

IRSTI 03.03.20

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## METHODS OF DESCRIPTION OF CITIES AND REGIONS IN «SUBH AL-ASHA» AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY

The study of historical and geographical data on individual cities and entire regions allows us to determine the features of their development. Usually, researchers obtain this data from sources of past eras. One of them is the encyclopedia of the Mamluk official Al-Qalkashandi, «The Dawn for the Blind in the Art of Writing». The current article aims to reveal the meaning of «The Dawn...» for historical geography in the context of the methods of describing cities and regions used by Al-Qalkashandi in the encyclopedia. To achieve this goal, the works of Kazakh and foreign researchers were analysed, and excerpts from «The Dawn...» itself were used. Data monitoring, comparison, historical-critical approach, and specification were chosen as the research methods. The application of this entire set of methods allowed us to create our methodology, which determined the complexity of this study—as a result of the analysis revealed a connection between the geographical location of regions and cities and their system of administration, power transfer and lifestyle of their inhabitants. The results also showed that Al-Qalkashandi actively used historical geography methods, although it did not even exist as a science during his lifetime. This indicates the importance of his work for historical geography, establishing Al-Qalkashandi as one of the first researchers who understood the connection between geographical indicators and the dynamics of the development of the territories that he described in «The Dawn...». The prospect of further research is to compare the description of cities and regions that Al-Qalkashandi made with information from his contemporaries to analyse the reliability of the facts presented in «The Dawn...».

**Key words:** mamluks, Fatimid dynasty, Islamic East, historical and geographical methods, encyclopedia.

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### «Субх ал-аша» қалалар мен аймақтарды сипаттау әдістері және олардың тарихи географиядағы мәні

Жеке қалалар мен тұтас аймақтар туралы тарихи-географиялық деректерді зерттеу олардың даму ерекшеліктерін анықтауға мүмкіндік береді. Әдетте зерттеушілер бұл деректерді өткен дәуірлердегі дереккөздерден алады. Солардың бірі – Мамлюк шенеунігі Әл-Қалқашандидің «Жазу өнеріндегі соқырлар таңы» атты энциклопедиясы. Бұл мақаланың мақсаты – энциклопедияда Әл-Қалқашанди қолданған қалалар мен аймақтарды сипаттау әдістері контекстінде «Зори...» тарихи география үшін маңызын ашу. Осы мақсатқа жету үшін қазақстандық және шетелдік зерттеушілердің еңбектері талданып, «Зора...» шығармасынан үзінділер пайдаланылды. Зерттеу әдістерінің ішінде деректерді бақылау, салыстыру, тарихи-сыни көзқарас және нақтылау әдістері таңдалды. Осы әдістердің барлық жиынтығын қолдану осы зерттеудің күрделілігін анықтайтын өз әдістемемізді құруға мүмкіндік берді. Талдау нәтижесінде облыстар мен қалалардың географиялық орналасуы мен олардың басқару жүйесі, биліктің ауысуы мен тұрғындарының өмір салты арасындағы байланыс анықталды. Сондай-ақ, нәтижелер Әл-Қалқашандидің көзі тірісінде ғылым ретінде болмағанымен, тарихи география әдістерін белсенді түрде пайдаланғаны анықталды. Бұл оның «Таң шапағында...» суреттеген аумақтардың даму динамикасы мен географиялық көрсеткіштер арасындағы байланысты түсінген алғашқы зерттеушілердің бірі ретінде Әл-Қалқашанды негіздей отырып, оның тарихи география үшін еңбегінің маңыздылығын көрсетеді. Келесі зерттеулердің перспективасы «Зорада...» келтірілген

үшін Әл-Қалқашанди жасаған қалалар мен аймақтарды оның замандастарының мәліметтерімен салыстыру болып табылады.

**Түйін сөздер:** мамлюктер, Фатимидтер әулеті, Ислам Шығысы, тарихи-географиялық әдістер, энциклопедия.

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### Методы описания городов и регионов в «Субх аль-аша» и их значение для исторической географии

