

Letters in My Mind

Concepts and Practices of Response in the Writing of al-Qādī al-Fāḍil

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Abstract al-Qādī al-Fāḍil, Saladin's omnipotent minister and head of the state chancery, was a famous prose stylist and a model for later authors of epistolary literature. In his letters, al-Qādī al-Fāḍil mentions the critical reading of his own texts, and he reacts to incoming letters as an inspiration for his work as an author. For this reason and as a central component of the practice and concept of correspondence, which carried his writing, the response is a pivotal topic. al-Qādī al-Fāḍil referred to reading the letters he received, anticipated replies, encouraged or urged his addressee to respond, thereby referring to what the reception and reading of the reply letter meant to him as an author whose artful writing was meant to induce and nourish the ideal of an affective relationship.

Keywords Critical reading. Active and responsive reading. Public reading. Interrelation of writing and reading. Ornate prose style. Conceptual framework of response. Ideal of affective relationship.

The beginnings and evolution of ornate prose (*inšā'*) are closely related to the institution of the state chancery. For centuries, the refined prose style displayed by chancery scribes in letters and official documents linked the demonstration of rhetoric proficiency, the representation of political authority – in particular of the rulers in the name of whom the texts were issued – and the appeal to moral values and religious beliefs. The stylistic features such as assonance (*tarṣī'*), paronomasia (*ġinās*) and particularly prose rhyme (*saġ'*), which became



firmly established in the fourth/tenth century,¹ as well as figurative embellishment such as tropes, metaphors, similes, and allusions, and the insertion of Qur'ānic quotations and poetry, were conventional characteristics of ornate prose also beyond the Arab speaking world.² These elements of elegant and ornate style, in conjunction with the regular structuring of letters and documents and the use of specific formulaic expressions in its different parts, provided a complex formal framing.³ The composition of these multilayered texts, which might construe a multitude of equivocal references, was a highly appreciated art and underwent a remarkable evolution over the centuries, especially from the sixth/twelfth century onwards.⁴ An abundant didactical literature accompanied the scribes' work.⁵ Despite the official nature of diplomatic letters and the practical importance of official acts such as a decree (*tawqī'*, *marsūm*), an appointment (*taqlīd*) and other types of official communication – intercession (*ṣafā'a*), blame (*mu'ātaba*), reports of victories (*futūḥāt*) or minor notes (*ruq'a*) – archival preservation of original documents was rare, at least as far as we can infer from what was preserved. A major part of this literature survived in compilations of letters, documents and excerpts, and selective florilegia (or rather collections of what was available), all dedicated to prominent representatives of the art. As these collections often aimed at demonstrating the literary achievement of the secretary-authors as well as the compilers' connoisseurship, and were not composed for the purpose of historical documentation, they often anonymise the addressees of the letters or persons referred to in the documents. Yet historiography and manuals of the chancery scribes' art, as well as encyclopedias, also provide pertinent material.

This is particularly true for the oeuvre of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, 'Abd al-Rahīm b. 'Alī al-Baysānī, whose prose enjoyed an excellent reputation among contemporaries and exercised remarkable influence.⁶ Prominent chancery scribes of the Ayyubid and Mamlūk periods

1 Hachmeier 2002a, 3; 2002b, 139.

2 Mitchell 2009, 13-18, 118-44.

3 For the study of documents from the eighth to the fourteenth century, Diem 2018. Hachmeier 2002a, 27-93 examined the structure and content of the letters of Abū Ishāq al-Ṣābi'. Hein 1968, 27-93 studied the form and content of Ayyubid's diplomatic documents and letters.

4 Diem 2002, 155.

5 For the time up to the fifth/eleventh century, see Hachmeier 2002b, 142-51. In the Ayyubid period, the works of Ibn al-Ṣayrafī (d. 542/1147), on him, see Helbig 1909, 10 ff.; Ibn Mammātī (d. 606/1209); and Ibn Šiṭ al-Qurašī (d. Muḥarram 625/December-January 1227-28) were significant.

6 Diem 2020, 502.

composed anthologies of his writings, as a rule mostly letters,⁷ and thus expressed their great esteem for his highly refined and wonderfully balanced prose style. Muwaffaq al-Dīn al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad al-Dībāḡī (d. 617/1220), a chancery clerk as well as *wazīr* under Sultan al-Kāmil,⁸ composed an eclectic collection entitled *Min tarassul al-Qāḍi al-Fāḍil*.⁹ Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Abd al-Ẓāhir (d. 692/1292), administrator and head of the chancery for the Mamlūk Sultan Baybars, Qalāwūn and al-Ašraf Ḥalīl,¹⁰ produced the anthology *al-Durr al-naẓīm min tarassul ‘Abd ar-Raḥīm*,¹¹ and Ğamāl al-Dīn Ibn Nubāta (d. 768/1366), poet, *adīb*, prolific author and chancery scribe, compiled *al-Fāṣil min kalām al-Fāḍil*.¹² Ibn Nubāta also acknowledged al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil’s virtuoso mastership of ornate epistolary prose composition in one of his *adab* anthologies, and compiled two collections of his own chancery prose.¹³

The bulk of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil’s writings is preserved in anonymous collections, some of which may date back to his lifetime or the early thirteenth century. Authors of works on the history of the Ayyubid period, such as al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil’s colleague ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (d. 597/1201)¹⁴ and Abū Šāma (d. 665/1268),¹⁵ also quote his writings. Ibrahim Hafsi’s unpublished biography and edition of 430 letters and documents offers a survey of the sources, mostly manuscripts, which he used for his study.¹⁶ In addition to his letters, fragments of his *mutaḡaddidāt*, a type of journal, are also preserved.¹⁷ al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil’s letters constitute an important, yet seldom-used source for modern research on Saladin and his time,¹⁸ and the obvious prominence of his epistolary style has also encouraged modern research in Arabic epis-

⁷ Diem 2015, 135 points out that letters may refer to, or even convey, official decisions. A strict distinction between letters and edicts thus was not always applied.

