



KAṬṬĀBIYA

KAṬṬĀBIYA (Khattabiyya), an extremist Shi'ite sect named after Abu'l-Ḳaṭṭāb al-Asadi (killed ca. 755 CE), who for some time was an authorized representative (*dā'i*) of Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādeq (d. ca. 765) in Kufa.

Our knowledge of the Ḳaṭṭābiya comes primarily from two well-known theologians, who show little agreement: Heṣām b. al-Ḥakam (d. ca. 796; q.v.) and Abu 'Isā al-Warrāq (9th century). The work of the former is transmitted by the Shi'ites Ḥasan b. Musā al-Nowbaḳṭi (d. between 911 and 922) and Sa'd b. 'Abd-Allāh al-Aṣ'ari (d. 912 or 914), while the accounts of the latter were preserved by the Sunnite Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Aṣ'ari (d. 935; see **AṢ'ARI**). In works of synthesis (e.g., Halm, pp. 199-217), these sources are customarily combined with information taken from other works. According to these heresiographic sources, the Ḳaṭṭābiya took its name from the heresiarch Abu'l-Ḳaṭṭāb Moḥammad b. Abi Zaynab al-Ajda' al-Asadi al-Kufi (q.v.), and became the most important extremist Shi'ite sect (see **ĠOLĀT**) in Kufa. Abu'l-Ḳaṭṭāb was without doubt an exceptionally charismatic individual, and at first Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādeq is said to have designated the *dā'i* as his successor (*waṣi*), but apparently around 748 the imam rejected and denounced him for his extremist ideas. The tension between Abu'l-Ḳaṭṭāb and his master caused Abu'l-Ḳaṭṭāb's followers to split up into several factions, and these are briefly characterized below. Given the strong bias of the heresiographic literature to condemn these factions, every element of these characterizations has to be considered with reserve.

(1) One group claimed that a single Divine Light lives in those imams who are



both imam and prophet. In each generation, God is incarnate in one imam-prophet who speaks (*nāṭeq*) and in another who keeps silent (*ṣāmet*), as was the case for the pairs of Mohammad and ‘Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb, and Ja‘far and Abu‘l-Ḳaṭṭāb. Their fully initiated followers were free from obligations imposed by the Sharia (*ṣari‘a*), such as Friday prayer (see EMĀM-e JOM‘A), fasting, or the pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥajj*). In other words, they adhere to a form of antinomianism (see EBĀḤIYA).

(2) The Ma‘mariya, or Mo‘ammariya, were supporters of Ma‘mar (Mo‘ammar) b. Aḥmar; they believed in the transmission of the Divine Light from ‘Abd-al-Moṭṭaleb to Ja‘far, having passed through Moḥammad, ‘Ali and the line of imams to Abu‘l-Ḳaṭṭāb and Ma‘mar. Some members of this faction claimed that Ja‘far and Abu‘l-Ḳaṭṭāb had attained the rank of angels, while Ma‘mar occupied divine rank. Denying the existence of heaven and hell, they preached antinomianism and claimed that the initiated would not know death but would enter the beyond with their physical bodies.

(3) The Baziḡiya were followers of Baziḡ b. Musā, and believed that he and Abu‘l-Ḳaṭṭāb were the messengers of Ja‘far, who was worshiped as the incarnation of God. They believed that initiated followers were able to receive divine revelation (*wahy*) and to attain immortality through the daily ascetic practice of mortifying the body. It is surprising that heresiographers classified this group as a faction of the Ḳaṭṭābiya, since Baziḡ considered himself the equal of his companion Abu‘l-Ḳaṭṭāb, who in turn rejected Baziḡ’s claims.

(4) The ‘Omayriya adhered to the teachings of ‘Omayr b. Bayān al-‘Ejli. While they rejected the belief that those who were initiated into the mysteries attained immortality, they claimed that initiated believers would be elevated to the rank of imam-prophet. They deified Ja‘far. Around 748, Yazid b. ‘Omar b. Hobayra, the governor of Iraq, ordered the arrest and the execution of their leader, ‘Omayr in Kufa.

(5) The disciples of al-Sari al-Aqṣam considered him to be the messenger (*bāb*) of Ja‘far. They deified Ja‘far, and believed that al-Sari possessed the supernatural powers of the prophet Musā. They worshiped Ja‘far and al-Sari, his principal *bāb*.

(6) The Mofazzaliya were followers of al-Mofazzal b. ‘Omar al-Jo‘fi. Al-Warrāq classified them as a faction of the Ḳaṭṭābiya who deified Ja‘far. Yet most sources—and in particular Imamite works—argue that Ja‘far first condemned



Abu'l-Ḳaṭṭāb and then charged Mofaẓẓal to return the Ḳaṭṭābiya to the right path. According to these sources, Mofaẓẓal always remained a close disciple of the imams Ja'far and Musā al-Kāẓem, and never fell into heresy.

(7) The heresiarch Yunos b. Ẓebyān (Ẓabyān) and his followers believed Abu'l-Ḳaṭṭāb to be the Messenger of God, and Yunos allegedly later taught the divinity of the Imam 'Ali al-Reẓā. He is considered the author of the book *Ḥaqā'eq asrār al-din* which the Noṣayris later included into their canonical books (Ṭusi, 1983b, no. 791; cf. Massignon, 1963b, p. 642).

