

1000 Years Amnesia: Environment Tradition in Muslim Heritage

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In a seminar organised by the Oxford Centre of Islamic Studies in 11 January 2005, aimed at brain-storming the topic of Islam and the Environment, Professor Al-Hassani presented a short overview on the environment issue in Islam as seen from its sources and from history of Muslim practice over a 1000 years of planning and management of natural resources. The following article expands on earlier lectures and contributions made by Professor Al-Hassani including his participation in the conference "Islam and the Environment: Muslim 7 Year Action Plan to deal with Climate Change" held in Istanbul 6-7 July 2009.

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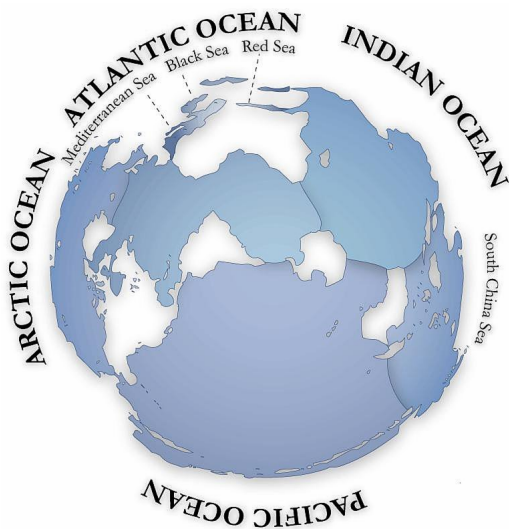


Figure 1: World map of seas and oceans. A continuous body of water encircles the Earth covering 71% of the Earth's surface and divided into a number of principal areas: Pacific, Atlantic, Indian, Arctic, and Southern

1. Introduction

Although the Muslims today are becoming increasingly part of the new world order, which believes in economic growth as the vehicle to human happiness, they were previously a leading example in constructing environmentally and ecologically friendly societies which were guided by principles and ethics totally different from those adopted by the present industrialised world. The dangerous problems of overpopulation in concentrated areas and the resulting increasing consumption and waste accumulation, water (both soft and sea water) pollution, destruction of other species including micro-organisms, which are an essential part of the life cycle, change of the chemistry of the atmosphere with its associated problems of global warming and the insatiable appetite of technology to dominate social and economic order, with its consequent demand for energy and material, are the most apparent features of the crisis of environment and the economic model that governs world affairs today. Increasing are issues of great importance to human existence and warrant the utmost attention by all the citizens of the world.



Figure 2: The retreat of Aletsch Glacier in the Swiss Alps (situation in 1979, 1991 and 2000)

In this context, all cultures and communities are concerned. Consequently, uncovering the 1000 years of Muslims' response to environment will serve to give a good example to present day Muslims to derive lessons from their successful past so that they may contribute positively with the rest of the world in its struggle to handle this titanic problem, which besets humanity. It will also enlighten non-Muslims - particularly those in Europe and America - on the position of Islam –as religion, culture and civilisation- on environment, and thus will generate a positive response and create a better image of Islam and Muslims and perhaps triggering process of common areas of interest and collaboration.

