

Seyed Amir Asghari

Juridical Esotericism: *Ghuluww*, the Palāsī–Ibn Mi‘mār Network, and the Mamluk Criminalization of Shī‘ī–Sufi Metaphysics

Ghuluww is not a doctrinal category. It is a historically produced accusation — one that did its most consequential work in eighth/fourteenth-century Mamluk Syria. Scholarship has established that *ghuluww* is polemical rather than doctrinal. This paper takes that consensus further and asks what the accusation did — the procedural, rhetorical, and sovereign work performed under its name.

The primary evidence is the cluster of Damascus execution narratives from 726/1326, read alongside the juridical writings of Ibn Taymiyya (661–728/1263–1328): *al-Ṣārim al-maslūl*, *Bughyat al-murtād*, and the relevant *fatwas* in *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā* (vols. 2, 11, 35). These texts reveal what I call the *ghuluww*-dispositif: a juridical apparatus that collapsed Shī‘ī imamology, Akbarian metaphysics, and Isma‘īlī hermeneutics into a single accusatory label — *bāṭiniyya* as *ghuluww* — subjected the accused to a repent-or-die protocol (*istitāba*), and completed itself in the public spectacle of the *sūq al-khayl*.

Against this stands an eastern, Ilkhanid-Iranian archive. In *Tuhfat al-Rūḥ wa-al-Uns*, Ḥasan ibn Ḥamza al-Shīrāzī al-Palāsī (active late seventh/thirteenth century) develops an Akbarian cosmology within a distinctly Shī‘ī Sufi framework. His memoir of an encounter with his teacher Khwāja Muḥammad b. Ṣādiq al-Kujujī (d. 677/1279) in Tabriz shows something rarely documented: a Sufi ethics of esoteric disclosure (*adab al-ifshā’*), in which the danger of *ta’wīl* is managed through pedagogical restraint rather than juridical procedure. What this milieu treated as a problem of spiritual discipline, the Mamluk apparatus converted into a criminal one.

The analytical hinge is Jalāl al-Dīn Ibn Mi‘mār al-Baghdādī (fl. 1300–1330). His failed dialogue with Ibn Taymiyya, and the execution of his associates in Damascus (Nāṣir b. Abī al-Faḍl al-Ṣāliḥī, 726/1326), make him the biographical miniature of the paper’s argument: a mainstream Ilkhanid intellectual formation — Shī‘ī, Sufi, philosophical — that the Mamluk juridical apparatus could only process as *ghuluww*. The paper proposes juridical esotericism as a framework for this dynamic and argues that the formative-period category was continuously retooled. The Mamluk eighth/fourteenth century is the missing middle of *ghuluww*’s long juridical career.

Keywords: *ghuluww*, juridical esotericism, Mamluk Syria, Ibn Taymiyya, Shī‘ī–Sufi thought, *bāṭiniyya*.



Seyed Amir Asghari

Indiana University, Bloomington

Seyed Amir Asghari is Senior Fellow at the Center for the Study of the Middle East at Indiana University Bloomington and formerly held a postdoctoral appointment in the Department of Religion at Baylor University. He received his PhD from Indiana University in 2022. His research focuses on Islamic intellectual history, Shī‘ī thought, Sufism, and Qur’anic studies, with particular attention to the intersections of philosophy, theology, and mysticism. He is the author of *Sufism and Philosophy in the Contemporary Shia Seminary* (Bloomsbury, 2025).