

Haifa

*Transformation of an Arab Society,
1918—1939*



MAY SEIKALY
Foreword by Walid Khalidi

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Contents

Foreword	vii
List of Acronyms	x
Preface to the Paperback Edition	xi
Acknowledgements	xiii
Explanatory Notes	xv
Maps	xvi–xix
 Introduction	 1
 PART ONE Haifa: the Town in 1918	 13
1 Physical Characteristics of Haifa in 1918	15
2 Demography and Distribution of Haifa's Communities	19
3 The Economic, Social and Political Structure of Haifa's Society in 1918	26
 PART TWO British Policy and the Development of Haifa	 45
4 The Demographic Transformation of Haifa 1918–39	47
5 The Administrative Set-up: the Municipality and its Functions	52
6 Town Planning: Policies and the New Quarters	61
7 British Plans and Projects	72
 PART THREE The Evolution of the Economic Sectors	 79
8 Industry: a Jewish Monopoly	81
9 Banking and Commerce	98
10 Land and Housing Policy	122
11 Labour Policy	133

	PART FOUR The Political Transformation of Haifa's Arab Community	149
	Prologue	151
12	Transition into the British Orbit	160
13	The Phase of Political Fragmentation	182
14	Radicalization of the National Forces	217
15	Conclusion: the Path to Revolution	240
	APPENDIX	
	Haifa's Prominent Arab Families 1918–39	263
	Bibliography	267
	Index	276

Foreword

May Seikaly's work is an original and important contribution to the scholarship of mandatory Palestine. As a multi-dimensional profile of the growth of Haifa into one of the major cities of the eastern Mediterranean, it is perhaps unique in the field of Middle East urban studies. Its principal theme is the impact on its indigenous Arab population, both Christian and Muslim, of global British imperial policy and the implementation of the Zionist programme in Palestine in the wake of the Balfour Declaration and Britain's assumption of the Mandate for the country. At the start of the period covered by this work, Jews constituted one-eighth of Haifa's population; by the period's end, they had grown to more than 50 per cent, largely through immigration under British protection. Haifa was one of the three major locations of Jewish demographic concentration, which comprised between them almost 80 per cent of the total population of the Yishuv on the eve of the establishment of Israel.

Long before the First World War, London had identified Haifa's harbour as the 'most suitable landing site' for its troops to take in the rear an Ottoman army advancing upon the Suez Canal. Also well before the First World War, Arthur Ruppin, the master architect of Zionist colonization, had pinpointed Haifa as the fulcrum for the two major axes of Jewish settlement he envisaged: one extending southwards along the coast towards Tel Aviv (which he was instrumental in founding) and the other cutting across Palestine along the Marj Ibn Amr towards Lake Tiberias and then extending northwards towards the upper reaches of the River Jordan.

The author thoroughly covers the demographic, spatial, economic, industrial, strategic, institutional (municipal and other) and ethnic evolution of the city in the two decades between the end of the First World War and the eve of the Second World War. She marshals her data from an extraordinary range of sources, official and unofficial, British and Zionist. She supplements these with interviews stretching back to the mid-1970s with former Arab residents of Haifa in various countries of their diaspora.

While she is entirely at home discussing the minutiae of British politics on town planning or municipal taxes, and the wranglings between London and the Zionist Organization on the specific site of the proposed Haifa port or the location of the Iraq Petroleum Company's terminal in Haifa bay, the trees never blur her view of the Haifa wood.

It is against the background of the convergence between British and Zionist interests in the development of Haifa, tempered to some extent in the case of the former by attempts, mostly ineffectual, to soften its impact on Haifa's Arab population, that the author develops the underlying theme of her work. This is the steady change in the balance of power within the city between its Jewish and Arab communities in favour of the former. The author analyses the emergence of a new mercantile and entrepreneurial Arab class whose characteristics were defined by the Zionist monopoly, because of superior organization and financial resources, of the city's industrial sector.

She traces the relations within the Arab community between, on the one hand, its political and mercantile elite and, on the other, the growing underclass of Palestinian villagers attracted to the city by employment opportunities afforded by its economic development. Even in the early 1920s, a senior British official remarks on the feeling of 'claustrophobia' experienced by Haifa's Arab population as a result of its encirclement by Jewish residential quarters and rural colonies. The author investigates the intra-Arab tensions as well as those between the haves and have-nots, the Christians and the Muslims, and examines the mounting sense of frustration and despair among the alienated and proletarianized Arab village immigrants from the hinterland of Galilee.

She explains how these feelings were drawn upon by the charismatic and puritanical Syrian cleric Sheikh Ez eddin al-Qassam, himself a resident of Haifa, who preached a powerful mixture of Islamic reformism and national resistance to British and Zionist policies, which crystallized in an open call to armed struggle in defence of Palestinian rights. It was this call to arms by Qassam in 1934-35, and his death in an encounter with British security forces, that forced the hands of the more moderate and conservative Palestinian Jerusalem leadership and ushered in the 1936 country-wide strike, the prelude to the Palestinian 1936-39 rebellion. The disciples of Qassam were to bear the brunt of the armed rebellion against the British, which reached its zenith in northern Palestine, where the overwhelming majority was Arab, particularly in the wake of the Peel partition proposals to incorporate the entire region in the proposed Jewish state. The author does not flinch from describing and analysing the adverse impact of this rebellion on the coherence of Haifa's Arab population and the deterioration of the revolt, as its leadership slipped into the hands of rural elements after the flight or imprisonment of the more sophisticated middle-class leadership.

The author's analysis of the socio-economic and psycho-political milieu that gave rise to the radicalization of Haifa's underclass has almost prophetic contemporary resonance. This work goes a long way to explaining why Haifa, after the sudden withdrawal of the British army, fell virtually overnight to the Haganah battalions on that fateful day, 23 April 1948. With Haifa militarily in its hands, the Zionist leadership was able to use the city's Jewish manpower for the conquest of the rest of Galilee. Indeed this work is paradigmatic in throwing light on the plight of Eastern Jerusalem today.

The text is accompanied by useful maps and statistical tables, and a poignant appendix containing the names of members of the principal families of Haifa, Christian and Muslim, now dead or scattered with their descendants to the four winds.

