

Nomination form International Memory of the World Register

Al-Masaalik Wa Al-Mamaalik

2014-56

Summary (max 200 words)

The *Al-Masaalik Wa Al-Mamaalik*, Istakhri's invaluable work, is one of the most important geographical books from the 4th century AH/10 CE, which presents an accurate description of the then socio-economic, cultural and political conditions of the Islamic lands – from India to Africa – supplemented by maps. The existence of numerous manuscripts of this book in several of the world's libraries and museums, its translation into various languages, and its very many impressions up until recent decades all show the importance of the book.

The oldest known MS of *Al-Masaalik*, in its Arabic original, is kept at University and Research Library Erfurt/Gotha, Research Library Gotha, and, its oldest Persian translation, at Iran's National Museum, are both introduced in the present file.

2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

The Iranian National *Memory of the World* Committee

2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

The *Al-Masaalik* was introduced to Iran's National *Memory of the World* Committee in 2007. A year later in 2008, this work was inscribed in the Iran's national *Memory of the World* Register.

2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

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2.4 Contact details

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3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

If inscribed, the exact title and institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given

Al-Masaalik Wa Al-Mamaalik

The book, written by Abu Ishaq Ebrahim b. Mohammad Farsi Istakhri (died 346 AH/950 CE), is on the geography of Islamic lands in the 4th century AH/10 CE.¹

Persian MS: This manuscript, 275 pages/138 folios, is an old 5-6th century AH/10-11 CE translation, transcribed on *dawat-aabadi* paper in the *naskh* style, at Esfahan by Mohammad-Hasan b. Sa'd b. Mohammad Nakhjavani known as Ibn-e Savaji in 726 AH/1325 CE, its page dimensions being 22.9 x 30.8 centimeters. It contains 12 frontispieces, and 20 color maps.

Arabic MS: This manuscript, 150 pages/75 folios, was written in 569 AH/1173 CE in the *naskh* style; its pages dimensions being 25.0 x 19.0 centimeters. It contains 21 color geographical maps.

3.4 History/provenance

Persian MS: Formerly, this manuscript belonged to the mausoleum library of Shaykh Safiuddin Ardabili, the direct ancestor of the Safavid kings. From there it was first transferred to the *Dawat-e aliye-ye Iran* (Iran's Exalted Government Library) and then in 1314 Sh/1936 CE to the Iran Bastan Museum (National Museum of Iran) -set up in 1316 Sh/1938 CE- being still kept there.

Arabic MS:

1. Formerly this manuscript was in possession of Bahā' al-Dīn Zuhayr b. Muḥammad al-Muḥallabī, secret secretary of the last Ayyubid al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb; Zuhayr b. Muḥammad. It is assumed that he acquired the manuscript in 1240 in Syria or Mesopotamia.
2. The biographer and legal scholar Ibn Ḥallikān acquired the manuscript from him.
3. Unknown owner: Ishāq b. Yaḥyā b. Ishāq al-Ḥanafī.
4. Rulor (ruled 721-764/1321-1363) in Yemen: 'Alī b. Da'ūd b. Yūsuf b. 'Umar b. 'Alī b. Rasūl
5. 'Abd al-Qādir b. Muḥammad al-Anṣārī al-Jazīrī al-Ḥanbalī.
6. Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767-1811, medical practitioner, scientist, traveler and orientalist) acquired the manuscript in 1807 in Kairo.
7. In 1810 the manuscript came to the Ducal Library in Gotha.

¹. According to De Goeje, the Dutch orientalist, this work was written sometime between 318-321 AH/930-933 CE.

4.0 Legal information

4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name:	Address
National Museum of Iran	30 Tir Street, Imam Khomeini Ave, Tehran, IRAN. Postal code: 11369 1711, PoBox:11365 4364

Telephone:	Facsimile:	Email:
+98 21 66702677	+98 21 66702648	info@nationalmuseumofiran.ir

Name:	Adress:
University and Research Library Erfurt/Gotha Research Library Gotha	Schloss Friedenstein D-99867 Gotha Germany

Telephone:	Facsimile:	Email:
+49 361 737 5530	+49 361 737 5539	bibliothek.gotha@uni-erfurt.de

4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)

Name -----	Address -----
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Telephone	Facsimile	Email
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4.3 Legal status

The legal and administrative responsibilities of the Persian manuscript lie with the National Museum of Iran.

