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Standardizing Emotions: Aspects of Classification and Arrangement in Tales With a Good Ending

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Abstract: This article links classifying activities to practices of emotion. Re-reading al-Tanūkhī's collection *al-Faraj ba'd al-shidda* ("Deliverance after hardship"), it focuses on the arrangement of the book on the one hand, and on how the involved emotions are handled on the other. This double approach suggests that by connecting the fields "order" and "emotion" the scope of knowledge with regard to the Arabic scholarly tradition can be reviewed and extended. Against the background of the widespread impulse to arrange and classify, the emotional spectrum is given a framework which generalizes, even rationalizes, the feeling itself. In turn, emotional representations in the stories shed light onto the fragile mechanisms of encyclopedic presuppositions and on definitions in general. Since both concepts are affected and shaped by narrative structures, story-telling can be considered as a significant means of structuring the world.

Keywords: tanukhi, adab, narrative, emotion, encyclopedic

Research on the history of knowledge-transfer usually starts with a fixed concept of the subjects and disciplines that are to be included, either confirming the arrangement of the investigated texts, or critically commenting on the selection criteria. Related to this approach is the discussion of the textual genre and the question of which texts – depending on their subject – belong to the tradition of knowledge-transfer in general and which belong to the encyclopedic tradition in particular. A closer look at the history of the encyclopedia shows the importance of natural sciences alongside history as well as religion, philosophy, or grammar, which denotes an educational canon based on the realms of time, space, and cultural context. Aside from this discipline-orientated approach however, scholarly attention in recent years has shifted from genre distinctions to the mechanisms of

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collection and to assumptions made by the author on the work itself.¹ It is now broadly understood that ordering and arranging are not restricted to the transmission of canonical knowledge, rather they are used to mirror and to understand the world or a specific part of the world.² With regard to the Arabic-Islamic tradition, some work to date has shown that it could be useful to focus on the collecting process itself.³

In the field of literature, the tendency to classify is mostly seen in books of advice, be they mirrors for princes or manuals for certain professions, or standard works that aim to provide a core of knowledge deemed necessary or desirable for the educated elite.⁴ It should be borne in mind, however, that our own perception of order and classification can lead to a potential exclusion of texts that do not meet explicit or implicit criteria, even if we don't restrict ourselves to certain disciplines.⁵

Until now, storytelling itself has received little attention in the context of encyclopedic writing and the dissemination of knowledge. The workshop in Zurich that initiated this volume explicitly did not exclude *a priori* any kind of text where the phenomenon of classification and arrangement can be observed. If we do not want to compromise the results of our research by presupposing textual categories, and if we instead take the motto of the workshop literally – “putting the house of wisdom in order” – and draw attention also to textual strategies and an action-based understanding of arrangement, we could analyze texts that do not seem to be dedicated to knowledge transfer in the first place. One may argue that by expanding the textual corpus so far, we would risk making such terms as encyclopedia, classification or knowledge transfer blurred and meaningless. However, I am convinced that discussing the epistemological framework of classification can lead to new insights with regard to genres, texts, and concepts which to date have remained separate from one another in discourse for the most part. By considering them in this all-encompassing manner, our perception of ordering processes in general can be enriched.

1 Dimitri Gutas for the Arabic-Islamic tradition as well as Mary Frankling-Brown for the Scholastic Age prefer to speak of encyclopedism rather than of encyclopedias (Gutas 2006: 91; Franklin-Brown 2012: 10).

2 The two main characteristics of encyclopedic writing as defined by Christel Meier; totality (“Totalität”) and utility (“Utilität”). Meier 2002: 519.

3 Regular Forster, for example, has pointed out tendencies of “encyclopedi-ing” and “de-encyclopedi-ing” within the field of mirrors for princes. Forster 2007: 269.

4 Josef van Ess has discussed the difficulty of rigid definitions in van Ess 2006: 6, 9, 13–14, et passim.

5 Cf. Hilary Kilpatrick's article on the *adab* encyclopedia, especially the matter of consistent organization. Kilpatrick 1982: 34–35.

For this purpose, I shall re-read tales with a happy ending as collected and exemplified by Abū 'Alī al-Muḥassin al-Tanūkhī (d. 994) to see how they display characteristics of classification, arrangement and inventory. Stories under the title of “Deliverance after Hardship” (*al-faraj ba'd al-shidda*) have been perceived by their anthologists as a category of their own. The act of classification here begins with the collection of stories that, from the editor's viewpoint, share content and form to a certain extent. The stories open up a wide range of hermeneutic possibilities, for example to investigate the intertextual relations with other genres,⁶ to take a closer look at the self-determination of the protagonists,⁷ to refer to the historical and theological background,⁸ or to present a structural analysis of the narrative composition,⁹ to name just a few. They also offer information about different aspects of human experience, for example the arbitrariness of rulers and employers, or the encounter with ‘exotic’ places and animals.¹⁰

What all the stories have in common is the hardship suffered by a protagonist who mostly tells us his story himself. The aim of my reading is to look at the emotions related to the various hardships and to examine how they are addressed and presented.

The history of emotions has been a focus of research for many years, in many fields and institutions, all of which have produced different approaches and results. Sometimes the deciphering of emotions has been considered a necessary criterion if we are to understand former epochs and foreign cultures. Sometimes the decoding of historical sentiments has been regarded as a means of gaining clearer insights into the psychological nature of today's society. Others have considered the endeavor of investigating the history of emotions as completely futile and impossible.¹¹

In several studies, attempts have been made to describe and analyze emotional concepts in different genres of Arabic literature.¹² With regard to the rich heritage of premodern Arabic texts in particular, it is worthwhile to continue to try to understand emotional patterns, conventions, representations, communities and constellations.¹³ The hermeneutic potential of our tales with a

6 Ashtiany 1991.

7 Ghersetti 1994.

8 Bray 2004; Khalifa 2010.

9 Özkan 2008.

