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THE WAFAYĀT AL-A'YĀN OF IBN KHALLIKĀN: A NEW APPROACH*

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Particularly in the light of recent developments of literary criticism in European literatures, a reorientation of Western criticism of medieval Arabic literature and an increased awareness of methodology is necessary. The break with the still widespread positivistic concept of *Quellenforschung* is overdue since its value for the understanding of literary works is questionable. The interpretation of any work of literature, which includes historiography, has to start with the analysis of the structures of the work in its transmitted form. A biographical work, such as ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, is composed of individual biographies, which can be broken down into smaller units: strictly biographical parts and narrative units (anecdotes and aphorisms). A literary critic trying to understand and explain the biographical work must begin with the analysis of these small narrative units, and from there proceed to the work as a whole, and only then to its place in history.

I. IT HAS BEEN CUSTOMARY TO VIEW Arabic historiography, of which biographical literature is a part, mainly under two aspects, namely, as philological material and as historical documents. The interest in philology, together with which Arabic studies grew in the West, has resulted in numerous meticulous text-editions, in lexicographical and grammatical studies. The interest in the purely factual value of historiography has resulted in the establishment of the course of historical events. Somewhere on the borderline between these two aspects, *Quellenforschung* is located, that branch of literary research that reduces any literary production to the sum of its sources.

Critics of medieval European historiography have often argued fiercely about the methodology of historical and philological criticism ever since interest in medieval historiography began to grow during the Romantic period. There has, however, been almost nothing comparable among Western critics of Arabic historiography. Therefore, many scholars of Arabic historiography seem to stand today where many scholars of medieval European historiography stood last century when

some of them, in editing the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, wanted to disregard and exclude from publication all the material of a book borrowed from previous works.¹ To be sure, Arabists have not omitted sections from Arab historiographers when publishing their works. Yet philosophically and ideologically tinted terms such as "dilution," "lack of originality," or the Spenglerian "rise and decline," still rampant in Islamic studies in the West, suggest the same basic attitude that measures changes and developments against an ideal image, which is necessarily alien to the historical realities and therefore inappropriate as a value-judgment. The often made comparisons between history, or for that matter between literature and biological processes, fail to do justice to history (or literature). History cannot get cancer, but it can change or, in any case, it moves on!

This kind of comparison of history or literature to biological processes is positivism at its best; positivism that under the cloak of alleged strict objectivity conveys the idea of literary works, which are considered as directly mirroring life, as determined by necessity and causality and as

* The present article is a slightly modified version of the first chapter of my doctoral dissertation submitted to the Near Eastern Center at the University of California at Los Angeles in 1972. My thanks are due to Professor S. A. Bonebakker, who for over a year never failed to give me advice and assistance in the preparation of this dissertation.

¹ For this and the whole discussion by European medievalists of criticism of medieval historiography, cf. J. Spörl, "Das mittelalterliche Geschichtsdnken als Forschungsaufgabe", *Historisches Jahrbuch der Görresgesellschaft* 53 (1933), 281-303; repr. in *Geschichtsdnken und Geschichtsbild im Mittelalter* (ed. W. Lammens; Darmstadt, 1965), 1-29.

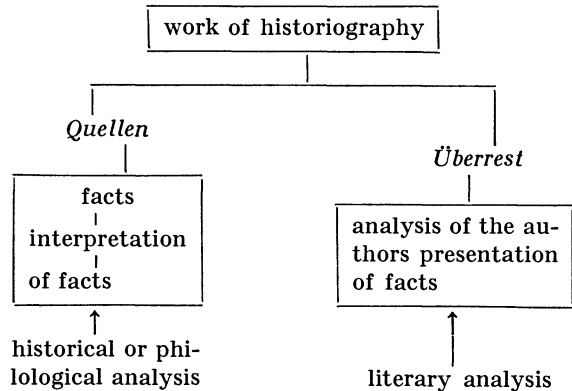
the sum of their sources; positivism that materializes in two distinct trends: as "accumulation of unrelated facts" and as application of "the methods of the natural sciences."²

One of the results of the revolt against positivism was to become the "movement" of *Geistesgeschichte*, the reconstruction of the "spirit of the time" from the different objectifications of an age.³ In Islamic studies, this trend found its supreme exponent in A. Mez, who in his *Die Renaissance des Islāms* characterized the fourth Islamic century (10th cent. A.D.) by minutely describing aspects of life as different as "the Empire," "the Administration," "Scholars," "Literature," "Way of Life," "Industry," and "River Navigation." The approach of *Geistesgeschichte*, of course, makes literature just one more aspect of human endeavor, which has to be dealt with only in the framework of all other aspects of life. *Geistesgeschichte* denies any autonomy to literature by claiming necessary relationships to all other human activities. Thus, literature becomes a kind of document helping to illustrate the *Zeitgeist*, which is itself a concept the validity of which has for good reasons been questioned.⁴

In order to keep separate the merely factual value of a piece of historiography from its literary value, it is helpful to refer to a pair of terms coined by the nineteenth century historian Droysen in his *Historik*:⁵ *Quellen* (sources) and *Überrest* (remnant/relic). According to his definition, *sources* are all the material collected to be handed down to future generations as information about by-gone times, whereas *remnant* designates all that has come down to us accidentally or by implication. Much literature, and certainly historiography, participates in both aspects of historical material: As far as sources are concerned, the historiographer wants to give specific information to posterity, and these facts can be extrapolated, interpreted, and proved correct or

wrong by the historian. A philologist will similarly isolate facts. As for remnants, the analysis deals with the whole work at one time and does not ask whether the facts are actually true, but, rather, what these facts mean in the context of the whole work; in other words, the analysis deals with implications.

Graphically this separation can be presented as follows:



II. It is not the purpose of this study to examine in detail Western historical writing about Islam and the employment of medieval Islamic sources therein. The purpose is, rather, to suggest a literary approach to one work of Islamic historiography. For the literary critic the focal points in viewing any kind of literature are different from the ones employed by the traditional historian, who explains and connects the facts he extrapolates from a work. Perhaps it is time to pay more attention to much of Arabic writing as literature in the sense of creative writing rather than as historical documents, grown out of sources and becoming sources themselves, as *Überrest* rather than as *Quellen*. Although much of the material that the historiographer or, in this case, the biographer, incorporates into his work is part of his literary heritage, his literary tradition, all this material is filtered through the author's mind, is tinged by his interests and propensities. He may deem changes necessary: insertions, inversions, omissions. He includes facts which he considers important; he excludes facts which he considers negligible. Particularly in pre-Romantic literatures, to which the later idea of individualism and creativity is alien, creative writing has to be understood as the impregnation of traditional motifs with the authors personal ideas.

² R. Wellek, "The Revolt against Positivism in Recent European Literary Scholarship", id., *Concept of Criticism* (New Haven, Conn./London, 1963), 256ff.

³ M. Maren-Grisebach, *Methoden der Literaturwissenschaft* (Bern/München, 1970), 23.

⁴ E.g., L. L. Schücking, *Soziologie der literarischen Geschmacksbildung* (Bern/München, 1961³), 13.

