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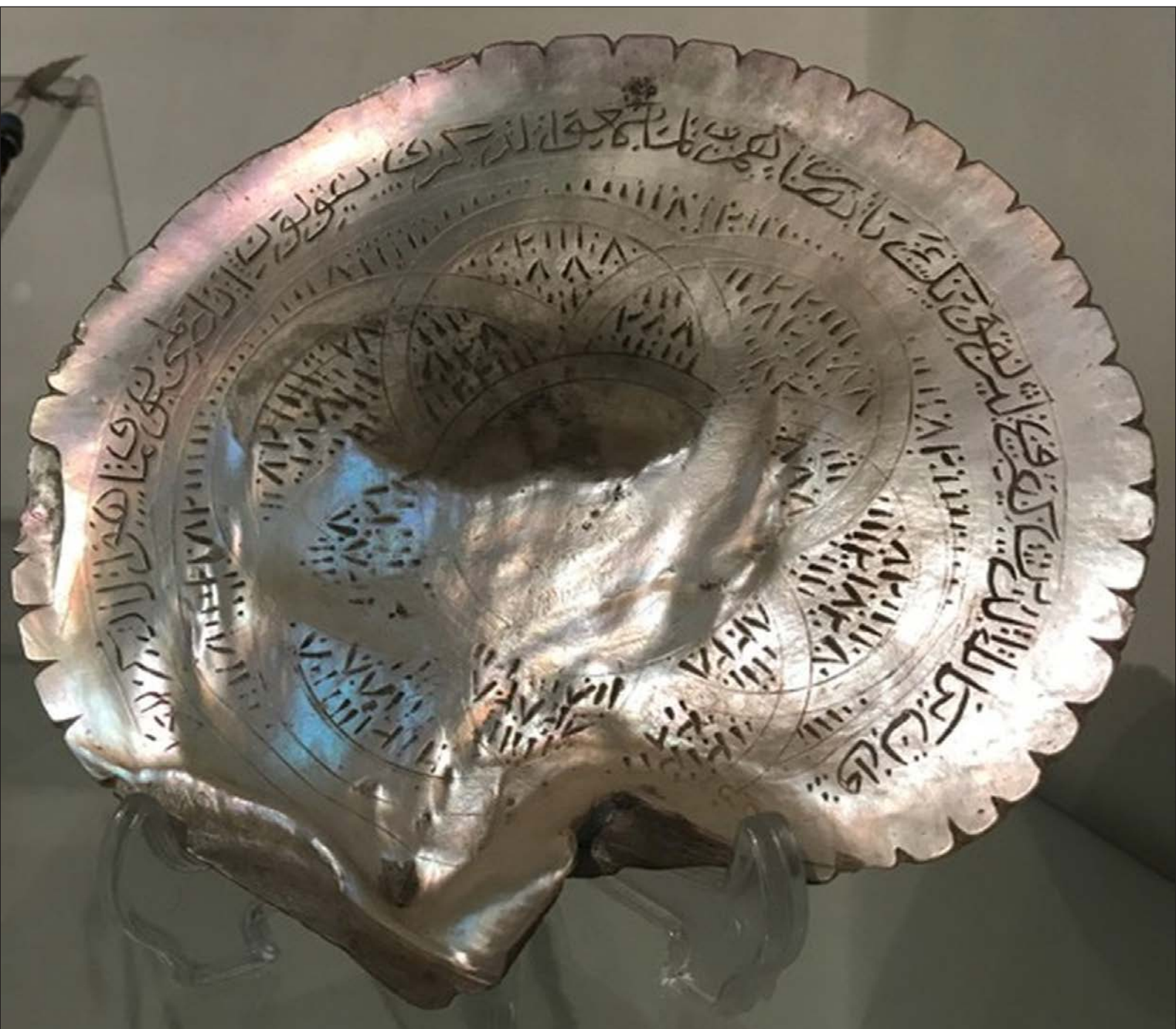
In God's Eyes: The Sacrality of the Seas in the Islamic Cartographic Vision

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MOTHER-OF-PEARL INCISED WITH VERSES 51 AND 52 OF SURAT AL-QALAM ('THE PEN') AND WITH MAGICAL NUMBERS. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY OF AZERBAIJAN, BAKU. Photo: Avinoam Shalem.

IN GOD'S EYES: THE SACRALITY OF THE SEAS IN THE ISLAMIC CARTOGRAPHIC VISION

A TRAVÉS DE LOS OJOS DE DIOS: LA SACRALIDAD DE LOS MARES EN LA VISIÓN CARTOGRÁFICA ISLÁMICA

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Abstract

In keeping with the theme of this issue, this article focuses on the sacrality embedded in the depiction of the seas in the medieval Islamic KMMS mapping tradition. Teasing apart the depictions, this article analyses the sacred dimensions of the five seas that make up the classical KMMS image of the world: *Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* (the Encircling Ocean), the *Baḥr Fāris* (Persian Gulf-Indian Ocean-Red Sea), *Baḥr al-Rūm* (the Mediterranean), *Baḥr al-Khazar* (Caspian Sea), and *Buḥayrat Khwārizm* (Aral Sea).

Keywords

Islamic cartography; History of Cartography; Illuminated manuscript; Encircling Ocean; Mediterranean; Indian Ocean; Persian Gulf; Sacred Relics of Prophet Muhammad.

Resumen

Atendiendo a la temática de esta publicación, este artículo indaga sobre la incorporación de lo sagrado en la representación de los mares en la tradición cartográfica islámica medieval KMMS. Por medio de un minucioso análisis de dichas imágenes, este estudio analiza la dimensión sagrada de los cinco mares que encontramos en la representación clásica del mundo de la tradición KMMS desde la perspectiva de lo sagrado en la forma cartográfica: *Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* (el Océano Circundante, el golfo pérsico-mar Rojo y océano Índico (*Baḥr Fāris*), el Mediterráneo (*Baḥr al-Rūm*), el mar Caspio (*Baḥr al-Khazar*) y el mar de Aral (*Buḥayrat Khwārizm*).

Palabras clave

Cartografía islámica; Historia de la cartografía; Manuscrito iluminado; Océano circundante; Mediterráneo; Océano Índico; Golfo Pérsico; Reliquias Sagradas del Profeta Muhammad.

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FIG. 1: KMMS WORLD MAP FROM AL-IŞTAKHRĪ'S *KITĀB AL-MASĀLIK WA-AL-MAMĀLIK* (BOOK OF ROUTES AND REALMS). TIMURID, DATED 827/1424. ULTRAMARINE GOUACHE AND BLACK INK AGAINST A FOLIATED GOLD BACKGROUND ON PAPER. DIAMETER 24 CM. COURTESY: TOPKAPI SARAY MÜZESİ KÜTÜPHANESİ, İSTANBUL. BAĖDAT 334, F. 2B. (Photo: Karen Pinto).

«He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His Throne was upon the waters, so as to test you: who among you is the best in works». (Qur'ān 11:7)²

One of the most enigmatic verses in the Qur'ān is the verse implying that God's throne rested *somewhere upon the waters*. Where exactly it rested this Qur'ānic *āyat* (verse) does not specify. Nor does it indicate which sea. As a result of this lack of specificity all the world's seas gain an aura of the sacred in the Islamic context.³

2. *The Qur'an*, transl. with an introduction by Khalidi, Tarif. London, Penguin, 2008, 171–172.

3. Although this article focuses on the seas, the same argument can be applied to the rivers. The authors of the KMMS maps usually use the same colour to represent the seas as the rivers. In fact, four rivers are designated as the rivers of Paradise by medieval Islamic geographers and historians alike.

Is this Qur'anic concept that all the seas have lapped god's throne reflected in their depiction on medieval Islamic maps? This article will argue that this is indeed the case and that the manifestation of sacrality in the seas can be read in the forms used to represent them.

THE KMMS TRADITION

What follows is a reading of the sacred in the depiction of the seas in a widely copied set of Islamic 'carto-ideographs'. The KMMS series comprises the cartographically illustrated *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-al Mamālik* (KMM) geographic copies of the tenth and eleventh century geographers, in particular those of al-Iṣṭakhrī (fl. early 10th century), Ibn Ḥawqal (fl. second half of 10th century), and al-Muqaddasī (d. ca. 1000). The S in the acronym is used to distinguish those texts in the KMM genre that include illustrations. Forming the world's earliest known atlas, the KMMS is composed of stylized maps of the world that include illustrations of twenty-one parts of the old world including five seas.⁴



FIG. 2: KMMS OTTOMAN CLUSTER WORLD MAP SHOWING THE LAYOUT OF THE SEAS BEHIND THE CENTRAL LANDMASS. LIGHT BLUE GOUACHE AND RED AND BLACK INK ON PAPER. DIAMETER 19.5 CM. COURTESY: SÜLEMANIYE CAMII KÜTÜPHANESİ, ISTANBUL. AYA SOFYA 2971A, F. 3A. (Photo: Karen Pinto).

