

ALAMUT

Vez med Slovenijo in Iranom

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ALAMUT

A Bridge Between Slovenia and Iran

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الموت

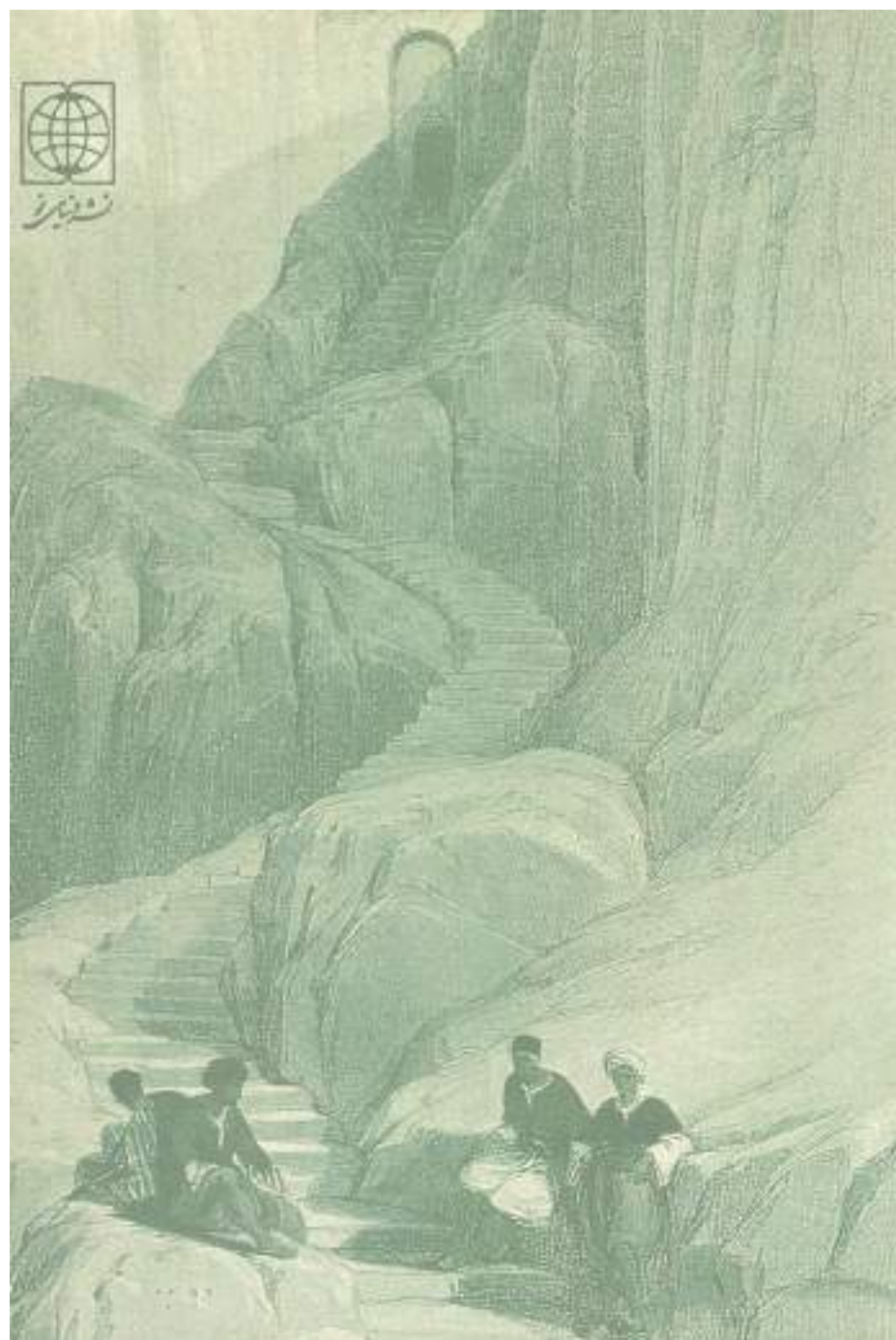
ایران و اسلوونیا میان پلی



Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia in Tehran



سازمان اسناد و کتابخانه ملی
جمهوری اسلامی ایران



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project "Alamut - a timeless link between Slovenia and Iran" would not have been possible without the help and support of Slovenian Embassies around the world.

We would like to express sincere thanks to our Ambassadors and diplomats, who had searched, with a great enthusiasm, for the Alamut book in the languages from the countries where they represent Slovenia. We have received translations of the novel from Ankara, Lisbon, Madrid, Sofia, Paris, Trieste, Belgrade, Munich, Budapest, Skopje, Prague, Tokyo, Zagreb, Helsinki, Bratislava and Cairo.

Special place in our Library and our hearts has a version in Slovenian and translation in Farsi language.

On my personal note, I express sincere gratitude to Alenka Žigon at the Protocol department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia.

*H.E. Kristina Radej
Ambassador
Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia in Tehran*

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ALAMUT

Alamut is a novel by Vladimir Bartol, first published in 1938 in Slovenian, dealing with the story of Hassan-i Sabbah and the Hashshashin, and named after their Alamut fortress (today's in Northern Iran).

Alamut takes place in 11th Century Persia, in the fortress of Alamut, where self-proclaimed prophet Hasan ibn Sabbah is setting up his mad but brilliant plan to rule the region with a handful elite fighters who are to become his "living daggers." By creating a virtual paradise at Alamut, filled with beautiful women, lush gardens, wine and hashish, Sabbah is able to convince his young fighters that they can reach paradise if they follow his commands. With parallels to Osama bin Laden, Alamut tells the story of how Sabbah was able to instill fear into the ruling class by creating a small army of devotees who were willing to kill, and be killed, in order to achieve paradise. Believing in the supreme Ismaili motto "Nothing is true, everything is permitted," Sabbah wanted to "experiment" with how far he could manipulate religious devotion for his own political gain through appealing to what he called the stupidity and gullibility of people and their passion for pleasure and selfish desires.

The novel focuses on Sabbah as he unveils his plan to his inner circle, and on two of his young followers — the beautiful slave girl Halima, who has come to Alamut to join Sabbah's paradise on earth, and young ibn Tahir, Sabbah's most gifted fighter. As both Halima and ibn Tahir become disillusioned with Sabbah's vision, their lives take unexpected turns.

Alamut was originally written in 1938 as an allegory to Mussolini's fascist state. In the 1960's it became a cult favorite throughout Tito's Yugoslavia, and in the 1990s, during the Balkan's War, it was read as an allegory of the region's strife and became a bestseller in Germany, France and Spain. Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, the book once again took on a new life, selling more than 20,000 copies in a new Slovenian edition, and being translated around the world in more than 19 languages including Czech (1946), Serbian (1954), French (1988), Spanish (1989), Italian (1989), German (1992), Turkish, Persian (1995), Arabic, Greek, Korean and Slovak. More recently it has been translated into Hebrew (2003), English (2004), Hungarian (2005) and Finnish (2008).



