

Al-Mas'ūdī's Historiographical Method: An Empirical and Multidisciplinary Approach in Classical Islamic Historiography

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ABSTRACT

Al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956 CE), renowned for his *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar* (*The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems*), occupies a significant position in the development of classical Islamic historiography. This study examines how Al-Mas'ūdī constructed his historiographical method and explores its distinctive contribution to historical writing in the medieval Islamic world. Employing the historical method through the stages of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography, the research analyzes Al-Mas'ūdī's methodological approach as reflected in his major works. The findings demonstrate that he developed an empirical, multidisciplinary, and comparative model of historiography by prioritizing direct observation obtained through extensive travel while critically engaging with transmitted reports. His method integrated geographical, ethnographic, and environmental perspectives within a thematic framework (*al-tashnīf al-mawḍū'ī*), enabling a broader interpretation of historical phenomena. His relatively objective engagement with cross-civilizational perspectives is evident in his efforts to document and compare the customs, beliefs, and social practices of diverse societies rather than limiting his narratives to a single cultural viewpoint. This study highlights Al-Mas'ūdī's contribution as an innovative historian whose methodological approach remains relevant for contemporary historiographical discourse, particularly in promoting interdisciplinary and empirically grounded historical inquiry.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic historiography has produced several great historians who have made fundamental contributions to the development of world history. Among these historians is Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn Ali al-Mas'ūdī (896–956 CE), a Muslim historian, geographer, and encyclopedist who lived in the tenth century CE. Al-Mas'ūdī is often referred to as the “Arab Herodotus” due to his comprehensive and multidimensional approach to historical writing (Hana et al., 2026). This designation reflects his significant contribution to the development of historiographical methods that not only recorded events chronologically but also analyzed the geographical, social, and cultural factors underlying historical developments.

The tenth century CE represented a golden age of intellectual achievement in Islamic civilization, during which various branches of knowledge flourished, including historiography. Historical writing during this period evolved beyond the simple recording of political and military events and gradually developed into a more complex discipline characterized by systematic methodological inquiry. Al-Mas'ūdī emerged as one of the pioneers of this transformation by introducing an approach that integrated multiple fields of knowledge into historical narratives (Basyar et al., 2026).

Al-Mas'ūdī lived during the Abbasid period, an era marked by remarkable advances in science, philosophy, literature, and historical scholarship. Unlike many earlier historians who focused primarily on dynastic or regional histories, he adopted a universal perspective encompassing diverse nations and civilizations. His monumental work, *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar* (*The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems*), demonstrates both the breadth of his intellectual vision and the originality of his historiographical method (Mas'ūdī, 2009). The work serves not only as an important source for the history of the Islamic world but also as a valuable repository of information concerning other civilizations, ranging from Europe and Africa to India and East Asia (Alpaten et al., 2024). Within this work, Al-Mas'ūdī demonstrates his ability to synthesize information derived from direct observation during his extensive travels and from a wide range of written sources.

Al-Mas'ūdī is widely recognized as a historian who rejected dogmatic approaches in the interpretation of historical events. He sought to construct historical narratives that maintained fidelity to Islamic values while encouraging critical inquiry and empirical observation. His rational and empirical orientation contributed significantly to the emergence of scientific consciousness within the Islamic intellectual tradition. Subsequently, it influenced the development of historiography in both the Middle East and Europe (Kadril, [2021](#)).

In methodological terms, Al-Mas'ūdī's writings reveal a systematic approach to historical inquiry. He did not merely arrange events in chronological order but also analyzed the causes, contexts, and consequences of historical developments. The classical Islamic historiographical tradition evolved from simple political chronicles into a more analytical and interpretive form of historical writing. This transformation reflected broader intellectual efforts within Islamic civilization to combine revelation and reason in understanding historical reality (Hermawan et al., [2025](#)).

In addition, Al-Mas'ūdī is known for his multidisciplinary approach to historical writing. He did not rigidly separate history from geography, anthropology, ethnography, or sociology; rather, he integrated these perspectives into a coherent historical narrative (Anthony, [2026](#)). This holistic orientation enabled him to explain historical phenomena not as isolated events but as interconnected processes shaped by geographical conditions, cultural interactions, economic activities, and social structures.

