

**A MUSEUM CASE
EXHIBIT MARKING
THE 125TH
ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FIRST
ZIONIST CONGRESS
IN BASEL,
SWITZERLAND IN
AUGUST, 1897
AND THE 75TH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE
UNITED NATIONS VOTE
ON NOVEMBER 29, 1947
AUTHORIZING
THE CREATION OF
THE STATE OF ISRAEL**

IN BASEL, HE FOUNDED THE JEWISH STATE!

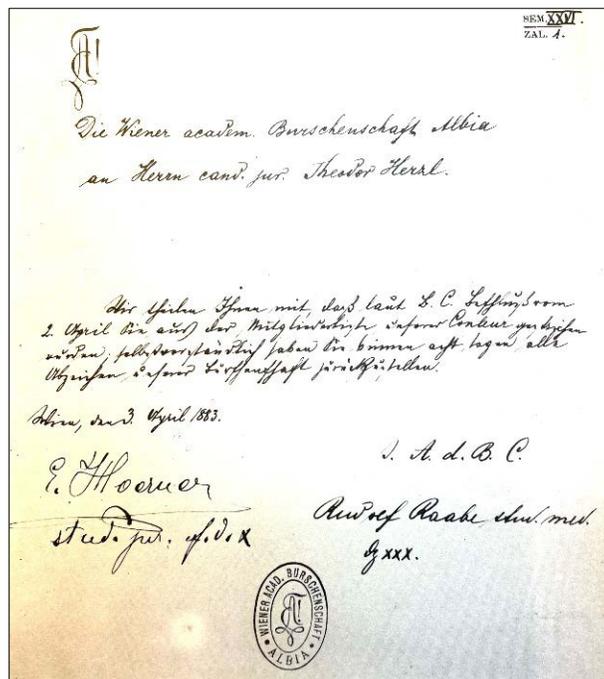


Theodor Herzl at Basel
photograph by Ephraim Moses Lilien

Theodor Herzl, the father of political Zionism and founder of the World Zionist Organization – and, ultimately, of the Jewish state – was a Budapest-born Viennese journalist. His pamphlet, *Der Judenstaat*, published in 1896, provided the blueprint for the movement to establish a Jewish national home. He viewed “the Jewish question” both as a national problem, to be solved by the normalization of the existence of the Jewish people through the establishment of a Jewish state and, as an international political one, to be solved through international diplomacy. Accordingly, he convened the first Zionist Congress at Basel, Switzerland in 1897, thus creating a political structure for the Jewish nationalist movement, a “government in exile,” striving for the restoration of its national home. (Adapted from a lecture by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, 1973)

Explaining Herzl's Journey from Assimilation to Zionism

Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) was born in Budapest and raised in a house where the Hungarian Jewish museum now stands (next to the Dohany Street Synagogue). The family moved to Vienna in 1878 after the death of his sister. He studied law at the University of Vienna. There he became a member of the German nationalist fraternity Albia, which had as its motto *Ehre, Freiheit, Vaterland* (honor, freedom, fatherland). He resigned in protest at the organization's antisemitism. Their response? The letter below, dated April 1882, informing him that his name had been removed from the roster of the Albia student fraternity as a result of his condemnation of the fraternity's antisemitic bias.



A more profound change began in Herzl's life soon after a sketch he had published in the leading Viennese newspaper, *Neue Freie Presse*, led to his appointment as the paper's Paris correspondent. Arriving in Paris with his wife in the fall of 1891, he was shocked to find in the homeland of the French Revolution the same antisemitism with which he had become so familiar in Austria. Until then, he had regarded antisemitism as a social problem that the Jews could overcome only by abandoning their distinctive ways and assimilating to the people among whom they lived. At the same time, his work as a newspaperman heightened his interest in, and knowledge of, social and political affairs. This led him to the conviction that the answer to antisemitism was not assimilation but organized counterefforts by Jews. As a reporter in Paris, he covered the trial of Alfred Dreyfus, which opened in 1894. The trial focused on a batch of French military documents that had been given to German agents, and the Jewish

artillery officer, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, who had been falsely charged with the crime. The ensuing political controversy resulted in an outburst of antisemitism among the French public. The Dreyfus affair crystallized Herzl's understanding of the precariousness of the Jewish community in Europe. He said in later years that the Dreyfus affair was what led him to become a Zionist. He realized that so long as antisemitism existed, assimilation would be impossible and the only solution for the majority of Jews would be organized immigration to a state of their own. (Adapted from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*)



