et. al., Leiden, 1953.

(\*2) Memoirs, London, 1954.

This power of "the community" is hard for a western observer to understand. It has to be seen against the Hindu caste structure of India. The Hindus here are split into a number of water-tight little compartments from which outsiders are excluded. They are called "communities," but they might just as well be called castes.

Although Islam preaches the one brotherhood of man, the Kenya Muslim Indians are grouped in the same, Hindu-type caste-communities. Then, in addition to the religious tie, a group like the Khoja Ismailis in Kenya are bound together by the fact that most of them are merchants and because they came from the same place in India--- Cutch and Kathiawar in the Gujerat area. In former years there even existed sub-castes on geographical lines. A Khoja Ismaili man whose family came from Kathiawar could not marry a Khoja Ismaili girl whose family came from Cutch. This is rapidly breaking down now.

But the power of "the community" shows no signs of waning significantly. A European might shrug off criticism from other Europeans as "meddling," but an Indian, be he Muslim or Hindu, would worry greatly about criticism from "the community" and always talks of his "duty to the community."

When, as will be discussed later, the Khoja Ismailis were required to sign "loyalty pledges" to the Aga Khan, one young Khoja Ismaili in Nairobi was reluctant to do so. He regarded himself as loyal, but he objected to being required to sign a pledge. Discussing the case, another Indian Muslim, not a Khoja Ismaili, said to me:

"I told him, 'Look, sign that pledge as fast as you can. Do you know what it would mean to be ex-communicated? You would be an outcast from your own people. No one else would have you. You would belong to no community. You would have no friends. You would feel like committing suicide.'"

The young man signed.

The Khoja Ismaili councils are not selected by the community. There are no elections. The Aga Khan appoints the presidents and all the members. Each retiring council suggests double the names required to make up the next council. But the Aga Khan makes the final choice and he has gone outside the suggested names even in picking the presidents.

In some parts of the world, the local leaders of the Ismailis are hereditary. The Aga Khan writes that among his followers in Afghanistan, Russia and Chinese Turkestan, "certain families have been, since their conversion to Islam, administrators and representatives of the Imam. The local leadership passes down in a close connection of kinship from one generation to another. Sometimes it is the hereditary chieftain and occasionally---as in the case of Hunza---the secular king, himself an Ismaili, who is the administrator of the religious brotherhood."\*

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\* Ibid.

Little dissent is tolerated among the followers in Kenya. An example occurred several months ago. Some Khoja Ismailis distributed pamphlets by mail to the community, criticizing the Aga Khan's spending. They said their contributions to the Imam should not be used for buying race horses and other aspects of lavish living. Rita Hayworth's divorce settlement reportedly was mentioned.

The leadership acted quickly. From his villa in France, the Aga Khan demanded that all of his followers here sign "loyalty pledges." They did so. Then the councils met privately to try those suspected of criticizing the Imam. In Nairobi---I have no information on the other councils---the hearings were ex parte as the defendants refused to appear. Some were ex-communicated. An Indian editor of another Shia sect has said he received veiled threats that he might be assassinated for having published details of the affair. The "revolt" appears to be quashed.

"We believe that what the Aga Khan does with our contributions is his business, not ours," one of the men who pronounced the ex-communications in Nairobi said to me.

Khoja Ismaili religious services here are held each Friday, the Muslim day for formal worship, in the Jamat Khana or community hall. They are sometimes referred to as "mosques," but Jamat Khana appears to be the proper name. This is typical of the unorthodox nature of the faith.

There are three Jamat Khanas in Nairobi, with a fourth under construction. Each has a large and ornate throne to be occupied only by the Aga Khan. In his absence, a large photograph of him rests on the throne.

