Winter 2-15-2022

Reinterpreting Medieval Islamic Autobiography: The Case of al-Sakhāwī's Irshād (1428/831 AH - 1497/902 AH)

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Reinterpreting Medieval Islamic Autobiography: The Case of al-Sakhāwī's *Irshād* (1428/831 AH - 1497/902 AH)

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts
By

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Under the Supervision of
Distinguished University Professor Nelly Hanna

December/ 2021

Dedication

In loving memory of Manar Shawki, who has taught me to never give up

Acknowledgment

I am deeply indebted to my mother, Tafida Soliman, who has opened my eyes to the fascination of history and has been an invaluable support throughout my life. I cannot express my gratitude toward my father, Shawki Mahrous, who has always pushed me to fight my demons and step out of my comfort zone. I am also fortunate for my older sister, Noha Shawki, who has been my rock and best friend.

This thesis would not have been possible without the guidance, support, and patience of Dr. Nelly Hanna. I am tremendously touched by the grace and acceptance she showed me every time I struggled throughout the process of research and writing. Her dedication and enthusiasm for academia are truly inspiring. I will be forever indebted for her encouragement and mentorship.

I am thankful to the committee members Dr. Leonor Fernandes and Dr. Hoda El Saadi for reading this thesis and providing me with corrections and valuable improvements.

I owe special acknowledgment to my dear friend Menna Rashad, who has encouraged and supported me in this endeavor. I would not have been able to complete this thesis without her urging and faith in me. I am also grateful to my brothers, Ahmed and Mohammed, who provided me with coffee and chocolates to keep me sane while working on this research. The amazing Hoda Mostafa and Heba Mostafa deserve a special thank you. I am lucky to be surrounded by many great friends like Aisha Khairat, Azza Awwad, Joyce Rafla, Mounira Morsy, Nada El Newahy, Youmna Hussein, and Caroline Mitry.

Ms. Marwa Sabry deserves recognition for her extraordinary kindness and continuous support throughout my graduate studies. Her warm smile and willingness to go the extra mile improved my graduate experience.

Finally, I am filled with gratitude toward the Islamic Manuscript Association, Centre for the Study of Islam and Society at Leiden University, and the AUC Graduate Studies Office for sponsoring my visits to access al-Sakhāwī's manuscripts at Leiden University and Süleymaniye Library.

Contents

Introduction

Pre-modern Arabic autobiographies or *tarājim dhātiyya h*ave been identified as a significant source of curriculum and religious education. The content of many *tarājim dhātiyya* was the primary reason for this identification as it usually revolves around the academic education and career of their authors. On the other hand, *tarājim dhātiyya* were viewed as lacking in terms of self-image and self-reflection as they did not show the character of their authors nor reveal their private family life. This was coupled with the conclusion that pre-modern Arabic autobiographies were in reality confined to the form of curriculum vitae highlighting only the knowledge and skills of their authors.[1] In fact, scholars argue that "true" autobiographies as we know them today emerged only in the western tradition.[2] The rationale behind this is that western autobiographies share a somewhat consistent purpose, structure, and content that distinguish them from other genres. On the other hand, pre-modern Arabic autobiographies vary significantly in the nature of their purpose, structure, and content. Accordingly, many scholars argue that pre-modern Arabic autobiographies cannot be defined as a genre on their own. Hence, the value and importance of studying Arabic autobiographies as a genre are challenged.

All of the earlier remarks about pre-modern Arabic autobiographies are somewhat valid depending on the autobiography being examined. However, such comparisons often neglected the social difference, historical context, and the nature of literary expressions of each civilization. In fact, stressing the inadequacy of medieval Islamic autobiographies compared to modern western autobiographies has reduced the importance of Islamic *tarājim dhātiyya* as a historical source and colored their analysis based on western standards.

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[1] Gustave von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam: A Study in Cultural Orientation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 270.

[2] Among these scholars are Rosenthal, Grunebaum, Misch, Humphreys, and Hourani. A detailed description of their works will follow.

Furthermore, it discouraged attempts to examine the potential value of autobiographies regarding topics other than medieval education such as self-image, self-expression, social environment, and family life of scholars.

This thesis research will aim to contribute to the study of medieval Arabic autobiographies by examining the autobiography of one of fifteenth century Mamluk scholars, Muḥammad Ibn ʿabd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī (1428/831 AH - 1497/902 AH). Al-Sakhāwī's autobiography represents a unique and interesting case for four main reasons making it a significant addition to the study of pre-modern Arabic autobiographies.

Significance of al-Sakhāwī's Autobiography

First, al-Sakhāwī authored a stand-alone book, *Irshād al-ghāwī bi-isʿād al-ṭālib wa al-rāwī lil-iʿlām bi-tarjamat al-Sakhāwī* that he dedicated to reporting his *sīra* and detailed biography.[3] This practice of writing an independent, stand-alone work by a scholar about himself rather than having someone else write it on his behalf or attaching a short self-biographical entry to another work was not very common. At least not many such medieval Islamic texts have survived. In fact, according to Dwight Reynolds, only around 20 scholars have left a stand-alone work about their lives.[4]

An additional remarkable aspect about al-Sakhāwī's case does not lie in the uniqueness of the autobiography alone but also in the fact that al-Sakhāwī composed several works in which autobiographical information about himself and his family is included. In fact, al-Sakhāwī authored two other works that would help scholars fill any information gap or limitation in his autobiography. The first work is al-Sakhāwī's massive centennial biographical dictionary *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ* that included data about influential figures who

[3] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād al-ghāwī bi-isʿād al-ṭālib wa al-rāwī lil-iʿlām bi-tarjamat al-Sakhāwī*, ed. Saʿd al-Dawsarī (Kuwait: Maktabat Ahl al-Athar, 2014).

[4] Dwight Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 256-288.

lived during the fifteenth century. Al-Sakhāwī included a thirty-page entry about himself in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ* as well as biographical accounts of most of his family members.[5]

The second work written by al-Sakhāwī is his chronicle, *Wajīz al-kalām fī dhayl duwal al-islam,* which reports on the period (1344/745 AH- 1491/896 AH). The chronicle, thus, covers the entire lifespan of al-Sakhāwī in yearly accounts except for the last six years of his life. The chronicle is relevant because it included some useful family information put in the context of concurrent events and economic conditions. This chronicle is also relevant because al-Sakhāwī utilized it to express his opinions and reactions to the political, economic, and social conditions of his time. Therefore, this thesis has taken the previously mentioned two works into consideration while examining al-Sakhāwī's autobiography and family life.

In addition to self-biographies written by al-Sakhāwī, several other scholars wrote biographical entries on al-Sakhāwī. Among these scholars are al-Suyūṭī who added a short account about al-Sakhāwī in his biographical dictionary, *Naẓm al-ʿiqyān fī aʿyān al-aʿyān* and Ibn Iyās who wrote an obituary upon al-Sakhāwī's death in his chronicle *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr*.[6] In other words, al-Sakhāwī is one of the most written about *ulama* of the fifteenth century. These narratives that belong to different sources could help us interpret al-Sakhāwī's autobiography more accurately as they provide an outsider view of the author's life and give a richer canvas for researchers to analyze.

Furthermore, the case of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography is significant as it was written during the second half of the fifteenth century, a period in which the genre of autobiography was particularly flourishing. In fact, al-Sakhāwī's autobiography is historically connected to a cluster of autobiographies started by the Mamluk scholar Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalanī (1372/774 AH - 1449/852 AH) and followed by his students including al-Sakhāwī. This cluster also

[5] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsiʿ* (Beirut*:* Dār al-Jil, 1992), 8:2-32.

[6] Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī*, Naẓm al-ʿiqyān fī aʿyān al-aʿyān*, ed. Philip K. Hitti (New York: Syrian-American Press, 1927), 152-153; Muḥammad Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr*, ed. Muḥammad Musṭafá (Fīsbādin: Frānz Shtāynar, 1972), 2:361.

incorporated Ibn Ḥajar's student al-Suyūṭī (1445/849 AH - 1505/9811 AH) and the tradition was later continued by his students such as Ibn Ṭūlūn (1475/880 AH - to 1546/953 AH) and al-Shaʿrānī (1493/899 AH - 1565/973 AH).[7] Up to now, this is the only known cluster of autobiographies that was authored as a tradition started by a scholar and followed by his students. Thus, studying al-Sakhāwī's autobiography can give insights into the circumstances and conditions that took place during the fifteenth century leading to the rise of autobiographical texts.

Finally, one notices a uniqueness in al-Sakhāwī's autobiography even in comparison to the cluster of autobiographies mentioned above. What is unusual and unpreceded in the autobiography is the presence of his family. In fact, al-Sakhāwī included a narrative about each of his family members, including the women. In these biographical accounts, he provided information whenever relevant about their education, marital status, divorce cases, inheritance, significant characteristics, and occupation. Thus, the autobiography reveals insights not only about al-Sakhāwī's academic life but also his domestic and family life, making it a rich source for research.

Based on the importance of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography, this thesis will focus on the following objectives.

Objectives

First, this research will study the characteristics of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography and the possible motivations behind writing it. This will help us understand more about the art of writing an autobiography during the late Mamluk period and how it relates to broader Islamic tradition. This will be done by considering al-Sakhāwī's autobiography in the context of other similar concurrent texts written during the late Mamluk period to detect possible links and to

[7] Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥaduth bi-niʿmat Allāh*, ed. E. M. Sartain (Cairo: al-Matbaʿa al-ʿarabiyya al-ḥaditha, 1975); Muḥammad Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Fulk al-mashḥūn fī aḥwāl Muḥammad Ibn Ṭūlūn* (Damascus: Matbāʿt al-Taraqī, 1929); ʻAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī, *Latāʾif al-Minann wa al-akhlāq fī wujūb al-taḥaduth bi-niʿmat Allāh*, (Cairo: ʻĀlam al-Fikr, 1976).

investigate how a medieval autobiography can be shaped by the character and ideology of its author.

Then, the thesis will try to analyze the context that led to the emergence of many autobiographies during the time of al-Sakhāwī to understand why this genre became prevalent. The research suggests several intellectual and social changes that might have fostered a flourishing environment for this type of writing.

In addition, the thesis will explore some of the unique themes that al-Sakhāwī wrote much about in his autobiography and which holds a significant presence in the autobiography. Upon closely examining al-Sakhāwī's autobiography, I have chosen to explore the value of the autobiography in contributing to the theme of *ulama* family life. Thus, the final objective of this thesis is to show how an autobiography such as al-Sakhāwī can reveal some aspects related to family conditions and dynamics. This will be done by examining the portrayal of al-Sakhāwī's family as presented in the autobiography and analyzing it in relation to the *ulama* family life during this period.

To address these objectives, the research will be divided into the following chapters. Chapter one will orient the reader to the characteristics of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography and examine the possible motivations behind writing it. Chapter two will look into the broader context that led to the emergence of different types of writing, like al-Sakhāwī's autobiography, and analyze the reasons behind the rise of autobiographies during the fifteenth century.

The following part of the thesis will focus on family life as presented in al-Sakhāwī's autobiography. Thus, chapter three will study the family background and economic conditions of al-Sakhāwī's family as discerned from the autobiography to understand how the family conditions compare to the broader circumstances within society. Finally, chapter four

will attempt to utilize the autobiography to draw a possible portrayal of al-Sakhāwī's family regarding marriage and divorce conditions and show aspects of their domestic life.

It is important to emphasize that this thesis is guided by earlier research on the genre of pre-modern Arabic autobiography. Prior research has dealt with the issues of defining and classifying the genre, which was a crucial starting point to determine which literary works should be cataloged as medieval Arabic autobiographies. Accordingly, several corpora of pre-modern Arabic autobiographies were introduced based on the suggested definitions by surveying both published and manuscript texts. Thanks to these earlier studies, the manuscript of al-Sakhāwī's *Irshād* was identified as an autobiographical text.

Previous scholarship had also looked at motivations behind writing autobiographies and attempted to trace the development of the genre within the Islamic traditions. Thus, before addressing the main objectives of this thesis, the rest of the introduction will be devoted to highlighting earlier works dedicated to the genre to understand the nature of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography and where it stands within the context of Islamic tradition.

Earlier Research on Medieval Arabic Autobiographies

Rosenthal's article "Die arabische Autobiographie" published in 1939, demarcates the starting point of scholarly interest in Arabic autobiographical texts.[8] Rosenthal carefully selected and examined twenty-three Arabic autobiographical texts in his research. He concluded that these texts are mainly written to transmit academic knowledge for future scholars in an impersonal nature, unlike western autobiographies that revolve around the author's life experiences reflecting his personality and describing the various stages of his life.[9] He reached this conclusion because, based on his analysis, these Arabic texts do not contain personal thoughts and feelings nor represent a comprehensive account of personal

[8] Franz Rosenthal, "Die arabische Autobiographie," *Studia Arabica* 1, (1937): 4-5.
[9] Ibid., 36-40.

life. Furthermore, these texts vary extensively in terms of objective, organization, tone, and nature of the content. According to Rosenthal, this suggests a lack of formalized literary genre of autobiographies within the Islamic tradition.

Several other scholars agreed with this view. Among them is Gustave von Grunebaum, who also examined the topic of Arabic autobiographies as a form of self-expression in his book *Medieval Islam,* written in 1946. Like Rosenthal, Grunebaum also commented on the lack of personal tone and character in Arabic autobiographical texts.[10] In his multi-volume endeavor to study the history of autobiography, George Misch examined Arabic autobiographies in *Geschichte der Autobiographie*, published in 1969. He concluded that Arabic autobiographical texts, unlike the western tradition, never developed into a genre of their own within the Islamic tradition.[11] Other scholars who agreed with this conclusion are Marshall Hodgson, Georges Gusdorf, and Roy Pasca.[12] Also, Albert Hourani, Edward Said, and Stephen Humphreys commented on the scarcity of autobiographies in the medieval Arabic tradition.[13]

This wave of interest in the topic of pre-modern Arabic autobiography among orientalists, originating from an interest in Western autobiography, led to a rise of Arabic written scholarship on the subject, especially after ʿabd al-Rahmān Badawī published a translation of Rosenthal's article in his book *al-Mawt wa al-ʿabqariyah.*[14] Among the first research written in Arabic is the article "*mā Ṣunnifa ʿulamāʾ al-ʿarab fī aḥwāl anfusihim*" published in 1955. In this article, Carl Brockelmann used the broad Arabic words *aḥwāl* and

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[10] Von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam: A Study in Cultural Orientation,* 270.

[11] Georg Misch, "Selbstdarstel Von Tragem des Geistign Lebens in dem Mittelalterichen Kulturbereich des Islam," in *Geschichte der Autobiographie* (Frankfurt: G. Schulte-Bulmke Verlag, 1969), 3.

[12] Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," in *Autobiography Essays Theoretical and Critical,* trans. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 29; Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods* (University Of Chicago Press, 1974); Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 21.

[13] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 224; Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*s (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 81-82; Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (Cairo: AUC Press, 1992).

[14] ʿAbd al-Rahman Badawī, *al-Mawt wa al-ʿabqariyah* (Kuwait: Wakālat al-Matḥūʿāt, 1945).

akhbār anfusihim to designate Arabic texts that incorporate self-narratives about the author's life, insights, or experiences.[15] He selected and briefly discussed fourteen Arabic texts that match this criterion, starting with al-Wāqadī's (747/130 AH - 823/207 AH) self-reported stories reserved in Mohamed Ibn Saad's (784/168 AH - 845/230 AH) biographical dictionary *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* and ending with Taha Hussein's autobiography *al-Aiyam* as well as Mohamed Kurd Ali's memoirs embedded in his book *Khiṭaṭ al-Shām.*[16]

It is important to note that studies before Brockelmann relied heavily on Rosenthal's corpus of Arabic autobiographies in their research, while Brockelmann attempted to expand Rosenthal's corpus and search for other autobiographical texts. However, he did not offer a definition or a methodology of determining pre-modern Arabic autobiography; he merely used the overarching Arabic term *ḥadath ʿan nafsuh*. Therefore, his standpoint concerning the classification of the genre is not stated.

After Brockelmann, two important books were written in 1956, focusing on the topic of Arabic autobiography. The first is *al-Tarjama al-shakhsiyah* by Shawqī Dayf.[17] In this book, Dayf attempted to shed light on the genre of Arabic autobiography by tracing its existence from the Abbasid to the modern period. Although Dayf did not refer to Rosenthal or Brockelmann in his book, almost all autobiographies mentioned belong to Rosenthal's corpus. Also, the book's approach matches Brockelmann's with an emphasis on the autobiographies mentioned by Rosenthal. This could be the result of a coincidence, but most likely, Dayf was affected by these two articles. Dayf started his research by describing how the influence of the autobiographical Greek tradition, which early Arab scholars copied, has led to the emergence of similar texts in Arabic. Although he did not provide a definition of what constitutes a pre-modern Arabic autobiography, he differentiated the twenty-three

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[15] Carl Brockelmann, "*mā Ṣunnifa ʿulamāʾ al-ʿarab fī aḥwāl anfusihim,*" in *al-Muntaqa min Dirasat al-Mustashriqin*, ed. Salah al-Dīn al-Munajjid (Cairo: Matbā't Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa al-Nasher, 1955), 1:1-23.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Shawqī Dayf, *Al-Tarjama al-shakhsiyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1956) 3.

medieval texts he introduced into two types: comprehensive autobiographies covering the author's life and partial ones covering a selected aspect or phase in the author's life. He also attempted to categorize existing autobiographies based on classifying their authors. According to Dayf, Arabic autobiographies are grouped into four categories: philosophical, scholarly, spiritual, or political, based on the intellectual inclination of the author.[18] Also, Dayf briefly discussed the typical characteristics and content of each category of autobiography and identified the most famous examples of each type. An important note made by Dayf is the spread of academic autobiography as a tradition from the thirteenth century until the fifteenth century.[19]

Other than Dayf's work, the second significant book written in 1956 is *Fann al-sīra* by Iḥsān ʿAbbās. The methodology of this book is different from the one written by Dayf.[20] Whereas Dayf was following Brockelmann's approach and studying the genre by presenting and commenting upon autobiographical texts, ʿAbbās tried to trace the trajectory of Arabic autobiography within the Islamic tradition and compare it to the western tradition using a more analytical approach. It appears that ʿAbbās was extending Rosenthal's research as well as acknowledging Brockelmann's corpus. This is clear as the book surveyed existing pre-modern Arabic autobiographies and recognized the advancement of western autobiography tradition.[21] ʿAbbās also discussed the reasons for the emergence of *sīra* and classified Arabic autobiography into four different types based on the motivation of their authorship: texts written to record the events of the author's life, to justify and apologize for the actions of the author, to convey spiritual journey, or to depict the adventures of the author.[22]

[18] Ibid., 5-6.
[19] Ibid., 52-53.
[20] Iḥsān ʿAbbās, *Fann al-Sīra* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1967), 4.
[21] Ibid., 6-7.
[22] Ibid., 114-118.

It is helpful to highlight that until this point there did not seem to be a disagreement in scholarship concerning pre-modern Arabic autobiography. Western scholars agreed more or less with Rosenthal's conclusion; their reference and primary concern were European autobiographies. Through the lens of European standards, the genre was examined in other cultures among which is the Islamic world. Scholarships written in Arabic, on the other hand, took two turns. The first was to disregard Rosenthal's conclusion, as seen in Dayf's case, and proceed with highlighting examples of pre-medieval autobiographical texts without an emphasis on formalizing, defining, or analyzing the genre as a whole. The second, adopted by ʿAbbās, was to acknowledge Rosenthal's analysis and contribute to the research within the boundaries and framework established by western scholarship.

By the mid-seventies, a shift started to appear towards the study of Arabic autobiography based on refuting Rosenthal's conclusion. The main argument of this refutation was that autobiography, as a genre, does not abide by rigorous rules but rather by certain conditions that vary according to the culture or ideology of the society.[23] Many scholars did not adopt this shift, but it kept reappearing throughout the literature. It is difficult to trace the reason for this change as well as the exact starting point. However, it appeared to emerge from a broader paradigm shift towards studying Islamic tradition.

The earliest research I could trace that employed this shift is conducted by Yaḥyá Ibrāhīm ʿAbd al-Dāyim as part of his master's thesis on pre-modern Arabic autobiography which he later published as a chapter in the book, *al-Tarjama al-dhātiyya fī al-adab al-ʻarabī al-ḥadīth.*[24] ʿAbd al-Dāyim started his research by differentiating between the terms diary, memoir, journal, confessions, novel, and autobiography in modern standards versus in the classical period in an effort to argue that applying modern standards to classical texts is

[23] Jean Starobinski, "The Style of Autobiography," in *Autobiography Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 78.

[24] Yahyá ʻAbd al-Dāyim, *Al-Tarjama al-dhātiyya fī al-adab al-ʻarabī al-ḥadīth* (Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍah al-'arabiaMisṛīyah, 1975).

restraining.[25] Based on a proposed definition of what constitutes an autobiography, ʿAbd al-Dāyim designated specific texts within the Islamic tradition to belong to the genre of autobiography with an emphasis on the usage of the Arabic terminologies *sīra* and *tarjama.*[26] ʿAbd al-Dāyim followed ʿAbbās's methodology and classified autobiographies based on the purpose of their writing. He detected six main reasons behind writing pre-modern autobiography: the desire to justify the author's actions, record a particular standpoint, discharge agitation, portray the perfect life, showcase exemplary academic life, or for nostalgic reasons.[27] The features and characteristics of pre-modern Arabic autobiography were also examined as part of this research. ʿAbd al-Dāyim ended his study by comparing medieval autobiographies to the modern concept of an autobiography. He concluded that, at some level, pre-modern autobiography is similar to the contemporary concept despite the differences in representation.[28] According to ʿAbd al-Dāyim, the closest medieval text to the modern autobiography is *al-Tibyān,* the autobiography of ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Buluggīn (1056/447 AH - after 1090/482 AH) the last *Zīrdī amir* of Granada.[29] Other research conducted by Goitein in 1977 re-considered Rosentahl's conclusion by clarifying the difference in the concept of individuality within Islam to western culture. Through examining al-Baldāhurī's (d. 892) *Ansāb al-ashrāf* work, Goitein argued that such works show the personality of their authors according to the Islamic sense of individuality, which is different from the western concept.[30]

Another vital progress in scholarship during this period is that several manuscripts were recently discovered, became available to researchers, or were classified as

[25] Ibid., 5-6.
[26] Ibid., 30-31.
[27] Ibid., 33-35.
[28] Ibid., 37-38.
[29] Ibid., 40.
[30] S. D. Goitein, "Individualism and Conformity in Classical Islam," in *Individualism and Conformity in Classical Islam,* eds Banani and Vryonis (Wiesbaden: Fifth Giorgio Levi Delia Vida Biennial Conference, 1977), 3-18.

autobiographical. Consequently, these works were now accessible and popular to study. These texts enabled researchers to extend the corpus of the genre and come up with new findings and insights. Among these texts are the autobiographies of al-Suyūṭī (1445/849 AH - 1505/911 AH), and Ibn Khaldūn (1332/732 AH- 1406/808 AH).[31] The most prominent study concerning al- Suyūṭī' autobiography was attributed to Elizabeth Sartain published in 1975 in her book *Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī Vol1: Biography and Background*. Sartain was cautious in the terminology she used in the book, often referring to the manuscript as belonging to autobiographical texts rather than classifying it as an autobiography. Clearly, she adopted the view of Rosenthal, Misch, and Grunebaum in classifying this type of work as a precursor to modern autobiography. She also explained that although this type of work was abundant, it never developed as an independent literary genre in Islamic tradition.[32] Furthermore, Sartain affirmed Rosenthal's remark that autobiographical writings, within the Islamic tradition, were usually in the form of a scholar's curriculum vitae in which "a person is viewed as a type rather than an individual"; therefore, these texts did not show development in personality or character.[33] She concluded, however, that al-Suyūṭī's book, in certain aspects, did not follow the typical tradition of pre-modern Arabic autobiography because it showed his progress as a scholar, a glimpse of his personality, and was occasionally organized in a chronological manner similar to modern autobiography.[34]

As more "atypical" medieval Arabic autobiographies were discovered, this opened the door to re-interpretations regarding the discourse. For example, Aldo Scaglione reached a

[31] ʿAbd al-Rahṃān Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Taʿrīf bi-Ibn Khaldūn wa-riḥlatihi gharban wa-sharqan*, ed. Muḥammad Ibn Tāwīt al-Ṭanjī (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'līf wa-al-Tarjama wa-al-Nashr, 1951); al-Shaʿrānī, *Latā ʾif al-Minan*; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥaduth bi-niʿmat Allāh*.

[32] Sartain, *al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background*, 137.

[33] Ibid., 139.

[34] Ibid., 140.

different conclusion in his study of Ibn Khaldūn's autobiography in 1984.[35] His primary focus behind this was to examine if autobiographies existed outside the European world; he analyzed three medieval autobiographical texts along with Ibn Khaldūn' autobiography, including Ibn Sīnā (980/370 AH-1037/427AH), al-Ghāzalī (1058/450 AH - 1111/505 AH), and Tamerlane (1336/736 AH - 1405/817 AH).[36] He concluded that these texts should be deemed proper autobiographies because they share basic characteristics with the European autobiography. Similarly, Vytautas Kavolis detected the existence of autobiographies in Chinese, Japanese, and Islamic culture, arguing that the Islamic tradition included the most productive among the three traditions and ranking second to the western tradition.[37]

A significant research was conducted in 1989 by Saleh al-Ghāmidī, who devoted his Ph.D. dissertation to studying autobiography in classical Arabic Literature.[38] This research is important as it introduced a more coherent working definition and methodology to classify pre-modern Arabic autobiography. After analyzing the issues of the previously suggested definitions, al-Ghāmidī decided to adopt Heidi Stull's definition, which is also used for western autobiography. According to Stull's definition, an autobiography is "a sincere and intended recording in retrospect of a lifetime (or at least a considerable number of years) of experiences, actions, and interactions, and their immediate and long-range effects upon the individual."[39] Al-Ghāmidī slightly amended this definition to require the existence of a clear explicit or implicit intention from the author to write his biography.[40] The definition, thus, excluded travel works (*riḥalāt*), brotherly letters (*rasāʾil al-ikhwāniyya*), literary essays or

[35] Aldo Scaglione, "The Mediterranean's Three Spiritual Shores: Images of Self between Christianity and Islam in the Later Middle Ages," in *The Craft of Fiction: Essays in Medieval Poetic*s, ed. Leigh Arrathoon (Rochester: Solaris Press, 1984), 453–473.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Vytautas Kavolis, *Designs of Selfhood* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press,1984), 59.

[38] Saleh al-Ghāmidī, "Autobiography in Classical Arabic Literature: An Ignored Literary Genre." PhD Dissertation. Indiana University, 1989; Saleh al-Ghāmidī, *Kitābat al-Dhāt: Dirāsāt fī al-sīra al-dhātiyya* (Morocco: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 2013).

[39] Heidi Stull, *The Evolution of the Autobiography from 1770-1850: A Comparative Study and Analysis* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985).

[40] Al-Ghāmidī, "Autobiography in Classical Arabic Literature: An Ignored Literary Genre," 10-13.

treatises (*rasāʾil adabiyya*), works containing scattered autobiographical information about the author, counsel works (*kutub al-naṣāʾiḥ*), and fictional philosophical works.[41] Based on this definition, many texts that appeared in Rosenthal's and Brocklean's corpora like Ibn Hazm's (994/384 AH -1063/456 AH) *Ṭawq al-Ḥamāma*, and al-Muhasibī's text were excluded from the genre. By examining twenty-six texts based on the above definition, al-Ghāmidī's research traced the genre's development and categorized the Arabic classical autobiography into three types: spiritual, political, and academic. For each category, al-Ghāmidī identified several examples and drew common features. By studing these texts, al-Ghāmidī concluded that autobiography was a well-established genre in pre-modern Arabic literature identified by common characteristics that correspond to the period's historical context and Islamic culture.[42]

In 1989, Devin Stewart identified a gap in earlier research. He highlighted the lack of representation of Twelver Shiʿi autobiographies in most of the used corpora of Islamic autobiography, which resulted in an absence of research done on autobiographies written by Shiʿi scholars.[43] To address this gap, Stewart recognized ten autobiographical accounts, mainly included in biographical dictionaries, written by Shiʿi scholars. Stewart's research focused on one of these accounts, the brief autobiography of the Safavid scholar, Niʿmat Allah al-Jazāʾirī (1640/1050 AH -1701/1112 AH). Through his analysis, Stewart concluded that al-Jazāʾirī's autobiography showed a vivid portrayal of the author's life and his distinct humorous personality.[44]

It appears that the question of whether pre-modern Arabic autobiography existed or not as a literary genre still prevailed and guided, to some degree, the scholarship. None of the

[41] Ibid., 14-21.
[42] Ibid., 234.
[43] Devin Stewart. "The Humor of the Scholars: The Autobiography of Niʿmat Allah al-Jazāʾirī (d. 1112/1701)," *Iranian Studies* 22, no. 4 (1989): 48.
[44] Ibid., 50-54.

above research managed to make the desired effect and guide future research in a particular direction. Some scholars like Hilary Kilpatrick decided to take a middle ground concerning the question and attempted to come up with an interpretation or what she called the "missing piece" to the perception of medieval Arabic autobiography. Her research introduced the idea that travel books like *Kitāb al-aghanī* and other works containing autobiographical fragments could be seen as the medium through which medieval scholars represented themselves.[45] Such work revealed the personality of their authors in the manner that western autobiographies did.

The movement to translate and analyze new autobiographical texts continued despite the controversy over the genre. This is shown in the case of Dwight Reynold, who devoted his article to translating the preface of al-Shaʿrānī's autobiography and interpreting its content. In 2001, an extensive and crucial research dedicated to studying pre-modern Arabic autobiography was published. The research was conducted by a team of scholars and edited by Dwight Reynolds in the book, *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition.* The book's value relies upon its methodology to examine Arabic autobiographical texts from the perspective of Islamic tradition and within historical context rather than Western standards. First, the book constructs a definition for Islamic autobiographies and then introduces a corpus of over a hundred Islamic autobiographical texts dating from the ninth to the nineteenth century. Based on this corpus, the research confirmed that pre-modern Arabic autobiographies varied in format and organization. Furthermore, the book acknowledged that the genre was never formulated into an organized structure like biographical dictionaries.[46] However, the book concluded that pre-modern scholars

[45] Hilary Kilpatrick, "Autobiography and Classical Arabic Literature." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 22, no. 1 (1991): 3.
[46] Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*, 242.

recognized these texts as autobiographies and, thus, they should be subjected and classified based on the context of their culture and historical conditions.

The extensive corpus introduced in the book *Interpreting the Self* enabled researchers to move away from comparing Western and Islamic concepts of an autobiography and focus more on studying a wider range of pre-modern Arabic autobiographies. Among the scholars who pursued this approach are Stephan Conermann, James Fromherz, René-Vincent Guérin du Grandlauna, and Yakar Gülşe

Conermann devoted his research to analyze Ibn Ṭūlūn's (1475/880 AH - to 1546/953 AH) autobiography, *al-Fulk al-mashḥūn fī aḥwāl Muḥammad Ibn Ṭūlūn*, and place it within the autobiographical writing tradition of the Mamluk period.[47] This study was beneficial as it went beyond the attempt to refute Misch's conclusion that autobiographies are a "testimony to the development of self-awareness of man in the Occident."[48] Conermann examined three different autobiographies from the Mamluk period compared to Ibn Ṭūlūn's to pinpoint the differences and commonalities of the genre during thier time. Although the comparison was brief and mainly focused on the structure of the texts, it was, nevertheless, valuable to study the development of the genre and its significance to fields like Islamic academic life. James Fromhez, on the other hand, was interested in reconstructing Ibn Khaldūn's life in his book *Ibn Khaldūn: Life and Times* published in 2010.[49] The book included a section with the title "The Originality of Ibn Khaldūn's Autobiography" in which Fromhez discussed Ibn Khaldūn's autobiography, *al-Taʿrīf bi- Ibn Khaldūn wa-riḥlatihi gharban wa-sharqan*, and examined how it relates to the tradition of the genre. Based on his analysis, Fromhez classified the text as an autobiography similar to the western concept because the personality

[47] Stephan Conermann, "Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 955/1548): Life and Works," *Mamluk Studies Review* 8, no. 1 (2004): 115- 139.
[48] Georg Misch, *Geschichte der Autobiographie*, 1:1:5.
[49] James Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldūn: Life and Times* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

of Ibn Khaldūn is visible in the autobiography along with his feelings, which were often expressed in poetry.[50]

The courtesy of introducing the topic of this thesis as well as providing the much-needed background information about al-Sakhāwī's autobiography goes to Du Grandlaunay's Ph.D. dissertation published in 2015.[51] Du Grandlaunay's main objective was to analyze al-Sakhāwī's autobiography in an attempt to rebuild his academic life, particularly his training years as a young scholar. Guided by the data in the autobiography, Du Grandlaunay was able to shed light on some educational practices and the process of transmission during the end of Mamluk time. Interestingly, Du Grandlaunay concluded that the text, as a whole, cannot be considered a proper autobiography, especially in comparison to Ibn Khaldūn's.[52] Only the part that deals with the biographical data of al-Sakhāwī can be considered a short autobiography.[53] This thesis will attempt to build on Du Grandlaunay's research by focusing on the family aspects presented in al-Sakhāwī's autobiography to examine the potential of such medieval Arabic autobiography as a historical source.

The fourth and most recent research published in 2019 is a master's thesis on the earliest known manuscript of a diary written in Ottoman Turkish belonging to the seventeenth century *Shaykh* Seyyid Hasan.[54] Yakar's research attempted to put the diary into the context of ego document historiography and examine the sense of individuality within the Islamic tradition.

It is worth mentioning here that Jacob Presser introduced the word ego document as an overarching term to indicate all writings about the self, including autobiography, memoir,

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[50] Ibid., 169.

[51] René-Vincent du Grandlaunay, "*Irshād al-Ghāwī bi isʿād al-ṭālib wa-l-rāwī li-l-iʿlām bi-tarjamat al-Sakhāwī:* Édition et analyse de la première partie de l'autobiographie d'al-*Sakhāwī* (831-902/1428-1497)." PhD Dissertation. Sorbonne University, 2015.

[52] Ibid., 233.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Yakar Gülşen, "Individual and Community, Public and Private: The Case Of a 17th-Century Istanbulite Dervish And His Diary," Master's thesis, (Turkey: Middle East Technical University: 2019):52.

diary, and letters.[55] This term became popular recently as it provided a solution to the problem of genre classifications of medieval texts, which was a stumbling block in the study of autobiographies.

Among scholars who used this term and dedicated part of her research to the study of Islamic medieval ego-centered documents is Nelly Hanna.[56] Her article aimed at examining ego-centered texts of the period 1500-1800 from the perspective of medieval scholars rather than an outsider or modern view. She highlighted that many self-narratives appeared in various genres of writings, including literary works, belles letters, chronicles, dictionaries, and travel books.[57] The reasons for this could be attributed to different writing techniques, culture, context, and the nature of the knowledge transmission method.[58] Regarding the impersonal tone of medieval scholars, Hanna provided many examples that show deep emotions without explicit declaration.[59]

Another research worth mentioning is done by Khālid Khashramī. His book *al-Sharq wa al-gharb fī al-sīra al-dhātiyya al-ʿarabīyya* examined the portrayal of the west and east in two Arabic autobiographies; *al-iʿtibār* by Usāma Ibn Munqidh (1095/584 AH -1188/488 AH) and *al-Ayam* by Taha Hussein.[60] Inevitably, Khashramī covered most of the previously mentioned issues related to the genre of pre-modern autobiographies, but his work was unique in the methodology he used. He was interested in examining the perception of the West as portrayed in two eastern autobiographies and how it differed through time. Other

[55] Rudolf Dekker, "Jacques Presser's Heritage: Egodocuments in the Study of History," *Memoria Y Civilización* 5, (2002):13-37.

[56] Nelly Hanna, "Self Narratives in Arabic Texts 1500-1800," in *The Uses of First Person Writings Africa America, Asia, Europe,* ed. François-Joseph Ruggiu (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2013), 139-154.

[57] Ibid., 142.

[58] Ibid., 145.

[59] Ibid., 146.

[60] Khālid Khashramī, *Al-Sharq wa al-gharb fī al-sīra al-dhātiyya al-ʿarabiyya* (Mecca: Nādī Makkah al-Thaqāfī al-Adabī, 2013).

tangential scholarship included topics such as Sufi self-narratives, medical autobiographies, and literary analysis of Arabic biographical accounts.[61]

Development of the Genre

The development of the literary genre of autobiography within Islamic tradition was best described by Chase Robinson.[62] According to his analysis, Islamic historical narratives were formed in the ninth century and were organized into three methods or types: chronography (*taʿrīk*), biography (*sīra*), and prosopography (*ṭabaqāt*).[63] The first type is written to inform the reader about the events of the past. The second type consists of a single narrative about the life of a distinguished person, while the third type focuses on a specific social group by compiling and organizing data about individuals belonging to this group in a narrative often called *tarjama*.

Initially, the term *sīra* in early Islamic literature meant several definitions that could more or less be translated to "a way of life."[64] Furthermore, it designated a biography when it was associated with the prophet's name.[65] It seems that the term expanded to include other figures gradually as one sees the appearance of titles such as *Sīrat mulūk al-ʿajam* (720/756 - 102/139 AH) and *Sīrat Muʿāwiya wa-banī Umayya.*[66] Later on, the term encompassed the biographies of famous figures and was used frequently even for self-authored biographies. By checking the definition of the term *sīra* in *Muhīt al-muhīt,* one finds no provided explanations for the Arabic term, which could suggest that, according to Buṭrus al-Bustānī, the term did

[61] Ralf Elger and Köse Yavuz, *Many Ways of Speaking about the Self: Middle Eastern Ego-documents in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010); Derin Terzioğlu, "Man in the Image of God in the Image of the Times: Sufi Self-Narratives and the Diary of Niyāzī-i Mıṣrī (1618-94)," *Studia Islamica*, no. 94 (2002); David Reisman, "Medieval Arabic Medical Autobiography," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129, no. 4 (2009): 559-569; Julia Bray, "Literary Approaches to Medieval and Early Modern Arabic Biography," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 20, no. 3 (2010): 237-53.

[62] Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[63] Ibid., *xxiv-xxv*.

[64] W. Raven, "Sīra", In *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* Second Edition, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1089.

[65] ʿAbd al-Dāyim, *Al-Tarjama al-dhātiyya*, 30-31.

