

Perceiving Palestine

British Visions of the Holy Land

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Abstract

This article examines depictions of Palestine from above in the form of maps, high-elevation drawings and paintings, and aerial photography. Tracing the representations of Palestine from the mid-nineteenth century until the early twentieth, we explore how the imposition of a biblical landscape, supported by modern mapping surveys and the latest biblical scholarship, came to re-shape the Holy Land in the British imagination. Moreover, the imposition of an ancient past largely erased the modern landscape, forcing it to conform to set images of Palestine as it was and must be again. Looking at a variety of media allows us to see common images and tropes, with the landscape of aerial photography made to conform to a biblical vision that emerged from mapping surveys. A British biblical self-identification that often went hand-in-hand with settling Palestine with Jews, and increasing imperial interests and involvement in the region, created a form of imperial eschatology, fed and supported by these depictions of the Holy Land that blurred the lines between the past, present, and future.

Keywords

Britain; Biblical fantasy; Palestine Exploration Fund; archaeology; maps; paintings; aerial photography.

Introduction

In the summer of 1838, the British government appointed a vice-consul to reside in the city of Jerusalem for the first time.¹ Taking advantage of the new political order created in the region by the occupation

of Syria and Palestine by the Ottoman ruler of Egypt, Mehmed Ali Pasha, the British sought to expand their political and economic influence in the Levant.² The man appointed to the job was William Tanner Young, a protégé of the Earl of Shaftesbury and a fervent supporter of “British Restorationism,” that is, the idea that the second coming of Christ could be achieved through a “restoring” of the world’s Jews to the Holy Land, under British protection. Before departing for Palestine, Young wrote to the Foreign Secretary, Viscount Palmerston, proposing that he take a tour of his new jurisdiction, ostensibly with a view to report back to London on its trade potential and the nature of his duties.³ In his letter, he enclosed what he called “the latest map of that country.”⁴ The map in question (figure 1), published in January 1836 by the noted cartographer R.H. Laurie, includes Young’s hand-drawn route around the country, taking in the port of Jaffa, Jerusalem and its environs, and the northern centers of Tiberias and Safad. His focus was always on understanding the Jews of the land (despite the Palestinian population comprising over 95 percent) in order to offer them British protection for both commercial and eschatological reasons. Yet the map is not a map of Ottoman Palestine, but of an imagined biblical landscape. While geographically accurate, the provincial divisions were not of Ottoman administrative units (*vilayets*, *livas*, or *mutasarrifs*), but the supposed territories of the biblical Twelve Tribes of Israel. Its two inset maps showed the wanderings of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan, and a “Plan of Jerusalem and its Environs,” depicting the city in the time of the Jewish temple, rather than the city as it stood in 1838.

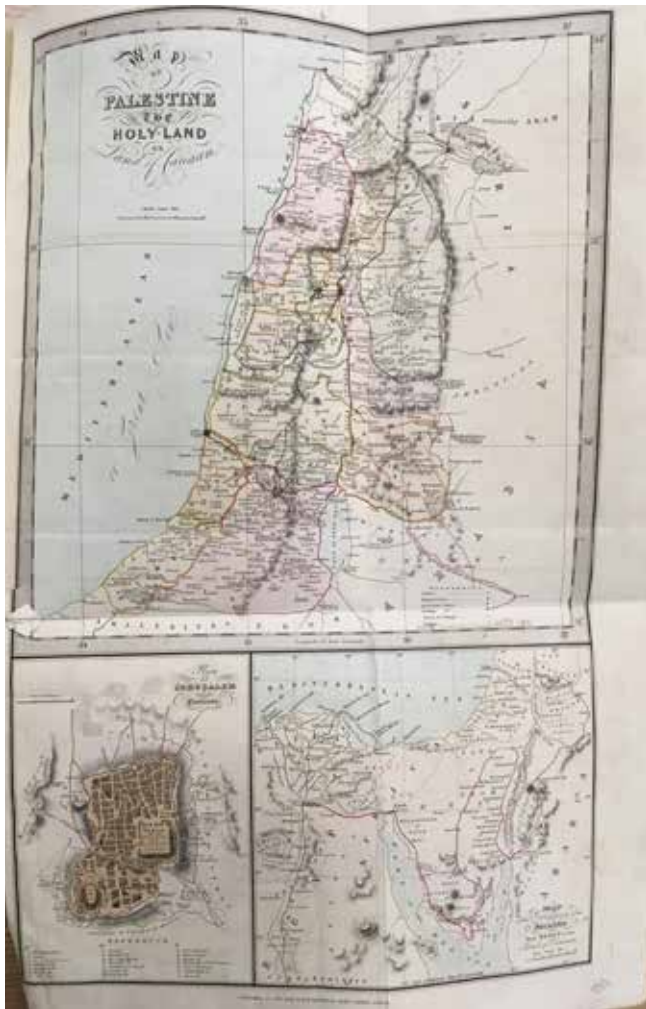


Figure 1. Map of Palestine and the Holy Land (1836) with William Tanner Young’s tour route and annotations in grey (1838), The National Archives of the UK, FO78/340.

Young's map of Palestine provides an important entry point to understanding how the British envisioned Palestine from the sky in the century that would follow. A genuine political and commercial interest in the land of Palestine in its present situation consistently converged with a desire to recreate Palestine *as it was* in a distant but living scriptural and archaeological past. This paper will trace the British relationship to Palestine through how Palestine's landscape has been depicted and represented from above, primarily through maps, but also through high elevation and aerial artwork and photography. These two-dimensional images are more than simple illustrations, but served to shape and layer British understandings of Palestine as a space where ideas and ideals could transform realities. Studying maps and other images of Palestine from above help us to understand the relationship between reality and idealization in British depictions of Palestine. These tensions are evident if we apply the framework conceived in Henri Lefebvre's influential *The Production of Space*, a key text in the "spatial turn" in the historical discipline.⁵ He proposed a triad of spaces delineating space into: "spatial practice" in which daily practices and routines shaped a given space, "representations of space" where spaces are conceptualized and conceived in forms like maps and models, and "representational spaces" in which spaces are imagined and theorized.⁶ In the case of the British and Palestine, scriptural and historical understandings of the Holy Land (the representational space) shaped the ways in which Palestine was depicted (the representations of space), but these often had little in common with late Ottoman Palestine as a set of living and working urban and rural spaces (its spatial practice). The images the British produced and reproduced of Palestine in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries created a particular set of spaces that attempted to change and appropriate Palestine in Britain's own image, moving images, labels, and concepts from being ideas and representations on the pages of maps, to influencing the political and physical structures of Palestine itself.

