Ma'alul



Ma'lul: A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Nazareth District

Ma'lul was a Palestinian village in the Nazareth District, situated on the northern edge of Wadi al-Mujaydil approximately 6 kilometres west of Nazareth, at an average elevation of about 275 metres above sea level. Its population reached 690 in the 1944/1945 statistics, including 490 Muslims and 200 Christians. A special unit of the Golani Brigade occupied Ma'lul on 14–15 July 1948 during the second stage of Operation Dekel. Its inhabitants were displaced and most of its houses were destroyed during the Nakba and the occupation of Palestine in 1948.

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Nazareth
Distance from district center	6 km west of Nazareth
Average Elevation	275 m above sea level
Population in 1931	390
Number of Houses in 1931	90
Population in 1944/1945	690 – 490 Muslims and 200 Christians
Estimated Population in 1948	About 800 – a later demographic estimate, not an official census
Total Land Area in 1945	4,698 dunams – of which 1,949 dunams Arab-owned, 2,719 dunams Jewish-owned and 30 dunams public land
Attack and Depopulation	A crack unit of the Golani Brigade occupied the village in the second stage of Operation Dekel, on 14 or 15 July 1948, on the eve of the capture of Nazareth. According to Morris as cited by Khalidi, the village was completely emptied of its residents and its houses levelled.
Final Israeli Control	14–15 July 1948; the sources differ: Morris states that it was occupied one day before the capture of Nazareth, on 15 July 1948, while a United Press report at the time indicated that it was occupied one day earlier
Military Operation	Operation Dekel (second stage)
Military Unit	A crack unit of the Golani Brigade, according to the History of the War of Independence as cited by PalQuest
Cause of Depopulation	Direct military assault by Israeli occupation forces, after which the village was completely emptied of its residents and its houses levelled

Item	Information
Settlements Documented on Village Lands	Timrat, completed in 1983 1.5 km west of the village site, part of it on village land; and a military base established on village land. The settlement of Timurim had been established at Ma'lul in June 1948, possibly on village lands according to Morris, and was later moved to a site north of Qiryat Gat

Location

Ma'lul stood on the northern edge of Wadi al-Mujaydil, facing the Palestinian village of al-Mujaydil approximately 2 kilometres to the south.

The village was approximately 6 kilometres west of Nazareth and had an average elevation of about 275 metres above sea level.

Two springs lay near Ma'lul, one to the northeast and another to the northwest.

A secondary road linked the village with the Nazareth–Haifa highway, which passed a short distance southeast of the site.

Ma'lul Through History

Ma'lul may have been established on the site of an earlier settlement known as Mahalol during the Roman period and later identified by the Crusaders as Maula.

In 1596, Ma'lul was a village in the nahiya of Tiberias in the Safad district, with an estimated population of approximately 77.

The inhabitants paid taxes on wheat, barley, goats, beehives, and other forms of agricultural production.

In the late nineteenth century, Ma'lul was described as an adobe-built village situated on a hill, with an estimated population of approximately 280.

Architecture and Public Facilities

The houses of Ma'lul were closely clustered and constructed of stone and mud, stone and cement, or concrete.

The population included both Muslims and Christians. The village contained a mosque and two churches, one Greek Orthodox and the other Greek Catholic.

Residents obtained domestic water from springs and wells in and around the village.

The Arab built-up area covered 29 dunams in the 1944/1945 statistics, while 35 built-up dunams were recorded under Jewish ownership within the statistical unit.

Population

The 1922 census recorded 346 inhabitants in Ma'lul.

By the 1931 census, the population had increased to 390 people living in 90 houses.

According to the 1944/1945 statistics, the village had 690 inhabitants: 490 Muslims and 200 Christians.

The estimate of approximately 800 inhabitants in 1948 is a later demographic estimate rather than an official Mandate census figure.

Palestine Remembered estimates the number of refugees and their descendants at approximately 4,915 in 1998.