10 See Julia Bray's article in this volume.

11 An overview regarding the state of research is given, for example, in Prevenier 2005; Rosenwein 2006: 1–31 and 191–203, and Plamper 2012, who gives a thorough survey of the field. On the historicity of emotions, see Frevert 2013: 7–16 and 75–81.

12 For example, “love” by Thomas Bauer 1998; and “jealousy” by Pernilla Myrne 2014.

13 For one way of approaching this task, see Rosenwein 2006: 24–31.

happy ending, as mentioned above, could extend to the analysis of displayed and hidden emotions, to their verbalization, their narrative function etc. A comprehensive study of these aspects would have to be carried out separately. This paper does not try to ‘map’ the emotional setting in these texts, nor does it enter the discussion about ‘authenticity’.¹⁴ Rather, it takes into account the observation that emotions are subject to definition, semanticization, formation, and recognition and thus have to be both narrated and sorted.¹⁵ Stories according to the pattern “Deliverance after hardship” (*al-faraj ba’d al-shidda*) show classifying features in more than one respect. They also act out, and speak of, specific feelings. Parallel to engaging in the classification process as mentioned above, we could consider emotions as practices and analyze how the act of mobilizing, naming, communicating, and regulating emotions shapes the text.¹⁶ To look at emotions in the framework of a specific narrative pattern and to contextualize them within the encyclopedic impetus of the age will provide us with another means of understanding the history of emotions and the way Arabic authors of the 4th/10th century “put the house of wisdom in order”. Therefore, by taking into account impulses from several academic fields, I will approach the issues “emotion” and “order” in the following three steps: The first part will show that these story-collections had an encyclopedic agenda; the second will present examples for certain emotions and their levels of representation in selected stories; and finally, how emotional acts and classifying activities interact with each other will be analyzed.

1 Encyclopedic agenda

Since one of the key issues in this workshop was to understand some of the reasons for, and the effect of, the practice of arranging and summarizing in the 4th/10th century, the first step would be to listen to the author himself, keeping in mind that it is always good to be cautious regarding paratextual interventions. The authorial voice is particularly strong in works that are driven by a comprehensive aspiration, a claim to completeness. In addition, the author

¹⁴ The European historical discourse about the authenticity of emotions is sketched in Oesterle 2003: 49–51.

¹⁵ Engelen 2012: 42–44, 50.

¹⁶ As Monique Scheer has shown, this approach would help to include the history of feelings as well as highlight the agency of emotions in contrast to the traditional perception of emotions as mere re-actions and rather passive conditions. Scheer 2012: 209–217. To look at both emotion and classification in the framework of ‘social practice’ also allows to emphasize these activities as “practical operations of construction”; cf. Bourdieu 1977: 97.

clearly lays down the rules at the beginning.¹⁷ In his preface, al-Tanūkhī carefully explains his intentions and purposes, and, to a certain extent, discloses the methods which he employed. He takes his assignment seriously and introduces himself as a competent expert who has the task and the responsibility of presenting a well-founded selection.¹⁸

One important step in the ordering process is to place a work in relation to its predecessors. Al-Tanūkhī did not invent the stories he collected, and he was not the first to collect them. Story collections according to the pattern “Relief after Hardship” or “Deliverance after Distress” (*al-faraj ba’d al-shidda*) were well-known already in the 3rd/9th century. He could, therefore, rely on preceding works and fellow authors.

In his introduction he names some of them himself, like Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Madā’inī (d. 842/3) who also lived in Basra and later Baghdad, and who composed a book with the title *Kitāb al-faraj ba’d al-shidda wa-l-ḍiqa*.¹⁹ Likewise, a *Kitāb al-faraj ba’d al-shidda* has been transmitted from the Baghdadi scholar and royal tutor Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 894). Al-Tanūkhī also mentions the judge Abū l-Ḥusayn ‘Umar b. Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Qāḍī (d. ca. 940) with a similar title. There are other variations of the same type of stories, like the collection *Kitāb al-mukāfa’a wa-ḥusn al-‘uqbā* by the Egyptian Aḥmad b. Yūsuf, known as Ibn al-Dāya (d. 941). This book is subdivided into three parts, the “Reward for the Good” (*mukāfa’a ‘alā l-ḥasan*), the “Retaliation for the Bad” (*mukāfa’a ‘alā l-qabīḥ*), and the “Happy Ending” (*ḥusn al-‘uqbā*).²⁰

What led al-Tanūkhī then to present yet another collection? He gives several reasons. The existing collections are too short and do not address the subject in a comprehensive manner.²¹ Some predecessors have different priorities, for example they include too many stories on the importance of prayers and religiously motivated patience etc., which, for al-Tanūkhī’s taste, somewhat miss the point for this genre (*ghayr mustaḥiqq an yadkhula fī kitābin maqṣūrīn ‘alā hādhā al-fann*).²² For him, the main motivation in the past has been, and in the future should be, to come as close as possible to the meaning of the title of the book, in other words: the stories should correspond to the title and the genre, respectively, as closely as possible.²³ To achieve this, instead of sheer

¹⁷ How authorial authority shapes the conclusion of a text is shown in Behzadi 2015.

¹⁸ The mere introduction as a competent author influences the perception of what follows as ‘serious’ knowledge. Cf. Fuhrer 2012: 134.

¹⁹ References to authors in al-Tanūkhī 1978: 52–53.

²⁰ Ibn al-Dāya 2001.

²¹ Al-Tanūkhī 1978: I/52.

²² Al-Tanūkhī 1978: I/53.

