



Scouting Palestinian Territory, 1940- 1948: Haganah Village Files, Aerial Photos, and Surveys

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Palmach Squadron, Al-Majdal (Gaza District),
1947, Aerial Photograph, Haganah Archive.

In the years between 1943 and 1948, squads of young scouts from the Haganah, the pre-state armed organization and forerunner of the Israel Defense Forces, were employed to gather intelligence about Palestinian villages and urban neighborhoods¹ in preparation for a future conflict and occupation, and as part of a more general project of creating files on target sites.²

The information was usually collected under the guise of nature lessons aimed at getting to know the country, or of hikes that were common in that period. The scouts systematically built up a database of geographical, topographical and planning information about the villages and population centers. This included detailed descriptions of roads, neighborhoods, houses, public buildings, objects, wells, caves, wadis, and so forth.

Overall, this intelligence effort was

known as the “Village Files” project, reflecting the fact that most of the sites about which information was collected were the numerous Palestinian villages existing in Palestine before 1948, and that documenting those villages was a central mission. The scouts’ work included perspective sketches, maps, drawings and photographs of each village and its surroundings. The maps used by the scouts were collected in a secret base on Mapu Street in Tel Aviv, located in a cellar that was given the cover name of “the engineering office” and code-named “the roof.”

Detailed information about the villages was meticulously catalogued and organized in files by the planning bureau of the Haganah general staff, then held in the organization’s territorial command centers around the country. Over time, in order to broaden the existing information in the files, Haganah commanders decided to photograph the villages from the air. Sophisticated ruses were used to deceive the British authorities, who prohibited such activity. The villages were therefore photographed under the guise of the activities of a flying club or romantic aerial excursions, with a camera and film hidden in various parts of the plane developing unique means of military spying. Women played a significant role in this process, and one of them became, as far as is known, the first female aerial photographer of the Jewish community of Palestine.

The efforts of the scouts and aerial photographers continued and expanded the project of personnel from Shai, the Haganah’s information service,³ that in 1940 had started to collect detailed and extensive information – historical, social, economic, demographic, educational, agricultural, military, architectural, planning and more – about Palestinian villages and population centers. Based on this information, textual surveys of Palestinian villages were compiled. Over the years, in parallel with the “Village Files,” many such surveys that thoroughly mapped Palestinian communities throughout the country were conducted.

Retrospectively, the history of this clandestine intelligence-gathering was researched, documented and acknowledged, mainly with an emphasis on its Israeli aspects.⁴ Some of these studies, nationalist in character, noted the sense of adventure, daring and drive, the improvisation and unbridled imagination required to activate and implement this enterprise. Meron Benvenisti’s research is unique in that it indicates the significance of Jewish and British sources of information in the absence of Palestinian sources in order to expand knowledge about the Palestinians.⁵ Following Benvenisti, this essay seeks to challenge the formal Zionist and Israeli history, using original, official materials to present an alternative reading.⁶

The Official Version

Most of those involved in the Village Files project are no longer alive. I interviewed some of them a few years ago as part of my research dealing with the vast reservoir of material about Palestinians in Israeli archives, the origins of military photography in Israel, and the methods used by the pre-state Jewish forces and their successors in



Patrols of the Palmach/Technical Department, Khulda, 1947. 1 - The Neighborhood; 2 - The Way to the Well; 3 - The Store; 4 - The Way to the Road. *Source: IDF and Ministry of Defense Archive.*

Israel's army to collect information about the Palestinians. In addition the majority of those who took part in the project left detailed testimonies in books and archives. However, due to space limitations only a few of the names will be mentioned here. Readers desiring a more complete picture are urged to study the sources cited herein.

According to Yitzhak Shefar (who later changed his name to Eran), chief instructor of the Haganah field corps in Tel Aviv and a graduate of a scouts officers course, the idea of creating "Village Files" was conceived by a number of people simultaneously, both in the general staff and at the field operations level.