Theodor Herzl addressing the First or Second Zionist Congress in Basel

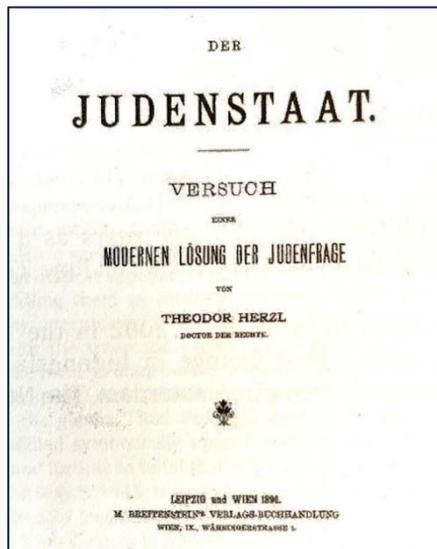
“At Basel, I founded the Jewish state,” Herzl wrote in his diary a few days after the conclusion of the event, which took place in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897. “If I said this out loud today, I would be answered by universal laughter. Perhaps in five years, certainly in fifty, everyone will realize it,” he wrote.

Fifty-one years later, with the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, Herzl's vision indeed became a reality.

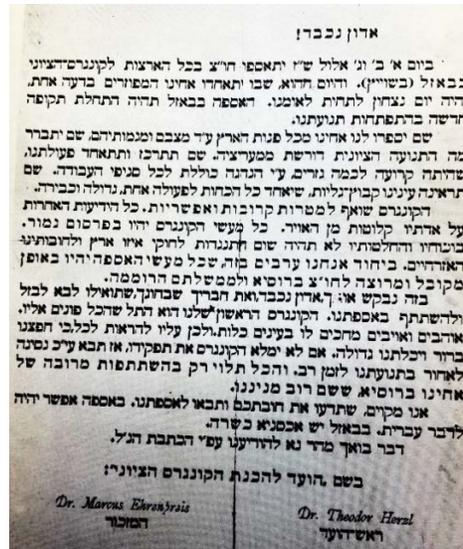


Israel Postal Authority, first day cover 1997 marking 100 years since the First Zionist Congress. The stamp shows the exterior of the Basel Stadtcasino in which the Congress's meetings were held. (The interior is the setting for the group photo above.) The "cancellation" reads in Hebrew *B'vasel yiisad'ti et medinat ha-y'hudim*, and in English (the words are partially obscured), "In Basel, I founded the Jewish State."

"As the convener of the first Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897 and as the founder of the World Zionist Organization, Theodor Herzl has become identified more than any other person with the emergence of political Zionism. His life has acquired legendary proportions, his portrait has become one of the trademarks of Zionism, and the symbolism attached to his personality has become one of the powerful elements of the Zionist creed.



The Jewish State, 1896



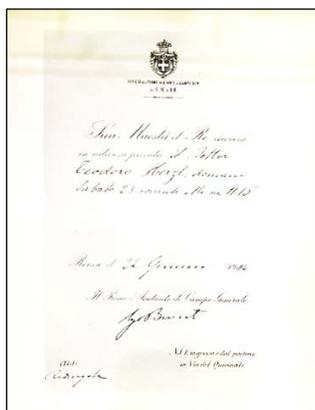
Invitation to the First Zionist Congress

"Anyone reading Herzl's writings – mainly *The Jewish State* (1896) and his 1902 book, *Altneuland* (Old-New Land) – will find a plethora of ideas about dilemmas of Jewish existence in the modern world as well as some very practical suggestions toward their solution. Yet few of these ideas are novel or original. Herzl's acute analysis of the roots of antisemitism in the

