Yavne is rich in archaeological and historical sites. The local council and residents maintain these sites as part of a range of environmental conservation programmes. Yavne City Council plans to establish visitor centres and tourist attractions at these sites. At Tel Yavne, a preserved site in the east of the city, finds have been uncovered indicating that a settlement existed there thousands of years ago. In recent years, archaeological excavations have unearthed ancient artefacts from the Early Bronze Age and other periods. There are several other ancient archaeological sites throughout the city, where evidence has been found of developed settlements that once existed in the area.

The modern city of Yavne was founded some 70 years ago, but its ancient roots date back 2000 years. The city of Yavne rose to prominence and became the spiritual centre of the Jewish people around 70 AD, following the destruction of the Second Temple.

Following the destruction, the people sank into the depths of despair at the loss of their Temple and the loss of leadership from both the religious and political spheres. During that period, Yavne served as the guardian of the flame and the bearer of the torch of hope for the entire nation.

It was here in Yavne that the great rabbis and sages of the nation gathered and established the spiritual and scholarly centre known as Kerem Yavne; from here, important rulings on laws and customs were issued, along with answers to the questions raised by the times, some of which remain valid to this very day.

After several generations, the people of Yavne were also forced to leave the land. Since then, numerous peoples have ruled the city, including the Crusaders, the Muslims, the Ottomans and the British.

When the State of Israel was established, its leaders decided to restore Yavne to its former glory and to rebuild the city in exactly the same place where it had stood 2000 years ago.

Tolerance and pluralism were the cornerstones of ancient Yavne. The residents of Yavne today are proud of this tradition; they carry on this legacy and pass it on to the next generation.

The town of Yavne was founded in 1949. It is situated on the Coastal Road, 26 km south of Tel Aviv, 13 km north of Ashdod, 6 km east of the coast and 6 km south of Rehovot. It has a temperate climate, typical of a town situated near the sea in the centre of the country. Its current population is approximately 46'000. Yavne is a city of diverse origins, home to people from all ethnic backgrounds. Although the town’s official founding took place on 22 December 1948, when twenty-two immigrants from Bulgaria arrived, its true history began many years earlier.

Yavne Through the Ages

Yavne is first mentioned in the Bible as Yavne’el, on the border of the territory of Judah. “And the lot fell to the tribe of the children of Judah, according to their families, to the border of Edom, the wilderness of Zin, southwards from the edge of Teman … and it passed by Mount Baalath and came out at Yavne’el; and the end of the border was at the sea” (Joshua 15:1, 11)

In the days of Saul and David, Yavne was part of the land of the Philistines; it is mentioned alongside the Philistine cities whose walls were breached by Uzziah. Yavne, situated on the Mediterranean coast, became a commercial port city in ancient times due to its proximity to the sea

and its central location, serving as an important crossroads for Jerusalem and the surrounding area.

During the Hasmonean Revolt, Judah Maccabee attacked the harbour and set the ships alight. In the time of Alexander Jannaeus, Yavne was part of Herod's kingdom, which he bequeathed to his sister Shalom and which subsequently passed into the hands of the Roman Emperor. The Greeks changed its name to Lemnia. Yavne, the second most important city for the Jewish people after Jerusalem, was a centre for the study of halakha, as well as a cultural, national, religious and spiritual centre for the Jewish people following the destruction of the Second Temple. The Jewish revolt against the Romans broke out in 66 AD; the revolt culminated in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. Tradition recounts that during the Roman siege of Jerusalem, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai (Avot de-Rabbi Natan, Version B) set out with two of his disciples – Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Elazar – from Jerusalem and asked the Emperor: 'I ask of you Yavne, that I may study Torah there, make tzitzit there, and perform all the other commandments there.'

Yavne in the Mishnaic and Talmudic Periods

Yavne in the Mishnaic and Talmudic Periods – On the 9th of Av in the year 70 AD, the Romans burnt the Temple, and thus Jerusalem lost its status as the centre of the Jewish people. Yavne became the centre of national and religious leadership.

Yavne was the seat of the Sanhedrin, as our sages said: 'The Sanhedrin was exiled from Jerusalem to Yavne'. The city's sages enacted important regulations in Yavne that enabled Jewish life to continue even without the Temple. Prayers suited to the circumstances of the time were established in Yavne – prayers that we still use today, such as the Amidah and the Blessing against Heretics – and the foundations for the compilation of the Mishnah were also laid there.

The great yeshiva of Yavne was called 'Kerem Yavne' and, according to the Sages, it was so named because its students sat in rows, like the vines in a vineyard. Students from all over the land flocked to the yeshiva to study Torah from the greatest sages of the generation. It is said that some would declare, 'Let us go to Yavne, to a place where the Torah is loved, to a place where there are many scholars, and where their names will be exalted through wisdom.' As Yavne was the centre of Torah and wisdom in the south of the land, our sages said, 'Whoever wishes to become wise should go down to Yavne.' Rabban Gamliel, the successor to Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, who worked to unite the people in the wake of the crisis following the destruction of the Temple, led delegations to Rome to represent the people and collect donations; in Yavne, he sanctified the month and marked the New Year.

