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Forms, Ideals, and Methods. Bauhaus Transfers to Mandatory Palestine

Introduction

A “Bauhaus style” would be a setback to academic stagnation, into a state of inertia hostile to life, the combatting of which the Bauhaus was once founded. May the Bauhaus be saved from this death. Walter Gropius, 1930

The construction activities of the Jewish community in the British Mandate of Palestine represents a prominent paradigm for the spread of European avant-garde architecture. In the 1930s, there is likely no comparable example for the interaction of a similar variety of influences in such a confined space. The reception of architectural modernism – referred to as “Neues Bauen” in Germany – occurred in the context of a broad cultural transfer process, which had already begun in the wake of the waves of immigration (“Aliyot”) from Europe at the end of the nineteenth century and had a formative effect within the emancipating Jewish community in Palestine (“Yishuv”). Among the growing number of immigrants who turned their backs on Europe with the rise of fascism and National Socialism were renowned intellectuals, artists, and architects. They brought the knowledge and experience they had acquired in their European homelands. In the opposite direction too, young people left to gain professional knowledge, which was beneficial in their homeland.¹

Despite the fact that, in the case of Palestine, the broad transfer processes were fueled by a number of sources and therefore represent the plurality of European architectural modernism, the Bauhaus is assigned outstanding importance. As the “first school of this movement,”² it undoubtedly holds a special place in the spread of “Neues Bauen”: With the 1923 Weimar exhibition *International Architecture*, which entered discourse as the first Bauhaus Book, Walter Gropius presented the avant-garde’s claim to internationality. In addition, the multinational make-up of the teacher and student body reflects the charisma of the school as well as the cross-border network Gropius

¹ On the transfer process of modernity using the example of the British Mandate of Palestine, see. Heinze-Greenberg 2011; Dogramaci 2019; Stabenow/Schüler 2019.

² Kállai 1930: 135.

was able to establish. As a result, and also as a reaction to external difficulties, the Bauhaus became a “phenomenon of reception” a few years after its founding—and was criticized by Hannes Meyer for being an institute “whose performance was repeatedly exceeded by its reputation and with which an unprecedented advertising campaign was run.”³ Critical observers like Ernst Kállai polemicized against a popularized “Bauhaus style” that spread despite the often-cited assertions of the founding director.⁴

3 Meyer 1930: 170.

4 Cf. Ernst Kállai 1930; also Gropius 1931: 11: “Das Ziel des Bauhauses ist eben kein ‘Stil’, kein System oder Dogma, kein Rezept und keine Mode! Es wird lebendig sein, solange es nicht an der Form hängt, sondern hinter der wandelbaren Form das Fluidum des Lebens selbst sucht!”

Since then, the term “Bauhaus style” has triumphed in an unprecedented way and gained even more momentum in the anniversary year 2019: As a result of its inflationary use in all possible media, it subsumes generic terms such as International Style, Functionalism, Constructivism, New Objectivity, and Neues Bauen. With regard to Mandatory Palestine and Tel Aviv as the gravitational center of Jewish construction activity, Ita Heinze-Greenberg has presented a well-informed study on the establishment of “Bauhaus style” in Hebrew usage and public awareness. From the beginnings of the semantic expansion of the term in the 1990s until its independence as a brand name and generic term, it charts a development that has completely uncoupled itself from the historical institution.⁵ Today in Tel Aviv, the term “Bauhaus” appears to have been lost to the cultural, tourism, and real estate industries as a marketing label. At the same time, the reduction of complex historical and architectural developments to an attractive style term should be viewed as a challenge to counteract the accompanying trivialization with a differentiated and multi-faceted image of Modernism in the Yishuv.

5 Cf. Heinze-Greenberg 2019; Heinze-Greenberg 2006.

However, 2019 does not seem to be the appropriate time for this. Numerous events, exhibitions, and publications are dedicated to the so-called “Bauhaus legacy” in Tel Aviv and expand the horizon of observation to buildings, urban spaces, and protagonists, who demonstrably did not—or did not want to—refer to the Bauhaus at all. On a more academic level, efforts to achieve a well-founded and critical appreciation have been undertaken: In May 2019, the *Martin Buber Society of Fellows* organized an international conference entitled *Lived, Contested, and Adapted Modernities. Re-evaluating Bauhaus 100 Years After*, seeking a multifaceted view of the establishment of architectural modernism within the Yishuv. The Azrieli Architectural Archive is preparing an exhibition for the Tel Aviv Museum of Art on the (Jewish) Bauhaus students, who were active as architects in the territory of present-day Israel. The exhibition offers the opportunity to look at not only the concrete contents and paths of education, but also the extensive architectural work beyond the metropolis of Tel Aviv. The Israel Museum in Jerusalem presents an exhibition *Bauhaus: our play, our party, our work* which addresses especially young visitors. It focusses on Johannes Itten’s pedagogy and his passion for exploration, understanding, and discovery. Modernist architecture in Haifa will be the subject of the event *In the Shadow of the Bauhaus* in December 2019, organized by the German and Israeli chapters of DOCOMOMO and ICOMOS in cooperation with the Haifa and Tel Aviv Municipality. However, the life and work of those former Bauhaus students who acted beyond architecture and planning remains largely absent.

As a key figure in the transfer of Bauhaus concepts in the field of architecture, Arie Sharon and his work determine the discourse. His prominent position is undisputed and as chief planner of the State of Israel, he is probably the most influential of all the Bauhaus graduates. Sharon's radius of action includes the most diverse range of construction activities, planning contexts, and scales.⁶ The experiences at the Dessau Bauhaus and its parallelization with his own background as a founding member of the kibbutz Gan Shmuel are combined in the title of his autobiography *Kibbutz+Bauhaus. An Architect's Way in a New Land*. The impetus for this publication came from Hans Maria Wingler, accompanying an exhibition of the same name by the Bauhaus Archive in Berlin.⁷ Long before the Israeli public's interest in the Bauhaus was awakened, Sharon and Wingler established a topos around which research into the reception of the Bauhaus in Palestine and Israel has since centered.⁸

From a research perspective, neither acknowledging a "Bauhaus style" as an aesthetic category nor denying the existence of connections between the Bauhaus and architectural modernist approaches in Mandatory Palestine are appropriate. In order to develop this field of tension productively, it is helpful to focus on the processes underlying the transfer of Bauhaus ideas, theories, and concepts.

