



KAŞIBI

KAŞIBI, ḤOSAYN B. ḤAMDĀN AL-JONBALĀNI, ABU ‘ABD-ALLĀH (d. 969), founder of Noşayrism. The mystical Shi‘ite sect whose present-day followers in Syria and southern Turkey call themselves ‘Alawis (Turk. Alevi), became widespread throughout Iraq and Syria as it was backed by the Ḥamdānids of Aleppo (r. 944-1004) and the Buyids of Baghdad (r. 945-1055).

LIFE

Kaşibi was born in Jonbalā’, an Iraqi village located between Kufa and Wāsiṭ, to a well-educated family with close ties to Ḥasan al-‘Askari (d. 874; see [‘ASKARI](#)), the 11th imam of the Twelver Shi‘ites. He was nicknamed Kaşibi after his grandfather, Kaşib. His father, Ḥamdān, and his uncle, Aḥmad, were traditionists, in particular of the Prophet’s biography (*sira*), while his uncle Ebrāhim was a devoted assistant (*morābet*) of the Imam (*HK*, pp. 54, 59-60, 67, 69, 151-53, 159). In 886, at a young age, he prayed in a mosque in Medina, and performed the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) in 895 (*ibid.*, pp. 67-68, 121). Two mystics initiated Kaşibi into the mystery of Moḥammad b. Noşayr al-Namiri, the sect’s eponym (d. after 850). The first was ‘Abd-Allāh al-Jannān al-Jonbalāni (d. 900?), a fellow townsman nicknamed al-Fāresi al-Zāhed (lit. “the Persian ascetic”). In 926 Kaşibi met his second guide, a certain ‘Ali b. Aḥmad, in the presence of a group of about 150 of his disciples in Ṭorbā’, a village near Karbalā’ (Ṭabarāni, pp. 126-31). Only after their guidance did Kaşibi begin to spread his doctrine in [Baghdad](#). His open propaganda led to his imprisonment, which supposedly happened before the Buyid conquest of Baghdad in 945 (see [BUYIDS](#)), and his mysterious escape allowed for the survival of the Noşayri sect (*DK*, fol. 3a; cf.



Ađani, p. 16).

After this traumatic event Kaşibi probably practiced *taqiya* since the differences between the Noşayri and the Shi'ite sources suggest that Kaşibi led a double life. The Shi'i accounts document his open activity, and the Twelver Shi'ite literature preserved several important traditions ascribed to Kaşibi (Majlesi, I, p. 39, XV, pp. 4, 25-28, L, p. 335, LXXXII, p. 27, CII, pp. 37, 102). In Kufa, Abu 'Abbās b. 'Oqba relied on Kaşibi's traditions ('Asqalāni, II, pp. 343-44), and Hārūn b. Musa Tal'akbari received a license (*ejāza*) from Kaşibi (Astarābādi, p.112). Nonetheless, Najāši (982-1058; I, p. 187) was suspicious and accused him of "heretical doctrine" (*fāsed al-maḏhab*). Of Kaşibi's Twelver Shi'ite writings only *al-Hedāya al-kobrā*, which is probably identical to his previously assumed lost *Ta'riḫ al-a'emma*, has survived. Yet five more books are mentioned in Shi'ite sources: *al-Mā'eda*, *al-Ekwān*, *al-Masā'el*, *Asmā' al-Nabi wa'l-a'emma*, and *Resālat takliḫ* ('Āmeli, V, p. 491).

Kaşibi's secret activity is preserved in the Noşayri sources. After his escape from prison he moved to **Harrān** in northern Syria, where he established a secret community of 51 disciples whom he called "monotheists" (*mowahhedun*). This group included the future leaders Moḥammad b. 'Ali Jelli, 'Ali b. 'Isā Jesri, and Ḥasan b. Šo'ba, who was probably a resident of Harrān (*DK*, fol. 145a; cf. Ađani, p. 29). After the Buyid dynasty had seized power in Baghdad, Kaşibi returned to **Iraq**. He appointed Jesri to lead the *mowahhedun* in Baghdad (Ṭawil, p. 259; Jesri, fol. 47b-48a), and in 947 he visited his community, which numbered around 140 disciples, in Ṭorbā' (Ṭabarāni, p. 131). Kaşibi dedicated an Arabic treatise (*RR*), whose title includes the Persian imperative *rāst bāš* ("be righteous!"), to the Buyid prince 'Ezz al-Dawla Baḫtyār (r. 967-78). This dedication and a panegyric of the Noşayri poet Montajab al-'Āni (d. ca. 1009; cf. C. Brockelmann, *GAL S I*, p. 327), indicate that Baḫtyār backed the sect's community in Iraq.

