

The Euphrates According to Medieval Islamic Geographers

Abdullah BALCIOGULLARI

Cukurova University

Abstract: Today, in the broad sense, the name given to the region between the Tigris and the Euphrates is Mesopotamia. It was founded the first cities and the first organized states on the banks of the Euphrates and the Tigris. One of the two rivers that make up Mesopotamia is the Euphrates and this river has found considerable space in the geography books of Arab scientists. The Euphrates word has taken place both in the old sources as a river name and as a good water source. The Euphrates River, considered to have been born from the heavens and has been regarded as a sweet and lush source of water like the rivers of heaven. The 8th and 14th centuries are regarded as the Golden Age of Islam in science. In this period, as in other branches of science, many works have been taken in the field of geography. Islamic geographers have portrayed the geographical features of the areas they visited in accordance with the understanding of that period. These works were also discussed with the Euphrates River maps and miniatures. In this study, the characteristics of cities taking place in and near the Euphrates River will be discussed with the expression of Islamic geographers. For this purpose the geographical works written between the X and XIV centuries will be examined and thus the Euphrates River will be tried to be revealed about a thousand years ago.

Keywords: Historical geography, The Euphrates, Islamic geographers

Introduction

Euphrates River gives life to cities in Turkey, Syria and Iraq and also it is the longest stream in the Middle East. The Euphrates, is located in a separate place in the Middle East region geopolitically. Both Turkey's importance as well as the Middle East's most important river. Both in Turkey, as well as the Middle East's most important river, the river Euphrates is also important in terms of geopolitics in the Middle East region. Their effects on the economy and demography of countries are also quite high.

It merges with the Tigris in Iraq, who was born in Turkey and then reach the sea in the Persian Gulf. The Euphrates River was formed by the merging of two branches called Karasu and Murat. Karasu, the arm that formed the Euphrates, has always been known as the Euphrates among the people. Therefore, it is considered the main branch of the river. Therefore, Dumlu Suyu, which originates from Dumlu Mountain, is accepted as the starting branch of Euphrates. Karasu passes through Erzurum Plain and passes through narrow and deep gorges after Askale in the west of this plain. The water flowing by Divriği, Calti Suyu (old Nehru Abriğ) connects him. In the south, after taking the Arapkir Suyu (old River Ancâ), it is 10-12 km. until the north of the Murat River and thus merges the Euphrates. The point where Karasu and Murat merged is now under the water of Keban Dam.

Murat River, the main branch of the Euphrates (the river Arsanas in the Middle Ages Arabian resources), arises from the north-west of Van Lake and the northwest of Muratbasi. Murat Suyu, connects the water from the Eleskirt Plain. The part of the stream west of the town of Palu is now under the water of Keban Dam. The Euphrates River and its main branch, Murat Suyu, originating from the high plateau of Eastern Anatolia, and first pass through the plains such as Palu, Altinova and Malatia Plain of tectonic origin extending along the north of the Southeastern Taurus Mountains. It extends from the Malatya Plain to Kahta, passing through the Taurus Mountains in Komurhan, east of Malatia.

After passing the Samsat and Bozova plains, Birecik crosses a small strait and reaches Syria from Karkamis.

- This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

- Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of the Conference

The length of the Euphrates Valley exceeds one thousand kilometers. The Euphrates River, which is very important in the emergence and progress of humanity, has always attracted the attention of geographers and travelers. It separated from just east of Karkamis the territory of Turkey and enters Syria. In the interior of Syria, respectively, Cerablus, Münbiç, Meskene, Raqqa, Dairizzor and Abu Qamal among the important settlements such as or passing through the Iraqi territory passes.

Some rivers reach the Euphrates River in this region. These are; Sacir Suyu (Sacur) coming from Gaziantep Plateau and Belih Suyu coming from Sanliurfa region are Habur Cayı which is near Mardin. After passing the Abu Qamal in Syria, the river that left Syria and passes into Iraqi territory and passes near the cities of Karbalâ, Hille, Najaf and Nâsriye in this country. Due to the land structure of Mesopotamia very often changes the stream bed. Therefore, historical information does not correspond to the information given in this stream.

