



Restless Park: On the Latrun villages and Zochrot

By Eitan Bronstein

Translated by Charles Kamen

One day in March, 2007, while waiting for a group whose members wanted to hear the story of Canada Park, I wandered through the ruins of 'Imwas, near the cemetery of the village. Remnants of walls still stand there. I was surprised to find on the ground a round metal object, its edges painted

blue. It looked like a plate. My friend, Umar Ighbarieh, confirmed my guess. "I myself ate from such plates," he told me. And I even had thought to bring it to a lab for testing... This discovery, of a plate from which - apparently - the residents of 'Imwas had eaten, made clear to me that even today, seven years

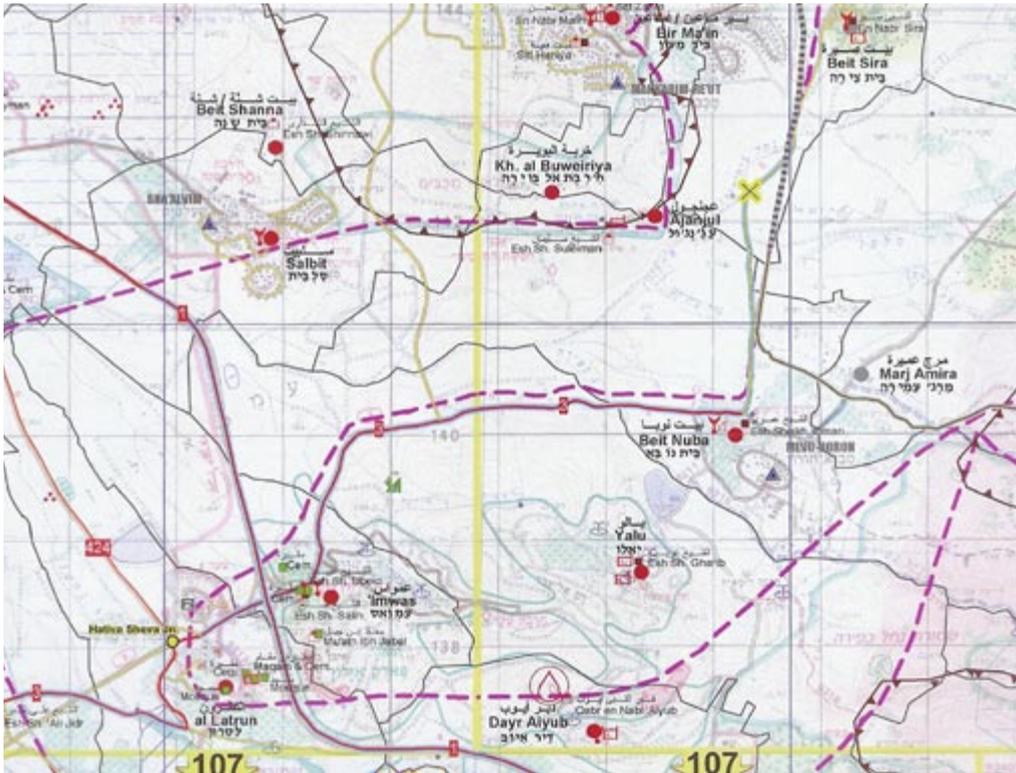
after I first became acquainted with the area, and after hundreds of visits, its earth continues to reveal new secrets.

I like using the name 'Canada Park' as a starting point for telling the story of this place. It's a story of one name that hides other names that have been erased here. Not only the names of 'Imwas, Yalu and Beit Nuba were erased by the Keren Hakayemet Leyisrael (KKL; in English, the 'Jewish National Fund' or JNF) when it established the park. Ironically, the Canadians themselves weren't happy at what had been done in their name. Maybe that's the reason the visitor discovers that the place is also called "Ayalon Park" and "Canada-Ayalon Park." This schizophrenic dual nomenclature was due to the embarrassment which followed the announcement that the park had been established with the financial support of Jews from Toronto. Fifteen million Canadian dollars were donated in order to plant, beyond the Green Line, thousands of pines and cypresses to make bloom the wilderness on which remained the ruins of these three villages. The KKL was forced to apologize in Canada, and to reduce the embarrassment it had to change the park's name. But the Canadians don't forget. In 2003, someone from the Canadian Embassy in Tel Aviv asked me to give a tour of the area. He said he'd also bring their representative from Ramallah. We set a date, but after

a number of postponements the tour never took place. They also seem to find it hard to see what has been done in their name.