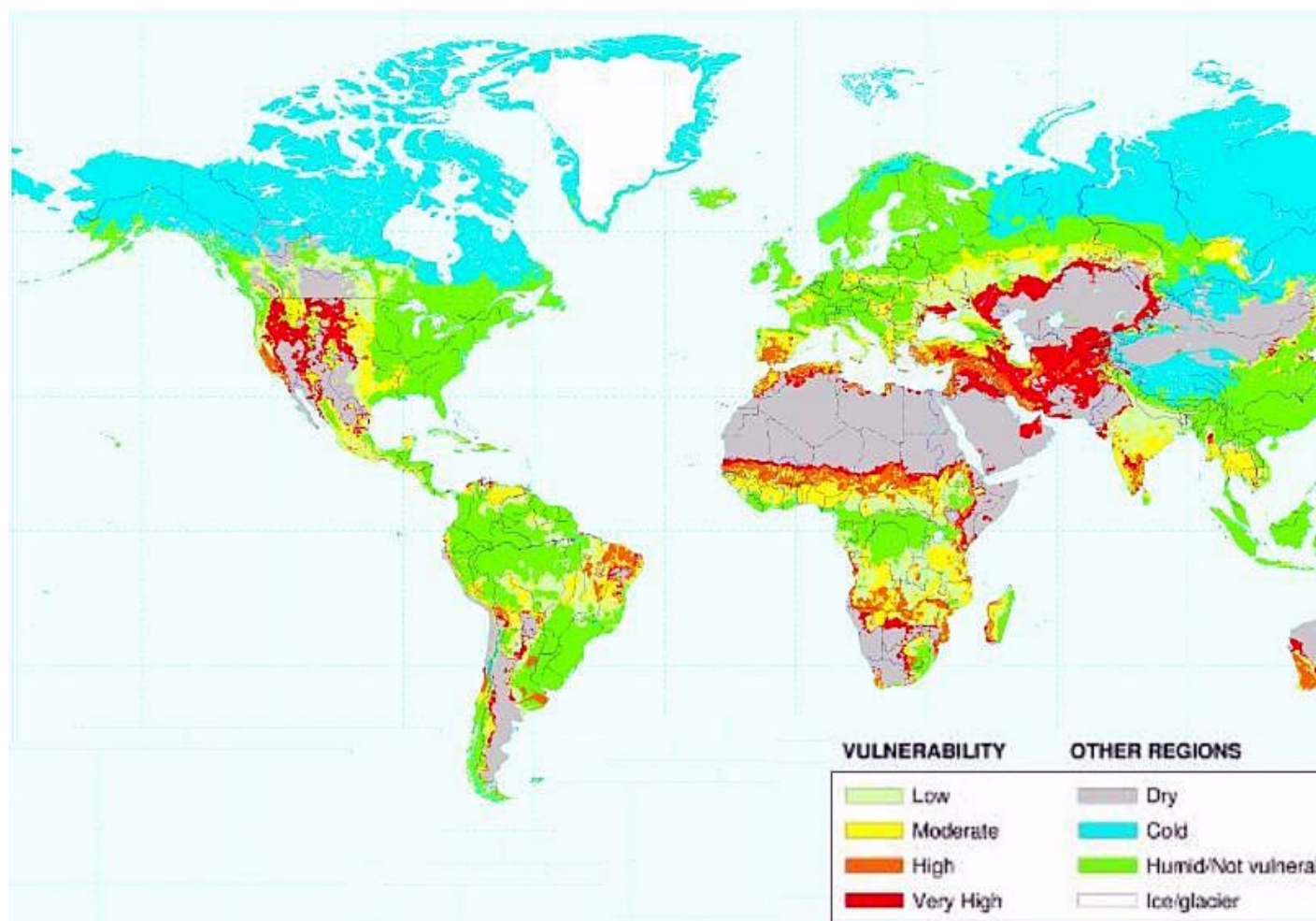


Figure 3: World map showing desertification vulnerability. (Source: [UNEP](#))

Before highlighting the missing history of environment in Islam, it is appropriate to examine some conceptual aspects and follow them by a review of the principles and guidelines, which produced the environmental friendliness attitude of Muslim societies in the past.



Figure 4:

This Landsat satellite image [Source](#) reveals sand dunes advancing on Nouakchott, the

2. Central Concepts, General Principles and Guidelines

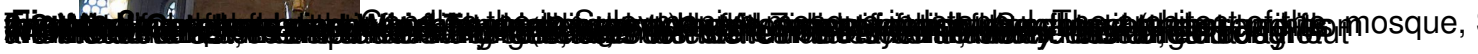
The main sources of knowledge about the position of Islam on environment are the Quran, the Hadith (sayings of Prophet Muhammad PBUH), Sirah (documented life of Prophet Muhammad), and the life of his Companions and the ways in which the Muslim societies have conducted themselves when upholding the principles of Islam and facing the challenges of production of goods for maintaining human life and building economic growth as well as progress in civilisation.



Figure 5: General Physical map of Islamic countries showing the variety of physical geographies and the diversity of the Islamic world. The map is a physical map of the Islamic world, showing the variety of physical geographies and the diversity of the Islamic world. The map is a physical map of the Islamic world, showing the variety of physical geographies and the diversity of the Islamic world.



Figure 6: Drawing of the water-lifting machine described by al-Jaziri in his Book of the Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices. The drawing is a detailed illustration of a mechanical device, likely a water-lifting machine, with a vertical shaft and a bucket-like structure. It is labeled with Arabic text.



