

Tel Aviv, a White City on the Sands

by Anita Shapira

One warm, sunny afternoon of Passover 1909 (April 11.1909), representatives of some sixty families gathered on the dunes north of Jaffa and raffled off barren lots there to construct the small neighborhood of Ahuzat Bayit. The moment, captured on film, became emblematic: amid the blazing wastes on a Middle Eastern spring day, a European-clad group was enigmatically engaged in an endeavor unusual for this landscape.¹ The planned neighborhood was to be a garden suburb for the educated middle class who sought to give their children European-standard housing and living space. What developed in the end was a large, noisy, bustling city, sometimes clean, sometimes dirty, sometimes pleasant, sometimes unsavory, much like all large cities. The story of Tel Aviv is to a large extent the story of the Zionist enterprise: the gap between the ideal and the real, for better or for worse. One of the founding fathers once stated that there's no way to predict the actual results of one's ideas and plans. The same applies to Tel Aviv.

Tel Aviv was the "infant prodigy" of the Zionist enterprise: the name "Tel Aviv" was the Hebrew title of Herzl's utopian novel, *Altneuland*, translated by Nahum Sokolow. Sokolow, an intellectual and writer and later the president of the Zionist Organization, no doubt knew that it was problematic: the same words appear in the Bible as the name of a city on the Chebar River in today's Iraq. In Hebrew, the term "*tel*" denotes an old ruin. But Sokolow apparently was drawn by the contradiction between "*tel*", vestige of a ruin, and the promise of spring – "*aviv*" – in the name's second component. His crowning of *Altneuland* as Tel Aviv made it suitable in the eyes of the neighborhood developers, and when the council voted on a name, "Tel Aviv" won a resounding majority.²

Herzl did not envision Tel Aviv. He saw Haifa as the city of the future, the economic and cultural hub of the old-new land. So did many other people. Haifa had the advantages of stunning scenery, a natural port and more. But it was Tel Aviv, a city never imagined by anyone, that superseded it. I would like to tell the story of Tel Aviv through the cities that it has not been, the ideals that it has challenged.

1 Yaakov Shavit and Gideon Biger, *Ha-Historia shel Tel Aviv* [The History of Tel Aviv], Ramot Publishing, Tel Aviv University 2001, pp. 69-72.

2 On the name "Tel Aviv", see A. Druyanow (ed.), *Sefer Tel Aviv* [The Tel Aviv Book], Vol. I, The Sefer Tel Aviv Committee with the municipality, Tel Aviv 1935, pp. 140-141, 268-269.

Tel Aviv's connection to the Zionist ideal was ambivalent: in Zionist thinking, the new Jewish settlement of the land of Israel was conceived as primarily agricultural. In the space of ideas of the latter half of the 19th century in Eastern Europe, cities were considered the mother of all evil, the source of all falsehood, artificiality and exploitation that capitalism had brought to the world. Against this, the return to a more simple life was upheld, back to nature; an organic community living by the toil of its hands. The romance of Arcadia, the lost paradise of innocence before industrialization brought on alienation and migration to the big city, struck Jews as particularly attractive: Jews had always been considered urbanites, removed from the soil and manual labor. Even though there was a considerable proportion of artisans among them, the common image of Jews was of a people that does not produce goods but acts as an intermediary. The idea of making Jews productive was part of the Jewish Enlightenment heritage from the early 19th century, and it was shared by all Jews with some measure of a secular education. Towards the end of the century, socialist ideology was added to it: accordingly, Jews had to join the class of the future, the proletariat, or be crushed between the capitalists and the proletarians when the revolution dawned. The Zionist idea adopted these basic principles and added the territorial dimension: in Eastern Europe, hatred of Jews prevented their integration into the proletariat. They therefore needed a land of their own where they would be able to apply the ideas of productivization, back to nature, manual labor etc. When the Zionist fathers envisioned this picture, they imagined plowed fields where a Jewish farmer proudly walked and sowed the ground. This idyll was featured on posters produced by Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael-Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF), one of the first institutions Herzl established to ensure that the funds of the Jewish people would be directed towards redeeming the homeland soil, i.e. purchasing land for Jewish farming settlements. The first *moshavot* (colonies) fired the Zionist imagination, radiating a new image of Jews working the land, turning the wilderness into cultivated fields and blossoming orchards. From the 1920s, the Jezreel Valley – or simply the Valley, as it was called – was the symbol of the Zionist enterprise. The Valley was the theme of songs, the destination of all VIPs who were duly ushered there to bask in the sight of a Jewish *halutz* working his land and pioneering endeavors, making the wilderness bloom.³ Tel Aviv did not fit the romance of Arcadia. When the city fathers

