

GHAZĀLĪ AND HIS EARLY BIOGRAPHERS

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This article offers an outline of what we know of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's life from the earliest sources, beginning with key autobiographical passages of Ghazālī's *al-Munqidh* and surveying the earliest available biographical sources. Works drawn on include, most prominently, those by 'Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī and Qāḍī Abū Bakr b. al-'Arabī.

Keywords: al-Ghazālī, autobiography, biography, polemics.

Introduction

Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Ghazālī¹ al-Ṭūsī was born in the village of Ṭabarān near Ṭūs² in northeast Iran in 450/1058;³ he

1. Biographers mention that his name is spelled with either one or two z's—sometimes a *shadda* (a double letter that is enunciated but never written) is used to denote emphasis. Agreement seems to be on not using the emphasis, or using one z, and that is how it is used here and throughout this paper. See al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'iyya al-kubrā*, ed. A.F. Helo and M.M. Tanjī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ḥalabī, 1969), 6:191–92 and the footnotes therein. See also Frank Griffel, “Al-Ghazali or al-Ghazzali? On a Lively Debate Among Ayyubid and Mamluk Historians in Damascus” in *Islamic Thought in the Middle Ages: Studies in Transmission and Translation in Honour of Hans Daiber*, ed. Anna Ayse Akasoy and Wim Raven (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishing, 2008).
2. Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, ed. F.A.A. al-Jundī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1990). See the entry on Ṭūs (4:55–57), a city in Khurāsān province which is actually two towns, Ṭabarān (4:3–4) and Nooqan (5:360).
3. Griffel argues that Ghazālī was born two years earlier (448/1056), based on correspondence that is attributed to Ghazālī and reverse calculation

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died there in 505/1111, at the age of 55. He came from a modest background. His father died⁴ when he and his younger brother Aḥmad were still young, leaving them with little money in the care of a Sufi friend of meager means. When their father's money ran out, their caretaker suggested that they enroll in a madrasa.⁵ The madrasa system meant they had a stipend, room, and board. Ghazālī studied fiqh in his home town under a Sufi named Aḥmad al-Rādhakānī; he then traveled to Jurjān and studied under Ismā'īl b. Mas'ada al-Ismā'īlī (d. 477/1084).⁶

Ghazālī returned to Tūs for a period of three years, where some accounts say he committed to memory all that he had learned thus far.⁷ In 469/1077 he traveled to Nishāpūr to study with an outstanding scholar, Imām al-Ḥarāmī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), at the Nizāmiyya College;⁸ Ghazālī remained his

of his birthdate. Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 23.

4. As the story goes, his father was a man of modest means who had given up the hope of becoming a scholar because he had a family to provide for, though he enjoyed the company of scholars, jurists, and Sufis. When he was in the midst of jurists he would pray to have a son who would be a jurist and when in the company of Sufis he would pray to have a son who would be a Sufi. His prayers were answered, as Abū Ḥamid became a famed jurist and Aḥmad became a Sufi.
5. This system of teaching was widely available by the time of Ghazālī. Nizām al-Mulk is given credit for starting it. See R. Hillenbrand, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition article on "madrasa" at 5:1123 and George Makdisi, "Madrasa and University in the Middle Ages," *Studia Islamica* 32 (1970): 255–64.
6. According to al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt* 6:195, Ghazālī's teacher in Jurjān was Abū Naṣr al-Ismā'īlī. His full name was Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm b. Ismā'īl (d. 405/1014). In fact, the teacher's full name was Ismā'īl b. Mas'ada b. Ismā'īl b. Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm b. Ismā'īl (d. 477/1084). Many modern authors have pointed out this error, including Jabre ('Abd al-Karīm al-'Uthmān, *Sīrat al-Ghazālī wa-aqwāl al-mutaqaddimīn fihi* [Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.], 17). Many thereafter copied the mistake that originated with al-Subkī. It is quite possible that it was a transcription error that crept into the manuscripts and made its way to the scribes of al-Subkī's work. Having the surname al-Ismā'īlī, it should be noted, does not denote that he was a follower of the Ismā'īlī sect, but a descendent of the Prophet Muḥammad's family through his grandson al-Ḥusayn.
7. Some accounts claim that on his journey home the caravan was met with highway robbers who stripped them of everything. Ghazālī ran to the head of the band to demand his notebooks. The leader acquiesced to Ghazālī's demands, and left a lasting impression on the young scholar. Thereafter, Ghazālī spent time committing his notes to memory.
8. Nizām al-Mulk founded the Nizāmiyya colleges throughout the Saljūq

student for approximately eight years, until al-Juwaynī died. Ghazālī was one of his most eminent students, and al-Juwaynī referred to him as a copious ocean [of knowledge].⁹ Ghazālī's star was rising; with the death of al-Juwaynī, it continued to ascend.

Very little is known about Ghazālī's family, though some biographers mention that he married in Nishāpūr, while others mention that he was married in Ṭūs prior to leaving for Nishāpūr. Some accounts mention that he had five children, including a son who died early and four daughters.¹⁰ It also seems that his mother lived to see her son rise to fame and fortune.¹¹

After the death of al-Juwaynī, Ghazālī went to the camp (*al-mu'askar*)¹² of the Saljūq *wazīr* Nizām al-Mulk (d. 485/1192). He stayed at the camp, a gathering place for scholars, and quickly distinguished himself among their illustrious company. Nizām al-Mulk recognized the genius of Ghazālī and appointed him professor at the famed Nizāmiyya College of Baghdad.¹³

Ghazālī left for Baghdad in 484/1091 and stayed there for four years—a very exciting time for him to be in the heart of the Islamic empire. At the Nizāmiyya College he had many students, by some estimates as many as three hundred.¹⁴ This was also a prolific period in which he wrote a great deal, including *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, *al-Mustazharī*, and other works.

In Baghdad, Ghazālī underwent a spiritual crisis. He suffered such internal turmoil that one day, as he stood before his students to present a

empire to teach Sunnī Islam (Shāfi'ī jurisprudence and Ash'arī theology), and offset the spreading tide of the Fātimid-sponsored Shī'ī *da'wa* that was perceived as a danger at the time.

9. al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt* 6:196.

10. His patronym or *kunya* “Abū Ḥāmid” would indicate that his son was named Ḥāmid, but this is not conclusive. Al-Subkī also mentions the four daughters (*Ṭabaqāt* 6:196).

11. Mentioned by D.B. Macdonald, “The Life of al-Ghazali with Special Reference to his Religious Experiences and Opinions,” *JAOS* (1887): 71–132.

12. This is the camp at Nishāpūr (*mu'askar* Nishāpūr) mentioned in al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-buldān* 4:140.

13. Nizām al-Mulk gave him the title *zayn al-dīn sharaf al-dawlā*, “the beauty of the faith and the honor of the state”. Ibn al-Jawzī, a Ḥanbalī scholar from a rival school of jurisprudence and theology, states, “His words were acceptable (fluent and influential) and extremely bright (*wa kān kalāmahu maqbūlan wa-dhākahu shadīdan*).” He was appointed to the college in Jumada I, 484/June 1091.

14. See *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl*, ed. Farid Jabre (Beirut: al-Lajna al-Libnāniyya li-Tarjama, 1969), based on the reliable edition of Jamil Saliba and Kamil 'Ayyad (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1967).

lecture, he found himself unable to speak. Words simply would not come out. The physicians at hand were unable to diagnose any physical malady. Ghazālī remained for a time, and eventually departed for the pilgrimage, and did not return to his teaching post.¹⁵ He left behind fortune, fame, and influence. He was beloved by his numerous students and had many admirers, including the sultan; he also had many who envied him. The presumption is that he left in the manner he did—meaning for the pilgrimage—because if he had made public his intentions to depart permanently he would not have been allowed to leave everything as he did.

After leaving Baghdad, he changed direction and headed toward Damascus;¹⁶ he literally disappeared from the intellectual scene for ten years, according to his autobiography. He may have taught during this time, but did not want to return to public life. This ten-year period can be divided into two stages. First, he spent two years in the East—in Greater Syria and on the pilgrimage. We have evidence that he made an appearance at a Sufi lodge opposite the Nizāmiyya College in Baghdad, on his way back home to Tūs.¹⁷ The remaining eight years were spent in Tūs, where he completed the famed *Ihyā' ʿulūm al-dīn*.¹⁸

When he arrived back in his hometown in 490/1097, he established a school and a Sufi lodge, in order to continue teaching and learning. In 499/1106, Nizām al-Mulk's son, Fakhr al-Mulk, requested that he accept a teaching position at his old school, the Nizāmiyya of Nishāpūr. He accepted and taught for a time, but left this position in 500/1106 after Fakhr al-Mulk was assassinated by Ismāʿīlī agent; Ghazālī stated, "I left them before they leave

15. See his *al-Munqidh*, 37; Richard Joseph McCarthy (trans.), *Freedom and Fulfillment: An Annotated Translation of al-Ghazālī's al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl and other Relevant works of al-Ghazālī* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), 92; W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953), 58.

