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The Doctrine of muḥammisa according to Muslim Heresiography

Abstract

The article presents the doctrine of muḥammisa according to Muslim heresiography. The muḥammisa is one of *ḡulāt* groups. This term is applied to groups accused of exaggeration (*ḡuluww*) in religion and has covered a lot of groups from the early Šī‘ī circle. Muḥammisa is a current without a specific leader, it seems to have been a group of partisans having propagated a very particular idea: the divinity of five persons from *aḥl al-kisā’*: Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Al-Ḥasan, Al-Ḥusayn and Fāṭima. The article focuses on their doctrines as presented by the heresiographers and their relation to another group, ‘*alyā’iyya*, who recognised ‘Alī as God and Muḥammad as his servant.

The name muḥammisa is applied to a doctrinal current among the Šī‘ī extremist *ḡulāt*. However, this group and other *ḡulāt* sects differ widely in their form of organisation: muḥammisa are presented rather as a loose group of people professing the same doctrine than a faction like the other *ḡulāt* groups, with one leader and with a definite political view. Generally, the pejorative term *ḡulāt* is applied to groups accused of exaggeration (*ḡuluww*) in religion. This term has covered a lot of groups from the early Šī‘ī circle, but in the interpretation of Muslim heresiographers it applies, above all, to those sects or groups whose members exaggerated in their adoration of the imams and whose doctrines were later rejected by the official *Iṭna‘ašārī* orthodoxy. But it should be remembered that *Iṭna‘ašārī* doctrine took final shape in the middle of the 10th century, and perhaps even later, and by then it had assimilated some of the *ḡulāt* concepts. Although the *ḡulāt* movement began to decline towards the end of the 8th century, some of its ideas survived and continued to inspire and influence the later movement of Šī‘ī political inspiration. The *ḡulāt* ideas could also be noticed in later Sunnī thought and Islamic mysticism as well as in numerous apocalyptic and syncretic movements in which various concepts of

the *ḡulāt* were used. The best example of surviving *ḡulāt* ideas in modern time are the Nuṣayriyya, the Druzes, the ‘Alī-Ilāhī and Ahl al-ḥaqq. In these movements, the *ḡulāt*’s adoration for the person of ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib was transformed into a divine cult: they saw ‘Alī as God.

Generally, it may be said that the term *ḡulāt* is applied to a heterogeneous but interconnected group of Šī‘ī orientation, which was active above all in Al-Kūfa in the late 7th and 8th centuries.¹ It seems that the first generation of the *ḡulāt* had been mostly of religious inspiration and they introduced a lot of new concepts into the embryonic Šī‘ī doctrine, but in the next generation part of them started a different form of independent political activity. Some details of the *ḡulāt* thought may reflect pre-Islamic tribal Arabian tradition and conceptions, since many of the early leaders and followers seem to have been tribal Arabs.² But in the next generation the core of the group was made up of Muslims of non-Arab origin. They were *mawālī* of various backgrounds: Christian, Gnostic and old-Persian.

Among the most important conceptions of this milieu the following should be listed: denying ‘Alī’s death, the notion of the absence of the imām, who is in concealment, and the notion of the *mahdī*, or Messiah (‘Alī’ himself, another imām or the leader of the group), whose return would establish justice and the reign of the true form of religion. The *ḡulāt* believed in incarnation of the soul of the deceased imām in the body of the next imām (*hulūl*). Various forms of belief in reincarnation (*tanāsuh*) were also attributed to them, which could be noticed in the later syncretic groups, like the Nuṣayriyya or the Druzes. Many of the early and later *ḡulāt* seem to have adopted the principle of the condemnation of the first three caliphs (Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uṭmān) as usurpers of ‘Alī’s right to the imāmate. As far as the imāmate and the position and nature of the imām are concerned, the *ḡulāt* speculated that the imām could be the *waṣī* (representative) of the Prophet or the prophecy could be continued in his own person. These circles also exaggerated in the deification of ‘Alī, the successive *imams* and from time to time the leaders themselves.

