Al-Sawalima

أراضي القرية التي باتت محروثة الآن (أيار/مايو ١٩٩٠) [السوالمة]

al-Sawalima – Jaffa Subdistrict

Al-Sawalima, also known as 'Arab al-Sawalima, was a depopulated Palestinian village in the Jaffa subdistrict. It stood approximately 11 km northeast of Jaffa at an average elevation of about 50 meters in the central coastal plain.

Its lands extended north of the al-'Awja River, whose channel ran approximately 2 km south of the village site. The village was established by the nomadic 'Arab al-

Sawalima, who originally used the locality seasonally before gradually settling permanently and building adobe houses.

The official 1931 Census of Palestine recorded 429 inhabitants, and the 1944/45 statistics recorded 800. The village lands totaled 5,942 dunums.

Depopulation probably began or accelerated in late March 1948 as military pressure by the Haganah and Irgun spread across the Palestinian communities north of Tel Aviv, particularly after events in neighboring al-Shaykh Muwannis. The precise date on which Zionist forces physically occupied al-Sawalima is not established by Khalidi, who states only that the village probably fell before the end of the British Mandate on 15 May 1948. PalQuest also lists al-Sawalima among the villages affected by Operation Hametz.

Location of al-Sawalima

The village stood on relatively flat terrain that sloped gently from north to south.

The northern bank of the al-'Awja River formed the most important natural boundary of its lands to the south, while the village houses stood approximately 2 km from the river channel.

The location provided access to fertile coastal-plain agricultural land, irrigation water, Jaffa, and the network of Palestinian villages northeast of the city.

Neighboring Villages and Lands

Palestinian sources identify the following lands as immediately surrounding al-Sawalima:

Village / Area	Notes
'Arab Abu Kishk	Among the neighboring lands to the north and northeast
Ijlil al-Qibliyya	Within the northern and northwestern surroundings
al-Shaykh Muwannis	Among the neighboring lands to the west and southwest
al-'Awja River	The principal natural boundary to the south

Palestinian village maps also show Qubaniyat to the west, al-Mirr/al-Mahmudiyya to the east, and al-Jammasin al-Sharqi and Fajja in the wider surroundings.

These nearby localities should not all automatically be treated as direct cadastral boundaries; original Mandate land maps remain the strongest evidence for exact boundary lines.

'Arab al-Sawalima and the Formation of the Village

Walid Khalidi identifies the founders as the nomadic 'Arab al-Sawalima, whose presence in Palestine predated Ottoman rule.

They initially used the site seasonally as one stage in their annual cycle of movement.

Over time, families increasingly settled permanently, replacing seasonal encampments with adobe houses and transforming the locality into a settled agricultural village.

al-Sawalima in the Late Nineteenth Century

The Survey of Western Palestine recorded a site rendered Khirbat al-Suwalimiyya in the late nineteenth century and noted visible remains there.

Continued settlement by 'Arab al-Sawalima during the late Ottoman and British Mandate periods transformed the locality into a permanent village with cultivated lands and, eventually, an elementary school.

Population of al-Sawalima

Year	Population	Nature of figure / Notes
1922	70	Official Census of Palestine; all enumerated inhabitants were Muslims
1931	429	Official census: 218 males and 211 females, all Muslims

Year	Population	Nature of figure / Notes
1944/45	800	Official Government of Palestine statistics; all were Arabs and Muslims
1948	928	Later Palestine Remembered estimate; not an official census
1998	5,699 refugees and descendants	Later demographic estimate published by Palestine Remembered

Number of Houses

No securely documented independent house total for al-Sawalima in 1931 or 1948 was found in the principal sources reviewed.

No estimated house count has therefore been inserted without a clear source, although the village's historical development from tents and seasonal encampments toward permanent adobe dwellings is well documented.

Land Ownership in 1944/45

Al-Sawalima's registered lands totaled 5,942 dunums.

Using Palestine Remembered's simplified terminology:

Ownership category	Dunums
Palestinian	5,844
Transferred to Zionists	0
Communal/Public	98
Total	**5,942**

The official categories record 5,844 Arab dunums and 98 Public dunums, with no land in the Jewish ownership category.

Land Use in 1944/45

Land use	Arab	Public	Total dunums
Citrus and bananas	894	0	894
Plantations and irrigable land	191	0	191
Cereals	4,566	0	4,566
Non-cultivable land	193	98	291
Total	**5,844**	**98**	**5,942**

The land-use categories balance exactly with the official ownership figures.

