Kenneth Goudie  
*Ghent University*

**How to Make it in Cairo: The Early Career of Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʿī**

**Introduction**

How it all went wrong for Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʿī (809–85/1406–80), a fifteenth-century Quran exegete and historian active in Cairo, has been well covered. Modern scholarship has discussed in detail the downward trajectory of his later career from 868/1464, in which his embroilment in two controversies—respectively on the use of the Bible in *tafsīr* and the poetry of Ibn al-Fāriḍ—so eroded his position in Cairene society that he was forced to flee to Damascus in 880/1475. A third controversy—on the theodicy of al-Ghazālī—incensed the Damascene populace, and he died destitute in 885/1480. While charting his declining fortunes reveals much about the religio-intellectual environment in which he operated, these three episodes all date from after al-Biqāʿī had succeeded in securing himself a position in Cairo as the resident Quran exegete at the Ẓāhirīyah Mosque, and also as first the personal tutor of Sultan Jaqmaq and then as a confidant of Sultan Īnāl. The issue, however, of how it all went *right* for al-Biqāʿī is relatively overlooked.

This article is aimed at two complementary purposes. Firstly, it will provide an overview of how al-Biqāʿī sought to increase the social and cultural capital

This article has been finalized within the context of the project “The Mamlukisation of the Mamluk Sultanate II: Historiography, Political Order and State Formation in Fifteenth-Century Egypt and Syria” (UGent, 2017–21); this project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Consolidator Grant agreement No 681510). A draft of this article was read as part of the workshop “Fifteenth-Century Arabic Historiography: Historicising Authors, Texts, and Contexts,” which was held at Ghent University on 17 December 2018; the section on al-Biqāʿī’s marriages was presented on 21 March 2019 at the workshop *Professional Mobility in the Islamic Lands (900–1600): ‘Ulamā’, Udabā’, and Administrators*, which was held at the School of Oriental and African Studies. My thanks to all of the participants in both workshops, and particularly Frederic Buyllaert and Eric Vallet, for their insightful comments and advice. The remaining flaws are my own.

resources which he had at his disposal to build and expand the social network that underpinned his career in Cairo, and which subsequently crumbled under the weight of the later controversies. In doing so, it will outline in more detail al-Biqāʿī’s origins, before moving to discuss the key relationships—particularly his patron-client relationships—he established and how these facilitated his making his way in Cairo. Having done so, it will turn to its second purpose: namely, it will argue that the descriptive reconstruction of al-Biqāʿī’s life and career should be read against the interpretative frameworks employed by the authors of our sources, and that doing so leads to a deeper understanding of not only al-Biqāʿī himself, but of the social contexts in which he operated.

**A Fruitful Tension**

When discussing the life of al-Biqāʿī, invaluable testimony is provided by his ʿUnwān al-zamān bitarājim al-shuyūkh wa-al-aqrān, a biographical dictionary of his shaykhs and peers. The ʿUnwān al-zamān contains biographies of his father, ʿUmar ibn Hasan al-Rubāṭ, one of his uncles, Shihāb al-Dīn Ahmad ibn Hasan al-Rubāṭ, and an autobiography. This can be supplemented by al-Biqāʿī’s chronicle, the Iẓhār al-ʿaṣr li-asrār ahl al-ʿaṣr, which contains considerable autobiographical material. Aside from al-Biqāʿī’s own writings, the following discussion also relies heavily upon Al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsiʿ of al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497).

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2 Ibrāhīm ibn ʿUmar al-Biqāʿī, ʿUnwān al-zamān bitarājim al-shuyūkh wa-al-aqrān, ed. Ḥasan Habashi (Cairo, 2001), 261–85. This edition of the ʿUnwān al-zamān is incomplete, and it is not clear upon which manuscripts it is based. In the preparation of this article, I have therefore relied primarily upon two manuscripts of the ʿUnwān al-zamān—Köprülü Kütüphanesi MS Köprülü 1119, and Maulana Azad Library MS ʿArabīyah akhbār 40—which date from the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries respectively. Nevertheless, I have included references to the edition, which is more readily available. MS ‘Arabiyah akhbār 40 includes additions by al-Biqāʿī, which are otherwise absent in both the edition and the MS Köprülü 1119. On the problematic nature of the edition, see Muḥammad Ajmal Ayyūb al-Iṣlāḥī, Fihrist muṣannafāt al-Biqāʿī: ʿan nuskhah manqūlah min khaṭṭih (Riyadh, 2005), 171.


Al-Sakhāwī had both a dislike of and obsession with al-Biqāʿī: his biography of al-Biqāʿī veritably drips with invective, and he also includes the biographies of many people who crossed paths with al-Biqāʿī. This, coupled with the scope of Al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ, makes it an invaluable resource in reconstructing the network of connections that al-Biqāʿī made.

Of course, these sources cannot be treated as disinterested and innocent witnesses that mimetically reproduce the historical reality of al-Biqāʿī’s career. Rather, they should be understood as carefully crafted literary works in their own rights, which served as a means through which their authors could mediate their own perspectives and understandings of that reality. What this means for our present purpose is that we are ultimately not in the process of reconstructing al-Biqāʿī’s social advancement as it actually happened, but rather how and in what ways his social advancement was perceived by both al-Biqāʿī himself and by his greatest rival. To do so requires a deeper understanding of the interpretative frameworks employed by al-Biqāʿī and al-Sakhāwī.

Turning first to al-Biqāʿī’s writings, the ‘Unwān al-zamān is essentially a record of al-Biqāʿī’s intellectual development: it was designed to emphasize his membership in the intellectual elite by memorializing and stressing those links he had established with other scholars. In this regard, the autobiography—the core of which was written in 841/1437, shortly before he secured his first appointments as the mufassir of the Zāhiriyah Mosque and as Sultan Jaqmaq’s personal tutor—is a distillation of the ‘Unwān al-zamān: it stresses those relationships and links that al-Biqāʿī prized over all others. Yet this is only one way in which we can read the autobiography: as I have argued elsewhere, it can be read not merely as a description and justification of his membership amongst the intellectual elite, but also as an attempt to semiotize his life.⁷ In the autobiography, al-Biqāʿī frames his life as fundamentally guided by God and defined by trial and hardship, particularly the death of his father and the opposition that he faced in Cairo; he overcomes these with the assistance of God, and it is through God’s will that he achieves his successes.

This sense of divine immanence continues in al-Biqāʿī’s Iẓhār al-ʿaṣr, which Li Guo has argued was fundamentally eschatological, being concerned with the internal turmoil and self-destruction that al-Biqāʿī saw as endemic in fifteenth-century Cairene society.⁸ He further argues that al-Biqāʿī interpreted his own life within the context of this eschatological outlook. Simply put, al-Biqāʿī saw the


trials and tribulations he underwent as parallels to the trials and tribulations of the Muslim community-at-large: just as the Muslims would be triumphant, so too would he triumph over his opponents and detractors. In both cases, Guo argues, this is because the eventual triumph of al-Biqāʿī and the Muslim community-at-large was predictable in accordance with God’s divine plan.9 Thus, when approaching any of al-Biqāʿī’s more historically-minded works, we need to recognize that these works—the autobiography in a more explicit way, but the Izhār al-ʿaṣr also—are not simply descriptions of al-Biqāʿī’s life, to be mined uncritically for biographical information, but attempts to reify the very story they purport to describe: they are not merely witnesses but actors in their own right.

The same can be said about al-Sakhāwī’s Al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ. The writing of biographical collections is fundamental to the formation and maintenance of group identities: the periodic updating and compilation of these works is an attempt to assert continuity between the present and the past, because the present gains its authority by virtue of the weight of memory. More than this, however, biographical collections of contemporaries are attempts to direct the transition from communicative memory to cultural memory. Where communicative memory exists in the everyday and has a relatively short time depth, stretching back no further than eighty years, cultural memory is preserved and re-embodied to subsequent generations through mnemonic institutions such as monuments, museums, and archives—like biographical dictionaries. Further, where communicative memory is diffuse and egalitarian, cultural memory is specialized and tends towards elitism: it requires specialists for its preservation and transmission.10 While both are shared by a group of people, cultural memory conveys to these people a collective cultural identity. Thus, biographical collections sought to control the continued maintenance and development of the group’s identity by setting the boundaries of the imagined community: inclusion in such works was the means whereby an individual had his position within the imagined community substantiated.