¹ The ideas and activity of the *ḡulāt* are discussed in: H. Halm, *Die Islamische Gnosis, Die Extreme Schia und die ‘Alawiten*, Artemis, Zürich, München 1982; Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites. The Ghulat Sects*, Syracuse University Press, New York 1988. Furthermore, particular aspects of their thought are elaborated in articles. The primary Arabic sources for the examination of the *ḡulāt* are the heresiographical treatises. The most important: Aš-Šahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa-an-niḥal*, ed. M. Kīlānī, Bayrūt 1986, vol. I, p. 173–191; Al-Aš‘ārī, *Kitāb maqālāt al-islāmiyyin*, ed. H. Ritter, Istanbul 1929, vol. I, p. 1–16; Al-Baḡdādī, *Al-Farq bayn al-firaq*; the treatises of the Šī‘ī heresiographers: An-Nawbahūtī, *Kitāb firaq aš-šī‘a*, ed. M. al-Ḥifnī, Bayrūt 1984; Al-Qumī, *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa-āl-firaq*, ed. M. Maškur, Tehrān 1963. The *ḡulāt* views are also presented in the treatises of ‘ilm ar-riḡāl, the science devoted to the study of the persons figuring in *isnāds*, for example in the Šī‘ī work of Muḥammad al-Kaššī, *Aḥbār ar-riḡāl*, ed. H. al-Muṣṭawafī, Mašhad 1969; Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭūsī, *Aḥbār ar-riḡāl*, ed. M. al-Kutubī, An-Naḡaf 1961. Some information can also be found in historical chronicles.

² M.G.S. Hodgson, *Ḡulāt, Encyclopaedia of Islam 2*, CD-Rom Edition, underlines old-Arabian origin of the divination of the imams and the *ḡulāt* leaders, and of the conception of *raḡ‘a*, return of the deceased imam or leader.

The *ḡulāt* circles were often accused by the heresiographers of rejecting the Divine law.

In fact, some of them seem to have given up the preservation of religious obligations, moreover they abandoned the rules of legal and conventional morality. The *ḡulāt* in a broad sense, for example the *ḥurramiyya*,³ seem to have applied this *ibāḥa*, nevertheless it should be remembered that a part of the accusations, i.e. the accusations of incest or debauchery, could be groundless as a product of the adversary heresiographers' imagination.

Many of the *ḡulāt* thinkers were active in the Šī'ī imāms' circle, notably the fifth imām, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, and the sixth, Ġa'far aš-Šādiq, were surrounded by the *ḡulāt*, such as Abū Maṣṣūr al-Īḡlī, Al-Muḡīra Ibn Sa'īd or Abū al-Ḥaṭṭāb, who were accused of having subscribed to their imāms' extremist doctrine, mainly to having elevated their. As far as the attitude of the imāms towards the claims about their divinity is concerned, the opinions are ambiguous, but generally the scholars agree that they strongly rejected such a claim.⁴ Moreover, among the *ḡulāt* circles there developed systems of symbolic interpretation of the Sacred Texts, which were carried on in the later Muslim *ḥaraka baṭīniyya*. In groups such as the *Ismā'īliyya*, particular emphasis was placed on the necessity of esoteric Qur'ānic interpretation and explanation.

It should be remembered, however, that the *ḡulāt* were not a coherent group, but differed in terms of the supreme idea they put forward and the person they exalted. A special doctrine is attached to the faction called *muḥammisa*, or pentadist.⁵ *Muḥammisa* is a current without a specific leader, it seems to have been a group of partisans having propagated a very particular idea: the divinity of five persons from *ahl al-kisā'*: Muḥammad, 'Alī, Al-Ḥasan, Al-Ḥusayn and Fāṭima.⁶ This paper will focus on their doctrines as presented by the heresiographers and their relation to another group, 'alyā'iyya,⁷ who recognised

³ The term *ḥurramiyya* or *ḥuramdniyya* refers to the religious movement founded by Mazdak. Then this term covered a wide variety of the groups and sects, above all Iranian and anti-Arabic in their character, which were strongly influenced by the extremist *ḡulāt* ideas. The distinction between the *ḡulāt* and the *ḥurramiyya* is sometimes rather indefinable. See W. Madelung, *Ḳhurramiyya or Ḳhuramdniyya*, EI₂, where further sources are listed.

