

Tarek Kahlaoui. *Creating the Mediterranean: Maps and the Islamic Imagination*. Leiden: Brill, 2017. 370 pages. ISBN: 9789004346192.

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*Translated by Mehmet Emin Güleçyüz***

Tarek Kahlaoui's book under review here focuses on the Islamic visual representations of the Mediterranean and exemplifies the *longue durée* historiography. From the inception of the geography tradition at the hands of the bureaucrats of the 9th-century Islamic world up until the 17th century, the book follows how the image of the Mediterranean developed in Islamic geographical works and cartography and consists of an introduction, three parts, a conclusion, an appendix, a bibliography, and an index. Its three main parts are divided up into seven chapters. Part I, "The Formation of the Mediterranean in the Islamic Imagination," comprises three chapters; Part II, "The Mediterranean of the Maghribi Geographers and Cartographers from the Fifth/Eleventh to the Ninth/Fifteenth Century" has two chapters; and Part III, "The Image of the Mediterranean in Islamic Maritime Cartography (Eighth/Fourteenth to Tenth/Sixteenth Century)" has two chapters.

After a comprehensive inquiry into the theses of Fernand Braudel (d. 1985) and Henri Pirenne (d. 1935), authors of canonical works on the Mediterranean history, Kahlaoui states that the book's aim is not to discuss how modern historians perceive the Mediterranean but to establish how the Mediterranean was perceived in the periods when the works under investigation were produced. For this reason, the author aims to study the subject from the perspective of the history of the Mediterranean and the context in which the Islamic visual material

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was produced. The extent to which these seemingly two separate perspectives specify one another defines the book's methodology.

In Chapter 1, the author offers a lengthy analysis on the etymology of the term "Mediterranean," stating that it has yet to be comprehensively analyzed. This analysis makes an important contribution to the literature by determining the frequency and popularity of the different terms used for the Mediterranean (*Baḥr al-Shām*, *Baḥr al-Rūm*, *Baḥr al-Mutawassit*) that prevail in the 38 works authored during the period under investigation (24–33). In a separate inquiry, the author shows that *Baḥr al-Rūm*, the most frequently used term, did not necessarily denote the Byzantium but did always indicate non-Muslims; hence the seas were demarcated on the axis of beliefs rather than ethnicities (33–41). At the end of Chapter 1, he questions Karen Pinto's depiction of medieval Muslim geographers' perception of the Mediterranean between two conflicting extremes, one being as a wondrous sea because of the various mythical creatures believed to be living therein and the other as a tedious sea over whose coasts one must pass to cross from one point to another. The author demonstrates the issue to be more complex than this two-pole approach by touching upon the works of al-Mas'ūdi (d. 345/956), al-Ghīrnāṭī (d. 565/1169), and Ibn al-'Adīm (660/1262).

Chapter 2 investigates the early medieval cartographic representations of the Mediterranean (50–64). This chapter establishes the two approaches that had existed among Muslim geographers toward the Mediterranean since the 9th century. Accordingly, while some solely focused on the sea, others treated the Mediterranean as a region (*iqlīm*). Next, Chapter 3 looks at al-Iṣṭakhri (d. after 340/951–952) and Ibn Ḥawqal (d. 4th/10th century), who first treated the Mediterranean as a region and were thus viewed as the founders of the *Atlas of Islam* school, a tradition the current chapter attempts to redefine (65–103). In Kahlaoui's view, the al-Iṣṭakhri tradition showed more schematic features and thus represented the Mediterranean in a bulb-like shape without gulfs and capes. Ibn Ḥawqal was less schematic and seems to have intended to depict certain geographical details. Al-Muqaddasī's (d. ca. 390/1000) work is assessed closer to al-Iṣṭakhri's schematic style.

Islamic sea power in the Mediterranean had ramped down from the 11th century onwards with the rise in dominance of the European naval forces and shipping merchants. But the Maghrib sea power, which had been developing since the 10th century, did not decrease with the rise of the European forces. As a consequence, the Maghribi geographers began playing a greater part during this period and

onward (107). Part II of the book examines the Maghribi geographers' perceptions and representations of the Mediterranean from the 11th century to the 15th within this framework.

After an inquiry into the beginning of the geographical works in the Maghrib, Chapter 4 examines the perception of the Mediterranean among Maghribi geographers through an analysis of *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik* by Abū 'Ubayd 'Abd Allāh al-Bakrī (d. 487/1094), a high-ranking bureaucrat from 11th-century Andalusia (107–41). Following this, an anonymous text from the Fatimid era, *Gharā'ib al-funūn wa-mulaḥ al-'uyūn*, is put under the microscope and comprehensively examined, despite having only recently been published by its discoverers.

