Our Palestine — Depopulated village — Haifa — 30 April 1948

Al-Rihaniyya

Al-Rihaniyya – A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Haifa Subdistrict

Al-Rihaniyya was a Palestinian village in the Haifa Subdistrict, situated approximately 25 km southeast of Haifa on a hilltop in a generally hilly area, at an average elevation of about 225 meters above sea level.

It should not be confused with the Circassian village of Rihaniya in the Safad Subdistrict. This article concerns the depopulated Palestinian village of al-Rihaniyya in the Haifa Subdistrict, within the broader Bilad al-Rawha region.

The hills east of the village rose sharply, while the western slopes were gentler and descended toward the Wadi al-Milh road, approximately 3 km northwest of the village.

Al-Rihaniyya came under attack in April 1948 following the battle of Mishmar ha-'Emeq. A contemporary report stated that it was occupied on 14 April, but Walid Khalidi suggests that firm Haganah control may not have been established until late April, after the fall of Haifa and in the context of operations that included Operation Bi'ur Hametz.

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Haifa
Region	Bilad al-Rawha
Distance from Haifa	Approximately 25 km southeast
Elevation	Approximately 225 m above sea level
Population, 1944/45	240
Estimated population, 1948	278
Total land area	1,930 dunums
Earliest reported occupation	14 April 1948
Firm military control	Probably established in late April 1948
Military force	Haganah; Carmeli Brigade at the Operation Bi'ur Hametz level
Military context	Operation Bi'ur Hametz following the fall of Haifa, preceded by fighting around Mishmar ha-'Emeq
Settlements originally established on village land	Khalidi does not identify a settlement originally founded on al-Rihaniyya's land

Location and Geography of Al-Rihaniyya

Al-Rihaniyya stood on a hilltop in a generally hilly landscape. The hills immediately east of the village rose steeply, while those to the west were gentler and descended toward the Wadi al-Milh road.

The Wadi al-Milh highway lay approximately 3 km northwest of the village and linked the surrounding region with Haifa, the coastal area, and Marj ibn 'Amir.

Al-Rihaniyya formed part of Bilad al-Rawha, a rural region between Mount Carmel and Marj ibn 'Amir characterized by agricultural villages, springs, and local road networks.

Neighboring Villages and Localities

Palestinian maps and local documentation indicate the following approximate geographical relationships:

- North: Umm al-Zinat.
- Northeast: Qira wa Qamun.
- East: the Abu Zurayq area.
- South: Daliyat al-Rawha'.
- Southwest: al-Kafrayn.
- West and northwest: the Khirbat Qumbaza area and lands toward Umm al-Zinat and the Wadi al-Milh road.

These are approximate geographical relationships rather than substitutes for detailed historical cadastral boundaries.

Name of Al-Rihaniyya

The village name derives from **rihan**, the Arabic word for sweet basil, an aromatic plant widely known throughout Palestine and the Mediterranean region.

Local documentation further associates the name with the area's vegetation and abundant water sources, although Khalidi's principal entry simply links the name to the basil plant.

Al-Rihaniyya in the Late Ottoman Period

Late nineteenth-century sources indicate an established population at al-Rihaniyya. A population estimate from around 1887 gives approximately 190 inhabitants, all

Muslims.

A boys' elementary school was established around 1887 during Ottoman rule but was later closed during the British Mandate.

The village also had a mosque, reflecting its established Muslim community before the Mandate period.

Built Form

Al-Rihaniyya was relatively small and compact. The official 1931 census recorded 55 occupied houses.

Local Palestinian documentation describes houses built of stone and cement or stone and mud, while the mosque and school were among the village's principal public structures.

The 1944/45 Village Statistics classified approximately 46 dunums as built-up Arab land.

Population of Al-Rihaniyya

The official 1922 Census of Palestine recorded 266 inhabitants in al-Rihaniyya, all Muslims.

By the 1931 census, the population had risen to 293, again all Muslims, living in 55 occupied houses.

The 1944/45 Village Statistics recorded 240 Arabs.

Later local accounts attribute the decline between 1931 and 1945 partly to the departure of several families from the village. This explanation derives from local history rather than the official statistical records themselves.

Palestine Remembered later estimated the population at 278 in 1948 and the number of refugees and their descendants at 1,710 in 1998. These are retrospective estimates rather than official British Mandate census counts.