⁴ For example Aš-Šahrastānī states that after having announced Ġa'far aš-Šādiq's divinity in Al-Kufa, Abū al-Ḥaṭṭāb was expelled from the city (*la'anahu*). Aš-Šahrastānī, *Milal*, p. 179; Al-Baḡdādī, *Farq*, p. 145, *An-Nawbahātī*, *Firaq*, p. 37.

⁵ H. Halim, *Die Islamische Gnosis*, op. cit., pp. 218–229; W. Madelung, *MuḲhammisa*, EI₂; Al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, op. cit., pp. 56–60; Abū Ḥātim ar-Rāzī, *Kitāb az-zīna*, in: A. as-Sāmarrā'ī, *Al-ḡuluww wa-āl-firaq al-ḡāliyya wa-āl-ḥadāra al-islāmiyya*, p. 307.

⁶ *Ahla al-kisā'* (people of the cloak) is a term applied to these five persons. They are also referred to as *āl al-'aba'*. It is one of the fundamental notions for the Šī'ī conception of the imāmate since it serves to justify the Šī'ī claim to power: the rule is succeeded by the descendants of 'Alī and Muḥammad's daughter, Fāṭima, who all have the special spiritual leadership. The origins of this belief could be found in the ḥadīṭ called *ḥadīṭ al-kisā'*: at the time of the visit of the delegation from Naḡrān in 631, the Prophet gathered 'Alī, Al-Ḥasan, Al-Ḥusayn and Fāṭima under his cloak and quoted to them from the Qur'ān: "God only desireth to put away filthiness from you as his household and with cleansing to cleanse you" (Q 33:32).

⁷ H. Halim, *Die islamische*, op. cit., pp. 233–240; B. Lewis, *Bashshar al-Sha'irī*, EI₂.

‘Alī as God and Muḥammad as his servant. I will not discuss the *Umm al-kitāb*⁸, a rather enigmatic treatise had originated in this circle, as convincingly demonstrated by Halm, who identified the authors of this esoteric treatise with the *ḡulāt* from southern Iraq, since it should be the subject of a separate study.⁹

But the information transmitted by the heresiographers differs in details and depends on their primary sources and the period they were active in. The doctrine of the muḥammisa was described thoroughly by the Šī‘ī heresiographer, Al-Qummī. His description is of great value, since as a Šī‘ī he had a better understanding of the doctrinal nuances. His presentation, however, is from a later period and it seems to have reflected the doctrine from the beginning of the 9th century.¹⁰ At the beginning of his description, the author mentions that the muḥammisa are the partisans of Abū al-Ḥaṭṭāb, d. 755 (*hum-aṣḥāb Abī al-Ḥaṭṭāb*),¹¹ the leader of another *ḡulāt* group, the *ḥaṭṭābiyya*. But the core of the doctrine ascribed to the *ḥaṭṭābiyya* is different, most importantly, they did not deify the five members of *ahl al-bayt*.¹² Generally, it should be remembered that the relations among the muḥammisa, the *ḥaṭṭābiyya*, and another group, the ‘alyā’iyya,¹³ who recognised ‘Alī as God and Muḥammad as his servant, are rather obscure and tangled.

In Al-Qummī’s opinion, the muḥammisa believed that Muḥammad is a godhead, and that he appeared in this world in five different shapes and forms (*ḥamsa ašbāḥi wa-ḥamis šūra muḥtalifa*): they were the five members of *ahl al-kisā’* cited above. But the real divinity is incarnated in Muḥammad, he is called *ma’nā*,¹⁴ since he was the first

⁸ The edition of Persian text: *Ummu’l Kitāb*, W. Ivanow (ed.), „Der Islam” 1936, XXIII, pp. 1–132. The meaning of the treatise was analysed by him in: *Notes sur l’ummu’l-kitāb*, „Revue des Études Islamiques” 1932, p. 419–482. The Italian translation: P. Filippini-Ronconi, *Ummu’l-Kitāb*, Napoli 1966. See also the critical review of this edition: W. Madelung, *Ummu’l-Kitāb*, „Oriens” 1976, 25, pp. 352–358. The text of *Umm al-kitāb* was studied in detail by H. Halm, *Die Islamische Gnosis*, op. cit., pp. 113–198; idem, *Kosmologie und Heilislehre der frühen Ismā‘īliya*, DMG, Wiesbaden 1978, op. cit., pp. 142–168.

