

IBN AL-JAWZĪ – A PROLIFIC SCHOLAR

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Annotation: This article provides a comprehensive and analytical overview of the life, scholarship, and intellectual legacy of the eminent Muslim scholar Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī (508–597 AH / 1115–1201 CE). Drawing upon classical biographical sources and historical accounts, the study highlights his early upbringing, extensive scholarly training under leading scholars of Baghdad, and his mastery of diverse Islamic sciences including tafsīr, hadith, fiqh, preaching, asceticism, history, and literature. The article examines Ibn al-Jawzī's exceptional contributions as an author of more than two thousand works, his influential role as an orator whose sermons inspired tens of thousands, and his deep spiritual reflections that shaped Islamic intellectual tradition.

Keywords: Ibn al-Jawzī; Islamic scholarship; medieval Baghdad; hadith studies; Qur'anic exegesis; Islamic preaching; Islamic history; biographical literature; asceticism; Islamic theology; Arabic literature; classical Islamic scholars.

Introduction. As a product of the First Renaissance (al-Nahda al-Ūlā), ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Alī Abū al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamūdī ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Qāsim ibn Naẓr ibn Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr al-Ṣiddīq ‘Abd Allāh ibn Abī Quḥāfa — the Ḥāfiẓ of the Qur’an, the erudite scholar (‘Allāma), Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī al-Qurashī, al-Tamīmī, al-Baghdādī, al-Ḥanbalī — was born in Baghdad in 508 AH / 1115 CE and passed away in Baghdad in 597 AH / 1201 CE.

Ibn al-Jawzī lost his father at the age of three, and his upbringing was undertaken mainly by his aunt, a woman well-versed in religious sciences, who paid great attention to his education. According to Arab historians, he began studying with teachers at the age of six. His sharp intellect and powerful voice contributed to his reputation as an *effective and compelling orator* (*khaṭīb mu’assir*). The gifted Ibn al-Jawzī mastered numerous sciences, including Qur’anic exegesis (tafsīr), hadith, jurisprudence (fiqh), preaching, asceticism (zuhd), history, literature, medicine, and other fields — and later authored works on all of these disciplines.

Historians state that among his teachers were Abū al-Ḥusayn ‘Adī ibn ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Daynūrī, Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Barra’, Abū al-Sa‘āda Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad al-Mutawakkilī, Abū Sa‘īd Ismā‘īl ibn Abī Ṣāliḥ al-Mu‘adhdhin, Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Zāghūnī al-Faqīh, Abū Ghālib ibn Bannā, Yahyā, Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn, Hibat Allāh ibn al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ghālib Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Māwardī, al-Khaṭīb al-Isfahānī, Abū al-Qāsim ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Rāwī, Abū al-Sa‘ūd Aḥmad ibn Mufajjalī, Abū Manṣūr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad al-Qazzāz, ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Muwahhid, Abū al-Qāsim ibn Samarqandī, Ibn al-Nāṣir and around eighty other scholars of that period. Ibn al-Jawzī quoted narrations from these teachers throughout his works. His writings have not yet been fully studied in a comprehensive manner.

He was particularly renowned for his mastery in the art of oratory (*fann al-khiṭāba*). At the age of 13–14, he would deliver eloquent sermons from the pulpit, attended by thousands — ranging from representatives of the caliphate to ordinary citizens — who would request him to continue speaking. Ibn al-Jawzī learned this art of preaching from Abū al-Qāsim ‘Alī ibn Ya‘lā ibn ‘Awaḍ al-‘Asī al-Harawī and Abū al-Ḥasan ibn Zāghūnī.

He also had a deep passion for learning. He studied jurisprudence under Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Daynūrī, and later authored a book on this discipline entitled *al-Ilqā’ wa-l-Ta’thīr* (“Delivery and Influence”). According to the historian Imām al-Dhahabī, the number of his authored works exceeds one hundred, and they are well-known across various fields of knowledge.

He studied hadith under Ibn al-Nāṣir, and history and literature under Abū Manṣūr Mawḥūb ibn Jawāliqī — later composing his work *Fuhūm al-Āthār fī al-Tārīkh wa-l-Siyar* (“Understanding Historical Reports and Biographies”).

