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# ABDĀL

**ABDĀL** (sing. *badal/badīl*, pl. *abdāl/bodalāʾ*), an Arabic technical term designating one of the categories of *awlīāʾ* (“friends of God,” Muslim saints). According to classical Sufi theory, as formulated in the 4th/10th century, a fixed number of *abdāl/awlīāʾ* are chosen by God and, by their presence, preserve universal equilibrium, especially during periods between prophets. They transmit *baraka* “blessing” and are considered able to perform *karāmāt* “charismata” but not *moʿǰezāt* “miracles,” which are the prerogatives of *anbīāʾ* “prophets.” Like the prophets, on Judgment Day they will perform the function of *šafāʿa* “intercession” on behalf of the human race. The origin and early development of this doctrine in medieval Islamic society poses a complex problem.

*Badal* “substitute” has been translated by L. Massignon as “substituted” saint or one “appointed as an apostle” (*La Passion d’al-Ḥosayn-ibn-Manṣour al-Ḥallāj*, new ed., Paris, 1975, I, pp. 27, 249). It is not a Koranic term, at least not in its specifically mystical sense. Yet it appears in the unexpurgated corpus of 2nd/8th century traditions cited in the 3rd/9th century collections of Hadith, lexicography and *adab* literature. The Muʿtazilite Jāḥeẓ (d. 258/860) is one of the earliest to mention the term *abdāl*, in his *Ketāb al-tarbīʿ wa’l-tadwīr* (ed. C. Pellat, Damascus, 1955, p. 28). According to this passage, the *abdāl*, whose number is not specified, were connected to a specific place: either Palestine (Baysān) or the region of Mount Lebanon (al-ʿArǰ). Jāḥeẓ’s rhetorical style permits the interpretation that reference was being made to *mawālī*, such as Salmān and Belāl, connected with a “Ṣāḥeb Anṭākīya,” possibly the Christian

saint Agabus (Lat. Agapius of Antioch; see *Tarbīʿ*, index, p. 5). Such pre-mystic, even pre-Sunnite, evidence suggests for the theory of the *abdāl* a non-Muslim source (probably Christian, e.g., Origenism and Messalianism; see M. Molé, *Les Mystiques musulmanes*, Paris, 1965, p. 9). An indication of the importance of traditions of Christian origin is also found in the *Ketāb al-zohd* of the 3rd/9th century author, Ebn Qotayba (*ʿOyūn al-aḵbār*, Cairo, 1964, II, p. 261). Nor should the possibility of Manichean influence be excluded. (See Molé, op. cit., p. 8, for instance, on the repeated appearance of the term *ṣeddīq* in relation to the theory of *awlīāʾ*.) However, since the *Tarbīʿ* is essentially directed against Shiʿites of the Rāfeżī persuasion (Pellat, intro., pp. xv-xvi), it can be concluded that Jāḥeẓ was attacking, not non-Muslims, but certain of his co-religionists. These were Shiʿites who, in his time, had begun to use the doctrine of *abdāl* in a Muslim context (especially Shiʿites of the sort branded as *ḡolāt*; cf. L. Massignon, op. cit., I, p. 245). It was at this same time, according to *Lesān al-ʿarab* (Būlāq, 1300-08, XIII, pp. 50-52), that the Kufan lexicographer, Ebn al-Sekkīt (d. 244/853), whose Shiʿite affinities are well-known (*EI*$^2$ III, pp. 940-41), defined the term *badal*. Finally, it seems that the early use of the *abdāl* doctrine by certain Shiʿite elements can be confirmed by its prominent place in the Ismaʿili compendium of the Eḵvān al-ṣafāʾ. These texts were collected over a period of almost 100 years, from the second half of the 3rd/9th century (Y. Marquet, “Imamat, resurrection et hierarchie selon les Ikhwan as-Safa,” *REI* 30, 1962, p. 61). In the *Rasāʾel eḵwān al-ṣafāʾ* (I, pp. 376-77; Marquet, op. cit., p. 119), the institution of *abdāl/awlīāʾ* is openly presented as a pre-Islamic tradition that continued under Islam. The *abdāl* are said to be four, chosen by God from the forty *ṣāleḥūn* who, in every age, follow the “Abrahamic” religion and automatically succeed one another.

From the second half of the 3rd/9th century, the theory of the *abdāl/awlīāʾ* seems to have progressively infiltrated that segment of the Sunnite community which inclined toward mystical expression. Its chronology and geographic extent are still unclear but often coincide with the influence of Ismaʿilism, Qarmatism, and sects of *ḡolāt* Shiʿism. Concerning the Iraqi school of mysticism, we know of the case of Ḥallāǰ (late 3rd/9th cent.), who was supposed to have claimed the law of *motāʿ* (Eṣṭaḵrī, pp. 148-49), i.e., of the chief of the *abdāl/awlīāʾ* of his time. Massignon (*Passion* I, p. 249) thinks that the Shiʿite/Ismaʿili affinities are clear. At the same time, in Khorasan, Ḥākem Termeḏī (d. first quarter of the 4th/10th century) handled the question of the *abdāl/awlīāʾ* from a perspective similar to that of Eḵvān al-ṣafāʾ (his dependence on Iraqi Sufism is open to conjecture). His purpose, it appears,

