



A Time To Remember

Palestinian Towns and Villages

Introduction

This booklet includes information about 24 Palestinian villages that have been depopulated and demolished during the Nakba period. Most of these villages will be visited during Sabeel's 7th International Conference on November 12 - 19, 2008. This booklet is meant to give the reader a short historical background about each of the towns and villages. Every one had a vibrant living community which within hours had lost its inhabitants who were displaced and became refugees and were never allowed to return to their homes in contravention to United Nation Resolutions.

The number of Palestinian refugees who fled to the surrounding Arab countries was approximately 750,000. Many others were displaced from their towns and villages and became internal refugees inside Israel and are still unable to return to their original homes, in spite of the fact that they are Israeli citizens.

'AYN HAWD

12,605 dunams

'Ayn Hawd is located 14.5 km south of Haifa on the slopes of Mount Carmel and was linked to the coastal highway by a secondary road. In 1945, the village population was Muslim and numbered 650 residents. The village mosque was located in the center of 'Ayn Hawd. The village also contained a coffee shop and a diwan. An elementary school for boys was established during Ottoman rule. The village economy relied on animal husbandry and agriculture, selling their produce in Haifa and Acre. In addition, the villagers sold building stones and whitewash to surrounding villages.ⁱ

'Ayn Hawd was attacked several times beginning in April 1948 but held out until mid-July. According to Walid Khalidi, the village probably fell during an operation resulting in the



The village mosque converted into a bar/restaurant

capture of a number of villages south of Haifa. However, prior to the occupation of 'Ayn Hawd, many villagers were prompted to flee by the news of the massacres at Dier Yassin and Tantura. One former resident, Abu Faruq, referring to news of rape committed by Jewish forces during both massacres, asserts that the reasons for fleeing concerned the honor of the female population of the village.ⁱⁱ

In 1954, an artist colony was established on the village site and continues to be a tourist attraction today. The village mosque has been converted into a bar and many of the villagers' houses are being used by the new residents. During the war, a few of the villagers of 'Ayn Hawd took refuge close to the village and in 1951, decided to establish a new village in that spot naming it "'Ayn Hawd". The site became one of many Arab villages not recognized by the Israeli government after the war and consequently lacked government services such as water and electricity.ⁱⁱⁱ

The government attempted to prevent the development of the new village on several occasions. In 1964, the Israeli authorities erected a fence around the new village. The fence had no opening and prevented entrance to and departure from the site. In 1965, the village and surrounding area was declared a military zone. In addition, portions of the land were reserved for archeological excavation. The introduction of the "Black Goat Law," prohibiting the grazing of goats on the land impeded the self-sufficiency of the villagers and forced many to seek work outside of the village. The process of recognition of the village began in 1992. However, by 1996, only 40 dunams of village land were recognized as sites with permission to be built on and 25 dunams were recognized as open land. The legal battle to obtain municipal status of the entire village site continues today.

AL BASSA

29,535 dunams (4,178 dunams were Jewish owned)

Al Bassa was a mixed Christian-Muslim village located 19 km north of Acre and lies within very close proximity to the Lebanese border. The census taken in 1945 of the village site included the population of neighboring Khirbat Ma'sub and totaled 1,590 Christian inhabitants and 1,360 Muslim inhabitants. The name al Bassa is thought to be derived from the Canaanite word "bissa", or swamp. The village was known as Bezeth during the Roman period and as 'Ayn al Bassa in accounts written by 'Imad al-Din al-Isfahani in the thirteenth century.

In 1922, a local council was established to manage public affairs and workers established a branch of the Palestinian labor union. The village contained a public elementary school for girls and a separate one for boys (established by the Ottomans in 1882) in addition to a private secondary school. The residents also established two athletic clubs, two mosques, two churches, and several shrines.^{iv} The shrine to Saint George was considered holy by



The shrine to Saint George holy to Christians and Muslims

both Muslims and Christians.

Al Bassa was the last major village to be seized during the first stage of Operation Ben-Ami. Benny Morris states that most of the residents, including the women and children, had been previously evacuated to Lebanon and that the remaining militia fled surprised by the assault. Villagers who remained were ordered to go north to



Church interior

Lebanon while some residents were transferred to al Mazra'a.^v However, according to Nafez Nazzal many residents remained to witness the attack.^{vi} These people were ordered to gather in the church while they took a few of the young men and at least one woman to be shot outside the church. The remaining villagers were then ordered to bury the bodies. In addition to these casualties, villagers were also killed as they attempted to return to al Bassa in order to salvage their belongings. The Israeli settlement of Betzet was established on the village site in order to accommodate the influx of Jewish immigration in 1948. Kefar Ro'sh ha-Niqra and Leman, named after U.S. Senator Herbert Lehman, were also established on village land in 1948. In 1950, Shelomi, a development town, was established just south of village lands but has since expanded onto the village site.

BEISAN

28,000 dunams

Beisan is located in the center of the Beit Shean valley and was on a highway linking former Transjordan to northern Palestine. Archeological evidence has shown that the first settlement on the village site was established around five thousand B.C. and in the sixteenth to twelfth centuries B.C., the city became the seat of Egyptian rule. Sovereignty over the village site passed through multiple hands including Assyrian, Roman, and Byzantine. A rural settlement was established during the Abbasid period and during British rule grew to a town of 6,000 people.^{vii}



Catholic Church converted into local Likud Party headquarters



Episcopal Church converted into an office supply store

The Golani Brigade seized the town of Beisan in mid May 1948 as part of Operation Gideon. By this time, Haifa, Tiberias, and Safad had already been captured. In addition, the Golani Brigade already occupied key positions surrounding the city including the major satellite villages of Beisan and the hill, Tall al Husn just north of the town.^{viii} The residents of Beisan were given an order by Zionist forces to evacuate within ten hours. When the city's notables received this order they rejected it and began preparations for the impending attack on their city. However, after sustained bombardment from the ground and air from the end of April until mid May, the notables, consisting of the qadi, the local priest, the municipal secretary, and the richest merchants in town, decided to surrender.^{ix} The town was officially occupied by Jewish forces on May 12, 1948 when the town's notables agreed to negotiate and a truce was declared.^x Most residents of Beisan had fled (mainly to Jordan or Jenin) during the daily bombardment or the assault. However, between 700 and 1,500 residents remained after the truce. Eventually, the

Jewish forces obtained authority to expel the remaining inhabitants. The Christians were given the option of being transferred to Jordan or Nazareth. Due to the fall of Beisan, the capital of its district, the remaining inhabitants of the Beisan Valley fled.

Today Beisan is known as Bet She'an and contains a residential area in addition to a national park housing ruins from the Roman and Byzantine periods. Soon after Beisan was seized, most of the village's land on the periphery was leased to nearby kibbutzim and the demolition of the built up areas of Beisan began. After much internal debate, in 1949, demolition ceased and the Israeli government began to use the village site to accommodate the influx of immigrants. One thousand new apartments were built and six hundred former Arab dwelling units were restored for the Jewish residents, composed entirely of newly arrived immigrants.^{xi} Today, the Episcopal Church in the village is used as an office supply store and the Catholic Church is presently the local Likud party headquarters.

