

The Development of a Palestinian Entity Before Balfour During the Late Ottoman Period



THE BALFOUR JERUSALEM PROJECT
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Palestine and Syria in the Ottoman Imagination



- In the Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire, Bruce Masters asserts flatly the “Palestine did not exist in the geographical imagination of the Ottomans”. He further claims that Palestine, as a geographic entity, was kept alive in the Ottoman period by Biblical scholars, imperial cartographers, and Jewish references to Eretz Yisrail
- But this claim is not born by the evidence. From the beginning of the 17th century Ottoman cartographers, writing in Turkish, Farsi and Arabic used the designation Filistin in reference to the southern part of Bilad ashSham.
- This was a practice which followed the Ummayyad Abbasid designation of Jund Filistin (Ramleh), and Fatimid designation of Ard Filistin—both deriving their terminology from the Roman Byzantine divisions of Palestina Prima and Secunda.
- Ottoman Administrative Divisions of Syria, shifted boundaries but they were collectively referred to in the geographic lexicon as Syria and Palestine, until the special province of Kudus Serif was created in 1876, which became synonymous with ‘Filistin’

Ottoman Visions of the Arab Provinces



- This portrayal of the Arab as reactionary elements, and WWI assessment of the Syrian Hijazi alliance as ‘an Arab stab in the bank’ created a stereotyped notion of the Arab and Syrian territories as a backward hinterland of Anatolia

But this portrayal is far from accurate, and does not reflect the evolving notion of the Syrian and Arab provinces as can be gleaned from the rich repertoire of Ottoman cartography, and ethnographic description of those regions

Military Manuals and Ethnography



- Military Manuals were extensively used in WWI to guide the officers into the nature of enemy territory and its population. These manuals were issued by German, French, Russian, British, and Ottoman commands to their officers. They involved cartographers, historians, and geographers
- In *Filisitin Risalesi* (Jerusalem Military Press, 1331/1915) issued by the Eight Army Corps in Turkish, we have a rich treatise on the population, contours, and logistics of the Palestine Front—the major frontierland with Suez and British Egypt.



Ottoman Cartography

Ottoman cartography has a rich tradition of surveying the world of early modernity, beginning with Piri Reis magnificent map of the America (1513) which contained accurate descriptions of the newly discovered Western hemisphere based on Columbus' second voyage to the new world



الحاج أحمد محيي الدين بييري (1470-1555) Piri Reisi

- In the work of Admiral, Geographer Piri Reis the *cartography of the Eastern Mediterraenaen (Kitab al Bahriyyeh, 1521-1525)* the cities of Palestine and Syria were drawn for military strategic purposes. The area from Latakia to Gaza appear as the coastal region of Sem Serif. With Beirut, Damascus and Jerusalem prominently displayed.



Borders and Frontierland

تحفة الكبار في أسفار البحار

In Tuhfat al Kibar Kateb Celebi, the Istanbuli Cartographer and Traveller constructed a workable navigational Atlas for the extants of the Ottoman Empire and the Mediterranean.

His charts for the Eastern Mediterranean and the Arab provinces included rich ethnographic commentary on the customs and conditions of their societies

