Dayr Yasin



The Depopulated Palestinian Village of Deir Yasin

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Deir Yasin was a depopulated Palestinian village in the Jerusalem Subdistrict. It stood on the eastern slopes of a high hill approximately five kilometers west of the center of Jerusalem.

The village became associated with one of the best-known massacres committed by Zionist armed organizations during the 1948 war. On 9 April 1948, Irgun and Lehi forces attacked Deir Yasin with assistance from Haganah and Palmach
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personnel. Around one hundred villagers, including women, children, and elderly people, were killed during the assault and massacre. A later Birzeit University field study documented the names of 107 victims.

Basic Information

Field	Information
District	Jerusalem.
Historical Administrative Location	Jerusalem Subdistrict, Mandatory Palestine.
Distance from District Center	Approximately 5 km from central Jerusalem.
Direction	West of Jerusalem.
Average Elevation	Approximately 780 meters above sea level; the hilltop on which the village stood reached about 800 meters.
Population in 1922	254 inhabitants according to the official census.
Population in 1931	429 inhabitants according to the official census: 428 Muslims and one Jewish resident. PalQuest lists 428, corresponding to the Arab/Muslim population.
Occupied Houses in 1931	91 according to the official census.
Arab Population in 1944/1945	610 inhabitants.
Jewish Population in 1944/1945	0.
Total Population in 1944/1945	610 inhabitants.
Estimated Population in 1948	Approximately 750 according to Walid Khalidi and PalQuest; Palestine Remembered gives an estimate of approximately 708.
Estimated Houses in 1948	Approximately 144 according to Walid Khalidi/PalQuest.
Total Land Area	2,857 dunums.

Field	Information
Land Ownership in 1944/1945	Palestinian: 2,701 dunums; Transferred to Zionists: 153 dunums; Public/Common: 3 dunums.
Date of Attack and Depopulation	9 April 1948.
Later Transfer of Control	Irgun and Lehi seized the village on 9 April. Contemporary reports said the Haganah took control on 10 April, while a later report described the village as being formally occupied on 11 April 1948.
Military Operation	The occupation of Deir Yasin fell within the broader military framework of Operation Nachshon, the Haganah campaign in the Jerusalem area and along the Jerusalem–Jaffa road.
Military Units	Irgun and Lehi were the principal attacking forces. A Palmach unit intervened with mortar support, while Haganah command supplied ammunition and military assistance.
Cause of Depopulation	Military assault, massacre, and expulsion. The village was emptied during and immediately after the attack, and the surviving inhabitants were not permitted to return.
Extent of Destruction	Parts of the village were blown up or demolished during and after the assault, but Deir Yasin was not completely erased. Many stone houses survived and were later incorporated into the Kfar Shaul hospital complex.
Settlements Established before 1948 on Village Land	No pre-1948 settlement on Deir Yasin land was confirmed in the sources used. Giv'at Shaul, established around 1906, was a neighboring settlement across the valley.
Settlements Established after 1948 on Village Land	Giv'at Shaul Bet – 1949. The Kfar Shaul Mental Health Center was also established within the village site and incorporated surviving Palestinian buildings.

Occupation Chronology

Date	Stage	Details
January 1948	Non-aggression agreement	Notables from Deir Yasin and representatives of neighboring Giv'at Shaul reached an understanding intended to preserve mutual quiet and non-aggression and to exchange information about armed groups entering the area from outside.
3 April 1948	Beginning of Operation Nachshon	The Haganah launched Operation Nachshon to open the Tel Aviv–Jerusalem road and seize strategic positions and villages along it. The later occupation of Deir Yasin fell within the operation's broader framework.
Early April 1948	Decision to attack Deir Yasin	Irgun and Lehi commanders decided to attack the village amid the fighting west of Jerusalem. Haganah command in Jerusalem knew of the plan and approved the attack on condition that the attackers were able to retain the village after seizing it.
Dawn, 9 April 1948	Beginning of the assault	Approximately 120 Irgun and Lehi fighters attacked Deir Yasin from several directions. Local defenders resisted and initially stalled the attackers' advance.
9 April 1948	Palmach and Haganah intervention	After the initial assault stalled, a Palmach unit intervened with mortar support, while Haganah command supplied ammunition and other military assistance.
9 April 1948	Massacre and seizure of the village	Irgun and Lehi forces entered the village and widespread killings took place, including the killing of women, children, and elderly residents. Houses were blown up during and after the fighting, and prisoners and survivors were removed from the village.
9 April 1948	Depopulation	Deir Yasin was emptied of its Palestinian inhabitants during the assault, massacre, and their immediate aftermath. Survivors were not permitted to return.

