



NĀŞEBI

NĀŞEBI (pl. *nawāṣeb*), the term used to denote a person who is perceived as harboring malice for 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb (q.v.) or members of his household (see [AHL-E BAYT](#)). The term *nāṣebi* is also used among Shi'ites to refer to a Sunni with anti-Shi'ite views.

Introduction. In contrast to the popular tendency to venerate 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb and his kin among Moslems, some personalities are described in medieval literature as holding them in contempt and having anti-'Alid sentiment (*naṣb*, *boğd 'Ali*, *'adāwat ahl al-bayt*; Ṭorayḥi, II, pp. 173-74). Since devotion to 'Ali and his house was so central to Shi'ism, those who challenged 'Ali's alleged claims to authority after the Prophet's death or his caliphate in the last years of his life were portrayed as *nawāṣeb* in Shi'ite historiography. For example, the first two caliphs in early Shi'ite literature became villainous figures who displayed open animosity for 'Ali and **Fāṭema** (q.v.; *Ketāb Solaym*, pp. 148-61, 224-59). 'Ā'asha, Mo'āwiya, 'Amr b. al-Āṣ, the Omayyads, the Zobayrids, the 'Abbāsids, and others who contested 'Ali's rule or the authority of the Twelver Imams are similarly portrayed as *nawāṣeb*. In many cases, these portrayals do not mention the term *naṣb* or *nāṣebi*, but the personalities exhibit all of the usual characteristics, including: (1) support for the murder, persecution, or assault of 'Ali and his kin, (2) cursing, mocking, and insulting them, and (3) accusing them of crimes or heresy. Sunnis with strong pro-'Alid tendencies and Shi'ites further included anti-Shi'ite polemicists like Ebn Ḥazm and Ebn Taymiya in this group for their propensity to reject widely transmitted **hadith** (q.v.) about the merits (*faẓā'el*) of the *ahl al-bayt*. Some Shi'ite hadith attributed to **Ja'far al-**



Ṣādeq (q.v.) further identified anyone displaying animosity for Shi'ites as a *nāṣebi* (Baḥrāni, X, pp. 361-62; Ebn Bābawayh, III, p. 601). The report suggests that since the Moslem community no longer consented to *nawāṣeb* openly reviling the *ahl al-bayt*, their only recourse was to express their aversion to Shi'ism.

Historical overview. According to pro-ʿAlid Sunni, Muʿtazilite, and Shi'ite sources, antipathy for ʿAli is attributed to a number of his contemporaries for a variety of reasons. Those who nursed a grudge against the Prophet for decades, even after their surrender and conversion to Islam, continued to express their dissatisfaction with the religious and political ascendancy of Muslims by opposing any further attempts by the Prophet's clan, the Hashemites, to produce authorities that the community was obligated to follow. The first two caliphs and Moʿāwiya, speaking on behalf of the tribe of Qorayš and the clan of Omayya respectively, are credited with stating that tribal elders would not accept both prophetic authority and rule (*nobuwa wa emāra/ ke lāfa*) to belong to Hashemites alone (*Ket āb Solaym*, pp. 153, 157; Balāḍori, X, pp. 378-79; Soyūṭi, II, p. 173). In one anecdote, ʿAli remarks that had the Prophet left a direct son as an heir, the community would have killed him after the Prophet's death had he conducted himself any differently than ʿAli (Ebn Abi'l-Ḥadid, XX, pp. 298-99). From these sources, anti-ʿAlid sentiment appears to be a by-product of tribal rivalries that manifested themselves in contestations for power.

ʿAli was noted for his austerity and alienated some of the Companions of the Prophet (*ṣaḥāba*) in his lifetime, some even admitting to have hated him at the time. Such reports usually end with the Prophet censuring these Companions for their hatred of ʿAli (Boḳāri, V, p. 110). Others reportedly resented ʿAli for killing leading members of their family during the wars of the Prophet. These personalities, who became Moslems near the end of the Prophet's life and after the Moslem conquest of Mecca, received epithets like "the pardoned" (*tolaqā*) and "those whose hearts needed placating" *mo'allafat al-qolub* (a category of people mentioned in the Qur'an). The latter received monetary rewards for their continued allegiance, which was considered irresolute. Those who kept ʿAli from ruling after the death of the Prophet are described as hypocrites (*monāfequn*) and remain unnamed in Muʿtazilite sources (ʿAbd al-Jabbār, I, pp. 224-25). In these sources, the first three caliphs only rule with ʿAli's permission in response to this anti-ʿAlid sentiment. In Shi'ite sources, the first two caliphs and ʿĀʿeša are portrayed as particularly envious and resentful

of ‘Ali’s close relationship to the Prophet and many of the honors that were bestowed upon him. Among Shi‘ites, these three figures are consistently portrayed as *nawāşeb* who despised ‘Ali and Fāṭema and deliberately deprived them of their special rights as *ahl al-bayt*.