In 1943, Shmuel Zalman Zelikson (Ziama Dibon) of the planning bureau of the Haganah general staff, who had previously commanded the field corps in the Jerusalem area, formulated the idea of preparing files about Palestinian villages with which a military clash was deemed likely. Concurrently, Zerubavel Vermel (Arbel), of Kibbutz Maoz Haim, used scout squads from the field corps to collect information about Palestinian villages in the areas of Mount Gilboa, the Jordan River, and the Arab town of Beisan, and began to organize the material in files.

Vermel said in testimony he gave later, "I told myself that if we find ourselves in a war, we will have to conquer these villages ... But did we know anything about them? Nothing, it turned out."⁷ The files were shown to Yigael Sukenik (Yadin), a senior member of the planning bureau (and later IDF chief of staff). He organized a meeting between Zelikson and Vermel, whose cooperation laid the foundation for ramified and orderly intelligence work.

After a model was devised for the structure of the files, the Haganah conducted a training course for scouts, held at the Meir Shfeya youth village near Haifa. Yitzhak Eran mentions four villages – al-Furaydis, al-Sindiyana, Sabbarin, and Kanir, all in the vicinity of the Shfeya youth village⁸ – about which information was gathered during the course.

Major General (reserve) Moshe Gornitzky (Goren), a graduate of the first Haganah course for intelligence officers (and later chief scouts officer in the general staff), also described how the participants sat on a hillside above al-Furaydis, one of the villages chosen as sample cases in the course, and sketched the landscape.⁹

Intended for operational purposes, the Village Files consisted mostly of topographical, geographical, planning and physical elements – information about the locale's main structures, access roads, water-sources, and so on. In 1945 the scouts



Patrols of the Palmach/Technical Department, Salama, circa 1946-April 1948. *Source: Haganah Archive.*



Palmach Pilots Next to a Plane of the Civilian Aviron Company. Pilot Emanuel Zur, seated, was invited for the first trial flight. *Source: Haganah Archive.*

started to photograph the villages, as photographs were considered an “objective” source of reliable and accurate information. Shefar, an amateur photographer, and Yisrael Spector, a Haganah member and photographer, urged the use of photos to enhance the files. According to Shefar, in a book published in 1994, they argued that because the reconnaissance missions would be undertaken under the guise of excursions, while scouts were passing through the village or its outskirts, taking pictures would be seen as “natural.”¹⁰

Sukenik, at the time the Haganah planning officer in the Tel Aviv district, was persuaded, and a number of cameras were purchased. Henceforth, the Village Files would be based mainly on photography. The scouts generally avoided including themselves in the photographs, and their work had a clandestine character.

“In some cases, the scouts ‘were lent’ a few female ‘hikers’ to act as a cover,” relates Shefar.¹¹ The manual prepared for the photographer-scouts includes this bit of instruction: “If you are unable to hide the act of photography, ‘cover’ it by taking pictures of your friends or of the local people. In the former case, ensure that your friends do not appear [in focus] in the photo, not even from the back ...

If, nevertheless, people do appear in the

picture (as a result of carelessness), blur them on the negative.”¹²

According to Aptekmann “The kuntz [trick] was to pose the scouts so that the ‘show’ would be perfect, but they would not appear in the photo, for fear that if the file was seized the scouts would be identified. There was no choice but to delete them from the photographs.”¹³

At the end of 1945, Gornitzky and Shefar initiated the effort to photograph the Palestinian villages and sites of operational importance from the air. In the words of Shefer, this was in order to collect “contingency information in advance and under favorable conditions for a time of battle.”¹⁴ Sukenik, who was by then head of

planning in the general staff, was invited for a test flight, along with Ari Glass, from Kibbutz Yagur, who had been an aerial photographer in the German Army in World War I, and Emanuel Zuckerberg (Zur), a pilot in the Jewish Agency's Aviron company. The results proved satisfactory, and systematic, organized flights began.

