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Rachel's Tomb, a Jewish Holy Place, Was Never a Mosque

Nadav Shragai

- UNESCO has declared that Rachel's Tomb near Jerusalem is the Bilal ibn Rabah mosque – endorsing a Palestinian claim that first surfaced only in 1996 and which ignores centuries of Muslim tradition.
- As opposed to the Temple Mount and the Cave of the Patriarchs which also serve as the location of mosques, Rachel's Tomb never served as a mosque for the Muslims. The Muslim connection to the site derives from its relation to Rachel and has no connection to Bilal ibn Rabah, Mohammed's first *muezzin*.
- Rachel's Tomb, located some 460 meters south of Jerusalem's municipal boundary, has been identified for over 1,700 years as the grave of the Jewish matriarch Rachel. Many generations of Jews have visited the place for prayer. The depiction of Rachel's Tomb has appeared in thousands of Jewish religious books, paintings, photographs, stamps, and works of art.
- There is a Muslim cemetery on three sides of the compound mainly belonging to the Bedouin Taamra tribe, which began burying its dead at the site due to its proximity to a holy personality. Members of the Taamra tribe harassed Jews visiting the tomb and collected extortion money to enable them to visit the site. With this background, Moses Montefiore obtained a permit from the Turks to build another room adjacent to Rachel's Tomb in 1841 to keep the Muslims away from the room of the grave and to help protect the Jews at the site.

- Jewish caretakers managed the site from 1841 until it fell into Jordanian hands in 1948. In contravention of the armistice agreement, Jordan prevented Jews from accessing the site during all the years of its rule (1948-1967). On October 19, 2010, the anniversary of her death, some 100,000 Jews visited Rachel's Tomb.
- In 1830 the Turks issued the *firman* that gave legal force to Rachel's Tomb being recognized as a Jewish holy site. The governor of Damascus sent a written order to the Mufti of Jerusalem to fulfill the Sultan's order: "the tomb of esteemed Rachel, the mother of our Lord Joseph...they (the Jews) are accustomed to visit it from ancient days; and no one is permitted to prevent them or oppose them (from doing) this."
- Ironically, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan, whose government has been described as "neo-Ottoman" in outlook, told the Saudi paper *al-Watan* (March 7, 2010) that the Cave of the Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb "were not and never will be Jewish sites, but Islamic sites."

On October 21, 2010, UNESCO (the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) declared that Rachel's Tomb near Jerusalem is the Bilal ibn Rabah mosque – endorsing a Palestinian claim that first surfaced only in 1996 and which ignores centuries of Muslim tradition.

In a series of decisions condemning Israel, the UNESCO board called upon the government of Israel to rescind its decision in February to include Rachel's Tomb and the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron on Israel's official list of national heritage sites. The sharp protests by Israeli Ambassador to UNESCO Nimrod Barkan to the UN body's decision were expunged from the record by the chairman of the session, the Russian representative, on the pretext that they were too aggressive.¹

A scrupulous examination of testimonies and historical sources demonstrates that defining Rachel's Tomb as a mosque does an injustice to historical facts and traditions anchored in both Muslim documents and Jewish sources, and constitutes distortion, bias, and deception. As opposed to the Temple Mount and the Cave of the Patriarchs which also serve as the location of mosques, Rachel's Tomb never served as a mosque for the Muslims. The Muslim connection to the site derives from its relation to Rachel and has no connection to Bilal ibn Rabah, Mohammed's first *muezzin*.

Rachel's Tomb – A Jewish Holy Site

Rachel's Tomb is located on the northern outskirts of Bethlehem some 460 meters south of Jerusalem's municipal boundary. The site has been identified for over 1,700 years as the grave

of the Jewish matriarch Rachel. The copious literature of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim pilgrims identifies and documents the spot as the place where Rachel is buried.²

Many generations of Jews have visited the place for prayer, requests, and entreaties. The site has become a sort of Wailing Wall to which Jews come to pour out their hearts and share their troubles and requests with the beloved matriarch, hoping to find solace and healing. Jewish tradition attributes unique and wondrous qualities to Rachel's tears,³ and visitors to her grave ask her to cry and pray on their behalf.