Kharijites. Sometime after the Battle of Şeffin and ‘Ali’s agreement to an arbitration with Mo‘āwiya, some of his forces withdrew their support and seceded from his army. This group of early Kharijites (see [KHARIJITES IN PERSIA](#)) argued that ‘Ali had committed an act of disbelief (*kofr*) by agreeing to arbitration and ignoring the command of scripture (Qur’an 49:7) to fight rebels like Mo‘āwiya until their total surrender. In Ebāḍi sources, ‘Ali is portrayed as a just ruler who eventually compromised his faith out of a desire to remain in power. In Sunni literature, Shi‘ites are collectively condemned as deceitful and untrustworthy in their transmission of hadith. In Ebāḍi literature, the ill repute of Shi‘ites is extended to ‘Ali himself, who is credited with forging hadith and beginning the Shi‘ite heritage of mendacity (Cook, p. 19). In addition to the sin of arbitration, ‘Ali refused repeated Kharijite requests to publicly repent of his unbelief and killed thousands of pious Moslems at Nahrawān, whom Ebāḍis considered innocent of any wrongdoing (*Siar*, I, pp. 200-201; Warjalāni, I, pp. 15, 28). In accordance with Kharijite political theory that allowed a ruler guilty of unbelief and refusing repentance to be forcefully removed or killed (*Siar*, I, pp. 75-76), a Kharijite assassinated ‘Ali. ‘Ali’s assassin, Ebn Moljam, is held in high esteem in some Ebāḍi texts (*Siar*, I, p. 109), but not others. After ‘Ali’s death, Ḥasan b. ‘Ali (q.v.) eventually surrendered to Mo‘āwiya and abdicated the caliphate to him. Ḥasan’s conduct with Mo‘āwiya led to a Kharijite assassination attempt, but the attacker, Jarrāḥ b. Senān al-Asadi, was killed after striking Ḥasan’s thigh with a pick-axe. Since Ḥosayn b. ‘Ali (q.v.) backed the political careers of his father and brother, he was condemned as an inhabitant of Hell with them. Kharijites generally did not consider membership in the tribe of Qorayş or ‘Alid kinship with the Prophet to have any merit in theological and political debates.

Omayyads. The Omayyads epitomized *nawāşeb* in ‘Abbāsīd-era historiography and Shi‘ite literature. The dynasty is credited with going to war against ‘Ali and his sons and successfully foiling their opportunities to rule as caliphs, massacring Ḥosayn and his family at [Karbalā’](#) (q.v.), killing Zayd b. ‘Ali, persecuting and killing close companions of the ‘Alid imams for their allegiance to them, and ritually cursing ‘Ali during Friday sermons across the Moslem world. The Omayyads considered ‘Ali and his partisans directly



responsible for the death of ‘Oṭmān. It seems ‘Alids (descendants of ‘Ali) were allowed to live unmolested as long as they refrained from openly challenging Omayyad rule. According to Shi‘ite literature, the Omayyads also poisoned the Twelver imams, ‘Ali Sajjād (see [‘ALI B. ḤOSAYN B. ‘ALI B. ABI ṬĀLEB](#)) and Moḥammad Bāqer (see [BĀQER, ABU JA‘FAR MOḤAMMAD](#)).

‘Oṭmāniya. The ‘Oṭmāniya (partisans of the first three caliphs) apparently reviled ‘Ali well into the 3rd/9th century. Members of the ‘Oṭmāniya included hadith transmitters and theologians who did not consider ‘Ali a legitimate caliph after ‘Oṭmān. They did not necessarily support the Omayyads either. Some supported the claim to the caliphate by Ebn Zobayr and his family (the Zobayrids). Others were quietists who insisted on the religious obligation to obey those in power (including tyrants). The early ‘Oṭmāniya considered ‘Ali an antagonist to the first three caliphs, who opposed their succession and quarreled with them on a number of issues. Like other *nawāṣeb*, the ‘Oṭmāniya considered ‘Ali covetous of the caliphate.

