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From the Heavens to the Nile and from Creation to al-Naṣir Muḥammad: Universal Historiography and Literary Scale in the works of Ibn al-Dawādārī

Abstract

In the early eighth/fourteenth century the scope and scale of historiographic projects in Syro-Egypt shifted from an earlier focus on biographical monographs towards expansive chronicles, often of universal scope. This article studies the nine-volume universal chronicle *Kanz al-durar wa-jāmiʿ al-ghurar* and the single-volume but similarly universal chronicle *Durar al-tījān wa-ghurar tawārīkh al-azmān*, both composed by the Egyptian litterateur Ibn al-Dawādārī (d. after 736/1335). The chronicles are analysed for their use of scalar strategies in managing large amounts of historical information. In their literary and historical presentations, the texts appeal to a celestial scale and a localised Egyptian perspective, both of which are repeatedly connected to praise of the sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (third reign 709/1310–741/1341). This article argues for a holistic understanding of such chronicles by considering their structural organisation, the holograph manuscripts in which the texts survive, and a close reading of their introductions alongside multiple panegyric sections across the works. The shift in scale in historiographical production is linked to the intellectual environment of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's court in the decades following his return to power in 709/1310.[1]

Keywords

Universal history, Ibn al-Dawādārī, Late Medieval Egypt, Classical Arabic Literature, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad.

In the year 709/1309–10, when he was about thirty years old, the Egyptian litterateur Abū Bakr b. ʿAbdallāh b. Aybak al-Dawādārī (d. after 735/1335) decided to compile a great chronicle. In that same year the sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad retook the throne of the Cairo sultanate, starting a long and powerful third reign which would last un-

2. In this essay I follow a recent trend to avoid designating this sultanate with the anachronistic misnomer 'Mamluk', despite widespread scholarly usage of this designation. Like most other contemporaries Ibn al-Dawādārī designated this polity as "the Turkish dynasty" (*al-Dawla al-Turkiyya* or *Dawlat al-Atrāk*), which is however undesirable for modern use given the existence of multiple other historical states ruled by Turkic elites. For the rationale behind avoiding the Mamluk designation in modern research and for using 'Cairo sultanate' instead, see Van Steenbergen, "Revisiting."

3. According to Ibn al-Dawādārī's own reckoning, he was born on the 6th of Ṣafar 688/1st of March 1289. Scholars have generally assumed he died sometime after 735/1335, the point where his chronicle ends (its final volume's colophon is dated to the year 736/September 1335–August 1336). P.M. Holt suggested that he must have lived until 740/1340 based on his usage of certain official titles (Holt). Radtke even argues that *Kanz al-durar* was only finished by 741/1341, when its first volume was added to an original eight-volume draft ("Einleitung" 6). The *dawādār,* "holder of the inkwell," was a military office charged with overseeing the chancery. Some scholars, including some of the text's editors, have referred to the author as Ibn Aybak al-Dawādārī but this appears undesirable to me as it flattens the layers of generational authority embedded in his name: our author's father was called ʿAbdallāh and it was he who served the *dawādār* Balābān al-Rūmī, while his father was in turn named Aybak.

4 For extensive overviews of the author's life and works, see Haarmann, *Quellenstudien* 61–84 and Haarmann, "Einleitung." A more technical discussion of his working method in Radtke, "Einleitung." For an update on the state of research two decades later, see Graf 8–11. For a brief overview in English, see Li Guo, "Ibn al-Dawādārī."

5 For an up-to-date discussion of these historians, which have been denoted as an 'Egyptian school' and a 'Syrian school' see Van Steenbergen, "Introduction."

til 741/1341.[2] It would take Ibn al-Dawādārī—"son of the one who served the *dawādār*", as he is most commonly known—almost as long as that reign to bring his work to completion: some time in 735/1335 or 736/1336 he put the finishing touches on this great history, a nine-volume universal chronicle which he entitled *Kanz al-durar wa-jāmiʿ al-ghurar* ("The Treasury of Pearls and Compilation of Wonders").[3] In the meantime he had also finished a one-volume chronicle with a similar historical scope, which he named *Durar al-tījān wa-ghurar tawārīkh al-azmān* ("The Crowning Pearls and the Marvels of the Histories of Bygone Times"). It shares much textual material with *Kanz al-durar*, but covers history much more schematically. Although he had earlier put together at least two literary compilations, a biography of his *shaykh*, and another likely hagiographical work of which he only provides the name,[4] his chronicles appear as the culmination of a life's work pursuing the ideals of *adab*, the expansive Arabic term designating both literature and ideals of refined comportment. The chronicles not only provide a distillation of history which, though based extensively on older sources is still frequently original, they are also brimming with literary elements: frequent citation of poetry, extensive sections in rhymed prose (*sajʿ*), as well as structural choices that indicate a creative rather than a practical vision of historical scope.

Ibn al-Dawādārī, who seems to have served in various mid-ranking state functions for much of his life and mingled with members of the ruling and cultural elites of his day, was not alone in compiling works of substantial size and extensive scope in early eighth/fourteenth century Egypt and Syria. His chronicles are just two among several large historical works produced in the space of less than half a century. At least three Egyptian historians composed large-scale chronicles contemporary to him, while a group of Syrian historians also compiled multi-volume obituary chronicles—consisting of yearly annalistic reports followed by obituaries devoted to prominent people who had passed away in a given year—mostly as continuations of earlier chronicles.[5] By contrast, only a few decades earlier the dominant historical genre produced in Egypt had been that of the regnal biography (*sīra*, pl. *siyar*) devoted to a single ruler and typically composed by a chancery official (Van Den Bossche, *Literary Spectacles*). While such *sīra* texts would continue to be written—the final volume of *Kanz al-durar,* devoted to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's second and third reigns, is notably designated as a *sīra* by Ibn al-Dawādārī (see Table 1 below)—it is clear that by the early eighth/fourteenth

century historiographical projects had undergone an important shift both in scope and in scale: from the monograph devoted to a single life and/or reign to the multi-volume chronicle devoted to very long periods of time. Managing scale became a primary concern in such large texts and historians used multiple organisational and compilatory strategies to create coherent works.

In the present essay, I study Ibn al-Dawādārī's two chronicles as representative of this shift in historiographic episteme and methodology of the early eighth/fourteenth century. I argue that his works were part of a small but meaningful shift in 'regime of historicity' (Hartog, *Régimes*), similar to other such moments which have been identified in Islamic history (Borrut 255; Şen 54–55). This, I argue, can be linked to new literary and scientific ideals cultivated in the Cairo sultanate's courtly circles. While the early eighth/fourteenth century has often been remarked as a moment where an 'encyclopaedic' approach became widespread, the implications of this approach for historiography has not received as much attention. In fact, the most famous such encyclopaedic text, al-Nuwayrī's *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab* ("The Ultimate Ambition in the Arts of Erudtion"), itself consists for the most part of a universal chronicle. While al-Nuwayrī's *Nihāyat al-arab* has recently been studied for its management and organisation of large amounts of historical and other information by Elias Muhanna (29–55), texts that have a more limited focus on historical materials have not received the same attention. Ibn al-Dawādārī's chronicles are interesting use cases for such a study, because they adhere to common traits found in other works while also showcasing several unique, even unusual features which make them particularly interesting to approach from a literary perspective.

Ibn al-Dawādārī's main chronicle *Kanz al-durar* has long been known to scholars and a full Arabic edition of the text has been available since 1994—the earliest published volume was volume nine, edited already in 1960 by H.R. Roemer (see Table 1 for an overview of the respective titles and editors). A full edition of *Durar al-tījān* has not been published, although Gunhild Graf published a partial edition of the unique information it contains along with a German translation, omitting those sections where it overlaps verbatim with *Kanz al-durar* (Graf 122–238 (German translation), 1–105 (Arabic edition—Arabic pagination)). In part because most of the editors who prepared the edition of *Kanz al-durar* took pains to provide extensive editorial introductions zooming in especially on the author's working method and citation of sources it is one of the most exten-

sively studied chronicles of the period. While many of these foundational studies have also highlighted Ibn al-Dawādārī's self-fashioning as an *adīb* (for example Haarmann, "Auflösung" 169), they have typically disparaged his literary credentials and approached his chronicle as one where reliable historical information needs to be filtered out from the literary embellishment. By contrast, in the present article I take this literary self-fashioning seriously and argue that the text's scope and organisation must be understood as participating in practices of *adab*. This logic has major repercussions for the historiographical discourse of the text and for the larger historiographical episteme in which he participated.

The essay starts with a conceptual section dealing with questions of scale, universal historiography, and the limits of comparative literature more generally. In a second and third section I turn to a "panoramic study" (Muhanna 29) of *Kanz al-durar* and *Durar al-tījān*, with special attention to the management of scale. Some recurrent textual features in the nine volumes of *Kanz al-durar* and the single volume of *Durar al-tījān* invite analysis in terms of the application of what Zayde Antrim has called "scalar strategies" (Antrim 33). I study how this author grappled with the size of the past and envisaged a great textual architecture to accommodate the events of history and their relationship to the present. Starting with the largest possible scale, I start with the universe and Ibn al-Dawādārī's employment of a celestial framework to give literary meaning to his organisation of the past. I then zoom in on the centrality of Egypt and especially the Nile which takes up a central space in his annalistic organisation. Both natural phenomena are used not only to organise the historical narration but also to centre the person of the reigning sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad in numerous panegyrical sections. With this analysis in mind, I question the common perception of these texts as 'popular chronicles' in a fourth section. I argue instead that their primary, and for the most part only, audience should be situated within the courtly orbit of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. I do this especially by discussing the manuscript copies of the text. I conclude on a hypothesis about why historiography in this period underwent this epistemic shift, arguing that this can be related to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's establishment of absolute but notably stable rule in Egypt in his third reign and the flourishing of an encyclopaedically-minded intellectual atmosphere at his court.

Conceptual issues: how do you say 'universal history' in Arabic?