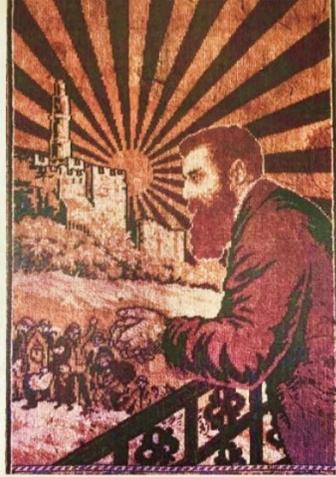
post-Emancipation era was preceded by the even more analytical writings on this subject by Moses Hess, Mosheh Leib Lilienblum, and Leo Pinsker; Herzl's ideas about the establishment of Jewish national institutions to further the aims of Zionism were preceded by similar ideas – and institutions – dating back to Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, Peretz Smolenskin, and the founders of the Hovevei Zion movement. And Jewish settlements had been established in Palestine decades before Herzl and, for all their limited scope and mixed success, they had become a focus of attraction and admiration for numerous Jewish organizations in various countries.

“What, then, were the novelty and historical significance of Herzl's activity? They lay neither in the originality of his thoughts nor in his organizational skills, which were rather limited, but in something quite different. Herzl was the first to achieve a breakthrough for Zionism in Jewish and world public opinion. He turned the quest for a national solution to the plight of the Jewish people from an issue debated at great length and with profound erudition in provincial Hebrew periodicals read by a handful of Jewish intellectuals in the remote corners of the Russian Pale of Settlement into a subject for world public opinion. From a marginal phenomenon of Jewish life, he painted the Zionist solution on the canvas of world politics – and it has never left it since.

“Herzl had no financial resources and no political power to back him up. The Jewish establishment, both financial and rabbinical, viewed him, in most cases, with suspicion if not outright horror. Herzl's appearance in the arena of world public opinion was achieved through his own almost maniacal heroic struggle, in the course of which he sometimes showed signs of irresponsible, if not slightly dangerous, egotism. What helped Herzl in this leap into the public limelight was his profession and his personality: he was a journalist – brilliant, sometimes superficial – hungry for publicity and adept at public relations... More careful and less superficial people would have feared to tread where he did. But from the moment Herzl came to his conclusion about the necessity for a national solution to the Jewish problem, he correctly realized that such a momentous and revolutionary task could not be achieved through silent labor at the edge of world politics...Only a daring breakthrough, which might have something of adventurism in it, would succeed in bringing it into the center of the world's attention.



(left) Herzl's invitation to meet with the king of Italy (right) An invitation to Herzl to visit the Pope

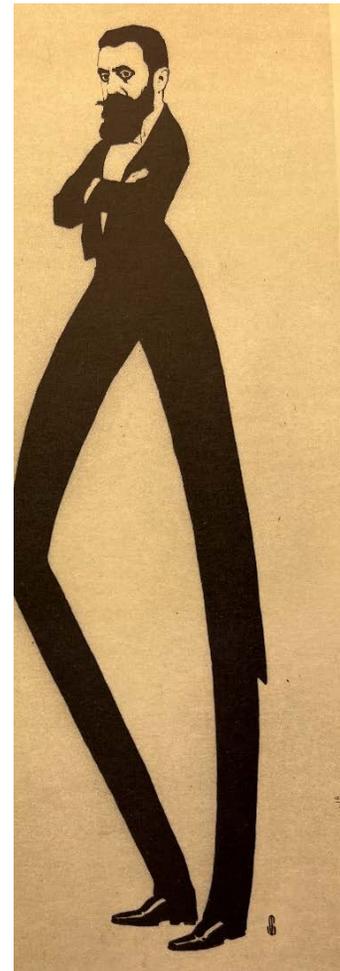


(left) Wall carpet honoring Herzl, Jerusalem, early 20th century
(right) Bronze tray, portrait of Herzl, inscription reads “If you will it, it is no dream.” Bezalel School, 1910’s.

“Therefore, his writing was sometimes pompous, bombastic, and theatrical – especially in *The Jewish State* – and his solutions look not only as if their author himself had discovered them for the first time but also as if he had been the first to pose those very questions. For example, his attempt to solicit the help of Jewish financial magnates, like Edmund de Rothschild and Maurice de Hirsch, was done with all the prophetic *chutzpah* of a beggar claiming to speak for the whole Jewish people. All his rather dramatic approaches to the Pope, to Emperor Wilhelm II, to the Sultan, to the Archduke of Baden, to the British Colonial Secretary, were motivated by his profound understanding that the efforts of a small and persecuted people could become successful only if they were thrust directly, without mediation, with unrelenting simplemindedness, straight into the commanding heights of world power and international opinion.