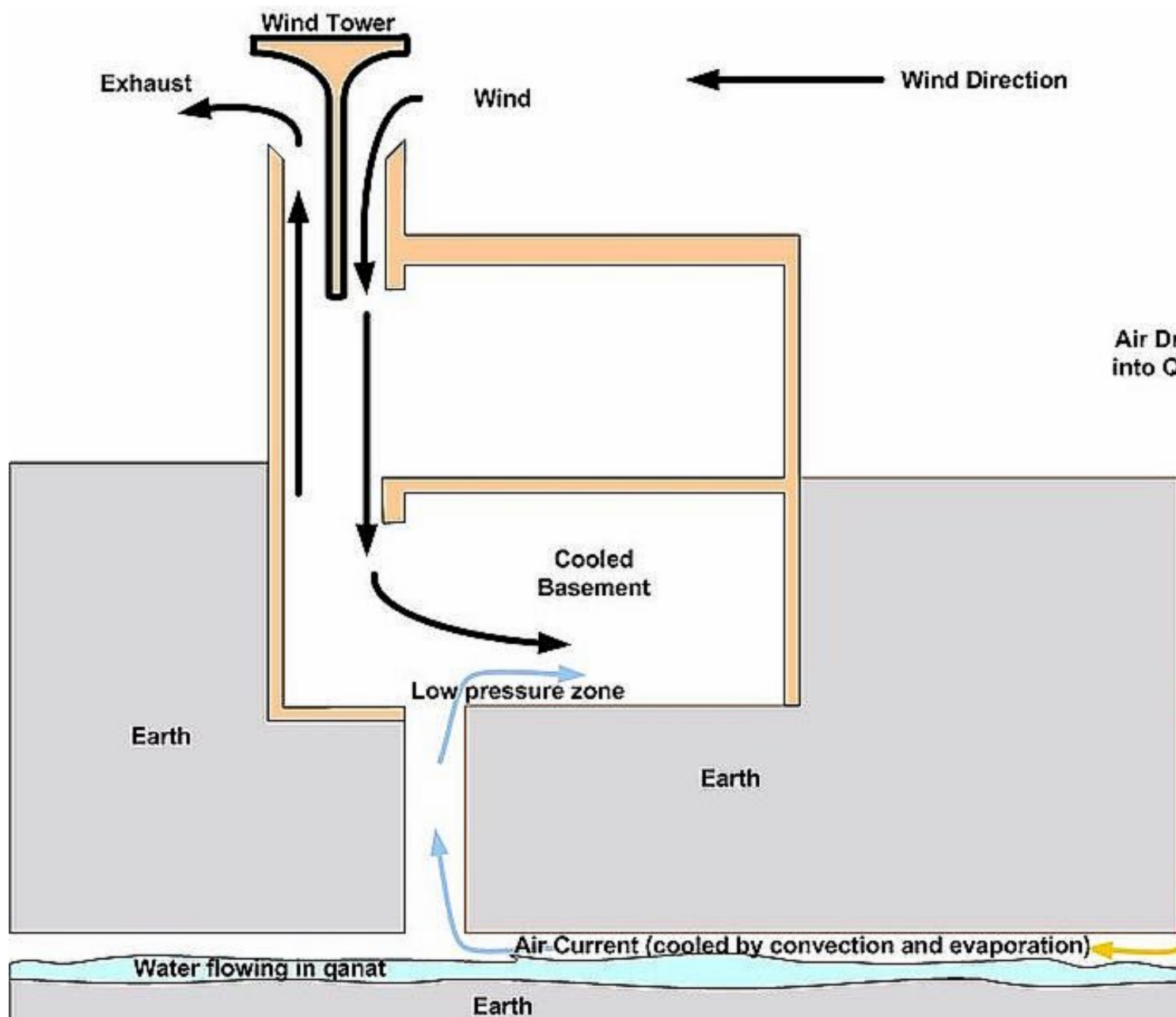


Figure 2: A schematic diagram of a traditional wind tower cooling system (Barfakh) in the Middle East. The diagram shows the wind tower, the cooled basement, the low pressure zone, and the air current flowing into the qanat system.

