

AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S "SPIRITUAL CRISIS" RECONSIDERED

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There have been many speculations about the reality of al-Ghazālī's unexpected abandonment of his professorial position at the Nizāmiyyah college¹ and his departure from Baghdad. It is the aim of this paper to question those speculations in an attempt to present an impartial account of what has become known in modern literature as the "spiritual crisis"² of al-Ghazālī. However, the scope of this paper is limited to certain works, selected wholly on arbitrary bases, which, for the most part, relate an account distinct from what al-Ghazālī himself has stated with regard to his "conversion" to *taṣawwuf* and his renunciation of the world.

After the death of al-Juwaynī in 478 A.H./1085 C.E.,³ his most prominent student, al-Ghazālī went to the Camp (Al-Mu'askar) to see vizier Nizām al-Mulk, whose court was a meeting place for scholars. There, he debated with other scholars on various subjects and won their respect. About six years later at Al-Mu'askar, Nizām al-Mulk assigned al-Ghazālī

¹ Nizām al-Mulk built a college that was named after him in each city in Iraq and Khurasan. These include Baghdad, Balakh, Nishapur, Harāt, Aṣfahan, Al-Baṣrah, Marw, Ṭubristān, and Al-Mūṣil. Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā* (Cairo: 'Isā al-Bābi al-Halabī & Co., 1964), 4: 314.

² Cf. 'Abd al-Amīr al-A'sam, *al-Faylasūf al-Ghazālī* (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1981), 42; Al-Sharbāshī, 34; 'Abd al-Rahman Dimashqīyyah, *Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī wa al-Taṣawwuf* (Riyad: Dār Ṭibah, 1988), 43.

³ 'Abd al-Malik [Imam al-Ḥaramayn] Ibn 'Abd Allah [Al-Shaikh Abū Muhammad] Ibn Yūsuf. He was the teacher par excellence at the time.

to teach at the Nizāmiyyah of Baghdad, where he lectured between 484 A.H./ 1091 C.E. and 488 A.H./1095 C.E.⁴ This position won him prestige, wealth, and "respect that even princes, kings, and viziers could not match."⁵ Al-Ghazālī, according to the Hanbalite scholar, Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597 A.H./1200 C.E.), who studied at the hands of al-Ghazālī's student, the Mālikī judge Ibn al-'Arabī, came to Baghdad directly from Aṣfahān where the Camp must have been located.⁶

At the Nizāmiyyah, several hundred students used to attend the lectures of al-Ghazālī. Some of those students became famous scholars, judges, and a few became lecturers at the Nizāmiyyah of Baghdad itself.⁷ Also, according to Ibn al-Jawzī's *al-Muntazam fi Tārīkh al-Mulūk wa al-Umam*, scholars such as Ibn 'Aqīl and Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, among the heads of the Hanbalite school of jurisprudence, attended his lectures and incorporated them in their writings.⁸

⁴ Al-Subkī, 6: 196-197.

⁵ Al-Zubaydī, *Ithāf al-Sādah al-Muttaqīn bi Sharḥ Asrār Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī), 1: 7.

⁶ Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntazam fi Tārīkh al-Mulūk wa al-Umam* (Hayderabad: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyyah, 1939), 9: 55.

⁷ They include: Judge Abū Naṣr al-Khamqārī (d. 544 A.H./1149 C.E.); Abū Bakr Ibn al-'Arabī al-Mālikī (d. 545 A.H./1150 C.E.), who was quoted frequently in criticism of al-Ghazālī; Abū 'Abdullāh Shāfi' Ibn 'Abd al-Rashid al-Jīlī al-Shāfi'ī (d. 541 A.H./1146 C.E.), whose lectures were attended by Ibn al-Jawzī; Abū Manṣūr Sa'd Ibn Muḥammad al-Bazzār (d. 539 A.H./1144 C.E.), who taught at the Nizāmiyyah; Imam Abū al-Faṭḥ Aḥmad Ibn 'Alī Ibn Burhān (d. 518 A.H./1124 C.E.), who taught at the Nizāmiyyah for a short period; and Abū 'Abdullāh Ibn Tūmart, founder of the Al-Muwahḥidūn state in Al-Maghrib, among many others. Al-Sharbāsi made a mistake in listing Abū Ḥamid al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 406 A.H./1015 C.E.), who was one of the heads of the Shafi'ites, among the students of al-Ghazālī. See Aḥmad al-Sharbāsi, *Al-Ghazālī* (Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1975), 32.