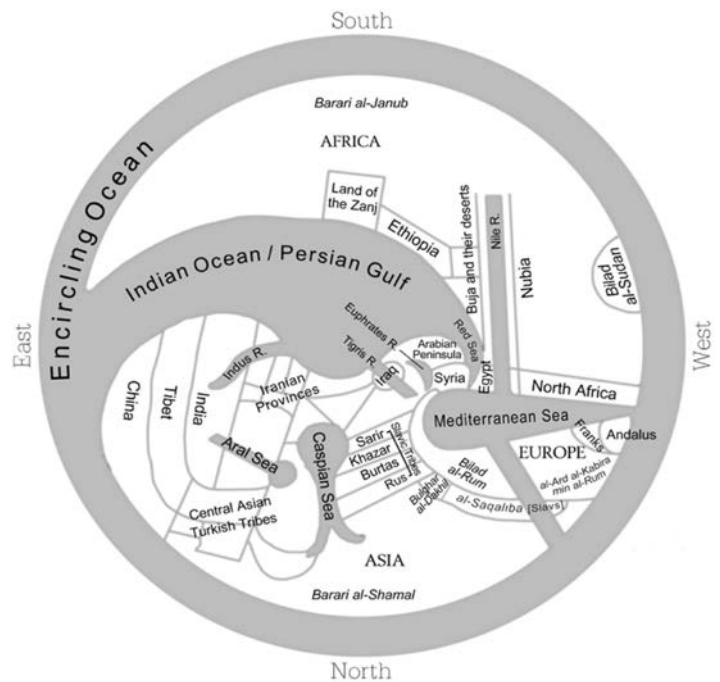


FIG. 3: DRAWING OF THE KMMS WORLD MAP BASED ON OTTOMAN CLUSTER MAP (FIG. 2). Drawing: Karen Pinto and Damien Bovlmov.

4. For more on the medieval Islamic mapping tradition and the role that the KMMS plays within it, see PINTO, Karen: *Medieval Islamic Maps: An Exploration*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

The key is: blue for seas; paper white for land masses; red for border lines and the name of the Encircling Ocean; and black for area/region/kingdom names and directions.

The classical KMMS map of the world is made up of a double-edged circle in a square or rectangular frame. Placed within this circle is the image of a pre-Columbian world, punctuated by seas and rivers. At the top of the map a large crescent shape sweeps in to shelter a double-headed, bulging form in the lower left-hand corner with a tiny triangle marooned in the lower right-hand sector of the image. These are white or paper-coloured. Two outspread blue arms emerge from a blue encircling band and additional blue shapes punctuate the white mass, including two small twin keyhole shapes towards the bottom of the map.

Within this aesthetically packaged ideograph are all the features standard to the classical medieval Islamic vision of the world. The Encircling Ocean (*Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*) that rings the world along with four other seas, seven rivers and the three major land masses of Africa, Asia and Europe (listed here in order of their size on the map). The key to comprehending the medieval Muslim conception of the world is to assimilate the basic shapes of the land masses and the seas, and, crucially, the map's southerly inversion.

The crescent-shaped land mass is the continent of Africa. Once we make this association we recognize that the double-headed, bulging form in the lower left-hand corner corresponds to the continent of Asia. The bulge connecting Africa to Asia is the Arabian Peninsula, and the tiny triangle marooned in the lower right-hand sector of the image is none other than Europe. Behind lie the seas outlining the land masses and, in doing so, make them possible.

Yet, precisely because they appear to serve as a background and highlighter for the lands, they have been collectively ignored.⁵ When we turn the focus onto the seas, a very different image emerges of the godly, sacral sea within which the devil and the jinn are also lurking, disappearing and reappearing. All the seas of our

5. Until now most of the studies on Islamic seas has focused on the Mediterranean as a logical outcome of the domination of Western supremacy in the modern era. The Mediterranean is studied length and breadth in great detail by historians of the Crusades and naval buffs –too numerous to list. Iconographically, MILLER, Konrad: *Mappae Arabicae: Arabische Welt-und Länderkarten des 9–13. Jahrhunderts*, 6 vols. Stuttgart, 1926–31, superficially analyses the forms that make up the Islamic maps in his extensive six-volume reprint of Islamic maps. But it isn't until the work of KRAMERS, J. H.: «La question Balḥi-İştāḥrī-Ibn Ḥawkal et l'Atlas de l'Islam», *Acta Orientalia*, 10 (1932), 9–30, that some semblance of serious enquiry is undertaken. The focus has picked back up with the work of DUCÈNE, Jean-Charles, who has written about the geographical accuracy of a number of seas at length in a number of articles: «Les îles de l'océan Indien dans les sources arabes médiévales: lente découverte ou imagination galopante?», in CANNUYER, Christian (ed.): *L'île, regards orientaux: varia orientalia, biblica et Antiqua*, Lille, Société belge d'études orientales, 2013, 125–34; «The Ports of the Western coast of India according to Arabic geographers (Eighth-Fifteenth centuries AD): A glimpse into the geography», in BOUSSAC, Marie-Françoise, SALLES, Jean-François and YON, Jean-Baptiste (eds.): *Ports of the Ancient Indian Ocean*. Delhi, Primus Books, 2016, 165–178; DUCÈNE, Jean-Charles: «The Cartography of the Caspian Sea in the Islamic Cartography (17th C.)», Communication given to the Second II International Congress of Eurasian Maritime History, Saint Petersburg, 23–26 July 2014 <https://www.academia.edu/8055620/The_cartography_of_the_Caspian_Sea_in_the_Islamic_Cartography_17th_c._>; and, most recently, Ducène has also written about the seas generally in DUCÈNE, Jean-Charles: «The Knowledge of the Seas According to the Ottoman Translations and Adaptation of Arabic Works (15th–16th C.)», in *Uluslararası Piri Reis ve Türk Denizcilik Tarihi Sempozyumu, 26–29 Eylül 2013, İstanbul*, vol. 4. Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014, 123–134 and 301–304. Where Ducène and I differ is on the application of religious, cosmographic and iconographic interpretations.

world have lapped the throne of God and the edges of the sea connect trans-cosmographically with the seven seas that ring the world, yet they are also the most deeply primordial of waters. They are the *fons et origo* of the universe and our world within it, the life blood of it all. This article only scratches the surface of revealing the fantastic that lies within its depths and forms.

THE ENCIRCLING OCEAN

Encasing this entire image is the broad band of the Encircling Ocean, encompassing the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. In a single flourishing sweep, it reinforces the idea that our world is an island marooned in a vast sea struggling to keep the waters at bay, it is the ring that encircles, contains and connects the traces of liquid divinity imparted by God's throne to the earthly seas. It is the most liminal of seas, representing the boundary of man and his land and ships and the realm of God on the other end, nine heavenly circles away. Edged in later medieval variations of the KMMS world map by the *Jabal Qāf* (Mountains of Qāf) that the Hoopoe bird of Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's *Conference of the Birds* (*Mantiq al-ṭayr*) expresses as the ultimate aim of *fanā'* –the dying away of self– beyond which one can be closer to God and really live.



FIG. 4: THE MOUNTAINS OF JABAL QĀF ENCIRCLING THE WORLD AND THE OCEAN. IBN AL-WARDĪ KMMS-TYPE MAP. LATE 17TH CENTURY. GOUACHE AND INK ON PAPER. DIAMETER 14.4 CM. Courtesy: Leiden University Libraries. Cod. Or. 158, ff. 3b-4a.

Nowhere is the Islamic geographer more challenged than by the enigmatic *Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* that, by its world-encircling and cosmographic nature, defies total exploration. The geographers present a conflicted Manichean view of this sea. Mirroring the Qur'ānic mention of *al-Baḥrayn*, we are told that it is the only sea that contains both sweet and briny waters – merged or flowing side by side depending on the interpretation of «*maraja al-baḥrayn*» in verses 25: 53 and 55: 20 –and that it simultaneously houses the throne of God and the islands of the devil *Iblīs*. The crossing of this multivalent encircling sea is dangerous and forbidden to ordinary people because it separates the mundane earth from the heavenly cosmos. Only exceptional humans like Dhū 'l-Qarnayn (Alexander the Great), *Khidr* (the mythical green man), King Solomon and the perfect Sufi who has succeeded in extinguishing his individualistic identity can attempt such a crossing.

It is composed of a series of radical opposites best described as 'conceptual malleability'. It is, on the one hand, the finite end of the world, and, on the other, infinite because no one can determine if or where it ends. The sense conveyed in geographical texts is either that it is infinite and connects with the cosmos as part of the seven encircling seas or that it skirts the mountains of Qāf that encircle and stabilize the earth. It is the quintessential transitional body between the mundane world of humans and the cosmos of the divine. It is water, fire and fog; dark, forbidding and light; primordial and life-giving while simultaneously encapsulating death and the most terrible forms of evil.