Year	Population	Nature of Figure / Notes
c. 1887	Approximately 190	Historical estimate; all Muslims
1922	266	Official census; all Muslims
1931	293	Official census; all Muslims
1944/45	240	Official statistics; all Arabs
1948	278	Later Palestine Remembered estimate, not an official census
1998	1,710 refugees	Later estimate of refugees and their descendants

Number of Houses

Year	Houses	Nature of Figure
1931	55	Occupied houses recorded in the official census
1948	55	Later Palestine Remembered figure repeating the 1931 count; not an independent official census

Education

Al-Rihaniyya had a boys' elementary school established around 1887 during Ottoman rule.

The school was closed during the British Mandate and was therefore no longer functioning during the final years before the Nakba.

Some secondary sources give 1888 rather than 1887 as the founding year, so “around 1887” is the safest formulation.

The Mosque

The Muslim village had a mosque serving its inhabitants.

Khalidi's principal account does not provide sufficient documentation concerning its construction date, architecture, or dimensions to support more detailed claims.

Land Ownership in Al-Rihaniyya

The total village land area in the 1944/45 Village Statistics was 1,930 dunums.

Palestine Remembered presents the simplified ownership categories as follows:

Ownership Category	Area in Dunums
Palestinian	1,885
Transferred to Zionists	0
Communal/Public	45
Total	**1,930**

The official Village Statistics use the categories Arab and Public: 1,885 dunums were classified as Arab land and 45 as public land. No land was recorded under the Jewish category.

Some later local sources give a total of 6,930 dunums, but this conflicts with both the official Village Statistics and PalQuest. This article therefore uses the official total of 1,930 dunums.

Land Use in 1944/45

Use	Arab	Public	Total
Cereals	1,761	0	1,761
Plantations and irrigable land	73	0	73
Built-up land	46	0	46
Non-cultivable land	5	45	50
Total	**1,885**	**45**	**1,930**

Cultivable land totaled 1,834 dunums, approximately 95 percent of the village area.

Built-up and non-cultivable land totaled 96 dunums: 51 Arab and 45 public

dunums.

Economic Life

Agriculture and livestock raising were the principal sources of livelihood in al-Rihaniyya.

Cereals and fruit were the most important crops. In 1944/45, 1,761 dunums were devoted to cereals and 73 dunums to plantations and irrigable land.

Springs and the nearby wadi supplied water for household use and supported part of the village's agricultural activity.

Water and Springs

Several springs bordered the village from the north and west. Villagers obtained water both from the wadi and from these springs.

Later local Palestinian documentation preserves names including **'Ayn al-Rihaniyya**, **'Ayn al-Hawd**, and **'Ayn al-Mahshura**.

Wadi al-Sitt began north of the village and flowed eastward before joining other streams in the drainage system leading toward the Muqatta' River.

These detailed names derive from local geographical documentation, while Khalidi's principal account confirms more generally that the wadi and numerous springs supplied the village with water.

Archaeological Sites and Khirbas

Khirbat Furayr was one of the principal archaeological sites associated with al-Rihaniyya. Khalidi records that it had been classified as an archaeological site but had not yet been securely dated.

The English PalQuest entry places Khirbat Furayr approximately **1.5 km northwest of the village**. Some Arabic reproductions give 15 km, which appears to result from a missing decimal point.

Later local sources also identify Khirbat Qutayna east of the village, Khirbat Qumbaza, Khirbat al-Qasr, Khirbat al-Shaqaq, Khirbat al-Buwayda, and Khirbat al-Najasa.

Some local accounts associate Khirbat Qutayna with an ancient Canaanite settlement, but this attribution should not be treated as established without independent archaeological confirmation.

The Mishmar ha-'Emeq Fighting

The area around al-Rihaniyya witnessed major fighting in April 1948 following the battle of Mishmar ha-'Emeq between the Haganah and the Arab Liberation Army under Fawzi al-Qawuqji.

During the Haganah counteroffensive that followed, a number of Palestinian villages southeast of Haifa were overrun.

Khalidi describes al-Rihaniyya as apparently among the last villages occupied in the aftermath of that fighting.

Occupation and Depopulation of Al-Rihaniyya

The precise date on which al-Rihaniyya came under firm military control is disputed.

