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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 *gulāt* 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 *ahl 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 *gulāt*. However, this group and other *gulāt* 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 *gulāt* groups, with one leader and with a definite political view. Generally, the pejorative term *gulāt* 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 *Itna‘ašarī* orthodoxy. But it should be remembered that *Itna‘ašarī* doctrine took final shape in the middle of the 10th century, and perhaps even later, and by then it had assimilated some of the *gulāt* concepts. Although the *gulāt* 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 *gulāt* 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 *gulāt* were used. The best example of surviving *gulāt* ideas in modern time are the Nuṣayriyya, the Druzes, the ‘Alī-Ilāhī and Ahl al-ḥaqqa. In these movements, the *gulāt*’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 *gulāt* 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 *gulāt* 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 *gulāt* 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 *gulāt* 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 *gulāt* seem to have adopted the principle of the condemnation of the first three caliphs (Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Utmān) 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 *gulāt* 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 *gulāt* 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 *gulāt* are the heresiographical treatises. The most important: Aš-Šahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milāl wa-an-nihāl*, ed. M. Kīlānī, Bayrūt 1986, vol. I, p. 173–191; A1-Aš-ṣāfiī, *Kitāb maqālat al-islāmiyyīn*, ed. H. Ritter, Istanbul 1929, vol. I, p. 1–16; A1-Baġdādī, *Al-Farq bayn al-firaq*; the treatises of the Šī‘ī heresiographers: An-Nawbahtī, *Kitāb firaq aš-ṣī‘a*, ed. M. al-Hifnī, Bayrūt 1984; A1-Qumī, *Kitāb al-maqālat wa-āl-firāq*, ed. M. Maškūr, Tehrān 1963. The *gulāt* views are also presented in the treatises of ‘ilm ar-riğāl, 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-riğāl*, ed. H. al-Muṣṭawafī, Mašhad 1969; Muḥammad at-Tūsī, *Aḥbār ar-riğāl*, ed. M. al-Kutubī, An-Nağaf 1961. Some information can also be found in historical chronicles.

² M.G.S. Hoggson, *Gulāt*, *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2, CD-Rom Edition, underlines old-Arabian origin of the divination of the imams and the *gulāt* leaders, and of the conception of *rağ'a*, return of the deceased imam or leader.

The *gulāt* 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 *gulāt* in a broad sense, for example the *hurramiyya*,³ seem to have applied this *ibāha*, 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 *gulāt* thinkers were active in the Šī‘ī imāms' circle, notably the fifth imām, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, and the sixth, Ḥa‘far as-Ṣādik, were surrounded by the *gulāt*, such as Abū Mansūr al-‘Iğlī, Al-Muğīra Ibn Sa‘id or Abū al-Hattāb, 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 *gulāt* circles there developed systems of symbolic interpretation of the Sacred Texts, which were carried on in the later Muslim *haraka bātiniyya*. In groups such as the Isma‘īliyya, particular emphasis was placed on the necessity of esoteric Qur’ānic interpretation and explanation.

It should be remembered, however, that the *gulāt* 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 Fātimah.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 *hurramiyya* or *huramdiyya* 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 *gulāt* ideas. The distinction between the *gulāt* and the *hurramiyya* is sometimes rather indefinable. See W. Madelung, *Khurramiyya or khuramdiyya*, EI₂, where further sources are listed.

⁴ For example Aš-Šahrastānī states that after having announced Ḥa‘far as-Ṣādīq's divinity in Al-Kufa, Abū al-Hattāb was expelled from the city (*la'anahu*). Aš-Šahrastānī, *Milal*, p. 179; Al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, p. 145, An-Nawbahī, *Firaq*, p. 37.

⁵ H. Hallm, *Die Islamische Gnosis*, op. cit., pp. 218–229; W. Madelung, *Mukhammisa*, EI₂; Al-Qummī, *Maqālat*, op. cit., pp. 56–60; Abū Ḥātim ar-Rāzī, *Kitab az-zīna*, in: Aṣ-ṣāmarrā‘ī, *Al-guluwwa-āl-firaq al-ḡāliyya wa-āl-hadāra al-islāmiyya*, p. 307.