⁸ al-Šafadī 1981, 398; al-Suyūṭī 1968, 216.

⁹ al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil MS Süleymaniye. The text was edited under the title *Rasā’il ‘an al-ḥarb wa-l-salām* (al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil 1978).

¹⁰ Meisami, Starkey 1998, 2: 303.

¹¹ al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil 1959.

¹² al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil MS London.

¹³ Bauer 2009, 190, 197.

¹⁴ ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī 1987.

¹⁵ Abū Šāma 1418/1997 comprises more than 120 quotations of and from al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil’s letters.

¹⁶ Hafsi 1979. Cf. Smarandache 2015. Most of these manuscripts are not edited to date. The forthcoming edition (*Rasā’il al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil*) makes use of all the material available for the 326 letters, which it contains.

¹⁷ al-Maqrīzī 1434/2013, 5: 959; Hafsi 1979, 3: nos. 1-44.

¹⁸ With the exception of Lyons, Jackson 1984. The authors refer frequently – about 250 times – to al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil’s letters preserved in various manuscripts. These references to al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil do not appear in the index of the book.

tology to include his letters. Several studies of Werner Diem contributed substantially to our acquaintance with his work.¹⁹

Born in Ascalon in 529/1135, he came to Egypt as a young man, found humble and precarious employment as a scribe in Cairo and Alexandria, and then ascended to the position of the deputy head of the Fatimid chancery in 563/1167.²⁰ Three years later, he became director of the *dīwān al-inšā'* in Cairo and held this position officially until his death, which occurred on the 6 or 7 Rabi' II 596/26 or 27 January 1200. He was actively involved in the transition from Fatimid to Ayyubid rule and served Saladin as his right hand when the latter became vizir of the Fatimid caliph al-ʿĀqid li-llāh. With the end of the Fatimid era, the submission to the Abbasid caliph's authority and the negotiation of Saladin's needs and interests were mainly conducted through al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's correspondence. Once Saladin's dominion in Egypt was established in 567/1171, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil remained his omnipotent minister and chief diplomat for more than two decades.²¹ He assisted with Saladin's war against the Franks in Syria, where he was often at Saladin's side. He also supported Saladin's expansion into northern Syria and the Ġazīra practically and diplomatically, even though he felt free to advocate the interests of Egypt in the correspondence with his patron.²² al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil entertained a literary *maḡlis* frequented by scholars and literati,²³ and among the prestigious endowments he made were, quite characteristic of his private interests, book endowments.²⁴

At this time, the institution of the chancery (*dīwān al-inšā'*) was a pillar of the state, a pivotal component of the alliance between the politico-military and the civil elites and a crucial agent of the political communication between central power and the governmental and military leadership of fief holders and members of Saladin's extended family.²⁵ al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's correspondence gives ample evidence of his personal influence and self-reliance. Even though the importance and weight of practical agendas and the style conventions of the chancery required issuing official texts according to these paradigms, there remained enough leeway for al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's proper articulation to include his authorial accentuation. His prose is a mile-

¹⁹ In Diem 2002, 10 letters of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil are considered. Diem 2015, 75-112 and 369-71, discusses, interprets and partly translates 32 letters of intercession. Diem 2020 contains pertinent observations regarding four of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's letters.

²⁰ Helbig 1909, 18.

²¹ Saladin died in 589/1193.

²² Ehrenkreutz 1972, 187 ff., 228. See also Dajānī-Shakeel 1977.

²³ al-Ṣafadī 1408/1988, 346 ff.

²⁴ Hirschler 2012, 131, 135.

²⁵ On the organisation and political impact of this institution, see also Eddé 1999, 316-22.

stone in the evolution of epistolary literature; this is not only obvious from the brilliant rhetorical elaboration of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's writings, but also apparent in his self-awareness as an author and his appreciation of letters he received and the mastership of their authors. From this perspective, reading, or the various kinds of reading, to which his letters refer, is a foundational practice for the process of writing. His letters maintain the idea of correspondence and sustain the irreplaceability of response, documenting reading as a practice and revealing that reading is a conceptual component of his writing.

