Israel: *An Uncommon Guide*

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by Joan Comay

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To Michael

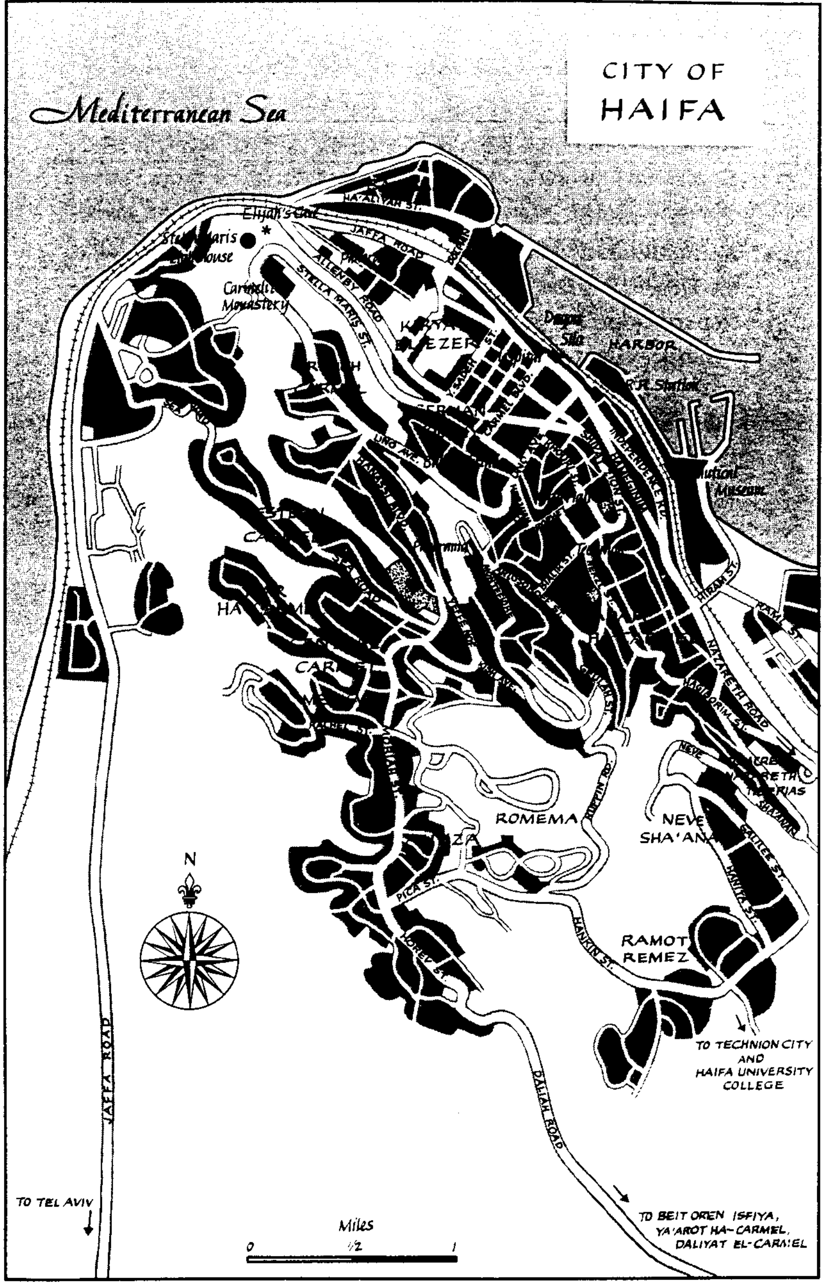
1,200 ocean-going vessels, carrying more than half of the goods entering or leaving Israel and more than 230,000 passengers.

Haifa's most important business is ships, and its most poignant moments in the struggle for independence were connected with ships of a special kind—the small and shabby vessels that tried to bring Jewish refugees to the forbidden shores of the Promised Land. But most of them were boarded from British naval vessels when they reached territorial waters and were towed into Haifa harbor, where their passengers were disembarked and dragged straight onto waiting prison ships with deck areas caged in by wire, in which they were shipped out again to the detention camps in Cyprus—or, in the case of the *Exodus*, all the way back to Germany, a story that made front-page news all over the world.

Haifa never got used to the anguish of these transshipments, or to the crowd of weeping relatives and friends pressing against the military barriers at the port. Then, suddenly, the Mandate was no more, and Haifa was the wide-open door to the Jewish State.

Through it came a great stream of displaced persons and immigrants. For them the excited moment of homecoming was when they packed the deck in the early morning to watch the rosy top of Mount Carmel rise out of the sea and hail the pilot's launch riding out to meet them ("A Jewish pilot," they told each other, "in a Jewish launch!").

