

THE NAMES AND BOUNDARIES OF ERETZ-ISRAEL (PALESTINE) AS REFLECTIONS OF STAGES IN ITS HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION

Classical historical geography focuses on research of the boundaries of the various states, along with the historical development of these boundaries over time. Edward Freeman, in his book written in 1881 and entitled *The Historical Geography of Europe*, defines the nature of historical-geographical research as follows: "The work which we have now before us is to trace out the extent of territory which the different states and nations have held at different times in the world's history, to mark the different boundaries which the same country has had and the different meanings in which the same name has been used." The author further claims that "it is of great importance carefully to make these distinctions, because great mistakes as to the facts of history are often caused through men thinking and speaking as if the names of different countries have always meant exactly the same extent of territory."¹ Although this approach — which regards research on boundaries as the essence of historical geography — is not accepted at present, the claim that it is necessary to define the extent of territory over history is as valid today as ever. It is impossible to discuss the development of any geographical area having political and territorial significance without knowing and understanding its physical extent.

Of no less significance for such research are the names attached to any particular expanse. The naming of a place is the first step in defining it politically and historically. Many localities have been given a wide variety of names, by different nations. The inhabitants of a certain region may assign various names to the land over time, while the residents of neighboring areas affix others to it. The political upheavals that an area undergoes over the generations, and the various nationalistic attitudes toward it, are reflected in the variety of its appellations over the course of history.

1 E. Freeman, *The Historical Geography of Europe*, I, London 1881, pp. 1-3.

The present study deals with the geographical expanse of Eretz-Israel, and the array of names which have been given to this land. Because Eretz-Israel has undergone countless changes and upheavals for 5,000 years — the period in which historiographers have been familiar with this area — it serves as an ideal test case for the hypothesis presented above. The uniqueness of Eretz-Israel derives from the fact that large portions of humanity are linked to it historically and culturally. This land is not merely a small territorial segment of the globe, but a cultural entity exerting a profound cultural influence over various parts of the world. It holds special significance for Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and has played a singular role in the development of human thought and belief. In diverse historical periods people throughout the world have had free ties with this stretch of land, and have given it various names reflecting whatever attitude they have held toward it. These ties often took the form of active control over the area, control which altered its territorial expanse. By tracing the geopolitical extent of Eretz-Israel throughout the ages, one can demonstrate the connection between its name and borders on the one hand, and the religious-cultural perception of its rulers on the other hand. This phenomenon has become more pronounced with time, and today, as in the past, there are different attitudes toward the name and spatial dimensions of Eretz-Israel.

THE ESSENCE OF ERETZ-ISRAEL

“Eretz-Israel” is more a geohistorical concept rooted in historical consciousness than a defined and measured stretch of land lying within clear geographical boundaries or stable political borders. With the exception of the Mediterranean Sea, there are no geographic limits based on prominent topographical features which separate Eretz-Israel from the larger region in which it is situated, and for this reason it has always served as a passageway. Topographical features have played only a minor role in determining its political and historical boundaries.

In most periods the borders hinged upon the outcome of a struggle between world powers for control over the entire region; in some cases political and cultural frontiers divided the country internally, while on other occasions the land in its entirety became a part of a much larger political unit. Only for brief periods was the area under the uniform control of its residents. However, despite the perpetual instability and vicissitudes with regard to its ethnic, cultural and political status, “Eretz-Israel” did exist as a concrete geohistorical unit with unique qualities of its own. This singularity derived mainly from the historical consciousness of the Jewish people, as well as the influence of this consciousness over other nations and faiths.

Because of the political and cultural changes that Eretz-Israel underwent, its

boundaries and its status in the area constantly fluctuated, and its name was often altered. The first reference to "Eretz-Israel" per se appears during the reign of Saul (I Samuel 13:19), and the name gained currency at the time of the first *aliyot* (waves of Jewish immigration) in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and during the British Mandate period, when the country was officially titled "Palestine," will the addition of the Hebrew acronym for Eretz-Israel.

Before this, Eretz-Israel had been called many different names and sobriquets that reflected the way the Jewish people and other nations regarded the status and qualities of the land — both the reality and the ideal: Judea, the Land of the Hebrews, Zion, the Holy Land, the Sacred Land, Palestine, the Promised Land, and the Land of the Deer.

Thus a survey of the boundaries of Eretz-Israel has two divergent starting points: the definition of the physiographic limits on the one hand, and the political borders in different periods on the other hand. In dealing with the latter, one should distinguish between periods in which Eretz-Israel was divided internally, thereby losing its political uniformity, and times when the land formed a single sovereign unit or a district belonging to a larger political entity. In terms of Jewish history, one must draw a distinction between the ideal borders as dictated by a religious-biblical perception, and the borders of sovereign Israel. Similarly, one must differentiate between the boundaries of Jewish settlement on the one hand, and the presence of ethnic, cultural and political enclaves on the other hand. The political borders of Eretz-Israel were dictated by various geostrategic and political considerations, along with the international status of the land and the regime in power during one period or another.

PHYSIOGRAPHIC DEMARCATION

"Physical demarcation" is the marking off of boundaries through a clear and unequivocal delineation of a certain territory, which sets it off from the neighboring territories and creates a separate geographic unit. The commonly used phrase "natural boundaries" implies something similar, but because its connotations go beyond the sphere of physical demarcation, the latter term is preferable. Eretz-Israel comprises a part of an expansive geographic region that stretches from the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. In its entirety, this region is called the Fertile Crescent. It consists mainly of plains and lowlands, and is bounded in the north and the east by the Taurus (in Turkey) and Zagros (in Iran) mountain chains. On the south it is open toward the Arabian Desert, part of which, the Syrian Desert, penetrates deep into its center. The Fertile Crescent averages around 600 km. in length and 90 km. in width (from

the sea to the desert). Its southwestern section is separated from the rest of the area by the deep Syrian-African rift that in Eretz-Israel forms the Jordan Rift Valley, the Arava plain and the Gulf of Elat. This rift on one side, and the Mediterranean Sea on the other, have constituted the country's boundaries in the twentieth century, and the stretch of land between them comprises Eretz-Israel in the limited sense of the term.

Eretz-Israel can be defined geographically as a land on the outskirts of Syria, integrally related to the latter.² The Syrian Desert separates Eretz-Israel from the biblical Aram-Naharaim, or Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), while the Sinai Desert separates it from Egypt. This location has had a decisive influence on the history of this land as a passageway and as a frontier district. Neither the Syrian Desert nor the Sinai Desert constituted an impassable natural barrier, and the eastern and southern borders changed over the generations in accordance with the vicissitudes of the ongoing struggle between settlement and desolation, and between various world powers. For extensive periods the desert was the boundary of Eretz-Israel, but the exact nature of this delimitation was determined by the prevailing political circumstances and the state of settlement in the east and south of the land.

