



'ALAWĪ

'ALAWĪ, the *nesba* used to denote descendants, political states, or sects connected with one or another 'Alī (Ebn al-Aṭīr, *al-Lobāb*, II, Cairo, 1357, p. 148; Ebn Ḥaǧar, *Tabṣīr al-montabeh*, ed. 'A. M. al-Beǧāwī, Cairo, 1964-67, III, pp. 1020-21); more particularly, it is employed to refer to a Shi'ite sect centered today in Syria. The *nesba* is most commonly used to refer to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb, and with this meaning frequently is combined with a title of nobility such as Sayyed or Šarīf. In this sense the term, often translated as "Alid," has a wider application than "Fāṭemī" (since 'Alī had children by wives other than Fāṭema) and a narrower application than "Ṭālebī" (since Abū Ṭāleb had other sons besides 'Alī).

According to most works on 'Alawī genealogy, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib had eighteen sons, five of whom left issue: Ḥasan, Ḥosayn, Moḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīya, 'Omar, and 'Abbās (Maqrīzī, *Ette'āz al-ḥonafā'*, ed. J. al-Šayyāl, Cairo, 1967, I, p. 8). The allegiance of the various Shi'ite sects was given to Ḥasan, Ḥosayn, Moḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīya, and their descendants, most of whom did not take part in the political activities of their days (e.g., the Imams Moḥammad Bāqer and Mūsā Kāzem), though a few were politically active and led revolts against the Omayyads (e.g., Ḥosayn b. 'Alī in 61/681 and Zayd b. 'Alī in 121/739) and the 'Abbasids (e.g., Moḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakīya in 145/762 and Ḥosayn b. 'Alī Šāḥeb Faḵḵ in 169/785.) The genuine 'Alawīs did not commonly use the name 'Alawī; more often their *nesbas* referred to the son of 'Alī from whom they were descended. But pretenders to 'Alawī descent, such as the leader of the Zanǧ revolt in Bašra in 255/869, often employed it.



States founded and ruled by ‘Alawīs included in the Mağreb, the Edrīsīs, the Fatimids (also in Egypt), and the Šarīfīs; in Yemen, the Solaymānīs, the Banu’l-Oḳayẓer, and the Rassīs; in Mecca, the Solaymānīs, the Banu’l-Oḳayẓer, the Banū Fodayta, and the Banū Qatāda; in northern Persia, the Zaydīs (see ‘Alids); in Āmol the Ḥasanīs; in Andalusia the Ḥammūdīs. Of all these, only the state in northern Persia and the Šarīfī state in Morocco were commonly referred to as ‘Alawī, though some historians (e.g., Ebn al-Aṭīr) called the Fāṭemī state by that name.

The Shi‘ite sects that grew up around ‘Alawīs were usually given names derived from their direct and often non-‘Alawī leaders or from one of their doctrines. Thus the Bayānīya were named after their active leader, Bayān b. Sam‘ān, and the Isma‘īlis after Esmā‘īl b. Ja‘far Šādeq; the Wāqefa believed in the “termination” (*woqūf*) of the imamate after Mūsā Kāẓem, whom they claimed was the Mahdī. In modern times the names ‘Alawī and ‘Alawīya have often been used to refer to various *golāt* sects, all of which are said to deify ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb. Thus the Tahtaci and the Qizilbāš in Anatolia are commonly called ‘Alawī; more rarely the term is used for the Ahl-e Ḥaqq in Iran. ‘Alawīyūn is also the name of a sect found largely in Syria, particularly in the Jebāl al-Noṣayrīya and the district of Lādeqīya.

The Muslim heresiographers call this last group the Nomayrīya or Noṣayrīya and say that it was named after its founder, Abū Šo‘ayb Moḥammad b. Noṣayr al-‘Abdī al-Bakrī al-Nomayrī, a Basran who was a contemporary of the tenth Imam of the Eṭnā‘ašarīya, ‘Alī Naqī (d. 254/868), and founded an independent *golāt* sect in 245/859. The name Noṣayrīya probably was adopted by the sect in the time of the first full formulator of the doctrine, Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥosayn b. Ḥamdān al-Ḳašībī (d. 346/957 or 358/968). The Noṣayrīya still recognize Moḥammad b. Noṣayr as their first teacher and Ḳašībī as their real founder (Aḍanī, *al-Bākūra*, pp. 15-16, 27), and it appears that the term “Noṣayrīya” was derived from the name of Ebn Noṣayr. Other hypotheses can be discarded: that “Noṣayrīya” was (a) a diminutive from *našrānī* (“Christian,” Renan); (b) a *nesba* derived from a village near Kūfa, Noṣayrāya (S. de Sacy, *Exposé de la Religion des Druzes*, Paris, 1838, I, clxxvii); (c) an attribution to Jebāl al-Noṣayrīya, to which the sect migrated (Kord ‘Alī, *Ḳeṭaṭ al-Šām*, VI, Damascus, 1925-28, p. 266). The confusion is understandable, in view of the numerous explanations given by some Noṣayrīya and others as to the name’s origin (e.g., from the name of a freedman of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb, a vizier of Mo‘āwīa, a Shi‘ite martyr, or even a son of ‘Alī; Dussaud, *Histoire*, pp. 10ff.). These explanations,



possibly “popular” among the Noṣayrīya at a later stage in their development, do not appear in their doctrines, poems, and liturgies.