Scholars have generally not considered the eighth/fourteenth century production of universal histories particularly noteworthy. The chronicles have received ample scholarly attention, but predominantly as primary sources for their own times or because they preserve material from older, now lost texts through citation. Elsewhere they are considered to be derivative of earlier sources.[6] Universal history appears indeed as a recognisable phenomenon in Islamic history: both the designation of universal history and its cognate world history—especially in the German *Weltgeschichte* tradition—have been widely used in the evaluation of the Islamic historical tradition (e.g. Radtke, *Weltgeschichte*; Inglebert 473–511).[7] In his classic study of historiography in the Islamic world, Franz Rosenthal observed that by the start of the tenth century three main types of universal histories had emerged, represented respectively by al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 284/897), al-Masʿūdī (d. 286/896) and al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), although only the latter two had any real influence on later historians. Al-Ṭabarī's grand annalistic chronicle informed by the methods of *ḥadīth* criticism turned out to be especially formative and multiple later works were directly or indirectly based on it. Rosenthal did not think highly of most of these later chronicles. For example, he disparaged the Baghdadi traditionist-historian Ibn al-Jawzī's (d. 597/1201) *Muntaẓam* by stating that it "reached the lowest level to which Muslim historiography, in its main representatives, ever sank" (Rosenthal 143). Ibn al-Athīr's (d. 630/1233) *al-Kāmil fī al-taʾrīkh* ("The Complete History") and Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī's (d. 654/1256) *Mirʾāt al-zamān fī tawārīkh al-aʿyān* ("The Mirror of Time: the Histories of the Notables"), both of which provided much of the source material for the eighth/fourteenth century universal histories, received a more positive evaluation but were still seen as late bloomers in a period of decadence (Rosenthal 146–47). Rosenthal did not mention the early eighth/fourteenth century universal histories at all. In his view these works were mere continuations of annals up to the author's own time, at best providing some minor different emphases.

While more recent studies have re-assessed the value of much post-classical historiography, they have not fundamentally altered Rosenthal's classification of historiographical types and have accepted the existence of universal histories more or less as a given.[8] Tarif Khalidi did argue that there was an important shift in the scale of

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6. The great chronicle of Ibn al-Dawādārī's contemporary Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-fikra fī taʾrīkh al-hijra,* for example remains largely unedited because it has been perceived to be derivative. Only its final (likely eleventh) volume has been published, despite the preservation of manuscripts of four prior volumes (Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat*).

7. Ibn al-Dawādārī's chronicle was central to Radtke's analysis, likely because Radtke wrote this study after finishing his edition of the first volume of *Kanz al-durar* (which was published in 1982, see Table 1 below).

8. Chase Robinson did not actually discuss a category of universal history as such but highlighted how in the third/ninth century large synthetic works adopted a 'universalist mode', centring the Prophet Muḥammad's message in a grand history of humanity's salvation (Robinson 42).

works of history in the late medieval period, where he saw a historiographical episteme of *siyāsa,* that is, state management or "politics" (*siyāsa*'s semantic range in modern Arabic) operating. This episteme followed on three epistemes of *ḥadīth, adab* and *ḥikma* operating consecutively, if often also overlapping, in earlier periods. By the fifth/eleventh century, however, these earlier epistemes had lost sway, and historical texts became marked by an especially pronounced entangling of political elites and historians, who often held some kind of state-appointed function or strived to attain one. This in turn resulted in a pronounced focus on state affairs in large historical works which he designated "imperial bureaucratic chronicles" (Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought* 182–231). While such works are marked most by their efforts to compile great amounts of information out of a political desire to know and control, implicit in Khalidi's assessment is also a confirmation of the idea that these works are predominantly of interest for the view they provide on their own times.

Judith Pfeiffer recently underlined some of the problematic assumptions underlying modern study of the Islamicate historical tradition, especially as it related to the genre of universal history (Pfeiffer). As it turns out, no explicit term for universal history or world history in classical Arabic, Persian, or other languages was ever used in pre-modern Islamicate contexts. While she acknowledged that a modern understanding of the term can usefully be applied to many premodern chronicles, she highlighted the example of Rashīd al-Dīn's (d. 718/1318) chronicle *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh*, written in Persian and Arabic in the orbit of the Mongol Ilkhānid court. This was not so much a universal chronicle but a pluralist one: it does not claim a universal experience of history for all of mankind but recognises the primacy of different people's own reckoning of time and history without necessarily introducing a hierarchy in this, even if the Islamic perception of the past is considered the only theologically correct one. Rashīd al-Dīn even explicitly justified his pluralist approach as historiographically superior. By contrast, the great classic of Islamic historiography, al-Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, does employ a universal scope and outlook, evident for example from the painstaking efforts of the author to harmonise Persian and Biblical history so as to get to a teleological narrative of humankind's striving for Islam, even as he allows for multiple narratives of events to stand next to each other (Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought* 78–79; Shoshan x). Pfeiffer recognises that Rashīd al-Dīn's historiographical outlook was unique and that al-Ṭabarī's approach is likely more applicable to

most premodern Islamic histories, but her thorough analysis of Rashīd al-Dīn's stated intent and methods highlights how we should be careful to apply the 'universal history' tag to large-scale historical texts without critically assessing the scope and approach of these texts.

Pfeiffer's discussion of the importance of understanding a text on its own terms before attempting categorisation or comparative study may seem self-evident, but we must not underestimate the gravitational pull of established paradigms, especially in contexts where non-European literatures are studied predominantly from a European or North American lens. Much as Adam Talib asked the rhetorical question "How do you say epigram in Arabic?" Pfeiffer highlights how we could also ask "how do you say universal history in Arabic?"[9] At the conference in Rome where I first presented the paper out of which this essay grew, I also touched on this problem. Inspired by an entirely unrelated conversation with a biologist friend prior to traveling to Rome, I brought in the concept of 'convergent evolution' which "refers to the evolution in different lineages of structures that are similar or 'analogous', but that cannot be attributed to the existence of a common ancestor." (Gabora) These evolutionary developments are adaptive, responses to similar environmental circumstances rather than innate characteristics. This digression into evolutionary biology struck a chord with several members of the audience even if some did rightly point out that there was, in fact, a common ancestor to Arabic and European universal histories in the form of the Judeo-Christian scriptural heritage. Indeed, the Qurʾān explicitly acknowledges that heritage, even if it argues that the original divine message contained in the Torah and the Bible had been severely distorted. One could retort that the common ancestor of European and Arabic historiographies is a rather distant ancestor: it should be situated in late antiquity at best, or even further back in time to the compilation of Judeo-Christian scripture. As has also been much noted, despite the sheer amount of works translated from Greek into Arabic during the translation movement, this included few works of history (Gutas).[10] Furthermore, while the Biblical narrative inheritance is certainly important for the development of Arabic historiography, Tayeb El-Hibri has shown how contemporary events defined how early historical texts were written and how accounts of the deep and the recent past were often narrated in such a way as to comment on contemporary events through literary allusions and powerful narrative patterns. Rather than a blueprint, the

9. Adam Talib theorised the *maqṭūʿ* (pl. *maqāṭīʿ*) typically denoted as "epigram" in English, a term that does not quite fit its functions in the Arabic poetical tradition, although he also notes how this is due in part because the genre was undertheorised in Arabic (Talib). See also a more forceful statement of the incommensurability of European and Arabic literary categories in Rashwan and an insightful analytical discussion of the limits of using established European categories for the study of Arabic literature in Weaver.

10. The case is different for Middle Persian historiography, much of which does appear to have been translated into Arabic, although it tends to survive only indirectly (Hämeen-Anttila, *Khwadāynāmag*).

11. Compare Wai-chee Dimock's call to abandon rigid genre constraints and rather think of genres along the lines of 'family resemblance', which I believe is not dissimilar to my proposition here.

12. It is dwarfed by his contemporary al-Nuwayrī's *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*, which was published in thirthy-three volumes, twenty of which consist essentially of a universal chronicle. Another contemporary work which may have influenced Ibn al-Dawādārī and al-Nuwayrī is also larger: Baybars al-Manṣūrī's *Zubdat al-fikra fī taʾrīkh al-hijra*, an eleven-volume chronicle of Islamic history, which may have been finished around 709/1310.

13. The oldest manuscript copy of *Durar al-tījān* (Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Damad Ibrahim 913), for its part contains 239 folios (twenty-one lines of text per page).

14. The breakdown of folios per volume is as follows: Vol. 1: 171 folios; Vol. 2: 178 folios; Vol. 3: 166 folios; Vol. 4: 167 folios; Vol. 5: 178 folios; Vol. 6: 165 folios; Vol. 7: 167 folios; Vol. 8: 177 folios; Vol. 9: 171 folios.

15. Word count from the OpenITI digital text version. The OpenITI (Open Islamicate Texts Initiative) is a large academically curated corpus of predominantly premodern and currently predominantly Arabic Islamicate texts. The Arabic part of the corpus is managed by the KITAB project which studies text reuse across this corpus. For more information on the corpus and on the KITAB project, see online. A high-quality digital version of Ibn al-Dawādārī's *Kanz al-durar* has been part of the corpus since September 2020. It was originally included in the Shamela library. The word count given here is in fact a token count. A token is a string of letters separated from other tokens by a space. Due to the agglutinating nature of the Arabic language many tokens in fact contain two or more words. For example, the commonly used phrase *wa-fī-hā* (in most cases denoting "and in this [year]") contains three grammatical 'words' but is counted as a single token. In *Kanz al-durar* this phrase is used 1480 times.

Biblical heritage provided narrative inspiration for how both the distant and the recent past could be written (El-Hibri).

The matter of convergent evolution and its applicability to literary comparison must remain tentative here. At stake is Pfeiffer and other scholars' concern about imposing conceptualisations on phenomena that are not always well understood by themselves. It is a call to understand works on their own terms, to take seriously their programmatic assertions. It reminds us of the necessity to take a step back and identify those features that define a text or a set of texts before making a comparison based on a seemingly good terminological fit such as 'universal history' or 'epigram.' The recognisable features of such textual phenomena across different languages and cultures may be aspects that betray common reactions to common challenges rather than common ancestors, and we should be careful to identify contextual explanations for convergences and divergences.[11] It is this perspective I find useful for studying works such as Ibn al-Dawādārī's chronicles. In the following section I specifically look closer at several programmatic assertions made by the author in the multiple introductions and authorial asides found throughout his works. Most of my discussion will concern *Kanz al-durar*, but I will frequently bring in *Durar al-tījān* as well to highlight continuities and divergences between the two texts.