Изучение исторических и географических данных об отдельных городах и целых регионах позволяет определить особенности их развития. Обычно исследователи получают эти данные из источников прошлых эпох. Одним из них является энциклопедия мамлюкского чиновника Аль-Калқашанди, «Заря для подслеповатого в искусстве писания». Целью данной статьи является выявление значения «Зари...» для исторической географии в контексте методов описания городов и регионов, которые использовал Аль-Калқашанди в энциклопедии. Для достижения этой цели были проанализированы труды казахских и иностранных исследователей, а также использованы отрывки из самой «Зари...». Среди методов исследования были выбраны методы мониторинга данных, сравнения, историко-критического подхода и конкретизации. Применение всего этого набора методов позволило сделать уникальную методологию, которая определила комплексность этого исследования. В результате проведенного анализа была обнаружена связь между географическим положением регионов и городов, их системой администрирования, передачи власти и образа жизни их жителей. Также результаты позволили обнаружить, что Аль-Калқашанди активно использовал методы исторической географии, хотя ее даже не существовало как науки в период его жизни. Это указывает на важное значение его работы для исторической географии, утверждая Аль-Калқашанди как одного из первых исследователей, понимавшего связь между географическими показателями и динамикой развития территорий, описанных в «Заре...». Перспективой последующих исследований является сравнение описания городов и регионов, которое Аль-Калқашанди сделал на основе информации от его современников с целью анализа достоверности фактов, приведенных в «Заре...».

**Ключевые слова:** мамлюки, династия Фатимидов, исламский Восток, историко-географические методы, энциклопедия.

### Introduction

The study of history has consistently remained a relevant endeavour, not only for researchers and academics but also for individuals interested in past events. As time is inextricably linked to the space in which events occur, history as a discipline is often examined in the context of geography. This intersection has given rise to historical geography, an interdisciplinary field that investigates the specific ways in which geographical phenomena change over time. Notably, historical geography focuses primarily on transformations driven by anthropogenic factors (Taxel, 2023). Today, historical geography is frequently a component of modern school and university curricula, reflecting its growing significance (Keighren et al., 2017). Despite its relative youth as a scientific discipline—emerging only in the twentieth century—historical geography has become increasingly important. Initially regarded as a mere subdivision of geography, its historical aspects were

underestimated until the latter half of the twentieth century.

One of the principal methods for studying historical geography involves analysing sources that describe historical events in the context of human interactions within specific regions. To explore the methodologies for describing cities and areas, we selected the work of the renowned encyclopaedist and official of the Mamluk Sultanate, Al-Qalqashandi, titled *Subh al-A'sha fi Sina'at al-Insha* ("Dawn for the Near-Sighted in the Art of Composition"). This monumental work is considered the last great encyclopaedia of the Mamluk period and comprises 14 volumes. These volumes provide a comprehensive guide for scribes of the time, detailing everything from the tools they should use to historical and geographical facts.

In historical geography, *Subh al-A'sha* is particularly intriguing due to its descriptions of the regions and cities of Mamluk, Egypt and the Mongol territories (Iran and Turan). However, a key issue with this

encyclopaedia lies in its historical and geographical content inconsistencies, as much of the data was compiled from earlier sources that Al-Qalqashandi could not verify. This lack of verification introduces confusion and often undermines the work's coherence, raising doubts about the accuracy of specific facts. For instance, Al-Qalqashandi's description of Rome, where he cites Ibn Khordadbeh in characterising the Roman people as "the most timid among those created by Almighty Allah" (Safuan, 2020), exemplifies how he became "a hostage" to his inability to validate the information.

Despite Subh al-A'sha's occasional unreliability as a source of historical and geographical data due to its reliance on contradictory compilations, we decided to use this work to assess its role in historical geography. This decision was motivated by its uniqueness and the relatively limited attention it has received from domestic and international scholars. The work lacks comprehensive translations into Kazakh, English, or Russian, underscoring its underexplored potential.

### Literature review

The literature for the review was selected based on the following criteria: **relevance**—scientific works published no more than ten years ago (except for the first two, which introduced a broader audience to al-Qalqashandi's encyclopaedia); **accessibility**—all selected works are available online, either in whole or in excerpts; **free access**—all scientific works are freely available, and the repositories are publicly accessible; **scientific value**—the selected works meet the fundamental criteria of scientific rigour. It should also be noted that most studies on the chosen topic are written in Arabic; therefore, specialised software (online translation tools) was used for their translation.

In the Soviet Union, al-Qalqashandi and his encyclopaedia *Subh al-A'sha* were virtually unknown to the general public due to the language barrier. His works were accessible only to scholars specialising in Oriental studies who had access to specialised library collections and an understanding of the historical contexts described in *Subh al-A'sha*. In the Republic of Kazakhstan specifically, *Subh al-A'sha* circulated only in small translated excerpts, such as those in Semenova's (1974) Soviet-era book *From the History of Fatimid Egypt*. This book contains a few short excerpts from al-Qalqashandi's work, describing, for example, the construction of a canal in Sharqiya, the *Dar al-'Ilm* (House of Knowledge), and the Fatimid fleet and army. While the book does

not provide an analysis or interpretation of *Subh al-A'sha*, it played a significant role in sparking interest in al-Qalqashandi's contributions and encyclopaedic activities.

