

That still remains - 2012

That Still Remains documents the scattered remains from across the country of the now historic Palestinian presence in much of Israel's landscape. The pictures record the locations of some of the 400 or so Palestinian villages that were cleared of their population, and then deliberately demolished, in the aftermath of the 1948 war. In referencing the impact of this war, which brought about the new state of Israel, the pictures reflect on a principle cause of the subsequent Israeli / Palestinian conflict; and the still unresolved refugee problem.

All the pictures are taken on or very close to the original location of a Palestinian village or town. Many scenes defy, in what there is left to see, the history of the place. Despite the preponderance for memorials and information boards through out the country that explain and celebrate modern and ancient history, there is virtually no official notification of this history. Together images and text explore a story that rarely makes the headlines, and which is little known.

The story is brought up to date by documenting Bedouin communities in the Negev desert, whose 'unrecognised villages' are currently under threat of imminent demolition.

Picture captions:

Deir Yassin, district of Jerusalem. (27).

The village of Deir Yassin, situated on the Western edge of Jerusalem, had a population in 1948 of around 600 people. In January 1948 villagers signed a peace agreement with the neighbouring Jewish neighbourhood of Giv'at Shaul, promising to inform on Arab militia activity. On the 9th April the village was attacked by the Jewish Irgun and Lehi Militia (the Stern gang) resulting in the most infamous massacre of non-combatants during the conflict. The militia gunned down villagers in the street and threw hand grenades into occupied houses. Having ransacked and looted the village, survivors were rounded up and paraded through the streets of West Jerusalem as trophy. The Militia initially claimed to have killed 250 people though this is now common accepted as an exaggeration resulting from the excitement of battle. The number of 107 dead has become generally accepted, with a further 25 young prisoners later executed in a nearby quarry. As a consequence fear and panic spread through out the Palestinian population and large numbers began to leave for neighbouring countries and the West bank as refugees. The remaining village houses now form part of a psychiatric institution, and village lands have been occupied by an expanded Giv'at Shaul. The cemetery is neglected. There are no memorials to the dead.

al-Dawayima, district of Hebron. (25).

Before 1948 the Muslim village of al-Dawayima had a population of 3710 and was considered 'very friendly' by the Haganeh. On the 29th October 1948, the 89th Battalion of the Eighth Brigade of the Israeli Defense Forces captured Al Dawayima with little or no resistance. Israeli accounts report that the soldiers entered the village with machine guns blazing. Villagers were gunned down inside houses and in the alleyways. "We saw a vast plain stretching eastward...covered with thousands of fleeing Arabs...the machine guns began to chatter and the fight became a rout". Jewish observers reported that children

were killed by breaking their heads with sticks. After the battle a soldier boasted he had raped a woman and then shot her. One woman, with a newborn baby in her arms, was employed to clean the courtyard where the soldiers ate. She worked for a day or two, after which the soldiers killed her. The American consul in Jerusalem reported (probably incorrectly) that '500 to 1000 Arabs had been lined up and killed by machine gun fire' after the battle. Most villagers fled to Hebron, as did many from surrounding villages, prompted by the killings. Part of the village lands now form a popular weekend tourist spot; there are no signposts present to indicate the former presence of a village at the site, or to recognise the killings that took place.

al Ramle, district of al Ramle (24).

Founded in the early eighth century by Umayyad Caliph Suleiman ibn Abed al-Malik, the City was allocated to the Arab state under the 1947 UN partition plan, Resolution 181. On February 18th 1948, a bomb planted by the Jewish guerrilla forces exploded in al Ramle killing 7 and injuring 45. In May ground attacks and aerial bombing raids proved unsuccessful. By July, Ben Gurion commented in Cabinet of the need to remove 'these two thorn's from the Yishuv's side'. Stating that Lydda and Ramle had to be 'destroyed'. In mid July Operation Dani was initiated in order to induce civilian panic and flight as a means of precipitating military collapse. After the first aerial bombing raids HQ reported general and serious civilian flight, concluding 'there is great value in continuing the bombing'. The Arab Liberation Army withdrew from al Ramle and city notables surrendered. Fighting aged males were taken prisoner and combined with the population of Lydda over 50,000 civilians were expelled to behind Arab lines. The London Economist reported: "The Arab refugees were systematically stripped of all their belongings before they were sent on their trek to the frontier". The Mapam party leader, conjuring memories of Jewish treatment in the second world war, wrote "I am appalled".

Abu Zurayq, district of Haifa.