Translating history at scale 1: the heavens

A first aspect to consider when thinking about the scale of Ibn al-Dawādārī's works is the sheer size of *Kanz al-durar*—and *mutatis mutandis* the relative smallness of *Durar al-tījān*. While by no means the largest chronicle produced in Egypt at this time, *Kanz al-durar* is still an extensive work.[12] Its nine manuscript volumes add up to 1540 folios (21 lines of text per page),[13] while its nine printed volumes contain 3745 pages of Arabic text.[14] The digital version of this edition included in the OpenITI corpus contains some 700 000 words.[15] Due to the scale at which many Islamic authors operated—made possible in part by the availability of relatively affordable paper (Bloom 79–81; Rustow 111–37)—many works of history and literature spanned multiple volumes. What is remarkable is that Ibn al-Dawādārī did not just divide his work into volumes for the sake of manageability, he translated this necessity into an elaborate organisational and chronological division. Each of the nine volumes of the

chronicle was accorded an individual title that reimagined the 'treasury of pearls' of the work's general title as nine individual pearls with particular attributes (see Table 1 for an overview). He also provided each volume with a separate laudatory introduction, some of which run for nearly a dozen pages in the printed edition.[16] He was aware that this titular and topical nesting was unique in Islamic historiography. While making such claims about uniqueness is certainly not unusual in the Islamic written tradition, it is still worthwhile to examine how this topos and justified his organisational logic in the introduction to the first volume:[17]

> Then the slave (al-ʿabd, i.e. Ibn al-Dawādārī) came up with a way to put together [the work]—a proposition which, I believe, has not been proposed by anyone before, a claim of which the soundness will be evident to anyone considering it—namely, I assigned each of its nine volumes to a dynasty (dawla) among the dynasties […] and I [then] appointed its volumes to these nine heavenly spheres (aflāk), because of the grandeur of their destiny, for fate endowed them with benefit (Kanz, vol. 1: 10).

We know that Ibn al-Dawādārī first drafted his chronicle in eight volumes, and that he then decided to add the first cosmographic volume—when he did so he must have reorganised and rewritten some of his material accordingly, although some cross-references persist in the second volume calling it the first volume (Radtke, "Einleitung" 5). While in adding this first volume he was following a time-honoured example of cosmographical introductions to universal histories—he also notably copied the bulk of this volume nearly verbatim from the first volume of Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī's Mirʾāt al-zamān (Radtke, "Einleitung" 8–9)—it also allowed him to align the nine volumes with the nine heavenly spheres, and this does appear as unique in the Islamic historiographical tradition. In the lines directly following the above excerpt Ibn al-Dawādārī provides an overview of both titles: first the celestial title, and then the durr-title. In the manuscript the copyist notably took care to fit each title on a single line, even though this required him to extend the lines into the margin (Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Ayasofya 3073, 6a). The celestial titles cover seven heavenly bodies (the moon, the sun and five planets) and the two outer spheres of the Zodiacal stations and the starless heaven. In Table 1 below these titles are rendered in transcription and in translation (compare also Munajjid 6-7 for translations of conflated versions of these titles into French).

16. The length of these introductions varies considerably. The first volume and the final two volumes have relatively long introductions, while the middle volumes dealing with earlier Islamic history all have rather short introductions of about two pages each. The long introductions of vols. 1, 8 and 9 all include extensive panegyrics to the reigning sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, some of which will be dealt with below. The page ranges for the introductions are as follows: Kanz, vol. 1: 2–12; vol. 2: 5–8; vol. 3: 2–4; vol. 4: 2–3; vol. 5: 2–4; vol. 6: 2–3; vol. 7: 3–4; vol. 8: 2–11; vol. 9: 2–6.

17. There are earlier books that were divided into "books" in following the Graeco-Roman tradition, some of which would also circulate independently from the larger work they were initially part of. However, these do not exhibit the same extent of volume-division evident from Kanz al-durar.

Vol.	Pearl title	Celestial title	Manuscript call number	Publication
1	*al-Durr al-ʿulyā fī akhbār badʾ al-dunyā* = The Most Exalted Pearl: Reports About the Creation of the World	*al-Jawhar al-anfas min qismat al-falak al-Aṭlas* = The Most Precious Jewel as Foreordained by the Sphere of the Starless Heaven	Istanbul, Süleymaniye kütüphanesi, Ayasofya 3073	*Kosmographie*, ed. Bernd Radtke (1982)
2	*al-Durrat al-yatīma fī akhbār al-umam al-qadīma* = The Unequaled Pearl: Reports About the Ancient Nations	*ʿIllat al-wārid min qismat falak ʿUṭārid* = The Cause of Arriving as Foreordained by the Sphere of Mercury	Istanbul, Süleymaniye kütüphanesi Ayasofya 3074	*Der Bericht über die alten Völker*, ed. Edward Badeen (1994)
3	*al-Durr al-thamīn fī akhbār sayyid al-mursalīn wa-l-khulafāʾ al-rāshidīn* = The Precious Pearl: Reports About the Prophet and the Righly Guided Caliphs	*al-Sharaf biʾl-qudra min qismat falak al-Zuhara* = Nobility through Omnipotence as Foreordained by the Sphere of Venus	Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, Ahmet III 2932/3	*Der Bericht über den Propheten und die Rechtgeleiteten Chalifen*, ed. Muḥammad as-Saʿīd Jamāl ad-Dīn (1981)
4	*al-Durrat al-sāmiyya fī akhbār al-dawla al-Umawiyya* = The lofty pearl: Reports about the Umayyad Dynasty	*Bughyat al-nafs min qismat falak al-shams* = The Soul's Desire, as Foreordained by the Sphere of the Sun	Istanbul, Süleymaniye kütüphanesi Ayasofya 3075	*Der Bericht über die Umayyadan*, ed. Gunhild Graf & Erika Glassen (1994)
5	*al-Durrat al-saniyya fī akhbār al-dawla al-ʿAbbāsiyya* = The sublime pearl: reports about the Abbasid Dynasty	*al-Ladhī kull samʿ la-hu nasīkh min qismat falak al-Marrīkh* = The One Transforming each Listener, as Foreordained by the Sphere of Mars	Istanbul, Süleymaniye kütüphanesiAyasofya 3076	*Der Bericht über die ʿAbbasiden*, ed. Dorothea Krawulsky (1992)
6	*al-Durrat al-muḍiyya fī akhbār al-dawla al-Fāṭimiyya* = The pearl of deeper insight: Reports about the Fatimid Dynasty	*al-Fāʾiq ṣaḥāḥ al-jawharī min qismat falak al-Mushtarī* = Superiority is the Jeweller's Soundness, as Foreordained by the Sphere of Jupiter	Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, Ahmet III 2932/6	*Der Bericht über die Fatimiden*, ed. Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn al-Munajjid (1961)
7	*al-Durr al-maṭlūb fī akhbār mulūk Banī Ayyūb* = The desirable pearl: Reports about the Ayyubid Kings	*Shuhd al-nuḥl min qismat falak Zuḥal* = The Bees' Honeycomb, as Foreordained by the Sphere of Saturn	Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, Ahmet III 2932/7	*Der Bericht über die Ayyubiden*, ed. Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ ʿĀshūr (1972)
8	*al-Durrat al-zakiyya fī akhbār al-dawla al-Turkiyya* = The pure pearl: Reports about the Turkish Dynasty	*Zahr al-murūj min qismat falak al-Burūj* = The Meadows' Flowering, as foreordained by the Sphere of the Zodiacal Stations	Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, Ahmet III 2932/8	*Der Bericht über die frühen Mamluken*, ed. Ulrich Haarmann (1971)

Vol.	Pearl title	Celestial title	Manuscript call number	Publication
9	*al-Durr al-fākhir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir* = The outstanding pearl: The Biography of al-Malik al-Nāṣir	*al-Jawhar al-anfas min qismat al-falak al-Aṭlas* = The Most Precious Jewel as Foreordained by the Sphere of the Starless Heaven	Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, Ahmet III 2932/9	*Der Bericht über den Sultan al-Malik an-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalaʾun*, ed. Hans Robert Roemer (1960)

Table 1: *Kanz al-Durar* volume titles, manuscript call numbers and publication history.

18. Also note the usage of the terms *murūj* ("meadows") and *jawhar* ("gem") in the celestial titles for volumes seven and eight. Both terms appear also in the title of al-Masʿūdī's well-known and in many ways foundational work *Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhar* ("The Meadows of Gold and the Mines of Gems"). Throuhgout *Kanz al-durar* this work is cited explicitly five times and its author twenty-three times. Many of these author references relate to another work *Akhbār al-zamān* ("The Reports of Time"), also attributed to al-Masʿūdī. However, the authenticity of the published version of this work has been questioned, as it was published based on a messy manuscript transmission (Khalidi, "Masʿūdī's Lost Works").

The alignment of these two sets of titles is quite ingenious and opens up a world of associations which Ibn al-Dawādārī exploits throughout the chronicle. The pearl-titles participate in a discourse commonly invoked in rhyming book titles in which the litterateur compiles material like pearls on a string, or in this case into a treasury, a jewel-box perhaps (compare Ambros 22 and 29). This is a static view of history, where every age equals a pearl. But the nesting of these pearls alongside the celestial sequence adds notions of movement and of astrological destiny. This is also implied by some other word choices, as we shall see.[18] It should be noted, however, that while the pearl-titles are found prominently on each individual volume (see Figure 3 below, the bottom cartouche contains the volume's individual *durr*-title), the second celestial titles are not repeated in the ensuing volumes. Nevertheless, the general title of the work, *Kanz al-durar wa-jāmiʿ al-ghurar*, also participates in this discourse, as *ghurar*, which I have translated as "wonders" can also be translated as "new moons" and thus invokes the inexorable and cyclical progress of time observable in the movement of the closest of the spheres (Munajjid 11). The titular nesting also embed itselfs within themes found throughout the chronicle, especially in the numerous panegyric sections addressed to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. Among the literary metaphors repeatedly invoked in such sections is Ibn al-Dawādārī's cosmological, even astrological alignment of history to the celestial spheres. Some of these same heavenly spheres are for example invoked in the long praise section found in the introduction to volume eight:

> And among what [al-Nāṣir Muḥammad] is worthy of—may God sustain his kingship until the end of ages!—are eloquent prose pieces, such as the [following] utterance of the slave—though he is known to be inadequate and short of tongue—the originator and author, gatherer and composer, of what is brought together in this history of the entirety of time. [And

this is an utterance devoted to] the merits of our lord the sultan—may God aid his helpers and increase his assistants—who is a king aided by divine providence, Saturn-like[19] in elevation, Jupiter-like in judgment, Mars-like with the sword, Sun-like in kingship, Venus-like in good fortune, Mercury-like in movement, Moon-like of face, breath-like of kindness, garden-like in honour, mountain of the Earth, the pole of time (*Kanz*, vol. 8: 4).