⁶ *Ahl al-kisā'* (people of the cloak) is a term applied to these five persons. They are also referred to as *al-al-‘abā'*. It is one of the fundamental notions for the Shī‘ī conception of the imāmate since it serves to justify the Shī‘ī claim to power: the rule is succeeded by the descendants of ‘Alī and Muḥammad's daughter, Fātimah, who all have the special spiritual leadership. The origins of this belief could be found in the hadīt called *hadīt al-kisā'*: at the time of the visit of the delegation from Naṣrān in 631, the Prophet gathered ‘Alī, Al-Ḥasan, Al-Ḥusayn and Fātimah 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. Hallm, *Die islamische*, op. cit., pp. 233–240; B. Lewis, *Bashshar al-Sha‘rī*, 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 *gulāt* 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 muhammisa 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 muhammisa are the partisans of Abū al-Hattāb, d. 755 (*hum-ašhāb Abī al-Hattāb*),¹¹ the leader of another *gulāt* group, the *haṭṭābiyya*. But the core of the doctrine ascribed to the *haṭṭābiyya* 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 muhammisa, the *haṭṭābiyya*, and another group, the ‘alyā’iyya,¹³ who recognised ‘Alī as God and Muḥammad as his servant, are rather obscure and tangled.

In A1-Qummī’s opinion, the muhammisa believed that Muḥammad is a godhead, and that he appeared in this world in five different shapes and forms (*hamsa ašbāḥ wa-hamis šūra muhtalifa*): 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 Kitab*, 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. Filippiani-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 Isma‘iliya*, DMG, Wiesbaden 1978, op. cit., pp. 142–168.

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

¹⁰ A1-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, *Khaṭṭābiyya*, EI₂, where the sources are listed. The heresiographical treatises about Abū al-Hattāb and the groups connected to him: A n-Nawbāḥī, *Firaq*, pp. 79–80; A1-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 50–54, 63–64, 81–82; A1-Aš‘arī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 10–13, A1-Bāgdaḍī, *Farq*, pp. 145, 147, 154–155; Ib n Ḥazm, *Al-Fīsal*, vol. IV, p. 184; Aš-Šahrastānī, *Al-Milal*, pp. 179–181.

¹³ H. Halm, *Die islamische*, op. cit., pp. 233–240; B. Lewis, *Bashshar al-Sha‘ir*, 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 A1-Ġazālī understands this term as meaning, while Aṣ-Ṣulamī, 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. Horovitz identifies *ma’nā* with Platonic ideas. S. Horovitz, *Über den Einfluss der griechischen Philosophie auf die Entwicklung des Kalam*, Breslau 1908, pp. 44–48. See also R. Frank, *Ma’nā: some reflections on the technical meanings of the term in the Kalām and its use in the physics of Mu’ammār*, „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 šahs zahara wa-awwal nātiq nataqa*).¹⁵ But in A1-Qummī's interpretation, the five members of *ahl al-kisā'* were not the only manifestations of God, i.e. Muhammad. This divine pentad is the most important manifestation in the cycle (*dawr*) of Islam, aside from this, however, Muhammad had appeared to mankind in other forms (*suwar šattā*). According to A1-Qummī, the muḥammisa believed that Muhammad had also manifested himself in the forms of the prophets: Adam, Nūh, 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. Muhammad's manifestations appeared on earth in all cycles and times (*fī kullī adwār wa-duhūr*).¹⁶ But in the beginning, mankind had rejected Muhammad'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-haft wa-al-azilla*, 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 (*zāhir*) aspect of God, whereas the inner, esoteric aspect (*bātin*) is Muhammad. 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 lahmāniyya*). These forms are: all imams, prophets, chosroes and kings from Adam to the appearance of Muhammad in his bodily form. They all are *maqām* (place, representation) of the divine form of Muhammad. 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.

