



## BĀṬENĪYA

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**BĀṬENĪYA**, a generic term for all groups and sects which distinguished the *bāṭen* and the *ẓāher* of the Qurʾān and the Islamic law (*Šarīʿa*). The Arabic word *bāṭen* (inner, hidden, q.v.) was used to denote non-literal meanings of Koranic verses and Islamic legal commands and prohibitions, its opposite, the Arabic word *ẓāher* (outer, visible), to denote literal or obvious meanings presented by the wording of the texts or the implementation of the laws. This distinction was fundamental to the thinking of a number of mainly Shiʿite sects, whose origins are traceable to 2nd/8th century Iraq. Christian, Jewish, and Gnostic influences on their thinking cannot be ruled out but are hard to prove in particular cases.

The first Islamic sect which professed to find allusions to the imamate of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb and his descendants in certain verses of the Qurʾān was the Kaysānīya (q.v.), who expected ʿAlī's third son Moḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīya (d. 81/700) to come forth as the Mahdī. In particular, one branch of this sect, under the leadership of Moḥammad b. Ḥarb at Madāʿen, based its teachings on this type of Koranic exegesis (e.g., 95:1; see Qomī, p. 30). During the 2nd/8th century the Shiʿite radicals (*ḡolāt*, sing. *ḡālī*) in Iraq switched their allegiance to the imams of the line of Ḥosayn, the second son of ʿAlī, and they credited these imams with ability to impart secret knowledge, holding that the Prophet Moḥammad only transmitted the outer (*ẓāher*) wording of the divine revelation (*tanzīl*), whereas ʿAlī as his heir and executor (*waṣī*) possessed knowledge of its inner (*bāṭen*) meaning. It was also believed that ʿAlī's successors, i.e., the imams, kept possession of the knowledge of the *bāṭen* and



that they entrusted the interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of the outer working to only a small number of initiates. The word pair *tanzīl ta'wīl* was first used in this sense by the Kufan *ḡālī* Abū Maṣṣūr 'Ejlī, who claimed to be the plenipotentiary of the fifth imam, Moḥammad al-Bāqer (d. 114/732 or 117/735; Nawbakṭī, pp. 34f.; Qomī, pp. 46f.).

Two literary sources, both originally written at Kūfa, show how the Kufan *ḡolāt* identified their own secret doctrines with what they took to be inner meanings of the Qur'ān. One is the *Omm al-ketāb*, preserved only in a Persian translation. The other is the *Ketāb al-haft wa'l-azella*, written probably by Moḥammad b. Senān, a Kufan *ḡālī* contemporary with the imams 'Alī al-Rezā (d. 203/818) and Moḥammad al-Jawād (d. 220/835). In these texts the interpretation (*ta'wīl*) or unveiling (*kašf*) of the *bāṭen* is not an achievement of scholarly effort and human exegesis but a divine disclosure made known by the imams to a small number of initiates. Both texts therefore belong to the genre of apocalyptic literature. In the *Omm al-ketāb* the imam Moḥammad al-Bāqer tells secrets of the *bāṭen* to a select group of pupils; in the *Haft wa'l-azella* the imam Ja'far al-Šādeq initiates his confidant Mofazzāl Jo'fī into hidden meanings.

For the Kufan *ḡolāt*, perception of the *bāṭen* usually implied complete neglect of the *zāher*. The outer commands and prohibitions of the *Šarī'a* had no importance for a person acquainted with their inner meanings. Such a person therefore ceased to be bound by them and became exempt from all the ritual and legal obligations of the religion. Antinomianism (*ebāḥa*) of this type was expressed in a widely repeated saying that Koranic commands and prohibitions are really “men who must be followed or avoided” (e.g. Qomī, p. 47), i.e., that they are only allusions to imams and enemies of imams, their literal meanings being unimportant. This argument entered into the teachings of the Kufan *ḡālī* Abu'l-Ḳaṭṭāb (put to death ca. 138/755), who based it on the Koranic verse (4:28): “God wishes to make (burdens) lighter for you” (Qomī, p. 52). The *Ḳaṭṭābīya* described Moḥammad, the bringer of the *zāher*, as “speaking” (*nāteq*) and 'Alī, the keeper of the *bāṭen*, as “silent” (*šāmet*; Qomī, pp. 50-52; for examples of *Ḳaṭṭābīya ta'wīl*, see pp. 54f.).

