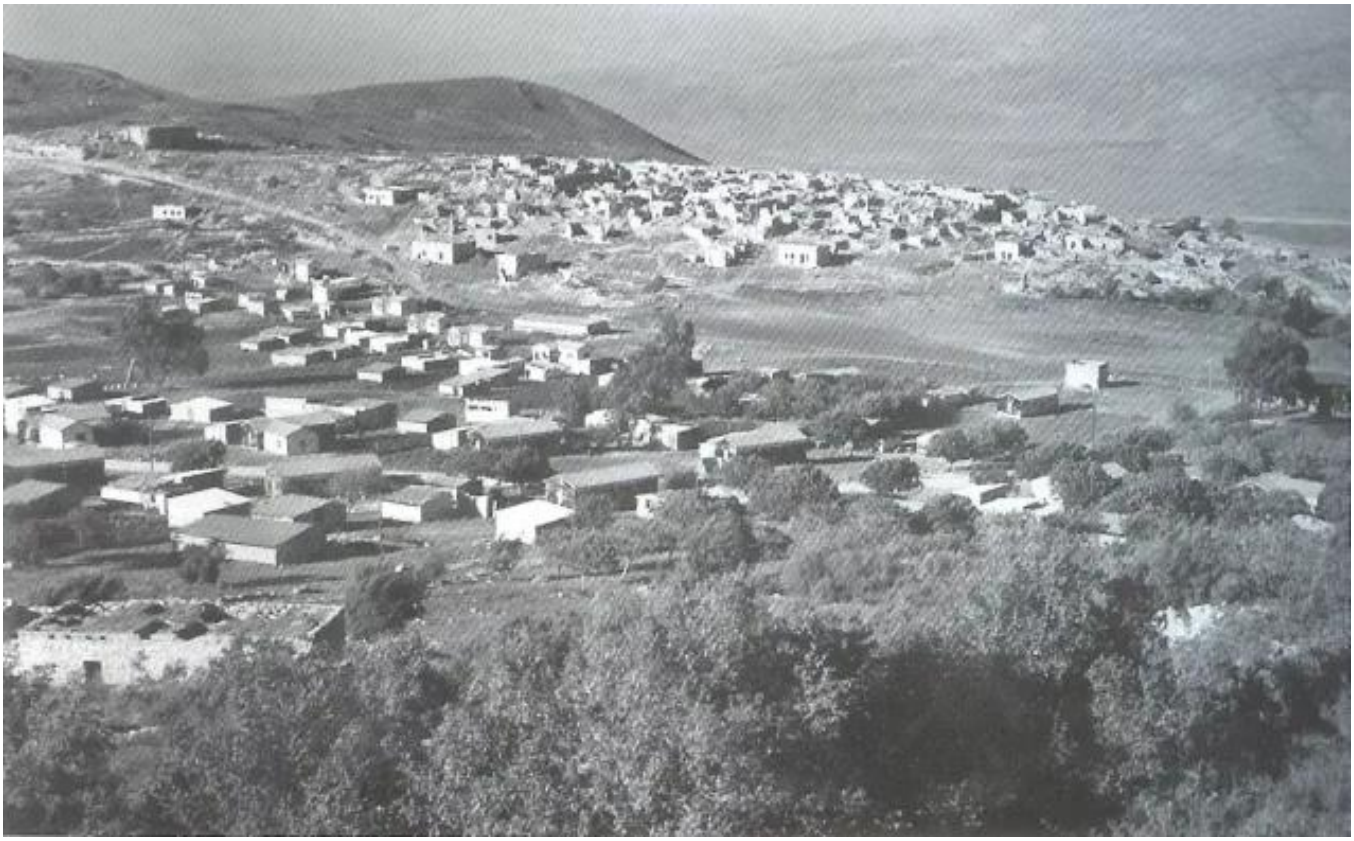
Hunin



- Hunin was a depopulated Palestinian village approximately 28.5 kilometres northeast of Safad.
- The boundary between Palestine and Lebanon passed very close to the village, approximately half a kilometre to its west.
- Although the straight-line distance from Safad was about 28.5 kilometres, the road journey was considerably longer and has been described in local geographical accounts as approximately 42 kilometres.
- Hunin formed part of Lebanon until 1923, when Britain and France delineated the political boundary between Mandate Palestine and Mandate Lebanon and incorporated the village into Palestine.
- Hunin stood on Mount Amil, on a relatively level ridge overlooking the

northern part of the al-Hula Plain. Its average elevation was approximately 650 metres above sea level. The higher ground west of the village culminated near the summit of al-Shaykh Abbad, while the eastern slopes descended steeply toward the al-Hula Plain.