The territory east of the Jordan River for the most part tended to have political and ethnic ties with western Eretz-Israel, despite the topographic obstacle posed by the Jordan Rift, which often served as a political border. When there was a stable, permanent settlement east of the Jordan, the Syrian Desert served as the boundary of Eretz-Israel, while in periods without such settlement, when most of the population consisted of nomadic tribes, the Jordan Rift and the Dead Sea formed the eastern limit. As a political border, this line was tenuous, since the Jordan Rift does not constitute a substantial natural barrier, and to the east of it, in Edom, Moab, Gilead and the Bashan, there are fertile settlement areas.

Similarly in the south, the Sinai Desert is a buffer zone serving as a passageway between Egypt and Eretz-Israel. Although this desert is desolate, with only a few oases and sparse settlement sites located around quarries, topographic difficulties preventing passage from Egypt to Eretz-Israel are nonexistent. Because most of the oases and settlement sites are located on the western margins of the Sinai Desert, they have been tied to Egypt, while only a few small oases, situated in the northeastern part of Sinai, have been tied to Eretz-Israel. From a geographic perspective, the Sinai Desert has not usually been considered a part of Eretz-Israel, even when Israelite settlements have existed there. The boundary between Eretz-Israel and the Sinai Desert has been shifted several times in accordance

2 Y. Karmon, *Eretz-Israel*, Tel Aviv 1978, pp. 11–12 (Hebrew).

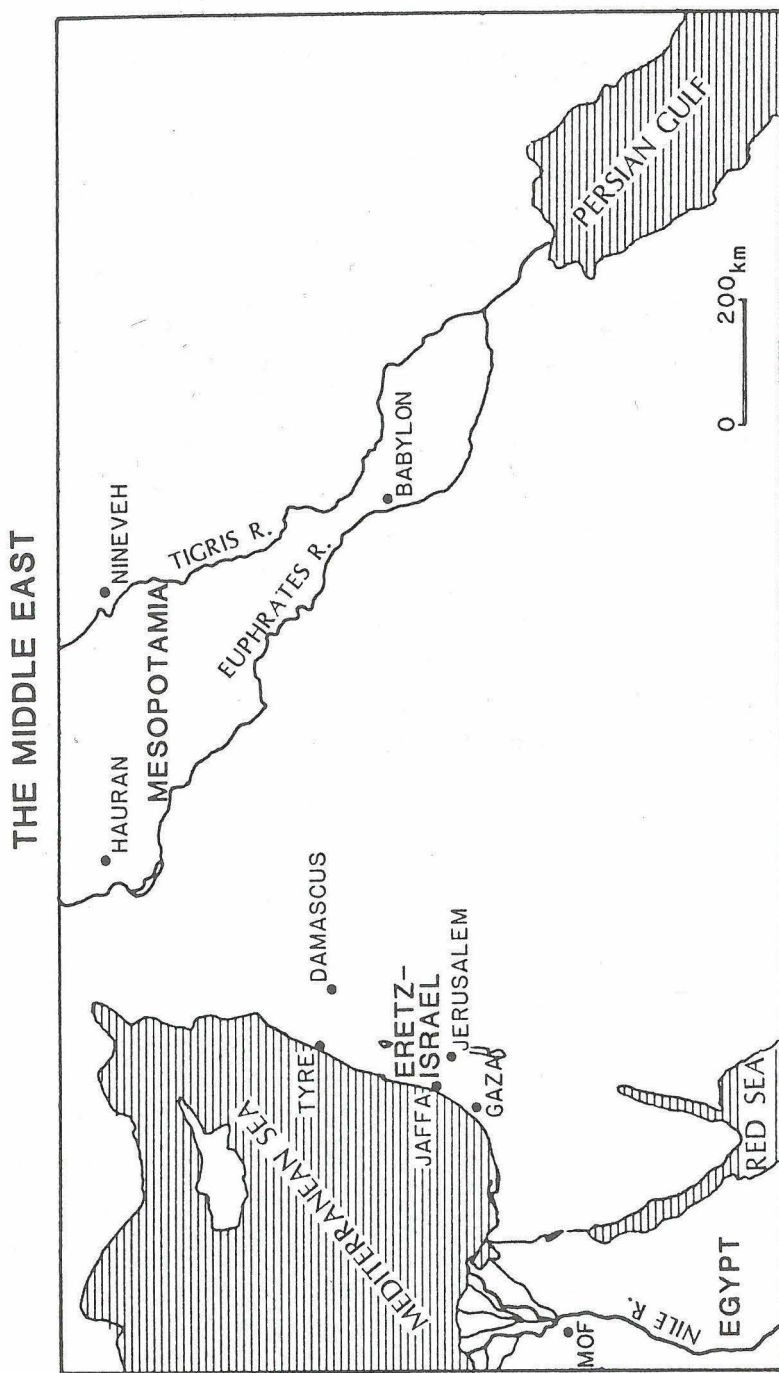


Fig. 1

with the settlement and political reality, and there were times when they were not contiguous at any point. The most blatant geographic demarcation between Eretz-Israel and this desert is Wadi el Arish, which reaches the Mediterranean Sea 45 km. southwest of Rafah. Most of the ancient sources refer to this wadi as *Nahal Musaru*, the Assyrian term for “the Egyptian water course.” The Hebrew equivalent — *Nahal Mitzrayim* — appears in the Bible, but usually in a context that does not pinpoint its locality. However, in one instance the easternmost tributary of the Nile — “Shihor” (I Chronicles 13:5) — is referred to as “Nahal Mitzrayim.”

The northern border from the geographic standpoint is the Lebanese mountain range, and the lofty Mount Hermon. The Phoenician coast and Lebanon Rift constitute a direct extension of the northern part of Eretz-Israel. Therefore Syria and Eretz-Israel have been regarded by foreigners as a single geographic unit ever since the Sumerian Empire. Nevertheless, there are a number of salient geographic features and locations within Eretz-Israel — the Hauran, the Bashan, the Damascus Rift, the Litani River and the sources of the Jordan — all of which have been the object of political and settlement struggles between the various sovereign entities that have controlled the area.

Since all the land’s boundaries have changed so frequently, it would be arduous and arbitrary to fix exact borders based on geographic lines. The perception of Eretz-Israel’s physical boundaries — or natural boundaries, as they are sometimes called — changes with the viewer’s vantage point. Forces outside the region regarded Eretz-Israel as an intermediate land between the sea and the desert, and a single unit with Syria. By contrast, the perspective of the kingdoms that have arisen within Eretz-Israel and Syria has been greatly influenced by the geographic lines of the land, as well as the settlement configuration and prevailing political and military circumstances. While outside observers viewed Eretz-Israel as an important passageway on the edge of the desert, the inhabitants of the land regarded it as the heart and soul of the entire geographic region.

THE NAMES OF THE LAND OVER HISTORY

Two names have been attached to the land for over 2,000 years. The Jewish-Hebrew world has used the term “Eretz-Israel,” while others have called it “Palestine,” or different derivatives thereof. Nevertheless, various other names preceded these.

In the Ancient World

The Sumerian Empire, which laid the foundations for civilization in the Fertile

Crescent in the third millennium B.C.E., named Eretz-Israel — together with all of the remaining land west of the Euphrates — *Maat Amurru*, “the Land of the Emorites” or “the western land.” According to Mari documents from the end of the eighteenth century B.C.E., Amurru is a defined political unit south of a small city, while in the New Egyptian Dynasty the kingdom of Amurru was centered in Lebanon.