To photograph the target sites without arousing suspicion, the pilots pretended to be members of the Aviron flying club. At first the flights assumed a romantic cast. A couple would come to the airfield, said Shefar, "wearing Shabbat [festive r.s.] clothes, as befit such occasions. The woman always carried a large enough handbag to hold the camera and the films. Later, another cover was added: an asthmatic child, who had been instructed by the doctor to fly high in the air!"¹⁵

The "asthmatic" was Nimrod, the son of Galila Plotkin. He currently lives in the United States. Plotkin herself, now 94, is the daughter of Baruch Katinka, a weapons instructor in the Haganah, who was also engaged in arms purchases and was the engineer who built the YMCA building in West Jerusalem. Plotkin attended a commander's course at the age of fifteen, trained guards and commanded outposts. She can also be considered the first female aerial photographer in the pre-state Jewish community.

"At first I accompanied them as a cover, and afterward I started to photograph myself," she said in her testimony. "It was Gershon, my husband, who originated this. We used to take our son, who was a year and a half old ... That was excellent camouflage. I hid the camera in our son's bag, between his diapers and the rest of the equipment, and fortunately he would nod off as soon as we took off and sleep soundly."¹⁶

Plotkin was not worried about the danger of the photographic missions. "We did the calculation for the altitude for taking the photographs in the office, and when the pilot announced that we were at the right altitude, I would stick my head out the window and take pictures. But it was absolute torture, because my hair got tangled up by the wind. Absurd as it may sound, it was really awful, until I got hold of pilot's headgear."¹⁷

The Palmach Squadron

By this time, a flight squadron of the Palmach, the Haganah's elite strike force, was already fully formed and organized. It was decided to entrust the squadron with the mission of taking the aerial photographs. Since the pilots were already registered as members of the flying club, it was only natural for them to want to accumulate flying time. In the Palmach they were known as the "airborne division," but for external consumption they were presented as "the flying club of the Aviron Company." At first they used large bellows cameras, but switched to small Leicas because of the need to reload frequently.

To train pilots for photographic missions, Shefar established the School for Aerial Photographers from the Underground. The "school" was located in the one-room apartment that he shared with his wife, Hassia.

"In the middle of the room," he recalls, "there was a table that was covered by a blanket. On the blanket there was a chair. There were two training props: the camera



Unknown Photographer, Yitzhak Shefar (Eran), 1938. Source: *Hasia Eran*.

and ... a box of matches attached to a string. On the floor, perpendicular to the side of the table, a chalk line was drawn. The apprentice sat on the chair. I pulled the matchbox and the apprentice had to press the button the moment the matchbox crossed the line ... After accomplishing this feat several times in succession, he was awarded the title of ‘authorized aerial photographer.’ Up to this point things were more or less logical. What was less logical was [the fact] that the pilots actually brought back good, even excellent photographs.¹⁸

The pilots hid the films in the Aviron hangar in al-Ramle, and on their bodies in order to remove them from the hangar. To avoid having to take the camera in and out, they hid it in a cache in al-Ramle. When the British

intensified their investigation of what they saw as suspicious Haganah operations, the pilots flew over a designated spot near the Palmach’s tent camp at Kibbutz Na’an and dropped the film from the plane before going on to land in al-Ramle. The films were hidden in a small pocket in bags sewn in Na’an, which were filled with sand and marked with a colored tail to make it easier to find them.¹⁹

“Black” (Yaakov Ben-Haim): “That was actually the conventional mode of air-surface communication in the British Army before the development of the wireless. Flying over Na’an on the way to landing in al-Ramle did not create suspicion. We landed with an empty camera, which we then hid in the cache. We also had a cache in the plane itself, if there was concern that for some reason we would not be able to get the camera into the hangar immediately upon landing ... We gave the impression of being a seemingly innocent flying club, but they [the British] didn’t really buy the story. They collected information about us, but they never found a concrete reason to put us on trial or at least to terminate our activity. This situation was our daily lot, but when all is said and done they never found a film or a camera. We were clean.”

