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## Tankiz ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥusāmī al-Nāṣirī (d. 740/1340) as Seen by His Contemporary al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363)

### INTRODUCTION

Many take Hayden White’s “theory of narrativity” to be the beginning of a “change of paradigm,” in the sense of Thomas Kuhn, that indicated the bankruptcy of mechanistic and organic models of truth and explanation. Historians could no longer believe in explanatory systems and monolithic visions of history.<sup>1</sup> From now on, they would prefer the formist or contextualist form of argument, which is more modest and fragmentary. It is thanks to “narrativity” that historians were reminded of their cognitive limits, which had been neglected by positivism and other historiographical trends, and it is thanks to White, and to his *Metahistory* in particular, that they were reminded of the importance of their medium, language, and of their dependence on the linguistic universe. With the appearance of White’s much-disputed book, the exclusively interlinguistic debate on the so-called “linguistic turn” gained ground among historians. The literary theory which has been developed by Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, and Mary Louise Pratt points out that history possesses neither an inherent unity nor an inherent coherence. Every understanding of history is a construct formed by linguistic means. The fact that a human being does not have a homogeneous personality without inherently profound contradictions leads to the inescapable conclusion that every text, as a product of the human imagination, must be read and interpreted in manifold ways: behind its reading and interpretation there is an unequivocal or unambiguous intention. In addition to this, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida have referred to the political implications of language and to the hierarchy of power that is expressed by it. The contradictions of human life force the reader to deconstruct every text to lay open its ideological elements. Reality is not transported or mediated but constructed by language and discourse. Language may no longer be seen simply as an “innocent” medium, relatively or potentially transparent, for the representation or expression of a reality outside of

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<sup>1</sup>For references and bibliographic details, see Stephan Conermann, “Einige allgemeine Überlegungen zum vormodernen ‘Historischen Denken’ der Araber,” *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 93, no. 2 (1998): 141–158; idem, *Historiographie als Sinnstiftung: Indo-persische Geschichtsschreibung während der Mogulzeit (932–1118/1526–1707)* (Wiesbaden, 2002), 1–33; and idem, *Die muslimische Sicht (13.–18. Jahrhundert)*, vol. 2 of *Geschichtsdenken der Kulturen: Eine kommentierte Dokumentation*, ed. Jörn Rüsen and Sebastian Manhart (Frankfurt, 2002), 15–25.



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itself. The “linguistic turn” has drawn the attention of historians to the important fact that the line between fact and fiction is no Iron Curtain. The single text is a web woven of “threads of discourses,” which penetrate into it from the outside and which the scholar must unravel.

Whoever composes a historical narrative approaches elements of the past as objects of historiography through the medium of the language which he employs.<sup>2</sup> The way in which a writer, chronicler, or historiographer makes use of the linguistic categories and of the “literary canons” underlying every representation of history is decisive for the manner in which the past is told and construed in his text. Although there might be a strong will to find the truth and to put things—epistemologically speaking—into the right light, historiography cannot, as most of the older “Quellenkunde” suggest, free the sources from their inherent subjectivity, so that we can, somehow, examine the object as though through the objective medium of a clear magnifying glass. On the contrary, subjectivity stands for the fact that historiography, as a created and organized product of the imagination, is the work of a fallible individual and therefore necessarily reflects the attitude of the chronicler toward his object. The individual intention is embedded in mind sets or mentalities that depend as much on the personal situation of the author as on the overall political, local, material, or social conditions. One of the basic attitudes is surely the conviction that it is important to call attention to one single event or the whole past. In many cases, a writer has it in mind to show his contemporaries and all future generations the evil of past deeds as a caution and the goodness of others as exemplary actions that should be followed by everyone. This pattern is based on the second mind set which is typical for medieval historiography: history is the history of the human being that has been created by God. It is finite and embedded in God’s will, which is recognized in revelation and which represents the normative values by which all human behavior is judged.

In analyzing what medieval Muslim historiography has produced, one might point out that its most important principle is didacticism, according to which accuracy as to “fact” was much less important than validity as to life vision.<sup>3</sup> “Facts” often served as the raw material of problem solving, or at least of problem raising. Accordingly, historians did not argue from the particular to the general;

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<sup>2</sup>For a good introduction, see Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

<sup>3</sup>An overview of studies on Mamluk historiography is given by Li Guo, “Mamluk Historiographic Studies: The State of the Art,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 1 (1997): 15–44. An excellent study on Ibn Wardi’s (d. 749/1349) chronicle is Konrad Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography: Authors as Actors* (London, 2006). See also Sami G. Massoud, *The Chronicles and Annalistic Sources of the Early Mamluk Circassian Period* (Leiden, 2007).



rather they made particular events and people conform to traditional types or patterns. Since Muslim historiographers pursued the goal of showing the ideal nature of the Islamic community in all its manifestations, in the chronicles the gap between the ideal and the real is especially apparent. The explosive potential of historical writing lay in its ability to depict this gap, to reveal that whatever could be learned about elusive “historical reality” could contradict the ideals of the very pattern into which it was being pressed. Thus, on the one hand there is created in a chronicle a canonical picture of the world and a conventional portrayal of historical figures, while on the other hand, a chronicle is necessarily a compendium of original facts which are to a certain degree capable of destroying the ideal. Historiography played an important role in the politics of a traditional society dependent, as was medieval society, upon the past for legitimacy. It is only by appreciating how deeply this attitude of piety towards the past ran in medieval Muslim society that we can begin to understand the use made of history. It is not a question of the mindless repetition of tradition, of an inability to innovate or create, but of a compelling necessity to find in the past the means to explain and legitimize every deviation from tradition. In such a society, every deliberate modification of an existing type of activity must be based on a study of individual precedents. Every plan for the future is dependent on the pattern found in the past. What is important here is to recognize the fruitfulness of the medieval approach to the past. Medieval Muslim chroniclers often see the past as a school of moral instruction, a storehouse of examples of good and evil conduct which illuminate principles of behavior and teach men how to live. By their very adherence to the theory of the exemplary nature of history, Muslim chroniclers expressed the belief that history had a moral and political utility beyond mere description of past deeds. One result of this approach to history was a willingness to reduce the complexity of human experience into stereotypes according to “literary canons” which could be utilized easily to make a moral point.

To explain these “literary canons,” it is useful to consider the method of literary criticism applied by the historian Dimitriĭ Likhachev to medieval Russian chronicles. Likhachev argues that the analysis of various stylistic phenomena in medieval literature should be based on distinctions between “literary cliché” (*literaturnoe kliše*) and “literary canon” (*literaturnyj kanon*)—a distinction for which he provides the following picturesque elucidation:

“The same suit may be worn day after day. This will only make it soiled by wear but will not transform it into a formal outfit. A formal outfit, on the other hand, is worn only on those occasions when etiquette requires it. The shiny, threadbare suit represents literary cliché while the splendid formal attire which always has



the same shape and appearance and is worn on the appropriate occasions represents literary canon. The author is the master of ceremonies who creates a gala procession. And we witness a festival, not the week-days of routine.”<sup>4</sup>

While the medieval Muslim historian may have lacked a specifically modern sense of causation, he nevertheless operated from a set of assumptions about the relationship between past events and present reality which, for him, functioned much as modern theories of causality do for us. In order to understand this, it is necessary to return to the use of *exempla* and reinterpret their possible function in medieval historiography. By means of interpretation within “literary canon,” the significance of the past is reaffirmed for the present: the past becomes a prophecy of the future and is predeterminant in the sense that its very existence determines the shape and interpretation of what comes later. With the aid of such “literary canons,” the chroniclers could use past figures and events as explanations and modes of legitimizing present political life.

