2 *Hebrew Space and Architecture*

We came to the Land[1]	אָנוּ בָּאנוּ אַרְצָה
To build and be built by it	לִבְנוֹת וּלְהִבָּנוֹת בָּהּ

This pioneering song became very popular from the 1920s. Of unknown origin, its lines were repeated over and over again in Hasidic fashion, another example of the spontaneous cultural generation that was common during early Zionism.

Zionists saw themselves as colonizers and spoke of themselves as such because, among other things, it boosted their credentials as Europeans. But they also considered the land they came to settle as their historical legacy. And if they wanted to reshape space in Palestine according to modern European standards, they also thought of their colonization project as an act of restoration, a contemporary expression of an ancient patrimony. It was a unique aspect of the Zionist colonial project and the Zionist immigration model, defined by Itamar Even-Zohar as rejecting the old culture they left behind but not adopting the new culture they encountered, the Arab culture of Palestine.[2] Instead, Zionists wished for something altogether new and different.

For Zionists, the desolation of Palestine was a historical accident they were intent on fixing by removing what they thought of as the layers of grime that had accumulated on it for generations and restoring it to

[1] The Land of Israel is often referred to in Jewish culture as simply the Land, without further identification, indicating its singularity and cultural significance. For historical recordings of the song see www.zemereshet.co.il/m/song.asp?id=717.

[2] Itamar Even-Zohar, "The Emergence of a Native Hebrew Culture in Palestine," in Yehuda Reinharz and Anita Shapira, eds., *Essential Papers on Zionism*, New York University Press, 1996, pp. 727–744. The connections between Zionism and colonialism have been debated at length. For a summary of the discourse see Avi Bareli, "Forgetting Europe: Perspectives on the Debate about Zionism and Colonialism," *Journal of Israeli History* 20: 2–3 (2001): 99–120. Derek Penslar has also written an excellent commentary on it in *Zionism: An Emotional State*, Rutgers University Press, 2023.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

its original Jewish condition. "Is this my land? The land of Abraham, Moses, Salomon, Judah Maccabee, Bar Kokhba and mine as well?" asks David, a young immigrant in a 1920s short story by Yosef Luidor.[3] Writing about his own childhood, S. Yizhar recalls a similar notion when he describes how his father

> continued to press as hard as he could on the handles of that iron plow; it was hard for the plow and hard for the mule and hard for the man, and he was not sure if it was so hard because the stubborn soil with its packed crust was undisturbed for thousands of years, or ever, no one has touched it, no one has violated its purity … but now we thrust a peg in, as the saying goes, and redeem another strip of land with our hands, unnoticed yet in the great expanse that lies wasting in the sluggish heat.[4]

Zionists considered the history of the Land an exclusively Jewish affair. But while Herzl's vision for a Jewish state was audacious, grand, and biblical in its proportions, in practice it was very difficult to carry out. Initially, Zionists had relatively few means at their disposal and few opportunities to use them. With limited funds, a small, irregular, and untrained work force, arbitrary access to land, political obstacles, and increasing resistance from Arabs in Palestine, they could not implement their ambitious national vision with predictability and regularity until the establishment of their state in 1948. The spatial consequences of these challenges meant that settlements were somewhat randomly spread over the country, that they were built intermittently, and that they were modest in scale and design.[5]

At the same time, the Zionist colonization project was an organized affair, paid for, planned, and managed centrally, and this also had an impact on the construction of the Yishuv. In other words, and unlike most colonial settlement projects, the Jewish colonization of Palestine was a group effort. "Settling the Land of Israel is not a personal matter but a communal one," wrote Ahad Ha'am in 1891; "anyone can just pick up and go to America, but the settlement of Jews in the Land of Israel should be arranged by the people as a whole … and managed

[3] Josef Luidor, "Yoash," in *Recklessness* (נער פחז כמים), Pardes, 2022, p. 64.
[4] S. Yizhar, *Preliminaries* (מקדמות), Zmora-Bitan, 1992, pp. 13–14 (my translation).
[5] Zvi Efrat, *The Israeli Project: Construction and Architecture, 1948–1974* (הפרויקט הישראלי: בניה ואדריכלות 1948-1974), Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2004.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

thoughtfully and with purpose by our leaders."[6] The communal nature of the Zionist colonial project shaped every inch of the land Jews acquired in Palestine, rural as well as urban.

A Hebrew Countryside

The modern idea of farming or work on the land as purifying or redemptive goes back to the ancient Greek concept of the pastoral, a harmonious life in the bosom of a welcoming nature. It was always more of a literary notion, in ancient Greece as well as in early modern Europe, where Romantic poets used the figure of the shepherd to symbolize it. But as life in Europe began to change, as factories replaced farms and cities replaced villages, the poetic notion of the pastoral transformed as well. From the late eighteenth century onward, farming and the allegedly cozy community it fostered began to be seen as an antidote to the ills of industrialism and the alienation brought on by urbanization. In the European Romantic imagination, farmers came to symbolize the new nation and its attachment to its ancestral soil.

The pastoral idea in its Greco-Christian version entered Jewish culture late, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It also took on a different form because the modern Jewish experience was different, shaped by the ancient legacy of the Jews and their minority status in the societies they inhabited. In the Hebrew Bible, shepherds often represent freedom and a critique of settled society; both King Saul and his successor, King David, began their careers as shepherds.[7] If we go back to Abraham Mapu's 1856 novel *The Love of Zion*, we find one of the first modern formulations of the pastoral idea in Jewish culture. The love story at the center of the novel takes place in a rustic biblical setting, populated by young men and women who frolic and make love in the fields and vineyards of Judea. "The sons and daughters of the noblemen had come up to Bethlehem to enjoy the spring weather. Tamar, radiant with beauty … went with her maid … to the shepherd's pastures, where Amnon was feeding his flocks."[8] At the same time, the novel is also

[6] Ahad Ha'am, "Truth from the Land of Israel" (אמת מארץ ישראל) *Hamelitz* 13, June 30, 1891 (כ"ד בסיון תרנ"א).

[7] Herbert Schneidau, *Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition*, Louisiana State University Press, 1976.

[8] Abraham Mapu, *The Shepherd Prince or The Love of Zion* (אהבת ציון), Brookside Publishing, 1922, p. 44.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

set in a densely built and culturally refined city, in a Jerusalem of fine palaces, teeming markets, and learned societies. The novel gives two separate and somewhat contradictory aspects of European modernity a distinctly Jewish context, the desire for a highly developed national culture alongside a romantic belief in a return to the land as an escape and expression of that culture.

The Jewish design of colonial space in Palestine mixed rustic and urban in ways that had begun in the construction of *moshavot*, the farming villages that were built in the 1880s by proto-Zionist immigrants to Palestine, who used their own capital to buy land and establish agricultural settlements as private farms. Unlike the Zionist immigrants, who would arrive twenty years later, these early Jewish immigrants did not have a coherent national agenda yet. They came to Palestine hoping to build a better and healthier Jewish life close to a land they considered theirs.

Moshava

Land ownership in Palestine was regulated and documented, and anyone who wanted to settle on it had to buy it from its legal owners. Until the establishment of the state of Israel, land could not be seized by force. This was another peculiarity of the Zionist project, which allocated considerable amounts of money for land acquisition.[9] Some of the land was occupied by Arab tenant farmers who had lived on it for generations, and removing them was not easy or pleasant. "When we come to our [*sic*] land," wrote Yitzhak Epstein in 1907, "we must not think of it as conquest, we must not wrong anyone" already living there. But his prophetic warning was largely ignored by the new Jewish owners, who were eager to reshape the land they had just acquired and considered virgin soil.

The question was, how? What shape should the new owners give the land they had bought? Like other colonialists, Jewish settlers could choose between two models, villages they knew back home, mainly in Eastern Europe, and local Arab villages. They chose neither.

[9] In some early European colonies, Manhattan, for example, or New Zealand, European settlers made land contracts with the indigenous peoples who lived on the land but whose concept of ownership differed from that of Europeans. Acquisition by force was a more common colonial practice.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

Instead, they developed a unique model that borrowed elements from both, but was based on a third model, the Templer village.

The Templers were members of a German Protestant sect, who believed that the second coming of Christ was imminent and that it would take place in or around Jerusalem. In preparation for it, they arrived in Palestine during the second half of the nineteenth century and built a number of agricultural villages in anticipation of their Messiah. The Templers were part of a larger Christian messianic trend, which took advantage of the decline of Ottoman rule to strengthen a Christian foothold in the Holy Land. Like many of the Christian projects that were developed around Palestine at the time – convents, hospitals, hostels – Templer villages were designed by European architects and engineers, many of whom were later engaged in the *moshavot*.[10] "The settlement I have seen," said Kaiser Wilhelm II to Theodor Herzl when the two met in Jerusalem on November 2, 1898, "the German ones as well as those of your people, may serve as indication of what can be done with the land."[11]

While a number of considerations determined the clustered shape of Templer villages – security, isolation in a new land, scant infrastructure – they had a curious "suburban" look to them: angular street plans, spacious houses, red-tiled roofs, and gardens with decorative trees and shrubs. They looked more like garden cities, a contemporary planning concept that combined city and country living. The notion developed in Europe in response to urban congestion, and it influenced design in the Yishuv in important ways. Templer villages were praised by contemporaries for "their well-cultivated fields, trim gardens, and substantial white stone mansions." In a sparsely populated Palestine they looked very distinct, "a most agreeable and unexpected picture of civilization upon this semi-barbarous coast," wrote Laurence Oliphant

[10] Yossi Ben-Artzi, "The Moshavot and the Beginning of Farming Architecture in Palestine – a Reassessment" (המושבות וראשיתו של תכנון פיסי כפרי בא"י – הערכה מחדש), in Yehoshua Ben-Arye, Yossi Ben-Artzi, and Haim Goren, eds., *Studies in Historical Geographic Settlement of the Land of Israel*, Yad Ben Tzvi, 1988, p. 105.