[66] Raven, "*Sīra*".

not need or require a definition. On the other hand, the term *tarjama* is translated as *sīra* in the *Muhīt al-muhīt*.[67] It originated from Aramaic, and the earliest evidence of its use dates back to the thirteenth century by Yāqūt al Hamaw (1179/574 AH - 1229/626 AH) in his *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*.[68] Thus, both terms, *sīra and tarjama* are translated in Arabic to mean 'history of a life' and were used interchangeably by medieval scholars.[69] No visible distinguishing between the two terms was detected during the medieval period.

All three types of Islamic historical narratives, chronography, biography, and prosopography belonged to history with the ultimate goal to record past events, teach and inspire by example. Within this historical discourse, autobiographical writings emerged and were placed somewhere between biography and prosopography. Sometimes it was closer to biography as some medieval scholars embed the story of their life in their religious or history-related texts. Other scholars included a self-biographical account in their *ṭabaqāt* work.

First Medieval Arabic Autobiography

Scholars agreed on tracing the first proper Western autobiography to be St. Augustine's confessions. However, there is not a unanimous agreement among scholars on identifying the first pre-modern Arabic autobiography. Rosenthal identified al Muhasibī (781/165 AH - 857/243 AH) as the earliest spiritual autobiographical text and Hunayn Ibn Ishāq's (809/194 AH - 877/264 AH) *sīra* to be the earliest secular autobiography.[70] Dayf and Stewart also considered *al-Risala* by Ibn Ishāq the earliest autobiography; however, Dayf classified it as a philosophical autobiography.[71] On the other hand, Taha Hussein classified

[67] Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Muḥīṭ al-muḥīṭ* (Lebanon: Maktabat libnān, 1987): 69.
[68] Ibid., 31.
[69] Ibid., 30-31; Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 64.
[70] Rosenthal, "Die arabische Autobiographie", 5, 11-15.
[71] Dayf, *Al-Tarjama al-Shakhsiyah*,12; Devin J. Stewart, "The Humor of the Scholars," 47.

al-Taʿrīf bi Ibn Khaldūn as the first proper Arabic autobiography in the Islamic tradition.[72] Other scholars like al-Ghāmidī and Yakar, understandably, avoided identifying a particular autobiography as the earliest and instead dated the ninth century to be the starting point of autobiographical writing tradition.[73] Another approach of scholars who avoided pinpointing the first autobiography was to identify the most significant pre-modern autobiographical text. For example, Hodgson and Bushnell indicated that al-Ghazālī's autobiography, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (1058/450 AH - 1111/505 AH), was an exception in the Islamic tradition while Khashrami considered Usāma Ibn Munqidh's autobiography, *al-iʿtibār* (1095/584 AH - 1188/488 AH), to be of the most important.[74]

Who Authored Autobiographies

By definition, an autobiographical text puts the author at the center of attention, focusing on narrating his story and consequently concentrates on contemporary events. Due to these reasons, the act of writing an autobiography or autobiographical account was frowned upon by early traditionalists.[75] Leaving non-traditional Muslim scholars like spiritual Sufi mysticism, and philosophers to carry on the act, especially during the early period from the ninth to the eleventh century. According to Robinson, one can trace a more assertive and confident approach towards historiography, leading to new forms and themes, especially during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[76] During this period, the genre of autobiography was commonly practiced by traditional scholars as well as historians. In fact, many Mamluk historians other than al-Sakhāwī, such as Abu Shama, Ibn Khaldūn, Ibn Ṭūlūn, all contributed

[72] Ibid., 31.
[73] Ibid., 41.
[74] Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 180; Khalid Khashrami, *al-Sharq wa al-gharb*, 42; Charles Bushnell, "The Middle Ages and their Autobiographies," in *University Library of Autobiography* (New York: F. Tyler Daniels, 1918), 2:ix.
[75] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 96.
[76] Ibid., 97-101.

to the writing of autobiographical texts. A detailed analysis of the developments that led to the rise of autobiography will be discussed in chapter two.

After surviving the research done on pre-modern Arabic autobiography, the following chapter will focus on placing al-Sakhāwī's autobiography in the context of other autobiographies written in the same historical period and examine the characteristics and motivations behind writing it.

Chapter 1

Introducing al-Sakhāwī’s Autobiography

"لو لقي السخاوي زمناً ورجالاً لم يتحرك إلا ووراءه جنائب ، وإلا فهو مع من لا يعرف، وفي وقت ليس به من ينصف"[77]

This chapter is intended to orient the reader to al-Sakhāwī's autobiography by examining how it relates to earlier tradition and other autobiographies written during the late Mamluk period. This will help clear any confusion about al-Sakhāwī's autobiography that could be colored by modern standards as it will focus on viewing the autobiography through the lens of its equivalence in the same tradition. Also, the purpose of this chapter is to study how the art of writing a medieval autobiography can be shaped by the character and ideology of its author. To achieve this, the characteristics of the autobiography will be examined in terms of definition, length, and structure in the context of other similar concurrent texts. Finally, the chapter will attempt to speculate the reasons that motivated al-Sakhāwī to leave a comprehensive self account of his life. Accordingly, the chapter will recognize several purposes of authoring such texts and their usage during the late Mamluk period.

By leaving a *tarjama* about his life, the 70 years old al-Sakhāwī was following the footsteps of his teacher, the famous Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalanī (1372/774 AH - 1449/852 AH), who composed several biographical accounts about his life. These accounts were later extended and published by his student, al-Sakhāwī.[78] Based on the latest survey, four other texts were written during the fifteenth century/early sixteenth century and were published as independently circulating stand-alone volumes. These works are Ibn Khaldūn's *Taʿrīf* (1322/732 AH - 808/1406 AH), al-Suyūṭī’s *al-Taḥaduth bi-niʿmat Allāh* (1445/849 AH - 1505/9811 AH), Ibn Ṭūlūn al-Dimashqī’s *al-Fulk al-mashḥūn* (1475/880 AH - 1546/953

[77] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād*, 331. Al-Sakhawi was quoting a scholar named al-Wahāb al-Yafʿī.

[78] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *al-Jawahir wa-al-Dūrar fi Tarjamat Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Ḥajar* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazim, 1999).

AH), and al-Shaʿrānī's *Latāʾif al-minann* (1493/899 AH - 1565/973 AH). According to Reynolds and al-Ghāmidī, al-Sakhāwī's autobiography is historically linked to the autobiographies of al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Ṭūlūn, and al-Shaʿrānī.[79] This connection is through Ibn Ḥajar, who taught al-Suyūṭī as well as al-Sakhāwī. Ibn Ṭūlūn and al-Shaʿrānī were influenced by al-Suyūṭī's autobiography and decided to follow his lead. Thus, in studying the autobiography of al-Sakhāwī, the other four surviving autobiographies written during the late Mamluk period will be consulted for a better understanding of the text.

Why is al-Sakhāwī's *Irshād* Classified as an Autobiography?

The first issue that comes to mind in examining any pre-modern autobiography is the problem of definition. This issue lies at the heart of the genre and is usually the focus of most research, as seen in the introduction. For the purpose of this thesis, the western standards will not be applied as the research is interested in examining al-Sakhāwī's text versus other similar pre-modern Islamic works and not the modern version of an autobiography.

Moving away from the western definition creates another issue because there is no formal native definition within the Islamic Tradition. In fact, according to Reynolds, the diversity of literary forms demonstrated by Arabic autobiographies hinders "the possibility of a single and simple description of the genre in a formal term like the western tradition".[80] Scholars who used a broad definition include travel accounts and other literary genres like chronicles that contain personal information like Ibn al-Ṭawq's *al-Taʿlīq* (1430/834 AH - 1509/915 AH) and al-Biqāʿī's chronicle (1406/809 AH - 1480/885 AH).[81] On the other end of the spectrum, other scholars apply a stricter definition like the one used by al-Ghāmidī, which

[79] Reynolds, *Interpreting the self*, 56; al-Ghāmidī, "Autobiography in Classical Arabic Literature: An Ignored Literary Genre," 200.

[80] Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*, 5.

[81] Shihāb Al-Dīn Ibn Ṭawq, *Al-Taʿlīq: Yawmīyāt Shihāb Al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Ṭawq, 834-915 H/1430-1509 M: Mudhakkirāt Kutibat bi-Dimashq fī Awākhir al-ʿAhd Al-Mamlūkī, 885-908 H/1480-1502 M*, Ed. Jaʿfar Muhājir (Damascus: I.F.E.A.D, 2000); Ibrahim al-Biqāʿī, *Iẓhār al-ʿasr li asrār ahl al-ʿasr,* ed. Muhammed al-ʿŪfī (Riyyad ,1993).

is an amendment of Heidi Stull's definition.[82] For the purpose of this thesis, this definition will be used to determine which texts belong to the genre of medieval Islamic autobiography.

Accordingly, al-Sakhāwī's *Irshād* is designated as an autobiography, because the text includes a clear statement from al-Sakhāwī stating his objective of writing his *sīra* or *taʿrīf*.[83] Furthermore, the text is published as a stand-alone self-circulating work, as seen in the manuscript version that reached us. Therefore, it is not attached to another more extensive work or embedded inside a biographical dictionary. Finally, the content of the book revolves around aspects of al-Sakhāwī's life that are conveyed mainly in the first-person narrative, even if it tends to alternate between first and third-person narrative.

The other four texts selected to be examined in comparison to al-Sakhāwī were chosen based on these criteria as well. In fact, Ibn Khaldūn, al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Ṭūlūn, and al-Shaʿrānī all have included a similar statement declaring their intention to leave a self account of themselves. Also, all of these autobiographies were independent texts not embedded in another work, as indicated from their manuscripts. The exception to this is Ibn Khaldūn's autobiography which was often attached to his historical work *Kitāb al-ʿIbar*. Still, a complete stand-alone manuscript of the autobiography was discovered recently. This indicates that Khaldūn's autobiography, *al-Taʿrīf,* circulated as an independent volume.

Connection Between al-Sakhāwī's Autobiography and Other Texts

As mentioned in the introduction, al-Sakhāwī's autobiography is often remarked as historically belonging to a cluster of autobiographies through a teacher-student connection. This section will examine any references mentioned in the autobiographies to verify this connection. In other words, were the scholars aware of the existence of these autobiographies before writing their own? And did they acknowledge following other scholars? Examining

[82] For more information about the various definitions refer to the introduction.
[83] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād*, 15-16.

this is possible since all autobiographies, except Ibn Khaldūn's, elaborate on the tradition of writing autobiographies among earlier scholars. Tracing the mentioned scholars will help determine the possible connections and influence of the autobiographies over one another and could also indicate the level of awareness, popularity, and importance of these autobiographies among their contemporaries. Also, it will give insights into how al-Sakhāwī and the others positioned their work to earlier scholars within the Islamic tradition. Finally, modern scholars have distinguished certain medieval autobiographies as the first or of particular importance and influence. Accordingly, this section will examine if these distinguished autobiographies were also recognized by these five autobiographies.

In terms of connection, none of the autobiographies has directly cited the others, except for al-Shaʿrānī, who quoted a statement from al-Suyūṭī's autobiography and mentioned it explicitly.[84] This does not mean that these scholars did not refer to one another; for example, Ibn Ṭūlūn reported al-Suyūṭī's name in his list. However, the reference was not to his autobiography but to his short self-biographical account. The lack of direct reference between the autobiographies questions the assumption that they were historically connected. As for their connection through Ibn Ḥajar, it is true that all autobiographies, except Ibn Khaldūn, mentioned Ibn Ḥajar's name in the list of earlier scholars who contributed to the tradition. Nevertheless, they cited different biographical entries and not the independent work, *al-Jawahir,* which was published by al-Sakhāwī.[85] Moreover, Ibn Ḥajar was not the only scholar to be cited in all four autobiographies. In fact, the autobiographies of the following scholars were also mentioned: al-Fārisī (1059/ 451 AH - 1135/529 AH), Yāqūt al-Hamawī (1179/575 AH - 1229/622 AH), Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb (1313/713 AH - 1374/775 AH), and Taqī al-Dīn al-Fāsī (1373/775 AH - 1429/832 AH).[86] Therefore, Ibn

[84] Al-Shaʿrānī, *Latāʾif al-Minan,* 13.

[85] Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Jawahir wa-al-Dūrar fi Tarjamat Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Ḥajar,* 107-117.

[86] Abd al-Ġāfir al-Fārisī was a scholar and historian. Yāqūt al-Hamawī was an Ayyubid Biographier living in Damascus but he visited Cairo. Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb was an Andalusi historian. Taqī al-Dīn al-Fāsī was a Meccan historian who

Ḥajar was not the only connecting figure in the four autobiographies. The other commonly referenced scholars could have influenced the four autobiographies. Having said that, Ibn Ḥajar lived during al-Sakhāwī's and al-Suyūṭī's time, so his influence on them was more substantial and more immediate. However, the autobiographies did not differentiate from one scholar over another. The main objective of referencing earlier scholars was to validate writing about the self and show it as a common act often practiced by earlier respected *ulama*. Indeed, as Reynold described, the authors of these autobiographies showed a high degree of consciousness to the tradition of leaving a biographical account of the self.[87]

Apart from al-Shaʿrānī's reference to al-Suyūṭī's autobiography, there is no evidence found in the autobiographies that indicates that these scholars were even aware of the existence of other contemporary autobiographies or influenced by them. This argument is plausible for the case of al-Sakhāwī, al-Suyūṭī, and Ibn Ṭūlūn. The three autobiographies were written at different geographical locations, Hijaz, Cairo, Damascus, and might not have reached the book market of the other regions. However, the lack of reference to Ibn Khaldūn's autobiography in the rest of the autobiographies is surprising since it was well circulated and written before all the other works. Also, most of Ibn Khaldūn's autobiography was written about his life in Egypt, and several manuscripts were discovered in Cairo, indicating it was popular during the late Mamluk period. Furthermore, the fact that all four autobiographies referred to the Andalusi historian Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb, who was a contemporary of Ibn Khaldūn could indicate that the scholars intentionally chose to exclude Ibn Khaldūn's work. A possible reason behind excluding Ibn Khaldūn is that *al-Taʿrif* was not considered an autobiography through the lens of contemporary scholars. A more

lived during the Mamluk period.

87 Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*, 64.

compelling reason is that the authors of these autobiographies had a personal issue with Ibn Khaldūn, who faced many enemies during his stay in Cairo.

As for how the authors placed their autobiographies compared to the earlier tradition, the following was discovered. Al-Sakhāwī, al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Ṭūlūn, and al-Shaʿrānī explained in their autobiographies that they were emulating other respected earlier scholars and following the tradition. Ibn Khaldūn was the only scholar among the five who did not explain how his work relates to Islamic tradition. In terms of providing enough examples to earlier scholars who authored a self account, al-Sakhāwī was the most prolific. Most of the examples he provided belonged to earlier Mamluk historians. In fact, the list of figures provided by al-Sakhāwī, al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Ṭūlūn, and al-Shaʿrānī mostly cited Mamluk historians who lived during the fourteenth century along with Mamluk judges and scholars.[88] The prominent appearance of Mamluk historians is not surprising as Robinson indicated that the art of writing an autobiography emerged from the confident approach towards historiography during the Mamluk land.[89]

Also, it appears that scholars during this period distinguished between the various types of autobiographies within the tradition. For example, al-Sakhāwī and the other scholars categorized the autobiographies they cited to stand-alone texts, self biographical entries, and biographies embedded in history works. All were equally recognized as valid *tarjama li nafsihi* or autobiography. Most of the examples provided in the four autobiographies referred to self-biographical entries that were included in biographical dictionaries and history books. This indicates that these forms of *tarājim* were more circulating and commonly produced than the stand-alone autobiography, which required dedicating an entire volume to write about the self.

[88] Check **Tables** 1,2,3,and 4 for more details.
[89] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 97-101.

Finally, the five autobiographies were surveyed to examine references to the famous autobiographies classified as pioneers or most distinguished by modern scholars. These autobiographies, as mentioned in the introduction, belong to the scholars, al-Muhasibī (781/165 AH - 857/243 AH), Hunayn Ibn Isḥāq (809/194 AH - 877/264 AH), Usāma Ibn Munqidh (1095/584 AH -1188/488 AH), and al-Ghazālī (1058/450 AH - 1111/505 AH). There were no references to the autobiographies of these early scholars, neither by al-Sakhāwī nor by any of the other scholars. As indicated, most of the references were to Mamluk historians and judges. Fromherz suggested that Ibn Khaldūn must have been aware of the autobiographies of al-Muhasibī and al-Ghazālī as well as having been influenced by them.[90] This could be the case, but there is no evidence supporting this assumption from the text of the autobiography. Also, one can not trace a resemblance in the structure or format between these autobiographies. It appears that al-Sakhāwī, al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Ṭūlūn, and al-Shaʿrānī, at least in their writing, were more influenced by earlier Mamluk historians and scholars and, thus, they connected their autobiographies to them. Earlier iconic autobiographies like al-Ghazālī and Ibn Ishāq did not hold a direct effect on al-Sakhāwī's autobiographies nor his contemporaries.

Characteristics of al-Sakhāwī's Autobiography

After examining the connection between al-Sakhāwī's autobiography and the similar texts written during the same period, the following section will examine the characteristics of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography versus others works in terms of length, number of manuscripts, structure, and content.

Length

In terms of length, al-Sakhāwī's autobiography is relatively long compared to the

[90] *Fromherz, Ibn Khaldūn: Life and Times,170.*

other four autobiographies both in manuscript and printed format. Al-Shaʿrānī's autobiography is commonly considered the longest known pre-modern autobiography in the Islamic tradition.[91] However, upon a closer examination, al-Sakhāwī's autobiography appears to be longer, or by the safest measures of relative length, based on the following details. First, the manuscript of al-Sakhāwī's *Irshād* (Leiden OR 2366.1) consists of 320 folios divided into 27 lines over the size of (25.5 X 17.5 cm).[92] On the other hand, al-Shaʿrānī manuscript (King Saud Library 1699) consists of 292 folios written on 35 lines within the area of (29x20 cm).[93] Furthermore, the edited version of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography is 1054 pages (approximately 20 lines), while al-Shaʿrānī's printed version consists of 811 pages (approximately 28 lines).[94]

It is worth noting that the length of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography is quite exceptional. Most other autobiographies are less than half of its size, except for al-Shaʿrānī.[95] The length of the autobiography shows the degree of effort and time al-Sakhāwī dedicated to the work. This could be seen as an indication of his desire to leave a comprehensive account of himself and the value and importance he attributed to his autobiography. Another reason behind this long text could be attributed to the fact that al-Sakhāwī particularly excelled at the art of writing biographies which was a passion of his. Therefore, when it came to writing his biography, he was prepared with all notes and documentation he recorded earlier during his life. In fact, writing such a long autobiography means that al-Sakhāwī kept extensive documentation of all aspects of his education and academic life. Finally, the amount of text could reflect the amount of knowledge and value al-Sakhāwī wanted to pass on to younger

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[91] Dwight Reynolds. "Shaykh ʿAbd al-Wahhab al-Shaʿrānīs Sixteenth-century Defense of Autobiography," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 4, no. 1-2 (1997-1998): 124.

[92] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād al-ghāwī bal isʿād al-Ṭālib wa-l-Rāwī li-l-iʿLām bi-Tarjamat al-Sakhāwī* (Leiden, Manuscript OR 2366.1: Leiden University). This number excludes the title and empty folios and also the Leiden manuscript is missing several folios.

[93] Al-Shaʿrānī, *Latāʾif al-Minan wa al-Akhlāq fī Wujūb al-Taḥadduth bi-Niʿmat Allāh ʿalā al-Itḥāq* (Riyadh, Manuscript 1699: King Saud Library) https://makhtota.ksu.edu.sa/search/makhtota/1932/1. Note: number of pages in the description is not accurate.

[94] I excluded the editors' introductions. Due to the existence of footnotes and difference in font size in the printed versions it is impossible to accurately compare the length based on the number of pages.

[95] For detailed information about the comparison of each autobiography length, check **Table** 5.

generation.

Number of Manuscripts

Al-Sakhāwī's autobiography has two surviving manuscripts transmitted by the same copyist and written during the life of al-Sakhāwī. This number is low in comparison with Ibn Khaldūn's 14 manuscripts. The reason behind the large number of manuscripts belonging to Ibn Khaldūn is that he attached the text of the autobiography to his famous *Kitāb al-ʿIbar,* which was gifted to many Kings and Sultans.[96] However, the fact that al-Sakhāwī's autobiography was not copied after his death (unless new manuscripts are discovered) could be seen as an indication of the lack of interest of contemporary and later scholars in al-Sakhāwī's autobiography. This is evident in comparison to al-Suyūṭī, who had one incomplete manuscript but was quoted by two later manuscripts belonging to different scholars.[97] Also, Ibn Ṭūlūn and al-Shaʿrānī each had one surviving manuscript but were reprinted in the late Ottoman period.[98] The location of the manuscripts could be a reason behind the low frequency of copies. Al-Sakhāwī wrote *Irshād* in Hijaz, while the rest of the autobiographies were written/copied mainly in Cairo and the Levant, where the book markets and circulation were more significant in scale than other cities like Hijaz.[99]

Structure of al-Sakhāwī's Autobiography

Before examining the structure of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography, it is important to understand that typical medieval Arabic autobiographies are usually arranged in a thematic and not a chronological order.[100] In other words, instead of portraying the life of the author in a single narrative like a modern autobiography, medieval autobiographies were organized in

[96] Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Taʿrīf,* (د-ح).
[97] Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background,* 142.
[98] Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Fulk al-mashḥūn*, 14; Al-Shaʿrānī, *Latāʾif al-Minann,* 6.
[99] Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Book in Mamluk Egypt and Syria (1250-1517): Scribes, Libraries and Market* (Leiden: BRILL, 2019), 22.
[100] Kilpatrick, "Autobiography and Classical Arabic Literature," 3.

sections or blocks that are centered around educational experiences or topics.[101] In fact, according to Reynolds, "the concept of ordering a life into a single narrative in the literal sense" was foreign to medieval scholars.[102] The reason behind this, in the view of al- Qāḍī, is to offer an internal classification tool for retaining and finding information more quickly by readers.[103] Reynolds also supported this argument explaining that the act of writing an autobiography in the Islamic tradition derived from the science of *ḥadīth*, which is based on the "intellectual methodology in which classification, categorization, and description were the ultimate tools for the acquisition and retention of knowledge."[104] This goes in contrast to the western autobiography, which was developed in parallel to the fictional literature of novels.[105]

As highlighted earlier, al-Sakhāwī and the other scholars acknowledged that earlier scholars have contributed to this genre; however, this did not mean that the genre had a formal and strict structure like biographies which consisted of a standard format. In fact, other than arranging content based on themes, the genre was somewhat fluid and informal in structure.[106] One possible explanation for this is that medieval scholars expected their autobiographies to be read along with their remaining works, leaving the totality of their life to be obtained through reading the collection of works they produced.[107] Taking this into consideration, the following section will examine the structure of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography and how it stood in comparison with the other four autobiographies.

Upon examining al-Sakhāwī's autobiography, one notices that the chapters were arranged in a thematic order as expected. However, a closer look shows that al-Sakhāwī

[101] Wadād al- Qāḍī, "In the Footsteps of Arabic Biographical Literature: A Journey, Unfinished, in the Company of Knowledge," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 68, no. 4 (2009): 245.
[102] Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self,* 5.
[103] Al- Qāḍī, "In the Footsteps of Arabic Biographical Literature," 244-246.
[104] Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self, 5.*
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid., 90.
[107] Ibid., 248.

rarely used one methodology to arrange the chapters. In fact, al-Sakhāwī sometimes mixed between different structures within the same theme. In several cases, the chapters shifted rather abruptly, from a dry enumeration of items or books to chronological narratives about the author's life. For example, chapter two, which deals with al-Sakhāwī's educational curriculum and training in an enumeration fashion, also included personal chronological narratives about al-Sakhāwī's childhood and family upbringing.[108]

It appears that such an organization was not unusual from other medieval autobiographies. In fact, al-Suyūṭī organized his autobiography in a very similar structure to al-Sakhāwī. Both autobiographies consisted of different themes and were not often ordered chronologically.[109] Nevertheless, if one discards the interruptions added in the middle of the text, some chapters show a significant amount of chronological narratives.[110] An example of this, in al-Suyūṭī's case, is the section about his upbringing and early education. It was arranged chronologically and often contained dated incidents, unlike the rest of the themes. As for the autobiography of Ibn Ṭūlūn, it was also organized thematically. However, the themes lacked the detailed chronological narratives found in al-Sakhāwī and al-Suyūṭī. Also, Ibn Ṭūlūn's autobiography only covered the basic information about his academic life.[111] In this respect, Ibn Ṭūlūn's autobiography fits the classification of a mere curriculum vitae covering only the educational and impersonal aspects of a scholar's life. On the other hand, al-Sakhāwī and al-Suyūṭī used more complex structure applying different methodologies and mixing between a dry enumeration of lists with sequential narratives that were personal in nature.

[108] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād*, 108.
[109] Sartain, *al-Suyūṭī :Biography and Background*, 140.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Conermann, "Ibn Ṭūlūn," 115- 139.

Reynolds could not have been more correct in expecting medieval autobiographies to be quite different in structure and organization upon comparison.[112] The case of Ibn Khaldūn's and al-Shaʿrānī's autobiography manifested this diversity. Unlike the thematic organization of al-Sakhāwī, Ibn Khaldūn portrayed his life through chronological narratives of his excursion and travels. Since Ibn Khaldūn often moved from one destination to another to seek a safe home, it made perfect sense to recall his life through his journeys which shaped his future and career. On the other hand, al-Shaʿrānī used a unique Sufi approach by organizing his autobiography not by chronology nor themes but by enumerating the various virtues and blessings God had bestowed on him. The enumeration, however, is written not as a detached list, but al-Shaʿrānī recorded the virtues and blessings in the form of personal narratives in a unique pedagogical and interesting way.[113] Although there are no clear cut associations between the virtues introduced by al-Shaʿrānī, the "text portrays itself as a full summation of the author's life and character."[114] Moreover, al-Shaʿrānī wrote the autobiography in a dialogue format, often addressing the reader directly as if he was delivering one of his sermons. While on the other hand, al-Sakhāwī and al-Suyūṭī mixed between using third-person and first-person narrative in their writing depending on the type of information they were mentioning. Ibn Khaldūn, on the other hand, often used the first-person narrative, which makes his text easier to follow.

In short, the overall structure of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography is thematic with an infusion of chronological personal narratives. In comparison to the other autobiographies, al-Suyūṭī's was the closest in structure to al-Sakhāwī's. The two scholars were contemporaries, and therefore, the two autobiographies could be seen as a reflection of their society and the image they wanted to project as scholars. Finally, it appears that al-Sakhāwī and al-Suyūṭī

[112] Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self,* 59.
[113] Reynolds, "Al-Shaʿrānī's Defense of Autobiography," 124.
[114] Ibid.

used the traditional structure to their advantage as it matched the development of their life and ideology. Ibn Ṭūlūn used a similar thematic structure, but due to the concise length of the autobiography, it lacked the detailed narratives al-Sakhāwī and al-Suyūṭī included. On the other hand, the autobiography of Ibn Khaldūn and al-Shaʿrānī reflected the unique personalities and interests of their authors. Thus, the free and flexible structure served each author to achieve his purposes and use the organization that suited his objective.

Let us clarify that the structure used by al-Sakhāwī is somewhat challenging for modern readers to follow for two main reasons. First, in many cases, there are no connections or proper transitions between the different narratives and styles, which confuses the reader. For example, when al-Sakhāwī uses the third person narrative, it is not often easy to detect if he is referring to himself or not. This is challenging, especially when he inserts personal narratives along with the other more formal data related to knowledge transfer. It seems that this lack of apparent coherence was a tendency in medieval Arabic writing in general; according to von Grunebaum, there was a general tendency to add unconnected reports or information without explaining the cause or effect of each narrative.[115]

The structure and organization of al-Suyūṭī are easier to follow than al-Sakhāwī, but it is not clear how much of this should be attributed to al-Suyūṭī since the printed version that reached us is copied from other manuscripts which were edited by other scholars.[116]

Secondly, although al-Sakhāwī's autobiography has a relatively detailed preamble or *fihrist* as well as a dedicated title for each *bāb*, the content of the chapters often included personal information that is important but not directly related to the subject of the chapter. This makes reading, searching, locating, and extracting information from the autobiography very challenging for researchers. Sometimes reading the entire text, including the seemingly

[115] Von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam*, 90, 284.
[116] Sartain, *al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background*, 143.

irrelevant chapters, is necessary to ensure that no information is missed. Therefore, despite arranging the autobiography into themes, al-Sakhāwī was not always successful in making the text easy to search and retain as al- Qāḍī and Reynolds envisioned medieval autobiographies would be.

Purpose and Motivations of al-Sakhāwī's Autobiography

Understanding the possible reasons and motivations that encouraged medieval scholars to write their autobiographies can be beneficial for different reasons. It can help us interpret the text with a more conscious perspective. Also, it could be used as a classification method for categorizing medical autobiographies, as seen in the research conducted by ʿAbd al-Dāyim and Abbas.[117] Most importantly, it can provide pointers in examining why the genre flourished during specific periods, which will be analyzed more in detail in chapter two.

Many medieval scholars mentioned the reasons that encouraged them to write about themselves at the beginning of their autobiographies. Moreover, based on the content of an autobiography, the motivations behind writing it could be speculated. However, it is often difficult to single out a definitive reason behind writing an autobiography because authors typically had complex and multifaceted reasons.[118] Thus, studying the motivations of any medieval autobiography requires a closer look into the author's life and a deeper analysis of the text. Generally speaking, among the catalysts that motivated medieval scholars to write their autobiographies are the following reasons: the desire to address criticism and refute allegations that the author was subjected to during his life, like the case of al-Suyūṭī, to guide future generations towards a successful academic/spiritual/philosophical journey, like the case of al-Ghazālī, to document religious conversions like the case of the famous

[117] ʿAbd al-Dāyim, *Al-Tarjama al-dhātiyya fī al-adab al-ʿarabī al-ḥadīth*; ʿAbbās, *Fann al-sīra.*
[118] Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self,* 8.

mathematician and physician al-Samawʾal Ibn Yaḥyā al-Maghribī (1130/524 AH - 1180/576 AH) who was born a Jew, or to leave work about themselves for one's children like Ibn al-Jawzī (1116/510 AH -1201/597 AH).[119]

This section will focus on the purpose and motivations that drove al-Sakhāwī to leave an autobiography. It will attempt to analyze if al-Sakhāwī shared the same motivations as the other scholars. Also, the section will explore how the motivations affected and shaped the content of the autobiographies. To address these questions, two steps will be deployed. First, the stated motivations in al-Sakhāwī's autobiography will be analyzed. Secondly, a closer look into the content of the autobiography will be conducted in an attempt to discern undeclared motivations that stand out from the attention and weight al-Sakhāwī gave to specific themes and topics.

Declared Motivations

Al-Sakhāwī explained in the preamble the story behind writing his own *tarjama*. The three-page narrative explaining why he was leaving a self-presentation is described as follows. First, a short version of the autobiography was initially written by "a very reluctant" al-Sakhāwī upon the insistence of a friend.[120] A-Sakhawi reported that this friend, who is interested in history, believed it was necessary to " write something about my ignored *tarjama* and discarded news, which is in truth neglected … I apologized, but he [his friend] did not accept my apology and insisted, so I hurried to write my *sīra* in brief."[121] Al-Sakhāwī

[119] Ibid., 8-9; R. Firestone, "Samawʾal b. Yaḥyā al-Maghribī, Abū Naṣr," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_8881.

[120] Friend name is Ibn ʿAzam al-Maghribī.

[121] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,*15-17.

" .... التمس مني بعض نبلاء الأصحاب، ممن له بالفن التاريخي اعتناء تام ،..... كتابة شيء من ترجمتي المغفلة ، وأخباري المعطلة، بل هي على الحقيقة مهملة، .... وتوقفت عنه مع طلبه ملحا واضربت عن إجابته صحفاً ، مع اعتذاري إليه، ...حين لم يقبل مني الاعتذار، ... وسارعت لكتابة هذه الكراريس ... ثم بدا لي بعد سنين، تزيد بكثير على الثلاثين، أن أبسط فيها العبارة، وأضبط ما اتفق وقوعه من السادات، مما يتضمن هذه الإشارة، حين التفات الناس مني لهذا المعنى، وفوات سن الصغر الذي قد تحتقر فيه المحاسن والحسنى، وإن كانت تلك قد تناولها أهل الآفاق"

reflected that more than thirty years later, he decided to expand this short draft into a large volume known as *Irshād*. [122]

Although this narrative is rhetoric in nature, several insights could be discerned from it. Al-Sakhāwī did not see that he was given the deserved recognition from contemporary scholars with regards to his *sīra*, not during his prime age or his advanced years. In reality, several scholars have left a biographical account about al-Sakhāwī during his life such as al-Suyūṭī and Ibn Iyās, but these accounts did not describe him in the positive image he was expecting.[123] This must have been a genuine concern for al-Sakhāwī, since he, more than his proclaimed friend, had a particular passion towards reserving the biographies of contemporary scholars as seen in his gigantic biographical dictionary *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ* and his biography of Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Jawahir*.[124] Therefore, based on the introduction of *Irshād*, lacking a "positive" representation of al-Sakhāwī's *sīra* produced by his contemporaries seemed to be the primary motivation behind his decision to willingly rework his short version of himself and expand it to a more detailed independent volume. Therefore, al-Sakhāwī, by writing the autobiography, was serving his own best interest by producing a text showing his superior knowledge and significance.

A note worth highlighting here is that the process of writing the autobiography, as described in the *fihrist*, was produced and reworked over a long period, almost all of al-Sakhāwī's adult life. It also entailed several notebooks, *kararīs*, a short version, and an extended version, making it a living document subject to the changes that affected al-Sakhāwī while writing it. In other words, it is possible that the purpose and motivations behind writing the autobiography changed or evolved over time. In fact, according to Reynolds, it is normal

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[122] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,*17.
" ثم بدا لي بعد سنين، تزيد بكثير على الثلاثين، أن أبسط فيها العبارة، وأضبط ما اتفق وقوعه من السادات، مما يتضمن هذه الإشارة، حين التفات الناس مني لهذا المعنى، وفوات سن الصغر الذي قد تحتقر فيه المحاسن والحسنى، وإن كانت تلك قد تناولها أهل الآفاق"

[123] Al-Suyūṭī, *Naẓm al-ʿIqyān fī aʿyān al-aʿyān ;* Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿal-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr.*

[124] Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Jawahir wa-al-Dūrar*, 107-117.

for medieval autobiographies to "expand and evolve beyond the original conventions and purposes of their type."[125]

The following section will examine the content of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography to address this possibility. Also, the autobiography will be surveyed to search for additional unstated purposes and motivations that could be speculated from the content.

Before examining the content of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography, it is essential to highlight that medieval Arabic autobiography typically covers the following aspects of a scholar's life: genealogy, an enumeration of teachers, books studied, certificates or *ijaza*, academic and teaching positions, list of students, produced texts, travel accounts, miracles, selection of poetry, and dreams accounts.[126] Thus, most of these topics revolved around the public academic life of medieval authors apart from the dream accounts which recalled supernatural experiences like *karamāt* or *manamāt*. These accounts were added to reflect a positive image of the author. In fact, the credibility of medieval Arabic autobiography was frequently questioned because this supernatural theme was often embedded as part of the author's academic life. However, according to the norms and tradition of medieval Islamic society, it was only natural to include this type of experience and interpret them as messages from God to serve as symbolic narratives.[127] Last by not least, the praise received by a scholar and his rise to fame was also a common theme in medieval autobiographies.[128]

Al-Sakhāwī's autobiography is divided into ten chapters covering most of the typical themes found in medieval Arabic autobiographies, which are mentioned above.[129] The autobiography starts by introducing al-Sakhāwī's genealogy and family conditions, which is followed by a detailed account of his educational training. The training section includes

[125] Reynolds, *Interpreting the self*, 59.

[126] Sartain, *al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background,* 139; Al-Ghāmidī, "Autobiography in Classical Arabic Literature: An Ignored Literary Genre," 240.

[127] Al-Ghāmidī, "Autobiography in Classical Arabic Literature: An Ignored Literary Genre," 91-94.

[128] Kilpatrick, "Autobiography and Classical Arabic Literature," 6.

[129] For a detailed breakdown of the content, check **Figure 1**.

books studied, a list of teachers, and certificates. This is followed by the longest chapter in the autobiography, which consists of around 33 percent of the text. This long chapter four is dedicated to glorifying al-Sakhāwī based on the praise he received from four different sources: deceased teachers, mentors who are still alive, praise received in the form of verse, and finally, a recollection of dreams that emphasize the excellence of al-Sakhāwī. Chapter five briefly discusses the positions that al-Sakhāwī occupied, followed by a chapter that enumerates the various texts and books he authored. Chapter seven which is described by Du Grandlaunay, as the archives, includes documents and letters received and produced by al-Sakhāwī in a method similar to the book of Ṣubḥ by al-Qalqashandī.[130] Al-Sakhāwī categorizes these documents into the following eight classifications: *Taqārīẓ* or critique of works, hearing and reading certificates, *istidʿāʾ* or requests by other scholars, *ʿarḍ* certificates, preaching sermons, letter correspondence, exchanged condolences and congratulations, and a sample of *fatāwī* or treaties given by al-Sakhāwī. Chapter eight enumerates the list of students taught by al-Sakhāwī. The following chapter is unusual and hard to categorize based on Du Grandlaunay's judgment because it entails a summary of the previous chapters recalling some key points selected by al-Sakhāwī. Finally, chapter ten is blank but it was intended to cover the death of al-Sakhāwī. Aside from the ten chapters, the autobiography contains a *firhist*, an introduction, and a conclusion. The conclusion is also marked unique because it includes al-Sakhāwī's reflection on old age and how he expected men over the years of seventy, like himself, to be granted God's forgiveness and go to heaven due to their old age.[131]

To conclude, based on the description of the chapters mentioned above, al-Sakhāwī's autobiography, in terms of topics, resembles a standard medieval Arabic autobiography. To

[130] Du Grandlaunay, "Édition et analyse de la première partie de l'autobiographie d'al-Sakhāwī," 31.
[131] Ibid., 17.

determine the motivations and purposes that stand out from the content of the autobiography, it is crucial to take a closer look at the details mentioned in the chapters, the weights dedicated to each theme, as well as the type of narratives provided by al-Sakhāwī.

Upon examining the weights and narratives, I came across several observations about the content of the autobiography that could help one understand more about the purpose and motivations behind writing it. Al-Sakhāwī's autobiography revolved around many aspects of his life and conveyed several messages. In my assessment, the most prominent narratives that al-Sakhāwī talked about in the autobiography were related to the following topics: family details, self-worth and entitlement, and frustration towards academic life. The following section will examine the nature of narratives in each of these topics to speculate what was the motivation behind writing them and what was the message al-Sakhāwī wanted to convey.

