



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Boundary making in the formative years of Tel Aviv Township, 1920–1923

Arnon Golan* 

Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Haifa, Israel

*Corresponding author. Email: agolan@geo.haifa.ac.il

Abstract

Boundaries are defined and maintained to establish and preserve cultural, societal and political integrity. Boundaries change as territorial structures and their related meanings change over time, reflecting the transformation of economic, political, administrative and cultural practices and discourses, and inherent relations of power. The Israeli metropolis of Tel Aviv is no different in this context. The end of World War I and establishment of a British Mandate regime in Palestine resulted in the transformation of political, economic, social and cultural structures. The British Mandate afforded the rise of and development of Tel Aviv from Jaffa's Jewish garden suburb into a separate urban entity. Different internal and external factors affected the delineation of the urban bounds of Tel Aviv following its declaration by the British Mandate government as an autonomous township.

Tel Aviv was established in 1909 as a Jewish garden suburb of Jaffa that formed Ottoman Palestine's main port town. It was the last among Jaffa's 11 Jewish neighbourhoods and home to many members of the town's Jewish elite. The founders and leaders of Tel Aviv designated the garden suburb as the nucleus of 'the First Hebrew City' – an independent Jewish-Zionist urban entity whose lifestyle would be based on modern western concepts.¹ They considered the end of the Ottoman rule and establishment of the British Mandate in 1920 an opportunity to promote the separation of Tel Aviv and other Jewish neighbourhoods from Jaffa and form the prospected Zionist urban entity. Their efforts bore fruit with the formal declaration of the autonomous township of Tel Aviv on May 1921. Yet, the demarcation of its boundaries lasted for another two years (Figure 1).

Recent scholarship regarding the formation of Tel Aviv's boundaries concentrates on the effect of external factors on their demarcation, mainly Palestinian Arabs and the British Mandate government.² This article asserts that inner rather

¹I.S. Troen, *Imagining Zion: Dreams, Designs and Realities in a Century of Jewish Settlement* (New Haven, 2003), 89.

²M. LeVine, *Overthrowing Geography: Jaffa, Tel Aviv and the Struggle for Palestine, 1880–1948* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2005); O. Aleksandrowicz, 'Paper boundaries: the erased history of the neighbourhood of Neveh Shalom', *Teoria U'Bikoret*, 41 (2013), 165–97 [Hebrew]; T. Goren, 'Relations between Tel Aviv and

© The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.



Figure 1. Tel Aviv and environs, 1923. *Source:* Plan of Jaffa, 1:6,000, Survey of Egypt, 1918. The National Library of Israel, Eran Laor Map Collection.

than external factors played a crucial role in the making of Tel Aviv's municipal boundaries. Demarcation was affected first and foremost by the prolonged effort to agglomerate the Jewish neighbourhoods of Jaffa into a Jewish-Zionist urban entity.

Based on archive materials, this article sheds light on the formation of the township of Tel Aviv not only as a matter of recognition by the British Mandate government, but as a process of agglomeration of distinct neighbourhoods. Involving protracted negotiations between the leaders of Tel Aviv and the leaders of adjacent neighbourhoods regarding the terms of the merger of these neighbourhoods with Tel Aviv, the process of agglomeration resulted in shaping a composite urban entity, whose boundaries reflected the territorial cohesion of its constituent neighbourhoods under the influence of the larger and politically stronger township of Tel Aviv.

Notes on boundaries

According to its most basic definition, a boundary is a line that marks a limit and divides one area from others.³ Notions of territory, self and us/them are all predicated on the existence of boundaries, which serve as symbolic, socio-cultural and/or physical lines separating insiders and outsiders. Every society creates itself by

Jaffa 1921–1936: a reassessment', *Journal of Israeli History*, 36 (2017), 1–21; T. Goren, 'Tel Aviv and the question of separation from Jaffa 1921–1936', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 52 (2016), 473–87.

³D. Newman, 'On borders and power: a theoretical framework', *Journal of Borderland Studies*, 18 (2003), 13–25.

defining its space and manipulating features of boundaries to (re)create inclusions and exclusions, to separate between those who belong and those who do not.⁴ From this perspective, boundaries are symbolic systems of categorization, arbitrary constructions that generate practices that become established norms. This idea has the merit of emphasizing that the relation between space and identity constitutes one of the fundamental frames of social life.⁵

Territorial structures and their related meanings change over time, reflecting the constant transformation of economic, political, administrative and cultural practices and discourses and inherent relations of power. The dynamics of change may (re)form boundaries based on the outcomes of conflicts emerging between various groups.⁶

Formal boundaries are set by laws or political decrees to separate sovereign states and districts within a state. At the urban level, they define municipal jurisdictions and statistical and land use zones. Informal social and cultural boundaries are more fluid and, in some cases, take the form of transition zones, in which the terms of engagement between ethnic, social and economic groups materialize at the global, state, regional and urban levels.⁷ In the Ottoman Empire, formal urban boundaries did not seem to exist. Cities and towns were surrounded by rural–urban fringe or transition zones in which urban land uses increasingly impinged on the rural.⁸ Internal urban boundaries also took the form of transition zones, structuring urban areas by demarcating co-existing identities. ‘Boundaries of this sort were intersecting and overlapping, often not materially defined, but symbolic in nature and sometimes perceptible only for those who knew how to read them in the urban fabric.’⁹

Palestine: urban boundaries in the turn from Ottoman to British rule

Until the final quarter of the nineteenth century, *Tanzimat* reforms¹⁰ had only a sporadic impact on the regulation of urban growth through town planning

⁴A. Paasi, ‘Europe as a social process and discourse: considerations of place, boundaries and identity’, *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 8 (2001), 7–17.

⁵D. Meier, ‘Borders, boundaries and identity building in Lebanon: an introduction’, *Mediterranean Politics*, 18 (2013), 353.

⁶S. Hasson and E. Razin, ‘What is hidden behind a municipal boundary conflict?’, *Political Geography Quarterly*, 9 (1990), 267–83.

⁷M. Lamont and V. Molnár, ‘The study of boundaries in the social sciences’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28 (2002), 167–8; D. Sibley, ‘The binary city’, *Urban Studies*, 38 (2002), 239; T. Tambassi, ‘From geographical lines to cultural boundaries’, *Rivista di estetica*, 67 (2018), 150–64.

