Suba

Suba: A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Jerusalem District

Suba was a Palestinian village in the Jerusalem District, located approximately 10 kilometres west of the city of Jerusalem on a mountain summit at an average elevation of about 750 metres above sea level. The village was subjected to several attacks beginning in April 1948 but remained outside Zionist control until the Har'el Brigade occupied it on the night of 12–13 July 1948 during Operation Dani. Its inhabitants were displaced during the Nakba and the occupation of Palestine in 1948.

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Jerusalem
Distance from district center	10 km from Jerusalem
Average Elevation	750 m above sea level
Population in 1931	434 – includes Dayr Amr
Number of Houses in 1931	110 – includes Dayr Amr
Population in 1944/1945	620
Estimated Population in 1948	About 719 – a later demographic estimate, not an official census
Total Land Area in 1945	4,102 dunams
Attack and Depopulation	Haganah forces attacked Suba on 3 April 1948, according to the newspaper Filastin, but were driven back despite air support, and two further attempts to seize the village failed in mid-April; the Harel Brigade then occupied it on the night of 12–13 July 1948 during Operation Dani, using two companies backed by artillery and mortars. According to Benny Morris, as cited by Khalidi, many inhabitants had already left the village, and those who remained fled the bombardment or were expelled.
Final Israeli Control	Night of 12–13 July 1948, by the Harel Brigade in the course of Operation Dani
Military Operation	Operation Dani
Military Unit	Harel Brigade (Palmach)
Cause of Depopulation	Direct military assault and bombardment by Israeli occupation forces; according to Benny Morris, as cited by Khalidi, the remaining inhabitants fled the bombardment or were expelled
Settlements Documented on Village Lands	Ameilim, established in 1948 on village lands 1 km southwest of the village site; later renamed Kibbutz Tzova

Location

Suba stood on the summit of a steep mountain overlooking the surrounding hills, approximately 10 kilometres west of Jerusalem.

The village had an average elevation of about 750 metres above sea level, while Wadi al-Sarar ran approximately 3 kilometres to its south.

A secondary road about 3 kilometres long connected Suba with the Jerusalem–Jaffa highway to the north. Dirt roads and paths also linked it with nearby villages and sites, including Ayn Karim, Sataf, Khirbat al-Lawz, Khirbat al-'Umur, and al-Qastal.

Suba Through History

Some scholars have identified Suba with an ancient town known as Rabba and associated it with “Rubute” mentioned in the Egyptian Amarna letters.

However, the archaeological excavations cited by Walid Khalidi indicate that the earliest confirmed settlement at the site dates to the Persian and Hellenistic periods. The identification with Rabba or Rubute should therefore be treated as a historical hypothesis rather than a conclusively established archaeological fact.

During the Roman period, the site was referred to in some sources as Seboim, while Greek and Roman forms of its name included Soba and Sobetha.

The status of the site during the early Islamic centuries remains uncertain in the archaeological material cited by Khalidi.

Belmont Castle

The Crusaders established a fortress at Suba known as Belmont, remains of which are still present at the site.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the powerful Abu Ghawsh family controlled Suba as part of its wider influence in the Jerusalem hills. The family constructed a fort

within the walls of the Crusader fortress. Sources state that the fort and parts of the Crusader walls were destroyed during the Egyptian campaign of Ibrahim Pasha in Palestine.

Suba During the Ottoman Period

In 1596, Suba was a village in the Jerusalem subdistrict of the Jerusalem district, with an estimated population of approximately 369.

The inhabitants paid taxes on wheat, barley, olives, goats, beehives, molasses, and other products.

Architecture

In the late nineteenth century, Suba was described as a medium-sized stone-built village situated on the summit of a steep conical hill and surrounded by olive groves and vineyards.

The earliest village houses were concentrated within a small area inside the enclosure of the Crusader fortress. Later construction extended southward along the road leading to the Jerusalem–Jaffa highway, giving the village a more rectangular layout.

The houses were built of stone, while an unusually tall house stood prominently near the centre of the village alongside the remains of the fortress.

The built-up area amounted to approximately 16 dunams according to the 1944/1945 statistics.

The inhabitants of Suba were Muslims and maintained a shrine dedicated to Shaykh Ibrahim south of the village site.

Population

The official 1922 Census of Palestine recorded 307 inhabitants in Suba.

In the 1931 census, the population reached 434, living in 110 houses. The sources note that both figures include Dayr 'Amr.

According to the 1944/1945 Village Statistics, Suba had a population of 620 Arabs.

The estimate of approximately 719 inhabitants for 1948 and 4,417 refugees and descendants in 1998, published by Palestine Remembered, are later estimates rather than official British Mandate censuses.

Population of Suba

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
1596	About 369	Historical estimate based on Ottoman records
1922	307	Official census
1931	434	Official census; includes Dayr 'Amr
1944/1945	620	Government of Palestine statistics
1948	About 719	Later estimate
1998	4,417	Estimate of refugees and their descendants
The figures for 1948 and 1998 are later estimates rather than official British Mandate censuses.		

Number of Houses

The 1931 census recorded 110 houses in the population unit that included Suba and Dayr 'Amr.

Land of Suba

According to the 1944/1945 statistics, the lands of Suba covered a total of 4,102 dunams.

Arab ownership amounted to 4,082 dunams, Jewish ownership to 15 dunams, while 5 dunams were classified as public land.

Total	4,102
Ownership Category	**Area in Dunams**
Arab ownership	4,082
Jewish ownership	15
Public land	5

Agriculture and Economic Life

The inhabitants of Suba depended primarily on agriculture. Cereals were grown mainly in the valley floors, while fruit and olive trees were cultivated on the mountain slopes.

Several springs around the village supplied water for domestic use and irrigation.

According to the 1944/1945 statistics, 712 dunams were devoted to cereals, all of them Arab-owned.

Irrigated and plantation land covered 1,446 dunams, including 1,435 Arab-owned dunams and 11 Jewish-owned dunams.

Approximately 150 dunams were planted with olive trees. This was a crop category within the cultivated and plantation land and should not be added separately to the overall land-use totals.

Total	4,082	15	5	4,102
Type of Use	**Arab**	**Jewish**	**Public**	**Total**
Cereals	712	0	0	712
Irrigated and plantation land	1,435	11	0	1,446
Built-up area	16	0	0	16
Uncultivable land	1,919	4	5	1,928

Archaeology and Historical Landmarks

Suba is an important archaeological site in the Jerusalem hills, containing remains from several historical periods.

Among its most prominent features are the remains of the Crusader Belmont fortress and stone walls and gateways uncovered during excavations.

The shrine of Shaykh Ibrahim was located south of the village site.

The Nakba and the Attacks on Suba

The Attack of 3 April 1948

According to the Palestinian newspaper *Filastin*, as reproduced by Walid Khalidi and PalQuest, Suba was attacked on 3 April 1948 following the assault on nearby al-Qastal.

Despite air support for the attacking forces, the defenders repelled the assault, and Suba remained outside Zionist control for approximately three more months.

Two further attempts to capture the village in mid-April also failed.

Operation Dani and the Occupation of Suba

Operation Dani

Operation Dani began on 9 July 1948 and continued until 18 July. It was the largest offensive launched during the Ten Days between the two truces.

The operation aimed to expand the Israeli-controlled corridor toward Jerusalem. Its first stage resulted in the occupation of Lydda and Ramla, while its second stage extended operations toward the Jerusalem corridor and al-Latrun area.

Several brigades participated in Operation Dani, with the Har'el Brigade assigned an important role in its eastern sector and the occupation of villages in the Jerusalem hills.

The Occupation of Suba

Suba was occupied by the **Har'el Brigade** on the night of **12–13 July 1948** during Operation Dani.

