Suhmata

Suhmata: A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Acre District

Suhmata was a depopulated Palestinian village located about 25 kilometers northeast of the city of Acre, in the Galilee, at an elevation of approximately 600 meters above sea level. During the late Ottoman period, it belonged to the Safad District, while the British Mandate authorities later incorporated it into the Acre District.

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Acre

Item	Information
Distance from district center	25 km from Acre
Average Elevation	600 m above sea level
Population in 1931	796
Number of Houses in 1931	175
Population in 1944/1945	1,130
Estimated Population in 1948	About 1,311 – a later demographic estimate, not an official census
Total Land Area in 1945	17,056 dunams
Attack and Depopulation	Israeli occupation forces took the village during Operation Hiram in late October 1948; at the Suhmata junction the Golani Brigade's First Battalion met units of the Oded Brigade. According to the History of the War of Independence as cited by Khalidi, the village showed some resistance 'but it was occupied after being encircled by an infantry platoon'; that source makes no mention of the inhabitants.
Final Israeli Control	Probably 30 October 1948, during Operation Hiram (28–31 October 1948); PalQuest does not give the day the village itself was taken, and dates to 30 October the capture by Israeli forces of the vehicles and equipment of retreating Arab Liberation Army units at the Suhmata junction
Military Operation	Operation Hiram
Military Unit	PalQuest does not name the unit that took the village itself; at the Suhmata junction the Golani Brigade's First Battalion, advancing on the southern front of Operation Hiram, met units of the Oded Brigade moving eastwards
Cause of Depopulation	Direct military assault by Israeli occupation forces during Operation Hiram; the official Israeli military account makes no mention of what happened to the inhabitants

Item	Information
Settlements Documented on Village Lands	Tzuri'el, the name given to the village, which was being readied for Jewish immigrants by 27 May 1949, with the main part of the settlement northeast of the village site; and Chosen (Hosen), established on village land in 1949 by Jewish immigrants from Romania

The village stood on the summits of two hills overlooking lower-lying land in most directions. A road passing through Suhmata connected it with Safad, the coastal road, and nearby villages. During the Nakba and the occupation of Palestine in 1948, Zionist forces occupied Suhmata in the course of Operation Hiram, displaced its inhabitants, and subsequently destroyed most of the village buildings.

Location of Suhmata

- Suhmata was located approximately 25 kilometers northeast of Acre.
- The village stood at an average elevation of about 600 meters above sea level.
- It was built on the summits of two hills overlooking lower-lying land in nearly every direction except the north.
- A road passing through the village connected it with Safad, the road leading toward the coast, and several neighboring villages in the Galilee.

The Built Environment of Suhmata

Most of Suhmata's houses were built of stone. The village was divided into two principal quarters: the western quarter, known as al-Hara al-Tahta, or the Lower Quarter, and the eastern quarter, known as al-Hara al-Fawqa, or the Upper Quarter.

According to accounts by people from Suhmata, the village ponds and the spacious central square known as al-Rahba separated the two quarters. The mosque, church, and elementary school were located in the western quarter, while the

historic fortress stood in the elevated eastern section of the village.

The figure of 135 dunums does not represent the total area of Suhmata's lands, as stated in the earlier draft. Rather, it refers to the built-up area according to the 1944/1945 statistics. The total area of the village lands was 17,056 dunums.

Education in Suhmata

Suhmata had an elementary school for boys established by the Ottoman authorities in 1886. An agricultural school was also established in the village during the British Mandate period.

According to documentation by the Association of the People of Suhmata and accounts by former villagers, the agricultural school was located near the eastern quarter. It was surrounded by a garden of approximately ten dunums that was used to train students in practical farming methods, poultry raising, and modern beekeeping.

Land Ownership in Suhmata

The total area recorded for Suhmata in the Government of Palestine's 1944/1945 statistics was approximately 17,056 dunums. Of this area, 9,572 dunums were recorded as Palestinian-owned, no land was recorded as having been transferred to Zionists, and 7,484 dunums were classified as public land.