As the starting context for cultural transfer⁹, the Bauhaus, with its fourteen years of existence in three locations under the rectorate of three avant-garde architects, has been comprehensively described. Many studies on the curriculum are available, and also on the life and work of various masters and numerous students. The target context, the Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine, is unique and particularly favorable: With the introduction of the Aliyot in the 1880s, the Yishuv grew from 25,000 to around 450,000 members in 1939. Fleeing violence and persecution in their Eastern and Central European homelands, the identity and expertise of the immigrants was the catalyst for a diverse cultural transfer from Europe to Palestine. At the same time, each Aliyah changes the culture of reception and encourages disposition to receive progressive European ideas and concepts.

The agents of cultural transfer—in the present context, 25 former Bauhaus students who have settled temporarily or permanently in Palestine—operated in a particularly open-minded reception context. Some of them were already familiar with the conditions in the country as they had once come from there to Germany and to the Bauhaus for education purposes. Others left their European homelands, fleeing fascism and National Socialism and settled in "Eretz Yisra'el"¹⁰ to work in the areas of photography and design, graphics and textiles, as well as sculpture and planning. With regard to architecture, the focus is on eight students who were either employed as architects, namely Leo Baumann, Chanan Frenkel, Edgar Hed (Hecht), and Selman Selmanagić, or worked as private architects like Shlomo Bernstein, Shmuel Mestechkin, Arie Sharon, and Munio Gitai (Weinraub).¹¹ As agents of a Bauhaus architectural transfer, they will be at the center of this study.

6 Cf. Efrat 2010: 183; Neumann 2018.

7 Sharon 1976. On the relationship between Hans Maria Wingler and Arie Sharon: Schüler, Ronny (2016): Sharon + Wingler. On the Establishment of a German-Israeli Bauhaus Reception. Lecture at the Young Bauhaus Researchers' Colloquium at the XIII International Bauhaus Colloquium in Weimar on October 27, 2016.

8 Cf. e.g.: Aharonov 1978; Fiedler 1995, Efrat 2010; Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau 2012.

9 For key terms of cultural transfer, see Dogramaci 2008: 20–23.

10 The Jewish population referred to the region either as "Palestine" in short, or using the biblical term "Eretz Yisra'el," "the Land of Israel," or in short, "the Land."

11 Cf. Levin 1984: 9, 30–35; Herbert/Heinze-Greenberg 1992: 161; Warhaftig 2007: 122–155; Schmitt/Kern 2011.

Their work is discussed in the context of three domains, which are defined by different clients and represent different social groups. This perspective is based on the assumption that it was not only the executing architects and planners who were involved in the processes of architectural transfer, but also the clients and building contractors, users, and recipients. Thus, the question of transfer also aims at the societal contexts in which Bauhaus concepts were received: What meanings were attributed to the imported architectural forms? Which social groups recognized themselves in it, and what ideological reference points did the new architecture offer? As the client, the urban bourgeoisie in the *White City* of Tel Aviv is first taken into account, followed by the labor movement represented by the Histadrut, the General Association of Workers, and finally, the kibbutz movement as a political, cultural, and social phenomenon specific to the history of the State of Israel.

With regard to the import and export mechanisms of cultural transfer, different points of view arise. The students from Palestine were confronted with the question of how the Bauhaus experience could advance their work in their homeland. The students emigrating from Europe were faced with the question of how to make use of their knowledge and skills in exile. In turn, the clients looked at the potentials of the imported expertise for their architecture and planning tasks.

Planning and Building for the Urban Bourgeoisie— The “White City”

Upon sight of a house, you can say: Your architect left Stuttgart (or Breslau) in 1926. He stayed with the dernier cri of the day before yesterday. He never suspected that Palestine was not Silesia and that there had been progress in certain architectural problems since 1926. Julius Posener, 1935

The discussions around the so-called Bauhaus style—sometimes referred to as the “Bauhaus vernacular”¹²—are intensifying in Tel Aviv. As the first independent Jewish city, it has particular significance for the identity of the Yishuv. Its origins date back to the garden suburb Ahuzat Bayit (literally “homestead”), which was founded in 1909 by 60 Jewish merchant families from Jaffa, and was given the name Tel Aviv (literally “Hill of Spring”) the following year. The city grew rapidly to the rhythm of the Aliyot; new neighborhoods such as Nahalat Binyamin (1910) or Ahad Ha’am Street (1913) were founded and successfully incorporated. In 1921, the British Mandate allowed the development of independent administrative and planning structures, and, by 1939, Tel Aviv had approximately 150,000 inhabitants. The rapid growth of the city occurred on the basis of various plans that were committed to the principles of the Garden City Movement, of which the most formative was the expansion plan conceived by Scottish urban planner Patrick Geddes in 1925. To this day, Tel Aviv owes its characteristic texture of free-standing apartment buildings on plots the size of half a Dunam (500m²) to Geddes’s plan.¹³

12 Cf. Herbert 1995.

13 For history of town planning in Tel Aviv, see: Goldman 1994; Metzger-Szmuk 2004: 29–44.

The search for an adequate Jewish or Hebrew architectural style accompanied the management of the extensive building volume: Individual iconic buildings such as the Herzliya Gymnasium (1909–1911) by Joseph Barsky, are of programmatic importance, predominantly employing late historicist and oriental motifs. This phase is summarized as the “Eclectic Period” because of its complex and contradictory nature. By 1930, only a few residential buildings, in the style of European architectural modernism had been constructed; however, this trend intensified exponentially in the following years. The process was catalyzed by the work of numerous graduates of European schools, the open-minded attitudes of the city engineer Ya’acov (Shiffman) Ben Sira, and the radiance of the 1934 Levant Fair.¹⁴ A significant proportion of these buildings are concentrated in today’s city center, which was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2003 as the *White City of Tel Aviv—The Modern Movement*. The designated conservation area is divided into a core area around Rothschild Boulevard in the east, Zina-Dizengoff Square and Meir-Dizengoff Street in the north, and the Bialik neighborhood in the west of the city center. Together with the existing buildings in the much larger marginal area, it comprises a total of around 140 hectares with 3,700 buildings (fig. 1).