This praise continues for several paragraphs in which Ibn al-Dawādārī systematically compares the sultan's virtues with virtues of bygone prophets and rulers, listed in chronological order. It is also notably preceded by the citation of nine poems by poets of nine different generations from the pre-Islamic *jāhiliyya* up to a poet of the seventh/thirteenth century (*Kanz*, vol. 8: 3–4). It is as if, before resuming the annalistic account of events in this penultimate volume, the author wanted to show how history folded back on itself, with the present reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad taking inspiration from and manifesting all the ideal features of previous times, while also harnessing astrological qualities commonly associated with the heavenly bodies (see also *Kanz*, vol. 8: 11 for more literary invocation of celestial bodies).

Like this historical mirroring in panegyric, the celestial titles inevitably but still meaningfully trace a linear ascent from the earthly sphere via the planets up the heavenly spheres of al-Burūj and al-Aṭlas, which are aligned with the 'Turkish dynasty' and with al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, respectively. This celestial order is essentially the Ptolemaic system, which was widely acknowledged, if also vigorously debated in the Arab world (Anchassi). One can also find it in the influential cosmography of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) who followed the Ptolemaic organisation of the planets with the sun in the middle (three heavenly bodies preceding it, three following it) before reaching the outer spheres. In Ibn ʿArabī's vision the outer spheres are followed by two more spheres, those of the Divine Pedestal (*al-kursī*) and of the Divine Throne of God (*al-ʿarsh*) (Burckhardt 12–13; compare Anchassi).[20] If we accept that Ibn al-Dawādārī was familiar with such ideas, if not necessarily directly influenced by Ibn ʿArabī—though note the use of the phrase "the pole of time" (*quṭb al-zamān*) to refer to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad at the end of the above quoted extract, reminiscent of Ibn ʿArabī's idea of the spiritual pole[21]—we can see how he set up a system here in which the reader can by reading these nine volumes move ever upwards through the spheres and reach the outer edges of historical knowledge, just

19. Note that here Ibn al-Dawādārī uses *Kaywān* for Saturn, whereas in the above-cited celestial titles he used the name *Zuḥal*. He also uses *Kaywān* in the praise section from volume 9 cited below.

20. It should be noted that Ibn al-Dawādārī does not mention these two outer spheres when describing them in his cosmographic volume. *Kanz*, vol. 1: 34.

21. Though also note that the only time he appears to refer to Ibn ʿArabī directly is in the context of a famous controversy involving Ibn Taymiyya's opinion on the Sufi author (*Kanz*, vol. 9: 143).

up to the threshold of the divine spheres. Note also how each of the celestial titles invokes the concept of *qisma*, which can mean destiny, fate, but also apportionment, thus establishing an association with the division of the work into nine parts. The idea of fate is also explicitly aligned with the progress of history in the passage introducing the titles cited above (*Kanz*, vol. 1: 10). In the titles it appears almost consistently as the connecting phrase *min qismat falak* (and once as *min qismat al-falak*), which I have translated as "as foreordained by the sphere". *Falak* in fact means both "sphere" and "orbit", so implicit in these titles is the astrological notion that through reading the orbit and especially the alignment of the heavenly bodies one may gain knowledge of one's, or indeed, a particular dynasty's allotment (compare *Şen 51–54*). Ibn al-Dawādārī implies that through his compilation of the wonders of the past one may gain such knowledge too.

The astrological implications of such a panegyric alignment are made clear in the introduction to the ninth volume of *Kanz al-durar*. Here Ibn al-Dawādārī composed the *taḥmīd*—the obligatory "laudatory preamble" at the start of any Islamic text, which had become an important literary vehicle for the statement of textual intent by the late medieval period (Qutbuddin 66)—in a cadenced rhyming prose inspired by the format of the *muwashshaḥ*. The *muwashshaḥ* originated in al-Andalus but had spread eastward not long before our author's lifetime, becoming prevalent in elite communication as well (Larkin, "Popular Poetry" 194; Muhanna 51 and 71). Ibn al-Dawādārī's nine strophes—the number is doubtlessly not a coincidence—loosely follow this popular format, with the first line of each strophe forming a monorhyme refrain ending on "our lord the sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir" (*mawlānā al-sulṭān al-Malik al-Nāṣir*)—rendered in bold in my translation below—while the other lines allow for a change of rhyme. Throughout the strophes the author develops a panegyric depiction of the sultan's divinely ordained rule by aligning it with the geographic and cosmographic focus laid out in the chronicle's first volume. The first two strophes invoke natural and human geography, but in the third and fourth strophe there is a gradual leap to the celestial spheres:

> **Praise be to God, the King, the Granter of Victory (*al-Malik, al-Nāṣir*) * to our lord the sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir ***
> who has been endowed with the divine duty * to harbour the sheep pens of the world *

and to take possession of the earth and its quarters * wherever its rivers run, *
its rains are made to fall, * and its flowers are illuminated, *

and all component parts [of creation], up to the whale *
[God grants] to our lord the sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir *
to take possession of the forelocks of their kings * their rich and their mendicants *
easterners and westerners * peaceful and war-like *
Muslims and unbelievers * nomads and sedentary *

be they rational or confounded. * [And God grants
victory] to the kingship of our lord the sultan al-Malik
al-Nāṣir *
whose awe-inspiring appearance has occupied imaginations *
whose qualities have confounded intellects, *
by whose reign (*bi-ayyāmihi*) the days are honoured * as are the weeks, months, and years *
His zeal vies with the celestial spheres * and the owners of estates bow to him,

shahs and emperors alike * because of the loftiness of our
lord the sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir *
he who is supported by the angels and the Qurʾān * and there is no conjunction in his fortunous ascendant *
for if there were a place for humanity in the celestial ark * then the stars of Arcturus and Spica would form the spine of his steed *
and the galaxy his racecourse * and Saturn (*Kaywān*) his great hall (*īwān*). (*Kanz*, vol. 9: 2–3; compare the German translation by Graf 233–34)

This *taḥmīd* continues for five more strophes, but further celestial metaphors do not appear. Rather, the sultan's reverence is brought back to earthly spheres and Ibn al-Dawādārī underlines the sultan's standing vis-à-vis his enemies. None of this is of course out of the ordinary in panegyric, but considered alongside the earlier noted titular nesting and the pervasive presence of similarly high-blown panegyric sections throughout the chronicle a theme of history's inexorable teleology towards the present emerges. Within that progress the present mirrors the past in a well-ordered manner and is linked to phenomena of the natural world. It is notable that this nine-strophe praise is found in

identical form in the shorter chronicle *Durar al-tījān*, directly following the account of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's return to power in the year 709/1310, which is effectively the end of this chronicle's annalistic range (Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Damad Ibrahim 237b–38a). In the shorter chronicle the panegyric thus completes the mirroring of history by being situated at the very end of the tally of the past.

The celestial metaphors here deserve some unpacking. In the fourth strophe of the *taḥmīd* al-Nāṣir Muḥammad is portrayed as being beyond the spheres of conjunctions. He is directly assisted by angels and the Qurʾān, both of which function as intermediaries between the worldly and the divine sphere but having an existence outside, indeed above it. The sultan stands above these spheres as well, although he is portrayed as directly harnessing them in his leadership of humanity: the stars of Arcturus and Spica (*al-Samakān*) symbolise his military power as the spine of the horse he would be seated on, while the galaxy and Saturn serve as stand-ins for his racecourse and his great hall (*īwān*), physical manifestations of his loftiness.[22] Especially interesting is the statement that there is no conjunction (*qirān*) in his "fortunous ascendant" *(Ṭāliʿ saʿdihi)*, which is indeed important as a conjunction should not appear in one's ascendant but in the tenth house.[23] While acknowledging the general importance of such conjunctions, Ibn al-Dawādārī here appears to place the fortune of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad above such matters, indicating a divinely guided fate rather than one governed by the heavenly bodies.

Scholars have devoted increased attention to the importance of conjunctions in royal discourse, although they have tended to focus on its much more explicit impact in the Timurid and post-Timurid world, almost a century after Ibn al-Dawādārī was active (Moin; Brack). There is however evidence for an interest in such material in the early period of the Cairo sultanate as well, notably in the decorative arts, where imagery related to the zodiac appear regularly, especially during al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's reign (Stanley; Carboni 7). Notably, some inscriptions by al-Ẓāhir Baybars (r. 658–76/1260–77) designate him as *ṣāḥib qirān* ("lord of conjunction"), a term that would become central to Timurid and post-Timurid sacred kingship (Aigle, "Les inscriptions" 73; Aigle, *Mongol Empire* 309–11). Reports that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad was a *ṣāḥib qirān* circulated in the early eighth/fourteenth century as well: Ibn al-Dawādārī's Syrian traditionalist contemporary Quṭb al-Dīn al-Yūnīnī (d. 736/1326) reports that a great conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter was seen in 684/1285, the year of the sultan's birth, and that the astrologer (*munajjim*) of

22. In a praise poem devoted to the confidential secretary (*kātib al-sirr*) Kamāl al-Dīn al-Bārizī (d. 856/1452) the poet Shams al-Dīn al-Nawājī (d. 859/1455) also associates *īwān* and *kaywān*, noting that the planet had positioned itself fortuitously towards the secretary's *īwān* (von Hees, "Ein Lobgedicht" 245).