Total	**17,056**
Ownership Category	**Area in Dunums**
Palestinian	9,572
Transferred to Zionists	0
Public Land	7,484

Land Use in Suhmata in 1944/1945

Agriculture formed a major part of Suhmata's economy. A total of 3,290 dunums was allocated to cereals, while 1,901 dunums were irrigated or used for orchards. The built-up area covered 135 dunums, while 11,730 dunums were classified as uncultivable land.

Total	**17,056**
Land Use	**Area in Dunums**
Orchards and Irrigated Land	1,901
Cultivated with Cereals	3,290
Built-up Area	135
Uncultivable Land	11,730

Palestine Remembered also gives an additional figure of 2,110 dunums planted with olive trees. This figure specifically concerns olive cultivation and should not be added again to the land-use categories in the table above.

Economic Life in Suhmata

The inhabitants of Suhmata cultivated wheat, barley, maize, tobacco, vegetables, olives, and figs. The village's tobacco was particularly known for its quality.

A substantial part of the village lands was rocky and uncultivated and was covered with oak trees and wild pear trees, while farming was concentrated on cultivable land around the village.

The inhabitants obtained drinking water from five springs as well as household wells used to collect rainwater. The village also had two ponds that collected rainwater and supplied water for irrigation. The larger pond had a capacity of approximately 5,000 cubic meters, while the second had a capacity of about half

that amount.

Religious Landmarks in Suhmata

Suhmata had both a mosque and a church, reflecting the presence of Muslim and Christian inhabitants in the village before the Nakba.

The 1945 statistics record a total population of 1,130 people, consisting of 1,060 Muslims and 70 Christians.

Population of Suhmata

Suhmata had 632 inhabitants in the 1922 census. The population increased to 796 in the 1931 census, and the official 1945 statistics recorded 1,130 inhabitants.

It should be noted that the narrative text in PalQuest's entry on Suhmata contains an apparent error, stating that the population consisted of 1,130 Muslims and 70 Christians. PalQuest's own statistical table and the Government of Palestine statistics show that the correct figures were 1,060 Muslims and 70 Christians, for a total of 1,130 inhabitants.

The figure of 1,311 inhabitants for 1948 and the estimate of 8,050 refugees in 1998 were published by Palestine Remembered and are not official censuses issued by the Government of Palestine.

Population of Suhmata

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
Late 19th century	About 400	Historical estimate
1922	632	Official census under the British Mandate
1931	796	Official census under the British Mandate
1945	1,130	Government of Palestine statistics: 1,060 Muslims and 70 Christians

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
1948	1,311	Estimate published by Palestine Remembered
1998	8,050	Estimated number of refugees published by Palestine Remembered
Official censuses and statistics should be distinguished from later estimates.		

Number of Houses in Suhmata

The 1931 census recorded 175 houses in Suhmata. Palestinian sources differ, however, regarding the number of houses immediately before the Nakba. Palestine Remembered gives a figure of 288 houses for 1948, while the Association of the People of Suhmata gives a figure of 224 houses. Neither figure represents an official census comparable to that of 1931.

Number of Houses in Suhmata

Year	Number of Houses	Source and Nature of Figure
1931	175	Official census
1948	288	Estimate published by Palestine Remembered
1948	224	Figure reported by the Association of the People of Suhmata
Sources differ regarding the number of houses in 1948, so neither figure should be treated as an official count.		

Archaeological Remains in Suhmata

Settlement at the site of Suhmata dates back to ancient periods. The Crusaders built a fortress at the site and referred to it as “Samueth.” In the eighteenth century, Zahir al-Umar repaired some of the structures that had been damaged there.

In 1932, a Byzantine church was discovered on a hill near the village. A mosaic inscription on its floor dated the building to 555 CE. Khirbat al-Duwayr and Khirbat al-Ballu'a were also located near Suhmata.

The Occupation of Suhmata and the Displacement of Its Inhabitants During the Nakba

Suhmata was occupied during the Nakba in the course of Operation Hiram, a Zionist military operation carried out in the Galilee between 28 and 31 October 1948.

According to the entry on Suhmata in Walid Khalidi's *All That Remains*, as published by PalQuest, the First Battalion of the Golani Brigade advanced on the southern front of the operation and met units of the Oded Brigade at the Suhmata junction as those units moved eastward. On 30 October 1948, units of the Arab Liberation Army were retreating in the area, and the attacking forces seized their vehicles and equipment.