⁸M. Karakuyu, ‘A new approach to analyzing historical urban growth of Ottoman cities: Manisa case study’, *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History*, 44 (2011), 131–8; F. Riedler, ‘Communal boundaries and confessional policies in Ottoman Niş’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 61 (2018), 739.

⁹N. Lafi and F. Riedler, ‘Administrative boundaries, communal segregation and factional territorialisation: the complex nature of urban boundaries in the Ottoman Empire’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 61 (2018), 594.

¹⁰The *Tanzimat* (Turkish for Reorganization) was a series of reforms promulgated in the Ottoman Empire between 1839 and 1876 intended to effectuate a fundamental change of the empire from the old system based on traditional principles to that of a modern state. See D. Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922* (Cambridge, 2005).

rules.¹¹ Since then, the reforms, along with the growing involvement of European powers and the rise of nationalism, accelerated the transformation of economic, societal and cultural structures in Ottoman urban communities. Urban political arenas became the platforms through which the relationships between social and ethnic groups were negotiated, affecting the transformation of urban boundaries from fluid zones of interaction into more rigid lines of separation. These processes survived the end of Ottoman rule and continued to affect urban external and internal boundaries.¹²

Different from the Ottoman case, British colonial governments typically defined formal separation lines in urban areas, especially to separate native populations and European settlers – the emissaries of the British empire.¹³ In British Mandate Palestine, however, the colonial government had no interest in delineating a boundary to separate Jews and Arabs in Jaffa or elsewhere in the country, as they considered Zionist Jews in Palestine as ‘western natives’ rather than European settlers or emissaries of the British empire.¹⁴

The establishment of a separate Jewish urban entity within Jaffa was the result of a bottom-up initiative of local Zionist leaders of Tel Aviv who negotiated the matter with the British Mandate government and the Arab-dominated Jaffa Municipality.¹⁵ Owing to the heterogeneous socio-economic, political and ethnic structure of Jaffa’s Jewish society, demarcating the external boundaries of the Zionist urban entity became primarily an intra-Jewish matter. Although the Mandate government approved the unification of Tel Aviv and other Jewish neighbourhoods in order to establish a separate township within Jaffa in May 1921, and the Jaffa Municipality complied, intra-Jewish debates delayed the official delineation of the new township’s municipal boundaries by two years.¹⁶

Jaffa and Tel Aviv in the final decades of Ottoman rule

In 1799, Napoleon’s troops ransacked Jaffa and killed many local inhabitants. Following the French withdrawal, Jaffa resumed its development in ensuing decades.¹⁷ In the late 1870s, the town walls were partly demolished to facilitate the expansion of the built-up area. At the outbreak of World War I, the Muslim and

¹¹Karakuyu, ‘A new approach to analyzing historical urban growth of Ottoman cities’.

¹²Lafi and Riedler, ‘Administrative boundaries’, 597; J. Leibovitz, ‘Faultline citizenship: ethnonational politics, minority mobilisation, and governance in the Israeli “mixed cities” of Haifa and Tel Aviv-Jaffa’, *Ethnopolitics*, 6 (2007), 236.

¹³G. Wasserman, ‘European settlers and Kenya colony: thoughts on a conflicted affair’, *African Studies Review*, 17 (1974), 425–34; E.L. Beverley, ‘Colonial urbanism and South Asian cities’, *Social History*, 36 (2011), 482–97.

¹⁴L. Yohanani, ‘Zionist identity and the British Mandate: Palestine’s internment camps and the making of the western native’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 26 (2020), 246–62.

¹⁵Aleksandrowicz, ‘Paper boundaries’, 171–2; Goren, ‘Relations between Tel Aviv and Jaffa’, 1–3; Goren, ‘Tel Aviv and the question of separation from Jaffa’, 473–5.

¹⁶I. Shchori, *From a Dream to a Metropolis: The Birth and Growth of Tel Aviv* (Tel Aviv, 1990), 193–214 [Hebrew].

¹⁷M. Yazbak, ‘Comparing Ottoman municipalities in Palestine: the cases of Nablus, Haifa and Nazareth, 1864–1914’, in A. Dalachanis and V. Lemire (eds.), *Ordinary Jerusalem 1840–1940* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2018), 257.

Christian Arab communities accounted for close to 80 per cent of Jaffa's 50,000 residents, while the remainder included Jews, a small Armenian community and a few European groups such as German Templers. Throughout the nineteenth century, the thriving port town attracted immigrants from other parts of Palestine, Egypt and the Levant, and from North Africa and south and eastern Europe. Immigrants included many Jews: *Sephardi* Jews from various locations in the Mediterranean basin established a community in Jaffa in 1837, and were followed by a growing number of *Ashkenazi* Jews from East and Central Europe, most of whom arrived after the 1880s. Muslim, Jewish and German Templer neighbourhoods developed north-east of the old quarter overlooking the harbour and its adjacent central business district (CBD).¹⁸

The ethnic-religious boundary between Jaffa's Muslim Arab and Jewish neighbourhoods took the form of a mixed-population seam area separating Arab Manshiya and Jewish Neve Shalom, both of which had developed rapidly in the 1890s. Most of the residents in both neighbourhoods were from the lower and lower middle classes, and many were owners or employees of workshops and shops located along the main artery that traversed the seam area and led south-west to the CBD and the harbour.¹⁹

Around Neve Shalom, the most populous Jewish neighbourhood of Jaffa, additional Jewish neighbourhoods established in the 1890s and 1900s spread to its east and north-east. The new neighbourhoods did not meet the demand for accommodation for the growing number of Jewish immigrants, many of whom were forced to rent rooms and apartments in Arab neighbourhoods. Facilities and living conditions of immigrants in both Jewish and Arab neighbourhoods were considered poor by modern European standards.²⁰

Tel Aviv was different from the other Jewish neighbourhoods of Jaffa. Its plan and regulations were based on the idealistic principles of the Garden City Movement and most of its residents belonged to the upper social and economic echelons of Jaffa's Jewish society. Unlike many residents of other neighbourhoods who had diverse motives for immigrating to Palestine, most of Tel Aviv's residents were devoted Zionists motivated by a nationalist ideology.²¹ In the five years from its foundation to the outbreak of World War I, Tel Aviv developed rapidly and its population reached some 1,500, accounting for about 15 per cent of the total Jewish population of Jaffa, second only to Neve Shalom's 2,200 residents.²²

The founders envisioned Tel Aviv as a model of modern urbanism designed to serve as the prototype of Zionist urbanization in Palestine, the ancient Jewish homeland of the Land of Israel. In a national-cultural sense, the garden suburb was envisioned as a future Hebrew urban hub, meaning that the spoken language in its public sphere was to be Hebrew, as a symbol and means of promoting Jewish

¹⁸On the development of nineteenth-century Jaffa until the outbreak of World War I, see R. Kark, *Jaffa: A City in Evolution* (Jerusalem, 1990).

