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Stephan Conermann

## **Quo vadis, Mamlukology?** *(A German Perspective)*

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Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg  
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Heussallee 18-24  
53115 Bonn  
Editor: Stephan Conermann

### **Authors addresses**

#### **Prof. Dr. Stephan Conermann**

(1) Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn Philosophische Fakultät IOA/Abt. für  
Islamwissenschaft Regina-Pacis Weg 7  
53113 Bonn  
Tel. 0228/737462  
Homepage: [www.ioa.uni-bonn.de/abteilungen/islamwissenschaft/abteilung](http://www.ioa.uni-bonn.de/abteilungen/islamwissenschaft/abteilung)  
Email: [stephan.conermann@uni-bonn.de](mailto:stephan.conermann@uni-bonn.de)

(2) Annemarie-Schimmel-Kolleg  
"Geschichte und Gesellschaft der Mamlukenzeit, 1250-1517"  
"History and Society during the Mamluk Era, 1250-1517"  
Heussallee 18-24  
53113 Bonn  
Telephone: 0228/7362946  
Fax: 0228/7362964  
Website: [www.mamluk.uni-bonn.de](http://www.mamluk.uni-bonn.de)

# Quo vadis, Mamlukology? (A German Perspective)<sup>1</sup>

by Stephan Conermann (Bonn)

## *About the author*

Stephan Conermann is professor and chair of Islamic and Oriental Studies at the University of Bonn. His research interests focus on the perception of European Cultures within Islamic societies and vice versa, Islam in India, Central Asia and Egypt, Muslim historiography, history and culture of the Mamluks (1250-1517) and historical anthropology. Conermann studied Slavic as well Oriental Studies and Asian and European History in Kiel, Poznan (Poland), Damascus and Moscow. After having completed his dissertation (1996) and his habilitation (2001) he worked as assistant professor at Kiel University. In 2003 Conermann came to Bonn where he now is not only professor but also acting director of the Asia Center of the university and speaker of the Bonn International Graduate School - Oriental and Asian Studies (BIGS-OAS).

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<sup>1</sup> This working paper is an extended and modified version of Conermann, St., Vorbemerkung: Islamwissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft, in: St. Conermann/Syrinx von Hees (ed.): Islamwissenschaft als Historische Anthropologie. I. Historische Anthropologie. Ansätze und Möglichkeiten. Schenefeld 2007, 9-20.

## 1. Introduction

No one would contest in principle that Mamlukology forms a branch of the humanities. However, owing to the fact that the relevance of the humanities for society is not easily explained to the public, for the past two decades they have found themselves in a constant crisis of legitimization that is characterized by the fear of a university-internal marginalization on the one hand and by the attempt to fulfil the university administrations' wish for disciplinary expansion on the other. In fact, this dilemma isn't new. Following a suggestion by the National Council for Research ("Wissenschaftsrat") and the Conference of University Rectors of West Germany "Hochschulrektorenkonferenz", a project was carried out at Konstanz University from 1987 to 1990 that aimed at developing perspectives for the future of humanities. The outcome of this project was the highly remarkable memorandum *Geisteswissenschaft heute* ("The Humanities Today").<sup>2</sup> The high-profile and certainly competent authors of this programmatic treatise eventually came to two conclusions: 1. The humanities only have a realistic chance of surviving if they henceforth see themselves as Cultural Studies and re-position themselves accordingly within the universities. 2. The central scientific questions for these new Cultural Studies ("Kulturwissenschaft") are provided primarily by Historical Anthropology.

Let me clarify both points briefly, speaking from the view of the authors: The humanities are, according to their opinion, the "place" where modern societies acquire knowledge of themselves in a scientific form. But this knowledge is not positivist knowledge of the kind postulated in the positivist sciences, but rather knowledge that mainly undertakes tasks of orientation.<sup>3</sup> There are good reasons to start the necessary re-orientation of the humanities on the basis of their modern designation as a cultural science: "culture" no longer represents the subsection of a sphere of life (next to politics, law, economy and religion), but must be expanded to include the cultural whole, i.e. culture as the epitome of human productivity and human ways of life – including developments in natural sciences and elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Cultural Studies structurally tend towards cultural pluralism, whereas the humanities tend towards the unity and entirety represented by the model of the one human spirit. Subjects like Mamlukology would not be lost after the re-structuring of disciplines, but would remain irreplaceable in the dialogue of disciplines whenever it is important to understand a matter from the context of its