Population of Ma'lul

Year	Population	Note
1596	About 77	Historical estimate based on Ottoman records

Year	Population	Note
Late nineteenth century	About 280	Historical estimate
1912	296	Historical figure preserved in local documentation
1922	346	Official census
1931	390	Official census
1944/1945	690	490 Muslims and 200 Christians
1948	About 800	Later estimate
1998	4,915	Estimate of refugees and their descendants

Number of Houses

The 1931 census recorded 90 houses in Ma'lul.

The figure of approximately 184 houses for 1948 is a later estimate rather than an official census count.

The Ma'lul Land Dispute

Land ownership was one of the most important issues in Ma'lul's history during the British Mandate.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the villagers cultivated land much of which was owned by the Beirut-based Sursuq family.

In 1921, the Sursuqs sold most of Ma'lul's lands, except for approximately 2,000 dunams, to the Zionist Palestine Land Development Company.

Because the remaining land was insufficient to support the villagers, the company, at the request of the Mandate government, agreed to lease approximately 3,000 additional dunams back to them until 1927, with an option allowing the villagers to purchase the land before the lease expired.

In 1927, a lawyer representing the inhabitants stated that they wished to exercise their right to purchase the land. The company, however, claimed that the deadline had passed and that ownership had been transferred to the Jewish National Fund.

A prolonged legal dispute followed, while villagers continued cultivating part of the contested land.

In 1937, the Mandate authorities attempted to arrange a land exchange under which sufficient land near Ma'lul would be made available to the villagers in return for state land near Baysan being transferred to the Jewish National Fund, but the proposal was not implemented.

Negotiations resumed in 1946, producing an agreement in principle under which the JNF would relinquish 3,700 dunams near Ma'lul in exchange for 5,433 dunams near Baysan. Disputes over the proposed Baysan land prevented implementation, and the issue remained unresolved as late as May 1947.

Land Ownership

According to the 1944/1945 statistics, the Ma'lul statistical unit covered a total of 4,698 dunams.

Arab ownership amounted to 1,949 dunams, Jewish ownership to 2,719 dunams, while 30 dunams were classified as public land.

Total	**4,698**
Ownership Category	**Area in Dunams**
Arab ownership	1,949
Jewish ownership	2,719
Public land	30

Agriculture and Economic Life

The inhabitants of Ma'lul depended primarily on agriculture and livestock raising.

Cereals and olives were among the principal crops, and villagers used a manual press to produce olive oil.

According to the 1944/1945 statistics, 784 Arab-owned dunams were devoted to cereals, while 650 Arab-owned dunams were irrigated or used for plantations.

A further 2,678 dunams of cereal cultivation were recorded under Jewish ownership.

Palestine Remembered records approximately 700 dunams planted with olive trees. This represents a crop category within cultivated land and should not be added separately to the overall land-use total.

Total	**1,949**	**2,719**	**30**	**4,698**
Type of Use	**Arab**	**Jewish**	**Public**	**Total**
Irrigated and plantation land	650	0	0	650
Cereals	784	2,678	0	3,462
Built-up area	29	35	0	64
Uncultivable land	486	6	30	522

Archaeology

In the late nineteenth century, a substantial Roman mausoleum known as Qasr al-Dayr stood immediately outside Ma'lul.

The mausoleum provides evidence of habitation or activity at the site during the Roman period.

Remains of old building foundations, graves, and other archaeological features were also recorded within the village site.

These remains support the possible association between modern Ma'lul and the settlement known as Mahalol in Roman times and Maula in Crusader sources.

Operation Dekel

Operation Dekel began on **8 July 1948** and continued until **18 July**.

The operation aimed to expand Israeli control over western and Lower Galilee and resulted in the occupation of extensive areas, including Nazareth and numerous Palestinian villages.

Forces from the **Sheva' (Seventh), Carmeli, and Golani Brigades** participated in the operation.

During its second stage, Israeli forces advanced toward Saffuriyya, Nazareth, and the surrounding Palestinian villages.

The Occupation and Depopulation of Ma'lul

Ma'lul was occupied during the second stage of Operation Dekel as Israeli forces closed in on Nazareth.

The sources differ slightly over the precise date. Palestine Remembered gives **15 July 1948**, while PalQuest's Operation Dekel account places the occupation of Ma'lul and al-Mujaydil on **14 or 15 July**.

