

February 8, 111 Tuesday 12 AdarI 3871 22:35 IST

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PA has been 'renaming' Jewish sites in textbooks

By LIDAR GRAVÉ-LAZI
18/01/2011

Since 2001 Palestinian civil studies books, "with the help of Arab and Islamic centers," change Rachel's Tomb to Bilal Ibn Rabah Mosque.

Since 2001, Palestinian civics textbooks, "with the help of Arab and Islamic centers," have been referring to Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem as the Bilal Ibn Rabah Mosque, according to a new report by the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-SE).

The report, released on Tuesday, said that Palestinian Authority textbooks have given new names to other historical Jewish sites as well.

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The report was recently prepared by IMPACT-SE following a UNESCO decision to recognize Rachel's Tomb as a mosque only.

According to the report, in 1995, Rachel's Tomb was described in a grade-6 textbook as "Rachel's Tomb: mother of Joseph our lord (Said) and Jacob's wife."

In 2001, in a 7th-grade textbook, the editors reported to their students that they have decided "with the help of Arab and Islamic centers" to change its name to Bilal Ibn Rabah Mosque.

The renaming turns the feminine Rachel into a masculine Bilal. According to Muslim tradition, Bilal was a slave who was set free and then converted to Islam after meeting Muhammad of the Kuraish tribe; he was later buried either in Bader near Amman or in Damascus, the legend says.

According to IMPACT-SE CEO Shelley Elkayam, who authored the report, the phenomenon is characterized by a few levels of significance, among them gender symbolism alongside subversive logical undermining and a slipping away from the modernhistorical to the mythical-legendary.

Elkayam asserted that the Palestinian text itself explains the process of change as a conscious manipulation that was done by "Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic centers and with the help of charities working to revive the

Arab Palestinian heritage to maintain the character of Palestine and its heritage like Al-Burke Wall – the Western Wall, Bilal Ibn Rabah Mosque – Rachel’s tomb.”

In the schoolbook from 2001, in an exercise titled “attempts to erase the Palestinian heritage,” the Bilal Mosque (Rachel’s Tomb) and the Cave of the Patriarchs are presented to the children as part of the Palestinian “philosophical heritage” and examples of “the attempt to ‘turn Jewish’ Muslim-religious places like: Abraham’s Mosque [Cave of the Patriarchs] and the Bilal Ibn Rabah Mosque [Rachel’s Tomb].”

According to Elkayam, the manipulation confuses children and causes a misunderstanding of historical sequence and is against UNESCO recommendations in the field of education and science.



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