⁵ J. G. Droysen, *Historik. Vorlesungen über Enzyklopädie und Methodologie der Geschichte* (ed. R. Hübner; München, 1937. 1971⁶), 37-84.

It has been detrimental to Western criticism of Arabic literature to have developed in close connection with philology, *Quellenforschung*, and the study of Islamic history, and to have been dealt with usually by scholars who were either philologists or historians and not infrequently both. To this day, the philosophical basis of nineteenth century positivistic scholarship, represented in the two trends of accumulation of unrelated facts and of evolutionism, is all too noticeable in the criticism of Arabic literature.

The accumulative trend on the one hand can be seen in numerous recent articles and books that either hardly exceed the limits of mere summaries of one or more literary works or that list only topics or motifs and restrict the literary interpretation to an insufficient minimum.

The evolutionist trend on the other hand is apparent in works in which literature and its changes are dealt with on the pattern of political and social history, which is itself understood as an almost biological, and thus necessary, process of growth, peak, and decline. This evolutionist approach to literature goes back to Aristotle, whose concept of the development of literary genres was teleological. In modern times, J. J. Winckelmann applied this pattern to the *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* in a passage that was to have a strong impact on last century scholarship. Since Winckelmann's concept of growth and decline continues to prevail in much of Western criticism of medieval Arabic literature, it is worthwhile to quote it in its entirety:

Die Kunst unter den Griechen hat, wie ihre Dichtkunst, nach Scaligers Angaben, vier Hauptzeiten, und wir könnten deren fünf setzen. Denn so wie eine jede Handlung und Gegebenheit fünf Theile und gleichsam Stufen hat, den *Anfang*, den *Fortgang*, den *Stand*, die *Abnahme*, und das *Ende*, worinn der Grund lieget von den fünf Auftritten oder Handlungen in Theatralischen Stücken, eben so verhält es sich mit der Zeitfolge derselben: da aber das Ende derselben ausser die Gränzen der Kunst gehet, so sind hier eigentlich nur vier Zeiten derselben zu betrachten. Der ältere Stil hat bis auf den Phidias gedauert; durch ihn und durch die Künstler seiner Zeit erreichte die Kunst ihre Grösse, und man kann diesen Stil den Grossen und Hohen nennen: von dem Praxiteles an bis auf den Lysippus und Apelles erlangte die Kunst mehr Gratie und Gefälligkeit, und dieser Stil würde der Schöne zu benennen seyn. Einige Zeit nach diesen Künstlern und ihrer Schule fing die Kunst an zu sinken in den

Nachahmern derselben, und wir könnten einen dritten Stil der Nachahmer setzen, bis sie sich endlich nach und nach gegen ihren Fall neigte.⁶ (Italics mine)

As but one example of the continuing prevalence of this concept in Arabic literary criticism, the arrangement of H.A.R. Gibb's *Arabic Literature. An Introduction* (2nd ed. 1963) may suffice: There, Arabic literature until A.D. 1800 is divided into five (!) periods, neatly coinciding with politico-historical periods:

The Heroic Age (c. A.D. 500-622)
The Age of Expansion (A.D. 622-750)
The Golden Age (A.D. 750-1055)
The Silver Age (A.D. 1055-1258)
The Age of the Mamlûks (A.D. 1258-1800)

None of the dates given has anything to do with literature as such: in 622 the Prophet emigrated from his hometown Mecca to Medina; in 750 the 'Abbāsid dynasty took over the power from the Umayyads; in 1055 the Turkic Seljūkids deprived the 'Abbāsid Caliph of the real power over his empire;⁷ in 1258 the Mongols conquered Baghdād and terminated the 'Abbāsid caliphate altogether; around 1800 (in 1798) Napoleon landed in Egypt. Thus, all literary production in the Arab world till 1800 is viewed as necessarily depending upon political history, the development of which is considered an evolutionist one.⁸

Even if one takes into consideration that Gibb's book is meant as a brief introduction to Arabic literature, the "date-approach" remains unsatisfactory. Elsewhere, Gibb took an approach to

⁶ J. Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* I (Dresden, 1764), 213f.

⁷ About this date in particular and with respect only to historiography, cf. C. Cahen, "The Historiography of the Seljuqid Period," *Historians of the Middle East* (ed. Lewis and Holt; London, 1962), 59: "Neither the beginning nor the end of Seljuq rule marks a true break in the development of Muslim historical literature; the drawing of a specific picture of Seljuq historiography is therefore uncalled-for."

⁸ The power of this concept of a classical and a post-classical era can be seen in the distribution of periods of interest in modern Islamic studies: The philologists' interest in the period before 1000 A.D. is much greater than in the period after that time. (Cf. H. R. Roemer, "Der islamische Orient in der historischen Forschung," *Saeculum* 16 (1965), 64.)

literary change that does more justice 'to literature'.⁹

In several articles and books, medieval Arabic historiography has been dealt with as a whole. However, very rarely have authors been concerned with the concept of history and that of man and their modifications through the ages, as expressed in historiographical works. Usually, Arabic historiography is considered a problem of form and forms rather than one of form and content. Even as recent a book as F. Rosenthal's *History of Muslim Historiography* (2nd ed. 1968) does not do what its introduction promises: too much discussion of admittedly important formal questions of Arabic historiography obscures the individuality of each single work.

In the light of this, from a literary analyst's point of view, regrettably underdeveloped state of criticism of medieval Arabic historiography, a new awareness of methodology seems necessary.

III. It is becoming a more and more widely accepted belief in international literary criticism that literary qualities are found first and foremost in the literary work itself and not in historical circumstances, connected with the work by strict causality, such as the ones listed by Gibb as characterizing Arabic literature. These qualities should, therefore, become evident upon close reading of a text. Depending on which "school" of criticism the literary critic adheres to, he will consider permissible additional ways to determine the qualities of a work. The work may be considered from the point of view of genre, and genre does not here mean the sum total of works that possess the same external features. External features are only one aspect of a literary genre, which is constituted by the inseparable unity of form and content.¹⁰ While the biographical dictionary as a whole, more than other historical works may defy characterization on the basis of features of form and content, this method of characterization can certainly be applied to the smaller units partly constituting the dictionary—anecdotal and sententious genres. In addition to these individual analyses, comparisons of the

text to similar works in general and to the author's "sources" in particular appear most helpful. In literary analyses, such comparisons should not serve to find out how much material of a work originates from other "sources" and which "sources" were drawn on (this would be *Quellenforschung* and not literary criticism) but, rather, how the material is shaped and arranged; in other words, if and how different views are expressed in different works.

There are other approaches to the study of the qualities of a literary work, approaches that without necessarily neglecting the formal aspects of a work emphasize its content by concerning themselves first and foremost with the presentation of social problems, moral values, or psychological and archetypal patterns. It remains for future investigations to decide whether these approaches, and others now discussed by literary critics everywhere, are applicable to the genre of biographical dictionary in medieval Arabic literature. As far as historiography proper (chronicles and annals) of the Mamlūk period is concerned, an examination of the arrangement of *topoi* in it could serve as a first step in the direction of sociological, moral, psychological, or archetypal criticism,¹¹ if it goes beyond E. R. Curtius' approach to *topoi*.¹² Whether this can also be done with *topoi* in early Islamic historiography has yet to be examined.¹³

IV. According to a recent definition,¹⁴ there are three types of literary biography, "the chronicle-compendium, the synthesized and summarized narrative (which might be termed the "organic" type), and the literary portrait. The three types

⁹ H. A. R. Gibb, "The Social Significance of the Shuubiya," id., *Studies on the Civilization of Islam* (ed. Shaw and Polk; Boston, 1962), 62-73.

