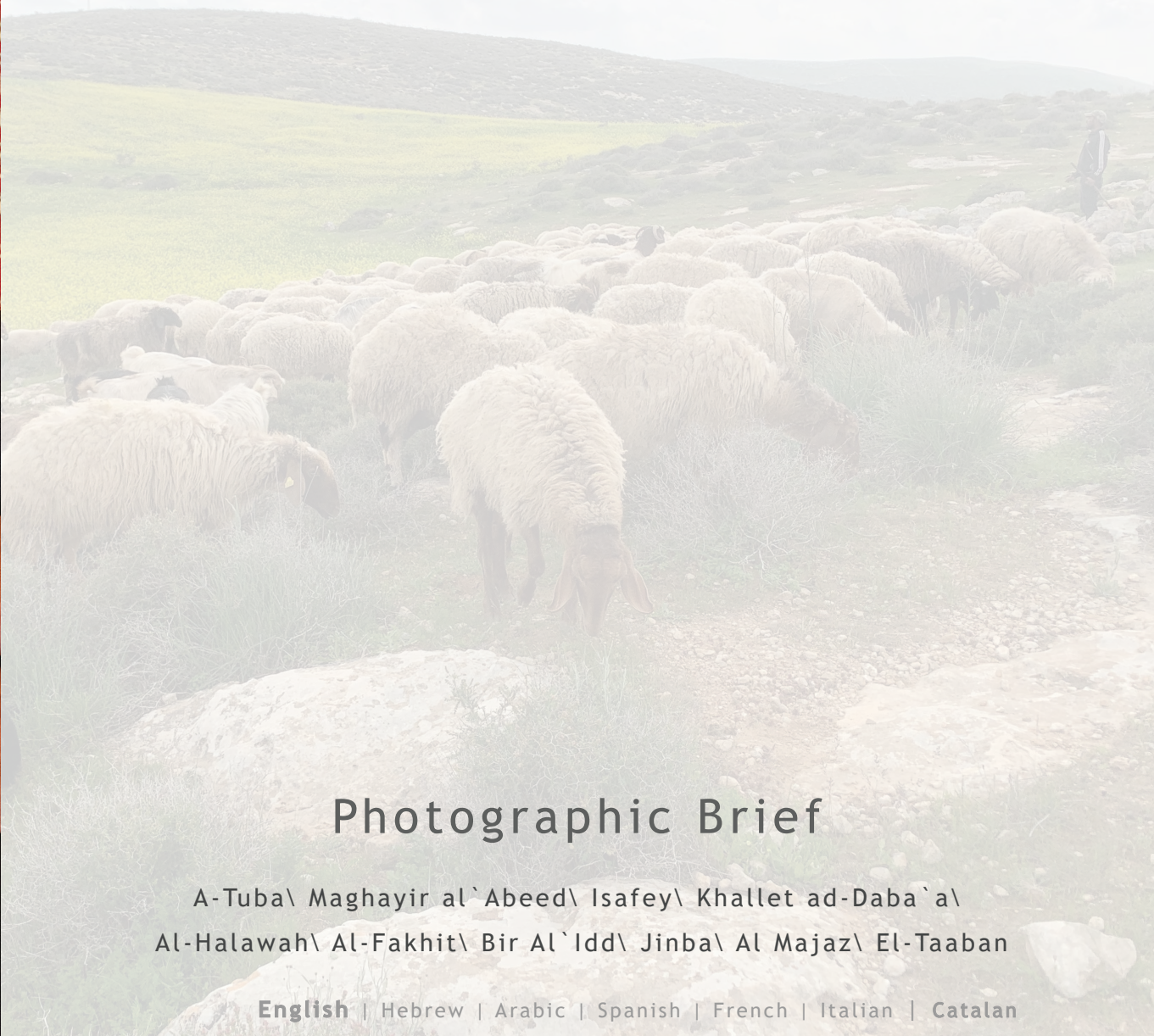




The Ancient Communities Of Masafer Yatta



Photographic Brief

A-Tuba\ Maghayir al`Abeed\ Isafey\ KHALLET ad-Daba`a\
Al-Halawah\ Al-Fakhit\ Bir Al`Idd\ Jinba\ Al Majaz\ El-Taaban

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English | Hebrew | Arabic | Spanish | French | Italian | Catalan

On the edge of the Judean desert, on the hard lands south of Hebron city, you can see the flocks returning from grazing, drinking water out of ancient troughs, peasant men, women and children picking their olives and harvesting their grain with their hands, as their ancestors did for hundreds of years.

