

Bayt Mahsir



Subdistrict: Jerusalem

Estimated population of Bayt Mahsir in 1948: approximately 2,780

Date of occupation and depopulation: 11 May 1948

Military unit: Har'el Brigade (Palmach)

Israeli settlements established on the village lands before 1948: None

Israeli settlements established on or near the village site after 1948: Beyt Me'ir and
Mesillat Tziyyon

Area reported as lying along the 1949 Armistice Line: 1,272 dunams. This figure could not be independently confirmed in the principal Palestinian and British Mandate statistical sources consulted.

Bayt Mahsir

Bayt Mahsir was a Palestinian village in the Jerusalem Subdistrict, situated approximately 26 kilometres west of Jerusalem. The village was built on the upper slope of a mountain and overlooked the broad coastal plain to the west.

The inhabitants of Bayt Mahsir were Muslim. Olive cultivation was particularly important, and the villagers obtained water from a spring northeast of the village. Bayt Mahsir also contained several shops, a mosque, schools, an olive press, and flour mills.

Boundaries of Bayt Mahsir

Bayt Mahsir was surrounded by the following Palestinian villages:

- Northwest: [Dayr Ayyub](#).
- West: [Bayt Susin](#).
- Southwest: [Ishwa'](#).
- South: [Dayr al-Hawa](#).
- Southeast: [Kasla](#).
- Northeast: [Bayt Thul](#).

Architectural Structure of Bayt Mahsir

Bayt Mahsir had a broadly trapezoidal layout. Its stone and adobe houses were grouped into four distinct quarters. As the village expanded, new construction followed the roads leading to neighbouring villages, particularly the road towards Saris. A principal street crossed the centre

of the village from east to west, with shops and public buildings—including the mosque—standing on both sides.

Shrines in Bayt Mahsir

The villagers took pride in the fact that the mosque's last imam, Shaykh Khalil As'ad, was a graduate of al-Azhar University in Cairo. In addition to the mosque, the village maintained two shrines. One was associated with Shaykh Ahmad al-'Ajami, while the other was attributed to Shaykh Ahmad Taj al-'Arifin. Local tradition held that the latter was descended from the Prophet Muhammad; this should be understood as a community tradition rather than a genealogically verified fact.

Economic Life in Bayt Mahsir

The inhabitants depended principally on rainfed agriculture. They cultivated cereals, fruit trees, olives, and grapevines, while extensive woodland covered areas near the village. In 1944/45, 6,225 dunams were devoted to cereal cultivation and 1,348 dunams were classified as irrigated land or orchards. Olive groves accounted for approximately 1,340 dunams and formed part of the orchard category. The village also had an olive press and flour mills.

Land Ownership in Bayt Mahsir, 1944/45

Ownership category	Area (dunams)*
Palestinian ownership	15,428
Jewish ownership	0
Public land	840
Total	16,268

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres.

Land Use in Bayt Mahsir, 1944/45

Land-use category	Palestinian land (dunams)*	Public land (dunams)*	Total (dunams)*
Irrigated land and orchards	1,348	0	1,348
Olive groves (included within orchards)	1,340	0	1,340
Cereal cultivation	6,225	0	6,225
Built-up area	77	0	77
Cultivable land	7,573	0	7,573
Uncultivated land	7,778	840	8,618

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres. The olive-grove figure is a subset of irrigated land and orchards and should not be added to it when calculating the total cultivable area.

Population of Bayt Mahsir

Late nineteenth-century accounts estimated the village population at approximately 450. The British census recorded 1,367 inhabitants in 1922 and 1,920 in 1931. The official Village Statistics for 1945 recorded 2,400 inhabitants, all of them Palestinian Muslims. The 1948 and 1998 figures shown below are later demographic estimates rather than contemporaneous censuses.

Year	Population*
Late nineteenth century	Approximately 450
1922	1,367
1931	1,920
1945	2,400
1948 estimate	2,784
Estimated number of refugees and descendants in 1998	17,097

* The 1948 and 1998 entries are demographic estimates; they are not official census counts.

Number of Houses in Bayt Mahsir

Year	Number of houses
1931	445
1948 estimate	645

Archaeological Sites around Bayt Mahsir

Several archaeological ruins surrounded the village, including Khirbat al-Huwaytiyya, Khirbat al-Masi, Khirbat Khatula, and Khirbat al-Sallam. Remains recorded in the area included collapsed walls, rock-cut cisterns, caves, and the foundations of square buildings.

Education in Bayt Mahsir

Bayt Mahsir had an elementary school in the western part of the village, a school providing more advanced instruction in the east, and a girls' school housed in a building that had originally served as the village infirmary.

Occupation and Depopulation of Bayt Mahsir

Bayt Mahsir was initially targeted during Operation Nachshon in early April 1948 but was not occupied at that time. In the aftermath of that operation, Zionist forces launched further attacks intended to widen the corridor towards Jerusalem and secure the strategically important al-Latrun salient.

The village was attacked during Operation Makkabi by the Palmach's newly formed Har'el Brigade. The fighting extended over several nights, and the village was occupied on the

morning of 11 May 1948. Palestinian and Arab Liberation Army forces continued to contest the area, and contemporary accounts indicate that control may have shifted briefly during the fighting on 11–12 May. Nevertheless, Bayt Mahsir ultimately remained under Zionist military control and its Palestinian population was displaced during Israel's occupation of Palestine—the Nakba. The sources consulted do not provide a complete, independently verified account of the circumstances in which every resident left the village.

Israeli Settlements on the Lands of Bayt Mahsir

- Beyt Me'ir was established on the village site and among its surviving buildings. Sources differ over its formal date of establishment: some report initial settlement activity on 27 September 1948, while other reference works date its formal establishment to February 1950.
- Mesillat Tziyyon was established in 1950 northwest of the village site, on land belonging to Bayt Mahsir.

Bayt Mahsir Today

Several Palestinian houses remain standing and are interspersed among the buildings of Beyt Me'ir. Among the surviving structures are two large limestone houses with arched entrances and windows. Remains of a flour mill, ruined stone houses, retaining walls, abandoned wells, and entrances to caves once used as dwellings can also be seen.

An old woodland covers the eastern edge of the village site on the mountain summit. The tomb of al-'Ajami and other graves remain among the trees, while rubble from houses and orchard walls is visible on the western side. Part of the surrounding woodland was subsequently designated as a nature reserve.

Sources

- [Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question – Bayt Mahsir.](#)
- [Institute for Palestine Studies – Bayt Mahsir.](#)
 - [Palestine Open Maps – Bayt Mahsir.](#)
 - [Palestine Remembered – Bayt Mahsir.](#)
- Walid Khalidi, ed., *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*, Institute for Palestine Studies.
- Government of Palestine, *Census of Palestine, 1931*, and *Village Statistics, April 1945*.