The Canadian money, which could have been used to establish schools and pave roads in Canada, was used instead to create a magnificent park on territory captured in 1967, on the ruins of three villages. A KKL representative told a reporter for Channel 5 in Canada that the funds weren't invested beyond the Green Line, but "in another part of the park." She sat with him beside a large wooden sign, in the center of the park, honoring the Tannenbaum family from Toronto for their contribution to its creation. "So let me understand," she said to him: "This sign here, beyond the Green Line, is in honor of a Toronto family because of money it donated and invested somewhere else?" "Yes," he replied, unabashed. The reporter's thorough investigation demonstrated that almost the entire area of the park is located beyond the Green Line, and it's clear that those millions were invested in violation of Canadian law.

When I tell Israeli visitors to Canada Park that we are now in territory captured in 1967 - not 1948 - many have difficulty believing it, and rightly so. The area of the park has been completely "Israelised." Not a single roadblock or sign warns that the traveler is crossing the Green Line, Israel's internationally recognized border. At least one driver,



The section of Road 1 (Jerusalem - Tel Aviv) that crosses over the Green Line (Source: Salman H. Abu-Sitta, *The Return Journey: A Guide to the Depopulated and Present Palestinian Towns and Villages and Holy Sites*. London: Palestine Land Society, 2007)

who was caught speeding on the part of intercity Route 1 that runs past Canada Park, escaped punishment by arguing before the judge that the place where he was stopped was outside the judge's jurisdiction.

Political signage

But thousands of visitors to the park apparently are unaware that not only were villages located there until 1967, but that they themselves are forbidden to get off the road running between Ramallah and Latrun - because, according to the Military Order dated April,

1968, which regulates the confiscation of these lands ("Area Yod"), "persons using the road will not delay their travel nor will they leave the road!" This order was issued to prevent the return of refugees from those villages to the lands they occupied until June, 1967. For the same reason, the order also details the hours that a curfew is in effect - a curfew which, of course, is not imposed on visitors to KKL parks. Or perhaps the KKL is not bound by military regulations? Is that possible?

It is, however, certain that the JNF is above Israeli politics. For when

¹ Adv. Zvi Freizler (Ed.), n.d. *Legislation in Judea and Samaria* (Chapter A, p. 23). Jerusalem: Ktuvim Publishing Co. [Hebrew]



Zochrot asked KKL's directors to place signs in the park indicating that Palestinian villages used to exist within its boundaries, they replied as follows: "Unfortunately, the KKL does not deal with topics having political significance, and therefore we suggest you address your request to the appropriate official bodies."

Zochrot's letter to the KKL arrived following an event to commemorate 36 years since the uprooting of the Latrun villages. Together with residents of the nearby locality of Neve Shalom and representatives of the villages themselves, Zochrot erected signs indicating that villages had once been located on the land where the park was established. Zochrot brochures which we left next to one of the signs gave my telephone number. Two days later the phone rang.

"Hello, is that Eitan?"

"Yes."

"This is Cohen speaking, Canada Park's maintenance superintendent. Did you put up those signs?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"So that people would know what used to be there."

"But that's illegal."

"There are thousands of illegal signs in Israel, even inside the park - for example, those advertising all kinds of things for sale."

"But your signs are political."

"And yours - those that describe the Romans, the Hasmoneans, the Byzantines, the Ottomans, but don't say a word about centuries of Palestinian settlement - they aren't political?"

"But they're legal...."

The park's maintenance superintendent made sure to remove



the signs and the KKL doesn't deal with political issues, so we contacted the "Civil Administration" (a strange name for this organization, considering that it is responsible for various matters affecting non-citizens under occupation). This is what we wrote them in June, 2003:

"...Visitors to Canada Park can learn a great deal about the history of the

area by reading the dozens of signs situated throughout the park that present many and varied histories, but not the history of the local Palestinians. The KKL hopes to educate the public about the country we live in. We believe it is appropriate that the information provided in Canada Park, as well as that provided everywhere else, should not selectively ignore the Palestinians who have lived here for hundreds of years.

“Therefore, we would be grateful if you would add signs which include such information. If doing so requires approval by the local planning authority, Zochrot is willing to make the necessary application, and requests that you agree to erecting the signs.”