Ancient Egyptian sources apply the name *Haryosha* (“the Land of Sand-Dwellers”) to the desert and the sandy coast of Eretz-Israel, but during the Middle Dynasty Eretz-Israel and Syria were called *Retenu*, which evidently means “the Land of Rulers.” Eretz-Israel itself was dubbed *Upper Retenu*, designating its position relative to Egypt. The Sinuhe Scroll from the New Dynasty period used the appellation *Tshahi*, while the name *Huru* — “the Land of the Hurrians,” referring to a people originating in the Mitanni kingdom — stems from this same period.

Another contemporary name that gained wide acceptance was *Canaan*. The name *Canaana* first appears in the fifteenth century B.C.E. El Amarna Letters, where it refers to an Egyptian province. Initially the term Canaan was applied only to the Phoenician coast (Joshua 5:1), but afterwards it came to include the northern Jordan Rift (Numbers 13:29), and the whole of Eretz-Israel and Syria. In the Bible the earliest mention of this appellation is in the stories of the Patriarchs (Genesis 11:31), in reference to western Eretz-Israel. It was in this period that the Land of Canaan became a unified political entity under Egyptian hegemony. It extended up to the Hittite border, and its capital was the city of Gaza. The borders of this political unit, which are delineated in Numbers 34:1–12, evidently comprised the boundaries of “The Patriarch’s Land,” or “The Promised Land.”

According to this source, the boundary of Canaan begins in the southern part of the Dead Sea, and turns southward until Ma’ale Akrabim, whence it curves southwestward up to Kadesh Barnea, El Qusaime (Atzmon) and Wadi El Arish (the Egyptian water course). In the east the border passes from Lebo-hamath — evidently the village of Labweh on the Orontes (Asi) River — in the north of Lebanon, up to the desert northeast of Damascus. From there it winds south to the Sea of Galilee and along the Jordan River to the Dead Sea. In the north the boundary passes from Mount Hor, whose location has yet to be decisively determined, to Lebo-hamath, while to the west the border is the Mediterranean Sea. These borders do not coincide with the area settled by the Tribes of Israel, and apparently demarcate the Egyptian province. Scholars are divided as to the exact position and the furthest north–south extension of these frontiers.³

3 N. Tokchinski, *The Boundaries of the Land*, Jerusalem 1970 (Hebrew).

"THE PROMISED LAND"

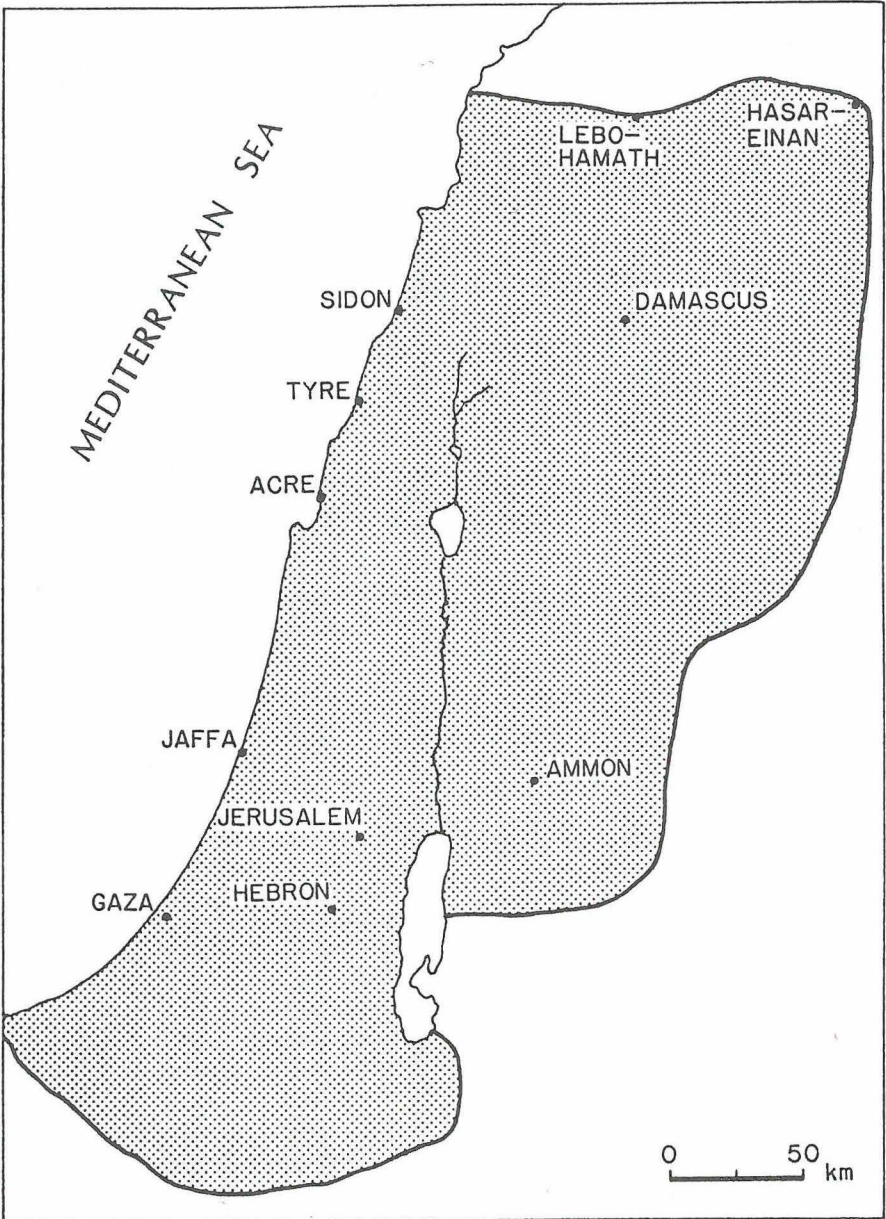


Fig. 2

The name "Eretz-Israel" emerged at the outset of the settlement in the land by the Tribes of Israel, and it defined only the area in which the Israelites settled (Joshua 11:22: "Land of the Children of Israel"). The land was divided among the various nations residing in it, and the southern coastal strip up to the Carmel, which was inhabited by the Philistines, was called *Glilot Pleshet*, or simply *Pleshet*. From this was derived the name "Palaestina," although this later version did not appear until after the Bar Kochva revolt. The name was rendered as "Filistin" in Arabic and Turkish — and this same label was applied to the British Mandate.

Along with these "ideal" boundaries specified in the Bible, also mentioned in the Scriptures are borders coinciding with the areas in which the Tribes of Israel settled, whether initially or at a later stage. Tradition renders these as "the Borders of Those Who Left Egypt," or "the Borders of Moses and Joshua" (Deuteronomy 34:1–4). From the time of the kingdom of David, the actual borders nearly coincided with the "Promised Borders," despite the fact that they encompassed enclaves of other nations (II Samuel 24:5–7; I Kings 5:7).