Family

أعرف كلا من أبيك و جدك، وعميك وجدك لأمك وخالك، وكلهم أناس أخيار، و[لكن"[132]

"ليس فيهم مثلك]

Al-Sakhāwī introduced his family tree in the autobiography by providing a biographical account of each member, including the women and children. He mentioned information about their education, personality traits, and marital status. This, according to Du Grandlaunay, is unique and unprecedented in any other autobiography written during this period.[133] Furthermore, the rest of the chapters hold scattered information about the family members whenever al-Sakhāwī saw fit. For example, he often cited incidents of his interference in the family affairs and referenced letters sent to him by his brother and nephew. Given the uniqueness of including such information, it is unclear why al-Sakhāwī's extended

[132] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād*, 258.

[133] Du Grandlaunay, "Édition et analyse de la première partie de l'autobiographie d'al-Sakhāwī," 128.

family is present in his autobiography. However, several reasons and purposes could be speculated.

First, most of the family narratives provided in the autobiography portrayed al-Sakhāwī as the ultimate source of power and knowledge within the family. For example, he refers to scholars ranking him superior to his father, uncles, and grandparents in terms of intellectual knowledge.[134] Another example is when he cited a letter from a friend praising how he took care of his deceased mother during her old age.[135] Not only that but many of the early family narratives showed how his parents and aunt invested in his education and rearing. These incidents give the reader a positive image of al-Sakhāwī and emphasize the tremendous devotion and efforts he exerted for his family. It appears that this positive image of heading his family is part of the legacy that he wanted readers to take away from his autobiography.

Alternatively, the insertion of details about the education level of all family members is explained by du Grandlaunay as an attempt from al-Sakhāwī to prove that he came from an *ulama* family, not merely a commercial one.[136] Given the importance of good academic lineage within the *ulama* society and in inheriting positions, this could be possible, especially since the reported education level of his paternal grandfather and father seemed exaggerated in the autobiography. Furthermore, the biography of the family showed that al-Sakhāwī's ancestors enjoyed a close ongoing association with the influential Sufi family of Bulqīnī whose members occupied influential religious positions in the Sultanate.[137] Therefore, such detailed family accounts and their connection to the Bulqīnī's family could have been added to give more prestige to al-Sakhāwī. In fact, Du Grandlaunay classified al-Sakhāwī's

[134] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 258.
[135] Ibid., 350.
[136] Du Grandlaunay, "Édition et analyse de la première partie de l'autobiographie d'al-Sakhāwī," 233.
[137] See Robert Moore, "al-Bulqīnī family," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*.

genealogy to be on the margin of *ulama*, so any attempt to elevate his ranking would be welcomed.[138]

There is a strong possibility that including family details in the autobiography was out of a genuine interest al-Sakhāwī held for writing biographies and reporting on the affairs of others. Who would be a more convenient target than his own family? This interest and passion played a role because al-Sakhāwī not only provided an account for his family members in his autobiography but in his earlier work, *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*. This passion for sharing family history could be seen as an aftermath of development in the literary atmosphere during the Mamluk period. More about this will be highlighted in the next chapter, which will discuss the reasons for the rise of the literary genre of autobiography during al-Sakhāwī's period.

In brief, regardless of al-Sakhāwī's initial reluctance to write his own autobiography, it was a natural direction and passion that he could not have avoided, as seen in his eagerness to include his family along with himself in the autobiography. Through the polished educational family narratives, al-Sakhāwī attempted to project the image of a scholar coming from a prestigious and well-educated family. Also, his influence and efforts to lead the family were conveyed through the text. Thus, it was quite possible that one of the purposes for writing the autobiography, at least in hindsight, was for al-Sakhāwī to argue for his excellent genealogy and showcase the care given to him by his parents as well as his devotion to the welfare of his family.

Thanks to al-Sakhāwī's passion for writing biographies, members of al-Sakhāwī's family are presented in many narratives. Chapters three and four will attempt to extract the family details from the autobiography and portray aspects of their domestic life. In my

[138] Ibid.,129.

opinion, this is one of the most significant contributions that could be extracted from al-Sakhāwī's autobiography.

Self-worth and Entitlement

"السخاوي في مصر كذلك درة على مزبلة"[139]

The introduction of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography starts with questioning whether it is permissible to praise oneself based on Islamic law. To answer this question, al-Sakhāwī dedicated 12 printed pages covering the legality of such an act followed by an enumeration of religious figures who praised themselves, including with the prophet.[140] Thus, it is evident from the introduction that al-Sakhāwī was preparing the reader to accept a high degree of self-praise and pride.

The purpose of this section, therefore, is not to determine if the autobiography contained self-praise. The objective is to examine if the praise was always incorporated to serve the purpose of al-Sakhāwī's proclaimed desire to spread his *ʿilm* or if glimpses of the author's own desire to glorify himself existed as well. The existence of these glimpses could help us determine if an ulterior purpose of writing the autobiography was to serve al-Sakhāwī's need to self-recognize his own merits and frame them for current or later generations to acknowledge. Let us recognize that al-Sakhāwī did not launch into a direct enumeration of his good merits and virtues in *Irshād* as al-Shaʿrānī did in his autobiography. Nor did al-Sakhāwī proclaim to reach the ultimate degree of *ijtihad* or express his aspiration to be among the great *mujadidūn* who are sent on the verge of each century like al-Suyūṭī did in his autobiography.[141]

Not having a prominent self-praise attitude makes the task of detecting self-glorification glimpses challenging in al-Sakhāwī's autobiography; especially since much of

[139] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād*, 369.
[140] Ibid., 35-47.
[141] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥaduth bi-niʿmat Allāh*, 203.

the praise in the autobiography, encapsulated in the enormous chapter four, was based on the positive testimonials of others and, thus, were not exactly in the form of direct self-praise. In fact, Ibn Ṭūlūn's autobiography contained a similar chapter that briefly highlighted the praise he received from other scholars, but it was divorced from a prominent self-praise tone or sense of ego.

Nevertheless, I came across several incidents that might reflect how al-Sakhāwī portrayed himself in the autobiography and to what extent he wished to be glorified. It is essential to clarify that self-worth and the sense of pride presented in medieval autobiographies are shown through different and multiple methods. It could stem from belonging to a distinguished family, enjoying a solid relationship with power or/and having a strong political influence like the case of Ibn Khaldūn. Al-Suyūṭī took pride in his intellectual abilities and genealogy as he came from a prestigious *ulama* family. Other scholars like al-Shaʿrānī glorified their close and special relationship with God and manifested it through their *karamāt*.

Al-Sakhāwī, on the other hand, did not possess any outstanding attributes in terms of family genealogy, political influence, a strong relationship with power, nor was he a devoted Sufi. This means that any glorification from his end would probably be directed to his knowledge or his unique relationship with the famous scholar Ibn Ḥajar. This section will examine how al-Sakhāwī could use his knowledge and relationship with Ibn Ḥajar to express his self-worth in the autobiography.

As stated, al-Sakhāwī did not include many direct narratives of self-praise or self-worth. However, his behavior and expectations in several situations in the autobiography could lead us to how he ranked himself as a scholar. The first incident worth highlighting is when al-Sakhāwī and other nine "brilliant" students of *ḥadīth* selected by Ibn Ḥajar visited the Sultan in one of the traditional celebrations. Al-Sakhāwī documented the visit with

disappointment as he recalled how Sultan Jaqmaq failed to appreciate his value financially.[142] He, therefore, regarded himself even as a young scholar worthy of being well compensated for his excellence, which demanded the acknowledgment and reward of the Sultan. Another reflection included in the preface of the autobiography shows how al-Sakhāwī viewed himself to be much revered and respected by others. In introducing chapter eight, which lists the disciples who learned from him, al-Sakhāwī added some self-glorifying text. For example, he mentioned that when he left for Hijaz "everybody [in Cairo] felt remorse for not meeting [me] .. they regretted not attending more of my classes or they wished to go back in time and be able to attend my classes even in my old age."[143] In another narrative, he reports that upon his return to Mecca, he received many letters urging him to return to Cairo.[144] These rhetorical remarks, if true, were probably mentioned to al-Sakhāwī by students who were seeking to obtain his *ijaza* or borrow some materials. Therefore, including words of praise before the actual request was a mundane and commonly practiced custom during this period. However, al-Sakhāwī seemed to take such remarks verbatim and use them in the autobiography to project the image of a much sought-after scholar.

Apart from similar incidents that showcase al-Sakhāwī's expectation and desire to be viewed as a great scholar, the addition of chapter four alone speaks volumes about his motivation for writing his autobiography. The act of compiling "an almost exhaustive collection of any praise al-Sahāwī received throughout his life" is a thorough and conscious act that requires a determined mind dedicated to affirming his greatness and self-worth through "unbiased" evaluation of other scholars.[145] Examples of the positive evaluation mentioned in the autobiography stressed the early eminence of al-Sakhāwī and pinpointed his

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[142] Du Grandlaunay, "Édition et analyse de la première partie de l'autobiographie d'al-Sakhāwī," 332.

[143] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 32-33.

" الكل يتحسرون على عدم اللقاء ، ومساعدة الوقت لهم فيه غير آيسين من الترجي لوقوعه بدون تمويه أو يتندمون على عدم الاستكثار من المجالسة للاستفادة و الاستبصار، أو يترجون العود و لوفي آخر سني عمرهم ليتم قصدهم في يقظتهم وسهرهم"

[144] Ibid., 231.

[145] Du Grandlaunay, "Édition et analyse de la première partie de l'autobiographie d'al-Sakhāwī," 29-30.

superiority over his father and uncle.[146] Al-Sakhāwī, also did not miss to include the acknowledgment he received from the prophet himself in one *manām,* and the *Abbasid Khalifa* when he wrote a book about the caliph's great grandfather al-ʿAbbas.[147]

It is essential to highlight that this extensive account of praise is not visible in other autobiographies, especially in terms of details. Also, Ibn Khaldūn, al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Ṭūlūn, and al-Shaʿrānī showed a degree of ambivalence towards the opinion of others towards them. It is, thus, insightful that al-Sakhāwī chose the primary method to show his self-value through the positive views of other scholars concerning him and not through his own words.

As for speaking about his relationship with Ibn Ḥajar, al-Sakhāwī could not have been more generous in the narratives that affirmed their connection. In fact, he seemed to be drawing his importance and value as a scholar from being the shadow of Ibn Ḥajar. For example, al-Sakhāwī stated that he does not know anyone who took from Ibn Ḥajar most of his work, *taṣānīf* like himself.[148]Also, he cited many scholars who acknowledge his closeness to Ibn Ḥajar; one scholar told him that "when I see you, it is as if I am looking at Ibn Ḥajar."[149] The way al-Sakhāwī cherished his link to Ibn Ḥajar and overemphasized using it as a classification of his knowledge is somewhat perplexing. It suggests that he was desperately attempting to persuade others of his value and influence them to classify him with the same caliber as Ibn Ḥajar. Indeed, this appears limiting in comparison with the other scholars, especially al-Suyūṭī and al-Shaʿrānī, who claimed to be the pioneers of their times holding the highest degree of knowledge.

In short, I believe that al-Sakhāwī is a bit hesitant about his self-value in the autobiography. His attention to document the praise he received since his early education

[146] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 254,79.
[147] Ibid.,344, 356.
[148] Ibid., 208-209.
[149] Ibid. "إذا رأيتك كأني رأيت الشيخ ابن حجر"

showed his expectation of being a famous and significant *ʿālim*. When writing the autobiography at the age of 70, however, he seemed aware that this expectation did not materialize, at least in the view of many scholars. Therefore, instead of writing about his own belief of being exceptional like the case of al-Suyūṭī and al-Shaʿrānī, al-Sakhāwī relied more on the testimonials and opinions of other scholars to show his self-worth. Also, he attempted to argue for his case by presenting himself as an extension to the famous Ibn Ḥajar. It appears that al-Sakhāwī felt that he did not get the fame and recognition he deserved from other scholars. Thus, one of the primary purposes of writing an autobiography was to prove himself as a worthy scholar.

Based on the analysis of this section, the drive of self-glorification and self-worth appears to have been closely connected with the act of writing a medieval autobiography, as detected in the autobiography of al-Sakhāwī and his contemporaries. More about the social context that led to this and how it has possibly contributed to the rise of the genre will be discussed in the next chapter.

The following section will cover another prominent topic that al-Sakhāwī wrote much about in his autobiography other than the family details and self-worth narratives. The autobiography was particularly rich in expressing frustration towards academic life. The following section will attempt to understand the reasons for this frustration and how these academic struggles could have motivated al-Sakhāwī to write his autobiography.

Frustration towards Academic Life

In my assessment, the most visible observation about the text of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography is the frequency of narratives in which he conveyed his disappointment and frustration towards the current academic environment. Based on examining the other selected autobiographies, it was not unusual for scholars to lament their time and recall the difficult circumstances and struggles they faced. However, al-Sakhāwī was most ardently consistent in

expressing his disappointment and frustration, which went beyond adding nostalgic comments about the glory of the past. This frustrated tone started in the introduction and continued throughout the autobiography. Furthermore, the frustration is not shown via rhetoric comments, but the reasons are clarified and explained in detailed narratives. For example, to verify his viewpoint, al-Sakhāwī cited other scholars who concur with his opinion. This frustrated attitude is particularly evident in comparison to al-Shaʿrānī's autobiography, which is more celebratory in tone. For example, al-Shaʿrānī focused on his achievements while acknowledging the difficult time and struggles he witnessed.

Al-Sakhāwī's academic frustration, as shown in the autobiography, could be categorized into three main concerns: the disappearance of traditional channels of seeking knowledge, dissatisfaction towards the appointment criteria of academic positions, and disputes with other scholars. One by one, each concern will be examined to determine how much of al-Sakhāwī's frustration towards each point pushed him to write an autobiography to address these concerns.

The Disappearance of Traditional Methods of Education

"إن ما أقوله لكم لا تجدونه عند غيري، ... سيما إن كان في بلد لا يعرف فيه العلم مطلقا"[150]

One of the prominent messages in the autobiography is the concern towards the future of Islamic knowledge, in particular to the traditional method of *samāʿ* and the value of *isnād*. The main threat presented by al-Sakhāwī was the decline in the significance of *isnād*, which was considered a central pillar of Islamic knowledge responsible for regulating and verifying the transmission process.[151] Al-Sakhāwī showcased this concern in the autobiography via two methods.

[150] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād*, 35.

[151] Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 22-23.

First, he started by overemphasizing the traditional and proper way he was taught. This traditional method relied on *isnād*, which required passing the knowledge through a proper teacher-student transmission instead of an independent reading. For example, the autobiography contains a detailed chain of scholars' names to validate al-Sakhāwī's *isnād* line to the prophet.[152] The provided chain shows that al-Sakhāwī sought *ijaza* for the most fundamental principles of science, *mutūn*, and thus reached the highest *isnād* possible with the same level of credibility as his teacher Ibn Ḥajar.[153] In fact, more than 30% of the content of the autobiography is dedicated to describing al-Sakhāwī's traditional training and his later contribution to the traditional methods of teaching.[154] For example, he included a section about the *ḥadīth al-musalsal bi al-awliyya* that he received, followed by an enumeration of his *marwiyyāt* that he is now allowed to transfer to others.

The education part of every medieval Arabic autobiography is a mandatory chapter that often contains elaborate details. However, what is significant about al-Sakhāwī's section is that he structured this information in the same traditional form of tracing the biographies of *ṣaḥāba* who transferred the *ḥadīth* science. Other autobiographers used different methods to present their knowledge and teachers. For example, Ibn Khaldūn dedicated a section about his education in which he included the biography of his teachers. Nevertheless, instead of highlighting his *isnād* line like al-Sakhāwī, Ibn Khaldūn was more interested in describing the relationships that his teachers enjoyed with the rulers.[155]

Furthermore, to sign off the credibility of al-Sakhāwī's traditional educational training, the role of Ibn Ḥajar in his education and their special relationship is highlighted in

[152] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād*, 125.

[153] Du Grandlaunay, "Édition et analyse de la première partie de l'autobiographie d'al-Sakhāwī," 231. He traveled to Aleppo to gain permission to the same matun and thus increase the ranking of his *isnād* to reach the same as Ibn Ḥajar.

[154] Ibid., 25.

[155] Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Taʿrif*, 21-56.

the autobiography.[156] This was possibly included to demonstrate that Islamic knowledge should be passed from one scholar to another to be authentic.

The second method that al-Sakhāwī used to demonstrate his concern regarding the disappearance of traditional knowledge is through the criticism he directed to other scholars concerning their method of education, which he, unsurprisingly, found lacking. For example, he mentioned that "the attendees of my lectures discovered the importance of *marwiyyāt* and *isnād* which are almost distinct traditions."[157]

Also, he confessed in his autobiography, "I ceased teaching *īmlāʿ* because Cairo is filled with ignorant teachers and people can not differentiate anymore between these ignorants and qualified teachers who were educated based on *isnād*."[158] It is significant to highlight here that al-Suyūṭī like al-Sakhāwī also expressed his superiority over other scholars. However, he did not attribute it to their improper education but rather to his genius intellectual ability.[159] Also, al-Suyūṭī takes pride in expressing how he mastered several sciences without a tutor while al-Sakhāwī condemned such behavior.

According to Du Grandlaunay, al-Sakhāwī, indeed, could be considered one of the few scholars who were educated the traditional way during his period. This could be detected through the traveling pattern of scholars who no longer went through the trouble of traveling to other Islamic lands to obtain *samāʿ* and collect a higher degree of *isnād*. In fact, when Du Grandlaunay examined the journeys conducted by 25 contemporaries to al-Sakhāwī, he found the tradition of traveling to collect *mutūn* was rare among these scholars. [160] On the other

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156 Al-Sakhāwī, Irshād, 281.

157 Ibid., 557.

" بل كان في جميع ما قرأه لولده يحدث الجماعة الحاضرين مع الشيوخ بسنده وانتشرت الأسانيد المحررة والأسمعة الصحيحة والمرويات المعتبرة، وتنبه الناس كما سبق لإحياء هذه السنة الشريفة ، بعد أن كادت تنقع من أصيل بها أو خليفة"

158 Ibid., 556-557.

"من جل الناس أو كلهم بين العملين،...بحيث استوى عندهم ما يشتمل على مقدمات التصحيح ...مع و عدم التمييز قطع الاملاء بالقاهرة لمزاحمة من لا يحسن فيه ما يورد بالسند مجرداً عن ذلك وكذا ما يكون متصلا بالسماع"

"على وجه الاستدلال وإبرازها في حتى في التصانيف والأجوبة إيراد الأحاديث الباطلة وأشد في الجهالة ..."

159 Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥaduth bi-niʿmat Allāh,* 90,105.

160 Du Grandlaunay, "Édition et analyse de la première partie de l'autobiographie d'al-Sakhāwī," 230-231.

hand, al-Sakhāwī traveled to different cities to secure a similar ranking of *isnād* to Ibn Ḥajar.[161]

Thus, al-Sakhāwī's frustration towards the disappearance of traditional methods of education is valid, as it appears that *isnād* was losing its symbolic significance and was replaced by independent text reading without a proper teacher. Thus, in a sense al-Sakhāwī was motivated to write the autobiography to demonstrate how real knowledge could be obtained through the proper traditional channels of knowledge transfer.

To summarize, based on a detailed look into the content of the autobiography, I agree with du Grandlaunay's assessment that al-Sakhāwī was motivated to write his autobiography out of his genuine concern for the disappearance of the traditional methods of education and the lack of worthy students carrying fundamental sciences such as *ḥadīth*.[162] Thus, the purpose of writing the autobiography was, to some degree, to guide future generations to follow al-Sakhāwī's steps and reach true Islamic knowledge through the traditional method of *isnād.*

It is crucial to remember that al-Sakhāwī faced personal challenges that most likely have exaggerated this concern. First, he invested in the training of his eldest son, whom he expected to carry on the chain of the traditional training methods, but unfortunately, he lost his son at the age of 12 due to the plague.[163] None of his other 13 children survived, so he could not pass his knowledge to his children. At the same time, al-Sakhāwī was not blessed with a zealous disciple who could mirror his devotion to Ibn Ḥajar.[164] Thus, the fact that al-Sakhāwī was facing old age without a promising disciple must have intensified his need to document all the traditional *isnād* and educational training he deemed exceptional. What

[161] Ibid., 232.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 556.
[164] Ibid., 28.

better way to channel this than an elaborately detailed self biography? In fact, al-Sakhāwī quoted several scholars who argued that writing a book is the best method to preserve the memory and knowledge of any scholar, especially if he does not have children or students to inherit his *ʿilm*.[165] In this regard, the autobiography served al-Sakhāwī as it provided a channel with a more prolonged effect on future generations than treaties.[166]

Bitterness Towards Academic Appointments

"قد صار المستحقون والفضلاء محرومون في هذه الأزمات"[167]

Another reason behind al-Sakhāwī's frustration towards the academic environment "in Cairo" is closely connected to academic appointments. Based on the survey of *jihāt* or positions enumerated in chapter five, al-Sakhāwī was not very successful in obtaining high-ranking and influential positions in Cairo. To clarify, al-Sakhāwī did hold minor positions like library bookkeeper and invited lecturer in mosques. However, he did not manage to secure a professorship in a teaching position as he expected. In fact, *Irshād* dated the first significant teaching academic appointment in a religious establishment to when al-Sakhāwī was around 38 years old.[168] This is very late in life in comparison with other scholars; for example, al-Suyūṭī was appointed professor of *fiqh* at the Shaykhūniyya when he was 18 years old.[169] This relative failure in obtaining appointments, resulted in deep frustration and disappointment as al-Sakhāwī considered himself one of the few true scholars who were properly trained.

It is true that the other autobiographies also expressed occasional career frustration upon being discharged from an academic position. For example, Ibn Khaldūn dedicated an entire chapter to explaining the Nāṣirī's *fitnna* and how it caused his dismissal from the

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165 Du Grandlaunay, "Édition et analyse de la première partie de l'autobiographie d'al-Sakhāwī," 339, 352.
166 Ibid., 8.
167 Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 314.
168 Aḥmad Al-Ḥassū, "Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī as a Historian of the 9th/15th Century: with an Edition of that Section of his Chronicles (*Wajīz al-kalām*) Covering the Period 800-849." PhD Dissertation. University of St. Andrews, 1973, 38.
169 Sartain, al-*Suyūṭī: Biography and Background,* 37.

position of chief *qāḍī* by the Sultan. However, most of this section is very abstract and rhetoric in nature and does not include specific details about Ibn Khaldūn's actions. It mainly deals with the reasons for the revolt and how it was historically justifiable. Also, al-Suyūṭī included a brief section about the academic positions he has proudly held. Still, this section was celebratory in nature and did not go into details about particular dismissal or rejection incidents. Al-Sakhāwī, on the other hand, dedicated much of his attention to referring to and describing moments of frustration related to his academic posts. Let us examine a few insights from the autobiography to explore the possibility that al-Sakhāwī's frustration towards his lack of academic appointments could be an additional motivation for leaving an autobiography.

First, al-Sakhāwī included an ardent declaration in the preamble that he was not interested in gaining academic positions. He provided reasons for this decision, mainly due to the low salaries and intense competition among the many incompetent scholars who lacked any actual knowledge.[170] This was coupled with al-Sakhāwī's complaint about Mamluk officials who were not able to distinguish between genuine and ignorant *ulama*.[171] However, al-Sakhāwī's desire towards obtaining academic positions, as shown in the autobiography, was vivid despite his many attempts to show his indifference and many refusals.[172] In fact, the stories he recalled show that he coveted certain positions to the point of going into fights, arguments, and refutation, explaining why he was the best candidate for the post. He also included the testimonials of other scholars to validate his superiority over all other candidates.[173] This particular strategy and level of verification did not exist in any of the other four autobiographies, which marks it interesting to examine as a possible motivation behind

[170] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād*, 23.
[171] Ibid., 32.
[172] Du Grandlaunay, "Édition et analyse de la première partie de l'autobiographie d'al-Sakhāwī," 334- 335.
[173] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 285, 294, 298, 304, 305, 314.

writing the autobiography. Al-Sakhāwī kept referring to three incidents, in particular, which seemed to have traumatized him in his pursuit of academic positions in Mamluk Cairo.

The first incident was when Sultan Jaqmaq chose not to appoint al-Sakhāwī in a position after officially meeting him and gifting him a book about the Sultan's accomplishment in 855/1451.[174] This rejection is something al-Sakhāwī lamented deeply in the autobiography.[175] It seems that the frustration towards academic appointments extended to the founders of *awqāf* as well. In another incident that took place in 1469/874 AH, al-Sakhāwī was quickly dismissed from the *Kāmiliyya ḥadīth* professorship based on the request of the founder's family.[176] He was deeply wounded when he described how he was replaced by a member of the founder's family who held no credible education.[177] In showing his right to the position, al-Sakhāwī mentioned the attempts of the Sultan and many scholars who intervened to re-appoint him.[178] This particular incident appears to have left its mark on al-Sakhāwī as it is the most frequently referred narrative in the autobiography. The references are usually in the form of other scholars arguing how unjustifiable the dismissal was. For example, al-Sakhāwī mentioned "I saw that he [another scholar] was in great pain due to the *Kāmiliyya* incident [dismissal of al-Sakhāwī] stating that he does not know of any position that is held nowadays by a qualified scholar."[179]

The third situation related to appointments shows a more mature approach in dealing with a discharge, at least on paper. Al-Sakhāwī did not go into many details about this incident, but he narrated briefly how many scholars were hurt by his dismissal from the

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[174] Aḥmad Al-Ḥassū, *"Makhtūtat Irshād al-ghāwī bal isʿād al-Tālib wa l-Rāwī lil-iʿlām bi-Tarjamat al-Sakhāwī, Dirāsa Naqdiyya li-Nūskhataīy ayā ṣūfīyā wa-Lāydīn," Alhasso center for quantitative and heritage studies*, (2013): 36.

[175] Al-Ḥassū, *"Makhtūtat Irshād al-Ghāwī,"* 36.

[176] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 104.

[177] Ibid., 1048.

[178] Ibid., 373.
قال لي في أول واقعة للكاملية "قلت للسلطان: لا أعلم الآن من أجمع عليه في علم كإجماع الناس على السخاوي في علم الحديث

[179] Ibid., 285, 294, 298, 304, 305, 314. For example,
"رأيت منه مزيد التألم بكائنة الكاملية لا أعلم الآن وظيفة في الحديث مع مستحقها"

Baybarsiyya position. He reflected, "I was not upset because I could not keep up with the rapid [re-assignments], and I knew that these jobs no longer hold the previous prestige."[180]

Apart from these three failures to secure a prestigious academic position, al-Sakhāwī went beyond portraying this as a personal problem. He referenced other scholars who shared his disapproval of the selection of unworthy scholars in crucial positions. For example, in a correspondence letter included in the autobiography, a scholar called al-Amshatī informed al-Sakhāwī that a respected scholar was given a particular position that he deserved. This is described as a happy event because, according to him, it was "a rare occasion nowadays when a qualified scholar is given a position."[181] In another incident, al-Sakhāwī also reported that the *Barquqiyya* school was "given to those who no longer appreciate its significance."[182] Thus, the problem with the academic appointments is portrayed in the autobiography to be a phenomenon that is specific to Cairo, where al-Sakhāwī was unsuccessful in holding prominent positions.[183] Through the autobiography, one can trace al-Sakhāwī's unsuccessful attempts to reach the prestigious place he aspired within the academic society as well as his frustration due to the lack of appointments, acknowledgment, and authority he received. For one reason or another, he could not succeed in establishing himself as a scholar, maybe because of the challenging conditions in Cairo that some scholars described entailing corruption in all aspects of the society.[184]

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[180] Ibid., 554.
كثر تألم جماعة كثرين حين صرف البيبرسية عنه حتى من ساعد المستقر فيها. والله ما انزعج لذلك لعجزه عن توالي الحركة وعلمه بأن الأمور بقدر، وأن تلك "الوجاهة التي كانت لأرباب هذه المناصب قد نقصت بل انفصلت

[181] Ibid., 355-6.
حصل لنا سرور عظيم لما سمعنا أنه أعطي وظيفة الصرغتمشية، و ما علمت في هذه الأيام خرجت وظيفة لمن هو كفؤ لها، خصوصا من وظائف شيخنا الأميني الأقصرائي.

[182] Ibid., 31.
وشكوى البرقوقية، من اجتماع أناس فيها لحقها لا يراعون

[183] Ibid.,19, 329.
من حين أخذت وظيفة دار الحديث من فلان عرفت أنه ما بقي في القاهرة خير

[184] Rebecca Hernandez, "Sultan, Scholar, and Sufi: Authority and Power Relations al-Suyūṭī's Fatwā on Waqf." *Islamic Law and Society* 20, no. 4 (2013): 343.

On some level, thus, the autobiography can be viewed as a medium through which al-Sakhāwī expressed his frustration and represented the injustice that had fallen upon him so future generations would see his true value through his lens. He wanted to be perceived as one of the few faithful and accomplished scholars of his time, but in reality, he was not given the place nor authority he deserved, at least in Cairo.

To short, I believe that one of the motivations that could have strongly driven al-Sakhāwī to rework his initial short autobiography and expand it is the fact that it provided him with the space to channel the frustration and injustice that have fallen on his behalf concerning academic positions. Obtaining high-ranking posts in the Mamluk society determined the status and ranking of scholars. It also often came with influence and prestige, therefore, it was a much sought-after target in the scholar's life. Therefore, through the autobiography al-Sakhāwī was able to explain why he was not successful in reaching prominent positions, which would consequently have resulted in respect, fame, and prestige.

What al-Sakhāwī was referring to could be a general change in the selection criteria that resulted from a shift in the power dynamics between the Mamluk elite and Mamluk scholars. Also, it is possible that the nature of this period resulted in frequent dismissal that matched the unstable political leadership. Therefore, some scholars might have lost their status or were unable to cope with these changes. The next chapter will discuss more the nature of academic positions and how they affected the academic society during the life of al-Sakhāwī. This will be considered in light of the possible contribution of such an environment to the rise of the genre of autobiographies during this period.

Academic Rivalry: Justify One's Actions

"أنت منظور إليك في كل ما يصدر منك"[185]

[185] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād*, 329 ; Scholar informing him to that he should avoid Ibn ʿazm and Ibn al-Suyūṭī.

The following section will examine an additional reason behind al-Sakhāwī's frustration towards the academic environment other than the disappearance of traditional methods of learning and the disappointment regarding the appointment selection in academic posts.

Judging by the life of al-Sakhāwī and the literary production dedicated to attacking him by other scholars, he was not short in collecting enemies throughout his life. This section will examine to what extent the autobiography was used to address the attacks of these enemies. It is essential to clarify that al-Sakhāwī did not include a section or chapter dedicated to "being blessed with having so many enemies" as al-Suyūṭī did in his autobiography.[186] This means that a thorough examination of explicit or implicit references to refutation and disputes throughout the autobiography should be conducted. Upon a closer examination with this purpose in mind, the following insights were observed.

First, there are many references to attacks in the autobiography but most of them are directed by al-Sakhāwī to other scholars rather than the other way around. In fact, most of the attacks, in a sense, were related to the previous two frustrating reasons towards the academic environment. The attacks were in the form of indicating the incompetence of a particular scholar and/or his unworthiness of obtaining an academic position. Among the examples of attacks related to knowledge is when al-Sakhāwī accused al-Suyūṭī of copying parts of his written works while pretending to be his student.[187] Also, Abu Hamid al-Qadisī, is accused of plagiarizing from al-Sakhāwī while lacking an understanding of what he was copying.[188] In general, the fear of others stealing from him seemed to be a concern of al-Sakhāwī, and this resulted in his avoidance of several scholars. Attacks related to academic positions were

[186] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Tahadduth bi-Niʿmat Allāh,* 160.
[187] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād*, 572-573.
[188] Ibid., 572.

usually reported in incidents showing the superiority of al-Sakhāwī in comparison to those who obtained the academic position instead of him.

For example, al-Sakhāwī attacked Taqi al-Qalqashandī, who was given precedence over him in an appointment, by showcasing his superior knowledge over him.[189] Also, al-Sakhāwī stressed in the autobiography how scholars have ranked him above al-Biqāʿī.[190]

Having said that the autobiography is mostly filled with attacks from al-Sakhāwī to other scholars does not mean that al-Sakhāwī did not mention attacks that were directed at him. However, such attacks were not as frequent and were often included in an abstract and rhetorical way. For example, he recalled how some had twisted his stated reasons behind refraining from visiting Sultan Inal to harm him.[191] Another example refers to others spreading lies about him.[192] It is important to highlight that some of these attacks were initiated by al-Sakhāwī himself. For instance, al-Sakhāwī stated that "I was not short of vicious enemies who were delusional about their knowledge … They attacked me because I exposed their bad traits that are unknown to others."[193] He was probably referring to the biographical entries he included in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*, which, according to scholars, have caused much jealousy and rivalry among scholars and was the reason behind many attacks on al-Sakhāwī.[194] In fact, it is because of such confrontational entries that al-Suyūṭī accused al-Sakhāwī of filling his history books with invading *"aʿrāḍ al-nās"* and reporting false vices about them.[195]

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[189] Ibid., 241, 271, 357, 1039.
"سألت شيخنا : أيهما أمثل، الشيخ تقي الدين القلقشندي أو فلان ؟ فقال مشيرا لترجيح الثاني على الأول (السخاوي")

[190] Ibid., 324, 327,276, 1046.

[191] Ibid., 333.
"فتعلل بكلمات لها مقدمات وتتمات ، فردها عليه بعض من علم منه سيئ الغرض"

[192] Ibid., 316.
"هذا مع مشي بعض الفساق معه فيما يتأثر به الخاطر مما هو كذب محض "

[193] Ibid., 573.
"لم أعدم من الحسدة الفجار المردة الذين لا وجاهة لهم في الدين، … لأجل ما يتوهمه من ترجمتي له ببعض ما هو متصف به، ويتكتمه عن المغفلين "ن

[194] Muhammed ʿAnan, "*Al-Sakhāwī: Hayatū wa Turathūh,*"*Al-Resalah Magazine* 104 (1935).

[195] Al-Suyūṭī, *Nūzim al-ʿIqyan*, 152-153.

In other words, the autobiography does not show a frequent occurrence of narratives dedicated to addressing direct attacks on al-Sakhāwī. Thus, one is hesitant to affirm that al-Sakhāwī had in mind the purpose of addressing refutation and claims directed at him when he was writing the autobiography. This is particularly visible through a comparison with al-Suyūṭī's autobiography in which al-Suyūṭī enumerated the primary attacks that were directed at him and provided the context and refutation for each attack.[196]

Nevertheless, if we move away from using content as a speculating factor to determine what motivated al-Sakhāwī to write his autobiography, the academic rivalry could possibly be an intrinsic factor that drove him to leave an autobiography. Let us not forget that al-Sakhāwī would not have been keen to keep records of the positive testimonials others reported about him if it was not for the attacks directed at him. For example, he stated in the autobiography that "at that time, I was not planning to do this [writing the praise he recieved] then after the death of my *Shaykh*, they started to attack me so I wrote the following testimonials… ."[197] These records were a precursor act that the autobiography could not have existed without. Furthermore, it is quite possible that al-Sakhāwī was addressing criticism in the autobiography without direct reference to attacks to avoid tarnishing his image. For example, Du Grandlaunay argued that when al-Sakhāwī went into detailed account about describing the spread of his books among students outside Cairo, he was indirectly addressing the criticism of al-Suyūṭī, who argued that no one is interested in al-Sakhāwī's works.[198] Thus, the spread of many negative attacks on al-Sakhāwī, even if not explicitly visible in the text, must have motivated him to leave a positive, credible, and "accurate" account about himself as he indicated in his autobiography that "few students were exposed to some lies [about al-Sakhāwī] which are stated and written by someone who is disrespectful to others

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196 Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Taḥaduth bi-niʿmat Allāh*, 163.

197 Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād*, 241-242.

" من أمثل الملازمين لكم ؟... ولم تكن همتي إذ ذلك متوجهة إلى شئ من هذا، ثم بعد وفاة شيخنا وتوجه من توجه لعداوتي استكتبت كلا من المذكورين بذلك"

198 Du Grandlaunay, "Édition et analyse de la première partie de l'autobiographie d'al-Sakhāwī," 31.

based on his ignorance."[199] More about the context of academic rivalry during this period and how it possibly has contributed to the rise of autobiographies will be discussed in the next chapter.

Finally, it is worth highlighting that including such detailed accounts of criticism targeting other scholars and documenting positive testimonials that show the superiority over other scholars must have been an intentional act. Al-Sakhāwī probably documented these incidents in *kararīs* throughout his life. Therefore, in a sense, the autobiography could be seen as a selective compilation of what the author has previously written or documented about his affairs throughout his life. As seen earlier, al-Sakhāwī, was in the habit of attacking other scholars in the earlier works he authored, such as his famous biographical dictionary *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ* and other dedicated treaties.[200] Therefore, it was natural to rely on these records while he was writing his autobiography. Thus, writing such an extensive autobiography relies on rich documentation available to the author about aspects of his life and a plethora of earlier works that would be later reworked to produce an autobiography.

In conclusion, this chapter was intended to orient the reader about al-Sakhāwī's autobiography in terms of the characteristics and motivations behind writing it. The research classified al-Sakhāwī's text *Irshād* as an autobiography because it was written as a stand-alone volume with the purpose of documenting the life of its author. Four other similar works written during the late Mamluk period were identified which are the autobiographies of Ibn-Khaldūn, al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Ṭūlūn, and al-Shaʿrānī.

The first part of this chapter was dedicated to examining the characteristics of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography and analyzing it in relation to the other four autobiographies. All scholars, except for Ibn Khaludūn, acknowledged that they were following the tradition of

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[199] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād*, 363.
"اقتفى الأثر بعض الطلبة ممن لم يعلم بالصدق فيما قاله وكتبه على وجه لا يجوز إجماعا لتضمنه ازدراء الناس جهلا وابتداعا."

[200] Ibid., 272.

earlier respected scholars who left a *tarjama* about themselves. Most of the examples the autobiographies provided were earlier Mamluk historians and scholars. Thus, the act of writing an autobiography was an assertive and recognized act to them which indicates that the genre probably crystallized during the Mamluk period. As for the connection and influence between al-Sakhāwī's autobiography and the others, no references were detected within the texts except in the case of al-Shaʿrānī, who mentioned being guided by al-Suyūṭī's autobiography. This means that, apart from al-Shaʿrānī, al-Sakhāwī and the other scholars were either unaware of the existence of the other autobiographies or chose not to acknowledge them.

