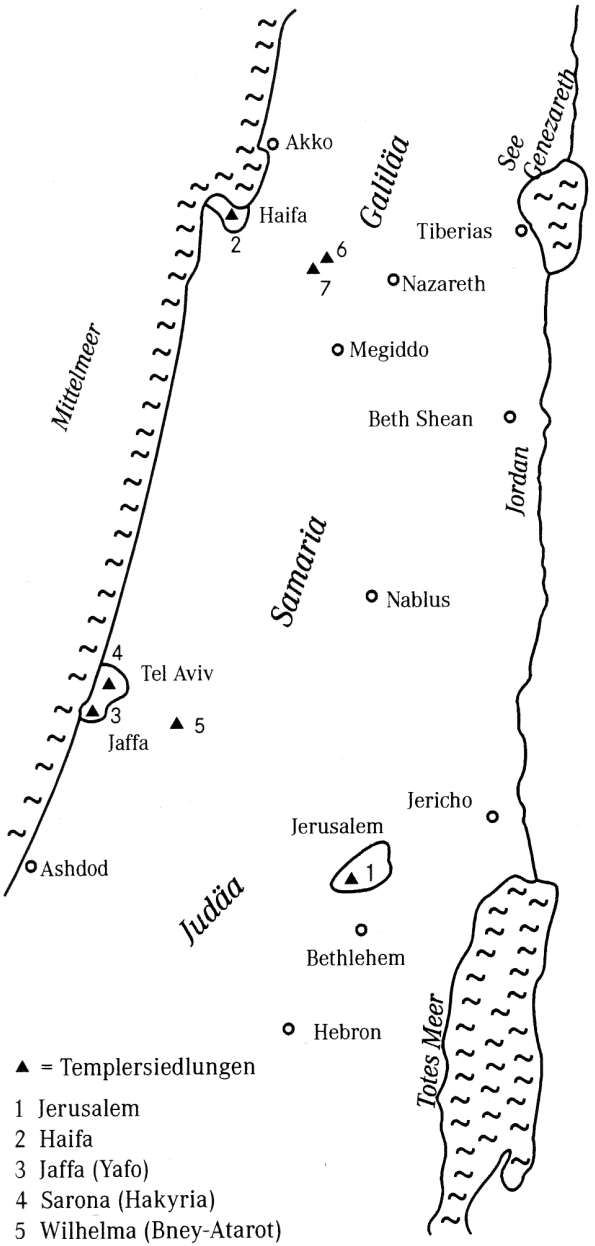
Following the call of their faith, they began moving to the Holy Land in 1868. They were the first to successfully drain swamps and make the land habitable for Europeans. To this day, many traces testify to their beneficial activity.



Footprints of the Templers

The Württemberg Templers in the Holy Land

Templer settlements in the Holy Land



Who are the Templers?

First of all a necessary distinction: they have nothing to do with the Knights Templar of the crusader era. That order was dissolved in 1312 AD.

The Christian community of the Templers evolved out of mid-nineteenth century Protestant Pietism. The Temple Society was brought into being by the theologian **Christoph Hoffmann** (1815-1885), who was the son of the founder of the Korntal Pietist Community near Stuttgart and a delegate to the 1848 National Assembly in the Frankfurt *Paulskirche*. Its special concern is to return to the **core message of Jesus**, to his promise of the kingdom of God and his directive to contribute to the making of a better world through personal action to bring about this kingdom of love and kindness.

In view of the grave social ills of the time and guided by this basic attitude, Hoffmann and his followers saw the **renewal of society in line with Jesus' teachings** as the foremost challenge facing a Christian community. They separated from the Church because they believed that, along with all the other Churches, the Protestant Church was neglecting this main task.

They perceived such renewal to be achievable through a more profound Christianity, where individuals strive to align their life and the choices they make with the words of Jesus in the New Testament, and where creeds, dogmas and rituals are of secondary importance in line with the Society's motto: *Set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice before everything else*.

This was to be realised – after the model of the early Christian Church – through the **establishment of communities of like-minded people**, which then, by their example, were to gradually pervade and transform society. In these communities, where tolerance and love of neighbour were practised, individuals would see themselves

as **living components of a spiritual temple of God**, as demanded in the New Testament – hence the name *Templers*.

