

April 2012

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Recommended Citation

Harris, Patrick (2012) "Power, Piety, and Rebellion in Al-Andalus: The Reception and Influence of Al-Ghazali's Political Philosophy in Islamic Iberia," *The Hilltop Review*. Vol. 5 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/hilltopreview/vol5/iss2/4>

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POWER, PIETY, AND REBELLION IN AL-ANDALUS: THE RECEPTION AND INFLUENCE OF AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY IN ISLAMIC IBERIA

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Dissident Muslims have utilized discourses of pious rulership to justify their revolt against centralized authority at least as far back as the Kharijite rebellion in the 1st/7th century, which, in turn, resulted in the first major schism within the Islamic community.¹ One may, indeed, interpret the very founding of Islam, in part, as a pietist response to a Meccan regime which fostered an environment of injustice and iniquity. Thus, the need for a pious rulership has been at the heart of Islamic political sensibility, if not from its very foundation, then at least from its first division. Rebels and reformers have deployed this discourse many times and in many places throughout the history of the Islamic world. Medieval Islamic Spain, or al-Andalus, was no different. This paper proposes to examine discourses of piety prevalent in al-Andalus from the late 5th/11th through the 6th/12th centuries, and how they related to the political upheavals of the time, focusing specifically on the influence of the philosophy of Abu Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (450-505/1058-1111) within these events.

A cultural and intellectual milieu existed within al-Andalus that would be receptive to the ideas of al-Ghazālī, as his work echoed ideas that were already fomenting there. After his work gained a large degree of acceptance, it would furthermore provide a catalyst for the overthrow of the Almoravid regime (c. 1040-1147), or at least be remembered as such. Through this conjunction of al-Ghazālī's thought with the Andalusian and North African political and cultural situation, one will see that this area was not so removed from the cultural center of the Islamic world in the East, but rather existed in discourse with it. One will be able to see how ideas emanating from the intellectual center influenced a region perceived to be peripheral, and how these same ideas become absorbed and reflected back to the center from that very same periphery.

The cultural milieu of al-Andalus in the 5th/11th century

The collapse of the Umayyad Caliphate in al-Andalus in the early 5th/11th century ushered in a period of political fragmentation under the Taifa kings. Centralized authority had completely broken down leaving a patchwork of petty kingdoms throughout the Islamic domains of the Iberian peninsula. Berber and "Slavic" rulers asserted themselves and demolished the facade of Arab hegemony. The mawālī, or non-Arab Muslims, could now safely voice their previous feelings of political alienation and proclaim themselves as proper Islamic rulers as they had previously been disenfranchised by the Arab Muslim political elite.

¹ For those unfamiliar with this dual dating system, which is preferred by some Western scholars of Islamic history, the first date indicates the Islamic century after its traditional beginning with the hijra, and the second indicates the Christian century.

The Kharijite rebellion began during the Caliphate of Ali in the mid-7th century CE when a pietist group attempted to break away from caliphal authority after becoming discontented with Ali's conciliatory attitude towards the Umayyad clan who attempted to usurp Ali's authority.

The *shu'ūbiyya* letter of Ibn García provides an ideal example of this *mawālī* mentality. Ibn García was a court secretary under the Taifa king of Denia, which is located in the south-eastern portion of the Iberian peninsula, during the mid to late 5th/11th century. This particular letter can be dated sometime between 443/1051 and 469/1076.² James T. Monroe states in the introduction to his translation of the letter, “the *risāla* [letter] does not differ much from those written by eastern *Shu'ūbites* with whose works Ibn García seems to have been well-acquainted...Ibn García's cultural horizon extended eastward.”³ *Shu'ūbiyya* literature has its roots with the *mawālī* under the Umayyad Caliphate in the East (c. 40-132/661-750), namely with Persian intellectual elites dissatisfied with the ethnic favoritism displayed by the ruling Arabs there.

Ethnic tensions provided the basis in which *shu'ūbiyya* writers launched their assault on their Arab overlords, and they rationalized their position through questioning the Arabs' piety. Göran Larsson deftly observes:

Given al-Andalus' heterogeneous composition, tensions arose relating to distinctions of boundaries, power and group identity. These tensions mostly manifested themselves in clashes over how to define Islam. Consequently, contemporary power structures had a great impact on the articulation of Islam and the development of society. Mainly through the possession of authority, it became possible to label contrasting and competing opinions as heterodox. However, in their turn contesting groups not in power questioned the legitimacy of the current rulers. Thus it seems that definitions of both orthodoxy and heterodoxy are closely related to the concept of power.⁴

Because the *mawālī* now had power, they were free to define Islamic rulership as they saw fit, which meant eliminating its ethnic basis and replacing it with pietism. Ibn García did not define Islamic rulership in Qur'anic terms, however. He never cites the Qur'an nor any of the *sunna*.⁵

