

Dayr Yasin



Subdistrict: Jerusalem

Estimated population in 1948: approximately 710–750

Date of attack and depopulation: 9 April 1948

Attacking forces: Irgun (Etzel/IZL) and Lehi (the Stern Group), with support from Haganah and Palmach units

Settlements established on the village's lands before 1948: None

Neighbourhoods subsequently established on village land: Har Nof and Giv'at Shaul Bet, Jerusalem

Boundaries of Deir Yasin

Deir Yasin was surrounded by the following villages and localities:

- To the north: Bayt Ikse.
- To the northwest: [Qalunya](#).
- To the west: [Suba](#).
- To the southwest: [Ayn Karim](#).
- To the south: [Al-Maliha](#).
- To the southeast and east: Jerusalem.
- To the northeast: [Lifta](#).



The Depopulated Palestinian Village of Deir Yasin

Geography of Deir Yasin

- Deir Yasin was located approximately five kilometres west of Jerusalem.
- The village stood on the eastern slopes of a hill rising to approximately 800 metres above sea level and commanded extensive views in every direction.

A terraced valley planted with olive, almond, and fig trees separated Deir Yasin from Jerusalem's western suburbs.

Origin of the Name

The first element of the village's name, *deir*, means “monastery” in Arabic and may refer to a monastery traditionally believed to have been established at the site during the twelfth century.

The locality was reportedly known at an earlier period as Dayr al-Nasr. The second element, *Yasin*, is associated with Shaykh Yasin, a local religious figure whose name was borne by the village mosque or shrine.

Archaeological Sites

Deir Yasin occupied an archaeologically significant location containing medieval walls and arches, burial remains, and other architectural traces. Approximately 500 metres west of the 1948 village site lay Khirbat Ayn al-Tut, an earlier settlement nucleus containing vaulted ruins, a cistern, and burial remains.

Economic Life

The inhabitants of Deir Yasin traditionally depended on agriculture and livestock raising. During the British Mandate, however, the expansion of construction in Jerusalem transformed the village economy. The surrounding area was rich in limestone, and residents developed extensive quarries along the secondary road leading to the city. Stonecutting and related industries eventually became more important than agriculture; by the late Mandate period, only

a minority of the population remained primarily engaged in farming.

The village contained two schools, two guesthouses, a social club, three shops, four wells, and a mosque overlooking the settlement. Olive, almond, and fig trees were cultivated on the terraced slopes and in the valley separating the village from western Jerusalem.

Land Ownership in Deir Yasin

Ownership category	Area (dunams)*
Palestinian ownership	2,701
Jewish ownership	153
Public land	3
Total	2,857

Land Use in Deir Yasin in 1945

Land-use category	Palestinian-owned land (dunams)*	Jewish-owned land (dunams)*
Olive groves	200	0
Cereal cultivation	756	110
Built-up area	12	0
Total cultivable land	756	110
Uncultivated land	1,936	43

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres.

Education in Deir Yasin

During the early British Mandate period, children from Deir Yasin attended schools in the neighbouring villages of Lifta and Qalunya. The village's first boys' school was established in 1943, followed by a girls' school in 1946. Both institutions were built with donations from village residents. The girls' school was administered by a headmistress from Jerusalem who lived in the village.

Population and Housing

- The inhabitants of Deir Yasin were Muslim. The population rose from 428 in 1931 to an estimated 710–750 in 1948.
 - By the late nineteenth century, the village's houses were predominantly constructed of stone. Water was supplied by two springs, one north and the other south of the village.
 - Most houses were concentrated in an area known as the *hara*, or quarter, characterized by narrow winding lanes and thick stone walls.
- The number of houses increased from 91 in 1931 to an estimated 144 in 1948.

Population Figures for Deir Yasin

Year	Population*
1596	39
1922	254
1931	428
1945	610
1948	708
Estimated refugee population in 1998	4,345

The Deir Yasin Massacre

At dawn on 9 April 1948, approximately 120 fighters from Irgun and Lehi attacked Deir Yasin. The assault took place during Operation Nachshon, the wider Haganah campaign to secure the road linking Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Although the village had a non-aggression understanding with neighbouring Jewish communities, it was selected as a military objective because of its location west of Jerusalem.

Fighting proceeded from house to house, and the attackers used small arms, grenades, and explosives. Palestinian villagers, including local guards and other armed residents, resisted the assault. Palmach personnel later provided fire support, helping the attacking forces overcome remaining resistance.

During and after the fighting, Irgun and Lehi members killed Palestinian villagers, including women, children, and elderly people. Prisoners were transported through West Jerusalem; contemporary testimony and subsequent historical research indicate that some captives were later killed. Houses were looted or demolished, and surviving residents were expelled or fled.

The precise death toll has long been debated. Early public claims placed the number as high as 254 or 300, but later historical and field research substantially revised those figures. A study by Sharif Kanaana and Nihad Zitawi of Birzeit University identified 107 Palestinian victims, while several historians estimate that approximately 100–110 people were killed. The victims included civilians as well as a smaller number of armed defenders.

Reports of mutilation, executions, and abuse emerged from survivors, Haganah observers, medical personnel, and Jacques de Reynier, head of the International Committee of the Red Cross delegation in Palestine, who visited the village shortly afterward. Some highly graphic stories circulated in the immediate aftermath and remain disputed; an academically responsible account therefore distinguishes corroborated killings and abuses from allegations that cannot be independently verified.

The massacre became a defining event of the Nakba. News of the killings spread rapidly and intensified fear in Palestinian communities, contributing to further displacement. The Haganah and Jewish Agency publicly condemned the massacre, although Haganah and Palmach personnel had approved or assisted aspects of the operation. Menachem Begin, the political commander of Irgun, was not the on-site commander but later defended and celebrated the capture of the village.

The Occupation and Depopulation of Deir Yasin

The Irgun and Lehi assault on 9 April resulted in the effective occupation and depopulation of Deir Yasin. Haganah forces assumed control of the village immediately afterward; contemporary reports differ over whether formal control was recorded on 10 or 11 April. The surviving Palestinian inhabitants were not permitted to return.

Israeli Development on the Lands of Deir Yasin

- Giv'at Shaul Bet was established in 1949 and named after the neighbouring Giv'at

Shaul settlement, founded in 1906.

- Kfar Shaul Mental Health Center was established within surviving village buildings.
 - Parts of the later Har Nof neighbourhood were constructed on land belonging to Deir Yasin.

Deir Yasin Today

- Several village houses remain standing within the grounds of Kfar Shaul Mental Health Center. Some buildings were used for patient care, while surviving structures outside the institution have served residential, commercial, or storage purposes.
- The village cemetery has been neglected and affected by debris and construction associated with the ring road around the hill. A solitary cypress tree remains one of its most visible features.