Gideon Bar

Reconstructing the Past:
The Creation of Jewish Sacred Space
in the State of Israel, 1948–1967

ABSTRACT

The outcome of Israel's War of Independence was the main catalyst for the creation of a new map of Jewish pilgrimage sites. Places of only secondary importance before the war now turned into central cult centers. Several categories of the sacred sites are discussed herein: sites in the possession of Jews before the 1948 war that were developed during the 1950s as central cult centers; sacred sites owned by Muslims prior to the war, which were "converted" into Jewish sacred sites during the 1950s; and new Jewish pilgrimage sites created only after the establishment of the State of Israel, whose importance relied exclusively on newly created sacred traditions. The research demonstrates how various official, semi-official, and popular powers took part in the shaping of the Jewish sacred space.

INTRODUCTION

THE IMPACT OF ISRAEL'S 1948 War of Independence on the history of the region has been examined from various angles: political, geographical, and ideological.[1] Yet there is almost no research on the influence of the war on the development of sacred sites, particularly Jewish pilgrimage destinations.

The Land of Israel was blessed with an abundance of holy places that have attracted pilgrims for centuries. This region's uniqueness as the cradle of Judaism and Christianity, the two monotheistic religions, together with its centrality to Islam, engendered the development of dozens of sacred sites, most of them graves of kings, prophets, and saints, places that were revered along the centuries by local and foreign pilgrims.[2]

I

Veneration of saints is a universal phenomenon in both monotheis-
tic and polytheistic creeds.[3] The saints were perceived as intermediaries
between a petitioner and god—and in this sense Judaism was not different.
From at least the Crusader period until today, Jewish pilgrims venerated
the different sacred sites, most of them tombs of Jewish saints. The graves
functioned as cairns, claim stakes to assert Judaism's historical presence in
this region. They were also perceived as tangible evidence that Judaism once
flourished in this holy landscape.

Against this almost unbroken history of Jewish tomb veneration, it
seems that the period between 1948 and 1967 is exceptional. The division
of the country into two separate political entities, the State of Israel and
the Kingdom of Jordan, changed the region by forcing a separation among
the region's inhabitants and their sacred shrines. These were now often in
unreachable parts of the land. This was true for the Muslims and Chris-
tians,[4] but it was especially prominent for the Jewish populace, which was
cut off from most of its sacred sites.[5]

Pursuing its long-standing Zionist position towards Jerusalem's Old
City basin and the holy sites, the State of Israel did not insist on its right
of worship at these pilgrimage centers.[6] The cease-fire agreement between
Israel and Jordan officially provided the Jews free access to the Western Wall,
the holiest place for the Jews and a substitute for the destructed temple.
In practice the agreement was not honored, and the Jews were prevented
from reaching the Wall and the rest of the sacred sites in East Jerusalem
and its surroundings.[7]

This cut-off of the Jewish population from most of its sacred sites
brought about the re-designing of the sacred space in the State of Israel.
The development of the map of Jewish sacred sites during these 19 years was
manifested in various ways, the central one being the emphasis on and the
signalization of some sacred places that held minor importance before the
war and their development as central and important pilgrimage centers.

Between 1948 and 1967, sacred sites such as *King David's Tomb* in
Jerusalem, the *Cave of Elijah* in Haifa, and the tombs of the saints in the
Galilee attained great importance and were the focus of the Israeli Ministry
of Religions Affairs (hereafter, MRA). The director-general, Shmuel Zanwil
Kahana, was personally involved in the creation and development of the
Jewish sacred sites. He, then, can be seen as a key figure in the development
of the Jewish sacred geography of this unique period.

JEWISH HOLY PLACES BEFORE 1948

Judaism's approach towards pilgrimage and worship at sacred places has been ambivalent. The Jews' prolonged history as a dispersed minority with neither political sovereignty nor their own controlled territory dictated a unique reliance on time as a dimension that sanctifies the universe.[8] Yet despite this unique situation, popular cultic activity related to the worship of saints (*Tsaddikim*) gained popularity and was common during the second millennium.

During the Othman period, from the sixteenth century onwards, more and more Jews living in both the Land of Israel and in the Diaspora visited the dozens of sacred graves found in various parts of the country. These holy sites were scattered around the Galilean cities of Safed and Tiberias, but especially in the vicinity of Jerusalem.[9] Because of their holiness and centrality, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Hebron were the natural pivot. Many sacred sites and burial grounds connected to the history of the Jewish nation and Old Testament figures such as the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the matriarch Rachel, and King David were created and developed. The sacred sites were a magnet not only for pilgrims from Jerusalem and the Land of Israel itself, but also for those who came from the Jewish Diaspora.

The Galilee was also rich in many tombs and sacred sites that were ascribed to Talmudic figures, places which before 1948 enjoyed less importance.[10] Many of these latter Jewish sacred places were owned by Muslims, a fact that forced the Jews to share them with the local (and much larger) Muslim population. In contrast, Jews had no desire to share or hold the Christian Galilean sacred sites that were venerated by the dense local Arab-Christian population. Places like Nazareth, Capernaum, and Mount Tabor were largely ignored by the Jews.

Contrary to Jerusalem and its surroundings, where buildings and memorials were built on top of the sacred places in earlier generations, in other parts of the land, especially in the Galilee, the process of institutionalization was only in its initial phase before 1948. Many of the sacred sites were no more than simple landmarks in the Galilean landscape. These included caves, ancient pillars and tombstones, heaps of stones, rocks with unusual shapes, and sometimes ancient sarcophagi that were also regarded as the burial places of the saints.[11] The number of Jewish pilgrims who visited the Galilean sacred space before 1948 was quite limited, as most pilgrims preferred to visit the sacred places near Jerusalem and not many were able to travel as far as the Galilee.[12]

The traditions in this rather remote region, populated almost entirely by Muslims, were local in nature and the sacred sites were used mainly by locals—Muslims and Jews alike. This population determined the time frame and ritual agenda in the sacred places by including prayers, feasts, and other religious customs. In the absence of a central authority accountable for the development and ownership of the sacred sites, they fell mostly into the hands of individuals and associations that assumed responsibility for their daily operations while attempting to obtain ownership.