¹⁰ E.g., K. Viëtor, "Die Geschichte der literarischen Gattungen," id., *Geist und Form* (Bern, 1952), 300; and W. V. Ruttkowski, *Die literarischen Gattungen* (Bern/München, 1968), 15.

¹¹ About the nature of *topoi* in Mamlūk historiography, cf. U. Haarmann, "Auflösung und Bewahrung der klassischen Formen arabischer Geschichtsschreibung," *ZDMG* 121 (1971), 46-60.

¹² For such an approach, cf. O. Pöggeler, "Dichtungstheorie und Toposforschung," *Jahrbuch für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 5 (1960), 89-201; W. Veit, "Toposforschung. Ein Forschungsbericht," *DVjs* 37 (1963), 120-163; id., "'Topics' in Comparative Literature," *Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature* 5 (1965), 39-55.

¹³ About the nature of *topoi* in early Islamic historiography, cf. A. Noth, "IṢFAHĀN—NIHĀWAND: Eine quellenkritische Studie zur frühislamischen Historiographie," *ZDMG* 118 (1968), 274-296.

¹⁴ L. Edel, "Literature and Biography," *Relations of Literary Study* (ed. J. Thorpe; New York, 1967), 57.

are simply different ways of presenting the results of biographical research." These types are not only useful as categories of biographies of literary personalities. Political biographies can be grouped in the same manner. However, they all fall short of comprising medieval biographies, specifically, biographical dictionaries such as the ones popular in medieval Arabic literature, in that they all are "continual narratives." Only if "continual narrative" is defined as the sum total of any number of small literary units that are held together by their characterization of one person, does the type "chronicle-compendium" include the biographies in Arabic biographical dictionaries, if these biographies exceed the limits of mere lists of facts. Many biographies in Ibn Khalikān's *Wafayāt* must be cautiously considered "synthesized and summarized narratives": They are not simply selections of material from previous works. The material is rephrased, even if only in small details. Some material is left out. Thus, a new image is conveyed of many persons presented.

There is, however, an essential difference between a biographical dictionary such as the *Wafayāt* and a biographical monography, such as Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. In the former, each individual is placed in a double context, the context of his own life as presented in his biography and the context of the lives of all other individuals in the biographical dictionary. In the latter, the context is a single one, as there is no structure of lives of other individuals. The individual stands by himself.

If we are to believe the standard works about biographical literature in classical antiquity, the origin of biographical literature coincides with the time of the transition from type to individual in representational arts and poetry and with the time of the beginnings of psychological historiography in ancient Greece.¹⁵ The early biographies in the Greek and Roman world were usually devoted to literary personalities and to scholars. Only with Plutarch and Suetonius did the biographical interest shift to rulers and politicians. Suetonius in his *Lives of the Caesars* employs the pattern of Alexandrian biographies of scholars:

¹⁵ F. Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer literarischen Form* (Leipzig, 1901), 316; A. von Meuss, "Die Anfänge der Biographie in der psychologischen Geschichtsschreibung in der griechischen Literatur I," *RM* 70 (1915), 337.

narrative introduction, descriptive main part, and narrative end.¹⁶ This pattern was to influence very strongly the biographer of Charlemagne, Einhard.¹⁷ Otherwise, classical historiography had only limited—formal—influence on medieval European historiography. Much stronger was the influence of the Christian tradition, especially of the passions of martyrs, the *Acta Apostolorum*, and the lives of Saints. The same formal pattern was then applied to the description of the lives of contemporary Saints. Presentations of secular personalities in separate biographies—not in the framework of another form of historiography, such as annals or chronicles—were rare in the European Middle Ages.

The development of medieval Arabic biographical literature was quite different from that of medieval European biographical literature. It is not within the scope of this study to examine the correctness of the wide-spread concept of the development of Arabic historiography, of which biography is a part. According to this concept,¹⁸ Arabic historiography originated from two sources, the pre-Islamic tradition and the sacred history of early Islam. Pre-Islamic tradition includes tribal and genealogical memories and ancient Arabian stories and poetry. Sacred history of early Islam includes the history of the Prophet himself and all the events that led to his mission; this would, of course, also encompass the Judaic-Christian tradition inasmuch as it became influential upon early Islam.

After a certain period of time, Islamic historiography, the *ʿilm at-taʾrīkh*, is said to have bifurcated and continued its development as two separate categories, annals and chronicles on the one hand and biographies, the *ʿilm ar-rijāl*, on the other. Not before the late twelfth century is a third basic form said to have been introduced, a combination of the two previous ones. Its initiator was Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200).¹⁹ Bio-

¹⁶ H. Vogt, *Die literarische Personenschilderung des frühen Mittelalters* (Leipzig/Berlin, 1934), 11.

¹⁷ For what follows, cf. H. Grundmann, *Geschichtsschreibung im Mittelalter* (Göttingen, 1965), 29ff.

¹⁸ F. Gabrieli, "Storiografia dell'oriente islamico," *RSI* 75 (1963), 81-96; I. Lichtenstädter, "Arabic and Islamic Historiography," *MW* 35 (1945), 126-132; A. A. Duri, "The Iraq School of History to the Ninth Century—a Sketch," *Historians of the Middle East* (ed. Lewis and Holt; London, 1962), 46-53.

¹⁹ About Ibn al-Jawzī and his new historiographical

graphical and annalistic presentation of historical material were no longer strictly separated but combined into one single work. The annalistic material was divided into periods of a certain length: decades, thirty years, or a hundred years, and to the end of each of these sections the biographies, or rather obituaries, were added, usually arranged chronologically according to the dates of the personalities' death. In its mechanistic approach, this still popular concept of the development of medieval Arabic historiography neglects almost any literary aspects of historiography, and is thus indicative of the situation of Western criticism of medieval Arabic literature.

The most important difference between medieval European and medieval Arabic biographical literature is that the latter is strictly function-oriented in its beginnings, while the former is more person-oriented. Arabic biographical literature developed in close connection with *isnād*-criticism, i.e., the criticism of the validity of chains (*isnāds*) of transmitters of religio-legal stipulations from the early days of Islam. The interest in a person's reliability, however, soon led some biographers to an interest in more personal aspects of the persons he mentioned. The most important questions to be answered concerning every personality in this kind of biographical works, called *Ṭabaqāt*, or "Generations," were: Whom could he have seen? Whom did he actually see? From whom did he learn traditions? To whom did he teach traditions? And finally, traditions about what or whom did he hand down?

