



Spatial Thought

in Islamicate Societies, 1000–1600

The Politics of Genre, Image, and Text

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

UNIVERSITY OF TÜBINGEN

30 MARCH – 1 APRIL 2017

Spatial Thought in Islamicate Societies, 1000–1600

The Politics of Genre, Image, and Text

International Conference

University of Tübingen
30 March – 1 April 2017

Funded by
University of Tübingen
Islamic History Geodata Initiative
École pratique des hautes études – Research University Paris
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Trinity College

PROGRAMME AND ABSTRACTS

PROGRAMME

THURSDAY, 30 MARCH 2017

Alte Aula, Münzgasse 30, Festsaal

18:00 *registration*

OPENING

19:00 *welcome address*

Thomas Pothast (Speaker, Platform 4, German Excellence Initiative
at the University of Tübingen)

19:15 *opening lecture*

Zayde Antrim (Hartford, Conn.)
Spatial Thought and the Limitations of Genre

20:00 *reception with buffet*

FRIDAY, 31 MARCH 2017

Hohentübingen Castle, Institute of Classical Archaeology, room 165

09:00 *welcome address*

Jürgen Leonhardt (Dean, Faculty of Humanities)

09:15 *keywords*

Jean-Charles Ducène (Paris)

PANEL 1 · GENRE

chair

Zayde Antrim (Hartford, Conn.)

09:30 **Emmanuelle Tixier Dumesnil** (Paris)

Comprendre un auteur dans son contexte historique, ou pourquoi l'histoire de la géographie n'existe pas: l'exemple de l'Andalou al-Bakrī (XI^e s.)

10:30 *coffee break*

11:00 **Kurt Franz** (Tübingen)

Geographical Narratives and Normalized Space in the Age of Islamic Encyclopaedism

12:00 **Travis Zadeh** (New Haven, Conn.)

Crossing the Sea of Darkness: Wonder, Knowledge, and the Shifting Limits of Islamic Geography

13:15 *lunch at Café Ranitzky · Am Markt*

PANEL 2 · IMAGE

chair

Jean-Charles Ducène (Paris)

14:30 **Yossef Rapoport** (London)
Maps of Urban Space in Medieval Islam

15:30 *coffee break*

16:00 **Feray Coşkun** (Berlin)
Representations of Culture, Religion and History in the World Maps of the Ottoman *Kharīdat al-‘Ajā‘ib*

17:00 **Nadja Danilenko** (Berlin)
Getting the Picture: How al-İşṭakhrī’s *Book of Routes and Realms* Made It to the Nineteenth Century

18:00 *transfer*

VISIT TO FINT

Department of Oriental and Islamic Studies, Research Unit for Islamic Numismatics (FINT), Wilhelmstraße 113

18:30 **Lutz Ilisch** (Tübingen)
Coins as a Source of Historical Geography and the Tübingen Numismatic Collection

19:30 *transfer*

20:00 *dinner at Tübinger Wurstküche · Am Lustnauer Tor 8*

SATURDAY, 1 APRIL 2017

Hohentübingen Castle, Institute of Classical Archaeology, room 165

PANEL 3 • TEXT I

chair

Dana Sajdi (Chestnut Hill, Mass.)

09:00 **Stefan Heidemann** (Hamburg)
Defining the Abbasid Empire on Its Own Terms

10:00 *coffee break*

10:30 **Irina Konovalova** (Moscow)
Ways of Describing Regions in the Geographical Work of al-Idrīsī

11:30 **Jean-Charles Ducène** (Paris)
Géographie politique, physique ou religieuse? Le monde vu depuis la chancellerie mamelouke

YOUNG SCHOLARS POSTER SESSION

12:30 **Ari M. Gordon** (Philadelphia, Pa.)
Sacred Orientation: The *qibla* as Ritual, Metaphor and Identity Marker in Early Islam

12:40 **Aglaia Iankovskaia** (Budapest)
At the Edge of the World of Islam: Maritime Southeast Asia in the Eyes of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa

12:50 **Dženita Karić** (London)
Sacred Spaces and Secured Provinces: Bosnian Hajj Literature and the Making of Local Cosmopolitanism

13:00 **Masoumeh Seydi** and **Maxim Romanov** (Leipzig)
A Method for Comparing Geographical Descriptions

13:15 *lunch at Mauganeschtle (Hotel am Schloss) · Burgsteige 18*

PANEL 4 · TEXT II

chair

Dorothee Kimmich (Tübingen)

