Ghuwayr Abu Shusha

Ghuwayr Abu Shusha: A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Tiberias District

Ghuwayr Abu Shusha, also known as Abu Shusha, was a Palestinian village in the Tiberias District. It was located about 8 kilometres from the city of Tiberias and approximately 2 kilometres west of the shore of Lake Tiberias, on a low hill at an average elevation of about 150 metres below sea level. The displacement of its inhabitants began in April 1948, and testimonies from former villagers document its occupation in a surprise Palmach assault at dawn on 24 April 1948, during the Nakba and the occupation of Palestine in 1948.

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Tiberias
Distance from district center	8 km north of Tiberias
Average Elevation	150 m below sea level
Population in 1944/1945	1,240 Arabs – the 1944/45 statistics also record 157 Jews within the same statistical unit, for a total of 1,397
Estimated Population in 1948	About 1,438 – a later demographic estimate, not an official census
Total Land Area in 1945	12,098 dunams – for a statistical unit that includes the settlement of Ginnosar, of which 8,609 dunams were Arab-owned
Attack and Depopulation	Forty Zionist militiamen raided the village at 3:00 a.m. on 3 January 1948, according to the newspaper Filastin; the Palmach then occupied it in a surprise attack at dawn on 24 April 1948, according to the villagers' testimonies, after they had evacuated the women, children and old men to the village of al-Rama. Benny Morris, as cited by Khalidi, states that the inhabitants left in two waves on 21 and 28 April 1948 following the fall of Tiberias, without mentioning a direct attack on the village.
Final Israeli Control	24 April 1948, according to the villagers' testimonies; Benny Morris, as cited by Khalidi, gives no date for its occupation and places the exodus of its inhabitants on 21 and 28 April 1948.
Military Unit	Palmach – according to the villagers' testimonies; the sources do not name the battalion
Cause of Depopulation	Direct military assault by the Palmach, according to the villagers' testimonies; Benny Morris, as cited by Khalidi, attributes the exodus to the panic that followed the fall of Tiberias
Settlements Documented on Village Lands	Livnim, established in 1982 on village lands; and Ginnosar, established in 1937 east of the village on what had traditionally been village land

Location

Ghuwayr Abu Shusha stood on the summit of a small, low hill overlooking Lake Tiberias and lay approximately 2 kilometres west of the lakeshore.

A secondary road connected the village with the main Tiberias–Safad road, while other local roads linked it with neighbouring villages and sites.

The lower lands beneath the village were fertile, and several springs supplied the inhabitants with drinking water.

When the American traveller and scholar Edward Robinson passed through the area in 1838, he described the remains of a small number of stone houses and a shrine. He also noted that members of the Ghawarina Bedouin cultivated large parts of the fertile plain and that members of the Samakiyya tribe used some of the village buildings for storage.

The Name Ghuwayr Abu Shusha

The first part of the name, “Ghuwayr,” is linguistically related to the diminutive form of “ghawr,” meaning a low-lying depression or valley. This description corresponds to the village's location in the lowlands surrounding Lake Tiberias.

The principal Palestinian sources reviewed do not provide a securely documented historical explanation for the name “Abu Shusha.” For this reason, the account attributing the name to a person or shrine called “Hasan Abu Shusha” has not been presented as an established fact.

Architecture and Social Life

The inhabitants of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha were Muslims. The village contained a shrine dedicated to Shaykh Muhammad, one of the principal local landmarks documented by Walid Khalidi.

Some secondary sources describe the village as consisting of two residential clusters, one more densely built and another extending to the north, where some dwellings consisted of tents. This description, however, does not appear in the same form in Walid Khalidi's principal account and is therefore not treated here as a definitive description of the village's layout.

The Arab built-up area recorded in the 1944/1945 statistics amounted to approximately 6 dunams. This does not mean that the village lands covered only 6 dunams; the figure refers solely to the Arab built-up area.