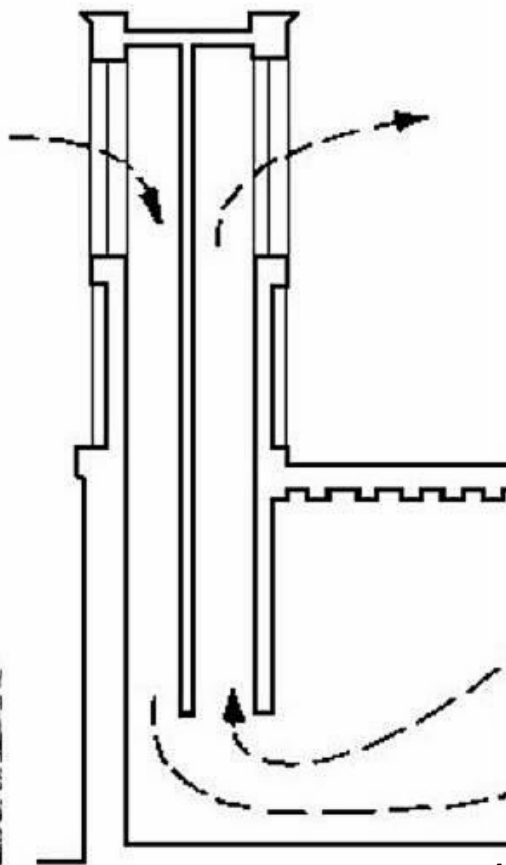
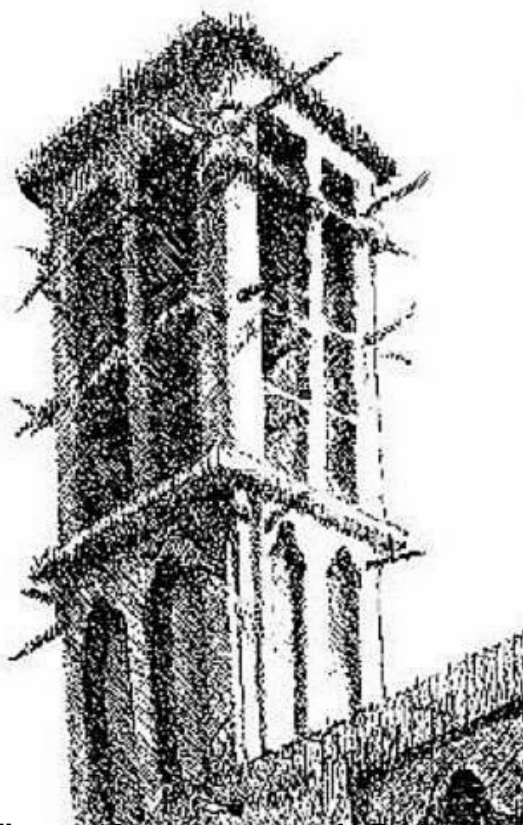


Figure 10: The minaret of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, Spain, showing the windmill-like structure, traditional



Figure 11: The minaret of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, Spain, showing the windmill-like structure, traditional



Figure 12: The minaret of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, Spain, showing the windmill-like structure, traditional

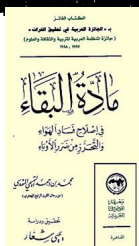
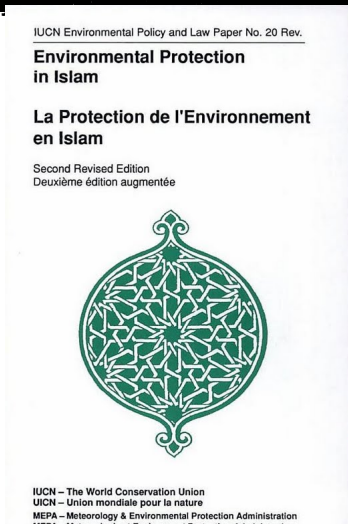
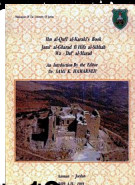
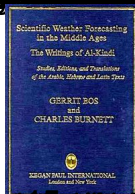


Figure 13: The minaret of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, Spain, showing the windmill-like structure, traditional