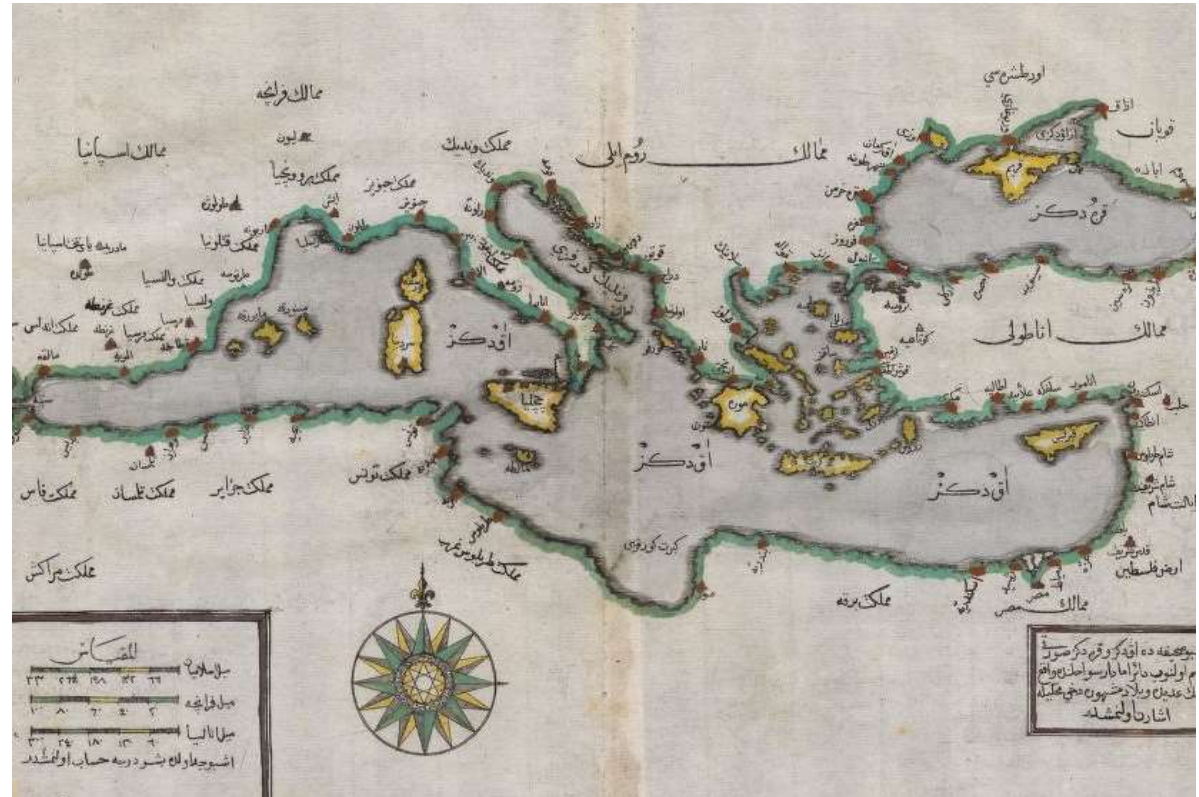




Ard Filistin in Iyalat al Sham

Kateb Celebi

Tuhfat al Kibar





Cedid Atlas 1802: Bar esh-Sham

Cedid Atlas (1802/3) was a landmark of Ottoman modern cartography. Authored by Mahmud Raif Effendi and published by the Istanbul College of Engineering it heralded the new administrative reforms of Sultan Selim III reforms known as Nizam Cedid

