



From Remains to Relics: Authentic Monuments in the Israeli Landscape

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Maoz Azaryahu

From Remains to Relics: Authentic Monuments in the Israeli Landscape

And Joshua ... took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the LORD which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God."

Joshua 24:26–27

The objective of this study is twofold: first, to examine the semiotic structures of the commemorative monument in general and the authentic monument in particular; and second, to explore the monumentalization process of two outstanding relics of the Israeli War of Independence and their place both in the mythology of that war and in the monumental discourse of the respective memorial sites. These relics – the Syrian tank near Kibbutz Degania and the wrecks of armored cars scattered alongside a section of the steep road leading to Jerusalem – became representative icons of the Israeli mythology of heroic sacrifice and salient parts of the heroic landscapes of the War of Independence.

In the context of monumental commemoration, authenticity is a fascinating yet problematic concept. The notion of authenticity appeared in nineteenth-century Europe as an active norm in connection with the Romantic movement and the national and ethnic revivals that followed. The revival of an “authentic” national vernacular was considered an essential element in the process of national awakening. The description of a language as “authentic” implied, as Itamar Even-Zohar maintains, that it was “sincere,” “unfalsified,” “itself.”¹ Joshua Fishman has specified authenticity as a basic parameter of nationalist language-planning.² However, the quest for authenticity is not as simple as the

nationalist would have us believe, and selecting the “authentic” often involves manipulation and even invention of authenticity.

The issue of authenticity becomes even more complex in the context of the relationship between “reality” and its reproductions. Walter Benjamin questioned the relationship between the “original” work of art and its “copy” in the age of (technically perfected) reproduction.³ Umberto Eco has considered the operation of reproduced realities in popular culture and the phenomenon of “hyperrealism,” especially in its manifestations in American culture where the construction of “make-believe” worlds has been perfected.⁴ He is fascinated by the American obsession with “The Real Thing,” and by the paradoxical result, namely that the “absolutely false” is treated as the “absolutely real.” In similar vein, Jean Baudrillard maintains that a basic trait of (post)modernity is that the “real” and the “simulated” are no longer distinguishable.⁵

The notion of authenticity is closely associated with the cultural and economic mechanisms that direct mass tourism. The desire to experience the “authentic” is a major force behind the impulse to encounter foreign cultures and places. The economic interests involved in the tourist industry therefore necessitate preserving or reproducing authenticity in order to attract tourists. Authenticity is here a cultural commodity with a convertible market value.

The issue of authenticity is also relevant to the encounter with the past and, in particular, to what concerns us here – the encounter with commemorative monuments. The past is not an abstract idea but a semiotic reality, and the encounter with the past always involves an encounter with a certain text of the past. The commemorative monument is an outstanding example of such a text. But what does authenticity mean in this context? How does it operate and how is it produced? And specifically, how can commemorative monuments exude an aura of authenticity (to borrow Benjamin’s term) in relation to the past they are dedicated to? The following discussion is an attempt to address these questions.

Authentic Monuments

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Commemorative monuments are intended by their builders to be constant reminders. Their goal is to turn the encounter with the monument into a sublime experience in which a segment of the collectively relevant past (a cultural construct) is recalled and celebrated.⁶ The monument is a traditionally prestigious commemorative vehicle which is endowed with authority concerning the past and reflects the power relations that prevailed at the time it was constructed.⁷ Moreover, it embodies the link between history and geography, community and terrain, society and environment, culture and nature in the process of forging an identity between past and present.

A single monument or its extension, the monumental complex, operates as a conventional relay station in the communication between past and present. Whether the monument serves ideological purposes or is of merely nostalgic value, its basic trait is that it tells a story. This is always true. However, our interest here focuses on monuments that provide a text of the National Narrative and are therefore part of the historical communal heritage. Even if, as is so often the case, the observer is not familiar with the events and heroes to which these monuments are dedicated, one thing is clear: they commemorate episodes of the general story of the emergence of the ruling sociopolitical order. The story of such a monument is therefore complex. On the surface, it is the story of the past that its builders wished to commemorate, but on another level there is the story of its construction and the performative history of the monument itself, which is usually not to be found in the monumental text. And last, but certainly not least, the story includes the visitor's encounter with the monument, an encounter that constitutes the last chapter of its story and at the same time its "happy end." The onlooker's participation in the story is thus an essential element of the monumental narrative. In particular, when the past involved is politically relevant and the encounter is perceived as an act of communion, each onlooker, by acknowledging the relevance and meaning of the heroic past for the present, provides an infinite number of individual "happy ends" that unite in the story of the emergence and triumph of the ruling order.

As a result of their size and topographical location monuments naturally enjoy considerable public exposure and attract attention to themselves and to the story they tell. Remote monuments become tourist attractions, while those situated in the center of cities are constantly encountered by passers-by. Remote monuments may be less frequented, but the encounter with them is characterized by intense awareness of their significance. City monuments, by contrast, are woven into the urban texture so that a maximal number of random encounters is guaranteed, although each encounter (apart from those that occur during memorial rites performed at the monument) carries a low charge of symbolic potential.

