CHAPTER I:
Mughal perception of European geography
Mughal Perception of European Geography

In the Islamic world, the knowledge of geography was at a different level from that of the Europeans. In the education that was imparted to the elites in the Mughal period, geography was an important subject. Mughal notions of the physical world were influenced by the knowledge of geography in the Islamic world, based on Greek learning.

In the Middle Ages in Europe, the shape of the earth was known to be flat, whereas in the Islamic world it was accepted that the earth was spherical, turning on two poles (falak muhit-ast bar waygardan bar du quth), North Pole and the South Pole. The Earth was conceptually divided into four parts by two circles, of which the one is called Horizon (da'irat al-afaq) and the other Equator (khaff al-istiwa),¹ (Land masses were thought to occupy about one-quarter of its surface which was categorized as the inhabited world). Al-Biruni in 11th century wrote in Arabic a number of books on geographical and astronomical subjects. These writings included accurate determination of latitudes and longitudes, and geodetic measurements. In his Atlas, Al Beruni also portrayed the shape of the earth as round. It influenced the Mughals, as well, and in the paintings of the Mughal period, the world was depicted as a globe.²

Ptolemy’s *Geographia* was the median text for the Euro-Islamic world until the 15th century when Europe rejected Ptolemy’s earth-view once and for all. However, the Islamic geographical theories continued to imitate the ancient Greek works on Geography. Ptolemy’s Geography was translated in Arabic in 9th century. Ptolemy’s ideas were challenged by Al Beruni in 11th century. He also criticized those who ‘only imitated him.’ Through contacts with merchants, he also collected some information on European countries. Concerning Eastern Europe, he consulted Bulgarian or Khwarazmian merchants. Al-Beruni is the first among Muslim geographers to mention the names of the river Angara and of the population of Baykal region in eastern Siberia, as also gives account of the Scandinavian Warangians, Northern Europe, and the Ice-Sea north-east of Europe. The influence of Al-Beruni on the intellectuals and the elites of the Mughal society is not clear, but during Akbar’s reign, at least, his works were much read and valued. In any case, Al-Beruni does provide a lot of useful


3 He suggested that Ptolemy could have made factual errors concerning the longitude and latitude. He says ‘now we find a crowd of places, which in the (Ptolemaic) 'Geography' are indicated as being to the east of other places, actually situated to the West of the others named, and vice versa. He takes into consideration the alterations caused by environmental changes while determining afresh the latitudes and longitudes and would not blame the ancient geographers for their errors; E.C. Sachau, *Al-Beruni’s India,* Eng. tr., London, 1910, p. 161.

4 ibid.
information on Europe that must have found its way to the Mughal scholars and ruling classes.

Early Arab geographers, particularly al-Batany and al-Khwarazmi wrote on the geography and culture of Africa, South-eastern Asia and northern Asia on the Greek models.\(^5\) Abu Yusuf Yaqub al Kindi (d. A.D. 873-4) used translation of Ptolemy’s work for his own geographical work ‘Description of the Inhabited Part of the Earth’ (\textit{Rasm al-mamur min al-ard}) (mentioned by Masudi), and his pupil, Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn al ‘Tayyib Sarakhsi’s (d. A.D.899) geographical work titled “\textit{Kitab al-Masalik wal Mamalik}” (Book of Routes and kingdoms) etc. was almost entirely based on Greek works on geography.\(^6\)

\textit{Hudud al ‘Alam} (The regions of the world’ is a Persian monograph, compiled 372 A.H. 982 A.D.) is an anonymous work perhaps written in Afghanistan. This manuscript was copied in 652/1258 by Abul-Mu’ayyad ‘Abd al-Qayyum ibn al Husayn ibn ‘Ali al Farisi.\(^7\)

The text certainly forms a complete description of the world known to the Muslims of the 10\(^{th}\) century A.D. and again, is based on Ptolemaic geographical concepts. Although the author had read the works of several Arab geographers, the only authorities cited in the book are Aristotle and Ptolemy.\(^8\) The author gives information about the islands in Western Ocean (and Canary islands) and on the


\(^{7}\) \textit{ibid.}, v.i., p.166.