⁸ Al-Sharbāsi, 31.

The end of al-Ghazālī's career at the Nizāmiyyah of Baghdad was unexpected. He discussed the reason for the relinquishment of his position in his autobiographical work, *Deliverance from Error (al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl)*, in the section on *taṣawwuf*. The aim of this book was to show his lifetime preoccupation with, and quest for, knowledge of certitude (*Im al-yaqīn*), an occupation which required him to study numerable sects and groups of his time, culminating in his declaration of *taṣawwuf* as the only path that quenched his epistemological thirst through direct experience. After discussing the methods of the *Mutakallimūn*, the philosophers and the Bāṭinites respectively, al-Ghazālī chose the method of the Sufis as the right method for the attainment of true knowledge.⁹ His rejection of these three groups was not equal; he declared the philosophers as non-believers, the Bāṭinites as being empty except from some Pythagorean notions, and while he cherished the *Mutakallimūn* as the guardians of faith, he believed that their method fell short of achieving his goal. Indeed, in the last few lines of *al-Munqidh*, he declares that his objective was to criticise the philosophers and the Bāṭinites; he did not mention the *Mutakallimūn*.

The method of the Sufis, however, had a major prerequisite—one should abandon all worldly attachments. Al-Ghazālī thought that, in order to implement this, he should "shun fame, money and to run away from obstacles."¹⁰ He made it clear that any deed which was not for the sake of

⁹ It is my understanding that, in *al-Munqidh*, the Bāṭinites represent the deviationist groups that attempt to change the Sharī'ah from within, and the philosophers represent the Muslim thinkers whose worldview is influenced by Western thought. Almost nine hundred years after al-Ghazālī, both phenomena remain in their essence the same.

¹⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, eds. Jamil Ṣalība and Kāmil 'Ayyād (N.p. Dār al-Andalus, 1981), 134.

Allah,¹¹ was an obstacle. Al-Ghazālī scrutinized his activities, including teaching, and decided that his motivation was not for the sake of Allah.¹² Although he could have simply changed his motivation—which he eventually did upon his resumption of public teaching at the Nizāmiyyah of Nishapur in 499 A.H./1106, al-Ghazālī wanted to abandon those obstacles but the temptation was very strong. He spent six months struggling to stop teaching, until he no longer had a choice. Of this he said:

For nearly six months beginning with Rajab, 488 A.H. [July, 1095 C.E.], I was continuously tossed about between the attractions of worldly desires and the impulses towards eternal life. In that month the matter ceased to be one of choice and became one of compulsion. [Allah impeded my tongue]¹³ so that I was prevented from lecturing. One particular day I would make an effort to lecture in order to gratify the hearts of my following, but my tongue would not utter a single word nor could I accomplish anything at all.¹⁴

The fact that al-Ghazālī could not speak caused him grief, which eventually affected his ability to digest food. Soon his health deteriorated and the physicians gave up any hope and stated that the only way to cure him was by solving his problem, which they described as an affair of the heart.

¹¹ I used the word "Allah" instead of "God" because the latter has various connotations, in different religions and cultures, that might not represent the Islamic concept.

¹² Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 134.

¹³ Originally translated as "God caused my tongue to dry". See Arthur Hayman and James J. Walsh, eds., *Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987), 277.

¹⁴ Hayman and Walsh, 277.

Realizing his impotence and worsening situation, al-Ghazālī "sought refuge with Allah who made it easy for his heart to turn away from position and wealth, from children and friends."¹⁵ He distributed his wealth, retaining only as much as would suffice the necessary sustenance of himself and his children. In public, he declared that he was going to make pilgrimage to Makkah, though, in fact, he was planning to go to al-Shām.¹⁶ Al-Ghazālī had this plan because he was convinced that the Caliph and the scholars of Baghdad would not understand his position; he was afraid they might prevent him from leaving.¹⁷ He asked his brother Aḥmad to replace him at the Nizāmiyyah,¹⁸ and left Baghdad with the intention not to return at all.¹⁹

