

Sur Baher and Umm Tuba

Note: Due to their geographical proximity, the sociopolitical histories of the villages of Sur Baher and Umm Tuba intersect. Though we have combined them in this brief report, and though similarities between them abound, they are distinct villages, each with its own unique features. We hope to research them independently in the near future.

Introduction

"O Palestine, make mention and record of us in the history books.

Take note of those martyred and wounded in valleys and hills.

On our lands are the vanguards... to the front of Sur Baher, you summon us.

The sons of the Holy War protect our homeland and people,

Standing guard day and night in the face of our enemies.

*Brave people of Sur Baher ... Almighty God is our guardian."*¹

These words were voiced by the resistance fighters of Sur Baher and Umm Tuba during the battles of 1948. They reveal a love of country, and a loyalty to those who were martyred and wounded in defense of the villages, which came to be known for fierce resistance that prompted the enemy to declare: "We forgot a piece of Gaza in Sur Baher."²

¹ Jadallah, Mohammad Mahmoud. "100 years of my life," Al-Asa, Aziz Mahmoud (Review). Jerusalem, 2019. P. 48.

² According to Mahmoud Mustafa Fawaqa (b.1946), in an interview with Grass Roots staff on 23.07.2019 in Sur Baher.



Location and Area

Sur Baher and Umm Tuba are located four kilometers southeast of the Old City of occupied Jerusalem.³ They are bordered by Dar Salah and al-Ubeidiya from the east, Beit Safafa from the west, Bethlehem and Beit Sahour from the south and al-Sawahrah and Silwan from the north and northeast. According to most references, Sur Baher and Umm Tuba extend over an area of 9,471 donums.⁴ Despite always being referred to in association with Sur Baher, Umm Tuba is a distinct village, as its own villagers define it.

Origin and History

There are various accounts as to the origin of the name Sur Baher. One account associates the name with the Aramaic *Sur Baal*, meaning “rocky hill” or “rock.” It was known as Sarbael in the

³ Al-Dabash, Khaled. “Generations: Demographics and Families of Sur Baher and Umm Tuba,” Jerusalem, 2013. p. 5.

⁴ Al-Dabbagh, Mustafa Murad. “Our Homeland, Palestine.” Last accessed on April 2, 2021:

http://www.palestineremembered.com/GeoPoints/Hizma_1172/en/index.htm

Crusader era.⁵ Researcher Nasser al-Din Abu Khdeir believes that the “aa” sound in *Baal* became an “h” sound. The locals later gave it an Arabic name that they could understand and interpret, hence *Sur Baher* or *Bahel*.⁶

In another account, villagers maintain that the name dates to the seventh century AD and a meeting between the Muslim Caliph Omar Ibn al-Khattab and the Companion Amr ibn al-Aas near the village location and prior to the liberation of the city of Jerusalem by the Muslim army. The story goes that they met in a valley, later named al-Omarayn Valley (and in some accounts, Omar Valley), where they discussed a covert plan to defeat the Byzantines in Jerusalem, that is, a *remarkable secret* (*sirron baher* in Arabic). The name would eventually morph into *Sur Baher*.⁷

The name Umm Tuba originates from the Arabic word *Umm*, literally meaning “mother of,” a way of saying “one that is.” *Tuba* means “a good or beautiful place;” hence, *Umm Tuba* would translate to “the beautiful one.” The name may also derive from a proper noun.⁸

Sur Baher is rooted in ancient history, and the oldest antiquities found in the village date to the Iron Age. Excavations conducted in 2013 by the Israeli Antiquities Authority in Khirbat al-Zaquqa, south of the village, uncovered caves and cisterns believed to belong to the first Iron Age (1200-1100 BC).⁹ Several years prior to this discovery, excavations revealed Roman and Byzantine remains.¹⁰

The origins of Umm Tuba do not diverge from those of neighboring Sur Baher. It is believed that Umm Tuba was the site of a Roman village named Metopa.¹¹ According to the villagers' accounts, ancient ruins dating back to the Roman and Byzantine eras, including the remains of churches, exist in the village. Several archaeological sites in the village, such as Khirbat Masada, Khirbat Luqa and Khirbat Umm al-Asafir, contain springs that have mostly run dry, such as Shiab al-Battikh and al-Maamoudiya springs.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Abu Khdeir, Nasser al-Din. “The Names of Jerusalem Villages: A Semantic and Linguistic Study.” Bab El Wad, Dec 6, 2016. Last accessed on April 2, 2021 at www.babelwad.com/ar/jerusalem-villages-names

⁷ See note 2.

⁸ See note 6.

⁹ A report issued by the Israeli Ministry of Antiquities, dated August 7, 2014, accessed August 4, 2019, at <https://bit.ly/2na4wRR>

¹⁰ A report issued by the Israeli Ministry of Antiquities, dated December 13, 2009, accessed August 4, 2019, at <https://bit.ly/2nbBpxH>

¹¹ See Note 4.



Population

Today, Sur Baher is home to about 19,000 Palestinians¹² hailing from five clans.¹³

The al-Fawaqa clan was given its name because it resided in the elevated area of the village (*fawq* means “above” in Arabic). Several families descend from the clan: Dawood, Abu Hamed, al-Atrash (or Tarshan), Abu Asla, Awadallah, al-Shahadat, Abu Abed, al-Masry, Qawarit and Abu Sbitan.

