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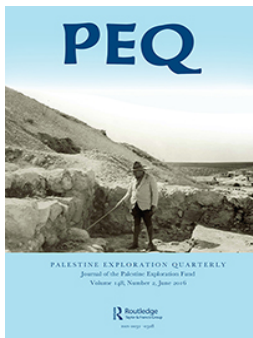
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THE MURDER OF JAMES LESLIE STARKEY NEAR LACHISH

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On 10 January 1938, the British archaeologist James Leslie Starkey was murdered on his way from Lachish to Jerusalem. From that time onwards, the murder has been presented as just one more of the insurgency episodes that were so common in those days. There was, however, a conflict at Lachish with the local landowners regarding the excavation of the site's summit, the expedition's preferred area. An amicable resolution of this conflict was never reached between the two sides, and only legal expropriation of this land by the Mandatory Government of Palestine enabled the excavation of the upper part of the site. The landowners never received full compensation for the expropriated land, undoubtedly a strong motive for revenge.

Keywords: James Leslie Starkey, Olga Tufnell, Tell ed-Duweir, Lachish

1. INTRODUCTION

On 10 January 1938, the British archaeologist James Leslie Starkey was murdered on his way from Lachish to Jerusalem. Starkey, who had studied archaeology with W.M. Flinders Petrie, was the director of the excavation at Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir). The project began in December 1932, and by the time of Starkey's death he had conducted six long excavation seasons, each lasting 6 months (Figs. 1 and 2).

Lachish was a very prominent city in biblical times. The Late Bronze Age Canaanite city is mentioned in several letters sent by the king of Lachish to the Egyptian pharaoh and discovered in the Amarna archive. The Iron Age Judean city is mentioned almost thirty times in the Old Testament. It also features in the annals of the Assyrian king Sennacherib, who took the city during his campaign of 701 BCE; this event is depicted on a large wall relief originally in Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh and now in the British Museum.

A special celebration was planned for the evening of 11 January 1938 to mark the inauguration of the Palestine Archaeological Museum (now the Rockefeller Museum) in Jerusalem. Only VIPs, including His Excellency the High Commissioner for Palestine, were invited to the ceremony, and Starkey was scheduled to give a talk. Starkey left Lachish in the afternoon of 10 January, at the end of the working day. However, he never reached his destination. The political situation of Palestine in 1936–39 was unstable, with the local Arab population in revolt against the British Mandate, the authority that controlled the country from the end of the First World War until 1948. Hundreds of people were killed in countless acts of banditry during these years. The *Palestine Post* newspaper for January 1938 reports on a new incident almost every day, and a British report to the League of Nations gives the following information for the same month:

During the month, particularly in the Jerusalem district where constant attacks involving four Jewish deaths were made on Jewish traffic along the Jerusalem - Jaffa road, sporadic acts of lawlessness persisted

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Fig. 1. Map of the area in 1938, showing the location of Lachish, Beit Jibrin, Hebron and Jerusalem, with the roads connecting them. J. L. Starkey was murdered a few kilometres west of Hebron.

in the form of isolated murders, shooting at the police and military forces, and attacks on Jewish settlements. On the 10th, Mr. J. L. Starkey, the well-known archaeologist, was murdered by a party of armed Arabs on the track leading from Beit Jibrin to Hebron ([UNISPAL Archive 1938](#), 8–9; the spelling ‘Beit Jibrin’ is adopted for the rest of the article).

The official Certificate of Death issued by the Department of Health of the Government of Palestine on 11 January 1938 indicates “bullet wounds of abdomen and chest” as the cause of death (Starkey family archive).

From that time onwards, the murder of James Leslie Starkey has been presented as just one more of the terror episodes that were so common in those days. The official Palestine Exploration Fund website informs us:

‘In January 1938, at the age of 43, Starkey’s career was tragically cut short. His good relations with the workmen and people from the surrounding villages were well known, so it came as a great shock when he was murdered by a group of Arab militants en route to the opening of the new Palestine Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem (<http://www.pef.org.uk/profiles/james-leslie-starkey-1895-1938>).

Detailed descriptions of Starkey’s activities and the murder have recently been published by [Begin \(2000, 92–95\)](#) and [Ussishkin \(2014, 48–56\)](#). Both accepted the above-mentioned version of events. Ussishkin added:

When news of Starkey’s murder became known, the rumour spread that it had been no coincidence, but rather was the result of a feud between him and local sheikhs in the Lachish area. That possibility was even raised in newspaper accounts and remained in many people’s minds for decades thereafter. Looking back, this rumour seems unfounded ([Ussishkin 2014, 51](#)).

Ussishkin, however, did not explain why he adopted the official version. Ussishkin provides some consolation in the way that the event ended:

Another noteworthy angle on Starkey’s murder is the great speed with which the British government’s wheels of justice turned at the time: Starkey was killed on January 10 at dusk. The police set out



Fig. 2. J. L. Starkey and Olga Tufnell with the inscribed jar known as the “Lachish Ewer.”

immediately in a hunt for the perpetrators and arrested two men, one of them wounded. One of these men was tried before a military court on January 19th and the other was tried the next day. They were both sentenced to death and executed on Saturday, January 22—that is, less than two weeks from the day of the murder and 24 hours after their trial! (Ussishkin 2014, 51–52).

When I read the unpublished expedition reports and the Lachish files of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine, a rather different picture emerged from them. There was a conflict with the local landowners regarding the excavation of the site’s summit, the expedition’s preferred area. An amicable resolution of this conflict was never reached between the two sides, and only legal expropriation of this land by the Mandatory Government of Palestine enabled the excavation of the upper part of the site.

Starkey’s excavation at Lachish was one of the most significant archaeological projects in Palestine in the period between the First and Second World Wars. The importance of his work was stressed in the various obituaries published after his death (Albright 1938; Murray 1938; Petrie 1938; Torczyner 1938; Tufnell 1938; Vincent 1937; Glueck 1939, 146–47); further information and evaluation of his work can be found in later publications (Tufnell 1950, 1985; Begin 2000, 13–62; Ussishkin 2014, 31–56).

2. ORGANISING THE EXCAVATION AREAS AT LACHISH

In the early 1930s, Tel Lachish was just one more hill in its area and its land was cultivated by local farmers, who lived in the nearby village of Qubeibeh. Since the land was privately owned, the expedition had to obtain permission from the landowners to access the areas that they wished to excavate. The land was either leased for a specific time — a season or a few years — or simply purchased by the expedition. The landowners were compensated in two ways: financially and by employment for themselves and members of their family by the expedition.

The land of Tel Lachish and its immediate vicinity can be divided into three different categories:

1. Land around the tel. This was cultivated by the local farmers and was of interest to the expedition for research on the site's ancient cemeteries. In addition, these areas were needed for various logistical purposes, such as the expedition's camp and dumps for the excavation sediments. Areas earmarked for dumps were first excavated down to virgin soil or natural bedrock and then prepared for dumping; many graves, as well as the famous Late Bronze Age "Fosse Temple," were excavated in this way. In these areas, a system of retaining walls was first constructed. The excavated sediments were then dumped in horizontal layers, creating a level surface. Consequently, when the excavations came to an end, these areas could once again be used for farming. As there was plenty of land available all around the site, no single landowner had a monopoly. The expedition did not have any specific priority here and the excavation areas were chosen for ad hoc reasons.
2. The slopes of the tel. These are rather steep and have little value for agriculture. As a result, it was relatively easy for the expedition to lease or purchase areas of the slopes from the local landowners.
3. The summit of the tel. This was the most desirable area for excavation and the main priority of the expedition. This fact was apparently very clear to the landowners, and the expedition found it impossible to reach agreement with them. At the highest point of the tel stood the ruins of a large stone complex that ruled out agricultural use, so the expedition was able to conduct limited work there for some time. However, most of the tel was cultivated, as can be seen in photographs taken by the expedition at the time (Fig. 3).

Starkey sent a typed report every 2 weeks to Sir Henry Wellcome in London, who sponsored the project. The report usually contained five to eight pages and was sometimes accompanied by a few black and white photographs. As each excavation season usually lasted for 6 months, about twelve such reports were sent every year. Two copies of these reports exist in London: one is kept by the Department of the Middle East at the British Museum and the other by the Wellcome Trust. The reports were not only devoted to scientific aspects of the excavations but also gave detailed accounts of various other matters, such as tactical and logistical issues. In this way we can follow the daily difficulties of the expedition and how various problems arose and were solved. As the reports record the events in their original order and in a clear manner, I quote relevant passages verbatim. If there is a need to clarify a term, I add my remark in square brackets. In addition, I have standardised as £ sterling the various terms for the Palestinian pound/lira.

In his first report, covering 1–14 December 1932, Starkey wrote about his first day at Lachish on 20 September earlier that year:



Fig. 3. A cultivated plot on the summit of Tel Lachish. Note the massive podium of the Iron Age palace in the background.