16. His choice of Syria is not a concern of this paper. It is worth mentioning at this juncture that *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl* is the only source for this information; all other sources mention that he went on pilgrimage and then to exile. Ghazālī's reason for revealing this information is a source of some mystery. See below.

17. Modern biographers believe that he was writing during this period. See Watt, *Faith and Practice*; Maurice Bouyges, *Essai de chronologie des oeuvres de al-Ghazali* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1959); and ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Badawī, *Muʿallafāt al-Ghazālī* (Kuwait: Wakālat al-Maṭbūʿat, 1977). This is disputed by Mustafā Abu Sway, who believes that he only participated in Sufi rituals. See Mustafā Mahmūd Abu-Sway, "Al-Ghazālī's 'Spiritual Crisis' Re-considered," *Al-Shajarah* 1, no. 1 (1996): 77–94.

18. Hereafter referred to as the *Ihyāʾ*.

me.” He then went back to Ṭūs and divided his time between teaching and worship. He died in 505/1111 and was buried in a cemetery near the citadel of Ṭabarān.¹⁹

In order to understand Ghazālī's life we must study the earliest sources;²⁰ below is a chronological list of his biographers and works that include significant mention of Ghazālī's life.

1. ‘Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī (d. 529/1135), one of Ghazālī's students, includes an entry on Ghazālī in his work *al-Siyāq li-tārīkh Nishāpūr*.
2. We have brief mentions of Ghazālī in a eulogy by al-Abiwardī (Abū l-Muẓaffar Muḥammad b. Aḥmad) from Abiward in Khurāsān (d. 507/1113).
3. Qāḍī Abū Bakr b. al-‘Arabī (d. 543/1143), one of Ghazālī's students from his days in Baghdad, makes mention of him in his *al-‘Awāsim min al-qawāsim* and his own autobiographical account of his voyages to acquire knowledge, *Tartīb al-riḥla*.
4. Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 571/1175), *Tabyīn kadhb al-muftarī* and *Tārīkh Dimashq*.
5. In Ibn Ṭufayl's (d. 581/1185) *Ḥayy bin Yaqẓān* and in Ibn Rushd's criticism we find mention of Ghazālī's works, but not his life.
6. Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201), *al-Muntaẓim fī tārīkh al-mulūk wal-umam*.
7. Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229), *Mu‘jam al-buldān*.
8. Ibn al-Athīr (d. 636/1239), *al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*.
9. Šibt Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 654/1257), *Mir‘āt al-zamān*.
10. al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277), *Ṭabaqāt*.
11. Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), *Wafayāt al-a‘yān wa-anbā’ abnā’ al-zamān*.
12. al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’* and *Tārīkh al-islām*.
13. al-Yafī‘ī (d. 768/1367), *Mir‘āt al-jinān*.
14. Abū al-Fidā’ Ismā‘īl b. ‘Alī (d. 731/1331), *Mukhtaṣar Abī Fidā’*.
15. Zayn al-Dīn ‘Umar b. al-Muẓaffar Ibn al-Wardī (d. 750/1349), *Tārīkh Ibn al-Wardī*.
16. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb b. ‘Alī al-Subkī (d. 771/1370), *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi‘iyya al-kubrā*.
17. Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), *al-Bidāya wal-nihāya*.
18. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Wāsiṭī (d. 776/1374), *al-Ṭabaqāt al-‘aliyya fī manāqib al-shāfi‘iyya*.
19. Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 790/1388), *al-‘Aqd al-mudhhab fī ṭabaqāt ḥamalāt al-madhhab*.
20. Taqī al-Dīn b. Qāḍī Shahba (d. 851/1447), *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi‘iyya*.

19. Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt* 6:201. See Muẓaffar Iqbal's "Visiting the Grave of al-Ghazālī" in this issue.

20. These sources are found in al-‘Uthmān, *Sīrat al-Ghazālī*, based on a compilation of important original biographical source material presented at the Ghazālī millenary 900 years after his birth, held in Damascus in 1961.

21. Ibn Taghrībīrdī (d. 874/1470), *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*.
22. al-‘Aynī (d. 855/1451), *‘Aqd al-jumān*.
23. al-Jāmī (d. 898/1492), *Nafahāt al-uns*.
24. Ṭāsh Kubrī Zāda (d. 962/1365), *Miftāḥ al-sa‘āda wa miṣbah al-siyāda*.
25. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafadī (d. 964/1367), *al-Wāfī bil-wafayāt*.
26. Abū Bakr b. Hidāyat Allāh al-Ḥusaynī (d. 1014/1605 or 6), *Ṭabaqāt Ibn Hidāyat Allāh*.
27. al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1621), *al-Kawākib al-durriyya fī tarājīm al-sāda al-ṣūfiyya*.
28. al-‘Aydārūs Bā ‘Alawī (d. 1038/1628), *Ta‘rīf al-aḥyā’ bi-faḍā’il al-Iḥyā’*.
29. Ibn al-‘Imad al-Ḥanbalī (d. 1089/1679), *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār man dhahab*.
30. Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1791), *Ithāf al-sāda al-muttaqīn bi-sharḥ Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*.

Ghazālī’s Autobiography

The earliest source on Ghazālī’s life is the autobiographical material that can be gleaned from *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (*Deliverance from Error*). A work such as this is of great historical value, despite the fact that it is not chronologically ordered. Another source is his correspondence, mostly in Persian, that was organized by an unknown compiler and published much later. This correspondence was not available to early biographers.²¹ Ghazālī wrote *al-Munqidh* to answer the question as to why he returned to teaching, among other epistemological issues:

You ask me why, after resigning at Baghdad a teaching post which attracted a number of hearers, I have, long afterward, accepted a similar one at Nishapur. Convinced as I am of the sincerity which prompts your inquiries, I proceed to answer them, invoking the help and protection of God.²²

Among the pertinent passages that deal with events in his life, he states:

The research to which I had devoted myself, the path which I had traversed

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21. This correspondence contains scant biographical details. Even those who are well-versed in Persian have ignored these as a source of biographical information. More recently they have been used by Frank Griffel in *Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*. See *Makātīb-i fārisī-yi Ghazzālī be-nām-i Fazā’il al-anām min rasā’il Ḥujjat al-Islām*, ed. ‘Abbās Iqbāl Āshtiyānī (Tehran: Kitāb Furūsh-i Ibn Sīnā, 1333 [1954]), English translation by Abdul Qayyum, *Letters of al-Ghazzali* (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1992). In German a landmark study of these letters is found in Dorothea Krawulsky, *Briefe und Reden des Abū Hāmid Muhammad al-Gazzālī* (Freiburg, Germany: Klaus Schwarz, 1971).
 22. *The Confessions of al-Ghazali*, trans. Claud Field (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, n.d.), 12.

in studying religious and speculative branches of knowledge, had given me a firm faith in three things—God, Inspiration, and the Last Judgment. These three fundamental articles of belief were confirmed in me, not merely by definite arguments, but by a chain of causes, circumstances, and proofs which it is impossible to recount. I saw that one can only hope for salvation by devotion and the conquest of one's passions, a procedure which presupposes renouncement and detachment from this world of falsehood in order to turn toward eternity and meditation on God. Finally, I saw that the only condition of success was to sacrifice honors and riches and to sever the ties and attachments of worldly life.²³

Here we see Ghazālī struggling internally, trying to save himself from his situation and looking more and more toward his state in the afterlife. There are Prophetic traditions that refer to the fate of insincere scholars who do not practice what they teach; they will be thrown into the hellfire.²⁴

Coming seriously to consider my state, I found myself bound down on all sides by these trammels. Examining my actions, the most fair-seeming of which were my lecturing and professorial occupations, I found to my surprise that I was engrossed in several studies of little value,²⁵ and profitless as regards my salvation. I probed the motives of my teaching and found that, in place of being sincerely consecrated to God, it was only actuated by a vain desire of honor and reputation. I perceived that I was on the edge of an abyss, and that without an immediate change I should be doomed to eternal fire. In these reflections I spent a long time. Still a prey to uncertainty, one day I decided to leave Baghdad and to give up everything; the next day I gave up my resolution. I advanced one step and immediately relapsed. In the morning I was sincerely resolved only to occupy myself with the future life; in the evening a crowd of material thoughts assailed and dispersed my resolutions. On the one side the world kept me bound to my post in the chains of covetousness, on the other side the voice of religion cried to me, “Up! Up! Your life is nearing its end, and you have a long journey to make. All your pretended knowledge is nothing but falsehood and fantasy. If you do not think now of your salvation, when will you think of it? If you do not break your chains today, when will you break them?” Then my resolve was strengthened, I wished to give up all and flee; but the Tempter, returning to the attack, said, “You are suffering from a transitory feeling; do not give way to it, for it will soon pass. If you obey it, if you give up this fine position, this honorable post exempt from trouble and rivalry, this seat of authority

23. Ibid., 44.

24. See book 1, §6 of the *Iḥyāʾ* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1346/1927), 1:58–82. In English see Nabih Amin Faris, *The Book of Knowledge: Being a Translation with Notes of the Kitāb al-ʿIlm of al-Ghazzālī's Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al Dīn* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1991), 154–220.