¹⁹Aleksandrowicz, 'Paper boundaries'.

²⁰G. Alroey, *Immigrants: Jewish Immigration to Palestine in the Early Twentieth Century* (Jerusalem, 2004), 191–3 [Hebrew].

²¹Alroey, *Immigrants*, 66; Y. Shavit and G. Biger, *The History of Tel Aviv*, vol. I (Tel Aviv, 2001), 64 [Hebrew].

²²Shavit and Biger, *History of Tel Aviv*, 53–64, 81–6.

national consciousness.²³ Although formally included within the bounds of Jaffa, Tel Aviv's self-imposed regulations formed an imagined boundary designed to preserve the unique character of the burgeoning Zionist urban entity that adopted a novel architectural and morphological language that contrasted with the crowded vernacular streets and mixed population of the port town.²⁴

Garden suburb or Jewish urban centre – debating the boundaries of Tel Aviv, 1919–21

Tel Aviv's ambition to become an independent urban entity had little chance of realization under the rule of the Ottomans, who were openly hostile to Zionism. New opportunities emerged following World War I, which had led to the establishment of a new political and economic regime in Palestine when the League of Nations declared British-controlled Palestine a Mandate territory in 1920.²⁵

World War I marked the beginning of the rise of Zionists to hegemony in the Jewish community in Palestine. Tel Aviv's local committee formed the wartime emergency epicentre of Jewish activity. Meir Dizengoff, one of the neighbourhood's founders who had served as the elected head of its local committee since 1911, rose to dominate the wartime General Jewish Committee that represented all the Jewish neighbourhoods of Jaffa, and later the entire Jewish community of Palestine, in negotiations with the Ottoman authorities.²⁶ To promote their national cause, Zionists sought to blur social and political differences in the pre-war Jewish community.²⁷ In the spatial context of Jaffa, this necessitated the incorporation of all Jewish neighbourhoods within the limits of the anticipated Zionist urban entity. Dizengoff considered Tel Aviv's wartime rise in status a golden opportunity to attain this objective. In July 1920, he appealed to Herbert Samuel, the first British high commissioner, to declare Tel Aviv and other Jewish neighbourhoods an autonomous borough within the municipal framework of Jaffa.²⁸

While the majority of Tel Aviv's residents supported Dizengoff's campaign to establish a separate Jewish urban entity,²⁹ a minority, which included the neighbourhood's wealthiest residents, opposed Dizengoff's initiative, preferring to retain Tel Aviv's status as the autonomous middle- and upper-class garden suburb of Jaffa, which was the seat of the Mandate government's regional administration and Palestine's main economic centre, where most of Tel Aviv's residents were

²³Y. Katz, 'Ideology and urban development: Zionism and the origins of Tel Aviv 1906–1914', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 12 (1986), 402–24.

²⁴Shavit and Biger, *History of Tel Aviv*, 77–80; T. Hatuka and L. Forsyth, 'Urban design in the context of globalization and nationalism: Rothschild boulevards, Tel Aviv', *Urban Design International*, 10 (2005), 76.

²⁵O. Aleksandrowicz, C. Yamu and A. van Nes, 'Spatio-syntactical analysis and historical spatial potentials: the case of Jaffa–Tel Aviv', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 49 (2019), 454.

²⁶A. Kidron, 'Constructing the boundaries of social consciousness under conditions of war: the urban Jewish society in Eretz Yisrael/Palestine during World War I', *Journal of Levantine Studies*, 7 (2017), 36–40; Y. Ben-Bassat and D. Halevy, 'A tale of two cities and one telegram: the Ottoman military regime and the population of Greater Syria during WWI', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 45 (2018), 215.

²⁷Kidron, 'Constructing the boundaries of social consciousness under conditions of war', 36.

²⁸'The high commissioner in Jaffa', *Do'ar Ha'Yom*, 20 Jul. 1920, 3.

²⁹M. Ben-Hillel Ha'Cohen, 'Our urban settlement in 1919–20', *Ha'aretz*, 12 Sep. 1920, 2; Goren, 'Tel Aviv and the question of separation from Jaffa', 474.

employed or maintained their business.³⁰ In view of the large number of Jewish immigrants expected to settle in the thriving port town, Dizengoff's opponents believed that by separating from Jaffa, an opportunity to form a Jewish majority in the port town's limits would be lost. They also were concerned that the Jewish municipality would substantially raise urban taxes following separation from Jaffa.³¹ Yet another source of concern was that the inclusion of all Jewish neighbourhoods would diminish Tel Aviv's unique modern, European socio-economic and cultural character. Considered most threatening was the densely populated neighbourhood of poor Yemenite Jews whose 'Oriental' lifestyle was considered anathema to that of Tel Aviv's residents.³²

These arguments were expressed at the general assembly of Tel Aviv³³ that took place on 2 January 1921. Some participants demanded that the township's anticipated boundaries should not cut through existing Jewish neighbourhoods, while others remained concerned by the annexation to Tel Aviv of 'problematic' (i.e., poor) Jewish neighbourhoods such as the Yemenite neighbourhood. The general assembly decided to elect a provisional committee of 15 members to study this question and other implications of the establishment of the township, and to proceed with the negotiations with the British Mandate government.³⁴