\(^{8}\) \textit{ibid.}, resp. fol. 2a ult., 4a 20 and 5a 9.
‘isles of Brittania’ based on Ptolemy’s description, with some minor additional information. (Brittania is called9 “the storehouse of goods from Byzantium (Rum) and Spain (Andalus).” Athens (Athinas) and Rome (Rumiya) are described as places (nahiyat) where all wise men and philosophers resided.10

The author of Hudud al-Alam divides the oceans of the world as divided into ‘seven seas’ (khalij). They are-1) Eastern Ocean (Green Sea was called Eastern Ocean by Greeks (al bahr al muzlim (sea of darkness) of khwarizmi) and al bahr al-akhdar of Ibn Rusta and Al Masudi, 2) Western Ocean (Atlantic ocean),11 Indian Ocean, Mediterranean Sea, Caspian sea, (the Caspian Sea is called the “Sea of the Georgians” (darya-i-Gurziyan), a term which does not apparently occur anywhere else,12 Black Sea (Azov sea for which various terms were used such as darya-i-khazaran, darya-i-gurzgan/gurzyan, bahr-al Rusiya, nahr al rusiya etc.) and Aral Sea.13

The rivers which have been mentioned in Hudud al-Alam are 1) Atil, 2) Artush (both of which sprang from Ural mountains),14 3) Rus river (was shown as having sprung from River Volga), 4) Don (was a branch of Volga), 5) Ruta (which was shown as being in south-west of River Volga is perhaps Danube),15 6) Kurr (was

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9 ibid., f.37 b.
12 ibid., p.32 (p.23 org.).
13 ibid., p.180, f.2b.
14 ibid., p.215.
15 ibid., p.437.
shown as having sprung from Caucasus range), *Nahr al karum*, (flowing from east of Ankara to the black sea). Tembris, Sangrias and Kama are other rivers which have been mentioned.

Like all other Arab Geographers (as also by the ancient Greek geographers), he accepts the division of the world into three parts- Asia (*Asiayat al-Kubia*), Europe(*Yurup*), Libya. Asia occupies two-third; Europe, one-quarter, Libya occupied one-twelfth of the inhabited world.¹⁶ The inhabited world covered 1/9th in northern quarter, of which the western most town was termed *Sus al aqsa*, the uninhabited world covered the rest part.

The author divides the world into 51 countries (*nahiyat*), of which five were situated south of the equator, forty-five to the north of it and one (Sudan) on the line of the equator.¹⁷ The belief that the area of Asia was twice as big as the other regions of the world put together, is shared by the author with other Arab authors also, such as al Beruni. Other geographers say that Europe was three times as large as Africa, but the division of the world into parts is borrowed from the Greeks.

Hudud al-Alam discusses the races living in Europe. It mentions *Majghari* (Magyars),¹⁸ as living in a region to the east of which were mountains, to the south lived a Christian people called Vanandar. Croats lived next to Magyars. Other European races which were mentioned in the work were Spartans and Lacedaemonians, Danubian Bulghars (inner Bulghars), Bulghari are called Rumi because they were Christianized from Byzantium. Bakri called burjans and Normans ‘magians.’ Slavs (*Saqaliba*)

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.33, 82.
¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.33.
¹⁸ *ibid.*
were described as Christians who lived around Rus River, and to the north of Spain. Inner Bulghars were those who lived to the east of Slavs. Next in numbers are Jalaliqa (Galicians). Then there were baskunas or Basques. Some other races were Khazar, burta, Alans and bulghar etc. Christianised Slavs such as Macedonian Slavs were however, wrongly placed. Bartania (British?) and Gurz were described as living on small islands, whereas there seem to have been none. Races of Rus were described as Khazarian Pechenags who lived between Urals and Volga.

The European mountains which were described in Hudud al-Alam were Sinai and Syrian mountains, Armenian Taurus, (of lesser Caucasus), Eastern Caucasus, Carpathians in eastern Russia near Volga. Caucasus mountains were described as Georgian mountains. Urals, Pontic Alps (another mountain-range in Rum) were situated near Afrakhun. Selucia-Cicilian Taurus, Eastern watershed near Tagus river, (a hill-range north of river Tagus), hills near eastern shore of Caspian and Jabal al Qamar were also mentioned by Ptolemy.

