

STUDENT EXHIBITION: “PATHS NOT TAKEN IN PALESTINE”



Late Modern Palestine re-assessed

In the framework of the Fall 2025 seminar *A History of Late Modern Palestine: before and beyond the conflict (1840-1948)*, the students learned about various political projects that existed for Palestine before 1948 but that didn't materialize. Among these projects were decentralization within the Ottoman Empire (early 20 th century), the Arab Kingdom of Syria (1916-1920), a binational state for Jews and Palestinians (1920s onwards), a Communist state project (20 th century), hopes for Federalism under the umbrella of Kemalist Turkey (1919-1924) and the daily struggles for dignity of the Palestinian trade union movement (1925-1947). All of these projects generated writings by political thinkers, activists and journalists. They offered political horizons that have since been largely forgotten.

King-Crane Commission archives, Oberlin College



One of the key categories developed by Koselleck is the horizon of expectation (Erwartungshorizont) - the realm of what is not yet, but is imagined and anticipated. It is the space in which political projects take shape and daily life unfolds amid change. This dimension is largely missing from the historiography of Palestine and of the Arab world in general. Reinstating these horizons of hope, ambition and community -viewed within their own temporal context and through the eyes of those who lived them - opens the way for a reassessment of the past that centers alternative social and political imaginaries. This renewal of perspectives is opposed to the notion of a dead-end in history; instead, it brings back into view the vibrant landscape of possibilities that once animated the region.



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With this mini-exhibition and podcast project, we propose to shift the gaze towards some of these paths not taken. The period of the first world war and its immediate aftermath stand out as a particularly fertile moment brimming with alternative imaginaries and competing conceptions and dimensions of political community. Many of these visions reached beyond the nation-state, offering strikingly different understandings of belonging and citizenship. Focusing on projects that never materialized calls for a mode of historical inquiry rarely applied to Palestine and the larger region: an exploration of past futures, in Reinhart Koselleck's sense, and a history of possibilities that “restores dignity to each time-space position” while foregrounding what Hans Blumenberg describes as “humanity’s radical potentialities.”



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To access the podcast, please visit:
<https://fi.hypotheses.org/>