The expression "from Dan to Beersheba" was coined in this period as a description of the central area settled by the Israelites. This demarcation later became the accepted description of Eretz-Israel (I Samuel 24:2; I Kings 5:5), and it largely influenced the location of the country's northern border during the British Mandate.

At the outset of David's kingdom in 1,000 B.C.E., "Judah and Israel" emerged as a term defining the entire kingdom, and subsequent to its division "Judah" denoted the area ruled by the House of David, while "Israel" signified the kingdom of Israel.

After the Return to Zion in the days of the Persian Empire, the area occupied by the Jews returning from Babylonia was called *Yahad*, and generations later the name "Land of Judah" was accepted as denoting all of Eretz-Israel. In the Bible the name "Eretz-Israel" signifies the kingdom of Israel only (II Kings 5:2).

The combined borders of the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah changed in accordance with the military and political dictates of the time. The annexation of Aram Damascus up to Lebo-hamath by Jeroboam II marked the height of territorial aggrandizement (II Kings 14:24–28).

Shortly thereafter, in the years 732–734 B.C.E., the Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser III, conquered Gilead, the Galilee and the coastal plain, and the kingdom of Israel dwindled to the vicinity of Mount Ephraim. With the final Assyrian conquest of Samaria, the area was transformed into an Assyrian province called *Shomreinu*. Uzziah, king of Judah, later captured the coastal plain and Edom, and the interim period between the fall of Assyria and the rise of Babylonia allowed Josiah, king of Judah (609–634), to expand the borders of his realm to

