

Sistan Mapped: A History of Cartographic Representations of a Borderland Region

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In the late 19th century Qajar Dynasty, British imperialism in Iran changed the essence of the Sistan region by imposing a new border line between Iran and Afghanistan. The British redefined territorial boundaries, all influenced by a “colonial gaze”—seeing the region as a miserable space, awaiting reclamation by supposedly more civilized cultures. This paper takes a qualitative, interpretive-historical approach along with visual analysis to examine five historical maps of Sistan as primary sources. This study examines how the border imposition was artificially created through mapping and cartographic representations, how the British showed various moments of confrontation and displacement of regional identities, and how Persians resisted to save their territoriality and reverse the colonial gaze. Initially, a 10th-century world map crafted by Ibn Hawqal indicates the historical significance of Sistan in both Persian culture and the Islamic world. Then, Dhulfaqr Kirmani’s 1871-1873 map invokes the “mythical unity” of Sistan, drawing inspiration from Abu’l Qasim Firdausi’s *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings) to assert Iran’s claim. Frederic Goldsmid’s 1872 map, reflecting British interests, serves as an “ideological construct” to assert colonial control. Mirza Mohammad-Reza Tabrizi’s map as a “cultural construct” blends indigenous territoriality with British influence, showcasing a complex hybrid. Finally, Henry McMahon’s 1905 map highlights the interplay between meanings and power while revealing the impact of local resistance on Sistan’s cartographic representation. These interpretations demonstrate that maps are not disembodied representations or neutral constructs. Sistan is depicted on these maps as a “region interrupted” by Eurocentric perspectives, a “region united” by Persian maps, and a “region in-between” when the British maintained their political order and relied on the locals to resist the imposed border, resulting in an ongoing “place of conflict.” Overall, this paper unveils how these maps transformed Sistan into an “in-between” region, striated by delineated boundaries, disrupting its seamless territorial perception.

“In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography.”

Jorge Luis Borges, “On Exactitude in Science,” in *Collected Fictions*¹

INTRODUCTION

Sistan, a historic region spanning Iran and Afghanistan, carries a 5,000-year legacy. In Persian literature, Sistan was known as a legendary region; the birthplace of Rostam “the chief figure in heroic poetry of Persia”² based on Abu’l Qasim Firdausi (977-1010 CE) ‘s *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings), the world’s longest epic poem. During the late 19th century Qajar Dynasty³, British imperialism in Iran significantly altered the essence of the Sistan region by imposing a new boundary line between Iran and Afghanistan, severely disrupting Sistanis’ environmental self-identification.

The delineation of Eastern boundaries in Iran and the new boundaries of Afghanistan, as well as their strategic manipulation, were central elements of the “Great Game,” a geopolitical rivalry between the British and Russian Empires with the aim of reshaping the political landscape of Afghanistan and West Asia.⁴ The British strategically used mapping to establish a “buffer zone” between the East and West, later known as Middle East,⁵ responding to perceived Russian expansionism in Central Asia, which they viewed as a threat to their interests in India. This territorial barrier fundamentally altered national territoriality for both Iran and Afghanistan. During this time, the British undertook an extensive effort to reshape the territorial boundary between the two states through the production and dissemination of surveys, maps, photographs, and travelogues. They did so by interpreting the landscapes, architecture, and honorific monuments that all generally reflected the “colonial gaze”—seeing the region as a miserable space, awaiting reclamation by supposedly more civilized cultures.

Through a qualitative, interpretive-historical approach coupled with visual analysis, this paper rigorously scrutinizes the significant historical maps of Sistan as primary sources to narrate a historical moment, Sistan border delineation. This study delves into how the British border imposition was artificially created through mapping and spatial representations, how they showed

various moments of confrontation and displacement of regional identities, and how Persians resisted to save their territoriality and reversed the colonial gaze through mapping. This work engages in an in-depth examination of the intricate interplay among these spatial representations, elucidating the central significance of maps and mapping in molding spatial perceptions within the complex geographical context of the Sistan region. The focus of this study will be on the examination of five historical maps. These maps include one that portrays Sistan within the context of historic world mapping in 10th century, followed by four pivotal maps from the late 19th and early 20th centuries representing the region and its spatial representation both through the eyes of its own locals, Persian cartographers, as a supposedly inside view, and through the eyes of the colonialist British perspective. Initially, the KMMS⁶ world map crafted by Ibn Hawqal offers valuable contextualization of this region within the realms of both Persian culture and the Islamic world. Then, Dhulfaqr Kirmani's 1871-1873 map, rooted in Iranian culture, invokes the "mythical unity" of the region, drawing inspiration from Firdausi's *Shahnameh* to assert Iran's claim. Frederic Goldsmid's 1872 map, reflecting British interests, serves as an "ideological construct" to assert colonial control. Mirza Mohammad-Reza Tabrizi's map blends indigenous territoriality with British influence, showcasing a complex hybrid of a "cultural construct." Finally, Arthur Henry McMahon's 1905 map, shaped by native surveyor collaboration, highlights the interplay between meanings and power while revealing the impact of local resistance on Sistan's spatial representation. Overall, this study unveils how these maps transformed Sistan into an "in-between" region, striated by delineated boundaries, disrupting its seamless territorial perception.