[11] Theodor Herzl, *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, Herzl Press and Thomas Yoseloff, 1960, pp. 755–756, available at https://archive.org/details/TheCompleteDiariesOfTheodorHerzl_201606/TheCompleteDiariesOfTheodorHerzlEngVolume2_OCR/page/n165/mode/2up?view=theater.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

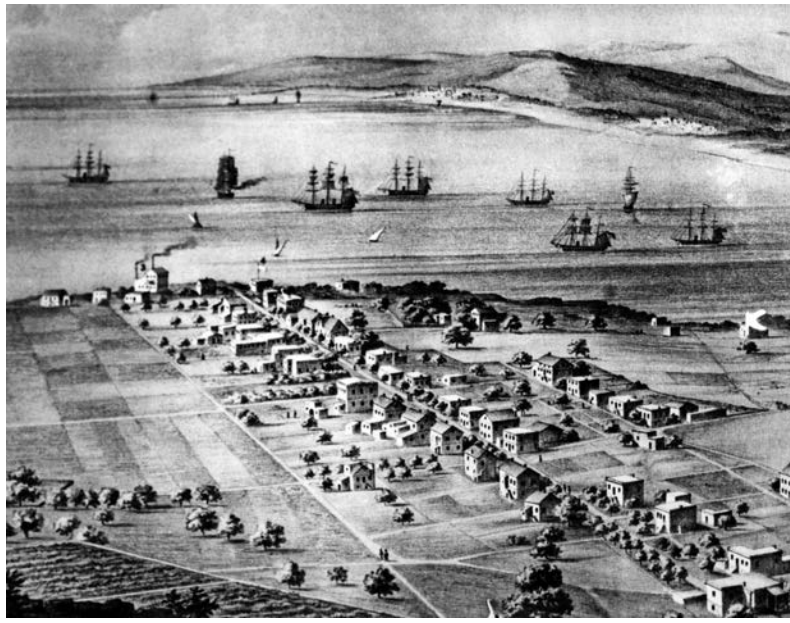


Fig. 2.1 The first Templer colony in Haifa, before 1874, when the square houses were retrofitted with red-tiled roofs following a freak winter and heavy snows. Süddeutsche Zeitung Photo/Alamy Stock Photo.

(see Figure 2.1).[12] Visiting the colony in 1883, Oliphant was delighted to observe how,

leaving [Haifa] by the western gateway, we ride for about a mile parallel to the seashore between high cactus hedges, and suddenly find ourselves apparently transported into the heart of Europe. Running straight back from the beach for about half a mile and sloping upward for about a hundred feet in that distance, to the base of the rocky sides of Carmel, runs the village street. On each side of it is a pathway, with a double row of shade-trees, and behind them a series of white stone houses, of one and two stories, generally with tiled roofs, each surrounded with its garden, and each with a text in German engraved over the doorway.[13]

[12] Laurence Oliphant, *Haifa: Or, Life in Modern Palestine*, William Blackwood & Sons, 1886, p. 20; Yossi Ben-Artzi, *The Hebrew Moshava in the Landscape of the Land of Israel, 1882–1914*.) 1914–1882 המושבה העברית בנוף ארץ ישראל), Yad Ben Tzvi/Hebrew University, 1988, p. 282.

[13] Ibid.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

Most of the early *moshavot* adopted the clustered shape of Templer colonies, with two facing rows of rectangular white houses and slanted red roofs, separated by a main road that ran through them. It was a common village configuration, in the old countries as well as in colonies overseas, that changed over time for different ideological and security considerations.[14]

Isolation and poor infrastructure forced both German and Jewish farming villages to establish communal institutions that added a municipal flair to their settlements, an urban aspect that was not alien to the traditional founders of the *moshavot*. As modern farming communities, the *moshavot* were unprecedented in Jewish history. But since most of their founders had grown up in shtetls, small Jewish towns in Eastern Europe, their idea of community was informed by their upbringing and was reflected in the institutions they added to their farming communities, "rabbi and butcher, cantor and choir, a doctor and a pharmacist and a medic, an infirmary … a school, and a store," as Agnon wrote: institutions that were more typical of a town than a farming community, in Europe or in Palestine.[15] The writer Y. D. Berkowitz left this exuberant note about a trip he took around the country a few years after he settled in Palestine in 1928 (see Figure 2.2):

> The Jewish settlements stand out almost immediately. After you see the charred Arab villages with their houses jumbled on top of bald, rocky hills, with no windows and not a spot of greenery, looking like old, abandoned nests, it's lovely to see the Jewish settlements with their fresh green grass, young red roofs, and tall water towers that jot into the blue sky and look to the future.[16]

This unique combination of town and country was passed on to future communal settlements in the Yishuv.[17]

[14] Ya'acov Shavit, "Regulations of the First Moshavot Concerning the Practicality of Utopia" (תקנות המושבות הראשונות: מתקנות הקהל לניסיון באוטופיה מעשית), *Katedra* 72 (1994): 50–62, at p. 52.

[15] S. Y. Agnon, *Only Yesterday* (תמול שלשום), Shocken Books, 1971, p. 193.

[16] Y. D. Berkowitz, "Tel Aviv," in *Collected Writings* (כתבי י"ד ברקוביץ), Dvir, 1963, p. 354.

[17] See Shavit, "Regulations of the First Moshavot," pp. 50–62; Yisrael Bartal, "Old Yishuv, New Yishuv" (ישוב ישן וישוב חדש), *Katedra* 2 (1976): 1–17 (esp. nn. 1, 3). On the urban character of the shtetl see Allan Sokolova, "The Podolian Shtetl as Architectural Phenomenon," in G. Estraich and M. Krutikov, eds., *The Shtetl: Image and Reality*, Routledge, 2000. Templer

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003



Fig. 2.2 New Jewish settlements, such as Rosh Pina, pictured here around 1896, impressed visitors, including the writer Y. D. Berkowitz. Photo by Leon Katz, Pritzker Family National Photography Collection, National Library of Israel.

House design on *moshavot* was also influenced by the innovations of the Templers, who rejected both the crammed and irregular farmhouses of traditional German villages and the closed and almost windowless houses of local Arab farmers, the *fellahin*. Instead, they enlarged the square shape of Arab houses into roomier stone structures, added tall windows, and, following a freak winter in 1874, when heavy snows caused their flat roofs to collapse, they replaced them with slanted terracotta roofs.[18] The founders of the *moshavot* simplified these designs, duplicated them on a smaller scale, and standardized them to ensure their communities "are built attractively and in good order … with well-regulated houses."[19] Later, the design became a template

villages had many of the same services as well, including schools, medical facilities, churches, and sometimes a hotel. See Oliphant, *Haifa*, p. 24.

[18] Gil Gordon, "Roofs in the Wind: The Introduction of Roof Tiles and a Terracotta Industry to Palestine" (גגות מתעופפים ברוח: כניסתם של רעפים ותעשיית החרסית לארץ ישראל), *Zmanim* 96 (2006): 58–67.

[19] Shavit, "Regulations of the First Moshavot," p. 59: 1879 ordinances of Petah Tikva.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003



Fig. 2.3 The simplified design of houses on *moshavot* became the model for country housing, usually on kibbutzim. Kibbutz Bet Alfa, 1948–1951. Pikiwiki.

for the iconic Israeli house: a rectangular white house – or cottage, as it was popularly called – topped by a triangular roof of red tiles (see Figure 2.3).

The selective choices of the early Jewish settlers and their new designs were the first example of Even-Zohar's Zionist immigration model. But because these early settlers were not guided by a well-defined national vision, their construction of space was considered pragmatic rather than ideological.[20] It was not until the next wave of immigrants, who started arriving in the early 1900s, that space in Palestine began to change on a bigger scale and followed an ideological program in ways that had unexpected consequences.

[20] A few people did speak about a grander national vision at the time. In 1882 Z. Dubnov wrote that "I and several other people have a lofty and far-reaching goal in mind. Our end goal is to take eventual possession of the Land of Israel and reestablish the national independence that was lost to the Jews for two thousand years." See https://benyehuda.org/read/43514.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

The Creation of the Kibbutz

The kibbutz (pl. kibbutzim) was the next stage in the evolution of modern farming space in Palestine and one of the earliest attempts to give the natural environment an ideological shape as part of the Zionist restoration project. Communalism played a major role in it, as it had in other settlements Jews set up in Palestine during the nineteenth century – in 1868 a man named Wolf Kalisher drew up plans for a communal farming village near Jerusalem and proposed that members give up their private property and share everything.[21] There were two reasons for this. The first was the absence of a modern infrastructure in Ottoman Palestine, which made cooperation necessary. The second was the communal traditions of the Jews who established these settlements.

