Ishwa'



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[إشوع]

Ishwa' – A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Jerusalem Subdistrict

Ishwa' was a Palestinian village in the Jerusalem Subdistrict, situated approximately 20.5 km west of Jerusalem on a broad low hill on the southeastern slope of one of the western Jerusalem mountains, at an average elevation of about 275 meters above sea level.

Wadis bordered the village on the east and south. Ishwa' stood on the highway connecting Bayt Jibrin with the Jerusalem–Jaffa road, while secondary roads linked it to the surrounding villages, giving it an important position on the western approaches to the Jerusalem corridor.

The village experienced fighting as early as March 1948, when most inhabitants temporarily evacuated during a major British military intervention. The final occupation and expulsion occurred on 16 July 1948, when the Fourth Battalion of the Har'el Brigade entered Ishwa' during the second phase of Operation Dani and expelled those inhabitants who remained.

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Jerusalem
Region	al-'Arqub / western approaches to Jerusalem
Distance from Jerusalem	Approximately 20.5 km west
Average elevation	Approximately 275 m above sea level
Population, 1944/45	620
Estimated population, 1948	719
Total land area	5,522 dunums
Final occupation and expulsion	16 July 1948
Military operation	Operation Dani
Village-specific military unit	Fourth Battalion, Har'el Brigade
Israeli settlement established on village land	Eshta'ol, founded in 1949 on lands belonging jointly to Ishwa' and 'Islin

Location and Geography

Ishwa' stood on a broad, low hill on the southeastern slope of a mountain, with wadis bordering it to the east and south.

Its position lay close to the transition between the Jerusalem hills and the lower inland country, and the road through the village connected the Bayt Jibrin area

with the Jerusalem–Jaffa highway.

Secondary roads linked Ishwa' with nearby villages, while olive groves and other cultivated land spread across lower ground beneath the settlement.

Neighboring Villages

Palestinian maps and later local documentation indicate the following approximate geographical relationships:

- North: Dayr Ayyub.
- Northwest: 'Islin.
- Northeast: Bayt Mahsir.
- East: Kasla.
- Southeast: Dayr al-Hawa.
- South: 'Artuf.
- Southwest: Sar'a.

These directions represent approximate geographical relationships rather than substitutes for historical cadastral boundaries.

Name and Ancient History

Khalidi associates Ishwa' with the ancient locality of **Eshta'ol** and states that the Palestinian village is thought to have stood on or near the site of the Canaanite settlement.

The place-name continued into the Roman period, when the locality belonged administratively to Eleutheropolis, or Bayt Jibrin.

The identification is not conclusive, however. Dayr Abu al-Qabus, approximately half a kilometer north of Ishwa', has also been proposed as the location of Roman Eshta'ol.

Local oral tradition associates the modern name Ishwa' with the prophet Joshua, while other interpretations see it as a later development of the older Eshta'ol

name. No single etymology can therefore be treated as certain.

Ishwa' and 'Islin between the Sixteenth and Eighteenth Centuries

Khalidi states that settlement appears to have shifted approximately half a kilometer northwest toward the site of 'Islin during the sixteenth century.

When 'Islin later went out of use, probably in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, Ishwa' was apparently repopulated.

For this reason, this article does not reproduce the widely circulated claim that Ishwa' had 450 inhabitants in 1596. Khalidi instead gives **approximately 450 inhabitants in 1875**.

Ishwa' in the Nineteenth Century

The population was approximately 450 in 1875 according to the historical source cited by Khalidi.

By the late nineteenth century, the village stood near the foot of a hill and olive trees covered the lower lands beneath it.

The Survey of Western Palestine recorded Ishwa' as a rural agricultural settlement along the western foothills of the Jerusalem mountains.

Built Form

Ishwa' had a star-shaped plan, with houses extending outward along the roads connecting the village to neighboring communities.

Most houses were built of stone.

Newer construction spread southward and northwestward toward 'Islin during the final decades before the Nakba.

The 1944/45 Village Statistics classified approximately 18 dunums as built-up land.

Population of Ishwa'

The official 1922 Census of Palestine recorded 379 inhabitants in Ishwa', all Muslims.