“There was constant surveillance,” he continued, “with searches and interrogations, and for our part we upgraded the caches, the deceptions and the cover stories. For example, a ‘special navigation training flight,’ or a ‘special teaching flight’ – things that were meant to explain all kinds of strange loops and rotations in the air, which we did in order to take pictures. Occasionally we also flew over Jewish settlements in order to

mislead the British. We did not always drop the films from the plane over Na'an.

“Sometimes, for various reasons, we hid them in the cache on the plane and dropped them on the next flight, or we had a few pilots stay until late evening, supposedly for the maintenance of the planes, because after the special detectives went for beer and rest it was easier to remove things. Sometimes the fellow with the film left the base on an Arab bus, which was not as suspect. He would take the film to Jaffa, then to Tel Aviv, then to Rehovot and make his way from there to Na'an on foot! All these evasive maneuvers to cover our tracks were logical.”²⁰

In the course of a series of interviews with the author Shimri Salomon, Deputy Director of the Haganah Archives in Tel Aviv, who researched the Village Files project and the surveys of the Palestinian villages, explained, from the official establishment and Israeli perspective, how the Village Files came into being:

Salomon: “The first initiative was that of Zelikson and Vermel, who understood that the Haganah did not have a database of intelligence information that could be used to plan operations against Arab targets. They certainly did not see the War of Independence looming on the horizon, but did anticipate the possible outbreak of a new wave of ‘troubles’ [i.e., another Arab revolt] probably more severe than the last one, and thought that the Haganah should deploy for this organizationally and from the intelligence aspect. Shai [the information service] had been operating since 1940, but its personnel were not trained to collect field intelligence and did not engage in that. Zelikson and Vermel concentrated their efforts precisely in that direction; from 1943, the Village Files project became a central element in the effort to collect operational intelligence. It functioned alongside Shai and supplied what Shai neither tried to supply nor was capable of supplying.”

RS: Why the focus on the villages?

SS: “During the Arab Revolt the villages served as bases of departure and places of sanctuary for the gangs – the [Arab] armed groups that acted against the Mandate authorities and against the Yishuv. The villagers also supplied the gangs with money and food, and many members of the gangs were recruited from the villages. Collecting information about the access roads to the village, the places of hiding in its vicinity, its sources of water, its physical structure and the location of observation points in our direction, and the concentration of this information and of other relevant information in a special file was considered a vital and effective means in case the need should arise to act against the village or against a gang that relied on it.”

RS: What is the difference between the surveys of the Arab settlements and the Village Files?

SS: “The surveys include general and verbal information about the villages. For example, number of inhabitants, the land and its use, the clans, the village mukhtar and also about security issues: how many weapons the residents possessed and of what type, whether the village assisted the gangs during the Troubles and which of the villagers joined the gangs. In the first years of the surveys project, historical information about each village was also compiled: when it was founded, whether it was located on an ancient site and contained antiquities, where the inhabitants came from.

“A great deal could be learned about the village and its inhabitants from this information, but it could not be used to plan military operations, so the need arose to collect operational intelligence. That was the purpose of the Village Files. It should be noted that in addition to the Village Files, files were also compiled of Arab neighborhoods in mixed cities, of police stations and of the British military bases in the country. The work of compiling the files on the police stations and the bases was intensified during the period of the armed struggle against the British, from the end of 1945 onward, and some of those files were used to plan operations.”

RS: Were the Village Files used in the conquest of the villages in the war of 1948?

SS: “Testimonies exist, particularly of commanders and soldiers who were involved in the Village Files project before the War of Independence, stating that in general the files were used and proved useful in the war – for example, in the fighting in the villages around Jerusalem – but I found only a few references to the use of specific files in the war. In my estimation, if files were used, it was mainly in the first half of the war, in what is now usually referred to as the inter-communal war or the civil war – that is, before the invasion of the Arab armies.”

