The Last Days of al-Ghazzālī and the Tripartite Division of the Sufi World

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī's Letter to the Seljuq Vizier and Commentary

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Introduction

In 504AH/1110CE, the head of the Baghdād Niẓāmiyya college, ʿAlī Kiyā Harāsī,[1] died, and Seljuq officials felt that the only suitable replacement would be the great scholar and former rector of the school, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī. Muḥammad b. Fakhr al-Mulk b. Niẓām al-Mulk, fully the third generation of his family to serve as Seljuq vizier and call al-Ghazzālī to teach, sent word to the aging Sufi master in his native city of Ṭūs. In his response, al-Ghazzālī hints that his end is near, giving the vizier one final lecture on the mystical path and the duties of just government before refusing the position. His excuses stem from his devotion to a strictly principled ascetic regime, his obligations to his disciples as well as logistical considerations. Like many of his personal correspondences, al-Ghazzālī wrote the letter in Persian. He himself dates it as 504AH, a year before his death.[2]

The letter is a fitting end to a great career,[3] as it draws on two traditions of which al-Ghazzālī was a master: Islamic mysticism and political counsel. In the letter's vehement refusal to again associate with the government or participate in scholarly debate, we see how much al-Ghazzālī's attitudes had changed from his days as an argumentative professor at the state-sponsored Niẓāmiyya. In the letter's division of mankind into three tiers according to their desire to worship and encounter God, we see how al-Ghazzālī expresses the Islamic mystical idiom as it had emerged from the wider milieu of Muslim high culture. Representing a synthesis of various roles al-Ghazzālī had played in his life,

the letter weaves together the strands of ritual piety, mysticism and Islamicate political ideals. The letter is also a personal testament that sheds light on aspects of al-Ghazzālī's life passed over in grand evaluations of his scholarship. We catch a glimpse, for example, of his family and the nature of his Sufi lodge in Ṭūs.

This article presents a translation of this letter as a window into the scholar's concerns and worldview in the year before his death. Following the translation, this article places the concepts and terminology used by al-Ghazzālī within the historical contexts of Islamic political thought and mystical discourse. Specifically, it traces the history of a central motif in al-Ghazzālī's letter: the Sufi tradition's tripartite division of mankind into the three classes of *'āmm, khāṣṣ and khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*. Existing studies on Sufism have only treated these terms briefly, so the present commentary investigates their emergence and development within Islamic culture and mysticism through al-Ghazzālī's time and in the wake of his seminal career.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111) needs no introduction in the Muslim world, and very little for Western students of the religious tradition he did so much to shape. An orphan hailing from the Iranian city of Ṭūs, al-Ghazzālī rose to master the full range of Islamic sciences from law and theology to logic and philosophy. The works he composed on these subjects remain textbooks for Muslim scholars even today.

In 484/1091 the powerful and influential Seljuq vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092) appointed this gifted and politically savvy thirty-two year-old scholar to the rectorship of the new Niẓāmiyya college in Baghdād. Al-Ghazzālī's famous spiritual crisis occurred four years later in 488/1095, when he was plagued by existential and spiritual doubts so profound that he left his post at the Niẓāmiyya and went into seclusion. In an act that would eventually validate the previously suspicious Islamic mystical tradition and change the contours of Islamic orthodoxy, al-Ghazzālī turned to the path of introspection and spiritual discipline offered by Sufism. He spent the next eleven years cultivating this art in Damascus and other cities of the Levant. Al-Ghazzālī then established his own Sufi lodge in Ṭūs, where he instructed aspiring ascetics and wrote mystical and pietistic works such as *Mishkāt al-anwār*, "The Niche of Lights," and *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, "The Revivification of the Religious Sciences," far from the din of public life.

Yet through persistent efforts, Fakhr al-Mulk, who had replaced his father as vizier after his assassination, convinced al-Ghazzālī to teach at the nearby Nīshāpūr Niẓāmiyya in 499/1106. The scholar accepted but soon left his position to retire once again to Ṭūs and tend to his disciples. It was in this setting that he received the letter from Fakhr al-Mulk's son Muḥammad, and there the scholar remained until his death.

Problems in the Text

Posterity has preserved al-Ghazzālī's letter extremely well in a variety of manuscript sources that have now been published. The most important of these are the famous Sufi biographical dictionary *Rawḍat al-jannāt* of Muḥammad Bāqir Khawaje Ansari (d. 1895CE), the collection of al-Ghazzālī's letters entitled *Faḍa'il al-anām* and the work *Farāyed-e gheyāthī* of Jalāl al-Dīn Yūsuf al-Ahl (d. circa 870/1466). Khawaje Ansari's work preserves a copy of the letter originally taken from the *Tārīkh-e estaẓhārī* of Abū Bakr Shāshī (d. 507/1114), a contemporary of al-Ghazzālī. *Faḍa'il al-anām* is a collection of the great scholar's letters and sundry writings compiled by an anonymous relative and also dates from the years after his death.[4] Finally, the document collection *Farāyed-e gheyāthī*, edited by Heshmat Moayyad, also contains a copy of the letter.

The text of the letter as assembled by Jalāl al-Dīn Homā'ī in his fascinating and valuable work *Ghazzālī-nāme* is based on the *Faḍa'il al-anām* and *Tārīkh-e esteẓhārī* manuscripts, but Heshmat Moayyad's edition also takes the *Fārayed-e gheyāthī* manuscripts into consideration. In addition, Homā'ī's version bears traces of significant interpolation within the manuscripts in an effort to explain challenging wording. Based on the principle of *lexicus difficilior* and on its wider scope, I have thus selected Moayyad's edition of the letter for translation.[5]

These different versions of the letter differ about to whom al-Ghazzālī is addressing. Some manuscripts used in the Homā'ī edition identify him as one of Niẓām al-Mulk's sons, Mu'ayyid al-Mulk; but this is impossible since he had already died by the time the letter was written. Some manuscripts of *Faḍā'el al-anām* present the addressee as the then-deceased Niẓam al-Mulk or another of his sons, Aḥmad.[6] The *Farāyed-gheyāthī* text used for this translation has yet another son of Niẓām al-Mulk, Fakhr al-Mulk, as the intended addressee. Fakhr al-Mulk had, however, also been dead for some time when the letter was composed in 504/1110–1. He was assassinated in 500/1106–7 after serving as the grand vizier of Malikshah's son Sanjar in Khorasan.[7] The true addressee was most probably Fakhr al-Mulk's son, Muḥammad, who also served as Sanjar's vizier from 500/1106 to 511/1117, when he was dismissed and mulcted for over one million *dīnārs* in cash.[8] It was Muḥammad b. Fakhr al-Mulk who, along with his uncle Aḥmad and another high government official, had been trying to convince al-Ghazzālī to return to teaching just before his death. The copyist of the *Farāyed-e gheyāthī* manuscript probably passed over the word "Muḥammad" when writing the addressee's name. This conclusion dovetails with al-Ghazzālī's invocation to God to "cleanse *their* spirits," referring in all probability to Muḥammad b. Fakhr al-Mulk's martyred father and grandfather.

Text of the Letter

From the Pinnacle of souls, the Proof of Islam, Sultan of the World's Scholars, Master of Unveiling and Inspiration, Advisor to Kings and Rulers, Guide of Noble Men at large, Imām Moḥammad Ghazzālī,[9] to the Sultan of Viziers, Protector of the People, Khawāje [Moḥammad b.] Fakhr al-Molk b. Neẓām al-Molk, may God comfort their souls and cleanse their spirits (*ashbāḥahum*) with the pure waters of virtue (*bizulāl al-afḍāl*), concerning the refusal to head his madrase in Baghdād and some small moral advices.

Arrenga / Ḥosn-e Maṭlaʿ

In the name of God, the most Gracious, the most Merciful.

God has said "to everyone there is a direction presided over by God, so vie in doing good deeds (*khayrāt*)" (Qurʾān 2:148). God, may His truth be magnified, says that no man applies himself to a matter without it being his objective, his *qeble*. [O mankind, He says], devote yourself to that which is best and race to contend with one another in doing so. Now, those who have made some objective their *qeble* fall into three groups. The first are the vulgar masses (*ʿavāmm*) who are the people of heedlessness (*ghaflat*). The second are those elite (*khavāṣṣ*) who are characterized by intelligence and perspicacity (*keyāsat*). The third are the elite of the elite (*khāṣṣ al-khavāṣṣ*), who are the people of true perception and understanding (*baṣīrat*).

As for the people of heedlessness, their vision is limited to transient goods, for they think that the greatest blessings are the blessings of this world which one harvests by seeking wealth and prestige. They devote themselves to this quest, and wealth and prestige become the most beloved objects in their eyes (*qorrat al-ʿayn*). The Prophet, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, said: "*there are no two wolves let into a pen of sheep more destructive than the love of money and honor released into the faith of a believer (al-marʾ al-muslim).*" So it is that these heedless people have not separated the wolf from its prey and have not properly distinguished between what is most dear to them and what brings them the greatest pain (*sokhnat al-ʿayn*). Thus have they attached dignity to the path of despondency. Of this misfortune the Prophet once said, "*Woe unto the slave of the dīnār, woe unto the slave of the dirham.*"[10]

As for the second group, they are the elite who have grasped [the nature of] the world through intelligence and perspicacity and are sure of the superiority of the afterlife. The verse "the life to come is better and more enduring" (Qurʾān 87:17) has manifested itself to them. It does indeed take some intelligence to realize that eternity is better than obliteration and annihilation (*fanāʾ*),[11] so they turn their faces from the world and make the hereafter their *qeble*. And although these people are at fault for not seeking

only the Absolute Good, they have at least contented themselves with something better than this earthly world.