In the year 1969, at a time when the term “linguistic turn” became popular with the anthology *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method* which the philosopher Richard Rorty edited in 1967, Ulrich Haarmann wrote in his Ph.D. thesis about a process of *Literarisierung* taking place in Arabic historiography during the last centuries of the Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> Without knowing the philosophical debates on language as constructing reality, Haarmann shows in his study that Mamluk chronicles are in general works of fiction as much as of history. In my opinion, Mamlukologists should pursue this train of thought. By analyzing the biography which the scholar and historian al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363) wrote about the amir Tankiz ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusāmī (d. 740/1340), I would like to draw our attention again to this remarkable approach.

#### “FACTS” ABOUT TANKIZ

Tankiz ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusāmī al-Nāṣirī Amīr Sayf al-Dīn (d. 740/1340) was governor of the province of Damascus (712–40/1312–40) during the third reign of the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn (709–41/1310–41).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Dmitriĭ Sergeevich Likhachev, *Poëtika drevnerusskoĭ literatury*, 2nd ed. (Leningrad, 1971), 139.

<sup>5</sup>Ulrich Haarmann, *Quellenstudien zur frühen Mamlukenzeit* (Freiburg, 1969). On the discussion about Haarmann’s hypothesis that there was a trend deviating from the classic medieval Islamic standard in Mamluk historical writing, see Guo, “Mamluk Historiographic Studies,” 33–43.

<sup>6</sup>This is an extended version of my article on Tankiz in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 10:185–86. For good biographies of Tankiz, see Ellen Kenney, “Power and Patronage in Mamluk Syria: The Architecture and Urban Works of Tankiz al-Nasiri (1312–1340)” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2004), 19–32 and 396–403; and Ḥayāt Nāṣir al-Ḥajjī, *Al-Amīr Tankiz al-Ḥusāmī—Nāʿib al-Shām fī Fitrat 712–741/1312–1340* (Kuwait City, 1980).



Tankiz, whose name is an Arabic transcription of Old Turkish *teniz*, “sea, ocean,” was bought, as a young man, by a certain al-Khwājah ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Sīwāsī. He was brought to Egypt, where he was eventually purchased by the future sultan Ḥusām al-Dīn Lājīn. After Lājīn’s violent death in 698/1299 Tankiz became one of the bodyguards (*khāṣṣakīyah*) of Sultan al-Nāṣir. In al-Nāṣir’s service he distinguished himself in several battles with Mongol forces. Before the sultan went into exile to al-Karak 708/1308–9, he raised him to the rank of *amīr ‘asharah*. From al-Karak, Tankiz was sent to Syria on some dangerous missions, and, because of the skill with which he fulfilled these tasks, al-Nāṣir appointed him *nā’ib al-salṭanah* of Damascus when he himself took over the Mamluk sultanate for the third time. In Rabī’ II 712/August 1312 Tankiz arrived at his new headquarters.

Although some chroniclers claim that Tankiz suffered from hallucinations, that he had a mean and weak character, and that his punishments were sometimes unnecessarily cruel,<sup>7</sup> he was respected by the population because of his strong sense of justice. During his governorship, Tankiz maintained a strong personal relationship with the sultan so that he became extremely powerful: in 712/1312 al-Nāṣir gave orders to all governors of Syria not to contact him directly anymore but to send every message via Tankiz. With this appointment to the *niyābah* of al-Shām in 714/1314, Tankiz finally controlled all *nuwwāb* of the Syrian provinces. Almost every other year he travelled to Egypt to meet with al-Nāṣir, who normally received him with great honor and bestowed precious gifts on him. In 730/1331, al-Nāṣir raised Tankiz’ son ‘Alī to the amirate and even welcomed the promotion of Tankiz’ two other sons, Muḥammad and Aḥmad, as being useful for his own aims.<sup>8</sup> When in 737/1336 Tankiz came to the royal court for the wedding of al-Nāṣir’s son to the daughter of Amīr Ṭuquzdamur, the sultan greeted him like a ruler of his own rank.<sup>9</sup> The climax of this kingly favor was reached with the honors that were granted to Tankiz during a visit on the occasion of his daughter’s confinement, as she was married to al-Nāṣir. In the course of his meeting, the sultan also arranged the marriage between two of his daughters and the sons of his highly esteemed governor.<sup>10</sup>

During his governorship Tankiz also distinguished himself as an able commander-

<sup>7</sup>Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *Kitāb al-Wāfi bi-al-Wafayāt*, vol. 10, ed. Ali Amara and Jacqueline Sublet (Wiesbaden, 1980), 424; ‘Umar ibn al-Muẓaffar ibn al-Wardī, *Tatimmat al-Mukhtaṣar fi Akhbār al-Bashar*, ed. Aḥmad Rif‘at al-Badrāwī (Beirut, 1970), 2:466ff.

<sup>8</sup>For references see Amalia Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History: The Third Reign of al-Nasir Muhammad Ibn Qalawun (1310–1341)* (Leiden, 1995), 48, n. 95.

<sup>9</sup>See Mūsā ibn Muḥammad al-Yūsufi, *Nuzhat al-Nāẓir fi Sirat al-Nāṣir*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥuṭayṭ (Beirut 1986), 363–64.

<sup>10</sup>See Shams al-Dīn al-Shujā‘ī, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn al-Ṣālīhi wa-Awlādihī*, ed. and trans. Barbara Schäfer (Wiesbaden, 1977–85), 42ff. (Arabic text), 63ff. (German trans.).



in-chief. At the end of the year 715/1315, the sultan sent several regiments from Egypt to Syria to join the Syrian troops and attack Malatya, a town that was allied with the Mongols. He entrusted Tankiz with the supreme command, and Tankiz succeeded not only in taking the town but also in accomplishing some effective raids on the neighboring areas of Lesser Armenia.<sup>11</sup>

The rapid expansion of the Mamluk capital under Sultan al-Nāṣir was followed by repercussions throughout the whole kingdom. The provincial governors displayed a remarkable building activity.<sup>12</sup> This is especially true of Tankiz, whose reconstructions and foundations changed the landscape of Damascus. Besides nine public bath houses and a large expansion of the communications network, he was responsible for the building of an impressive mosque that was named after him, for the extensive restoration of the Great Mosque, and for the rebuilding of the Dār al-Dhahab, which became his residence. In addition one should also mention the mausoleum of Sitt Sitītah, a double construction consisting of a mausoleum and a *ribāt* for women that was built for his wife Sitītah bint Amīr Kūkbāy al-Manṣūrī posthumously in Dhū al-Ḥijjah 730/September–October 1330.<sup>13</sup>