This faith gave them strength. They made the task of working towards the kingdom of God the centre of their lives and founded their first model community not far from Stuttgart, in Kirschenhardthof, in 1856. They understood the prophetic promise that God's kingdom would begin its victorious spread in **Jerusalem** as a call that they should also strive for it in the Holy Land and form communities there. Thus, many of them sold all they had and emigrated from Württemberg, from Saxony, from the USA and from the Caucasus to the Holy Land, then a desolate region of the Turkish Empire, and to Jerusalem.

The Old City of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives



The work of the Templers

“When the Templers began establishing their settlements in 1869, Palestine was nothing but a neglected Ottoman province. The country had not one decent seaport, its forests had been cut down, agriculture was primitive and there were more dilapidated townships than inhabitable ones. It was a country with no coach traffic, no hotels and no trained physicians.” So wrote the Israeli historian of the University of Haifa, Professor Alex Carmel († 2002), in his book *Die Siedlungen der württembergischen Templer in Palästina 1868-1918 (The Settlements of the Württemberg Templers in Palestine 1868-1918).*

After years of meticulous planning, **the first four Templer settlements** emerged in Haifa, in Jaffa, in Sarona near Jaffa and in Jerusalem. Initially the newcomers concentrated on getting established in **agriculture**. They laid out fields, vineyards and orchards and successfully employed modern working methods. Their steam-powered oil presses and flourmills were open for business to the local population also. Qualified tradesmen began operating **workshops** of every kind, and **factories** emerged, producing soap, machines, beer and cement, to name but a few; others opened **shops, banks** and **hotels**. A doctor set himself up in Haifa

Ruff’s carpentry, Haifa

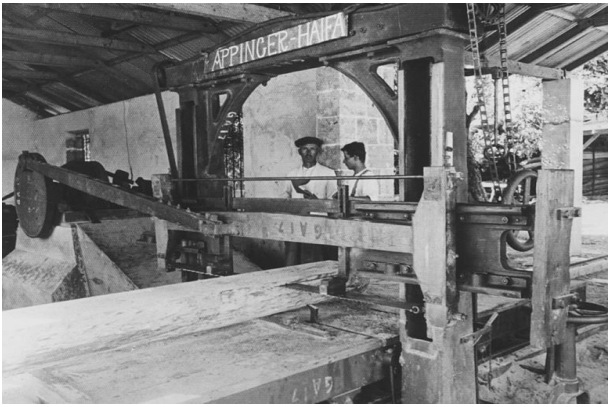


as early as 1870, and another one in Jaffa, and European-style **pharmacies** and **infirmaries** commenced operations in both towns.

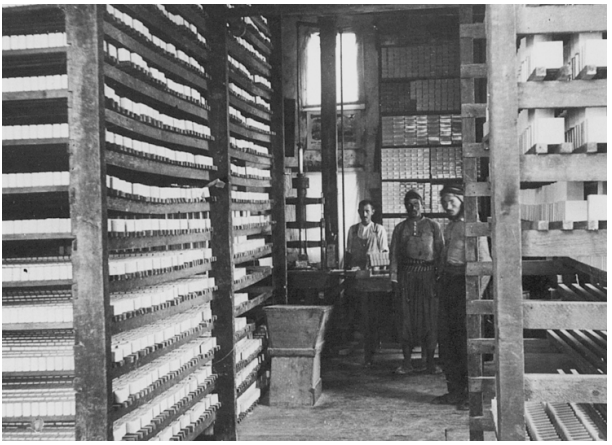
“The Templers soon gained a reputation for their skills and their diligence. They built exemplary colonies and pretty houses surrounded by flower gardens – a piece of their homeland in the heart of Palestine” (Carmel).

The generously laid-out Haifa Templer settlement has meanwhile become the heart of the city. Then Jerusalem consisted of only the Old City within its walls, as we still find that part today. It began to outgrow its walls only after the Templers founded their settlement on the Plain of Rephaim.

Appinger’s sawmill, Haifa



Struve oil and soap factory, Haifa



The Templers' decisive contributions to the country during these early years were the building of **new roads** and the improvement of the existing transport routes, because up to then there was only one road fit for vehicular traffic, namely the road the pilgrims travelled from Jaffa to Jerusalem.

