

Editorial

Geography in Israel

The study of the geographical characteristics of Israel figured prominently over centuries in what may be described as pre-modern geographical writings. However, this was confined to attempts to gain a better understanding of the Bible, of the environment in which biblical events took place and to locate places of interest mentioned in the Old and New Testament. Guided by the same motives were some early modern geographers who during the 19 and early 20 centuries made detailed regional studies of Israel. It should be noted that while Jewish scholars were very active and played important roles in the advancement of most sciences during the 19th and 20th centuries, they are almost absent from the field of geography even in the exploration and study of the physical and human characteristics of the Holyland.

It was only after World War I, with the rapid growth and expansion of Jewish settlement in Israel that modern geographical studies were initiated and carried out by Jewish geographers, graduates of Departments of Geography in various European Universities, who made Israel their home. However, they were mainly concerned with the traditional regional approach, which was prevalent in those days, and again with historical and Biblical themes. There was hardly any study which could benefit the practical needs of the rapid transformation which the country was undergoing with the growth of population and the urban and rural development.

During the period of the British Mandate (1919–1948) there was little spatial planning and that did not recognize the significance of geographical surveys and studies. Climate, soil and water were the main fields which attracted some practical research activities mainly to help modern agricultural development.

The establishment of the State of Israel (1948) created, within a short time, a completely new situation with far reaching influences on the extent and character of geographical research and the role it plays in the dynamic scientific activities undertaken in Israel. The 1949 armistice line super-imposed new boundaries in areas where they have never existed before. The sudden realization of the extreme limitation of space and resources, on the one hand, and the unparalleled pace at which the population grew (by immigration), had to be settled and activated economically, made the thorough acquaintance with geographical properties of the country of great importance and urgency. Hundreds of new villages sprang up, many of which situated in areas which had no sedentary population for many centuries. New towns were established while a good many villages and townships grew into urban centres. Geographical research and guidance gained vital im-

portance not only for economic development, conquest of the desert and the solution of various problems of spatial organization but also from a political and military point of view. These are actually, the circumstances under which geographical research and the teaching of geography in Israel have received conspicuous impetus over the last three decades.

During the first decade of the State, there was a great advancement in geographical research into a wide range of subjects that included: geomorphology, climate, agriculture, water resources, transportation, population, urban and rural settlement. This scientific activity was investigated by a regional methodology focused on the land of Israel. These studies examined in detail the physical structure of the country, the different climate factors, settlement processes and transformation. In addition to these studies, general and thematic mapping techniques developed, basic geographic information crystalized, and the teaching of geography in higher education improved. It was not until the beginning of the sixties that Israeli geographical research penetrated the field of urban studies and was applied to physical planning. In the mid-sixties there was a significant advancement of Israeli geography that followed these basic regional studies which were published in Israel and abroad. There were basic works that represented for the first time the geography of the land of Israel as a science in all its aspects. The seventies saw the expansion of geographical research into many areas such as topoclimatology, fluvial geomorphology, computer mapping, inter-urban geography, and the social and economic aspects of settlement geography. The continued publication of Israeli geographical works in both Hebrew and foreign language scientific publications, strengthened the basis of Israeli geographic information.

The Department of Geography at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, founded in 1950, was the only centre in Israel for the study of geography until the mid-1960s. It trained most of the geographers who are active in this field in Israel today. At present there are four other Departments of Geography in Israel: Tel Aviv University (the largest department), Bar Ilan University in Ramat Gan, Haifa University and Ben Gurion University in Beer-Sheva. Hundreds of geography students graduate, each year, from these universities. The number of students who take up post-graduate studies and specialize in various branches of geography has been growing continuously in recent years.

The Department of Geography at Tel Aviv University, founded in 1967, presents in this issue of **GeoJournal** a characteristic cross section of products of research carried out in recent years by members of its teaching staff. The article by **M. Romann** analyses the phenomena and processes resulting from the unification of Jerusalem in 1967. **E. Efrat** makes a comparative critical study of the layout of new Israeli towns, founded over the last 30 years, with an optimal model of urban

development. **Y. Gradus** surveys the development of Beer-Sheva, the main urban centre of the Negev, which has grown over the last 30 years, from a small market township serving some Bedouin tribes, to a flourishing industrial and administrative centre of with over 100,000 inhabitants.

I. Graiczer describes the factors and processes responsible for the transformation of one of the first modern agricultural settlements, Rishon le Zion, into satellite town, a development typical of several of the early modern villages. **M. Brawer** presents a study of the geographical aspects of far reaching changes caused in some Arab rural areas first by the superimposition of international boundaries and 20 years later by the removal of these boundary. **M. Har-El** explains the geographical, historic and economic background of an important ancient trade route through the Judean Wilderness. **A. Bitan** and **P. Ben-Rubi**, review the phenomenon of snow fall in Israel, based on observations and measurements over more than 100 years. **A. L. Marcus** presents the results of a geomorphological study which examined the severity of run-off erosion on the slopes along a section of the Israeli beaches near Ashkelon. Finally, a few short reviews of recent Israeli geographical publications.

It is hoped that the articles in this issue which reflect typical research subjects and activities in which Israeli geographers have been engaged in recent years will give the reader some idea of the interesting and unique aspects of Israely Geography.

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Further Contributions on Israel published in GeoJournal:

Efrat, E.: Industry in Israel's New Development Towns	vol 1, no 4 (1977)	pp. 41 – 46
Soen, D.: Israel's Population Dispersal Plans and their Implementation, 1949 – 1974: Failure or Success ?	vol 1, no 5 (1977)	pp. 21 – 26
Borukow, W.: The Trade-off between Density and other Objectives: A Re-Examination of Planning Norms	vol 2, no 1 (1978)	pp. 71 – 80
Mushkat, J. jr.: Inter-Regional Variations in Cyclical Sensitivity to Unemployment in Israel	vol 2, no 1 (1978)	pp. 81 – 83
Stern, E.: Inter-Nodal Association of Bus Services in Israel	forthcoming (1979)	
Meir, A.: A Dynamic Spatial Diffusion Model: An Application to the Kibbutz Industry in Israel	forthcoming (1979)	