Walid Khalidi
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Acronyms

ACS	Assistant Chief Secretary
ADPS	Assistant District Police Superintendent
AE	Arab Executive
AHC	Arab Higher Committee
CA	Chief Administrator
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CO	Colonial Office
CS	Chief Secretary
CZA	Central Zionist Archives
DC	District Commissioner
DG	District Governor
FO	Foreign Office
GFJL	General Federation of Jewish Labour
HC	High Commissioner
HMG	His Majesty's Government
IPC	Iraq Petroleum Company
ISA	Israeli State Archives
JA	Jewish Agency
JNH	Jewish National Home
ND	Northern District
OAG	Officer Administering the Government
OETA	Occupied Enemy Territory Administration
PICA	Palestine Jewish Colonization Association
PLDC	Palestine Land Development Company
PRO	Public Records Office
PWD	Public Works Department
S of S	Secretary of State
SMC	Supreme Muslim Council
YMMA	Young Men's Muslim Association
ZE	Zionist Executive
ZO	Zionist Organization

Preface to the Paperback Edition

In the 1970s, when I undertook the project of studying Haifa, the city had already lost much of its Arab character, both in its architectural features and human makeup. Today the situation is much worse. A visitor would be hard pressed to unearth the remnants of Arab Haifa, its quarters, its churches, mosques, cemeteries, market places and even its streets. It has become a challenge, every time I return to Haifa, trying to identify what has remained and where my roots have been buried, where (and even if) my family home is, where and if my ancestors still rest in their graves. More telling of an active policy to eradicate the traces of the original city and its Arab roots, has been the array of new street names that speaks only of its recent Zionist history. Many of the comparatively few Arabs currently living in the city are unaware of the underlying historical foundations of Haifa; they are the young, the new arrivals who came here after 1948.

Today the areas targeted for destruction by the developers and social engineers are the last remnants of the old, traditional town, the quarters of the Churches, Wadi Salib and Wadi Nisnas. At the same time more official projects are energetically giving a face lift to the old European quarter, the German colony in the western end of the city, and the Bahai headquarters overlooking that colony. These are being promoted for trading and tourist purposes as well as to complete the policy of judiazation and the denial of Arab claims, a policy already started in the 1920s as this book shows.

In spite of the dismal prospect for the survival of the sites and physical artefacts validating the original history of the city, I have been surprised and heartened to find a growing and enthusiastic interest in the scholarly rediscovery of general Palestinian history, that of its cities, its people and their experiences. More recently this has been activated by socio-political developments in the region and particularly by the process to finally resolve the Palestinian problem. The spectre of

historical loss and eradication explains the drive to capture memory and safeguard the links to the past. A very significant contribution to this direction has been the work of young scholars, outside and within Israel, who have forged a process of rethinking and revising the accepted discourse on that history. In large measure, this has been due to better access to freshly available documentation, to more innovative research techniques and methodologies and building on the groundbreaking research that had challenged that discourse. This challenge has come from studies on the particularities of the Palestinian experience, its varieties, minutiae and locations. In most of these studies, as is the case in this book on Haifa, and in other current research, the voice of the people, the makers of history – the participants in critical events – endorse, validate and often contradict the documents and the official data. Such sources and methods have humanised the historical text, providing new perspectives which frame today's discourse and its character.

This book on Haifa, originally published in hardcover in 1995 was received with varied but keen interest and enthusiasm from many quarters. A general reading public, concerned with the preservation and validation of Palestine's historical experience earlier in the 20th century has been anxiously awaiting a paperback edition. Another very important response to the book has come from scholars, teachers and students in the field who have seen it as a source for a better understanding of Palestine's history. The request has always been to make it more readily available to the academe, students and teachers, and I hope this paperback edition will fill the gap.

It is my hope that the availability of this edition of my book will now meet the needs of the many – whether general readers who follow the history of the Middle East, or researchers, teachers and students – who have asked me over the years about its appearance as a paperback.

Acknowledgements

The basic research for this book was undertaken for my D.Phil. thesis at Oxford University over ten years ago. While the basic data of that research still form the nucleus of this altered study, the focus and time-span in this book have been reformulated and extended. My thesis adviser and my mentor, the late Albert Hourani, was the main moving spirit encouraging and prodding me to complete the work and publish it. It was his belief, and that of a number of Middle East historians and intellectuals, that the thesis should be published in order to fill a need in the field of Palestinian urban and socio-economic history. It is in appreciation of his insight and tremendous help in preparing the manuscript, until his passing away in 1993, that I dedicate this book to his memory. Without his intellectual help, and the emotional support of both he and Odile, this book would not have been published.

A number of institutions and a large number of people have helped and supported my efforts in the completion of this work, both during the initial period of collecting the data and the more recent work on the book manuscript; I wish to thank them collectively, although their contributions are valued and remembered separately. St. Anthony's College, its staff, and especially its Middle East Centre, the Lebanese Studies Centre, Oxford, as well as the University of California Los Angeles and its Middle East Librarian: all should be particularly thanked for the assistance rendered to me, whether by providing a congenial working atmosphere, library assistance or expert help and advice. Here I would like to single out the friendship and interest extended by Nadim Shehadi, who provided me with valuable insights and with the photographs from his extensive collection which have been used for the jacket of the book. Special gratitude goes to a number of Middle East specialists who have been generous with their time by reading all or parts of the early and later drafts of the manuscript, suggesting changes and giving invaluable advice. Among these are Walid Khalidi, Derek Hopwood, Peter Sluglett, Barbara Smith, Sarah Graham Brown, Nels Johnson, John Ruedy, Rosemarie

Said Zahlan, Nancy Gallagher, Leila Fawaz, Usama Khalidi, Pamela Smith, Sonia El-Nimr, Antoine Zahlan and Nahid Osseiran. The views and suggestions of these scholars have helped me reach my own interpretations and conclusions, for which I am solely responsible.

Particular thanks go to the late Yosef Washitz of Lehavot Habashan, Israel, whose innate scholarship and moral commitment superseded all differences between us. He made available to me his personal unpublished manuscript and data of the Haifa Municipal reports and history, whose existence had been denied by the Municipality. In Israel and Haifa, my work was smoothed by the support of Butrus Abu Manneh, Alex Carmel and Moshe Maoz of the Universities of Haifa and Jerusalem respectively. Bernard Wasserstein was helpful in untangling the mysteries of the Israel State Archives and their selectively restrictive policies.

My unbound gratitude goes to the people of Haifa: the old men who walked with me through its streets reconstructing maps from their memories, the families who generously offered me their information, nostalgic memories and private documents, and the incredible enthusiasm of its communities in the diaspora from Amman to London to San Diego who have enriched my work and my personal life. My own extended and spread-out family – particularly my uncles and aunts – have been a constant source of information, support and contact. However, it was my mother who remained the beacon that pushed me to persist in the project and to commemorate her memories of the city of her birth and youth.

Anna Enayat, in addition to being a supportive friend, has led me gently through the maze of publishing a book and all its intricacies. I am grateful for her continued consideration and support. The staff at I.B.Tauris, and particularly those in charge of my manuscript, have done a great job with understanding and indulgence. Margaret Cornell has been patience itself in performing the complicated editorial job of helping me transform my thesis into a book over long distances and an extended period of time. My deepest gratitude goes to her for her tolerance, cheerful disposition and professionalism. Special thanks also go to Abier Ziyadeh Shamma, who proof-read the final draft of the manuscript and drew my attention to significant last-minute corrections. The central source of my well-being and strength has been my immediate family, my brothers and sisters as well as my huge repertoire of close friends. My sister Maha and her children, Rania, Kareem, Ameen and Waleed, have provided me with constant stability, joy and affection.

Explanatory Notes

Transliteration

Arabic Arabic terms, names of people and places which are used in British official documents have been transliterated according to the most common form appearing there. Some family names have been written in the form which the family itself normally uses. Other Arabic terms, names of people and places have been rendered according to the system of transliteration adopted by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES).

