Our Palestine — Depopulated village — Safed — 31 October 1948

Al-Malikiyya

al-Malikiyya: A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Safad District

al-Malikiyya was a Palestinian village in the Safad District, situated in the mountains of Upper Galilee approximately 15.5 km from Safad, at an average elevation of about 675 metres above sea level and less than half a kilometre from the Lebanese frontier. The village remained part of Lebanon until the final demarcation of the Lebanon–Palestine boundary in 1923. During the Nakba and the occupation of Palestine in 1948, al-Malikiyya changed hands repeatedly between Arab and Zionist/Israeli forces. Israeli occupation forces finally captured it in late October during Operation Hiram, when the Ninth Battalion of the Sheva' (Seventh) Brigade attacked from the south under air cover.

Location of al-Malikiyya

al-Malikiyya stood in the mountains of Upper Galilee on the northern slope of a hill, less than half a kilometre from the Lebanese frontier.

It was approximately 15.5 km from Safad and had an average elevation of about 675 metres above sea level.

A secondary road connected the village with a main road leading to Safad and with neighboring villages and the coastal highway to the west.

Nearby Palestinian and Lebanese localities included Qadas, al-Nabi Yusha', Dayshum, 'Alma, Saliha, 'Aytarun, and Marun al-Ras.

al-Malikiyya and the Lebanon–Palestine Frontier

An important feature of al-Malikiyya's modern history is that the village remained part of Lebanon during the first years following the First World War.

This situation continued until 1923, when the final Lebanon–Palestine frontier was demarcated and al-Malikiyya was placed within British-administered Palestine and subsequently the Safad District.

The village therefore retained close geographic and social ties with the Jabal 'Amil region and communities lying on both sides of the newly established frontier.

al-Malikiyya through History

Walid Khalidi suggests that al-Malikiyya may have stood on the site of an earlier settlement known as Caphargun, although the identification is presented as tentative.

The Arab geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi, who died in 1229, recorded a tradition that the villagers possessed a large wooden platter they believed had belonged to the Prophet Muhammad.

In 1596, al-Malikiyya was a village in the nahiya of Tibnin within the liwa of Safad and had an estimated population of approximately 369.

The inhabitants paid taxes on wheat and barley as well as goats and beehives.

In the late nineteenth century, travellers described al-Malikiyya as a village of stone-and-mud houses on a plain east of a wadi. Its population was estimated at 200–300 and olive cultivation was prominent.

Architecture of al-Malikiyya

The village had a roughly square layout, with houses clustered closely together.

The houses were described in the late nineteenth century as being built of stone and mud.

A police post stood near the village to the southeast.

The built-up area amounted to approximately 55 dunums in the 1944/45 statistics.

Water Supply

In the late nineteenth century, al-Malikiyya obtained water from a nearby wadi.

In the Mandate period, rainwater was also collected in wells and cisterns for household use, including a well east of the village site.

Water resources and the surrounding uplands supported both agriculture and livestock raising.

Population of al-Malikiyya

The inhabitants of al-Malikiyya were Muslim.

Because the village remained administratively within Lebanon until the 1923 boundary settlement, this article does not present a 1922 Palestine census figure

for al-Malikiyya as though the village had already been part of Mandatory Palestine.

Population of al-Malikiyya in selected years

Year	Population	Nature of figure
1596	369	Estimate derived from Ottoman records
Late nineteenth century	Approximately 200–300	Historical estimate
1931	254	Official Government of Palestine census; all Muslim
1944/45	360	Official statistics
1948	418	Later estimate published by Palestine Remembered
Estimated refugees in 1998	2,565	Later estimate published by Palestine Remembered
The 1948 and 1998 figures are later estimates and should not be treated as official British Mandate census figures.		

Number of Houses in al-Malikiyya

Number of houses in al-Malikiyya

Year	Number of houses	Nature of figure
1931	48	Official Government of Palestine census
1948	78	Later estimate published by Palestine Remembered
The 1948 house count is a later estimate rather than an official Mandate census figure.		

