Dayr al-Hawa



Dayr al-Hawa – Depopulated Palestinian Village of the Jerusalem District

Dayr al-Hawa was a depopulated Palestinian village in the Jerusalem District. It stood on a high mountain summit in the western part of the district, approximately 18.5 kilometers west of Jerusalem, at an average elevation of about 650 meters above sea level.

Israeli occupation forces captured Dayr al-Hawa during the opening stage of Operation Ha-Har in October 1948. Walid Khalidi places its capture on the night of 18–19 October, or possibly the following night, by the Fourth Battalion of the Har'el

Brigade.

Location and Geography

Dayr al-Hawa stood on a high mountain top overlooking extensive areas to the west, north, and south.

The village lay approximately 18.5 kilometers west of Jerusalem at an average elevation of about 650 meters above sea level.

A secondary road linked Dayr al-Hawa with another road leading toward Bethlehem several kilometers to the southeast, while dirt tracks connected it with neighboring Palestinian villages.

Its surrounding lands bordered those of Dayr Aban to the west, Dayr al-Shaykh to the east, Sufla to the south, Bayt 'Itab to the southeast, and Kasla to the northeast, with 'Artuf and Bayt Mahsir farther north and northwest.

In the late nineteenth century, Dayr al-Hawa was described as standing on a knoll along a high ridge overlooking a deep valley to the north, with only a few tall houses at the time.

Name

The name Dayr al-Hawa may literally be rendered as “Monastery of the Air” or “Monastery of the Wind,” a name consistent with the village's high and exposed location.

Nineteenth-century visitors associated the name with the elevated, windswept site. The principal Palestinian sources, however, do not provide conclusive historical evidence identifying a particular monastery as the origin of the name.

The interpretation should therefore remain tentative.

Built Environment

Dayr al-Hawa had a generally rectangular layout, with newer construction extending along a northwest–southeast axis that followed the mountainous topography.

The houses were constructed of stone or mud, stood close together, and were separated by narrow lanes.

The official 1944/45 statistics classified approximately 4 dunams as built-up land.

Population and Houses

The inhabitants of Dayr al-Hawa were Muslims.

Year	Population	Note
1922	38	Official Census of Palestine: 18 males and 20 females, all Muslims
1931	47	Official census; all inhabitants were Muslims
1945	60	Official statistics; all inhabitants were Palestinian Arab Muslims
1948	About 70	Later demographic estimate, not an official Mandate census
1998	About 427 refugees and descendants	Later estimate published by Palestinian sources

The official 1931 census recorded 11 houses in Dayr al-Hawa.

The estimate of approximately 16 houses for 1948 is a later calculation rather than an official Government of Palestine census figure.

Palestine Remembered currently displays 18 inhabitants for 1922. The official census table shows that 18 was the number of males; together with 20 females, the correct total was 38.

Mosque and Maqam of Shaykh Sulayman

A mosque stood in the western part of Dayr al-Hawa and served the village's Muslim population.

The villagers also maintained a shrine dedicated to Shaykh Sulayman, a locally revered figure.

Education

Walid Khalidi and PalQuest do not document an independent formal school in Dayr al-Hawa before the Nakba.

No school, enrollment figure, or grade level is therefore attributed to the village without clearer Palestinian village-specific evidence.

Water Resources

The villagers obtained drinking water from two principal wells.

One was situated southeast of the village center and the other to the west.

The western water source is consistent with historical descriptions of a good water source on that side of the high village site.

Economic Life and Agriculture

Most of Dayr al-Hawa's agricultural land was mountainous, so cereals were cultivated primarily on the valley floors and less steep ground.

Apple, olive, fig, and almond trees were planted on the slopes, and agriculture was primarily rainfed.

In 1944/45, 1,565 dunams were allocated to cereals and 58 dunams were classified as plantations or irrigable land.

Palestine Remembered separately reports 501 dunams of olive groves. This figure cannot be combined directly with the official land-use table, whose plantation and irrigable category totals only 58 dunams. Olive cultivation is therefore documented without adding the 501-dunam figure to the official arithmetic.

Land Ownership, 1944/45

The total land area of Dayr al-Hawa was 5,907 dunams. Under the official Government of Palestine classification, ownership was distributed as follows:

Total	**5,907**
Ownership Category	**Area in Dunams**
Arab	4,660
Jewish	0
Public	1,247

The official table balances exactly: 4,660 + 1,247 = 5,907 dunams.

Palestine Remembered currently displays 1,347 dunams as Public land, a figure that does not reconcile with the total village area. This article therefore uses the official PalQuest figure of 1,247 dunams.

When reproducing Palestine Remembered's terminology, the ownership categories are “Palestinian,” “Transferred to Zionists,” and “Communal/Public.” No land in Dayr al-Hawa was recorded as “Transferred to Zionists” in these figures.