The symbolic potential of monuments is translated into an aura of sacredness that permeates their immediate surroundings. Two types of monument can be distinguished: those that mark the site where the commemorated events took place *derive their sacredness from their location*;⁸ they proclaim that place to be a historical site and enhance its significance. They thus embody the “myth of the place” which existed as a potential yet to be realized before the monument was erected. The monument here serves as the semiotic center of the site whose exact boundaries are not always marked. Monuments of the second type – those whose position is determined by the measure of public exposure thus achieved – *endow their location with sacredness*. Such monuments, which are usually located in central squares, derive their sacredness from the collectively relevant meanings they produce and distribute. The myth they propagate is not a specific “myth of a place” but a general myth, which is not associated with their particular location.

Every encounter with a commemorative monument involves an encounter both with a certain culture and with a particular past. The issue of authenticity, however, has different implications for the emotionally uninvolved tourist, on the one hand, and for the visitor who perceives the encounter with the monument as an act of communion with his or her own collective heritage, on the other hand. In the former case, authenticity is mainly understood in the framework of the indigenous, “pure” and “uncorrupted” culture that is being visited.⁹ The tourist is interested not so much in the past, which merely provides the context for his/her encounter with the particular culture, as in its reproduction, which

is regarded as an element of the indigenous culture and its historical heritage. In the latter case, however, the past is a meaningful part of the visitor's collective heritage, and the monument serves as an intermediary in the process of communing with that past. Here the issue of authenticity is related to the manner in which the past is evoked by the monument. My concern here is not with the question of the "truth" of the represented past – a question of vital interest when exploring the prevailing structures of a society's hegemonial ideology – but rather with the manner in which the past is transmitted and the monument's ability to evoke an illusion of a direct encounter with the past to which it is dedicated.

In the title of his original and richly detailed book, David Lowenthal asserts that "the past is a foreign country."¹⁰ However, there is an obvious difference between an encounter with the past and a visit to a foreign country: whereas a foreign country coexists synchronically with the leisure tourist or adventurer, the tourist who visits the past through an encounter with a commemorative monument experiences synchronicity with a *representation* of the past, and not with the past itself. The outward encounter with the monument is presumed to correspond to an inward encounter with the past, in the way that ancient religions regarded idols not as a representation of the deities but as the deities themselves, and some Christian doctrines treated religious icons not as representations of the saints but as embodiments of the saints themselves. Such religious approaches deny the distinction between the "original" and its reproduction by asserting that a synchronic identity exists between the two. In the case of a monument, however, no matter how rich it is in details or symbols, the original past can never be retrieved. Commemorative monuments may therefore seem to be synthetic representations of the past, mere "secondary witnesses," since their message was imprinted on them after the event they commemorate occurred, so that their testimony is, so to speak, of a "hearsay" nature. In such cases, the monument can only confirm feelings of identification that already existed in the onlooker.

With regard to commemorative monuments, therefore, authenticity is an option and not an obligatory norm. However, endowing a monument with an aura of authenticity is a powerful

strategy for increasing its evocative power, transcending the sense of the merely impressive with which so many monuments are permeated, and achieving a persuasive evocation of the past. Monuments that successfully create the illusion of a direct link with the past they commemorate can be referred to as authentic. Authenticity in this sense should be an integral part of the semiotic structure of the monument. The illusion of a direct encounter with the past requires more than a formal proclamation; it also requires a certain conduit that links the visitor with the represented past.

An aura of authenticity is produced when a monument succeeds in convincing visitors that it shares with them the past it experienced and witnessed. This aura is produced by credible and reliable “eyewitnesses” that function as “primary witnesses” of the past. Thus, in the epigraph to this essay Joshua, the ancient Israelite conqueror of Canaan, proclaims the “great stone” as a witness to the covenant between the People of Israel and their God, as an eternal reminder of the people’s obligation. Objects that serve as primary witnesses are, of course, dumb, and they derive their poetic eloquence from the fact that they “experienced” the event at the time that it occurred, or even participated in the event itself. These primary witnesses have shared that past, captured and fully “recorded” it in their material fabric, and are thus forever permeated with it. It is this mixture of historical synchronicity and diachronical semiotic operation that enables these monuments to fulfill the task bestowed upon them.

The monument itself does not necessarily have to serve as a primary witness in order to provide a linkage with the past. A monument that is erected on the site where the commemorated event took place endows the very landscape with the power to testify. Such a monument serves as a marker whose role is both to provide historical context and to proclaim the landscape as a primary witness. However, a more powerful and meaningful illusion of an encounter with the past is generated when original objects that took part in the commemorated event are proclaimed as primary witnesses and operate as constant reminders at the site of the event. Remains of a battle, for instance, have much greater persuasive power than any object whose later imposition on the

scene of the past has an artificial and even a manipulative character.