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<sup>2</sup> Frühwald, W. et al., *Geisteswissenschaften heute: eine Denkschrift*. Frankfurt am Main 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Frühwald et al. 1991, 39.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Frühwald et al. 1991, 40.

term, its history, its symbolic character or its form, i.e. philosophically, historically, linguistically, or aesthetically. The potential of Mamlukology's re-interpretation as a cultural science would then lie in the possibility to translate mere information into communication, to control and permanently demonstrate anew the understanding of the self through the other as well as of the other through the self. So borders need not necessarily separate, but may open up new horizons and promote the unanimity among those who know and those who act. The foundation of these Cultural Studies, as I have mentioned already, should be Historical Anthropology, because it is set to historicize the results of a basically ahistorical, yet essential discipline for Cultural Studies, such as descriptive ethnology, as well as to – reversely – explore the anthropological dimension of language, history and aesthetics for the benefit of the other sciences. The concern of such research would transcend the traditionally and institutionally still Eurocentric system of knowledge, and would need hermeneutics of intercultural communication (the keyword here is “hermeneutics of foreignness”) and would have to retrieve regionally focused studies – like African Studies, South American Studies or in a certain sense Mamlukology – from their isolation, in order to make their findings available and productive for a general theory.<sup>5</sup>

So these are the two most important results of the treatise *The Humanities Today* that was published in the early 1990s. As the demanded changes in content and institutions have more or less not yet been implemented in Mamlukology as far as I can assess it,<sup>6</sup> it may be legitimate, more than 20 years later, to ask: What are we going to do with this document now? Two options present themselves: either we take it seriously and draw certain consequences or we discard it and continue along the same lines as before. I have decided to follow the direction suggested in the memorandum and – as far as I can – to give our Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg ([www.mamluk.uni-bonn.de](http://www.mamluk.uni-bonn.de)) a “kulturwissenschaftliche” direction. This decision was not only based on my socialization as a humanist and Islamic scholar interested in theories and methodology and on 20 years of professional experience with university and educational policies, but has to be seen mainly against the backdrop of the imminent and seemingly unstoppable transformation of the German university-level educational organisation into a Bachelor-Master system.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Frühwald et al. 1991, 71.

<sup>6</sup> A fresh impulse should give the proceedings of the Annemarie Schimmel's kick-off conference “Ubi sumus, quo vademus?” (Bonn, December 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>, 2011) (<http://www.mamluk.uni-bonn.de/mamluk-events/archive/flyer-kick-off-conference/view>).

At this point I want to emphasize explicitly that I consider a thorough philological instruction a *condition sine qua non*, especially for studies of cultures of a Muslim character. Moreover, I believe that the historical critical method can still be a fruitful and proven approach of textual interpretation.<sup>7</sup> Yet, what matters are new objectives against the background of a new self-assessment acquired through permanent, constructive self-reflection. Whether Historical Anthropology will prove itself to be the methodical nonpareil remains to be seen.

## 2. Mamlukology (in Germany) – some general remarks

In his his seminal article “Die deutschen Orientalisten im 20. Jahrhundert und der Zeitgeist“, the well-known German Iranist Bert Fragner put forward the following argumentation:<sup>8</sup> The insistence of Mamlukologist, formerly referred to as “Orientalists”, to be in charge of the research on the history of the regions covered by them, is traditionally based on their ability acquired in their philological instruction to master the original sources linguistically and place them in their factual context, which is to be elaborated historico-critically and is conditional to their understanding. The term “Islam” encompasses, in the view of these scholars, the Islamic religion and the culture *thought of* as something inspired by it, characterized by it and arisen from it; it includes additionally the most important languages of this culture – Arabic, Persian, Turkish – and also the history of the so-called “Islamic world”. The decipherment of these difficult texts, of which the Mamlukologist has every reason to be proud, result in a fragmentary and one-sided picture of the ‘Islamic culture’ – as every medievalist knows. We learn a lot about the Islam as a textbook religion, the ideal literary Islam of the few well-educated – and only little of the Islam of the illiterate masses as they used to live it, i.e. of popular Islam. We find out much more about the culture of the elites than about the hybrid cultures of the people, the peasants, Bedouins and urban day labourers. This has the effect that text-fixated Mamlukotlogists that are unaffected by more modern methods and formulations of questions often cultivate an image of Islam that not only has little to do with the reality of Mamluk society as a whole, but moreover tempts us to misconceive the present as a perceived product of degeneration. Owing to this tradition, Mamlukology has been primarily defined in

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<sup>7</sup> Still the best introduction is Utzschneider, H./Nitsche, S.A. Arbeitsbuch literaturwissenschaftliche Bibelauslegung. Eine Methodenlehre zur Exegese des AT. Gütersloh 2005.