1948, HOLY PLACES, AND THE CHANGING OF THE ISRAELI LANDSCAPE

One of the more interesting aspects of the cultural history of the Jewish national revival in the Land of Israel has been the incorporation of the sacred in a secular-national framework. Traditionally, Jewish sacred space included largely alleged graves of biblical figures and Talmudic saints, but as the Zionist enterprise progressed and upon the founding of the State of Israel, a new type of sacred space emerged, emphasizing mostly Jewish heroism together with Zionist martyrdom.[13]

Following the 1948 War, Zionist sacred topography was extended to include dozens of war memorials and military cemeteries designed to substantiate and celebrate the heroic sacrifice of the fallen soldiers and the achievement of the State's independence. The cult of the fallen soldiers was based on both the ethos of patriotic sacrifice exalted in all modern nation-states and on the unique Jewish legacy of sacrifice, martyrdom, and national heroism.[14]

During this period, then, when the State of Israel nurtured mainly the "cult of nationhood", stressing national elements connected to both the distant and more recent history of the Land of Israel,[15] the MRA, led by Director-General Kahana, made parallel efforts to emphasize the Jewish-religious past of the land, especially its history as the land of the Bible and the seat of the sages from the period of the Mishna and Talmud.

Thus, not only places connected to Zionist and Israeli heroism, such as Tel-Hai and Degania were expected to be positioned on the Israeli map, but the Galilean tombs of the saints were also declared an essential part of it. Not only archaeological sites such as Masada, emphasizing the Jewish heroic past, were posted on the map,[16] but also places like the "Lion's Cave" and the "Light" in Modi'in, were now part of the sacred space.

Kahana's activity in rearranging the sacred sites during the 1950s and 1960s is a clear case of "renewing" and "inventing" a tradition,[17] which he tried to intensify by organizing a system of religious cult and worship in the different Jewish sacred sites, most of which had not been revered before 1948. Kahana drew the legitimacy for his activities from his official position, cultivating existing traditions and creating new ones, gathering myths and assembling symbolic items at the sites that embodied their sacredness for the pilgrims.

These efforts were in fact anti-establishment activities, which were carried out in an era where the secular "cult of nationhood" rather than traditional religion was dominant. Indeed, Kahana's activity in creating sacred sites in Jerusalem and other parts of the country raised bitter criticism against him. Academics and officials often complained about his actions.[18] Journalists, time and again, attacked his freedom to ascribe holiness to places like King David's Tomb or the Rock of Destruction.[19] Especially critical was Shmuel Yeivin, the general manager of what was then the Israeli Department of Antiquities.[20] As some of Kahana's sacred places were also archeological sites, Yeivin protested against the MRA's activity in these places but had no successes.[21] Disputes about the question of ownership of places such as the ancient Galilean Synagogues or the tomb of Raban Gamliel usually ended while Kahana had the upper hand.

The combination of Kahana's activity, the involvement of individuals and various associations and organizations, and the unique geo-political situation following the 1948 war yielded re-design of the pilgrims' routes in the different parts of the State of Israel and led to the creation of a new, alternative map of Jewish sacred space that dominated the local landscape up until 1967.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF JEWISH SACRED SPACE AFTER 1948

Even as Israel's War of Independence was raging, and before the cease-fire agreement with the various Arab states that participated in the warfare was reached, the newly established MRA began to arrange and develop the sacred space within the as-yet amorphous boundaries of the young state. Kahana argued that it was now imperative to imprint a traditional Jewish character on the Israeli landscape—a rather new agenda whose purpose was to link the ancient history of the *Land* of Israel to the current history-in-the-making of the *State* of Israel.[22]

One of the first measures Kahana applied to demonstrate this transition was to place signposts near Jewish sacred sites and roads leading to pilgrimage centers. As no systematic information regarding the Jewish sacred sites was at hand,[23] Kahana was forced to gather information on the location of the sacred sites and the rituals that were customarily performed there. The data were gathered from locals: rabbis, guides, and teachers.[24] The joint enterprise between the MRA and local initiatives, whether private people who were involved in the identification and development of the sacred sites, or various local religious associations, brought an enormous change in the Jewish sacred sites map and a sharp increase in the number of sacred sites that were now identified and introduced to wider sectors of the Israeli public.[25]

Indeed, during the British Mandate few attempts were made by local Jews and Jewish organizations to register any of the sacred places as Jewish property. These were, for example, the Cave of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem and the Graves of the Saints in the Galilee.[26] In reality, only a minority of the Jewish sacred places developed during the 1950s were actually owned by Jews before the 1948 war. This stemmed from a variety of historic reasons, mainly the fact that during the latter part of the Othman Period and the British Mandate, Muslims possessed most parts of the Land of Israel, regions where Jews and Muslims shared the same holy sites. This created the reality in which almost all the historically venerated Jewish sacred sites were in local Muslim hands since before 1948.

HOLY PLACES OWNED BY JEWS BEFORE 1948

After the establishment of the State of Israel, Kahana focused his activity on these rather well-established sacred places and used them as foci for his operations. One example is the *Cave of the Sanhedrin* in Jerusalem, a sacred place where, according to the Jewish tradition, more than seventy Jewish elders were buried during the Second Temple Period. The place was turned into one of the MRA's main centers of activity in Jerusalem. The cave, which was bought by Jerusalem's Jews at the beginning of the twentieth century,[27] played an important role in the creation of the Jewish sacred space in the western part of divided Jerusalem.[28]

Another prominent example of Jewish ownership of sacred space before 1948 is the tomb of *Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai* [*Rashbi* in initials] near the Arab village of Meiron and an active pilgrimage site for Jews and Muslims for generations prior to 1948.[29] Jews acquired ownership of this

sacred Galilean place in the nineteenth century. For generations Jews had frequented the place, especially during the feast of *Lag Ba'Omer*, when it was customary to take part in the annual regional *hiloola* (a celebration, usually on the day when the *Tsaddik* passed away).