The Christian cult of saints that emerged in the fourth century centered on the physical remains of saints that were considered as sacred relics capable of miracles.¹¹ The authenticity of the bones was often dubious, yet as long as they were perceived as authentic, as the remains of a specific saint, they possessed both magical powers and high “market value.” Battle remains seem to have a similar mystical force, radiating a sense of immediacy and simultaneity, and thus they are obvious authentic monuments. From the moment that they are proclaimed as relics, they become positioned outside the flow of time, in an enclave of frozen time. Yet the utilization of remains as witnesses, i.e. their transformation into relics, demands direct and constant human interference, first in the form of the very proclamation that they are relics, and second in the form of the constant care needed to enable them to fulfill this role. With the passage of time, nature reconquers history. Vegetation grows back, trenches fill with earth, the scars in the landscape gradually heal. Wood decays and metal rusts. The blood of battle is washed by the rains and covered by sand. While the testifying powers of the landscape, such as mountains, fields and rivers, do not need human maintenance, the remains of a battle need to be preserved in order to prolong their eloquence. Ironically, therefore, relics, primary witnesses *par excellence*, are constantly manipulated in order to halt their decay and enable them to fulfill the task bestowed upon them. It is human manipulation that maintains their evocative power as authentic monuments.

The Relics of the Israeli War of Independence: Two Cases

The mythologization of the Israeli War of Independence of 1948 began as soon as the war ended. Battle reports, personal memoirs, novels, plays and popular songs portrayed the heroic atmosphere of events that had already become legendary. This process was supplemented and enhanced by the construction of monuments which appeared in an increasing number in the Israeli landscape.¹² The monuments commemorated the heroic sacrifice of the fallen, yet many of them perpetuated at the same time the memory of

battles and victories. Among these monuments, the battle remains that were sanctified as relics of the heroic past form a special category. The decision to transform such remains into relics is directly related to the dynamics of myth-building, involving national and local agencies with their particular intentions. This part of the article therefore addresses various issues, such as the historical circumstances that brought about the transformation of the battle remains into relics, the mythical operation of the relics in the relevant landscape of memory, the relationship between the relics and their topographical surroundings, and the manner in which the aura of authenticity was maintained. However, no attempt will be made to examine the “historical hardware” out of which the myth was constructed and to determine whether the myth is historically “true” or “false.”

1. The Tank of Degania

The Syrian tank that stands near the fence of Kibbutz Degania Alef in the Jordan Valley became a monument to heroic victory in what seemed at one point to be a lost battle. It was one of three Syrian tanks damaged by a Molotov cocktail thrown by members of the kibbutz.¹³ This act dramatically changed the situation: the attackers withdrew, the Jordan Valley and its Jewish settlements were saved. Two of the tanks were removed by the Israeli army and restored for military use. The third tank, however, was beyond repair except for its cannon which was dismantled for re-use.

The burnt tank came to a halt at the edge of a defense trench at the outer fence of the kibbutz, and there it stayed. A few days later, when the excitement subsided, the bodies of its crew were removed and the tank underwent the first stage in its transformation into a relic and monument of triumph. Degania, the first kibbutz to be founded in Palestine and thus already a symbol of Zionist pioneering mythology, now also became a symbol of the fighting spirit of a Jewish settlement against a much superior enemy. The relatively small Renault R36 tank became the quintessence of the local heroic myth, serving as the iconic representation and confirmation of the mythical principle that “not the tank but the human being will prevail,” the principle

that the heroism of the few could overcome the material superiority of the invading Arab armies.¹⁴

This particular relic derived its enormous power from two complementary factors: the first was the mythological context of the story, which included the element of achieving the seemingly impossible and thus “proving” the superiority of the “just” human spirit over an unjust yet powerful enemy. It also contained an element of the miraculous, since the act of setting the tank on fire had reversed the outcome of the battle and brought victory. This miracle was not the result of a divine force but a manifestation of the heroic human spirit fighting for a just cause. The second factor was the aura of authenticity exuded by the relic which embodied and “proved” these mythological truths. Left standing at the place where it had been halted, the tank was permeated with the magic of “frozen time,” preserving the decisive moment of the battle both in its material structure and in its spatial relationship to its surroundings. The fact that it had stopped right on the fence of the kibbutz emphasized the drama of the story it narrated.

The mythical qualities of the relic were recognized almost immediately after the battle, and the tank very soon became an object of pilgrimage.¹⁵ Of crucial significance was the fact that a visit to the tank became included in the school curriculum. Pupils first learnt about the story in class and were then brought to visit the tank which stood as a witness to the tale of heroism they had been told.¹⁶ The tank of Degania thus became an active element in the Israeli landscape of memory, as well as a popular tourist attraction.