When reviewing the sources, we find that those who narrated information about Ibn al-Jawzī include, first and foremost, his son Muḥyiddīn Yūsuf, as well as his students: Sabta Shams al-Dīn Yūsuf al-Wā‘iz, Ḥāfiẓ ‘Abd al-Ghanī, Shaykh al-Muwaffaq, Bahā’ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, Ḍiyā’ Muḥammad, Ibn Khalīl, Dabīsī, Ibn al-Najjār al-Buldānī, Zayn ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm, Najīb ‘Abd al-Laṭīf, and a number of other transmitters.

In the Eastern Islamic scholarly tradition, the practice of granting *ijāza* (authorization to transmit knowledge) was well established. Ibn al-Jawzī received his *ijāza* in the science of ḥadīth—which we may conditionally call a “diploma”—from his teachers: the muḥaddith Shaykh Shams al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān and Aḥmad ibn Abī al-Khayr. In the field of oratory (*‘ilm al-khiṭāba*), he received authorization from his teacher, the preacher (al-Wā‘iz) ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Sayqal.

Among his most devoted teachers were Quṭb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Salām al-Asrūnī, Taqī al-Dīn Ismā‘īl ibn Abī al-Yūsuf, Khidr ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Himwayh, and Fakhr ‘Alī ibn al-Bukhārī. One of the teachers who played a particularly active role in the education of this exceptionally talented orphan boy was Ḥāfiẓ Ibn al-Nāṣir. Ibn al-Jawzī also learned various modes of Qur’anic recitation (*qirā’āt*) from Abū Muḥammad Salt al-Khayyāt. Recalling his youth, Ibn al-Jawzī said: “*The hardships I endured in seeking knowledge, because of my passion for learning, felt sweeter to me than eating honey. I would be content with dry bread and cold water, and in that I found the true delight of knowledge.*”

His deep love and longing for learning undoubtedly became the driving force that shaped him into a great and multifaceted scholar in the future.

Ibn al-Jawzī authored works in numerous fields, including literature, history, Qur’anic exegesis (tafsīr), hadith, biographical virtues (manāqib), Qur’anic recitation (qirā’āt), the science of writing, medicine, and several other disciplines. Among his works are the following: 1. Al-Mughnī – on the science of Qur’anic recitation. 2. Zād al-Masīr – in the field of tafsīr. 3. Tadhkirat al-Adab fī Sharḥ al-Gharīb. 4. Nuzhat al-Nawāzīr fī al-Wujūh wa al-Nazā’ir. 5. Uyūn ‘Ulūm al-Qirā’āt wa Huwa Funūn al-Afnān. 6. Al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh. 7. Minhāj al-Wuṣūl ilā ‘Ulūm al-Uṣūl. 8. Nafy al-Tashbīh. 9. Jāmi‘ al-Masānīd. 10. Al-Ḥaqā’iq. 11. Nafy al-Naql. 12. Al-Mujtabā. 13. Al-Nazha. 14. Uyūn al-Ḥikāyāt. 15. Al-Mawḍū‘āt. 16. Al-Aḥādīth al-