In a work as late as Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt*, which had altogether lost its function as a *ṭabaqāt*-work, many of these formal features still exist. The original *ṭabaqāt*-works²⁰ were arranged according to generations: first came the generation of the Prophet's companions (the *Ṣaḥāba*), then the first generation after the Prophet (the *Tābi'ūn*). In later times, several divisions of the biographical material were undertaken, both horizontal and vertical. The time was divided into eras and these eras were subdivided either chronologically according to the dates of the persons'

death or alphabetically by the persons' names. The material was divided either according to profession or by locality; there are, for instance, biographical dictionaries about poets, judges, or grammarians, and there are others that list only personalities who, at some point in their lives, had anything to do with one particular town.

Biographical dictionaries that are arranged totally alphabetically can no longer be considered *ṭabaqāt*-works, as the most important aspect of the *ṭabaqāt*-works has disappeared, the arrangement of the material in some kind of sequence of time. They may still be limited to one particular group of people and they may still abound in traces of their provenance, but the change of the most important part in the system of the *ṭabaqāt*-works indicated both a different outlook by the author on the work and a different function of the work. The persons included in the dictionary are no longer envisaged as functioning as transmitters of traditions or as belonging to one particular time. The presentation of the individuals can, therefore receive more attention.

The first Arabic authors to arrange biographical dictionaries on an exclusively alphabetical pattern were al-Khaṭīb (d. 463/1071) in his *Ta'riḫ Baghdād* and ibn 'Asākir (d. 571/1176) in his *Ta'riḫ Dimashq*.²¹ The titles of both works clearly indicate that biographical dictionaries were considered works on history: The history of eminent inhabitants of a city was regarded as the history of the city itself.

V. Ibn Khallikān's work, the *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa-Anbā' Abnā' az-Zamān*²² (written during the second half of the 7th/13th century) can be called a "mixed form" as it consists of a time-honored vessel, the biographical dictionary, and a content that may well be described as *adab*, a mixture of educational and entertaining material or educational material presented as entertainment. Thus, the *Wafayāt* is an *adab*-work in the cloak of a biographical dictionary or a biographical dictionary with numerous features that are common to *adab*-works.

form, cf. several articles by J. de Somogyi, esp. "The Development of Arabic Historiography," *JSS* 3 (1958), 373-387; and "Ibn al-Jauzī's School of Historiography," *AcOrHung* 6 (1956), 207-214.

²⁰ About these different forms of biographical dictionaries, cf. O. Spies, *Beiträge zur arabischen Literaturgeschichte* (Leipzig, 1932; repr. Nendeln, 1966), esp. 4f.

²¹ Ibid., 54. According to F. Rosenthal (*A History of Muslim Historiography* [Leiden, 1968²], 167), alphabetical arrangement already appeared in the tenth century, or possibly even earlier.

²² Brockelmann, *GAL* GI, 327; SI, 561. The edition used here is the new one prepared by I. 'Abbās, vols. I-VII (Beirut, 1971).

Formally, the following features connect Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt* with the literary genre of the biographical dictionary: It consists of 855 biographies of various lengths. The statistics are as follows:

vol.	no. of pages	no. of biographies	average length of biographies (in pages)
1	356	146	2.43
2	532	167	3.20
3	498	204	2.44
4	470	160	2.93
5	419	86	4.87
6	425	60	7.08
7	254	36	7.05

The overall average length of the biographies in the *Wafayāt* is 3.4 pages.

Referring to a note in one of the manuscripts²³ and to the author's epilogue, C. Brockelmann, following F. Wüstenfeld,²⁴ suggests that Ibn Khallikān, who had to interrupt the work on his *Wafayāt* for professional reasons for ten years, changed the plan for his work when continuing it. From no. 817 (in Wüstenfeld's edition, corresponding to no. 806 in I. 'Abbās' edition) onward, Brockelmann says, Ibn Khallikān no longer considered his work a draft but the final version. Consequently he expanded the biographies considerably. In the light of this contention—Ibn Khallikān is by far not as explicit about a change of plan as Brockelmann—it would be interesting to find out the reason for the gradual increase in length of the individual biographies throughout the work (with the exception of volume II).

The "factual material" presented in the *Wafayāt* also connects it with the genre of the biographical dictionary. The term "factual material" is a definition of content. It is employed here to designate a certain amount of information that is offered in almost every biography and that establishes each personality genealogically, historically, geographically, philosophically, professionally, and politically. It is the information that is usually not changed, except in volume and arrangement, on its way from one historical work to another. This so to speak static character of the "factual material" can be contrasted with

the dynamic character of what will be called "illustrative material," material that within the limits of an author's respect of tradition and his personal literary capabilities and taste is changed and modified in order to express changes in the image of the person he depicted.

With respect to its function, "factual material" should be termed "structural material," since in the framework of each biography "factual material" sets up a basic structure, however flexible, within which "illustrative material" can be employed or within which this "factual material" can be moulded to become illustrative. Most biographies in Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt* are made up of factual and illustrative material closely interwoven with each other.

As a general rule, the illustrative material is integrated into, or at least strung up with, the factual material without differentiation as to its historical value. The reason for this equal treatment of factual and illustrative material is obvious: It is the nature of illustrative—sententious and especially anecdotal—material to claim historicity. If both kinds of material claim to be historical, how should one differentiate between them?

Length of a biography is not achieved by the author through appending a number of odd little stories about a person to his *Kurzvita*.²⁵ Rather, biographies are lengthened through a dynamic process by means of which the author increases the number of aspects under which the reader is called to view the presented person. The author may also strengthen an aspect already given as factual material. Thus, the factual material participates in, and is under the impact of, the dynamic process of the writing of a biography. It arouses associations in the author's mind that cause him to elaborate a fact, and it is subject to rearrangement by an author.

The strict differentiation between factual and illustrative material is a fallacy. In any case, it is not, as the terms would suggest, a difference of content but only a difference of presentation. Al-Aḥnaf b. Qays' physical peculiarities, for example, may be arranged in a long list²⁶ or they may be placed in an anecdotal context—someone saw al-Aḥnaf, who looked pitifully ugly, and

²³ Printed in Wüstenfeld's edition at the end of biography no. 817, in I. 'Abbās' edition only in a footnote (VI, 229, n. 2).

²⁴ F. Wüstenfeld, *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Araber und ihre Werke* (Göttingen, 1882).

²⁵ About this term, cf. H. Gottschalk, "Abū 'Uбайд al-Qāsim b. Sallām. Studie zur Geschichte der arabischen Biographie," *Der Islam* 23 (1936), 248.

²⁶ Ibn Khallikān II, 506, 2-4.

commented: "But once he opened his mouth, he really showed the excellence of his mind."²⁷

When using the information as factual material, the author describes a person; when using it as illustrative material, the author describes and characterizes the person. The difference between description and characterization is essential for the presentation of historical material all through Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt* and probably all through medieval Arabic biographical literature.

VI. The term and concept of *adab* has been defined several times in modern Islamic scholarship.²⁸ The first Islamicist to give an overall picture of *adab* was C. A. Nallino in the introductory chapter to his *La littérature arabe des origines à l'époque de la dynastie umayyade*. Nallino goes back to pre-Islamic times and follows the development and changing concept of the term *adab* up to modern times, where it has come to mean simply "literature" in the specific sense of *belles-lettres*. During most of the Islamic Middle Ages *adab* meant several things: It was proper conduct in general and—outside the moral field—the familiarity with an art or a science. Therefore, it also came to signify the amount of knowledge required in a particular field of human endeavor. With increasing identification of culture with refined taste, *adab* assumed the meaning of gracefulness and elegance in one's way of life. Finally, *adab* designated any pleasant and delightful literary composition.