The first reason is fairly obvious. Establishing settlements in a new and unfamiliar land that was not rich in resources required capital, expertise, organization, and cooperation. The second is more unusual, and came from the cooperative nature of traditional Jewish communities. Centuries of existence as minoritized communities led to an advanced collective culture amongst Jews. These traditions came in handy during the Jewish settlement of Palestine. They also contributed to the urban character of the *moshavot*. The establishment of the first kibbutzim in the early 1910s took these communal traditions to a new level, not only in Jewish history but in world history as well, and redefined Jewish space in the process.

Unlike the first group of middle-class Jewish immigrants, whose settlements soon turned into small towns, some of the settlers who arrived in Palestine in the early 1900s were very different: young, single, fiercely ideological, and with a clear national vision they were eager to realize. "He felt like a stranger" in Palestine, says a young immigrant in Luidor's short story "Harvest." "Nothing bound him to it yet, no land of his own, no footing, no family, a brother, a sister, no one, only his love for the land of his fathers."[22] But within a few years of landing on the shores of Palestine this group of young men and women came up with a completely new settlement configuration. Eventually called

[21] Haim Gvati, *One Hundred Years of Settlement: The History of Jewish Settlement in the Land of Israel* (שנות התיישבות 100), Hakkibutz Hame'uhad, 1981.

[22] Josef Luidor, "Harvest" (ימי הקציר), in *Recklessness*, p. 34.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

the kibbutz, it was a unique communal setup that became one of the earliest and most well-known innovations of Zionism.

Ironically, the creation of the kibbutz was a historical accident, a meeting of ideology, demography, physical conditions, and coincidence. Between 1909 and 1912 Zionists experimented with three kinds of cooperative settlements that were influenced by contemporary trends of social and economic justice in Europe. We often think of socialism and communism in this context, but in many ways Zionism belonged to those trends as well. Some of the Jewish immigrants who arrived in Palestine in the early 1900s were deeply moved by those ideas, especially the redemptive power of labor and Jewish self-sufficiency. But since most of them had no agricultural experience, they were sent to vocational farms that were set up by Zionist organizations specifically for that purpose. The idea was to train them as farmers and then help them set up private farms; no one envisioned cooperative farming yet. In practice, the plan did not work very well. First, because farming in Palestine was not very profitable. Second, because work on the training farms created tension between capital and labor, between the Zionist central organization and the agricultural students. That tension generated the first kibbutz.

Specific problems started when a group of agricultural students at a training farm near the Sea of Galilee, known as Kvutzat Kinneret, became upset with the manager of the farm, who had hired local Arab laborers as additional farm workers. As the students saw it, it was a question of profit over ideals – nationalist ideals about Jewish labor and self-sufficiency. They walked off the job in protest, and were persuaded to come back only after management agreed to let them run part of the farm on their own and set up "an independent farm … with no managers or overseers."[23] The harvest was good that year, and when the rookie farmers turned a profit, the managing Zionist organization agreed to continue the experiment on a more permanent basis, making history in the process; a socialist experiment in the service of national-capitalism, if you will.

A year later, in 1910, the second farming cooperative, Degania, was established and laid the foundations for what soon became a phenomenally successful settlement scheme, based on a bottom-up approach that

[23] Gvati, *One Hundred Years of Settlement*, p. 126.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

contributed to its strength and endurance.[24] Cooperatives helped the young settlers to cope with the harsh conditions and compensated for their inexperience. Later, when Arab resistance to Jewish colonization grew, farming cooperatives were instrumental as training grounds and as shelter for the Jewish militia, the Hagana.

The failure of a third experiment in collective farming, Merchavia, clearly demonstrated the benefits of the first two. Merchavia was established in 1911 as the brainchild of the German economist and sociologist Franz Oppenheimer (1864–1943), who envisioned an agricultural settlement that would combine capitalist and communist principles in accordance with the socialist maxim "From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs" – the same idea that inspired Herzl's New Society in his utopian novel *Altneuland*. Although Merchavia was temporarily abandoned in 1918 following a series of difficulties, its plan for communal space had a lasting effect on the layout of kibbutzim later.

Plans for the cooperative were made by another German architect, Alexander Baerwald (1877–1930), who happened to be in nearby Haifa at the time to plan the Technion, the first institution of higher learning in Palestine. Baerwald's task was to create a space that would express the common ownership of the land and the cooperative nature of labor and the means of production while accommodating differences in individual needs and abilities. Inspired by housing projects for German farm workers, the initial design included a large central yard, flanked by living and farming facilities. "On the north side," wrote the secretary of the cooperative, "cowsheds, a stable and warehouses. … On the east side, residence buildings, and on the south more residences, a dining hall and other communal facilities. On the west, by the outside wall, farm sheds, a carpentry and a smithing shed."[25] The geometric shape emphasized cohesion and cooperation and outlined the community clearly in the open setting of the land (see Figure 2.4).

In essence, Baerwald shrank an entire village and arranged it in a neat square that included all the different parts of the community in one place – shopping malls are designed on a similar principle. It is difficult to guess what spatial form the unique composite of communism and capitalism would have taken had Merchavia prospered. Baerwald only

[24] Galia Bar-Or and Yuval Yaski, curators, *The Kibbutz: Architecture without Precedent. The Israeli Pavilion at the 12th International Venice Biennale* (הקיבוץ: אדריכלות בלא תקדים), Keter, 2010.

[25] Merchavia Visitor Portal, available at https://merchavyard.org.il/.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

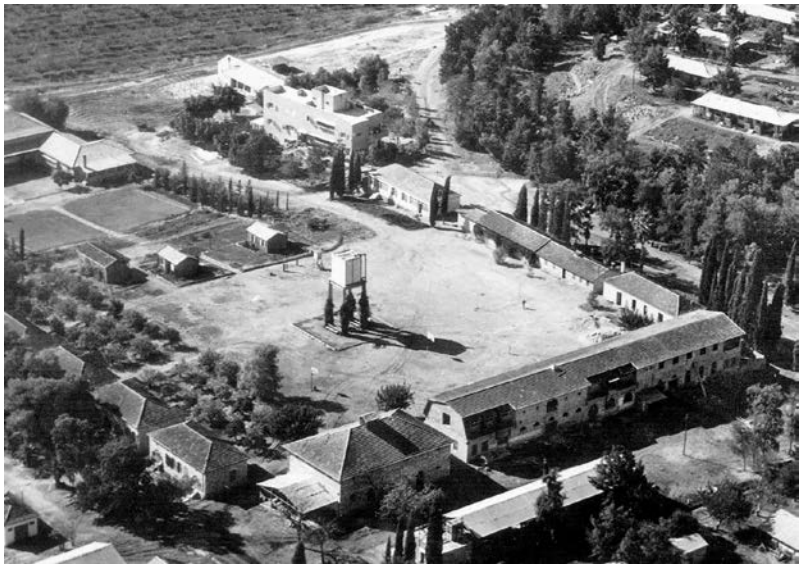


Fig. 2.4 Aerial photo of the restored yard in Merchavia, 1937, originally designed by Alexander Baerwald in 1912 as a cooperative village. Baerwald was an eclectic architect who incorporated local elements into his designs. His plan for the cowshed, stable, and storehouse reflects local Arab aesthetics in the arched windows, flat roof, and limestone bricks. The shape of the residential section of the farm, with its big square windows, quoins, and red-tiled roof, reflects Templer aesthetics. Israel Government Press Office.

managed to articulate its first and more communal phase, and in doing so gave a clear physical expression to abstract ideas that circulated almost simultaneously in Kvutzat Kinneret (see Figure 2.5), in Degania (see Figure 2.6), and in Merchavia.

The closed geometry of early kibbutzim was a sensible plan for a small and isolated collective. But as cooperative farms grew in size and number during the 1920s and 1930s, the division of space evolved as well. Two architects in particular helped to redefine it: Richard Kauffmann (1887–1958) and Lotte Cohn (1893–1983). Their major challenge was the novelty of the task. There were no precedents for planning a kibbutz. Existing farm models were not useful because most of them were private properties planned for profit. It was a completely new concept.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003



Fig. 2.5 Hatzar Kinneret, the first Zionist farming cooperative, in 1912. Some of the principles that informed Baerwald's design for Merchavia in 1912 are visible in this earlier layout as well, such as cohesion, cooperation, and the clear outline of the farm in the surrounding open space. Photo by Ya'acov Ben-Dov, Bitmuma, Aharon Israeli collection, Pritzker Family National Photography Collection, National Library of Israel.

Kauffmann and Cohn came up with an odd solution for this challenge: they took the principles of the garden city and applied them to rural space. "We are actually the first in the world," said Kauffmann, "to take modern principles of urban planning and apply them to country life."[26] The solution was odd because Palestine was sparsely populated and mostly rural at that time.