Al-Omrah (the Omayrah clan) branches into the Abu Kaf, Khamis, Awad and Jaber families.

The al-Bakeirat clan branches into the Hamdan, Hamed, Hamada, Affana and Basit families.

The al-Dwayyat clan branches into the al-Aamas, Dabash, Abed Rabbo, Qasim, Khudair and Alyan families.

¹² See note 2.

¹³ Al-Dabash, Khaled. “Generations: Demographics and Families of Sur Baher and Umm Tuba,” Jerusalem, 2013.

The al-Jabour clan branches into the Atoun, Jadallah and Abdul-Jawad families.

Umm Tuba has a population of about 5,000,¹⁴ all hailing from the large Abu Tair clan, from which 12 families descend. According to the popular village narrative, the clan's name is rooted in the story behind the naming of its oldest ancestor, Sheikh Ishaq Abu Tair, a descendant of Sheikh Mohammad al-Tayyar, who occupied a prominent administrative position in Jerusalem during Ottoman rule.

The story goes that a group of Taamrah tribe Arabs that lived south of Umm Tuba disagreed with Sheikh Ishaq, and they attacked, beat and robbed one of his shepherds. Sheikh Ishaq sought revenge, and it was said that as he pursued the group, he threw his horse's feedbag up in the air, which from afar resembled a flying bird. Hence, the Sheikh acquired his title, Abu Tair (*tair* meaning "bird" in Arabic), and it was said that he killed 40 of the Taamrah men on that day.

¹⁵

Resistance Notables

Born in Sur Baher in 1937, resistance fighter Fayez Mahmoud Hamdan sought refuge in Amman with his family during the Nakba in 1948. He enlisted in the Military College there and graduated with the rank of captain. With the launch of Palestinian guerrilla operations after the 1967 war, Hamdan joined the fedayeen, and along with his comrades Subhi Ghosheh and Khalil Sufyan founded the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front. Hamdan went on to join the Fatah movement, where he was assigned to lead the central division and the Ein Hazir training camp, south of the Jordanian city of Salt. He was martyred in an Israeli airstrike on August 14, 1968.¹⁶

In Umm Tuba, Sheikh Mohammad Hassan Abu Tair¹⁷ (born 1952) is renowned. Since the 1970s, he has spent nearly 35 years intermittently in Israeli occupation prisons and is known for his struggle and resistance against the occupation. In 2006, he was elected to the Palestinian Legislative Council as a Hamas movement Jerusalem representative. As a result of his political activity in the Legislative Council on behalf of Hamas, the Occupation authorities exiled him, along with other Jerusalemite representatives, from Jerusalem following a decision to withdraw

¹⁴ See note 2.

¹⁵ This story is passed down by the elders of the Abu Tair family, and we have included it here as narrated by Sheikh Muhammad Hassan Abu Tair, a prominent figure in Umm Tuba, during a phone call on September 29, 2018.

¹⁶ A report published about the martyr on the anniversary of his killing can be reviewed through the following link:

<https://bit.ly/2ojuYcl>

¹⁷ Ibid.

their Israeli-issued “residency” cards. They are exiled from the city to this day (2021) and reside in Ramallah.

Social and Economic context

Due to the hilly terrain of Sur Baher and its lack of springs, villagers relied on rainfed agriculture. Olives and stone fruit trees abounded in the village groves and orchards, and so, the arrival of spring each year ushered a blanket of white blossoms, to where the village appeared from a distance to be a pocket of snow-covered ground.

Oral accounts in the village relate that a Mercedes truck and its Hebronite driver would park in the center of the village, where the truck would be "loaded with sacks of mokhmali almonds for transport to Amman and then to the Gulf countries."¹⁸

Harvest in Sur Baher was another distinct season, as each clan would gather at its own threshing floor, an area of solid ground where the crop of chickpeas, barley, wheat and Palestine vetch was collected. Animals were used to stomp and thresh the grains, after which the wind was relied on for winnowing and separating grains from shafts, followed by sifting and grain collection.¹⁹ These agricultural norms have all but vanished from the village in practice and in memory as well. The encroachment of the Zionist colonial monstrosity onto village land since 1948, in addition to Palestinian urban expansion, has led to the restriction of agricultural activity to limited areas today, notably, Wadi al-Hummus, where olive trees still abound.

Due to the lack of water in Sur Baher, its people relied on digging and building wells to secure their water needs, and so, every home was equipped with a well. Prominent among these wells was al-Habra or al-Harba²⁰ (also known as al-Maghara well). Besides these wells, an Ottoman water line established under Sultan Suleiman the Lawgiver's reign (1494-1566) ran through the village, carrying water from the pools of Bethlehem to Jerusalem. For the people of Sur Baher, Umm Tuba, and Sawahrah, this collection point located north of Sur Baher in the area known as Batn al-Wad, was referred to as al-Kariz (meaning *storage container*).²¹

¹⁸ See note 2.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Social life in Umm Tuba did not differ much to that of Sur Baher, as the geographical features, primarily the foothill terrain is well-suited to olives, especially the Roman variety, in addition to all types of stone fruits. "The villagers were all farmers who worked their lands, with cooperation and love, sharing the seasons, joys and sorrows, which they also shared with their Christian brothers and sisters in nearby Beit Jala and Beit Sahour, only eight kilometers away."²² This lifestyle was in part maintained due to the low population numbers in the village and the villagers' descent from the same family: Abu Tair.