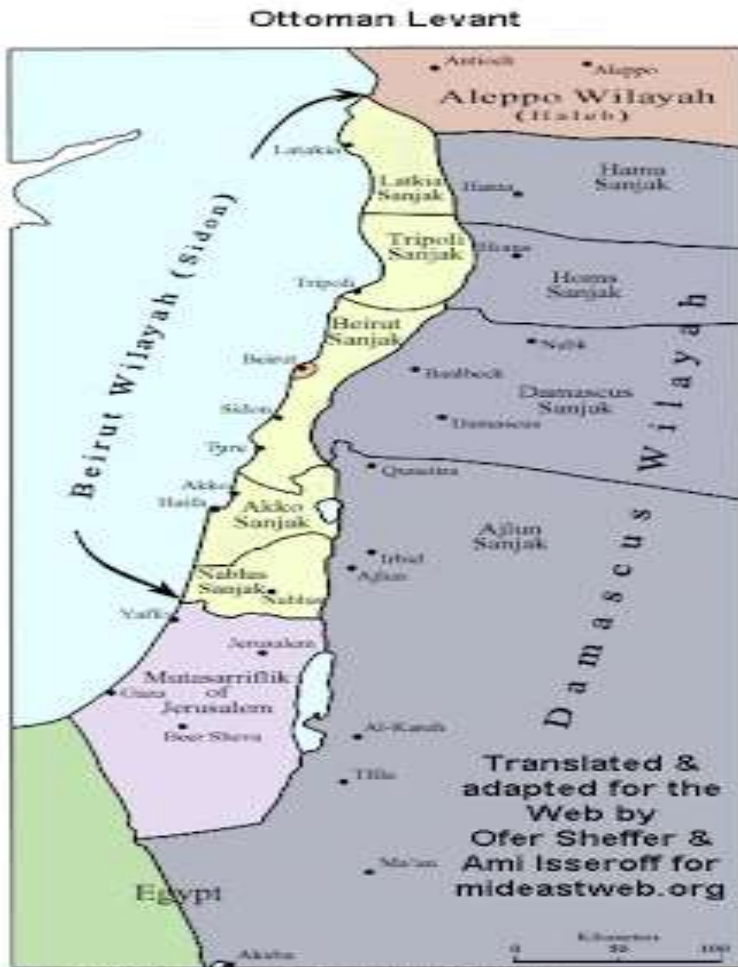
Source: Map Dept. in LoC



1872: The Creation of a Palestine Province

The Merger of Three Sanjaks

- Following Egyptian withdrawal from Syria the Ottomans created a greater Jerusalem province, called Palestine under the governorship of Thurayya Pasha, the governor of Damascus
- The New Province was created by the merger of the Sanjaks of Akka and Nablus into the existing autonomous Province of Jerusalem (Mutassariflik of Kudus Sherif)
