

# The Influence of al-Ghazālī on the Juridical, Theological and Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus

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## 1 Introduction

It is fairly well-known that the works of al-Ghazālī were read by and exercised significant influence on not only Muslims of subsequent ages, but also Jewish scholars – who read his works in Arabic and later in Hebrew translation – and Christian scholars in the Latin West.<sup>1</sup> Less well-known, it seems, is the influence his writings had on the Christians living within the Near East and in particular among the Syriac-speaking Christians. Among these Syriac-speaking Christians, al-Ghazālī’s writings were to serve as the source of the material, as well as the form, of a number of works by at least one major author, namely the Syrian Orthodox prelate and polymath Gregory Abū l-Faraj Bar ‘Ebrāyā, commonly known in the West as Barhebraeus.

Barhebraeus was born as the son of a physician in Melitene (Malatya) in 1225/6 (622/3 AH). After a period of study in Antioch, Tripoli and, possibly, Damascus, he was ordained bishop at the age of twenty and appointed to the see of Gubos in the vicinity of Melitene. He was later translated to Aleppo, and was the bishop there when the city fell to the Mongols in 1260 (658 AH). In 1264 he was elected to the “Maphrianate of the East,” the second-highest office in the Syrian Orthodox Church, with jurisdiction over those areas which had been under Persian rule in pre-Islamic times. As Maphrian Barhebraeus normally resided in Mosul and the nearby Monastery of Mar Mattai, but also made visitations to such cities as Baghdad and Marāgha, the latter of which had become a new centre of learning under the leadership of Naṣīr ad-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūsī. It was on a visit to Marāgha that he died on 30th July, 1286 (685 AH).<sup>2</sup>

Besides his training in Syriac and the ecclesiastical sciences, Barhebraeus clearly also had good knowledge of the Arabic language and of scientific

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the contributions by Girdner, Harvey and Janssens in the present volume.

<sup>2</sup> On the life and works of Barhebraeus in general, see Hidemi Takahashi, *Barhebraeus: A Bio-Bibliography* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2005).

literature written in Arabic. He actually composed a number of scholarly works in Arabic, including several medical works, as well as the *Compendium of the History of the Dynasties* (*Mukhtaṣar taʾrīkh ad-duwal*), a work he is said to have begun writing at the request of Muslims and had almost completed at the time of his death. The majority of his works, however, were written in Syriac. It seems that one of the principal goals of his literary activity was a revival of learning in Syriac; he aimed to accomplish this by synthesizing the older Syriac literary heritage and the fruits of more recent scholarly activities which were available to him mostly in Arabic. One of the Muslim authors he frequently drew upon in doing so – alongside Ibn Sīnā and Barhebraeus' older contemporary Naṣīr ad-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūsī – was al-Ghazālī. It has been known for some time that a number of Barhebraeus' works are closely modelled on al-Ghazālī's, both in their overall structure and their contents. In what follows I shall provide an overview of what is known about the relationship of the works of Barhebraeus to those of al-Ghazālī, and shall then attempt towards the end of the paper to say a few words comparing the attitudes of the two authors towards philosophy and the secular sciences.

## 2 References to al-Ghazālī in *Candelabrum of the Sanctuary* and *Chronicon*

Before moving on to discuss those works in which Barhebraeus was influenced by al-Ghazālī, we should first mention those instances where Barhebraeus refers to the latter by name. Barhebraeus does not, as far as I am aware, mention al-Ghazālī's name in those works of his where he relied on him as his main source and inspiration. This is, in fact, very much in line with his treatment elsewhere of non-Christian sources, as well as of Christian sources close to his time, whose authors are rarely named by Barhebraeus; in contrast, he regularly cites the earlier Church Fathers.<sup>3</sup> There are, however, at least two instances where al-Ghazālī's name is mentioned explicitly by Barhebraeus. One of the instances occurs in his major theological work, the *Candelabrum of the Sanctuary* (*Mnārat qudshē*), namely in the fourth part of that work, which deals with the Incarnation and was probably written around 1271/2.<sup>4</sup> In refuting the miracles attributed to Muḥammad there, Barhebraeus mentions "Ghazālī in the Book of *Munqidh*" (*GZ'LY ba-ktābā d-MWNQD*, ܟܬܒܐ ܕܡܘܢܩܝܕܗ) as

3 On this point, see David G. K. Taylor "L'importance des Pères de l'Église dans l'œuvre speculative de Barhebræus," *Parole de l'Orient* 33 (2008): 63–85, esp. 77ff.

4 On the chronology of Barhebraeus' works, see Takahashi, *Barhebraeus*, 90–94.