A1-Qummī 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 (*sūra at-tawḥīd*) having quoted the passage from the *Qur’ān* (112:1): *qul huwa Allāhu ahad*.¹⁸ Moreover, A1-Qummī suggests the muḥammisa belief in the manifestation of the divinity in other noble women: the Prophet's wives Ḥadīga and Umm Salama. On earth, Muhammad's divinity is accompanied by the ranks of imāms and gates (*bāb*), and the names of these ranks are listed, among

¹⁵ A1-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, op. cit., p. 56.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ A1-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, op. cit., p. 57.

them some names of *gālīs* active at the time of Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ğa‘far aş-Şādiq could be noticed: for example Al-Muğīra¹⁹ and Muḥammad al-Baṣīr.

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 yażharu 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), *nuğabā’*, *nuqabā’*, *muṣṭafawn*, *muḥtaṣṣūn*, *mumtaḥanūn*, *mu‘minūn*. These ranks also have their *ma‘nā*: for example for *yatīm* they are Al-Miqdād (*yatīm kabīr*) and Abū Darr (*yatīm ṣagīr*), the Companions of the Prophet. Once again, resemblance to the Nuşayrī conceptions should be noted: the Nuşayrī 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 Darr is the one to whom all planets belong.²² In A1-Qummī’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 *ibāha*, or antinomian tendencies, was rather common in the heresiographical treatises in relation to the extremist Šī‘ī groups, particularly the *gulāt* 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-Muğīra Ibn Sa‘īd al-Bağalī was a leader of the *gulāt* group – the muğīriyya 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-Muğīra’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-Muğīra moved his claims to the person of the Ḥasanid 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. Tucke r, *Rebels and Gnostics: Al-Muğīra Ibn Sa‘īd and the muğīriyya*, “Arabica” 1975, XXII, p. 34; idem, *Mahdis and Millenarians, Shi‘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 *gulāt* movements and in the Nuşayriyya, 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 A1-Qummī, *Maqālat*, op. cit., p. 57.

²² *Kitāb al-maġmū‘*, in: S. a1-Aḍānī, *Kitāb al-bakūra as-sulaymāniyya*, Bayrūt 1988, p. 22.

²³ A1-Qummī, *Maqālat*, op. cit., p. 57.

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

A1-Qummī mentions that to acquire full membership in the community and the knowledge of the esoteric doctrines an earlier examination (*imtiḥān*) was necessary. The initiation of this kind, involving drinking wine and sharing of women, was also a part of the ceremony in the Nuşayrī circles in the 19th century, as described by A1-Adanī in his *Kitab al-bakūra*.²⁵

The muḥammisa believed in metempsychosis (*tanāsuh*) – as A1-Qummī states – in contrast to the other *gulāt* groups ('alā *hilaf* *gayrihim*). 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 *gulāt* group, called *ğanāhiyya* or *tayyāriyya*. 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-Hārit, and his followers believed in metempsychosis of the same kind as the muḥammisa. A1-Ğīlānī mentions that according to *ğanāhiyya*, 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 *ğanāhiyya* 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 *ğanāhiyya*.

But the spirits of believers (*al-mu'min al-'arif 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: Muhammad in his luminous (*nūrāniyya*), divine form, not in the bodily one (*bašriyya lahmāniyya*).²⁹

The above-mentioned description is the most detailed and precise out of all that are known. A1-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 *Kitab al-zīna* discusses the muḥammisa along with the 'albā'iyya, the 'ayniyya and the mīmiyya. But in his version one fundamental difference should

²⁵ A1-Adanī, *Kitab al-bakūra*, op. cit., pp. 8–18.

²⁶ A1-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, op. cit., p. 59.

²⁷ A1-Ğīlānī, *Al-Gunya lī-tālibī ṭarīq al-haqqa*, Kair 1304 h., p. 99.

²⁸ Aḥ-Šahrastānī, *Al-Milal*, p. 151.

