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Ubi sumus? Quo vademus?

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With numerous figures

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Contents

Stephan Conermann
Quo vadis, Mamlukology? *(A German Perspective)* 7

Thomas Bauer
Mamluk Literature as a Means of Communication 23

Caterina Bori
Theology, Politics, Society: the missing link. Studying Religion in the Mamluk Period 57

Albrecht Fuess
Mamluk Politics 95

Syrinx von Hees
Mamlukology as Historical Anthropology 119

Thomas Herzog
Mamluk (Popular) Culture. 131

Konrad Hirschler
Studying Mamluk Historiography. From Source-Criticism to the Cultural Turn 159

Th. Emil Homerin
Sufism in Mamluk Studies: A Review of Scholarship in the Field 187

Carine Juvin
Mamluk Inscriptions 211

Paulina B. Lewicka
Did Ibn al-Ḥājj Copy from Cato? Reconsidering Aspects of
Inter-Communal Antagonism of the Mamluk Period 231

Christian Müller
Mamluk Law: a reassessment 263

Lucian Reinfandt
Mamlūk Documentary Studies 285

Bethany J. Walker
What Can Archaeology Contribute to the New Mamlukology? Where
Culture Studies and Social Theory Meet 311

Torsten Wollina
Ibn Ṭawq's *Taʿlīq*. An Ego-Document for Mamlūk Studies 337

Thomas Bauer

Mamluk Literature as a Means of Communication

Pragmatic and literary communication

Every work of literature is the manifestation of an act of communication. In this respect, Mamluk literature is no different to Abbasid (or any other) literature. However, the use of literature as a means of communication changed considerably from the Abbasid to the Mamluk period. Most significantly, the courts of caliphs, princes, sultans and governors gradually lost their central role in literary communication. Instead, urban, bourgeois milieus increasingly participated in the consumption and production of literary texts. Anthologies like the *Yatīmat al-Dahr* by al-Thaʿālibī (350 – 429/961 – 1038) and its successors, the *Dumyat al-Qaṣr* by al-Bākharzī (c. 418 – 467/1027 – 1075) and the *Kharīdat al-ʿAṣr* by ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (519 – 597/1125 – 1201) display an increasing number of poems written by judges, Ḥadīth scholars, grammarians, traders and craftsmen.

By the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods, this transformation was completed. Many, if not the majority, of religious scholars wrote poems and literary letters, while *udabāʾ*, the *hommes de lettres*, also had training in Quran, Ḥadīth and the law. Ibn Nubātah (686 – 768/1287 – 1366), to give just one example, was a full-time *adīb*, but nevertheless he gave lectures in which he transmitted Ḥadīth and Ibn Isḥāq/Ibn Hishām's *Life of the Prophet*. On the other hand, at least four judges are included among the eleven contributors to his *Sajʿ al-Muṭawwaq*, a work to which we will return later. I once labeled this process the "*adabization* of the *ʿulamāʾ* and the *ʿulamāʾization* of the *udabāʾ*", but even this description does not do justice to the increasing participation of traders and craftsmen in literary life to such a degree that there was even a gradual blurring of the boundaries between "high" and "popular" literature.[1] In any case, Ayyubid and Mamluk literature became bourgeois, or, to use a German term, underwent a process of *Verbürgerlichung*. Rather than serving for representation as in previous periods, literature began to serve as a means of communication between members of the

1 On these developments see Hirschler, *Written Word*.

educated middle class. It should go without saying that this development had a fundamental influence on the content and style of the literature produced during these periods.[2]

One of the consequences of this development was the use of literary texts for pragmatic communication as well as the creation of pragmatic texts in a literary guise.[3] As a result, the distinction between pragmatic and literary communication cannot be said to be exclusive. Texts may engage in both forms of communication. Before we examine the role of communication as played by literary texts, let us say a few words about the differences between pragmatic and literary communications.[4]

Pragmatic communication, the common form of everyday communication, is based on the assumption that texts accord with reality, that they claim to be true and induce a specific reaction from their hearers and readers that is based on the same shared assumptions. Appointment decrees are a typical example of pragmatic communication. They can only function if the person being appointed truly exists, if he/she truly has been given the job and if the people in his/her domain accept his/her authority. If they decide to read the decree for its literary value (provided it has any) alone and fail to take it seriously, the communication will have failed.

Literary texts, on the contrary, do not have to obey this rule. In societies in which literary texts exist, people understand that in artistic literature the convention mentioned above is not necessarily valid. Literary texts are under no obligation to conform to reality, and there is no requirement that they be true or that they be obeyed. Instead, they are expected to provide some sort of aesthetic benefit. The *convention of aesthetics* (rather than the convention of conforming to reality) is the first important difference between pragmatic and literary texts.

The presence of stylistic features not common in pragmatic texts such as rhyme, parallelism, paronomasia, metaphor, etc. is also a strong indication that a text is intended for literary communication. But this is not always the case. Most of the poems written for one's grandmother on her birthday will not generally be considered literary texts. This is not so much a judgment of the poems' quality but rather has to do with their lack of polyvalence. The *convention of polyvalence* is, according to S.J. Schmidt, the second criterion of literary communication.[5] People know that "ordinary" texts are intended to inform, instruct, ask, suggest, claim, command, etc. in a more or less unambiguous way. And hearers and readers know that they are expected to react accordingly. This is not the case for

2 Panegyrics to sultans, governors and high-ranking officials were, of course, still composed in Mamluk times, but no longer set the model for style.

3 As, e.g., didactic verse, see van Gelder, *Didactic Verse.*

4 On the difference between literary and every-day communication see Schmidt, *Grundriß.*

5 Ibid., 133.

literary texts. People may react differently to them at different times, on different occasions or while in different moods, they may have different individual interpretations and associations and they may connect them, in different ways, to their own lives and their own experiences. These different reactions are not in any way antithetical to the intention of the producer of the text and thus are not to be considered failed communication.

Following this definition of literary texts, it is obvious that most poems for grandmothers on their birthdays do not qualify as literary texts because they can hardly be understood as anything other than poems for these specific occasions. The same situation may, on the other hand, spur a poet to write a poem about old age, which even people who do not know the grandmother whose birthday gave rise to the poem's composition can find relevant. In this case, the poet intended (1) to speak to the occasion of the birthday and (2) at the same time to write a *polyvalent* text that is also of interest to other readers who may find the text interesting, rewarding and relevant for their own lives.

Occasional texts written to fulfill a purpose in the mode of pragmatic communication may also function as literary texts at the same time, as we have seen, provided they comply with the convention of polyvalence and are found to be aesthetically pleasing. In most instances texts like this are used at least twice, a good indication of their polyvalence. After fulfilling their immediate communicative mission, they are presented in a different context in which the original communicative situation is no longer relevant, or perhaps no longer even traceable. They may be published in an anthology, a *dīwān* or another type of collection meant to be read by a wider public that has no immediate connection to the communicative situation in which the text was first deployed.

This holds true even for appointment decrees. Let us take, for example, a decree in which a certain Shujāʿ al-Dīn was appointed Wālī of Ṣaydā (Sidon). The text, written by Ibn Nubātah, was issued in 743/1343–1344.[6] Appointment decrees are, no doubt, first and foremost pragmatic texts and as such they must conform to reality. Shujāʿ al-Dīn must be a real person, he must have actually been appointed to the position, and the people of Ṣaydā must not regard the text – beautiful as it may be – exclusively as a means of literary entertainment, rather they must react to its content and accept Shujāʿ al-Dīn as an authority. This is only one side of the text however. After it had been drafted, written and handed to the appointee, the story of the decree was not over. It lived a second life in one of Ibn Nubātah's works called *Taʿlīq al-Dīwān*, in which he collected the output of his first year working in the chancellery of Damascus. The title is typical for Ibn Nubātah, who (after his first book, *Maṭlaʿ al-Fawāʾid*) preferred titles based on the *double entendre* instead of rhymed titles. *Taʿlīq al-Dīwān* can mean "The

6 Ibn Nubātah, *Taʿlīq al-Dīwān*, 23a–24a; see also al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā*, 12:333–334.

Draperies of the Chancellery" (that is, texts that are an adornment for the chancellery), or "The Appendix to the Collection of Poetry" (that is, prose texts that have to be considered as an addition to the author's poetry). Readers of this collection were not expected to have any knowledge of or any interest in Shujāʿ al-Dīn or the administration of Ṣaydā. Instead, they would read the text either as a model for appointment decrees and an aid to future clerks (in which case the decree would still remain in the sphere of pragmatic communication) or as an aesthetic text. Several criteria suggest that the text was indeed intended (along with others) to be read as a literary text. It is sophisticated, aesthetically ambitious and full of literary devices. Its length and stylistic perfection far exceed what would have been necessary for the appointment decree of a comparatively unimportant office-holder. Moreover, Ibn Nubātah included it in a volume that was explicitly linked to his *Dīwān* of poetry, a collection of clearly literary texts. We may safely assume, therefore, that the decree was meant to serve as both a pragmatic as well as literary text when Ibn Nubātah drafted it.

The other texts that will be dealt with in the following pages are even more unambiguously of an aesthetic nature. Nevertheless, there was a time when they served as a more direct means of communication between individuals. Yet even when they were addressed to a specific person, their authors had a broader public in mind. Inter-*ʿulamāʾ*-communication was, to a great extent, a public affair. *ʿUlamāʾ* and *udabāʾ* performed their communication in front of a public, who in the end were the real addressees. Their texts were part of a communicative strategy that was used by both professional and non-professional poets and prose writers to establish, strengthen and improve their social position. In the end, they played an important role in the formation of the class of *Bildungsbürger* in Mamluk towns.

Literature is still one of the least studied fields in Mamluk studies. The following pages will demonstrate that no comprehensive understanding of Mamluk society is possible without a careful and attentive study of its poetry and literary prose.

Dedication

The simplest way to use a text for the purpose of communication is to dedicate it to another person. Ever since the time of al-Jāḥiẓ, literary, scholarly, and scientific texts have been dedicated in great numbers. The dedicators expected either to receive a reward from the dedicatee, to win a patron's attention or to strengthen ties of friendship and comradeship. The last of these motives became far more important in Mamluk times than before, but many works were still

dedicated to patrons or influential public figures, as Ibn Nubātah's dedications show.