Rā'iqah. 17. Al-Du'afā'. 18. Talqīh Fuḥūm Ahl al-Athar fī 'Uyūn al-Tārīkh wa al-Siyar. 19. Al-Muntazam fī Akhbār al-Mulūk wa al-Umam. 20. Shudhūr al-'Uqūd fī Tārīkh al-Yahūd. 21. Manāqib Baghdād. 22. Al-Madhhab fī al-Madhhab. 23. Al-Intiṣār fī Masā'il al-Khilāf. 24. Al-Dalā'il fī Mashhūr al-Masā'il. 25. Al-Yawāqīt fī Khuṭab al-Wa'ziyyah. 26. Al-Muntakhab. 27. Nasīm al-Saḥar. 28. Al-Mukhtār fī Ikhtiyār al-Akhbār. 29. Ṣafwat al-Ṣafwah. 30. Musīr al-Azm al-Sākin ilā Ashraf al-Amākin. 31. Al-Muq'id al-Muqīm. 32. Tabsirat al-Mubtadī. 33. Tuhfat al-Wā'iz. 34. Dhamm al-Hawā. 35. Talbīs Iblīs (one of his most famous works). 36. Al-Adhkiyā'. 37. Al-Ḥumqā wa al-Mughfilīn. 38. Al-Manāfi' fī al-Ṭibb – on medicine. 39. Al-Shayb wa al-Khiḍāb. 40. Rawḍat al-Nāqil. 41. Taqwīm al-Lisān. 42. Minhāj al-Iṣābah fī Maḥabbat al-Ṣaḥābah. 43. Sabā Najd. 44. Al-Muz'ij. 45. Al-Mulahhib. 46. Al-Muṭrib. 47. Muntahā al-Mushtahā. 48. Funūn al-Albāb. 49. Al-Zurafā' wa al-Mutamajjinīn. 50. Taqrīb Ṭarīq al-Ab'ad fī Faḍl Maqbarat Aḥmad. 51. Al-'Ilal al-Mutanāhiyah fī al-Aḥādīth al-Wāhiyah. 52. Asbāb al-Bidāyah fī Aṣḥāb al-Hidāyah. 53. Silwat al-Aḥzān. 54. Yaqūtāt al-Mawā'iz. 55. Minhāj al-Qāsidīn. 56. Al-Laṭā'if. 57. Wāsiṭat al-'Uqūd. 58. Al-Khawātim. 59. Al-Majālis al-Yūsufiyyah. 60. Al-Muḥādathah. 61. Īqāz al-Wasnān. 62. Nasīm al-Riyāḍ. 63. Al-Thabāt 'inda al-Mamāt. 64. Al-Wafā' bi Faḍā'il al-Muṣṭafā. 65. Manāqib Abī Bakr. 66. Al-Ma'ād. 67. Manāqib 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz. 68. Manāqib Sa'id ibn al-Musayyab. 69. Manāqib al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. 70. Manāqib Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad. 71. Manāqib al-Fuḍayl. 72. Manāqib Aḥmad. 73. Manāqib al-Shāfi'ī. 74. Manāqib Ma'rūf. 75. Manāqib al-Sawrī. 76. Manāqib Bishr. 77. Manāqib Rābi'ah. 78. Al-'Uzlah. 79. Marāfiq al-Marāfiq. 80. Al-Riyāḍah. 81. Al-82. Naṣr 'alā Miṣr. 83. Kāna wa Kāna fī al-Wa'z. 84. Mawāsim al-'Umr.

And among the works most frequently republished—belonging to the field of literature—is his renowned book “Ṣayd al-Khāṭir” (Captured Thoughts). This is the work we would like to present to you. He has many other compilations as well.

Among his ancestors was Ja'far, who was known as *al-Jawzī*: he was one of the people of the port district of Basra. The term *furḍa* refers to a harbor or port. It is also said that he was called *al-Jawzī* because there was a walnut tree (*jawz*) in his courtyard. Thus, his title “*al-Jawzī*” derives from one of these two reasons, and no other explanation has been mentioned. His childhood:

When Abū al-Faraj Abū al-Ḥasan was three years old, his father passed away. He had a pious aunt whose family worked as coppersmiths and were engaged in the copper trade. For this reason, we find that Ibn al-Jawzī occasionally wrote about certain crafts. When he grew older, his aunt once carried him to the house of Ibn Abī Nāṣir. That scholar became fascinated by the boy's intelligence, for Abū al-Faraj had been granted an exceptional natural gift for receiving and absorbing sermons. His rank as a preacher: He attended the assemblies of caliphs, viziers, and high-ranking figures, and they in turn attended his sermons. At least one thousand admirers would participate in his gatherings.

Sabta Shams al-Dīn Abū al-Muẓaffar says: “I heard Ibn al-Jawzī, near the end of his life, standing on the pulpit and saying: *‘With these very fingers I wrote two thousand volumes. One hundred thousand people repented at my hands. Twenty thousand Jews and Christians embraced repentance in my presence.’*”

Ibn al-Jawzī would sit in al-Qaṣr, al-Ruṣāfa, al-Manṣūr, Bāb Badr, or the mausoleum where the mother of the caliph was buried, and each week he would complete a full recitation of the Qur'an. He would only leave his home for Friday prayer or for his preaching sessions.