We need to distinguish at this stage between al-Ghazālī's internal struggle to leave the Nizāmiyyah of Baghdad and his earlier period of skepticism and methodical doubt; this crucial distinction was neglected by many writers on al-Ghazālī. Al-Ghazālī described the nature and length of this period, saying:

This malady was mysterious and it lasted for nearly two months. During that time I was a skeptic in fact, but not in utterance and doctrine. At length [Allah] Most High cured me of that sickness. My soul regained its health and equilibrium and once again I accepted the self-evident data of reason and relied on them with

¹⁵ Hayman and Walsh, 278.

¹⁶ Al-Shām usually refers to what later on became known as Greater Syria which includes Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria. It is also used to indicate the city of Damascus; Al-Ghazālī used it in the latter sense.

¹⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 137.

¹⁸ Al-Zubaydī, 1:7.

¹⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 137.

safety and certainty. But that was not achieved by constructing a proof or putting together an argument. On the contrary, it was the effect of a light which [Allah] Most High cast into my breast. And that light is the key to most knowledge.²⁰

Nevertheless, the relationship between these two periods is very strong; the end of the period of skepticism brought with it the establishment of divine light as a meta-rational source of knowledge. Its eminent sign, according to al-Ghazālī, is distancing oneself from the affairs of this world in favor of the hereafter, the climax of which, in his case, was abandoning his distinguished professorial position at the Nizāmiyyah and leaving all the worldly affairs of Baghdad as a requirement to tread on the path of the hereafter.

Although al-Ghazālī used clear and simple language in describing the reason why he left the Nizāmiyyah, many scholars challenged his straightforward account, which he recounted in his *al-Munqidh*, and presented various interpretations of the nature and reason for his departure from Baghdad. Not only was al-Ghazālī's version questioned, but according to Nakamura in *An Approach to Ghazālī's Conversion*, a host of scholars including Carra de Vaux, Samuel M. Zwemer, Margaret Smith and R. J. McCarthy were all skeptical about the contents of *al-Munqidh* as a source material; 'Abd al-Dā'im al-Baqarī adopted an extreme position towards *al-Munqidh* by dismissing it as fictional.²¹ 'Umar Farrūkh, echoing al-Baqarī's dissonant voice, alluded to the "story of skepticism and certitude" as

²⁰ Richard J. McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfillment* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), 66.

²¹ Kojiro Nakamura, "An Approach to Ghazali's Conversion," *Orient* XXI (1985), 47.

an artistic play (*masrahiyyah fanniyyah*).²²

As for Carra de Vaux, he considered al-Ghazālī's internal struggle before leaving Baghdad real. Yet he considered al-Ghazālī's dialogue with the sensibles an intellectual play.²³ Zakariyyā al-Imām objected to Carra de Vaux's latter notion, and expressed his astonishment.²⁴ I would say that if Carra de Vaux was denying that al-Ghazālī went through skepticism, this would raise more than eyebrows. But if he was referring to the style in which it was written, this statement has a grain of truth, for al-Ghazālī never claimed that *al-Munqidh* was a spontaneous outcome of that period. Suffice it to mention that *al-Munqidh*, as al-Ghazālī himself stated at the very beginning of this book, was written towards the end of his life when he was more than fifty years old, that is, about fourteen years after his departure from Baghdad. Then it is clear that this work, like his others, was a product of al-Ghazālī's well-organized thought.

In addition, the position of Margaret Smith regarding al-Ghazālī's "conversion" reflects her acceptance of the reasons he declared in *al-Munqidh*—she said: "The reasons for the abandonment of his career and for the rejection of all that the world had to offer him—a decision which astonished and perplexed all who heard of it—al-Ghazālī sets forth in his *apologia pro vita sua* [*al-Munqidh*]." ²⁵ Thus, we

²² 'Umar Farrūkh, *Tarīkh al-Fikr al-'Arabī ilā Ayyām Ibn Khaldūn* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm Li al-Malāyin, 1972), 497. Farrūkh cited al-Baqarī's *I'tirāfāt al-Ghazālī aw kayfa Arrakha al-Ghazālī li Nafsih* in his bibliography; the influence of al-Baqarī on Farrūkh is obvious.

