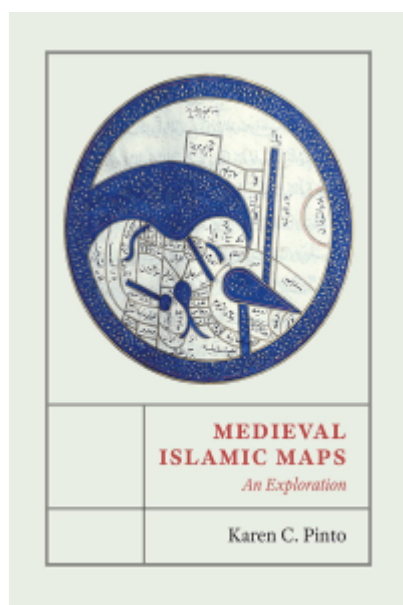




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Book review



Pinto, Karen C. ***Medieval Islamic Maps: An Exploration.*** Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. 406 p. \$60.00. ISBN: 9780226126968

As a relative newcomer to the study of medieval geographies and cartographies, I found Karen C. Pinto's *Medieval Islamic Maps: An Exploration* to be a very challenging read, at first. However, once I crossed into the main body of the text to encounter the thrust of her scholarly contribution, I came to understand what an imaginative and theoretically groundbreaking perspective she offers on Islamic mapping. By combining contemporary iconographic and literary analysis with comprehensive in-person manuscript study in libraries around the world, Pinto's investigation works from an expansive definition of cartography, one that is much more symbolic and narrative than it is mimetic.

Pinto defines a new genre of medieval Islamic maps, which she names KMMS, an initialism of *Kitāb al-masālik wa-al-mamālik* (Book of Routes and Realms) combined with *ṣūrat*, the Arabic word for picture – in short, a grouping of the geographic illustrations that accompany travelogues in this tradition. She studies KMMS maps through three lenses: the presence of an Encircling Ocean, a key



iconographic and cosmographic motif across multiple cultures; the labelling of the territory of the Beja, an East African nation; and the imperial patronage traditions that led to their production. This framework illuminates the cosmopolitan cross-pollination of ideas and ideologies that emerged as a result of exploration and travel in and beyond the Islamic realm, as well as the aesthetic and literary formats that they were recorded in.

As few extant examples of some KMMS maps remain, Pinto studies literary and archival texts recording the depiction of the earth in them – those who might raise an eyebrow at the absence of originals are reminded in Chapter 6 that this is how Greek cartographic thought was charted, as even works in Ptolemy's own hand are nonexistent. She argues for the importance of studying manuscripts in person, engaging their provenance instead of just their content, as the conditions of their (re)production provide critical information about their use and reception in an imperial context – Chapters 10 and 11 contain a remarkably detailed examination of the “Ottoman cluster” of KMMS maps, where her observation of a sloppy hand in sultan Mehmed II's atelier allows her to connect these systems of artistic production to his expansionary aims.

I admit the introductory chapters left me somewhat lost: while Pinto provides a comprehensive overview of the literature on medieval Islamic mapping, she offers too much detailed critique of previous scholarship in this section to make the history legible to anyone who is entirely new to the subject. She elucidates how her scholarly tack departs from previous perspectives before making any of her own claims clear. However, her argument gains fruition and momentum approximately 60 pages in, as she demonstrates the abstraction of the discovered world into the unfamiliar cartographic form of the KMMS maps step by step, and the accompanying figures start to become legible. As she draws parallels between the development of Islamic mapping traditions and the cosmographic and cartographic descriptions of other cultures, the importance of these maps as cultural and political texts becomes apparent.

Organization of the text aside, the book is beautifully designed and typeset, and the maps are clearly reproduced. As Pinto combines the rigorous material analysis of a medievalist with the imagination of a critical cartographer, *Medieval Islamic Maps* has expanded my worldview of the realm of maps.

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