The tank soon received official status as a relic as well. It was portrayed on one of the special postage stamps issued in 1952 on the fourth anniversary of independence. In the mid-1950s an official sign relating the story of the battle was placed at the site by the Unit for the Commemoration of the Fallen, a department of the Ministry of Defense. This sign served as an official proclamation of the tank as a relic.¹⁷

The kibbutz itself, although attached to the relic that bore its name, nonetheless appeared to take care to draw a line between itself and the tank that had stopped at its fence. The tank was the place where the local heritage of heroism was transmitted to the

younger generation – usually by one of the kibbutz members who had been a protagonist in the drama – but it did not play a part in the ceremonial aspect of remembrance. The memorialization of the battle mainly took the form of commemoration of the fallen. Accordingly, the military cemetery at the kibbutz, where those who had died in the battle had been buried, served as the sacred site of memory for the whole region, along with a memorial that was erected on the shores of Lake Kinneret to emphasize the regional, rather than the local, character of the battle.¹⁸ The tank itself was therefore not related to the sacred task of commemorating the heroes and the spirit of joint sacrifice, a fact that reduced its “official” appeal. Thus, although the tank served as the most popular attraction for ordinary tourists, the kibbutz did not include it on the itinerary of the many official guests who came to Degania to pay homage to the cradle of the kibbutz movement.¹⁹

The tank had been halted right on the fence of the kibbutz. When the fence was repaired, a small enclave was formed for the tank outside the fence. The new spatial relationship between the tank and the fence emphasized that the tank had failed to break through the fence into the kibbutz. Moreover, the encounter between the many visitors to the site and the relic took place outside the kibbutz. The location could indicate exclusion, an impression reinforced by the apparent lack of official kibbutz interest in the site itself or its maintenance, but the real reason was mainly of a practical nature. A new entrance to the kibbutz was being planned which would necessitate moving the tank from its present site. It was assumed that the tank would be placed near the new entrance, and therefore no effort was made to maintain the original site or make it more attractive to visitors.²⁰ However, the plan to redesign the main entrance of the kibbutz was delayed for many years because of the reluctance to disturb a memorial garden that had meanwhile been planted at the site of the new entrance. It was only in 1980, when there was no longer any sentimental obstacle to redesigning the garden, that the kibbutz began to implement the plan to construct both a new entrance and a new “tank-site,” as it was commonly referred to. It applied for financial help to the Ministry of Defense, arguing that “The tank-site marks a chapter in the War of Independence in the region and the entire country.” The state authorities

acknowledged their responsibility to this distinguished icon of the local and regional myth, and the Ministry contributed to the cost of constructing the new site.²¹

The object of the new tank-site was to invest the tank with its “essential meaning,” bearing in mind that “Degania and the tank are identified as one and are conceived as a single and inseparable entity.”²² Moreover, the planners recognized that “The place and the situation should be kept as authentic as possible.”²³ Thus, the aim was not simply to relocate the tank, but also to enhance its relationship with its surroundings. At the original site the tank – which in modern terms was rather small – had sunk about 20cm. so that it looked almost miniature. It was therefore agreed that at the new site the tank should be elevated to create a more forceful impression on the onlooker. In the discussion of the plan held in the kibbutz, some members advocated incorporating the tank-site within the boundaries of the kibbutz,²⁴ but it was eventually decided to transfer it to a site outside the fence of the kibbutz, next to the new main entrance. A small, artificial trench was built in the immediate vicinity of the tank as a symbolic reconstruction of the original conditions. The relocation was intended as a minimal change in these conditions, and it actually provided an even more dramatic representation of the myth, according to which the tank had almost succeeded in penetrating into the kibbutz. In any case, for the innocent visitor, who did not know the original site, the effect was just as authentic. Recently, the tank’s cannon, which had been removed after the battle by the Israeli army, was also restored. A young member of the kibbutz discovered another cannon between the tank’s metal plates, and this was installed in the place of the original cannon in April 1992.²⁵ Thus the tank regained its military appearance and was restored to the condition that had prevailed at the very moment when it had ceased being a machine of war and had begun its transformation into a relic. Paradoxically, however, the restoration of genuineness made the relic a different object from the one that had been imprinted on the public mind for over four decades. In this case, at least temporarily, genuineness was gained at the expense of authenticity.