3 This ideology appears in the writings of the fathers of Zionism from the days of BILU (House of Jacob, come ye and let us go [Isa. 2:5]), the first group of pioneer immigrants from the Russian Empire, in 1881. It was behind the establishment of the farming colonies by the first Zionist settlers in the country. The writings of J.H. Brenner are filled with the call to return to till the soil as an expression of the renewal of the Jewish People. One prominent advocate of manual labor was A.D. Gordon, though this was the common position of all the leaders of the Second Aliya immigration

headed by Meir Dizengoff asked KKL-JNF for a convenient loan to enable them to build their homes on the large dune that they bought with their own money, the heads of the Anglo-Palestine Bank, the financial arm of the Zionist Organization, were discomfited: KKL-JNF funds were earmarked for the purchase of land in Eretz-Israel in order to establish farming settlements, not for settling middle-class people in an urban neighborhood. Only after protracted negotiation, during which the project was almost cancelled, did KKL-JNF agree to provide assistance for urban settlement as well. Urban settlement, if at all, was meant to be the fruit of private initiative, which was suspect of capitalist ambitions and contrary to the pioneers' socialist idealism.⁴

Tel Aviv posed a challenge to Jewish pioneering: from the start, it stood as an alternative to the *halutzic* ascetic puritanism. The image of the *halutz*, in shorts, work clothes and heavy shoes with a hoe across his shoulder, was the Left's beau idéal, rivaling the Right's image of the refined, European-clad gentleman. Each type expressed a different life ethos. While the kibbutzim were proud of their asceticism and wore their poverty as a badge of honor, Tel Aviv held out temptation by its mere existence: Ahuzat Bayit already boasted the first kiosk, a Tel Aviv institution promptly replicated on every corner. It offered soda drinks and ice cream, items looked on as deplorable extravagance.⁵ Soon, eateries too sprang up, along with shops offering European fashion; advertisements appealed not to the virtue of thrift, but to the concealed love of luxury that the Jews had brought from home.⁶ Thus, while the kibbutz was extolled as the marvel of the social originality and creativity of the Zionist enterprise and the symbol of human progress, the great majority of Jews chose rather to live in Tel Aviv. They preferred the petit bourgeois way of life to communes. Nor, it seems, did the Jews' predilection for town life wane in the land of Israel, as evident from Tel Aviv's rapid growth: within 25

wave that spawned the future leadership of the labor movement of the fledgling State of Israel. See the autobiographical work by S. Yizhar, *Mikdamot* [Preliminaries], Zmora-Bitan, Tel Aviv 1992, which describes his father's efforts to be a farm worker or at least to live in a farming colony. See also Anita Shapira, "The Origins of the Myth of the 'New Jew': The Zionist Variety", in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, (ed. Jonathan Frankel), Oxford University Press, Vol. 13, 1997, pp. 253-270.

4 On the KKL-JNF loan, see Druyanow, *Sefer Tel Aviv*, above, pp. 69-87, and Shavit and Biger, above, pp. 66-9; see also Ahad HaAm on the subject in Aharon Vardi (ed.), *Ir HaPlaat, Divrei Sofrim u-Midina'im al Tel Aviv le-Yovel ha-Esrin* [The Wonder City, Writers and Statesmen Speak on Tel Aviv's Twentieth Anniversary], p. 29.