Another source available to Kazakh readers is the work of Grigoryev and Frolova (2001) examine the structure of the Golden Horde, its borders, natural features (rivers and lakes), trade (goods and prices), prominent rulers, and military organisation (size, administrative systems, and soldier uniforms). While this study provided the first extensive excerpts from *Subh al-A'sha* in Russian translation, its primary shortcoming is its narrow focus and lack of structural coherence.

Among more recent sources, Kalinina (2017) stands out for discussing the Golden Horde's administrative districts and their distinctive characteristics. The author distinguishes between data sourced directly from al-Qalqashandi and information derived from another Arab scholar, Abu al-Fida, whose work some of al-Qalqashandi's descriptions were based on. This analysis clarifies al-Qalqashandi's contributions to his encyclopaedia, refuting that he was merely a skilled compiler of pre-existing knowledge.

The article by Tayman and Aubakirova (2022) examines the relationships between Turkic and Arab communities during the Mamluk era. Subh al-A'sha served as a key source for this study, highlighting the depth and breadth of Turkic-Arab relations. Additional works referenced later in this review support these conclusions.

Another scientific study addressing the geography of the Golden Horde is the article by Zhuzbayeva and Ilyasova (2024), which demonstrates al-Qalqashandi's comprehensive approach to studying the structure of the Golden Horde as a unified empire. This perspective contrasts with the views of other researchers, who emphasise its decentralised nature.

Finally, a detailed description of one of the Golden Horde's cities mentioned in *Subh al-A'sha* is provided in the article by Pohekayev (2020). Based on al-Qalqashandi's assertion that Kerch and Taman were part of the Azak district, Pohekayev (2020) hypothesises a special status for this region. This hypothesis is corroborated by khanate decrees identifying Azak's regional governors.

Kramarovskiy's (2014) work focuses on the specifics of studying Solkhat's defensive tools during the crisis of power in the Golden Horde. The significance of defending this city is substantiated by Al-Qalqashandi's assertion that Solkhat served as the centre of the eastern (right) wing of the Horde.

The research of Namatova and Rasulova (2023) highlights that in “*Subh...*”, Al-Qalqashandi concentrated on the reign of Bayezid in his descriptions of the Ottomans. It is noted that Al-Qalqashandi was uncertain about the nature of the relationships between Ottoman and Mamluk rulers, which led him to describe them with extreme caution.

Khodzhayeva’s (2020) article examines the interrelation of Turks, Mamluks, and contemporary Egyptians. One of the arguments presented is the interaction between Turkish and Mamluk rulers described in Al-Qalqashandi’s “*Subh...*”. Furthermore, the author demonstrates, based on Al-Qalqashandi’s encyclopaedia, the Turks’ intent to protect the Mamluks’ historical heritage, indicating their strong connection. While R. Khodzhaeva’s study mentions the geographical and historical aspects of “*Subh...*”, these are not in-depth explored as the author focuses primarily on its cultural dimension.

Particularly notable in the context of historical geography and its connection to Al-Qalqashandi’s “*Subh...*” is the work of Sayfetdinova (2024), which identifies differing interpretations of the city of Ukek as described by Abu-l-Fida and Al-Qalqashandi. According to the author, this divergence further proves the unreliability of “*Subh...*” as a source of historical knowledge. Al-Qalqashandi’s claim regarding the transfer of Ukek to Orda Khan lacks any corroboration and remains doubtful. This underscores the necessity of critically assessing the historical data employed by Al-Qalqashandi in compiling “*Subh...*”.

Al-Badhani (2024) investigates the origins of the Nabataeans by analysing compilers’ works, including Al-Qalqashandi’s “*Subh...*”. This analysis concludes that the Arabic alphabet evolved from the Nabataean script, establishing a connection between Nabataean and Arab cultures and reaffirming their shared geographical boundaries.

Martín (2024) explores the reasons, methods, and objectives behind Al-Qalqashandi’s discussion of the status of Christian kingdoms on the Iberian Peninsula. His analysis of the kingdoms of Castile, Portugal, Barcelona, and Navarre is of particular interest in the context of historical geography.

The scholarly work of Pramono (2022) delves into the Abbasids’ advanced military technologies, including the secret of producing “Damascus steel” used for sword-making. Al-Qalqashandi explained this phenomenon in “*Subh...*”, noting that Damascus became a prominent centre for iron and steel processing in the 12th century CE. This explanation clarifies the etymology of the term “Damascus steel.”