Date	Stage	Details
10 April 1948	Reported Haganah takeover	Contemporary press reports initially stated that the Haganah took control of Deir Yasin on the day following the massacre.
11 April 1948	Formal occupation according to a later press report	A later New York Times report stated that the Haganah formally occupied the village on 11 April. This should be distinguished from the Irgun-Lehi seizure on 9 April.
11 April 1948	International Committee of the Red Cross visit	Jacques de Reynier, head of the ICRC delegation in Jerusalem, entered Deir Yasin, saw victims' bodies inside and outside houses, and was able to remove a small number of wounded survivors.
Summer 1949	Post-depopulation settlement	Several hundred Jewish immigrants were settled near the Deir Yasin site, and the new settlement was named Giv'at Shaul Bet.
1951	Reuse of village buildings	The Kfar Shaul Mental Health Center was established at the village site, incorporating a number of surviving Palestinian houses.

Location and Geography

Deir Yasin was built on the eastern slopes of a hill whose summit reached approximately 800 meters above sea level. PalQuest gives the village's average elevation as approximately 780 meters. The site commanded a broad view of the surrounding area.

A terraced valley separated the village from the western suburbs of Jerusalem. Olive, almond, and fig trees and grapevines were cultivated on its terraces. A secondary road along the northern edge of the valley connected Deir Yasin with Jerusalem's suburbs and with the main Jerusalem–Jaffa road, approximately two kilometers to the north.

Lifta lay to the northeast, Ayn Karim to the southwest, and Qalunya to the

northwest. The neighboring settlement of Giv'at Shaul stood across the valley from Deir Yasin.

Origin of the Name

The Arabic word *deir* refers to a monastery or religious structure. A large ruin at the southwestern edge of the village was known simply as “the Deir.”

The second part of the name is associated with Shaykh Yasin, whose tomb stood inside a mosque bearing his name near the ruins of the Deir. The sources used do not establish precisely when the population shifted from Khirbat Ayn al-Tut to the later village site or when Shaykh Yasin's mosque was constructed.

Some local accounts also preserve the earlier name “Deir al-Nasr” in connection with the site.

Architecture

Most houses in Deir Yasin were built of stone. The older houses were concentrated in an area known as the *Hara*, or quarter, which was characterized by narrow winding lanes and strongly built houses with thick walls.

As the village economy prospered during the British Mandate, construction expanded uphill and eastward toward Jerusalem, and larger stone houses appeared outside the older core.

The village contained two mosques, two elementary schools, a bakery, two guesthouses, a social club known as the Renaissance Club, a thrift fund, three shops, and four wells. A second mosque overlooking the village from the upper slopes was built by Mahmud Salah, a prosperous villager.

Archaeological Sites

Both Deir Yasin and nearby Khirbat Ayn al-Tut contained archaeological evidence of earlier settlement, including walls, arches, cisterns, and tombs. A large ruin known simply as the “Deir” stood on the southwestern edge of the village.

Khirbat Ayn al-Tut lay approximately 500 meters west of the 1948 village site. Walid Khalidi suggests that it may have formed the nucleus of settlement in the early Ottoman period. In 1596 it had an estimated population of 39 and paid taxes on wheat, barley, and olive trees.