Architects and engineers, including the perhaps best-known second-generation Templer, **Gottlieb Schumacher** (1857-1925), realised these ambitious plans, together with Templer building firms such as Beilharz Brothers. In addition to his work in town planning, cartography and scientific publications, Schumacher led the first archaeological excavations at Megiddo from 1903 to 1905.

Fast's Lloyd Hotel, Jerusalem



The Wagner Brothers foundry, Jaffa



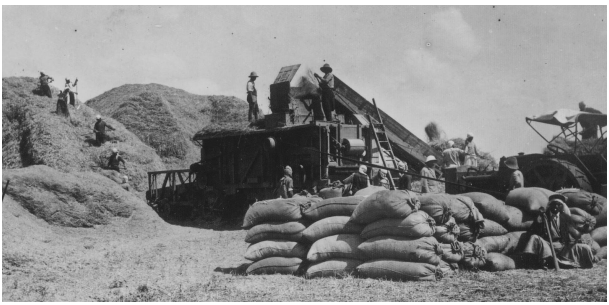
The Haifa University's *Institute for Research into the Christian Contribution to the Restoration of Palestine in the 19th Century* bears his name.

The road from Haifa to Nazareth was the first to be built. The construction costs were largely carried by the members of the Haifa Templer Community. The new road made relatively convenient and safe pilgrim journeys to Galilee possible. Templer families built and ran hotels in Haifa, Tiberias and Nazareth. Regular coach services operated between Haifa and Acre, and between Jaffa and Jerusalem. Where previously goods transport and travel were only possible using beasts of burden, or boats along the coast of the Mediterranean, the face of the country was now changing. The groundwork for the development of a modern economy had been created.

In addition, the **Jewish immigrants** who began arriving in the late 19th century were able to draw on the knowledge and experience of the Templers, who not only were commissioned with building work in Zikkron-Ya'akov and Bath Shlomoh, but also supplied the Jewish settlers with foodstuffs and household equipment.

Due to the increased volume in domestic markets and the development of trade links with Europe and the USA, some of the workshops and service industries of the Templers grew into sizeable enterprises.

New agricultural settlements (Sarona, Wilhelma, Betlehem and Waldheim) were founded and further projects were in the pipeline. Even though the



Temple Society in Palestine remained a small community of less than 1500 people, its contribution to the development of the country was fruitful in many ways.

The settlements were pushed to the brink of disintegration during World War I when the British, after occupying Palestine in 1918, deported a large number of Templers to internment in Egypt and denied them the return to their settlements after the war. Permission to re-enter Palestine was not forthcoming until international intermediaries intervened on behalf of the Templers, who then returned to restore their houses and farms, which had been badly damaged by the ravages of war.

However, Great Britain's entry into World War II signalled the end of the Templers' work in Palestine. They were interned in their own settlements by the British Mandate Authority, and a large proportion, consisting mainly of younger families, was deported to Australia in 1941. The last of those remaining had to leave the country when the State of Israel was proclaimed in 1948.

Footprints of the Templers

The most striking visible footprints left in Israel are in the Templer precincts of Haifa and Jerusalem and in the agricultural settlements of Sarona, Wilhelma, Betlehem (near Nazareth) and Waldheim. In addition, their cemeteries in Jerusalem and Haifa still testify to their lives and work in the Holy Land.

Haifa

The Haifa Templer settlement was the oldest and largest settlement. The first Templers arrived here, on the "roadstead of Caifa", in 1868. They bought land at the foot of Mt Carmel, to the west of the then Arabic town. Originally, it was meant to be a predominantly agricultural settlement, but the favourable geographical position and the persistent efforts of the newcomers led to Haifa becoming a new economic centre in northern Palestine.



“In those days, Haifa was still a miserable place, overshadowed by Acre, the district capital. Most of the 4000 inhabitants lived crowded within the city walls. If there was anything like a fresh breeze to be felt in the small town at that time, it was the German settlers who now provided a decisive impetus for its development” (Carmel).