Previous scholarship has examined Al-Mas'ūdī from a variety of perspectives. Several studies have focused on his role as a major source for understanding the political, social, and cultural history of the medieval Islamic world, emphasizing the richness of information contained in *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar* (Mas'ūdī, [2009](#)). Other scholars have explored his geographical descriptions and accounts of foreign societies, highlighting his extensive travels and broad intellectual curiosity (Alpaten et al., 2024). Research on classical Islamic historiography has likewise recognized Al-Mas'ūdī as a key figure in expanding the scope of historical writing beyond dynastic chronicles by incorporating geographical, ethnographic, and cultural observations into historical narratives (Kadril, [2021](#)).

Several scholars have also discussed Al-Mas'ūdī's empirical tendencies and multidisciplinary orientation. His reliance on direct observation, comparative descriptions of societies, and engagement with non-Islamic civilizations has frequently been identified as evidence of a distinctive historiographical approach (Anthony, [2026](#)). These studies have contributed significantly to understanding Al-Mas'ūdī's intellectual legacy and the historical value of his works. However, most of them focus primarily on the content of his writings, his geographical contributions, or his historical narratives rather than on the methodological structure that underpinned his historiographical practice.

Despite acknowledging Al-Mas'ūdī's empirical and multidisciplinary characteristics, previous studies generally discuss these features descriptively and in isolation. Limited attention has been devoted to examining how empirical observation, source evaluation, thematic organization, geographical interpretation, and comparative analysis operated together as an integrated historiographical framework. Existing scholarship rarely addresses the methodological mechanisms through which Al-Mas'ūdī constructed historical knowledge or explains how these methodological elements contributed to the transformation of Islamic historiography from narrative chronicle writing into a more analytical and interpretive intellectual enterprise.

Within Indonesian scholarship, discussions of Al-Mas'ūdī have largely remained confined to analyses of his historical narratives and geographical descriptions, while the methodological foundations of his historiographical writings have received comparatively limited scholarly attention. As a result, his historiographical method has yet to be examined comprehensively as an autonomous subject of academic inquiry. This tendency has created a significant gap in the literature, particularly regarding the development of methodological thought in classical Islamic historiography and the intellectual principles that informed Al-Mas'ūdī's approach to historical writing. The absence of focused studies on his methodological framework has consequently restricted a fuller appreciation of his contribution to the evolution of historical scholarship within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

This gap gives rise to a fundamental scholarly question: how did Al-Mas'ūdī formulate a historiographical method capable of integrating empirical observation, comparative investigation, and multidisciplinary knowledge into a coherent framework of historical analysis? Addressing this question is crucial not only for elucidating Al-Mas'ūdī's intellectual legacy but also for reassessing the methodological sophistication that characterized classical Islamic historiography more broadly. Such an inquiry enables a deeper exploration of the epistemological foundations underlying medieval Islamic historical writing and challenges assumptions that portray premodern historiography as

merely descriptive or narrative in nature. Examining his methodological approach therefore offers valuable insights into the analytical dimensions of historical inquiry within the Islamic scholarly tradition.

The novelty of this study lies in its systematic investigation of Al-Mas'ūdī's historiographical method as an integrated analytical framework rather than treating him solely as a transmitter of historical information or a medieval geographer. This research examines how he combined direct observation, source criticism, thematic organization, geographical interpretation, and cross-civilizational comparison in constructing historical narratives. By foregrounding the methodological dimensions of his scholarship, the study advances a perspective that differs substantially from previous research, which has predominantly emphasized the descriptive content of his works. This approach contributes to a more nuanced understanding of historiographical innovation and methodological development within the broader context of Islamic intellectual history.

Accordingly, this article aims to provide a systematic analysis of the historiographical method developed by Al-Mas'ūdī and to evaluate its significance within the wider trajectory of classical Islamic historiography. The study seeks to demonstrate how empirical, comparative, and multidisciplinary approaches were incorporated into medieval Islamic historical writing and how these approaches informed the construction of historical knowledge. Through this examination, the article highlights the enduring relevance of Al-Mas'ūdī's methodological contributions to contemporary debates on historiography, interdisciplinary research, and historical interpretation. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions concerning historical methodology and the intellectual heritage of Islamic civilization.

METHOD

The research employed the historical method as the principal methodological framework for examining Al-Mas'ūdī's historiographical thought. The historical method is understood as a systematic and scientific procedure for tracing, verifying, interpreting, and reconstructing past phenomena in a historically accountable manner (Aysachev & Abdumutallibov, [2026](#)). This method was selected because the study focuses not only on the content of Al-Mas'ūdī's historical writings but also on the methodological principles underlying his construction of historical knowledge. The historical method was implemented through four interconnected stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography.