In a letter addressed to 'Imād al-Dīn, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil explained that, for him, writing a text was a creative act instigated by impulse and nurtured by an enduring stimulus that would not end the moment he had composed the text. He described the constant effort of correcting and improving the texts, which he had written or dictated. When he expressed his view of his work as an author, he applied the rhetoric embellishment and hyperbolic periphrasis characteristic of the ornate prose style, yet the display of a diversity of references, allusions and linguistic nuances appears particularly elaborate here.²⁶ As correspondence between colleagues, this letter was not written in the name of Saladin or any other superior and may be considered as belonging to the genre of *ihwāniyyāt*, letters of exchange between friends and colleagues.²⁷ al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, who had recommended to Saladin the employment of 'Imād al-Dīn as his *munšī*' in the year 570/1175,²⁸ was a colleague, superior and supportive friend of 'Imād.²⁹ As the private correspondence among the urban elites of literati, scholars and civil officials later developed into a proper literary discipline, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's prose here again has a precursory and foundational character.³⁰

In the attempt to highlight aspects of the literary dimension of his epistolary work, we apply a reductive approach regarding al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's scintillating prose, which translation cannot adequately render, and concentrate instead on specific ideas to which the prose refers. Our translations are therefore selective, approximate and necessarily simplifying. It is our intent, however, to convey something of the enthusiasm that this prose induced among the educated of the time and during the following Mamlūk period and we therefore incorporate samples of his sophisticated rhetorical style.

26 al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil 1978, 73-6. Cf. *Rasā'il al-Qaḍī al-Fāḍil* (forthcoming), Risāla 53.

27 Hachmeier 2002a, 2, 37; Bauden 2017, 204-8.

28 Richter-Bernburg 1998, 106-8.

29 The title of 'Imād's historical work *al-Faḥḥ al-qussī fī al-faḥḥ al-quḍsī*, referring to Quss ibn Sā'ida, was inspired or encouraged by al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil; Richter-Bernburg 2014, 46.

30 Ibn Nubāta 2019, 11.

I do not write [anything] on a scrap of paper (*fa-lā aktubu ġuzāzatan*) [he writes] without asking to bring it forward to me again in due time, and no detail (*wa-lā lum'ata*) without being exposed to utmost disgust when I read through it again (*fī stirġā'ihā*). Tirelessly I apply sharp criticism by unsheathing the sword of the Sunday-people, when I bring it in shape (*lā azālu uġarridu fī aḥḍihā sayfa ahli l-aḥādī*), and I become as frail (*wa-taḍ'ufu nafsī*) as the Sabbath-people's souls (*da'fa anfusi ahli s-sabt*) while trying to preserve it (*fī stibqā'ihā*).³¹ There are reasons for this. One is that, by God, I do not write any utterance (*lafzatan*) without being unsatisfied (*ġayru rāḍin*) afterwards, and unwilling that it is quoted or something is reproduced from it (*ġayru mu'tirin li-an tunqala 'annī wa-lā an yunqala minhā*).

Another reason, he explains, refers to his good reputation (*fīyya zunūnun ġamilatun*) and wish to “not reduce with what I write [lit. with my own hand] the credit which I have in the hearts of well-meaning people” (*wa-lā 'astarġi'u bi-yadī mā liya fī qulūbi ahli ḥusni z-zanni min al-'awārī*). He also hints at his difficult situation, explaining that his responsibilities at the chancery naturally provoke rebuke and rejection, but that he is willing to endure this situation despite all difficulties.

While this argument may be understood, in accordance with an allusion at the beginning of this letter, as an excuse for not having returned to 'Imād al-Dīn the books he had borrowed from him, the explication of his working method also highlights that al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil does not need model texts found in books in order to compose his texts. Yet his remark also implies that reading, in this case the critical reading of his own text, was a basic tool used in his work as an author. He returns to this aspect when he asserts that he never saw something written the day before that did not require being redone today (*illā wa-qtadā l-wuqūfu 'alayhi al-yawma*), either because of the depreciation of its purpose (*tasfīhan li-murāḍihi*) or the rebuke of its hyperbolic and composition (*qadḥan fī mubālaġatihi wa-qtiṣādihī*). In another passage of this letter, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil emphasises that for the process of writing, or dictating, he is completely within himself, not distracted by any preoccupation or disturbance (*lā a'lamu šāġilan li-qalbin aw sam'in*), and does not allow for secondary considerations or calculations. “During the dictate I do not seek confirmation of the beauty of the text (*lā stath-bitu fīhi 'alā ġariyyin*)”,³² and while writing with his own hand, he does not restrain (lit. tighten the strings of) his hand (from moving with the flow) of his ideas (*lā aḥbisu 'anāna yadī 'alā ḥātīrī*).

³¹ The edited text al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil 1978 reads *istifā'ihā*.

³² The edited text al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil 1978 reads *ġayrī*.