Following the establishment of the State of Israel, this pilgrimage was turned into a mass event, an annual gathering of thousands of worshippers in this remote Galilean settlement.[30] The annual pilgrimage to the site was made into a joint operation of different State agents, particularly the MRA. The importance of Meiron and its magnetic attraction as a major sacred place was one of the main reasons for the creation of a broad set of additional secondary pilgrimage sites in the same area during the 1950s, most of them are still venerated by Jewish pilgrims today.

Tiberias, situated on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, was home to additional important central sacred sites, many of them owned by the local Jewish community since the nineteenth century. Two prominent examples of this phenomenon are the tombs of *Rabbi Moshe Ben-Maimon* [*Rambam*] and *Rabbi Meir Ba'al HaNess*, two of the more important Jewish pilgrimage destinations in the Land of Israel. The importance of Tiberias as a sacred pilgrimage center grew after the establishment of the State of Israel. Jews thus regularly frequented the city during that period, especially during the annual *hiloolot*, which the MRA sponsored.[31]

THE JUDAIZATION OF MUSLIM HOLY PLACES

Another category of Jewish sacred places developed after 1948—and far more abundant in the Israeli landscape—was sacred sites that were held by Muslims prior to the War. Although even before the division of the region Jews regularly frequented many of these sacred sites (for example *King David's Tomb* in Jerusalem and the *Cave of Elijah* in Haifa), ownership of these places remained in Muslim hands and many of the sacred sites were in fact run by the Islamic charitable foundation [*Waqf*]. Jews were usually allowed to visit these places only during certain days and only after paying entrance fees.

The political, military, and, most importantly, demographic changes that took place after 1948 led to the extraction of different areas in the Land of Israel from their original Arab population, and to the transfer of the sacred sites in those areas to Israeli sovereignty.[32] Although this activity was not guided by official policy, these sacred sites can be seen as but another means of achieving sovereignty over these sites and territories, parallel to

other endeavors that were made during the same period to establish Israeli settlements in these territories.

Complicated legal problems connected mostly to the determination of the ownership of these sacred sites forced the State of Israel to relinquish many of them to Muslim religious trusts. Kahana and the MRA, which was now in charge of these places, were required to find creative solutions to this unique situation, especially as Jews were enhancing the veneration of these places. In some cases Kahana handed over the responsibility for the sacred sites to the Druze and Muslim Department of his ministry, which leased many of them to different interested Jewish bodies, usually for a minimal rent.

In practice, Jewish ownership of these places was made effective by the different associations and individuals that frequented them daily. They held regular prayers, feasts, and special celebrations in those sites and conducted small-scale development projects on-site, gradually reshaping the appearance of the sacred sites and giving them a more Jewish character.

The Jewish hold over these places was also enforced by the semi-official operations of a number of organizations, committees, and societies that were encouraged by Kahana.[33] One of the more extraordinary consequences of this process was the erasure of the sacred places' Muslim past and the emphasis instead on the Jewish traditions and heritage connected to them.

In many places where Muslims and Jews alike believed in the sacredness of the figure buried in the site, the identity of the place was kept Jewish, with Jews now possessing the sacred place. This was true for *King David's Tomb* on Mount Zion, a Muslim pilgrimage destination for centuries which had long been known as *Nebi Daud*. Despite the fact the since the Late Middle Ages Jews believed in the sanctity of the place, they were not permitted to visit it on a regular basis. The effects of Israel's War of Independence were especially dramatic in Mount Zion, leading to a profound change in the status of the place. Immediately following the war, *King David's Tomb* was turned into the key Jewish pilgrimage site in the State of Israel. Its new status resulted in a profound modification of Mount Zion's physical and symbolic status.

In other instances where Jews occupied former Muslim sacred sites, the identity of the sacred place was altered as the Jewish heritage of the place was highlighted at the expense of other traditions. Thus, for example, the Tomb of *Ali Abu Hurayra* in Yavneh was developed as the tomb of *Rabban Gamliel*, the *Nasi* (president) of the Jewish Sanhedrin.[34]

Following the War, this Muslim tomb with its typical cupola was converted into a Jewish sacred place, gradually drawing more and more Jewish worshippers.[35] The change in Yavneh had a lot to do with the new local Jewish settlers, immigrants who came primarily from Arab countries to settle in the nearby vacated Arab village of Yubna.[36] These settlers adopted the adjacent tomb and reused it as the tomb of *Raban Gamliel.* As in many similar cases throughout the State of Israel, the tradition that connected Jews to Yavneh was not unfounded, and was based mainly on the literature of Medieval Jewish pilgrims, who frequently mentioned visits to that place.

The Jewish claim of ownership over this tomb was based on the argument that it, as well as many other Muslim sacred tombs, were originally Jewish sacred burial places that were Islamized during the later history of the region.[37] During the decades prior to 1948 no visible active or large-scale Jewish pilgrimage to Yavneh was recorded, as was true for most of the sacred places that formed the Jewish sacred space later, during the 1950s.

The involvement of Jewish immigrants from Arab countries, many of them from North Africa, in the development of *Raban Gamliel's* tomb in Yavneh was only part of an extensive process that took place after 1948 with the influx of hundreds of thousands of immigrants. These immigrants' culture and customs, and especially their need to revere sacred sites near their settlements,[38] extended the sacred space to additional parts of the country in which Jewish immigrants replaced the former local Muslim populations. Besides *Raban Gamliel's* tomb in Yavneh, where the identity of the sacred place was changed, there are additional examples where such a process took place: the Muslim sacred site of *Nebi Yemin* near the city of Kfar Saba, which was converted into the tomb of Benjamin, son of Jacob;[39] the tomb of Judah was sanctified in the small town of Yahud;[40] and on the main road connecting Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem, near the immigrant town of Beit Shemesh, the tomb of *Sheikh Gherib* was transformed into the tomb of Samson.[41] One of the areas where this process was particularly evident was the Galilee. There, many Muslim sacred sites, usually tombs of local Muslim saints, were converted and their past obliterated as their Jewish connection was being emphasized.[42]

JEWISH HOLY SITES CREATED AFTER 1948

An additional type of sacred places developed solely by Kahana during 1948–1967 was sites whose sanctity was newly established during that period. This activity was based on the creativeness of Kahana and other MRA officials, as well as on biblical and Talmudic literature and pilgrims' epistolary records recalling legends and traditions connected to these sacred places.