When we first came to Palestine we were impressed by the beauty and splendor of [a] country … unchanged yet by the intensive agriculture that altered it later. … The unusual modest yet heroic beauty of the land struck us like no

[26] Similar solutions were suggested for Templer villages and in housing design in Tel Aviv. See Marina Epstein-Pliouchtch and Michael Levin, eds., *Richard Kauffmann and the Zionist Project* (ריכארד קאופמן והפרויקט הציוני), Hakibbutz Hame'uhad, 2016, p. 111.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003



Fig. 2.6 Aerial photo of Degania in 1918. On the left is the yard, comprising barns, workshops, and granary. The two-storied house outside the yard to the right is the members' living quarters. Pritzker Family National Photography Collection, National Library of Israel.

other land before. It seemed to us that the landscape – perhaps including its "charred Arab villages with their houses jumbled on top of bald, rocky hills, with no windows and not a spot of greenery, looking like old, abandoned nests," as Berkowitz put it[27] – challenged architects to dare and build on it.[28]

After a few years of trial and error, and with input from members of kibbutzim, architects such as Kauffmann, Cohn, and others broke the original farm square and shaped it into an expansive "socialist" space.[29] The major aspects of communal life, which were placed on different sides of the original kibbutz square, were now separated into different areas or

[27] Berkowitz, "Tel Aviv," p. 354.
[28] Epstein-Pliouchtch and Levin, eds., *Richard Kauffmann*, pp. 108–109.
[29] Early plans for kibbutzim were neater and more symmetrical, and set aside small private spaces for members. See Ruth Enis and Yosef Ben-Arav, *Kibbutz Gardens and Landscape* (גנים ונוף בקיבוץ), Defense Ministry, 1994, pp. 34–38.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

zones that were easily negotiated on foot. There was a communal zone for dining, cultural facilities, and children's dorms; a zone consisting of small apartment blocks for members; and a third zone with barns and workshops. They were placed in a park-like setting that was free of cars and broke the traditional division between private and public. The main landscaping challenge here was how to shape the kibbutz "park," how to release the landscape from the boundaries of the (ornamental) garden, as Christopher Tunnard put it, free it from the capitalist constraints of the parcel and the plot and fit it to the classless kibbutz society.[30] Since green space surrounded the entire community on a kibbutz, turning it into an ornamental garden was impractical and irrelevant, as members of Degania soon realized. When they first arrived at the shores of the Sea of Galilee and saw the "bare valley, without tree or shade," they quickly "arranged a little garden with neat flower beds … they planted alfalfa that carpeted everything with green, built a little round pool with a fountain," and arranged garden paths around it.[31]

But the refined design felt wrong and out of place. Another configuration was needed, one that would fit a cooperative community that was "neither a city nor a village … nor … a [recreational] park."[32] And it had to be practical too, a landscape or a garden that would redefine the relationship between private and public space. "As farmers of a commune," recalled a member of Kibbutz Bet Zera, "we ignored Kauffmann's plans for small vegetable gardens next to members' apartments" and his fondness for symmetry.[33] A more fitting solution was offered by Architect Shmuel Bickels, who suggested thinking of the kibbutz as "a garden for the whole day," a green space where people live, work, and rest.[34]

[30] Elissa Rosenberg, "Landscape Modernism and the Kibbutz: The Work of Shmuel Bickels," in Inbal Ben-Asher Gitler and Anat Geva, eds., *Israel as a Modern Architectural Experimental Lab, 1948–1978*, Intellect Books, 2019.

[31] Enis and Ben-Arav, *Kibbutz Gardens*, p. 21. The Deganians were not alone in that. Ornamental pools cropped up in other kibbutzim even after gardening was made to match the communal ideology better. See ibid., pp. 38–39. For a picture of Degania's first ornate garden see https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jewish_colonies_and_settlements._Various_Jewish_colonies,_etc._Degania_(A)_near_Semakh._approximately_1920_to_1930._matpc.02346.jpg.

[32] Kibbutz architect Shmuel Bickels in Rosenberg, "Landscape Modernism."

[33] Enis and Ben-Arav, *Kibbutz Gardens*, p. 31.

[34] Rosenberg, "Landscape Modernism," p. 101.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

Lawns became an important element in the whole-day kibbutz garden, even if they were unusual in the context of the Middle East. They required a lot of water and stood out as green oases in the semi-arid environment, as did the kibbutz landscape in general, a literal representation of the Zionist colonial project with its aspirations of making the desert bloom. The social value of lawns was first suggested by the gardener of Kibbutz Ashdot Ya'acov, who took generic plans for his kibbutz and modified them to better fit the nature of his cooperative community. "We wanted to imbed our community in green and create large lawn areas that would blend with the natural environment more harmoniously," he wrote later, no doubt as someone who had grown up in Europe, a stranger to the dry land around him. "We planted ornamental plants around the lawns and arranged trees for shade by the houses."[35]

Toward the end of the 1930s lawns became an iconic element of kibbutz life, an open living-room for members to hang out in, to socialize, to play, to celebrate, and, before the introduction of air-conditioning, to stay cool as well. Lawns also contributed to the final evolution of the original kibbutz square into a deconstructed home, whose various rooms – kitchen, dining room, living rooms, bedrooms, etc. – were extended outside and blended with the external environment, mixing inside and outside as well as private and public. A garden for the whole day indeed (see Figure 2.7).

Houses were integral to the garden and designed to suit its communal logic. On the first communal farms, houses looked very similar to those on *moshavot* and Templer villages. Standing two stories tall and built of stone, with decorative elements and red roofs, the first houses in Degania looked oddly bourgeois amidst the barns, warehouses, and open land around them. But as the original square yard of the first kibbutz was abstracted and diffused, architecture was changed as well.

Curiously, building conventions on many kibbutzim developed two distinct orientations, public and private. Public buildings, like dining halls and performance spaces, children's houses, and schools were modernistic in shape, while the private apartments of kibbutz members – measuring about 25 square meters (apartments were called

[35] Enis and Ben-Arav, *Kibbutz Gardens*, p. 45. For a picture of one these first kibbutz lawns see www.bitmuna.com/?s=אשדות+יעקב&jig_custom_search=nextgen.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

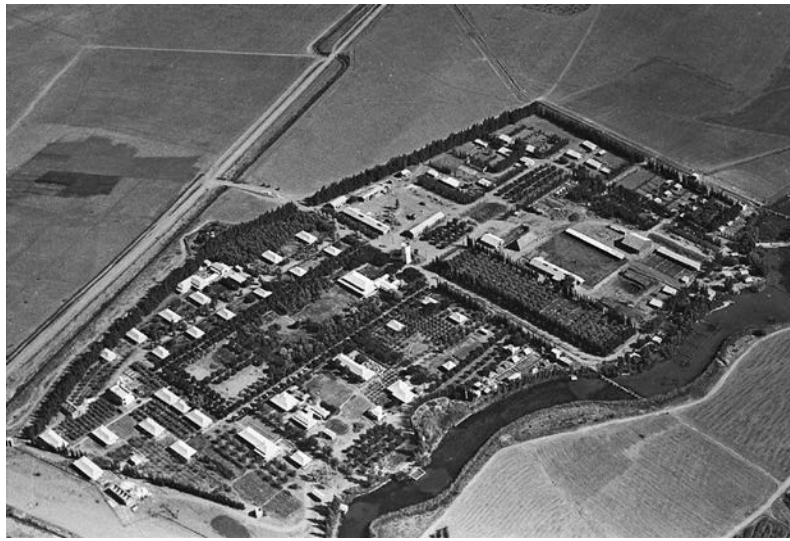


Fig. 2.7 The introduction of large lawn areas on kibbutzim integrated the different zones of the community and extended the communal living space to the outside. The biggest lawn area was usually set up next to the dining hall, the center of kibbutz life. In this picture it occupies the center of the diagonal rectangle around the dining hall with rows of trees planted at the edges of the rectangle. Smaller lawns can be seen throughout the community, around the children's houses (bottom right) and next to members' apartments (bottom left). Kibbutz Nir David, 1946. Wikipedia.

"rooms" on kibbutzim) – had more rustic features, such as red roofs. The difference was another expression of the unusual combination of town and country that marked the kibbutz experiment and the Jewish colonization project in general.[36]

The most distinctly urban aspects of kibbutz life were education and culture, and the modernistic structures that housed them conveyed it in their simple, angular shapes. Dining halls were the focus of communal life on kibbutzim, and not just because all meals were taken there. They

[36] A picture of Kibbutz Nir David shows 1930s rustic apartment houses of kibbutz members, with red terracotta roofs, on the right. The modernistic, two-story building at the center-top is the children's house. See https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_VIEW_OF_KIBBUTZ_TEL_AMAL_(NIR_DAVID)._נירדוד_תלעמל_קיבוץ_של_כללי_מראה).D14-018.jpg.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

also had an important cultural function as meeting places for leisure and entertainment. Kibbutzim had a rich cultural calendar – the culture committee had a big role in kibbutz life – of lectures, music concerts, and festivals, especially Jewish festivals. These were adapted by kibbutz members to life on the land and were marked on a grand communal scale that was unprecedented in Jewish history. In traditional Jewish communities, holidays were usually marked in the synagogue and followed by a family meal at home. Kibbutzim took those rituals out of the synagogue and incorporated them into the communal festival meal as part of an integrated cultural program, blending traditional religious elements with elements from the agricultural cycle that were meant to recall biblical times. The celebrations were held in the kibbutz dining hall, which was transformed into a festive space that attracted guests from all over the country.

The cultural aspects of kibbutz life were not confined to the dining hall. Many kibbutzim built dedicated cultural institutions, such as reading rooms, museums, performance spaces and memorial halls, that housed various cultural activities. Some of these events took place outside in the open spaces of the whole-day garden, where festivals, dance performances, concerts, and a variety of shows could be easily hosted; this set the kibbutz apart as a unique community, a farming community designed by townsfolk for other townsfolk who had become farmers, a vivid example of the kind of cultural engineering that went into the making of Zionism.

