"EVERY NEW SYNAGOGUE IS BOTH A RELIGIOUS AND A SECURITY FORTRESS": SYNAGOGUES IN ISRAELI URBAN INTERNAL FRONTIERS AS SYMBOLS OF SOVEREIGNTY

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ABSTRACT: This article focuses on synagogues in the urban internal frontier in Israel following the Nakba/1948 war. After the war, several initiations were held to demonstrate sovereignty in these urban spheres. Among these initiatives were the establishment of new synagogues by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Two significant features were highlighted in these synagogues—their architectural design and their location. Synagogues were built in monumental dimensions and located in locations where they would overshadow other religious buildings and extract Israeli surveillance over Palestinian presence and memory. The synagogues, as the communities that gathered around them, were harnessed into the Zionist colonial policy and served as national-sovereign agents. This phenomenon is demonstrated through spatial historical analysis of several urban frontiers, thus pointing out the implications of this shift in various contexts. These examples demonstrate the shift in the synagogue's role within Jewish society and theology—from places of worship and longevity to the destroyed Temple to symbols of Jewish sovereignty. Additionally, these initiations shed light on the

Palestine/Israel Review, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2025

http://doi.org/10.5325/pir.2.2.0006

ambivalence of Religious-Zionist agents toward Mizrahi Jews, an ambivalence that shifted from viewing them as frontier communities to negating their religiosity as one that cannot be regarded as a proper Israeli religiosity.

KEYWORDS: Urban Internal Frontier, mixed cities in Israel, synagogues, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Religious Zionism, religious architecture

In March 1970, David Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, was invited to participate in the American Reform Rabbis conference in Jerusalem. Ben Gurion replied that he would be happy to participate, but not as a lecturer. He explained his decision by writing:

> Obviously, I am a Jew. However, I am neither an Orthodox nor a Reform. In Israel, I do not attend synagogues. (Only once did I step inside [a synagogue], when independence was declared, at the request of Rabbi Berlin of the Mizrachi Party). When I am abroad, I enjoy attending synagogues on Saturdays.[1]

This comment might seem anecdotal, but it hides a profound understanding of the change in Jewish self-determination following the emergence of Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel. To use William Cavanaugh's terms, and following Yaacov Yadgar, if the modern state changes the identity of the individual from one associated with the Christian holy communion to one associated with the national collective, the Jewish sovereign state shifts the identity of the individual Jew from the local synagogical community to the sovereign national collective (Yadgar 2017; Cavanaugh 2024; Yadgar 2024).

Ben Gurion's ignorance of the synagogue and the theopolitical insights that derive from it are indeed thought-provoking. However, it ignores the increasing number and popularity of synagogues in the sovereign State of Israel. To put it another way, the institution that was "replaced" by the state is flourishing under its protection. This article aims to highlight one aspect of the synagogue's relationship with the sovereign state through an outline of one of its institutions—the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Established shortly after the Declaration of Independence, this state institution symbolizes the ambivalence of

the secular state with the holiness that it sought to replace. The ministry was responsible for providing state religious services. Nonetheless, ministry officials, most of whom were religious Zionists, sought to harness their authority to form a "proper" and national religion that would suit the Zionist agenda (Borabeck forthcoming). Synagogues were no different from other religious institutions in this regard. The ministry was responsible for establishing, organizing, and managing synagogues. With this responsibility, its officials wished to develop "national" synagogues, prayer texts, and prayer melodies that appeared to be nonethnic in nature. These synagogues hosted national services and ceremonies that shifted the synagogue institute from a communal to a national sphere.

A major agenda of the ministry was the establishment of synagogues as symbols of sovereignty, most significantly at the urban internal frontier. Two significant features were highlighted in these newly constructed Israeli synagogues—their architectural design and location within urban space. Synagogues were built in monumental dimensions and were located in places where they would overshadow other religious buildings and extract Israeli surveillance over the surviving Palestinians in the urban sphere. Thus, the synagogues, as well as the communities that gathered around them, were harnessed into the Zionist colonial policy in the urban sphere and served as national-sovereign agents.

Illustrating this phenomenon through spatial history offers us to "reconsider space as the unfinished sum of all its text, forms and practices" and to highlight the "evolution of power relations as part of an unfinished process of negotiation in which neither space nor its meaning reach a point of absolute stasis" (Leshem 2017, 20). Through the close analysis of archival documents and spatial materials, this article seeks to contribute to the understanding of the ongoing process of space production and ethnic urban power relations in Israel.

To establish my argument, I will first distinguish between two main functions synagogues played in Jewish history: as a place of worship and longevity for the destroyed temple and as symbols of sovereignty in areas of contention in the sovereign Jewish state. Later, I will describe how this recontextualization has had a significant impact on synagogues' architecture and location in Israel. Finally, I will demonstrate

this phenomenon through a close analysis of several urban frontiers in the State of Israel and point out the implications of this shift in various contexts.

It is important to note that synagogues are more than a physical structure in a particular location; they serve as a focal point for community gatherings. Accordingly, the discussion of synagogues in the urban frontier opens up a broader discussion about the communities situated in the urban frontiers and gathered around them. These communities, mainly of Mizrahi new immigrants/settlers, functioned as symbols of sovereignty in contrasted areas (Kemp 2002; Benjamin 2006; Leshem 2017; Sharon 2017; Brin 2024). Furthermore, these Jewish immigrants/settlers often established their own synagogues in abandoned mosques and houses. While these synagogues were not established as a part of the state agenda or the Religious-Zionist agents but rather as a means of undermining the Zionist melting pot and constructing a communal safe haven within the Zionist national atmosphere, they actually served as symbols of Israelization and segregation (Benjamin 2006; Weiss 2011; Leshem 2017). Thus, synagogues were agents of what Ella Shohat called "the divide and conquer approach to Sephardi/Palestinian relations" (Shohat 1988, 26), as their initiators sought to make them symbols of urban segregation. As such, even though this article focuses on the agendas and activities of bureaucratic initiators and does not engage the "bottom-up" realm of neither Mizrahi Jews nor Palestinians, it sheds light on the state motivations that navigated the role of the synagogue as an agent of segregation and sovereignty.

Given the distinctive nature of Israel as a settler colonial state, it is important to note that religious buildings were indeed utilized by colonial regimes as a means of demonstrating their power. British colonial rule is a good example. According to Tania Sengupta, churches played a major role in the colonial landscape in India, along with other "secular" institutions, such as courthouses, villas, prisons, telegraph offices, and barracks (Sengupta 2019). Thus, as Andreas Volwahsen argues, "these churches by their very existence announced a British intention to remain permanently as colonial rulers. Their soaring spires spoke not only to God but of growing political power of the English as they set out to mark their presence, and the superiority of their faith, on the land of India" (Volwahsen, 2004, 110). Similar examples can be found

in Algeria, where the French colonialists converted mosques into barracks, depots, and churches. Said Bousmaha demonstrates how French officials appropriated the central Ketchaoua mosque in Algiers into a church in order to assert dominance over the indigenous population. As part of this appropriation, the French hoisted a cross and a French flag on the mosque's minaret (Bousmaha 2023). Therefore, the discussion offered in the following sections can contribute to a broader understanding of religious buildings in relation to colonial urban power relations.

