



NAWBAḲTI FAMILY

NAWBAḲTI FAMILY, a notable Shi'ite family of Persian descent, many of whose members, like their eponymous ancestor Nawbaḳt and his son Abu Sahl Faḏl, ranked among the local illuminati of Baghdad, served as advisors and administrators for the 'Abbasid court, and gained fame as Shi'ite theologians and locum tenants of the twelfth Imam of Shi'ite Islam.

The namesake of the Nawbaḳti house was a Zoroastrian astrologer named Nawbaḳt Fāresi Majusi Monajjem (fl. mid-2nd/8th cent.; his name was also transcribed as “Nēbaḳt”; see, e.g., Ṭabari, III, p. 296; tr., XXVIII, p. 267; Boḥtori, III, p. 1840; V, p. 12), who served the 'Abbasid caliph Abu Ja'far al-Manṣur (r. 136-58/754-75) as a trusted astrological advisor throughout his caliphate. The significance of the name's apparent meaning (“of new fortune”) is not entirely clear. If Nawbaḳt indeed converted to Islam as Muslim accounts claim (see below), perhaps the astrologer adopted this name as a result of his conversion.

It is significant that Nawbaḳt's name contains little trace of his Zoroastrian past, unlike the theomorphic name of his son Abu Sahl b. Nawbaḳt, which the latter revealed to Manṣur as being *Ḳvaršēd-māh* (Sun-Moon), *Ṭaymādāh*, *Mābādār* (Māh-bādān? see Gignoux, p. 110, no. 525), and *Ḳosrevā Behšād* before the caliph renamed him Abu Sahl (Justi, p. 226a; Ebn Abi Oṣaybe'a, I, p. 152; Ebn Qeḏḏi, p. 409; Ebn al-'Ebri, p. 125; Najāši, p. 407; and Nawbaḳt's invocations of the sun and moon in Tanuḳi, VII, p. 217). From two panegyrics of the poet Boḥtori (206-84/821-97) composed for the astrologer's descendant, Eshāq b. Esmā'il Nawbaḳti, we also learn that the family traced their lineage back to the hero of Persian epics, *Gēv* son of *Gōdarz* (Boḥtori, I, p. 247, v. 18;



III, p. 1840, v. 14).

The astrologer Nawbaḳt's fealty to al-Manṣur predated his caliphate. An account related on the authority of one of Nawbaḳt's grandsons, Abu Sahl Esmā'il b. 'Ali b. Nawbaḳt, places the astrologer's first meeting with the future caliph in the jail of Ahvāz, where Nawbaḳt predicts al-Manṣur's future rise to power and his destiny to rule as caliph. After al-Manṣur assumes the caliphate, Nawbaḳt presents himself to the caliph and converts to Islam at his hands, serving thereafter as a court astrologer (Tanuḳi, VII, pp. 216-17; Ḳaṭīb Baḡdādi, XI, pp. 245-46; cf. Mas'udi, *Moruj*, sec. 3446). Another account, recorded by Balāḍori (d. 279/982), places the future caliph's first encounter with Nawbaḳt at the astrologer's native town of Rāwa. Passing by Rāwa on his way to join the revolt of 'Abd-Allāh b. Mo'awia (q.v.) against the Umayyads, al-Manṣur was informed that a skilled astrologer named Nawbaḳt resided in the town, which led him to consult this Nawbaḳt regarding his future. Nawbaḳt portended that, though the dominion of the Arabs (*molk al-'arab*) would one day be his, he would meet misfortune after joining Ebn Mo'awia; both portents soon turned out to be true (Balāḍori, pp. 183-84, reading 'Rāwa' for 'Rāwi'; cf. Ebn Ṭāwus, p. 210).

Al-Manṣur maintained an entourage of astrologers in his employ and was the first caliph to do so by reputation; hence, though the circumstances depicted in the stories of Nawbaḳt's entrance into Manṣur's entourage may be dubious, the fact of his service is beyond doubt. Nawbaḳt served the caliph alongside a retinue of other prominent astrologers, such as Ebrāhim Fazāri, Māšā'-Allāh, 'Omar Ṭabari, and 'Ali b. 'Isā Oṣṭorlābi, all of whom were entrusted with overseeing the construction and planning of the caliph's most ambitious projects (Ya'qubi, pp. 238, 241; tr., pp. 9, 12; Mas'udi, *Moruj*, sec. 3446; Ḍahabi, VII, p. 409; cf. Pingree, p. 104). Historians frequently single out Nawbaḳt as the most skillful (*aḥḍaḳ*) of Manṣur's astrological coterie (Ṭa'ālebi, p. 370; cf. Ebn al-'Ebri, p. 125). As such, Nawbaḳt's horoscopes for al-Manṣur during his caliphate correspond to decisive events of his reign. Most famous is Nawbaḳt's horoscope determining the most propitious day to found the new royal city of Baghdad (Ebn Faḳih, p. 338; Ḳaṭīb Baḡdādi, I, p. 375; cf. Nawbaḳt's prognostication of the city's future glory in Ebn Faḳih, p. 290; Ḳaṭīb, I, p. 376; Ṭa'ālebi, p. 370). The polymath Biruni (d. after 442/1050) even preserves the actual horoscope drawn up by Nawbaḳt, which recommends 30 July 762 as the most propitious date for inaugurating the city's construction (*Āṭār*, pp. 270-71; tr., pp. 262-63). This horoscope is likely to be the most authentic trace of



Nawbaqt's writing to have survived to our day, although a *Resāla fī sarā'er aḥkām al-nojum* (Epistle on the secrets of astrology) attributed to Nawbaqt is also extant in a hitherto unpublished manuscript (Ullmann, p. 303, n. 3). In 145/762-63, Nawbaqt issued another famous horoscope assuring the caliph of his victory over the rebel 'Alid Ebrāhim b. 'Abd-Allāh and predicting the rebel's impending death. Certain of the veracity of his star-reading, Nawbaqt volunteered to be detained until the news of victory arrived, even agreeing to be executed if proven mistaken. He was in prison when news of the accuracy of his prognostications was received (Ṭabari, III, 317; tr., XXVIII, p. 291). According to another, slightly ribald tale, al-Manṣur's trust of Nawbaqt's prognostications was so great that once the caliph even rushed out of the privy at the urgent beckoning of the astrologer. The caliph's decision to heed his astrologer proved wise, for the privy's exit immediately collapsed behind him (Rāḡeb Eṣfahāni, I, pp. 300-301).