²³ Al-Tanūkhī 1978: I/54.

quantity, a well-considered choice has to be made in order to avoid tedium and weariness (*sa'āma/malal*).²⁴ The present collection is intended as an enhancement in every respect: al-Tanūkhī distances himself from his predecessors (*an ukhālifa madhhabahum fī l-taṣnīf wa-a'dula 'an ṭarīqatihim fī l-jam' wa-l-ta'lif*) and promises to provide more stories (*akthar*), to be more elaborate (*ashraḥ*), clearer with regard to the purpose of the stories (*abyan*), more revealing (*akshaf*), and more explicit (*auḍaḥ*).²⁵

Among the methods he wants to apply is a sorting of the stories (*an unawwi'a al-akhbār*) and a grouping of them into different chapters (*wa-aj'alahā abwāban*), a rearranging of existing material, and an omission of parts that could cause distraction.²⁶ It seems important to al-Tanūkhī that he discloses his sources, not least in order to illustrate the improvements he has made.

The explanation of the arrangement here becomes a normative procedure: to focus on “what is important”, thus setting the agenda with regard to the content of the stories.

These intentions and the measures he takes to fulfil them reflect a rational need to grasp and understand certain conditions of life. The reader should not be bored, nor be overwhelmed by masses of unstructured text; instead, a well-organized arrangement of stories (*akhbār*) should lead to the result that readers would choose this last, i. e. al-Tanūkhī's, collection over all existing books of this kind.²⁷ The reader finds a classification into chapters that clearly indicates a common feature of both encyclopedic works and literary anthologies: they are to be consulted, not read in a linear fashion.²⁸ Although this is a collection of stories, on this organizational level it seems as if we are dealing with some kind of encyclopedic endeavor or educational text.²⁹ Formally, the collection meets the criteria of encyclopedic *adab* writing, even if it does not appear to systematize knowledge, or to give advice which should be applied in educated circles.³⁰

²⁴ Al-Tanūkhī 1978: I/54.

²⁵ Al-Tanūkhī 1978: I/54.

²⁶ Al-Tanūkhī 1978: I/54.

²⁷ Not least because of the refined language. In the Arab-Islamic context, encyclopedic writing is not at all opposed to rhetorical ambition, as has been stated for Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, quite the contrary. Gipper 2006: 234.

²⁸ Michel/Herren 2007: 13. Knowledge evolving by reading and re-reading, not necessarily in systematic works but also in open-ended anthologies, cf. Büttner/Friedrich/Zedelmaier 2003: 7.

²⁹ For the presentation of a certain curriculum in *adab* texts, see Biesterfeldt 2002: 79. Syrinx van Hees in her example on al-Qazwīnī has applied categories of encyclopedic writing to do justice to the work in terms of knowledge-transfer. Cf. Van Hees 2006: 174–184. One could easily do the same for al-Tanūkhī but his approach seems clear enough, at least in terms of outward appearance.

³⁰ The transition from an encyclopedic work to belles-lettre being fluid or, as Hinrich Biesterfeldt states, forming a “hybrid genre”. Biesterfeldt 2004: 80.

However, this is a special sort of *akhbār*. On the whole, all of these stories are about a person who is saved or can escape from a difficult, often life-threatening situation, or whose miserable circumstances take a turn for the better. The genre-title already suggests intense feeling: *al-shidda* (literally: pressure, intensity, strength) means disaster, hardship, misfortune, harm, calamity, distress, pain – and in these translations we can already see that events mix with sentiments. The outcome, *al-faraj*, similarly involves an event of some kind and feelings that correspond to it, such as a happy ending, absence of sorrow and harm, deliverance, joy, relief, ease. What is the expected benefit of the stories?

For Ibn al-Dāya, they are tantamount to medicine, even an antidote (*didd*). Thinking about these events raises the spirit and provides hope:

... فإذا لم تعالج بالدواء ، اشتدّت العلة وازدادت المحنة. والتفكّر في أخبار هذا الباب ، مما يشجّع النفس ، ويبعثها على ملازمة الصبر ...

If [the soul] is not treated with medicine, the illness will grow worse and the trials harder. Reflection upon the tales in this chapter will encourage the soul and lead it to untiring patience.³¹

In al-Tanūkhī's view, relief starts when we realize that we are not the only ones under pressure or in a difficult situation. It has helped him; therefore he wants to share this effect with others:

ووجدت أقوى ما يفرّج إليه من أناخ الدهر بمكروه عليه ، قراءة الأخبار التي تنبئ عن تفضّل الله عزّ وجلّ ، على من حصل قبله في محصله ، ونزل به مثل بلائه ومعضله ...

To me, the most effective course of action to which one whom fate burdens with misfortune can turn is to read stories that speak of God's goodness toward those who have experienced something similar before him, and who have encountered similar hardships and difficulties ...³²

Many of these stories appear to be tales of moral guidance and religious instruction; up to this point, the phrase *al-faraj ba'd al-shidda* was prominently used especially in religious context with regard to similar phrases in the Qur'an.³³ What is important with regard to the authors' claim is the impact of reading and, to a certain extent, identifying with the characters involved. Both al-Tanūkhī and Ibn al-Dāya stress the empathizing or healing effect of the

³¹ Ibn al-Dāya 2001: 84.

³² Al-Tanūkhī 1978: I/52.

³³ For example Qur'an 65:7; 94:5–6.

stories. At the same time, their recommendations suggest that dwelling too long on unhappy thoughts can be unhealthy. There seems to be no clear distinction between thoughts and feelings, no dichotomy of reason and emotion. However, hardship is described as something that can wear you down and make you ill.³⁴

To illustrate how emotions and structure are intertwined, we should consider some examples. It is neither possible to cover all the stories nor can all the emotional nuances be taken into account. What's more, there is no doubt that my choice of examples is a classification in itself. However, this is the case with any academic endeavor that involves thinking, deducing and drawing conclusions. The following categories and examples, therefore, present merely a small sample and should serve to encourage further research of this type.³⁵ The collection of stories is presented in a well-crafted literary setting which is thoroughly familiar to the reader. We shall see how the genre boundaries of *adab* literature in general, and of *al-faraj ba'd al-shidda* literature in particular, contain the feelings expressed by the protagonists and how, in turn, emotions affect the connection between ordering and classifying on the one hand, and telling wild stories on the other.