RS: What use was made of the files in the war?

SS: “In my estimation, the files were used primarily to plan limited operations against villages, whether for deterrence or for punitive purposes. In certain cases files might have been used to plan the conquest of a village. At the same time, advance surveillance was usually conducted before such operations, in which updated and specific intelligence was collected. After the invasion, when the fighting was against regular armies, the situation changed. The deployment and the activity on the ground were influenced by the change in the character and in the mode of operation of the major enemy the IDF now confronted. There were also other changes which reduced the relevance of the Village Files. In the second half of 1948, the ability of the IDF’s mapping and photographic service to supply the forces with real-time aerial photographs improved apace, and in some cases it was also possible to carry out flights manned by scouts who provided information to the combat units.”²¹

Lost or Destroyed Information

Many of the Village Files have been lost or were destroyed after the establishment of the State of Israel; only a few dozen remain in the various archives.

RS: What happened to the Village Files?

Salomon explains: “Some of them were apparently destroyed in connection with ‘Black Shabbat’ [June 1946, when the British arrested many of the Jewish leaders], for fear they would fall into the hands of the British, or they were hidden and not found afterward. Some of them were lost in the heat of the War of Independence. But there is no doubt that quite a few files survived the war. What became of them? I imagine that most of them were cleared out by intelligence officers.”²²

Hilik Libal, who at the end of 1950 began to serve as an intelligence soldier in IDF

Central Command, provided more concrete information and described what happened to the Haganah Village Files that were under his responsibility. This information enables us to make an educated guess about the fate of other files, which were stored in the Northern and Southern Commands.

“After the establishment of the state, we continued to draw up files on enemy territory,” Libal, now 81, said. “I was a field scout, an air scout and an analyst of aerial photographs in Central Command. We operated mainly in the West Bank. You have to remember that the austerity regime was in effect during the period of my service, and there was a shortage of everything, including cardboard cartons that were used to prepare intelligence files. So I took old cartons that the Haganah had used for the Village Files before the state’s establishment and used them for the new intelligence files. As for the rest of the material that was in the old Village Files – maps, photographs, sketches and so forth – I burned it.

“For the most part, the files that were burned documented the Arab villages in the Jerusalem Corridor. We also destroyed the negatives of the aerial photographs. We sold the silver iodide they contained to raise money for the unit. Today I regret this. I don’t remember if I acted on my own or at the order of my commander. But already at an early stage I realized what a mistake I had made. Therefore, after my discharge from the army I returned to intelligence as a civilian employed by the IDF. At first I served in the computer unit and afterward as a department head in the research division. Until my retirement, I worked hard to document and preserve history for future generations.”²³

In contrast to the Village Files, a large number of aerial photographs exist, along with many textual surveys of Palestinian settlements.²⁴ An example is a report on the village of Majdal al-Sadiq (known as Majdal Yaba, in the al-Ramle region), which was conquered on July 12th, 1948, by the Israeli Alexandroni Brigade. Its Palestinian residents were uprooted; three Jewish settlements – Rosh Ha’ain, Givat-Hashlosha and Nachsholim were established on its land.

According to the survey, the village of Majdal Yaba was founded approximately 220 years ago on ancient ruins dating back to Roman times. The remains of the holy tomb of Sheikh Baraz el-Din from the early period of the al-Sahaba, the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are also situated there. The village had a well operated by electricity provided by a cable connected to a quarry in the vicinity, and next to the well was a pool where the women of the village came to get water. There were also many pits to collect rainwater used to water sheep, goats and cattle, for laundry and sometimes for drinking. The houses in the village were built from stone with roofs of stone, cement and wood.

At a distance of three kilometers was a road to Rosh HaAyin [Ras al-Ain] railway station, an inferior road to Lod (al-Lid), which passed by Ben Shemen and the villages of Mujraah, Kulla, Beit Nabalaha, and also an old road to Kalkilyah. A service bus to Lod arrived three times a day. Close to the village was Wadi al-Majdal, and also Wadi Rabah.

