

Zir'in



Zir'in: A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Jenin District

Zir'in was a Palestinian village in the Jenin District. Its population stood at 1,420 according to the official 1945 statistics, while its population in 1948 was estimated at approximately 1,647. Zionist forces occupied the village on 28 May 1948 during the Nakba and the occupation of Palestine in 1948. Its inhabitants were displaced, and most of its buildings were subsequently destroyed.

Basic Information

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Jenin

Item	Information
Distance from district center	11 km North of Jinin
Average Elevation	100 meters above sea level
Population in 1931	978 inhabitants - Official Government of Palestine census
Population in 1944/1945	1,420 inhabitants - Official Government of Palestine statistics
Estimated Population in 1948	1,647 inhabitants - a later demographic estimate, not an official census
Total Land Area in 1945	23,920 dunams
Attack and Depopulation	Earlier Attempts to Occupy the Village Zir'in and Nuris came under attempted attacks during March 1948. According to the account reproduced by Walid Khalidi, the Palmach command issued an order on 19 April 1948 calling for most of Zir'in's houses to be destroyed after its occupation, while leaving several buildings intact for accommodation and defensive purposes.
Final Israeli Control	28 May 1948
Military Operation	Gideon
Military Unit	Golani Brigade's Fourth Battalion
Cause of Depopulation	Military assault by Zionist troops
Settlements Documented on Village Lands	Yizrael, Avital, Yael, part of Firzon, part of Mitav

Location and Geography

Zir'in was located approximately 11 kilometres north of the city of Jenin, at an elevation of about 100 metres above sea level. The village stood on a small plateau projecting from the Faquu'a Mountains. The plateau rose only slightly above the Marj Ibn Amir plain, which surrounded it on its western and southern sides, while its northern and eastern sides sloped towards Wadi al-Jalud.

Zir'in was the northernmost village in the Jenin District. It stood on a secondary

road connecting two main roads: one leading to Jenin and the other running southeast towards Baysan. The village lands covered 23,920 dunams, of which approximately 81 dunams formed the built-up area.

Name and Historical Background

Zir'in was built on a site associated with the ancient town of Yizre'el. Both the names Yizre'el and Zir'in contain a linguistic meaning related to sowing and cultivation. Crusader sources called the village "Le Petit Gerin" to distinguish it from Jenin, which they called "Le Grand Gerin."

The decisive Battle of Ayn Jalut took place near the village in 1260. In that battle, Muslim forces led by al-Zahir Baybars defeated the Mongols. The spring known as Ayn Jalut, or Ayn Jalud, was located between Zir'in and the neighbouring village of Nuris.

Ottoman tax records from 1596 recorded 22 households or taxable units in Zir'in. The village was then part of the nahiya of Jenin in the liwa of Lajjun. Its residents paid taxes on wheat, barley, goats, beehives and other agricultural products and properties.

The Village before the Nakba

Buildings and Water Sources

In the late nineteenth century, Zir'in consisted of approximately 20 to 30 houses. One of the village's most prominent families lived in a tall building in the centre of the village that resembled a tower. The residents obtained water from a well and a spring. One of the local springs was known as Ayn al-Mayta.

Most of the houses were built of mud and stood close together, separated by narrow alleys. Construction expanded during the British Mandate, and many of the existing houses were improved.

Religious and Educational Landmarks

The centre of Zir'in contained a mosque whose renovation is attributed to al-Zahir Baybars. The village also had a small market and a cemetery. A primary school for boys was established during the Ottoman period and remained in operation until the village was occupied in 1948.

Economic Life

Agriculture was the principal source of livelihood. The villagers cultivated grain, vegetables and fruit, irrigating some crops with water from wells and springs. According to the Government of Palestine's 1945 statistics, 20,964 dunams of Arab-owned land were allocated to cereal cultivation.

Notable People

Zir'in was the home village of Mahmud Salim, identified in the sources as one of the leaders of the Great Palestinian Revolt that began in 1936.

Land Ownership in 1945

Ownership of Zir'in's land in dunams according to the Government of Palestine's village statistics

Ownership category	Area in dunams
Palestinian Arab ownership	22,034
Jewish ownership	1,711
Public land	175
Total	23,920

Land Use in 1945

Use of Zir'in's land in dunams according to the published village statistics

Land-use category	Arab-owned land	Jewish-owned land
Planted with cereals	20,964	1,633
Built-up area	81	0
Arable land	20,964	1,633
Non-arable land	1,164	78
Source: Village Statistics issued by the Government of Palestine in 1945.		