2 Emotions in the stories

The stories provide different sorts of knowledge, in terms of unheard-of events, previously unknown or strange animals, peoples and lands mostly to illustrate the extent of the calamity that befalls the protagonist. They arrange the challenging situations on a macro-level, and they classify a certain scale of emotional structures for dealing with critical situations on a micro-level.

On the macro-level, the book presents a succession of circumstances in which the protagonists are in danger and are rescued in different ways. Such circumstances could be the encounter with a wild beast, being robbed, being imprisoned, being condemned to death, losing one's possessions or experiencing extreme lovesickness, for example. The type of misfortune shapes the order of the literary work: each of the fourteen chapters is dedicated either to the condition that caused the harm, or to the means of rescue, except the last one:³⁶

- (1) What can be found in the Qur'ān regarding hardship and deliverance;

³⁴ For this holistic approach, see Scheer 2012: 196–199.

³⁵ Further viewing angles in the field of emotions could aim at the narrative perspective, at gender issues, at emotional speech acts etc.

³⁶ Al-Tanūkhī 1978: I/55–56.

(2) What can be found in the tradition; (3) Rescue by uttering a prayer or otherwise fitting words; (4) Using the appropriate words or phrase to get away from an angry ruler; (5) Those who managed to leave prison; (6) Those who were led to rescue by something they had seen in their dreams; (7) Rescue through either force or agreement; (8) Those who got nearly killed [by others, for example death sentence]; (9) Rescue from wild animals; (10) Deliverance from a deadly illness; (11) Escape from robbers; (12) Escape by fleeing; (13) Delivery after heavy lovesickness; (14) Selection of poems with regard to the subjects named before.

Already in this macro structure sentiments are mentioned, the hardship (*shidda*) for example is specified. Chapter 4 is about “those who manage to soften the wrath of the ruler” (*man istaʿṭafa ghaḍab al-sultān ...*), chapter 12 addresses “those who are forced by fear to flee and hide” (*man aljaʿahu khawfun ilā harabin wa-stitārin ...*).

On the micro-level, the stories display certain patterns in how they depict difficult situations. Patterns also emerge in the range of reactions possible in facing the challenge. Since emotions on the one hand can be felt below a linguistic level, and on the other hand are dependent on time and space, several steps of translation are necessary to verbalize them.³⁷ One of the advantages of reading literary texts is that one becomes accustomed to, and aware of, the rhetorical devices and the multilayered fabric of any text, not in the sense of hermeneutic obstacles but as a profound human need for designing, shaping, and using all available means of expression. The realization that emotions are understood within a coded system and in turn can signify something else is a matter of course and does not mean that they are not ‘real’.³⁸ As researchers, we can encounter emotional performances in a) the vocabulary, i. e. words that signify a certain emotion, b) the images and metaphors that cover a sensation and illustrate an emotion, c) physical reactions that stand for certain emotional conditions, or as a result of a certain feeling, and d) certain actions, for example behavior that symbolizes a certain sensation, or a conduct as a consequence of a specific feeling that can tell us something about the sentiments felt. It would be

³⁷ A debate on universalism vs. social constructivism doesn’t seem useful here. Cf. Plamper 2012: 15, 19. There also seems consensus – at least in the fields of history and literature – that we all practice more or less emotionology (cf. Stearns/Stearns 1985: 813, 829) and, on this basis, develop further approaches of “reading” emotions.

³⁸ For example, the rational use of extreme emotions in public as a substitute for a lack of institutions. Cf. Althoff 1996: 67–68. David Konstan’s notion with regard to Aristotle, that “an apparent visceral reaction like fear can depend essentially on reasoning and evaluation”, can be applied to our context, too. Konstan 2006: 133. The same is true for grief as being reasonable in its proper moment. Konstan 2006: 256.

worth looking at these emotional expressions in detail, for example at the metaphors, or how emotion is linked to bodily representations, or expected emotions which are strangely absent (which words are *not* there, what feelings are omitted etc.). It should suffice at this stage that these categories exist at all.

a) Vocabulary:

The stories present several ways of expressing feelings, such as fear, sorrow, anxiety, grief and hopelessness. Words of relief are rather scarce. For a start, we therefore concentrate on the semantic field of the distress linked to the hardship.³⁹ We can find the highest quantity of verbal expressions in the chapter on lovesickness. In other chapters, the phrases are rather monosyllabic, and the vocabulary is not very varied.⁴⁰ Interestingly, the sentiment, syntactically-speaking, is mostly the *agens*. It overcomes the protagonist, enters his heart, and has a grip on him. The emotion words mostly used to express the hardship are: fear (*fazaʿ*, *jazaʿ*, *khawf*); pain (*alam*); sorrow, anxiety, grief (*qalay*, *karb*, *ghamm*, *ḥasra*, *ḥuzn*); loneliness, abandonment (*wahsha*); hopelessness, despair (*yaʿs*); anger (*ḥanaq*, *ghayḥ*); passionate love resulting in lovesickness (*ishq*).