According to the Book of Genesis (ch. 35), Rachel died when she gave birth to Benjamin: "And Rachel died, and was buried on the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem." In Jewish tradition, her tears have been identified by authors, poets, and biblical commentators with almost every disaster that befell the Jewish people.⁴

Over hundreds of years, visitors to her grave have established the tie between Rachel and her burial place. "The house with the dome and the olive tree" became a Jewish symbol.⁵ An additional room that was attached to the original structure by Sir Moses Montefiore in 1841 has only enhanced the link. The depiction of Rachel's Tomb has appeared in thousands of Jewish religious books, paintings, photographs, stamps, and works of art.

Yet anyone visiting the site today will find it difficult to identify the image known to generations of Jews. The small, domed structure now sits within an armored concrete sleeve containing firing positions and defensive fortifications, and covered with camouflage netting. At the height of the Second Intifada, the Israeli government decided on September 11, 2002, to place the sacred compound inside the area of the Israeli security barrier in the Jerusalem area.

The Muslim Link to Rachel

The Muslim link to the site derives from the figure of Rachel rather than from Bilal ibn Rabah, who is buried in Damascus. The accepted Muslim tradition which venerates Rachel identifies the site at the outskirts of Bethlehem as her grave. According to Muslim tradition, Rachel's name comes from the word "to wander," because she found her death on one of her wanderings and was buried on the way to Bethlehem.⁶ Rachel is alluded to in the Koran⁷ and other Muslim sources where, just as in Jewish sources, Joseph tearfully falls upon the grave of his mother, Rachel, when the caravan of his captors passes by the site.⁸

For hundreds of years, the shape of Rachel's Tomb resembled the grave of a *vali* (a Muslim saint). The building received its distinctive shape in 1622 when the Turkish governor of Jerusalem, Mohammad Pasha, permitted the Jews to wall off the four pillars that supported the dome and for the first time Rachel's Tomb became a closed building.⁹ This was allowed by the Turkish governor to prevent Arab shepherds from grazing their flocks at the site.¹⁰ Yet according to one report, an English traveler claims this was done "to make access to it more difficult for the Jews."¹¹

For centuries, Rachel's Tomb was considered only a Jewish holy place. The sixteenth-century Arab historian Mujir al-Din regarded Rachel's Tomb as a Jewish holy place.¹² Beginning in 1841, the keys to the place were deposited exclusively with Jewish caretakers who managed the site until it fell into Jordanian hands in 1948.¹³ In contravention of the armistice agreement, Jordan prevented Jews from accessing the site during all the years of its rule (1948-1967).¹⁴ Following the Six-Day War, Jews returned to Rachel's Tomb, with millions of Jews from around the world having visited the site. According to Jewish tradition, Rachel died on the 11th day of the Hebrew month of Heshvan (October 19); in 2010, some 100,000 Jews visited Rachel's Tomb on that day.¹⁵

The Harassment of Jews at Rachel's Tomb

For many centuries, Jews were compelled to pay protection money and ransom to the Arabs who lived in the area so they wouldn't harm Rachel's Tomb and the Jews who visited it. In 1796, Rabbi Moshe Yerushalmi, an Ashkenazi Jew from central Europe who immigrated to Israel, related that a non-Jew sits at Rachel's Tomb and collects money from Jews seeking to visit the site.¹⁶ Other sources attest to Jews who paid taxes, levies, and presented gifts to the Arab residents of the region.

Dr. Ludwig August Frankl of Vienna, a poet and author, related that the Sephardi community in Jerusalem was compelled to pay 5,000 piastres to an Arab from Bethlehem at the start of the nineteenth century for the right to visit Rachel's Tomb.¹⁷ Other testimonies relate that in order to prevent damage to Rachel's Tomb, payment was transferred to Bedouin members of the Taamra tribe who lived in the region, who had also begun to bury their dead near the tomb during that era.¹⁸ There is a Muslim cemetery on three sides of the compound that mainly belongs to the Taamra tribe and the entire attitude of the Muslims to Rachel's Tomb derives to a large extent from this tribe, which began burying its dead at the site during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries due to its proximity to Rachel's Tomb. The origins of the practice, as the Land of Israel researcher Eli Schiller writes, is the popular Muslim belief that "the closer that the deceased is buried to the tomb of a sainted personality, the greater will be his rewards in the world to come."¹⁹