Views from the Seas, the Mountains, and the Heavens

Young's arrival at his post in Jerusalem in late 1838 marked the start of a period of intense British activity in Palestine, with mapping a key part of understanding and shaping the region's geography.⁷ This was in part engendered by direct British military involvement in the region, with the Oriental Crisis of 1840 seeing naval actions against the forces of Mehmed Ali along the Palestinian and Syrian coasts. The mission of the Royal Navy in the Eastern Mediterranean was accompanied by cartographers, who attempted to accurately depict the Palestinian littoral and parts of the interior in a series of surveys sent to London in 1840 and 1841, building on earlier observations in the 1830s.⁸ Some of these maps were drawn to show the destruction of British bombardments to coastal fortifications like those in Acre, with two views provided, one a bird's-eye view from above, another a ship's-eye view of the landscape.⁹ Others aimed to provide practical military maps that gave detailed information on a variety of features, such as an 1841 depiction of Gaza that not only showed military encampments

but roads, religious buildings, wells, and orchards.¹⁰ The British military expedition to Palestine resulted in a wealth of cartographic productions that aimed to survey the region beyond purely military concerns, including relief maps by Frederick Holt Robe and triangulations by J.F.A. Symonds.¹¹ The new emphasis on precision would mix with existing biblical tropes to use modern maps to illustrate both the past and the potential future of the Holy Land.

Maps of Jerusalem, always an object of fascination for British cartographers, are a key example of how maps of Palestine were transformed by the new scientific surveys, with William Aldrich's map of the city sketched after the Egyptian-Ottoman Oriental Crisis showing the modern layout and road system but with scriptural labels.¹² Among the biblical sites, however, can be found the "Site of the Protestant Church New Building" opposite the Ottoman barracks and adjacent to the British consulate, a plot that was earmarked for a new Protestant place of worship in the Holy City. The addition of British features to the Jerusalem cityscape in particular demonstrated both the cultural and political aspirations of the United Kingdom in the Holy Land. In 1845, Consul Young sent another annotated map to London, this time his copy of the architect Frederick Catherwood's map of Jerusalem, one of the earliest survey maps of the city (figure 2).¹³ As well

as creating a detailed, accurate map of Jerusalem, Catherwood also created a high-elevation panorama from the vantage point of "Pilate's House, and now residence of Turkish [sic] Governor."¹⁴ Details of the contemporary city mixed with biblical sites, and on his copy Young enthusiastically noted the "real" place of the Pool of Sihon, and added on the map in pencil the locations of the Greek, American, and British burial grounds to the list of significant Christian sites.



Figure 2. "Plan of Jerusalem by F. Catherwood" (1835) with William Tanner Young's annotations (1845), The National Archives of the UK, FO78/626.

The increased British political, military, and intellectual presence in Palestine from the 1830s onwards was driven in no small part by religious interests. The new expertise gained by the various military and naval surveys allowed for more detailed and convincing depictions of biblical sites and stories, and their modern state, for presentation to a domestic audience. Cartographers and artists provided new and comprehensive views of the Holy Land from a variety of vantage points which, when combined, allowed for the consolidation of particular images of Palestine. These views tend to fall into three categories: maps accompanied by relief drawings from ships; high-elevation illustrations, often accompanied by maps; and historical maps, sometimes with insets.

Given the maritime nature of many of the military mapping missions in the nineteenth century, nautical charts and off-shore panoramas were a common and effective way of visualizing Palestine both from above and in three dimensions. A fine example is a depiction of the Bay of Haifa drawn by Lieutenant F.G.D. Bedford of the Royal Navy in 1862, with detailed surveys of the liquid and terrestrial coasts, and plans of the cities of Haifa and Acre (figure 3).¹⁵ The map pays close attention to contemporary scenery, showing elevation, roads, orchards, and farms, as well as careful plans of the two towns and their ancient and modern monuments. This is accompanied on the page by two beautiful drawings of Haifa and Acre (‘Akka) – which, unusually, is called by its Arabic name – as viewed from the ship, with illustrations of the town and its surrounding countryside, allowing the observer to combine the two views to get a better understanding of the physicality of the land beyond the flatness of regular nautical maps. These military depictions began to produce a corpus of knowledge on Palestine that would provide a scientifically accurate template over which the ideas and fantasies of scripture, history, and archaeology could be overlaid.

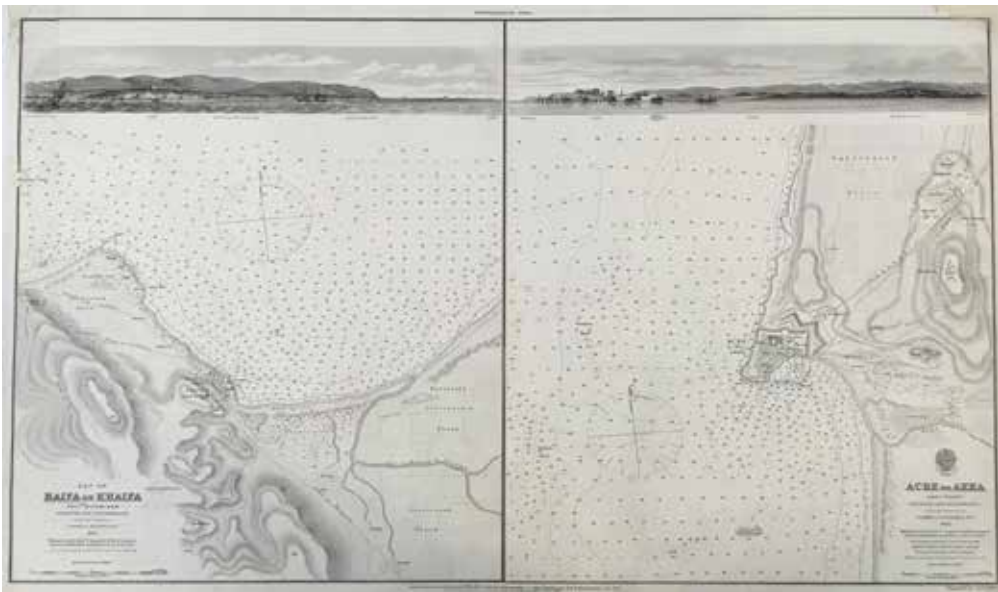


Figure 3. “Mediterranean – Syria: Bay of Haifa or Khaifa / Acre or Akka” (1863), British Library, Maps SEC.5 (1242).