MAPS AS EMBODIED REPRESENTATIONS

Moving beyond the geopolitical context, representations of a space are the ways in which any space is thought about, grasped, imagined, conceived, and formulated. Mapping as a process of inquiry and representation which comes with spatial experiences plays a crucial role in shaping and constructing lived spaces (representational spaces) and spatial practices (perceived spaces), in the words of Henry Lefebvre.⁷ This approach encompasses the macro-scale of a given space which is determined by the totalizing gaze of mapmakers and in this case British representatives. Moreover, in a dynamic context, mapping can be connected to the concept of "itinerary" by Michel de Certeau which expresses the temporary form of spatial experience, "spatial trajectories"⁸ rather than "a totalizing stage on which elements of diverse origin are brought together to form the tableau of a "state" of geographical knowledge, [...]."⁹ The purpose of mapping goes beyond mere reflection of reality; rather, it serves to catalyze the transformation of the environments in which individuals reside.¹⁰ Therefore, maps are not disembodied representations or neutral constructs; rather, they emerge as dynamic and potent tools that actively shape spatial perceptions, influence geopolitical strategies, and imbue geographical spaces with nuanced layers of



Figure 1. Ibn Hawqal's KMMS world map from *Kitāb Sūrat al-Ard* (Book of the Image of the World). 10th Century. Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul. Ahmet 3346, fols. 3b–4a.

meaning, reflecting the complex interplay of political, cultural, and imperial motivations.¹¹

Creating buffer-zone and then making frontier thorough mapping were the tactics wielded by Europeans during colonialism and manifested their power through a scientific and aesthetic representation of space, encapsulating the totality of places, and then colonizing the spaces. Maps, in this context, serve as powerful tools in creating the buffer-zone as an "in-between space" and later delineating territorial boundaries, demarcating zones of influence, and visually articulating the spatial perception of a region. According to de Certeau, a buffer-zone "does not have the character of a nowhere that cartographical representation ultimately presupposes. It has a mediating role."¹² This mediating role signifies that a buffer zone serves not merely as an empty space on a map but rather as a strategic intermediary, a dynamic region where competing interests converge and interact. In this context, it becomes a locus of geopolitical maneuvering, where nations strategically position themselves to safeguard their interests, negotiate boundaries, and assert influence. This contrasts with the conventional notion of cartography as a representation of fixed, unchanging spaces, highlighting how buffer zones embody the ever-evolving and contested nature of geopolitical realities. Toward this end, this study delves into the intricate interplay among these embodied representations, shedding light on the essential role that maps have played in shaping spatial perceptions of the Sistan region.

SISTAN'S HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE IN IBN HAWQAL'S WORLD MAP

Historically, Sistan has played a significant role within both Persian culture and the broader Islamic world. In the 10th century, Muḥammad Abū'l-Qāsim Ibn Hawqal, a prominent Arab geographer and cartographer, crafted the world map. While



Figure 2. Kirmani's map of Sistan, 1871-1873. This map belongs to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran. <http://iranshahrpeida.ir>

no original copies of this renowned work have survived, Ibn Hawqal's detailed descriptions within his book, "*Kitabe Surat al-Ard*" (Book of The Picture of The Earth), provide valuable insights into its content and significance.¹³ Ibn Hawqal's map presented the world as a circular structure encircled by mountains and oceans. The divisions into regions were prominently centered around the Islamic world. Within this cartographic masterpiece, *Sijistan*¹⁴, the ancient name for Sistan, occupied a remarkable position, surrounding with other Persian provinces such as Khurasan and Kirman.

Notably, Ibn Hawqal provided a separate and detailed cartographic representation of the Sistan region within his manuscript "*The Surat al-Ard*." In this portrayal, Sistan emerges as a coherent entity, characterized by geometric elements, including straight and curved lines. Wide parallel lines on the map symbolized rivers, while perfect circles represented lakes. These meticulously crafted maps within Ibn Hawqal's work served as indispensable resources for comprehending the Sistan region for a long time. It is worth noting that these maps transcended mere geographical representation; they intertwined mythical, historical, and temporal dimensions. Water bodies carried profound symbolic significance in Ibn Hawqal's maps. Consequently, these cosmological considerations were manifested in Persian maps of Sistan during the late 19th century, specifically during the process of border delineation. Within these maps, the

representation of water resources and the incorporation of an oval or circular boundary surrounding the region conveyed intricate spatial perceptions.