During the heuristic stage, the researcher collected both primary and secondary sources relevant to the study. The principal primary source was Al-Mas'ūdī's *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar*, which served as the main object of analysis. Secondary sources included scholarly books, journal articles, and previous studies on Al-Mas'ūdī, classical Islamic historiography, and the development of historical methodology within the Islamic intellectual tradition. Particular attention was given to studies examining empirical observation, comparative historical inquiry, geographical writing, and interdisciplinary approaches in Islamic historiography. These materials were selected to provide a broader intellectual context for evaluating Al-Mas'ūdī's historiographical contribution.

The source criticism stage involved both external and internal criticism. External criticism was conducted to verify the authenticity, authorship, historical context, and textual reliability of the primary source. This process included examining the status of *Murūj al-Dhahab* within the corpus of classical Islamic historical literature and reviewing its transmission and publication history. Internal criticism focused on evaluating the credibility, consistency, and historiographical significance of the information presented in the text. Particular attention was paid to identifying Al-Mas'ūdī's use of eyewitness accounts, travel accounts, transmitted reports, and cross-cultural descriptions. The reliability of these materials was assessed by examining the extent to which Al-Mas'ūdī differentiated between direct observation and second-hand information, critically evaluated competing accounts, and demonstrated awareness of geographical and cultural contexts.

The interpretation stage involved a qualitative analysis of the historiographical principles embedded in Al-Mas'ūdī's writings. Rather than focusing solely on historical content, the analysis examined how historical knowledge was constructed through empirical observation, thematic organization, geographical explanation, and comparative inquiry. The researcher identified recurring methodological patterns and categorized them into several analytical dimensions, including direct observation, multidisciplinary integration, source evaluation, and cross-civilizational comparison. This stage also explored the relationship between Al-Mas'ūdī's historiographical practice and broader intellectual developments within the Abbasid scholarly environment.

To strengthen the study's analytical dimension, a comparative historiographical approach was employed. Al-Mas'ūdī's method was systematically compared with the approaches of other influential Muslim historians, particularly al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Khaldūn. The comparison focused on several criteria, including source use, narrative structure, treatment of causality, empirical observation, and engagement with social and geographical factors. Through this comparison, the study sought to identify both the distinctive features and the broader historiographical significance of Al-Mas'ūdī's method within the tradition of classical Islamic historical writing.

The final stage was historiography, which involved organizing and presenting the findings in a coherent, systematic, and analytical scholarly narrative. At this stage, the results of source criticism and interpretation were synthesized to reconstruct Al-Mas'ūdī's historiographical method and to evaluate its contribution to the development of classical Islamic historiography. The historiographical presentation emphasizes the empirical, comparative, and multidisciplinary dimensions of Al-Mas'ūdī's approach, thereby highlighting its relevance for understanding both the evolution of Islamic historical thought and contemporary discussions on historical methodology.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Al-Mas'ūdī's Intellectual Formation and Historiographical Orientation

Al-Mas'ūdī was one of the most influential Muslim historians, geographers, and intellectuals of the tenth century CE. His full name was Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Mas'ūdī, and he was born in Baghdad around 896 CE before passing away in Fustat, Egypt, in approximately 956 CE. His reputation as a pioneering historian is reflected in Ibn Khaldūn's designation of him as *Imām al-Mu'arrikhīn* (Leader of Historians). At the same time, later scholars frequently referred to him as the "Herodotus of the Arabs" because of his extensive travels and systematic efforts to investigate diverse societies through direct observation (Nafi et al., 2025). These labels indicate not merely personal prestige but also recognition of a methodological shift in Islamic historical writing. Unlike many earlier historians whose works were largely dependent upon transmitted reports, Al-Mas'ūdī emphasized the importance of empirical inquiry as a means of expanding historical knowledge.

Al-Mas'ūdī received his early education from his father, who introduced him to religious sciences, literature, and historical traditions. His intellectual development, however, cannot be understood solely through formal education. Extensive travel played a decisive role in shaping his historical outlook and methodological orientation. Beginning in 301 AH/923 CE, he departed from Baghdad and undertook a prolonged scholarly journey through Persia, Karman, Istakhr, India, China, Madagascar, Zanzibar, Oman, Najd, Palestine, and Anatolia (Amri, 2025). He later continued his travels to Tiberias, Palestine, and Antioch before eventually settling in Egypt during the final years of his life (Maulana et al., 2024). These journeys exposed him to a wide range of political systems, religious traditions, ethnic groups, and cultural practices. As a result, his historical writings were informed not only by textual sources but also by direct encounters with different societies. This experience enabled him to develop a broader and more comparative perspective than many of his contemporaries.