²³ Carra de Vaux, *Al-Ghazālī*, trans. 'Ādil Z'aytir (Beirut: Al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyyah li al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr, 1984), 48.

²⁴ Zakariyyā Bashir al-Imām, *al-Falsafah al-Nūrāniyyah al-Qur'āniyyah 'ind al-Ghazālī* (Kuwait: Maktabat al-Falāh, 1989), 91.

²⁵ Margaret Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic* (Lahore: Hijrah International Publishers, 1983), 23.

find her statement inconsistent with Nakamura's above-mentioned account.

In the introduction to *Freedom and Fulfillment*, McCarthy discussed the position of al-Baqarī, in which he relied heavily on *Autour de la sincérité d'Al-Ghazālī*, a useful article by 'Abd al-Jalīl. According to McCarthy, Al-Baqarī stripped *al-Munqidh* of all its historical values based on the fact that al-Ghazālī pointed out in *Ihyā'* (Book XXIV) that lying is not intrinsically wrong and that, indeed, sometimes it is even obligatory. Thus, the main thesis of al-Baqarī is that the structure of *al-Munqidh*, despite reflecting some experienced realities, is essentially a lie. McCarthy sided with 'Abd al-Jalīl in stating that "al-Baqarī uses this teaching of Ghazālī, but unfortunately with certain lacunae which seem intentional and which permit him to insinuate as a general principle what Ghazālī did not really claim as such."²⁶ In addition, McCarthy agreed with 'Abd al-Jalīl that none of al-Baqarī's arguments "authorizes a doubt about Ghazālī's sincerity. The human, intellectual and spiritual value of the *Munqidh* remains firm, though it cannot of itself alone serve as an historical source."²⁷

Commenting on the reliability of *al-Munqidh*, Nakamura said that al-Ghazālī's account is "by and large genuine and reliable" and that his two crises are historical facts beyond doubt with no evidence to the contrary.²⁸ In fact, there are established accounts by many contemporaries of al-Ghazālī who witnessed him going through the various stages and changing his lifestyle in favour of *taṣawwuf*, which confirm the description in *al-Munqidh*. One of these reliable accounts is that of 'Abd al-Ghāfir Ibn Ismā'il al-Khaṭīb al-Fārisī (d. 551 A.H./1156 C.E.), who personally visited al-Ghazālī several times before and after he changed his way of

²⁶ McCarthy, xxvi-xxviii

²⁷ McCarthy, xxix.

²⁸ Nakamura, 49.

life to *taṣawwuf*, and he verified the reality of al-Ghazālī's changes before attesting to their truthfulness.²⁹ He stated that after reaching a rank and reputation which superseded that of the princes and the Caliph, al-Ghazālī turned away from all that in exchange for the path of mysticism and preoccupied himself with the affairs of the hereafter.³⁰ It is imperative to know that before quoting al-Fārisī's narration,³¹ al-Subkī stated in the *Ṭabaqāt* that he was "trustworthy [*thiqah*], contemporary [i.e., of al-Ghazālī] and knowledgeable".³² The latter statement is a clear indication of the authority of al-Fārisī. It should be known that '*thiqah*' in this context is a technical term, which is considered by many scholars of *ḥadīth* as the highest rank attributed to a Muslim narrator.³³

Al-Ghazālī's candid description of his innermost feelings, thoughts and physical conditions, which preceded his withdrawal from public teaching, tempted some contemporary scholars to "diagnose" his sickness.³⁴ These scholars left the realm of philosophy for medicine in their attempt to diagnose and evaluate al-Ghazālī's physical and mental fitness during the period leading to his departure from Baghdad. Although it is not the aim of this paper to define

²⁹ Al-Subkī, 4: 208.

³⁰ Al-Subkī, 4: 206.

³¹ For the full text of al-Fārisī's narration, see Al-Subkī, 4: 203-214.

³² Al-Subkī, 4: 203.

