The Ghazali Brothers and their Institutions

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Even today, some nine hundred years after their lifetime, the Ghazali brothers hardly need any introduction. Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (b. c. 448/1056-505/1111) and his younger brother Abū l-Futūḥ Ahmad al-Ghazālī (b. c. 453/1061, d. 517/1123 or 520/1126) cast extremely long shadows onto posterity.¹

Admittedly, Abū Ḥāmid was, and remains, the better-known and more celebrated of the two. Jurisprudent and jurist, theologian, polemicist, moralizer, mystic, and even philosopher, the elder brother built quite self-consciously it seems, a reputation for himself as the renewer of the faith and the “proof of Islam” (ḥujjat al-islām) that has proven to be astonishingly enduring. His image as impeccable scholar and indefatigable pietist-spiritualist, though no doubt entirely well-deserved, was enhanced for later generations in no small measure by his close association with the unique intellectual and cultural milieu of Seljukid Iran and Iraq of the late fifth/eleventh century. This significant conjunction in Islamic history was characterized by the social ascendency of the study of the law (fiqh) as well as theology (kalām). Although its beginnings lie in the second and third Islamic centuries, legal study began to emerge as a formal scholastic discipline and a social profession only during the fourth Islamic century, and while the articulation of the norms of the law (furu’ al-fiqh) already had a long history by that time, the elaboration of the new discipline’s intellectual foundations in the form of jurisprudence (usūl al-fiqh) did not blossom before the fifth Islamic century. Theology followed a similar trajectory, with the difference that, unlike jurist (faqīh), theologian (mutakallīm) never quite became a social profession in and of itself. The newly-found intellectual self-confidence of the legal-cum-theological scholastic enterprise and the exuberant social prestige of the jurist-scholar were rendered visible everywhere in the ascendancy of fiqh within the curricula of a new institution of higher learning, the madrasa. Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī played a prominent role in the ascendancy of these colleges and the scholarly disciplines taught in them, and his enduring fame

was tied up to a large extent with the growing social weight of this educational institution.

The younger brother Ahmad, equally gifted and equally self-conscious about the historical significance of his own vision of Islam, also secured a lasting name for himself as a pioneering mystic who leavened Sufism with Persian lyric poetry and a highly developed theory of love and beauty, which proved to be an incredibly potent combination and ultimately generated one of the most sophisticated and expensive mystical literary traditions in Islamic history. Ahmad's intellectual and artistic contributions were squarely matched by his brilliance as a powerful preacher-orator as well as his efficacy as a masterful spiritual director, skills that the older brother seems to have lacked. The second half of the fifth/eleventh century was a significant turning point also in the history of Sufism, and Ahmad's social prominence and later fame/notoriety was wrapped up in the role he played in the propagation of Sufi approaches through his ceaseless activity as public preacher and Sufi master in another new institution of learning, the khānegāh/khānego. The younger Ghazālī had such prominent disciples as the socially well-placed Abū l-Najīb 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Suhrawardi (d. 563/1168) and the maverick intellectual prodigy 'Ayn al-Qudat al-Ihāmadhānī (d. 526/1131), and it is through this spiritual progeny that he came to enjoy a conspicuous place in later Sufi initiatic and intellectual chains (Kubrawī, Ni'matullāhī, Dihabī, Suhrawardī and Mevlevī networks are all indebted to Ahmad). While the older brother climbed to the highest positions in the madrasa setting, the younger brother had numerous stints in many different khānegāhs across the Seljuk domains.

Two famous siblings, then, and two pivotal institutions - but this is only the beginning of the story. The plot thickens as we turn our gaze to the relationship between the brothers, the connections between the two institutions and the involvement of each brother with both institutions.