25. That is, little value to his life in the hereafter. Here he is examining the value of his teachings in light of what he is practicing. Also he is calling his sincerity into question, for if he wants God to accept these actions they have to be done for the sake of God alone.

safe from attack, you will regret it later on without being able to recover it.”²⁶

Thus I remained, torn asunder by the opposing forces of earthly passions and spiritual aspirations, for about six months from the month Rajab of the year 488 [1096]. At the close of them my will yielded and I gave myself up to destiny. God caused an impediment to chain my tongue and prevented me from lecturing. Vainly I desired, in the interest of my pupils, to go on with my teaching, but my mouth became dumb. The silence to which I was condemned cast me into a violent despair; my stomach became weak; I lost all appetite; I could neither swallow a morsel of bread nor drink a drop of water.

The enfeeblement of my physical powers was such that the doctors, despairing of saving me, said, “The mischief is in the heart, and has communicated itself to the whole organism; there is no hope unless the cause of his grievous sadness be arrested.”

Finally, conscious of my weakness and the prostration of my soul, I took refuge in God as a man at the end of himself and without resources. *He who hears the wretched when they cry* [Q 27:62] deigned to hear me; He made easy to me the sacrifice of honor, wealth, and family. I gave out publicly that I intended to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, while I secretly resolved to go to Syria, not wishing that the caliph (may God magnify him) or my friends should know my intention of settling in that country. I made all kinds of clever excuses for leaving Baghdad with the fixed intention of not returning there. The imams of Iraq criticized me with one accord. Not one of them could admit that this sacrifice had a religious motive, because they considered my position as the highest attainable in the religious community. *Behold how far their knowledge goes!* [Q 53:30]. All kinds of explanations of my conduct were forthcoming. Those who were outside the reaches of Iraq attributed it to the fear with which the government inspired me. Those who were on the spot and saw how the authorities wished to detain me, their displeasure at my resolution and my refusal of their request, said to themselves, “It is a calamity which one can only impute to a fate which has befallen the faithful and learned!”

At last I left Baghdad, giving up all my fortune. Only, as lands and property in Iraq can afford an endowment for pious purposes, I obtained a legal authorization to preserve as much as was necessary for my support and that of my children; for there is surely nothing more lawful in the world than that a learned man should provide sufficient to support his family. I then betook myself to Syria, where I remained for two years, which I devoted to retirement, meditation, and devout exercises. I only thought of self-improvement and discipline and of purification of the heart by prayer in going through the forms of devotion which the Sufis had taught me. I used to live a solitary life in the mosque of Damascus, and was in the habit of

26. This type of introspection and psychology can also be seen throughout the *Ihyāʾ*.

spending my days in the minaret [where he had a small room] after closing the door behind me.

From there I proceeded to Jerusalem, and every day secluded myself in the Sanctuary of the Rock. After that I felt a desire to accomplish the pilgrimage, and to receive a full effusion of grace by visiting Mecca, Medina, and the tomb of the Prophet (may the peace and blessings of God be upon him). After visiting the shrine of the Friend of God [Abraham], I went to the Hijaz. Finally, the longings of my heart and the prayers of my children brought me back to my country, although I was so firmly resolved at first never to revisit it. At any rate I meant, if I did return, to live there solitary and in religious meditation; but events, family cares, and vicissitudes of life changed my resolutions and troubled my meditative calm. However irregular the intervals which I could give to devotional ecstasy, my confidence in it did not diminish; and the more I was diverted by hindrances, the more steadfastly I returned to it.

Ten years passed in this manner. During my successive periods of meditation there were revealed to me things impossible to recount.²⁷

As we can see in the above account of the ten-year period, all ten years were not spent in Greater Syria; rather, he was only there for two years of this period. As we mentioned above, he spent the other eight years in his hometown of Ṭūs.

In Arabic literature as well as historical narratives there are many examples of autobiographical accounts that are not chronological, such as Usāma b. al-Munqidh's autobiography.²⁸ Similarly, a work can have literary and historical value, though it may be considered primarily a work of history. *Al-Aqd al-farīd* by Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, a history of al-Andalus set in verse, is one such example.

The language that Ghazālī utilizes in *al-Munqidh* is highly personal and typical of his other works; he even writes with a terse, laconic style, such as in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. Marmura notes,

Al-Ghazālī is a master of Arabic prose. His style, however, is very personal and highly idiomatic; it carries with it nuances that are difficult to recapture in a translation. As such, the difficulties it often poses are not so much due to lack of clarity. For the most part, his presentation of complex and subtle arguments is remarkable for its clarity. But there are also lapses. Ambiguities do occur. And there are times when what is stated is so condensed that its intention is not immediately clear.²⁹

27. *Confessions of al-Ghazali*, 45–49. The translation has been slightly modified.

28. Usama b. al-Munqidh, *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades*, trans. Philip K. Hitti and intro. Richard W. Bulliet (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

29. *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa: A Parallel English-Arabic text*, ed. and trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo: Brigham

‘Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, in his bibliographic study of Ghazālī’s works, *Muʿallafāt al-Ghazālī*, uses *al-Munqidh* as a guide to construct a chronology of Ghazālī’s works.³⁰ While the historical aspects of *al-Munqidh* are often debated, at the very least this work illustrates how Ghazālī wanted others to see him in this period. Ghazālī emphasized his personal crisis and analyzed himself on a psychological level. In addition, he writes a biting social commentary on the occupation of teachers, their social position, and civic duty. It is Ghazālī’s retrospective view, written many years after the crisis.

Ghazālī’s own assessment of the events as he lived them and later recorded them in *al-Munqidh* is of vital importance to understanding his crisis and personality, though it does not offer us a complete *raison d’être* of all his works during and after his crisis. Certainly the realization that he reached, that is, that he had to totally alter the course of his life and priorities, directly influenced his output.

Modern writers such as MacDonald firmly believe that *al-Munqidh* represents the true state of Ghazālī’s affairs. MacDonald states, “the result of a careful study of it has been to convince me of the essential truth of the picture which al-Ghazālī there gives us of his life.”³¹ McCarthy provides support and goes into great detail to prove the veracity of *al-Munqidh*, refutes the arguments against it, in his book *Freedom and Fulfillment*. He states in his introduction, “I see no reason why [the biographical passages from *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*] should not be accepted literally....”³²

Although Ghazālī stated clearly that he was going to hajj, according to his account of this event he went directly to Syria instead. He did perform hajj a year later and visited the holy places, in Jerusalem, Hebron, Mecca, and Medina. This strategy to prevent others from thwarting his plans to leave Baghdad altogether was unusual, as was his frank honesty in admitting it. Both serve to strengthen the case for Ghazālī’s portrayal of events in *al-Munqidh*. McCarthy states that Ghazālī had little choice in this matter given his position at that time: with so many people attached to him politically and as students, he would not have been allowed to leave had they known his true intention.

In her biography of Ghazālī, Margaret Smith writes, “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 min al-ḍalāl*].”³³ Nakamura says that *al-Munqidh* is “‘by and large genuine and reliable’ and

Young University Press, 1997), xxvii.

30. See al-Badawī, *Muʿallafāt*, 9–19.

31. MacDonald, “The Life of al-Ghazali,” n. 5.

32. McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfillment*, xxix and thereafter.

33. Margaret Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic* (London: Luzac, 1944), 23.

that his two crises are historical facts beyond doubt with no evidence to the contrary.”³⁴



Archeological site of ancient Ṭūs, 2004.
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Early Biographies of Ghazālī

Al-Fārisī

The oldest known biography of Ghazālī is that by ‘Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī (451–529/1059–1134), a student and contemporary of Ghazālī.³⁵ He does not include some of the details of Ghazālī’s life that we gather from other sources, namely his trip to Jurjān and the sequence of his leaving Baghdad to al-Shām (Greater Syria) and Mecca. Although this account is very sympathetic to the second half of his life (after his Sufi inclinations emerged),³⁶ it is quite critical of his early years, specifically the period at the Nizāmiyya in Baghdad. Al-Fārisī’s account portrays Ghazālī’s immersion in Sufism, highlighting the stark contrasts of before and after as of one who was asleep and then awakened.³⁷

34. Kojiro Nakamura, “An Approach to Ghazālī’s Conversion,” *Orient* 11 (1985): 49.

35. al-Fārisī’s work on Ghazālī in al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt* 6:203–14, and in al-‘Uthmān, *Sīrat al-Ghazālī*, 41–48.