The legal and administrative responsibilities of the Arabic manuscript lie with the Research Library Gotha belonging to the University of Erfurt / Germany.

4.4 Accessibility

The microfilm and the digital copy of the Persian manuscript are easily accessible for research purposes. The original is available only to special people and in special cases under quarantine conditions, turning its pages not permitted.

The microfilm and the digital copy of the Arabic Manuscript are easily accessible for research purposes. The original is available only to special people and in special cases under quarantine conditions in the library.

4.5 Copyright status

All the rights of the author of the Persian manuscript are under the charge of the National Museum of Iran.

All the rights of the author of the Arabic manuscript are under the charge of the University and Research Library Erfurt/Gotha Research Library Gotha / Germany.

5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

5.1 Authenticity.

Because of their clearly recorded dates of transcription and known past history, both the Arabic as well as the Persian manuscripts of the *Al-Masaalik wa Al-Mamaalik* described here enjoy great credibility and authenticity. The Persian MS has a known scribe and date of transcription, which reveals that it is not only the oldest dated MS of the translation, but also the oldest translation ever extant in Persian. Scholars and codicologists have confirmed the authenticity and credence of these two MSS, and have thus proceeded to edit and have them published, presenting them as an authoritative reference book.² The Arabic MS is a copy of the *Kitāb al-Aqālim* by Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Fārisī al-Karkhī al-Iṣṭakhrī (died 951) from 569/1173.

5.2 World significance

The *Al-Masaalik wa Al-Mamaalik* is one of the most significant geographical works dating back to the 4th/10th century, whose author, Istakhri, is one of the founders of the science of geography in the Muslim world. Contrary to others, he has divided the Muslim lands, not into 7 but into 20 climes (*aqalim*; sing. *eqlim*).

Istakhri describes places to which he himself has travelled and seen directly. He maintains that since the *Ka'ba*, at Mekka, is the *naaf* (navel: central point) of the earth, and that as God the Exalted has, in the Qor'an, called Mekka '*Omm-ī-Qora*'³ (Mother of all towns), being the house of God and the *qibla* of all Muslims, and located in the Arab land, he starts with the latter. He then proceeds to the Persian Sea. He returns to the Arab domain whence he directs his attention to Maqrib, Egypt, *Shaam* (Syria), Mediterranean, Jazirah (northern Mesopotamia), land of Iraq (southern Mesopotamia), Khuzestan, domain of Pars, Kirman, Sind and Hind (Indian Subcontinent), Azerbaijan, Kuhestan, Deylaman, Khezer territory (northern Iran), and the arid land between Pars and Khorasan ending with Sistan, Khorasan and Transoxania. He also writes about Habasheh (Ethiopia), Zanzibar, and some other parts of Africa. The inclusion in the *Al-Masaalik* of this amount of information that is not found in geographical sources preceding Istakhri has rendered this book a unique one.

The author presents useful information regarding borders, distances, and connecting routes, as well as cultural and social matters of the communities in each place described and their religions and denominations; also about their agricultural products, trade, crafts and occupations, regional monuments and buildings such as citadels, fire-temples and fortified towns.

One of the features of the book is its being based on maps, which demonstrate the old methods of map-drawing. In his *Al-Masaalik* Istakhri has designed the maps according to Abu Zayd of Balkh in his *Sovar-al-Aqalim* [Maps of the Climes]. Since no work

2. Having studied 18 MSS of the *Al-Masaalik wa Al-Mamaalik* at the world's different libraries, including Aya-Sufia, National Library of Vienna, Bagdad Kushku Library (Turkey), Central Library of Tehran University (Iran), Library of the Institute of Oriental Studies at Leningrad, *Astan-e Qods-e Razavi* Library (Iran), Malek National Library (Iran), Library of the Islamic Assembly (Iran), Ravan Kushku Library (Turkey), Bibliotheque Nationale de France, India Office Library at London, Eton College Library (England), and *Golestan* Palace Library (Iran), Iraj Afshar chose to edit the Persian manuscript described in the present file because of its authenticity and long history.

One Persian manuscript is also in the Research Library in Gotha (Germany).

The Arabic manuscript was for the first time selected for a facsimile edition by Moeller in 1839; later, it constituted the basis for De Goeje's critical edition in 1870 as well as Mordtmann's German translation in 1845 of the *Al-Masaalik*.

³. A place in relation to which the locations of other places are determined.

has as yet reached us from Abu Zayd, who represented a new school and tradition in Persian-Islamic geography, Istakhri may well be regarded as having been the chief instrument in upholding, preserving and transferring that tradition, showing, thus, the importance of his book in the history of science.

