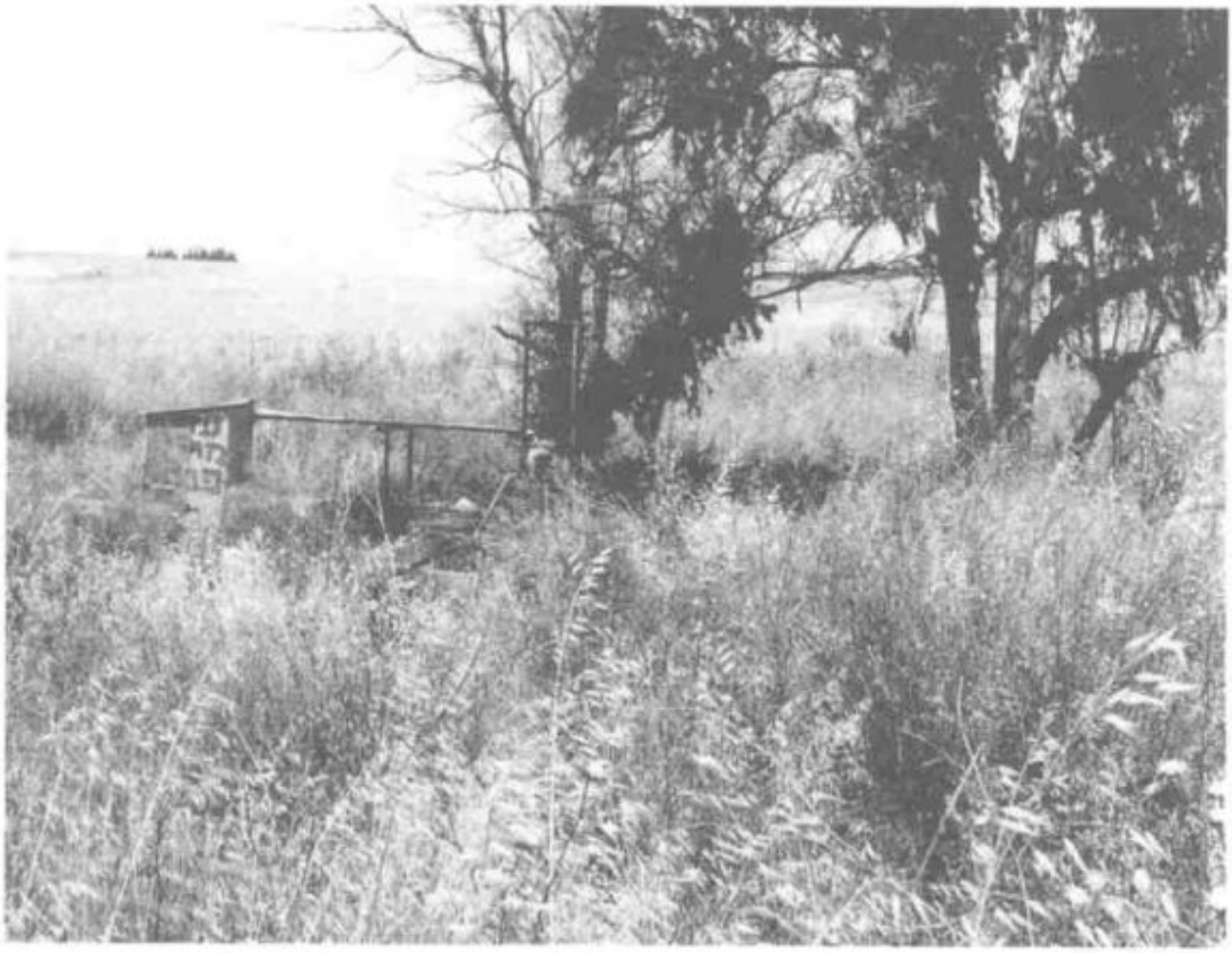
Zayta



A village well, still in use today. (May 1987) [ZAYTA]

Zayta – Depopulated Palestinian Village of the Hebron District

Zayta was a depopulated Palestinian village in the Hebron District, located approximately 29 kilometers northwest of Hebron. PalQuest gives an average elevation of about 75 meters above sea level.

The final village stood on a hill approximately one kilometer north of Wadi Zayta.

During the British Mandate, the inhabitants moved north from the older site known as Khirbat Zayta al-Kharab because stagnant water in the wadi encouraged insects and disease.

The Giv'ati Brigade occupied Zayta during Operation An-Far in July 1948. The precise date is disputed: one account places the capture on 9–10 July, while another gives 17–18 July.