Hebrew The form in which Hebrew names have appeared in official correspondence or in English print has been used.

Currency

Until 1927, the monetary unit in Palestine was the Egyptian pound (£E), which equalled 100 piastres (P.T.). The pound sterling was worth 97.5 Egyptian piastres. In 1927, the Palestinian pound was introduced (£P), which equalled 1,000 mils. Although there was no intermediate unit between the pound and the mil, in practice the term 'piastre' was adopted as the equivalent of ten mils. The Palestinian pound was valued at par with the pound sterling. Because of the almost negligible difference in value of these respective pounds, British officials were not always careful to distinguish among them.

Square measures (land)

Land in Palestine was measured in dunums. The old Turkish dunum was equivalent to 919.3 square metres, but the British Administration adopted a metric dunum of 1,000 square metres (about one quarter of an acre). In general, no distinction was made between the two measures despite the 8-per-cent variation.

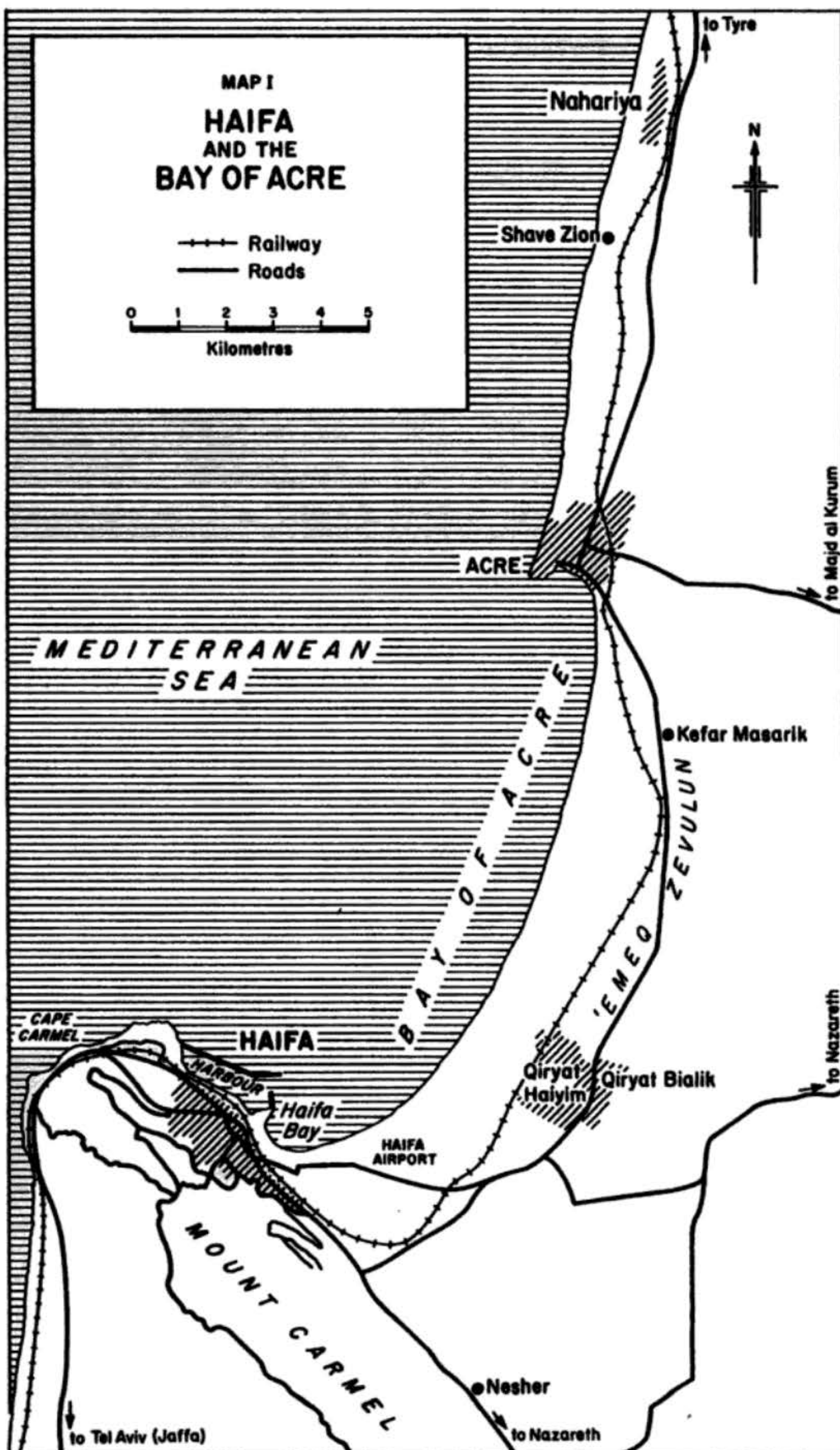
Notes

First references to any publication in the notes to each chapter have been given in full, but subsequent references have been given in truncated form. References to archival material are notated according to the list of acronyms that follows. Unless there is a special significance attached, no differentiation is made between despatches and telegrams or official and semi-official communications. Israeli State Archives documents are numbered by record groups in accordance with the listing in the bibliography unless they were not yet classified; in this case, the full notation appearing on the file cover has been reproduced.