Masafer Yatta in the South Hebron Hills is dotted with dozens of villages and ruins, which are home to 2800 Palestinians living on the desert soil. The grazing and farming lands and the rain cisterns are the basis and anchor of the existence and continuity of their unique lifestyle. The land provides subsistence, the flocks provide a livelihood, and the open expanses, under conditions of arid agriculture, make the conjunction of land and grazing a necessary condition. Tilling the land and raising the flocks consist of countless chores throughout the day and over the year, making such work an entire lifestyle. This labor is woven into the totality of the lives of the residents and planted in the familial, communal and intercommunal spheres.

European travelers and adventurers who came to the region in the 19th century left documentation of some of the villages known to us today.

The extreme combination of a dry and very hot climate in the summer and very cold climate in the rainy season, along with the unique character of the soil, gave rise over the course of history to a way of life unique in the Middle East, based on inhabiting caves carved out of the earth.

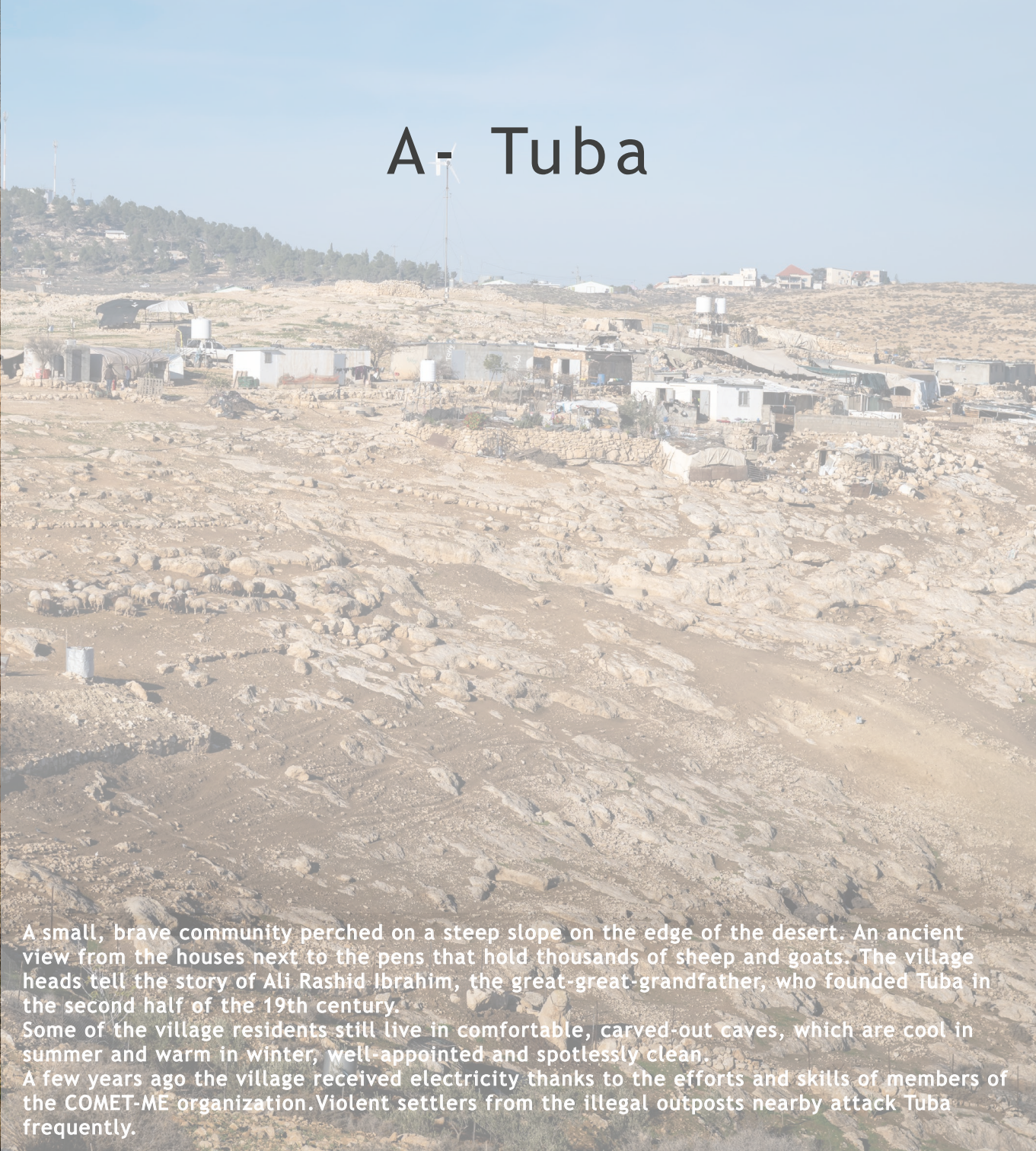
To this day most of the families in the Masafer live in and around the same caves in which they or their forebears were born. Most of them subsist on grazing flocks and tilling the soil, using ancient methods that maintain harmony with the environment and a delicate ecological balance.

