

# Afternoon Map

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## Ottoman and Arab Maps of Palestine, 1880s-1910s

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Academics have long concerned themselves with maps of Palestine. But almost all of the published literature on Palestine maps- *including the publication of the maps themselves* - has dealt with those maps published in Europe by Europeans. But what about the Ottoman administrators who ruled over Palestine, and those (primarily Arabic speakers) that lived in Palestine? How did they imagine Palestine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century? The largest collection of 'Palestine' maps available on the web from the Ottoman period, for instance, some 166 maps - contains a whopping total of ZERO maps produced *in* the Ottoman Empire.[1] Below, I would like to offer a few very preliminary comments on how the Arabs and Ottomans cartographized Palestine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



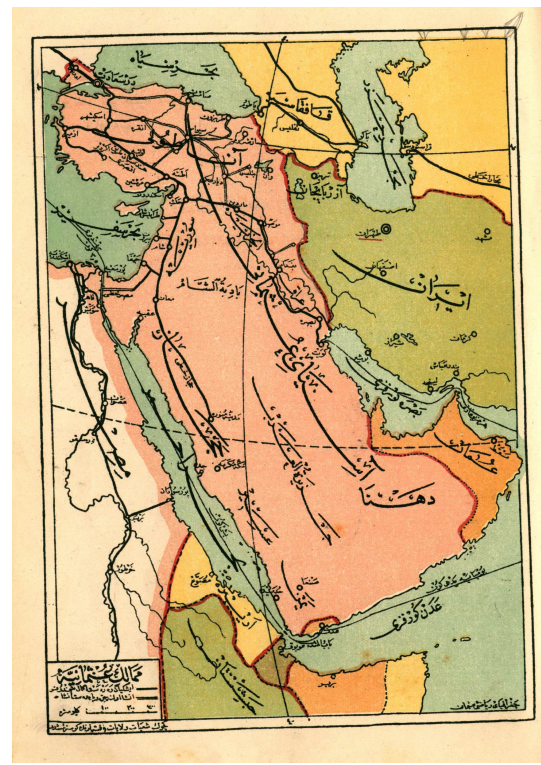
The first map in this collection was published in *Filastin Risalesi*, an official publication of the Ottoman army intended to be used as an officer's manual for the Palestine region. The manual itself is a social, topographical, demographic and economic survey of Palestine circa its time of publication, 1331 (Rumi).[2] It is actually a quite unremarkable work, and resembles much of the 'geographical' literature published in both Ottoman and Arabic in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The map itself, just as the rest of the book, is published in Ottoman

Turkish, and includes both topographical features, such as rivers and mountains (the darker the color, the higher the altitude), as well as all of the major towns and cities.

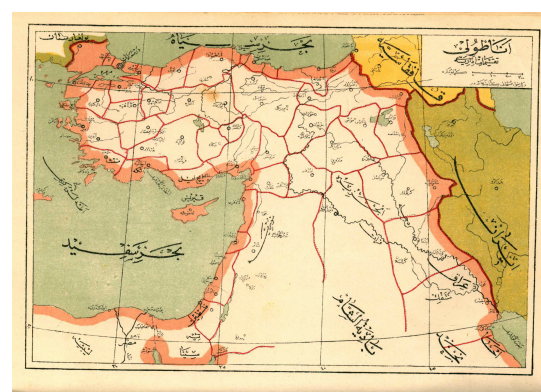
It is worth noting as well that the version of Palestine represented in this map bears heavy European influences. In much of the European geographical literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Gideon Biger tells us, Palestine extended from Rafah (south-east of Gaza) to the Litani River (now in Lebanon), from the sea in the west, to either the Jordan River or slightly east of Amman in the East.[3] This is more or less the Palestine that we see on the map. Notice, as well, that there are no lined-borders, only a very general sense of Palestine as a region. This was common for the period as well. Finally, the southern desert, or *Naqb* (Negev in Hebrew), is not included in the map, a common feature of European, Ottoman and Arab maps of the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. South of Beersheba was wilderness, both beyond the purview of Ottoman imperial authority, and therefore also beyond the purview of Palestine.



Now we shall turn to another series of maps published in book titled *Jughrafiya-i Osmani* (1332). The first map of Palestine in the book is actually not a map of Palestine per se, but a map of *Asya as-Sughra* (Asia Minor) *qabla al-Milad* (before the birth of Christ). This is quite an interesting map insofar as it attempts to portray the political geography of the region as it looked like in the pre-Christ period. Anyone with even a passing knowledge of European intellectual history of nineteenth century knows that what was interesting to write about, what was worth knowing, studying and digging up, was ancient, biblical history. Thus the European growth of 'bible studies' had a profound impact on Ottoman thinking, something that surfaces in this map here. Hence, the word 'Palestin' is written with the letter 'pe' in Ottoman Turkish - something I have only found on this map. It is also worth noting that the word 'Palestin' is written over only the very southern most area the settled part of the Levant (inside, even the city of Ahira (Jericho) is north of the 'Palestin.' This, again, reflects a classical geographical understanding of Palestine - which included the southern coastal strip from Gaza to Jaffa, or the territory inhabited by the Philistines, or 'Plishtim,' in Hebrew. Other noteworthy markers on the map include 'Samarya,' (Samaria), Damascus (Damascus), Palmyra, Tayr and Yupa (?).

