Our Palestine — Depopulated village — Haifa — 26 July 1948

'Ayn Ghazal

Ayn Ghazal: A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Haifa District

Ayn Ghazal was a Palestinian village in the Haifa District, located about 21 kilometres south of the city of Haifa on the upper slopes of Mount Carmel, at an average elevation of approximately 110 metres above sea level. Together with Ijzim and Jaba', it formed an area known as the “Little Triangle.” The three villages resisted several attempts to occupy them before falling during Operation Shoter in late July 1948, and their inhabitants were displaced during the Nakba and the occupation of Palestine in 1948.

Basic Information

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Haifa
Distance from district center	21 km South of Haifa
Average Elevation	100 meters above sea level
Population in 1931	1,439 inhabitants - Official census including al-Sawamir
Number of Houses in 1931	247 houses - Official census including al-Sawamir
Population in 1944/1945	2,170 inhabitants - Government of Palestine statistics
Estimated Population in 1948	About 2,517 inhabitants - a later demographic estimate, not an official census
Total Land Area in 1945	18,079 dunams
Attack and Depopulation	Ayn Ghazal was subjected to several attacks before its final occupation. PalQuest, drawing on contemporary Palestinian, British, and foreign press reports, records an attack on the village on 10 March 1948, followed by another attack on 14 March that destroyed four houses and, according to the British police, killed one Palestinian woman and wounded five men.
Final Israeli Control	26 July 1948
Military Operation	Operation Shoter (“Policeman”)
Military Unit	Alexandroni Brigade, Golani Brigade, The Carmeli Brigade
Cause of Depopulation	Military assault by Zionist troops
Settlements Documented on Village Lands	Ofer

Location

Ayn Ghazal was built along the edge of a valley on the upper slopes of Mount Carmel. It lay close to the main coastal road connecting Haifa with areas to the

south, giving the village considerable strategic and military importance in 1948.

The lands of Ayn Ghazal bordered those of several Palestinian villages, including Ijzim, Jaba', Kafr Lam, al-Sarafand, and al-Tantura. Khirbat al-Sawamir lay south of the village and was statistically associated with Ayn Ghazal in the 1931 census.

In the late nineteenth century, Ayn Ghazal was described as a small village built of stone and mud, with an estimated population of approximately 450.

Population

The population of Ayn Ghazal was 1,046 in the 1922 census. In the 1931 census, the population stood at 1,439, with the figure also including the inhabitants of Khirbat al-Sawamir.

In the 1944/1945 Village Statistics, the population of Ayn Ghazal was 2,170.

The figure of approximately 2,517 inhabitants for 1948, published by Palestine Remembered, is a later estimate of the population shortly before displacement and not an official Government of Palestine census. The same applies to the estimate of 15,458 refugees and descendants in 1998.

Population of Ayn Ghazal

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
Late nineteenth century	About 450	Historical estimate
1922	1,046	Official census
1931	1,439	Official census including al-Sawamir
1944/1945	2,170	Government of Palestine statistics
1948	About 2,517	Estimate published by Palestine Remembered

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
1998	15,458	Estimate of refugees and their descendants
The figures for 1948 and 1998 are estimates and are not official British Mandate censuses.		

Number of Houses

The 1931 census recorded 247 houses in the statistical unit that included Ayn Ghazal and al-Sawamir. The figure of 432 houses for 1948, published by Palestine Remembered, is a later estimate.

Number of Houses in Ayn Ghazal

Year	Number of Houses	Nature of Figure
1931	247	Official census including al-Sawamir
1948	About 432	Later estimate

Education and Public Facilities

Ayn Ghazal had an elementary school for boys established around 1886 during the Ottoman period, as well as an elementary school for girls.

The village also had a cultural and sports club. Its inhabitants were Muslims, and the village contained a local shrine dedicated to Shaykh Shahada.

During the 1940s, a well was dug near the village, and water was pumped from it to the houses through pipes.

Land of Ayn Ghazal

According to the 1944/1945 statistics, the total land area of Ayn Ghazal amounted to 18,079 dunams.

Arab ownership amounted to 14,628 dunams, Jewish ownership to 424 dunams,

while 3,027 dunams were classified as public land.