Dedications are a form of paratext. Their connection to a text is loose, and in most cases there is no connection whatsoever between the content of a text and the person to whom the text is dedicated. We may assume that an author would choose a subject for his dedicated work which he expects the dedicatee to be interested in, but the work lives its own life and is fully comprehensible even if the reader is unaware of its dedication. In the published version of a text, the dedication may be considered irrelevant or even distracting so the author (or copyist) may wish to omit the name of the dedicatee in the published version of a text. Since the dedication is normally included as part of the foreword, the deletion of the dedicatee's name may necessitate larger textual modifications. A striking example from the work of Ibn Nubātah shows how an author can make a virtue out of necessity.

In the year 732/1331 the Ayyubid prince and governor of Ḥamāh, Abū al-Fidā', to whom the sultan had awarded the title al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad, died. Thanks to clever maneuvers of al-Mu'ayyad's mother, his son was installed as his successor in the same year. He was given the title *al-Malik al-Afḍal* and reigned Ḥamāh until he was deposed in 742/1341. Al-Mu'ayyad had been a gracious patron to Ibn Nubātah and was perhaps even his friend so his death and the transition of power to his son al-Afḍal was clearly an important matter for Ibn Nubātah and it has left its traces in several of his works. One of them is a brilliant *qaṣīdah*, in which he simultaneously condoles al-Afḍal for the death of his father while congratulating him on his accession to the throne.[7] To suit the occasion, Ibn Nubātah also compiled a book of advice and dedicated it to al-Afḍal. The text is preserved in two versions: the first is the version in which the text was dedicated and handed over to al-Afḍal and the second represents the text as Ibn Nubātah published it.[8] The book is now given an elaborate, *tawriyah*-based title (*Sulūk Duwal al-Mulūk*) which was lacking in the dedicatory version. Even more interesting, however, are the changes that Ibn Nubātah made in the preface. Here is a synopsis of the Arabic text of both versions:

7 See Thomas Bauer, *Der Fürst ist tot.*

8 MS Istanbul, Esad Efendi 1822 (first version); Wien, Staatsarchiv, Krafft 474; Oxford, Bodleian, Seld Superius 29 (both second version).

Dedicatory manuscript	Published version
فقد اخترت من بعض كتب علم السياسة والتدبير ما حسُن وتركت ما خشُن ، لأحمل ذلك إلى الخزانة الشريفة السُلطانيّة الملكيّة الأفضليّة خلّد الله مُلْكَ مالكها ، ورُبَّ حاملِ فقْهٍ إلى من هو أفْقَه / والله تعالى يزين ويحرُسُ بشُهُب سعادتهِ جانِبَ الملكِ وأُفقَه/ بمنِّه وكرمِه	فقد اخترت من بعض كتب علم السياسة والتدبير ما حسُن وتركت ما خشُن ،لأحمل ذلك إلى خزانة من بسط الله به على الخلق رِزْقَه / ورُبَّ حاملِ فقْهٍ من هذا التصنيف إلى من هو أفْقَه / والله تعالى يزينُ بخلودِ مُلكه جانب الملك وأُفقَه / ويُعمِّر بدوام مواهبِه ومهابته غرب المعمور وشرقَه / بمنِّه وكرمِه
I selected from writings about conducting and managing the affairs of state what is suitable and omitted what is coarse in order to bring it to the Sublime Sultanic Princely Afḍalite Library – may God make the reign of its sovereign last forever! “Many a time has a bearer brought knowledge to someone more knowledgeable.”[9] | May God the Exalted adorn and guard with the shooting stars of his bliss the territory of his dominion and its horizon || in His grace and generosity!	I selected from writings about conducting and managing the affairs of state what is suitable and omitted what is coarse in order to bring it to the library of him with whose help God extends his sustenance over the people. | “Many a time has a bearer brought knowledge – as this book – to someone more knowledgeable.” | May God the Exalted adorn with his everlasting reign the territory of his dominion and its horizon | and, by continually bestowing gifts and inspiring awe, make flourish the land from the west to the east || in His grace and generosity!

In the first version, the dedicatee al-Malik al-Afḍal is unambiguously identified by calling the library *Malakīyah Afḍalīyah.* The dedication is followed by a quotation from the Ḥadīth. It forms a transition to a sentence of blessing in praise of the dedicatee, which rhymes with the Ḥadīth. The whole and rather short passage (typical of Ibn Nubātah's prefaces) therefore consists of two rhymed cola.

In the second version, the author wanted to remove the reference to the dedicatee. He did not, however, omit the dedication entirely, which is longer now than it was before. Instead, Ibn Nubātah replaced the epithets of the dedicatee's library with a phrase that praises a great man who remains anonymous. This phrase ends with the word *rizqah* and thereby allows the dedicatory phrase to become part of the following series of cola that rhyme in *-qah.* At the very end, the author adds a further colon rhyming in *-qah* (*sharqah*) so that the rhyming series comes to consist of four quite elaborated cola instead of two.

9 Quotation of a Ḥadīth, see al-Ḥākim an-Nīsābūrī, *al-Mustadrak, Bāb al-ʿilm* etc.

As Ibn Nubātah's modified text shows, the identity of the dedicatee may not have been considered important when a book was intended to be distributed to a larger audience. In this case, authors like Ibn Nubātah took great pains to revise and improve the text. Of course, it is likely that a general audience may have been more important for an author than a single dedicatee. Dedications may have often been a mere strategic device to secure attention and influence.

Nothing better demonstrates this than cases in which the dedications have been changed. Ibn Nubātah did this at least once. One of his famous prose texts is a "Dispute between Sword and Pen".[10] The original version was dedicated to al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad (*al-yad al-sharīfah al-sulṭānīyah al-malakīyah al-mu'ayyadīyah*)[11], but in the year 729, while al-Mu'ayyad was still alive and his relationship with Ibn Nubātah untroubled, Ibn Nubātah dedicated the same text to the Dawādār Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Kawandak, praising *al-yad al-sharīfah al-ʿāliyah al-mawlawiyah al-amīriyah al-ʿālimīyah al-ʿādilīyah al-mālikīyah al-makhdūmīyah al-nāṣirīyah* instead.[12] We do not know if one or both of the dedicatees (and their contemporaries) knew about this double dedication and how they felt about it if they did. In any case, this example shows the degree to which the content of a dedicated work could be separated from its dedication.

Address

More or less all the texts which we deal with under the banner of Mamluk literature were meant to be sent to someone after their completion, whether or not the author also intended to make his text accessible to a wider public. The addressee may have been mentioned in the text and thus been included in its content or not. We will limit ourselves here to the first case and use the term "address" exclusively for those prose texts and poems in which the addressee is the subject of at least part of the text.

As far as poetry is concerned, most texts of this kind would fall under the headline *madḥ* / *madīḥ* "praise". Categories like *tahni'ah* / *hanā'* "congratulations" and *taʿziyah* / *ʿazā'* "condolence" may be considered subcategories of *madīḥ* because praise of the addressee is always a central concern in addition to the communicative purpose of congratulations, condolence etc. Few other developments were as momentous for Arabic literature as the gradual change of the social groups to which such *madīḥ* was addressed. It was still true during the

10 Ibn Nubātah, *al-Mufākharah*; see also Ibn Ḥijjah, *Khizānat al-Adab*, 2:218 – 238; van Gelder, *Conceit*, 356 – 358.

11 See the autograph version MS Escorial 548, 34b – 53b (here 47b – 48a).

12 See Ms. Berlin 8400, 65b – 70b (here 65b and 69b).

career of al-Mutanabbī that *madīḥ* poems were almost exclusively addressed to caliphs, princes, governors, generals and other high-ranking officials. Starting from the period known as the Sunni Revival, "bearers of the sword" became less important for poets and instead more and more *madīḥ* was exchanged among "bearers of the pen" themselves. To be sure, throughout the whole of the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods there were panegyric poems addressed to princes, sultans and high-ranking Mamluks and continued to be an important part of the output of major poets. Several poets had an especially close relationship with a *ṣāḥib al-sayf*, (e. g. Ibn Nubātah and al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad; Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī and the Artuqids; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī and the Rasūlids to name only a few). But even these poets composed more poems of praise for their fellow *ʿulamā'* than they did for princes and sultans.

Most authors in the Mamluk period did not even differentiate between panegyric poems for princes and members of the military establishment on the one hand and on scholars and *hommes de lettres* on the other. Both fell under the heading of *madīḥ*. The major exception was Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī whose *Dīwān* included a chapter on *madīḥ*, which was reserved for poems on his princely patrons from the Artuqids of Mārdīn and the Ayyubids of Ḥamāh for the most part, and another chapter, which bore the rather old-fashioned title of *ikhwānīyāt*. The difference between these may have more to do with the character of the poems than the social position of the dedicatees, however. Thus we find a poem on the judge Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿĀqūlī in the chapter of *madīḥ*, while the poems in the *ikhwānīyāt*-chapters are of a more familiar character, in some cases addressing members of the poet's own family.[13]

In his *Al-Qaṭr al-Nubātī,* Ibn Nubātah subsumes poems for al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad as well as for different *ʿulamā'* and *udabā'* under the headline "praise, gratitude, congratulations and the like" (*al-madḥ wa-l-shukr wa-l-hanā' wa-mā ashbaha dhālik*). The following is one example of these:[14]

لا عدِمنا لابن الأثير يراعاً   جارياً للعُفاةِ بالأرزاقِ
كلّما ماس في المهارقِ كالغُصْـ   ـنِ رأيتَ النَدَا على الأوراقِ

May we never be deprived of Ibn al-Athīr's reed, which is used to satisfy those who seek bounty!
As it moves over the sheets, swaying like a branch, dew can be seen on the leaves.