Over the course of time the wealth and authority of Tankiz steadily increased, so that the amirs at the court of Sultan al-Nāṣir began to fear his immense power. Tankiz even thought himself powerful enough to undermine the sultan's authority. For example, he sent back one of the envoys of Aratnā, the ruler of al-Rūm, when he arrived in Damascus with a message for the sultan. The insulted Aratnā complained to al-Nāṣir and demanded that he rebuke Tankiz for his improper behavior. Although the sultan kept the affair to himself, his ire rose when he sometime later learned that Tankiz had put one of the sultan's mamluks in prison and refused the ruler's request to release him.<sup>14</sup> In addition to this, Tankiz once again incurred the anger of the sultan when in 739/1340 he not only held back the taxes levied from Damascene Christians who had been accused of arson in the provincial capital but also punished them with inappropriate cruelty. As a result, the relations between the sultan, who was suspicious by nature, and his *nāʿib al-*

<sup>11</sup> See Abū al-Fidāʾ Ismāʿīl ibn ʿAlī, *Al-Mukhtaṣar fī Tārīkh al-Bashar* (Cairo, 190–8), 4:74–76; P. M. Holt, *The Memoirs of a Syrian Prince* (Wiesbaden, 1983), 67ff.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Kenney, “Power and Patronage,” and idem, “A Mamluk Monument “Restored”: The *Dār al-Qurʾān wa-al-Ḥadīth* of Tankiz al-Nāṣirī in Damascus,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2007): 85–118.

<sup>13</sup> See Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah fī al-Tārīkh* (Cairo, 1932–39), 14:151; ʿAbd al-Qādir ibn Muḥammad al-Nuʿaymī, *Al-Dāris fī Tārīkh al-Madāris*, ed. Jaʿfar al-Ḥasanī (Damascus, 1948–51), 2:274–75.

<sup>14</sup> See Mufaḍḍal ibn Abī al-Faḍāʾil, *Al-Nahj al-Sadid wa-al-Durr al-Farid fīmā baʿda Tārīkh Ibn al-ʿAmīd*, ed. and trans. Samira Kortantamer (Freiburg, 1973), 92–93 (Arabic text), 239–41 (German trans.).



*salṭānah* in Syria worsened even more, if one can trust al-Maqrizī, who reports on Tankiz' intention to overthrow al-Nāṣir.<sup>15</sup>

When the sultan informed Tankiz of his decision to send some of his amirs, including Sayf al-Dīn Bashtāk, together with 350 of his mamluks to Damascus in order to accompany his two sons to their promised wives, Tankiz tried with sundry excuses to prevent them from coming. It seems that he now for his part mistrusted the sultan and had a strong suspicion that the real aim of this visit was his incarceration. His suspicions proved to be right, as al-Nāṣir did eventually give the order for his arrest. On 23 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 740/21 June 1340, Tankiz was put into prison by Amīr Sayf al-Dīn Ṭashtamur, the governor of Ṣafad. He was brought to Cairo in chains and later to Alexandria, where he was imprisoned and finally, on Dhū al-Ḥijjah 740/May–June 1340 or Muḥarram 741/June–July 1340, executed. His fortune and properties were confiscated and distributed among various high-ranking amirs. Two years after the death of Sultan al-Nāṣir (he died in 741/1341), Tankiz was buried in his mausoleum in Damascus.

#### THE STORY

The philologist, literary critic, litterateur, biographer, and all-around humanist Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī (696–764/1297–1363),<sup>16</sup> who served Tankiz as a chancery secretary in the *dīwān al-inshā'* from 731/1331 onward, writes of him in his *Kitāb al-Wāfi bi-al-Wafayāt*:<sup>17</sup>

Tankiz, the great and formidable amir Sayf al-Dīn Abū Sa'īd, the viceroy of Syria. He was brought to Egypt as a boy and grew up there. He had a light olive complexion, was lean of physique, and had beautiful, slightly grey hair and a slow growth of beard. He was of handsome build. It was al-Khwājah 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Sīwāsī who brought him and from whom the amir Ḥusām al-Dīn Lājīn bought him. When Lājīn was murdered during his reign, he became one of the sultan [al-Malik al-Nāṣir]'s bodyguards. He fought with him in the battle of Wādī al-Khazindār and at Shaqḥab. The judge Shihāb

<sup>15</sup>See Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Maqrizī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Ma'rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ziyādah and Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattāḥ 'Āshūr (Cairo, 1930–73), 2:509.

<sup>16</sup>On him, see F. Rosenthal, "al-Ṣafadī," *EP*, 8:759–60; Josef Van Ess, "Ṣafadī-Splitter," *Der Islam* 53 (1976): 242–66 and 54 (1977): 77–108; Donald P. Little, "Al-Ṣafadī as Biographer of his Contemporaries," in *Essays on Islamic Civilization Presented to Niyazi Berkes*, ed. idem (Leiden, 1976), 190–210, esp. 206–10.

<sup>17</sup>Al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, 10:420–43. The text has been translated into German by Susanna Fischer in her M.A. thesis, "Ägypten und Syrien in der ersten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts: Vier ausgewählte Sultans- und Emirsviten aus dem biographischen Wörterbuch aṣ-Ṣafadis (Übersetzung und Kommentar)" (University of Freiburg in Breisgau, 1991), 35–47.



al-Dīn ibn al-Qaysarānī told me [the following], saying:

“One day he told me he and the amir Sayf al-Dīn Ṭaynāl belonged to the mamluks of Malik al-Ashraf.” He frequently listened to Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* [read] by Ibn al-Shiḥnah,<sup>18</sup> to al-Ṭahāwī’s<sup>19</sup> work *Al-Āthār* and Muslim’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*; he listened to [readings by] ʿĪsā al-Muṭʿim<sup>20</sup> and Abū Bakr ibn ʿAbd al-Dāyim,<sup>21</sup> studying the science of hadith. Al-Maqrīzī [i.e., Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Qādir ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Tamīm al-Maqrīzī al-Ḥanbalī,<sup>22</sup> the grandfather of Abū ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd al-Qādir’s father] read to him Bukhārī’s *Thulāthiyāt* in the city of the Prophet [Medina].

Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir made him the amir of ten mamluks before going to al-Karak. He had left his *iqṭāʿ* in the care of the amir Ṣārim al-Dīn Ṣārūgā al-Muẓaffarī.<sup>23</sup> He [i.e., the sultan] was an *aga* to him [i.e., Tankiz], as the Turks would say. When he [i.e., the sultan] went to al-Karak, he was in the sultan’s service. Once he sent him as a messenger to al-Afram in Damascus, who suspected him of carrying letters to the amirs of Syria with him. He [i.e., al-Afram] became very afraid of him. He was searched and threatened with punishment. When he returned to the sultan, he gave him news about this, and the sultan said to him: “When I assume power again, you will be governor of Damascus.” When he came back from al-Karak, he installed the amir Sayf al-Dīn Arghūn al-Dawādār as viceroy of Egypt after capturing al-Jūkandār al-Kabīr and he said to Tankiz and Sūdī: “Be with Arghūn every day and learn from him to perform the duties of a governor and [also learn] the rules.” They did so assiduously for a year. When they had gained experience, he sent Sayf al-Dīn Sūdī as governor to Aleppo and Sayf al-Dīn Tankiz as governor to Damascus. He, al-Ḥājj Sayf al-Dīn Ariqtāy,<sup>24</sup> and the amir Ḥusām al-Dīn Ṭuruntāy al-Bashmaqḍār<sup>25</sup> came [to Damascus]

<sup>18</sup>Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad ibn Niʿmah, called Ibn al-Shiḥnah, d. 730/1313. Gaston Wiet, *Les biographies du Manhal Safī* (Cairo, 1932), 46.

