Sarafand Al-Amar

Sarafand al-'Amar: A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Ramla District

Sarafand al-'Amar, also known as Sarafand al-Kubra, was a depopulated Palestinian village in the Ramla District. It was located approximately 5 kilometers northwest of Ramla on flat terrain in Palestine's central coastal plain, at an average elevation of about 50 meters above sea level.

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Ramla
Distance from district center	5 km northwest of Ramla
Average Elevation	50 m above sea level
Population in 1931	1,183

Item	Information
Number of Houses in 1931	265
Population in 1944/1945	1,950 – 1,910 Muslims and 40 Christians
Estimated Population in 1948	About 2,262 – a later demographic estimate, not an official census
Total Land Area in 1945	13,267 dunams
Attack and Depopulation	On 15 April 1948 Haganah sappers raided the village and blew up a three-storey building, killing 16 people according to the British authorities (39 according to the attackers). The village was probably occupied on the night of 19–20 May 1948 by the Second Battalion of the Givati Brigade in the context of Operation Barak, and its inhabitants probably fled or were evicted at the same time, according to Khalidi.
Final Israeli Control	Probably the night of 19–20 May 1948, according to Khalidi
Military Operation	Operation Barak
Military Unit	Probably the Second Battalion of the Givati Brigade, according to Khalidi
Cause of Depopulation	Direct military assault by Israeli occupation forces; the inhabitants probably fled or were evicted when the village was occupied, according to Khalidi
Settlements Documented on Village Lands	Tzerifin, established in 1949 on the ruins of the village and including an army camp; and Nir Tzevi, established in 1954 on village land

The Government of Palestine's 1944/1945 statistics recorded a population of 1,950 and a total land area of 13,267 dunums. During the Nakba and the occupation of Palestine in 1948, Israeli forces probably captured Sarafand al-'Amar on the night of 19–20 May in the context of Operation Barak. The attacking force is identified as the Second Battalion of the Giv'ati Brigade. The Palestinian inhabitants were displaced and most of the village was subsequently destroyed.

Location of Sarafand al-'Amar

- The village was located approximately 5 kilometers northwest of Ramla.
- Its average elevation was about 50 meters above sea level.
- It stood on flat terrain in the central coastal plain, west of the main Ramla–Jaffa road.
- It was also known as Sarafand al-Kubra to distinguish it from nearby Sarafand al-Sughra, later known as Sarafand al-Kharab.

Sarafand al-'Amar Through History

In 1596, Sarafand was a village in the nahiya of Ramla within the liwa' of Gaza and had an estimated population of 358. Its inhabitants paid taxes on wheat, barley, sesame, fruit, goats, beehives, and orchards.

Later historical accounts distinguished between Sarafand al-'Amar and Sarafand al-Kharab. The Egyptian Sufi traveler Mustafa As'ad al-Luqaymi referred to a shrine associated with Luqman al-Hakim at Sarafand, while Edward Robinson recorded in the nineteenth century that two villages bore the name Sarafand, one inhabited and the other deserted.

Archaeological evidence at Sarafand al-'Amar indicates settlement at the site during the Roman and Byzantine periods.

Sarafand al-'Amar During the British Mandate

Sarafand al-'Amar gained additional importance during the British Mandate when the British established a major military base nearby, described by Walid Khalidi as the largest British military base in the Middle East at the time.

The British authorities also constructed a prison in the area that was used to detain Palestinian nationalist activists.

The village itself had a rectangular layout, and most of its houses were built of adobe. It also contained a popular shrine associated with Luqman al-Hakim.

Population of Sarafand al-'Amar

The 1922 census recorded 862 inhabitants in Sarafand al-'Amar. The population increased to 1,183 in the 1931 census, when 265 houses were recorded.

The Government of Palestine's 1944/1945 statistics recorded 1,950 inhabitants, consisting of 1,910 Muslims and 40 Christians.

The figures of 2,262 inhabitants for 1948 and 13,891 refugees for 1998 published by Palestine Remembered are later estimates and are not official Government of Palestine censuses.

Population of Sarafand al-'Amar

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
1596	358	Historical estimate based on Ottoman records
1922	862	Official census under the British Mandate
1931	1,183	Official census under the British Mandate
1944/1945	1,950	Government of Palestine statistics: 1,910 Muslims and 40 Christians
1948	2,262	Estimate published by Palestine Remembered
1998	13,891	Estimated refugee population published by Palestine Remembered
Official censuses and statistics should be distinguished from later estimates.		