The author devotes Chapter 5 to the famous Maghribi geographer al-Idrīsī (d. 560/1165). Starting off by constructing a new biography, the author thoroughly investigates al-Idrīsī's works and confirms that they are the outputs of teamwork. Taking al-Idrīsī's map as a product of mathematical geography, the author argues that al-Idrīsī considered the Mediterranean as more of a sea. Kahlaoui supports this thesis with proofs as well as texts from al-Idrīsī's works. For instance, the passages on the regions over the coast of the Mediterranean are lengthier, whereas the passages about the inland areas are quite brief.

Part III aims to investigate the image of the Mediterranean in maritime cartography in the period from the 14th to the 16th century. One of the main reasons for composing this part is the insufficient attention that has been paid to texts on the Mediterranean, while Muslim sailors' writings on navigating the Indian Ocean have been well studied over the years. In Chapter 6, the author revisits the Maghrib Chart, which is purported to be the earliest Islamic portolan chart, concluding it to likely be part of an incomplete sea atlas and a rather Italian-style work not meant for navigation (181–239). Kahlaoui identifies Aḥmad al-Ṭanjī's 813/1413-14 chart as the first Islamic portolan chart based on his detailed analysis of toponyms. While mostly building his comments about Ibrāhīm al-Mursī's 865/1461 chart over Mónica Herrera-Casais's study, the author states it to be closely connected to European portolans, especially from Catalonia, and to have not attracted much attention. The author overlooked Doğan Uçar's treatise, which includes a detailed technical analysis of this portolan.¹ At the end of this chapter, Kahlaoui carries

1 Doğan Uçar, *The Chart of Ibrahim of Mursiye* (İstanbul: Deniz Kuvvetleri Komutanlığı, 1981).

out detailed analyses on the two atlases and world maps created by ‘Ali al-Sharfi and Muḥammad al-Sharfi from the Sharfi family who were influential in the 16th century. Based on the cartographic material produced by the Sharfis, the author concludes that the Mediterranean was viewed not just as a geographic space but also as a political scene.

The book’s Chapter 7 discusses the image of the Mediterranean through the cartographic works produced in the 16th-century Ottoman Empire (240-62). The author first brings into question Piri Reis’s (d. 960/1552) maps. While following Giancarlo Casale in taking the existence of an “Ottoman age of exploration” to be a given, Kahlaoui then follows Pınar Emiraliöğlü’s view of the geographical traditions that emerged in this century as a reflection of the state’s imperial ideology.² The arguments from both authors have raised discussions in the literature and were marred by factual flaws.³ Kahlaoui’s narrative, which does not take these into account, therefore creates problems. It overlooks the fact that the only two copies had been produced from the first of *Kitâb-ı Bahriye*’s two versions in Piri Reis’s lifetime casts doubts on the idea that this work reflected the state’s imperial ideology. Moreover, a more detailed research into Piri Reis’s biography clearly shows that he never received the response he expected after completing this work. That being said, the author has important evaluations centered on the maps from *Kitâb-ı Bahriye*, which have thus far not been studied adequately. Furthermore, Kahlaoui studied the portolan maps of al-Ḥājj Abū al-Ḥasan (10th/16th century), Ali Macar Reis (active ca. 1567), and Menemenli Mehmed Reis (active ca. 1590). He critiques the theses forwarded by Svat Soucek and Thomas D. Goodrich that these maps are largely imitations of European maps and ascertains that the Ottoman and Maghribi portolan and sea maps contain features peculiar to these societies.

Tarek Kahlaoui’s book is a significant contribution in that it offers a chance to look at Islamic cartographical and geographical production from a new perspective. We believe that it is a point of neglect that a book with such a long compass has overlooked certain secondary sources. The detailed catalogues in the Appendix,

2 Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Pınar Emiraliöğlü, *Geographical Knowledge and Imperial Culture in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014).

3 For some reviews see Emrah Safa Gürkan, Review of *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, by Giancarlo Casale, *Renaissance Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (2014): 1000-998; Güneş Işıksel, “Entre désirs et réalités (Sur l’Ottoman Age of Exploration de Giancarlo Casale),” *Turcica*, no. 43 (2011): 588-600; Sonja Brentjes, Review of *Geographical Knowledge and Imperial Culture in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*, by Pınar Emiraliöğlü, *Journal of Historical Geography*, no. 48 (2015): 77-78.

which is comprised of the geographical works and maps the author used, will likely assist researchers in future studies. However, considering the book's perspective on art history, we consider its visuals being quite small in size, few in number, and colorless to be a notable deficiency. For example, examination of the details about regions and cities in certain chapters is impossible with the visuals the author has provided. The selection of a regional western Mediterranean map from 'Alī al-Sharfi's 1551 atlas for the cover image is a proper decision, given the emphasis laid on Maghribi geographers throughout the book, as well as being a rare work autographed copies of which are extant.