As for the third group, the elite of the elite who are the people of truly perceptive understanding, they realize that everything that is possessed of good cannot be the ultimate good. Such things are therefore transitory, and *no discerning person is pleased with things that fade* (al-ʿāqil lā yuḥibbu al-āfilīn, based on Qurʾān 6:76). They realize that this world and the next are both created, and they understand that the best aspects of these two realms are the twin pleasures of eating and conjugal intercourse, both of which animals also enjoy.[12] This could never be a sufficient station [for them], for the Lord and Creator of the world and the hereafter is greater and more lofty. For [the elite of the elite] the verse "and God is better and more enduring" (Qurʾān 20:73) has become manifest and they have chosen a place in "an assembly of truth in the presence of an omnipotent Lord" (Qurʾān 54:55), for "the companions of the garden are ever occupied with joy" (Qurʾān 36:55). Indeed the truth of "there is no deity but God" (lā ilāha illā Allāh)[13] has revealed itself to them, and they have realized that any person who is bound to something, he is the slave of that object, and it becomes his god and object of worship. This is why [the Prophet] said "*woe to the slave of the dirham.*" Everyone whose objective is something other than God most high, his profession of God's transcendental unity (towḥīd) is neither complete nor free from subtle acts of granting other than God that place reserved for God alone (sherk-e khafī). This group has therefore divided all existence into two opposing groups: God and other than God. They hold up these two groups against each other, like the two weighing pans of a balance, making their innermost heart (del) its measure (lesān-e mīzān).[14] When they see their hearts, out of their very nature and obeisance [to truth] leaning towards the best side, they conclude that "indeed the scale of good deeds is more heavy." If they see it tilting away from that side they conclude "the scale of bad deeds is heavier." They have realized that whatever does not pass this test will not pass the test on the Day of Judgment. And just as the first level were mere vulgar masses (ʿavāmm) compared to the second, so is the second group mere rabble (ʿavāmm) in relation to the third level; they do not understand their words and do not grasp the true meaning of *gazing at the face of God most high.*

Narratio
Since the Grand Vizier (ṣadr-e vezārat), may God most high grant him the loftiest of stations, calls me from a lower position to a higher one, I also call him from the "lowest of the low" (asfal al-sāfilīn; Qurʾān 95:5) to the "highest of the high" (aʿlā al-ʿiliyyīn). The lowest station is that of the first group, and the highest of the high is that of the third group. The Prophet, may God's

peace and blessings be upon him, said "*he who treats you with beneficence, repay him with equal treatment.*" Yet I find myself incapable of such reciprocation and am without the means to reply in kind. [The vizier should] make preparation to move with all due haste from the depths of the masses (*ḥadīd-e dareje-ye ʿavāmm*) to the acme of the elite of the elite (*beqāʾ-e* [sic!]-*dareje-ye khavāṣṣ-e khavāṣṣ*).[15] For the roads from Ṭūs and Baghdād and any land to God's Truth most high (*Haqq-e taʿālā*) are all one. None is shorter or longer than the others. As for the path from this position [that you are offering me], it is [also] no better. In truth, he should know that if he should omit even one religious obligation (*farāʾeḍ*), commit any major sin (*kabāʾer*) from amongst those things that the sacred law has forbidden, or enjoy one peaceful night when in all of his realm there is one person suffering injustice, regardless of what excuse he might proffer, his station would be none other than the lowest, and he would be counted amongst the people of heedlessness. "Those heedless ones, certainly they are the losers in the Hereafter" (Qur'ān 11:22). *I ask God most high to awaken [the vizier] from the sleep of heedlessness so that he might look to the morrow before his fate escapes his control.*

Dispositio

Having come to the subject of the Baghdād *madrase* and [my] excuse (*ʿodhr*) for desisting from obeying the direction of the Grand Vizier, it is that nothing eases the inconvenience [of moving away] from [one's] homeland and place of refuge except the prospect of an increase in either faith or worldly advantage. As for worldly increase, praise be to God's grace, it has been removed from [Ghazzālī's heart]. Even if Baghdād were brought to Ṭūs with no movement on [Ghazzālī's] behalf, its affairs fully arranged and given to Ghazzālī as property, his heart would not heed it. For recognizing this [temptation] would be the fate of those weak in faith. My remaining days would be disturbed and no affair would come easily to me. As for an increase in faith and religion, by my life this does warrant some seeking and movement on my part. [Indeed,] there is no doubt that to inundate oneself in knowledge would be much easier there [in Baghdād], that the means to do so would be much more elaborate and that the number of students there would be much greater. In the face of all this increase, however, there are excuses and religious reasons that would fall into ruin, such that this increase could not compensate for [so great] a loss.

One reason is that there are one hundred and fifty students here busy with learning and living in pious abstinence (*motavarreʿ*). Transferring them [to Baghdād] and providing means for them [there] would not be feasible. The hope of having more students in another place is no license to neglect these students or cause them harm. This would be equivalent to someone who was

responsible for the care of ten orphans leaving them lost and hungry out of the hope that he could tend to twenty orphans somewhere else.

The second excuse is that, at the time that the noble martyr Neẓām al-Molk, may God sanctify his soul, called me to Baghdād, I was alone and without family or relations. Presently, because I have such relations and children, moving them, neglecting them or injuring their hearts would likewise not be feasible.

The third reason is that since I attained the grave of God's Intimate (*khalīl*) [Abraham, in Hebron], may God's peace and blessings be upon him, in the year 489 [AH] (it has been almost fifteen years since then,) I have made three oaths that I have so far fulfilled. The first is that I not accept any Sultanic money; the second is that I not call on any sultans; and the third is that I not engage in any scholarly debate. If I were to break this oath my heart and days [*vaqt*] here would be greatly disturbed and no religious act would be accomplished for me. In Baghdād there is no escaping debates, and one cannot avoid visiting the Caliphal Abode (*dār al-khelāfe*). In that period since I returned from Syria (*Shām*) I have not paid a visit to Baghdād, have surrendered myself to not holding any position and have been in reclusion. Should I take some job I would not be at peace, for my soul would not be free denying such reclusion, and this would have its consequences.

Finally, the greatest excuse is that of livelihood. If I do not accept any of the sultan's money, and since I have no property or means of sustenance in Baghdād, the path of livelihood would be closed off to me. Furthermore, this trifling property here in Ṭūs, which suffices my children only after our excessive efforts at parsimony and contenting ourselves [with what we have], would not prove sufficient in our absence from this place. These are all religious excuses that are very significant to me, although the majority of people would consider these matters quaint.

Conclusion

In conclusion, since [my] time has drawn long (*dowr dūr dar keshīd*), it is time to bid farewell rather than travel to Baghdād. It is expected from one so bounteously endowed with good character (*makārem-e akhlāq*) [like the Grand Vizier] that he accept these excuses. Also, he should suppose that if Ghazzālī came to Baghdād and then the term [set for his life] set by God (*Ḥaqq*), may He be glorified and elevated, also came to pass, plans would again need to be made for [finding] another teacher. [The vizier] should consider as if this [had happened] today. Peace be unto him who has followed God's guidance. May God (*Īzad*) most eminent adorn the universal minister (*ṣadr-e jahān*) with the essential truth of faith (*ḥaqīqat-e īmān*) which lies beyond faith's outward form (*ṣūrat-e īmān*) that he might become one of its

Knowers. *Praise be to God for His favors, and may His blessings be upon the Prophet and his family. May God endow us with a loathing for the Abode of Delusion (dār al-ghurūr) and assign us to the Abode of Bliss (dār al-surūr) by His mercy and the breadth of His generosity, indeed He is the most merciful of those who grant mercy.*

Genre of the Letter: Mirrors for Princes

At the time al-Ghazzālī composed this letter, classical Islamic political writing had already reached its full maturity. Just as al-Māwardī's (d. 450/1058) *al-Aḥkām al-ṣulṭāniyya* formulated a coherent Islamic political theory from a juridical point of view, the more practical "Mirrors for Princes" genre fit the ancient Sassanian notion of just rule into an Islamic idiom. Al-Ghazzālī and his patron, the inimitable vizier Niẓām al-Mulk, both wrote exemplary works in this genre, combining the language of Islamic piety and holy law with the practical political advice inherited from the Pahlevi *Andarz-nāme* (advice literature). This Persian literature probably first entered the Islamic tradition in the late Umayyad period through translations of texts like the *ʿAhd Ardashīr*.[16] Other Persian texts were later translated by Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d.c. 139/756) in the early Abbasid period.[17] The syncretic nature of this genre and its synthesis of Near Eastern traditions is no more evident than in Niẓām al-Mulk's eclectic *Siyāsat-nāme*, which cites the political wisdom of Alexander the Great, Sassanian kings and the Companions of the Prophet within a few pages.[18]

Also steeped in Persianate, Hellenistic and Islamic traditions, al-Ghazzālī penned the *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, "The Advice of Kings," in which he dubbed the sultan the "Shadow of God" and called upon the ruler to preserve the famous Circle of Justice. In this classical Persian ideal of government, a pious monarch strengthens his dynasty by maintaining the perfect balance between taxation and military spending under a consummately just eye.[19] For both ruler and the ruled, a fear of God and devotion to justice are requirements for prosperity.[20] Works like the *Siyāsat-nāme* and *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk* express this ideal of a just ruler through stories that portray kings like Sultan Maḥmūd of Ghazna engaged in their daily prayers and personally tending to the most minor infractions of the law.[21] Al-Ghazzālī's letter to Muḥammad b. Fakhr al-Mulk reiterates these motifs by reminding the vizier to fulfill his religious obligations (*farāʾeḍ*) and warning him against allowing any injustice to appear in his realm.