At midday we reached Duweir, and I had a conference with Mr. Harding and settled on the site for the camp building, after making a general survey which included some discussion with local landowners. They expressed great pleasure in offering us a piece of land, which was part of an upper terrace of the local limestone outcrop, adjoining the Tell to the south (Starkey 1932–33, 1).

Gerald Lankester Harding was a staff member of the expedition and later become the head of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. Starkey left for Jerusalem on the same day to proceed with the excavation's logistics and Harding stayed at Lachish to start building the expedition house. When Starkey returned to Lachish 2 weeks later, on 2 October, he was surprised to see that "Mr. Harding had been unable to proceed with building operations, owing to the difficulties that had arisen with the landowners and inhabitants of the neighbouring village of Kubeibe" (Starkey 1932–33, 1).

With the involvement of the Hebron District Officer, Mr Abdullah Effendi Kardus, the difficulty was overcome. The officer enlightened the locals about the expedition:

He hailed us as their benefactors and said we should not be taking their land away, but only bringing more money into the district. He also explained that of course we should be employing them in the work, but we should have to bring into the district a number of skilled workers to teach them our aims and methods. Just as a school must have good teachers, so must a dig have experienced workers. I promised the authorities that I should only import trained labour and that all unskilled workers would be employed from the neighbouring fellaheen [farmers] and Arabs (Starkey 1932–33, 2).

Starkey later reported: "I have arranged with landowners that the ground adjoining the base of the great bastion to the south of the west side of the city, which undoubtedly held the constructions of the city gate, with a view to examining its massive ruin this season, shall be left

unploughed” (Starkey 1932–33, 5). In the second report of that year, he wrote about 23 December:

We moved our camp of native workers onto new ground in accordance with our promise given to the local landowners on whose land they had been camping, as this was now required for ploughing before sowing the summer crops. As a good deal of unwillingness had been shown by the local fellaheen landowners and as I did not want to bring any undue pressure to bear, I accepted the readiness of the neighbouring Arab landowners to use a new camping site in their area (Starkey 1932–33, 7).

From this report, it is clear that the expedition had to reorganise the local workers’ camp just 3 weeks or so after it was first established. Apparently a new payment was requested as well.

In the report for 16–31 January 1933, Starkey wrote about the north-eastern side of Tel Lachish:

...having concluded a satisfactory agreement with the freeholders to purchase this enclosed plantation for a sum of £4 plus 10 Pt [piastres] each for the ten existing fig trees and a promise to employ the owners on any work done on this region...I deemed the purchase of the land necessary, as this area is the best position for the dumping of debris from any work connected with the clearance of the N.E. quarter of the city. Although the tail of the dump would be terraced and available for cultivation the actual slope of the mound at this point would never be free for cultivation as long as our discharge shoots were working at the dump head. This being the case we should constantly be having either to compensate the landlords annually against varying crops or we should be having constant argument and trouble. This expenditure of five pounds will settle the matter once and for all. We have promised that the present freeholder should have first refusal to purchase from us, when we no longer need the land, for the purchase price (Starkey 1932–33, 17).

Maintaining good relations with the landowners was important, as emerges from the report for 1–15 February 1933: “On our return that evening we paid our second official visit to the village and I am now glad to report that our relations with the landowners are of a most cordial nature” (Starkey 1932–33, 27). Such visits, however, were not mentioned again in the reports. In the last report of the first season, covering 15–30 April 1933, Starkey reports:

We have arranged with the owners of the land on which the camp premises have been built to rent this area for a period of five years, for an annual rental...We are paying compensation for the crops sown on the area of the late residency and the adjoining plots on which we have temporarily placed our excavation rubbish (Starkey 1932–33, 49–50).

3. THE LANDOWNERS OF THE SUMMIT OF TEL LACHISH

While it was relatively simple to negotiate with the owners of land around the tel and on its slopes, the landowners of the summit were very stubborn, turning down any arrangement suggested by the expedition. In the reports of the second season (1933–34), the issue is mentioned several times. Just before the excavation season started, the report states:

On 14 November, Abdulla Khardus Effendi, District Officer, Hebron called on us by arrangement and made on our behalf a small presentation to the mayor of the village and his late associate in this office, conveying at the same time our appreciation of what these two local dignitaries had done to help us through our difficult initial season at the Tell. A third presentation was made by Arif el Arif, governor of Beersheba to the sheykh of the Amorine tribe of Bedawy, Sheykh Suliman el Ajjulyn.

Abdulla Khardus spoke in strong terms to the assembled villagers, reiterating his remarks of last season that we were here with the permission and authority of the government and that the inhabitants of the district should do all in their power to assist us.

Should he receive word from us that anyone had been hindering us or causing trouble he warned them that they would be severely punished. He reminded them of the power which we had in our concession to

expropriate land if we failed to make an equitable arrangement with those who had the right of surface cultivation, but he made it clear to them that we did not wish to exercise this right, as long as it was at all possible to make an alternative settlement, based upon fair compensation for a lost crop (Starkey 1933–34, 2–3).

In the report for 16–31 December 1933, we are informed: “The line of the lower defence wall has now been completely traced” (Starkey 1933–34, 16). It is clear that the various activities around the tel are about to be closed down. Indeed, some work was allowed for excavating the large podium at the top of the site, and an impressive Persian period administrative palace had been uncovered. This operation, however, was stopped after a while. For the excavation of the summit of Lachish Starkey had already arranged a sophisticated system for evacuating the excavation sediments, including eight tipping wagons that were already at the expedition camp and a cargo of rails that was expected to arrive at the port of Jaffa in a few weeks (Starkey 1933–34, 17). The need to arrive at an agreement for excavating the tel itself was becoming increasingly urgent. Later in the same report, further negotiations with landowners are mentioned:

We are pleased to report that various landowners who are interested in the cultivation rights of the top surface of the Tell, have approached us with a view to purchasing their land outright at the rate of £2 per dunam (the surface of the Tell totals 81 dunam, one dunam being 919 square metres).

This action on their part has been accelerated by the delay on our side in starting work on the Tell, due of course to the non-arrival of the rails. They are all most anxious to take some action to get employment guaranteed for the men and children of their families. It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good (Starkey 1933–34, 18).

In the report for the period of 1–14 January 1934, Starkey reported on the progress of the work around the tel: “The men who had completed the tracing of the outer fortifications are now concentrated on the final clearance of the upper levels of the mound, at the N.W. corner and have exposed the five buttresses down to their foundations” (Starkey 1933–34, 22). Further information is given regarding access to the tel:

During the last fortnight negotiations with the various landowners of the tell have proceeded and up to the moment we have secured about three quarters of the top surface by agreement, but negotiations for the remaining plots are still continuing, and you can be assured that we are using our best diplomacy to secure the remaining quarter, so that the cost of expropriation may be obviated (Starkey 1933–34, 24).

Starkey was losing time, and instead of excavating the core of the site (the ancient city), he had spent much time on excavating the slopes and the areas around the tel. In the report for 1–14 March, Starkey reported: “Our work on the lower slopes now being completed [...]” (Starkey 1933–34, 48). Indeed, most satisfactory results had been obtained from these areas. First, the Late Bronze Age Fosse Temple had been uncovered, yielding stratified Egyptian, Canaanite, Cypriot and Mycenaean material. Second, gates of the Persian period and Iron Age had been unearthed on the western side of the tel. Later, during the third excavation season of 1935, the famous Lachish Letters, Hebrew inscriptions from the last days of the Kingdom of Judah, would be found here. However, time was passing and the expedition found itself still clearing large parts of the slopes and various areas around the tel.

Later, Tufnell described and explained these activities as a planned strategy:

The investigation was begun early in the programme of work in order to delimit the site. It was hoped to establish the date of the defence system and to locate the main gateway and any postern entrances. With these ends in view, work was begun in 1932 on the north-east side of the mound (Tufnell 1953, 88).

My impression, however, is that encircling the entire site was an ad hoc tactic rather than a planned strategy. As rightly observed by Ussishkin (2014, 38): “Enormous effort was invested in this work, but in fact it contributed almost nothing to the understanding of the tell and its remains.” Starkey was apparently aware of the problem, but as the expedition had not received the landowners’ permission to work on the summit, he was simply in a desperate situation.

From the report for 15–31 January 1934, it seems that the purchase of the land of the tell had been completed:

I am pleased to report that negotiations have been concluded with all the landowners of the Tell and the agreements which we hold, consign to us the freehold rights of the whole area of the top surface, i.e. 81.52 dunams (about 18 acres) for the sum of £163.040. I notified them that if they were not prepared to come to an amicable settlement before the end of the month, we should take the necessary proceedings to expropriate the land, and they would automatically lose the privilege which they could otherwise exercise as provided in clause 8 of the terms of the agreement, which forms the basis of our tendered offer. The attached plan of the top of the mound shows the various plots purchased, and is a copy of the plan which is attached to each agreement, hence the necessity of colouring in brilliant tints. The landowners have gone away as much pleased with the map as with the cash deposit they have received on account [this map is presented here as Fig. 4].