Cartography in this form could only do so much for the imagination, and attempts to give flesh to the bones of maps of Palestine resulted in some rather stunning illustrated texts. One notable example is *Syria, the Holy Land & Asia Minor Illustrated*, three volumes of detailed descriptions by John Carne and 120 illustrations of the Ottoman Mediterranean, with a particular focus on Syria and Palestine.¹⁶ Volume 3 includes a map of the region covered, with Palestine depicted in a rather dated fashion with a jagged coastline – unlike the recent maritime surveys that tended to give the coast a smoother run. Here too the divisions of the Twelve Tribes of Israel are noted, together with an inset map of Jerusalem seemingly based on Catherwood.¹⁷ The book combines this cartographic reference with text and illustrations that aim to transport the reader to the area described. Several of these illustrations are high-elevation, with one of the most impressive being a view of the “Plain of the Jordan, Looking Towards the Dead Sea.”¹⁸ As this is a multimedia source, the map (figure 4), the illustration (figure 5), and the text (of which the following is an extract) need to be considered together:



Figure 4. Detail of map of Palestine in John Carne, *Syria, the Holy Land & Asia Minor Illustrated*, 3 vols. (London/Paris: Fisher, Son & Co., 1840).



Figure 5. Detail from “Plain of the Jordan, Looking Towards the Dead Sea” in Carne, *Syria, the Holy Land & Asia Minor Illustrated*, vol. 3, 77.

The surface of the plain, for many miles before you arrive at the Dead sea, is dry and withered, without a shrub, a flower, or even a blade of grass. Higher up, the verdure that fringes the river is delightful to the eye many a tree, many a wild flower, many a beautiful shrub is there; sweet is their shadow and perfume beside the everlasting stream. This view appears to be taken in the summer, when the Jordan is shrunk within its bed, and flows shallow and languidly. In winter, its waters are full and rapid, often on a level with their bank. The Bedouins come from the mountains to the pastures on its banks; their dark tents are pitched in a group, or scattered over the plain, whose solitude they people for a time: when their fire is kindled, they gather round it at their evening meal, and converse with wild gestures; then kneel down in the open air before the tent-door and invoke the Prophet, where the Israelite once poured out his sorrows before the Lord. The faint sound of their voices, heard amidst the stillness from afar, is hushed, and deep silence again falls on the plain. Each Arab is armed with a long spear and a matchlock gun, and it is not safe to travel through this plain without a guard; hardly a single traveller has traversed it from Jericho to the Sea of Galilee, though it would repay the trouble and the danger.¹⁹

The map, the high-elevation image, and the text invoke the senses, transforming the observer to a participant, transporting them to the Holy Land to experience its timeless landscape, biblical resonances, and contemporary wildernesses and dangers. Similar high-elevation views of Acre, Jaffa, Mount Carmel and the Bay of Haifa, the Wilderness of Ziph, the Sea of Galilee, and Jerusalem provided a common theme of showing Palestine as it was in the late 1830s, but highlighting the landscape's continuity with the biblical past.²⁰ Illustrated texts like Carne's would provide a model for later photographic and stereoscopic tours of the Holy Land in both their content and experiential tone. They allowed readers to view Palestine from different angles, embellishing cartographic depictions with high-elevation views. These images created new understandings of and engagements with historical biblical narratives, and also helped to shape and reify understandings of Palestine in terms of contemporary theology as a potentially rich, but frequently neglected, land awaiting the "right" inhabitants to bring its beauty back to life. The relationship between aerial and high elevation views of the Holy Land based on scripture, and British attempts to shape the flow of eschatological time, is particularly evident in such productions, allowing the viewer to fill the space with their own ideas and images.

The relationship of temporality to depictions of Palestine from above became increasingly linked to a desire to control that space through ever more accurate cartography. A number of cartographic sources in the British archives provide historical narratives, sometimes on multiple timelines, as a way of not simply representing Palestine from above, but using such representations to convey a religious and political narrative. Some are simple religious educational depictions of biblical geography, such as Frances Wood's map of Palestine with biblical cities and other landmarks, intended for use in Sunday schools, or a photolithographic plan showing the territories of the Twelve Tribes for use in schools.²¹

Many maps, however, combined biblical and contemporary narratives. Two of particular interest are from the British Library's collection. The first is a "relievo" map that is a three-dimensional relief or embossed map, published in 1845 and dedicated to Queen Victoria.²² It divides the Holy Land into biblical entities, such as Philistia and Judea while showing the modern road network, and includes a detailed list from the map of "towns and villages in the Holy Land which have been identified," giving their scriptural name and modern Arabic equivalent. The second map shows even more clearly how maps were used by the British to convey different layers of history, and in doing so provided an immediacy to biblical space and time. Entitled "A New Historical Map of Palestine" (figure 6), it was published in 1838 and drawn by R. Creighton, its subtitle indicating it was "intended to illustrate the geography of the Holy Scriptures."²³ On the sides of the map are four illustrations, of the Tower of Babel, Grand Cairo, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem "in its present state." Two inset maps are intended to contrast Jerusalem in its biblical glory and its contemporary distress. Palestine itself is colored and divided according to the boundaries of the Twelve Tribes, with place names given a combination of

biblical, classical, and modern Arabic names. The landscape is intersected by a number of lines that weave across time as well as space, notably with the near parallel routes of the journey of the Children of Israel in their wanderings towards Canaan, the journeys of recent European travelers, and the pilgrimage route of contemporary Muslims undertaking the hajj (figure 7). This blurring of temporal lines furthered the political and religious message that the British held the keys unlocking the biblical potential of Palestine. Maps were one part of a knowledge production that created an intertwined destiny of a Palestine awaiting divinely-guided liberation and a British Empire that, above all the world's powers, looked best placed to achieve it.