In al-Ghazzālī's time it was not novel for scholars to encapsulate such advice in letters to viziers. An earlier scholar and Sufi named Abū al-Ḥasan al-Bustī (d. 478/1085–6)[22] had written Niẓām al-Mulk reminding him of his duties and even quoting a similar letter written to the Buyid vizier al-Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād (d. 385/995) a century earlier.[23] In the *Faḍāʾil al-anām* alone we have twelve letters that al-Ghazzālī wrote to viziers and five to military commanders.[24] Like

his letter to Muḥammad b. Fakhr al-Mulk, these correspondences address specific and often banal topics. Even when addressing the Seljuq sultan himself, however, al-Ghazzālī does not hesitate to draw from the Mirrors for Princes genre with advice like "today it has reached such a point that [for a ruler] one hour of justice is the equivalent of a hundred years of worship."[25]

Khāṣṣ and *ʿĀmm*: the Elite and Commoners in Islamic Intellectual and Political Culture

Al-Ghazzālī's choice to divide human beings into the three distinct levels of *ʿāmm*, the vulgar masses; *khāṣṣ*, the elite or the elect; and *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*, the select elite of the elite, draws on an elitist strain in Islamic social and intellectual history that has its origins in late Umayyad and early Abbasid times. The terms *ʿāmm* (or *ʿāmma*, pl. *ʿawāmm*), meaning "general, common, or plebian," and *khāṣṣ* (or *khāṣṣa, khuṣūṣ*, or pl. *khawāṣṣ*), meaning "specific, elite, or select" are ubiquitous in Islamic sciences and literature. Like other terms such as *aṣl* and *farʿ*, the pervasive *ʿāmm / khāṣṣ* distinction binds together the disparate and stratified branches of the Islamic sciences as well as broader expressions of Islamic civilization as a whole. In an instance of what one might term the "logocentrisme"[26] of Islamic thought, words such as *khāṣṣ* and *ʿāmm* serve as conceptual touchstones wherever they appear, their specific connotations and technical implications shifting in context while their general import ties both text and reader to the united worldview that defines Islamic civilization. Thus, Muslim jurists speak of *naṣṣ ʿāmm* and *naṣṣ khāṣṣ* in the Qurʾān and hadith, alluding to legal injunctions that should be interpreted as either broadly applicable or specific to certain persons or circumstances.[27] The lands belonging to rulers from the Abbasid caliphs to the Ottoman sultans were deemed *khāṣṣ*, or private, and al-Ghazzālī addresses another letter to the Seljuq ruler with both a public (*ʿāmm*) and a private (*khāṣṣ*) request. The former is his plea on behalf of the drought-stricken inhabitants of his native Ṭūs, while the latter cautions the sultan to ignore petty accusations leveled against the scholar by his rivals.[28] A ruler's *khāṣṣa* constituted his court or elite retinue, while the *ʿāmma* were the masses he ruled.[29]

Unlike other salient Islamicate terms such as *aṣl* and *farʿ*, however, *ʿāmm* and *khāṣṣ* do not originate in the Qurʾān. Rather they make their first appearance in a religious or legal context in the hadith literature that developed in the first century and a half of Islamic history. There the two words generally denote one's familiars versus the general public. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) transmits a report in which *khāṣṣa* simply means "familiars" or "friends and family."[30] In the *Sunan* of Ibn Mājā (d. 273/866) we find Anas b. Mālik quoting the Prophet identifying God's people (*ahlīn*) as "the people of the Qurʾān, the people of God and His intimates

(*khāṣṣatuhu*)."[31] In the *Kitāb al-zuhd wa al-raqāʾiq* of ʿAbdallāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797), the author quotes one Bilāl b. Saʿd (d. between 105–125/724–743) as saying "indeed disobedience to God done covertly only harms those directly involved (*khāṣṣatahā*), but if it is made public and not rectified it harms the general public (*al-ʿāmma*).[32] Decades earlier, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) narrated a hadith in which the Prophet instructs his followers to be merciful, adding "this is not the mercy of one of you towards himself, his progeny or his familiars (*khāṣṣatuhu*), but rather towards the people at large (*al-ʿāmma*). . ."[33]

This original juxtaposition of "familiars" versus "general public" also appeared in a political context during the early second century of Islamic history.[34] Just as this milieu produced Prophetic hadith in which devout believers are "God's intimates (*khāṣṣatuhu*)," so does the historian al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956) tell of the Umayyad caliph ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's (d. 101/720) personal retinue (*khāṣṣa*).[35] The concept of familiarity or closeness was clear in these political circumstances. For example, Yazīd b. al-Muhallab (d. 104/720–1) is described as having enjoying "intimacy (*khāṣṣa*)" with the Umayyad caliph Sulaymān b. ʿAbd al-Malik (d. 99/717), who regularly sat this advisor next to him on his throne.[36] The influential political treatise *ʿAhd Ardashīr* is replete with juxtapositions between the *khāṣṣa*, the ruler's ministers and junta, and the governed masses (*ʿāmma*).[37] By the time of Niẓām al-Mulk, *khāṣṣa* was an indispensable term for the ruler's ministers and elite retinue.

As the early pietism and nascent scholarly culture of the first Islamic century matured into the cosmopolitan Near Eastern atmosphere of the Abbasid period, *khāṣṣ* and *ʿāmm* developed from the distinction between familiar and general to the dichotomy between elite and common. This transition was natural for scholars and litterateurs whom the state often either patronized or employed as secretaries and judges. Sophistication and proximity to the state thus went hand in hand. The scion of a noble Persian family and an advisor to the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr (d. 158/775), Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ endows the terms with the notion of a small, sophisticated elite as opposed to the uncultured masses.[38] Al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869), who wrote many of his letters for the political elite, composed a treatise describing the characteristics of these commoners in Abbasid society (*Risāla fī waṣf al-ʿawāmm*).[39] Al-Jāḥiẓ's younger contemporary, the judge Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), adorned his letters with assertions such as "scholars would prohibit the masses (*al-ʿawāmm*) from asking too many questions, [since] to be presented with something of which one is ignorant is safer than being presented with something of which one has knowledge."[40] This shielding the uneducated from knowledge that might harm them can be traced back as early as Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) in the mid second/eighth century.[41]

Later scholars carried this distinction to more theoretical levels. In his division of the different fields of knowledge, the philosopher Abū al-Ḥasan al-ʿĀmirī (d. 381/992) explains that only the educated and gifted *khāṣṣa* should learn or practice the sciences (*ṣināʿāt*), guiding the blissfully ignorant *ʿāmma*.[42] This would remain a central usage of *khāṣṣ* and *ʿāmm* until the modern period. Administrators and viziers looked down upon the vulgar masses and emphasized the need to guide them properly. Niẓām al-Mulk, for example, describes the licentious and disgraceful sexual communism of the Mazdakean heresy as appealing especially to the *ʿawāmm*.[43]

Al-Ghazzālī was very much a product of this stratified intellectual culture. Debate has raged over whether or not the famous scholar cultivated esoteric doctrines that he hid from all but his finest students.[44] Indeed his writings are pregnant with suggestive statements such as "you have wrapped on a door opened only to the most discerning scholars . . . and the breasts of those free [souls] are the tombs of secrets." Furthermore, he cites adages such as "revealing the Secret of Lordliness is disbelief."[45] The scholar Lazarus-Yafeh argues that this debate arises from a misunderstanding of al-Ghazzālī's approach to teaching and Islamic religious discourse in general. Knowledge and higher truths were always the purview of the elect, who in turn guided the masses only to that knowledge which benefited them in this world and the hereafter. Thus throughout his works al-Ghazzālī repeatedly quotes maxims such as "speak to people according to their minds' ability."[46] He states in his *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* that a scholar should not expose commoners to an esoteric understanding of the Qurʾān, for "his bonds as a common man [to religion] would be loosened, and it would not be easy to bind him in the bonds of the elite (*khawāṣṣ*)."[47] Al-Ghazzālī's contempt for the ignorance of the masses sometimes expresses itself palpably in his writings. In his *Miʿyār al-ʿilm*, for example, he criticizes scholars who have allowed themselves to be deceived by false arguments as if they were "stupid commoners" (*al-ʿawāmm al-aghbiyāʾ*).[48]

The Tripartite Division of the Sufi World: *ʿāmm, khāṣṣ* and *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*

Al-Ghazzālī's use of *ʿāmm, khāṣṣ* and *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ* to divide mankind into three classes in his letter represents an expression of a specifically Sufi worldview. Yet the role of these terms in Islamic mystical discourse has not received significant attention. There has been no attempt to trace their emergence as a framework for establishing a tripartite division of society with Sufi mystics at its apex.[49] M.A.J. Beg's otherwise excellent article on *ʿāmma* and *khāṣṣa* in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* does not venture into the Sufi genre. Nikkie Keddie's insightful article on the elitist tendencies of Islamic intellectual

and religious culture has too broad a scope for a detailed investigation of the link between these terms and Sufism.[50] If Sufi glossaries produced from within the Islamic tradition include the terms, they often give them either cursory or anachronistic definitions.[51] Furthermore, the many modern studies of Islamic mysticism are often too general to focus on such obscure issues, and even the books' indices of technical terms frequently omit *khāṣṣ*, *ʿāmm* and all their derivatives.[52]