14:30 **Alexis Norman Wick** (Beirut)
Of Other Places: Visions of the Sea and the World before
European Hegemony

15:30 *coffee break*

16:00 **Sergey Minov** (Oxford)
The *Marvels Found in the Great Cities, Seas and Islands*:
Syriac-speaking Christians Engaging Muslim Spatial Thought

17:00 **Robert J. Haug** (Cincinnati, Ohio)
Local History and Spatial Thought in Ibn Isfandiyyār's
Tārīkh-i Ṭabaristān: A Refugee's Geography of Home

18:00 *coffee break*

PANEL 5 · SUMMARY DISCUSSION

18:15 *general response*
Nasser Rabbat (Cambridge, Mass.)

18:30 *summary discussion*

19:30 *concluding address*
Kurt Franz (Tübingen)

20:00 *transfer*

20:15 *farewell dinner at Le Romarin · Mohlstraße 26*

SUNDAY, 2 APRIL 2017

Departure from Hotel am Schloss

CULTURAL PROGRAMME

10:00 *“Stoherkahn” ride on the River Neckar and city walking tour
or visit to the Museum of Ancient Cultures*

ABSTRACTS

Zayde Antrim*Spatial Thought and the Limitations of Genre*

In this paper, I will explore and evaluate approaches that categorize spatially-oriented texts by genre. While this kind of approach has produced studies that are essential for any understanding of spatial thought in medieval Islamicate societies, a reliance on genre, whether as an organizing mechanism or framework for analysis, may have certain limitations. I contend that drawing boundaries between genres has at times produced overly rigid dichotomies, such as that between mathematical and human geography or between “secular” and religious history. Scale has also influenced considerations of genre with dichotomizing ramifications, as when local and universal histories are distinguished from each other, or urban topography from geography. Moreover, maps have been associated with some genres rather than others and often studied in isolation from written texts.

After this introductory discussion, I will demonstrate some of the limitations of genre-based approaches with reference to the region of *al-Shām* (Greater Syria) between the 4th/10th and 8th/14th centuries. First, I will highlight a marked intertextuality between major Arabic works composed in this period that have been differentiated by genre, and thus often analyzed separately, in secondary scholarship.

Then, I will raise two cases that are particularly revealing of the limitations of genre. The first is the composition of literature in praise of Jerusalem. The insistence on the purity of a standalone *faḍā'il* “genre” has fueled a scholarly debate about the historical depth and geographical extent of Muslim reverence for Jerusalem that has distracted from the interdependence of these texts with others and isolated Jerusalem from the broader history of Islamicate spatial thought. The second case relates to the tendency to define genre in terms of scale, with the result that a proliferation of what have been called “urban topographies” and “local histories” in this period has led scholars to emphasize the city at the expense of the region. In conclusion, I will identify alternative approaches in recent scholarship on spatial thought in medieval Islamicate societies.

Feray Çoskun

Representations of Culture, Religion and History in the World Maps of the Ottoman Kharīdat al-‘Ajā’ib

This paper concentrates on the relationship between the written text and the world maps in the Turkish translation of the fifteenth century cosmography, the *Kharīdat al-‘Ajā’ib wa Farīdaṭ al-Gharā’ib*. Having been attributed to Sirāj ad-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar ibn al-Wardī (d.1457), it provided a general view of the cosmos (*‘ālam*), both heavenly and terrestrial phenomena, and touched upon certain matters of religion, culture and history. Although its content overlapped with various fields of modern knowledge, it was classified under Islamic geographic literature. It was translated into Turkish by Maḥmūd al-Ḥaṭīb in 970/1562–1563 and became one of the most copied works of the Ottoman geographical literature.

Similar to the original work, the translated copies also included world maps drawn in the style of the Balkhi School. In other words, they conveyed a south-oriented view of the world surrounded by the Mountain Qaf and the Encircling Ocean and centred around Mecca. This paper will analyse the world maps in the Turkish copies of the *Kharīdat al-‘Ajā’ib* with regard to the world view conveyed in the main text. The focus will be given to such questions as why only some of the cosmographical/geographical elements were represented on the maps and how their representations are connected to certain issues of theology and history. Can one assume that the depiction of Arabian Peninsula as an isolated centre might have to do with the sanctity attributed to Mecca and Medina in the Islamic tradition? How was Istanbul (*Ḳoṣṭantīniyye*) represented on the maps? What does it mean that it was either depicted in the form of a triangle or a crescent directed to Europe? Why did the translation continue to be copied in the late Ottoman period even though it did not reflect the latest geographical discoveries?