Education and Public Services

Contrary to some accounts claiming that Ghuwayr Abu Shusha had no public services, educational documents preserved by Palestine Remembered confirm that a school existed in the village before the Nakba.

These records document the work of teacher Najib al-Khadra at the Ghuwayr Abu Shusha school in 1946, as well as correspondence between him and an education inspector in 1947 and documents concerning his appointment between 1945 and 1947.

A local study of the village states that the school opened in 1946 and provided elementary education through the fourth grade. Since these details come from local studies, testimonies, and later-published documentation, it is more accurate to state that the existence of the school is firmly documented by the mid-1940s while treating the exact founding year and grade structure with greater caution.

Population

According to the 1944/1945 statistics, the Arab population of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha was 1,240.

PalQuest also lists 157 Jewish residents within the same statistical unit, producing

a total of 1,397. This figure is connected with the statistical unit that also included the settlement of Ginosar. The population of the Palestinian Arab village itself was therefore 1,240.

The figure of approximately 1,438 inhabitants for 1948 and the estimate of 8,833 refugees and descendants in 1998, published by Palestine Remembered, are later estimates rather than official censuses of the Government of Palestine.

Population of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
1944/1945	1,240 Arabs	Government of Palestine statistics for the Arab village
1944/1945	1,397 total	1,240 Arabs and 157 Jews within the statistical unit also associated with Ginosar
1948	About 1,438	Later estimate published by Palestine Remembered
1998	8,833	Estimate of refugees and their descendants
The figures for 1948 and 1998 are estimates and are not official British Mandate censuses.		

Land of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha

The statistical unit of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha covered approximately 12,098 dunams according to the 1944/1945 statistics.

Arab ownership amounted to 8,609 dunams, Jewish ownership to 3,439 dunams, while 50 dunams were classified as public land.

It is important to note that PalQuest explicitly states that the land-ownership and land-use figures include Ginosar. They therefore should not be interpreted as representing the Arab village alone as an entirely separate statistical unit.

Total	12,098
Ownership Category	**Area in Dunams**
Arab ownership	8,609

Total	12,098
Ownership Category	**Area in Dunams**
Jewish ownership	3,439
Public land	50

Agriculture and Economic Life

The inhabitants of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha depended primarily on agriculture and benefited from the fertility of the lower lands and the presence of several springs.

Palestinian villagers cultivated vegetables and cereals, particularly in the eastern part of the village lands.

According to the 1944/1945 statistics, a total of 3,702 dunams in the statistical unit were devoted to cereals, including 1,848 dunams of Arab-owned land and 1,854 dunams of Jewish-owned land.

A total of 2,827 dunams were irrigated or used for plantations, including 1,377 Arab-owned dunams and 1,450 Jewish-owned dunams.

Citrus and banana cultivation covered 115 dunams, including 21 Arab-owned dunams and 94 Jewish-owned dunams.

Walid Khalidi's historical account also states that approximately 200 dunams of orange groves west, north, and south of the village were Jewish-owned. This figure does not correspond exactly with the “citrus and bananas” category in the 1944/1945 table and is therefore treated as a separate historical description rather than added to the land-use totals.

Total	8,609	3,439	50	12,098
Type of Use	**Arab**	**Jewish**	**Public**	**Total**
Cereals	1,848	1,854	0	3,702
Irrigated and plantation land	1,377	1,450	0	2,827

Total	8,609	3,439	50	12,098
Type of Use	**Arab**	**Jewish**	**Public**	**Total**
Citrus and bananas	21	94	0	115
Built-up area	6	41	0	47
Uncultivable land	5,357	0	50	5,407

Archaeology and Historical Landmarks

Nearby Khirbat Abu Shusha was among the principal historical sites associated with the village.

Palestinian sources document the remains of water-powered mills near Wadi al-Rabdiyya. The remains of at least one such mill were still visible during later periods of field documentation.