Examples from his sermons: In one of his sermons he said: *“The scorpions of desires sting—beware! Indeed, the body of desire kills the senses.*

The water of life is sprinkled into the vessel of one’s lifespan by means of breaths.”

When he delivered admonitions to some rulers, he said: *“When you wield power, do not forget the justice that God will execute upon you. And when you punish someone, remember that God is fully capable of exacting retribution from you. Do not try to quench your anger by tormenting people in the name of your religion.”* A man once said to Ibn al-Jawzī: *“Because of my eagerness, I could not sleep last night while waiting for your sermon.”*

Ibn al-Jawzī replied: *“Then you only wished to take pleasure in listening. A true listener is one who stays awake at night reflecting on what he has heard.”* A man asked Ibn al-Jawzī: *“Is it better for me to recite tasbīḥ or to seek forgiveness?”* He answered: *“A dirty garment needs soap more than it needs perfume.”* (i.e., first purify yourself through repentance before increasing devotional recitations)

Among his supplications are the following: *“My Lord, do not punish the tongue that speaks of You, the eye that looks toward the knowledge that guides to You, the feet that walk in Your service, and the hand that writes the sayings of Your Messenger. By Your might, do not let me enter Hell—let not the people of Hell say that the one who defended Your religion has been cast into it”.*

Examples from the poetry of Ibn al-Jawzī: Imād al-Kātib mentions the following lines from his verses:

1.

يَوَدُّ حَسُودِي أَنْ يَرَى لِي زَلَّةً
إِذَا مَا رَأَى الزَّلَّاتِ جَاءَتْ أَكَاذِيبُ

“My envier longs to see me slip even once; But if he sees many slips, then lies begin to pour forth.”

2.

أَرُدُّ عَلَى خَصْمِي وَلَيْسَ بِقَادِرٍ
عَلَى رَدِّ قَوْلِي فَهُوَ مَوْتٌ وَتَعَذِيبُ

*“I refute my adversary, yet he is unable to refute my words—
For to oppose my speech is death and torment for him.”*

3.

تَرَى وُجُوهَ الْحَسَادِ صُفْرًا لِرُؤْيَايَ
فَإِنْ فَهِمْتُ عَادَتْ سَوْدَ غَرَابِيبِ

“You see the faces of my envier pale when they behold me; But if I perceive their envy, their faces turn black as a raven’s wing.”

An Unexpected Calamity. In the final years of his life, Ibn al-Jawzi faced extremely difficult ordeals. His envious rivals slandered him before the caliph, and a grave conspiracy was formed against him. This incident occurred during the summer. He was in the cellar of his house, occupied with writing, when suddenly men of harsh temperament stormed into his courtyard.

They insulted him, sealed his books and his home, dispersed the members of his family, and after nightfall forced him onto a boat and sent him to Wasit.

There he lived for five days without even tasting salt. At that time, he was eighty years old. Later, they confined him to a house in Wasit and placed guards at its door. Ibn al-Jawzi was compelled to take care of all his needs by himself: washing his clothes, cooking his food, and drawing drinking water from a well. He remained in this condition for five long years.

The reason behind this ordeal was the arrest of his supporter, the vizier Ibn Yunus. Ibn al-Qassab, who was tracking down Ibn Yunus's associates, was approached by Rukn 'Abd al-Salam ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Jili—an individual accused of corrupt belief. He said to Ibn al-Qassab: "Why do you not target the greatest of Ibn Yunus's men, Ibn al-Jawzi? He granted him my grandfather's madrasa, and on his advice my books were burned. He is my enemy and a descendant of Abu Bakr." Ibn al-Qassab, being from among the Shi'a, readily accepted this incitement. He and a group of others misled the caliph, who then ordered the matter to be placed in Rukn 'Abd al-Salam's hands.

At that time, the caliph's son, Muhyiddin Yusuf—a highly intelligent young man who had mastered the science of preaching—intervened. He appealed to the mother of the vizier, hoping she could help save his father. The vizier's mother held great respect for Ibn al-Jawzi and would read his books even before the ink had dried. She wrote a plea to the caliph, requesting the scholar's release from imprisonment. Her request was accepted, and Ibn al-Jawzi was set free.