By seeking answers to those questions, this paper aims to offer insight into the interplay of physical, mental and social space in the world maps of the *Kharīdat al-‘Ajā’ib*.

Nadja Danilenko*Getting the Picture: How al-Iṣṭakhrī's Book of Routes and Realms Made it to the Nineteenth Century*

The tenth century *Book of Routes and Realms* by al-Iṣṭakhrī is one of the first Arabic examples that communicates an understanding of space through both text and images. The 21 images of the Islamicate world not only serve as a means for picturing the vast space between al-Andalus and al-Sind, they also provide the text with a structure. And yet, the research focus up until now has been either on the text alone or on al-Iṣṭakhrī's world map, neglecting a detailed analysis of all pictures and their relationship to the text.

This paper focuses on al-Iṣṭakhrī's images for two reasons. First, his strategy of visualization is strikingly elaborate, coherent and esthetically pleasing – an accomplishment that has to be understood both in its own right as well as in relation to the text. Second, these images may have been the reason for this work's remarkable "life" since it was translated from Arabic into Persian and Ottoman and was transmitted via manuscripts until 1898 CE.

It is this rich manuscript tradition that I will explore in the last part of my paper. On the one hand, the fifty extant copies of the *Book of Routes and Realms* provide insights into the manuscripts' owners and the book's audience. On the other hand, the changes and consistencies speak to knowledge transfer and to the way this 10th century geography mattered for nearly a millennium. As such, the *Book of Routes and Realms* illustrates the importance of combining questions of spatial thought with manuscript studies. Only then is it possible to get a better picture of the relevance of imagining and thinking about space.

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Jean-Charles Ducène

Géographie politique, physique ou religieuse? Le monde vu depuis la chancellerie mamelouke

Les manuels ou les encyclopédies rédigés dans le cadre de la chancellerie mamelouke du Caire par al-‘Umarī (m. 749/1348), Ibn Nāzīr al-Ġayš (786/1384), Qalqašandī (m. 821/1418) et al-Saḥamāwī (m. 868/1464) développent un discours sur le monde et les Etats en relation avec le domaine mamelouke doublement significatif. En effet, si le positionnement des territoires mameloukes est pensé selon des critères de géographie mathématique (ou de cartographie) et des considérations traditionnelles « ethniques » (*Rūm, Ifranġ, Sūdān*, etc), qui remontent à la géographie de position telle qu’elle s’est développée du IX^e au XII^e siècle, le discours qui détaille les rapports particuliers qui unissent ces territoires avec le reste du monde s’élabore à partir de notions religieuse et politique. Les catégories religieuses sont simplement l’islam, le christianisme et l’infidélité (*kāfir*), mais la vision politique est plus complexe car elle exige une définition de l’Etat.

Or, les auteurs utilisent ici deux types de notions, soit des notions théoriques originales comme celles de la territorialité d’un pouvoir politique, sa capacité militaire, à côté de notions pragmatiques basées sur l’existence de relations économiques et diplomatiques. En outre, lorsque les intérêts de l’Etat mamelouke – ou de l’islam – sont en jeu, le discours se teinte de notions de géopolitique. C’est certainement al-‘Umarī qui est le plus novateur dans la mise en place des éléments qui structurent cette réflexion mais ils se retrouvent plus tard chez al-Maqrīzī (845/1442), mais ne semblent pas cependant se diffuser hors du cercles des auteurs amenés à penser l’Etat dans ses rapports avec l’étranger.

Notre contribution vise à mettre en lumière les éléments conceptuels qui se superposèrent pour constituer cette représentation géo-politique du monde, vu depuis le Caire mamelouke.

Dr Jean-Charles Ducène, Directeur d’études · École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences historiques et philologiques, Paris · jean-charles.ducene@ephe.sorbonne.fr

Kurt Franz

Geographic Narratives and Normalized Space in the Age of Encyclopaedism

The established division of Arabic geographical literature into “classical” and “post-classical” writing, with al-Muqaddasī’s *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm* as the cornerstone of the former (Miquel), has also ushered a decline paradigm. It lauds the early authors’ critical scientific attitude, originality and emphasis on authentic reports, while finding repetition, synopsis and consolidation in the later ones (Maqbul Ahmad). Within this opposition, the encyclopaedic works that sprang up from the eleventh century often serve as principal witnesses of eclecticism. I in contrast take the view that one should do away with this bias and ask which new claims, themes, forms, and concepts were put forth in their own right during the age of encyclopaedism.