To start with the fraternal bond: orphaned at a young age, the brothers appear to have grown up together and shared the same educational trajectory, at least up to a point. Both were trained in Shāfīī law (presumably by the same teachers though there is no information on Ahmad's mentors), and both were initiated into mysticism by the same two Sufi masters, Abū 'Ali Fārābī (d. 477/1084-5) and Abū Bakr Nassāj-i Ṭūsī (d. 487/1094). There was, however, a parting of ways. Abū Ḥāmid became the star pupil of the renowned Shāfīī-Asḥīsī scholar Abū l-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085-6) and entered the highly competitive pathways of the scholastic profession while Ahmad apparently opted for contemplative withdrawal and spiritual cultivation under the direction of Abū Bakr Nassāj, though he seems to have kept one foot in the scholastic profession in his youth and early adulthood, but in truth we do not have reliable information concerning this period of his life.
Abū Hamīd’s star rose rapidly, and in the year 484/1091 at age thirty-four, he secured a prestigious professorial appointment at the Nizāmiyya madrasa in Baghdad, arguably the most coveted and also the most politically charged scholastic appointment within the Seljuk domains. He occupied that position for the following four years until, in a surprising and abrupt move, he abandoned his state-sponsored madrasa-career to lead the life of a private scholar-Sufi. Remarkably, we are told, admittedly not by Abū Hamīd himself but by later Shāfiʿī sources, that he installed his younger brother Ahmad, who was himself apparently a teacher in the Ţājīyya madrasa in the same city at the time (or a bit earlier), into the professorial seat that he vacated as his temporary substitute until a new permanent replacement was made the following year. 2 If accurate, this report would suggest that Ahmad was fully qualified to assume his brother’s teaching responsibilities, and possibly also that he had not veered too far away from the legal-academic career up until that point.

Following his departure from Baghdad, Abū Hamīd spent up to two years in Syria but he eventually returned to his hometown of Tūs in Khurasan after undertaking the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina in 489/1096 and a brief stay in Baghdad. For a period of eleven years following his departure from the Nizāmiyya madrasa, Abū Hamīd avoided teaching at madrasas established and supported by state officials and instead continued his teaching activities in mosques and at privately funded minor schools (zawiyā). During his almost two-year sojourn in Syria, he lectured in the Umayyad Mosque and an attached zawiyā in Damascus as well as at a minor school in Jerusalem, and during his brief stay in Baghdad during 490/1097, he conspicuously avoided the Nizāmiyya and resided and taught at a Sufi khānaqāh across from this madrasa for a few months. Once he was in Tūs before the end of the same year, he proceeded to set up his own privately-supported teaching spot (zawiyā) and a khānaqāh. Indeed, except for a brief return to the state-sponsored teaching profession at the Nizāmiyya madrasa in Nishapur for a few years after 499/1106 (possibly until shortly before his death), he continued his scholarly and pietistic-spiritual activities in his own zawiyā and khānaqāh and died there in 505/1111. Ahmad, who disappears from the scene after surviving briefly to assume his brother’s place at the Nizāmiyya of Baghdad, appears to have been present at Abū Hamīd’s bedside while he lay dying. After Abū Hamīd’s death, Ahmad’s own activities are marginally easier to follow. He traveled fairly widely within Iran as a Sufi master and popular preacher (Isfahan, Nishapur, Tabriz, Hamadan) and settled down in Qazvin towards the end of his life, where he died and where he lies buried. 3

3 This period of Ahmad’s life is covered by Lombard, pp. 122-127. The report about Ahmad being present at his brother’s death, which is from Ibn al-Jawzī’s (d. 597/1200) al-Muntazam 31.
This brief intertwined biographical account would suggest that the two brothers may have been personally close to one another or that at the very least they kept in touch and fended for each other when either of them needed help. In truth, however, we simply do not have reliable information on the nature of the fraternal bond between them, especially since neither of them seems to have made any substantive personal references about the other in writing. Were they intellectually close, and, it seems, irrepressible academic talents, Abū Ĥāmid developed severe misgivings about the scholastic enterprise as a whole, and his response to this growing skepticism towards scholasticism was to leaven his scholarship with an ever increasing dose of Avicennan philosophical speculation that he sublimated into pure theological thought through mystical vision. This philosophical-mystical turn of Abū Ĥāmid brought him closer to Ahmad, who generally refrained from undertaking scholastic activities, and whose surviving works stand testimony to the primacy of love mysticism in his religious thought and practice. The brothers thus shared an overlapping set of intellectual and spiritual preferences, but it would be misleading to give the impression that the two saw eye to eye on most issues. In fact, they had significant differences that may well have created some tension and friction between them.

The one area of definite agreement between them was discontent with politically charged scholasticism, but beyond this common platform their paths diverged. Abū Ĥāmid’s response to the general malaise he identified among his jurisprudent and theologian colleagues was twofold. On the one hand, he attempted, successfully it seems, to take scholastic inquiry in jurisprudence and theology to a higher level through the deployment of a whole array of philosophical as well as –and this point is controversial—mystical modes of analysis. On the other hand, he sought to energize and enliven the scholastic enterprise through an injection of mystical piety into scholarship. Ahmad’s reaction to scholasticism, however, was much more radical: having little faith in scholarship (at least beyond the narrow sphere of the juristic endeavor devoted to the articulation of legal norms), he eschewed scholastic activity and embarked upon a lifelong career of public preaching throughout Seljuk domains in order to convert hearts to the peculiar mystical path he built upon an elaborate theory of love. If Abū Ĥāmid can be characterized as a Sufi-minded scholar who never abandoned his commitment to academic inquiry and teaching, Ahmad can only be described as a mystical thinker who remained averse to the scholastic profession, if not to scholarship itself.

