Khulda

Khulda: A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Ramla District

Khulda was a Palestinian village in the Ramla District, located approximately 12 km south of Ramla on a flat-topped hill overlooking broad areas of the surrounding countryside, at an average elevation of about 150 metres above sea level. Its inhabitants were displaced during the Nakba and the occupation of Palestine in 1948. Khulda was among the first Palestinian villages seized by the Haganah in the course of Operation Nachshon in April 1948 and was systematically demolished on 20 April.

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Ramla
Distance from district center	12 km south of Ramla
Average Elevation	150 m above sea level
Population in 1931	178
Number of Houses in 1931	29
Population in 1944/1945	280
Estimated Population in 1948	About 325 – a later demographic estimate, not an official census
Total Land Area in 1945	9,461 dunams
Attack and Depopulation	A Haganah battalion occupied the village along with neighbouring Dayr Muhaysin at the start of Operation Nachshon in early April 1948, “without fighting” according to the History of the Haganah as cited by Khalidi; the village was then systematically levelled with bulldozers on 20 April 1948.
Final Israeli Control	3–6 April 1948; sources differ: 3 April in the English text of the village entry on PalQuest and on the Operation Nachshon page, 5 April in PalQuest's overall chronology, and 6 April in the Arabic text of the village entry
Military Operation	Operation Nachshon
Military Unit	A Haganah battalion
Cause of Depopulation	Direct military assault by Zionist forces (the Haganah) in the course of Operation Nachshon; Benny Morris, as cited by PalQuest, states that the inhabitants of the area seized in the operation fled either before or during the conquest of their villages
Settlements Documented on Village Lands	Mishmar David, a kibbutz established in 1948 on village lands about 0.5 km west of the site; Tal Shachar, 2 km south of the site, is not on village lands

Location of Khulda

Khulda stood on a flat-topped hill commanding broad views in all directions.

The village was approximately 12 km south of Ramla and had an average elevation of about 150 metres above sea level.

It lay near a highway linking Gaza with the Ramla–Jerusalem road, while a network of secondary roads connected the village with Ramla, other major roads, and neighbouring Palestinian villages.

Villages bordering or lying near Khulda's lands included Dayr Muhaysin, Saydun, Umm Kalkha, Sajad, Qazaza, Khirbat Bayt Far, and al-Mansura.

Name and History of Khulda

Khulda is identified with a locality known to the Crusaders as Huldre.

In 1596, Khulda was a village in the nahiya of Ramla within the liwa of Gaza, with an estimated population of approximately 66. It paid taxes on crops including wheat and barley, as well as on goats and beehives.

The American biblical scholar and traveller Edward Robinson passed by Khulda in 1838 and described it as a large village.

In the late nineteenth century, Khulda was described as a village constructed of stone and mud on the slope of a hill. A masonry well stood on its western side.

Architecture and Local Services in Khulda

In the late nineteenth century, the houses of Khulda were built primarily of stone and mud and occupied the hill and its slopes.

All of the village's inhabitants were Muslim, and Khulda had its own mosque.

Villagers obtained domestic water from two wells northeast of the village, in

addition to the masonry well documented west of the village in nineteenth-century descriptions.

Education in Khulda

The principal approved sources used for this article do not provide sufficiently documented information concerning a village school or a date for the establishment of one before the Nakba. No unverified educational details are therefore added.

Economic Life in Khulda

The inhabitants of Khulda depended mainly on livestock raising and rainfed agriculture.

Cereals were the principal crop, while smaller quantities of vegetables were also cultivated.

According to the 1944/45 statistics, 8,994 dunums were devoted to cereals and 9 dunums were irrigated or used for plantations.

The overwhelming majority of the village's cultivable land was therefore used for cereal production.

Land Ownership in Khulda

The total registered land area of Khulda was 9,461 dunums in the 1944/45 statistics.

Total	9,461
Ownership category	**Area in dunums**
Palestinian	9,349
Transferred to Zionists	0

Total	9,461
Ownership category	**Area in dunums**
Communal	112

The figures record no land in Khulda under the category “Transferred to Zionists” in 1944/45.

Land Use in Khulda, 1944/45

Total	9,349	112	9,461
Land use	**Palestinian**	**Communal/Public**	**Total**
Plantations and irrigable land	9	0	9
Cereals	8,994	0	8,994
Built-up area	8	0	8
Non-cultivable land	338	112	450

A total of 9,003 dunums, approximately 95 percent of Khulda's lands, was cultivated or cultivable, all of it recorded as Palestinian land.

Built-up and non-cultivable land together amounted to 458 dunums, or approximately 5 percent of the total.

Palestine Remembered presents all 450 dunums of non-arable land in a single Palestinian column. PalQuest's more detailed table separates this into 338 Arab dunums and 112 public dunums. The communal/public category is therefore shown separately above.

Population of Khulda

Population of Khulda in selected years

Year	Population	Nature of figure
1596	66	Estimate derived from Ottoman records
1922	53	Official British Mandate census
1931	178	Official British Mandate census
1944/45	280	Official statistics; all recorded inhabitants were Arab
1948	325	Later estimate published by Palestine Remembered
Estimated refugees in 1998	1,995	Later estimate published by Palestine Remembered
Official Mandate census and statistical figures should be distinguished from the later estimates for 1948 and 1998.		

Number of Houses in Khulda

Number of houses in Khulda

Year	Number of houses	Nature of figure
1931	29	Official British Mandate census figure
1948	52	Later estimate published by Palestine Remembered
The 1948 figure is a later estimate rather than an official British Mandate census figure.		

Archaeological Remains around Khulda

In addition to the identification of Khulda with the Crusader locality of Huldre, Palestine Remembered records an archaeological site nearby known as Khirbat al-Shaykh Khalid.