SYNAGOGUES AS SITES OF DEMONSTRATION OF COMMUNAL SELF-PERCEPTION

In his book, *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages*, Jacob Katz stated that "The organization of the prayer service and the development of the synagogue provide one of the main themes in the history of the social differentiation of Jewish communal life; the social element is hidden behind the ostensibly religious facade" (Katz 2000, 151). Indeed, synagogues can serve as an important prism for reflecting the community's self-perception, moral values, and relationships with its surroundings. While a detailed description of the transformations in the synagogues' roles throughout history might be tedious and superfluous, a general clarification is necessary. In general terms, since antiquity and up until the rise of the centralized state in Europe, synagogues served as a communal sphere that combined rituals, such as praying and reading the *Torah*, with communal practices—community gatherings, charity, hospitality, conflict resolution, and sanctioning. These practices were meant to form the Jewish collective as a minority among a non-Jewish majority (Bonfil 1994; Goldin 1997; Katz 2000; Levine 2005; Ben-Naeh 2008).

Furthermore, synagogues represent a dual attitude toward the destroyed temple since its destruction in 70 CE. In one sense, synagogues served as *Mikdash Meat* (little sanctuary) or as a communal space that replaced the temple during exile. This role is based on the verse from Ezekiel 11: "Therefore say, thus saith the Lord God; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come." On another level, synagogues

presented the absence of the temple and the Jewish theopolitical situation of exile. This dual attitude was evident since antiquity in the synagogue's architecture and visual elements as well as in the ritual itself (Safrai 1989; Ta-Shma 1994; Ha'Cohen 1995a; Reiner 2000; Yaniv 2017). Focusing on Ashkenazi Jewish communities in the modern era, Roni Tzoreff demonstrates that visual elements, particularly the *Shivity* panels and the *Menorah*, served as representations of Jewish communities' self-identification as scattered communities within various geographies and political centers as well as part of local cultural traditions. Moreover, these elements placed the exile within a historical visual sequence—the destruction of the temple, the dispersion of the communities, and the desire for redemption in the future (Tzoreff 2022).

A significant watershed in the synagogues' role in Jewish society is the emergence of the centralized state in Western and central Europe. The emancipation and the cancellation of the autonomous Jewish community raised the question of whether the Jews form a "religion" or a "nation." This debate was one of the main sites where the definition between these two categories was articulated. The definition of Jews as a religious, a-political, and a-national community enabled their integration in European nationalism. However, defining them as a national collective negated their fidelity to the European nation and therefore invalidated their participation in the modern national collective. Indeed, the main Jewish discourse since the nineteenth century focused on various attempts to adapt Judaism to the new definitions of "religion." This internalization stands at the base of the formation of both Reform and Modern Orthodox Judaism and impacts the current debate on Jewish religion, secularism, and nationalism (Batnizky 2011; Raz-Krakotzkin 2021). This historical moment marks a double transformation in the synagogues' role. On the one hand, its centrality as a communal space was emphasized. On the other, this role was reduced to merely religious practices (Breur 1992; Meyer 2001).

One of the most significant transformations in Western and central European synagogues was their architectural design. In that sense, synagogues' architecture remained tools for negotiating political, social, and cultural identities of the community with the surrounding world. The most fundamental example for this phenomenon is Israel Jacobson's synagogue in Sessen, Westphalia. This synagogue, constructed in 1810,

symbolized the shift of the synagogue to the main street and the decoration of the outdoor area with Jewish symbols. In Jacobson's view, this synagogue symbolized the collapse of the wall dividing the Jewish community from the surrounding society. Up until the middle of the nineteenth century, dozens of synagogues in Central and Western Europe and North America were designed to express the congregation's worldview and identity through their external decoration (Kalmar 2001; Klein 2006; Gotzmann 2017; Olson 2019). As paradoxical as it may seem, these monumental synagogues were part of European architecture's prevalent trend of monumental cathedrals built as symbols of sovereignty in the nineteenth century (Alvis 2008). In other words, synagogue architecture embodied the desire of European Jews to integrate into the centralized state and culture of Europe. Furthermore, European religious leaders and synagogue designers in North Africa aimed to Frenchify and de-Semitize North African Jews through the design of synagogues in Algeria and Tunisia (Jarrassé 2011). Other historical contexts have led to changes in the appearance and location of synagogues due to class, demographic, and political changes within the Jewish community (Stranger-Ross 2006).

Synagogues in Palestine were no different in that regard. Reuven Gafni demonstrates that while houses of prayer could be found across all Jewish communities in Palestine, the most significant and symbolic ones were located in Jerusalem, Tiberius, Safed, and Hebron. While most of these synagogues were run by families, there was at least one central synagogue in every central city, run by the local Sephardi community. Even though the central Sephardi synagogues became places of communal ceremonies, Torah study, and various rallies, and even though folk tales were woven around them, their appearance was not notable. The Ashkenazi central synagogues in Jerusalem, established in the 1850s and 1860s, were exceptional as they were significantly high and monumental (Gafni 2023).

THE SHIFT IN SYNAGOGUES' ROLE FOLLOWING THE EMERGENCE OF ZIONISM

If the Jewish negotiation with the surroundings through the location and appearance of synagogues was essential when Jews formed a minority in a centralized state, it is even more critical when Jews form a

sovereign collective in their state. Indeed, with the emergence of Zionist settlements in Palestine, some synagogues in Palestine have taken on a new character. Several national religious congregations wished to adapt the synagogue to Zionist narrative to make synagogues centers of national culture and claims. These synagogues hosted national ceremonies, demonstrations, and rallies, and Zionist political movements supported their funding. This change included the design of synagogues that expressed the Zionist political narrative and the inclusion of national symbols in their decorative plan.[2] As an example, the Yeshurun Synagogue in Jerusalem, built in 1935, was designed in the same style as the nearby National Institutions House and created a national urban landscape in this part of Western Jerusalem (Gafni 2017; Sparr 2022). Another example is the Great Synagogue of Tel Aviv, which was founded in 1926. It was designed as a monumental building with a large dome on its roof. Stars of David were placed above the windows, and tablets of stone were placed above the entrance. Later, the Great Synagogue of Tel Aviv served as a prototype for other national synagogues in Palestine (Meyer-Maril 1990; Gafni 2017). Furthermore, even the great synagogues in the old city of Jerusalem, once a center for the "Old Yishuv" critics of Zionism, became symbols of Zionist presence in Jerusalem, hosting national ceremonies (Paz 2010; Gafni 2022). As opposed to communal synagogues, these synagogues were not intended to serve a particular community but were rather intended to serve the nation as a whole. As such, they signify the change in the synagogue's character from one of assimilation into European culture within a centralized European state to one of Jewish superiority.

