Bayt Jibrin

Bayt Jibrin: A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Hebron District

Bayt Jibrin was a Palestinian village in the Hebron District, located about 21 kilometres northwest of the city of Hebron, along the western foothills of the Hebron Mountains, at an average elevation of approximately 275 metres above sea level. It was one of the largest and most important villages in the area in terms of land, trade, and services. Israeli forces occupied the village on 27 October 1948 during the final phase of Operation Yoav, following a series of air raids and military attacks. Its inhabitants were displaced during the Nakba and the occupation of

Palestine in 1948.

Basic Information

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Hebron
Distance from district center	21 km Northwest of Hebron
Average Elevation	275 meters above sea level
Population in 1931	1,804 inhabitants - Official census
Number of Houses in 1931	369 houses - Official census
Population in 1944/1945	2,430 inhabitants - Government of Palestine statistics
Estimated Population in 1948	About 2,819 inhabitants - a later demographic estimate, not an official census
Total Land Area in 1945	56,185 dunams
Attack and Depopulation	After Egyptian forces entered Palestine in May 1948, orders were issued to the First Battalion of the Egyptian Army to take positions in Bayt Jibrin. The village consequently became situated along one of the front lines between Egyptian and Israeli forces.
Final Israeli Control	27 October 1948
Military Operation	Operation Yoav
Military Unit	Givati Brigade
Cause of Depopulation	Military assault by Zionist troops
Settlements Documented on Village Lands	Beyt Guvrin

Location

Bayt Jibrin stood on relatively level ground along the western foothills of the Hebron Mountains, south of Wadi Bayt Jibrin. The valley and the village's location made it an important crossroads connecting routes toward Hebron, Jerusalem, Ramla, and al-Faluja.

Most of the village houses were built of stone and mud. In the late nineteenth century, Bayt Jibrin was described as a large village occupying a strong position on the slope of a valley, with olive groves extending across the valley to the north.

PalQuest and Walid Khalidi give a distance of approximately 21 kilometres between Bayt Jibrin and Hebron and an average elevation of about 275 metres. Some other Palestinian sources provide slightly different figures, reaching approximately 26 kilometres and 287 metres.

The Name Bayt Jibrin

Walid Khalidi suggests that the name “Bayt Jibrin” is probably of Aramaic origin and means “House of the Mighty One” or “House of the Strong Man.”

Local tradition also associates the name with giants or mighty men and links them with ancient Canaanite inhabitants of the region. This account is best treated as local tradition rather than as a firmly established linguistic or archaeological fact.

Bayt Jibrin Through History

Bayt Jibrin was an ancient settlement with a long history of continuous habitation through several historical periods. The historian Josephus referred to it as “Betogabra.”

In 200 CE, the Roman emperor Septimius Severus granted the town the status of a Roman colony and renamed it “Eleutheropolis.” By the fourth century CE, it had become the seat of a Christian bishopric.

Bayt Jibrin came under Muslim rule in the seventh century CE. The village contained the shrine of Tamim Abu Ruqayya, one of the Companions of the Prophet. In the late tenth century, the Palestinian geographer al-Muqaddasi described Bayt Jibrin as a commercial centre serving the surrounding villages and towns.

During the Crusader period, the Crusaders called the town “Beth Giblin” and built a fortress there in 1137. Yaqut al-Hamawi reports that Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi later destroyed the Crusader fortress. Mamluk Sultan al-Zahir Baybars subsequently ended Crusader control over the town.

Bayt Jibrin prospered during the Mamluk period and, by the late thirteenth century, had become a station on the postal route linking Gaza with al-Karak.

In 1596, Bayt Jibrin was a village in the Gaza subdistrict of the Gaza district, with an estimated population of about 275. Its inhabitants paid taxes on wheat, barley, sesame, goats, beehives, and other products.

Population

In the late nineteenth century, the population of Bayt Jibrin was estimated at approximately 900 to 1,000. Baedeker's guide recorded about 1,000 inhabitants in 1912.

The official 1922 Census of Palestine recorded 1,420 inhabitants, while the 1931 census recorded 1,804.

According to the official 1944/1945 Village Statistics, the population stood at 2,430, all of whom were Muslims.

The figure of approximately 2,819 inhabitants for 1948 and the estimate of 17,310 refugees and their descendants in 1998, both published by Palestine Remembered, are later estimates and not official censuses of the Government of Palestine.