This idealised image of authorship served more than one purpose. al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil presented his own inspired creativity as a model and incitation, and he highlighted that the originality of his writing did not depend on books from which he would copy. It also relates to the idea that the mastery of ornate prose meant striving towards perfection. As an author, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil was well aware, of course, that his own texts were read and sometimes, if not regularly, also read aloud. Producing texts with the purpose of having them read aloud was a common practice at the chancery; official texts, such as edicts, which al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil regularly produced, might explicitly request a public reading of the document (*tilāwa*).³³ Reading letters aloud could serve a similar purpose, namely communicating them to an assembly of people. In this case, however, the performative character of the reading would contain a demonstration of the particularly artful composition of the text, making recognisable its aesthetic qualities, such as assonance and symmetry, rhyme and rhythm of the *ko-la*. The attention for both kinds of reception, we assume, were thus part of the author's strategy when he composed his texts. al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's reply to an anonymous addressee, probably a person of high standing, contains a laudation of the letter he had received. Here he mentions the reaction of those who read it aloud as an evidence for the letter's outstanding qualities and the reader's as well as the listeners' respect for its author.³⁴ "And what would our patron think", he writes, "of the faces of the slaves, as they were cheerfully shining when they read it, and of their tongues which, when articulating it, were spluttering because of their utmost respect for it?!" (*mā ḡannu mawlānā bi-wuḡūhi l-mamālīki taqra'uhu wa-hiya li-l-isfāri bi-hi tataballaḡu, wa-l-alsunati taṭaliqu bi-hi wa-hiya li-l-i'zāmi tatalaḡlaḡu*). His reference to reading aloud probably indicates a usual practice and it implies that al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil considered careful attention to the text's phonetic effects as being part of the author's task; in a reply letter to 'Imād al-Dīn, he affirms this. His eulogy, adorned by metaphoric and hyperbolic phrasing, asserts that accomplished ornate prose is a delight when read or heard (*wa-aḡḡat kutubuhā³⁵ tatahādā bayna r-rā'ina wa-l-sāmi'ina*).

In this letter, dated 14 Muḡarram 574/2 July 1178, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil elucidated more specifically that reading the artfully composed epis-

³³ His letter to an anonymous *amīr* contains an edict (*manšūr*), which he ordered – in Saladin's name – to be publicly proclaimed from the pulpit (*minbar*). al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil 1978, 234–6, spec. 236. Cf. *Rasā'il al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil* (forthcoming), Risāla 129.

³⁴ al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, *Ḡuz' min kalām al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil*, ff. 58b–59a (p. 118 f.; cf. fig. 2). *Rasā'il al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil* (forthcoming), Risāla 221.

³⁵ Referring to 'Imād as *al-ḡaḡra*.

tle of his addressee served as a source of inspiration.³⁶ His allusion to his own expertise as an author of refined prose at the end of his empathic appraisal of 'Imād's letter did not serve, or at least not centrally, his claims as an authority, but purposely correlated responsive reading and creative authorship. al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil here evokes the benefits of studying the letter in a way that penetrates to its precious essence (*wa-stašfaftu ḡawharahu t-tamīn*) and seeks healing from its grace manifest in a clear message (*wa-stašfaytu min faḍlihi l-mubīn*). The effects of 'Imād's letter produce an extended, if not endless, shade and protective sphere and sweet, salubrious water (*far-ṛa'aytu kitābatan warafat*³⁷ *zīlālan wa-raqqat*³⁸ *zulālan*). al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil asserts that praising the letter to the highest heavens is a forgivable wrong: the one who lets himself go unrestrained when describing it does not stumble or commit a sin, but will be forgiven (*lā ya'turu man aṭlaqa 'ināna*³⁹ *wašfīhi fa-yakūnu muqālan*). al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's praise of the unchallenged uniqueness of 'Imād's style makes use of the notions *ḥaqīqa* and *maḡāz* in a pun that has a double entendre. 'Imād's letter, he states, reached the (protected) treasures of the scribe's craft as a matter of fact and with respect to literal meaning (of course through his use of appropriate metaphors), while the utmost to be realised by a less capable person is to reach this metaphorically and with respect to metaphorical meaning (by use of less appropriate metaphors) (*Wa-ḥaṣalat min ḡaḥā'iri ḥādhihi ṣ-ṣinā'ati 'alā l-ḥaqīqa, wa-quṣārā l-muqaṣṣiri an yaḥṣula 'alā l-maḡāzi*). 'Imād's pen (lit. 'pens'; the plural is employed hyperbolically) is, metaphorically, the conquering sword of the hero to whom "the land of rhetoric" was made subservient (*ḡulūlan*),⁴⁰ in reference to the Qur'ānic notion.⁴¹ After elaborating on the significant equitation of the chancery scribe's pen and political power, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil insinuates that the recognition of the letter's superior quality is a binding juridical act: 'Imād al-Dīn's letters were considered to replace his hand (used for vowing, we infer; *wa-stunībat*⁴² *kutubuhā 'an yadihā*), and they thus constitute a protecting hindrance (or, intended ambiguity, a butt) for the sinners (*fa-hiya 'urḡatun li-l-*

36 'Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī 1987a, 108-10, reproduced by Hafsi 1979, no. 67. In the quoted passage, we correct a few readings of the editor of 'Imād's *al-Barq al-šāmī*. For a documentation of the variants, which appear in manuscripts containing anonymous collections of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's letters, see *Rasā'il al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil* (forthcoming), Risāla 169.

37 'Imād al-Dīn 1987a reads *raqqat*.

38 'Imād al-Dīn 1987a reads *rāqat*.

39 'Imād al-Dīn 1987a reads *lisān*.

40 'Imād al-Dīn 1987a reads *ḡulūlan*.

41 67:15: "He it was who made the earth subservient to you".

42 'Imād al-Dīn 1987a reads *unši'at*.