The Euphrates, which is one of the two big rivers that constitute Mesopotamia, extends to the Persian Gulf with its geographical and cultural definition. Aside from the mountainous regions of the Eastern Anatolia, the Euphrates River has prepared a suitable environment for the development of cultural development in the history of humanity. Euphrates and its main branch, Murat Suyu, after taking its origin from the mountainous parts of Eastern Anatolia, follows the lines of the tectonic structure of Anatolia and crosses many valleys separated from each other by narrow straits.

Various dams have been built on the Euphrates River from the 1960s onwards. First, Keban, then Karakaya, Atatürk, Birecik and Karkamis dams and Syria, mainly Tabqa (Esat Dam) was built, including large dams. Therefore, the Euphrates loses its property of being a river; From Palu to the Iraqi border, there is a large lagoon at the site of the Euphrates.

Before the Euphrates was merged with the Tigris River, it was divided into several branches to create a field covered with swamps and lakes. The Euphrates River, which has passed to Syria, is being poured into the Persian Gulf shortly after it meets in the region called "Shattul Arab" with the Tigris flowing parallel to it in Iraq. The stream which is formed by the merging of two rivers reaches the Persian Gulf by taking the name of Sattularap. Total bed is 2800 km. The length of the Euphrates River from Karasu source to the Syrian border is 971 km.

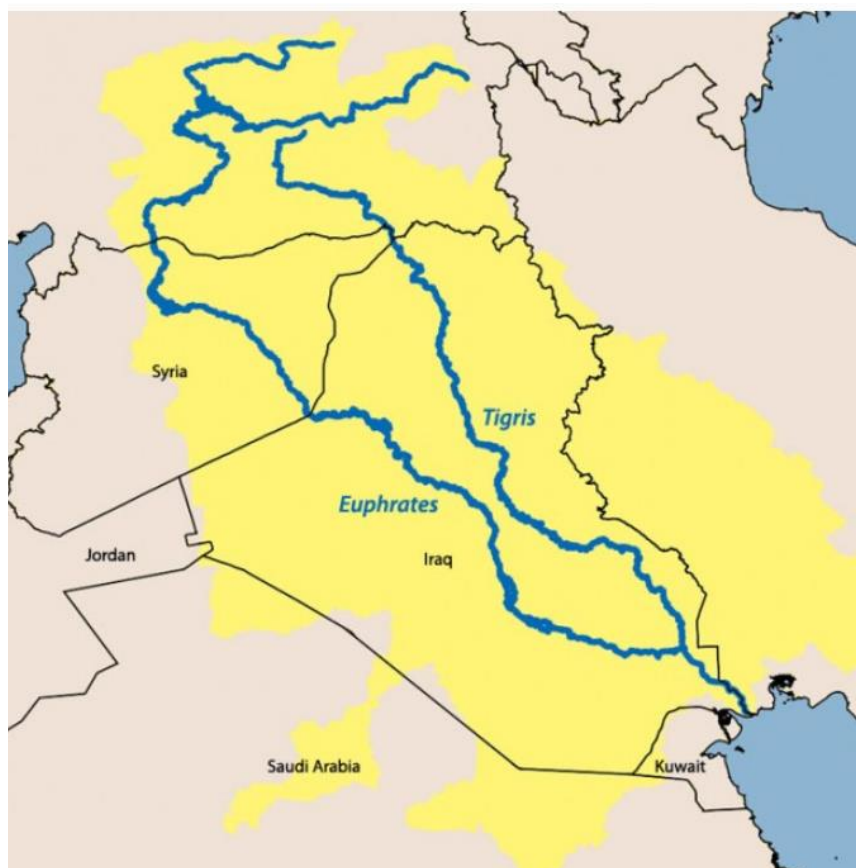


Figure 1. The Euphrates and Tigris River

Method

The aim of this study is to reveal the historical geography of the Euphrates River by examining the travel books written in Arabic between the 10th and 14th centuries. For this purpose, the Arabic travels written between the 10th and 14th centuries were examined travels about the Euphrates and its basin. Thus, the situation of the Euphrates River, about six hundred years and a thousand years ago, was tried to be revealed by using different sources.