4.1 Early Contributions by Al-Razi and Qusta ibn Luqa (9th-10th centuries)



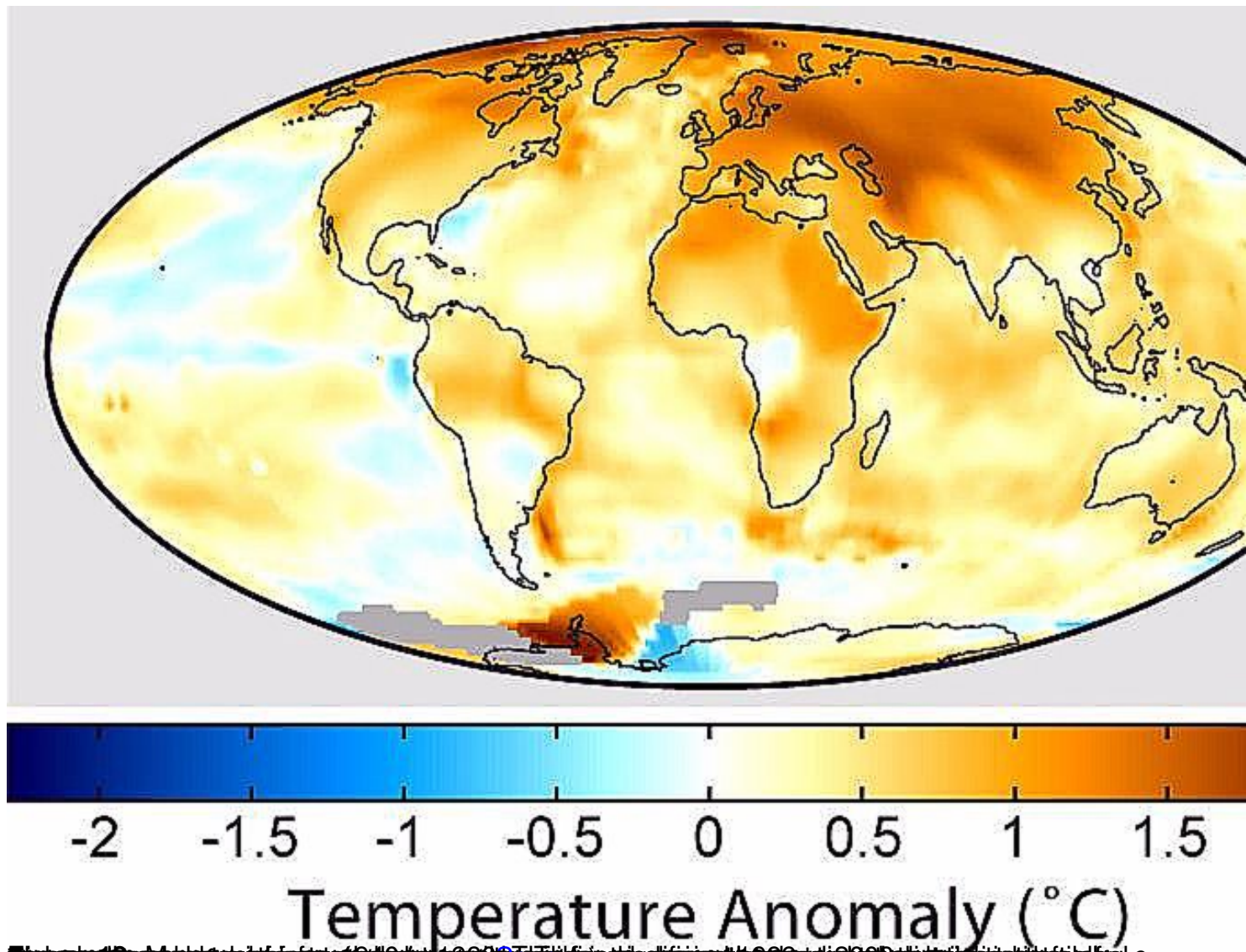
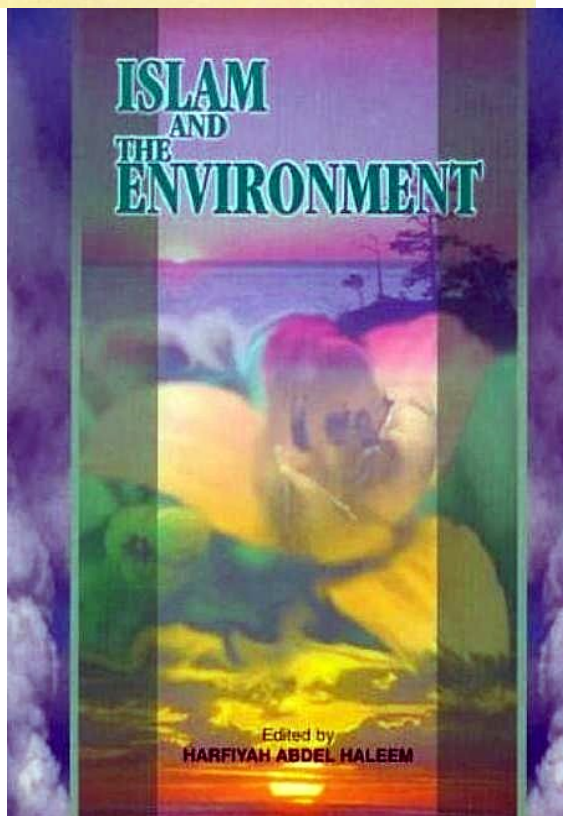
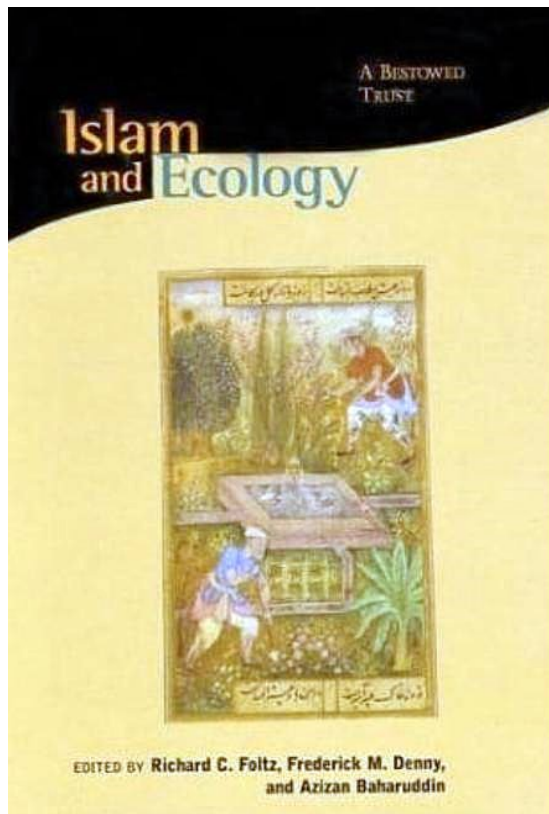