Several weeks later, in response to a demand by the Mandate government, Dizengoff presented a draft outlining Tel Aviv's future urban boundaries at a meeting of the provisional committee. He asserted that Tel Aviv should include almost all areas populated by Jews, with the exception of a section of the mixed seam area separating Neve Shalom and Manshiya. Dizengoff's draft also included areas considered essential for Tel Aviv's future expansion, such as the small and poor make-shift Arab neighbourhood of Kharet al-Tanaq ('tin shacks neighbourhood', in Arabic), abutting the Yemenite neighbourhood. Both neighbourhoods were apparently included to check the unplanned development of Jewish and Arab 'Oriental' neighbourhoods that otherwise would encircle Tel Aviv and choke its urban development. Another matter discussed at the meeting was the purchase of land for a planned modern business centre south of Tel Aviv to be included within the future urban bounds.³⁵

While the Mandate authorities were inclined to approve Dizengoff's draft of the prospective township's urban boundaries, several leaders and (some self-proclaimed) representatives of several Jewish neighbourhoods questioned the need to unite with Tel Aviv. Others supported unification only reluctantly and demanded the same degree of autonomy they had enjoyed under Jaffa's

³⁰Matters of Tel Aviv', *Doar Ha'yom*, 9 Sep. 1919, 3; 'Pros and cons for setting Tel Aviv a municipality', *Ha'aretz*, 1 Dec. 1920, 2; Goren, 'Relations between Tel Aviv and Jaffa', 2-3.

³¹'Tel Aviv - a municipality', *Ha'aretz*, 21 Nov. 1920, 2.

³²'The general assembly of Tel Aviv, a report', *Do'ar Ha'Yom*, 27 Jan. 1921, 4.

³³Members of the assembly were the founders of Achuzat Bayit Society that established Tel Aviv, adjoining owner-occupiers and some of the leaseholders of apartments in the neighbourhood, which elected the Tel Aviv Neighbourhood Committee; see 'The general assembly of Tel Aviv (a report)', *Doar Ha'Yom*, 19 Jan. 1921.

³⁴'The general assembly of Tel Aviv', *Ha'aretz*, 11 Jan. 1921.

³⁵Tel Aviv Municipal Historical Archive (TMHA), 1-283B, Protocol no. 7 of the Proceedings of Tel Aviv Municipal Committee, 1 Feb. 1921.

Ottoman municipality, which would effectively preserve rather than blur existing boundaries between social, economic and cultural differences in the Jewish community.³⁶

To promote the negotiations with the Mandate government over the formation of the township, the provisional committee of 15 was also required to decide on the timing and format of Tel Aviv's municipal council elections and the delineation of a final municipal boundary. Both issues were discussed at a special meeting of the provisional committee in April 1921, during Passover week vacation of the Jewish year of 5681 (1920/21). The committee decided that elections would take place only after the finalization of Tel Aviv's municipal by-laws, which could not be completed prior to the formal establishment of a township, and that meanwhile the committee would resume negotiations with the neighbourhoods on the terms of unification.³⁷

From the foundation of a township to boundary demarcation, May 1921 – May 1923

On 1 May 1921, growing Arab–Jewish tension culminated in a wave of violence that erupted in the seam area between Manshiya and Neve Shalom. British military units restored order after three days of rioting,³⁸ which caused over 5,000 Jewish residents to flee from Jaffa. Most of them found accommodation in temporary housing in Tel Aviv and nearby Jewish neighbourhoods.³⁹

The British high commissioner formally affirmed the establishment of Tel Aviv as a township on 11 May 1921. The provisional committee became the provisional township council, with powers to impose taxes, raise loans, enter into contracts, pass by-laws and to plan further urban development according to the newly enacted Town Planning Ordinance of Palestine 1921. The number of Jews residing in the township of Tel Aviv – whose final boundaries had yet to be settled – swelled to about 13,000 in 1922. Almost half were refugees from Jaffa and many others were Jewish immigrants, mainly from East and Central Europe, part of what Zionist historiography considers the Third Aliya (the third wave of immigration that followed the end of World War I and subsided in 1923). Many of the refugees and immigrants belonged to lower socio-economic strata and could not afford to purchase or build permanent houses. Instead, they settled in four tent and shack barracks located in and around Tel Aviv. The wealthier immigrants built their homes in Tel Aviv, including in the two newly established neighbourhoods of Neve Sha'anán on the south-east fringes of the built-up area of the township, and Nordia, located to its north. Jewish businessmen from Jaffa were among the founders of the township's new commercial centre established south of its built-up area.⁴⁰

³⁶TMHA, 1-283B, Protocol no. 9 of the Proceedings of Tel Aviv Municipal Committee, 12 Feb. 1921.

³⁷TMHA, 1-283B, Protocol no. 24 of the Proceedings of Tel Aviv Municipal Committee, 24 Apr. 1921.

³⁸Palestine, *Disturbances in May 1921. Reports of the Commission of Inquiry with Correspondence relating Thereto* (London, 1921), 17–60; J. Knight, 'Securing Zion? Policing in British Palestine, 1917–39', *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 18 (2011), 525.

³⁹Shavit and Biger, *History of Tel Aviv*, 93, 117–21.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 117–19, 159–63.

Swift population growth fuelled the need to identify vacant land for building additional new neighbourhoods. One option was the sparsely inhabited *mahlul*⁴¹ sand dunes to the north of Tel Aviv⁴² considered to be of little agricultural value owing to low fertility and irregular cultivation. Infuriated by the growth of Tel Aviv, nationalist Palestinian leaders incited Arabs from Jaffa and nearby villages to demand tenure by setting up shacks and tents and cultivating tracts of the *mahlul* land. In response, in early March 1921, Dizengoff had proposed to purchase the entire *mahlul* land from the Mandate government to prevent Arabs who sought to block the future growth of Tel Aviv from establishing tenure. In the meantime, he proposed to encourage Jews to cultivate tracts of the *mahlul* land, build shacks and erect tents and apply to the government for tenure.⁴³