The Civil Administration did not reply promptly. Our sources reported that its legal advisors determined there was no legal way to refuse our request. On the other hand, it was hard for them to grant it explicitly, so they transferred it to the headquarters of Central Command, which in turn examined it and sent it on to the Ministry of Justice for further consultation. When we understood that the procedure was likely to be endless, we petitioned the High Court of Justice against the Military Commander of Judea and Samaria, the Civil Administration and the KKL, represented by Adv. Michael Sfarad. The complete text of the petition is available on Zochrot’s web site. It stated, in part:

“...The decision to conceal selected portions of the area’s history is unreasonable in the extreme, one that undermines those values mentioned above, and the very justification for erecting historical markers, one accepted by every planning body throughout the world. Since we were given no reason for rejecting our request, let us say, with all due respect, that we suspect the rejection was based on political motives, whose goal is to prevent visitors to the site from learning about its history of Arab settlement which, until the 1967 war, contained a vibrant and vital Palestinian population.”

In its response of July, 2005, the KKL made its first commitment in writing:

“(KKL) did not oppose including relevant information about the villages of Yalu and ‘Imwas on the signs erected in the park, and in fact proposed a text that would describe the history of those villages, which would be added to the existing signs. This proposal was based solely on professional considerations, taking into account the characteristics of the place and the view that an overabundance of signs in the park would damage its aesthetic character, and on a desire to maintain it as a location for rest and recreation.” Not a word about politics. Just professional considerations, aesthetics and recreation...

The State Attorney's office responded as follows to the High Court of Justice on behalf of the Military Commander and the Civil Administration of the Occupied Territories: "The respondents state that in the wake of previous discussions held in the Civil Administration and in the office of the State Attorney during 2003-2004, and following an additional discussion in the office of the head of the Civil Administration, instructions were issued on June 27, 2005, by the head of the Civil Administration that, as requested, signs be erected stating that the villages of Yalu and 'Imwas existed in the area until 1967."

All the respondents requested that the petition be voided since their agreement to erect signs rendered it, in their judgment, superfluous. Attorney Michael Sfarad demanded that the petition be heard before the High Court of Justice; if, prior to the hearing, the signs would be erected, we would withdraw the petition.

The KKL and the Civil Administration agreed, therefore, to erect new signs in the park, noting the existence of the villages of Yalu and 'Imwas. The village of Beit Nuba was not actually located within the park's boundaries, and only a portion of its lands were included in the park's area. The settlement of Mevo Horon was erected on the ruins of Beit Nuba. A hearing before the High Court was set for April 4, 2006.

It was now necessary to agree on the wording of the signs. Michael Sfarad explained to Zochrot that there was no chance that the text would refer to "occupation," "expulsion," "destruction of the villages" or "refugees," but contain only a laconic reference to what had existed prior to the 1967 war. The members of Zochrot greeted this news with dismay. On the one hand, the decision to erect signs in Israel commemorating destroyed Palestinian villages was a substantial achievement, and would set a precedent. On the other hand, the "acceptable" language was so euphemistic that it could create the impression that the disappearance of the villages was the result of some natural evolutionary process rather than of the Zionist project of conquest.

The sides agreed to the following wording: "The villages of 'Imwas and Yalu existed in the area of the park until 1967. 'Imwas had 2,000 inhabitants, who now live in Jordan and in Ramallah. A cemetery is located next to the ruins of the village. Yalu had 1,700 inhabitants, who now live in Jordan and Ramallah. A well and a number of cisterns can be found there."

Imagine the reaction in Israel if a similar text were inscribed on a sign in Warsaw memorializing the local Jewish community...

The signs were not actually erected until a few days before the scheduled hearing. Two laborers, two supervisors



and one photographer appeared on site. The laborers mixed cement and dug a hole. The supervisors gave instructions, and the photographer immortalized the event in order to show the court that the deed had been done. Umar from Zochrot was also there, and took photographs as well. The KKL personnel explained to him how open they are to presenting various histories. The new sign, white on brown, was erected on the site of Yalu, adjacent to the old sign referring only to Tel Ayalon from the Hasmonean period. The sign on 'Imwas' lands was erected a few meters from where Zochrot had placed its "illegal" sign three years earlier. This time the sign was erected by the sovereign power and included its official title, "The Civil Administration - Judea and Samaria." Even the unit's colorful insignia appears, as a "stamp of approval."