“None of these efforts proved successful ... but friend and foe alike had to admit that since Herzl’s meteoric appearance, Zionism had begun to move from a parochial concern of some Jewish intellectuals into an issue of world politics that transcended the mere organizational fact of the founding of the Zionist movement.”

Excerpted from *The Making of Modern Zionism: The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* by Shlomo Avineri, 1981

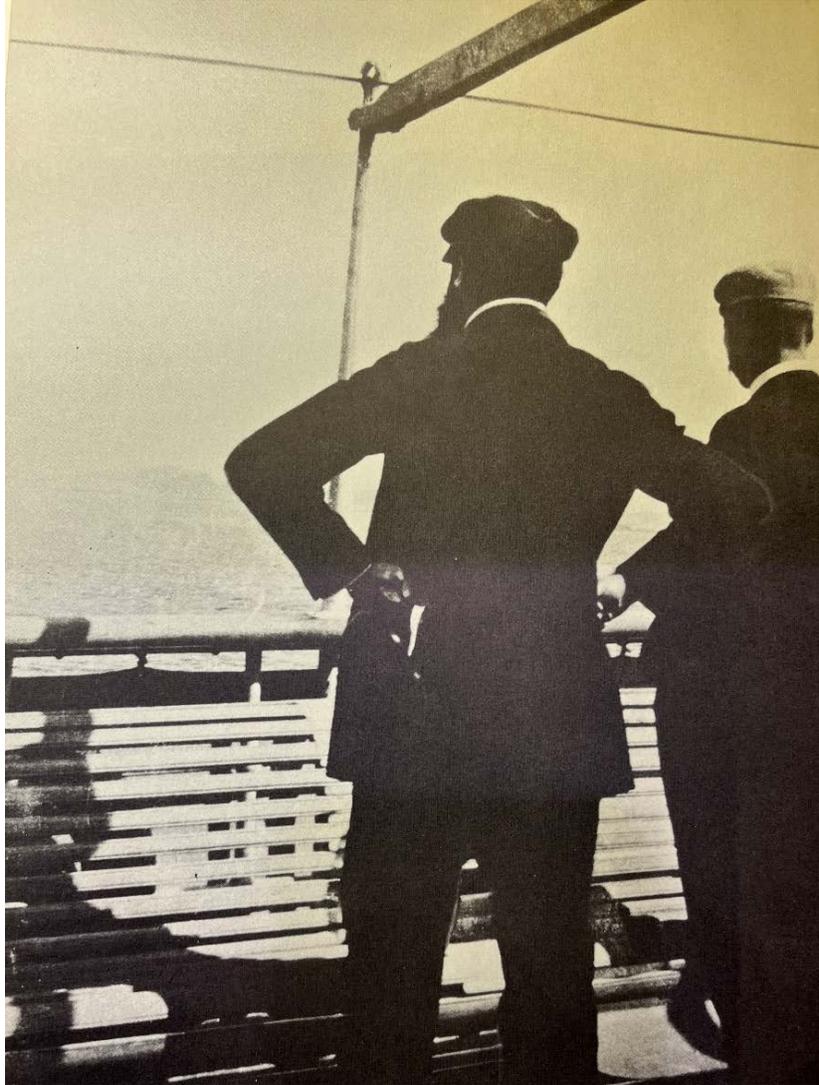


Newspaper caricature of Theodor Herzl entitled “The Greatest Jew of Our Times,” published during the First Zionist Congress (1896)