The fact that the landowners had divided the Tell into three main divisions permanently, one third for each of the three families concerned, helped the business forward considerably. The south-east third marked in red in the map was offered to us as one lot, by the family of which the Muktar is the head. The other two sections, as will be seen by the sub-divisions were not so unanimous in their desires, the southern section, green, yellow, black, purple showed much hesitations. It is interesting to note the view they took with regard to the area of the citadel, which was not included in the original division, as all parties wanted to retain some hold on the area that they thought we had most interest in, and it required a good deal of manoeuvring to get them to divide specifically according to their shares. Of course up to now, the annual allocation of plots had proceeded in rotation as the value of the area for cultivation varies considerably according to the amount of stones on the site. It is only now left to us to deal with the land registry (Starkey 1933–34, 30–31).

The haggling over the land of Tel Lachish, however, had not yet ended, as is evident a month later from a letter dated 27 February 1934, sent by Starkey to the Director of the Department of Antiquities:

As you are aware we are now concluding our second season at Tell Duweir under your licence No. 219 and so far we have been unable to come to a satisfactory arrangement with regard to taking over the agricultural rights of the landowners of the neighbouring village of Qubeibeh.

We have recently endeavoured to make an agreement to purchase, which they have repudiated despite the fact that they received half the purchase money and only yesterday we were informed that they would not allow any soil to be removed from the top of the Tell.

The only constructive proposal they have made is that they should mortgage the land to us, but the Expedition could not entertain any such suggestion.

May I ask if you could institute the necessary application for the expropriation of the area concerned; naturally it is understood that the compensation awarded would be paid by the Expedition.

...The matter is an urgent one, as we had planned to terminate our season with the clearance of an area on the Tell and it would therefore be necessary for some action to be taken immediately if we are to carry out this part of our programme.

Two points become clear from this letter. First, although Starkey had agreed to pay the original asking price for the land and had even paid half of the requested sum in advance, the landowners were still dissatisfied. They apparently assumed that the land was worth much

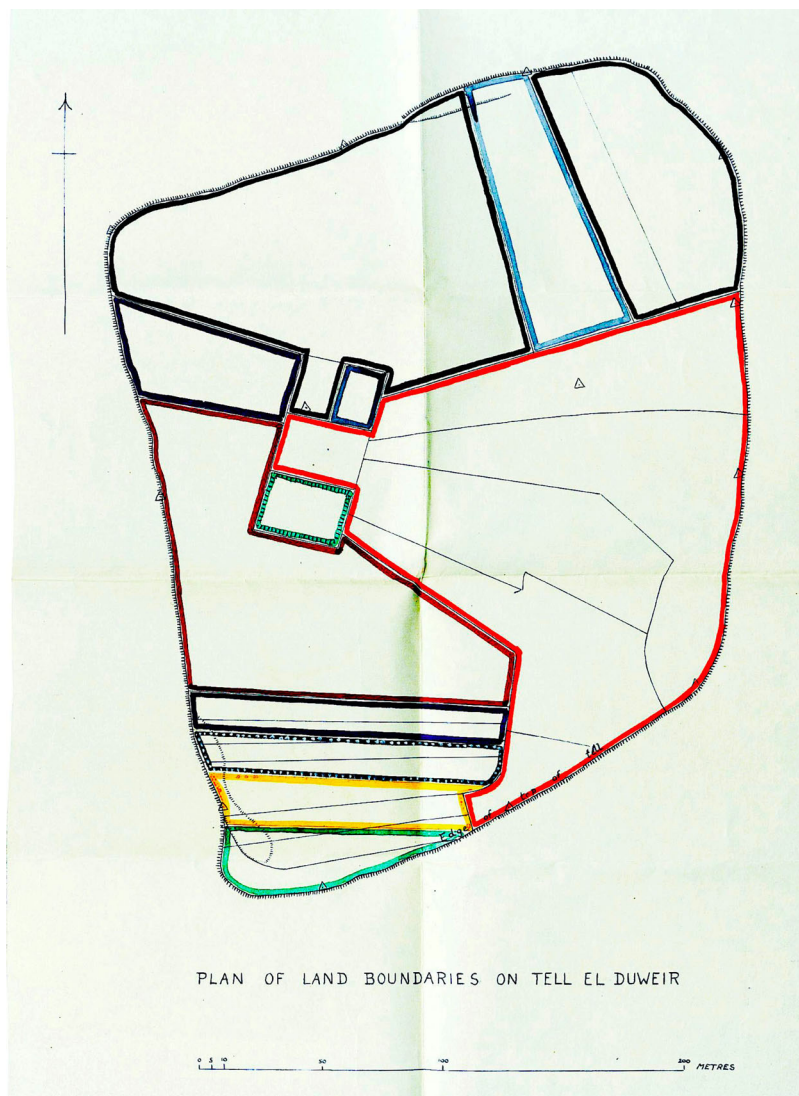


Fig. 4. Plan of land boundaries on Tell ed-Duweir. Original map sent by J. L. Starkey with his report of 15–31 January 1934.

more than the amount they had asked. The second point is a clear change in Starkey's policy. A British expedition in an area under British control was more powerful than a few greedy local landowners in a remote village. The process had moved on to imposed legal action, and the expropriation of the land, which had been mentioned from time to time, had been officially requested.

Much information on the expropriation is given in various reports written by Starkey. The archive of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine, now kept by the Israel Antiquities Authority at the Rockefeller Museum, contains further information on the issue. The documents in

this archive are open to the public on the Israel Antiquities Authority website. More than thirty letters exchanged between the expedition, the Department of Antiquities, the Department of Lands and the Attorney General reveal the exact process step by step. Of special interest is a paragraph in the report for 15–31 March: “Mr. Horton (Land Department) is familiar with our requirements and most sympathetic, he has recently carried out the expropriation of the remaining portion of Megiddo for Professor Breasted on behalf of the Oriental Institute of Chicago” (Starkey 1933–34, 60–61). As far as I know, the expropriation of land in archaeological sites to enable scientific work during the British Mandate has never been discussed in scholarly publication. In fact, this legal action was used in at least two sites: Lachish and Megiddo.

On 12 April 1934, an official declaration was published in the *Palestine Gazette* No. 433:

I, Lieutenant-General, Sir Arthur Grenfell Wauchoppe, High Commissioner for Palestine, hereby certify that the excavation for antiquities on a plot of land at Tel El Duweir, in the Sub-District of Hebron, is an undertaking of a public nature within the meaning of the Expropriation of Land Ordinances, 1926–1932, and the Antiquities Ordinance, 1929. A plan of the site is deposited at the offices of the Director, Department of Antiquities, Jerusalem, the District officer, Hebron and the Director of Lands.

In the final report of the season for the period 1–15 June 1934, in fact written in London, Starkey wrote:

It appears that the landowners had received “Notices to treat” from the Lands Department, in consequence of the expropriation of the Tell, and had gone in a body to appeal to the District Officer, Hebron, who, he informs me, advised them to go on to Jerusalem. This news makes us hopeful that things are going forward and will be settled before our return (Starkey 1933–34, 77).

On 11 June 1934, an official letter was sent to the excavation team from the Department of Antiquities, informing them that as from 20 June they could access Tel Lachish. All in all the legal process had taken its time and the expropriation did not affect the 1933–34 excavation season. Only in the third excavation season (1934–35) was the expedition able to work on the summit of Tel Lachish. The report of the third excavation season for 3–17 November 1934 states that Mr Harding, who had arrived earlier in Palestine to organise equipment and train workers in Gaza, did not go directly to Lachish:

On the 3rd October he left for Jerusalem, as it was considered advisable that he should be acquainted with the position in regard to the expropriation of the Tell before meeting the local landowners at camp. He called at the Department of Antiquities and met the Director, from whom he learnt that the Inspector had been down to the Tell the previous day to formally receive the land on behalf of the Government. All the interested parties were prepared to hand it over voluntarily with the exception of one person (Starkey 1934–35, 1).

In his report for 1–15 December 1934, Starkey states:

I received a letter dated December 4th from Director of Antiquities, informing me that the Director of Lands asked to be furnished with the sum of £210, to meet the claims which are now being filed by the landowners. This promises, I hope, the approach of a final settlement, nevertheless I anticipate some further obstacles, over which our District Officer, Abdulla Kardus, may not be very helpful. The Director of Lands is taking a firm stand and is not to be dictated to from this quarter. Anyway it is not our business now, as the final settlement is a Government matter (Starkey 1934–35, 15).

