

Ron Cantor: The Butcher of Ramallah Is Free

The image is seared in my memory. On Oct. 12, 2000, the “Butcher of Ramallah” ran to a window of the police station in order to reveal his blood-stained hands to the bloodthirsty crowd below of about 1,000 people. They erupted in cheers at the sight of his victorious pose. The blood on Abdel Aziz Salha belonged to two Israeli soldiers who made a wrong turn and ended up at a Palestinian Authority roadblock.

Instead of turning the two away, the Palestinian police took them into custody and brought them to the Ramallah police station.

As news spread that two Israelis were at the police station, a murderous mob formed outside. Finally, some of them stormed the building. A news report said, “The Israeli reservists were beaten, stabbed, had their eyes gouged out, and were disemboweled.”

It was at this point that Abdel Aziz Salha became famous—maybe not his name, but definitely his hands. He ran to the window to feed the ravenous multitude.

Unfortunately for Salha, an Italian film caught his celebration on tape. This was no small miracle, as the mob had already destroyed the equipment of other photographers.

Rumors spread that it was Italy’s state television RAI that got the footage, prompting a sickening apology from Riccardo Cristiano, their local correspondent. He made it clear they would never publish footage so damaging to the Palestinian cause and went as far as to congratulate the Palestinians—for what? I can only assume the murdering of two Israelis. Israel temporarily revoked his press pass.

It is not uncommon for reporters to make the most disturbing apologies to the Palestinian Authority. They understand that in Palestine, unlike in Israel, there is no freedom of the press. They could be sent packing in a heartbeat. Naturally, this means there is very little honest reporting coming out of the Palestinian Authority.

Aided by the picture, Israeli authorities captured Salha—who had been in hiding for several months—in 2001, and he confessed to his crimes.

“We were in a craze to see blood,” he was quoted as saying in a story from Dec. 25, 2013. “I entered the room ... I saw an Israeli soldier sprawled on the floor in front of the door. I came closer to him and saw a knife lodged in his back, near his right shoulder. I removed the knife and stabbed him in the back two or three times ... while others in the room continued to kick him.

“I put my hand over his mouth and the other on his shoulder, in order to strangle him.

“I saw that my hands were drenched with blood, and so was my shirt. So I went over to the window and I waved my hands at the people who were in the courtyard.”

Mark Sieger, a photographer who clearly is pro-Palestinian, shared his harrowing account in the *Sunday Telegraph* on Oct. 15, 2000.

“My God, I thought, they’ve killed this guy,” he said. “He was dead, he must have been dead, but they were still beating him, madly kicking his head. They were like animals.

“They were just a few feet in front of me and I could see everything. Instinctively, I reached for my camera. I was composing the picture when I was punched in the face by a Palestinian. Another Palestinian pointed right at me, shouting, ‘No picture, no picture!’—while another guy hit me

in the face and said, 'Give me your film!'

"I tried to get the film out, but they were all grabbing me and one guy just pulled the camera off me and smashed it to the floor. ... I was scared for my life."

Salha was sentenced in Israel to life in prison. We don't have a death penalty here, except for specific acts, such as genocide—but few could argue that Salha deserved to live.

Salha Alive and Free

That's right. You really did just read what you thought you read. He is free! In 2011, the controversial release of more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners took place. A fourth of the prisoners were serving life sentences (i.e., murderers and terrorists). This was done in exchange for the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, who had been imprisoned in Gaza for five years after being kidnapped.

As a part of the deal, Salha was transferred to Gaza. That is where Mohammed Suliman of the Electronic Intifada news site caught up with him. Salha did not express remorse for his actions that day—but neither did he gloat. He sought to justify himself, saying that Israeli actions against Palestinians provoked him. He claimed, "Earlier on that day, one Palestinian from Ramallah was murdered by Israeli settlers. After they had killed him, they cut his ears and threw his body."

The only problem with this story is that it never happened. There is no record of any Palestinian being killed that day by anyone, much less his body being mutilated. I have sent a message to the interviewer asking for corroboration. I am not holding my breath.

This is not to say, Salha did not believe this. It is very common in the Middle East for rumors like this to spread like wildfire in order to provoke a violent response. It is also

possible that he is simply lying to make his gruesome actions understandable to the modern world.

“The night we were released and driven to Gaza City on a road along the sea, it was the first time I saw the sea in my entire life,” he reminisced. “I was awed to see water in such tremendous quantity, and it was the first time I felt truly free.”

While Abdel Aziz Salha enjoys life by the sea in Gaza with his wife, Vadim Nurzhitz and Yossi Avrahami, the two Israeli soldiers Sahla and his band of thugs murdered and mutilated, are still dead.

Ron Cantor is the director of Messiah's Mandate International in Israel, a Messianic ministry dedicated to taking the message of Jesus from Israel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Cantor also travels internationally teaching on the Jewish roots of the New Testament. He serves on the pastoral team of Tiferet Yeshua, a Hebrew-speaking congregation in Tel Aviv. His newest book, Identity Theft, was released April 16. Follow him at @RonSCantor on Twitter.

For the original article, visit .