

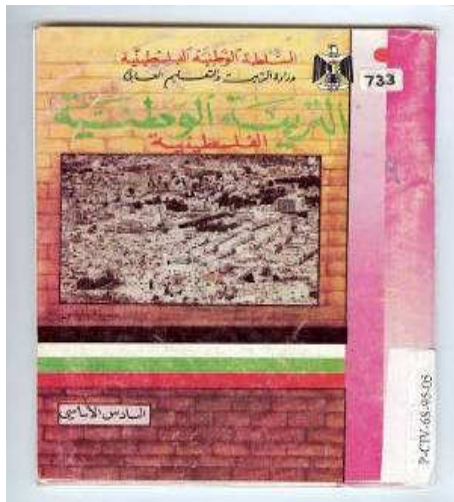
REPORT

Rachel's Tomb in Palestinian Schoolbooks
The Genesis of Falsification and its Implications

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At its 185th session (5-21 October 2010), the board of UNESCO adopted a resolution reaffirming that "The Palestinian sites of al-Haram al-Ibrahimi/Tomb of the Patriarchs in al-Khalil/Hebron and the Bilal bin Rabah Mosque/Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem... are an integral part of the occupied Palestinian Territories and that any unilateral action by the Israeli authorities is to be considered a violation of international law.." The board of UNESCO was obviously convinced that, by underlining both the Muslim and Jewish significance of these sites, they were being balanced and could not be accused of one-sidedness. The fact is that, with regard to Rachel's tomb, the board of UNESCO was actually being misled and manipulated into giving legitimacy to an historical inaccuracy.

In one of the first schoolbooks issued by the Palestinian Authority in 1995, there was a reference to Rachel's tomb in Bethlehem. It was in a textbook on ***Palestinian National Identity*** for grade six. Its front cover shows at its top the name of the author **Palestinian National Authority** (red), **Ministry of Education** (black), below it the title **Palestinian National Education** (green & red) and at the bottom **Grade 6 Primary** (black). The back of its front page indicates at its bottom that it was issued in 1995.

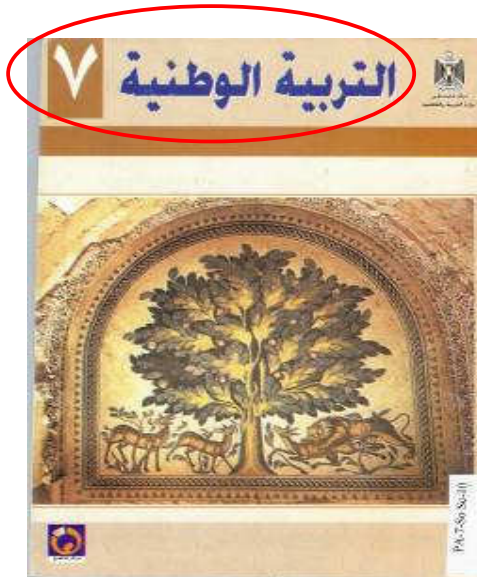


In this book, on page 91, one can find an explicit reference to Rachel tomb which reads as follows: "*Rachel's Dome: mother of Joseph our lord [Said] and Jacob's wife.*"



In other words, this Palestinian schoolbook refers to Rachel's tomb specifically as Rachel's Dome, since this has been the sole identification of this site used by Muslims since the dawn of Islam more than thirteen centuries ago.

But in 2001, the Palestinian Authority decided to replace this thirteen- century- long Muslim denomination by a radically different one. It did so in a schoolbook on *National Education* for **Grade 7**.



On page 54 of this schoolbook, there is a picture of the site, which now is renamed the "**BILAL bin RABBAH Mosque**". In other words, this site was then re-designated as the burial place of Bilal. The reprint of 2010 holds the same wording



On the next page, there is a hint regarding the context of this manipulation. It is claimed that the Israelis are attempting to Judaize Muslim religious places like "**the Mosque of Abraham and the Mosque BILAL Bin RABBAH**".

There is also a clear reference to the instigators of such a move, namely "a number of Palestinian, Arab and Islamic centers working on the revival of the Arab Palestinian tradition for the protection of Palestine's – particularly Jerusalem's - Arabism, published cultural publications defending Palestine and its tradition such as

Al BURAQ Wall: the Wailing Wall

Al BILAL Mosque: Rachel's dome" ¹

Furthermore on page 56, under the section "**Check yourself**" the pupil is asked to answer several questions. Question 2 reads:

¹ *National Education*, Grade 7, 2001, p. 56 *National Education*, Grade 7, 2010, p. 56



Question 2: "Mention names of mosques and of Muslim and Christian sites that the Israelis tried to change their features?"

It is important to clarify that BILAL was an Ethiopian slave who was set free and then, after meeting the prophet Mohammed, converted to Islam. There are two historical traditions regarding his burial; one that BILAL is buried in Bader, near Amman, and the other that he is buried in Damascus. Furthermore, the Palestinians have constructed a new tradition, turning a feminine place of burial into a masculine one.

What is the import of these falsifications by the Palestinian Authority and of its teaching in the Palestinian curriculum?

First of all, it must be noted that the Palestinian Authority has no problem resorting to falsification. For the PA, historical facts are of little significance, so that an historical truth can be changed and replaced by anything which fits its perceived interests.

This is not the first time that the PA has been caught red handed in resorting to falsification. One remembers how the forged "protocols of Zion" was mentioned in a Palestinian schoolbook as an authentic document adopted by the first Zionist Congress!!! Everyone knows how resorting to falsification will impinge on objective and critical thinking.

Secondly, the Palestinian Authority does not display respect for Jewish tradition or for Jewish holy sites, in this instance, for the sanctity in Jewish tradition of Rachel's Tomb. The PA could have claimed, albeit falsely, that Rachel's Dome was also a Muslim holy place. However, they preferred to bluntly ignore the Jewish tradition regarding this Jewish holy place and to write off a Jewish tradition by presenting it as an Israeli attempt to Judaize a Muslim holy site.

Thirdly, the Palestinian Authority has no qualms in turning Rachel's tomb, a feminine burial place, a highly emotional holy site for Jewish women, into a masculine one. On the level of gender symbolism this reveals a strong male chauvinist tendency.

The last of these misrepresentations is that the Palestinian authority has no qualms in resorting to falsification in order to incite Palestinian youth against the Israelis and the Jews, presenting a genuine Jewish holy site, Rachel's tomb, known as such for more than 1700 years², i.e. four centuries before the birth of Islam, as a so called Muslim holy site that the Israelis are attempting to turn Jewish.

To all of this, the board of UNESCO's³ has given its blessing. This is in sheer contradiction with UNESCO most basic principles regarding science, education and culture, sticking to truth, objectivity and critical thinking as well as to tolerance and peace, paying respect to the others - including female- and not inciting against them.

² On Rachel's Tomb see: SHILER, E., **Rachel's Tomb**, ARIEL, 1997. VILNAI, Z., **Sacred Tombstones in the Land of Israel**, MOSAD HA RAV KOOK, 1963. SHRAGAI, N., The Story of Rachel's Tomb, Chapter A- 1700 years of evidence, **Gates to the Study of Jerusalem**, 2005

³ On Israel's reactions to UNESCO's decision: INBARI, P., **UNESCO's Decision to recognize Rachel's Tomb as Bilal Ben Rabbah Mosque – an Expression of Ignorance**, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 31.10.2010. SHRAGAI, N., "Between Rachel's Tomb and Rabin Square" **HAARETZ**, 24.10.2010. SHRAGAI, N., **Rachel's Tomb is a Jewish holy place and not a Mosque**, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2.11.2010