



BĀB

BĀB “door, gate, entrance”: a term of varied application in Shi‘ism and related movements. It is applied differently in several sects to a rank in the spiritual hierarchy, either as conceived in transcendent terms or as actually manifested in the religious system on earth. Thus, the Isma‘ili hierarchy of *ḥodūd al-dīn* includes the *bāb* as fourth in rank after prophet, *asās*, and *emām* (Hollister, p. 260), while under the Fatimids *bāb* came to be used as a title for the chief *ḥojja*, immediately under the imam and responsible for the organization of the *da‘wa* (Lewis, “Bāb”). In the Noṣayrī system, the *bāb* is the third element in the hierarchy after *ma‘nā* and *esm*, in which the *ma‘nā* is the equivalent of the Isma‘ili “silent” (*ṣāmet*) imam, the *esm* the equivalent of the “speaking (*nāṭeq*)” imam, and the *bāb* the gateway to the imam. The names of the *abwāb* are given for the first seven cycles and for the cycle of Islamic imams, beginning with Salmān al-Fāresī (with ‘Alī and Moḥammad). (For lists of these names, see Massignon, “Nuṣairī.”) In 245/859-60, Ebn Noṣayr proclaimed himself *bāb* of the tenth Shi‘ite imam, ‘Alī al-Naqī. The Druzes apply the term to the embodiment of the *‘aql al-koll* who stands as the first of the hierarchy of five agents below the divinity; thus, Ḥamza b. ‘Alī, their founder, claimed to be the *bāb* as the last incarnation of universal reason (Carra de Vaux, “Druzes”).

Among the Twelver Shi‘ites, the term is applied in a variety of ways to the imam, who is spoken of in traditions as *bāb Allāh*, *bāb al-hodā*, *bāb al-īmān*, and so forth, in which capacity he is the means of access to the knowledge of God and an intermediary for the passage of prayers and grace between the divine and human worlds (for numerous traditions on these themes together



with Koranic verses interpreted accordingly, see Kermānī, *Mobīn* I, pp. 227-31; for commentary on the application of the term *abwāb al-īmān* to the imams in the *zīāra al-jāme'a al-kabīra*, see Aḥsā'ī, *Šarḥ* I, pp. 78-85; for discussion of this theme in general, see Kermānī, *Eršād* I, pp. 338-69; idem, *Feṭra* II, pp. 198-213). 'Alī is described in one tradition as the gate of the prophet, the latter being “the gate of God” (Kermānī, *Mobīn* I, p. 228), while a well-known *ḥadīth* (extant in several versions) ascribes to Moḥammad the words “I am the city of knowledge (*madīnat al-'elm*) and 'Alī is the gate; will you enter the city other than by its gate?” (ibid., pp. 229-30). Shi'ite interpretation of Qur'ān 2:58 and 7:161 identifies the imams with the *bāb* through which the Children of Israel are to pass after saying “*ḥeṭṭa*” (for traditions, see Kermānī, *Mobīn* I, p. 229; for commentary, see Aḥsā'ī, *Šarḥ* II, pp. 227-31; Šabestari, *Šarḥ*, pp. 148-49).

The term also came to be used among the Imami Shi'ites to designate the representatives of the imam and is best known in its application to the four *abwāb* believed to have acted as intermediaries for the twelfth imam during his lesser occultation: Abū 'Amr 'Oṭmān b. Sa'īd 'Omarī, his son Abū Ja'far Moḥammad (d. 305/917), Abu'l-Qāsem Ḥosayn b. Rūḥ Nowbaḳṭī (d. 326/937), and Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Moḥammad Sāmarrī (d. 329/940). (On these, see Maškūr, *Tārīk-e Šī'a*, pp. 137-42; Hussain, *Occultation*, chaps. 4-7.) Other claimants to this rank appeared during the same period (ibid., pp. 142-46), but in the end the system of *bābīya* was abandoned in favor of the theory of the greater occultation. During the nineteenth century, a section of the Shaikhi school (q.v.) came to regard [Shaikh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī](#) and [Sayyed Kāzem Raštī](#) as gates of the imam, a belief which led to the emergence of [Babism](#) following the application of the term *bāb* to Sayyed 'Alī Moḥammad Šīrāzī (see [BĀB, 'ALĪ MOḤAMMAD ŠĪRĀZĪ](#)).

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