This paper is to trace novelties precisely where they usually are least suspected, that is in geographical dictionaries. On the basis of Yāqūt’s (d. 1229) *Muʿjam al-buldān*, with side glimpses at al-Bakrī, Šāfi al-Dīn, al-ʿUmarī and al-Ḥimyarī, I mount two arguments. First, specialized geographers continued to make sense of the world through story-telling and kept up with the times by creating new geographic narratives. Such narratives can be identified on the level of articles while at the same time master narratives emerge from in-between the articles. These together enable us to recognize the *Muʿjam* as a coherent literary composition that calls for a holistic approach.

Second, I argue that the dictionary format meant a disenchantment with the idea of a sanctified realm of Islam that was centralized, subdivided, actually limited, and prospectively expanding. Instead, a fresh concept was expressed and promoted that I characterise, in retrospect, as “normalized space.” This was conceived as a truly extensive, continuous, and basically ceaseless geographic space, not as much structured by religious and politico-administrative regional entities than by *buldān*, punctiform settlement units. By turning from religious normativity to geo-spatial normality, authors devised a non-hierarchical theatre of human agency in which geo-spatial and human topologies cut across regions, periods, and even across the coming of Islam.

Ari M. Gordon*Sacred Orientation: The qibla as Ritual, Metaphor and Identity Maker in Early Islam*

My research explores the *qibla* as a point of confluence between sacred geography, ritual and religious identity in the formative period of Islam. Through innovative readings of a wide range of pre-modern literary and material sources, I argue that the *qibla* offered a unique symbol for the expression of Islamic identity in a variety of ways. The Qurʾān's framing of the *qibla* participates in a ritual koiné among religions of Late Antiquity around orientation and group distinctiveness. Critical literary analysis of the *qibla*'s role in the narratives of Islamic origins enriches the conversation about Mecca and Jerusalem as socio-religious emblems of belonging that utilize geography and "place." The legal framing of orientation towards the *qibla* for ritual evidences the ways that "place" became embodied in practice. Research into literatures of theology, belles-lettres, geography and interreligious polemic also show the ways in which topographic orientation persisted as a metaphor for proper orientation towards God well beyond the period of Islamic origins. Rigorous study of textual and material culture from Late Antiquity through the 11th century applies and generates critical theory relevant to other fields of inquiry (e.g. the study of space/place, interreligious relations and ritual).

Following the current best practices among historians of Islam, my study of the *qibla* as "place-maker" expands our lens to consider the experience of place at a distance. Facing the *qibla* creates a sense of belonging through an embodied practice that conjures up remembered as well as present connections to a far-off site. It also marks the presence of the God of the Qurʾānic revelation in any space one chooses to pray, slaughter, or bury the dead. In early Islamicate cultures, physical orientation for ritual functioned as a metaphor for one's relationship with God and with one's co-religionists. We cannot appreciate the connection between place and identity in Islam's formative period without considered analysis of this important symbol.

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Robert J. Haug*Local History and Spatial Thought in Ibn Isfandiyar's Tarikh-i Tabaristan:
A Refugee's Geography of Home*

Medieval Persian local histories are increasingly recognized not only as important sources on the history of Iran and the broader Persianate world, but also as subjects of historiographical and literary study in their own right. Geography plays an important role in this genre and most examples of local histories include introductory sections describing the geography of the locality under study. These geographical sections are often divided into chapters focused on mundane geographical knowledge (descriptions of cities, rivers, irrigation systems, tax revenues, etc.) and chapters focused on marvels and wonders.

This presentation will discuss the place of geography in the genre of local histories and the place of local histories in the study of medieval geography and spatial thought using an example of Persian local histories, Ibn Isfandiyar's *Tarikh-i Tabaristan*. Written in the early thirteenth century CE on the eve of the Mongol invasion of Iran, Ibn Isfandiyar's local history is an important look into a region that stood at the fringes of the Islamic world by an author who had been integrated into the larger intellectual and cultural networks of the faded 'Abbasid world, having traveled from Tabaristan to study in Khwarazm, Rayy, Baghdad, and even Mecca. How does Ibn Isfandiyar present the geography, both mundane and wondrous, of Tabaristan? What is the relationship between Ibn Isfandiyar's geography of Tabaristan and the image of Tabaristan in geographic literature? What is the role of geography beyond the specifically geographic chapters of his history and what role does geography play in Ibn Isfandiyar's historical narrative?