Taxes were also collected from the Sephardi Jewish community in Jerusalem to pay the authorities for various "rights," such as passage to the Western Wall, passage of funerals to the Mount of Olives, and for the protection of gravestones there, as well as payment to the Arabs of Bethlehem for safeguarding Rachel's Tomb.²⁰

One of the scribes who managed the accounts of the Sephardi Kotel during the eighteenth century reported on the protection money that the Jewish community at that time had to transfer to the "non-Jews and lords of the lands who are called *toeffendis*...(15,000) Turkish grush...and these are the people who patrol the ways of Jaffa Road, Kiryat Yearim, the people of the Rama, the site of Samuel the Prophet, the people of Nablus Road, the people of the Efrat

Road, the tomb of our matriarch Rachel...so they would not come to grave-robbing, heaven forbid. And sometimes they complain to us that we have fallen behind on their routine payments and they come scrabbling on the gravestones in the dead of night, and they did their things in stealth because their home is there. Therefore, we are compelled against our will to propitiate them.”²¹

Rabbi David d’Beth Hillel, a resident of Vilna who visited Syria and the Land of Israel in 1824, testified about a Muslim cemetery in the region of Rachel’s Tomb. “No person is living there, but there was a cemetery. On the opposite hill there is a village whose residents are Arabs and they are most evil. A stranger who comes to visit Rachel’s Tomb is robbed by them.”²²

In 1856, fifteen years after Montefiore had built another room to Rachel’s Tomb, James Finn, the British consul who served in Palestine during the days of Turkish rule, spoke about the payments that the Jews were forced to pay to Muslim extortionists at some holy places including Rachel’s Tomb: “300 lira per annum to the effendi whose house is adjacent to the site of crying” (the Western Wall) for the right to pray there and “100 lira a year to the Taamra Arabs for not wrecking Rachel’s Tomb near Bethlehem.”²³

Jews Expand Rachel’s Tomb in 1841 to Prevent Muslim Violence and Strengthen the Jewish Presence at the Site

In 1841 Moses Montefiore obtained a license from the Turkish authorities to refurbish Rachel’s Tomb and add another room to it, which changed its appearance and improved its formerly neglected status. A door to the domed room was installed and keys were given to two Jewish caretakers, one Sephardi and the other Ashkenazi. Fourteen years previously, an official of the Sephardi Kolelim (religious study centers) in Jerusalem, Avraham Behar Avraham, laid the groundwork for Montefiore’s activity at Rachel’s Tomb when he obtained recognition from the Turkish authorities for the status and rights of Jews at the site. This was, in practice, the original *firman* (royal decree)²⁴ issued by the Ottoman authorities in Turkey recognizing Jewish rights at Rachel’s Tomb.

The *firman* was necessary since the Muslims disputed ownership by the Jews of Rachel’s Tomb and even tried by brute force to prevent Jewish visits to the site. From time to time Jews were robbed or beaten by Arab residents of the vicinity, and even the protection money that was paid did not always prevail. Avraham Behar Avraham approached the authorities in Istanbul on this matter and in 1830 the Turks issued the *firman* that gave legal force to Rachel’s Tomb being recognized as a Jewish holy site.²⁵ Additionally, the governor of Damascus sent a written order to the Mufti of Jerusalem to fulfill the Sultan’s order.

This is our order to you: (the following matter) was submitted to us by the subject of our order, the sage representative of honored Jerusalem’s Jewry and his translator that the tomb of esteemed Rachel, the mother of our Lord Joseph...they (the Jews) are accustomed to visit it from ancient days; and no one is permitted to

prevent them or oppose them (from doing) this....It turned out that at this holy site, they have been visiting since ancient times, without any person preventing them or trespassing on their property and they (have it) as was their custom. In accordance with the respected judgment, I order that our commandment be issued to you so you will treat them accordingly without addition or without subtraction, without hindrance and without opposition to them by anyone in any way whatsoever – written August 10, 1830.²⁶

An additional *firman* from April 1831, eight months later, determined *inter alia*:²⁷