5 A good example may be found in S. Yizhar, above, pp. 107-115. On the kibbutzim and their way of life, see Anita Shapira, *Native Son*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2006.

6 For a description of Jaffa and its Jewish neighborhoods in the 19th century, see Druyanow (ed.), *Sefer Tel Aviv*, above, pp. 9-66; Anat Helman, *Or ve-Yam Hikefuba, Tarbut Tel Avivit bi-Tekufat ha-Mandat* [Urban Culture in 1920s and 1930s Tel Aviv], University of Haifa Press, Haifa 2007, pp. 100-107.

years, it was already a real city.⁷ Tel Aviv's very existence may have attested to Zionism's success, to the normalization that comes with nation-building, but it was also seen as a city of sin, reflecting capitalist trends and hedonism, and this in the period of nation-building itself when personal interest should have taken a back seat to national interests.⁸

Tel Aviv was a brazen challenge to other cities. Firstly, to Jaffa: Tel Aviv rose as a suburb of Jaffa. Jaffa was an old-new city that developed in the 19th century under the rule of Egyptian Ibrahim Pasha, who for the first time brought relative security to the place and introduced citrus planting in the area. The shoreline between Acre and Gaza had no inlets; Jaffa offered the one bay that could serve as a port for the export of oranges. Jaffa, because of its proximity to Jerusalem, also served the Christian pilgrims who flocked to the Holy Land as steamships promoted sea travel and safety improved. Towards the end of the 19th century, a railway was built from Jaffa to Jerusalem, boosting the region's economic activity. Jaffa became an important Jewish center for those Jews (mostly Sephardi) who chose to live off their own labor rather than from Jewish charitable distributions (the *haluka*) in Jerusalem. When the Lovers of Zion movement began in 1882, and the First Aliya immigration wave arrived, many of the newcomers settled in Jaffa, seeking a way of life similar to what they had left behind. Farming the wilderness was not for them. An Ashkenazi community developed, as well as public institutions, a Hebrew high school (Gymnasia Ivrit), a conservatory, and there were even attempts to establish a theater.⁹ But exotic Jaffa, with its beachfront Arab cafés, its male clientele playing backgammon, smoking water pipes, and drinking Turkish coffee out of little cups, did not meet the expectations of the immigrants: they wanted a well-planned European city without the maze of dead-end streets and lanes, without the dirt and filth, without fear of violence, with their women being able to walk the streets without being harassed. Tel Aviv was to be all that Jaffa was not: a garden city with paved streets and clean sidewalks, indoor running water (a novelty unknown to many of the Jews in their countries of origin), proper sewage, street lighting, Hebrew-language schools, and regular night-watchmen. The homes were relatively spacious, and each was surrounded by a garden. Compared to Jaffa's overcrowding, neglect and negligence of the public domain, Tel Aviv presented the ideal of a European garden city on the Mediterranean coast.

7 In 1922, Tel Aviv had 15,000 residents. In 1939, it already had 130,000. In 1921, it received the autonomous status of a local council, separate from Jaffa. In 1934, it received the status of a municipality. Maoz Azaryahu, *Tel Aviv, Ha-Ir ha-Amitit, Mythographia Historit* [Tel Aviv, the Real City, Historical Mythography], Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, Sde Boker 2005, p. 29.

8 See also Shavit and Biger, above, pp. 283-286; Helman, above, pp. 116-37.

9 Druyanow, *Sefer Tel Aviv*, pp. 32-66.

The red roofs of the Tel Aviv homes and the gate that closed off Herzl St. near the railway at night symbolized the boundary between Europe and the Orient, marked by the Hassan Bek Mosque and the palm trees along Jamal Pasha Blvd. – later King George Blvd. and today Jerusalem Blvd.¹⁰

