Our Palestine — Depopulated village — Akka (Acre) — 01 November 1948

Tarshiha



Tarshiha: A Palestinian Town in the Acre District, Most of Whose Residents Were Displaced During the Nakba

Tarshiha is a Palestinian town in the Acre District, located in western Galilee about 27 kilometres northeast of the city of Acre, at an elevation of slightly more than 500 metres above sea level. The town was subjected to bombardment and occupation during Operation Hiram in late October 1948, and most of its inhabitants were displaced during the Nakba and the occupation of Palestine in

1948. Unlike many completely depopulated Palestinian villages, however, Tarshiha was not emptied entirely of its Palestinian population. Some residents remained, others returned after the occupation, and a Palestinian community has continued to live there to the present day.

Basic Information

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Akka (Acre)
Distance from district center	27 km Northeast of Acre
Average Elevation	500 meters above sea level
Population in 1931	2,522 inhabitants - Official census
Number of Houses in 1931	584 houses
Population in 1944/1945	About 3,830 inhabitants - Figure specific to Tarshiha
Total Land Area in 1945	47,428 dunams
Attack and Depopulation	For much of 1948, Tarshiha remained an important Palestinian centre in western Galilee. Local fighters and members of the Arab Liberation Army were present in the town.
Final Israeli Control	Morning of 30 October 1948
Military Operation	Operation Dekel
Military Unit	The 11th Battalion of the Oded Brigade
Settlements Documented on Village Lands	Me‘ona, En Ya‘aqov, Ma‘alot

Location

Tarshiha is located in western Galilee on mountainous terrain northeast of Acre. During the British Mandate, paved roads connected it with Acre, Nahariya, Mi'ilya, al-Rama, Hurfeish, Sa'sa', al-Jish, Suhmata, and al-Kabri, making it an important centre for transportation, trade, and services in the region.

Tarshiha was one of the most important towns in the Acre District during the British Mandate. Its elevated location gave it a distinctive mountain climate, and its lands were characterized by hills and numerous valleys.

Among the villages and towns surrounding Tarshiha were Mi'ilya, Dayr al-Qasi, Suhmata, Yanuh, al-Kabri, Fassuta, Kafr Sami', Hurfeish, and al-Buqay'a.

Tarshiha Before the Nakba

Most of Tarshiha's buildings were constructed of stone, and the town expanded primarily along an east-west axis. It contained shops, mosques, schools, clinics, and other public facilities and services.

Tarshiha had a local council that administered the town and organized its services. A weekly market attracted residents of surrounding villages and reflected the town's important economic and commercial position in western Galilee.

The population included both Muslims and Christians, and the town contained religious institutions belonging to both communities. This religious and social diversity formed an important part of Tarshiha's public life before the Nakba.

Population

Tarshiha had 1,880 inhabitants in the 1922 census. The population increased to 2,522 in the 1931 census, when 584 houses were recorded.

By 1945, the population of Tarshiha itself was approximately 3,830, according to figures published in Palestinian encyclopedic sources and Palestine Remembered.

The figure of 5,360 that appears in some statistical tables includes the populations of Tarshiha and al-Kabri together and should not be presented as the population of Tarshiha alone.

Following the Nakba and the sharp decline caused by displacement, Tarshiha's

population was approximately 639 in 1949, according to the Palestinian Encyclopedia. It later increased to 1,150 in 1961.

Population of Tarshiha

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
1596	585	Historical estimate reported in the sources
1922	1,880	Official census
1931	2,522	Official census
1945	About 3,830	Figure specific to Tarshiha
1949	639	Post-displacement population according to the Palestinian Encyclopedia
1961	1,150	Later census
The figure of 5,360 for 1944/1945 that appears in some tables includes Tarshiha and al-Kabri together and is therefore not used here as the population of Tarshiha alone.		

Education

Tarshiha had two elementary schools, one for boys and another for girls, and the town had a notable educational life during the British Mandate period.

Records published by Palestine Remembered document male and female teachers working in Tarshiha's schools during the 1930s and 1940s, while Mandate-era documents also indicate the continued operation of the boys' school during this period.

Frequently repeated figures concerning exact literacy rates and the number of pupils in individual classes have not been included because they could not be sufficiently confirmed in the principal sources reviewed.

Economic Life

The inhabitants of Tarshiha depended on agriculture, trade, and animal husbandry. The town's lands were mountainous and intersected by numerous valleys. Large areas were used for grazing, while cereals, olives, and fruit trees were also cultivated.

Tarshiha was particularly known for olive and tobacco cultivation and was one of the important olive-producing centres in the Acre District. The Palestinian Encyclopedia reports that approximately 4,047 dunams were planted with olive trees during the Mandate period, making Tarshiha one of the leading olive-growing localities in the district.

