



ĠAZĀLĪ, MAJD-AL-DĪN ABU'L-FOTŪḤ AḤMAD

ĠAZĀLĪ, MAJD-AL-DĪN Abu'l-Fotūḥ AḤMAD, b. Moḥammad b. Aḥmad, outstanding mystic, writer, and eloquent preacher (b. ca. 453/1061, d. 517/1123 or 520/1126). The younger brother of the celebrated theologian, jurist, and Sufi, Abū Ḥāmed Moḥammad Ġazālī (q.v.), Aḥmad Ġazālī was born in Ṭābarān, a village near the city of Ṭūs in Khorasan, and it was in Ṭūs that he received his early education, primarily in jurisprudence. He turned to Sufism while still young, becoming the pupil first of Abū Bakr Nassāj Ṭūsī (d. 487/1094) and then of Abū 'Alī Fārmaḏī (d. 477/1084). He was thus well advanced in Sufism when in 488/1095 his brother, Abū Ḥāmed, asked him to teach in his place at the Neẓāmīya in Baghdad and to assume responsibility for his family during his planned absence. Aḥmad Ġazālī traveled extensively in the capacities both of a Sufi master and of a popular preacher, visiting places such as Nīšāpūr, Marāḡa, Hamadān, and Isfahan. He died and was buried in Qazvīn (biographical notices may be found in Ebn al-Jawzī, *Montaẓam*, IX, p. 260; idem, *Ketāb al-qoṣṣās wa'l-modakkerīn*, ed. M. Swartz, Beirut, 1971, text pp. 104-7, tr., pp. 184-87, 210; Ebn Kallekān, tr. de Slane, I, pp. 79-80; Sobki, *Ṭabaqāt* [Cairo2], IV, p. 54; 'Abd-al-Karīm Rāfe'ī Qazvīnī, *al-Tadwīn fī aḵbār Qazvīn*, ed. 'A. 'Oṭāredī, Haydarabad, 1984, repr. Beirut, 1987, IV, p. 251), having initiated and trained many eminent disciples such as 'Ayn-al-Qozāt Hamadānī (q.v.) and Abu'l-Najīb Sohravardī (d. 563/1168). It is because of the latter that the initiatic chains (*selsela*) of the Sohravardī order and its derivatives such as the Kobrawīya, the Mawlawīya, and the Ne'mat-Allāhīya go



back to Aḥmad Ġazālī.

He is best known in the history of Sufism for his ideas on love, expressed primarily in the celebrated work entitled *Sawāneh*. This little book, written around 508/1114 and comprising some 77 short chapters, was innovative in form, for at a time when Persian Sufi authors used only prose, Ġazālī had recourse to verse in order to illustrate in metaphorical fashion the themes he expounded more technically in the prose sections of his work. The same technique was used a century and a half later by Sa'dī in his *Golestān* and by Faḡr-al-Dīn 'Erāqī (q.v.) in his *Lama'āt*; the latter author explicitly acknowledges his debt to the *Sawāneh*. Aḥmad Ġazālī relates numerous romantic anecdotes, especially those concerning Laylī and Majnūn and Maḥmūd and Ayāz (q.v.); in contrast, his citations of the Qur'ān or Hadith are relatively infrequent. In the prologue to his work, Aḥmad Ġazālī states his intention of using the language of allusion (*eṣāra*) in order to express his ideas, a choice in which he had been preceded by Sufi masters such as Jonayd Baġdādī and Abū 'Alī Rūdbārī; the result is occasional ambiguity and obscurity of meaning.

The *Sawāneh* opens with a description of the entry of Love and Spirit into the world of beings and the union between them that gives rise to the Lover, by means of whom Love then aspires to return to its original solitude and oneness. This process of return and the difficulties that accompany it, metaphorically described, form the main theme of the book. Love is depicted as a bird that flies into the world for a brief sojourn before returning to its nest. Transcending in its essence human knowledge and comprehension, Love is experientially accessible to the Lover who, beholding the beauty manifest in the Beloved (q.v.), strives toward union (*weṣāl*). Such union, however, does not end the process, for the duality of Lover and Beloved still remains. Only when the Lover fully transcends the Beloved and becomes totally annihilated is Love's return journey to its origin complete; then Love alone remains, in absolute unity and sanctity.