To inform and demonstrate to all interested parties and the appointed officials, the right of the Jews who are residents of holy Jerusalem to visit the grave of Rachel, the mother of the Prophet Joseph, peace be upon him, without hindrance....The deputy translator and other public functionaries, members of the Jewish community of Jerusalem, approached me with many requests regarding the tomb of Rachel, may peace be upon her, the mother of the Prophet Joseph, peace be upon him, and it is known that this grave is located outside the city of Jerusalem opposite the town of Bethlehem, on the highway...and that since ancient times the Jews have tended to visit this holy grave without anybody preventing them from doing so, as an inviolable law. And now people have emerged who have begun to hinder them, although as aforesaid and as proven the Jews have a right to visit the grave according to the Sultan's order. Hence I approach his honor the governor, may he be exalted, reminding him of the contents of the existing order. I also order him to attempt to remove the obstacles from the Jews, residents of Holy Jerusalem and others, so they can visit the aforementioned holy grave unhindered. Rendered in Istanbul at the end of the month of Shawwal in the year 1246 to the Hejira. Signed: The Sublime Porte.

Ironically, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose government has been described as “neo-Ottoman” in outlook, told the Saudi paper *al-Watan* (March 7, 2010) that the Cave of the Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb “were not and never will be Jewish sites, but Islamic sites.”²⁸

The two *firmans* were preserved in the archives of the Sephardic Community Committee in Jerusalem. In 1910 they were transferred to Pinhas Grayevsky, one of Jerusalem's most important researchers, who published them 22 years later. They were also published in *Miginzei Kedem*, a more scientific publication.²⁹

Montefiore received the permit for building an additional room attached to the existing structure from the Sublime Porte in Constantinople. The permit, bearing the seal of the Sublime Porte, resided for many years in the museum named after Sir Isaac and Lady Edith Wolfson at Hechal Shlomo in Jerusalem. Many saw it, but it was lost and quite possibly stolen.³⁰

We have no details regarding the conversations of Montefiore with the Turkish authorities on this topic. Nevertheless, one can assume that Montefiore arrived at an informal arrangement

with the authorities on a modus for dividing the rights to use the additional room, the room that leans on the older structure from the south.

We can find support for this in the *mihrab* – a niche symbolizing the direction of prayer to Mecca that was built in the new room.³¹ Subsequently, Muslim dead were purified in this room on occasion.³² Yehuda Burla, the son of Yehoshua Burla, the caretaker of Rachel's Tomb, and his wife Miriam recount in their memoirs that the additional room was built so the Muslims would keep their hands off of the room marking the grave itself.³³ The Jews who came to Rachel's Tomb also used this room either as a waiting room or as a prayer room, especially on those days when a large public had gathered at Rachel's Tomb.³⁴ In practice, in any event, presumptive ownership at the location was Jewish. Shlomo Freiman, the last Ashkenazi caretaker of Rachel's Tomb, documents in his diary the friction with the Muslims who from time to time attempted to purify their dead in the additional room until they desisted from the practice in return for a sizable amount of money.³⁵

Here, for example, is one of Freiman's descriptions from his diaries:

The 18th day of Sivan 5705: On Wednesday they brought a slain person from Bethlehem. We suffered greatly. They spent around two hours in the outer room and fought among themselves regarding revenge....The sheiks said that one had to wait three more days and the others claimed that it was a pity to wait. The grave was closed until they quitted the place.

Elul 5706: Most of the (Muslim) dead do not enter inside (the anteroom). Only in isolated cases where they bring a slain person from Jerusalem, or a dead person from the hospital, and have not managed to pray at the spot, they bring the dead body into the corridor and pray. Many times they bring the dead deliberately in order to disturb the prayers, for they as well recite a long prayer. Many times they sit for hours upon hours without disturbance....I think that one has to correct this distortion and must not allow them to do as they want. Yesterday I felt that they were afraid. They saw many Jews, so they didn't bring the dead person inside.