Landmarks

We will note a few of Sur Baher's most prominent landmarks, their association with popular heritage, with the colonizers, or with the battles that took place in Sur Baher and Umm Tuba:

The al-Omari Mosque of Sur Baher: Previously known as Omar ibn al-Khattab Mosque, it is the village's primary mosque among five others, and the only one to host Friday and Eid prayers.

The mosque dates to the first Islamic conquest of Jerusalem. According to popular narrative, it is believed that the mosque was built where the Caliph Omar ibn Al-Khattab had passed or was lodged or prayed on his journey from Gaza to Jerusalem in 16 AH (637 AD). To honor him, Omar ibn al-Khattab and al-Omari became common names for many mosques along that route.²³ According to ethnographer Taufiq Canaan, it is likely that this mosque — which, according to his definition, is an Islamic shrine deemed a mosque — is built on the ruins of an ancient church or house.²⁴

²² Abu Tair, Muhammad. "My Father Died Dreaming of Returning to Umm Tuba." Al-Dustour, Last accessed on May 23, 2021, at <https://bit.ly/2ojzMyyp>

²³ According to Mr. Mahmoud Mustafa Fawaqa (b.1946), in an interview with the Foundation's staff on 23.07.2019 in Sur Baher.

²⁴ Canaan, Taufik. Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine. London, 1927. p:45



The other mosques in Sur Baher are **al-Daawah**, **al-Murabitin**, **al-Muhajirin** in the Wadi al-Hummus neighborhood, **al-Ansari** in the Deir al-Amud neighborhood, and **Musab bin Omair**.

Amron Citadel:²⁵ Located in Wadi Amron east of Sur Baher, it is an archaeological site with an abundance of flintstone. Popular narratives relate that the two Prophet Companions, Omar ibn al-Khattab and Amr ibn al-As, met there preceding the conquest of Jerusalem. The Citadel itself is today buried under dust and rubble.

Dawarah Graves: These are the remains of five to seven tombs (or shrines, according to some) located within the cemetery west of Sur Baher and forming a single Islamic sanctuary.²⁶ These graves or shrines belong to the elders of the sanctified Dawarah family. Following their death, members of the family were afforded the honor and sanctity given to their ancestors, including Sheikh Bakhit, Sheikh Al-Helou and Sheikh Saleh. Some members of this family were buried in

²⁵ According to Mr. Mahmoud Mustafa Fawaqa (b.1946), in an interview with the Foundation's staff on 23.07.2019 in Sur Baher.

²⁶ Ibid. p:49

Sur Baher, and others in the Shuafat cemetery, in Jericho, and in al-Sawahrah's Qurun al-Hajar area.²⁷

In the popular imagination, the Dawarah sheikhs were associated with the miracle of traveling by riding on boulders. According to the narrative, "Their camels died during their stay in Mecca for the Hajj. When they asked a rich man to help them to procure other camels, he answered mockingly, 'Go, ride those boulders!' They went, did as they were told, and everyone watched as the boulders began to rise higher and higher, heading northwest. One landed in Qurun el-Hadjar, because the saint riding it had died. At this spot, in the Sawahri territory, he was buried. The others reached SurBaher."²⁸

Sur Baher is also home to the shrines and graves of Sheikh Suwan and Sheikh Ismail. In *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, ethnographer Taufiq Canaan describes Sheikh Ismail's tomb: "In SurBaher just behind the guest-house there is a rectangular depression in the rock about 4x2 metres in extent, with a depth of 50–60 cm. Two steps lead down. In the midst of the western wall there protrudes a small, very simple building resembling one half of a common Mohammedan tomb. Enquiring about the significance of this I was told that Sheikh Ismail was buried in a small cave in the rock, and that this building is intended to cover his feet, which protruded since the cave was not long enough for the whole body. In the east side of this half tomb there is a taqah [small window-like opening] which serves light and incense."²⁹

As for Sheikh [Suwan], Canaan writes that "A peasant of SurBaher, who lived in a small cave, lost one member of his family after the other through death. No one could explain his misfortune. One night a reverend sheikh appeared to him in a night vision and reproaching him severely said: 'Why do you not respect my habitation? If you will not atone for your past forgetfulness I will cause the remainder of your family to die.' The frightened man asked: 'Who are you, my Lord?' The reply was: 'I am Sheikh [Suwan] and am buried here.' Early in the morning a tomb was built, the cave cleaned and the family moved elsewhere."³⁰

As in other villages of Palestine, the people of Sur Baher "sanctified these graves or shrines and held them in great esteem, reverence and respect. The villagers regarded those buried there as

²⁷ Ibid. p:51

²⁸ Mohammedan Saints... pp. 273-274.

