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### **Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1058-1111)**

Born in Tus (Eastern Persia) in **1058**. Was orphaned at an early age with his brother Ahmad. Unclear who looked after them perhaps a Sufi scholar and a local teacher.

Context: a time of fragmentation of the Islamic empire during al-Ghazali's time. **Umayyads** in Spain, **Fatimids** in Egypt, **Saljuks** in the Islamic heartlands. Also, the age when the first **crusade** is launched.

The social situation of the cities of the Middle East is still far more advanced than any in Europe. **Great scientific and philosophical activity.**

Education: Al-Ghazali was educated in the Islamic sciences: **Qur'an, Jurisprudence, Theology** (studied these later under al-Juwayni who was the most prominent scholar of his day belonging to the Asharite school of theology).

Education system: working with a particular scholar (pupil-teacher); mosques; madrasas; private homes; Nizamiyya schools.

Career: After Juwayni's death in **1085** al-Ghazali joined the court of **Nizam al-Mulk** the powerful vizier of the Seljuq sultans in **Isfahan**. The Seljuqs were a Turkish military dynasty that ruled the Islamic heartlands under the caliph in Baghdad. Nizam called him جبة الاسلام ("the Proof of Islam") and شرف الائمة ("the pride of the religious leaders"), and appointed him head of the Nizamiyya madrasa in **Baghdad** in **1091**.

Philosophy: Al-Ghazali studied philosophical works independently.

**Al-Ghazali attacked the philosophers stating that their ideas were incompatible with Islamic doctrine.**

**Asharites**: argued against opponents that God can do whatever he wishes (Occasionalism) that he acts freely and by will. **Avicenna** disagreed: everything about God is necessary (starting with his existence) his actions are necessary actions.

Physical causation as necessary versus Asharite Occasionalism. Example: Cotton must burn from fire (Asharites: God does everything, so God makes the cotton burn).

**The Incoherence of the Philosophers**: the trend of the philosophers had infected Islam. 3 major errors: 1) Eternity of the world (matter cannot be destroyed) *contra* creationism (God created the universe from nothing); 2) God does not know particulars (knows generalities not specifics); 3) the *falāsifa* do not believe in a bodily resurrection. Therefore they are outside the pale of Islam.

**Al-Ghazali played a major role in the development of Islamic thought:**

1091-1095 head of the Nizamiyya school in Baghdad at the age of 33.

The "crisis". Al-Ghazali leaves Baghdad. Focus on philosophy before departure, mysticism after. Personal crisis described in *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl*. It is a quest for certainty: he states that just as **reason** can stand in judgment over the **senses** (correcting visual illusions) so too reason (because not self-verifying) needs external confirmation through a **mystical union** with God. Then you know and know that you are certain. **The certainty of truth**. It is very short (unlike Augustine's *Confessions*) and was popular. Both al-Ghazali and Augustine were plagued by religious doubt (skepticism): in need of certainty through religion/faith.

**1095:** Al-Ghazali goes on Pilgrimage, then travels the region dressed as a Sufi (visits Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, and the Umayyad mosque, Damascus, residing in its minaret).

**1100:** back in hometown in Tus in Eastern Persia where he stayed. For him the Sufis alone (**mysticism**) know the path to God. All the knowledge of the intellectuals is as nothing compared to what the Sufis know in their heart (*qalb*=quintessential part of a human being which is the only way that you can really find God, not in intellectual way – *aql* – but through mystical experience).

**Legacy/impact:** al-Ghazali does not end Muslim philosophy. He is **selective** in his criticism of philosophy (accurate meaning of *tahāfut* = carelessness/omission not error).

1. In Islamic east (Safavid, Mughal and Ottoman empires) emergence of an approach to philosophy which is suffused with Avicenna's philosophy. **Logic** becomes a big vehicle in later theological seminaries.

2. **The intertwining of philosophy and theology after al-Ghazali:** Integration of Avicenna with theology = **Islamic philosophical theology** (with logic as its main vehicle).

3. Al-Ghazali focused on objectives of the law underlying the *Sharī'a* to allow for its development. Lays the groundwork for reformists and revivalists of Islamic law who rely on him.

### **Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' (10<sup>th</sup> c.)**

A secret society of Muslim philosophers living in **Basra**, Iraq probably during the **10<sup>th</sup> century**.

Wrote a giant compendium of **52 epistles** known as the **Encyclopedia of the Brethren of Purity** (*Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*). **Topics covered:** mathematics (including geography and music), natural philosophy (minerals and plants), psychology (soul and intellect), religious questions and magic.

A valuable window into the state of knowledge during this period.

**Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'**: the name is taken from a story in *Kalīla wa Dimna* in which a group of animals acting as faithful friends (*ikhwān al-ṣafā'*) escape the traps of the hunter. Another example of the impact of the translation movement in introducing new literature from Indian, Persian, Greek and Syriac cultures.

An example of philosophical Adab (a **blend of philosophy and literature**). Appropriation of philosophy for more eloquent literary production.

**Persian culture, literary culture, integration of philosophy with Islam come together in the epistles of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'.**

They maintained an esoteric view of Islam attacked by al-Ghazali.

The most celebrated epistle is a **zoological fable**: it imagines a debate between animals and humans in which the animals attempt to persuade a neutral judge that they should no longer be oppressed by humans. An inventive and amusing discussion among the animals follows where many animals put forward their claims to equality or even superiority relative to humans.

**One of the most favourable portrayals of animals in Arabic literature.** Ascribing to them a kind of rationality and an ability to worship God. As with monotheists and Muslims, so too their cries are prayers to God. Ultimately the humans prevail because the animals have not produced the outstanding saintly figures and prophets as those produced by humankind.

The Brethren are mostly interested in commenting indirectly on humankind.

The Brethren draw on Hellenic philosophy to construct a systematic account of their religious beliefs.