<sup>19</sup>On him, see Norman Calder, “al-Ṭahāwī,” *EP*, 10:101–2.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah fī Aʿyān al-Mīʾah al-Thāminah*, ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Jād al-Ḥaqq (Hyderabad, 1966), 2:56.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Died 732/1332. Cf. Wiet, *Les biographies*, 210.

<sup>23</sup>Died 743/1343. Cf. *ibid.*, 171.

<sup>24</sup>He successively held the offices of governor of Ṣafad, Tripoli, and Aleppo, viceroy of Egypt, governor of Aleppo, and Damascus; he died in 750/1349 aged 80. Cf. *ibid.*, 54.

<sup>25</sup>Died 748/1347. Cf. *ibid.*, 176.



using the messenger route. They arrived there in the month of Rabīʿ II 712/[August 1312]. He was a good governor. He led the troops to Malatya and conquered it. His reputation was great; the amirs and governors in Damascus treated him with reverence and the subjects felt safe under his rule. For fear of him, because of his scrupulousness and his severe punishments, neither an amir nor a man of high degree could oppress anybody, whether it was a *dhimmī* or another. He constantly rose in rank which doubled his *iqṭāʿ*, his presents, and his income in horses, fabric, birds, and birds of prey, so that he was given the title of *Aʿazz Allāh Anṣār al-Maqarr al-Karīm al-ʿĀlī al-Amīrī*, and among his courtesy titles was *al-Atābikī al-Zāhidī al-ʿĀbidī*. He was called *Muʿizz al-Islām wa-al-Muslimīn, Sayyid al-Umarāʾ fī al-ʿĀlamīn*. And it was not known to us that letters of a sultan can also be written by a governor or by someone who is not governor but has a different function or position. The sultan hardly took any steps without sending for and consulting with him.

Rarely was he denied a request he addressed to the sultan. Whatever he decided concerning the appointment of an amir, a governor, an official or a judge, the bestowal of an *iqṭāʿ*, and so forth, the sovereign's approving signature would be given forthwith. Neither I nor any other man has ever heard of him giving someone an *iqṭāʿ*, the position of an amir, or any other office, whether important or unimportant, and accepting a bribe for it. He was incorruptible and virtuous.

Sharaf al-Dīn al-Nashw told me: "What he was given as a present by the sultan in the year 733/[1332–33] added up to 1,050,000 dirhams in addition to the horses and saddles which he was [also] given, the money in cash, the yield of the crops, and the small livestock which he owned in Syria. Then I saw documents in his hand which showed his expenses. These were 23 registers of what he needed during his sovereignty. They included two falcon-drums made of pure gold that weighed 1,000 *mathāqīl*, as well as the dusty long-sleeved gown which he was wearing." At length al-Nashw told me: "It [i.e., the gown] was valued for the sultan at 2,000 or 1,500 Egyptian dinars."

After that he betook himself [to the sultan] four times, I think, and every time the presents he received were doubled. His power and his reputation increased until the Egyptian amirs who were the [sultan's] bodyguards dreaded him. The amir Sayf al-Dīn Qurmushī



al-Ḥājib told me that the sultan had said to him: “O Qurmushī, for 30 years I have been trying to make people understand what I want to do for the amir, and [yet] they haven’t understood what I mean with that. The code of sovereignty keeps me from saying myself that I will not do anything for anyone unless it is on his request or intercession,” and he wished him [i.e., Tankiz] a long life. This reached his ears, and he said: “For the sultan’s life I will die.” When the amir Sayf al-Dīn Qurmushī communicated this to the sultan he said to him: “Tell him, if he lives longer than me, then he will be of use for my children, wives, and relatives; if he dies before I do, what should I do with his children? They can’t become anything higher than amirs, which they already are now, during his lifetime.” This is about how he spoke.

He introduced something we haven’t heard of anyone before, for he had a secretary who didn’t have any other business than to calculate the wealth which he [i.e., Tankiz] gained and that which he actually possessed. When the year came to an end, he compiled documents about the *zakāt* he [i.e., Tankiz] had to pay. He ordered that [the money] should be taken and given to those who were rightfully entitled to it.

His capital and his private property increased. He built the mosque in Ḥikr al-Summāq in Damascus which was named after him. Next to it he built a tomb and a bath. He built a tomb for his wife next to al-Khawāṣīn and a madrasah next to his house, the Dār al-Dhahab. In Jerusalem he built a caravansary; he renewed Jerusalem, supplied [the city with] water and diverted it to the Ḥaram district right towards the doors of the Aqṣá Mosque. He built two bathhouses there and an extraordinarily beautiful covered bazaar. In Ṣafad he built the hospital which was named after him and renewed the canals in Damascus because their water had changed. He renovated mosques and madrasahs, broadened the paths there [i.e., in Damascus] and took care of issues [regarding the city]. He owned edifices, buildings, and properties all over Syria.

He was not devious and did not hide anything. He would not let anything pass and would not allow any injustice. Neither did he flatter the amirs nor did he pay any special attention to them. In his time people’s properties and employment were safe. Each year he went hunting near the Euphrates with his troops. On some of his travels he crossed the Euphrates and stayed on the other side



for five days, hunting. The people fled from him into the cities of Tabriz and Sulṭānīyah, as well as to the cities of Mārdīn und Sīs.

His only aims were justice and its promotion, and to foster the application of the shari‘ah. However, he suffered from a hallucination [clouding of the mind], which made him imagine things that were not real, but of which he was absolutely certain. Awestruck, nobody was able to open his eyes and tell him the truth about what he was doing, [even though] it was the cause of several people’s deaths. When he was angry he could neither approve nor forgive. When he turned to violence he was immoderately cruel.<sup>26</sup> Even if the offence was inconsiderable and of little account, he magnified and exalted it and inflated it more and more, exceeding all limits.

I saw the following things in His Excellency: mostly, when he was seized by a fury against someone, this person would become so weak and miserable that he died. The judge Sharaf al-Dīn Abū Bakr ibn al-Shihāb Maḥmūd said: “By God, I was constantly worrying and afraid; I always expected something like this,” until [eventually] he was arrested and died.

When he was infuriated with someone he would not forgive him. Qiwām al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Abī al-Fawāris al-Baghdādī told me [the following]: “Once I said to him: ‘By God, O master, I have seen greater personalities and wealthier people than you.’ When he heard these words, he got into a fury and said to me angrily: ‘Whom have you seen that was greater and wealthier than me?’ At this I said to him: ‘Kharbandā,<sup>27</sup> Jūbān,<sup>28</sup> und Abū Sa‘īd.’<sup>29</sup> When he heard that, his fury abated. Then I said to him: ‘But [their] subjects did not love them as [yours love you], and they did not wish them any good, as your subjects wish for you. Their subjects did not live in this safety and justice.’ At this he said to me: ‘What joy could a sovereign have, whose subjects are not safe and sound?’”