We find no trace of any religious usage for *khāṣṣ* and *ʿāmm* amongst the early Muslim ascetics (*zuhhād*) to whom later Sufis would look as forbearers after Sufism had emerged as a distinct tradition with its own technical lexicon.[53] In early ascetic works such as material attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Ibn al-Mubārak's *Kitāb al-zuhd wa al-raqāʾiq* and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's *Kitāb al-zuhd*, the terms appear very rarely, only denoting the general juxtaposition of familiars with the unknown. They possess no spiritual dimension.[54] Even in the mid third/ninth-century writings of the pivotal Sufi al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857) the terms have no specifically spiritual significance. Although he was an important ascetic, al-Muḥāsibī uses the terms in the same manner as mainstream scholars of the Abbasid period; *khāṣṣ* and *ʿāmm* simply denote the elite minority and common masses in Muslim society.[55]

Most of the early figures associated with Sufism left no written works. For ascetics like Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya (d.c. 185/801), Bishr al-Ḥāfī (d. 227/841)) and Ibrāhīm b. Adham (d. 161–3/777–80), we only have isolated sayings preserved in later works such as Muḥammad al-Sulamī's (d. 412/1021) *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī's (d. 437/1045) *Risāla*, Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī's (d. 430/1038) *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, ʿAbdallāh al-Harawī's (d. 481/ 1089) *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, and Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār's (d. 586/1190 or 627/1230) *Tadhkerat al-awleyāʾ*. The first figure they cite as employing *khāṣṣ* and *ʿāmm* in a technical sense is al-Muḥāsibī's contemprary Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 246/ 861) in the mid third/ninth century. He is quoted as saying "the *ʿawāmm* repent for sins, but the *khawāṣṣ* repent for heedlessness (*ghafla*)."[56] In this statement, we see the first use of these terms to distinguish between laymen and a special Sufi caste. Margaret Smith has recognized Dhū al-Nūn's pioneering role, crediting him with the elaboration of the different stations (*maqāmāt*) along the mystical path.[57] After him, the terms *khāṣṣ* and *ʿāmm* divided Sufi mystics from religious society at large and became prevalent in Baghdād among the disciples of al-Junayd (d. 298/910), the epicenter of classical Sufism, and in the Khorasan school of mysticism.[58]

The *khāṣṣa* came to correspond to those elect who devote themselves to the mystical path and whom God has initiated into its secrets. The *ʿāmma* consists of the laymen for whom the basic requirements of faith and the sacred law (*sharīʿa*) suffice. For the great mystic Ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), the

khāṣṣa are "the professional mystics" as opposed to the uninitiated ʿāmma.[59] While the masses are separated from God's reality, the elect enjoy a different relationship with the Divine and are exposed to its majesty. Only the elect experience the bliss of encountering God.[60] The famous Sufi master al-Qushayrī writes in his *Risāla* that "the masses (ʿawāmm) are shrouded by the veil [between man and God], while [God] is constantly revealed (tajallā) to the elect (khawāṣṣ)."[61] The elect thus understand God's commands in the light of their desire to know Him and devote themselves exclusively to His worship. The ʿawāmm obey God out of fear of divine retribution and hellfire, while the elect heed God for His sake alone.[62] In Dhū al-Nūn's statement about the repentance of the khawāṣṣ, so intent are these elect on constantly remembering God and so close is their tie to Him that even a moment's neglect is tantamount to a sin in their eyes. Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 382/993 or 386/996), whose comprehensive Sufi manual *Qūt al-qulūb* had a large impact on al-Ghazzālī, uses ʿāmm and khāṣṣ in essentially the same manner.[63]

It remains to be seen whether mysticism borrowed the khāṣṣ / ʿāmm bifurcation from political culture. Regardless, in both realms the usage stemmed from the general import that the terms displayed in the hadith literature. Sufis expressed khāṣṣa in its abstract meaning of intimacy with God through the term khuṣūṣiyya, a word equated with sainthood (wilāya). The notion of personal familiarity attached to khāṣṣ in hadith literature was the root of wilāya and khuṣūṣa, both of which portrayed the Sufis as God's inner circle. In his work *Khatam al-wilāya* the Sufi master al-Ḥakīm b. ʿAlī al-Tirmidhī (d. 285/898 or 318/930) therefore devotes a chapter to the prophets and God's intimates (khāṣṣa).[64] In his exegesis of the Qurʾān, al-Sulamī ties khāṣṣa and wilāya together, noting the ways in which God has elected (khaṣṣa . . . bi-khāṣṣatihi) the Prophets, saints (awliyāʾ) and the true believers.[65] Al-Junayd explained these saints' relationship to the masses. In one of his letters he identifies his addressee as one of those who know God (ahl maʿrifatihi) and whom God has elected (khaṣṣa) by granting him a true understanding of the Qurʾān. Al-Junayd then urges him to guide the ignorant and misled masses.[66] In reciprocation for this direction, the major early Sufi authority Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) asserts that all people must believe in the existence of the spiritual elect (khuṣūṣiyya).[67] Two centuries later al-Ghazzālī adds that, along with basic religious obligations, the ʿawāmm should devote themselves to supporting the elect so that these sages could seek true knowledge.[68]

The emergence of khāṣṣ and ʿāmm in the budding Sufi lexicon was part of a major transition occurring in Sufism. Dhū al-Nūn's teachings introduced the notion of gnosis, or an elevated knowledge of God that revealed His oneness to His elite devotees.[69] At this time mystics such as al-Junayd and Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261–4/874–8) began seeking direct experience with the

Divine and the annihilation of the self before God's transcendental unity. This ecstatic drive to know God in the most immediate sense was a departure from the sober piety and rigorous religious discipline found amongst earlier ascetics in works like Ibn al-Mubārak's *Kitāb al-zuhd*. Marshall Hodgson observed that in this period "a new dimension was being added to the expectations mystics had of what mystical experience could lead to."[70] From the material that has survived it appears that at this time Dhū al-Nūn first elaborated the tripartite division of people in relation to their knowledge of the Divine.[71] ʿAṭṭār quotes him as saying:

> Knowledge exists on three levels: the first is the knowledge of God's oneness (*towḥīd*), which is for the masses of believers (*ʿāmme-ye moʾmenīn*); the second is the knowledge of compelling argument and elucidation (*ḥojjat va beyān*), which the wise, cultured and scholarly possess; the third is the knowledge of the attributes of the Absolute Unicity (*vaḥdāneyyat*), which is the dominion of the saints (*ahl-e velāyat*).[72]

ʿAṭṭār was writing nearly four hundred years after Dhū al-Nūn, whose aphorisms are preserved only by later authors. The evidence from ʿAṭṭār's *Tadhkerat* alone thus does not suffice for dating the emergence of the tripartite division with Dhū al-Nūn. The Egyptian Sufi's student, Sahl al-Tustarī, however, echoes this tripartite distinction in his surviving exegesis of the Qurʾān. There he divides men into the masses of the believers (*ʿāmmat al-muʾminīn*), the *ʿulamāʾ*, and finally the Prophets and the righteous (*ṣiddīqūn*).[73] Sahl's younger contemporary al-Junayd's threefold division of religious men into the ritually devoted who worship God out of fear, the ascetics, and finally the Sufi mystics strengthens evidence for the emergence of the tripartite division by this time.[74]

After Dhū al-Nūn's time the tripartite division acquired a central role in Sufi discourse and crystallized around three terms. In addition to the *ʿāmm* and *khāṣṣ* distinction between the masses and the more devoted ascetics, the third level stemmed from Hodgson's "new dimension" of a direct experience of the Divine. Like the early Christian Gnostic groups of the second century CE that divided humanity into three tiers, this third level was one of gnosis (*maʿrifa*), whose practitioners (*ʿārifūn*) sought an immediate knowledge of God.[75] One of al-Junayd's associates, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Nūrī (d. 295/907) thus groups men's hearts into three tiers, with the third and most pious that of the gnostics (*ʿārifūn*).[76] In his early fifth/eleventh century work *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, al-Sulamī quotes Sahl as dividing the trials and pitfalls (*fitan*) facing believers into the three levels of the *ʿāwāmm*, *khawāṣṣ*, and *ʿārifūn*.[77] Several decades later al-Qushayrī records a statement detailing these three increasingly demanding stages of asceticism.[78] For al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's

contemporary Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī, the term *ʿārif* served as a mainstay for denoting the true Sufis.[79]

The concept of gnosis continued to define the topmost level in the Sufis' tripartite division of mankind, but in the late third/early tenth century another term entered mystical discourse and superceded *ʿārif* as the designation for man's ultimate relationship with the Divine. The first occurrence of the term *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ* (or its Arabic and Persian variants of *khuṣūṣ al-khuṣūṣ* and *khāṣṣ-e khāṣṣ*) I found appears in the *Kitāb al-lumaʿ* of the Khorasani Sufi Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988).[80] This seminal work represents a concerted and organized explanation of Islamic mysticism, featuring a chapter that systematically defines Sufi jargon. Al-Sarrāj resorts to a quote from the Baghdād mystic Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/948) to explain *khuṣūṣ al-khuṣūṣ*. Al-Shiblī states that his master al-Junayd asked him what he had heard about the term and what his opinion was concerning it.[81]