Hollister says the resourceful Ismaili missionary Pir Sadruddin made the transition easy for his intended Khoja converts of several centuries ago by building "temples of Ali"---probably the fore-runners of the Jamat Khanas. "In some of these 'temples' he placed pictures of Ali so that the Hindus might be completely weaned away from their idols and become real followers of Ali. When this had proceeded to a point that lakhs (a large number) of people had joined the secret faith, he gradually taught them other truths."\*

It is difficult to get a good picture of what goes on in a Khoja Ismaili worship service. There still are strong traditions of secrecy. Khoja Ismaili friends tell me that the services are led by a Mukhi. There is no priesthood; the Mukhi is merely a highly-respected citizen. The Koran sometimes is read, though it seems to have less prominence than in the services of other Islamic sects. The Khoja Ismailis gather in the evenings, whereas the orthodox do so at noon. The orthodox face Mecca in their prayers; the Khoja Ismailis do not. The Khoja Ismailis are expected to pray only three times a day, while others do so five times. Prayers seem to be addressed to the Aga Khan, reportedly as a mediator between man and God, and critics say a large part of the time is taken up chanting all the names of the Aga Khan.

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\* Hollister, The Shi'a of India, London, 1953.



The secular side of the Khoja Ismaili movement here is impressive. They operate 104 schools up to the secondary level in East Africa. These are usually built with funds raised by the community, matched on a pound for pound basis by the Aga Khan (and his money in turn comes from their tithes). Government grants and tuition fees take care of the day-to-day expenses. There is an education committee, appointed by the Aga Khan, for each town. The Khoja Ismailis also operate hospitals, maternity homes, orphanages, social clubs and cemeteries.

The community has its own insurance company and it has an investment trust for making loans to Khoja Ismaili businessmen. A building society, designed to enable followers to acquire their own homes on a long-range, low-interest basis, is envisaged.

The investment trust was founded with a grant of £300,000 (\$840,000) from the Aga Khan. That represented his net receipts from being weighed against diamonds in East Africa in 1946. The ceremony commemorated the 60th anniversary of his accession to the Ismaili throne. The building society is to be founded with the £250,000 (\$700,000) that is to be realized from weighing him in platinum. The platinum ceremony was scheduled for last September, but has had to be postponed because of his ill health.

By means of all these various ventures, the Khoja Ismailis are aiming at establishing a strong position for themselves in their adopted home. Side by side with these economic efforts, the Khoja Ismailis strive to continue their friendly relations with the dominant English. This effort takes two forms. One, they are adopting a number of western customs, presumably with the idea of making themselves less distinctive---or less "Indian"---and therefore less objectionable. Secondly, their political orientation is one of strict friendship with the British.

The westernization effort is a result of a decree from the Aga Khan in 1952. He told them that their women should discard the sari and adopt western dresses. Many Khoja Ismaili women here now wear their saris only in the evenings. Some wear them only infrequently---as a formal dress.

One leading Khoja Ismaili said:

"It will take time to get our people to give up wearing saris. After all, they've been wearing them for hundreds of years. But the custom should die out in 10 years' time.

"I, for instance, am not going to buy my wife any more saris. When the ones she now has wear out, she'll have to get along with dresses. If nothing else, I couldn't afford to keep her in two complete wardrobes."

The Aga Khan decreed too that English must be taught to the children. As the Kenya Khoja Ismailis are from Gujerat, Gujerati and related dialects have always been their languages. Now,

English is being taught even at the nursery level in the Khoja Ismaili schools. It is replacing Gujerati as the medium of instruction. The goal is to have English-speaking children arrive for the first day of school.

"We're taught by the Aga Khan that wherever we go, we have to be citizens of the country of our adoption," the leading Khoja Ismaili said. "We must adopt their customs. In Burma, our people are asked to wear Burmese clothing, adopt Burmese names and speak Burmese languages."

Many Khoja Ismailis are beginning to westernize their names, although it is said that this is not the result of an order from the Imam. Young men with, say, the name Janmohamed are beginning to call themselves "John." Others, with names that cannot be Anglicized as easily, just take any name. Sadruddin might become known as "Jimmy."

At the same time, many Khoja Ismailis are dropping the old custom under which there were no family names. If a man was named Ahamed Mohamed, that used to mean "Ahamed son of Mohamed." Ahamed's son would be Hassan Ahamed---Hassan son of Ahamed. But now the younger generations are settling on family names. Hassan's descendants would always keep Ahamed as their surname.