Ali (2024) examined the rise and fall of the Hasanwayhid Barzikani dynasty by analysing events in Jibal. According to Al-Qalqashandi’s encyclopaedia, Jibal was divided into two parts: Kurdish (western Jibal) and non-Kurdish (eastern Jibal). This division (*Jabal al-Akrad*) enabled a distinct approach to analysing Jibal’s components and highlighted the region’s specificity.

The article by Mohammed (2020) is a pivotal contribution to the entire Middle East. It presents a comparative historical-geographical study of the cities in the Khorasan region as described in Al-Qalqashandi’s “*Subh...*”. The research reveals the advanced development of most regional towns, the simultaneous decline in settlements, and the consolidation of existing ones.

In the scholarly work by Hamad (2020), the economic activity of the cities in the Khorasan region is evaluated based on data from *The Dawn (Subh al-A’sha)* by al-Qalqashandi. A distinctive feature of this study is its consideration of geographical and economic aspects as key factors in the financial functioning of the region’s cities. Hamad (2020) conducted a detailed analysis of how the geography of Nishapur, Marw, and Bam impacted economic interactions between these cities, revealing the advantages of their proximity to trade routes.

Hameed (2024) examined the influence of geography on the formation of political power in the Islamic East. Al-Qalqashandi’s *The Dawn* was utilised to describe the province of Ghor in terms of its geographical characteristics and rulers. H. Hamid’s research demonstrated that geography played a significant role in the establishment of states and in shaping their future leaders.

Liasari (2023) explored how barren lands were transformed into thriving Islamic cities during the Arab expansion. Using descriptions of Basra, al-Kufa, Fustat, and Kairouan, the study revealed that military settlements provided a robust foundation for establishing Islamic rule in newly acquired territories. In this context, al-Qalqashandi is mentioned as one of the creators of Kufic calligraphy (khat kufi).

The joint article by Husson and Al-Aarajee (2024) focused on the work of Abu Shama al-Maqdisi, *Al-Rawdatayn fi Akhbar al-Dawlatayn al-Nuriya wa al-Salahiya (The Two Gardens in the History of the Nuri and Salahi Dynasties)*. The article also briefly describes bridges, the al-Atiq Hospital in Cairo, and bathhouses, as noted by al-Qalqashandi in *The Dawn*. Although al-Qalqashandi’s data was used only as a supplement to *The Two Gardens*, it helped confirm the reality of events and locations described by Abu Shama al-Maqdisi.

Mohammed (2023) examined another work by al-Qalqashandi, *Ma'athir al-Inafa*, describing the Islamic Caliphate's development. The data from this book were critically assessed and compared with other sources and *The Dawn*. The study identified recurring issues in al-Qalqashandi's work, such as inaccuracies in historical records, unreliable interpretations of events, and uncritical reliance on earlier historians.

The reviewed studies analyse al-Qalqashandi and his encyclopaedia, *The Dawn*, and highlight its significance for historical and geographical research concerning the Golden Horde, Egypt, the Khorasan region, and even Europe (the Iberian Peninsula). However, none of the reviewed works fully elucidated the connection between *The Dawn*'s descriptions of cities and regions and the methodologies of historical geography. This research aims to address that gap.

The primary objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To provide a concise overview of the most significant cities mentioned in *The Dawn*.

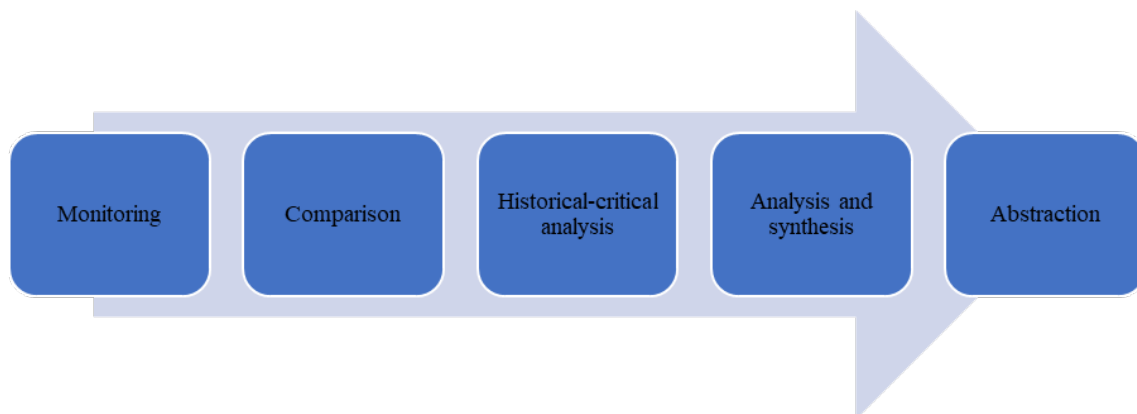
2. To determine whether al-Qalqashandi employed historical-geographical methods when gathering information and compiling his encyclopaedia.