MAP I
HAIFA
AND THE
BAY OF ACRE

---+---+--- Railway
——— Roads

0 1 2 3 4 5
Kilometres

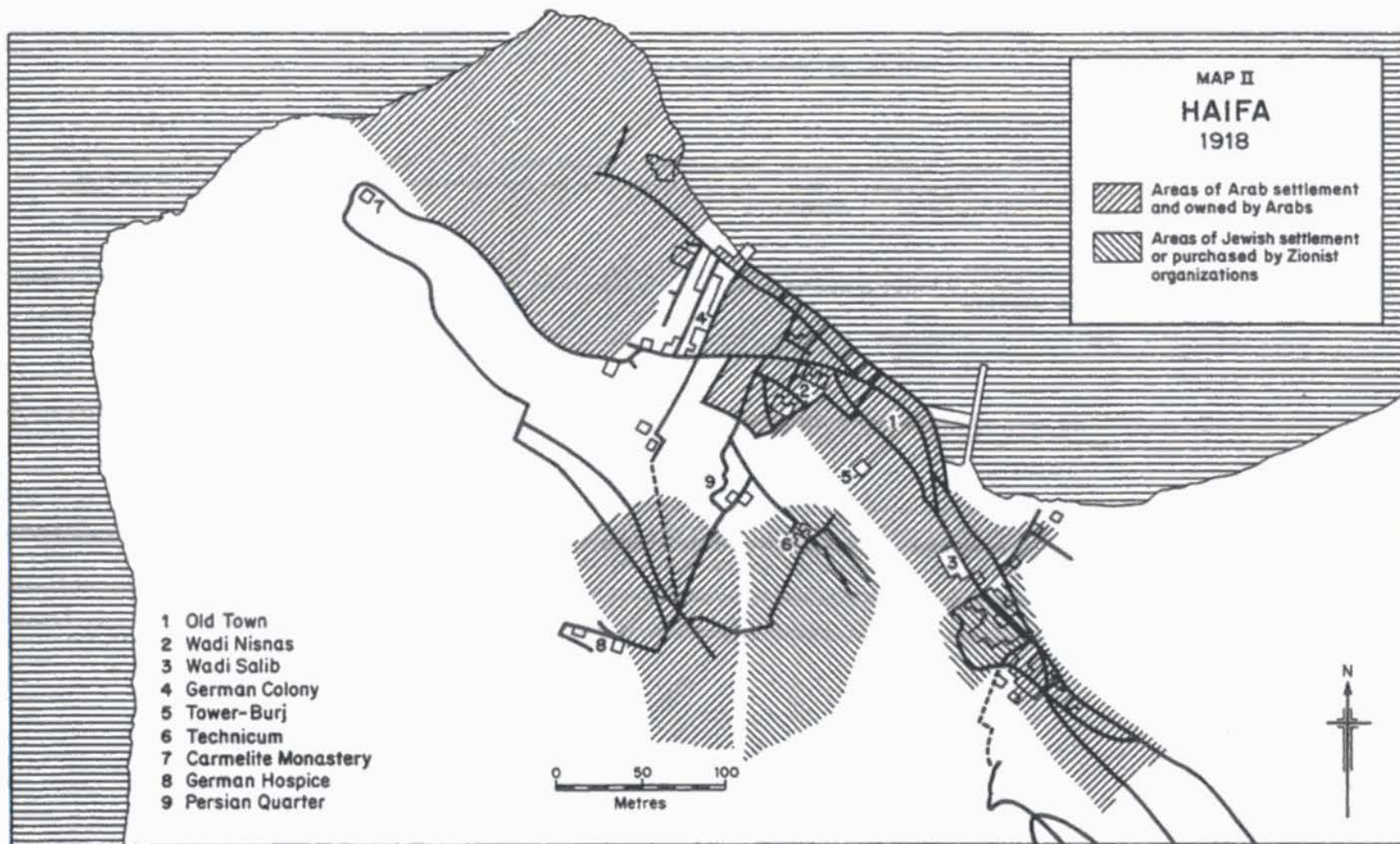


MAP II
HAIFA
1918

-  Areas of Arab settlement
and owned by Arabs
-  Areas of Jewish settlement
or purchased by Zionist
organizations

- 1 Old Town
2 Wadi Nisnas
3 Wadi Salib
4 German Colony
5 Tower-Burj
6 Technicum
7 Carmelite Monastery
8 German Hospice
9 Persian Quarter

0 50 100
Metres

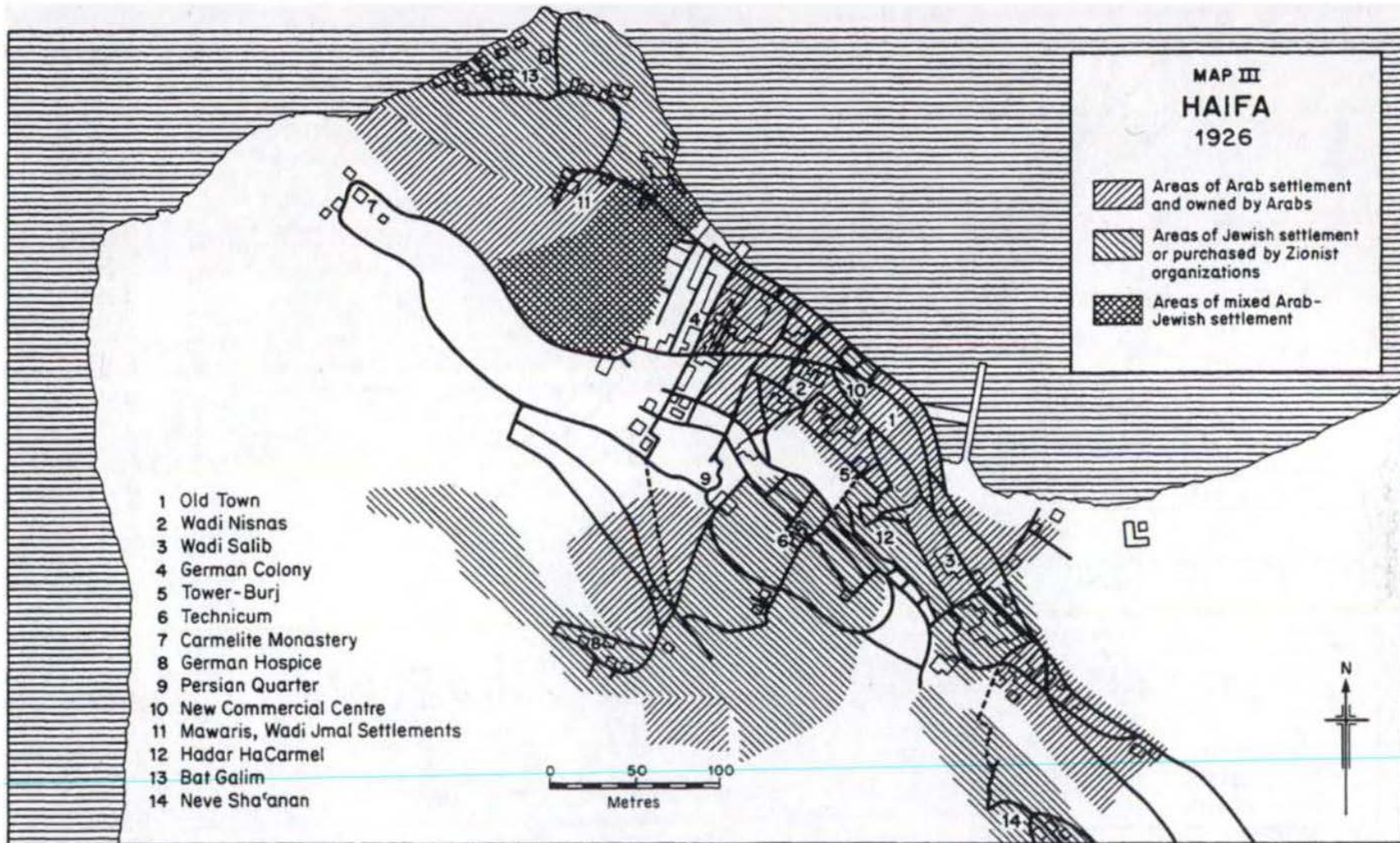


MAP III
HAIFA
1926

-  Areas of Arab settlement and owned by Arabs
-  Areas of Jewish settlement or purchased by Zionist organizations
-  Areas of mixed Arab-Jewish settlement