Some examples are as follows⁴¹ “... now each one of us feared the other.” (*wa-qad istawḥasha al-āna kullun minnā min ṣāḥibihi*, III/384)⁴²; “... a great fear seized me ...” (*fa-nālanī jazaʿun shadīd*, II/294); “... and I am frightened ...” (*wa-anā wajilun*; II/352); “... he imprisoned me, so that I gave up on deliverance ...” (*wa-ḥabasani ḥattā yaʿistu min al-faraj*, II/266); “we gave up on our lives ...” (*wa-kunnā āyisīna min al-ḥayāt*, II/132); “Pain, burning, and sorrow entered my heart, nothing like that had entered my heart before except from passion.” (*wa-dakhala ilā qalbī min al-alam, wal-iḥtirāq, wal-qalaq, amrun mā dakhala mithluhu qaṭṭu fī qalbī, faḍlan ʿan ʿishq*, IV/310); “I found him in a great anxiety ...” (*wa-wajadtuhu min al-qalaq ʿalā amrin ʿaẓīmin*, IV/346); “... I was sad ...” (*fa-ghṭamamtū*, II/330); “Grief and distress, anxiety and sorrow overtook me, until my mind nearly left ...” (*fa-laḥiqanī al-karb wal-ghamm, wal-qalaq wal-jazaʿ, ḥattā kāda yadhhabu bi-ʿaqlī*, IV/426).

The vocabulary of distress remains rather monotonous throughout the stories regardless of the situation and the protagonist. This does not apply to anger,

³⁹ What interests here is, of course, not the fact that a human being feels fear but how it is expressed and perhaps conceptualized. Cf. Jaeger 2003: VII–VIII.

⁴⁰ A comprehensive study would, for example, count words, contextualize them, compare genres, gather a “dossier”, as Barbara Rosenwein suggested. But since literary studies don’t tend to generalize or to deduce ‘historical truth’, I think it is justified to start with a single work/genre. Cf. Rosenwein 2006: 26–27, 194–195.

⁴¹ Almost always the protagonist expresses his own feelings.

⁴² The numbers indicate volume and page number.

however. Mostly, anger is something that is felt by someone superior or someone else, and not by the narrator: “The vizier was angry towards Ibn al-Furāt because of you.” (*qad ḥarada al-wazīr ‘alā Ibn al-Furāt bi-sababika*; II/114); “... my rage about him ...” (*wa-ghayẓī ‘alayhi ...* ; this is the caliph al-Ma’mūn speaking; II/352) However, this remains to be investigated thoroughly with respect to the narrative and situational context.

b) Images/metaphors:

Quite often, to illustrate the extent of fear, the fear itself is linked to the mind (‘*aql*) or the soul (*rūḥ*; *nafs*) and manipulates the protagonist’s sanity: “My mind (soul) nearly left out of fear.” (*wa-rūḥī fī khilāla dhālika takādu takhruju faza’an*, IV/131); “My mind was absent/frozen (i. e. unable to function).” (*wa-dhahala ‘aqlī*, II/116); “I found him in such a great anxiety, that I doubted his sanity ...” (*wa-wajadtuhu min al-qalaq ‘alā amrin ‘aẓimin, ḥattā ankartu ‘aqlahu ...*, IV/346); “Grief and distress, anxiety and sorrow overtook me, until my mind nearly left ...” (*fa-laḥiqanī al-karb wa-l-ghamm, wa-l-qalaq wa-l-jaza’, ḥattā kāda yadhhabu bi-‘aqlī ...*, IV/426).

Sometimes it is not the character that expresses his fear; instead an animal functions as a substitute to illustrate the emotional distress:

... I saw a lion standing there, and between him and the ass’s hooves there was an arm’s length or less, and when the ass smelled his scent, a violent shiver seized him, and he was rooted to the spot and didn’t move. I didn’t have any doubt about the end ... (*fa-ra’aytu asadan qā’iman, wa-baynahu wa-bayna qawā’im al-ḥimār naḥwa dhirā’in aw aqall, wa-idhan al-ḥimār qad shamma rā’ihatahu fa-aṣābathu ra’datun shadīdatun, wa-rasakhat qawā’imuhu fī al-arḍ, wa-lam yataḥarrak. Fa-lam ashukka fī al-talaf*, IV/170–171)

We were in the dark, seven of us, and we didn’t see him [the lion] except when he breathed, and we heard his breathing. The ass defecated from fear and filled the mosque with dung; the night fell and our situation hadn’t changed, we nearly died of fear. (*wa-ḥaṣalnā fī al-ẓulma, wa-l-sab’u ma’anā, fa-mā kāna ‘indanā min ḥālihi shay’un illā idhā tanaffasa, fa-innā kunnā nasma’u nafasahu. Wa-rātha al-ḥimāru min faza’ihi, fa-mala’a al-masjida rawthan, wa-maḍā al-laylu wa-naḥnu ‘alā ḥālinā, wa qad kidnā natlafu faza’an*, IV/187)

Other images are linked to the body as well: “She trembled like a branch out of fear ...” (*fa-htazzat mithla l-qaḍībi faza’an*; IV/356) which brings us to physical reactions in general that convey a meaning.

c) Physical reactions:

The stories show that emotions cause physical reactions, or that the physical reactions are necessary to illustrate the extent of emotional involvement, as we have seen in the examples above. In addition, they can also be perceived as an emotional experience in itself, not just as an ‘outer’ representation of an

‘inner’ status.⁴³ The most prominent non-verbal expressions of distress are weeping (*bakā*) and sobbing (*shaḥīqa*). Linda G. Jones, in her essay on *Weeping in Islamic sermons*, argues that crying in the Islamic religious context was seen mostly as a sign of pious authenticity, but the notion that tears can be deceptive is also evident.⁴⁴ Although weeping seems to be an ahistorical bodily function, it is a “performative act open to manipulation”⁴⁵ and can work both ways: to express emotions and to evoke emotions in others and oneself.⁴⁶ In our stories, the protagonists cry quite often; this is mostly a simple statement and marks one of the peaks of the narration. Tears can be a sign of hopelessness as well as sympathy with an unhappy person; sometimes they are an instrument to arouse sympathy in others:

“He [al-Muttaqī] asked me about the reason for my disturbance, and I confided in him and cried in front of him; I begged him to ask his father to sell the girl to me, or to give her back to me.” (*fa-sa’alanī ‘an sababi ikhtilālī, fa-ṣadaqtuhu, wa-bakaytu bayna yadayhi, wa-sa’altuhu an yas’ala abāhu bay’ al-jāriyya ‘alayya, aw hibatahā lī, IV/311*);

“I regretted [the selling of the slave girl] and burst into tears without restraint ...” (*nadamtu, wa-ndafa’tu fī bakā’ aẓīm, IV/317*);

“... the number of tears and slaps/blows had made me confused.” (*wa-warada ‘alayya min al-laṭm wal-bakā’ mā hawwasanī, IV/317*);

“He wept out of pity for me ...” (*fa-bakā riqqatan lī, IV/318*)

“I told him my story and wept, and the girls’ sobbing rose from behind the curtain, then he and his brothers wept hard, out of pity for us.” (*fa-ṣadaqtuhu ‘an amrī, wa-bakaytu, wa-‘alā naḥību l-jāriyya min khalf al-sitāra, wa-bakā huwa wa-ikhwatuhu bakā’an shadīdan, riqqatan lanā, IV/322*);

“... my weeping happens out of compassion for myself because of where I got to ...” (*bakā’ī raḥmatun li-nafsī mimmā dafa’tu ilayhi, II/375*);

“... she became anxious and wept and went away quickly, and al-Ashtur began to weep while I told him my story, then we departed.” (... *fa-jaza’at, wa-bakat, wa-maḍat musri’atan, wa-ja’ala al-Ashtur yabkī, wa-anā uḥaddithuhu bi-qīṣṣatī, wa-rtaḥalnā, IV/357*);

“... he started to shed burning tears and to cry bitterly.” (*fa-ja’ala yabkī aḥarra bakā’an, wa-yantaḥibu, IV/395*); “I cried and wept ...” (*abkī wa-antaḥibu, IV/426*);

⁴³ Cf. Scheer 2012: 198. On body language, see p. 218.

⁴⁴ Jones 2012.

⁴⁵ Blanchfield 2012: XXII.

⁴⁶ Ute Frevert has drawn attention to this reciprocity. Frevert 2013: 12.

The sobbing occurs more often to female characters: “She sobbed and nearly died, and loud weeping rose from her ...” (*thumma shahiqat fa-kādat tatlafu, wa-rtafa’a lahā bakā’un ‘aẓīmun*, IV/321); fainting, in turn, apparently can happen to anyone:

“I fainted ...” (*wa-ṣu’iqtu anā*, IV/321, literally: I was thunderstruck);

“I sang it [the melody] for him, and he lost consciousness, so that I thought him dead. [...] I said: ‘I am afraid you could die.’ He said: ‘Alas, alas, I couldn’t be more wretched.’” (*thumma ghannaytuhu iyyāhu, fa-ughmiya ‘alayhi, ḥattā ẓanantuhu qad māta ... qultu: akhshī an tamūta. Fa-qāla: hayhāt, hayhāt, anā aqshā min dhālika*, IV/395)

- “... then he fainted harder than the first time, until I thought his soul had just died ...” (*fa-ṣa’iqa ṣa’qatan ashadda min al-ūlā, ḥattā ẓanantu nafsahu qad fāẓat*, IV/395)

Depending on where emotions are located, the respective body parts are used to illustrate the intensity of a feeling (the heart, the soul, or the chest, for example): “... but all the time I was broken-hearted, my vitality dead, my sorrow visible.” (*illā annanī fī khilāla dhālika, munkasir al-naḥs, mayyit al-nishāt, ẓāhir al-ḥuẓn*, IV/324); “... my chest became tight.” (*fa-dāqa ṣadri*, II/330).

Other bodily representations that either symbolize certain feelings or are depicted as a result of certain feelings are sleeplessness and losing appetite: “Sleep refused to come to me ...” (*qad imtana’a ‘alayya al-nawm*, IV/346); “I returned to my bed, but sleep wouldn’t come to me ...” (*fa-raja’tu ilā farāshī, fa-idhan al-nawm mumtani’un ‘alayya*, II/226); “... I stayed without eating and drinking ...” (*lā ākulu, wa-lā ashṛabu*, IV/311).

d) Actions:

Certain actions or types of behavior accompany strong emotions. To describe this behavior as “action” takes into account the observation that emotion is not only something that overcomes the protagonist or is passively felt but “something we do”,⁴⁷ thus shifting the focus to the capacity of the characters to take action on the one hand, and to the impact these stories can have on their readers, on the other hand. Often crying is accompanied by loud wailing and hitting the face, for example: “I cried and hit my face ...” (*fa-bakaytu wa-laṭamtu*, IV/317); “I began to hit my face, to cry and to wail ...” (*wa-aqbaltu alṭimu, wa-abkī, wa-aṣīḥu*, II/375). Although this is probably within the framework of socially expected behavior, the narrator makes it clear that it sometimes goes beyond the usual ritual: “... the girl tore her clothes and broke the lute; she cut off her hair, wept and slapped her face, and we couldn’t stop her.” (*fa-kharraqat*

⁴⁷ Scheer 2012: 194.

al-jāriyya thiyābahā, wa-kassarāt al-ūd, wa-jazzat sha'rahā, wa-bakat, wa-laṭamat, fa-mā mana'nāhā min shay'in min hādhā, IV/325)

The obvious question of gender-related behavior cannot be answered here; however, what can be said is that emotionally-caused actions or actions as emotions can be found in men and women alike, albeit with sometimes different attributions.