KING DAVID'S KINGDOM

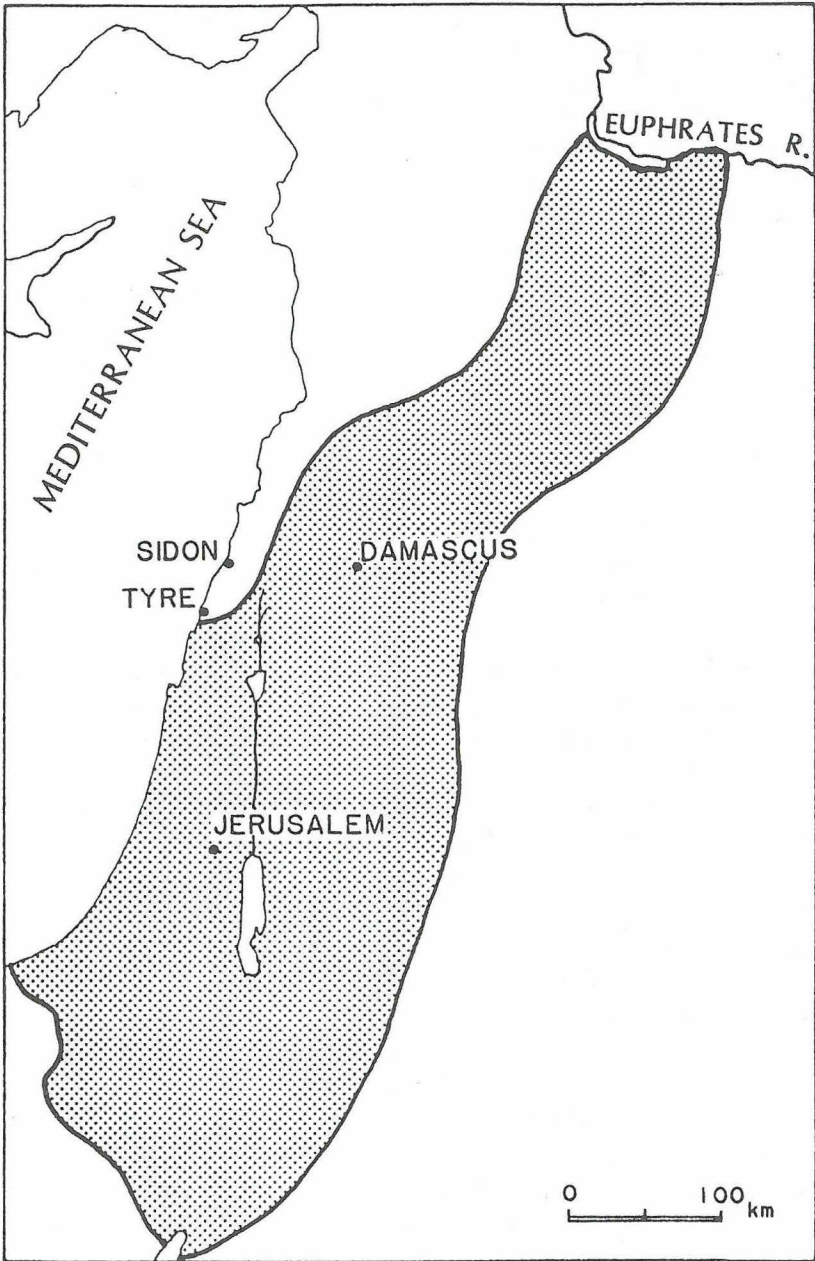


Fig. 3

**THE KINGDOMS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH
EIGHTH CENTURY B.C.E.**

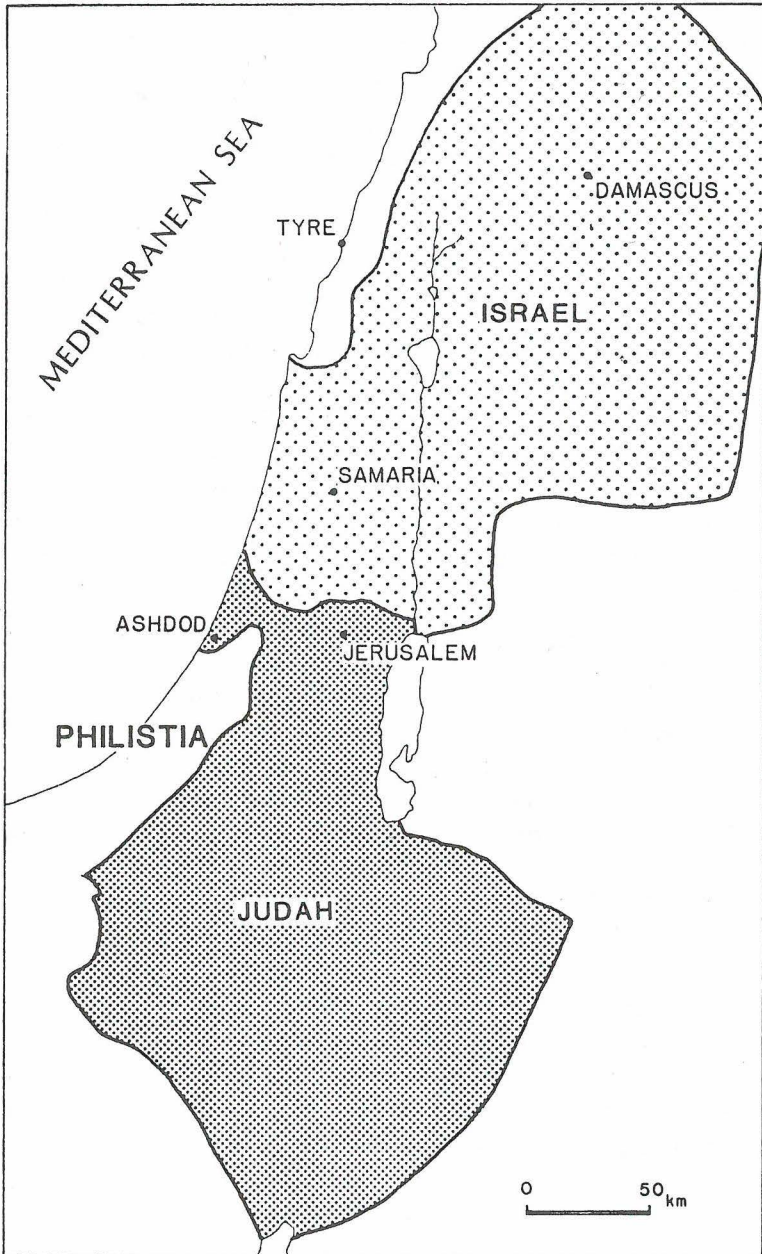


Fig. 4

include “the cities of Manasseh and Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naftali...throughout all the land of Israel” (II Chronicles 34:6–7). This occurred after the Assyrian conquest led by Sennacherib had reduced the size of Judah. The ascendancy of Babylonia gave rise to repeated truncations of Eretz-Israel, accompanied by exiles that diminished the Jewish population. The southern part of the Judean Hills up to the vicinity of Bet Tzur was inhabited by Edomites and now called *Edom*, while the Jewish population was concentrated in Benjamin and the Negev, and along the Pleshet border.

Eretz-Israel in the Second Temple Period

The Babylonians, like the Sumerians before them, viewed Eretz-Israel and Syria as one unit, which they called *Ever Nahari*, meaning “the land beyond the river,” with reference to the Euphrates. The Persian Empire, which supplanted the Babylonian Empire, adopted the Aramaic version of the name — *Ever Nahara* — and applied it to the province (*strepia*) that encompassed Syria, Phoenicia and Eretz-Israel (Ezra 4:10). *Yahad*, one district (*pahva*) within this province, encompassed the area between Jerusalem and Hebron, the Judean Desert and the coastal plain — a total of around 1,600 sq. km. The division of this territory did not change with the conquest of Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic hegemony soon to follow. The Ptolemaic dynasty, and later the Seleucid dynasty, re-divided the land into districts, one of which was *Iuda*, which was later changed to *Iudea*.

The Hasmonean House steadfastly endeavored to expand the borders of the independent Jewish regime in Eretz-Israel. From the days of Judah Maccabee and his brother Simeon until the death of Alexander Yanai in 76 B.C.E., the Hasmonean kingdom had come to encompass the coastal plain from Mount Carmel to El Arish (*Rinocorura*), excluding Ashqelon, which remained independent. The Galilee and Judean Hills, the land around the Dead Sea, the northern Negev and sections east of the Jordan were also included in the Hasmonean kingdom.⁴

Although various sources refer to this area as “the territory of those who returned from Babylonia,” the borders were actually established by the Hasmoneans. These boundaries hold great importance for the Halacha, as they determine *inter alia* the lands to which the *mitzvot hatluyot ba'aretz* (“commandments dependent upon the land”) apply. Apparently these borders have come to be accepted over the generations as demarcating the domain of

4 M. Avi-Yona, *Carta's Atlas of the Period of the Second Temple*, Jerusalem 1960, p. 44, map no. 66 (Hebrew).

THE HASMONEAN KINGDOM

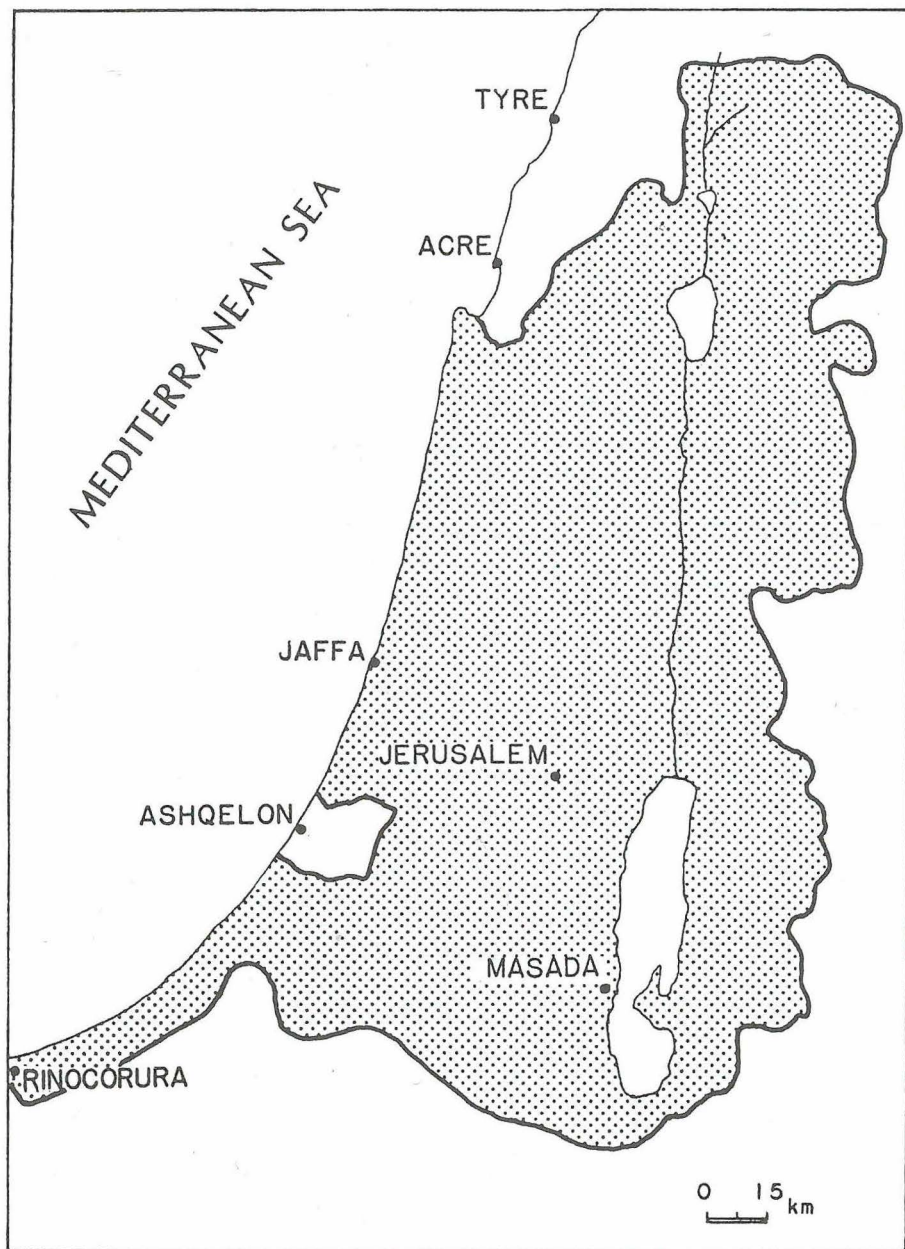


Fig. 5

Eretz-Israel, and up to the beginning of the twentieth century they have come to signify for the Jews and at times for non-Jews the boundaries of Eretz-Israel.