Total	18,079
Ownership Category	**Area in Dunams**
Arab ownership	14,628
Jewish ownership	424
Public land	3,027

Agriculture and Economic Life

The economy of Ayn Ghazal depended on agriculture and animal husbandry. Its proximity to Haifa also allowed some villagers to work in the service sector, including employment connected with the port and the city's commercial centre.

In the 1944/1945 statistics, a total of 8,896 dunams were devoted to cereals, including 8,472 dunams of Arab-owned land and 424 dunams of Jewish-owned land.

A further 1,486 dunams of Arab-owned land were irrigated or used for plantations. Sources reproduced by Walid Khalidi also indicate that approximately 1,400 dunams of village land were planted with olive trees.

The olive acreage formed part of the agricultural land and should not be added again to the overall land-use total.

Total	14,628	424	3,027	18,079
Type of Use	**Arab**	**Jewish**	**Public**	**Total**
Cereals	8,472	424	0	8,896
Irrigated and plantation land	1,486	0	0	1,486
Built-up area	130	0	0	130
Uncultivable land	4,540	0	3,027	7,567

The Nakba and the Defense of Ayn Ghazal

Ayn Ghazal was subjected to several attacks before its final occupation. PalQuest, drawing on contemporary Palestinian, British, and foreign press reports, records an attack on the village on 10 March 1948, followed by another attack on 14 March that destroyed four houses and, according to the British police, killed one Palestinian woman and wounded five men.

Another attack took place on 20 May 1948, but the attacking forces were unable to establish control over the village.

Ayn Ghazal and the “Little Triangle”

Together with Jaba' and Ijzim, Ayn Ghazal formed a Palestinian enclave south of Haifa that became known as the “Little Triangle.” The three villages continued to resist after the occupation of Haifa and large parts of the Palestinian coastal region.

The area was of considerable military importance because it overlooked the coastal road between Haifa and Tel Aviv. The defenders of the three villages were able to disrupt Israeli military movement and transportation along this route.

PalQuest records that Israeli forces attempted to occupy the three villages on 18 June 1948, but the defenders repelled the assault. A second attempt on 8 July also failed.

Operation Shoter and the Occupation of Ayn Ghazal

The Military Operation

The final assault on Ayn Ghazal, Jaba', and Ijzim was carried out during Operation Shoter, meaning “Policeman,” which was launched during the Second Truce.

The operation was officially presented as a “police operation,” but sources reproduced by Walid Khalidi and PalQuest describe it in practice as a large-scale military operation.

Participating Units

The special force that attacked the villages of the Little Triangle was composed of units drawn from three Israeli brigades:

- Golani Brigade.
- Carmeli Brigade.
- Alexandroni Brigade.

Bombardment and the Final Assault

The final assault began on 24 July 1948. The villages were subjected to intense artillery and aerial bombardment for approximately a day before the ground forces advanced.

Despite the intensity of the bombardment, Israeli forces did not immediately capture the three villages, and the fighting continued for about two days.

Date of Occupation

Palestine Remembered records 24 July 1948 as the date of Ayn Ghazal's occupation. PalQuest, however, provides a more detailed sequence indicating that 24 July marked the beginning of the final assault and that the three villages did not fall under Israeli control until approximately two days later.

It is therefore more precise to distinguish between 24 July 1948 as the date on which Operation Shoter and the final attack on Ayn Ghazal began, and 26 July 1948 as the approximate date by which Israeli forces had completed their military takeover of the village and the Little Triangle.

Displacement and Human Losses

The occupation of Ayn Ghazal resulted in the displacement of its Palestinian inhabitants. PalQuest reports that Israeli forces continued firing on inhabitants of the three villages as they fled the area.

PalQuest also reproduces differing accounts concerning the killing of defenders in Ayn Ghazal and reports of burned bodies after the occupation. Contemporary reports alleged that a massacre had taken place, while Israeli authorities denied those claims.

A United Nations investigation did not find conclusive evidence establishing that a massacre had occurred in Ayn Ghazal. It later estimated that approximately 130 people were killed or missing from Ayn Ghazal, Jaba', and Ijzim combined. A specific casualty figure for Ayn Ghazal alone should therefore not be presented as a definitive or universally agreed number.