Number of Houses in Sarafand al-'Amar

The 1931 census recorded 265 houses in Sarafand al-'Amar. The figure of 506 houses for 1948 published by Palestine Remembered is a later estimate rather than an official Government of Palestine census figure.

Number of Houses in Sarafand al-'Amar

Year	Number of Houses	Nature of Figure
1931	265	Official census
1948	506	Estimate published by Palestine Remembered
The officially documented house count is the figure recorded in the 1931 census.		

Education and Public Facilities

Sarafand al-'Amar had two elementary schools, one for boys and another for girls. The boys' school was established in 1921 and became a complete elementary school during the 1946/1947 academic year, when enrollment reached 292 pupils.

Fourteen dunums of land were attached to the boys' school for agricultural training.

The girls' school was founded in 1947 and had 50 pupils.

Adjacent to the village were the al-Raja' Orphanage, established for the children of Palestinians killed during the 1936–1939 Great Palestinian Revolt, a government hospital, and an agricultural station.

Land Ownership in Sarafand al-'Amar

The total land area recorded for Sarafand al-'Amar in the 1944/1945 statistics was 13,267 dunums.

The Arabic Palestine Remembered table uses the categories “Palestinian,” “Transferred to Zionists,” and “Masha'.” These terms are preserved below to reflect the wording of that source. The Government of Palestine statistics, as reproduced by PalQuest, classify the corresponding categories as “Arab,” “Jewish,” and “Public.”

Total	13,267
Ownership Category	**Area in Dunums**
Palestinian	9,223
Transferred to Zionists	761
Masha' / Communal	3,283

Land Use in Sarafand al-'Amar in 1944/1945

Citrus was one of the village's principal crops. Citrus and bananas covered a total of 3,770 dunums, including 3,509 dunums of Arab land and 261 dunums of Jewish land.

Cereal cultivation covered 7,230 dunums: 4,012 dunums of Arab land, 500 dunums of Jewish land, and 2,718 dunums of public land. Plantations and irrigable land covered another 1,665 dunums of Arab land.

Total	9,223	761	3,283	13,267
Land Use	**Arab**	**Jewish**	**Public**	**Total**
Citrus and Bananas	3,509	261	0	3,770
Plantations and Irrigable Land	1,665	0	0	1,665
Cereals	4,012	500	2,718	7,230
Built-up Area	36	0	0	36
Non-Cultivable Land	1	0	565	566

Palestine Remembered additionally records 120 dunums planted with olive trees. This figure should be understood as part of the agricultural categories above rather than as a separate area to be added again to the land-use total.

Economic Life in Sarafand al-'Amar

Agriculture was the principal economic activity in Sarafand al-'Amar. Citrus and bananas were especially important, alongside cereals, orchards, fruit trees, and

olives.

The orchards were irrigated with water from artesian wells, while other crops were largely rainfed. The artesian wells also provided drinking water for the inhabitants.

Attacks Before the Occupation of Sarafand al-'Amar

Sarafand al-'Amar and its surrounding area were subjected to a series of attacks during the first months of 1948.

On the morning of 2 January 1948, Arab workers at the British military base in Sarafand discovered twelve timed explosive charges set to detonate at noon, when the workers would have been lining up to collect their weekly wages. The Palestinian newspaper *Filastin* reported that Jewish workers had not appeared for work that day and interpreted this as an indication that they had received advance warning from the Zionist groups responsible for planting the charges.

Palestinian documentation also records another incident on 19 January 1948, when occupants of a Jewish vehicle passed an Arab coffeehouse in the Sarafand area and opened fire, killing one man and wounding six others.

The Haganah Raid of 15 April 1948

On 15 April 1948, a Haganah demolition unit raided Sarafand al-'Amar, penetrated the Arab area, and destroyed a three-story building.

According to contemporary reports cited by Walid Khalidi, the British authorities stated that 16 people were killed beneath the rubble and 12 were wounded.

The attacking force, however, claimed that the building was being used by fighters affiliated with Shaykh Hasan Salama and asserted that 39 people had been killed. Because the accounts differ, both figures are identified with their respective sources rather than presenting the attackers' figure as a confirmed casualty total.

The Sarafand Military Base in May 1948

As the British Mandate ended in mid-May 1948, an Arab force was permitted to take over the Sarafand military base, which covered approximately 500 acres.

PalQuest, through Walid Khalidi's account, states that the base was handed to Arab forces on 14 May and was seized by Zionist forces approximately five days later in a two-pronged attack from the north and southeast.

These details are reproduced here through the Palestinian source Khalidi/PalQuest, which itself cites contemporary press and Israeli military accounts; Israeli sources have not been used independently.