³³ These scholars include Ibn Abū Ḥatīm al-Rāzī, *al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl*; Abū Bakr al-Khaṭīb, *al-Kifāyah* and Ibn al-Ṣalāh, *Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*. '*Thabt*' and '*ḥujjah*' are interchangeable with '*thiqah*'. Al-Dhahabī differed in considering a repetition of '*thiqah*' or a combination of it with any of the other two as higher; Al-'Irāqī (d. 806 A.H.) agreed with him. See al-'Irāqī, *al-Taḥqīd wa al-Idāh limā Uṭliqa wa Ughliqa min Muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalāh* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1993), 152.

³⁴ Al-Sharbāṣī, 37.

what the job of philosophy is, looking for symptoms in autobiographical works is certainly not philosophy *per se*. One cannot but criticize such unphilosophical attitudes.

The most awkward "diagnosis" is that of 'Umar Farrūkh in *Tārīkh al-Fīkr al-'Arabī ilā Ayyām Ibn Khaldūn*. After making reference to al-Ghazālī's description, he said:

We undoubtedly declare that al-Ghazālī was sick with 'al-kanz' or 'al-ghanz', a psychological disease which appears, mostly, among those who have extreme religious orientation [*dhawī al-itti-jāh al-dīnī al-mutaṭarrif*].³⁵

Even if Farrūkh were a physician or a clinical psychologist, which he is not, none of al-Ghazālī's statements warrants the decisive terms that he applied in his "diagnoses". To complicate things further, Farrūkh decided, without citing any reference and without any justification, that al-Ghazālī must have been sick for three years prior to the date he stated in *al-Munqidh*.³⁶ In addition, his statement, which suggests that al-Ghazālī was an extremist, uses a language that is alien to Arabic, and which reflects the semantic shift, or rather the adulteration, of contemporary Arabic by Western concepts.

Moreover, Farrūkh admitted that available lexicons do not have a clear definition of this disease. Nevertheless, contrary to the latter statement, he came up with a three-page description of 'kanz', including its influence on the physical and mental abilities, and the various bodily functions.³⁷ For comparison, al-Ghazālī's own account of his

³⁵ Farrūkh, 494.

³⁶ Farrūkh, 493.

³⁷ For this description, Farrūkh *cited*: 'Uyun al-Anbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā'; F. W. Price, ed., *A Text Book for the Practice of Medicine* (London: Oxford Medical Publication, 1947); and W. Mayer-Gross et al., *Clinical Psychology* (London: 1945)!

physical and mental conditions occupied three lines, he said that he reached the point where he could not speak anymore, and that this condition caused him grief, which in turn led to loss of appetite and indigestion of food, only to be followed by general weakness.³⁸ Farrūkh, on the other hand, unwittingly left the door wide open for the inexperienced reader to accept his long list of *kanz* symptoms *in toto*, for he never mentioned which parts of it apply to al-Ghazālī, although I am sure none would include irregular menstruation, which he included in the impact of *kanz* on women! This list, which is preceded by a statement describing *kanz* as a hereditary disease,³⁹ includes, but is not restricted to, melancholy, weakened memory, inability to think properly, fear of taking responsibility, being haunted by memories of the past, despair, severe depression, indecisiveness, having frequent illusions, developing inferiority complex, withdrawal from public life, feeling humiliated, insomnia, eating disorders, weakness of sexual desire and blowing minor mistakes out of proportion. Farrūkh, who blew al-Ghazālī's conditions out of proportion, ended his rather lengthy description by stating that, as a result of this disease, the patient would be inclined to become religious and pious.⁴⁰ The latter statement misleads the reader to conceive al-Ghazālī's "conversion" as a symptom of a disease rather than a genuine religious experience.

Al-Ghazālī's declared motives for his departure from Baghdad in *al-Munqidh* have been challenged by many scholars. Duncan Black Macdonald argued that al-Ghazālī left Baghdad because he felt that he was *persona non grata*

³⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 131.

³⁹ This statement was accepted by Dimashqiyyah, who is an avid critic of al-Ghazālī, without any qualifications. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Sa'id Dimashqiyyah, *Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī wa al-Taṣawwuf* (Riyād: Dār Ṭibah, 1409 A.H.), 45.