Despite the growing tension between Arab–Palestinian and Jewish–Zionist communities, economic interests encouraged Assem al-Said, the mayor of Jaffa, and Dizengoff to restrain national fervour following the suppression of the riots. The two leaders embarked on a series of attempts at reconciliation in order to stabilize the relations between Arab and Jewish residents of Jaffa and Tel Aviv. Shortly after the formal approval of the establishment of Tel Aviv, they made considerable progress on demarcating the boundaries of the Jewish autonomous township. The line traversing mix-populated Manshiya, which Dizengoff had already proposed in February, formed the western boundary of the township. The road leading from Jaffa to Nablus was set as Tel Aviv’s provisional eastern boundary. Owing to the dispute over the *mahlul* land, they decided to postpone the demarcation of Tel Aviv’s northern boundary.⁴⁴ It is conceivable that both al-Said and Dizengoff considered the formal boundary traversing mix-populated Manshiya as of little practical consequence. Perhaps they hoped that Arab–Jewish reconciliation would reinstate Manshiya’s function as a transition zone of contact and exchange.⁴⁵ Furthermore, it seems that Jaffa’s Arab-dominated municipal council did not consider the delineation of Tel Aviv’s permanent northern, eastern and southern boundaries an urgent matter as the British authorities included the rural–urban fringe surrounding Tel Aviv within Jaffa’s town planning area.

Within the Jewish community, the outcome of the 1921 riots had effectively resolved the debate over the formation of the new township, and from that point, negotiations between the various Jewish groups concentrated on terms of unification.⁴⁶ The Jewish neighbourhoods of Jaffa had organized their own committees, grass root organizations that were not formally acknowledged by the British government or the Jaffa Municipality. Dizengoff and the members of the

⁴¹*Mahlul* was vacant land abandoned by original cultivators and confiscated by the government under the 1858 Ottoman Land Law (which was still in effect in 1921). See M. LeVine, ‘Conquest through town planning, the case of Tel Aviv 1921–48’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 27 (1998), 36–8.

⁴²Aerial photos taken by the Bavarian 304 squadron in late 1917 and early 1918 display the features of this area: FL. 304. 3. 22.11.17. Jaffa. H. 2500 BR. 25; FL. 304. 602. 6.3.18. Jaffa. H. 4500 Br. 25.

⁴³TMHA, 1-283B, Protocol no. 14 of the Proceedings of Tel Aviv Municipal Committee, 1 Mar. 1921.

⁴⁴Goren, ‘Relations between Tel Aviv and Jaffa’, 2–3; ‘To the history of the boundaries of Tel Aviv’, *Tel Aviv Municipal News*, 15 Nov. 1943, 16.

⁴⁵On such phantom-like boundaries in post-Ottoman cities, see Lafi and Riedler, ‘Administrative boundaries, communal segregation and factional territorialisation’, 600.

⁴⁶Shavit and Biger, *History of Tel Aviv*, 200–1.

provisional council preferred to incorporate the Jewish communities through mutual consent rather than forced inclusion based on government rulings, and to this end resumed negotiations with the self-proclaimed neighbourhood committees. Negotiations revolved around matters such as taxation, ownership of public assets and representation in the future elected municipal council of Tel Aviv.

The election of a permanent municipal council could not, however, take place before the Mandate government enacted a municipal election law.⁴⁷ In the interim, and as long as the matter of the municipal boundary was not settled, the provisional council decided against including neighbourhood representatives in its ranks. This formality did not appear to be of immediate concern to most representatives of the self-proclaimed neighbourhood committees, who seemed quite indifferent to their neighbourhoods' formal annexation to Tel Aviv. Their main interest was to ensure a reliable supply of municipal services and utilities such as water and garbage collection, and, indeed, municipal services in the neighbourhoods improved. However, to handle the consequent increase in Tel Aviv's deficit, the provisional council demanded that the neighbourhoods would pay Tel Aviv Township the same taxes that they had paid to Jaffa Municipality until May 1921.⁴⁸

Other matters also required urgent resolution. In a meeting that took place less than a week after the suppression of the 1921 riots, the provisional council decided to allocate a public tract of land, originally designated for a municipal park, for temporary accommodation for refugees from Jaffa. As it was too small to house all the needy, the provisional council also decided to build temporary housing on *mahlul* land north of Tel Aviv, which would at the same time support Tel Aviv's demand to include this area within its bounds. The provisional council assumed responsibility for supplying water to temporary refugee neighbourhoods, inspecting sanitation matters to prevent the spread of disease and plagues, and curbing the scope of further temporary housing construction that threatened to impede future development based on modern planning principles. The council also decided to permit the return of Arab merchants from Jaffa to the township's market. While Arab residential areas were excluded as a matter of policy, Arab economic activity was allowed to breach the proposed urban boundary in order to provide for the township's residents basic needs.⁴⁹

In the summer of 1921, three months after the formal British declaration of Tel Aviv as an autonomous township, Dizengoff demanded that the neighbourhood leaders should decide whether they wished formally to become part of Tel Aviv and pay taxes to the new township, or rejoin Jaffa. At the meeting convened for this purpose on 21 August 1921, the neighbourhood representatives demanded representation on the provisional council. Although Dizengoff vetoed the demand on legal grounds, a compromise was reached to define working procedures between neighbourhood representatives and the council.⁵⁰

⁴⁷A. Mebashan, 'Tel Aviv', *Ha'aretz*, 6 Oct. 1921, 3.

⁴⁸TMHA, 1-283B, Protocol no. 27 of the Proceedings of Tel Aviv Municipal Committee, 21 May 1921.

⁴⁹TMHA, 1-283B, Protocol no. 25 of the Proceedings of Tel Aviv Municipal Committee, 8 May 1921; Protocol no. 26 of the Proceedings of Tel Aviv Municipal Committee, 10 May 1921.

⁵⁰TMHA, 1-283B, Protocol no. 43 of the Proceedings of Tel Aviv Municipal Committee, 16 Aug. 1921.