In the years proceeding the 1948 war Zionist organisations gathered intelligence on Arab villages so as to assist with land purchases and potential future military encounters. In 1940 the preparation of 'village dossiers' was initiated. By 1948 over 600 had been completed. The 1944 Abu Zurayq dossier presented a picture of a peaceful agricultural community of 80 families. The village land was exceptionally fertile and owned communally. Crops included tobacco, olive, apple and plum. Some villagers tended sheep. The village economy was good, the people healthy, with reasonable rates of literacy amongst the men. A school was built in 1936. It was reported that the teacher did not express political opinions and that he sort out the company of local Jews. He was well liked. A small mosque was built in 1938. During the Arab uprising the people were peaceful and opposed the armed bands. The British searched the village but found no weapons. Economic and social relations with the local Kibbutz were good. After Abu Zurayq was attacked by Haganah forces on April 11 1948 and the population were expelled towards Jenin in the West Bank, a neighbouring kibbutznik wrote of his horror at seeing that when 'defenseless, beaten peasants' tried to surrender, 'most were killed (i.e. murdered)'. He reported that men hiding in the village were shot dead, women raped and every farmer from the nearby moshava took part in looting. He demanded from Jewish leaders that their troops be made to abide by the Geneva Convention. The village was entirely flattened and a coniferous forest planted over it. There are no signposts to record Abu Zurayq's existence or history.

Kafr Bir'im, district of Acre. (18).

By 1948 the village had a population of 1050 people, made up of both Maronite and Melkite Christians. Relations with Jewish settlers were very strong; when Zionist troops arrived at the village on 29th October 1948 they were received by the village priests with a white flag and food. On the 13th November the entire population was forcibly expelled from the village with a promise they would be allowed to return at a later date. After living rough through the winter villagers were eventually resettled in the houses of expelled Muslims in the neighbouring village of Jish. In 1953 the villagers won a case in the High Court which permitted them to return to their homes; the following day the Israeli army declared the area a military zone and that afternoon bombarded the village from the air, watched by the returning population from a place they have since called 'the crying hill'. Though the villagers' political campaign continues to this day the village site is now an archaeological park and a third century synagogue has been reconstructed amongst the ruins of Kafr Bir'im. The villagers have to pay an entrance fee to visit the site, but are allowed to use the restored church on religious holidays. The park information focuses on the locations of ancient Jewish history, a small mention of an Arab village is made in the final paragraph.

al Bassa, district of Acre. (16).

With early Jewish and Crusader origins, al-Bassa was by 1948 a relatively large and developed village with a predominantly Christian population of around 3500 people. In 1938, during the Arab revolt, British troops from the Royal Ulster Rifles massacred around 20 villagers by forcing a bus to drive over a land mine in retaliation for a previous killing. Under the 1947 UN partition plan, Resolution 181, al Bassa was to be included within the Arab State. On May 14 1948 it was invaded by Zionist troops as part of operation Ben-Ami, which, under Plan Dalet, aimed to secure blocks of settlement outside the borders of the UN specified Jewish State. After the occupation villagers were contained in the local church where between five and seven were executed, the remainder were expelled to Lebanon, settling in the Dbayeh Refugee camp. The village was largely demolished soon after. The ruins of the Melkite Catholic Church, a derelict Muslim shrine and two other substantial buildings still stand. There are no signposts at the site to record al Bassa's history.

Jaba' district of Haifa. (7).

In 1948 Jaba was a small agricultural village with a population of 1140 and 158 houses. The first attack on the village took place in February, the New York Times reporting Zionist forces "arriving in two armoured buses, they opened fire, raided a house and smashed up its interior before moving on again". Strategically located above the coastal highway the village was used by Arab snipers to fire on Jewish traffic. It was heavily bombed from the air before being attacked during the second truce in late July 1948. Its population was expelled to the Jenin district of the West Bank and the village was entirely flattened except for a local shrine. In September UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte condemned Israel's destruction of villages in the area and demanded that Israel restore at its own expense all houses damaged or destroyed during and after the attack. He also demanded that the estimated 8000 expelled inhabitants from the locality be allowed to return. Israel rejected the demands. On 17th September 1948 Bernadotte was assassinated in Jerusalem on the orders of future prime minister Yitzhak Shamir. A pine forest and recreational facilities now cover the site. No signposts exist to record the history of the village.

Assir village (unrecognised), al Naqab/Negev. (6).

