



MOḤAMMAD B. NOŞAYR

MOḤAMMAD B. NOŞAYR, Abu Šo‘ayb al-Nomayri/al-Namiri (d. after 868), the founder and eponym of the Nomayriya/Namiriya sect (the nucleus of the later Noşayriya; see also Noşayris and ‘Alawi)—a circle (*majles*) of Shi‘ite mystics whose activities took place in the 9th century between the house of its leader in Bašra and the tenth and eleventh Imams ‘Ali al-Hādi (d. 868) and Ḥasan al-‘Askari (d. 873) in Samarrā’. Accused of extremism (*ḡoloww*), he was excommunicated by the Imami Shi‘ism. Nevertheless, his backing by the Banu Forāt family enabled the survival of his group.

Biography. Ebn Nosayr’s *nesba* is ‘Abdi-Bakri-Nomayri-Bašri, to indicate his Arab origin from Bašra, of the ‘Abd-Allāh b. Nomayr tribe of the ‘Āmer b. Sa‘sa‘a confederation, who were allies of the Banu Taḡleb. His tribal affiliation makes Nomayriya a more favorable variant for the name of his sect than Namiriya, but more indications are needed for that. Bakr seems to have been the name of his grandfather (Kāšibi, p. 338). Although no accurate information is available concerning the years of his birth and death, he is known to have been a contemporary of the Imams ‘Ali al-Hādi and Ḥasan al-‘Askari. Considered by his followers as the true and the only *bāb* (gate) to the eleventh Imam, he taught a combination of mystical traditions transmitted from disciples of the previous Imams, mainly Abu‘Abd-Allāh Jāber Jo‘fi (d. between 745 and 750), Mofazzal b. ‘Omar al-Jo‘fi (d. 796), and Moḥammad b. Senān (d. 835), who were disciples of the fifth and sixth Imams Moḥammad al-Bāqer (c. 677-736?; q.v.) and Ja‘far al-Šādeq (d. 765). The Noşayri literature preserved accounts of the meetings of the circle of Ebn Noşayr at the time of



‘Ali al-Hādi (Kaşibi, pp. 323-24) and Ḥasan al-‘Askari (Idem, pp. 338-39). According to these accounts, as well as to other sources of the sect, Eshāq b. Moḥammad al-Nakā‘i al-Aḥmar betrayed Ebn Noşayr and left his circle to lead his own group, the Eshāqiya (*Akwār wa al-adwār al-nurāniya*, pp. 58, 62-65, 98, 136). Although the followers of Ebn Noşayr are referred to in one source as Banu Nomayr/Namir, which looks as a tribal nomination (al-‘Āni, fols. 150a, 151a, 159a, 165a-166b, 186b), the connection between his sect and his tribe is unclear. The close relationship of the Noşayriya with the Hamdanid dynasty may have had its roots in the relations between the Banu Nomayr and the Banu Tağleb in the time of Ebn Noşayr. More accurate available information concerns the religious and economic backing of the the Noşayris by the respectable Banu Forāt, and that of Ahmad b. al-Furāt, the Shi‘ite vizier of the caliph al-Muqtadir (d. 932) in particular. Noşayri’s writings, describing the presence of members of the Banu Forāt at Ebn Noşayr’s assembly (*majles*) in Başra, back Louis Massignon’s hypothesis concerning this connection between the Banu Forāt family and Ebn Noşayr (Massignon, pp. 25-29; Kaşibi, pp. 323, 338). This connection explains the maintaining of the Nomayriya/Namiriya as well as its survival after its rejection from the Imami mainstream. The hostility of the Shi‘ite sources towards Ebn Noşayr indicates not only that he was a charismatic figure who threatened the authority of the *sofarā’* (representatives), but also that the mystical nature of his teaching was known in the Shi‘ite community. Indeed, the *safir* Abu Ja‘far b. ‘Otmān (d. 917) cursed him in public (Nawbakṭi, pp. 93-94; Majlesi, XXV, pp. 285, 318; Idem, LI, p. 367). This excommunication did not prevent the continuity of the sect’s activities, probably under *taqia* (dissimulation). Imami heresiographers did not succeed in revealing the identity of the true successor of Ebn Noşayr, Moḥammad b. Jondab (*Akwār wa al-adwār al-nurāniya*, p. 58; an incorrect assumption concerning the identity of his successor is given in Nawbakṭi, p. 94). Since Ebn Noşayr was considered by the Noşayris as part of the divinity, there is no record of his death or burial in any source of the sect. According to Imami sources, he died from an illness, which is not specified (Majlesi, XXV, p. 285).

