



ĠOLĀT

ĠOLĀT (lit.: exaggerators, sing. *ġāli*), an Arabic term originally used by Twelver Shi'ite (*eṭnā 'ašariya*) heresiographers to designate those dissidents who “exaggerate” the status of the Imams in an undue manner by attributing to them divine qualities. This kind of heresy is generally, though inaccurately, called *ḥolul* (incarnation) of a divine essence into a human body. In fact, the *ġolāt* considered Imam 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb and the other Imams as manifestations of God, whose “bodies” were not corporeal but mere illusion. The main tenet of *ġoluw* (exaggeration) was that Imam 'Ali had been the manifestation of God and that it was he who had sent Moḥammad as a prophet. Other distinguishing features of *ġoluw* rejected by mainstream Shi'ites were belief in metempsychosis (*tanāsok*) and the allegorical exegesis (*ta'wil*) of the text of the Qur'ān, often combined with a latent or patent antinomianism (*ebāḥa*, q. v.), that is, the disregard of the Islamic law (*šari'a*) and its ordinances.

The first heretic who is said to have idolized 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb is 'Abd Allāh b. Saba' who preached that 'Ali was God (*al-elāh*), whereupon 'Ali had him banned from Kufa to Madā'en (old Ctesiphon, q.v.). After 'Ali's death he is said to have declared that a devil in 'Ali's appearance had been murdered whereas 'Ali himself had ascended to heaven and that his return (*raj'a*) was imminent (Aš'ari, *Maqālāt*, p. 15; Baġdādi, *Feraq*, pp. 233-35).

During the Omayyad caliphate a certain Bayān b. Sem'an Tamimi, who acted as a prophet on behalf of the idolized Imams, was burned in Kufa in the year 119/737 on the order of the governor Kāled Qasri. Bayān is said to have preached the existence of two gods: the first one, the “eternal God” (*al-elāh al-*



azali), being in heaven and consisting of pure light, and the second one on earth, probably the creator of the material lower world. The Twelver Shi'ites hand down a letter by which Bayān is said to have summoned the deified fifth Imam Moḥammad Bāqer to acknowledge him as his prophet (Ṭabari, II, pp. 1619-20; Nawbakṭi, pp. 25, 30-31; Qomi, pp. 33-35; Baḡdādi, *Feraq*, pp. 236-37).

A new set of *ḡoluw* doctrines enters the scene with 'Abd-Allāh b. Saba' Ḥarb Madā'eni, who acted on behalf of the anti-Omayyad rebel 'Abd-Allāh b. Mo'āwia (q.v.), a descendent of 'Ali's brother Ja'far b. Abi Ṭāleb, who in the last days of the Omayyad caliphate founded an independent state in Kufa (127/744) and was later killed by the 'Abbasid propagandist Abu Moslem Ḳorāsāni (q.v.) in Herāt (131/748-49). According to 'Abd-Allāh b. Ḥarb's doctrine, the prophet Moḥammad as well as 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb and his descendants, the Imams, were gods (*āleha*); the Holy Ghost (*ruḥ al-qodos*) was transferred successively from Moḥammad to 'Ali, then to Imam Ḥasan and Imam Ḥosayn, then to 'Ali's third son Moḥammad b. Ḥanafiya and his son Abu Hāšem, and finally to Ebn Ḥarb's master, 'Abd-Allāh b. Mo'āwia. Ebn Ḥarb seems to be the originator of the myth of the preexisting "shadows" (*azella*), the first creatures whose hubris and blindness entail their fall and the creation of the material world. The transmigration of souls (*tanāsok fi'l-arwāḥ*) is a punishment for those of the "shadows" who do not recognize the true Imam of their respective epoch as God (Nawbakṭi, pp. 32-34; Qomi, pp. 44-46; pseudo-Nāše', p. 37).

This myth, probably of pre-Islamic gnostic origin, together with the deification of the Imams and the doctrine of metempsychosis, henceforth becomes the hallmark of the Iraḳi (especially Kufan) *ḡoluw* and is the central theme of two original *ḡoluw* books of probable Iraḳi origin. The first is entitled *Omm al-keṭāb* and is handed down to us only in a Persian translation, with marks of a subsequent Isma'ili adaptation, by the Isma'ilis of the Pamir region and the Northern Areas of Pakistan; it was discovered by Russian scholars at the end of the 19th century. The book claims to be a secret revelation by the fifth Imam Moḥammad al-Bāqer to his disciple Jāber Jo'fi. It contains an ample version of the myth of the "shadows" (*azella*) who, as a result of their unbelief in the divinity of the Creator (who is masked by the phantoms of the different Imams), are thrown down again and again, creating by their fall the seven heavens and the sublunar world and are finally imprisoned in human bodies. The doctrines of the *Omm al-keṭāb* present many characteristic details which the Arabic heresiographers ascribe to the sects of the Moḳamma, 'Alyā'iya, and Ma'mariya, which are all said to have been subsets of the Ḳaṭṭābiya (see



below).

The second book, entitled *Ketāb al-Haft al-Šarif* (or *Ketāb al-ažella*, or *Ketāb al-Haft wa'l-ažella*), poses as a revelation of the sixth Imam Ja'far al-Šādeq. The book is handed down by the Isma'ili communities in Syria but its content has nothing to do with the well-known doctrines of Isma'ilism. Its author seems to have been the Kufan *gāli* Moḥammad b. Senān, who died in 220/835, in the same year as the eighth Imam 'Ali al-Rezā. Here again the myth of the hubris and fall of the "shadows," i.e., the preexisting human souls and their final imprisonment into the human bodies is given in its full length.

