Al-Tira (Baysan)

Al-Tira (Tirat al-Marj / al-Tira al-Zu'biyya) – Depopulated Palestinian Village of the Baysan District

Al-Tira, also known as Tirat al-Marj and al-Tira al-Zu'biyya, was a depopulated Palestinian village in the Baysan District. It stood on the side of a low hill overlooking the steep slopes of Wadi al-Bira to the north and northeast and flatter land to the west and southwest.

The village lay approximately 17.5 kilometers north of Baysan at an average

elevation of about 125 meters above sea level.

Al-Tira was depopulated on 15 April 1948, after officials of the Jewish National Fund had earlier discussed forcing its inhabitants to leave and after pressure from the Haganah. The village's depopulation cannot securely be attributed to Operation Gideon, which did not begin until 10 May, approximately four weeks later.

Location and Geography

Al-Tira lay in the northernmost part of the Baysan District, close to the administrative boundaries of the Tiberias and Nazareth districts.

The village occupied the side of a low hill overlooking the steep slopes of Wadi al-Bira to the north and northeast, while flatter terrain extended westward and southwestward.

A secondary road connected the village with the main route leading north to Samakh and south to Baysan. Other tracks linked al-Tira with neighboring villages and its water sources.

Palestinian sources place Ma'dhar to the north, 'Awlam to the northeast, Sirin to the east, Danna to the southeast, al-Tayyiba al-Zu'biyya to the south, Tamra to the southwest, and Kafr Misr to the west.

Name

PalQuest records the official name al-Tira and the alternative names Tirat al-Marj and al-Tira al-Zu'biyya.

The principal Palestinian sources reviewed do not provide a securely established historical explanation for the name al-Tira or for the epithet al-Zu'biyya. No definitive linguistic or tribal derivation is therefore adopted here.

Built Environment

Al-Tira's houses stood along the side of the hill in a relatively compact settlement.

Late nineteenth-century descriptions portray it as a small village, largely built of adobe, standing on a hill above a deep gorge.

In the 1944/45 statistical unit, 29 dunams of Arab-owned land were classified as built-up, while one additional built-up dunam belonged to the Jewish settlement of Irgun Borokhov.

Population and Houses

The Palestinian inhabitants of al-Tira were Muslims.

Year	Population	Note
1922	130	Official census; all inhabitants were Muslims
1931	108	Official census; all inhabitants were Muslims
1945	150 Arabs	Population of the Palestinian village itself
1945 – Irgun Borokhov	50 Jews	Population of the adjacent Jewish settlement included in the broader statistical context
1945 – Combined Total	200	150 Arabs in al-Tira plus 50 Jews in Irgun Borokhov

The official 1931 census recorded 24 inhabited houses in al-Tira.

Later estimates for 1948 and 1998 are inconsistent across Palestinian websites. Figures of approximately 170–174 appear for 1948, while estimates of refugees and descendants in 1998 range between 1,069 and 1,609. Because the underlying calculations are unclear and some statistical tables combine al-Tira with Irgun Borokhov, no single later estimate is treated here as definitive.

Water Resources

'Ayn al-Bayda was the principal source of water for al-Tira's inhabitants, and tracks connected the village with the spring.

The Palestinian Encyclopedia also records 'Ayn al-Mazarib north of the village along a watercourse and 'Ayn al-Mustafa among a group of springs farther north.

The abundance of springs in the area supplied domestic water and supported agriculture.

Shrine, Education, and Public Services

A shrine dedicated to Shaykh Dhiab stood south of the village.

Walid Khalidi's principal village entry does not document an independent formal school, while the Palestinian Encyclopedia describes al-Tira as lacking public facilities and services.

No formal school or separately documented mosque is therefore added without stronger village-specific evidence.

Economic Life and Agriculture

Agriculture was the principal livelihood of al-Tira's Palestinian inhabitants.

Cereals were the dominant crop, with a smaller area devoted to plantations and irrigable land.

The principal village source does not provide securely documented crop-specific acreage for additional crops such as olives, so no unsupported figures are added.

Methodological Note on the 1944/45 Statistics

The land statistics for al-Tira must be read carefully because the official land unit presented by PalQuest **includes the Jewish settlement of Irgun Borokhov**,

established near the village in 1943.

The Jewish ownership and land-use figures below therefore do not mean that Jewish residents lived within the Palestinian residential core of al-Tira itself. They belong to the combined land-statistical unit.

Land Ownership, 1944/45

Total	10,207
Ownership Category	**Area in Dunams**
Arab	4,463
Jewish	2,604
Public	3,140

The official table balances exactly: 4,463 + 2,604 + 3,140 = 10,207 dunams.

Palestine Remembered presents the same figures using its simplified terminology: 4,463 dunams “Palestinian,” 2,604 dunams “Transferred to Zionists,” and 3,140 dunams “Communal/Public.” The phrase “Transferred to Zionists” should be preserved when reproducing that source's classification.

Land Use, 1944/45

Grand Total	4,463	2,604	3,140	10,207
Land Use	**Arab**	**Jewish**	**Public**	**Total**
Cereals	4,326	2,603	298	7,227
Plantations and irrigable land	56	0	0	56
Total cultivable/cultivated land	4,382	2,603	298	7,283
Non-cultivable land	52	0	2,842	2,894
Built-up land	29	1	0	30
Total non-cultivable and built-up	81	1	2,842	2,924

The official table balances exactly: 7,283 dunams of cultivated or cultivable land plus 2,924 dunams of built-up and non-cultivable land equal the total 10,207 dunams.