In this context, al-Sakhāwī’s biography of al-Biqāʿī, as voyeuristic and vitriolic as it is, is not merely the invective of a man against his erstwhile arch-rival, but an attempt to write his opinion of al-Biqāʿī as the opinion of al-Biqāʿī. This is, in many ways, more invidious than a simple attempt at damnatio memoriae, for rather than simply exclude al-Biqāʿī, al-Sakhāwī instead opts to defame. He paints a portrait of a vainglorious and deceitful man who was “ruined by his pride, his vanity, and his desire for rank and reputation,”11 all of which led him to overreach and go far

9Ibid.

10The demarcation of two conceptual categories of collective memory arises from the research of Jan Assmann. On this, see Jan Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” in A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin, 2010), 109–18.

beyond the limits of his intellect: according to al-Sakhāwī, al-Biqāʿī composed no works at all and failed even to complete his studies of the six canonical collections of hadith. In short, al-Biqāʿī was no scholar, merely a scribe and a children’s tutor, a peasant interloper who could not even read Arabic correctly.

Much of this is, of course, half-truth, which reveals a tension between what we might consider the historical reality of al-Biqāʿī—that he was an accomplished scholar whom Ibn Ḥajar patronized—and al-Sakhāwī’s hatred of al-Biqāʿī. Indeed, this biography was but one of a number of tools with which al-Sakhāwī sought to discredit his arch-rival: al-Sakhāwī also composed a work titled Aḥsan al-masāʿī fī idāh ḥawādith al-Biqāʿī,12 which was devoted to enumerating and outlining the scandals in which al-Biqāʿī was involved. Unfortunately the work does not survive, but the fact that it was written in the first place speaks to the depths of al-Sakhāwī’s feelings. Read in this way and in this context, al-Sakhāwī’s Al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ is not merely a description of fifteenth-century society, but al-Sakhāwī’s attempt to define how that society—and members of that society—should be remembered.

The contention of this article is that the tension and contradiction between these two emplotments of the historical reality of al-Biqāʿī, between al-Biqāʿī’s divinely-ordained self and al-Sakhāwī’s shameless charlatan, is not an insurmountable obstacle in the recovery of the historical reality of al-Biqāʿī. Rather, by recognizing how thoroughly entangled our authors and texts are and by appreciating their discursive strategies and intentions, we can arrive at a more nuanced understanding of al-Biqāʿī’s life. What follows is an interpretation of these sources, after which we will return to the issue of their historicity.

From Humble Origins

Turning first to al-Biqāʿī’s origins, he was born into humble circumstances, with neither impressive genealogy nor wealth to ease his social advancement. In his autobiography, al-Biqāʿī begins with an extended discussion of his genealogy. After providing his full genealogy—Ibrāhīm ibn ʿUmar ibn Ḥasan al-Rubāṭ ibn Ṭāhir ibn Abī Bakr—al-Biqāʿī positions himself within the Banū Ḥasan, which comprised three branches: the Banū Yūnus, the Banū ʿAlī, and the Banū Makki. Although the Banū Ḥasan originated in the village of Khirbat Rūḥā in al-Biqāʿ al-ʿAzīzī, where al-Biqāʿī himself was born, the three branches were broadly dispersed through al-Shām and Egypt, though the largest contingent seems to have resided in Khirbat Rūḥā.13 Al-Biqāʿī’s immediate family, however—including both his father and his uncle—were uncertain of their genealogy beyond Abū Bakr, al-

12Ibid., 8:17.
13MS Köprülü 1119, fol. 71v; MS ʿArabīyah akhbār 40, fol. 96r; al-Biqāʿī, ʿUnwān al-zamān, 2:61.
Biqāʿī’s great-great-grandfather. Al-Biqāʿī surmises that they were members of the Banū Makkī. He reached this conclusion by comparing his genealogy with those of two of his relatives, whom he calls his ibn ‘amm. As his relatives—Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan ibn Makkī ibn ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Ali ibn Ḥasan and ‘Ali ibn Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf ibn ‘Alī ibn Yūnus ibn Ḥasan—both count only four generations between themselves and Ḥasan, and that because they claim descent from ‘Ali ibn Ḥasan and Yūsuf ibn Ḥasan respectively, al-Biqāʿī argues that he must be descended from Makkī ibn Ḥasan.

Additionally, al-Biqāʿī notes that while no one in the Banū Ḥasan could outline their genealogy beyond Ḥasan, he had been told that they “traced their genealogy to Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ al-Zuhrī, one of those who will witness Paradise,” and that the uncle of Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan believed that they had a nisbah which confirmed this. That the Banū Ḥasan were descended from Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ was likely a family myth or legend, but the attraction to him is nevertheless obvious. He was one of the first Muslims and—as al-Biqāʿī himself tells us—one of those to whom paradise had been promised. Furthermore, the Prophet was reported to have acknowledged him as his maternal uncle; Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ and the Prophet’s mother, Āminah bint Wahb, were both members of the Banū Zuhrah, a clan of the Quraysh. Al-Biqāʿī’s attempts to discover this nisbah, however, were confounded. While traveling toward Āmid with Ibn Ḥajar as part of the 836/1433 campaign of al-Ashraf Barsbāy against Qarā Yulūk, he asked a group of his relatives in Damascus about the nisbah; although they deemed it credible, the nisbah itself was unknown.

Turning to al-Biqāʿī’s immediate kin, although no member of his family beyond his father’s generation is included in the ‘Unwān al-zamān, the biographies of his father and uncle allow us to reconstruct to some extent the context of his family. His father, ‘Umar ibn Ḥasan al-Rubāṭ, was born after 780/1378–79 in Khirbat Rūḥā and had six brothers: three of these—Abū Bakr, Dāwūd, and Muḥammad Suwayd—were full brothers; the other three—Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad, Yūsuf, and ʿAlī—were paternal brothers. Concerning his grandfather, Ḥasan al-Rubāṭ, al-Biqāʿī explains that he earned his laqab, al-Rubāṭ, because he was very tall and people compared

16Al-Tirmidhī, Al-Jāmiʿ al-kabīr, 6:104, no. 3752.
17MS Köprülü 1119, fol. 71v; MS ‘Arabīyah akhbār 40, fol. 96v; al-Biqāʿī, ‘Unwān al-zamān, 2:62. For more on his genealogy, see Goudie, “Al-Biqāʿī’s Self-Reflection: A Preliminary Study of the Autobiographical in his ‘Unwān al-zamān.’”
him to a rope: the ḍammah in place of the kasrah was due to their speech being ungrammatical. Otherwise, all Biqāʾī knew about his grandfather was that “he was the bravest of the people of that country, the most persistent in wounding, and the most attractive in appearance.”

The biography of his father is essentially a laudation of the man, wherein al-Biqāʾī praises him as a paragon of virtue, intellect, and martial ability. It reads as a touching tribute to his father, though in terms of factual—and I use the term loosely—material, it is somewhat lacking. The main impression that emerges from it is how close to violence the family lived: one story describes how his father faced sixty mounted men, all of whom were afraid of him. The main value of his father’s biography, however, is the detail it provides concerning the formative event of al-Biqāʾī’s childhood. In Shaʿbān 821/September 1418, his family was attacked by an unnamed group who murdered his father, two uncles, and six other relatives. The event comes into sharper focus through his father’s biography: although the perpetrators are still unnamed, we are told that it was his uncles ‘Alī and Muḥammad Suwayd who were killed, and that the killers dumped their bodies in a well near the village of al-Shamsīyah in “the lands of the Rāfiḍah.” This led to two years of wandering until his mother and maternal grandfather took him to Damascus in 823/1420, whereupon he embarked upon his riḥlah fī ṭalab al-ʿilm.

Alongside this violence, however, we learn that his uncle, Shihāb al-Dīn Ahmad, was a faqīh. Born sometime after the year 770/1368–69 in Khirbat Rūḥā, Ahmad devoted himself to the memorization of the Quran and developed beautiful handwriting: so beautiful was his handwriting that he became skillful in the art of letter writing and supported himself by penning letters for the Turkmen. Before his death, which al-Biqāʾī places somewhat uncertainly before 820/1417–18, he taught al-Biqāʾī how to write: al-Biqāʾī describes the relationship as beneficial. Al-Biqāʾī returned the favor when, in 840/1437, one of Ahmad’s sons, Yūsuf, traveled to Cairo: al-Biqāʾī taught him penmanship for roughly a month, before Yūsuf demonstrated an aptitude for bookbinding and returned to Damascus.