Through exploring Ibn Isfandiyar's work, the role of local histories in the study of medieval Islamicate geography and spatial thought more broadly will be discussed.

Professor Robert J. Haug · University of Cincinnati, McChicken College of Arts and Sciences, Department of History · haugrt@ucmail.uc.edu

Stefan Heidemann*Defining the Abbasid Empire on Its Own Terms*

The Islamic/Abbasid Empire, as the pinnacle of the late antique empires in its extent from the Hindukush to the Atlantic, had no obvious official term with which contemporary authors addressed it. There was seemingly also no such term for the capital or residence of the caliph, which might distinguish it from other cities. A closer look at the provinces shows that also here the terminology and the extent of the regions covered by each provincial name varies from author to author and makes it difficult to write an administrative history of the empire. The descriptions of the empire diverge at an obvious water-shed. These are the decades of regionalization around the 940s. While al-Ya‘qubi and Ibn Khurradadbeh describe the empire while still functioning, al-Muqaddasi retro-projects a provincial system onto the empire, as the “best divisions in the knowledge of the regions,” which never existed in this form.

Professor Stefan Heidemann · Universität Hamburg, Asien-Afrika-Institut, Abteilung für Geschichte und Kultur des Vorderen Orients · stefan.heidemann@uni-hamburg.de

Aglaia Iankovskaja

At the Edge of the World of Islam: Maritime Southeast Asia in the Eyes of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa

The account of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, who claims to have visited the Malay Archipelago around 1345–1347, stands out among medieval Arabic sources on the region as one of the few first-hand reports and the first of this kind after 1000. However, the Southeast Asian chapters of his travelogue remain understudied. The project deals with the two issues related to the text – its credibility and the conception of the region it represents. Yet Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s accounts contain some details that seem to confirm them being those of an eye-witness: the route and chronology of his journey are largely inconsistent. Since the credibility of other parts of the *Riḥla* has been already questioned by a number of scholars, one might assume that its Southeast Asian chapters could be a compilation. The project aims to highlight some parallels between Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s reports and other medieval texts and look for his possible sources of borrowing.

Be the account original or not, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s conception of maritime Southeast Asia appears to be an interesting case of bordering the world of Islam. The different ways he describes parts of the Archipelago that have already been or have not yet been converted to Islam are revealed through the opposition of *Jāwa* and *Mul Jāwa* in his narrative. While *Jāwa* (the northern part of Sumatra subject to the sultanate of Samudra) is described in a positive and realistic way as a stronghold of Islam, the “pagan” *Mul Jāwa* (still Hindu-Buddhist lands) remains a scene for traditional tales of exoticism and bizarre customs. The accounts of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa can be seen as a new stage in the development of Islamic cultural geography that marked the expansion of Islam further to the east and dislodging of the most fantastic ideas of Southeast Asia beyond its borders.

Aglaia Iankovskaja, Cand. Sc. · Central European University, Department of Medieval Studies, Budapest · iankovskaia_aglaia@student.ceu.edu

Lutz Ilisch*Coins as a Source of Historical Geography and the Tübingen Numismatic Collection*

The Forschungsstelle für Islamische Numismatik (FINT) was planned in 1988 to provide numismatic primary source material for Islamic Studies, and it was equipped with a large collection of 30.000 medieval Islamic coins, which has since grown to over 75.000. While this collection was originally organized dynastically, the work of FINT from 1990 onwards followed guidelines of the American Numismatic Society and re-organized the collection geographically.

This led to a change in perspective, not only replacing top down with bottom up organizational criteria, but also illuminating many aspects of local history. For instance, phases of precious metal monetary activity relate to the foundation and extinction of sites as well as to economic development, while petty copper coinage relates to the administrative importance of a place. It is undeniable that the scales which determine the existence and volume of activity of mints differ across time and space. But once these changes are appropriately clarified, the numismatic material should contribute to historical geography in a more continuous way than the lists of tax income or related kinds of information found in geographical literature.

This paper will demonstrate how vitally the precision of data depends on the accessibility of original coins. The focus will be on historical coinage production.