EILABOUN

14,712 dunams

Eilaboun is located 30 km northeast of Nazareth. Inhabitation of the village site began in the 5th Century BC. During this time it was known as Ailabo. The “n” was added to the name after the Islamic Conquest. The town was destroyed after a battle with the Crusaders during a time when the area was referred to as the “Galilee of the Gentiles”. Resettlement of the village site began in the seventeenth century when Christian tribes from Hauran and the Transjordan remained on the land to raise cattle and eventually develop an economy based on agriculture. In 1948, the population of Eilaboun was predominantly Christian, consisting of 680 residents.^{xii} Eilaboun was captured as part of Operation Hiram on October 30, 1948. According to Benny Morris, the occupation of the remaining Galilee at this time was provoked by an Arab Liberation Army (ALA) attack on Israeli traffic occurring on October 22. In September, Ben Gurion told his cabinet that if violence broke out in the north that Galilee would be cleansed.^{xiii} Morris lists Eilaboun as one of the villages that “resisted” but that resistance consisted of ALA units, and when the Israeli army entered the village they were greeted with white flags. The priests formally surrendered the village and the residents gathered in the church. As this took place, one villager was killed and one wounded. The soldiers chose twelve young men to kill as revenge for resistance and the remaining residents, not including the priests, were forced to flee to Lebanon. During this time, the army fired at them, killing an old man and wounding three women. The residents were robbed and Eilaboun was looted.

The residents of Eilaboun appealed to the Israeli government and to clergy in the European community for the right to return to their village. International pressure led the Israeli government to grant their return - the only village that was granted that right. The villagers have conducted annual memorial ceremonies for the victims of 1948 since the first anniversary of the event.^{xiv}



The village site (courtesy of Makbula Nassar)

AL GHABISIYYA

11,786 dunams

Al Ghabisiyya is located 11.5 km from Acre, south of the highway that connected Tarshiha and Acre. The site of the village is within the territory allotted to the Arab state under the 1947 partition plan. The entire population of the village before 1948 was Muslim, consisting of 690 residents in 1945. The Ottomans established a school there in 1886. The village economy was based on livestock and agriculture. Olives were grown and processed in the two animal-drawn presses in the village.^{xv}

In March 1948 village residents established a non-aggression pact with Jewish militia leaders. However, the agreement was not honored and in May, before the end of the British Mandate, al Ghabisiyya was occupied by Jewish forces as part of Operation Ben-Ami. The operation began mid May with the aim of capturing all the coastal villages from Acre to the Lebanese border.^{xvi} Despite no local resistance, units of the Carmeli Brigade



The village mosque

entered the village on May 21st shooting and killing a resident, Daoud Zaini, who was greeting the units by waving a white flag indicating the villagers' desire for peace. Families residing near the entrance to the village had prepared coffee for the advancing Jewish militia. Despite these gestures, ten additional villagers were killed and the remaining residents were expelled.^{xvii}

Unlike most internal refugees of 1948, the residents of al Ghabisiyya were allowed to return to the village less than 12 months after expulsion. However, on August 2, 1951, Prime Minister David Ben Gurion declared the village site a closed military zone and the villagers were expelled again. Since that time, former residents of al Ghabisiyya have fought to return to their homes by direct non-violent action and by legal means. On November 30, 1951, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the villagers, stating that they had a right to return. After the court ruling, the villagers attempted to re-enter the village but were turned back by Israeli forces refusing to recognize the ruling.

Between 1955 and 1956, all village homes and buildings were demolished with the exception of the village mosque which remains standing, although in disrepair. In 1995, former residents of al Ghabisiyya began their attempts to pray weekly at this mosque. In response, the Israeli Land Authority sealed the doors and windows of the mosque and erected a 2 meter high barbed wire fence around the structure. Former residents and their descendents continue to worship as close to the mosque as possible. Many of these families live within close proximity to the village site, some within view of their former homes.^{xviii}

In 1950, the Jewish settlement of Netiv ha-Shayyara, located 1.25 km west of the village site, was established for Jewish Iraqi immigrants on village land.

HITTIN

22,764 dunams (147 dunams were Jewish owned)

Hittin, known as Kefar Hittaya during the Roman Empire lies 8 km west of Tiberias. The village is located at the northern foot of Mount Hittin on an important commercial caravan route. Hittin also served as a rabbinical seat in the fourth century and is the site of the famous battle of Hittin (where Salah al-Din defeated the Crusaders in 1187). The entire village population was Muslim and reached a total of 1,190 inhabitants as of 1945. Hittin contained a mosque, an elementary school established under Ottoman rule and a small market. The village also housed a shrine to the prophet Shu'ayb which was particularly sacred to the Druze.^{xix} The villagers learned of the outbreak of the war from the mukhtar's radio which picked up broadcasts transmitted by Radio Damascus and Radio Amman. However, they only

realized the gravity of the situation when Lubyia, the neighboring village was attacked. After the occupation of Lubyia, most of the villagers from Hittin fled. The elderly residents remained with 30-35 militia men until the Israeli army advanced on July 17. The village militia did not have enough ammunition or arms to withstand an assault and were forced to retreat.^{xx} Many of the villagers took refuge within close proximity to Hittin with the hope that the Arab armies would recapture their village. However, after a month of waiting, the villagers moved north to Lebanon. Arbel and Kefar Zetim were established on village land in 1949 and 1950. Today, the mosque still stands, though it has fallen into disrepair, and the shrine to the prophet Shu'ayb is still in use by Druze pilgrims.



The remains of demolished village houses (courtesy of Makbula Nassar)

IJZIM

49,905 dunams

Ijzim is located 19.5 km south of Haifa on the southwest part of Mount Carmel and is linked by a secondary road to the coastal highway. It was the home of the powerful al-Madi family who controlled the coastal region south of Carmel and the western slopes of Jabal Nablus during the first half of the nineteenth century. Shaykh Mas'ud al-Madi was the leader of the Haifa coastal area in the late 19th Century and governor of Gaza for a short time. The population of Ijzim was predominantly Muslim. In 1945, the population was comprised of 1,000 Muslims and 140 Christian residents. They relied on animal husbandry and agriculture as a source of income. The village contained two mosques and a boys' elementary school established in the late nineteenth century.^{xxi} Ijzim was allied with the neighboring villages, 'Ein Ghazal and



The village mosque



The meeting-house of the al-Madi family converted into a museum

Jaba, creating a triangle or bloc south of Haifa that was able to hold out against Israeli attack until late July 1948. The triangle also effectively blocked Jewish traffic on the roads from the beginning of the war.^{xxii} Two attempts to occupy the village were repulsed on June 18 and July 8. From mid-July until the occupation of Ijzim, the village was periodically shelled and bombed and consequently many villagers fled. The third successful attempt was part of Operation Shoter and occurred during a truce.^{xxiii} The villages in the triangle were captured on July 24 and the remaining villagers were expelled. The villagers were fired upon as they fled. In 1949, Kerem Maharal was established on the village site. The village was only partly destroyed and many of Ijzim's structures remain standing. Masud al-Madi's meeting house has been converted into a museum, the school is now a synagogue, and one of the mosques still stands, though it has fallen into disrepair.