The addressee is ʿAlā' al-Dīn b. al-Athīr,[15] who was *kātib al-sirr* in Cairo from 709 to 729. He is praised in these lines for his generosity, a virtue that has always been

13 Al-Ḥillī, *Dīwān*, 1:403.
14 MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale 2234, 159b.
15 See Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 4:15 – 18, where the epigram is quoted p. 17 – 18.

one of the main subjects of *madīḥ*. The profession of the addressee provides the main concept for the poem: the reed pen of the chancery secretary is compared to a twig, his paper to leaves, and his gifts to dew. Out of these elements Ibn Nubātah creates an elegant example of Abbasid-style *murāʿāt al-naẓīr* (harmonious choice of ideas or images[16]). The poem is a two-line epigram. As a result of the growing importance of epigrams, in the Mamluk period epigrams were also used for *madḥ* poetry more often than before. Occasionally one and the same subject was treated in two or more different forms. Ibn Nubātah, to mention just one example, composed a *qaṣīdah* and an epigram on the death of his slave girl and again made it the topic of a prose letter.[17] In the above example, the second line here lives a second life as the punch line of an epigram. Ibn Nubātah had already used it in a *qaṣīdah* of 25 lines, in which lines 20 – 21 line read as follows:

ذو يراعٍ جارٍ بفضل القضايا   واتّصالِ العُفاةِ بالأرزاقِ
كلّما ماسَ في المهارقِ كالغُصْـ   ـنِ رأيتَ النَدَا على الأوراقِ

Who has got a reed that brings about the benefit of his judgments und unites the seekers of sustenance with the bounty destined for them.
As it moves over the sheets, swaying like a branch, dew can be seen on the leaves.[18]

Obviously Ibn Nubātah liked the second line so much that he did not want to see it hidden in midst a longer poem and also wanted to use it as the punch line of an epigram. To accomplish this all he had to do was rewrite the preceding line, which now forms the perfect introductory line of an epigram.

On the other hand, this line would not have been suitable for the final line of a *qaṣīdah*. Rather the *qaṣīdah*'s final line connects praise of the *mamdūḥ* with the poet's self-praise:

جُودُك المجتدَى وأمداحِيَ الغُـ   ـرُّ كُنوزٌ تبقى على الإنفاقِ

Your generosity, the hope of many, and my brilliant praises are treasures that can never be exhausted.

Instructive as it may be to know that a line could be used both as part of a *qaṣīdah* and as the punch line of an epigram, it is even more instructive to learn that the *qaṣīdah*, from which the line is taken, was not addressed to the same person as the epigram. The *qaṣīdah* was written in praise of the *wazīr* Sharaf al-Dīn Yaʿqūb. Again, the immediate addressee is interchangeable and of less importance than the poetic *maʿnā*, which the author considers more generally relevant.

16 See W.P. Heinrichs, *EAL* 2:658 – 659.
17 See Talib, *Arabic Verse*.
18 Ms. Berlin 7811, 116a – 117a, Ms. Köprülü 1249, 120b – 121a, see also Ibn Nubātah, *Diwān*, 346.

Address and response

Poems and prose texts were addressed to a person in order to provoke a reaction. In the case of a *madīḥ* poem sent to a ruler or a person of considerably higher status, the author expected a *reward*, and in the case of texts addressed to people of similar status, the author expected a *response*. Due to the developments mentioned above, the second category became the more common case in the Mamluk period. It must have been quite detrimental to a person's career and prestige when they were not able to respond properly to an address in the form of a poem or letter. One such deplorable case was that of Badr al-Dīn b. Mālik (d. 686/1287), who, despite being a prolific scholar of grammar, prosody and rhetoric, lacked sufficient poetic talent to compose verses of his own.[19] This earned him the scorn of al-Ṣafadī, who considered Badr al-Dīn's failure as a poet significant enough to include it in his entry on him in the *Wāfī*. There he relates an anecdote according to which Badr al-Dīn tried desperately to answer a poem he had received. He struggled from morning till the afternoon prayer, but could not come up with a single line. In the end he had no other choice but to ask his neighbor to write the expected response-poem for him.[20]

The ability to take part in the literary communication of the educated class was an important signal of distinction and proof that one belonged to the elite. In a time when even many craftsmen had some sort of scholarly training, the production of sophisticated literary texts was the ultimate proof of one's membership in the class of the highbrow *ʿulamāʾ* and *udabāʾ*. Whereas the established scholar Badr al-Dīn had failed the test, a much less prominent woman was able to pass it. Once again it is al-Ṣafadī who transmits the report about an exam carried out by Shihāb al-Dīn b. Faḍl Allāh. The latter had heard that Fāṭimah, the daughter of a lumber merchant who lived in his neighborhood, possessed great poetic talents. In order to "test" her and provoke a response, he sent her a long poem that could be read as a love poem. The woman answered him with a short, seven-line poem of remarkable ambiguity. The poetess declares her inability and unwillingness to compete with Shihāb al-Dīn's poetic prowess. At the same time, some of the lines can be read as a lover's rejection. The main paradox of the poem lies, however, in the fact that Fāṭimah, by explicitly refusing to communicate, does in fact communicate and thereby gains al-Ṣafadī's (and most certainly Shihāb al-Dīn's) approval:[21]

19 On him see Simon, *Badr al-Dīn Ibn Mālik*.

20 Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-Wafayāt*, 1:204.

21 Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr*, 4:33, see also *al-Wāfī* 23:702 – 704. – She may be identical with Fāṭimah bint ʿAlī, Bint Ibn (!) al-Khashshāb, a Ḥadīth scholar born in 708/1308 – 1309, who transmitted the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, see Ibn Ḥajar's *al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 4:264.

إن كان غرَّكمُ جَمالُ إزاري   فالقبحُ في تلك المحاسن واري
لا تحسِبوا أني أُماثِلُ شِعْرَكم   أنَّى تُقاسُ جَداولٌ ببِحارِ
لو عاصر الكنديُّ عَصْرَكُمُ رمى   لكمُ عوالي راية الأشعار
أقصى اجتهادي فَهْمُ ظاهر نَظْمِكم   لا أنَّني أُدعىَ دُعاء مُجارِي[22]
مَن قصَّرتْ عنه الفحول فحقُّه   أن ليس يَبلغُه لحاقُ جواري
ولربّما استحسنتَ غير حقيقة   فإذا سَفَرْتُ أشَحْتَ بالأبصار
لستُ الطَّموحَ إلى الصِّبَى من بعدما   وضُح المشيب بلِمّتي كنهاري

If ever the glamour of my shawl has dazzled you, remember that ugliness sets fire to all those beauties.[22]
Don’t imagine that I would try to match your verses – how can a creek be compared to the sea?
If the Kindī (Imra’ al-Qays) lived in our times, he would hand you the lances that bear the banners of poetry.
I do not strive to do any more than comprehend the overt meaning of your verses and I don’t ask to be addressed like a competitor.
A man with whom not even the stallions/*master poets* can compete, can never truly be caught by the maiden’s pursuit.
Did you not often deem beautiful what in reality did not exist? Such is me: if I were to unveil myself, you’d no doubt avert your eyes.
I no longer fancy the follies of youth now that my hair has turned white like bright daylight.

Al-Ṣafadī liked her lines and surmised that she might be a better poet than most of the men in his as well as in older times. He was especially delighted by her use of the word *jawārī* in the rhyme. It is after all very revealing to see al-Ṣafadī’s scorn for a great scholar of his day on the grounds that he was not able to participate in a poetic exchange and his admiration for the daughter of a humble lumber merchant precisely because she could.

Exchange

Though only a subcategory of the preceding (and often difficult to distinguish from it), we will deal with this topic under a separate heading, which reflects Arabic terms such as *mukātabāt*, *murājaʿāt*,[23] or *muṭāraḥāt*.[24] Such an exchange could consist of a poem or a letter sent to someone and answered by him or her by adhering to the same formal parameters as the original. Quite often the address consisted of a poem *plus* a letter and it would be answered in the same way. Today, scholars anxious to study these texts in their original context would

22 *Alḥān:* مُجارِ, *al-Wāfī:* فُجار.
23 For example al-Ṣafadī, *Alḥān* 1:41.
24 See Shihab al-Din al-Ḥijāzī, *Rawḍ al-Ādāb*, Ms. Wien, Staatsbibliothek 400, bāb 4 faṣl 2 (129b: *fī l-mukātabāt wa-l-muṭāraḥāt*).

be especially interested in those cases in which all parts of the exchange—the poetry and the prose, the address and the response—have come down to us. Unfortunately, the authors of these texts hardly shared this interest. Once more, they were convinced that the texts were of general relevance even when divorced from their original purpose. As a result, comparatively few works have come down to us in which the entirety of an exchange has been preserved; al-Ṣafadī's *Alḥān al-Sawājiʿ* being the most comprehensive and important example from the 7th/14th century.

Even Ibn Nubātah, who took great pride in his prose, divided his poetry and prose between separate works (*Sajʿ al-Muṭawwaq* being the major exception). The poet Burhān al-Dīn al-Qīrāṭī (726 – 781/1326 – 1379), who closely followed Ibn Nubātah's footsteps, may have been the first to include entire "packages" of prose-*cum*-poetry in his *Dīwān*; however not even he quotes the poems and letters written by his conversation partners.

Since both of the most celebrated poets of the 7th/14th century, Ibn Nubātah and Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī, had a habit of separating their prose and their poetry as well as only publishing their own side of a literary exchange, it is difficult to reconstruct their literary conversations, and completely impossible for anyone who does not have access to both *Dīwāns.*

The only case of an address and its response which we can identify with certainty is the poem *Khafīf* / rhyme *ātahū* (*Dīwān Ibn Nubātah* 72 – 73, 26 lines), which bears the headline *wa-qāla jawāban li-l-Ṣafī* in the earliest manuscripts.[25] It is not difficult to find Ṣafī al-Dīn's poem that started the exchange off: it is no. 208 of his *Dīwān*, explicitly mentioning the addressee (and, of course, sharing the same rhyme and meter).

Other cases are more difficult to determine. One of them is a short poem of four lines (*Ṭawīl,* rhyme *xrī,*[26] *Dīwān Ibn Nubātah* 235) whose heading says it is "a response to al-Ṣafī al-Ḥillī". Provided that al-Ḥillī's poem displays the same rhyme and the same meter and that it is included in al-Ḥillī's *Dīwān*, there are at least two potential solutions: poems no. 238 and 281. A poem of 22 lines (*Khafīf,* rhyme *2qū, Dīwān Ibn Nubātah* 344 – 345) is again said to be "a response to al-Ṣafī," who is also mentioned in course of the poem. No corresponding poem can be found in al-Ḥillī's *Dīwān.* A three-liner (*Ṭawīl,* rhyme *xlū, Dīwān Ibn Nubātah* 413) is said to be "written on a *qaṣīdah* that was sent to him from Mārdīn". Seeing as al-Ḥillī spent a lot of time in this town and we know of no one else from Mārdīn who had relations with Ibn Nubātah, it is a good guess that the poem has something to do with al-Ṣafī al-Ḥillī. His *Dīwān*, however, provides no further

25 Ms. Berlin 7861, 125b – 126b, Ms. Köprülü 1249, 141b, see also Ibn Nubātah, *Diwān* 72 – 73, where al-Ḥillī's first line is quoted.