Aḥmad Ġazālī employs the metaphor of a bird and its journey in another work, a short Persian treatise entitled *Resālat al-ṭayr* (or *al-ṭoyūr*). Thanks to its reworking by Farīd-al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār (q.v.) in his *Manteq al-ṭayr* (which was indeed influenced by Aḥmad Ġazālī's work or possibly by an Arabic text on the same theme attributed to his elder brother), the frame story of this work has become extremely well known. A group of birds, widely disparate in their habits, natures, and manners of song, agree that they stand in need of a king.



They further agree that the ideal candidate for the position is the legendary bird known as Sīmorǧ, and accordingly set out for the island where he resides. The journey is fraught with danger and difficulty, and not all the birds survive to reach their destination. Each of the birds corresponds, obviously enough, to the figure of the Lover in the *Sawāneḥ* and the Sīmorǧ, residing in its primordial nest, to Love in its essence.

Aḥmad Ġazālī wrote a number of other brief works in Persian. The best known is an epistle given the title *Rāz-nāma* by the author, but commonly known as *ʿAynīya* in view of the belief that was addressed to ʿAyn-al-Qoḏāt Hamadānī (q.v). Written in an elegant but emotive style, the *ʿAynīya* seems to resemble the sermons Aḥmad Ġazālī was famous for delivering in mosques. In addition to profuse quotations from the Qurʾān and prophetic tradition, he cites many sayings of the Sufī masters as well as verses, in both Arabic and Persian, some of which he probably composed himself. The central theme of the epistle is the extreme brevity of life and the threatening closeness of death, a predicament which man can sensibly confront only by preparing himself for judgment and the hereafter. Vivid language is used in depicting the dilemma of human existence; the author writes, for example, that “if man eats to satiety, he will be as if drunk, and if he remains hungry, he will be as if mad. If he sleeps, he will be a mere corpse, and if he remains awake, he will be bewildered. Impotence is fastened on him, and weakness is his permanent attribute” (*Majmūʿa*, 1st ed., p. 389, 2nd ed., p. 225). The topic of love is not raised on this occasion, but Aḥmad Ġazālī does use some of the mystical language associated with it, particularly in the poetry.

Some nine other letters, most of them similarly addressed to ʿAyn-al-Qoḏāt Hamadānī, have also been discovered and published. They deal with private instructions given by Aḥmad Ġazālī to his disciples and his interpretations of their visions and dreams.

Aḥmad Ġazālī’s Arabic works also deal with Sufism; he appears not to have written anything on jurisprudence, despite his training in the Shafiʿite school. One such work is the record of the sessions (*majāles*) he conducted in Arabic while in Baghdad, compiled by one of his followers, a certain Saʿīd b. Fāres Labbānī, in several volumes (Sobkī, *Ṭabaqāt* [Cairo2] VI, p. 60). Only part of the record survives, but it suffices to give a picture of how Aḥmad Ġazālī conducted his sessions. They corresponded to the established tradition whereby a master would speak extemporaneously on some topic pertaining to Sufism, stimulated by a question from the audience, a letter read out loud, or a



verse from the Qur'ān recited at the beginning of the session. In this fashion, Ġazālī would guide his listeners to the Sufi path, clarify some point of doctrine, or provide the esoteric interpretation of a Koranic verse, drawing on traditions of the Prophet, poetry and anecdotes to illustrate his themes. Among the topics discussed in these sessions were love, the levels and degrees of gnosis, and the quality of Eblīs as a lover of God.

Among his other Arabic works, mention may be made of *al-Tajrīd fī kalemat al-tawḥīd*, a theological and mystical interpretation of the basic creed of Islam; *Lā elāha ellā Allāh*, which reflects his adherence to the Ash'arite school of theology; *Baḥr al-maḥabba fī asrār al-mawadda*, a Sufi commentary on *Sūrat Yūsuf* (Qur'ān 12); and an abridgment of his brother's *Eḥyā' 'olūm al-dīn*, a work he himself taught.