IQRIT

24,722 dunams

Iqrit is an archeological site built over a tell, or an artificial mound consisting of the accumulated remains of one or more ancient settlements. This site can be traced back to the Canaanites. The village was named Acref by the occupying Crusaders and was destroyed during the events of the Crusades. Iqrit was only rebuilt in 1596. The village is located about 5 km from the Lebanese border and 25.5 km from Acre. The village was linked to the Acre-Ra's al-Naqura coastal highway by a secondary road. Before 1948, the population consisted of 460 Christian and 30 Muslim inhabitants. A portion of the land was used to cultivate wheat, barley, olives, figs, grapes, and tobacco. However, the greater part of the land was covered by oak and pine trees. The Archdiocese of



The village cemetery (courtesy of Noga Kadman)

the Greek Catholic Church established and maintained a private elementary school in the village.^{xxiv}

Iqrit was captured on October 31, 1948 as a result of Operation Hiram. The aim of the operation was to take the Upper Galilee region from the Arab Liberation Army (ALA) to ensure that this area, an area allotted to be part of the state of Palestine according to the United Nations Partition Plan, would become part of the new state of Israel.^{xxv} The inhabitants of Iqrit surrendered and remained in their homes. Six days later the Israeli Army ordered the villagers to evacuate, promising that they would be able to return in two weeks after the conclusion of military operations in the north. However, their return never occurred.

“Iqrit was an Arab Christian village for hundreds of years — until 31 October 1948,” recalls Rizik Atalla, a native of Iqrit who was 19 years old in 1948. On that day a battalion of the Israeli army entered the village to be met, not with resistance, but with white flags and wooden crosses. Due to Iqrit’s proximity to the Lebanese border — about five kilometres — the battalion’s commander told the village’s 500 residents that it was dangerous for them to stay, but promised that they would be able to return to their homes “within two weeks”.^{xxvi}

The struggle to return to the village has been an ongoing battle beginning in 1951 when the villagers pleaded their case before Israel’s Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the villagers, stating that the evacuation was illegal because it was carried out without an official order and that there was no legal obstacle for the return of the refugees to their village. In response, the Military Governor issued a retroactive order of evacuation to the refugees from Iqrit living

in Rama. The villagers then appealed to the Supreme Court asking that their right of return be implemented. However, as the legal battle waged on, the Israeli Army demolished all of the houses and buildings of Iqrit on Christmas Eve of 1951 leaving only the church and the cemetery.^{xxvii} Though the inhabitants were not allowed to live in their village, they were allowed to be buried in this cemetery when they died. After the abolition of Military Rule, former residents of Iqrit began restoration of the church and the cemetery and begin to stage sit-ins in the church which lasted years. The legal battle for the right of return to Iqrit as well as the demonstrations continued for decades. The last appeal was declined by the court at Sharon's request in 2001. He argued that the land was legally appropriated and warned that "the precedent of returning the displaced persons to their villages would be used for propaganda and political purposes by the Palestinian Authority".^{xxviii}

AL KABRI

47,428 dunams (90 dunams were Jewish owned)

Al Kabri is located 12.5 km northeast of Acre and is linked by the coastal highway to the settlement of Nahariyya. The site of the village is thought to be built on the remains of a city from the Bronze Age (excavation continues today). The village's name is derived from the Syriac word "kabiraya", meaning large or wealthy. The crusaders knew the village site as Cabra. The inhabitants of the village were all Muslim and depended on agriculture and animal husbandry for their livelihood. The village was blessed with an abundance of water, the source of which being four major springs called, 'Ayn Mafshuh, 'Ayn Fawwar, 'Ayn al-'Asal, and 'Ayn Kabri. The springs annually produced 8.6 million cubic meters of



Interior of a mill used by the villagers of al Kabri



The remains of demolished village houses

water making the springs in al Kabri the leading source of water in the area. Throughout history, from the Hellenistic period to the nineteenth century, aqueducts and canals have been built by various governors to channel the water to Acre.^{xxix} On February 1, 1948, a small Zionist unit attempted to blow up the house of a village leader allied with the Mufti of Jerusalem. This event galvanized efforts to block Jewish traffic on the main highway to the north. On March 28, the villagers ambushed a convoy consisting of three armored cars and military vehicles. As a result, forty-nine Jews and six Arabs were killed according to the New York Times statistics. In response to this event, the British shelled al Kabri and according to Benny Morris, the Haganah also participated in retaliatory action.^{xxx}

Al Kabri was formally captured by units of the Carmeli Brigade on May 20-21 as part of the second stage of Operation Ben-Ami. The goal of the first and second stage of the operation

was to secure blocks of Jewish settlements (even those outside the borders provided for in the Partition Plan). The specific goal of the second operation was to open the route to Kibbutz Yehiam, an isolated Jewish settlement. The orders were "To attack in order to conquer, to kill among the men, to destroy and burn the villages of Al Kabri, Umm al Faraj and An Nahr".^{xxxi}

Dov Yirmiya, a company commander of the Carmeli Brigade, reports that Al Kabri was conquered without a fight, most inhabitants fleeing. One of the soldiers present had previously escaped the attack on the Yehiam convoy and sought revenge by lining up and killing about seven "youngsters".^{xxxii} After the completion of the operations in the Western Galilee, the military commander ordered the demolition of the captured villages with the intention of punishing the past anti-Yeshuv activities of the villages, in particular, al Kabri and Azib.

Today the village site has been converted into a memorial marking the March attack on the Jewish military convoy. Behind the memorial still lies the village graveyard in disrepair. Still visible are the remains of the mill and springs.