The European islands mentioned in it were Britania (as having 12 islands in Western or Atlantic Ocean), TUWAS (or Tus) was situated north of the islands of Britaniya. Ghadira or Cadiz islands in Western ocean again. Islands of Mediterranean were named as Jabal-al qilal, till Calabria. Corsica was confused with Crete, Ibiza lay between Sicily and Crete, Sardinia was confused Sardinia with Sicily, Crete was confused with Cyprus. Jazirat al

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19 ibid., p.424-5
20 ibid., p.42
21 ibid., p.204.
22 ibid., p.68.
bab (Madder island), Siyah kuh, on north east coast of Caspian (now called Manghishlaq) and Dihistanan Sur were other islands that were mentioned.23

The knowledge of the European world found in such works as Hudud al-Alam crucially shaped Mughal perception of the geography of Europe. These works were accessible to the Mughal scholars and elites, and were even taught in the madarasas and private education. The contacts with the European traders and Company servants must have modified many of their conceptions of Europe, but the broad framework that the Mughals received from the Islamic/Arab world crucially shaped their understanding of the geography of Europe. The Mughals concepts of geography were influenced by the Graeco-Arab works on Geography, for example, Haft Iqlim of Amin Ahmad Razi,24 which was completed in 1593 A.D., and then Haft Kishwar which was based on Haft Iqlim.

Along with them, Greece and its philosophers found an equally eminent place, along with the ancient Indian philosophers and the learned men of Islam. In the Islamic geographical tradition the entire inhabited globe was seen as divided into seven climes, called Haft-Iqlim, largely based on the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic concepts. Mughal scholars continued to employ this system, with its celestial spheres and epicycles, sometimes using it in a variant form called Haft Kishwar. European countries were seen as located in the seventh clime, but except for Russia and occasionally Austria and Hungary, the names of the countries were not

23 *ibid.*, p.54-60.
24 A.A. Razi, *Haft Iqlim*, 3 vols., Tehran, n.d. (a copy of Haft Iqlim is also available in National Archives of India, Delhi).
With respect to geography, Abul Fazl also made extensive references to Greek views and findings. Shahjahan's first teacher, Mulla Qasim Beg Tabrezi, who was probably one of the translators of Majmu'\'i-Buldun, a stupendous work on geography, also followed Graeco-Arab concepts of geography. Jahangir displaying his faith in the Graeco-Arab geography, refers to four quarters of the world. He writes about Naqib Khan, one of his nobles, as an incomparable chronologist in the 'inhabited world.' From the beginning of the creation till the present time, he has by heart the tale of the four quarters of the world (emphasis added). and so did Aurangzeb, when he wrote to Rana Raj Singh that 'regulations of my great ancestors, who are so much esteemed by the worshipful ones, will cast lustre on the four-cornered inhabited world. (emphasis added). In the works of Mughal elites, we find a similar faith in Graeco-Arab geography, coupled with lack of information about Europe. Sadiq, in his encyclopaedic account of the Ptolemaic geography, followed by a gazetteer, sensibly compiled list of coordinates and an astonishingly large atlas (33 sheets) of the Old World drawn on the plate carree projection (but he did not give

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28 For the text of the nishan, see Kaviraj Shyamaladas, Udaipur, n.d; Mr. Vinod, ii. pp. 419-20 n. cf. M. Athar Ali, Mughal India: Studies in Polity, Ideas, Society and Culture, preface by Irfan Habib, (Delhi, 2006), p.64.
29 The work is described by Irfan Habib in "Cartography in Mughal India", Medieval India-A Miscellany, vol. iv, 1977.
any contemporary information to fill the sheets for Europe; and not
a very illuminating passage on Yangi Duniya (the Young World),
found in one of the manuscripts of his work (in Bodlein Library,
London) is probably a later interpolation.³⁰

Fragmentary information on contemporary Europe was
available to the Mughal elites through the missionaries and
travellers as well as the European envoys who visited the Mughal
court. There are instances in European accounts of their being
inquired by the Mughal nobility and kings about their countries.
The Mughals first came into contact with the Portuguese Jesuits,
who came from Goa and with these Jesuit Fathers, with whom
Akbar would sometimes discuss Europe. The Jesuits, whom Akbar
had summoned at Fatehpur in 1579 A.D., presented to him an Atlas,
which the archbishop of Goa had sent as a present. He was greatly
pleased to see them.³¹ Later, he ordered the Jesuit Fathers to bring
him an Atlas, and on receiving it, he enquired from them the
position of Portugal and his own empire on the map.³² Monserrate
is also reported to have satisfied Akbar's curiosity as to the distance
between Portugal and India, with the help of an atlas.³³ During
Jahangir's period, the Western European monarchs had started
sending embassies to the Mughal court. By 17th century, the
Mughal court had a fair idea of Europe and Europeans. Partly, their
ideas had developed from their interactions with the English
merchants visiting the Mughal court such as Thomas Kerridge and
William Hawkins with whom Jahangir held frequent conversations