Yavne served as the centre of the Jewish people for some 60 years. As Roman decrees grew harsher and the Bar Kokhba revolt broke out in 132, many of its inhabitants migrated to the Galilee. The Sanhedrin, too, moved from Yavne, presumably to Betar and subsequently to Oshah in the Western Galilee. Although Yavne subsequently ceased to be a Jewish city and became a Christian and later a Muslim settlement until 1948, its name remained over the following generations a symbol in the life of Israel – a symbol of Judaism's triumph over its enemies and its victory over those who persecuted it. Institutions of Torah study, study halls and synagogues were named after it both in the Land of Israel and throughout the Diaspora.

Yavne in the War of Independence

Yavne in the War of Independence: The Egyptians, advancing from the south along the coastal road, sought to reach this centre and, from there, Tel Aviv. At that time, Yavne was an Arab village with a population of around 2000. At the beginning of March, 200 men from the 'Iraqi Salvation Army' arrived in the Yavne area and settled at the railway station between Yavne and Rehovot. The entire area was heavily armed and difficult to attack.

As Yavne posed an obstacle to Jewish transport heading south, 'Operation Annihilation' – an ambush on the Coastal Road designed to lure the Iraqis into a trap – was planned. On 29 March 1948, the Arabs discovered the ambush and the operation failed.

Operation 'Barak B' was planned to seize weapons from Zarnoga, Kobiba and Yavne, eliminate the enemy at the railway station and blow up the Ashdod Bridge. The Ashdod Bridge was blown up on 12 May 1948. On 27 May 1948, Kobiba was captured, followed by Zarnoga. On 29 May 1948, the Egyptians reached the Ashdod Bridge and were halted (and the bridge was renamed 'Ad Halom Bridge'); our forces decided to capture Yavne in order to definitively deny the Egyptians access from the north. On 31 May 1948, a force from the Irgun and a force from the Givati Brigade set out to capture Yavne. The plan was to outflank the entire village on both sides and cut off any means of retreat. The capture was supposed to be completed before dawn, but in reality the first troops only reached Yavne at daybreak; the Arabs of Yavne had fled.

The Tomb of Rabban Gamliel

The Tomb of Rabban Gamliel: According to Jewish tradition, this tomb is attributed to Rabban Gamliel, President of the Sanhedrin in Yavne.

When Yavne was conquered in 1244, the Mamluks converted the building from a church into a mosque. Rabban Gamliel's tomb also became a holy mosque, and it is well known that Abu Huraira is buried in the area, according to all the findings. The tomb is situated at the highest point of the village. The arches are 6 metres high. The columns are Roman and set into the ground. The tomb is built of ashlar stones in layers, with the top layer of Giti marble. During the British Mandate, the building housed a school, and the hall was divided into classrooms. On one side of the tomb building (the eastern side) lies the Sanhedrin Garden.

The story of Rabban Gamliel, his departure from Jerusalem with Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai and the Sanhedrin. At the entrance to the tomb is the 'mihrab', a prayer niche facing Mecca and Medina, the two cities of great significance to Muslims. This niche was built after Khalil ibn Sha'ur, the governor of Ramla, expelled the Crusaders from the land; he used the coffins of deceased Crusaders and subsequently funds from donations.

The construction of a new structure over the tomb and the building of a mosque on the site of the church were part of a process of re-Islamisation that took place in the Land of Israel and served as a sharp reaction to the Crusader period. The Mamluks destroyed the coastal cities, including Yavne Yam, in order to neutralise the immediate military advantages they held, as they were accustomed to transporting supplies by sea. It could be said that, following the destruction of the coastal cities, Yavne became a more important city as an inland route from Egypt, northwards to Syria and

Lebanon, which were under Mamluk rule. There are two surviving monuments from the Mamluk period, which lasted until 1517: the 13th-century drawbridge (the ‘Post Bridge’), which was used for trade, and the tomb of Rabban Gamliel, built by the governor of Ramla on the orders of the Mamluk sultan Baybars. The tomb is situated at the highest point of the village. In 1337, it also served as a church. The mausoleum is divided into two parts: the entrance and the hall. The arches are 6 metres high; the columns are Roman and set into the ground. The hall ends in a ‘mihrab’ – facing Mecca. The monument is built of ashlar stones in layers, with the top layer of Giti marble. Above the prayer hall, rooms were fitted out as classrooms.

The building is divided into two parts: a spacious hall and a main chamber. The hall opens onto the courtyard on its northern side through three pointed arches. The columns are Roman; their lower sections are embedded in the floor, so their bases are not visible above the floor level. The capitals are late Corinthian, featuring two rows of acanthus leaves, each row comprising four leaves. Above are six domes: five are 6 metres high and the sixth is 7.80 metres high. The hall forms a square ending in a mihrab, above which is the seventh and highest dome. Jacob the Apostle, writing in the mid-13th century, states that on the tomb of Rabban Gamaliel there is ‘a very fine dome, which serves as a house of prayer for the Ishmaelites. It is a magnificent building, known as Abu al-Hirra’.

Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela also mentions the place, stating that there are no Jews there. The Babylonian Talmud states: ‘Rabban Gamliel had a grave in Yavne’ (Tractate Simchat, Chapter 10). In 1322, the grave is mentioned by Ashtor Ha-Parhi; subsequently, the grave is recorded in various lists of graves, sometimes alongside Rabbi Levits, who, according to tradition, was also buried in Yavne. On one side of the tomb (the eastern side) lies the Sanhedrin Garden, which, according to the pottery shards found there, was inhabited and served as a cemetery during the Muslim period. ‘The Power of Stone’ by Dr Hannah Tרגן, from the quarterly journal «Kathedra» (97) on the History of the Land of Israel and its Settlement, published by Yad Ben-Zvi.

Tel Yavne

On the eastern side of the garden runs the ‘old’ road to Ashkelon, and to the east of it rises Tel Yavne. At the summit of the tel lie the ruins of a large Crusader fortress that served as a church. The Crusaders called the town Avlin. The fortress, built in the 12th century, served as a place of worship and constituted a strategic point in the Crusaders’ defensive system against Ashkelon. During the Crusader Kingdom, Yavne was granted to the family of Abir ben France, Balian the Elder. After the conquest of Yavne by the Muslim Mamluks, the church was converted into a mosque; the Arab inhabitants called it ‘Al-Jama’ al-Kabir’ – the Great Mosque.

On the wall of the building is an Arabic inscription which reads: ‘In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, His Excellency the Great Scholar, the Venerable al-Sayyid Bishtaq al-Nasiri, ordered the construction of this blessed tower at the beginning of the second month of Rabi’ al-Thani, in the year seven hundred and thirty-eight’. The year 738 corresponds to 1337 AD. At the foot of the tel ran the great road from Egypt to Syria via the sea. The Mamluks built a bridge over the Sorek Stream, which flows alongside it (the Sorek Stream, also known as the Achziv Stream, originates in the Jerusalem Hills, flows north-west and empties into the Mediterranean Sea near Kibbutz Palmachim), in order to facilitate the passage of caravans travelling along this route. The

bridge, also known as the ‘Jumping Bridge’, was built by the Mamluk governor Baybars in the 13th century; a railway line runs east of the bridge. The track was laid by the British Army on its way from Egypt during the Second World War. After the British recaptured the area from the Turkish army, which had been stationed in the hills to the east, they continued laying the railway line northwards. Next to the railway line stands a pillbox – a reinforced concrete structure that served as a fortified post designed to protect the nearby bridge. Another building situated near the drawbridge is the House of Arches. This was once an impressive palace containing rooms and halls. The palace was built in 1936 by the sheikh who ruled the area. In 1948, construction was halted and the sheikh fled to Abu Dhabi with his four wives. The palace was converted into a hotel and was eventually purchased by a Yavne family. Running the length of the house is a veranda with a stone balustrade adorned with ancient Oriental carvings; the house’s windows are long and end in ornate arches, hence its name – the House of Arches. Everything is rounded and ornate; about 200 metres from the house are water wells that served the residents of Yavne until the end of the Mandate period.

When Yavne was conquered in 1099, it was known to Christians as Ibelin or the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. During the First Crusade, in 1141, the Crusader king Fulk built a fortress intended to counter the Egyptian forces holding Ashkelon. This fortress was of the square-shaped type and belonged to the French knight Balian, who was later known as Daub d’Ivlin. In 1187, Yavne fell to Saladin and remained under his control for four years.

Subsequently, in 1191, Richard the Lionheart, King of England, who was on the Third Crusade and had won several victories, arrived in Yavne by night. However, under a peace treaty signed between the Muslims and the Christians, Yavne-Ivlin remained outside the Crusaders’ control; in 1240, Yavne returned to Crusader hands and came under the rule of the rulers of Caesarea. The church on the mound was destroyed by artillery fire during the First World War. British researchers say it was a basilica-style church. From the top of the mound, one can see the entire area – Rishon LeZion and Ashdod.

This is an artificial hill – a tel – which was known as Yavne for a long time, probably as far back as the days of Joshua in the Bible, when Yavne was mentioned as being on the border of the tribe of Judah. At the foot of the hill ran the Way of the Sea, along which trade routes led from Egypt through the Land of Israel to Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

If the tower could speak, it would tell many stories: it was originally built as a large Crusader fortress and served as a church (the Crusaders called the place ‘Abelin’); it functioned as a house of prayer and was a strategic vantage point. In the 12th century, Yavne was granted to a French knight – Balian the Elder. In the 13th century, Yavne was conquered by the Muslims/Mamluks, and the building and church were converted into the minaret of a mosque; a plaque was affixed to it stating that it was built by Amos Asaydi Bashat al-Nasiri in 1337.

Richard the Lionheart, King of England and one of the leaders of the Third Crusade, sold off much of his property to finance the campaign to liberate the holy sites of Christianity from the Muslim Saladin. Along the way, he took control of Cyprus and conquered both Acre and Jaffa, but within his own ranks he fell out with Leopold, Duke of Austria. He failed to capture Jerusalem, was captured by Leopold’s men, handed over to Henry VI and imprisoned; he was only released after paying a large ransom.

(Translated with DeepL.com)