In the wake of the Roman conquest, Eretz-Israel was again reduced to the area of Judah, including eastern Edom from Adoraim to En Gedi. The Jezreel Valley was severed from the Galilee, which remained Jewish. During Herod's reign *Iudea* once more expanded, as Augustus annexed Jaffa, Jericho, and Yavne to Herod's kingdom, as well as Geva Susita and Gader to the east of the Jordan. Later the areas of the Bashan, Golan and Hauran were also annexed, along with Pamiyas (Baniyas) and the Hula. Following Herod's death the kingdom was divided among his three sons and his sister Shlomit. The great Jewish revolt against the Romans broke out in these areas, after the activities of Jesus caused the territorial image of Eretz-Israel at the time to be embedded for generations in the minds of the Christian world.

The Roman-Byzantine Period: 70–638 C.E.

After the revolt against the Romans was crushed, Iudea became a province of the Roman Empire. Called *Provincia Iudea*, it encompassed most of the coastal cities and the Decapolis cities in the north of the land and east of the Jordan. Following the death of Agrippa II, most of his kingdom in the north was also annexed to the Roman province. In the year 106 C.E. *Provincia Arabia* was established; it encompassed the Negev, and later Rabat Ammon (Amman), Gesher and Dibon.⁵

In the wake of the Bar Kochva revolt and its suppression, the old name Pleshet (*Palasta* in Roman usage) gained wide currency. The emperor Hadrian endeavored to quash Jewish nationalism and thereby extirpate the roots of the revolt. Jerusalem was rebuilt as a pagan city, and called Aelia Capitolina, while the name *Palaestina* or *Provincia Syria Palaestina* was used for Eretz-Israel, in an attempt to eradicate any trace of Judaism in the land.

The Roman province of Palaestina was a part of Syria. During the later Roman period and the Byzantine period its borders were altered as neighboring tracts of land were added to it. The emperor Diocletian annexed the province of Arabia to Palaestina, but in 385 C.E. this territory was separated and called *Palaestina Salutaris*.

In the year 425 C.E. the remaining territory was divided into two additional provinces: *Palaestina Prima*, which included the coastal towns, the Judean Hills and the Jewish part of the Jordan Rift; and *Palaestina Secunda*, which comprised

5 Z. Baras et al., *Eretz-Israel: From the Destruction of the Second Temple to the Muslim Conquest*, Jerusalem 1982, p. 11 (Hebrew).

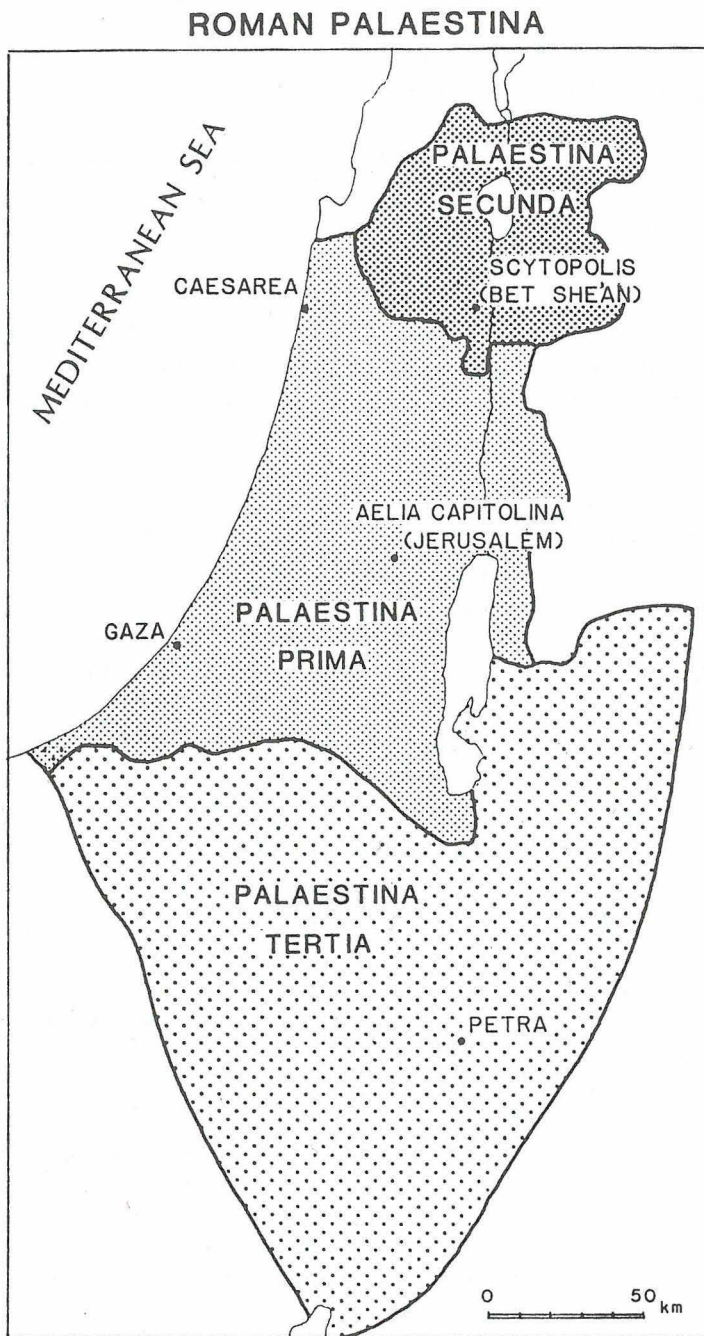


Fig. 6

the Jezreel Valley, Upper and Lower Galilee and the Golan. The name of the third province was changed to Palaestina Tertia.⁶

The capital of Palaestina Prima was Caesaria, and that of Palaestina Secunda was Bet She'an (*Scytopolis*). After the Arab conquest in 638 C.E. the administrative division was maintained, but the names of the geographic units were changed and their capitals relocated. Palaestina Prima was renamed *Jund* (military district) *Filistin*, and was administered from Lod, and later from Ramla, a city that had been built by the Arabs.

Palaestina Secunda was renamed *Jund Urdun* after the Jordan River, and Tiberias was made its capital. Although the border between the districts was occasionally shifted, it generally preserved the Roman-Byzantine framework — dividing Eretz-Israel horizontally, unlike the modern border demarcation, which runs from north to south.