The significance of Al-Mas'ūdī's travels extends beyond biographical interest. His mobility served as a methodological tool, enabling him to gather firsthand information and verify historical accounts. In this respect, travel became an empirical investigation rather than merely a scholarly activity. Modern historiographical theory recognizes direct observation as an important means of enriching historical understanding, particularly when written sources are limited or contradictory. Al-Mas'ūdī's practice anticipated this principle by combining transmitted knowledge with field-based observation. His historical narratives, therefore, reflect an effort to bridge textual authority and empirical evidence, a characteristic that distinguishes his work from many earlier Islamic historians.

Al-Mas'ūdī's intellectual orientation was also shaped by the rationalist environment of the Abbasid period and by intellectual currents associated with Mu'tazilite thought. This influence encouraged a greater appreciation for reason, critical inquiry, and the systematic examination of evidence (Tofaynudin & Amalia, 2024). Rather than accepting historical reports uncritically, Al-Mas'ūdī frequently evaluated information by considering geographical realities, social conditions, and cultural contexts. Such an approach reflects a movement away from purely narrative historiography toward a more analytical mode of historical explanation. His writings demonstrate an awareness that historical events cannot be understood adequately without examining the broader forces that shape human societies.

From this intellectual foundation emerged one of Al-Mas'ūdī's most significant contributions to historiography: the adoption of *al-taṣnīf al-mawḍū'ī* (thematic organization) as an alternative to the dominant *al-ḥawliyyāt* (annalistic or chronological) model. While many historians of his time arranged events by year, Al-Mas'ūdī organized historical knowledge around themes such as kingdoms, peoples, religions, trade networks, and cultural interactions (Tranggono & Nurwahidin, 2023). This method enabled him to explore historical relationships across time and space rather than restricting analysis to isolated chronological events. His approach, therefore, represented a significant methodological innovation in classical Islamic historiography, enabling historical narratives to address broader questions about social change, cultural interaction, and civilizational development.

Historian Nazeer Ahmad identifies Al-Mas'ūdī as one of the earliest Muslim historians to employ an empirical and inductive mode of historical writing. His works incorporated geography, ethnology, ecology, anthropology, and political history within a single analytical framework. This multidisciplinary orientation demonstrates that Al-Mas'ūdī did not view history as an autonomous discipline separated from other forms of knowledge. Instead, he understood historical phenomena as products of interactions among environmental conditions, human behavior, cultural traditions, and political structures. Such an understanding closely resembles contemporary interdisciplinary historiography, which emphasizes integrating multiple perspectives in the interpretation of historical processes.

The methodological significance of Al-Mas'ūdī's work becomes even more evident when examined through the lens of modern historiographical theory. His commitment to observation, comparison, and contextual analysis suggests an early form of evidence-based historical inquiry. Nevertheless, describing Al-Mas'ūdī as entirely "objective" requires careful qualification. The concept of objectivity in contemporary historiography differs substantially from medieval understandings of historical truth. Al-Mas'ūdī remained a scholar embedded within the intellectual, religious, and cultural assumptions of his own era. These contexts inevitably shaped his historical narratives. The value of his work, therefore, lies not in achieving modern notions of neutrality but in his willingness to engage critically with diverse sources, compare different cultural traditions, and move beyond narrowly sectarian or dynastic perspectives. This approach allowed him to construct historical narratives that were remarkably broad in scope and relatively open to cross-civilizational understanding for his time.

The intellectual legacy of Al-Mas'ūdī extends far beyond the historical information contained in his writings. His contribution resides primarily in the methodological innovations he introduced into Islamic historiography. Through the integration of empirical observation, thematic organization, comparative inquiry, and multidisciplinary analysis, he transformed historical writing from a predominantly narrative enterprise into a more analytical and interpretive form of scholarship. His work consequently occupies an important position in the evolution of Islamic historical thought. It continues to provide valuable insights for contemporary discussions on historiography, methodology, and the production of historical knowledge.