Dr Lutz Ilisch · Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen, Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies, Department of Oriental and Islamic Studies, Research Unit for Islamic Numismatics · lutz.ilisch@uni-tuebingen.de

Dženita Karić

Sacred Spaces and Secured Provinces: Bosnian Hajj Literature and the Making of Local Cosmopolitanism

The Hajj was one of the mechanisms by which Ottoman rule was established in newly conquered and Islamized areas, such as the Balkans. The places of Mecca and Medina were quickly established as recognizable spatial authorities among the Bosnian Muslim educated elites. Moreover, in the new rapidly changing context, the Hajj imagery was reproduced in a way that could appeal to larger imperial audiences by the members of those elites themselves.

There are three authors who are focused on in this project: Ali Dede Bosnawi (d. 1598), Abdullah Bosnawi (d. 1644) and Hasan Imamzade Bosnawi (d. after 1661). In terms of genre, their works belong to three separate, but inter-related categories: *faḍā'il* (literature on virtues), *awā'il* (the literature on the "firsts") which is usually followed by the sections on the *awākhir* (the literature on the "lasts"). The importance of these genres in the Ottoman context is such that they present a suitable tool for the authors – who acted as textual agents – to express the imperial self-aggrandizing image and support the Ottoman claims on the holy places. ... Therefore, the genres of the *faḍā'il*, *awā'il* and *awākhir* were used to bolster imperial claims on space in ways they had not been used previously. The space was shifted accordingly – the holy places were observed as having ideological primacy which was, however, adjusted to suit imperial claims. Although presented as spaces that emit *baraka*, Mecca and Medina were increasingly seen not only as objects for contestation, but also as objects whose description meant promotion in the realm of textual authorities.

Therefore, this paper will deal with three types of authorities: imperial, spatial and textual in the context of the creation of local cosmopolitanism in the early modern Ottoman Empire.

Dženita Karić, M.A. · University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies,
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Irina Konovalova*Modes of Regional Description in the Geographical Work of al-Idrīsī*

The aim of this paper is to discuss modes of regional description in medieval Islamic geography. Beginning with the 9th century, Islamic geographers developed different presentation formats, depending on a chosen scale — global, regional, or country-size. The regional approach was widely used in works of various genres. Sometimes coming to the fore, sometimes playing a secondary role, the regional format was always combined with other structural principles, closely related to the author's objectives. The most sophisticated model of such combination was the description of the entire oecumene, where a country or a region had to be characterized not only as such, but also as a part of the whole. For this purpose a specific type of geographic description — zonal-climatic in its form, but filled up with cultural and historical content — was elaborated. An outstanding example of this type of work was the geographical treatise by al-Idrīsī (1154), in which the arrangement of information by climates created the illusion of a holistic view of the world, but, under the climate 'cover,' particularistic modes of regional description were hidden.

The following questions will be considered in the analysis of the East European data of al-Idrīsī: 1) the structure of the geographical work of al-Idrīsī and his methods of regionalization, i.e. delineation of boundaries – natural, ethnographic, state – and administrative, social, linguistic, religious, etc.; 2) the role of routing information as a basic mode of regional description and its place within the general climatic frame of world depiction; 3) the specific features of medieval toponyms and, in particular, the identity-building capacity of imaginary geographical objects and their real geographical and cultural background; 4) the place of traditional and new data in geographical description; and 5) the correlation between cartographic and textual information concerning the region.

Dr habil. Irina Konovalova · Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute for World History,
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Sergey Minov

The Marvels Found in the Great Cities, Seas and Islands: Syriac-speaking Christians engaging Muslim spatial thought

The genre of *ʿaǧāʾib*, that is of describing and narrating stories about marvelous events, things and natural phenomena, enjoyed a considerable popularity throughout the Islamicate world and is well represented in Arabic and Persian literatures. Until now, however, no specimens of this genre were attested in the literary traditions of Christian minorities living under Islam.

In my presentation I would like to draw attention to a sole representative of this genre in Syriac Christian literature that, so far, has not been published or studied. In my paper I would like to introduce the Syriac work entitled *Marvels Found in the Great Cities, Seas and Islands*, a critical edition of which I am currently preparing. This anonymous composition provides a catalogue of wondrous things and phenomena found through the inhabited world. Preserved in three East Syrian manuscripts, the oldest of which (ms. Vatican, Borgia sir. 39) is dated by the seventeenth century, the *Marvels* were composed by an East-Syrian Christian, most probably, in the region of Urmia, at some point between the fourteenth and early seventeenth century.