By the 1931 census, the population had risen to 468, again all Muslims, living in 126 occupied houses.

The 1944/45 Village Statistics recorded 620 Arabs.

Palestine Remembered later estimated the population at 719 in 1948 and the number of refugees and their descendants at 4,417 in 1998. These are retrospective estimates rather than official British Mandate census counts.

Year	Population	Nature of Figure / Notes
1875	Approximately 450	Historical estimate cited by Khalidi
1922	379	Official census; all Muslims
1931	468	Official census; all Muslims
1944/45	620	Official Village Statistics; all Arabs
1948	719	Later estimate, not an official census
1998	4,417 refugees	Later estimate of refugees and their descendants

Number of Houses

Year	Houses	Nature of Figure
1931	126	Occupied houses recorded in the official census
1948	193	Later Palestine Remembered estimate, not an official census count

Education

Khalidi confirms that Ishwa' had an elementary school.

Later Palestinian local documentation states that formalized village education

began with a kuttab in 1935, when Shaykh Mustafa 'Umar Barghal of Bayt Nuba was brought to teach reading, arithmetic, Qur'an, and Arabic in the mosque arcade or rooms associated with the shrine of the prophet Joshua.

In the 1937–38 school year, a government school opened with one teacher and three elementary grades.

The school later expanded through the seventh elementary grade and received pupils from neighboring villages. A dedicated school building was established west of the village in an area locally known as Wa'rat al-Shaykh Gharib.

These details derive from the village monograph *Ishwa': A Palestinian Village* and later local documentation; Khalidi's principal entry confirms the existence of the elementary school but does not provide this full chronology.

Mosque and the Joshua Tradition

The inhabitants were Muslims and maintained a village mosque known as Ishwa', associated in local tradition with the prophet Joshua.

Community accounts also describe rooms used for Qur'anic teaching and a public space around the mosque that served as a focus of village social life.

Water Supply

'Ayn Ishwa', north of the village, was the principal source of drinking water.

Residents also relied on smaller springs, wells, and rainwater cisterns.

Later local documentation describes a public well beside the mosque courtyard, with several openings and surrounding troughs used for washing and other domestic needs. Residents of nearby villages reportedly visited the well during periods of drought.

Land Ownership

The total land area recorded for Ishwa' in the 1944/45 Village Statistics was 5,522

dunums.

Using Palestine Remembered's simplified terminology:

Ownership Category	Area in Dunums
Palestinian	5,456
Transferred to Zionists	0
Communal/Public	66
Total	**5,522**

The official Village Statistics use the original categories Arab and Public: 5,456 dunums were Arab land and 66 dunums were public. No land was recorded under the Jewish category.

Land Use in 1944/45

Use	Arab	Public	Total
Cereals	1,911	0	1,911
Plantations and irrigable land	473	0	473
Built-up land	18	0	18
Non-cultivable land	3,054	66	3,120
Total	**5,456**	**66**	**5,522**

Cultivable land totaled 2,384 dunums, approximately 43 percent of the village's recorded area.

Built-up and non-cultivable land totaled 3,138 dunums, approximately 57 percent.

Palestine Remembered also records approximately 414 dunums planted with olive trees. This is a crop-specific figure within the agricultural categories and should not be added separately to the total.

Economic Life

Agriculture was the principal source of livelihood, supplemented by livestock raising and small-scale commerce.

Most farming was rain-fed. Villagers cultivated cereals, olives, grapes, and fruit trees.

In 1944/45, 1,911 dunums were devoted to cereals and 473 dunums to plantations and irrigable land.

The village also contained several small shops serving local everyday needs.

Archaeological Sites

Two important khirbas lay southeast of the village: **Khirbat al-Shaykh Ibrahim** and **Khirbat Hammada**.

One contained wall remains, rubble from collapsed buildings, and caves that had once been inhabited.

The other contained similar caves, rock-cut cisterns, and an olive press.

These remains demonstrate older settlement in the area but do not by themselves prove uninterrupted demographic continuity between ancient communities and the modern Palestinian village.

Fighting around Ishwa' in March 1948

Ishwa' experienced military conflict several months before its final occupation.