In order to carry out this study, some of the original manuscripts / photographs of Arabic manuscripts written between the 10th and the 14th centuries have been reached. Some of this information is given in the form of a direct transfer.

Origin of the Word Euphrates

This concept was pronounced as Ufratu by the Persians who dominated Mesopotamia and passed to the west as Euphrates. Today's Euphrates form is the Arabic language.

The reason why the Akades used the Purattu concept for the Euphrates was due to the Sumerians saying to this river Baranun. The Purattu word belongs to the Akad, one of the Sami races. Yaqut al-Hamawi, who gave detailed information about the Euphrates River in his work *Mucem al Buldan*, explains the origin of the Euphrates word. He said that the word was actually Faladrud and that it was El Furat in Arabic. The word Faladrud is derived from the word "falad" which means "by its side" in Persian. Hamawi explains the reason for this;

"The Euphrates River is located next to the Tigris River. Tigris is also located next to Iran. Therefore, it is called Faladrud, which comes from Falad (near the Euphrates River)."

After this statement, Hamawi gave a different explanation. He claims that the word Euphrates means the dessert of the waters in Arabic. Arabic has been said to be the carefree (farahat), the comfort word which means comfort. The Arabs also stated that they called *Euphrates* (the freshest water), and the bitter and salty water on this side, and they even called Euphrates for water if it was sweet and delicious.

The Euphrates River was considered to be much more important by the former Arab geographers when it was taken over by the regional dimension in today's world. One of the Arab geographers, Himyari, gives information about the Euphrates River and regards the Euphrates as one of the six major important rivers in the world. According to Himyari, the Euphrates River is one of the largest rivers in the world; together with the Nile, Ganges, Amu Darya (Amo River), Tigris and Pearl River in China. El Zuhri counts the most important rivers of the world and accepts the Euphrates as the third largest river.

Almost all of the studied manuscripts show similar information about the Euphrates River basin. Especially in almost all of the works, the source of the river was mentioned and information was given. Sahip Hudud-i Alem states that the source of Euphrates River is Alik Mountain, and it divides Anatolia in two parts. He speaks about the Habur, Isa and Sarsar Rivers (in Anbar City) as important branches of the Euphrates. Since the Euphrates is a very strong and wide stream, it is provided by transport vessels in the river. The Euphrates River was quite suitable for river transportation from Samsat (Sumeysat), one of the districts of today's Adiyaman. Samsat, which is in the state of Adiyaman, is studied in detail in the Euphrates River. The Euphrates River, which has its source from the mountains of Eastern Anatolia, has a different feature from here. Samsat, formerly known as Samusata or Sumaysat with its fortress and city walls, is a port city during that period. As far as Samsat is, the stream that passes through the narrow valleys and is very faulty, from this point on, it becomes a stream that ships can go. In this way, the transportation by ships in the Euphrates River can be provided from Samsat to Baghdad. The commercial connection between Damascus and Baghdad was provided through the Euphrates River, and a large amount of goods were transported through this river. Among the transported goods, timber brought from the Eastern Anatolia Mountains and olive oil brought from Damascus were placed on the top.

The importance of the Euphrates River basin, which is rich in agricultural areas due to its suitability and climate characteristics, has never lost its importance. However, the importance of trade routes on the routes has changed since the past. For example, the Euphrates River has a special importance in silk trade, which comes from various aspects throughout the Middle Ages. During the Abbasid period, the main two main routes of international trade were following the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Hence, one of the X.th century Islamic

geographers called it the Chinese Sea from the Persian Gulf, where these two rivers were merged. Because it was the starting point of the ships going to the Far East. The city of Basra, which owes its establishment to the existence of the Euphrates River, became the starting point for the Arab ships that went to the east.