26 Abbreviations in noting the rhyme scheme: *x* = any consonant; *2* = ū or ī; *3* = a,i,u.

clues. Finally, a number of other poems in either *Dīwān* could have been addressed by Ibn Nubātah to al-Ḥillī and vice versa, but neither the texts of the poems nor their headings are of any help.

The fact that in the *dīwāns* of Mamluk poets the addressee is often mentioned in the heading (more often in modern printed editions than in manuscripts) should not detract from the fact that the identity of the addressee was not a matter of importance for the poet, as is clear from many manuscripts as well as the fact that the relationship between the two most important poets of their time – Ibn Nubātah and Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī – is so difficult to trace. For the authors themselves the identity of the addressee was obviously of less importance than it is to modern scholars.

Intertextuality – simple and complex

From the very first poems that have come down to us and until the present day, Arabic literature is characterized by a remarkably high degree of intertextuality. Countless works refer to other works, either directly or indirectly. In the Mamluk period, the main upholders of the literary arts were well-educated intellectuals and learned connoisseurs of the literature of the past as well as the present. It is no wonder then that intertextual references should permeate Mamluk literature. Several studies on Ibn Nubātah have shown that some of his most famous poems cannot be properly understood without taking into account their level of intertextuality.[27] Even a craftsman like Ibrāhīm al-Miʿmār, who could only draw on a much smaller repertoire of "classical" literature, displays the same passion for quotations and allusions as the high-brow intellectuals of his day. In his epigrams, the punch line is often based on the quotation of a popular proverb, but also quite often on al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* or the same author's versification of the rules of grammar, *Mulḥat al-Iʿrāb*. "Classics" such as al-Mutanabbī and al-Buḥturī are used to construct points, as is *al-Qaṣīdah al-Zaynabīyah*, a popular religious poem attributed, among others, to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. The following example shows how lines on grammar can lend themselves to an amorous purpose. In line 19a of *Mulḥat al-Iʿrāb*, al-Ḥarīrī gives examples for the three kinds of definite nouns: nouns marked with the article, proper names and pronouns: مثالُهُ الدارُ وزيدٌ وأنا, "examples are *the house*, *Zayd* and *I*". In line 21a, al-Ḥarīrī explains that there are three categories of verbs: past tense, imperative

27 Al-Ghubārī, *Al-Tanāṣṣ*; Bauer, Communication; idem, *Der Fürst ist tot.*

and present/future tense. There exists no fourth. Taken together, they form the second line of a love epigram:[28]

مَتَى أرَى المحبوبَ وافَى بالهَنَا   ونحنُ في دارٍ ولا واشٍ لَنَا
أيُّ ثلاثٍ ما لهنّ رابعٌ   مثالُهُ الدارُ وزيدٌ وأنا

My beloved made me happy when we were alone together in a house where no slanderer could disturb us.
What better model of a set of three that has no fourth: the house, and Zayd, and me!

Quotations like this one are common in the Mamluk period, perhaps even more common than in earlier periods, but they do not set the Mamluk era apart from its predecessors. This may, however, be the case when we take into account more complex intertextual relations, which presuppose a dense network of intellectuals contributing to literary culture as was characteristic of the urban centres in the Mamluk empire. I will give two examples, which I refer to as "shared intertextuality" and "cross intertextuality".

Shared intertextuality

I use the term *shared intertextuality* to denote cases in which an existing text is used by two or more participants as the basis of a literary exchange. A case in point is a series of poems exchanged by al-Ṣafadī and Ibn Nubātah, for which they drew on poems by Imra' al-Qays and al-Mutanabbī.[29] The sequence was started by al-Ṣafadī at a moment when his friendship with Ibn Nubātah was troubled. To seek a reconciliation, he sent Ibn Nubātah a poem in which all the second hemistiches were taken from Imra' al-Qays's *Muʿallaqah*, while the first hemistiches were replaced by new formulations that gave new meanings to the famous second halves. This kind of quotation is called *taḍmīn*. As was to be expected, Ibn Nubātah answered him with a poem that used the same device. Nevertheless the dispute still did not come to an end because Ibn Nubātah sent both al-Ṣafadī's poem and his own response to Shihāb al-Dīn Ibn Faḍl Allāh, the chief of the Damascus chancellery (and perhaps even al-Ṣafadī's superior at that time). It appears that al-Ṣafadī felt ashamed and replied with another *qaṣīdah*; this time borrowing from a poem by al-Mutanabbī. The poem was carefully chosen: it is al-Mutanabbī's first poem to Sayf al-Dawlah. It contains a long description of Sayf al-Dawlah's tent and the pictures on its walls. Consequently,

28 Al-Miʿmār, *Dīwān*, Ms. Escorial 463, 61a; quoted also in al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān*, 1:89 and idem, *Al-Wāfī*, 6:177.
29 Al-Ṣafadī, *Alḥān*, 2:245 – 251; see also Ibn Ḥijjah, *Khizānat al-adab*, 4:131 – 134 together with further examples of similar transformations.

it is less bellicose than most of his other *sayfiyyāt* and, therefore, more appropriate for the tone of civility required to help settle a dispute between *hommes de lettres.*

Ibn Nubātah, however, had the far more difficult task. Whereas al-Ṣafadī was free to choose from any of al-Mutanabbī's 41 lines, Ibn Nubātah had to restrict himself to the lines that al-Ṣafadī had not used. Of course, al-Ṣafadī had picked out those lines that lent themselves most easily to the new purpose. He used most of the lines describing the tent and left only the battle scene to Ibn Nubātah; in addition he did not take up any of the rather martial lines from the concluding *madīḥ*. Despite the fact that the most easily transformable lines had already been used up by his colleague, Ibn Nubātah did a good job, using 21 of the remaining 25 lines. Among them are lines 30 – 31 and 37 – 38 of al-Mutanabbī's poem. Lines 30 – 31 form part of a battle scene. After mentioning lances and swords that have become tired of fighting, al-Mutanabbī describes an army over which birds of prey circle:[30]

وملَّ القنا ممّا تدُقُّ صُدُورَه   وملّ حديدُ الهند ممّا تُلاطِمُهْ
سَحابٌ مِن العِقْبانِ يَزْحَفُ تحتها   سَحابٌ إذا استسقَتْ سَقَتها صَوَارِمُهْ

30. The lances weary of your shaft-shattering and the Indian steel wearies of striking and being struck.
31. There is a cloud of eagles beneath which moves a cloud whose swords pour for them if they ask to drink.[31]

A few lines later, al-Mutanabbī links this to the praise of Sayf al-Dawlah:

لقد سلَّ سيفَ الدولةِ المَجْدُ مُعلِماً   فلا المجدُ مُخْفِيهِ ولا الضَربُ ثالِمُهْ
على عاتِقِ المَلْكِ الأغرِّ نِجادُهُ   وفي يَدِ جَبَّار السَمَواتِ قائمُه

37. Glory has drawn the Sword of the Dynasty as its warrior wearing a badge of defiance[32] so that neither glory can obscure it, nor can a stroke notch in its edge.
38. Over the shoulders of the most noble prince (the caliph) hangs its belt, and in the hand of the Compeller of the heavens rests its hilt.

It is difficult to imagine how the second halves of these verses could possibly be used in a poem of reconciliation between literati, but Ibn Nubātah could. This passage (ll. 8 – 11) of Ibn Nubātah's reply to al-Ṣafadī may illustrate how the poet managed to give them a completely different meaning indeed:

30 Al-Barqūqī, *Sharḥ*, 4:55 – 60.
31 Translation of l. 31 Hamori, *Composition*, 28.
32 Translation ibid., 54.

ولاطفَ آمالي بِسُقْيا زلالِه «سَحابٌ إذا استسقَت سَقَتها صَوَارِمُهْ»[33]
فتى المَجْدِ والأشعار تَلقى ضُروبَها «فلا المجدُ مُخْفِيهِ ولا الضَربُ ثالِمُهْ»
يقومُ لنا بالنَظْمِ جبَّارُ فِكرِهِ «وفي يَدِ جَبَّار السَمَواتِ قائمُه»
فتَعطِفُهُ من بعد ما ملَّت الوغى «وملّ حديدُ الهند ممّا تُلاطِمُهْ»

8 By pouring out cold water, a cloud complied with my wishes. Whenever they suffer thirst, its sharp ideas give them to drink.[33]
9 He is a man of glory and poems that hit their match, so neither glory obscures him nor can the one kind (of poems) belittle him.
10 His compelling mind bestows us with his poetry, while its author rests in the hand of the Compeller of the Heavens.
11 And (his verses) deal gently with him after they weary of tumult. Even Indian steel grows weary of striking and being struck.

The passage starts with the transformation of al-Mutanabbī's line 31: the word *ṣawārim* is used now not for the sharp swords but for the addressee's sharp wit, which brings relief not to eagles, but to the poet's wishes. The word *ḍarb* from al-Mutanabbī's line 32 is reinterpreted to mean the "matching" lines, obviously alluding to the poetic exchange between both poets in which each poem is answered by a poem in the same meter and with the same rhyme, using the same intertextual device. Since his verses "matched" in terms of their quality as well, he has no reason to fear degradation. The verb *thalama*, originally meaning "making notches in a sword's edge," must now be understood metaphorically. Again, Ibn Nubātah manages to get rid of the swords.

The next line is a transformation of al-Mutanabbī's line 38, a particularly difficult case. It was easy to dispose of the caliph, but Ibn Nubātah had to keep God as *jabbār*. Still, there is another reference to swords in the word *qā'im*. Again, Ibn Nubātah managed to demilitarize his model. He introduced a second, secularized *jabbār* in the first hemistich ("compeller of his ideas"), who "brings us" (*yaqūmu lanā*) poetry. The rhyme word *qā'im* can thus be understood to refer to the one who brings the poetry and does not need to be understood in its original sense as "sword hilt".

Ibn Nubātah succeeded brilliantly in disarming al-Mutanabbī's verses three times, but he could not do away with the "Indian steel" in al-Mutanabbī's line 30. Instead, he turned al-Mutanabbī's phrase into simile: just as even Indian steel can become weary of striking, so our poems have become weary of quarrel.

Ibn Nubātah's transformation of al-Mutanabbī's poem presents a nice example of the *Verbürgerlichung* of Mamluk literature. Here al-Mutanabbī's heroic poem with all its lances, swords and blood-shed is transformed to fit the more irenic life of secretaries, poets and intellectuals.