When he returned to Baghdad, the streets were filled with crowds welcoming him. Alas, the five years of imprisonment and his advanced age had exhausted him, leaving clear signs of weakness and fatigue. According to the narration of his student, Sabta Abu al-Muzaffar, Ibn al-Jawzi – may Allah have mercy on him – ascended the pulpit located in the mausoleum of the caliph's mother near the grave of Ma'ruf al-Karkhi on the seventh day of the blessed month of Ramadan. Sitting there, he recited several poetic verses:

اللّٰهُ اَسْأَلُ اَنْ يَطْوِلَ مَدَّتِي
وَأُنَالُ بِالْإِنْعَامِ مَا فِي نِيَّتِي

"I ask Allah to prolong my life, And grant me, through His grace, that which I intend."

لِي هِمَّةٌ فِي الْعِلْمِ مَا مِنْ مِثْلِهَا
وَهِيَ الَّتِي جَنَّتِ النُّحُولُ هِيَ الَّتِي

"I possess an ambition for knowledge unlike any other; It is like that which the bees gather in their hives."

كَمْ كَانَ لِي مِنْ مَجْلِسٍ لَوْ شَبِهَتْ
حَالَتُهُ لِتَشْبِهَتْ بِالْجَنَّةِ

"How many assemblies I have held — If one were to liken them, they would resemble Paradise itself."

After reciting these verses, he descended from the pulpit. Five days later, he fell ill. On the night of Friday, the thirteenth of Ramadan, between Maghrib and 'Isha, he passed away. At

dawn, when his body was washed, Ziyā' al-Dīn ibn Sakīna and Ziyā' al-Dīn ibn Hubayra were present. The people of Baghdad gathered in great numbers, and the markets were closed. Crowds carried the bier of Ibn al-Jawzi to the mausoleum of Ahmad ibn Hanbal. A great multitude attended his funeral, and that day became a day of mourning forever remembered in the history of Baghdad.

I would like to express my own reflections on these events. In this regard, I cite a verse from one of the qasidas of my compatriot, the great poet Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Sarakhsi, who lived and created works during that era:

العلم من شرفته لمن خدمه،
أن يجعل الناس كلهم خدمه...

"Knowledge has this quality: To those who serve it (those who seek it), it makes all people appear as its servants." (This verse, written in the poetic meter *al-Baḥr al-Munsariḥ*, contains the rhetorical device of *jinas* — a form of wordplay.)

Ibn al-Jawzi had bequeathed that the following verses be inscribed upon his grave:

يا كثير الصفح عمن
كثير الذنب لديه

"O You who abundantly pardons the one who comes to You with abundant sins."

جاءك المذنب يرجو ال
عفو عن جرم يديه

"Your sinful servant comes to You, hoping for Your forgiveness for the crimes his hands have committed."

أنا ضيف وجزاء ال
ضيف إحسان إليه

"I am Your guest, and the due of a guest is that he be received with kindness."

Conclusion

Ibn al-Jawzī stands among the most distinguished figures of the Islamic intellectual tradition, embodying the synthesis of rigorous scholarship, eloquent oratory, and spiritual refinement. Raised under challenging circumstances and trained by some of the most respected scholars of his time, he developed extraordinary intellectual curiosity and an unwavering dedication to learning. His legacy of more than two thousand works, spanning Qur'anic sciences, hadith, fiqh, literature, history, ethics, and medicine, demonstrates both the breadth and depth of his knowledge.

His sermons influenced vast audiences—from caliphs and viziers to common people—and his writings continue to enrich contemporary Islamic scholarship. Even during periods of political persecution and imprisonment, Ibn al-Jawzī remained steadfast in devotion, productivity, and spiritual insight. His poetry and supplications reflect humility, sincerity, and a profound awareness of God.

Overall, Ibn al-Jawzī's life offers a powerful example of intellectual perseverance, moral courage, and scholarly excellence. His enduring contributions ensure his prominent place among the greatest scholars of the Islamic Golden Age, and his works remain an essential foundation for the study of classical Islamic sciences.

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