Al-Haram (Sayyidna 'Ali)

al-Haram (Sayyiduna 'Ali): A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Jaffa District

al-Haram, also known as Sayyiduna 'Ali, was a Palestinian village in the Jaffa District, situated on a low sandstone hill overlooking the Mediterranean coast approximately 16 kilometres north of Jaffa, at an average elevation of about 25 metres above sea level. Its Arab population reached 520 in the 1944/1945 statistics. The villagers began leaving amid fear and fighting during the early months of 1948, while the detailed Palestinian reference account indicates that Zionist forces probably secured final military control shortly before the end of the British Mandate on 15 May 1948.

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Jaffa

Item	Information
Distance from district center	16 km north of Jaffa
Average Elevation	25 m above sea level
Population in 1931	333
Number of Houses in 1931	83
Population in 1944/1945	520 – Arab inhabitants; the statistical unit totalled 880, including 360 Jews
Estimated Population in 1948	About 603 – a later demographic estimate, not an official census
Total Land Area in 1945	8,065 dunams
Attack and Depopulation	The available sources document no specific attack on the village; Khalidi states that Zionist forces probably seized it some time before the end of the British Mandate on 15 May 1948, when they controlled the whole coastal area between Haifa and Tel Aviv.
Final Israeli Control	Probably some time before 15 May 1948, according to Khalidi; the available sources give no exact day.
Settlements Documented on Village Lands	Kefar Shemaryahu, established in 1937 southeast of the village site on what had traditionally been village land; and Rishpon, built in 1936 on the northern border of the village lands

Location

al-Haram stood on a low sandstone hill on the central coastal plain overlooking the Mediterranean Sea.

The village was approximately 16 kilometres north of Jaffa and had an average elevation of about 25 metres above sea level.

Its coastal location allowed the inhabitants to combine agriculture with fishing.

The Village Name and the Shrine of Sayyiduna 'Ali

The village was known both as al-Haram and Sayyiduna 'Ali, after the shrine and mosque that formed its principal religious landmark.

Some modern reference texts identify the saint as “al-Hasan ibn 'Ali,” who died in 1081 and was descended from Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattab. This formulation is historically inconsistent with the well-known Hasan ibn 'Ali.

More detailed local Palestinian documentation instead identifies the saint as **Shaykh 'Ali ibn 'Alil, also known as Ibn 'Alim**, who is said to have died in 474 AH/1081 CE and to have been descended from Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattab.

This article therefore uses the name 'Ali ibn 'Alil when referring to the figure associated with the shrine, while noting the discrepancy in some secondary references.

The shrine drew visitors from across Palestine, particularly during the summer, for prayer, religious observances, and social gatherings.

Architecture and Public Facilities

The houses of al-Haram were closely clustered and constructed of stone or adobe brick.

The mosque and shrine formed the principal religious complex of the village and included colonnaded and arched porticoes, as well as a minaret.

Most inhabitants of the village were Muslims.

The Arab built-up area covered approximately 18 dunams in the 1944/1945 statistics.

Education

A boys' elementary school was established in al-Haram in 1921.

By the mid-1940s, enrollment had reached 68 pupils.

Local Palestinian documentation additionally records two teachers, a school library containing approximately 132 books, and about 110 men in the village who were literate. These details derive primarily from local documentation and are not all reproduced in the same detail in the principal reference sources.

Population

Local historical documentation gives an estimate of approximately 341 inhabitants in 1904.

The 1922 census recorded 172 inhabitants.

By the 1931 census, the population had increased to 333 people living in 83 houses.

The 1944/1945 statistics require a distinction between the Arab village population and the broader statistical unit. They recorded 520 Arabs and 360 Jews, producing a total of 880.

The Palestinian Arab village itself therefore had 520 inhabitants, not 880.

The figure of approximately 603 Arabs in 1948 is a later estimate. Palestine Remembered estimates the number of refugees and their descendants at 3,704 in 1998.

Population of al-Haram

Year	Population	Note
1904	About 341	Local historical estimate
1922	172	Official census

Year	Population	Note
1931	333	Official census
1944/1945	520 Arabs	Arab village population
1944/1945	880	Statistical-unit total: 520 Arabs + 360 Jews
1948	About 603 Arabs	Later estimate
1998	3,704	Estimate of refugees and their descendants

Number of Houses

The 1931 census recorded 83 houses in al-Haram.

The figure of approximately 150 houses in 1948 is a later estimate rather than an official census count.

Land of al-Haram

According to the 1944/1945 statistics, al-Haram had a total land area of 8,065 dunams.

Arab ownership amounted to 2,681 dunams, Jewish ownership to 4,745 dunams, while 639 dunams were classified as public land.

Total	8,065
Ownership Category	**Area in Dunams**
Arab ownership	2,681
Jewish ownership	4,745
Public land	639

Agriculture and Economic Life

Agriculture formed the mainstay of al-Haram's economy, alongside fishing due to the village's coastal location.

According to the 1944/1945 statistics, 136 Arab-owned dunams were devoted to citrus and bananas.

Irrigated and plantation land covered 301 dunams in total: 256 Arab-owned dunams and 45 Jewish-owned dunams.