About his love for justice [I can report the following]: One day one of his closest confidants, whose name I have forgotten, had

<sup>26</sup>An allusion to Quran 26:130.

<sup>27</sup>The person meant is Khudābandā, Qāzān’s brother.

<sup>28</sup>Great Mongolian amir under Uljāytū and Abū Sa‘īd. He was Abū Sa‘īd’s deputy and son-in-law. Cf. Samira Kortantamer, *Ägypten und Syrien zwischen 1317 und 1341 in der Chronik des Mufaḍḍal b. Abī l-Faḍā’il* (Freiburg, 1973), 61.

<sup>29</sup>Ninth sovereign of the Ilkhanate (704–36/1305–35), ruled 716–36/1316–35. Cf. Paul Jackson, “Abū Sa‘īd,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1: 374–77.



a meal with him. He [i.e., Tankiz] looked at his bandaged finger and asked for the reason, but the man did not want to name it. However, he did not leave him any peace until he finally said: “O master, a bowyer tried to make an arch three times [without succeeding]. He made me angry and I hit him with my fist.” When he heard what the man was saying, he turned away from his food and said: “Raise him.” Then he hurled him to the ground and gave him the cane 400 times, as it is said. He stripped him of his *iqṭāʿ* and was angry with him for years, until someone put in a good word for him. Then he showed himself favorable to him again. Years after Tankiz’s death, his secretary Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Kūndak told me: “By God, during the time I was in his service I have never seen him inattentive. I always saw him as if he stood in front of God, the Sublime. At nighttime he only prayed with a fresh ritual washing,” so he said.

The Shaykh Ḥasan ibn Damurtāsh<sup>30</sup> was vexed with him [i.e., Tankiz] and dreaded him. It is said that he defamed him in front of the sultan and said to him: “He wanted to come to me and conspire against you.” After this the sultan acted unapproachably [towards Tankiz]. This happened [just] when the amir Sayf al-Dīn Bashtāk, Sayf al-Dīn Yalbughā al-Yaḥyawī,<sup>31</sup> as well as twenty amirs from the [sovereign’s] bodyguard were planning on coming to Damascus with two of the daughters of the sultan of Egypt, to marry them off to the two sons of the amir Sayf al-Dīn Tankiz. Thereupon [Tankiz] sent the following [message to the sultan]: “O master, what is the use of those noble amirs coming to Damascus? The coast lands are barren this year, [and] high expenses for the army are necessary. I will come to [your] palace together with my sons and the wedding will take place there.”

At this, [the sultan] sent the amir Sayf al-Dīn Ṭājār al-Dawādār<sup>32</sup> to him, who told him: “The sultan is sending you his regards and says he is not asking you to come to Egypt any more; also he is not sending you a noble amir any more, so you do not need to worry.” Thereupon he said: “I will go to him with you and my sons.” The other said to him: “If you arrived in Bilbays he would send you back. I want to spare you this sorrow. In eight days I will

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Kortantamer, *Ägypten und Syrien*, 194.

<sup>31</sup>He successively became governor of Ḥamāh, Aleppo, and Damascus and died in 748/1347. Wiet, *Les biographies*, 403.

<sup>32</sup>A Mamluk amir, died 742/1341. Wiet, *Les biographies*, 174.



be with you again with a new certificate of appointment and new presents.” With these words he convinced him. Had he gone to see the sultan it would have been better for him, but God decides what will be executed.<sup>33</sup>

In those times the inhabitants of Damascus had spread the rumor that he had decided to go to the country of the Mongols. This gossip came to the ears of Ṭājār al-Dawādār. Tankiz had treated him in an indecorous manner in those times, whereupon he angrily turned away from him. It seemed as if he had falsified a remark [of Tankiz], but God knows best. The sultan was very cross. He sent 5,000 or 10,000 horsemen, and Bashtāk was their commander. He made the entire Egyptian army swear [allegiance] because he was scared. He sent [an order] by way of a messenger to the amir Sayf al-Dīn Ṭashtamur, the governor of Ṣafad, commanding him to go to Damascus to arrest Tankiz. He wrote [orders] to the chamberlain, the amir Sayf al-Dīn Quṭlūbughā al-Fakhrī and the amirs [and commanded them] to arrest him, and he said: “If you can keep him from going [to the Mongols], then that is all I want. The troops will come to you from Egypt.”

The amir Sayf al-Dīn Ṭashtamur reached al-Mizzah by noon and sent for the amir Sayf al-Dīn al-Fakhrī. His secretary had already arrived in the early morning of that day and had met the amirs. They had made an arrangement. The amir Sayf al-Dīn al-Lamash al-Ḥājib went to al-Qābūn and made the way [there] impassable. He threw pieces of wood on [the way], tethered camels [there], and [unloaded] bales of straw. He said to the people: “The enemy of the sultan will be passing you soon; stop him.” The amirs rode off and gathered at the Bāb al-Naṣr.

All this happened while he [i.e., Tankiz] was awaiting the arrival of Ṭājār al-Dawādār, without having any notice of what was being planned against him. This day he had gone to the palace which he had built on [his] fief with his wives. The amir Sayf al-Dīn Qurmushī went to him and told him about the arrival of the amir Ṭashtamur. He was astonished and perplexed about that and said to him: “What am I supposed to do now?” [The other] said: “We are going into the Dār al-Sa‘ādah.” Thereupon he went and entered the Dār al-Sa‘ādah, and the gates of the city were closed. He wanted to put on [his battle] dress and fight. Then he was told

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<sup>33</sup>An allusion to Quran 8:42.



that the people were plundering and that Damascus was at war; upon this he preferred allaying the riot without drawing weapons. He was advised to leave. Thereupon he sent for the amir Sayf al-Dīn Ṭashtamur and had him told: “Why have you come [here]? Come in to see me.” [The amir] said: “I have come as a messenger from your master; if you come outside to see me I will tell you what he told me to do. Even if you go to where the sun rises, I will follow you. I will not return unless one of us dies. [But] I will not enter the city.”

Thereupon he went outside to them and realized that this was his end. So he surrendered. His sword was taken from him, and he was tied up behind the mosque al-Qadam; in the afternoon on 23 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 740/[21 June 1340] he was sent to the sultan, together with the amir Rukn al-Dīn Baybars, the armor-bearer. The inhabitants of Damascus pitied him. How long they pitied him! Hail to the one who can sweep away [all] wealth [at once], the one whose reign does not end, whose power is everlasting and who is not befallen by misfortunes.

I saw him myself in the year 739/[1338–39], when the sultan went to Biʿr al-Bayḍāʾ with his amirs and children to meet him. When he was close to him, he approached him by foot, kissed his head, embraced him, and honored him in an exaggerated way, after one amir after the other had already come to him, greeted him, and kissed his hand and his knee. The amir Sayf al-Dīn Qawṣūn came to the inn in al-Ṣāliḥīyah to welcome him. As for the presents with which he [i.e., the sultan] overwhelmed him daily in the year [739], until he went away for a period of almost fifty days, they were beyond all limits.