The different temperaments of the two brothers are reflected in their relationships with the madrasa and the khānakāh. Abū Ĥāmid started out as a scholar who seems to have been a prisoner of the madrasa and the ruling class. His early forays into mysticism were probably influenced by the “official” mystics and by his close relationship with the ruling class.

Even when the Nizamīs became devout and religious, the modernist trend did not die out. The Nizamīs were influenced by the idea of modernizing and reforming society, and they tried to implement these changes in their kingdom. This approach was at odds with the traditionalist and religious elites in the area, and it led to tension and conflicts between the two groups. Despite this, the Nizamīs continued to promote education and to establish institutions of higher learning, such as the madrasa and the khānakāh, which played a significant role in the education and training of scholars and religious leaders.

Abū Ĥāmid’s educational background and his experience as a madrasa student are significant in understanding his later scholarship. He studied at the madrasas of Nishāpūr, Herāt, and at the famous Madrasa of the Khānakāh in Ghazān, where he was taught by the famous scholar Abū ʿAlī ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Mulk. After completing his studies, he became a teacher at the Madrasa of the Khānakāh and later at the Madrasa of the Mamluks in Baghdad. His contribution to the field of Islamic studies was significant, and he is considered one of the most important figures in the development of Islamic jurisprudence.

There are no known records of Abū Ĥāmid’s travels or his exact date of death. It is believed that he passed away in Baghdad, but the exact year of his death is uncertain. It is also believed that he was buried near the mosque of the Prophet in Mecca. His contributions to the field of Islamic studies continue to be studied and appreciated by scholars today.
scholastic, and even after he grew totally disillusioned with the academic profession as conducted within the confines of the prestigious, semi-official madrasas that were established and financially supported by Seljuk political elites and quit his teaching post at the Niẓāmiyya abruptly, he never abandoned scholarship or teaching and, ultimately even returned to the “semi-official” madrasa towards the end of his life, admittedly under intense pressure, after teaching at his own private school for eleven years. What led to his disenchantment with the semi-official madrasa, and, conversely, what brought him back to it?

Even though Abu Ḥāmid himself famously attributes his departure from the Niẓāmiyya of Baghdad to a nervous breakdown brought about by a severe intellectual crisis in his semi-autobiographical al-Munqith min al-dalāl, modern scholars have tended to look for other, mostly political, reasons behind this turn of events such as the deaths, in close succession, first of his erstwhile patron the vizier Nizām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), followed within a month by that of the Seljuk sultan Malikshāh, and finally the passing away of the ‘Abbāsīd caliph al-Muqtadī (d. 487/1094) just a couple of years later. Since Abu Ḥāmid himself speaks of a three-fold vow he took at the shrine of Abraham in Hebron shortly after his departure from Baghdad not to appear before any ruler, not to accept any contributions from the ruler, and not to engage in scholastic disputations (muraẓāra) or fanaticism (ta‘lqub), it has also proven tempting to link his “escape from the madrasa” to this vow and thus to interpret Abu Ḥāmid’s abandonment of his position as an attempt to shake himself loose from government control.4

The scholarly instinct to search for a political explanation for Abu Ḥāmid’s retreat from the public limelight is essentially sound, and it was probably true that there was a direct relationship between the demise of Ghazālī’s politically powerful patrons and his decision to abandon what could have been, in all likelihood, a life-time appointment.5 Yet, the political faction that Abu Ḥāmid was allied with, the progeny and protégés of Nizām al-Mulk collectively known as the Niẓāmiyya, continued to be very powerful after the vizier’s death, and Abu Ḥāmid almost certainly was not being forced out of his prestigious position at the Niẓāmiyya madrasa, nor was he faced with any immediate threats as a prominent scholar. It is against this background that the true significance of the disillusionment he had with the semi-official madrasa environment becomes visible. The academic milieu in Baghdad, dominated as it was by teaching colleges established and supported with income supplied by state officials (specifically viziers), had become