The provisional council reiterated its demand that the neighbourhoods' residents would pay the same taxes they used to pay to the Jaffa Municipality. However, since many neighbourhood residents had evaded municipal taxes or paid partial taxes to the Jaffa Municipality, whose tax collection and service delivery systems were inferior to that of Tel Aviv, joining Tel Aviv effectively implied higher taxes. Despite the improvement in services and utilities, many neighbourhoods' leaders and residents resented the increased tax burden.⁵¹

The Mandate government obliged Tel Aviv to supply utilities and municipal services to the neighbourhoods, and its expenses continued to grow. Frustrated, on 5 September 1921, Dizengoff recommended that Tel Aviv should separate from the other Jewish neighbourhoods, which would revert to the jurisdiction of Jaffa. He proposed that Tel Aviv should develop northward, to the *mahlul* land, and that the Jewish neighbourhoods should be able to join Tel Aviv in the future once they were prepared to relinquish their autonomy and unconditionally become an integral part of the township, i.e., pay full taxes. Most provisional council members supported Dizengoff's proposal, and one suggested the incorporation of Neve Tzedek alone, the only neighbourhood whose residents followed the modernist standards of Tel Aviv. Opposition members asserted that Dizengoff's proposal might align with modern urban development principles, but undermined the national goal of forming a Jewish-Zionist urban centre. Moreover, they argued that an inclusive Jewish urban entity was essential for maintaining security in case of the eruption of further riots. Despite these objections, Dizengoff's policy was approved by the provisional council, which presented a *de facto* ultimatum to the neighbourhoods either to join on Tel Aviv's terms or to return to Jaffa's jurisdiction.⁵²

While Dizengoff and his supporters seemed to favour modernity over the national Jewish interest, their position may have been the result of tactical political manoeuvring rather than strategic policy. Despite threats to exclude the neighbourhoods from the bounds of Tel Aviv, no practical measures were taken in this direction in the autumn of 1921 despite the absence of any agreement between the council and the neighbourhood committees.⁵³ This state of affairs also persisted in early 1922, resulting in a reduction in the provision of municipal services in the annexed neighbourhoods, such as street cleaning, gardening and paving of roads and sidewalks, which undermined Tel Aviv's image as a model modern urban Jewish-Zionist entity.⁵⁴

In the meantime, Tel Aviv had been developing to the north, to the south and to the south-east. New residential neighbourhoods and a commercial and manufacturing centre were established on vacant or sparsely inhabited lands purchased by Jewish entrepreneurs.⁵⁵ Although the evolving commercial centre and residential neighbourhoods were not yet formally part of Tel Aviv, in order to enjoy the provision of municipal amenities and services they were expected to conform

⁵¹On the issue of the Tel Aviv Municipality', *Do'ar Hayom*, 13 Sep. 1921, 3.

⁵²TMHA, 1-283B, Protocol no. 46 of the Proceedings of Tel Aviv Municipal Committee, 5 Sep. 1921.

⁵³Letters from Jaffa: in the Tel Aviv Municipality', *Ha'aretz*, 10 Nov. 1921, 4.

⁵⁴A. Sherman, 'The sanitary situation in Tel Aviv', *Hapo'el Hatza'ir*, 12 Jan. 1922, 18.

⁵⁵'The development of Tel Aviv', *Do'ar Hayom*, 21 Aug. 1921, 3; Hatuka and Forsyth, 'Urban design in the context of glocalization and nationalism', 75–6.

unconditionally to Tel Aviv's neighbourhood regulations, which had been converted into municipal by-laws in accordance with the newly formed British Mandate government's legislative system.⁵⁶

Another source of disagreement between the provisional council and the neighbourhood committees was the issue of the franchise. Although the population of Tel Aviv and the Jewish neighbourhoods grew steadily, according to the township's by-laws only owner-occupiers and others who had been paying full taxes were entitled to vote, which excluded many tenants and residents of tents and shacks who paid some taxes. Owner-occupiers, who dominated the provisional council, sought to retain their political power, even at the expense of supporting Tel Aviv's development as a modern Jewish-Zionist urban entity in which all residents were expected to participate in all aspects of urban life.⁵⁷

A general assembly of Tel Aviv's original residents that convened in early April 1922 revealed that owner-occupiers specifically wished to protect their interests in the public property of the original Tel Aviv neighbourhood. At stake was the ownership of certain water supply installations and other devices that had been purchased by the Tel Aviv neighbourhood committee, designated for transfer to the new township. Dizengoff suggested that other neighbourhoods, once incorporated, would make a one-time payment to gain co-ownership of municipal public property.⁵⁸ One neighbourhood representative who attended the assembly objected to the one-time payment for public property. He enumerated Tel Aviv's prospective gains from unification: the neighbourhoods formed a defensive buffer around Tel Aviv, as proved during the 1921 riots, and the 3,500 residents of the neighbourhoods would also constitute a considerable source of income, notwithstanding the amount of tax they would pay. Dizengoff's opponents assumed that residents of other neighbourhoods would refuse to pay, just as they wished to avoid paying full taxes in total.⁵⁹

The deadlock in the unification negotiations resulted in a rather perplexing situation. Following the 1921 declaration of the township, the Mandate government regarded all Jewish neighbourhoods of Jaffa as included within the bounds of Tel Aviv, and as a result, Tel Aviv was considered responsible for the supply of utilities and services, maintaining law and order, and urban planning regulations in all the areas within its jurisdiction. Tel Aviv had no choice but to resume negotiations with the neighbourhoods, which now focused on debates over the township structure, either as a single urban entity or a federation of neighbourhoods as Dizengoff suggested, which would allow each neighbourhood to join on its own terms.⁶⁰ The spring and summer of 1922 passed without any noteworthy progress in the negotiations between the neighbourhoods and Tel Aviv.⁶¹

Futile negotiations and irregular provision of municipal utilities and services encouraged residents of the neighbourhoods to form a united neighbourhood

⁵⁶'In the Tel Aviv Municipality', *Do'ar Hayom*, 4 Sep. 1921, 3; 'In the Tel Aviv Municipality', *Ha'aretz*, 12 Sep. 1921, 4.

⁵⁷'Tel Aviv and its future', *Ha'aretz*, 25 Mar. 1922, 3.

⁵⁸'Tel Aviv general assembly (report from our special correspondent)', *Do'ar Ha'yom*, 6 Apr. 1922, 2.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰'Letters from Jaffa: the annexation of the neighbourhoods', *Ha'aretz*, 6 May 1922, 3.

