

(Kermani, Mobin I, p. 228), while a well-known hadith (extant in several versions) ascribes to Mohammad the words “I am the city of knowledge (madinat al-ʿilm) and ʿAli is the gate; will you enter the city other than by its gate?” (ibid., pp. 229-30). Shiʿite interpretation of Koran 2:58 and 7:161 identifies the imams with the bab through which the Children of Israel are to pass after saying “hetta” (for traditions, see Kermani, Mobin I, p. 229; for commentary, see Ahsaʿi, Šarh II, pp. 227-31; Šabestari, Šarh, pp. 148-49).

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The term also came to be used among the Imami Shiʿites to designate the representatives of the imam and is best known in its application to the four abwab believed to have acted as intermediaries for the twelfth imam during his lesser occultation: Abu ʿAmr ʿOtman b. Saʿid ʿOmari, his son Abu Jaʿfar Mohammad (d. 305/917), Abuʿl-Qasem Hosayn b. Ruh Nowbakti (d. 326/937), and Abuʿl-Hasan ʿAli b. Mohammad Samarri (d. 329/940). (On these, see Maškur, Tarik-eŠiʿa, pp. 137-42; Hussain, Occultation, chaps. 4-7.) Other claimants to this rank appeared during the same period (ibid., pp. 142-46), but in the end the system of babiyya was abandoned in favor of the theory of the greater occultation. During the nineteenth century, a section of the Shaikhi school (q.v.) came to regard Shaikh Ahmad Ahsaʿi (q.v.) and Sayyid Kazem Rašti (q.v.) as gates of the imam, a belief which led to the emergence of Babism (q.v.) following the application of the term bab to Sayyid ʿAli Mohammad Širazi (see BAB, ʿALI MOHAMMAD ŠIRAZI, below).

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