

The almost complete lack of comparative perspective in the book is also a disadvantage. In one place (p. 228) Bentlage mentions briefly cases in Tunisia and Jordan that went much further. (In Tunisia a 2003 statutory regulation of DNA testing allowed children born out of wedlock to take their biological father's name and receive maintenance payments from him; cf. the legal construct of "civil paternity," developed by the Israeli Supreme Court in 1995 [Y. Reiter, "Qāḍīs and the Implementation of Islamic Law in Present Day Israel," in *Islamic Law: Theory and Practice*, ed. R. Gleave and E. Kermeli (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), 206].) It would have been interesting to analyze the reasons for the difference between Egypt's conservative stance and the more "Western" orientation of these two states.

As a doctoral thesis this work is impressive because it is comprehensive, thorough, and well reasoned. As a book it tends to be long-winded and cumbersome, which proper editing would have taken care of. The absence of an index in a book that is laden with so many details is a true shortcoming.

RON SHAHAM

THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

Controversies in Formative Shi'i Islam: The Ghulat Muslims and Their Beliefs. By MUSHEGH ASATRYAN. Shi'i Heritage Series, vol. 4. London: I.B. TAURIS, in association with THE INSTITUTE OF ISMAILI STUDIES, LONDON, 2016. Pp. xviii + 206. \$48.50, £29.50.

Mushegh Asatryan's excellent book is a careful dissection of the texts, cosmology, leadership, and ideas of the *ghulāt*, whom he describes as "those Shi'is who lived in Iraq between the 2nd and 3rd/8th and 9th centuries, and for some of their views were branded as 'extremists' (*ghulāt*) by Shi'i as well as Sunni authors" (p. 11). He traces the evolution of their texts to their final form as preserved by communities that inherited their ideas, most notably the Nuṣayrīs.

While Asatryan builds on the work of earlier scholars, especially Heinz Halm, he has benefited from a great infusion of texts into the material available for study, brought about by the anonymous publication of the mysterious series "Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿalawīyya" somewhere in Lebanon in 2006–7. This has given him a hugely increased corpus with which to understand the tortuously complicated relationships between the individuals, doctrines, and texts in this milieu. At the center of his corpus is *Kitāb al-Haft wa-l-aḏilla* (The book of the seven and the shadows), which presents itself as the narration of the second/eighth-century Mufaḏḏal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfi, from his Imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. Halm ascribed the core of the work to Muḥammad b. Sinān (d. 220/835); however, given the nature of this work, the very utility of ascribing "authorship" should be reconsidered. As Asatryan puts it, "what [Halm] calls the 'firm kernel' [of the work] is itself not all that firm" (p. 18), as it contains several layers of composition laid down between the second/eighth to fifth/eleventh centuries. Asatryan shows that it is inextricably linked to a cluster of texts with related combinations of names—in particular to what he calls the "Aḏilla Group." Asatryan has done the great service of dissecting and describing in detail the layers, themes, and interrelations in *Kitāb al-Haft* in chapter one, followed by a detailed analysis of the intertextual relations within the corpus in the following chapters.

On the basis of his careful textual analysis, Asatryan makes some important new arguments regarding the probable doctrinal and historical relationships between texts and groups, which scholars in the field should take note of. In addition to his observations regarding the complex issues of dating and authorship of *Kitāb al-Haft* itself, he offers a useful genealogy and dating of those of the *aḏilla* group (pp. 77–78)—not only the texts themselves, but also the different layers within the texts (pp. 72–78).

Beyond issues of dating and authorship, Asatryan provides insights into the relations between the texts in his corpus and other strands of early Shi'ism. Thus, he convincingly rejects (p. 99) Hossein Modarressi's distinction (in *Crisis and Consolidation*) between those groups that divinized Muḥammad and the Imams (identified as the real *ghulāt*) and those that espoused the more moderate idea of God's having delegated his power to the Imams (the *mufawwiḏa*). Modarressi suggests that these represent two successive stages, with the divinizers being earlier than the delegationists. As Asa-

tryan shows, neither this periodization nor, indeed, any clear distinction between *tafwīd* delegationism and *ghuluww* divinization can be borne out by the texts, for “a plethora of differing views about the miraculous role of Muhammad and his heirs coexisted not just in the same period, but at times in the same text” (p. 100).

