



# ĠAZĀLĪ, ABŪ ḤĀMED MOḤAMMAD VII. ĠAZĀLĪ AND THE BĀṬENĪS

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## vii. ĠAZĀLĪ AND THE BĀṬENĪS

The Bāṭenīya, or Ismaʿilis, occupied Ġazālī's mind throughout his writing career. He devoted more space to refuting them than to any other school of Islamic thought. Even in his autobiographical *al-Monqad men al-żalāl*, written late in his life, he singled them out for lengthy denunciation after having critically discussed *kalām* theology and philosophy and before endorsing Sufism as the most fulfilling form of Islam. This preoccupation reflected his concern about the reinvigorated Ismaʿili missionary activity in contemporary Persia organized by the *dāʿīs* (q.v.) ʿAbd-al-Malek b. ʿAṭṭāš and Ḥasan-e Šabbāḥ. Deeply committed to the Sunnite caliphate and anti-Shiʿite, he saw in the Ismaʿili movement a grave political threat. Although he recognized certain affinities between his own and Ismaʿili religious thought, it is unlikely that he was ever attracted to Ismaʿilism. There is, on the other hand, no sound evidence that he ever felt personally threatened by the Ismaʿilis and that he, as suggested by Farid Jabre (pp. 84-94), gave up his prestigious teaching position in Baghdad and went into hiding afraid for his life because of the assassination of his patron, the vizier Neẓām-al-Molk, by a *fedāʿī* (q.v.) in 485/1092.



The first and most comprehensive refutation of Ismaʿilism by Ġazālī was his *Ketāb fażā'eḥ al-Bāṭenīya wa-fażā'el al-Mostazherīya*, often simply called *al-Mostazherī*. It was, as the title indicates, commissioned by the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mostazher and was composed in Baghdad between al-Mostazher's accession in Moḥarram 487/February 1094 and the death of the Fatimid caliph al-Mostanşer in Du'l-Ḥejja/December of that year. The refutation was largely based on the earlier tradition of anti-Ismaʿili polemics. In particular Ġazālī appears to have relied on the *Ketāb kaşf al-asrār wa-hatk al-astār* of the Ash'arite Abū Bakr Moḥammad b. Ṭayyeb Bāqellānī (d. 403/1013), as noted by himself or a gloss in his *Eḥyā' olūm al-dīn* (see Goldziher, p. 16). Thus he repeated the black legend of the polemicists about Ismaʿilism having been founded by a clique of atheist conspirators seeking to destroy the rule of Islam, quotes Bāqellānī's characterization of Ismaʿilism as "a doctrine whose exterior was Shi'ite rejectionism and whose interior was pure unbelief (*maḍhab zāherohu al-rafż wa-bāṭenohu al-kofr al-maḥż*)" (Goldziher, Ar. text, p. 7) and lists among the names under which the Ismaʿilis were said to be known those of Persian Mazdakite heresies such as the Ḳorramīya, Bābakīya, and Moḥammera with whom the polemicists tried to associate them. He describes nine fictitious degrees of initiation, also known from other polemicists, through which the Ismaʿili *dā'īs* allegedly guided the neophytes from scrutiny (*tafarros*) to the stripping away of all religious belief (*salk*), and characterizes Ismaʿilism as moving between doctrines of dualists and the philosophers while distorting both of them to serve their purposes. Ġazālī, however, does not mention the most notorious pamphlet ascribed by the polemicists, including Bāqellānī, for defamatory purposes to the Ismaʿilis, the *Ketāb al-sīāsa wa'l-balāğ al-akbar* (see Stern, chap. 4) and admits that the Ismaʿilis in his time universally denied some of the accusations of the polemicists against them, such as their alleged disregard of the *şarī'a*.