In his *Medieval Islam*, G. E. von Grunebaum adds two important points to the definition of *adab*: "Adab, the general knowledge of everything, completes 'ilm, the thorough possession of one area of information."²⁹ and "Whichever the detail of its contents, *adab* is, above all, an approach;

it is, so to speak, a principle of form, not an array of materials."³⁰

Applying the differentiation between 'ilm and *adab* to the above-mentioned difference between "factual material" and "illustrative material" appears most helpful in analyzing Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt*. It explains the double aspect of knowledge of facts and of means to embellish one's speech. Yet, as argued above, it is not possible to draw a clear borderline between factual and illustrative material, since it is not possible to separate completely entertainment from information or facts from their presentation. Entertainment always contains information, and the difference between the presentation of factual and illustrative material is a difference in approach. The factual presentation of historical material results in sources, whereas both the arrangement and the illustrative presentation of historical material implies meaning, which is given to this material by the author and has to be interpreted by the critic.

To define the difference between "biographical dictionary" and "*adab*-work" (according to the traditional definition) is as difficult or impossible as to define the difference between information and entertainment. Here as there, the meanings overlap. At first glance, the difference appears to lie in the arrangement of the material. In biographical dictionaries the headings are names, and pertinent material is presented under them. In *adab*-works the headings are themes that are followed by pertinent material. Thus, in the first case, each chapter deals with one particular topic. This distinction between *adab*-works and biographical dictionaries is based solely on externally formal grounds and seems therefore not quite tenable from a literary point of view. Several so-called *adab*-writers also compiled biographical dictionaries, and it should be examined whether, for instance, the approach in Ibn Qutayba's *K. Adab al-Kātib* differs essentially from the approach in his *K. ash-Shi'r wash-Shu'arā'*. In the *K. al-Ma'ārif*, even a number of biographies of early Islamic celebrities are included.

The reasons for the tentative classification of Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt* as an *adab*-work are several. All of these reasons seem to indicate that Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt* represents a certain literarization³¹ of the genre of "biographical dic-

²⁷ al-Jāhiz, *Bayān* I, 56, 1-6.

²⁸ C. A. Nallino, *La littérature arabe des origines à l'époque de la dynastie umayyade* (transl. Ch. Pellat; Paris, 1950), 7-34; I. Goldziher, "ADAB," *EI*; I. Lichtenstädter, "On the Conception of Adab," *MW* 33 (1943), 33-38; G. E. von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam. A Study in Cultural Orientation* (Chicago, 1953²), 250-257; F. Gabrieli, "ADAB," *EI*²; R. Blachère, "Un auteur d'Adab oublié: al-'Utbi, mort en 228," *Mélanges H. Massé* (Téhéran, 1963), 38-47; Ch. Pellat, "Was al-Mas'ūdī a Historian or an Adīb," *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 9 (1961), 231-234; id., "Variations sur le thème de l'adab," *Correspondance d'Orient. Études* 5-6 (1964), 19-37.

²⁹ Von Grunebaum, *op. cit.*, 251.

³⁰ Ibid., 255.

³¹ For this term, cf. *ibid.*, 250-257.

tionary" in that for the presentation of a great part of the material the literarizing approach of *adab* is employed.

Ṭāshköprüzāde described Ibn Khallikān as having a knowing hand in *adab*.³² There, *adab* may mean prose writing, since it is mentioned together with poetry. It may also mean "knowledge of *adab* (grammar and lexicography)." It may finally mean this particular literarizing approach to historical material as defined before. A strict distinction between these two possible meanings is hardly feasible because a word that assumes a second meaning does not immediately lose the first one. Even if the new meaning is intended in all contexts at one point in history, the first meaning may still be resonant in a word, which then becomes a "polysemant." *Adab* in this context—and possibly in most of its contexts in later medieval Arabic literature—is such a polysemant, denoting basically prose writing and the knowledge of grammar and lexicography but strongly alluding to the approach which is also called *adab*.

In both Arabic and European literature of the Middle Ages, the prolixity formula was a very wide-spread stylistic device. In European literature, the origin of this device was court rhetoric.³³ The exhortation to conciseness was later generalized, and brevity in speech became a virtue in any kind of literary effort. This concept of brevity as a virtue was adopted by authors in the Middle Ages.

The origin of the same idea of fear of prolixity in Arabic literature is unknown. Al-Jāḥiẓ in his *K. al-Bayān wal-Tabayīn* gives a number of traditions about the usefulness and even the necessity of conciseness. None of them, however, indicates the origin of this demand.³⁴

The idea of brevity was expressed in the preface of many a work, especially of works that have traditionally been called *adab*-works. In these works, the aim to avoid boredom among the readers ties in with the *adab*-approach as elaborated above. It is the principle of providing pleasure and diversion and of shunning boredom and fatigue by offering to the reader serious information, which is useful and reliable, and

enjoyable information, which is diverting and amusing.³⁵

In their respective remarks about Mu'āfā's (d. 380/1000) *K.al-Jalīs aṣ-Ṣāliḥ al-Kāfī wal-Anīs an-Nāṣiḥ ash-Shāfī*, both H. Ritter³⁶ and A. Dietrich call this book a precious old *adab*-work. The plan for the book, as outlined in its preface, is said by A. Dietrich³⁷ to be characteristic of *adab*-literature in general: the avoidance of both tediousness and thoroughness in the treatment of details. If this is true—other examples can be found, for instance, in the preface to Ibn Qutayba's *K.al-Ma'ārif* and to Ibn Abī 'Awn's (d.322/934) *K.at-Tashbīḥāt* as summarized by G. E. von Grunebaum³⁸—then Ibn Khallikān's *Waḥyāt* falls even into some traditional formal categories of *adab*-works. In the preface of the *Waḥyāt*, there are two aspects of the idea of brevity, one concerning the whole work (the work is called *mukhtaṣar*) and another concerning individual constituents of it (the author frequently claims to be striving for *ījāz*, or "conciseness").

Several attempts have been made at determining both origin and character of *isnāds*.³⁹ Originally, *isnāds* were traced back to the Prophet, to the *ṣaḥāba*, and to the *tābi'ūn*. Later, when the distance of time no longer allowed a link-up of the author with early authorities by means of an *isnād*, links were omitted and only the oldest authority mentioned or the tradition was traced to a generally recognized authority of later times. This technique seems to have developed into a mere indication of references in later times. Unfortunately, studies in the decrease of the technique of bolstering the veracity of

³⁵ Cf. the preface to the *K.al-Jalīs wal-Anīs* by Mu'āfā as summarized by A. Dietrich, "Das Kitāb al-Ġalīs wa-'l-anīs des Mu'āfā, ein wertvolles altes Adab-Werk," *ZDMG* 105 (1955), 279f.

³⁶ H. Ritter, "Philologika XIII." *Oriens* 2 (1949), 279f.

³⁷ Dietrich, *op.cit.*, 279.