The impression that al-Biqāʾī gives is that his family lived a relatively common life, which makes his rise to prominence particularly striking. While previous scholarship, notably the work of Michael Chamberlain and Ira M. Lapidus, argued
that membership in the ulama was relatively open, with there being no strong barriers to advancement, the more recent work of Irmeli Perho has demonstrated that Muslim society was not quite as egalitarian and open to social mobility as had previously been believed. Drawing upon Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī’s Al-Durar al-kāminah fi aʿyān al-miʾah al-thāminah, Perho demonstrates how a number of commoners advanced their position in life. While individual merits, particularly intelligence and literacy, were important ingredients in social advancement, they were not enough to guarantee it. Success stories like al-Biqāʿī’s were few and far between: the trajectory of al-Biqāʿī’s cousin, Yūsuf ibn ʿĀḥmad ibn Ḥasan al-Rubāṭ, wherein there was a gradual increase of status across generations, was likely the more typical.

While gradual mobility across generations was likely the experience of most people attempting to climb the social ladder, Perho provides examples of three ways in which this process might be accelerated: through the development of a network of contacts; through the combination of talent and patronage; and through the accumulation of wealth. Al-Biqāʿī relied upon his intellectual merits, which, as Perho notes, required a network of contacts if they were to be fully and profitably exploited. The key relationships that al-Biqāʿī made and exploited to advance his situation can be divided into two broad and occasionally overlapping categories: intellectual and political.

A Supportive Shaykh

Al-Biqāʿī had many teachers, ranging from the fameless to the famous, the links with whom his ʿUnwān al-zamān was designed to memorialize. In his autobiography, he focuses on a select few of these shaykhs. Thus, he describes relationships with Sharaf al-Dīn al-Masḥarāʾī (d. 825/1422), a pre-eminent scholar of the qirāʾāt; with Tāj al-Dīn Ibn Bahādur al-Jalālī (d. 831/1428)—with whom he studied grammar, morphology, and fiqh—noting that he “did not profit from anyone as

28MS Köprülü 1119, fol. 72r; MS ‘Arabīyah akhbār 40, fols. 96v–97r; al-Biqāʿī, ʿUnwān al-zamān, 2:62.
he profited from him”; and with one al-‘Imād Ismā‘īl ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Sharaf, with whom he studied hisāb in Jerusalem. Likewise, he tells us about his studies with two prominent scholars, Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429) and Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah (d. 851/1448); these relationships do not, however, seem to have been particularly enduring.

From 834/1430–31, however, he focuses almost entirely on one relationship: that which he cultivated with Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), and which began when he traveled to Cairo in that year with the express purpose of studying with him. How and why Ibn Ḥajar accepted al-Biqā‘ī as a student is relatively unclear. We know, for example, that Ibn Ḥajar was in the practice of distributing his manāṣib among his more promising students, acting as something of a career-making broker for them; as will be seen, this was precisely the role he played for al-Biqā‘ī. The question remains, however, what Ibn Ḥajar hoped to gain from this: was he simply attempting to build a network of people who were both loyal and indebted to him?

Regardless of how and why the relationship arose, it would nonetheless prove to be influential and important. Among the works he studied with Ibn Ḥajar were the Sharḥ nukhbat al-muḥaddithīn (from which al-Biqā‘ī tells us he benefited greatly), Al-Tārīkh al-mufannan, and the majority of Sharḥ alfīyat al-ʿIrāqī fī ʿulūm al-ḥadīth. Ibn Ḥajar had a formative impact upon al-Biqā‘ī. Al-Biqā‘ī attests to this himself frequently in the biography, stating for instance that he was increasingly humbled by and in awe of his teacher as the years passed, and that he continued being eager for Ibn Ḥajar’s company. Furthermore, in the introduction to the ʿUnwān al-zamān, al-Biqā‘ī explains that it was only when he met Ibn Ḥajar that he found a teacher whose interest in the personal qualities of transmitters matched his own, and that it was out of this interest that the ʿUnwān al-zamān arose. Likewise, his introduction to the Iẓhār al-ʿaṣr explicitly describes the work

29 MS Köprülü 1119, fol. 72r; MS ʿArabīyah akhbār 40, fol. 97r; al-Biqā‘ī, ʿUnwān al-zamān, 2:63. For al-Biqā‘ī’s biography of him, see MS Köprülü 1119, fols. 233v–234r; al-Biqā‘ī, ʿUnwān al-zamān, 5:112–14.
30 MS Köprülü 1119, fol. 72r; MS ʿArabīyah akhbār 40, fol. 97r; al-Biqā‘ī, ʿUnwān al-zamān, 2:63. For al-Biqā‘ī’s biography of him, see MS Köprülü 1119, fol. 92v; MS ʿArabīyah akhbār 40, fol. 123r; al-Biqā‘ī, ʿUnwān al-zamān, 2:135.
31 For more on his relationships and studies with these scholars, see Goudie, “Al-Biqā‘ī’s Self-Reflection: A Preliminary Study of the Autobiographical in his ʿUnwān al-Zamān.”
33 MS Köprülü 1119, fol. 24v; MS ʿArabīyah akhbār 40, fol. 35r; al-Biqā‘ī, ʿUnwān al-zamān, 1:138.
34 MS Köprülü 1119, fol. 32v; MS ʿArabīyah akhbār 40, fol. 46r; al-Biqā‘ī, ʿUnwān al-zamān, 1:171.
35 Al-Biqā‘ī, ʿUnwān al-zamān, 1:33; MS Köprülü 1119, fol. 1v. The introduction in MS ʿArabīyah akhbār 40 is wildly different, and was evidently written by a later hand: this is made clear on
as a continuation of Ibn Ḥajar’s Inbāʾ al-ghumr bi-anbāʾ al-ʿumr fī al-tārīkh; discrepancies between the style and structure of the two works, not to mention the five-year gap between the end of the Inbāʾ al-ghumr and the beginning of the Izhār al-ʿaṣr, do not undermine the spirit of al-Biqāʿī’s statement.

Beyond the formative impact on his intellectual development, Ibn Ḥajar played a much more prominent role as al-Biqāʿī’s patron. Al-Biqāʿī describes himself as Ibn Ḥajar’s mulāzim, meaning either an adherent or follower, but which might be more fruitfully understood as “disciple.” Mulāzim denotes the junior partner in a ṣuhbah or mulāzamah relationship, terms which both connote a long and enduring personal relationship, wherein one follows or adheres to a master, a ṣāḥib, and works under his direction.⁴⁷

The ṣuhbah relationship was first explored within the context of the educational field by Makdisi, but has more recently been understood by scholars such as Berkey, Hirschler, and Eychenne as an important bond between individuals in other social fields.⁴⁸ Eychenne especially has framed the ṣuhbah relationship as one of those practices whereby individuals could acquire loyalties and connections which were both socially and politically useful, and has focused in particular on its appearance in and between the civilian and military elites.⁴⁹ He understands the ṣuhbah relationship as the base for the foundation of those temporary groups which constituted the social network,⁵⁰ in this, he follows Hirschler who conceptualized it as expressing “the highly personalized nature of relationships within formative and medieval society as a whole.”⁵¹

It has been more schematically defined by Hirschler, who has highlighted four key features of this type of relationship: it was hierarchical, formal, mutually exclusive, and advantageous. Thus, it was the socially weaker partner who would accompany the socially stronger in a relationship that was not merely stable but which had been explicitly established. Concomitant with this formalization, the relationship would typically be exclusive, especially on the part of the junior

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⁴⁹ Eychenne, Liens personnels, clientélisme et réseaux de pouvoir dans le sultanat Mamlouk, 43.
⁵⁰ Ibid., 42–43.
⁵¹ Hirschler, Medieval Arabic Historiography, 19.
partner: where the more senior partner might have multiple such relationships, especially when the social gulf was particularly extreme, it was uncommon for the socially weaker partner to do so. Finally, and most importantly, both members of the relationship expected to benefit in some way from their association.\(^{42}\)

It is clear that al-Biqāʿī’s relationship with Ibn Ḥajar followed this pattern. Their relationship was particularly enduring, with al-Biqāʿī stating that it was ongoing from 834/1430–31 through 846/1442–43;\(^{43}\) this was the year in which he composed his biography of Ibn Ḥajar and, given its laudatory tones, it is likely that the relationship continued until Ibn Ḥajar’s death. Al-Biqāʿī also accompanied Ibn Ḥajar when the latter was part of al-Ashraf Barsbāy’s 836/1433 campaign to Āmid. Further, we know of a letter sent by al-Biqāʿī to Ibn Ḥajar, and included in the latter’s \textit{Inbāʾ al-ghumr}, wherein al-Biqāʿī described his personal experience of the Rhodes campaign of 847/1443.\(^{44}\) Most important, however, are the tangible advantages which al-Biqāʿī garnered from his relationship with Ibn Ḥajar. These advantages were both professional and social.

