

10 • Introduction to Ottoman Cartography

AHMET T. KARAMUSTAFA

SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION

The surviving maps of the premodern Ottoman Empire are as rich as they are variegated.¹ For roughly four hundred years—from the early decades of the fifteenth century when the distinctive institutions and culture of this world empire began to take shape to the final quarter of the eighteenth century when increasingly rapid assimilation of contemporary western European cartographic practices into Ottoman culture almost completely squeezed out older “traditional” patterns of mapmaking—Ottoman society nurtured and sustained several cartographic traditions. These ranged from various forms of state-sponsored practical cartography (military, administrative, architectural) to private scientific, religious, and artistic mapmaking. Not many recorded artifacts survive from these traditions. But the quality and diversity of extant premodern Ottoman maps certainly suggest that there was a significant and continuous level of cartographic consciousness in certain segments of premodern Ottoman high culture that merits independent scrutiny.

In the two chapters that follow this Introduction the main genres of surviving Ottoman terrestrial maps are described. A common influence in these groups of maps is the extent to which either they were made to serve some practical purpose of imperial policy or reflected the influence of imperial patronage on cartographic form and style. Thus in chapter 11 a diverse group of military plans and scroll maps of water supply systems in Istanbul highlights the key role of official architects, engineers, and soldiers in the development of Ottoman cartographic traditions. Similarly, in chapter 12 the driving force behind the town views and itinerary maps in the Ottoman historical chronicles was the conscious commemoration of imperial exploits and especially the conquest of new territories in the Mediterranean, southwest Europe, and Asia Minor. By way of contrast, there are the maps produced for everyday consumption. These include the regional and world maps that illustrated scholarly texts and are also described in chapter 11. Such maps are often far less innovative, incorporating Western traditions from the sixteenth century onward, but also perpetuating the older characteristics of Islamic geographical mapping described

in chapters 4 through 7 of this book. Finally, though not included in this discrete Ottoman section, chapter 14 brings together the previously scattered corpus of Islamic marine mapping in the Mediterranean and examines a number of charts of Ottoman provenance. Many of these charts, drafted in portolan or *isolarii* style, were initially copied from Italian models, but the *Kitab-i bahriye* of Piri Re’is in particular includes non-Western sources and shows considerable cartographic inventiveness.

Taken as a whole, the Ottoman maps we have reviewed in this book may eventually turn out to be only a small part of this original corpus. This may particularly be the case for the later or transitional period of mapping from the seventeenth century onward, when the slow diffusion of Western practices transformed traditional cartography. Even so, in these examples and despite the problems described below, a foundation is laid from which to enlarge a previously neglected chapter of cartographic history.

TERMINOLOGY

The modern Turkish term for “map” is *harita*. In Ottoman Turkish, however, the word *harīṭa* and its variations *ḥarti*, *karta*, *kerte* had the restricted meaning “sea chart.” More specifically, this cluster of words that ultimately derive from the Catalan “carta” through the Greek “kharti” was used in Ottoman Turkish to denote “portolan charts.” In this meaning, the terms were used interchangeably with *mapamundi*, *papamundi*, and *nappamundi*, three Turkish variants of the medieval European term *mappamundi* when it was used as a nautical term.² In contrast to the specificity of the terms used for marine

1. In addition to the corpus detailed in the following two chapters, some Ottoman maps are discussed and illustrated in the chapters on qibla maps and marine charting in the Mediterranean.

2. Details with ample documentation can be found in Henry Kahane, Renée Kahane, and Andreas Tietze, *The Lingua Franca in the Levant: Turkish Nautical Terms of Italian and Greek Origin* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958), 158–59 (term 177, “carta”), 290–91 (term 394, “mappamondo”), and 594–97 (term 875, *ḫartī* [“kharti”]). There is no evidence that the Ottomans were familiar with the *mappaemundi* “world map” tradition.

charts, Ottoman terrestrial maps were referred to under such generic names as *resm* (“drawing,” “picture”) and *sûret* (“image,” “representation”). The term *resm* seems to have been used more commonly than *sûret* to designate graphic representations in general. In Ottoman architectural practice it was normally this term and its cognates *tasvîr* and *tersîm* that were used to signify “ground plan” and, when modified by a suitable adjective, “three-dimensional model.”³

PROBLEMS IN THE STUDY OF OTTOMAN CARTOGRAPHY

The study of premodern Ottoman cartography is hindered by several problems—most notably, the almost complete lack of scholarship on the subject and the limited and tentative nature of the few existing studies. In addition, the cartographic record is difficult to trace, since the cultural legacy of the Ottoman Empire is both large and scattered. And, most broadly, there are considerable methodological difficulties in understanding the unique social and cultural space that the empire occupied between western Europe on the one hand and the societies of Asia and Africa on the other hand.

Scholarly examination of the cartographic record from the Ottoman Empire is only beginning. Apart from individual studies devoted to isolated Ottoman maps there still exist no systematic attempts to recover and record, let alone examine in detail, the extant cartographic output of this sprawling and long-lived world empire. The cartographic holdings of even the most central repositories of source materials for Ottoman history, the library and the archives of the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, the Başbakanlık Arşivi, and the İstanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi, all in İstanbul, remain uncataloged.⁴ The incomplete record hinders effective study of the history of Ottoman cartography as a whole. In particular, the protracted process of replacing premodern Ottoman cartographic traditions by contemporary western European ones during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries is impossible to trace in the absence of published, or even unpublished, inventories and catalogs. There is therefore a serious need for concerted efforts to uncover and publish all surviving Ottoman maps.⁵

The task of building the record, however, is severely hampered by the volume of existing source materials for the study of Ottoman history. The Ottomans developed and maintained a centralized and highly bureaucratized state apparatus that employed sophisticated procedures of record keeping. Moreover, an extremely literate high culture rested and centered on the state. The archival, literary, artistic, and architectural legacy of this imperial political community and its culture is staggeringly large in volume. Despite the advances of the past three decades,

the scholarly sifting of this material is still in its early stages. In these circumstances, the historian of Ottoman cartography has to be content with occasional and incidental finds rather than systematic surveys of Ottoman maps.