Location and Geography

Zayta lay northwest of Hebron, near the transitional zone between the western foothills of the Hebron highlands and the southern coastal plain.

It was approximately 29 kilometers northwest of Hebron. PalQuest gives an average elevation of about 75 meters above sea level, while the Palestinian Encyclopedia gives approximately 175 meters for the new village site. This source discrepancy is retained rather than merged into a single figure.

The village stood on a hill about one kilometer north of Wadi Zayta. A dirt track connected it with 'Iraq al-Manshiyya, which lay on the main east–west road between the coastal town of al-Majdal and Bayt Jibrin.

Nearby villages included 'Iraq al-Manshiyya, Bayt Jibrin, Kudna, Ra'na, Zikrin, Summil, al-Jusayr, and Barqusya.

Old Zayta and the Relocation of the Village

The older settlement, known as Khirbat Zayta al-Kharab, stood south of the later village on the southern bank of Wadi Zayta.

Walid Khalidi places the distance between the old and new sites at approximately 1.5 kilometers, while the Palestinian Encyclopedia rounds it to about two kilometers.

During the British Mandate, the inhabitants moved to the new site north of the

wadi because stagnant water in the old location encouraged insects and disease.

The new village extended along a northeast–southwest axis, and its houses were constructed of mud, wood, and cane.

Ottoman Period

In 1596, Zayta belonged to the nahiya of Gaza in the liwa' of Gaza and had an estimated population of approximately 165.

The villagers paid taxes on wheat, barley, goats, and beehives.

In the late nineteenth century, the old settlement was described as a small adobe-built hamlet at the edge of the wadi, flanked by low hills.

Population and Houses

The inhabitants of Zayta were Muslims.

Year	Population	Note
1596	About 165	Historical estimate derived from Ottoman records
1922	139	Official Census of Palestine: 68 males and 71 females, all Muslims
1931	234	Official census; all inhabitants were Muslims
1945	330	Official statistics; all inhabitants were Palestinian Arab Muslims
1948	About 383	Later Palestine Remembered estimate, not an official Mandate census
1998	About 6,839 refugees and descendants	Later demographic estimate published by Palestine Remembered

The official 1931 census recorded 44 inhabited houses.

Palestine Remembered currently displays an estimate of 209 houses for 1948. No independent official basis for that number was located in the sources reviewed, so

it is not treated as an official or securely established figure.

Built Environment and Public Services

The new village extended along a northeast–southwest axis, with houses built from mud, wood, and cane.

The Palestinian Encyclopedia describes Zayta as having few public facilities or services.

Walid Khalidi and PalQuest do not document an independent formal school or a specifically identified mosque in the village. Neither is therefore added without clearer village-specific documentation.

Water Resources

Zayta relied on artesian wells for drinking water.

Most wells were dug south of the village near Wadi Zayta, where groundwater lay close to the surface.

Another well stood north of the village.

The unhealthy stagnant water in the wadi was one of the principal reasons the villagers moved from the old settlement to the newer site during the Mandate.

Economic Life and Agriculture

Most inhabitants depended on rainfed agriculture and livestock raising, particularly sheep and goats.

Cereals were cultivated across extensive areas, while remaining suitable land was used as grazing ground.

The official 1944/45 land-use table does not list a separate orchard or olive category for Zayta, so no unsupported crop acreage is added.

Land Ownership, 1944/45

The total land area of Zayta was 10,490 dunams. Under the official Government of Palestine classification, ownership was distributed as follows:

Total	**10,490**
Ownership Category	**Area in Dunams**
Arab	3,127
Jewish	1,273
Public	6,090

Palestine Remembered presents the same figures using its simplified terminology: 3,127 dunams “Palestinian,” 1,273 dunams “Transferred to Zionists,” and 6,090 dunams “Communal/Public.” The wording “Transferred to Zionists” should be preserved when reproducing that source's terminology rather than replacing it with the official “Jewish” category.

Land Use, 1944/45

Grand Total	**3,127**	**1,273**	**6,090**	**10,490**
Land Use	**Arab**	**Jewish**	**Public**	**Total**
Cereals	3,027	1,251	5,872	10,150
Total cultivable/cultivated land	3,027	1,251	5,872	10,150
Non-cultivable land	100	22	186	308
Built-up land	0	0	32	32
Total non-cultivable and built-up	100	22	218	340

The official table balances exactly: 10,150 dunams of cultivated or cultivable land plus 340 dunams of built-up and non-cultivable land equal Zayta's total area of 10,490 dunams.

Palestine Remembered's simplified land-use display requires correction when

interpreted. It places 8,899 cereal dunams in the Palestinian column, while the official table shows that this figure combines 3,027 Arab dunams with 5,872 Public dunams. Public land has therefore been kept separate above.