Tel Aviv's establishment did not stymie Jaffa's development. For some years, Jaffa continued to serve as the commercial center while Tel Aviv was just a suburb. But in the 1921 riots, Arabs from Jaffa and adjoining neighborhoods fell upon their Jewish neighbors, murdering newly-arrived immigrants housed in Jaffa, as well as writer J.H. Brenner and his friends in a nearby orchard. The British authorities subsequently agreed to separate the two cities. An independent local council was established in Tel Aviv (which in 1934 became a municipality). Since then, every rise in Arab-Jewish tension saw more Jews leaving Jaffa. But ties between the two towns remained: the Mandate Administration had its seat in Jaffa. On the seam, in the commercial center on Jaffa-Tel Aviv Road, there were Arab businesses and quite a few Arab-Jewish partnerships. In Tel Aviv's markets, Arab vendors selling their goods were very popular among Jewish housewives. There was cultural interaction too: Jaffa's Arabs would attend Purim parades, the famous *adloyadas*. Despite the tensions, relations remained quite close. The Arab Revolt (1936), which among other things saw a lengthy strike of all Arab trade and acts of terror against Jews frequenting Jaffa, cut the ties between the two communities. The tangible expression of this was the erection of a wharf, named the Tel Aviv Port, to ensure continued immigration and economic activity in the area. When the violence died down, the Jews reconnected with Jaffa Port, especially for citrus exports which carried the famous "Jaffa Oranges" label. After the UN Partition Resolution of November 29 1947, the violence resumed. For months, shots were fired from Jaffa at Tel Aviv and vice versa, causing a wave of Jewish refugees from Tel Aviv's southern neighborhoods. But in the meantime, under the British Mandate, Tel Aviv had become the metropolis of the Dan Region, surrounded by numerous Jewish satellite communities. Arab Jaffa had become an enclave in a predominantly Jewish area. It was a historical reversal: young Tel Aviv became the dominant city. As the violence escalated, Jaffa went the way of other Arab towns: the local leadership, those with means, left the city for safer areas. Demoralization set in and the city's Arab society disintegrated. Jaffa fell to Jewish hands on the eve of

10 On the composition of the Jewish population that immigrated to the country at the start of the 20th century and mostly settled in Jaffa, see Gur Alroey, *Immigrantim* [Immigrants], Ben-Zvi Institute, Jerusalem 2004, especially the introduction to ch. 5, pp. 163-207. On Tel Aviv's modern character compared to Jaffa, see Azaryahu, pp. 60-4. See also Shavit and Biger, above, pp. 80-81. On life in early Tel Aviv, see Ziona Rabau-Katinsky in *Tel Aviv al ha-Holot*, Ramat Gan 1973. On the gate, also see Vardi, above, p. 34. On water and electricity, *ibid.*, p. 46.

the establishment of the State of Israel. The conquerors came upon a ghost town. New immigrants, mainly from Bulgaria, found housing in Jaffa. Only a small Arab community stayed in town. Jaffa became an integral part of Tel Aviv and is so to this day, with an Arab neighborhood. Its Arab residents have integrated economically and share in Tel Aviv's prosperity. Hinawi, Abulafia are Tel Aviv landmarks. Recently, there have also been attempts to commemorate the city's Arab and Ottoman past and restore buildings of historic importance.¹¹ Still, Jaffa is not a separate island, and any tension between Jews and Palestinians in Israel or in the Occupied Territories is immediately reflected in the relations between Jew and Arab in Jaffa.