36. See Nakamura, “An Approach,” 46–59.

37. This echoes a *ḥadīth* that says, “people are asleep until they die—then they awake.”

Al-Fārisī's account relates that the fear of God brought Ghazālī to his senses; he was saved from the clutches of materialism and gave up his wealth out of the fear of Almighty God. Due to its importance it is best to quote al-Fārisī's account in its entirety:

Abū l-Ḥasan 'Abd al-Ghāfir son of Ismā'īl, the Khaṭīb (the preacher) al-Fārisī said: The Khaṭīb of Nīsābūr, Muḥammad son of Muḥammad son of Muḥammad Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, the Proof of Islam [Ḥujjat al-Islām] and the Muslims, the Imam of the Imams of Religion, whose like eyes have not seen in eloquence and elucidation, and speech and thought, and acumen and natural ability, in his childhood in Ṭūs acquired some learning in jurisprudence from the Imām Aḥmad al-Rādḥakānī. Then he went to Nīsābūr where, with a group of youths from Ṭūs, he frequented the lectures of the Imām al-Ḥaramayn (the Imām of the two sanctuaries, i.e., Mecca and Medina, so called for his enforced sojourn there). He worked so hard and seriously that he finished his studies in a short time. He outstripped his fellows and mastered the Qur'ān, and became the best reasoner [*anzar*] of the men of his time and matchless among his fellows in the days of the Imām al-Ḥaramayn. The students used to derive profit from him, and he would instruct them and guide them and work hard himself (or: formulate his own independent judgments). He finally reached the point where he began to compose works. The Imām, despite his high rank and lofty diction and the speed of his flow in speech and discussion, did not have a sincere private regard for Ghazālī because of his dislike for his speed in expression and his natural ability, nor was he pleased by his literary undertakings, even though Ghazālī had been trained by him and was associated with him, as is not unknown regarding human nature; but he made an outward show of pride in him and esteem for his position, contrary to what he hid in his heart.³⁸ And Ghazālī continued thus until the end of the Imām's days.

Then Ghazālī left Nīsābūr and went to the 'Askar³⁹ and was officially (or: warmly) welcomed by Nizām al-Mulk. And the Master (i.e. Nizām) took an interest in him because of his high rank and prominence and his excellence in disputation and his command of expression. And His Excellency was the stopping-place of the ulema and the goal of the imams and the literary men. So there befell Ghazālī some fine encounters from contact with the imams and meeting tough adversaries and disputing with luminaries and arguing with the distinguished, and his name became known in distant lands. He took the fullest advantage of that until circumstances led to his being appointed to go to Baghdad to take charge of the teaching in the blessed Nizāmiyya School there. He went off to Baghdad and his teaching and disputation delighted everyone and he met no one like himself, and after holding the Imamate of Khurāsān he became the Imam of 'Irāq.

Then he looked into the science of the "fundamentals" (*'ilm al-uṣūl*, i.e., the

38. Clearly this is speculation on the part of al-Fārisī, as he could not have known what was hidden in the heart of al-Juwaynī.

39. A *mu'askar* is a camp-court—a political and military base.

roots, or bases, or sources, of jurisprudence) and when he had mastered them he composed some books on that science; and he revitalized the school (of jurisprudence: the Shāfi‘is) and wrote works on it; and he molded *al-khilāf*⁴⁰ and also composed new works on that. His rank and entourage in Baghdad became so great that it surpassed the entourage of the notables and the princes and the residence of the caliph. Then, from another aspect, the matter was turned around.

After studying the subtle sciences and applying himself to the books written about them, he was overwhelmed and followed the path of asceticism and godliness, and he gave up his entourage and cast away the rank he had attained to devote himself to the causes of piety and the provisions for the afterlife. So he left his occupations and repaired to the House of God and performed the Pilgrimage. Then he entered Damascus and remained in that region for nearly ten years,⁴¹ wandering about and visiting the venerated religious shrines, and he began to compose the renowned works to which no one had preceded him, such as *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*Ḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*) and the books abridged therefrom, such as *The Forty [Chapters]* (i.e., *al-Arbā‘īn fī uṣūl al-dīn*) and others of the treatises which, if one reflects on them, he will know the man’s place vis-à-vis the branches of learning.

He began to battle against the self and to regulate his character and to improve his qualities and to rectify his lifestyle. Thus the devil of frivolity and of seeking leadership and fame and of taking on bad qualities was transformed into serenity of soul and nobility of qualities and having done with [outward] forms and rites. He took on the apparel of the godly and reduced his hope and devoted his time to the guidance of men and to summoning them to what concerned them regarding the afterlife and to making the world and preoccupation with it hateful to those in via (i.e., to the afterlife), and to preparation for the departure to the everlasting abode and obedience to everyone in whom he saw a promise of or smelt the fragrance of [spiritual] succor or alertness to any glimmer of the lights of [mystical] vision, until he became pliant and supple regarding that.

Then he returned to his native land where he kept fast to his house, preoccupied with meditation, tenacious of his time, a godly goal and treasure for hearts to everyone who repaired to him and visited him. That went on for some time, and [his] works appeared and [his] books circulated. In his own day there appeared no opposition to what he was doing nor did anyone object to what he prescribed. Finally the office of Minister (Wazīr) came to the most venerable Fakhr al-Mulk⁴²—may God encompass him with His mercy! Khurāsān was adorned with the latter’s entourage and government. He had heard of and verified Ghazālī’s

40. *al-khilāf*, i.e., the branch dealing with differences in matters of jurisprudence.

41. As noted above and as will be shown below, this is incorrect. He only spent two years in the region and then headed back to Ṭūs.

42. McCarthy adds, “son of Nizām al-Mūlk,” Ghazālī’s old patron. Fakhr al-Mulk was assassinated by a Bāṭini/Isma‘īlī in 500/1106.

position and rank and the perfection of his superiority and his standing and the purity of his belief and his social intercourse. So he sought a blessing from him and had him brought and listened to what he had to say. Then he asked Ghazālī not to let his breaths and useful lessons remain sterile, with no one profiting from them or learning from their lights, and he went all out in importuning and suggesting until Ghazālī agreed to go forth. He was transported to Nisābūr—and the lion was absent from his lair, and the matter was hidden in the veiled and secret decree of God. Then Ghazālī was invited to teach in the blessed Nizāmiyya School [of Nisābūr]—God grant it length of days! He could not but yield to his master. By bringing forth that with which he had busied himself he aimed at guiding the trained (i.e., the educated, those with learning) and benefiting the seekers [of learning] without going back to what he had been divested of, viz. seeking honor and wrangling with his peers and condemning the headstrong.

How often was he attacked by opposition and defamation and calumny regarding what he did not or did and slander and vilification: but he was unaffected by it and did not busy himself with answering the slanderers, nor did he manifest any distress at the calumny of the confused (or: the muddle-headed; or: the scheming). Indeed, I often visited him, and I did not find in him what I had formerly been familiar with in his regard, viz. maliciousness (or: peevishness) and making people uneasy and regarding them disdainfully and looking down upon them out of haughtiness and arrogance and being dazzled by his own endowment of skill in speech and thought and expression, and his quest of glory and high status: he had become the exact opposite and had been cleansed of those impurities. I used to think that he was wrapped in the garment of constraint (or: affectation) and “blessed” by what he had achieved (the phrase is ambiguous: it perhaps has the nuance of “having his head turned by good fortune”). Then I realized, after reflection and examination, that the matter was not as I thought, and that the man had recovered from madness.

He related to us on certain nights how his circumstances had been from the beginning of his manifest following of the path of godliness and the victory of the mystical state over him after his delving into the sciences and his behaving arrogantly toward all by virtue of his [superiority in] discourse (or: arguing), and the readiness with which God favored him in the acquisition of the various kinds of knowledge, and his capability for investigation and speculation until he became dissatisfied with preoccupation with the sciences alien to conduct and he reflected on the outcome and on what was profitable and useful regarding the afterlife. He had begun in the company of al-Fāramdhī and learned from him the beginning of the Way, and he followed what he suggested to him, viz. the performance of the offices of worship and intentness on works of supererogation and seeking to practice *dhikr* (remembrance of God; or the practice so designated) continuously and assiduity and diligence in the quest for salvation until he traversed those steep paths and undertook those hardships—but he did not attain the goal of his questing.

Then he related that he reviewed the sciences and waded into the [various] branches and applied anew his assiduity and diligence to the books on the subtle sciences, and he so acquired their interpretation that their doors were opened to him. For a while he remained preoccupied with their details and the counterbalancing of the proofs and the different sides of the problems. Then he related that there was opened for him a door of fear to such an extent that it distracted him from everything and compelled him to abandon all else with the result that it became easy for him, and so on and so on until he became fully practiced [in religious matters] and truths were manifest to him and what we used to think was manipulation and put-on became [his] nature and ascertainment (conviction). That was a sign of the beatitude decreed for him by God.

Then we asked him how he had come to wish to leave his house and to return to what he was summoned to, viz. the business of Nisābūr. In defense of that he said: According to my religion I could not conceivably hold back from the summons and the utility of benefiting the seekers [of knowledge]. It was indeed imperative for me to disclose the truth and to speak of it and to call to it—and he was truthful in that.

