

Defending the *Ihyā'* from those Devoid of Shame

BY GF Haddad – Ramadan 1426 / October 2005

Al-Ghazzālī's *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* ranks as one of the most widely read books in Islām, having earned the praise of the scholars and the general acceptance of the Community. Among the countless Ulema who praised it Imām al-Ṣafādī said: "It is among the noblest and greatest of books, to the extent that it was said, concerning it, that if all books of Islām were lost except the *Ihyā'*, it would suffice for what was lost."<sup>1</sup>

The *Ihyā'* was also criticized for a variety of reasons, among them the number of weak or forged narrations cited in it, a list of which is provided by Ibn al-Subkī, who stressed that al-Ghazzālī never excelled in the field of ḥadīth.<sup>2</sup> Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Māzarī al-Mālikī incorrectly said in *al-Kashf wal-Inbā' 'an Kitāb al-Ihyā'* that most of the narrations cited in it were completely defective (*wāhin*) with regard to authenticity, while the Mālikī censor Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Walīd al-Turtūshī (d. 420) exclaimed in his epistle to Ibn Zāfir – Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Aṭīyya: "He has crammed his book full with forgeries." Ibn al-Subkī replied:

Al-Māzarī was a passionate champion of al-Ash'arī's positions – both the authoritative, the modest, the great, and the small – declaring an innovator anyone who went beyond them in the least. In addition to this he was a Mālikī with a strong bias for his school, which he defended strenuously. On the other hand, al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazzālī reached a level of expertise and knowledge which every impartial observer can acknowledge as unmatched by anyone after them, and where they may have seen fit to contradict Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Ash'arī] in questions of *kalām*. Ash'arīs, particularly the Moroccans, do not take kindly to this nor allow anyone to contravene Abū al-Ḥasan in the least.<sup>3</sup> Further complicating matters is al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazzālī's weakening of Imām Mālik's position on certain points, such as rulings inferred from public welfare<sup>4</sup> or the favoring of a certain School over another. ... As for al-Māzarī's saying: "al-Ghazzālī was not a foremost expert (*mutabaḥḥir*) in the science of *kalām*," I agree with him on this, but I add: He certainly had a firm foothold in it, even if, in my opinion, it did not match his foothold in other sciences. As for al-Māzarī's saying: "He engaged in philosophy before he became an expert in the science of principles," this is not the case. He did not look into philosophy except after he had become an expert in the science of *uṣūl*, and he indicated this in his book *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, adding that he involved himself in the science of *kalām* before turning to philosophy. ... As for Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazzālī declares him a disbeliever – how then could he possibly rely on him? ... As for his blame of the *Ihyā'* for al-Ghazzālī's indulgence in some narrations: it is known that the latter did not have skill in the ḥadīth, and that most of the narrations and stories of the *Ihyā'* are taken from his predecessors among the Ṣūfīs and jurists. The man himself did not provide a single *isnād*, but one of our companions [Zayn al-Dīn al-'Irāqī] took care to document the narrations of the *Ihyā'*, and only a small amount were declared aberrant or anomalous (*shādhah*). I shall cite them for the sake of benefit ... Nor is al-Ghazzālī's phrasing "the Prophet ﷺ said" meant as a definitive attribution to him but only as an attribution that appears definite. For if he were not assuming it true, he would not say it. The matter was not as he thought, and that is all. As for al-Turtūshī's statement concerning the forgeries found in the *Ihyā'*, then – I ask you – is al-Ghazzālī the one who forged them so that he may be blamed for them? To blame him for them is certainly nothing more than inane fanaticism. It is an attack which no serious examiner can accept.<sup>5</sup>

Imām al-Dhahabī also vented some anti-Ṣūfī sentiments while discussing Imām al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī over whom he quotes the aspersions of the ḥadīth Master Abū Zur'a then exclaims:

And where are the likes of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī? How then if Abū Zur'a saw the books of later Ṣūfīs such as the *Qūt al-Qulūb* of Abū Ṭālib [al-Makkī], and where are the likes of the *Qūt*? How then if he saw *Bahjat al-Asrār* of Abū Jaḥdam, and *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* of al-Sulamī, he would jump to the ceiling! How then if he saw the books of Abū Ḥāmid al-Tūsī [Imām al-Ghazzālī]...? the *Ghunya* of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir [al-Gīlānī]... the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* and *Futūḥāt al-Makiyya* [of Ibn 'Arabī]?!<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>In Ibn al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā* (6:253).

<sup>2</sup>*Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā* (6:287-389).

<sup>3</sup>See al-Ghazzālī's epistle entitled *Faysal al-Tafriqa [Rasā'il (3:75-99)]* in reply to those Ash'arīs who pronounced the verdict of apostasy (*takfīr*) on anyone who diverges from the tenets of Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, even on the bases of *ijtihād*. In this epistle al-Ghazzālī states (3:89): "Know that there is no *takfīr* at all in the branches except in a single matter, namely, denial or rejection of one of the principles of the Religion that came to us through mass transmission. In other matters there may be a verdict of untruth (*takhtī'a*) – as in legal matters (*fiqhīyyāt*) – and, in others, that of innovation (*tabdīl*), as in the untruth connected with the office of imām [*i.e.* the first four caliphs] and the states of the Prophet's ﷺ Companions."