NAWBAQT'S DESCENDANTS

Nawbaqt's astrological expertise earned him wealth and influence through his long, storied relationship with al-Manṣur and placed Nawbaqt's progeny in an ideal position to leave an imprint on several spheres of the high culture of the 'Abbasid period, in particular belle-lettres, astrology, 'Abbasid statecraft, and, eventually, Twelver Shi'ism. Nawbaqt's service to Manṣur was richly rewarded; the caliph granted Nawbaqt a tract of land measuring 2,000 *jaribs* south of Baghdad near the Jawbar Canal as an *eqtā'* (Ṭabari, III, p. 318, tr., XXVIII, p. 291; Ṭa'ālebi, p. 370), ensuring that Nawbaqt's career left a profound legacy for his descendants with far-reaching consequences.

Astrology. When Nawbaqt's prognostications proved less reliable, al-Manṣur appointed as his replacement his son, Abu Sahl Faḏl b. Nawbaqt, in 158/775. Abu Sahl b. Nawbaqt accompanied the caliph on *hajj* pilgrimage at least once (Ebn Qefti, p. 439; Ebn al-'Ebri, p. 125) and continued to serve as a court astrologer to al-Manṣur's successors well into the reign of Hārūn al-Rašid (r. 169-93/786-809), where one finds mention of him working in the *Kezānat al-ḥekma* (Treasury of wisdom), Hārūn al-Rašid's private library, translating works from Middle Persian into Arabic (Ebn al-Nadim, II, p. 234; tr. Dodge, II, p. 651; tr. Tajaddod, p. 492). Ebn al-Nadim lists the titles of seven works attributed to Abu Sahl b. Nawbaqt, which, as Van Bladel notes (p. 43), "marks him as an expert not only in astrology but also in ancient history." Most emblematic of this wide-ranging erudition is a long excerpt quoted by Ebn al-Nadim from Abu Sahl's *Ketāb *at-Thmk'n fi'l-mawālid* (Book of the **Tohmagān*



on nativities; see Ebn al-Nadim, II, pp. 131 ff.; tr. Dodge, pp. 572-75; tr. Tajaddod, pp. 434-37; cf. van Bladel, pp. 41-62 for the reconstruction of this work's title).

Many astrologers arose from the progeny of Nawbaḳt. In the mid-3rd/9th century, the poet Ebn al-Rumi (221-83/836-96) could still panegyryze his Nawbaḳti patrons as the most knowledgeable people in the science of the stars (*a'lam al-nās be'l-nojum ... 'elman*; Ebn al-Rumi, I, p. 149, v. 1; V, pp. 1954-55, vv. 8-15). Three of Abu Sahl's sons served at the court of al-Ma'mun (r. 198-218/813-33) as astrologers: 'Abd-Allāh b. Abi Sahl Nawbaḳti, Esmā'il b. Abi Sahl Nawbaḳti, and Abu'l-'Abbās Faḏl b. Abi Sahl Nawbaḳti (Ebn al-'Ebri, p. 237; Ebn Ṭāwus, pp. 125, 131-32; Ebn Ṭayfur, pp. 299-300; cf. Eqbāl, p. 15-24, tr., p. 33-39). Esmā'il Nawbaḳti, for example, was among the infamous entourage of astrologers to give a false prognosis of the longevity of al-Wāteq before his death in 232/847. Bedridden by his illness, the court astrologers predicted the caliph would reign 50 more years; al-Wāteq died a mere ten days later (Ṭabari, III, p. 1364; tr., XXXIV, p. 53; Ebn al-'Ebri, p. 245 gives his name erroneously as Hasan b. Sahl Nawbaḳti, conflating the names of Ḥasan b. Sahl, the brother of Faḏl b. Sahl Du'l-Riāsatayn, and Esmā'il b. Nawbaḳt, as first noted in Eqbāl, pp. 17-18; tr., p. 36).

The works of these court astrologers of the Nawbaḳt family have not survived, but the works of other members of the family do, albeit often only in part. Ḥasan b. Sahl b. Nawbaḳti wrote a *Ketāb al-anwā'* (Ebn al-Nadim, II, pp. 150, 239), fragments of which are cited in the extant works of his contemporary Ebn Kaṣīb (d. 252/866) and of the 5th/11th-century astrologer Ebn Abi'l-Rejāl. Extracts of an otherwise unknown work attributed to him known as *Ketāb aḥkām al-mawālīd* appear in Chester Beatty 5399, fols. 184-206 (Ullmann, p. 308). Two works of Abu'l-Ḥasan Musā b. Ḥasan b. Moḥammad b. 'Abbās b. Esmā'il b. Abi Sahl b. Nawbaḳt (fl. 4th/10th cent.), more widely known as Ebn Kebriā', survive in two unique manuscripts. An edited version of the first treatise, composed in 324/935 and entitled *al-Ketāb al-kāmel*, was published in 1982. The manuscript itself is kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale (ed., p. 26; cf. van Ess, 2011, pp. 222-23). The second treatise, *Ketāb al-azmena wa'l-dohur*, exists in a manuscript held by the Istanbul University Library. An edited version by Ana Labarta was published in 2005. Najāši (p. 407) speaks of Ebn Kebriā' as an erudite astrologer and a deeply pious Shī'ite (*ḥosn al-e'teqād, ḥosn al-'ebāda wa'l-dīn*, etc.; Eqbāl, p. 239) and claims that he wrote many astrological treatises (*laho moṣannafāt fi'l-nojum*); however, he mentions only