The development of these sacred sites was part of a plan by Kahana to deepen and expand the map of Jewish sacred places in Israel by creating additional sacred hubs in locations where no ancient Jewish sanctity was previously to be found.

The MRA now began to develop new sacred sites such as the "Tamarisk of Abraham" in Beer-Sheva, the "Rock of Destruction" near the settlement of Eshta'ol, or the "Cave of the Lion" in Jerusalem.

This cave, for example, was situated in Western Jerusalem and was artificially connected to Jewish history while cultivating a legend on an ancient lion which, in antiquity, hid and guarded the bodies of Jewish soldiers buried in the cave. Kahana, the exclusive promoter of the cave on these grounds, was the one who established a connection between the impressive grotto in the western part of Jerusalem and a well-known medieval tradition, thereby sponsoring the place as a Jewish destination for pilgrimage.[43]

GEOGRAPHICAL ASPECTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE JEWISH SACRED PLACES

One of the more prominent geographic testimonies of religious expression is sacred space. All human religions, from the great traditions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, to sectarian cults and tribal beliefs, have designated certain places as sacred.[44] Devotees acknowledge that different areas are endowed with divine meaning, which separates them qualitatively from secular or profane places.[45] Many also agree that sacred space does not exist naturally, but that sacred space is assigned its sanctity per the believers' definitions, limitations, and characterizations as interpreted from their culture, experience, and goals.

Geographers, in particular geographers of religion, have explored a wide range of themes connected to the development of sacred space.[46] Queries about how and why pilgrims travel to sacred sites and how their pilgrimages affect the environment and society are frequently asked.

The distribution of sacred space usually reveals important clues about religious meaning and symbolism as well as why certain places are regarded as special. Some of the more central questions related to this topic are: Why and on what basis is space defined as sacred;[47] what makes a particular place sacred to the believers; how are sacred sites classified and selected; what implications does this designation have on the use and character of those areas; how do believers respond to the idea of sacred space; and how is their response, particularly as demonstrated in pilgrimages, reflected in geographical flows and patterns.

Israel's War of Independence had a profound influence on the Jewish pilgrimage sites and on their hierarchy in comparison to earlier times. Jerusalem maintained its central position as the holiest place in the State of Israel. The problem was that no important Jewish sacred sites existed in the western Jewish part of the city, but this was solved by various means, primarily through the development of three sacred sites: King David's Tomb, the Cave of the Sanhedrin, and the Lion's Cave. Similar methods were applied to other parts of Israel, where the development of many new sacred places created pilgrimage routes that were completely distant from those that prevailed among the Jewish population prior to 1948.

One of the more outstanding examples for this phenomenon was the Galilee, where dozens of tombs ascribed to Talmudic figures were developed into some of the more important pilgrimage destinations during the 1950s and 1960s. The Upper Galilee, which was densely populated by Arabs prior to 1948, was now included within the Jewish state's boundaries. Many Arab villagers in this region were forced to abandon their homes, and those were reoccupied by Jewish settlers. As part of the many demographic changes that took place in the area, the shared Muslim and Jewish sacred sites were now included within the boundaries of the young Jewish state.

These political and demographic changes gave the Galilean Jews, particularly the Jews of the city of Safed, the opportunity to gain full possession of the local sacred sites and develop them as exclusively Jewish sacred sites, without any mention of their Muslim past.[48] The Galilean sacred sites, many of which were situated inside or near Arab villages that were now being demolished,[49] drew a growing mass of Jewish pilgrims.[50]

The dramatic consequences of the 1948 War brought about the creation of a rather extended Jewish sacred layout where, besides the tomb of *Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai* in Meiron, which was the main pilgrimage destination in this region,[51] a complex set of dozens of tombs was now developing, drawing a multitude of worshippers. The conversion and development of the sacred space in the Galilee was the fruit of a joint venture involving

local agents, individuals, and organizations that were occupied in locating and the expanding the sacred places as well as more institutional activity by the MRA.[52]

All took action to fence off some of the sacred places, collect and reset tombstones, or construct other buildings on top of the pilgrimage destinations.[53] As a result, the importance of the Galilean tombs of the saints in the general map of sacred space in the State of Israel increased a process that accorded this heretofore secondary area on the map of Jewish sanctity an entirely different status.

In addition to the sacred sites in the Galilee, Kahana made efforts to create several centers of devotion in other parts of the State of Israel. Thus, the *Cave of Elijah* on the slopes of Mount Carmel near the city of Haifa was used by the MRA as the organizational center for the northern part of the country and was promoted as one of the three holiest sites for the Jews. Before 1948, this cave was nothing more than another Muslim trust under the name of *Nebi-Khader* ("the green", one of the names by which Elijah was known in Palestinian culture), a place sacred to the three monotheistic religions as a pilgrimage site.[54]

The War of Independence's impact on Haifa brought a sharp change in the ritual reality in this cave. The demographic changes in the city, including the exodus of many of its Arab inhabitants,[55] brought about the development of the sacred cave as a central Jewish pilgrimage destination. The evolution of the place during the 1950s was the outcome of endeavors made by the local Jewish inhabitants of the city, mainly its Sephardic community, together with the institutional activity of the MRA.[56]

The symbolic value of Elijah's cave and its importance were emphasized now by Kahana and his staff in various ways. During major Jewish holidays and feasts, such as *Lag Ba'Omer*, a procession with a sacred torch traveled from Mount Zion in Jerusalem, passed through the *Cave of Elijah*, and reached its final destination at the tomb of *Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai* in the Galilee,[57] thus connecting the three holiest Jewish sites in the State of Israel. The deliberate attempt to collect legends regarding the history of Elijah's Cave, together with an archeological survey of the cave and the deciphering of the many ancient inscriptions on its walls, were utilized by the MRA as another means to emphasize the cave's Jewish history.[58]

