

Al-Batani al-Gharbi



al-Batani al-Gharbi: A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Gaza District

al-Batani al-Gharbi was a Palestinian village in the Gaza District, located approximately 36 km northeast of Gaza city on flat terrain in the southern coastal plain, at an average elevation of about 25 metres above sea level. Its inhabitants were displaced during the Nakba and the occupation of Palestine in 1948. The detailed accounts of Walid Khalidi and PalQuest place its occupation on 18 May 1948 during the second stage of Operation Barak.

Location of al-Batani al-Gharbi

al-Batani al-Gharbi stood on flat terrain in the southern coastal plain and was one of two neighbouring villages bearing the name al-Batani. Its twin, al-Batani al-Sharqi, lay to the east, and the terms “western” and “eastern” distinguished the two villages from one another.

The village was approximately 36 km northeast of Gaza city and had an average elevation of about 25 metres above sea level.

Secondary roads connected it with neighbouring villages and towns, including Yasur and Isdud on the main coastal highway.

During the British Mandate period, a military airfield was constructed on flat land approximately 2 km south of the village.

History of al-Batani al-Gharbi

The earliest historical reference cited by Walid Khalidi states that al-Batani was originally established as an estate or farm belonging to Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan, the first Umayyad caliph, who ruled from 661 to 680 CE.

The principal sources used here do not provide enough evidence to separate the earliest history of al-Batani al-Gharbi completely from that of its eastern twin. This reference is therefore treated as relating to the historical origin of al-Batani generally.

Architecture of al-Batani al-Gharbi

In the late nineteenth century, al-Batani al-Gharbi stood on low ground and had a rectangular layout running from southeast to northwest.

Building initially spread along the two shorter sides of the rectangle and later expanded along the roads leading toward neighbouring villages.

The houses stood close together and were separated by narrow alleys. Most were constructed of adobe brick, with roofs made of wood and reeds. Scattered gardens, two ponds, and several wells were also found on the village lands.

Mosque and Local Services

The inhabitants of al-Batani al-Gharbi were Muslim. The village had its own mosque and several small shops.

Wells scattered throughout the surrounding area provided water for domestic use and also supported irrigation.

Education in al-Batani al-Gharbi

al-Batani al-Gharbi and al-Batani al-Sharqi shared an elementary school that opened in 1947 with an initial enrolment of 119 pupils.

Palestine Remembered describes it as a boys' school, while Khalidi's PalQuest entry describes it simply as an elementary school shared by the two villages.

Economic Life in al-Batani al-Gharbi

Agriculture was the principal source of livelihood. The villagers cultivated cereals, citrus fruit, and other crops. Farming relied on both rainfall and water from wells throughout the area.

Residents also raised livestock and poultry.

According to the 1944/45 statistics, 170 dunums were devoted to citrus and bananas, 4,152 dunums to cereals, and 95 dunums were irrigated or used for plantations.

Land Ownership in al-Batani al-Gharbi

The total land area of al-Batani al-Gharbi was 4,574 dunums according to the 1944/45 statistics.

Total	4,574
PalQuest statistical category	Area in dunums
Arab	4,475
Jewish	0
Public	99

Palestine Remembered presents the corresponding categories in its Arabic table as 4,475 Palestinian dunums, zero dunums “transferred to Zionists,” and 99 dunums of communal land.

Land Use in al-Batani al-Gharbi, 1944/45

Total	4,475	99	4,574
Land use	Arab	Public	Total
Citrus and bananas	170	0	170
Plantations and irrigable land	95	0	95
Cereals	4,152	0	4,152
Built-up area	34	0	34
Non-cultivable land	24	99	123

A total of 4,417 dunums, approximately 97 percent of the village lands, was cultivated or cultivable. Built-up and non-cultivable land together amounted to 157 dunums.

Palestine Remembered gives 123 dunums as non-arable land in a single Palestinian column, whereas PalQuest's detailed table separates this into 24 Arab dunums and 99 public dunums.