⁴⁰ Farrūkh, 494–496.

with the Sultan Barkyāruq.⁴¹ According to Macdonald, this was because al-Ghazālī sided with Tutush (d. 488 A.H./1095 C.E.), uncle and rival of Barkyāruq. In fact, this opinion goes back in history to the time of al-Ghazālī who mentioned it essentially in *al-Munqidh*. It contradicts, however, al-Ghazālī's own account of his relationship with those in authority at the time. It is quite clear, rather, that he was courted by them. He was convinced that the Caliph would not understand his reasons for leaving Baghdad and thus would prevent him from doing so.⁴² Besides, if his only goal was to disappear from Baghdad in order to escape political difficulties, he could have done so without the trouble of becoming a Sufi, the hardships associated with the distribution of his wealth and leaving his family behind in Baghdad.

Another challenge to al-Ghazālī's account was set forth by Farid Jabre who claimed that al-Ghazālī fled Baghdad for fear of assassination by the Bāṭinites.⁴³ The above-mentioned criticism of Macdonald's opinion also applies here. In addition, one could argue that if it were true that al-Ghazālī feared for his life, he would have looked for places located far away from the influence of the Bāṭinites. However, he went to Damascus and Jerusalem which were under the direct influence of the Fāṭimids. Furthermore, at the end of his journey, he returned to Nishapur, which was very close to the strongholds of the Bāṭinites, during the peak of political assassinations.⁴⁴ Among the many dignitaries who were systematically assassinated by the Bāṭinites was Fakhr al-Mulk, son of Nizām al-Mulk and vizier for Sanjar in Nishapur, who met the same

⁴¹ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of Al-Ghazālī* (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh University Press, 1963), 140.

⁴² Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 137.

⁴³ Watt, 140.

⁴⁴ Watt, 140–143.

Influence
fate as his father in 500 A.H./ 1106,⁴⁵ the same year al-Ghazālī resumed public teaching at the Nizāmiyyah of Nishapur. The description of his return reflects his awareness of the great danger awaiting him in Nishapur, for he wondered in *al-Munqidh* whether he would be able to fulfil his duty of spreading knowledge or be cut off by death. He faced the latter possibility with a faith as certain as direct vision that there was no might for him and no power save in Allah, the Sublime, the Mighty.⁴⁶ He believed that Allah facilitated his movement to Nishapur and, indeed, that it was He who was moving him.⁴⁷

Another fact that can be cited against Jabre's claim is that the teachings and the activities of the Bāṭinites prompted al-Ghazālī to devote at least seven books and treatises to what appears to be a systematic confrontation of their positions, which ironically commenced in Baghdad by writing *Faḍā'ih al-Bāṭiniyyah wa Faḍā'il al-Mustazhiriyyah* and continued throughout the rest of his life.⁴⁸ Obviously, such a commitment and determination to undermine the Bāṭinites'

⁴⁵ Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma'arif, n.d.), 12: 167.

⁴⁶ McCarthy, 107.

⁴⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 146.

⁴⁸ These books are: 1. *al-Mustazhiri fi al-Rad 'ala al-Bāṭiniyyah*, also known as *Faḍā'ih al-Bāṭiniyyah wa Faḍā'il al-Mustazhiriyyah*; Al-Ghazālī wrote it at the request of the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Mustazhir (d. 512 A.H./1118 C.E.) against the Bāṭiniyyah; 2. *Hujjat al-Haqq*, was written in Baghdad but has been lost. Also, both *Qawāsīm al-Bāṭiniyyah* and *al-Darj al-Marqūm bi al-Jadāwil*, which was written in Ṭūs, are lost; 3. *Qawāsīm al-Bāṭiniyyah*. 4. *Jawāb al-Masā'il al-Arba' allatī Sa'alahā al-Bāṭiniyyah bi Hamadhān* [published in *Al-Manar* 11 (1908), 601–608]; 5. *al-Darj al-Marqūm bi al-Jadāwil*; 6. *Faṣal al-Tafriqah bain al-Islām wa al-Zandaqah*; 7. *al-Qistās al-Mustaqim*, and the section on *Ahl al-Ta'lim* in *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl* which is a critique of their methodology; Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 117–129. The above

position could only be an expression of a deeply motivated, knowledgeable and courageous scholar.