- 1 Old Town
- 2 Wadi Nisnas
- 3 Wadi Salib
- 4 German Colony
- 5 Tower-Burj
- 6 Technicum
- 7 Carmelite Monastery
- 8 German Hospice
- 9 Persian Quarter
- 10 New Commercial Centre
- 11 Mawaris, Wadi Jmal Settlements
- 12 Hadar HaCarmel
- 13 Bat Galim
- 14 Neve Sha'an

0 50 100
Metres

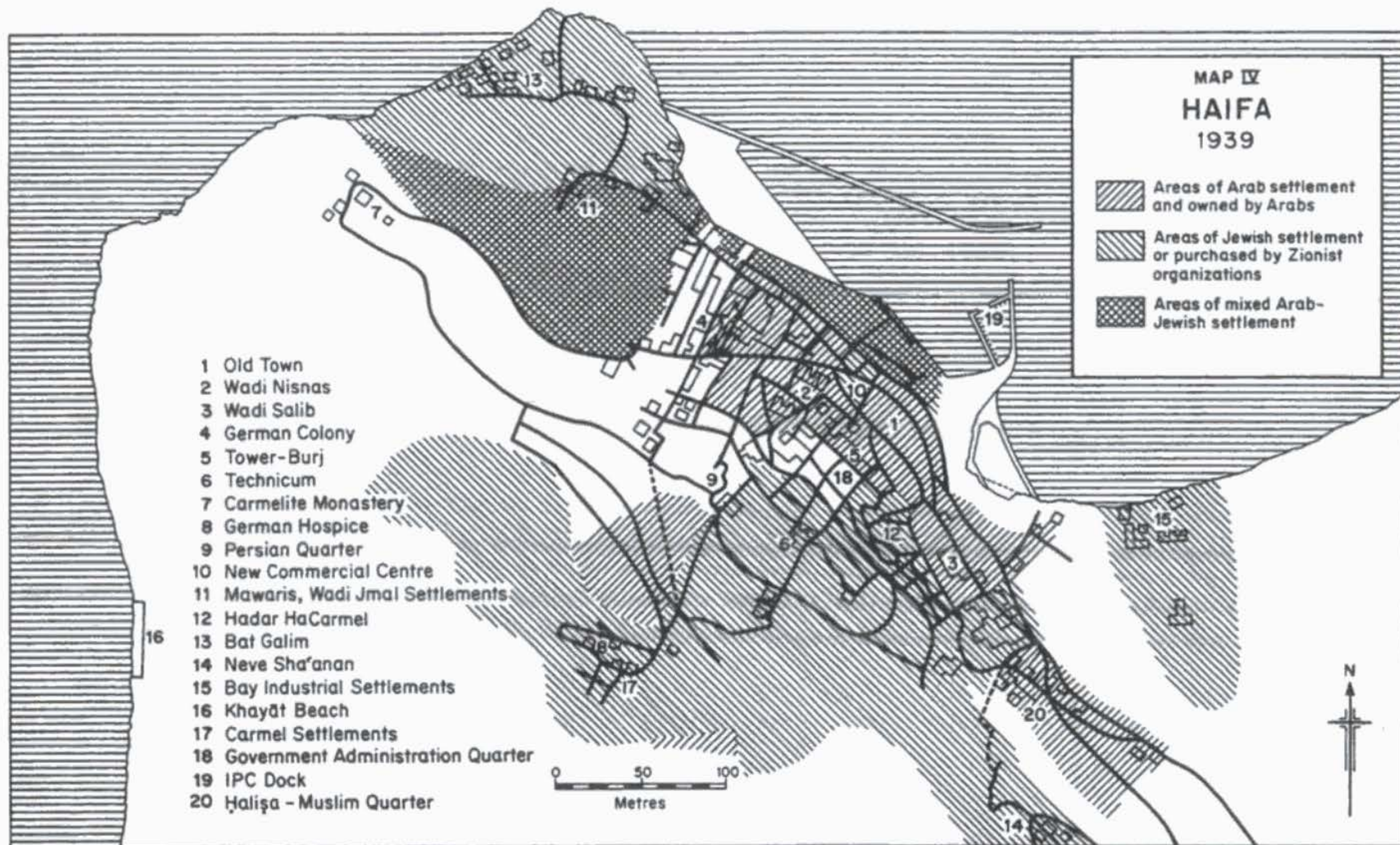


MAP IV
HAIFA
1939

-  Areas of Arab settlement and owned by Arabs
-  Areas of Jewish settlement or purchased by Zionist organizations
-  Areas of mixed Arab-Jewish settlement

- 1 Old Town
- 2 Wadi Nisnas
- 3 Wadi Salib
- 4 German Colony
- 5 Tower-Burj
- 6 Technicum
- 7 Carmelite Monastery
- 8 German Hospice
- 9 Persian Quarter
- 10 New Commercial Centre
- 11 Mawaris, Wadi Jmal Settlements
- 12 Hadar HaCarmel
- 13 Bat Galim
- 14 Neve Sha'anani
- 15 Bay Industrial Settlements
- 16 Khayāt Beach
- 17 Carmel Settlements
- 18 Government Administration Quarter
- 19 IPC Dock
- 20 Halişa - Muslim Quarter

0 50 100
Metres



Introduction

Scholarly work on the British Mandate in Palestine has mostly been concerned with British policies or Zionist activities, and it is only recently that proper attention has begun to be given to the development of the Palestinians. While a certain interest in and concern with Palestinian studies has picked up in the last decade, its main focus has been the political and the contemporary. There has been an obvious gap in the research on the evolution of the Palestinian national community in its social, cultural, economic and political aspects.¹ The political development of the Palestinians has been a field of great interest to scholars, especially in view of the timely significance of the subject.² More recently there has been more concern with particular features of Palestinian history such as the revolt of 1936-9 and the Intifadah as well as concentrated studies on particular towns, villages and cities.³ Other features of the community's life have been touched upon incidentally in studies on Jewish Zionist settlement and the development of the Jewish National Home (JNH).⁴ They reflect only the reaction of the Arabs to these developments, which was on the whole negative, and so transmit a distorted picture of Arab social behaviour in toto. The latest attempts to fill this gap by studying the dynamics and experience of the Arab community in a socio-political framework,⁵ while initiating the path towards a more thorough study of the community, have concentrated on such factors as demography, social stratification and education, and have not provided a comprehensive study of all aspects of community life. Such studies have laid most emphasis on the Palestinian communities after 1948, leaving a gap that needs to be filled by further research on the Mandate period.

This book is an attempt to meet part of the demand for Arab community studies, by highlighting the transformation of one Arab urban community in conditions of extreme mobility and change during the Mandate period. The Arab community that resided in Haifa between 1918 and 1939, and was influenced by the socio-economic changes

that were particular to the city and to northern Palestine, was made up of a core group of Arabs who had resided there for generations and of a continuous flow of Arabs from other areas of Palestine, as well as neighbouring Lebanon and Syria. This Arab amalgam was united not only by its common cultural heritage but by a sense of a common destiny formed largely by the course of events after the First World War. During the nineteenth century the majority of this community had been Christian, but the Muslims had outnumbered the Christians since the early 1900s. The minority of Jews was originally minute, and most of them were Arabic-speaking; the Jewish population grew significantly only with the influx of the European Jews who came in fulfilment of the Zionist dream, thus changing the overall character of that minority.