³⁰ Irfan Habib, Reason and Science in Medieval India, p.170.
³¹ Fr. A. Monserrate, Commentary on his Journey to the Court of
³² ibid., p.126.
about the countries of the west, particularly England. In 1617, Roe writes that ‘I rode to court to visit the king, who questioned about the booke of maps.’ He further writes that ‘the same month, he (Jahangir) sent for the map-booke, and no man could reade nor understand it; therefore, if I would I should have it againe. And so it was returned.’ Jahangir later even wished to see Roe’s country. Terry wrote that “The Mogol feeds and feasts himself with this conceit, that he is a conquerer of the world; and therefore I conceive that he was troubled upon a time, when my Lord Ambassador, having businesse with him and having at that time nothing left which he thought fit to give him, presented him with Mercators great book of Cosmography, telling the Mogol that that book described the four parts of the world, and all several countrieys in them contained. The Mogol at the first seemed to be taken with it, desiring presently to see his own territories, which were immediately shewen unto him; he told Tartaria and Persia, as the names of the rest which confine with him; and the causing the book to be turned all over, and finding no more to fall to his share but what he first saw, and he calling himself the conquerer of the world and having no greater share in it, seemed to be a little troubled, yet civily told the Ambassadour, that neither himself nor any of his people did understand the language in which that book

33 ibid.
34 William Foster (ed.), Early Travels in India (1583-1619), New Delhi, Reprint, 1985, p.64).
36 ibid., p.382.
37 ibid., p.212.
was written, and therefore he returned it." In 1717, Mr. J. Surman, an English ambassador (on behalf of the United East India Company) to the court of Emperor Farrukh-siyar, gave a map of the world to the latter, but nothing is known of his response to it.

We find that Akbar ordered 'Abd al-Sattar to write about the history of Rome (who in 1603 compiled the Samarat al-falasifah, with the help of a Portuguese Jesuit father Jerome Xavier, a work also known as Ahwal-i Frangistan. This work was concerned with the history of the Roman Empire (Salatin-i-Rum), with special reference to its rulers and wisemen (i.e. the sayings of Greek and Roman philosophers), including the life of Christ, no such effort was made to write about the geography of Europe.

Atlases, globes and maps of Europe were imported and gifted to the Mughal kings and nobility by the Europeans. In fact, globes formed an important item of import to India to meet the growing demand for this item among the Mughal nobility. The English factors sent globes as presents to the Mughal Emperors, princes and nobles. A globe appears as a symbol in a painting during the reign of Jahangir, showing an outline map of some

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41 One of the manuscript copies of the Samarat-i-Falasifah is in the Bodlein Library, London, and one copy in available in Aligarh Collection: Samarat-i-Falasifah, Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh, University Collection, zamima 28, ff. 1-2.
Asian countries. Raja Jai Singh Sawai (1699-1743) of Jaipur asked for maps, globes and books on astronomy from the Jesuits when he built observatories in India. Nonetheless, the fact remains that no sustained attempts were made to bring European geographical notions and their new geographical discoveries into the existing framework of knowledge or even to indigenize the globes and maps.

The Mughal elite displayed surprising disinterest in European geography even during the seventeenth century. Danishmand Khan, a Mughal bureaucrat employed by Shahjahan and later, Aurangzeb, learnt geography, among other things, from Francois Bernier, who was under his employment. However he never showed any interest in enquiring about the place he came from i.e. Europe. Even a noble of Aurangzeb, Muhammad Qubad Beg, Diwan in Deccan, who perhaps visited Europe (Firangistan) towards the end of the seventeenth century and spent sufficiently long period of time in Europe, mentions nothing about geography of Europe in his account of his visit to Europe. Nor does he make any reference to the European knowledge of geography.

43 R. Ettinghausen, Painting of Sultans and Emperors of India, N. Delhi,1961, Pl. 12: 'Jahangir's Dream of Shah 'Abbas's Visit'. Also see Silvia Crowe, Sheila Haywood, Susan Jellicoe and Gordon Patterson, The Gardens of Mughal India, Delhi, 1973, unnumbered plate facing p. 90.
46 Khulasat ul Afsar, f. 347a. Abu Talib provided this information as a part of the biography of a contemporary scholar-
Aurangzeb, by way of exception, did exhibit some interest in European geography. He rebuked his erstwhile teacher:

"What did you teach me? You told me that the whole of Franguistan (Europe) was no more than some inconsiderable island, of which the most powerful monarch was formerly the king of Portugal, then the king of Holland and afterwards the king of England. In regard to the other sovereigns of Franguistan, such as the king of France and that of Andalusia, you told me that they resembled our petty Rajas, and the potentates of Hindoustan eclipsed the glory of all other kings; that they alone were Humayons, Ekbars, Jehan-Guyres, or Chah-Jehans; the Happy, the Great, the conquerors of the World, and the kings of the World; and that Persia, Usbec, Kachguer, Tartary, and Catay, (Cathay). Glory be to God! What knowledge of geography and history you displayed!"