Population of al-Batani al-Gharbi

Population of al-Batani al-Gharbi in selected years

Year	Population	Nature of figure
1922	556	Official British Mandate census
1931	667	Official British Mandate census
1944/45	980	Official statistics; the recorded population was Arab and Muslim
1948	1,137	Later estimate published by Palestine Remembered
Estimated refugees in 1998	6,981	Later estimate published by Palestine Remembered
Official Mandate census and statistical figures should be distinguished from the later estimates for 1948 and 1998.		

Number of Houses in al-Batani al-Gharbi

Number of houses in al-Batani al-Gharbi

Year	Number of houses	Nature of figure
1931	147	Official census figure
1948	250	Later estimate published by Palestine Remembered
The 1948 figure is a later estimate rather than an official British Mandate census figure.		

Occupation and Depopulation of al-Batani al-Gharbi during the Nakba

al-Batani al-Gharbi was among the villages occupied by Israeli occupation forces during Operation Barak, an offensive targeting villages south and west of Ramla and parts of the southern coastal plain in May 1948.

PalQuest records the opening stage of Operation Barak as beginning on 9 May 1948, conducted mainly by the Haganah's Giv'ati Brigade with the participation of

the Palmach's Negev Brigade. A second stage of attacks was conducted in southern Palestine as British forces withdrew and the Mandate ended on 15 May.

Walid Khalidi and PalQuest place the occupation of al-Batani al-Gharbi on 18 May 1948 during this second stage, several days after the fall of al-Batani al-Sharqi.

Palestine Remembered contains an internal discrepancy concerning the date. Its statistical summary lists 13 May 1948, while its reproduction of the Khalidi account gives 18 May. Since 18 May is also the date given in the detailed PalQuest entry, it is used here while the discrepancy is explicitly noted.

Khalidi cites Israeli historian Benny Morris as stating that most inhabitants of the villages captured in this phase left before or during the attacks and that some were probably expelled. Morris is not used here as an independent source; this account is included only because it is reproduced in the approved Palestinian reference.

PalQuest's account of Operation Barak also states that Giv'ati's operational plans included the occupation, evacuation, or destruction of villages and that residents remaining after occupation were liable to expulsion.

- Occupation date supported by the detailed Khalidi/PalQuest narrative: 18 May 1948.
- Different date in Palestine Remembered's statistical table: 13 May 1948.
- Military operation: Operation Barak, second stage.
- Attacking unit according to Palestine Remembered: Giv'ati Brigade.
- Brigades involved in Operation Barak overall: Giv'ati Brigade and Negev Brigade.
- Fate of the inhabitants: the Palestinian population of al-Batani al-Gharbi was displaced during the Nakba in the course of the military assault and occupation.
- Fate of the village: its buildings were subsequently destroyed, although traces of the site and some alleys remained.

Settlements on the Lands of al-Batani al-Gharbi

According to Walid Khalidi and PalQuest, no Israeli settlement was established directly on the lands of al-Batani al-Gharbi.

Azriqam, established in 1950, lies close to the village site to the south. It was, however, built on land belonging to the neighbouring Palestinian village of Bayt Daras and is therefore not listed as a settlement established on al-Batani al-Gharbi's lands.

al-Batani al-Gharbi Today

According to the field description published by Walid Khalidi in *All That Remains*, cactus plants and fig and sycamore trees grew on the village site, while some of its old alleys or streets remained recognizable.

Parts of the nearby land were being cultivated by residents of the neighbouring settlement, and a stone quarry was also located on village lands.

This principal description derives from field research published in Khalidi's book in 1992. The approved sources used here do not provide a sufficiently comprehensive, independent, and recent field survey to verify the precise condition of every part of the al-Batani al-Gharbi site in 2026. It should therefore be treated as a historical site description rather than a real-time account.

Sources

- [PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: al-Batani al-Gharbi](#)
- [PalQuest – Operation Barak](#)
- [Palestine Remembered – al-Batani al-Gharbi, Gaza District](#)
- [Palestine Remembered – al-Batani al-Gharbi entry from All That Remains](#)
- [Institute for Palestine Studies – All That Remains, Walid Khalidi](#)