The following insights were discovered upon comparing the characteristics of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography with the others. Al-Sakhāwī's text is exceptionally long compared to the others. This manifests the level of effort, passion, and time al-Sakhāwī dedicated to writing it. Also, it shows al-Sakhāwī's desire to leave a comprehensive account of himself as well as the value and importance he attributed to his autobiography. The relatively low number of manuscripts discovered and the fact that al-Sakhāwī's autobiography was the latest to be printed could indicate the low level of popularity of the autobiography from earlier and modern scholars. Finally, in terms of structure, the autobiography was organized into themes which was a typical structure of a classic autobiography. These themes, however, in many cases included personal sequential narratives. Al-Suyūṭī's and Ibn Ṭūlūn's autobiography was the closest to al-Sakhāwī with regards to the structure, while Ibn Khaldūn and al-Shaʿrānī were unique and atypical to the traditional structure.

The second part of the chapter attempted to examine the reasons that motivated al-Sakhāwī to leave an autobiography. It started with examining the reasons that al-Sakhāwī cited in the autobiography. This was followed by a thorough analysis of the text to speculate other possible motivations that drove al-Sakhāwī to write the longest discovered pre-modern

autobiography. Based on the analysis, three observations were detected that could answer the question of motivation.

First, al-Sakhāwī went into a great effort to provide detailed biographical accounts of all his extended family members, including the women and children. He was not in any way obliged to report about the affairs of his extended family, which was a unique and unprecedented act in medieval autobiographies. This could be seen as a clear indication that al-Sakhāwī had a genuine passion for writing biographies and reporting on the affairs of others. Thus, one of the primary motivations for writing the autobiography is the fact that he loved and enjoyed compiling and reporting such texts. Furthermore, al-Sakhāwī, who lacked a distinguished genealogy, could project an elevated image of his family's status through the autobiography. He portrayed them as *ulama*, as well as a merchant family who had a close relationship with the prestigious family of Bulqīnī. Finally, he positioned himself as the eminent figure in the family, being the most cherished, learned, and devoted member. There was probably no other medium through which al-Sakhāwī could convey this positive image about himself other than through the autobiography.

The second observation about the content of the autobiography, which could give further insights into the motivations behind writing it, is the impressive documentation of all the praise al-Sakhāwī received throughout his life and the glimpses of self-glorification he incorporated in the autobiography. From the various situations al-Sakhāwī discussed in the autobiography, one can observe that he projected a high degree of self-worth and a sense of entitlement. Thus a possible motivation behind writing the autobiography was the need to highlight his superiority and excellence among his peers. Interestingly, he pursued this through citing the positive testimonials and evaluations others wrote about him rather than explaining how he thought himself exceptional like the case of al-Suyūṭī and al-Shaʿrānī.

Finally, the frustrated attitude that al-Sakhāwī showed in his autobiography towards the academic environment could have possibly motivated him to leave a detailed self-biographical volume about himself. This frustration can be attributed to three main issues. The first concern was the disappearance of the traditional channels of seeking knowledge. Driven by his conviction of the value of *samāʿ* and *isnād*, which was declining at the time, al-Sakhāwī was motivated to leave a documentation of all the proper ways in which knowledge should be attained. An additional frustration towards the academic environment was due to al-Sakhāwī's dissatisfaction with the selection of unworthy *ulama* in prestigious academic positions. Since al-Sakhāwī made several unsuccessful attempts to secure an influential academic appointment and was subject to several dismissals, he used the autobiography to justify the reasons behind such unfair and alarming phenomena, which was widespread in Cairo, according to him. Although al-Sakhāwī already expressed his thoughts regarding his dismissals in detail in several treaties, he was inclined to add a detailed account of these incidents in the autobiography because such work will reach a larger audience and last longer, as he indicated in the introduction. The final reason for al-Sakhāwī's frustration towards the academic environment was the intense attacks and rivalry he witnessed. However, upon a closer examination of the narratives, one can observe that al-Sakhāwī was the initiator of these attacks rather than the other way around. This appears to be an impulse that he showed in his different works. Since al-Sakhāwī did not provide detailed narratives about the attacks he received nor refutation regarding them, one is reluctant to confirm this as a motivation behind writing the autobiography. However, there is no question that the act of writing the autobiography in itself has been indirectly triggered by the many attacks that al-Sakhāwī received throughout his life. He desired to leave a positive account of his life that showed his superior knowledge over other scholars since many biographical accounts were not written in his favor. Finally, it is impossible to single out a reason behind the

autobiography. It appears that most of the points discussed above had been factors behind pushing al-Sakhāwī to dedicate his time and effort and produce such a thorough self account.

CHAPTER 2

Rise of the Autobiography during the Time of al-Sakhāwī

Many scholars such as Robinson, Rapoport, Wollina, and ElBendary have observed that autobiographical writings were on the rise in the late Mamluk period.[201] This was evident from the widespread of personal narratives in different genres of literature like chronicles and biographical dictionaries. Another indication of the interest in writing about the self is the discovery of texts written during this period by famous scholars like Ibn Khaldūn, al-Sakhāwī, al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Ṭūlūn, and al-Shaʿrānī with the conscious decision to dedicate a stand-alone work to write their *sīra.*

The question of why the art of autobiography was on the rise during this period is very complex, especially since there was visible anxiety attached to the act of writing one's biography, as shown in the apologetic preface of several of these texts.[202] Also, leaving an autobiography required tremendous efforts from scholars as indicated by Ibn Ṭūlūn, making it a challenging task.[203] Therefore, the reasons that motivated scholars must have been more compelling to overcome the anxiety and demanding efforts.

Since self-documents such as autobiographies were not produced out of a vacuum, it appears that this rising trend to write about the self must have emerged from broader political and socio-economic developments that took place during the late Mamluk period. Also, investigating the reasons behind the popularity of autobiographies demands a study of the

[201] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography,* 100-103; Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self,* 63; Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," 3; Torsten Wollina, "Ibn Tawq's al-Taʿlīq: An Ego-Document for Mamluk Studies," in *Ubi Sumus? Quo Vademus? Mamluk Studies: State of the Art*, ed. Stephan Conermann (G.ttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013), 350; Amina Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans: Urban Protest in Late Medieval Egypt and Syria* (Cairo: AUC Press 2015), 104.

[202] Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self,* 66,*1*22.

[203] Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Fulk al-mashḥūn,* 22.

concurrent changes in academic establishments and, consequently, the internal relationships among *ulama* as a class.

Therefore, this chapter will investigate possible explanations for the rise in autobiographies during the fifteenth century by examining their broader historical context. The research will be guided by modern studies on the developments of the fifteenth century Mamluk Empire. Thanks to the research done by Robinson, Berkey, Petry, Sartain, Raymond, and ElBendary, certain aspects of the period have been identified as possible precursors behind the flourishing of the genre of autobiography.[204] However, due to the complexity and many-sided interpretations of the period, it appears that different threads of developments had induced one another. This makes it difficult to affirm one exact factor or a specific order of sequence that led to the rise of autobiography.

After consulting modern research on the developments of the fifteenth century as well as analyzing al-Sakhāwī's autobiography and its contemporaries, I have chosen to focus on the developments that took place regarding two main dimensions in a scholar's life. The first dimension is the intellectual atmosphere that influenced the scholars' creativity and fostered different literary conventions and discourses. The second dimension is the internal structure within the *ulama* class, which regulated the synergy between the scholars as well as moderated access to academic appointments.

Thus, this chapter will start with a brief historical background of the period's political, economic, and social conditions. This will be followed by an attempt to make some links between the developments that took place within the two mentioned dimensions and the rise of autobiography.

[204] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography;* Carl Petry, *The Cambridge History of Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background;* Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self;* Amina Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans.*

Clarification on the Historical Period of Ibn Ṭūlūn and al-Shaʿrānī

Before examining the historical conditions, it is crucial to clarify that al-Sakhāwī's autobiography, as well as the autobiographies of Ibn Khaldūn and al-Suyūṭī, were written during the Circassian Mamluk period. Half of Ibn Ṭūlūn's life, as well as the formative years of al-Shaʿrānī until the age of 20, were also spent under the late Circassian period. However, their remaining years witnessed the early period of the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, since they resided away from the newly established center in Istanbul, many Mamluk regulations and conditions were still in place during this period. This residual Mamluk influence is evident in the writing of Ibn Ṭūlūn and al-Shaʿrānī, who referred to Mamluk historians and scholars in their autobiographies as part of their tradition. Thus, although Ibn Ṭūlūn's and al-Shaʿrānī's autobiographies were written during the early Ottoman period, for the purpose of this research, an emphasis will be dedicated to examining the conditions of the fifteenth century to highlight how the circumstances during this period shaped the art of writing a medieval autobiography.

Historical Background

In general, the late Circassian period is often described to have witnessed significant challenges such as political instability, external threats, natural disasters, and economic decline that resulted in substantial shifts in Mamluk policies and practices. These newly formulated policies severely affected all strata of society and are considered by many historians and chronicles of the time to have led to internal disorders, corruption, decentralization, and further economic decline, all of which eventually caused the fall of the empire.[205]

On the other hand, recent scholarships such as the studies conducted by John Meloy and Amina Elbendary viewed the fifteenth century as a period of opportunities and social

[205] *Sartain, Al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background,* 1-8.

mobility to many classes.[206] Also, it appears that several literary types flourished out of the womb of these complex and dynamic conditions in which the society was being reshaped.

As for the political conditions, many scholars argue that the Circassian period witnessed a diminishing political power and control of the Sultans.[207] The accession to the throne was not hereditary despite many failed attempts. This uncertainty of succession led to acute continuous struggle among the various Mamluk factions, especially fights between the new Sultan and the dethroned ruler's supporters.[208] The tension overpower has always been a characteristic of Mamluks since the foundation of the empire; however, it was more on the rise during this period. Consequently, the *ulama* class was affected by this unstable political atmosphere as they have always acted as intermediaries between the ruling elite and commoners since the formation of the Mamluk empire. During each failed attempt, the *ulama* associated with the revolting armies would be released from their official positions, and new scholars would be appointed. This high turnover affected the stability and, to some degree, the credibility of the *ulama* as a class.

Apart from these internal political conditions and struggles, the empire also faced external threats as this period witnessed a shift in the power dynamics of the world system. In fact, the vacuum of authority that emerged after the Mongol invasion affected Asia Minor and led to the rise of local principalities. The leading rising powers during al-Sakhāwī's life were the Ottomans, restive principalities in Persia, and the White Steppe principality of Uzun Hasan.[209] The rise of these new empires affected the Mamluk Sultanate as the fighting got closer to the Mamluk Syrian border. It required dispatching frequent expeditions, which

[206] John Meloy, "The Privatization of Protection: Extortion and the State in the Circassian Mamluk Period," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47, no. 2 (2004):196; André Raymond, *Cairo* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 195-196; Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans.*

[207] Carl Petry. *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, 316-317.

[208] Raymond, *Cairo*, 166; Nezar AlSayyad, *Cairo: Histories of a City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 123.

[209] Ibid., 464.

required tremendous funds.[210] Furthermore, the rise of these new powers led to competition over trade routes and the loss of Mamluk dominance over essential trade ports.[211] Controlling trade routes meant access to spice trade, which was always a lucrative source of cash that the Mamluk economy relied upon heavily. Therefore, although these external threats initially did not reach the heart of the Mamluk lands, they indirectly affected the internal Mamluk society in two ways. It contributed to the decentralization and lack of order as it redirected most of the attention of the Sultans to external threats and fighting going over the borders rather than ensuring the stability of internal affairs of the empire. In addition, sending frequent and massive expeditions to fight demanded a tremendous amount of finances, which often created a cash crisis that the Sultans overcame by applying practices such as confiscation, austerity measures, and re-monetary evaluation. This led to poor living conditions for the entire Mamluk society.[212] Other than the unstable political environment, the society during this period suffered from a series of plague outbreaks that led to a high mortality rate and labor shortage, which contributed to a decline in the economy and resulted in challenging living conditions.[213]

Back to the main research question of this chapter, why would a first-class *ʿālim* living in the context of these difficult circumstances and conditions such as Ibn Khaldūn, al-Sakhāwī, and al-Suyūṭī would be motivated to invest his time and effort to write an extended self-circulating text about his *sīra*? The two dimensions that affect a scholar's life the most will be investigated to address this question. The first part of this chapter will start by analyzing the development in the intellectual atmosphere that prevailed during this time.

[210] Ibid., 473.
[211] Ibid., 465.
[212] Nur Khan, "Slaves, Wealth and Fear: An Episode from Late Mamluk-Era Egypt," *Oriens* 37 (2009): 156.
[213] Petry, *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, 471.

Intellectual Atmosphere

Since the practice of writing an autobiography was not an individual act as seen in the several examples produced during this period, this means that certain developments in the intellectual atmosphere served as a catalyst for its existence and rise. Thus, let us examine the intellectual atmosphere during this period to discern how it allowed specific literary genres and types of writing to exist, among which is the medieval autobiography. The intellectual atmosphere will be examined in terms of dominant literary genres, channels of expression as well as aspects related to circulation, audience, and trends.

Sartain described the fifteenth century as an "age of compilations, encyclopedic works, commentaries, glosses, extracts, and abridgments.[214] According to Sartain and Petry, such an intellectual atmosphere is best described as lacking in creativity with no original contribution to Islamic knowledge or thoughts.[215] This conclusion was reached based on the testimonials of scholars who lived during this period, including al-Sakhāwī, who referred to their time with dissatisfaction, criticism, and a nostalgic attitude to the earlier period of the Mamluk.[216] For example, al-Sakhāwī talked about the deterioration of the education system as well as the difficult economic conditions and suffering that he witnessed in Cairo. For example, he stated that “signs of the end of time appeared in Cairo, which is filled with hypocrites.” [217] These problematic conditions must have led to a high degree of anxiety and a sense of insecurity across society. It appears that part of this tension that the scholars have felt affected the literary texts produced by scholars of the time. In fact, Petry argued that the fear of confiscations of a*wqāf* and the insecurity that the scholars felt could have contributed

[214] Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background,* 132

[215] Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background,* 119 ; Carl Petry, *Protectors Or Praetorians? The Last Mamlūk Sultans and Egypt's Waning as a Great Power* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 221.

[216] Carl Petry, "Scholastic Stasis in Medieval Islam Reconsidered: Mamluk Patronage in Cairo," *Poetics Today* 14, no. 2 (1993): 332.

[217] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 430. سيما عند تجدد علامات الساعة وأشراطها بالقاهرة و كثرة ذوي النفاق

to the lack of creative production.[218] Sartain argued that scholarship was affected by the deteriorating economic conditions and subsequently the shortage in *waqf* endowment that sponsors scholars.[219] The corruption of the government and the appointment of unqualified scholars in key religious positions through bribery was also among the reasons noted by Sartain.[220] Finally, according to Sartain, what hindered creativity were factors such as the teaching methods, which did not encourage original thoughts and focused on the oral transmission of knowledge.

Focus on History in the Literary Production of the Period

It is worth highlighting that Petry and Sartain were referring to a decline in religious production in Islamic theology and other related fields. This type of production, indeed, held few outstanding works and were usually in the form of short "treatises on problems of interest, law or grammar, collections of traditions on different subjects, and abridgments, commentaries, and glosses on earlier scholars' works."[221]

However, it appears that the challenging circumstances and complex conditions that the scholars faced did not result in a lack of creativity per se; it rather redirected Mamluk scholars' interest to other non-religious discourses. According to Robinson, one can trace a more assertive and confident approach towards historiography, leading to new forms and themes during the Mamluk land.[222] In fact, the famous works of the period were in the field of history and other related sub-genres. There was an expansion in the works of chronicles, commentaries, encyclopedism, and legal proceduralism during the Mamluk period. The fifteenth century, in particular, is considered the brilliance or *taʾalluq* phase of Cairo's

[218] Petry, *Protectors Or Praetorians*, 220-222.
[219] Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background,* 84.
[220] Ibid., 128.
[221] Ibid., 132.
[222] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 97-101.

historical writing school due to the rich production of history and other sub-genre of this century.[223]

This development in literary production is significant because religious production was always at the center and heart of Islamic scholarship in earlier classic periods, while history was often seen as a marginal science, complementing other fields and written by scholars in their leisure and free time.[224] Given the assumption that no religious works produced during this period were lost and none exists in manuscript form, the widespread works of history texts and history-related genres is remarkable. In fact, history writing was so popular that, according to Nasser Rabbat, the number of texts written in Cairo during the first half of the fifteenth century about history, chancery manuals, and geographical treaties surpassed the production of any other half-century period till the modern era.[225] To give an indication to the intellectual atmosphere of the fifteenth century, among the prominent *ulama* historians who were active at the time are: Ibn Khaldūn (1322/732 AH - 1406/808 AH), al-Qalqashandī (1356/756 AH - 1418/821 AH), al-Māqrizī (1364/766 AH - 1442/845 AH), al-ʿAyni (1360/762 AH - 1451/855 AH), Shihab al-dīn, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalani (1372/774 AH - 1449/852 AH), al-Biqāʿī (1406/809 AH - 1480/885 AH), Ibn Taghri Birdi (1411/813 AH - 1570/874 AH), al-Jawhari (1416/819 AH -1495/900 AH), al-Sakhāwī (1428/831 AH - 1497/902 AH), al-Suyūṭī (1445/849 AH - 1505/911 AH), and Ibn Iyās (1448/ 852 AH - 1524/930 AH).

Since the tradition of medieval autobiography was a development from historical discourse, as highlighted in the introduction, an increased interest in history writing would increase the probability of scholars writing about their *sīra*. For example, the autobiography of Ibn Khaldūn was initially written as a complementary part to Ibn Khaldūn's famous

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[223] Fatḥīyah al-Nabarāwī, *ʿIm al-Taʾrīkh: Dirasah fi Manāhij al-Baḥth* (Alexandria: al-Maktab al-Jāmiʿa al-ḥadītha, 1993), 200.

[224] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography, 101.*

[225] Nasser Rabbat, "Who Was al-Māqrizī? A Biographical Sketch*," Mamluk Studies Review,* 7 no.2, 2003: *3-4.*

history book, *'Ibar.* Furthermore, the influence of history writing is shown in Ibn Khaldūn's autobiography, as he excused himself saying, "although the [historical] events I am describing are not relevant to my *sīra,* I wrote them to document and verify these [historical] events."[226] Thus, it is doubtful that Ibn Khaldūn would have recorded his *sīra* if it were not out of his fascination with history as well as his belief that he was an influential figure in the course of history. There are many other cases of Mamluk historians leaving short historical accounts embedded in their history works, as highlighted in the previous chapter.

However, since the act of writing an autobiography was on the rise among scholars as well as historians, it appears that the increased interest in history writing alone was not the only factor that facilitated the rise of autobiographies. This demands a further examination of the development in history writing/discourse as well as intellectual thoughts. Among the developments that are worth investigating is the rise of new and innovative sub-genres and themes produced during this period like local history, biographical dictionaries, self-representation texts, and popular history, which were all incorporated into the genre of history writing.[227]

A Rise in Local History

A significant factor that opened the door for the various forms of autobiographical writings is that the intellectual atmosphere and literary production did not only shift towards history in general, but it focused specifically on local history. Robinson argued that this shift towards contemporary history was significant as it did not materialize before the Mamluk Period.[228] History during earlier centuries tended to focus on describing the advent of Islam and surveying the history of the Islamic empire since its establishment.[229] This was a natural

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[226] Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Ta'rīf*, 302.
وإنما كتبت هذه الاخبار ، وان كانت خارجة عن غرض هذا التعريف بالمؤلف، لأن فيها تحقيق لهذه الواقعات

[227] Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans,*108 , 83.

[228] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography, 101.*

[229] Ibid., 100, 138.

direction as the history inquiry originated from the *isnād* tradition.[230] Thus, history was typically written not by contemporary historians but rather later generations who were not active participants during the historical events they reported.

On the other hand, historians and scholars of the Mamluk period were more interested in writing chronicles about the events and years they witnessed. Most importantly, this focus on current events provided scholars and historians with channels to express their voices regarding non-religious aspects they faced in their lives. For example, they often expressed their objections and criticism towards the new policies implemented by the Circassian Sultans. In addition, the chronicles of this period are rich with detailed information about the administration changes, market prices, the drought, famine and Nile status, the plague outbreaks, demonstrations and riots, and the various incidents of attack on scholars who occupy administrative positions.

There is much speculation behind the reasons for this shift towards local history during the Mamluk period. The absence of a major mainstream Islamic empire after the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate probably played an essential part in this paradigm shift.[231] These earlier empires often relied on their connection to the prophet or early ancestor to validate their legitimacy. Therefore, highlighting the continuation of this link in the history books was important. On the other hand, the Mamluk Sultans did not enjoy such a legacy. This naturally redirected the attention to current events. Furthermore, this period as highlighted in the introduction, was rich in events ranging from an unstable political atmosphere, external threats, as well as internal changes and developments, so scholars of the fifteenth century must have sensed that their time was important and worth documenting.[232] Robinson suggested another explanation behind the shift towards contemporary history rather than

[230] Ibid.,60.
[231] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 139; Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*, *73*.
[232] Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*, 105.

earlier approach of recalling the past. He argued that history books, during this period, were not produced by the average traditional Muslim scholar alone but also by secretaries and *awlād al-nas* like Ibn Taghri Birdi and Ibn Iyās. [233] These Mamluk historians believed that history should be written for the purpose of "not only to record but entertain, legitimize, criticize and inspire," which made it worthy of adding their personal point of view and observations.[234]

Regardless of the reasons behind the shift, the change towards micro or local history allowed historians to be present in their writing. For example, when reporting about current events happening in Egypt and Syria, it was only natural for the Mamluk historian to see himself as an acting faculty amid events they witnessed. Thus, the habits of including the author's life in the text and concentrating on contemporary events were not foreign concepts in the Mamluk period as during the classical period.

This slow but steady paradigm shift towards more present and expressive intellectual thoughts led to the expansion of different sub-genres and themes such as biographical dictionaries, self-representation, and popular culture. These three types of writing, in particular, are worth investigating as they could have possibly served as precursors as well as catalysts to the act of writing a stand-alone autobiography.

Biographical Dictionaries

The shift to local history led to the flourishing of the genre of biographical dictionaries. During this period, scholars frequently included the biographies of famous figures they knew. This was done in an effort to substitute the lack of reference to earlier Islamic history and give more credibility to their work. Rabbat describes this development in historiography as a "formation of an endogenous and insular school of historiography, every

[233] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 101-102.
[234] Ibid., 87; Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*, 91.

member was linked in more than one way to the other and works are measured against others."[235] Thus, the rise in local history, during the Mamluk period, manifested in an increased interest in documenting the biographies of important figures of the period. This practice led to the expansion of biographical dictionaries.[236] An example of such work is al-Sakhāwī's *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsiʿ*, which contains biographies of "nearly 12,000 men and 1,075 women" who lived during the ninth/ fifteenth century. [237] Also, al-Suyūṭī left a biographical dictionary titled, *Naẓm al-ʿiqyān fī aʿyān al-aʿyān.*

The spread of biographical entries is often associated with the rise of autobiographies.[238] These two genres could be connected in various ways. First, parts of the entries in the biographical dictionaries are actually self-written by the figures themselves. It was common practice for scholars working on a biographical dictionary to write to other scholars requesting their biographies to include these narratives in the dictionary, especially if the two scholars were on good terms. Thus, scholars became more used to the practice of writing about themselves, even if it was in the form of a short third-person narrative and upon the request of another scholar.

Secondly, it seems that respected scholars expected other scholars to write about them and, thus, were prepared to provide the needed information about their academic life. As highlighted in the previous chapter, writing an extensive medieval autobiography required a lot of *kararīs*, documentation, and recording to allow for reporting details such as the enumeration of the line of transmissions, scholars, students, readings, and praise. Therefore, the existence of these documents was an essential prerequisite to producing an independent, more extended version of an autobiography.

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[235] Rabbat, "Who Was al-Māqrizī?," 3-4.

[236] Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*, 96.

[237] Al-Suyūṭī, *Naẓm al-ʿiqyān fī aʿyān al-aʿyān*; Aliya Saidi, "Marriage and Divorce in Urban Mamluk Society in the Fifteenth Century." PhD Dissertation. University of Cambridge, 2000, iii.

[238] Saleh al-Ghāmidī, *Kitābat al-dhāt: Dirāsa fī al-sīra al-dhātiyya*, 49.

Initially, it appears that the ideal way to produce a *sīra* or *tarjama* was for a scholar to provide these records or an oral version of them to be published by another scholar or a student as explained by Ibn Ṭūlūn.[239] An example of this type of *sīra* is the biography of Ibn Ḥajar, which was published by his student al-Sakhāwī. In the absence of a student or a devoted scholar willing to write about another scholar, some medieval authors took matters into their own hands, proceeded with expanding these *kararīs*, and wrote their own autobiography. The autobiography of al-Sakhāwī and Ibn Ṭūlūn was developed as such. Thus, the most crucial contribution of biographical dictionaries is that they provided an incentive for scholars to create a blueprint of autobiographical materials that could be given to other scholars or used later on by the scholar himself to produce an autobiography.

A third connection between biographical dictionaries and the rise of autobiography is that some biographical entries created considerable instability within the *ulama* class. Not all figures in the biographical dictionaries approved their entries, as some scholars were portrayed in a negative light. Al-Sakhāwī's biographical dictionary, for example, resulted in many disagreements as it offended many scholars because of the confrontational and attacking attitude al-Sakhāwī used in providing his own ranking and classification of contemporary scholars. A natural reaction to diffuse a negative image or an unsatisfying classification provided in a biographical dictionary would be to produce a credible source of self-account. In some cases, these accounts developed into an independent work like the autobiography of al-Suyūṭī and al-Shaʿrānī, who expressed their desire to leave a credible source about themselves. Most importantly, the implicit ranking in the biographical dictionaries led to many rivalries and disputes among scholars, which resulted in more biographical dictionaries and autobiographies being produced to counter them. This made biographical dictionaries and autobiographical text the official medium through which

[239] Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Fulk al-mashḥūn*, 22-23.

scholars can respond to attacks. Thus, the biographical dictionary was an important sub-genre in the field of history that seemed to contribute to the spread of autobiographies.

Rise in Self-representations

Another development in the intellectual atmosphere due to the focus on local history and current events is that it allowed scholars to include themselves as factors in historical events. This development in the intellectual atmosphere led to a more prominent self-representation of scholars in the various literary productions of the fifteenth century. Scholars during the life of al-Sakhāwī were interested not only in recording the history as they witnessed it but also in reporting their own life stories.[240] One way of accomplishing that is by mixing history writing with autobiographical narratives. In fact, Hanna highlighted that personal narratives were prevalent in different genres such as literary works, belles letters, travel books, biographical dictionaries, and chronicles.[241] Many of these personal narratives were in the form of autobiographical materials, including incidents about the scholars' public life and their domestic and family life.[242] According to Rapoport, it was customary for Mamluk authors to include narratives about their domestic life and speak about their wives, concubines, children, and the domestic life of their fellow scholars in their literary texts.[243]

The methods through which scholars added personal narratives to their academic works varied; some authors were subtle and indirect in their approach by hinting their opinions whenever it was relevant, while others explicitly expressed their views and objections. Some scholars even went to the extreme of oversharing their daily routine without a justification or a clear link to the objective of their works. An example of subtle self-expression is shown in the chronicle of Ibn Iyās. Upon recording events in his chronicle, Ibn

[240] Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*, 105.
[241] Hanna, "Self Narratives in Arabic Texts," 142.
[242] Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*, 104.
[243] Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," 2-3.

Iyās frequently represented himself through the poetry he composed for a particular event. For example, Ibn Iyās inserted a poem he wrote in his chronicle for the procession of Sultan al-ʿAdil TumanBay's wife, Khound al-Khasbakiah; after citing the verses in the chronicle, he commented that the wife of the Sultan expressed her admiration of the poem.[244] A more forward example for self-expression appears in the chronicle, *Iẓhār al-ʿasr li asrār ahl al-ʿasr* in which al-Biqāʿī not only express his views and opinions clearly, but he recalled the challenges he faced in his domestic life like jealousy among his wives/concubines.[245] The infamous Ibn Ṭawq (1430/834 AH - 1509/915 AH), on the other hand, did not shy away from expressing himself in his diary/chronicle, *al-Taʿlīq*. His daily life is recorded as he described detailed interactions within his family, work, and neighbors.[246] He often interrupted the yearly events with personal such as his struggles with his finances or that his wife's visit to the public *ḥamām*.[247] Needless to say, *al-Taʿlīq* is a unique and unusual text of this period, therefore it is misleading to treat its content as a standard practice; however, it was not written out of a vacuum. Its existence shows the level and desire for self-expression at the time, even among marginalized clerks like Ibn Ṭawq.

Plague and Epidemics

It is true that this tendency for more self-expressive writing emerged from the broader intellectual atmosphere that focused on the present and local history. However, a decisive factor that has possibly led to the insertion of autobiographical and family narratives is the high degree of anxiety the Mamluk society faced due to the Black Death and plagues. There is no doubt that the Mamluk society suffered severe loss and devastation due to the aftermath of repeated plague outbreaks. Losing several family members due to the plague was a

[244] Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr*, 3: 473.

[245] Al-Biqāʿī, *Iẓhār al-ʿasr li asrār ahl al-ʿasr,* 2:143-44.

[246] Shihāb Al-Dīn Ibn Ṭawq, *Al-Ta'līq: Yawmīyāt Shihāb Al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Ṭawq, 834-915 H/1430-1509 M: Mudhakkirāt Kutibat bi-Dimashq fī Awākhir al-'Ahd Al-Mamlūkī, 885-908 H/1480-1502 M*, Ed. Ja'far Muhājir. (Damascus: I.F.E.A.D, 2000).

[247] Ibn Ṭawq, *Al-Ta'līq*, 1427, 1425, 1432.

frequent and recurrent catastrophe. The mortality rate was so high that at one point, the society lost around a third of its population, as estimated by some chronicles.[248] This left its mark on scholars who were deeply affected by the losses of their family members. For example, Ibn Khaldūn wrote abruptly in his autobiography how he lost his parents and many of his distinguished teachers due to a *jārif* plague outbreak.[249] Also, al-Shaʿrānī grieved the death of his parents at the age of 12 due to the plague.[250] Ibn Ṭūlūn reported in the autobiography that his mother died because of the plague.[251]

To give an indication of the frequency of outbreaks and how they affected the life of scholars of this period, al-Sakhāwī witnessed around seven plague outbreaks throughout his life during the years of 1430, 1437, 1448, 1459, 1469, 1477, 1492, and 1498.[252] Each episode was likely to continue for a couple of years and lead to many deaths in the family. Scholars expressed in their literature the personal losses they faced. For example, al-Sakhāwī spoke briefly but repeatedly about the loss of his eldest son due to the plague in his autobiography.[253] Not only that, but he reported the loss of all of his fourteen offspring. Although he did not specify the exact reason behind each child's death, it would be safe to assume that some died in their infancy due to the plague. It was prevalent for parents to lose one or more children during this time. Other than al-Sakhāwī, al-Māqrizī and al-ʿAynī witnessed the death of all of their children as well.[254]

It appears that due to the many losses the society faced, the prominence of family and domestic life was given higher value and a more cherished attitude than in earlier periods.

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[248] Jonathan Berkey, "Culture and society during the late Middle Ages," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 380; Berkey Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*, 47.

[249] Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Taʿrīf*, 57.

[250] Al-Shaʿrānī, *Latāʿif al-ninann*, 66.

[251] Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Fulk al-mashḥūn*, 27.

[252] Raymond, *Cairo*, 167.

[253] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād*, 221.

[254] Anne Broadbridge, "Academic Rivalry and the Patronage System in Fifteenth-Century Egypt: al-ʿAyn, al-Māqrizī, and Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalani," *Mamluk Studies Revie*w 3 (1999): 105.

Also, the repeated mention of family-related narratives in the historical works and other literature could be a coping method to handle the frequency of losing children and family members and to preserve their memory.

Thus, it is not surprising to see many medieval scholars involve family stories or talk about their positive roles and contributions to their family. For example, al-Sakhāwī was very keen in his autobiography to highlight his efforts and dedication to his family, as seen in the previous chapter. Also, the need to console the bereaved parents was visible in the literature as scholars wrote many consolation treaties which were widely circulating.[255] An example of such treaties is authored by al-Sakhāwī entitled "*Irtiyaḥ al-akbād bi-arbāḥ faqd al-awlād."* In this treaty, he attempted to comfort grieving parents and provide a religious guide on how to handle the tragedy of losing one's child based on his experience.

By all means, the inclination towards self-expression and self-representation in the intellectual atmosphere of the period coupled with the desire to talk about personal and family life seemed to have influenced the rise of the autobiography. In fact, the art of writing an autobiography, by definition, is the ultimate self-representation channel an author can utilize. It provided a medium through which a scholar can freely express himself and portray any desired self-image. For example, Ibn Khaldūn selected to represent his life through the various journeys he endured. This allowed him to show how he influenced the political atmosphere in the multiple empires he visited. Al-Sakhāwī chose to present himself as the best in his family, with the rest of the members gravitating towards him as the remaining keeper of traditional knowledge in Cairo. Al-Suyūṭī, on the other hand, was not satisfied with any ranking less than being the greatest *mujtahid* of the century; his autobiography prompts this image and addresses the attacks and refutations that might have tarnished this

[255]Avner Gilʿadi, "The Child Was Small... Not So the Grief for Him: Sources, Structure, and Content of Al-Sakhāwī's Consolation Treatise for Bereaved Parents," *Poetics Today* 14, no. 2 (1993): 367.

classification. Ibn Ṭūlūn was surprisingly very reluctant to express himself freely, in the autobiography. The autobiography shows no clear self-representation other than Ibn Ṭūlūn prolific ability and contribution to Islamic knowledge through the many books he authored. Al-Shaʿrānī believed that he reached a divine state that no other contemporary had approached, and his autobiography was an enumeration of evidence that proved his superior spiritual status.

In short, the medieval autobiography provided a unique and valuable medium through which scholars can pursue the rising inclinations to speak about the self and express the struggles they went through. Writing an autobiography requires the author to put himself at the center of attention and focus on contemporary events he witnessed. Thus, it was only natural for autobiographies to thrive during this period, which beheld shifts in the intellectual atmosphere to focus more on local history and self-expression.[256]

Fluidity of Genres

The overall intellectual atmosphere that promoted self-expression through personal and family narratives in various literature led to another development, which is "blurring of lines" between history and autobiography. This fluidity between the genres, according to Rapoport, was very prominent in some works of the fifteenth century.[257] The unclear distinction encouraged the creation of innovative sub-genres such as diaries, memories, and autobiographies and elevated the significance of such genres. In other words, these types of self-representation texts were perceived as historical works that were of value to a wider spectrum of readers. Thus, writing an autobiography was not seen as an individual act of self-representation, but it was more positively perceived, or at least wished to be perceived, as contributing work to the field of history. As shown earlier, Ibn Khaldūn clearly stated that he

[256] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 96.
[257] Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," 3.

envisioned his autobiography to serve as a historical source.[258] Furthermore, Ibn Ṭūlūn said that he reluctantly wrote his autobiography because the famous Damascus historian al-Nuʿīmī (1422/845 AH - 1520/927 AH) obliged him to write it. Among the reasons that al-Shaʿrānī mentioned for writing the autobiography is to provide later historians with a source for information.[259] Also, during this period, the tradition of writing an autobiography was often positioned and framed as a duty to serve Islamic scholarship and educate later generations. This enabled traditional scholars like al-Sakhāwī, al-Suyūṭī, and Ibn Ṭūlūn to freely write their autobiographies, which was something only Sufi and non-traditional scholars pursued in earlier periods like the tenth century.[260]

Thus, the increased amount of self-representation and family narratives led to the fluidity of genres during this period. Consequently, this allowed medieval autobiography, which was often described as a mere curriculum vitae, to encapsulate other aspects like family narratives and historical events. This re-positioned and re-classified the autobiography in a way that encouraged various traditional scholars to pursue it.

Public versus Private Readership

Apart from the fluidity between the genres, the incorporation of self-representation and family narratives in the literature of the period blurred the distinction between public and private texts, which questioned the readership of these texts. As some scholars included scandalous and very intimate stories about their families and close acquaintances, like the case of Ibn al-Ṭawq's *al-taʿlīq*, it became unclear who was the intended audience of such texts. In other words, were these types of text meant to be circulating among the public audience or to be read in the privacy of the author's home by a selected audience. This introduced the idea that some medieval texts written during this period could be classified as

[258] Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Taʻrīf*, 302.
[259] Al-Shaʿrānī, *Latāʿif al-Minan*.
[260] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 96.

semi-private texts written with a selected audience in mind rather than the public audience.[261] These semi-private texts were more reflective in nature as scholars could freely express their opinions towards their family and acquaintances and direct any criticism or attacks without worrying about the consequences.[262] Most importantly, they showed glimpses of the authors' vulnerability and private characters.

Having said that, there was never any confusion about the intended audience of medieval autobiographies; it was undoubtedly written for the wider public. However, the existence of private and semi-private texts seemed to have indirectly affected the scope and content of autobiographies during this period. It appears that the presence of private readership influenced the scholars to view the previously "proper" typical medieval autobiographical account as insufficient. The self-biographical entry drastically expanded into an independent autobiography that showed a degree of vulnerability and details about the author's life and character, which could not have been publicly accepted in earlier centuries. Let us not forget that many of these autobiographies, like the four autobiographies highlighted in this research, were written towards the end of the scholars' lives. During this phase, the authors were retired from the public domain, which made them more open to showing their vulnerability and private characters. There were also less reserved to speak about other scholars.

This characteristic was evident in the case of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography. For example, al-Sakhāwī spoke freely about the evil deeds of his sister-in-law describing her to be "the daughter of an ill-tempered mother" and that her brother "suffered from her sulking."[263] He also expressed remorse for not gaining any inheritance from his deceased

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[261] Li Guo, "Book Review: Ibn Ṭawq, Al-Taʿlīq: Yawmīyāt Shihāb al-Dīn Ahmad Ibn Ṭawq," *Mamluk Studies Review* 12, no.1 (2008): 210.

[262] Guo, "Ibn Ṭawq, Al-Taʿlīq," 213.

[263] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 393, 687.
ذلك مع اشتغال فكره بمقاساة نكد زوجته أم أولاده - و هي ابنة أمة سيئة العشرة حتى مل و اكتسب أمراضا باطنية

mother except her luggage![264] Furthermore, he freely showed his emotions in the autobiography for example he recalled, "a friend, informed me that my brother is well and he misses me, so I started to cry."[265] Ibn Khaldūn also expressed in his autobiography how he was more motivated by money during his young age.[266] In addition, he acknowledged his need to take time and recover after the death of his wife and two daughters at sea. Another example is found in al-Suyūṭī's autobiography in which he expressed how he used to value certain books in his youth that he viewed now unworthy of attention and how his earlier books were not very promising.[267] In short, the existence of private readership led to the expansion of autobiographies, making them richer resources to read, as the genre was open to incorporate various private and personal narratives. Along with these more elaborate and personal autobiographies, more traditional and less personal autobiographies like Ibn Ṭūlūn's still existed.