KIRMANI'S MAP AS A "MYTHICAL UNITY"

Iran faced persistent boundary conflicts in the Sistan region with British involvement while engaged in ongoing negotiations. Iran's stance centered on asserting its historical claims to Sistan, particularly emphasizing Nasir al-Din Shah's¹⁵ hereditary ownership of the region. By Shah's command, Dhulfaqar (Zulfaqar) Kirmani, an Iranian government official and *Dar ul-Funun*¹⁶ graduate participated in boundary commissions tasked with delineating Iran's eastern frontier in 1871 when General Fredric Goldsmith led a commission to resolve the Sistan issue.¹⁷ Kirmani's mapping endeavors extended to Kirman, Baluchistan, Sistan, and Khurasan, culminating in his work titled "*Jughrajiya-yi qadim va jadid-i vilayat-i nimrud va sistān*" (The Old and New Geography of the Province of Nimrud and Sistan).¹⁸

Kirmani's map of Sistan weaves mathematical calculations with historical discourse, tracing Sistan's historical borders and contextualizing the region.¹⁹ This map embodies a convergence of mythical, historical, and bodily time upon its surface. It painstakingly records mountains, hills, and significant ruins, while its annotations breathe life into the map, linking places to local mythological stories such as the legendary tales of Rostam and Esfandiar from *Shahnameh*.²⁰ For example, he elucidated the origin of the name "*Puze-e-Dak Tir*," explaining that it was the place where Rostam retrieved the double-headed arrow during his battle with Esfandiar. His references to *Shahnameh*²¹ and even identification of the cities, mountains, and natural landmarks connected to these legends indicate that he "could not distance himself from the geographic myths that impregnated the land"²² while creating a scientific treatise.

In Kirmani's map, a fascinating interplay of observation and myth creates a complex narrative of the region. At its core lies the Hirmand River, symbolizing Sistan's essence intricately intertwined with its water sources. Here, water is portrayed as an indispensable lifeline, depicted with a continuous ebb and flow that transcends the conventional confines of traditional cartography. Notably, an annotated dashed line graces the eastern side of the map, signifying a deliberate effort to ascribe territorial designations to both Seistanis and other entities. Kirmani's precise categorization of diverse architectural and geographical features in the map's legend is noteworthy. He employs evocative descriptors such as "*Gale kharab*" (ruined castle) and "*Gale Aabad*" (inhabitable, flourishing castle), breathing life into the landscape. The scale, measured in *Farsakhs*,²³ a Persian unit of walking distance, adds a layer of precision to the map's artistic representation, enhancing its overall richness and depth.

Kirmani's map weaves a vivid tapestry, uniting the desert and hills through the river's central presence. Functioning as a "mythical construct," it melds landscape and myth into a

cohesive narrative, fortifying Sistan's collective consciousness and perception.²⁴ Amid military defeat and European dominance, *Shahnameh's* citation fueled a cultural revival longing for ancient Iran's history. Kirmani's map transcends traditional cartography, transforming into a mental "itinerary" of a collective traveler rather than a "totalizing view from above," in de Certeau's words.²⁵ It enriches with extensive textual annotations, introducing "an image of a woven-into-myth landscape,"²⁶ acting as poignant reminders not only for Sistanis but for all Iranians. It transforms spatial journeys into historical odysseys, safeguarding identity and territory through myth and history. For him, Sistan is not a "geographical map" but a "history book"²⁷ to walk on and breathe in its mythical atmosphere.

GOLDSMID'S MAP AS AN "IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCT"

The 1872 arbitration map of Sistan created by General Frederic John Goldsmid²⁸, a British diplomat, was undertaken as part of a diplomatic mission to resolve boundary disputes between Iran and Afghanistan toward the creation of a buffer-zone to preserve the stability of Persia and the protection of India.²⁹ The map's purpose was to establish clear territorial boundaries, delineating the border between these two nations. It systematically charted geographical features, rivers, towns, and other landmarks to facilitate the arbitration process. However, this map carries an inherent colonialistic overtone, portraying British agents as detached observers exploring the region without interference from local powers. In British accounts, local residents were often depicted as lacking comprehensive knowledge of their own geography. Even the Iranian commissioner, Mirza Ma'sum Khan, was described as being "in utter ignorance of the nature of the work."³⁰ Goldsmid's map, in its division of Sistan between "Sistan Proper" and "Outer Sistan,"³¹ seemingly overlooked the nuanced local conditions and intricacies.

Goldsmid's map, a lithographed map inserted into his report in 1872, emerges as a powerful embodiment of the "ideological construct" imposed upon the region. At the forefront of this map stands a bold, unyielding red line, a striking demarcation that defines the suggested border. It is an assertion of control, an emblem of authority, and the embodiment of the imperialist narratives imposing his colonial gaze. This sharply defined, clear-cut, and unwavering red division line as the map's most compelling feature is a visual testament to a significant shift in the discourse of sovereignty—an imposition of colonial authority. This solid line on a seemingly sketchy canvas encapsulates the colonial imagination, representing more than just a border—it symbolizes "a line of control."³² It evokes a sense of permanence and order within a region that had, until then, thrived on fluidity and adaptability.