Farmland

The Bible had tremendous influence on the human imagination, especially in the Christian world, and shaped the perception of the Land of Israel for millennia. Most of the visitors to Palestine who left a record of their journeys – some 3,500 journals in total, 2,000 of them in the nineteenth century alone – made the journey because of the Bible and experienced the land through it.[37] Many of them, though not all, were disappointed with a land that seemed to them empty and desolate.[38]

[37] Rachel Gottesman, Tamar Novick, Iddo Ginat, Dan Hasson, and Yonatan Cohen, eds., *Land. Honey. Milk: Animal Stories in Imagined Landscapes*, Israeli Pavilion, Biennale di Venezia and Park Books, 2017, p. 46.

[38] Ruth Kark, *The Land that Became Israel: Studies in Historical Geography*, Magness Press, 1989. Laurence Oliphant, for one, praised the Jezreel Valley for

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

Their disillusionment was likely shaped by the temperate climes of Europe and North America, whence most of them came. But it was also formed by the radiant picture they had of ancient Israel, whose spiritual value was expected to manifest in real life and take on familiar images. "We were only one little hour's travel within the borders of the Holy Land," wrote Mark Twain excitedly about his well-publicized visit to Palestine in 1867, "we had hardly begun to appreciate yet that we were standing upon any different sort of earth than that we had always been used to and see how the historic names began already to cluster! … They were all in sight." But the meeting with the earthly Palestine was sorely disappointing. Twain saw a land "where prosperity has reigned, and fallen; where glory has flamed, and gone out; where beauty has dwelt, and passed away; where gladness was, and sorrow is."[39] The expectation was as unrealistic as the abstract nouns Twain used.

The Hebrew Bible colored the view of Zionists as well, but with one crucial difference. The comparison of contemporary Palestine with the milk and honey of biblical times didn't depress Zionists, it inspired them. In fact, the vision of the modern Jewish settlement project was predicated on it. Zionist ideology promised to turn the present desolation of Palestine into a fertile future that was based on an idyllic past.[40] Jewish patriotism, said Berl Katznelson, is a literary patriotism "born out of the Book, out of verses and historical names." And while it may be an abstract patriotism, it has become "a mighty force."[41]

Nineteenth-century photographs and early twentieth-century films of the Palestinian countryside show a land with little tree coverage, stony hills, and small valleys, dotted with villages of stone houses, usually bunched on hilltops, surrounded by small, uneven fields and hillside terraces. Vegetation looks sparse and consists of subsistence crops such as cereals and vegetables, small plantations of fruit trees, like olives and citrus, and a distinct central American import, the cactus plant. Also known as prickly pear, or *sabar* in Arabic, the cactus spread throughout the Mediterranean via Spain and was commonly used for marking out

looking "like a huge green lake of waving wheat … one of the most striking pictures of luxuriant fertility which it is possible to conceive": Oliphant, *Haifa*, p. 60.

[39] Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, available at www.gutenberg.org/files/3176/3176-h/3176-h.htm, chapters 56 and 57 respectively.

[40] Yohai Oppenheimer, *Barriers: The Representation of the Arab in Hebrew and Israeli Fiction, 1906–2005* (מעבר לגדר), Am Oved, 2008, pp. 46–47.

[41] Ibid., p. 47.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

property boundaries in the way hedges, tall trees, walls, or fences are used in other countries. These were the sights that greeted visitors to Palestine in the nineteenth century, pilgrims and Jewish settlers alike.

The attempts of Jewish farmers to transform this landscape and "restore" it to its biblical glory went through several stages that grew progressively distant from the initial romantic vision of an agricultural Jurassic park based on old literary descriptions – it was a romantic vision that was shared by the British Mandate authorities, which governed Palestine from 1918 to 1948. Moreover, ancient Israel stretched over the hilly land west of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea, in the areas known as Judea and Samaria. But since that land was crowded with Arab villages and farms, it was not for sale. Zionists had to get what they could, less populated and less arable land on the coastal plain of Palestine and the Jezreel Valley in the north. If the open land they bought looked less biblical, it lent itself better to industrial farming and geometric field shapes that produced an orderly and modern look.

Excited by the first attempts at Jewish farming since antiquity, the settlers of the *moshavot* tried to revive a biblical agriculture of cereal crops and fruit trees, "a land of wheat and barley, and vines and fig-trees and pomegranates," as it says in Deuteronomy 8:8. But excitement was not a substitute for experience, and the early idyllic stage didn't last long. "Our Jewish colonists came full of ideals, and some of them with money too, but none of them have the necessary skills or habits fit for farming," wrote Ahad Ha'am in 1891.[42]

In the 1880s Baron Edmond de Rothschild was persuaded to help the struggling Jewish farmers start a wine industry in Palestine. Rothschild, who owned renowned vineyards in France, sponsored the planting of thousands of acres of vines in the *moshavot*. But the attempt proved problematic, and the project was eventually abandoned. "All of our colonies are following the baron's gardeners blindly," wrote Ahad Ha'am, even though "we have no idea if the vines will do well here." Many of them did not, but for a while vineyards replaced seasonal crops and marked the landscape of Jewish Palestine.

By the early 1900s vineyards began to be replaced by orange trees. Citrus traveled to the Middle East from Asia and was cultivated in the region long before the arrival of Jewish settlers, who adopted it enthusiastically. Perhaps it was the relative ease of growing the sturdy fruit, storing it, and moving it to market that made it such a favorite.

[42] Ahad Ha'am, "Truth from the Land of Israel."

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

From the 1920s on, Jewish farmers began to expand what was already a considerable Palestinian citrus sector. They surrounded their settlements with dark-green groves of the short, round trees and soon turned oranges into part of Zionist folklore, art, and literature. Writing about a memorable visit to one of those orchards, Y. D. Berkowitz described how

> they were greeted by the coolness of shaded orange groves that stretched before them right and left and across the gentle hill country to the distance, a fresh carpet of green leaves, dappled with golden red spots that twinkled in the morning light. The sun … was warm and pleasant here, redolent of a soft and gentle spring, shining brightly on the whitewashed trunks of the small trees, on their rich green leaves, and on the golden ripe fruit that hung peacefully in their fullness.[43]

The final form of the Yishuv's landscape came with the purchase of larger tracts of land and the establishment of cooperative farming. Unlike the smaller private plots on *moshavot*, the open land of kibbutzim and their intensive farming practices created bigger and more geometric field shapes that were often marked by rows of tall trees. Jewish farmers were not fond of the ubiquitous prickly pear and chose another import for that purpose, the Australian eucalyptus, as well as the local cypress tree. Both trees stood taller and were more orderly and manageable than the cactus, "a strange, wild plant covered in sharp needles that burn like fire if you touch them," as Yishuv children were admonished in an early story, before the cactus, or *sabra*, as it was called in Hebrew, came to describe Jewish natives of the Yishuv and later Israel in an ironic twist.[44] By the 1940s the landscape of Jewish Palestine had been considerably transformed by Zionists, who turned it into an orderly agricultural space of large, even fields dotted with small communities of rectangular white houses topped by red roofs. Many of the stony hills that could not be cultivated were planted with trees, mostly pines and cypresses.[45]

[43] Y. D. Berkowitz, *The Days of the Messiah*, in *Collected Writings*, p. 486. See the 1935 picture of an orange grove on Kibbutz Na'an, available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_KIBBUTZ_MEMBER_IRRIGATING_ORANGE_TREES_IN_THE_PLANTATION_OF_KIBBUTZ_NA'AN. חבר_קיבוץ_נען_משקה_עצי_תפוזים_במטע_הקיבוץ_.D18-034.jpg.

[44] Alexander Siskind Rabinovich, "The Hike" (הטיול), *Eshkolot*, issue 3, 1907; mentioned in *Onegshabbat* blog, https://onegshabbat.blogspot.com/search?q=אשכולות .

[45] Aerial picture of kibbutz Degania, 1931, available at https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Degania._Jewish_agricultural_colony._South_end_of_Lake_Galilee._1931_Oct._matpc.15823.jpg.g.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

Woodland

The Eastern Mediterranean has been inhabited continually since prehistoric times, and the human impact on it was extensive early on, as the Bible tells us. In preparation for their entry into Canaan, God instructs the Israelites to "plant all manner of trees for food" (Leviticus 19:23). But he also tells them to clear the land for farming: "the high country shall be yours, for it is forest, and you shall clear it" (Joshua 17:18). By the nineteenth century, grazing, farming, and frequent wars in the region had used up most of the natural tree growth in Palestine and left large parts of it bare.