As a result of the establishment of the State of Israel, national religious initiatives were no longer carried out by local agents or Zionist institutions, but by the Israeli bureaucratic management, most notably by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The "Synagogues Department" of the ministry was responsible for supporting new and existing congregations. This activity was held in conjunction with other Israeli managements, such as the Ministry of Labor, the Jewish Agency, and the Jewish National Fund. In addition, the ministry cooperated with two Israeli institutions that were responsible for the real estate left behind by Palestinian refugees, the Custodian of Absentee Property and the Development Authority. The

Ministry of Religious Affairs supported synagogues of new immigrants/settlers regardless of their political views. This support, however, was often connected with the "top-down" intention to dismiss the synagogues' ethnic nature and to construct them as symbols of sovereignty.

INTERNAL URBAN FRONTIER AND THE NEED TO DEMONSTRATE SOVEREIGNTY

Following the establishment of the State of Israel, its sovereignty had to be demonstrated both along its borders and within its internal frontier, namely regions within the state's boundaries in which Jewish expansion was sought. Like other settler societies, the Israeli Jewish hegemonic collective wished to replace the indigenous groups within its boundaries and thus related to them as a threat. Therefore, the Israeli administration was seeking to increase its dominance and control over peripheral regions where the Palestinian survivors were constituting a significant minority (Yiftachel 1998). An important scene of this settler activity was the urban sphere. Special attention was spent by the Israeli military to the Palestinian cities during the Nakba/1948 war. The occupation of these cities included the expulsion of most of their Palestinian residents and the prevention of their return (Zubi 2018). As Danna Piroyansky coins it, these Palestinian urban spheres had to be "remade" in order to fit the new political and demographic circumstances (Piroyansky 2014). Therefore, several Palestinian cities, including Jaffa, Acre, Lod, and Ramle, became "mixed cities," or "urban internal frontiers," with a vast Jewish majority and a tiny Palestinian minority; Jewish immigrants/settlers were settled in ethnically-cleansed houses, while the remaining Palestinians were forced to move into small enclaves in the urban sphere.[3] These urban internal frontiers served as sites where Israeli sovereignty had to be demonstrated, both in front of the Palestinian survivors and in front of the memory of the Palestinian presence. Following Wandy Pullan's argument that "architecture remains a critical factor for embodying . . . frontiers" (Pullan 2011, 16), I argue that among the administrative initiatives used by the authorities to demonstrate sovereignty in the internal urban frontier were the construction of synagogues. This aspiration was reflected in both the architectural design of the synagogues and their location within urban space.

SYNAGOGUES' ARCHITECTURE AS A SYMBOL OF JEWISH SOVEREIGNTY

In 1955, the Ministry of Religious Affairs published a collection of essays, titled *The Synagogue: Papers and Masses* (Ha'Cohen 1955b). In his contribution to this collection, architect Meir Ben-Uri (1908–1983), the architectural consultant to the Ministry of Religious Affairs in its early years who was in charge for planning sacred Jewish sites in the Galilee, proposed that the synagogue definition should be amended in light of the establishment of the State of Israel:

> We should make every effort to build synagogues by strict design in order to deepen them in the State in regions that emphasize our affinity for the sanctity of the land and to the sanctity of the Jewish people. (Ben-Uri 1955, 196–7)
>
> Synagogues in the State of Israel require architects to renew architectural elements in light of the significant changes occurring in the traditional synagogues after (a) the horrific Holocaust (b) the establishment of the State, its sovereign symbols, earthly roles, and historical assignments (c) the beginning of the redemption and the longing of the generation. (Ben-Uri 1955, 216)

One of these "architectural elements" was the Menorah—the seven-branched candelabrum that is described in the Bible as having been used in the Tabernacle and later in the temple. Regarding the roof design of the synagogues, Ben-Uri requested that a Menorah would be placed on the roof, along with a pole bearing the national flag. In addition, Ben-Uri requested that synagogues built before the establishment of the state will "renew their existing symbols [...] and include at least the State's emblem: the Menorah" (Ben-Uri, 236). A similar tone was reflected in the piece of the ministry's general manager and the spirit behind some of ministry's initiatives, Shmuel Zanwill Kahana (1905–1998), who declared that "the Menorah represents the spirit of the era and serves as the emblem of the State" (Kahana 1955, 65–66). Vice Minister Zorach Warhaftig (1906–2002) also noted that "a unique Eretz-Yisraeli style is taking shape in the synagogues. One of its symbols is the Menorah, for a mitzvah is a candle and Torah is illumination. This symbol became the emblem of the State" (Warhaftig 1955, 7).

The Temple Menorah is a recurring theme in Jewish visual culture that appears in many contexts throughout Jewish history, including synagogues (Fine 2016). However, the Menorah proposed by Ben-Uri, Kahana, and Warhaftig has been transformed. The Menorah on the state's emblem is a visual reference to the Arch of Titus in Rome and differs from the Menorahs on former Jewish visual elements. In contrast to some of the other suggestions for the state's emblem, including Menorahs, the chosen Menorah does not depict temple rituals, but rather the temple as a symbol of Jewish sovereignty lost with its destruction (Arbel 1982; Mishory 1987; Handelman and Handelman 1991). Thus, as Roni Tzoreff argues, the Menorah was transformed from a symbolic representation of an exilic longing for the temple service into a symbol of renewing the ancient sovereign past in the present. In this manner, the Menorah is shifted from its exilic dimensions and placed within Jewish sovereignty (Tzoreff 2022). It may be argued that the Menorah has lost its symbolic significance due to its standardization as a common emblem. However, this standardization reflects how Jewish symbols have been reconceived in the sovereign state. Furthermore, placing the recontextualized Menorah on synagogues' roofs, an institution that symbolizes the longing for the temple as a place of worship, as well as applying them as an "emblem of the state," clearly represents not just the detachment of the Menorah from its ritual context, but also that of the synagogue itself, shifting from a symbol of longing to one of sovereignty.

SYNAGOGUES' LOCATION IN THE INTERNAL FRONTIER

The sovereign contextualization of the Menorah not only differs from its ritual context, but it also suspends it. In the piece cited above, Ben-Uri compares the newly constructed Israeli synagogues to the ancient synagogues of Meron, Bar'am, Alma, and Korazim, "which demonstrated the strong Jewish affinity to the Temple in Jerusalem" (Ben-Uri 1955, 196–97). Clearly, Ben-Uri aims to conjoin the State of Israel with the historical Jewish presence in Palestine. However, unlike these ancient synagogues, Ben-Uri does not refer to the synagogue's direction but to its location within the region. To put it another way, the shift offered by Ben-Uri highlights the change in synagogue orientation. It is no

longer the destructed temple that serves as the organizing factor but rather the sovereign state. Both physically and metaphorically, synagogues turn to the state rather than to the temple.[4] Contextualizing the synagogue as a sovereign symbol, like the nineteenth-century European cathedrals and unlike the European monumental synagogues of this century, expresses what Yaacov Yadgar argues to be the Zionist contextualization of the sovereign state as the fulfillment of Jewish traditional longing in exile. This framework emphasizes the relationship between sovereignty, territory, and Jewish identity (Yadgar 2017). As such, Israeli synagogues serve as "religious" spheres that express the secularization of Jewish longings and their recontextualization as political and sovereign national consciousness. In the following, I demonstrate four examples of new synagogues that were planned and located as symbols of sovereignty in the urban internal frontier.[5] Whether built or only planned, these synagogues signify the ministry officials' agenda behind the construction of synagogues in urban frontiers, as well as the recontextualization of the synagogue derived from it.