2. Bab-el-Wad

The remains of armored cars and other vehicles scattered alongside a section of the steep road that links the coastal plain with Jerusalem – known by its Arabic name as Bab-el-Wad (in Hebrew Sha'ar ha-Gay, “gateway to the wadi”) – are relics of one of the central episodes of the War of Independence: the battle for the road to Jerusalem. These are the remains of the convoys which made their way to Jerusalem in spring 1948 carrying provisions and reinforcements in defiance of the Arab siege on the Jewish parts of the city. The heroic sacrifice of the drivers and guards, both civilians and members of the Haganah and Palmah units who volunteered for the task, was epitomized by the wrecks of the vehicles that were damaged during the attempt to reach Jerusalem and were abandoned alongside the road. The burnt and rusting wrecks became the quintessence of the heroic myth and figure in one of the most popular songs of the period, written shortly after the end of the war, urging that the fallen should not be forgotten and comparing the eloquent silence of the wrecks to the silence of the fallen comrades. The song both expressed and enhanced the evocative power of the remains by proclaiming them as icons of heroic sacrifice. In the national lore the wrecks were thus rapidly transformed into relics, becoming both an object of pilgrimage and a striking landmark for travelers on their way to the capital.²⁶

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The fate of these wrecks illumines some of the problems involved in the rivalry between the “authentic” and the “synthetic” representation of the past and the manner in which this rivalry is reflected in the opposition between institutionalized efforts and popular sentiments concerning the emergence of a commemorative monument. While the remains were rapidly endowed with a high symbolic potential and were widely accepted in practice as authoritative monuments of the heroic past, the official stand was to prefer an institutionalized commemoration in the form of a conventional “synthetic” monument. In 1950 the Unit for Commemoration of the Fallen in the Ministry of Defense suggested that a monument should be erected at the side of the road to Jerusalem to commemorate the battle for the road and that the wrecks should be removed from the roadside. Yet by then

the remains were already charged with high symbolic voltage, and the plan met fierce public opposition. The issue was even addressed by the Israeli parliament: a representative of the party identified with the militias that had operated in this particular theater of the war charged that the intention to remove the remains was "sacrilege." David Ben-Gurion, acting as both Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, considered the remains to be merely wrecks, with no extra symbolic charge, and in his reply he accordingly maintained that they should be removed from the site and that eventually an appropriate memorial should be erected.²⁷

At the beginning of 1951 the recently founded Public Council for the Commemoration of the Fallen officially decided to erect a monument in memory of this chapter of the war. This was part of a national commemoration project which included eight other monuments to be built in various parts of the country, each representing a regional chapter of the war. This decision focused the discussion on two options: whether to give the wrecks official status, since their popular appeal was already established, or to remove them from their position alongside the road. According to a Ministry of Defense report of September 1954, the question of the remains was examined by dozens of committees who visited the site but who could not agree on an appropriate solution.²⁸ While acknowledging that relocating the wrecks would substantially reduce their symbolic value, they feared that the rust had advanced to such an extent that the remains could no longer be saved. It was decided to leave them in their place until the official monument was erected. Construction of the monument was, however, delayed for technical reasons, and in 1954 another attempt was made to have the wrecks removed, following rumors of a report by a foreign correspondent referring to the remains as wrecks of trucks which the State of Israel had received from the United States as part of the American Aid Program to the new state.²⁹ This report, with its implied charge of Israeli incompetence, caused considerable embarrassment and indicates the danger to which remains are exposed unless they are duly proclaimed as relics. Without an identifying sign, a marker, whose function is first of all proclamatory, only those with previous knowledge can interact with the past evoked by the remains.

The issue of authenticity was of no interest to those in charge of the state memorial. In response to questions posed by participants in the first public contest to design an official monument, the members of the jury asserted that there was no need to preserve the remains of battle such as the trenches on the hill chosen for the monument or the ruined building at the top. The same applied to the wrecks. The official view was that they could be incorporated into the memorial, but this was not obligatory. "There is nothing against using the wrecks or their material in their original location or at the site of the monument – according to the designer's considerations."³⁰ This indifference to the wrecks emphasized the official disregard for the issue of authenticity.

Among the various designs proposed at this period, the one that was commissioned by the Unit for Commemoration of the Fallen from the sculptor Yitzhak Danziger is particularly relevant to our discussion. Danziger, a leading figure in the emerging Israeli artistic scene, was intensely interested in incorporating local landscapes and their ancient mythologies into his works. His notion of the memorial was that of a landscape sculpture, combining both sculptured elements and historic relics.³¹ The "heroic landscape" he designed for the monument was based on the road itself, the quintessence of the heroic story. The memorial was to begin 600 meters after the entrance to Bab-el-Wad, with a large wall covered with a mosaic, followed by another wall 100 meters further on. Since the encounter with the memorial was to take place while traveling along the road, the distance between the two walls was "translated" into time, 30 seconds, which according to the sculptor were to be dedicated to a communion with the heroes. Another element of much symbolic significance was a stone battering ram attached to the cliffs alongside the road, pointing toward Jerusalem. This structure was intended to symbolize the meaning of the heroic sacrifice, the breaking of the siege and the effort to reach Jerusalem. Danziger acknowledged the tremendous evocative potential of the relics and intended to incorporate them into his sculptured landscape. They were to be distributed on the slope to the left of the road. This, of course, meant that they would be relocated and rearranged, but it also meant that the artist recognized that they were an integral part of the landscape and its myth.