KAFR BIR'IM

12,244 dunams

Kafr Bir'im is located 4 km from the Lebanese border and had a population of 1,050 villagers, predominantly Maronite Christian in 1948. The village houses an ancient synagogue that had been built over a Roman temple. The synagogue was respected as consecrated ground by the villagers.^{xxxiii}

The village was occupied on November 4, 1948 with the aim of achieving an Arabless border strip due to fears that this area could serve as way-stations and bases for hostile irregulars or as an entry point for returning refugees or invading Arab armies.^{xxxiv} The inhabitants of Kafr Bir'im endured a similar fate to that of the villagers of Iqrit. The Israeli Army evacuated the residents of Kafr Bir'im, promising that they would be



An Ancient synagogue

able to return in two weeks. The army explained that their relocation was to guarantee their safety and that ten soldiers would remain in Kafr Bir'im to guard the villagers' property. The villagers locked their doors, leaving all of their possessions inside, and took refuge in the village's olive grove.^{xxxv} According to Benny Morris, seven children died of exposure during this time.^{xxxvi}



The village church

After two weeks with no information from the soldiers in Kafr Bir'im, the village elders decided to go investigate for themselves. They found their houses broken into and looted. When they confronted the soldiers they were told that the village did not belong to them any longer. Confused by this information and suffering from exposure to the elements, the villagers were forced to leave their land. Most went to the neighboring village, Jish, located 4 km from Kafr Bir'im. The former residents of the village appealed to the Supreme Court, several times petitioning for the right to return to the village. During legal proceedings concerning their case, in November 1951, the IDF closed the village site and retroactively issued evacuation orders for Kafr Bir'im three years after the

villagers were expelled.^{xxxvii} On Christmas of 1953, the village houses were demolished ensuring that the villagers could not return regardless of court orders.^{xxxviii}

Today the village site is considered a national park and a tourist site. The church, recently renovated and maintained by former residents and their children, is the only structure that remains standing while the rest of the village consists of partially-collapsed houses and rubble. Today most of the refugees of Kafr Bir'im and their descendents live in Jish and Haifa. Their commitment to opposing the government's decision by nonviolent means, legally and through direct action has been unceasing and mirrors that of the battle for the right of return to Iqrit. Heritage trips and summer camps sponsored by Kafr Bir'im residents allow the younger generations to learn about their history.

KAWKAB AL-HAWA

9,949 dunams

Kawkab al-Hawa is located 10.5 km north of the city of Beisan overlooking the Jordan River in the east and the Sea of Galilee in the northwest. One of the most well-known crusader castles, the Belvoir, meaning "beautiful view" was built on the village site by the Hospitaller Order. The Belvoir was difficult to capture but after a year and a half of fighting, Salah al-Din's forces were able to penetrate the fortress. In 1220, the castle was destroyed to prevent the return of the Crusaders. Kawkab al-Hawa was established on the ruins of the fortress and slowly expanded to the surrounding area. The name Kawkab al-Hawa means "star of the wind".^{xxxix}



Interior of the Belvoir

The village was seized in mid-May of 1948 due to its strategic position overlooking the valley below. It was an ideal location to defend against attacks from the east. The villagers resisted the assault but were quickly defeated. In addition, there are varying accounts of Iraqi forces either briefly capturing the village or fighting Israeli forces on the hill just below the village during this time. However, Kawkab al-Hawa returned to Israeli control by late May.^{xl}

Today, nothing remains of the village. The site has become a national park housing the excavated ruins of the Belvoir castle.

LUBYA

39,629 dunams (1,051 dunams were Jewish owned)

Lubya, known by the same name during the Crusades, lies 10.5 km west of Tiberias. In 1945, the population was predominantly Muslim, consisting of 2,350 inhabitants. The village's economy was based on agriculture due to the particularly fertile land the fields were located on and the village was known in the region for its quality wheat.^{xli}

Clashes between Jewish militias and the villagers of Lubya began on January 20, 1948 when Zionist forces conducted a coordinated raid against Lubya and the nearby village of Tur'an. Skirmishes continued into mid July, contributing to both Jewish and Palestinian casualties. The village militia cooperated briefly with the Arab Liberation Army (ALA) during the attack against the Jewish settlement of Sejera (located

close to the Arab village of al Shajara). However, when news reached the inhabitants of Lubya that Nazareth had fallen and was under occupation, the villagers became terrified and appealed to the ALA for military aid. They were turned down and as a result the majority of the villagers fled in mid July leaving only the village militia and a few elderly people.^{xliii} On July 17, 1948 Zionist forces approached, announcing their presence by shelling, prompting the village militia's retreat and the remaining elderly people to take refuge in nearby caves. Nazzal quotes two residents describing the assault on their village: "When the Jewish armoured unit approached us, the village was almost empty. We were few, our morale was low...we knew we could not withstand the attack and decided to retreat, leaving the village in Jewish hands".^{xliiii} Today, the remains of the village lie beneath the Lavi pine forest planted by the Jewish National Fund. Another forest planted in the name of the Republic of South Africa stands where the western area of the village of Lubya was located. Scattered wells, originally used by the villagers, and cacti are the few visible remnants of Lubya.



A Muslim shrine (courtesy of Jamal Ali)

MA'LUL

4,698 dunams (2,719 dunams were Jewish owned)

Ma'lul, known to the Crusaders as Maula, is located 6 km east of Nazareth and just 2 km north of the village of al-Mujaydil. In 1945, the village population was comprised of 690 inhabitants - 200 Christians and 490 Muslims. The village contained a mosque and two churches, Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic. The inhabitants were tenant farmers on land owned by the Sursuq family, who lived in Beirut. In 1921, the family sold all but 2,000 dunams of the village land to a Zionist company, which eventually transferred to the Jewish National Fund (JNF).^{xliv}



The village mosque



The village church

According to Walid Khalidi, there was confusion regarding ownership of the land on the part of the Arab residents of Ma'lul, including regulations prohibiting the sale of land owned by the Jewish National Fund to non-Jewish people. The remaining 2,000 dunams was insufficient to sustain the agricultural demands of the village population. Thus, the inhabitants were forced to lease the land from the JNF. Beginning in 1927, a legal battle ensued over the status of the land between the JNF and the inhabitants regarding rent and the right to buy the land back. In 1946, the JNF came to an agreement with the government to exchange land in Ma'lul for land near the town of Beisan. However, this exchange was hard to implement and it is unclear how the inhabitants of Ma'lul were affected by this.

Ma'lul was occupied on July 14, 1948 as part of Operation

Dekel.^{xlv} The occupation of this land was a strategic move linking the Jewish settlements around Nazareth and effectively isolating the town. The residents of Ma'lul were expelled and their houses were leveled.^{xlvi}

Today, a military base is located on part of the village site while another portion of the land is now covered in pine trees planted by the Jewish National Fund. The village mosque is still recognizable though it has fallen into disrepair. Adjacent to the mosque lies the Muslim cemetery. The two churches were used intermittently as cow sheds by the neighboring kibbutz. However, both churches have been recently cleaned and are used by the families of former residents. The Christian cemetery is within the confines of the military base.

AL MUJAYDIL

18,165 dunams (485 dunams were Jewish owned)

Al Mujaydil is located 6 km southwest of Nazareth on the Nazareth-Haifa highway. In 1945, the population was composed of 1,640 Muslims and 260 Christian residents. The village contained an elementary school for boys and a separate one for girls. It also housed a Roman Catholic church and monastery. The village economy depended on agriculture and was the second largest producer of olives in the district.^{xlvii}



The village church recently renovated

Al Mujaydil was one of several villages around Nazareth to be captured in order to seize the city. It was taken as part of the second stage of Operation Dekel on July 15, 1948 by the Golani Brigade. The village was evacuated and almost entirely destroyed except for the church and monastery. Around 1,200 refugees fled to Nazareth.