A few months earlier I spoke with the KKL office in Eshtaol. They have a "signage" department, no less. I tried to find out what happened to the signs that we had erected, and that had been

removed. I spoke with Osnat, who was happy to help. "Yes, there were signs there that were erected by the Muslim Brotherhood or something, and on them was written how many people lived in the villages, and how many schools were there. We removed them. There aren't any KKL signs anywhere in the park that mention the villages because we only want to help people find their way around the park. Not that we want to cover up what was here." I told her about the sign for the Roman bathhouse that had been placed in 'Imwas' cemetery, but she replied that the area wasn't their responsibility,



nor were the signs theirs. I insisted that there were signs in the park directing visitors to the bathhouse. She obtained confirmation from Michal, a senior staffer, that a sign of their's pointed the way to the bathhouse. She explained that "we don't refer specifically to Arab villages that were destroyed in 1948, like everywhere in Israel." She's right. I asked whether these particular villages hadn't been destroyed in 1967, and she

replied immediately that the area was a no-man's-land and the villages had been abandoned since 1948. I expressed surprise, and she said that she wasn't sure. Michal confirmed that the villages



Entrance to the site of the bath-house from the area of the park only

were found abandoned in 1967, and had been abandoned since 1948. They referred me to Amikam, who sounded like the local commander. He himself had removed the yellow "Muslim Brotherhood" signs. He explained that "the guys from Neve Shalom erected signs there about a year and a half ago, stating how many people lived in each village." He also confirmed that no reference to the Palestinian villages appears anywhere in the park.

Judaizing the landscape

Nor were the Palestinian villages mentioned in a Hannukah, 2002, tour in Canada Park - "The Wars of the Maccabees" - run by the Society for the Protection of Nature. I took that tour with my son Gal, who was ten years old. A high-quality family tour - that is, a tour for children, accompanied by

parents who by their presence confirm the accuracy of what the children are told. The guide takes us back to the mythological period of Jewish history - the wars of the Maccabees, the best known of which is the battle of Emmaus. She begins the tour from the Yalu overlook: "Here, where we're standing, above the Ayalon riverbed, were famous battles. These are the Judean Hills, there the hills of Samaria, and there the coastal plain. The city of Modi'in to the left, lower Beit Horon opposite us, and upper Beit Horon above it - you hear about it on Galgalatz [a popular radio station]. Mavo Horon is down in the valley. Next to Modi'in, Re'ut and Maccabim." The view in front of us is filled mostly with Arab villages: Beit Sira, Beit Liqiya, Beit Ur-a-Tahta, Beit Ur-a-Fuqa, Beit Inam. But the guide directs our attention to the Jewish settlements. The landscape has been made Jewish, and even the location from which we're viewing it has been cleansed of its Palestinian identity. Yalu, a lively village for hundreds of years, until its inhabitants were expelled in 1967, is not mentioned at all on this tour. What we see expressed here is the effort to transform consciousness to such an extent that even the capture and occupation of the villages among whose ruins we are walking has vanished from sight and from our minds.

As the tour continues, the guide very dramatically relates the Jewish Hannukah

story, with the eight battles fought by the Maccabees, which is why the Hannukah menorah has eight candles. The story is told to listeners seated on the ruins of buildings, in the shade of a huge carob tree. These are the ruins of 'Imwas, also destroyed in 1967. But they remain transparent even unto invisibility, and the story continues: "During the battles something important occurred. In the year 187 they find the jug of oil and declare Jewish independence in the land. Great joy, because the Greeks formerly ruled. Just like the joy which greeted the independence of the state of Israel. What happiness when Ben Gurion established the state! It's the same as Jewish independence in the Hasmonean state, just fifty years ago." These five sentences carry a heavy burden. Jewish mythology serves the Israeli mythology, and paves the road to continuing the conflict with the Palestinians. Just as we were victorious then - we, the Maccabees - so will we vanquish our enemies today.

Toward the end of the tour, the guide makes a strange comment: "There are lots of remains here of habitation that precede the Hasmonean period, and also of those that came after it." There are in fact many remains of "post-Hasmonean" life, but not a word about them. But the comment is important, perhaps exactly because the guide didn't elaborate. It symbolizes the Palestinian Nakba, the destruction of the life

lived here, something repressed that erupts occasionally in a way that seems uncontrollable. No one asked the guide what lives she meant, and whose "lots of remains" they were. Because it's hard to ask, and even harder to reply and provide an accounting.