was openly anti-Ismaʿili, since the *awlīāʾ al-zūr* at whose door he lays the blame are the Ismaʿilis. The terms which Termeḏī used to define the status of the *awlīāʾ* are often very similar to those of the Eḵvān al-ṣafāʾ. A detailed comparative study would be of great value. For example, instead of the seven *abdāl* posited by the Ismaʿilis, Termeḏī counts four, but agrees that they are chosen from forty *awlīāʾ/ṣeddīqūn*. He also affirms their connection with the "Abrahamic" religion (see ʿOṯmān Yaḥyā, in bibliog., pp. 345, 426, 434, 442). In Iraq, with its repressive atmosphere following the execution of Ḥallāǰ (d. 309/922), the Sufi movement continued the *abdāl/awlīāʾ* theory but with certain reservations. Perhaps such questions as the following date from this period: Are the *awlīāʾ* known to each other? Are the *awlīāʾ* recognized as such during their lifetime? (See Hoǰvīrī, *Kašf al-maḥǰūb*, tr. R. A. Nicholson, repr. London, 1976, pp. 214-15). The future central role of the doctrine is perceptible in an author of the end of the century, Abū Ṭāleb Makkī (d. 998); see his *Qūt al-qolūb*, Cairo, 1961, II, pp. 134, 154.

The existence of ancient ties between the local Iranian schools of *zohd* and Iraqi Sufism is verifiable. From the first half of the 4th/10th century numerous Iraqi Sufis, undoubtedly fleeing local repression, seem to have continued their practices on foreign soil. Some of them settled in Iran, where they rapidly founded schools (e.g., Abū Bakr Vāseṭī in Marv; R. N. Frye, *The Histories of Nishapur*, London, 1965, text no. I, fol. 27a). From the second half of the 4th/10th century there flourished works which presented "apology for and illustration of" Sufism in the Iraqi style. The *abdāl/awlīāʾ* theory appears strongly affirmed in Sufi doctrine (Kalābāḏī, *Ketāb al-taʿarrof*, Cairo, 1380/1960, p. 71). It becomes common to designate as *badal* a pious person of the past (*Histories*, no. I, fol. 27a; Ḥākem Nīšāpūrī, for instance, calls Ḥamdūn Qaṣṣār *badal*). The 5th/11th century confirms these tendencies, and the first great exposés on the doctrine of *abdāl/awlīāʾ* which can be described as classical date from this century.

The doctrine of the *abdāl* was present not only in the mystical currents of Sunnism; it also appeared in traditionalist schools like Hanbalism. Frequently anti-Sufi, this school was favorable to a well-defined form of *zohd* which excluded socio-religious marginalism (see G. Makdisi, "The Hanbali school and Sufism," *Humaniora Islamica* 2, 1974, pp. 61-72). It is difficult, however, to determine when and under what conditions the theory of the *abdāl* infiltrated Hanbalism; at present our only source is information in Hanbalite *Ṭabaqāt* of the 6th/12th century. This information is largely due to Ebn Abū Yaʿlā, whose

father, Abū Yaʿlā (d. 5th/11th cent.), had been a strong upholder of belief in the *awlīāʾ* (*Moʿtamad*, Beirut, 1974, p. 170). In his *Ṭabaqāt*, Ebn Abū Yaʿlā has Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, as well as several of his disciples, invoke the doctrine of the *abdāl*. In this version the *abdāl* are seven in number and perform an intercessory role (*Ṭabaqāt al-ḥanābela*, Cairo, 1952, I, p. 263). The head of the *abdāl* is called *mostaḵlef*; his rank is that of a *nabī* (a non-lawgiving prophet), and he dispenses *baraka* "blessing" that is transmittable by others (ibid., II, p. 62). It is not certain, however, that everyone in the Hanbalite movement agreed on this point. Ebn Baṭṭa (d. 384/997) attacks those who invoke beliefs supposedly held by the *awlīāʾ* (H. Laoust, *La profession de foi d'Ibn Baṭṭa*, Damascus, 1958, p. 87 of the Arabic text). Yet it seems evident that, despite the silence of the Qurʾān and the continued hostility of certain conservative groups (e.g., the Muʿtazilites), the belief in *abdāl/awlīāʾ*, which was probably of non-Muslim origin, deriving from a common, ancient Near Eastern source, infiltrated Islam at a very early date. It was first introduced by minority Shiʿite groups (*ḡolāt*) which were more receptive than others to such innovations, and then extended itself to broader Shiʿite communities, such as the Ismaʿilis. Eventually it gained a large following among Sunnite Muslims, especially those who professed Sufism or *zohd*. As Sufism expanded throughout the Muslim world, beginning in the 5th/11th century, and Sufi orders (*selsela*s) began to appear at the end of the 6th/12th century, the doctrine of the *abdāl/awlīāʾ* gained added importance. It continued to be wide-spread with modifications, until modern times. In certain Sufi orders, all the *darvīšān* came to be called *abdāl* (H. J. Kissling, "Abdāl," *EI*$^{2}$ I, pp. 94-95).

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