

Prince Karim is seen at his coronation ceremony four years ago, when he became the fourth Aga Khan at 19.

THE WORLD'S MOST ELIGIBLE BACHELOR

EVERY DAY a tall young Englishman, profoundly good-looking, steps from his Swiss chalet into the snow, lays a prayer rug on the snow, and, with a map and a pair of compasses, makes certain calculations. Then he prays.

By the Moslem faith, if you look toward Mecca you find it, and from the mountaintops of Switzerland the young Aga Khan, spiritual leader of 12 million Ismaili Moslems, was applying himself to his daily religious devotions.

This odd contrast of the Moslem faith being practiced in a Swiss canton, of the head of a great religious movement praying in the mountain snows while his followers pray on sand amid palm trees is characteristic of Prince Karim, Aga Khan IV, the 49th Imam of the Ismailis, the 23-year-old son of the late Aly Khan. From his grandfather, Karim inherited a spiritual empire; from his father he inherited physical beauty; from both he inherited a sense of paradox.

For the first half of this century, Europeans tried to reconcile the Aga Khan with his love of horse racing, champagne, and pretty women, with his unique position in the Moslem religion. They also had to reconcile Aly Khan's reputation as a girl-chasing playboy with the special reverence the Ismailis gave him.

But none of this is as extraordinary as the double image of Karim, on the one hand a typical member of the younger International Set, skiing, water-skiing, dating pretty girls, and driving fast cars, and, on the other hand, a devout Moslem in whom the blood of Mahomet himself flows, and to whom millions of Moslems turn for both material and spiritual guidance.

Cleverly avoiding the gossip columns which dogged his father and grandfather in their love affairs, Karim has still managed to date some of Europe's most beautiful girls. The latest, Annoushka von Meks, is a 17-year-old Parisienne, daughter of a Russian dressmaker of German origin.

He has tended to find safety in numbers since the breakup of his first major romance with the Mexican heiress, Sylvia Casablancas. Sylvia, with her wild and impulsive ways, was just a little too much for the quiet Karim. She stormed out of his life after a spectacular quarrel. "He is too possessive and jealous," she said. "I don't want to become the wife of an Oriental potentate."

No doubt Karim was hurt by Sylvia who went on to have several front-page romances, but he soon got over it. He possesses a certain innocence in these matters which is its own protection. "I don't know girls very well," he told me once, before he became the Aga Khan, "but those I do know are all good friends—platonic friends."

His attachment to Annoushka is serious, but, as with

Latest rumors link Karim with 17-year old Annoushka von Meks.



all girls he has dated, he runs into a basic problem, and one that grows more severe as the years go by. Annoushka von Meks is a Christian, and the old Aga Khan asked him to marry a Moslem.

Annoushka could adopt the Moslem faith, but that was not what the old man had in mind. He wanted Karim to marry an Asiatic. Why the Aga Khan, who had two European wives, did not want Karim to do the same is a question that highlights one of the great problems of Karim's life. The fact is that, before he died, the Aga Khan saw that narrow nationalism, which he personally detested, was becoming the greatest emotional force in the world. Among his people, anti-Europeanism is strong. Even the old Aga Khan was hurt by it, although he was 100 percent Asiatic, having been born in Karachi of Persian parentage. Only if Karim, whose mother is English, marries within his own people, regardless of love, can he escape the threat of an "Asia for the Asiatics" reaction.

KARIM IS NO FOOL. His feeling for Annoushka is something he will work out in his own way. In the meantime, he takes his religious duties with great seriousness. As head of the Ismailis and a descendant of the Prophet, he is a king without a country, his followers scattered in groups through India, Pakistan, Iran, Uganda, Kenya, Zanzibar, and even Russia and China.

He spends six months of each year touring his territories and giving counsel, turning for advice to the wise elders of the sect. He speaks Urdu, Arabic, and several Indian dialects. His reign is completely personal. He may be asked for advice on how to buy a house, plant rice, convert dollars, repudiate a faithless wife, or he may receive requests to recommend a good school or a surgeon.

After a tour of his people, Karim always returns to Switzerland and the snow. "I can relax in the snow and contemplate," he says. Here he rises between 7:30 and 8, works until lunch, after which he skis. Evening is for entertaining his friends. Karim loves the company of attractive young people, and he is a particular friend of Prince Rainier and Princess Grace.

(Continued)

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