Further information is given in the report for 1–15 January 1935:

In accordance with the request made by the Director of Antiquities for the sum of £250 to meet the expected claims by the landowners, I have forwarded a cheque for this sum to Mr. E.T. Richmond. I

hope to be able to report here that some of the early claims have been settled, but I fear I shall not be privileged to live long enough to see the end of this transaction (Starkey 1934–35, 30).

The last mention of the expropriation for that season can be found in the report for 16–31 January 1935: “I have received a receipt for £210 from the Treasury. Jerusalem forwarded them to meet the expected claims of our villagers, but I have not yet heard of any individual settlement” (Starkey 1934–35, 37).

A year later, in the fourth excavation season (1 November 1935 to 30 April 1936), the issue of the expropriation occupied little attention. It was mentioned only once, and not mentioned again in future seasons. The report for 16–30 November 1935 states:

I am glad to say that several locals have now applied to the Lands Department to complete the sale of their share of the expropriated area. These formalities have to be carried out by the claimants before the Government makes payment. It is all a long drawn-out business but I hope to be able to report further progress later (Starkey 1934–35, 9).

From now on the expedition was busy with regular scientific matters and great progress was made in every excavated area.

4. EXCAVATIONS DURING THE ARAB REVOLT

Towards the end of the fourth season, the political situations in Palestine became unstable. The local Arab population revolted against the British Mandate and the expedition report for 16–30 April 1936, the last report for the fourth excavation season, reflects the situation under the title “Palestine Disorders.” Starkey wrote:

The various unfortunate episodes that have taken place in and about Jerusalem and Jaffa, culminating in an Arab transportation strike, have not so far affected the morale of our district. On the 24th the District Superintendent of Police Hebron, sent us a message inquiring as to our welfare, and he reported that his district was well under control.

That night I went to Hebron and saw him about 7.30 p.m. where he was standing by for emergencies with Abdulla Kardus Effendi and the Medical Officer. In my continued journey to Jerusalem I found the main road deserted. Jerusalem was in a general state of tension, everybody expected the worse to happen the following day, as it was Friday, the Moslem Sabbath. The crowds at the Mosque of Omar fortunately had not been excited to acts of violence, and immediately there was a general feeling of relief. The only concerted action on the part of the Arab masses has been to force non-Jewish shopkeepers to close down, and all Arab traffic is kept off the roads by liberal distribution of nails, and the slashing of tyres (Starkey 1935–36, 61).

The unstable political situation delayed the beginning of the fifth excavation season, which lasted for only 5 months, from 1 December 1936 to 30 April 1937. Despite the political unrest in many parts of Palestine, the area of Lachish was quite remote from either British military camps or Jewish settlements. The expedition concentrated its efforts on scientific matters. In the same way, most of the local populations were probably concentrating on their daily work, either employed by the expedition or occupied with seasonal agricultural tasks.

On the night of 5 October 1936, during the intermission between the fourth and the fifth excavation seasons, the expedition camp was damaged. This event is not documented in the expedition reports, as it took place between seasons. A half-page police report, dated 7 October 1936 and kept in the archive of the Department of Antiquities, states:

Police Beit Jibrin report that Diab Basham, ghaffir [unarmed guard] at Tell ed Duweir reports to them that on the night of October 5/6 a band of 20 armed men attacked the camp at 10 p.m. The band held up the ghaffirs and made them hand over the keys of the petrol store. They tied the ghaffirs up and put them together in one room. The room was searched and three watches and £2.135 stolen. Before leaving they

stated that they would burn the camp on their next visit. Police inspector Beit Jibrin has proceeded to the scene but has not reported.

A three-page letter dated 8 October 1936 and kept in the archive of the Department of Antiquities describes the event in a more detailed manner. It was summarised in a short telegram sent by the Department of Antiquities in Jerusalem to Starkey in London on the same day: "Camp raided Monday night. Damage negligible but repetition feared. Permanent government guard unavailable. Police state could provide your expense minimum six armed guards three pounds each monthly plus approximately fifty pounds purchase shotguns. Do you agree?" Starkey responded in a telegram on the next day, 9 October: "Agree police appointed guards with guns. Request guards are not selected from Qubeibeh village and that expedition guards remain unarmed."

The sixth and last excavation season started on November 1937. Mrs. Starkey and the children, who had accompanied Starkey in the previous seasons, remained in England. In this season Starkey grew a beard, probably to save the trouble of shaving each day.

Starkey's first report, for 15–30 November 1937, starts with a pastoral description of his journey from Qantara, a port city on the Suez Canal in Egypt, to Gaza, but soon relates to the political situation of the time: "the telephone wires connecting Gaza with Qantara had been cut, and the authorities feared that the line had been mined, so that the IIIrd class had been put in the front of the train and the Ist class behind" (Starkey and Inge 1937–38, 1). The last field report sent by Starkey relates to 16–31 December 1937. No security concerns are mentioned here. The *Palestine Post*, however, stated after Starkey's assassination: "It is reported that, some time last month, shots were fired at a car belonging to the expedition as it was passing Solomon's Pools. The road had also been barricaded but the car crashed through the obstruction safely" (12 January 1938, front page; see also the letter of Bonney Holbrook in Appendix 2).

The next field report relates to 1–31 January 1938, and at its end it is indicated that: "The Third Report was delayed, as the original was stolen at the time of the Director's death, so that this Fourth Report covers the whole month of January" (Starkey and Inge 1937–38, 25). From this report onwards, there is always a section devoted to security aspects.

The report for 1–15 February states:

On arrival in Jerusalem, I [Charles Inge] got in touch with the District Commissioner, Keith Roachs, and I visited him in his office the next morning. He showed me the Police Dossier concerning the murder of Mr. Starkey; the Police are still actively on the trail of the murderers, but there is no fresh information of apparent value, and there is nothing to connect the crime with local politics in this direction (Starkey and Inge 1937–38, 26).

The report for 1–15 February 1938 conveys additional information on the murder: "The cheque for £500 from Sir Charles Marston, which Mr. Starkey was carrying at the time of his death was stolen by the murderers, but this sum has been replaced and credited to a new account in Barclays, Jerusalem, known as C.H. Inge Lachish Account" (Starkey and Inge 1937–38, 32).

The report for 16–28 February 1938 relates further to security matters:

The position of Tell Duweir has continued to be absolutely quiet, and the district still shows no signs of being affected by reports from other parts. Miss Tufnell's clinic is still visited by people from villages within a radius of ten miles, which indicates far spread recognition of the beneficence of our work.

The relations of the Police guard here with ourselves and with the village of Qubeibeh continue to be excellent. They patrol the camp premises at night, and seem to be a reliable body of men (Starkey and Inge 1937–38, 33).

From the last paragraph we learn that after the murder of Starkey a special police station had been set up at Lachish.

5. THE EVENTS OF 10 JANUARY 1938

Starkey travelled to Jerusalem by himself. As no other members of the expedition were travelling with him, they could only tell about his last day at Lachish. According to a letter sent on 24 January 1938 by Bonney Holbrook:

Starks left camp on the 10th at 4:15 p.m. with only the driver of the car. I went in and looked at the time because I was worried about him leaving so late. Everyone, time and again, had tried to make him travel well before sunset, and the driver arrived early for that purpose (see Appendix 2).

A more poetic description was published by Tufnell (1938, 80): "On 10 January, J. L. Starkey left the camp house at Duweir to attend the opening of the Palestine Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem. He went off cheerfully and the encounter with armed bandits just outside Hebron was so sudden that he cannot have realized what was happening."

The news of Starkey's assassination was officially released by the government Press Bureau that night and was broadcast for the first time in the 9 p.m. radio news. N.H. Torczyner, the scholar who deciphered and published the Lachish Letters, reported that Starkey telephoned him that day and arranged to meet him that afternoon, although he never arrived.

Olga Tufnell's letter to her mother, dated 12 January 1938, now kept at the Palestine Exploration Fund offices in London, tells how the bad news reached the expedition:

The first we knew was when the Gaza Police rang to say he had been slightly shot in the leg. That was on Tuesday morning—shortly after Gerald arrived for as luck would have it, he, like Starks, had also to be in Jerusalem for the opening of the new Museum. It was decided that work should go on as usual with Charles in charge and that Gerald and I should do the Jerusalem—London end. We got up by 11.30 and he put calls through to Trustees and Marston and we tracked down Sir Robert [Mond] in Cairo. So that by the evening we knew that each was personally in favour of continuation to the end of the season, as we feel is essential. It is no longer a personal matter. It is something we must do, not only for Starks' memory but for the morale and peace of south Palestine.

It happened on the bend of the road 3 Km out of Hebron just where you turn back to look at the best view in the country. There is little doubt that the hold-up was the work of the notorious bandit whom everyone has been out to catch for months, for repeated crimes of a similar nature. So you can put your mind at rest that there is anything personal about it, it would have happened to any non-Moslem travelling on that road so late.