Because of its capricious nature references to the Encircling Ocean in the geographical texts range from sparse to immensely detailed, from banal empirical statements to fabulous accounts. Some geographers barely mention the *Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, and if they do, they dispense with it quickly and vaguely. Others embrace the enigma of this sea and incorporate fantastic tales of the dread that lies within –complete with mythical signs warning the incautious traveller of the dangers that lie ahead. Stretching unlimited across all horizons, the Encircling Ocean is the paradoxical source of life and death. In the Islamic picture of the world, it reigns supreme as the ultimate, boundless, uncharted, enigmatic, most intimidating sea on earth.

Hovering on the periphery of world maps it opens into a complex liminal feature between two extremes: a hierophany and an anti-hierophany. On the one hand, it is the realm where reality and fantasy meld, beyond which the cosmic mountains of Qāf beckon souls seeking peace and unity with the maker, and paradise awaits. On the other, it is the dark dismal sea where the devil lurks amidst fish several days long.⁶

It encircles as a mark of the transition between life and death, between the internal and external, between the world and the cosmos. It is the connector and separator of multiple encircling seas in the heavens that reach up to God.⁷

6. PINTO, Karen. *Medieval Islamic Maps*. 157–178.

7. For greater detail on the meaning and interpretation of the Encircling Ocean, see PINTO, Karen. *Medieval Islamic Maps*. ch. 4 and 7.



FIG. 5: THE ENCIRCLING OCEAN WITH A GIGANTIC FISH. IBN ZUNBUL'S *QANUN AL-DUNYA* (LAW OF THE WORLD). COURTESY, TOPKAPI SARAYI MÜZESİ KÜTÜPHANESİ, ISTANBUL: REVAN 1639, FOL. 4A. (Photo: Karen Pinto).

THE FIRST SET OF TWIN SEAS: PIR AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

From the Encircling Ocean, two blue arms sweep in from opposite ends, cutting through the land masses (see Figures 2 and 3).⁸ One dominates the other. Sweeping in from the east, the PIR (Persian Gulf-Indian Ocean-Rea Sea) overwhelms the midriff of the image with its breadth, width and length, capturing the centre of

8. The geographers debate whether these two seas are offshoots from the Encircling Ocean or if they feed into it.

the image. In comparison, its twin sea, the Mediterranean, which sweeps in from the opposite end on the western perimeter of the Encircling Ocean, is noticeably smaller. It appears to float blissfully like a small bird with outstretched arms made up of the Nile and the Bosphorus while the PIR with its hook of the Red Sea threatens to snatch it up. Placid versus threatening reflects the operational dynamic between these two seas.

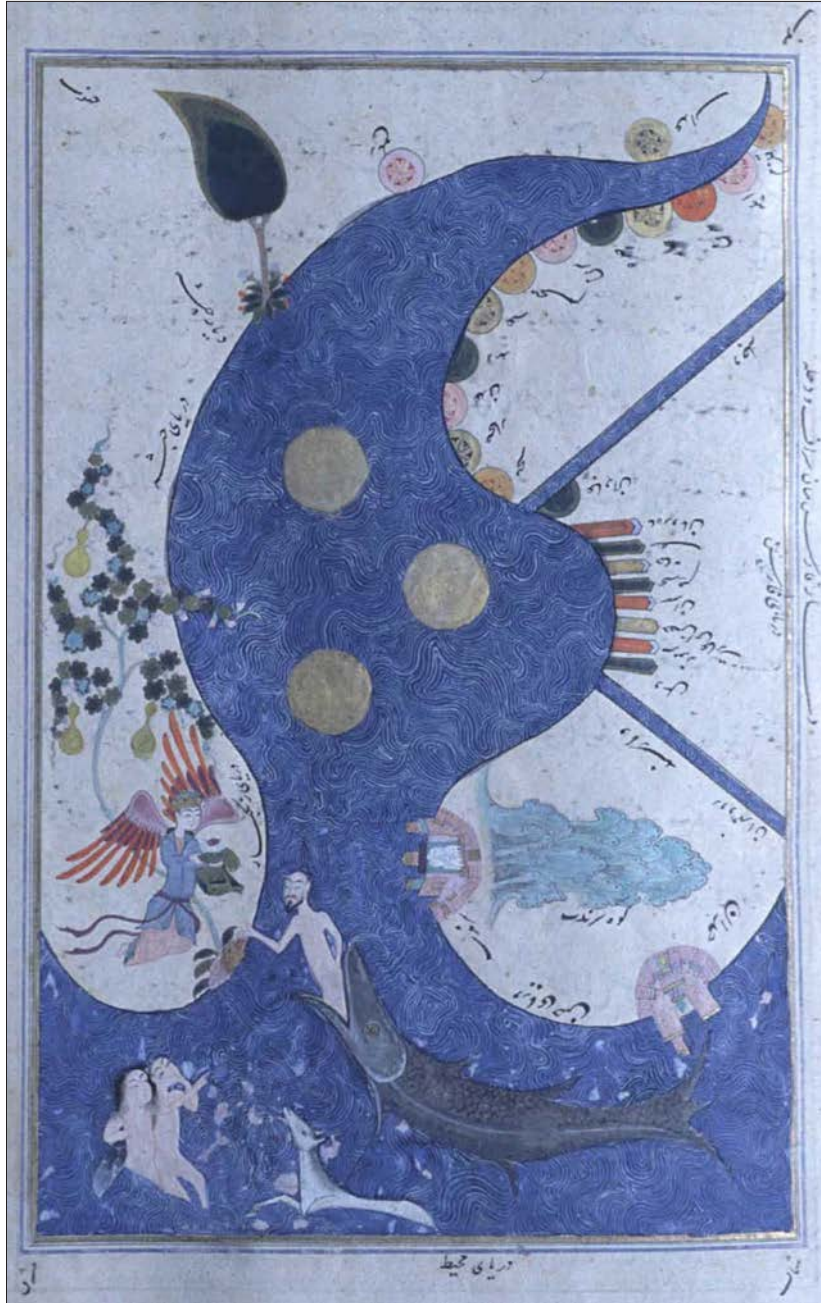


FIG. 6: JONAH EMERGING FROM THE WHALE. KMMS MAP OF THE *BAHR FĀRIS* (PERSIAN GULF-INDIAN OCEAN-RED SEA, ABBREVIATED TO PIR). TIMURID, DATED 827/1424. GOUACHE AND INK ON PAPER. 12.7 X 16.4 CM. COURTESY: TOPKAPI SARAY MÜZESİ KÜTÜPHANESİ, İSTANBUL. BAĞDAT 334, F. 17A. (Photo: Karen Pinto).

THE PIR AND ITS SYMBOLIC MEANING

At the world level, the PIR looks like a large menacing hand with a pointed finger. At the regional level, however, the PIR takes on a more whimsical, pointed, bulbous form with whiskers – a form in which some have seen a bird, a cape and even the head of an elephant.⁹ In the absence of an explanation of other possible forms, I suggest a different interpretation: that what we are dealing with in the form given to the PIR is a rare and highly unusual symbolic use of the eye tooth (also called canine tooth) of the Prophet as a vehicle of signification for the sea. This reading is reinforced by the corollary form given to PIR's twin, the Mediterranean at the regional level (as discussed in the next section.)



FIG. 7: OUTLINE OF THE FORM OF THE KMMS PIR (BASED ON FIG. 6). Drawing: Karen Pinto.

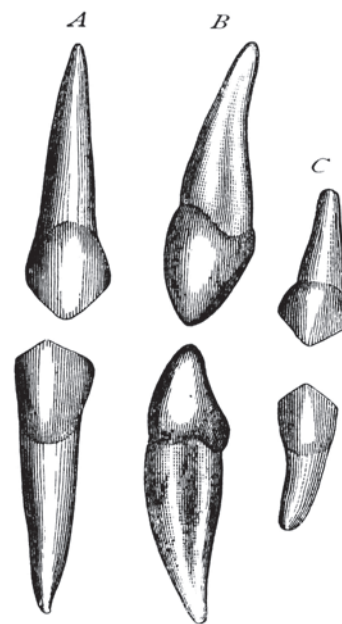


FIG. 8: SKETCHES OF EYE-TEETH SHAPES (PLEASE COMPARE WITH PIR, FIGS. 6 & 7).

The symbolism of teeth holds a special place in many cultures. The Buddha's tooth has been called one of the top ten religious relics of all time.¹⁰ Following his cremation, it is said that his canine tooth was left intact. After causing much spilled blood over ownership and the accompanying divine right to rule, the tooth came to rest at the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, Sri Lanka. There are, of course, other claims of ownership of the Buddha's tooth, such as the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple

9. MIQUEL, André: *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu'au milieu du 11e siècle*. Paris, Mouton, 1967–88, vol. 2, 29, 91; vol. 3, 241. A recently published book aims to expand our understanding of the Islamic cartographic concept of the Indian Ocean. VAGNON, Emmanuelle and VALLET, Éric: *La fabrique de l'océan Indien: Cartes d'Orient et d'Occident (Antiquité-XVI^e siècle)*. Paris, Sorbonne, 2017.