one work of Ebn Kebriā' by name, namely the *Ketāb al-kāfi fi aḥdāt al-azmena*. Ana Labarta, the editor of Ebn Kebriā''s surviving treatises, has reasonably postulated that this work mentioned by Najāši is in fact a larger work, which at one time subsumed the two treatises that survive in manuscript (*Kāmel*, ed. Labarta, pp. 26-27; cf. Samsó, pp. 260-62; van Ess, 2011, pp. 223-24). Attempts by scholars to delineate the familial relationship between Ebn Kebriā' and his better-known Nawbaḳti *motakallem* kinsman, Ḥasan b. Musā (see below), have produced little fruitful results (see van Ess, 2011, pp. 222-23). Ebn Kebriā' otherwise appears as transmitter of historical reports about the deputies of the Twelfth Imam during the minor occultation [on which, see [ISLAM IN IRAN vii](#)] (e.g., see Ṭusi, pp. 372, 385-86; cf. Eqbāl, p. 239; tr., p. 275).

'Abbāsīd belle-lettres and administration. Land grants in Baghdad and No'māniya given by al-Manṣur to Nawbaḳt continued to serve his descendants as a key source of wealth from the 2nd/8th to 4th/10th centuries. Ya'qūbi (d. after 292/905) notes in his geography that the Nawbaḳti family residences lay near No'māniya on the Upper Zāb (p. 321; tr., p. 100), a residence that became key destination for literati seeking patronage (cf. Ṣafadi, XXI, pp. 168-69; Ebn al-Rumi, VI, pp. 2266-77; McKinney, pp. 334-35, 520). The Nawbaḳtiya quarter of Baghdad located near the Thorn Bridge (*qaṅṅarat al-šawk*), said to have been a part of al-Manṣur's original *eqṭā'* granted to Nawbaḳt (Ebn Faḳih, p. 303; Ṭusi, p. 386), was frequented by Abu Nowās and other poets ('Omari, I, p. 392; Abu'l-Faraj Eṣfahāni, XVIII, pp. 347-48). The Nawbaḳtiya quarter also included a cemetery containing the graves of Qorayš and other notables (Ebn Kallekān, II, p. 127; Hamaḍāni, p. 400), the grave of Ḥosayn b. Ruḥ, the third special vicegerent of the Twelfth Imam, and the mansion of 'Ali b. Aḥmad Nawbaḳti (Ṭusi, p. 386).

The Nawbaḳtis' vast wealth earned them reputations as generous patrons of 'Abbasid-era intellectuals, and their salons offered a space where élites, literati, and intelligentsia could intermingle. The sons of Abu Sahl Faḳl b. Nawbaḳt ('Abd-Allāh, Faḳl, Solaymān, and Esmā'il) were among the staunchest supporters of the poet Abu Nowās throughout his career (ca. 140-98/755-813; Kennedy, pp. 11-12; Eqbāl, pp. 21-24; tr., pp. 40-43). Notoriously, numerous (though not all) accounts of Abu Nowās's death lay the blame at the feet of the Nawbaḳti family, claiming that they conspired to poison him either because of an invective against them that he had composed or had been falsely ascribed to him. Abu Nowās, of course, commonly impugned his patrons in good fun, the Nawbaḳtis included (e.g., Jāḥeẓ, p. 63; tr., p. 61). According to Abu Heffān



(pp. 34-36), the alleged invective went too far by mentioning the mother of Esmā'il b. Abi Sahl by name; but modern scholars have dismissed these accounts as spurious. However, Abu Nowās did indeed breathe his last breath in the house of his Nawbaḳti patrons, who played a key role in preserving his poetry (Kennedy, pp. 26-27, 106-7). According to Ḥamza Eṣfahāni (d. after 350/961), the Nawbaḳtis' collection of Abu Nowās's poetry proved indispensable for the collection of his *Divān* (apud Wagner, p. 313).

As an affluent family and, presumably by reputation, one of considerable managerial skill when it came to matters of wealth, the Nawbaḳtis first enter into the nitty-gritty 'Abbasid politics as auditors and administrators. Among the first of the Nawbaḳtis to succumb to the tidal pull of 'Abbasid administrative concerns is [Abu Sahl Esmā'il b. 'Ali b. Eshāq b. Abi Sahl Nawbaḳt](#) (d. 311/923). Abu Sahl is remembered primarily for his contributions to Shi'ite theology (see below), but he also dedicated a great deal of his wealth to patronizing poets, most notably Ebn al-Rumi (221-83/836-96; see Mas'udi, *Moruj*, sec. 3380; McKinney, pp. 94-95 and passim) and Boḥtori (206-84/821-97; see Boḥtori, III, p. 1840; Şuli, 1987, pp. 65, 120; Eqbāl, pp. 196-99; tr., pp. 233-36 and passim), and to holding regular sessions attended by theologians (Ebn al-Nadim, I, p. 634, *laho majles yahzoroh jamā'a men al-motakallemīn*; tr. Dodge, I, p. 439; tr. Tajaddod, p. 330). Abu Sahl Nawbaḳti's first recorded dealings with the 'Abbasid administrations were negative. The vizier Qāsem b. 'Obayd-Allāh b. Solaymān (288-91/901-4) imprisoned Abu Sahl during the reigns of al-Mo'tazed (r. 279-89/892-902) and al-Moktafi (r. 289-95/902-8) after a fellow theologian, Abu'l-'Abbās Moḥammad b. 'Emrān Ḥalabi, testified against him and denounced him as a leader of the Shi'ites (Marzobāni, p. 424). Abu Sahl's plight during the vizierate of Qāsem b. 'Obayd-Allāh was the same as that of many other prominent Shi'ites and 'Alids, whom the vizier indiscriminately rounded up and imprisoned, likely in response to Qarmaṭi revolt in Kufa in 278/891 (cf. Hussain, pp. 110-18). Abu Sahl was released upon the vizier's death in 291/904 (Tanuḳi, VII, p. 275; Ṭusi, p. 257) and benefited from the profound sea change marked by the appointment of the Shi'ite vizier Abu'l-Ḥasan Ebn al-Forāt during the reign of al-Moqtader (r. 295-320/908-32). In Rabi' II 311/June 923 we find for the first time that Abu Sahl Nawbaḳti was working, somewhat late in his life, as the auditor of the wealth of the former vizier Ḥāmed b. 'Abbās in the Mobāarak district of Wāseṭ, after having been appointed by Ebn al-Forāt during his third vizierate (Helāl Şābe', pp. 40-41; Hamadāni, pp. 229-30; Najāši, p. 31; cf. Sourdell, II, pp. 424-25).



