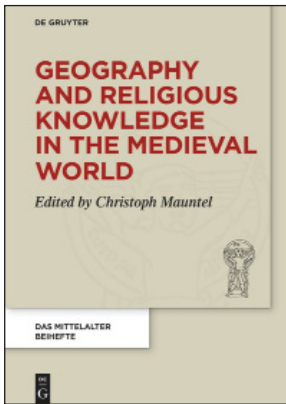


Geography and Religious Knowledge in the Medieval World,
ed. by Christoph Mauntel, De Gruyter, Berlin–Boston, 2021, 312 pp.

The presented volume explores the intersection of the geographic and religious fields. It is structured around the overarching inquiry into how religious ideas influenced geographical knowledge in various forms. It comprises case studies that focus on specific premodern geographic works, combining textual and cartographic sources,



often existing in multiple copies. This criterion allows for extensive analysis and comparison, exploring diverse modes of presenting geographic thinking and enabling examination across multiple copies of a single work.

In the cultural traditions of Latin Christian Europe and the Arabic Islamic world, it is shown how these domains converged in various ways – a phenomenon less evident in the ancient world. The Authors discussed that while Greek and Roman geographical texts primarily focused on religion to identify and locate specific temples and places of worship, this volume presents case studies delving into how geography and religion became intertwined in diverse contexts and societies. On a secondary level, the Authors seek to facilitate comparative analyses between the Arabic Islamic and Latin Christian worlds. Although recent

years have witnessed a growing trend in this comparative approach, the overarching question that forms the core of the book is to what extent religious knowledge influenced geographic and cartographic representations of the world.

The book's Authors span various academic disciplines, contributing expertise from medieval history, Islamic studies, social space, cartography, travel accounts, and German literature. Their diverse backgrounds offer in-depth insights into themes such as canon law, geographical culture, and temporal dynamics covering medieval and Renaissance periods. This disciplinary diversity enriches the book with a wealth of perspectives and approaches, forming a cohesive team capable of effectively addressing the themes, challenges, and research questions outlined in the introduction.

Organised into four sections, the volume groups papers with common subjects to foster a comparative perspective. Building on these themes, each contribution delves into detailed analyses of individual texts, providing insights into their unique ideas. Simultaneously, they facilitate comparisons between the Latin Christian and Arabic Islamic traditions of geographical thought.

As stated by the Author and editor Christoph Mauntel, one of the main objectives of the volume “is to use the concept of ‘religious knowledge’ to trace such adaptations, transformations, and transfers of religious ideas in premodern geographic thinking, and to ask whether these ideas directly refer to any source of revelation by analysing how different authors and works used, interpreted, and frame this religious knowledge”. Therefore, in the first chapter, he asserts that Christian

cartography, particularly in the case of the Beatus tradition from the tenth century, reflects a distinct religious influence in the framing and orientation of world maps. To some extent, these maps, known as *mappae mundi*, are visualisations of Christian theology. In contrast, the impact of religious knowledge on Latin Christian geographic representations persisted well into the early modern age. However, the Arabic Islamic geographic tradition appears, at first glance, less evidently influenced by religious knowledge. Indeed, it is noteworthy that, in line with Yossef Rapoport, the Author suggests that Islamic maps served primarily as practical guides to the world, focusing on functionality rather than being regarded as religious artefacts aimed at salvation.

Turning to the various contributions comprising the volume, these have revealed themselves to be particularly appropriate and stimulating with respect to the discussion set out in the volume's introduction. The four sections already anticipated can be synthetically addressed as follows:

1. In this section, the Authors interpret the fundamental visual representations of Arabic-Islamic and Latin-Christian geographical thought through a religious lens. Karen Pinto addresses the challenge of identifying Islamicate maps as representations of the "world", emphasising the need for expertise, a discerning eye, and a willingness to move beyond the ingrained mimetic structure of contemporary maps and daily satellite images. She advocates for a cartography that embraces geographical spatiality, transcending the limitations of a single predetermined modern perspective. Following this, Christoph Maunzel analyses the T-O diagram, which, with its memorable and easily replicable representation of the three parts of the known world, was the most frequently drawn depiction of the medieval world. Contrary to assumptions linking it to antique and pre-Christian origins, Maunzel contends that the tripartite world concept does not necessarily derive from antique authors. However, the exact origin of the diagram remains unclear, subject to ongoing scholarly debate.
2. The second set of papers addresses how various authors tackled the collection and compilation of geographical knowledge following religious specifications. Notably, Lambert of Saint-Omer, al-Idrīsī, and Yāqūt are analysed to discern how they organised their works and the role assigned to religious knowledge. Kurt Franz delves into the impact of faith and religious knowledge on the work of Muslim geographical authors, particularly examining Yāqūt's 'Mu 'jam al-buldān'. While the volume suggests a connection between pre-modern geographical knowledge and religious ideas, Yāqūt's work offers limited support. Jean-Charles Ducène aims to investigate whether the well-known al-Idrīsī employed religious ideas as a structuring element in his geographical, cartographic, and descriptive work. Ducène contends that religious practices or beliefs appear secondary in a geographic description primarily focused on towns and itineraries. Furthermore, al-Idrīsī's maps, rooted in mathematical geography, do not exhibit a religious structuring of space, with only two iconographic elements having potential ties to religious tradition.
3. The third section concentrates on innovative methods for locating and illustrating geographical and religious knowledge. For instance, the focus is on the initial Latin globes around 1500, presenting three-dimensional *mappae mundi*. Felicitas Schmieder addresses a crucial question aligned with the volume's central themes: does religious significance exist, and if so, does it convey