The main Tel-Aviv–Jerusalem highway, which connects the two most important cities in the State of Israel, was also included in the map of sacred space in the country once several sacred sites were identified along its route. Besides Samson's tomb,[59] there was the "Rock of Destruction", which linked this area to Jerusalem's dramatic destruction at the end of the Second

Temple period. Repeating his tried and tested pattern in other sacred sites, namely basing the sanctity of the place on a popular legend and connecting it to a noticeable geographical outpost, Kahana imposed new sanctity on a rock that stood on top of one of the hills along the road.[60] From 1949 onwards, this rock became a pilgrimage site for the local Jews, mainly settlers who had emigrated from Yemen and saw in this rock a practical solution to the scarcity of religious space in the area. Near the sacred rock, Kahana also painstakingly established the "Valley of Destruction", where ceremonies took place during Jewish mourning days. Rocks from this valley were sent annually to Jerusalem during the fast of the 9th of Av and were deposited on top of the tombstone of King David in Jerusalem.[61]

Even though the southern and sparsely populated part of the State of Israel was never an integral part of the sacred space of Israel, the MRA made efforts to develop new pilgrimage sites in the Negev as well. Thus, for example, Kahana tried to promote Beer-Sheva, the "capital city of the south", as another pilgrimage destination while emphasizing its connection to the patriarch Abraham. Beginning in 1949, Kahana endorsed an annual pilgrimage to the city on the 15th of the month of Shvat. That year, a Tamarisk tree was planted on the outskirts of the city, symbolizing the tree that Abraham himself planted in Biblical times. Pilgrims subsequently started to frequent the city annually to plant trees next to the sacred place.[62]

Similarly, in Eilat, situated on the southernmost tip of the State of Israel on the Red Sea coast, Kahana tried to promote a pilgrimage during the feast of Passover, marking the crossing of the Red Sea by Moses and the People of Israel following the Exodus from Egypt. This annual ceremony included the reading of the biblical story on the crossing of the Red Sea and other prayers.[63]

Although the MRA promoted the development of sacred places in several parts of the country, Kahana's activity in Jerusalem was the most focused and intensive. The city's importance and symbolic status was the guideline for the MRA's activities. Consequently, Kahana committed his staff to find solutions to the problematic situation created as a result of the partition of the city. Compounding the sparseness of tourist attractions in Western Jerusalem[64] was the fact that most of the Jewish sacred places were left in the eastern section of the city, from which Jerusalem's Jews, who were living in its western part, were banned.

This situation obligated the MRA to highlight the importance of the handful of Jewish sacred places in the western part of the city and to establish new sacred places whose sanctity was based on legends and relatively new traditions. The holiness of sacred sites such as the *Cave of the Sanhedrin*

to the north of the city or the "Cave of the Lion" in the center of the town—both having either minor or no importance at all prior to 1948—was now forcefully emphasized.[65] This process was most prominent in the case of *King David's Tomb* on Mount Zion.[66]

This tomb, which, prior to the division of Jerusalem, had drawn only a relatively small number of Jewish worshippers, and then mainly on the day after *Shavuot* (the Feast of Pentecost), became the most important Jewish ritual and folklore center in Jerusalem and Israel as a whole during the 1950s. Together with the "Mount Zion Committee" which he headed, Kahana cultivated Mount Zion as the main Israeli national-religious sacred site. He transposed to that site many traditions that were celebrated in other pilgrimage destinations, such as the *Rachel's Tomb* or the *Western Wall*, before 1948. These were now channeled to Mount Zion and marked by a complex set of ceremonies, rituals, exhibitions, and other events spread throughout the year. Mount Zion, which offers an impressive panorama of the eastern, inaccessible part of Jerusalem, was used as a memorial site for the other Jewish sacred sites that remained behind the cease-fire line.

SUMMARY

One of the more central twentieth century phenomena was the establishment of new sovereign states. In Central and South America, Africa, and subcontinental India, colonial powers gave way to independent states that often gained their sovereignty by means of a military struggle. To date, research has tended to emphasize the political, economic, and social aspects of this global process. Less attention was given to the influence of these changes on the cultural landscape and to the changes made in the sacred space.

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 brought in its wake numerous changes, among them the reshaping of the map of the Jewish sacred sites. During the post-war years, Israeli society witnessed the process of the growing popularity of folkloristic religious rites around sacred places, the main foci of which were the burial sites ascribed to figures from the ancient Jewish tradition. In most cases, the graves were attributed to the sacred figures with no convincing historic or archeological basis. They were ascribed to figures from Jewish mythology and history, from biblical figures through Talmudic personages, down to Kabbalists from all ages. During the 1950s and 1960s, these elevated figures became part of the lexicon of sanctity in the State of Israel once their assumed grave sites were recognized and re-identified, making these sacred sites prime pilgrimage attractions.

The current research shows that the cult of sainthood and pilgrimage to sacred sites was a thriving phenomenon. A dynamic network of beliefs grew firmer roots, reinvented itself, and adapted to the Israeli scene of those years. The increasing number of adherents to mysticism, as illustrated by the phenomenon discussed here, apparently reflected a deep need in a significant segment of Israel's population during its first years of statehood for both types of sacred places—national and popular as well. This phenomenon was no doubt greatly influenced by the sociological, cultural, and religious understandings that were the fruit of their time and place.

During the post-war years and because of its dramatic outcome, Jews who craved a form of cult of worship found both a center and a symbol for their ritual needs in *Elijah's Cave*, the *Tombs of the Sanhedrin*, *David's Tomb*, or other sacred sites. For almost 20 years the *Tomb of Rashbi* in Meiron and other traditional saints' burial sites constituted the focus of Jewish religious aspirations, attracting masses of believers who relocated their customs to these new sites. The difficulty of making a pilgrimage to many of these sites before 1948, when they were held by Muslims, made the changes after the war all the more dramatic. After hundreds of years in Muslim hands, these destinations became the most important Jewish places of worship. The fact that these were the only sacred places within the boundaries of the State of Israel that were linked by tradition to the Jewish people's ancient religious history led to their development regardless of their earlier status.