Of Abu Sahl's sons, Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Ali Nawbaḳti was mostly remembered as a transmitter of his father's works (Ḳaṭīb, XIII, p. 261; Ḍahabī, VII, p. 234), but his other son, Abu Ya'qub Eshāq Nawbaḳti, followed the political path that his father took late in life and became embroiled in the politics of 'Abbasid administration. Eshāq b. Esmā'il rose to prominence as a tax-farmer with control over Wāseṭ and the irrigation of the Euphrates during the caliphate of al-Moqtader (Meskawayh, I, p. 271; tr., IV, pp. 307-8; Helāl Ṣābe', p. 338). The wealth he derived therefrom seems to have been considerable, which made him a target for the notorious 'Abbasid fines (*moṣādarāt*) that the court would use to extort money from its affluent officials and appointees in order to fill the coffers of the treasury, especially during the vizierate of Aḥmad Ḳaṣībī (313-14/925-27; Meskawayh, I, p. 144; tr., IV, pp. 161-62). The vizier 'Ali b. 'Isā had charged Eshāq with providing the revenues for the pay of the eunuch general Mo'nes Moẓaffari and his troops, which provided him with some leverage in the politics of the 'Abbasid court (Meskawayh, I, p. 160; tr., IV, p. 180).

After al-Moqtader was deposed and executed in 320/932, Eshāq Nawbaḳti proved instrumental in convincing Mo'nes to appoint al-Moqtader's brother, Moḥammad al-Qāher (r. 320-22/932-34), rather than the deceased caliph's son, Abu'l-'Abbās Aḥmad. Eshāq's reasoning was that al-Qāher would avoid the pettiness and excessiveness of the politics of the *ḥaram*, whereas al-Moqtader's son would, like his father, be dominated and manipulated by the internecine squabbles of the domestic intrigues (Meskawayh, I, pp. 241-42; tr., IV, p. 272; Ebn al-Aṭīr, ed. Tadmori, VI, p. 772; ed. Tornberg, VIII, p. 244; *Ketāb al-'oyun* IV, pp. 261-62). Historians often portray Eshāq as the author of his own death (*kā'l-bāheṭ 'an ḥatfehe be-zelfeh*), given that the caliph al-Qāher, whose candidacy he so fervently favored, eventually chose to execute him cruelly; the caliph had him buried alive by casting him into a well bound in fetters. Al-Qāher's rationale for the act seems to have been capricious. He apparently thought that Eshāq had humiliated him when he was a mere 'Abbasid prince, by outbidding him in an auction for a singing girl of exceptional beauty, named Zina (Meskawayh, I, pp. 284-85; tr., IV, p. 323; Ebn al-Aṭīr, ed. Tadmori, VI, p. 30; ed. Tornberg, VIII, pp. 295-96). Indeed, the first sign of Eshāq's future troubles with the new caliph came with al-Qāher's proscription of singings girls (*tahrim al-qiān*) and his orders for the arrest of all effeminate, singers, and singing slave-girls (*man 'orefa be'l-ḡanā' men al-rejāl wa'l-makāniṭ wa'l-jawāri al-moḡanniāt*; Meskawayh, I, p. 269; tr., IV, p. 307). Eshāq's residence in Baghdad's Nawbaḳtiya quarter along the banks of the Tigris River was a direct



target of this policy; he himself was arrested, though his dependents fled, and ‘Ali b. ‘Isā was given Eshāq’s former administrative appointments (Meskawayh, I, p. 270, tr., IV, pp. 307-8).

Despite the potential hazards of the ‘Abbasid court, the Nawbaḳtis’ reputation as men of great wealth with a knack for managing finances continued to ensure that their skills would be sought out by the court. Abu Ṭāleb ‘Ali b. ‘Abbās Nawbaḳti (d. 324/935-36; Şuli, *Awrāq* II, p. 76; tr., I, p. 131; d. 329/940-41 according to Yāqut, *Erşād* IV, p. 1778, who gives his patronymic as Abu’l-Ḥasan), also known for transmitting the materials of Boḥtori and Ebn al-Rumi, was one such member of the Nawbaḳti family. He often appears in the ‘Abbasids’ employ as a liquidator of wealth, converting properties into cash.

In 317/929, acting as the locum tenant (*wakil*) of al-Moqtader, he oversaw the sale and distribution of the contents of the ‘Abbasid treasury, as well as estates and properties (*al-ziā’ wa’l-amlāk*), to pay the soldiery upon al-Moqtader regaining the office from al-Qāher (Meskawayh, I, p. 200; tr., IV, pp. 224-25; Hamadāni, p. 263). He reprised the same function again upon al-Qāher’s second accession to the caliphate in 320/932, when he, alongside Eshāq b. Esmā’il, acted as the overseer of the sale of the properties for al-Moqtader’s mother, Şāḡab, prior to her execution (Meskawayh, I, pp. 244-45; tr., IV, p. 276; *Ketāb al-‘oyun*, p. 263).