These accounts are included on the basis of the material reproduced by PalQuest and Walid Khalidi rather than through direct reliance on the Israeli sources cited within some of those accounts.

The United Nations and the People of the “Little Triangle”

The attack on Ayn Ghazal, Jaba', and Ijzim drew international objections because it was carried out during the Second Truce.

United Nations mediator Count Folke Bernadotte condemned what he described as the “systematic” destruction of Ayn Ghazal and Jaba'. He reported that approximately 8,000 people had been expelled from the three villages and had moved toward the Jenin area in search of refuge.

Bernadotte called for the refugees to be allowed to return to the three villages and

for damaged houses to be repaired or destroyed houses rebuilt at Israel's expense.

On 13 September 1948, he issued an order to this effect. Israel refused to implement it, and the inhabitants of Ayn Ghazal were not permitted to return and re-establish their village.

Fate of the Population and Buildings

The Palestinian population of Ayn Ghazal was completely displaced during the Nakba. Many fled eastward toward the Jenin area, while others became refugees elsewhere.

The village was extensively destroyed after its occupation. PalQuest documents the United Nations' condemnation of the destruction of Ayn Ghazal and Jaba' following the assault.

Over time, most of the village's built-up area disappeared, leaving only limited remains of its original structures.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
The Military Operation	Not specified precisely	The final assault on Ayn Ghazal, Jaba', and Ijzim was carried out during Operation Shoter, meaning “Policeman,” which was launched during the Second Truce. The operation was officially presented as a “police operation,” but sources reproduced by Walid Khalidi and PalQuest describe it in practice as a large-scale military operation.
Bombardment and the Final Assault	24 July 1948	The final assault began on 24 July 1948. The villages were subjected to intense artillery and aerial bombardment for approximately a day before the ground forces advanced.

Stage	Date	Details
Date of Occupation	24 July 1948	Palestine Remembered records 24 July 1948 as the date of Ayn Ghazal's occupation. PalQuest, however, provides a more detailed sequence indicating that 24 July marked the beginning of the final assault and that the three villages did not fall under Israeli control until approximately two days later.

Israeli Settlements on the Lands of Ayn Ghazal

Ofer

The settlement of Ofer was established in 1950 on the lands of Ayn Ghazal, approximately 2 kilometres southeast of the village site.

Ein Ayala

Ein Ayala was established in 1949 approximately 3 kilometres southeast of the village site.

Walid Khalidi and PalQuest state that, contrary to some published accounts, Ein Ayala was not established on the lands of Ayn Ghazal itself.

Settlements Associated with the Site of Ayn Ghazal

Name	Year Established	Relationship to Ayn Ghazal's Lands
Ofer	1950	Established on the lands of Ayn Ghazal
Ein Ayala	1949	Located near the village but not on the lands of Ayn Ghazal according to Walid Khalidi and PalQuest

The Site of Ayn Ghazal After the Nakba

According to the field documentation published by Walid Khalidi, the only structure still standing at the village site was the shrine of Shaykh Shahada, which was already in a deteriorated condition at the time of documentation.

Ruined walls and piles of stones were scattered throughout the site, alongside pine, fig, and pomegranate trees and cactus plants.

The site had been fenced for use as cattle pasture, while the nearby level lands were cultivated with vegetables, bananas, and other fruit crops. Almond trees were planted on some of the surrounding slopes.

This description reflects the period of field documentation used by Walid Khalidi and should not necessarily be interpreted as a comprehensive field survey of the site in 2026.

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Ayn Ghazal.
- Palestine Remembered: Ayn Ghazal, Haifa District.
- Palestine Remembered: Ayn Ghazal.
- Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains*, entry on Ayn Ghazal, as reproduced by PalQuest and Palestine Remembered.
- Government of Palestine, Department of Statistics, *Village Statistics, 1945*.
- Palestine censuses of 1922 and 1931, with the note that the 1931 census figure for Ayn Ghazal includes al-Sawamir.
- Reports of the United Nations mediator and observers concerning the villages of the Little Triangle, as reproduced by PalQuest in its entry on Ayn Ghazal and by Walid Khalidi.