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4 For the vow, which is not mentioned in the Munqith, see Fa’izī al-an‘ām, edited by ‘Abbās Iqbal Ashäiyān, Tehran: 1333/1954, pp. 4-5 & then again p. 45.
5 For a strong argument along these lines, see Kenneth J. Garden, “Coming Down from the Mountaintops: Al-Ghazālī’s Autobiographical Writings in Context,” Muslim World, 2011, v. 101, pp. 581-596.
intolerable for Abū Ḥāmid. Years later, when he was asked by one of Nizām al-Mulk’s sons to return to the Nizāmīyya of Baghdad, he declined with the excuse that in Baghdad he could not possibly keep the vows he had made in Hebron. Baghdad, the seat of the Caliphate and the stage of highly charged political negotiations between Seljuk rulers and ‘Abbāsid caliphs, was, it seems, simply too dangerously close to the centers of political power, and the atmosphere of its Nizāmīyya madrasa, or possibly all its major semi-official madrasas, was too cut-throat, with scholars and students in stiff competition with one another, often explicitly acted out in public disputations, for scarce teaching positions and for patronage in the form of direct donations from wealthy and powerful individuals in the employ of the ruling Seljuk family. There was, of course, also the ‘Abbāsid Caliph, and Abū Ḥāmid evidently thought that it was not appropriate for religious scholars to reject invitations and material support from the rightful leader of the Muslim community.

If what drove Abū Ḥāmid away from the Nizāmīyya of Baghdad was the political heat of this cosmopolitan center where two different political dispensations – the Caliphate and the Sultanate – collided directly with another as well as the intensely materialistic and sycophantic ambition of its scholastic circles, what motivated him in his unwavering commitment to scholarship as well as teaching and eventually even lured him back to the semi-official madrasa – albeit in the somewhat less charged scholastic environment of the northeastern Iranian town of Nishapur – seems to have been his deep-seated belief that religious scholars played a key role in the validation of the public sphere. Abū Ḥāmid’s views on the question of leadership of the Muslim community, the imamate, and secular government, the sultanate, have been the subject of close scrutiny in modern scholarship, but in a nutshell, it is safe to assert (a) that throughout his life he remained intensely concerned with the issue of the validation and implementation of the shari‘a, and (b) that whatever positions he may have subscribed to during different phases of his career, he viewed the existence of a vibrant and reliable scholastic enterprise as the sole and ultimate guarantee for the construction and preservation of an Islamically-sanctioned, thus moral, public order. For this reason alone, there could be no question of abandoning scholarship or teaching and, a fortiori, the institutional settings within which such scholarship could be conducted.  

As an institution of higher learning, the madrasa fit into the Islamic public sphere in a peculiar way. Like the mosque and the khanqāh, it was always set up as a charitable foundation (waqf) with private funds, and there could therefore be no question of direct government control in the form of funding.

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from the central treasury or a state charter. Unlike the mosque, however, over which the founder gave up all rights once he/she signed the waqf deed, the legal status of the madrasa and the khānqāḥ was such that the founder could maintain some control over the foundation even after the finalization of the waqf deed. In the case of the madrasa, this could mean—and often did mean—that the founder retained the right to determine the course of study (such as the particular legal school whose scholastic tradition would be taught) and to make the professorial appointments, but the founder did not set the actual curriculum, nor did he/she have total control over the appointments due to external constraints such as local popularity of particular teachers, student demands and availability of scholars to fill the post. Nizām al-Mulk, for instance, originally founded the Niẓāmiyya madrasa in Baghdad for the famous Shafi’i scholar Abū Išāq al-Shirāzī (d. 476/1083), but he had to appoint another scholar, Ibn Sabbâgh, as professor when Abū Išāq did not accept the position. Abū Išāq eventually transferred to the Niẓāmiyya only after his own students, possibly motivated by the prospect of better living conditions and student stipends, threatened to switch their allegiance to Ibn Sabbâgh. 7

As for the khānqāḥ: although its economic and legal dimensions in its nascent phase remain largely obscure, two extant legal opinions (fatwā) of Abū Ḥāmid, one in Arabic and the other in Persian, throw some light into the various ways in which this new social institution was established. In the Arabic fatawa, Abū Ḥāmid was asked the following questions:

What is his [Ghazâlī’s] opinion on one who endows a landed estate for the Sufis? Who can lawfully use [such an endowment]? What are the conditions for one to be considered a Sufi or not to be considered a Sufi? Are poverty and insolvency among these conditions or not? Is inability to earn a living one of them or not? Is a Sufi supposed to wear a particular kind of clothes or not? And if a jurist lives among Sufis who does not wear their clothes and is occupied with studying law or writing/copying books, can he make use of the endowment or not? Is a Sufi one who is bestowed a patched cloak by a shaykh and one who bestows it? Can a jurist who dresses as they [the Sufis] do and who performs their ceremonies yet teaches law [still] make use of the endowment or not? [Could the preceding questions be about Abū Ḥāmid himself?] Should one who uses the endowment be free of sin or not? For one who has a house and a family outside so that he comes and goes, is frequent attendance at the lodge (khānqāḥ) a condition for using the endowment or not? Is there a difference between setting up an endowment

for a Sufi lodge (ribāṭ) and its residents and setting one up directly for the Sufis themselves.