Still, Bible-reading visitors to Palestine were surprised to find the land so naked. It wasn't an unreasonable surprise, given the great variety of trees the Bible mentions. The word יער, meaning forest in Modern Hebrew, is mentioned forty-two times in the Bible, and its frequent poetic use, from Exodus to Ezekiel, indicates that ancient Israel must have been covered with all manner of trees. The clash between the poetic then and the very different now was disappointing. Palestine is "stripped and starved … a carcass of a land," wrote the Scottish theologian George Adam Smith after his visit, expressing the disappointment of many visitors.[46]

Jewish settlers were also dismayed to find a dry and stony land when they first arrived. In 1927 the founders of Kibbutz Bet Zera looked at the Jordan Valley and saw "a flat plain, bare, burnt and scorching."[47] Even Jews who came from the dry Arabian Peninsula noticed it. "Our elders praised the Land of Israel," wrote Sa'adya Maswari, who came from Yemen in 1912, "but what I saw was very different, a dry and desolate land, hilly, full of thorny bushes and very few trees."[48] But such sights also strengthened the resolve of Jewish settlers to change it, to return the land to the glory of biblical times and soothe their own longing for some of the greenery they left behind in Europe. "Our first reaction was – shade. To plant a tree, to screen the burning light with green … [to fulfill the biblical commandment] 'when you come to the land … plant all manner of trees'" (Leviticus 19:23).[49]

[46] Roza I. M. El-Eini, "British Forestry Policy in Mandate Palestine 1929–1948: Aims and Realities," *Middle Eastern Studies* 35: 3 (July 1999): 75–155.
[47] Enis and Ben-Arav, *Kibbutz Gardens*, p. 23.
[48] Nitza Droyan, *The First Yemeni Immigrants, 1882–1914* (חלוצי העליה מתימן, פרקים בהתישבותם תרמ"ב-תרע"ד), Zalman Shazar, 1982, p. 101.
[49] Enis and Ben-Arav, *Kibbutz Gardens*, p. 23.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

The pitiful impression made by Palestine sent both Jewish settlers and the British Mandate authorities who followed them on a quest to restore the land to its imagined past. And if the exact nature of that wooded past was unknown, it didn't stop the Jews or the British from trying.

The Templers from Germany were among the first to bring modern horticulture to Palestine. They planted trees and flower gardens in their colonies and tended to the woods around them. The practice was picked up by the settlers of the *moshavot*, who mandated setting aside "four yards for a rose garden in front of every house" and planting trees that would sweeten the air.[50] The efforts must have been successful because a few years later visitors to those new Jewish villages were impressed with the "flower beds in front of almost every house, and [the] shaded boulevards of mulberry trees along the streets."[51] But most of these attempts were local and limited, even when they included larger projects, such as the grandly named Hadera Forest of Eucalyptuses that was planted in 1896 to help drain marshland around the *moshava*.[52]

Most of the trees that were planted by the German and early Jewish colonizers of Palestine were fruit trees. This was not necessarily because of the biblical injunction to do so; it simply made good farming sense, certainly for private farmers not thinking of themselves as founders of a future Jewish state. Zionists thought it was a good idea too. We need "to establish a national arbor association for planting trees in Palestine," Herzl noted in his diary two years before he visited the country. "Every Jew should pay for one or more tree," he added, so we can have "ten million trees."[53] It was a brilliant idea. When it was combined with a commemorative gesture after Herzl's death, the innovation became a highly effective foresting scheme that paid for the first Zionist plantation in Palestine: thousands of olives, almonds, apricots, and grapevines that were planted at Ben Shemen in 1908 in honor of Herzl. More orchard

[50] Shavit, "Regulations of the First Moshavot," p. 61. For an image of these early gardens see https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PikiWiki_Israel_13752_Petah_Tikva_streets.jpg.

[51] Tal Alon-Mozes and Shaul Amir, "Landscape and Ideology: The Emergence of Vernacular Gardening Culture in Pre-State Israel," *Landscape Journal* 21: 2 (2002): 37–50, at p. 46.

[52] For an image of Hadera Forest see https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PikiWiki_Israel_1120_hadera_שמירה_ביער_בחדרה.jpg.

[53] Orly Rechtman, "The Development of Forestry in Israel" (התבססותו של משאב היער בישראל, מדיניות מעשים ותוצאות מתחילת הייעור ועד 1960), *Ya'ar* 18 (December 2017), at p. 6.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

than forest, it was a romantic reenactment of Leviticus 19:23 and, in good Zionist fashion, a pragmatic attempt at a cash crop as well.

But orchards and forests are two different things, and the project flopped, prompting Zionists to take another look at the challenge. "We cannot speak of forests in Palestine in a European sense," wrote Max Bodenheimer in 1911. "Let's plant woodland trees like eucalyptus, pine and cypress," he suggested more sensibly; in other words, not an emotional act of restoration but a project of environmental engineering that was supported by scientists, botanists, and agronomists who set up experimental nurseries for that purpose. Bodenheimer worked for the Jewish National Fund (JNF), an organization that was set up in 1901 to collect money for land acquisition in Palestine. Most of that land was used for settlements and farms. Land that was unfit for either was planted with trees, mostly pines and cypresses because they grew fast.

As the Yishuv developed and expanded, forestry became a strategic settlement device. Forests extended Zionists' dominion over land they owned but could not cultivate, either for logistical reasons, such as manpower and money, or for more objective reasons like topography or arability. Planting forests also provided work for a growing force of unskilled workers. Moreover, Zionists thought of tree planting as an act of *tikkun* or holistic repair, an environmental improvement and an aesthetic gesture, a civilizing expression of high culture. "Woe to the land whose woods were cut off and chopped and is left uncovered," a 1921 JNF report waxed poetically. "The absence of forests disturbs the creative harmony of nature and invites evil spirits which befoul the air and spoil it for human habitation," the report continued.[54] Planted forests became symbolic of the rejuvenating spirit of Zionism, which rededicated to it the ancient tree day of Tu Bishvat, 15 Shevat, and used it to organize tree planting events that involved the entire Yishuv.[55]

[54] Nili Liphschitz and Gideon Biger, "Forestry Policy of the Zionist Movement in Palestine 1895–1948" (מדיניות הייעור של התנועה הציונית בא"י 1895–1948), *Katedra* 80 (1996): 88–108, at p. 96.

[55] For studies on this see Shaul Amir and Orly Rechtman, "The Development of Forest Policy in Israel in the 20th Century: Implications for the Future," *Forest Policy & Economics* 8 (2006): 35–51; Lifschitz and Biger, "Forestry Policy of the Zionist Movement in Palestine, 1895–1948"; Nurit Kliut, "Ideology and Forestation in Israel" (אידאולוגיה וייעור בישראל – יער מעשה אדם באמצעות הקרן הקיימת לישראל), *Mehkarim bege'ografia* 13 (1993): 87–106; Nili Liphschitz and Gideon Biger, "British Mandate Forestry Policy in Palestine" (מדיניות

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

The British colonial administration in Palestine advanced the cause of trees even more than the Zionists. In their first year the Mandate authorities planted 370,000 trees. A year later, in 1920, the number of planted trees rose to 2 million. The British were surely inspired by the Bible and showed a metaphysical reverence for restoring the Promised Land to its ancient botanical beauty; a beauty which the "virile [Hebrew] race" bestowed on it, as Claude Jarvis put it; he was the British colonial governor of the Sinai Peninsula between 1923 and 1936.[56] But they tempered that reverence with experience gained in other parts of their empire.[57] Joining science to romance, the British approached forestry in Palestine more scientifically, considering the practical aspects of trees for preventing soil erosion, stopping the advance of sand dunes, and supporting a timber industry.

If the local Arabs and Jews who helped them in their work had "never [seen] a forest since there are no forests in Palestine," the British were determined to change that. In 1929 the high commissioner to Palestine, John Chancellor, assured the League of Nations that he intended "to allocate ten million dunams for forest reservations." Unlike the Zionists, who were confined to land they had bought, the British could plant trees anywhere they wanted in Palestine, and that was precisely what they did. They set up woodland reservations and planted a variety of local trees that proved much sturdier and longer lasting than the more homogeneous and faster-growing Zionist woodland.

But if the British and the Zionists shared a biblical dream, it meant little to local Arabs, who often disregarded new tree plantations and continued to use the land for grazing. "The Jews have started planting increasing numbers of pines and other trees," wrote T. J. Tear of the Palestine forestry division in 1931. "Arabs, on the other hand, have no interest in forests, they only want olive and other fruit trees"; and they "wantonly destroy everything for which they could find no immediate

הייעור של הממשל הבריטי בארץ ישראל), *Ofakim bege'ografia* 40–41 (1994): 5–16.

[56] Robert S. G. Fletcher, *British Imperialism and the Tribal Question*, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 196. 22

[57] Alon Tal, "British Planting, an Unfulfilled Mandate" (הנטיעות הבריטיות - מנדט שלא התגשם, מרחבים בשינוי: תמורות גיאוגרפיות באי"י וסביבתה), *Merhavim* 7 (2016), ed. Yaron Balslav, Yossi Katz, and Yitzhak Schnel: 159–188, at p. 162.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

use," Jarvis wrote elsewhere.[58] It was an economic issue. Many Arabs were subsistence farmers who depended on grazing for survival, and none of them was consulted anyway about the landscaping initiatives of the Jews and the British. And although Tear did add in his report that "Arabs began to understand the importance of forest preservation as well and several of their learned men have begun to plant forests," the economic differences between Arabs and Jews were eventually channeled into a growing national rivalry that led to deliberate sabotage of tree plantations.