This is what transfer looks like

A little tale, marginal to the 1967 war, provides an opportunity to begin such an accounting of the war's results in the Latrun area. Yosef Hochman, a professional photographer, was at the time a member of Kibbutz Har'el. He reports that a few days prior to the Israeli attack a number of sheep were stolen from his kibbutz. Suspicion fell on villagers from 'Imwas, who were apparently able to cross the border fairly easily. After the region fell, and "our forces" rushed to the outskirts



of Ramallah in six hours without encountering any resistance in the Latrun area, members of Kibbutz Har'el decided that they had a golden opportunity to get back the stolen

sheep. Driving a jeep, armed with rifles they owned, Hochman carrying his camera, all of them dressed in work clothes, the kibbutzniks joined the soldiers in 'Imwas, Yalu and Bayt Nuba. At the beginning they took part in patrols searching for Egyptian commandos who were in the area. The Egyptians were captured, and one of them was killed. An Israeli soldier who caught one of the commandos was photographed



smiling and pointing to the camera as if he wanted his picture taken.

Hochman was amazed to discover the army beginning to destroy the buildings, and he documented everything. He told me that two weeks after the war ended Uzi Narkiss, GOC Central Command, gave a talk at Kibbutz Har'el. Hochman asked why the villages were destroyed. Narkiss answered that it was revenge for what happened there in 1948.

The last photograph of 'Imwas shows a large, attractive village whose large buildings are surrounded by greenery. Hochman photographed the bulldozers demolishing the buildings - apparently

the same bulldozers that during the same period were busy destroying hundreds of Palestinian villages whose



inhabitants had been expelled during the Nakba². The most disturbing photographs show the refugees leaving their villages - long columns of refugees carrying all they could in their arms and on donkeys. Alongside them IDF soldiers and their vehicles stand facing in the direction opposite to that of the refugees. Amos Keinan wrote an eyewitness report about these columns of refugees based on his reserve military duty at one of the roadblocks which prevented the refugees from returning to their villages. His piercing report was distributed throughout the world, causing an international scandal that forced Israel to stop Moshe Dayan who had begun destroying Qalqilya.

One photo in particular touched my heart, as a father, even after I've looked at it and shown it to others hundreds of times. It shows a Palestinian family

² Aharon Shai, 2002. "The fate of the abandoned Arab villages in Israel on the eve of the Six Day War and afterwards." *Qathadra*, 105, pp. 151-170.



leaving its village. The mother carries on her head a large vessel and holds a baby in one arm. A child, who appears to be around twelve, carries on his back his sister, who's about a year and a half old. Beyond them, an Israeli soldier looks at this scene with his arms crossed behind his back. The soldier is looking at the camera, at us viewing the photograph. It's as if he's returning our gaze, and demanding of us to watch what's happening there. The youth carrying a white flag also looks to the camera. He also demands that we look. He moves on, into exile. We and the soldier remain, conquerors³.

³ For further reading about the possibility of creating a 'citenry of photography' see Ariela Azoulay, 2007, *The Civil Contract of Photography* [האמנה האזרחית של הצילום]. Tel Aviv: Resling.