This is their story





A- Tuba



A small, brave community perched on a steep slope on the edge of the desert. An ancient view from the houses next to the pens that hold thousands of sheep and goats. The village heads tell the story of Ali Rashid Ibrahim, the great-great-grandfather, who founded Tuba in the second half of the 19th century. Some of the village residents still live in comfortable, carved-out caves, which are cool in summer and warm in winter, well-appointed and spotlessly clean. A few years ago the village received electricity thanks to the efforts and skills of members of the COMET-ME organization. Violent settlers from the illegal outposts nearby attack Tuba frequently.



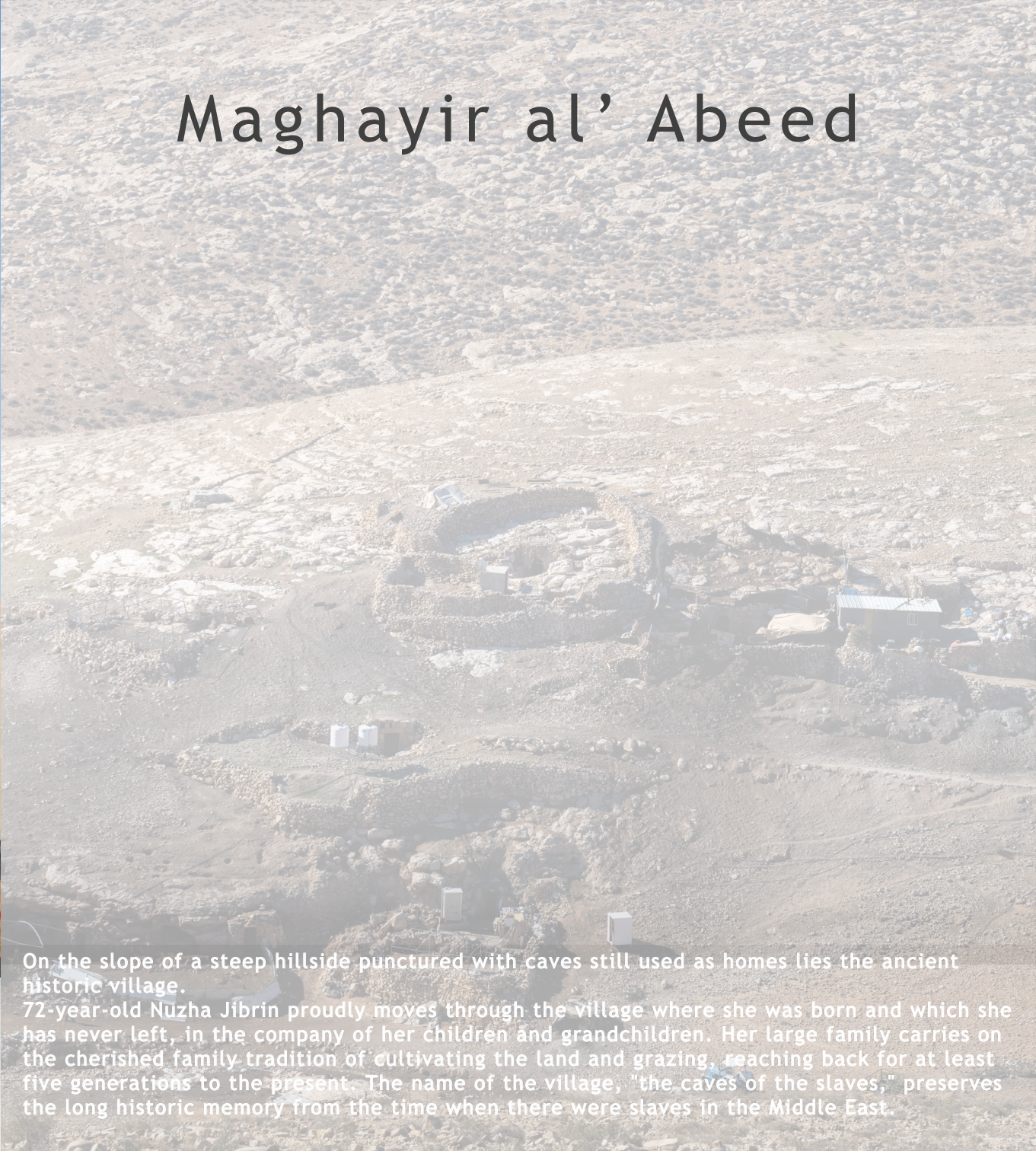
Origin

Details





Maghayir al' Abeed



On the slope of a steep hillside punctured with caves still used as homes lies the ancient historic village.