Moḥammad b. Noṣayr and Kaṣībī lived in Iraq (*Bākūra*, p. 16), as did the latter’s contemporary, the Noṣayrī poet Montaḡab ‘Ānī (d. ca. 400/1009; A. ‘Alī, *Fann al-Montaḡab al-‘Ānī*, Beirut, 1968, p. 21). Thus it can safely be assumed that the Noṣayrīya first appeared in Iraq. Moreover, a poem written by Kaṣībī indicates that the Noṣayrīya doctrines were not popular in Syria (Šām) during his time (*Bākūra*, p. 16), though they had attained some currency in Persia through one of his teachers, ‘Abdallāh b. al-Jannān al-Jonbolānī (*Bākūra*, p. 16). The situation in Syria probably changed not long after Kaṣībī, for the Noṣayrī feast calendar of the 4th/10th century contains references to Tiberias, Tripoli, Aleppo, and Lādeqīya (Strothmann, *Die Nuṣairi im heutigen Syrien* [Nachr. der Ak. Wiss. 4], Göttingen, 1950, p. 39). By the 6th/12th century, the Noṣayrīya had become well established in northwestern Syria, but not until 1920 under French occupation did the Noṣayrīya come to be known as “Alawīyūn.” At this time they claimed that this was their original name but that they were “prohibited” from using it for 412 years, i.e., from the time of the Ottoman conquest of Syria (Kord ‘Alī, p. 266).

According to the early heresiographers, both Shi‘ite and Sunnite, the teachings of Moḥammad b. Noṣayr included the deification or prophethood of the Imam ‘Alī Naqī, the idea that Ebn Noṣayr was his *bāb* (gate) and *rasūl* (messenger), *eḥlāl al-maḡārem* (abolition of certain prohibitions of the *šarī‘a*), and *tanāsok* (metempsychosis). Ebn Noṣayr’s followers believed in the prophethood of ‘Alī Naqī’s son, Ḥasan ‘Askarī (d. 260/873). The shift toward the deification of ‘Alī, known as the basic doctrine by the time of Ebn Taymīya, may be due to Kaṣībī, as is admitted by the sect itself (*Bākūra*, p. 16). According to the Noṣayrī *Ketāb al-maḡmū‘* and to Solaymān Aḡanī, a convert to Protestantism, the Noṣayrīs believed, with minor variations, that ‘Alī was God, the Creator, the Giver, the amir of the angels, etc. He is the *ma‘nā* (meaning) and is compared to the moon; he created the *esm* (name), Moḥammad, who is like the sun and is called the *ḡejāb* (veil) of the *ma‘nā*. Moḥammad created his *bāb*, identified with Salmān Fārsī and compared to the sky (*Ketāb al-maḡmū‘* in Dussaud, *Histoire*, pp. 183, 185, 193; also *Bākūra*, pp. 19-20, 77). Salmān created the five *aytām* (orphans)—al-Meqdād, Abū Ḍarr Ġefārī, ‘Abdallāh b. Rawāḡa, ‘Oṭmān b. Maḡ‘ūn, and Qanbar—who in turn created the various aspects of the universe (*al-Maḡmū‘*, pp. 189-90; *Bākūra*, pp. 18-20). ‘Alī, Moḥammad, and Salmān make up the Noṣayrīya trinity, corresponding to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit;



hence the primary initiatory word of the sect is *‘ayn-mīm-sīn*. The Noṣayrīs developed a sophisticated belief in *tanāsoḳ* (*Bākūra*, pp. 59-61, 81) and interpreted the pillars of Islam as symbols (*ibid.*, pp. 24-33, 96), an act which led to their abandonment of the performance of the Islamic duties. Both Baybars (658-76/1260-77) and ‘Abd-al-Ḥamīd (1293-1327/1876-1909) forced the sect members to build mosques. According to Solaymān al-Aḍanī, the image of Christ the Messiah plays an important role in the sect’s doctrine (*ibid.*, pp. 16-17).

The sect celebrated festivals of diverse origin: Islamic (Feṭr and Aẓḥā), specifically Shi‘ite (Ġadīr, Ferāš, ‘Āšūrā’ and 15th Ša‘bān, the birth date of the twelfth Imam), Persian (Nowrūz and Mehraĵān), and Christian (Christmas, Epiphany, feast of St. Barbara; *ibid.*, pp. 34-35). Of special interest are the initiation ceremonies for new members, in which wine plays a paramount role (*ibid.*, pp. 2-11). The ‘Alawīyūn of today are still very secretive about their creed; they prefer to describe themselves as Arabs, of a moderate Shi‘ite stand not much different from that of the Eṭnā‘ašarīya.

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Both these books, as well as *Bākūra*, have to be handled with great care. For a list of the sect’s works, see Dussaud, *op. cit.*, pp. xiv-xxxiv.

L. Massignon, “Esquisse d’une bibliographie nusayrie,” *Mélanges syriens offerts à M. R. Dussaud*, Paris, 1939, pp. 913-22.



Idem, “Nuṣairī,” *EI*¹ III, pp. 963-67.

There has been no thorough study of the doctrine of the ‘Alawīyūn.