Regardless of the officially supported advertisement as the “Bauhaus Capital of the World,”¹⁵ there is wide consensus in the research community on the relative marginality of a Bauhaus reception in Tel Aviv. Under the headline *Bauhaus buildings without Bauhaus*, Zvi Efrat draws parallels between the “White Period” of the 1930s and the search for a Jewish national style during the “Eclectic Period” of the 1910s and 20s. In both cases, the architects had relatively arbitrarily made use of an architectural vocabulary, which at first drew on the various historicist styles and finally on the repertoire of the different European avant-gardes. In terms of historiography, architectural modernism and Zionism have thus reached a congruence characterized by “revolution and youthfulness, progress and efficiency, zeitgeist and cosmopolitanism.”¹⁶ This idea was radicalized by Sharon Rotbard, who has dedicated himself equally enduringly and extensively to the “historiographical campaign,” which led to the establishment of the “Bauhaus style” in the general consciousness and to the declaration as UNESCO World Heritage. According to Rotbard, architectural historical research has not been able to establish links between the Bauhaus and modern architecture in Tel Aviv to this day.¹⁷

Since the founding of Ahuzat Bayit in 1909, Tel Aviv’s urban and architectural development has been based on civic and private initiatives. The design of residential buildings, which form the core of the *White City* building stock, charts the change in its residents’ self-conception: Over the course of the 1920s, the urban bourgeoisie had strongly grown as a result of the Fourth Aliyah (1924–1929)—the so-called “middle-class” or “homeowner” Aliyah. The architecture of this period remained bound to the tastes of the respective clients and reflected their geographical origin from Eastern and Central Europe, as well as the self-confident adherence to European lifestyle and architecture.¹⁸ The shift to architectural modernism in the 1930s followed politi-

14 Davidi 2019.



Fig.1 The UNESCO World Heritage area of the *White City* (white) concentrates along Rothschild Boulevard (a), Habima Square (b), Zina Dizengoff Square (c), and Meir-Dizengoff Street (d) as well as around Bialik Square (e). It is embedded in the “margined UNESCO area” (light gray) with a total number of 3,700 buildings. Around 880 of these buildings are considered to reflect the International Style (black).

15 Ashkenazy 1998.

16 Efrat 2011: 9.

17 Rotbard, 2015: 11–24, esp. 17.

18 Meyer-Maril 1994.

19 For "Negation of Diaspora" cf. Nitzan-Shiftan 1996: 154–155.

20 Cf. Nitzan-Shiftan 1996: 153.

21 Cf. Metzger-Szmuk 2004: 127–131, 298–301, 318–319; Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen 1994: 244; Levin 1984: 30.



Fig. 2 Shlomo Bernstein, Efroni House, 95 Ahad Ha'am Street, Tel Aviv 1937 (photographer: unknown).

22 Cf. Metzger-Szmuk 2004: 129–131.

23 Cf. Warhaftig 2007: 140–143; Metzger-Szmuk 2004: 128; Schmitt/Kern 2011: 66; Wingler 2005.

cal and ideological, as well as economic, motivations: Bourgeois Jewish life in Tel Aviv was politically determined by a new identity after the election of an autonomous city council for the first time in 1923. Ideologically, modernism is understood as refusing history and tradition, thus showing a way out of the cultural imprinting in the diaspora.¹⁹ Economically, pragmatic functionalism offered urban building contractors promising possibilities to adequately address the general housing shortage resulting from the Aliyot. The young architects, who entered the local market at the same time, consistently propagated the principles of an undogmatic modernism that reflected their different European educational backgrounds.²⁰

Against this backdrop, it is by no means a subtlety to take a differentiated view of the specific building tasks and the corresponding clients and building contractors and to distinguish the characteristic building stock of the *White City*—the bourgeois, three-story apartment building as a commercial investment object—from the social and cultural projects that were constructed, for example, in the area of the labor movement.

Considering the contribution of former Bauhaus students as mediators of the architectural transfer to the stock of bourgeois residential buildings in the White City, the achievement is comparatively small: Only nine buildings of Bauhaus students Arie Sharon, Shlomo Bernstein, and Shmuel Mestechkin are mentioned in the relevant literature, of which no more than six still exist and are recognizable in their original form.²¹

One of them is the Efroni House (fig. 2), built by Shlomo Bernstein in 1937 in Ahad Ha'am Street. The smoothly plastered, cubic building has a commercial unit on the ground floor, five residential units on three floors, and a roof garden. The street façade is asymmetrically structured by the vertical window of the staircase. The apartments in the left part of the building each have a balcony, while the others have a loggia. The deck-rail-like balcony railings on the side façades show similarities to the Prellerhaus in Dessau, whereas the loggias have concrete balustrades with ventilation openings, referencing the Maschrabiyya motif. Conversely, in the design of the roof garden, references to Le Corbusier's projects are visible.²²

The example of Shlomo Bernstein and the Efroni House points toward the difficulty of making a clear reference to the Bauhaus through design elements. Bernstein (1907–1969) had, on the recommendation of his teacher Alexander Baerwald, only completed the winter semester 1931/32 in Dessau after his studies at the Haifa Technion before he embarked on an internship with Le Corbusier in Paris. Between 1933 and 1939 in Tel Aviv, he carried out only a few commissions as a private architect before joining the Tel Aviv Municipality. Such a cross-border education path can be traced for many Jewish architects at that time, albeit with individual differences. This therefore indicates that it is difficult to establish a clear and dogmatic reference to a single educational step or career move.²³

The Kiryati House (fig. 3) was built by Shmuel Mestechkin for his brother Mordechai Kiryati in 1938 in Ruppin Street. It is presented as a group of three wings, where the central part of the building is set back and separated from the side wings by two vertically glazed staircases. The building is visually united by a pergola that connects the two stairwells and defines the roof garden. The façade is structured by the horizontal lines of the balconies and loggias, which are allocated to each of the twelve residential units. In this project, there are visible references to Gropius's contribution to Berlin-Siemensstadt, although the floor plans of the Kiryati House do not exhibit any comparable optimization and instead refer to the bourgeois European forms of living.²⁴

Shmuel Mestechkin (1908–2004) went to the Bauhaus in 1931 and studied with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Ludwig Hilberseimer until October 1932. Upon his return, he first worked for Joseph Neufeld before establishing his own office in Tel Aviv in 1937. In line with his socialist convictions, his contribution to bourgeois housing in Tel Aviv remained marginal; beginning in 1943, he dedicated himself to planning and building for the kibbutz movement.²⁵