In the Middle East geography, the importance of the Euphrates River has very much emphasized. Some geographers describe it as one of the largest rivers in the world, while others attributed sanctity. In Qazwini (p.421), Idrisi (p. 650), four rivers came out of Heaven. They emphasize the importance of these streams by saying that they are Nile, Syr darya, Amu darya and Euphrates River. It is also emphasized in Islamic sources that it is one of the pre-apocalyptic signs.

In the same way, Ibn-i Batuta's work also discusses the issue of the Euphrates River. But unlike the other works here, it is said that the four rivers originate from heaven, but two of them continue to flow in heaven, while both extend from heaven to earth. One of the rivers reaching the earth from heaven is the Nile and the other is the Euphrates River.

The lands watered by the Euphrates and Tigris rivers originating from the Eastern Anatolia Region are one of the oldest settlements in the history of humanity in which the first civilizations emerged. When the Greeks call this fertile land Mesopotamia; The Arabs divided the same region into two parts. They called the south of the region, namely Lower Mesopotamia is Sevad or Iraq, and the Upper Mesopotamia is Al Jazeera.



Figure 2. Al Jazeera

As is known, the Euphrates River is the most important river that forms today's Mesopotamia and Arab geographers called Al Jazeera, which is an island in English. Since this region is located between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, the Arabs accepted this region as an island. Even in some sources, the Euphrates River came to the fore more and covered the entire region and was mentioned as al-Jazeera al-Furatiyya (Euphrates Island). In the same way, Abu Ubayd al-Bakri describes the borders of today's Arabian Peninsula, using the Arabian Island statement to refer to the seas that turn from three sides. The Euphrates River surrounds the Arabian Island from the fourth side. Abu Ubayd al-Bakri speaks of the Euphrates as follows;

“Arabia Island is surrounded by seas and rivers. Among these, the Euphrates River ranks first, which separates Bilad-i Rom and Arabia Island. The region between the Euphrates and the Tigris is surrounded by rivers and because it is separated from the land by water, it is like an island and it is called Al Jazeera (island).”

For example, one of the Arab geographers Istahri describes al-Jazeera as follows;

Al-Jazeera is between the Euphrates and the Tigris. It includes Moudar and Rebia. Euphrates, two-day distance to Malatia in Anatolia, and flows around Malatia, then passes through Sumeisat (Samsat) and Cisir-i Menbic

In the work of Abu Ubayd al-Bakri al-Jazeera, which is the regions of al-Jazeera in Anatolia mentioned as important cities are Rabia, Raqqa, Ruha (Urfa), Seruc, Harran, Samsat and Hisn-i Mansur.

