



## AḲBĀRĪYA

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**AḲBĀRĪYA**, a school in Imamite Shi'ism which maintains that the traditions (*aḳbār*) of the Imams are the main source of religious knowledge, in contrast to the Oṣūlī school. As long as the Imams were present and could wield their authority, their utterances, transmitted orally or set down in writing by their disciples (in collections known first as *al-Oṣūl al-arba'ome'a*, and later as *Jawāme'*), formed the basis for Imamite doctrine and law. With the disappearance of the Twelfth Imam (260/873), the rationalist current within Imamism gradually asserted itself, in confrontation with the traditionist school, which at the time was based in Qom. The leading Imamite scholars of the Buyid period, Mofīd (d. 413/1022), Mortazā (d. 436/1044; see '[Alam-al-hodā](#)'), and Abū Ja'far Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), introduced a methodology of jurisprudence (*oṣūl al-feqh*) and elements of Mu'tazilite theology into Imamite thinking. Their readiness to allow a measure of speculative reasoning in the principles (*oṣūl*) of religious law earned them the title of Oṣūlīs. This occurred, however, at a later date; there is no evidence that the terms Aḳbārī and Oṣūlī were in use before the Saljuq period. Perhaps the earliest reference to the Aḳbārīs as a distinct school occurs in the *Ketāb al-melal wa'l-neḥal* (pp. 124, 131), composed in 521/1127 by Šahrestānī (d. 548/1153); the Aḳbārīs are described as subdivided into Mošabbaha (anthropomorphists) and Salafiya (presumably in the sense of adhering to Imamite traditions). Their opponents within the Emāmīya are identified as the Mo'tazela (i.e., those upholding Mu'tazilite principles) or the Kalāmīya (who are probably identical with the Mu'tazilites), and the two groups are described as fiercely antagonistic. The earliest reference to the opponents of the Aḳbārīs as Oṣūlīs occurs in an Imamite text,



the *Ketāb al-naqẓ*, composed around 565/1170 by ‘Abd-al-Jalīl Qazvīnī, who shows himself sympathetic to the Oṣūlī line. Another adherent of the Oṣūlīs, Ebn Edrīs Ḥellī (d. 598/1202), seems to be the first who, in his *Sarā’er* (composed in 588/1192), embarked on a detailed refutation of the Aḵbārī position. No contemporaneous defense of the beliefs of the Aḵbārīs is known to have survived, but to judge from the writings of their opponents, it would seem that Aḵbārī doctrine was not yet fully developed.

The first exponent of the full-fledged Aḵbārī position is Mollā Moḥammad Amīn b. Moḥammad Šarīf Astarābādī (d. 1033/1624 or 1036/1627), the founder of the later Aḵbārī school. His views are set out in his *al-Fawā’ed al-madanīya* (Tehran, 1321/1904), completed in Mecca in 1031/1622. The author states that the work was written at the behest of his teacher Moḥammad b. ‘Alī Astarābādī (d. 1028/1619), who told him that he had been predestined to “revive the *ṭarīqa* of the Aḵbārīs.” Astarābādī does indeed see his task as one of restoring to its former preponderance the doctrine which he believes to have been espoused by the Imams themselves. In his view, the first to have deviated from the Aḵbārī line were Ebn Abī ‘Aqīl (fl. first half of the 4th/10th cent.) and Ebn al-Jonayd (d. 381/991), who was notorious for his use of *qīās* (analogical reasoning). Mofīd’s favorable attitude towards them lent respectability to the Oṣūlī position. Astarābādī is particularly critical of ‘Allāma Ḥellī (d. 726/1325) for introducing elements of Sunni Hadith criticism by classifying the *reǰāl* of Imamite tradition according to their reliability. The ‘Allāma was followed in this by other leading figures, such as Šahīd Awwal Moḥammad b. Makkī ‘Āmelī (d. 786/1384), Šahīd Ṭānī Zayn-al-dīn ‘Āmelī (d. 966/1558), and Astarābādī’s contemporary Bahā’-al-dīn ‘Āmelī (d. 1030/1621). Astarābādī himself maintains, against the Oṣūlī position, that the single most important source of law is the traditions of the Imams. These provide the community with an infallible guide to all aspects of life; they are also indispensable for a correct understanding of the Qur’ān and the Prophet’s utterances. Indeed, without the exegesis of the Imams the Qur’ān would remain beyond human comprehension and could not serve as a source of law. Imamite traditions recorded in reliable sources are sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*), in the sense that they derive with certainty from an Imam (i.e., they are *qaṭ’ī al-worūd* or *al-ṣodūr*). Such traditions are to be accepted, even when they are isolated (*kabar wāḥed*), without examining the doctrinal reliability of their transmitters, all of whom are *ṭeqa* (meaning that they do not lie). Of the sources considered reliable, the most important are (in addition to the pre-*ǧayba* works) the four canonical books (*al-kotob al-arba’a*). The only other



recognized category of Hadith is *ẓaʿīf*, referring to traditions about whose provenance from an Imam there are doubts. In the *kotob al-arbaʿa*, the only *ẓaʿīf* traditions are those which Abū Jaʿfar Ṭūsī (author of two of the four books) cites in order subsequently to reject. It is not essential to ascertain in each case whether or not a given Hadith constitutes a genuine expression of the Imam's thoughts; once its soundness has been established, the believer is allowed to follow its ruling even if it is based on *taqīya* (dissimulation). Where there is no ruling as to the permissibility of a particular action, that action is considered to be dubious (*šobha*), and it is deemed best to use caution (*eḥtīāṭ*) and refrain from performing it. This attitude conflicts with the Oṣūlī principle of *barāʿa*, or *ebāḥat al-aṣl*, according to which every action not expressly forbidden is licit. In the case of conflicting traditions, one should follow the procedures laid down by the Imams themselves. Where these procedures do not enable one to reach a decision in favor of a particular tradition, an attitude of *tawaqqof* should be adopted: None of the traditions should be followed, but at the same time no blame should be attached to someone who acts in accordance with one of them. The principle of *ej̄māʿ* is not to be understood as the consensus of the scholars of a particular generation, but as a consensus as to the opinion of an Imam; and since this opinion can only be known through Imamite tradition, it follows that *ej̄māʿ* as an independent principle is of little practical value. *Qīās* is to be rejected as a device used by Satan (apud Qurʾān 7:12, 38:76) and as a favorite tool of the Ḥanafīs.