- The Objective was to consolidate and expand Jerusalem to protect it from Western objectives to create a separate protectorate under European suzerainty



The Geography department, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Administrative division under Ottoman rule
between the years 1864-1871



1912 Filistin and Tih Sahrasi

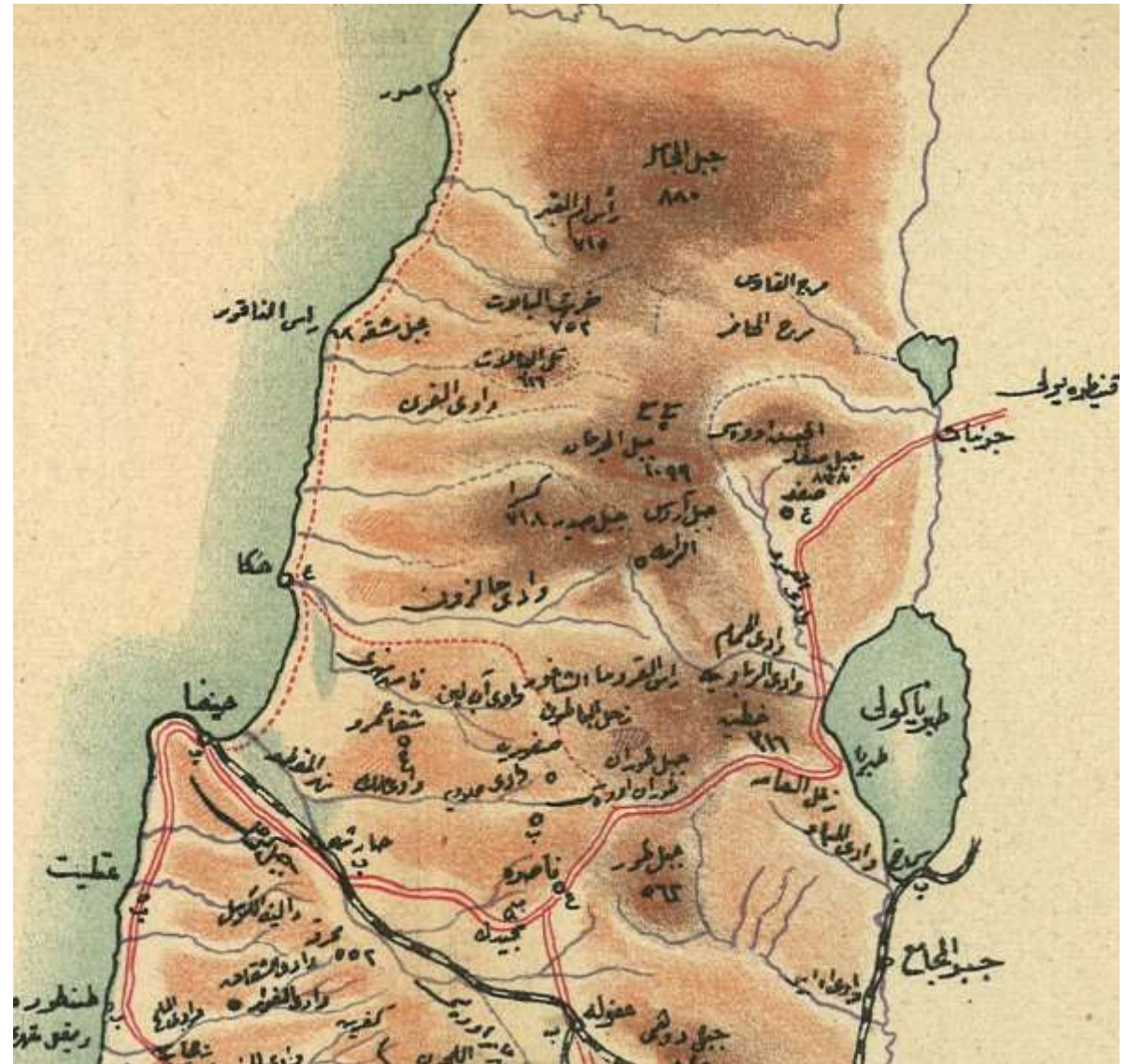
This is the first official Ottoman map which identifies Palestine as a country equivalent to the Mutasarafilig of Kudus Serif. Note that Palestine's Western borders are the Suez Canal which separates Ottoman Africa from Ottoman Asia