<sup>4</sup>Hanafī and Mālikī jurists deemed discretion (*istihsān*) and rulings adduced from public welfare (*al-masālih al-mursala*) on certain issues a licit source of laws in Islām in the absence of texts, consensus, or legal analogy on those issues. See Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī, *al-Luma' fī Usūl al-Fiqh* (p. 121), al-Shātibī's *al-Muwāfaqāt fī Usūl al-Fiqh* (3:75-77), al-Āmidī's *al-Ihkām fī Usūl al-Ahkām* (4:32f., 4:167f.), al-Rāzī's *al-Māhsul fī 'Ilm al-Uṣūl* (6:218-225), and Ibn Badran's *al-Madkhal ilā Madhhab al-Imām Ahmad* (p. 295-296). Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī authored a book entitled *al-Istihsān*, which al-Shāfi'ī refuted in *Ibtal al-Istihsān*.

<sup>5</sup>*Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā* (6:244-, 249, 252).

<sup>6</sup>Al-Dhahabī, *Mizān* (1:430 §1606).

Imām al-Suyūṭī responds strenuously to al-Dhahabī:

Do not let al-Dhahabī’s mumblings deceive you, for he went so far as to mumble against Imām Fakhr al-Dīn ibn al-Khaṭīb [al-Rāzī] and against one who is greater than the Imām, namely, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī the author of *Qūt al-Qulūb*, and against one who is greater than Abū Ṭālib, namely, Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, whose fame has filled the firmaments! And al-Dhahabī’s books are filled with that: *al-Mizān*, *al-Tārīkh*, and *Siyar al-Nubalā’*. Are you going to accept his words against their likes? Never, by Allāh! His word is not accepted concerning them. Rather, we respect their right over us and render it to them in full.<sup>7</sup>

Ibn al-Jawzī – a detractor of Sūfīs – similarly dismisses the *Ihyā’* in four of his works: *I’lām al-Ahyā’ bi-Aghlāt al-Ihyā’* (“Informing the Living of the Mistakes of the *Ihyā’*”), *Talbīs Iblīs*, *al-Quṣṣās*,<sup>8</sup> and his history *al-Muntazam fī Tārīkh al-Mulūk wal-Umam*.<sup>9</sup> His views influenced Ibn Taymiyya and others. The basis of their position was also that al-Ghazzālī used too many weak or baseless ḥadīths. ‘Abd al-Fattāh Abū Ghudda said:

Our reliance is on Allāh! Ibn al-Jawzī composed a great big book on ḥadīth forgeries so that jurists, preachers, and others may avoid them, then you will see him cite in his exhortative works forged ḥadīths and rejected stories without head nor tail, without shame or second thought. In the end one feels that Ibn al-Jawzī is two people and not one!... For this reason Ibn al-Athīr blamed him in his history entitled *al-Kāmil* with the words: “Ibn al-Jawzī blamed him [al-Ghazzālī] for many things, among them his narration of unsound ḥadīths in his exhortations. O wonder that Ibn al-Jawzī should criticize him for that! For his own books and exhortative works are crammed full with them (*maḥshuwun bihi wa-mamlū’un minh*)!”<sup>10</sup> And the ḥadīth Master al-Sakhāwī said in *Sharḥ al-Alfiyya*: “Ibn al-Jawzī cited forgeries and their likes in high abundance in his exhortative works.”<sup>11</sup>

Other moderate ḥadīth Masters documented almost every single ḥadīth in the *Ihyā’* without questioning its usefulness as a whole, accepting its immense standing among Muslims and contributing to its embellishment and spread as a manual for spiritual progress. Among these Scholars:

- Zayn al-Dīn al-‘Irāqī (d. 806): *Ikhbār al-Ahyā’ bi-Akhbār al-Ihyā’* in four volumes in which he kept the highest respect for al-Ghazzālī and his work, al-‘Irāqī’s largest documentation of the narrations of the *Ihyā’* – compiled in his twenties – which he then abridged into the medium-sized *al-Kashf al-Mubīn ‘an Takhrīj Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* and the small-sized *al-Mughnī ‘an Ḥaml al-Asfār*;<sup>12</sup>
- His student Ibn Ḥajar: *al-Istidrāk ‘alā Takhrīj Aḥādīth al-Ihyā’*;
- Al-Qāsim ibn Quṭlūbaghā al-Ḥanafī: *Tuḥfat al-Ahyā’ fī mā Fāta min Takhrīj Aḥādīth al-Ihyā’*;
- Sayyid Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī al-Ḥusaynī (d. 1205): *Ithāf al-Sādāt al-Muttaqīn fī Sharḥ Asrār Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, each scholar completing the previous scholar’s documentation.