**PHOTOGRAPHS AND MEDALS
HONORING THEODOR HERZL,
THE FOUNDER OF POLITICAL ZIONISM**



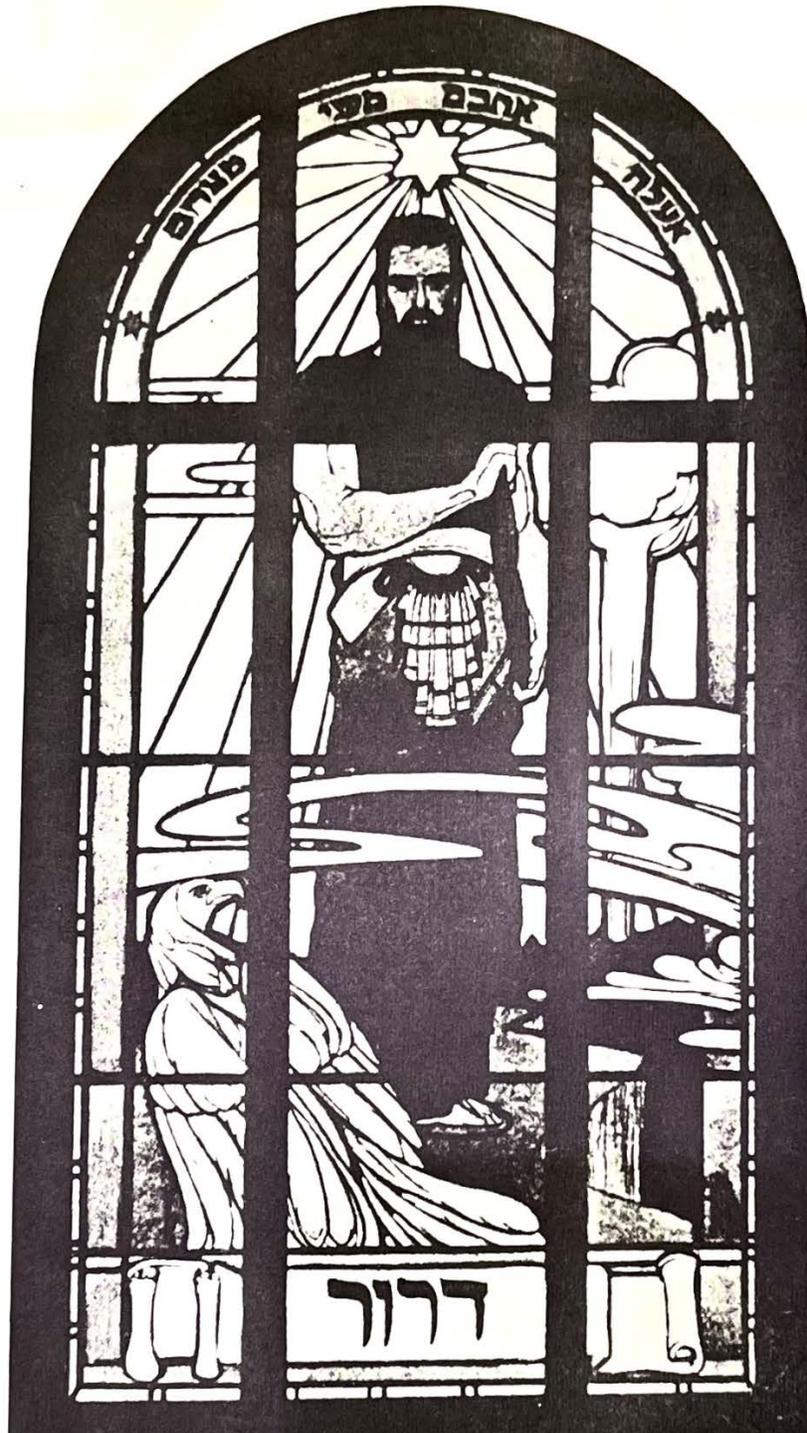
Representatives of the Caucasian Jewish community at the First Zionist Congress



Herzl looking back toward shore after his visit to Ottoman Palestine, 1898



Two-shekel silver commemorative coin issued in 1997 to honor the 100th anniversary of the First Zionist Congress



Ephraim Moses Lilien designed this stained glass window for B'nai B'rith in Hamburg, Germany (early 20th century). Note that the artist has given Moses the face of Theodor Herzl. The Hebrew text above his head reads *a'aleh etkhem mei-eretz mitzraim*: "I shall bring you up from the land of Egypt." The Hebrew word at the bottom of the window, *d'ror*, can mean both "liberation" and "freedom" and is equally applicable to both.



Herzl died at the age of 44. His funeral was held on July 7, 1904 in Vienna, where he was buried.



