

FAROUK MITHA, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ismailis. A Debate on Reason and Authority in Medieval Islam* (Ismaili Heritage Series, 5). I.B. Taurus in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London 2001. Pp. 128. Price: £25.00 hardback/£12.95 paperback. ISBN: 1-86064-792-8 hbk/1-86064-819-3 pbk.

In his autobiography *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl*, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) mentioned that during his career as a prominent teacher at the first college in Baghdad he wrote three books of refutation against the Bāṭinites. Bāṭinī was a pejorative label for an Ismāʿīlī Shiʿī who followed the teachings of the Fāṭimid propaganda organization that was active — and quite successful — since the beginning of the 5th/11th century. Muslim theologians who were close to the ʿAbbāsīd court had written refutations of the Ismāʿīlī teachings since the early years of the century. We know that the Ashʿarīte al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), for instance, composed such a work in the years preceding the official condemnation of the Fāṭimid caliphs as unbelievers by the ʿAbbāsīd court in 402/1012. This genre of literature was not limited to Ashʿarī authors; there are also reports of such books by Muʿtazilites. The demise of the Fāṭimids and of the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa* as well as the final defeat of the last Ismāʿīlī stronghold by the Mongols in 654/1256 led to a situation where none of the early refutations have survived. Al-Ghazālī's books against the Bāṭinites are among the very few witnesses of this genre. We can judge from reports on al-Bāqillānī's book, however, that these texts have always provided a perfect occasion to indulge into fundamental theological discussions on, for instance, the sources of human knowledge or on the criteria for membership in the rightly-guided community. To write a refutation against the Bāṭinites, would be comparable in today's world with the writing of a white-book on a subject of political controversy. The ruler would commission such a work to a leading scholar and expect some applicable benefit from his promotion of scholarship and research. For a theologian such a commission was a perfect occasion to prove the importance of his profession and what he, as well as the whole body of scholars, was capable of in terms of applicable results.

Al-Ghazālī was commissioned in 487/1094 — in the wake of the *ayyām al-bāṭiniyya*, the crisis of the Seljuq state starting 485/1092 — probably by the advisors of the infant caliph al-Mustazhir bi-llāh who had been installed after his predecessor and other leading political figures had fallen victim to the events. In addition to the three books written during this period, al-Ghazālī later returned to the subject and wrote refutations of particular arguments or strategies of persuasion used by the agents of the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa*. In one of these smaller texts, the *Qawāsim al-bāṭiniyya*, for instance, he struggles to refute the technique of the *dāʿīs* to cast all kinds of doubts into the trustworthiness of one's senses. At gatherings around a campfire the *dāʿīs* would take a piece of burning coal, turn it around in fast circles and show that a point in the darkness can easily become a circle. They would ask their audience to put their finger on their eyeball and tell how many moons they could see? The *dāʿīs* would connect these examples to their general argument that truth has only one single source in this world, the infallible successor of Muḥammad's prophecy. This successor was in their view the Fāṭimid caliph in Cairo. It is interesting, however, that many of these examples of scepticist arguments would later appear in al-Ghazālī's own writings quoted not from Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs*, but from an inner voice in al-Ghazālī that challenged his epistemology from the viewpoint of a radical sceptic. There is no question that al-Ghazālī's intellectual formation and his thorough approach towards questions of epistemology is partly a result of his confrontation with the Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs*.

Among the numerous writings of al-Ghazālī directed against the Ismāʿīlies and their theology (there are more than just the three mentioned in his autobiography), the *Fadāʾih al-bāṭiniyya wa-fadāʾil al-Mustazhiriyya* is by far the most important. As a result of the caliph's commission in 487/1094, this book is one of the few of al-Ghazālī that can be clearly dated. Only two manuscripts are known of this text. One incomplete copy has been acquired in 1913 by the British Library and has almost immediately been edited by Ignaz Goldziher, who also translated key parts into German. After a second manuscript was discovered in Iran, the recently deceased ʿAbd al-Rahmān Badawī published a new edition in 1964 that provided the text for Richard J. McCarthy's translation of more, but still not all, passages of the book.¹ Al-Ghazālī's book has provided valuable material for several studies, but it has never been the subject of a monograph, with the probable exception of Goldziher's book. Whether it deserves to be the subject of a monograph at this stage of our knowledge remains, however, questionable. Farouk Mitha, a postgraduate student at McGill University, wrote a small monograph of roughly a hundred pages on al-Ghazālī's *Mustazhiri* book, a text that is approximately double that size. Mitha's book is the result of a degree work supervised by Wael B. Hallaq who provides an introduction. The book is a plain and straightforward analysis of al-Ghazālī's *Mustazhiri* from the McCarthy-translation. Mitha is largely unaware both of the longer tradition of Bāṭinī-refutations as well as of al-Ghazālī's other texts written against the Ismāʿīlites. In fact, Mitha does not use any text that is not available in English translation. As a result he presents the *Mustazhiri* as if it had no context in Muslim literature other than al-Ghazālī's autobiography.