The questions that were directed to Abū Ḥāmid in the Persian fatwa are equally revealing: 'What does the Proof of Islam [Ghazālī] say about those who reside in the lodges (khānqāhī) of Sufis and eat out of the endowment of these lodges? What are the conditions for eating out of the endowed [food] and bread of the Sufis? Is [this food] licit for them?' Abū Ḥāmid started his answer to these questions by classifying food consumed in lodges into three categories: (1) legal alms (zakāt), (2) solicited and unsolicited donations, (3) endowed funds (waqf). He pointed out that use of legal alms was permissible only for those who were derelicts and who did not have the means to earn a living themselves. He then proceeded to elaborate upon the conditions for those who could receive legal alms but also declared without equivocation that constant prayer and dhikr could never be an excuse for not earning a livelihood. All the conditions that applied to use of legal alms also applied to donations, but there were two additional stipulations: (1) donations needed to be solicited indirectly and privately, and (2) they needed to be 'licit' (ḥalāl), which, Abū Ḥāmid acknowledged, was indeed very difficult to insure. Donations (but not zakāt!) that were given to the lodge indirectly but willingly, with the understanding that they would enable lodge dwellers to be engaged in constant prayer, were acceptable. As for endowments, if the endowment was directly for the lodge, this was a relatively simple set up where only the stipulations of the endower needed to be observed. If, however, the endowment was specifically for Sufis, then it became obligatory to ascertain that those who made use of the endowed funds were indeed Sufis. In order to qualify for this status, one definitely needed to be free of all major sins (kabār), but the evaluation of minor sins was more complicated. Abū Ḥāmid observed that some minor sins, like praising oneself or showing false humility in front of the powerful, were as bad as major sins if they became habitual behavior. Other minor sins, however, nullified one's claims to being a Sufi even if they were committed only occasionally; these included, notably, sitting alone with women, wearing silk clothes and gold rings, accepting illicit (ḥarrām) wealth from a sultan, sitting with beardless lads, having samā' with them, liking them, and talking about them often. Once these conditions were met, those who claimed to be Sufis also needed to be engaged in worship or service all day. Wearing Sufi garments and praying five times every day, Abū Ḥāmid declared, were simply not sufficient for one to be considered a Sufi.

It seems, then, that Abū Ḥāmid, ever the jurist-moralist, was preoccupied with questions about licit income for scholars and Sufis who benefited from the revenue of these endowments. The laudatory words of all Muslim scholars on this issue could not sustain the force of which they were considered obligatory and, in fact, it became obvious that the endowments were being supplied by the madrasas. This situation rose to its full head in the eighteenth century, when the Nizāmī scholars, who had not, so far, reacted to the endowments of the madrasas, attempted to bridge the gap, as perpendiculars had done for themselves and their students, by exulting the profit from these endowments for the scholars and the Sufis involved, and for the mendicant orders in general.

Abū Ḥāmid's position is not an easy to grasp, given that it is tenuous and brittle, and full of the doubts and the misgivings that his brother, Abū ʿAbd Allāh, had about the ajal. He needed to assert the necessity of the endowments, but also to make sure that their amount is sufficient. As he put it in Qazvīnī's words, 'It is the duty of the khānqāhs to be self-sufficient.