More importantly, the majority of ḥadīth Masters hold it permissible to use weak ḥadīths in other than the derivation of legal rulings, such as in the encouragement to good and discouragement from evil (*al-targhīb wal-tarhīb*), as countless ḥadīth Masters have indicated as well as other scholars, such as Imām al-Ṣafādī.<sup>13</sup> It must be understood that al-Ghazzālī incorporated all the material which he judged of use to his didactic purposes on the bases of content rather than origin or chain of transmission; that most of the *Ihyā’* consists in quotations from Qur’ān, ḥadīth, and the sayings of other than al-Ghazzālī, his own prose accounting for less than 35% of the work;<sup>14</sup> and that three quarters of the huge number of ḥadīths cited are authentic in origin.<sup>15</sup>

The Ḥanafī ḥadīth Master and foremost lexicographer Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī began his great commentary on the *Ihyā’* with an explanation that al-Ghazzālī’s method of ḥadīth citation by conveying the general meaning without ascertaining the exact wording, had a basis in the practice of the Companions and *Salaf*:

The verification of the wording of narrations was not an obligation for al-Ghazzālī – Allāh have mercy on him! He would convey the general meaning, conscious of the different significations of the words and their mutual conflict with one another avoiding what would constitute interpolation or arbitrary rendering of one term with another.

<sup>7</sup>Al-Suyūṭī, *Qam’ al-Mu‘arīḍ bi-Nuṣrat Ibn al-Fārid* (“The Taming of the Objector With the Vindication of Ibn al-Fārid”) in his *Maqāmāt* (2:917-918) and as quoted by Imām al-Lacknawī in *al-Raf’ wal-Takmil fīl-Jarḥ wal-Ta’dīl* (p. 319-320)

<sup>8</sup>Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Quṣṣās wal-Mudhakkirīn* (p. 201).

<sup>9</sup>Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntazam* (9:169).

<sup>10</sup>Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fīl-Tārīkh* (Dār Sādir ed. 10:228=‘Ilmiyya ed. 9:240).

<sup>11</sup>‘Abd al-Fattāh Abū Ghudda, notes to al-Lacknawī’s *al-Raf’ wal-Takmil* (p. 420-421).

<sup>12</sup>As reported by Ibn Fahd in *Lahz al-Alhāz bi-Dhayl Tadhkirat al-Huffāz* (p. 228), the fifth volume of the original edition of al-Dhahabī’s *Tadhkirat al-Huffāz*.

<sup>13</sup>See al-Hākim, *al-Madkhāl li-‘Ilm al-Ḥadīth* (beginning), al-Bayhaqī *Dalā’il al-Nubuwwa* (introduction), al-Nawawī, *al-Tibyan fī Adab Hamalat al-Qur’ān* (p. 17). The latter says: “The scholars are in agreement on the legitimacy of using weak ḥadīths in the realm of virtuous works.” Al-Sakhāwī stated the view of the scholarly consensus on this question in the Epilogue of his *al-Qawl al-Badī’* (p. 245-246).

<sup>14</sup>T.J. Winter, trans. *Ghazali’s “Remembrance of Death”* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1989), Introduction (p. xxix n. 63).

<sup>15</sup>Ibn al-Subkī’s list of weak, very weak, or forged ḥadīths is under 1,000 while the total number of ḥadīths quoted in the *Ihyā’* exceeds 4,000.

A number of the Companions have permitted the conveyance of Prophetic ḥadīth in their meanings (*riwāya bil-ma'nā*) rather than their very wordings (*riwāya bil-alfāz*). Among them: 'Alī, Ibn 'Abbās, Anas ibn Mālik, Abū al-Dardā', Wāthila ibn al-Asqa', and Abū Hurayra ﷺ.<sup>16</sup> Also, a greater number of the Successors, among them: the Imām of Imāms al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, al-Sha'bī, 'Amr ibn Dīnār, Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī, Mujāhid, and 'Ikrima.... Ibn Sīrīn said: "I would hear a ḥadīth from ten different people, the meaning remaining one but the wordings differing."<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the Companions' wordings in their narrations from the Prophet ﷺ have differed one from another. Some of them, for example, will narrate a complete version; others will narrate the gist of the meaning; others will narrate an abridged version; others yet replace certain words with their synonyms, deeming that they have considerable leeway as long as they do not contradict the original meaning. None of them intends a lie, and all of them aim for truthfulness and the report of what he has heard: that is why they had leeway. They used to say: "Mendacity is only when one deliberately intends to lie."<sup>18</sup>

'Imrān ibn Muslim [al-Qaṣīr] narrated that a man said to al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī]: "O Abū Sa'īd! When you narrate a ḥadīth you put it in better and more eloquent terms than when one of us narrates it." He replied: "There is no harm in that as long as you have fully expressed its meaning."<sup>19</sup> Al-Nadr ibn Shumayl (d. 208) said: "Hushaym (d. 183) used to make a lot of mistakes in Arabic, so I adorned his narrations for you with a fine garment" – meaning, he arabized it, since al-Nadr was a philologist (*naḥwī*).<sup>20</sup> Sufyān [al-Thawrī] used to say: "When you see a man show strictness in the wordings of ḥadīth, know that he is advertising himself." He narrated that a certain man began to question Yaḥyā ibn Sa'īd al-Qaṭṭān (d. 198) about a specific wording inside a ḥadīth. Yaḥyā said to him: "*Yā Fulān!* There is not in the whole world anything more sublime than the Book of Allāh, yet He has permitted that its words be recited in seven different dialects. So do not be so strict!"<sup>21</sup>