23. I am grateful to Fien De Block for clarifying this for me and for her advice on translating the *taḥmīd*.

Mosul ʿImād al-Dīn b. al-Dahhān interpreted this as announcing the arrival of an exceptionally powerful (ʿaẓīm) ruler (al-Yūnīnī, vol. 2, 1267).[24] Ibn al-Dawādārī reports something similar himself in the eighth volume of *Kanz al-durar*, but instead of a conjunction he mentions the appearance of an auspicious star with three "hairlocks" (*dawāʾib,* i.e. a comet?) in Muḥarram 684 / March 1285, the exact month of the sultan's birth. Such a star had appeared only a few times earlier in Islamic history, and its appearance had always coincided with the birth of a particularly powerful ruler. Ibn al-Dawādārī cites this as the first of four good omens for al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's reign (*Kanz* vol. 8: 271–73).[25]

It is thus especially in such panegyric sections which appear regularly throughout the chronicle that comparisons between the deep past and the present are established and where Ibn al-Dawādārī endeavours to link the progress of history to some form of celestial order. Earlier scholars have tended to gloss over such sections because they contain little historical information and because, to be sure, such comparisons are commonly found in panegyric.[26] Yet, this does not mean such comparisons are meaningless. I would even argue that they are of prime importance to understand how a historian imagined the literary universe in which his chronicle could convey its contents most meaningfully. This thinking is evident from the same introduction to volume nine. Following shortly after the *taḥmīd,* Ibn al-Dawādārī explains the reasons for having devoted a separate volume to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's reign instead of including him in the eighth volume with the other Turkish sultans. He writes that for this sultan there were too many "commendable virtues" to be mentioned:

> the totality of which are like the number of stars of the horizon, and like the glow of the sun ablaze and at sunset. And how shall the notebooks and pages accommodate them? God has made us successful in informing about these glorious deeds, which is a necessary duty for every *adīb*, excellent [writer], poet, and prose author, so that the greatest kings may imitate them. We have set down these [reports] from the dictation of the pens' tongues and the aromatic inkwells, which were made fit for the pursuit of these traces. See how they help fortune along, serving the rotation of the celestial spheres! (*Kanz*, vol. 9: 6).

Here we see a particularly telling intertwining of some of the major themes of Ibn al-Dawādārī's historiographical approach: the past, the

24. Such a conjunction did in fact take place in Shawwāl 684/December 1285, online (last consulted 1 July 2023).

25. An interest in dreams and predictions of the future is also reflected in many anecdotes related by Ibn al-Dawādārī throughout his chronicle. Of the fifty cases of predictions of the future identified by Amir Mazor in historiography of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, for example, he found seven cases in *Kanz al-durar*'s final two volumes (Mazor 112–17). These interests may be related to a burgeoning 'occult' literature at the time (Gardiner 16–19).

26. Compare for example an Ayyubid era poem cited in Ibn ʿAqīl, Perles 78–79.

universe, and the literary merit one may gain from pondering reports of (natural) history are here brought together in a panegyric discourse. Following the tradition of earlier Arabic panegyrists, including such towering examples as Ibn al-Rūmī and al-Mutanabbī, Ibn al-Dawādārī creates a crucial space for himself within the panegyric here, for it is he who records the sultan's virtues and, more generally, the past (Larkin, *al-Mutanabbi*; Gruendler; Van Den Bossche, *Literary Spectacles*).

Translating history at scale 2: Egypt and the Nile

The celestial ascent towards the reigns of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad also highlights another important feature of *Kanz al-durar*, which is equally relevant to *Durar al-tījān*: namely the extent to which they are Egypt-centred despite their universality. It is of course a truism that any view of the world is a view from somewhere (Gruzinski), but Ibn al-Dawādārī's historical works are an especially relevant case. While one would expect a geographical narrowing the nearer the author gets to his own time, this narrowing already takes place well before the ninth volume. The title of volume six for example makes the highly meaningful choice to foreground the Fatimids and not their Saljuq rivals, or indeed, any other dynasty reigning contemporaneous to them, despite the Fatimid caliphate's complicated reception among later Sunnī historians due to their Ismāʿīlī Shīʿī identity.

Even before we get to later periods of Islamic history, Egypt is central to representation of the past. The introduction to volume two, devoted to the "ancient nations" (*al-umam al-qadīma*), for examples states:

> We have devoted particular attention in this volume to mentioning Egypt and its reports, its kings and priests (*kuhhān*), its communities and inhabitants, its reports and traces, treasuries and symbols, buildings, corners and regions. And we looked after each concern in doing so, providing as such a foundation on which a building can be built beautifully; and we traced all of its kings, from the beginning of time until nowadays, as well as the governors of the Abbasid caliphs, and those Fatimid caliphs who became independent here, and those who followed them from the Ayyubid kings, after whom the Turkish kings took control, until the end of the year 735, part of the revered state (*dawla*)

of al-Nāṣir—may God provide resources for his reign forevermore! (*Kanz*, vol. 2: 6–7)

The pre-Islamic focus on Egypt's kings and priests is thus not antiquarian, but naturally linked to the later pre-eminence of Egypt in the chronicle through the focus on the Fatimids, the Ayyubids and then the Turkish rulers under whom Ibn al-Dawādārī lived and served himself.

But Egypt is also present in a very regular way throughout the two chronicles in the form of the river Nile and its yearly flooding. Starting with the Islamic year 1 of the Hijra (622–23 CE), Ibn al-Dawādārī records for every year the extent to which the Nile flooded before moving on to reporting the notable events of a given year. While doing so for later periods when Egypt was indeed the centre of Ibn al-Dawādārī's historical purview appears logical, his choice to foreground the Nile even for years where the focus of the historical narrative lies across the Red Sea in the Arabian Peninsula or Iraq is remarkable. Just before providing the first recording of a Nile level, he also provides a specific "small chapter on Egypt's Nile" (*faṣl laṭīf fī Nīl Miṣr*) (*Kanz*, vol. 3: 55–56). The author also explicitly refers to this organising principle of his chronicle already in his general introduction to volume one as follows:

> Then I commenced [to record] the flow (*siyāqat*) of the Nile, from the first year of the Hijra, following (*siyāqatan*) on how the sequence of years [had been measured] from the Year of the Elephant [before],[27] so I made [this record of the Nile level] precede all the events of that year, as is proper to speech, noting whether the lowest part reached the standard water level (*al-māʾ al-qadīm*) and what increase it reached according to the proper established principle, and I corroborated these with the numerous moral lessons on which commentary is provided, making their benefits clear to the attentive and skilful spectator (*Kanz*, vol. 1: 9).

Kanz al-durar thus presents Egypt and its great river as it were at the centre of the universe: the banks of the great river are the point from which all of creation may be observed, recorded, and ultimately learned from. Indeed, there is a direct association between the Nile's yearly levels and "moral lessons" (*fawāʾid*) here.[28] In the cosmographic first volume, the Nile is repeatedly cited along with three other major rivers as being the most excellent in the world. This claim is attributed to the Prophet's cousin, fourth successor, and first Shīʿī

27. This refers to the pre-Islamic dating system of measuring time by distance of years from notable events. The Year of the Elephant referred to the year in which Western Arabia was invaded by an Ethiopian army led by Abraha (Conrad 228)

28. It is notable in that sense that a close historical connection has been noted by scholars between historical observations of the tides and celestial bodies for agricultural ends and the development of 'astrology' and the Zodiac. I am grateful to one of the peer reviewers of this article for pointing this out to me.

imam ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), who is reported to have said that "the four most excellent rivers are Sayḥūn [Syr Darya], Jayḥūn [Amu Darya], the Euphrates, and the Nile" (*Kanz*, vol. 1: 186).
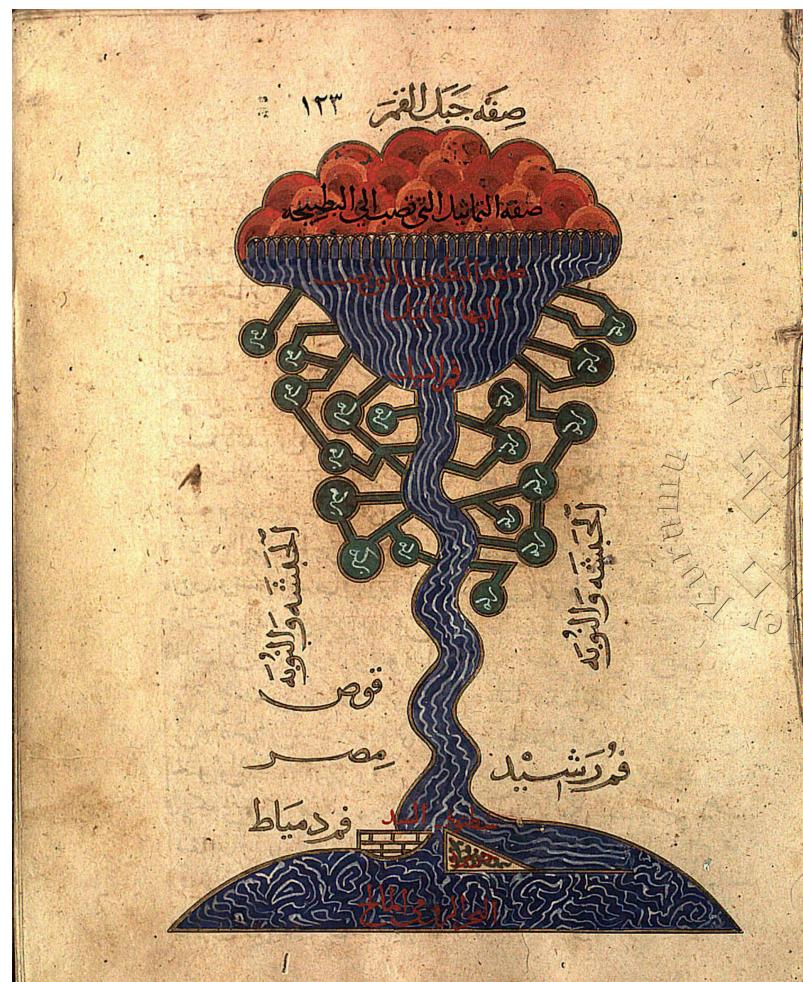

Figure 1: Istanbul, Süleymaniye kütüphanesi, Ayasofya 3074, page 123 (this manuscript is paginated, not foliated), vol. 2 of *Kanz al-durar*.