It was presumably through contact with Europeans that Abul Fazl came to know of the New World, and he devotes some space
in his book on its discovery. Abul Fazl was aware that the Europeans had discovered the Americas, which he called *Alam-i Nau*, the New World. But, apart from this rough idea, it was not recognized in Mughal knowledge system as the ‘fourth’ continent. They stuck to the idea of three continents till eighteenth century when more direct contact with Europe and Europeans evolved and more information was consequently acquired on world geography. Murtaza Husain was specifically advised by Jonathan Scott to include an account of America in his *Hadiqat al-aqalim* as the first draft of the work was without any information concerning this continent. ‘Abd al-Latif explained that the philosophers and learned men of Europe had divided the universe into four divisions (*qismat*), namely Europe (*Yurup*), Asia (*Askya*), Africa (*Ifriqiya*) and America (*Amrika*). The latter being the newly discovered continent, while the other three consisted of the known parts of the inhabited globe, the *Haft Iqlim*.

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52 Until the third quarter of the eighteenth century, Muhammad 'Ali, the author of *Burhan al-fituh*, could not write anything more than the basic fact that European named Columbus (*Qaulun-i firangi*) had discovered a New World (*Yengi dunya*) around the middle of the ninth century of the Islamic Era (equivalent to around the middle of the fifteenth century of the Christian Era) and classified
In the eighteenth century, Muhammad Husain seems to have been the first scholar trained in the Mughal tradition to have made an effort to delineate the place of Europe in the world. Murtaza Husain provided similar information, which he took from a treatise by Jonathan Scott. This treatise described the geo-political configuration of all the four continents with exactitude. It dealt with the European countries, their circumference, territorial extent, capital cities etc. Abd al-Latif further endeavoured to delineate with exactitude the place of Europe in a geo-political configuration along with the other three continents. He wrote that Europe covered all countries of farang (mamalik-i farang), and a few cities of Turkey (Rum), such as Istanbul (Istambul).

It was in the eighteenth century that the Mughal scholars realized that the Ptolemaic concepts on geography had not only been challenged, but had also been successfully rejected in Europe. They were also now becoming aware of the contributions of Copernicus and Columbus. They were seen as outstanding scientists and philosophers of Europe in the Age of Discovery. Columbus was thought to be a sailor, geographer and explorer as well as a scientist who laid down rules of mathematics and geometry. By employing new methods of seamanship and technical

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instruments like the compass, Columbus discovered the New World (arz-i jadid), hitherto unknown. Copernicus' findings in astronomy had changed the Ptolemaic world-view. Copernicus and Columbus were followed by successive generations of scientists. 'Abd al-Latif sought to draw a logical sequence in the overall development of Europe. He wrote that from the sixteenth century onwards, Europe witnessed the emergence of philosophers (hukama) and scholars (danishmandan) who played a crucial role in the development of their countries. He realized that, with the expansion of man's geographical horizons, the classical Greek notions of the universe and ideas of cosmography had changed. He specifically noted that the Europeans had measured the size of oceans, and according to their findings all oceans were one. Among all these oceans the Indian ocean was the largest of all, and it was the same ocean which flowed throughout the globe, acquiring a particular name according to the region it passed through, such as the Mediterranean (bahr-i rum) and the Pacific/Atlantic (bahr-i muhit) 'Abd al-Latif explained that Europeans had been able to reach all known parts of globe. They had determined the longitude and the latitude of the oceans with remarkable precision and accuracy.

While the writers in eighteenth century had started writing about European countries in more details than before, there was a visible shift in their attitude towards Europe which was visible in the stress that they now gave to the continent, often portraying it in positive colours. There was at the same time, a shift in emphasis

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54 Risalah hi'at-i Jadid Angrezi, Maulana Azad Library, University Collection, No.18/1, Farsia Ulum, no. 166, ff. f. 12a.
55 ibid., f.117.
from Eastern to Western Europe.