The existence of a large number of MSS of *Al-Masaalik* in the libraries, museums, scientific institutes and research centers of various countries also points to the importance of this book. In 1839, the Arabic text of the *Al-Masaalik* was for the first time published in facsimile form by Moeller. Then, De Geoeje produced a critical edition of the book, which was published (1870) by Brill in Leiden, with no maps though. Up until 1927, the Leiden edition went through 9 offset reprints.

Once again, the Arabic MS of the *Al-Masaalik wa Al-Mamalik* was edited by Mohammad Shafiq Gharbal in 1961 at Cairo, being enhanced by Mohammad Jaaber Abd –‘Al Al-hini’s research and introduction. This new production was made with De Goeje’s edition in mind, and by utilizing three MSS. In this edition, use has been made of 20 black-and-white maps taken from the five existing MSS of the *Al-Masaalik* at Arab as well as European libraries.

Besides, the translation of this book into other languages and its publication in other countries indicate its universal status. Six centuries after the *Al-Masaalik* had been written, namely early 11th AH / late 16th century (more precisely, 1003 AH/1596 CE), during the reign of the Ottoman empire, Mohammad III, the *Al-Masaalik* was turned into Turkish. Madini produced an Italian rendering of the book in 1842, and in 1845, Mordtmann translated it into German.

The Persian translation of the book was edited by Iraj Afshar and published (1340 Sh /1961 CE) in Tehran; this edition went through 3 reprints by 1368 Sh/1989 CE. Afshar’s primary MS used in his edition, is the one introduced in the present file. It was copied based on an old Persian translation of the *Al-Masaalik* from 5-6th centuries AH. Another Persian translation of the book ascribed to Tostari and belonging to the 7th AH/13th CE century⁴ was also edited by I. Afshar and printed in 1373 Sh/1994 CE. The MS copied in 696 AH/1297 CE is kept at Bodleian library⁵.

5.3 Comparative criteria:

1 Time

The Hegira 4th century was the golden era of the burgeoning Islamic civilization. The era is referred to as the time of “Islamic Renaissance”, The political and cultural independence of the then Iran greatly helped toward the progress of science and scholarship. Because of the love the Buyid (Aal-e Buyeh) rulers demonstrated for learning, a good number of scholars gathered at their courts where they enjoyed extensive scientific facilities. In that period, various sciences including mathematics, astronomy, medicine, natural sciences and philosophy reached their height and growth among Muslims.

The *Al-Masaalik wa Al-Mamaalik* is indicative of the science of geography amongst Iranian Muslims in that period, revealing the state of understanding the earth’s dry lands, global waters,

⁴ Several other works written up to 731 AH/1396 CE have been attributed to Tostari, including the translation of *Qisas-al-Anbiya*, as well as the compilation of a selection of Awfi’s *Jawami’-al-Hikayaat*. In His *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey*, C.A. Storey says thus: The translator of *Qisas-al-Anbiya*, who lived in the reign of the Mogul Oljeitu (703-716 AH/1303-1316 CE) and is mentioned in *Habib-al-Siar*, made a selection of Awfi’s *Jawami’-al-Kitab*.

⁵ This manuscript, belonging to the late 7th AH/13 CE century, of *rahli* size (normally 35 x 25 cm), is written in elaborate *naskh* style and has 17 color designs. Two forms are missing from the middle of the MS, lacking half of the section on *Sham* (Syria) up to half of the section on Khuzestan; between these two sections should be included information on the Mediterranean, the land of *Jazira* and Iraq. This MS was purchased by Sir Gore Ouseley in 1811 at Shiraz, now kept under No 396 at Bodleian Library.

techniques of drawing geographical maps and the nature of geographical information in Islamic countries of the 4th.century AH.

2 Place

In the Buyid times, Shiraz was the seat of rulership and considered as one of the prominent cultural centers in the whole Islamic world. A good number of Buyid governors and viziers, who themselves were eminent writers and scholars, played a remarkable role in expanding learning and knowledge and in attracting men of erudition and scientific status to the Buyid courts. The Buyid Azad al-Dawleh's grand library as well as many other libraries in the province of Fars were research centers for the scholars of the time. Book-sellers' bazaar at Shiraz was thriving with great growth. It was under such conditions that Istakhri, of the town of Istakhr, near Shiraz, embarked on his geographical investigations.