Both examples demonstrate how the iconography of the Bauhaus merged with many European sources of inspiration to form an “International Style” as it was formalized by Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock in 1932. The internationality of modern architecture in Tel Aviv is reflected in the multinational background of the immigrant architects, but also in the diverse educational and career paths to and across Europe. Focusing on the specific societal context of a new bourgeoisie in the city of Tel Aviv, it can be said that the transfer of Bauhaus ideas and concepts appeared only through formal references. For private clients and building contractors, the social agenda of the Bauhaus—the emphasis on the collective, or the socio-utopian implications of Gropius, Meyer, or Hilberseimer—did not offer any reference points. The reflection of central themes, such as typification, rationalization, or prefabrication, stood in contrast to the technical possibilities and economic interests of the local construction industries. Potential for identification was offered instead by Gropius's bourgeois villas from the time of his rectorates in Weimar and Dessau, for example the Auerbach House (1924) and the Zuckerkandl House (1928) in Jena, the Lewin House (1928) in Berlin, and the Masters' Houses in Dessau (1926). They demonstrate contemporary forms of representation of a sophisticated, enlightened, and cosmopolitan bourgeoisie. When transforming a bourgeois villa into a middle-class apartment building, various architecture elements from the Bauhaus field were used, primarily ship-style railings or vertical windows to illuminate stairwells, both of which were used in villas and housing developments alike. None of them can be exclusively linked to the Bauhaus, and consequently, the local stock of architecture elements also drew on other sources, out of which Le Corbusier's or Erich Mendelsohn's works were given a special position.²⁶ Critical observers, like Julius Posener and Leo Adler, noted as early in the 1930s that the architectural vocabulary had been adapted, varied, and newly combined, but hardly further developed.²⁷ Consequently, the eclectic

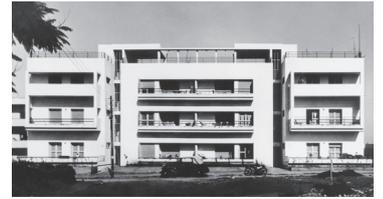


Fig. 3 Shmuel Mestechkin, Kiryati House, 12–14 Ruppin Street, Tel Aviv 1938 (photographer: unknown).

²⁴ Cf. Levin 1984: 30–35; Metzger-Szmuk 2004: 299–301.

²⁵ Cf. Metzger-Szmuk 2004: 298; Schmitt/Kern 2011: 67; Ingersoll 1994: 31.

²⁶ Cf. Levin 1984: 30–35.

²⁷ Posener, Julius: Letter to Le Corbusier, November 3, 1935. In: Schirren/Claus 1999: 65–66; Adler 1934: 11.



Fig. 4 Engel House was the first building in Tel Aviv to be erected on pilotis. Ze'ev Rechter, Engel House, 84 Rothschild Boulevard, Tel Aviv 1934.

28 Nerdinger 1994: 12.



Fig. 5 Genia Averbuch created the iconic centre of Tel Aviv's *White City* with the design of a uniform façade layout. Genia Averbuch, Façade Design for Zina Dizengoff Square, Tel Aviv 1934.

29 Sharon 1976: 48, Metzger-Szmuk 2004: 308.

practice of the 1910s and 1920s simply continued—albeit with other means. It is therefore not surprising that none of the former Bauhaus students' contributions gained iconic status, like for example Ze'ev Rechter's Engel House (1934, fig. 4) or Genia Averbuch's design for Zina-Dizengoff Square (1934, fig. 5). In the reduction of architectural transfer to purely visual effects, the reference to the innovative power and design consistency of the Bauhaus in Tel Aviv "is least comprehensible."²⁸

Planning and Building for the Labor Movement— The Me'onot Ovdim

As a result of [Meyer's] thinking, we tended to aim in the new "Bauabteilung" (Building Department) at the solution of social and human architectural problems, instead of concentration on aesthetics and forms in design. Arieh Sharon, 1976

While Tel Aviv's bourgeois residential architecture incorporated merely formal references, a small number of ambitious projects were developed at the same time that, in addition to aesthetics, also conceptually referred to the Bauhaus and its architectural education by emphasizing social and ideological agendas. In the 1930s, several cooperative housing estates were built in Tel Aviv—the Me'onot Ovdim. They were commissioned by the Histadrut, the General Association of Workers in the Land of Israel, and are thus part of a particular sector of local construction that requires a separate examination.

The Histadrut was founded in 1920 in Haifa by David Ben Gurion, who would later become Israel's first president. It is based on the ideals of a socialist community that arrived in Palestine with the Third Aliyah (1919–1923), together with immigrants of predominantly Russian origin. At the time of the British Mandate, the Histadrut not only represented workers' rights as a professional trade union but was also the largest employer in all sectors of the economy. Its construction and planning department played a decisive role in the establishment of infrastructure projects, but also in fighting the housing shortages. With every wave of immigration, the deficiency intensified and led to unacceptable conditions. At the end of the 1920s, the Center for Workers' House Estates ("Hevrat Shikun") was founded with the aim of countering land speculation, improving housing conditions, and confronting the urban bourgeoisie with efforts towards a new, egalitarian society on a cooperative basis.

Cooperative housing estates were revolutionary in 1930s Tel Aviv, but with the support of trade union officials, who were familiar with comparable projects in Sweden, Germany, and Austria, the future residents could be convinced of the benefits, such as lower construction costs, increased privacy, and improved design appropriate for the local climate, as well as the benefits of communal gardens and facilities.²⁹ In line with the European model, the Me'onot Ovdim were organized as social cooperatives and consisted of shops, kindergartens, communal kitchens, and laundry facilities, as well as cultural

and education institutions. The housing estates were based on the principles of visual separation from the surrounding urban architecture and from bourgeois life, and on minimalist design and consistent living standards. The architects were chosen via open competitions and on the basis of qualitative and economic criteria; the work was completed in cooperation with residents' councils and under the supervision of the Center for Workers' Housing Estates.³⁰

Arieh Sharon held a prominent position in the planning and construction of the Me'ot Ovdim in Tel Aviv. He was involved in almost all projects of this kind and planned either independently or in close cooperation with his colleagues Dov Kuczinsky and Yonatan Shlaien, as well as Joseph Neufeld, Israel Dicker, and Carl Rubin.

With the Me'ot Ovdim IV, V, VI ("Hod"), built between 1934 and 1936 along Frishman Street (fig. 6), Sharon created the most frequently published ensemble of its kind and therefore an icon of social housing in Tel Aviv.³¹ He designed three uniform blocks, each of which contoured a central, lower inner courtyard. In contrast to the underlying Garden City ideal, a number of plots of land were combined to form a larger plot thus providing the required space. The white-plastered, three-story structures were rhythmized by staircases, each of which marked a recess in the façade to adapt to the course of the street. Each staircase provided access to six two- to four-bedroom apartments, the floorplans of which reference Gropius's projects in Karlsruhe-Dammerstock and Berlin-Siemensstadt.