PalQuest and Walid Khalidi reproduce Israeli military accounts stating that two companies supported by field artillery and mortars were used in the assault.

The accounts transmitted through the Palestinian sources indicate that bombardment caused the defenders to withdraw. Many inhabitants had already left before the final attack, while those who remained either fled under bombardment or were expelled.

These Israeli military claims are cited here only as transmitted through Walid Khalidi and PalQuest and not through direct reliance on the original Israeli sources.

The principal Palestinian sources reviewed do not identify a specific battalion of the Har'el Brigade as responsible for capturing Suba.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
First attack on the village	3 April 1948	According to the newspaper Filastin, Suba was attacked after an attack on nearby al-Qastal; despite air support, the Haganah forces were driven back, and the village remained beyond the occupiers' grasp for three months.
Two failed attempts to occupy the village	Mid-April 1948	Two further attempts to seize the village were made during the battles around al-Latrun, but both failed.
Beginning of the military operation	9 July 1948	Operation Dani (9–18 July 1948), the largest offensive of the Ten Days between the two truces, began; in its second stage, which extended to the Jerusalem corridor, the Harel Brigade was charged with occupying a number of villages further east.
Final occupation	12–13 July 1948	Suba fell to the Harel Brigade in the course of Operation Dani; according to the History of the War of Independence, as cited by Khalidi, two companies backed by field artillery and mortars were used. The Associated Press reported that Palmach storm troops took the village without combat after a bombardment that drove out the Arab defenders.
Depopulation of the village	12–13 July 1948	According to Israeli historian Benny Morris, as cited by Khalidi, many of Suba's inhabitants had already left, while those who remained fled the bombardment or were expelled.
Settlement on village lands	1948	The settlement of Ameilim was established on village lands, 1 km southwest of the village site; it was later renamed Kibbutz Tzova.

Displacement and Fate of the Village

The final occupation of Suba resulted in the displacement of its remaining Palestinian inhabitants, who were not permitted to return and re-establish their village community.

A large part of the village was destroyed or damaged, although a number of houses and the remains of the Crusader fortress survived. It is therefore inaccurate to describe Suba as having been completely erased from the site.

Israeli Settlements on the Lands of Suba

Ameilim – Tzova

The settlement of Ameilim was established in 1948 on the lands of Suba, approximately 1 kilometre southwest of the village site.

It was later renamed Kibbutz Tzova.

Yedida School

Yedida School was established northwest of Suba in 1964, but it stood on lands traditionally belonging to Abu Ghawsh. It should therefore not be classified as a settlement or institution established on Suba's lands.

Settlement Established on the Lands of Suba

Name	Year Established	Relationship to Village Lands
Ameilim / Tzova	1948	Established on Suba's lands, approximately 1 kilometre southwest of the village site

The Site of Suba After the Nakba

According to the field documentation relied upon by Walid Khalidi, many village buildings remained standing, although some had lost portions of their walls or roofs.

Arched doors and gateways remained visible on several houses, while other buildings were almost completely destroyed, leaving only wall foundations.

The remains of the Crusader fortress were still present, and archaeological

excavations uncovered a large stone gateway and sections of walls.

The village cemetery lay at the southern base of the mountain, while networks of trenches remained visible on the northeastern side of the summit.

A water reservoir was constructed at the site with a pipe descending the northern slope. Fig, almond, and cypress trees, together with cactus plants, grew on the terraces surrounding the lower slopes.

This description reflects the condition of the site during the field documentation relied upon by Walid Khalidi and should not necessarily be interpreted as a comprehensive survey updated to 2026.

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Suba.
- PalQuest: Suba.
- PalQuest: Operation Dani.
- Palestine Remembered: Suba, Jerusalem District.
- Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains*: Suba, as reproduced by Palestine Remembered.
- Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains*, entry on Suba.
- Government of Palestine, censuses of 1922 and 1931.
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