‘Ali Nawbaḳti’s son, Abu ‘Abd-Allāh Ḥosayn b. ‘Ali Nawbaḳti (282-326/895-938), exceeded all other Nawbaḳtis in gaining power and influence in ‘Abbasid affairs. Ḥosayn b. ‘Ali’s career began as an administrator of powerful tax-farmers, such as the Baridis, whose affairs in Wāseṭ, Şelḥ, and Mobārak he had managed early in his career, despite his later antipathy against the family (Hamadāni, p. 288; Meskawayh, I, p. 327; tr., IV, p. 370). He seems to have acquired most of his skills as a close protégé (*şani’a*) of Eshāq b. Esmā’il Nawbaḳti (Meskawayh, I, p. 362; tr., IV, p. 408). Ḥosayn b. ‘Ali’s most prominent role in ‘Abbasid administration, however, was during the reign of al-Rāzi (r. 322-29/934-40), when he served as a confidant and secretary to the governor of Wāseṭ and Başra, Ebn Rā’eq (Şuli, *Awrāq* II, p. 87; tr., p. 149; cf. Meskawayh, I, p. 335; tr., pp. 377-78). Chroniclers such as Meskawayh were keen to see Ḥosayn b. ‘Ali’s administrative acuity and political savoir-faire as the true driving force between Ebn Rā’eq’s rise to power as the first supreme commander (*amir al-omarā’*) of the ‘Abbasid caliphate, thus enabling Ebn Rā’eq to assume control of both the financial and the military might of the empire in 324/936. Ḥosayn b. ‘Ali served Ebn Rā’eq thereafter as his vizier,



although by that time the office existed only in name (Şuli, *Awrāq* II, p. 87; tr., I, p. 131; Meskawayh, I, p. 360; tr., IV, p. 405; Şafadi, XII, pp. 455-56). The downfall of Ḥosayn b. ‘Ali came about because of his betrayal by his ambitious protégé, Abu Bakr Ebn Moqātel, who successfully plotted to replace his mentor as Ebn Rā‘eq’s most trusted administrator. Ebn Moqātel took advantage, on the one hand, of Ebn Rā‘eq’s difficulties during his conflict with the governors of Ahvāz, the Baridis, whom Ḥosayn b. ‘Ali sought to hound until the Baridis’ power had been broken, and, on the other hand, Ḥosayn b. ‘Ali’s sudden decline in health. Bribing Ḥosayn b. ‘Ali’s son-in-law, ‘Ali b. Aḥmad, with false promises of power, Ebn Moqātel purportedly succeeded in portraying Ḥosayn’s illness as fatal when he had in fact recovered. Ebn Rā‘eq sought to restore Ḥosayn b. ‘Ali upon hearing reports from the physician Senān b. Tābet that he had recuperated, but, with the aid of Ḥosayn’s perfidious son-in-law, Ebn Rā‘eq was convinced by Ebn Moqātel that Ḥosayn was too ill to ever return to office (Meskawayh, I, pp. 361-63; tr., IV, pp. 407-9; Hamadāni, p. 309; Ebn al-Aṭir, ed. Tadmori, VII, pp. 59-60; ed. Tornberg, VIII, pp. 331-32; cf. Mottahedeh, p. 94). The absence of Ebn Rā‘eq’s most trusted and able advisor eventually led to his downfall in 326/938 at the hands of Bačkam, a Turkish amir who replaced Ebn Rā‘eq as the supreme commander (*amir al-omarā*); this marks an end to any notable record of the involvement of the Nawbaḳti family in ‘Abbasid politics.

Twelver Shi‘ism. The Nawbaḳt family is renowned for its loyalty to the Imami Shi‘ites and their Imams, but this loyalty’s origins are difficult to trace with precision. Early historians predicate Nawbaḳt’s conversion upon his entering into the service of al-Manşur as the caliph’s client (*mawlā*) and court astrologer, but these historians make no mention of Nawbaḳt’s sectarian proclivities, Shi‘ite or otherwise. By the reign of Hārūn al-Raşid, however, the Nawbaḳtis’ sectarian loyalties are easy to discern when, for example, the poet Abu Nowās, while lampooning Esmā‘il b. Abi Sahl for avarice, also accuses him of hardline Shi‘ism (*ramāho be’l-boḳl wa-nassabaho ela’l-rafz*; Abu Heffān, p. 34). A spurious tradition also has two grandsons of Nawbaḳt, Hārūn and Moḥammad b. Abi Sahl b. Nawbaḳt, seeking explicit sanction of Imam Ja‘far al-Şādeq concerning their practice of astrological craft (Ebn Ṭāwus, p. 2, 100; on the chronological impossibility of this tradition, see Eqbāl, pp. 19-20; tr., p. 38; cf. Capezzone, pp. 429-39). Abū Ḥayyān Tawḥidi (d. 414/1023) alone records a curious account that attributes Nawbaḳt’s Shi‘ite conversion to his legendary astrological acuity. According to this account, determined to discern the true religion, Nawbaḳt writes on two slips of paper, one bearing, “religion (*al-din*),



Islam, Moḥammad, and his family,” and the other, “Zoroastrianism and adoration of the sun (*al-majusiya wa-maḥabbat al-šams*).” After asking a Muslim man to bury the two slips of paper in the ground, thus concealing their location, Nawbaḳt looks to the stars and perceives an astral boon in the east. This observation convinces him that the paper with true religion written thereon would be in the easterly facing hole; so he unearths the paper slip and finds Islam and Moḥammad’s name written on it, thereby resolving to become a Shi’ite Muslim (Abu Ḥayyān, VII, p. 167).