Al-Mas'ūdī's Historiographical Epistemology and Methodological Innovation

Al-Mas'ūdī developed a distinctive approach to historical writing that departed from the dominant historiographical conventions of his time. While earlier Muslim historians generally relied on transmitted reports (*akhbār*) and chains of transmission (*isnād*) as the primary basis for establishing historical credibility, Al-Mas'ūdī placed greater emphasis on direct observation, travel experience, and critical evaluation of information. His epistemological foundation rested on the conviction that historical knowledge should be constructed not only through textual transmission but also through empirical engagement with the realities being described. Extensive journeys across India, Persia, the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa, and other regions enabled him to gather firsthand information that could be compared with existing historical narratives (Amri, 2025). This approach transformed travel from a mere scholarly activity into a methodological instrument for producing historical knowledge. Rather than functioning solely as a collector of reports, Al-Mas'ūdī positioned himself as an observer who actively investigated the social and cultural realities of the societies he encountered.

The significance of this methodological orientation becomes clearer when viewed through contemporary historiographical theory. Modern historiography emphasizes the importance of evidence, contextualization, and source evaluation in constructing historical explanations. Although Al-Mas'ūdī operated within a medieval intellectual environment, his insistence on observation and verification reflects an early awareness of these principles. His historical narratives reveal an effort to move beyond the simple transmission of information toward a more critical engagement with historical evidence. Consequently, his work represents an important transitional stage in the development of

Islamic historiography, where historical writing began to evolve from a predominantly narrative tradition into a more analytical mode of inquiry.

Empirical Observation and the Construction of Historical Knowledge

A central feature of Al-Mas'ūdī's historiographical thought is the integration of empirical observation into the process of historical reconstruction. Unlike many historians who depended primarily on written reports inherited from previous generations, Al-Mas'ūdī sought to verify information through direct encounters with different societies. His travels allowed him to observe political institutions, commercial networks, cultural practices, religious traditions, and environmental conditions firsthand. In *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar*, these observations are organized within a thematic framework (*al-taṣnīf al-mawḍū'ī*) that combines geographical descriptions with historical narratives (Sa'adillah & Syauqi, [2023](#)).

From an epistemological perspective, this approach places Al-Mas'ūdī within what Islamic intellectual tradition identifies as the *burhānī* mode of reasoning, which privileges observation, rational inquiry, and empirical evidence. His historiography demonstrates that historical understanding cannot be separated from the contexts in which events occur. Historical facts acquire meaning only when connected to the social, geographical, and cultural environments that shape them. This methodological position distinguishes Al-Mas'ūdī from historians who regarded transmitted reports as sufficient evidence for historical reconstruction. He consistently attempted to bridge textual authority and empirical experience, thereby broadening the methodological foundations of Islamic historiography.

His use of direct observation should not be interpreted merely as an accumulation of travel experiences. Rather, it functioned as a critical strategy for evaluating historical claims. By comparing his observations with existing reports, Al-Mas'ūdī identified inconsistencies, challenged assumptions, and offered alternative interpretations. This practice demonstrates an awareness that historical knowledge is not simply inherited but must be examined and tested. Such an approach anticipated later developments in historical methodology that emphasize source verification and evidentiary scrutiny.

Environmental, Geographical, and Social Dimensions of History

One of Al-Mas'ūdī's most innovative contributions lies in his effort to connect historical developments with geographical and environmental conditions. He rejected the notion that historical events occur in isolation from their physical surroundings. Instead, he argued that climate, terrain, natural resources, trade routes, and geographical location significantly influence the development of societies and civilizations. This perspective enabled him to explain historical change through a broader analytical framework that incorporated environmental and social factors rather than focusing exclusively on political events.

Al-Mas'ūdī's discussions of geography reveal an early recognition of the relationship between environment and human behavior. He frequently examined how climatic conditions influenced economic activities, settlement patterns, cultural practices, and political organization. Such observations demonstrate an understanding that historical developments are shaped by complex interactions between humans and their environments. This perspective represents a significant departure from purely event-centered historical writing and moves toward a more structural understanding of historical processes.

The analytical significance of this approach becomes evident when compared with later developments in historiography. Although Al-Mas'ūdī did not formulate a systematic theory of historical causation comparable to that of Ibn Khaldūn, his writings contain important conceptual foundations for understanding the relationship between environment, society, and history. Several ideas later developed more comprehensively in Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddimah* can already be identified in Al-Mas'ūdī's efforts to explain historical phenomena through geographical and social analysis (Lestari et al., [2023](#)). His contribution, therefore, extends beyond the provision of historical information and includes a methodological shift toward contextual explanation.

Comparative Civilization and Cross-Cultural Historical Analysis

Another distinctive characteristic of Al-Mas'ūdī's historiography is his comparative and integrative treatment of civilizations. He did not restrict historical inquiry to the Islamic world but examined diverse societies, including Persia,

Rome, India, East Africa, and other regions known through travel and trade networks. This broad geographical scope allowed him to situate Islamic history within a wider global context rather than presenting it as an isolated historical experience (Darmawan & Chaniago, [2024](#)).