10. Kayla Webley, «Top 10 Religious Relics», *Time*, 19 April 2010 <http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1983194_1983193_1983197,00.html> [25 May 2017].

and Museum in Singapore and the one said to be still growing that is now housed at the Lu Mountain Temple in Rosemead, Los Angeles. While all these teeth can't be the one that the Buddha purportedly left behind, one thing we can be more certain of is that there is among the Buddhists and in cultural circles in Asia a penchant for tooth veneration, which at the very least would fit with the Indian Ocean dimension of PIR. In addition to this veneration of the Buddha's tooth – a veneration also existing with that of the Prophet Muhammad– the Buddha's footprints are also preserved in a variety of mediums (gold, silver, clay) and also painted in an elaborately ornamented symbolic form. This connects with my reading of the form ascribed to the Mediterranean in the KMMS series as a *na'l* (Prophet's sandal-imprint) and points towards Buddhist overtones in the Muslim discourse of relics.

From Taoist and Zen thinking we get the concept of the third eye – an inner mystical invisible eye that enables paranormal perception. Representations of the third eye are also sometimes accompanied by symbolic masks with prominent canine teeth.¹¹

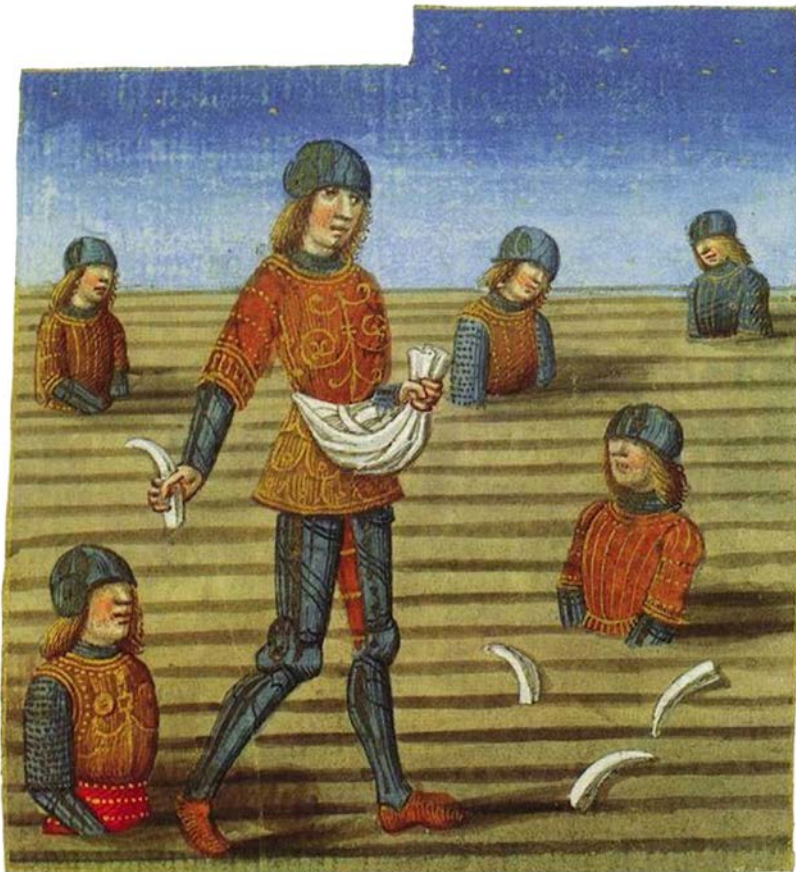


FIG. 9: CADMUS SOWING THE TEETH OF THE SLAYED DRAGON, FROM WHICH THE FEROCIOUS SPARTAN WARRIORS EMERGED. 15TH CENTURY MANUSCRIPT (LOCATION UNKNOWN).

11. See, for instance, this artistic rendition in which the form of the eye tooth clearly matches the form of PIR <<http://illustr8yourdream.deviantart.com/art/Third-Eye-210222877>> [3 June 2017].

The well-known myth of Cadmus, founder of Thebes, carries within it the trope of dragon's teeth. Cadmus was forced to fight a dragon, an offspring of the god Ares, for water from a well it guarded and which Cadmus needed for a ritual sacrifice of a cow by the goddess Athena. On Athena's instructions, Cadmus slew the dragon and Ares then advised him to plant the dragon's teeth in the plains in order to make Thebes mighty in war. Cadmus obeyed and from these planted teeth, legend tells us, sprouted the Spartan warriors. This myth gave rise to popular illustrations in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century manuscripts showing Cadmus sowing the dragon's canine-looking teeth.¹² The form used to represent teeth in these images reinforces the interpretation of the PIR in the form of an eye tooth (Figure 9).

In the visual puzzles that comprise the KMMS maps, the PIR in the shape of a tooth fits with the blessings of the Prophet as it comes directly from the mouth through which the Qur'ān – the word of God – was revealed. No more sacred a form could exist in contrast to the sandal-imprint of the Prophet than his tooth. (For a contrasting discussion of the form of the Mediterranean as the sandal-imprint of the Prophet refer to the next section.)

The form belonging to the bottom of his foot is necessarily of lesser ranking than the one found in his mouth, the very same mouth that served as a conduit for the Qur'ān. One of the distinctions of the Prophet Muhammad is that he was the unlettered Prophet (*an-nabī al-ummī*) through whose illiterate mouth God sent his most beautiful words of the Qur'ān.

Hadith narrating the way (*sunnah*) of the Prophet indicate that he was extremely fond of keeping his teeth clean and there are a large number of references indicating that he carried his *siwāk* (toothbrush or tooth stick) behind his ear and used it often and recommended that others brush their teeth frequently.¹³ Additional hadith report that the Prophet was fond of laughing and that when he did his beautiful white teeth, kept clean with constant brushing, were clearly visible.

As the fourth Rashidun caliph and the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law 'Alī b. Abī Tālib is quoted in a hadith as saying: «Your mouths are the paths of the Qur'ān, so perfume them with the tooth stick».¹⁴

Outside of the form ascribed to the PIR, the ubiquitous use of the form of the Prophet's eye tooth does not emerge as a recognizable symbol in the same way in which the Prophet's footprint and sandal-imprint do over the millennia. As discussed in the next section of this paper, today the Prophet's footprint and sandal-imprint are well-worn symbolic tropes of the Prophet.¹⁵ One wonders why the Prophet's

12. Unable to determine the exact location of this image, I am providing a link for the reader to examine <<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/395402042264240483/>> [3 June 2017].

13. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 64: 459, among many other similar examples.

14. *Sunan Ibn Majah*, V1, Bk 1, 291.

15. GRUBER, Christiane: «The Prophet Muhammad's Footprint», in HILLENBRAND, Robert, PEACOCK, A.C.S. and ABDULLAEVA, Firuza (eds.): *Ferdowsi, the Mongols and the History of Iran: Art, Literature and Culture from Early Islam to Qajar Persia*. London, I. B. Tauris, 2013, 297–307; WHEELER, Brannon: «Relics in Islam», *Islamica*, 11 (2004), 110–111; FLOOD, Barry Finbarr: «Bodies and Becoming: Mimesis, Meditation, and the Ingestion of the Sacred in Christianity and Islam», in PROMÉY, Sally M. (ed.), *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014, 470–474; and ELIAS, Jamal: «Islam and the Devotional Image in Pakistan», in METCALF, Barbara, (ed.): *Islam in South Asia in Practice*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2009, fig. 8.2.

na'l (sandal-imprint) became one of the most popular symbols of the Prophet while that of his tooth languished. Is it possible that since the KMMS mapping tradition predates by a couple of centuries the tradition of venerating the footprint/sandal-imprint of the Prophet during earlier Islamic ages, forms indicating the tooth of the Prophet carried a symbolic significance that was subsequently lost or suppressed? Perhaps this happened in tandem with the development of the concept in Islam that bodily artefacts are not permitted as relics because of the prohibition placed upon the mutilation of the dead body and the need «to preserve the integrity of the remains of virtuous figures».¹⁶ Is it for this reason that relics incidental to the human body, such as cups, bowls, shoes, cloaks, swords and staffs, standing for traces of the Prophet (*athar al-nabi*) supersede memorabilia of the Prophet's body? That said, hairs thought to be from the Prophet's beard are among the revered highlights of mosque and museum collections throughout the Middle East. The Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, heir to the largest collection of Prophetic memorabilia, also houses a fragment of the eye tooth of the Prophet originally acquired, it is said, during the Battle of Uhud (625 CE) during which the Prophet was injured and almost died. Unlike the Topkapı Sarayı's examples of the footprint and sandal-imprint of the Prophet that are proudly displayed in their museum cases for the public to see, the Prophet's tooth is not displayed but squirreled away in a gem-studded casket instead.¹⁷

A Timurid rendition of the KMMS PIR map (Figure 6) shows the prophet Jonah emerging from the mouth of the whale at the confluence of the PIR with the Encircling Ocean. We can read into this special adornment of the PIR confirmation of the reading of the heightened sacrality of this sea specially blessed by the mouth of the Prophet Muhammad as symbolized by the form of the sea in the image of his eye tooth. Indeed, as revealed by the work in progress of Simon O'Meara and Giancarlo Casale, the sacred Cupola of the Earth (*Qubbat al-Arḍ*) comes to be located in later medieval variations of Islamic maps on the Persian Gulf island of Qeshm in the very heart of the PIR.¹⁸

One aspect that emerges through both map form and text is that for the Muslims the PIR is *their sea*. It is the sea that surrounds the Arabian Peninsula, the sea blessed by pearls as opposed to the Mediterranean that only has coral, and the sea that is most hospitable to Muslims unlike the Mediterranean, which, as its titular designation of *Baḥr al-Rūm* (Sea of Byzantium) suggests, owes its loyalty to the Christians first and Muslims second. It is this dichotomy that I believe can be read into the forms used to the represent these waters.