Hamun Lake, delineated in yellow, adds a layer of visual complexity, juxtaposing the starkness of the red line with the fluidity of its surroundings. This juxtaposition embodies the tension between colonial representation and the organic, ever-shifting nature of the terrain.³³ Notably, the map features a rectangular

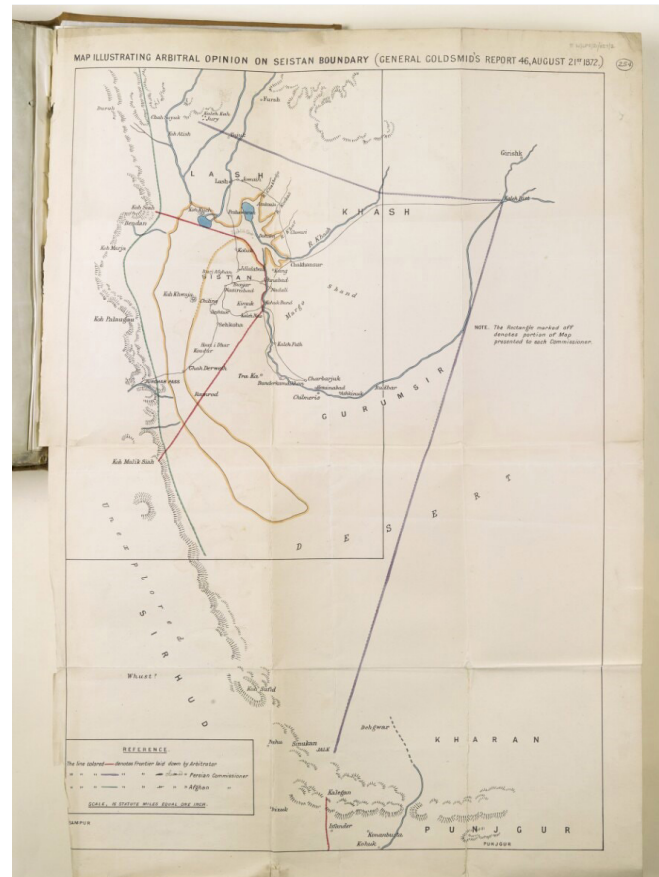


Figure 3. Goldsmid's map of Sistan, 1872, showing arbitral opinion on Sistan Boundary, General Goldsmid's Report 46, August 21st, 1872. [254r] (1/2), British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/10/52, f 254, in Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100040047751.0x000075.

demarcation, signifying the portion allocated to the Qajar and Afghan commissioners, marking an acknowledgment of the diplomatic dimension of its creation. Yet, within this apparent collaboration lies a deeper narrative—a narrative of colonial power and its imposition on the indigenous landscape. Even the legend reinforces the colonial narrative, categorizing the lines (borders) into three types: the red line (arbitrator's frontier), the angular gray line (Persian commissioner's vision), and the green line (Afghan commissioner's proposal). Depiction of these colors and this categorization reflect the dual role of cartography—not only for documentation but also for creating categorizations and hierarchies in line with modern geographical perceptions.³⁴

Goldsmid's 1872 map of Sistan, while attempting to label specific locations and fortified settlements, falls short of offering a comprehensive portrayal of the region's human geography. It adopts an abstract, diagrammatic style devoid of annotations and descriptions, reinforcing the colonial gaze, a gaze that aims to overwrite and override the lived experiences of the native population. This selective naming mirrors the colonial perspective, emphasizing elements that align with its narrative while