"GENUINE CROWN": THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE OF HADAR HA'CARMEL, HAIFA

Haifa is one of the most significant examples of urban internal frontiers in Israel. Before the rise of Zionism, Jews and Palestinians lived there in close proximity. The establishment of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish neighborhoods outside the city walls in the late nineteenth century signified the beginning of the urban separation within the city. As in other cities in Palestine, Zionist immigrants/settlers brought a national element into this separation. Zionist associations established their neighborhoods as urban enclaves on the Carmel, which were segregated from the Palestinian area on the bay, especially during the Mandate period. Even so, Haifa was indeed a mixed urban community on a social, commercial, and municipal level (Naor 2019; Karlinsky 2021; Maoz and Karkabi 2024).

During the fights over Haifa in April 1948, the Haggana forces created manipulations to cause the Palestinian residents to flee. Most of the Palestinian residents were evacuated to the port, and from there to Acre and Lebanon. Others were expelled to Nazareth and Jenin. After

the 1948 war, only 3,500 Palestinians were living in Haifa out of a population of over 70,000. Those who remained were confined to Wadi Nisnas, which was placed under military control (Zubi 2018; Manaa 2022).

One of the Zionist neighborhoods on the Carmel was Hadar ha'Carmel neighborhood. Established in 1922 on the edge of the mountain, Hadar ha'Carmel separated the Jewish Carmel from the bay and Palestinian Haifa al-Jadida, or "new Haifa," later known as Lower city of Haifa. The neighborhood, built around the Technion building, a significant Zionist project situated on the Carmel, was one of the symbols of Zionist segregationist aspirations in Haifa (Kidron 2016). The central synagogue of Hadar ha'Carmel was first designed in the 1920s by Alexander Baerwald, who was responsible for the architecture plan of the Technion. Even though this plan never materialized, the synagogue is still attributed to Baerwald, the first Zionist architect who imprinted his signature style on the city. Hence, even before it was built, the synagogue was associated with the creation of the Zionist landscape of the Carmel. Financial difficulties halted the construction, and it was completed only in the mid-fifties. The synagogue was erected on the side of the mountain between Harav Herzog and Herzl streets. Its façade, facing Herzl Street, is 23 meters tall, covered with stone, and a great dome is situated on its roof.

The synagogue's role as a symbol of sovereignty is well articulated in a report written by Pinchas Peli (1930–1989), Harav Kook Institute literary editor, at the companion discussed above. Following an extensive description of the synagogue's construction, he concluded that "As long as the golden dome of a particular church dominates the city and overshadows the central synagogue . . . and as long as Haifa lacks a magnificent synagogue whose roof rises above the buildings of the city, the city is still lacking its genuine crown" (Peli 1955, 169–70). Although Peli does not specify the "particular church," he seems to be referring to the Baha'i golden-domed shrine of the Bab, Haifa's crowning architectural centerpiece. Completed in October 1953, this majestic building was part of an expansion of Baha'i projects in Haifa and Acre. The Israeli government permitted and supported these projects, and some of these breathtaking buildings and gardens were situated on Palestinian absentee lands (Day 2018; Geller 2019).

An explicit statement of this role can be found in the architectural decoration of the synagogue. Its monumental dimensions were complemented by a unique relief sculpted on its giant façade. At the end of 1956, the municipality of Haifa announced a competition for the design of a stone relief to be sculpted on the façade of the synagogue. According to Ben-Uri, the suggestions were required to include "the changes in the Jewish people in our generation, the generation of the War of Independence, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the gathering of the exiles" (Ben-Uri 1956, 2). The winning proposal was submitted by Israel Rubinstein, a sculptor, painter, and mosaic artist from the artists' colony of Ein Hod. According to Rubinstein, this work of art, named *Atchalta de'Geula* (the beginning of redemption), illustrates:

> Elijah on Mount Carmel, the precursor of redemption, is depicted on a carriage bearing the symbols of the tribes as they are found in many synagogues. Following him are the Jews returning from the exile who carry the Menorah carved in the Arch of Titus, which was built in Rome after the destruction of the Temple. The Jews who were exiled to Rome as prisoners of war return now upright as freemen. The Menorah, a symbol of Jewish hope and faith through the generations, now returns to the land as an emblem of the renewed State. (Ben-Uri 1956, 2)

Rubinstein's description seems to encompass all the decorative main themes of the synagogue as a sovereign agent. This monumental relief measuring 10× 4 meters illustrates the transition from sovereignty to exile and back to sovereignty with the establishment of the State of Israel. Elijah, the most significant symbol of Jewish longing for redemption, and the local patron of the Carmel, leads the way for the returning Jews to their sovereign homeland, and the Menorah is explicitly the Menorah of Titus, resembling the lost sovereignty with the destruction of the temple. In this framework, the sovereign state is significantly the sole political entity that realizes Jewish redemption.

The relief's location and position are significant as well. The central synagogue of Hadar ha'Carmel is located on Herzl Street, the path that leads from Wadi Nisnas to Hadar ha'Carmel. Approximately one

kilometer separates these two points, and the synagogue is 30 meters higher up the hill than the Palestinian neighborhood. There are approximately 3.3 kilometers between the synagogue and the shrine of the Bab, and the shrine is approximately 50 meters higher than the synagogue. To put it another way, the relief is located on the Zionist synagogue that faces the Palestinian neighborhood of Wadi Nisnas and the competing shrine of the Bab, symbolizing Israeli sovereignty over Palestinian survivors while competing with other religious buildings in the area.

"Significant Jewish Identity": The She'rit ha'Pletah Synagogue in "Lower Town" Haifa

While the central synagogue of Hadar ha'Carmel is an official establishment, the concept of synagogues as symbols of sovereignty is reflected also in places where a local congregation requested support for funding a synagogue for traditional, or better said nonnationalized, reasons. In these cases, the local congregation's efforts were recontextualized as aspirations of sovereign power.

Following the Nakba/1948 war, some Palestinian neighborhoods of Palestinian Haifa had been destroyed, while others had been resettled by Jewish immigrants/settlers or by the military. The entire area, now referred to as "Lower Town," was marginalized, neglected, and therefore plagued with crime, gambling, brothels, and stench (Zoubi 2019). After the demolition of the Palestinian city, mosques and churches were still standing, surrounded by ruins. By doing so, Israeli officials wished to reduce the Palestinian presence in the new Israeli city to that of a religious minority, and to negate any sense of national identity (Zoubi 2023). As with other urban internal frontiers, Israeli officials wished to demonstrate Israeli sovereignty toward the remaining Palestinians and toward the memory of those who fled it.

