

STONES OF MEMORY

Ein Hanniya

By Paul Turban

Last January, on lands belonging to the Palestinian village of Walajah, near the spring of Ein Hanniya, Israel opened up a new national park. In reality, it is a Christian holy place recalling the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch by Philip, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 8:26-39). In the story, Philip met the eunuch traveling on a road in his chariot, reading the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. The Ethiopian asked Philip to explain the reading; and then, as they passed a spring, the eunuch asked Philip for baptism. "Saint Philip's Spring" commemorates this event.

WATER IN A SCORCHED LAND

Saint Philip's Spring is a little over six miles to the southwest of the Old City of Jerusalem, at the bottom of *Wadi Wuheida*—the "Valley of Roses": a small, rock-filled valley outside Jerusalem. The site is located on the shortest route between the Holy City and Gaza. A small trickle of water that breaks through the surface gathers here and is parceled out into several basins. Until the creation of the national park which now encircles the place with barriers, the villagers of Walajah and Orthodox Jews used to come to scoop up the precious commodity.





“THERE IS SOME WATER HERE!”

The spring of Ein Hanniya is a sacred place for Christians. The Armenians—owners of the site—go there on pilgrimage once a year, as have groups of Ethiopian pilgrims seeking to honor their ancestor in the faith, eunuch of Queen Candace, who was baptized by Philip the deacon. This site does not

claim to be the spring of Saint Philip. The ancient pilgrimage guidebooks also mentioned the spring of *Ein ed-Dirweh*, not far from Hebron located on the other road between Jerusalem and Gaza. A mosque built in the 20th century now makes that location inaccessible for Christians.



A TIME OF HARMONY

A couple of years ago, Palestinians and Israelis swam together here. The basins, located on the Palestinian side of the so-called “Green Line” (the border between Israel and Jordan from 1949 to 1967), served as a pool for the Jewish families who came to refresh themselves alongside the inhabitants of the area. Picnics were celebrated in the open air. But now it’s only a memory. Integrated into the natural park, this territory is now on the Israeli side. The checkpoint which separates it from Jerusalem was even moved in February 2018 in order to place the site on the Israeli side, thus making it inaccessible to the Palestinians. ✚