He surveyed the then Muslim world from India to Africa and made an imaginary division of it into 20 climes, giving a description of each in his *Al-Masaalik*. In his demarcation of the boundaries of the Muslim lands, Istakhri says thus: "To the east of the Islamic domain is located India and *Darya-ye Pars* [Persian Sea/Gulf], and to the west lie Rum [apparently, Byzantine Empire], Armenia, Aalaan, Sarir, Khezer, Russia, Bulgaria, Soqlab and part of Turkistan. To the north is situated China and the area close to Turkistan that is connected to China; and to the south is located *Darya-ye Pars*". Regarding the map of the earth and the location of Pars, he observes: "This is *surat* (map) of the earth, in good repair or ruined, which we have divided into *mamaalek* (lands, territories)... and no place is more developed, more complete and more pleasant than *mamaalek-e Iranshahr* [Iranian territories] whose pole is Babylonia being the land of Pars. The boundaries of the land were well-known at the time of *Parsiyan* [Pre-Islam Zoroastrian Iranians]. With the emergence of Islam, Muslims took a share of each and every territory, as will be stated presently: of the Rum [Roman] territory, Syria, Egypt, Andalusia and Maqrib; of that part of the land of Hindustan bordering the victorious land [*zamin-e mansureh*, apparently meant, greater Persia]; of Multan as far as Kabulestan and around Tokharestan; and of the lands of China, Transoxania and whatever [area] that goes with that". Over two thirds of the *Al-Masaalik* is devoted to Persia and Transoxania. The book contains a great deal of invaluable historical information about the vast geographical expanse outlined above and the Muslim settlements in those times.

3 People

Istakhri has been recognized as one of the creators of the science of geography in the Muslim world. Not only did he have influence on other contemporary geographers of his time in the 4th AH/10th CE century, but also this influence continued to hold for several centuries to come, and his book came to serve as a reliable source for such geographers as Maqdesi (4th/10th century) and the anonymous author of *Hodud-al-Aalam* (Boundaries of the World), as well as Yaqt Hamawi, the 7th/13th –century geographer and author of *Mo'jam-al-Boldan*. Istakhri's other contemporary geographer, Ibn Hawqal admits that what stimulated him to write his own book was his meeting with Istakhri and reading his works. As Ibn Hawqal maintains, Istakhri had drawn a detailed systematic map of the province of Fars.

4 Subject and theme

The *Al-Masaalik wa Al-Mamaalik* is counted as one of the most important sources and references on history and historical geography. This work is of immense import for gaining insight into the life-style of Muslims in various regions and their distribution through a vast area of the world at that time. Knowledge of the places, towns, and villages that no longer exist today,

such as *Istakhr*, *Ardashir-khoreh*, *Beshavor (Bishapur)* located in the province of Fars, is to be obtained from this book. Furthermore, certain names, age-old expressions and items of information that have undergone many changes and transformations have all survived in this book.

5 Form and style

In his *Al-Masaalik wa Al-Mamaalik* Istakhri, in opposition to other geographers before him, who had divided the Islamic lands into 7 climes, for the first time divided them into 20 climes. Also, following the method of Abu Zaid of Balkh in the latter's *Sovar-al-Aqaalim* [Maps of the Climes], Istakhri has designed a number of maps. Abu Zaid represented a new school and tradition in Persian-Islamic geography. However, as no work by him has survived to the present day, Istakhri can be regarded as having been instrumental in safeguarding, completing and transferring that new school and tradition for the geographers after him.

6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:

The geography of the world of Islam in the 4th Century (Lunar calendar) is fully illustrated in *Al-Masaalik wa Al-Mamaalik*. The Book offers vast information on people's living conditions as well as the traditions and rites of the people in every area of this vast region. This informative collection construes the historical and geographic memory of Muslims, living in different regions. It is also very helpful in identifying the background(s) and identity(ies) of different ethnic groups and nations.

6.0 Contextual information

6.1 Rarity

There exist a number of the *Al-Masaalik wa Al-Mamaalik* MSS, in Arabic as well as in Persian, at libraries and museums throughout the world. Several of them have been described in footnote 2 of the present file. Some 10 MSS have been identified in various catalogues as existing in Iran. Because of its old age, completeness, and having an exact date of copying, the Persian MS introduced in this file has been recognized as the best among the Persian MSS.

6.2 Integrity

The Persian MS is hundred percent complete with no lacunae.