The main focus of my presentation will be on understanding the spatial thought of the *Marvels*' Christian author. With that goal in mind, I intend to examine sources used by this writer to construct his own version of imaginary geography, as well as the degree of his indebtedness to the Greco-Roman, Christian and Muslim traditions of geographical, ethnographical and paradoxographical lore. In addition to that, I shall engage the problem of this work's literary characteristics and its relation to the burgeoning genre of Arabic and Persian *ʿaǧāʾib* literature. I believe that the *Marvels* provides us with a unique opportunity to glimpse into the fascinating process of participation of Christian minorities of the late medieval Near East in the dominant culture of its Islamicate society.

Sergey Minov, PhD · University of Oxford, Faculty of History ·
sergey.minov@history.ox.ac.uk

panel 5 · sat, 18:15

Nasser Rabbat

Discussant

General response

Professor Nasser Rabbat · Massachusetts Institute of Technology, School of
Architecture and Planning, Department of Architecture, Cambridge, Mass. ·
nasser@mit.edu

Yossef Rapoport*Maps of Urban Space in Medieval Islam*

It is often been said that medieval Islam was a world of cities, a network of urban centres. Yet, surprisingly, little work has been done on cartographic representations of the cities of Islam. In the late antique and early Islamic Near East, vivid images of urban agglomerations in mosaics – most famously the Madaba map - formed an important cartographic tradition. While such a tradition does not exist in medieval Islam, the different ways in which cartographers represented urban features can tell us a great deal about different conception of urban space.

This paper will discuss three different approaches to urban mapping in medieval Islam: commercial, military and topographic. The first approach is exemplified by the largest set of town plans from the medieval Islamic tradition, that of the traveller and merchant Ibn al-Mujāwir, written in the 620s/1220s. The most complex map drawn by Ibn al-Mujāwir is that of the port of Aden, where the emphasis is undoubtedly commercial. The two main features at the centre of the map are the circle labelled 'balance', probably the weighing house, and the label 'custom house.'

A second approach comes from al-Qazwīnī's plan of his hometown of Qazwīn in Iran, a highly stylized diagram of four concentric circles. The map highlights the typical concentric layout of a medieval town, disregarding any strategic or military aspects. The map-maker is keen to show the ways in which the city is integrated into its rural hinterland.

A third approach comes from the Fatimid *Book of Curiosities*, where the most decorative and realistic set of maps of Mahdia, Tinnis and Palermo share a focus on the fortifications, palaces, and the harbour facilities, carrying a clear political message.

Finally, the talk will note the iconographic absence of mosques from any cartographic representation of cities known to us. It is not the minaret that defined cities, but economy, security and governance.

Masoumeh Seydi and Maxim Romanov*A Method for Comparing Geographical Descriptions*

As an important part of the premodern Islamic written legacy, geographical texts contain a lot of valuable information on how different geographers viewed the division of the Islamic world. Finding an efficient way to compare geographical data can help us to improve our understanding of the views of Islamic geographers as well as the view of the Islamic world as a complex geographical entity.

In this work, we introduce a method that allows comparing similarities and differences of hierarchical representations (administrative divisions) of the Islamic world at a large scale. We develop the process of data preparation and comparison for two sources as our test dataset. One is Georgette Cornu's *Atlas du monde arabo-islamique à l'époque classique: IX^e-X^e siècles* (1983) which defines the divisions in two levels of major provinces and settlements. The other source is *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm*, a comprehensive geographical text written by al-Muqaddasī (10th century CE) and describing a multi-level hierarchy of administrative divisions from the level of major provinces down to settlements.

Although we focus on the mentioned sources, this approach can be applied to compare other datasets which are structured in the similar manner. This method is a way to identify and then interpret descriptive patterns and spatial understanding of various sources at the macro level. What we offer here is not only the comparison of specific geographical sources but an approach to provide comparable data and comparison models in order to study differences, similarities, and corresponding relations between sources.