Palestine Remembered's simplified display can make the entire 291-dunum non-arable category appear Palestinian. The official breakdown shows that it consisted of 193 Arab dunums and 98 Public dunums.

The PalQuest table does not present a separate, reliable built-up-area figure for al-Sawalima, so none has been inferred.

Economic Life in al-Sawalima

Agriculture became the principal economic basis of the village after the community settled permanently.

The inhabitants cultivated cereals, citrus, and orchards. Citrus production was particularly important in the western and southern sections of the village lands.

In 1944/45, 894 dunums were devoted to citrus and bananas, 4,566 to cereals, and 191 to plantations and irrigable land.

The northern portions of the village lands were predominantly forested, while wells and intensive cultivation characterized much of the south.

Water and Wells

Numerous wells in the southern parts of the village lands supplied irrigation water for citrus groves and orchards.

Supplementary Palestinian sources also record wells used for drinking and irrigation and mention Wadi Samara, which drained toward the al-'Awja River.

The village's proximity to the al-'Awja formed an important part of its agricultural environment even though the built-up settlement stood about 2 km north of the river itself.

Education

The inhabitants opened an elementary boys' school in 1946.

Its initial enrollment was 31 pupils.

A separate summary field on Palestine Remembered gives a figure of 43 pupils, but Khalidi's text and PalQuest explicitly identify 31 as the initial enrollment. The better-supported figure is therefore used here.

The school was modest in size. According to Khalidi's later field description, only the remains of one room of the school building were still discernible after the destruction of the village.

Religious Life

The population was entirely Muslim in the Mandate-era censuses and statistics.

Khalidi's core village entry does not document a specific mosque or shrine inside al-Sawalima, so none has been added without evidence.

The shrine of Shaykh Sa'd stood in the fields between neighboring Abu Kishk and al-Sawalima according to the Abu Kishk entry, but it should not automatically be classified as a shrine within al-Sawalima itself without more precise cadastral evidence.

al-Sawalima before the Nakba

Al-Sawalima's location northeast of Jaffa and close to al-Shaykh Muwannis and Abu Kishk placed it within the Palestinian rural belt immediately north of Tel Aviv.

As fighting intensified during the first months of 1948, this zone came under increasing military and political pressure from the Haganah and Irgun, and Palestinian communities north of Tel Aviv faced growing isolation and fear of attack.

The Events at al-Shaykh Muwannis and Their Regional Impact

Events in neighboring al-Shaykh Muwannis contributed to the broader wave of displacement from the area.

Despite a local truce between al-Shaykh Muwannis and the Haganah, an Irgun unit infiltrated the village in late March 1948 and kidnapped five of its leaders.

The incident produced widespread fear and flight among Palestinian communities in the coastal zone north of Tel Aviv.

Palestine Remembered links al-Sawalima's displacement to this atmosphere and indexes 30 March as the village's occupation or depopulation date.

Was al-Sawalima Occupied on 30 March 1948?

The date cannot be established as a definitive village-specific military occupation date.

Palestine Remembered lists **30 March 1948** in its occupation field and classifies the cause of departure as fear of Zionist attack or fear of being caught in fighting.

It also relates the villagers' flight to the atmosphere created by Haganah and Irgun pressure in the surrounding area.

Khalidi's detailed al-Sawalima account, however, does not state that forces entered the village on 30 March and does not document a direct assault on al-Sawalima on that day.

Late March is therefore better understood as a likely beginning or acceleration of the exodus rather than an unquestionable final occupation date.

Operation Hametz

Operation Hametz ran from 24 April to 13 May 1948.

Its purpose was to encircle Jaffa, seize Palestinian villages around the city, and sever Jaffa from its rural hinterland and communication routes.

The Haganah's Alexandroni, Kiryati, and Giv'ati brigades participated in the operation.

PalQuest explicitly lists al-Sawalima among the villages affected by Operation Hametz.

The operation entry does not, however, identify which of the three brigades entered al-Sawalima itself. No individual brigade should therefore be assigned to the village without village-specific evidence.

Final Occupation of al-Sawalima

Walid Khalidi states that al-Sawalima probably fell into Zionist hands at some point before the end of the British Mandate on **15 May 1948**.

By then, Zionist forces controlled the coastal zone stretching between Tel Aviv and Haifa.

The source does not provide one exact day for the final takeover, so neither 30 March nor a particular day during Operation Hametz should be converted into a certain final occupation date without additional evidence.

The most accurate formulation is that **the villagers began leaving in late March under the impact of fear and military pressure; al-Sawalima was affected by Operation Hametz in late April and early May; and final Zionist control was established before 15 May 1948.**

Military Units

No single brigade can be securely identified as the formation that occupied al-

Sawalima itself.

