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Tracing the Legacy of the *Mufawwiḍa Ghulāt* in Imami Shi'a Theology

The *Ghulāt* have been an influential current throughout the history of Shi'ism, playing a role in shaping a portion of Imami Shi'a beliefs as they exist today. In light of the serious transformations that occurred within the conceptual domain of *ghuluww* and, consequently, among those who embodied it, transformations that led to significant changes in certain dimensions of the fundamental doctrine of the Imamate relative to those of Divine Unity and Prophethood — this article seeks to shed light on these transformations by presenting specific and falsifiable criteria.

Ghuluww, in the dimensions of the Imamate unfolded in two stages: *rubūbī ghuluww* (attributing the station of lordship to the Imams, or "Imam-as-God") and *tafwīdī ghuluww* (attributing to the Imams all sacred stations except lordship, or supra-human Imamate). The *rubūbī Ghulāt* include Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, Mughayra ibn Sa'īd, Bayān ibn Sam'ān, and others, with the School of Kufa. *Rubūbī ghuluww* was rejected in the most explicit terms by the Imams, and those who held such views were expelled and cursed for lying about the Imams and fabricating *ḥadīths*.

During the period of institutionalization of Imami Shi'a religious beliefs between the second and fourth centuries AH, a conflict emerged among the Imams' companions between proponents and opponents of *tafwīdī ghuluww* (the delegation by God to the Imams of the acts of creation and sustenance). In effect, the *Ghulāt*, by reconstructing their views, offered a new edition of *ghuluww* — a reduction of *rubūbī ghuluww* into *tafwīdī ghuluww* — which found acceptance within the Shi'a community. Eventually, from around the fourth century onward, the current of the "*Mufawwiḍa Ghulāt*" gradually came to dominate the mainstream Imami Shi'a discourse, and opponents of this current were marginalized as "*Muqaṣṣira* Shi'a," (people of understatement). By "mainstream view" is meant the positions of figures of the Baghdad School.

Among the Imams' companions accused of *tafwīdī ghuluww* were Muḥammad ibn Sinān, Mufaḍḍal ibn 'Umar, and Jābir ibn Yazīd. The attributions made by such figures to the Imams in matters of a supra-human nature were, in response to questions from certain specific companions, gently denied by the Imams themselves. In the Shi'ism that predates the tracing legacy of the *Mufawwiḍa Ghulāt*'s views, the Imams are '*ulamā' abrār* — righteous scholars — not divine individuals of supra-human nature with a luminous and distinct essence.



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