Some have been quick to identify the Ḳaṭṭābiya with the Moḳammaṣa (derived from Ar. *kamsa* “five” and comprising Moḳammad, 'Ali, Fāṭema, Ḥasan, and Ḥosayn). There is not much documentary evidence to support this identification with regard to the Ḳaṭṭābiya factions just described, but it is possible that later on these two movements reconciled their differences. Similarly the assertion of some Imamite authors to perceive the Ḳaṭṭābiya as a template for the nascent Isma'īlism should be regarded with considerable reservations (cf. Ṣadiqi). Early Isma'īlite doctrines are not very similar to those attributed to the Ḳaṭṭābiya and the Moḳammaṣa, aside from some recognition given to Esmā'il b. Ja'far al-Ṣādeq and his son Moḳammad. For it is true that Mofaẓẓal, to whom some Ḳaṭṭābiya owe allegiance, never condemned the claim of Esmā'il to the imamate, and it might be true that, after the execution of Abu'l-Ḳaṭṭāb, some followers claimed that Ja'far's Divine Light had passed from Abu'l-Ḳaṭṭāb to Moḳammad b. Esmā'il.

In the 10th century, after the Noṣayris, who accord Abu'l-Ḳaṭṭāb and Mofaẓẓal a high rank among the manifestations of the Divine Light, had split from the Imamiyya, the Moḳammaṣa could emerge because some, probably rather marginal, members of the Imamiyya had continued to hold and transmit Ḳaṭṭābiya doctrines. The acceptability of Ḳaṭṭābiya doctrines to some members of the Imamiyya is not surprising, if one is willing to acknowledge both the existence of extremist Shi'ite sects and the above-mentioned obvious distortions of the heresiographic literature. For the underlying principal themes of the Ḳaṭṭābiya doctrines are found in most Imamite traditions. Aspects of the gnostic (see **GNOSTICISM**) doctrine of the imam as the locus of the manifestation of God (Amir-Moezzi, 1996; 2002, pp. 730-33), the doctrine of the transmission of the Light of the divine man to his descendant or disciple (Amir-Moezzi, 1992a, pp. 109-13), or the doctrine of the salvific role of transformative wisdom (Amir-Moezzi, 1992a, pp. 174-99)—all these themes are to a great extent represented in the principal **hadith** compilations of Imamite



authors, such as [Forāt b. Ebrāhim Kufi](#), Abu Ja‘far al-Šaffār al-Qommi, ‘Ali b. Ebrāhim al-Qommi, [Abu’l-Naẓr Moḥammad al-‘Ayyāši](#), al-Kolayni, or Ebn Bābūya al-Šaduq (see [EBN BĀBAYWAYH \(2\)](#)).

The Imamite scholar Abu ‘Amr Moḥammad b. ‘Omar b. ‘Abd-al-‘Aziz al-Kašši (first half of the 10th century) transmitted many instances in which the imams Ja‘far al-Šādeq or ‘Ali al-Rezā cursed and powerfully refuted doctrines ascribed to Abu’l-Kaṭṭāb and his supporters; Abu Ja‘far Moḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭusi (d. 1067) preserved those in his abridgement of Kašši’s work (Ṭusi, 1983a, no. 409). Yet these examples appear as apocryphal reports that support the rationalist Imamite distinction between the true moderate orthodoxy of the imams and the false heresy of the extremist (sing. *ḡālin*, pl. *ḡolāt*). While this moderate-extremist dichotomy became very important for the rationalist Imamiyya in the second half of the 11th century, after the [Buyids](#) had lost their power, it seems of little relevance for the time before the rise of the Buyids in the early 10th century, when the esoteric Imamiyya (see [BĀṬENIYA](#)) was much more influential (Amir-Moezzi 1992a, pp. 33-48; Amir-Moezzi and Jambet, pp. 181-283). A significant number of prominent men who were accused of exaggeration (*ḡoluw*) were disciples of the imams, and many whom an imam had cursed remained nonetheless members of his circle. This observation suggests that the public curse (*barā’a*) might have had tactical implications, since the cursed disciples apparently continued to follow the teaching of their imams. On the one hand, the imams might not curse their followers *for* what they said but rather *because* they violated their obligation to preserve the secrecy (*taqiya*) of the revealed knowledge (Amir-Moezzi 1992a, pp. 313-16; 1992b, 227-29; cf. Kohlberg). On the other hand, the public curse might have protected these followers from persecution by the authorities. Two traditions about Imam Ja‘far which are preserved in the orthodox Imamite sources support both these interpretations. In the first, the imam stated: “It happened that I taught something to someone; then he left me and repeated this teaching word for word to someone else. I therefore declare that it is permissible to curse him and to dissociate from him” (Ebn Abi Zaynab al-No‘māni, p. 57 s.v. chap. 1, 7). In the second the imam asked his disciple ‘Abd-Allāh b. Zorāra: “Tell your father Zorāra [b. A‘yan] that I have dissociated myself from him and I have cursed him publicly; this is in order to protect him. In fact, our enemies persecute those whom we admire and leave alone those whom we banish” (Ṭusi, 1983a, no. 221).

This evidence suggests that until the mid-10th century the imams used the



term *ḡoluw* to specifically reject antinomian teaching, according to which the discovery of the hidden meaning (*bāṭen*) of the Sharia allowed the initiated believer to disregard its literal meaning (*ẓāhir*) and its obligations for the believer (Abu Jaʿfar al-Ṣaffār al-Qommi, pp. 526-36 s.v. sec. 10, chap. 21, 1: “The letter of Jaʿfar to al-Mofazzal against the *ḡolāt*”). But until the rationalization of the Imamiyya under the aegis of theologians such as Shaykh Mofid (d. 1022) and al-Ṣarif al-Mortazā (d. 1044), other gnostic or esoteric doctrines that are central to all branches of Shiʿism were never considered *ḡoluw*.

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