<sup>8</sup> The following paragraph closely follows his text which has been published in Hiery, H.J. (ed.): Der Zeitgeist und die Historie. Dettelbach 2001. I replaced “Orientalisten“ and „Islamwissenschaftler“ with „mamlukologists“. See also his "Iranistik zwischen brennender Aktualität und exotischer Abseitigkeit – Gedanken zur Positionierung eines `kleinen` orientalistischen Faches", in: Poya, A./Reinkowski, M. (ed.), *Das Unbehagen in der Islamwissenschaft. Ein klassisches Fach im Scheinwerferlicht der Politik und der Medien*. Bielefeld 2008, 105-117.

philological terms. This primacy meant that the sectors history, literature, religious history or history of philosophy were not seen as essential parts of Mamlukology but rather as accidental ones. The philological basis used to be considered as the very own art of Mamlukology, the truly essential element of that science. This understanding was based on a type of language reception which paralleled the one of the classics. The idealistic glorification of philology, which is still often romanticized today, has been a characteristic feature of Mamlukologists, and especially of German Mamlukologists, for generations. Paradoxically, it was the first 20 to 25 post-War years in which precisely this philological basic conviction of their own way of acting that led the German scholars deeply into an attitude typical of the *Zeitgeist* which dominated much more than scientific thought at the time. The focus on philology, so hard to connect to philosophy, ideology or politics, made it possible to be escapist in public whilst adhering to central scientific principles. For the first time in 20<sup>th</sup> century, the structural inclination of the so-called Orientalistic disciplines – to see the appropriate form of “pure science” in philology – coincided with a general attitude – also shared by the public – to reject categories that could be introduced from outside the particular discipline like “creation of theories”, “philosophy of science” or the intrusion of elements suspected of being ideological. “Freedom from ideology” was the most popular catchphrase among Islamic scholars during the 1950s and 60s, even though it was not always expressed in public. Thus it is not surprising that especially during this time at German Universities one text edition was produced after the other. But then the unruly 1970s followed, threatening the mamlukological idyll with new ideas from the social sciences. It was generally thought that social sciences should take the place of philosophy as the leading science in the field of the humanities. The questions why we research what became louder and was brought of bare on the subject from the outside. What was the relevance of Islamic Studies whose scholars were at a loss when faced with current political events and had no answers or explanations at all (one can just mention the Suez Canal conflict, the Palestinian Question, the fall of Mossadegh in Iran or the Algerian Crisis)? Islamic Studies and Mamlukology soon acquired the air of a supposedly remote and eccentric subject to the content of which depended on the idiosyncrasies of the respective professors. In some respects this has remained so – at least in Germany – until 9/11.

Outside Germany Edward Said's book *Orientalism* published in 1978 roused the scientific community from its intellectual slumber.<sup>9</sup> Vivid theoretical debates following overall methodical discussions lead everywhere to substantial re-orientations. But among Mamlukologists such a debate on principles did not take place yet. Because of the sustained refusal of many scholars to join the ongoing intensive theoretical debates there are – to paraphrase Ute Daniel – still far too many Mamlukologists

1. who think that facts speak for themselves
2. who believe that they can see how things really have been
3. who assume that their professional methods and their ability to reflect on scientific topics are more than able to match the requirements and who think that philosophical and theoretical discussions would only disturb this prestabilised harmony
4. who believe that their discourses let the world speak for itself in the form of history
5. who pursue the limited documented reconstructions of a pre-critically designed past
6. who see the experience of historical subjects as unquestionable proof and
7. who set themselves apart from many other distinguished scholars because of their hostility or at least their blindness towards theories and questions which have been raised from Hegel on.<sup>10</sup>

In my opinion, neither the humanities nor Mamlukology can be pursued on this basis any longer without losing the intellectual connections to the globalized world entirely.

