



ḤOSAYN B. RUḤ

ḤOSAYN B. RUḤ, SHAIKH ABU'L-QĀSEM ḤOSAYN B. RUḤ B. ABI BAḤR NOWBAḲṬI, also known as Ruhi, the third of the four “special vicegerents” (*nowwab-e kāšša*) of the Hidden Imam. His vicegerency lasted from Jomāda II 305/November 917 (or a year earlier) to Ša'bān 326/June 938. Although he is commonly known by the *nesba* Nowbaḳti, he probably acquired the name of this illustrious family from his mother rather than his father. It is also probable that he was from Qom, as he spoke the dialect of nearby Āba and maintained close ties with the Imamite community there (Ebn Bābavayh, pp. 502-4; Ṭusi, pp. 195, 229; Eqbāl, p. 214).

The vicegerency of Ḥosayn b. Ruḥ coincided with the rise to power of a number of Imamite families at the service of the 'Abbasid state under the caliphs al-Moqtader (295/903-320/932), al-Qāher (320/932-322/934), and al-Rāzi (322/934-329/941). In this period, members of the House of Forāt and other Shi'ite viziers intermittently controlled the 'Abbasid bureaucracy, while the members of the Nowbaḳti and other Shi'ite families served as tax farmers, officials, and lower-ranking viziers. With the absence of the Imam into its fifth decade, the Nowbaḳ-tis came to exercise a preponderant influence over the Imamite hierarchy and community, and by the early 4th/10th century Abu Sahl Esmā'il b. 'Ali Nowbaḳti (d. 311/923) had established himself as the leader of the Imamites in Baghdad.

In common with many other members of the Nowbaḳti family, Ebn Ruḥ began his career in the 'Abbasid financial administration. His date of birth is not known, but the highly improbable reports that he was a close companion of



the eleventh, and even the tenth Imam (Eqbāl, pp. 214-15), should be dismissed. He may have been a junior clerk at the holy seat in the third/ninth century, as a decree of excommunication is said to be written in his hand (Ṭusi, p. 245). The report that he held office during the vizierate of the Shi'ite Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Ali b. Moḥammad b. Forāt, from 304/917 to 306/919, is more reliable. By this time, he had become one of the ten agents of the second vicegerent, Moḥammad b. 'Oṭmān 'Amri (or 'Omari), though not one particularly close to the latter (Ṭusi, p. 225). One tradition attests that he was 'Amri's agent during the two or three years immediately before his succession (Ebn Bābavayh, p. 501; Ṭusi, p. 225). He is said to have supplemented his official income during this time by 30 dinars in commissions (Ṭusi, p. 227). It is tempting to speculate that the appointment of Ebn Ruḥ as the third vicegerent of the Hidden Imam prior to the death of the second vicegerent was related to the marriage of the latter's daughter, Omm Kolṭum, to a member of the Nowbakṭi family, Aḥmad b. Ebrāhim (Ṭusi, pp. 228-29; Eqbāl, p. 243; see further below). In any event it came as a major surprise: the followers of the older Imamite tradition in the hierarchy expected the choice of 'Amri's close associate, Ja'far b. Moḥammad b. Motayyel or his father (Ṭusi, p. 225), while the faction under the sway of the new Imamite leadership expected it to be the aforementioned Abu Sahl Nowbakṭi (Ṭusi, p. 240). The traditions in support of Ebn Ruḥ, mostly transmitted by Omm Kolṭum and Aḥmad b. Ebrāhim's grandson, report that Ja'far eventually accepted this surprising choice by the second vicegerent on the latter's deathbed (Ebn Bābavayh, p. 503; Ṭusi, p. 226). In fact, there was some initial opposition to the take-over of the hierarchy by Ebn Ruḥ, and one of the Hidden Imam's agents, Moḥammad b. Faẓl of Mosul, only accepted him and submitted his accounts after much persuasion, as late as 307/919, two years after the second vicegerent had died (Ṭusi, pp. 192-93).

There were already signs of trouble ahead in the last years of 'Amri's life, when his authority was challenged, first in around 300/912 by the controversial mystic Ḥosayn b. Maṣṣūr Ḥallāj (q.v.; d. 310/922), who claimed to be the deputy (*wakil*) of the Lord of the Age (Ṣāḥeb-al-Zamān), and then, in 303/914-15, by someone who claimed to be the Lord of the Age himself, returning from occultation (Klemm, p. 133; Arjomand, 1996, p. 506). The response to this crisis of hierocratic authority represents the first of Ebn Ruḥ's two major policies, which he pursued with vigor and determination to consolidate his leadership of the Imamite hierarchy. He declared the resumption of direct communication between the Hidden Imam and the community, which had been interrupted a quarter of a century earlier (Ebn



Bābavayh, pp. 92-93; English tr. Arjomand, 1997, p. 8). Since the resumption of communication required an intermediary, it is most probably at this time that the term “intermediary” (*safir*, which was later to be applied to all the four special vicegerents) started to be used as the formal designation of the head of the hierarchy. When Moḥammad b. ‘Oṭmān ‘Amri died in Jomāda II 305/November 917 (or a year earlier), his daughter Omm Kolṭum asserted that he had designated Ḥosayn b. Ruḥ as his successor, and her husband, Aḥmad b. Ebrāhim Nowbakṭi, as the chief secretary at the holy seat. His Nowbakṭi kinsmen testified that the dying vicegerent had presented his successor to them thus: “Here is Abu’l Qāsem al-Ḥosayn b. Ruḥ b. Abi Baḥr al-Nowbakṭi, my lieutenant and the intermediary (*safir*) between you and the Lord of the Command (*Ṣāḥeb-al-Amr*)” (Ṭusi, pp. 226-27). On 24 Šawwāl 305/9 April 918, the newly ensconced *safir* produced the first decree said to be issued by the Hidden Imam after a quarter of a century of silence. The subject of the decree was, appropriately, the confirmation of Ebn Ruḥ as the new head of the hierarchy.