Dealing with the more straightforward first, Ibn Ḥajar was responsible for al-Biqāʿī receiving his appointment as Sultan Jaqmaq’s hadith teacher in 842/1438, and defended him during the controversy which had erupted upon his nomination.\(^{45}\) In his autobiography, al-Biqāʿī states that:

\begin{quote}
When Sultan al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Abū Saʿīd Jaqmaq obtained the sultanate in the year 842/1438, I inquired of the qāḍī al-qudāh; and therefore did he speak on my behalf concerning the reading of al-Bukhārī in his—the sultan’s—presence, because he who had been reading in that capacity was no longer competent for it. He asserted and described me in my absence with reference to many attributes, amongst which was that the handsomeness of my reading was excellent. The slanderers sought to undermine that, exerting themselves and acting deceitfully.

And so, on the day on which he would select someone to read, the qāḍī al-qudāh inquired of the sultan before the reading. He said: “The one about whom you have spoken—may he be greatly rewarded.” And he praised me concerning my knowledge and my
\end{quote}

\(^{42}\)Ibid., 19–20.

\(^{43}\)MS Köprüülü 1119, fol. 24v; MS ʿArabīyah akhbār 40, fol. 35r; al-Biqāʿī, \textit{ʿUnwān al-zamān}, 1:138.


\(^{45}\)MS Köprüülü 1119, fol. 72r; MS ʿArabīyah akhbār 40, fol. 97r; al-Biqāʿī, \textit{ʿUnwān al-zamān}, 2:64.
compositions, and said: “Tomorrow, he will read and he will aston- 
ish the sultan.”46

Although it is uncertain how al-Biqāʿī became the Quran exegete of the Zāhīr Mosque, it was likely around the same time that he gained this appointment.

That al-Biqāʿī relied upon Ibn Ḥajar as a continuing source of support in Cairo is suggested by the fact that the tumult Ibn Ḥajar experienced in his later career coincided with a period of tumult in al-Biqāʿī’s life. When, after the old minaret of the Fakriyah madrasah collapsed and killed many people, Ibn Ḥajar lost his position as qāḍī al-quḍāʾ on 11 Muḥarram 849/19 April 1445, and when later that year on 20 Jumādā I/24 August Ibn Ḥajar was ousted as the shaykh of the Baybarsiyah khānqāh, al-Biqāʿī lost his immediate source of support in Cairo. While his position remained secure in the short term, Ibn Iyās notes that al-Biqāʿī was dismissed as Sultan Jaqmaq’s hadith teacher in Rajab 851/September 1447 and imprisoned in the Maqsharah before being banished to India.47 His eventual return was facilitated by a group of amirs whose names, unfortunately, we do not know. That it was amirs who were responsible for his pardon suggests that al-Biqāʿī’s network had expanded and evolved in the 840s.

Further hardship followed when, a few months after the death of Ibn Ḥajar (on 28 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 852/22 February 1449), al-Biqāʿī was dismissed from his position as the Quran exegete of the Zāhīrīyah in Rabīʿ II 853/May 1449. He would not recover the position until Jumādā I 857/May 1453, after al-Ashraf Īnāl had become sultan. While it may well be coincidence that the upheaval experienced by both Ibn Ḥajar and al-Biqāʿī overlapped, that Ibn Ḥajar was so instrumental in al-Biqāʿī’s career suggests otherwise. The social advantages which pertained to al-Biqāʿī’s relationship with Ibn Ḥajar, to which we now turn, are somewhat more opaque and best exemplified by al-Biqāʿī’s marriages.

Matrimonial Maneuvers

Two marriages of al-Biqāʿī are documented: the first was to Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad (d. 884/1479) and the second to Suʿādāt bint Nūr al-Dīn al-Būshī (d. after 902/1497). While both marriages have been discussed before by such schol-

46 MS ʿArabīyah akhbār 40, fols. 106v–107r.
47 Ibn Iyās, Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr (Beirut, 1973), 2:259. Al-Biqāʿī himself tells us that it was by his own volition that he departed his position as Jaqmaq’s hadith teacher, being replaced first by the protégé of al-Safṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Amānā, and then by Wālī al-Dīn al-Asyūṭī, protégé of the nāẓir al-khāṣṣ. The sultan, however, sought to enforce the position upon al-Biqāʿī, but he resolved never to do it because of the opinions of the religious notables; in the face of further urging, al-Biqāʿī remained silent until finally God intervened and repelled it from him. Al-Biqāʿī, Iẓhār al-ʿaṣr li-asrār ahl al-ʿaṣr, 1:413.
ars as Rapoport and Guo,⁴⁸ only the marriage to Suʿādāt has been covered in any great detail: al-Biqāʿī’s marriage to Fāṭimah is treated as a mere marriage of convenience that he left when “his luck changed for the better.”⁴⁹ Rapoport and Guo’s understanding of the marriage to Fāṭimah is based on al-Sakhāwī’s acerbic biography of her, wherein he describes her as “one of those [women] who married al-Biqāʿī when he was insignificant and poor and whom—as soon as he came into his prime—he abandoned and divorced.”⁵⁰ Suʿādāt, the daughter of the late shaykh of the khānqāh in Siryāqūs, is presented as being a much more advantageous match than Fāṭimah, the daughter of a Cairene perfume merchant.⁵¹ While al-Biqāʿī did divorce Fāṭimah and did marry Suʿādāt, further exploration of Fāṭimah’s family sheds light onto how the marriages both functioned as attempts to consolidate his position in Cairo.

Fāṭimah was, like al-Biqāʿī, an immigrant to Cairo. She had moved from her native Sunbāṭ, near Cairo, in 831/1427–28 with her father, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-ʿAṭṭār (ca. 784 to 849/1382 to 1445–46) and her younger brothers, Muḥammad (816 to 891/1413–14 to 1486) and ʿAbd al-Laṭīf (819/1416 to after 902/1497). As her father’s nisbah suggests, the family made its money in the perfumery trade; they were also particularly well-regarded. Fāṭimah’s great-grandfather, Muḥammad ibn Ahmad ibn Masʿūd al-ʿAlim al-Bahāʾ ibn al-ʿAlim, was highly regarded and was one of those upon whom an unidentified nāẓir al-jaysh bestowed favor. Her grandfather, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad (d. 816/1413–14),⁵² was counted among the most reputable men of the country, as was her father.⁵³ After moving to Cairo, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-ʿAṭṭār established a shop near the Zuhūmah Gate at the market of the Ṭābaqātīyūn;⁵⁴ his younger son, ʿAbd al-Laṭīf, helped run the shop, taking it over upon his death.

Although we do not know the date of the marriage, if al-Sakhāwī is to be believed that it took place before al-Biqāʿī established himself in Cairo, then it

⁴⁹Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society*, 87; Guo, “Tales of a Medieval Cairene Harem,” 103. Both Rapoport and Guo use the same phrase.
⁵¹Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society*, 87; Guo, “Tales of a Medieval Cairene Harem,” 103. Both Rapoport and Guo use the same phrase.
⁵³Ibid., 9:198, no. 487.
must have been sometime between 834/1430–31 and 842/1438. There is the question, then, of why this good local family, which was evidently well-respected and successful, would have accepted al-Biqāʿī as a son-in-law. The biographies of Fāṭimah’s brothers suggest a possible reason. According to al-Sakhāwī, both brothers studied with Ibn Ḥajar, performed the hajj, and resided in the Hijāz, suggesting that the marriage was arranged on the basis of personal links between Fāṭimah’s brothers and al-Biqāʿī, which were formed by all three being students of Ibn Ḥajar.

Al-Sakhāwī provides more information about the two brothers. After the death of their father, ʿAbd al-Laṭīf married the daughter of a certain Shaykh Muḥammad al-Fawū, had many children, and became rich. At the same time, he patronized the khānqāh of Saʿīd al-Suʿādā; after the death of his brother, he devoted himself to his fāriqah, leaving the running of the perfume shop to his son. Unlike ʿAbd al-Laṭīf, however, Muḥammad enjoyed a much broader reputation as a scholar: al-Sakhāwī describes him as qidwat al-muḥaddithīn wa-al-māḍī, and states that he “became an authority concerning books and their study for those who desired that.” Upon his death, he was buried in the turbah of Saʿīd al-Suʿādā.

Muḥammad’s biography is particularly illuminating; by digging deeper into it, it is possible to reconstruct his intellectual network. Aside from Ibn Ḥajar, al-Sakhāwī singles out six shaykhs with whom Muḥammad studied: Sharaf al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 840/1437), Shams al-Dīn al-Qāyātī (d. 850/1446), Shams al-Dīn al-Wanāʾī (d. 849/1445), ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Qalqashandī (d. 856/1452), Abū al-Qāsim al-Nuwayrī (d. 857/1453), and al-Maqrīzī. With the exceptions of Ibn Ḥajar and al-Maqrīzī, none of these scholars are particularly famous; nevertheless, they were all important figures in fifteenth-century Cairene society.