3. To assess *The Dawn* as a historical and geographical source.

### Materials and methods

A comprehensive set of methods was employed to conduct the current study, forming the foundation of a methodology applied to implement the steps outlined in Figure 1.

The first step in the research involved using the monitoring method. This was applied during the preparatory phase to gather, systematise, and analyse data on historical geography methods and the descriptions of cities and regions in Al-Qalqashandi's *Subh al-A'sha*. This method facilitated the identification of the primary tools utilised by historical geography as a discipline. It enabled the development of a systematic approach for interpreting the descriptions of cities and regions in *Subh al-A'sha*.



**Figure 1** – Main stages of the current study  
Source: authors' development.

The next stage of the study involved comparing the historical geography methods employed by Al-Qalqashandi, focusing on their influence in *Subh al-A'sha*. This was achieved through the application of the comparative method. This approach allowed us to identify the unique aspects of Al-Qalqashandi's perspective and their impact on the geographic dimension of his encyclopaedia.

Subsequently, a critical analysis of *Subh al-A'sha* was conducted using the historical-critical method. This analysis examined the encyclopaedia's characteristics, including its structure (organisation and sequencing of material), linguistic style (terms

and expressions), and emphases (the purpose and aims of referencing geographical facts). Overall, the historical-critical method helped elucidate the context and motivations behind Al-Qalqashandi's selection of specific cities and regions for description in *Subh al-A'sha*.

The penultimate step of the study involved the use of the analysis and synthesis method. This method aimed to identify the main stages and factors influencing the development of the elements under investigation. It enabled us first to examine the geographical components of *Subh al-A'sha* and subsequently group them based on their connections

and properties for further evaluation of the encyclopaedia as a historical-geographical source. This method was chosen due to the difficulty of evaluating *Subh al-A'sha* in its entirety, given the vast amount of information it contains and the complexity of adequately perceiving the historical context of Al-Qalqashandi's era by contemporary researchers.

The final but equally significant step involved applying the scientific abstraction method. Alongside abstract-logical and dialectical methods, scientific abstraction is frequently employed for formulating conclusions, ensuring researchers focus on the most critical aspects of the studied phenomenon. In this study, the process of scientific abstraction enabled us to conceptualise *Subh al-A'sha* specifically as a historical-geographical source, excluding all elements irrelevant to the research objectives.

Thus, the step-by-step implementation of all the aforementioned methods highlights how Al-Qalqashandi described cities and regions in *Subh al-A'sha*. This reveals their significance for historical geography and serves as a foundation for analysing similar works by his contemporaries. This approach provides other researchers with a ready-to-use methodology, saving time and resources.

## Results

To understand the specifics of city and regional descriptions in *Subh al-A'sha fi Sina'at al-Insha'*, it is essential to examine Al-Qalqashandi's work as an encyclopaedist. First and foremost, it should be noted that *Subh al-A'sha* is a compilation of data drawn from various sources written across different periods. As an administrative encyclopaedia, it encompasses a broad range of topics, even including sections on the fundamentals of cryptography

and cryptanalysis (Aziz, 2024). The work adheres fully to the stylistic trends of its era, characterised by gigantism and meticulous structuring. Within the geographical sections on cities and regions, Al-Qalqashandi frequently cites numerous scholars and diligently provides quotations (Bjorkman, 1928).

Among the scholars whose works informed Al-Qalqashandi's descriptions are Al-Biruni and Al-Masudi, who wrote about the geographical characteristics of various lands as early as the 10th century. Al-Qalqashandi used Al-Biruni's work to refine the locations of cities, while Al-Masudi's writings helped him explore the relationships between peoples and the territories they inhabited. Particularly valuable to *Subh al-A'sha* are the insights derived from Al-Masudi's *The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems*, as Al-Masudi was renowned for his critical approach to information, carefully analysing and discarding unreliable data (Khalidi, 1975).

A primary challenge for Al-Qalqashandi as an encyclopaedist was his inability to verify the facts presented in *Subh al-A'sha*, forcing him to rely on the credibility of the researchers whose data he incorporated. This reliance occasionally led to inaccuracies in his descriptions of events or phenomena, sometimes resulting in misinterpretations, such as in his account of the transfer of Ukek to Orda Khan. On the other hand, Al-Qalqashandi's knowledge was remarkably universal; he was interested in the history and geography of Islamic lands and those of most neighbouring countries and kingdoms. His encyclopaedia includes the names of rulers and significant historical events from these regions up to his time.