72-year-old Nūzha Jibrin proudly moves through the village where she was born and which she has never left, in the company of her children and grandchildren. Her large family carries on the cherished family tradition of cultivating the land and grazing, reaching back for at least five generations to the present. The name of the village, "the caves of the slaves," preserves the long historic memory from the time when there were slaves in the Middle East.



Origin



Details



Isfey



In the middle of the village you meet the few children who go to school in an old trailer standing on blocks. In the background you can see the old school that was recently demolished. The young children go to school in the trailer and those older children who are able to walk long distances go to the schools in the nearby villages. The village covers a large area with two concentrations, Upper Isfey and Lower Isfey.

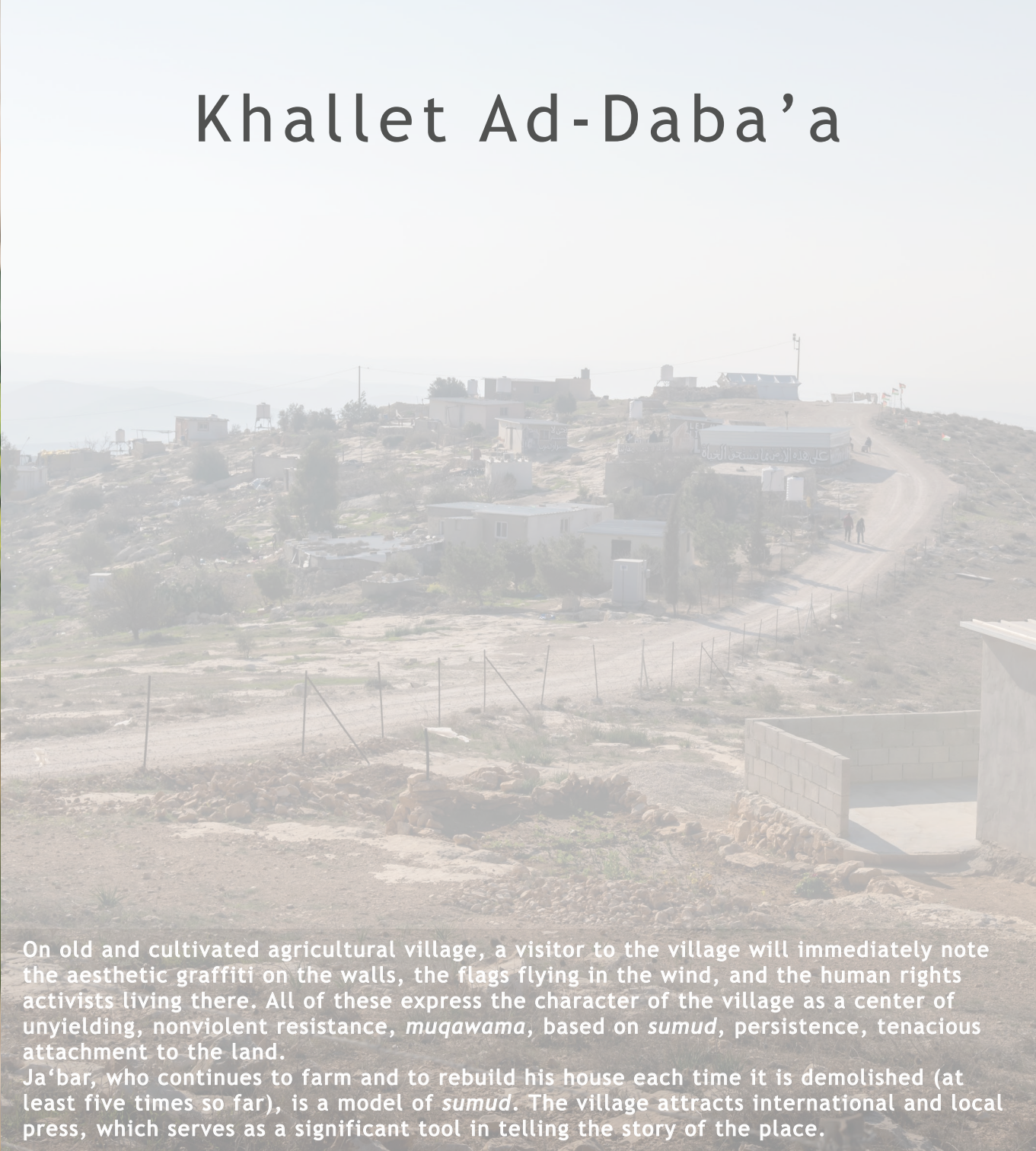




Muqawama



Khallet Ad-Daba'a



On old and cultivated agricultural village, a visitor to the village will immediately note the aesthetic graffiti on the walls, the flags flying in the wind, and the human rights activists living there. All of these express the character of the village as a center of unyielding, nonviolent resistance, *muqawama*, based on *sumud*, persistence, tenacious attachment to the land.