VLADIMIR BARTOL, THE AUTHOR OF ALAMUT

Vladimir Bartol was born on 24 February 1903 (in the same year as George Orwell) in the village of Sv. Ivan (St. John) near Trieste as a son of Gregor Bartol, a post office clerk, and of writer Marica Bartol-Nadlisek. He was their third child out of seven. Both his parents were extremely tolerant and broadly liberal and they offered their children extensive education. His mother introduced her son to painting, and his father to biology. With adequate stimulation, various horizons opened for young Vladimir. He always described himself in his autobiographic short stories as an oversensitive and slightly odd child with rich fantasy. He was interested in

many things: biology and philosophy, psychology, art, and of course in theatre and literature. As a scientist, he collected and researched butterflies.

Vladimir Bartol began his elementary and secondary schooling in Trieste and concluded it in Ljubljana. Afterwards, he enrolled at the University of Ljubljana to study biology and philosophy and with special attention researched the work of Sigmund Freud. He graduated in 1925 and continued with his studies at Sorbonne in Paris (1926 - 1927), for which he obtained scholarship. In 1928 he served the army in Petrovaradin in today's Serbia. From 1933 to 1934, he lived in Belgrade, where he edited the Slovenian Belgrade Weekly. Afterwards, he returned to Ljubljana where he lived as a freelance writer until 1941. After World War II, he moved to his hometown Trieste, where he spent a whole decade from 1946 to 1956. Later he became an associate member of Slovenian Academy of Sciences And Arts, which he worked for until his death on 12 September 1967 in Ljubljana.

V L A D I M I R B A R T O L

ALAMUT

ROMAN

1938

ZALOZBA MODRA PTICA V LJUBLJANI

Manuscript

MANUSCRIPT

Vladimir Bartol first started to conceive the novel in the early 1930s, when he lived in Paris. In the French capital, he met with the Slovene literary critic Josip Vidmar, who introduced him to the story of Hassan-i-Sabbah. A further stimulation for the novel came from the assassination of King Alexander I of Yugoslavia perpetrated by Croatian and Bulgarian radical nationalists, on the alleged commission of the Italian Fascist government. When it was originally published, the novel was sarcastically dedicated to Benito Mussolini.

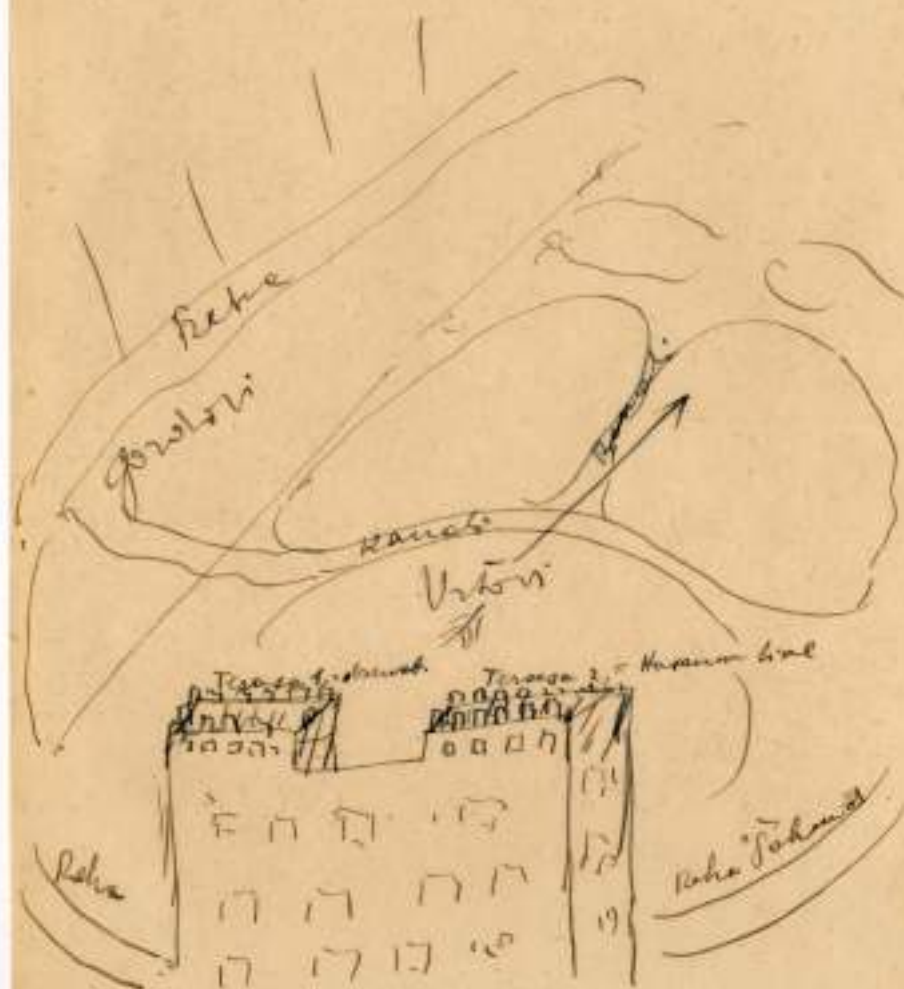
The maxim of the novel is "Nothing is true, everything is permitted".

The novel is a sophisticated allusion to totalitarian regimes that emerged in Europe in 1930's. Bartol wrote in his notes to the second edition of Alamut in 1958 that at some point of writing his characters started talking to him, and live fluid of world historic events infused into his novel: in the north, Hitler with his fanatic SS corps pressed against the border; in the west, Mussolini, who had already subjugated a third of Slovenians and a large part of Croats, threatened Slovenia and the whole Yugoslavia; in the east, mysterious Stalin took over the heritage of Lenin's revolution and began with his monstrous processes. In brief, Alamut is a quite faithful account of the beginning of Ismailis' history in 1092, who established a sect of Assassins led by Hassan Ibn Saba, and at the same time a vivid allusion to the period of terrible dictators between the two wars.

• Wood.

V začetku enajstega stoletja po nastop itelji
je prišel naposled sultan Mahmud in vodilne
garnizije z enega svojih pohodov proti ~~Timhorstanu~~
svoj ^{vojaki} ~~vojaki~~, ki je Katakhat, planje blizu Trana,
(mladega Turka Mihaila, sina Seldžukovca,
Seldžukom je prišel v Perzijo, cel svoj svet
vojakov, ki so izšli iz današnjega Turkestan
in Tatarije v oblasti Buchare. Nasledil je
skraj Zerdasana v bližini mesta Merv in
od tam so vseli kuraki delali kufurke
pohode na vse strani. Poročilo je prišlo
sultanu, da je njegov polbrat, deček
svojega in svoje vdovine najhujša sovra-
nika. Ko je umrl, se je v prebostje ravnal,
da ^{se} ~~prej~~ ^{bi} Turke koncu gladno in upogonega
vile.

Kaj po njegovu smislu je ultralevo politikal
v Parizu je več svojih rojakov. T ugrini so
s svojimi brati in sestro je prenapel skakati
dove naslednike, predel^{male} / proti njemu in
ml. tanz oblast Davidson ter uaredit v dolo.



186. IX. 36. 4.

Pozdrav na prahu Alamute

(Šik al dičbal.)

Davide Mussolinijsa *

Omnia in numero et mensura.

Nič mi venično, vse je dovršeno.

Pravni icedi shte Tunastev.