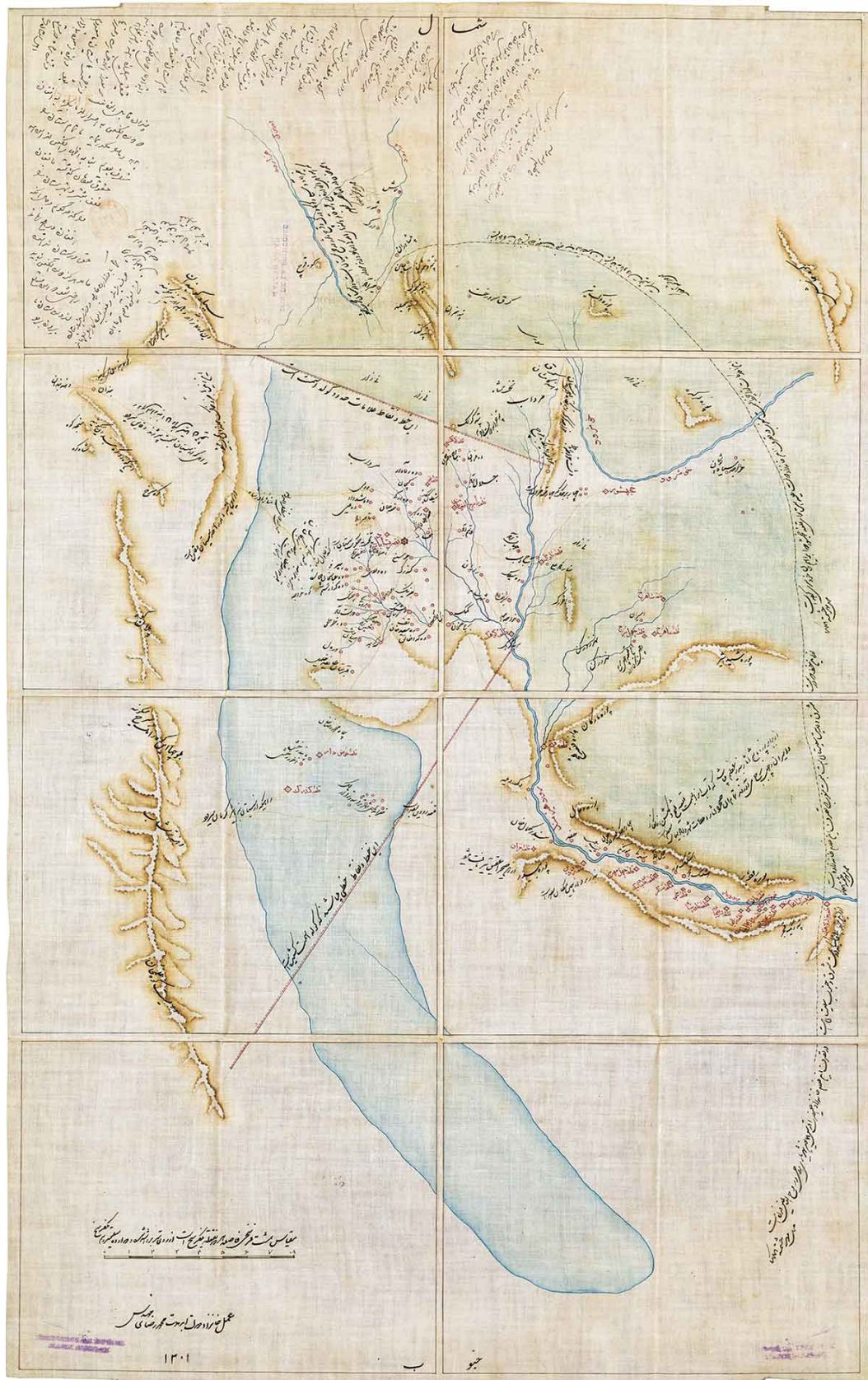


Figure 4. Tabrizi's map of Sistan, 1883. Bibliotheque nationale de France, Suppl. Persan-2333-1883.

overlooking the complexity of indigenous life. Goldsmid's map as an "ideological construct," imposes a new spatial order on Sistan and seeks to establish colonial authority in a region steeped in myth and history.

TABRIZI'S MAP AS A "CULTURAL CONSTRUCT"

In 1883, a decade after Goldsmith's boundary delineation in Sistan, Mirza Mohammad-Reza Tabrizi, known as *Mohandes Bash*³⁵ (Head Engineer), crafted an independent map of the region. Tabrizi had received advanced education in Europe, contributing to the modernization endeavors of the Qajar government.³⁶ Tabrizi's Sistan map, now housed in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, can be viewed as a form of counter-mapping.³⁷ This concept involves the asymmetric use of dominant cartographic discourse to challenge prevailing perspectives on territorial boundaries.

This cartographic depiction of Sistan, akin to Kirmani's map, transcends mere topographical data, embodying an intricate "artful conception" distinct from earlier renditions. This map both aligns with and challenges Goldsmid's preceding map. Tabrizi's map inherits the boundary line from Goldsmid's arbitration map but endows it with a renewed sense of purpose. A straight, light-red line, subtly segmented into two parts, emerges as the defining feature, with its inscriptions rendered in black ink as a subtle homage to Goldsmid's contributions. This map is not a mere document; it is an experience. It is meticulously rendered on tracing linen, cradled within a protective cardboard slipcase. At its zenith and nadir, the cardinal points, North (*shamal*) and South (*janub*), gently guide our orientation through this intricate terrain.

What sets Tabrizi's map apart is its profound insight into the human geography of Sistan. The colors employed become the palette of his spatial journey. Four distinct colors categorize settlements based on fortifications and population presence. Employing a double-line grid, the map elegantly divides its canvas into a mosaic, evoking the process of assembling intricate pieces of a complex regional puzzle. Blue hues delicately trace rivers, while the seasonal Hamun lake, mirage-like, is rendered in its distinctive hue of blue. Green swathes represent the promise of land improvement. Then discreetly rendered dashed black line delineates what is denoted as "the eastern limit of the Amir of Sistan [...]."³⁸

Tabrizi's map is not merely a visual artifact; it is a vessel carrying the very essence of Sistan's soul. It echoes the indigenous understanding of the land, weaving historical and folkloric claims into the fabric of its representation. This map represents a region marked by uncertainty, where a fragile dashed border line stands as the sole marker of demarcation, becoming a canvas for regional identities, narrating stories of territorial desire and disenchantment.