Praying and crying, as we have seen, are ways to react emotionally: “I was certain that I would be executed, and I turned to pray, to seek God’s help, and to crying.” (*fa-ayqantu bil-qatl, wa-aqbaltu ‘alā al-ṣalāt, wal-du‘ā, wal-bakā, II/133).*

Behavior that is more extreme than this is depicted as a deviation from the norm. The protagonist is no longer able to fulfil his duties and to live his daily life or, if he is in prison, to abide by the typical rules for polite conversation: “I ceased to care for my affairs and was engaged in crying, and there was no way for me to find consolation.” (*fa-mtana‘tu ‘an al-naẓar fī amr dārī, wa-tashāghaltu bil-bakā, wa-lam yakun lī sabīlun ilā al-ghazā, IV/310); “I didn’t know where to go ...” (wa-anā lā adrī ilā ayna adhhabu, VI/317); “I went to him and sat next to him without greeting him or asking him about his affairs, because I was in such a state of fear and confusion.” (fa-qaṣadtuhu, fa-jalastu ilayhi min ghayri an usallima ‘alayhi, aw as’alahu ‘an shay’in min amrihi, limā anā fīhi min al-jaza‘ wal-ḥayra, II/116; Kap. 5).*

The most extreme action a man can take is to attempt to take his life. These attempted suicides mostly happen in a state of lovesickness, but not exclusive to this kind of malaise: “I went to the Tigris and covered my face with my headgear; I wasn’t good at swimming, and so I threw myself into the water to drown.” (*fa-jī‘tu ilā dajla, wa-lafaftu wajhī bi-ridā’in kāna ‘alā ra’sī, wa-lam akun uḥsinu asbaḥu, wa-ramaytu bi-nafsī fī l-mā’ li-aghraqa, IV/317); “I nearly killed myself because the house seemed so deserted to me, then I recalled hellfire and the afterlife, so I left my house, fleeing ...” (wa-kidtu an aqtula nafsī li-waḥshat manzilī ‘alayya, thumma dhakartu al-nār wal-ākhirā, fa-kharajtu min baytī hāriban, IV/318); “I cried and grieved [...] and came to drown myself in the Tigris, but I recalled the sweetness of the soul, and the fear of the punishment in the afterlife, and so I refrained.” (fa-bakaytu, wa-ḥazantu, [...] wa-jī‘tu li-aghruqa nafsī fī dajla, fa-dhakartu ḥalāwat al-nafs, wa-khawf al-‘uqāb fī al-ākhirā, fa-mtana‘tu, III/315); “... I wanted to die.” (*tamannaytu an amūt; II/268).**

3 Textual order and emotional scale

Most of the stories follow a certain dramatic composition. The expression of feelings happens quite often from an auto-diegetic standpoint. Hakan Özkan in his study counts 205 cases in which the narrator is the central character of the

story; in addition to that the interlacing levels of narration lead to changes in the focalization.⁴⁸ It appears that we have here before us a collection of individual cases that cannot be generalized. Is it justified then to link emotional settings to an encyclopedic way of writing? And if we do that, how does the encyclopedic aspect function, and what does it bring about?

The encyclopedist, as Christel Meier has rightly pointed out, does not reflect a certain order, rather he is constructing it.⁴⁹ The tension which she identifies between empiricism and model (or: theory and practice) is also present in our stories. They claim to tell authentic experiences of real people; at the same time the stories serve as models by extending our scope of imagination as well as providing a framework.

The “Tales of Deliverance after Hardship” provide a pool of possible reactions to serious disruptions in life. By telling stories of disorder and chaos, the narration process itself is a process of clarification. Chronology, perspective, a defined space, a number of protagonists, and the promise of a clear outcome, all these factors help to cope with the incomprehensible. The reader receives encouragement either to manage his own crisis, or to prepare for future difficulties. In her study on encyclopedic writing in the scholastic age, Mary Franklin-Brown pointed at the continuity between encyclopedic and literary practices and identified narrative constructs as important organizational principles of encyclopedic texts.⁵⁰ With regard to our stories the reverse is the case: the narrative texts possess encyclopedic structures especially when looked at as a collection, as has been pointed out at the beginning. Even beyond the tales treated here, we can maintain that the narrative process itself structures a reality which also encompasses its contradictions.⁵¹

In terms of emotions, the stories display an array of sentiments that correspond initially with certain events and situations. Some of the sentiments appear to be quite common and conventional, even ritualized; they are conveyed without much variation or explanation. Stereotyped speech is used to make an intense emotional reaction, such as weeping and crying, even fainting, seem normal and expected.⁵² The repeated reading of emotional distress within a

⁴⁸ Özkan: 2008 277–278, 342.

⁴⁹ Meier 2002: 511.

⁵⁰ Franklin-Brown 2012: 126, upper paragraph.

⁵¹ On the chaotic elements of the scholastic encyclopedia (and a comparison with Wikipedia), see Franklin-Brown 2012: 309. To be more clear: while narrative constructs serve the purpose of encyclopedias, here we can see that an encyclopedic approach serves the narration and the authorial aspiration.

