



EBN ḤAWQAL, ABU'L-QĀSEM MOḤAMMAD

EBN ḤAWQAL, ABU'L-QĀSEM MOḤAMMAD b. 'Alī Naṣībī, traveler and geographer of the 4th/10th century. Biographical data on him are exclusively derived from his single extant work on geography, which bears the title *Šūrat al-arż* (Configurations of the earth) in the oldest manuscript, dated 479/1086, of its last version. Years of his birth and death are not known. His *nesba* points to a descent from Naṣībīn in Upper Mesopotamia. The earliest dates given by him about himself indicate he stayed also in Lower Mesopotamia: soon after 320/932 at Tekrīt and in 325/936 at Baghdad (pp. 245, 343). From his early years he was fond of reading geographical works and making inquiries about unknown countries (pp. 3, 329); he devoted himself deliberately to travels and departed from Baghdad 7 Ramaẓān 331/15 May 943. In the course of thirty years he visited the most remote lands of the Islamic world. The dates and datable events mentioned by him allow us to know that he was in 336-40/947-51 at various points of North Africa and Spain, about 344/955 in Egypt, Armenia, and Azarbaijan, in 350-58/961-69 in Jazīra, Iraq, Kūzestān, and Fārs, in 358/969 in K̄vārazm and Transoxania, and in 362/973 in Sicily.

He was motivated not only by intellectual curiosity but undoubtedly by profitable commerce, and his keen interest in political and religious situations and his plainly expressed sympathy for the Fatimids induced some scholars to think of him as a spy and Isma'īli *dā'ī*.



He dedicated his book first to Sayf-al-Dawla, the Hamdanid prince of Aleppo (d. 356/967). The second version, written approximately in 367/977, was dedicated to a certain Abu'l-Sarī Ḥasan b. Faḏl Eṣbahānī. Emendations were made by the author till 378/988. Ebn Ḥawqal's book contains a full description of Islamic countries (*belād al-eslām*) in the inhabited quarter of the earth. The number of these, according to traditional division (which goes back to the ancient Persian picture of the world), was twenty, and to each one he devoted a map and a chapter of his book. All this is preceded by a short introduction and the "round world map."

He begins with Arabia and the adjoining Persian Gulf; jumps over to Māḡreb; and returns from it eastward to Mesopotamia; and then describes Kūzestān, Fārs, Kermān, and Send; jumps again to the north of Persia; and concludes with Khorasan and Transoxania. "Distribution of geographic material depends entirely on maps and submits in general to the strictly determined order. For every province, towns, rivers, mountains, and inhabitants are consecutively described, then data on routes are reported" (Krachovskī, p. 209).

Ebn Ḥawqal says he never parted with the books of Ebn Kordādbeh, Jayhānī, and Qodāmat b. Ja'far, but as a matter of fact he took as a basis for his own book the maps and the text of Eṣṭakrī. He mentions that they once met, together collated their maps, and Eṣṭakrī asked him to make corrections. Ebn Ḥawqal incorporated the book of Eṣṭakrī wholly into his own, retaining even those passages where the latter stated his personal experience and wrote in the first person, merely substituting plural forms for singulars. He did not misappropriate his elder contemporary's book, however; he simply considered the compiling of the "Islamic atlas" a common aim, to which every future geographer would be obliged to make his contribution. When he repeated the words of his predecessor he shared a responsibility for them. But where he perceived information to be insufficient or inaccurate, he freely interfered in the text of Eṣṭakrī, reshaped it, or amplified it, sometimes by means of a phrase or a word. He thoroughly recast the chapters on North Africa, Spain, and Sicily by introducing much fresh, reliable information, for instance concerning Berber tribes and trans-Saharan commerce (pp. 98-103).

Some scholars underestimated Ebn Ḥawqal's contribution to the description of the eastern provinces. But even where he least interfered in the text of Eṣṭakrī, his additions were apt and precise, since they were based on personal observation, verification of the evidence of sources, and comparative estimation of oral testimonies, or reflected real changes in a situation.



Examples are his evidence and opinions on the contemporary dynasties of the Musafirids (p. 334), Saffarids (p. 414), Samanids (pp. 383, 430), Buyids (pp. 304, 373, 383), Ziyarids (pp. 383, 385), and alterations under them in Azarbaijan, Deylam, Jebāl, Khorasan, and Sīstān; on natural resources and beautiful landscapes (pp. 363-67, Isfahan); on prosperity or decline of provinces and towns (pp. 334-36, Ardabīl, Marāḡa, and others); on products, wares and prices, water supply and fertility of soil, and profits and taxes (pp. 298-99, Fārs; pp. 358-59, Hamadān; p. 381, Deylam); on ethnographic, social, and religious features of inhabitants (p. 254, food of Kūzestānīs; pp. 289-90, richness and enterprise of the people of Sīrāf; pp. 361, 370, Arab Shi'ites in Qom, using Persian language; p. 376, infidels in Deylam); on remarkable men (p. 292, members of the Marzbān family; pp. 510-11, Fārābī).

The work of Ebn Ḥawqal is widely used as the most trustworthy source on the historical topography and economic geography, the politico-administrative organization, and the cultural history of the Islamic world in the 4th/10th century.

An edition of *Ṣūrat al-arḡ* was first published by M. De Goeje (Leiden, 1873) as the second volume of *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, now replaced by the more complete edition of J. H. Kramers (Leiden, 1938, repr. Leiden, 1967). A French translation of the text, prepared by Kramers and revised by G. Wiet, was published as *Configuration de la terre* (2 vols., Paris and Beirut, 1964).

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