Starkey was buried on the day after the assassination, on 11 January, in the Mount Zion Protestant cemetery. According to the report in the *Palestine Post* (12 January 1938, front page), hundreds of people participated in the funeral, including some of the most important figures of the British administration as well as the archaeological community. The inauguration of the Palestine Archaeological Museum was postponed to the next day, after the funeral.

I do not have the official text of the Press Bureau, but parts are cited by the *Palestine Post* on 11 January

About 5 p.m. this afternoon a band of armed Arabs held up a motorcar in which Mr. J. L. Starkey was travelling from Hebron to Tell edDuweir on the Beit Jibrin track. They forced Mr. Starkey to alight and shot him dead. Mr. Starkey was a British archaeologist engaged in excavations at Tell edDuweir the ancient Lachish.

Similar texts were published in Hebrew in the Jewish daily newspapers *Davar* and *HaAretz* on 11 January 1938. Each newspaper, however, gave a somewhat different account of the event.

The *Palestine Post* gave the following headline on the front page in large letters: "Murder of British Archaeologist. J.L. Starkey killed in cold blood. Discoverer of 'Lachish Letters' shot by Arabs". The report goes on to say:

Mr. John Llewellyn Starkey, one of the most distinguished among archaeologists working in Palestine, was shot and killed at 5 o'clock yesterday afternoon by a gang of Arab brigands on the Beit Jibrin track, north-west of Hebron. Mr. Starkey, who was 50 years old was the director of the field expedition of the Wellcome Research Foundation at Tell ed Duweir, the site of ancient Lachish, where some three years ago he had made the discovery of inscribed tablets dating from the period of Jeremiah.

Ordered to Alight: Mr. Starkey was on his way from Tell ed Duweir to Jerusalem, where he had intended to be present today at a preview arranged at the Palestinian Archaeological Museum. The High Commissioner was expected to attend the preview, which has now been cancelled. The car in which he was travelling was on the Beit Jibrin track some two kilometres from the main Hebron-Jerusalem highway when it was stopped by a band of armed Arabs. The driver was questioned and, it is said, Mr. Starkey was asked who he was. He answered that he was British. He was then ordered to leave the car and the driver was told to drive on to Hebron. Mr. Starkey was made to march on. As the driver made off, he heard two shots and, turning his head, saw the archaeologist fall. According to one report there were two of Mr. Starkey's Arab assistants in the car, but they were spared. The driver went on to Hebron, where he informed the police.

A large party of constables, later reinforced by troops, set out for the scene where they found the body of Mr. Starkey on the track. He had been shot twice in the back...

Mr. Starkey leaves a widow and three children who, it is believed, are at present in England. The body was brought to Jerusalem last night by ambulance and the funeral is to take place today at 2.30 at the Protestant Cemetery on Mt. Zion. Wreaths may be sent to the Government Hospital before 1.30 (*Palestine Post* 11 January 1938, front page).

The following editorial was also published:

Mr. Starkey was a friend of the Arab people. He knew their language, sympathised with the lot of the fellah, and was himself an employer of many Arabs. But terrorism, once allowed to prevail, is blind to the interests it is supposed to serve, and its bullet hits friend as cruelly as its alleged opponent. In one sense the murder of the Director of the Wellcome Expedition typifies the struggle between civilisation and primitive savagery of which we have experienced so many unfortunate examples recently (*Palestine Post* 11 January 1938, 3).

On the next day, additional information was presented by this newspaper:

Police dogs were brought to the scene of the murder of Mr. Starkey, some two or three kilometres west of the Hebron-Jerusalem road on the Beit Jibrin track, at dawn yesterday morning and took up a trail that led them across the hills in the direction of the coast. Detachments of the Palestine Police scoured the area from an early hour. It was not known, by a late hour last night, what the results of the search had been. The Arabic press reports that a large detachment of British police, fully armed and equipped with Lewis-guns, proceeded to the scene of the murder. Many villagers are reported to have been arrested. Major Alan Saunders, Inspector-General of Police, and Mr. E. Keith Roach, the District Commissioner, were on the scene at an early hour yesterday.

Mr. Starkey was not robbed nor was the body removed until the arrival of the police from Hebron who were notified by the driver.

On Intimate Terms. A particularly tragic aspect of the murder is that Mr. Starkey had always been on the best of terms with the Arab peasantry in the district, and that during the past five years he had engaged hundreds of them in the diggings, thus pouring thousands of pounds into the district in the form of wages. He was also able to converse fluently in Arabic and was a keen student of Arab folklore and customs (*Palestine Post* 12 January 1938, front page).

The Hebrew daily newspaper *Davar* gave the same basic information. Starkey was travelling with two Arab assistants, there was a conversation between Starkey and his murderers, and the assassination took place 4 km from Hebron, near a place called “Beer el Hagar.” In an attempt to locate the place called “Beer el Hagar” I looked at relevant maps of the Hebron area from the 1930s, as well as more recent ones, and could find no such place. There is, however, a place called “Beer Abu Kharaza” about 4 km west of the junction where the Beit Jibrin road meets the main Hebron-Jerusalem road. This may be the location of the murder, if there was an error in the translation of the Arabic name to Hebrew or a printing error.

New details were added by the Hebrew newspaper *Davar* the next day. According to the paper’s sources, Starkey’s body had been photographed by the Red Cross and the body had been moved first to Hebron and the next morning to Jerusalem. The attackers’ conversation with the taxi driver and Starkey is given in a fairly detailed manner; however, it is not clear if indeed the reporter interviewed the driver. There were eight to ten members in the group of attackers, and Starkey was shot numerous times; it is reported that eleven bullets were found in his body. The body was looted and the murderers took Starkey’s hat, walking stick, suitcase and watch (12 January 1938, front page).

The Hebrew daily newspaper *HaAretz* published additional details of the case in the days immediately following the assassination. In the morning regular edition, it was reported that the police refuted rumours that Starkey’s body had been mutilated (12 January 1938, front page). In the evening edition of that day, it was reported that Starkey’s skull was found broken, the murder had been executed with “needless cruelty,” the crime scene was terrifying and the body was not taken for post-mortem examination, as was the usual procedure in such cases (12 January 1938, front page of evening edition). The Palestinian Arab newspapers of the time are also relevant to this entire affair. However, as I do not read Arabic, this aspect has to await further study.

Two reports on Starkey’s murder were sent by Charles Inge and Olga Tufnell from Lachish to London, entitled “Extra-ordinary Report I and II.” In the Wellcome Trust archive, I found only the second of them, written on 31 January 1938, 20 days after the murder (see below, Appendix 1). This seems to me the most accurate report that was written at the time. The driver’s testimony is the major issue here, as he was the only eye-witness to the event. It is not clear from the report whether Charles Inge and Olga Tufnell spoke with him directly or merely quoted what they had heard from the police. In any case, they wrote in the first section: “Many conflicting stories appear to have been told, even by the driver of the car himself.” In any case, a most pertinent part of the driver’s testimony is the dialogue between the murderers and their victim.

When all the relevant information about Starkey’s murder is analysed, several problems become apparent:

1. The Press Bureau stated that Starkey was travelling from Jerusalem to Lachish, when in fact he was travelling in the opposite direction.
2. It was stated that he was travelling with two Arab assistants. This is strange, as Starkey needed assistance in the excavations, not in Jerusalem. If he was taking two additional persons with him, he would need to organise room and board for them in Jerusalem. This does not seem likely to me.
3. The taxi driver, the only eye-witness, gave conflicting testimonies according to Inge and Tufnell.
4. It was stated in the report that the taxi driver and Starkey talked with the murderers. In such terror attacks the victims were usually shot with no questions asked.

5. It was first reported that Starkey was shot twice in the back. *Davar*'s information was that eleven bullets were found in the body. Further, what details led *HaAretz* to report that the murder had been carried out with "needless cruelty"?
6. Why was the taxi driver immediately allowed by the attackers to drive away? With an eye-witness escaping by car, the police would surely have been notified within a very short time and the murderers may not have had time to escape. It would seem more logical that they would force the driver to make his escape to Hebron on foot.
7. Some newspapers reported that no looting of either Starkey's personal possessions or the driver's was conducted. *Davar* and the expedition field reports, however, indicate some theft took place. Why were Starkey's hat and walking stick reportedly taken?
8. Why were there rumours that Starkey's body had been mutilated?
9. Why was the body not taken for post-mortem examination, as was the usual procedure in such cases?
10. It was reported that the taxi driver was a Christian Arab, but this person completely disappeared in the published proceedings and never resurfaced during subsequent investigations. He was not mentioned by name in any source.