- Local geographical accounts identify several water features around the village, including a reservoir on its southwestern edge and the springs of Ayn al-Ajl, Ayn al-Jinjar, and Ayn al-Aqarib. The village also had two principal springs recorded in academic surveys.

Population and Public Buildings in Hunin

- In 1931, Hunin had 233 houses. Its built-up area in 1944/45 was 81 dunams, while its total registered land area was 14,224 dunams. Of this land, 486 dunams were under Jewish ownership, equivalent to approximately 3.4 percent of the total.
- The population recorded for Hunin was 1,075 in 1931 and 1,620 in 1945. The 1945 statistical unit included the populations of Hula and Udaysa, two Lebanese villages located respectively west and north of Hunin. The figure therefore should not be interpreted as a count of Hunin’s inhabitants alone.
- Hunin had an elementary school for boys and a mosque. Local accounts assign medieval dates to parts of the mosque and its minaret, but these dates are not consistently confirmed by the principal academic surveys. The surviving historical monument most securely dated by those surveys is the Crusader castle constructed in 1179.

Land Ownership in Hunin

Ownership category	Land area (dunams)*
Palestinian ownership	13,623

Ownership category	Land area (dunams)*
Jewish ownership	486
Public land	115
Total	**14,224**

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres.

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Safad
Distance from district center	28.5 km north of Safad
Average Elevation	650 m above sea level
Population in 1931	1,075
Number of Houses in 1931	233
Population in 1944/1945	1,620 – joint figure including Hula and Udaysa, not the village alone
Total Land Area in 1945	14,224 dunams – joint figure including the lands of Hula and Udaysa
Attack and Depopulation	Hunin was occupied in the course of Operation Yiftach (April–May 1948), the sources not giving the day of its occupation. Accounts of its inhabitants' departure differ: an Israeli military intelligence report dates it to 3 May, a Palmach report claimed that Arab forces ordered them to leave by 14 May, while eyewitness recollections show the village was still inhabited after the fall of Safad on 11 May, its people probably moving on to Lebanon a few days after the fall of neighbouring al-Khalisa.
Final Israeli Control	The available sources do not give the day of the village's occupation: it was occupied in the course of Operation Yiftach (15 April–25 May 1948), and Zionist forces had not yet reached it on 3 May, so it was probably occupied between 3 and 25 May 1948
Military Operation	Operation Yiftach

Item	Information
Military Unit	The available sources do not identify the unit that occupied the village; Operation Yiftach was carried out by the Palmach under its commander Yigal Allon, PalQuest lists the Yiftach Brigade as its unit, and the Palmach's First Battalion spearheaded it
Cause of Depopulation	Fear of Zionist attacks, according to an Israeli military intelligence report published by PalQuest, in the course of Operation Yiftach, which emptied eastern Galilee of its inhabitants through direct attacks and psychological warfare
Settlements Documented on Village Lands	Misgav 'Am, established in 1945 on the northern part of the village lands; Margaliyyot, established in 1951 by Jewish immigrants from Iraq and Yemen on village land just south of the village site

The British Mandate statistical unit for Hunin included Hula and Udaysa in these figures.

Land Use in Hunin, 1944/45

Land-use category	Palestinian ownership (dunams)*	Jewish ownership (dunams)*	Public land (dunams)*	Total (dunams)*
Irrigated land and orchards	859	19	0	878
Olive groves	152	0	0	152
Cereal cultivation	5,987	290	105	6,382
Built-up area	81	0	0	81
Cultivable land	6,846	309	105	7,260
Uncultivated land	6,696	177	10	6,883

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres.

The British Mandate statistical unit for Hunin included Hula and Udaysa. The 152 dunams of olive groves were recorded as a crop-specific figure within the broader cultivated-land categories.

Population of Hunin

Year	Population
1931	1,075
1945	1,620
1948	1,879 (estimated)
Estimated number of refugees in 1998	11,540

The 1931 and 1945 population figures include Hula and Udaysa. The figures for 1948 and 1998 are later demographic estimates rather than contemporary census counts.

Economy of Hunin

Agriculture and animal husbandry formed the basis of Hunin’s economy. In the 1942/43 season, approximately 152 dunams were planted with productive olive trees. Fruit orchards were concentrated northwest, west, southwest, and east of the village.

In 1944/45, 5,987 dunams under Palestinian ownership were allocated to cereal cultivation, while 859 dunams were irrigated or used for orchards. Agricultural land was concentrated principally in the valleys below the surrounding hills.

Historical and Archaeological Importance of Hunin

The Crusaders constructed the fortress known as Chastel Neuf at Hunin in 1179. The Arab traveller Ibn Jubayr, who passed through the region around 1183, described it as a fortress still held by the Franks.