One of the more interesting groups among the Israeli-Jewish society of this period is that of the Jews who immigrated to Israel after 1948 from Arab countries. Besides taking part in the rituals in the more established holy places such as Meiron, these Jews tended to adopt and develop places where hints of ancient Jewish sanctity were to be found, used before 1948 mainly by the local Muslim population. This reality prevailed mainly in the social and geographical periphery of Israel, in regions and places where the new immigrants were settled by the establishment during the 1950s and 1960s.

The 1967 Six-Day War, like the 1948 War of Independence, had an enormous impact on the Jewish sacred sites map, once accessibility to the sacred places in the vicinity of the Old City of Jerusalem and it environs was restored. From 1967 onwards, the customs attached to *David's Tomb* and other sacred sites when the territory was divided, once again dispersed throughout the entire sacred space. *The Western Wall, Rachel's Tomb*, and the *Tomb of the Patriarchs* in Hebron retained their position as the Jewish people's holiest sites, attracting throngs of worshippers and celebrants. *David's Tomb, Elijah's Cave*, and other sacred sites that were so popular before 1967, now became less attractive and were reduced to secondary

pilgrimage destinations in the Land of Israel. Some of them disappeared from the sacred sites' map altogether, while others retained their status.[67]

The second part of the 1970s and early 1980s saw the emergence of a large-scale Jewish pilgrimage movement to the graves of saints located in the Galilee and other peripheral regions of the State of Israel, a phenomenon that has become an outstanding social trend in present-day Israel. Places like the tombs of Rabbi Yisrael Abuchatzeirah (Baba-Sali) in Netivot and Rashbi in Meiron became enormously popular, drawing crowds of thousands each month. This development was no doubt fueled mainly by members of the ethnic communities that had emigrated from Arab countries during the decades following the establishment of the State. These immigrants had only minor influence on the development of the sacred sites during the 19 years that the Land of Israel was divided. At the same time they gradually grew to become the largest group of pilgrims in the sacred sites. These changes are based on the physical and theological infrastructure that was developed by Kahana during the 1950s and 1960s.

NOTES

1. Yoav Gelber, *Independence versus Nakbah: The Arab–Israeli War of 1948* (Or Yehuda, 2004) [Hebrew]; Arnon Golan, "The Transformation of Abandoned Arab Rural Areas," *Israel Studies*, 2.1 (1997) 94–110; "Zionism, Urbanism and the 1948 Wartime Transformation of the Arab Urban System in Palestine," *Historical Geography*, 27 (1999) 152–166; "Jewish Settlement in Former Arab Towns and Their Incorporation into the Israeli Urban System," *Israel Affairs*, 9.1 (2003) 149–164; S. Ilan Troen. *Imagining Zion: Dreams, Designs, and Realities in a Century of Jewish Settlement* (New Haven, 2003); Ilana Shamir, Commemoration and Remembrance—Israel's Way of Molding its Collective Memory Patterns (Tel-Aviv, 1996) [Hebrew]; Maoz Azaryahu, "From Remains to Relics: Authentic Monuments in the Israeli Landscape," *History & Memory*, 5:2 (1993) 82–103; *State Cults* (Sede Boker, 1995) [Hebrew].

2. In Hebrew it is common to use the term "*kadosh*", while referring to a sacred/holy place. I use the term "sacred place" rather than "holy place" as this term better describes the process of human involvement in creation of such places in the history of the Land of Israel.

3. Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981); Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints Among Muslim and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford, 2002); David M. Gitlitz and Linda Kay Davidson, *Pilgrimage and the Jews* (Westport, CT, 2006).

4. For a reference to the influence of the War on the Christians, see Chaim

Wardi, *Christians in Israel, a Survey* (Jerusalem, 1950); Shaul Colbi, *Christianity in the Holy Land: Past and Present* (Tel-Aviv, 1969) 124–157; Uri Bialer, *Cross on the Star of David: The Christian World in Israel's Foreign Policy, 1948–1967* (Bloomington, IN, 2005). Arab-Christian Israelis, living inside the boundaries of the State of Israel, were also cut off from most of their holy sites in Jerusalem and its environs. Only individuals, mostly clergymen and women, were permitted to visit sites such as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem or the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. This was made possible mostly during certain holidays. On the passage of Christians from Western Jerusalem to its Eastern part see, for example, *Ha'aretz*, December 21, 1948, a report on a group of Christians crossing the Mandlebaum Gate to reach Bethlehem on Christmas 1948. See also *Ha'aretz*, April 10, 1949, on Christian clergy crossing through Jaffa Gate to take part in Easter festivities in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. A similar license applied to Israel's Arab-Muslims, who were not able to frequent the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, such as the Dome of the Rock or the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

    5. Doron Bar, "Re-Creating Jewish Sanctity in Jerusalem; The Case of Mount Zion and David's Tomb Between 1948–1967," *The Journal of Israeli History*, 23.2 (2004) 233–251; *Sanctifying a Land: The Jewish Holy Place in the State of Israel 1948–1968* (Jerusalem, 2007) [Hebrew].

    6. Motti Golani, "Yearning Apart from Deeds: Israel's Policy Regarding the Question of Jerusalem, 1948–1967," in Anita Shapira (ed), *Independence: The First Fifty Years* (Jerusalem, 1998) [Hebrew].

    7. Meiron Benvenisti, *The Peace of Jerusalem* (Tel-Aviv, 1981) [Hebrew]; Elihu Lauterpacht, *Jerusalem and the Holy Places* (London, 1968) 13–36.

    8. Yoram Bilu, "The Sanctification of Space in Israel Civil Religion and Folk Judaism," in Uzi Rebhun and Chaim I. Waxman (eds), *Jews in Israel: Contemporary Social and Cultural Patterns* (Hanover and London, 2003).

    9. Michael Avi-Yonah, *Jewish Holy Places in the Western Part of Palestine under British Mandate* (n.d) [Hebrew]; Elhanan Reiner, "Traditions of Holy Places in medieval Palestine—Oral versus Written," in Rachel Sarfati (ed), *Offerings from Jerusalem: Portrayals of Holy Places by Jewish Artists* (Jerusalem, 2002).