āṭimīn). As a condition for this rule, “the testimonies for its superiority or quality were brought forward (*wa-ubdiyati š-šahādātu bi-faḍlihā*)”. Therefore, the Qur’ānic precept would be applicable: “We shall not conceal the testimony of God, or else we are counted sinners”.⁴³

In a particular expression of his appreciation for ‘Imād’s letter, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil relates his reading of it to his own work as an author. ‘Imād’s letters, “every passage of which appears as a unique and inimitable pearl (of a necklace; *wa-ġadat kullu fiqratin minhā yatīmatan*)”, he states, would make a deep impression on every reader. If this is the case, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil argues further, “for the one who is not directly addressed or concerned (*man lam yakun bi-hā ma’niyyan*), or for the one whom the concealed, intended meaning of the letter might allude to (*wa-man rubbamā kāna sirru surūrihā ‘anhu makniyyan*)”, what would one think of someone like himself?

Someone who takes up from them the tiny twilight of daybreak as evidence (*fa-mā z-zannu bi-man*⁴⁴ *yataqalladu minhā l-faġra*⁴⁵ *burhānan*), and to whom the (everlasting) stones of their exquisite features (*ḥawālidu*⁴⁶ *maḥāsinihā*) grant that they will endure for a time after the [end of] time? Someone whose petrified thought becomes flexible (*talīnu ṣaḥriyyatu fikrihi*), and who is sustained by these letters in his effort of inventing figurative expression (*fa-yakūnu bi-hā ‘alā tawliḍi l-ma’ānī mu’ānan*)?!

One may suggest that al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil’s praise reflected the ambitious style of ‘Imād’s ornate prose. However, when al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil referred to the personal experience of receiving inspiration from reading this letter, he again spoke to his addressee as an author who read his prose. A short reference to his reading experience also appears in a reply preserved in Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir’s (d. 692/1292) collection *al-Durr an-naẓīm min tarassul ‘Abd ar-Raḥīm*.⁴⁷ The remark concerns the letter al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil had received from his anonymous addressee and regards his expertise of active and responsive reading: while reading, he wrote, he elaborated in his mind on the ideas, or figurative expressions, that the wording of the letter suggested. Yet apart from this aspect, this letter’s character is quite different from what he wrote to ‘Imād al-Dīn.

⁴³ 5:106: *wa-lā naktumu šahādata llāhi innā iḡan la-mina l-āṭimīna*. The context here is the testimony for a bequest.

⁴⁴ ‘Imād al-Dīn 1987a reads *li-man*.

⁴⁵ ‘Imād al-Dīn 1987a reads *li-l-faġr*.

⁴⁶ The three stones of the fireplace that support the cooking-pot.

⁴⁷ al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil 1378/1959, 55 ff. *Rasā’il al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil* (forthcoming), Risāla 280. For Ibn ‘Abd az-Zāhir, see above.

The duties as a chancery scribe, we may suppose, required the production of letters of reply as a common diplomatic practice, and included the convention of an articulation of gratitude for a received letter. al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil applied this scheme here in his own fashion. A major thematic aspect of the missive, as we read it, regards the value that he bestowed upon the communication with his correspondent, while the style of the received letter was less significant. Making use of an established motif, he placed next to the conventional eulogy of his addressee five verses complaining about the grief and despair caused by separation from the beloved – “The letter reached the distressed because separation afflicted him” (*al-ka’iba li-mā ‘arāhu min al-firāqi*).⁴⁸ Continuing in this vein, he confirmed the arrival of the addressee’s letter: “The illustrious letter reached me at a time of looking forward (to it with great impatience) and of an anticipation growing every day” (*waṣala l-kitābu l-karīmu ilayya hīna taṭallu’in šadīd wa-tawaqu’in yazīdu fī kulli yawmin ḡadīd*). The author’s relief and delight upon being in contact with his correspondent again explained his esteem for the letter, which he received with utmost care and respect.

When he⁴⁹ broke its seal and kissed the letter [lit. his lips came close to the abundant refreshment⁵⁰ that it offered] and let his gaze pasture freely in its blossoming [meadowland] (*fa-lammā faḍḍa ḥitāmahu wa-šāfaha mudāmahu wa-sarraḥa nāzīrahu fī nāḍīrihi*), and when he augmented in his mind the ideas, or figurative expressions, of the letters wording (*wa-tazayyada ma’āniyahu min alfāzihi fī ḥāṭiri*), and studied what the writing had laid down (*waqafa ‘alā rasmihi*), and inferred (*qaḍā*) what the mamlūk [referring to himself] had to honour and observe according to his instruction (*mā yaḡību mina t-ta’zīmi ‘alā rasmihi*), and saw a plantation full of ripened fruits (*rawḍatan qad ayna’at*) and gardens which had blossomed, bearing fruits (*qad azharat wa-aṭmarat*), his mind (*sarā’ir*) was delighted and his heart (*ḍamā’ir*) gladdened. The ties of his benevolence (*asbāb ni’amihi*) were reaffirmed in him, and renewed were for him (*‘indahu*) the obligations resulting from his nobleness (*min ‘uhūdi karamihi*).

As we may infer from al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil’s references to the letters, which he had received or expected to receive, many of his letters were factually or intentionally part of an exchange. Yet the collections

⁴⁸ Aḥmad Badawī included these verses in his edition of the *Dīwān* (al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil 1961, 493, no. 607).