PalQuest also cites the official Israeli military account as stating that Suhmata resisted and was occupied after being encircled by an infantry force. This account is included here only because it is cited and discussed by the Palestinian source PalQuest, and not because an Israeli source was used independently.

PalQuest and Palestine Remembered date the occupation of Suhmata to 30 October 1948. Accounts and testimonies from people of Suhmata, however, state that the village was bombed from the air on 28 October and that the forces entered it on 29 October. Because of this discrepancy, the different dates should be presented clearly rather than treated as a single undisputed date.

Palestine Remembered identifies the First Battalion of the Golani Brigade as the force that attacked the village, while PalQuest also documents the presence of Oded Brigade units at the Suhmata junction as part of Operation Hiram.

Testimonies from people of Suhmata and Palestinian local sources state that 16 villagers were killed during the bombing, occupation, and related events. This figure does not appear in Walid Khalidi's PalQuest entry on Suhmata and is therefore presented as a figure documented in Palestinian local accounts and oral testimony rather than one confirmed by all of the sources used.

The occupation resulted in the displacement of Suhmata's inhabitants. Many fled toward Lebanon, while some became internally displaced Palestinians and were not permitted to return to their homes. Most of the village buildings were subsequently destroyed.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Beginning of the military operation	28 October 1948	Israeli forces launched Operation Hiram with units from the Sheva', Carmeli, Golani and Oded Brigades to eliminate the last pocket of Arab resistance in Galilee; PalQuest lists Suhmata among the villages affected.
Final occupation	Probably 30 October 1948	At the Suhmata junction the Golani Brigade's First Battalion met units of the Oded Brigade, and on 30 October retreating units of the Arab Liberation Army narrowly escaped falling into the hands of Israeli forces, which captured their vehicles and equipment, according to Morris as cited by Khalidi. According to the History of the War of Independence, the village showed some resistance but was occupied after being encircled by an infantry platoon; PalQuest does not give the day it was taken.
Settlement on village lands	By 27 May 1949	The village, which had been renamed Tzuri'el, was being readied for the arrival of Jewish immigrants; the main part of the settlement lies northeast of the village site.
Settlement on village lands	1949	Jewish immigrants from Romania established the settlement of Chosen (Hosen) on village land.

Zionist Settlements Established on the Lands of Suhmata

By 27 May 1949, the site of Suhmata had been prepared to receive Jewish immigrants in the settlement named Tzuriel, whose main section was located northeast of the village site.

In 1949, the settlement of Hosen was established on the lands of Suhmata by

Jewish immigrants from Romania.

- Tzuriel: established on the site and lands of Suhmata in 1949.
- Hosen: established on the lands of Suhmata in 1949.

Later Palestinian local sources also state that the eastern parts of Ma'alot expanded onto portions of Suhmata's lands. Walid Khalidi, however, does not include Ma'alot in his original list of settlements established on the village lands. It is therefore important to distinguish between settlements established directly on the village lands after the Nakba and later urban expansion.

The Site of Suhmata After the Nakba

According to the field description recorded by Walid Khalidi, rubble and the remains of stone house walls covered the village site, while stones were scattered among olive trees that continued to grow there.

The fortress and a wall believed to date from the Crusader period remained standing. The fortress occupied an elevated position on the eastern side of the site, while the wall surrounded the western quarter. The surrounding lands became partly covered with trees, and some areas were used for grazing.

Later Palestinian reports indicate that parts of the village buildings and religious landmarks remained and that portions of the site were used for livestock grazing. These descriptions, however, were recorded at different times and should not be treated as a field survey updated to the present day.

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Suhmata
- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Operation Hiram
- Institute for Palestine Studies: Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*

- Palestine Remembered: Suhmata – Acre District
- Village Statistics of 1945: Land Ownership and Population in the Acre District, based on Government of Palestine statistics
- Village Statistics of 1945: Land Use in the Acre District, based on Government of Palestine statistics
- Association of the People of Suhmata: Historical Documentation and Accounts by Villagers
- WAFA – Palestine News and Information Agency: The Nakba of Suhmata and Testimonies of Its People