

Editing a Polemical Treatise **Al-Aqwāl al-qawīmah fī ḥukm al-naql min al-kutub al-qadīmah**

In 860/1456 al-Biqā'ī started working on Qur'an commentary that would eventually contain a large number of quotations from the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels. These quotations were extensive, and used primarily to explain the biblical references in the Qur'an. The context was thus positive and the conclusion to be drawn from this practice was unambiguous: al-Biqā'ī was using the Bible in a positive religious context. A controversy soon ensued and the issue of the status of the Bible was hotly debated in Mamluk Cairo. Soon all the senior judges of the four legal schools were solicited for fatwas and eventually al-Sakhāwī wrote a critique of al-Biqā'ī's practice. To answer his critics al-Biqā'ī wrote al-Aqwāl al-qawīmah which defended his approach to the Bible and reviewed Islamic religious history as it dealt with the scriptures of Judaism and Christianity. Luckily the treatise has survived in three medieval copies and a modern transcription of one of them. We have thus four copies of the Work.

For the past four years I have been studying and editing the text. A critical edition meanwhile had been published by Brill (it will be by the time the conference takes place). In my lecture I will describe the manuscripts, the editorial decisions I have taken to edit this text and the problems one faces when editing a text of this nature. Apart from its intrinsic significance, being a unique document in Islam, the text as a text presented its challenges as to how best to approach and edit it.

The major issue I was faced with was how to decide which manuscript to use as the basis for the edition. One of the manuscripts stems from the year 873/1469 and was copied by a friend of the author and is based on the personal copy of al-Biqā'ī. Its authority is thus indisputable. It is housed in the National Library in Egypt (Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyah). This manuscript was supposed to be the clean copy of the work, mubayyadah, it was however proofread by al-Biqā'ī who changed his mind and added copious marginalia, ḥawāshī. The copy was thus turned once more into a musawwadah. Seven years later the author reworked the work and published it in its final form sometime after 880/1475. No copy survives from that period. A copy based on this later work has survived.

Unfortunately, this copy is not dated. It is clear however that it is based on the Dar al-Kutub copy but differs in some significant ways from it. This copy is housed in the Escorial. The problem with this copy is that it is defective in so far as it has many missing words and paragraphs and filled with mistakes. It is however clear that it represents the final work of the author and the shape he wanted it to take.

In the end I decided to use the Second copy as the basis of my edition, despite the fact that precedence in variants was given to the Dar al-Kutub copy. The editorial reasons behind my decision will be the main topic of my talk. I will also describe the two other copies and show why they are not essential for the edition. I will also raise the issue of computer word processing programs and the need for a specialized program that can accommodate the needs of Arabic editorial practices.

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