No design was awarded the first prize in the 1953 contest, and the state-promoted project to erect a monument was delayed for several more years.³² Meanwhile, the wrecks alongside the road were finally marked as relics. The Israeli National Parks Authority inscribed the battle dates on nearby rocks and boulders, a device that detracted as little as possible from the authenticity of the wrecks and even enhanced the evocative powers of the scenery by mobilizing natural objects and topographical features as additional primary witnesses. The work of preservation, which included painting the wrecks with antirust red-brown paint, was regularly carried out by the Unit for the Commemoration of the Fallen. Wreaths were laid on the remains on the national Memorial Day for the fallen (the day before Independence Day). This was a further stage in the transformation of the remains into official relics.

The wrecks convey the illusion that time froze at the moment of battle. Even though they were subsequently relocated three times during work to widen the road and transform it into a principal national highway, the relationship between the relics and the road, which charged them with their extraordinary evocative powers, was preserved. The relics were not, however, given any ceremonial role, apart from the wreath-laying. The traffic regulations forbid drivers to halt on this section of the road so that access to the relics is relatively tedious. They are clearly seen by passers-by but can be approached only with difficulty. Thus, interaction with the relics alongside the road to Jerusalem takes place almost exclusively while the observer is in motion, and is repeated on every journey to and from Jerusalem. Every encounter reasserts the sacrifice symbolized by the relics and at the same time involves the passer-by in a celebration of the now open, unthreatened road. Indeed, with the pathos characteristic of the 1950s, the remains were described as “the cry of the open road.”³³

In 1961 a second public contest to design a monument was announced, and in March 1962 the winning design among the 57 proposals submitted was selected.³⁴ The monument was finally inaugurated five years later, on 15 March 1967, and it was portrayed on that year’s Memorial Day postage stamp. This monument was a far cry from the innovative and ambitious concept developed by Danziger in 1955. In the context of

authenticity, our main concern here is the relationship between the official monument and the relics which had hitherto served as sole representatives of the heroic myth. The structure provided what the relics themselves could not provide: the visual representation of the meaning of the sacrifice. Danziger had expressed this theme in the form of the battering ram; the monument that was built presented it by means of groups of connected aluminum pipes pointing toward Jerusalem. It was constructed on the top of a hill overlooking the road, from where the city can be seen in the distance. In contrast to Danziger's design, which sought to incorporate the relics into the landscape memorial, the official monument did not involve any change in the position of the relics. Indeed, the delay in construction prevented any change in the monumental reality that had governed the landscape for the previous 19 years. The original plan to remove the wrecks was now unfeasible since they had become unequivocally recognized as sacred relics.

Nonetheless, the construction of the official monument modified the discursive context. While the remains alongside the road continued to unfold the story of heroic sacrifice, the "authoritative meaning" of this story became evident only when the metal structure on the hill above the road became visible to the passer-by. The official monument was thus granted an independent role and legitimacy. There is, however, another element to this monumental discourse, arising from the complex history of the site and the rivalry between the relics and the monument that was originally intended to replace them. The aluminum structure is both an admission and a challenge. Its synthetic character indicates that it has no claim to authenticity, a domain left solely to the relics. Yet, at the same time, this very lack of authenticity – the fact that aluminum does not rust – implies the permanence of the monument in contrast to the relics themselves which need constant painting in order to prevent their disappearance from the landscape.

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We have seen that authentic monuments derive their evocative power from their operation as primary witnesses to the past they

commemorate. Through them, the observer encounters that past – an encounter that has been described metaphorically as a narrative related by the relic or as the experience of returning in time to the event embodied by the relic. Thus, after a visit to one of the wrecked armored cars in Bab-el-Wad, an elementary school pupil reported that it had “spoken” to him and “told” him about the heroic events in which it had participated.³⁵ Another pupil, who was taken to visit the tank at Degania, described his sensation, while sitting on the tank, of crossing the barrier of time and reliving the battle.³⁶ In this case the relic functioned as a time-machine. The events that the pupils described as having experienced were, of course, those that constitute the conventional version of the myth they had previously been told.

Since relics are characterized by their economic utilization of symbols, they are unable to meet the specific need of localities, veterans and bereaved families to commemorate their fallen and to propagate the meaning of that sacrifice. They could not and did not replace in Israel the conventional commemorative monuments. The two types of monument coexist, complementing each other in the sense that they emphasize different aspects of the heroic myth and utilize different techniques for its propagation and perpetuation.

Relics possess a special place in the national lore since they convincingly convey local myths by physically embodying the drama of the past. The official attitude toward relics is therefore influenced by popular sentiments that identify the relics with a particular historical event. The case of the wrecks in Bab-el-Wad clearly illustrates the power of popular sentiments to impel the authorities to change their views and to accept remains as official relics.