The comparative dimension of Al-Mas'ūdī's work reflects a methodological awareness that historical understanding can be enriched by examining similarities and differences across societies. His descriptions of political systems, religious traditions, economic activities, and cultural practices demonstrate an effort to identify broader patterns of human development. This comparative perspective enabled him to construct a more comprehensive understanding of civilization and historical change.

Many scholars characterize this aspect of Al-Mas'ūdī's work as evidence of his relatively objective and tolerant attitude toward non-Islamic societies. Such an assessment, however, requires critical consideration. The concept of objectivity in contemporary historiography cannot be directly applied to medieval historical writing. Al-Mas'ūdī remained a scholar shaped by the intellectual assumptions, religious worldview, and cultural environment of the Abbasid period. His descriptions were therefore never entirely free from the values and perspectives of his own context. The significance of his historiography lies not in achieving modern standards of objectivity but in his willingness to engage seriously with other civilizations, compare diverse cultural traditions, and acknowledge the complexity of historical experience beyond narrowly sectarian boundaries. Within the intellectual framework of medieval Islamic historiography, this represented an inclusive approach to historical inquiry.

Al-Mas'ūdī and the Transformation of Classical Islamic Historiography

The methodological distinctiveness of Al-Mas'ūdī becomes particularly evident when compared with al-Ṭabarī, one of the most influential historians of the classical Islamic period. Al-Ṭabarī predominantly employed the *ḥawliyyāt* (annalistic) method and relied heavily on chains of transmission as the foundation of historical authority. His primary concern was preserving and compiling historical reports in chronological order. Al-Mas'ūdī, by contrast, adopted a thematic approach, integrated geographical and cultural analysis, and emphasized the interpretation of historical phenomena rather than the mere transmission of reports (Hak, [2020](#)).

These differences illustrate two distinct historiographical orientations within the Islamic intellectual tradition. Al-Ṭabarī represents the culmination of narrative and transmission-based historiography, whereas Al-Mas'ūdī represents a movement toward analytical, comparative, and interdisciplinary historical inquiry. His work demonstrates that historical writing can extend beyond mere recording of events to encompass explanations of social structures, environmental conditions, cultural interactions, and civilizational dynamics. Through this methodological innovation, Al-Mas'ūdī contributed significantly to transforming Islamic historiography from a predominantly narrative discipline into a more interpretive and analytical field of knowledge.

The enduring relevance of Al-Mas'ūdī's historiographical thought lies in this methodological legacy. His integration of empirical observation, source evaluation, geographical interpretation, and comparative analysis anticipated several principles that continue to shape contemporary historical scholarship. His work illustrates that meaningful historical understanding emerges not from the accumulation of facts alone but from the critical interpretation of evidence within broader social, cultural, and environmental contexts. For this reason, Al-Mas'ūdī occupies a pivotal position in the history of Islamic historiography and remains an important reference for discussions of historical methodology in both classical and modern contexts.

The Contemporary Historiographical Significance of Al-Mas'ūdī's Methodological Thought

Al-Mas'ūdī's historiographical method occupies an important position in discussions of contemporary historical methodology because it introduced several principles that remain relevant to modern historical scholarship. His contribution should not be understood merely in terms of the information contained in his works but rather in the methodological framework through which historical knowledge was produced. Contemporary historiography emphasizes critical engagement with evidence, contextual interpretation, interdisciplinary inquiry, and the comparative analysis of societies. Many of these elements can already be identified in Al-Mas'ūdī's writings, demonstrating that his historiographical thought represented a significant departure from purely narrative traditions and anticipated methodological developments that became central to later historical scholarship.

One of the most significant aspects of Al-Mas'ūdī's relevance lies in his commitment to empirical inquiry. He consistently emphasized observation, travel, and direct engagement with the societies he described, distinguishing himself from historians who relied predominantly on transmitted reports. His historical narratives reveal an awareness that reliable historical knowledge requires verification through experience and critical examination rather than unquestioned acceptance of inherited traditions (Arfi, [2024](#)). From the perspective of contemporary historiography, this approach resonates with the principle that historical claims must be supported by evidence and subjected to critical scrutiny. Although Al-Mas'ūdī operated within a medieval intellectual context, his emphasis on observation represents an important precursor to evidence-based historical inquiry.