(Bai)

Ulojsta shte barvniur (Arasinos):

Pradam te: Ali vsi, zahaj je Isiduna (Bai prapad)
maj trojica ^{med} vsi vladayer, ki so ledaj bi;
to in ledaj bodo na senji? *

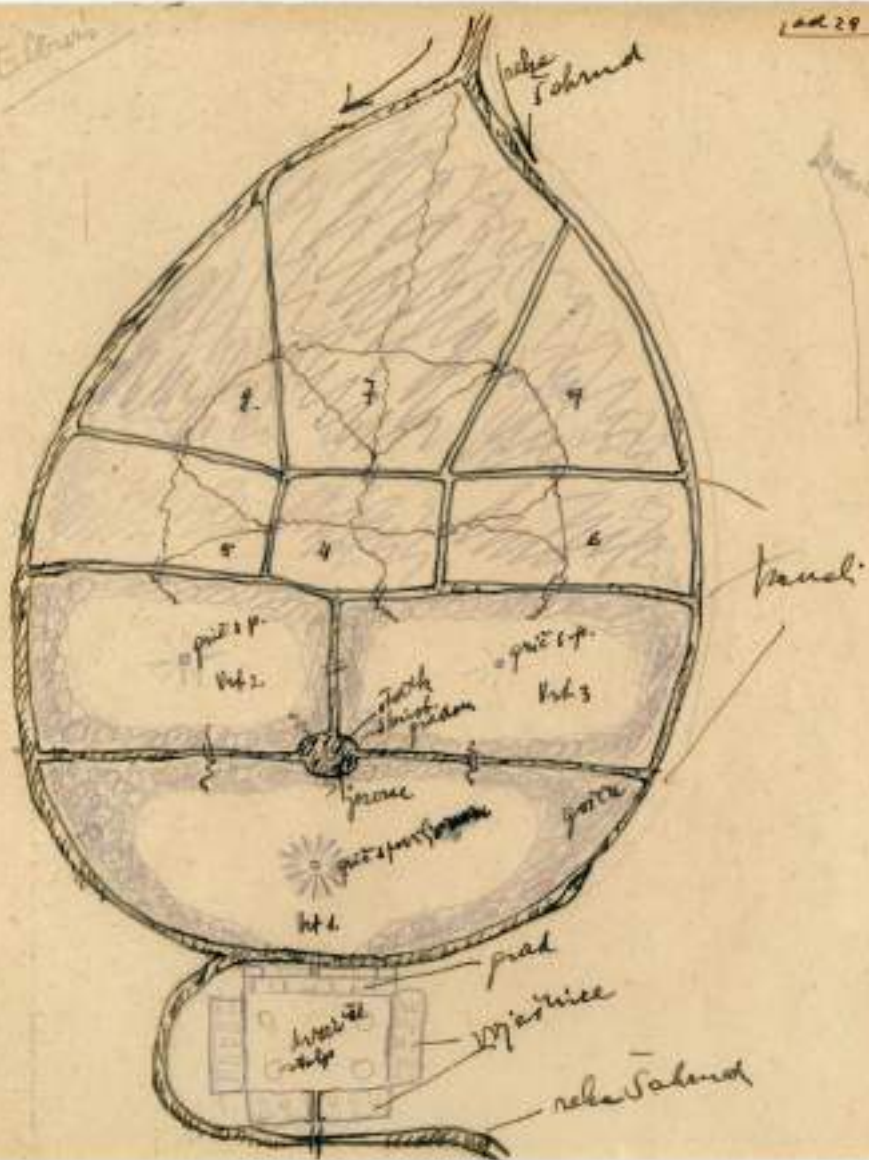
(Fadun)

Tratovci se: Kler ima kofni, ki so lla pa nata
+ raj.

a) Plot shtinčuna manovranta
s feldain, da amari kofa shtinčuna

Cellulose

ad 29



Against Ideologies

AGAINST IDEOLOGIES: VLADIMIR BARTOL AND *ALAMUT*

Vladimir Bartol (1903–1967) wrote *Alamut*, which remains his only book of any significant renown, in the peaceful seclusion of a small, baroque town nestled in the foothills of the Slovenian Alps, over the course of about nine months in 1938. As he worked on an early draft, barely thirty miles to the north Austria was forcibly annexed to Nazi Germany. Fifty miles to the west, just over another border, Italy's Fascists regularly hounded the large ethnic Slovenian minority of the Adriatic seacoast town of Trieste, and were already looking to extend their holdings into the Slovenian and Croatian regions of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. A few hundred miles to the north and east, in the Soviet Union, Stalin's bloodiest purges had reached their high tide, claiming hundreds of thousands of victims, most of whom met their fate in dark cellars with a single bullet to the back of the head. Amidst this turmoil and menace, Slovenia and its parent country of Yugoslavia were, for the time being, an island of relative tranquility. If the book that Bartol wrote in these circumstances proved to be an escape from the mass political movements, charismatic leaders, and manipulative ideologies that were then coming to rule Europe, it was also a profound meditation on them.

Most of all, *Alamut* was and is simply a great read—imaginative, erudite, dynamic and humorous, a well-told tale set in an exotic time and place, yet populated by characters with universally recognizable ambitions, dreams and imperfections. Both at home and abroad, it continues to be perhaps the most popular book that Slovenia has ever produced, with recent translations of *Alamut* having become bestsellers in Germany, France and Spain. But despite its surface appearance as popular literature, *Alamut* is also a finely wrought, undiscovered minor masterpiece which offers the reader a wealth

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of meticulously planned and executed detail and broad potential for symbolic, intertextual and philosophical interpretation.

Bartol, himself an ethnic Slovene from Trieste, studied in Paris and Ljubljana, eventually settling in the Slovenian capital to pursue a literary career. During his studies in Paris in 1927, a fellow Slovene who knew of Bartol's ambitions as a writer recommended that he draw on the episode of the "Old Man of the Mountain" from *The Travels of Marco Polo* as material for a short story or novel. This tale, recounted to Marco Polo as he progressed along the Silk Road through Iran, had to do with a powerful local sectarian warlord who supposedly used hashish and a secret bower of kept maidens to dupe young men into believing that he had the power to transport them to paradise and bring them back to earth at will. Thus winning the youths' fanatic loyalty, he was able to dispatch them to any corner of the world on suicidal missions of political assassinations that served to extend his power and influence. Bartol took the subject matter to heart and during the next ten years did extensive research into the broader historical background of the tale while inventing a novelistic plot and structure of his own. Completing the novel became his passion, his reason for being. In his diary he pleaded with the fates to let him live to finish the book and deliver it safely into the printer's hands. After a long gestation of ten years, the novel finally took shape on paper in the course of four successive drafts during those intense, secluded months that Bartol spent in the town of Kamnik. By all accounts, Bartol was radiantly happy during this period, just as we might imagine a person who knows he's creating a masterpiece should be.