Table 1 has been created to assess the contributions of the researchers whose works Al-Qalqashandi used for geographical data in *Subh al-A'sha*.

**Table 1** – Geographical researchers and their contributions to the Al-Qalqashandi encyclopedia

Author	Contribution to <i>Subh al-A'sha</i>	Source used
Al-Umari	Description of the territory of the Golden Horde	«Ma-salik al-absar fi mamalik al-amsar» («Paths of View in the States of Great Centers»)
Abu-l-Fida	Writing the names of settlements and their geographical coordinates	«Taqwim al-burden» («Arrangement of Countries») and «At-Tarih» («Chronicle»)
Al-Khimari	General geographical data on the location of states	«Ar-Raud al-mitar fi khabar al-aktor» («The Fragrant Garden with Reports of Countries»)
Al-Biruni	Clarifying the location of cities	«Al-Qanun al-Masudi fi-l-haya wa-n-nujum» («Masudi's Tables on Astronomy and the Stars»)
Al-Masudi	Identifying the relationship between peoples and the territories in which they live	«Muruj az-dhahab wa maadin al-jawahir» («The Golden Meadows and Mines of Gems»)

Source: Compiled by the authors based on Al-Qalqashindi (1922).

Indeed, during the creation of *The Morning Star* (*Zhorra...*), Al-Kalqashandi utilised a much larger body of works from various regions by geography and history researchers. However, he often mentioned these sources only a few times, and in some cases only once, such as in the reference to Ibn Khaldun's *The Great History*.

After identifying the features of Al-Kalqashandi's encyclopedic activity during the creation of *Zhorra*, it is necessary to consider the existing methods of historical geography and determine which might have been available to him. Historical

geography methods are grounded in the subject of study: the formation and development of territorial-political systems under specific historical conditions and in interaction with geographical space (Rajovic & Bulatovic, 2020).

Historical-geographical methods often focus on establishing the hypothetical archetype of a particular folklore narrative, its geographical origin, and the historical routes of travel (Mista, 2022). Currently, science recognises five historical-geographical methods, the specifics of which will be explained in Table 2.

**Table 2** – Methods of historical geography and the specifics of their use

No.	Method	Description	Specifics of usage
1	Analytical-synthetic	It involves identifying facts, systematising them, generalising them, and determining the essence of phenomena with precise localisation in space and time.	Study of the process of territorial growth of states (or cities) and their administrative structure
2	Comparative-historical	It involves establishing the similarity of genetically unrelated phenomena formed simultaneously in different populations.	Allows you to identify the connections that exist between different peoples or residents of a region (city)
3	Retrospective analysis	It consists in reproducing individual socio-geographical phenomena based on establishing their feedback.	Used to determine internal administrative-territorial borders and habitats, settlement of tribes and entire peoples
4	Statistical observation	The method is based on recording facts through censuses, reports, and sample surveys to identify patterns.	Allows you to show the processes of economic development of individual districts, regions and states
5	Cartography	Compilation of cartograms and atlases that demonstrate historical phenomena in a specific territory at a particular time or the processes of development of these phenomena	Used to illustrate better the connection between a change in place of residence and the characteristics of the development and activity of the population of regions or entire states.

Source: compiled by the authors based on Frog (2013).

Analysing Table 2, we concluded that at the time of writing, *Zahra...* Al-Kalqashandi could have used all the known methods of historical geography. However, it is essential to note that the tools available to Al-Kalqashandi were limited by the low level of technological development at the time. This circumstance influenced the quality and speed with which he could work, compiling data from others and offering his interpretations of various events or phenomena. Therefore, although, theoretically, historical-geographical methods were available to Al-Kalqashandi for use in *Zahra...*, the effectiveness with which he applied them can certainly not be compared to the capabilities of modern encyclopedists.

Furthermore, one cannot overlook the influence of Al-Kalqashandi's culture and place of residence

on his use of historical geography methods. Even the structure of *Zahra...* is described using specific terminology. He divided his book into an introduction (*muqaddimah*), ten articles (*maqala*, plural *maqalat*), and a conclusion (*khatima*). The introduction and articles are divided into sections (*bab*, plural *abwab*) and subdivided into subsections (*fasl*, plural *fusul*). *Fusul* are sometimes divided into sections (*maqsad*, meaning 'purpose', plural *maqasid*). *Maqasid* can also be divided into 'types' (*darb*), which are further divided into 'variations' (*wajh*), or 'statuses' (*hala*), which are subdivided into points (*jumla*), and further divided into 'kinds' (*naw*). Sometimes *fusul* are divided into 'levels' (*martaba*) and 'sublevels' (*tabaqa*), or 'types' (*rukn*). Information regarding the geographical features of cities and regions is concentrated in the second article of

*Zahra...*, which is divided into four sections: 'Geography of the World'; 'The Caliphate and Various Dynasties'; 'The Kingdom of the Egyptian Lands and its Additions'; and 'The Kingdoms and Other Countries Surrounding the Egyptian Kingdom'.