### 3. Mamlukology as Cultural Studies

If we want Mamlukology to become a tributary of the broad river of Cultural Studies, we first have to define exactly what we mean by this term.<sup>11</sup> At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the era of the fighting over methods seems to be over in most of the humanities, with Mamlukology having never really been affected by the sometimes heated academic arguments. The current “methods after methods” are eclectic and open, selecting theorems from the traditional methods and supplementing them by new ones while at the same time forming overlaps and

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<sup>9</sup> Excellent introductions are Varisco, D. M., *Reading Orientalism. Said and the Unsaid*. Seattle and London 2007 and Burke, E./Prochaska, D. (ed.), *Genealogies of Orientalism. History, Theory, Politics*. Lincoln and London 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Daniel, U., *Kompendium Kulturgeschichte. Theorien, Praxis, Schlüsselwörter*. Frankfurt 2001, 157-158.

<sup>11</sup> The German „Kulturwissenschaften“ must not be mixed up with “Cultural Studies”. Cf. Nünning, A., Art. “Kulturwissenschaft”, in: Nünning, A. (ed.), *Metzler Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie. Ansätze – Personen – Grundbegriffe*. Stuttgart and Weimar 2001, 353-356. In this text, we use the term “Cultural Studies” for “Kulturwissenschaften”. Works of reference are Jaeger, F./Liebsch, B. (ed.), *Handbuch der Kulturwissenschaften*. Bd. 1: Grundlagen und Schlüsselbegriffe. Stuttgart und Weimar 2004, Jaeger, F./Straub, J. (ed.), *Handbuch der Kulturwissenschaften*. Bd. 2: Paradigmen und Disziplinen. Stuttgart und Weimar 2004, Jaeger, F./Rüsen, J. (ed.), *Handbuch der Kulturwissenschaften*. Bd. 3: Themen und Tendenzen. Stuttgart und Weimar 2004 and Bachmann-Medick, D., *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Geisteswissenschaften*. Hamburg 2006.



crossovers. What all these approaches have in common is that they understand philologically oriented disciplines as Cultural Studies without forcing them to abandon their philological basis.<sup>12</sup> What matters is rather the networking of the various methodical approaches, their necessary “hybridisation” in the age of globalization. The debate about Cultural Studies in this context is the articulation of a paradigm shift within the humanities and as such it is certainly far more than just a fashionable trend. Ignoring this fact now will inevitably show its consequences in the future.

Under the name “cultural history”, “cultural science” has been an established concept since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> In the “Sattelzeit” of modern epistemology, i.e. in the years from 1880 until 1933,<sup>14</sup> philosophers and sociologists expressed and debated some basic ideas about what kind of knowledge about man the various disciplines could and should provide.<sup>15</sup> Thus, neither the concept nor the central problems of modern-day Cultural Studies are actually new. Cultural Studies and cultural history are both located on the same fundamental level, namely that of their self-conception. It is fundamental in that it entails decisions that have to be made before any scientific work can become possible in the first place – for example the decisions on which conditions have to be met by a scientific proposition in order to be accepted as “true” or correct; on what is to be considered a historical fact; or on exactly when something should be considered “explained” and the significance of the fact that explanations of historical phenomena are usually given in the form of narratively structured texts – in short: decisions on what kind of knowledge it is that is provided here and which criteria may be used in its discussion.<sup>16</sup> Although there are striking parallels between the method debate of the last 35 years and the intellectual discussions that took place around 1900, the matter here can’t be a mere revitalization of considerations from the past which are naturally based in their context and time. Still, it is legitimate and maybe even necessary to take the writing of Friedrich Nietzsche, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim or Georg Simmel as an inspiration or even as a guideline in formulating new foundations for the self-concept of Mamlukology as Cultural Studies today.

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Benthien, C./Velten, H.R., Einleitung, in: Benthien, C./Velten, H.R. (ed.), *Germanistik als Kulturwissenschaft. Eine Einführung in neue Theoriekonzepte*. Hamburg 2002, 7-34, here 7.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Daniel 2001, 195-220.

<sup>14</sup> See Koselleck, R., *Über die Theoriebedürftigkeit der Geschichtswissenschaft*, in: Conze, W. (ed.), *Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft und Praxis des Geschichtsunterrichts*, Stuttgart 1972, 10-28.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Daniel 2001, 8. See also Oexle, O. G., *Geschichte als Historische Kulturwissenschaft*, in: Hardtwig, W./Wehler, H.-U. (ed.), *Kulturgeschichte heute*. Göttingen 1996, 14-40.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Daniel 2001, 9-10.

