Bayt Umm al-Mays

Bayt Umm al-Mays – Depopulated Palestinian Village in Jerusalem Subdistrict

Bayt Umm al-Mays, also known as Khirbat Umm al-Mays, was a Palestinian village in the Jerusalem subdistrict. It stood approximately 14 kilometers west of Jerusalem in mountainous terrain at an average elevation of about 650 meters above sea level.

The village occupied a northwest-facing mountain site bounded by two deep wadis to the northeast and southwest, which met northwest of the settlement. High

ground and deep valleys on three sides gave Bayt Umm al-Mays a degree of natural defensive and strategic importance.

The official 1944/45 statistics recorded 70 Arab Muslim inhabitants and a registered land area of 1,013 dunums.

The precise circumstances of its occupation are not independently documented in detail. Walid Khalidi nevertheless considers it almost certain that Bayt Umm al-Mays was captured during Operation Ha-Har and cites 21 October 1948 as the probable occupation date, most likely by the Har'el Brigade.

Key Facts about Bayt Umm al-Mays

Field	Information
Name	Bayt Umm al-Mays
Alternative name	Khirbat Umm al-Mays
Subdistrict	Jerusalem
Mandate classification	Hamlet
Distance from Jerusalem	Approximately 14 km west
Average elevation	Approximately 650 m above sea level
Population, 1944/45	70 Arab Muslims
Registered land area	1,013 dunums
Probable occupation date	21 October 1948
Military operation	Operation Ha-Har
Military unit	Probably the Har'el Brigade
Cause of depopulation	Military occupation during Operation Ha-Har; Palestine Remembered classifies it as direct military assault
Extent of destruction	Most buildings were destroyed; portions of two houses, terraces, caves, and other remains survived in later field documentation

Field	Information
Israeli settlements on village land	None documented by Khalidi or PalQuest

Location

Bayt Umm al-Mays stood in the Jerusalem hills west of the city and faced northwest.

Two deep wadis bordered the village to the northeast and southwest and joined northwest of the site.

The combination of steep high ground and deep valleys on three sides gave the locality a naturally defensible position.

A secondary road linked Bayt Umm al-Mays with the Jerusalem–Jaffa highway and with the villages of Suba and al-Qastal.

Village lands adjoined those associated with Khirbat al-'Umur, Dayr 'Amr, 'Aqqur, and Kasla.

The Name Bayt Umm al-Mays

The village was also known as Khirbat Umm al-Mays.

Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh explains “mays” as the name of a woodland tree bearing small dark fruit and suggests that the place name carries the sense of “the house where the mays tree grows.”

During the Crusader period the locality was known as Beittelamus.

The Arabic etymology should be understood as al-Dabbagh's linguistic interpretation rather than as conclusive evidence for the exact historical origin of the name.

Bayt Umm al-Mays before the Nakba

Bayt Umm al-Mays was a very small community and was classified as a hamlet in the Palestine Index Gazetteer.

Its layout was roughly trapezoidal. Older stone houses were tightly clustered, while newer buildings extended southeast toward the mountain overlooking the village from the south.

Only about 2 dunums were classified as built-up land in the 1944/45 statistics.

Population

The principal sources reviewed do not provide a separate documented population figure for Bayt Umm al-Mays in the 1922 or 1931 censuses.

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
1944/45	70	Official Village Statistics; all Arab Muslims
1948	81	Later Palestine Remembered estimate, not an official census
1998	499 refugees	Later Palestine Remembered estimate of refugees and descendants

The 1948 and 1998 figures are later estimates and should not be attributed to British Mandatory census statistics despite the generic source label appearing beneath the Palestine Remembered table.

Number of Houses

No reliable independent official house count for Bayt Umm al-Mays in 1931 or 1948 was identified in the principal sources reviewed.

No estimate has therefore been inferred from population or built-up acreage.

Land Ownership

The registered village land area in 1944/45 totaled 1,013 dunums.

Ownership Category	Dunums
Palestinian / Arab	1,013
Transferred to Zionists	0
Communal/Public	0
Total	**1,013**

The figures balance exactly, with all 1,013 dunums recorded in the Arab category.

Land Use in 1944/45

Land Use	Dunums
Cereals	273
Plantations and irrigable land	51
Built-up land	2
Non-cultivable land	687
Total	**1,013**

The land-use figures balance exactly: 273 + 51 + 2 + 687 = 1,013 dunums.

A total of 324 dunums was therefore cultivated or cultivable, approximately 32 percent of the village land, while 689 dunums were built-up or classified as non-cultivable.

Economic Life

Agriculture formed the basis of village life.

Residents cultivated cereals and fruit, with grapes especially important. Vineyards and fruit orchards covered parts of the mountain slopes.

Some crops depended on rainfall while other plots were irrigated with spring water.

Part of the village land was used as grazing ground for sheep and goats.

Most cultivated land lay south of the built-up village.