Popular Culture

Apart from the rise in biographical dictionaries, self-representations, fluidity of the genres, and appearance of private readership, another development in the intellectual atmosphere is the spread of popular culture and vernacular forms of writing. This development will be examined to investigate a possible connection between it and the rise of autobiography.

In examining Mamluk historiography, Li Guo highlighted that chronicles written during the Mamluk period contained an increased reference to anecdotes and popular motifs, which were usually narrated in vernacular language.[268] Robinson also indicated that the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries marked the widespread appearance of vernacular language

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[264] Ibid., 229.

[265] Ibid., 272. أعلمني بعافيه أخي و كثرة شوقه إلى فبادرني البكاء

[266] Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Taʿrif,* 323.

[267] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth bi niʿmat Allah,* 105.

[268] Li Guo, "Tales of a Medieval Cairene Harem: Domestic Life in al-Biqāʿī's Autobiographical," *Mamluk Studies Review* 9 no. 1, (2005): 34.

in Mamluk historical texts.[269] In other words, a degree of vernacular words and phrases were accepted in respectable historical texts.[270] With time, popular culture and vernacular forms were accepted even in the court culture during this period.[271] Thus, what distinguished the production of this period is the fluid distinction between popular and classical literature, as it was acceptable to use both in the same work.[272] The chronicle of Ibn Iyās's *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr* is an example of such style in writing in which Ibn Iyās chose to include many narrations in the colloquial language despite his mastery of classical Arabic.[273]

There were many suggestions to explain the tendency to use colloquial language instead of or along with classical Arabic. Guo identified two main reasons behind this phenomenon. First, he suggested that the diversity of authorship due to the spread of education resulted in the emergence of new forms and styles covering high *adab*, gossip and entertainment literature where the colloquial language was more suitable.[274] The second reason introduced by Guo is that the process of history production in terms of writing and circulation changed during this period. It shifted towards a more "public participation" and increased popularity which allowed editors, copyists, and authors to later insert personal elements and Egyptian slang into the original texts to make it more accessible to broader readership and audience.[275] On the other hand, Elbendary interpreted the rise of popular culture and the use of vernacular expressions in the literature to reflect the decentralization of the government control over the empire and the spread of education among commoners.[276] In addition, the absence of a major mainstream Islamic nation after the fall of the Abbasid

[269] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 100.
[270] Ibid.
[271] Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*, 75.
[272] Petry, *Protectors Or Praetorians*, 6.
[273] Guo, "Domestic Life in al-Biqāʿī's Autobiographical," 41.
[274] Ibid., 34.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*, 31

Caliphate could have played a role in allowing regional empires to integrate their own popular literature and themes into high culture.[277]

Popular culture did indeed allow for including a wider spectrum of the urban population in historical texts written during al-Sakhāwī's time. For example, the protests of the simple silk weavers and glassmakers were recorded in Ibn Iyās and Ibn Ṭūlūn chronicles.[278] Thus, unlike the classical *taʾrīkh* period, Mamluk historical texts focused not only on Sultans and influential scholars but also on ordinary men of humble origin.[279] Furthermore, the rise in popular culture increased the readership and led to a wide circulation of popular literature. Among the famous popular works of the Circassian period are *Alf Layla* and *Sīrat al-Ẓāhir Baybars*, *Sayf bin dhi Yazan* and *Dhat al-himma*.[280]

This wider spectrum of audience for popular culture must have contributed to the high production of chronicles and other history-related genres, as they were more in demand by the urban population.[281] This might suggest that the rise in popular culture had contributed to the art of medieval autobiography. However, upon studying al-Sakhāwī's autobiography and the other four, I did not come across any evidence or inclination suggesting that these autobiographies were affected by the rise in popular culture in terms of style, readership, or objective.

First, writing an autobiography as an independent volume of *sīra* was common among first-class *ulama* scholars like Ibn Khaldūn, al-Sakhāwī, and al-Suyūṭī. Therefore, based on the latest surveys, the authorship of medieval autobiographies did not extend to low-profile scholars like Ibn al-Ṭawq, who used other channels like merging chronicles with autobiographical narratives. Apart from the authorship, the intended audience of these

[277] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 139;
[278] Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*, 96-97.
[279] Guo,"Domestic Life in al-Biqāʿī's Autobiographical," 34.
[280] Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*, 88.
[281] Ibid., 107.

autobiographies is not the wider spectrum of urban population like popular texts. However, all autobiographies are clearly directed to future generations of true knowledge seekers looking to elevate their Islamic knowledge and spiritual status. Al-Sakhāwī, in particular, was advocating traditional and proper methods and complaining about the spread of ignorant scholars. Therefore, in his case, he could have written the autobiography to counter the influence of popular culture. Accordingly, I did not observe a direct relationship between popular culture and the rise of autobiography.

As for the degree of colloquial language used in the autobiographies, it is important to clarify that examining the degree of vernacular language was not attainable in most cases as the editors usually alter the language in the printed versions. The editor of Ibn Khaldūn's autobiography indicated that the text was written in the form of *fuṣḥa* Arabic, so he corrected any grammar and language mistakes he found in the manuscript.[282] Therefore, I could not assess the original language of Ibn Khaldūn's autobiography. Since I had access to al-Sakhāwī's manuscript, I surveyed the text and found it was also written in *fusah* format with no visible frequency of vernacular style or language except in some common words like *ʿiyyal*. The oral conversations that al-Sakhāwī cited in the autobiography were also written in *fusah*. Even the notes added by al-Sakhāwī, the ones I could read, were written mainly in *fusah*.[283] Since al-Māqrizī (d. 845/1442), Ibn Taghrī Birdī (m. 874/1470), and al-Biqāʿ accused al-Sakhāwī of not knowing proper Arabic; it seems that al-Sakhāwī was very keen on the language he presented in his autobiography.[284]

It is difficult to assess the language of al-Suyūṭī's autobiography as Sartain mentioned that the text was reserved by two manuscripts that belonged to two of Suyūṭī's students named al-Shādhilī and al-Dāwūdī. The manuscript had corrections and omissions of

[282] Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Taʿrif*, (ك- بط) noted by editor Mohamed al-Tangi.
[283] Check **Figure 2**
[284] Du Grandlaunay, Édition et analyse de la première partie de l'autobiographie d'al-Sakhāwī," 8.

colloquialism that initially appeared in the fragment of text written by al-Suyūṭī.[285] This could mean either that al-Suyūṭī revised the text himself and the fragment belonged to a draft version or that al-Dāwūdī corrected the text himself.[286] According to Sartain, al-Suyūṭī's overall writing style "approaches colloquial Arabic so closely that you seem to hear him speaking."[287] She could not be more accurate in indicating that the dialogues that al-Suyūṭī included to refute his disagreements with other scholars were written in a conversational tone in an almost colloquial style.[288] According to the edited version, though, the language was not vernacular per se, but the tone was undoubtedly conversational.

As for Ibn Ṭūlūn and al-Shaʿrānī, there is no reference to the original language style because I could not access the manuscripts. However, in terms of style, Ibn Ṭūlūn switched between third-person and first-person narratives in his autobiography; his writing style and tone are formal in nature. Al-Shaʿrānī, on the other hand, addressed the reader directly in his autobiography by calling him "my brother." It appears that al-Shaʿrānī was more influenced by sermons styles, which sometimes also appears in al-Sakhāwī's autobiography. Thus, in general, upon examining the language of these autobiographies, none of them is close to the very colloquial language used in Ibn al-Ṭawq's or Ibn Iyās's works.

To conclude, the art of autobiography was affected by the change in Mamluk historiography. The intellectual atmosphere that was prevalent at the time showed certain developments that acted as precursors and facilitators to the rise of medieval autobiography. Among these developments are the focus on local history, the spread of biographical dictionaries, the emergence of various forms of self-representations, the fluidity between the genres, and the existence of private and public readership. Several examples from al-

[285] Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī*: *Biography and Background,* 141.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Ibid.
[288] Ibid., VIII.

Sakhāwī's autobiography as well as the other four texts written at the same period were highlighted to show possible links to the developments in the intellectual atmosphere. Thus, it appears that these various developments, to varying degrees, have contributed to creating a suitable environment for the medieval autobiography to thrive.

Developments in the *Ulama* Class

The previous part showed that certain developments in the Mamluk intellectual atmosphere enabled certain literary genres to appear, among which is the medieval autobiography. However, the availability and existence of such a genre did not mean that scholars would pursue it. The decision to write an autobiography appears to be further triggered by shifts that affected the *ulama* class and personally touched the lives of these scholars. Thus, in the next part of this chapter, I will examine the conditions and developments in the *ulama* social class during the fifteenth century in an attempt to identify potential catalysts in the circumstances of the *ulama* class that drove some scholars to write an autobiography. The following section will briefly analyze the developments that affected the *ulama* class during this period. A particular focus will be given to the shift in the *ulama* hierarchy, the rise in academic rivalry and competition, and the instability in academic careers. The potential links between these developments and the need to write an autobiography will be examined.

The Ulama Society: a Class Reshaped

As discussed in the introduction of this chapter, the fifteen century is described by some scholars to have witnessed a high degree of social flux due to the difficult circumstances and accompanying shifts in the policies implemented by the Circassian Sultans.[289] In fact, the ability to move between classes and join circles closer to the authority

[289] Meloy, "The Privatization of Protection," 196; Raymond, *Cairo*, 195-196;

was more attainable than the earlier Bahri period.[290] Furthermore, the economic crises and the decentralization of the administration that took place created many opportunities for emerging political and social groups, which eventually led to the rise and decline of many classes.[291]

Accordingly, this time marked a visible shift in the background of the *ulama* class as part of the social flux that affected the entire society. Berkey suggested that this time witnessed a more "democratized education" system in which the entry barriers were minimal.[292] This, in part, was due to the high number of religious institutions, which according to Berkey, was roughly more than two hundred, ranging from mosques, *madrasa,* and Sufi orders.[293] In addition, a study of *awqāf* endowment during the Circassian period showed that the money endowed for sponsoring educational institutions did not significantly decrease from the funds during the "golden" Bahri dynasty, and new establishments were being created.[294] For example, Qāytbāy invested heavily in building and sponsoring massive religious complexes.[295] Thus, there was wider access to education, making it more attainable to commoners and people of humble origin. Accordingly, ordinary men of humble origins had the opportunity to access influential positions through the spread of educational institutions.[296] Also, due to the shortage of skilled artisans, craftsmen increased their wages and gained wealth which enabled them to buy official and religious positions and move up the social ladder to be close to the *ulama* class.[297] Eventually, some craftsmen joined the

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[290] Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "Craftsmen, Upstarts and Sufis in the Late Mamluk Period," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 74, no. 3 (2011), 375.

[291] Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*, 1.

[292] Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education (*New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 181-188.

[293] Ibid., 304.

[294] Berkey, "Culture and society during the late Middle Ages, 405.

[295] M. Sobernheim and E. and Ashtor, Qāyyit Bāy. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition.

[296] Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*, 47.

[297] Mortel, "The Decline Of Mamlūk Civil Bureaucracy in The Fifteenth Century," 174.

intellectual community, and many of them became scholars, administrators, and official agents, as stated in the chronicles.[298]

It is important to note that, in general, *ulama* class never consisted of a homogenous group as their expertise and learning experiences would differ according to their background, circumstances, and interests. However, most scholars in the Bahri Mamluk and early Circussain period came from well-off, privileged families in which scholarship was inherently important, practiced from one generation to another.[299] For example, Berkey indicated that many scholars came from merchants' families like Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalanī, who was a descendant of a Karimi merchant family.[300] Furthermore, Berkey highlighted that such *ulama* class appeared to have been governed by an informal hierarchy of a circle of well-esteemed and influential *ulama* who ensured the autonomy of the class, held power to appoint junior scholars, and resolve any disputes within the network of scholars.[301] This suggests that an accepted authority within the *ulama* class existed based on specific classifications such as line of transmission, genealogy, respected fame, and knowledge.

The move to a more "democratized education" system which resulted in the entry of a new population to the *ulama* class coupled with the decentralized control of the Mamluks and the unstable political atmosphere, appears to have shaken the central authority that the *ulama* class used to enjoy. It seems that the *ulama* class gradually moved to a flatter structure or that the hierarchy was in the process of being reshaped. The following section will examine how the shifts in the *ulama* class could have triggered scholars to leave an autobiography about their lives.

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[298] Doris, "Craftsmen, Upstarts and Sufis in the Late Mamluk Period," 375-379.
[299] Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background*,118.
[300] Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 95-96.
[301] Ibid., 95-96.

Rise in Individualism

In such moments of restructuring as the *ulama* class has witnessed, it is expected for specific subgroups to lose their status and consequently attempt to fight back and show their actual value and knowledge. Also, some scholars would try to fill in the void and put their own ranking and classification based on an individual approach rather than the earlier collective perspective, which is no longer enforced. This is where the art of writing an autobiography could have served as a medium through which scholars could argue for their own benefit and react to the restructuring that was taking place at the time.

In fact, with the lack of central hierarchy within the *ulama* class and the absence of a collective reference to ranking and classification, one can notice a rise in the sense of ego and pride scholars felt towards their own knowledge and accomplishment during this period.[302] The scholars of the period could freely express their excellence and superiority over other scholars, even to their teachers in some cases. This could be seen as a natural reaction to the loss of status some scholars witnessed.

In all cases, a scholar looking for a possible channel to draw his own classification and show his superiority in a medium that would surpass his lifetime had to look no further than to utilize the medieval autobiography. In fact, to varying degrees, Ibn Khaldūn, al-Sakhāwī, al-Suyūṭī, and al-Shaʿrānī, were motivated to leave an autobiography to showcase elements of self-pride and superiority over others.

Ibn Khaldūn was subtle in his approach as he did not attempt to classify his knowledge but showed his superiority by demonstrating his political influence over the rulers of the regions he visited. He only shifted into claiming a higher level of knowledge over others when recording his time in Cairo. These incidents were related to his position as chief *qāḍī* of *Mālikiyya* during which he was attacked by ignorant *aṣāghir muftī* who did not know

[302] Gülşen, "Individual and Community, Public and Private," 22.

the proper *sharīʿa* laws and issued *fatāwī* without correct religious biases.[303] Also, upon his first dismissal from the position of chief *qāḍī*, he claimed that the Sultan, although appointed other scholars, always saw Ibn Khaldūn as the best candidate for the position. He clarified in the autobiography, for example, "He [the Sultan] saw me as the best candidate for this position, but the amirs and envious scholars intervened to stop him."[304]

As for al-Sakhāwī's case, the previous chapter showed in detail how one of the main motivations behind writing his autobiography was to show his self-worth and value as a scholar. This desire did not stem from self-pride but rather a remorse for not reaching the high status he expected. It is worth highlighting that al-Sakhāwī's autobiography is filled with incidents that demonstrated the decentralization of *ulama* class and the rise in status of ignorant and incompetent figures who were not educated in the proper traditional way. Many of these incidents were referred to in the previous chapter.

Al-Suyūṭī could not have been more explicit in his self-admiration and wish to be classified as *mujtahid* of the century. He attempted to convey this using several methods, some in writing and others in actions. For example, upon claiming to be the greatest *mujtahid* of the century, al-Suyūṭī convinced the Abbasid Caliph to appoint him as a *qāḍī* in chief over the land of Islam, giving him the right to assign and dismiss any *qāḍī*.[305] Naturally, this decree was faced with an instant objection, and the Caliph revoked it immediately. It, however, speaks volumes about his desire to coerce others into recognizing and ranking him as a superior holder of knowledge among *ulama* of this period.[306] Hence, it was only natural for him to leave an autobiography to validate his qualifications and superiority. His

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303 Ibn Khaldūn, Al-*Taʿrīf*, 342.

304 Ibid., 383-384.

و السلطان يولي في الوظيفة من يراه أهلا ... وكان يراني الاولى بذلك لولا

305 Marlis Saleh, "Al-Suyūṭī and His Works: Their Place in Islamic Scholarship from Mamluk Times to the Present," *Mamluk Studies Review, 5* (2001): 7; Sartain, Al-Suyūṭī:*Biography and Background*, 76.

306 Mohammad Gharaibeh, "A case study on knowledge specialization and knowledge brokerage in the field of Ḥadī collections," in *History and Society during the Mamluk Period (1250-1517)*, ed. Stephan Conermann, (Goŏttingen: Bonn University Press, 2016), 102.

autobiography is filled with narratives classifying him as the best among his generation and even surpassing some glorified scholars of the past. For example, he proudly claimed that he authored books no other scholar could have ever written as he declared that "I was unique in authoring these books… no similar texts were ever written … contemporary authors are not capable of writing such books as it requires extensive reading."[307] Reynolds could not be more accurate to state that "al-Suyūṭī's vision of himself as a unique individual or the sheer force of his at times overweening personality."[308]

Due to the shortness of Ibn Ṭūlūn's autobiography, studying the motivations behind writing it did not yield conclusive results. The massive list of works Ibn Ṭūlūn incorporated in the autobiography could be interpreted as an attempt to document his works for future generations to acknowledge his academic contribution. Other than this list, Ibn Ṭūlūn was brief in the narratives he included about the rest of his life to detect signs of self-worth.

Al-Shaʿrānī stated clearly, in his autobiography, that part of his motivation for writing the text is to inform others of the high degree of knowledge and good deeds that he achieved so that they can follow his footsteps.[309] Even with Sufi elements considered, the entire autobiography is dedicated to self-glorifying the high spiritual status that al-Shaʿrānī reached. Throughout the autobiography, he often described a virtue or a scholarly endeavor and mentioned that no other contemporary had reached such a high status.[310] In other words, he often compared himself with contemporary scholars and ranked himself at a much higher level that no other contemporary has reached in terms of religious knowledge and spiritual status.

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[307] Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Taḥaduth bi-niʿmat Allāh*, 105.
ما أدعى فيه التفرد ….لم يؤلف له نظير فى الدنيا … وأما أهل العصر فإنهم لا يستطيعون أن يأتوا بمثله لما يحتاج إليه من

[308] Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self,* 5.

[309] Al-Shaʿrānī, *Latāʾif al-Minann*, 11.

[310] Ibid., 85.

In short, the fifteenth century witnessed a rise in self-image and ego and a need for scholars to draw their own classification in the absence of a central hierarchy within the *ulama* class and the entry of new populations leading to a disturbance in the structure. One of the mediums through which scholars could address this need and react to the potential status loss they witnessed was the autobiography. It provided a space for scholars to draw the classification they envisioned and validate their qualifications and superiority.

The Rise in Competition and Academic Rivalry

It appears that the lack of a centralized authority to referee the disagreements between scholars has negatively affected the unity of the *ulama* class. Naturally, there has always been competition and disagreements among *ulama* as indicated by Chamberlain.[311] However, the fifteenth century marked the highest point of heated disputes and rivalry among the academic scholars, which eventually affected the strength of the network of scholars.[312] This is evident from the chronicles and literature devoted to scholars vilifying one another, indicating a high level of tension. Typically, the nature of a scholarly attack would be in the form of criticizing the poor mastery of the Arabic language or an Islamic science like the *ḥadīth*. In addition, it was common for scholars to pinpoint plagiarism, contradictions, fabrications, exaggerations, and biases in the works of others. For example, true to his time, al-Sakhāwī brutally used any chance to criticize other scholars. He remarked on the lack of integrity in the works of al-Māqrizī and attacked Ibn Taghrī Birdī.[313] Al-Sakhāwī also argued that al-Suyūṭī was incomplete in Arabic grammar, which is demonstrated in his use of corrupted phonetics, misspellings, or misplaced diacritics.[314] Personal attacks were also permissible. For example, al-Sakhāwī argued that al-Suyūṭī possessed an "excessive arrogance even his mother

[311] Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350 (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 43;
[312] Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans, 95.*
[313] Walid Saleh, *In Defense of the Bible: A Critical Edition and an Introduction to Al-Biqāʿī's Bible Treatise,* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 10.
[314] Conermann, "Ibn Ṭūlūn," 79.

complained."[315]Also, al-Sakhāwī described al-Biqāʿī, who was his lifelong rival, as "[one with] outrageous behavior, calamities, disorder and holder of contradictory options, self-love, and vanity."[316] The exaggerated and bitter tone of al-Sakhāwī is evident when he argued that al-Biqāʿī should be considered as a mere scribe and not a true scholar.[317] Consequently, al-Māqrizī, Ibn Taghrī Birdī, al-Biqāʿī, and al-Suyūṭī replied by attacking al-Sakhāwī and questioned his knowledge in Arabic and *ḥadīth*.

Apart from the decentralization of the *ulama* class, further reasons could explain this high degree of hostility among the academic society during this period. Michael Chamberlain highlighted that the *ulama* environment was characterized by ongoing competition over close relationships with the amirs to gain access to influential positions and salaries.[318] Since the political atmosphere was unstable during this time and the struggle over power was intensified, the struggles between scholars was consequently on the rise. Anne Broadbridge, who dedicated her research to examine the reasons and patterns of rivalry among famous fifteenth century scholars, confirmed Chamberlain's suggestion. Her study concluded that interdependent relationships between the amirs and *ulama,* who were needed for authority in return for legitimacy, created a competitive environment in which *ulama* struggled to build strong personal and professional relationships to advance in their careers.[319]

Also, many disagreements and rivalry among scholars tended to rise over theological issues, *fatāwī*, which quickly led to personal vendetta and attacks. An example of the widespread controversies, which included the entire religious community is the dispute over whether women can see God in the afterlife.[320] Thankfully, al-Sakhāwī argued that women

[315] Ibid.
[316] Saleh, *Al-Biqāī's Bible Treatise, 9*.
[317] Ibid., 10.
[318] Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus,* 93. Broadbridge, "Academic Rivalry and the Patronage System in Fifteenth-Century Egypt," 85-107.
[319] Broadbridge ,"Academic Rivalry in Fifteenth-Century Egypt," 107.
[320] Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī:Biography and Background,* 74.

would be able to. At one point, Ibn Khaldūn described Cairo's conditions as chaotic because of the spread of opposing and contradicting *fatāwī*.[321] It appears that scholars during this period were reluctant to be contradicted and prejudiced against others' opinions compared to earlier Islamic scholars. Thus, because of the lack of a centralized entity to authorize fatwa, every party desired to be the proper source of knowledge leading to intolerance towards opposing religious opinions.

Furthermore, another factor that affected the unity of the *ulama* and led to further rivalry is the debate over *awqāf*'s liquidization affected the unity of the *ulama* society dividing it into opposers and supporters, which increased the friction and affected the synergy between the *ulama*. This controversy started when the Circassian Sultans, due to the economic crisis, succeeded in bending the rules and overcoming the strong objections from the *Shāfiʿī* judges to give legal *fatāwī* enabling them to control earlier *awqāf* through exchange or *istibdāl.*[322] Sultan Barquq was the first to succeed by gaining the support of the *Ḥanafī madhhab*, which approved the liquidation of *awqāf.*[323] During the fifteenth century, the *Ḥanafī* jurists became more and more involved in helping Sultans exchange *awqāf* and revoked them under the control of the Sultan through *iqṭāʿ* lands.[324] The supporting *ulama* were usually *Ḥanafī* scholars who were often foreign scholars of Persian or *Maghribī* origin.[325] The Mamluks expectedly favored these scholars and provided them with the needed patronage. Threatened by the Sultan's favoritism, opposing *ulama* fought for their status by repelling foreign scholars and any new population who tried to penetrate their circles; this was done by publicly criticizing or mocking these scholars through various channels like *al-*

[321] Ibn Khaldūn, Al-*Taʿrīf,* 375

[322] Petry, *Protectors Or Praetorians,* 196.

[323] Amalia Levanoni, "A Supplementary Source for the Study of Mamluk Social History: The Taqārīẓ," *Arabica* 60, no. 1/2 (2013), 165.

[324] Levanoni, "The Taqārīẓ," 168.

[325] Ibid., 175.

Taqārīẓ.[326] An example that showed the level of anxiety between the two teams was the incident when Ibn Nahid requested *Taqārīẓ* from famous scholars regarding his book "*al-Sīra al-Mu'ayadiyya.*" Scholars did write back *Taqārīẓ* but in the form of a parody mocking Ibn Nahid rather than praising his work.[327] According to Levanoni, this incident showed the high degree of anxiety that scholars experienced due to the favoritism of the Sultan to these scholars.[328]

Furthermore, Sartain argued that the main reason behind this fearless competition was that new sources of employment were being established, which profoundly changed the nature and character of social relations between *ulama*.[329] In other words, the increase in rivalry and competition is attributed to fighting over academic posts. It seems that most of the rivalries mentioned in the chronicles started with a dispute between scholars over the legitimacy of holding a post. For example, the disagreement between al-Māqrizī and al-ʿAynī in 801-803/1399-1401 was over the *ḥisba* position.[330] Based on al-Sakhāwī's autobiography, al-Biqāʿī stole several appointments from al-Sakhāwī which seemed to have made the latter very furious as he did not relent any opportunity to show the incompetence of Biqāʿī. It appears that the difficult economic conditions that prevailed during this time increased the anxiety over job security and consequently losing one's status. This led to a very hostile and competitive environment in which scholars did not miss any chance to claim the incompetence of one other.

Autobiography as a Medium to Settle Academic Disputes

Regardless of the reasons for academic rivalry, several mediums were used by scholars to settle the academic disputes and attacks that were bestowed upon them. An instant

[326] Ibid.
[327] Ibid., 177.
[328] Ibid.
[329] Sartain, *Jalāl al-dīn al-Suyūṭī:Biography and Background,* 95.
[330] Broadbridge, "Academic Rivalry in Fifteenth-Century Egypt," 107.

common method to attack other scholars and provide refutation was to write a treaty or pamphlet dedicated to this purpose.[331] For example, al-Sakhāwī dedicated an entire book to the scandals of al-Biqāʿī called *Aḥssan al-Masāʿī fī īḍāḥ ḥawādith al-Biqāʿī,* but it did not survive. Al-Sakhāwī and al-Suyūṭī often exchanged works written exclusively to highlight the incompetence of one another and refute the other's attacks. For example, al-Suyūṭī criticized al-Sakhāwī's approach towards history and challenged his competence in *ḥadīth* in a pamphlet titled, *al-Kāwī fī tārīkh al-Sakhāwī.*

Since these treaties were often short-lived and had a limited audience, some scholars relied on the medieval autobiography to guarantee that they left future generations with a credible source about the nature of their disputes and attacks. Clearly, the autobiography had a more prolonged effect on future generations than treaties.[332] It also helped that the autobiography provided space to encapsulate all the different attacks and refutations that the scholar was subjected to in one work rather than the scattered written pamphlets. Furthermore, it was written towards the end of a scholar's life, so he had time to address all criticism he faced during his life as well as justify his religious opinions and actions.

For example, Ibn Khaldūn explained in his autobiography how rivals in Cairo had spread injustice and rumors about him after his appointment as chief *qāḍī* of *Mālikiyya*, which spoiled his relationship with *ahl al-Dawla* and led to his retirement for three years.[333] Al-Sakhāwī, on the other hand, used his autobiography as a medium to attack others rather than explicitly refuting attacks on him, as seen in the previous chapter. Although, according to Du Grandlaunay, the act of writing *Irshād* in itself could be seen as a reaction from al-Sakhāwī to show his superior knowledge over those who criticized him.[334] Based on Sartain's

[331] Sartain, *Jalāl al-dīn al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background,* 131.
[332] Du Grandlaunay, "Édition et analyse de la première partie de l'autobiographie d'al-Sakhāwī," 1.
[333] Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Ta'rīf*, 378, 274-276.
[334] Du Grandlaunay, "Édition et analyse de la première partie de l'autobiographie d'al-Sakhāwī, 9.

analysis, al-Suyūṭī started writing his autobiography after the major attacks he received following his claim of reaching the state of *ijtihād muṭlaq.*[335] From the number of justifications and refutations al-Suyūṭī provided in the autobiography, one can discern that he wrote it with the purpose of clarifying his point of view and addressing the attacks he received throughout his life. Although Ibn Ṭūlūn did not dedicate part of his autobiography to mention his enemies and refute their attacks, he stated in the introduction that he had many envious enemies and few supporters.[336] Al-Shaʿrānī also referred to rivals and enemies in his autobiography. For example, he recalled that his enemies were jealous of how many amirs revered him. These enemies wrote to the Sultan arguing that al-Shaʿrānī was a threat to the Sultanate and accused him unjustly that he claimed to reach the state of *ijtihād muṭlaq*.[337] Al-Shaʿrānī also referred to how a rival would attack him in a *majlis,* but he would use the proper way to respond, which was to mention good things about the attacker.[338] Other attacks he referred to in the autobiography were related to spreading wrong *fatāwī* on his behalf, inserting wrong religious *fatāwī* in his books, and distributing it in the market under his name to tarnish his image.[339]

Hence, it appears that the scholars who lived during this period viewed the act of writing an autobiography as a suitable medium to settle their scuffles and academic disputes. Since the competition and academic rivalry was on the rise during the fifteenth century, it increased the probability of authors resorting to autobiographies to leave a long-lived credible account of their lives and address the criticism and attacks of other authors.

[335] Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background*, 140.
[336] Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Fulk al-mashḥūn,* 22.
[337] Al-Shaʿrānī, *Latāʿif al-Minan,* 763.
[338] Ibid., 40.
[339] Ibid., 762.

Turbulent Academic Careers

Other than the shift in the hierarchy of the *ulama* class and the rise in academic rivalry, another development of the *ulama* class during this period is the high degree of instability and insecurity the class members witnessed in their academic careers. Many scholars seemed to have lived through a very turbulent academic life fluctuating from being very close to power followed by a sudden dismissal. Many factors contributed to this volatile academic environment in which job security and appointment regulations seemed to fluctuate.

Careers in bureaucracy and religious institutions that fall under the prerogative of the Sultans were unstable as they relied on the patronage of the political oligarchy, who were frequently fighting and shifting loyalty.[340] This was reflected in the *ulama* class, who, according to Petry, was compelled to change loyalty based on the winning fractional.[341] For example, Ibn Khaldūn dedicated an entire chapter in his autobiography to describe the rebellion of Yalbugha al-Nāsirī against Sultan Barquq that took place in 1389. This incident led to a significant career challenge for Ibn Khaldūn, who enjoyed an excellent relationship with Sultan Barqūq because he supported al-Nāsirī against Sultan Barquq. As a result, Ibn-Khaldūn was dismissed from his position as the head of *Baybarsiyya Khanqa* and was "forced" to retire from public service for more than four years. It also did not help that, according to Rapoport, the fifteenth century witnessed the expansion of *siyāsah* courts, which belonged to royal and military officers such as the *ḥājib* and *dawādār*.[342] These courts acted as parallels to the sharīʿa courts and, thus, eventually led to "direct competition over the

[340] Petry, *Civil* Elite, 24.
[341] Ibid., 24.
[342] Yossef Rapoport, "Royal Justice and Religious Law: Siyāsah and Sharīʿah under the Mamluks," *Mamluk Studies Review* 16, no. 1 (2012): 75.

interpretation of the sharīʿa between the sultan and the jurists," which must have shaken the status of *ulama* as a class.[343]

As for the *ulama* who were in charge of administering *waqfs*, they were subjected to a possible liquidization, confiscation, or a reduction in economic revenues.[344] For example, al-Māqrizī reported that Syrian jurists had to move down positions due to the selling of *awqāf*.[345] Also, Ibn Ḥajar, admitted that he delayed the Sultan's orders to liquidate a particular *wqaf* as much as possible and eventually exerted pressure on the Sultan to convince him to maintain the *wqaf*.[346] It is important to note that Ibn Ḥajar was one of the last few scholars who enjoyed a high degree of influence over the Sultan as well as respect and fame within the *ulama* class. His struggle to maintain *awqāf* even if it ended in his favor is unexpected from a well-revered scholar such as himself and could be seen as a sign of the increased influence of Sultans over *awqāf*.

The rise in Sultan's interference and influence over *awqāf* added to the instability of the scholars' academic life as *awqāf* formed the financial backbone of the academic society. The *awqāf* deeds regulated the salaries and selection criteria of scholars in charge of teaching and supervising the establishments. Also, the endowments provided the needed funds for lodging, food, salaries, and stipends both for students and for teachers. Thus, *ulama* during this period struggled to maintain their positions and relative autonomy that relied heavily on the nature of *awqāf*.[347]

This affected the income of the scholars as well. Although the stipends varied tremendously depending on the institution, Lapidus described the nature of the work/functions as complex and varying in income.[348] According to Lapidus, the average

[343] Rapoport, "Royal Justice and Religious Law," 100 .
[344] Ibid., 25.
[345] Levanoni, "The *Taqārīẓ*," 168.
[346] Ibid., 169.
[347] Ibid., 113.
[348] Ira Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press,1984), 140.

range of salaries in the year 1325/ 725 AH was 198,000 dirhams annually for a *qāḍī*; 60,000 for an official preacher; and 30,000 to 60,000 for professors.[349] Another study on the *waqfiyya* of Taghribirdi estimated the average income of prominent scholars in such religious foundations to be in the range of 500-1,000 dirhams per month.[350] Lesser earning jobs like Quran readers and junior *ulama* would be paid 20-100 dirhams a month from *waqf* endowments.[351] Al-Maqrīizī, as well as al-Sakhāwī, commented on the low salaries of *ulama* criticizing the fact that some *ulama* earn that same income as cultivators and labor workers.[352] Also, the financial crisis led to an overall decline in revenues, including funds set aside for endowments and stipends for scholars.[353] In fact, the endowment of many religious institutions depended on the revenues of agrarian lands, which decreased significantly during this period due to the shortage of water and depopulation.[354] Even if the salaries were not reduced, the devaluation of the currency and steady increase in prices affected the financial conditions of the *ulama* as the rest of the populace.[355] Thus, scholars during this period suffered from insufficient stipends and struggled to maintain their income.

Having said that, there were always ways to offset the low income of teaching salaries. Several scholars, including Sartain, Fernandes, and Berkey, highlighted that this period witnessed a plurality of job holding.[356] Scholars would often seek multiple employment in various teaching posts and even seek administrative positions.[357] Based on her research on the Barsbary's *waqf*, Fernandes indicated that scholars held multiple positions

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[349] Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*,138.

[350] Hani Hamza, "Some Aspects of the Economic and Social Life of Ibn Taghrībirdī Based on an Examination of His Waqfīyah," *Mamluk Studies Review* 12 no 1, (2008): 145.

[351] Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*,139.

[352] Ibid., 139.

[353] Hernandez, "Al-Suyūṭī's Fatwā on Waqf," 333–370.

[354] Petry, *Civil Elite*, 27.

[355] Ibid., 27.

[356] Sartain, Al-Suyūṭī*: Biography and Background*, 129.Leonor Fernandes, "Three Sufi Foundations in a 15 Century Waqifyaa," *Annales Islamologiques - IFAO* 17 (1981):141; Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 96.

[357] Sartain, Al-Suyūṭī: *Biography and Background*, 129.

even within the same religious complex; for example, a scholar can hold a position in the *madrasa*-mausoleum and another in *khanqa* to gain an additional source of income.[358] Nevertheless, Fernandes indicated that this plurality was often a controversial issue.[359] Also, the plurality of job holding seems to have increased the competition over appointments and added to the instability of academic careers.

Another way to cope with the shortage in allowance was to rely on outside sources for financial support like legal experts, gifts, pensions from rich *ulama*, merchants, officials, or charity.[360] In fact, al-Sakhāwī referred, in his autobiography, to several incidents in which some *ulama* or officials provided him with gifts. These sources, however, were not sustainable, as seen in al-Sakhāwī's case. He mentioned in the autobiography that towards the end of his life, he was struggling with his finances and requesting the interference of the Sultan to send his books to Hijaz as he could not afford the journey to Cairo.[361]

Another challenging obstacle in scholars' careers during the fifteenth century is the widespread sale of academic positions reported by the chronicles to be a devastating common trend.[362] It was common for Sultans during this period to demand payments in exchange for appointments of important academic posts.[363] These posts were influential positions in the *ulama* class, as according to al-Qalqashandī's manual *Ṣubḥ al-aʿsha,* the Sultan had the authority to appoint teachers in the famous religious institutions like *Mansūriyya, al-Ṣālihiyya, al-Khashshabiyya.*[364] Also, the Sultan was directly involved in the appointment of the most prestigious post, the chief *Shāfiʿī qāḍīs* as well as the other *madhāhib*.[365] As for

[358] Fernandes, "Three Sufi Foundations in a 15 Century Waqifyaa," 141, 151.
[359] Ibid., 141.
[360] Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*,140.
[361] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād*, 797.
[362] Petry, *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, 472.
[363] Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 97.
[364] Ibid., 195.
[365] Ibid.,103.

bureaucratic posts, the Sultan would also be involved in selecting critical positions like the market inspector, *muḥtasib,* a very lucrative post.

Therefore, most of these positions might have required payment to be obtained, and the duration of any candidate was short-lived. The replacement with another scholar who would offer more incentive was always encouraged, as indicated in Ibn Khaldūn's autobiography, which explained how incompetent *muftī* reached their positions through buying the positions.[366] Also, inevitably the Sultans appointed religious scholars who would yield to their power and influence rather than based on their qualification or knowledge, which resulted in qualified scholars not reaching the prestigious positions they deserve. Thus, the sale of offices eventually reconfigured the political relations in a way that empowered certain administration classes to exploit their positions for their benefit and wealth due to the lack of central authority.[367] This eventually led to many injustices and a shortage in job offerings available to scholars who relied only on their knowledge and good connections.

Furthermore, the sale of appointments was not only practiced by Sultans but also by scholars who controlled less prominent religious appointments. These scholars were allowed to pass on their position as a form of inheritance. As Berkey mentioned, influential scholars had the authority to appoint their sons/friends/students as their successors.[368] Transferring a post from father to son, friend to friend, or teacher to student was a common practice, especially during al-Sakhāwī's life and towards the end of the empire. Inheritance conditions were often added to the endowment deeds of the religious institutions.[369] As the appointments of lesser academic posts were safer from the control of the Sultan, scholars of the period did not hesitate to pass on these positions to their children and students or sell their positions.

[366] Ibn Khaldūn, Al-*Taʿrīf*, 274-276.
[367] Meloy, "The Privatization of Protection," 196- 210.
[368] Berkey,*The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 107.
[369] Ibid., 121.

This ability to pass on academic positions usually had a positive effect on the *ulama* class and guaranteed their autonomy. However, it appears that during this period, due to the lack of centralized authority to regulate the criteria of selection and apply the rules, there were many violations and abuse of the control scholars had over positions. The legitimacy of selecting a certain scholar in a position was often questioned and complained about as seen in the autobiography of al-Sakhāwī.