The central element of Mamlukology as Cultural Studies is a comprehensive conception of culture:<sup>17</sup> as mentioned above, culture is thought of as a creative force of life as a whole, encompassing the ways of life, patterns of perception and forms of communication of the different groups, strata, sexes and classes. It is no longer believed that culture is a closed concept in which everyone can participate on an equal basis. Settlers and nomads, rural and urban dwellers, scholars and courtiers cannot be measured against the same concept of culture, since they are all bound by different living conditions and have different interests in life. The reality of life is characterized by a plurality of ways of living. This extended concept of culture comprises not only the scholarly code of values but also the world of the manifold traditions, lifestyles, needs and interests of the individuals and social groups, which are not interpretable in a single direction. In this was, the heterogeneity of life-ways and different constructions of meaning makes it possible to speak of many cultures rather than one, even within a single geographical entity. Accordingly, the cultural value is no longer measured after a European-style hierarchical pattern but in terms of the benefit and importance it has for the individual as well as for individual groups. Without absolute standards, after all, it becomes easier to perceive the plurality of cultures and their equality in status.

The task of Mamlukology as a part of the quite heterogeneous Cultural Studies is to locate itself in their broad and changing fields and frames. Of course this is not easy but what counts is that the borders of the discipline do not limit the things which can be known about a society. These borders only define the center point of our interest and give us the tools for our research, i.e. the philological and historico-critical access. But beyond this point, Mamlukology has to be open to the large offer in self-reflection which the Cultural Studies have developed in the last 125 years. For them there are no given facts but only socially relevant imaginations, the formation and selection of topics within a specific context. Mamlukology as Cultural Studies always has a hermeneutical dimension by asking what meaning human beings give and have given to things.<sup>18</sup> In the past Mamlukologists used to pass those questions on to others all too willingly. The nucleus of the debates within the Cultural Studies is the understanding that theory and practical work cannot be separated from each other without paying high price for it: those who produce academic knowledge are not able to reflect self-critically on its status. Mamlukology as Cultural Studies is no recipe for an automatic generation of methodically proven knowledge in the latest fashion style. Method and result – and

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<sup>17</sup> Here, I follow Dülmen 2001, 43.

<sup>18</sup> This paragraph follows Daniel 2001, 13-15.

this is a central claim of Cultural Studies – are in a circular relation to each other. In this way they are mutually dependent. However different the linguistic games which characterize the current ‘culturalistic’ spectrum may be, all of them – from post structuralism to discourse analysis and contemporary hermeneutics to the linguistic turn – formulate in the respective language a central finding, namely the one of unavoidable circularity of all academic doings: whether you identify fields of subjects or contexts, whether you make causal connections, or whether you use terms or you tell stories – again and again the shape of what “comes out” later on is outlined through explicit and implicit parameters which were involved previously. Fortunately, Mamlukology as Cultural Studies implies an understanding of science which no longer requires the disciplinary rituals of safeguards, limiting, and profiling which seemed to be essential for a long time. Thus, by using a certain method, a certain way of acting, a certain vocabulary, you cannot score higher results on the same reference scale – you can only make them look different. And: you can argue about the results. This does not mean that all results are “equal before God” but you cannot derive their quality and acceptance from a certain methodical way of acting. If for some times some methodical ways of acting and some concepts had a big chance to be accepted this does not mean that the results reached through them are “more sure” but only that during that time there was a consent that results formulated in that way were accepted. Everyone is allowed (and has) to think for himself and let himself get inspired by positions and persons who seem to be convincing in creative and argumentative ways. Argumentation is important but only concerning results not methods. It is about weighing up the strong and weak points of ways of acting and not about hierarchization of “good” and “bad” approaches.

To make a long story short, Mamlukologists who understand themselves as scholars within the Cultural Studies should – to paraphrase Ute Daniel again – accept its three basic creeds which are:

1. Nothing can be understood or explained or described unless you include the meanings, the ways of perception and the sensibilities of the human beings into your understanding, description, and explaining.
2. The scholars accept that they are not excluded from descriptions and explanations which they make but that they are part of them. It is basically about the visualization of their perception of the world and their self-concepts. And
3. Mamlukology as Cultural Studies understands itself as the symbolic form in which the individual and the collective debate their self-awareness within the historical process. It analyzes past epochs regarding how people perceived and interpreted themselves in

those times; which material, mental, and social backgrounds influenced their world-views and their meaningful reflections on the future.<sup>19</sup>