²⁹ Mohammedan Saints... pp. 54-55.

³⁰ Ibid. pp.72

saints or righteous ones, and they visited their shrines to intone their supplications and recite the Quran, and to illuminate them with lanterns through the shrines' small openings or taqahs designed for that purpose. These customs were held especially on Thursdays.³¹ The customs, however, have ceased to exist with the disappearance of these shrines, save for the Dawarah graves and the shrine of Sheikh Ismail.

Al-Omari Mosque in Umm Tuba: Located in the al-Ghars neighborhood on al-Sultan Street, it is believed that Omar ibn al-Khattab prayed at its location when passing through the village and ordered the building of a mosque there.³²

Colonial Landmarks

The Olive Columns: located in the Olive Garden, east of Ramat Rachel colony, the installation is built on Sur Baher land, at the 1949 Armistice line. It consists of three 15-meter-tall brown marble columns, placed in a triangular formation. Perched atop two pillars are two olive trees, estimated to be over 80 years old. Designed by Zionist architect Ran Morin in 1991, the installation symbolizes, among other things, the complex relationship between "Jewish civilization" and the land of Palestine.³³

Monument to the Zionist Jerusalem Brigade: a stone monument bearing names of eleven combatants from the Occupation army's Jerusalem Brigade, who were killed by a Jordanian soldier in the June 1967 war. Further will be detailed about the incident in the section concerning the Naksa. The monument stands in the westernmost reaches of Sur Baher.

History of Resistance

Sur Baher has written its own chapter of heroism and sacrifice in the history of the Palestinian Arab struggle against British colonialism and the Zionist movement. The village's history is rich with many heroic deeds and battles led by its resistance fighters, side by side with the free people of the Arab nation who came from Egypt, Syria and Jordan to defend Palestine.

³¹ See note 13.

³² See note 2.

³³ More about the columns can be read here: <https://bit.ly/2nGomUR>

The Great Palestinian Revolt (1936–1939)

During the glorious years of revolt against the British and the Zionists, a resistance fighter from Sur Baher, a member of the Higher Arab Committee and the Palestine Arab Party, Mahmoud Jadallah al-Khatib, assembled a fighting contingent from the village. Along with others from the neighboring areas, this group participated in many battles in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Resistance fighters confronted the enemy and inflicted upon them material losses and demoralization. They participated in the Battle of Bani Naim in 1938 and attacked the British-owned Palestine Potash Company's convoys until 1948.³⁴

One of these attacks³⁵ took place near Wadi al-Houd in the village of al-Ezariyah, in coordination between the fighters of Sur Baher (led by Mahmoud Jadallah), Abu Dis (led by Maayuf) and al-Ezariyah (led by Sheikh Musa al-Ezarawi). The fighters ambushed the British convoy as it headed from the company's Dead Sea plant to the port of Haifa. A fierce battle ensued between Palestinian resistance fighters on one side and British and Zionist forces with air support on the other. The Palestinian fighters succeeded in destroying the British convoy and killing several British and Zionist soldiers.

That battle had a significant impact on Sur Baher, as one of its people, Musa Muhammad Hamed, was martyred, and three others were wounded. A few days later, British forces cordoned off the village and imposed a curfew. Many were arrested, and some were exiled to Seychelles, including Ali Rashid al-Atrash and Mohammad Mustafa al-Atrash.³⁶

Sur Baher and Umm Tuba in the Nakba

Among the Jerusalem villages, Sur Baher and Umm Tuba were well-equipped for the battles of 1948, as several young men had attended military training camps outside Palestine.³⁷ When they returned, they formed a fighting force led by resistance fighter Nuh Al-Basit and affiliated with the Futuwwa Organization (a youth division of the Palestine Arab Party). They trained fighters from the two villages and neighboring ones in marksmanship and explosives in the camp established by the martyr Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini in Wadi Abu Hamra near Umm Tuba.³⁸

³⁴ "100 years..." p.16

³⁵ Ibid. pp.30-34

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ The most prominent of these is Mohammad Mahmoud Jadallah (b. 1921-), who participated in military training and battles in Syria prior to the Nakba, then went on to fight in the 1948 war, in the battles of Sur Baher, al-Qastal, and Jabal al-Mukaber. His father was an active participant in resisting British colonialism as well.

³⁸ "100 years..." P. 29

By mid-1948, there was a fighting company from al-Jihad al-Muqaddas (Army of the Holy War) in Sur Baher: the Fourth Company of the Third Regiment, led by Mahmoud Jadallah al-Khatib. The company included the Sur Baher faction, fighters from the surrounding villages and Yemeni volunteers.³⁹ Sur Baher also welcomed Egyptian and Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood volunteers who arrived in Palestine in 1948 to defend it against the Zionist forces.

The Egyptians set up camp in Sur Baher under the leadership of the Egyptian militant Mahmoud Abdo. In cooperation with the Third Company, they fortified the village, building trenches and bunkers (some still standing today) along the boundaries of the adjacent Zionist colonies (Talpiot, Arnona and Ramat Rachel Kibbutz). The combined fighting groups defending the village during the 1948 war prevented its occupation despite repeated Zionist attacks. They also participated in nearby battles such as Jabal al-Mukaber, Beit Safafa, Ramat Rachel and others.