Archaeological Sites

Palestine Remembered lists several archaeological localities associated with Zayta, including Khirbat Rujum al-Darbi, Zayta al-Kharab, and Bisiya.

The principal sources reviewed do not provide sufficient archaeological dating to assign these remains securely to particular historical periods.

Operation An-Far

Operation An-Far began on 8 July and officially ended on 15 July 1948.

It was an offensive launched by the Giv'ati Brigade on the southern front during the Ten Days between the two truces, intended to expand Israeli control southward and eastward and link coastal territory with Jewish settlements in the Negev.

The **Giv'ati Brigade** carried out the operation, with its **First Battalion** serving as the principal spearhead at the operational level.

PalQuest explicitly lists Zayta among the villages affected by Operation An-Far.

Occupation and Depopulation

The sources cited by Walid Khalidi do not agree on a single occupation date.

The *History of the War of Independence*, as cited through Khalidi, places the occupation on **9–10 July 1948**, during the early phase of Operation An-Far.

Benny Morris, as cited by Khalidi, gives a later date of **17–18 July 1948**.

This creates a chronological difficulty because PalQuest dates the official end of Operation An-Far to 15 July, even though both Khalidi and PalQuest clearly classify

Zayta among the villages taken in the context of the operation.

The discrepancy is therefore preserved rather than artificially resolved: **9–10 July according to one account, and 17–18 July according to another**.

The 1 July date currently displayed by the Palestinian Villages Encyclopedia predates the beginning of Operation An-Far and is therefore not used.

Correction of the Military Operation

The summary field on Palestine Remembered currently identifies “Operation Yoav” as the operation associated with Zayta.

However, the historical text on the same page, quoting Khalidi, explicitly states that Zayta was captured during Operation An-Far.

Operation Yoav did not begin until 15 October 1948, approximately three months after Zayta had already been depopulated.

The correct military context is therefore **Operation An-Far**, not Operation Yoav.

Military Unit

The military formation associated with Zayta's capture at the operational level was the **Giv'ati Brigade**.

The brigade's First Battalion spearheaded Operation An-Far as a whole.

The village-specific Zayta account does not explicitly identify the First Battalion as the formation that physically entered the village, so the distinction between operation-level participation and village-level attribution is retained.

Occupation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
End of the First Truce	8 July 1948	Fighting resumed on the southern front.
Beginning of Operation An-Far	8 July 1948	The Giv'ati Brigade launched its southward and eastward offensive.
Occupation according to the History of the War of Independence	9–10 July 1948	This account places the capture of Zayta during the early phase of An-Far.
Official end of Operation An-Far	15 July 1948	PalQuest's formal end date for the operation.
Occupation according to Morris as cited by Khalidi	17–18 July 1948	A second account places the village's capture after the formal end date of the operation, leaving the precise date disputed.
Depopulation	July 1948	The military assault resulted in the complete displacement of the Palestinian population.
Destruction	Exact date not documented	The village houses were subsequently removed; the later field survey found only a surviving well.
Settlement proposal	20 August 1948	The Jewish National Fund submitted a plan to establish a kibbutz called Gal-On at the village site, but no settlement was ultimately established on Zayta's lands.

Israeli Settlements on Village Lands

According to Walid Khalidi and PalQuest, **no Israeli settlement was established on Zayta's village lands**.

Approximately one month after the village was occupied, a plan dated 20 August 1948 proposed establishing Kibbutz Gal-On on the village site.

Other sources, however, indicate that Gal-On had already been established in early 1947 on land traditionally belonging to neighboring Ra'na, about two kilometers

east of Zayta.

Gal-On is therefore not listed as a settlement established on Zayta's lands.

Zayta Today

According to the field description published in Walid Khalidi's *All That Remains*, no traces of the village houses remained.

One village well was still present and in use at the time of the survey, while tall grass, wildflowers, and trees covered parts of the site.

The surrounding lands were under cultivation.

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

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Zayta
- PalQuest – Operation An-Far
- Palestine Remembered – Zayta, Hebron District
- Palestine Remembered – Walid Khalidi's account of Zayta
- Palestinian Encyclopedia – Zayta
- Palestinian Villages Encyclopedia – Zayta; supporting Palestinian documentation
- Government of Palestine – Census of Palestine 1922, Hebron Sub-District
- Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics – Historical Census Archive
- Sami Hadawi – Village Statistics 1945; reproduction of the Government of Palestine tables
- Institute for Palestine Studies – Walid Khalidi, All That Remains
- PalQuest – All That Remains: Methodology