²⁹ A1-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, op. cit., p. 59.

be noted: he states that the group believed that Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fātimah, Al-Hasan and Al-Husayn, all of them were one and the same thing (*hamsuhum šay’ wāhid*) and that one divine spirit was embodied in them all. He adds, however, one detail which was lacking in A l - Q u m m ī’s account: the muḥammisa believed Fātimah not to have been a woman, and they called her by the masculine name Fātīm. This information is also repeated by A š - Š a h r a s t ā n ī.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 Fātīr).³¹

A brief mention about the muḥammisa, although their name is omitted, is also included in A š - Š a h r a s t ā n ī’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 A r - R ā z ī’s version: the five members of the pentad (*ahl al-kisā’*) are equal in rank (*qālū hamsatuhum šay’ wāhid*).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-Kāzim. 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. A l - H i l l ī in his *Riğāl* suggests that his followers, whose identity is uncertain, however, considered the pentad of Salmān, Al-Miqdād, ‘Ammār, Abū Darr and ‘Amr ad-Damrī to be the *muwakkalūn bi-maṣāliḥ al-‘ālam* (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 *ula’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 hāttabiyya, and Al-Kaṣṣī mentions that he was condemned, among other “heretics”, by the sixth imām Ğa‘far aş-Sādiq who chased him out of Al-Kūfa.³⁵

³⁰ A r - R ā z ī, *Kitāb az-zīna*, p. 307; A š - Š a h r a s t ā n ī, *Kitāb al-milal*, p. 176.

³¹ A l - A d a n ī, *Kitāb al-bākūra as-sulaymāniyya*, op. cit. p. 16.

³² A š - Š a h r a s t ā n ī, *Kitāb al-milal*, pp. 175–176.

³³ A l - H i l l ī, *Riğāl*, ed. M. Ş a d i q , An-Naġaf 1961, p. 233; W. M a d e l u n g , *Mukhammisa*, 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. L e w i s , *Bashshār al-Sha’irī*, EI₂. The version of A l - Q u m m ī is very similar: he states that after having propagated his doctrines, Baššār transformed (*masaha*) into the form of a sea-bird called ‘albā’. A l - Q u m m ī, *Maqālāt*, op. cit., p. 60. About the group, see also H. H a l m , *The Islamic gnosis*, op. cit., pp. 225–230.

³⁵ A l - K a š š ī, *Riğāl*, ed. H. a l - M u ş t a f a w ī , Maşad 1969, pp. 398–400.

According to the heresiographers, the details of the doctrine of his followers are contradictory in some points. A 1 - Q u m m ī 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 Fātiḥa, Al-Hasan and Al-Husayn, 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 *ibāha*, the doctrine of the *ta‘īl* (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-Hasan ar-Ridā, the prophecy of Abū al-Haqqāb and other *gulat*.³⁷

In his *Maqālāt* A 1 - A š ‘a r ī states that ‘the twelfth group among the extremists (*gāliyya*)’ 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 (*addād*), and they were: Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Utmān, Mu‘āwiya and ‘Amr Ibn al-Āṣ. But they disagreed as to their position: a part of them recognized these adversaries as praiseworthy (*māḥmūda*), 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 (*madmūma*) and not to have acquired dignity in the subsequent forms. According to Aš-Šarī‘ī, Aš-Šarī‘ī had claimed divinity for himself.³⁸

In his *Milal*, A š - Š a h r a s t ā n ī 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 *damīma* (these who condemn). Then A š - Š a h r a s t ā n ī 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 (*rūh ḥāla fīhim bi-as-sawiyya*), and that they form one entity (*šay’ wāhid*).³⁹ It could be concluded that in A š - Š a h r a s t ā n ī’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 A 1 - Q u m m ī, *Maqālāt*, op. cit., pp. 59–60.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 63.

³⁸ A 1 - A š ‘a r ī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, ed. H. Ritter, Istanbul 1929, pp. 14–15.

³⁹ A š - Š a h r a s t ā n ī, *Al-Milal wa-an-nihāl*, Bayrūt 1986, p. 175.