On 18 March 1948, a skirmish took place on the outskirts. According to a report attributed to Jewish sources and relayed by the *New York Times*, a Haganah armored car became stuck in mud outside the village and was attacked by Arab fighters, killing its crew.

The following week, Palestinian fighters commanded by 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni

attacked the nearby Zionist settlement of Hartuv.

British Intervention, 22–23 March 1948

On 22 March, British forces intervened and shelled Ishwa' with high-explosive and smoke rounds.

Reports stated that villagers and Arab forces based in the village evacuated the site.

The following day, approximately 600 British troops entered Ishwa' as well as neighboring 'Artuf and Bayt Mahsir.

The sources do not clearly record when residents returned, but the later Haganah account of expulsions in July indicates that at least some inhabitants did return after the March events.

Operation Dani

Operation Dani began on 9 July 1948 and continued through 18 July.

It was one of the largest Israeli offensives of the “Ten Days” between the two truces and was designed to expand Israeli-held territory on the central front and widen the corridor to Jerusalem.

After the capture of Lydda and Ramla in the first phase, the second phase, from 13 to 18 July, extended toward the Jerusalem corridor, Latrun, and the Ramallah road.

The Har'el Brigade was tasked with capturing a series of villages farther east, and Ishwa' was among the villages directly affected.

Final Occupation and Expulsion

According to the account cited by Khalidi from the *History of the War of Independence*, the **Fourth Battalion of the Har'el Brigade** entered Ishwa' on **16 July 1948**.

The advance was preceded by mortar fire. Some inhabitants fled as Har'el forces approached, while those who remained were expelled after the village was entered.

PalQuest's entry for nearby 'Artuf provides an additional village-specific detail: the **Second Platoon of B Company, Fourth Battalion**, first drove the inhabitants of Ishwa' and 'Islin out and then continued toward 'Artuf.

Palestine Remembered's statistical header and some later local sources list 18 July as the occupation date. Khalidi's detailed narrative, however, gives 16 July, which this article uses as the more specific date.

Stage	Date	Details
Early skirmish	18 March 1948	Fighting on the village outskirts during the struggle for the Jerusalem corridor
British shelling	22 March 1948	British forces shell Ishwa' during intervention in the fighting
British entry	23 March 1948	Approximately 600 British troops enter Ishwa', 'Artuf, and Bayt Mahsir after most residents temporarily evacuate
Beginning of Operation Dani	9 July 1948	Large Israeli offensive begins on the central front
Final occupation and expulsion	16 July 1948	Fourth Battalion of the Har'el Brigade enters Ishwa' and expels remaining inhabitants
Alternative secondary date	18 July 1948	Appears in the Palestine Remembered header and some local secondary sources, but differs from Khalidi's detailed chronology

Israeli Settlement on Ishwa's Lands

Eshta'ol: Established in 1949 on land belonging to both Ishwa' and neighboring 'Islin.

The settlement should therefore not be described as having been founded exclusively on Ishwa's lands; Khalidi explicitly connects it to the lands of both

villages.

Ishwa' Today

According to Walid Khalidi's field description in *All That Remains*, a few Palestinian houses remained scattered among the buildings of Eshta'ol and were being used as residences or storage buildings.

The village cemetery beside the settlement's administrative building had been leveled and planted with grass.

At the cemetery's southern edge, a cave contained the large millstone of a former grain mill.

Olive and carob trees continued to grow at the site together with trees planted later. A football field had been constructed at the western edge of the former village, where walls and fallen roofs of destroyed houses remained visible at the time of Khalidi's survey.

This description is based on fieldwork carried out before the publication of *All That Remains* in 1992 and should not be treated as direct verification of every feature in 2026.

Palestine Remembered contains later community documentation, including a photographed tour identified with 2021 and additional material uploaded in July 2025. Such material is useful for documenting continued Palestinian identification of the village site and its remains, but upload dates do not necessarily establish when every photograph was taken, and the material does not constitute a comprehensive current archaeological or architectural survey.

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Ishwa'
- PalQuest – Operation Dani
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- Palestine Remembered – Ishwa', Jerusalem
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