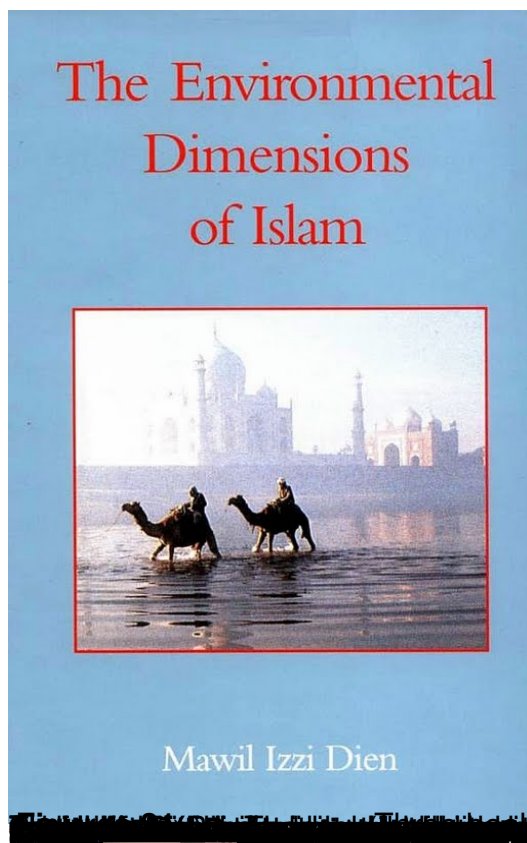


Figure 10. From left: Photo of a man in a white shirt and turban operating a manual water pump in a rural setting (a); Photo of a man in a blue and white striped shirt standing next to a large, ancient stone structure (b); Photo of a green field in the foreground and a large, ancient stone wall in the background (c); Photo of a small white car parked on a dirt road in a dry, hilly landscape (d).



Figure 10. The map of the Arabian Peninsula showing the locations of the various regions mentioned in the text. The map is a detailed representation of the Arabian Peninsula, with various regions labeled in Arabic. The map uses different colors to distinguish between various geographical areas. Labels include: 'سواج' (Suwayj) in yellow, 'منى' (Mina) in white, 'طخفة' (Takhfa) in yellow, 'الريان' (Al-Rayan) in yellow, 'غول' (Ghul) in yellow, 'حليت' (Haliyat) in white, 'كيشات' (Kishat) in white, 'البكرات' (Al-Bakrat) in white, 'ضرية' (Zurriya) in red with a yellow arrow, 'شعبي' (Shabi) in yellow, 'سعي' (Sai) in white, 'حسلان' (Hasslan) in white, and 'اللولي' (Al-Luli) in red. A yellow line with arrows points to a specific area labeled 'حبال اللقيت و نعوذها' (Habal al-Layit wa Nu'udha).





67 July 2019

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