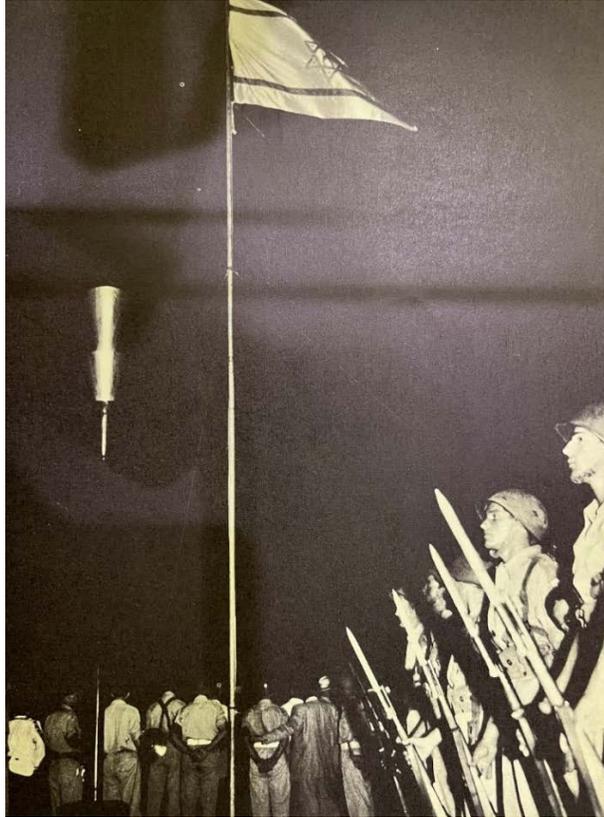
In August 1947, on the fiftieth anniversary of the First Zionist Congress, David Ben Gurion, Chairman of the Jewish Agency (the government-in-waiting for the soon to be declared State of Israel), addressed a memorial meeting in the reconstructed Herzl Room in the JNF building in Jerusalem.



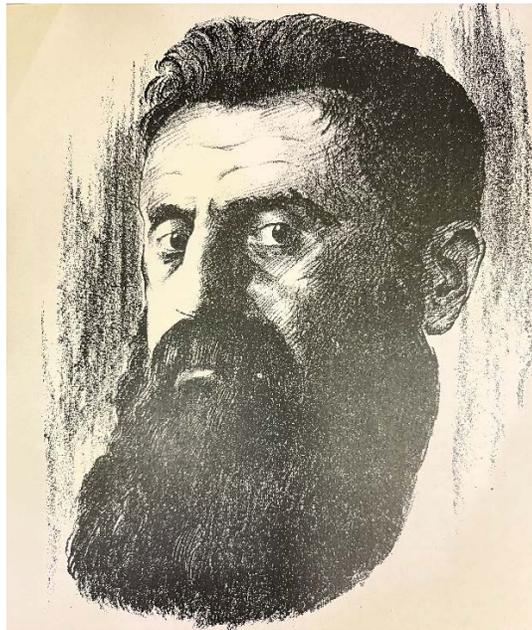
In 1903, Theodor Herzl wrote, "I wish to be buried in a metal coffin next to my father ... until the Jewish people can transfer my remains to Eretz Israel." He died a year later. In accordance with his will, his remains and those of his parents and sister were moved from the Jewish cemetery in Vienna to the new State of Israel in 1949.



Theodor Herzl's grave has a place of honor in the Mt. Herzl cemetery. The remains of his parents and sister and later, his children, are interred by his side. Mt. Herzl is also the burial place of five of Israel's prime ministers: Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, Yitzhak Shamir, Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres. Zeev Jabotinsky, founder of Revisionist Zionism (the Zion Mule Corps, the Jewish Legion, and Aliyah Bet), had been buried in New York; his remains were moved to this hallowed site in 1964. Har Herzl also serves as the Mt. Arlington of Israel. Among the thousands of military graves are those of Hannah Senesh, executed by the Nazis in Hungary on November 7, 1944 at the age of 23, and the six other young Palestinian Jewish paratroopers who went from their new homeland to rescue British pilots downed by enemy fire (their official mission) and to warn the Hungarian Jewish community of impending danger (the reason they volunteered) .