Another significant feature of this community was its non-conformist character, in the sense that it differed from what scholars have come to accept as the particular social and political Palestinian culture. The intense concentration of such studies on Central Palestine for the patterns of social and political behaviour has left the field without a full, dynamic and comprehensive picture of Palestinian national development. This book highlights the socio-political atmosphere specific to northern Palestine and to the Opposition front, and the contribution of these particulars to the many facets of Palestinian national history.

Both the town and its community were drastically transformed during the period under study. Haifa changed from a small roadstead with a promising commercial centre into a congested modern harbour city with major industrial projects and sophisticated trading activities. This transformation reflected many features of the development of European industrial and commercial cities. In Haifa, however, the process was not the result of a natural development of the economic structure of the country or the social consciousness of the people; it was a transplanted phenomenon, in which the financial and human components were alien to the inhabitants. The demographic transformation of the Arab community, both in size and character, was shaped by these factors. While the total population of Haifa was approximately 18,000 in 1918, it had grown to over 100,000 in 1939. Foreign elements had been a small proportion of the community at the end of the First World War, but in the mid-1930s the Jewish population, which was overwhelmingly foreign (Polish, Russian and German), made up a little less than 50 per cent of the total inhabitants of the town. The Arab community, because of improved health conditions and immigration, had practically doubled in number, but it had lost the social and psychological power of its previous majority status; more significantly, the fundamental nature of that community had been recast under the impact of the new political and economic realities, depriving it of a normal, progressive national evolution.

Having stated the focus of this book, it is also important to specify what the study will omit in its treatment of the subject. While all factors that contribute to the understanding of Arab development in Haifa are thoroughly investigated, it is not the intention to consider the evolution of other communities in the city unless they bear directly upon the subject. The Jewish community, in particular, which was the largest and the most rapidly growing minority, is treated only in terms of its economic, political and social impact on Arab development and on the transformation of the city; the dynamics of Haifa's development and its gradual Zionization are touched upon from that angle only. Inter-communal relationships are given the same degree of emphasis and consideration. Because this book concentrates on economic, social and political changes, details about the overall history of Palestine will be omitted except for a brief general framework to facilitate understanding of particulars relevant to Haifa. These will be recorded and referred to in due time. Similarly, while the imperialist nature of the British Mandate and the implications of its support for Zionist policy have a direct bearing on the subject of this research, a thorough analysis of that topic is beyond its scope, and it will be touched upon only indirectly.

A main assumption on which this research builds its approach to both the British Administration and the Zionist experiment in Palestine is that the political and economic practices of the Mandate reflected an imperialist policy.⁶ This is so important a precondition for the understanding of the framework in which Arab communities developed that something must be said at the very beginning about the tortuous history of Arab-British-Jewish relations.

Whatever altruistic motives Britain may have had in relation to the Mandate, it also had concrete political aspirations which frequently overrode Jewish and Arab needs. The traditional British concern about securing easy and complete access to Britain's eastern domains was still of paramount interest. This was even more pressing at a time when new territories could be opened up for British trade, territories which were also potential sources of natural resources. Palestine had long been important for the defence of the eastern bank of the Suez Canal, and it became more so after the discovery of oil in Iraq and the laying of the pipelines through northern Palestine. At the economic level, Palestine was made dependent on Britain in its trade relations, financial guarantees and methods of collection and allocation of public funds. The Colonial Office (CO) and the Treasury showed an unswerving imperialist spirit in their economic policy. Although Palestine did not promise material gains, it was essential that the country should achieve a viable economy in order not to become a financial liability to Britain.

It was only in relation to its political commitment to the Zionists and the establishment of the JNH that British economic policy faltered.

Theoretically, the Administration saw the aims of the incipient Zionist movement as compatible with and complementary to its own. It also perceived its own role to be that of a catalyst in the Palestinian economic future. The Zionist Organization (ZO), after 1927 the Jewish Agency (JA), was accepted as the main institution for channelling Jewish economic development in Palestine, which, in addition to serving the Jewish community, would depend on and bolster the Administration. As such, the function of this organization was to be an extension of British policy. Its aim was to pool and monopolize Jewish investment and expertise, thus developing the whole country, strengthening the government and helping to establish the JNH. Development on these lines was sought, but with time the situation grew more complex. Initially Zionist plans were much more accommodating to British demands than later on, when the JA had evolved into a stronger, more independent organization. Irrespective of the limitations, Zionist insistence often imposed its demands on British policy, while the Administration continued to hope for compromise and stabilization of the status quo, a situation that would make full use of Zionist co-operation while tempering Arab unrest. Nevertheless, when the Zionist experiment was facing financial problems, the Administration, uncharacteristically, bailed it out by providing extraordinary funds to employ Jewish workers in 1927-8, and covered the debts of the bankrupt Tel-Aviv municipality. But the largest expense went on defence needed to enforce the application of the policy of the JNH.

Support for Zionism was interpreted as meaning help towards the establishment of the movement's economic infrastructure, by invoking colonial power to give legislative form to the special advantages awarded to the Zionists. This in turn reinforced the movement's political and economic separatism, which had emerged in concrete shape by the end of the 1920s. An influx of Zionist immigrants entered Palestine as a result of this support. British commitment to minimal economic involvement permitted the Jewish minority a heavy stake in the economic growth of the country, especially in its larger cities. Zionist adherence to a political platform guided the economic development of the Jewish sector. Arab economic and social needs and political aspirations had to contend with these factors imposed from outside that contributed towards the form that the Arab struggle for self-expression took.

The mentality prevalent in the administrative apparatus compounded an already complex situation; the attempt to reconcile conflicting Arab and Jewish interests and to minimize animosity between Arabs and Jews was frustrated by an ambiguous British policy towards the two communities. For a long time, the government in London refused to acknowledge any disparity between its overall policy and the aspirations of these communities, and their conflict was recognized only when it

resulted in violence, especially after British money and lives had been lost. The Arabs and Jews, however, maintained a more consistent approach in their attitude towards the government of the country and their demands for the future. The Administration rarely had the support of the local population. While the policy of the National Home was vehemently opposed by the Arabs, its method of application often failed to satisfy the Jews. At no time did the three parties co-operate harmoniously, and more often than not the Administration faced the hostility of both Arabs and Jews. It was only in 1936 that the British government faced up to the irreconcilable conditions of the Palestinian dilemma. Even then it remained adamant about maintaining its control in the area:

The British government could not consider the abandonment of Palestine in this period without shuddering at the thought of a foreign power (even a relatively friendly power such as France) acquiring a base from which it might threaten the imperial lifeline at Suez.⁷

Even though the Partition Plan of 1936 was put aside, no alternative changes were introduced in Palestine by way of a British initiative. By the late 1930s the Administration had lost its political credibility in the eyes of the local population, especially the Arabs, and it meandered on to its distressing demise in 1948.