    10. Pinchas Giller, "Recovering the Sanctity of the Galilee: the Veneration of Sacred Relics in Classical Kabbalah," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 4 (1994) 147–169; Elhanan Reiner, "From Joshua to Jesus—The Transformation of a Biblical Story to a Local Myth (a Chapter in the Religious Life of the Galilean Jew)," *Zion*, 63 (1996) 281–318 [Hebrew].

    11. Zeev Vilnay, *Holy Places in Eretz-Israel* (Jerusalem, 1951) 19–41 [Hebrew].

    12. Avraham M. Luncz, *Guide to the Land of Israel and Syria* (Jerusalem, 1891) 230–260 [Hebrew]; Zeev Vilnay, *Steimatzky's Palestine Guide* (Jerusalem, 1935) 115–123 [Hebrew].

    13. Idit Zertal, *Death and the Nation* (Tel-Aviv, 2002) [Hebrew]; Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago, 1995); Azaryahu, *State Cults*.

14. Azaryahu, *State Cults*; Bilu, "The Sanctification of Space."

15. Azaryahu, "From Remains to Relics"; "Mount Herzl: The Creation of Israel's National Cemetery," *Israel Studies*, 1.2 (1996) 46–74; "(Re)naming the Landscape; the Formation of the Hebrew Map of Israel 1949–1960," *Journal of Historical Geography*, 27.2 (2001) 178–195.

16. Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Sacrificing Truth: Archaeology and the Myth of Masada* (Amherst, NY, 2002); Michael Feige, "Identity, Ritual, and Pilgrimage: the Meetings of the Israeli Exploration Society," in Deborah Dash Moore and S. Ilan Troen (eds), *Divergent Jewish Cultures: Israel and America* (New Haven, 2001).

17. Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983); Benedict R. Anderson, Imagined *Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York, 1991).

18. Moshe Avnimelech, "Forgery of History," *Be'terem*, 17/182 (1953) 20 [Hebrew]; *Ha'aretz*, November 23, 1956; Israel State Archives (hereafter, ISA) ISA 61 G6/5451.

19. *Ha'dor*, June 6, 1954; *Mas'a*, August 31, 1953.

20. Raz Kletter, *Just Past? The Making of Israeli Archaeology* (London, 2006) 73–76.

21. ISA, 162, GL 13/44864.

22. ISA, 98, GL 15/14917, July 20, 1948. Kahana (1905–1998) was born in Poland and immigrated to Israel in 1940. He developed the Jewish holy sites with zeal, perseverance, and self-confidence within the framework of his official title as director-general of the MRA (1948–1971) and his semi-official title as "the person in charge of the mountain" [Mount Zion]. Under his leadership dozens of Jewish holy sites were identified and developed in the State of Israel.

23. A relatively exceptional attempt to gather information about the Jewish holy sites was made by Avi-Yonah, *Jewish Holy Places*, where he included a comprehensive and rather generalized list of more than four hundred Jewish holy sites, prepared for a Jewish National Committee memorandum. The list was part of a wider attempt by the Zionist Movement to demonstrate the simultaneously ancient and current [ca. 1940s] strong and firmly-based Jewish claim over the land. Despite the list's importance, he was only mildly interested in the current situation in the holy places or the ritual habits practiced there.

24. ISA, 98, GL 15/14917, March 3, 1949, a letter from S.Z. Kahana.

25. See, for example, ISA, 98, GL 5/14939, November 29, 1949, B. Fishman, director of the Department of Land Registration and Regularization, to the director of the Religious Affairs Department (as the MRA was known before 1949), and details about the registration of various holy sites such as the tomb of Rabbi Meir Ba'al HaNess at Tiberias, the tomb of Rashbi in Meiron or Elijah's Cave in Haifa as Jewish. See also ISA, 98, GL 2/6309, regarding the registration of Jewish holy places in Western Galilee.

26. ISA, 98 GL 21/14917; 130 P/1/890.

27. Yeshayhu Press, "Jewish Burial Caves in Jerusalem and its Environs," *Almanac of Jerusalem*, 5 (1945) 147–157

28. ISA, 98, GL 21/14917, November 21, 1949; *Ma'ariv*, June 13, 1960.

29. Zvi Ilan, *Tombs of the Righteous in the Land of Israel* (Jerusalem, 1997); Vilnay, *Holy Places in Eretz-Israel*, 297–307 [Hebrew].

30. Vilnay, *Holy Places in Eretz-Israel*, 134–150; *Hatzofeh*, May 12, 1952; Moshe Shokeid and Shlomo Deshen, *The Generation of Transition: Continuity and Change Among North-African Immigrants in Israel* (Jerusalem, 1999) 98–112 [Hebrew].

31. ISA, 98, G 7/5586, August 1; *Hatzofeh*, December 5, 1952; *Ibid.*, May 15, 1957; Oded Avissar, *Tiberias' Book* (Jerusalem, 1973) 215–224 [Hebrew].

32. Yoav Gelber, *Palestine, 1948: War, Escape and the Emergence of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Brighton, 2001); Golan, "The Transformation of Abandoned Arab Rural Areas"; "Jewish Settlement in Former Arab Towns".

33. For example, a major part of the development of Mount Zion and King David's Tomb was conducted as part of the activities of the "Mount Zion Committee", which was a semi-independent body headed by the director of the MRA, S.Z. Kahana.

34. Hana Taragan, "Baybars and the Tomb of Abu Hurayra/Rabban Gamliel in Yavneh," *Cathedra*, 97 (2000) 65–84 [Hebrew].

35. The Tomb of *Abu Huraira* was renovated as part of the Muslim and Druze Department in the MRA, which was in charge of these religions' holy sites. As part of its activity, several Muslim and Druze pilgrimage sites such as King David's Tomb, *Haram Sidnā 'Ali* and *Sabil Abu Nabbut* were cleaned and restored. For a report on this department's activities and details about the renovations in Yavneh, see Leon A. Mayer, Yaakov Pinkerfeld, and Chaim Z. Hirschberg, *Muslim Religious Buildings in Israel* (Jerusalem, 1950) 17–21[Hebrew].

36. *Ha'aretz*, May 25, 1950; David Rozen (ed), *Ma'abarot and Immigrate Settlements* (Jerusalem, 1985) 70, with a report on the 1950 Jewish settlement.