With Arieh Sharon's prominent position, the Bauhaus building department established in 1927 under the leadership of Hannes Meyer comes into focus. Sharon (1900–1984) came to Dessau in late summer 1926 and was one of the first members of the architecture class.³² He admired the Dessau school building as the embodiment of Gropius's architectural approach. In his Bauhaus education, Sharon recognized a pedagogically guided liberation from the conventional attitudes and ideas in the fields of art, product design, and architecture.³³ He strongly identified with Meyer, who was the most prominent and radical representative of a "social modernity."³⁴

As a member of the socialist-Zionist youth movement HaShomer HaTza'ir, Sharon shared not only Meyer's political stance, but also his understanding of the role of design in the societal context as articulated in Meyer's poem entitled *bauhaus and society*: "building and designing are one and they are a societal event. as a 'school of design', the bauhaus is no artistic phenomenon, but rather a social phenomenon."³⁵ Meyer applied his enthusiasm for "co-op" to the Bauhaus education, while noticeably turning to Marxism in discussions with his students and fellow intellectuals.³⁶ Under Meyer's guidance, Sharon became familiar with objectified design, which puts the user rather than the producing artist at the center and uses empirical research methods from the social sciences.³⁷ Each concrete planning and construction activity was carried out based on a systematic, interdisciplinary analysis, which integrates factors such as materials, ecology, and infrastructure, as well as psychological and subjective aspects. To this end, experts were invited to the Bauhaus to give lectures on psychology and

30 Metzger-Szmuk 2004: 322; Efrat 2019: 476.



Fig. 6 Arieh Sharon, Me'ot Ovdim V, 33–35 Frishman Street, Tel Aviv 1934–1936.

31 Cf. among many others: Habinyan. A Magazine of Architecture and Town-Planning, vol. 2 (1937), no. 1: 1–4 and 8–10; Posener 1937: 17; Engineers', Architects' and Surveyors' Union (ed.), 20 Years of Building. Workers' Settlements, Housing and Public Institutions, Tel Aviv 1940: 16; Sharon 1976: 54–57.

32 Cf. Sharon 1976: 28–31; Metzger-Szmuk 2004: 318; Schmitt/Kern: 67.

33 Sharon 1976: 28.

34 Levin 1984: 31. For Sharon's identification with Meyer's pedagogical approach, cf. also: Nitzan-Shifan 1996: 153; Efrat 2019.

35 Meyer 1929.

36 See Oswald 2019a: 12; Hoffman 2019: 126–127.

37 For Hannes Meyer's pedagogical concept, see: Kiese 2019: 37–42. For Hannes Meyer's influence on Sharon's planning approach, see: Bittner/Möller 2011: 27–28.

philosophy, ethics, ecology, and urban planning. Particularly noteworthy is Otto Neurath of the Wiener Kreis, whose Method of Pictorial Statistics (“Isotype”) would become the visual basis for the first studies in the building department.

The grounding of the planning process in sociological and economical studies, combined with Meyer’s belief in the architect’s role as an implementer of social reform, equipped Sharon not only with pathos, but also with arguments: With simple and functional solutions that prioritized economic planning over aesthetics, Sharon succeeded in the competitions for the Me’not Ovdim. Meyer’s break with the past and its unconditional functionalism—“Building is a technical, not aesthetic, process, and the practical function of a house contradicts again and again the artistic composition. Ideally and elementarily designed, *our living space will become a living machine*”³⁸—henceforth determined Sharon’s work. While studying in Dessau, Sharon produced the *Design for the House of the Workers’ Council in Jerusalem*, which was published in the *bauhaus* magazine³⁹ alongside Meyer’s article *bauhaus and society*. This work indicates that Sharon had not lost sight of his geographical and political homeland.

Sharon returned to Tel Aviv in 1931 after graduating from the Bauhaus and gaining practical experience as construction supervisor for the ADGB Trade Union School (Bundesschule des Allgemeinen Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes). The work on the different Me’not Ovdim provided the opportunity to make use of his skills in service at the Histadrut, as well as to resume and develop his connections with the political leaders of the labor movement in Mandatory Palestine. In addition to the Me’not Ovdim, he designed the Histadrut pavilions at the Levant Fairs of 1932 and 1934. As the “in-house architect,” he was commissioned to design Beit Brenner—the Histadrut headquarters in Tel Aviv (1934–1935). Sharon utilized his experience as a construction supervisor at the ADGB Trade Union School in Bernau also in the design of the dining and lecture rooms (figs. 7, 8).⁴⁰

The Me’not Ovdim are considered to be pioneering projects in social and rationalized housing construction in Tel Aviv and, according to Michael Levin, represent “Sharon’s crowning architectural achievement of the thirties.”⁴¹ In the *White City* of Tel Aviv, they are the only buildings that suitably demonstrate a transfer of Bauhaus ideas and concepts: Arieh Sharon owes his career as an architect to the education he received in the building department and his subsequent work as a construction supervisor in Meyer’s Berlin office. With the Me’not Ovdim, he not only translated design ideas to the local context, but also contributed to establishing social, rationalized housing construction on a cooperative basis. In writing, too, Sharon devoted himself to the dissemination of ideas and concepts in European architectural modernism and added the analytically founded development of small apartments to contemporary architectural discourse, with indirect references to the writings of Meyer and Hilberseimer.⁴²

Considering the quantitatively limited input of former Bauhaus students to the building stock in Tel Aviv, the Me’not Ovdim are regarded as having

38 Meyer 1926: 222.

39 Sharon, Arieh (1929): “entwurf für das haus des arbeiterrates in jerusalem,” *bauhaus* – vierteljahr-zeitschrift für gestaltung, vol. 3, no. 1: 22–23.



Fig. 7 Sharon’s design for the dining room and the lecture hall of Beit Brenner show references to Hannes Meyer’s and Hans Wittwer’s ADGB Trade Union School in Bernau (1928–1930). Arieh Sharon, Beit Brenner, 5 Brenner Street, Tel Aviv 1934–1935, dining room (photographer: Yitzhak Kalter).



Fig. 8 Arieh Sharon, Beit Brenner, 5 Brenner Street, Tel Aviv 1934–1935, lecture hall (photographer: unknown).