³⁸ G. E. von Grunebaum, "The Literary Views of Ibn Abī 'Aun (d.934)," *Westöstliche Abhandlungen für R. Tschudi* (Wiesbaden, 1954), 225-230.

³⁹ J. Horowitz, "Alter und Ursprung der Isnād," *Der Islam* 8 (1918), 39-47; J. Robson, "The isnād in Muslim Tradition," *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society* XV/1953-54 (1955), 15-26; id., "The Form of Muslim Tradition," *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society* XVI/1955-56 (1957), 38-50; A. A. Duri, "Al-Zuhri. A Study on the Beginning of History Writing in Islam," *BSOAS* 19 (1957), 1-12.

³² Ṭāshköprüzāde, *Miftāḥ* I, 256f.

³³ E. R. Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern/München, 1967⁶), 479-485.

³⁴ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Bayān*, index "ījāz."

information by listing its transmitters have not yet been undertaken.

A separation between *adab*-works and non-*adab*-works on the basis of whether or not *isnāds* are given is not feasible. While it appears at first glance that *adab*-writers have a tendency to omit *isnāds*, comparable in this respect to *khabar*-historiographers, who want "to achieve brevity or to remove the appearance of scholarly austerity,"⁴⁰ it is not true in all cases. In the foreword to his already mentioned *K.al-Jalīs aṣ-Ṣāliḥ al-Kāfī wal-Anīs an-Nāṣiḥ ash-Shāfī*, Mu'āfā reproaches al-Mubarrad (d. 285/898) for omitting *isnāds* from his *al-Kāmil*. Mu'āfā himself gives complete *isnāds* and even adds dates to them.⁴¹

In spite of the original importance of *isnāds* for Islamic historiography, of which biographical dictionaries are considered a branch, and in spite of the fact that one of his great predecessors in the compilation of biographical dictionaries, al-Khaṭīb, the author of the *Ta'rikh Baghdād*, presents extensive *isnāds*, Ibn Khallikān does not give any. The comparatively few indications of sources in the *Wafayāt* are not to be considered *isnāds* but simply references, since they no longer possess the necessary characteristics of *isnāds*.

Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt* has what I shall call an "open form": It is not limited to any one class of people, to any one place, or to any one period. Perhaps this is the most convenient way to present a kind of "Reader's-Digest"-knowledge of Islamic civilization. It certainly points to a different concept of this civilization and of Islamic history in general in the *Wafayāt* from the one underlying biographical dictionaries with a "closed form."

The *Wafayāt* is the first biographical dictionary in medieval Arabic literature to encompass without differentiation personalities from all (Islamic) times, from all (Islamic) countries, and from all walks of life. Before Ibn Khallikān, there existed biographical dictionaries limited to one particular period of time; there were others limited to one area (town, region); and there were many others limited to representatives of one particular profession.

Whether the "open form" of the *Wafayāt* was politically motivated, we have no certain way of knowing. It appears questionable that the time of the aftermath of the great Mongol invasion of

the Islamic lands, halted not before the battle of 'Ayn Jālūt in Syria, in 1260, should have been favorable to a "pan-Islamic" historical outlook, except if intended as a manifestation in favor of, or as an "obituary" for, the Islamic world.

In the *Wafayāt*, the Islamic world is one, stretching from Spain to the Eastern regions of Persia, from Anatolia to the Yemen. Borders within this area are not mentioned expressly. Rulers who were in possession of independent political entities within the borders of the "Islamic Empire" are presented, yet not as in any way upsetting the peace and the unity of this empire but rather as contributing to its total composition in the same way as poets, scholars, or generals. In addition to the merely formal principle of selection—the date of death had to be determinable—it was obviously the question of how important a contribution someone made to the Islamic society or how influential a position he held in it that was most essential for Ibn Khallikān in selecting a personality for his *Wafayāt*. In several cases, the notion of someone's contribution to the Islamic society led to the presentation in a few words of a personality's teachings. In keeping with his concept of information and entertainment, Ibn Khallikān emphasizes the anecdotal aspects of these teachings and does not delve into complicated questions of detail. Thus, many a biography in the *Wafayāt* becomes an entertaining chapter on Islamic civilization and thereby loses much of its strictly biographical value. It is this kind of light information that was meant by the term "Reader's-Digest"-knowledge, used above.

VII. Most interesting with respect to a literarization of the genre of biographical literature and most important as an argument in support of the contention that medieval Arabic historiography in general and biographical dictionaries in particular can and should be analyzed as literature is the elaboration of many of the small narrative units presented in Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt*.

In order to undertake any examination of overall coherence of a work of the nature of the *Wafayāt*, the small narrative units have first to be investigated. These small narrative units are in this case anecdotes and aphorisms (or other sententious genres) focusing on one or more persons for whom there is an entry in the dictionary.

The etymological differences between the terms used in Arabic and in European languages, re-

⁴⁰ Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, 66.

⁴¹ Ritter, *op. cit.*, 279.

spectively, to denote the literary genre of "anecdote" indicate differences in the concept of "anecdote" between Arabic and European literatures. In European literatures, the term *anekdoton* was first employed by Belisarius' (1st half of 6th cent. A.D.) adviser and secretary, Procopius. He gave the name *Anekdotia* to his collection of stories of essentially palace-gossip about, and sharp criticism of, the emperor Justinian (d.565), his wife Theodora, his general Belisarius, and the latter's wife Antonina.⁴² In Procopius' time "anecdote" did, of course, not yet describe any literary form. It was descriptive only with regard to content: "material that had not been published before." This is not to say that the Greeks did not know the literary genre called "anecdote" today. The term, however, with which they used to denote "anecdote," *apophthegma*, was also used to mean a witty and/or remarkable utterance.⁴³ This polysemantic use of "apophthegm" in classical Greek points to a close connection between anecdotal and sententious forms.

A list of Arabic equivalents of "anecdotes," "tale," "story," "narrative," "report," and others is given with brief explanations by A.-A. 'Abdel-Meguid in his article *A Survey of the Terms Used in Arabic for 'Narrative' and 'Story.'*⁴⁴ Out of the twelve terms which 'Abdel-Meguid expounds, the ones most often used by Ibn Khallikān to express the concept of "anecdote" are *ḥikāya*, *khavar*, and *nādira*. *Ḥikāya* (narrative, story, tale) is the one of the three which is least frequently employed in the *Wafayāt* and most difficult to analyze because its application is vaguer than the others'. 'Abdel-Meguid points out that throughout at-Tanūkhī's (d.384/994) *Nishwār al-Muḥādara* the noun *ḥikāya* is used as a synonym of *ḥadīth* and *qisṣa*: "This shows, beyond doubt, that in the fourth century A.H. (10th cent. A.D.) the three words *qisṣa*, *ḥadīth*, and *ḥikāya* were used to denote the same meaning; i.e., an anecdote, a narrative, a tale, or a story."⁴⁵ It is difficult to work with a definition that suggests that there is no trait particular to *ḥikāya*. Also,

in the case of *ḥikāya* Ibn Khallikān's use of the word does not allow for a clear interpretation.