Unfortunately, the timing of this masterpiece's appearance in the world was less than perfect. *Alamut*'s trajectory was interrupted first by the German and Italian annexation of Slovenia from 1941 to 1945, then by the literary ideologies of Tito-led Communist Yugoslavia, where for some years the book was seen as a threat. What's more, its subject matter and style were completely at variance with the dominant trends in Slovenian literature both before and after World War II. Writers of small, linguistically isolated nations often have an overwhelming need to write about life in that particular small nation, perhaps as a way of helping to validate and reinforce the nation's very existence. Because there was nothing identifiably Slovenian about *Alamut*, except for its language, his fellow writers took to characterizing Bartol as "a mistake in the Slovenian genetic code." Here was an adventure novel set in northwestern Iran, written in places to resemble *Thousand and One Nights*, and centered around the deep tensions between the indigenous Pahlavi-speaking Shiite Muslim inhabitants of the region and their Seljuk Turkish Sunni Muslim overlords—a thoroughly readable and well-researched novel that used a simple prose style to depict colorful settings and develop a suspenseful plot, rather than the usual tale of tensions among Slovenian peas-

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ants, landowners and townspeople. Bartol himself told of being approached on the street years later by one of his old schoolmates, who told him, "I read your translation and really enjoyed it." "What translation?" Bartol replied. "That fat novel, the one that was written by some English or Indian author," the man explained. "Do you mean *Alawut*?" Bartol asked. "I wrote that." The man laughed at this and waved dismissively, "Go on, get out of here. You can't fool me." And then he walked away. Ordinary readers found it inconceivable that a Slovenian could develop a story so completely outside of their own historical experience—it had to have been written by a foreigner. Bartol himself saw the guild of Slovenian writers as divided into two categories: the nationalists, who were in the majority and expressed what he called "the anguished lament of their own time," and the cosmopolitans, who had a broader sense of history but were in the minority. Needless to say, Bartol saw himself in the second, generally misunderstood, group.

One of Bartol's strengths in *Alawut* is his ability to virtually disappear as a perceptible agent of the novel and let his characters carry the story. There is no authorial voice passing judgment or instructing readers which characters to favor and which to condemn. In fact, readers may find their allegiances shifting in the course of the story, becoming confused and ambivalent. Bartol certainly intended to write an enigmatic book. Literary historians have looked to Bartol's biography, personality and other work for keys to understanding *Alawut*, but much in the author's life still remains hidden from view. Its very openness to a variety of interpretations is one of the things that continue to make *Alawut* a rewarding experience.

Perhaps the simplest way to approach *Alawut* is as a broadly historical if highly fictionalized account of eleventh-century Iran under Seljuk rule. A reader encountering the novel from this perspective can appreciate its scrupulously researched historical background, the general absence of historical anachronisms, its account of the origins of the Shi'ite-Sunni conflict within Islam, and its exposition of the deep-seated resentments that the indigenous peoples of this area have had against foreign occupiers, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, for over a millennium. The author's gift for populating this setting with sympathetic, complex, and contemporary-seeming personalities, whose aspirations and fears resonate for the reader at a level that transcends the stock expectations of the exotic scenic décor, make this historically focused reading of the novel particularly lifelike and poignant.

A second reading of *Alawut* anchors its meaning firmly in Bartol's own time between the two World Wars, seeing it as an allegorical representation of the rise of totalitarianism in early twentieth-century Europe. In this reading, Hasan ibn Sabbah, the hyper-rationalistic leader of the Ismaili sect, becomes a composite portrait of Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin. In fact, Bartol originally intended to dedicate the first edition of his book "To Benito Mussolini," and

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when he was dissuaded from doing this, suggested a more generic dedication "To a certain dictator," which was similarly vetoed. Either dedication would almost certainly have been a bold exercise in high irony, but his publisher rightly saw the risks involved at that volatile time: lost readership, irate authorities. Some of the characters appear to have been drawn from real-life models that dominated the newsreels at that time. Abu Ali, Hasan's right-hand man, is depicted delivering inspiring oratory to the men of *Alamut* in a way reminiscent of no one so much as Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels. The ceremonial nighttime lighting of the castle of *Alamut* could pass for an allusion to the floodlit rallies and torchlight parades of the Nazi Party. The strict organizational hierarchies of the Ismailis, the broad similarities between some characters and their corresponding types within the Fascist or National Socialist constellations, and the central role of ideology as a sop for the masses all resonate with the social and power structures then existing in Germany, Italy and Soviet Russia, as do the progressively greater levels of knowledge and critical distance from ideology that are available to Hasan's inner circle.

More recently, yet another interpretation tries to persuade us that *Alamut* is a roman-à-clef representation of what should have been the ideal Slovenian response to the German and Italian totalitarianism then threatening Slovenia and the rest of Europe—in other words, a mirror image of the Hasan-as-Hitler reading. This interpretation looks to Bartol's origins in the area around Trieste, and his undisputed anger at Italian domination and persecution of the ethnic Slovenes in those regions beginning in the 1920s. Bartol was indeed a close personal friend of the head of a Slovenian terrorist group, the "Tigers," whose members conducted violent attacks on Italian institutions and individuals in the Italian-Slovenian border regions. (The group's Slovenian designation "TIGR" was actually an acronym based on the names of four key disputed areas: Trieste, Istria, Gorizia, and Rijeka [Italian Fiume].) When his friend was captured by the Italians in 1930 and sentenced to twenty years in prison, Bartol made a laconic and ominous note in his diary, "Zorko, I will avenge you." Hasan's positive traits—his rationality, intelligence and wit—together with his revelatory confession late in the novel to his youthful alter ego, ibn Tahir, that his entire life's work has been dedicated to liberating the Pahlavi-speaking population of Iran from foreign domination, would all seem to support this view of the novel as an Aesopian exhortation to oppressed Slovenes, focused around celebrating the charismatic personality and Machiavellian brilliance of the liberation movement's leader, Hasan/Zorko.

But as tempting as this Slovenian nationalist reading of *Alamut* may be, ultimately it rings facile and flat. For one, how can Hasan's nationalism—for which Bartol anachronistically draws on an ideology arising centuries later,

out of eighteenth-century European thought—square with Hasan's far more exhaustively articulated nihilism, his rejection of all ideology, his acceptance of power as the ruling force of the universe, and his implacable pursuit of power for its own sake? Moreover, how could any self-respecting human being, Slovene or otherwise, take to heart a manifesto based on the cynical manipulation of human consciousness and human life in furtherance of the manipulator's own goals? Attempts to make *Alamut* work as a veiled treatise on national liberation also run up against Bartol's own paradoxical avowals of authorial indifference to politics. And ultimately they are reductive and self-contradictory, turning what reads and feels like a many-faceted work of literature rich with meaning into a two-dimensional ideological screed.

This brings us to the present day and the reading of *Alamut* that is bound to be particularly tempting, now that America has incurred Hasan-like blows from a nemesis to the east and delivered its own counterblows of incalculable destructive force in return. This reading will see *Alamut*, if not as a prophetic vision, then at least as an uncanny foreshadowing of the early twenty-first century's fundamental conflict between a nimble, unpredictable upstart relying on a relatively small but close-woven network of self-sacrificing agents on the one hand, and a massive, lumbering empire on the other, put constantly on the defensive and very likely creating new recruits for its adversary with every poorly focused and politically motivated offensive step that it takes. The story of today's conflict between al Qaeda and the West could be a palimpsest unwittingly obscuring the half-obliterated memory of a similar struggle from more than a thousand years ago: injured and humiliated common folk who prove susceptible to the call of a militant and avenging form of their religion; the manipulative radical ideology that promises its recruits an otherworldly reward in exchange for their making the ultimate sacrifice; the arrogant, self-satisfied occupying power whose chief goal is finding ways of extracting new profits from its possession; and the radical leader's ominous prediction that someday "even princes on the far side of the world will live in fear" of his power. But however many parallels we may be able to find here between Bartol's eleventh century and our twenty-first, there is nothing clairvoyant about them. *Alamut* offers no political solutions and no window on the future, other than the clarity of vision that a careful and empathetic rendering of history can provide. There is, admittedly, much for an American readership to learn from a book like *Alamut*, and better late than never: thanks to Bartol's extensive and careful research, a rudimentary education in the historical complexities and continuities of Iraq and Iran, reaching back over a thousand years, is one of the novel's useful by-products.