Popular resistance led by the people of the two villages must also be noted. In addition to welcoming and supporting the fighters, the people of Sur Baher and Umm Tuba participated in digging trenches and building bunkers, and some families even sold their jewelry to secure weaponry.⁴⁰

The Battle of Ramat Rachel (May 17, 1948)

The battle of Ramat Rachel is of great significance in terms of the colony's strategic location overlooking the road connecting Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Hebron on one side and the southern side of the Old City of Jerusalem on the other. That is why six resistance garrisons and companies participated in the battle.

Between February and May 1948, several rounds of fighting took place between the resistance fighters of Sur Baher and the colonists of the surrounding settlements: Talpiot to the north, Ramat Rachel to the south and Mekor Haim to the west. One night, Zionists attacked the village from the west and managed to storm and blow up the al-Faidi mill and an adjacent house. In response, the fighters of Sur Baher, with the participation of fighters from Hebron, attacked the

³⁹ Ibid. p. 36

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 38

Ramat Rachel colony, destroyed its infrastructure and returned to the periphery to prepare for the major battle.⁴¹

On the eve of that battle, Muslim Brotherhood volunteers from Egypt, Jordan and Syria arrived in Sur Baher to participate in the next day's battle. In his book *al-Nakba: Nakbat Bayt al-Maqdis wal-firdaws al-mafqud* (*The Nakba: The Nakba of Jerusalem and the Lost Paradise*), Aref al-Aref lists the participating resistance groups: "...the battle took place in the south near Ramat Rachel. They occupied it on May 17, and they numbered 185 fighters at the time. Led by Ibrahim Abi Dayya, the Mar Elias garrison entered from the western side... and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood fighters entered from the southern side; they were led by Sheikh Mustafa al-Sibai, and 25 of them were killed. The Sur Baher resistance fighters came from the east and were led by Jadallah Mahmoud. So did the Taamrah Arabs, with 15 fighters led by Ahmad al-Salem, the al-Sawahrah and Ubeidiyah Arabs with 20 fighters led by Mahmoud al-Ali, and a group of fighters from Hebron, led by Abdel Halim al-Sahlaf. They were accompanied by a Jordanian tank commandeered by Jordanian officers."⁴²

The battle saw the advance of resistance forces, the withdrawal of Zionist militias (composed of three Haganah, Irgun, and Stern Gang companies) to the neighboring colony of Arnona, and the thwarting of the resistance fighters' advance by Zionist reinforcements. The Arabs were able to occupy the colony intermittently, but the chaos and the fighters' preoccupation with looting the colony enabled the Zionist forces on May 28 to raid the colony with five thousand combatants, supported by artillery and armored vehicles. Having destroyed the colony, the Arabs withdrew.⁴³

The fighting lasted three weeks, during which the resistance fighters' valiance was unmistakable, among them, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood fighters who displayed courage and self-sacrifice, "for they were tenacious fighters, and their shelling was fierce,"⁴⁴ inflicting many deaths and injuries and capturing enemies. Many Arab martyrs fell from all factions, and they went down in history as heroes who fell in defense of Palestine. Among them were Ibrahim Abu Diyya, the leader of al-Jihad al-Muqaddas fighters in the battles of al-Qastal, Qatamon, Kfar Etzion, Surif and the battle of Ramat Rachel, where he sustained injuries that resulted in his

⁴¹ Ibid. pp. 50-51

⁴² Al-Aref, Aref. *Al-Nakba: Nakbat Bayt Al-Maqdis Wal-Firdaws Al-Mafqud* (The Catastrophe: The Catastrophe of Jerusalem and the Lost Paradise). Institute for Palestine Studies, 2012. p. 397.

⁴³ Ibid. pp. 397-405.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 398

partial paralysis. He was transferred to Beirut, where he succumbed to his injuries in March 1952.

Among the martyrs of Sur Baher and Umm Tuba who fell in the battle of Ramat Rachel and the events that preceded it⁴⁵ were Mohammad Abdullah Afanah, Radwan Nimer, Abdullah Zoj Shamaa, Khalil Dabash, Salman Alyan, Ali Mahmoud al-Khatib and Rashid Mahmoud Abu Tair, who had been the guard of the Faidi brothers mill.



The Bombing of Ahmad Aliah's Home (July 1948)

The Ahmad Aliah residence was located in western Sur Baher. It consisted of two floors and was built during British colonial rule. Due to the house's proximity to the Talpiot colony, its residents fled it upon the start of skirmishes in 1948. Zionists then occupied it and converted it into a fortified military zone, where they installed heavy machine guns and targeted western Sur Baher and Jabal al-Mukaber. Many along the frontlines were martyred under fire from those guns.