Empirical Inquiry and Evidence-Based Historical Reconstruction

The methodological significance of Al-Mas'ūdī's empirical orientation becomes clearer when examined through modern historiographical theory. Contemporary historians generally regard historical knowledge as a process of interpretation grounded in evidence rather than a simple reproduction of past events. Al-Mas'ūdī's reliance on travel observations, eyewitness accounts, and comparative evaluation of information demonstrates an early recognition of this principle. His writings suggest that historical truth cannot be established solely through textual authority but must also be examined through engagement with observable reality.

Nevertheless, it would be anachronistic to portray Al-Mas'ūdī as a modern empiricist in the strict sense. His methods remained embedded within the intellectual traditions of the medieval Islamic world, where religious knowledge, transmitted reports, and scholarly authority continued to play important roles. The significance of his contribution lies not in conforming to modern standards of historical methodology but in expanding the range of acceptable evidence within Islamic historiography. By incorporating observation alongside textual transmission, he broadened the epistemological foundations of historical inquiry and encouraged a more critical engagement with historical sources.

Interdisciplinary Knowledge and the Expansion of Historical Analysis

A second area of relevance concerns Al-Mas'ūdī's multidisciplinary approach to historical writing. He integrated history with geography, ethnography, anthropology, environmental observation, and political analysis, thereby producing narratives that extended beyond mere event recording. Rather than treating historical developments as isolated occurrences, he sought to explain them through the interaction of multiple factors, including environment, culture, economy, and social organization (Lestari et al., [2023](#)).

This approach closely parallels contemporary interdisciplinary historiography, which recognizes that historical phenomena cannot be adequately understood through a single analytical lens. Modern historical research increasingly draws upon concepts and methods from the social sciences, environmental studies, cultural studies, and anthropology to explain complex historical processes. Al-Mas'ūdī's work anticipated this orientation by demonstrating that meaningful historical understanding emerges from the integration of diverse forms of knowledge. His contribution, therefore, extends beyond historical writing itself and includes a broader methodological vision concerning the nature of historical explanation.

Comparative Civilization and Global Historical Consciousness

Another significant aspect of Al-Mas'ūdī's relevance lies in his comparative treatment of civilizations. Unlike many historians whose perspectives remained confined to a particular political or cultural sphere, Al-Mas'ūdī examined diverse societies, including Persian, Roman, Indian, Chinese, Byzantine, and African civilizations. His descriptions reveal an effort to situate Islamic history within a wider global context and to understand historical developments through cross-cultural comparison (Darmawan & Chaniago, [2024](#)).

From the perspective of contemporary historiography, this approach resonates with the emergence of global history and connected history, both of which seek to transcend narrowly national or civilizational frameworks. Al-Mas'ūdī recognized that societies develop through interaction, exchange, and mutual influence rather than in isolation. His comparative perspective, therefore, represents an early form of global historical consciousness. The methodological value of this approach lies in its capacity to reveal broader patterns of human development and to encourage historical analysis that is sensitive to cultural diversity and intercivilizational connections.

Objectivity, Source Diversity, and Historiographical Critique

The question of objectivity is among the most important issues in evaluating Al-Mas'ūdī's historiographical legacy. Many scholars have praised his openness to diverse sources and his willingness to engage with non-Islamic traditions, including Greek philosophical works and the historical traditions of other civilizations (Musthafa, [2025](#)). Such practices undoubtedly distinguish him from more narrowly focused historians and demonstrate an unusual degree of intellectual openness for his time.

However, the concept of objectivity must be approached critically. Contemporary historiographical theory generally recognizes that complete objectivity is unattainable because every historian operates within specific cultural, intellectual, and ideological contexts. Al-Mas'ūdī was no exception. As a scholar of the Abbasid era and a product of the Islamic intellectual tradition, his interpretations were inevitably shaped by the assumptions and values of his environment. Consequently, his significance should not be measured according to modern standards of neutrality. Rather, his contribution lies in his effort to compare competing accounts, engage with diverse traditions, and avoid reducing historical reality to a single perspective. Within the framework of medieval Islamic historiography, this represented a remarkably sophisticated form of critical historical inquiry.

Environmental Perspectives and Historical Causation

Al-Mas'ūdī's attention to the dynamic relationship between the natural environment and human society represents one of the most significant aspects of his historiographical thought and contributes substantially to his enduring scholarly relevance. Throughout his writings, he consistently emphasized the influence of climate, geographical conditions, natural resources, and trade networks on the emergence, development, and transformation of civilizations. His analyses demonstrate a sophisticated awareness that historical change cannot be attributed solely to the actions of political leaders or ruling elites but must also be understood in relation to the environmental contexts within which societies operate. This perspective enabled him to move beyond conventional political narratives and toward a broader interpretation of historical processes shaped by multiple interacting factors. Such an approach illustrates the analytical depth that characterizes his contribution to classical Islamic historiography.

