

## Al-Tabigha



### al-Tabigha - Tiberias Subdistrict

Al-Tabigha was a depopulated Palestinian village in the Tiberias subdistrict, situated on the northwestern shore of Lake Tiberias approximately 9 km northeast of the city of Tiberias at an average elevation of about 200 meters below sea level.

The village stood on flat ground at the northern edge of the plain known as Ghuwayr Abu Shusha. A secondary road connected it with the Tiberias-Safad highway, while another road linked it with neighboring al-Samakiyya.

Al-Tabigha was distinguished by its numerous springs and direct access to Lake Tiberias. Agriculture formed the main basis of its economy, while some residents also worked in fishing. The area was historically known for water-powered mills.

The village had 175 inhabitants in 1922. The 1931 statistical unit, which included Khan al-Minya, had 245 inhabitants living in 53 houses. In 1944/45, the statistical

unit comprising al-Tabigha, Tall al-Hunud, and Khan al-Minya had 330 inhabitants.

Palmach forces occupied al-Tabigha, expelled its inhabitants, and destroyed part of its built-up area on or shortly after 4 May 1948 during Operation Matate, or Operation Broom, a sub-operation of Operation Yiftach.

### Location of al-Tabigha

Al-Tabigha stood on the northwestern shore of Lake Tiberias on low, flat ground immediately north of the Ghuwayr Abu Shusha plain.

Its average elevation was approximately 200 meters below sea level.

A spur road connected the village with the Tiberias–Safad highway, while a local road linked it eastward with al-Samakiyya.

### Neighboring Villages and Areas

| Direction        | Village / Area                                        |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| North            | al-Qudayriyya and the higher ground north of the lake |
| East             | al-Samakiyya                                          |
| South            | Lake Tiberias and the Khan al-Minya area              |
| West / Southwest | Ghuwayr Abu Shusha and its plain                      |

These directions describe the general geographical neighborhood. Original Mandate cadastral maps remain the stronger source for exact village boundaries.

### The Name and Ancient Site

The area was historically associated with **Heptapegon**, a Greek name meaning “seven springs,” reflecting the abundance of springs around al-Tabigha.

During the Crusader period, part of the site was known as **Mensa Christi**.

These older names refer to earlier historical layers at the site and should not be interpreted as proving uninterrupted administrative or demographic continuity with

the modern Palestinian village.

## **al-Tabigha in the Ottoman Period**

In 1596, al-Tabigha was a village in the nahiya of Jira within the liwa' of Safad and had an estimated population of 44.

The villagers paid taxes on wheat and barley as well as goats, beehives, and orchards.

The record demonstrates the presence of agriculture and animal husbandry at the site during the early Ottoman period.

## **al-Tabigha in the Nineteenth Century**

The Swiss traveler Johann Ludwig Burckhardt described one of al-Tabigha's springs as saline and recorded houses and a mill near it, together with inhabitants who earned part of their livelihood through fishing.

Edward Robinson later observed one or two water-powered mills in operation and several others that were inactive.

These mills were government-owned and some were operated by people from Safad.

## **Built Environment**

During the Mandate, the Palestine Index Gazetteer classified al-Tabigha as a hamlet.

Its houses extended along the lakeshore and alongside the spur leading to the Tiberias–Safad road.

The available published land statistics do not provide a securely separated built-up acreage for al-Tabigha alone.

## Population of al-Tabigha

| Year    | Population                     | Nature of figure / Notes                                                                                                               |
|---------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1596    | 44                             | Estimate derived from an Ottoman tax register                                                                                          |
| 1922    | 175                            | Official Census of Palestine: 157 Muslims and 18 Christians                                                                            |
| 1931    | 245                            | <b>Includes Khan al-Minya</b> ; 223 Muslims, 21 Christians, and one Jewish resident                                                    |
| 1944/45 | 330                            | <b>Includes al-Tabigha, Tall al-Hunud, and Khan al-Minya</b> ; 310 Muslims and 20 Christians                                           |
| 1948    | 383                            | Later Palestine Remembered estimate; not an official census and requires caution because the 1945 base was a combined statistical unit |
| 1998    | 2,351 refugees and descendants | Later demographic estimate requiring the same caution                                                                                  |

## Number of Houses

| Year | Houses             | Notes                                                                                    |
|------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1931 | 53 occupied houses | <b>Includes Khan al-Minya</b> and is not a securely separated count for al-Tabigha alone |

No securely documented independent house total for al-Tabigha alone immediately before the Nakba has been identified in the core sources.

