

RESEARCH

THE ATLAS PROJECT: THE SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF MUSLIMS IN SOUTH ASIA

The Atlas Project is a programme of research into the history and geographical spread of Muslim social and intellectual movements in South Asia. It aims to present in graphic form, through maps, charts and explanatory text, the history of the spread of social and intellectual movements in South Asia, and to account for the disruptions and differences, as well as connections and continuities, across different regions and epochs. There are significant gaps in our knowledge of how ideas and individuals moved within and between differently configured Muslim societies, how they interacted with and influenced local attitudes and customs, how they responded to changes in economic and political conditions, the scholarly and religious movements they inspired, and their enduring legacy in contemporary times. The Atlas Project as a whole envisages coverage of the entire Muslim world divided into five regions with, in terms of published output, one volume for each. Dr Farhan Nizami has been responsible for the volume on the South Asia region. The work on South Asia has been supported in the past by the Leverhulme Trust (UK), the Faisal Islamic Bank, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The current volume of the Atlas describes the coming of Islam in South Asia through trade and military incursions and the eventual establishment of enduring Muslim polities such as the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire. The main focus is on the diffusion of Muslim thought and practice through the villages, towns and cities of the subcontinent. It shows teaching centres, educational and philosophical trends, Sufi orders, religious, social and political movements, the networks of interconnection and competition among them, and the diverse routes for disseminating or challenging ideas, beliefs, practices, knowledge and attitudes. Some 170 maps and charts, visualize the interconnected networks of the transmission of ideas, beliefs, texts and practices over the centuries and vividly capture their discontinuities, as well as their continuous evolution, in the spread of Islamic thought in South Asia. The work demonstrates the unique contributions and experiences of the Muslim communities in South Asia while also illustrating the enduring intellectual and socio-cultural connections with other parts of the Muslim world over time. For amassing, processing and presenting the material, South Asia provides a good template for subsequent volumes. These can be conceived from the outset for final presentation in a digitized form.

Over the last year, progress has been made towards finalizing the remaining Atlas work. New, updated and revised, maps, tables and charts have been prepared and proofed. The work on charts and tables has been completed and they are now being worked into the book's page composition. Dr. Alex Kent (our cartographer) will be working on the final revisions of the remaining maps from May through July of this year, and getting them ready as image files for the print edition. The work on the graphic parts of the Atlas is expected to conclude this year. Concurrently, Dr. Moin Nizami, is continuing the writing up of the accompanying text and the endnotes to ensure that they compare with the changes done on the maps and charts during the last revisions.