

AL- **GHAZĀLĪ**, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad AL-Ṭūsī (450/1058-505/1111), outstanding theologian, jurist, original thinker, mystic and religious reformer. There has been much discussion since ancient times whether his *nisba* should be Ghazālī or Ghazzālī; cf. Brockelmann, S I, 744; the former is to be preferred in accordance with the principle of *difficilior lectio potius*.

## 1. Life

He was born at Ṭūs in Khurāsān, near the modern Meshhed, in 450/1058. He and his brother Aḥmad were left orphans at an early age. Their education was begun in Ṭūs. Then al-Ghazālī went to Djurdjān and, after a further period in Ṭūs, to Naysābūr, where he was a pupil of al-Djuwaynī Imām al-Ḥaramayn [*q.v.*] until the latter's death in 478/1085. Several other teachers are mentioned, mostly obscure, the best known being Abū 'Alī al-Fārmadhī. From Naysābūr in 478/1085 al-Ghazālī went to the "camp" of Nizām al-Mulk [*q.v.*] who had attracted [II 1039a] many scholars, and there he was received with honour and respect. At a date which he does not specify but which cannot be much later than his move to Baghdād and which may have been earlier, al-Ghazālī passed through a phase of scepticism, and emerged to begin an energetic search for a more satisfying intellectual position and practical way of life. In 484/1091 he was sent by Nizām al-Mulk to be professor at the *madrasa* he had founded in Baghdād, the Nizāmiyyā. Al-Ghazālī was one of the most prominent men in Baghdād, and for four years lectured to an audience of over three hundred students. At the same time he vigorously pursued the study of philosophy by private reading, and wrote several books. In 488/1095, however, he suffered from a nervous illness which made it physically impossible for him to lecture. After some months he left Baghdād on the pretext of making the pilgrimage, but in reality he was abandoning his professorship and his whole career as a jurist and theologian. The motives for this renunciation have been much discussed from the contemporary period until the present day. He himself says he was afraid that he was going to Hell, and he has many criticisms of the corruption of the 'ulamā' of his time (*e.g.*, *Ihyā'*, i); so it may well be that he felt that the whole organized legal profession in which he was involved was so corrupt that the only way of leading an upright life, as he conceived it, was to leave the profession completely. The recent suggestion (F. Jabre, in *MIDEO*, i (1954), 73-102) that he was chiefly afraid of the Ismā'īlīs (Assassins) who had murdered Nizām al-Mulk in 485/1092, and whom he had attacked in his writings, places too much emphasis on what can at most have been one factor. Another suggestion is that of D. B. Macdonald (in *EI*) that contemporary political events may have made al-Ghazālī apprehensive; shortly before he left Baghdād the Saljūqid sultan Barkiyārūq [*q.v.*] executed his uncle Tutuṣh, who had been supported by the caliph and presumably al-Ghazālī; and it was soon after the death of Barkiyārūq in 498/1105 that al-Ghazālī returned to teaching.

From al-Ghazālī's abandonment of his professorship in Baghdād to his return to teaching at Naysābūr in 499/1106 is a period of eleven years, and it is sometimes said, even in early Muslim biographical notices, that al-Ghazālī spent ten years of this in Syria. Careful reading of his own words in the *Munkidh* (see below), and attention to numerous small details in other sources, makes it certain that he was only "about two years" in Syria. On his departure from Baghdād in Dhu 'l-Ḳa'da 488/November 1095 he spent some time in Damascus, then went by Jerusalem and Hebron to Medina and Mecca to take part in the Pilgrimage of 489/November-December 1096. He then went back for a short time to Damascus, but

his own phrase of "nearly two years there" (*Munkidh*, 130) must be taken loosely. He is reported to have been seen in Baghdād in Djumādā II 490/May-June 1097 (Jabre, *op. cit.*, 87; cf. Bouyges, *Chronologie*, 3), but this can only have been a brief stay in the course of his journey to his home, Ṭūs. It is sometimes said that al-Ghazālī visited Alexandria, but scholars are now inclined to reject this report; if he did go to Egypt it can only have been for a short time.