Key terms of Mamlukology as Cultural Studies are, for instance, fact/object/truth – objective/subjective – explain/understand – historicism/relativism – contingency/discontinuity or language/narrativity.<sup>20</sup> Fields of research are history of science, history of terms, history of discourse, history of generations, history of women and gender, history of the mundane, history of alterity, history of mentality, or simply Historical Anthropology, which leads us to the next point.<sup>21</sup>

#### **4. One Possibility: Mamlukology as Historical Anthropology**

Here it also makes sense first of all to think about what could generally be understood by Mamlukology as “Historical Anthropology”. In other words: which epistemological and methodical preconsiderations would have to be internalized by a culture-specifically oriented Mamlukologist if he or she started to deal seriously with questions of Historical Anthropology?

Mamlukology as Historical Anthropology is basically a very wide theoretical concept which bases on approaches offered by historical sciences, philosophy, ethnography and cultural anthropology as well as by literary studies (key words are: history of mentalities, philosophical anthropology, the writing-culture debate or new historicism).<sup>22</sup> We want to analyse self-reflection of human beings in all forms of texts, for example with reference to the other or to non-human beings like animals or Gods. In the centre of the theoretical concept are all those phenomena known as human specifics like its dual division in mind and body, the proportion of urge and desire to establish self-control, the consciousness of mortality or human fantasy, creativity and emotionality. Mamlukology as Historical Anthropology is not based on the abstract of a “human being” but tries to put its analysis in concrete forms and to historicize it

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Daniel 2001, 17-19.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Daniel 2001, 380-466

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Daniel 2001, 297-379.

<sup>22</sup> See for the following thoughts Benthien/Velten 2002, 25. Still valuable introductions are Dressel, G., *Historische Anthropologie. Eine Einführung*. Wien 1996, Dülmen, R. van, *Historische Anthropologie. Entwicklung, Probleme, Aufgaben*. Köln 2000, Maurer, M., *Historische Anthropologie*, in: Maurer, M. (ed.), *Auflösung der Historischen Wissenschaften*. Bd. 7: *Neue Themen und Methoden der Geschichtswissenschaft*. Stuttgart 2003, 294-387, Reinhard, W., *Lebensformen Europas. Eine historische Kulturanthropologie*. München 2004, Tanner, J., *Historische Anthropologie zur Einführung*. Hamburg 2004 and Winterling, A. (ed.): *Historische Anthropologie*. Stuttgart 2006. See also the relatively new journal „Historische Anthropologie“ (<http://www.historische-anthropologie.uzh.ch/index.html>).

that is to situate its subjects in the particular cultural context. It analyses, as Max Weber called it, the human spun cultural web of meanings in the area of conflict of constancy and change, in the course of history or for concrete individual cases.

Even in historical anthropological disciplines Mamlukologists are still far away from real interdisciplinary work in the sense that the approaches and results of the research of others will neither be noticed nor taken into consideration for the own work.<sup>23</sup> However, historical anthropological research is only possible in an interdisciplinary way, as its subject is not limited to one discipline but is situated at the point of intersection to various fields. It is difficult, if not impossible, but maybe not absolutely necessary to distinguish between Historical Anthropology and the History of Mentalities.<sup>24</sup> You might define mentality as a collective, cultural overlapping attitude and world-view which includes heterogeneous concepts and ideas, but also unconscious motives of a complete epoch.<sup>25</sup> Mentalities have to be understood as pre-structured and generally pre-reflexive forms of knowledge of the reality. They are complex pictures of the world, just like the basic meaning of thinking and behaviour. Those effect on the systems of codes and on the aesthetic forms of expression of a culture, because mentalities express themselves through attitude, behaviour and actions as well as through symbolic forms. The History of Mentalities is mainly confined to collective processes of historical changes, long-term shifts of thinking patterns and collective forms of social self-understanding (keyword: *long durée*) as well as to serial processes of historical analyses.

Mamlukology as Historical Anthropology has a focus on the human individual, if only within its social, political or cultural references. In its centre stands the subjective part of historical experience.<sup>26</sup> It means the splitting of the historical view to the realisation and experience of individuals in their special and limited world, and at the same time to the retrospective of the thinking, ways of understandings, samples of meanings and other *attitudes mentalés*, which built the historical and cultural experience of the individual. The particularity of Mamlukology as Historical Anthropology is exactly this contradictory link between splitting and gen-

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<sup>23</sup> For this passage, see Röcke, W., Ordnungen des Wissens: Altere deutsche Literatur, in: Benthien/Velten 2002, 35-55, here 39. Cf. Also Hees, S. von, Historische Anthropologie in der Islamwissenschaft, in: Conermann, S./Hees, S. von (ed.), Islamwissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft – Historische Anthropologie/Mentalitätsgeschichte. Ansätze und Möglichkeiten. Schenefeld 2007, 21-35.