The *ḡolāt* sects in Iraq encountered strong opposition from the Twelver Shi'ites and at the end of the 3rd/9th century split into two groups: the Eshāqī (named after Eshāq al-Aḥmar, d. 286/899 at Baghdad) and the Noṣayrī (named after Moḥammad b. Noṣayr). The latter still survives. The sect's teachings were carried by wandering shaikhs to the coastal mountains of Syria, where its



adherents today call themselves 'Alawīs (q.v.). They are the only remaining heirs to the centuries-old legacy of the Kufan *ḡolāt*. It is by them that the *Ketāb al-haft wa'l-azella* has been handed down. As initiates acquainted with the *bāṭen*, they consider themselves exempt from all ritual obligations and therefore refrain from formal prayers, pilgrimage to Mecca, fasting in Ramaẓān, etc. (see Halm, 1982, pp. 315ff.).

Beside, but apart from, the extreme Bāṭenīs of the *ḡolāt* sects, who believed the *ẓāher* to be invalidated by the *bāṭen*, stood the moderate Bāṭenīs of the Isma'īli sects, whose missionary activity (*da'wa*) began in Iraq in the middle years of the 3rd/9th century. The distinction between *ẓāher* and *bāṭen* was likewise central to Isma'īli doctrine, according to which six “speakers” (*nāṭeq*) in the course of human history successively brought a *Šarī'a* (i.e., a combined system of religion and law). The six were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Moḥammad. Assigned to each of these was an “heir-executor” (*waṣī*; also termed *asās* “foundation”), respectively Abel (or Seth), Shem, Ishmael, Aaron (or Joshua), Simon Peter, and 'Alī. Only a small circle of initiates knew the secret of the *bāṭen*—which was identical with the Isma'īli doctrine of the Mahdī and his coming (*qīāma*)—and the few knowers were bound by their initiatory oath (*mītāq*) to keep the *bāṭen* secret and to adhere strictly to the *ẓāher*, i.e., to the commands and prohibitions of the *Šarī'a*. Believers would not be exempted from this obligation (*talkīf*) until the last day (*yawm al-qīāma*), when the Mahdī would come forth, order abolition (*raf'*) of the *Šarī'a*, and reinstate the original religion of Adam, namely pure monotheism (*tawḥīd*) without laws, commands, and prohibitions.

The earliest Isma'īli literature consists mainly of *ta'wīl* works in which justification is found in verses of the Qur'ān for every detail of Isma'īli doctrine: e.g., the *Ketāb al-rošd wa'l-hedāya*, ascribed to the missionary (*dā'ī*) Ebn Hawšab Maṣṣūr al-Yaman (d. 302/915), or the *Ketāb al-kašf*, a collection of six tracts from the first phase of the Isma'īli *da'wa* said to have been compiled by Ja'far b. Maṣṣūr Yaman. Inner meanings of sets of words or chapters of the Qur'ān and prescribed rituals are expounded in numerous Isma'īli monographs bearing titles such as *Ta'wīl ḥorūf al-mo'jam*, *Ta'wīl al-basmala*, *Ta'wīl Sūrat al-nesā*, *Ta'wīl al-ṣalāt wa'l-ṣawm*, *Ta'wīl al-zakāt* (Poonawala, pp. 73, 144, 317, 331). Nevertheless the “outer” *Šarī'a* was always binding on Isma'īlis. For them, *ẓāher* and *bāṭen* were inseparable, as shown for example in the two chief works of the Fatimid jurist Qāẓī No'mān (d. 363/974), namely his great compendium of law *Da'ā'em al-Eslām* (ed. A. A. Fyze, 2nd ed., Cairo,



1963-67), which is the foundation of Ismaʿīli jurisprudence, and the subsequent *Taʿwīl al-Daʿāʾem* (ed. Mohammad Aʿzamī, Cairo, 1968-72). In Egypt the Fatimid caliphs, in their role as imams of the Ismaʿīlis, always strictly applied the *Šarīʿa*. This is confirmed by their readiness to build mosques (al-Azhar, al-Ḥākem, and others) at Cairo and by their concern for the holy places at Mecca and Medina. They only allowed the *bāṭen* to be explained by a *dāʿī* to oath-bound initiates at weekly teaching sessions (*majāles al-ḥekma*; Maqrīzī, *Keṭaṭ*, Būlāq, 1853, I, p. 391). Several written accounts of such sessions are known (Poonawala, index, p. 509, s.v. *majāles*). Only on rare occasions did the inherent antinomianism of the Ismaʿīli doctrine lead to heretical adjuration of the law, as in the disturbances of the Druzes at Cairo in 408-11/1017-21 during the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākem's reign, or the proclamation of the *qīāma* at the fortress of Alamūt in 559/1164.

Polemics against the Bāṭenīs and their methods came not only from Sunnites such as Ġazālī (d. 505/1111) but, above all, from Shiʿites such as the Jaʿfarī (Twelver) authors Nowbaktī and Qomī in their books on sects and the Zaydite author Moḥammad b. Ḥasan Daylamī (who wrote ca. 707/1308).

See also [bāṭen](#); [ismaʿīlism](#).

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