



ASĀS

ASĀS (pl. *osos*), “foundation, basis,” a degree of the Isma‘ili *da‘wa* hierarchy. It designates the man who discloses the spiritual interpretation (*ta‘wīl*) of the revelation (*tanzīl*) and who knows the inner meaning (*bāṭen*) of the outer (*ẓāher*) religious law (*šarī‘a*) and imparts this to the initiates. According to Isma‘ili teaching, each of the six “messenger-prophets” (*nāṭeq*, pl. *noṭaqā’*) who have hitherto been sent with a *šarī‘a* has been accompanied by an *asās*: Ādam by Šīs (or, more rarely, Hābīl); Nūḥ (Noah) by Sām; Ebrāhīm (Abraham) by Esmā‘īl; Mūsā (Moses) by Yūša‘ b. Nūn (or, more rarely, Hārūn); ‘Īsā (Jesus) by Šem‘ūn al-Šafā (Simon Peter); Moḥammad by ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb. The 7th *nāṭeq*, the long awaited Mahdī/Qā‘em, will not have any *asās* with him; since he will not be bringing a new *šarī‘a* but rather will reveal the inner meaning of all previous religions. The question of whether Adam revealed a *šarī‘a* and had an *asās* was a contentious issue in early Isma‘ilism (cf. Kermānī, *Ketāb al-rīāz*, ed. A. Tāmer, Beirut, 1960, pp. 176ff.). The term *asās* is not the original name for this figure in Isma‘ili doctrine; pre- and early Fatimid texts use instead the old Shi‘ite term *waṣī*, “plenipotentiary, envoy, executor” (cf. Manšūr al-Yaman, *Ketāb al-kašf*; ed. P. Strothmann, London, 1952, p. 165; Qāzī No‘mān, *Orjūza*, ed. I. Poonawala, Montreal, 1970, pp. 34-37). Not until the Neoplatonic “Persian school” in the early 4th/10th century was the term *asās* introduced. Nasafī (d. 331/942-43) was probably the first to employ it in his *Ketāb al-maḥṣūl*, which is now lost; so one concludes from quotations in the *Eṣlāḥ* of Abū Ḥātem Rāzī (see Madelung, “Imamat,” p. 102 n. 320). Nasafī’s disciple Abū Ya‘qūb Sejestānī (mid 4th/10th century), who, like his master, denied the *šarī‘a* and the *asās* of Adam, still used *waṣī* and *asās* as synonyms (*Eṭbāt al-nobūwāt*, ed. A. Tāmer,



Beirut, 1966, p. 187; *Ketāb al-noṣra*, cited in Kermānī's *Ketāb al-rīāz*, pp. 209f.). The *Resāla al-moḏheba* (ed. A. Tāmer in *Ḳams rasā'el esmā'īliya*, p. 54) attributed to Qāzī No'mān and the *Ketāb al-fatarāt* (MS. Tübingen Ma VI 297) ascribed to Ja'far b. Maṣṣūr Yaman mark the adoption of the new concept by Fatimid literature in the time of Caliph Mo'ezz (r. 341-65/953-75).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See also W. Ivanov, *Brief Survey of the Evolution of Ismailism*, Bombay, 1952, pp. 57-59.

Idem, *Studies in Early Persian Ismailism*, Bombay, 1955, pp. 12f., 99-102.

W. Madelung, "Das Imamāt in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre," *Der Islam* 35. 1961, p. 102.