Autobiography as a Medium to Express Career Frustration

Based on the previously mentioned challenges, the process of appointment within the Mamluk academic society has always included mixed overlapping forms of authority depending on the nature of the institution, its endowment's deed, and the period.[370] With time, it appears that the actual appointment authority became more fluid and complex.[371] Thus, it was very challenging for scholars to navigate this complex and dynamic patronage system with tangled lines of authority and sustain a stable, successful career towards the end of the Circassian empire. It also required a new set of skills that went beyond mastery of Islamic knowledge with the rise of bribery and corruption. Consequently, many scholars during this period did not enjoy long, steady academic careers and instead lived through many fluctuating conditions and academic crises throughout their lives.

Such turbulent academic careers led to moments of crisis and tension, which could easily have triggered the act of writing one's own autobiography where a scholar can argue for his case or cope with his devastation towards the end of his life. Since medieval autobiography revolved around a scholar's academic life, it was not surprising for a scholar to resort to such a medium to express his frustrations towards the injustice that he faced in his academic life. The autobiographies of Ibn Khaldūn, al-Sakhāwī, al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Ṭūlūn, al-

[370] Ibid., 98-100.
[371] Ibid., 107.

Shaʿrānī showed elements of this. One of the visible trends in their autobiographies is an expressed frustration and disappointments towards the career challenges they faced. This comes as a surprise since all five scholars, Ibn Khaldūn, al-Sakhāwī, al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Ṭūlūn, al-Shaʿrānī were first-class scholars, competent, well educated, accomplished, and prolific. In fact, many of these names have held critical positions in the late Mamluk Empire, like Ibn Khaldūn and Ibn Ṭūlūn. Others like al-Suyūṭī and al-Shaʿrānī were well revered by later Muslim scholars and have risen to the degree of influential Sufi Saints or *Shaykhs*. However, it seems that the challenging conditions mentioned above have affected their academic lives, as one can observe a degree of career frustration and disappointment channeled through their autobiographies.

Ibn Khaldūn, for example, described, in his autobiography, how others have attempted to tarnish his excellent relationship with Sultan Barquq through gaining the support of influential amirs. He also mentioned that upon his appointment as the *Mālikiyya* chief *qāḍī*, he ended the careers of some notaries or *shuhūd* who were involved in corrupt behaviors like forgery and deception to grant favors to amirs.[372] These *kutāb* manipulated the *waqf* deeds and regulations in favor of amirs to facilitate the selling and accusation of *waqfs*.[373] He recalls how unjustly a petition was sent from these *kutāb* to Sultan Barquq demanding the summon of Ibn Khalūdn before the *ḥajib al-kabīr* to examine his case.[374] The autobiography also shows Ibn Khaldūn's frustration as he was appointed and dismissed from the *Mālikī* chief *qāḍī* no less than four times. According to the autobiography, he was often removed from the position by the intervention of amirs who would sponsor other candidates due to bribery.[375] The autobiography also described how Ibn Khaldūn chose to retire from

[372] Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Ta'rīf*, 274.
[373] Ibid., 375.
[374] Ibid., 277.
[375] Ibid., 387, 430.

public life due to various career pressures. Ibn Khaldūn mentioned in his autobiography that he started writing this book while he was in *ʿuzla* for four years in one of his political escapes.[376]

Al-Sakhāwī, on the other hand, was not shy in demonstrating his frustration towards his academic career in his autobiography, as seen in detail in the previous chapter, which examined his motivation behind writing the autobiography. It was clear from the autobiography that al-Sakhāwī could not function in the problematic relationship with rulers, complex environment, and challenging conditions. Eventually, he chose to migrate to Hijaz, where he spent the rest of his life. Throughout the autobiography, one can trace his unsuccessful attempts to reach the prestigious positions he aspired within the academic society and his frustration due to the lack of appreciation and acknowledgment he deserved. On some level, the autobiography can be viewed as a medium through which he could channel his frustration and disappointment regarding his lack of academic appointments and financial sponsorship by highlighting his top-notch *ījaza* and knowledge.

There is no better example to demonstrate the turbulence in scholars' careers during this period than the case of al-Suyūṭī. Despite his success in securing an appointment at the age of 18 by inheriting his father's post, al-Suyūṭī went through many downfalls in his academic life. Al-Suyūṭī is reported to have fallen into a massive dispute with Sultan Qāytbāy as he refused to be summoned every month to the citadel to collect his allowance as *nāẓir* of Barquq's tomb.[377] As a result, he went into a short retirement of public life in 1480.[378] Another major crisis in his life occurred when he withheld allowance from members of the Sufi order at the *Baybarsiyya khanqa* to overcome insufficient revenues available.[379] As a

[376] Ibid., 246.
[377] Sartain, Al-Suyūṭī: *Biography and Background*, 90
[378] Ibid., 80.
[379] Ibid., 75.

result, the Sufi order protested and physically attacked him. This dispute escalated, and al-Suyūṭī had to go into hiding as Sultan Tumanbay vouched to end al-Suyūṭī's life.[380] Such moments of crisis could have somewhat triggered him to write about their lives and provided the needed time and devotion to concentrate on portraying his image.

Ibn Ṭūlūn's autobiography was too concise to detect possible motivations or the triggers that drove him to write it. However, he left a short remark regarding academic frustration. He mentioned that he did not pursue any position in the jurisdiction system as they were gained through bribery.[381] Also, he recalled how a Damascus *qāḍī* at the time offered to sell him a position in exchange for 15 dinars, but he refused.[382] He cited several other offers that he politely declined, but the autobiography is short of a clear expression of frustration or disappointment regarding his career.[383]

As for al-Shaʿrānī, his academic life fluctuated between high and low moments. For example, he was forcibly dismissed from his post at al-Ghamrī mosque.[384] However, al-Shaʿrānī managed to secure a benefactor that dedicated a *Zawiya* exclusively for him, which became very prosperous towards the end of his time.[385] As mentioned earlier, al-Shaʿrānī's autobiography was unique in its structure and methodology. This uniqueness was reflected in how al-Shaʿrānī dealt with the career challenges he faced throughout his life. The Sufi approach was put into practice as instead of describing such moments of frustration negatively, al-Shaʿrānī viewed them as moments of triumph that demanded thanking God. For example, he mentioned that all of the *waqf* of his *Zawiya* were protected from the injustice of *ḥukām* in Egypt despite not being protected by a legal document from the

[380] Ibid.
[381] Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Fulk al-mashḥūn*, 59.
[382] Ibid., 68.
[383] Ibid., 69.
[384] Reynolds, "Al-Shaʿrānī's Defense of Autobiography," 122.
[385] Al-Shaʿrānī, *Latāʾif al-Minann*, 40; Reynolds, "Al-Shaʿrānī's Defense of Autobiography," 122.

Sultan.[386] He acknowledged that there were many injustices and attacks among his contemporaries that he disapproved of but that he mentioned that he did not resort to *ḥukām* in case someone tried to gain his home, his daily *rizq*, or *Zawiya*.[387] The conclusion of the autobiography is dedicated to enumerating the academic challenges al-Shaʿrānī went through. He was proud to label himself a magnet for *balaāʿ* and congratulated himself as he managed to overcome these dire circumstances without spoiling his spirit.[388]

In short, many Mamluk scholars struggled with the complex and dynamic patronage system during this period and the instability of bureaucratic and academic positions. Towards the end of their lives, some scholars were no longer interested in public life and directed their energy into writing. These periods of solitude and similar moments of crisis triggered some scholars to write their own autobiography in which they could channel the academic frustration they felt and display their impressive credentials and true value. Thus, some autobiographies can be viewed as a reaction to the various academic frustrations and widespread pressures during this period. The Medieval autobiography provided a medium through which scholars could freely portray themselves in a positive light despite the academic struggles they went through, and accordingly, more scholars were engaged in the practice.

In conclusion, this chapter attempted to examine the reasons behind the popularity of medieval autobiography during the fifteenth century. To address this question, the broader development in the intellectual atmosphere and the shifts in the *ulama* class were analyzed. Based on certain developments that took place in these two dimensions, the right environment was created for the genre of autobiographies to flourish. First, Medieval Mamluk scholars lived in an intellectual atmosphere that focused on contemporary events and

386 Ibid., 40.
387 Al-Shaʿrānī, *Latāʾif al-Minann*, 40, 35.
388 Ibid., 41.

biographical accounts, which encouraged various forms of self-representations to appear in literary production. Therefore, several types of sub-genres appeared and flourished, among which is the medieval autobiography.

Furthermore, the increase of personal and family narratives in the texts led to a more fluidity between the genres and the appearance of private readership, which empowered the genre of autobiography to expand and gain more significance. With the existence and acceptance of such a genre, it took only a trigger or more to initiate the act of writing an autobiography. These triggers were abundant during this period as the *ulama* class went through many challenges such as the entry of a new population, a shift in their informal central hierarchy, a rise of academic competition and rivalry, and a high degree of career instability and insecurity. During these tense moments of crisis, several scholars resorted to writing an autobiography to leave a credible long-lived source that portrays the positive self-image they desired, validates their qualifications and superiority, as well as encapsulates the refutations and career challenges they faced.

This chapter marks the end of the first part of this thesis, which was dedicated to examining al-Sakhāwī's autobiography in the context of similar works written during the same period as well as analyzing the reasons for the rise of autobiography during al-Sakhāwī's time. The second part of the thesis will examine a theme that al-Sakhāwī speaks much about in his autobiography, his family life. Thus, a closer reading of the autobiography will be conducted to attempt to portray an image of al-Sakhāwī's family conditions, as depicted in his autobiography. The following chapter will focus on the background and economic conditions of al-Sakhāwī's family as analyzed from the autobiography.

Chapter 3
Al-Sakhāwī's Family Background and Economic Conditions

Many contemporary autobiographies included a broad genealogy of the authors' ancestors, and family roots such as Ibn Khaldūn, in his *taʿrīf*, and Ibn Ṭūlūn al-Dimashqī in his autobiography, *al-Fulk al-mashḥūn.*[389] Other authors of *tarājim dhātiyya* like al-Suyūṭī and al-Shaʿrānī mentioned a brief account of their fathers and male relatives who either were involved in the *ulama* world or have occupied significant positions.[390] However, in comparison with other *tarājim dhātiyya* published as independent, standalone work during the fifteenth century, one notices a uniqueness in al-Sakhāwī's *Irshād* concerning the details of family narratives.

The difference is that none of these examined works oriented the readers with the author's family by providing a synopsis of each family member regardless of his/her position and gender. This allowed for an almost complete portrayal of al-Sakhāwī's extended family, starting with his grandparents on both sides and including parents, uncles, aunts, siblings, wife, in-laws, niece, and nephews.

It is worth mentioning here that the Mamluk historian/scholar al-Biqāʿī left a chronicle entitled *Iẓhār al-ʿasr li asrār ahl al-ʿasr*, which included very personal information about him and his wives/concubines. The chronicle contained what is considered today as private or intimate information like breastfeeding issues, women's menstrual cycles, and disputes among the women. However, this work is not classified as belonging to the genre of autobiography per se because its main objective was to leave a historical chronicle rather than an account of the author's life. Another difference between the family information provided in

[389] Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Taʻrīf*; Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Fulk al-mashḥūn.*
[390] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Taḥadduth bi niʻmat Allah*; Al-Shaʻrānī, *Latāʿif al-Minan.*

Iẓhār and *Irshād*, other than the difference in genres, is that the family, specifically women, in *Iẓhār* were mentioned only in reference to a narrative. Guo could not have described it better when he highlighted that women in the chronicle of al-Biqāʿī are like characters in Dostoevsky novels; they do not have their own "personal history and voices" but rather existed within the scope of the male lives.[391]

Al-Sakhāwī, on the other hand, introduced each of his family members, including the women, by providing information about their education, marital status, divorce cases, inheritance, significant characteristics, and occupation whenever relevant. It appears that being the biographer "par excellence," al-Sakhāwī could not stop himself from introducing all family members.

Apart from the first chapter in *Irshād*, al-Sakhāwī also referred to his family in different parts of the autobiography, whenever relevant, or if the story triggered him. Thus, al-Sakhāwī left sufficient information about his family in *Irshād*, which provides a unique opportunity for researchers not only to study al-Sakhāwī's immediate family environment but also to trace the progression of a merchant-*ulama* household across different generations living throughout the fifteenth century. This could enable researchers to examine possible patterns and progression within Mamluk *ulama* families. Also, it allows for a deeper understanding of the potential positive and negative impact of economic and social developments of the late Mamluk period on society. Thus, through *Irshād*, one can study al-Sakhāwī's presentation of his family and its relation to other *ulama* families at the end of the fifteenth century.

Following these remarks, this part of this thesis will aim to investigate the potential of using al-Sakhāwī's autobiography as a source that could contribute to the research of *ulama* family life. In pursuing this objective, the remaining part of the thesis will attempt to

[391] Guo, "Domestic Life in al-Biqāʿī's Autobiographical," 120.

reconstruct al-Sakhāwī's family conditions as presented in the autobiography and analyzing how they relate to the prevailing conditions of *ulama* during this period. This chapter will examine the family background and economic conditions, while the next chapter will focus on marriage and divorce conditions within al-Sakhāwī's family. Thus, the purpose of these two chapters is to present a close portrayal of al-Sakhāwī's family life based on the narratives provided in his autobiography.

Limitation

The significance and importance of the family information provided by al-Sakhāwī in *Irshād* for research on Mamluk *ulama* family studies were highlighted earlier. There are, however, several limitations to this study. First, it focuses on a single family, which may not be a typical representation of the *ulama* class. Therefore, this study should not be interpreted as an attempt to project a general portrayal or comprehensive view of *ulama* family conditions during this period but rather a possible trajectory of how certain *ulama* families lived, suffered, and thrived in the context of the fifteenth century. Another limitation is that the research essentially relies on al-Sakhāwī's perspective, which might be false, biased, or exaggerated. To reduce the effect of this limitation, the information provided by al-Sakhāwī will be critically analyzed to determine whether it was plausible or not. Also, whenever feasible, other primary sources will be consulted. The third limitation is that, in some cases, al-Sakhāwī did not provide a clear description of the narratives he mentioned, which rendered some facts misleading or missing fundamental context.

This information gap could be narrowed down thanks to other works produced by al-Sakhāwī. Two particular texts stand out in providing some missing information. The first work is al-Sakhāwī's massive biographical dictionary *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*, which included a short narrative of most of al-Sakhāwī's family members. The second work is his chronicle

Wajīz in which al-Sakhāwī occasionally included highlights of the family events taking place during the yearly entries.

Family Background

The starting point in reconstructing al-Sakhāwī's family history is to investigate their origin, social and economic background, as it will guide the research on the family's marriage and divorce conditions. Thus, this chapter will focus on examining the family background and financial status by attempting to discern, from the autobiography, possible answers to the following questions: did the family come from a rural or urban environment? What were the circumstances that led to the family migration? What was the economic condition of the family across the different generations? Moreover, who was the leading supporter of such a family that had both a merchant and *ulama* branch?

Although these are straightforward questions, the narratives about them, however, were tangled and evolving. This is due to several reasons. First, al-Sakhāwī's account of the family background was rather abrupt, with no dilation on circumstances and conditions. Secondly, al-Sakhāwī did not directly address some aspects of his family, especially in terms of the economic conditions and financial status. Therefore, it was challenging to develop an adequate explanation and analysis of these family conditions. However, al-Sakhāwī included many informative details that, if put together, can be enlightening in answering the previously raised questions.

Urban or Rural?

In introducing his genealogy and family roots, al-Sakhāwī expectedly chose to start with his paternal side. He affirmed that his paternal grandfather, Muhammad Ibn Abu Bakr migrated along with his wife from a village called *Sakhá* in the province of *al-Gharbiyya* in

the Nile Delta and settled in Cairo.[392] The date and reasons behind the migration from rural *Sakhá* to urban Cairo were not explained in *Irshād.* Determining the approximate date of the migration is the first step to help one discern the reason(s) behind the family's exodus from the Delta village of *Sakhá*. The migration certainly took place before the year (1391/793 AH) because the birth date of Abu Bakr, the second child of the grandfather, took place in (1391/793 AH) at their house in Cairo.[393] The birth date of the first child, al-Sakhāwī's aunt, Fatima, was not reported in *Irshād,* but it took place in Cairo, as well, which means that the migration happened at least one year before (1390/792 AH). On the other hand, the migration could not have taken place before the year (1389/791 AH) because the grandfather, upon his arrival to Cairo, was entrusted to take care of the grave of *Shaykh al-Islām's* son, Badr al-dīn Muḥammad al-Bulqīnī, who died in (1389/791 AH).[394] In his research, Grandlaunay estimated the grandfather's arrival to take place in the year (1389/791 AH).[395] This research will expand the migration period to be anytime from (1389/791 AH) to (1390/792 AH).

The second step to speculate why the family migrated is to understand what was happening around the period (1390/791 AH - 1389/792 AH) in the Nile Delta and Mamluk Cairo. Al-Māqrizī described the conditions of the population during the year (1390/791 AH) as witnessing great evil.[396] He was referring to the difficult circumstances that society had to endure. On the one hand, the internal struggle over power between the first Circassian Sultan Barquq and the old faction represented by the governor of Aleppo, Ylbughā al-Nasri was at its zenith. Yulbughā managed to dethrone Barquq and re-inaugurate al-Ashraf Qalawun as Sultan for eight months before Barquq managed to fight back and seize the throne again.[397]

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[392] Al-Sakhāwī, Irshād, 58

[393] Ibid., 64.

[394] Du Grandlaunay, "Édition et analyse de la première partie de l'autobiographie d'al-Sakhāwī," 46.

[395] Ibid.,46.

[396] Taqī al-dīn Al-Māqrizī, *Al-sulūk li-maʿrifat dūwal al-mulūk,* 5 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiya, 1997):268.
وانقضت هذه السنة والناس في مصر و الشام بشر كبير

[397] Ibid., 5:228-230.

Naturally, such instability in political affairs led to the spread of fear, chaos, and uncertainty among the population, as reported by al-Māqrizī. Furthermore, al-Māqrizī narrated two essential incidents that took place in the year (1389/791 AH) that could shed light on the conditions of countryside villages like *Sakhá* where al-Sakhāwī's grandparents lived.

The first event is that 40 Mamluk amirs went to *Sharqiyya* provinces to suppress al-Zahiryah Bedouins who were responsible for abusing and terrorizing the countryside, *rīf*.[398] The other information provided by al-Māqrizī is that the year (1389/791 AH) witnessed many deaths due to the plague.[399] Based on these narratives, it is possible that the plague, Bedouin's attacks, and disorder due to internal struggle over power were catalysts behind the migration of al-Sakhāwī's grandfather from *Sakhá* to Cairo.

The family's behavior was not a unilateral act; there was a wave of peasants escaping the countryside to Cairo since the Black Death plague in 1348. This continued throughout the fifteenth century as it witnessed sporadic plague outbreaks.[400] An indication of the continuation and high frequency of rural inhabitants' exodus to Cairo is highlighted in the decree issued in 1424 that demanded villagers to leave Cairo and return to their countryside.[401]

There were many reasons why peasants and *ulama*, among which are al-Sakhāwī's grandparents, were eager to leave the countryside. First, the plague affected rural inhabitants more severely than the urban population. This resulted in a high mortality rate among the rural residents, which eventually reduced labor workers and affected agricultural land production, leaving peasants unable to pay the required taxes.[402] In addition, many delta inhabitants abandoned their villages and migrated to Cairo, which is in relative geographical

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[398] Ibid.

[399] Ibid., 5:269.

[400] Raymond, *Cairo*, 138-140.

[401] Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*, 200; Al-Māqrizī, *Kitāb al-sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk*, 4:672.

[402] Stuart J. Borsch, The Black Death in Egypt and England: A Comparative Study (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 53; Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*, 26.

proximity, to escape the plague and gain easier access to food, medicine and live under better economic conditions.[403]

Finally, one cannot also underestimate the effect of the Bedouins' attacks on villages as a motivation to escape the countryside. In fact, Bedouins during this period gained more power and strength, making them nearly an unstoppable force because Bedouins were not as affected by the plague as the rest of the Mamluk society due to their isolation.[404] As their ratio in society increased, particularly against the declining population of peasants, Bedouins started to take over many deserted agricultural lands and terrorize other villages.[405] It is vital to highlight that Bedouins' attacks were not restricted to rural inhabitants as they often threatened pilgrimage caravans and urban dwellers. However, rural populations were defenseless and under no protection from their attacks, thus more vulnerable.

The grandfather's occupation in *Sakhá* is not stated directly to further analyze the conditions that drove him to leave *Sakhá*. He was not a scholar as indicated from his educational training, although al-Sakhāwī tried to suggest that he obtained a high religious knowledge. Furthermore, the autobiography did not show whether he worked in *Sakhá* as a peasant or a small trader. However, regardless of his actual occupation at *Sakhá* it seems that all classes suffered in the countryside.

The findings of Carl Petry in his attempt to plot the geographical origins of Mamluk *ulama* are worth mentioning here since his research is based on al-Sakhāwī's *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ* and Ibn Taghri-Birdi's *al-Manhal al-ṣāfī;* both texts focus on *ulama* of the fifteenth century.[406] When examining the frequency of *ulama* migration from Delta to Cairo during the fifteenth century, Petry detected a constant flow, but the "data was skewed during the second

[403] Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*, 200.
[404] Petry, Carl Petry, *The Cambridge History of Egypt* 297-318; Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*, 207.
[405] Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans*, 48.
[406] Carl Petry *The Civilian Elite of Cairo In the Later Middle Ages (* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

half of the century."[407] Around 20% of *ulama* in these two biographical sources originally came from Nile data like al-Sakhāwī's case. This makes the most significant number of *ulama* who immigrated to Cairo came from the Nile Delta.[408] Also, based on Petry's analysis, it was not surprising that al-Sakhāwī's family migrated from *Sakhā* of al-*Gharibiyya* as Party marked the towns and villages of al-*Gharibiyya* and *Munufiyya* to be ranked the highest in the frequency of continuous flow of *ulama* migration to Cairo in comparison to other Delta areas.[409]

Family Migration

The region of al-*Gharbiyya* was considered among the famous Saint Zones, which have a highly developed network of local *khanqa* and *Zawiya*. This network connected the *ulama* of al-*Gharbiyya* to Cairo, particularly those interested in continuing their education. These knowledge seekers could join relatives already established in an urban house or Zawiya.[410] Petry noticed that the more institutions in these towns or villages associated with Cairo, the more feasible the migration or transfer.[411]

Thus, it would be safe to assume that al-Sakhāwī's grandfather made use of such networks in his migration. In fact, the grandfather's settlement in Cairo was possible thanks to the charity of the influential *ʿālim* al-Sirag al-Bulqīnī (d. 1402/805 AH) who was appointed, at the time, in the prestigious position of *Shaykh* al-Islam and originally came from al-*Gharbiyya*.[412] This connection with al-Bulqīnī's family allowed the grandfather to gain access to almost free accommodation and empowered him to join Cairo's job market. Most importantly, al-Bulqīnī's family inspired the grandfather by providing a real case of a family

[407] Ibid., 43.
[408] Ibid.,148.
[409] Ibid.,41.
[410] Ibid., 150.
[411] Ibid., 44.
[412] Robert Moore, "al-Bulqīnī family," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_24603

coming from the Nile Delta and joining Cairo's elite class. In fact, the family's later generations succeeded in holding critical religious positions in the state through the support of good education. Petry highlighted that bureaucratic occupations like secretary, notaries, clerks, and supervisors were open to *ulama* from the Delta, who witnessed no barriers to such positions.[413] On the other hand, major executive offices, in rank and authority, were restricted to Cairo *ulama* families like the post of secretary of the chancellery, *kātib al-Sirr*, which was rarely occupied by delta descendants.[414]

Therefore, al-Sakhāwī's grandfather was probably trying to secure a better future for his descendants by giving them access to higher education through the famous scholars of Cairo and opening the road for them to join access to the influential *ulama* class.

In short, a combination of factors ranging from unstable political conditions described by historians as a "civil war," a possible shortage in the agrarian production accompanied with an outbreak of the plague, and Bedouin raids, led to difficult circumstances for the family at *Sakhā*. In addition, for someone aspiring to join the *ulama* class, Cairo offered desirable academic posts through the endowments of massive religious institutions along with its more developed commercial and employment activities. Thus, one can see how the broader conditions of the period may have had an impact on particular families who could have calculated that urban life would be preferable to rural life during this time of crisis.

On the other hand, the root of the maternal grandfather of al-Sakhāwī, Ibn Nudayba, was from urban Cairo. He was a *Mālikī faqīh* who worked as a notary, *takasab bi-al-shahada,* and he established a small *Zawiya*.[415] Apart from the education of Ibn Nudayba, al-Sakhāwī did not include many details about his life. This is surprising because al-Sakhāwī has met and known his maternal grandfather, unlike his paternal grandfather who died before al-Sakhāwī

[413] Ibid., 45-6.
[414] Ibid., 47.
[415] Al-Sakhāwī, Irshād, 68.

birth. Also, the maternal grandfather belonged to the *ulama* class, unlike his paternal grandfather. Therefore, it is interesting to observe al-Sakhāwī's decision to emphasize the role of his paternal grandfather rather than maternal grandfather despite the apparent superiority in their education level and urban background.

The Economic Conditions of al-Sakhāwī's Family

As mentioned above, al-Sakhāwī did not dedicate part in his autobiography to describe the family's economic status. However, he left many remarks that could indicate the financial conditions that the family endured. By collecting this information and analyzing the concurrent economic conditions that prevailed during this period, one can discern a possible portrayal of the economic conditions of al-Sakhāwī's family and how they fit within the overall economic context during this period.

To accomplish this, the family's lifespan will be divided into three phases according to the patriarchal nature of the family: First, the settlement period starting with the move of the paternal grandfather to Cairo until his death (1389/791 AH - 1415/818 AH). Second, the flourishment period when al-Sakhāwī's father became the head of the family until his death in (1415/818 AH - 1470/ 874 AH). The third phase is the deteriorating period after the death of al-Sakhāwī's father.

This section will use two sources authored by al-Sakhāwī to gain information about the economic conditions; the first is his autobiography, *Irshād,* for reference to information indicative of the family's financial conditions. The second source is his chronicle, *Wajīz al-kalām fī dhayl duwal al-islām*, which covered the period (1344/745 AH- 1491/896 AH). Therefore, it includes the entire life span of the family except for the last six years in al-Sakhāwī's life. The chronicle is valuable because al-Sakhāwī directly addressed the economic conditions of the Sultanate in a yearly manner from his perspective and included reflections on the policies of the current Sultans. Accordingly, examining the two sources together

would allow us to explore the family's financial conditions and analyze if their circumstances were moving in the same direction as the overall economic situations reported by al-Sakhāwī. Also, the chronicle is beneficial because it includes some helpful family information put in a yearly context and within concurrent events and economic conditions.

Settlement Period: Patriarchy of the Grandfather (1389/ 791 AH- 1415/818 AH)

It is safe to assume that al-Sakhāwī's grandfather, Muhammad Ibn Abu Bakr (d. 1415/818 AH), left *Sakhá* and came to Cairo in a modest financial condition. Many factors support this assumption. First, the previously mentioned poor conditions prevailed in the delta villages and led to the move in the first place. However, most importantly, al-Sakhāwī provided a few details regarding his grandfather's settlement in the neighborhood of Bahaʾ al-dīn Cairo that implied a very modest economic condition. For example, al-Bulqīnī allowed the family to dwell in his *awqāf* (as a charity) in exchange for the grandfather's promise to visit the grave of the *Shaykh's* son every Friday and leave basil or similar plants on his tomb.[416] From this time onwards, the grandfather was in service of the Sufi family of al-Bulqīnī.

In terms of political conditions, al-Sakhāwī's grandfather could not have arrived in Cairo at a more hectic time. The return of Barquq after his dethronement can be described as the actual start of the Circassian period. This distinction is relevant to the family's economic conditions as the period marked significant shifts in policies and practices due to political and economic challenges that affected all strata of the society and arguably have led to bankruptcy at the end of the Sultanate in 1517.[417]

[416] Ibid., 58.
[417] Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background,* 1-8.

Despite these challenging economic conditions, al-Sakhāwī's grandfather was working on improving the family's financial status. Al-Sakhāwī reported that his grandfather, during the life of al-Bulqīnī's son, Gala al-dīn, worked in a spinning business, implying that he was selling textiles.[418] This trade, which started with a small amount of investment, appears to have flourished as the grandfather later managed to educate his children, and travel for pilgrimage.[419] Another indication of the family's relative welfare during this period is the grandfather's travel to Damascus to trade in the surplus blue textile he owned. This shows that the family was in a much better condition than when the grandfather first moved to Cairo and had to rely on the charity of the Bulqīnī's family.[420]

Reading the success story of al-Sakhāwī's grandfather indicates the possibility of growth despite the poor conditions that prevailed during this period. Muhammad Ibn Abu Bakr managed to escape his impoverished conditions in the Delta, secure a residence for his family in Cairo, and start his small trade in a relatively short time. Also, he provided a good education for his children that might not have been attainable in the rural environment. Thus, the economic success story of the family concurs with the assessment of Raymond, Meloy, and ElBendary, who envisioned the Circassian period as a period of opportunities and social mobility and not necessarily steady economic decline.[421] According to ElBendary and Meloy, the merchants class was not part of the suggested classes that moved up the ladder; however, it appears that small merchants like al-Sakhāwī's grandfather benefited from the social flux that prevailed during this period. A possible catalyst behind the success of Mohammed Ibn Abu Bakr is that the first six years after his settlement, the economic conditions were stable, and Cairo was plague-free, according to al-Sakhāwī's chronicle.

[418] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 62-63.
[419] Ibid.
[420] Al-Sakhawi's, *Irshad,* 62.
[421] Meloy, "The Privatization of Protection," 196. Raymond, *Cairo*,195-196;

The family witnessed much turbulence after these six years. For example, during the year (1394/797 AH), the economic conditions deteriorated due to several outbreaks, and the rise of prices became unbearable in (1387/789 AH) leading to the disappearance of bread for seven days.[422] Sultan Barquq had to intervene and distribute bread in *Zawiyas* to prevent famine, but this did not help much as the population endured many catastrophes during the following period.[423] Surprisingly, there is no reference or evidence that the family suffered despite these economic challenges. On the contrary, his grandfather refused to take a grant from a colleague of around 400 gold dinar to expand his trade, suggesting that the family was not financially struggling, as one would expect during such deteriorating conditions.[424]

One possible explanation is that the grandfather belonged to the class of small-scale merchants with limited funds. Therefore, he was not the main target of these new policies and exploitation of the state, which applied more to wealthy and influential merchants like Karimi families. Hence, autobiographical texts such as *Irshād* shed light on a dimension not usually available in other texts, namely how individual or family experiences did not constantly develop in parallel to the general conditions of the period.

In conclusion, despite the difficult economic conditions and the unstable political atmosphere al-Sakhāwī's grandfather lived through, he succeeded in transferring the family from rural to urban city and re-establish himself again in urban Cairo through the support of the connections. He managed to join the Cairo labor market, work in textile, and eventually own a small business that he passed on to his eldest son. He managed to move the family from the peasant class to the class of humble merchants with enough means to expand and flourish. He also attempted to join the *ulama* class through the investment he dedicated for the eldest son, who reached adequate progress through his higher education. However, this

[422] Al-Sakhāwī, *Wajīz*, 315, 321. - increase in prices continued although the Nile level was good.

[423] See *Wajīz*, 329, 371-372, 376-377, 382, 407, 808. Number of deaths in Asyut was 10,000 and other villages 5,100 and \ major plague in 813 resulted in many villages in Damascus and Cairo could not find someone to cultivate it. .

[424] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 62-63.

prophecy was not fulfilled due to the plague that took the eldest son's life—leaving only one son who has to continue working in the trade to sustain the family.

Flourishing Period: Patriarchy of the Father (1415/818 AH -1470/ 874 AH)

The economic condition of the family shifted after the death of al-Sakhāwī's grandfather. However, the shift was moving in the opposite direction of the general deteriorating economic conditions reported by the chronicles. In fact, it appears that the family financial status significantly improved when al-Sakhāwī's father, 'Abdul Rahman became the head of the family during the period (1415/818 AH -1470/ 874 AH).

At 18 years old, the father took over the family business to support his family, including his wife, three sons, mother, and sister through working in the textile trade.[425] During this time, the overall economic atmosphere and monetary system were not very stable. It fluctuated between elevated prices, scarcity and inflation of the currency, spread of false *fulūs*, and other factors. The economic policies enforced by the administration were arbitrarily changing in reaction to a shortage in cash, warfare, drought, and other factors. However, it was not moving in a steady declining trajectory as will be showcased through the changing financial conditions of al-Sakhāwī's grandfather, who flourished financially despite the economic challenges. Like the grandfather's case, the sporadic improvement periods allowed for opportunities for economic growth and prosperity for several communities and classes, among which is al-Sakhāwī's father.

This close examination of the particular case allows us to see a more natural interpretation of this period and not judge it on a holistic deterioration scale. Clearly, the father seized the periods of intermediate stability to flourish. To further analyze the economic success of the father in comparison with the overall declining economic conditions of the

[425]Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād*, 66.

Sultanate, the years could be grouped into the following periods based on the economic conditions mentioned in *Wajīz*.

Early Period (1415/818 AH - 1454/858 AH)[426]

Still under the patriarchy of al-Sakhāwī's father, the broader economic conditions were as follows. Among the declining conditions that could have affected the family's economic conditions as reported by al-Sakhāwī in his chronicle are the repeated plague outbreaks during the period as well as the rise in market prices during the years (1415/818 AH), (1449/853 AH), and (1450/854 AH) due to shortage in the Nile water leading to a famine in (1450/854 AH).[427] There was also a Bedouin attack on pilgrimage Caravan in (1438/842 AH) in which al-Sakhāwī's father was traveling along, as stated in *Wajīz*.[428]

However, despite these challenges, one gets the impression, from al-Sakhāwī, that the state's overall economic conditions and stability were relatively well-controlled and manageable. He often ended his entry by stating that the Sultan intervened to stop the increase in market prices or distributed charity and food during famine and ordered his armies to follow.[429] He even reported a significant improvement in the market prices in the year (1452/856 AH).[430] Some scholars reflected on this period and argued that trade activities were flourishing again by the end of Barsbay's reign, and Egypt monopolized the spice trade.[431] Therefore, it is actually not surprising to find out that most of the financial success gained by al-Sakhāwī's father was accomplished during this period.

The evidence of his enhanced financial conditions is demonstrated through various events. Al-Sakhāwī's father managed in the year (1431-2/ 835 AH) to purchase a house and

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[426] Sultans during this period were al-Mu'ayad Shaykh, Barsbāy, and Jaqmaq.

[427] Al-Sakhāwī, *Wajīz*, 437, 441, 456, 460, 507; Note: plagues occurred during the years: (1415/818), (1416/819) (1419/822 AH), (1420/823 AH), (1429/833 AH) (major episode), (1437/841 AH), (1438/842) , (1444/848), and (1449/853).

[428] Ibid., 562-3.

[429] Ibid., 437, 633, 646-647.

[430] Ibid., 665.

[431] AlSayyad, *Cairo: Histories of a City*, 125.

move the family's residence from the charitable dwelling of al-Bulqīnī's to their own private home. Also, he provided relatively extensive religious studies and training for his three children, especially the oldest, al-Sakhāwī, who during the period (1431/835 AH - 1438/842 AH) changed five different *makātib* or *kutāb* to guarantee the quality of his education.[432] The father also allocated for al-Sakhāwī some silver dirhams as pocket money during his education.[433] Also, al-Sakhāwī reported that his father spent considerable money on al-Sakhāwī's marriage that took place in (1444/848 AH). The father continued to financially support al-Sakhāwī and his children throughout his life in order for al-Sakhāwī to devote all his attention to further religious training and teaching.[434] Al-Sakhāwī's father also is reported to have gone on pilgrimage many times, one of which is reported to have taken place in (1438/842 AH).[435] He also sponsored al-Sakhāwī on his first pilgrimage to Mecca in (1452/856 AH) in which he stayed in Hijaz for seven months to study.[436]

*Shifting Period (*1455/*859 AH - 1460/864 AH)*[437]

Al-Sakhāwī's views about the stability of the Mamluk empire, in his chronicle, slightly shifted starting the year (1455/859 AH). The family during this time was still under the patriarchy of al-Sakhāwī's father. The family witnessed during this year a plague outbreak and a *julbān's* riot in which they attacked merchants and stole goods from the market.[438] From this time onwards, the attacks of *julbān* continued particularly throughout the reign of Īnāl**.** For example, their violence was repeated the following year, (1456/860 AH), on a grander scale, leading to increased market prices.[439] The conditions did not improve in (1457/861 AH); the year witnessed an attack from Bedouins on the periphery of Cairo, and

[432] Du Grandlaunay, "*Irshād al-Ghāwī,* 190-193.
[433] Ibid., 83.
[434]Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 110.
[435] Al-Sakhāwī, *Wajīz*, 562-563.
[436] Du Grandlaunay, "*Irshād al-Ghāwī,* 17.
[437] Sultan: Īnāl was the ruler
[438] Al-Sakhāwī, *Wajīz*, 689.
[439] Ibid., 697.

al-Sakhāwī commented on the lack of control over the Sultanate.[440] Conditions took a drastic decline in (1458/862 AH) with the spread of fake silver currency, the spread of fire in Bulaq that destroyed many crops, shops and resulted in many human and animal casualties.[441]

Al-Sakhāwī considered these incidents a lesson and ultimatum from God to stop corruption; clearly, he was not happy about the administration of this period.[442] Al-Sakhāwī's entry about Sultan Ināl referred to him in a negative light, as a lenient ruler unable to control his *julbān* who terrorized the population and disturbed their lives.[443] It appears that what was bothering al-Sakhāwī the most and affecting the daily life of the population was the attacks and terror brought by the *julbān* who continued their riots in (1459/863 AH) and assaulted *kātib al-sirr*, *ustādār*, *wazīr*, leading eventually to a shortage in all goods; everyone feared the tyranny of *julbān* while the state lacked a powerful authority to suppress them.[444]Al-Sakhāwī eagerly reported that most people were thrilled as the plague of the year 864 killed more than 1,500 *julbān* and other mamluks.[445]Al-Māqrizī and Ibn Taghrī Birdī also referred to *julbān* as a source of threat to the city; they would often raid the market, destroy, steal, and abuse the merchants and women and children.[446]

Unfortunately, examining the detailed economic conditions of al-Sakhāwī's family during this period (1455/859 AH - 1460/864 AH) to determine how the deteriorating circumstances affected the family did not yield many results. This is because al-Sakhāwī did not refer to any economic difficulty in his autobiography during this period nor left remarks or events that would inform the family's financial status. However, the absence of references to declining conditions within the family could be viewed as a good indication that the family

[440] Ibid.,704.
[441] Ibid., 712.
[442] Ibid.
[443] Ibid.,737.
[444] Al-Sakhāwī, *Wajīz*, 721.
[445] Ibid., 728.
[446] Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī:Biography and Background,* 3, 8-9.

did not witness significant changes in their financial status. It appears that the family conditions were stable despite the broader economic conditions. Also, during this period, al-Sakhāwī's attempted to establish himself in the *ulama* world and pursue knowledge by traveling to Syria in (1455/859 AH) and upper Egypt in (1458/863 AH).[447] Since al-Sakhāwī was still dependent on his father, who sponsored his travels, this suggests that the family was not profoundly affected by the deteriorating economic condition.