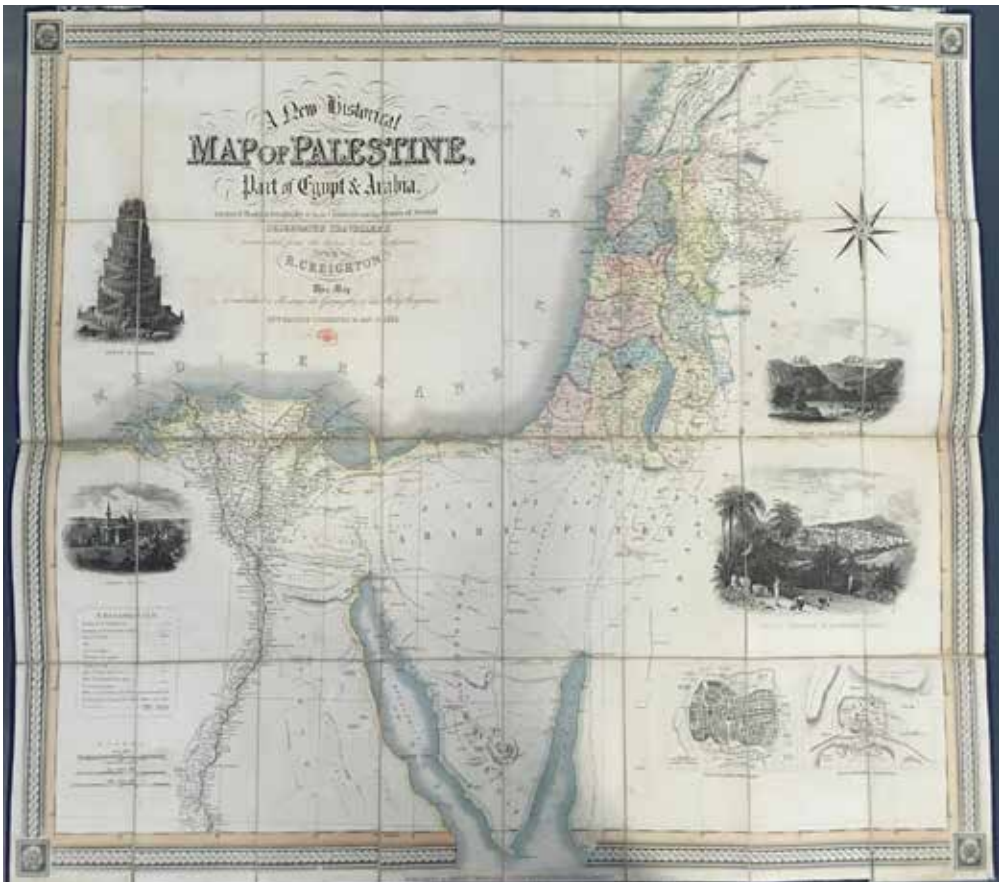


Figure 6. "A New Historical Map of Palestine" (1838), British Library, Maps 16.a.1.

As Debbie Lisle has argued, maps do not exist on their own in an intellectual or cultural vacuum, but rather "are always discursive; they make sense only to the extent that they are bolstered by already circulating myths, messages, and meanings about the

world.”²⁴ Mapping, she argues, is more than simply a linear journey towards Enlightenment values of accuracy, reason, and objectivity. Lisle ties her analysis with the approach of Derek Gregory, that while historians have often used maps (and indeed other visual sources) as mere illustration, their value as historical sources lies in understanding their relationship to what Gregory terms “systems of power knowledge.”²⁵ A crucial example of this is the Survey of Western Palestine, a monumental project to map the Holy Land, funded by the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) and

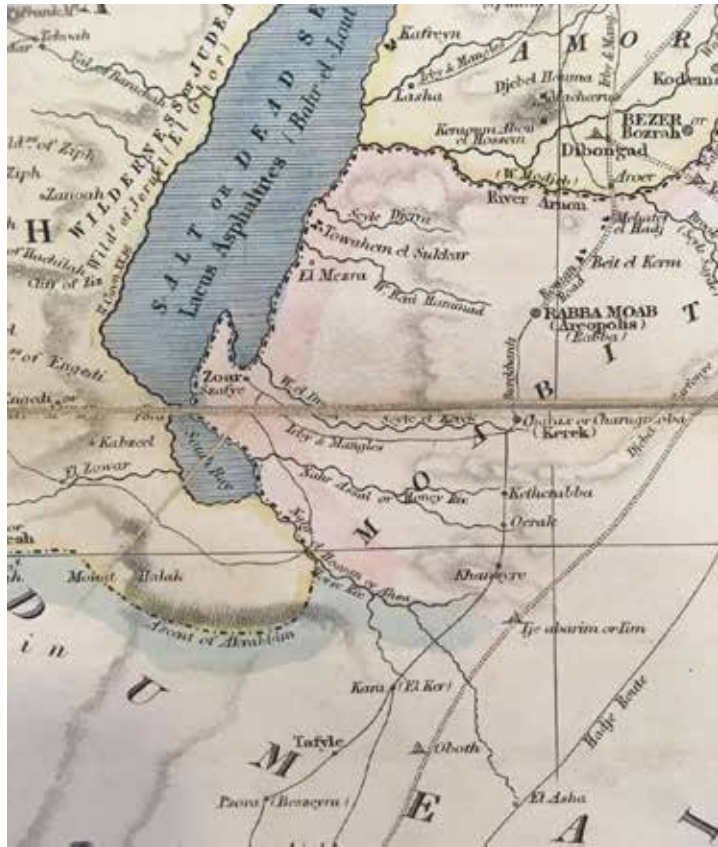


Figure 7. Detail from “A New Historical Map of Palestine” (1838) showing the travels of Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, the wanderings of the Israelites in the desert, and the route for Muslim pilgrims going on the hajj, British Library, Maps 16.a.1.

conducted with the expertise of the Royal Engineers from 1871 to 1877. The survey produced twenty-six map sheets published between 1881 and 1888, alongside six volumes of “memoirs” covering observations on the archaeology, flora and fauna, waterways, manners and customs, and place names.²⁶ Maps illustrating the Old and New Testaments were also published. The six memoirs, arranged via biblical geography into areas such as “Galilee” and “Samaria,” offer a deeper insight into the biblical preoccupations of the survey and illustrate how deeply embedded the ideal of biblical Palestine was within the survey. The introduction to the first volume informs the reader of “the necessity for a society entirely devoted to the work of collecting facts and information bearing on the Holy Land, its geography, ruins, people and customs,” alongside an illustration of a romanticized knight, an image that emphasizes the need for a crusade to recover Palestine once more.²⁷