The shrine of Shaykh Muhammad was also one of the village's principal religious landmarks.

Claims directly linking Ghuwayr Abu Shusha with fourth-millennium BCE excavations, the Zuttiyeh Cave, or discoveries relating to prehistoric humans have not been included because sufficient documentation directly connecting those claims with the village was not found in the principal Palestinian sources reviewed.

The Nakba and the Attack on Ghuwayr Abu Shusha

The Attack of 3 January 1948

Ghuwayr Abu Shusha was subjected to an early attack at approximately 3:00 a.m. on 3 January 1948.

According to the Palestinian newspaper *Filastin*, as cited by Walid Khalidi and PalQuest, approximately forty armed members of Jewish militias took part in the

assault.

The villagers resisted the attackers. The clash resulted in the death of the village mukhtar's son and an unnamed Palestinian woman. Three members of the attacking force were also reported killed.

Displacement and Occupation in April 1948

The Beginning of the Displacement

Following the occupation of the city of Tiberias on 18 April 1948, military and psychological pressure intensified on the villages of the district, including Ghuwayr Abu Shusha.

PalQuest, through Walid Khalidi, reproduces two differing accounts of the sequence of the village's depopulation.

The first, which Khalidi cites through the Israeli historian Benny Morris, claims that the inhabitants left because of fear following the fall of Tiberias and that departures occurred in two stages, on 21 and 28 April 1948. This account is mentioned here only as reproduced through PalQuest and Walid Khalidi and not through direct reliance on the Israeli source.

The Villagers' Account

Testimonies from former residents collected by Palestinian historian Nafez Nazzal present a different account.

According to these testimonies, the villagers were prepared to defend Ghuwayr Abu Shusha but did not receive the weapons they requested from the Arab Liberation Army. They therefore decided to move women, children, and elderly residents to the village of al-Rama, while approximately 48 men remained to defend Ghuwayr Abu Shusha with only about 35 to 40 rifles.

The Palmach Assault of 24 April

The villagers' testimonies state that at dawn on **24 April 1948**, a Palmach force launched a surprise attack and occupied Ghuwayr Abu Shusha while the armed defenders were positioned west of the village.

The defenders did not attempt a counterattack after the Palmach entered the village because the civilian population had already been evacuated and no longer required immediate protection.

The principal Palestinian sources reviewed do not identify a specific named military operation associated with the occupation of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha, nor do they identify a particular Palmach battalion. The assault is therefore attributed here simply to **a Palmach force**, without adding an undocumented unit or operation.

Differences Over the Date of Occupation

Palestine Remembered records 21 April 1948 as the occupation date, while the villagers' testimony places the direct Palmach assault at dawn on 24 April. Another account places stages of the population's departure on 21 and 28 April.

It is therefore more historically precise to state that the displacement of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha took place in stages during **21–28 April 1948**, while **24 April 1948** represents the date of the direct military assault and occupation according to villagers' testimonies collected by Nafez Nazzal.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
First attack on the village	3 January 1948	The newspaper Filastin, as cited by Khalidi, reported that forty Zionist militiamen raided the village at 3:00 a.m. and were confronted by the villagers; the raid killed the son of the village mukhtar and an unidentified woman, and three of the attackers were also killed.