Naturally, the Jewish immigrants/settlers in Haifa expected some religious services, including assistance in establishing new synagogues. In July 1955, the Minister of Religious Affairs received a letter from the *Sh'erit ha-Pletah* (surviving remnants—phrase related to Holocaust survivors) congregation's executive committee for support to purchase a plot provided by the Development Authority in Haifa's lower town. Additionally,

the congregation requested that the minister would halt their evacuation from the Palestinian building, which they had been using as a temporary synagogue since 1948. In the margins of the letter, the executive committee addressed that "hundreds and thousands of immigrants deserve at least a plot of land for a synagogue from the state. Why is there no synagogue in a city in Israel where most of its residents are poor new immigrants?"[6] In a prior letter to Haifa's mayor, Abba Hushi, the synagogue was described as "a central synagogue in the lower town, and due to limited space, some of the members must pray on the street." According to the description of the congregation, they were "Jews from the surviving remnants of the terrible exile, shady odes from the European inferno fire."[7]

About a year later, and following several more letters, Vice Minister Zorach Warhaftig contacted the Custodian of Absentee Property and asked him to assist the congregation in purchasing the plot. Interestingly, although Warhaftig echoed the congregation's concerns, he added that "by establishing a splendor synagogue, this part of Haifa will acquire a significant Jewish identity."[8] In other words, while the congregation addressed their need for a place to pray, the vice minister converted the facility into a symbol of Jewish sovereignty in the urban internal frontier of Haifa. Moreover, as demonstrated by Yfaat Weiss, the neighborhood of Wadi Salib hosted about 60 synagogues (Weiss 2011). In this respect, the synagogue was not such a vital need for the congregation, even though they might have preferred to pray by their own Eastern European custom. However, one might argue that in Wahrhaftig's perspective, the Moroccan synagogues of Wadi Salib do not contribute to the Israelization of the region, since for him, Israelization must be achieved through a "proper" and "splendor" synagogue. It is important to note that the former Palestinian neighborhood of Wadi Salib was one of the most vulnerable neighborhoods of North African Jews in Haifa. In 1959, shortly after the *She'erit Ha-Pleta* events, protests in this neighborhood served as the platform for what Sami Shalon Chetrit see as the beginning of the Mizrahi organized struggle in Israel. A fascinating aspect of these protests was the fact that the protesters climbed from the Wadi to the dominant Ashkenazi neighborhood of Hadar ha'Carmel, smashed shop windows, and set cars ablaze (Chetrit 2010; Weiss 2011). Therefore, in this case, as in many others, the ethnic and the intraethnic are intertwined.

The existing synagogue, as well as the plot proposed for the new synagogue, were both located on the outskirts of Wadi Nisnas, the Palestinian neighborhood in Haifa, as well as at the outskirts of Wadi Salib.[9] Thus, complementing the central synagogue of Hadar ha'Carmel, the *Sh'erit ha-Pletah* synagogue symbolically monitored the remaining Palestinians in Haifa. Put differently, Warhaftig recontextualized the synagogue, as well as the community of immigrants/settlers that gathered around it, into the Zionist colonial policy in the urban sphere, and formed them as national-sovereign agents, juxtaposed to the mosques and churches of the city, that were left to symbolize the Palestinian urban destruction. As a result, both the structure and the population constitute what Wandy Pullan calls "frontier urbanism" (Pullan 2011), which refers in this case to the settlement of civilians as frontier populations and the use of urban constructions in order to promote Israeli sovereignty and prevent Palestinian resistance.

"Jewish Center Once Again": The Central Synagogue of Ramla

Another example of an establishment of a great synagogue is the one of Ramla. Prior to 1948, Ramla and its neighboring town, Lydda, were two of the most important commercial and administrative centers in Palestine. During the war, Ramla was of national importance because the headquarters of the Palestinian guerilla commander Hasan Salama was located in its surroundings. Ramla and Lydda were taken by Israeli forces during Operation Dani in July 1948, while a horrific massacre was committed by Israeli forces in Lydda (Abdel Jawad 2007). Most of these towns' residents were forcibly expelled during the fighting and after the towns were seized. As a result of the war, only a few hundred residents remained in these towns out of an estimated 60,000 (Morris 2004). Ramla, like other Palestinian cities, became a "mixed city" or an urban internal frontier. Moreover, due to its proximity to the Jordanian border, the Ramla district serves as an external border as well as an internal frontier. In addition, Ramla is located in the center of the country, on the main road that connects Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. As demonstrated by Yael Ellweil, the Ramla area was a site of intense Jewish settlement housing policy by the Israeli government in the first years after the establishment

of the State of Israel. Its population increased from 2,981 to 66,878 people between 1948 and 1955, a growth rate of 2,143.5 percent, 12 times that of the Jezreel district and 25 times that of the Tel Aviv area (Allweil 2019). Most of these immigrants/settlers were resettled in Palestinian abandoned houses, while the remaining Palestinians were restricted to the Sakne neighborhood, also known as "the ghetto" (Yacobi 2009).

In the aftermath of its occupation, Ramla underwent intense appropriation and Israelization. Danna Piroyansky illustrates how monuments, gardens, street names, and army parades were utilized to transform the town from a Palestinian to an Israeli one. This process resulted in the marginalization of Palestinian survivors from citizenry participation in the town, both physically and symbolically (Piroyansky 2014). The central synagogue's proposed location is consistent with these Israelization processes. On June 25, 1956, the Religious-Zionist bulletin *Hatzofe* and the right-wing Herut party's bulletin *Herut* reported on the cornerstone ceremony of the central synagogue of Ramla. According to the *Herut* report, the plot was four dunams in size and the synagogue was intended to accommodate a thousand seats for men and women.[10] *Hatzofe*'s report described the ceremony and the speeches delivered in detail. The cornerstone ceremony was opened by waving a flag and blowing a trumpet. Thousands of residents gathered to celebrate the "construction of a synagogue along the Jerusalem–Tel Aviv main road, in the heart of Ramla." First, the deputy mayor, the head of the local religious council, and member of the executive committee of the Religious-Zionist party Ha'poel Ha'Mizrahi, Menachem Frenkel (1910–1973), addressed the audience. In his speech, Frenkel pointed out that 35 synagogues already function in Ramla. Nevertheless, none of them were built specifically for the purpose of serving as a synagogue. Further, he stated that the construction of the central synagogue illustrates the residents' "roots in the land" and their "maturity as citizens."[11] The chief Ashkenazi Rabbi Isaac Herzog (1888–1959) affiliated the central synagogue with what he called the "Jewish center" in Ramla that existed 800 years ago, stating that "now Ramla has become a Jewish center once again." The mayor of Ramla, Meir Melamed (1906–1987) of the ruling party of Mapai, explained that the city council wished to build the synagogue on the same site as the synagogue that served the Jewish community in the past. However, since it could not be located, a central plot was allocated for the

purpose. In addition, Melamed pointed out that "Ramla is well known for its churches with their high steeples. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure the Jewish character of the town through the establishment of a central synagogue." A similar tone was reflected in Chief Sephardi Rabbi Isaac Nissim's (1896–1981) remarks, where he stated that "every new synagogue is both a religious and a security fortress."[12]