Tabrizi's map seamlessly blends European cartographic techniques with local nuances, enriching our grasp of Sistan's multifaceted history, geology, and human geography. Annotations in the elegant *nasta'liq*³⁹ script adorn this artful representation, with layers of meaning. One layer follows Goldsmid's proposed boundary, while another showcases the Amir of Sistan's annotations and claims. A dotted line to the east symbolizes sovereignty, with a clear declaration of authority.⁴⁰ Naser al-Din Shah's comments punctuate the map, alongside Tabrizi's personal insights, adding unique depth. Each note, each stroke of ink, adds a layer of meaning to this document, transforming it into a spatial representation that transcends the conventional boundaries of cartography.

Tabrizi not only augmented, reconfigured, and supplanted Goldsmid's cartographic representation but also devised a cartographic rendering depicting a form of resistance within an unequal dialogue between the powers. His precisely crafted map stands as a robust historical testament to the phenomenon of "reversing the colonial gaze," signifying the embodiment of agency within the depicted context.⁴¹ It constituted both an endeavor and a visual manifestation aimed at preserving the cultural integrity of the region, concurrently fostering a dialogic exchange between the core and the periphery. This cartographic creation sought to emphasize that the formation and delineation of this region and its territorial boundaries did not adhere to the simplistic "diffusionist lines"⁴² envisioned by colonialists, even in the absence of clearly defined demarcations.

MCMAHON'S MAP AS A "REGION IN-BETWEEN"

Iranians' suspicious questioning Goldsmid's true intentions and later a slight change in the course of Helmand River necessitated a second British mission which made a slight adjustment in the Iran-Afghanistan Boundary. This map, created during Sir Arthur Henry McMahon's Second Seistan Boundary Commission (1903–5), leaned heavily on the collaboration of indigenous surveyors.⁴³ It became a foundational document for delineating borders and resolving longstanding disputes stemming from Goldsmid's earlier map.

McMahon's cartographic endeavor aimed to offer an exhaustive and precise portrayal of Sistan's geography. It incorporated topographical nuances, river systems, settlements, and other prominent geographic features. This resulting map played a central role in the diplomatic discourse between the British and Persian governments, facilitating their quest for a definitive border arrangement in Sistan. It is crucial to emphasize that McMahon's map of Sistan existed within a broader geopolitical context, reflecting the grand designs of the British Empire to assert influence and dominance in the Middle East and Central Asia during the early 20th century. This map embodies a fragment within the broader buffer zone in the colonizer's perception. Consequently, this map, along with the diplomatic interactions it initiated, wielded significant influence in shaping regional borders and political divisions.



Figure 5. McMahon's map of Sistan, 1905. Published by *The Royal Geographical Society* in 1906.

McMahon's map is a lithograph carefully rendered in ink and color. Brown hachures deftly depict the region's reliefs, and it also highlights areas susceptible to inundation. The map's grid system neatly divides the expanse into comprehensible sections. Unlike the Persian counterparts, it refrains from extensive annotations, instead focusing on the primary settlements, delineated in black. A mile-scale indicator resides in the lower right corner, offering a precise measurement standard. The map's legend further adds depth, featuring notations for ancient ruins, wells (W), springs (Spr.), villages (Vill.), and small triangular symbols denoting trigonometrical points, their heights measured in feet.

The topography of Sistan, a predominantly barren desert, is conveyed through brownish hues, with Hamun Lake thoughtfully outlined and lightly washed in shades of blue, mirroring Tabrizi's earlier map. However, McMahon's map occupies a unique place within the colonial perspective, serving as a fragment within a larger puzzle rather than a comprehensive representation of the entire region. A small reference map positioned in the upper right corner underlines this notion. It underscores the map's role in shaping the region's spatiality, positioned somewhere between Goldsmid's ideological construct and the unified indigenous Persian maps. Particularly, the delineation of the Persian Frontier takes the form of a dotted black line, a marked departure from the solid red lines seen in earlier colonial maps. This shift reflects the resistance of local populations and their assertions of ownership and claims over the region. It transforms the colonial map's representational approach from exclusionary to inclusive, fostering a more dialogical portrayal of the region that includes the perspectives and agency of its inhabitants.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have embarked on a journey through the intricate history, cultural tapestry, and geographical complexity of Sistan. It has been demonstrated that maps are far from being disembodied representations or neutral constructs. They

emerge as powerful instruments, harnessed for a myriad of purposes, spanning cultural, political, imperial, and colonial agendas. Whether considered from a descriptive or geographical standpoint, maps prove themselves to be intricate vessels, encoding and decoding multifaceted layers of meanings and narratives.

As we examined maps through various lenses, we gained a comprehensive understanding of Sistan's multifaceted identity. Initially, we observed Sistan as a "region interrupted," characterized by Eurocentric viewpoints that often dismissed or diminished indigenous cultures and rights. This perspective was closely linked to the colonial gaze, exemplified by Goldsmid's mapping, which sought to organize, simplify, and symbolize a world under conquest. Geographical knowledge by the British imprinted a new image of creating of their buffer zone between Russia and India and a new national territoriality for both Iran and Afghanistan.