An interpretation is, although not easy, at least easier in the case of the two expressions that are most often used in the *Wafayāt* for "anecdote," "story," "narrative," *khavar* and *nādira*. "*Khavar*," 'Abdel-Meguid explains, "has always maintained a sense of reality," it is never used for pure fiction.⁴⁶ This factual character of *akhbār* (pl. of *khavar*) is also emphasized by Ch. Pellat in his article "ḤIKĀYA" in the new *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. There, *khavar* is a "narrative of historical or biographical character."⁴⁷

Akhbār is used in many titles of medieval Arabic works, e.g., *al-Akhbār aṭ-Ṭiwāl* by Abū Ḥanīfa ad-Dīnawarī (d. 282/895-6), or *Akhbār Abī Tamām* by Abū Bakr M. b. Yaḥya aṣ-Ṣūlī (d. 335/946). All these titles indicate historical information to be presented in the respective works. J. Latz argues that because of its anecdotal nature the *K. al-Wuzarā' wal-Kuttāb* by al-Jahshiyārī (d.331/942) has often been quoted as *Akhbār al-Wuzarā'*.⁴⁸ Could it not rather be that the information given by al-Jahshiyārī was considered historically reliable? Some other usages of the root *kh-b-r* in the medieval Arabic vocabulary strongly suggest the idea of historical reliability: *akhbārīy* means "historian"; about an historian it can be said *wa-huwa akhbaru* (he is more/most reliable [in the transmission of historical facts]); and "the news of someone's death" is *khavaru wafātihī*, and so on.

The emphasis is different in *nādira*, which 'Abdel-Meguid translates as "a short, witty, subtle, and amusing anecdote."⁴⁹ Formally, *nādira* is the feminine participle of the active voice of a verbal root *n-d-r*, which carries the meaning of "jutting out" or "protruding." Some instances of this root as employed by Ibn Khallikān may serve to illustrate this meaning: *wa-akhbāru Ḥammādīn wa-nawādiruhū kathīratun*,⁵⁰ or "the (historical) anecdotes and the funny stories about Ḥammād are numerous"; *huwa nādiratu z-zamāni*,⁵¹ or "he is/was the outstanding figure of the/his time"; *wa-min shi'rihī n-nādiri fī r-Raq-*

⁴² H. Grothe, *Anekdoten* (Stuttgart, 1971), 4; W. Grenzmann, "Anekdoten," *RL*².

⁴³ Ibid.; T. Kellen, *Dichter- und Schriftstelleranekdoten* (Stuttgart, 1909³), 15.

⁴⁴ A.-A. 'Abdel-Meguid, "A Survey of the Terms Used in Arabic for 'Narrative' and 'Story,'" *IQ* 1 (1954), 195-204.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 197.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 202.

⁴⁷ Ch. Pellat, "ḤIKĀYA," *ET*².

⁴⁸ J. Latz, *Das Buch der Wezire und Staatssekretäre* (Diss. Bonn, 1958), 6.

⁴⁹ 'Abdel-Meguid, *op. cit.*, 202.

⁵⁰ Ibn Khallikān II, 209, -4.

⁵¹ Ibid., I, 131, 7.

qati qawluhū,⁵² or “and from his outstanding poetry about ar-Raqqā is the following”; *wa-ka’annī anẓuru ilayhi s-sā’ata wa-ilā ‘aynnayhi iḥdāhumā nādiratun wal-ukhrā ghā’iratun jiddan*,⁵³ or “(it is) as if I am looking at him (scil. the blind poet and philosopher a. l-‘Alā’ al-Ma’arrī, d.449/1057) (now) and at his two eyes, one of which was protruding and the other one was deeply sunken in its socket.”

The last example is especially useful as it shows clearly the originally physical meaning of the word which was later also taken figuratively. The emphasis of *nādira* is, thus, not on its historicity or its verisimilitude. The emphasis is, rather, on the remarkable event that stands out of the ordinary.

A detailed semantic study of the word *nādira* cannot here be undertaken. The few examples from Ibn Khallikān’s *Wafayāt* must suffice.

Common to *khavar* and *nādira*, and also to the European anecdote, is a certain basic structure, for which M. Dalitzsch’s oft-quoted definition is still valid with reservations:

Anekdoten ist die einen Einzelmenschen behandelnde, kurze Geschichte ohne Nebenhandlung, in der durch individuelle Züge des Handelns und Sprechens die Charakteristik einer Persönlichkeit oder Kennzeichnung einer gemeinsamen, womöglich allgemein-menschlichen Eigenschaft einer Gruppe von Menschen geboten wird. Dabei ist wesentlich, dass diese Geschichte entweder tatsächlich auf eine historische Begebenheit zurückgeht oder wenigstens den Anspruch erhebt, für historisch genommen zu werden in Bezug auf das zu charakterisierende Individuum.⁵⁴

Small literary forms, A. Jolles’ *Einfache Formen*, are marked, to use W. Mohr’s terminology,⁵⁵ as *gegenstandsbezogene Form* (object-oriented form) and *Darbietungsform* (presentation-oriented form). On the one hand, every action or part thereof possesses a particular structure. The writer may take just one aspect as his “object”: the sacred for a legend, a point for a joke, a personality for an anecdote. On the other hand, every writer possesses a certain capability of presentation and he writes for a particular public.

The object-oriented form of anecdotes, regardless of whether they be *akhbār* or *nawādir* (pl. of *nādira*), is composed of certain features which separate it from other genres. The most essential feature of an anecdote is brevity: the narration, the plot, and the time-span are all brief; and the climax is a brief and remarkable utterance or action. Surprise rather than suspense is created by an anecdote. Suspense requires an elaborate arrangement of the material presented, surprise needs only an unexpected turn of the story, which can still be focused on a single point. Suspense has to be built up gradually, surprise occurs suddenly.

In an anecdote both the personalities presented and the actions performed are historical, or in any case they claim historicity. Thus, every anecdote is true in the narrator’s eyes because it transmits a certain message about a certain personality.

Legends are and are not anecdotes. They are anecdotes in that they usually tell a story about a historical personality. They are not anecdotes in that they do not extol the personal qualities of an individual for their own merit; these personal qualities are, rather, used as manifestations of a power beyond the individual, who then becomes only a vehicle of that transcendental power.

Jokes, too, are and are not anecdotes. They are anecdotes in that their most essential feature is an unexpected turn. In jokes this turn is by definition funny through the “sudden connection of elements that are alien to each other”;⁵⁶ in anecdotes this turn is “merely” surprising. Jokes are not anecdotes in that they are anonymous. It is essential for anecdotes to expose a characteristic trait of a *known* personality. It is essential for a joke to connect seemingly alien elements, a connection of which is not expected by the audience. Persons, if mentioned at all in a joke, are not historically known individuals. Rather, they are types, representing certain generally accepted characteristics (“an American,” “a Scotsman,” etc.) or certain social functions (“a king,” “a merchant,” “a thief,” etc.). If historical persons (past or present from the author’s point of view) are mentioned in a joke, these persons are personifications of certain functions. Otherwise, the joke becomes an anecdote. Many stories that are called “anecdotes” by E. Littmann in the introduction to his translation of the *Arabian*

⁵² Ibid. II, 126, -2.

⁵³ Ibid. I, 114, 2f.