The Survey of Western Palestine came at a time when travel accounts of Palestine

were immensely popular. Many of these works were in the genre of scriptural geographies, described by Edwin Aiken in his work of the same name as Christian accounts of the Holy Land, mapped and explained in relation to the Bible, in a tradition dating back to the Roman era.²⁸ A significant portion of the scholarly and popular works published on Palestine in the nineteenth century fell into this category, as indeed does William Tanner Young's map. Notable British works of this genre include: Edward Robinson's influential *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petraea* (1841)²⁹; PEF collaborator John MacGregor's *The Rob Roy on the Jordan: Nile, Red Sea, & Gennesareth, Etc.: a Canoe Cruise in Palestine and Egypt and the Waters of Damascus* (1869)³⁰; politician and writer Laurence Oliphant's *The Land of Gilead: With Excursions in the Lebanon* (1881)³¹; and the Survey's own Charles Wilson's *Picturesque Palestine, Sinai and Egypt* in two volumes (1881 and 1883).³²

An increasing number of Britons made the journey to see the Holy Land for themselves, with Thomas Cook offering tours from the late 1860s and set routes in guidebooks and maps from the 1870s.³³ Beyond tourism and leisure, the mapping of Palestine formed part of an imperial project to "know" the world, to conquer it physically and intellectually, and to record it in Western forms of knowledge.³⁴ As Nadia Abu El-Haj argues, the aim was to "render a historic past materially visible on maps and on the contemporary landscape," something we have already seen from several of the depictions of Palestine from the sky.³⁵ This visibility of the historical past required a focus on the archaeological sites and ruins, which were meticulously surveyed and noted for future excavations. The unearthing of ancient sites was part of a physical resurrection of a biblical and ancient past that would sit alongside, and even supersede, the structures of modern Palestine. Conder outlines the methods used by the survey concerning "ruins":

The method is as follows. Every ruined or interesting site is visited and noted on the spot. Such as contain nothing of importance are not specially reported but merely included in alphabetical lists arranged for each sheet on that map. Any however where distinguishable relics are still to be found are at once reported and visited by myself. All buildings dating earlier than the time of Turkish occupation are planned with more or less detail according to their importance.³⁶

It is notable that "antiquities" were considered as earlier than the Ottoman presence in Palestine, something which reinforces the particular narrative and vision of the past that the British wanted to present. This was a past in which the West, and Britain in particular, was the true heir to the Holy Land. This British sense of ownership over Palestine was expressed at the very first meeting of the PEF by the archbishop of York, who stated that "this country of Palestine belongs to you and to me. It is essentially ours."³⁷

By omitting the Ottoman era from those "ruins" listed as sites of historical importance, this served to delegitimize and minimize the importance of the Ottoman presence in Palestine.³⁸ The Ottoman era was not deemed worthy of the same attention,

nor seen as part of the narrative of Palestine, in the same way that biblical, classical, and crusader archaeology were eras which emphasized what was important to the Western, Christian image of Palestine and one which minimized, if not erased, contemporary Ottoman and Islamic Palestine. Palestine was thus remade in a British image inspired by biblical scripture, as can be seen in depictions of the land through Old and New Testament framings in the Survey itself (figure 8). This fits into a wider pattern, identified by Zainab Bahrani, in which the narrative of Western civilization as being an inheritance from the ancient Middle East is constructed by denying the links between the ancient landscape and its modern inhabitants. Instead a narrative is created in which civilization passed westward, from Mesopotamia, to Egypt, and then to Greece, with modern Western Europe the pinnacle.³⁹ That many of the maps discussed here, such as Young's map (figure 1), and the "New Historical Map of Palestine" (figure 6) divide Palestine into the supposed territories of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, is an example of how the contemporary, especially Muslim, presence in Palestine was dismissed in favor of the Judeo-Christian and classical connections.



Figure 8. "Western Palestine Illustrating The Old Testament, The Apocrypha and Josephus" (1880), David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, 6930.037 (1880), online at www.davidrumsey.com/ (accessed 22 May 2020).

The detailed archaeological plans of ruins collected by the Survey are another example of this framing of Palestine, and the aerial view of the site of “Beisan” is a particularly illustrative example. On the plan (figure 9), archaeological features such as columns, capitals and ancient city walls are mapped in great detail while the modern village of Bisan is portrayed only as a mass of undifferentiated buildings, described as “a miserable hamlet of some 60 mud cabins.”⁴⁰ A high-elevation drawing that shows the site also depicts the area as devoid of modern life.⁴¹ That Bisan was a biblical site, and then classical, now rediscovered by the British who lamented its contemporary ruin – and could imagine its future potential – fits into this narrative of progress, from east to west.



Figure 9. “Plan of Beisan/Scythopolis” in Conder et al., *Survey of Western Palestine*, vol. 2, 105.

Inasmuch as it was a faithful cartographic representation of Palestine, the Western Survey was intended to act as a guide to the biblical Palestine as present in the British cultural imagination.⁴² It was a map intended to discover the “truth” of the Bible as grounded in the landscape. As Zayde Antrim argues in her

important study on *Mapping the Middle East*, British cartography in the Holy Land was as much a search for belonging as it was a military exercise motivated by geopolitical concerns.⁴³ Although this quest for “belonging” undoubtedly had political motivations centered on imperial interests in Egypt and beyond, by proving their connections to Palestine, by mapping Palestine in the way they saw it, the British were paving the way intellectually for the occupation of the Mandate. These connections were primarily religious, with Protestant organizations often acting as mediators between the Ottoman government and the British.⁴⁴ They were reinforced in Britain by what Eitan Bar-Yosef terms “vernacular biblical culture,” in which the Bible and the Holy Land were seen as a central part of British culture, and the British were seen as a chosen people. This narrative was used to justify the British Empire, and ultimately the British Mandate, by creating an Anglocentric historical narrative in which Britain (and often specifically England) became the true heir of civilization via the appropriation of the achievements of the ancient world.⁴⁵ As Nadia Abu El-Haj contends, “Cartography presented Palestine as a concrete, coherent, and visibly historic place, a sustained object of scientific inquiry, charted and recognizable on modern maps and increasingly explored through the ongoing excavation of ancient artefacts.”⁴⁶ Visions of Palestine from above in the nineteenth century clearly established the intellectual links between politics, cartography, and archaeology for the British. Military surveys provided the foundations for the overlaying of the landscape of the past on the topography of the present, which in turn would support imperial claims over the Holy Land.