⁵² Unlike the official communication described by Althoff 1996: 63–65, the protagonists here do not necessarily act in the public sphere and supposedly are left to themselves, hence the use

manageable range of expressions and recurring vocabulary leads to a certain standardization which, in turn, means that the portrayed characters act and feel within acceptable limits. It is telling, however – and will be dealt with in further research – that certain sentiments are hardly there (for example, anger and rage against the ruler, against the circumstances in which one finds oneself, against God) and others are clearly to the fore. Although not composed explicitly as works of inventory, these story collections contain an overview of utterances, images, and behavior linked to misery and misfortune, thus providing emotional knowledge that is no less important than any other discipline.⁵³

Furthermore, the severity of the extreme is lessened by repetition and familiarity, the danger is banished by the expected, the unknown is made familiar by naming it. Even when emotions are running high, they are tamed by the structure of a standardized narrative pattern.⁵⁴ The fact that protagonists can become over-emotional and be overwhelmed by their feelings is a consolation. It also momentarily opens the door to ambiguity, for example if the extremity of feeling is outside the realm of what is commonly considered acceptable.⁵⁵ We learn that this loss of self-control is suitable only momentarily. The fear of emotional outbreaks is clearly visible, emotion being a necessary part of the human condition, but nevertheless one which has to be handled with care.

In this collection, al-Tanūkhī puts a realm of experience in order that usually is characterized by the very absence of order. By systematizing and domesticating emotions, by addressing them like any other entity worth knowing and classifying, they are removed from the sphere of the individual and transferred to a normative level. Within this hermeneutic circle (individual life-stories vs. a universal pattern), they lose their intimidating other-ness (other than reason and intellect) and thus receive a considerable enhancement.⁵⁶ The encyclopedic act here provides orientation in a field that seems to be rather unorganized. The reader is granted his relief and deliverance (*faraj*) via generalization: he is not alone in his experience and his emotions are within the socially

of “intense reaction”. The same applies to Rosenwein’s notion that in her text corpus the ‘irrationality’ of anger had a rational function. She refers to the European medieval feuding culture and also to an openly displayed discourse, cf. Rosenwein 1998: 241.

⁵³ I would like to borrow Ute Frevert’s term “Gefühlswissen” here, although it refers to the discussion of emotion words in encyclopedias and lexicons in the framework of modernity in Europe. Frevert et al. 2011: 16, 18. For the nexus of orders of knowledge and emotional norms, see Scheer 2012: 216.

⁵⁴ Apart from the similarly happy ending, many stories display narrative symmetries. Ashtiany 1991: 118–119.

⁵⁵ On the incorporation of ambiguity, see Bowker/Star 2000: 324.

⁵⁶ For the inescapability from the hermeneutic circle, see Bowker/Star 2000: 320.

accepted limits. This confirmation can lead to what Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star call the “naturalization of categories”.⁵⁷

At the same time, it prevents the sentiments from overflowing to the point of intoxication. If we return to Ibn al-Dāya, he gives the reason why in such cases medicine is necessary:

لأنَّ النفس إذا لم تُغْنِ عند الشدائد بما يجدد قواها ، تولَّى عليها اليأس فأهلكها.

Because, if the soul in times of sorrow does not try to regain its powers, despair will become dominant, and ultimately it will destroy the soul.⁵⁸

The regulation of emotions happens through a certain selection of accepted sentiments, by highlighting some and neglecting others.⁵⁹ However, there remains a palpable risk that emotions can be overwhelming and all-consuming.

The focus on the emotional scale draws our attention to the fact that beneath the displayed trust in God, the texts reveal an awareness that any ordering process is a manmade makeshift construction, and a quite delicate one. This ambiguity, on the other hand, is the side effect of any conceptualization process, as we can see in early Arabic-Islamic discussions on innovations in poetry where critical thinking, disputation, and abstraction are identified as ingredients of an open discourse and of intellectual enhancement.⁶⁰

Within the multi-faceted discussion about the history of emotions, there is consensus that emotions are inextricably linked to language.⁶¹ The tales of hardship and deliverance demonstrate like a magnifying glass how the finding of words, images, patterns and categories for sentiments is a way of grasping the inconceivable and controlling the uncontrollable.

A very simple effect is the operability and manageability of events, however horrible they may be.⁶² This effect, present in every re-narration of events, is further intensified by summarizing and ordering. It provides clarity as opposed to chaos; it signals comprehensibility when there is arbitrariness. By putting side by side similar situations that are equally exceptional to their protagonist, the order establishes a recognition value: the hardship loses its terror. Within this delineated area there is even room for experimenting with emotions that can be

⁵⁷ Bowker/Star 2000: 294.

⁵⁸ Ibn al-Dāya 2001: 84.

⁵⁹ Scheer 2012: 215–217.

⁶⁰ Stetkevych 1991: 18. For a reflection on ambiguity in the Islamic cultural tradition in general, see Bauer 2011: 41–53 et passim.

⁶¹ Frevert 2013: 11, 15. With regard to the representational character of the sources, see the introduction by Kasten 2003: XVI–XVII.

⁶² For narration as a contribution to survival, see Wolf 2013: 61.

felt without actually experiencing the terrible circumstances, thus emotions are created via narration.⁶³

Classification in the tenth century, as we have seen, was not limited to sorting and categorizing scientific or religious knowledge, or to the curriculum for the educated. Moreover, sorting operations can be found in numerous places, not just in forms and genres apparently provided for this purpose. Thinking about emotions in the context of arrangement and classification strengthens the notion that emotion is something constructed and that it is subject to change. The stories of “Deliverance after Hardship” point once again to the contradiction that an emotion is perceived as a unique occurrence, whilst, at the same time, it is involved in a process of naming, classifying, and standardizing.⁶⁴ Perceiving classification systems as well as concepts of emotions rather more as textual processes and practices than as fixed entities with clear boundaries and locations helps us to see them both as adaptation techniques. As such, they have a lot in common and they operate as inter-dependently influencing forces. Lastly, as the tales show, purportedly stable frameworks can be quite flexible and sometimes fragile, and the fiercest emotions can appear astonishingly reasonable.

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⁶³ Böhme 2003: 28, 33. For the „pleasant horror effect“, see also Wülfing 2003: 78, 81, 88.

⁶⁴ Scheer uses the image of a snowflake. Scheer 2012: 213.

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