⁴⁹ The author’s use of the third person, after referring to himself in the first person, ties in with the preceding poem and alludes to his authorship of the verses.

⁵⁰ *Mudām*, lit. continuing rain; also wine.

that preserve his writings focus on al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍīl as the author of outstanding ornate prose and thus do not contain replies or letters that were sent to him. Notwithstanding the scarceness of documented correspondence containing letters from both sides,⁵¹ we may certainly suppose that the exchange of letters was a routine particularly in matters of political significance. A letter written in the name of Saladin and sent to the Abbasid caliph after the conquest of Sinḡār, when Saladin stayed at Niṣībīn in the early month of Ramaḍān of the year 578/December-January 1182-1183, contains al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍīl's allusion to letters he had received earlier from the caliph. Saladin's military operations in the Ġazīra and his objective to subdue Mosul were contested matters,⁵² and al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍīl was obviously anxious to emphasise Saladin's docility in reaction to the caliph's letters.⁵³ "Whatever replies reached him [i.e. Saladin] extended the pastures of hope, lightened the lamps of accepted guidance, reached his inner craves, and deepened his insight even though its perspicacity had waned" (*wa-mahmā waradahu mina l-aḡwibati fasaḡha masāriḡha r-raġā'i, wa-aḡkā maṣābīḡha l-ihtidā'i, wa-balaġa fī nafsīhi munāḡa, wa-zāda fī baṣīratīhi wa-in kāna stībṣāruhā qad tanāḡa*).

Diplomatic correspondence, as this case illustrates, was a means of polite communication articulating and negotiating specific political interests. More generally, communication through the exchange of letters granted relational contact and served the social cohesion between the participants, important for the functioning of the state and the networking of the head of the chancery. The intersecting of both perspectives, duty and personal relationship, fostered diplomacy and provided personal statement with authority. The wide range of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍīl's correspondence in the wider context of the state chancery, may illustrate this aspect.⁵⁴ At the same time, the collections of excerpts, represented here by the Konya manuscript, manifest the perception of his writings as epistolary literature largely independent of the historical and functional contexts of the chancery. Detached from the circumstance of the individual communication, this literature depicts and models the common cultural exercise of writing and receiving messages composed in accordance to the exi-

⁵¹ As an exception, see Bauden 2017. 'Imād al-Dīn 1987 also occasionally includes the exchange of letters from both sides.

⁵² Lyons, Jackson 1984, 182.

⁵³ al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍīl 1978, 65-8, spec. 66. For the dating of the letter, see MS London, British Museum 25757, f. 88a. Cf. *Rasā'il al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍīl* (forthcoming), Risāla 50.

⁵⁴ A preliminary list of 2,080 items of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍīl's correspondence (letters, documents and fragments), many of which are preserved in several sources, does certainly not comprise everything preserved. Even if this list may still hide so far unrevealed cases of multiple preservation in several sources, it may give an idea of the extent of the author's activity.

gent conventions of ornate prose. Yet even if the practice of reading remains in the background, we can discern an implicit notion of readership. For instance, when al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil explained in his response the impact and value of a letter he had received from the Emir ‘Izz al-Dīn Mūsak, Saladin’s nephew (d. 585/1189),⁵⁵ he insinuated that he had held it in his hands, read it and appreciated it. He mentions the significance of the *amīr*’s letter as a means of access to the sender (*ḡarī’a*), describes the sensual sensation that the musk-scent of its ink conveyed, and the smell that spread when he touched it, as well as the cheerfulness that arose from the reflecting surface of its page (*al-biṣru l-lā’iḡu min mir’āti ṡirsihi*).⁵⁶

In al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil’s writing, the composition and reception of letters were closely interrelated, not only for the exigencies of the chancery and not only in terms of the author’s explicit reference to the impulse that reading might afford to writing. Letters of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil suggest that receiving replies was a purpose and postulate of his writing, since they were a medium of expressing an idealised affective relationship often conveyed according to literary convention through love poetry. Independent of how al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil’s use of this theme related to literary tradition and to the relationship between the persons concerned in the individual case, it often stands for the importance given to the reciprocity of correspondence: the idea and practice of response was a concept that drove and structured his writing. One may encounter in al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil’s writing the solicitation of a close relationship with the addressee in a particularly elaborate manner. However, this aspect is to some extent a common trait of correspondence⁵⁷ and al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil’s elaboration of this motif illustrates his art of prose composition in the framework of chancery letters and more specifically relates to the conceptual framework of response. Both the aesthetic dimension of its literary articulation and the pragmatic objective of valuing the relationship between the author and his addressee are plausible incentives for this practice.

Waiting for a reply impatiently, urging the addressee to send a reply and despair over the addressee’s abstinence from replying are *topoi*, which explain the author’s attachment and wish for reciprocity. His pleas may very well have been a concern of plausible actuality, such as the sickness of his addressee, and he thus described his impatience to receive a letter, which would announce recovery. “He (referring to himself as *ḡādim*) waits for a reply letter which lets him expect an answer to the invocations elevated to their creator (*fa-hu-*

⁵⁵ Abū Šāma 1418/1997, 4: 108.

⁵⁶ al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil 1978, 47-50, spec. 47. Cf. *Rasā’il al-Qadī al-Fāḍil* (forthcoming), Risāla 35.

