'Atlit

'Atlit – A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Haifa Subdistrict

'Atlit was a Palestinian village in the Haifa Subdistrict, approximately 12.5 km southwest of the city of Haifa. It stood on a sandstone hill overlooking the Mediterranean Sea at an average elevation of about 25 meters above sea level.

The history of Palestinian 'Atlit must be distinguished from that of the Jewish settlement established nearby in 1903 under the same name. Later British Mandate statistics frequently combined the Palestinian village, the Jewish settlement, and several industrial and administrative sites into a single statistical

unit. Total population and housing figures from those censuses should therefore not automatically be treated as figures for the Palestinian village alone.

The principal sources do not establish a definite date or method for the depopulation of Palestinian 'Atlit in 1948. Palestine Remembered lists 15 May 1948 as the occupation date, but Walid Khalidi explicitly states that it is not known when the Arab village fell into Zionist hands or by what means.

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Haifa
Distance from Haifa	12.5 km from Haifa
Elevation	25 m above sea level
Population in 1931	452 – Arab population; the same statistical unit also recorded 496 Jews (total 948)
Number of Houses in 1931	193 – for the whole statistical unit, which included the settlement of 'Atlit, not the Palestinian village alone
Physical setting	Sandstone hill overlooking the Mediterranean
Arab population, 1944/45	150 – Arab population (90 Muslims and 60 Christians); the same statistical unit also recorded 510 Jews (total 660)
Estimated Population in 1948	About 174 – a later demographic estimate, not an official census
Total statistical-unit population, 1944/45	660: 150 Arabs and 510 Jews
Total land area	9,083 dunams – total for the statistical unit, of which only 15 dunams remained in Arab hands; 5,262 dunams were Jewish-owned and 3,806 dunams public
Attack and Depopulation	The sources do not say how or when the Palestinian village fell and its inhabitants were displaced: Khalidi states that it is not clear when the Arab village of 'Atlit fell into Zionist hands or by what means, and that Israeli historian Benny Morris does not list it among the villages captured and depopulated in 1948.

Item	Information
Final Israeli Control	Not documented: according to Khalidi, it is not clear when the village fell into Zionist hands or by what means
Date and method of depopulation	Not established by the principal sources
Military unit	The sources identify no unit; the History of the Haganah, as cited by Khalidi, refers to the settlement of 'Atlit as a base of Haganah activity and a source of recruits living there
Settlements established on village land	'Atlit, established by the Zionists in 1903 near the village and given the same name, and Newe Yam, established in 1939; both are now on village lands

Location and Geography of 'Atlit

'Atlit stood on a sandstone hill overlooking the Mediterranean. Coastal agricultural land extended to the east, while large evaporation pans used for extracting salt from seawater lay to the southwest.

The village occupied an important location near the coast and regional transportation routes. A railway line passed through the area, and 'Atlit had a railway station serving the locality and its surroundings.

Ancient and Medieval History

The area around 'Atlit contains exceptionally rich archaeological evidence. Excavations in Wadi al-Mughara, approximately three kilometers southeast of the village, identified evidence of early human occupation in the caves of al-Wad, al-Tabun, and al-Sukhul.

Approximately three kilometers northeast, at the entrance to Wadi Falah, excavations in a cave revealed evidence of Neolithic human presence.

Archaeological work east of the village also revealed a site occupied from the second millennium BCE to the seventh century CE. A Hellenistic source names the site **Adarus** and identifies it as a colony of Sidon.

The Arab geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi referred to a fortress at 'Atlit known as **al-Ahmar**, or “the Red Fortress.”

In 1218 the Crusaders constructed a fortified town and a major fortress at the site, naming it *Castellum Peregrinorum*, the “Castle of the Pilgrims.” It remained in Crusader hands until 1291.

In 1296 descendants of the 'Uwayrat tribe settled in 'Atlit and its vicinity. Ottoman records from 1596 refer to a farm at 'Atlit that paid taxes to the Ottoman government.

'Atlit in the Nineteenth Century

The British traveler James Buckingham observed the ruins of 'Atlit in the early nineteenth century. Later in the century, William Thomson described the Palestinian village as having been constructed within the ruins of the Crusader town.

The *Survey of Western Palestine* described 'Atlit as a small adobe-built hamlet with approximately 200 inhabitants cultivating about twenty faddans of land.

The Jewish Settlement of 'Atlit before the Nakba

In 1903 a Jewish settlement was established near the Palestinian village and given the same name, 'Atlit. This later created a complicated statistical situation in which the name referred to a wider unit containing both communities and several associated facilities.