He contrasted, rather, historical examples from the pre-Islamic period to those from the early period of Islamic conquest to prove his point. One criticism he cast against the Arabs was their perceived “worldliness.” He states:

If your people have made you wealthy to such an extent that you can manage without the whole world, according to what has been mentioned; then why this eagerness to accumulate possessions and to abandon your abodes? Seldom do poets begin a journey, save from an abandoned encampment!...who incited you to reject a virtuous wife whose chastity is stronger than a fortress and the close company of noble stallions...you feigned stupidity and became like unto a small calamity on top of a large misfortune, hoping for good fortune and striving after a precious reward.⁶

2 James T. Monroe, translator, *The Shu'ūbiyya in al-Andalus: The Risāla of Ibn García and Five Refutations*. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1970), 11-12.

3 Monroe, 12.

4 Göran Larsson, *Ibn García's Shu'ūbiyya Letter: Ethnic and Theological Tensions in Medieval al-Andalus* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 12.

5 The *sunna* roughly translates as “the tradition of the Prophet,” meaning the sayings and deeds of the prophet Muhammad, which were used as a guide for proper Islamic behavior and helped provide a basis for Islamic law.

6 Monroe, 23.

Ibn García asserts here that covetousness was the cause for the Arab conquests—they desired the riches and wealth of Sassanians and Byzantines. Of course, he is also contrasting the barbaric and low state of the Arabs to the glory of the great empires to their north. For Ibn García, the Greeks and the Persians “civilized” the Arabs. He goes on: “The non-Arabs are wise, mighty in knowledge...And they mastered what you will of investigation and research. They made themselves masters of the physical and religious sciences, and not of the description of towering camels.” According to Ibn García, the patronage and development of the arts and sciences are a mark of good rulership, which was a tradition the Arabs inherited from their Greek and Persian predecessors.

Ibn García does not just draw attention to the advanced state of the Persians and Greeks in terms of the “secular” arts, but he also draws attention to their superior spiritual development: “He [Muhammad] delivered us from the worshipers of the Trinity and the reverence of the Cross; whereas you he delivered from the followers of an abominable religion and from the worship of idols.”⁸ In a sense, the non-Arabs were more worthy inheritors of Islam as they had already received and followed the earlier monotheistic prophets. It should not be surprising, though, that Muhammad appeared among the Arabs as “pure gold is found in the dirt, and musk is a part of the secretions of the gazelle, and sweet drops are deposited in foul-smelling waterskins.” This observation is not meant to redeem the Arabs, however. Rather, he implies that the Arabs never truly abandoned their former ways. At their heart, the Arabs are still the covetous, lowly, uncivilized nomads of the desert, unworthy of inheriting or ruling over a great kingdom.

Ibn García was not the only one who held the belief that the wisdom of pre-Islamic Greek, Persian, and Roman rulers had something to offer. Al-Ghazālī also makes frequent allusions to non-Arab, pre-Islamic rulers in his *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*, or “Counsel for Kings.” This piece represents a genre related to *shu‘ūbiyya* literature. Larsson observes:

Ibn García’s references to both Byzantine and Persian traditions should also be seen as an attempt to formulate and legitimise non-Arab rule. During the eleventh century most parts of the Muslim world, including al-Andalus, were tormented by internal tensions due to a lack of political leadership. In this vacuum the literary genre known as the ‘Mirror for Princes’ became popular and significant in most parts of the Muslim world.¹⁰

F.R.C. Bagley, in his translation of al-Ghazālī’s *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*, went further, asserting that this genre represented a synthesis between Arab and Persian cultures created by the rise of Persian nationalism.¹¹ This work appears to have been one of al-Ghazālī’s last, dating between 502/1109-504/1111.¹² He depended heavily upon his previous work, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*’ or “Revival of Religious Sciences,” for its conceptual content.¹³ However, he draws out the concepts of proper Islamic piety contained within the “Revival” more fully by citing examples of pious rulership, in which he depends heavily on pre-Islamic examples. A rough sketch on the section “Qualities Required of Kings” displays this pattern. Of the approximate-

8 Monroe, 27.

9 Monroe, 27.

10 Larsson, 3.

11 F.R.C. Bagley, translator, *Ghazālī’s Book of Counsel for Kings (Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk)* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), ix.

12 Bagley, xiii.

13 Bagley, xxiv. This work is considered by some to be al-Ghazālī’s masterpiece. It is essentially a guidebook describing the proper approach and attitude towards Islamic faith and practice.

ly sixty-five anecdotes concerning historical kings and emperors, twenty-six refer to Islamic rulers, twenty-four to Persian rulers, twelve to the Greeks, while al-Ghazālī cites the *hadith* only four times and Jewish tradition three.¹⁴

The pre-Islamic king alluded to most in this work is the Sassanian Khusraw Anūshīrvān (r. 531-579). Al-Ghazālī calls him, “the pride of Īrān; his (qualities) were justice, equity, beneficence and helpfulness.”¹⁵ Ibn García also features this prominent figure in his letter:

Do you not know that the empire of Anūshīrvān and the kingdom of Ardashīr cut open your bodies and dislocated your shoulders, after which they inclined toward you and acted benevolently, making you kings of Hira after you had been thrown into great confusion, having been paltry and downtrodden, choosing for your wives girls filled with dread and seized by force on night raids, without a dowry?¹⁶

The “benevolence” of Anūshīrvān represents a ruling ideal for both al-Ghazālī and Ibn García. However, while al-Ghazālī focuses solely on Anūshīrvān’s righteousness, Ibn García uses him as a contrast against Arab barbarism, lust, and ingratitude saying:

Then your Gassān and Nu‘mān grumbled about this kingship, and the displeasure of the latter was a reason for the loss of the amnesty given to you, so that after the proud trailing of robes he came to be trampled under the feet of elephants.¹⁷

This particular passage reveals Ibn García’s belief in Arab racial inferiority. Yet, the Arabs were given the Prophet who could have redeemed them, but instead they betrayed their inheritance by ruling unjustly. On the other hand, non-Arabs, namely Greeks, Romans, and Persians came from a grand and glorious tradition, who, by taking up the mantle of Islam, fulfilled their own pious traditions.

One can see that Ibn García and al-Ghazālī were drawing from a similar body of literature and represent a certain intellectual milieu that existed throughout the Islamic world in the late 5th/11th century. As stated previously, the rise of mawālī power facilitated this cultural environment. The Islamic East had already been in the process of splintering with the reassertion of political power by the Persian nobility and the influx of Turkish warriors from Central Asia. Islamic Iberia, similarly, was being divided by regional petty kings of various ethnic origins. The breakdown of hegemonic power meant intellectual freedom for many. Gone was the push to create a normative Islamic identity as the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba had attempted to accomplish previously. Replacing it was “a newly revived intellectual liberty, thanks to the protection that the chiefs of the provinces gave to the intellectuals. Philosophical studies were reborn with new vigor.”¹⁸ The respite offered by the Taifa kings meant that mystics and philosophers, who had been considered renegades, could now preach their doctrines freely. Thus, it should be no surprise that this was the very period in which the writings of al-Ghazālī, particularly his *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, gained some acceptance in al-Andalus at this time. All of this would change, however, with the conquest of the Almoravids and the subse-

14 See Bagley, 45-105.

15 Bagley, 53.

16 Monroe, 26.

17 Monroe, 27.

18 Miguel Asín Palacios, *The Mystical Philosophy of Ibn Masarra and his Followers*, translated by Elmer H. Douglas and Howard W. Yoder (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 119.

quent rise of the Malikite jurists in Islamic Spain and North Africa.¹⁹

Intolerance towards al-Ghazālī under the Almoravids

Although the disunity of the Taifa period allowed for an environment of intellectual freedom in al-Andalus, it left Islamic Iberia in a politically weak position. The tide began to turn towards the Christians' favor in the long struggle for power over the Iberian peninsula during this period. The Christians consolidated while the Muslims splintered. As a result, the Christians, who were based in the north, made substantial advances southward. Yet, the Christians did not always adopt the strategy of outright conquest. Sometimes they would "soften up" the Taifa kings by bullying them into a relationship of clientage, demanding massive amounts of tribute which drained Taifa coffers. This relationship not only disrupted the Taifa economy, but also gave the Christian kings a powerful voice in Taifa politics. Should a Christian king find a Taifa ruler unqualified or troublesome, he could conceivably dissolve the relationship and take control over the Taifa territory himself.

This scenario occurred in the conquest of Toledo by the Castilian king Alfonso VI (r. 1065-1109) in 477/1085. The loss of Toledo sent shockwaves through al-Andalus, and after Toledo, Alfonso set his sights on Seville, causing the Taifa kings to ally themselves with the rising Maghribi power to their south, the Almoravids. A united Taifa-Almoravid alliance led by the Almoravid ruler, Ibn Tashfin, soundly defeated the forces of Alfonso outside Seville in 478/1086. Ibn Tashfin, however, did not take this opportunity to seize control of al-Andalus for himself, nor was he particularly enthralled by its legendary riches. Ronald Messier states:

...the delights of Andalusia held no appeal for him. Rather, he turned the booty over to the Andalusian chiefs, saying, "I came not to this country for the sake of booty; I came to wage jihad against the infidel and to merit the rewards promised to those who fight for the cause of God."²⁰

The Maghribi historian, al-Maqqarī (c. 1578-1632), citing the fifteenth century *Kitab ar-Rawd al-Mitar*, relates, "as he had passed the greater part of his life in his native deserts, exposed to hunger and privation, he had no taste for the life of pleasure and enjoyment which was recommended to him."²¹ Ibn Tashfin's rejection of wealth and disinterest in gaining power in al-Andalus illustrates the historical conception of him as a pious Muslim ruler—an image that has seemingly persisted to the present day. The episode cited by al-Maqqarī directly contrasts the piety and ascetic nature of Ibn Tashfin to the luxury and vanity of al-Mu'tamed, king of Seville:

Yūsuf Ibn Tāshefin inquired how Al-mu'tamed conducted himself in his pleasures; whether he always led the same dissipated life or whether he sometimes refrained and lived more soberly. The answer was that al-

19 The Malikites represented one of the four major schools of Islamic law. The Maliki school, whose origin was in the Islamic holy city of Medina, was particularly popular in al-Andalus and North Africa.

20 Ronald A. Messier, *The Almoravids and the Meanings of Jihad* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 84; unknown quotation.

21 As cited in Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Maqqarī, *The history of the Mohammedan dynasties in Spain : extracted from the Nafhu-t-tib min ghosni-l-Andalusi-r-rattib wa tárkh Lisánu-d-Dín Ibni-l-Khattib / by Ahmed ibn Mohammed al-Makkari, a native of Telemsán*, Vol. 2, translated from the copies in the library of the British museum, and illustrated with critical notes on the history, geography, and antiquities of Spain, by Pascual de Gayangos (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1964), 290.

mu'tamed always led the same life [of dissipation and pleasure]. "And do Al-mu'tamed's friends, do his allies, and the high functionaries of his court, approve of his conduct and imitate him?"—"No, they do not."—"Well, then, how are they pleased with him?"—"They are not pleased at all," was the courtier's answer.²²

Later, it is revealed that al-Mu'tamed sought to seize Ibn Tashfin from fear that the Almoravid ruler desired his kingdom.²³ The chronicler makes it clear, however, that al-Mu'tamed's fear was based in his own avarice.

In 480/1088, the Taifa kings again called for Ibn Tashfin's aid in the siege of the fortress of Aledo in the southeastern portion of the peninsula. The Taifa kings, however, spent much of their time using Ibn Tashfin as an arbiter in their own petty disputes, constantly attempting to flatter and bribe him, to Ibn Tashfin's frustration.²⁴ The impiety of the Taifa kings had succeeded in alienating the religious elite, as indicated above. One particular *qadi*, Ibn al-Khulay'i, had been accused of treason of Abd Allah, king of Granada, because the king feared that Ibn al-Khulay'i had discredited him to Ibn Tashfin for his un-Islamic ways. Abd Allah briefly imprisoned Ibn al-Khulay'i, but popular pressure forced his release. This *qadi*, along with other religious elites, then approached Ibn Tashfin with a *fatwa* condemning not only Abd Allah, but all the Taifa kings. After gaining the approval of his own *faqih*s, Ibn Tashfin sought the opinion of the eminent al-Ghazālī himself, who also approved it and confirmed Ibn Tashfin's status as *amir* of the Almoravids.²⁵ All al-Andalus would soon fall to Almoravid power.

The power of the Malikite jurists within these events cannot be overstated. Indeed, it was a Malikite legal scholar from Tunisia, Yahya Ibn Ibrahim, who previously helped spark the founder of the Almoravid regime, Abu Imran, to action.²⁶ The Almoravid movement was reformist in nature, interested in eradicating unorthodox Islamic practice and impious rulership. The leader of the Islamic community had to be morally upright in their opinion—an idea which had its roots in the Kharijism that had helped originally convert the region to Islam.²⁷ However, the increased power of the Malikite religious elite would alienate other intellectuals in al-Andalus, who saw *qadi* involvement in worldly affairs as a betrayal of their religious ideals as they were paid well from the public treasury and became heavily involved in politics, which was seen as a corrupting influence.²⁸

Almoravid hegemony, which facilitated Malikite attempts at establishing a normative Islam, led to tensions with the more independent-minded mystics and intellectuals who had previously flourished under the Taifa kings. One possible indicator of growing Sufi influence can be seen with the rise of miracle stories associated with the Prophet Muhammad during the Taifa period.²⁹

22 al-Maqqarī, 290.

23 al-Maqqarī, 290.

24 Messier, 97-101.

25 Messier, 97-101.

26 Mesier, 3.

27 Messier, 29-30; see also A.M. Mohamed Mackeen, "The Early History of Sufism in the Maghrib Prior to Al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 91, No. 3 (Jul.-Sep., 1971): 398-408.

28 Messier, 127-128.

29 Maribel Fierro, "The Polemic about the "karāmāt al-awliyā" and the Development of Sūfism in al-Andalus (Fourth/Tenth-Fifth/Eleventh Centuries)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 55, no. 2 (1992): 242-244.

Again, this was also the period where the work of al-Ghazālī began to circulate in al-Andalus and gain a degree of acceptance. In the early 6th/12th century, the Almoravids had begun a book-burning campaign against al-Ghazālī's *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*.³⁰ However, approximately fifty years later, a second book-burning campaign would ignite some mystics to outright revolt.

The Maliki jurists had a vested interest in repressing the work of al-Ghazālī as his hierarchical paradigm placed those with knowledge of God above legal scholars, which “would give Sufis a position of superiority with respect to traditional scholars.”³¹ For al-Ghazālī, law had become rotten at its core—it was form without function. In the *Ihyā'*, he argues that the “purity” claimed by the jurists has become “coquetry”, and that the situation has become so confused that what should be forbidden is licit, and what is licit, forbidden.³² Al-Ghazālī blames these corrupt jurists for the corruption of their rulers.³³ As Messier quotes him, “Better to be a fly on a heap of excrement...than be a theologian at the door of kings.”³⁴ The criticisms of al-Ghazālī may have stung the Maliki jurists in al-Andalus and rang true for their opponents as:

...the general trend of fifth and sixth-century Maliki jurisprudence, especially in Muslim Spain, had been to withdraw into an extreme form of sectarianism in which Mālik's adherence to the sunna of Medina was replaced by a form of legal practice based on the precedents established by a select group of scholars, with little regard being given to the sources of law found in hadith.³⁵

However, one may ask, why the change in attitude towards al-Ghazālī on the part of the Almoravid rulership? According to Madeleine Fletcher, al-Ghazālī had an interest in becoming a *qadi* in the Almoravid court, which threatened the head *qadi* of Cordoba, Ibn Ḥamdān, the very mastermind behind the initial book-burning. Should al-Ghazālī achieve his goal, the Almoravid ruler would have the “three elements necessary for political effectiveness: a ruling elite, an ideology and a popular following.”³⁶

The book-burning did not achieve its intended effect. Instead, some Sufis became militant in defense of the master they so highly revered. A second burning program took place in the mid 6th/12th century. Madeleine Fletcher cites a letter from 538/1143 indicating the Almoravid's renewed concern:

When you come across a heretical book or a person inciting to heresy, beware of them, and especially (God grant you success!) of the books of Abū

30 Delfina Serrano Ruano, “Why Did the Scholars of al-Andalus Distrust al-Ghazali? Ibn Rushd al-Jadd's *Fatwā on Awliyā' Allāh*,” *Der Islam* 83, no. 1 (2006): 137.

31 Serrano Ruano, 142.

32 As paraphrased in Henri Laoust, *La Politique de Ġazālī* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1970), 94; the exact quote is, “Dans le chapitre sur la pureté légale, qu'il traite en technicien, Ġazālī nous dit que la pureté est devenu le synonyme de coquetterie: l'extérieur est pur, l'intérieur ne l'est pas; ce qui était défendu est devenu licite et ce qui était licite est devenu interdit.”

33 Laoust, 102; “...la corruption des savants est à l'origine de la corruption des princes...”.

34 Messier, 127-128.

35 Vincent J. Cornell, “Understanding is the Mother of Ability: Responsibility and Action in the Doctrine of Ibn Tūmart,” *Islamica* 66 (1987): 81-82.

36 Madeleine Fletcher. “Ibn Tūmart's Teachers: The Relationship with al-Ghazālī,” *Al-Qantara* 18, no. 2 (1997): 319.

Hāmid al-Ghazālī. Track them down and let their memory be erased through uninterrupted burning; investigate about them and question under oath those suspected of hiding them.³⁷

During this time, a disciple of al-Ghazālī's teachings, Ibn Qasī, launched a full-blown insurrection in Silves, in modern day southern Portugal, where he had established a ribaṭ, proclaimed himself *imām*, and ruled as sovereign in the region for about ten years until his death in 546/1151.³⁸ However, it would be a Maghribi mystic and follower of al-Ghazālī who had already incited a new pious movement that would lead to the downfall of the Almoravid regime, Ibn Tūmart.

Al-Ghazālī Triumphant

An account of the meeting between al-Ghazālī and Ibn Tūmart from the 8th/14th century chronicle, *al-Ḥulal al-Mawshiyya*, gives the following account:

[Al-Ghazālī asking Ibn Tūmart] “Did you go to Cordova?”

“Yes”

“How are the theologians there?”

“Well”

“Did they receive the Book of the Revival [*Kitāb Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*]?”

“Yes”

“And what did they say about it?”

Then the old man [Ibn Tūmart], ill at ease, kept silent; the *imām* besought him to answer. The other shook his head told how the book had been burned...then the *imām*...said these words: “May their empire [the Almoravids] fly to pieces, as they destroyed this book, and may their dynasty disappear as they burnt it.”

Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Tūmart al-Sūsī, later called the Mahdī, began to speak so: “O *imām*, ask God that He commit this task to my hands.”³⁹

Whether or not this meeting actually took place has been the subject of some scholarly debate. Nevertheless, it remains important for achieving an understanding of the perception of al-Ghazālī's role in the rise of the Almohads and the downfall of the Almoravids.

Piety is essential for legitimate rulership in the view of al-Ghazālī. Without the presence of a true *imām*, the state has no legitimacy and its functionaries have no legal basis to enforce the Law. It is incumbent upon the *imām* to guide the community. He must first be without reproach, however. In the “Counsel for Kings”, al-Ghazālī begins by imploring the ruler to always be mindful of the true nature of God, and from this root, the branches of faith can grow and blossom⁴⁰

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37 Fletcher, 327

38 Asín Palacios, 122; Mackeen, 402.

39 In Roger Le Tourneau, *The Almohad Movement in North Africa in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 7.

40 Laoust, 234-235: “L’existence d’un *imām* à la tête de la communauté, pour Ġazālī...est une nécessité forme à la raison mais don’t le caractère obligatoire repose sur la Loi révélée... L’*imām* est la source de toute légitimité...En l’absence d’un *imām* légitime, ces fonctions publiques n’auraient plus de fondement juridique.”

and blossom.⁴¹ Proper Islamic belief ensures that the ruler will act righteously and the affairs of state will be kept in proper order. For al-Ghazālī, purity of belief trumps mere practice, as seen in his criticisms against the legal scholars of his day. This idea is also seen through his inclusion of pre-Islamic rulers in the “Counsel for Kings.” These rulers are models not because they blindly follow established religious practice, but because their true faith and piety come from within.

Consequently, it should come as no surprise why al-Ghazālī places the Sufi above the legal scholar in his spiritual hierarchy. Similarly, Ibn Tūmart insisted that *tawhīd*, or belief in the oneness of God, was the source of all proper knowledge and practice. Yet, also like al-Ghazālī, Ibn Tūmart believed one could attain proper knowledge through rational introspection—God was a logical imperative.⁴² Thus, Ibn Tūmart’s main criticism against the Malikites under the Almoravids was one of anthropomorphism, i.e. they had become worshippers of their own body of legal precedents.⁴³

Ibn Tūmart’s focus on internal reform can be seen in his conception of the *imām*:

There is no Imam who is not ‘free’...from falsehood...for falsehood does not abolish falsehood. He is also free from misguidance...for misguidance does not abolish misguidance. Likewise the sinful...does not abolish sin, for sin does not abolish sin. The Imam must by all means be free from these upsets.⁴⁴

It follows from this conception of the *imām*, that the immorality of society was a symptom of the ruler’s sinfulness as its center. Ibn Tūmart actually began his reformist career as an enforcer of morals under Almoravid rule. He was often appalled at people’s behavior, sometimes striking out with violence such as breaking musical instruments or smashing wine barrels.⁴⁵ Such behavior inevitably aroused a reaction by the Almoravids forcing him to find refuge in the Atlas mountains from which he would launch his long campaign that would eventually take down the Almoravid empire itself.

Ibn Tūmart died in 524/1130, before the Almohads ventured into al-Andalus. They crossed the Straits of Gibraltar in 540/1146 and sided with Andalusian rebels, including the aforementioned Ibn Qasī, not only destroying the last remnants of Almoravid power, but also achieving impressive victories over the Christian kings.⁴⁶ Despite maintaining an intolerant attitude towards Christians and Jews, they presided over one of the most intellectually vibrant periods for Muslims in the history of al-Andalus.

Ibn Tufayl was a witness to this tumultuous period, born in 498/1105 around the time of the first burning of al-Ghazālī’s *Ihyā’* and dying eighty years later. He was a minister, philosopher, and physician at the court of Granada from the mid-6th/12th century almost until his death.⁴⁷ He is best known for his philosophical tale about the autodidact *Hayy Ibn Yaqzān*.

41 Bagley, 3-12.

42 See Madeleine Fletcher, “The Almohad Tawhīd: Theology which relies on logic,” *Nu-men* 38, fasc. 1 (1990): 110-127.

43 Messier, 139-141.

44 As quoted in Cornell, 101.

45 See Le Tourneau, 15-16; Messier, 140-141.

46 Richard Fletcher, *Moorish Spain* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1992), 120-123.

47 Avner Ben-Zaken, *Reading Hayy Ibn-Yaqzān: A Cross-Cultural History of Autodidacticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 16; Lenn Evan Goodman, translator, *Ibn Tufayl’s Hayy Ibn Yaqzān: A Philosophical Tale*, 5th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 3-6.

In this tale, he allegorizes some of the key tenets of al-Ghazālī's philosophy. Ibn Tufayl actually begins his book by briefly explaining the works of some major Islamic philosophers, in which al-Ghazālī features prominently.⁴⁸

Hayy Ibn Yaqzān is the story of a man who grew up on a deserted island, completely isolated from any contact with society. As a child he was nurtured by a doe, or more specifically, a gazelle. Avner Ben-Zaken explains that this is no coincidence—the physical nourishment offered by the gazelle to *Hayy* is a direct metaphor for the spiritual and intellectual nourishment al-Ghazālī gave to Ibn Tufayl. Ibn Tufayl intentionally utilized this play on words (“gazelle” and “Ghazālī”).⁴⁹ As *Hayy* grows and develops, he uses his reason to discover the truth behind the world around him, eventually gaining a sort of mystic enlightenment; even the world of the spirits and the nature of God are eventually revealed to him. The progression that Ibn Tufayl traces is a parabolic device that seeks to explain al-Ghazālī's position on the role of reason in spiritual development—true understanding of God must come from within.

Eventually, *Hayy* is visited by a mystic named *Absāl* from a neighboring island, which happens to be inhabited by Muslims. Dissatisfied with the corrupt society around him, *Absāl* sought seclusion. This particular character represents the idea of *ḡurba*, or “feeling of alienation,” felt by mystics toward the trappings of civilization, which had a strong influence on the sense of piety in the initial phases of the Almohad movement.⁵⁰ This idea also echoes al-Ghazālī's teaching that one must turn inward to discover true Islam rather than blindly mimic the legalistic mandates enforced by the jurists. Once the communication barrier is broken, *Hayy* and *Absāl* discover they are kindred souls. *Absāl* explains the basis of Islam to *Hayy*. Yet, to *Hayy* many these ideas are not new; he had already discovered them himself through his own philosophical introspection:

He [*Absāl*] related all the religious traditions describing the divine world, Heaven and Hell, rebirth and resurrection, the gathering and the reckoning, the scales of justice and the strait way. *Hayy* understood all this and found none of it in contradiction with what he had seen for himself from his supernal vantage point. He recognized that whoever had offered this description had given a faithful picture and spoken truly.⁵¹

After hearing about the sinful state of the society on the neighboring island, *Hayy* agreed to go there and preach; but once he got there he could make no headway:

Hayy Ibn Yaqzān began to teach this group and explain some of his profound wisdom to them. But the moment he rose the slightest above the literal or began to portray things against which they were prejudiced, they recoiled in horror from his ideas and closed their minds...He saw “every faction delighted with its own.” They had made their passions their god, and desire the object of their worship. They destroyed each other to collect the trash of this world.⁵²

This passage appears to be a thinly veiled criticism of the anthropomorphism of the Malikites

48 Richard Fletcher, *Moorish Spain* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1992), 120-123.

49 Ben-Zaken, 22.

50 For a discussion this idea see Maribel Fierro, “Spiritual Alienation and Political Activism: The *ḡurabā'* in al-andalus during the Sixth/Twelfth Century,” *Arabica* 47, fasc. 2 (2000): 230-260.

51 Goodman, 161.

52 Goodman, 163.

that had disillusioned Ibn Tūmart. The ruler of this island was a man named *Salāmān*, who believed only in a literal interpretation of the Law. *Salāmān* tortured and killed those who strayed from his strict interpretation, to the effect that people only practiced their religion from the fear of pain and death rather than from the love of God. He writes, “the weak-minded... throw over the authority of prophets to ape the ways of fools.”⁵³ Again, one can see that Ibn Tufayl is referring to the previous Almoravid regime, who chose the legal precedents of the Malikites even over the Qur’an itself. In Ibn Tufayl’s view, the obstinacy of the Almoravids and their Maliki supporters prevented people from recognizing the truth, e.g. the message of al-Ghazālī. Thus, Ibn Tufayl builds upon the discourse on the piety of rulers established by al-Ghazālī and Ibn Tūmart—the piety of a ruler is not determined only by adherence to the proper Islamic practice, but must have an internal spiritual aspect as well.