Biographies of these men are provided in the Appendix, but suffice it to say here that there is a striking concentration of high positions within this group, both in institutions of learning and administrative posts. Shams al-Dīn al-Qāyātī and Shams al-Dīn al-Wanāʾī were, like Ibn Ḥajar, qāḍī al-quḍāh al-shāfiʿīyah; indeed, the three men seem to have passed the position between themselves for much of the 840s. ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Qalqashandī sought to be qāḍī al-quḍāh al-shāfiʿīyah of Damascus and was also a candidate to be qāḍī al-quḍāh al-shāfiʿīyah of Egypt, but was unsuccessful in both cases. Conversely, the Maliki scholar Abū al-Qāsim al-Nuwayrī refused all the judgeships he was offered because he was opposed to salaried positions, though he had previously been deputized as the qāḍī al-quḍāh al-mālikīyah in Egypt.

55 Al-Sakhāwī raises some ambiguity with this when he states that the marriage to Suʿādāt occurred “[…] at the time of his separation” from Fāṭimah. See al-Sakhāwī, Al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ, 12:62.
56 Ibid., 4:337–38, no. 937.
In terms of teaching positions, these men taught at some of the most important and prestigious madrasahs in Cairo and Egypt: the Ashrafīyah, the Baybarsīyah, the Gharābīyah, the Ḥasanīyah, the Ṣāliḥīyah, the Shaykhūnīyah, and the Zāhiriyyah. Of these, the Shaykhūnīyah was perhaps the most important, with Shams al-Dīn al-Wanāʾī being followed by Shams al-Dīn al-Qāyātī and then ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Qalqashandī as the mudarris al-fiqh there. Additionally, the khānqāh of Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ also played a prominent role in the network: Shams al-Dīn al-Qāyātī was the shaykh al-shuyūkh there from 839/1435–36, and was buried there alongside Sharaf al-Dīn al-Subkī. This khānqāh was the oldest in Cairo—having been founded by Saladin in 569/1173–74—and one of the most prestigious: its shaykh al-shuyūkh was drawn from men deeply involved in affairs of state, and it attracted numerous scholars from throughout the Islamic world.⁵⁸

What, however, does this have to do with al-Biqāʿī’s marriage to Fāṭimah, and al-Biqāʿī’s relationship with Ibn Ḥajar? First, Muḥammad studied with several shaykhs who would go on to hold a significant number of important teaching and administrative positions during the reign of Sultan Jaqmaq. ʿAbd al-Laṭīf also studied with Ibn Ḥajar and, though he failed to develop any reputation as a scholar, it is likely that he patronized the same shaykhs as his brother. Likewise, both of Fāṭimah’s brothers devoted themselves to the khānqāh of Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ. This suggests that Fāṭimah’s family was not merely a “good” local family, but was an aspirational family, the younger son of which was making a good case for his own social advancement on the basis of his intellect and network of scholarly and administrative contacts—contacts who would themselves go on to prominence.

Second, the network of Muḥammad overlaps with that of al-Biqāʿī: in addition to Ibn Ḥajar and al-Maqrīzī, al-Biqāʿī studied with all five of these shaykhs. More importantly, al-Sakhāwī states that al-Biqāʿī was part of a group of young students—which included Muḥammad, Ibn Fahd (d. 885/1480), and Taqī al-Dīn al-Qalqashandī (d. 871/1466), younger brother of ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn—who visited these shaykhs together. In other words, not only did al-Biqāʿī study with the same shaykhs as Muḥammad, he studied with them at the same time.⁵⁹ The question raised here is, of course, whether the relationships that al-Biqāʿī established with these shaykhs preceded or followed his marriage to Fāṭimah. That is to say, were these relationships a factor in Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-ʿĀṭṭar’s acceptance of al-Biqāʿī as a son-in-law, or were these relationships a consequence of al-Biqāʿī becoming the brother-in-law of Muḥammad?

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Given our current knowledge, this question is a thorny one to say the least. Al-Biqāʿī himself tells us that he traveled to study with Ibn Ḥajar in 834/1430–31, though whether the relationship became formalized in the same year is unclear; there may be an element of retrospective revision in al-Biqāʿī’s telling. Al-Biqāʿī likewise tells us that he studied with al-Sharaf al-Subkī in 834/1430–31, though the relationship seemingly did not become as enduring as the one he had with Ibn Ḥajar. His study with al-Maqrīzī, al-Biqāʿī states, took place when al-Maqrīzī traveled to al-Shām; although no date is ascribed to this by al-Biqāʿī, on balance it seems more likely that this was before 834/1430–31, when al-Biqāʿī traveled to Cairo, though it cannot have been during al-Maqrīzī’s longer residence in Damascus, at which point al-Biqāʿī was still living in Khirbat Rūḥā. Al-Biqāʿī provides no information about how or when the relationships with the other scholars began.

In either case, these relationships cast the marriage in new light: whether they preceded or followed the marriage, the marriage was nevertheless an attempt by al-Biqāʿī to establish his footing in Cairo, either by facilitating his entry into the scholarly elite or by consolidating his position within that elite. Regardless, we do know that his relationship with Ibn Ḥajar was the first he established in Cairo, through which it is likely that he was first introduced to the family of Fāṭimah. Thus, against the background of al-Biqāʿī’s intellectual network, the marriage to Fāṭimah is functionally similar to his marriage to Suʿādāt.

As noted above, the marriage to Suʿādāt has been covered before: Guo’s discussion is so extensive that it can be discussed here with brevity. On 24 Ṣafar 858/23 February 1454, when al-Biqāʿī was in his late forties, he married Suʿādāt, daughter of Nūr al-Dīn al-Būshī (790–856/1388–1452), the late shaykh of the khānqāh in Siryāqūs. While both al-Biqāʿī and Suʿādāt were reputedly excited for the wedding, this happiness quickly turned to acrimony. According to al-Sakhāwī, al-Biqāʿī’s behavior towards her was abusive and, after a year and a half of marriage—during which she gave birth to a son on 12 Rabīʿ I 859/1455—she could take it no more and asked him for a divorce. The straw that seems to have broken the camel’s back is a marriage which al-Biqāʿī concluded in Damascus while he was there overseeing the construction of a khān al-funduq on behalf of Birdibak al-Qubrusī (d. 868/1464), the dawādār thānī and powerful son-in-law of the sultan; he was absent from Cairo from shortly after Dhū al-Qaʿdah 858/November 1454 until Shawwāl 859/September 1455. The conditions of the divorce settlement, and the bitterness

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60 al-Biqāʿī, Ḥiṣn al-zamān, 1:110.  
62 For al-Biqāʿī’s account of the wedding, see al-Biqāʿī, Iẓhār al-ʿaṣr li-asrār ahl al-ʿaṣr, 2:20–23.
which accompanied their negotiation, have been outlined so extensively by Guo that they need not concern us here.⁶³

Rather, from the perspective of al-Biqāʿī’s strategies of social advancement, there are two aspects of this wedding which bear further investigation. The first is Suʿādāt’s father, Nūr al-Dīn al-Būshī. He had held the position of shaykh of the Siryāqūs khānqāh since the end of 830/1427. Located some twelve miles north of Cairo, this khānqāh was preeminent, particularly during the fourteenth century, and was the most important outside of the city proper.⁶⁴ Nūr al-Dīn al-Būshī had also been—at least tangentially—related to the same network of scholars and administrators as al-Biqāʿī; as shaykh of the Siryāqūs khānqāh, he had proven beneficial to various eminent people, including Shams al-Dīn al-Wanāʾī. Likewise, he was linked by way of the Siryāqūs khānqāh to Abū al-Qāsim al-Nuwayrī, who established a madrasah there. Additionally, Nūr al-Dīn al-Būshī had been offered the position of qadi of Egypt, but had declined it.⁶⁵ The marriage to Suʿādāt thus appears to have come out of the same nebulous network as the marriage to Fāṭimah.