Conversely, we encountered Sistan as a "region unified" in Persian maps, where it emerged as a cohesive entity, transcending fragmented divisions. Kirmani's and Tabrizi's maps reimaged their geography and remapped a world they had inherited and reclaimed it by reversing the colonial gaze. Persian maps portrayed only Sistan, illustrating how maps served as a medium to engrave the collective consciousness of Sistanis and Persians. They ignored everything existing outside of this region, depicting a unique border as a loop, inspired by Ibn Hawqal's work. These maps were not mere cartography; they were a global, historical representation of tangible events, driven by an awareness of colonial influence. The cartographers mapped, historicized, and claimed Sistan as a unified whole, all while preserving its cultural heritage through references to the *Shahnameh*, exemplifying their commitment to Sistan's identity amidst colonial pressures.

Lastly, Sistan as a "region in-between," a buffer zone, was depicted through Mac Mahon's map, where political order was delicately maintained through a balance of local collaboration and resistance against imposed borders. This map was a synthesis — amalgamating elements of the colonial perspective observed in Goldsmid's map, while simultaneously emphasizing the distinctive terrain and geographical characteristics featured in Kirmani's and Tabrizi's maps. This map, marked by vanishing borderlines, represented a moment of in-between—neither in the East nor the West, neither in Iran (Persia) nor in Afghanistan. It signified a pivotal transformation from clear-cut demarcations to cartographic ambiguity, forever altering the region's existence.

In essence, this paper underscores a transition from a cosmographic worldview to a cartographic one, tracing a diminished regional identity of Sistan evident in the ways it was mapped. These maps are not mere cartography; they embodied historical representations infused with an acute awareness of colonial influences. They not only reflect the geopolitical shifts of their time but also encapsulate the resistance of regional identity of Sistan amidst external pressures. Thus, the cartographic journey

traversed reaffirms that maps are potent agents of history and culture, intimately intertwined with the narratives they convey.