40 Posener 1937: 24; Nitzan-Shifan 1996: 155–156.

41 Levin 1984: 31.

42 Cf. Sharon 1935: 7; Sharon 1937; Efrat 2019: 477–478.

an enormous influence.⁴³ After all, with no more than twenty housing estates and a total of only 393 residential units, their contribution to the overall construction volume in the 1930s remained largely negligible. In the area of the *White City*, another four corresponding complexes were erected (figs. 9, 10), which, however, were not occupied by the urban proletariat, but rather functionaries and intellectuals, artists, architects, and actors.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, with the Me'onot Ovdim, Arie Sharon presents his own interpretation of the Bauhaus legacy, which, according to Zvi Efrat, juxtaposes the many petty bourgeoisie individual projects with the cooperative residential buildings and thus presents a firm counterproposal for the organization of social space.⁴⁵ Alona Nitzan-Shiftan argues that these projects have popularized the Bauhaus in that they have established an active consensus between the Bauhaus as a “leading architectural trend” and a “national ideology,” which is essentially rooted in *Labour Zionism*.⁴⁶

Planning and Building for the Kibbutz Movement

In some ways, life at the Bauhaus reminded me of the kibbutz, where the youngsters tried to get rid of conventional ties and to create a new productive style of living, parallel with the emergence of modern production methods in agriculture. Arie Sharon, 1976

The planning and building for the kibbutz movement represents a unique phenomenon worldwide as it is inseparably linked to the constitution and emancipation of the Jewish community in Palestine. The transfer processes between the Bauhaus and the design of these socio-utopian collective settlements are judged very differently. Freddy Kahana, himself a kibbutznik who has worked as an architect in kibbutz planning for decades, describes the influence of the Bauhaus as marginal and highlights that—with the exception of Mestechkin—the contribution of the former Bauhaus students is comparatively small. According to Kahana, architecture and spatial planning were primarily initiated by the Zionist institutions and their architects, such as Richard Kauffmann and Leopold Krakauer, without reference to the Bauhaus.⁴⁷ Conversely, the critic Ram Ahronove notes a congruence between the principles of the Bauhaus and the kibbutz movement during Meyer’s rectorate,⁴⁸ while the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation states that the ideals of the kibbutz movement and the Bauhaus make a unique synthesis in the architectural work of former Bauhaus students Shmuel Mestechkin, Arie Sharon, and Munio Gitai (Weinraub).⁴⁹

The kibbutz (“gathering, clustering, commune”; plural: kibbutzim) is inextricably linked with the history of the State of Israel as a political, cultural, and social phenomenon and has represented a reference point for Israeli identity for decades. In 1909, Degania was the first of these collective communes to be founded by Jewish pioneers from Eastern Europe on the southern shore of the Sea of Galilee. According to the Zionist ideal, a new Jewish society should form through agricultural activity, grassroots democratic struc-

43 Cf. Golan Yaron 2019: 51.

44 Meyer-Maril 1995: 93.



Fig. 9 Arie Sharon with Yonatan Shlain and Dov Kuczinsky, Me'onot Ovdim I, II, III, 63–65, 60–62, 64 Mazeh Street, Tel Aviv 1934–1936 (photographer: unknown).



Fig. 10 Arie Sharon with Joseph Neufeld, Israel Dicker, and Carl Rubin, Me'onot Ovdim VII, 64 Ben Gurion Boulevard, Tel Aviv 1935 (photographer: unknown).

45 Efrat 2010: 187.

46 Nitzan-Shiftan 1996: 149.

47 Cf. Kahana 2015: 154.

48 Ahronove 1978: 207.

49 Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau 2012.

tures, and the renunciation of private property, clearly distinguishing itself from life in the diaspora as a people of traders and scholars. With pioneering spirit and through physical labor, the “New Jew” was to become closely bound with the Land of Israel and make the lived utopia the starting point of a regeneration of society as a whole – based on Marx’s postulate: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.”

Until the establishment of the state in 1948, approximately 200 kibbutzim were founded, the number of members grew to 50,000 and eventually comprised 7.8% of the then Jewish population.⁵⁰ While early kibbutzim had approximately twenty members, with the growth of individual groups up to 1,000 kibbutzniks, the focus shifted to spatial and architectural planning. The pioneer of the planning and building for the kibbutzim was Richard Kauffmann. As the chief planner of the Palestine Land Development Company (PLDC), he designed more than 100 rural settlements on behalf of the Zionist World Organization. He based his work on the Garden City concept and modified it according to the geographical and ideological characteristics of the respective kibbutz.

The succeeding generation of architects was faced with challenges that resulted from the consolidation and the steady growth of the kibbutzim. The former Bauhaus students Arie Sharon, Munio Gitai (Weinraub), and Shmuel Mestechkin are prominent among them. Their contribution to the kibbutzim building stock documents the broad architectural transfer between the Bauhaus and the kibbutz movement, since all three spent essential parts of their theoretical and practical training at the Dessau Bauhaus and in the private offices of their teachers (figs. 11, 12, 13). It is not only the large number of realized projects—far beyond what was built by the former Bauhaus students within the *White City* of Tel Aviv—but above all the ideological and methodological references that determine a particularly multifaceted and sustainable transfer

50 Wolffsohn 2007: 353.



Fig. 11 The dining hall in kibbutz Givat HaShlosha is without doubt one of Arie Sharon’s outstanding buildings for the kibbutz movement. Arie Sharon, dining hall, kibbutz Givat HaShlosha, 1936–1939, view from the southwest (photographer: Rudi Weissenstein), 1941.

Fig. 12 Munio Gitai (Weinraub) built the elegant dining hall in kibbutz Kfar Mazaryk, which reflects his architectural training in Dessau, as well as his work for Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s private office. Munio Gitai (Weinraub), dining hall, kibbutz Kfar Mazaryk, 1958–1963.