Today, the “German Colony” is situated in the centre of the City of Haifa. The former *Karmelstraße* has become a **landmark** of the city. It runs straight from the sea to Mt Carmel. Jakob Schumacher from Tübingen built it in 1869. What was then a vision in the wilderness is today Ben Gurion Ave, “one of the most beautiful streets in Israel”. Many a doorway is still graced by a Bible quotation chiselled into its lintel. The old Templer neighbourhood extends along Ben Gurion Ave and across two roads running parallel to it, from the port facilities up to the foot of Mt Carmel, along the former *Weinstraße* (now HaGefen Rd). Many of the old houses





HAIFA – first Templer settlement in Palestine, established in 1869. The lithograph on the left has been made by Jakob Schumacher in 1877 (compare with the the photograph of the present-day city shown on the cover page)

are now renovated. The first building of the Templers in the Holy Land, the community house, restored in its original style, is now a museum of the City of Haifa (see photo lower left page).

A new suburb with residential areas, a hotel and a sanatorium was developed around 1890 in a generously laid out pine grove on Mt Carmel. The memorial stone commemorating the visit to the Holy Land by Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1898 can still be seen on Panorama Road (Yefe Nof). Looking down from this road over the Baha'i temple and across the red-tiled roofs of the Templer houses out to sea, the view is simply stunning (see cover page).

Jerusalem

The first Templers who moved to Jerusalem lived in the Old City but, in 1871, Matthäus Frank from Neuffen near Stuttgart, bought a piece of land on which he built a steam-driven flourmill and a home whose front door still features the *Eben Ezer 1873* inscription. This house, not far from Jerusalem's *Jaffa Gate*, was the start of the Templer community on the Plain of Rephaim, where businessmen, travel agents, hoteliers, tradesmen, architects, innkeepers, teachers and public servants soon settled. This is also where Christoph Hoffmann relocated the Templer head office and secondary school. The Templer president now lived in Jerusalem which quickly became the spiritual and cultural centre of the Temple Society.



Templer community hall („Saal"), Jerusalem

The **establishment of schools** was among the most urgent community projects for the Templers in new settlements and was carried out at great financial cost. These schools were also open to students of other nationalities and religions.

A walk through the lanes of the settlement with its quite well-preserved houses and gardens is a rewarding experience. Situated along **Rephaim Road**, the "German colony" is bounded by **Bethlehem Road** in the east. Just where the two roads meet at an acute angle is the ***Saal***, the Templer place of worship, which now serves the Armenian Patriarchate as a church. New constructions are now planned on the site of the two adjacent school buildings.

Betlehem and Waldheim

The agricultural settlement of Betlehem was founded in 1906, not far from the Plain of Jezreel. The village is now called **Beyt-Lehem Ha-Glilit**, after the archaeological dig of a Late Antique settlement in the immediate vicinity.

Just a few kilometres away, the settlement of Waldheim was founded in 1907 by the descendants of the Haifa Templer families who had returned to the Protestant Church. The neat village with its lovely little church is now named **Aloney-Aba**.

The people of Betlehem and Waldheim were engaged in agriculture, fruit growing and the dairy industry. Their produce found ready markets in the growing city of Haifa.

Wilhelma

In Wilhelma, now **Bney-Atarot**, the charm of rural Templer settlements is best preserved. Founded in 1902, its significance throughout the surrounding area was enhanced by the establishment of an **agricultural school** in 1909, by the introduction of artificial fertilisers and by effective animal husbandry. The products of its cooperatively managed dairy (which had an exemplary hygienic standard) were particularly in demand. The town, now a moshav, is situated not far north of Ben Gurion airport in the direction of Petah-Tiqvah.

Wilhelma was extensively damaged when the advancing British troops battled the Turks in World War I. In World War II, Wilhelma – like Sarona, Betlehem and Waldheim – was transformed by the British Mandate Authority into an internment camp for German nationals.

Jaffa

The first Christians who settled as a group in Jaffa in the 19th century were Adventists from the USA. They, too, were well prepared for settlement in the disease and epidemic-ridden land, even bringing with them their disassembled prefabricated houses. But the undertaking, which was begun with such great expectations, failed after only one year. The Templers acquired the timber houses in 1869 and several of them exist to this day.