After defining and explaining the methods of historical geography and the concentration of geographical data in Al-Kalqashandi's encyclopedia, we decided to analyse the descriptions of the cities mentioned in the second section of *Zahra...*. The source containing the second section of *Zahra...* was chosen as the work of Tarek and Heba (2017), as it is the only available scholarly source providing a detailed English translation.

The first city described in *Zahra...* is Fustat, the capital of Egypt during the rule of the Umayyads and Abbasids. The description begins with the correct name of the city (Fustat or Fissat), followed by the information that this city was known among the ordinary people as 'Misr,' and its ancient name was 'Bab Alyun' (Babylon). Fustat is located in the third of seven regions. Several sources provide the width and length of the city's borders, and Al-Kalqashandi specifies the measurements in kilometres as they were at the time. The information regarding the origin of the city's name is interesting. Referring to Al-Zamakhshari, the author himself states that 'Al-Fustat' is the name given to a type of construction smaller than a pavilion. At the end of this brief description is information about the history of the city's foundation on the site of Amr ibn al-As's tent, around which members of various tribes began building their own houses and mosques. Thus, the outskirts of Fustat were formed, named after tribes or their leaders. Notably, the homes of prominent residents, the residences of the emirs, and the mosques are mentioned. It is noted that Fustat was constantly growing, both in terms of buildings and population, leading to the problem of overcrowding. To prevent epidemics, a whole complex of baths was built in Fustat, which received water from the Nile River through copper containers. It is also mentioned that Fustat had a sewage system and aqueducts, the construction of which began during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods and continued during the Fatimid dynasty. The island of Al-Rawda is used for boat construction, and a pond located near Fustat, known as Al-Habash (named after gardens in the east), is described. The final fact provided by Al-Kalqashandi about Fustat is the construction of a hospital in 873 CE by Ahmad ibn Tulun. Referring to Al-Qadasi, he states that Ahmad ibn Tulun decreed that no soldier or Mamluk should be treated in the hospital.

The next city described in *Zahra...* is Cairo. It is mentioned that the distance between the walls of Fustat and Cairo is three miles; however, during Al-Kalqashandi's time, the two cities had already merged, with buildings extending continuously between them. This allows us to consider Fustat as a suburb of Cairo. The structure of the description of Cairo mirrors that of Fustat, with the addition of mentions of the Fatimid palace and fortifications (walls and gates). It is noted that the palace once occupied an area extending from the Al-Salihiyya madrasa in Bayn al-Qasrayn to the Al-Aydumari square and in width from Al-Sabha Huwaha to the Bab al-Id square. Al-Kalqashandi states that the palace had nine gates, some original, some added later. The palace area was continuously developed with new buildings in response to new challenges. For example, during the Crusades, a sanctuary was built in the palace to house the head of Imam al-Husayn, as there were fears that the Crusaders might capture Ascalon. This was not a one-time event but a rule, as nearly every caliph expanded the palace grounds, attempting to build something of their own. Another notable structure mentioned by Al-Kalqashandi in *Zahra...* is the mint (Dar al-Darb), which did not survive to his time, except for the 'old hospital' that was once part of it. The palace suffered greatly from fire, one of the causes of which was "the burning of timber and the accumulation of dust," as stated by Ibn Abd al-Zahir.

Analysing these descriptions of Egyptian cities provided by Al-Kalqashandi in *Zahra...*, the following conclusions can be made:

1. Al-Kalqashandi aimed to describe cities according to a specific plan, mentioning their foundation history, location, notable buildings, and the state of their surroundings.
2. He did not create maps, so his encyclopedia lacked the visual clarity that would be achieved through cartography as a method of historical geography.
3. Among the historical-geographical methods explicitly used in *Zahra...*, when describing the cities of Fustat and Cairo, we can identify the analytical-synthetic, comparative-historical, and statistical methods.

The purpose of mentioning facts about Fustat and Cairo was to show the evolution of Egypt through the development of its major cities. The descriptions of these cities are also closely connected with the activities of their rulers, as Al-Kalqashandi regularly mentions their contributions to construction. By doing so, he sought to demonstrate the his-

torical continuity of Egypt's rule to his readers and explain its rulers' functions in managing their own cities.