<sup>24</sup> Useful introductions are still Raulff, U. (ed.), Mentalitäten-Geschichte. Berlin 1987 and Dinzlacher, P. (ed.), Europäische Mentalitätsgeschichte. Hauptthemen in Einzeldarstellungen. Stuttgart 1993.

<sup>25</sup> For an excellent definition, see Dinzlacher, P., Zu Theorie und Praxis der Mentalitätsgeschichte, in: Dinzlacher 1993, XV-XXXVII.

<sup>26</sup> In this part, I follow Röcke 2002, 39-42.

eralising of the historic view: on the one hand the interest in the subjective view of the individual to the conditions and limits of his or her world and also to the other side of these frontiers. On the other hand, there is an understanding that this kind of “ideology” is not due to a subjective way of life, but, on the contrary, is only possible in discussion with samples of thinking, ideology and forms of understandings of a certain historical time. Here one follows Kant’s anthropology in a practical way, which focuses on the practically acting individual with its special possibilities of thinking and understanding, but also with its affects, moods and spirits, its imagination, dreams, memorial abilities or follies in the context of its special world. Of course, for the daily work of the Mamlukologist one has to ask for the sources. But one should not be discouraged. We have a huge amount of texts. And especially Mamlukology as Historical Anthropology is interested in each single and individual view of the world. And this is something which is poetically styled, confirmed or questioned in these texts. Therefore, these texts with their poetic singularities are very important for anthropological approaches. Literary, historiographic and even normative texts do not only repeat samples of explanation, “ideologies” or mentalities, but they reflect on them and change them, they accept them or call them into question.

Mamlukology as Historical Anthropology asks for possibilities of understanding and for the mental attitudes of man in his special world.<sup>27</sup> This task is achieved not within a sphere of trans-historical constants but, on the contrary, as a dialogue with contemporaneous attitudes. As a trans-disciplinary science Mamlukology as Historical Anthropology aims at explaining human expressions and ways of life, as well as the relation of man to his material surroundings but also to phenomena like time, space, death or luck. The Mamlukologists with this specialization want the historicization of what, at least since the splitting of science into the humanities and natural history, has been understood as universal: body, feelings, nature. The Mamlukology as Historical Anthropology looks for the origin and evolution of particular concepts, actions, thinking patterns and fields of meanings. The aim is not to interpret a person, a group, a happening, a structure or a proceeding from the outside in a hegemonic way but to understand it from within, i.e. from the perspective of the actor or the actors. The historical anthropology approach does not inquire into the essence or the universal meaning of human being in history but into the changing multiple cultural and social particularities in time. It focuses on the historically grown speciality and eccentricity of human behaviour and excludes a uniform and closed view of men and women. It concentrates all its energies on showing the

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<sup>27</sup> See for these arguments Dülmen 2001, 5-9.

individual's dependence on nature, society and cultural tradition. History is recognized as an act made by man, and man is defined as a being determined by history. That neither means that the historical subject can act autonomously nor that he or she is completely at the mercy of uncontrollable powers. We have to describe this in-between, i.e. the scope of human acting. On the other hand, Mamlukology as Historical Anthropology accepts the multiplicities and contradictions of acting and of the historical process as a whole. This complexity that is due to many circumstances and conditions has to be described within the context of society. The Mamlukologist as a historically oriented anthropologist considers man as a being with inherent possibilities to change. He never reacts in the same way because his acting is always influenced by situations which cannot be determined in advance.