Tel Aviv also posed a challenge to the Jewish *shtetl* of the Diaspora. One famous book on the sabra generation, by Moshe Shamir, was written in memory of his brother who was killed in the War of Independence. It is called *BeMo Yadav* (With His Own Hands) and opens with the words: "Elik was born of the sea".¹² Elik was not born to a family with a generations-long cultural tradition; he was born of the sea foam off Tel Aviv, like Aphrodite off Cyprus: it was interpreted as symbolizing the creation of something from scratch, a birth with no lineage, no past, no history, a new, different beginning. In vain did Shamir object that this had not been his intent, that he had merely meant that Elik had loved the sea in Tel Aviv and spent many hours on the beach. But a text has a life of its own, especially when it serves to censure the Zionists for spurning their ancestral traditions, for negating exile, and for aiming to fashion in Israel a new Jew, a new and different society. Tel Aviv was a rebuke to the *shtetl*; not only with its modernism, evident in its clean streets, ornamental gardens and Hebrew language, as well as the impressive gymnasium that at first marked its northern boundary. Tel Aviv gave Jews the feeling that they lived among their own, free from the caution they practiced among non-Jews. From its first day, Tel Aviv emitted the sense of an independent Jewish republic: the laborers building its houses, the doctors delivering its babies, the drivers of *diligence* carriages and then of the first buses, the owners of popular kiosks – all were Jews. The streets were named for Zionist VIPs: Herzl, Ahad HaAm, Rothschild, Lillienblum, Pinsker etc. Jews who had not earned recognition or appreciation in their countries of origin were now immortalized here even if their names were inconsistent with the drive for total Hebraism. This may have

11 On the relations between Tel Aviv and Jaffa, see Shavit and Biger, pp. 99-100. Vardi, pp. 22-23. Azaryahu, pp. 74-78. On the Arab peddlers, see Helman, pp. 109-112; on Jaffa in the War of Independence, see, *Palestine 1948, War, Escape and the Emergence of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, Sussex Academic Press, Brighton 2001, pp. 10-190.

12 Moshe Shamir, *Be-Mo Yadav*, Sifriat HaPoalim, Merhaviva 1951.

been the first dent in the argument for "rebirth", expressing a contrary desire, to preserve the bond and continuity with the Diaspora. The city emblem was a lighthouse rising above the sea with an inscription at the bottom: "Again will I build thee, and thou shalt be built", from Jeremiah's Restoration prophecies. The lighthouse and sea were surrounded by a Star of David set inside a circle, and all these were in a shield reminiscent of European coats of arms. The emblem had a local, land-of-Israel flavor: the sea and lighthouse were not common Jewish symbols, and they hinted at a territorial sovereignty lacking in the *shtetl*. On the streets of Tel Aviv, a Jewish policeman in uniform directed traffic. In time, he was issued a horse, another symbol of Jewish dominion. There was also a Hebrew courthouse, and KKL-JNF stamps were affixed to documents. In Tel Aviv, Jews were free from the insecurity felt by minorities. This was one of the city's powerful attractions.¹³

But was Tel Aviv in its first 50 years really so far removed from the Jewish *shtetl*? Certainly, as an autonomous Jewish unit, a Jewish state in the making, it was nothing like the *shtetl*. It was also a new cultural center to which writers and intellectuals flocked in numbers unprecedented elsewhere: the old cemetery on Trumpeldor St. is filled with the graves of great Jewish intellectuals and leaders: Bialik and Tchernichowsky, Brenner and Nordau, Pinsker and numerous others. They sought out the new Hebrew city, they did not seek interment on the Mt. of Olives. But was it really so new? Was it not, to some extent, an optical illusion? If we scratch beneath the surface, we will find signs of the old *shtetl*. During the Third Aliya immigration wave, when young pioneers settled down in tents on the sandy slope of what would soon be Allenby St., there was the feeling that a new world was rising in Tel Aviv. They would wander outdoors singing in full voice, "high" without alcohol, until the municipality prohibited street singing after 11:00 p.m.¹⁴ It was a young culture, breaking conventions in the revolutionary spirit of Russia at that time. A few years later, immigrants of the Fourth Aliya immigration wave arrived, petit bourgeois families, some religiously observant, and Tel Aviv's human landscape changed: businesses of every size and shape opened, restaurants and cinemas, and Yiddish filled the streets. Men in fedoras and women in elegant hats replaced the pioneer cap. Suddenly Tel Aviv began to resemble the Jewish centers of Eastern Europe. Chaim Weizmann, then President of the Zionist Organization, protested: it was not our intention to transpose Warsaw's Nalevki St. to Tel Aviv

13 On the challenge to the *shtetl*, see Vardi, pp. 3, 65, 77, 83; Azaryahu, pp. 32-37, 62-64, 70-87; on the city's emblem, see Azaryahu, pp. 22-23; on the street names, see Vardi, pp. 21-22. On the burial of Zionist figures, *ibid.*, pp. 78-79. See also Shavit and Biger, pp. 41-44; 4-100.