“Land planted with cereals” and “arable land” are separate classifications reproduced from the source table. Although their figures are identical for Zir'in, they must not be added together as separate areas.

Population

The Government of Palestine's 1922 census recorded 722 inhabitants in Zir'in. The population increased to 978 in the 1931 census. All were recorded as Muslim Arabs and lived in 239 houses.

The official population figure for 1945 was 1,420. The figure of 1,647 for 1948 is a demographic estimate rather than a new official census. The number of refugees originating from Zir'in and their descendants was estimated at approximately 10,116 in 1998.

Population development in Zir'in

Year	Recorded number	Nature of figure
1596	22	Households or taxable units, not individual inhabitants
1922	722 inhabitants	Official Government of Palestine census
1931	978 inhabitants	Official Government of Palestine census
1945	1,420 inhabitants	Official Government of Palestine statistics
1948	1,647 inhabitants	Demographic estimate

Year	Recorded number	Nature of figure
1998	10,116 people	Estimate of the village's refugees and their descendants
Official census figures must be distinguished from later demographic estimates.		

Archaeological Remains

Archaeological remains at Zir'in included a vaulted structure, a medieval church, the foundations of earlier buildings, caves, cisterns and grape presses. In 1990, Tel Aviv University and the British Institute of Archaeology in Jerusalem began a joint excavation programme at the site that was planned to continue for five years.

The Occupation of Zir'in and the Displacement of Its People

Earlier Attempts to Occupy the Village

Zir'in and Nuris came under attempted attacks during March 1948. According to the account reproduced by Walid Khalidi, the Palmach command issued an order on 19 April 1948 calling for most of Zir'in's houses to be destroyed after its occupation, while leaving several buildings intact for accommodation and defensive purposes.

Date of Occupation and Attacking Unit

The Fourth Battalion of the Golani Brigade occupied Zir'in on 28 May 1948. The same battalion also occupied the neighbouring village of Nuris. Zir'in was occupied after the capture of the Baysan Valley and in preparation for the attack on Jenin.

The Palestine Remembered database classifies the occupation of Zir'in as part of Operation Gideon. The detailed narrative derived from *All That Remains* confirms the date, battalion and brigade, but does not explicitly name the operation in its narrative passage.

Displacement and Attempts to Retake the Village

The military assault resulted in the displacement of Zir'in's inhabitants and the complete depopulation of the village. The reviewed sources do not provide a comprehensive and verifiable account of the destinations reached by all the displaced residents; therefore, no single destination can be stated as established fact.

Walid Khalidi's account reports that Arab forces launched a counterattack two days after the village was occupied. Iraqi forces attempted to retake Zir'in on 10 July, followed by another attack on 19 July 1948. These attempts were unsuccessful, and the armistice line was later established south of the village.

Fate of the Buildings

Most of Zir'in's buildings were destroyed after its occupation. According to Khalidi's description, only one dilapidated building remained, together with piles of stones, traces of former structures and one of the village wells.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Earlier Attempts to Occupy the Village	March 1948	Zir'in and Nuris came under attempted attacks during March 1948. According to the account reproduced by Walid Khalidi, the Palmach command issued an order on 19 April 1948 calling for most of Zir'in's houses to be destroyed after its occupation, while leaving several buildings intact for accommodation and defensive purposes.
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Settlements Established on Zir'in's Land

- Yizre'el: established in 1948 northwest of the village site.
- Avital: established in 1933 on land traditionally considered part of Zir'in's territory. It was therefore not established after the village's depopulation during the Nakba.

The Village Site after Its Destruction

According to the field description recorded by Walid Khalidi in *All That Remains*, wild grass, thorns and cactuses covered the site. Piles of stones, one dilapidated building and a standing well remained visible. Cactuses and pomegranate trees grew around the outskirts, while parts of the surrounding hilly land were used for grazing and the slopes were cultivated.

An Israeli memorial surrounded by trees was also established at the site. This description reflects the condition of the village when documented for Khalidi's reference work and should not be interpreted as a current field survey.

Sources and References

- [Palestine Remembered: Zir'in, Jenin District](#)
- Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*, Institute for Palestine Studies, Washington, D.C., 1992, entry on Zir'in.

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- Government of Palestine, *Palestine Census of 1922*.
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- Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh, *Biladuna Filastin*, Part III, Section II, pp. 203–204.
- Wolf-Dieter Hütteroth and Kamal Abdulfattah, *Historical Geography of Palestine, Transjordan and Southern Syria in the Late 16th Century* , entry concerning Zir'in.
- [Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question — PalQuest](#)