16. ABDULFATTAH, Iman R., «Relics of the Prophet and Practices of His Veneration in Medieval Cairo», *Journal of Islamic Archaeology*, 1, 1 (2014), 75–76.

17. AYDIN, Hilmi: *The Sacred Trusts: Pavilion of the Sacred Relics, Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul*. Clifton, NJ, Tughra Books, 2009, 138–139.

18. I am grateful to Simon O'Meara and Giancarlo Casale for bringing *Qubbat al-Arḍ* maps to my attention. They discuss them in their forthcoming works: O'MEARA, Simon, *Kaaba Orientations*, Edinburgh University Press; CASALE, Giancarlo, «Did Alexander the Great Discover the America? Debating Space and Time in Renaissance Istanbul», *Renaissance Quarterly*.

THE MEDITERRANEAN AND ITS SYMBOLIC MEANING



FIG. 10: KMMS MAP OF THE MEDITERRANEAN (BAHR AL-RŪM). LEIDEN MS. OR 3101. 589/1193. AN ABBREVIATED COPY OF AL-IṢṬAKHRĪ'S *KITĀB AL-MASĀLIK WA-AL-MAMĀLIK* (BOOK OF ROUTES AND REALMS). DATED 589/1193, MEDITERRANEAN PROVENANCE. GOUACHE AND INK ON PAPER. 34 X 26 CM. Courtesy: Leiden University Libraries. MS. Or. 3101, f. 33a.

The sea in the KMMS Mediterranean map (*Baḥr al-Rūm*) is always depicted with a distinctive bulbous shape at the micro regional and macro world level. It is round and fat at the base, which represents the eastern Mediterranean coast from Anatolia to Egypt. Both sides narrow down and funnel past North Africa, on one side, and Italy and Spain, on the other. The depiction of the North African flank is not surprising as, with the exception of the Gulf of Libya, the coastline is a straight shot from Alexandria to Tunis with a narrowing beginning around Algiers and continuing until the mouth of the Mediterranean, which is barely fourteen kilometres wide at the Straights of Gibraltar where it empties into the Atlantic. Rather it is the opposite European flank as a mirror image of the North African side that takes us aback. It does not reflect the northern shore of the Mediterranean pocked with rugged inlets and inland seas with landmasses of distinctive form such as the boot of Italy.¹⁹

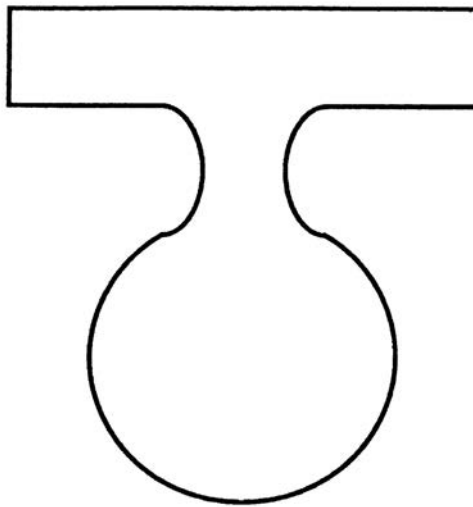


FIG. 11: OUTLINE OF THE FORM OF THE KMMS MEDITERRANEAN. (BASED ON FIG. 10). Drawing: Karen Pinto.

This striking misrepresentation of the northern shores of the sea serves to stress the distinctive form of the Mediterranean sea in the KMMS maps. It is a form that has puzzled many with no definitive answer. At the turn of the twentieth century, Konrad Miller in *Mappae Arabicae* postulated it to be a vase. Pregnant with meaning though this is, Miller provides no explanation of its meaning in the context of the Mediterranean.²⁰

19. The question of the how the shores of the Mediterranean do or do not match up with reality on the ground or water is not the subject of this paper. Readers interested in this question should refer to PINTO, Karen: «Surat Baḥr al-Rūm (Picture of the Sea of Byzantium): Possible Meanings Underlying the Forms», in TOLIAS, George and LOUPIS, Dimitris (eds.): *Eastern Mediterranean Cartographies: The Cartography of the Mediterranean World*. Athens, Institute for Neohellenic Research, 2004, 234–241. Further details on this topic will be discussed in the author's forthcoming *The Mediterranean in the Islamic Cartographic Imagination*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, under review.

20. MILLER, Konrad: *Mappae arabicae: Arabische Welt- und Länderkarten des 9–13. Jahrhunderts*. 6 vols. Stuttgart, 1926–31. Facsimile reprint, 2 vols., ed. Fuat Sezgin. Frankfurt am Main, Institut für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften, 1994, 184. In private conversation Cemal Kafadar has suggested that it could be read as a uterine form in keeping with the Ottoman vision of the Mediterranean *Ak Deniz* (White Sea) as the mother of seas.

A myriad of possibilities present themselves in the reading of this form including that of a keyhole, a prized form of Templar symbology. From the Aventine Keyhole with its sweeping picture-perfect view of Rome to the round churches with an oblong chancel, the keyhole form was pregnant with Templar meaning in the crusading period of the latter half of the Middle Ages.²¹ Parallels are to be found too with outlines of inverted churches in the context of illustrated medieval Islamic manuscripts.²²

From the repertoire of Islamic image another surprising one emerges: that of a stylized outline of the imprint of the sandal of the Prophet Muhammad, known as *na'l*. Proof of this interpretation for the form of the KMMS Mediterranean comes from the numerous depictions of the impression of Prophet Muhammad's sandal that are found in manuscripts and scrolls commemorating the haj pilgrimage (Figure 12). There are even examples of this iconographic form of the sandal-imprint of the prophet being used as Mamluk and Ottoman flagpole crests.²³



FIG. 12: THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD'S FOOTPRINT (RIGHT) AND HIS SANDAL-PRINT (LEFT). ILLUSTRATED PAGE WITH GOLD LEAF. OTTOMAN ILLUSTRATED PRAYER MANUAL, PROBABLY ISTANBUL, CA. 1850-1900, 10 X 14.6 CM, FF. 214-15, *MISC.*, UNCAT. II. C.4. Courtesy: The Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

21. NAPIER, Gordon: *Pocket A-Z of the Knights Templar: A Guide to Their History and Legacy*. Stroud, Spellmount, 2014, 226.
22. I discuss this elsewhere in PINTO, Karen. *Surat Bahr al-Rūm ...* 237.
23. For examples of this, see AYDIN, Hilmi. *Op. cit.* 125-129.

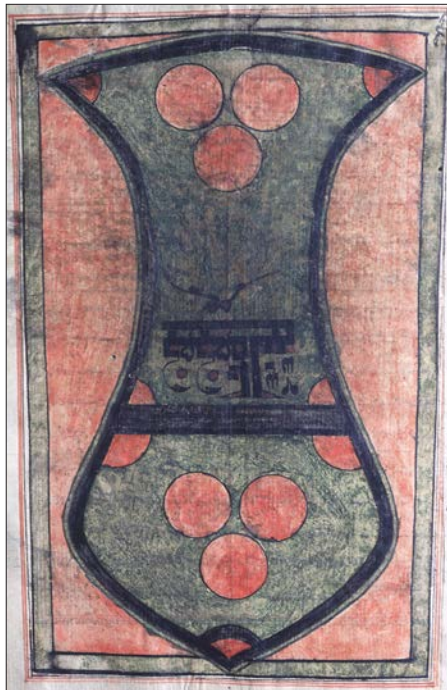


FIG. 13: SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE FOOTPRINT OF THE PROPHET FROM *NUR UL-VAHHAC* (THE BLAZING LIGHT), ARKEOLOJİ MÜZESİ KİTAPLIĞI, İSTANBUL: MS. 975, FOL. 7B, CA. 1700 C. E. (Photo: Karen Pinto)

Note: image is inverted to draw out the similarity between this image and the one form of the KMMS Mediterranean.