The town's weekly market was also an important centre of trade, attracting residents from surrounding Palestinian villages as well as traders and visitors from areas near southern Lebanon.

Tarshiha's Lands and the 1944/1945 Statistics

Land statistics for Tarshiha require an important clarification. The Government of Palestine figures reproduced by PalQuest combine the lands of Tarshiha and al-Kabri in a single statistical unit. The total of 47,428 dunams should therefore not be described as the land area of Tarshiha alone.

According to the combined 1944/1945 statistics, the lands of Tarshiha and al-Kabri together covered 47,428 dunams, of which 37,308 dunams were Arab-owned, 90 dunams were Jewish-owned, and 10,030 dunams were classified as public land.

Total	**47,428**
Ownership Category	**Area in Dunams**
Arab ownership	37,308
Jewish ownership	90

Total	47,428
Ownership Category	**Area in Dunams**
Public land	10,030

These figures apply to Tarshiha and al-Kabri together and should not be used to determine the land area of either locality separately.

Land Use in 1944/1945

The official land-use tables likewise combine Tarshiha and al-Kabri. In the combined unit, 14,056 dunams of Arab-owned land were devoted to cereals, along with 67 dunams of Jewish-owned land. A further 5,278 dunams of Arab-owned land and 23 dunams of Jewish-owned land were irrigated or used for plantations.

A total of 743 dunams were devoted to citrus and bananas, while sources specific to Tarshiha indicate that approximately 4,047 dunams of its lands were planted with olive trees.

Land use in the combined Tarshiha–al-Kabri statistical unit in 1944/1945

Type of Use	Arab	Jewish	Total
Cereals	14,056	67	14,123
Irrigated and plantation land	5,278	23	5,301
Citrus and bananas	743	0	743
These figures apply to the combined Tarshiha–al-Kabri statistical unit and do not represent Tarshiha alone.			

Archaeology in Tarshiha

Tarshiha stands on a site of archaeological significance. Rock-cut tombs, water cisterns, and other remains have been found in the town and its surroundings.

In 1931, the Department of Antiquities of the Government of Palestine excavated

rock-cut tombs dating to the fourth century CE. Rings, earrings, seals, and amulets were among the objects discovered.

Several archaeological sites and khirbas surround Tarshiha, including Khirbat Rusiyyat, Khirbat Jiddin, Khirbat Ja'tun, Khirbat Aliya, and Khirbat Shaghba.

The Nakba and the Occupation of Tarshiha

For much of 1948, Tarshiha remained an important Palestinian centre in western Galilee. Local fighters and members of the Arab Liberation Army were present in the town.

Operation Hiram

Operation Hiram began on 28 October 1948 and continued until 31 October. Its objective was to occupy the remaining areas of Upper and Central Galilee that had not yet come under Israeli control.

Several Israeli brigades participated in the operation, including the Oded Brigade, the Seventh Brigade, the Carmeli Brigade, and the Golani Brigade, together with additional forces operating on different fronts.

With regard to Tarshiha specifically, a study published by the Institute for Palestine Studies states that the 11th Battalion of the Oded Brigade advanced toward the town after passing through the Mi'ilya area, and that the residents who remained in Tarshiha surrendered to Israeli forces on the morning of 30 October 1948.

Aerial and Artillery Bombardment

Tarshiha was subjected to aerial and artillery bombardment at the beginning of Operation Hiram. Studies published by the Institute for Palestine Studies document Israeli air attacks on the town and indicate that the bombardment spread fear and contributed to the flight of a large part of the population.

The studies also document civilian casualties caused by the bombing. However,

detailed local accounts concerning the exact number of aircraft and the precise location of every bomb have not been included because they could not be independently verified through the principal sources reviewed.

Date of Occupation

The morning of 30 October 1948 is used here as the date on which Tarshiha came under Israeli control, based on the detailed study published by the Institute for Palestine Studies. Palestine Remembered gives 1 November 1948 in one of its tables, producing a slight discrepancy between the published sources.

The sequence of Operation Hiram and the fall of surrounding villages supports 30 October as the more precise date for the military occupation of the town.

Displacement of Tarshiha's Population

The bombardment and approach of Israeli forces caused most of Tarshiha's residents to flee on 29 and 30 October 1948. Many moved north toward Lebanon, while others temporarily sought refuge in neighbouring Palestinian villages, particularly Druze villages that remained inhabited.

Tarshiha was not, however, completely emptied of its population. A number of residents remained when Israeli forces entered. The Institute for Palestine Studies documents that the remaining residents were gathered in the area of the church and that a curfew was imposed on the rest of the town, while abandoned homes were subjected to looting.