Haifa ranked quite high in British and Zionist plans. It was to be the starting point of alternative routes, by land, by sea and by air, to India. Its geographic position and topography had great potential for its development into a major transport centre. It became the headquarters of the Palestine Railways, the location of a harbour for ocean-going ships, the terminus of the pipeline for oil from Iraq and the place of storage and refinery for the oil. For the Zionists too, Haifa held great attraction as the urban centre closest to the multiplying number of settlements in the newly acquired agricultural plains of Marj Ibn 'Amir. In addition to being the potential distributing centre for the agricultural produce of these settlements, it was also perceived as the location for the major heavy industries from which products could be easily distributed in the Near East and to the West. In fact, the largest Zionist industrial projects, the Shemen and Nesher factories, the Grands Moulins and the Rutenberg electrification project, were concentrated in the town; Jewish labour settlements were a direct corollary to these enterprises. Haifa offered an opportunity to fulfil three main aims of Zionism: the conquest of the labour market, the acquisition of land for eternal Jewish ownership and settlement, and the creation of economic openings in order to attract Jewish immigrants.

These large-scale plans created a feverish economic atmosphere in Haifa, and made it a point of attraction for those seeking employment

and prosperity. Even before this, another process of development had been taking place in Haifa from before the First World War, similar to that which had been at work in the main Palestinian cities and especially the coastal towns of the eastern Mediterranean. Members of the Arab community had been the main participants in this process of change, which involved all aspects of their life – social, political, economic and intellectual. Under the Mandate, this process did not continue in a vacuum but became entangled with the process initiated by British mandatory policy and Zionist aims; the way in which they affected its evolution is the main subject of this book.

Among the Palestinian towns subjected to the impact of British and Zionist policies, Haifa provides the best example for the study of the Arab community's transformation. Haifa acquired all the specific features of the other main towns, while not one of them combined all of Haifa's characteristics. Like Jerusalem, Haifa became a centre for administrative activities and personnel, especially for the railways and the port; like Tel-Aviv, it became a centre of industry, and, like all the other Palestinian towns, a centre of commerce. Unlike the other large towns with mixed populations, however, Haifa was relatively new, and was unhampered by long tradition and history. For this reason, in Haifa both the setting and the people were more receptive to change. It was partly because of this, too, that Haifa was chosen by the Mandatory government and by the Zionist planners as the location for their major projects. The British intended to bestow on Haifa certain characteristics that were bound to turn it into a cosmopolitan city, while the Zionists were anxious lest it become too cosmopolitan, preventing it from becoming a predominantly Jewish city. Unlike Tel-Aviv, which had become an insular Jewish town, Haifa offered to the Zionists the opportunity to control a wider part of the country and an area of economic influence beyond Palestinian frontiers. Haifa presented a challenge to the wider Zionist aspirations, both for Palestine and the region. The implementation of Zionist plans in the town, in their physical, economic and political aspects, provides an excellent example of that policy's subtle and gradual development. The fact that the transformation of the city and its Arab community was more rapid and sudden than in any of the other towns is a further reason to study the phenomenon of change in Haifa, where the results were relatively clear.

The heterogeneous character of the population is, perhaps, the most significant reason for the choice of Haifa as a model of study. In addition to a mixed Arab population, Haifa had foreign residents, who had begun to make an impact on local society even before 1900. The strongest influence was that of the French missionary and educational institutions; other influences were those of the German Templar settle-

ment and the large number of European consulates. By the early 1920s, the influx of Russian and Eastern European Jews, and in the early 1930s the immigration of a noticeably large number of German Jews, added to the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the town. The British Administration also brought to Haifa a residential British community of officials, businessmen and their families. These changes in the composition of the population influenced the socio-economic development of the Arab community, which in its turn was also undergoing change in its social and religious composition. By the mid-1930s Haifa had a mixed population, with more or less equal numbers of Arabs and Jews, many of whom had been recently attracted by the economic potentialities of the town. The struggle of the Arab sector of the population to survive and to maintain its socio-national identity, under highly competitive and adverse conditions, is a main focus of this study.

At the turn of the century, the composition of Haifa's Arab population was very similar to that of Beirut.⁸ Compared with the other Palestinian towns, Haifa had a proportionately larger number of Christian merchants, mainly Arabs, who had been educated in the European missionary institutions and were qualified to carry on business both with European firms and with Arabs in the towns and villages. Even when the Muslim population had overtaken the Christians in number, the Christian community still had the larger number of wealthy landowners, merchants and entrepreneurs. From the mid-1920s this stratum was enlarged by wealthy Muslims from Beirut and Damascus as well as the Palestinian towns. However, economic and political developments were such as to limit the opportunities open to this class. While the entrepreneurial merchant class in Beirut was able to develop its potential and diversify its investment, building a network of financial connections, in Haifa investment in fields other than the traditional mercantile activities was rendered practically impossible, except in a very few cases. The industrial field was monopolized by the Jewish sector, which financed it as part of a national Zionist economy. It became impossible for the Arab entrepreneurial class to compete in the new economic fields conquered by Jewish and Zionist capital. Many ambitious Arabs with limited capital had to seek opportunities to develop untapped lines of business outside Haifa, in the less advanced Arab towns such as Ludd, Ramleh and even Jaffa.⁹ Only a few Arabs, the very wealthy ones, were able to consolidate their economic base and initiate a few industrial projects or accumulate real estate. It is significant that those Arabs remained in Haifa after 1948, while most of the merchants and small entrepreneurs, whose wealth was engaged in small individual businesses and whose assets were more mobile, left Palestine at the outbreak of hostilities.

In addition to the expanding Arab mercantile class, other elements

in Haifa's Arab population, especially the mainly Muslim working class, grew noticeably during the 1920s and 1930s. Government employment provided a living for a substantial number of Arabs in the civil service and in the more menial jobs of the municipality, the harbour and government building projects. It was mainly the building boom, both in the private and the public sector, that attracted the large number of labourers, mostly from the economically distressed peasantry of the northern districts.¹⁰ The concentration of such a proletariat in Haifa was unprecedented; the town was unprepared and the Administration unwilling to deal with the problems resulting from congestion. For the Arab community, this influx altered the social structure of the society and intensified the gaps between the social classes.

The political transformation, in turn, was strongly affected by the socio-economic changes experienced by the community. Immediately after the British occupation, Haifa's political community was similar to those of other towns in the Arab East, touched by the same mood of nationalism and aspirations for a changed polity and reform. The intensity of the external threats drew all sectors of the community together and strengthened their political stand. However, when these threats diminished, whether in reality or imagination, differences between religious communities and between social classes emerged. Such differences were aggravated by the lopsided economic growth of some sectors of the community and by the entrenchment of the individualistic ethos which prevented the emergence of an Arab economy that could be geared towards Arab needs. This, in turn, led the different sections of society, the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', to acquire widely differing political aspirations and visions. It was the 'have-nots' who felt the political and economic deprivations most keenly and who retaliated in the mid-1930s by militant activities; but other classes as well were not unaware of the political dangers. The political experience of the Arab community in Haifa also provides an interesting study of the opposition movement in Palestinian politics. The main nationalist movement, as represented in the Jerusalem leadership which controlled the Arab Executive (AE) of the Palestinian Congresses and later on in the religious leadership of the Supreme Muslim Council (SMC), has been thoroughly investigated, but the opposition movement, especially that of northern Palestine, has not been given the same importance.