How Rachel's Tomb Was Islamicized and Became the Bilal Ibn Rabah Mosque

Between 1993 and 1995, Palestinian groups committed terror and suicide attacks that killed 80 Israelis. In February 1996, the Israel Defense Forces feared that Rachel's Tomb would furnish a convenient target for an attack of this sort, as it was situated on the main highway connecting Jerusalem and Hebron, with heavy Jewish and Arab traffic. Demonstrations of a nationalist Palestinian character erupted at Rachel's Tomb as Muslims began to raise the argument that the site involved "Islamic soil."³⁶

At the end of September 1996 the "Western Wall Tunnel Riots" broke out. After the attack on Joseph's Tomb in Nablus and its fall to the Palestinians, hundreds of Arab residents from

Bethlehem and the Aida refugee camp attacked Rachel's Tomb. They set on fire the scaffolding that was erected around the tomb as part of fortification work at the site and tried to break into the compound. Marching at their head was Muhammad Rashad al-Jabari, the Governor of Bethlehem, an appointee of the Palestinian Authority. The IDF dispersed the demonstrators with gunfire and stun grenades. Scores were wounded, including Kifah Barakat, the commander of Force 17, the presidential guard force of Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.³⁷

With the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000, Palestinians again attacked Rachel's Tomb, and for 41 days Jews were prevented from visiting the site due to shooting incidents.³⁸

The Muslims also escalated their rhetoric. They stopped calling the site "Rachel's Dome," as they had done for hundreds of years, and began calling it the mosque of Bilal ibn Rabah.³⁹ The Muslim religious authorities (*wakf*) first began to employ this name in 1996, and it eventually took root in Palestinian national discourse.

Bilal ibn Rabah, an Ethiopian by origin, is known in Islamic history as a black slave who served the household of the prophet Mohammed as the person in charge of calling the Muslims to prayer five times a day – the first *muezzin*.⁴⁰ Upon the death of Mohammed he went to fight the wars of Islam in Syria, was killed there in 642 CE, and was buried in Damascus.⁴¹ The Palestinian Authority raised the argument that, according to Islamic tradition, the Islamic conquerors of the country called the mosque that was established at Rachel's Tomb after Bilal ibn Rabah.

Yet the Palestinian argument ignores the presumptive ownership that the Jews acquired at the site for many hundreds of years and from the *firman*s that the Ottoman authorities issued awarding Rachel's Tomb to the Jews at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁴²

The Palestinian arguments ignore even the accepted Muslim tradition that venerates Rachel and identifies the site as her burial place. Professor Yehoshua Porat termed the claim of a mosque at Rachel's Tomb as mendacious. He noted that the place was known in Arabic as "Rachel's Dome, a Jewish place of worship."⁴³

For many years in official publications of Palestinian national bodies, there was no reference to any other name for the site, including in the *Palestinian Lexicon* issued by the Arab League and the PLO in 1984, or in the *Al-mawsu'ah al-filastiniyah* published in Italy by the *Palestinian Encyclopedia* organization after 1996. The book *Palestine the Holy Land* simply relates that "At the northern entrance to the city the Tomb of Rachel appears, the mother of the matriarchs, who died while giving life to Benjamin."⁴⁴ The book *The West Bank and Gaza – Palestine* also fails to mention the location of Rachel's Tomb as a mosque.⁴⁵ Despite this, the Deputy Minister of Religious Trusts and Religious Affairs in the Palestinian Authority defined Rachel's Tomb as an Islamic site.⁴⁶

On Yom Kippur 2000, six days after the IDF retreated from Joseph's Tomb in Nablus, the official PLO newspaper *Al-Hayat al-Jadida* published an article indicating Rachel's Tomb as the next

Palestinian target. "Bethlehem – Rachel's Tomb or the Mosque of Bilal ibn Rabah is one of the stakes that the occupation government and the Zionist movement drove into most of the Palestinian cities....This grave is spurious and was originally a Muslim mosque."⁴⁷ During the Second Intifada, Rachel's Tomb was attacked by gunfire both from the direction of the Aida refugee camp between Beit Jalla and Bethlehem, as well as from the rooftops of houses to the west, south and east. Palestinian Authority forces, who were presumably in charge of preserving order and should have prevented violence, not only did not prevent it but took an active part in the fighting.