Then he forsook that before being himself forsaken and returned to his house. He set up nearby a school (*madrasa*) for the seekers of knowledge and a place of sojourn (*khānqāh*: a kind of monastic dwelling) for the Sufis. He apportioned his time to the tasks of those present, such as the recital of the Qurʾān and keeping company with the men of hearts (Sufis, or, Sufi masters) and sitting down to teach, so that not a single one of his moments or of those with him was profitless. [This went on] until the eye of time attained him and the days begrudged him to the men of his age. Then [God] translated him to His gracious proximity after his endurance of the varied attacks and opposition of his adversaries and his being led to kings.

And God protected him and preserved him and guarded him from being seized by vexing hands or from having his religion defiled by any slips. The conclusion of his affair was his applying himself to the Tradition[s] of the Elect—God’s blessing and peace be upon him!—and frequenting the company of those devoted to it (i.e., *ḥadīth*) and reading (or: studying) the two *Ṣaḥīḥs* of al-Bukhārī and Muslim,⁴³ who are the Proof of Islām. Had he lived, he would have outstripped everyone in that discipline in a small number of the days in which he would have made every effort to acquire it. Doubtless he had heard Traditions in former days, and at the end of his life he busied himself with hearing them, but he did not happen to relate them. There was no disadvantage (or: harm) in what he left behind him of books written on the fundamentals (*uṣūl*) and the branches (*furūʿ*) [of jurisprudence] and all the other kinds [of books] which immortalize his memory, and it is owned by all the students who have profited from them that he did not leave his like after him.

He passed to the mercy of God on Monday the fourteenth of Jumada II, in

43. McCarthy adds that these are the two “sound” (collections of sound traditions), compiled by the authors mentioned.

the year 505 (Dec. 18, 1111). He was buried in the outskirts of the citadel of Ṭabarān. And God favors him with various marks of esteem in his afterlife, just as He favored him with various kinds of learning in his life here below. He left only daughters. He had of the means of subsistence, by inheritance and by his earnings, what provided him with a sufficiency and the support of his household and his children. He was not at ease with (or: beholden to) anyone regarding temporal (secular) affairs; wealth had been offered to him, but he did not accept it and shunned it and was content with the amount which would preserve his religion (i.e., keep him independent) and with which he would not need to address himself to asking and receiving from others.⁴⁴



He was criticized for his errors in the Arabic grammar of his speeches, and he admitted that he was not among the well-trained in the literary arts, but [what he knew] was suitable for his purposes and he was able to compose speeches, explain texts in an easy manner that the literati and grammarians were unable to match, and he gave permission to those who find an error in usage to fix it and to excuse him, because his concern was for terms and definitions more than for the words and their arrangement.

What riled [scholars] was his inclusion of unpleasant Persian expressions in his works, including the *Kimyā' al-sa'ādāt*, [*Ihyā'*] *al-ulūm*, and the commentary on some of the [Qur'ānic] *suras* and the [replies to] queries that are not consistent with Islamic law and evident Islamic principles. It is preferable—the truth is worthy of being stated—to not write about it and to avoid explicating it, as the common folk may not have the principles of creed fortified by proof and evidence. When they read (lit. hear) any of this they would imagine what is harmful to their doctrine and will attribute it to the school of thought of the ancients (the philosophers).

The impartial [reader], if he were to reconsider his (Ghazālī's) writing would know that most of what he mentioned, intimated, and alluded to was what the [Islamic] *shar'īa* has indicated, though not declared [outright]. Similar examples [of Ghazālī's controversial statements are found] in the statements of leaders (lit. shaykhs) of the *ṭarīqa*, as intimated and declared clearly in disparate [texts]. [In the] statements [of the shaykhs] there are no terms that allow any facet of doubt; all its facets are in accord with the doctrines of people of the [Muslim] nation. It is incumbent to consider and understand them (these statements) only in accord with what is agreed upon; one should not get involved in refutations if he is able to clearly show a facet that is correct with what is in agreement with fundamental principles. [On occasion] some explanation is needed to expose it (i.e. that it is in accord with *sharī'a*). It

44. McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfillment*, xiv–xx. Note that this translation has been slightly altered. It is based on al-Subkī's quote of al-Fārīsī's account of the entire biography of Ghazālī, whose account is no longer available except in summary form in the above quote.

would have been preferable to avoid any mention as we stated. It should not be [necessary for] every event and discovery to be exposed (spoken of); on the contrary, most things that are realized [should be] hidden and not spoken of. On this path proceeded (lit. stepped) the first [generation], and the pious predecessors trod within the bounds of [Islamic] law in order to protect the milestones of Islam from the defamation of slander and scoffing of heretics and unbelievers, and God is the one who leads to correctness (proper actions and understandings).⁴⁵

It has been verified that he completed a study⁴⁶ of *Sunan Abū Dāwūd* at the hands of al-Ḥākim ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Ḥākimī al-Ṭūsī, however I was unable to find documentation. He also studied many *ḥadīths* at the hands of jurists. What I have been able to find documentation for is what he related of the book on the birth of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, which was authored by Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ‘Amr b. Abī ‘Āṣim al-Shaybānī [chain to author’s son]. Ghazālī narrates by audition (lit. heard it) from Shaykh Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Khuwārī—*khuwār* Ṭabarān [an area in Ṭūs] with his two sons, al-shaykhayn ‘Abd al-Jābar and ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd and a group of jurists. He narrated: “It has been reported to us by the Shaykh Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Khuwārī, Abū Bakr b. al-Ḥārith al-Asbahānī informed us, Abū Muḥammad b. Ḥayyān informed us, Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ‘Amr b. Abī ‘Āṣim b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Mundhir al-Khawārizmī informed us, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Abī Thābit narrated to us, al-Zubayr b. Mūsā narrated to us, on the authority of Abū al-Ḥuwarīth, who said I heard ‘Abd al-Mālik b. Marwān [say]: I asked Qatāt b. Āshim al-Kanānī, “Are you greater (meaning older) or the Messenger of Allāh, may God bless him and grant him peace?” He replied: “The Messenger of Allāh is greater (meaning in station) than me and I am older (in age) than him. The Messenger of Allah, may God bless him and grant him peace, was born in the Year of the Elephant.” And the rest of the book has documentation

45. Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt* 6:211–12. What lies below the ornamental spacers is my own translation, this section having been omitted by McCarthy.

46. To answer critics who claim that Ghazālī did not study *ḥadīth* and that he was without an *isnād* (chain of narrators going back to the Prophet), al-Fārīsī lists reports that he had heard and states that he made a concerted effort to track down the *isnāds* that Ghazālī had narrated. This is an instance of such practice, and it is important because it shows that for a scholar of Ghazālī’s caliber and knowledge it would have been impossible for him to ignore this science. Thus, without question, Ghazālī had a very good knowledge of *ḥadīth* sciences; this is quite clear from his works on *fiqh* as well as *uṣūl al-fiqh* (theory of jurisprudence). In these works he avoided weak *ḥadīth* and only used them in the genre of *wa‘z* literature, as was quite common. Even Ibn al-Jawzī, who was among the fiercest critics of Ghazālī’s use of these weak *ḥadīth*, did in fact use them in his own books such as *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*. It is true that Ghazālī did not delve deeply into the *ḥadīth* sciences, for he concentrated his efforts elsewhere, where he felt the need was greater and his contribution would be more beneficial.

on [Ghazālī's] study of it.⁴⁷

Ibn al-ʿArabī

Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn al-ʿArabī⁴⁸ (468–543/1075–1148), a slightly later scholar and a student of Ghazālī, includes some biographical remarks on him in *al-ʿAwāsim min al-qawāsim*. Ibn al-ʿArabī was among the first to commit his criticism of Ghazālī to writing. Ghazālī certainly had other critics during his lifetime, but none of their criticisms directly reach us in written form.⁴⁹ Ibn al-ʿArabī was known to harshly criticize anyone with whom he disagreed; he called the litterateur Ibn Qutayba an ignorant person (*jāhil*), and the historian al-Maṣʿūdī even worse.⁵⁰

Because Ibn al-ʿArabī was a student of the “old” Ghazālī, he may have felt that he needed to inform others about the “new” Ghazālī who had gone too far into Sufism; perhaps he wanted to distance himself and warn others by attacking Ghazālī even more harshly than others.⁵¹ Ibn al-ʿArabī's father was on a mission to ask scholars of the Islamic East for a *fatwā* (scholarly legal ruling) to fight against the “party kings” (*mulūk al-ṭawāʾif*) of Andalusia who were allied with Christians against the Muslims. Ghazālī did in fact write the *fatwā* that Ibn al-ʿArabī's father sought on behalf of Yūsuf b. Tāshfīn,⁵² the leader of the Murābiṭs (r. 457–528/1065–1134). Ibn al-ʿArabī was initially

47. Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt* 6:212–14. My translation.

48. This is not Muḥyī al-Dīn b. al-ʿArabī, the famous Sufi author of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* and *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, though they are both of Andalusian origin. Also see A. M. al-Ṣaghīr for a discussion of the political dimension of Ibn al-ʿArabī's criticism of Ghazālī's Sufism in *Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī: Dirasāt fī fikrihi wa ʿasrihi wa taʾthīrihi* (Rabat: Munshirāt Kulīyyat al-ʿĀdāb wal-ʿUlūm al-Insāniyya bil-Rabāṭ, Muhammad V University, 1988), 173–93.