⁹ H. Halm, *Die islamische*, op. cit., pp. 113–199; idem, *Das Buch der Schatten. Die Mufaḍḍal-Tradition der Ḡulāt und die Ursprünge des Nuṣairierts*, „Der Islam” 1978, 55, pp. 219–266, 58, 1981, pp. 15–86.

¹⁰ Al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, op. cit., pp. 56–60.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹² About this group, see, for example, H. Halm, *Die islamische*, op. cit., pp. 199–218; W. Madelung, *Khattābiyya*, EI₂, where the sources are listed. The heresiographical treatises about Abū al-Ḥaṭṭāb and the groups connected to him: An-Nawbaḥtī, *Firaq*, pp. 79–80; Al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 50–54, 63–64, 81–82; Al-Aš‘arī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 10–13, Al-Baḡdādī, *Farq*, pp. 145, 147, 154–155; Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Fiṣal*, vol. IV, p. 184; Aš-Šahrastānī, *Al-Milal*, pp. 179–181.

¹³ H. Halm, *Die islamische*, op. cit., pp. 233–240; B. Lewis, *Baḥshar al-Ša‘ūrī*, EI₂.

¹⁴ The term *ma’nā* has different meanings depending on the discipline it is used in: grammar, poetry or philosophy. In philosophy it is commonly used as a synonym of *ma’qūl*, concept or idea. The philosopher and mystic Al-Gazālī understands this term as meaning, while As-Sulamī, one of the Mu‘tazilī thinkers, discussed the term *ma’nā* as the core of his metaphysical system. In his interpretation *ma’nā* is an entity brought on by another entity, and this process continues ad infinitum. Therefore, a whole chain of subsequent *ma’nā* comes into being, and God is its Prime Cause. S. Horowitz identifies *ma’nā* with Platonic ideas. S. Horowitz, *Über den Einfluss der griechischen Philosophie auf die Entwicklung des Kalam*, Breslau 1908, pp. 44–48. See also R. Frank, *Ma’na: some reflections on the technical meanings of the term in the Kalām and its use in the physics of Mu‘ammar*, „Journal of the American Oriental Society” 1967, 87, pp. 248–259; O. Leaman, *Ma’nā*, EI₂.

man who appeared on the earth and the first speaker-prophet who spoke the message (*awwal šahṣ zahara wa-awwal nāṭiq naṭaqa*).¹⁵ But in A l - Q u m m ī's interpretation, the five members of *ahl al-kisā'* were not the only manifestations of God, i.e. Muḥammad. This divine pentad is the most important manifestation in the cycle (*dawr*) of Islam, aside from this, however, Muḥammad had appeared to mankind in other forms (*ṣuwar šatta*). According to A l - Q u m m ī, the muḥammisa believed that Muḥammad had also manifested himself in the forms of the prophets: Adam, Nūḥ, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, and 'Isā. Moreover, he had appeared among Arabs and non-Arabs (*fī al-'Arab wa-al-'Ağam*), but in different forms to each group: to the second one his manifestations were the chosroes (*akāsira*) and the kings. Muḥammad's manifestations appeared on earth in all cycles and times (*fī kullī adwār wa-duḥūr*).¹⁶ But in the beginning, mankind had rejected Muḥammad's divinity. He had appeared to them in his luminous form and summoned to his unity, but people refused to acknowledge him (*ankarū*), as well as his subsequent manifestation: the form of prophecy (*bāb an-nubuwwa-wa-risāla*). Mankind accepted no one but his last manifestation: the form of the imāmate.¹⁷