It is interesting that the Khoja Ismailis frequently refer to the Aga Khan in conversation by his English title---"His Highness."

The friendly relations between the British and the local Khoja Ismailis are characteristic of all contact between the two. When the Aga Khan's grandfather left Persia in the 1840s, he put his cavalry at the disposal of the British, who were fighting Afghan tribesmen at the time. He later was granted a pension by the British government and the hereditary title of His Highness, which has been passed to his grandson, the present Aga Khan.

In Kenya, one of the most influential Khoja Ismailis, Eboo Pirbhai, has been granted a knighthood. Sir Eboo sits in the Legislative Council as a government nominated member. Another Khoja Ismaili, Ibrahim Nathoo, is Minister for Public Works in the new multi-racial cabinet. He had been elected to Legco on the voting roll for all Indian Muslims. When N. S. Mangat, president of the Hindu-dominated Kenya Indian Congress, let go his famous blast at the Europeans in Kenya a few months ago,\* Ismaili leaders were quick to disassociate themselves from his views. Individual Khoja Ismailis have close friendships with Europeans and often appear at European parties as the only Indians invited. Even the "hard-core" settlers have a good word for them.

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\* See DER - 27.

The Aga Khan says:

"It has been the practice of my ancestors, to which I have strictly adhered, always to advise Ismailis to be absolutely loyal and devoted subjects of the State---whatever its constitution, monarchical or republican---of which they are citizens. Neither my ancestors nor I have ever tried to influence our followers one way or another, but we have told them that the constituted legal authority of any country in which they abide must have their full and absolute loyalty... All my teaching and my guidance for my followers has been in fulfilment of this principle: render unto God the things which are God's and to Caesar those which are Caesar's." \*

One cannot quite believe that the Aga Khan's ancestors at Alamut advised the people to remain loyal to the orthodox rulers of that day---while carrying out a reign of terror against those same rulers---or that the Aga Khan I, in planning to invade Persia and depose the King, was following this principle. But at least it appears to be the policy today.

Like Kenya Muslims in general, the Khoja Ismailis have little in common with the Hindus or their Kenya Indian Congress. Hindu efforts to make common political cause with African nationalists seem to evoke little or no response from the Khoja Ismailis. It is not that they are "anti-African." As one tan-skinned Nairobi follower said, "We're men of color ourselves." They are merchants, dependent partly on African trade. They seem to be ready to compromise any way the wind happens to be blowing. But for the moment it blows from Britain, via the White Highlands.

The Khoja Ismaili leadership steers a straight course of friendship with the European community, but individuals are not immune from the Asian agitation for equal rights. They are kept in line publicly, but many individuals, though friendly with individual Europeans, voice bitter feelings in private about the White Highlands, political representation for Asians and what still exists of the color bar.

Muslim leaders of all denominations here are fond of minimizing denominational differences. But they still exist and the orthodox can be severely critical of Khoja Ismaili practices. In addition to the adulation of the Imam, which the orthodox regard as abhorrent, they criticize the way the Khoja Ismailis ignore some of the cardinal duties of the Muslim faith.

Muslims are enjoined to try to make at least one pilgrimage to Mecca in their lifetimes. Although individual Khoja Ismailis may make the pilgrimage if they desire, there is no obligation. Neither is there any obligation to make a pilgrimage to the tomb of Hussein, a son of Ali, at Kerbela, Iraq. It has become a Shia shrine. A few Khoja Ismailis do visit Kerbela---if they're

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\* Op. Cit.

in the neighborhood for some other reason, as one follower put it--- but it is not encouraged. "We have our Imam with us. Why should we go and pay homage to another?" he added.

The orthodox abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset during the month of Ramadan, but the Khoja Ismailis do not observe this fast. "There used to be medical reasons for it, back in the days when food was impure, but there's no reason at all these days," an informant said.