Palestine Remembered displays 4,624 cereal dunams in the Palestinian column. The official table shows that this number combines 4,326 Arab dunams with 298 Public dunams, so Public land has been kept separate above.

Khirbat al-Tira and Archaeology

Khirbat al-Tira lay south of the village.

Archaeological investigations uncovered ancient remains including caves and water cisterns.

The principal sources reviewed do not provide sufficient dating to assign all of these remains to a single historical period.

The March 1948 Decision to Remove the Population

Efforts to remove al-Tira's Palestinian inhabitants began before the major military campaigns in the Baysan Valley.

On 26 March 1948, Jewish National Fund officials discussed forcing the inhabitants of al-Tira and neighboring Qumya to leave, arguing that the villagers had not prevented Palestinian irregular fighters from entering the area.

The decision was not implemented on that date. **26 March was therefore not the date of al-Tira's occupation or final depopulation.**

Depopulation of Al-Tira

Walid Khalidi, citing Benny Morris through his own account, states that al-Tira was emptied on **15 April 1948** after the inhabitants received pressure or “friendly

advice” from the Haganah to leave.

Khalidi also notes that Morris gives a contradictory account elsewhere, stating that the villagers left on 20 May after orders from Arab irregular forces.

The two accounts are separated by more than a month and cannot both describe the same initial depopulation event without qualification.

This article therefore retains **15 April 1948** as the depopulation date given in the detailed village narrative, while recording 20 May as a conflicting later claim rather than as an equally established alternative date.

Was Al-Tira Depopulated during Operation Gideon?

Palestine Remembered and some later Palestinian databases classify al-Tira under Operation Gideon and identify the Golani Brigade as the executing force.

This attribution is chronologically inconsistent.

Operation Gideon began on **10 May 1948** and ended on 15 May, whereas al-Tira had already been emptied on 15 April, approximately four weeks earlier.

Operation Gideon is therefore not treated here as the military operation that depopulated al-Tira, and the Golani Brigade is not assigned as the village-level force responsible for its removal.

The organization directly identified in the village-specific depopulation narrative is the **Haganah**, with no specific brigade or battalion documented.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Decision to remove the population	26 March 1948	Jewish National Fund officials discussed forcing the inhabitants of al-Tira and Qumya to leave; this was not the date of physical occupation.
Depopulation of al-Tira	15 April 1948	According to the detailed account cited by Khalidi, residents left after pressure from the Haganah.
Beginning of Operation Gideon	10 May 1948	The Golani Brigade began Operation Gideon in the Baysan Valley after al-Tira had already been emptied.
Contradictory later departure account	20 May 1948	A second Morris account, cited by Khalidi, states that villagers left on orders from Arab irregular forces; it conflicts with the 15 April account.
Irgun Borokhov renamed Gazit	10 September 1948	A new settler organization took over the settlement and renamed it Kibbutz Gazit.
Village site absorbed by Gazit	Late 1948	Gazit incorporated the al-Tira village site and lands.
Destruction of village buildings	Exact date not documented	Most structures were subsequently destroyed, leaving stone ruins.

Military Unit

The village-specific account does not identify a Golani Brigade unit as the force responsible for al-Tira's depopulation.

The organization directly mentioned in connection with the villagers' departure is the **Haganah**.

No specific brigade or battalion is identified in the principal source, so none is assigned without direct village-level evidence.

Israeli Settlements on Village Lands

Irgun Borokhov was established in 1943 near the al-Tira village site and appears within the land-statistical unit associated with the village in 1944/45.

On 10 September 1948, another settler organization took over the settlement and renamed it Gazit.

By late 1948, Gazit had absorbed the al-Tira village site and lands. It lies approximately 1.5 kilometers south or southwest of the former village site on al-Tira's land.

Kefar Qish, established in 1946 approximately one kilometer northwest of al-Tira, stands on the lands of Ma'dhar in the Tiberias District and should not be listed as a settlement on al-Tira's lands.

Al-Tira Today

According to the field description published in Walid Khalidi's *All That Remains*, only the ruins of stone houses remained, covered by grass and thorns.

The site was fenced and used by Israeli farmers as grazing land, while cypress trees grew on surrounding land.

Later Palestinian community documentation, including material from 2007 and 2012, records house rubble, the cemetery site, and locations associated with former village families.

None of these descriptions constitutes a comprehensive field verification of conditions in 2026. The principal *All That Remains* fieldwork dates from 1987–1990.

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: al-Tira, Baysan

- Palestine Remembered – al-Tira, Baysan District
- Palestine Remembered – Walid Khalidi's account of al-Tira
- Palestinian Encyclopedia – al-Tira; Baysan section
- Palestinian Villages Encyclopedia – al-Tira / Tirat al-Marj / al-Tira al-Zu'biyya; used comparatively to correct the 26 March dating
- PalQuest – Operation Gideon; used to establish that the operation began after al-Tira had already been depopulated
- Institute for Palestine Studies – Walid Khalidi, All That Remains
- PalQuest – All That Remains: Methodology