In this period of retirement at Damascus and Ṭūs al-Ghazālī lived as a poor ṣūfī, often in solitude, spending his time in meditation and other spiritual exercises. It was at this period that he composed his greatest work, *Ihyā' ulūm al-dīn* ("The Revival [II 1039b] of the Religious Sciences"), and he may have lectured on its contents to select audiences. By the end of the period he had advanced far along the mystic path, and was convinced that it was the highest way of life for man.

In the course of the year 499/1105-6 Fakhr al-Mulk, son of Nizām al-Mulk and vizier of Sandjar, the Saldjūkid ruler of Khurāsān, pressed al-Ghazālī to return to academic work. He yielded to the pressure, partly moved by the belief that he was destined to be the reviver of religion (*mudjaddid*) at the beginning of the new century, in accordance with a well-known Tradition. In Dhu 'l-Ḳa'da 499/July-August 1106 he began to lecture at the Nizāmiyya in Naysābūr and not long afterwards wrote the autobiographical work *al-Munkidh min al-dalāl* ("Deliverance from Error"). Before his death, however, in Djumādā II 505/December 1111, he had once again abandoned teaching and retired to Ṭūs. Here he had established, probably before he went to Naysābūr, a *khānqāh* or hermitage, where he trained young disciples in the theory and practice of the ṣūfī life. Several names are known of men who were his pupils at Ṭūs (cf. Bouyges, *Chronologie*, 4 n.).

## 2. Works and doctrines

### (a) *Questions of authenticity and esotericism.*

A great difficulty in the study of al-Ghazālī's thought is that, while he undoubtedly wrote many books, some have been attributed to him which he did not write. Bouyges in his *Essai de Chronologie* (composed before 1924 but only published posthumously in 1959 with additional notes on subsequent publications by M. Allard) lists 404 titles. Many of these are taken from lists of his works and no copies are known to exist. In other cases the same book appears under different titles, and a great deal of work has still to be done on manuscripts before scholars know exactly what is extant and what is not. Further, at least from the time of Muḥyi 'l-Dīn b. al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240) allegations have been made that books have been falsely attributed to al-Ghazālī (cf. Montgomery Watt, *A forgery in al-Ghazālī's Mishkāṭ?*, in *JRAS* 1949, 5-22; idem, *The authenticity of the works attributed to al-Ghazālī*, in *JRAS*, 1952, 24-45). The works whose authenticity has been doubted are mostly works expressing advanced ṣūfistic and philosophical views which are at variance with the teaching of al-Ghazālī in the works generally accepted as authentic. There are difficulties, owing to the richness of his thought, in establishing conclusively the existence of contradictions. Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 581/1185), however, who called attention to contradictions, also suggested that al-Ghazālī wrote differently for ordinary men and for the elite, or, in other words, that he had esoteric views which were not divulged to everyone (*Ḥayy b. Yaqzān*, Damascus, 1358/1939, 69-72). This complicates the problem of authenticity: but there is no reason for thinking that, even if al-Ghazālī had different levels of teaching for different audiences, he ever in the "higher" levels directly contradicted what he maintained at the lower levels. An alternative supposition, that he adopted extreme

philosophical forms of *ṣūfism* in his last years, seems to be excluded by the discovery that *Ildjām al-‘awāmm*, in which he holds a position similar to that of the *Ihyā’*, was completed only a few days before his death (Bouyges, *Chronologie*, 80 f.; G. F. Hourani, *The chronology of Ghazālī's writings*, in *JAOs*, lxxix (1959), 225-33). In the present state of scholarship the soundest methodology is to concentrate on the main works [11040a] of undoubted authenticity and to accept other works only in so far as the views expressed are not incompatible with those in the former (cf. Montgomery Watt, *The study of al-Ghazālī*, in *Oriens*, xiii-xiv (1961), 121-31).

**(b) Personal.**

A year or two before his death al-Ghazālī wrote *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, an account of the development of his religious opinions, but not exactly an autobiography, since it is arranged schematically not chronologically; e.g., he knew something of *ṣūfism* before the stage of development at which he describes it in the book. Most of the details about his life given above are derived from the *Munqidh*. He is also concerned to defend himself against the accusations and criticism that had been brought against his conduct and the views he had expressed. A small work answering criticisms of the *Ihyā’* is the *Imlā’*.