Even though this study attempts to investigate the community's development in the main aspects where change showed itself, it cannot claim to have exhausted the subject. The timespan has been confined to the years 1918-39, a significant period both in its initial and final stages. It ushered in a new form of government, the British Mandate, which brought in and legalized the application of the Zionist policy. The Palestinian revolt of 1936-9 was a landmark in the long process of

Arab Palestinian struggle for self-determination and was to remain the first stage in that long struggle. The main features of change had completely taken shape by 1939, but the way in which the community dealt with the altered circumstances in the city after the 1936-9 revolt still needs investigation. Haifa played a significant role during the period of the revolt since it was the breeding ground for the first fighters, who were recruited from among its poorer class. Those years have remained a unique era in the town's history.

Other limitations that should be recorded are those imposed by the difficulties and restrictions met when collecting the source material. The official documentation on the period was easily accessible in the British and Israeli archives; however, some restrictions were placed on certain records in the latter. But the main difficulty lay in collecting data from the Arab community, which has not traditionally kept written records; moreover, most of the informants, whether living in Israel or outside, asked that only restricted use should be made of their material, in view of the still turbulent political conditions in the region. My close connection, however, with a large number of people who lived through the experience of the period and who have for a long time unconsciously imparted to me various facets of that period of their lives, has provided me with a more discerning perception of the subject; in a way, it has helped me to determine the significance and value of the oral source material.

The approach used in dealing with the subject is to examine four main aspects of the Arab community's transformation. In Part One, the physical and demographic character of Haifa in 1918 is discussed; this section deals with the community's composition, the town's size and the distribution of quarters. Part Two analyses the demographic transformation of Haifa's population and the movement of the various sectors of the community from certain areas to others. Gradual Zionist control of areas encircling the town, and the growth of new Jewish quarters encircling the old traditional Arab quarters, are shown here. This part investigates British policy in matters relating to town development in general and its application to Haifa and its municipality; here emphasis is placed on British ambitions to make Haifa a showpiece of spectacular British projects, thus accelerating the urban process as well as strengthening the causes of population expansion, mobility and gradual Zionist control of the urban scene.

Part Three concentrates on the economic aspects of change. Haifa had two distinct economies, of industry and of commerce. Industry, which gradually became a Jewish monopoly, is discussed in relation to the role played by the Administration in helping the Jewish sector to achieve industrial control through legislation. The basis of the Arabs' commercial role is also investigated, and their gradual loss of supremacy

in this line is discussed. The human factor of these two economies, labour, is placed within the context of the two and of British policy towards both Jewish and Arab labour. Part Four deals with the Arab community's political transformation in three consecutive stages punctuated by drastic local occurrences. The first ends in 1923, the second in the disturbances of 1929, and the third in the last stages of the Arab revolt in 1939.

The uniqueness of Haifa rests in the fact that it was the earliest and the best suited model for the application of the dual British/Zionist policy to its physical, economic and human components. The special feature of Haifa in 1918 as a youthful, forward-looking and economically viable town was a reason for this attraction. Another appealing characteristic was the type of population it attracted and their acceptance of change. The mechanics applied to bring about these changes are traced here historically to show the way in which the tactics of fragmentation, dependence and co-option were used in differing forms and with different degrees of success. At the same time, and while one level of this process was taking place, another process of change was going on within the Arab community itself, affecting its development and reaction to outside influences. Because and in spite of the highly charged political situation, the Arab community nevertheless developed economically, socially and politically within these restricted peripheries which led, inevitably, to armed struggle. Since then this pattern, in which the town was physically encircled, economically segmented, and its Arab community diminished, politically suppressed and socially fragmented, has been repeated in many Palestinian towns.

Notes

1. The need to study the evolution of the Palestinian Arab community and the dearth of such research has been emphasized by scholars in the field such as I. Abu-Lughod in 'The Pitfalls of Palestiniology', *Arab Studies Quarterly* 3 (Fall 1981), p. 404. It is also becoming a focus for social historians in the classroom but has still to show its accomplishments in publications.

2. For a few books on the subject, see: A. M. Lesch, *Arab Politics in Palestine, 1917-1939* (London, 1979); Y. Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian Arab National Movement, 1918-1929* (London, 1974); Y. Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement, 1929-1939* (London, 1977); E. Tuma, *Sittun 'Aman 'ala al-Haraka al-Qawmiyya al-'Arabiyya al-Filastiniyya* (The Last Sixty Years of the Palestinian Arab National Movement) (Beirut, 1978); N. 'Allush, *Al-Muqawama al-'Arabiyya fi Filastin 1917-1948* (The Arab National Struggle in Palestine 1917-1948) (Beirut, 1970); P. A. Smith, *Palestine and the Palestinians 1876-1983* (New York, 1984).

3. See: S. F. El-Nimr, 'The Arab Revolt in Palestine: A Study based on Oral Sources', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Exeter, 1990; T. R. Swedenberg, 'Memories of Revolt: the 1936-39 Rebellion and the Struggle for a Palestinian

Physical Characteristics of Haifa in 1918

The city of Haifa is situated on the southern shore of the Bay of Acre in the lee of Mount Carmel. Its geographical position gives it the advantage of easy natural access to the hinterland. To the south, the coastal plain leads to Jaffa, the south of Palestine and Egypt, and to the north it connects with Acre and on to Lebanon. To the east, the plain lying between the Carmel coastal range and the hills of Galilee gives access to the Marj Ibn 'Amir, the most fertile agricultural region in Palestine, and further east, by way of the Jordan valley, to the wheat-growing areas of Hauran in Syria. Haifa's prime geographical position is further enhanced by its fine natural harbour, the best on the Palestine coast.

Compared with other major Palestinian towns – Jerusalem, Jaffa, Nablus and neighbouring Acre – Haifa is a relatively new city. In its present location, its existence began in the mid-eighteenth century when, in 1764–5, the governor of Acre, Dhahir al-'Umar, laid waste the older hamlet of Haifa al-'Atiqah, located some one and a half miles to the west of the modern site, and transferred the population, around 250 people, to a new site, which he had surrounded by a protective wall. He also built a citadel overlooking the settlement to the south, the remains of which were still in use at the time of the British occupation in 1918.¹

Apart, however, from the damage caused by the violence of war and the wear and tear of four years of poverty, the town which the British occupied on 23 September 1918 had altered little physically from its description by Tamimi and Halabi, two Ottoman officials, in 1914 – one of the most accurate of the period. Their overall assessment was appreciative and optimistic. They compared Haifa to Beirut with its similar large buildings and glass-windowed shops. In their view, Haifa was 'like a bride' with its red-tiled and broad-windowed houses and its