Despite these inconsistencies, the entire case was presented as an act of banditry organised by local bandits as part of the Arab revolt. Various interpretations of the murder have been put forward over the years. The fact that Starkey had grown a beard that season was also integrated into the story in one version: "His death was a tragic case of mistaken identity. In the course of the protected excavations, he had grown a beard and the Arabs took him for a Jew" (Keller 1956, 278). Another interpretation, described by Ussishkin (2014, 51) as an unfounded rumour, was that Starkey's murder was not random but rather the result of a feud between him and local sheikhs in the Lachish area.

6. THE UNFINISHED EXPROPRIATION

From the reports sent by Starkey, it seems that the expropriation was completed during the season of 1933–34. The files of the Department of Antiquities, however, contain evidence that the matter resurfaced exactly 1 year after his death. A long letter dated 5 January 1939, sent by the Director of Land Registration of Palestine to Charles Inge in London, reveals the full story (Appendix 3). It indicates that the matter of the expropriation was never settled and that the landowners were never paid. The letter also indicates severe problems with the land of Tel Lachish:

The land is not all registered. The greater part of the registered area is held in common ownership as far as registration is concerned, but has been partitioned privately and private sales have been effected. The purchasers are, of course, claiming the land and the heirs of the original registered owners are also claiming the same land.

Indeed, Starkey's prophecy, mentioned above, had been fulfilled: "I shall not be privileged to live long enough to see the end of this transaction" (Starkey 1934–35, 30). As a matter of fact, the transaction was never settled. After the beginning of the Second World War, the subject was no longer of interest and was never mentioned again in official documentation. After 1948 the Arab inhabitants of Qubeibeh became refugees and very little of the deserted village can be seen today. I was told by residents of the modern village of Lachish that it was completely dismantled in 1958, when the stones were taken to build a water reservoir in the area.

7. THE MEMORIES OF VERONICA SETON-WILLIAMS

Veronica Seton-Williams (1910–92) was an Australian archaeologist who specialised in the archaeology of the Near East and worked in Egypt, Palestine, Turkey and Iraq. She had been privileged to excavate with W. M. Flinders Petrie and John Garstang, among others. She spoke Arabic as well. In 1988, at the age of 78, she published her memoirs as *The Road to el-Aguzein*. This book did not receive much attention; in Israel, for example, the united catalogue of libraries indicates that only one copy exists, in the library of the University of Haifa.

Seton-Williams participated in the last two excavation seasons at Lachish. She was not a member of the core staff that had started with Starkey in 1932, and hence was probably an outsider in the expedition's camp. In this respect, she differs from Olga Tufnell, who presents the official view of the expedition in her publications (Tufnell 1938, 1950, 1985). Offering an alternative view of these events, Seton-Williams wrote:

At the beginning of January our quiet routine of work was destroyed by the murder of John Starkey on his way from the camp to Jerusalem. He was going up to collect the men's pay and to attend the opening of the new Jerusalem Museum. He always travelled with just an Arab driver. The car was stopped before they reached Hebron and he was hacked to pieces by an axeman. His murderer was a gaol escapee who had already committed a similar murder. This man was caught again but never came to trial as he was killed trying to escape.

The cause of Starkey's murder was never satisfactorily cleared up. With his short thick-set figure and beard he certainly could have been mistaken for a Jew, but this is unlikely as he spoke fluent Arabic and, according to his driver, had had quite a long conversation with his murderer before his death; nor was robbery the cause, as he was not robbed and anyway the return journey would have been the time for that, for then he would have had the men's pay.

His Arab driver was unharmed and allowed to go with the car. The men on the work certainly knew something had happened to him before we received official notification, for news travels fast in an Arab country. The murder was certainly committed by someone who knew of his movements and the local Arab landowners claimed to have had a grievance as he had expropriated some of their land.

Gerald Harding came over from Jordan to try and clear things up and Charles Inge took over the direction of the excavations. For protection we were given a posse of six Palestinian police and a truck, and all of us laid in small-arms for our defence. So the season passed uneasily to its close and without Starkey's drive, energy and enthusiasm all hope of continuing the clearing of the great mound vanished. It was the last season at Tell el-Duweir: all that equipment, all that money and all those hopes had been destroyed in a few moments on the Hebron road. And next year the war would be upon us (Seton-Williams 1988, 78).

8. WHY WAS STARKEY MURDERED?

When taking into consideration all the data presented above, it seems to me that there are severe problems with the hypothesis that a group of Arab militants simply killed a traveller in a terror attack. Rather than an isolated incident, this was a long process and the following sequence of stages is relevant to the case:

1. Negotiation with landowners to enable work on the upper part of the tel was a long and frustrating process. Probably because this matter had not been solved during the first excavation season, there was a need for the meeting that took place at the beginning of the second excavation season, in which the local inhabitants were told of "[...] the power which we had in our concession to expropriate land if we failed to make an equitable arrangement with those who had the right of surface cultivation" (Starkey 1933–34, 2–3). It is of interest that the word "expropriate" is already mentioned here.

2. During the early part of the second excavation season, the landowners of the upper part of the tel offered to sell the land for £2 per dunam, £163.040 altogether. Starkey agreed to pay this original asking price without haggling. This was a fatal error, as the landowners apparently assumed that the land was worth much more than the amount they had requested.
3. Starkey immediately paid the landowners half of the sum (£81.520). The receipts for this transaction were kept by the expedition. It is interesting that Starkey did not mention this exact sum in the reports he sent to London.
4. In early 1934, Starkey described the land as belonging to three families. In 1939, the Department of Land Registration presented a more complicated situation: the land was not registered, most of it was held in common ownership, it had been partitioned privately, parts of it had been sold and the same land was sometimes claimed by different people. One must wonder how the situation had changed so dramatically in just 5 years.
5. After the negotiation with the landowners had failed, although they had received half the sum on account, Starkey changed his strategy. He applied to the appropriate authorities in order to expropriate that land.
6. The expropriation, which was declared on 12 April 1934 in the *Palestine Gazette* No. 433, and executed de facto, was never completed de jure.
7. Starkey deposited £210 to be used as compensation to the landowners. From now on his approach was: "Anyway it is not our business now, as the final settlement is a Government matter."
8. The sum of £210, represented by Starkey as a final payment in the report of 1–15 December 1934, was in fact a cheque handed to the appropriate government agency to be used only after completion of the legal action. As this process never materialised, the cheque was never deposited in a bank, and the landowners were never paid.
9. By the end of 1934, Starkey gave the following information about the landowners: "All the interested parties were prepared to hand it over voluntarily with the exception of one person" (Starkey 1934–35, 1). Who was this stubborn figure?
10. From the third season onwards, the expedition conducted fieldwork on various parts of the tel without any consideration of the local landowners. They were probably not hired as labourers by the expedition. In this way they lost the land, the full payment, and the privilege of working in the excavations.
11. It seems likely to me that the landowners were involved in the attack on the expedition camp on October 1936, a short time before the beginning of the 1936–37 season. The attackers sent a very clear message that the next time they would burn down the expedition camp.
12. I believe that the frustrated landowners approached Starkey on this matter during 1937. In response, he would have talked with the Department of Land Registration in April or early May 1937, requesting completion of the legal process. The Department sent a response to Starkey on 7 May 1937 but it never reached him, as it was sent to Gaza after the expedition had left for England.
13. The landowners, or some of them, decided on revenge and were waiting for the right moment to carry out an assassination.
14. Starkey's journey to the opening of the Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem was an unusual event and it is quite possible that it was discussed in the excavation, so that the local villagers were aware of this specific departure for Jerusalem. When it was seen that a taxi had arrived at the expedition camp, an ambush for the assassination was quickly organised. From the letter of Bonney Holbrook we learn that the taxi arrived

earlier that day and waited at the expedition camp for several hours. The car must have attracted much attention in the village, as vehicles rarely passed by in those days. The expedition camp was located adjacent to and below Tel Lachish, to the south. The village of Qubeibeh was on a hill located to the northeast of the tel, with a view over the expedition camp and the taxi.