⁶¹'In the municipality of Tel Aviv', *Ha'aretz*, 4 Sep. 1922, 3.

committee to demand representation on Tel Aviv's provisional council, and reiterate their demand to reduce what they considered a heavy municipal tax burden. Rejecting Dizengoff's position, they demanded the unconditional unification of all neighbourhoods into a single urban entity and called for general elections for a permanent municipal council. Only a minority among them supported rejoining Jaffa whose municipal taxes were considerably lower. The provisional council rebuffed the neighbourhoods' demands and asserted that elections would take place once the Mandate government enacted the proper legislation.⁶²

Dizengoff described the demands made by the neighbourhoods as an insurgent revolt against the provisional council, intended to obstruct the establishment of the township of Tel Aviv and implementation of its modern norms. Despite the apparently united front presented by representatives of neighbourhoods, Dizengoff used divide-and-rule tactics to argue that the neighbourhoods were motivated by particular interests. He revealed that the provisional council had, in fact, been negotiating separately with each since the spring of 1922, and that an agreement had been reached with Neve Tzedek and the commercial centre, while Neve Sha'anán demanded that its autonomy should be preserved.⁶³ The Yemenite neighbourhood was interested in becoming part of Tel Aviv but demanded a full tax exemption as its residents were not interested in policing or sanitation services.⁶⁴

The united neighbourhood committee responded to Dizengoff in a letter that listed their demands in detail: participation in the determination of municipal by-laws, annual budgets and taxes; determining the procedures for the municipal council elections, and the relationship between the mayor and heads of neighbourhood committees; and a population census. Furthermore, the united neighbourhood committee threatened to take steps to define by-laws independently for Tel Aviv if their demands were rejected. The letter was practically an ultimatum to the provisional council to refrain from any unilateral action that would affect the municipal entity.⁶⁵ The ultimatum was effective. On 2 January 1923, members of the provisional council and the united neighbourhoods committee elected a joint committee with an equal number of members of both sides to formulate a draft legal framework for Tel Aviv Township.⁶⁶

Finally, in March 1923, after weeks of discussions and deliberations among the members of the joint committee, the matters of unification and municipal council elections, as well as financial matters such as the public property of Tel Aviv, appeared to be settled.⁶⁷ At the last moment, however, a new problem emerged when observant Jewish residents, mainly from Neve Shalom, demanded inclusion of a by-law on the observance of the Jewish rules of the Sabbath, which forbade

⁶²Letters from Jaffa: the neighbourhoods and Tel Aviv Municipality', *Ha'aretz*, 6 Dec. 1922; 'Tel Aviv and its daughters', *Do'ar Ha'yom*, 11 Dec. 1922.

⁶³M. Dizengoff, 'On the "revolution" in Tel Aviv', *Ha'aretz*, 18 Dec. 1922.

⁶⁴Z. Gluska, 'Free stage: the Tel Aviv Municipality's attitude to Jaffa's Yemenites', *Do'ar Ha'yom*, 16 Dec. 1922.

⁶⁵On the elections to the Tel Aviv Municipality and its regulations', *Ha'aretz*, 1 Jan. 1923.

⁶⁶A mutual assembly of neighbourhoods committees and Tel Aviv committee', *Ha'aretz*, 3 Jan. 1923, 3; 'Unification of neighborhoods', *Do'ar Ha'yom*, 3 Jan. 1923, 2.

⁶⁷H. Bugrashov, 'To the working plan of the Tel Aviv Municipality', *Ha'aretz*, 9 Mar. 1923, 3; M. Glikson, 'Matters of Tel Aviv', *Ha'aretz*, 7 May 1923, 3.

working and the opening of stores of all kinds. Neve Shalom's representative on the joint committee threatened to secede from Tel Aviv unless the municipality forced the closure of all stores in the town on the Sabbath. The joint committee voted against the demand and representatives of Neve Shalom and the Yemenite neighbourhood left the meeting and declared their intention to separate from Tel Aviv and refrain from paying municipal taxes. Several weeks later, Neve Sha'an'an appealed to the Jaffa Municipality to rejoin, intending to put pressure to bear on Tel Aviv to lower taxes.⁶⁸ Once again, unification seemed to be elusive.

On 11 April 1923, in a meeting with the joint council, so-called 'notables' from the neighbourhoods proposed inclusion of the observance of the Sabbath as a requirement that would apply in Tel Aviv's public sphere. Dizengoff replied that as a civil rather than a religious authority, the township could not accept such a demand. He mentioned that the council had already accepted that Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, would be the formal rest day within the municipal bounds. To avoid further deliberations on the matter, he suggested deferring this issue to the future elected permanent municipal council. The representative of Neve Shalom, however, insisted that Sabbath observance was a precondition for unification. Dizengoff replied that neighbourhood committees were no longer relevant after they had accepted the terms of unification, and that the Sabbath matter would be decided following the municipal elections, scheduled to take place on 16 May 1923.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, observant Jews referred the issue to the *Ashkenazi* chief rabbi for the Land of Israel, Abraham Isaac Ha'cohen Kook.⁷⁰ Trusted by both observant and secular members of the Jewish community in British Mandate Palestine, the chief rabbi's ruling could not be easily disregarded. Rabbi Kook met with Dizengoff and proposed a compromise in which the municipality would declare that the religious rules of the Sabbath would be included in a by-law designed to protect observance of the holy day in the town's public spaces. Despite Dizengoff's support, the majority in the council rejected Rabbi Kook's compromise.⁷¹

In response, on 28 April, the self-proclaimed committee of Neve Tzedek sent a letter of protest to the council. In the past, Neve Tzedek had seemed to be the most supportive of unification, yet this time the neighbourhood threatened to boycott the forthcoming elections to the municipal council. Subsequently, the council decided to reschedule the elections in the hope that it would settle its differences with the neighbourhoods in the meantime.⁷² Unification seemed to be in jeopardy yet again.

⁶⁸In the Tel Aviv Municipality', *Ha'aretz*, 14 Mar. 1923, 4; 'Neve Sha'an'an and Tel Aviv', *Do'ar Ha'yom*, 29 Mar. 1923, 3.