This article therefore uses the date range **14–15 July 1948**.

PalQuest, transmitting an Israeli military account, states that a **special unit of the Golani Brigade** occupied Ma'lul and nearby al-Mujaydil.

Ma'lul was completely emptied of its Palestinian inhabitants, and most of its houses were subsequently destroyed.

Nazareth itself surrendered on 16 July, immediately after the occupation of Ma'lul.

Information derived from Israeli military sources is cited here only as transmitted through Walid Khalidi and PalQuest and not through direct reliance on the original Israeli sources.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Settlement established at the village before its occupation	June 1948	Morris, as cited by Khalidi, states that the settlement of Timurim was established at Ma'lul in June 1948, the month before its occupation; this early date may indicate that it was erected on lands belonging to the village rather than on the village site. The settlement was later transferred to another location north of Qiryat Gat.
Beginning of the military operation	8 July 1948	Operation Dekel began on the night of 8 July; during it most of Lower Galilee, including Nazareth, was occupied, with the Sheva' (Seventh), Golani and Carmeli Brigades taking part.
Final occupation	14–15 July 1948	A crack unit of the Golani Brigade occupied Ma'lul and neighbouring al-Mujaydil in the second stage of Operation Dekel as the Israeli army closed in on Nazareth. Morris states that it was occupied on 15 July, one day before the capture of Nazareth, while a United Press report at the time indicated that it was occupied one day earlier; Morris adds that the village was completely emptied of its residents and its houses levelled, the sources giving no date for this.
Settlement on village lands	1983	The Jewish Agency completed the settlement of Timrat 1.5 km west of the village site, part of it on village land; an agricultural training farm of the same name had operated near the site in the 1950s and was later abandoned.

Settlements and Installations on Ma'lul's Lands

Nahalal

Walid Khalidi and PalQuest do not identify Nahalal as a settlement established on

Ma'lul's lands. This article therefore does not list it as such without more specific cadastral evidence.

Timmorim

An account transmitted by Walid Khalidi states that Timmorim was established near Ma'lul in June 1948, approximately one month before the village was occupied.

The early date suggests that it may have been established on Ma'lul's lands rather than on the village site itself. Timmorim was later moved to another location north of Qiryat Gat.

Timrat

An agricultural training farm known as Timrat operated near the Ma'lul site during the 1950s, replacing the original Timmorim location, but was later abandoned.

Plans to reestablish Timrat were developed in the late 1970s, and construction was completed in **1983**.

Timrat lies approximately 1.5 kilometres west of the Ma'lul village site, and part of it is located on village land.

Military Base

A military base was also established on Ma'lul's lands.

Kefar ha-Horesh, founded in 1933, and Migdal ha-'Emeq, founded in 1952, are located nearby but stand on lands that belonged to al-Mujaydil rather than Ma'lul, according to Walid Khalidi and PalQuest.

Settlements and Installations Associated with Ma'lul's Lands

Name	Year	Relationship to Ma'lul
Timmorim	1948	Established near Ma'lul, probably on village land rather than the village site; later relocated

Name	Year	Relationship to Ma'lul
Timrat training farm	1950s	Operated near the former village site and was later abandoned
Timrat	1983	Partly located on Ma'lul's lands, about 1.5 km west of the site
Military base	After 1948	Established on village land

Ma'lul After the Nakba

According to the field documentation relied upon by Walid Khalidi, much of the village site became covered by a pine forest planted after the Nakba.

The mosque and both churches survived, together with remnants of several houses and piles of stone from destroyed buildings.

Parts of the Muslim cemetery and several graves near the mosque also remained visible.

Olive and fig trees and cactus plants continued to grow throughout the site.

At the time of Khalidi's field documentation, the mosque and churches were reportedly used on occasion for purposes associated with livestock.

Later Palestinian documentation published by Palestine Remembered records Easter services at one of Ma'lul's churches in 2006, indicating that the church had subsequently been restored and returned to religious use.

Khalidi's earlier field description should therefore be distinguished from later restoration and religious activity at the site.

Sources

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- PalQuest: معلول.
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- Palestine Remembered: Ma'lul, Nazareth District.
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