

Al-Safiriyya



Subdistrict: Jaffa

Estimated population of al-Safiriyya in 1948: 3,561

Documented population in 1945: 3,070

Occupation and depopulation: The exact date is disputed; contemporary reporting records 20 May 1948, while Palestinian historian Arif al-Arif places it in late April 1948

Probable occupying unit: Alexandroni Brigade, if the village was occupied during Operation Hametz

Israeli settlements established on village land before 1948: None

Israeli settlements established on village land after 1948: Tzafriyya, Kfar Chabad, Ahī'ezer, and Tochelet; Shafrir was later absorbed into these settlements and the suburbs of Rishon LeZion

Al-Safiriyya was a depopulated Palestinian village in the Jaffa Subdistrict. It had an estimated population of 3,561 in 1948 and two elementary schools. Agriculture formed the basis of its economy. The village was occupied and its inhabitants were displaced during Israel's occupation of Palestine in the 1948 Nakba. Most of the village was subsequently destroyed, and several Israeli settlements were established on its land.

- Al-Safiriyya was situated approximately 11 kilometres east of Jaffa.
- The village stood on flat terrain in the central coastal plain. A secondary road connected it to the main road leading to Jaffa and al-Ramla.
- Historical sources identify the village with Byzantine-period Sapharea and the Crusader-period name Saphyria. More recent linguistic research has questioned the certainty of this identification, so it should be treated as a historical association rather than a conclusively established fact.
- Hani al-Kindi, an early Muslim scholar and ascetic, was reportedly buried in al-Safiriyya. The Umayyad caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz offered him the governorship of Palestine, but he declined the appointment.
- During the British Mandate, the inhabitants—who were recorded as Muslims—built their adobe-brick houses close together.

Boundaries of al-Safiriyya

Al-Safiriyya was surrounded by the following Palestinian villages and localities:

- North: [Saqiya](#).
- Northwest: [Al-Khayriyya](#).
- West: [Bayt Dajan](#).
- Southwest: the Qabbaniyyat locality.
- South: [Sarafand al-Amar](#).
- Southeast: al-Lydd.
- East: al-Lydd Airport.
- Northeast: [Kafr Ana](#).

Architecture of al-Safiriyya

In the late nineteenth century, al-Safiriyya was described as a village built of adobe bricks, with olive trees planted on the land to its south. During the British Mandate, its inhabitants continued to build their adobe houses in a closely clustered pattern.

Economic Life in al-Safiriyya

Al-Safiriyya was the largest producer of tomatoes in the Jaffa Subdistrict. Its inhabitants also cultivated oranges across an extensive area. In 1944/45, 3,539 dunams under Palestinian ownership were devoted to citrus and bananas, 3,032 dunams to cereal cultivation, and 3,708 dunams were irrigated or used for orchards.

Land Ownership in al-Safiriyya

Ownership category	Land area (dunams)*
Palestinian ownership	10,545

Ownership category	Land area (dunams)*
Jewish ownership	1,722
Public land	575
Total	12,842

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres.

Land Use in al-Safiriyya, 1944/45

Land-use category	Palestinian ownership (dunams)*	Jewish ownership (dunams)*	Public land (dunams)*	Total (dunams)*
Citrus and bananas	3,539	1,412	0	4,951
Irrigated land and orchards	3,708	24	0	3,732
Olive groves	25	0	0	25
Cereal cultivation	3,032	286	0	3,318
Built-up area	95	0	0	95
Cultivable land	10,279	1,722	0	12,001
Uncultivated land	171	0	575	746

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres.

The olive-grove figure is a crop-specific statistic included within the broader cultivated-land categories and should not be added separately when calculating the total village area.

Education in al-Safiriyya

Al-Safiriyya had two elementary schools. The boys' school opened in 1920 and had 348 pupils by the mid-1940s. Approximately 11 dunams of land were attached to the school for agricultural training.

The girls’ school was founded in 1945 and enrolled 45 pupils during its first year. The original text’s statement that it had been “established for boys” was a drafting error; it was a separate school for girls.

Population of al-Safiriyya

The official 1945 village statistics recorded 3,070 inhabitants, all classified as Muslims. The village had two elementary schools: the boys’ school, founded in 1920, had 348 pupils in 1945, while the girls’ school, established in 1945, enrolled 45 pupils. Khirbat Subtara was among the noteworthy archaeological sites in the surrounding area.

Population of al-Safiriyya by Year

Year	Population
1596	292 (estimated)
1922	1,306
1931	2,040
1945	3,070
1948	3,561 (estimated)
Estimated number of refugees in 1998	21,870

The figures for 1596, 1948, and 1998 are demographic estimates rather than contemporary census counts.

Number of Houses in al-Safiriyya

Year	Number of houses
1931	489
1948	853 (estimated)

The 1948 figure is a later estimate rather than an official housing census.

Al-Safiriyya Football Team

Local historical accounts record that al-Safiriyya had a football club and team. The club formed part of the wider development of Palestinian sporting associations in Jaffa, Haifa, Jerusalem, Gaza, and other urban and rural centres during the British Mandate. Football clubs were an important expression of the commercial, cultural, and social life that developed in Jaffa and its surrounding villages. The al-Safiriyya team reportedly competed in the second division, although the surviving academic sources consulted for this article do not establish a precise date for the club's foundation.

Archaeological Remains in al-Safiriyya

Visible archaeological remains indicated that the site of al-Safiriyya had been inhabited in earlier periods. Nearby Khirbat Subtara, recorded at Palestine Grid reference 138155, was an artificial mound bordered by water reservoirs on its eastern and western sides.

Occupation and Depopulation of al-Safiriyya

The exact date on which al-Safiriyya was occupied remains uncertain. A United Press report stated that Israeli forces took the village on 20 May 1948. According to the dispatch, its occupation coincided with attacks carried out by the Irgun against al-Ramla farther south.

Palestinian historian Arif al-Arif gives an earlier chronology, stating that al-Safiriyya was occupied almost a month before 20 May, at approximately the same time as nearby Yazur and Bayt Dajan. Those villages were attacked during Operation Hametz in late April 1948 as part of the effort to encircle and occupy Jaffa. If al-Safiriyya was captured during that operation, the attacking troops were probably drawn from the Alexandroni Brigade.

Benny Morris lists the precise date and immediate cause of al-Safiriyya's depopulation as unknown. Consequently, neither 20 May nor the earlier April date can be treated as conclusively established. Estimates vary between sources.

The village was certainly under Israeli control by September 1948. On 13 September, David Ben-Gurion requested governmental authorization to demolish al-Safiriyya and thirteen other Palestinian villages. The request was subsequently approved.

Israeli Settlements on the Land of al-Safiriyya

The following settlements were established on land belonging to al-Safiriyya:

- **Tzafriyya**, established in 1949.
- **Kfar Chabad**, established in 1949, partly over the former village site.
 - **Ahi'ezer**, established in 1950.
 - **Tochelet**, established in 1951.
- **Shafrir**, established in 1949 and later absorbed into the surrounding settlements and the expanding suburbs of Rishon LeZion.

Later urban expansion from Rishon LeZion also extended across portions of al-Safiriyya's land. The names Ganei Rishon and Neve Hadarim are associated with this later suburban expansion rather than with independent settlements founded directly after the Nakba.

Al-Safiriyya Today

The village's two schools remain standing and have been renovated. They are long rectangular concrete buildings with rectangular doors and windows.

Several village houses also survive. Some were built of adobe brick and others of concrete; some have been left deserted, while others have been occupied. Most are architecturally simple, with flat roofs and rectangular openings. Cactus plants and various trees line one of the former village roads, while sycamore and cypress trees are scattered across the site.

Construction covers parts of the surrounding land, while other areas remain under cultivation.

Sources

- [PalQuest: Al-Safiriyya.](#)
- [Palestine Remembered: Al-Safiriyya.](#)
- [Institute for Palestine Studies: Walid Khalidi's *All That Remains*.](#)
- Government of Palestine, *Report and General Abstracts of the Census of 1922.*
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 - Arif al-Arif, *Al-Nakba*, 1956–1960.
- Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, Cambridge University Press, 2004.