There exists little evidence for the Nawbaḳtis playing a role in the leadership of Imami Shi’ism prior to Abu Sahl Nawbaḳti’s rise to prominence as a theologian and patron of theological learning and disputation. Abu Sahl’s rise must have been directly related to his ability to set the trajectory and theological agenda for the Imami Shi’ites through his patronage of theological learning and the numerous theological works that he himself authored on topics such as the imamate, jurisprudence, refutations of non-Twelve Shi’ite and non-Muslim sects, and other theological miscellanea. His efforts to articulate a rationalist Shi’ite theology were indispensable for the articulation of key Imami doctrines on the occultation (*ḡayba*) and deputyship (*sefāra*) of the Hidden Imam more broadly, and even presaged the eventual rapprochement between Shi’ism and Mo’tazelite rational theology. Unfortunately, none of Abu Sahl’s works appears to be extant, except for excerpts from two works on the imamate: the *Ketāb al-tanbih fī’l-emāma* and *al-Anwār fī tawāriḳ al-a’emma* (Anṣārī, p. 582). The most lasting monument to the theological influence of the Nawbaḳti family on the formation of Twelver theological orthodoxy survives in the work of Abu Sahl’s nephew, [Abu Moḥammad Ḥasan b. Musā Nawbaḳti](#) (d. between 300/912-13 and 310/922-23). Ḥasan b. Musā’s intellectual and scholarly interests ranged broadly, encompassing not only theology but also philosophy and astronomy, and he was claimed by both the Twelver Shi’ites and the Mo’tazelites. For posterity, his most important works have proven to be his two works on heresiology, namely his *Feraq al-Ši’a* and his *Ketāb al-arā’ wa’l-diānāt* (see [ĀRĀ’ WA’L-DĪĀNĀT](#), a work, which, though apparently no longer extant, is quoted extensively in later sources; see van Ess, 2011, pp. 224-30, and *passim*; Madelung, 2012).

There are less-known contributions of Nawbaḳt’s descendants as well. Kaṭīb Baḡdādi mentions a work known as *al-Radd ‘ala’l-ḡolāt* by an otherwise unknown Ḥosayn b. Yaḥyā Nawbaḳti, of which he quotes a section on the



Eshāqiya of Eshāq Aḥmar Naḳā'i (d. 286/899; Ḳaṭīb, VII, pp. 410-11; on its relation to Ḥasan b. Musā's *Feraq al-Ši'a*, see van Ess, 2011, pp. 245-46). As a general rule, the theologians hailing from the Nawbaḳti family are associated with the alignment of the Mo'tazela's rationalist theology with Shi'ite belief because of the long shadows cast by the giants Abu Sahl and Ḥasan b. Musā. Suprisingly, this tendency all but disappears in the last known theological contribution of a Nawbaḳti, namely, the *Ketāb al-Yāqut* of the otherwise unknown Abu Eshāq Ebrāhim b. Nawbaḳti (fl. 5th/11th cent.?.; cf. Madelung, 1970, p. 15, n. 1), which is only preserved in the commentary thereon written by 'Allāma Ḥelli (d. 726/1325) and titled *Anwār al-malakut fi šarḥ al-Yāqut* (Eqbāl, pp. 166-77; Schmidtke, pp. 48-49).

The Nawbaḳtis' political power and influence over the burgeoning Twelver orthodoxy often intersected. Louis Massignon, citing the Nawbaḳtis' "violent hatred" of Ṣufism, portrays Abu Sahl as the person responsible for the controversial Sufi Ḥosayn b. Maṣṣur Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) first coming to the attention of 'Abbasid authorities and his subsequent arrest, trial, and execution (Massignon, I, pp. 329-30). However, the evidence for this is virtually non-existent. Once Ḥallāj arrived in Baghdad, he found his most sympathetic audience among the Shi'ites, and Twelver works even claim that Ḥallāj purported to be Hidden Imam's representative (*wakil Šāheb-al-Zamān*; Ṭusi, p. 401). As a leading figure of the Shi'ites of Baghdad, Abu Sahl exchanged letters in correspondence with Ḥallāj after the latter first sought to gain Abu Sahl's loyalty and support. Abu Sahl took the opportunity to expose Ḥallāj as a fraud and charlatan (Massignon, I, pp. 401-2), his letters and mockery of Ḥallāj and his "miracles" became famous (cf. Tanuḳi, I, p. 161; Ḳaṭīb, VIII, p. 702; Ṣuli, 1999, p. 226). Yet, none of these points to Abu Sahl or any other Nawbaḳti playing a prominent role behind the machinations leading to Ḥallāj's execution in 309/922 during the vizierate of Ḥāmed b. 'Abbās, as postulated by Massignon.

The most conspicuous convergence of political power in the 'Abbasid administration and religious influence over the Twelver Shi'ites transpires, rather, during the deputyship of the third locum tenent (*safir*) of the Hidden Imam, Abu'l-Qāsem Ḥosayn b. Ruḥ b. Abi Baḥr Nawbaḳti (d. 326/938). Ebn Rūḥ's tenure as the Hidden Imam's representative of the Twelver community coincided with the reigns of those caliphs (i.e., al-Moqtader, al-Qāher, and al-Rāzi) under whom the Nawbaḳt family enjoyed some of its most powerful positions in the 'Abbasid administration, and other Shi'ite families in Baghdad,



such as the Banu Bestām and Banu Forāt, were at the apogee of their power as well. Most accounts portray Ebn Ruḥ's succession to the second locum tenent of the Hidden Imam, Abu Ja'far Moḥammad b. 'Oṭmān 'Amri (d. 305/917), as telescoped by his long service as the latter's protégé and confirmed by his daughter, Omm Kolṭum, who testified that her father had explicitly appointed Ebn Ruḥ as his successor and her husband, Aḥmad b. Ebrāhim Nawbaḳti, as the chief secretary of the Holy See, though this view is not entirely uncontested (Ṭusi, p. 391; Eqbāl, pp. 212-22; cf. Abdulsater, p. 315).