I saw him when he was hunting in Upper Egypt that year. The sultan came to him. In front of him came the amirs Malaktamur al-Ḥijāzī,<sup>34</sup> Yalbughā al-Yaḥyawī, Alṭunbughā al-Māridānī,<sup>35</sup> Āqsunqur, and another, whom I have now forgotten. On the hand of each of them sat a bird of prey. He [i.e., the sultan] said to him: “O officer, I am your hunting amir; those are your falcon-bearers and these are your birds.” Then [Tankiz] wanted to dismount to kiss the earth, but [the sultan] kept him from it.

Then I saw him myself the day he was arrested and chained.

<sup>34</sup>A Mamluk amir, died 748/1347. Wiet, *Les biographies*, 380.

<sup>35</sup>A Mamluk amir and governor of the province of Ḥamāh and Aleppo; died 744/1343. *Ibid.*, 77.



The blacksmith [who put him in irons] made him stand up and sit down again four times while the people stood in front of him. This was a clear warning to me. His income was confiscated, and Ṭughāy<sup>36</sup> and Janghāy,<sup>37</sup> his two mamluks, were held in the citadel. After a short while the amirs Sayf al-Dīn Bashtāk, Ṭājār al-Dawādār, al-Ḥājj Ariqṭāy, and seven more amirs arrived. They stayed at the palace al-Ablaq. At their arrival they made the amir swear [allegiance] and began to exhibit his income in public. They brought out his treasures and accumulated belongings.

Bashtāk went to Egypt; with him he had 336,000 Egyptian dinars from [Tankiz'] property, as well as 1,500,000 dirhams, jewels made of precious rubies, wonderful pieces, rare pearls, brocade fabrics, caps made of brocade, golden belts, silver containers inlaid with gold, and satin and other fabrics whose quantity added up to 800 *ḥiml*. He had left Barsbughā<sup>38</sup> in his place, who then went [after him] to Egypt carrying 40,000 dinars as well as 1,100,000 dirhams, after having extorted these from the people and the remaining property of Tankiz, and having taken his mamluks, [female] slaves, and valuable horses.

As for himself [i.e., Tankiz], he was sent to Alexandria. There he was held prisoner for a period of less than a month. Then God the Sublime decided on his case. It is said that the commandant Ibrāhīm ibn Ṣābir<sup>39</sup> went to him, and that this was the last thing ever to become known about him. He died and the inhabitants of Alexandria prayed for him. His grave is now visited and prayed at. May God the Sublime take pity on him. [In the meter *al-kāmīl*]:

“Like lightning, flaring up in the land, he vanished as if he had never shone.”

Then the decree of the sultan was published [with the command] to list his property. This was done justly by experienced people and persons who knew how to estimate the value properly. Together with this [list] official statements came into the state chancellery to be sent to the sultan. From these I copied the following: [Here

<sup>36</sup>Died 741/1341. Ibid., 177.

<sup>37</sup>Died 741/1341. Ibid., 124.

<sup>38</sup>A close confidant of Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir. He died 742/1342. Kortantamer, *Ägypten und Syrien*, 160.

<sup>39</sup>As a *jandār*, he was responsible for torture and executions. After Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir's death, he himself was tortured until he died in 742/1341. Ibid., 236.



follows a list of his properties in Syria and their values]. . . .

All this [which has just been listed] is in addition to the properties and charitable institutions he owned in Ṣafad, ʿAjlūn, Jerusalem, Nābulus, al-Ramlah, Jaljūlyah, and Egypt. He built a beautiful hospital in Ṣafad, and this was also where he had some of his charitable foundations. In Jerusalem he built a hospice, two bath houses, and covered bazaars. He owned a very beautiful caravansary in Jaljūlyah, which I think is a charitable institution [foundation]. In al-Ramlah and in the Kāfūrīyah gardens in Cairo he owned a magnificent house, a bath, and several stores.

At the beginning of Rajab 744/[middle of November 1343] his coffin was transferred from Alexandria to Damascus. He was laid to rest in his mausoleum next to his mosque, of which it is known that he had it built. May God take pity on him.

#### FACTS OR FICTION?

A typical feature of Mamluk historiography is the various narrative strategies the different chroniclers use in their biographical or annalistic texts to produce emotional effects on their readers.<sup>40</sup> They utilize, for example, tropes (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony) or anecdotes, dialogues, and/or quotations from poems and from the Quran. In his description of Tankiz' life and career we find several of these literary elements:

#### ANECDOTES

Al-Ṣafadī enriches his story with numerous little anecdotes (*nukat*), i.e., short tales narrating an interesting or amusing biographical incident. By giving variety and color to the text, they satisfy the taste of the audience. Ulrich Haarmann writes in his study on Mamluk historians that such anecdotes serve as a connection between history and literature. In general they should

on the one hand, illustrate complex, dry, or very factual accounts to increase the readers' awareness of the historian's main issues. On the other hand, they can serve the author's interest in entertaining his readership as well. If this is the case, the anecdotes exclusively focus on those facts which are suited to telling a good story. At this point, it is no longer the question for the chronicler whether these textual fragments are important for the overall scheme of his work

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<sup>40</sup>Cf. Haarmann, *Quellenstudien*, 167. For some of the following arguments, see also Fischer, "Vier ausgewählte Sultans- und Emirsviten," 66–76.



or not.<sup>41</sup>

Within al-Ṣafadī's *Wāfi* these short, entertaining, and amusing anecdotes have the function of emphasizing certain features and characteristics of historic figures. They illuminate special events in their *curricula vitae*. The annalistic framework of their narratives is punctuated by the inclusion of anecdotes, digressions which serve as commentary on the events of the present. Haarmann quotes Ibn al-Dawādārī (d. 713/1313), who recommends in his universal history *Kanz al-Durar* the use of stories as a rhetorical stylistic device:

For this digression we have several good reasons. The first is the following: books whose story follows just one mode of narration are bound to be boring. Therefore, we tried to present our speech in an interesting and varied way by using odd and remarkable anecdotes.<sup>42</sup>

Two short anecdotes which al-Ṣafadī incorporates in his biography of Tankiz constitute a good example of this narrative strategy:

When he was infuriated with someone he would not forgive him. Qiwām al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Abī al-Fawāris al-Baghdādī told me [the following]: “Once I said to him: ‘By God, O master, I have seen greater personalities and wealthier people than you.’ When he heard these words, he got into a fury and said to me angrily: ‘Whom have you seen that was greater and wealthier than me?’ On this I said to him: ‘Kharbandā, Jūbān, and Abū Sa‘id.’ When he heard that his fury abated. Then I said to him: ‘But [their] subjects did not love them as [yours love you], and they did not wish them any good, as your subjects wish for you. Their subjects did not live in this safety and justice.’ On this he said to me: ‘What joy could a sovereign have, whose subjects are not safe and sound?’”

About his love for justice [I can report the following]: One day one of his closest confidants, whose name I have forgotten, had a meal with him. He [i.e., Tankiz] looked at his bandaged finger and asked for the reason, but the man did not want to name it. However, he did not leave him any peace until he finally said: “O master, a bowyer tried to make an arch three times [without succeeding]. He made me angry and I hit him with my fist.” When

<sup>41</sup>Haarmann, *Quellenstudien*, 167.