This anecdote about al-Junayd discussing what appears to be an unfamiliar term with his younger student seems accurate. Al-Junayd's surviving works bear no trace of this highly formalized lexicon, while his disciples clearly employed this term.[82] It therefore seems both appropriate and convenient to date the emergence of the term *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ* at this juncture between al-Junayd and his student al-Shiblī, whom he respected a great deal.[83]

Unlike the term *khāṣṣ*, however, *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ* did not flourish in political discourse. Although al-Masʿūdī does use *khāṣṣ al-khāṣṣ* in a political context in his *Murūj al-dhahab* at approximately the same time as al-Shiblī,[84] the term is conspicuously absent from the Abbasid secretary Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Jahshiyārī's (d. 331/942) *Kitāb al-wuzurāʾ wa al-kuttāb*. Considering that author's intimate knowledge of Islamic political culture up to his time and his liberal use of *khāṣṣ* and *ʿāmm* throughout his book, this absence suggests that the superlative form *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ* was not widely used on the early tenth century political scene.[85] Neither do the term and its variants appear in al-Masʿūdī's *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya li-l-imām ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib*, a politically charged defense of the Shiite doctrine of the Alid right to religious leadership.[86] Finally, although al-Ghazzālī uses the term in several of his Sufi works, he does not employ *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ* in his political treatise *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*.

In mystical discourse, however, the elitist idiom of *ʿāmm / khāṣṣ / khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ* provided a convenient and well-understood tool from the fifth/eleventh century on. Although its usage differed slightly according to author and context, this idiom became the Sufis' primary means of ranking mystical awareness, from the uninitiated masses, to the Sufi neophyte and finally the accomplished mystic. Thus al-Sarrāj relied on the three terms to list the stations of faith in God (*ʿilm al-yaqīn*, *ʿayn al-yaqīn* and *ḥaqq al-yaqīn*).[87] A century later ʿAlī Hujvīrī (d. 465–9/1072–7) of Ghazna, who wrote the first Persian

treatise on Sufism, employed the same three terms to the same end.[88] The most conspicuous use of this phrasing of the tripartite division appears in ʿAbdallāh al-Harawī's (d. 481/1089) comprehensive Sufi glossary *Manāzil al-sāʾirīn*. There the author divides almost every Sufi concept he addresses, from God's unicity (*tawḥīd*) to spiritual discipline (*riyāḍa*), into the three levels of ʿ*āmm*, *khāṣṣ* and *khāṣṣ al-khāṣṣ*.[89]

It is thus no surprise that in his letter al-Ghazzālī chose this idiom to divide mankind into those obsessed with worldly goods, the religiously devout, and the mystical elite. This tripartite division had become commonplace amongst Sufis, and the great scholar frequently employed it in his works. It appears prominently in his *Mishkāt al-anwār*, which al-Ghazzālī begins by explaining that the word "light" has different meanings according to the three levels of people, the ʿ*āmm*, *khāṣṣ* and *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*.[90] Later in the work the scholar undertakes an exegesis of the mystical hadith in which the Prophet states that God has seventy veils of light and darkness. There, he again divides mankind into the three groups, the lowest veiled by total darkness, the second by an admixture of light and darkness, and the third by sheer light.[91] Of this elect gnostic class, the most elite are the *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ* whose piercing knowledge of God and His oneness effaces their essence and brings them into mystical union with the Divine.[92]

Conclusion: Sufism's Terminological Authenticity and Life after al-Ghazzālī

Much of the controversy surrounding the authenticity of Sufism in the Muslim world has centered on the relatively late development of the Islamic mystical tradition. Sufis hold up early ascetics such as Ibrāhīm b. Adham and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī as the progenitors of the mystical tradition and its authoritative guarantors amongst the early Muslim community. Yet we see that the ʿ*āmm* / *khāṣṣ* and *khāṣṣ* al-khawāṣṣ terminology so prominent in Islamic mystical discourse after its efflorescence in the fourth/tenth to sixth/twelfth centuries did not appear in early Sufi writings. Moreover, these terms are absent even in the Sufi tradition's later depiction of its early pioneers. As early as the fourth/tenth century, Sufis recognized this dearth of an early nomenclature, explaining that "today Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) is a name without a reality, it was once a reality without a name."[93]

Yet an overemphasis on Sufism's tangible origins in preserved texts clouds the important issue of the tradition's organic roots in Islam. Moreover, casting an overly diachronic eye on the Sufi tradition ignores Nicholson's insight on Ibn al-ʿArabī's (d. 638/1240) usage of *khuṣūṣ al-khuṣūṣ*, a notion whose underlying meaning he describes as "almost as old as Ṣúfism itself."[94] Indeed the tripartite division of people according to their submission to God and grasp

of His reality may be seen expressed in the Qur'ān. One such verse states that the communities to whom God has revealed His books are divided into those who wrong their own souls, those who take a middle course in religion, and those "who are the foremost in doing good (*sābiq bi-al-khayrāt*, Qur'ān 35:32).[95]" As part of his effort to prove the orthodox character of Sufism, al-Sarrāj uses this verse to ground the notions of *khāṣṣ* and *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ* in the Qur'ānic paradigm.[96] Al-Ghazzālī himself begins his letter to Muḥammad b. Fakhr al-Mulk with a reference to this duty of striving for preeminence in doing good.

Whatever the conceptual authenticity of the tripartite division in the Qur'ān, it is nonetheless clear that neither this distinction nor the 'amm / khāṣṣ or *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ* model appeared in the Sufi tradition until the second half of the third/ninth century. The tripartite division was a feature of Near Eastern Gnosticism from as early as the second century, but even with the Islamic tradition's adoption of Gnostic ideas, this development probably stemmed from the very nature of the Sufi calling itself. As Margaret Smith points out, the early Muslim ascetic tradition as evidenced in the work of Ibn al-Mubārak and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, was founded on supererogation. The practices of these early devotees centered on superceding the normal religious requirements of the masses and attaining higher levels of piety.[97] Later mystics like Dhū al-Nūn and Sahl al-Tustarī were intimately acquainted with the intellectual milieu of the Abbasid world.[98] In an environment where intellectual giants like al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn al-Qutayba had divided the political, social and religious world into two classes, Sufis would require a third and higher level that acknowledged their superlative devotion. This may explain why the term *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ* was effectively limited to mystical discourse. Even within this Sufi community the stage was set for laymen ('āmma) and ascetics (*khāṣṣa*). Those gnostics who sought the "new dimension" of salvational knowledge would need a class for themselves. Moreover, as the adherents of Islamic mysticism increased in the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries, Sufis like Hujvīrī worried about "fraudulent claimants to the Way."[99] If some of those claiming to be part of God's *khāṣṣa* were mere charlatans, then a third and higher level was necessary for the truly sincere.

It may also have been the very marginal nature of the Sufi movement in this period that led to the important role that terms like *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ* would acquire in Islamic mystical thought. Heterodox groups derided and occasionally forced into dissimulation naturally had to develop a worldview that deemed "the majority of Muslims as, at least for the present, too misled and unenlightened to appreciate higher truths."[100]

It thus seems natural that in the wake of al-Ghazzālī's successful adoption of Sufism into orthodox Islamic tradition, the 'āmm / khāṣṣ / khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ

triad lost much of its barbed and condescending tone. The decades after the famous scholar's death saw the institutionalization of Sufi brotherhoods that brought mysticism to the masses.[101] Al-Ghazzālī had already included non-Sufi ʿulamāʾ among the ranks of the ʿawāmm,[102] but as mysticism spread well beyond its original spiritual elite the tripartite division served more as an internal ranking within Sufism and less as a means of dividing up human society as a whole. Over a century after al-Ghazzālī's death another Persian mystic, Nūr al-Dīn Isfarāyīnī (d. 639/1242), applied this tripartite ranking to both saints and prophets. He proposed that both these revered classes be divided into ʿawāmm, khāṣṣ and khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ.[103] If one could refer to God's prophets as ʿawāmm, the term had clearly matured from the stupidity and iniquity associated with it in al-Ghazzālī's time. Isfarāyīnī's contemporary Muḥyī al-Dīn b. al-ʿArabī's usage of the three terms differs according to context, with the bottom end of the spectrum (ʿawāmm) ranging from the believers in general to an average Sufi adept. In all cases, however, Ibn al-ʿArabī employs the terms as an internal ranking for either the believing or mystical community.[104] Gone is al-Ghazzālī's damning dismissal of the ʿawāmm as "the people of heedlessness" obsessed with worldly aims. In his encyclopedia of Sufi terms, *Muʿjam iṣṭalāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya*, ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 730/1330) simply defines the ʿawāmm as scholars who limit themselves to the exoteric study of law.[105]

Endnotes

1.   This reading of the scholar's name follows Brockelmann, Helmut Ritter and Jalāl al-Dīn Homāʾī, while the Cairo edition of al-Subkī's *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfiʿiyya* has it Ilkiyā al-Harrāsī; see Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen litteratur* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1943), 1:489; Helmut Ritter, rev. of "*Makātīb-i Gazzālī ba-nām-i Faẓāʾil al-anām min rasāʾil Ḥuccatalislām*," *Oriens* 8:2 (1955): 355; Jalāl al-Dīn Homāʾī, *Ghazzālī-nāme*, 2nd edition ([Tehran]: Ketāb Forūshī Forūghī, 1964), 201 and 313–5; and Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfiʿiyya al-kubrā*, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad Ḥilw and Muḥammad Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī, 10 vols. (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1386/1967), 5:292. Homāʾī corrects what he considers a mistaken death date for Harāsī in al-Subkī's *Ṭabaqāt*.