Education and Public Services

Khalidi's principal PalQuest entry does not provide sufficiently documented information concerning an independent school in al-Malikiyya, its founding date, or enrollment.

No unsupported educational details are therefore added.

A police post southeast of the village is, however, explicitly documented in the principal source.

Economic Life in al-Malikiyya

Agriculture and livestock raising were the principal sources of livelihood.

The villagers cultivated cereals, olives, and fruit.

In the 1942/43 season, approximately 105 dunums were planted with olive trees in the northern, northeastern, southern, and southwestern parts of the village lands.

In 1944/45, 4,225 dunums were devoted to cereal cultivation.

The 105-dunum olive figure should not be added as a separate category to the 1944/45 land-use table because it refers to an earlier agricultural season.

Land Ownership in al-Malikiyya

The total registered land area of al-Malikiyya was 7,328 dunums in the 1944/45 statistics.

Total	**7,328**
Ownership category	**Area in dunums**
Palestinian	7,326
Transferred to Zionists	0
Communal	2

No land was recorded in the category “Transferred to Zionists.” Almost all registered land was Palestinian, with only two dunums classified as public/communal.

Land Use in al-Malikiyya, 1944/45

Total	7,326	2	7,328
Land use	**Palestinian**	**Communal/Public**	**Total**
Cereals	4,225	0	4,225
Built-up area	55	0	55
Non-cultivable land	3,046	2	3,048

The detailed categories above reconcile exactly with the registered total of 7,328 dunums.

PalQuest's online presentation also displays a cultivable-land subtotal of 4,725 dunums while explicitly listing only 4,225 dunums of cereals in that category. Adding the displayed subtotal to the built-up and non-cultivable figures would exceed the village's total registered area.

This article therefore follows the individual category figures that reconcile with the total rather than inventing an undocumented 500-dunum category.

The 105 dunums of olive groves refer to the 1942/43 season and are therefore discussed separately rather than added again to the 1944/45 table.

Historical and Archaeological Background

Khalidi tentatively associates al-Malikiyya with an earlier settlement known as Caphargun.

Yaqut al-Hamawi's thirteenth-century reference and the Ottoman records of 1596 demonstrate a long history of settlement at al-Malikiyya.

The principal approved sources used here do not provide a detailed inventory of archaeological remains within the village site, so no unsupported archaeological identifications are added.

The First Battles for al-Malikiyya in 1948

Because of its strategic position directly on the Lebanese frontier, al-Malikiyya became the site of repeated fighting in 1948.

Palestinian historian Hani al-Hindi states that the village was initially held by the Second Yarmuk Battalion of the Arab Liberation Army under Lieutenant Colonel Adib al-Shishakli.

According to his account, Palmach forces captured al-Malikiyya on the night of 12 May 1948, and Arab forces retook it the following day.

A different chronology reproduced by Khalidi cites contemporary reporting that Israeli forces entered the village on 15 May, after which Lebanese army units crossed the frontier and regained control later that day.

This disagreement illustrates why al-Malikiyya cannot accurately be assigned a single occupation date for the spring of 1948.

The May Battles and the Recapture of al-Malikiyya

Israeli forces launched another assault in the al-Malikiyya area on 20 May, according to accounts reproduced by Khalidi.

Later that month, the Haganah carried out an elaborate maneuver to retake al-Malikiyya and neighboring Qadas.

Israeli forces first attacked the Lebanese garrison to induce it to request reinforcements. An armored column then crossed into Lebanese territory by another route and approached al-Malikiyya from the rear while posing as Lebanese reinforcements.

The force surprised the actual Lebanese reinforcements and then entered al-Malikiyya in the early hours of 29 May 1948.

According to the military account reproduced by Khalidi, the village itself was

empty when the force entered.

Although Arab and Zionist accounts differ over some dates in the early fighting, both agree that al-Malikiyya was in Zionist hands at the end of May.

