



Village Profile

Name of Village: **Mas-ha**

Name of person doing the survey: Marie Jo & Eileen
Date of Survey: 21st November 2004

Updated: Beth and Nicole
January 10, 2009

Who gave the information: Mayor: Anwar Amer (Abu Thebit)
Interpreter: Yusef Hasan, English teacher
Member of Village Council: Omar Shalbi

For update: Mayor: Nidal Amer (since September 15, 2005, for four-year term)
Ahmad Saleh Amer (cousin; roofer); 0525-213-000

1. Location of village 38 Km southwest of Nablus
40 km northwest of Ramallah
9 km west of Salfit (but now it is a 25-km trip through Za'tara)

2. Current population, previous population. How many villagers are living outside Palestine?

The population is currently about 2,200.

3. Origins of the name. Any ancient sites or legends associated with the village?

Mas-ha is more than 1,000 years old. Before Mas-ha it was called Izbat. Sheikh Omar changed the name 500-600 years ago. About 900 years ago a man whose family name was Amer came from further south in the West Bank with his family and flock of goats. Thieves came and attacked him, trying to steal his goats; but he was a big strong man and he fought back. He attacked them, he

damaged them, he cut them down, he cleared them away. 'Mas-ha' means clearing away.

Over the centuries as Mas-ha has grown, people have spread out, acquiring more land and starting the new village of Kafr Khassim – which is now over the Green Line. The land around Kafr Khassim was very fertile and so the two villages of related people farmed all of the land between them.

4. Main forms of employment, currently and before intifada.

Mas-ha was the largest and the most famous market town in Palestine (before the second intifada, on Fridays and Saturdays). Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians all came together to the markets, and packed it. Since September 29, 2000, with Sharon's entering the Temple Mount, intifada started that day, army closed the road the following day, closing the market (it was a Saturday; **check date**. On the Sunday the settlers came, burned shops and attacked the people. Settlers also burned down the shop of Ahmad Amer; he used to have \$200,000 of wood in his shop.

In addition to the markets there were 800 manufacturers including stone carvers, metal workers and carpenters. The combined businesses had a total value of about \$3,500,000,000 (thirty five hundred million dollars) a year. In one week the total income from manufacturing and farming was about \$1,000,000 (for Mas-ha).

Now the markets are finished and only a little market gardening is possible, including in greenhouses (also some olive harvesting). The income of the town has been reduced by more than 90%. Many traders who were not from Mas-ha left at this time. "Before the intifada is like a dream."

5. Any traditional industries apart from farming?

Stone carving, building and marketing.

6. Agriculture. What crops do they grow? Any animals? How has this changed over the years?

Olives, fruits and vegetables were the main crops. A few small greenhouses remain, but there is very little land to plant. Each family keeps a few animals to feed their own people.

Most of the Mas-ha land is now behind the separation wall and can only be reached through a double gate. Permits are needed to get through the gate by Ez Efrayim during the olive harvest (8 am to 4 pm), but usually these are only given to older people – one representative from each family. However, tasks such as olive picking need a lot of people – one elderly person is not enough. Young men have a particular problem in getting permits. A permit is only issued for 6 months at a time (but at one time it was only 1 month) and reapplying can take a long time and involves a lot of paperwork. Even with a valid permit, one can be refused entry at the gates according to the whim of the soldier. Or farmers may be told that the gates will only be open for one hour, or told that the gates

will be open at 10.00 am, but they actually open at 9.00 am so when you arrive they are closed again. Or told that the gate will be opened at 4 p.m. to allow farmers to leave, but soldiers won't open it until 9 p.m. "This is like wearing handcuffs for the people of Mas-ha."

Mas-ha residents own about 8,800 dunums of land on other side of separation wall. About 2,500 dunums are left that are still plantable; the rest has settlements and the Wall on it.

7. Form of government, e.g. village council, municipality.

Appointed or elected. If elected, when were the last elections? If appointed, does each family have a representative?

Before 1995 each family proposed one representative to serve on the Village Council and the Mayor was chosen from amongst them.