⁴⁵ "100 years..." P. 53

Resistance fighters in Sur Baher decided to bomb the building and halt the machine gun fire targeting the fighters and villagers. In his journal, resistance fighter Mohammad Mahmoud Jadallah, a first lieutenant in the Fourth Company of the Third Regiment of al-Jihad al-Muqaddas recalls: "The meeting took place with the Syrian Lieutenant Deif Allah Murad, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood mission, and the details of the operation and bombing [of the building] were agreed upon. Following our preparations and all that they entailed, implementation of the operation coincided with the Jewish holiday, and so, they danced, got drunk and were boisterous, and we trusted in God. Lieutenant Deif Allah had delegated roles and coordinated all that was necessary, including carrying the explosive charge, laying covering fire after planting the charge and our positioning between the house and Talpiot. A trench linked the house to the colony of Talpiot, and the frontlines were prepared to strike the enemy with all types of weaponry."⁴⁶

He adds, "The battle began when they placed the explosives at the house entrance. Shortly thereafter, the house went up in a tremendous explosion, and gunfire ensued from either side. Those among the enemy who had survived the explosion fled to Talpiot, where our fighters awaited them. They proceeded to target the fleers with grenades and automatic gunfire. They inflicted serious casualties among enemy personnel."⁴⁷

The Sur Baher Company also participated in battles in nearby villages and neighborhoods, such as al-Qastal, Jabal al-Mukaber, al-Sheikh Jarrah, Bab al-Khalil (Jaffa Gate), Dheisheh and Kfar Etzion colony.

Despite blood and sacrifice, large swaths of Sur Baher came under occupation after the signing of the Armistice Agreement in 1949. The Armistice Line crossed through the village, effectively annexing village land to the nascent Zionist occupation state. Some estimate the area of these lands at around 1,000 donums, while others place the estimate at about 5,000.⁴⁸ The village became a frontier village until its complete occupation in 1967.

⁴⁶ Ibid. P. 63

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ According to Aref Al-Aref in his book *Nakbat Bayt Al-Maqdis Wal-Firdaws Al-Mafqud* (The Catastrophe: The Catastrophe of Jerusalem and the Lost Paradise), Zionists occupied 5,000 donums of Sur Baher after the Armistice Agreement. However, according to Fawaqa, it is likely that the area occupied in 1948 is approximately 1,000 donums.

Sur Baher and Umm Tuba during the Naksa

In contrast to the occupation of frontier villages and neighborhoods in 1967, which was undertaken from the western side, Israeli occupation forces entered Sur Baher through Jabal Al-Mukaber at the palace of the High Commissioner and occupied the village from its northern and eastern sides. The people of Sur Baher and Umm Tuba⁴⁹ fled eastwards and sought refuge in Taamrah and al-Ubeidiya. They returned to their homes two days later.⁵⁰

Jadallah writes: "I saw Zionist soldiers stationed atop the minaret of the Omari Mosque, drinking beer and throwing bottles. They declared a curfew, and people heard gunfire from time to time. Later, they came with large buses and ordered people to leave their homes in Sur Baher and travel to Jordan. A good number of families left."⁵¹

Regarding the role of the Jordanian army in the village, Sur Baher native Mahmoud Fawaqa (known as Abu Falastin) recalls that the Zionist tanks that stormed Sur Baher were painted green, much like that of Jordanian and Iraqi tanks. When the tanks reached the Jordanian guard post, west of the village, Jordanian soldiers came out of their trenches to receive what they thought were military reinforcements. The Zionists opened fire on them, and they were all martyred.⁵²

He adds, "one of the soldiers was in the bunker, and when he saw the death of all his companions, he reached for his machine gun, covered himself in blood and pretended to be dead. He waited for the Zionists to exit their tanks before opening fire, killing six soldiers and wounding several others."⁵³

Colonization

The colonization of Sur Baher and Umm Tuba will be discussed in three parts: bypass roads and colonies on village land, encirclement of the two villages with the Annexation and Expansion Wall, and the policy of home demolition.

⁴⁹ Abu Tair, Muhammad. "Sidi Omar: Memories of Sheikh Mohammad Abu Tair in the Resistance and Thirty-Three Years of Detention," Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, Beirut, 2017, p. 36.

⁵⁰ "100 years..." p. 99.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² See note 2.

⁵³ Ibid.

In terms of land seizure and colony construction, Sur Baher and Umm Tuba are surrounded by colonies on three sides, Ramat Rachel from the west, Har Homa (Jabal Abu Ghneim) from the south and Arnona, Talpiot and East Talpiot from the north. Zionists built parts of these colonies on Sur Baher and Umm Tuba land. For example, Zionists confiscated approximately 1,700⁵⁴ donums of land from Sur Baher for the benefit of Har Homa and East Talpiot.⁵⁵

The history of these colonies precedes the Nakba and the declaration of the Zionist state. Dating back to 1921, Talpiot is the oldest colony. The idea for its founding precedes that date by ten years, when Zionists Isaac Levy and Arthur Rubin sought funding from the International Jewish Agency to establish a modern Jewish neighborhood in Jerusalem to rival the Old City and attract immigrants. They bought 145 dunams of land from the Templers, who had purchased it from the Ottoman Empire in the mid-nineteenth century. However, the Ottoman defeat in World War I and the consequent British colonization of Palestine delayed construction of the colony until the 1920s; it was named Talpiot, in reference to the Torah.⁵⁶

From the moment it was established, Talpiot colony was vulnerable to attacks by Palestinian militants. These attacks intensified during the Palestinian revolts of 1929 and 1936 — which often compelled the temporary evacuation of the settlers — and continued even after 1948, owing to the colony's adjacency to the Armistice Line. The "security threat" was removed only when the Zionists occupied the eastern part of Jerusalem in 1967.