## Religious Composition

Al-Tabigha had both Muslim and Christian inhabitants during the Mandate period.

The 1922 census recorded 157 Muslims and 18 Christians.

The 1931 statistical unit contained 223 Muslims, 21 Christians, and one resident recorded as Jewish.

In 1944/45, the combined al-Tabigha-Tall al-Hunud-Khan al-Minya unit contained 310 Muslims and 20 Christians.

Several Christian churches and monasteries also stood in the wider al-Tabigha area, reflecting the site's long importance in Christian tradition.

## **Education**

Khalidi and PalQuest do not securely document an independent Palestinian village school in al-Tabigha before the Nakba.

Although religious institutions and other establishments existed in the surrounding area, the principal sources reviewed do not support a village-school founding date or pupil enrollment figure.

No unsupported educational institution has therefore been added.

## **Springs and Water Resources**

Al-Tabigha was famous for its numerous springs, reflected in the ancient Greek name Heptapegon, or “seven springs.”

Water from several springs in and around the village flowed toward Lake Tiberias.

Burckhardt described one spring as saline and recorded a nearby mill.

Streams also supplied water power for several mills during the nineteenth century.

The availability of water supported orchards and banana cultivation as well as the fishing economy associated with the lake.

## **Land Ownership in 1944/45**

**The following land figures refer to the combined statistical unit of al-Tabigha, Tall al-Hunud, and Khan al-Minya and should not be treated as figures for al-Tabigha alone.**

The combined area totaled 5,389 dunums.

Using Palestine Remembered's simplified terminology:

| Ownership category      | Dunums       |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| Palestinian             | 5,287        |
| Transferred to Zionists | 0            |
| Communal/Public         | 102          |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>5,389</b> |

The official categories record 5,287 Arab dunums and 102 Public dunums, with no land in the Jewish ownership category.

Palestine Remembered's current English page displays only 2 Public dunums, which is an evident data-display error because  $5,287 + 2$  does not equal the official total of 5,389. PalQuest and the Arabic Palestine Remembered page give the consistent figure of 102 Public dunums.

## Land Use in 1944/45

**These figures likewise include al-Tabigha, Tall al-Hunud, and Khan al-Minya.**

| Land use                       | Dunums       |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Cereals                        | 2,728        |
| Plantations and irrigable land | 287          |
| Citrus and bananas             | 7            |
| <b>Total cultivable land</b>   | <b>3,022</b> |
| Non-cultivable land            | 2,367        |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>5,389</b> |

PalQuest's published table does not provide a clearly separated built-up acreage, so no unsupported figure has been added.

## Economic Life in al-Tabigha

Agriculture formed the principal basis of the village economy, while fishing in Lake

Tiberias remained important for some inhabitants.

Cereals occupied the largest cultivated area, totaling 2,728 dunums within the combined statistical unit in 1944/45.

A further 287 dunums were irrigated or used as orchards, while seven dunums were devoted to citrus and bananas.

Olive trees grew in the northern part of the village lands, separated from the settlement by a small wooded area, while palm trees grew to the south.

The lakeshore location also allowed fishing to remain an important supplementary livelihood.

## **Archaeology and Christian History**

Al-Tabigha was one of the archaeologically richest locations in the Tiberias subdistrict.

A fourth-century Byzantine church stood at the site and was associated in Christian tradition with the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves.

Archaeological investigation showed that the church was rebuilt in the fifth century and was probably destroyed during the Persian invasion of 614 CE.

Important mosaic pavements survived.

## **Khirbat 'Urayma**

Khirbat 'Urayma lies a short distance west of al-Tabigha.