In the ḥadīth Master al-Suyūṭī's commentary on [al-Nawawī's] *al-Taqrīb*, in the fourth part of the twenty-sixth heading,<sup>22</sup> the gist of what he said is as follows:

If a narrator is not an expert in the wordings and in what shifts their meanings to something else, there is no permission for him to narrate what he heard in terms of meaning only. There is no disagreement concerning this. He must relate the exact wording he has heard. If he is an expert in the matter, [opinions have differed:] a large group of the experts of ḥadīth, *fiqh*, and *uṣūl* said that it is not permitted for him to narrate in other than the exact same words. This is the position of Ibn Sīrīn, Tha'lab, and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī the Ḥanafī scholar.<sup>23</sup> It is also narrated as Ibn 'Umar's position.

[When the *Tābi'ī* 'Ubayd ibn 'Umayr al-Marwazī addressed a Madīnan gathering in the presence of 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar and said that the Prophet ﷺ had said: "The similitude of the hypocrite is as a sheep between two sheepfolds (*rabīdayn*), when it comes to this one they horn it and when it comes to that one they horn it," Ibn 'Umar intervened and said: "The Prophet ﷺ did not say this. What he said is: 'As a sheep between two flocks (*ghanamayn*).'" The Shaykh was miffed and became angry. Ibn 'Umar said: "Truly! Had I not heard it, I would not have corrected what you said."<sup>24</sup>

Another version from Muḥammad al-Bāqir states that 'Ubayd had said "a sheep between two flocks (*ghanamayn*)" and Ibn 'Umar intervened and said the correct version was "a sheep between two sheepfolds (*rabīdayn*)." When 'Abd Allāh ibn Ṣafwān remarked to Ibn 'Umar that the two were one in meaning, he replied:

<sup>16</sup> Al-Khatīb in *al-Jāmi' fī Akhlāq al-Rāwī* (2:24, 2:26-28) mentions Ibn Mas'ūd, Abū al-Dardā', Anas, 'Ā'isha, 'Amr ibn Dīnār, 'Amir al-Sha'bī, Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī, Ibn Abī Nujayh, 'Amr ibn Murra, Ja'far ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī, Sufyān ibn 'Uyayna, and Yaḥyā ibn Sa'īd al-Qaṭṭān as allowing the narration of Prophetic ḥadīth other than in its precise original wording. He narrates examples from Ibn Mas'ūd (§1113), Abū al-Dardā' (§1114-1115), and Anas (§1116-1117) to that effect. He also narrates the prohibition of narrating Prophetic ḥadīth other than in their precise original wording from Wakī' (2:24 §11108), Mālik (2:25 §1110-1111). Al-Khatīb documents this subject at length in *al-Kifāya* (p. 203-211).

<sup>17</sup> Also narrated from Abū al-Aḥwas Muḥammad ibn al-Haytham by al-Khatīb in *al-Jāmi' li-Akhlāq al-Rāwī* (2:21 §1099).

<sup>18</sup> See on this chapter, al-Khatīb, *al-Kifāya* (1986 ed. p. 239-247=Madīna ed. p. 204-211).

<sup>19</sup> Narrated by al-Khatīb in *al-Kifāya* (1986 ed. p. 243=Madīna ed. p. 207) and *al-Jāmi'* (2:22 §1101-1102). Cf. al-Shāfi'ī – without naming al-Ḥasan or al-Zuhrī – in *al-Risāla* (p. 275).

<sup>20</sup> Ismā'īl ibn Umayya said: "We used to correct Nāfi' [Umar's freedman] if he made mistakes of language [in his narrations] but he would refuse and say: 'Nothing but exactly what I heard.'" Cited by al-Dhahabī in the *Siyar* (5:567).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Risāla* (p. 274).

<sup>22</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-Rāwī fī Sharḥ Taqrīb al-Nawawī* (1:532-539).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. al-Khatīb in *al-Kifāya* (1986 ed. p. 242=Madīna ed. p. 207) who also names Ibrāhīm ibn Maysara, al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad, Raja' ibn Haywa, and Ibn Tawus.

<sup>24</sup> Narrated by Aḥmad.

“Thus did I hear it.” A third authentic version adds that he said: “Woe to you! Do not lie about the Messenger of Allāh!” All three versions are in Aḥmad’s *Musnad* with good chains.]



At any rate, the vast majority of the *Salaf* and *Khalaf* from the various groups, among them the Four Imāms, permit narration in terms of meaning in all the above cases provided one adduces the meaning.<sup>25</sup> This dispensation is witnessed to by the practice of the Companions and *Salaf*, and shown by their narrating a single report in different wordings.