Abu Talib explained that northern Europe was surrounded by the Baltic sea (*bahr baltik*), encompassing four kingdoms (*saltanat*), namely, Russia, Prussia, *Danmark* (Denmark) was also mentioned by Abd-al Latif as small and Sweden. These four were often united, and followed the Russian monarch. On the southern side, Europe was bounded by the Mediterranean Sea and this also encompassed four kingdoms: Spain, Portugal (Muhammad Husain and 'Abd al-Latif both mention that the kingdom of Portugal (*Portgal*), whose capital was Lisbon, was a powerful state during earlier times, Italy (*rum qadim*) and Switzerland. There, in the middle of the continent, lay the four other states: France, Germany, Poland and Holland. (Abd al-Latif mentioned that the kingdom of Holland (*Wahindis*) as the ‘smallest of all in territorial terms.’

The islands of England and Ireland were situated on the western side of the continent. Apart from these, within the Holy Roman

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56 Mirza Abu Talib was born at Lucknow, and was employed in posts of high emolument under Nawab Shuja ud Daula and Nawab Asaf ud Daula. In the time of the latter, he lost his office, and came to seek subsistence from the English. He was ordered to visit Europe by them in 1799, where after he wrote an account of Europe and America. *Travels of Mirza Abu Talib Khan (Asia, Africa and Europe, During the Years 1799 to 1803)*, tr. Charles Stewart, N. Delhi, 1972.


58 *Risalah hi'at-i Jadid Angrezi*, Maulana Azad Library, University Collection, No.18/1, *Farsia Ulum*, no. 166, f. 7; also f. 12a.

Empire (*rum qadim*) and Germany, there were ten or-twelve smaller and weaker states.\(^{60}\)

'Abd al-Latif wrote that the entire state of Germany comprised three hundred *kuroh* (six hundred miles) in longitude and its latitude was two "hundred *kuroh* (four hundred miles). Its capital was known as Vienna.\(^{61}\) 'Abd al-Latif further wrote about Hungary (Angari) as another state of Europe, covering a longitude of five hundred and fifty *kuroh*, and a latitude of seventy *kuroh* also.\(^{62}\) He mentioned that Spain was one of the most extensive empires. Its sovereign was more powerful than the other kings of Europe and it had traditionally been called *Ispaniyol*. France was a country, wrote 'Abd al-Latif, which covered a territory of hundred *kuroh* in longitude and two hundred and fifty *kuroh* in latitude. It also occupied land of similar size in America.\(^{63}\)

Abu Talib explained with geographical clarity that the kingdom of England (*Inglistan*) comprised England, Scotland and Wales, the royal heir-apparent having the title of Prince of Wales. All the three together constituted Great Britain (*Bartaniya' Buzurg*).\(^{64}\) Muhammad Husain noted that England (*Inglistan*) was called *Inglisiya* by Arabic speaking people, but it was known as

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\(^{60}\) *Risalah*, f. 7. cf. Gulfishan Khan, *Indian Muslim Perception of the West during the Eighteenth Century*, p.126.


\(^{63}\) *ibid.*, ff. 129-306.

\(^{64}\) *Risalah*, f. 4. cf. Gulfishan Khan, *Indian Muslim Perception of the West during the Eighteenth Century*, p.126.
Great Britain (Grate Britan) by the Europeans themselves. Abd al-Latif wrote that England (Inglistan) comprised two islands (jazira), England (Ingiland) and Ireland (Ayarland), called by the Muslims 'large Britain' (Bartaniya' akbar) and 'small Britain' (Bartaniya' asghar) respectively.

Due to the geographical discoveries in the 15th-16th centuries, the Europeans developed an expanding notion of space, and could see, at least before the advent colonialism, that Europe was not the centre of the universe. Such an expansive notion of space is generally absent in Mughal India. For most Mughal scholars and elites, the Mughal Empire was the centre of the cosmos. They knew of the existence of the other worlds, as well, but assigned to their empire a place of pre-eminence. The other Asian empires—the Safavids, the Uzbeks, the Ottomans—could claim a secondary position, but Europe was, in their knowledge of the geography of the world, a marginal and an insignificant place, unworthy of scholarly interest.

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65 Hadiqat ul aqalim, pp. 515-23.
66 England had been mentioned as a small island in Hudud al Alam. And later in a map prepared by al-Idrisi, four islands were drawn in a map as adjacent to each other in Western Europe, beginning with Djazira Irlanda (Ireland), Djazira Rasianda (Scotland?), Djazira Anklitara (England(?)) and Djazira Dans(?). cf. The World According to Idrisi, A.D.1154) in “A Historical Atlas of Islam,” ed. William C. Brice, Leiden, 1981, p.1.