Stage	Date	Details
Beginning of the exodus	21 April 1948	Benny Morris, as cited by Khalidi, states that the exodus from the village apparently took place in two waves, on 21 and 28 April 1948, following the fall of Tiberias, and makes no mention of a direct military attack. The villagers, however, recall that they evacuated the women, children and old men to the village of al-Rama before the attack, on an unspecified date, when the Arab Liberation Army supplied them with no arms, leaving 48 men to defend the village.
Final occupation	24 April 1948	According to the villagers' testimonies cited by Khalidi, the Palmach occupied the village in a surprise attack at dawn while its armed men were asleep west of the village; they decided not to counterattack, since "there was no one in the village to protect."
Depopulation of the village	28 April 1948	According to Benny Morris as cited by Khalidi, the second wave of the exodus took place on this date; some of the villagers were displaced to the Galilean village of al-Rama.
Expulsion of the displaced villagers from al-Rama to Lebanon	Late October 1948	When Israeli occupation forces occupied al-Rama, they ordered the villagers of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha who had taken refuge there to move again, across the border to Lebanon, according to Morris as cited by Khalidi; some of them ended up in Ayn al-Hilwa refugee camp in southern Lebanon.
Seizure of village lands	Summer or early autumn 1949	According to Morris as cited by Khalidi, the Israeli state acquired the village lands and leased them for one year to the neighbouring settlements of Migdal and Ginnosar; Morris does not indicate whether they were later given longer leases or title deeds.
Settlement on village lands	1982	The settlement of Livnim was founded on village lands, about 1 km northwest of the village site.

Fate of the Population

A large number of the inhabitants of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha initially moved to the village of al-Rama in Galilee. Some returned to their village after its occupation in

an attempt to recover belongings.

After al-Rama itself was occupied in late October 1948, some of the displaced residents of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha were forced to flee again, this time toward Lebanon.

A number of former villagers later settled in the Ayn al-Hilwa refugee camp near Sidon in southern Lebanon, where some of the oral-history testimonies used by Nafez Nazzal were collected.

Fate of the Lands After the Occupation

PalQuest reproduces Walid Khalidi's account, which in turn cites an Israeli source, stating that some of the lands of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha were leased in the summer or autumn of 1949 to the neighbouring settlements of Migdal and Ginosar.

The lease mentioned in that account was for one year, and the source reproduced by Khalidi does not establish conclusively whether these arrangements later developed into long-term rights.

This detail is included here only as transmitted through PalQuest and Walid Khalidi and not through direct reliance on the original Israeli source.

Israeli Settlements on the Lands of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha

Ginosar

The settlement of Ginosar was established in 1937 east of the village on land traditionally considered part of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha's lands.

For this reason, Ginosar appears within the statistical unit used in the 1944/1945 land statistics.

Livnim

The settlement of Livnim was established in 1982 on the lands of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha, approximately 1 kilometre northwest of the village site.

Settlements Associated with the Lands of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha

Name	Year Established	Relationship to Village Lands
Ginosar	1937	Established east of the village on land traditionally regarded as belonging to Ghuwayr Abu Shusha
Livnim	1982	Established on the lands of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha, about 1 kilometre northwest of the village site

The Site of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha After the Nakba

According to the field documentation published by Walid Khalidi, wild vegetation and thorny plants covered the village site, including Christ's thorn and cactus.

Among piles of stones and several olive trees, the shrine of Shaykh Muhammad and the remains of a water mill were still visible.

The lower lands were used for cultivating citrus and bananas, while the higher lands were used for grazing.

Most of the village's built-up area was demolished, leaving ruins and a limited number of scattered historical features.

This description primarily reflects the condition of the site at the time of the field documentation relied upon by Walid Khalidi and should not be interpreted as a comprehensive field survey updated to 2026.

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Ghuwayr Abu Shusha.
- PalQuest: Ghuwayr Abu Shusha.
- Palestine Remembered: Ghuwayr Abu Shusha, Tiberias District.
- Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains*: Ghuwayr Abu Shusha, as reproduced by Palestine Remembered.
- Palestine Remembered: Documentation concerning teacher Najib al-Khadra at Ghuwayr Abu Shusha School, 1946.
- Palestine Remembered: Letter from teacher Najib al-Khadra to the education inspector, 14 October 1947.
- Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains*, entry on Ghuwayr Abu Shusha.
- Nafez Nazzal, *The Palestinian Exodus from Galilee, 1948*, Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut, 1978.
- Government of Palestine, Department of Statistics, *Village Statistics, 1945*.