The basic problem of Jabre's claim is his interpretation of a statement reported by 'Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī in which al-Ghazālī professed that, before leaving Baghdad, "the door of fear was opened for him" [*futiḥa 'alayhi bābun min al-khawf*] and that it preoccupied him, so much so, that he could not pay attention to anything else.⁴⁹ According to Jabre, this statement reflected al-Ghazālī's fear of being assassinated at the hands of the Bāṭinites, and not his fear of Hellfire as he confessed in *al-Munqidh*. After citing Jabre's argument, Nakamura criticized it by stating that he simply did not "understand why this 'fear' cannot be that of Hellfire as Ghazālī himself confesses."⁵⁰ The context in which al-Ghazālī mentioned his fear of Hellfire in *al-Munqidh*, reflects Sufi themes and terminology. Indeed, it is mentioned in the introduction to the section on "the Ways of the Sufis", after he declares his preference for their path which, by definition, requires him to be detached from worldly affairs, and his intention to follow it. It took al-Ghazālī six months, beginning Rajab 488 A.H., to reach the level where he severed his ties with worldliness. One can only ask: why would he wait for a total of six months in Baghdad, before embarking on his journey, if there was imminent danger and if he was preoccupied with his personal safety? He expected the scholars of Iraq neither to accept nor to understand the religious reasons behind his action; he blamed their position on their level of understanding.⁵¹ Thus, it is untenable that al-Ghazālī's fear of

mentioned books are listed in chronological order as they appear in 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī's *Mu'allafāt Al-Ghazālī* (Kuwait: Wikālat al-Maṭbū'āt, 1977).

⁴⁹ Al-Subkī, 4: 209.

⁵⁰ Nakamura, 50.

⁵¹ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 131-135.

assassination could have played any role in his departure from Baghdad. His own account, on the other hand, is perfectly comprehensible.

Among those who appear to have reconciled the positions of Macdonald and Jabre is al-'Uthmān who thought that it is not strange to interpret al-Ghazālī's "excessive fear" in terms of the "choking political crises" that prevailed during that time.⁵² He was only to be followed by al-A'sam who cited both Macdonald and al-'Uthman in concluding that "al-Ghazālī saw himself, beyond doubt, threatened by the danger that encircled him." He added that al-Ghazālī's increasing anxiety, due to his fear, was accompanied by his "consciousness of the threatening political danger."⁵³ It should be noted that there are two possibilities for interpreting "beyond doubt" in the above statement as it is read in Arabic.⁵⁴ The first is that al-Ghazālī did not have any doubt in seeing himself encircled by danger, and the second is that al-A'sam did not have any doubt that Al-Ghazālī saw himself encircled by danger; there remains nothing, understandably, in al-A'sam's account to substantiate any of the two possibilities. In addition, al-A'sam cited Watt regarding the same notion, yet he failed to mention that, on the same page he cited, Watt considered that Macdonald's position that al-Ghazālī was *persona non grata* with Barkyāruq "was probably not intended to do more than call attention to a secondary factor, since he accepted al-Ghazālī's "conver-

⁵² 'Abd al-Karīm al-'Uthmān, *Sirat al-Ghazālī wa Aqwāl al-Mutaqaddimīn fih* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 20.

⁵³ 'Abd al-Amīr al-A'sam, *al-Faylasūf al-Ghazālī: I'ādat Taqwīm li Munḥanā Taṭawunrihi al-Fikrī* (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1981), 39-40.

⁵⁴ *Ba'da'idhin ra'ā al-Ghazālī nafsahu, bimā lā yaqbal al-shakk, qad aṣḥaḥa muhaddadan bi al-khaṭari al-muḥdiqi bihi min kulli jānib*. Loc. cit.

sion" to the mystic life as genuine."⁵⁵ It is obvious that such a citation would have undermined al-A'sam's straightforward conformism to the position handed down by Macdonald.

