

(Al-Majdal (Tiberias



Subdistrict: Tiberias

Estimated population of al-Majdal in 1948: Approximately 420

Date of depopulation: 22 April 1948

Date of occupation: Shortly after 22 April 1948; the exact date and participating unit are not conclusively documented.

Israeli settlements established on the village's registered land before 1948: None

Israeli settlements established directly on the village's built-up site after 1948: None

Later encroachment onto village land: Migdal, established nearby in 1910, expanded onto land belonging to al-Majdal after 1948.

Al-Majdal was a Palestinian village that was depopulated and subsequently destroyed during Israel's occupation of Palestine—the Nakba—in 1948. Its Arabic name means “the tower” and probably preserves an older Semitic place-name associated with the ancient settlement commonly identified as Magdala.

The village stood on the western shore of Lake Tiberias, at the southern edge of the plain of Ghuwayr Abu Shusha. It is traditionally associated with Magdala, from which Mary Magdalene's name is derived. Although the identification is widely accepted, the precise relationship among the Palestinian village, ancient Magdala, Migdal Nunaya, and the Roman-period city of Taricheae has been subject to scholarly discussion.

The inhabitants left on 22 April 1948 amid military pressure and the destabilising effect of the occupation of nearby Tiberias four days earlier.

Boundaries of al-Majdal

Al-Majdal lay amid the following Palestinian villages, localities, and geographical features:

- To the north: [Ghuwayr Abu Shusha](#).
- To the northwest: [Khirbat al-Wa'ra al-Sawda](#).
- To the west: [Wadi al-Hamam](#).
- To the southwest: [Hittin](#).
- To the east: Lake Tiberias.

Location of al-Majdal

The village was situated on the western shore of Lake Tiberias, at the southern edge of the Ghuwayr Abu Shusha plain. It stood at the foot of a mountain that rose steeply above the plain to an elevation of approximately 380 metres above sea level.

Al-Majdal was approximately 4 kilometres northwest of Tiberias. A public road following the

western shore of the lake connected the village with the city.

Al-Majdal had the smallest registered land area of any village in the Tiberias Subdistrict. Its inhabitants were all Muslims and maintained a shrine dedicated to Shaykh Muhammad al-'Ajami. Agriculture formed the basis of the local economy, with vegetables and cereals among the principal crops.

Architectural Structure of al-Majdal

In the modern period, al-Majdal had a rectangular plan. Most houses were clustered closely together, although a small number extended northwards parallel to the shore of Lake Tiberias.

The houses were constructed from stone, cement, mud, or combinations of these materials. Some had roofs made of timber and reeds covered with a layer of mud. The village's built-up area covered approximately 6 dunams.

Al-Majdal and the Origin of Its Name

The name *al-Majdal* means “the tower” in Arabic and belongs to a wider group of Semitic place-names derived from a root associated with towers or fortified structures.

The Palestinian village is commonly identified with ancient Magdala, traditionally associated with Mary Magdalene. Ancient sources also refer to a fishing and fish-processing centre called Migdal Nunaya, while the name Taricheae was applied during the Greco-Roman period to a prosperous fortified town known for fishing, fish-salting, weaving, and dye production.

The identification of all these ancient names with precisely the same archaeological site is not entirely uncontested. It is therefore more accurate to describe al-Majdal as the probable successor to, or a village situated within, the wider historical landscape of ancient Magdala and Taricheae.

Economic Life in al-Majdal

The economy of al-Majdal depended principally on agriculture. Vegetables, cereals, citrus fruit, bananas, and orchard crops were cultivated on its limited lands.

According to the 1944/45 village statistics, 24 dunams were planted with citrus and bananas, 41 dunams were devoted to cereal cultivation, and 17 dunams were irrigated or used for orchards. Together, these categories accounted for 82 dunams of cultivable land.

Land Ownership in al-Majdal

Ownership category	Land area in dunams*
Palestinian ownership	88
Jewish ownership	0
Public land	15
Total	103

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres.

Land Use in al-Majdal, 1944/45

Land-use category	Palestinian ownership (dunams)*	Public land (dunams)*	Total (dunams)*
Citrus and bananas	24	0	24
Irrigated land and orchards	17	0	17
Cereal cultivation	41	0	41
Built-up area	6	0	6
Cultivable land	82	0	82
Uncultivated land	0	15	15

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres.

Population of al-Majdal

Year	Population*
Late nineteenth century	Approximately 80
1931	284
1945	360
1948	Approximately 420
Estimated refugee population in 1998	2,565

* The late nineteenth-century figure, the 1948 population, and the refugee population in 1998 are estimates rather than contemporary census counts.

Number of Houses in al-Majdal

Year	Number of houses
1931	62
1948	Approximately 91

* The 1948 figure is an estimate rather than a contemporary housing census.

Archaeological Landmarks in al-Majdal

Archaeological remains recorded at al-Majdal included sections of walls and arches, column fragments, foundations, and an ancient cemetery situated approximately 200 metres south of the village site.

Several additional historical and religious landmarks were located near al-Majdal:

- **Hajar al-Namla:** This perforated black stone stood on the shore approximately one kilometre south of al-Majdal. Local tradition held that ants had created its holes, giving the stone its Arabic name, “the Ant’s Stone.” The Syrian Sufi traveller Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulsi mentioned a stone of this description while travelling through the area around 1101 AH/1689–1690 CE.
- **Qal'at Na'la:** The remains of this fortress stood on the mountain west of the village at an elevation of approximately 181 metres above sea level. It has been associated with the remains of the Crusader fortress of Magdala.
- **Shrine of Shaykh Muhammad al-'Ajami:** This shrine stood on the northern outskirts of the village, between al-Majdal and the mouth of Wadi al-Hamam. It was the principal religious landmark maintained by the villagers.

Occupation and Depopulation of al-Majdal

The available documentary record concerning the occupation of al-Majdal is limited. The inhabitants left the village on 22 April 1948, four days after the occupation of nearby Tiberias.

The departure occurred amid military pressure and the fear and regional destabilisation produced by the fall of the subdistrict capital.

Haganah forces operating from Tiberias appear to have taken control of al-Majdal shortly after the villagers’ departure. The exact date of military entry and the identity of the specific unit involved are not conclusively documented in the Palestinian and British sources consulted. It would therefore be inaccurate to identify 22 April unreservedly as both the date of depopulation and confirmed military occupation.

No independently verified account establishes that the village was destroyed in its entirety on the same day. Its buildings were subsequently demolished, apart from the shrine of Shaykh Muhammad al-'Ajami.

The displacement of al-Majdal’s inhabitants and the subsequent destruction of their village formed part of Israel’s occupation of Palestine—the Nakba.

Israeli Expansion onto the Land of al-Majdal

The settlement of Migdal was established in 1910 on land acquired northwest of the Palestinian village, approximately 1.5 kilometres from its site. It was therefore not originally established on al-Majdal's registered 103 dunams.

After 1948, Migdal expanded to accommodate new settlers, and its later urban and agricultural development spread onto land formerly belonging to the Palestinian village. No separate Israeli settlement was established directly over al-Majdal's six-dunam built-up area.

Al-Majdal Today

Rubble from the destroyed Palestinian houses is scattered across the village site, together with Christ's-thorn bushes and a small number of palm and olive trees.

The only principal village landmark that remains standing is the neglected shrine of Shaykh Muhammad al-'Ajami. It is a low, square stone structure topped by a dome that was formerly whitewashed. The surrounding land is now cultivated by Israelis.

Sources

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