Secondly, and crucially, it also points to the continuing evolution of his network. We noted earlier that al-Biqāʿī’s pardon and return from exile was facilitated by a group of anonymous amirs, and that this suggested that his network had expanded and evolved in the 840s. The detailed guest list al-Biqāʿī describes in his own recollection of his wedding is a clear statement of the new circles within which he was moving. His wedding was, he tells us, the first wedding ever in Khānkah to be attended by the elite of Cairo. Alongside the Hanbali qāḍī al-quḍāh and the shaykhs of the Baybarsiyah, Barqūqiyyah, Ashrafiyyah, and Jamāliyyah madrasahs, the wedding was attended by the wakil bayt al-māl, the nāẓir al-māristān, the nāẓir al-isṭabal, the khaṭīb of the Great Mosque in Mecca, various Sufi shaykhs, and various members of the court, including the muqaddam al-mamālīk, ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Tuwāshī, the aforementioned Birdibak al-Qubrusī, and—last but by no means least—Sultan Īnāl himself.⁶⁶ This guest list shows us how strikingly composite al-Biqāʿī’s social network had become, and how it had moved beyond the realm of the intellectual and into the political: he had a new patron, Sultan Īnāl.

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A Political Patron

Although al-Biqāʿī began his career in the reign of Sultan Jaqmaq as the sultan’s hadith teacher, a position which he held for almost a decade, there is nothing to suggest that the relationship was particularly close. The only information which survives about their relationship is found in al-Biqāʿī’s Iẓhār al-ʿaṣr, which begins in 855/1451; that is, some four years after al-Biqāʿī was stripped of his position, imprisoned, and sent into exile. Consequently, there was no love lost for al-Biqāʿī when it came to Sultan Jaqmaq, whom he excoriated in the Iẓhār al-ʿaṣr.

Aside from ascribing all of the turmoil and chaos of the reign to the sultan himself, al-Biqāʿī records scandalizing anecdotes about Sultan Jaqmaq—such as his taking his son’s bride-to-be for himself, and his inability to consummate the marriage—and details the mistreatments which Jaqmaq inflicted upon the ulama at large. Thus, he tells us how Jaqmaq threatened to have Ibn Ḥajar paraded through the streets of Cairo on the back of a donkey and imprisoned in the Maqsharah. Likewise, he also threatened the qāḍī al-quḍāh al-hanafīyah, Sa’d al-Dīn ibn al-Dīrī, with the Maqsharah, and severely mistreated the qāḍī al-quḍāh al-shāfiʿīyah, ʿAlam al-Dīn al-Ṣāliḥ ibn al-Sirrāj al-Bulqīnī. ⁶⁷

Al-Biqāʿī’s standing does, however, seem to have improved somewhat in the last days of Sultan Jaqmaq’s reign. At some point during Muḥarram 857/January 1453, when Jaqmaq’s health was rapidly deteriorating and rumor spread that he had died, al-Biqāʿī was appointed to teach the ʿilm al-qirāʾāt at the Muʾayyadīyah mosque in place of the position he had lost. ⁶⁸ Whether he was appointed by the ailing sultan or whether his appointment was due to shifting balances in the court of Jaqmaq is, however, unclear. Nevertheless, it was during his involvement at the court of Sultan Jaqmaq that al-Biqāʿī met Īnāl, the powerful amīr al-kabīr, and entered into his circle; pinpointing when this occurred is another matter.

Al-Biqāʿī tells us that it was when he participated in the jihad of Rhodes that he met Ināl and found favor with him, becoming one of his close and intimate companions. ⁶⁹ During the reign of Sultan Jaqmaq, three expeditions were sent against Rhodes: the first was in late 844/1440, the second in 847/1443, and the third in 848/1444. The first expedition was led by the amir Taghrī Birmish al-Zardkāsh (d. 854/1450) and the amīr ākhūr Yūnus al-Muḥammadi, and proved insufficiently strong to overwhelm the defenders of the city of Rhodes and was forced to withdraw. The second and third expeditions were both led by Ināl. The second succeeded only in capturing Castellorizo; the third laid siege to the city of Rhodes for

⁶⁷Ibid., 1:304–5.
⁶⁸Ibid., 1:269–70.
forty days, but counterattacks by the Knights Hospitaller forced the expedition to retreat to Egypt.\(^{70}\)

As mentioned above, al-Biqāʿī took part in at least the second Rhodes campaign, in 847/1443.\(^{71}\) While İnāl was in charge of this expedition, al-Biqāʿī’s report of the campaign, included by Ibn Ḥajar in the \textit{Inbāʿ al-ghumr}, makes clear that he was not yet within İnāl’s circle. Concerning the retreat from Rhodes, al-Biqāʾī states that

On Sunday (3 Raġab/27 October) in the forenoon the flotilla sailed. At morning it reached Finike. Because the night was dark and the wind light, the fleet dispersed. It anchored there for two days and sailed afterwards. The wind intensified and the flotilla anchored on the western side of Ra’s aš-Šalidūn, in a bay named Qarā Bālık (the Black Fish). The fleet scattered all over. No one knew the place of the others. Then the wind intensified and the flotilla reassembled. All the vessels regrouped, only the ship of the emir İnāl ad-Duwaydir was missing. He was the senior among the commanders and they sent a light boat to enquire about his fate, but failed to obtain any information whatsoever. After a while it became known that due to the light wind, İnāl was anchoring at al-Qayqabūn together with his retinue. The commander of the navy ordered the war-vessels (\textit{ağriba}) to sail and join İnāl.\(^{72}\)

Al-Biqāʿī did compose a longer work, titled \textit{Al-İsfār ʿan ashraf al-asfār wa-al-ihkbār bi-aẓraf al-akhbār}, which was an eyewitness account of his experience of the campaigns against Cyprus and Rhodes. The work is, unfortunately, lost.\(^{73}\)

It may well have been during the expedition of 848/1444 that al-Biqāʾī was properly inducted into the circle of İnāl; although there is no evidence of al-


\(^{71}\)On this, see Frenkel, “Al-Biqāʾī’s Naval War-Report.”


\(^{73}\)There is some disagreement over the title of the work. Ḥājjī Khalīfah gives the title as \textit{Al-İsfār ʿan ashrīdat al-asfār}, and is followed in this by Li Guo. See Ḥājjī Khalīfah, \textit{Kashf al-zunūn ʿan asāmī al-kutub wa-al-funūn} (Beirut, 1992), 1:86; and Guo, “Al-Biqāʾī’s Chronicle,” 125. Ḥājjī Khalīfah does, however, seem to have been mistaken. Muḥammad al-İşlāḥī, who edited a medi-

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DOI: 10.6082/kz5z-7p81. (https://doi.org/10.6082/kz5z-7p81)

DOI of Vol. XXIII: 10.6082/msr23. See https://doi.org/10.6082/msr2020 to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html for more information about copyright and open access.
Biqāʿī’s involvement in this expedition, it is not unlikely. Al-Biqāʿī had a deep-seated interest in jihad, dating back at least to the 830s when he performed jihad twice. He even tells us that so great was his passion for jihad that he devoted himself to the practice of archery and swordsmanship, hoping to master both. He states that he furthermore began to compose a work on the science of the sword, which he hoped would become paradigmatic; if the work was ever completed, it does not survive.⁷⁴

In this regard, al-Biqāʿī appears emblematic of one of the broader changes in fifteenth-century social order; namely, the blending and blurring of the traditional roles played by the “men of the sword” and the “men of the pen.”⁷⁵ There is of course the question of why al-Biqāʿī was so keen to practice jihad. It is unlikely that it was a deliberate attempt to ingratiate himself with the military elite, given how enduring his interest appears to have been; it is tempting to interpret it as a post-traumatic response to the attack on his family, which instilled within him a desire to become proficient in self-defense and warfare. In any case, al-Biqāʿī’s penchant for jihad so puzzled al-Sakhāwī that the latter said concerning it that “God knows his reason for all of that.”⁷⁶

Al-Biqāʿī did not only practice jihad; he also preached it. He wrote two works on jihad, *Al-Istishhād bi-āyāt al-jihād* and *Dhayl al-istishhād bi-āyāt al-jihād*.⁷⁷ The latter is an example of the forty *ahādīth* genre, which found its impetus in variants of a hadith wherein the Prophet praised the collection of forty *ahādīth* which would benefit the Muslim community, and had been a popular vehicle for the encouragement of jihad since the second half of the twelfth century.⁷⁸ Given al-Biqāʿī’s involvement in the campaign of 847/1443, it is likely that both works were

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⁷⁴ MS ʿArabīyah akhbār 40, fol. 106r–v.
composed during the 840s. Further, as Burge notes, that the Dhayl in particular is a hadith collection suggests that it was composed during the earlier part of his career when he was more involved in hadith; this would place it during his time as Sultan Jaqmaq’s hadith teacher.

