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Traces of the *Ghulāt* in Shīʿī Hadith Literature: A Computational and Thematic Analysis of *Ghulāt*-Affiliated Traditions in al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī*

This study examines traditions transmitted by *ghulāt*-affiliated narrators in al-Kulaynī's (d. 329/941) *al-Kāfī*, one of the foundational hadith collections of Imāmī Shī'ism. Although the mainstream Imāmī tradition formally condemned *ghulāt* tendencies, the boundaries between normative Shī'ī belief and esoteric extremism remained fluid and contested throughout the formative period. This historical tension brings a critical question to the center of the study: Did *ghulāt* narrators infiltrate *al-Kāfī* incidentally, or did they pursue a deliberate transmission strategy concentrated on particular doctrinal issues?

The research proceeds in two interrelated phases. In the first phase, Ibn al-Ghaḍā'irī's *Kitāb al-Ḍu'afā'* serves as the primary prosopographical source for identifying *ghulāt*-affiliated narrators. To ensure methodological rigor, only narrators characterized as *ghulāt* in Ibn al-Ghaḍā'irī's work and in at least one additional Shī'ī *rijāl* source are included. For each narrator meeting this criterion, standardized data is compiled — name and epithets, grounds for *ghulāt* association, critical assessment terms such as *ghālīn* and *fāsid al-madhhab*, generational classification. Using digital hadith databases, the narrations of the identified transmitters in *al-Kāfī* are traced in order to construct a systematic corpus of *ghulāt*-affiliated traditions. The search includes narrators appearing at any link within the *isnād* chain, not only in the primary position.

In the second phase, the corpus is subjected to a multi-layered thematic analysis. The first layer classifies traditions according to classical categories — theology, jurisprudence, Qur'ānic exegesis, ethics, and esoteric knowledge — to statistically reveal domains of disproportionate concentration. The second layer searches for thematic clusters specific to *ghulāt* thought: the superhuman attributes of the Imām and *nūr* metaphysics; the *zāhir-bāṭin* dichotomy and transmission of secret knowledge; extraordinary eschatological imagery; and antinomian discourse that undermines *sharī'a* obligations through esoteric interpretation. The third layer explores the correlation between *isnād* structure and textual content, by examining where *ghulāt* narrators appear within *isnād* chains, and whether *isnāds* shared by multiple *ghulāt* narrators focus on specific themes..

By integrating classical *rijāl* criticism with computational methods, this study aims to illuminate the mechanisms through which *ghulāt* communities shaped Shī'ī hadith literature despite their formal marginalization, thereby contributing to broader debates on the formation of Imāmī orthodoxy and the fluid boundaries of heterodoxy in early Islamic thought.



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Peyman Ünügür Tekin graduated from Ankara University Faculty of Divinity in 2008. She completed her M.A. (2011) and Ph.D. (2017) in the field of Hadith at the same university. Her master's thesis examined Sunnism as a cause of *jarḥ* in Imāmī *rijāl* literature, while her doctoral dissertation focused on content criticism in the hadith methodology of Imāmī Shī'ism. In 2012, she was awarded a doctoral scholarship by TÜBİTAK (The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye). She began working as a research assistant at Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University in 2015 and joined the faculty as an Assistant Professor in 2018. In 2026, she became an Associate Professor at the same faculty. Her research focuses primarily on Shī'ī hadith studies, hadith criticism, and the history of hadith commentary, exploring how hadith commentaries reflect and shape changing religious and social ideas across Islamic intellectual history.