Doctrine. Original books by Moḥammad b. Noşayr, which became available recently (*Selselat al-torāt al-‘alawi*, vol. I), enable us to reconstruct the original doctrines of the Nomayriya/Namiriya. His most important works are the *Akwār wa al-adwār al-nurāniya* and the *Ketāb al-meṭāl wa al-şura*. These books were later canonized by Kaşibi (d. 956-57 or 969), the founder of Noşayrism, and most of the issues dealt with in these two books were



developed by him and by other leaders of the sect in the 10th and 11th centuries. The main issues of the *Akwār wa al-adwār al-nurāniya* are: the account of the divine creatures of ranks (*ahl al-marāteb*), who dwell in heaven (*Akwār wa al-adwār al-nurāniya*, pp. 40-44, 72, 137-83); the existence of cycles of history (*akwār, adwār*) before the creation of the material world, in which the deity appears in the world of lights (*Akwār wa al-adwār al-nurāniya*, pp. 47, 62); the transmigration of the soul as a punishment (*Akwār wa al-adwār al-nurāniya*, p. 186); and the issue of the mystical meaning of the Iranian celebrations on the days of the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, the [Nowruz](#) and the Mehregān (*Akwār wa al-adwār al-nurāniya*, p. 98). The main theological discussion concerns the relationship between the two main aspects of the divinity, the *ma'nā* (meaning) and the *esm* (name), that is, the abstract God and its definition. In Ebn Noşayr's writings, which reflect an early stage of development of the sect's theology, there is no clear concept of a third aspect of the divinity, the *bāb* (gate), which forms the later Noşayri's divine triad of *ma'nā-esm-bāb*. It was seemingly only after Ebn Noşayr's death and his sanctification as *Bāb Allāh* (Gate of God; see Ṭabarāni, p. 130) that the *bāb* became clearly the third inferior aspect of the divinity, which serves as mediator between the divine and the human.

The *Ketāb al-meṭāl wa al-şura* develops Gnostic ideas dealt with in Mofazzal b. 'Omar al-Jo'fi's *Ketāb al-haft wa al-ażella* (Halm, 1978) concerning the heavenly world of light and its creation, before the creation of the inferior material world (*Ketāb al-meṭāl wa al-şura*, pp. 208-16). It also deals with the *akwār* and *adwār*, adding the appearance of divinity also to human history (*Ketāb al-meṭāl wa al-şura*, pp. 226-27). Besides, the *Ketāb al-meṭāl wa al-şura* contains a mystical tradition concerning the creation of the world by the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet (*Ketāb al-meṭāl wa al-şura*, p. 225), which may have been inspired by the same source as the Jewish *Sefer Yetsira*. Like the *Akwār wa al-adwār al-nurāniya*, the *Ketāb al-meṭāl wa al-şura* repeats the main idea of the *'elm al-tawḥid* (the science of monotheism), which is that God is the one and the only, transcendental and abstract (*Ketāb al-meṭāl wa al-şura*, pp. 208-9).

Apart from the above-mentioned books, Noşayri's writings mention other books of Ebn Noşayr which are lost or still concealed by the sect. A certain *Aqrab al-asānid* is mentioned once in the context of the prohibition of wine (Jonbalāni, p. 272), while both the *Ketāb al-kāfi le'l-żedd al-manāfi* (Ṭabarāni, 2006, pp. 53, 105, 110, 112) and the *Ketāb al-mawāred* (Idem, 2006, pp. 49, 53) deal with the initiation to the sect.



In accordance with a known pattern in the creation of several religions and sects in the Middle East, the Nomayriya/Namiriya, which later turned into the Noşayriya, was created by two persons: the first, Ebn Noşayr, was the messenger who brought a revelation to his followers, and the second, Kaşibi, was the actual founder.

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