2.   Harāsī died in the first month of 504AH, a year and a half before al-Ghazzālī. Assuming that the correspondence between al-Ghazzālī and the Seljuq officials took place in the months following Harāsī's death, it is probable that al-Ghazzālī wrote this letter approximately one year before he died.

3.   Although such a personal communication written during the last year of al-Ghazzālī's life offers an insightful glimpse into his mindset, this letter was probably not his last composition. His work *Iljām al-ʿawāmm ʿan ʿilm al-kalām*, a warning about the damage that dialectical theology could wreck when wielded by the uneducated masses, was written a month before his death; see George F. Hourani, The Chronology of Ghazālī's Writings, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 79:4 (1959): 233.

4.   Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *Faḍāʾil al-anām*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn Āl ʿAlī (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya liʾl-Nashr, 1972), 26.

5.   See, for example, the second paragraph of Homā'ī's text where the words "concerning his [Ghazzālī's] death" are interpolated to explain the sentence. Moayyad's edition lacks this addition; see Jalāl al-Dīn Yūsuf Ahl, *Farāyed-e gheyāthī*, ed. Heshmat Moayyad, 2 vols. ([Tehran]: Bonyād-e Farhang-e Īrān, 1358/[1980]), 163; Homā'ī, 212.

6.   Homā'ī, 204–6.

7.   C. Edmund Bosworth, "Fakr al-Molk," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983–present), 9:164–5.

8.   W. B. Fisher et als., eds., *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968–91), 5:252.

9.   **Note on Transliteration and Organization:** In general I have transliterated this letter according to Persian pronunciation. Any Arabic portions more significant than Arabic phrases commonly used in Persian have been rendered in italics and transliterated according to the Arabic pronunciation. Al-Ghazzālī wrote the letter according to the perennial structure of Persian diplomatic correspondences. I have thus placed the standard names for the various parts of such letters in small font at the beginning of each section; see H. Busse, "Diplomatics: Persia" *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-ROM Edition v. 1.1. Henceforth *EI²*.

10.   This hadith was a staple in al-Ghazzālī's writings. He also used it in an advice letter to the Seljuq courtier and treasurer Saʿādat al-Khāzin; see Homā'ī, 369.

11.   This is no doubt a play on words. For al-Ghazzālī the obliteration of the self and its union with the Divine, *fanā'*, was the highest aspiration of the mystic. His use of the same word for the bodily death so feared by the masses represents an instance in which Sufis invert the meaning of word as it moves from the level of the common man to the ranks of the initiated.

12.   This description correlates with al-Ghazzālī's description of the people veiled by darkness in his *Mishkāt al-anwār*; see Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *The Niche of Lights*, trans. David Buchman (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), 45.

13.   The truth to which al-Ghazzālī refers is probably "there is no He except He (*lā huwa illā huw*)," what the great mystic terms the Testimony of Unicity for the Elect (*tawḥīd al-khawāṣṣ*) as opposed to the standard testimony of the masses (*tawḥīd al-ʿawāmm*), "there is no deity but God." The former he deems more befitting God's unique singularity (*fardāniyya*); see al-Ghazzālī, *Niche*, 20. The phrase *tawḥīd al-khāṣṣa* also appears in ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī's *Risāla*; see ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-qushayriyya*, ed. Maʿrūf Zurayq and ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Balṭajī (Beirut: Dār al-Khayr, 1408/1988), 301; for a more detailed explanation, see ʿAbdallāh Anṣārī al-Harawī, *Manāzil al-sā'irīn*, ed. Ibrāhīm ʿAṭwa ʿAwaḍ ([Cairo]: Maktabat Jaʿfar al-Ḥadītha, [1977]), 80–82; and Maḥmūd Abū al-Fayḍ al-Ḥusaynī, *Kitāb al-tamkīn fī sharḥ manāzil al-sā'irīn* (Cairo: Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, [1969]), 354.

14.   The correct English term for the indicator on this type of scale, the equal-armed beam scale, is the *pointer*. I have rendered *lesān-e mīzān* as 'measure' simply because it seems more befitting the spiritually poignant context. For a helpful discussion of the traditional scale used in Islamicate lands; see J. D. Latham, The Interpretation of a Passage on Scales (*Mawāzīn*) in an Andalusian *Ḥisba* Manual, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 23 (1978): 283–290; and "Mīzān" in *EI²*.

15.   This sentence must have caused copyists a great deal of trouble. The *Farāyed-e gheyāthī* version of the letter features the word "*beqā'*," which one can at best translate as "ground" and does not fit the intended juxtaposition of 'depths' (*ḥadīd*) and 'high' in the metaphor that al-Ghazzālī employs. Jalāl al-Dīn Homā'ī's edition of the letter has the word "*refā'*," a word that does not actually exist but seems to indicate 'heights,' instead of *beqā'*. This is most probably a confused but benevolent copyist's attempt to restore the overall

stylistic balance of the sentence. Fortunately, al-Ghazzālī uses the same metaphor in his *Mishkāt al-anwār*. There he describes how the gnostics (*ʿārifūn*) rise from the 'depths of metaphor (*ḥaḍīḍ al-majāz*) to the elevation (*yafāʿ*) of the Real (*al-ḥaqīqa*)'; see al-Ghazzālī, *Niche*, 16. It seems very probable that *yafāʿ* was the original word al-Ghazzālī used in the letter, and that a copyist mistook this rare word for *beqāʿ*.

16.   Al-Masʿūdī noted a horde of Persian texts dated 113/[731–2]. Iḥsān ʿAbbās feels that this may have included the *ʿAhd Ardashīr*, the political wisdoms of the great Sassanid ruler Ardashīr. At the very latest this work entered the Arab-Islamic corpus by 218/[833–4]; see Iḥsān ʿAbbās, ed., *ʿAhd Ardashīr* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1967), 33–4.

17.   Anne Lambton, *Theory and Practice in Medieval Persian Government* (London: Variorum, 1980), 6: 422.

18.   See, for example, Niẓām al-Mulk, *Seyāsat-nāme*, ed. Jaʿfar Shoʿār (Tehran: Ketābhā-ye Jībī, 1348/[1970]), 42.

19.   Lambton, 1:416 and 6:425; see al-Ghazzālī, *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, ed. Jalāl Homāʾī (Tehran: Chāp-khāne-ye Majles, 1315–1318/1937–1940), 39.

20.   Niẓām al-Mulk; 75, 83.

21.   Niẓām al-Mulk, 69.

22.   ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī tārīkh al-mulūk wʾal-umam*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā and Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1412/1992), 16:244.

23.   Ahl, 2:157. Bustī writes "tend to the matter [of state] now, since the worldly chieftainship (*kadkhodā-ye jehānī*) will pass from your hands [like] two transitory days."

24.   Homāʾī, 235–6.

25.   Homāʾī, 126.

26.   I have modified this term from Mohammad Arkoun's original usage; see Mohammad Arkoun, Logocentrisme et Vérité Religieuse dans la Pensée Islamique, *Studia Islamica* 35 (1972): 5–51.

27.   This legal usage of the two terms was definitely attested by the early third/ninth century; see Abū ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. Ḥasan al-Sandūbī (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Raḥmāniyya, 1352/1933), 139.

28.   Homāʾī, 199.

29.   M. A. J. Beg, "al-Khāṣṣa waʾl-ʿĀmma," *EI²*; see also ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr, *al-Lubāb fī tahdhīb al-ansāb*, ed. Qāsim Muḥammad al-Raḥī, 3 vols. (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthannā, [n.d.]), 1:412. For an example of the different officers associated with the *khāṣṣa*, see Niẓām al-Mulk, 334–5.

30.   Wensinck in his *Concordance et indices de la Tradition Musalmane*: Aḥmad 1:407.

31.   Wensinck: Ibn Mājā *muqaddima*, 16. For similar instances see Abū Dāwūd, *imāra*, 19, 23; and al-Tirmidhī, *manāqib*, 60 and *tafsīr sūrat al-māʾida*, 5, 18.

32.   ʿAbdallāh b. al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-zuhd wa al-raqāʾiq*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-Aʿẓamī (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1971), 475–6. See report # 1352 on p. 476 for a similar usage of the terms. Bilāl b. Saʿd's exact death date is unknown; al-Mizzī states that he met Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60/80) but died during the reign of the caliph Hishām (r. 105–125/724–743); see Jamāl al-Dīn al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl fī asmāʾ al-rijāl*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf, 35 vols. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1980), 4:293; Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr*, 4 vols. (Hyderabad: Osmania Oriental Publications Bureau, 1360/[1941]–1388/[1958]), 2:108.

33.   Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, *al-Zuhd*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Muḥammad (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1991), 139–40. Much material is attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, and it is difficult to determine the provenance of works such as this book. That the usage of *ʿāmm*

and *khāṣṣ* in the above hadith is echoed in Ibn al-Mubārak's better attested *Kitāb al-Zuhd* less than seventy years after al-Ḥasan's death (110/728), however, suggests that the hadith found in al-Ḥasan's book is at the very least faithful to the words' usage in the early second century AH.