Some residents who had temporarily taken refuge in neighbouring villages began returning gradually from November 1948 onward. What occurred should therefore be described as the large-scale displacement of most of the population rather than the complete and permanent depopulation of the town.

Tarshiha's population had fallen to approximately 639 in 1949, compared with about 3,830 in 1945, illustrating the scale of displacement caused by the Nakba.

Fate of Buildings and Property

Some of Tarshiha's buildings were destroyed by bombardment and military operations, but the town itself was not demolished in its entirety. A substantial number of houses and other buildings remained standing.

The Institute for Palestine Studies documents extensive looting of homes abandoned during the flight of the population. Food supplies, crops, furniture, and other property were taken. Tarshiha was particularly known for tobacco production, and quantities of dried tobacco were stored in houses at the time of the occupation.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
The Nakba and the Occupation of Tarshiha	Not specified precisely	For much of 1948, Tarshiha remained an important Palestinian centre in western Galilee. Local fighters and members of the Arab Liberation Army were present in the town.
Operation Hiram	28 October 1948	Operation Hiram began on 28 October 1948 and continued until 31 October. Its objective was to occupy the remaining areas of Upper and Central Galilee that had not yet come under Israeli control.
Aerial and Artillery Bombardment	Not specified precisely	Tarshiha was subjected to aerial and artillery bombardment at the beginning of Operation Hiram. Studies published by the Institute for Palestine Studies document Israeli air attacks on the town and indicate that the bombardment spread fear and contributed to the flight of a large part of the population.

Stage	Date	Details
Date of Occupation	30 October 1948	The morning of 30 October 1948 is used here as the date on which Tarshiha came under Israeli control, based on the detailed study published by the Institute for Palestine Studies. Palestine Remembered gives 1 November 1948 in one of its tables, producing a slight discrepancy between the published sources.

Israeli Settlements and Projects on the Lands of Tarshiha

Ma'alot

Ma'alot was established on land belonging to Tarshiha. The Institute for Palestine Studies explicitly lists Ma'alot among Israeli towns established on lands belonging to Palestinian Arab localities.

Kfar Vradim

Kfar Vradim was established on lands taken from Tarshiha, Yanuh, and Kafr Sami', according to a study published by the Institute for Palestine Studies.

Me'ona, Ga'aton, Ein Ya'akov, and Ma'alot

Walid Khalidi states that Ga'aton, established in 1948; Me'ona, established in 1949; Ein Ya'akov, established in 1950; and Ma'alot, established in 1957, stand on lands that belonged either to al-Kabri or to Tarshiha.

It is not possible to determine conclusively which village originally owned every parcel because the last British Mandate land-ownership map combined the lands of al-Kabri and Tarshiha. These settlements should therefore not all be attributed solely to Tarshiha without qualification.

- Ma'alot: established on land belonging to Tarshiha.
- Kfar Vradim: established on lands taken from Tarshiha, Yanuh, and Kafr

Sami'.

- Ga'aton, Me'ona, and Ein Ya'akov: located on lands belonging to either al-Kabri or Tarshiha; the available maps do not allow a definitive attribution between the two.

Tarshiha After the Nakba and Today

A Palestinian presence continued in Tarshiha after the Nakba, and some residents who had temporarily taken refuge in neighbouring villages later returned. The town's Arab population reached 1,150 in the 1961 census.

Tarshiha was later administratively merged with the Israeli town of Ma'alot into a single municipality known as Ma'alot-Tarshiha. The Institute for Palestine Studies notes that Tarshiha continues to constitute the Palestinian Arab part of this mixed municipality.

Tarshiha therefore differs from Palestinian villages that were entirely depopulated, demolished, and closed to the return of their inhabitants. Most of its population was displaced during the Nakba, and large areas of its land were lost, but part of its Palestinian community remained and continued to exist after 1948.

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Operation Hiram.
- Palestine Remembered: Tarshiha, Acre District.
- Palestine Remembered: Tarshiha in the Palestinian Encyclopedia.
- Institute for Palestine Studies: Study on Operation Hiram and the occupation of Tarshiha and the Galilee.
- Institute for Palestine Studies: *Nakba and Survival*, including documentation on the occupation of Tarshiha and the return of some of its residents after the Nakba.
- Institute for Palestine Studies: Population and Social Structure, including

reference to Ma'alot-Tarshiha as a mixed municipality.

- Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh, *Biladuna Filastin*, Volume VII, Part II, as cited by the Palestinian Encyclopedia.
- Government of Palestine, Department of Statistics, *Village Statistics, 1945*, with the clarification that the published combined land figures include both Tarshiha and al-Kabri.