37. Yehoshua Frenkel, "Baybars and the Sacred Geography of *Bilād al-Shāam*: A Chapter in the Islamization of Syria's Landscape," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 25 (2001) 153–170.

38. Eyal Ben-Ari and Yoram Bilu, "Saints' Sanctuaries in Israeli Development Towns: On a Mechanism of Urban Transformation," *Urban Anthropology*, 16 (1987) 243–272; Yoram Bilu and Eyal Ben-Ari, "The Making of Modern Saints: Manufactured Charisma and the Habu-Hatseiras of Israel," *American Ethnologist*, 19.4 (1992) 29–44; "Modernity and Charisma in Contemporary Israel: The Case of Baba Sali and Baba Baruch," in Robert S. Wistrich and David Ohana (eds), *The Shaping of Israeli Identity: Math, Memory and Trauma* (London, 1995).

39. ISA, 98, GL 5/14908, January 30, 1957; ISA, 98, GL 5/14908, January 30, 1957, S.Z. Kahana to J.Z. Hirschberg, MRA; ISA, 98, GL 5/14908, 6.4.1960, D. Halabi, Religious Committee, Kfar-Saba to S.Z. Kahana, MRA.

40. ISA, 98, GL-6/14918, January 30, 1962, A. Meir to S.Z. Kahana, MRA.

41. ISA 98 G-7/5586, September 26, 1954; Avi Sasson, "The 'Tomb of Dan' in the Shephelah of Judah," *Judea and Samaria Research Studies,* 10 (2001) 7–18 [Hebrew].

42. For a summary of Palestinian Muslim holy sanctuaries, see Tawfik Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine* (London, 1927); Vilnay, *Holy*

Places, 52–55; David Y. Eisenstein, *Ozar Massaoth: A Collection of Itineraries by Jewish Travelers to Palestine, Syria, Egypt and Other Countries: Pilgrimage to Holy Tombs and Sepulchers* (Newark, 1927) for details about holy places shared by Muslims and Jews. See, for example, the *Tomb of Abu-Bakher* in *Meiron*, which the Jews identified as *Rabbi Yohanan the Shoemaker*, in Zev Vilnay, *Steimatzky's Palestine Guide* (Jerusalem, 1948) 157–159.

43. *Ha'aretz*, September 11, 1950; *Hatzofeh*, September 3, 1951.

44. David E. Sopher, *Geography of Religions* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1967); Victor Turner, "The Center out There—Pilgrim's Goal," *History of Religion*, 12 (1973) 191–230; Simon Coleman and John Elsner, *Pilgrimage Past and Present: Sacred Travel and Sacred Space in the World Religions* (London, 1995).

45. Yi-Fu Tuan, "Sacred Space: Exploration of an Idea," in Karl W. Butzer (ed), *Dimensions of Human Geography* (Chicago, 1978).

46. Jamie Scott and Paul Simpson-Houseley, *Sacred Places and Profane Spaces: Essays in the Geographics of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York, 1991); Chris C. Park, *Sacred Worlds: An Introduction to Geography and Religion* (London and New York, 1994); Robert H. Stoddard and Allen Morinis (eds), *Sacred Places, Sacred Spaces: The Geography of Pilgrimage* (Baton Rouge, 1997).

47. Richard H. Jackson and Roger Henrie, "Perception of Sacred Space," *Journal of Cultural Geography*, 3 (1983) 94–107.

48. *Haboker*, September 17, 1948.

49. Aharon Shay, "The Fate of Abandoned Arab Villages in Israel on the Eve of the Six-Day War and its Immediate Aftermath," *Cathedra*, 105 (2002) 151–170 [Hebrew].

50. Vilnay, *Holy Places in Eretz-Israel*, 157–159, 188–190, 265–267.

51. Yosef Haglili, *The Book of Meiron* (Meiron, 1988) [Hebrew]; *Hatzofeh*, May 17, 1957.

52. Prominent in this aspect was the "Society for the Protection of the Holy Places", which was active in the Galilee and was responsible for the registration of a number of holy places under Jewish ownership prior to the 1948 War. See ISA, 130, P-1/890, January 29, 1948.

53. ISA, 43, G 7/340, March 30, 1949; Vilnay, *Holy Places in Eretz-Israel*, 282–284.

54. Asher A. Grinwald, *Sefer Tuv Yerushalaim* (Berehove, Ukraine, 1934) chapter 30 [Hebrew].

55. Yossi Ben-Artzi and Tamir Goren, "Molding the Urban Space of Haifa Arabs in 1948," *Studies in the Geography of Israel*, 15 (1998) 7–27 [Hebrew].

56. ISA, 98, GL 5/14939, November 29, 1949; *Hatzofeh*, August 4, 1950.

57. *Hatzofeh*, May 3, 1953.

58. ISA, 98, GL 7/2931; Asher Ovadyah, "Inscriptions in the Cave of Elijah," *Qadmoniot*, 7 (1969) 99–101 (Hebrew).

59. Ilan, *Tombs of the Righteous in the Land of Israel*, 183–184.

60. Zeev Vilnay, *Legends of the Land of Israel* (Jerusalem, 1981) 8 [Hebrew], was presumably Kahana's source for this legend.

61. *Yediot Aharonoth*, June 22; *Ha'aretz*, July 2, 1950.

62. *Hatzofeh*, February 13, 1949 and similar descriptions in succeeding years.

63. *Hatzofeh*, March 20, 1956.

64. *Yediot Aharonoth*, March 2, 1950; Eliezer Eskolsky, "Tourism," in Isaac A. Abbady (ed), *Jerusalem Economy* (Jerusalem, 1950) 241–244; *Jerusalem 1948–1951, Three Years of Reconstruction* (Jerusalem, 1952) 19–30; *Jerusalem: Israel* (Jerusalem, 1950) 27–29.

65. Theodor F. Meysels, *Jerusalem Old and New* (Tel-Aviv, 1956).

66. Bar, "Re-Creating Jewish Sanctity."

67. Bar, *Sanctifying a Land*, 203–244.