Honor guard of soldiers of Israel's Defense Forces at Herzl's tomb



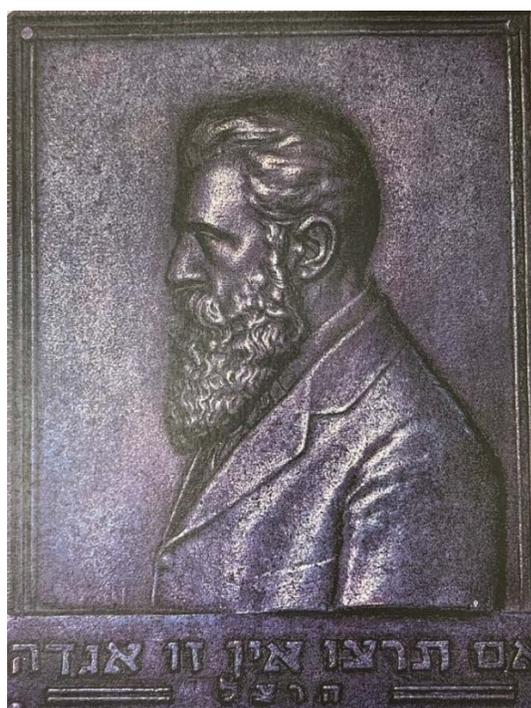
Portrait of Theodor Herzl, lithograph by Joseph Budko, 1920

The themes of these commemorative medals minted by the Israel Coins and Medals Corporation are self-explanatory.



The medal below was minted in 1962. One face shows “defeat” and the other “renewal.” The obverse reproduces a coin with the inscription, “*Judaea capta*,” minted by the Roman Senate to celebrate the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE. The reverse, in English and Hebrew, reads “Israel liberated 1948.” On this side of the coin is new birth: a baby held aloft, and a sapling being planted.





Copper relief portrait of Herzl
produced by Pal-Bell, Israel, 1950s.



This illustration accompanied Israel's joint issue of the commemorative postage stamp featuring the Basel Stadtcasino (reproduced on page 5) and a silver two-shekel coin (above) marking the 100th anniversary of the First Zionist Congress. The iconic depiction of Herzl looking across the river at Basel (see above in our display), engraved on the two-shekel coin, is here superimposed on the image of the Citadel fortress in Jerusalem.

The inscription quotes Herzl's inspiring charge:

Im tirtzu, ein zu agadah – “If you will it, it is not a dream.”



This exhibit was prepared by Rabbi Norman and Naomi Patz to mark two major milestone events in modern Jewish history: the 100th anniversary of the First Zionist Congress, called by Theodor Herzl in August 1897, and the 75th anniversary of the United Nations vote on the partition of Palestine on November 29, 1947, dividing it into a Jewish state and an Arab state. That vote came only nine years after Kristallnacht and barely two years after the end of World War II. (Had Israel only been in existence when the Nazis came to power, it is likely that the Holocaust would never have happened.) But after 1945, the horrors of the Holocaust could not be denied. Great Britain, as other colonial powers came to do in the following decade, withdrew from its colonial “possessions,” among them the Mandate for Palestine.

While the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization accepted partition, the Arab states all rejected the UN decision. As a result, Israel has had to battle for survival in one war after another: the War for Independence, 1948-49; the Suez campaign, 1956-57; the Six Day War, 1967; the Yom Kippur War, 1973; the Lebanon war, 1982; and the two intifadas, the Iranian missile attack in 1991, and the seemingly endless Gaza engagements. Although no Palestinian state has yet come into existence, with the Abraham Accords of 2020, most of the Arab nations have now come to terms with Israel. The Palestinians, represented by the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, continue to reject the validity of Israel’s existence, and call for its destruction, and the United Nations continues to condemn Israel’s “aggressions.”

It has been said that if Israel were to lay down its arms, it would be annihilated. If the Arabs were to lay down their arms, there would be peace. The deadly paradox continues.

CREDITS:

Black and white photographs

-*Herzl’s Life in Pictures: Forty Photographs*, prepared by the Joint Committee of the Government of Israel and the World Zionist Organization for the Observance of the Herzl Centennial, 1860-1960

Color photographs

-*Local Judaica: Judaica Artifacts Created in the Land of Israel 1880-1967*. Eretz Israel Museum, 2014

-Medals and coins, NRP