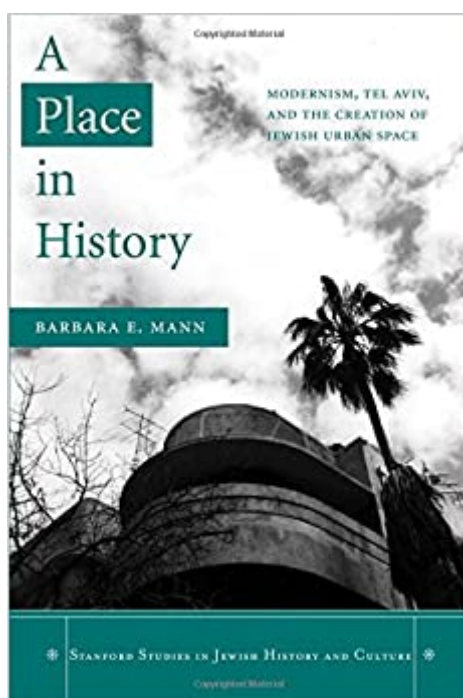


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# A Place In History: Modernism, Tel Aviv, And The Creation Of Jewish Urban Space



## Synopsis

A Place in History is a cultural study of Tel Aviv, Israel's population center, established in 1909. It describes how a largely European Jewish immigrant society attempted to forge a home in the Mediterranean, and explores the role of memory and diaspora in the creation of a new national culture. Each chapter is devoted to a particular place in the city that has been central to its history, and includes literary, artistic, journalistic, and photographic material relating to that site. This is the first book-length study of Tel Aviv in English. It will appeal to readers interested in urban cultures, the contemporary Middle East, modern Jewish history, and Israeli literature. It also contributes to the ongoing public debate about memory, memorials and urban identity.

## Book Information

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: Stanford University Press; 1 edition (April 10, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 080475019X

ISBN-13: 978-0804750196

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.2 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #334,594 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #195 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Religious Studies > Judaism](#) #288 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > History](#) #328 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Middle East](#)

## Customer Reviews

"A Place in History is an important contribution to the growing body of knowledge about Israeli public space in general and urban space in particular... Highly recommended to those who seek a theoretical perspective on Israeli urbanism, or are interested in its ideological roots or its spatial transformations. Though the book focuses on Tel Aviv, in many ways it conveys the broader story of Israeli territorialization. Mann's book could also serve visitors as an excellent critical guide to the city's modern geography and history." (H-Net Reviews)"A very important contribution, this book adds a crucial layer to the discussion of the city of Tel Aviv in its local, national, and historical context. I would even venture to claim that it offers the most complex and multi-layered view to date, a Renaissance text in which the author/flaneuse strolls, researches, interprets, writes, and even makes photographs, all at the same time." (Hebrew Studies)"While her love for Tel Aviv is palpable,

Mann maintains a critical distance from her subject, which assures *A Place in History* its own place as an authoritative guide to the complex textualities of Israel's largest urban area." (Tikkun

*A Place in History* is a cultural study of Tel Aviv, Israel's population center, established in 1909. It describes how a largely European Jewish immigrant society attempted to forge a home in the Mediterranean, and explores the role of memory and diaspora in the creation of a new national culture. Each chapter is devoted to a particular place in the city that has been central to its history, and includes literary, artistic, journalistic, and photographic material relating to that site. This is the first book-length study of Tel Aviv in English. It will appeal to readers interested in urban cultures, the contemporary Middle East, modern Jewish history, and Israeli literature. It also contributes to the ongoing public debate about memory, memorials and urban identity.

By the time one is done reading Barbara Mann's "*A Place in History*," one of the richest interdisciplinary studies of the creation of Jewish national culture to date, it is hard to understand why we waited so long for a scholar to carefully examine the crucial construction of Tel Aviv which, for most Israelis, has long represented the true center of national life and identity. A confident and wonderfully lively scholar, as familiar with European modernist responses to the city as she is with the lyrical impulses of Chaim Nahman Bialik, Leah Goldberg, and other Hebrew poets, Mann draws with wonderful skill on the rich archival sources she investigated. Another useful feature of "*A Place in History*" is the generous inclusion of numerous black and white reproductions of artists such as Gutman and Reuven Rubin, as well as Mann's own deeply evocative photographs of the city that clearly lives in both her heart and intellect. Readers will also appreciate the book's sensible organization which moves logically from perceptive discussion of utopian visions of the new Hebrew city in Jewish European discourse (many readers may be surprised to learn that Herzl's 1902 novel *Altneuland* was not the first Zionist utopian novel), through the city's life in the early 20th-century until the rapid years of growth after statehood. In a final chapter that is at once moving and richly analytical, Mann addresses the fraught aftermath of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, in terms of the transformation of public space as well as in narratives by Etgar Keret, Alona Kimchi, and other artistic renderings of the national trauma. "*A Place in History*" is consistently rewarding, offering rich understandings of early Zionist culture in its myriad forms, and unprecedented analysis of Tel Aviv as a deeply conflicted but always critically vital site and source of literary and artistic expression.

Viewed from afar, Jerusalem is the city that best captures the spirit of modern Israel. But as Barbara

Mann shows in this profound and beautiful book, it is in Tel Aviv - the first modern Jewish city -- that the complexities of the Zionist project are most evident. Mann describes these complexities in both broad strokes (as when she presents the long ambivalent history of Jewish attitudes towards space and place) and fine detail (as when she describes the old cemetery in the middle of Tel Aviv, and how its meaning has changed over the generations). Mann is a Berkeley-trained literature professor, so she's conversant in the sorts of contemporary theory that one encounters at universities. She carries her erudition lightly, though, using the tools of cultural studies and literary theory to explain what she sees, without getting carried into the jargony hermeticism that makes much academic writing insufferable and impenetrable. This could be because Mann is also an accomplished poet. Time and again she finds a perfect, small example that illustrate her big points, and these images stick with you after you've closed the book. She writes simply and beautifully, with pathos and with power. I recommend this book for anyone who wants a deeper view of Israel than it is possible to get from the evening news. Also for anyone interested in modern Jewish history and modern Jewish identity. For people who might find themselves drinking coffee at a kiosk on Rothschild or a café on Dizengoff on a Friday morning (I am one of these people), this book is a gem and a gift and a must.

If you want to understand Tel Aviv's dynamic, its history, its architecture, and the models its founders had in mind, this is a very nice book. It's well written and well researched.

This book was far too jargony for my taste. Here's one passage for example: "Michael de Certeau uses the term 'perambulatory rhetoric' to describe walking as a kind of utterance, a behavior that is understood and comprehensible in semiotic terms, like a language, on the axis of selection and combination." Having said that, this book did give me a sense of Tel Aviv intellectuals' identity crisis. They seem to have been caught between desires to recreate the European cities of their birth, to blend into the Arab landscape, and to create a wholly new Hebrew-speaking civilization.

Mann's *A Place in History* is a study of the founding and development of Tel Aviv, and she handles this from a variety of angles. But Mann is first and foremost an historian with a decided post-modern orientation, so this study is replete with words like "text" "trope" and "problematized." The net result of this is a work that is far too intellectual and clouds the extremely fascinating story of the founding of the first Jewish, or more correctly, Hebrew city. That said, Mann has access to some wonderful sources, interesting historical photographs, and is well versed in the art and architecture Tel Aviv

has generated in it's over 100 years of existence. When she allows the city of tell its story, the book is compelling and important. When she gets bogged down in theory and terms, there is a strong pull to stop reading this book.

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