Lending further support to just how important the Nile is in the chronicle, the single illumination found across *Kanz al-durar*'s nine volumes—aside from the nine title pages which are lavishly but non-figuratively decorated (see figure 3 below)—is a stylised map of the Nile running south to north in volume two, reproduced in Figure 1. This map illustrates the Ptolemaic view of the Nile as originating in "the mountains of the moon" (*jabal al-qamar*) at the top in red. In its further flow it is fed by several lakes (the circles are labelled as *birka*) in equatorial Africa before running through the lands of the Ethiopians and the Nubians (*al-Ḥabasha waʾl-Nūba*) and then to Egypt, where only the southern Egyptian city of Qūṣ is named specifically, just before the term Miṣr which can denote both Egypt in general and Cairo more specifically. The two branches of the Nile and their 'mouths' in Rashīd (Rosetta) and Dimyāṭ (Damietta) are named as

well, alongside Shaṭnūf—the point where the Nile splits up in its two branches—"the dam" (*al-sadd*) and "the island" (*al-jazīra*), before the Nile empties itself into "the Salty Roman Sea" (*al-Baḥr al-Rūmī al-Māliḥ*), that is, the Mediterranean. A more extensive discussion of this stylised map and how it compares to other conceptions of the Nile and geography lies outside of the scope of this essay but for our present purposes its inclusion in the chronicle underlines just how central the Nile is to Ibn al-Dawādārī's historical project. It is notable in that sense that, while maps of the Nile are one of the most commonly appearing maps in pre-modern Islamic geographical texts, they tend to appear alongside maps of the world (Rapoport and Savage-Smith 101), whereas here no such world map is found, despite the dedication of a whole volume to cosmography where such a map would have fit perfectly.[29]

Ibn al-Dawādārī's chronicles are the first to provide the yearly Nile levels systematically. This yearly tally is also one of the few parts of his chronicles which we know were copied by later historians: Ibn Taghrī-Birdī (d. 874/1470) provides such levels as well and appears to have copied them largely from Ibn al-Dawādārī's *Durar al-tījān* and updated them for his own time (Haarmann "Quellen" 202). As is clear from Figure 2, for quite a few years recorded in *Durar al-tijān* the Nile level is in fact nearly the only information given. On the top right of this image a header highlights the caliphate of the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtafī li-Amr Allāh (r. 530–55 / 1136–60), followed by a header for the year 535 (in red)—note the discrepancy with the usually given start date of this caliph's reign. For this year and for the following years up to year 542 near the bottom of the next page the only information given is the yearly Nile level, followed by the statement that "the situation [remained] as it was" (*al-amr bi-ḥālihi*). For the year 543 only a change of *qāḍī* is noted and for the year 544 only the death of a prominent individual. This is then followed by a rather extensive account on folio 176b. While this image is thus not representative for the whole chronicle, there are other points where a similarly bare listing of changes of years and Nile levels is found.[30] It thus emerges that while much other information was expendable for Ibn al-Dawādārī's more schematic historical project in *Durar al-tījān*, the yearly rhythm of Nile floods was not.

When introducing the first of these Nile levels in *Kanz,* the author notes that for this data he relied on a "Coptic book" he found in "the White Monastery in Southern Egypt" (*al-dayr al-abyaḍ bi ͗ l-wajh al-qiblī*). This mysterious book, as he notes: "was one of

29. For earlier cartographical depictions of the Nile, see Rapoport and Savage-Smith 101–24. Another distinctive feature which emerges compared to the maps discussed by Rapoport & Savage-Smith is the appearance of several lakes feeding into the Nile on Ibn al-Dawādārī's map.

30. Four prominent examples across the centuries: MS Damad Ibrahim 913, folios 69b–70a (years 51–58), 83b–84a (years 112–21) 121b–22a (years 258–67), 212b–213a (years 639–47).
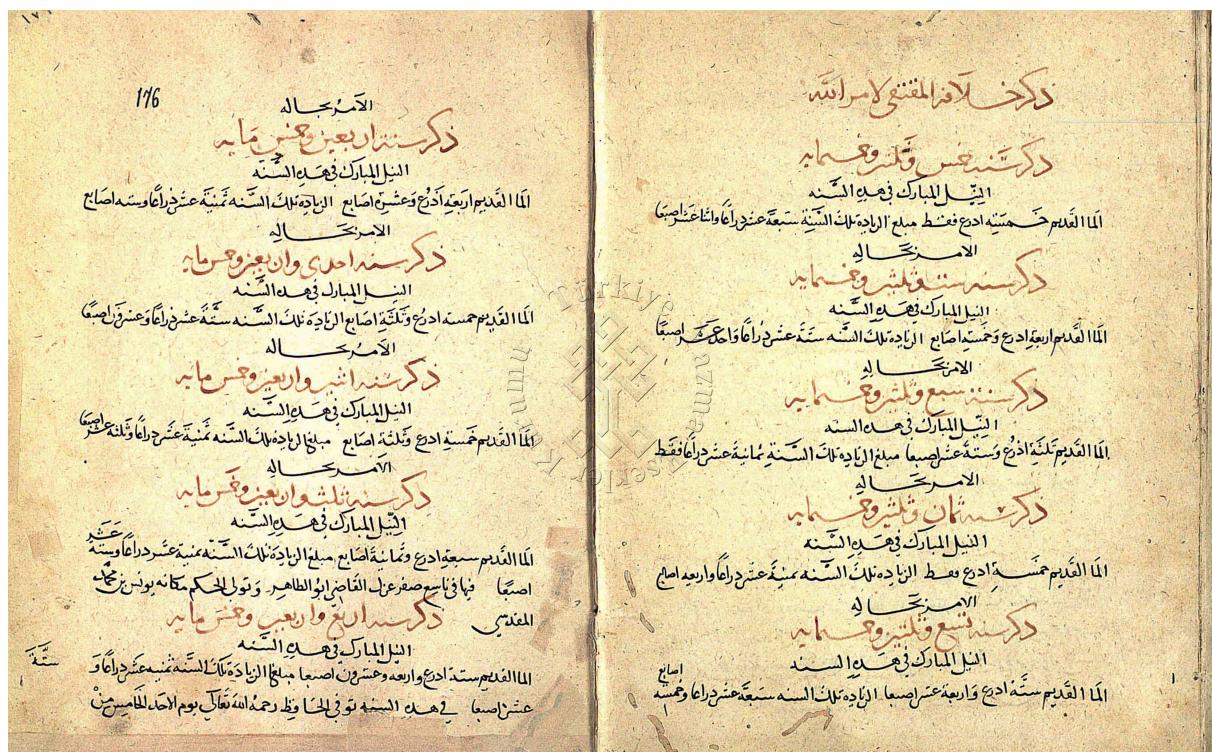
Figure 2: folios 175b–76a in Istanbul, Süleymaniye kütüphanesi, Damad Ibrahim 913: years.

31. This is a topic I plan to discuss at more length in a separate article.

the three texts which urged me to put together (*waḍaʿa*) this history when I consulted what they contained of marvellous events" (*Kanz*, vol. 3: 53–54). This "Coptic book" and its folkloric contents have received some attention from scholars (Haarmann, "Quellen" 207; Schenke). Important for our purposes is that we see here the foregrounding of locally or personally resourced knowledge for the presentation of the deep past, a strategy Ibn al-Dawādārī employs regularly. This kind of strategy too serves to centre Egypt and the personal viewpoint of the author.[31] This is thus one of the "alternative strategies" Marilynn Waldman suggested scholars should consider when evaluating bare annals, in response to Hayden White's evaluation of early annals in which many years are not accorded narrative significance (Waldman 789). Rather than lacking in narrative, *Durar al-tījān* foregrounds a particular natural, and essentially Egyptian order as of prime historical importance, with narrative sometimes fulfilling only a secondary role.

The centrality of the Nile goes beyond its yearly cycle however: it is also of prime importance in the recording of recent history, where Ibn al-Dawādārī relies on his own memories or those of his personal network, rather than on older sources. A particularly important section of recent history involves the brief interregnum between al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's second and third reign. Although he was by that point of age to rule by himself, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad

spent most of his second reign (698–708/1299–309) dominated by the two amirs Baybars al-Jāshnikīr and Sallār and was at mercy of the factions they represented. Exacerbated by this situation he abdicated the throne and sought refuge in Karak, in present-day Jordan, upon which he was briefly replaced by Baybars al-Jāshnikīr, who would only reign for nine months with the regnal title al-Muẓaffar. Ibn al-Dawādārī's accounts for this period are particularly rich in literary terms. At the start of the year 709/June 1309, for example, Ibn al-Dawādārī discusses four omens indicating al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's imminent return to power (*Kanz*, vol. 9: 161–63). Al-Muẓaffar Baybars' reign by contrast is not just marked by bad management, it is as it were resented by Egypt itself. In the middle of his reign there is a delayed Nile flood which results in prices rising. The author's report of this delayed flood triggers a digression in which the Nile voices its concerns, soon joined by the clouds bewailing the loss of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad—"and if I have trickled drops of rain on these regions, it is because these are tears of one who yearns, pained as he has been by being separated from al-Malik al-Nāṣir" (*Kanz*, vol. 9: 164)—and by Cairo and the Citadel calling out for its sultan to return, and finally the Nile's breeze (*nasīm al-Nīl*)—"I am the ailing breeze, yearning for that lofty king" (*Kanz*, vol. 9: 165). The whole section is in the end concluded by two poems, of which the final one is attributed to Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. Fahd al-Ḥalabī (d. 725/1325), one of the leading literary figures of the age (*Kanz*, vol. 9:165–66). These pages are reminiscent of some *maqāma*s produced at the time, in the sense that non-human entities speak in rich figurative language, balancing cadenced rhyming prose and poetical utterances (Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama*). However, the material is here embedded in the historical narration without demarcation, showing how the literary ambition of Ibn al-Dawādārī's historical project was not just restricted to panegyrical sections in introductions but also reappears in the annalistic parts of the chronicle.

The literary chronicle: popular or courtly literature?

The chronicles of Ibn al-Dawādārī appear as wide-ranging compilations of annalistic accounts and literary expositions on the *meaning* of those accounts. They functioned as works of *adab*, much as al-Nuwayrī saw the expansive encyclopaedic scope of *Nihāyat al-arab*

through a similar prism. Although this is evident in many instances, one passage in particular speaks to Ibn al-Dawādārī's perception of his role as that of a literary curator of meaning. The following section is again part of the introduction to *Kanz al-Durar*'s ninth and final volume. It directly follows the customary *basmallah* and *taḥmīd* (partially translated above):

> Because expressions (*alfāẓ*) are created, and meanings (*maʿānī*) precede them and are imperceptible; and since man's tongue is too short to reach the marvels of eloquence; and since it is appropriate to recognise [one's] impotence, and the need to set out for the place of attainment without substitute; it is the genuine litterateur's task to accept an apology, and to treat slips of the tongue kindly, and to not censure blunders. [Conversely,] the rational thinker must recognise the one who counts his lapses, and the virtuous one [must recognise the one] who enumerates his faults. For he knows that man—even if he had the purity of tongue of Quss [b. Sāʿida, fl. sixth–seventh C] or Saḥbān [Wāʾil, fl. late seventh/early eighth C], or the eloquence of Qudāma b. Ḥaṭṭān [sic for Qudāma b. Jaʿfar (d. 337/948) or ʿImrān b. Ḥaṭṭān (d. 84/703)?], let alone that of Badīʿ al-Zamān [al-Hamadhānī, d. 1007][32]—has to consider his circumstances, no doubt, and he needs to take them into account for his statements, and not even the one for whom a gate is opened and who has devoted himself to composing a book can evade this situation. For it is said: the one who composes [a work] exposes himself [to criticism]. As such, the slave [that is, the author] wishes to apologise to God and to every reader of [this book], I plead for [God's] favour on [the author] and that he may forgive me for committing outrages[33] and to not hold against me that which I have set forth (*Kanz*, vol. 9: 5).