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Comprendre un auteur dans son contexte historique, ou pourquoi l'histoire de la géographie n'existe pas: l'exemple de l'Andalou al-Bakrī (XI^e s)

Les histoires de la géographie, à l'instar de celles de toutes les sciences et savoirs, présentent généralement la caractéristique de dérouler en un récit en vase clos le long exposé de la maturation de la discipline. Tout au plus donne-t-on, et seulement à titre de repère, quelques indications de chronologie, souvent formelles, pour situer les étapes de ce développement. Ce faisant, on postule l'autonomie du savoir, hors des contextes qui ont prévalu à son élaboration et, partant, on nie toute validité à l'enquête historique. Or c'est précisément en historien qu'il nous faut comprendre la constitution de la géographie en discipline car rien n'est moins neutre que la façon dont les hommes ont envisagé l'espace qui fut le leur, la façon dont ils ont élaboré une *imago mundi*.

L'un des exemples les plus saisissants de cette nécessité de se plonger dans l'étude d'un temps pour comprendre une pensée nous est fourni par le géographe andalou al-Bakrī, né en 405/1014, alors que le califat omeyyade de Cordoue sombre dans la terrible *fitna* qui allait l'emporter, et mort en 489/1094, quand les Berbères almoravides sont devenus maîtres de la péninsule Ibérique. Ce siècle des Royaumes des Taïfas, fustigé par les contemporains comme par l'historiographie, est cependant le plus grand moment de rayonnement culturel d'al-Andalus : le cadī Ṣā'id de Tolède dans son traité sur les *Catégories des nations*, *Ṭabaqāt al-umam*, rédigé en 1068, l'année même de la composition du *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik* de Bakrī, témoigne de la richesse de ce temps pourtant troublé politiquement, et présente une génération exceptionnelle formée d'Ibn Ḥazm, d'Azarquiel, d'Ibn Gabirol, d'Ibn Darrāğ al-Qaṣṣallī et d'Ibn Ṣuhayd, entre autres grands noms. La multiplicité des cours princières, les rivalités qui les poussèrent à accueillir les principaux lettrés et l'activité de mécénat qu'elles déployèrent jouèrent un rôle déterminant dans cette floraison exceptionnelle.

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Alexis Norman Wick*Of Other Places: Visions of the Sea and the World before European Hegemony*

This paper examines the various appearances of the Indian Ocean in particular, the sea in general, and the world more largely in Aḥmad b. Mājid's foundational geographical treatise, the *Kitāb al-Fawā'id fī uṣūl al-baḥr wa-l-qawā'id*, widely celebrated as the culminating account (in verse) of navigation in the Western Indian Ocean just before the coming of the Portuguese. The assumption here is that 'the sea' is not a fixed and natural category, but one that depends on the author's time and place, and the text's intent and generic form. Indeed, as Merleau-Ponty affirmed, space (in general) is not "the setting (real or imagined) in which things are arranged, but the means whereby the positing of things becomes possible." The objective is to recapture an alternative worldview, with varying notions of spatiality, through the close textual analysis of a key text in a different tradition of writing about the sea. Of particular interest will be the parameters by which the author conceives of his work and the world, the notions of identity and difference that the text articulates, and the ontological and epistemological premises upon which it is based.

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Travis Zadeh*Crossing the Sea of Darkness: Wonder, Knowledge, and the Shifting Limits of Islamic Geography*

In a series of speeches made in 2014, the president of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, argued that Muslims discovered America centuries before Columbus. He concluded that the original Muslim population of the New World suffered the same fate as the Native Americans, forced to convert by the genocidal tyranny of Christian colonialism. The theory of Muslim precedence in the New World is not particularly novel. What is perhaps new is to hear it from a sitting head of state. The use of medieval Arabic geographical accounts as a means of challenging the European discovery of the New World can be traced back to the emergence of Arabic nationalism and Islamic revivalism in the course of the late nineteenth century. Among the first to champion this theory was the Egyptian philologist and statesman Aḥmad Zakī Pāshā (d. 1934), a prominent figure in what is commonly referred to as the *nahḍa*, the renaissance or awakening of Arabic language, literature, and culture.

The numerous publications that have followed after Zakī Pāshā in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu, to name a few, documenting the Muslim discovery of the New World profoundly neglect the historical means by which geographical knowledge of the Americas actually developed and was absorbed within the diverse frameworks of Islamic geography. Pre-modern Muslim geographers described and mapped the world not only to render it known but also to marvel at its unknowability. Accounts and reports drawn from Iberian materials of the discovery of the Americas occasioned notable shifts in Islamic geographical writing and cartography. This talk explores these historical transformations in geographical discourse by examining various textual and cartographical means of spatially reordering the limits of the world.

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