⁵⁷ Diem 2015, 275.

wa yantaḡiru ḡawāban yanḡuru bi-hi ilā ḡawābi l-ad'iyati l-marfū'ati ilā ḡāliqihā".⁵⁸ al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's concern for the continuity of communication with his correspondent and the responsiveness of his addressees pervades many of his letters. Letters, it seems, were written in order to assure and encourage communication. Metaphorically, communication – through letter writing, one must note – signifies life.

In an undated letter to Saladin, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil implores him to resume the correspondence. The metaphoric use of the terms truce and war, and the inversion of their meaning make his plea particularly impressive.⁵⁹ The arrows, which he asks Saladin to shoot, revive, and the truce, which means that no arrows are shot, is a deadly peril.

The slave over time entered a truce (*kāna l-mamlūk ma'a l-ayyām 'alā hudnatin*), yet it declared its proper war since our patron's hand made him become *hors de combat*, depriving him of the weapon of its letters (*fa-āḍinat bi-ḡarbihā muḡ 'aṭṭalathu yadu mawlānā min silāḡi kutubihā*). [...] When the arrow of our patron's letters is notched for the bowstring, it revives the moment it hits, the slain (*wa-s-sahmu min kutubi mawlāna idā fuwwiqa aḡyā bi-'iṣābatihī l-maḡtala*). By God, he is a marksman who revives with his shot, and a renegade whose forbearance kills (*fa-lillāhi huwa min rāmin yuḡyī bi-ramyihī, wa-nāhin yaḡtulu bi-nahyihī*). The slave had a share (*sahm*) of his patron's letters, which kept him alive, and when they stopped to flow, the share became an arrow (*sahm*), which destroyed him (*kāna li-l-mamlūki saḡmun min kutubi mawlānā yuḡyihī fa-lammā nḡaṭa'at šāra saḡman yurdihī*). So induce the arrow to hit him – if not, he is killed by its failure to appear (*fa-'arid 'alayhī s-sahma wa-illā qutila bi-'uṭlatihī*).

In another instance, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil compares the effect of the addressee's letter that revives the reader to that of the rain, which brings back vegetation to the dried earth as the Qur'ān depicts it,⁶⁰ and thus gives emphasis to this idea.⁶¹

The condition of the hearts is like the condition of this (lifeless) earth, lifeless when the letters ceased as is the numbness of the earth when rain has stopped to fall (*ka-ḡalika ḡālu l-qulūbi ka-*

⁵⁸ al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, *Ḡuz' min kalām al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil* (ms Konya, Yūsuf Aḡhā 4881), ff. 58a-b (p. 117; cf. figs 1-2). *Rasā'il al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil* (forthcoming), Risāla 220.

⁵⁹ al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, *Ḡuz' min kalām al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil*, ff. 55a-b (p. 111). *Rasā'il al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil* (forthcoming), Risāla 214.

⁶⁰ 22:5: *wa-tarā l-arḡa ḡamidatan fa-iḡā 'anzalnā 'alayḡa l-mā'a htazat wa-rabat wa-anbatat min kulli zawḡin baḡiḡin*.

⁶¹ al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, *Ḡuz' min kalām al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil*, ff. 58b-59a (pp. 118-19; cf. fig. 2). For another quotation from the same letter, see fn. 34.

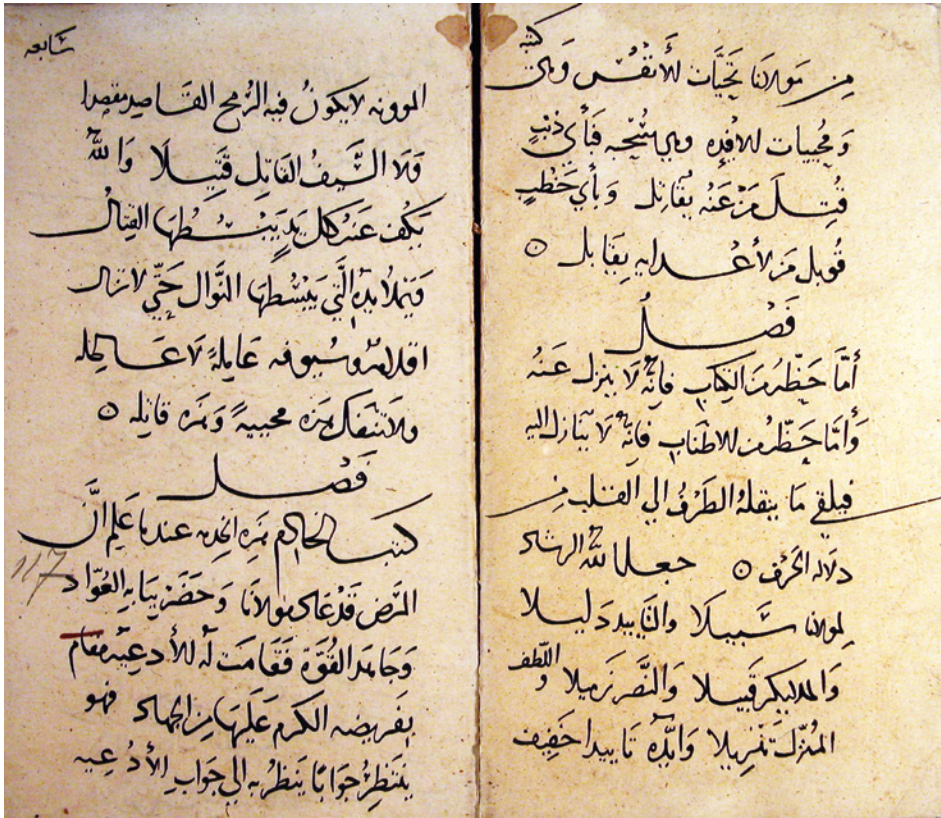


Figure 1 al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil. *Ġuz' min kalām al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil*. Ms Konya, Yūsuf Aghā 4881, ff. 116-117