Before 1948 the Negev Bedouin made up the vast majority of the population of Beersheba district (Negev), living as nomadic desert pastoralists. During and shortly after the 1948 conflict, the majority were either expelled or fled to the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan or the Sinai. The remaining population was forcibly relocated to an enclosed zone in the north east of the district covering only 10% of their former territory; remaining under military rule until 1966. Within the borders of this zone more than half of the population refused to take up residence in the officially established townships, often because they believed the land belonged to members of another Bedouin group, and as such, under Bedouin law, they did not have the right to reside there. As Israeli Law does not recognize traditional Bedouin ownership rights, the villages that they established are considered illegal and are classified as 'unrecognised'. As such they receive little or no services such water, electricity, paved roads, health care and rocket sirens. Under a law passed in September 2011 30,000 Bedouin will be relocated from these unrecognized villages into planned towns. The majority of Bedouin opposed the law. 2000 square kilometers of land currently under Bedouin control will be confiscated. The unrecognized villages will be razed.

Lydda, district of al Ramle.

Lydda, a predominantly Muslim town of 20,000 people in 1947, was allocated to the Arab state by the UN partition plan, Resolution 181. Under the auspices of the Israeli Operation Dani, it was the first city in Palestine to be bombarded from the air, prior to the artillery attack. The ground assault by the 89th armoured Battalion under the command of Moshe Dayan started on the 11 July 1948. The Chicago Sun Times reported, 'practically everything in their way died. Riddled corpses lay by the wayside'. The New York Herald Tribune reported "the Israeli jeep column raced into Lydda with rifles, Stens, and sub-machine guns blazing. It coursed through the main streets, blasting at everything that moved ... the corpses of Arab men, women, and even children were strewn about the streets in the wake of this ruthlessly brilliant charge." The small Arab Legion force had withdrawn from the city along with other Arab volunteers leaving it only lightly defended. The men of Lydda took shelter in the Dahamish Mosque. IDF troops threw grenades and fired bazooka rockets into the compound. The following day 176 bodies were found inside. The estimates of Palestinian deaths vary from 254 (IDF) to 1700 (Palestinian accounts). Yitzhaz Rabin issued the order "The inhabitants of Lydda must be expelled quickly without attention to age...." .

Lifta, district of Jerusalem. (1).

The village site, now almost surrounded by Jerusalem, has been populated since ancient times and was known to Israelites, Romans, Byzantines, Crusaders and Ottomans. By the 1940's it had a predominantly Muslim population of 2550 people. In early 1948 Lifta was occupied and cleared during the Haganah bid to open the western corridor from Tel Aviv into Jerusalem. The Palestinian population became refugees in East Jerusalem and the village lands were divided by the 1949 green line. Village houses were not flattened and Lifta remained the only one of the six cleared but not destroyed Palestinian villages, not to have been repopulated by Jewish citizens. Under the 1950 Absentee Property Law Palestinian villagers have been refused permission to reoccupy houses that they, or their ancestors once owned. In 1987, the Israeli Nature Reserves Authority announced it would restore the "long-abandoned village" and turn it into an open-air natural history and study center that would "stress the Jewish roots of the site." In 2004 a redevelopment project proposed to turn the site into a luxury residential and commercial neighbourhood. In 2011 the Israel Land Administration requested tenders for bids for Lifta's land. In

February 2012 the Administrative Court in Jerusalem ruled in favour of a request to cancel the ILA sale by Lifta refugees. The site of the Mosque has been transformed into a mikveh – a Jewish ritual bath, and regularly used by Jerusalem's Orthodox residents.

Saydun, district of al Ramla. (26.)

By 1948 Saydun was a small, mainly Muslim, agricultural village. It was probably depopulated by Palmach and Haganah troops during Operation Nachshon on 6th April 1948 as part of a plan to clear the road between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem of potentially hostile bases. The neighbouring village of Abu Shusha was attacked in mid May 1948 around the time Israel declared independence. During the attack a well documented massacre occurred in which up to 70 non combatant Palestinian villagers were allegedly killed. Israeli historian, Aryeh Yitzhaki, explains the events of Abu Shusha, citing a testimony of an Israeli soldier from the guards unit: "A soldier of Kiryati Brigade captured 10 men and 2 women. All were killed except a young woman who was raped and disposed of. At the dawn of 14 May, units of Giv'ati brigade assaulted Abu Shusha village. Fleeing villagers were shot on sight. Others were killed in the streets or axed to death. Some were lined up against a wall and executed. No men were left; women had to bury the dead." Saydun was probably flattened soon after its clearing. One building of unknown origin remains. There are no signposts that record the existence of a village on this site.