Thus al-Biqāʾi appears as something of an adventurer, and it is not inconceivable that he took part in the 848/1444 expedition; indeed, it is possible—perhaps even likely—that it was his martial ability that endeared him to Īnāl in the first place. Furthermore, it is possible that the group of anonymous amirs who intervened on his behalf and had his exile overturned included Īnāl and other members of his circle.

Much like his relationship with Ibn Ḥajar, al-Biqāʾi’s relationship with Īnāl would prove both beneficial and enduring. Indeed, al-Biqāʾi refers to Īnāl as his šāhib, and was close to him throughout his reign. As noted above, it was after Īnāl’s enthronement that al-Biqāʾi was returned to his position as the mufassir of the Zāhiriyyah mosque. It is also likely, though not certain, that it was during Īnāl’s reign that he was appointed to teach at the Sharfiyyah madrasah, and as the nāẓir of the Fakkāhīn Mosque. He would step down from these positions in 869/1464, the same year in which he resigned or was removed from his position as mudarris at the Mu’ayyadiyyah madrasah.

Aside from holding these teaching positions, al-Biqāʾi acted on behalf of Sultan Īnāl. He describes himself at one point as Īnāl’s secretary, and spends considerable time discussing his supervision of the waqf of a khān al-funduq in Damascus on behalf of both the sultan and his son-in-law, the dawādār thānī Birdibak al-Qubrusī. He was in charge of a group of distinguished members of the fuqahā’ and the fuqarā’, including the Maliki and Hanbali qadis of Damascus, which was tasked with both the examination and recording of the properties attached to the waqf of the khān al-funduq, but also their renovation. By al-Biqāʾi’s own account, he was successful and the sultan was happy with his work. Consequently, al-Biqāʾi’s close relationship with Īnāl solidified his position within the courtly elite, and offered him the opportunity to build relationships with leading members of Īnāl’s court.

During his reign, Sultan Īnāl founded his leadership and authority on the relationships, wealth, and charisma of his family. Aside from his wife, Zaynab

Asakir of Damascus (1105 1176) and His Age, with an Edition and Translation of Ibn ʿAsakir’s The Forty Hadiths for Inciting Jihad (Leiden, 2013).
bint Ḥasan ibn Khāṣṣ Bak (d. 884/1479), and son Ahmad (d. 893/1488), it was the husbands of his daughters, the dawādār kabīr Yūnus al-Aqbāʿī (d. 865/1461) and the dawādār thānī Birdibak al-Qubrusī, who played an increasingly central role. Al-Biqāʿī developed a particularly close relationship with Birdibak al-Qubrusī. Indeed, Birdibak al-Qubrusī is one of the more frequently mentioned figures in the Iẓhār al-ʿaṣr, appearing as both al-Biqāʿī’s source of information and—on occasion—his traveling companion. Their closeness is further attested by al-Biqāʿī’s attempt to absolve Birdibak al-Qubrusī from any blame for the problems of Īnāl’s reign, or the failure of Ahmad ibn Īnāl to successfully succeed his father. The latter was in distinct contrast to the writings of his contemporary, Ibn Taghrībirdī, who imputes a large part of the failure of Ahmad ibn Īnāl to his reliance upon Birdibak al-Qubrusī.

It is clear also that al-Biqāʿī sought to maintain his association with the family of Īnāl after Īnāl’s death. In addition to his relationship with Birdibak al-Qubrusī, al-Biqāʿī laid the groundwork for a relationship with Ahmad ibn Īnāl. At the beginning of Jumādā II 865/March 1461, al-Biqāʿī went to the new sultan to congratulate him on his accession; a little over a month later, on 18 Rajab 865/29 April 1461, he recited to the sultan a panegyric which he had composed. His efforts, however, proved futile, for Ahmad ibn Īnāl was deposed by Khushqadam in Ramadān 865/June 1461—some four months after his sultanate began; at the same time, Birdibak al-Qubrusī was imprisoned and mulcted, and was sent to live in Mecca in Shawwāl 866/July 1462.

This is, of course, only scratching the surface of what can be said about al-Biqāʿī’s relationships with the key figures of Sultan Īnāl’s court, particularly how and when these relationships developed. In particular, there is the question of how the triangle of Sultan Īnāl, Birdibak al-Qubrusī, and al-Biqāʿī functioned in actuality. Was, for instance, al-Biqāʿī closer to either of them, and could he be both the sultan’s man and representative while also being close to Birdibak? To answer this, however, would be to go far beyond the scope of the current article; it will require deeper analysis of how, why, and around which themes contemporary

87Ibid., 3:249.
historiographical material concerning the dynamics of İnāl’s court was produced by both al-Biqāʾī and other fifteenth-century historians.

The above cursory sketch should nevertheless demonstrate how al-Biqāʾī established and tried to establish relationships with the sultanic court, and it is perhaps not coincidental that the weakening of al-Biqāʾī’s position in Cairo—as evidenced by his inability to weather the controversies on use of the Bible in tafsīr and the poetry of Ibn al-Fāriḍ—followed the dismantling of Sultan İnāl’s political order; indeed, it may even suggest that al-Biqāʾī deliberately courted these controversies in order to establish his intellectual credentials in the new political order of Khushqadam.

**Conclusion**

This article has pursued two lines of enquiry. On the one hand, it has sought to clarify how al-Biqāʾī increased the social and cultural capital resources that he had at his disposal to build and expand the social network that underpinned his career in Cairo. Thus having no social capital but his intelligence and knowledge, al-Biqāʾī leveraged this to develop relationships with leading scholars, particularly Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, through whose patronage he was able to enter the orbit of Sultan Jaqmaq. His association with Jaqmaq’s court offered him the opportunity to cultivate relationships with leading members of the court, relationships that would prove beneficial when the political order of Jaqmaq was replaced with that of İnāl. At the same time, he sought to enhance and operationalize the social capital accrued through his scholarly and political connections by marrying into leading ulama families in Cairo.

This is not, of course, to suggest that there was some sort of Machiavellian plan behind al-Biqāʾī’s career. While he was no doubt ambitious—why else would he have left Damascus for Cairo?—and capable, there is nothing to suggest that he viewed the relationships he cultivated as mere means to an end. Likewise, we must not strip his teachers, his peers, or his wives of their agency; they were not merely stepping stones on al-Biqāʾī’s path to success, but were themselves actors with their own goals and intentions. Rather, the point to be made is how these different relationships all opened up different avenues for al-Biqāʾī while at the same time closing others: to do otherwise is to approach al-Biqāʾī’s life and career teleologically.

This interpretation of al-Biqāʾī’s life and career has relied primarily on three sources, two written by al-Biqāʾī and one by al-Sakhāwī. As noted earlier, these sources cannot simply be mined for historical information without considering why they were written. Rather, they should be understood as carefully crafted
literary works in their own rights, which served as a means through which their authors could mediate their own perspectives and understandings of that reality.

Literary does not necessarily mean fictional as, for instance, postmodernists following in the footsteps of White would have us believe. Rather, if these works are fictional then it is, to borrow the words of Geertz, fictional “in the sense that they are ‘something made,’ ‘something fashioned’—the original meaning of fictiō—not that they are false, unfactual, or merely ‘as if’ thought experiments.”

If we consider the events of al-Biqā‘ī’s life to be raw data, then we can consider al-Biqā‘ī’s autobiographical writings and al-Sakhāwī’s biography to be attempts to fashion this raw data into something meaningful. This is done through the judicious selection of which events to focus on, which relationships to emphasize, and by rationalizing al-Biqā‘ī through different themes and motifs.

There is, as was noted, considerable contradiction between al-Biqā‘ī’s and al-Sakhāwī’s emplotments of al-Biqā‘ī’s life and career—between al-Biqā‘ī’s self-dained self and al-Sakhāwī’s shameless charlatan. This does not mean that the images of al-Biqā‘ī which they create are irreconcilable. We know, for instance, that al-Sakhāwī was familiar with the ʿUnwān al-zamān, and used it as a source for his biography of al-Biqā‘ī. Crucially, then, we can see how al-Sakhāwī chose to incorporate this material and how these choices influenced the al-Biqā‘ī who emerges from Al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ.