In 1952, Migdal ha-'Emeq was established by Jewish immigrants from Iran on village land. Today, the village site is a residential area populated predominantly by Russian immigrants. The Catholic Church has been recently restored and is in use.

SAFFURYA

55,378 dunams

Saffurya is located 6 km northwest of Nazareth, just off the highway between Nazareth and the coast. The Romans knew the village site as Diocaesarea and made the village the administrative center for the Galilee. During the Byzantine period the village included Christian and Jewish communities. Saffurya was conquered during the Islamic conquest in 634 A.D. The Crusaders built a fortress overlooking the village that was later rebuilt during Ottoman rule. By 1945, the population of the village consisted of 4,320 Muslims and 10 Christians. The village contained an elementary school for boys and another for girls. The village also houses the remains of structures and artifacts dating from the Hellenistic period on.^{xlvi}



Village land—the hill in the background is now a pine forest planted in commemoration of Guatemala Independence Day

Saffurya was captured as part of Operation Dekel. According to Benny Morris, the village had supported troops from the Arab Liberation Army (ALA) and had been a center of anti-Zionist activity.^{xlix} After the village received 2,500 refugees from the village of Shafa 'Amr, the residents became concerned for their safety.^l On the night of July 15, Israeli forces began to bomb Saffurya from the air while advancing with tanks and infantry by land. Most of the villagers took refuge in the orchard while others stayed to fight. The resistance consisted of 135-150 men armed with 125 rifles, 15 machine guns, one cannon, and 50 explosives. The villagers incorrectly believed that the ALA stationed in Nazareth would come to their aid. One resident, Salih Muhammad Nassir describes the battle: "We fought independently, every man for himself. There was no communication or coordination among us".^{li} By the morning of July 16, the village was captured and demolished. The residents taking refuge in the orchard fled north or east.

In 1949, the moshav, Tzippori, and the town, ha-Solelim, were established on village land. In the 1980s, Allon ha-Galil, Hosh'a'aya, and Chanton were all built on land that was formerly Saffuriya. The Jewish National Fund planted a pine forest on the village site to commemorate Guatemala Independence Day.

SAFSAF

7,391 dunams

Safsaf, meaning “willow” in Arabic, is located 7 km northwest of Safad. The Romans knew the village as Safsofa. In 1945, the population was comprised of 1,070 residents, all of whom were Muslim. The village contained a mosque and elementary school and the village economy depended on agriculture.^{lii} Safsaf was captured as part of Operation Hiram on October 29, 1948. The battle was brief because the villagers were unprepared for an attack. The village defense consisted of 40 to 60 men armed with rifles and one machine gun. The night before October 29, Israeli planes bombed the nearby Arab Liberation Army (ALA) encampment and began shelling

Safsaf. The Israeli army advanced on three fronts and the village fell before dawn. The village militia retreated with the ALA volunteers to Lebanon leaving many villagers behind. Nafez Nazzal quotes a former resident, Isma’il Nassir Za’mut, who describes what occurred when the Israeli forces entered Safsaf: “We were lined up, a few Jewish soldiers ordered four girls to accompany them to carry water for the soldiers. Instead, they took them to our empty houses and raped them. About 70 of our men were blindfolded and shot to death, one after the other in front of us. The soldiers took their bodies and threw them on the cement covering of the village’s spring and dumped sand on them”.^{liii} In 1949, Sifsofa was established on village lands. Later, in 1979, Bar Yochay was also established on village land. Some of the village houses are used by the new residents.



The remains of the village school

AL SHAJARA

3,754 dunams (61 dunams were Jewish owned)

Al Shajara, known as Seiera during the Crusades, is located southwest of Tiberias on a highway connecting Nazareth to Tiberias. In 1902, a Jewish settlement was established within very close proximity to the village site and was named Sejera after its neighbor, al Shajara. The word al Shajara in Arabic means “the tree”. In 1945, the population consisted of 720 Muslims and 50 Christians. The village economy depended on agriculture. An elementary school was established during the British Mandate.^{liv}

After Tiberias fell, al Shajara was seized by the Golani Brigade on May 6, 1948. The assault began at dawn and lasted all day with local Arab forces defending the village. The Haganah account states that the villagers fled during the attack. Naji al-Ali, a famous Palestinian cartoonist, was one of the villagers



The village site today

forced to flee. He was 10 years old when he was forced to emigrate to a refugee camp in southern Lebanon where he began drawing as a means of political expression and outlet for the grief caused by the loss of his home. From this form of expression came the well known character, Handala. Naji al-Ali explains his creation stating:

“Handala was born ten years old, and he will always be ten years old. At that age, I left my homeland, and when he returns, Handala will still be ten, and then he will start growing up. The laws of nature do not apply to him. He is unique. Things will become normal again when the homeland returns.

I presented him to the poor and named him Handala as a symbol of bitterness. At first, he was a Palestinian child, but his consciousness developed to have a national and then a global and human horizon. He is a simple yet tough child, and this is why people adopted him and felt that he represents their consciousness”.^{lv}

Today, there are no settlements on al Shajara, but the village site is discernable by the presence of cactus and the remains of a well that served as the village’s source of water.



Stairs into the village well

SAMAKH

18,611 dunams (8,412 dunams were Jewish owned)

Samakh is located 10 km southeast of Tiberias at the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee. In 1945, the population had reached a total of 3,460 Arab residents (Muslim and Christian) and the total area of village land consisted of 18,611 dunams making the village the largest in the district of Tiberias. The village served as a major transportation link between areas east and west of the Jordan River, housing a railroad station served by the Hijaz railway line and located on a highway running along the coast of the Sea of Galilee. The village economy depended on commerce and agriculture, the main crops being bananas and grain. The village also contained a school for boys and a school for girls.^{lv}



The train station (courtesy of Makbula Nassar)

As a consequence of the fall of Tiberias, Samakh was isolated and consequently fell shortly thereafter. According to Benny Morris, many of the inhabitants of Samakh, particularly the rich inhabitants, left during the first months of the war due to a feeling of isolation and vulnerability to Jewish attack. The village was completely evacuated at the end of April.^{lvii} Syrian forces briefly recaptured the village site in mid May; however, Samakh was reoccupied on May 21 by the Golani Brigade.

Two Jewish settlements established in 1937, Massada and Sha'ar ha-Golan have expanded onto land previously part of Samakh. In 1949, two more settlements were established on village land, Ma'agan and Tel Qatzir. Today, a public park and a factory have been established on a section of the land of Samakh by inhabitants of a nearby town, leaving only the railway station as a landmark of the former village.