The issue of authenticity and its manipulation is particularly complex in this context. Relics are genuine remains, and that is the source of their power. Yet monumentalization often involves reconstruction and relocation. Thus, the installation of the cannon in the tank at Degania was intended to restore the conditions that had prevailed immediately after the battle. For those who were long acquainted with the relic, however, this meant that the tank, as they knew it, had been reconstructed, which involved a reduction in authenticity. Relocation also influences authenticity

and reduces the evocative power of the relic. Lowenthal maintains that “The removal of relics whose lineaments are indissolubly of their place annuls their testamentary worth and forfeits their myriad ties with place.”³⁷ Similarly, Clew and Sims assert that museum objects that have been removed from their original location “lose their preeminence as the primary source of authority in the presentation; they no longer control the discussion.”³⁸ All this is true when the relocation involves a new discursive context as well as a new place. Thus, one of the remains from the road to Jerusalem – a wrecked lorry – was later transferred to Kibbutz Ein Harod in the Jezreel Valley. This lorry had originally belonged to the kibbutz and had been driven by two members of the kibbutz who had died on their way to Jerusalem. But the relocation changed the story told by the relic. This was no longer the story of the struggle to keep the road to Jerusalem open, but the local story of the heroism of the kibbutz, its participation in the national toll of sacrifice and its commitment to the national cause: the same relic, the same history, but a different place and a different context – and hence a different emphasis and eventually a different story.

When the relocated relic nonetheless remains in the geographical arena of the historical event it commemorates, the discursive context is not substantially altered. It may even be enriched by various additions such as plaques or new monumental structures, but the basic relationship between the relic and the place is preserved, as was the case with the tank at Degania and the remains of the vehicles in Bab-el-Wad. In such cases the relics continue to embody the myth of the place, so that the natural features of the site can be activated as primary witnesses to affirm the presence of the memory of the heroic past.

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- 1 Itamar Even-Zohar and Khone Shmeruk, "Authentic Language and Authentic Reported Speech: Hebrew vs. Yiddish," *Poetics Today* 11, no. 1 (1990): 155.
- 2 Joshua Fishman, *Language and Nationalism: Two Integrated Essays* (New York, 1972).
- 3 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1969).
- 4 Umberto Eco, *Faith in Fakes* (London, 1986).
- 5 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York, 1983).
- 6 Barry Schwartz, "The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory," *Social Forces* 61, no. 2 (Dec. 1982): 377, suggests that events that are commemorated are "invested with an extraordinary significance and assigned a qualitatively distinct place in our conception of the past."
- 7 See Spencer R. Clew and James E. Sims, "Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialogue," in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, D.C., 1991), 159–75. See also my article, "Renaming the Past: Changes in 'City Text' in Germany and Austria, 1945–1947," *History & Memory* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1990): 32–53.
- 8 On markers see Dean MacCannel, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976; New York, 1989), 110.
- 9 On the issue of authenticity in tourist settings, see *ibid.*, 96–98.
- 10 David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985).
- 11 On the emergence of the cult of the saints in early Christianity, see Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (London, 1981).
- 12 On the sociocultural aspects of the commemoration-through-monuments project and its historical dynamics, see my article, "The War Memorials of the Israeli War of Independence," *Studies in Zionism* 13, no. 1 (1992): 57–77.
- 13 Another version of the events, which challenged the traditional myth, was published only much later. An article in the *Ha'aretz* weekly supplement, 14 Feb. 1990, argued that the tank was destroyed by an

- Israeli cannon that was firing from Israeli positions a few hundred meters north of Kibbutz Degania. Yet beyond the dispute over the historical facts, it remained clear that the tanks were halted and the Syrian attack thus broken. The rival version did not undermine the basic meaning of the story, while the passions aroused by the debate emphasized the enduring value of the issue to those involved.
- 14 The title of an article in the Israeli army weekly *Ba-Mahaneh*, "How Steel Was Defeated" (in Hebrew), 11 Apr. 1956, formulated the essence of the myth of Degania. Cf. Nurit Geertz, "The Few against the Many" (in Hebrew), *Siman Kri'ah* 16–17 (Apr. 1983): 106–14.
 - 15 The earliest record of a visit to the site that I found dates back to 1949: "A Visit to Degania" (in Hebrew), *Nivenu* (bulletin of the Rishon Le-Zion primary school), 1949, 4 (Archive of Jewish Education, Tel Aviv University, 3.159/2).
 - 16 See the report by a 6th grade pupil on a visit of his class to the tank, in *Megilatenu* (bulletin of Azur primary school), 5 July 1956 (Archive of Jewish Education, 3.161/3).
 - 17 Only in 1956 did the Governmental Company for Tourism issue guidelines for a public contest to design the signs to be placed at historical and archeological sites as well as "sites of significance from the War of Independence." These signs were to provide "guidance for visitors and tourists," and their texts presented the authorized version of the events. The sites associated with the War of Independence were now also included in the official tourist map of the State of Israel.
 - 18 This memorial and its construction were mentioned regularly in the kibbutz bulletin, which made no reference to the tank. See *Alon Degania Alef*, 9 Mar. 1951 and 29 Feb. 1952.
 - 19 At a relatively early stage Degania became a tourist attraction, as related in a report in *Davar*, 17 Apr. 1936. On the visits of foreign tourists to Degania in the 1950s, see *Alon Degania Alef*, 6 Apr. 1955 and 26 June 1955. These reports also describe the impressions conveyed by some of the tourists, but make no mention of the tank.
 - 20 Despite the lack of an official policy of maintenance, the site was taken care of, on a voluntary basis, by Yosef Baratz, a prominent member of the kibbutz. He became identified with the site and its maintenance, and a film made by the kibbutz to mark its 50th anniversary shows him sweeping the area around the tank.
 - 21 Letter from the Unit for Commemoration of the Fallen in the Ministry of Defense to the Secretary of Kibbutz Degania Alef, 1 July 1982, in Kibbutz Degania Archive.
 - 22 Quoted from the architectonic concept developed in 1980, published