The previous Mayor resigned for 'personal reasons' and signatures were collected for nominations for Mayor.

Current mayor was elected in 2005. Seven men and two women sit on the council, including the mayor.

8. Political, religious and civic organizations e.g. mosques, women's organizations.

Fatah is the main party and there are another four smaller parties.

There are 3 Mosques.

Two women's organizations.

The Mas-ha Sports Club for boys – they use the small facilities in the schools; The Association for Farmers – a farmers co-operative;

9. Names of the families living in the village in order of size.

Amer – 1,650 members

Shalabi – 210 members

Other, smaller families - 140

10. Services: Any schools or clinics? How many shops? Nearest hospital, nearest university.

There are 2 health clinics; UNRWA clinic is open one day a week (for 2 hours on Saturday, 10 am to noon, depending on whether the health-care professionals can make it out of Nablus. (They prescribe a lot of aspirin and painkillers.)

One public clinic and one run by the UNRWA. A doctor attends 1 day each week at the UN clinic and 2 days each week at the public clinic. Nurses attend public clinic each day and a midwife lives in the village. Residents also use clinics in Biddya and Qalqiliya.

The nearest hospital is in Nablus.

There are about 15 shops.

There are 2 schools: one combined elementary and secondary school for girls; one school for boys.

Students go to the Open University at Salfit, some go to Bir Zeit and some to Nablus (An-Najah), also Open University in Bidya.

11. Utilities: Does the village have electricity, running water? When did they receive these?

Other water sources. Any restrictions on their use?

The village has had an electricity supply since 1982. They pay the Israelis 40 agorots per kw. and sell at 0.5 IS to residents.

Running water had to be bought from the Israelis after 1984, although the village had just paid for their own water supply (a well near the mosque, which is now closed to residents) and pumps to be installed. These were confiscated and they were forced to buy water from the Israelis. They pay the Israelis 2.6 NIS per cubic metre and sell at 3 NIS per cubic metre. Mas-ha pays 125,000 NIS each month to the Israelis for water and electricity.

12. Transportation: what transportation services exist, transportation and road closure problems.

Taxi cabs and services. There are less than 20 private cars in town.

13. Housing: Village plan, problems with building permits, and history of house demolitions.

The Village plan is restricted to central Mas-ha which is in Area B ; most of the surrounding land is in Area C and permits to build have to be given by the Israeli civil authority, but are always refused.

Salfit is the local administrative authority.

Residents can't build proper buildings because they will be demolished (so, use tin rather than concrete to build with).

Around 20 buildings have been destroyed by the Israelis. Homeowners sometimes demolish their own houses so they won't lose everything (materials can be reused); soldiers often won't allow materials from inside the house to be removed.

There used to be over 70 thriving stalls along the main street until the year 2000 when the intifada started. During the first 15 days of the intifada, the settlers from Tappuah (near Za'tara) and Elqana came into the town and burned down the stalls. They were guarded by Israeli soldiers, who afterwards closed the area and erected barriers. The settlers shot and wounded 20 Palestinian people. (Ahmed Saleh Amer: "When my business was burned, soldiers were across the street, looking; I asked the soldiers to call the fire department, and the soldiers

said to ask Arafat to send a fire truck. At beginning of the intifada, Salfit's fire engines couldn't leave because the roads were all blocked.")

14. Land: total original area, previous confiscations with areas and dates and purpose, current confiscations and how they heard about confiscations? current built up area, agricultural area remaining (best to include maps if possible).

8,800 dunums of land have been confiscated by the Israelis, for the settlements and for the separation wall.

Update: almost 90% of the land is behind the Wall. 98% of agricultural land has been lost. Mas-ha has lost the most land of any village in Salfit.

15. Settlements: when built, population? Settler roads? Any problems with settlers?

The nearby settlements (directly to the west) are Elqana, Ez Efrayim and Sha'are Tiqwa.

In 1981 the Israeli Army declared the nearby land (where Elqana is now; during its construction) as a military area and it declared was closed to the Palestinians for two years.