Making Palestine British

The product of a system of mapping that privileged images of the past over the realities of the present meant that many images of Palestine from the sky neglected or ignored Ottoman authority in the region. Just as the early mapping projects of the 1830s and 1840s capitalized on Mehmed Ali’s occupation of Ottoman lands, those of the 1870s took advantage of the fact that the Sublime State was severely indebted to European creditors; they were also increasingly dependent on British and French political support in the international arena, highlighted by the serious Ottoman defeat to Russia in the war of 1877–78. In the British National Archives, in a folder of maps extracted from consular correspondence in the Ottoman realms that includes a plan to carve up the Balkans between British, Russian, French, and Italian zones in the aftermath of that conflict, there is a map showing another kind of proposed control. In 1876, an engineer named McBean published a book proposing a railway route to connect Britain with Palestine, Egypt, and India, arguing this would propose a pre-emptive answer to the Eastern Question – that is, what to do if the Ottoman Empire collapsed – and assert British interests over those of Russia, or indeed anyone else.⁴⁷ Sensing an opportunity to see his plan put into action following the Ottoman defeat, he sent a copy of his map to the authorities.⁴⁸ The thick red line of the proposed railway

route cuts across the Ottoman Empire and Iran, disregarding borders and established routes to create a new landscape centered on British interests, with Palestine a key link within a wider imperial landscape.

Maritime surveys of the region had tended to include the Palestinian coast as part of a wider region that centered on Egypt. In the 1850s and 1860s, stemming from the Suez Canal concession, British ships surveyed Palestine as part of a wider sphere of interest. The survey by A.L. Mansell in 1856 saw a number of maps drawn up that placed Palestine as part of an extended Egyptian coastline.⁴⁹ These maps were revisited, revised, and expanded throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the British state archives holding a significant set of maps of the region by the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. For example, the 1862 survey of the harbor of Jaffa was updated in 1904, and Mansell's detailed map of Palestine and its coast from Ras al-Naqura to al-'Arish received new additions to provide an up-to-date overview to aid the British advance into Ottoman Palestine in 1917.⁵⁰ Indeed, the wealth of military and cultural visions of Palestine from above would prove invaluable to the British from the outbreak of war between the United Kingdom and the Ottoman Empire in 1914. Palestine would quickly become a focus of British actions, not least because this was an opportunity to reshape the Holy Land in a British image.

The British military occupation of Egypt from 1882 – a campaign in which some of the surveyors of Western Palestine played a significant role – meant that the British began to make an active effort in shaping Palestine itself. During the nineteenth century, the border between Khedival Egypt (1805–79) and the Ottoman Empire proper went through the Sinai Peninsula, but a number of disputes between the British and the Ottomans, with a threat of force on the part of the United Kingdom, led to a new border delineated in 1906, broadly along the route of that between Egypt and Israel today.⁵¹ A fascinating set of maps planning the route of this new border in 1900 in The National Archives shows this new frontier, with a rather interesting use of the space of Palestine. One of these maps, with text in both English and Arabic, shows a key marker of the border between Egypt and Palestine through “Sketch of Two Pillars and Tree at Rafeh / Rasm al-‘āmūdayn wa al-shajarah fī Rāfah [sic].”⁵² This echoes an image published in the *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* some years before (figure 10). The German engineer and archaeologist, Gottlieb Schumacher, conducted a number of archaeological surveys in Palestine in the 1880s, many of which were published in the quarterly, including his “Researches in Southern Palestine.”⁵³ Schumacher described the site of “Khurbet Refah” (that is, *khirbat*, the “ruins of Rafah”), comprising “two upright and one fallen granite column [...] placed 18 feet apart below a poor-looking sidri [cedar] tree” and marking the border between Syria and Egypt.⁵⁴ The significance of the inclusion of this image with ancient and biblical resonances on a map of the modern Egypt-Palestine border has a wider implication: the imposition of British authority upon the landscape of the Holy Land using images from scripture, history, and archaeology to assert new claims.



Figure 10. (Left) detail from the image “Khubet Refah. Tell Refah in the Distance. The Boundary between Egypt and Syria” in Gottlieb Schumacher, “Researches in Southern Palestine,” *Palestine Exploration Fund* 18:183; (right) detail from The National Archives, Kew, MFQ 1/1000, Sketch Map of the Country round Turko-Egyptian Frontier (Enclosure in Lord Cromer’s No.37 of 22 February 1900).

The First World War saw the knowledge accumulated in previous decades annotated with new details, marking front lines, garrisons, and lines of marches. A series of maps held in the British archives, based on those first developed in the 1840s and 1860s, were marked in blue, red, and black pencil, with intelligence gathered from captured Ottoman maps, including similarly annotated plans of the front by the Ottoman commander Küçük Cemal Paşa, adding to this military knowledge.⁵⁵ The General Military Survey of Palestine from 1917–18 shows a different example of the ways in which the renaming of places and geographic features became a form of familiarity and ownership.⁵⁶ Instead of biblical “renaming,” these maps offer us insight into the humor, familiar locations, flora and fauna, and language of British soldiers during the Palestine Campaign. The maps for Yahia, Jerwal, and Bureir, include such renamed wadi as “Dundee Wadi,” “Thistle Wadi,” and “Grouse Wadi,” places, animals, and plants that would be more familiar on the British Isles than the semi-arid eastern coast of the Mediterranean. Although these names did not represent permanent changes, they are still an example of the ways in which Britain created an imagined landscape more familiar to itself than to the local population.⁵⁷

Sometimes these new names were added from the perspective of soldiers on the ground or surveying from high elevation positions.⁵⁸ But novel technologies provided new perspectives on Palestine, with aircraft providing a completely different, but also rather familiar view of Palestine from above. Often there were echoes of previous methods. Just as Lieutenant Bedford’s 1862 survey of the Bay of Haifa/Acre had a panorama from the ship’s perspective accompanying its detailed map, a 1916 survey of ‘Aqaba saw a series of photographs pasted together to provide a bird’s-eye-view map, above which was another set of photographs showing the panorama from

aboard HMS *Raven II*.⁵⁹ The mirrored aesthetic of the drawn 1862 naval survey and the photographed 1916 naval and aerial survey is indicative of a wider correlation between depictions of Palestine from above.