The following generation produced one of the most influential minds of Sufism and Islamic philosophy, Ibn ‘Arabī, who carried on the message of al-Ghazālī and his disciples. While in Tunis in 590/1193, he studied the work of Ibn Qasī and wrote a commentary on his *Khal’ al-na’lain*.⁵⁴ Yet, al-Ghazālī would hold a special place in Ibn ‘Arabī’s heart. He writes:

Down the centuries the Sufis have striven to keep alive that essential and immediate experience of divine truth which filled those first fuqarā’ (poor in God) who lived beside the Prophet and received through his mouth the words of God. As such they have been the leaven of the Muslim community as a whole, especially in troubled and chaotic times. Externally they were also, as in the case of the celebrated al-Ghazālī, the champions of Islam’s doctrinal integrity.⁵⁵

The burning of al-Ghazālī’s books still resonated with Ibn ‘Arabī, who relates the following anecdote:

Ibn Ḥamdīn, who was the judge at Cordova, had al-Ghazālī’s books burned and uttered anathemas against him. Sometime later Ibn Ḥamdīn saw al-Ghazālī in a dream with an iron chain in his hand with which he was pulling along a pig. Ibn Ḥamdīn relates that he greeted al-Ghazālī and enquired about the pig. Al-Ghazālī replied that the pig was Ibn Ḥamdīn and that he would remain in his power until he was shown how he had merited his curses.⁵⁶

Ibn ‘Arabī hurls an extraordinary insult at Ibn Ḥamdīn by representing him as a pig. However, the symbol of the pig here does not just represent Ibn ‘Arabī’s disgust with the man. He is implying that Ibn Ḥamdīn’s work is as illicit for Muslims to read as pork is to eat. He also provides the following anecdote about an Andalusian Sufi named Abu ‘Abdallah ibn Zain al-Yabari:

He was from Seville, a man of great merit, much given to the practice of austerities...He devoted himself to the study of the works of al-Ghazālī... One night he was reading the book of Abū al-Qāsim b. al-Ḥamdīn which attacks al-Ghazālī, when he was suddenly struck blind. He immediately

53 Goodman, 165.

54 R.W.J. Austin, translator, *Sufis of Andalusia: The Rūh al-quds and al-Durrat al-fākhirah of Ibn ‘Arabī*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1971), 26.

55 Austin, 50-51.

56 Austin, 137.

prostrated and abased himself, swearing that he would never again read the book. When he had put it away from him God restored his sight to him.⁵⁷

These two stories are interesting not only because they reveal Ibn ‘Arabī’s own opinions about al-Ghazālī, but also because they imply that he could have been drawing upon a developing mythology about the notorious book burnings. The burnings had only occurred in the previous couple generations, yet already Ibn ‘Arabī and perhaps other Sufis were forging the memory of these events for posterity. Of course, it would be the Sufis whose views would win out in the end, condemning the Malikite jurists to infamy.

The philosophical intricacies of Ibn ‘Arabī’s work and its relation to al-Ghazālī will not be dealt with here. What is important to note is that Ibn ‘Arabī thrived because the Almohads promoted a culture where mystics could freely express their admiration for al-Ghazālī, which was due directly to his influence on their founder.

Conclusion

The political instability of the Taifa period mirrored the situation in the Near East—the Islamic world was fragmenting and facing new military threats, which caused Muslim intellectuals to redefine proper rulership. Furthermore, the Arab ruling class was being replaced by the *mawālī* who looked to their own ancestors for guidance. Thus, when al-Ghazālī’s works reached al-Andalus, they reached a receptive audience whose situation was similar to his. His works gained such popularity, that they were seen as a significant threat by the Almoravids who were attempting to reconsolidate Islamic Iberia both politically and spiritually. However, the Almoravids were dedicated to a Malikite legal tradition seemingly guilty of the criticisms al-Ghazālī cast at all legal scholars who valued external conformity to internal refinement, which was an idea not lost on the mystics and philosophers of the Iberian peninsula who came under increasing persecution. This message also resonated with Ibn Tūmart in North Africa, whose successors quashed the Almoravids and actively promoted al-Ghazālī’s thought. In turn, al-Ghazālī’s work would spark some of the most influential writings produced in al-Andalus. The confluence of al-Ghazālī’s philosophy with the Andalusian environment had repercussions that would influence the world.

“Worldliness” is the common theme that runs throughout Islamic discourses on pious rulership in the period examined here. From Ibn García to the Almohads, internal refinement is a quality necessary in order to be a proper Islamic ruler. Although this idea existed in Islamic Iberia before the introduction of al-Ghazālī’s works there, he gave them the language and the paradigm that they would adopt towards later Islamic rulers—much like *Absāl* did for *Hayy*.

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⁵⁷ Austin, 136-137.

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