

Shahma



Subdistrict: Ramla

Estimated population of Shahma in 1948: 325

Date of occupation and depopulation: Commonly listed as 14 May 1948, although the precise circumstances remain undocumented

Military operation: Possibly the first phase of Operation Barak

Military unit: Often attributed to the Giv'ati Brigade, but not conclusively established in the principal village-specific account

Israeli settlements established on Shahma's lands before 1948: None

Israeli settlements established on Shahma's lands after 1948: None

Shahma was a small Palestinian village in the Ramla Subdistrict, situated approximately 15 km southwest of Ramla and about 50 metres above sea level.

The village stood on the coastal plain, on a level tract of land that rose slightly above the terrain to its south and southeast. Wadi al-Sarar ran approximately 1 km southwest of the village. A secondary road connected Shahma with a highway leading to Ramla and with the coastal highway.

Shahma was classified as a hamlet in the Mandate-era *Palestine Index Gazetteer*. Its earlier houses were primarily built of adobe bricks, although some incorporated stone taken from the remains of earlier structures at the site. The inhabitants, all of whom were Muslim, obtained water from a well south of the village.

Immediately north of Shahma stood 'Aqir military airfield, constructed by the British during the Second World War. The Shahma military camp extended north and east of the village.

Boundaries of Shahma

Shahma was situated among the following Palestinian villages:

North: ['Aqir](#).

Northwest: [al-Maghar](#).

West: [Qatra](#).

South: al-Mukhayzin.

East: [Umm Kalkha](#).

Northeast: [al-Mansura](#).

Economy of Shahma

Shahma's economy depended primarily on agriculture, especially cereal cultivation, and to a lesser extent on livestock raising.

According to the official 1944/45 village statistics, 152 dunums were devoted to citrus fruits and bananas, 6,420 dunums were planted with cereals, and 33 dunums were irrigated or used for orchards.

The cereal total comprised 4,911 dunums of Palestinian Arab-owned land, 220 dunums of Jewish-owned land, and 1,289 dunums of public land. The figure of 4,911 dunums cited in descriptive accounts therefore represents only the Arab-owned portion, not the total cereal-growing area.

Land Ownership in Shahma

Ownership category	Land ownership in dunums*
Palestinian Arab-owned	5,165
Jewish-owned	220
Public land	1,490
Total	6,875

*One dunum is equivalent to approximately 1,000 square metres. "Public land" follows the classification used in the official 1944/45 village statistics and should not be confused with private communal ownership.

Land Use in Shahma in 1944/45

Land-use category	Palestinian Arab-owned land in dunums*	Jewish-owned land in dunums*	Public land in dunums*	Total in dunums*

Land-use category	Palestinian Arab-owned land in dunums*	Jewish-owned land in dunums*	Public land in dunums*	Total in dunums*
Citrus and banana plantations	152	0	0	152
Irrigated land and orchards	33	0	0	33
Land planted with cereals	4,911	220	1,289	6,420
Built-up area	11	0	0	11
Total cultivable land	5,096	220	1,289	6,605
Non-cultivable land	58	0	201	259

*One dunum is equivalent to approximately 1,000 square metres. Some secondary tables incorrectly assign 6,200 dunums of cereal land to Palestinian Arab ownership by combining Arab-owned and public land. The official breakdown records 4,911 Arab-owned, 220 Jewish-owned, and 1,289 public dunums.

The figure of 40 associated with olive cultivation in some secondary compilations appears to refer to an approximate number of olive trees rather than a separately documented area of 40 dunums. It has therefore not been included as an independent land-use category.

Architecture of Shahma

Shahma consisted of two sections, northern and southern, separated by the secondary road connecting the village with Ramla and the coastal highway.

The village's houses were mostly built from adobe bricks. Some incorporated dressed stones or other architectural remains from earlier buildings that had occupied the site. In 1944/45, Shahma's built-up area covered only 11 dunums.

The official 1931 census recorded 34 houses. A later estimate placed the number of houses at approximately 73 in 1948.

Population of Shahma

Shahma had an estimated population of 80 in 1922. The 1931 census recorded 150 inhabitants, all of whom were Arab Muslims, living in 34 houses.

By 1945, the village population had increased to 280. A later demographic projection estimated that approximately 325 people lived in Shahma in 1948 and that the village contained around 73 houses. The number of refugees originating from Shahma was estimated at 1,995 in 1998.

Population of Shahma

Year	Population*
1922	80
1931	150
1945	280
1948 estimate	325
Estimated number of refugees in 1998	1,995

*The 1948 and 1998 figures are later demographic estimates rather than contemporary official census counts.

Number of Houses in Shahma

Year	Number of houses
1931	34
1948 estimate	73

*The 1931 figure comes from the official census, whereas the 1948 figure is a later estimate.

Occupation and Depopulation of Shahma

The principal village profile reproduced in Walid Khalidi's *All That Remains* does not provide a detailed account of Shahma's occupation or the circumstances in which its residents were displaced.

Later chronological compilations commonly date the village's depopulation to 14 May 1948. Some sources associate its depopulation with the first phase of Operation Barak and attribute the advance in this area to the Haganah's Giv'ati Brigade. However, the available village-specific evidence does not conclusively establish the attacking unit or reconstruct a direct assault on Shahma.

The original date of 1 May 1948 is not supported by the principal sources consulted. The date of 14 May is better documented in later village chronologies, but it should still be presented with caution. No verified account of casualties or a specific battle at Shahma has been located.

Shahma's inhabitants may have been displaced under the influence of military operations and the depopulation of neighbouring communities. This remains a historical inference rather than a fully documented village-specific sequence of events.

Israeli Settlements on Shahma's Lands

No Israeli civilian settlement was established on Shahma's lands.

The village site and parts of its land were instead absorbed into a fenced military airfield. The site is generally associated with the former British 'Aqir military airfield, which later became the Israeli Tel Nof Airbase.

Shahma Today

The former village site lies within the perimeter of a fenced military airfield and cannot be freely accessed. Cactuses and dense bushes marking the site remain visible from outside the fence.

No Israeli civilian settlement stands on the village site, and the surviving vegetation constitutes one of the few visible traces of Shahma's former landscape.

Sources

- [Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Shahma.](#)
- [Walid Khalidi, ed., All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948](#), Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992.
 - [Palestine Remembered: Shahma, Ramla Subdistrict.](#)
- [Village Statistics of 1945: A Classification of Land and Area Ownership in Palestine.](#)