In these remarks, the synagogue's national and sovereign role is clearly outlined. In Herzog's speech, the synagogue is referred to as a symbol of continuation between the indigenous Jewish community and the new Jewish-Israeli city, therefore appropriating the Jewish presence to Zionist agenda and articulating what Tovi Fenster calls the Israeli "sense of place and belonging," vis-à-vis the Palestinian negated sense of belonging.[13] In Frenkel's speech, this imagined continuity is utilized as a means of creating an urban citizenship. By celebrating the residents' roots in the land, Frenkel formed an exclusive Jewish citizenship and pushed out the Palestinian citizens of Ramla. Therefore, following Engin Isin's argument that cities form places where the very meaning, content, and extent of citizenship are being made and remade (Isin 2000), I argue that the synagogue's cornerstone celebrations were essential to appropriating the town as a Jewish-Israeli one referring solely to the town's Jewish residents as participating citizens. Moreover, this urban exclusion complemented the state's inequality and discrimination of Palestinian citizens in Israel through the legislation of the Law of Return (1950), declaring that "every Jew has the right to come to the country as an *oleh* [a Jew immigrating to Israel]," and the Absentees Property Law (1950), preventing the return of some 750,000 Palestinian refugees and expropriating their belongings. As argued by Hassan Jabareen, these two laws were intended to anchor the sharp distinction between the "outsider" Palestinian, who is considered an infiltrator and enemy, and the "insider" Jew Oleh, who is automatically regarded as a member of the Jewish sovereign hegemonic collective.[14] Thus, urban "religious" marginalization went hand in hand with state discrimination.

In a similar manner to the synagogues of the lower town of Haifa, 35 synagogues were already operating in Ramla, which indicates that the Jewish community there flourished. Therefore, the central synagogue was not intended just to serve the religious needs of the community's

residents. It was intended to manifest the shift in the town's character from Palestinian to Jewish. The synagogue's location on the main road is significant for this urban role. Ramla's main road was the site of national parades and rallies. A couple of years before the cornerstone ceremony, Ramla hosted the Israeli sixth army parade, which marched through the main road connecting Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. This road was also used by Maki (Israeli Communist Party) for its May Day parades during the 1950s. Unlike these parades, the Palestinians who conducted the Muslim parade celebrating Nabi Salah preferred to walk through the old city, inhabited mostly by Palestinians. This procession marched between the two most important Muslim symbols in Ramla—the Great Mosque and the White Mosque, thus marking the Muslim sacred territory, if only for a day (Piroyansky 2014). In this regard, the synagogue's placement in the national sphere of the main road links it with the national urban scene. In contrast to the Muslim "religious" procession that marched between two mosques, the synagogue occupies a prominent position within the national landscape. Thus, it is possible that the town leaders intended to make the synagogue a symbol in these processions, much as the great synagogue in Tel Aviv served as a symbol during national rallies (Helman 2010). Therefore, the synagogue expresses the Zionist agenda and serves, as Nissim coined it, both a religious and security fortress, forming the region as solely Jewish-Israeli in the face of Palestinians and other religious buildings.

About ten months after the cornerstone ceremony, in April 1957, Frenkel requested support for the establishment of the synagogue from the Minister of Religious Affairs, Moshe Shapira (1902–1970). In his request, Frenkel detailed the efforts of the municipality to locate a plot for a central synagogue and purchase it from its Palestinian owner "at a reasonable price." Even so, after regulating ownership, placing a shack, and celebrating the cornerstone ceremony, the Development Authority began to heap difficulties on the construction of the synagogue. Among the considerations mentioned by Frenkel was the importance of establishing a synagogue on the main road:

> There are several luxurious churches of different religions in Ramla located along the main road between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Why should the house of God be located on a side street?[15]

Unfortunately, the plans were never materialized and the synagogue was never constructed in the proposed location. The Ministers Committee to the Development Authority, authorized to handle Palestinian property, has objected to placing the synagogue on the main road. According to the head of the Department of Properties at the Ministry of Finance, the committee decided that the main street of Ramla should be converted into mixed commercial buildings.[16] However, according to Warhaftig's unofficial testimony, this objection relates more to its location on the main road and the fear of clashes between the religious members of the synagogue and motorcar drivers on weekends.[17] In other words, the city officials' desire to build the synagogue along the main road was the same reason for the Development Authority's objection to place it there. Eventually, in October 1958, a zoning plan (35/6) was adopted by the district committee that reserved the area for service centers for vehicles and trains, as well as for residential area, commercial area, and industrial workshops.[18]

"SPLENDOR *MIKDASH MEAT*": THE CENTRAL SYNAGOGUE IN JAFFA

The most significant example for the collapse of Palestinian urban society is the city of Jaffa. At the eve of the Nakba/1948 war, Jaffa was the largest Palestinian city in Palestine. It served as a major political, social, and cultural center, as well as a major commercial and industrial hub for the entire Palestinian population. A total of 71,000 Palestinians lived in the city, while another 40,000 lived in rural villages surrounding it (Radai 2011).

Jaffa has a history dating back almost 10,000 years, and its port is mentioned in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Throughout history, it has been destroyed and rebuilt several times. For our discussion, it is essential to note that during the late Ottoman period, Jaffa was a shared urban space. The demolition of the city walls in 1879 led to the development of separate neighborhoods, Palestinian neighborhoods to the north and south and Jewish neighborhoods to the north. The establishment of Tel Aviv in 1909 formed a Zionist enclave within the urban fabric of Jaffa. From its beginning, Tel Aviv founders sought to separate themselves from Jaffa and to create a Zionist municipal

entity that will function as a national urban sphere, in which Palestinians would have no access. Jaffa was marked as Arab, and thus as primitive, filthy, and nonmodern, vis-à-vis European, modern, and Jewish Tel Aviv (LeVine 2005; Karlinsky 2021). However, this segregation was constantly challenged. In fact, while Tel Aviv was segregated, 30% of the 110,000 residents in Jaffa were Jewish (Monterescu 2015). Moreover, southern Tel Aviv and northern Jaffa were mixed areas where Palestinians and mostly underclass Mizrahi Jews shared the public sphere, in some cases, against the official Zionist municipal policy (Levine 2005; Bernstein 2012; Gilad 2021).

On May 13, 1948, Jaffa fell almost without resistance to the Jewish military force following a period of social collapse and the migration of notable families (Radai 2011). The majority of the town's residents were forcibly expelled, and their return was prevented. After the war, approximately 3,600 of the 70,000 residents of the city remained. The survivors were concentrated in the al-'Ajami neighborhood, once a luxurious neighborhood, whereas the rest of the city was populated by Jewish immigrants/settlers or deliberately destroyed by Israeli authorities (Sa'di-Ibrahim 2022; Zoubi 2023). The Israelization of Jaffa's urban Palestinian space continues until our days through both official and unofficial means (Sa'di-Ibrahim 2022). In some ways, it remains a site of urban clashes over heritage, performance, and memory (Monterescu 2015; Huss 2023). Subsequently, I argue that this Israelization was intended to be achieved through the construction of new synagogues.