Toward the end of his life, Kaşibi returned to Syria. In Aleppo he was granted the patronage of the Hamdanid Sayf al-Dawla (r. 944-67), and dedicated to his patron *al-Hedāya al-kobrā* (*DK*, fols. 4a-5a; cf. Ṭawil, p. 259; 'Asqalāni, II, pp. 343-44). Kaşibi appointed Jelli as his successor in Aleppo, but the only information about his tomb in the north of Aleppo, called Šayḫ Yābrāq, stems from a problematic source (Ṭawil, p. 259).

DOCTRINE



Ḳaṣībī is the key figure to the understanding of the sect's identity. He was the first to use the terms “deficient believers” (*moqaṣṣer*, pl. *moqaṣṣera*) and “ignorant mass” (*‘amma*) for Shi'ites and Sunnis, respectively. Ḳaṣībī considered his own group not to be a deviant sect but “the true Shi'a” (*shi'at al-ḥaqq*), a phrase repeated throughout his *Divān* (see [AHL-e ḤĀQQ](#)). According to his doctrine of the “science of God's unity” (*‘elm al-tawḥid*), only the combination of Islam's esoteric and exoteric practices will result in a true monotheism. Within the Noṣayri religion, tradition and legacy, the Path of Ḳaṣībī (*Ḳaṣībīya*) is the orthodox Noṣayrism, and his immediate followers Jelli, Jesri and Ebn Šo'ba, as well as their successor Maymun b. Qāsem Ṭabarāni (d. ca. 1027), were busy editing the accumulated materials taught by their master.

Ḳaṣībī was a charismatic figure who succeeded in turning the small group of Ebn Noṣayr 's partisans in Syria and Iraq into a large community that was backed by powerful dynasties. Without his presence, the mystical circle of Ebn Noṣayr, which was first known as *namiriya*, probably would have disappeared, like most of the known *ḡolāt* sects of the post-*ḡayba* period (see [ĠAYBA](#)). Ḳaṣībī's *taqiya* became a model and served his followers as a means of survival, while they preserved his esoteric literature and poetry as the canonic Noṣayri text. Ḳaṣībī was a talented poet and expressed much of his doctrine in his poetry, which in turn was included in Noṣayri prayers. But the *Divān* (*DK*, fols. 16b-18b, 47a-50b) also contains references to his biography, such as his imprisonment and his immigration to Syria. In his *Divān* (*DK*, fols. 29b, 33b, 38b, 47a-50b, 107a) Ḳaṣībī reveals resentment towards Syria, and expresses longing for the Shi'ite sanctuaries in Iraq. Moreover, three treatises have been preserved, since *al-Resāla al-rastbāšīya* (*RR*) and its supplement, the *Feqh al-resāla al-rastbāšīya* (*FRR*), contain long citations from the lost *Resāla fi'l-seyāqa*.

The Noṣayri doctrine is unsystematically spread out in Ḳaṣībī's writing, but they document that his vast knowledge comprised both the exoteric (*zāher*) and the esoteric (*bāṭen*) Shi'ite traditions. Ḳaṣībī's *bāṭen* teachings focus on the Qur'ān's allegorical interpretations (*ta'wil*), accounts of miracles performed by the imams and their *bābs* (q.v.), and the teachings of known *ḡolāt* from Kufa, ranging from Mofaẓẓal b. 'Omar, a disciple of the sixth imam [Ja'far al-Šādeq](#) (d. 765) to Ebn Noṣayr. Ḳaṣībī's concepts of emanative creation and the pre-existence of the world of light are derived from Mofaẓẓal's *Ketāb al-ḥaft wa'l-azella* (Halm, 1978).

Unlike other *ḡolāt* sects, Ḳaṣībī rejected the principle of incarnation (*ḥolul*)



because the mixture of the spiritual and material worlds is considered impossible and rejected as a serious heresy. He relied on the docetist tradition to explain the appearance of the deity to mankind, and presented the cases of Jesus and Ḥosayn b. 'Ali (d. 680) as evidence. In the Qur'ān it is stated that Jesus was not killed “but so it was made to appear to them” (*laken šobbeha lahom*, Qur'ān 4:157). In two poems Kaşibi (*DK*, fols. 29b-31b, 37b-38a) even argued that 'Āşurā' is a day of joy and mourning is forbidden, because Ḥosayn's martyrdom was an illusion.