Archaeological excavation revealed evidence of human occupation during the Bronze and Iron ages.

These remains demonstrate the long history of settlement in the surrounding landscape but do not by themselves establish uninterrupted demographic continuity with the modern Palestinian village.

## **Khirbat al-Minya and the Umayyad Palace**

Khirbat al-Minya lies south of al-Tabigha along the shore of Lake Tiberias.

It contains the remains of a major palace constructed during the reign of the Umayyad caliph al-Walid ibn 'Abd al-Malik, who ruled from 705 to 715 CE.

German archaeological work in the 1930s uncovered Arab pottery and inscriptions inside the palace, together with a gold dinar minted in 707 CE in al-Walid's name.

## **Khan al-Minya**

Khan al-Minya stood farther south in the same area.

The khan dates to the Mamluk period and was built by Sayf al-Din Tankiz, governor of Syria, during the reign of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun.

It was later mentioned by travelers including 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulsi, Edward Robinson, and Johann Burckhardt, who commented on the area's greenery and attractive landscape.

## **al-Tabigha before the Nakba**

Al-Tabigha's position between Tiberias and eastern Galilee placed it directly within the military developments of northern Palestine in 1948.

The city of Tiberias fell to the Haganah on 18 April 1948.

Khalidi relays an account stating that the fall of Tiberias triggered a partial departure from al-Tabigha before the village itself was finally attacked.

## **Operation Yiftach**

Operation Yiftach formally ran from 15 April to 25 May 1948.

Palmach forces carried out the campaign to seize eastern Galilee before the end of the British Mandate. The Palmach First Battalion served as the principal spearhead

at the wider operational level.

The operation affected a large number of Palestinian villages in the Safad and Tiberias subdistricts, including al-Tabigha, al-Samakiyya, al-Qudayriyya, 'Arab al-Shamalina, and al-Zanghariyya.

## **Operation Matate / Broom**

On 4 May 1948, Palmach forces launched a sub-operation known as **Operation Matate, or Operation Broom**.

Its purpose was to empty the region north of Lake Tiberias and west of the Jordan River of its Palestinian population and consolidate Zionist-controlled territory in eastern Galilee.

Operational orders specifically named **al-Tabigha, al-Zanghariyya, and 'Arab al-Shamalina** as villages to be attacked, their inhabitants expelled, and their houses blown up.

## **Occupation and Depopulation of al-Tabigha**

Al-Tabigha was occupied, its inhabitants expelled, and part of its built-up area destroyed **on or shortly after 4 May 1948**.

Some villagers had already left after the fall of Tiberias in April, but the final depopulation was directly associated with Operation Broom.

Oral testimony from al-Tabigha's inhabitants provides a more detailed sequence.

The villagers initially fled to neighboring al-Samakiyya, whose inhabitants reportedly possessed five rifles and believed they could defend themselves.

On 4 May, displaced villagers saw smoke rising from al-Tabigha. Later that day, armored vehicles approached al-Samakiyya.

When it became clear that houses in al-Tabigha had been set on fire, panic spread and the villagers fled from al-Samakiyya toward Syria without having time to

collect their belongings, while Haganah soldiers fired over their heads.

## **Attempts to Return**

A small number of al-Tabigha villagers managed to return during the days following the attack.

Haganah patrols subsequently prevented the re-establishment of the village and made continued return effectively impossible.

What began as temporary flight for some families therefore became permanent displacement and denial of return.

## **Was There a Massacre at al-Tabigha?**

Palestine Remembered's current statistics page contains a field stating that a “massacre” occurred in al-Tabigha.

However, the detailed Walid Khalidi account reproduced by PalQuest and Palestine Remembered does not document a specific massacre, a mass killing, or a casualty figure for such an event.

This article therefore does not use the term “al-Tabigha massacre” without additional reliable documentation.

## **Military Unit**

The force responsible for the occupation was **Palmach forces operating during Operation Matate / Broom**.

The sub-operation formed part of the broader Operation Yiftach.

The Palmach First Battalion was the spearhead of Operation Yiftach as a whole, but the village-specific al-Tabigha account does not independently identify the battalion or company that physically entered the village.