It is interesting as well to trace the publication history of the poems. At first,

33 I read استسقت, instead of استسقى.

al-Ṣafadī objected to any dissemination of his first poem and the reply, probably because he did not want to shed light on his troubles with Ibn Nubātah. Later, when such personal motives were no longer a concern, he included the whole series of poems in his *Alḥān al-Sawājiʿ*. Ibn Nubātah for his part only included the Imra' al-Qays-transformation in his *Dīwān*; without quoting al-Ṣafadī's initial poem, of course.[34] Manuscripts do not even mention that the poem is a reaction to another poem, let alone that it was al-Ṣafadī who initiated the exchange.[35]

Ibn Nubātah's Mutanabbī transformation, however, is absent from his *Dīwān*. Perhaps Ibn Nubātah felt that the poem was difficult to understand without knowing its context and therefore of less general relevance. Perhaps he was also not entirely content with the result. After all, a reader who was not already aware of al-Ṣafadī's poem would not know that all the easily transformable lines had already been snatched away by al-Ṣafadī. In any case, we must be grateful to al-Ṣafadī for having preserved this specimen of intertextual virtuosity.

Cross Intertextuality

Whereas cases of *shared intertextuality* will be recognized immediately, there are other forms of intertextuality that are quite difficult for the distant observer to discern. One of these is what I call *cross intertextuality*.[36] This term shall designate cases in which author A addresses (or at least dedicates) a text t_1 to person X. Shortly after this, author B, who has knowledge of text t_1 and some sort of relation to author A, produces a text t_2, which is addressed (or at least dedicated) either to person X or someone completely different. At the same time, there is a discernible relationship between t_1 and t_2, and it was author B's intention that this relationship be obvious to author A and to the public (but not necessarily the addressee of the text himself).

Since in most cases author B does not explicitly mention the relationship of his text to that of A, the discovery of cases of cross intertextuality is often only possible with some speculation. Quite a clear example, however, may be provided by two letters in which al-Ṣafadī and Ibn Nubātah, respectively, respond to a gift in the form of camphorated apricots. The first letter was drafted by al-Ṣafadī in the name of the *nā'ib al-Shām* and addressed to the prince al-Afḍal of Ḥamāh, who had sent boxes of camphorated apricots (*mishmish kāfūrī*) to the *nā'ib* as a present. The letter must have been written between 732/1331 and 742/

34 Ibn Nubātah, *Diwān*, 392 – 393.
35 See Ibn Nubātah, *Diwān*, MS Ayasofya 3891, 44a – 45b.
36 It is a form of what Genette called *métatextualité*, see Genette, *Palimpsestes*, 11 – 12.

1341, i. e. during al-Afḍal's reign. It is a masterpiece of *inshā'* and is quoted in Shihāb al-Dīn b. Faḍl Allāh's *Masālik al-Abṣār.*[37] In his letter, al-Ṣafadī uses a number of similes to describe the apricots in their boxes. They are compared to pearls, stars, honey, blossoms, balls of crystal, buttons on the garbs of trees, fire in the gardens of leaves and bullets shot by the cross-bows of the twigs. A central passage reads:

... وينهي ورود المشرِّفة العالية قرينَ ما أنعم به مولانا من المشمش الكافوري فوقف عليها وقابل إحسانه بشكرٍ يُشرِقُ نُوراً * وثناءٍ يُديرُ على الأسماع كأساً كان مزاجه كافوراً * وواجه جوده بحمدٍ يتلوه منه وجه الأرض بمنثوره * وتجد الألسنة لمنظومه لذّةً تُنسي الأسماع ما قاله أبو الطيّب في كافوره * ومتّع ناظره بتلك الكوكب التي اتّسقَت من العُلَبِ في أفلاك * وتتسّقت كالدرر وما لها غير حسن الرصف أسلاك ...

... and he reports to have received the exalted letter together with the camphorated apricots bestowed on us by our patron, and that he devoted himself to it and answered his favors with a gratitude that shines brightly | and with words of praise that pass around the ears a goblet "the mixture of which is camphor" (Q 56:5), || and requited his generosity with a eulogy, which the surface of the earth will recite with its *gillyflower* / prose, | and in the poetry of which tongues will find a delight that causes the ears to forget what al-Mutanabbī said to his (patron) Kāfūr, || and made his pupil/eye enjoy these stars that are composed in their boxes [like] celestial spheres | and which are stringed like pearls though they have no string other than that they nicely joined together. ||

Obviously al-Ṣafadī takes as much pain to praise his own letter, which was apparently accompanied by a poem, as to praise al-Afḍal's gift. But why would al-Ṣafadī have spent so much effort praising his own prose and poetry in a letter to al-Afḍal, the rather sober and pious successor of Abū al-Fidā', the intellectual, instead of focusing on praising the donor as was to be expected? Two subtle allusions may suggest that there was another unspoken addressee. First, in speaking about his prose, al-Ṣafadī connects it to *al-manthūr*, which can mean "prose" as well as "gillyflower". However al-Ṣafadī was not the first to use this quite striking *tawriyah.* Some years before in 730, Ibn Nubātah published his first collection of prose, with which he hoped to demonstrate his capacity in the field of *inshā'*, and he gave it the title *Zahr al-Manthūr.* Given Ibn Nubātah's prominence, his name may have come to the mind of every informed contemporary reader when they heard this *tawriyah.*

Readers were thus prepared to understand the second allusion in al-Ṣafadī's praise of his own poetry. At first glance, there is nothing peculiar about a reference to Kāfūr al-Ikhshīdī in a letter on "camphorated" apricots. Bear in mind, however, that Ibn Nubātah had likened the prince of Ḥamāh to Sayf al-Dawlah

37 Ibn Faḍl Allāh, *Masālik al-Abṣār,* 12:484 – 485.

and Badr b. ʿAmmār, two of al-Mutanabbī's other patrons.[38] A comparison like this implies that the poet himself is assuming the role of a new Mutanabbī. Given this, the reader may understand al-Ṣafadī's claim as not only obliterating al-Mutanabbī's poetry, but Ibn Nubātah's as well. It is, therefore, reasonable to posit a subtext here that was addressed to Ibn Nubātah.

It is hard to believe that Ibn Nubātah was not aware of al-Ṣafadī's letter. They used to exchange their works, and if Ibn Nubātah had not received the letter from al-Ṣafadī himself, he would have got it from the court of Ḥamāh. Nevertheless as the letter was not directed to him, he could not immediately answer it. Opportunity came in the year 743.

This was a crucial year in Ibn Nubātah's life. After losing the support of the Ayyubids of Ḥamāh, he saw no other way to secure his livelihood than to enter the chancellery (*dīwān al-inshāʾ*) of Damascus. By then he was already 57 lunar years old, and having earned a reputation as a great stylist, his position as a "novice" in the *dīwān* cannot have been easy for him to swallow. He rose to the challenge by publishing his first year's output of official documents and letters under the title *Taʿlīq al-Dīwān.* This collection happens to include another letter in response to a gift of camphorated apricots. The situation parallels al-Ṣafadī's letter closely. Once again a secretary in the Damascus chancellery renowned for his stylistic competence seeks to express appreciation (probably also on behalf of the governor of Syria) for a present of camphorated apricots sent by the ruler of Ḥamāh. The protagonists, however, were different. Now it was Ibn Nubātah who wrote the letter rather al-Ṣafadī, and the addressee was no longer the Ayyubid prince al-Afḍal, but one of the Mamluk governors who succeeded the Ayyubids as commanders of the city and province of Ḥamāh. The identity of the addressee cannot be determined exactly since Ḥamāh saw three different Mamluk governors in the same year: Ṭuquztamir an-Nāṣirī[39], Alṭunbughā al-Māridānī,[40] and Yalbughā al-Yaḥyāwī (or al-Yaḥyawī).[41] The people of the city were not pleased to have received Mamluk governors in the place of Ayyubid princes. "Ṭuquztamir asked for the governorship of Ḥamāh," Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah says, "and it was given to him. He was the first Turk to be installed as governor of Ḥamāh, and the people blamed him for that (*wa-ʿāba l-nāsu ʿalayhi dhālika*)."[42] The governor's gift of apricots sent from Ḥamāh to Damascus may have been a conscious attempt to signal continuity and therefore somewhat politically sig-

38 Ibn Faḍl Allāh, *Masālik al-Abṣār*, 19:453 (poem 675, line 30) (N.B.: Ibn Faḍl Allāh gives better versions of the early poems of Ibn Nubātah than the printed *Dīwān Ibn Nubātah*).

39 See Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh*, 2:463–466; al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfī* 16:465–468.

40 See Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh* 2:378–379 (gov. from Rabīʿ II until Jumādā II); al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī* 9:364–365.

41 See Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh* 2:538–540; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī* 29:41–51.

42 Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh* 2:465.

nificant. Ibn Nubātah, for his part, may have had mixed feelings about writing a letter of thanks to the Mamluk successor of the Ḥamawī Ayyyūbids, to whom he owed so much. He refers to the gouvernor's "Turkishness" in the final passage of his letter, mentioning the "Ḥamawī's Khurāsānian unarabicness".[43] More interesting for our purposes, however, is the middle passage, which displays conspicuous parallels to al-Ṣafadī's letter:[44]

وينهي [37a] بعد ثناء وولاء : لهذا في الأسماع أزهى وأزهر ثمرة * ولهذا في القلوب أرسى وأرسخ شجرة * ورود المشرِّف الكريم على يد فلان بما ملأ السَمْعَ من أخبار مولانا المرتقية سرورا * والعَينَ من آثار يده الكريمة نُورا * والفَمَ من هداياه المشمش الحموي كُؤوسَ لذّةٍ كان مِزاجُها كافورا * فقبّل المملوك أسْطُرَهُ مستحْلِياً مَواقِعَ رشفاته * وقابله بعوائد الشكر مستجلياً عوائد افتقاداته وصلاته * ومدّ فكره ويده فالتقط النجوم المشرقة من هداياه وكلماته * واهتدى بتلك الهدية إلى أطيب الفواكه وبمثلها يهتدى الحيران * وقسم أفلاك العلب وأقسم منها بمواقع النجوم أنها من أنفس هدايا أنفس الجيران