Sometime around the 3rd/9th century, influential hadith scholars residing in Baghdad began to incorporate pro-‘Alid hadith in their compilations and distance themselves from the *nawāṣeb*. During this period, extreme anti-‘Alid sentiment among the ‘Oṭmāniya largely declined in popularity except in a few historically *nāṣebi* strongholds such as Baṣra and Aleppo. Milder ‘Oṭmāniya such as the famous story-teller Sayf b. ‘Omar (Madelung, 2009) still refrained from recognizing ‘Ali as a legitimate caliph; however, ‘Ali was now absolved of the crimes attributed to him in early *nāṣebi* historiography. Responsibility for these sins and crimes (the murder of ‘Oṭmān, the civil war, etc.) were primarily transferred to ‘Ali’s disciples and a nefarious group of heretics led by the legendary Ebn Saba’ (Anthony, pp. 47-57, 87).

It appears that the ‘Oṭmāniya of the 3rd/9th century also devalued hadith about the merits of ‘Ali by reinterpreting them in ways that made such proof-texts seem insignificant or even blemishes. For example, in the *Resāla ‘Oṭmāniya*, ‘Ali’s early conversion is belittled as the action of a child with no real rational faculties or responsibility to convert (Jāḥeẓ, pp. 13-24). Some even questioned the validity of his conversion (Ebn Taymiya, VII, p. 155).

‘Abbāsids. Various ‘Abbāsīd caliphs and poets appear as *nawāṣeb* in historical chronicles. The ‘Abbāsīd caliph al-Motawakkel (r. 232-47/847-61), for example, (1) persecuted ‘Alids, (2) killed Shi‘ites who proclaimed their allegiance to ‘Alids, (3) razed the shrine of Ḥosayn b. ‘Ali and forbade pilgrimage to the site,

and (4) enjoyed the company of people who openly disparaged and mocked ‘Ali (Ḍahabi, *Siar*, XII, pp. 18, 35; Ebn al-Aṭir, VII, pp. 55-56). Since early ‘Abbāsīd claims to legitimacy centered upon their kinship with the Prophet, Hashemite ancestry, and even a *waṣīya* from the family of ‘Ali, ‘Alids remained rivals to their authority. Many ‘Alid insurrectionists and their families were killed, imprisoned, and brutally tortured under the ‘Abbāsīds. The ‘Abbāsīds, like many caliphs before them, were motivated to characterize the descendants of ‘Ali as individuals with no special claim to authority. Initially, this was accomplished by highlighting ‘Alid descent from Abū Ṭāleb, who was discredited as a pagan, and from females (like Fāṭema) who could not claim to be heirs of the imamate, which was considered a patriarchal institution. Later, the ‘Abbāsīds abandoned Kaysāni and Rāwandi claims to their right to the imamate and became patrons of proto-Sunni scholarship which altogether rejected Hashemite claims to inheritance from the Prophet.

Anti-Shi‘ite polemicists. A common theme in Shi‘ite narratives about early *nawāṣeb* is their portrayal as individuals who secretly acknowledged their own desire to usurp or deny the rights bestowed upon the *ahl al-bayt*. *Nawāṣeb* appeared as literary devices to validate the beliefs of the Shi‘ite audience (i.e., since the villains in these stories will also acknowledge ‘Alids to be God’s true deputies on earth). However, in later periods, when judging the case of Sunni Moslems, Shi‘ites considered their allegiance to Sunnism to be accidental, inherited, and due to ignorance. Thus, Shi‘ite scholars devoted themselves to polemical works that sought to acquaint Sunnis with the history, unique qualities, and merits (*fazā’el*) of the *ahl al-bayt*.

Shi‘ites considered a number of Sunnis active after the 7th/12th century guilty of anti-‘Alid sentiment primarily for their rejection of pro-‘Alid hadith, partiality to accepting reports that exalted ‘Ali’s predecessors and rivals, and open hostility to Shi‘ism. Popular expressions of anti-Shi‘ite sentiment included treatises that condemned Shi‘ite doctrine as unbelief (Ebn Taymiya, 1986), the persecution or execution of Shi‘ites (such as Zayn al-Din ‘Āmeli, known as al-Šahid al-Ṭānī, killed in 965/1558) and Sunnis suspected of Shi‘ism (such as Moḥammad b. Yusof al-Kanji, killed in 658/1260), and the destruction of Shi‘ite libraries and shrines (such as the shrines of ‘Abbās and Ḥosayn b. ‘Ali in Karbalā’ and the massacre of the city’s inhabitants in 1802, the tombs of the Twelver imams buried in Medina in 1925, and the shrine of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askari in 2006).



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