15. The assassination took place 2–3 km before the junction of the road from Beit Jibrin and the main road from Beersheba and Hebron to Jerusalem. This location is about 15 km as the crow flies from Lachish, or 3 hours' walk from Qubeibeh.
 16. The area of Lachish and Beit Jibrin was considered a tranquil one before and even after the murder. This was a remote area lacking British military camps or Jewish settlements. It is not likely that a group of militants would organise an ambush on the road leading from Beit Jibrin to Hebron, in a place where there was hardly any traffic of strangers. It seems more plausible that they were specifically waiting for Starkey.
 17. The taxi driver was allowed to leave peacefully and was not even robbed. It is clear that the group was interested only in Starkey.
 18. According to various reports, the driver indicates that Starkey talked with his murderers. Seton-Williams even describes it as "quite a long conversation." Why should an anonymous group of militants talk at all with an anonymous victim? It seems that something else took place here.
 19. We have two versions of the murder itself. Officially, Starkey was shot: "bullet wounds of abdomen and chest." The newspapers, however, tell us of "needless cruelty" and a broken skull, and that the body was not subjected to the regular post-mortem examination. There is also Seton-Williams' lurid description ("hacked to pieces"). Similar mutilation of bodies is known from this region of Mandatory Palestine. This was the sad fate of many of the 66 Jewish victims of the Arab massacre of 24 August 1929 in Hebron (Cohen 2013, 197–210), as well as the 35 Jewish men who were killed on 16 January 1948 by local Arabs near the Valley of Elah (Ben Yaacov 2008, 146). In both cases, there are various versions of these events that deny that the bodies were mutilated (Ben Yaacov 2008, 106; Cohen 2013, 254).
- It seems to me that the British authorities covered up this aspect of the attack in order to prevent panic and perhaps also to preserve Starkey's reputation. The murder was particularly brutal, differing from the shootings that regularly characterised the militants' activities, and seems more consistent with an act of vicious revenge. If the police file on Starkey's murder ever turns up, we may get clear information on his last moments.
21. Police forces and dogs were sent to the location of the assassination. It was reported in the press that the traces left by the departing attackers led to the west. This is exactly the direction from the site of the murder towards Lachish and the village of Qubeibeh.

9. WERE STARKEY'S MURDERERS FOUND?

As stated by Ussishkin (2014, 51–52), the British government's wheels of justice moved swiftly and the purported murderers were hanged on 22 January, less than 2 weeks from the day of the attack. The report of Charles Inge dated 1–15 February, however, reflects a different situation. The District Commissioner, Keith Roachs, had showed Inge the police dossier on the incident, and at that time the police were still searching for the murderers. This police dossier, if it is ever found, may perhaps shed light on this problem.

The daily newspapers from the 2 weeks following Starkey's murder contain more information on the police investigation. On the third day after the assassination, it was reported that:

Investigations continued throughout yesterday into the murder of Mr. J. L. Starkey, the British archaeologist, on the Beit Jibrin track on Monday evening. Last night the Press Bureau issued the following statement: "This morning, Police dogs picked up a second trail leading southwards from the scene of Mr. Starkey's murder on the Beit Jibrin track. It led to Khirbet Taibeh, where some ammunition was found, and on to Taffuha, where two revolvers and some ammunition were discovered. Several arrests have been made" (*Palestine Post* 13 January 1938, front page).

The British police and troops intensified their activities in the Hebron area and a number of local Arabs were either killed or arrested. One of them was Hussein Ahmed el-Kut, 25 years old, from the village of Halhul near Hebron. The newspaper said about his footprint that "a similar footprint was found near the scene of the murder of Mr. J. L. Starkey on January 10" (*Palestine Post* 20 January 1938, front page). Another person, Ahmed Abdul Kader Taha, a 25-year-old man from Hebron, even confessed that he participated in the group that murdered Starkey (*Palestine Post* 21 January 1938, front page). Despite the "similar footprint" and "confession," however, none of Starkey's personal belongings, such as his hat, walking stick, suitcase or watch, were ever found. Nevertheless, these two men were tried in military court, sentenced to death and hanged on Saturday 22 January 1938. Their actual connection with Starkey's assassination was never satisfactorily proven. On the contrary, I see here a geographical problem: while the traces picked up by the police dogs indicated that the murderers escaped from the crime scene to the west and south, the two convicts came from Hebron and Halhul, which are located in the opposite directions, to the north and east of the site of Starkey's death.

10. CONCLUSIONS

The official picture from the day of the murder up to today presents the relations between the Lachish expedition and the local Arabs as those of fruitful coexistence. Indeed, I believe that most of the local residents probably were welcoming and developed good relations with the archaeologists. There were, however, a few people who apparently saw the expedition as the goose that lays the golden eggs, and for them no price would ever be high enough. Consequently, permission to excavate the land on the summit of Tel Lachish was not achieved through mutual agreement between the expedition and the local landowners, and Starkey had to resort to government involvement and expropriation of the land. This would almost certainly have been viewed as an act of tyranny and oppression by the locals. On top of this, the landowners never received full compensation for the expropriated land. Undoubtedly, this was a strong motive for revenge.

The landowners were stubborn; Starkey had to negotiate with them for years, and even after reaching an agreement and receiving half the payment, they repudiated the agreement. Even after the expropriation had taken place and most of the landowners were willing to receive the offered compensation, there was still the objection of "one person." Among the owners of land on the site's summit was the Mukhtar (village headman) of Qubeibeh. A person in this position must have been the head of one of the largest extended families in the village. Because of his status in the community, it's not unreasonable to expect that he would not be publically insulted without fighting back. The imposed expropriation would have transformed him from equal partner in the negotiation to passive victim and transformed the situation from a financial dispute to a struggle over power and authority. On top of all this, the full compensation for use of the disputed land was never paid. This was likely neither forgiven nor forgotten.

But more than that, I think that an element of extortion can be seen in this case, considering many of the facts mentioned above:

1. It is quite suspicious that the Mukhtar turned out to be the owner of the most desirable part of Tel Lachish from an archaeological point of view. The letter of the Land Department sent on 5 January 1939 (Appendix 3), clarifies this aspect:

The greater part of the registered area is held in common ownership as far as registration is concerned, but has been partitioned privately and private sales have been effected. The purchasers are, of course, claiming the land and the heirs of the original registered owners are also claiming the same land.

As the project began in 1932, the Mukhtar may well have understood the importance of the summit for the expedition and taken over parts of it from the original landowner.

2. The negotiations over the summit of Tel Lachish took the entire first season and about half of the second season, but no agreement was achieved. There seems to have been no good will on the side of the Mukhtar. With time on his side, he may have taken advantage of the limited schedule of the expedition.
3. In his attempt to receive maximum profit from the sale of the land, any offer made, even the payment of £2 per dunam that he himself had apparently requested, was seemingly not good enough for the Mukhtar.
4. After an agreement had been signed between the expedition and the landowners in full accordance with the terms of the owners, and half the sum had been paid, the landowners repudiated the agreement — behaviour that can hardly be considered trustworthy.
5. After repudiating the agreement, the landowners did not (as far as we can tell) return the payment that had been made on account; this moved the entire situation into the criminal sphere.
6. After the expropriation took place, no agreement was achieved with the government; the landowners probably continued to haggle over the compensation.
7. In my opinion, the Mukhtar, as the head of a powerful extended family, organised an attack on the excavation camp on 5 October 1937, just a few weeks before the beginning of the sixth excavation season. The message left by the gang — that they would burn the camp down on their next visit — was probably meant for Starkey: if payment for the land of Tel Lachish was not received, there would be another visit.
8. If this were the case, after all efforts to receive full compensation for the land of Tel Lachish had failed, it was time to exert the punishment. Starkey, who travelled on his own, was easy prey. When it became known that he was heading for Jerusalem, an ambush was organised just a few hours' walk from Lachish. He was intercepted and most brutally killed.

During the Arab revolt, a revenge assassination of this proposed nature could easily be covered up as an act of political militancy, and the Mukhtar was ultimately not even considered a suspect.

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APPENDIX I

'Extra-ordinary Report II', dated 31 January 1938, sent by C.H. Inge and Olga Tufnell to London (Wellcome Trust archive: WA.HSW.AR.LAC.Br3).

We are now in a position to give some account of the events on January and subsequent police action. Many conflicting stories appear to have been told, even by the driver of the car himself. The first reports in the papers were grossly inaccurate. By a process of sifting the various accounts the truth would seem to be somewhat as follows:

Mr Starkey left the camp at 4.15 p.m. on the afternoon of 10 January for Jerusalem with the intention of attending the opening of the Palestine Archaeological Museum the following day.

Mr Starkey and the driver were the only occupants of the car; there were no other Arabs as stated in the Press, and the driver asserts that they did not give anyone a lift on the way. As they were approaching the last bend on the hill leading up to Hebron, they caught up with another car. Coming nearer to the bend a number of men armed with rifles could be seen standing in the roadway. The first car was stopped by them and Mr Starkey's car had to draw up some little way behind. The road at this point is very narrow, on a steep up-grade and takes a sharp right-hand bend; it was therefore impossible to reverse the car and

return. The conversation between the occupants of the first car and the bandits was heard by the driver of Mr Starkey's car. The occupants were asked what they were and they replied that they were all Arabs. Having satisfied themselves on this point, the bandits told the car to drive on, and motioned to Mr Starkey's car to come forward. The car at first refused to start; some shots were fired over it and a man came up and pointed a revolver at the driver and ordered him to proceed. The car started, and when they reached the main group of bandits they had to stop again. The same question was put to them, and the driver replied that he was an Arab, and that his passenger was an Englishman, Director of excavations at Tell Duweir, had worked in the country for many years and was a friend of the Arabs. They replied that they did not believe him, that he was a Jew, and forced Starkey to get out of the car. Meanwhile other members of the gang had moved the attaché case the coat and various other objects from the back of the car, and the driver was ordered to proceed.