⁵⁴ M. Dalitzsch, *Studien zur Geschichte der deutschen Anekdote* (Diss. Freiburg, 1922). 4,

⁵⁵ W. Mohr, “Einfache Formen,” *RL*².

⁵⁶ E. Strassner, *Schwank* (Stuttgart, 1968), 14.

*Nights*⁵⁷ are not anecdotes according to the definition given above, since they are not built around historical individuals but around social types. They may be jokes, humoresques, or *Schwänke* (pl. of *Schwank*, or "merry tale, droll story, farce").

Between anecdotes on the one hand and jokes and *Schwänke* on the other hand, there is a large group of narratives which will be called "anecdotal *topoi*." Usually, they are narratives that in Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt* are called *nawādir*.

An "anecdotal *topos*" characterizes or, rather is used to characterize a historical personality. Thus, it appears to be an anecdote. The same anecdotal *topos*, however, may either be used to depict traits of several individuals or, with slight modification, to characterize the same individual several times. If the same anecdote is current about two or more individuals in a society, this anecdote is an anecdotal *topos*. This means that it is true in the narrator's eyes because it represents his image of a particular individual, it tells what—in the narrator's opinion—this individual could have done or said. It is not historical or, at least, of dubious historicity. It often says, therefore, more about the narrator than about the personality about whom he narrates. There is, for example, a group of anecdotal *topoi* centering upon Abū Dulāma that are used several times for his characterization in Arabic literature; and there is another group of anecdotal *topoi* that are used to characterize him as well as Abū Nuwās. For all we know, many of these stories may be the creation of a witty mind, i.e., they may have originated as a joke or as a *Schwank*. They have, however, become pseudo-anecdotes by being told about an historical figure.

Different from these anecdotal *topoi* are the "*topoi* in anecdotes." An anecdotal *topos* is the complete structure of an anecdote in which the names of the participants or localities can be changed and which may or may not be elaborated, depending on the stylistic capabilities of each narrator. A *topos* in anecdotes is a recurring motif, employed by different narrators in different anecdotes about different personalities. While the anecdote about a jester who, through an untimely joke, exhilarates a person deeply afflicted with grief at the death of a dear one is an anecdotal *topos*, the frequent sentence *ra'ay-*

tuhū/ra'āhu fī n-nawmi/l-manāmi, or "while asleep I/he saw him" is a *topos* in anecdotes. In the former case, the general situation and the participants' general character and circumstances are determined and names of persons are inserted who, in the narrator's view, could have been one of the participants. In the latter case, only the introduction of the anecdote is determined: "somebody dreamt that . . .," while the main part—the content of his dream—may vary in each case.

Probably on account of their close relation to anecdotal forms, sententious genres can be divided in the same manner as anecdotal forms. One group of them is anonymous, cut loose from their pronouncers, set free to exist and survive by themselves: They are called "proverbs," in Arabic *amthāl* (pl. of *mathal*).⁵⁸ Another group of them retained their known authors and not infrequently the particular historical situation of their pronouncement. They are called "apophthegms" or "sententiae." "Apophthegm" is used if the historical situation out of which it grew is still known and mentioned. Thus, it may cross the borderline to "anecdote." "*Sententia*" is used for a saying that does not carry any external indication of its origin. This differentiation is not made in medieval Arabic. In Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt*, remarkable utterances are indiscriminately introduced by *wa-min kalāmihi* (and one of the things he said was . . .) or *wa-kāna yaqūlu* (and he used to say).

Between these two groups there is a third one, the group of "sententious *topoi*." As their anecdotal counterparts, sententious *topoi* do not only occur once, in one particular situation and connected with one particular personality, but are, because of the message they convey, employed for different persons and in different situations. It is only a complete structure with an inherent meaning that should be considered a sententious *topos*.

For obvious reasons, hardly any anonymous anecdotal (jokes or *Schwänke*) or anonymous sententious forms (proverbs) are found in Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt*. Any material presented in a biographical dictionary is connected with historical personalities. Yet, there are some exceptions in the *Wafayāt*. A few times, Ibn Khal-

⁵⁷ *Tausendundeine Nacht* (transl. and introd. E. Littmann; Leipzig, 1928) VI, 725-733.

⁵⁸ For a definition of the use of *mathal* in medieval Arabic literature, cf. R. Sellheim, *Die klassisch-arabischen Sprichwörteransammlungen insbesondere die des ABŪ 'ĪBAID* ('s-Gravenhage, 1954), 8-22.

likān adds an anonymous narrative to an anecdote. The structure of both is then a *topos* and the anonymous narrative is added to show that the same unusual event happened to, or that the same unusual action was done by, someone else too.

There appears to be a number of sententious *topoi* in the *Wafayāt*. There are probably more in number than can easily be realized because only a diligent examination of Arabic proverbial literature will reveal many sayings to be proverbs or quotations that have attained proverblite popularity.

The whole complex of anecdotal and sententious forms as it presents itself in Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt al-A'yān* can for the sake of clarity be presented in the following table. It should, however, be kept in mind that the distinction between the different forms is not as clearly made by Ibn Khallikān as this table suggests.

	A. Sententious forms	B. Anecdotal forms
1. one particular person one particular situation	<i>kalām</i>	<i>khabar</i> (<i>ḥikāya</i>)
2. <i>topoi</i> attributed to several persons and several situations	<i>kalām</i>	<i>khabar/nādira/ḥikāya</i>
3. without real or alleged person or situation	<i>mathal</i>	<i>nādira</i>

VIII. The following six points are meant to sum up the results of this study and at the same time indicate the road or roads that I believe future *literary* research into medieval Arabic biographical dictionaries should take:

1. The traditional approach to medieval Arabic historiography, of which biographical dictionaries are a part, appears unsatisfactory from a literary

point of view. As *Quellenforschung* it is interested mainly in the provenance of the historical material. As historical research it is interested mainly in the veracity of the facts presented in a work of historiography. In either case, the work as such, with its inherent structures that originate from the selection and arrangement of the material, is neglected. This state of literary criticism of medieval Arabic historiography calls for a new methodological awareness.

2. In spite of the functional origin of biographical literature in the Arabic Middle Ages, the frequent presentation of personal traits and their selection and arrangement allow us often to discover the image an author had of a person.

3. Individual biographies are composed of factual and illustrative material. The difference between these two kinds of material lies in presentation rather than in content.

4. Illustrative material consists of anecdotal and sententious genres. Each anecdote or each saying may be mentioned for one person and one situation only, or for several persons and instances. In the latter case it is an "anecdotal (or sententious) *topos*."

5. Case studies in biographies have to start with the analyses of the smallest constituents, anecdotal and sententious genres, and then proceed to the interpretation of the selection and arrangement of the (factual and/or illustrative) material offered in a biography. Such analyses yield the biographer's image of the individuals he entered into his biographical work.

6. First attempts (some of which I hope to publish elsewhere) at analyzing the *Wafayāt al-A'yān* in this manner suggest that Ibn Khallikān's interpretation of historical personalities he presents differs considerably from that of biographers prior to him. Both his presentation of the material and his interpretation of many persons entered in the *Wafayāt* seem to place Ibn Khallikān into the group of authors who are traditionally called *adab*-writers.