The lack of original sources in this study is not sufficiently complemented by the use of secondary literature. The results of French scholarship are included only sporadically, German books are not mentioned at all. Mitha's presentation, therefore, often lacks precision, like on p. 6 where it is said that the Seljuq Toghril Bey proclaimed himself Sultan in Baghdad 447/1055. He did this already in 432/1040 in Nishapur, a fact often reflected upon in Erika Glassen's and Tilman Nagel's writings. The *ayyām al-bāṭiniyya*, the many local uprisings around 485/1092 do not figure in Mitha's book, neither does the socio-economic background of religious opposition to the Seljuq Empire as it is analyzed, for instance, by the Russian scholar Sergei G. Agadshyanow. There is also a lack of understanding of al-Ghazālī's intellectual background. On p. 53, for instance, Mitha presents a very naive view of what a syllogism is, and the example he quotes is clearly not one. The more subtle question of which kind of interpretation of the Qurʾān al-Ghazālī would allow and which forbid is only insufficiently discussed in passing (p. 69f.). Mitha makes sound efforts to reconstruct the teachings of the Ismāʿīlī *dāʾwa* that al-Ghazālī aimed at refuting. But such efforts remain stuck in al-Shahrastānī's account in his *al-Milal wa-l-nihal*, as long as one does not read Arabic books that are not translated into English.

Mitha rightly assumes (p. 43) that al-Ghazālī had access to Fāṭimid texts. A comprehensive effort to understand the *Mustazhiri* should start at the reconstruction of the Bāṭinītes' teachings addressed by al-Ghazālī in this book. The composition falls into a period of success but also of transition for the Ismāʿīlī *dāʾwa*.

¹ Published first 1980 in his *Freedom and Fulfillment. An Annotated Translation of Al-Ghazālī's al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl and Other Relevant Works of al-Ghazālī* (Boston) and reprinted in 2000 under the title *al-Ghazali, Deliverance from Error. Five Key Texts Including His Spiritual Autobiography al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* (Louisville, Kenn.)

After the death of the Fāṭimid caliph al-Mustaṣṣir in Dhū l-hijja 487/December 1094, the *da'wa* in Iran and Iraq no longer accepted the central leadership of Cairo and, under its leader Ḥasan al-Ṣabaḥ, became independent and called itself the 'new *da'wa*'. Al-Ghazālī's book seems to be written before this break occurred, since al-Mustaṣṣir is mentioned as the reigning caliph in Cairo. The book nevertheless already deals with the strategics of the new *da'wa*. Ismā'īlī theology is no longer a closed book to us as it was in the days of Goldziher, and the question of what kind of Ismā'īlism al-Ghazālī addresses needs to be looked at carefully. There are also interesting parallels between the *Mustaẓhiri* and al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* resulting from the fact that he considered some of the Bāṭinī teachings 'close to the teachings of the *falāsifa*',² and 'with some distortion and change extracted from the teachings of the *falāsifa*'.³ In fact, the text is in its scope very similar to al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut*, a book published also around 487/1094. The *Mustaẓhiri* is not a text of the *siyāsa shar'iyya* tradition, as Mitha suggest (p. 17), nor was it close to a *firaq* text (p. 34). This book rather was a full-fledged *radd*, a refutation of one's enemies' positions. Al-Ghazālī concluded that the leaders of the Bāṭinī movement are apostates and needed to be killed even without a trial. This is not 'appealing to atavistic impulses' of early Islam, as Mitha writes (p. 70), but a wide-ranging legal as well as political decision shared by many of his peers and executed by the authorities.⁴

Mitha's book is still a valuable introduction to al-Ghazālī's *Mustaẓhiri* which, if read together with McCarthy's translation, may shed some light on this often difficult and sometimes enigmatic text. Mitha presents a lot of the secondary literature that has been written on the *Mustaẓhiri* and on al-Ghazālī. For a monograph study, however, it lacks the depth and understanding achieved only through the careful study of primary texts.

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KHALED ABOU EL FADL, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001. Pp. xii + 371. Price: £47.50 hardback. ISBN 0-521-79311-4.

Abou El Fadl has written an interesting, meticulously referenced account of the development of the doctrine of *baghy* (rebellion) in Islamic law; the inclusion of the term 'violence' in the title is somewhat mysterious since the focus of the book is quite definitely 'rebellion'. Issues of violence, the distinction between legitimate and non-legitimate violence and the role of violence in the enforcement of the law are discussed only tangentially. This said, Abou El Fadl's work displays a sensitivity to the nature of juristic writing and an awareness of the laws surrounding rebellion. In some ways the presentation is rather formulaic. The chapters run: introduction (ch. 1), revelatory material relating to rebellion (ch. 2), historical context (ch. 3), later (mainly Sunnī) juristic commentary on the laws of *baghy* (chs 4–6), non-Sunnī (particularly Imāmī Shī'ī) positions (ch. 7), re-orientation and modern doctrines of rebellion (ch. 8). However, Abou El Fadl's style is fresh and engaging.

² al-Gazālī, *Faḍā'ih al-bāṭiniyya wa-faḍā'il al-mustaẓhiriyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Cairo, 1383/1964) 40.18f.

³ *Ibid.*, 42.3

⁴ Cf. the case brought forward by the Ḥanbalī Ibn 'Aqīl against a Bāṭinī from Khusestan in Sha'bān 490/July 1097 (Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fi l-tā'rikh*, vol. 5–10, Hyderabad 1358 (1938–9), vol. 9, p. 103).