A central idea underlying these views is that there is no essential difference between the legal state of the community before and after *ḡayba*. The Imams made certain that all major questions which might arise in the future would be addressed in the traditions dictated to their followers. All believers are *moqalledūn* (followers); all can reach a correct understanding of the utterances of the Imams through training in the Arabic language and a study of Imamite traditions. The knowledge acquired in this way, while insufficient to lead to absolute certainty (*yaqīn wāqeʿī*) as to God's intent, does establish with certainty that the religious law conforms with the transmitted utterances of the Imams. It is this "customary" (*ādī*) certainty which matters for religious practice, not the preponderant probability (*ẓann*) which, according to the Oṣūlīs, is the closest one can get to knowing the meaning of the traditions. Each generation, then, follows the same rules, even though these rules were established by persons now dead. This principle, known as *taqlīd al-mayyet*, was rejected by the Oṣūlīs, who maintained that each generation needed its own *mojtaheds* to interpret and elaborate the law.



Not surprisingly, the heyday of the Aḳbārī school in the 11th/17th and 12th/18th centuries saw a proliferation of major compilatory works on Hadith of which the most important are the *Wāfi* of Mollā Moḥsen Fayz Kāšānī (d. ca. 1091/1680) and the voluminous *Tafṣīl wasā'el al-šī'a elā aḥkām al-šarī'a* of Ḥorr 'Āmelī (d. 1104/1693), both adherents of the Aḳbārīya. Some, so-called “pure” (*ṣerf*) Aḳbārīs, followed Astarābādī's lead and engaged in vituperation against the Oṣūlīs. They include 'Abd-'Alī b. Aḥmad Derāzī Baḥrānī (d. 1177/1763-64) in his *Eḥyā' ma'ālem al-šī'a*, and 'Abdallāh Samāhījī (d. 1135/1723), whose own father was an Oṣūlī. In his *Monyat al-momāresīn fī aḵwebat so'ālāt al-šayḵ Yāsīn*, Samāhījī detailed some forty points of conflict between the two schools. He forcefully rejected any interpretative role for the *mojtaheds*. In his view, a *mojtahed* may only be consulted when he knows of a tradition relevant to a particular problem, or when he is able to elucidate an obscure passage; but since such matters are within the purview of the Hadith specialist, there is no need for a separate institution of *mojtaheds*. More moderate members of the Aḳbārīya are the elder Maḵlesī, Moḥammad Taqī (d. 1070/1660), who speaks approvingly of Astarābādī; the Khorasanian scholar 'Abdallāh b. Ḥājj Moḥammad Tūnī Bošravī (d. 1071/1660-61), who held independent views on certain particulars of Aḳbārī doctrine; Ne'matallāh Jazā'erī (d. 1112/1700), author of the encyclopedic *al-Anwār al-no'māniya*, in which he examines the views of both Aḳbārīs and Oṣūlīs with a view to refuting the latter; and Yūsuf b. Aḥmad Baḥrānī (d. 1186/1773), whose original support for the Aḳbārīs was later tempered by his belief that they were guilty of introducing division within the ranks of the Imamites.

Until the advent of Āgā Moḥammad Bāqer Behbahānī (d. 1208/1793-94), the Aḳbārī school dominated the shrines of Arab Iraq (the *'atabāt*). It was Behbahānī, especially in his *al-Ejtehād wa'l-aḳbār*, who spearheaded the Oṣūlī counterattack. The Aḳbārīs, whose opponents had earlier referred to them as *ḥašwīya* and *zāherīya*, were now declared to be infidels; such verbal attacks led on occasion to physical violence. By the time of Behbahānī's death, the former dominance of the Aḳbārīs had been effectively broken. A final attempt by the Aḳbārī scholar Mīrzā Moḥammad b. 'Abd-al-Nabī Naysābūrī to convert the Qajar ruler Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah (1797-1834) to the Aḳbārī cause failed, not least due to the scathing attack by the Oṣūlī leader Shaikh Ja'far Kāšef al-ḡeṭā' Naḵafī (d. 1227/1812), entitled *Kašf al-ḡeṭā' 'an ma'ā'eb Mīrzā Moḥammad 'adūw al-'olamā'*. Following the death, in 1233/1818, of Mīrzā Moḥammad at the hands of a mob in Kāzemayn, the Aḳbārīya disappeared almost completely. Kermān, formerly an Aḳbārī stronghold, became predominantly Šayḵī. Today



representatives of the Aḳbārī school are said to survive only in Korramšahr and Ābādān.

Of the various causes which led to the decline of the Aḳbārīya, perhaps the most important was their refusal to consider any role for intermediaries between the believers and the Hidden Imam. This refusal conflicted with the practical and emotional need of the Imamite community for leaders who, by their physical presence, could at least partially fill the gap created by the disappearance of the Imam and introduce an element of flexibility into the legal system. It was the rising power of the *mojtaheds* that sealed the fate of the Aḳbārī school.

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