SA'SA'

14,796 dunams

Sa'sa' is located 12 km northwest of Safad in the Upper Galilee Mountains. In 1945, all 1,130 residents were Muslim. The village contained a mosque and elementary schools for boys and girls. Sa'sa also contained a market and commercial area in the center of the village. The village economy was almost entirely self-sufficient. In addition, Sa'sa' exported tobacco to cigarette factories in Haifa.^{lviii}

The village was described by Jewish leaders as housing combatants and on February 15, 1948, it was raided by a Palmach force. Ten houses were completely destroyed or damaged by explosive devices and 11 villagers were killed, 5 of them small children. In late October the village was seized during Operation Hiram without resistance. The night before



A village house in use by Jewish residents today

Sa'sa' was captured, many residents fled due to the fall of Safsaf. Israeli planes bombing Safsaf were visible to the villagers and caused panic. The mukhtar, Muhsin al-Saiyad is quoted by Nafez Nazzal describing the event: "We stayed all night watching out for a Jewish attack. Our armed men did not go to the aid of Safsaf or



Tools used by the villagers in the Avraham Rashkes Archeological Museum

Jish because we were worried that the Jews would attack us from the west...Our men remained in the village. At dawn, we were told by the retreating ALA [Arab Liberation Army] and village militiamen that Safsaf had been captured. We could not stay because we were not prepared to defend ourselves and so decided to join them and leave for Lebanon".^{lix} In 1949, Kibbutz Sasa was established on the village site. Several of the village houses are now inhabited by the new residents. The kibbutz contains the Avraham Rashkes Archeological Museum which is described as housing "finds collected by kibbutz members or which were unearthed in archeological excavation on the kibbutz or in the nearby area". Artifacts include agricultural tools used by the Arab inhabitants of Sa'sa' but there is no mention of this population.

SUHMATA

17,056 dunams

Suhmata is located 25 km northeast of Acre and is on a highway connecting it to Safad. Prior to the Persian invasion of Palestine, the population was entirely Christian. During the Crusades, the village was known as Samueth and the Crusaders built a castle on the site. In 1945, the population consisted of 1,130 Muslims and 70 Christians. The village



The remains of a village house partially demolished.

contained a church and mosque. In addition, it housed an elementary school and agricultural school established during the British Mandate.^x Two pools that collected rain water were used for irrigation purposes.

The village was captured on October 30, 1948. The villagers put up some resistance but Suhmata was occupied after being surrounded by infantry. The village was demolished by air. Suhmata was renamed Tzuri'el and in 1949, Chosen was established on village land. Because the village was demolished by air, remains of houses are still discernable. The structure of the pool used for irrigation is also still visible.



The remains of a village house partially demolished.

AL TANTURA

14,520 dunams

Al Tantura is located on the coast 24 km south of Haifa and near the ruins of the Canaanite town of Dor. In the second century B.C, the Greeks occupied Dor referring to it as Dora. Eventually, in the fourth century A.D. Dora was abandoned. In the late nineteenth century, al Tantura's economy depended on agriculture and the sea. The village contained a harbor and a guest house for travelers. A train station connected the village to the coastal railway line. By 1945, the village population reached 1,490 residents and contained schools for boys and girls.^{lxvi}

On May 23, 1948, a week after the State of Israel was declared, the Alexandroni Brigade captured al Tantura.

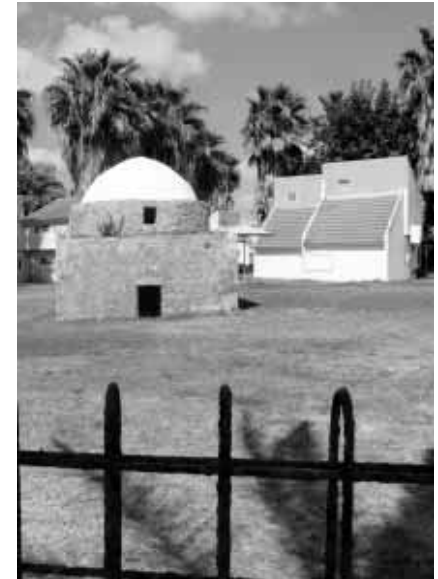


The house of al-Yahya

According to former resident, Farid Taha Salam, the villagers established a community watch after the news of the fall of Haifa reached al Tantura. The villagers were poorly armed with a few rifles, one automatic weapon left behind by the British, and a few hunting rifles. On the night of the attack, the watchmen returned fire but quickly ran out of ammunition.^{lxvii}

Walid Khalidi notes that the village fell after a "brief battle." Walid Khalidi does not offer further details regarding the specific actions taken in al Tantura, but recently, Teddy Katz, a former M.A. student at Haifa University, researched the history and contends that a massacre of 200-250 residents occurred and that the existing parking lot in front of the entrance to the beach serves as a mass grave for the victims.

Based on more than twenty interviews, Katz believes that after the brief battle a lethal hunt for the adult males of the village took place for hours. Katz states that "No more than 10 or 20 of the men of the village fell in the battle, but by the



A Muslim shrine

end of the day there were no fewer than 200 to 250 dead adult males, in circumstances in which the villagers were without arms and completely defenseless".^{lxiii}

According to former resident, Muhammad Abu Hana, after the battle, the residents were rounded up on the beach where the men were separated from the women. He goes on to recount the events he witnessed: "On the beach, soldiers led groups of men away, and you could hear gunfire after each departure. Toward noon we were led on foot to an orchard to the east of the village, and I saw bodies piled on a cart pulled by men of Tantura who emptied their cargo in a big pit. Then trucks arrived, and women and children were loaded onto them and driven to Furaydis. On the road, near the railroad tracks, other bodies were scattered about".^{lxiv}

After the battle and subsequent expulsion of the remaining residents, the village was completely demolished except for Iqab al-Yahya's house that still stands on the beach and a Muslim shrine. Four weeks after the battle, the village site was resettled and Kibbutz Nahsholim was established. The village site is now a recreational area with access to the beach and event facilities.

TIBERIAS

2,499 dunams (664 dunams were Jewish owned)

Tiberias is a mixed city located on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was the center of administrative and commercial services to the northern Jordan Valley and the eastern Galilee. The city's population had included Sephardic Jews for centuries prior to the 1948 war. This community maintained close ties with the Arab population of the city. Ashkenazi Jews began settling in the area at the end of the nineteenth century. The relationship between these different communities was described as harmonious by both the Arab notables and Jewish officials. By 1945, the Jewish communities comprised 53 percent of the population.^{lxv}



A village mosque with the Sheraton hotel in the background

Overall, the Arab notables, namely the Tabari family, maintained calm throughout the 1929 riots and the 1936-1939 Revolt. The only account of violence occurred on October 20, 1938 when 19 Jews were killed in the Jewish neighborhood of the city, Kiryat Shmuel. The Tabari family condemned the attack and asserted that it was carried out by people



A second village mosque

from outside Tiberias. After the 1947 UN Partition Plan, relations began to deteriorate as both communities prepared for conflict though the Tabari family continued to reject the Arab Liberation Army's demand to control the city in order to defend it from Jewish forces.

The first serious incident of violence occurred in the market place on March 8, 1948 during which 10 Jews and 12 Arabs were wounded. However, soon after the incident a ceasefire was negotiated between the Arab and Jewish community leaders. In the beginning of April, violence was renewed with sporadic exchanges of fire resulting in the complete deterioration of peace between the Arab and Jewish population. Jewish leaders refused any further ceasefires.