To be sure, Ibn al-Dawādārī is here setting up something that is very much a topos in the Arabic introductory tradition (and beyond): the overly humble acknowledgement of one's faults and the supplication for mild judgment on the part of one's readers and of God. But the statement that "since expressions (*alfāẓ*) are created, and meanings (*maʿānī*) precede them and are imperceptible" is of interest to my argument that Ibn al-Dawādārī saw his work primarily as a work of *adab*. This is Ibn al-Dawādārī's summary of the core of Arabic literary or rhetorical theory which had reached full maturity by

32. All of these are famously eloquent Arabic poets, orators and/or prose stylists. The last one was notably the inventor of the *maqāma*. "Badīʿ al-Zamān" is actually a nickname and means "the [stylistic] wonder of the age".

33. The verb *ijtaraḥat* can be translated both as I have done here and as "bringing about wonders", a telling choice for an ambiguous verb here. It is not unlikely to be a pun.

his time. This theory, which has sometimes been compared to Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotics, conceptualised the relationships between the concepts—the "idea" (*maʿnā,* or in Alexander Key's words "mental content")—to be communicated and the words—"expression" or "verbalisation" (*lafẓ*)—they actually use in doing so. Much of this theoretical writing was concerned with judging how well particular verbalisations expressed a given idea (Key; Harb). Ibn al-Dawādārī mentions the core elements of this theory here because he wanted his readers to remember that his rendering of the past was but one verbalisation of the past's meaning. This is then also what he wanted his readers to appreciate: he did not want them to consult his chronicle to find out "what happened" in the first place, but to consider Ibn al-Dawādārī's interpretation and artful presentation of these events, that is, the meaning he had given to them. Several of the other passages cited above also showcase a notable self-consciousness on the part of the author. They speak to a self-perception as an *adīb* and of his concomitant duty to aim for a clear expression of the meaning of history in literary terms.

The framework of pre-modern Arabic literary theory also helps to explain one of the core features of *Kanz al-durar* which has drawn sustained interest: its penchant to include accounts of marvellous events (*ʿajāʾib wa-gharāʾib*), colourful anecdotes and samples of poetry, as well as its relatively extensive use of vernacular Arabic. Some of the formal organisational aspects of the chronicle which I discussed above, especially the yearly Nile levels, have also been discussed in this context. This has given rise to an evaluation of history writing in this period as "literarised" (*Literarisierung*), with *Kanz al-durar* being one of its most distinctive examples. While I have argued above that *Kanz al-durar* is indeed a chronicle that thinks of itself as a work of *adab*, and thus as 'literary', the evaluation of literarisation has also gone hand in hand with the perception that historiography in this period became a more accessible genre catering to a broad audience: *Kanz al-Durar* especially has been assessed as a popular chronicle ("Volkschronik") (Haarmann, *Quellenstudien* 159–82; Haarmann, "Auflösung"; Irwin 159 and 164). This idea has been broadly influential. Particularly notable are studies concerned with narratives Ibn al-Dawādārī appears to have reproduced from oral literature or from books which are otherwise unknown. I already noted his use of a 'Coptic Book' above and another particularly well-studied example concerns the narratives devoted to Turko-Mongol origins, which may have been based on oral narra-

tives (Haarmann, "Alṭun Ḫān"; Haarmann, "Quellen zur Geschichte"; van den Bent). The assumption here is that by integrating this kind of material, Ibn Dawādārī was not just reproducing material circulating orally—and thus presumed to originate in popular strata of society—but also catering to that audience.

The idea of literarisation was challenged repeatedly by Bernd Radtke. His main complaint with the theory was that many of the elements singled out as unique in late medieval historiography in fact had long pedigrees. Indeed, nearly all the elements singled out by Haarmann are also found in much earlier works by al-Masʿūdī and others (Radtke, "Einleitung" 23–27; Radtke, *Weltgeschichte* 185–95).[34] More recently, Syrinx von Hees highlighted how Haarmann and those following him criticised the text from a mistaken understanding of *ʿajāʾib wa-gharāʾib* and their function in historical narrative (von Hees, "Meaning" 175–82). Another issue which Radtke highlighted but which has not been revisited is the connection between these materials considered to be popular and the idea that this made *Kanz al-durar* into a "popular chronicle" (Volkschronik). Radtke was essentially concerned with the types of materials included in the text, but he also noted briefly that the term "Volkschronik" was rather unhappily chosen, and that we might rather see it as a "volkstümliche Chronik", a "folkloric" or again "popular" chronicle (Radtke, "Zur literarisierten Volkschronik" 46). While in German this does help to define more precisely that the issue at hand concerns the textual materials, Radtke still left the question of the text's audience unanswered.

A holistic appraisal of the text, its contents, and especially its materiality, highlights that the idea of the text being 'popular' (be it 'of the people' or suffused with 'popular elements') is largely misplaced. An evaluation of the interaction between content and form, unconcerned with unhelpful distinctions between 'fact', 'fiction', 'popular', and 'courtly' sheds light on how literary patterns and narrative construction brought author and audience together in the creation of a meaningful past (compare Shoshan and El-Hibri for early Islamic history writing). For this we must evaluate how Ibn al-Dawādārī employed stylistic elements and especially how he verbalised (*lafẓ*) we created literary meaning (*maʿnā*) and created an overall aesthetic experience (Harb).

The evaluation of *Kanz al-durar* as a popular text has been made largely on the basis of the contents on the published version. This is unfortunate because *Kanz al-durar* survives fully in holograph cop-

34. For a summary of this debate, see Van Steenbergen, "Introduction" 10–14, and Van Den Bossche, "Literarisierung" 466–69.

ies and thus presents an excellent case to study the author's historiographical project holistically. We can especially infer something about how Ibn al-Dawādārī wanted his text to appear to his intended audience. In this I follow Roger Chartier who notes that "the historically and socially distinctive significations of a text […] are inseparable from the material conditions and physical forms that make the text available to readers" (Chartier 22). While Chartier has worked almost exclusively on the Western European context, these observations are highly relevant for the Islamic context as well. As Ali Karjoo-Ravary's states with reference to a late eighth/fourteenth century Persian panegyric historical text from Anatolia: "books in the premodern Islamicate context were produced with the complete appearance of the book in mind" (Karjoo-Ravary).

All the nine volumes of *Kanz al-durar* have been preserved as original presentation copies, four of them presently in the Ayasofya collection of Istanbul's Süleymaniye library—see Figure 3 for a reproduction of one such title page of the second volume—while the remainder are preserved in the Topkapı Palace Library (see Table 1 for the manuscript call numbers). From these title pages, and from the carefully produced map of the Nile reproduced above, it is clear that these manuscripts were produced at considerable expense and were likely offered to the library of a highly placed individual, potentially the sultan himself. In 848/1444 the full set of manuscripts was endowed (*waqf*) to the mosque of Zayn al-Dīn Yaḥyā (d. 874/1469), as is evident from the endowment note included in the margins of the title pages (see again Figure 3; a decipherment is given in Radtke, "Einleitung" 6). All nine volumes then at some point moved to the Ottoman palace library in Topkapı where they remained until 1739 when four of the nine volumes were endowed for the Ayasofya library. This late separation indicates that there was never much demand for these volumes and that they sat mostly forgotten in libraries for most of their existence (Haarmann, *Quellenstudien* 82), as many other chronicles of a similar size are today scattered across several different repositories. There are some exceptions to *Kanz al-durar*'s lack of circulation, notably two eighth/fourteenth century manuscripts which copy material from *Kanz al-durar*, one preserved in St. Petersburg (*non vidi*), and another also preserved in the Ayasofya collection, a short volume reproducing materials from *Kanz al-durar*'s two first volumes, produced in 773/1372.[35] Both of these need further study, as does the fact that one of the volumes of *Kanz al-durar* bears a consultation

35. The St. Petersburg manuscript is acephalous and has so far not been published. I have not been able to access the manuscript to assess it more closely. Rosen 114 (MS nr. 562, 171 in Rosen's numbering). The Ayasofya manuscript has the shelfmark 3077 and contains sixty folios. It was copied for a certain Burhān al-Dīn al-Almālaʿī al-Turkistānī al-Ḥanafī, whom I have not been able to identify so far. Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Ayasofya 3077, folio 1v.

note by the historian Ibn Duqmāq (d. 809/1407) (Haarmann, *Quellenstudien* 82), but generally it is clear that the text had a rather limited impact.