Operation Barak

The occupation of Sarafand al-'Amar was associated with Operation Barak, a Zionist military offensive conducted primarily by the Giv'ati Brigade in the areas south and west of Ramla during May 1948 as part of Plan Dalet.

The main phase of Operation Barak began on 9 May. PalQuest records that the Giv'ati Brigade expanded its area of control west of Ramla and Lydda and that a second stage of the offensive began following the British withdrawal after 15 May.

For this reason, the PalQuest entry on Sarafand al-'Amar places the village's capture on the night of 19–20 May within the context of Operation Barak, even though the chronological table for the operation lists its principal phase as 9–13 May.

The Occupation of Sarafand al-'Amar and the Displacement of Its Inhabitants During the Nakba

Walid Khalidi considers it probable that Sarafand al-'Amar was captured on the night of 19–20 May 1948 by the Second Battalion of the Giv'ati Brigade in the context of Operation Barak.

Palestine Remembered gives 20 May 1948 as the occupation date and likewise identifies the Second Battalion of the Giv'ati Brigade as the attacking unit. This is effectively consistent with Khalidi's dating of the capture to the night of 19–20 May.

The sources do not establish conclusively whether all of the villagers fled during the assault or whether some were expelled after the village was occupied. The most accurate formulation is therefore that the attack and occupation resulted in the depopulation of Sarafand al-'Amar during the Nakba, while the precise circumstances under which every inhabitant left remain uncertain.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Attempted bombing at the Sarafand army camp	2 January 1948	Arab workers at the large British army camp at Sarafand discovered twelve timed charges set to explode at noon, when they would have been lined up to collect their weekly wages; the newspaper Filastin noted that none of the Jewish workers had reported to work that day, implying that they had been warned by the Zionist groups responsible.
Raid on the village	15 April 1948	A party of Haganah sappers penetrated 'deep in Arab territory', according to the New York Times, and blew up a three-storey building. The British authorities stated that 16 people were killed in its ruins and 12 wounded, while the attackers claimed that the building was used by fighters under Shaykh Hasan Salama and that 39 people were killed.
Beginning of the military operation	9 May 1948	The Haganah's Givati Brigade launched Operation Barak to 'clear' the southern and western ends of its zone of control before 15 May, targeting the villages south and west of Ramla; PalQuest lists Sarafand al-'Amar among the villages affected by it.

Stage	Date	Details
Handover of the Sarafand camp to Arab forces	14 May 1948	As the British army withdrew, it allowed Arab forces to take over the military base near the village, which covered about 500 acres; according to the History of the War of Independence as cited by Khalidi, it was handed over to them on 14 May.
Seizure of the Sarafand camp	About 19 May 1948 (five days after the handover)	The 'small, semi-regular' Arab unit in the camp was driven out by a two-pronged attack from the north and southeast, its defences having been prepared only for an attack from the settlement of Rishon le-Tziyyon to the west, according to the History of the War of Independence as cited by Khalidi.
Final occupation	Probably the night of 19–20 May 1948	The village was probably occupied by the Second Battalion of the Givati Brigade, which places its occupation within the scope of Operation Barak, according to Khalidi, and its inhabitants probably fled or were evicted at the same time.
Settlement on village lands	1949	Israel established the settlement of Tzerifin, which includes an army camp, on the ruins of the village.
Settlement on village lands	1954	The settlement of Nir Tzevi was established on village land.

Settlements Established on the Lands of Sarafand al-'Amar

Two settlements were established on the lands of Sarafand al-'Amar after the Nakba:

- Tzrifin: established in 1949 on the ruins of the village and containing a military camp.
- Nir Tzvi: established in 1954 on village land.

Talmei Menashe, established nearby in 1953, was not built on the lands of Sarafand al-'Amar. According to Walid Khalidi and PalQuest, it was established on the lands of the depopulated Palestinian village of Abu al-Fadl.

The Site of Sarafand al-'Amar After the Nakba

According to Walid Khalidi's field description, the former village site became part of a closed military area containing a large military camp and an air base.

Khalidi recorded six surviving village houses. Most were abandoned, while one or two were occupied. The former village school also stood abandoned, with cactuses growing in its front yard, while surrounding lands were cultivated.

This description is based on fieldwork conducted for *All That Remains* and should not necessarily be treated as a field survey updated to the present day.

Sources

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- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Operation Barak
- Institute for Palestine Studies: Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains*
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- Government of Palestine: Census of Palestine, 1922 – copy hosted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
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- Palestinian Villages Encyclopedia: Sarafand al-'Amar – local documentation of attacks and village history