49. Except in Ghazālī's answers to critics of his *Iḥyāʾ*, entitled *al-Imlaʾ fī ishkalāt al-Iḥyāʾ*, which in some editions is published in the final volume of the *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*.

50. He calls him a sly innovator (*al-mubtadīʾ al-muḥtāl*). See his *al-ʿAwāsim min al-qawāsim*, ed. M.U. al-Khatīb, M.M. al-Iṣṭanbūlī, et al under the guidance of M.J. Ghāzī (Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1994), 261–62.

51. Though this sounds like reverse logic, in this context it is the correct logical assumption by Ibn al-ʿArabī.

52. Yūsuf b. Tāshfīn (d. 453/1061) was asked by the people of Andalusia for help during the era of the party kings. Ibn Tāshfīn needed a *fatwā* to fight against Muslims who were receiving help from the Christians and fighting their fellow Muslims in Andalusia. Ibn al-ʿArabī's father died in the Islamic East and did not personally deliver the *fatwā* to Ibn Tāshfīn.

impressed with Ghazālī, until his turn to Sufism.⁵³

Ibn al-ʿArabī rebukes Ghazālī for several reasons: first, because Ibn al-ʿArabī believed that there was a connection between Sufism and the Ismāʿīlīs/Bāṭinīs,⁵⁴ and envisioned Sufism as a foreign element (perhaps even as a form of Neoplatonism) that might lead to the introduction of Ismāʿīlī/Bāṭinī thought into Sunnī Islam, and feared that some might convert to it. The second is Ghazālī's usage of *ḥadīths*⁵⁵ with weak narrations, particularly in the *Iḥyāʾ*.⁵⁶ A third is Ghazālī's criticism of scholars of his time, as mentioned in the *Iḥyāʾ*.⁵⁶ This criticism of scholars did not go unnoticed during Ghazālī's time. Ghazālī himself had to write a defense of the *Iḥyāʾ*,⁵⁷ as noted. Ibn al-ʿArabī did not envision droves of Muslims taking on mystical tendencies, but he did fear a wholesale Muslim conversion to Shīʿī Islam. Given these concerns, it was not strange to see the Islamic West burning copies of the *Iḥyāʾ* along with works

53. al-Ṣaghīr, *Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī*, 175–77. Ibn al-ʿArabī criticized his shaykh, urging him to stop this trend toward Ismāʿīlism, according to the belief of those of 'puritan' faith, any small innovation would lead to heresy. He saw Sufism as an innovation of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, who were Ismāʿīlī; and believed that it was part of an overall plan by Ismāʿīlīs to corrupt 'true' Islam.

54. Note on usage: in this context the terms Ismāʿīlī, Bāṭinī, and Shīʿī are used interchangeably, because at the time they did refer to the same thing—a perceived united front coming from the West assaulting Sunnī Islam in the East. According to al-Shahrastānī in his book *al-Milal wal-nihal*, ed. Amir Ali Mahna and Ali Hasan Faʿour (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifā, 1998), 229, in the section on Bāṭiniyya: "In Iraq they are called *al-bāṭiniyya*, *al-qarāmīta*, and *al-mazdakiyya*, and in Khurāsān *al-taʿlimiyya* and *al-mulḥida*. They say: 'we are Ismāʿīlī because we differentiate from the Shīʿī sects with this name and this [particular] person.'" Note that Ghazālī refers to them according to how they were understood in the given locale for whom he wrote his books: for example, in *al-Mustazharī*, written for Iraq, they are referred to as Bāṭiniyya.

55. Some of the *ḥadīth* used by Ghazālī are weak, and some are even fabricated. According to Ibn al-Jawzī as noted below, Ghazālī was a 'nighttime woodcutter' when it came to *ḥadīth* sciences. However, among scholars of *ḥadīth*, there are two prevailing schools of thought: one that allows for the use of weak *ḥadīth* for *waʿz* (sermons), but not in jurisprudence or other subjects; and another school (including many Ḥanbalīs, like Ibn al-Jawzī) that does not allow their use at all, under any circumstance. Ghazālī was aware of this; to prove that his use of these *ḥadīth* was conscious, he used only strong *ḥadīths* in other works; see his *al-Mustasfa min ʿilm al-ʿuṣūl*. He says of himself in *al-Imlaʾ fī isḥkālāt al-Iḥyāʾ* that his knowledge of *ḥadīth* is *biḍāʿatī muzjā* (a mixed trade).

56. See *Iḥyāʾ* 1:58–82 and Faris, *The Book of Knowledge*, 154–220.

that were considered heretical.⁵⁷

It is best at this point to quote the sample of a passage from the *Iḥyāʾ* that likely offended Ghazālī's critics. This passage has drawn the particular ire of scholars who follow the Mālikī school of jurisprudence.

It is said that Yāḥyā b. Yazīd al-Nawfal [d. 258/872] wrote to Mālik b. Anas, "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, and may God bless His Messenger, Muḥammad, and give him peace in the former and the latter [worlds]; from Yāḥyā b. Yazīd b. 'Abd al-Mālik to Mālik b. Anas; and to come to the point: It has come to my attention that you wear fine clothes, eat thin bread, and sit on a soft seat. You have put a doorkeeper at your door and you have sat in the seat of learning. You have drawn mounted [visitors] to you; people have come to you from [various places] and have taken you for a leader (*imām*) and were pleased with your speech. Then fear God, O Mālik, and be humble. I have written you this letter of advice which no one except God has read. Now may peace be with you."

[In reply] Mālik wrote to him, "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. May God bless Muḥammad his family, and his Companions, and give them peace; from Mālik b. Anas to Yāḥyā b. Yazīd. May the peace of God be upon you. And now to continue, your letter has reached me; and I am in accord with your advice, sympathy, and manners. May God grant you the enjoyment of piety and reward you with good for your advice, and I ask success from God. There is no strength and no power except with God, He who is Exalted and Mighty.

"As for what you mentioned to me [in your letter], I do eat thin bread and wear fine clothes and seclude myself [from people] and sit on a soft chair. We do that and seek God's forgiveness. God has said, *Say, who has prohibited God's goodly raiment, and the healthful viands that He has provided for His servants?* [Q 7:30]. Really I know that it is better to leave that than to enter into it. And do not cut us off from your correspondence, and we shall not leave you out of ours. [Now may the] peace [of God be upon you]."

Then notice the impartiality of Mālik, for he avowed that it is better to forsake that than to enter into it, though he gave a legal opinion that it is permissible. Concerning both of them he spoke the truth. Then one like Mālik, whose soul permits [him] to be fair and avow such advice, is strong [enough] to stop at the borders of what is permissible so that [it] does not carry him to hypocrisy and dissimulation and trespass to what is disliked. As for another person, he would not be able to do so. It is a grave danger to incline toward delight in what is permissible, and it is remote from fear and reverence. Now a unique quality of the scholars of God (*'ulamāʾ Allāh*) is reverence, while a unique quality of reverence is to be well away from places that are suspected of danger.⁵⁸

57. al-Ṣaghīr states that the incident of book burning is in need of re-evaluation.

58. See Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 1:67. In English see Faris, *The Book of Knowledge*, 177–79 (the translation has been slightly modified).

Ibn ‘Asākir

The celebrated historian Ibn ‘Asākir (i.e., ‘Alī b. Ḥasan b. Hibat Allāh b. ‘Abdallāh; 499–571/1105–1176) wrote *Tabyīn kadhīb al-muftarī fī-mā nusiba ilā al-Imām Abī al-Ḥasan al-Āsh‘arī*,⁵⁹ in which he repeats al-Fārisī’s account, adding only a reported dream⁶⁰ followed by mention of a section of Ghazālī’s Book 2 of the *Ihyā’*, the book on theology and doctrine. In Ibn ‘Asākir’s book *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*⁶¹—a grand history of Damascus in eighty volumes—he mentions an abbreviated version of al-Fārisī’s account. He also mentions that Ghazālī studied *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* at the hands of Abū Sahl Muḥammad b. ‘Ubaydallāh al-Ḥafaṣī.⁶²

Ibn Ṭufayl

Ibn Ṭufayl’s comments, which are included in the introduction to his philosophical treatise *Ḥayy bin Yaqzān*, provide some insight into the spread of knowledge from the Islamic East to the Islamic West but little biographical information on Ghazālī. He states:

In his *Gems of the Qur’ān* Ghazālī said that he had written certain esoteric books which contain the unvarnished truth. So far as I know no such book has reached Spain, [sic] although some claims that certain books we have received are in fact this hidden corpus. Nothing could be further from the truth. The books in question are *Modes of Awareness* and *The Smoothing, the Breath of Life, and Related Problems*. Granted that these books contain many hints, they still add little to what is disclosed in his better known works.⁶³

Already we can see that forgeries and books attributed to Ghazālī were beginning to spread and had reached the Islamic West.