A contemporary newspaper report cited by Khalidi stated that al-Rihaniyya, Daliyat al-Rawha', and al-Butaymat were occupied on **14 April 1948**, after Arab Liberation Army forces in the area had been defeated and approximately ten other villages had been overrun.

Khalidi, however, adds that al-Rihaniyya may not have been securely under Haganah control on that date. Firm control may only have been established a couple of weeks later, when villages to its north and west were occupied after the fall of Haifa.

During this period the Haganah launched **Operation Bi'ur Hametz** from 22 to 24

April 1948 to consolidate control over Haifa's hinterland and approaches.

PalQuest explicitly lists al-Rihaniyya among the villages affected by this operation and identifies the **Carmeli Brigade** as the principal Zionist formation involved.

Palestine Remembered and the Palestinian Villages Encyclopedia use 30 April 1948 as the village's occupation date. Khalidi's narrative, however, does not establish that specific date conclusively.

The most careful chronology is therefore: **an initial reported occupation on 14 April, followed by probable firm Haganah control in late April in the context of Operation Bi'ur Hametz and the consolidation of Israeli control around Haifa.**

Stage	Date	Details
Mishmar ha-'Emeq fighting and aftermath	April 1948	Haganah counteroffensive against Palestinian villages following fighting with the Arab Liberation Army
First reported occupation of al-Rihaniyya	14 April 1948	Contemporary report stated that al-Rihaniyya, Daliyat al-Rawha', and al-Butaymat were occupied
Fall of Haifa	22 April 1948	Followed by efforts to consolidate control over the city's hinterland
Operation Bi'ur Hametz	22–24 April 1948	Haganah operation led largely by the Carmeli Brigade; PalQuest lists al-Rihaniyya among affected villages
Probable firm control	Late April 1948	Khalidi suggests secure Haganah control may not have been achieved until several weeks after the 14 April report
Date used by later Palestinian secondary sources	30 April 1948	Commonly listed date, but not conclusively established by Khalidi's detailed account

Military Unit

The securely documented military organization is the **Haganah**.

At the operation level, PalQuest identifies the **Carmeli Brigade** as the principal

force carrying out Operation Bi'ur Hametz and lists al-Rihaniyya among the villages affected by that operation.

The village-specific Khalidi entry does not identify a particular battalion or assault unit that entered al-Rihaniyya. The most precise formulation is therefore: **Haganah; Carmeli Brigade at the Operation Bi'ur Hametz level.**

Zionist and Israeli Settlements and Al-Rihaniyya's Lands

Ramat ha-Shofet: Established in 1941 close to al-Rihaniyya.

'En ha-'Emeq: Established in 1944 close to the village site.

Together, the two settlements formed an arc partly surrounding al-Rihaniyya from the north, east, and south.

Khalidi explicitly states that **neither settlement was originally founded on al-Rihaniyya's village lands**. They were, however, extremely close to the village—approximately half a kilometer away.

After the depopulation of al-Rihaniyya, residents of these settlements made use of the village lands for agriculture. A distinction should therefore be maintained between a settlement originally established on village land and a neighboring settlement that later used depopulated village land.

Al-Rihaniyya Today

According to Walid Khalidi's field description in *All That Remains*, the village houses had been reduced to piles of rubble covered with soil, bushes, and thorns.

The village cemetery remained visible, covered with cactus, as did a well at the foot of a hill north of the site.

Large parts of the surrounding land were being cultivated, and an avocado orchard occupied the southern part of the area.

The description is associated with field documentation and photographs from

around 1990, before the 1992 publication of *All That Remains*. It should therefore not be treated as direct field verification of every feature in 2026.

Later Palestinian community documentation on Palestine Remembered and the Palestinian Villages Encyclopedia includes material showing the ruins, 'Ayn al-Rihaniyya, the cemetery, and village lands. These materials provide useful later documentation but do not constitute a comprehensive modern archaeological or architectural survey of the site.

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: al-Rihaniyya
- PalQuest – Operation Bi'ur Hametz
- Palestine Remembered – al-Rihaniyya, Haifa
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- Government of Palestine – Census of Palestine 1922
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- Government of Palestine – Village Statistics 1945: Haifa Sub-District, Population and Land Ownership
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