Any of these readings is possible. But all of them miss the obvious, fundamental fact that *Alamut* is a work of literature, and that as such its chief job

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is not to convey facts and arguments in a linear way but to do what only literature can do: provide attentive readers, in a tapestry as complex and ambiguous as life itself, with the means of discovering deeper and more universal truths about humanity, about how we conceive of ourselves and the world, and how our conceptions shape the world around us—essentially, to know ourselves. Bartol does not overtly intervene in the narrative to guide our understanding of it in the way he wants. Instead, he sets his scenes with subtle clues and more than a few false decoys—much the way real life does—and then leaves it to us sort out truth from delusion. The most blinkered reading of *Alamut* might reinforce some stereotypical notions of the Middle East as the exclusive home of fanatics and unquestioning fundamentalists. (What, then, to make of the armies of black-shirted and leather-jacketed thugs that Europe spawned just sixty years ago?) A really perverted reading might actually find in it an apology for terrorism. That risk is there. But careful readers should come away from *Alamut* with something very different.

First and foremost, *Alamut* offers a thorough deconstruction of ideology—extending to all dogmatic ideologies that defy common sense and promise the kingdom of God in exchange for one's life or one's freedom to judge and make choices. Of course, there are Hasan's long, enlightened diatribes against Islamic doctrine and the religious alternatives to it, which he organizes around the retelling of his own life experience, his search for truth as a young man, and his successive disillusionments. He tells of how he transcended his personal crisis by devoting himself exclusively to experience, science, and what can be perceived by the senses. But this positivism develops into a hyper-rationalism that, by excluding the emotional aspects of human experience as irrational and invalid, itself becomes dogmatic. At its extreme, Hasan's rationalism proclaims the absence of absolute moral restraints, the supremacy of power as the ruling force of the world, and the imperative of manipulating lesser human beings to achieve maximum power and further his own ends—formally articulated in his sect's supreme maxim: "Nothing is true, everything is permitted."

Yet Bartol lets us see more of the complexities and weaknesses of this character than Hasan himself would probably admit to. We are given momentary glimpses of his visceral hatred for his lifelong rival, Nizam al-Mulk, who figures in the novel as his primary nemesis and object of revenge. Twice we see his terror at suddenly feeling alone and vulnerable in the universe. Near the novel's climax, he makes the contradictory revelation that his life's greatest driving force has been a fierce hatred of his country's Seljuk overlords. And repeatedly, wordlessly, but unmistakably we see him reject opportunities for emotional and physical connectedness, even though deep down he just as unmistakably wants them. All of these irrational impulses threaten his rationalist ideology and so have to be suppressed, but in suppressing

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them Hasan obliterates facets of his personality. The result is an emotionally deformed, if intellectually brilliant human being—who is all the more tragic for the great power that he wields.

Throughout the last half of the novel, Hasan refers to each of various interconnected events that he has engineered as "the next act of our tragedy," and it seems unclear just whose tragedy he is referring to. In the book's final chapter, as Hasan looks ahead to the future, he refers to "those of us who hold in our hands the threads of this mechanism," meaning the fearful mechanism of the sect of assassins. Aside from conjuring the image of Hasan as master puppeteer (which he is), these figurative threads and mechanisms also reverberate with the pulley- and rope-operated lift that his eunuch servants regularly use to hoist him up to his tower chambers. Considering that Hasan is also shown feeling vulnerable in that rudimentary lift, wondering what would happen if the eunuchs suddenly became aware of their degraded state and decided to cut the rope and send him crashing to his death, this final image of Hasan as master ideologue and manipulator becomes a highly ambiguous one. His apotheosis in the book's last sentences, as he is hoisted up to his tower, where he will spend the rest of his life codifying Israeli law and dogma, never again to emerge, is the ultimate ironic ending. What Hasan's character doesn't fully realize is that, in dispatching himself to the ultimate extreme of rationality, by willingly separating himself from human society in the name of this rationality, and by submitting himself to the "threads" of his own "mechanism," he makes himself the tragedy's most prominent victim.

So many of the novel's emotional sparks are generated not discursively through narration or dialogue, which is dominated by reason, but in the unspoken, subtle interstices of the spoken exchanges between some of the main characters. It is the fleeting, sometimes apparently throw-away depictions of their emotional affect—involuntary facial expressions, glances, blushes, body language, suppressed wellings-up of emotion—that express far more of the truth of their being than their words can do. These affective communications are generally left incomplete, partly because they represent ineffable moments, and partly because supposedly higher circumstances (ideology in the case of the fedayeen; duty in the case of the girls; "reason" in the case of Hasan) invariably manage to crush them before they can fully express themselves. Yet they are some of the novel's most pronounced and revelatory moments of truth.

The personalist philosophers who were so influential between the World Wars would have seen these highly charged moments of honesty and vulnerability in human relationships as the primary medium in which the divine force manifests itself. In reaction to dogmatic religion and similarly reductive tendencies in the social sciences (at that time, notably, Freudian

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psychology and Marxism), personalism granted equal importance to a wide range of facets in the human personality, from the biological, social and historical to the psychological, ethical and spiritual. Bartol studied in Paris at the same time as a number of his young countrymen who would later become influential personalist intellectuals, including the psychologist Anton Tixtenjak and the poet Edvard Kocbek. Although Freud and Nietzsche are most frequently mentioned as early influences on Bartol—and certainly Hasan embodies their lessons to perfection—the importance that *Alamut* ultimately places on the development of the integrated human being suggests that if any ideology still counted for Bartol, it must have been something akin to personalism.

In this light, the book's dual mottos, apparently in conflict with each other and the source of a fair amount of frustration for commentators over the years, begin to make sense. If "Nothing is true, everything is permitted" stands as a symbol of the license granted to the Ismaili elite, then the unrelated subsidiary motto "Omnia in numero et mensura" acquires an ultimately cautionary significance. All things within measure, nothing too much. In other words, skepticism and rationality are important assets, but overdependence on them at the expense of compassion leads to the tragedy that engulfs Hasan as much as it does his witting and unwitting victims.

Bartol incorporated many of his own qualities and personal interests into his portraits of Hasan and the novel's other characters. He was an avid student of philosophy, history, mathematics, and the natural sciences. He was an amateur entomologist and (like another Vladimir, four years his senior and the author of a book called *Lolisa*) an avid lepidopterist. In a country of mountain climbers, Bartol literally climbed with the very best of them. Like a famous French writer three years his senior, he was an enthusiastic and skilled small aircraft pilot—and all of this just as a prelude to his career as a writer. An individual who is that inquisitive and that eager for experience is either driven and obsessed, or in love with life. In his private life, Bartol was an example of the latter personality type, but in his novel he chose to portray an extreme version of the former.