On April 10, Jewish forces attacked the nearby village of Nasir al Din destroying the houses and killing many of the residents while evacuating the rest. Many refugees from Nasir al Din took refuge in Tiberias worrying the Arab community of the city that they might suffer a similar fate. Further scaring the residents, the British pulled out of the northern part of the city making the Arab community vulnerable to a Jewish strike. The Arabs of Tiberias were not prepared for a full-scale attack when the battle began on April 16 with an attack on an Arab house killing 14 civilians.^{lxvi} The British reported heavy fighting throughout the night of April 16/17. The Golani Brigade and Palmach forces advanced at dawn destroying houses in their path. The resistance to Jewish forces is described as unprepared and uncoordinated. The Arab residents appealed to the British forces responsible for Tiberias for help. The British responded, stating that their protection could only be guaranteed until their withdrawal on April 22, and advised them to evacuate. Thus, instead of restoring order, the British provided the Arab community with buses and an escort to Nazareth and Transjordan leaving the historically mixed city without a single Arab resident.^{lxvii}

AL TIRA, OR TIRAT AL-KARMIL

45,262 dunams (6,553 dunams were Jewish owned)

Al Tira, known to the Crusaders as St. Yohan de Tire, is located 7 km south of Haifa on the western slopes of Mount Carmel and is linked to the coastal highway. In 1945, the population was comprised of 5,240 Muslims and 30 Christians. The village contained an elementary school for boys and a separate one for girls. The economy was based on agriculture and a limited number of villagers engaged in livestock breeding.^{lxviii} Al Tira experienced several attacks prior to its capture beginning December 1947 when the Irgun bombed the village killing 13 residents including children and elderly villagers. Sporadic attacks occurred in the following weeks. In April 1948, the village was affected by the Haganah's goal to secure

the routes into Haifa and protect the Jewish population of the city.^{lxix} Al Tira was viewed as a threat because it dominated the southern exit of Haifa. Shortly after Haifa was seized, on April 25, an assault with the intent of capturing al Tira was launched using mortars and machine guns. A British unit arrived during the fighting and evacuated some of the women and children. This particular battle continued for about a week with the British attempting to evacuate village residents intermittently. The siege on al Tira lasted over two months. On July 16, the village was finally captured and the remaining villagers were evacuated or placed in POW camps.

Several Jewish towns have been established on village land. They are: ha-Chotrim, Tirat Karmel, Megadim, Kefar Gallim, and Beyt Tzvi. Today, a couple of the village houses and two shrines still stand. The cemetery is visible but has not been well preserved. Many of the tombstones have been broken. The village school is used today as a school for the local children.



The village cemetery

AZIB

12,438 dunums

Azib is located 13.5 km north of Acre east of the coastal highway. Excavations on the village site have revealed that the area has been settled since eighteenth century B.C. One of the many settlements on the site was Canaanite. Azib was composed of an all Muslim population reaching a total of 1,910 (including Manawat) residents in 1945. Azib contained an elementary school established by the Ottomans in 1882, a mosque, a clinic, and several olive presses. The village economy depended on agriculture and fishing. On average, sixteen metric tons of fish were caught a year.^{lxx}

Azib was captured during the first stage of Operation Ben-Ami. According to Benny Morris, the village was known to be a site of



The mukhtar's house converted into a museum

Arab resistance and when the assault on azib began with a barrage of mortar fire, most of the residents fled "fearful of Jewish retribution for their past anti-Yishuv activities".^{lxxi} Many residents that did not flee were transferred to al Mazra'a.

Soon after its capture, the village was demolished as punishment for Arab resistance. However, the head of the Jewish National Fund expressed disappointment regarding the demolition

because he felt it would have been a more satisfying revenge to settle Jews in the village houses.^{lxxii} Regarding the village houses, Weitz stated that they were "good for the settlement of [our Jewish] brothers, who have wandered for generation upon generation, refugees...steeped in suffering and sorrow, as they, at last, find a roof over their heads...This was [the reason for] our war".^{lxxiii}

Kibbutz Geshar ha-Ziv was established on the village site in January 1949. Today the village mosque and the mukhtar, Husayn 'Ataya's house remains standing. The mosque has been restored for the purpose of tourism and the mukhtar's house has been converted into a museum displaying many household items from the houses of the former residents of azib and tombstones from the village cemetery. However, information provided in the museum regarding the site does not refer to azib or its residents by name but describes the village economy under the British Mandate in one line, briefly mentioning that in 1948 Muslim inhabitants escaped Israeli forces by fleeing to Lebanon.



Villagers' possessions now housed in the museum

Al Birwa

13,542 dunams (546 dunams were Jewish owned)

Al Birwa, located 10.5 km east of Acre, was known to the Crusaders as Broet. The name “Birwa”, however, dates back to at least 1047, when the Persian traveler and writer Nasir Khusraw recorded his trip through the village in his book *Sifr Nameh*.¹ Just west of the village there is a tell containing artifacts dating to 2300 to 900 B.C.E.

The village had grown during the British Mandate period, reaching a population of 1,460-1,330 Muslims and 130 Christians. The primary source of livelihood was agriculture, and the village owned three large olive presses. By 1948, the village had two schools, one for boys and one for girls. The girls’ school was established in 1942.

According to residents of al Birwa, there was resistance to the British occupation from the residents of the village, including one incident in 1938 in which men from Al Birwa were forced to sit on cacti in retaliation for the land mine deaths of twelve British soldiers.²

Although there are differing accounts of the loss of the village, various sources agree that the village was captured by Zionist forces at dawn on June 11, 1948, the same day that the first United Nations truce began. According to official Israeli sources, the Israeli army “clashed with Arab units at al Birwa, inflicting 100 casualties.”³ The *New York Times* reported that UN observers entered the village due to “truce violations” but placed the blame for violating the truce on the Palestinian population, stating that Birwa “‘had been held by a small Israeli garrison prior to the truce.’”⁴

Following the capture of the al Birwa, the residents took refuge

in neighboring villages in the hope that they would be able to return to harvest their fields. However, as the end of harvest time was nearing, the villagers, hungry and concerned their crop would be ruined, took the Zionist forces by surprise and recaptured their village on June 23, 1948. They found some of their wheat already harvested and their possessions loaded into bags. Former resident, Najib Sa’d states, “The reason why we fought for our village was because we were hungry. It was harvest time... Why should we leave our crops to the Jews?” After two days, the Arab Liberation Army (ALA) entered the village suggesting that the villagers join their families in the neighboring villages as al Birwa would be under their protection. However, shortly thereafter, the ALA lost the village to Zionist forces.⁵

In 1949, Kibbutz Yas’ur was established on the village site and a year later, Achihud was established on a portion of the village’s land. It is worth noting that Al Birwa is the birthplace and childhood home of the most loved Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish, who passed away this year. Years after his family was expelled from their homes, Darwish would pen the famous lines that captured the spirit of the longing of the refugee for home: “I come from there...and remember.”