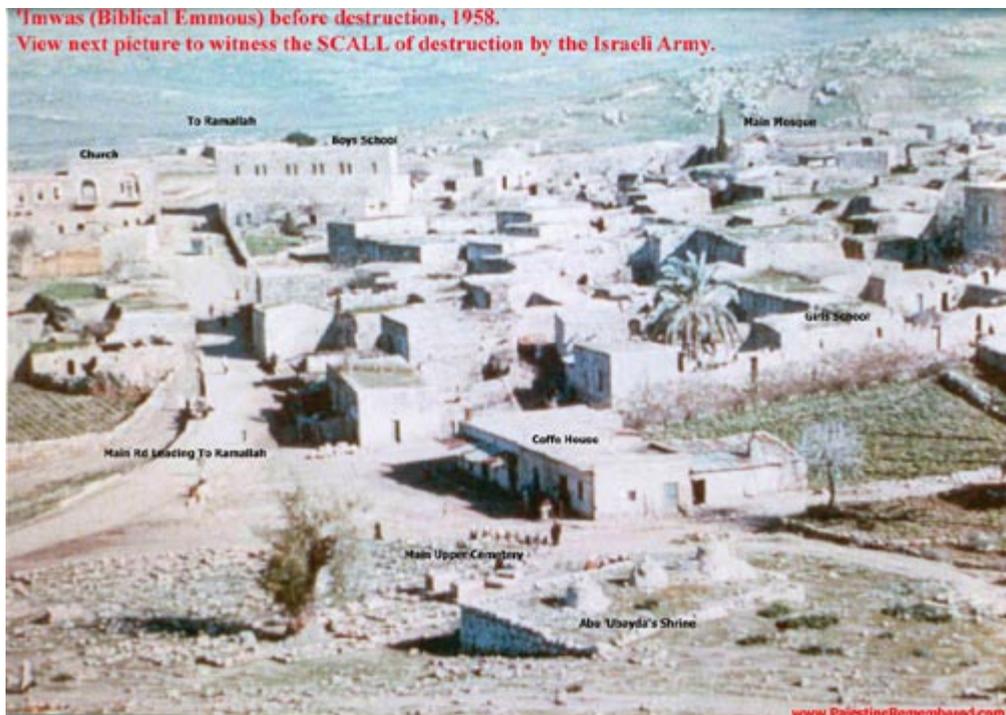


We've already had one person in our history who went to look for donkeys and returned a king. In 1967 there was one who went to look for sheep and returned with chilling documentation of ethnic cleansing. According to Hochman the sheep, if anyone cares, were found and returned to Kibbutz Har'el.

A few years later the Latrun refugees heard about those photographs from members of Kibbutz Nachshon. They located Hochman, received those which showed them and their villages, and put them on the internet. Today anyone can, if they wish, see what that expulsion looked like.

The JNF covers its tracks

An earlier photo of 'Imwas was taken in 1958. It shows people walking in the village streets, and in the lower part of the picture you can see the holy site associated with Obeida Ibn Al-'Jarah, a commander who participated in the Muslim conquest of Palestine in 632. To its left is a large almond tree that still stands today. The structure is very low. One side is raised slightly above ground level, and the other isn't more than two meters high. This photo is an important starting point, helping to understand the transformation of the Israeli landscape. I suggest seeing it as a part that testifies



1958

to the whole, the whole being the reconstruction of the entire Israeli landscape, carried out by destroying the Palestinian villages emptied of their inhabitants in the Nakba of 1948.

The obviously unnatural continuation of this photo is one taken a decade later, one year after the 1967 war, from the same location. The village has been razed almost completely by the bulldozers that Hochman photographed. The large almond tree and the holy site remain. The building's height is still fairly low.

In a 1978 photo, taken from almost the same location, you can already see Canada Park's trees covering practically

the entire landscape. As noted above, the KKL began to create the park at the start of the 1970's. The almond tree is still there. The structure on the holy site is still low.

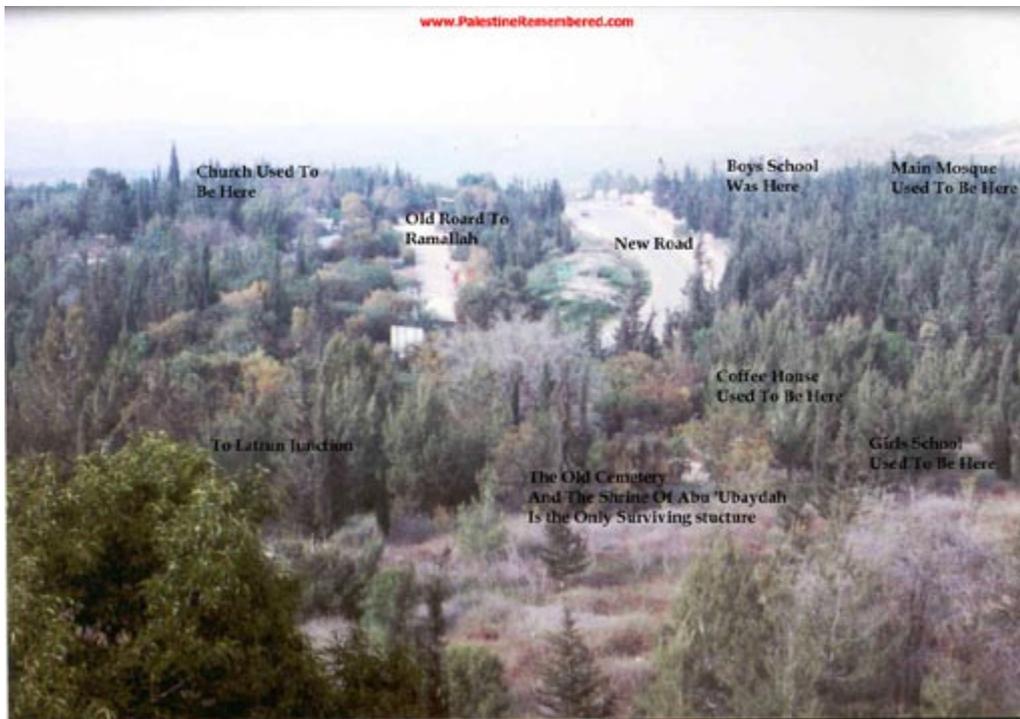
A 1988 photograph shows the KKL trees completely covering the wilderness, which has been transformed into a blossoming, green park serving thousands of visitors. The photo doesn't show the building associated with Obeida Ibn Al-'Jarrah, but it's still there among the trees. Because it isn't visible in the photo, you can't tell how high it is. As far as I know, in the 1980's the building got taller. Not, God forbid,