#### **4. Summary and Conclusion**

So, in short, if we Mamlukologists follow the advice from memorandum "The Humanities today" which suggested that the humanities from now on be pursued in an interdisciplinary and trans-departmental way as Cultural Studies based on Historical Anthropology, this means that Mamlukology, too, has to be open to the implied new methods and questions. Having developed from philological roots, the subject has always dealt not only with language – sometimes even linguistics – and normative literature but also with Mamluk history and society. However, this has been done mainly and mostly in a text-hermeneutical way with occasional socio-historical tendencies. The methods used were developed within the subject itself, with many German representatives of the subject declaring the independence, and sometimes even the uniqueness, of the "cultural area" of Islam to be the only *raison d'être* of their scientific discipline. The basic misconception behind this attitude is the assumption that the impact of Islam on the cultures in questions is so strong that it determines them entirely. This is just as misguided as to think that the occidental civilization was determined entirely by Christianity. However, it has been – and still is – a central assumption of some of the eminent scholars in the field – and is even more frequently supposed by the interested public.<sup>28</sup> In reality, we have to distinguish between different subject areas. In those disciplines which have already been affected by the "cultural turn", there is a fundamental paradigm shift going on at the moment. The old, narrow conception of culture – i.e. "culture" as a social dimension next to economy, politics and law – is being replaced by a broad, anthropologically based conception

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Ammann, L., „Islamwissenschaften“, in: Klaus E. Müller (ed.), *Phänomen Kultur: Perspektiven und Aufgaben der Kulturwissenschaften*, Bielefeld 2003, 71-96.

that, as a “finite segment of the meaningless infinity of the world process, a segment on which human beings confer meaning and significance”, as Max Weber said,<sup>29</sup> comprises the whole of all possible objects of research in the field of the humanities. Culture is no longer thought of as an essentialized substance but as the interference, the “in-between” of a whole range of different traditions of meaning. The homogenous and holistic understanding of culture is thus replaced by a conception of the term as denoting a process of exchange and adoption subjected to a wide variety of influences including group strategies and hierarchies of power. Against the backdrop of this model, the task of research in Mamlukology is no longer detecting cultural characteristics and their supposedly autonomous development but reconstructing processes of cultural transfer between the various societies and pointing out their commonly shared histories.

Mamlukology as Cultural Studies is not aimed at removing the borders that separate the various scientific disciplines but rather at crossing them in the interest of mutual enlightenment. Mamlukology with a cultural objective takes the claim of its subjects – to be a discipline in its own right – seriously, while at the same time quite consciously embracing the interdisciplinary stimulative potential and the plurality of possibilities for new insights that are offered by contemporary approaches and discussions within the field of Cultural Studies.<sup>30</sup> The restructuring of various individual branches of the humanities into an interdisciplinary association of Cultural Studies takes place against the backdrop of the general “anthropologization” of knowledge which is currently observable. Historical Anthropology, however, should be more than just history with an anthropological coloration, historical research applied to anthropological issues like family, relationship, birth, death, rituals, the history of every-day ways of life and mentalities. In the end, this is about calling into question a holistic and homogenous conception of culture and cultural identity, and even criticizing the universal assumption and claims of perception explicitly or implicitly contained in many of our most central ideas and concepts. Mamlukology as Historical Anthropology should contribute to extending and deepening the “anthropological turn” in the humanities through historical contextualisation and a critical “historicization”. It should help to draw attention to cultural multifaceted-ness and complexity by focusing on the impurity and hybridity of a culture, the multitude of cultural overlaps, syncretism, border crossings, negotiations and conflicts as constitu-

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. for this quotation and the following paragraph Lackner, M./Werner, M. (ed.), *Der cultural turn in der Humanwissenschaft. Area Studies im Auf- oder Abwind des Kulturalismus?* Bad Homburg 1999, 23-27.

<sup>30</sup> For these convincing arguments, see Medick, H., *Qua vadis Historische Anthropologie?*, in: *Historische Anthropologie* 9 (2001), 78-92.



tive moments of historical process. Mamlukology as Historical Anthropology traces the question of the meaning of culture back to the question of the constitution and transformation of economy and power, rejecting a culturalistic reduction to question of mentality, production of meaning and culturally determined forms of expression and ways of acting in history. In several respects, it has to confront an “after-the-fact” situation: Firstly and most importantly, this applies to its particular concern with reconstructing human actions of the past, where it seeks to acknowledge and expose the elements of foreignness and the differences of past realities. These reconstructivist efforts take place in a post-positivistic, post-structuralist, post-colonial atmosphere. In this situation, the starting point for every effort towards historical reconstructions has to be the acknowledgement of the specifically culturally, linguistically and historically determined character of historical insight. It is this acknowledgement which is so particular about the so-called “cultural-turn” in the humanities over the last 25 years. After the *cultural* and the *anthropological turn*, Mamlukology, like any other discipline – whether their representatives like or not –, cannot turn back any more to the old holistic assumptions about the functioning of separate social, cultural, legal and political dimensions in history.

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