14 Vardi, p. 75.

(i.e. that city's main Jewish street of traders and peddlers).¹⁵ Objections of this sort continued to be heard: Lillienblum was the moneychangers' street where foreign currency could be obtained at a time that ordinary citizens were not permitted to hold dollars. On the street behind Tel Aviv's central post office, peddlers sold contraband sardines, cheese and other delicacies impossible to obtain in the country then. The peddlers' Yiddish and the style of their trade smacked of the *shtetl*.¹⁶ The petit bourgeois way of life in the city bridged the Eastern European past and the new realities of the land of Israel. Average Jews were not attracted to the various forms of agricultural life. It was easier for them to integrate into Tel Aviv than into kibbutzim or moshavim. In vain did the nation's fathers invoke the importance of population distribution, of conquering the wilderness, overturning the upside-down pyramid of Jewish occupations (as defined by Ber Borochov) and setting it on a broad base of manual labor. Most of the Jews were not drawn to these ideals, preferring Tel Aviv over the periphery. In time, it transpired that the theses about the productivity of manual labor versus service personnel no longer held sway in modern economics, and the city of services was considered no less productive than the village whose farmers saturated the soil with the sweat of their brow. Tel Aviv was the embodiment of the normalization of Jewish life, not too innovative, not too frightening: maintaining ties to the past, remembering the home left behind, and nevertheless different.¹⁷

Of all the towns to which Tel Aviv constitutes a counterpoint, Jerusalem stands alone. From its very first day, though unplanned, Tel Aviv served as Jerusalem's polar opposite. If Tel Aviv was born of the sea, Jerusalem was born of Jewish history, of past glory, of the longing of generations. Jerusalem is anchored in Jewish fate. Tel Aviv symbolized the present. As said, Jaffa's Jewish community from which Tel Aviv grew did not adopt the way of life of Jerusalem's Orthodox Jews. On the other hand, Jerusalem's Orthodox regarded the entire Zionist endeavor as flying in the face of the gentiles. Zionists spoke Hebrew in Sephardi pronuncia-

15 On Tel Aviv as a challenge to the *shtetl*, see Helman, above, pp. 61-66, 238-239; Weizmann on transposing the *shtetl* to Tel Aviv – Azaryahu, above, pp. 41-43. For more on the Fourth Aliya immigration wave in Tel Aviv, see Dan Giladi, *HaYishuv bi-Tekufat ha-Aliya ha-Revi'it (1924-1929)* [The Yishuv in the Period of the Fourth Aliya (1924-1929)], Am Oved, Tel Aviv 1973.

16 On the peddlers in Tel Aviv, see Helman, above, pp. 113-116.

17 For a good example of the Jews' preference for middle class urban life and the sense of home they felt in Tel Aviv, see the passage quoted by Dr. A. Korálnik in Vardi. He asserts that Tel Aviv is an extension rather than something created ex nihilo: "It is a continuation. It is a bridge between Jewry in Europe and that in Eretz Israel". And he adds that the peddler in Tel Aviv is closer to his heart than the pioneers tilling the soil. Tolstoy may well have hated cities but "people like Tolstoy will never build a country." *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70. For the bourgeois character of the city, see Shavit and Biger, pp. 47-49, 100-103, 283-285.