Both of these districts lay between the Mediterranean Sea on the west and the desert on the east. Palaestina Tertia had ceased to exist as an independent unit, and most of it was absorbed into what Arab historians referred to as *Tiha Bani Israil* — the area of the wandering of the Children of Israel — or *Tiha* for short. This area included the Negev and most of the Sinai, and at times was combined administratively with *Jund Filistin*. Both districts, *Filistin* and *Urdun*, were incorporated into the large geographic unit of Syria, or *Ash Shams* in Arabic. This name was widely used, and the territory became a separate geographic entity alongside Egypt, Iraq, Arabia and Yemen. These districts, although not at all similar to the modern countries bearing the same names, were usually perceived as social, cultural and at times even economic-political entities with distinct and contiguous territory. *Ash Shams* stretched southward from the southern Taurus Mountains, while the districts of *Filistin* and *Urdun* constituted its southern border.⁷

Eretz-Israel under Crusader Dominion: 1099–1291

The Crusader conquest in 1099 led to the reunification of Eretz-Israel. “The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem” — its official title — came into existence as a small territorial unit, and gradually expanded until it engulfed the entire area from north of Beirut to the Sinai Desert, as well as Mount Se’ir south of Elat, and many sections east of the Jordan and south of the Yarmuk.⁸ The boundaries of

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 352–380.

7 J. Prawer, *The History of Jerusalem — The Early Islamic Period (638–1099)*, Jerusalem 1987, pp. 9–30 (Hebrew).

8 J. Prawer, *A History of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, I, Jerusalem 1971, pp. 151–220 (Hebrew).

THE LATIN KINGDOM OF JERUSALEM

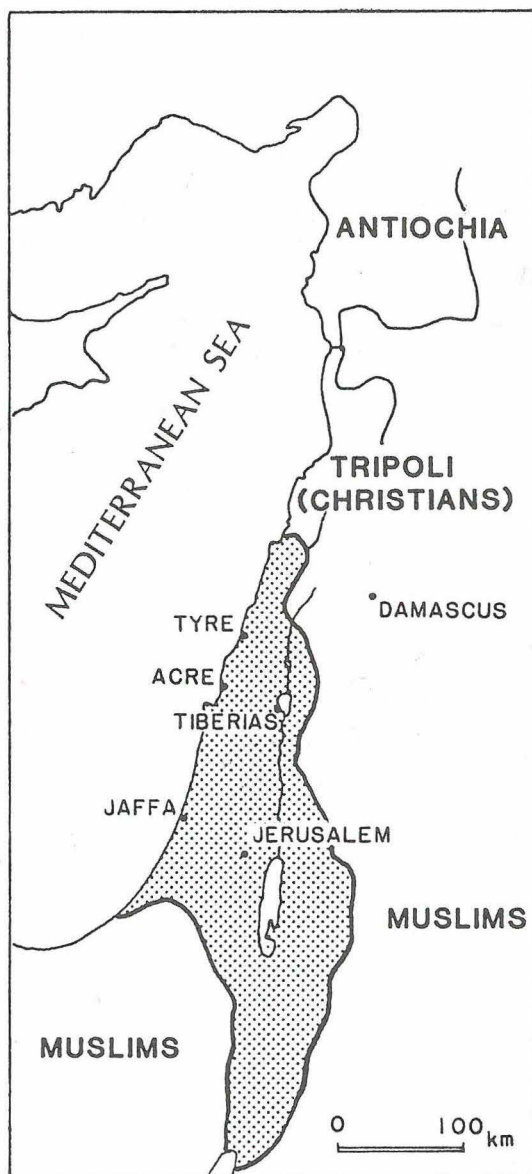


Fig. 7

this kingdom constantly fluctuated up to its destruction in 1291, but the Crusader period instilled in the Gentile world the historical consciousness of Eretz-Israel as a single geographic unit, and heightened the religious associations with the land.

The Mameluke Period: 1291–1517

The renewed conquest of Eretz-Israel by the Muslims did not lead to a resumption of the earlier Muslim administration or the adoption of the names Filistin and Urdun. Saladin's successors, and to a greater extent the Mamelukes following them, who ruled the area from the middle of the thirteenth century, redivided the land, and created a growing number of subdivisions, each one of which was named after its principal city. There was no attempt to devise an overall, unifying name. During most of the Mameluke period the land on both sides of the Jordan was divided into six subdistricts whose centers were Gaza, Lod, Qaqun, Jerusalem, Hebron and Nablus. These subdistricts comprised part of the Ash Shams province, whose center was Damascus. At times Gaza, Lod and Qaqun enjoyed independence. At the end of the Mameluke period Eretz-Israel was divided into two *niyabets* (military districts), Gaza and Safed, with the latter encompassing the districts of Tibnin and Tsur (Tyre) in southern Lebanon. These military districts were under the control of the viceroy in Damascus.⁹

Ottoman Eretz-Israel: 1516–1918

The Ottoman conquest in 1516–17 led to a redivision of Eretz-Israel into the *sanjaks* of Gaza, Jerusalem, Nablus and Safed west of the Jordan — and Ajlun east of it.¹⁰ Later the district of Lajun was formed, also west of the Jordan. As in the past, these districts were brought under the jurisdiction of the *bilarbay* (governor general) of Damascus.

These districts underwent constant changes during the 400 years of Ottoman rule in Eretz-Israel, dictated by the varying relations in the Ottoman state between the central regime and the district governors, and between the former and the other European powers. Through all of the internal vicissitudes, the name "Filistin" was conspicuously absent; it had vanished since the Crusader conquest. The name "Urdun" was applied to the river only. Throughout this entire period the Jewish world employed the name "Eretz-Israel," while "Filistin" was initially used by the Muslims to refer to a subdistrict only and eventually

9 Y. Friedman, "Eretz-Israel and Jerusalem on the Eve of the Ottoman Period," A. Cohen (ed.), *Jerusalem in the Early Ottoman Period*, Jerusalem 1979, pp. 1–38 (Hebrew).

10 M. Gichon, *Carta's Atlas of Eretz-Israel from Bether to Tel-Hai (Military History)*, Jerusalem 1969, p. 75, map no. 131 (Hebrew).

disappeared. On the other hand, the name "Palestine" was preserved by the Christian world, although in the Middle Ages the Christians usually called the land the "Holy Land" or "Judea."

The Renaissance and the renewed interest in the classical world imparted new significance to the Roman name "Palaestina," which was incorporated and commonly used in most European languages. This European usage was carried to the Orient by Christian Arabs who were subject to a Western Christian influence. The second Arabic newspaper to appear in Eretz-Israel, edited by a member of the Greek Orthodox Church and printed in 1911, was called *Filistin*.

It was only toward the end of the Ottoman period — first in 1856 and again in 1873 — that the southern portion of Eretz-Israel was detached from the spacious districts above it, from the Yarkon-Wadi Auja line in the north to the Dead Sea-Rafah line in the south. Following its severance, this territory was converted into an independent *sanjak* — or *mutessarif* — under the direct control of the capital of the Empire, Istanbul. It was demarcated by administrative boundaries appearing on a map, but not existing on the land itself, and was called "Mutessarif El Kuds," referring to Jerusalem. Now too, the name "Filistin" was not mentioned officially. North of this unit the area was a part of the *iyalet* (province) of Beirut, divided into the *sanjaks* of Nablus, Acre and Beirut (including the subdistricts of Sidon, Tyre and Marj Ayun). The territory east of the Jordan was part of the *iyalet* of Sham Sharit, or Damascus. The area south of the Dead Sea-Rafah line belonged to the Hejaz district which in the nineteenth century extended into the Sinai Peninsula, and east of the Arava. In 1906 an administrative boundary was drawn between Sinai and the remaining part of the Ottoman Empire along the Rafah-Taba line, while in 1908 the territory between this line and the Arava (the Negev Triangle) passed under the control of the governor of Damascus. The Hejaz railroad track laid in the early part of the twentieth century formed a sort of demarcation between the land east of the Jordan and the desert, a boundary that was frequently identified with the eastern border of Eretz-Israel.