Palestine redrawn 1915

A crucial development in the mapping of Palestine in Filistin Risalesi (Jerusalem 1915) is the redrawing of the northern maps of the country to include Haifa, Akka, and Sur (Tyre). The northern borders of Palestine in this military map is the Litani River

Source: Weidner



What conclusions emerge from these maps?

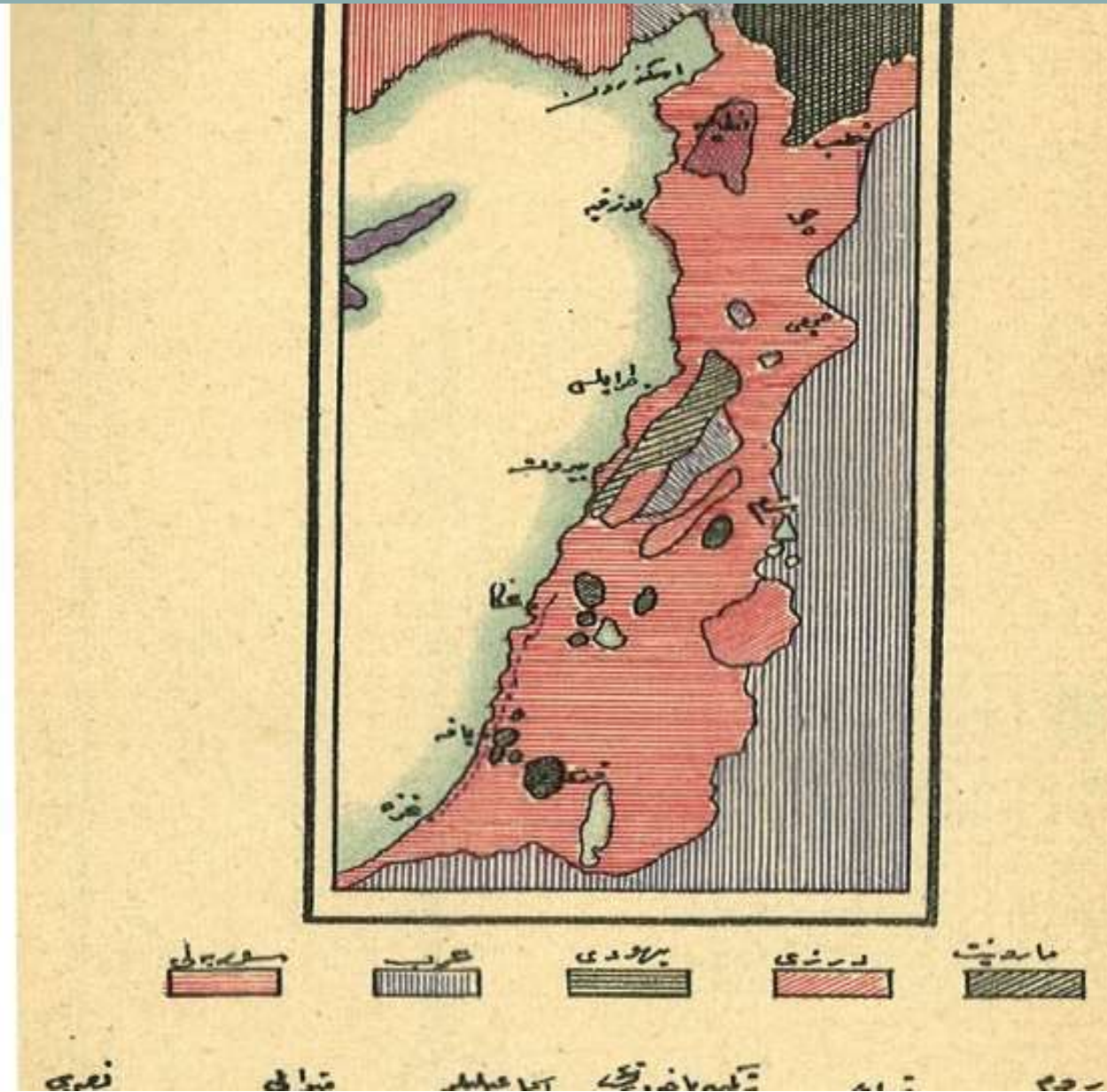


- From the 16th century to WWI Ottoman Cartography was driven by both commercial and military-strategic logistics
- Ottoman cartographers paid special attention to Italy, France, the Mediterranean region, and to the Syrian Coast and Hijaz
- Ottoman Cartography was mostly associated with a detailed ethnographies of the regions mapped. This was a tradition started with Haji Khalifah (16th century) and Kateb Celebi (17th century)
- For Syria: Ottoman cartography, beginning with Kateb Celebi, always drew Filistin (Palestine) as the southern part of Bilad al Sham
- Ottoman Sham (Sem) shifted boundaries and was made of four or five provinces (Beirut, Halep, Suriya, Kudus, Balqa)
- As we come close to WWI closer attention to Filistin as the southern flanks of the Ottoman Asia, and the defensive borderland of the Suez Canal

Ethnographic Mapping

One significant feature of Ottoman military manuals is the rich topographic and ethnographic mapping of the the regional populations we encounter.

The Ottoman conception of the Arab Provinces in the Military manual of the Eighth Army reveals a number of assumptions about how Istanbul saw the 'frontierlands'. Although the categories of 'Arabs and Turks' existed in the popular, and state-military lexicon, these were not the categories used to designate divisions of the population. Rather these population maps show an overlaying categories of ethnic, linguistic, religious, and tribal social categories





Tamimi and Bahjat's *Beirut Vilayeti*

An Ottoman
Ethnographic Policy
Manual, (Istanbul 1914)

- The main logic of these categories is to provide political administrators and military commanders and officers with a social mapping of the Ottoman 'frontier' provinces in order to determine disciplinary, coopting, and 'developmental' policy. In war time it was a crucial road map helping the officer corps (who were mostly serving a distance from their native communities) determine the friendly from the unfriendly populations.
- Notable examples of the effective use of these manuals can be seen in Muhamad Bahjat and Rafiq Tamimi's *Beirut Vilayeti* (1914) probably the best work of Ottoman ethnography undertaken by two CUP functionaries as an official social-demographic manual for policy makers. It is quite illustrative that this work was published simultaneously in Arabic and Turkish in 1914, just before the breaking of the Great War.
- (Also in the essays of Ekrem Bey outlining policies towards the tribal population of southern Palestine)



