Al-Khalisa



Al-Khalisa was a depopulated Palestinian village in the Safad Subdistrict. Its population was officially recorded as 1,840 in 1945 and was later estimated at approximately 2,134 in 1948. The village was occupied in May 1948, its inhabitants were displaced, and many of its houses were subsequently burned or destroyed.

The village extended across a low hill on the northwestern edge of the al-Hula Plain, a location that protected it from the seasonal flooding associated with Lake al-Hula. It overlooked the plain to the north and south and stood on the main road running from al-Mutilla in the north to Safad and Tiberias in the south, close to the Lebanese border. Its proximity to both Lebanon and Syria gave al-Khalisa particular importance as a commercial centre.

Population of al-Khalisa

The 1931 census recorded 1,369 inhabitants living in 259 houses: 1,340 Muslims, 26 Christians, and three Jews. The population rose to 1,840 in 1945, comprising 1,820 Muslims and 20 Christians. A later estimate placed the village's population at approximately 2,134 in 1948 and the number of houses at 403. In 1998, the number of refugees from al-Khalisa and their descendants was estimated at 13,108.

Population Figures for al-Khalisa

Year	Population*
1596	160
Late nineteenth century	Approximately 50
1931	1,369
1945	1,840
1948 estimate	Approximately 2,134
Estimated refugees and descendants, 1998	13,108

* The figures for 1596, 1931, and 1945 are historical counts or official statistics. The 1948 and 1998 figures are later estimates rather than census totals.

Number of Houses in al-Khalisa

Year	Number of houses
1931	259
1948 estimate	403

* The 1931 figure is from the official census; the 1948 figure is a later estimate.

Economic Life in al-Khalisa

- Al-Khalisa's economy was based on agriculture, livestock raising, and commerce. The village benefited from fertile land and from its strategic location near the Lebanese and Syrian borders.
- Its position encouraged trade with nearby Palestinian, Lebanese, and Syrian communities. In the years before the Nakba, the villagers held a weekly market every Tuesday, known as the Tuesday Market, where agricultural produce, textiles, and locally made goods were sold. Local accounts state that merchants from Safad offered to lease the market for 11,000 Palestinian pounds, but the villagers declined the offer; this amount has not been independently confirmed in the principal statistical sources.
- The residents obtained drinking water from several springs.

Land of al-Khalisa

In 1944/45, 3,775 dunams were devoted to cereal cultivation, while 5,586 dunams were irrigated or used for orchards.

Land Ownership in al-Khalisa

Ownership category	Area (dunams)*
Palestinian ownership	10,773
Jewish ownership	0
Public land	507
Total	**11,280**

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres.

Land Use in al-Khalisa, 1944/45

Land-use category	Palestinian ownership (dunams)*	Public land (dunams)*	Total (dunams)*
Irrigated land and orchards	5,586	0	5,586
Cereal cultivation	3,775	0	3,775
Cultivable land	**9,361**	**0**	**9,361**
Built-up area	20	0	20
Uncultivated land	1,392	507	1,899
Total land area	**10,773**	**507**	**11,280**

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres.

Education in al-Khalisa

The village had one elementary school for boys, which also admitted pupils from neighbouring villages.

Occupation and Depopulation of al-Khalisa

On 11 May 1948, the Haganah rejected al-Khalisa's request for an “agreement.” Israeli historian Benny Morris writes that the villagers, believing themselves to be in danger, decided to leave. News that Safad, the subdistrict capital, had fallen on the same day also influenced their decision. Yigal Allon, commander of Operation Yiftach, sought to remove as much of the area's Palestinian population as possible during the campaign, which provides important context for the rejection of the proposed truce.

Zionist forces probably entered al-Khalisa shortly afterwards during Operation

Yiftach, the wider military offensive in eastern Galilee. Plan Dalet had called for the occupation of the British police station in the village, although the precise date on which that order was implemented is unclear.

Villagers interviewed in later years by Palestinian historian Nafez Nazzal provided a more detailed account. They stated that most residents left after hearing of Safad's fall and sought refuge in Hunin to the northwest. The village militia reportedly remained for several more days, until al-Khalisa came under heavy fire from the direction of the Jewish settlement of Manara and an armoured unit was seen approaching. Because Zionist forces controlled the roads, the militiamen withdrew through the hills to Hunin. The villagers were subsequently displaced from there into Lebanon.

In the following weeks, some villagers returned briefly to retrieve money buried on their land or to harvest tobacco and grain. They reported that Israeli forces had burned and destroyed many houses and that the village had been left in ruins. These details derive from later oral testimony and should be distinguished from the official demographic and land records.

Israeli Settlement on al-Khalisa's Lands

Kiryat Shmona was established on the village site in 1950.

Al-Khalisa Today

Stone rubble from the village houses marks the site. The former school and several British Mandate administrative buildings remain, as do the village mosque and its minaret. The level land surrounding the site has been used for cultivation by Kiryat Shmona, while the mountainous areas are wooded or used as pasture. Kiryat Shmona, established in 1950, occupies the former village site.

Sources

- Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question (PalQuest): al-Khalisa.
- Palestine Remembered: al-Khalisa.
- Government of Palestine, Village Statistics, April 1945, reproduced by Palestine Remembered.