It should be noticed that the echo of this version could be found in the cosmological myth of the Nuṣayriyya, who in their cosmic pre-existence had also rejected the diverse manifestations of the supreme divinity: 'Alī. In this instance, however, as suggested in the old esoteric Nuṣayri treatise, *Kitāb al-ḥaft wa-al-aẓilla*, the negligence of the Nuṣayri souls, which did not recognise 'Alī in his manifestations, was the cause of their fall to the earth and their earthly existence. The imāmate is therefore, in the muḥammisa belief, the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) aspect of God, whereas the inner, esoteric aspect (*bāṭin*) is Muḥammad. But not all mankind is able to recognise his higher, luminous form: it is reserved only for the elected ones, the others perceive him in his human carnal form (*bašrāniyya laḥmāniyya*). These forms are: all imams, prophets, chosroes and kings from Adam to the appearance of Muḥammad in his bodily form. They all are *maqām* (place, representation) of the divine form of Muḥammad. The similarity of these beliefs to the Nuṣayrī doctrine should be underlined once more, which points to the fact that this doctrine was rooted in the same circles.

A l - Q u m m ī emphasizes the position of Fāṭima, having been conscious that in the Muslim society it was not common to assign such a rank to a woman. He states that the muḥammisa ascribed to her a form of unity (*ṣūra at-tawḥīd*) having quoted the passage from the *Qur'ān* (112:1): *qul huwa Allāhu aḥad*.¹⁸ Moreover, A l - Q u m m ī suggests the muḥammisa belief in the manifestation of the divinity in other noble women: the Prophet's wives Ḥadīġa and Umm Salama. On earth, Muḥammad's divinity is accompanied by the ranks of imāms and gates (*bāb*), and the names of these ranks are listed, among

¹⁵ A l - Q u m m ī, *Maqālāt*, op. cit., p. 56.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ A l - Q u m m ī, *Maqālāt*, op. cit., p. 57.

them some names of *gālīs* active at the time of Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ğa‘far aṣ-Ṣādiq could be noticed: for example Al-Muġīra¹⁹ and Muḥammad al-Bašīr.

This supplementary hierarchy has its *ma‘nā*, Salmān al-Fārisī.²⁰ The muḥammisa recognizes him as the gate (*bāb*) of the messenger, who appears with Muḥammad in all conditions (*bāb ar-rasūl yaẓharu ma‘a Muḥammad fī kulli ḥāl*).²¹ Muḥammad has his gates or other ranks in all time, among Arabs and non-Arabs. The lower ranks are: *aytām* (orphan), *nuġabā’*, *nuqabā’*, *muṣtafawn*, *muḥtaṣṣūn*, *mumtaḥanūn*, *mu‘minūn*. These ranks also have their *ma‘nā*: for example for *yatīm* they are Al-Miqdād (*yatīm kabīr*) and Abū Ḍarr (*yatīm ṣaġīr*), the Companions of the Prophet. Once again, resemblance to the Nuṣayrī conceptions should be noted: the Nuṣayrī treatise *Kitāb al-maġmū’* says that Salmān had created five orphans: the first one is Al-Miqdād, who is the master of lightning and earthquakes, and Abū Ḍarr is the one to whom all planets belong.²² In Al-Qum mī’s suggestion the muḥammisa claims that all who recognize these ranks and *ma‘nā* are true believers, and are not obligated, therefore, to obey the divine orders and are also released from observing the pillars of Islam and the prohibition as to unlawful intercourse (*zinā*), drinking wine, usury and theft.²³ The accusation of the *ibāḥa*, or antinomian tendencies, was rather common in the heresiographical treatises in relation to the extremist Šī‘ī groups, particularly the *ġulāt* ones.²⁴ Today we are not in the position to verify the authenticity of these accusations. They could be, undoubtedly, deliberately exaggerated, on the other hand, however, it seems that the underlying reason of this antinomian tendency was a conviction that the return of the Messiah, *Mahdī*, signified the abrogation of law. Moreover, among these groups the most important religious obligation was a knowledge of the imām, which overshadowed the other religious prescriptions.

¹⁹ Al-Muġīra Ibn Sa‘īd al-Baġalī was a leader of the *ġulāt* group – the muġīriyya in 8th century. He was a māwla of the governor of Iraq and belonged to the circle of the fifth Šī‘ī imām, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, though it seems that the latter did not accept Al-Muġīra’s statements about the imām’s person. He seemed to have ascribed the extremist doctrine to Muḥammad, having called him the Mahdī. After his death, Al-Muġīra moved his claims to the person of the Hasanid An-Nafs al-Zakiyya. In 737 he organized an anti-Umayyad revolt in Al-Kūfa. In his doctrine, as described by the heresiographers, many gnostic elements could be perceived. W. T u c k e r, *Rebels and Gnostics: Al-Muġīra Ibn Sa‘īd and the muġīriyya*, “Arabica” 1975, XXII, p. 34; idem, *Mahdis and Millenarians, Shī‘ite Extremists in Early Muslim Iraq*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008, pp. 52–71.