Ebn Ruḥ's tenure as *safir* marked a significant watershed during the minor occultation marked by the resumption of communications from the Hidden Imam, allowing Ebn Ruḥ to pursue assiduously a consolidation of the Twelver religious hierarchy, doctrine, and religious law. Ebn Ruḥ achieved his legal reforms in concert with the jurists of Qom (Ṭusi, p. 390), but most instrumental was a talented jurist and protégé of Ebn Ruḥ named Abu Ja'far Moḥammad b. 'Ali b. Abi 'Azāqer Šalmaḡāni (Ṭusi, pp. 303, 408). His greatest challenge arose, however in the wake of anti-Shi'ite sentiments following the Qarmaṭi attacks on Baghdadi ḡajj pilgrims (cf. Halm, p. 182), when in 312/929 'Abbasid authorities imprisoned Ebn Ruḥ on the charge that he owed past-due taxes and, more seriously, that he had entered into correspondence with Qarāmeṭa to urge them to besiege Baghdad ('Arib, p. 122; Ḍahabi, VII, p. 522; Eqbāl, pp. 218-21). During Ebn Ruḥ's imprisonment, his protégé Šalmaḡāni assumed the full authority, going so far as to issue the Hidden Imam's decrees in his own handwriting (Ṭusi, p. 324), thus bypassing Ebn Ruḥ as the sole intermediary between the Imam and his community and leaving at least some of the faithful with the impression that Šalmaḡāni had access to the knowledge of the unseen (Ṭusi, pp. 304, 323-24; Eqbāl, pp. 222-24). Reports of Šalmaḡāni disseminating heretical ideas soon surfaced. The second *safir*'s daughter, Omm Kolṭum, wrote the imprisoned Ebn Ruḥ that Šalmaḡāni had been teaching a prominent Shi'ite family of Baghdad, the Banu Bestām, and that the spirit of Imam 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb incarnated itself in Ebn Ruḥ, the spirit of Moḥammad in her father the second *safir*, and the spirit of Fāṭema in Omm Kolṭum herself (Ṭusi, pp. 403-5, 408).

Ebn Ruḥ moved quickly against Šalmaḡāni once word of the scandal reached him in prison. From the confines of his cell in the palace of the caliph al-Moqtader, he issued a rescript (*tawqi*) from the Twelfth Imam denouncing his former protégé as an apostate in Ḍu'l-Ḥejja 312/March 925, just prior to his release from detention that same year (Ṭusi, pp. 307, 410). Significantly, Ebn



Ruḥ's rescript contains no mention of Šalmaġāni's heresy, merely his apostasy (Ṭusi, pp. 410-11; cf. Hussain, p. 130). Šalmaġāni rebuffed Ebn Ruḥ's issuance of the Twelfth Imam's rescript by claiming to be the Hidden Imam's true *safīr* (Ṭusi, p. 307; Ebn al-Aṭir, ed. Tadmori, VII, p. 26). Ebn Ruḥ's estranged protégé Šalmaġāni had benefited from the protection of powerful benefactors highly established within the 'Abbasid administration, but these benefactors' support increasingly waned, especially after the execution of Abu'l-Ḥasan Forāt and his son Moḥassen in 312/924. Eventually, Šalmaġāni was forced to flee and seek refuge with the Hamdanids far from Baghdad, where the vizier Abu'l-Qāsem Kāqāni had pursued him and arrested many of his followers (Ebn al-Aṭir, ed. Tadmori, VII, p. 27; ed. Thornberg, VIII, p. 290; cf. Hussain, pp. 130-31). When Šalmaġāni's last protectors, Ḥosayn b. Qāsem b. 'Obayd-Allāh b. Wahb (vizier during 319-20/931-32) and the Banu Bestām, were exiled or arrested by the caliph al-Qāher (Meskawayh, I, p. 267; tr., IV, pp. 303-4), he unwisely challenged Ebn Ruḥ to a mutual imprecation (*mobāhala*) to determine who indeed was the Hidden Imam's true representative (Ṭusi, p. 307). Whereas Šalmaġāni's support in Baghdad had fallen into shambles, Ebn Ruḥ exited prison with his networks of patronage and influence essentially intact. Ebn Ruḥ in particular leveraged his considerable influence with the philo-Alid vizier Abu 'Ali Moḥammad Ebn Moqla (Ṭusi, p. 406; cf. Meskawayh, I, p. 225; tr., IV, p. 253; Hussain, p. 126). Ebn Ruḥ attempted to capture and litigate Šalmaġāni during the caliphate of al-Moqtader, but he was only successfully apprehended by Ebn Moqla during the caliphate of al-Rāzi. The letter of Šalmaġāni detailing his guilt accuses him of virtually every known doctrine of the Shi'ite extremists (*ġolāt*; Yāqut, *Eršād* I, pp. 108 ff.), although the curious claim of Ebn Ḥawqal that he was a *dā'i* for the Fatimids does not appear (Ebn Ḥawqal, p. 211; tr., II, p. 290). The houses of Šalmaġāni and his followers were ransacked for evidence for a trial. Found guilty for heresy and apostasy, Šalmaġāni was executed, though he denied his guilt of such heresy throughout his interrogation and only affirmed his claim to be a representative (*bāb*) of the Mahdi. The authorities ordered the bodies of him and his followers to be crucified and burned in Baghdad in 323/934 (Mas'udi, *Tanbih*, pp. 396-97; Ebn al-Aṭir, ed. Tornberg, VIII, pp. 290-94; ed. Tadmori, VII, pp. 26-27; Ḍahabi, VII, pp. 466-67). At a later date, Ebn Ruḥ repaid Ebn Moqla for his aid in dispatching this rival, intervening on his behalf with his fellow Nawbaḳti, Ḥosayn b. 'Ali, to see Ebn Moqla restored to his office in 325/936 (Šuli, *Awrāq* II, p. 76; tr., I, p. 131).