Ja'bar, who continues to farm and to rebuild his house each time it is demolished (at least five times so far), is a model of *sumud*. The village attracts international and local press, which serves as a significant tool in telling the story of the place.

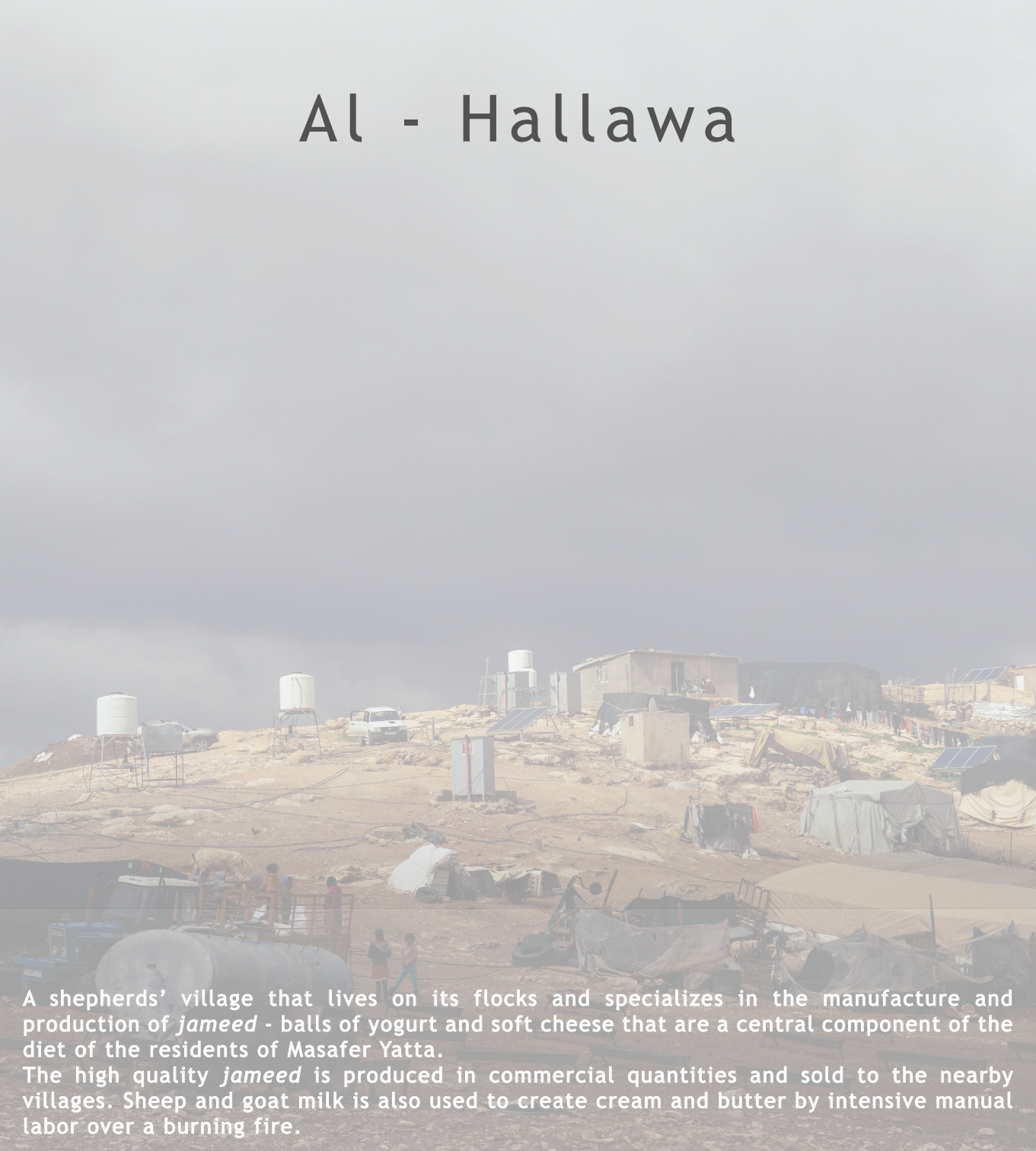


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Al - Hallawa



A shepherds' village that lives on its flocks and specializes in the manufacture and production of *jameed* - balls of yogurt and soft cheese that are a central component of the diet of the residents of Masafer Yatta. The high quality *jameed* is produced in commercial quantities and sold to the nearby villages. Sheep and goat milk is also used to create cream and butter by intensive manual labor over a burning fire.