The second major policy which Ebn Ruḥ instigated was the official standardization of Imamite law. His chief assistant in this project was Moḥammad b. ‘Ali Šalmaḡāni who, like Ebn Ruḥ, was a protégé of the Forāts in the caliphal bureaucracy. Ebn Ruḥ closely supervised Šal-maḡāni at the bureau of the Hidden Imam in the compilation of a legal manual, entitled *Ketāb al-taklif* (Ṭusi, pp. 228, 239; Eqbāl, p. 230). It was sent for approval to the jurists of Qom (Ṭusi, pp. 229-40).

While he was directing the affairs of the Imamite community, Ebn Ruḥ’s career in the caliphal bureaucracy underwent the vicissitudes typical of a period of political instability with frequent changes of viziers. He was known for practicing dissimulation (*taqiya*) to an extent that seemed unseemly for the vicegerent of the Hidden Imam to at least one follower (Ṭusi, pp. 236-37). Eventually, Ebn Ruḥ went into hiding, appointing Šalmaḡāni as his deputy with the responsibility to manage the affairs of the holy seat (Ṭusi, pp. 185-86). This was presumably before the return of his patron, Abu’l Ḥasan ‘Ali b. Moḥammad Forāt, to the position of vizier in Rabi’ II 311/July-August 923.

In 924/312, the vizier Abu’l Ḥasan Forāt and his son, Moḥassen, were executed. Ebn Ruḥ was imprisoned on fiscal charges, and Šalmaḡāni fled to Mosul, whose Hamadanid rulers were Shi’ites. Despite his legal learning, Šalmaḡāni soon abandoned law for antinomian extremism and appears to have sought to carry Ebn Ruḥ and Omm Kolṭum along with him, by claiming that they were



reincarnations of ‘Ali and Fāṭema respectively (Ṭusi, p. 249; Eqbāl, p. 227); Šalmaḡāni claimed for himself the rank of “Gate” (*bāb*) to the Hidden Imam before, eventually, in the manner of Ḥallāj, he also claimed to be the actual incarnation of God. Ebn Ruḥ refused to join him in what he regarded as a heresy, and so he issued a decree from prison, which purported to emanate from the Hidden Imam, to excommunicate Šalmaḡāni. The decree is said to have been issued in Ḍu’l-Ḥejja 312/March 925 but was not publicized until shortly before Ebn Ruḥ’s release from prison in 317/929 (Ṭusi, pp. 187, 252-53). Šalmaḡāni challenged Ebn Ruḥ to a *mobāhala* (a formal ordeal of mutual imprecation invoked by disputing individuals; see further “Mubāhala” in *EI2*; Ṭusi, pp. 186-87). With considerable inside knowledge of the holy seat of the absent Imam, Šalmaḡāni knew, as did Ebn Ruḥ, that everything was at stake, or as he put it: “we were wrangling over this matter just as dogs over a corpse” (Ṭusi, p. 241).

Ebn Ruḥ’s release from prison also meant his rise to eminence for the rest of his life. It coincided with the ascendancy of his Nowbakṭi kinsmen in the caliphal state. ‘Ali b. ‘Abbās Nowbakṭi and his son, Ḥosayn (d. 326/938), to whom Ebn Ruḥ was particularly close, were preeminent from 317/929 to 324/937, while Eshāq (322/934), son of the great Abu Sahl Nowbakṭi, emerged as the caliph-maker after the murder of al-Moqtader in 320/932 (Eqbāl, pp. 186-210). Ebn Ruḥ frequented the court of Rāzi be’llāh, who became caliph in 322/934, and exerted considerable influence on him. In these favorable political circumstances, Ebn Ruḥ used his political power and influence in the caliphal state and its judiciary to destroy Šalmaḡāni and suppress his heresy. The latter was arrested, tried with his followers, and eventually executed on 29 Ḍu’l-qa’da 322/11 October 934.

The defection and heresy of Šalmaḡāni must have ruined Ebn Ruḥ’s plans for legal reform. He did not issue another official manual of law and contented himself with advising the scandalized believers to continue using Šalmaḡāni’s legal works and to reject only what was his personal opinion in them (Ṭusi, pp. 239-40; Eqbāl, pp. 231-32). Ḥosayn b. Ruḥ died on 18 Ša’bān 326/20 June 938, and was buried in the district of Baghdad known after the Nowbakṭi family as the Nowbakṭiya, where his tomb has become a Shi’ite shrine.



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