- in *Daf le-Havrei Degania A* (newsletter for members of the kibbutz), 31 Oct. 1980, 20.
- 23 A summary of the deliberations of the Program Committee for the Tank-Site, *ibid.*, Feb. 1983.
- 24 Proposal of the special committee for the tank-site, protocol, members' assembly, 9 July 1983, 23, Kibbutz Degania Archive.
- 25 It was discovered from the study of the detailed plans provided by the manufacturer, along with the "service history" of this type of tank in the Middle East. See *Ha'aretz*, 6 May 1992.
- 26 See, for example, a report written in 1951 by a 7th grade pupil about his class excursion to Jerusalem: "When you reach Bab-el-Wad and see the cars lying in silence alongside the road you recall the whole past. You recall the attacks of the Arabs on Jewish convoys transporting food to besieged Jerusalem...." *Alon Beit Hinukh Rehovot* (the school bulletin), Spring 1951, 9 (Archive of Jewish Education, 4.165/3).
- 27 It is worth quoting the question and Ben-Gurion's answer, which summarize the themes we are discussing:

Question: Along Shaar ha-Gay ... on the road between Latrun and Jerusalem, there are the remains of pick-up trucks, jeeps and armored cars, which have already been affected by rust. Each wreck is a commemorative monument to the heroism of the "Crash-through" Brigade, the convoy leaders and those who opened the road to besieged Jerusalem. Each wreck is connected to the names of warriors who fell in battle and sacrificed themselves in the war of liberation of the fatherland.

In the light of all this, I respectfully ask:

1. Does not the Defense Minister think that this is a sacrilege to the honor of the fighters who fell and an intended erasure of the memory of heroic chapters of the war?

2. Is the Defense Minister willing to accept my proposal – to build an appropriate fence at the sites of the wrecks, to mark on the spot the names of the fallen and to write briefly on a sign the stories of their heroism, in order to commemorate on the road to Jerusalem the whole story of the battle for the capital of Israel?

Answer: The speaker has raised an important question, even though I do not agree with the whole proposal. The wrecks should be removed and in appropriate places memorial columns should be constructed. The issue of commemorating

the war throughout the country and at the approaches to Jerusalem still lies before us.

Quoted from Protocol of Session No. 153 of the First Knesset, 17 May 1950, *Divrei ha-Knesset* (Knesset proceedings), 1474.

- 28 Letter from Yosef Dekel, head of the Unit for Commemoration, Ministry of Defense, to the Minister of Defense, 15 Sept. 1954, Central Army Archive.
- 29 See the report in *Zmanim*, 9 Sept. 1954, in which the affair is exposed.
- 30 See a summary of the answers to participants' questions concerning the design of the monument, Public Contest for the Construction of the Memorial to the Openers of the Road to Jerusalem at Sha'ar ha-Gay, issued by the Unit for the Commemoration of the Fallen and the Israeli Association of Engineers and Architects, Archive of the Association, Tel Aviv, no date.
- 31 Interview with Danziger in *Ba-Mahaneh*, 30 Nov. 1955, 16.
- 32 Protocol, jury of the public contest, session on 3 Aug. 1953, 3. The plans were exhibited in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv during the week following the announcement of the results.
- 33 *Ba-Mahaneh*, 30 Nov. 1955, 17.
- 34 Protocol, session of the jury in the (2nd) public contest, 5 Mar. 1962, 3, Archive of the Israeli Association of Engineers and Architects, Tel Aviv.
- 35 "What the Armored Vehicle in Sha'ar ha-Gay Told Me," report by 5th grade pupil in *Moladeti* (bulletin of Primary School A in Nes Ziona), 1958, 13–14 (Archive of Jewish Education, 3.155/11).
- 36 "By the Tank in Degania," *ibid.*, 14.
- 37 Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, 287.
- 38 Clew and Sims, "Locating Authenticity," 169.