Fig. 13 Shmuel Mestechkin states that he realized all the design principles learned at the Bauhaus in the Beit Berl convalescent home for kibbutz Na’an: “Simplicity and care in proportion and in forms of expression.” Shmuel Mestechkin, Beit Berl (Katznelson) convalescent home, kibbutz Na’an, 1943–1945.



between the Bauhaus teaching and the planning and building for the kibbutz movement. Meyer's architecture teaching and its ideological and methodological foundation offered highly promising starting points for the specific requirements of planning and building in the constantly growing kibbutzim, at a time in which the tried and tested models, in Sharon's words, reached their limits:

These economic, social, and ideological developments naturally affected the physical layout and the building character of the kibbutz. Architecture is, in a sense, the mirror of society, but it should not be only a reflective, passive mirror, but also an active, guiding force, directing future development of the community. This is easier said than done. One of the difficulties was the complete lack of any planning tradition in the kibbutz or the example of a collective community in other countries.⁵¹

According to Sharon, planning does not have the sole purpose of representing the social constitution of the respective kibbutz, but also of actively shaping it and educating the members on collective life. Meyer's pedagogy is applied, for instance, in analytical drawings, diagrams, and schemata, which Sharon produced in connection with planning tasks for the kibbutz movement. He analyzed, for example, the positioning of different functions and their relationships to each other within the kibbutz, considering various parameters such as the relationship between built and open areas, the provision of privacy within residential zones, the optimal ventilation of buildings, and the allotment of collectively used areas (fig. 14). A comparable analysis drawing presents centralized and decentralized arrangements of dining rooms (fig. 15).⁵² Such diagrams show not only the analytical approach to concrete planning tasks, but also the demand to rationally justify design decisions and make them transparent to the kibbutz community.

Mestechkin's work focused significantly more on kibbutz planning than Sharon's. He, too, recognized the need to develop new models that would go beyond Kauffmann's approach and meet the needs of the large multipurpose and multigenerational kibbutz.⁵³ Mestechkin had studied with Mies van der Rohe and Hilberseimer. The latter started teaching at the Bauhaus in 1929 as Hans Wittwer's successor and led the architecture class until 1933. He also had a socialist orientation and a radically objective understanding of architecture: The central questions of density, development, privacy, sunlight, or ventilation were investigated by Hilberseimer with regard to their three-dimensional character and fundamental, generalizable regularity. While Meyer developed his architecture from the concrete conditions of the site, Hilberseimer showed little interest in investigating local conditions via urban planning, landscape, or sociological studies; his completely decontextualized works are mainly of a typological nature and therefore precede the actual architectural creation.⁵⁴ For kibbutz planning, such considerations form an ideal basis, as architecture only emerges as the result of a collective participatory process.

51 Sharon 1976: 62.

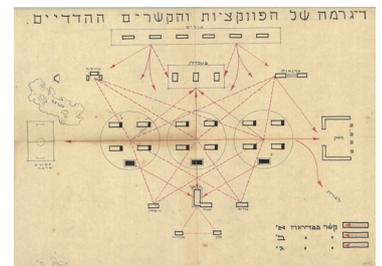


Fig. 14 Arie Sharon, Diagrammatic Study of Functions and Interrelations in a Kibbutz, 1940s

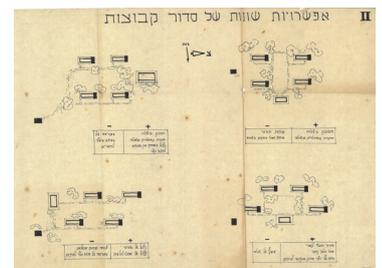


Fig. 15 Arie Sharon, Diagrammatic Study of Dining Hall Arrangements in a Kibbutz, 1940s

52 Cf. among others: Neumann 2018: 232–235.

53 Cf. Kahana 2015: 52; Bittner/Möller 2011: 27–28.

54 For Hilberseimer and his teaching at the Bauhaus cf. Oswald 2019b.

When the Technical Department of the movement HaKibbutz Ha'Artzi was set up in 1943, Shmuel Mestechkin was promoted to lead architect and henceforth focused his attention on developing projects based on a deep understanding of the particular requirements, functions, and resources of the kibbutz. Functional modernism, in combination with the ideological ethos he had learned at the Bauhaus in Dessau, corresponded with the general understanding of kibbutz planning as a way to a new socialist world.⁵⁵ Mestechkin dedicated himself to the question of how the social organization of the kibbutzim could be depicted and translated into physical relationships via architecture and spatial planning.⁵⁶ Along with Shmuel (Milek) Bickels, chief architect of the movement HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, he is one of the most influential kibbutz planners of the second generation. Even before his appointment, Mestechkin formulated fundamental considerations on the role of planning for the kibbutzim in contrast to capitalist-individualistic planning and highlighted the relevance of a rational approach that takes into account the requirements of collective life:

The social foundations of the kibbutz mean it is obligatory for construction to be an integral part that corresponds to the way of life and the human relations within it from both the social and the economic points of view. Contrary to current construction in the capitalist regime, which is directed primarily at the increasing of profits and is oriented to the pampered and individualistic taste of the possessors of means, construction in the kibbutz has to express in its design the requirements of people living a collective life and to address those needs in a rational manner, taking into account current [...] technical and material means available to the kibbutz.⁵⁷

55 Cf. Kahana 2015: 115.

56 Cf. Bittner/Möller 2011: 27.

57 Mestechkin 1936: 133.

Fig. 16 Shmuel Mestechkin, General diagrammatic plan for a kibbutz of the movement HaKibbutz HaArtzi



Along similar lines to Hilberseimer’s work, Mestechkin’s writings and graphic studies on kibbutz planning have a typological and schematic character, in which the laws of organization take the place of the architectural object, taking into account the specific requirements, functions, and resources of kibbutz life (figs. 16, 17). It was only the communal buildings, for example dining halls and cultural centers, that were given a special design for their role within the community, which above all led to the construction of iconic buildings in the period after the founding of the state, in which the ideology and the pathos of the kibbutzim were condensed.

The transfer of ideas between the Bauhaus and the planning and building for the kibbutz movement takes place on various levels. Freddy Kahana rightly points out that in particular the work of Richard Kauffmann is fundamental and significant, and for its part, free of any reference to the Bauhaus.⁵⁸ It formed the starting point for and link to all subsequent planning. Nonetheless, transmission processes can be proven, supported by a “moment of real overlap between kibbutz and Bauhaus principles,”⁵⁹ as Ram Ahronove states for Meyer’s period of influence. Dessau appeared to the members of socialist and Zionist youth movements as an adequate place of education, including the study of Meyer’s or Hilberseimer’s ideas. The ideal of collective work and life, as well as the rejection of a bourgeois, individualistic culture, acted as a conceptual framework. Furthermore, the introduction of analytical Marxist approaches to architecture education and the propagation of an uncompromising functionalism promoted a user-oriented understanding of architecture that was rooted in the needs of the community. Sharon, and especially Mestechkin, brought Meyer’s and Hilberseimer’s planning methods into the local discourse and thus continuously advanced approaches to kibbutz design. Eventually, the ideal of collective architectural and spatial planning—as embodied in the Bauhaus building department—found its completion in the formation of “planning communes” inside the kibbutz movements’ Technical Departments: This unique organizational form relied on specialized kibbutzniks who were sent abroad by their home kibbutz. The entire range of architecture and planning tasks was based on the professional expertise and direct experience of kibbutz members, which led to a uniquely integrated and participatory planning processes, including research, assessment, and application.⁶⁰ Thus, the special conditions and requirements of the kibbutzim provided ideal conditions for the application of Meyer’s concept of building as “social, technical, economic, and physical organization”⁶¹ not only to all functional and life areas of a community striving to be as self-sufficient as possible, but also to all phases of the human life cycle.