At one point, 50 Jews found themselves besieged at Rachel's Tomb while a gun battle between the IDF and Palestinian Authority forces was taking place around them.⁴⁸ On April 2, 2002, the IDF returned to Bethlehem in the framework of Operation Defensive Shield and remained there for a protracted time. At the outset, the IDF besieged wanted terrorists holed up in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem not far from Rachel's Tomb. Violence continued sporadically in the following years as well. A bomb was thrown at Rachel's Tomb on April 10, 2005, and another on December 27, 2006, while on February 10, 2007, scores of Palestinians attacked the site with rocks.⁴⁹ Israel's High Court of Justice has recognized the clear security need of defending this holy site. On February 3, 2005, it rejected petitions by Palestinians who wanted to change the route of the security barrier near Rachel's Tomb, ruling that the current location of the barrier preserved the balance between freedom of religion and the local residents' freedom of movement.⁵⁰

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Notes

1. Report by Gideon Kutz, Israel Radio, October 29, 2010.
2. For more documentation, see Avraham Yaari, *Jewish Pilgrims' Journeys to the Land of Israel* (Gazit, 1946) (Hebrew); Zeev Vilnai, *Sacred Tombstones in the Land of Israel* (Rav Kook Institute, 1963) (Hebrew); Michael Ish Shalom, *Christian Pilgrimages to the Land of Israel* (Am Oved, 1979) (Hebrew); Natan Shor, "The Jewish Settlement in Jerusalem according to Franciscan Chronicles and Travelers' Letters" (Yad Ben-Tzvi, 1979) (Hebrew); Eli Schiller, *The Tomb of Rachel* (Ariel, 1977) (Hebrew). For a summary of these and other sources, see Nadav Shragai, *At the Crossroads, The Story of the Tomb of Rachel*, Part I, 1700 Years of Testimony (Jerusalem Studies, 2005) (Hebrew).
3. See the summary in Gilad Messing, *And You Were Better than Us All* (Private Publication, 2001) (Hebrew), pp. 161-4.
4. See, for example, Shragai, *At the Crossroads*, pp. 163-5.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
6. Eli Schiller, *The Tomb of Rachel*, p. 18.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. Mendel Reicher, *The Gates of Jerusalem* (Warsaw, 5639), p. 40, Entry: Bethlehem.
10. See Mordechai Ha'Kohen, *The Holy Places in the Land of Israel* (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1971) (Hebrew), p. 33.

