



AḶYĀR

AḶYĀR (pl. of Arabic *kayyer*), “the chosen” (Persian, *bargozīdagān*), a category sometimes encountered in accounts given by Sufi writers of the unseen hierarchy known as *rejāl al-ġayb* (“men of the unseen”). The number of the *akyār* and the functions they are supposed to fulfill differ according to various sources. Hojvīrī numbers them at three hundred and says they are “among the officers of the divine court and the people of loosening and binding;” that is, they are the agents of destiny (*Kašf al-maḥjūb*, tr. R. A. Nicholson, London, 1911, p. 214). Four centuries later, ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān Jāmī adopted a view on the subject identical to that of Hojvīrī (*Nafaḥāt al-ons*, ed. M. Tawḥīdīpūr, Tehran, 1336 Š./1947, p. 20). In the popular Sufism of North Africa, the three hundred *akyār* are sometimes identified with the *noqabā* (“the lieutenants”), who are more commonly treated as a separate category of the *rejāl al-ġayb* (E. Dermenghem, *Le culte des saints dans l’Islam maghrébin*, Paris, 1954, p. 21).

A number of later Persian sources identify the *akyār* with still another category of the *rejāl al-ġayb*, the *abrār* (“the virtuous”). Sometimes this identification is combined with a retention of the figure three hundred (in, for example, the *Kašf al-loġāt wa’l-eṣṭelāḥāt* of Shaikh ‘Abd-al-Raḥīm Sūrbahārī, quoted in Deḥkodā (s.v. *akyār*) and Shaikh Moḥammad A’lā’ Tahānawī, *Kaššāf eṣṭelāḥāt al-fonūn*, ed. M. Waḥīh, ‘Abd-al-Ḥaqq, and Ġ. Qadīr, repr., Beirut, 1966, II, p. 421). Generally, however, those who identify the *akyār* with the *abrār* fix their number at seven; see, for example, the *Mo’ayyed al-fozālā*’ of Shaikh Moḥammad Dehlavī, quoted in S. J. Saḥḥādī, *Farhang-e moṣṭalahāt-e ‘orafā’ va motaṣawwefa*, Tehran, 1339 Š./1960, p. 24. According to the *Ḷolāṣat al-aṭar* of



Ḳaṭīb Baġdādī (quoted in Dehḳodā, s.v. *akyār*), the seven *akyār* are constantly traveling throughout the world, fulfilling the divine missions entrusted to them. This activity of the *akyār*, together with the fixing of their number at seven, suggests a further identification, with the group known to popular Sufism and folklore as the *haft tan* (“the seven”); (see, for example, *Mo’ayyed al-fożalā’* as quoted by Sajjādī). The *haft tan* are sometimes equated with the *ahl al-kaḥf* (i.e., the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus; see Qur’ān 18:22), but more generally they are regarded as an anonymous group of ubiquitous and immortal saints (see *Borhān-e qāṭe’*, ed. Mo’īn, p. 2344). It may also be remarked that an identification of the *akyār* with the *abrār* is implicit in the title of a celebrated compendium of Češtī hagiography, *Aḳbār al-akyār fī asrār al-abrār* by Shaikh ‘Abd-al-Ḥaqq Dehlavī.

In his detailed enumeration of the different classes of *awliā’*, Ebn ‘Arabī—the chief authority on this matter—does not assign any number to the *akyār*. He mentions a category numbering seven, but they are the *abdāl* (“the substitutes”; see *al-Fotūḥāt al-Makkīya*, Cairo, 1329/1911, II, p. 7), and another numbering three hundred, but they are described as “those who are formed according to the heart of Adam;” i.e., they receive all the forms of divine knowledge that were bestowed on Adam (*al-Fotūḥāt al-Makkīya*, II, p. 9). He insists that the *akyār* are subject to no numerical limitation; they are a group of men and women fluctuating in number but always present on earth. As for the sense of the designation *akyār*, he connects it to its occurrence in Qur’ān 38:47: “Verily they (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) are in Our presence among the elect and the chosen (*al-moṣṭafīn al-akyār*).” Those intended here by *al-akyār* are the same as those mentioned in Qur’ān 9:88: “To those belongs superabundance (*ūlā’eka lahom al-ḳayrāt*).” The superabundance enjoyed by the *akyār* is a kind of divine knowledge bestowed exclusively on them in a form only they can perceive. Among the *akyār* are some who can communicate this knowledge to other men, and others who cannot; the former group is superior to the latter, and necessarily includes all the prophets (*al-Fotūḥāt al-Makkīya*, II, p. 36).

In the Koranic commentary attributed to Ebn ‘Arabī but composed by ‘Abd-al-Razzāq Kāšānī, the term *akyār* as occurring in Qur’ān 38:47 is explained as “those exempt from evil, contingency, non-being and origination” (*Tafsīr al-Qor’ān al-ḳarīm*, Beirut, 1387/1967, II, p. 362). This interpretation was taken up by the Turkish Sufi Esmā’īl Ḥaqqī Brosevī in his commentary on the Qur’ān, *Rūḥ al-bayān* (Istanbul, 1389/1970, VIII, p. 47).



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text.