



MUHAMMET IBN NEJIP BEKRAN – A FAMOUS CARTOGRAPHER OF THE EAST

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Navigating the earth and determining directions in vast spaces has been a basic human survival skill since ancient times. The moon, sun, stars, mountains, seas, lakes, rivers, plains, deserts, forests, cities, villages, roads, and pathways have always served as crucial landmarks and guides for people to determine directions. With the development of human society, the rise of states, and the establishment of international relations, people's curiosity about distant lands increased. Information provided by travelers, pilgrims, and merchants—stories about unfamiliar countries, beautiful cities, hospitable villages, and dangerous roads—fueled humanity's curiosity about the structure of the Earth and intensified their desire for clear and precise knowledge about these topics. As science and knowledge progressed, individual scholars delved deeper into these subjects, leading to the creation of the first geographical maps.

In ancient and medieval times, writing books and presenting them as gifts to rulers was considered a special honor. Therefore, some scholars created world maps as unique gifts to dedicate to rulers.

One such renowned scholar, who created a world map in his time, was Muhammet ibn Nejip Bekran, a native of our region. Unfortunately, despite being a famous astronomer and geographer, little is known about Bekran's life and works. Even the details of when and where he was born or when he passed away remain uncertain. The only documented fact related to his biography is the year 1208, when he completed his world map. He mentions this date in his work "Jahannama" (The Book of the World) as an explanation of his map.

Eastern scholars who have studied Bekran's scientific legacy agree that he was originally from Khorasan. While some suggest he might have been born in the city of Tus, this claim remains unconfirmed. It is also highly likely that he could have been from Merv, Sarahs, Balkh, Herat, or Nishapur, as he describes these regions in great detail in his work.

Bekran particularly mentions knowing Merv, Sarahs, and Tus like the back of his hand. By providing detailed descriptions of the character and customs of the people in these areas, he demonstrates a familiarity that suggests he was a native of these lands.

In "Jahannama," Bekran states that he had the desire to "match the works of other scholars and receive a gift from the blessed hand of the ruler" and thus decided to create a world map for Khorezmshah Alaeddin Muhammad bin Tekesh. This significant and demanding task required years of tireless effort. According to "Jahannama," he completed the world map in 1208. Scholars believe the map was presented to Alaeddin Muhammad II (ruler of the Khorezm Turks, 1200–1220) in Konye-Urgench. Some evidence supporting this theory can also be found in "Jahannama." For instance, Bekran writes about the "Khorezm Desert stretching between Khorasan and Khorezm" and mentions crossing it on his way to Konye-Urgench.

The period in which Bekran lived—the late 12th and early 13th centuries—was a time of significant scientific and cultural development in Turkmenistan. Much like the era of the Great Seljuk Empire, this period saw the accumulation of a rich intellectual heritage in various scientific fields. Astronomy and geography, in particular, flourished during this time. Muhammet ibn Nejip Bekran drew heavily on the works of earlier renowned scholars, especially those from the Turkmen region, in creating his world map. In this challenging endeavor, he extensively utilized the "Book of the Image of the Earth" ("Kitab Surat al-Ard") by Muhammet ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi (787–863) and the numerous works of Abu Rayhan Muhammad ibn al-Biruni (973–1051).