Population of Bayt Jibrin

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
1596	275	Historical figure based on Ottoman records

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
Late nineteenth century	About 900–1,000	Historical estimate
1912	About 1,000	Historical estimate
1922	1,420	Official census
1931	1,804	Official census
1944/1945	2,430	Government of Palestine statistics
1948	About 2,819	Later estimate
1998	17,310	Estimate of refugees and their descendants
The figures for 1948 and 1998 are estimates and are not official British Mandate censuses.		

Number of Houses

The 1931 census recorded 369 houses in Bayt Jibrin. The figure of approximately 576 houses for 1948, published by Palestine Remembered, is a later estimate.

Number of Houses in Bayt Jibrin

Year	Number of Houses	Nature of Figure
1931	369	Official census
1948	About 576	Later estimate

Education, Institutions, and Public Services

During the British Mandate period, Bayt Jibrin served as a commercial and service centre for several surrounding villages. It had two schools, one for boys and another for girls, as well as a medical clinic, a bus station, and a police post.

Local accounts from former villagers indicate that education expanded during the 1930s and 1940s and that the boys' school received pupils from neighbouring villages. However, details concerning the highest grade and the precise dates on which the schools were established vary between accounts and are therefore not

treated here as fixed official statistics.

The village also held a weekly market every Tuesday, attracting residents of neighbouring villages to buy and sell goods and strengthening Bayt Jibrin's role as a local economic centre.

Family guesthouses, or madafat, played an important social role in village life. Traditional kuttab schools also continued to provide instruction in the Qur'an and Arabic alongside the formal school system.

Land of Bayt Jibrin

According to the 1944/1945 statistics, the total land area of Bayt Jibrin amounted to 56,185 dunams.

Arab ownership amounted to 54,962 dunams, Jewish ownership to 1,008 dunams, while 215 dunams were classified as public land.

Total	**56,185**
Ownership Category	**Area in Dunams**
Arab ownership	54,962
Jewish ownership	1,008
Public land	215

Agriculture and Economic Life

The inhabitants of Bayt Jibrin depended heavily on agriculture, particularly the cultivation of cereals, fruit, and olives. Most farming was rain-fed, while olive groves were concentrated in the hilly areas surrounding the village.

According to the 1944/1945 statistics, a total of 31,616 dunams were devoted to cereals, including 30,613 dunams of Arab-owned land, 815 dunams of Jewish-owned land, and 188 dunams of public land.

A further 2,477 dunams were irrigated or used for plantations, all of them Arab-owned.

The total area cultivated or suitable for cultivation amounted to 34,093 dunams, approximately 61 percent of the village's total land area.

Some Palestinian sources report approximately 3,500 dunams planted with olive trees. This figure represents a crop category within the agricultural land and should not be added separately to the overall land-use total.

Total	**54,962**	**1,008**	**215**	**56,185**
Type of Use	**Arab**	**Jewish**	**Public**	**Total**
Cereals	30,613	815	188	31,616
Irrigated and plantation land	2,477	0	0	2,477
Built-up area	287	0	0	287
Uncultivable land	21,585	193	27	21,805

Archaeology in Bayt Jibrin

Bayt Jibrin is one of the richest archaeological areas in Palestine. The region was occupied during numerous historical periods and contains many caves, rock-cut installations, tombs, presses, cisterns, and other remains.

Sources document caves that were used for habitation and other purposes, burial chambers, rock-cut columbaria, and architectural remains from several ancient periods.

Archaeologists working in the area uncovered mosaic floors belonging to two churches, one dating to the fourth century CE and the other to the sixth century CE.

Remains of the Roman and Crusader towns were also present around the village, including remains associated with Eleutheropolis and the Crusader fortress.

Claims that approximately one thousand caves were discovered or that as many as thirty thousand caves existed in the surrounding area have not been adopted in this article because sufficient documentation for these figures was not found in the principal Palestinian sources reviewed.

The Nakba and Bayt Jibrin Before the Occupation

After Egyptian forces entered Palestine in May 1948, orders were issued to the First Battalion of the Egyptian Army to take positions in Bayt Jibrin. The village consequently became situated along one of the front lines between Egyptian and Israeli forces.

The Bayt Jibrin area also received displaced Palestinians from other parts of the country. Among them were refugees from Jaffa, some of whom temporarily sheltered in the historic caves surrounding the village.

Operation Yoav and the Occupation of Bayt Jibrin

Operation Yoav

Operation Yoav began on 15 October 1948. Its objective was to break through Egyptian lines in southern Palestine and establish a connection between Israeli forces in the Negev and those farther north.

The Givati, Yiftach, Hanegev, and Harel brigades participated in Operation Yoav as a whole. In the Bayt Jibrin and Hebron Hills sector, however, detailed material concerning the village associates the direct military advance primarily with the Givati Brigade, which was assigned to move northward and eastward toward Hebron.