… and he reports –
after having conveyed his praise and confirmed his loyalty:
the first one (his praise), most lavish to blossom and to bloom, will bear fruit in the ears, | and the second one (his loyalty) will plant a tree most firmly rooted and anchored in the heart ||
– to have received the distinguished letter, handed out by so-and-so, by which the news that arrived filled the ears with joy, | and the traces of his noble hand filled the eye with light; | and his presents, the camphorated apricots, filled his mouth with the goblets of delight "the mixture of which is camphor" (Q 76:5). || Thus the slave kissed its lines and found sweet the spots his lips touched, | and he requited it with his recurring thanks, which brings the benefits of his inquiries and his gifts to light, | and he spread out his mind and his hand and received radiant stars from both his presents and his words, || and he was guided by this gift to the best of fruits –such are those who guide the confused– | and he split the celestial spheres of the boxes, "swearing by the setting places of the stars" (Q 56:75) that they are the most precious presents from the most precious neighbor. ||

Anyone who reads both texts will notice several similarities between them that do not appear to occur by chance. Let me just mention the parallelisms between gift and words, and between eyes and ears, which are both pleased by the present or the letter; ears that are filled with *ladhdhah*; "light" (*nūrā*) rhyming with *kāfūrā*; and the (rather inevitable) quotation of Q 56:5. Nevertheless despite these similarities, Ibn Nubātah's letter is not an imitation of al-Ṣafadī's. Whereas al-Ṣafadī praises his own letter, Ibn Nubātah praises the letter that came from Ḥāmāh. Moreover, both letters use different similes for the apricots. While al-

43 Ibn Nubātah, *Taʿlīq al-Dīwān*, Ms. Berlin 8640, 37b.
44 Ibid., 36b – 37b.

Ṣafadī tries to include as many comparisons for the fruits as possible, Ibn Nubātah confines himself nearly exclusively to comparing the apricots with the stars. As in many of his poems, Ibn Nubātah uses the technique of the *leitmotif*:[45] from the first part of the letter through to the end (neither quoted above), stars and other celestial bodies appear with different functions and meanings. The objects to which al-Ṣafadī likened the apricots – pearls, honey, blossoms, balls of crystal and buttons – are conspicuously absent in Ibn Nubātah's letter. There is only one remarkable exception: in the final portion of Ibn Nubātah's letter the apricots are said to be "perhaps colored bullets shot by the cross-bows of heaven" (*laʿalla hādhihī banādiqu qawsi l-samāʾi l-mulawwanati*).[46] This extravagant comparison is a clear echo of al-Ṣafadī's letter, in which we read, also toward the end, that the apricots seem "as if they were not bullets for the cross-bows of the twigs" (*ka-annahā lam takun li-qisiyyi l-ghuṣūni banādiqu*).[47] With his reference to *banādiq*, the most unlikely object of comparison mentioned by al-Ṣafadī, Ibn Nubātah was making it clear to the attentive reader that his letter was meant as a response.

This may be corroborated by the publication history of Ibn Nubātah's letter. Despite the fact that Ibn Nubātah published the letter shortly after it had been written in his *Taʿlīq al-Dīwān* in 743, it appears that the published version was not the same as the version that was actually sent. About seventy years later, Ibn Nubātah's letter was published again, this time by al-Qalqashandī who included it in his *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā*.[48] Al-Qalqashandī's version omits the beginning and one sentence from the middle of the letter, but carries on where the *Taʿlīq*-version ends and includes a description of a melon, which was obviously also part of the gift. As it is not very plausible that al-Qalqashandī added the melon-section from a different source, it is probable that Ibn Nubātah's original letter was indeed, as al-Qalqashandī's heading claims, "a response to the arrival of apricots and an Aleppine melon." Thus it seems that Ibn Nubātah must have decided to discard his description of the melon. By concentrating on a single subject (the apricots), the literary letter is not only made more focused and more concise, but it also becomes an exact counterpart to al-Ṣafadī's letter. Whatever Ibn Nubātah's intention, it is clear that Ibn Nubātah's publication decisions were governed by different principles than al-Qalqashandī's. Whereas the latter published shortened but otherwise unaltered versions of Ibn Nubātah's letters mainly to serve as models for other secretaries, Ibn Nubātah published revised versions of his letters to be read as aesthetic texts. Therefore, he did not dispose of the in-

45 See Bauer, *Der Fürst ist tot.*

46 Ibn Nubātah, *Taʿlīq al-Dīwān*, Ms. Berlin 8640, 37b.

47 Ibn Faḍl Allāh, *Masālik al-Abṣār*, 12:484.

48 Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā*, 9:117 – 118.

troduction and the address, in which the leitmotif of the celestial bodies already appeared, but did not hesitate to revise it whenever he thought his modifications would yield a better text regardless of its original wording and purpose. For al-Qalqashandī, however, the role of the text in pragmatic communication was still a concern, while in Ibn Nubātah's *Taʿlīq* it is mainly a text's potential for literary communication that is considered important.

Al-Ṣafadī's and Ibn Nubātah's letters were published separately without any hint of their interrelation. Since it is highly improbable that a reader would come across both texts and recognize their interdependence, the authors must have felt their texts were fully comprehensible and enjoyable even without the recognition of their cross intertextuality. This is also true of another text I have written about, Shihāb al-Dīn b. Faḍl Allāh's *Hunting Urjūzah*, which forms a knot in a complex network of intertextual relations but can also be enjoyed on its own.[49]

In the case of cross intertextuality there are at least three (groups of) participants: the addressee; the unmentioned person(s) who is/are the author(s) of the referent text(s); and the general reading public. In the texts examined here, it is clearly the last group that is most important to the author while the addressee may be no more than a pretext for the text's creation. The author of the text to which the text refers was certainly important, but the text could always still be considered relevant by those who were unaware of the connection.

Paratexts

As we saw in the preceding examples, Mamluk texts were often sent, dedicated or addressed to someone. It is tempting, therefore, to draw the conclusion that the main reason for a text was to convey a message to the person to which it was sent, dedicated or addressed. Such a conclusion, however, would be rash. The occasion of a text is merely its starting point and is not necessarily its *raison d'être*. Texts live on even after the occasion has passed and the addressee has been forgotten. Especially remarkable examples are those texts that began as paratexts to other texts but continued to be considered relevant works of art even when separated from the text to which they were originally linked.

A paratext is a text that in one way or another *accompanies* the main text, commenting, interpreting, illustrating, advertising, criticizing it in order to influence the reception of the text.[50] The main contribution of Mamluk literature to other established forms of paratexts was the *taqrīẓ*.[51] In a *taqrīẓ* the author

49 See Bauer, *Dawādār's Hunting Party.*

50 See Genette, *Palimpsestes*, 10–11.

51 Rosenthal, *'Blurbs' (Taqrīẓ)*; Veselý, *Taqrīẓ*; Bauer, *Was kann aus dem Jungen noch werden.*

expresses his appreciation of a newly published work and praises its author. Rosenthal's translation as "blurb" captures well one aspect of the word's meaning, but it should be stressed that in many cases it is the author himself who is being praised in a *taqrīẓ* rather more than the work in question. Gathering *taqārīẓ* was especially important for young authors just about to make their entrance on the public stage of literature and scholarship. We know of several cases of such *debut-taqārīẓ*, in which young authors circulated the work with which they hoped to announce themselves new members of the elite *ʿulamāʾ* or *udabāʾ*, asking established scholars and *hommes de lettres* to write them a *taqrīẓ*.[52] Thus collecting *taqārīẓ* may have been a sort of initiation rite for young, aspiring authors. It may very well be the case that the practice was begun by Ibn Nubātah in his *Sajʿ al-Muṭawwaq*, a work to which we will return later.

In general, *taqārīẓ* were published as an appendix to the work they praised and with which they stand in paratextual relation. Nevertheless, even *taqārīẓ* managed to live a second life, separated from the text that gave rise to them. Rudolf Veselý mentions several examples.[53] One may add to these Ibn Nubātah's *taqrīẓ* on a *dīwān* of epigrams written by Ibn Ḥabīb. The *taqrīẓ* started out as an appendix to Ibn Ḥabīb's work but was recycled in a considerably shortened and revised version in Ibn Nubātah's collection *Zahr al-Manthūr*, in which it can hardly be read as anything other than an aesthetic text.[54]

Whereas *debut-taqārīẓ* come, as a rule, in groups, a single *taqrīẓ* may be dedicated to a work of an established author as a sign of friendship and veneration. Perhaps the most extravagant *taqrīẓ* ever written was a letter sent by Burhān al-Dīn al-Qīrāṭī to Ibn Nubātah, a text of "utmost beauty and length", as Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī put it.[55] The text is not called *taqrīẓ*, and it is not clear which of Ibn Nubātah's works provoked its composition.[56] Its style and content leave little doubt, however, that it was meant as a sort of epitome of a *taqrīẓ*. It is also quite clear what al-Qīrāṭī's main purpose for the composition of the work was. Unlike the case of *debut-taqārīẓ*, here was a younger and less famous *adīb*, praising an older and extremely famous colleague. With this *taqrīẓ* al-Qīrāṭī hoped to anchor himself in the tradition of his revered model, Ibn Nubātah, to strengthen bonds of friendship with him and introduce himself as a worthy representative of Ibn Nubātah's legacy.

Though even this text had a kind of pragmatic background, there can be no doubt that it was intended to be and was indeed understood as a chiefly aesthetic

52 Bauer, *Ibn Ḥabīb*, 37 – 41.
53 Veselý, Taqrīẓ.
54 Bauer, *Ibn Ḥabīb* 45 – 50.
55 Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī: *Inbāʾ al-Ghumr*, 1:312.
56 Probably Ibn Nubātah's *Sūq ar-Raqīq* gave the occasion, one of his last works. It is a collection of revised versions of the *nasīb*s of his *qaṣīdah*s.

text. This is corroborated on several fronts. First, Ibn Ḥajar praised the text for its "extraordinary beauty" and considered it one of al-Qīrāṭī's main works. Second, it is included in Ibn Ḥijjah's selection of the works of al-Qīrāṭī called *Taḥrīr al-Qīrāṭī.* This volume is a *Best-of*, containing only those texts which Ibn Ḥijjah considered of extraordinary aesthetic value. Ibn Ḥijjah even mentions the "convention of aesthetics" in his foreword saying that, in the case of poetry, he omitted everything that is "purely meter and rhyme".[57] There was obviously no doubt on the part of Ibn Ḥajar and Ibn Ḥijjah that al-Qīrāṭī's text possessed aesthetic merit. Thirdly, the stylistic sophistication and the fact of the text's length– it covers more than 27 pages in the Berlin manuscript of *Taḥrīr al-Qīrāṭī*[58] – makes it all too clear that there is no justification in reading the text in a pragmatic way.