There is a ḥadīth of the Prophet ﷺ relevant to the issue narrated by Ibn Mandah in *Maʿrifat al-Ṣaḥāba* and al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Kabīr* from ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sulaymān ibn Aktham<sup>26</sup> al-Laythī [= ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sulaym ibn Ukayma]<sup>27</sup> who said: “I said: ‘Messenger of Allāh! Verily, when I hear a ḥadīth from you I am unable to narrate it again just as I heard it from you.’” That is, he adds or omits something. The Prophet ﷺ replied: “As long as you do not make licit the illicit or make illicit the licit, and as long as you adduce the meaning, there is no harm in that.”<sup>28</sup> When this was mentioned to al-Ḥasan he said: “Were it not for this, we would never narrate anything.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-Rāwī* (1:532-533, cf. *Taqrīb* p. 77-78). Al-Nawawī continues in his *Taqrīb* (p. 78 = *Tadrīb* 1:538): “This holds true in other than ḥadīth compilations (*musannafāt*). The alteration of a ḥadīth compilation is impermissible, even if in the same sense. Also, it is imperative for the one who narrates in terms of meaning to say, at the conclusion of his narration: ‘or something near it’ – *aw kamā qāl, aw nahwahu, aw shibhahu* – or other such expressions.” Al-Suyūṭī adduces proofs that this was the practice of Ibn Mas‘ūd, Abū al-Dardā’, and Anas ibn Mālik. Further proofs to this effect are adduced by al-Tirmidhī in his book *al-ʿIlal al-Kabīr* and its commentary by Ibn Rajab entitled *Sharḥ ʿIlal al-Tirmidhī* (1:145-152), al-Khaṭīb in *al-Kifāya* (1986 ed. p. 232-247 = Madīna ed. p. 198-211), and al-Qādī ‘Iyād in *al-ʿIlmaʿ* (p. 174-178). See also Ibn Ḥajar’s discussion and its commentary by al-Qārī in *Sharḥ Sharḥ Nukhbat al-Fikar* (p. 497-502).

<sup>26</sup> This is a misspelling in al-Zabīdī’s text.

<sup>27</sup> As stated by Ibn Ḥajar in *al-ʿIṣāba* and *Taʿjīl al-Manfaʿa*. Al-Husayni erred in *al-Ikmal* (p. 565 §1211) when he identified the Ibn Ukayma cited in Aḥmad’s *Musnad* as ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sulaym ibn Ukayma, as the Ibn Ukayma of the *Sunan*, the *Muwattaʿa*, and Aḥmad’s *Musnad* is named by al-Tirmidhī in the *Sunan* – and others – as ‘Umara or ‘Ammār ibn Ukayma al-Laythī. Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* (3:1566), Ibn Hibbān (5:158, 13:238-239), Abū Yaʿlā in his *Musnad* (12:348), and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr in *al-Tamhīd* (17:237) further identify him as ‘Amr ibn Muslim ibn ‘Ammār ibn Ukayma al-Laythī, all agreeing that he is not a Companion, but a Successor who narrated from both Abū Hurayra and Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab. As for ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sulaym(an) ibn Ukayma – al-Ṭabarānī’s narrator – he is unknown.

<sup>28</sup> Narrated from ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sulaymān ibn Ukayma by al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Kabīr* (7:100 §6491, 117) and Ibn Qānī (d. 351) in *Muʿjam al-Ṣaḥāba* (3:17), both with a chain containing two unknown narrators – Yaʿqūb ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sulaym(an) ibn Ukayma and his father ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sulaym(an) – as stated by al-Haythamī (1:154), cf. al-Sakhāwī, *Fath al-Mughhīth* (3:145). Also narrated by al-Jūraqānī (d. 543) in *al-Abāʾil* (1:90-97) where he said: “This ḥadīth is null and void (*bāṭil*), and there is confusion (*idtirāb*) in its chain.” Still, al-Khaṭīb adduced it through two similar chains in his discussion of the permissibility of narration in terms of meaning in *al-Kifāya* (1986 ed. p. 234 = Madīna ed. p. 198), as well as al-Qārī in *Sharḥ Sharḥ Nukhbat al-Fikar* (p. 498). Also narrated from Salama ibn al-Akwaʿ by Ibn ‘Asākir as stated by Ibn Ḥamza al-Husaynī in *al-Bayān wal-Taʿrīf* (2:77-78). Ibn Ḥajar narrates it in *al-ʿIṣāba* (3:166 §3436, 6:341 §8532) and says: “Ibn al-Jawzī included it among the forgeries, blaming al-Walīd ibn Salama for it, but it is not as he claimed. For Ibn Mandah narrated it [in *Maʿrifat al-Ṣaḥāba*] through another way from ‘Umar ibn Ibrāhīm, from Muhammad ibn Ishāq ibn Ukayma, from his father, from his grandfather, in similar terms. However, ‘Umar is a contemporary of al-Walīd. Ibn Mandah narrated it through another way from ‘Umar ibn Ibrāhīm, saying: ‘from Muhammad ibn Ishāq ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sulaym.’ He added ‘Abd Allāh in his genealogy. Then he cited it under ‘Abd Allāh’s entry with this chain. It was also narrated by Abū al-Qāsim ibn Mandah in his book *al-Wasiyya* through two chains going back to al-Walīd ibn Salama, ‘from Ishāq ibn Yaʿqūb ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ukayma, from his father, from his grandfather.’ There are other discrepancies.... Abū Mūsā in *al-Dhayl* and Ibn Mardūyah also narrated it in *Kitāb al-ʿIlm*, both through ‘Abdān al-Marwazī.... I believe some reshuffling took place and that the correct chain is: Muhammad ibn Ishāq, from ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sulaym ibn Ukayma, from his father, from his grandfather.” In *Taʿjīl al-Manfaʿa* (p. 531 §1440) Ibn Ḥajar declares Ibn