In a commentary on *Alamut* published on the occasion of a 1957 edition of the novel, an older Bartol, now more overtly solicitous of his readers, wrote:

The reader of *Alamut* will certainly have noticed one thing. No matter how terrible, inhuman and despicable the methods are that Hasan uses, the people subjected to him never lose their most noble human values. The sense of solidarity among the fedayeen never dies, and friendship flourishes among them, just as it does among

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the girls in the gardens. Ibn Tahir and his comrades are eager to know truth, and when ibn Tahir finds out that he has been deceived by the man he had most trusted and believed in, he is no less shaken than when he learns that Miriam's love for him was a deception. And finally, in all his grim knowledge, Hasan is unhappy and alone in the universe. And if somebody wanted to find out from the author what he meant by writing *Alamut*, what his underlying feeling was as he went through the process of writing it, I'd tell him, "Friend! Brother! Let me ask you, is there anything that makes a person braver than friendship? Is there anything more touching than love? And is there anything more exalted than the truth?"

(*Michael Biggins — August, 2004*)



The Opera

2. prizor - Vrtovi

Hurije se prebujajo. Umivajo se, oblačijo, češejo, ličijo ... Nato odplešejo v vrtove, kjer jim evnuhi strežejo s čajem, sadeži in slastnim pecivom. One pa se igrajo: tkejo, rišejo, muzicirajo Halima se pridruži njihovi igri.

Adornato
1994-1996

The musical score is written for a large ensemble. The instruments listed on the left are: Flauti I, Flauti II, Oboe, English Horn, Clarinet in Bb, Clarinet in Bb, Bass Clarinet, Bassoon I, Bassoon II, Horns I, Horns II, Horns III, Trombones I, Trombones II, Tuba, Cymbals, Bells, Bass Drums, Harp I, and Harp II. The vocal parts include Soprano I, Soprano II, Alto I, Alto II, Tenor I, Tenor II, and Bass. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *p* (piano), *pp* (pianissimo), and *mp* (mezzo-piano). The lyrics are in Slovenian and are written below the vocal staves.

Flauti I
Flauti II
Oboe
English Horn
Clarinet in Bb
Clarinet in Bb
Bass Clarinet
Bassoon I
Bassoon II
Horn I
Horn II
Horn III
Trombone I
Trombone II
Tuba
Cymbals
Bells
Bass Drums
Harp I
Harp II
Soprano I
Soprano II
Alto I
Alto II
Tenor I
Tenor II
Bass

Fre - ju - bi dan ču-do - vi - ti Vla - re - ti za - vi o - prav, iz nje - nih ču-del-nih ni - ti zne-

ON *ALAMUT*, AN OPERA IN THREE ACTS, BY MATJAŽ JARC *

Franc Križnar¹

Abstract

In 2006, Matjaž Jarc composed the opera *Alamut* to his own libretto, based on the 1938 novel by Vladimir Bartol. This paper is a short analysis of the opera, examining its musical and literary background, its musical and dramaturgical emphases, and its characteristics and pedigree.

French Abstract

En 2006, Matjaž Jarc écrit l'opéra *Alamut* d'après son propre livret, basé sur un roman de Vladimir Bartol qui date de 1938. Cet article analyse l'opéra en mettant l'accent sur les points de vue littéraire, musical et dramatique, et expose ses particularités et ses origines.

German Abstract

Basierend auf einem Roman von Vladimir Bartol schrieb Matjaž Jarc im Jahr 2006 seine Oper *Alamut* auf eine eigenes Libretto. Bei diesem Aufsatz handelt es sich um eine kurze Analyse der Oper. Sie untersucht ihre musikalischen, literarischen und dramaturgischen Schwerpunkte und Hintergründe.

Introduction

The opera *Alamut*,² with libretto and music by Matjaž Jarc³ (b. 1954) takes as its subject the important Slovenian novel of the same name, written by Vladimir Bartol in 1938. The opera takes up the same content of the book while adding new dramaturgical layers and characters to the plot. These additions allow Matjaž Jarc to expand the ideas of the novel and make them not merely into a musical score but also a script for a new Slovenian opera.

The novel relates the story of an eleventh century Persian fort called Alamut (Death Castle) where the leader of the Ismail sect, Seiduna, has gathered troops to attack the Seljuk Empire, which has taken over Iran. The storyline of the opera is focused on Tahir, a young man who came to the service of Seiduna, a great religious and military leader of the Ismailis, at his stronghold

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2. Matjaž Jarc, *Alamut*, Ljubljana: Editio Musica Hymnos, 2006.

3. A list of works follows at the end of the paper.

Alamut. One part of the building has been transformed into military barracks and a school for the young Fedaii—warriors for the Ismail faith; unknown to the warriors the other part of the castle has been transformed into spectacular gardens housing a harem of beautiful girls.

Seiduna who has proclaimed himself the prophet of the Ismail faith raised the youths through the Daii, teachers of warfare, science and arts. Some of the Daii doubled as Seiduna's generals sharing in his plan to defeat the approaching Seljuq army which was greatly superior in number and was at the time conquering Iran under the leadership of the Grand Vizier.

Tahir and his brothers in arms were being trained in complete fidelity to Seiduna and his faith. A part of their curriculum was also the lesson of illumination, a mystical experience reserved for the best of the young Fedaii. They were to experience the joys of the gardens of Paradise and return to the living. In order to provide this experience Seiduna fed them capsules laced with opium. They were then carried to the hidden gardens of Alamut castle. The young stupefied soldiers were convinced they have arrived to Paradise where they were to share in heavenly love with the beautiful Houries. This is where Tahir met Halima and fell in love with her. The Houries' task was to drug the boys once again after the merrymaking, in order for the guards to bring them back to awake in the military stronghold they called home. As they came to, the Fedaii were certain beyond all doubt that they have seen the gardens of paradise and they were now prepared to do anything to go back as soon as possible. Tahir was profoundly in love with Halima with his sole purpose in life focused on reuniting with her.

Seiduna, knowing that there is no fear of death left in the youth, decided to take advantage of his ardour. He sent him to the Seljuq military camp, on a mission to assassinate the Grand Vizier. Tahir set off, determined to sacrifice his life in the process and return to the love of his life. There was no doubt in anybody's mind as to the fact that he is marching towards his own demise.

After Tahir set off, Seiduna sent the next group of boys into the harem. The Houries had to re-enact the scenes of life in paradise and present the illusion to a new set of boy-warriors. Halima however, deeply in love with Tahir, could not force herself to make love with another. She became aware of Seiduna's game, as she realized all these young boys, including Tahir, would be sent to their deaths, and she committed suicide in despair.

Meanwhile, Tahir reached the Seljuq war-camp, tricked his way into the Grand Vizier's tent, and stabbed him with a poisoned blade. The Grand Vizier, though mortally wounded, immediately realized who had sent Tahir to kill him in his own camp. He knew all about Seiduna and his plans. On his last breathes he informed Tahir of Seiduna's cruel deception. He told the young assassin of the Gardens of Paradise, how they were nothing but a harem in the gardens beneath the Alamut stronghold, and of the girls that were no more than slaves bought by Seiduna and imprisoned at his castle. Before he died, the Grand Vizier presented Tahir with the truth and sent him back to assassinate Seiduna the false prophet.