This perspective bears remarkable similarities to contemporary developments in *environmental history* and *historical geography*, fields that increasingly emphasize the role of ecological and spatial factors in shaping human societies. Modern historians frequently recognize the significance of environmental conditions in explaining patterns of economic transformation, migration, political realignment, and cultural development. Al-Mas'ūdī's discussions of geographical settings, therefore, extend far beyond descriptive accounts of places and landscapes; they constitute an early and systematic attempt to interpret historical developments through environmental causation. His work reflects an understanding that historical events emerge from the continuous interaction between human agency and material conditions, a principle that remains fundamental to contemporary historical scholarship. The enduring relevance of this insight underscores Al-Mas'ūdī's position as a pioneering thinker whose methodological approach anticipated several concerns of modern historiographical inquiry.

Historiographical Legacy and Intellectual Influence

The enduring significance of Al-Mas'ūdī's methodological innovations is evident in their influence on subsequent generations of historians. His integration of empirical observation, comparative inquiry, and multidisciplinary analysis contributed to the evolution of Islamic historiography beyond the boundaries of narrative chronicle writing. Later scholars, including Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn Khaldūn, benefited from methodological developments initiated by Al-Mas'ūdī (Tofaynudin & Amalia, [2024](#)).

Ibn Khaldūn's recognition of *Murūj al-Dhahab* as a remarkable and innovative work reflects the extent of Al-Mas'ūdī's influence on later historiographical thought (Tranggono & Nurwahidin, [2023](#)). Although Ibn Khaldūn developed a more systematic theory of historical causation, several methodological foundations can already be identified in Al-Mas'ūdī's writings, particularly his concern with social dynamics, environmental conditions, and comparative analysis. His contribution, therefore, extends beyond the transmission of historical information and encompasses a broader transformation in the conceptualization and production of historical knowledge.

Al-Mas'ūdī's historiographical thought remains relevant because it demonstrates that historical understanding requires more than the preservation of historical facts. Meaningful historical explanation emerges through the critical interpretation of evidence, the integration of diverse forms of knowledge, and the contextual analysis of human experience. His empirical orientation, interdisciplinary perspective, comparative methodology, and attention to environmental factors continue to resonate with contemporary historiographical concerns. For this reason, Al-Mas'ūdī should be regarded not only as a major historian of the medieval Islamic world but also as an important contributor to the long-term development of historical methodology.

CONCLUSION

Al-Mas'ūdī was a Muslim historian who applied empirical, multidisciplinary, and comparative methods of historical writing long before such approaches became standard in modern historiography. Through direct observation, geographical analysis, critical engagement with sources, and openness to various civilizations, he succeeded in transforming the writing of Islamic history from a predominantly chronological and transmission-based narrative into a more analytical and comprehensive intellectual enterprise. His historiographical method integrated history with geography, ethnography, environmental observation, and comparative civilizational analysis, thereby broadening the methodological foundations of historical inquiry within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

The findings of this study demonstrate that Al-Mas'ūdī's contribution extends beyond the production of historical narratives and lies fundamentally in the methodological innovations he introduced to Islamic historiography. His emphasis on observation, contextual interpretation, source evaluation, and interdisciplinary analysis influenced the subsequent development of historical writing in the Islamic world. It provided important foundations for later historians, particularly Ibn Khaldūn. This study contributes to historiographical scholarship by positioning Al-Mas'ūdī not merely as a source of historical information but as a methodological innovator whose approach helped shape the evolution of analytical historical thinking in classical Islamic civilization. The continuing relevance of his methods is evident in their compatibility with contemporary historiographical principles that emphasize evidence-based inquiry, source diversity, contextual analysis, and interdisciplinary perspectives.

This study is limited by its reliance on textual analysis of Al-Mas'ūdī's works and the interpretation of existing scholarly literature. As a result, the discussion remains primarily focused on historiographical thought rather than on a comprehensive examination of the broader intellectual reception of his ideas across different historical periods. Future research could undertake comparative studies between Islamic and Western historiographical traditions to further explore convergences and divergences in methodological development. More detailed textual analyses of *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar* could also provide deeper insights into the practical application of Al-Mas'ūdī's historiographical principles and their significance for the development of global historical thought.

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