Details





Al - Fakhit



Located on a ridge overlooking the wilderness and the mountains on all sides, this tiny village prides itself on a high school and a basic clinic that serves the entire region. The village still has ruins of ancient structures from hundreds of years of continuous settlement. The village is mentioned by name in the 1881 report by the Palestine Exploration Fund.

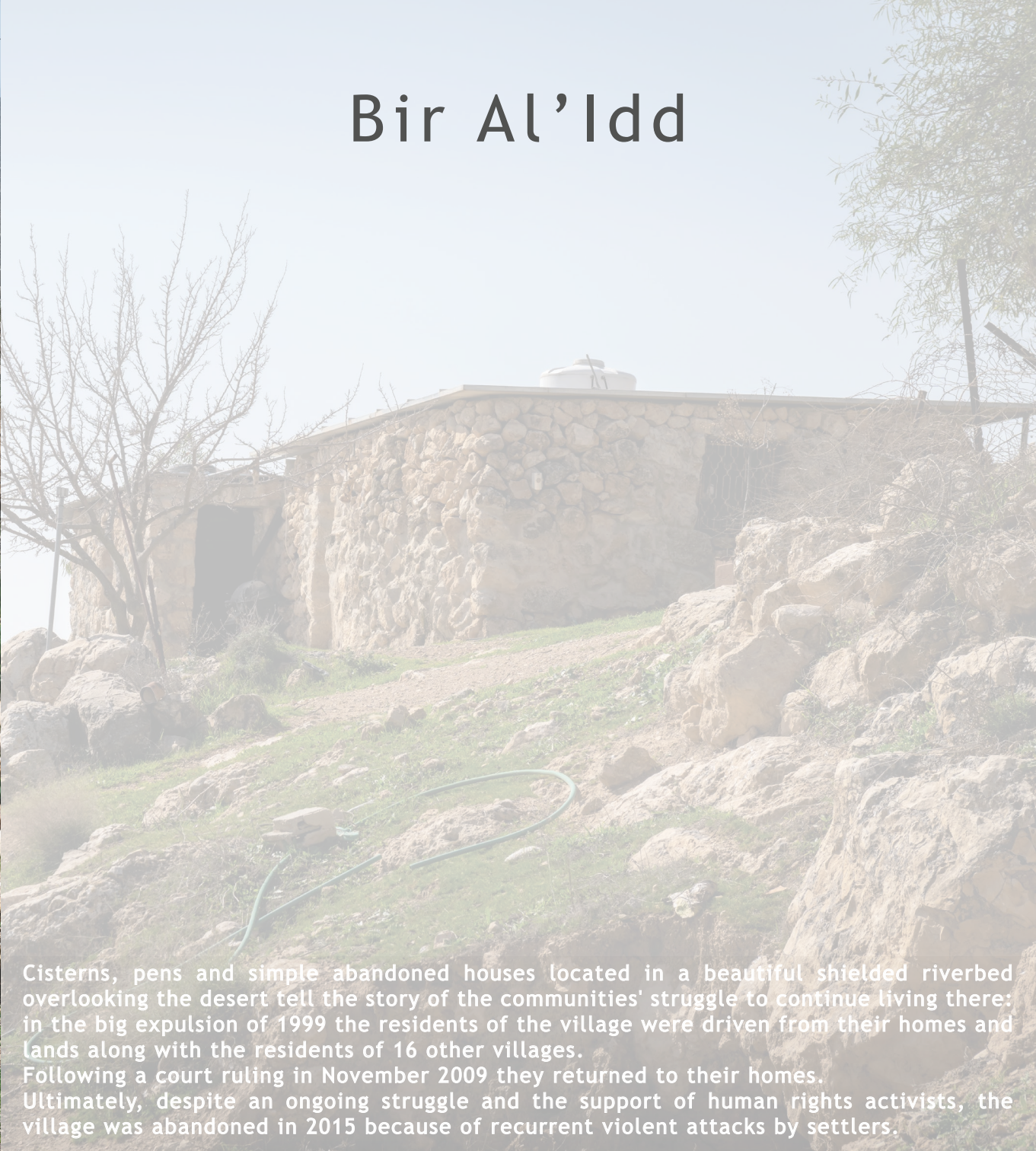


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Bir Al'Idd



Cisterns, pens and simple abandoned houses located in a beautiful shielded riverbed overlooking the desert tell the story of the communities' struggle to continue living there: in the big expulsion of 1999 the residents of the village were driven from their homes and lands along with the residents of 16 other villages. Following a court ruling in November 2009 they returned to their homes. Ultimately, despite an ongoing struggle and the support of human rights activists, the village was abandoned in 2015 because of recurrent violent attacks by settlers.