The **Irgun** played a major role in generating fear and displacement in the Palestinian zone north of Tel Aviv in late March, particularly through its assault on the leadership of al-Shaykh Muwannis.

During Operation Hametz, the Haganah's **Alexandroni, Kiryati, and Giv'ati brigades** operated around Jaffa, and PalQuest lists al-Sawalima among the affected villages.

The village-specific source does not identify which formation physically entered al-Sawalima. The village should therefore not be assigned exclusively to the Irgun, Alexandroni, Kiryati, or Giv'ati without further documentation.

Occupation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Growing military pressure north of Tel Aviv	March 1948	Haganah and Irgun activity intensified around al-Shaykh Muwannis, Abu Kishk, al-Sawalima, and neighboring Palestinian communities.
Kidnapping of al-Shaykh Muwannis leaders	Late March 1948	An Irgun unit infiltrated al-Shaykh Muwannis and kidnapped five village leaders, triggering widespread fear and flight in the surrounding area.
Palestine Remembered indexed date	30 March 1948	Listed as al-Sawalima's occupation/depopulation date, but Khalidi's detailed account does not establish a military entry into the village on that specific day.
Beginning of Operation Hametz	24 April 1948	The Haganah launched its campaign to encircle Jaffa and seize the surrounding Palestinian villages.
al-Sawalima affected by Operation Hametz	24 April–13 May 1948	PalQuest lists the village among those affected by the operation, carried out by the Alexandroni, Kiryati, and Giv'ati brigades.

Stage	Date	Details
Final Zionist control	Before 15 May 1948	Khalidi states that the village had probably fallen into Zionist hands by the end of the Mandate, without specifying an exact day.
Destruction of the village	Later; exact date not documented	The former tents and adobe dwellings disappeared almost completely, with only remnants of one schoolroom visible during the later field survey.

Refugees from al-Sawalima

Palestine Remembered estimates the village population in 1948 at approximately 928. This is a later demographic estimate rather than an official Mandate census figure.

The same source estimates that al-Sawalima refugees and their descendants numbered approximately 5,699 in 1998.

Palestinian community sources record some villagers and descendants living in Balata refugee camp, but the principal sources do not provide a complete official distribution of all refugee families after the Nakba.

Israeli Settlements on al-Sawalima Village Lands

Walid Khalidi and PalQuest state that **no Israeli settlement was originally established on al-Sawalima's village lands**.

Later Palestinian sources differ. The Palestinian Encyclopedia associates Ramat HaHayal, Tzahala, and other later Israeli urban developments with former al-Sawalima land, while Palestine Remembered currently displays Neve Sharett in a separate settlement field.

The core *All That Remains*/PalQuest entry nevertheless explicitly states that there were no Israeli settlements on village lands.

This article therefore distinguishes between **the original establishment of a**

settlement on the village's registered land and **later urban expansion from Tel Aviv and adjoining localities into parts of the historical landscape once associated with al-Sawalima**. Establishing the exact extent of later encroachment requires original cadastral maps.

al-Sawalima Today

In Walid Khalidi's field description, cactus grew across the former village site.

No identifiable traces remained of the former dwellings, whether the older tents or the later adobe houses.

Only the remains of one room from the village school could still be identified, while a highway passed along the northern edge of the site.

PalQuest dates field photographs of the site to May 1990, including one showing the cactus-marked northern edge and another showing village lands under cultivation.

This description does not constitute direct field verification of conditions in 2026. Field research for *All That Remains* was conducted between **1987 and 1990**, before the book's publication in 1992.

Palestine Remembered contains later community photographs suggesting substantial urban transformation in parts of the former village area. These materials are useful for tracing later change but do not constitute a comprehensive contemporary cadastral and field survey of all former village lands.

Sources

- PalQuest – al-Sawalima
- PalQuest – Operation Hametz
- Palestine Remembered – al-Sawalima, Jaffa District
- Palestine Remembered – al-Sawalima entry from Walid Khalidi's All That Remains
- Palestine Remembered – al-Shaykh Muwannis; context for the late-

March 1948 displacement

- Palestine Remembered – Abu Kishk; context for displacement north of Tel Aviv
- Institute for Palestine Studies – Walid Khalidi, All That Remains
- Government of Palestine – Census of Palestine 1931, Jaffa Subdistrict
- Palestinian Encyclopedia – 'Arab al-Sawalima
- PalQuest – All That Remains: Methodology and Field Research