Later Period (1460/865 AH - 1469/874 AH)[448]

Al-Sakhāwī's description of the years (1460/865 AH - 1469/874 AH) in his chronicle was relatively uneventful and economically stable. The major events worth mentioning are the low level of the Nile in (1461/866 AH) and (1466/871 AH) that led to an elevation in the market prices.[449] There is an inherent feeling of a significant improvement from the previous reign of Inal. This is also supported by al-Sakhāwī's neutral opinion towards khushqādim's rule upon his death in (1467/872 AH).[450]

During this period, al-Sakhāwī's nuclear family, his parents, and middle brother accompanied by his children traveled for pilgrimage in the year (1465/870 AH) and stayed in Mecca for almost a year.[451] This suggests that the family was in a good financial position to sponsor the traveling of the entire family to Hijaz, which was not an inexpensive journey. It also suggests that the pilgrimage roads were safe enough from Bedouin attacks and other instabilities that risked the lives of the pilgrims.[452]

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[447] Aḥmad Al-Ḥassū, "Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī as a Historian of the 9th/15th Century: with an Edition of that Section of his Chronicles (Wajīz al-kalām) Covering the Period 800-849." PhD Dissertation. University of St. Andrews, 1973, 90.
[448] Sultan during this period was Khushqādam.
[449] Al-Sakhāwī, *Wajīz* 782.
[450] Ibid., 790.
[451] Al-Ḥassū, "Al-Sakhāwī as a Historian," 39.
[452] Al-Sakhāwī, *Wajīz*, 773.

Upon returning from pilgrimage, al-Sakhāwī's father ceased trading activities out of piety, and he died in (1469/874 AH).[453] During all the previously mentioned periods, al-Sakhāwī's father was the primary financial supporter of the family.

The following section will attempt to analyze the conditions of the family after the death of al-Sakhāwī's father, who managed to leave the family in an excellent financial status despite the overall economic challenges, as illustrated above.

Decline Period: Unclear Patriarchy (1470/875 AH - 1496/902 AH)[454]

The family's economic condition after the death of al-Sakhāwī's father in (1469/874 AH) till the death of the brothers in (1487/893-894 AH) is a bit blurry. It is not clear from the autobiography who took over the father's trade and was the leading provider for the family. Although al-Sakhāwī was the eldest son, it was evident from his upbringing that his father intended him to become a great *ʿālim*. Therefore, the father took responsibility to financially support al-Sakhāwī in pursuing his studies rather than have him work in trade. Furthermore, al-Sakhāwī never associated himself with any commercial activity in the autobiography.

On the other hand, both of al-Sakhāwī's brothers worked in trade. In fact, al-Sakhāwī mentioned that his middle brother was successful in trade due to his honesty and cleverness.[455] The youngest brother is reported to have worked as a *faqīh* teaching *ḥadīth* and other religious topics along with trading.[456] There are no provided details on whether the brothers financially supported al-Sakhāwī or not. The question of who sponsored al-Sakhāwī after the death of his father is valid since al-Sakhāwī did not hold any official paid position for a sustainable duration. Al-Sakhāwī worked in one of the *madrasa* for a short time, but he stated that the money he received from these positions was very little.[457]

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[453] Ibid., 815.
[454] The Sultan during this period was Qāytbāy.
[455] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 70.
[456] Ibid.
[457] Ibid., 23.

A possible source of income is that he received some revenues from the family business or inheritance as he stated in the autobiography "I am content with what God has given on the hands of my father and what he left me".[458]Al-Sakhāwī, in the introduction of the autobiography, indicated that he is content to live on what his father left him. Nevertheless, was this sufficient to finance the family, especially since, according to al-Sakhāwī, the overall economic conditions of the Sultanate were more challenging than before? [459]

It is also possible that al-Sakhāwī earned money through copying and selling books. In fact, whenever al-Sakhāwī mentioned a situation when money was needed, he would sell copies of his work or Ibn Ḥajar's works to receive the required amount.[460] For example, al-Sakhāwī sold his books for 200 dinars to build a place next to his parent's house for his study, *maktab,* and a place where his students can visit him.[461] Furthermore, he sold copies of Ibn Ḥajar's *fihrist* and other books before he traveled for pilgrimage.[462]Al-Sakhāwī reported that he received a specific salary from his teaching position, but he described it as nothing worth mentioning.[463]

Regardless of the main sources of income, the family's conditions seemed to be relatively stable till around the year (1487/982 AH). In his chronicle, al-Sakhāwī expressed his disagreement with the monetary policies during this year, which targeted the poor and needy, explaining that such policies were unjustly issued through manipulations of the

[458] Ibid. أمّا أوّلاً فلكونه كان مَكفيّاً من فضل الله تعالى على يد أبيه.

[459] See al-Sakhāwī, *Wajīz*, 884 -1081. Among the major events is the rise of foreign threats and the failure of the Mamluk army to stop Yaqub's attacks and the spread of plague outbreaks in Hijaz and Egypt in (1480/885 AH) and (1482/887 AH) that led to many deaths in Mecca. Also, the deterioration continued due to riot of julbān in (1481/888 AH) and warfare with the Turks and the defeat of the Mamluk army in (1482/889 AH). However, the major decline in both the economy and control over state affairs took place during the years (1486/891 AH) and (1487/892 AH). This is due to the return of Mamluks julbān without permission after the fighting with the Ottomans in (1486/891 AH). The ʿasākir protested and took over many affairs and property belonging to Sultan Qāytbāy, including wheat and similar products. They also tried to assault the market's muḥtasib claiming their desire to decrease the market prices. This year also witnessed the rise of thieves who attacked many ulama, and killed several appointed officials of the Mamluks.

[460] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād*.

[461] Ibid., 1045.

[462] Ibid., 1045.

[463] Ibid., 758-759.

religious laws.[464] The inhabitants of Cairo also suffered from water shortage as Mamluks took the camels entrusted to transfer water and ordered them to transfer hay.[465] The challenging condition resulted in the death of many in Egypt due to famine; numerous families migrated to Gaza to escape the food scarcity.[466] Al-Sakhāwī reflected on this year (1487/892 AH) by stating that he did not witness a more difficult time in his life than the year, which he viewed as filled with death.[467] The most devastating event of the year, according to al-Sakhāwī, was not any of the catastrophes mentioned above but instead the *julbān's* attack in which they abused Muslim women, even virgins and children, which shocked the entire society.[468]

Although al-Sakhāwī did not indicate a co-relationship, it appears that the previously mentioned circumstances played a role in motivating the family to escape Cairo. This time the destination of the migration was Hijaz. Al-Sakhāwī's family, including his mother, wife, children, brother and his children, nephew and his children, decided to travel for pilgrimage during this year (1487/892 AH) despite the unstable conditions of the Sultanate. Al-Sakhawi's preference for residing in Mecca rather than Cairo is manifested as he reported, "I was, thanks to God, in Mecca, the city of safety and blessings.[469]It appears that the merchant arm of the family facilitated the migration to Hijaz through conducting trade and sustaining the family financially. The fact that al-Sakhāwī reported that his nephew had a slave who stole from him textiles from Jeddah strongly suggests that the family extended trade in the Hijaz area.[470]

[464] Ibid., 982. For example, the *dawādār* went to upper Egypt to collect money and crops and returned with many dead heads of their leaders apart from sending their women and children to other Bedouins living in lower Egypt. (993),
[465] Ibid., 1001.
[466] Ibid., 1002.
[467] Ibid., 1002-1003.
[468] Ibid., 1080-1081.
[469] Ibid., 1029.
[470] Ibid., 70.

Al-Sakhāwī's earlier comment about the conditions of Mecca and his letters from Hijaz reflect that the family was doing well financially after leaving Cairo. Al-Sakhāwī did not return to Cairo again except for a reluctant short visit upon the request of his mother after the death of his brothers, who died within less than three months apart of each other in the year (1488/894 AH).[471] During this visit, al-Sakhāwī arranged for the marriage of his niece and did not report major financial losses. However, after a period of going back to Hijaz, the economic condition of the family seemed to deteriorate. Al-Sakhāwī quoted in his autobiography a letter sent by him, while he was in Hijaz, to the chief *Ḥanafī qāḍī* al-Badrī al-Bagdādī. This letter might shed light on the economic circumstances of al-Sakhāwī's family.

Al-Sakhāwī, in the letter, complained about the rise in food prices. He informed the chief *Ḥanafī qāḍī* that he resorted to selling his books to sustain his family.[472] The purpose of the letter was to request the help of the *qāḍī* to send al-Sakhāwī's books from Cairo to Hijaz. Al-Sakhāwī explained that he could not afford to carry the expenses of sending his books due to the difficult economic circumstances he lived in, including the high costs of renting a house, pilgrimage, and clothes for himself and his children, which surpass his limited salary.[473] He followed this letter with another addressed to the Sultan Qāytbāy. This letter is significant as it explains clearly al-Sakhāwī's financial status. He informed the Sultan that he is in great need of his books, but is financially incapable bring his book to Hijaz as the money he receives from the chief Ḥanbalī *qāḍī* is not sufficient to pay the rent of the house, clothes for him and his children, and the cost of pilgrimage.[474] Therefore, these letters show that al-Sakhāwī could not maintain the family's welfare after the death of the merchant arms of the

[471] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād*, 386.
[472] Ibid., 758.
[473] Ibid.
[474] Ibid., 798.

family manifesting in his father and then brothers. Relying on his *ʿilm* alone did not sustain his welfare, especially given the broader decline in the Mamluk economy. The decline of the family after the death of the brothers who worked in trade shows that trade played an influential role in the flourishment of the family's conditions since the migration from *Sakhá*

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In conclusion, through examining the autobiography of al-Sakhāwī several insights about the background and economic conditions of his family has been reached. First, the family can be seen as a family of peasants or humble rural sellers who managed to escape the disadvantaged conditions in the Delta village of *Sakhá* and sought better conditions by moving to Cairo. The family succeeded in improving its conditions and quickly joining the merchant class by initially relying on the charity and support of the Sufi family of Bulqīnī and then on the opportunities of economic gain that the textile trade provided. Despite the overall decline in the economic conditions, the family managed to elevate its economic conditions and take advantage of the opportunities available during this period. The family particularly thrived under the patriarchy of al-Sakhāwī's father.

There were many attempts from family members to join the *ulama* class but without much success, except in the case of al-Sakhāwī, who was not very successful in terms of professional career. It appears that the high mortality rate within the family led to the loss of the most educated members of the family, like al-Sakhāwī's uncle. Also, the difficult economic conditions forced members of the family to keep working on trade to be able to sustain the family. After the death of al- Sakhāwī's father and brother, the family lost the stable merchant arm, and thus, the economic conditions started to deteriorate. Due to further challenges in the economic conditions in Cairo, the family conducted a second migration to Hijaz where the conditions were more convenient. Al-Sakhāwī lived in humble conditions at the end of his life in Hijaz and died with no offspring.

After this attempt to portray al-Sakhāwī’s family background and economic conditions from his autobiography, the next chapter will extend the portrayal of al-Sakhāwī's family to examine the marriage and divorce conditions.

Chapter 4

Marriage and Divorce as Portrayed in al-Sakhāwī’s Autobiography

As mentioned previously, al-Sakhāwī's autobiography, *Irshād,* includes valuable details about al-Sakhāwī's family conditions and dynamics that are worth analyzing. Since al-Sakhāwī was generous enough to provide details about almost all his family members, the autobiography could be seen as a potential source for the family life of Mamluk *ulama*.

The autobiography presented 11 marriage cases that belonged to al-Sakhāwī's extended family. These cases cover different generations starting with the paternal and maternal grandparents and ending with the marriages of al-Sakhāwī’s nephew and niece. The other reported marriage ties belonged to his mother's first marriage, al-Sakhāwī’s own marriage, his parents, in-laws, and two brothers. The marriage narratives are usually included in the section about the family genealogy by providing an account for each nuclear family covering the marriage condition and divorce case if applicable. Also, apart from these 11 unions, al-Sakhāwī's biographical dictionary *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ* referred to two other family marriages, which belong to his maternal cousin and her daughter. This raises the marriage cases available to this research to 13 marriage ties, all belonging to the extended family of al-Sakhāwī. Thus, the 13 marriages represented four different generations of the family spanning over the fifteenth century.

This chapter aims to examine the marriage and divorce cases that al-Sakhāwī reported in his autobiography in an attempt to detect marriage and divorce trends and conditions within the family. The analysis of the 13 unions gives insights into some aspects of marriage and divorce within al-Sakhāwī’s family. This chapter will be dedicated to examining the

highlights of these aspects in regards to authority over marriage decisions, frequency of polygamy and concubinage, conditions of divorce, rate of remarriage, and finally, the regulations of child custody within al- Sakhāwī's family. Furthermore, these aspects will be interpreted within the prevailing marriage and divorce conditions in the Mamluk society during this period.

A significant source that provided information on common trends, practices, and conditions of marriage and divorce during the fifteenth century is al-Sakhāwī's centennial biographical dictionary *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*. Several scholars used *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ* as a source to study the social history of women during the Mamluk period. Among these scholars are Yossef Rapoport, Hoda Lutfi, and Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Rāziq. These valuable earlier studies on the conditions of marriage and divorce will guide the analysis of this research and give a broader perspective towards the marriage and divorce conditions within al-Sakhāwī's family.[475] Also, Aliya Saidi has conducted quantitative analysis on the biographical entries of 608 women whose marital status are provided in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*. Through this study, Saidi detected general trends towards marriage as well as "attitudes of Mamluk society towards several aspects of marriage."[476] Therefore, Saidi's research will also be consulted in an attempt to place the conditions of marriage and divorce within al-Sakhāwī's family in light of the concurrent trends in the Mamluk society.

Two other sources stand out in studying the Mamluk family conditions, which are the famous Geniza collection and the *Ḥaram* of Quds documents.[477] Relevant research on

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[475] Yossef Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society: an Overview," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 11, no. 2 (2007): 1-47; Huda Lutfi, "Al-Sakhāwī's *Kitāb al-Nisa* as a Source for the Social and Economic History of Muslim Women during the Fifteenth Century," *The Muslim World* 71 (1981); Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Rāziq. *Al-Marʾah fī Miṣr al-Mamlūkīyah* (Cairo: al-Haiʾa al-Misrīyah al-ʿAmma lil-Kitab, 1999).

[476] Aliya Saidi, "Marriage and Divorce in Urban Mamluk Society in the Fifteenth Century." PhD Dissertation. University of Cambridge, 2001: 54-55.

[477] Geniza collection refers to documents found at Ezra Synagogue in Cairo starting in the late Fatimids and including the Mamluk period; Haram collection is around a thousand legal documents belonging to late fourteenth century Mamluk city of al-Quds. The collection has been cataloged by Donoald Little. Donald Little, *A Catalog of the Islamic Documents from al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf in Jerusalem* (Beirut and Wiesbaden, 1984).

marriage conditions based on these two important sources will be consulted throughout the analysis.[478] Studying these domestic aspects coupled with the earlier examination of the family background and economic conditions can help us reach a more detailed portrayal of a *ulama*-merchant family such as al-Sakhāwī's via using his autobiography as a source.

Marriage Decision: Who has authority?

From the description of al-Sakhāwī about his own marriage, one gets the impression that he was a passive participant in the selection process. He mentioned that his father *zawajahu* and *anfaqa ʿalayyhi,* which indicates that al-Sakhāwī's father arranged for the selection and paid for the marriage.[479] This brings into question how much authority a member within al-Sakhāwī's family had over his/her marriage and whether it varied based on gender and age.

A survey of the descriptions of marriages in the autobiography shows that the decision to marry, especially for the first time, was usually arranged by the current head of al-Sakhāwī's family. The head differed based on the marriage case, but the guardian was usually a patriarchal figure: the father, maternal grandfather, or paternal uncle. An example of a marriage arranged by the father within al-Sakhāwī's family is the marriage of al-Sakhāwī as indicated earlier. Another example is the first marriage of al-Sakhāwī's mother, whose father arranged for her marriage *zawajaha* to the son of an acquaintance.[480] The marriage of al-Sakhāwī's maternal cousin was arranged by her maternal grandfather because of the death of her father.[481]After the death of al-Sakhāwī's brother, al-Sakhāwī acted as a guardian for his children and arranged for the marriages of his nephew and niece, "*Zawajtuha li baʿḍ al-*

[478] S. D.Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza (*Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); Yossef Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Huda Lutfi, "A Documentary Source for the Study of Material Life: A Specimen of the Ḥaram Estate Inventories from al-Quds in 1393 A.D.," *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 135, no. 2 (1985): 215.

[479] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 110.

[480] Ibid., 67.

[481] Al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Ḍaw*', v. 12, 148.

mūwafaqīn,"[482] It is worth highlighting that al-Sakhāwī did not report any case in which the prospective bride or groom refused the marriage arrangement made by the guardian. The exception to this case is al-Sakhāwī's uncle, Abu Bakr, who remained celibate despite being the oldest son. His decision to remain unmarried until his death at the age of 30 seems to be accepted by the family and even glorified. Al-Sakhāwī reported that the reason behind his uncle's celibacy was due to his disinterest in material affairs and his dedication to studying, working on copies, and reading instruction.[483]

The lack of ability of custodians to refuse the decision to be married by the legal guardian within al-Sakhāwī's family concurs with Saidi's research. Based on the cases presented in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ,* she concluded that little evidence is available to show that young couples could object or refuse a marriage arranged by their guardian.[484] In addition, the reported cases in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ* demonstrate that the selection and acceptance of first-time marriages were usually decided by paternal guardians of not only the bride but also the groom.[485] According to Saidi's analysis, for first-time marriages, the prospective couple, who were usually in their early teen years, were not typically involved in the selection process nor had the maturity or power to refuse the union.[486] Although Lutfi argued that male patriarchy within the Mamluk family was manifested in their authority to accept and arrange for the marriages of the female members, it seems that first-time marriages were arranged for both male and female members equally.[487] Furthermore, although al-Sakhāwī's family did not witness any first-time marriage arranged by a female guardian, however, the practice did appear in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*. Saidi discovered rare cases reported in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ* in which

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[482] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 73.
"ثم زوجتها في رمضان سنة ست وتسعين لبعض الموفقين ، فاجتهد أخوها الكبير وأمهم حتى فارقها"
[483] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 64-65.
[484] Saidi, "Marriage and Divorce in Urban Mamluk Society," 142.
[485] Ibid.
[486] Ibid.
[487] Lutfi, "History of Muslim Women during the Fifteenth Century," 123.

female guardians arranged marriages; the female guardian was in one case the mother of the groom and in another case his stepmother.[488]

Interestingly, the male guardians' authority within al-Sakhāwī's family over arranged marriages did not seem to prevail over second-time marriages. For example, al-Sakhāwī mentioned, in the autobiography, that his aunt, who had been married before several times, insisted on marrying *faqīh* Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī despite his poverty, "*kānt maʿ fāqatihi rāghiba fīh.*"[489]Another complicated case is al-Sakhāwī's niece; although her first marriage was arranged by al-Sakhāwī, her mother is reported to have sought for her divorce and arranged a second marriage for her, "*zawajtuha … thumma ijtahadat ummuhum ḥatta faraqaha,*"[490]

The freedom that members had towards their second-time marriage could be due to various reasons. First, economic independence could have played a role in gaining this freedom. For example, al-Sakhāwī's aunt had access to funds since she bought her new husband a position in a *khanqa*.[491] Due to her financial independence and maturity, she did the selection herself and proceeded with the marriage despite objections as indicated from al-Sakhāwī's autobiography.[492] This probably was not an attainable course of action when she married for the first time, as seen in the reported cases of first marriages in which the narratives emphasize the role of the guardian "*zawajaha abuha,*" versus "*rāghiba fīh.*"[493]

As for the niece's case, it is not clear why her mother and brother, who was only a few years her senior, had the authority to arrange for the second marriage and not the first one. A possible contributing factor might be the bride's trousseau. According to Rapoport, the bridal

[488] Saidi, "Marriage and Divorce in Urban Mamluk Society," 139-40.
[489] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 65. Al-Sakhāwī mentioned that she married him because of his good reputation and virtuous nature
[490] Ibid., 292.
[491] Ibid., *65*.
[492] Ibid..
[493] Ibid., *67*.

trousseau was common among the Mamluk class and urban religious elites.[494] Providing the trousseau of orphaned brides, like al-Sakhāwī's niece, was the legal guardian's responsibility.[495] Hence, al-Sakhāwī was most likely accountable for arranging for his niece's trousseau in preparing for her first marriage, and this gave him the right to arrange for the marriage. Moreover, al-Sakhāwī mentioned in the autobiography that after the niece's divorce, her mother and brother had unrightfully taken her trousseau and he described that "they took liberty of her *amtiʿatihā* (furniture, textile, and bedding), her jewelry, copper utensils, and even her servant and sold most of these belongings."[496] It is important to clarify that the bride's trousseau "functioned as a form of a premortem inheritance reserved exclusively for daughters" and thus was the rightful personal property of Qurrat al-ʿAiyn, which explains why al-Sakhāwī reported that her mother and brother were unjust by selling her belongings.[497] Moreover, the selling of the trousseau was properly alarming to al-Sakhāwī as typically it provided a means of financial independence to females not only during their marriage but also in case of divorce or widowhood.[498] By all means, the authority of al-Sakhāwī to arrange for Qurrat al-ʿAiyn's first marriage seemed to be tied to his sponsorship of her bridal trousseau.

In short, the autobiography of al-Sakhāwī provided some insights into who had the authority to conduct marriages within the family. The details give the impression that arranging for a first-time marriage of a minor was the prerogative of the male guardian of both the bride and the groom. The guardian was typically the father, but in case of his death, guardianship transferred to either the maternal grandfather or paternal uncle, depending on the case of marriage. The decision of a male minor to remain celibate for the purpose of

494 Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," 19.
495 Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society*, 16.
496 Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 73.
"فاجتهد أخوها الكبير وأمهم حتى فارقها ،وتصرفا في أمتعتها و مصاغها ونحاسها حتى خادمتها مع كون أكثر ذلك إنما كان تحت يدها عارية"
497 Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society*, 112.
498 Ibid., 6.

worship and knowledge-seeking comes across as a rare but welcomed practice within the family.

Al-Sakhāwī's family had a more lenient attitude towards second-time marriages, probably because maturity and economic independence earned females more freedom to choose their partners. Also, the interference of female guardianship into second-time marriages was more visible. The trousseau provided by the male guardian in the first marriage could be the reason behind that. These general authority lines over marriage matched, to a great degree, the prevailing practices of marriage in urban Mamluk society.

Polygamy versus Monogamy

There is no disagreement that polygamy is permissible according to Islamic *sharīʿa*. The controversy, however, is regarding the rate of polygamous marriages within the different strata of society. Several scholars, among which are ʿAbd al-Rāziq and Lutfi have argued for the widespread of polygamy in Mamluk society among the Mamluk class and the rest of the population.[499] ʿAbd al-Rāziq also remarked on the degree of tolerance and acceptance of this practice among women.[500] Based on the Geniza documents, Goitein also highlighted that polygamy existed even among the Jewish community; however, according to his analysis, the practice was not common among the Jews.[501] In terms of the frequency of polygamy among the different classes, Rapoport indicated that the cases of polygamy were widespread among traveling merchants and scholars due to their traveling for considerable periods.[502] For example, Ibn Batuta took several local wives while he was traveling.

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[499] ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *al-Marʾah fī Miṣr al-Mamlūkīyah, 88.* Lutfi, "History of Muslim Women during the Fifteenth Century," 123.

[500] Ibid., 92.

[501] S. D.Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza (*Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), I:73

[502] Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," 29.

Surprisingly, al-Sakhāwī, who belonged to a family of both *ulama* and merchants, did not report, in his autobiography, any polygamous marriage within the family except in the case of his aunt. Al-Sakhāwī described how his aunt was shocked to discover that her husband had taken another wife while she was on pilgrimage.[503] He then described his aunt's jealousy and devastation when she heard the news. From al-Sakhāwī's disapproving tone and his aunt's reaction, polygamy appears to have been an undesirable outcome within the family. In fact, all other marriages show signs of being monogamous as al-Sakhāwī never referred to a second wife nor an *umm walad*. Furthermore, he often described the children by saying that all of them were born from the same mother, which was the same name as the wife.[504]

The reasons behind the lack of polygamy within al-Sakhāwī's family are not obvious, particularly since al-Sakhāwī highlighted that some marriages were not happy ones. For example, al-Sakhāwī's brother suffered from a rocky marriage and was always in constant sickness due to the ill-treatment and pain his wife inflicted on him.[505] Despite his unhappiness, there was no reference or suggestion to pursue a second marriage.

Several proposed reasons could be behind the preference towards monogamous marriages within al-Sakhāwī's family. First, the negative remarks al-Sakhāwī left about the second marriage of his aunt's husband imply a certain degree of rejection towards the practice of polygamy, at least from the women's perspective. This contradicts the earlier assumption of ʿAbd al-Rāziq that women accepted polygamous practices during this period.[506] Al-Sakhāwī's disapproving tone gives the impression that he also frowned upon such behavior.

This negative attitude towards polygamy within the family could have resulted from a broader preference within society. To further examine the typical attitude towards polygamy

[503] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād, 65.*
[504] Ibid., *73.*
[505] Ibid., *72.*
[506] Ibid., *92.*

among al-Sakhāwī's contemporaries, several studies were consulted. According to Rapaport, the fifteenth century witnessed many changes in gender institutions. One of these changes is a witnessed decline in polygamous marriages within the Mamluk society. Rapaport reached this conclusion based on two reasons. First, upon examining the *ḥaram* documents, only three out of 123 men were reported to have two wives at the time of their death.[507] Hence, Rapaport's conclusion that "polygamy was a marginal institution" in fourteenth century Mamluk Jerusalem.[508] Although this study is based on the population of Jerusalem, it demonstrates how the frequency of polygamy was not widespread as one expected. Furthermore, Rapaport indicates that the number of stipulations against polygamy in the Fifteenth century was frequent, while such objections were rare during the fourteenth century. Rapoport interprets this as a sign that the women no longer tolerated polygamous practices.

Saidi conducted another research that examined the rate of polygamy during the fifteenth century. Based on Saidi's examination of the marriage cases mentioned in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*, she concluded that this period was characterized by low incidents of polygamy, particularly among the *ulama* class. The records show that only 15 out of the 588 reported marriage cases (3%) involved polygamy.[509] Furthermore, the pressure against polygamy is evident in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ* from the cited disputes and objections of first wives. In fact, al-Sakhāwī reported four cases in which the first wife had literally gone mad due to distress when her husband took a second wife.[510]

Another supporting evidence that shows the lack of acceptance towards polygamy during this period is the reference to marriage cases that were conducted in *khufya* or clandestinely to avoid the anger of the first wife.[511]According to Rapoport, the existence of

[507] Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," 29; Donald Little, *A Catalogue of the Islamic Documents from al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf in Jerusalem* (Beirut and Wiesbaden, 1984).
[508] Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," 29-30.
[509] Saidi, "Marriage and Divorce in Urban Mamluk Society," 71,75.
[510] Ibid., IV, 80.
[511] Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society*, 86.

these types of marriages and manuals that describe how to conduct a *nikaḥ al-sirr* demarcate a reserved attitude towards polygamy among Mamluk society.[512]

As for the Royal Mamluk households, it is vital to note that Royal marriages were polygamous par excellence to ensure the prospect of a heredity rule. Although in concept, polygamy still prevailed within the Mamluk households, there were attempts of several Sultans during this period to maintain a monogamous marriage. For example, Sultan Inal and Khushqādam had only one wife, while Sultan Qāytbāy married a second time only towards the end of his reign to produce an heir.[513] It is important to emphasize that these monogamous attempts were entirely unheard of and rare compared to earlier Mamluk Sultans. Therefore, it is very possible that this change might have led to social pressure against polygamy among the populace to match the change in the Mamluk households during this period.

Thus, a possible reason that discouraged al-Sakhāwī's male family members from having second wives could be the social pressure that led to a decline in the acceptance of polygamy during this period, as highlighted above. The decline in polygamous marriages did not mean that it did not exist among *ulama* society. In fact, al-Biqāʿī, who was a contemporary to al-Sakhāwī, had several wives and often married while traveling to seek knowledge.[514] Since al-Sakhāwī's family belonged to the class of small merchants who often traveled for trade, in theory, they had an acceptable justification and a reasonable opportunity to entertain another wife while being abroad. The reasons for the lack of polygamy, thus, seemed more compelling than the public pressure against it. It appears that there were additional motivations for the lack of polygamy cases among al-Sakhāwī's family.

[512] Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," 32.
[513] Hiba ʿabd al-Nabī, "Al-zawāj fī ʿasar Salāṭīn al-Mamālīk," *Annales Islamologiques - IFAO* 42 (2008): 25-47.
[514] Guo, "Domestic Life in al-Biqāʿī's Autobiographical." ; Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," 31.

A possible insight from the autobiography is that the female family members often accompanied their husbands while traveling for trade or pilgrimage.[515] In many cases, even extended family traveled together; for example, al-Sakhāwī, his parents, and his oldest brother often went with their nuclear families for pilgrimage and stayed for a couple of years in Hijaz. Traveling with family could have reduced opportunities for the male members to conduct a second marriage. It appears that the female members have learned from Fatīma's case and did not part from their husbands.

A more compelling factor behind the monogamous marriages within al-Sakhāwī's family could be the challenging economic conditions that prevailed during the fifteenth century. In fact, al-Sakhāwī was astonished that his aunt's husband could sustain another wife as he commented in the autobiography, "despite his poverty, he was able to have more than one wife; oh how their time was filled with *baraka* and prosperity!"[516] One can discern from this remark that having a second wife was a considerable financial burden during al-Sakhāwī's time. Since the family was not particularly wealthy, having a second wife might not have been affordable to most family members.

In conclusion, al-Sakhāwī's autobiography represents the family as monogamous by tradition. Some families like al-Sakhāwī's, which belonged both to the *ulama* and merchant class, appear to have withheld a long practice of monogamy, starting with the grandfather till the second generation of grandchildren. The only polygamy case conducted was by an outsider who was married to the daughter.

Concubines

There are no references to a family member owning a concubine in al-Sakhāwī's autobiography or to a child born from a slave mother. Al-Sakhāwī explicitly indicated that

[515] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād*, 231.
[516] Ibid.

"رغم فقره تزوج وعدد كم كانت ايامهم مليئة بالبركة"

wives carried all the children he listed. Presumably, this suggests that none of the family members has taken concubines, or at least none have entertained one for a long duration to produce offspring. The lack of concubinage within the family is remarkable since owning a concubine was a more common practice than polygamy during this period. In fact, based on the reported cases in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ* "a significant number of men" owned concubines.[517] Also, several scholars such as al-Biqaʾī, al-Zawāwī, al-Māqrizī, and al-Suyūṭī's father are reported to have owned concubines.[518] It appears that keeping a concubine during this period was not an offensive act as taking another wife, which explains the lack of social pressure against it.[519]

Given the frequency of owning concubines, it is unclear why concubinage was never practiced or at least reported in the autobiography despite the relative acceptance of society to such behavior. There are several speculations that could have prevented the male members of al-Sakhāwī's family from owning concubines.

First, minors of al-Sakhāwī's family usually had their marriages arranged for them as soon as they reached suitable marriage age. For example, al-Sakhāwī was 17 hijra years old when he got married, while his nephew was between 16 and 17 hijra years old. Therefore, there was little chance to obtain concubines before their first marriages. The men did not pursue concubinage after marriage, probably because it was not practiced in the family history starting from the grandfathers. This could be related to the lack of acceptance of concubinage in the delta villages since the family initially migrated from there. Most studies refer to the frequency of concubinage within urban society, but there is no evidence that female slaves were purchased in the delta villages. In addition, there were financial considerations that might have discouraged the practice within the family. According to

[517] Saidi, "Marriage and Divorce in Urban Mamluk Society," 88.
[518] Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," 15-16.
[519] Saidi, "Marriage and Divorce in Urban Mamluk Society," 82.

Rapoport, there was a shortage of concubines during the fifteenth century as the mortality rate among female slaves was high.[520] Coupled with the instability in the slave trade, this resulted in the scarcity of female slaves and rise of their prices, especially in comparison with the first half of the fourteenth century when female slaves were abundant, and the practice was more widespread.[521] In fact, it is reported that even within the Mamluk households, the number of concubines owned decreased in the fifteenth century.[522]

In short, it comes as a surprise that no ownership of concubines was mentioned in al-Sakhāwī's autobiography since the practice was commonly practiced and spoken about among *ulama*. For example, al-Suyūṭī's mother was a concubine of his father, and al-Biqāʿī often spoke about his concubines in his chronicle. The lack of concubinage among the family could be because of their rural background since it was not as common in the delta villages to own concubines as in urban cities. Another speculation is the high expense of owning concubines during this period. Whatever the reason was, the women in al-Sakhāwī's family enjoyed monogamous marriages without second wives or concubines. This tradition characterized all the marriages reported in al-Sakhāwī's autobiography, especially the male members. The only exception was al-Sakhāwī's aunt, Fatima, whose husband took another wife.

Divorce

Four out of the thirteen family marriage cases mentioned by al-Sakhāwī ended in divorce. The remaining nine marriages were terminated by the natural death of the spouse. Thus, the frequency of divorce within the family was somewhat high, above 30% of the reported cases. Furthermore, it seems that al-Sakhāwī did not report all the divorce cases in the family. For example, in reference to his aunt, maternal cousin, and her daughter, al-

[520] Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," 13.
[521] Ibid., 11,15.
[522] Ibid., 13.

Sakhāwī only mentioned that they had multiple marriages. Most probably, some of these marriages ended in divorce. Therefore, the actual number of divorce cases is probably higher than four.

This relatively high frequency of divorce within al-Sakhāwī's family was not surprising as many scholars such as Lutfi and Berkey highlighted the widespread of divorce during this period.[523] Saidi supported this conclusion, arguing that divorce was not only frequently practiced in al-Sakhāwī's society, but it was socially accepted and tolerated with no stigma associated with being a divorcee.[524] To give an idea of the frequency of divorce during this period, close to 13% of the married women were divorced at least once, according to the cases mentioned in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*.[525] Also, based on Rapoport' estimate, three out of ten marriages ended in divorce.[526] He also concluded that the actual number is probably higher as al-Sakhāwī could not have reported all divorce cases within the society. The ratio of divorce in lower classes during this period was perhaps even higher based on an examination of the Jewish community in the Geniza document.[527] Thus, when it came to divorce, al-Sakhāwī's family, as portrayed in the autobiography, reflected the high frequency of divorce rates among the Mamluk society.

Reasons for Divorce

Several researchers attempted to study the reasons for the rise of divorce rate during this period. Rapoport emphasized that the fifteenth century witnessed a shift in gender-related institutions, which facilitated the process of divorce.[528] This shift manifested in the expansion of *maẓālim* courts by Mamluk officials. These courts had a more intervening rule in domestic

[523] Berkey, "Culture and Society during the late Middle Ages," 388; Lutfi, "History of Muslim Women during the Fifteenth Century," 114.
[524] Saidi, "Marriage and Divorce in Urban Mamluk Society," IV, 92.
[525] Ibid., 91. Note: 76 out of 588 women were divorced.
[526] Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," 36. Based on the biographies of 171 of women mentioned in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*.
[527] Ibid., 36.
[528] Ibid., 35.

matters and were receptive to women's complaints.[529]Also, Lutfi indicated that during this period, women actively sought the interference of the judges to intervene in their marriage.[530] Polygamy was still one of the most common reasons behind divorce. The rejection of polygamous practice from both first and second wives often led to having one of them divorced based on the records in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*.[531] It is important not to undermine the difficult prevailing conditions during the fifteenth century, including the declining economy, unstable political environment, plague, and high mortality rate. These conditions fostered a tense atmosphere leading to many fractions and disputes among spouses. Also, according to Rapport, such difficult conditions " triggered a transformation in gender relationships within families," which resulted in the rise in divorce cases.[532] Finally, research showed that women of this period enjoyed more financial independence through working in the spinning and textiles industry.[533] This gained financial independence empowered women to leave a marriage that did not suit them or if the husband decided to take a second wife, which eventually led to high divorce rates.[534]

Following these reasons, it would be intriguing to examine how they influenced the divorce cases in al-Sakhāwī's family. Naturally, the reasons behind the divorce cases varied. In the case of al-Sakhāwī's youngest brother, Abu Bakr, his marriage was always filled with torment and disputes. According to al-Sakhāwī, his sister in law was to be blamed for causing her husband's distress and illness due to her constant fighting.[535] Nevertheless, Abu Bakr's marriage lasted for at least 15 years and resulted in three children. The marriage ended when

[529] Ibid., 35.
[530] Huda Lutfi, "Manners and Customs of Fourteenth-Century Cairene Women: Female Anarchy versus Male Shar'i Order in Muslim Prescriptive Treatises," in *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, ed. Nikki Keddie and Beth Baron (Yale University Press, 1991), 107.
[531] Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," 31.
[532] Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society*, 5.
[533] Ibid., 37.
[534] Ibid., 112-113.
[535] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 72.

Abu Bakr was very sick and confined to bed as al-Sakhāwī described his condition "he suffered from the distress and agony that his wife inflicted on him ... till he was confined to bed … before his sickness he used to reside with her in '*Birkit al-Riḍá*' to please her.'"[536]The reason for the divorce, as reported by al-Sakhāwī is that "after his sickness [al-Sakhāwī's brother], he relocated to our house without her consent and she insisted on divorce until he granted her what she asked for."[537]

The second divorce incident belonged to al-Sakhāwī's nephew, Zain al-Din, who was shortly divorced after his marriage, which lasted around a year. The marriage produced a son, and the reason for divorce was due to the lack of agreement between the couple as al-Sakhāwī described the divorce "my nephew got married, but no harmony was reached, so they were separated in a short period; the marriage resulted in a pregnancy."[538] The case of the nephew's fast divorce was not unique. In fact, Saidi highlighted that many reported cases of divorce in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ* took place during the first year of marriage, and in several of these incidents, the wives were either pregnant or had just given birth.[539] This shows the openness of society to accept short marriages and indicates that children were not a factor that would prevent a divorce or prolong the marriage.

