Our Palestine — Depopulated village — Al-Quds (Jerusalem) — 17 July 1948

Kasla

Kasla – Depopulated Palestinian Village of the Jerusalem District

Kasla, also rendered Kisla, was a depopulated Palestinian village in the Jerusalem District. It stood on the summit of an elongated east–west mountain ridge in the Jerusalem hills, approximately 17 kilometers west of Jerusalem, at an average elevation of about 625 meters above sea level.

Kasla was occupied and its inhabitants displaced during the second half of July 1948 in Operation Dani. The sources reproduced by Walid Khalidi disagree on the precise day: one places the village's “clearing” on 16 July, while another dates its occupation to 17–18 July. The village-level attacking formation was the Har'el Brigade.

Location and Geography

Kasla stood on an elongated mountain ridge running from east to west and overlooking two deep wadis on its northern and southern sides. Its position, surrounded by steep valleys, made the site relatively defensible.

PalQuest places the village approximately 17 kilometers west of Jerusalem, while the Palestinian Encyclopedia gives a rounded distance of about 16 kilometers. Its average elevation was approximately 625 meters above sea level.

The Palestinian Encyclopedia identifies Wadi al-Sadd to the north and Wadi 'Ayn al-'Arab to the south. Both fed Wadi Ishwa', which in turn drained toward Wadi al-Sarar.

A secondary road passed the village along an east–west axis and linked the locality to routes connecting Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Bayt Jibrin. Tracks and roads also connected Kasla with nearby villages including Ishwa', Bayt Mahsir, Saris, Bayt Umm al-Mays, 'Aqqur, and Dayr al-Hawa.

Name and Historical Site

Walid Khalidi identifies Kasla with the site of the ancient Canaanite settlement of Chesalon, which was known in the Roman period as Chesalon or Cheslon.

In 1596, Kasla, or Kisla, belonged to the nahiya of Ramla in the liwa' of Gaza and had an estimated population of approximately sixty-one. The inhabitants paid taxes on wheat, barley, sesame, fruit trees, goats, and beehives.

Late nineteenth-century descriptions portray Kasla as a small stone village standing prominently on a rugged ridge above a deep valley and surrounded by agricultural land and springs.

Population and Houses

The inhabitants of Kasla were Muslims. Official censuses show population growth between 1922 and 1931, followed by a lower official population figure in 1945.

Year	Population	Note
1596	About 61	Historical estimate derived from Ottoman tax records
1922	233	Official Census of Palestine; all inhabitants were Muslims
1931	299	Official figure: 151 males and 148 females
1945	280	Official statistics; all inhabitants were Palestinian Arab Muslims
1948	About 325	Later estimate, not an official British census
1998	About 1,995 refugees and descendants	Later demographic estimate published by Palestine Remembered

The 1931 census recorded 72 occupied houses. The figure of approximately 78 houses for 1948 published by Palestine Remembered is a later estimate rather than an official census count.

Two numerical corrections are important. The Palestinian Encyclopedia gives 223

inhabitants for 1922, but the official census gives 233. PalQuest and Palestine Remembered currently display 298 for 1931, while the official 1931 census table clearly records 299.

Built Environment

Kasla had a generally rectangular plan. Most stone houses extended east–west alongside the secondary road, while a smaller number stood east of the village center.

The official 1944/45 statistics classified approximately 10 dunams as built-up land.

Education and Public Services

Walid Khalidi's principal village entry does not document an independent school in Kasla. The Palestinian Encyclopedia states that the village lacked public facilities and services.

No formal village school is therefore included without separate documentation confirming its existence.

Maqam of Shaykh Ahmad

Kasla had a shrine dedicated to Shaykh Ahmad, explicitly documented by Walid Khalidi.

Supporting Palestinian community documentation states that the small shrine also functioned as a prayer place or modest mosque and that prayers were at times held in nearby open courtyards. These details are treated as community documentation rather than information independently established in Khalidi's main entry.

Water Resources

The inhabitants obtained domestic water from several springs around the village, and some spring water was also used for irrigation.

A nineteenth-century description records two springs in the valley and another spring to the east. The Palestinian Encyclopedia gives local names including 'Ayn Kasla to the south, 'Ayn al-'Arab to the southwest, 'Ayn al-Qasab to the east, and 'Ayn al-Shaykh Ahmad to the west near the shrine.

Economic Life and Agriculture

Agriculture and livestock raising formed the principal foundations of the village economy. Grain, olives, and fruit trees were cultivated in the lowlands and valley floors.

Most cultivation was rainfed, although some orchards were irrigated with spring water. Steep and rugged slopes were also used for grazing.

In 1944/45, 2,265 dunams were devoted to cereals and 440 dunams to plantations and irrigable land. Approximately 203 dunams were planted with olives.

Land Ownership, 1944/45

The total land area of Kasla was 8,004 dunams. Under the official Government of Palestine classification, ownership was distributed as follows:

Total	**8,004**
Ownership Category	**Area in Dunams**
Arab	8,001
Jewish	0
Public	3

Palestine Remembered presents the same figures using its simplified terminology:

8,001 dunams “Palestinian,” 0 dunams “Transferred to Zionists,” and 3 dunams “Communal/Public.” The wording “Transferred to Zionists” should be preserved when reproducing that source's table.