Al-Shāfi‘ī<sup>30</sup> adduced as his proof [for the same position] the ḥadīth “The Qur’ān was revealed in seven dialects.”<sup>31</sup>

Al-Bayhaqī narrated from Makhūl that he and Abū al-Azhar went to see Wāthila ibn al-Asqa‘ and said to him: “Narrate to us a ḥadīth of the Prophet ﷺ in which there is no omission, no addition, and nothing forgotten.” He replied: “Has any of you recited anything from the Qur’ān?” They said: “Yes, but we have not memorized it very well. We sometimes add ‘and’ or the letter *alif*, or omit something.” He said: “If you cannot memorize the Qur’ān which is written down before you, adding and omitting something from it, then how about narrations which we heard from the Prophet ﷺ, some of them only once? Suffice yourself, whenever we narrate them to you, with the general meaning!”<sup>32</sup> He narrated something similar from Jābir ibn ‘Abd Allāh in *al-Madkhal*: “Ḥudhayfa said to us: ‘We are Bedouin Arabs, we may cite a saying without its proper order!’” He also narrated from Shu‘ayb ibn al-Hajjāb: “I visited al-Ḥasan together with ‘Abdān. We said to him: ‘Abū Sa‘īd! Someone may narrate a ḥadīth in which he adds or from which he omits something.’ He replied: ‘Lying is only when someone deliberately intends this.’”<sup>33</sup> ... [He also narrated something similar from Ibrāhīm al-Nakha‘ī,<sup>34</sup> al-Sha‘bī,<sup>35</sup> al-Zuhri,<sup>36</sup> Sufyān,<sup>37</sup> ‘Amr ibn Dīnār,<sup>38</sup> and Wakī‘.<sup>39</sup>]<sup>40</sup>

The Imāms of ḥadīth are unanimous in accepting the “narration in meaning” only on condition that the narrator masters the Arabic language and his narration does not present an aberration or anomaly (*shudhūdh*), among other conditions.<sup>41</sup> Al-Zabīdī’s documentation of the majority position that it is permissible to narrate the ḥadīths of the Prophet ﷺ in their meanings rather than their wordings is also the position of Ibn al-Salāh in his *Muqaddima*, but the latter avers that the dispensation no longer applies at a time when the ḥadīths are available to all in published books.<sup>42</sup> Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn ‘Itr adopts the latter position: “The last word on this subject is to prohibit ḥadīth narration in the sense of meaning only, because the narrations have all been compiled in the manuals of ḥadīth, eliminating the need for such a dispensation.”<sup>43</sup>

Shortly before al-Ghazzālī’s death, in the beginning of the year 503, ‘Alī ibn Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn the Murābiṭ Sultan had the *Ihyā’* burnt in Cordoba on the unanimous recommendation of its qāḍī Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Ḥamdayn (d. 508) and its jurists. Ibn al-Qaṭṭān al-Marrākishī (d. 648) mentions the incident in his *Nuzūm al-Jumān* and adds: “The burning of this great book by those ignoramuses, the like of which was never compiled, was the cause for the end of their rule, their collapse, and uprooting.”<sup>44</sup> The hypocrites, of course, are careful not to mention that he said this when they quote from his book! Ibn al-Qaṭṭān and others also narrate that al-Ghazzālī raised his hands and supplicated for the end of their rule in the presence of Ibn Tūmārt in Baghdād<sup>45</sup> when the news of their act reached him. Shortly thereafter, the Moroccans rehabilitated the book as stated by *Shaykh al-Islām* Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī – in a long poem that begins with the words “Abū Ḥāmid! You are truly the one that deserves praise.”<sup>46</sup>

Ibn al-Subkī narrated with his chain from Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī that Ibn Ḥirzāhm, one of the Moroccan shaykhs who had intended the burning of the book, saw the Prophet ﷺ in his dream commending the book before al-Ghazzālī and ordering that Ibn Ḥirzāhm be lashed for slander. After five lashes he was pardoned and woke up in pain, bearing the traces of the lashing. After this he took to praising the book from cover to cover.<sup>47</sup>