The third divorce case mentioned in the autobiography is the separation of al-Sakhāwī's niece, Qurrat al-ʿAiyn, and her husband. The marriage lasted for around a year and did not produce any children. Unlike the earlier two divorce cases, which took place due to disagreements between the couples, this divorce was due to an intervention from the family. Al-Sakhāwī mentioned that Qurrat al-ʿAiyn's mother and brother "insisted on separating her

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536 Al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Dāw'*, v. 11, 46.
" ومزيد كدره من أم أولاده مما ليس الخير فيه كالعيان وهو متجلد متنهد الى أن انحط ولزم الوساد وتوالت عليه أمراض وآلام وقاسى شدائد وتفتحت في يديه عدة أماكن ونفد ما كان بيده وهى مع ذلك تعالجه وتناكده بحيث أن مدة مرضه وقبله كان لأجل رضاها مقيما بها ببركة الرضى وكان الأحباب يتكفلون لعيادته ولمشاهدته وهي تأبى الرجوع بل وتسأل فى الطلاق ثم تحول بغير رضا منها الى بيتنا وأبت أن توافقه و بالغت حتى أجابها لسؤالها مع بذلها وإيرانها"

537 Ibid.

538 Ibid., v. 11, 173.
" وتجوز فلم يحصل التئام وفارق عن قرب مع اشتمالها على حمل انفصل عن ذكر ورجعت له حين سفرنا فى شوال سنة ست وتسعين ثم فارقها"

539 Saidi, "Marriage and Divorce in Urban Mamluk Society in the Fifteenth Century," 117.

from her husband."[540] It was not clear from the autobiography why they wanted to divorce her, but it could be because they were initially against the marriage as it was arranged by al-Sakhāwī. The reason for this divorce case appears to be unusual as Rapoport noticed that the decision of divorce during the fifteenth century was usually taken by the married couple, not the in-laws, based on the records of *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*.[541]

The last reported divorce case belongs to al-Sakhāwī's maternal cousin, Fatima. The divorce took place after the death of her grandfather, who arranged for her marriage as al-Sakhāwī indicated "her grandfather married her and after the death of her grandfather her husband left her."[542] Al-Sakhāwī did not illustrate the cause of divorce, but Fatima was 14 hijra years old at the time. The union, therefore, was short-lived. The timing of the divorce right after the grandfather's death could indicate problems between the couple.

In short, from the autobiography, one can observe several insights regarding the divorce cases within al-Sakhāwī's family. Although the family witnessed several divorce cases, all but one were clustered within the nuclear family of al-Sakhāwī's youngest brother. It started with the parents' divorce, then the son and daughter. Nevertheless, most probably, there were other incidents of divorce that al-Sakhāwī did not report. Therefore, the frequency of divorce was high among the family, matching the increased divorce rate among the fifteenth century Mamluk society. The duration of the marriage and the existence of children did not seem to affect the family's decision to obtain a divorce. As for the reasons for divorce within the family, they were either due to irreconcilable disagreement among the spouses or the interference of the in-laws. Polygamy, which was the main reason for divorce during this period, was not a contributing factor because the family was monogamous by tradition. The

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[540] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 73.
" ثم زوجتها في رمضان سنة ست وتسعين لبعض الموفقين ، فاجتهد أخوها الكبير وأمهم حتى فارقها "

[541] Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," 36.

[542] Al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Dāw'*, v. 12, 104.
"مات أبوها وهي صغيرة فكفلها جدها المشار إليه وسافر بها لمكة فى البحر فجاورت ورجعت فزوجها و فارقها الزوج بعد موته"

possible influence of courts to facilitate divorce and other shifts in the gender-related institutions can not be linked to the divorce cases within the family without examining the initiators of the divorce settlements.

Authority over Divorce

It is challenging to reach definitive conclusions from the autobiography regarding the nature of divorce settlements within al-Sakhāwī's family. However, al-Sakhāwī left some remarks that could give pointers to the process. Before examining these remarks, it is crucial to clarify that divorce within Islamic tradition is mainly the prerogative of husbands who also bore the financial expenses of divorce.[543] Cooperative husbands granted their wives regular repudiation upon their request for divorce. In the case of reluctant husbands, wives had different channels to navigate their way towards divorce. According to Saidi, *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ* narrowed down the divorce cases initiated by women to three different types, *khulʿ*, *mubāraʾa*, and *faskh*.[544] Both *khulʿ* and *mubāraʾa* did not involve the courts as they obtained the husbands' approval on the divorce. However, the difference is that *mubāraʾa* is when the couple agrees to separate without a financial obligation or compensation, while a financial compensation is provided by the wife to the husband in the case of *khulʿ*.[545] The *faskh* divorce is obtained when women resorted to religious courts and asked the *qāḍī* to grant them divorce based on some compelling reasons.[546] The *faskh* cases were used when husbands were lost overseas or when they traveled for prolonged years.[547]

Based on the remarks that al-Sakhāwī included in his autobiography, two out of the four divorce cases belonged to the category of *khulʿ* divorce. This classification indicates that the wife or her family requested the divorce, and the husband agreed on divorce after

[543] Lutfi, "History of Muslim Women during the Fifteenth Century," 113.
[544] Saidi, "Marriage and Divorce in Urban Mamluk Society in the Fifteenth Century," 98.
[545] Ibid. 104
[546] Ibid., 99.
[547] Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," 34.

negotiating a financial settlement. The first reported case of *khul'* belonged to al-Sakhāwī's sister-in-law who was granted divorce in return for "*badhlihā"* and "*ibrāʾihā*" which indicate that she excused her husband from any financial obligations he owed her such as any deferred marriage gift, *mūʾakhar*, any clothing allowance, and possibly the *ʿidda* money .[548] Additionally, the wife provided her husband with financial compensation, which al-Sakhāwī did not specify. The second case of *khulʿ* divorce is that of al-Sakhāwī's niece Qurrat al-ʿAiyn*;* this divorce is described by al-Sakhawi to be "due to her mother and her brother who agreed to have her divorced and her brother paid back her *ṣadāq.*"[549] The fact that her brother returned *al-ṣadāq* or the marriage gift could indicate that the marriage was not consummated and, thus, the marriage gift was returned with no further financial compensation provided. It also explains the hopelessness of Qurrat al-ʿAiyn and the high degree of control her family had over her. In short, these two *khulʿ* cases took place without resorting to courts.

It is difficult to discern the nature of the third divorce case within the family. Al-Sakhāwī's reported that Zain al-Dīn divorced his wife, but he did not report the initiator of divorce. He mentioned, however, that "after the divorce, the paternal grandfather took responsibility for the welfare of the child for three years."[550] This suggests that the wife requested the divorce. This is because a typical settlement in *khulʿ* divorce allowed the mother, if she remarries, to pay for obtaining the custody of her children for a fixed time.[551]

In conclusion, al-Sakhāwī provided settlement details for three out of the four divorce cases that were reported in his autobiography. The narratives give the impression that all the divorce cases were initiated by females or their families in exchange for providing a financial

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[548] Al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Dāw'*, v. 11, 46.
"أجابها لسؤالها مع بذلها وإبرائها."

[549] Al-Sakhāwī, *Wajīz*, v.3 1267.
" اجتمع هو وأمه على طلاق اخته قرة العين من زوجها ابن البدر بن قاسم ، و تحمل أخوها بصداقها "

[550] Ibid., 1267.
"زين العابدين ابن أخي طلق أم ولده ابنه الشمس ابن رجب وتحمل أبوها بالولد ثلاث سنين"

[551] Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," 34.

compensation to the husbands. According to the reported cases in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ* this was a common channel for women to obtain a divorce. In fact, Rapoport indicated that most reported divorce cases were in the form of *khulʿ*.[552] He argued that despite the common assumption that men had the freedom to divorce their wives anytime, in reality, the practice of "arbitrary unilateral repudiation" was not widespread as it demanded considerable cost from the husband.[553] Thus, it appears that the decline in the economy has led to a more monetized approach towards divorce and consequently a shift in gender power, as suggested by Rapoport. This was reflected in the family divorce cases reported in al-Sakhāwī's autobiography, as women within the family paid their husbands to obtain their freedom. The *maẓālim* courts did not directly influence the divorce cases within the family, as al-Sakhāwī did not mention that any of the women resorted to the courts to get a divorce or sought the interference of a *qāḍī*.

Surprisingly, when examining the remarks of al-Sakhāwī on the reported divorced cases in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*, Saidi noticed that he condemned husbands who coerced their wives to pay in return for their divorce.[554] However, as seen in the divorce cases within al-Sakhāwī's family, men of the family accepted payment in return for granting their wives a divorce.

Finally, it is important to clarify that scholars interpreted the increased rate of divorce during this period differently. Lutfi viewed it as a sign for "fickleness" male patriarchy that threatened the stability of women while Rapoport interpreted it as a sign of a shift in gender power relations in favor of women.[555] Judging from al-Sakhāwī's autobiography, it appears that Rapoport' perception is more relatable to the cases of divorce in the family.

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[552] Ibid., 33.
[553] Ibid., 32.
[554] Saidi, "Marriage and Divorce in Urban Mamluk Society," 109.
[555] Lutfi, "History of Muslim Women during the Fifteenth Century," 113; Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society*, 5-7.

Remarriage

As seen in the previous section, the family witnessed several divorce cases indicating that divorce was a common and acceptable practice in society. It will be interesting to examine the future marital status of members once they become free of matrimonial obligations due to divorce or widowhood. First, let us examine the prospect of remarriage within the family upon widowhood.

Al-Sakhāwī's maternal grandmother, mother, and his wife, after his death, lost their husbands at the corresponding ages (*hijri*) of 48, 64, and 65. Thus, they became widows at relatively senior years. Only one of them, al-Sakhāwī's wife, remarried after the death of her husband. It is essential to examine the conditions of the three women upon the death of their husbands to determine if financial considerations were linked to the decision of remarriage. Al-Sakhāwī's grandmother was supported by her eldest son upon the death of her husband, and she remained a widow for 21 years and died in Cairo.[556] Al-Sakhāwī's mother spent her 22 widowhood years accompanying her eldest son, al-Sakhāwī, in all his travels and eventually died while staying with him in Hijaz.[557] Al-Sakhāwī's wife was childless and living in Hijaz under poor economic conditions when her husband died. This could explain her decision to remarry to acquire a financial supporter. In fact, during this period, the financial independence of widows appeared to be a factor in making the decision not to marry again.[558] Nevertheless, the relative ease of al-Sakhāwī's widow remarriage at the age of 65 could indicate that the prospect of remarriage at senior years after widowhood was an acceptable practice within the society. The case of al-Sakhāwī's aunt, who also remarried at an advanced age, supports this assumption. However, it is not clear from the autobiography if she was a widow or divorcee before her last marriage.

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[556] Du Grandlaunay, "Édition et analyse de la première partie de l'autobiographie d'al-Sakhāwī," 59.
[557] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 68.
[558] Saidi, "Marriage and Divorce in Urban Mamluk Society," 121.

Two cases of young widows existed in the family, al-Sakhāwī's mother (from her first marriage), and the daughter of al-Sakhāwī's cousin, Zaynab. In both cases, a speedy remarriage was conducted. In fact, al-Sakhāwī's mother remarried right after her *'idda* period ended.[559] In addition, Zaynab, who had a young daughter, remarried several times after the death of her first husband.[560] Thus, the prospect of remarriage among young widows in the family seemed to be highly encouraged and accessible.

Finally, let us examine the remarriage pattern of family members who were divorced rather than widowed. The only reported senior female member who asked for divorce was the wife of al-Sakhāwī's brother. Al-Sakhāwī mentioned that she remarried after her divorce.[561] All other cases of divorce mentioned by al-Sakhāwī took place early in the lives of the family members. These are the cases of al-Sakhāwī's maternal cousin, niece, nephew, and the nephew's ex-wife. All of them remarried after their first divorce. Thus, remarriage after divorce seemed to be the norm in al-Sakhāwī's family regardless of the age of divorce and gender. In the cases of the cousin and nephew, they were even involved in consecutive marriages. For example, al-Sakhāwī's, reported the following about his nephew "I married him, then he quickly got a divorce, then he remarried and got another divorce then he remarried."[562]

This tendency to remarry was not common only in al-Sakhāwī's family. Based on the analysis of Saidi, remarriage was frequently practiced across society, especially among young divorcees or widows. She referred to this phenomenon of repeated divorce and marriage as "serial monogamy."[563] In fact, 30% of the women cited in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ* have remarried at least once after their divorce or widowhood.[564]

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[559] Du Grandlaunay, "Édition et analyse de la première partie de l'autobiographie d'al-Sakhāwī," 71.
[560] Al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Dāw'*, v. 12, 44.
[561] Al-Sakhāwī, *Wagiīz*.
[562] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 72; Al-Sakhāwī, *Wagiīz*, 1276. "…. و زوجناه فلم يمكث بل تزوج بعدنا غيرها و فارقها أيضا"
[563] Saidi, "Marriage and Divorce in Urban Mamluk Society," 63, 69.
[564] Ibid., 61.

Apart from the high number of remarriage incidents, another indication for the acceptance and spread of remarriage within al-Sakhāwī's family is the neutral tone with which al-Sakhāwī reported the remarriages. He was sympathetic, in his autobiography, with his aunt because she did not enjoy any luck with her several husbands. Saidi noticed a similar sympathy from al-Sakhāwī towards women who had several husbands in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*. Al-Sakhāwī's tone was even neutral when he reported that a woman had as many as 11 husbands.[565] On the other hand, men who divorced several wives were often criticized by al-Sakhāwī. An explanation provided by Saidi for this is that divorce was viewed as the responsibility of men.

Thus, one can conclude that the family's overall frequency of remarriage after divorce or widowhood was remarkably high. Second marriages were possible even at an advanced age, as seen in the cases of al-Sakhāwī's aunt, his sister-in-law, and his wife. This tendency to remarry, particularly among young female members, reflected the widespread practice of "serial monogamy" in society. Although according to Saidi's analysis, al-Sakhāwī held a preference in *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ* for long-life marriages favoring women who stayed loyal to their husbands after their death.[566] However, the decision to remarry during old age seemed to be connected to some financial considerations, as seen in the remarriage case of al-Sakhāwī's wife.

Custody of Children

The frequency of divorce and remarriages within the family, even with the existence of children, brings to mind the question of child custody. Al-Sakhāwī provided, in his autobiography, some remarks about the custody of young children of divorced and remarried parents that could give insights on how custody of children was handled within the family.

[565] Saidi, "Marriage and Divorce in Urban Mamluk Society," 64, 68-69.
[566] Ibid, 123.

The first mentioned case of custody of minor children belongs to al-Sakhāwī's brother, Abū Bakr, who divorced his wife and died shortly after. He left two boys and a girl aged fourteen, six, and eight *hijra* years. His ex-wife remarried after divorce, but the exact date is not cited by al-Sakhāwī. Upon hearing the news about his brother's death, al-Sakhāwī returned with his mother and family to Cairo from Hijaz and, *intadhaʾa,* took away the two youngest children from their mother.[567] The word *intadhaʾa* suggests that the children were taken against the wish of their mother. It appears that al-Sakhāwī was determined to take full custody of the younger children aged six and eight as he traveled back to Hijaz with them. They resided with him until al-Sakhāwī returned to Cairo three years later and arranged a marriage for his niece, who was 11 at the time.[568] The youngest nephew, who was nine, accompanied al-Sakhāwī back to Hijaz.

Al-Sakhāwī justified the decision to take the custody of the youngest children because of the misconduct of their mother as he proudly reported "I have taken my niece and my nephew from their mother due to her ugly manners."[569] According to Rapoport, losing children's custody would occur when the divorced mother remarried, so it is not clear why al-Sakhāwī had the authority to take the youngest children since the remarriage of his sister-in-law did not take place before his first visit.[570]

A possible reason is that losing custody of the children might have been part of the divorce negotiation. Furthermore, al-Sakhāwī's mother was still alive at the time and living with al-Sakhāwī so that the custody might have been legally transferred to her. The age of the children might also be a determining factor because both the niece and nephew were beyond the nursing years in which the mother's care is crucial. By all means, one gets the impression,

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[567] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 73.
[568] Ibid.
[569] Ibid., 393, 687.
"وانتزُعت بعد رجوعي من مكّة من أمّها ثم زّوّجتهُا- فانتزُِع من أمّه وأخذتهُ معي إلى مكّة في موسم سنة ستّ وتسعين - وكنتُ أخذتُها من أمّها لقُبحُِ شَأنُِها-"
[570] Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," 33-4.

from the description of his sister-in-law, that al-Sakhāwī would not have taken custody of the children if his judgment of her was favorable.

The other case of divorce with small children is that of al-Sakhāwī's nephew, Zain al-Dīn, who was shortly married for around a year, leaving an infant son.[571] Both partners remarried shortly after their divorce. Unlike the previous case, the child was put in the custody of his mother's side under the care of his maternal grandfather. Al-Sakhāwī indicated that this arrangement was part of the divorce's settlement and that the custody of the grandfather was confined to three years.[572] According to Rapoport, some husbands pressure their wives to pay for keeping the custody of young children upon divorce.[573] Therefore, the grandfather probably provided payment for keeping the child for three years since after the remarriage of his daughter, she would lose custody of her son. This is evident in the word *taḥamal abuha* described by al-Sakhāwī, which suggests that some kind of payment was involved. This case shows that women could temporarily gain custody of their young children through arranged payment to their ex-husbands. Typically, the payment is in the form of child alimony, which is initially the father's responsibility.

The last child custody case mentioned in *Irshād* was not due to divorced parents but rather losing both at infancy. In this case, the custody of al-Sakhāwī's maternal cousin, Fatima, went to the maternal grandfather. No mention of relatives from the father's side asking for custody or an arranged settlement with them. Fatima even accompanied her grandfather on pilgrimage until he arranged for her marriage.[574] Many reasons could be behind why the custody remained within the mother's side after the death of both parents. There might be no remaining first-degree relatives from her father's side or no interest in

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[571] Al-Sakhāwī, *Wajīz*, v3, 1267.

[572] Ibid., 1267.

"زين العابدين ابن أخي طلق أم ولده ابنة الشمس ابن رجب وتحمل أبوها بالولد ثلاث سنين"

[573] Rapoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Society," 33.

[574] Al-Sakhāwī, *Irshād,* 69.

obtaining Fatima's custody and responsibility. Whatever the reason was, al-Sakhāwī mentioned that after the death of his grandfather and Fatima's divorce, his mother, Fatima's aunt, and milk mother, was the one who *kafalatuha*. The maternal grandmother of Fatima was still alive at the time, and Fatima eventually remarried again. Therefore, al-Sakhāwī probably did not mean that his mother took full custody of Fatima but was close to her.

Upon examining the three custody cases of children with divorced or deceased parents within al-Sakhāwī's family, no pattern was detected. The cases suggest that the rules were somewhat fluid, with more authority in the hands of the father or his family. For example, arguing that the mother was neglectful or not fit to raise her children were acceptable reasons to transfer custody of young children to the husband's family. However, a conclusion can not be reached as the rules within the family varied according to circumstances, age of children, and will of involved parties. Lutfi argued that even a monumental biographical dictionary like *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ* did not provide "hard rule on the custody of children." It appears that the laws of child custody were tackled on a case by case basis rather than a unified rule in society.[575] One thing we are sure about is that Islamic law stated that the mother would lose the custody of her children upon remarriage; however, fathers accepted payment in exchange for granting them temporary custody. This practice was acceptable behavior in society. Furthermore, mothers relied on the support and help of their fathers to get access to their children, which shows the influence of the maternal grandfather in the life of his grandchildren, as seen in al-Sakhāwī's family.

In conclusion, this chapter attempted to use al-Sakhāwī's autobiography as a source to portray the marriage and divorce conditions within the extended family and interpret them in the context of the prevailing family conditions during the fifteenth century. Tracing and analyzing the narratives provided for the 13 marriage cases revealed the following.

[575] Lutfi, "History of Muslim Women during the Fifteenth Century", 116.

Al-Sakhāwī's family followed common trends and practices that were widespread during the fifteenth century concerning some aspects of marriage. First, the decision and selection to conduct a first-time marriage for minors was the prerogative of the male guardian of both the future bride and groom. The guardian in most cases was the father and, in case of his absence, the maternal grandfather or the paternal uncle. Due to the young age of first-time marriage, the bride and groom seemed to have little control over the selection criteria. However, this changed in second-time marriages, as the couple was more mature and with a degree of financial independence. The family had a visible preference towards monogamous marriages, which was in line with the decline in the practice of polygamy during this period due to a shift in gender institutions and a great degree of social pressure against it. As expected, the divorce rate within the family was relatively high as the practice was socially accepted by the family and society. Usually, the divorce was attributed to disagreement among the married couple and in a single case due to the interference of the in-laws. The short duration of a marriage or the existence of children did not seem to impede the divorce decision. Women of al-Sakhāwī's family were the initiators of the reported divorce cases. Divorce within the family was granted without resorting to courts and was done in the form of *khulʿ*. This meant that wives provided some financial compensation for their husbands to grant them a divorce. This practice was common across society as the economic decline appears to have led to the monetization of the divorce system. Remarrying after divorce or widowhood was as common as conducting a first-time marriage. Again, the short duration of the previous marriage and having children did not affect the prospect of a second marriage. As for the conditions of child custody, the rules seemed fluid. No pattern was detected as it varied based on the conditions of the case. However, a general remark is that women tended to gain custody over their young children for a short period even after remarrying by providing some payment to their ex-husbands.

Finally, al-Sakhāwī's family did not follow some common trends in society during this period. First, despite the spread of concubinage among the *ulama* and merchant classes, the family did not possess any concubines based on the narratives provided in the autobiography. This could be due to the young marriage age within the family, the rise in prices of concubines, or the rural background of the family. Also, the frequent travels of the male members of the family, along with not only their nuclear but also their extended family, was an unusual characteristic which probably contributed to the long tradition of monogamy within al-Sakhāwī's family.

ʿAbd al-Rāziq suggested that the families in the Mamluk society tended to form weak households with little attention to children due to the rise in divorce and polygamy.[576] Al-Sakhāwī's autobiography offers a different portrayal than the families ʿAbd al-Rāziq described. The members were closely connected, and special attention was given to the children. Also, as seen in some cases, the marriage and divorce conditions of the family did not necessarily follow the same trends in society.

[576] ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *al-Marʾah fī Miṣr al-Mamlūkīyah, 106.*

Conclusion

Arabic medieval autobiographies have been labeled as “improper” in comparison to western autobiographies. The debate over this has been useful in differentiating the development of this literary genre in the two civilizations as well as the differences that emerged based on the historiography of Islamic thoughts and historical contexts. Also, it identified the difference in self-representations among the orient versus the occident. However, this debate has limited the significance of medieval Islamic autobiography as most studies were focused on arguing for or against the proprietary of Islamic autobiography through the lens of the western genre. With the discovery of new medieval autobiographies in manuscript format and the increased interest in publishing autobiographical texts, new works have been introduced into the corpus of medieval autobiographies. Accordingly, several recent studies have been dedicated to examining medieval autobiographies as products of their time and investigating unique aspects and insights that emerged from these texts.

This thesis has attempted to contribute to the study of medieval Arabic autobiographies by examining the autobiography of one of the fifteenth century Mamluk scholars, Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, (1428/831 AH - 1497/902 AH). Al-Sakhāwī's autobiography represents an unusual and significant case because it is classified to belong to one of the distinctive historical clusters of autobiographies in the Islamic tradition. Also, the amount of personal narratives and family information that al-Sakhāwī provided in the autobiography is remarkable and unprecedented. This marks it as a potential source for studying Mamluk’s social history. Due to the significance of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography, this research was divided into two main parts that explored several aspects of the autobiography.

The first part of the thesis aimed to understand more about the art of writing an autobiography during the late Mamluk period. This was done by examining the

characteristics of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography and the motivations behind writing it in the context of other works written during the same period.

Four other similar works to al-Sakhāwīʾs autobiography were identified and chosen to be compared with it; these texts are the autobiographies of Ibn-Khaldūn, al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Ṭūlūn, and al-Shaʿrānī. Al-Sakhāwī and the others, except Ibn-Khaldūn, acknowledged that they were following the tradition of earlier scholars by leaving their *sīra*, which suggests that the genre of autobiography matured during the Mamluk period. Upon comparing the five texts, which were written in consecutive order, surprisingly, no direct references among these texts were detected except in the case of al-Shaʿrānī, who acknowledged being guided by al-Suyūṭī's autobiography.

In terms of characteristics, al-Sakhāwīʾs autobiography was the longest, which could be viewed as a sign of the amount of dedication, effort, and passion put into writing it. Also, the lengthy documentation highlights the intense desire of al-Sakhāwī to leave a positive source after his death so future generations of knowledge seekers would know of his superiority as a scholar. In terms of structure, al-Sakhāwīʾs autobiography was organized into different themes, a standard structure of a typical medieval autobiography. These themes, however, integrated personal narratives about al-Sakhāwī and his family. Al-Suyūṭī's autobiography was the closest to al-Sakhāwī with regards to the structure while Ibn Khaldūn and al-Shaʿrānī were unique and atypical to al-Sakhāwī and the traditional structure. The reasons that motivated al-Sakhāwī to write such a prolonged autobiography were numerous and overlapping. However, among the reasons that pushed al-Sakhāwī to leave an autobiography are his genuine passion for writing biographies and his desire to show his superiority and excellence. Another motivator was the frustration al-Sakhāwī felt towards various career challenges, such as the disappearance of traditional learning methods,

dissatisfaction with the widespread appointment of ignorant *ulama* in academic positions, and the many attacks he received.

Then, the research attempted to address the question of why autobiographies appear to be on the rise during the fifteenth century. Guided by modern scholarship on the developments of the fifteenth century as well as surveying the content of al-Sakhāwī's autobiography and its contemporaries, two main dimensions were selected to address this complex question. These dimensions are the intellectual atmosphere and the shifts in the *ulama* class. The developments in these dimensions were studied for a possible link to the rise of autobiography. Accordingly, possible social changes were detected in these dimensions in a way that fostered a flourishing environment for the autobiography.

The research showed that among the changes in the intellectual atmosphere that influenced the act of writing an autobiography and led to its popularity are the increased interest in local history, biographical dictionaries, and various types of self-representation narratives. Furthermore, these types of writing led to a fluidity among the genres and the appearance of private readership, which benefited the genre of autobiography by giving it more significance and allowing it to expand and encapsulate different themes and types of narratives.

As for the shifts in the *ulama* class, its contribution to the rise of autobiographies during this period was studied. Several developments stood out as possible factors and links. First, the high degree of social flux led to the democratization of the education system, which gradually affected the informal hierarchy that the *ulama* class seemed to enjoy and led to further decentralization within the class. With the lack of centralized authority, some scholars started to classify and rank themselves based on an individual approach rather than the previously collective perspective, which led to the rise of self-ego documents like autobiographies. The prevailing high degree of competition and academic rivalry among

scholars led to the flourishing of several literary types of writing that allowed scholars to refute the attacks they faced and provide clarifications for their case. One of these mediums was medieval autobiography as scholars could use it to leave a positive and credible source about themselves for future generations.

Finally, scholars during this period witnessed many fluctuations in their academic careers due to several challenges like the instability of academic positions that resulted from an unstable political atmosphere. The interference of the Sultans through liquidizing and confiscating *awqāf* also affected the financial independence of some *ulama*. These challenges increased with the widespread practice of selling appointments, which negatively affected the *ulama* society. Scholars living through these challenges went through many moments of crisis and tension, and several of them retired from public life during their old age. During these moments of crisis and disappointment, the act of writing one's *sīra* seemed to help as it allowed them to portray the image and legacy they desired. Therefore, the various developments of the intellectual atmospheres, as well as the shifts in *ulama* class during the fifteenth century, endorsed the act of writing about the self by creating the right environment for the genre of autobiographies to flourish.

The second part of this thesis was dedicated to exploring the unique presence of family life as presented in al-Sakhāwī's autobiography and examining the possible contribution of such an autobiography to the field of Mamluk social history. This was accomplished through reconstructing, first, the family background and economic conditions within the contemporary challenges of the period. A close examination of these aspects yielded the following main findings.

In terms of family background, al-Sakhāwī's family belonged to the class of small merchants and humble *ulama*. The merchant side started with their paternal grandfather migrating from the delta village of *Sakhá* due to the difficult circumstances that prevailed in

the countryside in search of a better future for his family by moving to Cairo. Despite the challenging economic conditions in Cairo, the family succeeded in improving its conditions and quickly joining the merchant class. This process was facilitated by the support of the Sufi family of Bulqīnī. The family's economic conditions upon their move to Cairo did not always go in the same direction as the prevailing economic circumstances. In fact, the family witnessed several long prosperous periods despite the decline in the economy. The case of the family's success reflects the opportunities that the fifteenth century offered to several classes despite the overall paradigm of decline, which is often perceived in regards to the fifteenth century.

Another family dimension that the thesis looked at is the domestic life of the family. Al-Sakhāwī's autobiography was used as a source to portray the marriage and divorce conditions within his extended family. The family conditions were studied in comparison to the broader social trends and shifts in the gender institutions. A close examination of the 13 marriage cases in al-Sakhāwī's family yielded the following insights.

Al-Sakhāwī's family followed the main guidelines of marriage during this period, starting with the male guardians' authority to decide marriage on behalf of the prospective first-time bride and groom. There was more control in the couple's hands regarding remarriage due to maturity and financial independence.

There was a long tradition of monogamy and long marriages within the family, with a few exceptions. The preference towards monogamous marriages was in line with the decline in the practice of polygamy during this period due to a shift in gender institutions and a great degree of social pressure against it. As expected, the divorce rate within the family was relatively high and socially accepted. Usually, the divorce is attributed to disagreement among the married couple and in a single case due to the interference of the in-laws. Women were the initiators of these divorce cases, and the divorce was granted without resorting to

courts in exchange for some kind of financial compensation, as was common during this period. Remarrying after divorce or widowhood was as common as conducting a first-time marriage. The short duration of the previous marriage and having children did not affect the prospect of a second marriage. As for the conditions of child custody, the rules seemed fluid. No pattern was detected as it varied based on the conditions of the case. However, a general remark is that women tended to gain custody over their young children for a short period even after remarrying by providing some payment to their ex-husbands.

Finally, despite the spread of concubinage among the *ulama* and merchant classes during this period, the family did not buy concubines based on the narratives provided in the autobiography. This could be due to the arrangement of marriages at a young age, the rise in prices for concubines, or most likely the lack of such tradition within the family due to their rural origin.

In short, this thesis attempted to contribute to the study of pre-modern Arabic autobiography by examining the remarkable autobiography of al-Sakhāwī in the context of other works written during the same period and examining its value to the theme of family history. Walter Fischel mentioned that Ibn Khaldūn's autobiography "constitutes a historical, literary and human document of the first order, a guide of immeasurable value."[577] Studying medieval autobiographies with this approach in mind would help us understand more about medieval scholars and the society that produced them.

[577] Walter Fischel, *Ibn Khaldūn in Egypt: His Public Functions and His Historical Research, 1382-1406: A Study in Islamic Historiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 161.

Tables and Figures

Figure (1)

Breakdown of al-Sakhāwī's Autobiography*

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Ch. 8: Students	875-1036
Ch. 9: A look back at the biography	1037-1049
Ch. 10: Death of al-Sakhāwī empty chapter	
Conclusion	1051-1069

*This breakdown is an edited version of Du Grandlauna's research.

Figure (2)

Aya Sofia Manuscript

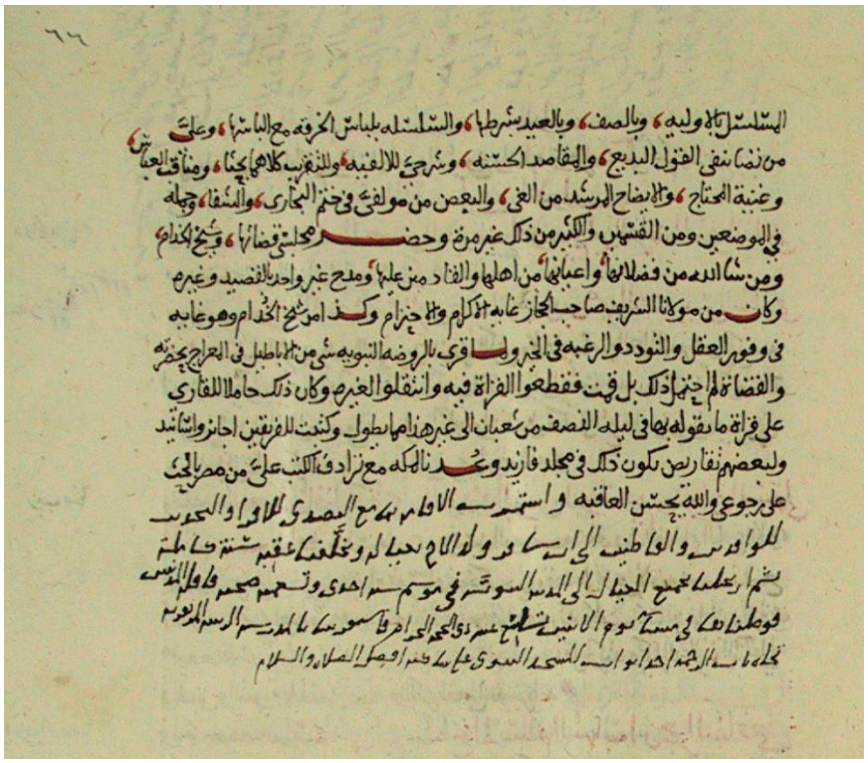

Table (1)*

Autobiographies Referenced by al-Sakhāwī	
Stand-alone Texts	
Al-Dhahabī (b. 672–3/1274, d. 748/1348)	Unidentified Text
Al-Safdī (d. 764/1363) (b. 696–97/1297, d. 764/ 1363)	Unidentified Text
Ibrāhīm Ibn Jamāʿa (d. 790/1388). (b. 725/1325, d. 790/1388)	Unidentified Text
Ibrāhīm Ibn Jamāʿa (d. 790/1388). (b. 725/1325, d. 790/1388)	Unidentified Text
ʿIzz al-Dīn Ibn Jamāʿa (n. 749/1349 ; m. 819/1416).	Unidentified Text
Shams al Al-ʿAyzarī (m. 808/1404)	Unidentified Text
Ibn Duqmāq (d. 809/1407)	Unidentified Text
Iftikhār al-Dīn Jābir b. Muḥammad al-Khawārizmī (m. 741/1340)	
Al-Samawʾal b. Yaḥyā al-Maghribī (b. 520/1126, d. 569/1174)	"a Jewish physician and scholar who converted to Islam"[578]
Embedded Self-Accounts	
Abd al-Gāfir al-Fārisī (m. 529/1135) (b. 451/1059, d. 529/1135)	A Persian scholar and historian
Yāqūt al-hamawī (b. 575/1179, d. 622/1229)	A famous biographer and scholar who lived during Abbasid period.
Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb (b. 713/1313, d. 775/1374)	"His autobiography includes a brief history of his family, an account of his life and career, lists of his teachers and writings, and many samples of his poetry and correspondence."[579]

[578] Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*, 263.
[579] Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*, 268.

Taqī al-Dīn al-Fāsī (b. 775/ 1373, d. 832/1429	"His autobiography includes a detailed account of his education, teachers, publications, and quotations from others regarding his Publications"[580]
Ibn Ḥajar	
Najm al-Dīn, Ibn Fahd (1409 - 1480)	
al-badr Hussein al-āhdal (789 (1387-8) 855 (11 Feb. 1451)	
Burhān al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan al-Biqāʿī (809 (1406-7) (23 Sep 1480)	Unidentified Text

*The references to these scholars are extracted from Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*.

Table (2)*

Autobiographies Referenced by al-Suyūṭī	
Stand-alone Texts	
Imād al-Dīn al-Kātib al-Isfāhānī (b. 519/1125, d. 597/1201)	"Personal secretary/chancellor to Saladin and historian." [581]
Umāra al- yamanī (b. 515/1121, d. 569/1175)	"His book-length autobiography recounts anecdotes, in roughly chronological order, about his childhood and extended family, his travels from Yemen to Egypt, his political and poetic career in Egypt under the Fatimids, various wazirs of Egypt, and finally his unsuccessful attempts to gain the favor of Saladin"[582]
Abu Hayyan (b. 654/1256, d. 745/1344)	"His autobiography was quite lengthy and was written as an act of mourning after the untimely

[580] Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*, 271.
[581] Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*, 264.
[582] Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*, 263.

	death of his daughter Nudfiār"[583] Unidentified text
Embedded Self-Accounts	
Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī (m. 529/1135)	
Yāqūt al-Rūmī (m. 626/1229)	
Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb (m. 776/1374)	
Taqī al-Dīn al-Fārsī (m. 832/1429)	
Ibn Ḥajar	
Abū Shāma (b. 599/1202, d. 665/ 1268)	Damascene jurist and historian.

*The references to these scholars are extracted from Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*.

Table (3)*

Autobiographies Referenced by Ibn Ṭūlūn	
Stand-alone Texts	
Abu Futuh al Mizzi (810- d.906/*1500*)	Unidentified Text
Embedded in works	
Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī (m. 529/1135)	
Yāqūt al-Rūmī (m. 626/1229)	
Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb (m. 776/1374)	
Taqī al-Dīn al-Fāsī (m. 832/1429).	
Ibn Ḥajar	
Al-Suyūṭī	

583 Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*, 268.

*The references to these scholars are extracted from Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*.

Table (4)

Autobiographies Referenced by al-Shaʿrānī	
Embedded in Ṭabaqāt	
ʿAbd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī (m. 529/1135)	Unidentified Text
Al-Isfāhānī (b. 519/1125, d. 597/1201)	
Al-Maqari (b. 765/1363, d.837/1433).	Unidentified Text
Yāqūt al-Rūmī (m. 626/1229)	
Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb (m. 776/1374)	
Abu Abdullah Al-Qarshi (544-599 AH)	
Abu al-Rabeʿal-Māliqī	
Safi al-Dīn bin Abu Mansur (658 - 739 AH)	Sufi Shaykh
Taqī al-Dīn al-Fārsī (m. 832/1429)	
Abu Hayyan	
Abu Shamma	
Ibn Ḥajar	
Al-Suyūṭī	

*The references to these scholars are extracted from Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*.

Table (5)

Autobiography	Printed Pages	Manuscript
Ibn Khaldūn	430 pages	MS Ayasofya 3200 (Independent Text) 83 folios
Al-Sakhāwī	1054 pages	Leiden OR 2366 322 folios
Al-Suyūṭī	234 pages	Tübingen MS 37 folios
Ibn Ṭūlūn	141 pages	–
Al-Shaʿrānī	811 pages	Saud Library 1699 292 folios

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