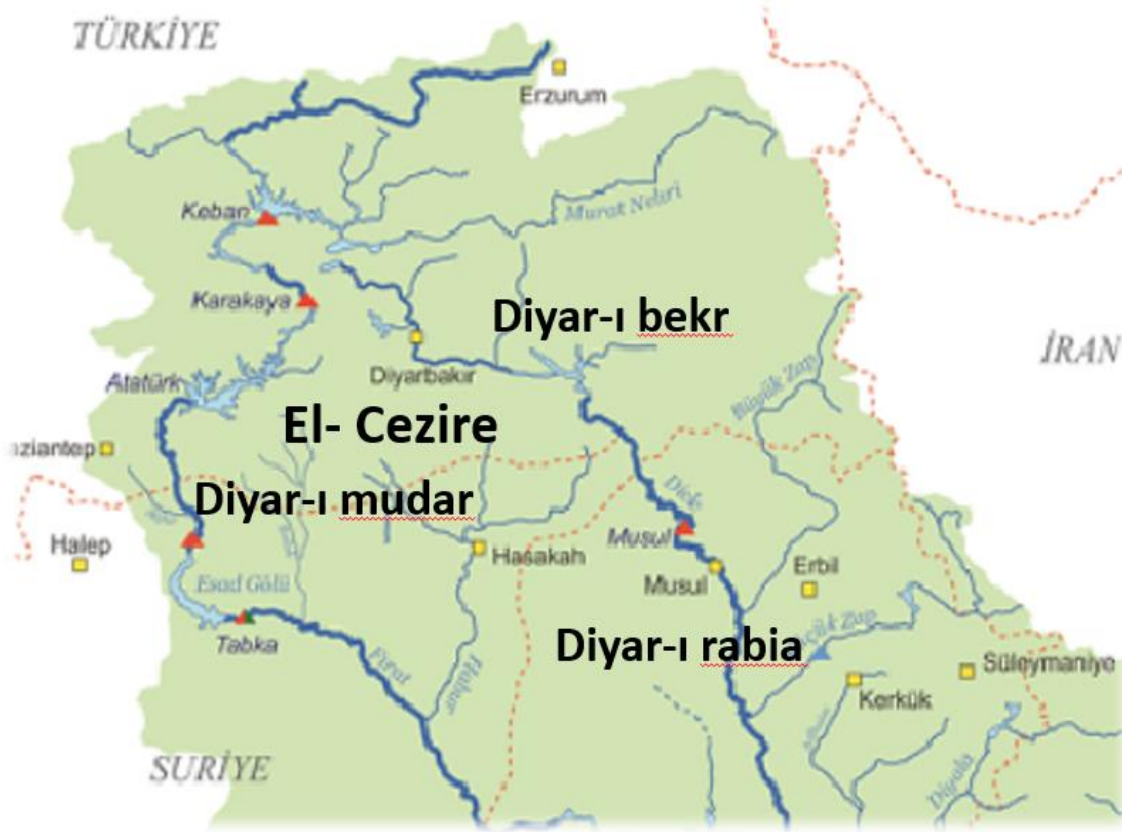


Figure 3. Sevad and Al Jazeera

Ibn Havqal, one of the geographers of the X. century, complies to Istahri and makes it more explicit than that of Al-Jazeera, on which the rivers are based. According to the proximity and distance to the east of the Tigris and the west of the Euphrates, he pointed out some cities and villages and stated that they were counted as Al Jazeera. Some geographers describe Al-Jazeera according to their settlements and generally state that they cover the following cities. Diyar-ı bekir, Meyyafarikin (Silvan), Erzen, Hisn-ı Keyf (Hasankeyf), Mardin, Ceziret ü İbn Ömer (Cizre), Beled, Nusaybin, Dara, Re'sül-Ayn (Ceylanpınar), Rakka, Suruç, Harran, Ruha (Urfa), Re's-Keyfa, Kefertoşa, Sümeysat¹(Samsat).

The Euphrates River was an important route for Syria as well as Iraq in the Middle Ages. There was a flow of goods from the Persian Gulf through the caravan along the river or along the river to the city of Bâlis, where the Euphrates was the closest to the Mediterranean. According to the former Arab geographers, the two important centers on this road were the cities of Raqqa and Bâlis. The city of Bâlis was of special importance since it was

¹ Sümeysat, Adıyaman'a bağlı olup merkeze yaklaşık 45 km uzaklıkta bulunan Samsat İlçesine karşılık gelen eski bir şehirdir. Tarihi merkezi bugün Atatürk Barajı'nın suları altında kalmıştır.

founded at the point where the Euphrates was the closest to the Mediterranean coast. In this way, the goods coming with the river transport to Balis, the highway was followed by the port of Iskenderun or Latakia. The Arab geographer Istakhri called this city "the port of Syrians". According to the information of the medieval geographer Hurdâzbih, the merchants traveled the highway between Bâlis and Antioch in three days. Istakhri also gives detailed information about the city and he mentions this as the port of Syria near the Euphrates. It is the first city between Syria and Iraq.