Majdal Yaba covered an area of 10,000 dunams. Approximately 1500 dunams of land, on the plateau near Rosh HaAyin, was planted with citrus and banana groves.



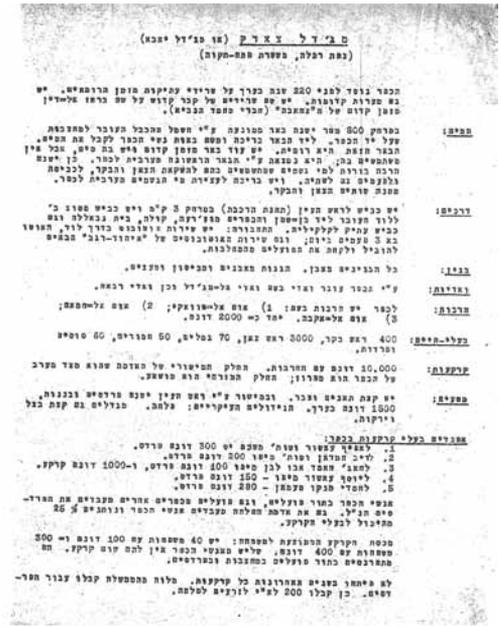
Unknown Photographer, The Israeli Occupation of Majdal-Yabba. *Source: IDF and Ministry of Defense Archive.*

There were also small numbers of fig trees and prickly pear cacti. Field crops were the main produce as well as some onions and vegetables. The village owned 400 heads of cattle, 3000 sheep and goats, 70 camels, 50 donkeys, 60 horses and mules.

There were 1,600 inhabitants in the village: approximately 500 men aged 18-48. Forty families owned 100 dunams of land and 300 families owned 400 dunams of land. A third of the villagers had no land at all. They earned their living by working in the quarries and citrus groves. The government supported the village school, built with village and government funds. The school had one hundred students and a teacher who came every day from Jaffa. There were six guesthouses financed by each family. A mosque was being built at the time. The Imam of the village was Sheik Ibrahim Damra; it was noted that his political inclination tended to shift.

An Alternative Reading

In retrospect, the Village Files (charts, sketches, drawings, maps and ground photographs), the textual surveys and the aerial photographs in some cases constitute the only surviving/most recent testimony of the existence of Palestinian villages, just before they were forcibly emptied of their inhabitants. They are the last remaining vestiges of the villages before they were either destroyed or settled by Jewish immigrants who streamed into the country in its first years; villages which were erased from the Israeli map because of their Arab identity. Consequently, much Palestinian visual and textual history was either lost or fell victim to wars and to the national



Majdal Sadeq (Majdal Yabba), Text Survey (page 1 of 3).

conflict, leaving behind few remains.

In 1992, the Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi published the book *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*.²⁵ The product of years of research, the book is a compendium of geographical, demographic, architectural, historical, agricultural and other information about more than 400 Palestinian villages that were destroyed (including images of the ruins), or in which Israel settled Jewish migrants after 1948, and about the Palestinian inhabitants who were uprooted from their land and for the most part became refugees. Khalidi's pioneering work made it possible to restore to the public sphere and to public consciousness important information about these communities.²⁶

Paradoxically, the information that was intended to assist the Jewish organizations in their struggle against the Palestinians now makes it possible to describe extensive sections of the Palestinian entity and the richness of life that existed in Palestine before 1948. This information can assist in many areas of research – architectural, agricultural, geographical, social, demographic, historical and others – and can fill in gaps in the currently held worldview. Thus, for example, if Khalidi's book contains information about 400 villages, the surveys provide information about 750 communities (not only those that were destroyed or were populated by Jewish immigrants). In addition, the Village Files and the aerial photographs offer visual information from the 1940s, which Khalidi's book does not contain.