Most of the newcomers were engaged in a trade. Hotels were fitted out, a small pharmacy and an infirmary, both of which had been taken over from the *Basler Pilgermission*, were expanded and a doctor established his medical practice.

Regular coach services soon connected Jaffa and Jerusalem. Farmers concentrated on the cultivation of citrus fruits: **Jaffa oranges** soon became a household word.





Shipping oranges in the port of Jaffa around 1930

When this neighbourhood, nicknamed *Amelikan,* ran out of space, the Templers of Jaffa spread to a place called *Walhalla* a little further north around 1892. A small, but by no means insignificant industrial area developed there, including the well-known **iron foundry and machine workshop** of the Wagner Brothers from Mägerkingen.

The Templer dwellings of Jaffa, situated in the vicinity of today's Jaffa Road in Tel Aviv South, have become dilapidated, but some are being restored or rebuilt at considerable cost.

Sarona

Since there was no space for sustained agriculture in Jaffa, the Temple Society bought land in the Plain of Sharon along the Yarkon (*Audsche*) River in 1871. This plain, after which the new settlement was named, was full of swamps and malaria was rampant. A large number of settlers, including



many children, fell victim to the disease. But the survivors did not give up; they drained the swampy ground and planted eucalypts in great numbers wherever possible. By 1873, malaria was largely defeated but, as late as 1902, Sarona still had to spend large sums of money on draining swamps.

Ten years after its founding, Sarona was a flourishing colony, not least through **viticulture**, which the farmers pursued as a specialty sideline to agriculture and animal breeding. Intensive orange cultivation was added in due course.

Today, Sarona **(Ha-Kyria)** is situated in the centre of Tel Aviv . The houses of the former settlers are seen on both sides of **Kaplan Street**, just before its junction with Petah-Tikvah Road. They were occupied by the Israeli military for many years. The houses vacated south of Kaplan Street have been restored and declared a Municipal Historical Park – **Sarona Gardens** (see lower left page).

Footprints along the way

Naturally, not all Templers lived in the named compact settlements. As early as the 1870s, the Wagner flourmill began operating in Nazareth; it is now the *St Charles Hospice of the Rosary Sisters.* Those days also saw the establishment of the *Hotel Galilee*. More traces of the Templers are to be found scattered throughout the country in places as far flung as Tiberias and Ramleh.

The Templer Cemeteries

Life continues in the former Templer settlements: new people live in the houses, and the fields are tended by others. What has remained, however, are the Templer cemeteries in Haifa and in Jerusalem. Originally, each Templer settlement had its own burial ground but, in 1964, the cemeteries of Waldheim, Betlehem and Wilhelma were closed and the mortal remains re-interred in the cemeteries of Haifa and Jerusalem. The deceased of Sarona/Jaffa had been transferred to Jerusalem in 1952.

The **Haifa cemetery** is situated on Jaffa Road. It lies to the west of the colony, shortly before the railway station of Bad-Galim, behind the British military cemetery. **The Jerusalem cemetery** is situated at No. 39 Rephaim Road (the key for the gate is available from the Sisters of St Charles Hospice at 12 Lloyd George Street).

Groups of young Templers from Germany and Australia travel to Israel every so often to tend both cemeteries with selfless commitment.

The Templers today

Following World War II and the loss of their Palestine settlements, the Templers reunited in new communities. After their liberation from internment, the Commonwealth of Australia offered the Templers the chance to stay. Communities were formed in Greater Melbourne and in Sydney. In Germany a new community centre was established in Stuttgart.

The members of these communities have adhered to the basic concepts of their founding fathers and to their motto: *Set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice before everything else.* To them, Christianity continues to mean trying – despite all human inadequacy – to live life according to the teaching and example of Jesus of Nazareth: trusting in God, loving their neighbour, acting responsibly towards the world and committed to furthering God's kingdom of love and kindness among humans. They feel a bond with all those who also see their life's task as working towards these aims.

Tempelgesellschaft in Deutschland
Felix-Dahn-Str. 39, 70597 Stuttgart, Germany
E-Mail: info@tempelgesellschaft.de
Internet: www.tempelgesellschaft.de

Temple Society Australia
152 Tucker Road, Bentleigh 3204, Australia
E-mail: tsa@templesociety.org.au
Internet: www.templers.org

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