tion, read and studied the Bible through biblical criticism, and instead of accepting charitable distribution, worked at physical labor, bore arms and performed acts that decent Jews avoided. They did not always observe the commandments. True, a siren announced the onset of the Sabbath in town, and all work ground to a halt. Masses filled the synagogues, and not only on the Days of Awe.¹⁸ At the same time, however, a secular culture developed: in the Ohel Shem Auditorium on Balfour St., Bialik introduced "Oneg Shabbat" evenings built around lectures, musical performances or theater. In other words, from the start, attempts were made to found a modern, secular, Jewish high culture in Tel Aviv. While the synagogues rang with prayer, Tel Aviv's beaches buzzed with people, and cafés were full. Bands would play and customers danced the tango or the waltz – rather than the *hora* of the pioneers. Tel Aviv had theaters, cinemas and even an opera house. Publishing houses were headquartered in Tel Aviv, the press, the sports associations – all these lent it the aspect of a modern city.¹⁹ In 1934, the Zionist Organization sponsored a propaganda film about the land of Israel: "The Land of Promise". The film devoted more time to Tel Aviv than to Jerusalem. Its beaches, cafés, bustling streets, secular lifestyle all underscored its character as a young, vibrant, European city. The film was a great hit among Jews in Nazi Germany, convincing many to immigrate to Palestine. It may be said that Tel Aviv's modern, secular way of life charmed them and saved their lives. Hedonistic, European-like Tel Aviv stood in opposition to the image of the threatening, foreign Levant as well as to Jerusalem, which combined the Levant and religious fanaticism, and did not suit the *Weltanschauung* of the immigrants from Germany.²⁰

The Zionist movement regarded Jerusalem as its heart: "Zion", after all, is Jerusalem. But the Zionist enterprise found Jerusalem difficult to digest; as a city sacred to the three monotheistic religions, it could not, by definition, be exclusively Jewish. Attempts were made to establish the new city of Jerusalem as the capital of the new Jewish Yishuv: when the Histadrut Workers Organization was set up, it located its headquarters in Jerusalem. The first newspaper editorial boards had their premises in Jerusalem. But Jerusalem was a hard city, most of its population belonged to the Old Yishuv, and all this activity soon moved to the throbbing, friendly city on the seashore. Jerusalem was the seat of the Mandate Government and of the Jewish Agency, but it had an Arab municipality and lacked Tel Aviv's

18 For the juxtaposition of Tel Aviv as a city devoid of history with Jerusalem, see Shavit and Biger, pp. 44-46, 53-55; on the Sabbath in Tel Aviv, see Helman, pp. 91-99; Azaryahu, pp. 78-90.

19 Azaryahu, pp. 87-90, 272-293; Helman, pp. 46-51, 81-102, 138-148, 153-169; Biger and Shavit, pp. 312-330.

20 Hillel Treister, "Taamula Zionit be-Emza'ut Seratim – 'le-Haim Hadashim' 1935 [Zionist Propaganda via Films – The Land of Promise 1935]", *Kivunim 9* [Directions] 1995-6, pp. 117-137.

sense of familiarity. Jews preferred the young, vital city to the tense, stern multinational city looked down on by kings and prophets, conquerors and crusaders, and the almost unbearable weight of its history.²¹ When the time came to proclaim statehood, Jerusalem was under siege and could be reached only by aircraft. As a result, it was not Jerusalem but Tel Aviv that had the honor of hosting the proclamation of statehood – the younger city, risen from the sands, without the baggage of the past and with its face to the future. On Rothschild Blvd., in the modest hall of the Tel Aviv Museum, previously the residence of Tel Aviv's first mayor, Meir Dizengoff, Jewish history changed course. That Friday afternoon, David Ben-Gurion proclaimed: "we hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state ... to be known as the State of Israel."²²