Like his brother, he was disturbed in the endowments and his Sultan, and he became a major player for his influence in the ludum dinars.
the revenues of madrasas and khānqāhs established as charitable foundations. The issue of legitimate income was, of course, a persistent concern for all Muslim religious specialists, who collectively remained vigilant about the issue of remuneration in return for teaching Islamic norms and values, which was normally considered a religious duty rather than a professional obligation well into the fifth/eleventh century and even beyond. But the emergence and ascendance of legally sanctioned and financially secure institutions of learning increased the tension around this issue several notches up by actively transforming scholars and Sufis who lived and “worked” in madrasa and khānqāh settings into religious professionals. Ābū Ḥāmid experienced this transformation in his own career, and in his view, the impact of such professionalization upon scholars (in the form of sycophantism and corrosive competition for patronage and social recognition) as well as on scholarship itself (in the form of increasingly conservative traditionalism) was nothing less than disastrous for Muslim learning and piety. Ābū Ḥāmid reacted to this crisis in his own life by distancing himself from semi-official madrasas, where politics seeped directly into the scholastic enterprise, and by attempting to sever his ties with rulers and politicians. That he was not able, as perhaps the most famous scholar of his time and place, to disentangle himself from the web of his previous social and political engagements and ultimately succumbed to intense pressure to teach at the semi-official Nizāmiyya of Nishāpūr is perhaps not all too surprising. In the light of his vows at Hebron, however, it is very likely that he refused to receive a salary for this appointment, though we do not have any information on this key question.

Āhmād’s stance on the issue of remuneration, on the other hand, is not easy to pin down. His connection with the madrasa appears to have been tenuous. He may have received student stipends in his youth, possibly taught at the Tājīya madrasa in Baghdad for a while, and also substituted for his brother for several months in the Nizāmiyya madrasa, though none of this necessarily means that he depended on madrasa salaries beyond a limited amount of time, if at all. He held his preaching sessions in mosques as well as khānqāhs, and it is possible that he had his own khānqāh once he settled in Qazvin at the end of his life, but the nature of his connections with the khānqāh in the many towns he is known to have visited remains obscure. Like his brother, he was well-connected with Seljuk ruling circles; he preached in high-circles (including the funeral of Tārkān Khārūn [d. 487/1094], Sultan Malikshāh’s widow), reportedly even received donations in exchange for his preaching directly from a ruler on at least one occasion (a thousand dinars from Maḥmūd II [r. 511/1118-525/1131]), and had disciples from

Sāhīr-i
among Seljuk administrators. Did he have, or, like his older brother, later in life develop compunctions about taking salaries or accepting donations from members of the Seljuk family and high-level Seljuk administrators, or did he, like some other Sufis, simply act as a clearing house for such possibly morally tainted funds by accepting them but immediately passing them on to others (dervishes, Sufi-affiliated communities, the needy and the destitute etc.)? It appears to be unlikely that we can answer this question.

But there are reasons to think that Ahmad may have had his own issues with the prevalent khānegāh cultures of his time. His version of Sufism, based on a highly intellectualized theory of love and less dependent on special mystical liturgy, featured avant garde ideas that were not welcome among many other Sufi communities. Among these one can cite Ahmad’s radical insistence on viewing created beauty as a direct reflection of divine beauty and his interpretation of Iblis as a true lover of God. Ahmad distilled such ideas into practices such as citing secular love poetry in his preaching and writings as well as contemplating God’s beauty in the face of beardless boys known as the “witness game” (shahid-bazti / naqar-bazi) that caused quite a stir in both Sufi and non-Sufi circles. One wonders if Abu Hamid, who, as we have just seen, issued a legal opinion against Sufis sitting alone with beardless boys, would have accepted Ahmad into his own khānegāh!

Two brothers, then, with two different but partly overlapping religious identities and two institutions with distinctive though variegated institutional cultures that did not coincide fully with the religious identities and practices of the two siblings. Abu Hamid’s expansive scholarly activities spilled out of the confines of the semi-official madrasa into the private school and the khānegāh so that in his case at least religious scholarship was not identical with scholasticism that was, at least indirectly, supported by the political elite. The Proof of Islam’s religious identity could not possibly be contained within the four walls of the prestigious semi-official madrasa, but he could not altogether stay away from this key educational institution, even though it was politically charged. Similarly, Ahmad’s public propagation of love mysticism overflowed from the khānegāh into the mosque and, one assumes, into teaching/preaching sessions (majlis) held in private residences. In Ahmad’s case, mystical love proved to be too potent to remain confined to the initiatic ritual-based communities of the khānegāh and spilled over into the general urban culture, especially in the form of lyric love poetry. In neither case could the institutions that played a formative role in the construction of the respective religious identities of the Ghazali brothers contain the outburst of their amazing creativity. Their examples suggest that Muslim scholarship and experiential knowledge could never be confined to scholasticism and

9 Lombard, p. 113 (on his preaching at Tarkān Khatun’s funeral) and p. 124 (on receiving 1000 dinars from Mahmud II).
mystical experience as conducted in madrasas and khānagāhs established and supported by the ruling elites.
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