In this area, Operation Yoav was coordinated with Operation Ha-Har, which targeted Palestinian villages in the southern part of the Jerusalem corridor.

Bombardment

Bayt Jibrin was subjected to aerial attacks and bombardment during Operation Yoav. PalQuest, drawing on the sources used by Walid Khalidi, reproduces differing accounts concerning the beginning of the bombardment. One account describes heavy bombing on 15–16 October, while contemporary press reports document an air raid during the night of 18–19 October, followed by further attacks over the following days.

The bombardment and military developments surrounding the village contributed to the departure of its inhabitants before the final occupation.

The Final Assault and Date of Occupation

The sources reproduced by PalQuest differ slightly regarding the date of the initial direct assault on Bayt Jibrin. One account places it on the night of 24 October, while another gives 26 October.

Both accounts, however, agree that Israeli forces completed the occupation of Bayt Jibrin on **27 October 1948**.

Palestine Remembered lists 29 October 1948 in its statistical table as the occupation date, but the detailed historical narrative published on the same site, in agreement with Walid Khalidi's account as reproduced by PalQuest, identifies 27 October as the date on which the occupation was completed. This article therefore adopts 27 October 1948.

The occupation of Bayt Jibrin represented an important military advance on the southern front and contributed to tightening the encirclement of Egyptian forces in the al-Faluja Pocket.

Displacement of the Population and Fate of the

Village

Air raids and the military advance in the Bayt Jibrin area led to the displacement of the village's inhabitants. Organized Palestinian community life in Bayt Jibrin ended with the occupation in late October 1948.

Walid Khalidi's account does not indicate that the entire village was demolished at the moment of occupation. PalQuest, through a source cited by Khalidi, reports that a request to blow up some of the village houses on the day of occupation was not carried out at that time.

This detail is cited here only as reproduced through PalQuest and Walid Khalidi, rather than through direct reliance on the original Israeli source.

Most of Bayt Jibrin's built-up area was destroyed during the subsequent period, while a limited number of historic village buildings survived.

Israeli Settlement Established on the Lands of Bayt Jibrin

Beit Guvrin

The settlement of Beit Guvrin was established in 1949 on the lands of Bayt Jibrin, north of the site of the Palestinian village.

Settlement Established on the Lands of Bayt Jibrin

Name	Year Established	Relationship to Village Lands
Beit Guvrin	1949	Established on the lands of Bayt Jibrin, north of the Palestinian village site

The Site of Bayt Jibrin After the Nakba

According to the field documentation used by Walid Khalidi, a mosque, an

unidentified shrine, and several houses remained standing at the village site.

The surviving mosque was a stone structure with a flat roof and arched windows and doors. At the rear of the building was a broad arcade topped by a dome.

Some of the surviving houses were in use at the time of documentation, while others stood abandoned. One two-storey stone house had been converted into a restaurant.

Grass, shrubs, cactus plants, and eucalyptus trees grew around the village site, while the surrounding archaeological area became a destination for visitors.

These details reflect the condition of the site at the time of the field documentation relied upon by Walid Khalidi and should not be interpreted as a comprehensive field survey updated to 2026.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
The Nakba and Bayt Jibrin Before the Occupation	May 1948	After Egyptian forces entered Palestine in May 1948, orders were issued to the First Battalion of the Egyptian Army to take positions in Bayt Jibrin. The Bayt Jibrin area also received displaced Palestinians from other parts of the country.
Operation Yoav	15 October 1948	Operation Yoav began on 15 October 1948. Its objective was to break through Egyptian lines in southern Palestine and establish a connection between Israeli forces in the Negev and those farther north.
Bombardment	Not specified precisely	Bayt Jibrin was subjected to aerial attacks and bombardment during Operation Yoav. PalQuest, drawing on the sources used by Walid Khalidi, reproduces differing accounts concerning the beginning of the bombardment.

Stage	Date	Details
The Final Assault and Date of Occupation	27 October 1948	The sources reproduced by PalQuest differ slightly regarding the date of the initial direct assault on Bayt Jibrin. One account places it on the night of 24 October, while another gives 26 October.

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Bayt Jibrin.
- PalQuest: Operation Yoav.
- Palestine Remembered: Bayt Jibrin, Hebron District.
- Palestine Remembered: Historical Study of Bayt Jibrin.
- Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains*, entry on Bayt Jibrin.
- Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh, *Biladuna Filastin*, material relating to Bayt Jibrin and the Hebron District.
- Government of Palestine, Department of Statistics, *Village Statistics, 1945*.
- Palestine censuses of 1922 and 1931.