This teaching is based on the dualist division of the cosmos into an ideal and an evil part. The ideal part is “the immense world of light” (*al-ālam al-kabir al-norāni*) in which “the creatures of ranks” (*ahl al-marāteb*) dwell. All these are the pure emanations of the three most exalted aspects of the divinity. The “meaning” (*ma'nā*) that is the One and the only God is the divinity's most transcendent part, because the eternal being has never been created and has no form or boundaries. From this emanate the two other aspects of the deity, which have different goals. The “name” (*esm*) of God defines the deity. This aspect is also called the “veil” (*hejāb*) because the divinity veiled itself from the creatures of light after they had committed the sin of denial. The third aspect is the “gate” (*bāb*), through which inferior beings can get close to the divinity and which therefore reflects God's mercy. The evil part of the cosmos is the negation of the world of light. In “the small world of dust” (*al-ālam al-šağir al-torābi*) dwell the inferior emanations of the deity, which are associated with the inferior ranks (*marāteb*), surrounded by an evil material universe (Kaşibi, *RR*, p. 16).

This concept combines Neo-Platonism with **Gnosticism**, and is commonly found in Kaşibi's works. In Mofazzal's *Ketāb al-şerāt*, which was transmitted by Kaşibi, the mystic is elevated through gnosis (*'elm*, *ma'refa*; see **ERFĀN**) in degrees to higher stations of spirituality in order to be freed of the material world and return to the divine source. That the *mowaḥhedun* are imprisoned in this world and must transmigrate from one human body to another is their punishment for the Original Sin. Kaşibi refers to Mofazzal's *Ketāb al-ḥaft* when he explains the “fall” (*ḥabṭa*) of spiritual beings into the material world, which is a well-known Gnostic idea, as the sin to deny the divinity when it appeared in their form. Metempsychosis is a punishment that prevents the escape from the materialist prison (*RR*, pp. 60-66; cf. *DK*, fols. 7a-7b, 101a). Unlike the mystic who is ascending according to the stations of the “path” (*şerāt*)□, a sinner descends in the degrees of “repeated transmigration” (*takrir*), from humans to



animals, plants, and finally even to stones and metals.

Ḳaṣibi explains the important concepts of the appearance of the deity's three aspects in human history and the degrees of metempsychosis in *al-Resāla al-rāstbāšiya*. The divinity contacted humanity in a cyclical transition of appearance (*seyāqat al-zohurāt*) during which *ma'nā*, *esm*, and *bāb* took on a docetic human form and constantly changed roles. These appearances have occurred in historical cycles (*kawr* pl. *akwār*, *dawr* pl. *adwār*) from the time of Adam until that of Ebn Noṣayr. The most prominent appearance was during early Islam when the divinity's three aspects were personified in 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb (d. 661), the superior *ma'nā*, Moḥammad who was the *esm*, and Salmān al-Fārsi (d. after 656 ?), the *bāb*. Afterwards the divinity appeared in the form of the twelve imams and their *bābs* until the last cycle of Ḥasan al-'Askari, Ebn Noṣayr, and the 12th imam Moḥammad al-Mahdi, who went into *ḡayba* in 874 (*FRR*, pp. 83-111).

Influences. While most of the concepts that exist in Noṣayrism can be traced back to Ḳaṣibi's teaching, some Noṣayri sources, which have recently become available, provide a better insight into the sources of Ḳaṣibi and of his spiritual guides. The *Izāḥ al-meṣbāḥ*, which is the only published text of Ḳaṣibi's guide Jannān, does not contain any trace of Iranian religious and mystical traditions, but the sect may still keep Jannān's writings a secret. Two works of Ebn Noṣayr have been published, and the *Ketāb al-akwār wa'l-adwār* and *Ketāb al-meṭāl wa'l-ṣura* contain most of Ḳaṣibi's teachings in a less developed form. Ebn Noṣayr refers to *Nowruz* and *Mehregān*, the Iranian holidays of the spring and the fall equinox, respectively, and Ḳaṣibi (*DK*, fol. 103b) explains them as the deity's appearance in the Persians' historical cycles.

The present state of research does not yet allow one to draw decisive conclusions about the possible external influences. Ḳaṣibi himself never mentions non-Muslim scholars, and his use of known Iranian and Christian terminology completely altered their original significance. Dualism exists in many aspects of Ḳaṣibi's doctrine, but the divinity itself is perceived as unity. Although the influence of Christian heresies, such as the denial of the crucifixion and of Gnostic beliefs are present, the Islamic heresiographical literature indicates that those had earlier infiltrated Shi'ite *ḡolāt* circles. Still, the Iranian influence on Ḳaṣibi and his general sympathy towards Persian culture should not be explained as an expression of anti-Arab sentiment (*šo'ubiya*), since some of his masters and disciples, as well as his Hamdanid patrons, were actually Arabs (see 'ARAB; IRĀN). They seem, rather, to reflect



that the emergence of Noşayrism coincided with the renaissance of Persian culture in the Buyid state, which Adam Mez (1869-1917) described in *Die Renaissance des Islam* (Heidelberg, 1922).

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