Asatryan argues that while these texts were very fluid, copying from each other and mixing different kinds of doctrine, the form that they eventually took was due to a crystallization that came with the hardening of sectarian boundaries: “In the 3rd/9th century things began to change. Relations between the Ghulat and the so-called ‘moderates’ who opposed their excessive adoration of the Imams and the Prophet Muhammad became strained” (p. 79). This tension left two major traces in the texts that derive from this period: the polemics between the *ghulāt* and those deemed deficient in their beliefs (*muqaṣṣira*); and the evidence of the increasing importance of the “gates” (*abwāb*, sg. *bāb*) who claimed to represent the Imams (p. 84) and who acquired much greater cosmological and practical significance in the third/ninth century. Asatryan seems to suggest that the cause of the rise of these two elements at this time was the absence of the Imam and the rise of the occultation doctrine (pp. 80–81). There are some problems with this suggestion. Firstly, the rise of the *abwāb* took place during the imamate of the tenth Imam, ‘Alī al-Hādī, rather than after the occultation. Asatryan is not right to say that Ibn Nuṣayr “lived during the lifetime of the eleventh Imam and advanced a claim to be his *bāb* after his death” (p. 81). Instead, the Twelver sources Asatryan cites tell us that Ibn Nuṣayr’s claims to be a prophet and the representative of the Imam were initiated before al-‘Askarī’s imamate, during al-Hādī’s lifetime. It is true that he was said to have been cursed by the Twelver *saḥīr* (intermediary), but so were several “moderates.” There were several ideas and people of *ghulāt* orientation within the pro-occultation camp, again leading us to question Asatryan’s suggestion of a hardening of boundaries between *ghulāt* and moderates as a result of the occultation. The very idea of occultation had previously been associated with *ghuluww*. The early Nuṣayrīs who inherited the *aḏilla* tradition seem to have been politically Twelver, at least with a lower-case if not a capital /t/, for they accepted the imamate of the hidden twelfth Imam and even, somewhat grudgingly, the authority of the hidden Imam’s supposedly anti-*ghulāt* agents, as we can see from the final chapters of al-Khaṣībī’s *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*. Instead of seeing the occultation as the cause of the rise of the *abwāb* and of sectarian crystallization, it might be more apt to suggest that the occultation was the result of these processes: the rise of the *abwāb* was already underway and the *bāb* paradigm offered a non-Imamic authority structure to take the practical place of the Imam at a time of crisis in Imamic succession, rather than vice versa. However, Asatryan is very likely right in emphasizing the intensification of discord at the time of al-Shalmaghānī (d. 323/934), but this suggests that the parting of ways might have been slightly later than he hints at. Al-Shalmaghānī, too, mounted a political challenge to the authority of the Twelver agents, and it was this, rather than doctrinal issues, that provoked his anathematization.

Likewise, the oft-repeated idea that Qumm was the seat of the moderates from which the *ghulāt* were expelled (pp. 79–80) deserves reappraisal. As Asatryan shows, we find affinities between many ideas in the *aḏilla* texts and early Qumm works, such as that of al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/903). In the absence of a more detailed study on *ghulāt* in Qumm, we must be open to the possibility that the expulsion of certain figures may have as much to do with personal power struggles as a cohesive orientation against *ghuluww* ideas.

After tracing the continued development of the textual corpus after the Nuṣayrīs left Iraq for Syria in chapter four and an overview of the cosmology presented in the corpus in chapter five, Asatryan’s final chapter describes “Constructing a Community,” inspiring hopes that some of these tricky questions of group affiliation and identity will be more closely dissected. Ultimately, however, this chapter does not provide a sociological analysis, but instead describes the historical theology of community present in these texts. While Asatryan apologizes that “little is known about the everyday life of the Ghulat” due to the “near-absence of references to contemporaneous people and events in Ghulat texts” (p. 165), he has already produced more material relevant to social formations in earlier chapters of this book. Indeed, perhaps the most sociologically suggestive parts of his book are where he provides explanatory frameworks for the transmission, reuse, and recompilation of texts. The question of authority is central to his assessment of the final form of these texts: “With no canonized set of texts or regulating clergy,

the belief system of the Ghulat was fluid, and the persons viewed as the loci of God's charisma unfixed, switching from Muhammad to 'Alī to all the Imams" (p. 110). This is a plausible vision and deserves further consideration.