²⁰ This semi-legendary companion of the Prophet is recognized to have been the first person of Persian origin converted to Islam. His life and his way to Islam were very adventurous, and he is renowned in Muslim history as the person who suggested to Muḥammad the idea to dig a moat in the Battle of the Trench. Salmān has a very particular position in some of the *ġulāt* movements and in the Nuṣayriyya, where he has the rank of the *bāb*, the gate to the imām. In this doctrine the Persian influences in this early Šī‘ī movement are reflected.

²¹ Al-Qum mī, *Maqālāt*, op. cit., p. 57.

²² *Kitāb al-maġmū’*, in: S. al-Aḍanī, *Kitāb al-bākūra as-sulaymāniyya*, Bayrūt 1988, p. 22.

²³ Al-Qum mī, *Maqālāt*, op. cit., p. 57.

²⁴ The exact meaning of the term *ibāḥa*, ‘permission’, comes from heresiographers’ accusation that *ibāḥa al-maḥārim* (allowing of the forbidden) was a common practice among the members of these circles. Moreover, the practice of *ibāḥa* served as one of the criteria of admission to the *ġulāt* groups. Almost all groups from the circles of Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ğa‘far aṣ-Ṣādiq, and the sects of ḥurramiyya were accused of rejecting the orders of shari‘a.

Al-Qummī mentions that to acquire full membership in the community and the knowledge of the esoteric doctrines an earlier examination (*imtihān*) was necessary. The initiation of this kind, involving drinking wine and sharing of women, was also a part of the ceremony in the Nuṣayrī circles in the 19th century, as described by Al-Aḍanī in his *Kitāb al-bākūra*.²⁵

The *muḥammisa* believed in metempsychosis (*tanāsuh*) – as Al-Qummī states – in contrast to the other *ḡulāt* groups ('*alā ḥilāf ḡayrihim*). They claimed that the spirits of persons who denied their belief would be transferred to animals. According to the rank of disbelief, it would be an animal of higher or lower species, stars (*kawākib*), or even rocks, mud and iron. Their souls imprisoned in such shapes would be tortured forever.²⁶ But it should be mentioned that belief in reincarnation of this kind was also prevalent among the partisans of another *ḡulāt* group, called *ḡanāḥiyya* or *ṭayyāriyya*. This name is applied to the group of partisans of 'Abd Allāh Ibn Mu'āwiya, who took the leadership of the Šī'ī revolt against the Umayyads in 744. They ascribed to him the position of the imām who knew the unseen, but it seems that he did not share this opinion. It is said that one of their leaders, Al-Hāriṭ, and his followers believed in metempsychosis of the same kind as the *muḥammisa*. Al-Ġīlānī mentions that according to *ḡanāḥiyya*, after a man's death his soul would be transferred in subsequent cycles (*adwār*) until the last one (*dawr al-udra*) to various states. It is suggested that they believed in the transferring of the soul to a camel, and furthermore, to ever lower creation. A sinner's soul transfers to pottery, iron and clay after his death, and it would be tortured by melting or bending.²⁷ Aš-Šahrastānī's version is not so precise, but similar in details. He maintains that the *ḡanāḥiyya* believed in the transfer of a soul after death, which, depending on the deceased person's merits or errors, was incarnated either into another human or an animal.²⁸ It could be concluded, therefore, that the *muḥammisa* inherited this *tanāsuh* conception, obviously influenced by Indian though, from the *ḡanāḥiyya*.