Figure 3: title page of Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Ayasofya 3074, 1a. The page identifies the text as the second volume of *Kanz al-durar* in the top cartouche and provides the specific title of the volume in the bottom cartouche. The middle panel contains the identification of the text's author. The different handwriting in the margins represents two endowment notes.
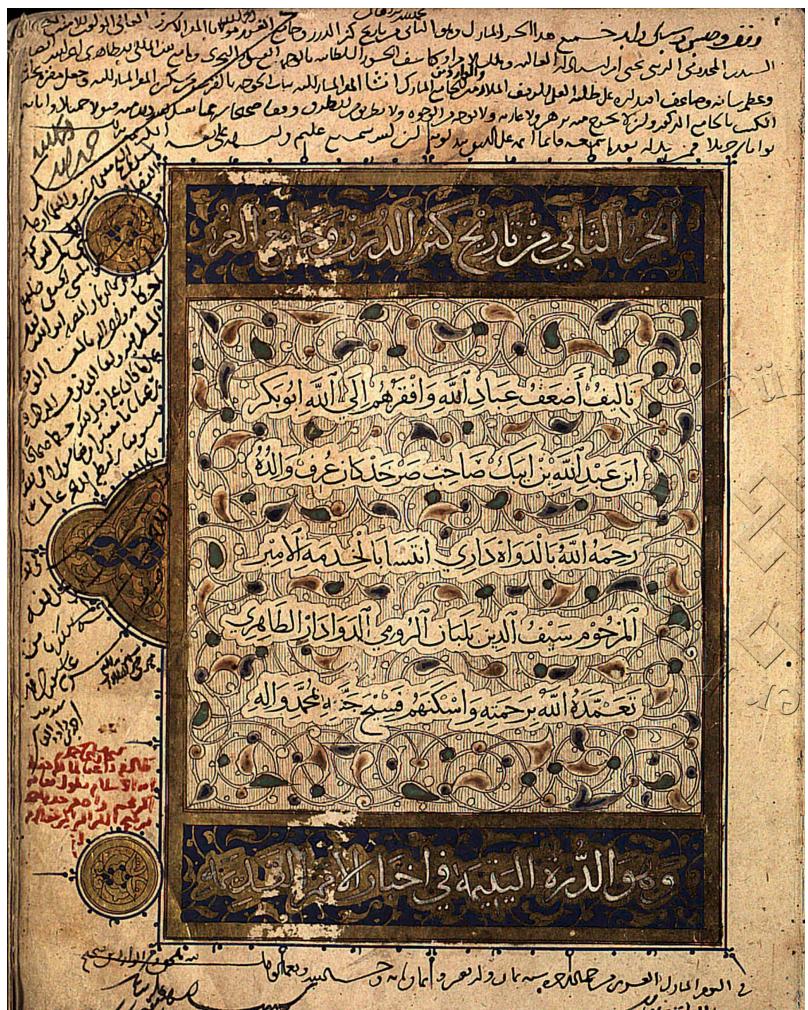
36. The second known copy of this text is Alexandria, Maktabat al-Baladiyya, 3828 J which is acephalous both at the start and at the end. As a result, it cannot be precisely dated. Dating the manuscript on palaeographic grounds is also challenging due to its peculiar, slanted handwriting, although it appears to me as quite modern.

37. I aim to discuss the copyist and his father's connection to Ibn al-Dawādārī at more length in a separate article focused on the author's self-fashioning through networks of information. I also aim to discuss potential identifications of the patron.

Our author's shorter chronicle *Durar al-tījān* exists in two copies, one of which (Damad Ibrahim 913, also in Istanbul's Süleymaniye Library) is also clearly a presentation copy—see Figure 2 for a reproduction of the preserved part of its (likely) double frontispiece (its first folio has not been preserved and the preserved part has been partially covered up by pieces of paper).[36] This manuscript was copied by a certain Yūsuf b. ʿUthmān al-Ḥimyārī, whose father appears to have been a friend of Ibn al-Dawādārī (Graf 13). It was likely offered to the library of a certain ʿAlam al-Dīn.[37]

The title pages of these texts do not appear as 'popular' texts at all. Their rich decorative programme, even if largely limited to their title pages, would have represented a significant financial investment for the commissioner (see also Haarmann, *Quellenstudien* 84). The

Figure 4: one half of the original double frontispiece of Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Damad Ibrahim 913, 1a (*Durar al-tījān*). The top cartouche reads "an offering by the slave, the supplicant" and the bottom cartouche reads the author's short name Abī Bakr b. ʿAbdallāh al-Dawādārī. On the left are two seals noting the text's inclusion in endowment libraries during the Ottoman period.

38. The first volume was copied 23 Dhū al-Ḥijja 732 / 23 September 1332 and the last volume was finalized sometime in the year 736 / September 1335–August 1336. Vols. 2 and 3 were copied throughout 733/1333 while vols. 4 to 8 were copied at a faster pace between Muḥarram and Dhū al-Qaʿda 734/October 1333–July 1334.

39. Compare for example the different parts of the famous Baybars Qurʾān, produced in seven volumes in 704–05/1304–06. London, British Library, Additional MSS 22406–22412.

fact that the nine volumes of *Kanz al-durar* were copied over the space of four years also suggests that the financial burden of copying had to be spread over time.[38] These manuscripts look similar to manuscripts from the period about which we can be certain they were intended for high-profile audiences because they bear specific presentation notes, usually employing the phrase *bi-rasm al-khizāna* ("intended for the library of […]") (for example Van Den Bossche, *Literary Spectacles* 224; D'hulster). As far as the visual programmes of these title pages are concerned, they may look strikingly different at first, but they both adhere to common visual practices at the time.[39] The manuscripts thus indicate a courtly audience for Ibn al-Dawādārī's chronicles. This is of course also indicated by the extensive panegyric sections, which also suggest the author laboured intensively to achieve a felicitous outcome for his donation of the text.

The political and cultural dynamics of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's

third reign also enlighten some of the choices Ibn al-Dawādārī made. As noted at the outset of this article, Ibn al-Dawādārī commenced gathering materials for his chronicle in the year in 709/1309–10, the exact year in which al-Nāṣir Muḥammad regained the throne after a moment of severe political crisis. The dramatic circumstances around al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's abdication and return to power in 709/1310 also followed on two particularly unstable decades which witnessed a dramatic reversal of fortunes vis-à-vis the Mongol enemy—who first routed a Syro-Egyptian army in 699/1299 at the battle of Wādī al-Khazindār only to be defeated by them a few years later at Shaqḥab/ Marj al-Suffar in 702/1303. Following his return to power, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad created a period of unseen stability in Syro-Egypt. While the sultan's near-absolute and ruthless rule has often been foregrounded in analysis (Petry 16–19; Levanoni), the sultan's household politics and state formation also enabled the flourishing of complex but strong networks of cultural dissemination, especially visible in the grand architectural heritage of this period and in its particularly rich material culture (Flinterman and Van Steenbergen). Ibn al-Dawādārī and contemporary authors were thus active in a period of unprecedented cultural efflorescence, which stimulated expansive and integrative, often encyclopaedic literary activity.

The case for historiography is particularly pertinent if we return to my hypothesis that around the turn of the eighth/fourteenth century, historiography in Egypt underwent an epistemic shift from the biographical to the universal. The political stability of the period may explain this shift, much as political developments explain earlier and later such shifts: the demise of astrological histories in the late third/ninth century highlighted by Antoine Borrut (Borrut 260), and the rise of full-fledged Ottoman historiography at the expense of chronological tables in astrological almanacs in early tenth/sixteenth century Istanbul (Şen 65–67). A similar, if less dramatic shift occurred in turn of the eighth/fourteenth century Cairo: now over half a century into its existence, observers started seeing the Cairo Sultanate less as an heir to the Ayyubid tradition but more as a distinctly new phenomenon. This was the "Turkish dynasty" highlighted so explicitly by Ibn al-Dawādārī for the title of the eighth volume of his chronicle and by his contemporary Baybars al-Manṣūrī who composed a dynastic chronicle of this sultanate alongside his great chronicle *Zubdat al-fikra* (Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *al-Ṭuhfa*). This shift in perception also resulted in a shift in historical perspective: rather than praising the rule of a single sultan, a practice inherited from Ayyubid literary

production, now it became more appealing to present the reigning sultan in a long line of succession of Islamic rulers, and as part of a line of Turkish sultans which had overseen this (re-)establishment of Egypt as the leading region of the Islamic world. The sultan stood at the receiving end of centuries of history to be learnt from and to be harnessed in the service of the present.

Conclusions

A. Azfar Moin and others have noted a strong millenarian tone in depictions of rulership in the late eight/fourteenth century and especially in the ninth/fifteenth and tenth/sixteenth century across Eurasia. In some ways we can see Ibn al-Dawādārī anticipating some of these concerns: in his chronicles he painted an image of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad as ruler at a particularly auspicious point in time. To convincingly portray that auspiciousness, Ibn al-Dawādārī compiled wide-ranging historical texts and employed a range of literary registers, from refined poetical idioms to material taken from burgeoning popular literature. This does not mean that his texts were aimed at a popular audience, but more likely, Ibn al-Dawādārī mixed techniques common to popular as well as high-brow literature to appeal to a courtly audience particularly interested in all-encompassing and integrative literary pursuits. To speak to the sultan's universal ambitions, Ibn al-Dawādārī felt that his chronicle should express this universality as well, in its scope and literary presentation, and in the literary and linguistic registers employed.

Returning to Judith Pfeiffer's and Adam Talib's concerns about the incommensurability of established literary categories and the evidence available to us for pre-modern Islamic literature, we can ask the question of whether Ibn al-Dawādārī's chronicle is indeed a universal history. By the standards of contemporary works denoted as universal histories, one would be inclined to answer this question positively, and I have as a result not taken great pains to avoid the designation universal history in this essay. Yet, as I highlighted with the analogy of convergent evolution, even when a text appears to fit a category seamlessly, it is worthwhile to investigate why it does so. In the case of Ibn al-Dawādārī's chronicles, it is certainly true that he was following in the footsteps of earlier chroniclers, even quite explicitly given how much he acknowledges his sources, but he was also responding to a cultural environment that particularly favoured the

grand format of universal history. He was participating in a historiographical moment where a minor shift in regime of historicity had occurred, from a biographical focus to one on universal history. In this he was responding to the political and cultural dynamics at al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's court, which cultivated an idea of the sultan presiding over a period that constituted an important pinnacle in history, but also sitting in a clearly defined dynastic line of Turkish sultans.

Ibn al-Dawādārī's chronicles are universal in the sense that they provide expansive panoramas of human and natural history. His narrative and structural centring of Egypt still functions within a framework of universal scale in the sense that it literally employs the universe to provide meaning. But it is in that creation of literary meaning that the main thrust of the texts lie: moreso than a universal account of history, they are accounts of the universality of history as selected, organised, and illustrated by the author. His was a profoundly literary approach to the universal chronicle, one in which annalistic accounts morph via digression into a literary elaboration in which the clouds and the Nile offer their perspective on events, in which poetry is regularly brought to bear on the events, and in which memoirist vignettes can take a prominent position.

Because of the expansive size of the past, managing scale was a primary concern. Ibn al-Dawādārī's chronicles appear as texts attempting a balancing act between two scales: that of the celestial and that of the local. As an exercise of finding the centre of history they find, unsurprisingly, Egyptian geography and history. It is around that core that the rest of the universal chronicles are built. This can be brought into direct relation with Ibn al-Dawādārī's ambition to write a chronicle as a work of *adab*, for how could he bring in his own literary perspective on the past without centring himself and the region that produced him?

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