Jinba

The village consists of small houses from the Turkish Ottoman era. Jinba was the central town of the area before 1948 and still serves as such. The village has a school, a clinic and a mosque.

In 1966 the Israeli army blew up dozens of homes in a raid on the area, which at the time was part of the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan.

Like most of the Masafer Yatta villages, it has a mix of caves and modern houses. Jinba has extensive fields and agricultural lands cultivated using ancient technologies: iron plows hitched to donkeys and hand-held scythes for the harvest.

Period

Ottoman





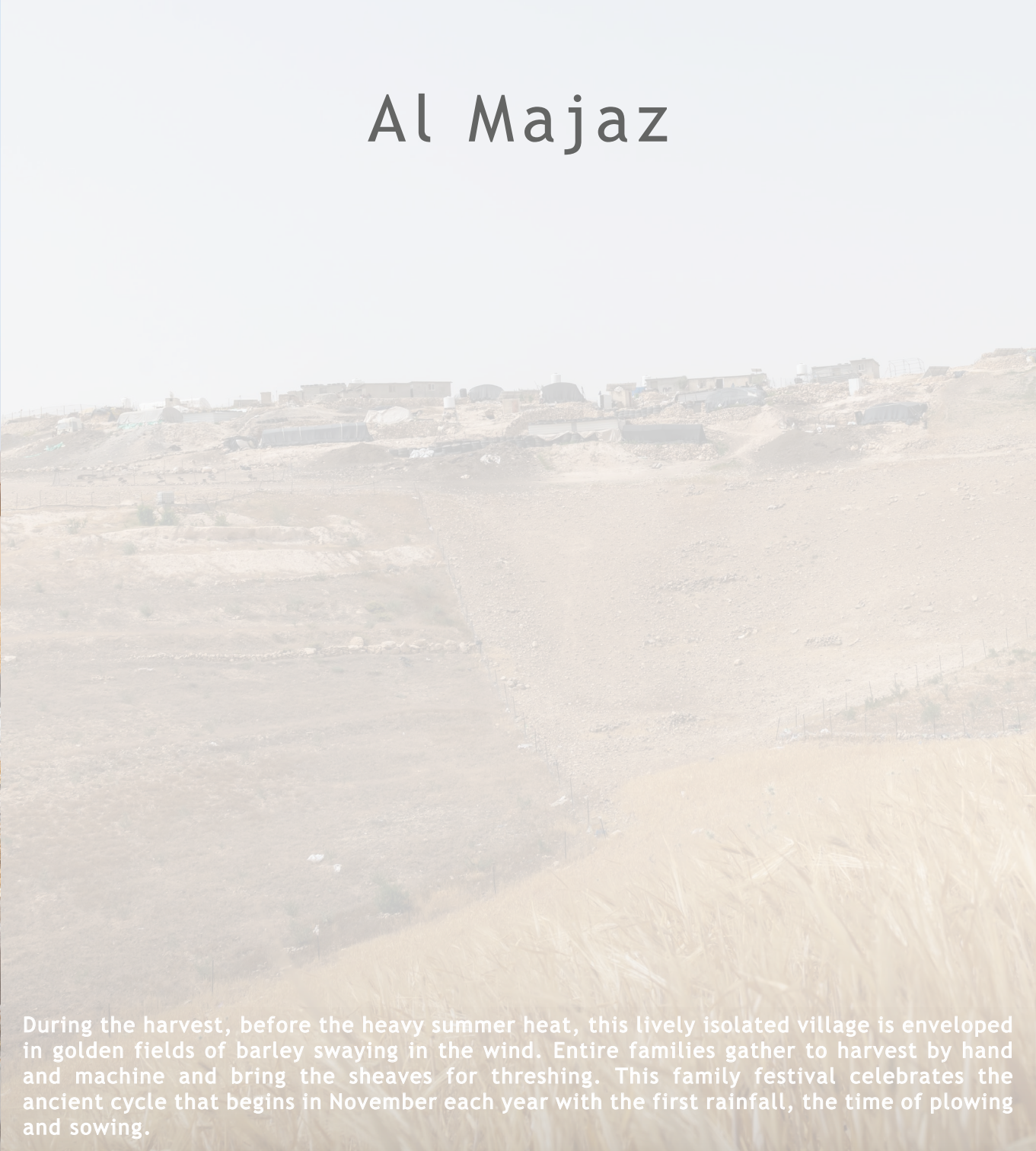
Origin



Details



Al Majaz



During the harvest, before the heavy summer heat, this lively isolated village is enveloped in golden fields of barley swaying in the wind. Entire families gather to harvest by hand and machine and bring the sheaves for threshing. This family festival celebrates the ancient cycle that begins in November each year with the first rainfall, the time of plowing and sowing.

Details





Landscape





El - Taaban

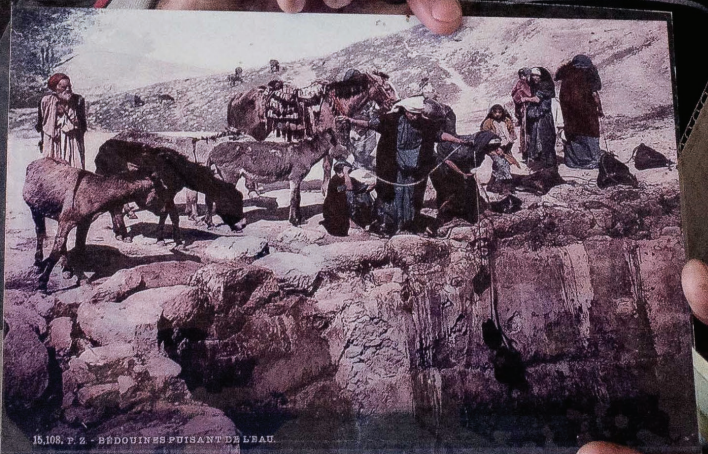


A small intimate village living peacefully in the open expanse between Fakhit and al-Majaz. At the center of one family's modest home stands a precious historic photograph from the days of the Ottoman Empire showing their great-grandfather and his family surrounding the waterhole .



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
قَالَ عَوْدًا
مَلِكِ النَّاسِ
مِنْ مَسْرَاةِ الْوَقْتِ
فِي مُنَادِيَاتِ
مَدِينَةِ

اللَّهُ



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The threat of mass expulsion hangs over these communities. In the early 1980s Israel decided to expel them, in violation of international law specifically forbidding an occupier to expel the population living in an occupied territory.

The State of Israel is using all the tools at its disposal, including the army and the police, in order to confiscate land, demolish houses, and block roads on a daily basis, as well as encouraging and informally aiding illegal Israeli settlement (most of it illegal even under Israeli law and Israeli court rulings) and turning a blind eye to settlers intent on stealing land, vandalizing agricultural fields and flocks, and occasionally attacking the local residents.