As the country's one big seaport and the dominant city in the north, Haifa was a glittering prize in the fighting of 1948. Actually, its possession was dramatically settled in the strange period of the Arab-Jewish subwar, between the


CITY OF
HAIFA
Mediterranean Sea
Elijah's Cave
Stella Maris Lighthouse
Carmelite Monastery
HA'ALIYAH ST.
JAFFA ROAD
ALLENBY ROAD
STELLA MARIS ST.
KIRYAT ELIEZER
Dagon Silo
HARBOR
R.R. Station
CARMEL BLVD.
INDEPENDENCE RD.
Maritime Museum
HIRAM ST.
RAMBAM ST.
NAZARETH ROAD
HAGIBORIM ST.
RUPPIN RD.
ROMEMA
NEVE SHA'ANAN
GALILEE ST.
HANITA ST.
HANKIN ST.
RAMOT REMEZ
PICA ST.
HOREV ST.
MORIAH ST.
JAFFA ROAD
DALIAH ROAD
HA
CAR
N
TO TEL AVIV
TO TECHNION CITY AND HAIFA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
TO BEIT OREN ISFIYA, YA'AROT HA-CARMEL, DALIYAT EL-CARMEL
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Carmel is by the Carmelit, Haifa's tilted subway, which whirls you up at a preposterous angle in less than ten minutes.

The main business thoroughfare, running in the reclaimed area adjoining the harbor, used to be known as Kingsway, but has been renamed Independence Road. The street crowd is a colorful and amiable mixture of seamen, port officials and dock workers, young men and women in trim naval uniform, businessmen parleying over endless cups of Turkish coffee or glasses of lemon tea, tourists, Arabs and Druses in flowing robes, and khaki-clad kibbutzniks hurrying from the bus station with the inevitable ancient briefcases in their hands.

Two prominent buildings on the seaward side are the Dagon grain silo and the huge Government Hospital, to the south of which are the Bat Galim and Carmel bathing beaches. The silo is one of the tallest buildings in Israel and one of the most beautiful. It is worth visiting, both for the view from the top and for its small exhibition tracing the history of wheat and flour in the Holy Land from Biblical times.

From the railroad station, Carmel Boulevard sweeps up through the old German Colony, with its solidly built gabled houses, many of them still bearing inscriptions above their doors in old Gothic letters. Pross' restaurant, which dates back to the last century, still provides a good and substantial meal. The former residents of this quarter, descendants of the original German Templar settlers, a Protestant group from southern Germany that started to set up its own colonies in the Holy Land from 1868 onwards. They were deported by the British authorities as enemy aliens at the beginning of World War II and have never come back. (A number of them now live in Australia.)

Hadar ha-Carmel

Hadar ha-Carmel has rather steep and congested streets, but it is pleasant to stroll along Herzl Street and to have coffee and wonderful pastries at one of its pavement cafés, which have a Viennese air about them.

The handsome City Hall on Bialik Street houses in one wing a gallery of modern art and an archaeological museum, which should be visited for its Roman and Byzantine exhibition, mainly from Caesarea, and for a noteworthy collection of ancient local coins. From the Memorial Garden in front, one looks down upon the harbor. The two old Turkish cannon standing here are survivals of a fort that once guarded the town.

High up on the mountainside stands the most arresting object in Haifa, the Bahai Shrine, with its gleaming golden dome. The whole slope below it, right down to the German Colony, is a terraced Persian garden through which runs a stairway lined by cypress trees. The garden is being continued upward behind the Shrine so that the whole effect will be that of a Persian carpet spread down the mountainside from top to bottom. To one side of the domed building is another one modeled on the Greek Parthenon, to house their museum and archives.

The Bahai faith, founded in Persia in 1844, upholds the unity of God and takes its inspirations from the Old and New Testaments as well as the Koran. It has no priesthood but attempts to adapt basic religious truths to modern needs. Haifa is the world center of the religion, which now has several million adherents scattered over many countries.

The Panorama road intersects the Bahai Garden above the Shrine and winds up to the top of the Carmel, with a more breathtaking vista opening up at each dizzy curve. Looking down from this vantage point, one gets a clear idea of the planned development of the bayshore area between Haifa and Acre, to the north. It now contains a number of Israel's major industrial plants, surrounded by housing projects, set in green belts, for workers and immigrants. The plain was known as the Valley of Zebulun, after the seafaring tribe of Israel that settled in this part of the country in the period of the Judges. (Their emblem was a galley with a square sail and banks of oars.) The silted mouths of two small rivers, the Kishon and the Na'aman, had turned the area into a malarial swamp, until it was drained and reclaimed by Jewish settlers more than forty years ago.