During the First World War, the Jewish settlement became an important base for Nili, a Zionist intelligence network that supported Britain against the Ottoman Empire.

During the 1920s, the Palestinian village itself belonged to a regional cooperative association of approximately twenty-five villages in the Haifa Subdistrict that sought to improve the conditions of Palestinian peasants.

Population of Palestinian 'Atlit

Population statistics for 'Atlit must be read with particular care because the boundaries of the statistical unit changed over time.

In the official 1922 census, historical Palestinian 'Atlit was recorded separately with 81 inhabitants, all Muslims. The Jewish colony and the salt works were listed separately.

By the 1931 census, a broader statistical unit contained 948 inhabitants: 413 Muslims, 39 Christians, and 496 Jews. The Arab total was therefore 452, compared with 496 Jews.

The 1931 unit included historical 'Atlit, the Jewish settlement, the salt company, a labour group, the quarry, the Aaronsohn farm, the railway station, and the police post. The figures of 948 inhabitants and 193 houses therefore do not describe the Palestinian village alone.

By 1938, the combined village and settlement population stood at 732, including 508 Arabs and 224 Jews.

In 1944/45, the Arab population had fallen to 150—90 Muslims and 60 Christians—while the Jewish population stood at 510, producing a total statistical-unit population of 660.

Palestine Remembered gives a later estimate of 174 Arabs for 1948 and estimates the number of refugees and their descendants at 1,069 in 1998. These are retrospective estimates rather than official British Mandate census counts.

Year	Population	Nature of Figure / Notes
Late 19th century	Approximately 200	Survey of Western Palestine estimate for the Palestinian hamlet
1922	81	Official census for historical Palestinian 'Atlit; all Muslims
1931	948 total	Expanded statistical unit: 452 Arabs and 496 Jews; not the Palestinian village alone

Year	Population	Nature of Figure / Notes
1938	732 total	508 Arabs and 224 Jews in the village and settlement combined
1944/45	660 total	150 Arabs—90 Muslims and 60 Christians—and 510 Jews
1948	174 Arabs	Later Palestine Remembered estimate, not an official census
1998	1,069 refugees	Later estimate of refugees and their descendants

Number of Houses

The 1931 census recorded 193 houses, but this figure applies to the wider statistical unit containing both the Palestinian village and the Jewish settlement and associated facilities.

Year	Houses	Nature of Figure
1931	193	For the expanded statistical unit as a whole, not the Palestinian village alone

Land Ownership in 1944/45

The total area of the 'Atlit statistical unit was 9,083 dunums. Palestine Remembered presents the simplified ownership categories as follows:

Ownership Category	Area in Dunums
Palestinian	15
Transferred to Zionists	5,262
Communal/Public	3,806
Total	**9,083**

The official Village Statistics use the categories Arab, Jewish, and Public: 15 dunums were classified as Arab, 5,262 as Jewish, and 3,806 as Public.

These figures show the dramatic change in landholding before the Nakba: by

1944/45 only 15 dunums remained classified as Arab land.

Land Use in 1944/45

Use	Arab	Jewish	Public	Total
Cereals	3	3,169	244	3,416
Plantations and irrigable land	11	1,262	0	1,273
Built-up land	0	124	0	124
Non-cultivable land	1	707	3,562	4,270
Total	**15**	**5,262**	**3,806**	**9,083**

Cultivable land totaled 4,689 dunums: 14 Arab, 4,431 Jewish, and 244 public dunums. Built-up and non-cultivable land totaled 4,394 dunums.

The present Palestine Remembered land-use table contains a display problem that assigns some public-land figures to the Palestinian column. The detailed PalQuest table reproducing the official Village Statistics has therefore been used for the breakdown above.

Economic Life

In the late nineteenth century Palestinian 'Atlit was a small agricultural hamlet, and the Survey of Western Palestine recorded its inhabitants as cultivating approximately twenty faddans.

The structure of landholding changed dramatically during the following decades. By 1944/45 only fifteen dunums remained in the Arab ownership category: three dunums of cereals, eleven dunums of plantations or irrigable land, and one non-cultivable dunum.

The wider 'Atlit area also contained salt evaporation works, quarries, and railway facilities. Because these belonged to the larger economic and statistical unit, they should not automatically be attributed to the economy of the Palestinian villagers alone.

The Railway Station

'Atlit had a railway station serving the village and the surrounding locality during the British Mandate period.

Khalidi's later field description recorded the station as still operating after the depopulation of the Palestinian village.