The lack of clarity regarding the borders of Eretz-Israel found expression in dozens of assorted publications written on the eve of World War I, each of which cited a different boundary. These publications, however, unanimously included certain territory: Upper and Lower Galilee, the Judean Hills up to the Dead Sea-Rafah line, and the area east of the Jordan from the Hermon to the Arnon River, which debouches into the Dead Sea. These contours were not at all reflected in the modern demarcation of Eretz-Israel following World War I.¹¹

11 G. Biger, "Where Was Palestine? Pre-World War I Perception," *Area*, XIII, no. 2 (1981), pp. 153-160.

The British Mandate over Eretz-Israel: 1918–1948

With the entry of the British into the area, Eretz-Israel was separated from the rest of the Ottoman Empire, and was reestablished as an autonomous administrative unit. During the British military administration, from 1917 to 1920, the land was called "Occupied Enemy Territory (South)," and its borders were: in the north, a line from Rosh haNiqra to the Hula; in the east, along the Jordan; and in the west, the sea. Although it is not certain where the southern border was, it apparently passed along the Arava to the top of the Gulf of Elat.

It was the Mandatory government that recreated Eretz-Israel as an integral territorial unit, and that, for the first time in the modern era, demarcated clear boundaries for it on maps, and in certain sections on the ground as well. The process of demarcation was part of the reorganization of the Middle East.¹² Eretz-Israel's northern border was established after long and tiresome negotiations between the French, who controlled Syria and Lebanon, and the British, who ruled Eretz-Israel. A variety of factors — historical formulations, the Zionist movement's plans for future development, the actual state of Jewish settlement, and physical elements such as watershed lines — combined together in the delineation of Eretz-Israel's northern border. This boundary, which was finally determined in the spring of 1923, has remained until today the border between the State of Israel and Lebanon.¹³ In 1922 it was agreed to draw a line along the Jordan River and the Arava, in order to separate Eretz-Israel from Trans-Jordan. In 1928 it was decided that the border would pass along the course of the Jordan.

The southern border had been determined earlier, as it was less problematic. The British adopted the 1906 line as the boundary between Eretz-Israel and Egypt, even though this decision was never officially publicized. Along with the border demarcation, the British simultaneously revived the territory's old name. Faithful to European Christian tradition, they opted for the name "Palestine," while adding two Hebrew letters standing for "Eretz-Israel."

In the course of the Mandate various plans were proposed for a territorial and political division of Eretz-Israel between its Jewish and Arab inhabitants. The United Nations resolution of November 1947 called for a partition into two independent political states, but the war of 1948 and the armistice agreements that followed it engendered a new political and geographic delimitation, in the center of which was a national entity with a new-old name: the State of Israel.

12 G. Biger, *Crown Colony or National Homeland*, Jerusalem 1983, pp. 12–41 (Hebrew).

13 G. Biger, "Geographical and Political Issues in the Process of the Creation of the Northern Boundary of Eretz-Israel during the Mandatory Period," A. Shmueli et al. (eds.), *The Lands of Galilee*, Haifa 1983, pp. 427–442 (Hebrew).

BRITISH PALESTINE

ISRAEL 1949

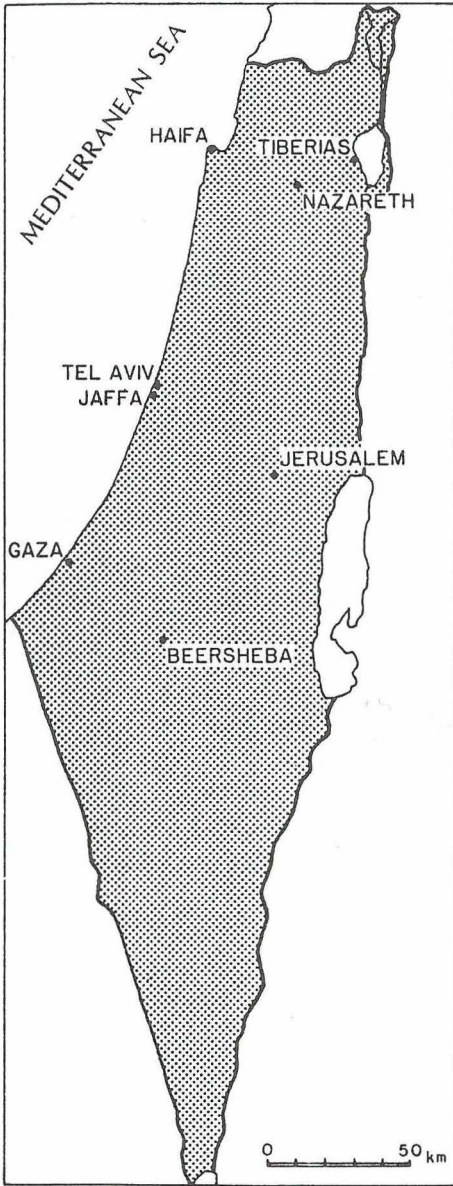


Fig. 8

Fig. 9

This division held sway until the Six-Day War, and since June 1967 the land has been undergoing a process of continual change in terms of its political borders. In 1979 a peace treaty was signed between Israel and Egypt, in which the two sides agreed to recognize the 1906 line as the international border between them.

CONCLUSION

Historical-geographical research relating to the names and boundaries of Eretz-Israel in various periods focuses both on this land as a geographic unit, and on the fact that it is an integral part of a larger region. These dualistic qualities impart a singular character to the land, and create a sense of geohistorical uniqueness. On the other hand, the external borders of the area have been in a constant state of flux over the generations. Several areas have repeatedly been included in Eretz-Israel in the course of these changes, and these may be regarded as the heart of Eretz-Israel. It appears that of all the geographic definitions of Eretz-Israel that have been formulated throughout its long history, the most appropriate one was "from Dan to Beersheba," i.e. from the sources of the Jordan in the north to the edge of the contiguous settlement in the south, and from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. In various periods the area considered part of Eretz-Israel was either expanded or diminished, but in the mind of the nations emotionally attached to Eretz-Israel, it has essentially signified the area in this "heart."

A survey of the names and borders of Eretz-Israel over history thus makes it possible to better understand the changes that the land has undergone — changes deriving from the activities of man in this area. Hence the great variations that have occurred in the border demarcations and the names form a framework in which geographic changes have taken place in each and every period. These variations also underscore the need for such a survey — a need which was noted over a hundred years ago, and which remains equally valid today.