

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

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- 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, Aṣḥāhan, 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-Sharbāṣī, 34; 'Abd al-Rahman Dimashqiyyah, *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 Aṣḫān 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-Muntaẓam fī 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-Muntaẓam fī 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-Rashīd al-Jīlī al-Shāfi'ī (d. 541 A.H./1146 C.E.), whose lectures were attended by Ibn al-Jawzī; Abū Maṣṣūr 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-Sharbāṣī made a mistake in listing Abū Ḥāmid 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-Sharbāṣī, *Al-Ghazālī* (Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1975), 32.

⁸ Al-Sharbāṣī, 31.