

SITTING BY THE RULER'S THRONE: AL-GHAZĀLĪ ON JUSTICE AND MERCY IN THIS WORLD AND THE NEXT

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The trend toward absolutism in Islam's political history, whether based on theories of the deputyship of «God's caliph» (*khalīfat Allāh*) or on Iranian notions of divine kingship, has been a common theme in Western Islamic Studies.¹ As has been noted, the rise of Turkish military régimes in the 5th/11th and 6th/12th centuries, given the problematic base of legitimacy of the sultānate, posed new challenges to the ideologues of state power.² Here it shall be examined to what extent absolutist conceptions of the sultān's power to punish or to show mercy resonated with medieval Muslim notions of God's justice. In particular, the question will be pursued

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¹ See Gibb, H. A. R., «An interpretation of Islamic history (part two)», *The Muslim World* (1955), 126; Lambton, A. K. S., «Qui custodiet custodes: some reflections on the Persian theory of government», *Studia Islamica*, 5 (1956), 127; Hodgson, M., *The venture of Islam*, Chicago, 1974, II, 44-46; Crone, P. and Hinds, M., *God's caliph: religious authority in the first centuries of Islam*, Cambridge, 1986; al-Azmeh, A., *Muslim kingship: power and the sacred in Muslim, Christian and pagan politics*, London, 1997, esp. 154-162; Crone, P., *Medieval Islamic political thought*, Edinburgh, 2004, 276-277.

² Mottahedeh, R., «Some attitudes towards monarchy and absolutism in the eastern Islamic world of the eleventh and twelfth centuries AD» in J. I. Kraemer and I. Alon (eds.), *Religion and government in the world of Islam*, Tel Aviv, 1983, 86-91.

as to how the eschatological imagination of Islam coloured perceptions of the mercy and cruelty of the temporal rulers. As will be argued, the Saljūq throne scene, the theatre for many rituals of sultānic justice, was described by writers of the period in terms akin to how eschatologists imagined the Divine Throne of Justice on the Day of Judgment. Similarly, the kind of 'throne justice' meted out by the Great Saljūq Sanjar (r. 490-552/1097-1157) and other rulers of the Saljūq period, examples of which will be discussed in the following pages, played with Ash'arite notions of God's mercy and punishment. Besides suggesting a continuity of both Iranian and Islamic notions of sacred kingship into the period of Turkish absolutism in Islamic history, this «play of analogies» (Aziz al-Azmeh) is indicative of a deliberate strategy for the symbolization of absolute power.

Sanjar famously became the patron of the late al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). The latter's view of divine mercy and punishment can be viewed as standing in an uneasy dialogue, sometimes critical, sometimes approving, with absolutist theories of sultānic justice. In fact, as this article argues, when al-Ghazālī's views about the absolutism of kings are examined on the backdrop of his eschatological thought, his legacy as a political thinker, as preserved, inter alia, in his «Counsel for Kings» (*Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*), appears in a new light.

1. BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH: THE SALJŪQ THRONE SCENE

It was inevitable, perhaps, that the worldly sovereign's justice in medieval Islam would always be measured against God's justice. As Tor Andrae has observed, the popular conception of God is inseparately connected with the picture of a king and his royal household.³ When the ruler sat on his throne, meting out acts of mercy or punishment to his subjects, the dread and awe inspired by his unrestricted, and sometimes arbitrary, use of violence conjured up in the minds of onlookers the terrifying prospect of God's tribunal of justice on the Day of Judgment. Sometimes the analogy was spelt out in explicit terms: The mystic al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), in his famous *Risāla*, states that the awe (*hayba*) a ṣūfī feels vis-à-vis God is best compared to the kind of awe one feels when entering into the presence of the earthly ruler on his throne, resulting in a complete loss of self-consciousness and self-control, to the extent that afterwards one will not remember any of the details of the

³ Tor Andrae, *Die Person Muhammeds in Lehre und Glauben seiner Gemeinde*, Stockholm, 1918, 260.

audience.⁴ This «play of analogies», as Aziz al-Azmeh has pointed out, was never systematically pursued in the Muslim literature on kingship, but was an underlying theme of much of medieval Islam's rhetoric of royal power. As a prominent illustration of this theme, al-Azmeh cites Muslim manuals of dream interpretation, which «represent kingship and divinity as displacements one of the other» and «in which the appearance of a king in a dream must be interpreted as a representative of God, and in which a smiling king represents divine favor.»⁵

Such forms of «sublime absolutism» had many roots in Islamic civilization. In the eastern Islamic lands, the awe felt in front of the ruler sitting on his throne derived from old Iranian traditions of divine kingship, which gave the throne a cosmological significance. In Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*, written around 400/1010, the ruler on his throne is compared to the sun and the moon shining over the earth, revealing his awe-inspiring divine effulgence (*farr-i izarī*) to humankind.⁶ This became a *leitmotif* of courtly panegyrics reprised, among others, by al-Ghazālī in an audience before Sanjar in 503/1109.⁷

However, already the Qur'ān makes the throne (*arsh*, *kursī*) one of the key attributes of absolute power.⁸ As in the Judeo-Christian tradition,⁹

⁴ Qushayrī, *Risāla*, Beirut, 2005, 68. Cf. Ibn al-Jawzī's statement that it is the «dissimilarity between the Divinity and his creatures» which produces *hayba* in the souls of men. See Bell, J. N., *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*, New York, 1979, 25.

⁵ Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 155.

⁶ Busse, H., «Thron, Kosmos und Lebensbaum» in W. Eilers (ed.), *Festgabe deutscher Iranisten zur 2500 Jahrfeier Irans*, Stuttgart, 1971, 15-16. For *farr-i izarī*, cf. Lambton, A. K. S., «Islamic Mirrors for Princes», *Atti del Convegno internazionale sul tema: La Persia nel Medioevo*, Rome, 1971, 425. The concept appears in Kaykā'ūs b. Iskandar's (d. ca. 480/1087-8) *Qābūs-nāma*, (Pseudo-?) Nizām al-Mulk's (d. 485/1092) *Siyāsat-nāma*, and the second part of the *Naṣīhat al-mulūk*, written by an anonymous Persian author of the 6th/12th century. See *EP*, s.v. «Advice and advice literature» [L. Marlowe.]

⁷ See Ghazālī, *Makātib-i fārsī-yi al-Ghazālī*, ed. 'A. Iqbāl, Tehran 1363/1984, tr. Krawulsky, D., *Briefe und Reden des Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Gazzālī*, Freiburg, 1971, 69.

⁸ See O'Shaughnessy, Th., «God's throne and the Biblical symbolism of the Qur'ān», *Numen*, 20/3, 202-221; Elias, J., «Throne of God» in J. D. McAuliffe (gen. ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, Leiden, 2001-2006, V, 276-278. For traditions about the place of the Throne in Islamic cosmology, see Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Risāla al-'arshiyya*, Cairo, 1399/1978-1979. On God's throne in Islam, see also *EP*, s.v. «Kursī» [C. Huart and J. Sadan], V (1986), cols. 509a-b; Vitestam, G., «'Arsh and Kursī: An Essay on the Throne Traditions in Islam» in E. Keck et al. (eds.), *Living Waters: Scandinavian Orientalistic Studies Presented to Professor Dr. Frede Løkkegaard*, Copenhagen, 1990, 369-378; van Ess, J., «'Abd al-Malik and the Dome of the Rock» in J. Raby and J. Johns (eds.), *Bayt al-Maqdis: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, Oxford, 1992, I, 89-104.

⁹ Daniel VII, 10 talks of the heavenly throne scene as a court: «The court sat in judgment and the books were opened». For throne visions in Jewish and Christian

the Qurā'n talks of God's throne as one of the constitutive elements in a court ceremony, where heralds announce the coming of the throne-sitter (XXXIX,75), guardians surround the throne (XL,7), and various groups of courtiers, the *muqarrabūn* («those who are brought near», cf. Hebr. *qār b le-malkūt*), are placed in proximity to the throne according to the level of intimacy they have achieved with the ruler (LVI, 8-11).¹⁰

Post-Qur'anic eschatologists elaborated on these ideas. We know little about what Sanjar's or other rulers' thrones actually looked like,¹¹ but the way in which Muslim theologians, including al-Ghazālī, described God's sitting on the throne on the Day of Judgment appears to echo the rituals performed before and around the throne of the temporal ruler. God's throne is elevated above those appearing before it, as if on a platform.¹² Heralds at the throne's feet (that is, angels blowing trumpets) announce God's coming.¹³ Intimates of God (the Prophet Muḥammad as well as other prophets) stand to the right of the Throne,¹⁴ while Jahannam, the terrible beast of Hell, stands to the left.¹⁵ 7th/13th-century Iranian figurative depictions of throne scenes appear to play with the analogy: they show the ruler sitting on an elevated platform, surrounded by trumpet-blowing heralds, courtly advisers to his right, and executioners (*sayyāfs*), to his left.¹⁶ Some images (see figure 1) reverberate powerfully with how

apocalypses from the third century B. C. to the second century C.E., see HIMMELFARB, M., *Ascent to heaven in Jewish and Christian apocalypses*, Oxford, 1993.

¹⁰ On the *muqarrabūn*, see Horovitz, J., «Das koranische Paradies» in R. Paret (ed.), *Der Koran*, Darmstadt, 1975, 54. The verb «to draw near» is used in the Bible of priests serving in the Jerusalem sanctuary; like «those near the Throne», they enjoy the privilege of intercession. See Himmelfarb, *Ascent to heaven*, 20.

¹¹ Since the publication of my *Justice, Punishment and the Medieval Muslim Imagination*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, 36-37, where I discuss Saljūq throne symbolism, I have come to the realization that, unlike the thrones of earlier dynasties, the Saljūqs are likely to have used relatively simple and unadorned throne seats, possibly continuing nomadic traditions. The authenticity of a stucco panel in the Pennsylvania Museum of Art, believed to show the Saljūq prince Ṭughril III (d. 590/1194) sitting on a throne, is now in doubt.

¹² According to Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira*, ed. L. Gautier, Geneva, 1878, 58-59, tr. Smith, J., *The precious pearl*, Missoula, 1979, 56, the Throne is installed «on that white earth which God has created for this special purpose».

¹³ Ghazālī, *Ihyā' `ulūm al-dīn*, tr. Winter, T., *The remembrance of death and the afterlife: book XL of the Revival of the religious sciences*, Cambridge, 1989, 175.

¹⁴ Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, tr. Winter, 216. The Garden also takes place to the right of the throne. See Ghazālī, *Durra*, 66, tr. Smith, 61.

¹⁵ Ghazālī, *Durra*, 66-68, tr. Smith, 61.

¹⁶ See Otto-Dorn, K., «Das seldschukische Thronbild» in U. Haarmann and P. Bachmann (eds.), *Die islamische Welt zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit: Festschrift für Hans Robert Roemer zum 65. Geburtstag*, Beirut, 1979, 168; Pancaroğlu, O., «The



[Figure 1: Rashid al-Din (d. 718/1318), Jami' al-tawarikh (Edinburgh University Library, Ms. Arab 20, f. 24r)].

al-Ghazālī describes the sinner's lot on the Day of Judgment, when he will be led before the Throne «like a wild horse», approaching «with palpitating, fearful and dismayed heart, humble and abject eye and sundered breast».¹⁷

Another arresting image which applies to both the Throne of God and to the thrones of earthly rulers is that of the throne's shadow. In Muslim eschatology, God's Throne on the Day of Judgment shades the righteous, while the wicked suffer in the heat.¹⁸ According to al-Ghazālī,

no shade shall there be upon the earth save that cast by the Throne of the Lord of the Worlds, which only those who have been brought nigh unto Him may enjoy. Thus shall they either take shade under the Throne, or be exposed to the sun's blazing heat, and their sorrow and misery shall grow with its rays.¹⁹

Panegyric authors of the Saljūq period liked to praise the shadow offered by their royal patrons, stretching over the entire realm under their control. As the chronicler al-Bundārī (d. 643/1245 or 6) records, the sultān's shadow «stretched over all, and his grace was ample».²⁰ The «sultān's shadow» thus became a metonymy not only of royal favour, but of territorial sovereignty. For example, Khurāsān, in the latter part of Saljūq history, was «under the shadow» (*fi zill*) of the Great Saljūq, sultān Sanjar.²¹

emergence of Turkish dynastic presence in the Islamic world: cultural experiences and artistic horizons, 950-1250» in D. J. Roxburgh (ed.), *Turks: a journey of a thousand years, 600-1600*, London, 2005, 82, 84-5.

¹⁷ Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, tr. Winter, 193.

¹⁸ The idea seems to originate in the context of the reward promised to martyrs. According to `Abd Allāh Ibn al-Mubārak, *K. al-Jihād*, Beirut, 1971, 30-31 (n.° 7), martyrs killed in *jihād* sit «in the camp under God's throne», while according to Muslim, *Imāra*, 121, they reside in the crows of green birds nesting in lamps (*qanādīl*) hanging from the Throne. *Samarqandī, Tanbīh al-ghāfilīn*, ed. `A. M. al-Wakīl, Jedda, 1401/1981, I, 95, details seven types of people who will stand protected in the shadow of God's throne on that day «when nothing will shade [people] except its shade (*yawma lā zalla illā zilluhu*)». For a late-medieval collection of *ḥadīths* on this topic, see al-Suyūṭī, *Tamhīd al-farsh fi l-khisāl al-mūjiba li-zill al-arsh*, ed. H. M. Salmān, al-Zarqā', 1407/1987.

¹⁹ Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, tr. Winter, 180.

²⁰ Bundārī, *Zubdat al-nuṣra*, ed. Th. Houtsma, Leiden, 1889, II, 55.

²¹ Ibn al-`Adīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab fi tārikh Ḥalab*, ed. S. Zakkār, Damascus, 1988-, VII, 3486. However, territorial sovereignty of the sultān became increasingly precarious after the failure of the Saljūqs to establish lasting central control. This is reflected in the saying preserved in al-Maydānī's (d. 518/1124) collection of proverbs that «the shadow of the sultān passes quickly» (*zill al-sultān sarī` al-zawāl*). See Maydānī, *Majma` al-amthāl*, ed. `Abd al-Ḥamīd, Cairo, 1959, I, 445.

Such analogies suggested to the subjects of the sultān that the space in front of the throne was a space set apart and sacred. An aura of holiness surrounded the ritualized acts of mercy and punishment meted out in this royal penal theatre. Here, the temporal authority of the ruler and God's eternal justice appeared to converge, as indeed there was always the very real prospect that one could literally be transported from this world to the next, as a look at the Saljūq chronicles will demonstrate.

2. SPLENDID ARBITRARINESS: ACTS OF CRUELTY AND MERCY BY THE SALJŪQ SULTĀN

This, then, was the stage on which the ruler displayed his justice and power. The Saljūq sultān Aḥmad Sanjar, al-Ghazālī's patron during the later stages of his life, is reported to have held punitive tribunals from his seat on the throne with great frequency. This was usually in the wake of important battles, when Sanjar had fought back a challenge to his authority and the situation called for a show of force.

In 493/1100, Sanjar, whose seat of power was Khurāsān, fought a battle against the rebellious governor of Western Khurāsān, the *amīr* Dād Ḥabashī b. Altūntāsh. Allegedly, Dād Ḥabashī had hired Bāṭinis from Ṭabas to fight in his army.²² When he was captured and brought before Sanjar's throne after the battle, he begged for mercy and offered a ransom of 100,000 *dīnārs*. However, Sanjar would not have it. Instead, the *amīr* was executed on the spot.²³ Two years later, in 495/1102, Sanjar had to fight off an even bigger challenge. The ruler of Transoxania Qadrkhān Jibrā'il b. `Umar had invaded Khurāsān. Fortunately for Sanjar, his *amīrs* managed to capture Qadrkhān when he went out on a hunting spree, accompanied only by a small band of followers.²⁴ Brought before Sanjar's

²² Hodgson, M., *The order of the Assassins: the struggle of the early Nizāri Ismā'īlis against the Islamic world*, The Hague, 1955, 86.

²³ Ḥusaynī, *Zubdat al-tawārīkh*, ed. M. Nūr al-Dīn, Beirut, 1985, 178; Bundārī, *Tārīkh dawlat al-Saljūq*, Beirut, 1978, 259-260. Ibn al-Athīr reports that Dād Ḥabashī was killed after battle by the *amīr* Bazghash, which does not exclude the possibility of an execution before the sultān's tribunal. See Eadem, *al-Kāmil fī l-tārīkh*, Beirut, 1417/1997, X, 201-202.

²⁴ Hunting in the Saljūq period seems to have been a dangerous pastime not so much because of the danger involved in hunting itself, but because of the peril of being outnumbered by enemy forces. The Saljūq sultān Alp Arslān, together with a hundred of his servants, was captured by Ārmānūs, the Byzantine emperor (*qayṣar*), while he was on a hunting expedition. Miraculously, Alp Arslān remained unrecognized, and the vizier Nizām al-Mulk successfully negotiated the ransom for his release. See Safī, O., *The politics of knowledge in premodern Islam: negotiating ideology and religious inquiry*,

throne, Sanjar «began to chide him, and he [Qadrkhān] asked for mercy,» reportedly kissing the ground before the sultān.²⁵ However, his plea was not accepted. «Either you serve us, or you don't,» Sanjar exclaimed, «and if you don't, then the sword will be your only reward!» Then Qadrkhān was beheaded.²⁶

Sanjar did not exactly soften in the later years of his reign, even if his position was by then much more secure, having assumed the title of Great Saljūq in 511/1118. In 526/1132, his nephew Mas'ūd b. Muḥammad (r. 529-47/1134-52) challenged him over the succession to the sultanate of Iraq. After defeating Mas'ūd's troops, Sanjar summoned one of Mas'ūd's *amīrs* to his throne, interrogated him and then proceeded to execute the defenseless man (*qatala-hu ṣabr^{am}*).²⁷

The formula *qatala-hu ṣabr^{am}* deserves some attention. The expression has two possible meanings according to whether one takes *ṣabr^{am}* to be the state (*ḥāl*) of the subject or the object of the verb *qatala*.²⁸ If taken to refer to the victim, *ṣabr^{am}* indicates the condemned suffers his punishment «patiently» or «steadfastly», or simply as a defenseless prisoner tied up in chains.²⁹ *Ṣabran*, however, can also refer to the person

Chapel Hill, 2007, 59, citing Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh*, ed. A. Ātash, Tehran, 1983, II, 278-279.

²⁵ Ḥusaynī, *Zubdat al-tawārīkh*, 180.

²⁶ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, VIII, 477. See also Bundārī, *Tārīkh dawlat āl Saljūq*, 241.

²⁷ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, IX, 36-7; Bundārī, *Tārīkh dawlat āl Saljūq*, 199; Anon., *Mujmal al-tawārīkh wa-l-qīṣaṣ*, ed. Malik al-Shu'arā' Bahār, Tehran, 1318/1939, 413. Mas'ūd b. Muḥammad b. Malikshāh tried to wrestle power from his brother Tuḡhril, to whom Sanjar had given Iraq. In the course of the battle, the *amīr* Qarāja had ridden a frontal attack on Sanjar's position. Cf. *EI²*, s.v. «Mas'ūd b. Muḥammad b. Malikshāh,» VI, 782a [C. E. Bosworth.]

²⁸ Syntactically, both is possible. See Reckendorf, H., *Arabische Syntax*, Heidelberg, 1921, 98 (§ 55).

²⁹ See Brockelmann, C., *Arabische Grammatik*, Berlin, 1913⁷, 115; Shālījī, `A., *Mawsū'at al-`adhāb*, Beirut, 1980, IV, 245, 247. Camilla Adang kindly draws my attention to the fact that many of the venerated Muslim leaders of the first generations met their violent deaths *ṣabr^{am}*. Ibn Ḥazm's *Naqt al-`arūs fi tawārīkh al-khulafā'* has a chapter on «those who did not comply with their deposition and met death steadfastly»: *man lam yūjib ilā l-khal' wa-ṣabara ḥattā qutila*. This includes the caliphs `Uthmān, `Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, Marwān b. Muḥammad, and al-Muhtadī. See Ibn Ḥazm, *Rasā'il*, ed. I. `Abbās, Beirut, 1980-83, II, 84. During the reign of Yazīd b. Mu`āwiya many of the most excellent Muslims from among the remaining *ṣaḥāba* and venerable *tābi`ūn* were thus killed: *qutilū jah^{am} zulm^{am} fi l-ḥarb wa-ṣabr^{am}*. See *ibid.*, II, 140. See also Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Thabāt `inda l-mamāt*, Beirut, 1413/1993, for a manual of edification explaining the proper attitude at the moment of death and including stories about pious men of the past who met their death *ṣabr^{am}* (e.g. `Uthmān, 244). Some *ḥadīths* declare *ṣabr* at the moment of execution (*qatl al-rajul ṣabr^{am}*) a propitiatory act (*kaffāra*) which wipes out the sins of one's life. See al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Kanz al-`ummāl*, ed. al-Dimyāṭī, Beirut, 1419/1998, V, 123.

who does the killing, suggesting a premeditated, perhaps even ritualized act, done «in cold blood».³⁰ This reading would also seem to suggest that in the case of Sanjar's execution of Mas'ūd's *amīr*, Sanjar killed the *amīr* with his own hands.

At first sight, this might seem counterintuitive, and the analogy with divine justice appears to break down. On the Day of Judgement, God does not descend from his Throne to punish the sinners. Rather, He lets Jahannam and his minions, the punisher angels in hell (the *zabāniyya*), do the dirty work. Likewise, the sultān might be expected to delegate the actual business of shedding blood to his executioner, the *sayyāf* standing next to his throne, or to other agents of the repressive state apparatus such as the policemen (*shihān*, *shurāt*). However, rather than undermining the elevated, aloof position of the sovereign as a superhuman ruler, his own direct involvement in the execution arguably served to strengthen the sense of terror and awe that permeated the throne scene. At least it may have appeared that way to the Saljūq sultāns who, it may be assumed, lacked in theological sophistication. Rulers of earlier periods in Islamic history appear to have doubled as executioners less frequently.³¹ Among the Saljūqs, on the other hand, not only Sanjar is known to have taken execution of enemies into his own hands. Again, this tended to happen in military tribunals that were set up after battles. In 494/1101, in the battle of Sharrā near Hamadhān between the two Saljūq pretenders Barkyārūq and Muḥammad, the latter's vizier Mu'ayyad al-Mulk was captured by Barkyārūq's forces. Barkyārūq resented that the vizier, whom he also suspected of Bāṭini connections, had incited Muḥammad to revolt against him. In what seems to have been an interrogation in front of the throne, Barkyārūq confronted the vizier with his alleged crimes. Mu'ayyad al-Mulk preferred to remain silent, whereupon the sultān proceeded to kill him «with his own hands».³² Some decades later, in 583/1187, Ṣalāḥ al-

³⁰ Wright, W., *A grammar of the Arabic language*, Cambridge, 1999³, II, 114.

³¹ Umayyad caliphs are occasionally reported to have killed their enemies, including members of their own family, with their own hands and in rather violent fashion. When the rebellious Umayyad `Amr b. Sa`id, a former governor of Medina under Yazīd, was captured by `Abd al-Malik, the caliph first humiliated him in front of the court, then straddled his chest, butchered him and tossed his head out to `Amr's supporters gathered outside. See Robinson, Ch., *`Abd al-Malik*, Oxford, 2005, 27. I owe this reference to Andrew Marsham. Another example is the public execution by `Abd al-Raḥmān III of his son `Abd Allāh discussed in Fierro, M., «Emulating Abraham: the Fāṭimid al-Qā'im and the Umayyad `Abd al-Raḥmān III» in Ch. Lange and M. Fierro (eds.), *Public violence in Islamic societies: power, discipline, and the construction of the public sphere, 7th-19th centuries CE*, Edinburgh, 2009, 130-155.

³² See Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, VIII, 442; Bundāri, *Tārīkh dawlat āl Saljūq*, 240; Anon., *Mujmal al-tawārīkh*, 409-410. Cf. *EP*², s.v. «Nizāmiyya», VIII, 81b [C. E. Bosworth.]

Dīn al-Ayyūbī famously decapitated Reynald de Châtillon after the battle of Ḥaṭṭīn.³³

For all we know, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's decision to execute Reynald with his own hands was exceptional, and motivated by exceptional circumstances.³⁴ Weighing especially heavily was that Reynald had treacherously broken a truce with the sultān. In 582/1186, he had attacked a Muslim caravane near the castle of Kerak, his fortress by the Dead Sea. Treachery and rebellion also appear to have been the main reason for Sanjar to stage public acts of cruelty in front of his throne, as the examples given above indicate.³⁵ The most well-known incident of this kind is the execution of his former chamberlain and boon companion `Alī Chatri, the Parasol Bearer, in 547/1152. `Alī Chatri had been a personal favorite of Sanjar, who had given the city of Herat to him as his fief. However, despite his protégé status, he had rebelled and plotted to overthrow Sanjar with the help of the Ghūrid king, `Alā' al-Dīn Ḥusayn (d. 556/1161). After giving battle to, and defeating, `Alā' al-Dīn's and `Alī Chatri's combined forces, the latter was brought before the sultān, and Sanjar ordered him to be cut in half by the throne, under the royal banner (*be-zīr-e rāyat*).³⁶ Perhaps this was a nod to the eschatological notion that on the Day of Judgment, «God will raise a banner over each of the traitors [*li-kulli ghādir*] and he will be known by it, and it will be said [on the banner]: 'This is the act of treachery [*ghadra*] of N.N. son of N.N.'»³⁷ Putting it more crudely, another tradition details that those who betray the leader (*imām*) of the Muslim community will have planted a banner at their buttocks (*yurkazu liwā'u-hu `inda isti-hi*).³⁸

However, treachery and rebellion was not always and not automatically followed by public execution. Sanjar was quite capable of mercy, too. In 513/1119, Sanjar's nephew Maḥmūd, who ruled over Iraq and Western Persia (r. 511-25/1118-31), was incited to rebellion against his uncle by his Chief Chamberlain, `Alī Bār. Sanjar invaded Iraq, defeating Maḥmūd

³³ Ibn Shaddād, *al-Nawādir al-sultāniyya*, ed. J. al-Shayyāl, Cairo, 1962, 78.

³⁴ Cf. Lyons, M. C. and Jackson, D. E. P., *Saladin: the politics of holy war*, Cambridge, 1982, 264.

³⁵ In this connection also see the contributions to this volume by L. Jones and M. J. Viguera.

³⁶ Rāvandī, *Rāḥat al-ṣudūr*, ed. M. Iqbal, London, 1921, 176; Nishāpūrī, *Saljūqnāma*, ed. A. H. Morton, London, 2004, 60; Juzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣiri*, tr. H. G. Raverty, *The Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣiri*, 1881, repr. Osnabrück, 1991, 237. In Saljūq times, «the office of its [i.e. the parasol's] bearer, *chatr-dār*, was among the highest that a *ghulām* could attain, with the standard bearer, the master of the wardrobe, and the armour-bearer». See *EP*, s.v. «Mizallā», VII, 192b [P. A. Andrews.]

³⁷ Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Beirut, 1996, IV, 144; Qurṭubī, *al-Tadhkira fī aḥwāl al-mawtā wa-umūr al-ākhirā*, Cairo, 1400/1980, 355.

³⁸ Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, IV, 483.

and `Alī Bār at Sāwa, but decided, at the request of Maḥmūd, to spare the Chief Chamberlain's life.³⁹ From the chronicles, it is difficult to tell what led Sanjar to punishment in one instance, and to mercy in another. Clues are few and far in between. In 497/1103-4, Sanjar's vizier Abū l-Faṭḥ al-Ṭuḡhrā'ī was caught spinning an intrigue, trying to alienate the sulṭān from the powerful *amīr* and army general (*aṣṣāḥsalār*) Bazghash. Reportedly, Sanjar arrested al-Ṭuḡhrā'ī and wanted to execute him. However, Bazghash convinced Sanjar to have mercy, reminding him that al-Ṭuḡhrā'ī had «the privilege of having served [*la-hu ḥaqqu khidmatⁱⁿ*].» Sanjar contented himself with exiling the vizier to Ghazna.⁴⁰

As these examples suggest, Sanjar did not indiscriminately execute everyone who had challenged his authority, not even in cases of high treason. On the other hand, his acts of mercy do not appear to follow a particularly consistent logic, either. Sanjar appears as the perfect embodiment of the «extensive arbitrariness» of sulṭānic governments that had arisen after the collapse of a central caliphal bureaucracy.⁴¹ «Even great sulṭāns», as Marshall Hodgson observed, «tended to be drastically arbitrary, splendid in their moments of generosity, inhuman in their anger or their fears.»⁴²

However, it stands to reason that this was exactly the point: in order to preserve the awe (*hayba*) felt by his entourage towards him, Sanjar's acts of cruelty and of mercy relied on the element of unpredictability. Only in this way could the supreme power of the sulṭān, who *qua* ruler was responsible to no one but himself, be made sufficiently clear. Arbitrariness, as long as it did not descend into complete capriciousness, was part of what being a ruler was all about. Intercession (*shafā'a*) remained a possibility,⁴³ as the examples show, but there could never be a guarantee for the offender that he would escape unharmed. Sanjar reserved the right to pardon whomever he wished, but he also took pains to announce to all and everyone, through ritual executions in front of his throne, that nobody was safe from his wrath.

³⁹ Bundāri, *Tārīkh dawlat āl Saljūq*, 191. On `Alī Bār's career, see further Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, VIII, 645; Anon., *Mujmal al-tawārikh*, 414.

⁴⁰ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, VIII, 500. At times, rebellious *amīrs* also enjoyed the mercy of Sanjar, rather than earning the ire he showed on other occasions. For example, Sanjar ordered the treacherous *amīr* Kundughdī to leave Khurāsān (*amara-hu bi-mufāraqat bilādi-hi*) and settle in Ghazna. See Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, VIII, 478.

⁴¹ Hodgson, *Venture*, II, 131.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 132.

⁴³ According to Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jhd. H.*, Berlin, 1991-97, IV, 545, the idea of *shafā'a* is «yet another proof that God was imagined in the fashion of an earthly ruler».

Couching the sultān's exercise of justice in such terms we are not too far away from the language of *kalām*. In fact, the Iranian theory of divine kingship here appears to echo the Ash'arī doctrine of God's attributes. This brings us back to al-Ghazālī.

3. THE «WHIP OF FEAR»: AL-GHAZĀLĪ ON GOD'S MERCY AND WRATH

Received wisdom has it that the god of Islam is a god of mercy. After all, His most famous epithet is «the All-Forgiving Forgiver», *al-rahīm* *al-rahīm*. The Qur'ān (7:156) says: «I punish whomsoever I please, but My mercy encompasses everything.»⁴⁴ Later tradition clothed this into the formula of the famous *ḥadīth qudsī*: «My mercy outweighs my wrath (*inna raḥmatī taḡlibu ḡhaḍabī*)».⁴⁵

However, pitching God's mercy against His wrath would hardly be necessary if *both* were not an essential ingredient of the religious imagination. Rudolf Otto pointed out long ago that the experience of the divine across cultures is predicated on a feeling of both loving nearness and awe-inspiring terror; the Deity is always both *fascinans* and *tremendum*.⁴⁶ The god of Islam is no exception to this. The wavering between bliss and doom, between visions of eternal happiness and eternal suffering is perhaps most eloquently expressed in the *isrā'* tradition, in which the Prophet Muḥammad witnesses, in rapid succession, both the bounties bestowed on the inhabitants of Paradise and the torments meted out to the sinners in Hell.⁴⁷

In the *Kīmīyā-yi sa'ādāt*, al-Ghazālī puts it this way:

There are people ignorant of God's attributes who say: «God is merciful and kind [*rahīm va-karīm*], He shows mercy to us in every respect [*be-har sifaṭ raḥmat mī-kunad*].» They do not know that He is as kind as He is

⁴⁴ Arguably, God's violence in the Qur'ān is never completely arbitrary or unaccountable. When God kills in the Qur'ān, usually a justification is given. See Peña, S. and Vega, M., «La muerte dada en el Corán» in M. Fierro (ed.), *De muerte violenta: política, religión y violencia en Al-Andalus*, Madrid, 2004, 249-300. Whether Muslim theologians of the Middle Ages stressed God's justice more than his sovereignty, however, is another matter.

⁴⁵ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, tr. Winter, 253.

⁴⁶ Otto, R., *Das Heilige*, first published in 1917, Munich, 1979, 14-22, 42-52.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Qushayrī, *Mi'rāj*, Cairo, 1384/1964, 39-42. Another illustration, the *isrā'* version transmitted by Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965), is found in Suyūṭī, *al-La'ālī al-maṣnū'a fī l-aḥādīth al-mawḍū'a*, Beirut, 1417/1996, I. On God's anger, cf. Shahzad B., «Anger» in J. D. McAuliffe (gen. ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*.

fierce in punishment [*shadīd al-`iqāb*], and they do not realize that He thrusts many people in this world into affliction, disease and hunger, despite the fact that He is kind and merciful.⁴⁸

Al-Ghazālī is arguing here that the believer must not think that God is incapable of acts of seeming cruelty. On the contrary, he says, just look at the tribulations God sends down on people in this life! One might add that God's terror-inspiring penchant for violence is also manifest in the way in which He punishes the sinners (*mufsidūn*) in Hell. Al-Ghazālī himself gives plenty of examples, both in the *Ihyā' ulūm al-dīn* and in his eschatological manual *al-Durra al-fākhira*, of God's truly horrific punishments of the *mufsidūn*. A full catalogue of the tortures in Hell would go beyond the scope of this article;⁴⁹ suffice it to say that the *mufsidūn* are humiliated, castigated, mutilated and incinerated. But as if that were not enough, God seems to be taking a kind of malicious pleasure in literally scaring the hell out of the resurrected on the Day of Judgement.

For example, in the *al-Durra al-fākhira*, al-Ghazālī relates the story of a pious ascetic who is brought before God's Throne on the Day of Judgement. The ascetic boasts that he has lived for 500 years on a desert island, doing nothing but serving God in fasting, prayer and devotion. Surely, he boldly affirms, God will reward him for his good actions. God answers that all good works of men are nothing in comparison to the blessings God bestows on them. To the ascetic, He has given birth and existence, the means of subsistence on his desert island, and He has listened to the ascetic's prayers. Surely, God concludes, the man has no claims on Him whatsoever. He then sends the ascetic to the Fire, in what seems like a wanton act of cruelty. But the story has a pun. As the shell-shocked ascetic turns away and begins his painful descent into Hell, God calls him back, with a smile on His face, and says: «Enter the Garden by My mercy; you have been a good servant.»⁵⁰

The point of this story is that believers do not deserve reward by virtue of their actions since, in line with Ash'arite thinking, God does not owe anything to anyone at all. What is more, the story also manifests a certain malice on God's part. As the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* remind us, it is a grave sin (*kabīra*) «to think oneself safe from the malice of God

⁴⁸ Ghazālī, *Kimiyā-yi sa`ādat*, Tehran, 1333/1914 or 15, 57-58.

⁴⁹ For a more extensive presentation, see Lange, Ch., *Justice, punishment and the medieval Muslim imagination*, 144-150.

⁵⁰ Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira*, 92, tr. Smith, 78. It should be noted here that the ascription of the *Durra* to al-Ghazālī is in doubt.

[*al-aman min makr Allāh*]].⁵¹ Too many are heedless of God's punishment in the hereafter: «If the believers knew about the extent of God's punishment [*uqūba*], none of them would hope for the Garden [*mā tama'a fi jannati-hi aḥad*]].»⁵² Approvingly citing traditions such as this one, al-Ghazālī maintains that the wrath of God is a very real prospect for the believer. As he pontificates in the *Iḥyā' ulūm al-dīn*, «your coming unto it [hell] is certain, while your salvation therefrom is no more than conjecture», urging the believer to «fill up your heart, therefore, with the dread of that destination.»⁵³

How could al-Ghazālī reconcile this grim picture with the idea that God is «all-merciful»? The answer he gives in the *Iḥyā' ulūm al-dīn* is that in an ideal world, where everybody leads a pious and virtuous life, God's true character as a god of mercy would shine unimpeded. However, in the current situation, where the *umma* is divided and wickedness widespread, the prospect of God's punishment has a more significant role to play than the hope in His mercy. «Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom» according to the Biblical adage, also preserved in the Islamic tradition (*ra's al-ḥikma khashiyat al-rabb*).⁵⁴ In the words of al-Ghazālī, «the dominance of fear [i.e., over hope] is the higher good, because disobedience and self-deceit are the more dominant over the creature.»⁵⁵

In consequence, al-Ghazālī recommends that believers practice psychological self-flagellation with the «whip of fear» (*sawt al-khawf*).⁵⁶ This injunction is no less than an instrumentalization of fear. Al-Ghazālī invokes the threat of divine punishment because he thinks this will help Muslims to achieve the unity of the *umma*. As Frank Griffel sums up al-Ghazālī's reasoning, «[i]f doubts about God's [...] ability to impose bodily

⁵¹ Ṣan`āni, *Muṣannaḥ*, ed. al-A`zamī, Beirut, 1970-1972, X, 459. *Al-aman min makr Allāh* is the 68th in al-Dhahabī's (d. 748/1348) well-known list of grave sins in the *K. al-Kabā'ir*. Cf. Qur`ān III, 54.

⁵² Samarqandī, *Tanbīh al-ghāfilin*, ed. `A. M. al-Wakīl, Jeddah, 1401/1981², I, 94. It must be admitted that such statements designed to inculcate fear, however, are usually juxtaposed with promises of salvation. Thus, the tradition in Samarqandī continues: «... and if the unbelievers knew about the extent of God's mercy, none of them would despair of His mercy.»

⁵³ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, tr. Winter, 220.

⁵⁴ Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaḥ*, ed. al-Ḥūt, Riyadh, 1409/1988-1989, VII, 68. Ibn Abī Shayba states that the saying is found in the *Fātiḥat al-zabūr*, «which is called the Zabūr of David», i.e. the Psalms. Cf. Psalm CXI, 10. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, Beirut, 1401/1980-1981, I, 323 (where the saying is attributed to Ibn Mas`ūd); Muttaqī, *Kanz al-ummāl*, III, 60.

⁵⁵ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, tr. McKane, W., *Al-Ghazzālī's book of fear and hope*, Leiden, 1962, 45.

⁵⁶ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, tr. Winter 232.

pain in the afterlife spread amongst the Muslims, the religious law may be disrespected». ⁵⁷ For al-Ghazālī, social harmony and cohesion will result from the spectre of God's violent retribution.

What is striking about this line of reasoning is that this is, in a nutshell, how the late-medieval ideologues of royal power justified the ruler's exercise of violence. In the mirror-for-princes tradition, for example, we find the notion that it is because society has become wicked that «rulers must rely on punishment [*siyāsat*] and awe [*haybat*].» ⁵⁸ In the old days of the rightly-guided caliphs, it may have been enough for a ruler like `Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb simply to carry a whip with him in order for people to desist from antisocial behavior. However, in the current situation, the ability to inspire terror through extreme punishments is a crucial requirement of good government. As the *Qābūsnāma*, a 5th/11th-century mirror-for-princes states, the king must not neglect bloodshed and punishment because it instills awe in the subjects, and therefore helps to hold society together. ⁵⁹ Perhaps, in an ideal world, there would be no need for cruelty and punishment; but because Muslims live in a world where disobedience is rampant, this is what the dictate of political expediency (*siyāsa*) requires. As Aziz al-Azmeh has observed, most medieval Muslim theories of kingship reflect a «pessimistic anthropology», according to which «the nature of humankind is such that its orderly collective existence can only be guaranteed by unrelenting maintenance on the part of a vigilant ruler». ⁶⁰

This kind of argument, I suggest, drew part of its legitimacy from the fact that it echoed a commonly held Ash`arite understanding of the nature of God's justice. In other words, the «play of analogies» worked not only through the *mise-en-scène* of courtly rituals, but also on the conceptual level, providing a basic rationale for justice. A ruler like Sanjar, who claimed that he had received kingship of the world directly from the Lord of the World—in Sanjar's time, Saljūq sultāns no longer relied on the intermediary role of the caliph— would not have seen a contradiction in his unpredictable and arbitrary way of dispensing mercy and punishment. One of God's names in the Qur'ān is *al-jabbār*, «Violent

⁵⁷ Griffel, F., «Toleration and exclusion: al-Shāfi`ī and al-Ghazālī on the treatment of apostates», *BSOAS*, 64/3 (2001), 354.

⁵⁸ (Pseudo-)Ghazālī, *Naṣiḥat al-mulūk*, ed. Humā`ī, 148, tr. Bagley, *Ghazālī's book of counsel for kings*, London, 1964, 89.

⁵⁹ Kaykā`ūs b. Iskandar, *Qābūsnāma*, ed. Levy, London, 1951, 55. Similar ideas are found in the *Siyāsatnāma* and the anonymous *Baḥr al-favā'id*. See Lambton, A. K. S., «Islamic mirrors», 434; *Eadem*, «The dilemma of government in Islamic Persia: the *Siyāsat-nāma* of Nizām al-Mulk», *Iran*, 22 (1984), 57.

⁶⁰ Azmeh, *Muslim kingship*, 115.

Compeller» (LIX, 23-4),⁶¹ and this was also one of the titles of the Saljūq sulṭān.⁶² If God inspired fear through violent punishment, then surely the sulṭān, God's shadow on earth,⁶³ was justified to do so, too.

4. THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF FEAR AND AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S LEGACY

Let us recall that al-Ghazālī is often admired for his critical stance vis-à-vis the temporal authority of kings, and for his constant warnings to the rulers not to behave in a tyrannical way. There can be no doubt that he would have raised fundamental objections to the suggestion that Ash'arī theology played a part in justifying the arbitrariness of sulṭānic justice. In his treatise on the ninety-nine beautiful names of God (*asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*), al-Ghazālī makes it clear that God is called «king» (*malik*) in a way which no temporal ruler could ever lay claim to.⁶⁴ While there is a human portion accruing to each name, in the final analysis, the attributes of God, al-Ghazālī points out, apply to no other than Him (*lā taṣīru ṣifāt^m li-ghayri-hi*). Indeed, one must guard oneself against theories of the indwelling (*ḥulūl*) of divine attributes in man, or against the even more heretical notion that there can be unity (*ittiḥād*) of the attributes of God and those of certain outstanding human individuals.⁶⁵ For, as the Qur'ān states (XLII, 1), «nothing is comparable to Him». Translated into the language of kingship theory, al-Ghazālī's treatise can be read as a firm statement against notions of divine kingship.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Cf. Gimaret, D., *Les noms divins en Islam*, Paris, 1988, 246: «It is striking [...] that the Qur'ān calls God *jabbār*, given that in a number of other verses (XI, 59; XIV, 15-16; XIX, 13-14; XIX, 30-32; XXVIII, 19; XL, 35) the same attribute has an entirely pejorative sense. Depending on the context, *jabbār* means someone proud or violent, or a combination of these two in the person of a tyrant, a despot.» (The translation is mine.)