But the spirits of believers (*al-mu'min al-'arīf minhum*) would be transferred into seven human shapes, called skirts (*aqmisa*), in seven periods (*adwar*) lasting 10 000 years. In the last period they would acquire the esoteric knowledge, and would be able to perceive the concealed one: Muḥammad in his luminous (*nūrāniyya*), divine form, not in the bodily one (*bašriyya laḥmāniyya*).²⁹

The above-mentioned description is the most detailed and precise out of all that are known. Al-Qummī is a Šī'ī heresiographer, his information could be therefore more reliable and the context better understood. Except for his version, laconic mentions about the *muḥammisa* can be found in Ar-Rāzī's and Aš-Šahrastānī's works. Ar-Rāzī in his *Kitāb al-zīna* discusses the *muḥammisa* along with the 'albā'iyya, the 'ayniyya and the mīmiyya. But in his version one fundamental difference should

²⁵ Al-Aḍanī, *Kitāb al-bākūra*, op. cit., pp. 8–18.

²⁶ Al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, op. cit., p. 59.

²⁷ Al-Ġīlānī, *Al-Ġunya lī-ṭālibī ṭarīq al-ḥaqq*, Kair 1304 h., p. 99.

²⁸ Aḥ-Šahrastānī, *Al-Milal*, p. 151.

²⁹ Al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, op. cit., p. 59.

be noted: he states that the group believed that Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭima, Al-Ḥasan and Al-Ḥusayn, all of them were one and the same thing (*ḥamsuḥum šay’ wāḥid*) and that one divine spirit was embodied in them all. He adds, however, one detail which was lacking in Al-Qummī’s account: the muḥammisa believed Fāṭima not to have been a woman, and they called her by the masculine name Fāṭim. This information is also repeated by Aš-Šahrastānī.³⁰ Once again this position could be found in the Nuṣayrī doctrine, as presented in the above-mentioned treatise *Kitāb al-bākūra* (but the form of the name is Fāṭir).³¹

A brief mention about the muḥammisa, although their name is omitted, is also included in Aš-Šahrastānī’s treatise. He mentions them as a group which comes from the ‘*albā’iyya*, the adherents of a doctrine about the superiority of ‘Alī’s divinity over the divinity of Muḥammad. But the core of the information is taken from Ar-Rāzī’s version: the five members of the pentad (*ahl al-kisā’*) are equal in rank (*qālū ḥamsatuḥum šay’ wāḥid*).³²

But it should be mentioned that in the later sources the position of the muḥammisa is described differently. This name is linked with a certain Abū al-Qāsim al-Kūfī, who claimed to be a descendant of Mūsā al-Kāzīm. It seems that he was an adherent of the imāmī doctrine, who in the later period of his life began to preach an extremist idea. Al-Ḥillī in his *Riḡāl* suggests that his followers, whose identity is uncertain, however, considered the pentad of Salmān, Al-Miqdād, ‘Ammār, Abū Ḍarr and ‘Amr aḍ-Ḍamrī to be the *muwakkalūn bi-mašāliḥ al-‘alam* (those who are looking after the causes of the world). Their relation to the pentad of *ahl al-kisā’* is unknown.³³

As I have mentioned above, the muḥammisa are from time to time opposed to the ‘*alyā’iyya* (or *ulā’iyya*, ‘*albā’iyya*)³⁴, the followers of the doctrine of ‘Alī’s superiority over Muḥammad. They recognized ‘Alī’ as a godhead and Muḥammad as his servant and messenger. The leader of this group was a certain Baššār aš-Šarī’ī (or Aš-Šā’irī). His nickname, Šarī’ī, suggests that he was a seller of barley. He lived in Al-Kūfa, where he preached his doctrine, but we have no more detailed information about it. It is said that previously Baššār was connected with the ḥaṭṭabiyya, and Al-Kaššī mentions that he was condemned, among other “heretics”, by the sixth imām Ġa’far aš-Šādiq who chased him out of Al-Kūfa.³⁵

³⁰ Ar-Rāzī, *Kitāb az-zīna*, p. 307; Aš-Šahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal*, p. 176.

³¹ Al-Adanī, *Kitāb al-bākūra as-sulaymāniyya*, op. cit. p. 16.

³² Aš-Šahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal*, pp. 175–176.

³³ Al-Ḥillī, *Riḡāl*, ed. M. Šādiq, An-Naḡaf 1961, p. 233; W. Madelung, *Muḥammisa*, EI₂.