⁶⁹TMHA, 206, 10-3, Meeting of the Provisional Municipal Council with the representatives of the neighbourhoods, 11 Apr. 1923; 'In the Tel Aviv Municipality', *Ha'aretz*, 15 Apr. 1923, 3. Elections took place eventually on 24 Jan. 1924; see Shavit and Biger, *History of Tel Aviv*, 166-9.

⁷⁰Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook (1865-1935) was the first *Ashkenazi* chief rabbi of the Land of Israel. His unique approach to Judaism endeared him to both the Old Pre-Zionist Jewish community and settlers of the Zionist venture. See: <https://korenpub.com/collections/rabbi-abraham-isaac-hakohen-kook>, accessed 15 Aug. 2020.

⁷¹TMHA, 206, 10-3, Protocol of the Meeting of the Provisional Municipal Council, 23 Apr. 1923.

⁷²TMHA, 206, 10-3, Protocol of the Meeting of the Provisional Municipal Council, 29 Apr. 1923.

On 11 May 1923, the British Mandate government, exasperated by the protracted disagreements in the Jewish community, formally announced the boundaries of Tel Aviv.⁷³ The Mandate government's announcement apparently encouraged the parties to settle their differences to prevent further British intervention in the matters of the autonomous township. On 5 June, Dizengoff announced that compromises and agreements had been reached: in the matter of taxation, all taxes payable by residents of the neighbourhoods would be equal to those payable by the residents of Tel Aviv. Neighbourhoods would not be granted self-autonomy, and town planning by-laws would apply to the entire urban area. As for the Sabbath day, Rabbi Kook's compromise was accepted, effectively subjugating civil authority to religious ruling.⁷⁴

On 11 June 1923, in a ceremony held in the office of the Jaffa district commissioner, representatives of the municipalities of Jaffa and Tel Aviv signed the agreement that defined the township's boundaries. The municipal area of Tel Aviv included the vast majority of the built-up area of Tel Aviv and the adjacent Jewish neighbourhoods. Excluded were certain sections of the seam area separating Neve Shalom from Manshiya, although 60 Arab families living in that area were included within the limits of the Jewish township.⁷⁵ In the south-east, residents of the neighbourhood of Neve Sha'anani objected to the exclusion of most of its land from Tel Aviv's limits.⁷⁶

This did not seem to worry Dizengoff, as a decree issued by Jaffa's assistant district commissioner guaranteed the revision of the boundary agreement after five years.⁷⁷ He presumably anticipated the future annexation of that area and others into which Jewish neighbourhoods would develop. In effect, further expansion of the bounds and built-up area of Tel Aviv in the 1920s and 1930s would become the outcome of business initiatives of private entrepreneurs, rather than 'conquest by urban planning', as asserted by Mark LeVine.⁷⁸

Concluding remarks

On 11 May 1923, the British Mandate government decided, with the approval of the Arab-dominated municipality of Jaffa, to set the formal boundaries of the township of Tel Aviv. Yet, the unification of Jewish neighbourhoods into a township still needed the approval of their residents. A compromise accepted in early June consented to most of the financial and political demands made by the Tel Aviv provisional council, while in the matter of the Sabbath day the provisional council succumbed to what was practically an ultimatum presented by residents and leaders of Jaffa's Jewish neighbourhoods.

As a primary aspect of Jewish identity, the matter of the Sabbath in the public sphere reigned supreme in the negotiations. Shabbat – the Jewish day of rest –

⁷³'Boundaries of Tel Aviv', *Ha'aretz*, 27 May 1923.

⁷⁴TMHA, 206, 10-3, Protocol of the Meeting of the Provisional Municipal Council, 5 Jun. 1923.

⁷⁵TMHA, 206, 10-3, Protocol of the Meeting of the Provisional Municipal Council, 11 Feb. 1924. On the history of this area, see Aleksandrowicz, 'Paper boundaries'.

⁷⁶TMHA, 206, 10-3, Protocol of the Meeting of the Provisional Municipal Council, 2 Aug. 1923.

⁷⁷Shchori, *From a Dream to a Metropolis*, 213–14.

⁷⁸For LeVine's view, see 'Conquest through town planning', 36–52.

was a biblical command that became a defining feature of Jewish identity transcending its original religious meaning also to become a national tradition acknowledged by secular Jews. Leaders and residents of the Jewish neighbourhoods subscribed to Ahad Ha'Am's⁷⁹ renowned observation: 'more than Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews'. In this sense, the character of the Shabbat in the public sphere was a social-cultural boundary that separated Jews and non-Jews.⁸⁰ Though not necessarily committed to the vision of a modern Hebrew city, following the mounting tensions between Jews and Arabs in Jaffa, most residents of the Jewish neighbourhoods of Jaffa supported administrative separation from Jaffa. But it was the compromise achieved over the preservation of the Sabbath day in Tel Aviv's public sphere that afforded the drawing of the imagined social-cultural boundary separating it from Jaffa. Its political manifestation was the formal boundary that the British had approved on 11 May 1923.

This boundary clearly differentiated between a Jewish Tel Aviv and a mostly Arab Jaffa. However, the inclusion of all Jewish neighbourhoods in Tel Aviv's municipal bounds did not obliterate all former social-cultural differences. In fact, it entrenched the differences between a relatively affluent Zionist-modernist north and the poorer socially and culturally variegated south of Tel Aviv that had become more sharply defined in the British Mandate period. Later, Tel Aviv developed northward through the establishment of modern residential neighbourhoods, while the old neighbourhoods on Tel Aviv's south-west flank, which included the Manshiya/Neve Shalom transition zone, became the nucleus of the 'backward' mixed-use zone of manufacturing, commerce and residence. The fissure between these two sections of Tel Aviv would prevail for many years to come.

⁷⁹Ahad Ha'Am (Hebrew for one of the people) was the pen name of Asher Zvi Hirsch Ginsberg (1856–1927), a Hebrew essayist, one of the foremost pre-state Zionist thinkers, known as the founder of cultural Zionism that promoted a secular vision of the founding of a Jewish spiritual centre in the Land of Israel. From 1922 and until his death, he lived in Tel Aviv.

⁸⁰*Ha'Shiloach*, 3 (1898), 560–1.