The attribution to Aḥmad Ġazālī of a number of other works has recently been shown to be spurious (Mojāhed, 1981). These include the Persian *Baḥr al-ḥaqīqa* (ed. N. Pūrjavādī, Tehran, 1356 Š./1977), and the Arabic *Bawāreq al-elmā'* (ed. and tr. by J. Robson in *Tracts on Listening to Music*, London, 1938) and *Serr al-asrār fī kašf al-anwār* (ed. 'A.-Ḥ. Sāleh Hamdān, Cairo, 1988).

Perhaps the most prominent feature of Aḥmad Ġazālī's writings is his incorporation into his prose of works of poetry, both Arabic and Persian, including verses he composed himself. It is in fact to him, as one of the earliest Sufi poets, that should be attributed some of the otherwise unidentified Persian quatrains that have come down to the present. Some of his poems are to be found in his Persian works, especially the *Sawāneḥ*, while others are scattered in the works of his disciple 'Ayn-al-Qożāt Hamadānī or in old anthologies of Persian poetry such as the *Nozhat al-majāles* of Jamāl Kalīl Šarvānī (ed. M. A. Rīāḥī, Tehran, 1366 Š./1987, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1375 Š./1996). By way of example we may cite the following quatrain from the *Sawāneḥ* (ed. Ritter, no. 18, p. 35) composed by the author in his youth: *tā jām-e jahān-nemāy dar dast-e man ast, az rū-ye kerad čark-e barīn past-e man ast / tā Ka'ba-ye nīst qebla-ye hast-e man ast, hošyārtarīn kalq-e jahān mast-e man ast* (As long as the world-displaying goblet is in my hand, the wheel of heaven on high lowers itself before me / As long as the Ka'ba of non-being is the *qebla* of my being, the most sober man in the world is intoxicated by me).

Aḥmad Ġazālī's Sufi thought, centered as it was on the idea of love, left a profound mark on the development of Persian mystical literature, especially poetry celebrating love. Many of the topoi (*mazāmīn*) used by later poets such



as ‘Aṭṭār, Sa‘dī, ‘Erāqī, and Ḥāfez, to name but a few, can be traced to his works, particularly the *Sawāneh*. It is in his writings that one finds a mystical or psychological interpretation for features of the beloved’s face, such as the eyes and the eyebrows; the lover enslaved to the dog or the dust in the quarter of the beloved; wine as a symbol of yearning (*šawq*) or love (*‘ešq*); love as a reciprocal relation between man and God, man’s love for God being his response to God’s love for him; the world-displaying cup (*jām-e jahān-nemā*); the mirror of Alexander (*āṭna-yeEskandar*); the fountain of life (*āb-e ḥayāt or zendagānī*) hidden in the realm of darkness; the journey of the birds to the homeland of their chosen sovereign, the Sīmorǧ—all these fundamental themes and images occur in the works of Aḥmad Ġazālī before they find their place in the poems of his celebrated successors.

Some of these topoi had, of course, been used by previous mystics but were revived and popularized by Ġazālī. He was, in fact, an heir to two traditions: the Malāmatis of Khorasan and the Sufis of Baghdad. Among his predecessors, he was influenced most strongly by Ḥallāj, and he made of his idea of essential love—fundamentally a neo-Platonic concept that had also been adopted by Muslim philosophers such as Fārābī and Avicenna (qq.v.)—the basis of his own Sufi thought. His belief that all created beauty is an emanation of divine beauty was likewise Hallajian or neo-Platonic in origin. Since God is both absolute beauty and the lover of all phenomenal beauty, Aḥmad Ġazālī maintained, to adore any object of beauty is to participate in a divine act of love. Hence the practice of *naẓar-bāzī* or *šāhed-bāzī*, gazing on young and beautiful faces, a practice for which he became notorious. He was well acquainted with the poems of Ḥallāj, citing them in both his Arabic and his Persian works, and he derived from the *Tawāsīn* of Ḥallāj themes such as Eblīs being a lover of God; the meeting of Eblīs with Moses; and the moth gradually advancing to immolation in the flame of the candle as a metaphor for the progress of the Sufi.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Persian works. ‘Aynīya, part. ed. Ḥ. Waḥīd Dastgerdī in *Armaǧān* 8, 1308



Š./1929, pp. 42-48; ed. N. Taqawī as *Tāzīāna-ye solūk*, Tehran 1319 Š./1940; ed. J. Nūrbakš as *Resāla fi'l-maw'ezā*, Tehran, 1352 Š./1973.