³⁴ The origin of this name is uncertain, it is sometimes suggested that they were called the *ulā’iyya*, since the leader of the group, Baššār, was changed into a sea-bird (*‘ulyā*). B. Lewis, *Bashshar al-Sha’iri*, EI₂. The version of Al-Qummī is very similar: he states that after having propagated his doctrines, Baššār transformed (*masaha*) into the form of a sea-bird called ‘*albā*. Al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, op. cit., p. 60. About the group, see also H. Halim, *The Islamicche gnosis*, op. cit., pp. 225–230.

³⁵ Al-Kaššī, *Riḡāl*, ed. Ḥ. al-Muṣṭafa wī, Mašad 1969, pp. 398–400.

According to the heresiographers, the details of the doctrine of his followers are contradictory in some points. Al-Qummī called the group the ‘albā’iyya.³⁶ He describes them as the followers of Baššār aš-Šarī‘ī, cursed by God, who claim that ‘Alī is the master of creation (*rabb al-hāliq*), and Muḥammad is his deputy, servant and prophet. They agreed with the muḥammisa on the position of Fāṭima, Al-Ḥasan and Al-Ḥusayn, but they elevated the position of ‘Alī, since it was him who designated the others to the imāmat. They denied the position of Muḥammad, having accorded him the same rank as the muḥammisa accorded to Salmān. They also propagated the *ibāḥa*, the doctrine of the *ta‘ṭīl* (divesting God of his attributes) and metempsychosis. The author also adds that no other group arose among them, since they denied the imāmat of Abū al-Ḥasan ar-Riḏā, the prophecy of Abū al-Ḥaṭṭāb and other *ḡulāt*.³⁷

In his *Maqālāt* Al-Aš‘arī states that ‘the twelfth group among the extremists (*ḡāliyya*)’ claimed ‘Alī to have been God, and vilified Muḥammad, but the author does not mention the name of this group. As a subsequent group he lists the followers of Aš-Šarī‘ī, who believed in God’s incarnation (*Allāh ḥalla*) in five members of *ahl al-kisā’*. But, he adds, they did not offend the Prophet, as the previous group did. They are said to have claimed that each of the five divine epiphanies had his adversary (*aḡḡād*), and they were: Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uṭmān, Mu‘āwiya and ‘Amr Ibn al-Ās. But they disagreed as to their position: a part of them recognized these adversaries as praiseworthy (*maḥmūda*), since thanks to them the virtue of the five *ahl al-kisā’* could be acknowledged, but another group claimed the adversaries to have been damned (*maḡmūma*) and not to have acquired dignity in the subsequent forms. According to Al-Aš‘arī, Aš-Šarī‘ī had claimed divinity for himself.³⁸

In his *Milal*, Aš-Šahrastānī calls this group ‘albā’iyya (‘ilbā’iyya), and derives its origins from the followers of Al-‘Albā’ Ibn Dirā‘ ad-Dawsī called Al-Asad. They recognized God in ‘Alī, and condemned Muḥammad since he had deprived ‘Alī of his adherents. This group was called *ḡamūma* (these who condemn). Then Aš-Šahrastānī lists the division of this group into several subgroups. He mentions ‘ayniyya, those who recognised the divinity in ‘Alī and Muḥammad, but agreed on the superiority of the former. The subsequent group, mīmiyya, on the contrary, recognized the superiority of the Prophet. The third group consists of the followers of the doctrine that the divinity is incarnated in the five members of *ahl al-kisā’* equally (*rūḥ ḥāla fīhim bi-as-sawiyya*), and that they form one entity (*šay’ wāḥid*).³⁹ It could be concluded that in Aš-Šahrastānī’s interpretation the latter group could be identified as the muḥammisa, the author does not, however, mention this name and discusses it as part of the ‘albā’iyya (the ‘alyā’iyya). This shows the complications and uncertainty involved in all modern attempts at classification.

³⁶ Al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, op. cit., pp. 59–60.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 63.

³⁸ Al-Aš‘arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, ed. H. Ritter, Istanbul 1929, pp. 14–15.

³⁹ Aš-Šahrastānī, *Al-Milal wa-an-niḥal*, Bayrūt 1986, p. 175.