Ibn al-Jawzī

Abū al-Faraj ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad Ibn Ja‘far al-Jawzī al-

59. Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn kadhīb al-muftarī fī-mā nusiba ilā al-Imām Abī al-Ḥasan al-Āsh‘arī* (Damascus: al-Qudsī, 1347/1928), 291–306. Ghazālī belonged to the school of Ash‘arī theology; this has been questioned lately by Nakamura and Frank. See the section on Ash‘ariyya online, www.ghazali.org/site/asharism.htm.

60. In al-Sāwī’s dream, he read *Qawā‘id al-‘aqā‘id* (from Ghazālī’s *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*) in the presence of the Messenger Muḥammad, who was pleased with it. Al-Subkī’s account also includes additional dream reports.

61. See Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1997), 55:200–204.

62. Ibid., 55:200, and al-Badawī, *Mu‘allaḥāt*, 504.

63. Lenn Goodman, *Ibn Ṭufayl’s Ḥayy bin Yaqzān* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972), 102.

Qurayshī al-Bakrī (510–597/1126–1200) includes a biography⁶⁴ of Ghazālī in his history, *al-Muntaẓim fī tārikh al-mulūk wal-umam*. He is the first to mention that Ghazālī was born in 450 and that he entered Baghdad in 484. He is the only biographer to note that after leaving teaching Ghazālī made his living as a scribe, which is an odd claim. He mentions only two books by Ghazālī, *al-Munkhūl* and the *Ihyāʾ*. His summary account largely follows that of al-Fārisī; it is critical of Ghazālī's Sufism and his use of weak *ḥadīth*, though the tone is not hostile. He calls him *ḥaṭṭāb al-layl*, “a nighttime woodcutter” in *ḥadīth* sciences, that is, one who might pick up a poisonous reptile, inadvertently thinking that it is wood when in fact it could bring about his demise. This account set the standard for many critics, including Ibn Taymiyya, another Ḥanbalī jurist. Ibn al-Jawzī praises Ghazālī's other works as original and well organized; moreover, he wrote two books about the *Ihyāʾ*, one of which is a summary and elucidation of some of its points entitled *Minhāj al-qāsidīn*⁶⁵ and the other a critical review of the *Ihyāʾ*.⁶⁶

Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī

Abū ‘Abdallāh Yāqūt b. ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1228) includes a brief biography of Ghazālī in his geographical dictionary *Muʿjam al-buldān*, in the entry on Ṭūs.⁶⁷ It is a summary account—just two paragraphs on Ghazālī's life, and includes a eulogy in poetry (*riṭhāʾ*). It follows Ibn al-Jawzī's account of events without any criticism and is quite neutral. He also states that Ghazālī was born in 450, died in 505, and was buried in Ṭabarān. He is the first to mention that Ghazālī went to Alexandria and that he lived in (or near its) lighthouse.

Sibt ibn al-Jawzī

Abū al-Muẓaffar Yūsuf Sibt ibn al-Jawzī⁶⁸ (d. 654/1257) quotes from his grandfather Ibn al-Jawzī's account with some direct quotes from al-Fārisī's account. He (incorrectly) mentions that Ghazālī lived in Damascus for ten

64. Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓim fī tārikh al-mulūk wal-umam* (Hyderabad: Maṭbaʿa Dāʾirat al-Maʾārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1359/1940), 9:168–70. The Hyderabad edition notes the entry for the death notices for the year 505.

65. In two volumes; it was further summarized by al-Maqdisī into one smaller volume, which is now a widely circulated book under the title *Mukhtaṣar Minhāj al-qāsidīn*.

66. Titled *Iʿlām al-aḥyāʾ bi-ighlāṭ al-Ihyāʾ*; he also reports about it in his book *Talbīs iblīs*.

67. al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, 4:55–57.

68. Sibt ibn al-Jawzī, *Mirʾāt al-zamān* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1907), 25–6, and Musfir S. Al-Ghāmadi (eds.), *Mirʾāt al-zamān fī tarikh al-āʿyān* (Mecca: Jāmiʿat Umm al-Qurā, 1987), 2:548–55.

years and that he finished the *Ihyā'* there. He also states that Ibn 'Asākir reported that Ghazālī arrived at Damascus in 487. He lists six of his books: *al-Basīl*, *al-Wasīl*, *al-Wajīz*, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, [*Bidāyat*] *al-hidāya*, *Sharḥ aḥwāl al-bāṭiniyya*, and *al-Mustasfā*. He mentions that Ghazālī wrote thirty works (though we now know he wrote more). He ends his biography with a quote of Ghazālī's poetry. (Later it was established that Ghazālī did not himself write any poetry, although he was well versed and quoted it to Ibn al-'Arabī in answer to some of his questions.)

Ibn Khallikān

Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Abū Bakr Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), in his biographical dictionary *Wafāyāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' al-zamān* includes a brief, neutral biography of Ghazālī, in which he mentions a small list of works as well as poetry attributed to Ghazālī and the eulogy quoted by Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī. He mentions that Ghazālī arrived at Baghdad and was teaching at the Nizāmiyya in 484/1091 and left the city in Dhū l-Qa'da 488/November 1095. He adds to al-Ḥamawī's account that Ghazālī lived in Alexandria for a time and that he intended to travel to the Muslim West to meet with Yūsuf b. Tāshfin of Marrakesh; however, on hearing news of the latter's demise, Ghazālī changed his mind and returned home. Significant here is his mention of a list of Ghazālī's works:

He composed instructive works on various branches of knowledge, the most celebrated of which are the *Wasīl* (*Medium Treatise*), the *Wajīz* (*Compendium*), the *Khulāṣa fil-fiqh* (*Quintessence of Jurisprudence*), and the *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-Dīn* (*Revival of the Sciences of Religion*). This last is a most valuable and comprehensive work. To this we may add the *Mustasfā* (*Chosen Extract*), treating the principles of jurisprudence, and which he completed on the sixth of Muḥarram, 503 AH (August 1109 CE); a treatise on polemics entitled *al-Manḥūl wal-muntaḥal* (*Doctrines Falsely Attributed to Others and Falsely Claimed by Some*); the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*; the *Maḥakk al-naẓar* (*Whetstone of Reflection*); the *Mi'yār al-'ilm* (*Weighing-scale of Science*); the *Maqāṣid [al-falāsifa]* (*Tendencies of the Philosophers*); the *Maznūn bihī 'alā ghayrī ahlih* (*Doctrines Wrongly Attributed*); the *Maṣṣad al-asnā* (*Highest Aim*), being an explanation of the excellent names of God; the *Mishkāt al-anwār* (*Niche for Lights*); the *Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (*Deliverer from Error*); and the *Ḥaqīqat al-Qawlayn* (*Truth of the Two Sayings*). His works are very numerous, and all of them are instructive.⁶⁹

Al-Dhahabī

69. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafāyāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' al-zamān*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1971), 4:216–19. English translation by Baron M. de Slane (Paris: Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1843), 2:622–23, with some modifications.

In his biographical dictionary *Siyar a'lam al-nubalā'*, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmād b. 'Uthmān al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) presents a biography of Ghazālī that is generous in volume, neither a scathing criticism nor full of praise. He describes Ghazālī as of vast knowledge (*al-Imām al-baḥr*), the wonder of the ages (*'Ujūbat al-zamān*), the author of many works (*Ṣaḥīb al-taṣānīf*), and of extreme intelligence (*al-dhikā' al-mufrat*).⁷⁰ Although his own commentary on Ghazālī is neutral, he does quote a number of sources that are downright vicious toward Ghazālī at a personal level. He also praised Ghazālī's intelligence and sincerity (*kibār al-adhkiyā' wa khiyār al-mukhlisīn*)—without which he could not have survived the study of philosophy with his faith intact.

Al-Dhahabī had wide and varied sources to draw upon, some of which were from the time of Ghazālī. Many of these original sources are lost to us, and so are known only through al-Dhahabī's quotations. It is important to note that al-Dhahabī was a scholar of *ḥadīth* and as such was meticulous in how he evaluated personalities; he was one of the masters of *al-jarḥ wal-ta'dīl*, a branch of *ḥadīth* science that rates narrators by their reliability and truthfulness. He collected what everyone, particularly *ḥadīth* scholars, had said about Ghazālī with regard to *ḥadīth*, as this was his interest. Naturally he was partial to *ḥadīth* scholars, as they were the figures that he trusted. However, he was not a blind imitator, nor did he copy them without providing the reader with some rebuttal if any was needed or if the scholar he quoted went to extremes in his criticism.

For instance, al-Dhahabī writes “As'ad al-Mahyani [d. 527/1133] said: I heard Abū Ḥāmid [al-Ghazālī] saying ‘I travelled to Abū Naṣr al-Isma'īlī in Jurjān and I stayed until I wrote down *al-Ta'liqa* (lit., Notes, i.e. on jurisprudence) from him.’” He also quotes Ibn al-'Arabī as saying that “our Shaykh al-Ghazālī swallowed philosophy and could not regurgitate it,” meaning that it stayed in his system. Ibn al-'Arabī and Ibn Taymiyya disagreed with Ghazālī; they considered anything foreign unnecessary. If it is not explicitly in the Qur'ān and Sunna, they do not want it. For them, the famous saying *al-ḥikma ḍallat al-mu'min* (“Wisdom is the lost treasure of the believer”) is invalid. For example, Ibn Taymiyya wrote a multi-volume work against Greek logic alone,⁷¹ not to mention his criticism of other branches of philosophy. Al-Dhahabī quotes many other scholars as well as the historians mentioned above.