Certainly, some of these photographs, such as that of the town of Tulkarm or the result of a bombing on the train tracks at Qatrana (south of Amman), had a specific intended use.⁶⁰ Survey photography, however, allowed observers to piece together the landscape in a different way. What is striking with aerial photography of the landscape is its resonance with earlier mapping surveys and illustrations. An interesting feature of portrayals of Palestine in various media is a sense of emptiness, as in the aerial paintings of the British war artists Sydney and Richard Carline of the Palestinian landscape. They share common themes with the high-elevation illustrations in *Syria, the Holy Land & Asia Illustrated*; for example, Sidney's painting of the Sea of Galilee echoes the illustration from that 1840 book (figure 5) – both depicting the shores as devoid of signs of human habitation and civilization, despite having significant populations centers and agriculture.⁶¹ In many depictions of Palestine from above, the landscape is sparsely populated at best, desolate at worst.

Crucially, the landmarks that featured on photographic aerial surveys were taken directly from the earlier military and archaeological surveys. In late 1918, in the final stages of the war, a British aircraft took a series of photographs over the front lines between Nablus and Jericho (figure 11). The timeless, artistic quality to the aesthetic of these photographs mirror that of earlier paintings and drawings.⁶² Starting at the villages of Qaryut and Talfit, the plane moved southeast viewing Jalud, al-Mughayyir, Duma, and Majdal Bani Fadil, before ending the panorama at Fadayil. In addition to annotating the names of these villages and marking the Ottoman defensive lines, the intelligence officers also added names to geographic features like wadis and prominent hills. Sometimes they used the local Arabic name, sometimes a name invented by the British soldiers as noted earlier, so that we find Wadi Bab al-Kharjah alongside Cheshire Wadi, and Ras al-Tawil together with Boulder Boil, and one bilingual feature in Kurn Surtubeh (Qarn Sartaba) also known as “Milly's Tit.” Crucially, however, some of the key features were *khurabat* those such as Kh. Sarra, Kh. Abu Malul, and Kh. Jibeit (Jib'it). These were all – and their name in Arabic suggest – ruins. These ruins, as with others throughout Palestine, had been surveyed and described in the *Survey of Western Palestine* back in the 1870s (figure 12). Khirbat Abu Malul, described as “foundations, cisterns, tombs blocked up,” Khirbat Sarra, “foundations and cisterns,” and Khirbat Kulasun, “heaps of stones on a hilltop,” became key geographic markers for the British forces.⁶³ Given that some elements of the British establishment, including in the military, already viewed the campaign in Palestine in biblical terms, the prominence of ancient features on this battlefield is significant.⁶⁴ The archaeological and biblical survey formed the basis for mapping the British conquest of Palestine and, combined with the view from the air, recreated in photographic form the blurred timelines of earlier views of Palestine from above, with ancient heritage living alongside, and even superseding, the contemporary scenery.



Figure 11. Photograph of the landscape between Khirbat Abu Malul and Jalud, with annotations of local Arabic names and new English names, as well as the Ottoman defensive lines highlighted, The National Archives of the UK, WO 319/3 (1918).



Figure 12. Detail from the *Survey of Western Palestine*, sheet XV, showing the same landscape as in Figure 9.

Views from the air, in photography and art, married with high elevation photography and art to develop the idea that the land was empty, but, harking back to its biblical fertility, ripe for development. The belief that the land was underutilized, transformed from its biblical glory, informed British policy in Palestine. “Scientific comprehension” evolved to focus on the way in which Palestine could be reclaimed from perceived Arab- and Ottoman-caused desertification.⁶⁵ While colonial restructuring of indigenous agriculture was not unique to Palestine, the biblical element influenced policy by offering a level of legitimacy to British control. Levin et al. write that maps “shaped

the ways in which the colonial state imagined its dominion, the nature of the people it ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry.”⁶⁶ In the case of Palestine, the biblical continued to inform the colonial. George Armstrong’s “Photo Relief Map of Palestine” of 1921 was reminiscent of previously mentioned biblical maps.⁶⁷ Thomas Cook continued to prove the power of biblical tourism to Palestine, producing guides, handbooks, and tours designed to offer a glimpse of this religiously oriented past. In “Cook’s Plan of Jerusalem,” featured in *A Guide to Jerusalem and Judea* (see figure 13), the focus is on the Old City and sites of worship, with peripheral mentions of Western colonization.⁶⁸