From the time of the fifth Imam Moḥammad al-Bāqer (d. 114/732 or 117/735) onwards the Kufan *goluw* is as inseparable from the Emamiya as a shadow. The most prominent *gōlāt* who appealed to al-Bāqer were Moğira b. Sa'id, executed in 119/737, and his disciple Jāber b. Yazid Jo'fi (Aš'ari, *Maqālāt*, pp. 6-8; Qomi, pp. 43-44).

During the imamate of Ja'far al-Šādeq (d. 148/765) the most prominent champion of the Kufan *goluw* was Abu'l-Ḳaṭṭāb Moḥammad b. Meqlāš, a client (*mawlā*) of the Banu Asad tribe, who was killed in the mosque of Kufa together with seventy of his followers during the governorship of the 'Abbasid prince 'Isā b. Musā (132-47/749-764). The activity of Abu'l-Ḳaṭṭāb seems to have given birth to a whole bunch of ephemeral Ḳaṭṭābiya sects such as the Moḳamma, Ma'mariya, 'Alyā'iya, and others (Nawbakṭi, pp. 38-41, 58-60; Qomi, pp. 50-63, 81-83; Kašši, pp. 290; 293-94, 296, 398-400; Aš'ari, *Maqālāt*, pp. 12-15; Šahrastāni, p. 134).

One of the most prolific propagators of *goluw* traditions allegedly revealed by Ja'far al-Šādeq was the Kufan Mofažžal b. 'Omar Jo'fi, the teacher of Moḥammad b. Senān mentioned above. He is also the author of a third *goluw* book, the *Ketāb al-šerāṭ*.

During the imamate of the tenth Imam 'Ali al-Hādi (d. 254/ 868) we find in Qom the *gālis* 'Ali b. Ḥasaka and Qāsem b. Yaqṭin (Kašši, pp. 516-19). Around the same time there appears in Baghdad the *gāli* Eshāq Aḥmar (d. 286/899), who left communities of followers (al-Eshāqiya) in Baghdad, Madā'en, and the villages of southern Iraq; the geographer Yāqut (d. 626/ 899) in his *Mo'jam al-boldān* (Beirut, III, pp. 334) mentions the Eshāqi sectarians in the district of Šorṭa between Bašra and Wāseṭ. Eshāq's *Ketāb al-šerāṭ* seems to be lost (if it is not identical with the book of the same title attributed to Mofažžal Jo'fi). The



sect seems to have disappeared after the Mongol conquest of Iraq in 1228 (*Ta'riḵ Baġdād* VI, p. 380; Šahrastāni, pp. 143-45).

From the Eshāqiya split the Noşayriya, a group founded by Moḥammad b. Noşayr Namiri, who is said to have been cursed by the tenth Imam for having propagated the doctrine of the divine nature of the Imams (Nawbaḳti, p. 78; Qomi, pp. 100-1; Kašši, pp. 520-21; Baġdādi, *Feraq*, pp. 255-56; Šahrastāni, pp. 143-45). The Noşayriya is the only sect of the *ġolāt* in the sense proper which has survived to this day and which preserves the tradition of the Kufan *ġoluw* in its original form.

In its Iraqi homeland, the Noşayri sect completely disappeared after the Mongol conquest, except perhaps at the little town of 'Āna on the Euphrates, where a Noşayri community is still recorded in modern times (Ṭawil, p. 522). According to the literature of the Noşayris (accessible in manuscripts and in several printed editions), the creed of the sect, including the myth of the fall of the "shadows," is largely identical with the doctrines of the Kufan *ġolāt*; the peculiarities of the Noşayri doctrine are due to an alleged special revelation by the eleventh Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askari to his disciple Moḥammad b. Noşayr. The connection of the sect with its Iraqi forerunners is corroborated by the chain of transmitters whom the Noşayris claim to be their spiritual masters: Ebn Noşayr (d. ca. 250/864), Moḥammad b. Jondob, 'Abd-Allāh Jannān Jonbolāni (d. 287/900), Ḥosayn b. Ḥamdān Kaşibi (d. 346/957), Moḥammad b. 'Ali Jelli (d. after 384/994), and Sorur b. Qāsem Ṭabarāni (d. 426/1034-35).

Kaşibi seems to have founded a community in Kark, the Shi'ite suburb of Baghdad. Later on he lived a restless vagrant life and made propaganda for his doctrines at the Shi'ite courts of the Buyids in Iraq and western Persia and of the Hamdanids in Mosul (Mawşel) and Aleppo (Ḥalab). His pupil and successor Moḥammad Jelli came from Jelliya at the mouth of the river Orontes (Nahr al-'āşi) in northern Syria; he lived to see the Byzantine reconquest of Cilicia and Antioch by the emperor Nicephoros Phocas in 358/969 and of the Syrian coast by the emperor Johannes Tzimisces in 363/975. In 423/1032 Jelli's successor Ṭabarāni settled down at Latakia (Lāḍeqiya; ancient Laodikeia) on the Syrian coast, whence he seems to have missionized the mountainous hinterland where the sect was able to get a firm footing during the epoch of the Crusaders and to survive up to this day.



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