One of the closest examples to the KMMS Mediterranean form comes from an Ottoman illustrated prayer manual: it comes from a manuscript called the *Surat al-In'am* (Chapter on the Cattle), dated to the late nineteenth century, that contains a version of the *na'l* bearing an uncanny resemblance to the form that the KMMS series used for the Mediterranean as a manifestation of the Prophet's sandal-imprint (Figures 10 and 11). A second example is a pair of sandal-imprints in the *Rawdat al-Safa fi Wasf Na'l al-Mustafa* (Description of the Pure One's Sandal in the Garden of Purity) commissioned by one of the last Ottoman caliphs, Abdülmecid, in the mid-nineteenth century (Figure 12).²⁴

A stylized version from a few centuries earlier (ca. 1700) in an Ottoman eschatological manuscript, *Nur ul-Vahhac* (The Blazing Light), which describes the life of the Prophet Muhammad and the seven stages of heaven and hell, also includes a similarly schematic representation of the sandal-imprint of the Prophet that harks back to the KMMS Mediterranean form (Figure 13).

The problem is that none of the extant images of the Prophet's sandal-imprint predate the KMMS maps – the earliest extant copies of which date from the eleventh century. The earliest extant woodblock example of a pilgrimage scroll (TIEM 4091), which dates from the early thirteenth century, contains a missing fragment of what has been identified as a possible sandal-imprint (Figure 13; see no. 5 in lower panel I).²⁵ Because the piece in question is missing we are unable to make a determination of the form used and can only wager that it would probably have resembled a version of the

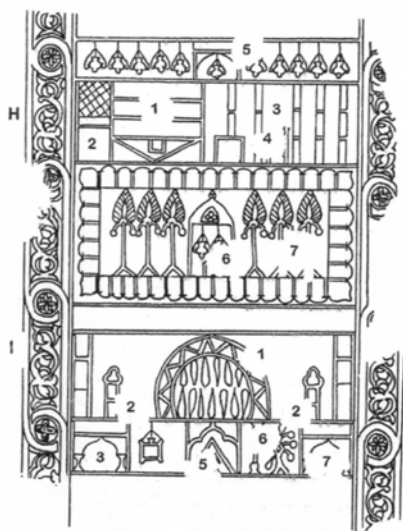
standard icon, as there are only so many ways the bottom of a male sandal from the period could have been represented. Presuming we could argue that by the outset of the thirteenth century representations of the Prophet were beginning to circulate, judging by the tiny size of the missing/damaged fragment in the Jerusalem section of the scroll in the collection of the Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi in Istanbul, these representations would have been very small and in no way as bold and dynamic as the full-page representations of the medieval Mediterranean KMMS (Figure 10) or the early modern Ottoman prayer manuals (Figure 14).

The practice of venerating the Prophet's sandal appears to have started in North Africa and the Maghreb following the seventh –and eighth-century conquests²⁶–

24. I am grateful to Christiane Gruber for this high-quality image and for bringing the Indiana manuscript to our attention in her excellent article that analyses the images in this Ottoman prayer manual in detail. GRUBER, Christiane: «A Pious Cure-All: The Ottoman Illustrated Prayer Manual in the Lilly Library», in GRUBER, Christiane (ed.): *The Islamic Manuscript Tradition: Ten Centuries of Book Arts in Indiana University Collections*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2010, 135–137 and figs. 4.8 and 4.10. Available online at <<https://www.academia.edu/456884/>> [1 June 2017].

25. AKSOY, Şule and MILSTEIN, Rachel: «A Collection of Thirteenth-Century Illustrated Hajj Certificates», in SCHICK, Irvin Cemil and DERMAN, Uğur (eds.): *65 Yaş Armağanı*. Istanbul, Sabancı Üniversitesi, 2000, 113–114, fig. 4.

26. Wheeler, Brandon. *Op. cit.* 110; and, ABDULFATTAH, Iman R. *Op. cit.* 77.



Detail of Figure
 H. Medina: 1. The tomb chamber 2. Mihrab Fājima 3. Al-rasafa 4. Mihrab 5. Hanging lamps 6. The dome of oils 7. Palm trees.
 I. Jerusalem: 1. The Dome of the Temple 2. Minarets 3. Mihrab (of al-Aqṣā or of David) 4. The cradle of Jesus 5. The Prophet's footprint on the Rock 6. The olive tree 7. Mihrab (of David or of Zachariah).

FIG. 14: SKETCH OF THE EARLIEST EXTANT EXAMPLE OF A PILGRIMAGE SCROLL (TIEM 4091) WITH A MISSING FRAGMENT OF A POSSIBLE SANDAL-PRINT (SEE N^o. 5 IN LOWER PANEL I). EARLY 13TH CENTURY. AFTER AKSOY AND MILSTEIN (2000), FIG. 4.

and could be seen as another tie-in to the shape ascribed to the Mediterranean by the KMMS designers. Thanks to the vociferous condemnation by the conservative theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) of *na'l* worship and the way in which he was beaten back by enraged crowds in Damascus for trying to destroy one, we can surmise that by the fourteenth century the Prophet's sandal-imprint had grown significantly in venerated stature.²⁷

As Avinoam Shalem has shown, by the fourteenth-century the sandal-imprints of the Prophet and his companions (*ṣaḥāba*) began to be used symbolically to demarcate fiefs (*iqṭā'*), such as that of Hebron, and therefore ownership.²⁸ Thus, the use of the *na'l* (Prophet's sandal-imprint) can be read as a stamp of ownership, and its use as the symbolic form for representing the Mediterranean in the KMMS mapping tradition could be read as an indication of Islam claiming the intention of taking over control of the Mediterranean from its rival Christian forces.²⁹

By the fifteenth century we begin to see illuminated examples of the Prophet's sandal-imprint being included in pilgrimage scrolls.³⁰ This growth in popularity set the stage in the sixteenth century for full-page manuscript folio examples of the Prophet Muhammad's sandal-imprint to make their way into regular circulation. Spurred on by active Ottoman interest in

acquiring prophetic relics and using them to illustrate Ottoman prayer books, this surge starts with Selim I's wresting of the Haramayn (the two holy sites of Mecca and Medina) from Mamluk control and continues well into the nineteenth century, peaking in the twilight years of the Ottoman empire.³¹

NA'L NUANCE?

One element unites all prior writing on the Prophet's footprint and sandal-imprint, and that is the abundance of positive platitudes. The history of the reception of the Prophet's footprint and sandal-imprint is buried in an aura of veneration with the only negativity stemming from attempts by naysayers such as Ibn Taymiyya to stay the crowds from kissing and swooning over it.

27. GRUBER, Christiane. *Prophet Muhammad's Footprint*. 298.

28. SHALEM, Avinoam: «Tamīm al-Dārī: A Portrait of Him as the First Muslim Artisan», *Oriente Moderno*, 23, 2 (2004), 509 and 513–514.

29. I am grateful to Avinoam Shalem for this suggestion. Further discussion of interpretations of the form of the KMMS Mediterranean will be provided in the author's forthcoming *Mediterranean in the Islamic Cartographic Imagination*.

30. FLOOD, Barry Finbarr. *Op. cit.* Fig. 29.3.

31. GRUBER, Christiane. *Pious Cure-All ...* 133–136; FLOOD, Barry Finbarr. *Op. cit.* 469–470.

But what if before it was venerated the Prophet used his sandal during his lifetime to convey admonishment? After all, shoes, even the shoes of Prophets, embody the dual elements of positivity and negativity. Shoes are usually worn to protect our feet, but they can also sometimes be used as a form of chastisement. In the Middle East there is a widespread folk *adab* –the operational mandate of Muslim culture– that the height of disrespect is to throw a shoe at someone’s head. We saw it in operation a decade ago. Many people probably still remember the furore and shock following an Iraqi reporter’s effort to hit the then American President George W. Bush’s head with his shoe during a press briefing in Baghdad on December 14, 2008. It fits with *adab*-based protocol that still operates in Muslim society.

Today, the Prophet’s shoe is only seen in an ultra-positive light, however. There is no nuance. Not only does the Prophet’s shoe have no negative connotations but there is no effort to create hierarchy among his relics. Shoe, footprint, hair, tooth, *burda* (cape), *siwāk*: all appear to carry exactly the same level of piety without distinction.

Since the KMMS Mediterranean map predates the earliest extant renditions of the Prophet’s *na’l*, it is possible that the earliest representation of the Prophet’s sandal-imprint could have carried a different meaning prior to the fourteenth century explosion in *na’l* veneration. It is possible that originally the *na’l* carried a more nuanced meaning within which both a positive and a negative meaning were embedded? By extension, we can inquire if the relics of the Prophet and his *ṣaḥāba* had more nuanced meanings in the earlier centuries that were obscured by the growth in their popularity from the fourteenth century onwards?