Another important city near Euphrates is Munbic. It is a city with fertile lands surrounded by pastures. Again according to Istakhri, the population living in this city is Arab. Near the town of Sinca, which is famous for its bridge, is located in the immediate vicinity of Munbic. There is no such bridge in all Islamic countries. Munbiç and Samsat are considered as the two most important settlements near the Euphrates River. Another city, which is located four days away from Munbic and near the Euphrates, is Malatia. This city is situated in a sense between the plain areas and the mountainous regions. In this respect, it is the junction and accommodation center of the roads coming from various directions. The mountains around Malatia are covered with a wide variety of fruit trees, especially walnuts (Istahri s.63 (orjinalinde)).

Raqqa, located on the banks of the Euphrates, is one of the market places where the Iranians took silk. This city was under the domination of Arabs, especially in the Sâsân iles period, along the Euphrates, in the northeast of Nizip and in the southwest by Damascus, he was in wealth and prosperity.

On the Water of the Euphrates

The Euphrates River, which receives its resources from the Eastern Anatolia Region, gives life to the places where the water passes. The water of this river, which cannot be used directly as drinking water, is highly praised in the past. In the manuscripts examined the water of the Euphrates has a special importance. The most important feature of the water of the Euphrates River is that the water is delicious. Ibn Fakih, who speaks about the Euphrates River, handles the Euphrates with the Tigris River. With regard to these two rivers, he used the following statements:

"It passes through Baghdad's land and there is no more sweet and healthy water than the waters of these two rivers. The best and most fertile river in the world"

Similarly, El Zuhri is another geographer who has expressions on the dessert of the Euphrates. El Zuhri, in his work the philosophers of the Atlantic Ocean on one side with salty and bitter juices; on the other side uses a sentence in the form of the Euphrates River, which has sweet and delicious waters. This sentence means the importance of the water of the Euphrates River.

The most important feature of the Euphrates and its surroundings from the first civilizations to the present day is the role played by the irrigation of the agricultural areas. The Euphrates River has been used for irrigation of agricultural land for a long time. But it was not possible to carry out intensive agricultural activities without irrigation in Mesopotamian territory. The alluvial shores of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers had a very hard structure. In Mesopotamia, the Sumerians were able to transform the marshes into agricultural land. The other important operation of the Sumerians must be able to reach the distances of the two important rivers, such as the Euphrates and Tigris, to distances which can be considered as distant by channels. These channels were later destroyed during the Mongol invasions. In this region these seized channels were arranged and made more effective in order to stimulate the economy by the Arabs, In other words, the efforts to control the irregular waters of the Euphrates River have been continued by Muslim Arabs in the Middle Ages. The name of the four most important canals separated from the Euphrates is called Isa River, Sarsar River, Mâlik River, Kûsâ River in Medieval Islamic Works.

The Great Wall of Sukayrûlabbas, where the river flows from Nusaybin to the south, joins Habur's branch. This dam was built by the Muslims in the X. century and was given water to the Sarsar River, which was in the north of Sâmerâ. When dam was destroyed in the XIII century, water could not go to Sarsar.

The importance of the Euphrates River in irrigating agricultural areas has declined throughout the history. The Euphrates River played an important role in medieval silk trade. During the Abbasid period, the main two main routes of international trade were following the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Ibn Havkal stated that Baghdad and Basra were connected to Kufa through the small rivers that left the Euphrates.

This depicts the river network to the smallest details.

Conclusion

The Euphrates River was the border region between the Islamic and Byzantine empires and the eastern vassals of the Byzantine. In addition to its strategic and commercial importance, the most important feature of Al-Jazeera, which both the boundaries of the Euphrates River and the existing Al-Jazeera during the early Islamic periods, ensured to be an agricultural and residential area. The Euphrates River is an important route between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean ports.

The Euphrates River, which has been used as a waterway for many years, has lost this characteristic due to the changes and developments in transportation networks and the amount of water carried by the river. As understood from the studied works, the amount of water that the Euphrates River carries today has decreased.