Thus, we have proven that *Zahra for the Short-Sighted in the Art of Writing* by Al-Qalqashandi played a leading role in the development of historical geography, providing the most comprehensive compilation of works from other historians and geographers. Al-Qalqashandi's extensive use of historical-geographical methods, which predated the emergence of historical geography as a science, laid the foundation for the discipline. Therefore, Al-Qalqashandi himself can be considered one of the founders of historical geography.

### Discussion

The analysis of city descriptions in *Subh al-A'sha fi Sina'at al-Insha* has demonstrated this encyclopaedia's significance as a valuable information source for modern researchers. Al-Qalqashandi extensively applied historical-geographical research methods in compiling the work. While he predominantly compiled data from other authors, his achievement lies in creating a clear structure for the job, alongside his additions and clarifications aimed to summarise each section of *Subh al-A'sha*.

One of the contemporary researchers who has explored Fustat and Cairo during the Fatimid period, mainly focusing on their urban characteristics, is Darwish (2023). His study investigated the architectural heritage of the Fatimid Palace in Cairo and the residential architecture of Fustat's inhabitants. The research confirms the size of Fustat and its continual expansion. Additionally, archaeologists have uncovered partial destruction of one of the Fatimid palaces due to fire, corroborating the information provided in Al-Qalqashandi's *Subh al-A'sha*.

Another study with conclusions akin to Al-Qalqashandi's focuses on the development of Fustat under the Tulunid, Ikshidid, and Fatimid dynasties (Vakilitanha & Adavoudi, 2023). Like Darwish's (2023) article, this research substantiates the northward expansion of Fustat following the establishment of the Abbasid dynasty. It further reveals that Fustat became Egypt's political and administrative centre during this time, achieving unprecedented dominance under the Fatimids—a point also affirmed by Al-Qalqashandi in *Subh al-A'sha*. This study highlights the absorption of Fustat into Cairo, a process described by Al-Qalqashandi, who noted that "the buildings are contiguous". Additionally,

it references the construction of aqueducts initiated during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods and continued under the Fatimids, as confirmed by Al-Qalqashandi's text.

The final work discussed here is an article examining excavations in Fustat (Ali & Adam, 2023). It confirms the city's location to the east of the Nile near the Babylon Fortress, contradicting Al-Qalqashandi's interpretation that Fustat and Babylon were essentially a single city. On the other hand, the article acknowledges the importance of Fustat's suburbs, which were founded on a tribal basis, as described in *Subh al-A'sha*.

Thus, comparing Fustat and Cairo, as depicted in Al-Qalqashandi's *Subh al-A'sha* with modern sources, underscores a near-complete concordance on key issues. Some inaccuracies in *Subh al-A'sha* may stem from the limited research tools available to Al-Qalqashandi and potential errors in his interpretation of data from other scholars. This necessitates the integration of additional historical and archaeological sources alongside Al-Qalqashandi's encyclopaedia to create a comprehensive picture of the historical-geographical development of cities and regions.

### Conclusions

Historical geography is a relatively young discipline. However, as Al-Qalqashandi demonstrated in his encyclopaedia *Subh al-A'sha fi Sina'at al-Insha* (*The Dawn for the Nearsighted in the Art of Composition*), one does not necessarily need to specialise in historical geography to employ historical-geographical research methods. Al-Qalqashandi, a remarkably erudite scholar for his time, had a profound understanding of the essence of scientific research. This enabled him to provide a detailed and structured description of the cities of Fustat and Cairo. It remains a reference point for modern historians and geographers verifying their data against the facts presented in his encyclopaedia.

The findings of this study indicate that Al-Qalqashandi not only adeptly employed historical-geographical research methods but also endeavoured to organise the sections of *Subh al-A'sha* according to a structure he devised for describing various events and phenomena. This approach aligns him with the practices of modern encyclopaedists.

It can be unequivocally stated that *Subh al-A'sha* was ahead of its time, although it remains largely unknown to a broader readership due to its only partial translation. Addressing this issue re-

quires efforts to popularise the work as a unique historical data source and encourage further research. A promising avenue for future studies lies in comparing Al-Qalqashandi's city descriptions with those of his contemporaries. Such comparisons could reveal differing perspectives on the events of the time, which, shaped by diverse viewpoints, may significantly diverge from the accounts presented in *Subh al-A'sha*.

## Acknowledgments, conflict of interest

This research is funded by the Science Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan within the framework of the project AP22682863 The work of al-Qalqashandi (15th century) "Subh al-asha fi sina'at al-insha" as a source of historical geography of the Golden Horde.

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Поступило: 01.01.2025

Принято: 05.06.2025