Majāles, ed. with Pers. tr. by A. Mojāhed as *Majāles: taqrīrāt-e Aḥmad Ġazālī*, Tehran, 1998.

Majmū'a-ye ātār-e fārsī-e Aḥmad Ġazālī, ed. A. Mojāhed, Tehran, 1358 Š./1979, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1370 Š./1991 (editions of all the Persian texts with critical apparatus).

“Maktūb-ī az Aḥmad Ġazālī,” ed. N. Pourjavady in *Sophia Perennis* 3/1, 1979.

Mokātabāt-e K̄vāja Aḥmad Ġazālī bā 'Ayn-al-Qozāt Hamadānī, ed. N. Pūrjawādī, Tehran, 2536=1356 Š./1977.

Resālat al-ṭayr, ed. N. Pūrjawādī as *Dāstān-e morġān/The Spiritual Flight*, Tehran, 1976.

Sawānehā, ed. H. Ritter as *Aḥmad Ghazzālī's Aphorismen über die Liebe*, Istanbul, 1942, repr. with intro. by N. Pūrjawādī, Tehran 1368 Š./1989; ed. N. Pūrjawādī, Tehran, 1359 Š./1980; tr. R. Gramlich as *Gedanken über die Liebe*, Mainz, 1976; tr. G. Wendt as *Gedanken über die Liebe*, Amsterdam, 1977; tr. by N. Pourjavady as *Sawanih: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits, the Oldest Persian Sufi Treatise on Love*, London and New York, 1986.

Arabic Works. *Baḥr al-maḥabba fi asrār al-mawadda*, Bombay, 1876, Tehran, 1312/1894; Pers. tr. by A. Faqīhī, Tehran, 1325 Š./1946 (wrongly attributed to Abū Ḥāmed Ġazālī).

Lobāb al-Eḥyā' or *Moktaṣer Eḥyā' al-'olūm*, pub. in margins of 'Abd-al-Malek b. Abi'l-Monā Bābī, *Nozhat al-nāẓerīn fi'l-aḳbār wa'l-ātār al-marwīya 'an al-anbīā' wa'l-šāleḥīn*, Cairo, 1954.

al-Tajrīd fi kalamat al-tawḥīd, ed. Cairo, 1379/1960; Turk. tr. by M. Fawzī as *al-Tafrīd fi tarjamat al-Tajrīd*, Istanbul, 1285/1868; Ger. tr. by R. Gramlich as *Der reine Gottesglaube: das Wort des Einheitsbekenntnisses*, Wiesbaden, 1983.

Studies. A. Mojāhed, intro. to the *Majmū'a* (see above).

Idem, intro. to Aḥmad Ṭūsī, *al-Hedaya al-sa'dīya fi ma'ān al-wajdiya*, Tehran, 1360 Š./1981.



N. Pourjavady (Pūrjawādī), *Solṭān-e ʿarīqat: Sawāneḥ-e zendagī wa šarḥ-e ātār-e K̄vāja Aḥmad Ġazālī*, Tehran, 1358 Š./1979.

Idem, “Selfhood and Time in the Sufism of Ahmad Ghazzali,” *Sophia Perennis* 4/2, 1981, pp. 32-37.

Idem, “Ālem-e kayyāl az nazr-e Aḥmad Ġazālī, *Ma‘āref* 3/2, 1365 Š./1986a, pp. 3-54.

Idem., “Ḥosn wa malāḥat” *Našr-e dāneš* 6/3, 1365 Š./1986b, pp. 2-9.

Idem, “Ahmed et Mohammad al-Ghazali: influence reciproque” in *Ghazali: la raison et le miracle*, Table ronde UNESCO 9-10, Paris, 1987, pp. 163-68.

Idem, “Metaphysik der Liebe: Der Sufismus des Ahmad al-Gazzali,” *Spektrum Iran* 3/1, 1990, pp. 45-72.

H. Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele*, Leiden, 1955.

B. Utas, “‘Ambiguity’ in the *Savanih* of Ahmad Ghazali,” *Proceedings of the Second European Conference of Iranian Studies*, Rome, 1995, pp. 701-10.