The most conspicuous plant in this bay industrial area is the oil refinery, with its giant concrete cooling vats, fretwork metal superstructure and shining tanks. Other large enterprises concentrated in the industrial zone produce chemicals and fertilizers, textiles, steel, glass, cement, and soap. There are also automobile assembly plants which use a growing number of components manufactured locally.

MOUNT CARMEL

There can be few more attractive residential districts anywhere than Har ha-Carmel (Mount Carmel), the top of the Carmel Range. It is an area of ridges and woody ravines, sunlit boulders and pine trees, summer breezes and glorious views of the Mediterranean and the Galilee highlands, with

the white cap of distant Mount Hermon floating over the eastern horizon on a clear day. The heavy dew keeps this a verdant oasis even in the dry, hot summer, and the very name Carmel (which means Vineyard of the Lord) suggests the blend of fertility and holiness which belongs to the mountain. From earliest times, mystery shrouded the habitation of Carmel. Its high places held the altars of strange gods, and its hidden places, the sanctuaries of fugitives and hermits.

> And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel,
> I will search and take them out thence; . . .
> —Amos 9:3

Above all, there broods over it the memory of that fierce old man of God, Elijah, and his war against idolatry.

The Bible tells us, in the First Book of Kings, that after a three-year drought which God had sent to punish King Ahab and the Israelites for their pagan cult, the Prophet Elijah gathered together on Mount Carmel 450 priests of Baal and proved by a miracle that their gods did not exist. Elijah built an altar for sacrifice, as did the other priests; but Baal did not come to the altar dedicated to him, whereas God sent a fire which burnt up the sacrifice offered by Elijah. As a result of this miracle the people turned to the true God and all the idolatrous priests were put to death. Then, in answer to Elijah's prayer, came rain in abundance. The place where this miracle was performed is traditionally identified with Muhraka or El Muhraka (Place of Burning), seventeen miles from Haifa by the mountain road to the southeast. The spot where the pagan priests were then put to death is by tradition identified with Tel el-Kuassis (Mount of the Priest), at a bend in the River Kishon.

road descends through a rugged defile to the coastal highway, passing the forest of Ya'arot ha-Carmel. The many caves which pit the rock-faces along the road have held strange tenants in their time, from Stone Age men to Byzantine hermits.

Just before Beit Oren is reached, a narrow side road turns off to the two big Druse villages of Isfiya and Daliyat el-Carmel. The handsome and dignified Druses from the Carmel move easily around Haifa city and frequent its Oriental coffee shops, the men distinguished by their big cavalry mustaches. Isfiya, which is populated by both Druses and Christian Arabs, stands on the site of the ancient Jewish village of Huseifa. A piece of a mosaic synagogue floor has been dug up here and it depicts a pretty garland of yellow flowers surrounding the Hebrew inscription *Shalom al Yisrael* (Peace be unto Israel); it is now in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, and is reproduced in the design of the Israel one-pound note. At the end of the main street in Daliyat el-Carmel is the house occupied in the eighties of the last century by Laurence Oliphant, an early English supporter of the Zionist cause. The tomb of Mrs. Oliphant is in the village. Visitors to these clean and picturesque Druse villages can enjoy a friendly cup of Turkish coffee while they buy the gay basketware for which the Druse women are noted.

Nowhere else in the world can there be the same curious human mixture as upon the Carmel: Jewish suburbanites, kibbutzniks, Carmelite monks, Druses, Christian Arabs, Moslems, and Bahais—all living side by side among the lingering echoes of primitive cavemen, pagan altars, hermits and Crusaders.

Haifa has one exquisite moment which every visitor should capture if he can. It is the sight from the top of the Carmel of a huge orange-red sun sinking into the sea while a spangled veil of lights is flung along the ancient coast from the Ladder of Tyre to Caesarea.

columns brought from the Roman ruins of Caesarea farther down the coast. These arcades enclose three sides of a large, sunny courtyard; behind them are small domed cells for the scholarly. The courtyard is paved with worn flagstones, and trees and flowering shrubs spring up in the corners. The sundial gives it charm, and the fountains gaiety. The mosque closes off the fourth side of the square. The Ministry of Religions has painted it and restored the ancient inscriptions. The visitor who slips off his shoes and enters will find the proportions good, but the effect one of emptiness.

At the bottom of the stairs leading to the square is Ahmed Jezzar's fountain, and next door are luxurious eighteenth-century steam baths modeled on those in Cairo but used today as a municipal museum. Here the Turkish tiling forms an attractive background for the collection of medieval ceramics and archaeological fragments through which the tumultuous history of the city can be traced, and also for a series of tableaux showing Arab and Druse village life and costumes.