The technical difficulties of gaining access to Ottoman maps are coupled with methodological problems in the study of premodern Ottoman history in general. At present, Ottoman studies is an insular field, with no operational ties to either European or Islamic studies. Most historians of premodern Europe and Islam, as well as the majority of Ottomanists, function with a set of assump-

3. A detailed survey of Ottoman architectural terminology for plans and models can be found in Gülru Necipoğlu-Kafadar, “Plans and Models in 15th- and 16th-Century Ottoman Architectural Practice,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 45 (1986): 224–43, esp. 240–42.

4. Many, though not all, of the Ottoman maps held at the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi are recorded with brief descriptions in Fehmi Edhem Karatay, *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi: Türkçe Yazmalar Kataloğu*, 2 vols. (İstanbul: Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, 1961), 1:464–77 (Portulan ve Haritalar, nos. 1407–58); English translation: E. H. van de Waal, “Manuscript Maps in the Topkapı Saray Library, İstanbul,” *Imago Mundi* 23 (1969): 81–95. Of the maps preserved at the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi, there is only a hurried handlist that was prepared by Çağatay Uluçay, though there is apparently an ongoing attempt to catalog them (oral testimony by Ülkü Altındağ, director of the archives). The cartographic holdings of the Başbakanlık (or Başvekalet) Arşivi have so far been subjected to two separate cataloging efforts, though the results of both these classifications remain for the most part inaccessible to researchers; see Atilla Çetin, *Başbakanlık Arşivi Kılavuzu* (İstanbul: Enderun Kitabevi, 1979), 42–43 (Haritalar Tasnifi). The İstanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi maintains only an inadequate card catalog of its Ottoman map collection, which is particularly rich for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

5. Existing general accounts of Ottoman cartography include Klaus Kreiser, “Türkische Kartographie,” in *Lexikon zur Geschichte der Kartographie*, 2 vols., ed. Ingrid Kretschmer, Johannes Dörflinger, and Franz Wawrik (Vienna: Franz Deuticke, 1986), 2:828–30; Franz Taeschner, “Djughrafiyâ: The Ottoman Geographers,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960–), 2:587–90; Hüseyin Dağtekin, “Bizde tarih haritacılığı ve kaynakları üzerine bir araştırma,” in *VIII. Türk Tarih Kongresi, Ankara 11.–15. Ekim 1976*, 3 vols. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1979–83), 2:1141–81; Abdülhak Adnan Adıvar, *Osmanlı Türklerinde İlim*, 4th ed. (İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1982). More specialized studies rarely go beyond narrow examination of individual maps. Some notable exceptions that cover more ground are David A. King, “Some Ottoman Schemes of Sacred Geography,” in *Proceedings of the II. International Congress on the History of Turkish and Islamic Science and Technology, 28 April–2 May 1986*, vol. 1, *Turkish and Islamic Science and Technology in the 16th Century* (İstanbul: İ.T.Ü. Research Center of History of Science and Technology, 1986), 45–57; Fevzi Kurtoglu, *Türk süel alanında harita ve krokilere verilen değer ve Ali Macar Reis Atlası* (İstanbul: Sebat, 1935); Necipoğlu-Kafadar, “Plans and Models,” (note 3); Günsel Renda, “Wall Paintings in Turkish Houses,” in *Fifth International Congress of Turkish Art*, ed. Géza Fehér (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1978), 711–35; and Zeren Tamındı, “İslam Resminde Kutsal Kent ve Yöre Tasvirleri,” *Journal of Turkish Studies/Türklük Bilgisi Araştırmaları* 7 (1983): 407–37.

tions that separates Ottoman history from mainstream European and Islamic history, thus effectively relegating it to the backstage of the purportedly more central dramas of the medieval West and of the pre-Ottoman Islamic East. The examination of the cartographic record of premodern Ottoman history cannot, however, lead to valid conclusions if Ottoman maps are not studied within the wider context of European and Islamic cartography. Even the most cursory glance at the corpus of extant premodern Ottoman maps shows that the maps that make up this corpus are both European and Islamic in nature. Many of the Ottoman cartographic traditions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries grew directly out of the decisive Ottoman encounter with the Latin cultural areas of the Mediterranean during the fifteenth century, while

some others were continuations of pre-Ottoman Islamic patterns of mapmaking. The historian of premodern Ottoman mapmaking, therefore, has to stride over rarely crossed boundaries in order to attempt a cross-cultural examination of traditional Ottoman and premodern European and Islamic cartography. The comparative effort required should not, however, lead to a search for survivals: Ottoman maps need to be studied not as derivations from other original cartographic traditions, but primarily as heterogeneous yet organic products of Ottoman culture in all its diversity.⁶

6. Necipoglu-Kafadar, "Plans and Models" (note 3), is a model study that pays equal and thorough attention to the European and Islamic background of Ottoman architectural plans.