Land Use, 1944/45

Grand Total	8,001	3	8,004
Land Use	**Arab**	**Public**	**Total**
Cereals	2,265	0	2,265
Plantations and irrigable land	440	0	440
Total cultivable/cultivated land	2,705	0	2,705
Non-cultivable land	5,286	3	5,289
Built-up land	10	0	10
Total non-cultivable and built-up	5,296	3	5,299

The official table balances exactly: 2,705 dunams of cultivable or cultivated land plus 5,299 dunams of built-up and non-cultivable land equal the total 8,004 dunams.

The separate figure of 203 dunams planted with olives is a crop-specific detail within the agricultural area and should not be added again to the land-use total.

Archaeology and Khirbas

Kasla itself was an archaeological site, while several surrounding khirbas contained ruined walls, cisterns, and cut stones.

The Palestinian Encyclopedia identifies Khirbat Marmita, Sar'a al-Midraj, and Shawqa among the archaeological sites in the village vicinity.

Together with the identification of Kasla with ancient Chesalon, these remains indicate a long history of settlement, although they should not all be assigned automatically to a single historical period.

Operation Dani

Operation Dani lasted from 9 to 18 July 1948 and was the largest offensive launched during the Ten Days between the two truces.

The operation involved the Har'el, Yiftach, Kiryati, Alexandroni, and Etziyyoni brigades, together with armored forces.

The first phase, from 9 to 12 July, centered on the conquest of Lydda and Ramla. The second phase, from 13 to 18 July, expanded into the Jerusalem corridor and toward the Ramallah–al-Latrun road.

During this second phase, the Har'el Brigade was assigned the capture of villages farther east in order to broaden the Israeli-controlled corridor to Jerusalem. PalQuest explicitly lists Kasla among the villages affected by Operation Dani.

Occupation and Depopulation

The sources reproduced by Walid Khalidi disagree on the precise date of Kasla's occupation.

According to the *History of the War of Independence*, as cited by Khalidi, Kasla was “cleared” on 16 July 1948 along with neighboring Ishwa' and other villages situated on a secondary road leading toward Jerusalem.

Benny Morris, as cited through Khalidi, gives a slightly later date of 17–18 July.

Palestine Remembered indexes 17 July as the occupation date. Given these discrepancies, the safest formulation is that Kasla was occupied and the remaining population displaced between 16 and 18 July 1948 during the second phase of Operation Dani.

Khalidi records several patterns of displacement among the villages in this sector: some inhabitants had already left, others fled under mortar bombardment, and those who remained in some villages were expelled by the occupying Har'el

Brigade.

The available evidence does not allow these categories to be assigned family by family within Kasla, so the depopulation of the entire village should not be reduced to a single cause.

Military Unit

The village-level military formation securely identified with the occupation of Kasla is the **Har'el Brigade**.

The Kasla entry does not identify a specific battalion within the brigade. A battalion number documented for a neighboring village such as Ishwa' should therefore not be transferred automatically to Kasla.

Occupation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Beginning of Operation Dani	9 July 1948	The large offensive began during the Ten Days between the two truces.
Beginning of the second phase	13 July 1948	Operations expanded toward the Jerusalem corridor and the Ramallah–al-Latrun road; the Har'el Brigade was assigned villages on the eastern axis.
Clearing/occupation according to one account	16 July 1948	Khalidi cites the History of the War of Independence as placing Kasla's “clearing” on this date.
Occupation according to another account	17–18 July 1948	Khalidi cites Morris as dating the occupation to this period by the Har'el Brigade.
End of Operation Dani	18 July 1948	The operation ended with the beginning of the second truce.

Stage	Date	Details
Destruction of village buildings	Exact date not documented	The village was destroyed and rubble remained, but the sources do not provide a securely documented day for the demolition of all houses.
Establishment of Ramat Razi'el	1948	Established on Kasla village land.
Establishment of Kesalon	1952	Established on village land about one kilometer south of the site at Khirbat Sar'a.

Israeli Settlements on Village Lands

Ramat Razi'el was established on Kasla's land in 1948.

Kesalon was established in 1952 on village land approximately one kilometer south of the former village site, at the archaeological locality of Khirbat Sar'a.

Kasla Today

According to the field description published in Walid Khalidi's *All That Remains*, wild grass covered much of the village site and grew among the rubble of stone houses, which was sometimes difficult to distinguish from the ruins of collapsed agricultural terraces.

Almond trees grew on the mountain summit, while cactuses spread across the southern slopes. To the northeast, two carob trees stood amid the remains of a vineyard, and several agricultural terraces remained intact on the slopes.

This description should not be treated as a field verification of conditions in 2026. Fieldwork for *All That Remains* was conducted between 1987 and 1990, so it records the condition of the site during that survey period rather than providing a comprehensive contemporary assessment.

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Kasla
- PalQuest – Operation Dani
- Palestine Remembered – Kasla, Jerusalem District
- Palestinian Encyclopedia – Kasla
- Census of Palestine 1922 – official table recording Kasla with 233 inhabitants
- Census of Palestine 1931 – Jerusalem Sub-District: Kasla, 299 inhabitants and 72 houses
- Palestinian Villages Encyclopedia – Kasla; supporting community documentation
- Institute for Palestine Studies – Walid Khalidi, All That Remains
- PalQuest – All That Remains: Methodology