Economic Life

Until the 1920s, the inhabitants of Deir Yasin depended largely on agriculture and livestock raising. They cultivated cereals, olives, almonds, figs, and grapes on the surrounding terraces.

The expansion of construction in Jerusalem transformed the village economy during the Mandate. The surrounding area contained hard limestone well suited for construction, and stone quarried around Deir Yasin became known locally for its quality and its use in Jerusalem buildings.

Villagers developed extensive quarries and stone-crushing operations along the road to Jerusalem. By the late 1940s four stone crushers were operating. Quarrying, stone processing, transport, and trucking became major sources of income, while other villagers worked in nearby British military camps or in the Mandatory civil service.

In 1935, residents of Deir Yasin and neighboring Lifta jointly established a local bus company. By the end of the Mandate, no more than about 15 percent of the village population was engaged primarily in agriculture.

Education and Social Life

During the early Mandate period, children from Deir Yasin attended schools in neighboring Lifta and Qalunya. An elementary school for boys was established in the village in 1943, followed by a girls' school in 1946.

Both schools were built through contributions from the villagers. The girls' school was headed by a resident schoolmistress from Jerusalem.

The Renaissance Club served social and cultural functions in the village, while a local thrift fund also served the community.

Population and Houses

The population of Deir Yasin was overwhelmingly Palestinian Arab and Muslim. The official 1922 census recorded 254 inhabitants.

The official 1931 census recorded 429 people living in 91 occupied houses: 428 Muslims and one Jewish resident. Walid Khalidi/PalQuest gives 428 when describing the village population, corresponding to the Muslim/Arab component of the official census.

The official 1944/1945 statistics listed 610 Arab inhabitants. For 1948, Walid Khalidi and PalQuest estimate approximately 750 residents in 144 houses, while Palestine Remembered gives an estimate of approximately 708.

Population of Deir Yasin

Year	Population	Notes
1596	39	Population of Khirbat Ayn al-Tut, not a census of the later 1948 Deir Yasin site.
1922	254	Official census.
1931	429	Official census: 428 Muslims and one Jewish resident; PalQuest lists 428.
1944/1945	610	Official estimate of the Arab population.

Year	Population	Notes
1948	Approximately 750	Walid Khalidi/PalQuest estimate; Palestine Remembered gives approximately 708.

Number of Houses in Deir Yasin

Year	Houses	Notes
1931	91	Occupied houses in the official census.
1948	Approximately 144	Walid Khalidi/PalQuest estimate on the eve of the Nakba.

Land Ownership in 1944/1945

The officially recorded land area of Deir Yasin totaled 2,857 dunums. The Mandatory Village Statistics classified 2,701 dunums as Arab-owned, 153 dunums as Jewish-owned, and 3 dunums as public land. In the terminology used by this project, these categories are presented as Palestinian, Transferred to Zionists, and Public/Common.

Land Ownership in Deir Yasin

Ownership	Area in Dunums	Approximate Percentage
Palestinian	2,701	94.5%
Transferred to Zionists	153	5.4%
Public/Common	3	0.1%
Total	2,857	100%

Land Use in 1944/1945

The Village Statistics classified 866 dunums as cereal and cultivable land, including 756 dunums of Palestinian-owned land and 110 dunums of land transferred to Zionists. The village's built-up area covered 12 dunums.

Separate agricultural records mention approximately 200 dunums planted with olive trees. This figure should not be added again to the village's total land area

because it is an overlapping agricultural classification.

Land Use in Deir Yasin, in Dunums

Land Use	Palestinian	Transferred to Zionists	Public/Common	Total
Cereal / classified cultivable land	756	110	0	866
Built-up area	12	0	0	12
Non-cultivable land	1,933	43	3	1,979
Total	2,701	153	3	2,857

Conditions before the Attack

In January 1948, notables from Deir Yasin and representatives of neighboring Giv'at Shaul reached a non-aggression understanding intended to preserve mutual quiet and to exchange information regarding armed groups entering the area from outside.