The Lebanese Army Recaptures al-Malikiyya

Control of the village did not remain settled after the May fighting.

On 7 June 1948, the Lebanese army successfully recaptured al-Malikiyya.

Lebanese and other Arab forces retained the village throughout the summer, and al-Malikiyya remained an important frontier position on the northern front.

A late-May date found in some summary tables should therefore not be treated as the village's final occupation date.

Operation Hiram and the Final Occupation of al-Malikiyya

In late October 1948, al-Malikiyya lay at the northeastern edge of the area targeted by Operation Hiram.

Operation Hiram ran from 28 to 31 October and aimed to occupy the remaining Arab-held areas of Upper Galilee.

At the broader operational level, the Sheva' (Seventh), Carmeli, Golani, and 'Oded brigades participated; PalQuest's operation metadata also associates Giv'ati with the offensive.

Khalidi's dedicated village account is more specific regarding the final attack on al-Malikiyya. The Ninth Battalion of the Sheva' Brigade approached from the south, exploiting the fact that the village defenses had been prepared primarily against an attack from the east.

The battalion attacked under Israeli air cover and captured al-Malikiyya in late October 1948.

If some inhabitants had returned to the village during the period of Arab control in the summer, they apparently fled again during this final assault.

- Military operation associated with the final occupation: Operation Hiram.
- Operation Hiram: 28–31 October 1948.
- First Palmach capture according to Hani al-Hindi: night of 12 May.
- Early Arab recapture: the following day according to al-Hindi.
- Alternative account of the first major battle: 15 May, followed by a Lebanese recapture the same day.
- Zionist recapture: 29 May 1948.
- Lebanese army recapture: 7 June 1948.
- Final Israeli occupation: late October 1948.
- Unit responsible for the final attack: Ninth Battalion of the Sheva' (Seventh) Brigade.
- Final assault: approach from the south under air cover.
- Villagers who may have returned during the summer apparently left during the final assault.

Why al-Malikiyya Has No Single 1948 Occupation Date

al-Malikiyya differs from many depopulated Palestinian villages because control of the village did not change once and remain settled.

Between May and October 1948, it changed hands repeatedly between Arab and Lebanese forces on one side and Zionist/Israeli forces on the other.

A date such as 28 or 29 May therefore records one phase of military control rather than the end of the fighting over the village.

The final occupation—the one after which Arab forces did not regain al-Malikiyya—occurred in late October during Operation Hiram.

Israeli Settlement on al-Malikiyya's Lands

After the Nakba, an Israeli settlement bearing the name Malkiyya was established on village land.

- Malkiyya: established in 1949 southeast of the former Palestinian village site on al-Malikiyya's lands.

al-Malikiyya Today

According to the field description published by Walid Khalidi in *All That Remains*, the former village site lies within a fenced military zone and is inaccessible.

Because access was restricted, the principal field account does not provide a detailed inventory of structures surviving inside the closed area.

Palestine Remembered preserves photographs and historical material relating to the site, including images of rubble and olive, pomegranate, and fig trees, together with maps and oral-history material.

In June 2026, the site also published a series of images taken from a historical filmed visit made after the village's occupation. Their 2026 upload date should not be confused with a 2026 field survey; the images themselves are historical material.

The principal systematic site description used here therefore remains Khalidi's field documentation published in 1992. The approved sources do not provide a sufficiently comprehensive independent contemporary survey to verify the precise condition of every part of al-Malikiyya in 2026.

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: al-Malikiyya
- PalQuest – Operation Hiram

- PalQuest – Operation Yiftach
- Palestine Remembered – al-Malikiyya, Safad District
- Palestine Remembered – al-Malikiyya entry from All That Remains
- Village Statistics 1945 – Safad Sub-District, built-up and non-cultivable land
- Government of Palestine Census, 1931 – Safad Sub-District
- Institute for Palestine Studies – All That Remains, Walid Khalidi