About 15 months after Jaffa was occupied, Rabbi Isaac Yedidiah Frenkel (1913–1986) of Florentin neighborhood, a leading Religious-Zionist figure in Tel Aviv, met with Tel Aviv's mayor Israel Rokach (1896–1959) to discuss urgent matters that affected the Jewish residents of Jaffa. Interestingly, the *Hatzofe* correspondent framed this issue as "the urgent problems of the southern Tel Aviv neighborhoods (the Hebrew neighborhoods in Jaffa's former urban area)," thus solidifying the erasure of Palestinian Jaffa. These urgent problems included the lack of a public garden, a school, a central synagogue, and a public bath, as well as the naming of streets and public transportation.[19] Indeed, in the 1951–1952 budget year of Tel Aviv's religious council, 50,000 of the 250,000 Israeli liras development budget was dedicated to the construction of a central synagogue in Jaffa.[20]

One possible motivation for constructing a central synagogue in Jaffa may be the desire to alter the city's landscape. In the aftermath of the war, Tel Aviv municipality and the custodian for absentees' property intentionally destroyed some Palestinian neighborhoods as a means of urban reconstruction (Aleksandrowicz 2017). One of these neighborhoods was the slop above the old city's port, first destructed by the British in "Operation Anchor" in 1936, and later by the Israelis following the Nakba/1948 war. Since then, a heated debate has raged between city officials and archaeologists about the site's future (Kletter 2006). One suggestion was to build a synagogue on the hilltop. In January 1951, *Hatzofe* published an opinion piece by David Avde'eli urging this action. Avde'eli begins by stating that "The hilltop, which dominates most of the city and the port, can be seen from far and above, both on land and at sea. This plot cannot be wasted for daily needs." The plot however is not empty:

> There is only one building standing there today, dominating the landscape. It is a monastery. It is clear that we cannot leave it standing there alone, dominating the landscape and symbolizing Israel's coastline. It is essential to shift the architectural focus to another monumental building superior to the non-Jewish building . . . the hilltop should be planned as a piazza with a splendor *Mikdash Meat*, a magnificent synagogue. (Avde'eli 1951, 6)

The monastery that Avde'eli refers to is the Franciscan Catholic St. Peter's Church and the small monastery adjacent to it from the north. Indeed, the monastery's bell tower can be seen from quite a distance. Thus, in Avde'eli's plan for Jaffa, as in Haifa and Ramla, the central synagogue symbolizes Jewish superiority and sovereignty over other affinities to the city. In this respect, it may be of interest to note that the title of the piece, "Tents of Shem in Jaffa," symbolizes the aesthetic conflict between Judaism and Christianity, described in the Babylonian Talmud.[21] Thus, the spatial conflict between the monastery and the synagogue is placed within a larger theological framework. Moreover, Avde'eli refers to the central synagogue as a "splendor *Mikdash Meat*,"[22] resulting in an oxymoron that explains the change in the synagogue's role in the State of Israel. The term used to describe the absence of the

destroyed temple now refers to a symbol of sovereignty and superiority in the former Palestinian city of Jaffa.

The planned synagogue has a significant role not only toward the non-Jewish affinities to Jaffa, but also to the Jewish new immigrants/settlers:

> It is noticeable in Jaffa that there is no central synagogue. The interethnic human composition is mostly religious, and places for worship are rare and crowded on Saturdays and holidays. A central synagogue would affect the interethnic merging of the new immigrants. With its very presence, the synagogue would symbolize the gathering of the exiles. (Avde'eli 1951)

As in Haifa and Ramla, the lack of a central synagogue in Jaffa does not mean that there were no synagogues whatsoever. For example, Avraham Bachar, one of the prominent members of the Jewish Bulgarian community in Jaffa, told Daniel Monterescu in an interview about his arrival in Jaffa in 1948:

> With twenty-two thousand lira I bought a shop and made a synagogue there. I smuggled three Torah books from Bulgaria. One is ancient—four hundred years old. I still have it. We put up chairs and opened the synagogue. God helped us plenty. The synagogue was full. We were the best. (Monterescu 2015, 222)

In fact, according to a survey published by the ministry of Religious Affairs in 1954, there were over 60 synagogues in Jaffa, serving various Jewish *Edot* (ethnic groups) (Goldrat and Daniel 1954). Even so, Religious-Zionist officials were keen to establish a central synagogue as a means of integrating the various Jewish communities into a united and solid frontier community, opposing both Palestinians and other non-Jewish affinities to Jaffa.

The central synagogue on the hilltop above the port was never constructed. In the early 1960s, the area was filled by public gardens, a piazza, and artist and scholar studios. Despite this, Religious-Zionist officials placed a high priority on the construction of a central synagogue. In a letter sent by the head of the ministry's synagogues

department Pinchas Dereberemdiger (1905–1997) to Zorach Warhaftig in June 1954, he indicated that his department was working for finding two plots in a central place in Jaffa for this purpose. In addition, he informed him that he entered a negotiation with the Development Authority regarding a dunam and a half plot near the Tzahalon (Dajani) hospital, which did not result in success. Additionally, Dereberemdiger declared that "establishing a central synagogue for Jaffa is one of the most important things. There are dozens of places for prayer, most of whom in abandoned houses. Nonetheless, none of which is suitable to be a central synagogue in a large city like Jaffa that is populated with tens of thousands of Jews."[23] A year later, in May 1955, Shmuel Grinberg of the Tel Aviv Religious Council, and the former general manager of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, requested Vice Minister Warhaftig to support the council's request for two plots from the Development Authority in Jaffa, a plot for a synagogue and another for a public bath. Grinberg did not give a rationale for his request, noting that "there is no need to overstate the necessity of these vital institutions in Jaffa, which is populated with thousands of residents."[24] Following this request, Warhaftig asked Tel Aviv's deputy mayor and Religious-Zionist party Hapoel Ha'Mizrahi member Avraham Breur, the ministry's legal counsel Issachar Dov Ber, and Dereberemdiger for assistance.[25]

The arguments of Avde'eli, Greenberg, and Dereberemdiger deviate from the communal understanding of the synagogue. As Avde'eli and Dereberemdiger state, and in a similar manner to Haifa and Ramla, Jaffa is home to dozens of places of prayer. However, ministry's officials seek a central plot for a synagogue that will address the fact that tens of thousands of Jews now populate the town. Therefore, the proposed central synagogues in Jaffa serve as a symbol of the transformation of this urban space from a Palestinian city to an Israeli one. It is perhaps not surprising that the plot proposed by Avde'eli for the synagogue is located just above St. Peter's Church, and the second plot is located just by the Dajani hospital, approximately five hundred meters from the al-'Ajami neighborhood. Moreover, Jaffa does not stand on its own. In April 1950, the Jaffa municipality was retroactively dissolved. The majority of its lands came under the jurisdiction of Jaffa's urban neighbor and rival city Tel Aviv, which was referred to as Tel Aviv-Jaffa (Monterescu 2015). Accordingly, Jaffa and its Jews were not separated from those of Tel Aviv

and its Great Synagogue. Therefore, it would appear that the need for a central synagogue in Jaffa was not any greater than that of other quarters of Tel Aviv. It can therefore be argued that the presence of a tiny, however sustainable Palestinian presence in al-'Ajami neighborhood and the will to both demonstrate sovereignty in Jaffa and maintain segregation between Jews and Palestinians were the driving forces behind the desire to establish a central synagogue in the city.