34.   Although al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* includes accounts in which *khāṣṣ* is used in the political sense of 'elite retinue' in the context of the caliph ʿUthmān, these reports cannot be accurately dated. Al-Masʿūdī's political usage of the term during later Umayyad times, however, is corroborated by the famous Umayyad secretary ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd's (d. 132/750) patently political use of *khāṣṣ* and *ʿāmm*; see Iḥsān ʿAbbās, ed., *ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd ibn Yaḥyā al-Kātib* (Amman: Dār al-Shurūq, 1988), 261 and 275; Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: the Crisis of the Early Caliphate*, trans. R. Stephen Humphreys (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 54.

35.   Beg, cf. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. Charles Pellat, 7 vols. (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jāmiʿa al-Lubnāniyya, 1965–79), 5:419.

36.   Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad al-Jahshiyārī, *Kitāb al-wuzurāʾ wa al-kuttāb*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā et als. (Cairo: Sharikat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1401/1980), 50.

37.   ʿAbbās, *ʿAhd Ardashīr*, 62, 98 and 104. On this last page, Ardashīr is quoted as saying "the more frightened the masses, the more secure the ministers (*akhwaf takūn al-ʿāmma āman takūn al-wuzarāʾ*)".

38.   Beg, cf. *Rasāʾil al-bulaghāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad Kurd ʿAlī ([Cairo]: [Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya], 1946), 13. See Jean Tardy, Traduction d'al-Adab al-Kabīr d'Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, *Annales Islamologiques* 27 (1993): 187 and 199 for a strictly political usage of *ʿāmm* and *khāṣṣ*.

39.   For other examples of al-Jāḥiẓ's usages of the term for elite and vulgar, see al-Jāḥiẓ, 137 and 153. For another pertinent writing of al-Jāḥiẓ and a discussion of his attitudes, see Wadād al-Qāḍī, The Earliest 'Nābita' and the Paradigmatic 'Nawābit', *Studia Islamica* 78 (1993): 46.

40.   Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-ashriba*, ed. Muḥammad Kurd ʿAlī (Damascus: Maṭbaʿat al-Turqī, 1322/1947), 75.

41.   Muḥammad Abū Zahra, *Mālik* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 2002), 40.

42.   Arkoun, 20.

43.   Niẓām al-Mulk, 298.

44.   For summaries of this debate and commentaries on such topics as esoteric Qurʾān commentaries attributed to al-Ghazzālī, see Nicholas Heer, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī's Esoteric Exegesis of the Koran, in *The Heritage of Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 1:235–57; and al-Ghazzālī, *Niche*, xxiii–xxx.

45.   "*qaraʿta bāb^{an} mughlaq^{an} lā yuftaḥu illā li-lʿulamāʾ al-rāsikhīn . . . bal ṣudūr al-aḥrār qubūr al-asrār, wa laqad qāla baʿḍ al-ʿārifīn ifshāʾ sirr al-rubūbiyya kufr*;" see al-Ghazzālī, *Niche*, 1–2.

46.   "*al-takallum maʿa al-nās ʿalā qadr ʿuqūlihim*;" see Hava Lazaraus-Yaveh, *Studies in al-Ghazzalī* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 351, 357.

47.   Heer, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī's Esoteric Exegesis of the Koran, 256. Translation from Heer.

48.   Al-Ghazzālī, *Miʿyār al-ʿilm*, ed. Ḥusayn Sharāra (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, [1964]), 36.

49.   Although Sufi writings abound with lists and descriptions that divide groups into any number of components, the hierarchical division of society in Sufi discourse centers on this tripartite division. The term "tripartite" is taken from Gerhard Böwering's *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 226, where the author discusses the tripartite division of knowledge in the thought of Sahl al-Tustarī.

Michael Cooperson also touches upon the concept of a three-fold division of mankind in Sufi discourse in his article on the competing portrayals of Sufis and the *ahl al-ḥadīth*; see Michael Cooperson, Ibn Ḥanbal and Bishr al-Ḥāfī: a case Study in Biographical Tradition, *Studia Islamica* 86 (1997): 76 note #17, and 85 note #54.

50.   See Nikki Keddie, Symbol and Sincerity in Islam, *Studia Islamica* 19 (1963): 59.

51.   One of the earliest and most comprehensive Sufi glossaries is the *Manāzil al-sāʾirīn* of ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī al-Harawī (d. 481/1089), which assumes a previous knowledge of these terms; see ʿAbdallāh al-Harawī, 12–15. See also, ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī's (d. 730/1330) famous *Muʿjam iṣṭalāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-Āl Shāhīn, (Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1413/1992), 125; also Sayyed Ṣādeq Gowharīn, *Sharḥ-e esṭelāḥāt-e taṣavvof*, 4 vols. (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Zavvār, 1367/[1988]) which unfortunately stops at the letter 'ḥ'; Manūchehr Dānesh-Peĵūh, *Farhang-e esṭelāḥāt-e erfānī* (Tehran: Āthār-e Marjeʿ-e Farzān, 1379/[2000]); Rabia Terri Harris, Sufi Terminology: Ibn ʿArabi's al-Iṣṭilâh al-Ṣûfiyyah, *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʾArabi Society* 3 (1984): 27–54; and Javad Nurbakhsh, *Sufī Symbolism: the Nurbakhsh Encyclopaedia of Sufi Terminology* (London: Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi Publishers, 1997), 11:142, which repeats uninformative material from the *Manāzil al-sāʾirīn*.

52.   See the technical glossary of Margaret Smith's *Al-Ghazzali the Mystic* (Lahore: Hijra International, 1983) and Alexander Knysh's *Islamic Mysticism: a Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000). For cursory treatments of the terms see Louis Massignon, *Essays on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, trans. Benjamin Clark (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 196; Reynold A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 77; R. C. Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (London: University of London Press, 1960), 172; for a concise discussion of Ibn ʿArabī's use of *ʿāmm, khāṣṣ* and *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*, see William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 387–8.

53.   In Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī's (d. 382/993 or 386/996) *Qūt al-qulūb* we find the distinction between *fitnat al-ʿāmm* and *fitnat al-khāṣṣ* used in the context of the Companion Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān, but this only relates his expertise on hypocrisy (*nifāq*) within the community; see Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb* (Cairo, 1893) 1:150, cf. A. M. M. MacKeen, The Ṣūfī Qawm movement, *Muslim World* 53:3 (1963): 215–6. One finds words that would later enter Sufi jargon used in bizarre contexts during the time of early Muslim ascetics. In his travels amongst the non-Muslim Turks, the ascetic Shaqīq al-Balkhī (d. 194/809–10 ?) met a group of idol worshippers who called themselves *al-Khuṣūṣiyya*, a term later Sufis such as al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī would use for 'sainthood'; see Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ wa ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyāʾ*, 10 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī & Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿāda, 1357/1938), 8:59.

54.   Ahmad Mahdavi describes Ibn al-Mubārak's book as both the first book on practical Sufism and also the first Sufi history; see Ahmad Mahdavi, Persian Contributions to Sufi Literature in Arabic, in *The Heritage of Sufism*, 1:35. The instances of the two words in Ibn al-Mubārak's *Kitāb al-Zuhd* and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's writings have been discussed above. The words appear only once in Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's book, indicating 'specific versus general' with no religious significance; see Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-zuhd* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1396/1976), 222.

55.   Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Makāsib*, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir Aḥmad ʿAṭā (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Kitāb al-Thaqāfiyya, 1407/1987), 45–46, 98. See also al-Muḥāsibī, *Une vision humane des fins dernières: le Kitāb al-tawahhum dʾal-Muḥāsibī*, ed. André Roman (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1978), 39. Note that in al-Muḥāsibī's book *al-Tawba* we find no trace of Dhū al-Nūn's usage of *khāṣṣ* and *ʿāmm*, although the Sufi scholar who later commented on the book begins his discussion with an explanation of *tawbat al-khāṣṣ*

versus *tawbat al-ʿāmm*; see al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawba*, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir Aḥmad ʿAṭā (Cairo: Dār al-Iʿtiṣām, [1982]), 84.

56.   Al-Qushayrī, 95; and Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, *Ketāb tadhkerat al-awleyāʾ*, ed. Moḥammad Khān-e Qazvīnī, 3rd ed. (Tehran: Chāpkhāne-ye Maẓāherī, 1336/1957), 134. The Persian version of this statement is "*towbat-e ʿavāmm az gonāh ast va towbat-e khavāṣṣ az ghaflat.*"

57.   Margaret Smith, "Dhū ʾl-Nūn, Abū ʾl-Fayḍ," *EI²*. Christopher Melchert seconds this conclusion about Dhū al-Nūn's seminal role; see Christopher Melchert, The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century CE, *Studia Islamica* 83 (1996): 51.

58.   See, for example, the words of Abū Ḥafs al-Naysābūrī (d.c. 270/884) and al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, who was one of the first to define the terms; Muḥammad Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1419/1998), 104, 181.

59.   See Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, trans. Herbert Mason, 4 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 3:320. See also al-Ḥasan b. Manṣūr al-Hallāj, *Kitâb al-Ṭawâsîn*, ed. Louis Massignon (Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner, 1913), 37, 78.

60.   Böwering, 214.

61.   Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, 74.

62.   This explanation is from the Baghdād Sufi Aḥmad b. ʿAṭāʾ (d. 309–11/921–924); see al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr*, ed. Sayyid ʿUmrān, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1421/[2001]), 1:119.