At this point the accounts become very confused, and it is difficult to ascertain what is really true. According to one version, Mr Starkey spoke with the men and seemed to convince them as to his identity, and he was told to walk on. According to another he produced his money, but they would have nothing to do with it. At any rate the car drove on, but had not gone more than 20 yds. Before the driver heard two shots and glancing in the driving mirror he saw Mr Starkey fall. It is definitely established that he was hit twice in the chest from a range of about 50 yds, which looks as though the first story might be correct and that he was walking on to region the car, for in addition to the men on the road there were some concealed behind the stone wall which borders the road about that distance away. All his pockets were then rifled and his jacket was removed.

The driver proceeded straight to Hebron police station where he reported the matter. The police proceeded to the scene as soon as possible. No action could be taken at that time, however, as it was by that time completely dark (the time of the murder was just after sunset, between 5 and 5.15 p.m.)

Very early next morning the police dogs were on the trail, and Sir Charles Tegart, Advisor to the Palestine Police, Mr Keith Roach, District Commissioner, and Mr Broadhurst, A.D.S.P. themselves followed the trail. The results were rather inconclusive, but led to the discovery of a revolver and some rounds of ammunition hidden in the wall of a house. The revolver had not been used recently and the ammunition did not correspond with the spent cartridges found on the site.

The next day a fresh trail was taken up by the dogs, leading in the opposite direction, but this was equally inconclusive. The same day Mr Keith Roach paid a visit to the camp, and re-assured the members of the Expedition.

On Tuesday, the day after the murder, Mr Harding arrived in camp at 8.25 a.m. to find that no news other than a vague rumour that Starkey had been wounded in the leg had reached the Expedition.

He broke the sad news to them and a meeting was held at which it was decided that the work must go on. It would have been bad for everyone, Arabs and staff alike, to have sat down on that day and done nothing. Mr Inge agreed to remain behind and keep the work going, and Miss Tufnell returned with Mr Harding to Jerusalem.

On arrival there, Mr Harding got in touch with Mr Bullock, Sir Charles Marston, and Sir Robert Mond on the telephone, and informed them of the position and asked their approval for the continuation of the work.

The funeral took place at 2.30 p.m. that afternoon and Mr Starkey was buried in the Protestant Cemetery on Mount Zion. The enclosed newspaper gives full particulars of the ceremony.

The reaction of the native population to this particular crime was so strong that some Hebronites, than whom there are no tougher characters in Palestine, voluntarily gave

information to the police which led to the arrest of two members of the gang, and the shooting of others in an attempt to capture them. Such an action is almost unprecedented. The two arrested men were tried by the military court, condemned to death, and were hanged last week. Unfortunately the leader of the gang made his getaway, but we feel that it cannot be long now before he is captured.

So far none of the articles stolen from him have been recovered, and it seems unlikely at this stage that they will be.

Most of the subsequent police actions have been fully reported in the press, and it is probable that you are more conversant with them than we are in our isolation.

All members of the Expedition were deeply touched by the tribute paid to Mr Starkey in the form of the Memorial Service at St Margaret's Westminster, and our thoughts were all in London on that day.

We are also enclosing a copy of an appreciation of Mr Starkey broadcast by Mr Harding from the Palestine Broadcasting Service of 11 January. Five minutes only was allowed for this talk, and it was impossible to do justice to the subject in this short time.

In addition to these tributes, several have also appeared in the local Arabic newspapers, notably in "El Difas," "Falistin" and "El Ahram" of Cairo. Popular sentiment throughout the country is as shocked by this crime as we are, and if feeling runs so high that the people themselves will turn against these bandits, then some good will come out of this great evil.

APPENDIX 2

Private letter dated 24 January 1938, sent by Bonney Holbrook from Lachish to his uncle, Sir Charles Marston, in London (Wellcome Trust archive: WA.HSW.AR.LAC.B13).

Dear Sir Charles,

It is difficult for me to give you much more information than you already possess concerning Starks murder. The police have not told us much more than the press accounts contain.

Starks left camp on the 10th at 4:15 p.m. with only the driver of the car. I went in and looked at the time because I was worried about him leaving so late. Everyone, time and again, had tried to make him travel well before sunset, and the driver arrived early for that purpose. About an hour after leaving when he reached the top of the big wadi just before reaching the Hebron-Jerusalem road, he was held up by twelve men (I have heard other figures) seven in the road and five behind the walls. The driver told them who Starks was and that he was not Jewish. However the brigands said that he was Jewish and made him get out of the car. The driver was told to go on, and as he drove off heard two shots and looked back and saw Starks fall. Later Starks was found with two bullet holes in the chest and his head bashed in. There was another car held up immediately in front of Starks but they did not report to the police when they drove off. It is not much more than a mile to the Police Station in Hebron. The driver of that car has since been arrested for not reporting.

A day or two later, after tracking with dogs, the police and soldiers cornered three of the gang, and shot it out with them, killing two and seriously wounding the third. Later two more were arrested and hung day before yesterday. However I understand the gang was shooting at cars on the Hebron road the day the two were hung. The leader of the gang missed by inches a trap laid to catch him. He is believed to be Issa Battat, the chap who held up a police station in a village near Hebron and ran off with their rifles shortly before we came out.

This gang has been operating almost daily close to Hebron for months. Pummel with Miss Cumming jumped a telephone pole that they had put across the road about 3 km from Hebron. Fortunately the broad tires of the pick-up carried him over it safely. He was shot at as he drove on. When he reported to the police, they were unable to go out because

there was no one present to give the order. This occurred last month. Starks asked me not to write you about it as he said it would worry you.

Conditions in this country are a wholesale disgrace, and I agree with the sentiments to Theodore Roosevelt when he said to England, with regard to Egypt, I believe, "Either rule or get out."

We have police in camp now for our protection and are avoiding going to Jerusalem. We shall try to do everything through Gaza.

The work is going on well and we are tying up the loose ends in preparation for a fresh start. Harding is with us for a couple of weeks.

Received your telegram a week after it was sent.

My best to all.

(Sgd.) Holbrook.

APPENDIX 3

Letter dated 5 January 1939, sent by the Director of Land Registration of Palestine to Charles Inge in London (Israel Antiquities Authority archive: Tell Duweir 4th Jacket, ATQ 54 [351/354]).

1. The director of land registration has asked me to find out what action you would like him to take on the situation described in the first paragraph of his letter, No. LD21/4-3102 of May, 1937, to which he has received no reply. For your convenience I attach a copy of that letter.
2. The present position seems to be that if the Expedition wishes to proceed with the acquisition of the site it will be necessary for the Director of Land Registration to apply to the Land Court for a valuation, and then to obtain a Vesting Order on payment into the Court of the money required.
3. Before action can be taken on these lines, however, the total estimated value of the land, viz., £300, will have to be deposited by the Expedition with the Government of Palestine, together with a statement that the Expedition is prepared to make up the difference should the valuation of the court exceed that of the Department of Lands.

Expedition. [typing error, as the beginning of page 2 does not match the end of page 1]. No money was deposited with Government but it was agreed that whenever a Deed of Sale was prepared and the exact amount required known, you would be asked to obtain this amount and deposit it with Government, so that it would be available for payment immediately the transaction was completed.

4. This arrangement was made to meet the objection advanced by the late Mr Starkey that it was unreasonable that Government should retain possession of the whole of the estimated cost of the land, about £300, and deprive the Expedition of the interest on this sum.
5. A number of efforts have been made, both through this Department and by the late Mr Starkey himself, to acquire a title to the land, but this has now been found to be impossible. The land is not all registered. The greater part of the registered area is held in common ownership as far as registration is concerned, but has been partitioned privately and private sales have been effected. The purchasers are, of course, claiming the land and the heirs of the original registered owners are also claiming the same land.

6. The only solution is to apply to the Land Court for a valuation and then obtain a Vesting Order on the payment of the money required into Court. There are two difficulties. The first is that before the case goes to Court the money must be available and it will therefore be necessary to ask the Expedition to deposit with the Government of Palestine (not with me) the sum of £300, the value of the land as estimated in 1934, and be prepared to find additional money if the assessment by the Court is higher than that made by Government. The second point is the treatment of the money already paid on account of the purchase price. The Court may accept the agreements and agree that the amount should be deduced from the final purchase price, but it is more likely that it will require a separate action to be brought, as some of the persons concerned may not be recognised as owners by the Court.
7. I enclose a copy of a letter addressed to the Director of the Expedition dated the 8 May 1937, to which no reply has been received.
8. I should be grateful if you would take up this matter with the Expedition and advise me as to the action they wish me to take in the matter.