because of additional construction. Rather, its foundations were excavated, and two meters below the surface the workers discovered the base of a Roman bathhouse dating from the second century CE. The story goes that, until about 500 years ago, when a large earthquake struck the region, there were hot springs here and it wasn't necessary to heat the water for the bathhouse. Since the 1980's at least three signs have been erected in the park referring to this structure. All three call it the "Roman bathhouse." There's no mention of the conquering Muslim commander. "End the Occupation!"

Signa infirma

But, as I've reported, the story of Canada Park's signage took a turn as of result of Zochrot's struggle. The KKL in fact erected two new signs which note the existence of Yalu and 'Imwas, but about two weeks after they were placed one of them was uprooted, along with its concrete base. About three meters away stood another metal sign, recounting the story of biblical Tel Ayalon. "An old narrative," you might call it. Cohen, the maintenance superintendent, suggested that the vandalism was carried out by thieves stealing metal. But that couldn't



be true, since the metal sign describing Tel Ayalon remained in place (unless, of course, the metal thieves preferred a sign containing a relatively progressive text...)

The second sign, which stood in 'Imwas' cemetery, is still there. About a month after it was erected its lower portion was painted black. The painter took care to leave visible only the "older" text. The laconic description of the villages which once stood here was covered by paint. The black paint is incontrovertible evidence of the erasure of the villages, as well as erasing the fact of their erasure. Someone either doesn't want us to

know what happened, or prefers that such knowledge not be exposed in a public space. The erased text can't be ignored, which an inattentive reader of the original sign might have been able to do before it was covered over. Now, however, something has been erased. The repression of knowledge about what existed here before the establishment of the Jewish state becomes overt. The very act of erasure leaves its traces, and makes the reader of the sign curious to know what was deleted.

During one of the tours in 2007, while I was telling the story of the struggle over the signs, one of the participants



went over to the sign and with a coin began scraping off the black paint. It was again possible to see the words “Yalu” and “Imwas.” Apparently this act of exposure was too much for someone. A few minutes after I had completed writing this article, I learned that the sign had been removed. A photographer from Ha’aretz, sent to take a picture of it to accompany a piece on the subject, reported from the site that only the posts and the metal frame remained.



Zochrot demanded that the KKL repair the signs. They replied that when all the signs in the park would be fixed, those would be as well. The KKL also replied recently to a letter it was sent more than a year ago, right after the new signs were erected, suggesting the erection of similar signs on all sites run by the KKL, commemorating villages destroyed after 1948. “We request that you provide us with a detailed list of these villages,” they answered. Noga Kadman did the research, and her study will soon appear as a book. The KKL received information about dozens of its sites and the villages on whose ruins they were established. We’ll see whether they’ll act differently now than they did in the past, this time willingly rather than under compulsion.



The names of the donors on the stones of the houses

Sometimes I wonder what the Canadian donors and their descendants would have said had they known the history of the site and the use that was made of their money. The names of hundreds of donors appear on the stone



walls of an area especially built for that purpose inside the park. I haven't yet written to them. The stones used for building those walls are suspiciously similar to those the villagers used to build their homes. The idea that stones taken from the demolished homes of



expelled Palestinians display the names of donors whose money was used to establish a park on the ruins of their villages can teach us something about the archaeology of our lives. (Tomer Gardi, the editor of **Sedek** magazine, just published by Zochrot, includes a chapter about a similar story in its first issue.)

The walls with the donors' names remind one of memorial plaques for fallen Israeli soldiers. About one kilometer away as the crow flies are other walls, and on them are the names of more than five thousand Israeli soldiers, generations of Armored Corps casualties. "The Armored Corps memorial, highly recommended to anyone who hasn't been there," said the tour guide.

Some of the refugees from the Latrun villages also became fighters, "terrorists" as they are called in the language of the Israel occupation. The Canadian television journalist reports that two of the descendents of these refugees blew themselves up in Jerusalem. How much dynamite does this peaceful park contain?