Cereal cultivation covered 6,387 dunams: 2,096 Arab-owned dunams, 4,057 Jewish-owned dunams, and 234 dunams of public land.

Palestine Remembered gives 2,330 dunams in its Arab cereal column, but this figure effectively combines 2,096 Arab-owned dunams with 234 dunams of public land. This article follows the detailed ownership breakdown in PalQuest.

Local sources also record approximately 137 dunams planted with olive trees. This represents a crop category within cultivated land and should not be added separately to the overall land-use total.

Total	**2,681**	**4,745**	**639**	**8,065**
Type of Use	**Arab**	**Jewish**	**Public**	**Total**
Citrus and bananas	136	0	0	136
Irrigated and plantation land	256	45	0	301
Cereals	2,096	4,057	234	6,387
Built-up area	18	0	0	18
Uncultivable land	175	643	405	1,223

Khirbat Arsuf and the Archaeological Landscape

Khirbat Arsuf lies approximately 800 metres north of al-Haram and represents an archaeological site occupied during multiple historical periods.

Excavations conducted in 1977 and 1982 uncovered the remains of a market dating to the early Islamic period.

The archaeological history of the site extends from approximately the fifth century

BCE to the sixteenth century CE.

During the Hellenistic period it was known as Apollonia, while the Crusaders later built a fortress there known as Arsur.

The name Arshuf also appears in sixteenth-century Ottoman tax records.

In April 1265, the Mamluk sultan al-Zahir Baybars captured Arsuf during his campaigns against Crusader strongholds on the Palestinian coast.

The modern village of al-Haram appears to have developed after the Arsuf site was abandoned sometime in the seventeenth century, around the shrine and mosque of Sayyiduna 'Ali.

The Nakba and the Depopulation of al-Haram

Palestinian sources differ over the chronology of the villagers' departure and the final military occupation of al-Haram.

Palestine Remembered's summary table gives 3 February 1948 and associates the villagers' departure with fear of a Zionist attack or of being caught in the fighting.

The detailed account transmitted from Walid Khalidi by PalQuest and Palestine Remembered, however, states that Zionist forces probably seized al-Haram shortly before the end of the British Mandate on 15 May 1948, by which time most of the coastal strip between Haifa and Tel Aviv had come under Zionist control.

The most cautious interpretation is therefore not to treat 3 February as a securely documented date of final military occupation. It can instead be associated with an early stage of depopulation, while final military control was established later, probably before 15 May.

The principal reference sources reviewed do not identify a specific named military operation, brigade, or battalion as conclusively responsible for the capture of al-Haram. This article therefore does not assign the occupation to an undocumented

unit.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Settlement on village lands	1936–1937	The settlement of Rishpon was built in 1936 on the northern border of al-Haram's lands, and Kefar Shemaryahu was established in 1937 southeast of the village site, on what had traditionally been village land.
Final occupation	Before 15 May 1948 (probably)	Khalidi states that Zionist forces probably seized al-Haram some time before the end of the British Mandate, when they controlled the whole coastal area between Haifa and Tel Aviv. The available sources give no exact day and name no operation or unit.

Settlements and Urban Expansion on al-Haram's Lands

Rishpon

Rishpon was established in 1936 on the northern boundary of al-Haram's lands.

Kefar Shemaryahu

Kefar Shemaryahu was established in 1937 southeast of the village site, on land traditionally regarded as belonging to al-Haram.

Herzliya

Herzliya existed before the Nakba and therefore should not be described as having been established on the ruins of al-Haram after 1948.

Its later urban expansion, however, came to encompass the former village site and the area surrounding the Sayyiduna 'Ali mosque.

Localities Associated with al-Haram's Lands

Name	Year Established	Relationship to Village Lands
Rishpon	1936	Established on the northern boundary of al-Haram's lands
Kefar Shemaryahu	1937	Established southeast of the site on land traditionally belonging to al-Haram
Herzliya	Before 1948	Later urban expansion encompassed the former village site and the Sayyiduna 'Ali mosque area

al-Haram After the Nakba

According to the field documentation relied upon by Walid Khalidi, the shrine of Sayyiduna 'Ali, several houses, and the cemetery survived the destruction of the village.

The shrine is a substantial architectural complex that was partially renovated and includes arched colonnaded porticoes and a minaret rising above one of its buildings.

The ruined foundations of Palestinian houses remain visible nearby, while several older houses also survived.

The Palestinian cemetery overlooks the Mediterranean and, according to Khalidi's documentation, part of it was used as a parking area.

Later Palestinian local documentation states that the Sayyiduna 'Ali mosque was restored and returned to use for Muslim prayer, attracting Palestinian worshippers from surrounding communities.

Khalidi's field description should therefore be distinguished from the mosque's later condition following restoration and renewed religious use.

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: al-Haram.
- PalQuest: al-Haram.
- Palestine Remembered: al-Haram, Jaffa District.
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- Local Palestinian documentation on al-Haram and the Sayyiduna 'Ali shrine.
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- Government of Palestine, Department of Statistics, *Village Statistics, 1945*.