<sup>42</sup>Quoted from Ulrich Haarmann, “Auflösung und Bewahrung der klassischen Formen arabischer Geschichtsschreibung in der Zeit der Mamluken,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 121 (1971): 55–56.



he heard what the man was saying, he turned away from his food and said: “Raise him.” Then he hurled him to the ground and gave him the cane 400 times, as it is said. He stripped him of his *iqṭāʿ* and was angry with him for years, until someone put in a good word for him. Then he showed himself favorable to him again.

These insertions correspond to the aim and objective of anecdotes. On the one hand they give us information about al-Ṣafadī’s idea of Tankiz’ character. On the other hand they provide us with an interesting and entertaining biography of the governor.<sup>43</sup> In general, one should be very careful when it comes to reconstructing reality from this material. We never know whether the picture the author draws in his text is real or just the result of his imagination. One has to find really independent sources which tell the same story to be sure that the event described actually happened.

#### DIALOGUES

When reported or imitated in the narrative, dialogues constitute a form of literature used for purposes of rhetorical entertainment and instruction. In his biographies al-Ṣafadī often puts words into the mouths of people. Everything in these scenes, from their setting to the dramatis personae, can be an invention of the chronicler.<sup>44</sup> Normally, he just wants to bring out a very complex and complicated relationship between two or three persons:

His power and his reputation increased until the Egyptian amirs who were the [sultan’s] bodyguards dreaded him. The amir Sayf al-Dīn Qurmushī al-Ḥājib told me that the sultan had said to him: “O Qurmushī, for 30 years I have been trying to make people understand what I want to do for the amir, and [yet] they haven’t understood what I mean with that. The code of sovereignty keeps me from saying myself that I will not do anything for anyone unless it is on his request or intercession,” and he wished him [i.e., Tankiz] a long life. This reached his ears, and he said: “For the sultan’s life I will die.” When the amir Sayf al-Dīn Qurmushī communicated this to the sultan he said to him: “Tell him, if he lives longer than me, then he will be of use for my children, wives, and relatives; if he dies before I do, what should I do with his children? They can’t

<sup>43</sup>Sometimes al-Ṣafadī includes in his *Wāfi* biographies in which we find only anecdotes and no concrete information about the person at all. Cf. Donald P. Little, *An Introduction to Mamlūk Historiography: An Analysis of Arabic Annalistic and Biographical Sources for the Reign of al-Malik an-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāʿūn* (Wiesbaden, 1970), 104–5.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. Haarmann, “Auflösung,” 57.



become anything higher than amirs, which they already are now, during his lifetime.” This is about how he spoke.

All this happened while he [i.e., Tankiz] was awaiting the arrival of Ṭājār al-Dawādār, without having any notice of what was being planned against him. This day he had gone to the palace which he had built on [his] fief with his wives. The amir Sayf al-Dīn Qurmushī went to him and told him about the arrival of the amir Ṭashtamur. He was astonished and perplexed about that and said to him: “What am I supposed to do now?” [The other] said: “We are going into the Dār al-Sa‘ādah.” Thereupon he went and entered the Dār al-Sa‘ādah, and the gates of the city were closed. He wanted to put on [his battle] dress and fight. Then he was told that the people were plundering and that Damascus was at war; upon this he preferred allaying the riot without drawing weapons. He was advised to leave. Thereupon he sent for the amir Sayf al-Dīn Ṭashtamur and had him told: “Why have you come [here]? Come in to see me.” [The amir] said: “I have come as a messenger from your master; if you come outside to see me I will tell you what he told me to do. Even if you go to where the sun rises, I will follow you. I will not return unless one of us dies. [But] I will not enter the city.”

Dialogue expresses the convolutions of human thought so spontaneously that it almost defies analysis. We should not trust it.

#### POEMS

Al-Ṣafadī had a predilection for poetry. In his *Wāfi*, he heaps very long and redundant *saj‘* poems upon the reader. They don’t refer to any event in the life of the main character but are only of rhetorical value. That is also true for the verses at the end of Tankiz’ biography.<sup>45</sup> As a rule, the poems were not written by him. This does not mean that al-Ṣafadī wasn’t a good poet. Quite the contrary, he belongs to the small group of outstanding, creative, and innovative poets of the Mamluk era.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup>Cf. al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, 432–35.

<sup>46</sup>On al-Ṣafadī as a remarkable poet, see Thomas Bauer, “Literarische Anthologien der Mamlūkenzeit,” in *Die Mamlūken: Studien zu ihrer Geschichte und Kultur: Zum Gedenken an Ulrich Haarmann (1942–1999)*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Anja Pistor-Hatam (Schenefeld, 2003), 71–122. See also Bauer’s “Mamluk Literature: Misunderstandings and New Approaches,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2005): 105–32.



#### QURANIC ALLUSIONS

References to the Holy Book are a very important rhetorical element in historiographical texts. In Tankiz' biography al-Ṣafadī writes:

His only aims were justice and its exercise, and to foster the application of the shariʿah. However, he suffered from a hallucination [clouding of the mind], which made him imagine things that were not real, but of which he was absolutely certain. Awestruck, nobody was able to open his eyes and tell him the truth about what he was doing, [even though] it was the cause of several people's deaths. When he was angry he could neither approve nor forgive. *When he turned to violence he was immoderately cruel.* Even if the offence was inconsiderable and of little account, he magnified and exalted it and inflated it more and more, exceeding all limits.

At this, [the sultan] sent the amir Sayf al-Dīn Ṭājār al-Dawādār to him, who told him: "The sultan is sending you his regards and says he is not asking you to come to Egypt any more; also he is not sending you a noble amir any more, so you do not need to worry." Thereupon he said: "I will go to him with you and my sons." The other said to him: "If you arrived in Bilbays he would send you back. I want to spare you this sorrow. In eight days I will be with you again with a new certificate of appointment and new presents." With these words he convinced him. *Had he gone to see the sultan it would have been better for him, but God decides what will be executed.*

The italicized passages are allusions to Quran 26:130 ("And if you attack, you strike ruthlessly?") and to Quran 8:42 ("And had you planned for this meeting, you would have disagreed on its timing, but God was to enforce a command that was already done. So that He would destroy those to be destroyed with proof, and to let those who will live be alive with proof"). For us, it is very difficult, not to say nearly impossible, to supply proof of the truth of al-Ṣafadī's statements.

To sum up, a typical feature of Mamluk biographies is the fact that the personality of the person whom the author describes in his text seems not to be that important. The person as such is only of secondary importance. The biographer does not show any interest in describing the inner development or socialization of character. The traits of the heroes are very often presented in the form of short anecdotes. We get, for example, very meagre information about Tankiz. He is characterized by al-Ṣafadī as being cruel but just, violent-tempered, and unforgiving. At the same time, the author of the *Wāfi* says that he acted open-mindedly, honestly,



and cleverly. We learn nothing concrete about his childhood, his upbringing, his family, or his feeling. The biographies offer the reader nothing more than a list of certain characteristics. But these features are put so vaguely that they could fit every second historical personality.