Needless to say, the system of laws that applies to the local Palestinian community is completely different from the system of laws that applies to the Jewish settlers (in other words: apartheid), all with the full backing of the Israeli justice system headed by the Supreme Court (albeit with some reservations and verbal acrobatics).

In the 1980s Israel declared 35,000 dunams of land as a firing zone for military training.

Since then a legal battle has been waged while daily life goes on.

In May 2022 the Supreme Court ruled there was no legal prohibition on expelling the residents of Masafer Yatta who live in firing zone 918 from their lands and homes, thus ending a 22-year legal battle.

The lives of the Palestinians in Masafer Yatta are an endless struggle for survival under difficult and threatening conditions. Access to water resources, healthcare services, hospitals and schools is very limited, and relief from the military courts operating in the occupied areas is nonexistent.

Despite all this, the residents of Masafer Yatta, who maintain a lifestyle going back hundreds or even thousands of years, are still clinging to the land and fighting for their future.

As a community they pursue education to an exceptional degree. A very active women's organization operates in the area, teaching the Arabic language and computer working skills, alongside cultivating traditional craft such as weaving and producing food items for marketing. Anyone who knows the shepherds and farmers of the South Hebron Hills knows that they have not lost their joy in life and hope of living in peace on their land.

Descendants of many generations who lived and died in these villages, the people of Masafer Yatta maintain the hope that their historic rights will be recognized by international law and Israeli and international public opinion, and that their deep-rooted love for the slopes of the mountains, for the grazing lands, for the wheat and barley fields, for the tents and the caves, for the desert landscapes, for their forefathers' graves, for the wells that have survived raids by the Israeli army and settlers, for the endless sky above them – will prevail.





For More Information