Madah’s chains “flimsy” (*wāhiya*). Thus he considers the ḥadīth weak, but not forged. Its content is confirmed by two other ḥadīths of the Prophet ﷺ adduced by al-Khaṭīb, the first being: “As long as one adduces the meaning, let him narrate it,” and the second: “I did not mean to prohibit that [one should narrate verbatim], but only that whoever falsely claims that I said something which I did not say, and his purpose is to shame me and smear Islām – or: to smear me and shame Islām.” Narrated respectively from Ibn Mas‘ūd and an unnamed Companion by al-Khaṭīb in *al-Kifāya* (1986 ed. p. 234-235 = Madīna ed. p. 198). From Abū Hurayra: “The Prophet ﷺ was asked about a man who narrates something he said while interchanging the position of clauses or words, and the Prophet ﷺ replied: ‘There is no harm in it as long as he adduces the meaning.’” Narrated by al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhī in *Nawādir al-Uṣūl* (p. 389). Thus the mass-transmitted ḥadīth narrated in unconditional terms from Salama ibn al-Akwa‘ by al-Bukhārī in his *Sahīh* (book of ‘*Ilm*): “Whoever says that I said something which I did not say, let him prepare himself for his seat in the Fire” must be understood in terms of those other ḥadīths. This is confirmed by the comments of the Companions and Successors related by al-Zabīdī and the practice of the *Salaf* as demonstrated by al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhī in *Nawādir al-Uṣūl* (p. 389-390, *Asl* §268) as quoted in full by al-Qāsimī in *Qawā‘id al-Taḥdīth* (p. 223-224), and Allāh knows best.

<sup>29</sup> Narrated by al-Khaṭīb in *al-Jāmi‘* (2:21-22 §1100) and *al-Kifāya* (Madīna ed. p. 207).

<sup>30</sup> In *al-Risāla* (p. 274).

<sup>31</sup> Narrated from ‘Umar and Ibn ‘Abbās by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, and Ahmad, and also from Ubay ibn Ka‘b in the *Sunan*.

<sup>32</sup> Narrated by al-Khaṭīb in *al-Jāmi‘* (2:20-21 §1098) and *al-Kifāya* (1986 ed. p. 239 = Madīna ed. p. 204). Al-Khaṭīb also narrates something identical from Qutayba. In al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhī’s version in *Nawādir al-Uṣūl* (p. 389) Makhūl asks: “Has any of you stood in prayer at length at night?”

<sup>33</sup> Narrated by al-Khaṭīb in *al-Kifāya* (1986 ed. p. 244 = Madīna ed. p. 208).

<sup>34</sup> See n. 16.

<sup>35</sup> See n. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Al-Khaṭīb, *al-Jāmi‘* (2:22 §1103).

<sup>37</sup> Al-Khaṭīb, *al-Jāmi‘* (2:23 §1104-1106).

<sup>38</sup> See n. 16.

<sup>39</sup> Also Hammād ibn Zayd as narrated in al-Khaṭīb, *al-Jāmi‘* (2:23-24 §1107). However, the reports indicate that Wakī‘, like Mālik, forbade *al-riwāya bil-lafz* and insisted on the precise original wording, cf. n. 16.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Zabīdī, *Ithāf al-Sādāt al-Muttaqīn* (1:48-49).

<sup>41</sup> ‘Itr, *Manhaj al-Naqd* (p. 227-230).

<sup>42</sup> Ibn al-Salāh, *Ulūm al-Ḥadīth* (p. 214).

<sup>43</sup> Nūr al-Dīn ‘Itr, ed., Ibn Hajar, *Sharḥ al-Nukhba Nuzhat al-Nazar fī Tawdīḥ Nukhbat al-Fikar* (p. 95 n. 1). Cf. al-Qāsimī’s *Qawā‘id al-Taḥdīth* (p. 223-225) and Tāhir al-Jazā‘irī’s *Tawjīh al-Nazar* (p. 298-312).

<sup>44</sup> Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, *Nuzūm al-Jumān* (p. 70-72).

<sup>45</sup> *Op. cit.* (p. 73), *al-Hilāl al-Mūshīya* (p. 104-105), and al-Wansharīṣī, *al-Mi‘yār al-Mu‘arrab* (12:185).

<sup>46</sup> In *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyya al-Kubrā* (6:254).

<sup>47</sup> In *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyya al-Kubrā* (6:258-260).

Another rallying-cry of the critics of the *Ihyā'* is that it contains no exhortation towards jihād and that its author remained in seclusion between the years 488-499, at a time when the Crusaders ravaged Antioch and al-Qudus, killing Muslims by the tens of thousands. These critics forget that the primary sense of the greater jihād (*al-jihād al-akbar*) in the Qur'ān is that waged first and foremost with the Qur'ān against those who deny Religion: **«Strive against them herewith with a great endeavor»** (25:52). Dr. Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī replied to these insinuations with the following words:

The great Imām's excuse may be that his most pressing engagement was the reform of his own self first, and that it is one's personal corruption which paves the way for external invasions, as indicated by the beginning of Sūrat al-Isrā'. The Israelites, whenever they became corrupt and spread corruption in the earth, were subjected to the domination of their enemies. But whenever they did good and reformed themselves and others, they again held sway over their enemies. He directed his greatest concern toward the reform of the individual, who constitutes the core of the society. The reform of the individual can be effected only through the reform of his heart and thought. Only through such reform can his works and behavior be improved, and his entire life. This is the basis of societal change to which the Qur'ān directs us by saying **«Lo! Allāh changes not the condition of a folk until they (first) change that which is in their hearts»** (13:11).<sup>48</sup>