Conclusion

Confronting these three domains, which are defined by different clients and represent different social groups, demonstrates that various reception modes and transfer processes with respect to the Bauhaus can be distinguished in the Yishuv’s construction activities. The former Bauhaus students have, without

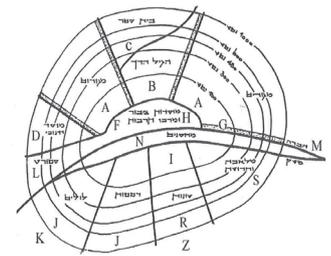


Fig. 17 Shmuel Mestechkin, Schematic Rendering of a Kibbutz’s Radial Growth.

58 Cf. Kahana 2015: 154.

59 Ahronove 1978: 207.

60 On the history of the kibbutz movements’ Technical Departments, see: Kahana 2015: 47–61, 113–136.

61 Meyer 1928: 13.

doubt, left their mark on the short history of Israeli architecture and the local discourse. Further, individual projects of prominent Bauhaus teachers can be identified as role models, which is reflected in various formal references—a popularized “Bauhaus style” or “Bauhaus vernacular” is not warranted on this basis. Conversely, the different societal groups of the Yishuv encounter the Bauhaus students and their technical, planning, and artistic know-how with specific expectations.

The private and bourgeois clients in Tel Aviv appeared open to the creative possibilities of architectural modernism after the formal experiments of the “Eclectic Period” in the 1920s. This not only allowed references to the artistic and intellectual climate in the home countries of numerous migrants, but also, as a result of its lack of historical ties, was suitable to represent a new, emancipated Jewish identity in contrast to the (architectural) history of the Diaspora. As the cipher of an enlightened cosmopolitan bourgeoisie, the iconography of the Bauhaus feeds the evolving International Style—in addition to many other sources of inspiration: The eclectic practice of the 1910s and 1920s merely continues in the adaptation, variation, and recombination of imported architectural vocabulary. In light of the few buildings realized by the former Bauhaus students Shlomo Bernstein, Shmuel Mestechkin, or Arie Sharon, the disproportionality between the massive building stock of the *White City* and the narrowing of the discourse on the Bauhaus as a primary source of architectural transfer remains questionable.

The labor movement, represented by the General Association of Workers, *Histadrut*, offered ideological points of reference beyond the formal ones and therefore greater development opportunities for a social agenda that was relevant for the work of the Bauhaus and decisive under Meyer as an architecture teacher and director. In the cooperative workers’ housing estates, the Me’ot Ovdim, these vital ideas grew stronger. A project of similar consistency can only be identified in the Balcony Access Houses in the Dessau-Törten Housing Estate: Collective design work and optimized floor plans for small apartments, functional equipment, and rationalized construction methods. The construction of social and cooperative housing, however, is central to the Neues Bauen in general—also far beyond the impact radius of the Bauhaus, which can hardly compete with, for example, the achievements of Ernst May or Bruno Taut. As a result of his radicalism and uncompromising nature, Hannes Meyer nevertheless holds a prominent position, and, in the work of his influential student Arie Sharon, the reference to the Bauhaus becomes tangible in the Me’ot Ovdim.

As lived utopias of a socialist and grassroots, democratically organized community, the kibbutzim represented a particular field of tasks and experiments: The “New Jew” demanded a functionally designed living space and user-oriented architecture that served not only to represent the existing social constitution of the kibbutz community, but also played an active role in socialization in terms of this community ideal. In the 1930s and 1940s, the projects in the kibbutzim focused above all on the questions of general planning in the face

of constant growth and permanently changing economic, social, and ideological conditions. An analytical, functional approach to planning that is rooted in Marxism, as advocated by Meyer and introduced by Sharon and Mestechkin, was successful in and capable of integrating the dialogue with the kibbutzniks. Formal references and ideological points of contact combined with the use of specific methodologies were completed in the formation of the “planning communes” within the Technical Departments.

The pluralistic and emancipating Jewish community in the British Mandate area of the 1930s presents itself as a wide experimental field in which ideas, theories, and concepts could be tested. The modes of reception are selective, and the underlying transfer processes differ according to the specific client and social group. They demonstrate the diversity of the reference points offered by the Bauhaus in its own heterogeneity and plurality. At the same time, hardly any of these ideas, theories, and concepts refer to the Bauhaus exclusively, rather to a cross-border discourse and a European network in which the changing directors positioned themselves. However, the political optimism of the immediate postwar period and the exaggerated belief in the social power of art and design formed a conceptual framework. It is this atmosphere of awakening that connects the Yishuv of the 1930s with the European avant-garde of the 1920s—and therefore creates the conditions for an unprecedented transfer of culture in which the Bauhaus itself becomes a phenomenon of reception.

(Deutsche Fassung unter cloud-cuckoo.net abrufbar.)

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Figure

Fig. 1 Ronny Schüler.

Figs. 2, 4, 5 Courtesy of Nitza Metzger-Szmuk.

Fig. 3 Courtesy of Ada Karmi-Melamede.

Fig. 6 Barkai, Sam/Posener, Julius (1937): “Architecture en Palestine”, *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, vol. 8, no. 7: 17.

Figs. 7, 11 Azrieli Architectural Archive, Yael Aloni Collection.

Figs. 8, 9, 10 Yael Aloni Collection, The Sharon Digital Archive, ariehsharon.org.

Fig. 12 Credit: Courtesy of Oded Rozenkier.

Figs. 13, 16 Courtesy of the HaShomer HaTza’ir Archives, Yad Ya’ari.

Figs. 14, 15 Azrieli Architectural Archive, Arie Sharon Collection.

Fig. 17 Chyutin, Michael/Chayutin, Bracha (2016): Architecture and Utopia. The Israeli Experiment. London/New York: Ashgate: 106.

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