After the Naksa, the colony expanded significantly. From the north, what is called North Talpiot spread over the lands of the Palestinian al-Baqaa neighborhood. On the western side, the new heart of the colony's industrial zone developed to house shops in place of those that were destroyed in the Maamanullah (Mamilla) market, which itself would later be converted into a significant industrial and commercial center in occupied Jerusalem, containing several massive shopping centers, workshops, warehouses, car dealerships, and repair garages. Work is underway on its permanent expansion to accommodate high-tech firms, academic institutions, theaters and more.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ This figure does not include the areas seized before 1950. According to the 1945 Village Statistics, Jews owned 540 donums in Sur Baher and Umm Tuba. A further 1,000 donums were seized in 1949.

⁵⁵ ARIJ Applied Research Institute. "Sur Baher Guide," Jerusalem, 2012: <https://bit.ly/2nGlml4>

⁵⁶ Kark, Ruth Oran-Nordheim, Michal. Jerusalem and Its Environs: Quarters, Neighborhoods, Villages, 1800-1948. The Hebrew University Magnes press, 2001, p. 196.

⁵⁷ Zimmerman, Michael. Talpiot's Tels and Turrets: A Look at My Old Neighborhood. Midstream, 2007.

Within the same colonial scheme, a neighborhood (colony), Arnona, was established to the south of Talpiot in 1931. During the 1948 War, it was attacked by resistance fighters from Sur Baher and Umm Tuba. After the 1967 war, the colony expanded over no man's land, separating the eastern and western parts of Jerusalem between 1949 and 1967 and acquiring its present borders.⁵⁸

The colony's construction boom during the 1990s led to an increase in real-estate value in the area. Today, it is one of the most upscale "Israeli neighborhoods" in occupied Jerusalem, inhabited by the wealthier classes.

The US Consulate building was located in Arnona, though in May 2018, it was converted into the US embassy headquarters in occupied Jerusalem, following US President Donald Trump's announcement in December 2017 of its transfer from Tel Aviv and the recognition of occupied Jerusalem as the capital of the Occupation state.

Ramat Rachel colony was named so because it overlooks what is believed to be the tomb of Rachel, the wife of the prophet Jacob. It was established in 1926⁵⁹ by members of the Labor Brigade, a Zionist group that sought to settle Jerusalem.⁶⁰ According to the British colonial authorities' 1945 Village Statistics, Ramat Rachel had an area of 145 donums.⁶¹

During the al-Buraq Revolt in 1926, Palestinian militants destroyed the colony of Ramat Rachel, attacked its training farms and burned them to the ground. During the 1948 war, the colony witnessed one of the most significant battles in southern Jerusalem. The colonization process in Sur Baher and Umm Tuba continued after the 1967 Naksa. The Occupation authorities confiscated approximately 1,700 donums to make way for Har Homa colony and East Talpiot. Both fall within what Zionists refer to as the "Ring Neighborhoods of Jerusalem," the result of a Zionist policy that aims to encircle the Old City with eight colonies: Ramot, the French Hill, Neve Yaakov, Pisgat Zeev, Gilo, East Talpiot, Ramat Shlomo, and Har Homa on Jabal Abu Ghneim.⁶²

⁵⁸ "The Battle for Ramat Rachel, Southern Gateway to Jerusalem." <https://bit.ly/2nAeufC>

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ The Yosef Trumpeldor Labor and Defense Battalion was the first Zionist colonialist labor group to be active in Palestine. Founded in 1920, the organization sought to lay socialist foundations in Palestine by establishing colonies that adhered to a similar socialistic framework.

⁶¹ Ramat Rachel's area totaled 145 donums (109 for Jews and 36 for Arabs) according to "Village Statistics for the Year 1945". See Abu Sitta, Salman. Atlas of Palestine 1917-1966. London: Palestine Land Authority, 2011. p. 36.

⁶² Ayed, Khalid. "Settlements in Jerusalem: Jabal Abu Ghneim and beyond." Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya. Institute for Palestine Studies, Volume 8, Issue 31, Summer 1997. p. 119. <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/35541>

East Talpiot colony: also known as Qasr al-Mandoub (Commissioner's Palace) because the former British High Commissioner's headquarters is located on the northern edge of the colony. It was established in 1937 on lands stolen from the villages of Sur Baher and Jabal al-Mukaber. About 15,000 Zionist colonists reside there today.⁶³

Har Homa colony: located south of occupied Jerusalem, on land owned by the people of Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, Sur Baher and Umm Tuba. The area was covered with a pine forest, planted during the period of Jordanian rule in Jerusalem. The Occupation authorities continued to grow the forest, and the area was declared a "green zone," prohibiting Palestinians from carrying out any residential construction there.⁶⁴ In 1997, the construction of the Zionist colony on 1,850 donums began, and today it is inhabited by about 20,000 colonists.⁶⁵ By changing the features of Jabal Abu Ghneim and stripping it of its forests, Har Homa is a stark embodiment of Zionist colonial environmental policies. On the one hand, the Occupation authorities encourage tree planting and praise afforestation policies and the expansion of open spaces to reduce environmental pollution. On the other, they bulldoze hundreds of acres of land planted with trees to expand their colonies in the Jerusalem area in favor of Jewish demographic supremacy.