A charming initiative that was not directly connected with Jewish nationalism or British colonialism was an ecological project called the Men of the Trees in Palestine.[59] It was the brainchild of Dr. Richard St. Barbe Baker, an Englishman who worked for the British colonial forestry division in Kenya and Nigeria, where he set up similar tree clubs in 1922. In 1929 he founded a Palestinian chapter that did speak of the need "to beautify the Holy Land" but was much more focused on "developing an affinity for trees in every person and encourag[ing] everyone to plant and love trees … [since] forest work is one of humanity's oldest and most respected activities, unselfish and constructive." As an English peer, St. Barbe Baker was able to enlist key British figures in support of his project, which called on everyone in Palestine, "irrespective of religion, race, or wealth," to take part in it and plant trees on their private land and anywhere else they could. The club planted trees with money collected from both Jews and non-Jews. Some of its initiatives included planting competitions for high schools, with points given for soil preparation, planting methods, choice of trees, and cultivation practices.

In 1953 St. Barbe Baker was invited to Jerusalem for an exhibition called Defeating the Wilderness. In an open letter to the organizers he wrote how happy he was "to be part of the exhibition and thankful for all those who help beat wilderness and hold back the desert. The fertility of the soil in Israel depends on trees, and the dry bones – the exposed lime rocks – are coming back to life. It won't be long before

[58] Liphschitz and Biger, "British Mandate Forestry Policy," p. 7; Fletcher, *British Imperialism*, p. 196.

[59] Uri Rosenberg, "Developing a Tree Sense: The First Land Preservation Project in the Land of Israel," available at www.kalanit.org.il/firsttreesassoc2020/.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

the mountains will be covered with green, and the land will be a fruitful garden again" – a romantic, perhaps, after all.[60]

By the end of the Mandate period in 1948, about 35 million trees had been planted on 85,000 dunams. It was less than 3 percent of Palestine and far below the 10 percent Zionists aimed for – the current forest coverage of Israel is about 6 percent. More than two-thirds of the trees were planted by the British, a mixture of pines, cypresses, pistacias, and other varieties. Most of it was planted on rocky hills and mountain slopes that could not be farmed and gave the Israeli countryside much of its current look.

Hebrew Cities

Cities occupied a peculiar place in Zionist thinking, which was more concerned with farming. This was understandable, given some of the old connections between city and decay – the pastoral idea in ancient Greek culture was an early critique of the corrupting influences of urban life – and between the city and Jews; for various historical reasons Jews had settled in towns and cities outside the Land of Israel. Herzl made several references to it in his diaries. Max Nordau, his right-hand man, premised his popular 1895 *Degeneration* on "the evils which follow the uprooting of the people from fostering Mother Earth, and the incubation of [the] urban industrial proletariat," and based his famous call for a muscular Judaism on it.[61]

One of the express aims of Zionism was to sever these damaging connections, to take Jews out of their unhealthy ghettos and turn them into wholesome farmers again. But since city life was ingrained in Jewish diasporic civilization, it was integral to Zionist ideology as well. It influenced the formation of farming communities in Palestine, and had an impact on the Zionist imagination. Highly developed cities were part of most future visions of a sovereign Jewish state in the various utopias written by the likes of Theodor Herzl, Elhanan Leib Lewinsky, Edmund Menachem Eisler, and Boris Schatz, who named his 1918 utopia *The*

[60] Richard St. Barbe Baker, "Shall These Bones Live?" (התחיינה העצמות האלה), *Laya'aran, Agudat Haya'ar Beyisra'el* (Israel Forestry Newsletter) 4: 1–2 (1954), p. 23, available at www.kkl.org.il/files/Accessible-1/afforestation_and_environment/afforestation_and_environment_publications/layaaran_magazine/layaaran-1-2-1954.pdf.

[61] Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, tr. William Heinemann, 1898, p. 163.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

Built Jerusalem (ירושלים הבנויה). And it was clear to all that the viability of the Jewish settlement project in Palestine required an urban base, cities that would "encourage building, commerce and industry," like the city "Herzl envisioned in [his novel] *Altneuland*" and named Tel Aviv.[62] Talking about it, however, was not as exciting as talking about the bosom of nature.

In the early 1900s Palestine had two principal towns or cities, Jaffa and Jerusalem. The descriptions we have of them by contemporaries are not glowing. "Here we are in Jaffa: again, poverty and misery and heat in gay colors," Herzl wrote in his diary on October 27, 1898.[63] A month later he described his last day in Jaffa as "exceptionally unpleasant, full of beggars and spies." Meir Dizengoff, the first mayor of Tel Aviv, described Jaffa as "filthy" and "ugly," lacking "comfort and aesthetic beauty."[64] Jerusalem did not fare better. Herzl though it looked charmingly picturesque in the moonlight or from afar: "so much can be done with this [spectacular] view," he noted complacently as he stood on the Mount of Olives looking over the city. But the filth and beggary he saw there on closer inspection upset him so much that he jotted down how to improve it "by a loving hand that will make it a gem of a city."

While these were the views of people who were at home in cities such as London, Vienna, and Paris, the small and ancient cities of Jaffa and Jerusalem could not logistically absorb substantial numbers of immigrants. And yet many of the Jews who arrived in Palestine during the first decade of the twentieth century settled in Jaffa, in particular, for lack of other options. The need to accommodate them prompted several initiatives for building new and more spacious neighborhoods outside the walls of both cities on land bought for that purpose. Although the first such initiative began in Jerusalem in 1860, urban development on the coastal plain around Jaffa grew more quickly than in the hills around Jerusalem. Jaffa was closer to the country's main port, where most immigrants disembarked, the sand dunes to its north were fairly flat, they were sparsely populated and little farmed, and had no religious

[62] Akiva Arye Weiss, one of the Tel Aviv's founders, in Edna Yekutieli Cohen, "Akiva Arye Weiss and the First Hebrew City" (עקיבא אריה ויס והעיר העברית הראשונה), *Katedra* 135 (2009), at p. 134.
[63] Herzl, *The Complete Diaries*, p.739.
[64] Mark Levine, "A Nation from the Sands," *National Identities* 1: 1 (1999): 15–38, at p. 17.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

significance. Most importantly, large chunks of it were for sale. It made for a good canvas.[65]

Ahuzat Bayit, later named Tel Aviv, was not the first community that was built for Jews on the sands north of Jaffa; the first one, Neve Tzedek, was built in 1887. But it was the first properly planned community, and its founders had big hopes for it. Although it was described in its bylaws as "a modern Jewish quarter of Jaffa," plans for the gated community were strongly influenced by contemporary ideas about the garden city, ideas that set the neighborhood apart from its surroundings and shaped its growth.[66] Almost everything about it was different, from the land area that was bought and exceeded its needs, the professional plans that were drawn for it, "with roads, sidewalks, electricity … and running water, like a modern European city,"[67] to the vision of its founders, who long before the first house was built spoke of it as "a new kind of Hebrew settlement … a city of Jews in the land of the Jews … the New York of [Israel]."[68] In many ways the building blocks of Ahuzat Bayit were like stem cells that later grew into the urban organs of a much larger city that became the hub of the Yishuv. This was the revolutionary aspect that set Tel Aviv apart from earlier Jewish settlements.[69]

[65] For an aerial view of Jerusalem around 1920, looking west, see https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jerusalem,_Temple_area_from_S.E._corner_showing_a_great_part_of_the_Old_City._ppmsca.18914.jpg. The new construction outside the walls is primarily to the left (west) of the old city, where the first Jewish neighborhood outside the city walls, Mishkenot Sha'ananim, was built in 1860. For an aerial photo of Jaffa, looking from the north east toward the southwest in 1917, see commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:יפו_תל-_אביב_.29%_1915_28%_.תצלום_אויר-PHKH-1278800.png. The city of Jaffa juts out into the sea at center top. The white triangle of sand extending north of Jaffa to the right is crowded with new Jewish neighborhoods. Ahuzat Bayit is at bottom left of a triangle whose urban base is Jaffa. Arab-owned citrus groves comprise the dark part of the picture on the left of the photo.

[66] Levine, "A Nation from the Sands," p. 20.

[67] Yekutieli Cohen, "Akiva Arye Weiss," p. 135.

[68] Ibid., pp. 133, 136–137.