Tel Aviv was a big city almost from its first moment. Despite its small dimensions and maybe even the whiff of provincialism emanating from the bourgeois householders who had built it, there was something about it that was open to the big, wide cosmopolitan world. Tel Aviv was first and foremost a city with the many hues characteristic of a Middle Eastern port, pleasant, seeking excitement, open to innovation of every kind. In the 1920s, dream houses were built in Tel Aviv combining oriental and European elements; a strange, surprising mix that today appears interesting but at the time must have struck architects as transposing the image of the Levant that existed in Europe – to the Levant. In the 1930s, when architects under the influence of the Bauhaus and International Style arrived from Germany, buildings with simple lines were constructed, functional, European, unconnected with the Levant. It was both an expression of homesickness and truth to the esthetic values they brought with them.²³ Today that part of Tel Aviv has been declared a White City, a UNESCO World Heritage site (2003), in appreciation of the unique architecture of these immigrants, which preserved a German-Jewish culture that has passed from the world. It was generally said of Tel Aviv that it was an ugly city, with its back to the sea which was its most important natural treasure, that its buildings lacked style, that it had no impressive edifices or spacious gardens. And this litany would be capped by a line from city poet Nathan Alterman, "and yet there's something about her", as if speaking of an unattractive woman but with an interesting face and appealing personality. Today, it transpires

21 The contrast between the two cities comes to the fore in numerous literary works, e.g. Shulamit Hareven, *Ir Yamim Rabim* [City of Many Days], Am Oved, Tel Aviv 1972; Amos Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, London, Vintage 2004.

22 Anita Shapira (ed.), *Anu Makebrizim ba-Zot* [We Hereby Declare], Kinneret-Zmora-Bitan-Dvir, Israel 2008, pp. 43-45.

23 Helman, pp. 22-27.

that the unimpressive city merits a special status among the architectural delights of the world.²⁴

Tel Aviv was meant to bridge Europe and the East. The city fathers viewed the Levant as exotic, mysterious and even enchanting. But it was also perceived as dangerous, a symbol of the desert rising up to conquer the living land. Tel Aviv was meant to show that the Orient could be accommodated without losing its character. The symbol chosen for the Levant Fair held in Tel Aviv biennially from 1932 to 1936, under the auspices of the British High Commissioner, was the flying camel. On the one hand, the camel was the ship of the desert, on the other, it had sprouted wings – the symbol of progress and momentum. The emblem of Tel Aviv portrayed the sea and the lighthouse: the sea connected the land of Israel and Europe, but also separated them; the lighthouse symbolized the hope of *ex oriente lux* – a light meant to illuminate the entire East.²⁵

The story of Tel Aviv is the story of a city that rose on shifting sands and managed to put down roots in the wilderness. But the image also carries a hidden threat: will the sands in the end stifle the settled land? Will transience vanquish the roots? Recently, the *New York Times* carried an article that crowned Tel Aviv as "the capital of Mediterranean cool". It described the tolerance of the large city, its openness to the spirit and fashions of the world at large, the rich entertainment fare it offers casual visitors and resident alike, the beauty of the many different young people walking its streets.²⁶ It's a city of the 21st century with high-tech and internet and postmodernism and a consumer culture, as well as neighborhoods of migrant workers from all over the world. What has remained of Tel Aviv, the garden city built on the edge of Jaffa, when howling jackals disturbed the sleep of its children? Fifty years ago, a nostalgia program already sang about Tel Aviv: "it will not come back, all this is already gone."²⁷ But even if the past dons a veil of beauty and longing, and the figments of our imagination turned out differently from what we had hoped for, this is the reality, and this reality has its own power and optimism, and a clear-eyed hope for the future. Tel Aviv is ready to leap forth into the 21st century.

24 On the White City and preservation of Bauhaus architecture in Tel Aviv, see Nitza-Metzger-Samok, *Batim min ha-Hol* [Houses from the Sand], Ministry of Defense, 1994; Michael Levine, *Ir Levana – Adrikhalut ha-Signon ha-Beinle'umi be-Yisrael* [White City – Architecture of the International Style in Israel], Museum of Tel Aviv, 1984.

25 On the Levant Fair and its emblem, see Azaryahu, pp. 66-69; Shavit and Biger, pp. 132-135; Helman, pp. 73-77.

26 Henry Alford, "There is Room for Everyone in Tel Aviv", *New York Times*, 20.7.2008.

27 Azaryahu, pp. 112-118.