More lands were confiscated from Sur Baher and Umm Tuba for the construction of Route 398,⁶⁶ a bypass road linking the colonies in the area with the Old City of occupied Jerusalem.

The Annexation and Expansion Wall

The Annexation and Expansion Wall cuts through the southern and eastern areas of Sur Baher, and along with Mazmoriya military checkpoint, severs its natural contiguity with the rest of the town and with the city of Bethlehem and its villages beyond the Wall.

Following the annexation decree issued in 1967, 5,750⁶⁷ donums of Sur Baher were annexed within the boundaries of the Occupation Municipality in Jerusalem. Following the Oslo Agreement, the remaining, unannexed areas were attached to West Bank territory, administratively classified as Areas A, B, and C. The most significant area covers the Wadi

⁶³ See note 50.

⁶⁴ See note 57.

⁶⁵ See note 50.

⁶⁶ See note 50.

⁶⁷ Bimkom (Planners for Planning Rights). "Sur Baher Information Card," <https://bit.ly/2nF1s06>

al-Hummus, Deir al-Amud, and al-Mintar neighborhoods and is classified as Area C, meaning that administration and security are under the Occupation army's jurisdiction.

During the second Intifada, the Annexation and Expansion Wall — in its construction phase — was meant to roughly outline the Occupation's municipal borders in Jerusalem, that is, to separate "Jerusalem territory" (under Municipality jurisdiction) from "West Bank territory." Since Sur Baher and individual families would find themselves on either side of the Wall, the residents lodged their objection to the Wall's planned path. Their petition succeeded in relocating the Wall eastward, thus creating a third classification: "West Bank" territory within the Wall (on the Palestinian side of the wall, so to speak), and "West Bank" territory outside the Wall (on the Israeli side of the wall, within occupied Jerusalem).⁶⁸

For Jerusalemites, and Sur Baher in particular, this complex reality has created an opportunity for urban expansion as a means of escaping the high costs of living and real-estate. Construction in these neighborhoods is carried out with Palestinian local government-issued permits, which are in fact made available. On the other hand, these neighborhoods are situated within occupied Jerusalem, and consequently, the 6,000 Palestinians that live in these areas carry the Israeli-issued "residency" cards, except for 60 people who are West Bank ID carriers.⁶⁹

The policy of demolition and displacement is fundamental to colonialist regimes, even if carried out through what appear to be less brutal and barbaric means, including legal pretexts. Accordingly, the Israeli occupation authorities have demolished more than 150 homes in Sur Baher since 2000,⁷⁰ the last of which were part of a demolition spree in July of 2019 that targeted ten buildings in Wadi al-Hummus, Deir al-Amud, and al-Mintar, under the pretext of their proximity to the Annexation and Expansion Wall. These demolitions are bolstered by the 2011 Israeli military order no. 08/11/AB, which prohibits construction within 100–300 meters of either side of the Wall, depending on the area (an average of about 250 meters).⁷¹

⁶⁸ Qawasmī, Hanādī. "Dangerous precedent: East Jerusalem Neighbourhood Faces Mass House Demolitions." Middle East Eye, July 2019. <https://bit.ly/2nHaqKh>.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Sadiq, Mervat. "In War and Peace ... Demolishing Palestinian Homes to Cement Colonization." Aljazeera.net. July 2019. <https://bit.ly/2SYwuMk>.

⁷¹ Bimkom (Planners for Planning Rights). "Sur Baher Information Card." <https://bit.ly/2nF1s06>

Epilogue

To the extent that the history of Sur Baher and Umm Tuba is rich with valiant resistance and sacrifice, the Occupation authorities seek to implant defeat in the people's consciousness as a bulwark against that resistance, which is built and shaped by their battles, martyrs and resistance fighters. Sur Baher and Umm Tuba embraced the Muslim Brotherhood fighters who came to Palestine to defend it, and who, according to the people's accounts, left a clear impact on their religiosity and commitment to the teachings of Islam. Their participation in the fighting and their time in the two villages bolstered the spirit of struggle and resistance within the people of Sur Baher and Umm Tuba.

In its bid to sear the consciousness of the younger generations and to implant a sense of defeat within them, the Occupation Municipality in Jerusalem seeks to impose the Occupation's official curriculum on village schools affiliated with the Municipality. Schools that adopt the Occupation's curriculum (along with the Palestinian curriculum) are afforded substantial privileges and capabilities in order to attract more students, given the more comfortable classroom and learning conditions afforded to such schools as opposed to others that resist the curriculum.

The Occupation often applies soft power as part of its Zionist policies to penetrate and control the occupied Jerusalemite community. In January 2020, it established an integrated service center at Sur Baher's southern entrance, a complex that includes a police station, offices affiliated with the Occupation's Ministry of Interior, National Insurance, in addition to ambulance and police services.