63.   See Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Kitāb qūt al-qulūb*, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Mutabannā, [1980]), 1:76, 178 and 2:8. In this last page al-Makkī describes the reliance in God (*tawakkul*) of the *ʿumūm* and the *khuṣūṣ*.

64.   Massignon, *Essays on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, 196; see also Bernd Radtke and John O'Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism: Two Works by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), 98; see also Geniève Gabillot, Édition de Tirmiḏī: "le Livre de la Profondeur des Choses," *Annales Islamologiques* 28 (1994): 1–83, where the terms do not appear.

65.   Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, 1:118.

66.   Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd, *Rasāʾil al-Junayd*, ed. ʿAlī Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Qādir (Cairo: Buraʿī Wijdawī, 1988), 27.

67.   Sahl b. Tustarī, *al-Muʿāraḍa wa al-radd*, ed. Muḥammad Kamāl Jaʿfar (Cairo: Dār al-Insān, 1400/1980), 83.

68.   Lazarus-Yafeh. 354.

69.   See Margaret Smith, "Dhū ʾl-Nūn, Abū ʾl-Fayḍ."

70. Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 1:395.

71.   Al-Qushayrī's *Risāla* quotes Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal with a statement dividing asceticism (*zuhd*) into three levels, "the first is abandoning what Islam has forbidden (*al-ḥarām*), which is the asceticism of the masses (*al-ʿawāmm*). The second is leaving those luxuries allowed by God, which is the asceticism of the elect (*al-khawāṣṣ*). The third is abandoning [all] that which distracts the slave from God most high, and that is the asceticism of the Knowers (*al-ʿārifīn*)" (see al-Qushayrī, 119). If this were authentic it would make Ibn Ḥanbal the first known person to use the tripartite distinction between the masses, the ascetics and the gnostics. Although scholars such as Leah Kinberg and Michael Cooperson have treated this attribution as authentic, I feel it is apocryphal. Firstly, the statement is highly formalized and does not resemble the terse statements Ibn Ḥanbal makes in attested

works such as *Kitāb al-waraʿ*, *Kitāb al-zuhd* or in chapters devoted to his views on *zuhd* in later Ḥanbali literature. Secondly, this quote does not appear in these other works or in al-Qushayrī's contemporary Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī's long entry on Ibn Ḥanbal in his Sufi biographical dictionary *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*. Thirdly the statement contradicts a narration in Ibn Ḥanbal's *Kitāb al-zuhd* insisting that "asceticism in this world is not prohibiting what God has allowed . . ."; see Leah Kinberg, What is Meant by *Zuhd*?, *Studia Islamica* 61 (1985): 41–2, Cooperson, 85; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, 18; *Kitāb waraʿ*, ed. Muḥyī al-Dīn ṣabrī al-Kurdī (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿāda, 1340/[1921]) and Abū al-Faraj b. al-Jawzī, *Manāqib al-imām ibn Ḥanbal*, ed. Muḥammad Amīn al-Khānjī (Beirut: Khānjī and Ḥamdān, [1973]).

72.   ʿAṭṭār, 122.

73.   Böwering, 226.

74.   Here I am indebted to Christopher Melchert's referral to an unpublished manuscript by al-Junayd; see Melchert, 70–1.

75.   See al-Shiblī's description of the *ʿārif*, Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, 1:22.

76.   In the place of *ʿāmm* and *khāṣṣ*, al-Nūrī's first two levels are those who disobey God (*al-ʿaṣāt*) and those who sincerely obey Him (*al-muṭīʿūn*); see Paul Nwyia, Textes mystiques inédites d'Abū-l-Ḥasan al-Nūrī, *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph* 44 (1968): 138.

77.   "*al-fitan thalātha: fitnat al-ʿāmma min iḍāʿat al-ʿilm, wa fitnat al-khāṣṣa min al-rukhaṣ wa al-taʾwīlāt, wa fitnat ahl al-maʿrifa min an yulzimahum ḥaqq fī waqt fayuʾakhkhirūhu ilā waqt thān*"; see al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 169.

78.   Al-Qushayrī, 119. For the false attribution of this statement to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, see n. 69 above.

79.   Abū Nuʿaym's *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* is riddled with occurrences of the word. He dubs ʿAlī "the ornament of the Gnostics (*zīnat al-ʿārifīn*)" and calls the early ascetics of Medina (*ahl al-ṣuffa*) "the role models of the Gnostics (*qudwat al-ʿārifīn*);" see Abū Nuʿaym, 1:62 and 1:337.

80.   There is evidence that the avant-garde Iranian mystic Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī was the first to utilize the term *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*. Bisṭāmī's legacy is only recorded in later works, the most prominent of which is Abū al-Faḍl al-Sahlagī's (d. 476/1084) extant *Kitāb al-nūr fī kalimāt Abī Yazīd al-Ṭayfūr*. This material, however, is not credible. Although Sahlagī uses *isnāds* to bridge the chasm of almost two hundred years between him and Bisṭāmī, some of the material he attributes to his predecessor does not seem authentic. In the one instance where Bisṭāmī supposedly employs the *ʿāmm / khāṣṣ / khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ* distinction, the narrations are disjointed and incomplete. He allegedly tells his audience that the path of worship (*ʿubūdiyya*) consists of the aforementioned three levels, but then only mentions two, the *ʿāmm* and the *khāṣṣ*. Moreover, even the sub-groupings he says he will mention within these two levels are incomplete; see ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī, *Shaṭaḥāt al-ṣūfiyya: Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1949), 97–8. Al-Sahlagī or one of the transmitters he relied on for the quote could have been affected by teachings current in Khorasan at the time. Al-Qushayrī quotes his master Abū ʿAlī al-Daqqāq as dividing *ʿubūdiyya* into that of the *ʿawāmm, khawāṣṣ* and *khawāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*; see al-Qushayrī, 197. Another narration ascribed to Bisṭāmī and featuring the term *khāṣṣa* seems much more authentic. In it the ecstatic Sufi presents the three levels (although he promises the reader four!) of God's elect (*khāṣṣat Allāh*), those who cannot bear the weight of the secrets God has revealed but are compelled to nonetheless, those who enjoy the experience, and those who are completely engulfed by the presence of God; see Badawī, 80.

81.   Abū Naṣr ʿAbdallāh al-Sarrāj, *The* Kitāb al-Lumaʿ *fiʾl Taṣawwuf*, ed. Reynold A. Nicholson (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1914), 337. Al-Sarrāj could have met al-Shiblī on his travels.

He probably did not, however, since he claims him as a teacher in his chain of mystical knowledge (*silsila*) only through an intermediary. Al-Sarrāj thus does not narrate pious sayings of al-Shiblī directly, and in the *Kitāb al-lumaʿ* he either names this intermediary or uses the anonymous "it was recounted from al-Shiblī . . . ;" see al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 260; al-Sarrāj, 337.

82.   Al-Sarrāj, 71. Here al-Sarrāj cites ʿAmr b. ʿUthmān al-Makkī (d. 297/909), one of al-Junayd's disciples.

83.   ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb, *Jostejū dar taṣavvof-e īrān* (Tehran: Selsele-ye Enteshārāt-e Amīr-e Kabīr, 1367/[1989]), 153.

84.   Beg, cf. al-Masʿūdī, *ibid*.

85.   The term *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ* also seems to be absent from several addenda to al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* that cover the first thirty years of the fourth century *hijrī*; see *Dhuyūl tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, [1960]), vol. 11 of *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl, 11 vols.

86.   For the technical usage of *khāṣṣ* and *ʿāmm* in later medieval Shiite thought; see Norman Calder, Zakat in Imami Shi'i Jurisprudence, from the Tenth to the Sixteenth Century A.D, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 44:3 (1981): 468–480.

87.   Al-Sarrāj, 71.

88.   ʿAlī Abū al-Ḥasan al-Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, ed. Dr. Zukofskī (Tehran: Ketābkhāne-ye Ṭūrī, 1399/1979), 497–8.

89.   ʿAbdallāh al-Harawī; 15, 80–82.

90.   Al-Ghazzālī, *Niche*, 2

91.   *Ibid.*, 44.

92.   *Ibid.*, 52.

93.   This was said by Abū al-Ḥasan Fūshanjī in the fourth/tenth century and repeated a century later by al-Hujvīrī; see Martin Lings, *What is Sufism?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 45; cf. al-Hujvīrī, 49. Hujvīrī translates Fūshanjī's Arabic statement "*al-taṣawwuf al-yawm ism bilā ḥaqīqa wa qad kāna min qabl ḥaqīqatan bilā ism*" as "*taṣavvof emrūz nāmīst bī ḥaqīqat va pīsh azīn ḥaqīqatī būd bī nām.*"

94.   Nicholson, 77.

95.   See also Qurʾān 56:8–10.

96.   Al-Sarrāj, 337.

97.   Margaret Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1995), 161.

98.   Zarrīnkūb, 134.

99.   Hodgson, 1:400.

100.   Keddie, 59.

101.   Hodgson, 2:211.

102.   Lazarus-Yaveh, 355.

103.   Nūr al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Isfarāyīnī, *Le Révéteur des mystères: Kâshif al-Asrâr*, ed. Hermann Landolt (Paris: Verdier, 1986), 53–4, 56.

104.   Chittick, 268 and 387–8.

105.   Al-Kāshānī, 125.