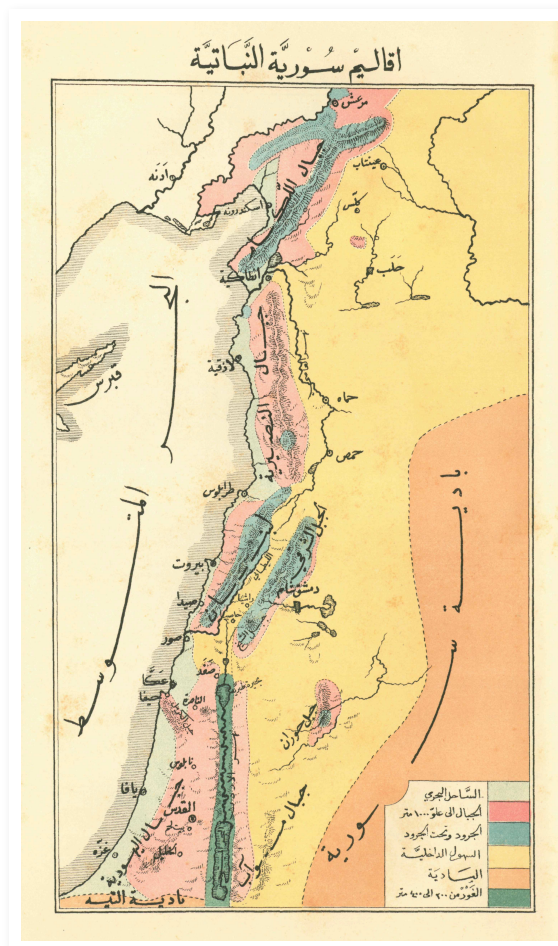


Our next map, like the rest in *Jughrafiya-i Osmani* (see 90, 101, 104, and 116), make no mention of Palestine anywhere. This was not uncommon for the period, as Palestine did not constitute an administrative district in the Ottoman Empire. Instead, the entire region is labeled 'Suriye' in all of these maps.



Now we turn to another map in *Jughrafiya-i Osmani* (after p. 98) which does in fact mention Palestine, now spelled in standard Ottoman (as well as Arabic) way rather than spelled as a transliteration of the Latin word Palestina. This map claims to be a map of the Ottoman administrative geography (taksimat-i idariya), which is interesting because, as we just stated above, *Filistin* was *NOT* an administrative unit in the Ottoman Empire. The region in which *Filistin* appears in this map (in between the two horizontal lines) was in fact the *Mutasarıflık* (*Mutasarifiyya*, in Arabic) of Jerusalem, of *Kudüs-i Şerif*. Indeed, it was not uncommon in both Ottoman and Arabic geographical thinking to regarding 'Palestine' as synonymous with this administrative district.<sup>[4]</sup> This was a curious blend of the way the Ottoman administered the region - and the way the Europeans labeled them.





The final map in our collection comes from George Post's *Nabat Suriya wa-Filastin wa-al-Qatr al-Misri wa-Bawadiha* (Beirut, n.p., 1884), 411 (The Flora of Syria, Palestine, and the Egyptian Country and its Desert). The title of the map itself is: *The Botanical Climate of Syria* (Aqlim Suriyya al-Nabatiyya). Note that *Filastin* does not appear anywhere on the map. Again, insofar as this is a translation of a book by one of most well-regarded botanists and geographers of Palestine in the nineteenth century, we once again see just how much the Arabs, in this case, came under the influence of their European counterparts. Indeed, this is one of the first books ever published in the Arab language which included the word 'Filastin' in the title of the work, and, low and behold, it is a translation from the English!

The editors of the OHP have urged me to include a cautionary note to nationalist ideologues on all sides of the spectrum: the 'idea' of palestine in Arab and Ottoman thinking indeed bears heavy European influences, but this a point of scholarly interest, and has no political implications of any kind. Nationalists love to point to the 'indigenouness' of their own nations and national territories -- their originality, their time-immemorialness. But this 'urge' to 'defend' the 'taintlessness' (as if being influenced by Europeans is somehow 'tainted') of their own national spaces, to claim they were not 'mere' 'knee-jerk' 'reactions' to European ideas is itself profoundly reactionary, and embraces everything wrong with nationalism: its claims to ethnic or ideational purity; its ideas of exclusivity, gloriousness and ever-lasting-ness: these are dangerous ideas and have been at the origins of some of the most deadly and dangerous plots in all of human history. Yes, Europe came to dominate the globe in the nineteenth century, with their bibles, guns and MAPS.

[1] This would be The David Rumsey Collection.

[2] For a more detailed discussion of the pamphlet, See Salim Tamari's, "Shifting Ottoman Conceptions of Palestine: Part 1: Filistin Risalesi and the two Jamals," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 2011(47)

[3] Gideon Biger, "Where was Palestine? Pre-World War I perception, AREA" *Journal of the Institute of British Geographers* 13(2)(1981): 153-160.

[4] See, for instance, Sabri Sharif Abd al-Hadi *Jughrafiyat Suriyya wa Filastin al-Tabi'iyya* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Ahliyya, 1923), 32; Butrus al-Bustani, *Da'irat al-Mar'arif* 10 (1898), 196; Yehoshua Porath, "The Political Awakening of the Palestinian Arabs and their Leadership Towards the End of the Ottoman Period," in *Studies on Palestine During the Ottoman Period*, Moshe Ma'oz (ed.) (Jerusalem: The Magnes, Press, 1986), 351-381; Johann Büsso, *Hamidian Palestine: Politics and Society in the District of Jerusalem 1872-1908* (Leiden; Boston : Brill, 2011), 479.

Zachary J. Foster at [3:33AM](#)

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