The existence of this significant and comprehensive body of information in Israeli archives, as stated above, has been made known in a few publications, though limited research use has been made of it.²⁷ Much of the material was collected for Israeli military use, is tendentious in character, marked by Zionist national terminology, and reflects the relations between the forces at the time. Nevertheless, recovering the material will make it possible to become acquainted with various aspects of life in the villages, and to restore to the collective lexicon – Israeli and Palestinian alike – the sights and sites of this land before 1948.

As early as 1973 the testimony Pinhas Apteckmann gave about the Village Files project included the incontrovertible statement that "These photographs ... are the only remnant left of the villages, as the villages themselves no longer exist."²⁸

A contemporary reading of the Israeli archives, which includes intelligence

material about the pre-1948 Palestinian population in Palestine, based on a critical approach which neutralizes their tendentiousness, would enable us to make sober and conscious use of them. Such a reading will not seek to erase the primary aim and purpose of the Village Files and the surveys, or to obscure the calamity that befell the Palestinian towns and villages and their inhabitants. At the same time, it will have the power of restoring to the public sphere significant and important information, which was lost, but actually still exists in Israeli archives, and of completing the missing chapters in Palestinian history.

A national conflict sometimes engenders deceptive, illusory situations and overturns meanings, and the history of one becomes the history of the other. This “new” history puts to the test the inner fortitude, resilience and strength of Israeli society, which is called upon to deal with its past. Unfortunately, an Israeli body that would be willing to finance the publication of a comprehensive lexicon of the villages, based on this material has not yet been found. Will Israeli society manifest here, too, the same daring that glorifies the pages of the official history?

Rona Sela is a curator and historian, specializing in the visual aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, within a political, ideological and social context.

Endnotes

- 1 As well as British army bases, police stations and the like.
- 2 Shimri Salomon shows that various organized activities, intelligence projects, and military scouting were undertaken by the Haganah from the 1920s to learn about the “Arabs areas” for operational purposes. These activities/projects enabled the development of the information gathering in the 1940s, the core of this essay. Shimri Salomon, “Documenting and Learning the Arab Areas by the ‘Haganah’ before Village File Project.” in “A Sheet from the Cache, *Quarterly Bulletin of the Haganah Archives*” no. 12, (2005).
- 3 And later Palestinian informers as well.
- 4 Ian Black and Benny Morris, *Israel’s Secret Wars: A History of Israel’s Intelligence Services* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991), 24-29, 129; Yoav Gelber, *The History of Israeli Intelligence, Part I: Growing a Fleur-de-Lis: The Intelligence Services of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine, 1918-1947*, (Tel Aviv: Israel Ministry of Defense Publications, 1992), 329-330; 526-527; Yitzhak Eran, *The Scouts*, (Tel Aviv: Israel Ministry of Defense Publications, 1994). Shimri Salomon, “The Haganah’s Arab Intelligence Service and Project for Surveying Arab Places, Palestine, 1940-1948,” in “A Sheet from the Cache,” *Quarterly Bulletin of the Haganah Archives* no. 9-10, (2001); Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape, The Buried History of the Holy Land since 1948* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 70-79; Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 17-22; and Shimri Salomon, “The Village Files Project: A Chapter in the Development of the Haganah’s Military Intelligence, Part 1: 1943-1945,” *The Haganah Research Pamphlets* no. 1. For a comprehensive study about information gathering see: Gil Eyal, *The Disenchantment of the Orient - Expertise in Arab Affairs and the Israeli* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).
- 5 Benvenisti, 78-79.
- 6 I first developed this claim in Rona Sela “The Absent-Present Palestinian Villages,” *Terminal* (2006), 28: 22-25. An expanded version appeared also in English: Rona Sela, “The Absent-Present Palestinian Villages,” *History of Photography* (2009) 33, no. 1. See also Rona Sela, *Made Public, Palestinian Photographs in Military Archives in Israel* (Israel: Helena Publishing House, 2009), and