The blackest hour of my life

It's important for me, nevertheless, to end this text on a hopeful note. One of Hochman's photos shows two soldiers standing in the doorway of one of the houses, next to an Arab woman - perhaps one of the occupants. Laundry is still hanging outside on the line. Such a meeting was unusual at the time the villages were demolished, for most of the residents had already left. That's what Zakaria Sunbati, who lived in nearby Beit Laqiya, told us during one of our visits to the area in 2001. At the time I was still working in the School for Peace at Neve Shalom, and I had organized a tour for high school students from the Brenner Regional School. One of their teachers had taken part in the capture of the villages. He agreed to come and tell his story. Zakaria began by telling us that a few days before the war the inhabitants received word of plans to capture the villages, and warnings from the army that all residents of dozens of villages in the area should leave. At

the time Zakaria was nine years old. He remembers that they fled from their village and took shelter in caves and under the trees nearby. War broke out, and the Israeli army stampeded toward Ramallah. There were no Jordanian forces to oppose the attack. On the second or third day of the war⁴, Israel soldiers had already begun demolishing the buildings of Yalu, 'Imwas and Beit Nuba⁵. Zakaria remembers seeing from a distance the buildings being blown up. A few days later the villagers were permitted to return, except the ones from these three villages. They were razed to the ground. After the war Zakaria, the child, came to see what was left. He saw the destruction, and recalls that he also saw bodies under some of the ruins. In other words, some of the houses were demolished while people were still inside.

The teacher from Kibbutz Netiv HaLamed Heh told his story next: "Everything Zakaria said is correct, except for one thing. We didn't demolish buildings with people inside. On the contrary - we took care to insure that no one was in them, and when we found people here and there we

removed them. It's important for me to tell you what happened here, because it was the blackest hour of my life. Things were done here which should not have been done, and I participated in an action that I shouldn't have been a part of. I don't come here to enjoy myself, and in fact I haven't been here since it was captured in 1967. Today is the first time I've come, to tell you what I did. I was part of a unit whose job was to insure that no people remained in the buildings before they were demolished. We went from building to building, and occasionally found an elderly man or woman whom we removed, and the building was demolished. But then we came to a building with an old man inside. He told us that for him to leave would be like dying, and he preferred to die inside his home. At that moment the coin dropped. In that second I realized the significance of what I and the others were doing here. I knew that demolishing the buildings was intended to prevent the area from ever being returned to Jordan or to the Palestinians. I also knew that the destruction was revenge for Israel's defeat here in 1948. But none of that was worth destroying the life of that old man and the lives of thousands who were expelled. I demanded that my commander stop the action. They refused to listen to me, of course. We removed the old man and demolished his home. I shouldn't have done it."

⁴ That the destruction began at such an early stage indicates that it was planned in advance, and establishes the capture and destruction of the Latrun villages as the link between the Nakba and the occupation beginning in 1967, between the massive destruction of villages in 1948 and the events of 1967 in which relatively many fewer villages were destroyed.

⁵ At the same time the remains of the village of Latrun, whose residents had been expelled during the Nakba and settled in 'Imwas and Yalu, were also razed.

After that tour I knew that we had to come here and begin erecting signs telling what once had been here, but was no more. That was how Zochrot started.

The soldier in Hochman's photo is looking at us. He appeals us to take responsibility for what was done here in 1967. The expulsion of the Latrun villagers is the link between the Nakba and the Naksa, between the capture of 78% of the country's territory in 1948, and the finishing of the job in 1967. The soldier's gaze can be read as an expectation that someone be called to account for the crimes that were committed. The photo doesn't show the expulsion merely as "something that happened there," but also as something which will always make demands on us, something we can see in the Israeli soldier's eyes. He turns his gaze from the Palestinian woman and looks at us, as if to say that from now on the

burden is ours, we who refuse to view the world only through the slit in the blue-and-white KKL donation box.

The Israeli soldier's gaze at us, as he is expelling a Palestinian woman from her home, invokes us to accept responsibility for him as an occupier, as one who expels. He is there on behalf of the country, representing us, its citizens. The teacher told his students that for the rest of his life he will bear the scar of the immoral behavior in which he took part. These wounded soldiers demand our compassion, which may allow both them and us to make peace with our past. Recognizing the right of that Palestinian woman to return home is a major part of the reconciliation process.

Thanks to Norma Musih, Tomer Gardi and Amaya Galili for their excellent comments.