meaning on any spiritual level? David A. King explores two distinct solutions rooted in folk astronomy and mathematical geography, representing what he considers the ultimate medieval solutions for determining the sacred direction in Islam. The sacred direction is oriented towards the sacred Kaaba in Mecca, astronomically aligned for various ritual acts from prayer to burial. A recently unearthed 40-sector scheme adds a new dimension to Islamic folk geography or cartography, marking a culmination, though more ornamental than practical, of qibla-charts.

4. The fourth section's papers centre on descriptions and depictions of medieval cartographic and diagrammatic representations of the Holy Land: Ingrid Baumgärtner and Eva Ferro emphasise the religious dimensions and potential to facilitate pilgrimage, evoke religious symbolism, and elicit spiritual emotions. The leading hypothesis suggests that medieval mapmakers incorporated specific technical features into maps and to deepen religious emotions and evoke intense sensory responses in readers of narrative travel accounts. For instance, the Florence map is contextualised within the late medieval reception of travel reports, exploring how cartographic visualisations aim to intensify the pilgrimage experience. Despite being predominantly studied as a coherent codex, a deeper analysis reveals its composite nature. Another paper delves into the material usage and experience of texts and maps as tools for virtual pilgrimages. It illustrates how texts and maps sought to guide readers' responses by enabling rotation or unfolding. Raoul DuBois investigates fifteenth-century pilgrims' attempts to mediate their Holy Land journey through various representational forms, examining the material and medial dimensions of reproductions and exploring processes

of reorienting books, turning pages, and unfolding maps and woodcuts. The article scrutinises specific examples of illustrated guidebooks for the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, such as miniatures in a German translation of Niccolò da Poggibonsi's *Libro d'Oltramare*. Niccolò's book is here considered the first pilgrimage guidebook in the vernacular and fully illustrated, expressing a desire to bring the Holy Land experience to those unable to travel. This recalls the concept of "virtual pilgrimage".

The volume, as a whole, provides the reader with a rich variety of case studies that amplify, on various scales, contexts, and sources, the ambitious research questions proposed by the purpose of the work presented here. These themes could be further explored in relation to the contemporary sacred landscape and the traces it preserves: What repercussions are observed in present-day representations? In religious practices, particularly pilgrimage, what iconography emerges? Are there other sources in art history?

While typically addressed separately, it is noteworthy how the volume ultimately contemplates that the Latin Christian and Arabic Islamic geographic traditions are not isolated. Numerous studies affirm that both spheres have significantly influenced each other, though the degree of entanglement remains a subject of dispute. Many case studies illustrate how Latin works, in most instances, adapted geographical ideas from Arabic texts. For example, the world map crafted by the Venice-based cartographer Pietro Vesconte is a prominent example of this cross-influence. Additional instances outlined above suggest the exchange of geographical names, cartographic ideas, and entire texts between Latin and Arabic scholars, often facilitated by Jewish intermediaries. However, as intriguing as these examples may be, the volume acknowledges Gautier Dalché's

scepticism regarding the extent of entanglement. He argues that distinct Latin and Arabic approaches to descriptive geography and cartography remained largely isolated, with certain remarkable exceptions. Furthermore, he contends that Arabic texts translated into Latin primarily conveyed Greek knowledge and ideas to Latin scholars rather than Arabic Islamic ideas.

The case studies in this volume demonstrate, on the one hand, connections and entanglements, even concerning the realm of religious knowledge. On the other hand, it becomes evident that the spiritual

influence on geographic knowledge was predominantly a characteristic feature of the Latin Christian tradition. The Arabic tradition of geographic knowledge was Islamic in that it often focused on the Islamic world and, in individual cases, was influenced by religious knowledge. In conclusion, the volume sensibly leaves the discussion open, acknowledging that assessing the extent of entanglement in both traditions is challenging. ■

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