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The Historical Link between Jesus and *Ghulūww*: Jesus's Function in *Ghulāt* Thought and its Impact on Shi'a Hadith

Throughout Islamic history, the mystical aspects of Jesus—his personality, life, and teachings—have been central to various esoteric movements and sects. The appropriation of Jesus's extraordinary attributes became a key strategy for Shi'i esoteric and *Ghulāt* movements to legitimize their doctrines.

On the one hand, the *Sabā'iyya* sect, drawing on the early Shi'i belief that 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is the "Beast of the Earth" (*Dābbat al-Arḍ*) whom God will manifest in the Apocalyptic era, claimed that—like Jesus—he had ascended to heaven and would return before the Resurrection. On the other hand, a group of the *Ghulāt* in Kufa believed that Ḥusayn b. 'Alī was not killed at Karbala but was, like Jesus, raised to heaven. This analogy provided an allegorical interpretation of Karbala, recasting it as a positive and salvific event, similar to the Christian perspective on the crucifixion. The *Wāqifiyya*, similarly paralleling Jesus, asserted the ascension of Mūsā b. Ja'far (the seventh Shi'i Imam). Designated as the *Qā'im* (Rising Imam) by earlier Imams, yet dying without rising, they concluded he had ascended and would return. The *Manṣūriyya* transferred Jesus's Quranic and Biblical title, *Rūḥ Allāh*, to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, viewing him second divine creation and the successor to Jesus's prophetic mission. Furthermore, certain Post-'Askari sects invoked the Jesus-Muhammad *Fatrat* (intermission) to argue that the Imamate had entered a similar suspension, which would persist until God willed a new Imam's emergence.

In response to the *Ghulāt*'s diverse appropriations of Jesus, Shi'i Imams and theologians (particularly those of the Qom school) actively countered these esoteric approaches, seeking to refute deviant understandings of Jesus's personality and status. For instance, to rebut the *Wāqifiyya*'s ascension belief, 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā (the eighth Shi'i Imam), invoked 'Imrān (Jesus's grandfather): God's promised son came through Maryam. By analogy, the *Qā'im*'s uprising could be fulfilled through Mūsā b. Ja'far descendants, not himself. Shi'i theologians, especially those of the Qom school, joined the Imams in challenging the *Ghulāt*'s Christological references. For example, in response to post-'Askari *Fatrat* claims, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq cited narrations affirming the earth never lacks an Imam until Judgment and argued that Messengers (*Rasūlan*) renew and abrogate Religion and Sharia, hence an intermission between them is conceivable. Imams, by contrast, require unceasing presence, making any gap in succession impossible. In summary, Jesus has been a theological focal point in Shi'a history, engaging *Ghulāt*, Imams, and Theologians in dynamic interpretive interplay. This article offers a systematic typology of these interactions.



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Hossein Barati earned his B.A. with Distinction in Quran and Hadith studies, alongside simultaneous studies in Jurisprudence and Islamic Law. A M.A. followed, with a thesis exploring the intertextuality between the Quran and Nahj al-Balagha. He then completed a Ph.D. dedicated to investigating the image of Jesus Christ within Shi'a and Sunni narrative sources, analyzing how differing perceptions have shaped historical narratives across Islamic thought. His publications include "*The Descent of Jesus or His Person? A Critical Inquiry into the Exegesis of Qur'an 43:61 (innahū la-ilmun li-al-Sā'a)*", "*Analyzing and Examining the Opinions of Commentators on 'When (Jesus) the Son of Mary Is Held up as an Example (Q 43: 57)'*", "*The Conceptualization of Jihad in the Holy Qur'an and its Semantic Distinction from Qital (With Emphasis on Verse 73 of Surah At-Tawbah)*" and so forth.

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