The castle’s defenders surrendered to Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi toward the end of 1187. Crusader forces reoccupied it in 1240, before the Mamluk sultan Baybars expelled them in 1266. The geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi described Hunin as a

village in the mountains of Amila overlooking al-Hula, while al-Dimashqi later referred to the castle as an administrative centre governing neighbouring villages.

In the late nineteenth century, travellers described Hunin as a stone-built village adjoining the ruins of the Crusader castle. The village had a mosque and an elementary school for boys.

Occupation and Depopulation of Hunin

The chronology of Hunin’s occupation and depopulation involved several stages and cannot accurately be reduced to 31 October 1948. Like most Palestinian villages in the Galilee Panhandle, Hunin was affected by Operation Yiftach, which Palmach forces conducted in April and May 1948.

A military intelligence report cited by Benny Morris claimed that the inhabitants evacuated the village on 3 May, before Zionist forces had reached it. A separate Palmach report alleged that Arab forces instructed the population to leave by 14 May. These accounts conflict with later eyewitness testimony from residents of neighbouring al-Khalisa. Those witnesses recalled that women and children from al-Khalisa sought refuge in Hunin after the fall of Safad on 11 May, indicating that Hunin was still receiving displaced Palestinians after the alleged evacuation of 3 May.

The inhabitants of Hunin and the Palestinian fighters who had withdrawn there appear to have moved toward Lebanon later in May as Zionist forces advanced through the area. Estimates vary between sources regarding the precise timing and immediate circumstances of this first displacement.

Some inhabitants subsequently remained in or returned to Hunin. In August 1948, village representatives reportedly expressed a willingness to remain peacefully in their homes. Nevertheless, Israeli forces raided the village on 2 September, demolished approximately twenty houses, killed several residents, and expelled those who remained. Benny Morris records twenty Palestinian deaths in this raid,

including a son of the village mukhtar, although the exact casualty total is not independently confirmed across all sources.

The village’s final destruction took place by the end of October 1948, during the broader Israeli offensive in the Upper Galilee. Thus, 31 October may refer to the completion of Hunin’s destruction rather than its initial occupation or the beginning of its inhabitants’ displacement. The Carmeli Brigade participated in the wider Upper Galilee operations at that time, but it should not be listed as the sole force responsible for every stage of Hunin’s depopulation.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Beginning of the military operation	15 April 1948	Operation Yiftach, masterminded by Palmach commander Yigal Allon to gain control of eastern Galilee and 'cleanse' it of its inhabitants, began and lasted until 25 May 1948. PalQuest lists Hunin among the villages affected by the operation.
Beginning of the exodus according to Israeli reports	3 May 1948, or 14 May 1948 (accounts differ)	An Israeli military intelligence report (30 June 1948) published by PalQuest states that the inhabitants of Hunin fully left the village on 3 May out of 'fear of our attacks' and were in Lebanon, although Zionist forces had not yet reached the village at that time; a Palmach report claimed that Arab forces ordered them to leave by 14 May. Khalidi notes that these reports are not consistent with the recollections of eyewitnesses.
Women and children of al-Khalisa take refuge in the village	11 May 1948	On the morning that Safad fell, the people of the nearby village of al-Khalisa (2.5 km to the southeast) decided to evacuate their women and children to Hunin, according to eyewitnesses interviewed twenty-five years later, as cited by Khalidi.

Stage	Date	Details
Depopulation of the village	May 1948 (probably a few days after the fall of al-Khalisa)	When al-Khalisa was captured a few days after the fall of Safad, its defenders retreated temporarily to Hunin, and Khalidi considers it probable that they moved on to Lebanon a few days later along with the people of Hunin itself.
Final occupation	Probably between 3 and 25 May 1948	Like almost all the villages of that part of eastern Galilee, Hunin was occupied in the course of Operation Yiftach, which ended on 25 May 1948; Zionist forces had not yet reached it on 3 May. The available sources give neither the day of its occupation nor the unit that occupied it.
Settlement on village lands	1951	Jewish immigrants from Iraq and Yemen established the settlement of Margaliyyot on village land, just south of the village site.

Israeli Settlements on the Land of Hunin

- **Misgav Am** was established in 1945 on the northern portion of Hunin’s land.
- **Margaliot** was established in 1951 on village land immediately south of the former village site. Its first residents included Jewish immigrants from Iraq and Yemen.

Hunin Today

The village cemetery, elementary school, and historic castle remain visible. The castle has been developed as an archaeological attraction, while the school building has been used as an agricultural warehouse. The surrounding lands are cultivated by residents of the Israeli settlements established in the area.

Sources

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