On the way back Tahir thought deeply about all he had learned, especially about Seiduna's relentless and cruel method of defending his homeland from

the Seljuq army. Firmly decided to kill Seiduna he returned to Alamut where no one expected to ever see him again. The moment he saw the assassin return, Seiduna knew by what purpose Tahir's life was spared. He ordered the young man to be put into chains and then proceeded to explain his own life's mission to stop the advance of the Seljuq and their religion and in so doing deliver the Ismailis and their homeland from certain doom. He admitted to all the deceptions he had committed against his soldiers and finally convinced him of the necessity and inevitability of his actions.

Tahir realized the significance of Seiduna's mission but only understood the matter in all its depth when Halima, who had died because of her love for him, spoke in his mind's ear, and now as his muse revealed to him that love is above all else. He no longer wanted to kill Seiduna. Free of all ties he set out into the world and became a poet and philosopher.

Since the story is set in an eleventh-century Persian stronghold, let us turn our attention to the Iranian music of the time. At the time, the Arabs had conquered Persia and assimilated a part of Iranian traditional music. This influence is the most important. After the eighth century, Persian singers could be found in many Arabian courts. With them they brought their typical instruments. The most common were: the long-necked lute (rut, rubab), two types of harp: the upright harp (chang) and the horizontal harp (van), a bowed instrument called the kamacheh, percussion instruments (daira, kube, tonbak), the timpani (kus) and two types of wind instruments—the flute type (nay) and the oboe type (surnay). The official language in Persia at this time was Arabic and the music theory literature was also written in the same language. The great Arabic musician Al-farabi (around 870–950), among other things, spoke and wrote about Persian music. Later Persian music was also influenced by Turkish, Mongolian and Turkmenian music.

Analysis

Characters:

Seiduna (bass)—leader of the Ismailis and commander of Alamut

Tahir (tenor)—member of the Fedaii and beloved of Halima

Halima (soprano)—the harem beauty, beloved of Tahir

Miriam (mezzo-soprano)—harem caretaker, a past love of Seiduna's

Grand Vizier (bass-baritone)—the leader of the Seljuq army, leading the occupation of Iran

Fedaii (a choir of 12 male singers)—Seiduna's select warriors

Da'i (male vocal sextet)—military and religious chiefs (also science and art teachers)

The Soldiers of the Grand Vizier (male choir)

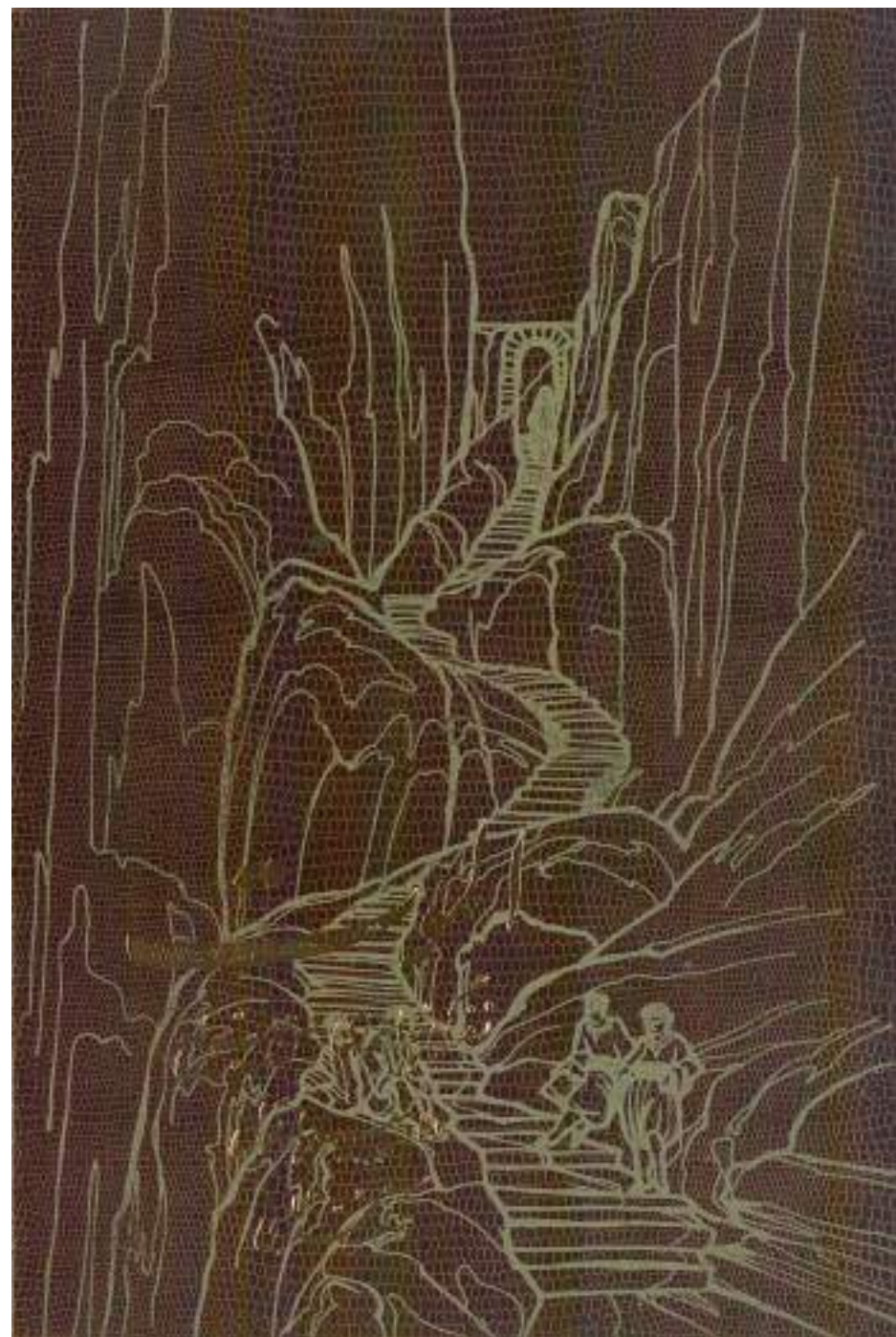
3 teachers (tenor and 2 bass-baritones)

Suleika (non-singing role, flutist)—a harem beauty

Ballet: Houries, eunuchs, Seiduna's warriors

Extras: Seiduna's black guard, Courtiers of the Grand Vizier

The work is divided into three acts and 23 scenes.



Alamut in Farsi

الموت در فارسی

مقدمه

الموت رمانی است که نیم قرن بعد از نخستین چاپ به شهرت جهانی رسید. گمنام ماندن این کتاب در این سالهای طولانی چند دلیل داشت: اول آن که به زبان اسلونیایی^۱ نوشته شده بود که تنها اقلیتی در شمال غربی یوگوسلاوی به آن سخن می گفتند و طبعاً کتابهایی که بدینگونه زبان ها نوشته می شود تا مدت ها در جهان ناشناخته می ماند. نویسندگان کشورهایی چون فنلاند و مجارستان و لیتوانی و آلبانی غالباً با این مشکل روبه رو هستند. برای مثال سینهوه مصری اثر میکا والتاری^۲ نویسنده فنلاندی همین سرنوشت را داشت که بعد از سالها به زبانهای دیگر ترجمه شد و میلیون ها نفر آن را خواندند و از بداعتش تعجب کردند.

