



The History of the Land Is Jewish, Not Palestinian

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The claim by the elected representatives of the Israeli Arab public that they are the original owners of the land while the Jewish citizens of Israel (and, by implication, the State of Israel itself) are “colonialist invaders” is a complete inversion of historical reality. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s declaration about the legality of the West Bank’s Jewish communities, along with President Trump’s peace plan based on that principle, offers a unique opportunity to correct that mistaken notion by applying sovereignty to all Israeli West Bank communities.

The elected representatives of Israel’s Arab community claim that the Palestinians are the original owners of the land—an indigenous minority disinherited by foreign invaders. According to this notion, which is aimed at undermining the Zionist narrative about the Jewish people’s return to its historical homeland, the Arabs of the Land of Israel—like the Indians in America, the aborigines in Australia, and the Zulu tribes in South Africa—are victims of European imperialism/colonialism, which turned them into a disenfranchised and oppressed minority in their own land. From this standpoint, Zionism is a crude perversion of Judaism because the Jews do not constitute a people but only a religious community with no national attributes or aspirations, let alone any right to a state of their own in even a tiny part of the Islamic-Arab-Palestinian patrimony.

That thesis is not only baseless but a complete inversion of the historical truth.

It was Arab/Muslim invaders who came to the Land of Israel as an ascendant imperialist force in the decade after the Prophet Muhammad’s death and laid the groundwork for the colonization of this land by a long string of Muslim empires up to the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of WWI. During this lengthy era, the non-Jewish and non-Christian residents of the land identified themselves as Muslims—not

as Arabs, and certainly not as Palestinians—until WWI, when the idea of Arab nationalism gathered steam with the help of British imperialism.

One need only look at common family names among the Palestinians to see their colonialist origins: Hijazi, from the Hijaz in the Arabian Peninsula, from which the original invaders came; Bosniak, from Bosnia; Turk, from Turkey; Halabi, from Syria; Hindi, from India; Yemeni, from Yemen; Masarwa/Masri, from Egypt; Mughrabi, from the Maghreb, and so on.

In contrast, countless place names in the Land of Israel testify to a Jewish presence over thousands of years. Take, for example, the Narbata River in northern Samaria. Narbata, which is the Aramaic pronunciation of Arubot, the biblical city in which one of King Solomon's 12 governors lived, ruled the whole region of northern Samaria. In Narbata, as Yosef ben Matityahu (Josephus) recounts, the Romans slaughtered thousands of Jews during the Great Revolt (66-73 CE). The area teems with archaeological relics from the Second Temple, Mishnaic, and Talmudic eras.

The Jewish population did not take to Roman-Byzantine rule and over the centuries rebelled against it repeatedly. The Great Revolt considerably depleted the Jewish population, but it was the Bar Kochba Revolt (132-35) and the subsequent religious and economic decrees that devastated the population, particularly in the Judea region. Harsh taxes were levied on the owners of Jewish estates and on farmers, and those who were struggling sought respite in nearby lands, especially Syria.

Concerned about the Jewish character and demography of the Land of Israel, the sages promised life in the next world to those who dwelt in the land and even for those who simply walked four cubits in it. In the words of Rabbi Meir: "Whoever raises his children in the Land of Israel is promised a place in the World to Come." Settlement flourished, particularly in the Galilee, Samaria, and the South Hebron Hills. Dozens of communities developed, among them Tiberias, Baram, Gush Halav, Yota, Eshtemoa, Halhoul, Kfar Kanna, Arraba, and Sakhni.

With the Christian conquest of the Roman Empire, the Jews' lot worsened. Whole populations of Jews and non-Jews converted to Christianity and the Jewish presence dwindled greatly. Not for nothing did the Jews of the Land of Israel play a major role in helping the Persian conquerors in 614.

In 628, Byzantine Emperor Heraclius defeated the Persians. Though he had promised the Jews and their leader Benjamin of Tiberias that if they laid down their arms nothing would befall them, he quickly broke his promise and murdered thousands of Jews.

Less than a decade later the Muslims conquered the land, with the help of the Jewish population. Although, during Muslim rule, the agricultural and urban Jewish population remained in good condition, it was hit hard by the Crusader conquest and the subsequent Mamluk conquest.

As evidenced by descriptions of Jewish and Christian pilgrims, Jews lived in Jewish villages in the Galilee such as Kfar Hanania, Parod, Baram, Alma, Ein Zeitim, Kfar Kanna, and others until the 18th and 19th centuries. It was the Ottoman Turks who forced the Jewish villagers to leave their homes, either by expelling them, discriminating against them, persecuting them, or increasing their taxes, causing Jews to migrate to the cities of Safed, Tiberias, Acre, Haifa, and even Tyre and Sidon.

In the northern Samaria region, Jews lived in Anin, near Umm al-Fahm, growing citrons for trade, until the Turks settled Yemenite Arabs there. In addition, the community of Bitra (Bitron in Aramaic) became Barta'a. In this village and its vicinity the large Kaba clan, a branch of the Banu-Hilal tribe of Saudi Arabia, came to settle, as did the Masarwa clan from Egypt.

The northern Samaritan mountains are strewn with thousands of relics of winepresses and of terraces that served as vineyards for the Jewish and Samaritan residents of the region. As the Muslim population took over, the wine industry collapsed and was replaced by olive and carob cultivation.

The land speaks Hebrew. The names of the communities have a linguistic meaning in Hebrew: Jaffa = *yafeh* (beautiful), Haifa = *hofa shel ihr* (shore of a city), Shikmona = *shkamim* (sycamores), Nazareth = *notzeret/shomeret* (guardian), Beit Guvrin = *ihr hag'varim/hat'kifim* (city of the strong), and so on. When the Arabs conquered these places, they pronounced the names in their own way, distorting them and changing their meaning: thus Shfaram (meaning "a people whose luck has improved") became Shfa'amr, Ganim became Jenin, Bitra became Barta'a, Ashdod became Isdud, Tur Karem (meaning "mountain of the vineyards") became Tulkarem, and Jordan became Urdan—names with no linguistic meaning in Arabic.

As Israeli military and political leader Yigal Allon said, a people that does not know its past has a meager present and an unknown future. When Ahmed Tibi, an Israeli Arab member of Knesset, protested to President Reuven Rivlin that the Arabs of the Land of Israel are the land's indigenous residents and hence its masters, the president should have answered him appropriately, as in the dictum of the Jewish sages: know how to answer an ignoramus.

Today the wineries and vineyards have returned to the mountains of Samaria, and on the holiday of Tu B'Shvat more and more grapevines will be planted. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's declaration about the legality of Jewish communities in the West Bank, along with President Trump's peace plan based on that principle, offers a unique opportunity to apply sovereignty to all of the Israeli West Bank communities, including those in northern Samaria where the Narbata River flows.

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