Most of the buildings in the Old City of Acre are squeezed together and threaded by narrow alleys in which a rich assortment of communities amicably rub shoulders. The population includes nearly 5,000 Christian and Moslem Arabs and 20,000 Jewish immigrants from a score of different countries. New immigrant quarters have spread to the east, across the highway.

The chief meeting place is the winding bazaar which crosses the Old City. Here Arab pottery jars jostle plastic cups and saucers, while in the metalworkers' street European tinsmiths hammer out zinc buckets next door to Arab coppersmiths making traditional coffee urns. Little donkeys share with trucks the deliveries of fresh fruit and vegetables, and prices are settled in a dozen different tongues. Travelers to Palestine in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries talked of the grain trade carried on in Acre, where two to three thousand camels arrived daily in the season from the Hauran in Syria. The grain caravans have disappeared, and the trucks piled high with produce from the fertile Galilee have taken their place.

The most important Crusader monument in Acre is known as the Crypt of St. John. The entrance can be reached from a lane off the bazaar. This magnificent vaulted stone hall under the Turkish Citadel has been excavated and is now believed to have been the refectory of the Hospitalers. A secret tunnel has been found and cleared at the base of one of the big columns that support the Gothic arched roof. It leads right through the city to the water's edge and was almost certainly designed as a secret passageway which in times of emergency offered the knights direct access to their vessels from the central hall.

In the course of the clearance work, other openings were found in the walls of this tunnel. These lead to what appears to be a considerable network of wider tunnels marking the streets of the old Crusader city beneath the present street levels. When all this is cleared, which may take years, it will perhaps prove one of the most exciting Crusader sites in the world. There is also the possibility that beneath the Crusader city is the city of Roman times, for remains of that period have already come to light.

The Citadel, whose stone walls rise sheer above the lane leading to the so-called Crypt of St. John, was built by the Turks in the eighteenth century and rests on Crusader foundations. During the Mandate the Citadel was used as the central prison of Palestine. In its dungeons were locked captured members of the Jewish underground resistance movement; and tablets in the execution chamber, which now serves as a small museum, record the names of those who were hanged. The novel and film *Exodus* recall the 1947 jailbreak of resistance fighters from the Acre prison. Here too are the cells where the Bahai apostles were imprisoned by the Turks more than half a century ago. The Citadel today, looking less grim after being repainted a soft pink color, serves as a government psychiatric hospital. As new institutions are built the patients will be moved out, and there are plans afoot to clear the moat and restore the Crusader citadel.

On top of the walls is a restaurant and night club called Chumot Acco (Walls of Acre). It can be approached through a secret tunnel.

The road down to the old port passes a number of Jezzar's cannon, mounted on the sea wall, and some captured French pieces that Sir Sydney Smith presented to him after the defeat of Napoleon. The road ends at the port, now sanded up and shallow with small fishing boats riding at anchor in the lee of a crumbling medieval tower.

Between Acre and the Lebanese border stretch twelve miles of fertile coastal plain.

An avenue of eucalyptus trees just beyond the city limits of Acre marks the entrance to the Government Experimental Station, where a former Turkish *khan* (caravan inn) with a spacious cobbled courtyard now houses Israel's most important stud farm for horses and mules.

A mile to the north is the house and tomb of the prophet and founder of the Bahai sect, Baha-Ullah (Glory of God), set in a beautiful flower garden. This is where he lived when he was released in 1892 after twenty-four years of imprisonment in the Acre jail. The house is preserved exactly as it was and its furnishings are an odd blend of Victorian and Persian.

The dramatic stone aqueduct that runs parallel to the main road was built by Jezzar atop the remains of an ancient Roman one to bring fresh water to Acre from the Springs of Kabri. Each of the aqueduct's hundreds of arches is a separate picture frame enclosing a vista of farms and hills, orange groves and cypress trees, surmounted by a curved slice of blue sky.

On a small plateau next to the aqueduct stands a square museum exhibiting scenes of the Nazi period. It was established by the nearby kibbutz Lohamei ha-Ghettaot, which is composed of ghetto fighters.

Nahariya (River) gets its name from a small stream that runs down the center of the main street of this town. With its fine beach, its gardens and its clean, pleasant pensions (boarding houses) and cafés, it has become a popular summer resort. At the beginning, Nahariya remained a stronghold of the German Jews and the German language; there is an apocryphal story that when the Royal Commission of 1936 recommended a partition plan by which their town would fall within the proposed Arab state, the angry inhabitants cabled Dr. Weizmann that, come what may, "Nahariya bleibt immer Deutsch" (Nahariya remains forever German).

The faintly scandalous archaeological pride of this very respectable town is the remains of a Canaanite temple that was discovered while the foundation of a house was being dug near the beach. A little figure of 1500 B.C. was found at the site; it seems to be that of Astarte, the Goddess of Fer-