11. Shor, p. 413, cites the words of the English traveler Richard Pocock and writes: "in speaking about Rachel's Tomb he says, the Turks closed the spaces between the arches in order to make access to it more difficult for the Jews."
12. Shmuel Berkowitz, *The Wars of the Holy Places* (Jerusalem Institute for Israeli Studies and Hed Artzi, 2000), p. 301.
13. Shragai, *At the Crossroads*, pp. 65-76.
14. See Nadav Shragai, "The Palestinian Authority and the Jewish Holy Sites in the West Bank: Rachel's Tomb as a Test Case" November 14, 2007, http://www.jcpa.org/JCPA/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DRIT=2&DBID=1&LNGID=1&TMID=111&FID=377&PID=0&IID=1923&TTL=The_Palestinian_Authority_and_the_Jewish_Holy_Sites_in_the_West_Bank:_Rachel%E2%80%99s_Tomb_as_a_Test_Case.
15. Data from the Authority for the Holy Places.
16. Yaari, *Jewish Pilgrims' Journeys to the Land of Israel*, p. 450.
17. Shoshana Halevi, *Affairs at the Beginning of the Yishuv's History* (1989) (Hebrew), p. 71.
18. S. Avitzur, *Daily Life in the Land of Israel in the 19th Century* (Am Ha'Sefer, 1972) (Hebrew), p. 108.
19. Schiller, *The Tomb of Rachel*.
20. Yehoshua Kaniell, *In Transition, Selected Articles* (Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi, 2000) (Hebrew), p. 29. For details, see Yehoshua Ben Hananiah, "Taxes and Burial Pangs in Jerusalem," *Yerushalayim* [n.d.], pp. 43-46, and Meir Benayahu "More on Burial Taxes in Jerusalem," *ibid.*, pp. 47-49.
21. Avraham Ben Yaakov, *Jerusalem between the Walls: a History of the Meyuhas Family* (Reuven Maas, 1977) (Hebrew), pp. 60-70.
22. Yaari, pp. 508-9.
23. Ish Shalom, p. 635.
24. A *firman* was an official order by the governor in the oriental countries. In this case it was a letter on behalf of the central government in Constantinople bestowing authorization and rights.
25. The *firmans* that were found in the Sephardic Community Committee and subsequently published bear the dates 1830 and 1831. They were received after an agreement in principle obtained in 1827 by Avraham Behar Avraham to award a *firman*.
26. Malachi Ha'Doar XXVI (5707), Issue 38, pp. 1170-1171; Meir Benayahu "Five Years that Turned Jerusalem into Bedlam," in *Asufot* (Yad Harav Nissim, 5752) (Hebrew), pp. 250ff.
27. *Miginzei Kedem, Documents and Sources from the Writings of Pinhas Grayevsky*, ed. Yitzhak Beck (Yad Yitzhak Ben-Tzvi, 1977) (Hebrew), pp. 33-34.
28. "Rachel's Tomb Was Never Jewish," *Jerusalem Post*, March 7, 2010, <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=170394>.
29. *Miginzei Kedem*, pp. 30-32.
30. Dov Genachowski, the author and journalist who studied this document when it was still preserved at the Wolfson Museum, told me that it was signed by the Sublime Porte. A search conducted by museum personnel for the documents in October 2003 did not turn up anything. Genachowski also saw the accompanying letter of Montefiore's secretary, Eliezer Halevi, beseeching Jerusalem's rabbis in Montefiore's name not to commemorate his name because of the site's refurbishing and the construction of the additional room. A copy of this letter is preserved with Genachowski.
31. The *mihrab* was installed in the southern wall to the right of the window and was concealed after 1967. Details on this matter are included in a letter from Shmuel Hamburger, the Coordinator of Religious Affairs in the Judea and Samaria Civil Administration, to Minister of Religious Affairs Rabbi Yitzhak Cohen, dated November 15, 1999.
32. Details on this matter are included in the Rachel's Tomb diaries of Shlomo Freiman, the caretaker of Rachel's Tomb between the years 1918-1948. Photocopies from its pages are in the author's possession, as well as in the explanations by Yitzhak Ben Zvi, the second president of the State of Israel, that are included in a letter dated November 22, 1961, after information was received that the Jordanians were desecrating Rachel's Tomb, State Archives Het Tzadi 2963/2. Eli Schiller informs that the purification of the dead at the site was stopped just before the War of Independence in return for a substantial bribe. Miriam Burla also divulges this in her memoirs.
33. Miriam Burla's Memoirs, photo of a printout in the author's possession.
34. Freiman Diaries.
35. This emerges from a study of the Freiman Diaries.

36. Danny Rubinstein, "Bethlehem Does Not Want to Be Berlin," *Ha'aretz*, February 16, 1996.
37. Shragai, *At the Crossroads*, p. 216.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 230-231.
40. Danny Rubinstein, "The Slave and the Mother," *Ha'aretz*, October 9, 1996, and a private conversation with Orientalist Yoni Dehoah-Halevi.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Shragai, *At the Crossroads*, pp. 48-52; *Miginzei Kedem*, pp. 30-32.
43. Yehoshua Porat, "Two Graves, Two Worlds," from an issue of *Maariv* from that period.
44. The book was published by PACDAR with an introduction by Yasser Arafat.
45. Islam adopted a similar fable regarding the Western Wall. Further information can be found in Dr. Berkowitz' book. He found that until the eleventh century Muslim scholars disagreed as to where the prophet Muhammad had tethered al-Buraq, his winged horse, after he had landed following his celestial night ride from Mecca. Some identified the place as the southern wall of the Temple Mount, others as the eastern wall, but none of them suggested any connection to the western wall, sacred to Judaism. The claim was only raised after the "Wall conflict" broke out between Jews and Muslims before the 1929 riots.
46. Shragai, *At the Crossroads*, p. 233.
47. *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, October 8, 2000.
48. Shragai, *At the Crossroads*, p. 242.
49. From newspaper chronicles and reports on Israeli websites based on the IDF Spokesperson's Office.
50. From the High Court of Justice decision on this matter.

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