We may conclude, then, that even paratexts such as the *taqrīẓ*, which are the least probable candidates to be non-pragmatic texts, could be intended and understood as aesthetic texts, that they could be enjoyed as such and considered relevant and satisfying by readers who were not particularly interested in the texts and authors, which first gave rise to the composition of these texts.

Combinations

All the modes of communication described so far can also be combined. There is such a work that combines all of them together: Ibn Nubātah's miraculous (and still unedited) *Sajʿal-Muṭawwaq.* The book is *dedicated* to al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad, and is also *addressed* to him. The texts by its contributors are *responses* to Ibn Nubātah's invitation. Thus the book is mostly made up of texts (letters, poems) that are the outcome of a literary *exchange.* The contributors to the work knew that several of their colleagues were composing texts for the same purpose and all contributors had to react to an earlier text by Ibn Nubātah. This is a case of *shared intertexuality.* Although we do not know precisely how the contributors interacted, we can safely assume that the whole book is the result of *cross intertextuality.* Finally, the core of the book is made up of *taqārīẓ.* As we can see, all of the modes of communicative strategies discussed so far are not only present in the book, they form the very root of it.

The story of the work goes as follows: In the year 717/1317, one year after he had arrived in Damascus, the time was ripe for Ibn Nubātah to make his entrance onto the stage of *adab.* His debut-work was an anthology entitled *Maṭlaʿ al-Fawā'id wa-Majmaʿ al-Farā'id*, a programmatic work about the role of the *adīb*

57 Ibn Ḥijjah al-Ḥamawī, *Mukhtaṣar Dīwān al-Qīrāṭī (= Taḥrīr al-Qīrāṭī)*, Ms. Berlin 7870, 2a.
58 Ibid., 40a – 54a (17 lines per page).

and its import.[59] Ibn Nubātah dedicated it to al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad, the prince of Ḥamāh, and at the same time invited a number of members of the civilian elite to write a *taqrīẓ* on the work with the intention of publishing the incoming texts in a separate volume. According to the autograph manuscript, the work was accomplished in 719/1319.[60] Here is a list of the contributors in the order of their appearance in *Sajʿ al-Muṭawwaq:*

(1) al-Shihāb Maḥmūd ibn Salmān ibn Fahd (644 – 725/1246 – 1325), Ḥanbalī judge and from 717 until his death director of the chancellery (*kātib al-sirr*) of Damascus, famous *adīb* and author of several works, especially on *inshā'* and *adab.*[61]

(2) Najm al-Dīn b. Ṣaṣrā (655 – 723/1257 – 1323), from 702 until his death Shāfiʿī chief judge of Damascus and, thus, the holder of the highest religious office in Syria. In this function he was one of the four judges in the trial against Ibn Taymiyya in 705.[62] Two of them had already died by 719. The fourth is number (4) on our list.[63]

(3) Jalāl al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī, known as Khaṭīb Dimashq, Shāfiʿī judge, preacher at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. He is best known as the author of *Talkhīṣ al-Miftāḥ.*[64]

(4) Kamāl al-Dīn b. al-Zamlakānī (667 – 727/1269 – 1327), one of the great representatives of Shāfiʿī jurisprudence in his time, author of several works, among them refutations of Ibn Taymiyya, for whose trial in 705 he acted as judge. He held several positions as *nāẓir* and served as *muwaqqiʿ al-dast* in the *dīwān al-inshā'* of Damascus. In 724 he (reluctantly) became chief judge of Aleppo. Years before he had hoped to become chief judge of Damascus instead of Ibn Ṣaṣrā. When he was eventually offered the position in 727, he died.[65]

(5) Badr al-Dīn b. al-ʿAṭṭār (670 – 725/1271 – 1325), served as *nāẓir al-ashrāf* and secretary in the Damascus chancellery. His heyday, under Āqūsh al-Afram when he served as *nāẓir al-jaysh* of Syria, was already over by 719.[66]

(6) ʿAlā' al-Dīn b. Ghānim (651 – 737/1253 – 1336), highly respected and influential intellectual and *adīb*, who preferred to stay in Damascus rather than accept the post of director of the chancellery (*kātib al-sirr*) in Aleppo.[67]

59 See Bauer, *Anthologien*, 85 – 94.

60 Ibn Nubātah, *Sajʿ al-Muṭawwaq*, Ms. Ayasofya 4045, 77b.

61 See al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr* 5:372 – 399 (here and in the following I will limit myself in general on one source).

62 See Jackson, *Ibn Taymiyyah.*

63 See al-Ṣafadī: *al-Wāfī* 8:16 – 18 and al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 9:20 – 22 with a quotation from *al-Sajʿ al-Muṭawwaq.*

64 See al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr* 4:492 – 499.

65 See al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr* 5:106 – 111.

66 See al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr* 4:240 – 241 and idem, *al-Wāfī* 30:272 – 273.

67 See al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr* 3:496 – 502.

(7) Fakhr al-Dīn b. al-Muʿallim (660 – 725/1262 – 1325), lawyer, Koran reader, Ḥadīth scholar and *adīb*, former judge of al-Khalīl.[68]

(8) Amīn al-Dīn b. al-Naḥḥās (681 – 757/1282 – 1356) held several administrative positions in Damascus such as secretary in the *dīwān al-inshāʾ*.[69]

(9) Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Ghānim (d. 735/1334) started his career as *kātib al-inshāʾ* in Ṭarābulus, became *kātib al-Darj* in Damascus and was transferred to Ṣafad as *muwaqqiʿ* around the time Ibn Nubātah composed *Sajʿ al-Muṭawwaq*. He would end up as *kātib al-sirr*, back in Ṭarābulus.[70]

(10) Sharaf al-Dīn Aḥmad b. al-Yazdī, a lesser known figure, representative of Ṭarābulus, just as Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Ghānim.

(11) Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. Ḥammād al-Ḥamawī represented Ḥamāh.

Each of the contributors had some relation to *adab*, some more, others less. They were, after all, supposed to be interested in an anthology of *adab* and they had been asked to write a text that would match its literary standard. Many of them had positions in the chancellery and were trained to write sophisticated rhymed prose. Others, like Ibn Ṣaṣrā, had professions that had little to do with literature but they cultivated poetry in their free time. None of the eleven, however, was a poet of renown, let alone a professional littérateur. Most of them belonged to the upper rank of the civilian elite. Lesser known figures were included because Ibn Nubātah was keen not to restrict himself to people from Damascus and wanted to see the other towns in Syria also represented. It would be interesting to know whether the contributors knew of each other's contributions. This would be especially interesting in the case of ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. Ghānim and Ibn al-Zamlakānī, who nourished a mutual hatred, a fact that obviously did not prevent Ibn Nubātah from including them both.[71]

It is quite remarkable that the young and still quite unknown Ibn Nubātah managed to entice all these famous people to compose a *taqrīẓ* for him. We know that he had directed poems and letters to them before. Some of these have been preserved, many in *Sajʿ al-Muṭawwaq* itself, and it is more than likely that al-Malik al-Muʾayyad Abū al-Fidāʾ had a hand in it all. We do not know if there were any other VIPs who declined the invitation. After all, eleven contributors plus Ibn Nubātah himself would yield the magic number twelve.

In the end, *Sajʿ al-Muṭawwaq* ended up as a literary work in which thirteen people were directly involved: The author and editor Ibn Nubātah, the dedicatee Abū al-Fidāʾ (who himself remains silent), and the eleven *muqarriẓūn*. Their task was to write a text in rhymed prose, praising Ibn Nubātah, especially for the

68 See al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr* 5:183 – 184.
69 See al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr* 5:247 – 253.
70 See al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr* 2:5 – 12.
71 See al-Kutubī, *Fawāt al-Wafayāt*, 3:78 – 84.

achievement of his *Maṭlaʿ al-Fawā'id*, and also to eulogize al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad. Ibn Nubātah's task was to write a preface (the longest of any of his works), assemble the contributions and append what in the end is an anthology of his own poems and letters. The text is arranged in twelve chapters: the preface and one chapter for each contributor. Apart from the preface, each chapter is comprised of three sections: (1) a presentation of the contributor, (2) the contributor's *taqrīẓ*, (3) and a selection of the poem and letters Ibn Nubātah sent to the contributor.

The first chapter, on al-Shihāb Maḥmūd, may serve as an example. It is introduced by the word *al-shaykh*[72], written in thick ink to mark the beginning of a new section. The full name of the contributor comes next and is then followed by Ibn Nubātah's praise of ash-Shihāb Maḥmūd in rhymed prose (4 pages). The headline *nuskhah mā katabahū* introduces the second section: ash-Shihāb Maḥmūd's *taqrīẓ* of Ibn Nubātah and his praise of al-Mu'ayyad (3 pages) in rhymed prose, concluding with a few lines of poetry. The third section is titled *nubdhah min madā'iḥī wa-mukātabātī ilayhi* (12 pages). It starts with a poem of 33 lines "which I wrote to him this year"[73], followed by a short poem (5 lines) "which I wrote to him when he came to Damascus"[74], followed by a four-liner "which I wrote to him when he moved into the house of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil"[75]. The main piece is a very long and elaborate letter which "I wrote from Damascus while he was in Cairo" (6 pages), mostly praising Cairo at Damascus' expense. The next ten chapters follow this scheme closely.

