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## ON THIS DAY:

# Theodor Herzl re-interred 69 years ago atop Mt. Herzl

• By OREN OPPENHEIM

Friday, Av 23 in Judaism's lunar calendar – corresponding to August 3 – marks the 69th anniversary of the re-internment of Theodor Herzl (1860-1904). The date in the Gregorian calendar falls on August 17. But while the grave on Mount Herzl today is a landmark atop the highest point in west Jerusalem, other cities in the newborn state nearly claimed the honor of housing the mausoleum of the founder of modern Zionism, said Nomi Rabhan, a tour guide at the Herzl Museum located near the tomb on the Mount Herzl.

Known in Hebrew as Har Hazikaron (the Mount of Memory) as well as Har Herzl, Israel's national cemetery is symbolically located adjoining the Yad Vashem Holocaust Remembrance Center and the Jerusalem Forest.

Like the biblical leader Moses, Herzl didn't die in Israel, the land they both pined for. But while Moses's remains lie in an unknown location on Mount Nebo in biblical Moab, today Jordan, Herzl's bones were brought for re-burial in the Jewish state he envisioned, in accordance with his last will.

In that document, written in German in 1903, Herzl wrote, "I wish to be buried in a metal coffin near my father, and lie there until the Jewish people will transfer my body to the Land of Israel." He also indicated that he wanted close family members to be buried there as well.

On July 3, 1904, Herzl died of cardiac sclerosis in Edlach, a village near Reichenau an der Rax, Lower Austria, having been diagnosed with heart disease earlier in the year. A day before his death, he told his Zionist colleague Rev. William H. Hechler: "Greet Palestine for me. I gave my heart's blood for my people."

The Zionist visionary, who in 1897 founded the World Zionist Organization, convened the Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland that year, and tirelessly engaged in international diplomatic efforts to gain a charter to establish a Jewish state, was buried in Döbling, Vienna, where he had been living.

In 1949, his remains were brought from the Austrian capital to Jerusalem to be reburied on the top of Mount Herzl. In 2006 his children Hans and Pauline were disinterred from their graves in France and reburied alongside their father. The following year, the remains of his grandson Stephen Theodore Norman were exhumed in Washington, DC, and re-interred alongside his grandfather.

Rabhan told the *Post* that various reasons prevented the World Zionist Organization from bringing Herzl's remains to Palestine during the British Mandate. In 1949 with the conclusion of the War of Independence, the issue became a priority for the nascent state.

"[David] Ben Gurion's sitting down with his first government... where are they going to start? They have a brand new country," she said, with little infrastructure and no laws. Yet even so, "one of the first things they decided to do" was to bring Herzl's body to Israel, she said.

But where should the father of the country be laid to rest?

Some Israelis called for Herzl to be reburied in Herzliya, the city north of Tel Aviv named in his honor. Others called for

him to be re-interred in Tel Aviv, as that city's name is a Hebrew translation of his book *Altneuland* (Old-New Land). There were also calls for him to be buried in Haifa, which Herzl rhapsodized over during his only visit to the Land of Israel in 1898.

Ben Gurion, serving as Israel's first prime minister, eventually put his foot down, insisting that Herzl be buried in Jerusalem.

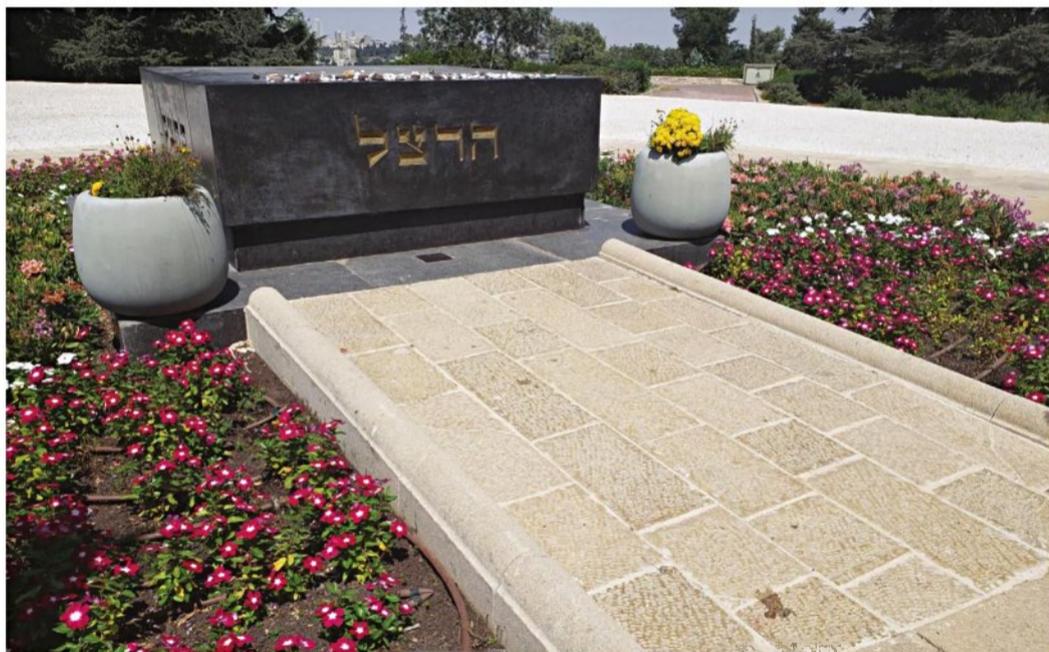
"It's 1949; we've just finished fighting this war and we've lost half this city [Jerusalem]... Ben Gurion thought, what better way to remind people that even though we only have half the city, and we lost the Temple Mount, lost the Kotel [Western Wall], we still have half our capital city, and we have to refocus everyone's attention to this area because we don't want to forget

that [Jerusalem] is still a center, focal point [for Israel]," Rabhan said. "What better way of doing that than drawing national attention to this place?"

From the 834-meter-high peak of Mount Herzl, one can view the Temple Mount.

Representatives from every locale in Israel attended the re-internment ceremony. Each in turn poured earth from their locale onto the grave, so that Herzl would be "buried under dirt from every single inch of this land, from the land that he so loved and adored," Rabhan said.

While the Herzl Museum is not commemorating the re-internment, Rabhan said that tours on Friday will mention the occasion. Herzl's grave can be visited with or without a formal tour. Admission is free.



THEODOR HERZL'S GRAVE atop Mount Herzl in Jerusalem. (Oren Oppenheim)