Water Resources

The inhabitants obtained drinking water from two springs southwest of the village.

Spring water was also used to irrigate part of the orchards.

Khalidi's later site description also records a well near the southern end of the former village, close to the ruins of one of the surviving houses.

Education and Institutions

No independently documented village school, founding date, or pupil enrollment was identified in the principal sources reviewed.

Khalidi's entry likewise does not provide a clear record of a functioning village mosque immediately before the Nakba. No educational or religious institution has therefore been added without direct supporting evidence.

Archaeology and Nearby Khirbas

Several archaeological khirbas lay around Bayt Umm al-Mays.

Sources record ruins, foundations, and collapsed walls in the surrounding area.

The nineteenth-century Survey of Western Palestine also noted ruined walls at the site without establishing their date.

These remains indicate earlier occupation, although their precise chronology requires specialist archaeological evidence.

Operation Ha-Har

Operation Ha-Har began on 19 October 1948 and continued until 24 October.

Launched after the second truce, it targeted the southern part of the Jerusalem corridor and sought to widen Israeli-held territory there and link it with positions farther south toward the Hebron hills.

The Har'el, Etzioni, and Giv'ati brigades participated in the broader operation, while Egyptian forces defended several sectors.

Among the Palestinian villages affected were Bayt Umm al-Mays, 'Allar, Bayt 'Itab, Dayr al-Hawa, Dayr al-Shaykh, Khirbat al-'Umur, and Khirbat al-Tannur.

Occupation and Depopulation

Walid Khalidi does not provide an independent detailed account of a battle inside Bayt Umm al-Mays or of the precise manner in which the villagers left.

He nevertheless considers it almost certain that the village was occupied during Operation Ha-Har.

Khalidi cites Israeli historian Benny Morris as indicating that Bayt Umm al-Mays fell on 21 October 1948, probably to the Har'el Brigade.

This makes 21 October the better-supported date in the principal village source, rather than 1 July 1948 as displayed in some secondary databases.

Palestine Remembered classifies the cause of depopulation as direct military assault.

Because Khalidi explicitly states that the detailed circumstances are unknown, no village-specific expulsion order or evacuation route has been added without independent evidence.

Ethnic Cleansing

Palestine Remembered describes the final outcome at Bayt Umm al-Mays as complete ethnic cleansing.

Khalidi establishes the disappearance of the Palestinian community following the village's occupation during Operation Ha-Har but does not provide a detailed account of how every resident was removed.

The term “ethnic cleansing” is therefore retained as an attributed characterization used by Palestine Remembered, while the directly established fact is the complete depopulation of the Palestinian village.

Occupation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Second truce	Before October 1948	The southern Jerusalem corridor remained a contested military sector.
Beginning of Operation Ha-Har	19 October 1948	Har'el, Etzioni, and Giv'ati formations began the offensive in the southern Jerusalem corridor.
Probable occupation of Bayt Umm al-Mays	21 October 1948	Khalidi cites a source placing the village's fall on this date, probably to the Har'el Brigade.
Depopulation	In the course of occupation	Palestine Remembered classifies the cause as direct military assault; Khalidi does not detail the precise mechanism of departure.
End of Operation Ha-Har	24 October 1948	The operation ended after the occupation of numerous villages southwest of Jerusalem.
Destruction	Precise date not documented	Most village buildings were demolished, while fragments of two houses, terraces, caves, and other remains survived.

Israeli Settlements on Bayt Umm al-Mays Lands

Khalidi and PalQuest explicitly state that **no Israeli settlement was established on Bayt Umm al-Mays village lands**.

Some secondary database headers state that part of Ramat Raziel lies on village land, but the detailed text reproduced from Khalidi on the same sites contradicts this claim, while other sources describe Ramat Raziel as merely near Bayt Umm al-Mays.

Ramat Raziel has therefore not been classified here as a settlement on Bayt Umm al-Mays lands without independent cadastral evidence.

Bayt Umm al-Mays Today

According to Walid Khalidi's field description, wild grass covered the site and grew around the remains of stone terraces.

Almond, olive, and fig trees grew along the terraces, while dried grapevine stems remained visible among the vegetation.

At the northern end stood the remains of a demolished house, including fragments of an arched entrance.

The ruins of another house remained near a well close to the southern end of the former village.

Two caves were visible to the west, while two large flat stone slabs surrounded by shrubs marked the southern edge of the site.

This account derives from fieldwork undertaken before the publication of *All That Remains* in 1992 and should therefore be treated as a documented historical site description rather than comprehensive direct field verification of conditions in 2026.

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Bayt Umm al-Mays
- PalQuest – Operation Ha-Har
- Palestine Remembered – Bayt Umm al-Mays, Jerusalem District
- Institute for Palestine Studies – All That Remains, Walid Khalidi
- Palestinian Villages Encyclopedia – Bayt Umm al-Mays / Khirbat Umm al-Mays, drawing on Khalidi and Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh