Hiribya

Subdistrict: Gaza Subdistrict

Estimated Palestinian population of Hiribya in 1948: Approximately 2,600

Occupation and depopulation: Early November 1948, commonly dated to 5 November. The exact date has not been conclusively established.

Military operation: Hiribya was targeted during Operation Yoav, which involved the Giv'ati, Yiftach, Negev and Har'el brigades.

Israeli settlement established near Hiribya before 1948: Yad Mordechai, founded in 1943. It was not initially established on the village site but later expanded onto Hiribya's lands.

Israeli settlements established on Hiribya's lands after 1948: Zikim, established in 1949,

and Karmia, established in 1950

Hiribya was a Palestinian village in the Gaza Subdistrict. It was located on Palestine's southern coastal plain, approximately 14 kilometres northeast of Gaza and about 25 metres above sea level.

The village was surrounded by the lands of al-Khisas, al-Jura, Barbara and Niʿilya to the north; Bayt Jirja and Dayr Sunayd to the east and south; and Bayt Lahiya farther south. The Mediterranean Sea lay to the west.

Hiribya stood in a flat area surrounded by sand dunes. A secondary road connected it with the coastal highway, which passed approximately 2 kilometres east of the village and provided access to Gaza and al-Majdal.

Boundaries and Neighbouring Villages

Hiribya was surrounded by the following Palestinian villages, towns and geographical features:

- **North:** Niʿilya.
- **Northwest:** al-Khisas.
- **West:** The Mediterranean Sea.
- **South:** Dayr Sunayd.
- **Southeast:** Simsim.
- **East:** Bayt Jirja.
- **Northeast:** Barbara.

The Depopulated Palestinian Village of Hiribya

The Depopulated Palestinian Village of Hiribya

Historical Background

The site of Hiribya had been inhabited since the Canaanite period. During the Crusader period,

it was known as Forbie. The Arab geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi, who died in 1228, referred to it as Firbiya and placed it within the administrative jurisdiction of Asqalan.

Hiribya was the site of a major battle in 1244 between Muslim forces and a combined force of Crusaders and their regional allies. The battle ended in a decisive Muslim victory and is considered an important event in the military history of medieval Palestine.

In 1596, Hiribya was recorded in the Ottoman tax registers as a village in the Gaza subdistrict of the Gaza district. It had an estimated population of 963 and paid taxes on wheat, barley, grapes, fruit and cotton.

Architectural Character of Hiribya

In the late nineteenth century, Hiribya had a broadly rectangular plan. Most houses were constructed of adobe brick, although some were scattered among the surrounding orchards.

A pond, a well and several gardens surrounded the village. The remains of a Crusader-period fortress stood to its south. The village expanded along the roads connecting it with the coastal highway.

Hiribya's mosque and elementary school were located near its centre. The settlement's Palestinian population consisted principally of Muslims, with a small Christian community documented in the British Mandate censuses.

Area and Landscape of Hiribya

- Hiribya had a total land area of 22,312 dunams. Its Palestinian built-up area covered approximately 42 dunams, while an additional 50 built-up dunams were recorded under Jewish ownership.
- The village stood amid sand dunes on the southern coastal plain and was sometimes described as resembling an oasis.
- Its agricultural lands extended through the lower basin of Wadi al-Hasi, between the sands of Asqalan to the north and those of Bayt Lahiya to the south, towards the Mediterranean coast.
- Rainfall was generally sufficient for agriculture, while groundwater was relatively

close to the surface.

Population of Hiribya

The British Mandate census of 1922 recorded 1,037 residents in Hiribya: 1,031 Muslims and 6 Orthodox Christians. The figure of 1,307 appearing in some accounts is a transcription error.

In 1931, the population reached 1,520, comprising 1,510 Muslims and 10 Christians living in 234 houses. The figures of 803 males and 707 females describe the 1,510 Muslim residents but exclude the 10 Christian residents from the total.

In 1945, the relevant statistical unit had a combined population of 2,300: 2,240 Palestinians—2,200 Muslims and 40 Christians—and 60 Jewish residents. The Palestinian population of Hiribya should therefore be distinguished from the combined statistical total.

The village's Palestinian population immediately before its depopulation has been retrospectively estimated at approximately 2,598, commonly rounded to 2,600. This was a demographic projection rather than the result of a new official census.

Historical Population of Hiribya

Year	Recorded or estimated population	Notes
1596	Approximately 963	Estimated from Ottoman tax records.
1922	1,037 Palestinians	The census recorded 1,031 Muslims and 6 Orthodox Christians.
1931	1,520 Palestinians	The census recorded 1,510 Muslims and 10 Christians living in 234 houses.
1945	2,240 Palestinians	The wider statistical total was 2,300, including 60 Jewish residents.
1948	Approximately 2,598 Palestinians	Projected estimate, commonly rounded to 2,600, rather than a new official census.
1998	Approximately 15,957 refugees and descendants	A retrospective estimate published by Palestine Remembered.

Number of Houses in Hiribya

Year	Number of houses	Status of figure
1931	234	Recorded in the British Mandate census; the figure includes the locality of Ashraf.
1948	Approximately 399	Later estimate; no comparable official village housing census was conducted in 1948.

Economic Life in Hiribya

Hiribya's economy depended primarily on agriculture. Adequate rainfall and groundwater close to the surface supported both rainfed and irrigated cultivation.

The village was known for its citrus orchards. Local accounts estimate that Hiribya contained approximately 150 individual orchards or agricultural holdings, although this figure does not appear in the principal British Mandate land tables.

The villagers cultivated cereals, vegetables and fruit, particularly citrus, grapes, bananas and sugar cane. Citrus produce, especially oranges, was transported by vehicle and exported through regional markets and ports.

Some residents also worked in Mediterranean fishing. Palestinian records preserved by Palestine Remembered include lists relating to fishermen and the distribution of fishing equipment in the Gaza region, including Hiribya, during the 1940s.

In 1944/45, 2,765 dunams of Palestinian–owned land were devoted to citrus and bananas, 5,706 dunams were irrigated or used for orchards, and 4,366 dunams were allocated to cereal cultivation. A further 2,037 dunams of public land and 776 dunams under Jewish ownership were used for cereals.

Land Ownership in Hiribya, 1944/45

Ownership category	Area (dunams)*
Palestinian ownership	12,987
Jewish ownership	1,226

Ownership category	Area (dunams)*
Public land	8,099
Total	**22,312**

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres.

Land Use in Hiribya, 1944/45

Land-use category	Palestinian ownership (dunams)*	Jewish ownership (dunams)*	Public land (dunams)*	Total (dunams)*
Citrus and banana cultivation	2,765	0	0	2,765
Irrigated land and orchards	5,706	400	0	6,106
Cereal cultivation	4,366	776	2,037	7,179
Built-up area	42	50	0	92
Cultivable land	12,837	1,176	2,037	16,050
Uncultivated land	108	0	6,062	6,170

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres.

Education in Hiribya

Hiribya had a mosque and an elementary school, both situated near the centre of the village. The school opened in 1922 and had approximately 124 pupils by the mid-1940s.

Archaeological and Historical Sites

Archaeological remains indicated that Hiribya had been inhabited since antiquity. Recorded features included the remains of a tower, architectural fragments and water reservoirs southwest of the village.

Khirbat al-Sharf was identified with the Roman-period settlement of Diocletianupolis, also known as Sarafia. Farther east lay the Byzantine site of Khirbat al-Yasmina.

The remains of a Crusader-period fortress stood south of Hiribya, reflecting the village's association with the site known in medieval sources as Forbie.

Occupation and Depopulation of Hiribya

The exact date on which Hiribya was occupied and depopulated remains uncertain. Palestinian academic sources confirm that it was targeted during Operation Yoav, which began on 15 October and formally ended on 4 November 1948.

Hiribya and other Palestinian communities in the region came under aerial bombardment on 15–16 October. A subsequent ground attack against the village was planned but postponed after reports indicated that a substantial Egyptian force was stationed there.

The available evidence indicates that Hiribya remained outside Israeli control during at least part of Operation Yoav and probably fell in early November, shortly after the occupation of nearby al-Majdal.

Palestine Open Maps and Our Palestine assign 5 November 1948 as the date of depopulation. PalQuest and Walid Khalidi, however, describe the timing more cautiously as early November. Accordingly, 5 November may be used as an estimated date, but it should not be presented as an indisputably documented day of occupation.

Israeli Settlements on Hiribya's Lands

Yad Mordechai was founded in 1943 near Hiribya. It was not originally established on the Palestinian village site, but after the Nakba it expanded onto lands belonging to Hiribya.

Zikim was established in 1949 on Hiribya's lands. Karmia was established on additional village land in 1950. The statement that Zikim was founded in 1948 is therefore inaccurate.

Hiribya Today

The mosque and the house of Muhammad Atiyya are identified by Walid Khalidi's village survey as the principal surviving buildings. The mosque was subsequently converted into a warehouse.

Cactus, camomile, shrubs and sycamore trees grow across the village site. Wheat, avocados and other crops are cultivated on the surrounding lands.

Sources

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