[69] This garden-city plan for Ahuzat Bayit by the Jewish-Austrian architect Wilhelm Stiassny was not officially adopted by the community, which nevertheless implemented many of its principles, including the grid, the space between houses, gardening ordinances, and the construction of a main road and public buildings at the center of the community. For an image of Stiassny's plan see www.researchgate.net/figure/Stasianis-scheme-for-Ahuzat-Bayit-Source-Avigdor-Droyanov-The-Tel Aviv-Book-Tel_fig1_263520167.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

Organic growth aside, the expansion of Tel Aviv, which was quickly dubbed the "first Hebrew city," posed several challenges. In addition to the logistical difficulties imposed by rapid expansion, there were more ideological and aesthetic challenges: the parts, quarters, zones, or areas the city should contain and the form these parts should take; the layout of streets; the shape of houses etc. that would fit its original plan. This was not a *moshava* or a kibbutz anymore but something bigger, a city. The fact that it was to be a Jewish city begged another question. Given the charged nexus between cities and Jews, and given that Yishuv society wished to change it and was focused on farming, how would urban culture fit into it? This tension dogged the image of Tel Aviv for decades and became the stuff of literature too. Here is how Y. D. Berkowitz put it:

> The pioneering farmers look askance at Tel Aviv, especially the fanatics among them, those sworn slaves to toil who never crack a smile, who vowed to till the nation's soil with solemn dedication for the glory of Hebrew labor. Tel Aviv is the devil to them, a symbol of urban decay, land wasted for petty commerce and a specter of the Jewish Diaspora. But the city is also home to Jewish culture, and it pulls at the heartstrings of those farmers, especially on festival days. On Hanukkah or Passover, some of them come to celebrate in Tel Aviv, and the city makes them smile.[70]

Part of this tension was eased by the novelty of the concept of the "Hebrew city." A majority of Jews may have lived in cities throughout history, but always as a minority, and frequently as a discriminated-against minority. One of the commonplaces of early Yishuv culture was to give various everyday phenomena the pair of adjectives "first" and "Hebrew": the first Hebrew child, the first Hebrew cow, the first Hebrew streetlight. These sobriquets were theatrical perhaps, but they reveal the civic exuberance of the Zionist settlers and their appreciation for the Jewish historical moment they were living in. "When the small wheel began to scrape against the wire, its voice carried to the entire length of Herzl Street," reminisced Nahum Gutman about the lighting of the first streetlight in Tel Aviv:

[70] Berkowitz, "Tel Aviv," p. 356.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

People in the street grew silent and approached the lamp post that was put up a few days earlier on the corner of Herzl Street and Rothschild Boulevard. … A green light flickered in the small mesh inside the lamp … and with a hum that sounded like a tired bee it grew and spread, sending long fingers across the street and over to the sand dunes … let's call it the hum of culture, which has just set foot on this quiet place and stood among us.[71]

Calling an entire city "first" and "Hebrew" expressed a much higher aspiration, one that already implied the next stage, a sovereign Jewish state.

In principle, the challenges of constructing a so-called Hebrew urban space were not different from those of shaping a Hebrew countryside. Similar questions could be asked here as well: What does the term Hebrew city mean, and how does one give concrete shape to such an abstract idea? If none of these questions was asked directly, answers to them were formulated in quick succession during the three evolutionary stages Tel Aviv underwent, following the shifting fortunes of Zionism.

During the first stage, between 1909 and 1914, Ahuzat Bayit was a small, landscaped neighborhood for middle-class Jews whose first priority was to leave the congestion of old Jaffa and the provisional Jewish neighborhoods around it.[72] This is how Agnon described it:

Camels and donkeys carry sand over, wheelbarrows come and go, hammers come down, and a steamroller presses down on the stones [that] level the plain. … 'Tis the sound of building and the smell of a dwelling place … the beginning of a road, a firm footrest. And men, women and children come from Jaffa and try the road for firmness and behold, the road is unyielding, their feet do not sink into the sand anymore.[73]

In its first years Ahuzat Bayit looked like a *moshava*. With its cream-colored, one-family homes, topped by red roofs and spruced up with gardens, the neighborhood looked like a peaceful suburb of a metropolis rather than the beginning of one (see Figure 2.8). "Tourists who later

[71] Nahum Gutman, "The First Streetlight" (פנס רחוב ראשון), Ben-Yehuda Project, available at https://benyehuda.org/read/30638. Gutman dedicated a drawing to that auspicious moment in his memoir about early Tel Aviv, *A Small City with Very Few People* (עיר קטנה ואנשים בה מעט), Am Oved, Dvir, 1959.
[72] Levine, "A Nation from the Sands," p. 21.
[73] Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, p. 439.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003



Fig. 2.8 Stage 1: Rothschild Boulevard in 1911 during Tel Aviv's initial "suburban" stage. Most houses have one story and red terracotta roofs, characteristic of the architectural style of the *moshavot*. The front gardens facing the street were mandated by community ordinances to add to the beauty, peace, and health of the neighborhood. At the back of the photo, toward the shore, is the older and more crowded neighborhood of Neve Tzedek. Photo by Abraham Soskin, Pikiwiki.

came to Palestine saw a neat new neighborhood of sixty houses called Tel Aviv," wrote Agnon, "houses with gardens around them, and clean streets, and boys and girls playing in the streets, and old people leaning against their canes basking in the sun."[74] And although the modest scale of Ahuzat Bayit reflected the limitations of the Zionist movement at the time, the neighborhood did have one imposing building, the Herzlia Gymnasium or high school, visible proof of its greater urban aspirations.[75]

[74] Ibid., p. 141.

[75] The Herzlia Gymnasium was completed in 1910. The building was designed by Joseph Barsky and Boris Schatz in the eclectic style, a mixture of Western and Eastern elements. Barsky was an early practitioner of the style. Schatz was the founder of the Yishuv's first art academy, the Bezalel School of Arts and

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

The second and more organic stage, 1919–1925, began with the British Mandate in Palestine and the surge in Jewish immigration that changed the garden suburb into a more chaotic town that grew in all directions. By the 1930s, twenty years later, the fortunes of Zionism had changed dramatically. Even though a majority of Jews did not answer the call of Zionism, Palestine had by then become the third most vibrant Jewish community in the world, after New York and Warsaw. Tel Aviv benefited from this increase (see Figure 2.9). The city grew exponentially after the end of World War I and the arrival of the British, far beyond its initial remit. Much of the planned suburban character of the city's original neighborhood was lost as it filled sideways and upward with houses, as living cities do, jostled on all sides by new neighborhoods. It was time for another master plan, one that would be more suited to the swelling town and the growing capacities of Zionism.

The third stage in the evolution of Tel Aviv was shaped by the 1925 Geddes plan, named after its forward-thinking Scottish architect, Patrick Geddes, who was called in to address the growing needs of the first Hebrew city. In many ways Geddes modified the founding principles of Ahuzat Bayit to fit a bigger urban context. His plan brought together two modernistic trends that singled out the city and accounted for its putative Hebrew character. The first was the emerging discipline of urban planning. The second was the growing popularity of modernist architecture. It was their chance convergence in Tel Aviv that lent the city its distinct "Hebrew" urban character.

Tel Aviv at that moment in its history provided an exceptional opportunity for innovation: the need for a new urban plan, available land, new trends in urban planning that combined country and city life, architectural sensibilities that put together form and function with a revolutionary social awareness, as well as ready practitioners of these trends, Jewish refugees from an increasingly uncomfortable Europe who were looking for employment. In yet another historical coincidence, the

Crafts. Their initial design for the building was criticized as "too oriental" and had to be modified to look less like a mosque, to mollify the critics. The school building became iconic almost immediately and was an aesthetic monument to a brief cultural exchange between Jews and Arabs in Palestine – and not just in architecture – that ended after the civil unrest in 1929. For an image see https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PikiWiki_Israel_49237_Gymnasia_Herzliya_Tel_Aviv_1910.jpg.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003



Fig. 2.9 Stage 2: Rothschild Boulevard in the 1930s during its more organic growth stage. Most houses have two stories by now, space between them is smaller, and some of the front gardens have been eliminated in favor of more urban landscaping of the street. Rothschild Photo Collection of Professor Shaul Ladani, Pikiwiki.



Fig. 2.10 Stage 3: Rothschild Boulevard in the late 1930s during Tel Aviv's third planned stage, the modern urban stage. The character of the street has become distinctly urban by now, with four-story apartment buildings lining the landscaped boulevard. Zoltan Kluger, Wikimedia.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003

unplanned meeting of these elements created something new and singular. The more utopian parts of Geddes's plan for Tel Aviv, such as urban agriculture and temples of culture, did not materialize. His plans for a peaceful city of low-rise, unconnected apartment buildings, surrounded by gardens and unfriendly to cars, with easy access to street-level commerce, were, however, adopted in full. They characterize Tel Aviv to this day and set it apart from other major cities, in Israel and elsewhere.

With the swelling of Tel Aviv and the arrival of young, German-trained architects, the outline Patrick Geddes made for a garden city started taking modernist shape. The streets of Tel Aviv began to fill with angular buildings that reflected the simplicity in form and function of its designers as well as those of New Hebraism itself. None of the people who put these elements together was native to Palestine. The elements themselves were developed elsewhere and for reasons unconnected to the Yishuv. But it was their unusual blend under the ideological aegis of Zionism that mixed all of them together into something altogether new that eventually became "Hebrew" (see Figure 2.10).

In 1947 the JNF marked its fiftieth anniversary by publishing a map showing the development of the Zionist settlement project since 1917. Edited by Ernst Mechner, and designed by S. F. Loeb, the map was issued in three editions: Hebrew, English, and Yiddish. Theodor Herzl was quoted on the back of the map: "The ancient land grows young under their diligent hands. It again bears flowers, it again bears fruit, and perhaps one day, one beautiful day, it will again bear the happiness and the honor of the Jews. Herzl, 1896."[76]

Another change the map shows is that modern Jews settled in parts of Canaan/Palestine different than those of their claimed biblical predecessors. If the ancient Israelites occupied the hill country between the Jordan River and the sea, Zionists settled on the coastal plain and in valleys in the north, areas that were occupied by other biblical nations in the past. It was a historical irony that dictated the shape of space in the Yishuv. The flat lands Zionists developed had few natural constraints and little Jewish history. They constituted a relatively empty canvas on which drawings could be made from scratch of geometric shapes and airy houses that came to typify the space Zionists designed in Palestine as both a colonial gesture and a romantic restoration project.

[76] National Library of Israel map collection, https://blog.nli.org.il/en/hoi_zionist_map/.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:07:42, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009591430.003