The Khoja Ismailis do not follow the Muslim law of inheritance either. Under it, female survivors are always entitled to a share in an estate. A man cannot will more than one-third of his property---the rest must go to his family. The Khoja Ismailis will as much as they like and females are not always in for a share. This has given rise to the quip that they are "Muslims while they live and Hindus when they die."

In 1847, the Aga Khan I, newly-arrived in India, tried without success to get the Khoja Ismailis to drop this Hindu custom and accept the Muslim law. Hollister says that in 1930 a suit was filed against the present Aga Khan which brought up the whole matter again. A follower had willed a large sum of money to the Aga Khan, leaving only a small amount for his female survivors. The plaintiff sought to break the will, but he was unsuccessful. "On this occasion the influence of the Aga Khan was against Muslim law, and in favor of 'custom,' which was Hindu practice," says Hollister.\*

The attitude of the Ismailis in general toward the laws of Islam is characteristic of the whole Shia movement. As it was persecuted by the orthodox Sunnis in the early days, it took on the flavor of a protest against established order. It had considerable success in acquiring followings among the conquered populations in the old Arab Empire. Shia teachers told them that laws were not absolute, that they were created by those in power to keep the masses down. The conquered, chafing under Arab taxes and Arab rule, took to these teachings readily.

The Aga Khan writes:

"Ismailism has survived because it has always been fluid. Rigidity is contrary to our whole way of life and outlook. There have really been no cut and dried rules, even the set of regulations known as the Holy Laws are directions as to method and procedure and not detailed orders about results to be obtained."\*

But even still, Ismailism has erected an orthodoxy of its own and two pages later the Aga Khan says:

"Our religion is our religion, you can either believe in it or you do not. You can leave a faith but you cannot, if you do not accept its tenets, remain within it and claim to 'reform' it..."

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\* Op. Cit.

About a score of people out of many millions---a small group in Karachi and in India---pretended to be Ismailis but called themselves 'reformers.' The true Ismailis immediately ex-communicated them. There has never been any question of changing the Ismaili faith, that faith has remained the same and must remain the same."

Sunnis and other non-Ismaili Muslims in Kenya criticize aspects of Ismaili thought, but still the Aga Khan has an influence over Muslims of all shades of belief. He is the only powerful and well-known leader within the wide ranks of Islam. Non-Ismailis here sometimes look to him in a vague sort of way for leadership in secular issues.

Another factor that promotes him as a leader of all Muslims is his money. "He'll never pass up a good cause; naturally that helps his standing with all of us," an Arab Sunni said. The Aga Khan has made many substantial contributions to educational and other institutions for the benefit of all Muslims. One such donation, of £100,000 (\$280,000), helped to build a Muslim technical school in Mombasa which now is run by the government.

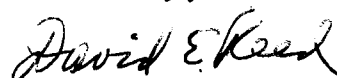
The Aga Khan is 77 years old and ailing. In Kenya, the Khoja Ismailis are engaging in hushed speculation about his successor. Aly Khan, Rita Hayworth's ex-husband, is the Aga Khan's eldest son and has been regarded by some as the heir to the throne.

But some Khoja Ismailis here privately voice dissatisfaction over the idea of Aly succeeding as Imam. They feel he is too much of a playboy. It is said that once, when Aly visited Zanzibar, a Khoja Ismaili editor, hard pressed to find something about which to praise Aly to the skies, finally had to settle on describing him as an outstanding race car driver and horseman.

It is the Aga Khan's prerogative to name his successor and, according to a recent Reuter report, he recently gave Aly a strong reminder to that effect. The report said that Aly had "announced" in Cairo that he would succeed his father. According to the report, the Aga Khan was angry with Aly for making this pronouncement and the aged Imam stated emphatically that he and he alone will name his successor.

It seems that the successor does not have to be his eldest son. Kenya followers say the Aga Khan has declared that he could pick any of four persons---Aly, his other son Sadruddin, or one of his two grandsons. Perhaps, the local Khoja Ismailis say, the Aga Khan will designate Sadruddin, who is described as "serious-minded," as the Aga Khan IV and 49th Imam of the Shia Imami Ismailis.

Sincerely,



David E. Reed