**(c) Legal.**

Al-Ghazālī's early training was as a jurist, and it was probably only under al-Djuwaynī that he devoted special attention to *kalām* or dogmatic theology. Some of his earliest writings were in the sphere of *fiqh*, notably the *Basīt* and the *Wasīt*, but he apparently continued to be interested in the subject and to write about it, for a work called the *Wadḥz* is dated 495/1101, while the *Mustasfā* was written during his period of teaching at Naysābūr in 503/1109 (Bouyges, *Chronologie*, 49, 73). The latter deals with the sources of law (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) in a manner which shows the influence of his earlier philosophical studies but is entirely within the juristic tradition. It is reported in biographical notices that at the time of his death al-Ghazālī was engaged in deepening his knowledge of Tradition.

**(d) Philosophy and logic.**

After the period of scepticism described in the *Munqidh*, al-Ghazālī in his quest for certainty made a thorough study of philosophy, a subject to which he had been introduced by al-Djuwaynī. This occupied all the earlier part of the Baghdād period. What he studied was chiefly the Arabic Neoplatonism of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. Though his final aim was to show in what respects their doctrines were incompatible with Sunnī Islam, he first wrote an exposition of their philosophy without any criticism, *Makāšid al-falāsifa*, which was much appreciated in Spain and the rest of Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This he followed by a criticism of the doctrines entitled *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, "The incoherence (or inconsistency) of the philosophers"; this was finished at the beginning of 488/1095 (Bouyges, *Chronologie*, 23). In it he noted twenty points on which the philosophers' views were objectionable to Sunnīs or inconsistent with their own claims; in respect of three of these they were to be adjudged unbelievers. In the *Tahāfut* al-Ghazālī concentrates on demonstrating the inconsistencies of the philosophers and does not argue for any positive views of his own. Because of this he has been accused of having remained something of a sceptic. This accusation fails to notice that the *Tahāfut* was written just before the crisis which caused him to leave Baghdād; it is therefore possible that at the time he was

somewhat uncertain of his positive beliefs, but a few years later when he was writing the *Ihyā'* he was in no doubt about what he believed. What impressed al-Ghazālī most of the various branches of philosophical studies was logic, and in particular the Aristotelian syllogism. For the sake of Sunnī jurists and theologians to whom philosophical books were not easily accessible or, because of their technical language, not readily understandable, he [II 1040b] wrote two books on Aristotelian logic, *Mi'yār al-'ilm* and *Mihakk al-nazar*. A justification of the use of this logic in religious matters is contained in *al-Kiṣṭās al-mustakīm*, apparently written for some comparatively simple-minded believers who were attracted by Bāṭinī (Ismā'īlī) doctrines. While full of enthusiasm for philosophy al-Ghazālī wrote a work on ethics, *Mizān al-'amal*, though whether the whole of the extant text is authentic has been questioned (JRAS, 1952, 38-40, 45). Since al-Ghazālī does not appear to refer to the *Mizān* in his later works, and since he became very critical of philosophical ethics (*Munkidh*, 99 ff.), it is possible that, as his enthusiasm waned, he rejected much of what he had written in this work.

**(e) Dogmatic theology.**

His chief work of dogmatics is *al-Ikṭiṣād fī 'l-i'tikād*, probably composed shortly before or shortly after his departure from Baghdād (Bouyges, 34). This book deals with roughly the same topics as the *Irshād* of al-Djuwaynī, but it makes full use of Aristotelian logic, including the syllogism. In this respect Ibn Khaldūn (iii, 41) is correct in making al-Ghazālī the founder of a new tendency in theology, although there is no striking novelty in his dogmatic views. In *Kitāb al-Arba'īn*, (Cairo 1344, 24), written after the *Ihyā'*, al-Ghazālī says that the *Ikṭiṣād* is more likely to prepare for the gnosis (*ma'rifa*) of the ṣūfī than the usual works of dogmatics; and this continuing approval strengthens the view that al-Ghazālī never ceased to be an Ash'arī in dogmatics, even though he came to hold that intellectual discussions in religion should range far beyond the limited field of dogmatics, and that detailed discussions in dogmatics had no practical value. To dogmatic theology might also be assigned *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayn al-Islām wa-'l-zandaqa*. This is partly directed against the Bāṭiniyya, but is mainly a defence of his own views on the extent to which *ta'wīl* is justified, and on the relative places of *tawātur* and *idjām'* as sources of religious knowledge. *Idjām al-'awāmm 'an 'ilm al-kalām*, which appears to be his last work, warns of the dangers in the study of *kalām* for those with little education.