Al-Yāfi'i

'Abdallāh b. As'ad b. 'Alī al-Yāfi'i al-Yamānī (d. 768/1367) wrote a history,

70. Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lam al-nubalā'* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1996), 19:322–346, no. 204.

71. Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar' ta'arūḍ al-'aql wal-naql*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, 11 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kumūz al-Adabiyya, [1980]).

Mir'āt al-jinān wa 'ibrat al-yaqzān.⁷² In al-Yāfi'ī's lengthy account—nearly ten pages in length—he defends Ghazālī. Again he makes use of earlier sources, including that of al-Fārisī. It is noteworthy that al-Yāfi'ī refutes claims that the *Iḥyā'* was written and taught in Damascus. He says that it would have been impossible to write the *Iḥyā'* in two, three, or four years, and that it would take much longer to write the work.⁷³

Al-Subkī

A final account from this period is that of al-Subkī⁷⁴ (d. 771/1370), known for his grand biography of famous Shāfi'ī jurists. He naturally had a good bit to say about Ghazālī, as the latter was considered a Shāfi'ī luminary. Al-Subkī's work is by far the most comprehensive biography of Ghazālī up until the time of Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī in the thirteenth/eighteenth century.

In his biography, al-Subkī states that he wants to be fair⁷⁵ with Ghazālī by quoting accounts of both admirers and detractors. He details Ghazālī's life and lists many of the legends that had grown around his life, rejecting some as false. Some of the false reports, for example that Ghazālī spent twenty years in Damascus, could not be verified and were thus discredited.⁷⁶ Al-Subkī's account is generally positive and, interestingly, does not quote from Ghazālī's *al-Munqidh*, though he does quote al-Fārisī's account in full. In fact, his citation of al-Fārisī's report is the only complete source we have for that firsthand report.⁷⁷

Al-Subkī's account does not address any of the details of Ghazālī's life about which there is some debate. This is where *al-Munqidh* offers unique insights into the psychological dimensions of Ghazālī's personality.⁷⁸ Al-Subkī's

72. 'Abdallāh b. As'ad b. Alī al-Yāfi'ī al-Yamānī, *Mir'āt al-jinān wa 'ibrat al-yaqzān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1997), 3:136–46.

73. Ibid., 3:111.

74. Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt* 6:191–389.

75. Ibid., 6:203–204.

76. Ibid., 6:197–198. His teacher, al-Dhahabī, mentions that Ghazālī stayed in Greater Syria for twenty years (!); when al-Subkī checked Ibn 'Asākir, he could not find the quotation and thus rejected the report.

77. Others have it in a condensed and reworded format. See Ibrāhīm al-Ṣarīfīnī's condensed version of al-Fārisī's *al-Siyāq li-tārīkh Nishāpūr* entitled *al-Muntakhab min al-siyāq li-tārīkh Nishāpūr* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1993).

78. Although *al-Munqidh* was written in retrospect, toward the end of Ghazālī's life, it should not be dismissed as a simple conversion narrative or autobiographical sketch similar to Ibn Sīnā's account or even Ibn Khaldūn's longer autobiography; rather, it should be seen as a multifaceted work on the lessons of life, on a par with, if not superior

biography became the de facto standard used by all later scholars of Ghazālī.

Later Biographies

Al-Subkī's account marks the end of the early sources for Ghazālī's biography. From here on the biographers offer little additional information. They are, however, still valuable as sources of information which we hope to study later in some detail, along with al-Subkī's account. From the eighth/fourteenth century on, biographers quoted the sources mentioned above but added very little of substance until Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1791), who has nothing but praise for Ghazālī in his introduction to his supercommentary on the *Iḥyā'*.⁷⁹ His admiration, even love, for Ghazālī is the most prominent feature of the work. Al-Zabīdī cites all the historians mentioned above and numerous other accounts. This serves to inform the reader of the importance of Zabīdī's contribution; his is the first major commentary on the entire *Iḥyā'* undertaken by a major author with such breadth of knowledge. It should be noted that al-Zabīdī's account has been studied at some length in an article by Duncan B. McDonald.⁸⁰

Legacy and Contributions of Ghazālī

Ghazālī's two hundred and seventy-three⁸¹ works span many disciplines and can be grouped under the following headings:

1. Jurisprudence and legal theory. Ghazālī made foundational contributions to Shāfi'ī jurisprudence; his book *al-Wajīz* is a major handbook that has been used in teaching institutions around the world and on which many commentaries have been written, most notably by al-Rāfi'ī. In legal theory, *al-Mustaṣfā min 'ilm al-uṣūl* is considered one of five foundational texts of the discipline.
2. Logic and philosophy. Ghazālī is responsible for introducing logic in

to, Ibn al-Jawzī's *Ṣayd al-khāṭir* (Beirut, 1999).

79. Al-Zabīdī's commentary is the *Iḥāf al-sāda al-muttaqīn bi-sharḥ asrār Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*. The old Egyptian printed version has al-'Aydārūs's *Ta'rīf al-ahyā' bi faḍā'il al-Iḥyā'* and the *Iḥyā'* 'ulūm al-dīn itself (starting at 1:53) printed on the margins because the commentary does not include the full version of the text of the *Iḥyā'*. Also included is Ghazālī's *al-Imla' fī isḥkālāt al-Iḥyā'*, his answer to his critics. The biography is at 1:6–53. For a major study on al-Zabīdī and his works including the *Iḥāf*, see Stefan Reichmuth's *The World of Murtada al-Zabidi (1732–91): Life, Networks and Writings* (Exeter: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2009).

80. MacDonald makes generous use of this biography in his article on Ghazālī, "The Life of al-Ghazali."

81. See al-Badawī, *Mu'allafāt*, 1–388 and Bouyges, *Essai*, 7–154 for a detailed listing.

terms that jurists understand and have used since his work. His works on philosophy include the *Tahāfut*, which has been studied far beyond the Muslim world; since its publication, it has been the subject of numerous commentaries, engagements, and refutations. This work has made it easier for Muslim scholars to study philosophy and metaphysics.

3. Theology, including works on heresiography in refutation of Bāṭinī doctrines. He also introduces a theory of occasionalism.
4. Ethics and educational theory.
5. Spirituality and Sufism. His grand work the *Ihyāʾ* is quite a unique book and a pioneering work in this field, both in terms of its organization and its comprehensive scope.
6. Shorter works in various fields, including autobiography, Qurʾānic studies, and political theory.



Ancient boundary mud wall of Ṭūs, with al-Ghazālī's grave in the foreground (right), 2004.

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Chronological Table of Ghazālī's Life

450/1058	Birth of Ghazālī at Ṭūs
c. 461/1069	Began studies at Ṭūs
c. 465/1073	Went to Jurjān to study
466–469/1074–1077	Study at Ṭūs
469/1077	Went to Nishāpūr to study with al-Jūwaynī
477/1084	Death of al-Fāramdhī
478/1085	Death of al-Jūwaynī; Ghazālī left Nishāpūr
484/1091	Arrival in Baghdad
4 Ramaḍān 485/14 Oct. 1092	Nizām-al-Mulk killed
484–487/1091–1094	Study of philosophy begins
Rabīʿ II, 486/June 1093	Present at sermons in Nizāmiyya
Muḥarrām 487/Feb. 1094	Present at oath to new caliph, al-Mustazhir
487/1094	Finished <i>Maqāṣid</i>
5 Muḥarrām 488/21 Jan. 1095	Finished <i>Tahāfut</i>
Ṣafar 488/Feb. 1095	Tutush killed, Barkiyarūq recognized in Baghdad
Rajab 488/ July 1095	Spiritual Crisis
Dhū l-Qaʿda 488/Nov. 1095	Left Baghdad for Damascus
Dhū l-Qaʿda 489/Nov.-Dec. 1096	Made pilgrimage and was working on the <i>Iḥyāʾ</i> ³
Rajab 490/June 1097	Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī saw him in Baghdad
ca. 492/1099	Went by Hamadhān to Ṭūs
Rabīʿ I, 497/Dec. 1104	Barkiyarūq dies
Dhū l-Qaʿda 499/ July 1106	Returned to teaching in Nishāpūr
500/1106	Wrote <i>al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl</i>
500/1106	Returned to Ṭūs
28 Dhū l-Hijja 502/5 Aug. 1109	Finished <i>Mustasfā</i>
Jumada I 505/Dec. 1111	Finished <i>Iljām</i>
7 Jumada II 505/18 Dec. 1111	Death of Ghazālī at Ṭūs

Source: Montgomery Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of Al-Ghazali* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963), 201 (with some modifications).