و دلیل دیگر بد اقبال این رمان این بود که در سال ۱۹۳۸ یعنی در آستانه جنگ جهانی دوم از چاپ درآمد و غوغای نبرد، در آخر دهه چهارم قرن بیستم در اروپا، وقایع یازدهم و دوازدهم ایران در این کتاب جایی برای خودنمایی نداشت.

۱- Slovenia از جمهوری های تازه استقلال یافته در یوگوسلاوی.

۲- Mikka Waltari

درباره داستان

نویسنده در رمان الموت بر خلاف تصور گروهی از خوانندگان، قصد تاریخ نویسی ندارد. بلکه در نهایت زیرکی خود را در پشت پرده وفاییی در قرن یازدهم ایران پنهان می کند تا در مورد حوادث روزگار خود چیزهایی بگوید و رازش را آشکار نمی کند تا هر کس به ذوق خود حدس و گمانی بزند. او با دقت و وسواسی شگفت آوری به نقل جزئیات وقایع می پردازد، و گاهی چنان ریزه کاری می کند که ما را به حیرت می اندازد. و بیرحمانه ترین صحنه ها را با چنان ظرافت شاعرانه ای می آمیزد که خواننده احساس نفرت نمی کند، بلکه به تردید می افتد و مجذوب می شود و به فکر فرو می رود. حسن صباح در این رمان گاهی عظمتی غول آسا می یابد و با آن که فریفتگان و فدائیانش را زیر پا له می کند هرگز ابعاد انسانی و معنوی را از دست نمی دهد. و نویسنده در اینجا به سبک توماس مان در اثر برجسته اش « هیتلر، برادر من! » نزدیک می شود. اشیل و شکسپیر نیز در نمایشهای خود از این گونه قدرتمندان بسیار آفریده اند که در نهایت سنگدلی نفرت تماشاگران را بر نمی انگیزد.

نویسنده در این رمان حسن صباح و جنبش اسماعیلیه را از زاویه خاصی می نگرد و به ذوق خود طرحی از چهره حسن می کشد که هول آفرین، اما پر معنا و جذاب است. حسن صباح که از نام آوران تاریخ ایران است، زندگی پرماجرایی دارد. و مانند همه بزرگان عالم پس از مرگ در هاله ای از افسانه و رویا فرو رفته است. جنبش سازمان یافته و بسیار فعال اسماعیلیه به رهبری او به کمال خود رسید. و چهارصد سال در ایران دوام آورد و حتی هشتاد سال بعد از انقراض فاطمیان مصرپایدار ماند و قرن ها گرمابخش جان گروهی از روشنفکران و اندیشمندان ایران بود و بسیاری از آرزومندان را که در جستجوی جامعه ای عادلانه بودند مجذوب کرد. اسماعیلیان به تعبیر و توجیهی فلسفی از جهان می پرداختند. بردباری و فداکاری را ضامن بقای آئین خود می پنداشتند. بر آموزش تاکید بسیار داشتند. و خرد را بزرگترین موهبت الهی می دانستند. حسن صباح سازمان بزرگی را بنیاد نهاد که قطعا با نیاز زمان او هم آهنگ بود و جنبش اسماعیلیه در آن روزگار راهی جز آن طی کرد برای درگیری با حریفان نداشت و پایداری این گروه اندک در مقابل سیل عظیم دشمنان مایه شگفتی است.

ولادیمیر بارتول بی تردید برای نوشتن رمان الموت اسناد تاریخی مربوط به این دوران را دقیقاً مطالعه کرده، با افسانه های پیرامون آن آشنا بوده است. جهان غرب از قرن ها پیش جنبش اسماعیلیه را به نام حشاشین می شناسد. مارکوپولو در سفرنامه اش از حشیش محلول خوردن و بهشت مخلوق آنها که چشمه های پر از آب و شیر و شراب و شهد روان دارد و دختران خوشخرام و جنگ نواز، داستانها می گوید. و به هر جهت، اسماعیلیان نام خود را در گوشه ای از تاریخ جهان ثبت کرده اند. شاخه ای از آنها که در شام نیرو گرفتند در دوران جنگهای صلیبی در اروپا نامور بودند. شاعران مشهور مغرب زمین مانند رمبو، بودلر، نروال، هریک به گونه ای در اشعارشان از آنها یاد کرده اند. هر چند گروهی این فرقه را به بدنامی و هول آفرینی می شناسد، گروهی در پس این پرده چیزهای دیگری می بینند و حسن صباح را مردی شگفت آور و صاحب اندیشه می شناسند و بر جنبه های معنوی و فلسفی کوشش های او انگشت می گذارند.

در رمان الموت گاهی تاریخ با افسانه می آمیزد، و گاهی حوادث از واقعیات تاریخی دور می شود، اما داستان آنقدر جذاب و پر کشش و هیجان انگیز است که هر کس چند صفحه اول آن را بخواند دیگر نمی تواند آن را رها کند و با امواج پرخروش حوادث همراه می شود و بی صبرانه تا پایان پیش می رود.

درباره نویسنده

ولادیمیر بارتول نویسنده الموت در سال ۱۹۰۳ در تریست^۱ به دنیا آمد. اعضای خانواده بارتول اکثراً روشنفکر بودند و از دوستداران فرهنگ فرانسه و خود او قسمت عمده تحصیلاتش را در لیوبلیانا مرکز اسلووانی به انجام رساند و در دهه بیست به پاریس رفت و در سوربن پای درس استاد نشست. و تا پایان عمر دانش اموختن را رها نکرد و در فلسفه و روانشناسی و زیست شناسی و علم ادیان صاحب نظر بود. با افکار فروید آشنایی عمیق داشت. درباره زندگی پروانه ها تحقیق می کرد. مذاهب گوناگون جهان را عالمانه می شناخت، و در هر زمینه مطلب می نوشت.

لیوبلیانا در دهه سی، چهارراه عقاید و آرای متخاصم بود. از اتریش که سرانجام به بازی آلمان منضم شد اندیشه های هیتلری به این سو می آمد. فاشیست های ایتالیا در این طرف فعال بودند و سوسیالیسم نیز هواخواهان زیادی داشت. ولادیمیر بارتول در این گیرودار خود را با خواندن و نوشتن مشغول می کرد و با همه گرفتاریها که داشت «الموت» را نوشت که شاهکار او بود. و در سال ۱۹۳۸ آن را به دست چاپ سپرد، که با آغاز جنگ حتی نام آن فراموش شد. و نویسنده قلم را کنار گذاشت و تفنگ به دوش گرفت و از سالهای ۱۹۴۰ تا ۱۹۵۶ در صف میهن دوستان مرز و بوم خود در نهضت های مقاومت با اشغالگران آلمانی به رزم و ستیز پرداخت و بعد از پایان جنگ به تریست رفت و از ۱۹۴۶ تا ۱۹۵۶ در آنجا ماند و سپس به لیوبلیانا بازگشت و کار نویسندگی را ادامه داد، مقالات و آثار تحقیقی خود را منتشر کرد، و الموت را در سال ۱۹۵۸ بار دیگر به چاپ سپرد، که اجازه انتشار نیافت. نویسنده در سال ۱۹۶۷ در گذشت و کتاب او بعد از مرگش دوباره در سالهای ۱۹۸۴ و ۱۹۸۸ به چاپ رسید و به زبان های دیگر ترجمه شد و شهرت یافت، و ستاره اقبال کتاب پس از مرگ نویسنده به درخشش درآمد.



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