Asatryan also leaves some suggestive material regarding social group identity and relationships unexplored, including questions of language and ethnicity (why is the title of the central book in his corpus written in a macaronic mix of Persian and Arabic?); patronage and politics (touched upon tantalizingly in chapter four); and inter-group doctrinal discussion and polemic (what are the implications of the mention of the occultation in *Kitāb al-Ṣirāt*?) In addition, Asatryan misses a trick in not using "exoteric" works from the *ghulāt*, such as al-Khaṣībī's *Hidāya*, which he neglects as having been produced under *taqiyya* (self-protection): "any Ghulat themes are toned down" (p. 125). Maybe so, but this does not make it an insincere work, and its content and structure clearly show it to be related to the more esoteric material in the *aẓilla* group, while giving very explicit details about authority and interactions between groups. The references to debates between al-Khaṣībī and followers of Ja'far "the Liar," the brother of the eleventh Imam, are particularly interesting in their evocations of the milieu in which interactions between such groups might have taken place. Finally, a deeper understanding of the sociopolitical structure of the *ghulāt* groups requires a really thorough investigation of the authority structure implicit in the various understandings of the word *bāb*, its synonyms, and near-synonyms.

My last points here are not a criticism, but rather an indication that there is far more fruitful work to be done in the directions that Asatryan has opened up. Much more could have been done with this fascinating material if he had had "but world enough and time," but this does not diminish the contribution Asatryan has made. His book provides a real service to anyone who wants to understand the *aẓilla* works, the early Muslims known as *ghulāt*, and how they relate to each other and the broader fields of Islamic studies and Islamic history.

A more substantial problem, pertaining to the field as a whole, rather than just Asatryan as its latest exemplar, is that the word *ghulāt* itself, which is given in the subtitle of this book, is deeply unsatisfactory as a tool for analysis. The only real reason to use it is inertia: it is already current in the field and is used by the contemporary heresiographical sources. The reasons against its use, however, are manifold: it is almost meaningless as a descriptor of content, since "extremists" are really often only tantamount to "the bad guys." This is very clearly not what Asatryan intends by using the word. However, using it has the unintended consequence of implicitly assigning a negative moral judgment to certain ideas and groups—some of whom are still very much alive and under attack for these ideas. It also leaves hard questions unanswered: how *are* we to characterize these layered texts with their mosaic beliefs? A discussion of alternative terms that have been proposed would have been useful: M. A. Amir-Moezzi's use of the phrase "esotericism," again imperfect but widespread, or Bella Tendler's suggestion of the phrase "Islamic heterodoxy," or geographical monikers like Halm's qualification: the Kufan *ghulāt*. Asatryan has elsewhere assessed the ambivalent utility of the word "gnosticism" as a term to be applied to the *ghulāt*. There are lower-order designations available based on doctrine (*mukhamissa* or "Pentadists," *ʿAlyāʿiyya*) and affiliation (*mufaddaliyya*, *ishāqiyya*), though as Asatryan has shown, the texts suggest a mixing and overlaying of doctrine and affiliation that makes the use of lower-order terms also problematic. In this case, what umbrella term would fit the content of these texts but allow us to distinguish from and relate them to other doctrinal complexes like those of the various Sufi orientations through history? In fact, it might be that we need to coin new terminology. This would have the effect of leading us to discuss these groups and their ideas with increasing precision, instead of just letting the inertia of the field continue to reproduce the prejudices of the medieval heresiographers and leave these groups as "the bad guys."

EDMUND HAYES
LEIDEN UNIVERSITY