Arabs, Zurban, and Syrians

- As far as the Arab population is concerned the most important distinction made by the treatise is between Syrian (*Suri*) and Arab (*Arep*), with the former constituting the bulk of the coastal population including both urban Syrians and peasants. The term Arab was reserved to the 'tribal' formations east of Salt and Hawran, and extending to the periphery of major urban centres of Iraq. Thus we have three categories of 'Arabs' in Ottoman thinking of the war period: *The Arabs of Hijaz* and Iraqi tribesmen who 'betrayed' the Ottoman state by allying themselves with the English; *the Arabs of Libya, Egypt and Morocco*, who were seen as heroically fighting the Italians, French and British imperialists to join their Ottoman motherland; and the *tribal Arabs* "zurban" who lived east of Syria. An amorphous distinction was made between the Syrians (whose forces fought with the Ottomans in Galipoli and Suez) on the one hand, and what might be called generic 'Arabs' on the other, who were seen as untamed and unreliable. Clearly this distinction was considerably an *ideological category* and did not always have conceptual coherence, since after the great Arab Revolt, many "Syrians" joined the Arab rebellion under the banner of Arab nationalism.
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- Enough Syrians (including Lebanese, Palestinians and Transjordanians) however remained within the ranks of the imperial order to lend some legitimacy to this distinction. It should be added here that this ambiguity about 'who is an Arab', was not peculiar to the Turkish political and military elite. The word 'Arab', indicating Bedouins and tribal formations, was common to many, if not most intellectuals in Egypt and Bilad Ash-Sham, for much of the 19th century and the first decades of the twentieth century. From the perspective of the imperial capital (one hesitates to say 'the Turkish side', since the Istanbul intelligentsia was not entirely Turkish) the situation was equally complex. Despite Arab (as well as Greek and Armenian) nationalist attacks on the Turanic tendencies emerging within the ranks of the CUP, the idea of Turkishness, for much of the earlier period, was problematic for the new Ottomans. As Sukru Hanioğlu states "the young Turks refrained from formulating a nationalist theory involving race during the formative years of their movement...[t]here is little doubt that this was because, in the Darwinist racial hierarchy, Turks were always assigned to the lowest ranks".
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How the war changed notions of ethnicity

Ethnicities
'Nationalized' and
became a basis for
mobilization

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- The view from the imperial center, however, was different. In her review of the Ottoman revolutionary press Palmira Brummit throws significant light on ethnic stereotyping in the waning years of Ottoman rule. Only the Greeks, Bulgarians, and Albanians were ethnically cast in political caricatures (mostly through dress). Arabs were cast negatively only when the circle around Abdul Hamid's corrupt advisors (the 'monkeys'), were associated with the old reactionary order. Otherwise the "Arabs" were often seen as the victims of Italian and British imperialism (in Libya and Egypt), struggling to free themselves and (presumably) to restore Ottoman rule.
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- This situation changed drastically after the Arab rebellion of Sherif Hussein in Hijaz in 1916, when Ahmad Cemal Pasha, and his publicist Falih Rifqi (Atay) began to talk about the "Arab betrayal" and the "stab in the back" (Falih Rifki Atay and Cemal Pasha) A distinction continued to be made however between Syrians and Arabs, especially when Syrian soldiers had fought valiantly in the defense of Anatolia in Jannak Qal'a and Galipoli. Brummett, as well as Kayali, note that distinctions within the press were made on the basis of regional, rather than ethnic affinities. In examining satirical cartoons Brummett notes: "...other than in [the] anti-imperialist form, the 'Arab' is a it hard to find in these Ottoman cartoons. He does not appear as a rabid separatist, demanding an Arab nation from the new regime. He does not appear, as he will in a later era in the West, as a catch-all symbol of terrorism and trouble. Indeed, one can scan hundreds of Ottoman cartoons without finding a figure who can be irrevocably tagged as "Arab". For that matter, one can scan hundreds of cartoons without finding a figure tagged as a "Turk", except wehre "Turk" stands as a synonym for Ottoman in general and particularly for an Ottoman as distinct from European." But it was within few years, during the war, in which this identification of the Ottoman *with* the Turk, that started a process of differentiations and exclusions which leading to the undermining the legitimacy of the term Ottoman as all-inclusive concept