



# **The Muslim Geographical Image of the World in the Middle Ages: A Source Study (Orientalia Polona Book 1)**

*Ahmad Nazmi*

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This book deals with the Muslim Geographical Image and ideas of the world. The main purpose of this study is to present the Muslim image of the world from the geographical point of view through the major Muslim geographical sources of the Middle Ages. The activity of the early Islamic scholars in the field of geography, cosmography, and astronomy is known to us not only through their original works that have reached us, but also through the mass of studies, surveys, and editions which were made by recent scholars, especially by orientalists. The author's aim is also to explore the links between Muslim thought in general and the geographical data to form an idea about how the Muslims integrated Islamic and geographical concepts to create a general and unified image of the world.

The sources are available in original Arabic or Persian. Many of them were also translated into European languages, studied, and edited. The difference is how to understand it and how to treat it methodologically to arrive at a scientific approach and a satisfying conclusion from all of these works. The technique used in this study is dictated by the aforementioned purposes. I must ask to be judged according to what I attempt and not according to what other scholars have quite differently attempted.

The geographical information mentioned in this work presents the main idea without adding exotic specimens to the main concept of the Muslim image of the world. The world image is used in this study in two senses: the mature image of the world and its components and the conscious picture of the world and its components as they became clear to them. The Muslim image of the world is treated in this study as a product of geographical science, not merely as a product of religion. Thus, in addition to the chapters on Islamic influence on geography, it contains the main chapters – and they are the majority – on aspects of the image of the earth, oceans, seas, islands, rivers, and mountains.

Moreover, it presents a contribution to the studies of scholars of both the East and West to introduce Muslim geography and its achievement, development, and its relation to and influence on modern western geography.

It was also necessary to survey whether the motives behind the Muslim interest in acquiring geographical knowledge were religious or purely scientific. It seems also that the vast Islamic empire demanded knowledge of the conditions of their territories, of routes, and of distance, apart from the requirements of worship.

In theory, the number of subjects to be included in an account of the contributions of Muslim geographers to the achievement of mankind is almost limitless, in practice because of the size of the book. The author intended to designate one chapter for the Muslim discovery of the world, which is by no means comparable to the European exploration in the 15th century and later. However, The phenomenon of ebb and flow and its cause according to Muslim geography is not so very important for this study and thus treated exclusively in the chapter on seas.

It may seem rather arbitrary to write on the ideas of Muslim geographers concerning the geographical elements of the world, i.e. earth, seas, oceans, islands, rivers, and mountains without speaking about the inhabitants of the world.

The collection of material and sources used in this study represent a long span of time. As has been already indicated in my introductory chapter, these sources cover a long period extending from the 9th century to the 17th century.

Like some chapters, such as the chapter on oceans, this chapter takes a cautious approach to certain

controversial issues where no definitive evidence is available to prove or disprove them, such as the Muslim discovery in the Atlantic Ocean.

In this book Dr Nazmi has taken the opportunity to present the main aspects of Muslim geography and to clarify some obscure notices and ideas in this field.

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