

Ammaar Muslim

Literary Analysis of Polemical Anecdotes: A Neglected Source for the Study of the Early *Ghulāt*

One of the most significant challenges facing academic study of the *ghulāt* is that of sources, especially because *ghulāt* voices were marginalized by their rivals among the so-called 'legalist' or 'rationalist' trend who got to define and formulate Shī'ī 'orthodoxy'.

Previous scholarship traditionally depended on heresiographical (*firaq*) literature to characterize the *ghulāt* but this has more recently been deemed problematic because of potential bias on the part of authors who were not *ghulāt* themselves and cannot be expected to have been wholly objective and accurate in their presentation. While there has been a growing trend towards utilizing the extant literature attributed to the *ghulāt* themselves, the relatively paucity of such texts and their complicated nature (many consists of layers dating back to different time) means that this endeavour has not been entirely successful.

This paper seeks to draw attention to a relatively neglected source. The Imāmi biographical literature, specifically *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, preserves evidence of the fierce historical dispute that erupted over certain controversial figures associated with *ghuluww*. Within the same profile (*tarjama*) one encounters reports (*akhbār*) that seek to defend a suspected *ghālī* in conversation with other reports that attempt to condemn him. A number of these reports are anecdotes which I consider to be literary creations devised to convey a polemical message as opposed to a strict recording of historical episodes.

Using the profile of the infamous Kufan narrator Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar al-Ju'fī (d. after 183/799) as a case-study, it is demonstrated that literary analysis of such anecdotes, including those likely formulated and promulgated within *ghulāt* circles, can reveal a lot about the historical beliefs of the early *ghulāt* including their attitudes towards antinomianism and their perception of the true status of the Imams.



Ammaar Muslim

Independent Researcher

Ammaar Muslim is a Masters graduate in Telecommunications Engineering but his primary interest has always been Islamic studies. Pursuing auto-didactic research for more than a decade, he is fluent in classical Arabic and has a special interest in *ḥadīth* and *rijāl*. He is the author of *Engaging the Qur'an: A Compendium of Reliable Shia Hadith* in which he collects and analyses all the reports about the merits of the Qur'an with a reliable chain as found in the Shia corpus. He is also interested in translation, working on an English translation of Shaykh Aṣif Muḥsinī's *Mu'jam al-Aḥādīth al-Mu'tabara*. He is currently teaching Islamic studies to secondary students in a seminary in East Africa.