A hadith from geographer al-Muqaddasi (fl. late 10th century), copies of whose book *Aḥsan at-taqāsīm fī ma’rifat al-aqālīm* (The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions) contain maps, injects an alternate narrative. He tells us that:

When God created the Sea of al-Sham, he uttered this inspiration to it: «I have created thee and designed thee as a carrier for some of my servants, who seek my bounty, praising me, worshipping me, magnifying me, and glorifying me; so how wilt thou act towards them?» Said the sea: «My Lord, then shall I drown them». Said God: «Begone, for I curse thee, and will diminish thy worth and thy fish». Then God said to the sea of al-’Iraq [the Persian Gulf/Indian Ocean] the selfsame words, and it said: «My Lord, in that case I shall carry them on my back; when they praise Thee I praise Thee with them, and when they worship Thee I worship Thee with them, when they magnify Thee I magnify Thee with them». Said the Lord: «Go, for I have blessed thee, and will increase thy bounty and thy fish».³²

If, as this hadith suggests, the Mediterranean in contradistinction to the PIR was cursed by God, what form could be used to represent such a curse? Could a sandal-imprint form be read as a sign of the Prophet Muhammad’s disdain?

32. AL-MUQADDASĪ, *Aḥsan at-taqāsīm fī ma’rifat al-aqālīm*, transl. by COLLINS, Basil Anthony: *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Earth*. London, Centre for Muslim Contribution to Civilization and Garnet Publishing, 1994, 17.

Here we run into some concerns, as it does not fit with the standard discourse on the blessings conveyed by the Prophet's footprint and sandal-imprint. But what if there is a distinction between the two and the sandal-imprint was used to convey a sentiment of disdain in the tenth century when these KMMS maps were reputedly first conceived? Though we cannot be sure as to the tradition's early date, the association between sandal and disrespect (or disapproval) in the Muslim tradition would fit with the aforementioned *adab*-based protocol that still operates in Muslim society.

When it comes to the distinction between the forms ascribed to the twin seas of the PIR and the Mediterranean of tooth and sandal-imprint, we are dealing with a case of sacral hierarchy. Both are sacred, but one is more sacred than the other.

That said, it is indeed telling that over the course of the centuries it is the *na'l* form of the Prophet's sandal-imprint that comes to dominate the symbolic repertoire of Prophetic veneration and not the symbolic form of his tooth. Is this related, perchance, to the priority that the Mediterranean arena receives from the early modern period onwards at the expense of the Indian Ocean?

The Mediterranean was destined in Islamic history to play second-fiddle to its mightier PIR counterpart as confirmed by the hadith cited above. It was the sea of the Muslims that carried them safely and proudly as opposed to the Mediterranean that presented endless challenges, faced as they were on its opposite flank by bellicose Christians bent on pushing the Muslims back.

It is no surprise then to find that the PIR is depicted in the KMMS world maps as significantly larger than the Mediterranean and often with a hooked Red Sea end that visually threatens to capture the Mediterranean (see Figures 3 and 4).³³

This fits with the reading of undertones of Islamo-Christian tension between the two seas that is further manifest in the close-up macro illustrations of each sea. When viewed at an angle, the individual map of PIR is even more dramatically hook-shaped with the distinct shape of an eye tooth, one of the four most important teeth in our mouth (see Figure 8). A tooth-shaped PIR is in keeping with the interpretation of the Mediterranean as an early version of the Prophet's *na'l* (sandal-imprint). The hadith cited above validates this reading, as do textual discussions of the Mediterranean as being a difficult and stormy sea that raged in particular on Thursday nights, the night before the day of Muslim prayer.³⁴

Thus it is that the twin seas of the PIR and MED are embedded with an overt illustrated tension that can be read in the vein of Islamo-Christian sibling rivalry.³⁵ It is an artistic posturing of visual opposition that balloons and wanes with dynasties and the geographical map manuscripts that they sponsored. After all, every good royal court in the medieval Islamic world worth its snuff had as part of its propaganda machine ateliers with artists seasoned in communicating the desired

33. See discussion of the most exaggerated versions of this phenomenon in PINTO, Karen: «The Maps Are the Message: Mehmet II's Patronage of an 'Ottoman Cluster'», *Imago Mundi*, 63, 2 (2011), 155–179.

34. AL-MUQADDASĪ. *Op. cit.* 16.

35. For more on this theory see BULLIET, Richard W.: *The Case of Islamo-Christian Civilization*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2004.

message of the dynasty.³⁶ Manuscript copies range from productions in Abbasid Iraq, Fatimid Cairo, Norman Palermo and Timurid Samarqand to Ottoman Istanbul, Safavid Qazvin and Mughal Agra, and variations in the renditions of symbolic map forms inlaid with a matrix of places changes distinctively from atelier to atelier.

THE SECOND SET OF TWIN SEAS: THE CASPIAN AND THE ARAL

The world maps indicate a second set of twin seas: the inland seas of the Caspian and the Aral as two small, usually identical, eye or keyhole type of shapes that puncture the northern end of the Asian land mass. Referred collectively to by Arab geographers as *buhayrat* (small sea) rather than *baħr*, the designation used for the larger seas, these two smaller inland seas are therefore not as dominant as the image of the Encircling Ocean that encases the entire world, nor are they as distinctive as the tooth and sandal-imprint forms of the PIR and the Mediterranean, but they are compelling nonetheless as they occupy the line of the final bulwark that separates civilized portions of the Asian land mass from its barren northern extremities inhabited by monsters and mythical creatures, including Gog and Magog-type barbaric beings.

The Caspian and Aral Seas, the great inland seas of Inner Asia that feature prominently in ancient and medieval yore, feature on the KMMS world maps as a set of similarly sized, perfectly round keyhole-shaped inland seas placed so close together as to resemble an evenly spaced set of eyes studding the continental land mass of Asia (see Figures 1, 2 and 3).³⁷

What is the purpose of these two inland seas? How is it that if they are land-locked they are not considered lakes? Size appears to be the primary consideration, salt only secondarily. The Dead Sea is high in salt content but not designated a sea by Muslims, yet the Caspian is, though it has significantly less salt.³⁸

Are they two separate seas or mirror images of each other? The ever-shifting Oxus River that presently feeds the Aral Sea earlier fed into both the Caspian and the Aral. It moved completely over to feeding the Aral sometime in the later medieval period when Muslims were actively involved in the area. As a result, the Arabic and Persian geographies reflect the changing nature of the river through conflicting accounts. During the period of the tenth and eleventh centuries when the tribes of the Turkic Ghuzz occupied the large stretch from the eastern Caspian to the western Aral, the mighty Oxus fed both.³⁹

36. See, PINTO, Karen. *Maps are the Message ...*

37. In an unpublished piece, Ducène tracks the evolution of the Caspian and the Aral seas in the Muslim geographical mind from their discovery of the seas following their seventh-century invasions into the region of Iran and the Caucasus up through the mathematical discussions in al-Khwārizmī to the depiction in the KMMS manuscripts. DUCÈNE, Jean-Charles. *Caspian Sea ...* 1–5.

38. MIQUEL, André. *Op. cit.* Vol. 3, 228–230.

39. The medieval Islamic geographers and historians mention the Aral Sea often and in detail. There is a working theory that the Oxus River (Jayhūn) first fed the Caspian and shifted slowly towards the Aral until at some point in the