ENDNOTES

1. Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science," in *Collected Fictions*, trans. by Andrew Hurley (New York: Viking, 1998), 325.
2. "To those who know completely the legendary history of Rustam has entered into the soul and spirit of the Persian people, and how largely it has helped to form the character of nation, it must, then be of interest to reflect that a germ of historic truth thus lies in the whole fabric of romance; that, in fact, there really was a native Arian Aristocracy, in the sixth century B.C., struggling against the Turanian invaders from east [...]." In H.C. Rawlinson, "Notes on Seistan," *Journal of The Royal Geographical Society of London* 43 (1873): 275.
3. Qajar Dynasty (1789–1925) is known as "the most vital period of Iranian encounters with colonial modernity." In Hamid Dabashi, *Reversing the Colonial Gaze: Persian Travelers Abroad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 362, <https://doi-org.uc.idm.oclc.org/10.1017/9781108768986>.
4. Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh, *Small players of the Great Game: The Settlement of Iran's Eastern Borderlands and The Creation of Afghanistan* (London; New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 8.
5. "The official mind of imperialism was the preservation of Ottoman Empire and Qajar Iran as friendly buffer states against Russian expansion toward the frontiers of India. Indeed, the term Middle East was popularized precisely in this strategic sense." H. Lyman Stebbins, "British Imperialism, Regionalism, and Nationalism in Iran, 1890–1919," in *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Farzin Vajdani (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 154.
6. Karen C. Pinto introduces a novel category of medieval Islamic maps, which she labels KMMS, formed by combining *Kitāb al-masālik wa-al-mamālik* (Book of Routes and Realms) with *sūrat*, the Arabic term for image. Essentially, KMMS comprises the geographical illustrations that typically accompany travel accounts in this genre. In Karen C. Pinto, *Medieval Islamic Maps: An Exploration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).
7. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, USA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991), 38.
8. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 115.
9. Ibid., 121.
10. James Corner, "The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention," in *The Map Reader*, ed. Martin Dodge, Rob Kitchin, and Chris Perkins, 1st ed. (Wiley, 2011), 89, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470979587.ch12>.
11. Nilanjana Mukherjee, *Spatial Imaginings in the Age of Colonial Cartographic Reasons: Maps, Landscapes, Travelogues in Britain and India* (London, Routledge India, 2020), 35.
12. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 127.
13. Ibn Hawqal's map is considered a valuable contribution to early Islamic cartography and provides insights into the world as understood during his time. "The earliest set of maps to survive from the corpus of Islamic cartography are those that accompany the text *Kitāb Surat al-ard* (Picture of the earth) of Abu al-Qasim Mubammad ibn Hawqal in the manuscript dated 1086, found in the Topkapı Sarayı Miizesi Kitiphanesi in Istanbul." J. B. Harley, David Woodward, *The History of Cartography, Vol. II, Book I: Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies* (University of Chicago Press; 74th ed., 1992), 108.
14. The etymology of Sistan, which in some of English documents spelled Seistan, derives from Sagastan or Sakastan as the land of Sacae or Saka, a Scythian tribe who migrated to Persia in Second century BC. The other names of this region over the time were Zarank or Zaranka, means the land of the lake in the more ancient old Persia, and *Sijistan*, after Arab conquest of Iran. "In Persian Romance universally, and not unfrequently in standard works of history and geography, Seistan is known by the name of Nimruze, that is "mid-day" or "meridies," the south; but Seistan is not south of modern Persia." In Rawlinson, "Notes on Seistan," 273.
15. The fourth Shah (King) of Qajar Dynasty from 1848 to 1896.
16. Established in 1851 by the Royal Vizier to Nasir al-Din Shah, this institution stands as Iran's oldest Western-style institute of higher education.
17. Following the Treaty of Paris in 1857, which resulted in Afghanistan's separation from Iranian territory, one of the treaty provisions dictated that in the event of disagreements between Iran and the nations of Afghanistan and Herat, the British government would be responsible for resolving these disputes. Consequently, the delineation of the Sistan border occurred under the influence of British intervention after the Treaty of Paris. In Mojtahed-Zadeh, *Small players of the Great Game*, 180.
18. The Sistan map, which is still in existence today, was drawn in 1871 and was completed by 1873.
19. Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804–1946* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 57.
20. "Rostam and Esfandiar" is one of the most prominent stories throughout Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. The battle between them happened in Sistan region.
21. The *Shahnameh* was widely available during this period due to frequent printing in India and Iran and became "an essential geographical source for Persian irredentists." Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, "Fragile Frontiers: The Diminishing Domains of Qajar Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 2 (1997): 220. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800064473>.
22. Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fiction*, 57.
23. *Farsakhs* is a Persian unit of walking distance equivalent to approximately 3.5 miles or 6 kilometers.
24. Farhad Tehrani and Sina Soltani, "Sistan Map and Zulfaqr Kermani," *Athar Journal* 34, no. 61(2013): 16.
25. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 120.
26. Jilly Traganou, *The Tōkaidō Road: Traveling and Representation in Edo and Meiji Japan* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 42.
27. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 120.
28. Goldsmid's participation in the boundary arbitration commission during the late 1860s aligned with the growing awareness among British surveyors of eastern Iran. This increased knowledge was facilitated by significant projects such as the construction of the Indo-European telegraph line connecting India to the Persian Gulf. This era witnessed the accumulation of an unparalleled volume of data pertaining to areas such as Sistan.
29. Daniel Foliard, *Dislocating the Orient: British Maps and the Making of the Middle East, 1854–1921* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 131–132.
30. Frederic John Goldsmid and Oliver St John, *Eastern Persia: An Account of the Journeys of the Persian Boundary Commission, 1870–71–72* (London, Macmillan, 1876), 148.
31. According to Goldsmid, "it would be somewhat embarrassing to define what at the present day is meant by the term "Sistan." Intelligibly to illustrate the case I see no better plan than to suppose two territories, one compact and concentrated, which I will call "Sistan Proper," the other detached and irregular, which may be known as "Outer Sistan." Frederick Goldsmid, "Journey from Bandar Abbas to Mashhad by Sistan, with Some Account of the Last-Named Province," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 43 (1873): 70.
32. B.D. Hopkins, "The Bounds of Identity: The Goldsmid Mission and The Delineation of The Perso-Afghan Border in The Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Global History* 2, no.2 (July 2007): 236.
33. Daniel Foliard and Nader Nasiri-Moghaddam, "Contested Cartographies: Empire and Sovereignty on a Map of Sistān, Iran (1883)," *Imago Mundi* 72 (2020): 22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03085694.2020.1675332>.
34. Traganou, *The Tōkaidō Road*, 61.
35. *Mohandes Bashi* was a title given to the chief engineer or head of public works during the Qajar dynasty in Persia (modern-day Iran). The term "*Mohandes*" is derived from the Arabic word "*Muhandis*," meaning engineer, and "*Bashi*" denotes a chief or leader.
36. His expertise in topography and cartography was honed during his participation in an international boundary commission, which included Iranian, Russian, and British experts during the 1813 Treaty of Golestan.
37. Foliard and Nasiri-Moghaddam, "Contested Cartographies," 15.
38. Ibid., 32.
39. *Nasta'liq* is a primary calligraphic style employed for writing the Perso-Arabic script.
40. The accompanying text is unequivocal: "Everything located on the western side of this line, lying within the eastern part of the province of Sistan, falls under the purview of your humble servant." In Foliard and Nasiri-Moghaddam, "Contested Cartographies," 25.
41. Reversing the colonial gaze as an occidental gaze which Iranian scholars such as Hamid Dabashi have introduced it through his studies on the history of Iran. Dabashi, *Reversing the Colonial Gaze*, 332.
42. Foliard and Nasiri-Moghaddam, "Contested Cartographies," 27.
43. Foliard, *Dislocating the Orient*, 186.