- a previous version of this article, "It Took a Village," *Haaretz Supplement*, 21.5.2011. This paper develops the latter.
- 7 Eran, *The Scouts*, 25-26.
 - 8 Eran, *The Scouts*, 32. See also Eran (Shefer) Itzhak, Testimony (registrar unknown). January 1985. "The Development and Application of Aerial and Ground Photography in the Haganah," Archive of the History of the Haganah, file 194.4, 1. Pinchas Aptekmann (Yoeli), The Head of the Maps Division, who took part in planning the scouts course, mentions only two villages: "Two small Arab villages: Al-Sindiyana, Sabbarin, close to Zichron Shafiya, were our 'guinea pigs' and based on them we worked out the shape of the file." Pinchas Aptekmann (recorded by Haya Ironi), 1973. "Yoeli testimony (Aptekmann)." Archive of the History of the Haganah, file 24.90, 2.
 - 9 Eran, *The Scouts*, 32-33. Pinchas Aptekmann testified: "One of the questions that concerned us was how best to describe the interior of the village. I remember sitting on the slope of a hill north of Zichron, overlooking al-Furaydis, and discussing this subject amongst ourselves." Pinchas Aptekmann 1973. Yoeli testimony (Aptekmann), 3.
 - 10 Eran (Shefer) 1985, "The Development and Application of Aerial and Ground Photography in the Haganah," 1.
 - 11 Eran, *The Scouts*, 34.
 - 12 From the instruction manual *Photography for Scouts*, Archive of the History of the Haganah, file 34/209, 10.
 - 13 Yoel Aptekmann (registrar of testimony unknown), 19.11.1984. "Professor Pinchas Yoeli (Aptekmann), Former Chief Instructor of Topography – after Hillel Burger." Archive of the History of the Haganah, file 24.90.
 - 14 Eran, *The Scouts*, 25.
 - 15 Eran (Shefer) 1985, "The Development and Application of Aerial and Ground Photography in the Haganah," 3.
 - 16 Galila Plotkin (testimony, registrar: Chava Avrahami), 1.1.1957. "Galilia (Katinka) and Gershon Plotkin. Dept. of Planning," Archive of the History of the Haganah, file 64.32, 3.
 - 17 Plotkin, 3.
 - 18 Eran (Shefer), 1985, "The Development and Application of Aerial and Ground Photography in the Haganah," 4.
 - 19 Black (Yaakov Ben-Haim) quoted in Eran, *The Scouts*, 57.
 - 20 "Black Testimony (Yaakov Ben-Haim)," registrar: Eran Itzhak, unedited. "Palmach Squadron (Reconnaissance and Aerial Photography) 'Black' testimony (Yaakov Ben-Haim), former Squadron Commander," Archive of the History of the Haganah, file, 194.5, 2-4.
 - 21 Author's personal interview, conversations and correspondence with Salomon, 14.4.2011 - 16.5.2011.
 - 22 Author's personal interview, conversations and correspondence.
 - 23 Author's conversation with Libal, 6.5.2011.
 - 24 When I searched the Haganah Archive in early 2009, I found hundreds of photographs of this nature. Reviewing the archive once again, there were only a few dozen of them (mainly those I scanned for the book *Made Public*). It's not clear whether their disappearance after the publication of the book was accidental or intentional, but it raises questions.
 - 25 Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992).
 - 26 Efraim Karsh claims that Khalidi overlooked the Village Files and the aerial photographs as sources for his book, *All That Remains*, although he doesn't mention it. See: Efraim Karsh, *Fabricating Israeli History: The New Historians* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 12. For more information about the villages see also notes 4 and 5 above.
 - 27 After publication of my book, *Made Public* (2009) and an article in *Haaretz* (Sela, 2011) various sources have begun to use them, notably websites such as Zochrot and Wikipedia, with regard to settlements.
 - 28 Aptekmann, 1973. "Yoeli testimony (Aptekmann)."