This may have an impact on irrigation, climatic changes and dams. In addition, all the works of Euphrates's water is always very beautiful, delicious and refreshing. But nowadays there is no such feature.

The Euphrates River, which is at the crossroads of trade routes coming from various directions, brought the precious goods from the far east through the Persian Gulf to Raqqa via the Euphrates, from here they moved to Antioch and other Mediterranean ports. The agricultural products produced in this region and the trade goods from the far east were transported and sold to the markets of the cities of Nusaybin and Urfa through the Euphrates.

The Euphrates River, which has an indisputable importance in human life, is considered as a separate title in the works of Islamic geographers. In the studied artifacts, the sources of the Euphrates River, the cities in which it was inhabited, the people living in these cities and the characteristics of the Euphrates Water were covered in detail.

The Euphrates River, which is seen as a messenger of the apocalypse even in today's Islamic faith, has been so important that sacredness has been dedicated. At that time, one of the largest streams in the world was accepted and the Euphrates was described as a stream coming from heaven.

Recommendations

This study was carried out to determine how the Euphrates River was handled by Islamic geographers. To understand the characteristics of this river, which is the lifeblood of the Middle East, not only the eastern sources but also the western works can be examined. Thus, more detailed information can be reached with two different approaches.

This study was aimed focused on the Euphrates River, and the remaining regions are within the borders of Turkey to investigate. In other studies, basin can be investigated the Euphrates basin and the human geography of this and can be examined not only place remaining within the borders of Turkey, but also places in Syria and Iraq.

References

- Abū 'Ubayd 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Bakrī (1945). *Mucam ma Isti'cam min Asma al Bilad*. Alam al Kitab. Bairout, Lebanon
- Al-Idrisi (2002). Abu Abd Allah Mohammad al-Qurtubi al-Hasani al-Sabti, *Kitab Nuzhat Al-Mushtaq*, reprinted by Maktab al Saqafat al Diyniyye, Cairo, Egypt.
- Al-Baghdadi, Safi ad-Din Abd al-Mu'min Abd al Haqq (1954). *Marasid al-Ittila ala Asma al-Amkina wa al-Biqā*, A. Mohammed al Bacawi, Ed., Dar al-Ma'rifa, Beirut, Lebanon.
- Al-Himyari (1975). Mohammed bin Abd al-Mun'eem, *Kitab al-Rawd al-Mitar*, I. Abbas, Ed., Beirut. Lebanon,
- Al Maqdisi, Abu 'Abd Allah Muhamad (1902). *Ahsan al-Taqasim Fi Ma'rifat al-Aqaim*. Leiden, Matb't Brill.
- Al-Mas'udi, Abu l-Hasan 'Ali ibn Husayn ibn 'Ali (1973). *Muruj al-Dhahab wa-Ma'adin al-Jawhar*, vol. 1-2, ed. Mohammad Muhyi al-Din 'Abd al-Hamid; Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, Lebanon.
- Ibn Batuta, Abu 'Abd al-Lah Mohammad ibn 'Abd al-Lah l-Lawatī Tāngi (1987). *al-Rihla*, ed. by Sheikh Mohammed Abd al Muneem al Arian and Mostafa al Qassas, Dar al Ihya al uloom, Beirut. Lebanon.

Ibn Hawqal (1992). *Surat al-Ard*, Mansurat Dar Maktabat al-Haya, Beirut, Lebanon.

Yaqut al-Hamawi (1977). *Kitab mu'jam al-buldan*, reprinted Dar Sadeer lil-Ṭiba'ah wa-al-Nashr, Beirut, Lebanon.

Zakariya al-Qazwini (1849). *Athar al-bilad 'Aja'ib al-Makhluqat*, F. Wüstenfeld, Ed., Göttingen.

Author Information

Abdullah Balciogullari

Cukurova University, Faculty of Education

Balcali/Adana/Turkey

Contact e-mail: eabalci@cul.edu.tr