Instead of using the land for military purposes, the first settlement of Elqana was started. First came caravans, then houses.

In the surrounding area of Rafat and Az Zawiya explosives or mines were put among the olive groves. It was children who were injured when they picked pieces up thinking that they were playthings.

There have been no problems with settlers since the separation wall was built, because there are no relations between the two communities. Every now and then, though, settlers throw garbage and stones on Munira and Hani Amer's house, which is surrounded by the wall (two or three times a month).

16. Past human rights violations: killings, serious injuries, house demolitions, admin detention by army and/or settlers.

20 building demolitions. Serious injuries during first intifada (two injured: both were shot on legs and arms. One has one leg shorter than the other).

Arrests: 2 people arrested and sentenced recently; one got out after six to seven months, one is still in jail (only one). Army comes in every day (before and after dark), driving back and forth. Seldom enter houses or make arrests, though.

17. History of resistance

Prior to first intifada

Everything happened in stages so there was “small resistance”.

First intifada

During the first intifada over 180 people were detained. “They were taken away in busloads.” The reason given was that children had been throwing stones. There was a demonstration on the Day of the Land 31st March 1997 and many other demonstrations against the occupation.

Second intifada

There was big resistance at the beginning, after the damage to the markets, against the settlers. This caused a big reaction from soldiers, who shot on everyone.

Wall

There has been resistance against the wall, through protesting and a tent (“peaceful resistance, al the time”). Demos assisted by North Americans, European, Israeli activists; soldiers responded by shooting and throwing tear-gas canisters. Two or three people were injured by wall near Munira and Hani Amer’s house (one Israeli was seriously injured, with bullet to head?).

“All of Palestine is a big cage; we cannot get through to work.”

18. Recent developments:

Wall:

Will any land be confiscated?

“98% of our land has already been confiscated, what else can they take.”
About 480 dunums of the land was taken for the building of the Wall.

When did the villages receive notices of confiscation?

Three days notice was given before the Wall construction started, during which they had to lodge objections. They went to the Israeli court and some small adjustments were made.

If so, how was this information conveyed to them?

The information was conveyed to the landowners by the DCO. Shop owners were given individual notices by soldiers in Hebrew and Arabic and they brought them to the Mayor.

Status once the wall is built:

Wall is now built around settlements (to west). Planned second stage of Wall (to south) will “kill us all”. “Nothing left; just the houses.”

Issues with permits, gates because of the wall:

As stated before. Soldiers don't like to open the gates.

What will be the loss of income from the wall in shekels?

"Countless; there is no food for people to eat."

How many shekels has the village earned from land per year prior to the wall?

"It is not the loss of the profit, it is the loss of our culture, our history, our land."

19. Contact numbers for village for the media:

The Mayor is the contact. Currently he is working from home while the municipal offices are being built. There will be a new official phone number next month, meanwhile use his mobile phone number: 0544 745 679.

20. Any other relevant information.

Now that they rely entirely on their land for survival, the biggest problem for Mas-ha is lack of income. Also, problem getting to land on other side of Wall during olive harvest. Sometimes settlers also harass farmers (throwing stones and beating them; kick them out, saying "this land is ours"), and sometimes steal the olives before farmers can harvest them. Internationals have been denied access behind the Wall. Farmers can only pass through the gate during the olive harvest, and at no other time of year. Won't open convenient gate, either (at Hani and Munira Amer's house), but gate that's further away, meaning farmers have to walk a long way to get to their land. This year the gate was open (with permits) from October 15th for two to three weeks.

Incident and House Reports from IWPS:

House Report 39 : Arrest at Mas-ha of 46 protestors during a demonstration against the Wall.

Incident Report 70: During non-violent demonstration against the Wall, soldiers shot two protestors, one of whom was hit in both legs causing serious injury.

Incident Report 71: Between Mas-ha and Az Zawiya, soldiers blocked the road all day following a non violent demonstration.

Incident Report 74: Between Mas-ha and Az Zawiya, soldiers detained dozens of people at the checkpoint from 6 P.M. to midnight.