Ebn Ruḥ's dispute with Šalmaġāni marks an important moment for the



Nawbaḳti family insofar as his rivalry with the third *safir* threatened to unravel the achievements of Ebn Ruḥ and his fellow Nawbaḳti theologians in terms of organization and legal and doctrinal reforms for the community, on the one hand, and, on the other, exemplifies the importance of the Nawbaḳtis' networks of patronage in Baghdad and Ebn Ruḥ's deft ability to wield and navigate them. Šalmaḡāni's defection, however, left its scars. Controversy surrounded the works that he composed under Ebn Ruḥ's tutelage, such as his *Ketāb al-awṣiā'*, *Ketāb al-taklif*, and *Ketāb al-ḡayba*. He also continued to transmit while hiding under the protection of the Hamdanids in Ma'laṭā (Najāši, p. 379). This controversy threatened to make Ebn Ruḥ's efforts all for naught. One dismayed Shi'ite exclaimed, "Our houses are filled with his books!" (Ṭusi, p. 379; cf. Mas'udi, *Tanbih*, p. 397; Najāši, pp. 378-79). Ebn Ruḥ remedied this crisis by giving a blanket endorsement of all of Šalmaḡāni's works composed prior to his rescript (Ṭusi, pp. 373, 379, 408-9; Eqbāl, pp. 222-38).

The Nawbaḳti theologians were rationalists steeped in the theological debates of their Mo'tazelite contemporaries; however, this does mean that they were necessarily keen to extirpate the supra-rational and esoteric elements from Imami Shi'ism. For this reason, though their embrace of theological rationalism prefigures the like of Shaikh Mofid (d. 413/1022) and Šarif Mortaza (d. 436/1044), the Nawbaḳtis are often portrayed as supporting views at variance with those of later Shi'i-Mo'tazli thinkers. When examining our best source for their systematic opinions and their impact on Twelver theology, Shaikh Mofid's *Awā'el al-maqālāt*, a nuanced picture emerges. Modern scholars have adduced a passage from Mofid's *Awā'el* to argue that the Nawbaḳtis rejected the idea that the Imams performed miracles (e.g., McDermott, p. 113; Modarressi, p. 44). Mofid, however, notes that the Banu Nawbaḳt differed from the majority (*al-jomhur*) on the issue, but his text is vague. Mofid's record of the Nawbaḳtis' rejection of the position espoused by him (viz., Imams may perform miracles but that such performance is not rendered necessary by reason) is not necessarily tantamount to a denial of the Imams' miracles outright. A more likely possibility is that the Banu Nawbaḳt rejected the notion that such miracles were merely a divine grace as opposed to a rational necessity intrinsic to the Imamate, thus conforming to the parallel assertions of the Mo'tazela with regards to prophecy (Mofid, pp. 40-41; cf. the "pro-miracle" position of the rationalist Ebn Qeba Rāzi, quoted in Modarressi, pp. 136-38, 141-43).



Other views of the Nawbaḳti theologian Mofid are:

(a) In agreement with the adherents to the doctrine of the transmigration of souls (*aṣḥāb al-tanāsok*), the Banu Nawbaḳt regarded prophecy and imamate as conferred not by grace (*tafaẓẓol*) but rather by virtue of the Imams' intrinsic merit (*esteḥqāq*; pp. 33-35);

(b) against the majoritarian position, they asserted the Imams' deputies can only be appointed by explicit statement (*naṣṣ*), like the Imams themselves (p. 36);

(c) against the majoritarian opinion, but in accord with Mofawweẓa and the extremists (*ḡolāt*), the Banu Nawbaḳt believed that the Imams' knowledge necessarily encompassed all crafts (*ṣanā'e*) and languages (*loḡāt*), just as they regarded the performance of signs and miracles as rationally and logically necessary to the office of the imamate (pp. 38, 40-41);

(d) against the majoritarian opinion, they denied the occurrence of miracles at the hands of the *safirs* and *bābs* (p. 41);

(e) they denied that the Imams heard the speech of angels (pp. 41-42);

(f) they espoused a view contrary to Mofid's affirmation of the wholeness (*salāmat*) of the Qur'an (*wa-hādā'l-madḥab be-keḷāf mā same'nāho 'an bani Nawbaḳt ... men al-ziāda fi'l-Qor'ān wa'l-naqṣān fihi*; p. 56);

(g) they believed that the rewards of some righteous deeds were received in this life (*fi dār al-donyā*) and thus would not be rewarded as a portion (*naṣīb*) in the hereafter (p. 57);

(h) they espoused the mutual cancellation (*taḥābot*) of good and evil deeds (p. 57; cf. van Ess, 1991-99, IV, p. 64, n. 35; Schmidtke, p. 232 n. 47)

(i) they admitted the possibility that an unbeliever could know and obey God thus procuring divine rewards in this life and also rejected the majoritarian position on *mowāfāt*, namely, that a man who died an unbeliever never truly believed at any moment in his life (p. 58; cf. Kohlberg, 1983).

Overall, the above list shows that the Nawbaḳtis aligned Imami beliefs with Mo'tazilite theology in a way that exalted the status of the Imams and demystified the position of the Imams' deputies. In particular, the positions



espoused by the Nawbakṭis on the Imams' deputies during the minor occultation can be viewed as emblematic of their attempts to counter rogue claimants to charismatic, esoteric bābship (see BĀB), such as Ḥallāj and Šalmaġāni, and to appropriate theological rationalism for their burgeoning vision of Twelver orthodoxy.

See also: [ABU SAHL NAWBAḲT](#); [ABU SAHL NAWBAḲTI](#); [AL-ĀRĀ' WA'L-DĪĀNĀT](#); [ḤOSAYN B. RUḤ](#); [ISLAM IN IRAN IX. DEPUTIES OF THE MAHDI](#); [NAWBAḲTI, ḤASAN B. MUSĀ](#)

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