Al-Şafadī is no exception among the Mamluk historians. Comparing his biographies to vitae written by other scholars, one must say that their inner structures always follow the same pattern: the biographer wants to emphasize the religious, political, or cultural contribution of the chosen person to the Muslim community.<sup>47</sup> Al-Şafadī deems Tankiz appropriate and worthy to be included in his *Wāfi* because he was not only an important amir but also a confidant of the sultan, a very successful military leader, and a respected and generous patron of architecture in Egypt and Syria.

Al-Şafadī was a man with literary ambitions. He knew all the literary strategies and rhetorical tricks. He was very interested in Abbasid poetry and had an excellent knowledge of the sources. As a Mamluk official he had a tendency to describe his peers. Al-Şafadī's method of working meets the expectations of the readership and complies with its demand for "stark literarisierten Werken der Popularitätsmethode."<sup>48</sup> Historical writing is as fictional as other forms of literary expression, being as Hayden White puts it, "a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse."<sup>49</sup>

#### RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

The discussion of the relationship between "narrativity" and historiography, poetry and narration, language and textuality, fact and fiction has demonstrated that even after the imposition of the scientific method on all realms of knowledge which set in with the closing of the eighteenth century, there are more similarities than differences among historiography, poetry, and rhetoric. Recent studies across the field have shown the soundness of this hypothesis. Unfortunately, the overwhelming majority of modern theoreticians are only interested in European and Anglo-American historiography after 1800 and do not take into consideration other cultures or "premodern" historiographical works. This is, in my opinion, a culpable omission, because I think it a very interesting field of research for a historian not only to sort out basic facts and information about social phenomena from the chronicles but also to analyze how these works are composed. What does the author intend with his chronicle? What kind of narrative techniques does he use, and to what end? Which topoi, stereotypes, clichés, myths, archetypes, and/or

<sup>47</sup>Cf. Little, *Introduction*, 112.

<sup>48</sup>Cf. Haarmann, "Auflösung," 59.

<sup>49</sup>Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore, 1973), ix, quoted in Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography*, 4.



legends can we isolate? Is it possible to gain some insight into the “literary canon” and the “literary cliché,” i.e., the two categories discussed by Likhachev? Can we distinguish prevailing cultural semiotic associations? What do we know about the historical consciousness that is expressed in the chronicles? Does the author try to make “sense” of the past? And if he does, what form does this “sense” take? What about linguistic and semantic connotations in the text?

Another field of research could be the representation and narratological translation of “historical thinking” in historiographical texts. Here are the main characteristics of “historical thinking”: (1) Both happy and unhappy or fortunate and unfortunate events have to be explained. This is the more necessary if these events do not come up to the expectations one has in mind while doing something. Above all it is the realized or unrealized intention that leads to the desire to explain these events. This is true for individuals, groups, or communities, if they want to create an identity. (2) Experiences are always experiences in time. The “historical thinking” has to interpret and explain these experiences in time. (3) Although historiography must invariably be used for interpreting experiences in time, it is not the only form of “historical thinking.” It is a fact that historiography normally tries to be nearer to the truth than other texts and tries to operate with chosen elements of “historical thinking,” but in the end one shouldn’t consider this approach or this sort of texts totally different from other approaches or texts. This is all the more the case if we proceed on the assumption that every text is part of the mental process we call “historical thinking.” (4) “Historical thinking” produces sense or meaning out of time. Time in this context again means events which have taken place in time and which have to be explained, whereas sense or meaning stands for understanding all the connotations and epistemological facets the word “time” includes. If someone wants to understand what meaning the present time has for him, he has to refer to the experiences of the past. In addition to that, he can, for example, deduce the further course of development or future processes from comparable cases, which also occurred in the past. His expectations or hopes for the future exercise a strong influence on his acting in the present. They lay the foundation for his social, political, or individual behavior. In the final analysis “historical thinking” and historiography have only the task to make it possible for an individual, a group, or a community to master his or its life or—to say it in other words—to give an orientation in time. The essence of “historical thinking” and historiography is not necessarily its scientific claim. (5) Aside from this orientation in time, “historical thinking” achieves a reflection of the subject or the historical self on its own premises. One can say that action as well as writing as a consequence of thinking always leads to the idea a historical subject has of its own, if this subject understands itself as a planning and acting unity. Therefore, if an action upon which one has been reflecting does not achieve the



intended results, not only the understanding of the world but also the self-image, the conception of oneself is affected. The result is personal and extra-personal self-doubt, especially if we keep in mind that during a period of upheaval and change “historical thinking” gives meaning to our life (*Sinnstiftung*) and continuity to the individual or collective identity. In this manner the understanding of oneself is preserved or newly formulated and has repercussions on future actions, insofar as the historical agents want to be seen and judged by other subjects in the context of its self-image. (6) “Historical thinking” and historiography do not give and cannot give eternal verities or supertemporal answers. This statement seems the more true if we consider the fact that “historical thinking” has to give meaning to the world again and again. On the other hand, it is impossible to think of this task, i.e., giving meaning to the world, without the claim of being true. (7) Here we have the problem of what to consider true. In the field of “historical thinking” historiography or—generally speaking—occupation with the past in every scientific form is synonymous with the institutionalized public dealing with its own collective memory (*Erinnerungsarbeit*), what in the end is a problem of norms. If we ask for the intentions and motives for acting in the past, we have in the first place to reflect upon the current values of this past. Norms, i.e., value judgements on things, attitudes, ways of acting, tastes, etc., are part of the process which leads to the description of the past as history. We are obliged to decipher these norms, because the human past gives us no key to decode its events as a history which has any meaning for the present. The past as such makes no history. What transforms the past into a history is our interest in it, our desire to let the past explain who we are. (8) Today, historical science and historiography are bound to the necessity of being universally valid. This is of course a self-image that this so-called science can hardly ever fulfill. History as the result of historiography is basically in its fundamental structure, i.e., as a narration, not different from other narrations which are related without the claim of being scientific. This narrativity illustrates that history is a construct. It is not possible to give meaning to the world out of the knowledge of past events if we do not see the inner epistemological coherence of a text which becomes evident by its narrative pattern. (9) Considering the fact that we cannot separate historiography from other texts, we have to presume that we can find in historical texts the same narrative strategies as in other texts. Thus, we find for example the following three elements: (a) the claim of having been an eyewitness to the events (*empirical validity*); (b) the hint that the story is important for the reader, i.e., that it leads to a better understanding of the present (*normative validity*, because the choices the narrator makes are influenced by his norms, because he wants the reader to share his values); (c) the narration unites experiences and norms and wants to give meaning to the world (*narrative validity*). (10) To understand the present in the



context of the past is not possible with isolated facts (*empirical validity*) or with values even if one agrees with these values (*normative validity*). For this reason, the *narrative validity* is the specifically historical criterion of what is true. Through the applications of norms and values (what is interesting?), it turns the past into history and then draws out of that history conclusions for the present time by giving instructions for acting. This finally is essential for planning the future.

If we want to understand our chronicles better it might be a good idea to follow both of these tracks. At the least, there are some interesting and new questions. I am sure that the answers will broaden our horizon.