More forthright than the above is Imām Sufyān al-Thawrī's reply to those who asked him why he did not join those who fought against the enemies of Islām in his time: "Because they are remiss in [observance of] the obligations of Islām."<sup>49</sup> Al-Ghazzālī himself said: "As for exhortation (*al-wa'z*), I do not consider myself qualified for it. For exhortation is a purification-tax (*zakāt*) of which the minimum untaxable amount (*al-nisāb*) is self-admonishment (*al-itti'āz*). As for he who has no minimum untaxable amount, how can he produce its tax? Can there be a straight shadow when the tree is crooked?"<sup>50</sup>

More evident proof yet that al-Ghazzālī considered himself deeply involved and concerned about the plight of Muslims in his time is given in his words towards the end of *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl* ("Deliverance from Error") – as already cited:

When I saw that the faith of all the different kinds of people had reached such a low state of weakness... and saw my soul entirely mobilised to discover the root causes of this defect, it became easier for me to expose all of them than to drink a sip of water due to my deep familiarity with their sciences and their paths – I mean the paths of the Sūfīs, the philosophers, the academics (*al-ta'līmīyya*), and those who wear the outward signs of the Ulema. I became convinced that this [weakness] was precisely the inevitable state of our times. What then could seclusion and isolation (*al-khalwa wal-'uzla*) avail you when the cancer has become so widespread that the physicians themselves are sick and humanity on the brink of destruction? Then I said to myself: When will you put yourself to work to try and remove this disaster and face down this huge darkness? But these are feeble times, a time for the rule of falsehood. If you tried to call people back from their false ways to truth, all of them will oppose you. How on earth are you going to fight them, and how on earth are you going to live with them at the same time? This can never come about except with a propitious time and a pious and powerful sultan.

Then he remained in *khalwa* until he saw signs of such a Sultan, at which time he came out and went to advise him.

Shaykh al-Islām Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī said about the detractors of the *Ihyā'*:

I consider them similar to a group of pious and devoted men<sup>51</sup> who saw a great knight issue from the ranks of the Muslims and enter the fray of their enemies, striking and battling until he subdued them and unnerved them, breaking their ranks and routing them. Then he emerged covered with their blood, went to wash himself, and entered the place of prayer with the Muslims. But that group thought that he still had some of their blood on his person, and they criticized him for it.<sup>52</sup>

His son Ibn al-Subkī said:

"It ranks among the books which Muslims must look after and spread far and wide so that many people may be guided by reading them. Seldom has someone looked into this book except he woke up on the spot thanks to it. May Allāh grant us insight that shows us the way to truth, and protect us from what stands between us and the truth as a veil."<sup>53</sup>

Among the most famous commentaries of the *Ihyā'*:

- The ḥadīth Master Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī's ten-volume *Ithāf al-Sādat al-Muttaqīn Sharḥ Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* ("The Lavish Gift of the Godwary Masters: Commentary on al-Ghazzālī's 'Giving Life to the Religious Sciences'") which contains the most comprehensive documentation of the ḥadīth narrations cited by al-

<sup>48</sup> Al-Qaradāwī, *al-Imām al-Ghazzālī* (p. 174).

<sup>49</sup> Cited from al-Khuraybī by al-Dhahabī in the *Siyar* (7:203).

<sup>50</sup> In Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Tabaqāt al-Awliyā'* (p. 104).

<sup>51</sup> Present-day detractors, however, are no longer the "pious and devoted men" of old but rather idle devils busy with nonsense and useless knowledge and drooling after the scraps of this lower world.

<sup>52</sup> In *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā* (6:254).

<sup>53</sup> *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā* (6:253).

Ghazzālī. (Do not be deceived by the calumnies of the Irāqī Wahhābī Mamūd Shukrī al-Ālūsī (d. 1342) as this man has nothing to do with the same-named commentator of Qur’ān who died in 1270 and relies on the *Ihyā’* in his *Tafsīr* entitled *Rūḥ al-Ma’ānī*).

- ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Aydārūs Bā ‘Alawī’s *Ta’rīf al-Ahyā bi-Faḍā’il al-Ihyā* (“Appraising the Living of the Immense Merits of the *Ihyā’*”).
- Mullā ‘Alī al-Qārī’s *Sharḥ ‘Ayn al-‘Ilm wa-Zayn al-Hilm* (“The Spring of Knowledge and the Adornment of Understanding”) on the abridged version. Al-Qārī begins it by stating:

I wrote this commentary on the abridgment of *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* by the Proof of Islām and the Confirmation of Creatures hoping to receive some of the outpouring of blessings from the words of the most pure knowers of Allāh, and to benefit from the gifts that exude from the pages of the Shaykhs and the Saints, so that I may be mentioned in their number and raised in their throng, even if I fell short in their following and their service, for I rely on my love for them and content myself with my longing for them.<sup>54</sup>

May Allāh have mercy on Imām al-Ghazzālī and give him all the merits of his detractors and those whom Shaytan busies with calumniating the Friends of Allah because they are devoid of shame.

<sup>54</sup>Al-Qārī, *Sharḥ ‘Ayn al-‘Ilm* (1:1).