One last odd addition, to what seems to be the scholars' ever-mounting reasons for al-Ghazālī's "conversion" and abandonment of Al-Niẓāmiyyah, came from Victor Sa'īd Bāsil, who said, in his *Manhaj al-Baḥth 'an al-Ma'rifah 'ind al-Ghazālī*—which was introduced by Farid Jabre—that among other reasons "al-Ghazālī was also bored of teaching"⁵⁶

Al-Ghazālī's abandonment of almost everything he possessed and his choice of the spiritual path of *taṣawwuf* should not come as a surprise. He read the books of Sufis such as Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī's *Qūt al-Qulūb* (Food of Hearts), the books of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, and the writings of al-Junayd, al-Shiblī, and Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī.⁵⁷ Al-Ghazālī's position was consistent with those of the above-mentioned Sufis. He chose their methodology as the one that could best fulfill his quest for knowledge. Al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243 A.H./857 C.E.), for example, withdrew from public life and died in want.⁵⁸ Likewise, al-Junayd (d. 298 A.H./910 C.E.), a student of al-Muḥāsibī, had doubts whether he was worthy of giving lectures.⁵⁹ Al-Shiblī (d. 334 A.H./946 C.E.), a student of al-Junayd, was the governor of Dunbawind, canton of Rayy, and also renounced the world and asked of the inhabitants forgiveness for his past conduct. He then submitted his resignation.⁶⁰ Al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 261 A.H./874 C.E.)

⁵⁵ Watt, *Muslim Intellectual*, 140.

⁵⁶ Victor Sa'īd Bāsil, *Minhaj al-Baḥth 'an al-Ma'rifah 'ind al-Ghazālī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnani, n.d.), 18.

⁵⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 131.

⁵⁸ Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa Anbā' Abnā' al-Zamān*, trans. B. Mac Guckin De Slane (Paris: Printed for the Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1843) 1: 365.

⁵⁹ Ibn Khallikān, 1: 338.

⁶⁰ Ibn Khallikān, 1: 511.

stated that he gained knowledge of the world by means of a hungry belly.⁶¹ Following suit, al-Makkī (d. 386 A.H./996 C.E.) advocated self-mortification: he lived for a considerable time on nothing but wild herbs.⁶² Their influence on al-Ghazālī is visible.

Al-Ghazālī's internal struggle might have been triggered by the visit of Abū al-Ḥusayn Ardashīr Ibn Manṣūr al-'Abbadī to the Niẓāmiyyah of Baghdad in 486 A.H./1093 C.E. His preaching, which al-Ghazālī attended, was so influential that "more than thirty thousand men and women were present at his circles, many people left their livelihood, many people repented and returned to mosques, wines were spilled and instruments of play [i.e. music] were broken."⁶³

Furthermore, al-Ghazālī's departure from Baghdad was consistent with the activities of a typical Sufi. It was a part of the path of the Sufi to travel from one place to another and to visit tombs of good people. Visiting cemeteries was intended to help the Sufi purify his soul, since the sight of the graves teaches one a lesson about the temporal and limited nature of life on earth, and that one should treat it as a passage to the hereafter. A different perspective concerning al-Ghazālī's journey came from Zwemer, who said: "When Al-Ghazālī determined to abandon the world and set out as a pilgrim he was only following the custom of the time." To "prove" his point, Zwemer narrated the travels of al-Tabrīzī and the Persian poet Sa'ādī; both narrations, although full with adventures, are devoid of any religious connotations.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibn Khallikān, 1: 662.

⁶² Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 131.

⁶³ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, n.d.) 12: 144.

⁶⁴ Samuel M. Zwemer, *A Moslem Seeker after God: Showing Islam at its Best in the Life and Teaching of Al-Ghazali Mystic and Theologian of the Eleventh Century* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1920), 105.

على امرئ القيس
مجلس ربيع
الاول

دعوت
تعاليم
زعمار

Thus, describing al-Ghazālī's journey as a "custom" reduces it to a this-worldly affair!

It is theoretically possible that a certain text can be proven forged, or it may not reflect historical facts; however, this does not apply to the case of *al-Munqidh*, whose authenticity has already been demonstrated on sound grounds. In addition, my acceptance of al-Ghazālī's account contained therein, on its own merit, as an authentic source, does not entail accepting every idea mentioned in it. Thus, proving the authenticity of *al-Munqidh* renders the interpretation and criticism of al-Ghazālī's description as mere conjectures, or at best as an intellectual exercise. Al-Ghazālī accounted for the people of his days who, once they learned of his departure from Baghdad and rejected his declared religious reasons, became confused and entangled in devising explanations for his conduct.⁶⁵ It is amazing that this is still the case, nine centuries later!

⁶⁵ McCarthy, 93.