No narrower unit attribution has therefore been made without evidence.

## Occupation Chronology

| Stage                                           | Date                           | Details                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Beginning of Operation Yiftach                  | 15 April 1948                  | The Palmach began a broad campaign to seize eastern Galilee and remove its Palestinian population.                                            |
| Fall of Tiberias                                | 18 April 1948                  | The Haganah captured the city, and Khalidi's source indicates that its fall triggered a partial departure from al-Tabigha.                    |
| Expansion of Zionist control in eastern Galilee | Late April 1948                | Haganah and Palmach operations expanded across the area between Safad, Lake Tiberias, and the Jordan River.                                   |
| Beginning of Operation Matate / Broom           | 4 May 1948                     | Palmach forces launched the sub-operation to expel inhabitants and destroy the targeted villages, including al-Tabigha.                       |
| Attack on al-Tabigha                            | 4 May 1948                     | Palmach forces attacked the village under operational orders explicitly calling for the inhabitants to be expelled and houses demolished.     |
| Burning and destruction of houses               | 4 May or immediately afterward | Villagers who had fled to al-Samakiyya saw smoke rising from al-Tabigha and learned that houses had been set on fire.                         |
| Flight from al-Samakiyya toward Syria           | 4 May 1948                     | As armored vehicles approached al-Samakiyya, villagers fled toward Syria while Haganah soldiers fired over their heads.                       |
| Limited attempts to return                      | Following days                 | A small number of villagers succeeded in returning temporarily to al-Tabigha.                                                                 |
| Return prevented                                | Subsequent period              | Haganah patrols prevented the permanent return of the inhabitants, making the depopulation permanent.                                         |
| End of Operation Yiftach                        | 25 May 1948                    | The operation ended after Zionist forces had secured most of eastern Galilee and large numbers of Palestinian inhabitants had been displaced. |

## Refugees from al-Tabigha

Palestine Remembered gives a 1948 estimate of 383 inhabitants and a 1998 estimate of 2,351 refugees and descendants.

These are not official census figures, and the 1945 population base itself included al-Tabigha, Tall al-Hunud, and Khan al-Minya in one statistical unit.

The two later estimates should therefore not be treated as precise independent totals for al-Tabigha alone.

Villager testimony clearly records that a substantial part of the displaced population fled toward Syria after the events of 4 May, although this does not establish one final destination for every family.

## Israeli Settlements on al-Tabigha Village Lands

According to Walid Khalidi and PalQuest, **no Israeli settlement was established on al-Tabigha village lands.**

Other Israeli settlements and sites exist in the wider Lake Tiberias region, but geographical proximity alone is not sufficient to classify them as being on al-Tabigha land without cadastral evidence.

## al-Tabigha Today

In Walid Khalidi's field description, piles of stones and the remains of crumbling stone walls were scattered across the former village site, parts of which were covered with thorns and cactus.

Nearby churches, monasteries, and shrines remained standing at the time of the survey.

Part of the surrounding land was used as pasture, while other areas were cultivated.

The wider area had also become an important tourist destination because of its

Christian and archaeological landmarks.

Palestine Remembered dates one field photograph of the destroyed village to **1987**. This documentation belongs to the field research undertaken for *All That Remains* between **1987 and 1990**.

It therefore does not constitute direct comprehensive field verification of all former al-Tabigha lands in 2026.

## Sources

- [PalQuest – al-Tabigha](#)
- [PalQuest – Operation Yiftach](#)
- [PalQuest – al-Zanghariyya; documentation of Operation Matate / Broom orders](#)
- [Palestine Remembered – al-Tabigha, Tiberias District](#)
- [Palestine Remembered – al-Tabigha entry from Walid Khalidi's All That Remains](#)
- [Institute for Palestine Studies – Walid Khalidi, All That Remains](#)
- [Government of Palestine – Census of Palestine 1931](#)
- [Government of Palestine – Census of Palestine 1922](#)
- [PalQuest – All That Remains: Methodology and Field Research](#)