Archaeological Heritage

The 'Atlit area is exceptionally rich in archaeological remains. In addition to the prehistoric caves of Wadi al-Mughara and Wadi Falah, excavation has documented settlement extending from the second millennium BCE through the seventh century CE.

A Hellenistic source refers to the site as **Adarus**, while Yaqut al-Hamawi recorded a fortress called al-Ahmar.

The most prominent surviving monument is the Crusader Castle of the Pilgrims, constructed in 1218. During the 1930s, C. N. Johns excavated the Crusader town and fortress on behalf of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine.

Later research suggested that the northern harbor may originally have been Hellenistic. A Muslim cemetery east of the Crusader fortress contains an Arabic inscription dated to 1800.

Depopulation of Palestinian 'Atlit in 1948

The depopulation of 'Atlit is one of the cases for which the principal sources do not provide a securely established date or military operation.

Khalidi, citing the *History of the Haganah*, notes that the Jewish settlement at 'Atlit was a center of Haganah activity and a source of recruits.

At the same time, Khalidi observes that Israeli historian Benny Morris does not list Palestinian 'Atlit among the villages for which he documents capture and

depopulation in 1948. Khalidi therefore concludes that **it is not known when the Arab village fell into Zionist hands or by what means**.

Palestine Remembered lists 15 May 1948 as the occupation date. Its own Khalidi-derived narrative, however, states that the timing and circumstances remain unknown. The 15 May date should therefore not be treated as a securely verified historical occupation date.

No specific military unit can be established with confidence as the force responsible for depopulating the Palestinian village. Haganah activity in the nearby Jewish settlement does not by itself establish which unit, if any, carried out the final removal of the Arab inhabitants.

Issue	Historical Assessment
Date listed by Palestine Remembered	15 May 1948
Khalidi's assessment	The date and method by which Palestinian 'Atlit fell are unknown
Military unit	Not securely identified
Documented military context	The Jewish settlement of 'Atlit was a center of Haganah activity and recruitment

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Settlement on village lands	1903	The Zionists established a settlement near 'Atlit and gave it the same name; during World War I it became a centre of Nili, a pro-British Zionist intelligence organisation. It now stands on village lands.
Settlement on village lands	1939	The settlement of Newe Yam was established; it now stands on village lands.

Stage	Date	Details
Decline of the Arab population and its land	1938–1944/1945	In 1938 the village and the settlement together had 732 inhabitants, 508 Arabs and 224 Jews; by 1944/45 the Arab inhabitants had fallen to 150, and only 15 dunams of land remained in Arab hands, according to Khalidi.
Fall of the village and displacement of its inhabitants	Not given in the sources	Khalidi states that it is not clear when the Arab village of 'Atlit fell into Zionist hands or by what means; he notes that the History of the Haganah refers to the settlement as a base of Haganah activity, and that Benny Morris does not list 'Atlit among the villages captured and depopulated in 1948.

Israeli Settlements on the Lands of 'Atlit

'Atlit: A Jewish settlement bearing the same name was established in 1903 near the Palestinian village. Khalidi and PalQuest identify it as having been established on village land.

Newe Yam: Established in 1939 on land belonging to 'Atlit, also before the Nakba.

'Atlit therefore differs from many depopulated Palestinian villages in that Zionist settlements had already been established on its lands decades before 1948, and by the mid-1940s the Palestinian village had become part of a much larger settlement and economic complex carrying the same name.

'Atlit Today

According to the field description published by Walid Khalidi in *All That Remains*, no recognizable traces of the Arab houses remained. The railway station that had served the village was still in operation at the time of his documentation.

Khalidi also mentioned a nearby prison that Israel used in 1989 to hold Palestinian and Lebanese detainees. This describes the facility's use at that particular

historical moment and should not automatically be treated as a statement about its present function.

Khalidi's description derives from fieldwork conducted before the publication of *All That Remains* in 1992 and therefore does not constitute direct field verification of conditions at the site in 2026.

Palestine Remembered contains later community documentation of ruins, shrines, wells, and archaeological sites in the wider 'Atlit area. Some of this material also concerns neighboring localities such as Khirbat al-Shaykh Burayk, so not every later photograph should automatically be treated as evidence of surviving houses from Palestinian 'Atlit itself without more precise site identification.

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: 'Atlit
- Palestine Remembered – 'Atlit, Haifa
- Palestine Remembered – 'Atlit entry from All That Remains
- Institute for Palestine Studies – Walid Khalidi, All That Remains
- Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics – Historical Census Reports, including the 1922 and 1931 censuses
- Birzeit University Repository – Census of Palestine 1931: Population of Villages, Towns and Administrative Areas