Sajʿ al-Muṭawwaq became one of Ibn Nubātah's most popular works. It is preserved in even more manuscripts than *Maṭlaʿ al-Fawā'id*, the book that spurred the composition of *Sajʿ al-Muṭawwaq*. It goes without saying that the edition of a work like this, comprising nearly all conceivable forms of literary communication and thus giving a distillation of Mamluk elite literature, is a great desideratum. The editor will, however, have to cope with a serious problem. The autograph version, which we used to describe the al-Shihāb Maḥmūd-section, is obviously not identical with the published version. The published version, which all other copies I have examined so far represent, shows a considerable amount of revision. Some of them are trivial. Instead of *nubdhah min madā'iḥī wa-mukātabātī ilayh* Ibn Nubātah now writes *nubdhah min madīḥī* (or *madā'iḥī*) *fīhi wa-mukātabātī ilayhi*. Several phrases in his letters are reworded (note that the letters had been sent a long time before, and some of their addressees were already dead). In the headline to the first poem to al-Shihāb Maḥmūd b. Nubātah

72 No. 1, 3, 4, 7 and 11 are called *al-shaykh*, no. 2 *sayyidunā*, the others *al-ṣadr*.

73 Ibn Nubātah, *Sajʿ al-Muṭawwaq*, Ms. Ayasofya 4045, 9a, text also Ibn Nubātah, *Diwān*, 363.

74 Ibn Nubātah, *Sajʿ al-Muṭawwaq*, Ms. Ayasofya 4045, 10b, not in the *Dīwān*.

75 Ibid., not in the *Dīwān*.

cancels the words "which I wrote to him this year", which would have been misleading for later readers. Other changes are more drastic. Whole poems are omitted or added or transposed. In the case of al-Shihāb Maḥmūd, the second poem is omitted and another short poem "on the occasion of his arrival in Damascus" is added instead. In the case of Ibn al-Zamlakānī, the change is even more drastic. The main text by Ibn Nubātah in this section is an *ʿaynīyah* of 55 lines.[76] As it happened, out of his two long eulogies in praise of Ibn al-Zamlakānī it was not the *ʿaynīyah* that became famous. Rather it was his monumental *tāʾīyah,* a poem of more than a hundred lines. Its fame is attested by Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, who quotes it and acclaims it, adding that the poem led many *udabāʾ* to write a *muʿāraḍah* of it, but that they all failed and none could match it;[77] this despite the fact that Tāj al-Dīn himself had been eulogized in one of these *muʿāraḍāt* composed by al-Qīrāṭī.[78] Ibn Nubātah did what his readers would have expected and replaced the *ʿaynīyah* with the *tāʾīyah.*

Again we see how texts can live a second life. Poems and letters that had already fulfilled their first communicative purpose were reassembled and revised to serve as texts of literary interest for a broader public for whom the texts' original purpose was of little relevance. What is more, some of the texts gained a third life: they were revised a second time and found their way into other publications. This is, for example, the case with Ibn Nubātah's letter to al-Shihāb Maḥmūd, which Ibn Nubātah included in his anthology of prose texts called *Zahr al-Manthūr* from the year 730. The letter is presented in a slightly shortened version. It comes under the bare heading *min risālah.* Not even the name of the addressee is mentioned this time as it was considered to be irrelevant for the reader.[79]

Conclusion

After the *Sturm und Drang* with its cult of genius and the aesthetics of authentic experience, literature that was composed for a particular occasion was in a difficult position – or was not even considered to be "authentic" literature any longer. Despite Goethe's attempt to vindicate "occasional" poetry,[80] European romanticism reinforced the idea that the poet had to be a medium, who, owing to his individual sensibility, is gifted with deeper emotions and insights. The poet's

76 Ibid. 33b – 36a, see also Ibn Nubātah, *Diwān* 297 – 299.

77 Al-Subkī, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 9:191 – 201.

78 See Ibn Ḥijjah, *Taḥrīr al-Qīrāṭī*, Ms. Berlin 7870, 17a – 19b. Ibn Nubātah's *Tāʾīyah* is in Ibn Nubātah, *Diwān* 67 – 71.

79 Ibn Nubātah, *Zahr al-Manthūr*, Ms. Chester Beatty Library 3774, 84a – 85a.

80 See Segebrecht, *Gelegenheitsgedicht.*

task is then to reveal his individual, authentic vision of life to the public. In this understanding, there is no place for occasional poetry, which is irreconcilable with "the aesthetics of romanticism, where the notion of eternal models (…) is replaced by a passionate belief in spiritual freedom, individual creativity. The painter, the poet, the composer do not hold up a mirror to nature, however ideal, but invent; they do not imitate (the doctrine of mimesis), but create not merely the means but the goals that they pursue; these goals represent the self-expression of the artist's own unique, inner vision, to set aside which in response to the demands of some 'external' voice – church, state, public opinion, family, friends, arbiters of taste – is an act of betrayal of what alone justifies their existence for those who are in any sense creative."[81]

The romantic idea of poetry was a purely Western and modern concept (– it has its roots in the end of the 18th century –), but as with many Western concepts, it was soon considered universal. Writers in non-Western cultures were expected to write accordingly, and historians of literature applied the romantic paradigm to literatures of the past, using it to distinguish between good and bad texts and good and bad literatures. Arabic literature fared especially badly. There is not much of a romantic spirit in it, and, even worse, the bulk of it was quite obviously composed for particular occasions. Western scholars of Arabic literature were especially vexed by the fact that so much of Arabic literature is panegyric. Panegyric literature is occasional literature *par excellence* and was banned from the realm of "true" literature in the 19th century in most Western literatures. In classical Arabic literature, instead, panegyric poetry has always been a genre of highest prestige. Joseph Hell even went so far as to see in the Arab's esteem for al-Mutanabbī a "problem of the psychology of nations rather than of literary history".[82] On the other hand, Johann Jacob Reiske (1716 – 1774), who was still rooted in the ideas of the Enlightenment, had no problem with panegyrics and considered al-Mutanabbī one of the greatest poets ever.[83] Joseph Hell gave the following harsh verdict on al-Mutanabbī and his admirers: "No nation other than the Arabs would ever declare a professional panegyrist their greatest poet. The rest of the civilized world would never allow themselves to reckon among the great figures of world literature a poet who dedicated his talents – great as they may have been – almost exclusively to the glory – whether justified or not – of generous personalities."[84]

In the aftermath of Western domination and colonialism, Western concepts of literature found their way into the Middle East. In Ṭāhā Ḥusayn[85] al-Mutanabbī

81 Berlin, *Crooked Timber*, 57 – 58.
82 Hell, *al-Mutanabbi*, here 176 (translation T.B.).
83 Reiske, *Proben*.
84 Hell, *al-Mutanabbi*, 175 (translation T.B.).
85 Ḥusayn, *Maʿa l-Mutanabbī*.

hardly fared better than with Joseph Hell, and many literary scholars wasted their time sniffing out lines in which a poet "expresses true feelings" despite the fact that neither the idea of "true" (vs. false) feelings nor the concept of "expressing" one's feelings was shared by pre-modern Arabic poets and intellectuals.[86]

Arab scholars are even more critical about the Mamluk period. Its literature is equally as occasional as that of the Abbasid period, but, due to *Verbürgerlichung*, it lacks much of the former's heroism, which appealed to scholars who were interested in writing a nationalist literary history. Enough has been said about prejudices and misconceptions concerning Mamluk literature however. The present article is not intended as another defense of Mamluk literature or another state-of-the-field article.[87] Instead, it probed the different ways in which literature was used as a medium of communication among the educated in Mamluk society.

As a result we may state that occasionality (i. e. the production of texts first composed for a particular occasion) plays indeed an important role in Mamluk literature. It is, however, a different kind of occasionality than that of the panegyric poetry of earlier times. In a panegyric poem addressed to a caliph, a prince or a high-ranking officer the participants of the communication can be arranged in a triangle on the top of which is the *mamdūḥ* while the poet and the public form the two corners at the base.[88] In general, there is a strong hierarchic gap between the *mamdūḥ* on the one hand and the poet and the audience on the other. In Mamluk times, this kind of asymmetric communication is the exception rather than the rule. The occasion for which literary texts were produced was no longer prescribed by aristocrats. Instead, the *udabā'* created their own occasions. Often there was no occasion other than the mere desire to communicate. It could even happen that princes took part in an act of communication between the *ʿulamā'* and *udabā'* as we have seen in the case of Ibn Nubātah's *Sajʿ al-Muṭawwaq*, in which the prince of Ḥamāh assumes the role of the *mamdūḥ*, which turns out, however to be only a supporting role.

The romantic rejection of occasional poetry entails a price: the marginalization of poetry.[89] It is hardly an exaggeration to suggest that literature that demands more than pure amusement – to say nothing of poetry – is of lesser social importance today than it was during most of the history of Western and Middle Eastern societies. Today whenever poetry reaches a wide audience, it is

86 See Bauer, *review: al-Afandi, al-Ghazal.*
87 See Homerin, *Reflections*, and Bauer, *Mamluk Literature*, and idem, *Post-Classical Literature.*
88 See Bauer, *Shāʿir (Poet).*
89 See Segebrecht, *Gelegenheitsgedicht*, 15, 25.

again thanks to its occasionality as in political songs, rap music, poetry slams or events like *shāʿir al-milyūn*.

The central importance of literature in the Mamluk period coincides with its high degree of occasionality. Literature, especially poetry and ornate prose, was central, it permeated every field of life and was an important medium of educated conversation. The subjects of literature were great emotions as in Ibn Nubātah's "Kindertotenlieder"[90] as well as the trifles of everyday life. Esprit, wit and elegance, even critique and provocation were held in high esteem; playfulness was enjoyed. In all these parameters, Mamluk literature has much more in common with the literature of the Enlightenment than with that of romanticism. No wonder both the Mamluk period and the Enlightenment share an interest in the pointed epigram, which became one of the most prevalent literary forms in both epochs.

As we have seen in the preceding, communication among the educated in the Mamluk period did not (only) take place in a private context. It was always also a means of distinction as well as a means of creating group identity. It, therefore, had to take place on a *stage*, at least on an imaginary stage. As we saw, many if not most poems and prose works were composed for a particular occasion. In many cases, however, the occasion is not important for the understanding of the texts. It may even be invented or manipulated, as was the case with Ibn Nubātah's letter on camphorated apricots, where he only told half the truth about the occasion. Though texts were (truly or allegedly) composed for a certain occasion, it was not the occasion that mattered, but their staging. The stage, of course, must not be taken literally (except in the case of popular literature as certain types of texts were intended for oral performance). Rather, the stage of the educated class was the book market. Thus, texts that were considered relevant beyond their use for a particular occasion were divorced from their original context, revised, adapted to new contexts and distributed in a different medium. The impulse to give a second (or third…) life to formerly occasional texts is one of the reasons why the Mamluk period was also the "Golden Age" of the anthology.[91]

It is remarkable that out of all literary epochs it was in the unromantic Mamluk age that one of the great ideals of the Romantics – the unity of life and literature – had come closer to becoming a reality than hardly ever before or after. For scholars of literature, this is a fascinating discovery. For scholars in other fields, it is a challenge. Anyone who seeks to gain a deeper understanding of Mamluk society has no choice but to take its literature – prose and poetry – into close consideration.

90 See note 27.

91 See Bauer, *Anthologien.*

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