⁶² Rāvandī, *Rāḥat al-ṣudūr*, 125 (Malikshāh).

⁶³ (Pseudo-)Ghazālī, *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, tr. Bagley, 45.

⁶⁴ Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā sharḥ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*, Cairo, 1910, 28. The *Maqṣad* was written sometime after the year 490/1097, that is, after the completion of the *Ihyā'*. See Bouyges, M., *Chronologie des oeuvres de al-Ghazali (Algazel)*, ed. M. Allard, Beirut, 1959, 46. Eric Ormsby has recently suggested that it was conceived as a «manual for meditation» for al-Ghazālī's *ṣūfi* novices in Nishapur. See Ormsby, E., *Ghazali: the revival of Islam*, Oxford, 2008, 62.

⁶⁵ Ghazālī, *Maqṣad*, 72-73. On al-Ash'arī's view of divine justice, cf. Khadduri, M., *The Islamic conception of justice*, Baltimore, 1984, 56-58.

⁶⁶ The danger that kings would end up stylizing themselves as deities is a well-known topos in Persian literature. Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*, Iran's national epos, tells the story of the just king Jamshīd, whose power crumbled when he claimed divinity. As a result, he

Al-Ghazālī's mistrust vis-à-vis any form of arbitrary absolutism also comes out quite clearly in the first part of the *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk* (*NM1*), the mirror-for-princes that al-Ghazālī wrote toward the end of his life, probably at the request of Sanjar. Among other didactic tales about the justice of kings, al-Ghazālī includes stories that predict divine retribution for rulers who punish «in excess of what God bade» them, that is, those rulers who assume the power to punish beyond the relatively narrow framework of *ḥadd*, *qiṣās* and *ta`zīr* penalties provided in Muslim *fiqh*.⁶⁷ Al-Ghazālī's clear condemnation in *NM1* of the absolutism of kings, together with his strong condemnation of ideas of divine indwelling (whether in *ṣūfis* or kings), is a strong argument in favor of the view that the second part of the *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk* (*NM2*), which follows in the Iranian tradition, is unlikely to have been penned by him. This opinion has been put forth forcefully by Patricia Crone and Carole Hillenbrand,⁶⁸ even though others have insisted on al-Ghazālī's authorship of both parts.⁶⁹

However, a shift in emphasis is perhaps required with regard to this vexing question. Regardless of whether the two parts of the *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk* are al-Ghazālī's or not, it is astonishing that the generations immediately following al-Ghazālī thought him perfectly capable of having authored both parts. According to Patricia Crone, the merger of *NM1* and *NM2* happened «as early as the second half of the 12th century».⁷⁰ It appears as if neither the person responsible for adding *NM2* to *NM1*, nor the readers of the final two-part version sensed a contradiction. Not a single Muslim scholar before the modern period appears to have doubted

was overthrown and cut in half by the evil usurper Zuhāk. See *EP*, s.v., «Zuhāk» [E. Yarshater.]

⁶⁷ (Pseudo-)Ghazālī, *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, 22. For earlier formulations of the same principle, cf. Juwaynī, *Ghiyāth al-umam*, ed. `A. al-Dīb, Cairo, 1401/1981-1982, §§ 321ff.; Māwardī, *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, ed. M. J. al-Ḥadīthī, Baghdad, 1986, 365-367. It should be noted, however, that al-Ghazālī was quite ready to expand the framework of Islamic criminal law if the «interest of the state» and the *umma*'s unity were at stake. This is evident, for example, in his legal views of apostasy, which he gave a much broader definition than al-Shāfi`ī before him. See Griffel, «Toleration and Exclusion», 353.

⁶⁸ Crone, P., «Did al-Ghazālī write a mirror for princes? On the authorship of *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*», *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 10 (1987), 168; Hillenbrand, C., «Islamic orthodoxy or realpolitik? Al-Ghazālī's views on government», *Iran*, 26 (1988), 92. I am inclined to follow Crone's and Hillenbrand's lead, since impositions of the postmodern idea of hybridity on al-Ghazālī's identity as an intellectual strike me as somewhat forced. This does not mean, however, that I think that al-Ghazālī's legacy is one of unadulterated egalitarianism. See below.

⁶⁹ See Fierro, M., *El libro de las novedades y las innovaciones de Abū Bakr al-Ṭurṭūṣī*, Madrid, 1993, 69. Also leaning in this direction is SAFI, *The politics of knowledge*, 116-117.

⁷⁰ Crone, «Did al-Ghazālī write a mirror for princes?», 169.

that the *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk* was written by al-Ghazālī in its entirety. Perhaps one element in the explanation of why this was possible is that al-Ghazālī's Ash'arite view of God's punishment as unrestricted and unpredictable, though tied to ulterior utilitarian ends, translated so well into the language of Iranian concepts of sacred kingship. As if by osmosis, the same logic of sovereign mercy and punishment is operational in both traditions.

There is no reason to doubt that al-Ghazālī was keen to draw a clear line between the justice of God and the justice of the temporal ruler. But in the last resort, he could not escape the thought that, if God could instrumentalize fear of punishment to achieve unity among the *umma*, the *sulṭān*, God's shadow on earth, could not be criticized for using punishment toward the same end. Two years before his death, in 503/1109, al-Ghazālī was summoned to Sanjar's encampment in order to defend himself against certain accusations that envious colleagues had leveled against him. Al-Ghazālī wrote a letter of apology, asking to be excused, but Sanjar insisted. When al-Ghazālī finally appeared before the throne, Sanjar reportedly stood up, embraced him and invited him take a seat next to him by the throne.⁷¹ It is difficult not to appreciate the irony of the scene. Al-Ghazālī, at the end of a long political career torn between anti-absolutism and the necessity to preserve the unity of the *umma*, ended up sitting next to Sanjar's throne, as awkwardly perhaps as *NMI* sits next to *NM2*, but not, after all, a completely unwelcome guest in the royal tent.

⁷¹ Ghazālī, *Makātib-i fārsī*, tr. Krawulsky, 68.