In mentioning their being called Ta'līmīya, Ġazālī notes that this name is the most appropriate for the Bāṭenīya of his own age because of their call for reliance on *ta'līm*, inspired instruction by their infallible (*ma'şūm*) imam, and their rejection of personal reasoning (*ra'y*). This observation reflects his awareness of the thrust of the propaganda of the new *da'wa* of Ḥasan-e Şabbāḥ. He stresses the need to counter this doctrine and devotes a chapter to refuting it in particular. In another chapter he discusses the legal status of the Ismaʿilis. While he describes some of their basic Shi'ite beliefs as merely error not constituting unbelief, he considers others as definite unbelief requiring their treatment as apostates subject to the death penalty. In his later *Fayşal al-*



*tafreqa* (p. 198), he brands the Isma'ili doctrine that God can only be described as giving existence, knowledge, and unity to others while Himself being above such qualification as manifest unbelief (*kofr ṣorāh*). The final section of the *Mostaẓherī* is devoted to the exaltation of the caliph al-Mostaẓher as the sole legitimate vice-gerent of God (*kalīfat Allāh*) on earth and to the functions of the imam according to the Sunnite doctrine (Goldziher, pp. 80-97).

Nowhere in his refutation does Ġazālī quote or name any Isma'ili authors. The reason was evidently, as he explains in his *Monqed* (p. 28), his agreement with the opinion of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal that the arguments of heretics should not be quoted in refuting them lest some readers might get attracted by them. Ġazālī defends himself that he refuted only arguments that were widely known among the public. His reliance on the anti-Isma'ili polemical literature, however, made it easy for the Yemenite Isma'ili *dā'ī moṭlaq* 'Alī b. Moḥammad b. Walīd (d. 612/1215) in his detailed refutation of the *Mostaẓherī*, entitled *Dāmeḡ al-bāṭel*, to point out Ġazālī's numerous distortions and misrepresentations of Isma'ili teaching.

In his *Monqed*, Ġazālī names four other books besides the *Mostaẓherī*, in which he refuted Isma'ili doctrine. Of these only one is extant, namely the *Ketāb al-qoṣṭās al-mostaqīm*. In this book he describes an imaginary debate between himself and an Isma'ili about the question of *ta'līm*, in which his opponent eventually concedes defeat and asks Ġazālī to become his teacher, which the latter refuses. Ġazālī accepts the universal human need for an infallible teacher as stipulated by his opponent, but he insists that the sound balance for weighing religious truth is provided by the Qur'ān and the teaching of the Prophet Moḥammad without any need for an infallible imam after him. Also extant is Ġazālī's *Jawāb al-masā'el al-arba' allatī sa'alahā al-Bāṭenīya be-Hamadān* (see Badawī, pp. 132-34). It contains brief answers to four questions concerning the compatibility of *taklīf*, the imposition of duties on man, by a God who was believed to be self-sufficient (*ḡanī*). Ġazālī further wrote a refutation in Persian of the "Four Chapters" (*al-Foṣūl al-arba'a*) in which Ḥasan-e Ṣabbāḡ had set forth his argument for mankind's need of an infallible teacher. The beginning of the refutation is quoted by Faḡr-al-Dīn Rāzī in *Monāẓarāt* and criticized as an inadequate response to Ḥasan-e Ṣabbāḡ's argument (Kholeif, pp. 63-65, Ar. text pp. 40-42).

The question of *ta'līm* evidently concerned Ġazālī in his later life more than any other aspect of Isma'ili thought. In his *Monqed*, too, he speaks of Isma'ilism only as the *madḡhab al-ta'līm*. He severely criticizes those opponents of the



Ismaʿilis who endeavored to refute their assertion of the need for *taʿlīm* and an infallible teacher, suggesting that they lost the argument and thus strengthened the cause of the heretics. The proper way was to argue that Moḥammad was the infallible teacher of all Muslims and that his death after God had announced the perfection of their religion (Qurʾān 5:3) could not be any more detrimental to them than the inaccessibility of the allegedly infallible imam to most Ismaʿilis.

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