CONCLUSION

Following the Nakba/1948 war, several administrative initiations were held by authorities to demonstrate sovereignty in the former Palestinian urban spheres. Among these initiatives were the establishment of new synagogues by Religious-Zionist agents, most notably by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Two significant features were highlighted in these newly constructed Israeli synagogues—their architectural design and location within urban space. Synagogues were built in monumental dimensions and were located where they would overshadow other religious buildings and extract Israeli surveillance over Palestinian presence and memory in the urban sphere. Thus, the synagogues, as well as the communities that gathered around them, were harnessed into the Zionist colonial policy in the urban sphere and served as national-sovereign agents.

This phenomenon sheds light not only on the urban space itself. It demonstrates the shift in synagogues' role within Jewish society and theology—from places of worship and longevity to the destroyed temple to symbols of Jewish sovereignty, centered around the state. Moreover, these synagogues demonstrate a shift in the role of religion in Jewish society following the establishment of the State of Israel.

Most of the synagogues mentioned in this article never materialized. They remain aspirations for local and state bureaucrats as points on maps negotiated between municipal and/or state authorities and local congregations. Nevertheless, following Haim Yacobi's call to expose the discursive meaning of the professional sphere as "a key to understanding the spatial dynamics of the city as well as its ideological agenda" (Yacobi 2004, 165), this article argues that these aspirations are crucial to understand Israeli policy in the urban internal frontier.

While demonstrating the relative weakness of the ministry's officials, these ideas and aspirations can provide insight into one of the most exciting activities that state officials undertake to demonstrate its sovereignty. Most of the bureaucrats mentioned above were affiliated with Religious Zionism. Therefore, these different cases illustrate how Jewish religion was reformulated and contextualized within the sovereign Jewish state and the vital role of Religious-Zionist agents in this process. Synagogues, the most "religious" and communal Jewish institution, which commemorate the loss of the temple and the Jewish condition of exile, were transformed into state institutions, demonstrating the state's sovereignty over the internal frontier.

These initiations failed not only because they were not built, but also because they failed to encourage Jewish new immigrants/settlers to utilize the synagogue and themselves to demonstrate Israeli sovereignty in the region. As mentioned, the *She'rit Ha'Pleta* congregation did not use the sovereign terminology employed by the ministry, while in Haifa, Ramla, and Jaffa, dozens of synagogues operated independently of state agendas, making officials' aspirations redundant. In all of these cases, Religious Zionist agents sought to utilize the synagogue as a means of demonstrating Israeli sovereignty, thus segregating Jews and Palestinians and forming local Jews as urban frontier communities. However, the ability of new immigrants/settlers, especially Mizrahi Jews to be part of this process, or to contribute to the Israelization of the region was doubted, since for Religious Zionism, Israelization must be achieved through "proper" religiosity and "splendor" synagogues.

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NOTES

This article is based on research completed while I was a doctoral candidate in the Department of Jewish History and a doctoral fellow at the Center for the Study of Conversion and Inter-religious Encounters at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, as well as a postdoctoral fellow at the Haifa Laboratory for Religious Studies. This research was presented in November 2024 at the Israel Studies Seminar at Oxford University, and I would like to express my gratitude to Yaacov Yadgar for his hospitality and support. It is also my pleasure to thank Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, Menashe Anzi, Michal Huss, Avi-ram Tzoreff, Lena Salaymeh, Roni Tzoreff, Alma Katz, and Ofir Hadad for their thoughtful comments on the various

manuscripts of this research. In closing, I would like to thank the editors of the *Palestine/Israel Review* and anonymous readers for their comments, which have contributed significantly to the development of the research.

1. David Ben Gurion to Ezra Spicehandler, March 1, 1970, Ben Gurion Archive, The Ben Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel & Zionism, Sde Boker. In fact, and for the sake of historical accuracy, this self-testimony is inaccurate, as Ben Gurion attended a prayer of gratitude at the Yeshurun synagogue of Jerusalem following the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly, and not following the declaration of independence. See Zameret and Tlamim (1999).
2. Gafni (2017). Regarding the architectural design of the First Aliya synagogues see: Kattan (2011).
3. The term 'mixed cities' was criticized in length, as it conceals the ethnocratic character of these cities. See: Yiftachel and Yacobi (2003); Karlinsky (2021).
4. Regarding this negation see, Raz-Krakotzkin (2013).
5. The fifth example is the great synagogue of Natzrat-Illit. Nonetheless, since Naomi Simhony has well-articulated this case, I will not discuss it further in this article. See Simhony (2020).
6. Sh'erit ha-Pletah Synagogue Executive Committee to M. Shapira, July 18, 1955, ISA [Israel State Archive] GL-2968/12.
7. Sh'erit ha-Pletah Synagogue Executive Committee to Abba Hushi, May 12, 1955, ISA GL-2968/12.
8. Warhaftig to the Custodian of Absentee Property, August 3, 1956, ISA GL-2968/12.
9. The committee's address was 60 Shivat Zion (Stanton) Street, outside the Wadi Salib neighborhood, and the proposed plot (10844/25) was located between Kibutz Galuyot (Iraq) Boulevard and al-Hillal street. I thank Omer Gealdor for his assistance.
10. "The Cornerstone Ceremony of the Ramla Central Synagogue," *Herut*, June 25, 1956, 4.
11. *"A Cornerstone of the Ramla Central Synagogue," Ha'Tzofe, June 25, 1956, 4.*
12. "A Cornerstone of the Ramla Central Synagogue," *Ha'Tzofe*, June 25, 1956, 4.
13. See Fenster (2004). It is important to note that Herzog's determination seems overstated. Even Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, who sought to find Jewish continuity through historical studies of Jewish communities in Palestine, argued that Ramle was never a 'Jewish center' despite the existence of a Jewish community since the 8th century. See Ben-Zvi (1936).
14. Jabareen (2014). Also see Piroyansky's discussion about the urban citizenry marginalization of Palestinians in Ramle. Piroyansky (2014, 167–69).
15. M. Frenkel to M. Shapira, April 12, 1957, ISA GL-2968/12.
16. M. Levine to M. Shapira, June 4, 1957, ISA GL-2968/12.
17. Warhaftig to the Minister of Religious Affairs, June 13, 1957, ISA GL-2968/12.
18. TABA now, https://www.tabanow.co.il/%D7%AA%D7%91%D7%A2/%D7%A8%D7%9E%D7%9C%D7%94/%D7%9C%D7%94/6.
19. "Problems of the Southern Tel Aviv Neighborhoods," *Hatzofe*, August 19, 1949, 10.
20. "260 thousand IL—Tel Aviv's Religious Council's Budget," *Hatzofe*, March 17, 1951, 4.
21. Babylonian Talmud, Megilah 9B.

22. D. Avde'eli, "Tents of Shem in Jaffa," *Hatzofe*, January 26, 1951, 6.
23. Dereberemdiger to the vice minister, June 2, 1955, ISA GL2968/12.
24. Grinberg to Warhaftig, May 24, 1955, ISA GL2968/12.
25. Warhaftig to A. Bruer, May 31, 1955, ISA GL2968/12; Warhaftig to I.D. Ber, June 1, 1955, ISA GL2968/12; Y. Etzion to Dereberemdiger, June 2, 1955, ISA GL2968/12.

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DATE OF RECEPTION: JULY 15, 2024
DATE OF ACCEPTANCE: JANUARY 12, 2025