

Tall al-Safi



Subdistrict: Hebron

Estimated population of Tall al-Safi in 1948: approximately 1,500

Date of occupation and depopulation: 9–10 July 1948; some sources date the village's fall to 8–9 July

Military operation: Operation An-Far

Military unit: First Battalion, Giv'ati Brigade

Israeli settlements established on the village's lands after 1948: None conclusively

Other facilities established at the village site after 1948: The archaeological site and surrounding area were incorporated into Tel Tzafit National Park

Tall al-Safi was a Palestinian village in the Hebron Subdistrict, approximately 31 kilometres north-west of Hebron. Its lands bordered those of Mughallis, 'Ajjur, Dayr al-Dubban, Dhikrin and [Bi'rkusiyya](#).

The Giv'ati Brigade occupied and depopulated Tall al-Safi on 9–10 July 1948 during Operation An-Far, although some Palestinian geographical sources date its depopulation to 8 July. The neighbouring village of Bi'rkusiyya was occupied during the same offensive. Tall al-Safi was subsequently destroyed as part of Israel's occupation of Palestine—the Nakba.

Overview of Tall al-Safi

The archaeological mound at Tall al-Safi was inhabited from at least the third millennium BCE. This date refers to ancient occupation of the site and should not be interpreted as the founding date of the modern Palestinian village.

The village stood on the summit and slopes of a prominent hill rising approximately 100 metres above the surrounding plain, at the southern end of Wadi 'Ajjur and on the western foothills of the Hebron Mountains. Its houses were built principally of stone bonded with mud mortar. A well in the valley north of the village supplied water for domestic use.

Tall al-Safi is widely identified with ancient Gath, an important Canaanite and later Philistine city. During the Crusader period, the site was known as Blanche Garde—meaning “White Fortress”—rather than Safita. The Crusaders built a fortified castle there, which was later captured by Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi's forces.

Boundaries of Tall al-Safi

Tall al-Safi was situated among the following Palestinian villages and localities:

- To the north: [Idhnibba](#).
- To the north-west: [Mughallis](#).
 - To the west: ['Ajjur](#).
- To the south-west: [Dayr al-Dubban](#).
- To the south: [Dhikrin](#).
- To the south-east and east: [Bi'rkusiyya](#).

Architectural Structure of Tall al-Safi

In the late nineteenth century, Tall al-Safi was described as a village of stone and mud-mortar houses. The buildings extended along intersecting roads inside and beyond the village centre, giving the settlement a broadly star-shaped plan.

The village contained a market, a mosque and a shrine dedicated to the local religious figure Shaykh Muhammad. Its elevated position and the remains of the medieval fortress formed the principal features of its landscape.

Archaeological and Religious Landmarks

- A shrine dedicated to Shaykh Muhammad stood along the eastern approach to the village.
- The site contained the remains of the Crusader fortress known as Blanche Garde.
 - Other remains included walls, burial places, a cave and dressed stone blocks.
- The archaeological mound contains evidence of settlement extending from the Bronze Age through the Canaanite, Philistine, Hellenistic, Roman, Islamic and medieval periods.

Population of Tall al-Safi

Ottoman tax records indicate an estimated population of approximately 484 in 1596. The official British Mandate census of 1922 recorded 644 residents, all Muslims.

In 1931, Tall al-Safi had 925 residents—not 965 as stated in some secondary accounts—living in 208 houses. The population rose to 1,290 in 1945. Its projected population immediately before its depopulation in 1948 was approximately 1,496, commonly rounded to 1,500.

Year	Population*
1596 estimate	484
1922	644
1931	925
1945	1,290
1948 estimate	1,496
Estimated refugees and descendants in 1998	9,190

* The 1948 and 1998 figures are demographic estimates rather than contemporaneous census totals.

Number of Houses in Tall al-Safi

Year	Number of houses
1931	208

Economic Life in Tall al-Safi

Tall al-Safi had a market, a mosque and the shrine of Shaykh Muhammad. The inhabitants obtained water for domestic use from a well north of the village. Animal husbandry—particularly the raising of sheep and goats—was an important part of the local economy.

The agricultural terrain was uneven in some areas and level in others. Residents cultivated cereals, vegetables and fruit, including grapes, figs and almonds. Olive trees covered approximately 521 dunams.

In 1944/45, 19,716 dunams of Palestinian-owned land were allocated to cereal cultivation, while 696 dunams were irrigated or used for orchards.

Land Ownership in Tall al-Safi

Ownership category	Land ownership (dunams)*
Palestinian ownership	27,794
Jewish ownership	1,120
Public land	11
Total	28,925

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres.

Land Use in Tall al-Safi in 1945

Land-use category	Palestinian ownership (dunams)*	Jewish ownership (dunams)*	Public land (dunams)*	Total (dunams)*
Irrigated land and orchards	696	0	0	696
Olive cultivation*	521	0	0	521
Cereal cultivation	19,716	1,115	0	20,831
Built-up area	68	0	0	68
Cultivable land	20,412	1,115	0	21,527
Uncultivated land	7,314	5	11	7,330

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres. Olive cultivation formed part of the broader orchard

category and should not be added separately when calculating the total cultivable area.

Occupation and Depopulation of Tall al-Safi

On 7 July 1948, the commander of the Giv'ati Brigade, Shimon Avidan, issued instructions to the brigade's First Battalion to occupy the Tall al-Safi area and expel the Palestinian refugees sheltering there. The order formed part of preparations for Operation An-Far, conducted between the first and second truces.

The Giv'ati Brigade occupied Tall al-Safi on 9–10 July 1948, although some sources give 8–9 July. The operation resulted in the displacement of the village's inhabitants and refugees who had sought shelter in the surrounding area. Tall al-Safi and neighbouring Bi'rkusiyya were occupied during the same phase of the offensive.

The village was subsequently destroyed, and its inhabitants were prevented from returning. These events formed part of Israel's occupation of Palestine—the Nakba.

Israeli Settlements and Facilities on the Lands of Tall al-Safi

No Israeli residential settlement has been conclusively identified as having been established directly on the built-up site of Tall al-Safi. Kfar Menahem lies to the west of the village site, but authoritative Palestinian references do not classify it as a settlement founded on Tall al-Safi's lands. The claim that neighbourhoods of Kfar Menahem were constructed on village land therefore requires further cadastral evidence.

The archaeological mound and surrounding area were subsequently incorporated into the site commonly known as Tel Tzafit National Park. This designation encompasses the remains of the ancient settlement and the depopulated Palestinian village.

Tall al-Safi Today

Wild vegetation covers much of the village site. Cactus plants and several palm and olive trees remain scattered across the area. The remains of a well and the deteriorating walls of a former pool are also visible.

The surrounding lands are cultivated with citrus fruit, sunflowers and cereals. Bedouin pastoralists have also occasionally established temporary encampments near the site.

Sources

- [Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Tall al-Safi](#), Institute for Palestine Studies and the Palestinian Museum.
- [Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Palestinian villages and military operations during the Nakba](#).
- [Palestine Remembered: Tall al-Safi, Hebron Subdistrict](#).
 - [Palestine Open Maps: Tall al-Safi](#).
 - [Visualizing Palestine: The Story of Tall al-Safi](#).
- Walid Khalidi, ed., *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*, Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992, pp. 221–223.
 - Government of Palestine, *Census of Palestine, 1922*.
 - Government of Palestine, *Census of Palestine, 1931*.
- Government of Palestine, Department of Statistics, *Village Statistics, April 1945*.