Despite this agreement, Irgun and Lehi commanders planned an attack on Deir Yasin during the fighting west of Jerusalem. Haganah command in Jerusalem knew of the plan. Its commander, David Shaltiel, informed the attackers that taking and holding the village fitted within the Haganah's broader Operation Nachshon plan and approved the attack provided they could retain the position.

The Deir Yasin Massacre

At dawn on Friday, 9 April 1948, approximately 120 fighters from Irgun and Lehi attacked Deir Yasin. Sources reproduced by Walid Khalidi state that Haganah command knew of the operation and supplied ammunition and military support during the fighting.

The attackers advanced from several directions but encountered resistance from the village's defenders and suffered casualties and wounded. After the initial

assault stalled, a Palmach unit intervened with mortar support, helping the attackers overcome the remaining resistance and enter the village.

Widespread killings followed in parts of the village. Men, women, children, and elderly residents were among those killed, houses were blown up during and after the fighting, and a number of prisoners were killed after capture.

Some prisoners and survivors were placed on trucks and taken through neighborhoods of West Jerusalem in what historical accounts described as a “victory procession.” Some were later released in Arab areas, while historical testimony records that a group of male prisoners was killed after capture.

On 11 April, Jacques de Reynier, head of the International Committee of the Red Cross delegation in Jerusalem, entered Deir Yasin. He saw victims' bodies inside and outside houses and was able to remove a small number of wounded survivors.

Number of Victims

Figures exceeding 250 deaths circulated immediately after the massacre and appeared in contemporary statements and press reports. Material reproduced by Walid Khalidi also records that the official History of the Haganah cited 245 victims.

A later field study by Sharif Kanaana and Nihad Zeitawi for Birzeit University's Destroyed Palestinian Villages Documentation Project reviewed victim names and survivors' testimony and documented 107 deaths and 12 wounded. A figure of roughly 100–110 deaths therefore corresponds more closely to the later name-based investigation than the much higher figures circulated immediately after the massacre.

Regardless of the numerical dispute, Palestinian historical sources and the testimony of the International Committee of the Red Cross document widespread killing of civilians during and after the assault.

Occupation and Depopulation

Deir Yasin was attacked and effectively seized on 9 April 1948. Its Palestinian population was removed during the massacre and its immediate aftermath through flight under attack, forced removal, and expulsion.

The Irgun-Lehi seizure on 9 April should be distinguished from the Haganah's later assumption of control. The New York Times initially reported that the Haganah occupied the village on 10 April and later stated that it was formally occupied on 11 April.

The massacre had a major impact on Palestinian society. News of the killings spread rapidly through towns and villages, and fear that similar attacks could be repeated contributed to further waves of displacement during the Nakba.

Settlement on the Lands of Deir Yasin

In the summer of 1949, several hundred Jewish immigrants were settled near the Deir Yasin site. The new settlement was named Giv'at Shaul Bet after the neighboring Giv'at Shaul settlement, which had been established around 1906.

In 1951, the Kfar Shaul Mental Health Center was established within the village site and incorporated a number of surviving Palestinian houses. As West Jerusalem expanded, Israeli urban development spread across large parts of the village lands, and neighboring Giv'at Shaul expanded over the eastern sector of the former village.

Deir Yasin Today

The detailed site description available through Walid Khalidi and PalQuest is based largely on field documentation and photographs dating to 1986. It should therefore be treated as a historical description of the site rather than a current field verification for 2026.

According to that documentation, many of Deir Yasin's stone houses remained standing on the hill and were incorporated into the Kfar Shaul hospital complex. Some surviving buildings outside the hospital grounds were used for residential, commercial, or storage purposes.

Carob and almond trees, remnants of olive trunks, and several wells were also documented near the southwestern edge of the village site.

The old village cemetery, on the eastern or southeastern side of the site, was described as neglected and affected by debris from the ring road constructed around the hill. A tall solitary cypress tree still stood in the cemetery when Walid Khalidi's photographic documentation was made.

Sources and References

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