ḥālī ḥāḍihi l-arḍi, hāmidatun iḍā nqaṭa'ati l-kutubu humūda l-arḍi iḍā nqaṭa'ati s-saḥābu). When the letter came [down] to us from our patron, it was as if rain would fall upon us (*fa-iḍā nazala bi-nā min mawlānā l-kitābu fa-huwa ka-mā nazala 'alaynā s-saḥābu*). It brought life [lit. motion] back into the bodies (with the alertness of the mind reawakened), just as the dried earth [i.e. its vegetation] comes into motion again. Fresh ideas grew from every fragrant pool, as the earth brings forward all kinds of splendid plants (*fa-hazza l-aṭāfa htizāza l-arḍi l-iḡāfi, wa-anbatati l-ḥawāṭiru min kul-li rawḍin 'arīḡ inbāta l-arḍi kulla zawġin bahīḡ*).

This simile represents the reply letter as a source of life and intellectual vitality and reveals the significance of a fecund topic in the writing of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil. As the extracts above show, he referred to letters received, anticipated replies and encouraged or urged his addressee to respond. The topic of the reply relates his concept of

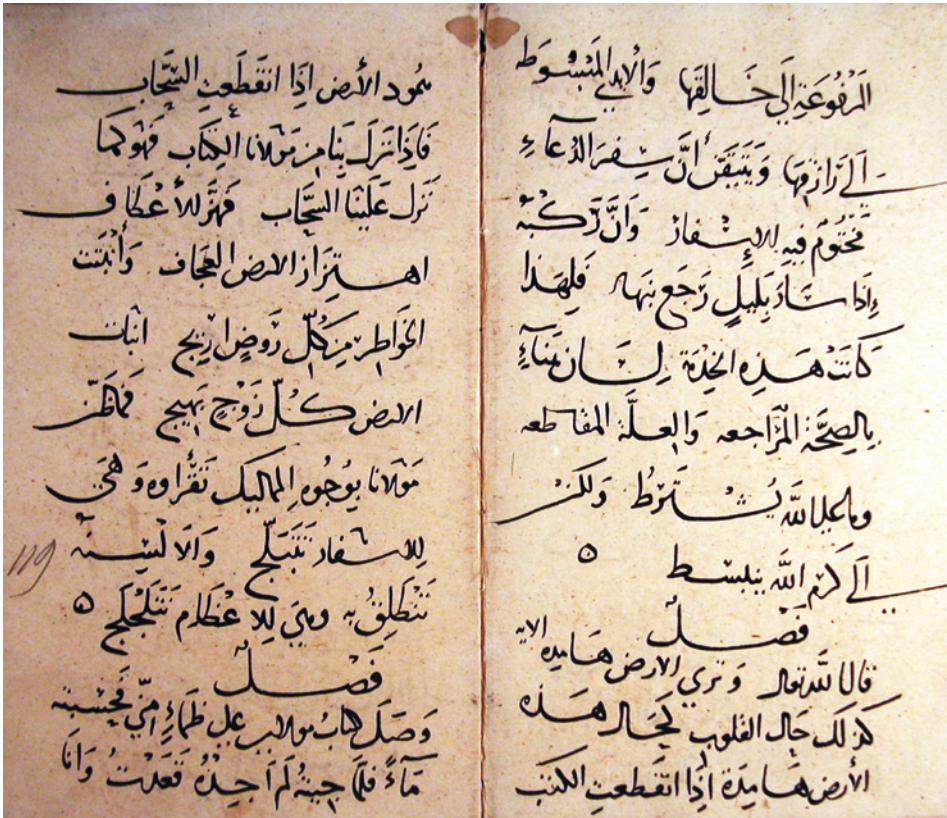


Figure 2 al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil. *Ġuz' min kalām al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil*. Ms Konya, Yūsuf Aghā 4881, ff. 118-119

authorship to the idealised image of reading: al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's mind responds to the stimulating text he reads, and reading is not only a means of absorbing the text, but also of valuing the courtesy implied by the sending of the message. The expression of appreciation is generally a formal aspect of letters, yet the rhetorical elaboration on the image of affective relationship, which the issue of the reply letter accommodates and invites in the context of both diplomatic and private correspondence, is an essential component of the communication that ornate prose is expected to entertain and frame. The reply letter serves as a means to construe affective relationships in a context of intersecting social conventions and established literary themes. Pivotal as it is for any correspondence, the reply letter is an essential feature of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's prose, independent of its true appearance and shape.

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