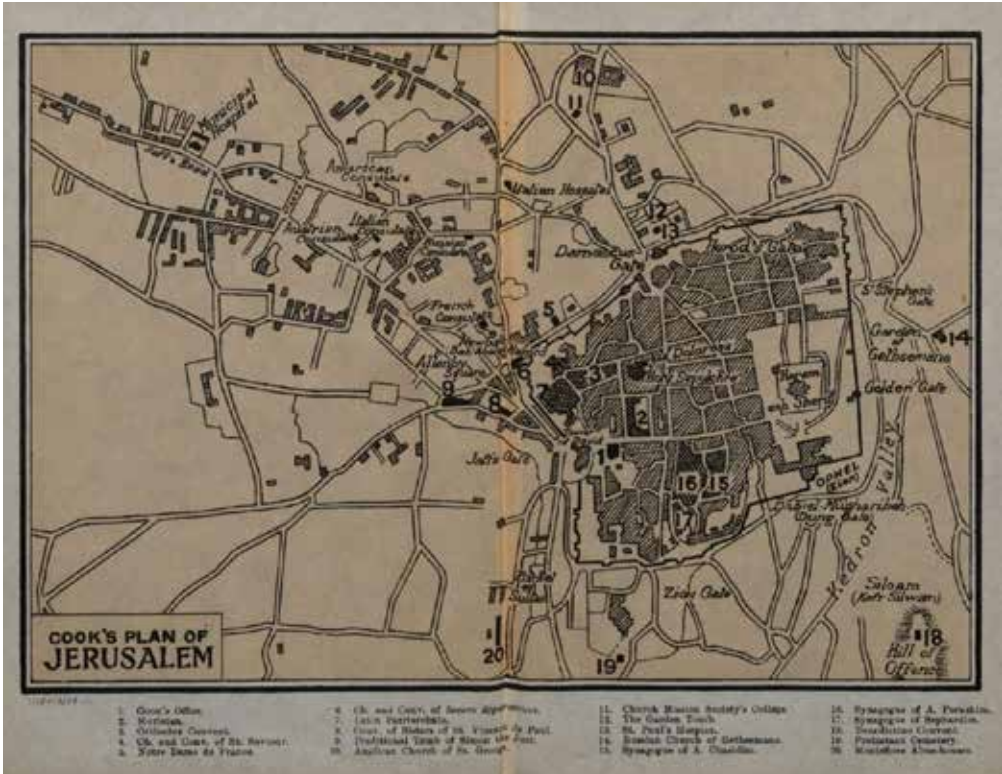


Figure 13. “Cook’s Plan of Jerusalem,” *A Guide to Jerusalem and Judea* (London: Thomas Cook, 1924).

In his 1917 paper, “Palestine: Its Resources and Suitability for Colonization,” E.W.G Masterman described the land as “unique in history and religious sentiment,” but depopulated, with “unredeemable deserts” that had potential to be “restored to their ancient fertility.”⁶⁹ The images that accompanied his paper at the Royal Geographic Society, and subsequent publication, show a desolate, deserted land. He concludes that it is “useless for any to settle in Palestine who are not prepared

to be themselves practical agriculturalists.”⁷⁰ Maps such as that compiled by the War Office in 1918, included a “Reference Section” featuring different forms of waterways and flora, including vineyards, orchards, gardens, woods, scrubs, palms, fir trees, and marshes all give their own symbols are marked clearly on the maps.⁷¹ Bartholomew’s *Quarter Inch Maps of Palestine*⁷² includes an inlay titled “Vegetation Maps of Modern Palestine” that features “Cultivable Lands” along the coast.⁷³ Agriculture was not the main interest of every colonial enterprise: Rhodesia, for example, was of more use for the extraction of raw materials, and the colonial government and its backers were far less interested in mapping the territory’s agricultural land. Interest in mapping and reshaping of agriculture, however, can be found in British projects like those of South Africa, Egypt, and India, two of which remained major agricultural exporters for the Empire through the Mandate era.⁷⁴

The role of Zionism, which had found formal British support during the First World War, was to play the middleman between biblical interpretation and colonial reimagining of the landscape, in the same way that Zionist Jewish settlers were seen as an “intermediary race between white Europeans and natives.”⁷⁵ While settlements such as Petah Tikva and the suburb of Tel Aviv may have appeared in pre-Mandate maps, they became more numerous, and in some cases more pronounced. Comparing the Railways Maps of Palestine and Transjordan from 1922 and 1929, both produced by the Survey of Egypt, the number of Zionist settlements included increases from five to eighteen. These settlements were clearly marked with a Star of David symbol, highlighting to the reader their perceived importance.⁷⁶ Thomas Cook began to include day trips to Zionist settlements, in tours given titles such as “How to see Modern Palestine,” where one could be taken around Zionist agricultural schools, a Zionist agricultural experimental station, and of course, several agricultural settlements.⁷⁷ Tel Aviv became not just a suburb or “Jewish settlement,” but was given city status with equal prominence to Jaffa in both tour descriptions and mapping. Note the appearance of Tel Aviv in Cook’s map for the 1929/30 Season (figure 14), after having not appeared at all in their 1927/28 catalogue. Kobi Cohen-Hattab has argued that this was in part due to the development of the Zionist Information Bureau for Tourists,⁷⁸ but it could easily be argued that the creation of that bureau was itself a reaction to a growing interest in Palestine where the biblical was now the modern.



Figure 14. (Left) Thomas Cook Season 1927–28; (right) Thomas Cook Season 1929–30. Map from *The Traveller's Handbook for Palestine and Syria* reprinted in Thomas Cook Archive, *A Guide to Jerusalem and Judea* (London: Thomas Cook, 1924).

Conclusions

The depictions of Palestine from above in various forms held in British archives and libraries show a number of themes emerging. The British blurred the boundaries of space and time in overlaying a biblical landscape over the modern outline. This outline became increasingly accurate and detailed as more and more British expeditions undertook to map and survey the Holy Land with ever more sophisticated methods. The focus, however, remained fixed on the past. The Survey of Western Palestine and its successors further shaped the British understanding of Palestine, populating the landscape with endless ruins and sites of biblical and classical interest that ensured past glories overshadowed contemporary geography. The effect of these maps, along with the illustrations that accompanied them, was to emphasize Palestine as a deserted, decayed land ripe for rejuvenation under the right stewardship. British imperial interests in the region, coupled with a sense of biblical self-identification and, to some extent, a sense of eschatology predicated on the return of the Jews to their scriptural home, fed into these mapping projects, but these depictions of Palestine

from above also provided the material that allowed such narratives to develop. The growing sense of British entitlement towards Palestine, evident in their redrawing and renaming of its borders and places, had a direct impact on a political culture that would see Palestine restored through conquest and control in 1917 and 1918. The attention given to Zionist settlements in the travel literature of the early twentieth century was a nod to British modernization of the Holy Land, an emphasis on the rebirth of a land perceived as having lost its ancient fertility. As such, the depictions of Palestine in the Cook maps of the 1920s share an intellectual and imperial vision with the map cherished by William Tanner Young in the 1830s.

Aerial, high-elevation, and cartographic depictions of Palestine from the British perspective in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries allow us to visualize developing narratives of control. The privileging and foregrounding of an ancient, biblical landscape that all but erased the lived experience of contemporary Palestinians is of course something that is all-too familiar in the context of today's Palestine. These maps, drawings, and photographs present Palestine as a canvas onto which could be imposed the religious and imperial fantasies and aspirations of the British. Palestine of the present became something to be improved, with William Tanner Young's vision of a land with a rich biblical past laying just underneath the surface waiting for the Jews, under British protection, to make it fruitful once more evolving over the century through expressions in cartography, art, and photography. As such, the space of Palestine as represented by the British became so well-known, so often reproduced, so discussed in the latest scholarship and technology, that these representations would come to shape Palestine as a lived space.

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