According to that source, Khirbat al-Shaykh Khalid contains cisterns, caves, and remains of walls. These details are attributed specifically to Palestine Remembered because they are not described at the same level of detail in Khalidi's PalQuest entry.

Operation Nachshon and the Occupation of Khulda

Khulda was among the earliest Palestinian villages targeted during Operation Nachshon, a Haganah and Palmach offensive conducted in April 1948 within the broader framework of Plan Dalet. The operation sought to seize villages along the approaches to Jerusalem and establish a corridor for military forces and supplies.

PalQuest dates Operation Nachshon from 3 to 15 April 1948. Approximately 1,500 Haganah and Palmach troops organized into three battalions were mobilized for the offensive. PalQuest lists the Har'el and Giv'ati Brigades among the Zionist units participating in the operation as a whole.

For Khulda itself, however, the dedicated Arabic PalQuest entry states that a Haganah battalion occupied Khulda and neighbouring Dayr Muhaysin on 6 April 1948. Palestine Remembered's statistical summary also gives 6 April as the occupation date.

The approved sources nevertheless contain a discrepancy. PalQuest's dedicated Operation Nachshon page states that the operation began with the capture of Khulda and Dayr Muhaysin on 3 April, while PalQuest's overall chronology places the attack on the two villages on 5 April.

This article therefore uses 6 April as the village-specific occupation date given in the dedicated Khulda entry and Palestine Remembered while explicitly preserving the alternative dates of 3 and 5 April found elsewhere in PalQuest.

The History of the Haganah, as quoted by Khalidi, states only that Khulda was taken “without fighting.” This Israeli source is not used independently here; the statement is included only because it is reproduced in the approved Palestinian reference.

- Occupation date used in the dedicated village entry: 6 April 1948.
- Date given on PalQuest's Operation Nachshon page: 3 April 1948.
- Date given in PalQuest's overall chronology: 5 April 1948.
- Military operation: Operation Nachshon.

- Village-specific occupying force according to Khalidi's entry: a Haganah battalion.
- Forces involved in Operation Nachshon overall: Haganah and Palmach units; PalQuest lists the Har'el and Giv'ati Brigades.
- Fate of the inhabitants: Khulda was depopulated of its Palestinian residents during the military offensive and the Nakba.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Beginning of the military operation	3 April 1948	Operation Nachshon began; Ben-Gurion and the Haganah General Staff had decided to launch it within the general framework of Plan Dalet, 1,500 Palmach and Haganah troops in three battalions were mobilized for it, and its operational orders stated that all the Arab villages along the Khulda–Jerusalem axis were to be treated as enemy assembly or jump-off bases. According to PalQuest's page on the operation, it began with the occupation of Dayr Muhaysin and neighbouring Khulda on 3 April.
Final occupation	3, 5 or 6 April 1948 (sources differ)	A Haganah battalion occupied Khulda along with neighbouring Dayr Muhaysin at the start of Operation Nachshon, and the History of the Haganah, as cited by Khalidi, says only that the village was taken “without fighting.” The English text of the village entry and the Operation Nachshon page on PalQuest date this to 3 April, PalQuest's overall chronology to 5 April, and the Arabic text of the village entry to 6 April.
Failed Palestinian counterattack	The day after the occupation (6 April 1948, according to PalQuest's overall chronology)	According to PalQuest's overall chronology, Khulda and Dayr Muhaysin were attacked and captured on 5 April, and a Palestinian counterattack the following day failed.

Stage	Date	Details
Destruction of the village	20 April 1948	The village was systematically levelled with bulldozers, two weeks after its capture.
Fighting in the village area	Last week of May 1948	Battles continued to rage around the village in the following weeks, especially when an engagement around al-Latrun spread to the Khulda area, becoming what the press called “the biggest single clash of the war to date.”
Settlement on village lands	1948	Kibbutz Mishmar David was established on village lands, about 0.5 km west of the village site.

Destruction of Khulda on 20 April 1948

The occupation and depopulation of Khulda were followed by the systematic destruction of the village. Approximately two weeks after it was captured, most of Khulda was levelled on 20 April 1948.

The military significance of the area did not end with the destruction of the village. Fighting continued around Khulda during the following weeks.

During the final week of May 1948, battles around al-Latrun spread into the Khulda area, once again turning the surrounding countryside into a major battlefield.

Settlements Established on the Lands of Khulda

Kibbutz Mishmar David was established in 1948 on Khulda's lands, approximately half a kilometre west of the former village site.

Tal Shachar lies approximately 2 km south of the site. Walid Khalidi and PalQuest explicitly state, however, that it was not established on Khulda's village lands.

- Mishmar David: established in 1948 on Khulda's lands.
- Tal Shachar: located nearby but not on Khulda's lands.

Khulda Today

According to the field description published by Walid Khalidi in *All That Remains*, two houses remained standing at the former village site. Between them stood the walls of two ruined houses, with iron roof supports still attached to the stonework.

Wild vegetation covered much of the site, while eucalyptus, cypress, and carob trees grew around it.

Palestine Remembered contains later user-contributed photographs, including images dated 2002 showing one of the surviving village houses. Some captions indicate that a surviving structure had been adapted to a new use by that time. These photographs are individual contributions and do not constitute a comprehensive independent field survey.

The principal description above therefore relies on the historical field documentation published by Khalidi in 1992. The approved sources used here do not provide a sufficiently comprehensive and independent recent survey to verify the precise condition of every part of the Khulda site in 2026.

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Khulda
- PalQuest – Operation Nachshon
- Palestine Remembered – Khulda, Ramla District
- Palestine Remembered – Khulda entry from All That Remains
- Institute for Palestine Studies – All That Remains, Walid Khalidi