**(f) Polemics.**

The *Mustazhirī*, edited in abridged form by Goldziher as *Streitschrift des Gazālī gegen die Bāṭiniyya-Sekte* (1916), is a searching theological critique of the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs or Assassins. A Persian work, edited by O. Pretzl as *Die Streitschrift des Gasālī gegen die Ibāḥijya* (1933), attacks the antinomianism of certain mystics. The authenticity of a work of anti-Christian polemic, *al-Radd al-djāmīl 'alā sarīḥ al-indjīl* (ed. and tr. R. Chidiac, Paris 1939), is doubted by Bouyges (126), but defended by Louis Massignon (in *REI*, 1932, 491-536).

**(g) Ṣūfistic practice.**

Al-Ghazālī's greatest work, both in size and in the importance of its contents is *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, "The revival of the religious sciences", in four volumes. This is divided into four "quarters", dealing with *'ibādāt* (cult practices), *'ādāt* (social customs), *muhlikāt* (vices, or faults of character leading to perdition), *mundjīyāt*

(virtues, or qualities leading to salvation). Each "quarter" has ten books. The *Ihyā'* is thus a complete guide for the devout Muslim to every aspect of the religious life—worship and devotional practices, conduct in daily life, the purification of the heart, and advance along the mystic way. The first two books deal with the necessary minimum of intellectual knowledge. This whole stupendous undertaking arises from al-Ghazālī's feeling that in the hands of the '*ulamā'* of his day religious knowledge had become a means of worldly advancement, whereas it was his deep conviction [II 1041a] that it was essentially for the attainment of salvation in the world to come. He therefore, while describing the prescriptions of the Sharī'a in some detail, tries to show how they contribute to a man's final salvation. *Bidāyat al-hidāya* is a brief statement of a rule of daily life for the devout Muslim, together with counsel on the avoidance of sins. *K. al-Arba'īn* is a short summary of the *Ihyā'*, though its forty sections do not altogether correspond to the forty books. *Al-Maḥṣad al-asnā* discusses in what sense men may imitate the names or attributes of God. *Kīmīyā' al-sa'āda* is in the main an abridgement in Persian of the *Ihyā'* (also translated in whole or in part into Urdū, Arabic, etc.), but there are some differences which have not been fully investigated.

#### (h) *Ṣūfistic theory.*

It is in this field that most of the cases of false or dubious authenticity occur. *Mishkāt al-anwār* ("The niche for lights", tr. W. H. T. Gairdner, London 1924; cf. idem, in *Isl.*, v (1914), 121-53) is genuine, except possibly the last section (*JRAS*, 1949, 5-22). *Al-Risāla al-laduniyya* deals with the nature of knowledge of divine things, and its authenticity has been doubted because of its closeness to a work of Ibn al-Arabī and because of its Neoplatonism (cf. Bouyges, 124 f.). There are numerous other works in the same category, of which the most important is *Minhādī al-ābidīn*. These works are of interest to students of mysticism, and their false attribution to al-Ghazālī, if it can be proved, does not destroy their value as illustrations of some branches of *ṣūfistic* thought during the lifetime of al-Ghazālī and the subsequent half-century.

### 3. His influence

A balanced account of the influence of al-Ghazālī will probably not be possible until there has been much more study of various religious movements during the subsequent centuries. The following assessments are therefore to some extent provisional.

#### (a) His criticism of the Bā

*ṭiniyya* may have helped to reduce the intellectual attractiveness of the movement, but its comparative failure, after its success in capturing Alamūt, is due to many other factors.