Thus while al-Sakhāwī might jettison all of al-Biqā‘ī’s discussion of his childhood—so essential as it was for al-Biqā‘ī’s sense of self—and while he might minimize the importance of certain relationships, as he does with Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, or turn supportive relationships critical, as he does with ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Qalqashandī, he cannot deny the historicity of these relationships. Likewise, what may appear as nothing but the specious insults of a rival are confirmed by al-Biqā‘ī, who tells us that he was conscious of his pronunciation of Arabic, and that he occasionally had difficulties reading. Al-Sakhāwī and his biography of his arch-rival are still essential for our understanding of al-Biqā‘ī. As Wālid Saleh argues,

the significance of al-Sakhāwī’s biography is that, despite all the self-disclosure that al-Biqā‘ī offers his readers, one needs an outsider’s view of our author in order to corroborate his self-understand-

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89 For succinct criticism of White and the postmodernists, see Lubomír Doležel, “Fictional and Historical Narrative: Meeting the Postmodernist Challenge,” in Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis, ed. David Herman, Theory and Interpretation of Narrative Series (Columbus, 1999), 248–51.
91 MS ʿArabīyah akhbār 40, fols. 106v–107r.
ing. It takes an opponent to describe for us the circle of influences that shaped al-Biqāʿī.⁹²

The issue at stake, then, is not so much one of historicity as of interpretation. Both emplotments are founded upon a fundamental and shared layer of historicity: the “historical reality” of al-Biqāʿī. That is to say, these emplotments are circumscribed by the social contexts in which both al-Biqāʿī and al-Sakhāwī operated, and it is at these social contexts that the emplotments meet and from which they depart. They use the same basic information—particularly the relationships that al-Biqāʿī cultivated—to create wildly different understandings of al-Biqāʿī; their use of this basic information was filtered through their respective lenses, and colored by their feelings about al-Biqāʿī. While al-Sakhāwī may exclude or reframe material, he nevertheless confirms al-Biqāʿī’s own reflections that he faced hardship and opposition from the intellectual elite of Cairo, who disputed his presence among them. Al-Sakhāwī’s biography of al-Biqāʿī is this opposition made manifest.

Consequently, this article has argued that by recognizing how thoroughly entangled our authors and texts are—and by appreciating their discursive strategies and intentions—we can begin to disentangle the emplotments of al-Biqāʿī’s life from the social contexts. In this way, we develop a more nuanced understanding of both who al-Biqāʿī was and the social contexts themselves. What this has meant for our present purpose is that we were not in the process of simply reconstructing al-Biqāʿī’s life and career as it actually happened, but rather of also exploring how and in what ways his life and career were perceived and emplotted by both al-Biqāʿī himself and his greatest rival. In doing so, we arrive at a multi-layered representation of al-Biqāʿī, one which eschews the positivist tendency to seek the “answer” to historical figures, and which is perhaps closer to the historical al-Biqāʿī, in all his complexity and contradiction.

⁹²Saleh, In Defense of the Bible, 10.
Appendix: Biographies of Shaykhs

Here follow brief biographies of the shaykhs with whom both Muḥammad, brother of Fāṭimah, and al-Biqāʿī studied.

Sharaf al-Dīn Mūsá ibn Aḥmad ibn Mūsá ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sulaymān al-Subkī (ca. 762–840/1361–1437)\(^\text{93}\)

A scion of the Banū al-Subkī, Sharaf al-Dīn al-Subkī was a prominent scholar well-versed in fiqh, usūl, and Arabic. He was a mulāzim of Burhān al-Dīn al-Abanāsī, to whom he was related by marriage. He was appointed to teach at the Gharābīyah madrasah, and would also read either Al-Tanbīh, Al-Ḥāwā, or Al-Minhāj by himself in the Azhar. After his death in 840/1437, he was buried in the turbah of Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ.

Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Qāyātī (c. 785–850/1384–1446)\(^\text{94}\)

Shams al-Dīn al-Qāyātī had a career as both a mudarris and an administrator. Supporting himself initially by working as a shahīd out of the Ṣāliḥiyah Mosque in Cairo, he studied at the Muʿayyadī Mosque before being appointed the mudarris of hadith at the Zāhiriyah (Barqūq) Mosque and then the Shafiʿī mudarris at the Ashrafīyah mosque in 830. Subsequently he became the Sufi shaykh of the khānqāh Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ in 839 (held until he replaced Ibn Ḥajar),\(^\text{95}\) the mudarris of the Gharābīyah after the death of Sharaf al-Dīn al-Subkī, and then the mudarris of fiqh at the Shaykhūnīyah and the Ṣāliḥiyah after the death of al-Wanāʾī. He replaced Ibn Ḥajar as both the shaykh of the Baybarsiyah and as the qāḍī al-qudāh al-shāfiʿīyah in 849/1445. He continued to hold these positions until his death in 850/1446; he was buried in the turbah of Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ.

Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Wanāʾī (788–849/1386–1445)\(^\text{96}\)

Shams al-Dīn al-Wanāʾī, a companion of Shams al-Dīn al-Qāyātī, likewise supported himself as a shahīd before embarking upon a career as a mudarris and administrator. His first position was a mudarris at the Tankiziyah, fol-

\[^{93}\text{Al-Sakhāwī, } \text{Al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ}, \text{10:176–77; MS Köprülü 1119, fols. 369r–370v.}\]

\[^{94}\text{Al-Sakhāwī, } \text{Al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ}, \text{8:212–14.}\]

\[^{95}\text{Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī, } \text{ʿIqd al-jumān fī tārīkh ahl al-zamān: Ḥawādith wa-tarājim, ed. ʿAbd al-Rāziq al-Ṭanṭāwī Qarmūṭ (Cairo, 1989), 2:640–41.}\]

\[^{96}\text{Al-Sakhāwī, } \text{Al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ}, \text{7:140–41.}\]
allowed by *mudarris al-fiqh* at the Shaykhūnīyah. During the reign of Barsbāy, al-Maqrīzī tells us that he was patronized by a number of the *āyān*, among them the amir Jaqmaq; when Jaqmaq became sultan, al-Wanāṭī frequently attended his councils until he was given responsibility in government.⁹⁷ Al-Wanāṭī’s career in government would, however, prove to be tumultuous. In Rabi‘ I 843/August 1439, Jaqmaq appointed him the *qāḍī al-quḍāh al-shāfi‘īyah* of Damascus; he was removed from this position in Ramadān 843/February 1440. After traveling to Mecca, he returned to Cairo and was appointed the *qāḍī al-quḍāh al-shāfi‘īyah* in Ṣafar 844/July 1440; he was quickly replaced by Ibn Hajar. He then returned to Damascus, and in Rajab 844/December 1440 or Shawwāl 844/January 1441 was once again made *qāḍī al-quḍāh al-shāfi‘īyah* of Damascus, a position which he successfully held until the end of 846/1443. Once again he returned to Cairo and once again he was appointed *qāḍī al-quḍāh al-shāfi‘īyah*. He resigned in Muharram 848 and devoted himself to teaching *fiqh* until his death in 849.

ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn ʿAli ibn Ahmad ibn Ismāʿīl ibn Muḥammad al-Qalqashandi (788–856/1387–1452)⁹⁸ ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Qalqashandi was the scion of a prominent family of Cairene ulama, and enjoyed a reputation as a scholar, particularly of hadith. He was appointed the shaykh of the madrasah endowed by the *dawādar al-kabīr* Taghrībirdī al-Muʿayyadī, and was at one point the librarian of the Ashrafiyah. He sought to be *qāḍī al-quḍāh al-shāfi‘īyah* of Damascus and was also a candidate for the *qāḍī al-quḍāh al-shāfi‘īyah* of Egypt, but was unsuccessful in both cases. He was more successful later in life: he was appointed the Shafiʿi *mudarris al-fiqh* at the Shaykhūnīyah after the death of Shams al-Dīn al-Qāyātī in 850/1446, and was appointed to teach hadith at the Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn after the death of Ibn Hajar in 852/1449. He also taught the *qirāʾāt* at the Ḥasanīyah madrasah, and in 853/1449 he was appointed the *mudarris* of the Khashābīyah—a *zāwiyah* in the Mosque of ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ.⁹⁹ He resigned the appointed soon after because this position had been held by scions of the Bulqīnī family for some sixty years.


A scholar of some repute, Abū al-Qāsim al-Nuwayrī was eulogized by al-Sakhāwī as “a shaykh greatly exalted, revered, and essential to his madhhab.” He was offered numerous judgeships, including of Jerusalem, Egypt, and al-Shām. He rejected all of these because he was opposed to taking salaried positions, though he had previously deputized for his shaykh Shams al-Dīn al-Bāsaṭī (d. 842/1439), as the qāḍī al-quḍāh al-mālikīyah in Egypt. He is reputed to have said on one occasion that “Verily, Jaqmaq desires to bind me in conformity to him with this salary!” He established a madrasah at the Siryāqūsīyah khānqāh, to which he bequeathed his landed property, with the surplus going to his children.

101 Ibid., 9:248.
102 Ibid., 9:247; on Shams al-Dīn al-Bāsaṭī, see ibid., 7:5–8.
103 Ibid., 9:248.