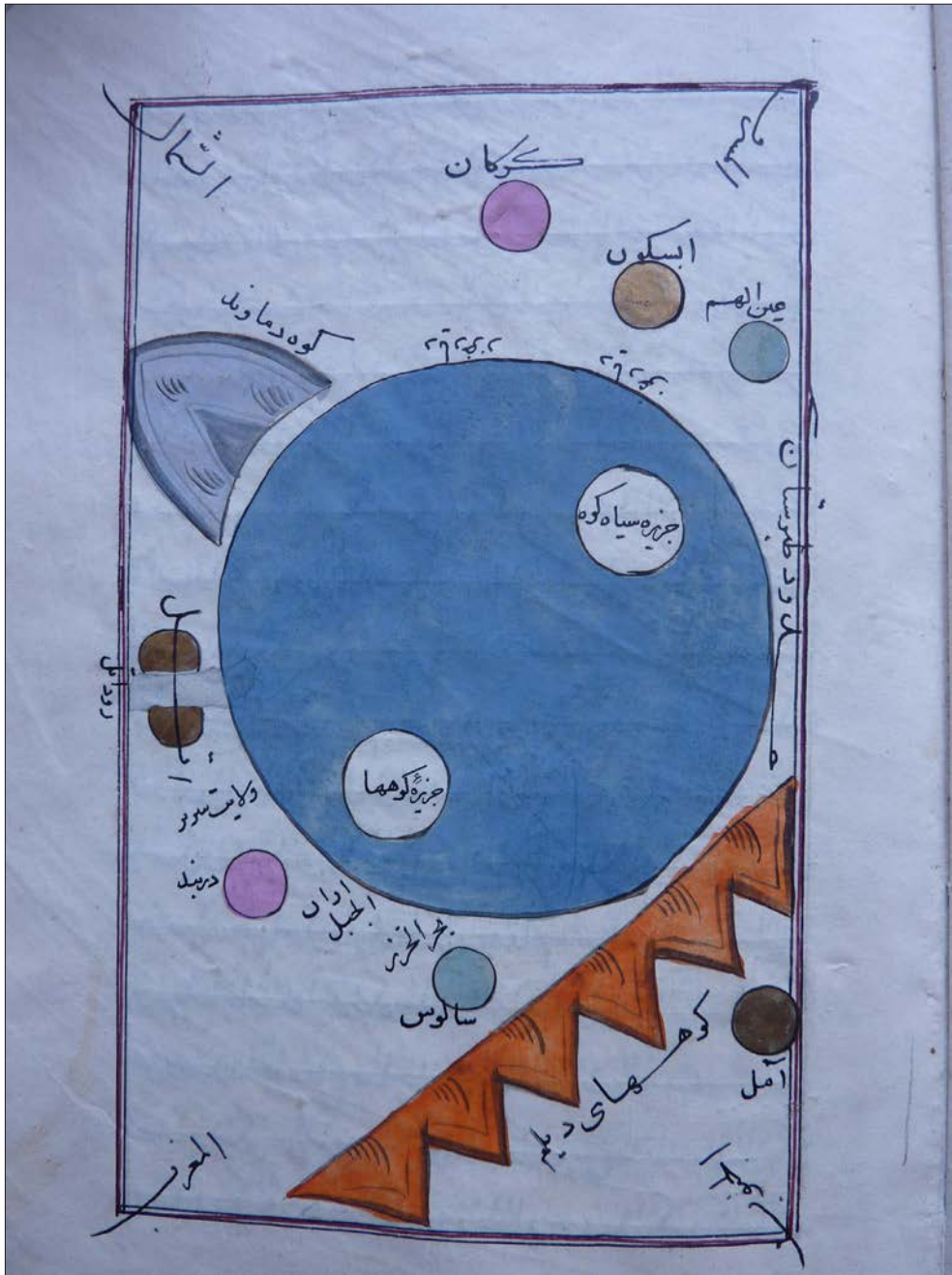


FIG. 15: KMMS MAP OF THE CASPIAN SEA (BAḤR AL-KHAZAR) SHOWING DAYLAM MOUNTAINS THAT GIRL THE SEA'S SOUTH-EASTERN END, THE MOUNTAIN PASS THAT KEPT THE APOCALYPTIC RACES AT BAY CAPS (NORTH-WESTERN END), AND THE UNINHABITED ISLANDS OF DOGS AND SHEEP THAT DOT THE SEA LIKE TWO EYES. A PERSIAN COPY OF AL-IṢṬAKHRĪ'S *KITĀB AL-MASĀLIK WA-AL-MAMĀLIK* (BOOK OF ROUTES AND REALMS). DATED 1258/1842. GOUACHE AND INK ON PAPER. 21 X 14.6 CM. INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL MANUSCRIPTS OF THE RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, ST. PETERSBURG. B-797, F. 100A.

tenth century it moved over and started feeding the Aral instead. BARTHOLD, W.: *Nachrichten über den Aral-See und den unteren Lauf des Amu-darja von den ältesten Zeiten bis zum XVII. Jahrhundert*. Leipzig, Otto Wigand m.b.h., 1910.

The question of shared feeder rivers becomes relevant in the context of the representation of these two seas in the KMMS tradition. At the level of the world map both are given identical keyhole-like representations in spite of the Caspian being significantly larger than the Aral Sea.⁴⁰ At the regional level there is only a close-up map of the Caspian Sea (Figure 15), with the Aral Sea only forming an incidental edge to the map of the area of Khwārizm of north-eastern Iran.

Given their twinned depiction at the world level and singular depiction at the regional scale, these two seas can only be addressed collectively and in a non-specific manner because they lie along the northern-most limits of the civilized world (*al-arḍ al-ma'mūra*) as known to Muslims. As such, they are not as familiar to the Muslims as PIR and the Mediterranean. Forming in their layout the arc of the bulwark against barbarians of the northernmost reaches of Eurasia, the Caspian and Aral Seas occupy for Muslim geographers and historians a liminal space. This aspect is reflected in their naming conventions: *Baḥr al-Khazar* is most commonly used to designate the Caspian, not as a sea of the Muslims, but as a sea of the non-Muslim Khazars who controlled the northern end of the sea in the ninth and tenth centuries; and *Buḥayrat Khwārizm* denotes the Aral as a reminder that it is the sea on the edge of the Muslim realm in the north-eastern-most province of Iran.

The famous gates of Darband (Bāb al-Abwāb, which translates literally as the «Gate of Gates»), which Alexander the Great is said to have used to bottle up the barbaric apocalyptic races, lie on the western bank of the Caspian. The Arab geographers describe this famous wall as adorned with statues and talismanic images that reinforced its strength to ward off evil and keep any impending apocalypse at bay.⁴¹ Travellers who ventured beyond the northern edges of the Caspian and Aral Seas faced the danger of being swallowed by the terrible races and disappearing off the map.

At the same time, the Ural and Altai mountains that surrounded the two seas were associated with the cosmographic mountains of Qāf that separated the world from the greater outer realms of God. Thus if one ventured far enough beyond them, one was not only in danger of meeting monsters but also within grasp of the heavenly reaches of God (see Figure 4 and the earlier discussion of the *Jabal Qāf* that surround the world). In this is encapsulated the liminality of the space of these two smaller seas on the outer fringes of the known world.

On the one hand, these two seas are known for dark putrid waters filled with monstrous creatures (*sākin min sukkān*),⁴² strange uninhabited islands of dogs and sheep and mermaids emerging from the bellies of gigantic fish, and, on the other hand, they are known for containing fountains of life fed by the Amū-daryā (Oxus)

40. Today it is almost non-existent as a result of the terrible 1950s-era Soviet efforts to turn the area into a cotton-producing centre that depleted and all but destroyed the Aral Sea. Efforts are underway to revive its northern end.

41. ZADEH, Travis: *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam: Geography, Translation, and the 'Abbasid Empire*. New York, I. B. Tauris, 2011, 42, 70, 76.

42. ZADEH, Travis. *Op. cit.* 76 and pl. 3 for an image of the Caspian Sea monster from an al-Qazwīnī manuscript.

and Syr-daryā (Jaxartes), two of the rivers designated as the rivers of Paradise emanating from the godly mountains of Qāf that encircle the world.⁴³

It is this quixotic liminal space that the mini-seas of the Caspian and Aral occupy as barriers to apocalyptic monsters and as gateways to the highest realms of God. It is for this reason that the forms attributed to them look like, on the one hand, eyes and, on the other, keyholes, indicating that they are gateways to be monitored and respected.

CONCLUSION

Due to their divine nature, the seas figure in the medieval Islamic maps as perfect and smooth shapes without irregular coastlines. Each can be argued to have symbolic emanations of their own. The Mediterranean equals a sandal-imprint, possibly that of the Prophet Muhammad, at the close-up regional scale (see Figures 10, 11 and 12). At the level of the world it morphs from the form of a footprint into a teardrop. On the opposite end is the Indian Ocean in a hook-shaped form that resembles that of an eye tooth at the regional level and a hook-ended arm at the world level (see Figures 6, 7 and 8). These two make up the arms that stretch out into (or, depending on your perspective, out of) the Encircling Ocean.⁴⁴ In the middle of the Asian land mass the Caspian and Aral Seas glimmer like a pair of blue or sometimes green eyes –depending on the colour code for the seas that varies from map to map. Collectively they create a refracted set of splintered arms and eyes surrounded by the quixotic Encircling Ocean of good and evil that connects cosmographically to the nine spheres beyond, which end in the ultimate overarching realm of God that encircles all.⁴⁵

This interpretation of the seas in the KMMS maps represents a stylized vision of the world that, on the basis of the longevity of the KMMS mapping tradition, held sway for at least eight centuries. From the depiction of the seas in KMMS world maps we can assert that they can be read as an amorphous fluid mass of the divine amidst traces of the diabolic. This analysis of the seas in the Islamic cartographic imagination reaffirms that cosmogony establishes a timeless space that transcends history and geography.⁴⁶

43. The other two designated rivers of Paradise are the Nile and the Euphrates.

44. Al-Istakhri and Ibn Hawqal argue that the two seas feed into the Encircling Ocean, whereas al-Muqaddasi argues the reverse.

45. Extended discussion on the godliness of Islamic seas and Neoplatonic influences will be included in the author's forthcoming book: PINTO, Karen: *What is Islamic About Islamic Maps? The Diabolical and the Divine*, Amsterdam, Arc Humanities Press of Amsterdam University Press, 2019.

46. MIQUEL, André. *Op. cit.* Vol. 3, 232, argues that cosmogony is timeless in his masterful reading of the Islamic geographers.

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