(b) After his criticism of the philosophers there are no further great names in the philosophical movement in the Islamic east, but it is not clear how far the decline of philosophy is due to al-Ghazālī's criticisms and how far to other causes. Its continuance in the Islamic west, where the *Tahāfut* was also known, suggests that the other causes are also important.

#### (c) Al-Gh

azālī's studies in philosophy led to the incorporation of certain aspects of philosophy, notably logic, into Islamic theology. In course of time theologians came to devote much more time and space to the philosophical preliminaries than to the theology proper. On the other hand, his speculations about the nature of man's knowledge of the divine realm and his conviction that the upright and devout man could attain to an intuition (or direct experience—*dhawq*) of divine things comparable to that of the worldliness of the 'ulamā' does not seem to have led to any radical changes.

(d) He undoubtedly performed a great service for devout Muslims of every level of education by presenting obedience to the prescriptions of the *Sh*

arī'a as a meaningful way of life. His *khānqāh* at Tūs, where he and his disciples lived together, was not unlike a Christian monastery; and it may be that he gave an impetus to the movement out of which [II 1041b] came the dervish orders (but this requires further investigation).

**(e) His example may have encouraged those forms of ṣ**

ūfism which were close to Sunnism or entirely Sunnī. Before him, however, there had been much more ṣūfism among Sunnī 'ulamā' than is commonly realized. His influence on the ṣūfī movement in general, however, requires further careful study.

(W. Montgomery Watt)

(a) *Life, General*. P. Bouyges, *Essai de chronologie des oeuvres de al-Ghazali*, ed. M. Allard, Beirut 1959 (pp. 1-6 contain very full references to the main biographical sources)

D. B. Macdonald, *The life of al-Ghazzālī*, in *JAOS*, xx (1899), 71-132 (still useful but requires to be supplemented and corrected)

Margaret Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the mystic*, London 1944 (contains large biographical section, also chapter on his influence)

W. Montgomery Watt, *Muslim intellectual*, Edinburgh 1963

W. R. W. Gardner, *An account of al-Ghazālī's life and works*, Madras 1919

S. M. Zwemer, *A Moslem seeker after God*, London 1920.

(b) *Works*. Brockelmann, I, 535-46; S I, 744-56

Bouyges, *Chronologie* (as above). In *ZDMG*, xciii, 395-408, Fr. Meier gives information about the Persian *Naṣḥat al-mulūk* and its Arabic translation *al-Tibr al-masbūk*

English tr. by F. R. C. Bagley, *Ghazālī's book of counsel for Kings*, London 1964. Translations and studies later than Brockelmann: W. Montgomery Watt, *The faith and practice of al-Ghazālī*, London 1953

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G.-H. Bousquet, *Ih'ya ou Vivification des sciences de la foi, analyse et index*, Paris 1955

*Ih'yā'*, xi, Ger. tr. H. Kindermann, Leiden 1962

xii, Fr. tr. G.-H. Bousquet, Paris 1953

xxxi, Susanna Wilzer, *Untersuchungen*, in *Isl.*, xxxii, 237-309, xxxiii, 51-120, xxxiv 128-37

xxxiii, Eng. tr. W. McKane, Leiden 1962

*Tahāfut*, Eng. tr. S. A. Kamali, Lahore 1958

Fr. trs. of *Kāṣṭās* by V. Chelhot in *BEt.Or.*, xv, 7-98

and of *Munkidh* by F. Jabre, Beirut.

(c) *Doctrines*. M. Asin Palacios, *La espiritualidad de Algazel y su sentido cristiano*, Madrid 1935, etc.

J. Obermann, *Der philosophische und religiöse Subjektivismus Ghazalis*, Vienna and Leipzig 1921

A. J. Wensinck, *La pensee de Ghazali*, Paris 1940

Farid Jabre, *La notion de certitude selon Ghazali*, Paris 1958

idem, *La notion de la Ma'rifa chez Ghazali*, Beirut 1958

M. Smith, *al-Ghazālī the Mystic* (as above)

Roger Arnaldez, *Controverses theologiques chez Ibn Hazm de Cordoue et Ghazali*, in *Les Mardis de Dar el-Salam*, Sommaire, 1953, Paris 1956, 207-48.