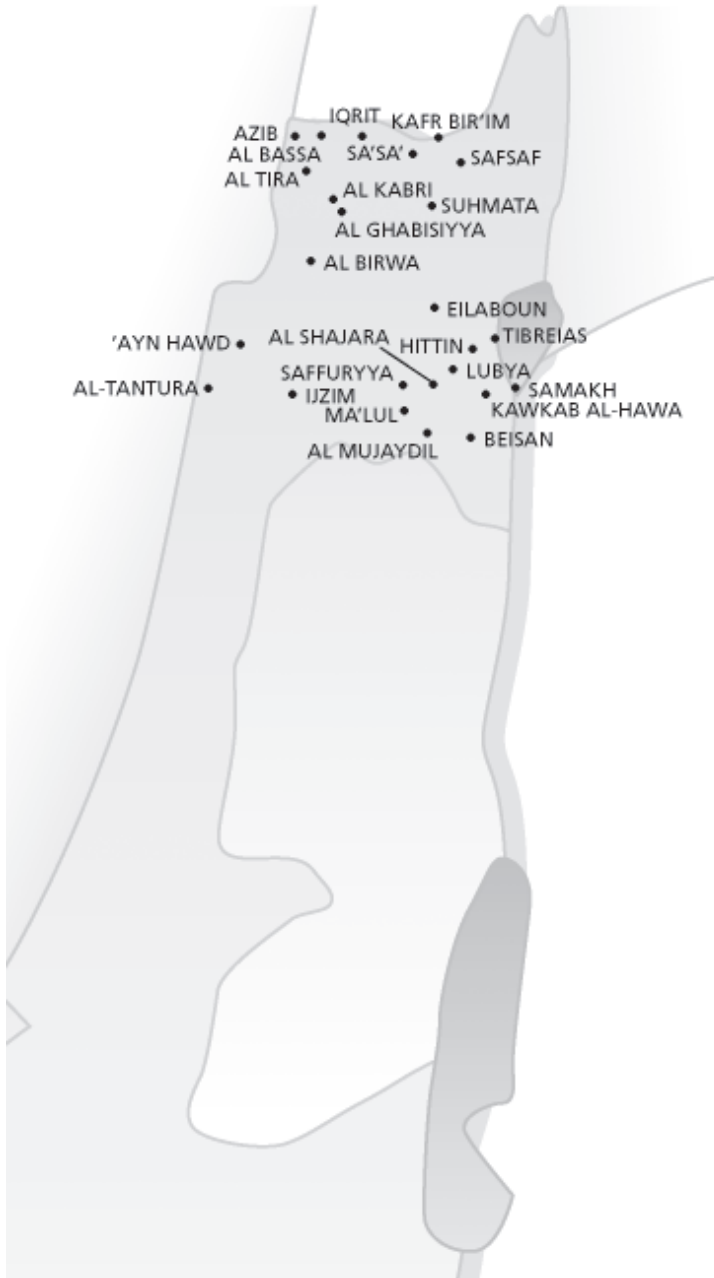
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UNRWA photo

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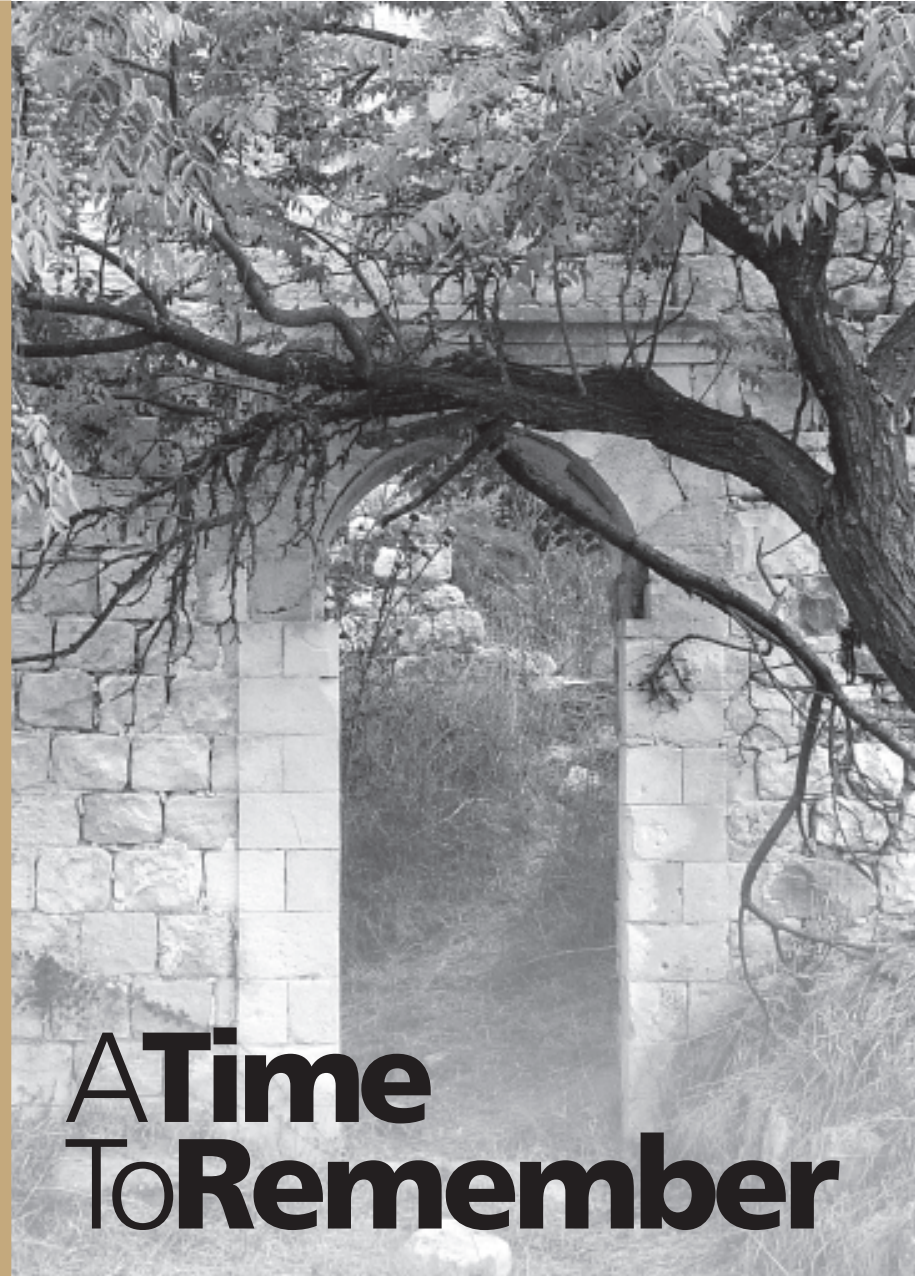
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A Time To Remember

Palestinian Towns and Villages