Land Use, 1944/45

Grand Total	**4,660**	**1,247**	**5,907**
Land Use	**Arab**	**Public**	**Total**
Cereals	1,565	0	1,565
Plantations and irrigable land	58	0	58

Grand Total	4,660	1,247	5,907
Land Use	**Arab**	**Public**	**Total**
Total cultivable/cultivated land	1,623	0	1,623
Non-cultivable land	3,033	1,247	4,280
Built-up land	4	0	4
Total non-cultivable and built-up	3,037	1,247	4,284

The official table balances exactly: 1,623 dunams of cultivated or cultivable land plus 4,284 dunams of built-up and non-cultivable land equal the total village area of 5,907 dunams.

Archaeological Site

Dayr al-Hawa stood on an older archaeological site.

Some ancient building stones and columns were reused by villagers in the construction of their houses.

Khalidi does not conclusively date all of these remains, so the site's archaeological material should not collectively be assigned to the Roman, Byzantine, or any other single period without additional specialist evidence.

Operation Ha-Har

Operation Ha-Har, meaning “the Mountain,” began at the end of the second truce. PalQuest formally dates the operation from 19 to 24 October 1948, although its opening assault began during the night of 18–19 October.

The operation aimed to widen the Israeli-held corridor to Jerusalem and link it with areas being conquered toward the Hebron hills.

The Har'el, Etzioni, and Giv'ati brigades participated in the operation at the broader operational level, while Egyptian forces defended several sectors.

At Dayr al-Hawa itself, the village-specific formation was the **Fourth Battalion of the Har'el Brigade**.

Occupation of Dayr al-Hawa

Dayr al-Hawa was among the first villages captured during Operation Ha-Har.

After Israeli units seized Dayr Aban from Egyptian forces, they turned toward nearby Dayr al-Hawa.

The villages were only about two kilometers apart, but Dayr al-Hawa stood approximately 300 meters higher than Dayr Aban, making the ascent militarily difficult.

Walid Khalidi places the capture of Dayr al-Hawa by the Fourth Battalion of the Har'el Brigade on the **night of 18–19 October 1948, or possibly the following night**.

The safest dating is therefore 18–20 October rather than treating 20 October or the later 29 October date found in one secondary index as an uncontested single-day occupation date.

Depopulation

The village-specific account does not provide a detailed description of what happened to the civilian population during the assault.

Khalidi records that the defending troops withdrew after the position was shelled.

He also cites Benny Morris's assessment that Operation Ha-Har commander Yigal Allon probably communicated to his officers that Arab civilian communities should not remain in the territory captured during the operation.

Because this is an inference rather than a documented written expulsion order specifically for Dayr al-Hawa, it is not presented as such. What is securely established is that the village was depopulated in the course of the military assault

and Operation Ha-Har.

Military Unit

The village-specific military formation responsible for the capture of Dayr al-Hawa was the **Fourth Battalion of the Har'el Brigade**.

Other brigades participated in Operation Ha-Har more broadly, but they should not be transferred to the village-level attribution when the principal source explicitly identifies Har'el's Fourth Battalion.

Occupation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
End of the second truce and renewed fighting	October 1948	Large-scale military operations resumed on the southern front and around the Jerusalem corridor.
Opening assault of Operation Ha-Har	Night of 18–19 October 1948	Israeli forces attacked Egyptian positions west of Dayr Aban.
Capture of Dayr Aban	Around 18–19 October 1948	Israeli forces seized Dayr Aban and then turned toward the much higher position at Dayr al-Hawa.
Occupation of Dayr al-Hawa	Night of 18–19 October or the following night	The Fourth Battalion of the Har'el Brigade captured the village after shelling and the withdrawal of the defenders.
Depopulation	During and immediately after the occupation	The source does not detail the civilians' route of departure, but the village was emptied during the operation.
Continuation of Operation Ha-Har	Until 24 October 1948	Israeli forces continued occupying villages southwest of Jerusalem and expanding toward the Hebron hills.
Destruction of the village	Exact date not documented	The village structures were later destroyed and parts of the site were leveled and bulldozed.

Israeli Settlements on Village Lands

According to Walid Khalidi and PalQuest, **no Israeli settlement was established on Dayr al-Hawa's village lands**.

Nes Harim was established in 1950 close to the northeastern edge of the former village site, but it does not stand on Dayr al-Hawa's land.

The village-specific record for neighboring Bayt 'Itab identifies Nes Harim as having been established on Bayt 'Itab's lands. It should therefore not be listed as a settlement on Dayr al-Hawa.

Dayr al-Hawa Today

According to the field description published in Walid Khalidi's *All That Remains*, rubble from the village houses was mixed with ruined agricultural terrace walls across the site.

Parts of the location had been leveled and bulldozed, with debris gathered into a large pile near one edge of the site.

Carob groves and olive trees covered terraces to the north, south, and west, while cactuses grew along the southern edge.

Ruined walls and large reinforced-concrete blocks remained in the western part of the site, together with a lookout tower erected in the bulldozed area.

The Jewish National Fund also developed the “Bicentennial Park” across parts of Dayr al-Hawa's lands and those of neighboring Palestinian villages. The tree-lined Hubert H. Humphrey Road passes through the park on former village land.

This account should not be treated as a comprehensive field verification of conditions in 2026. The principal description derives from the historical field survey associated with *All That Remains* and documents the site during that survey period rather than providing a complete current assessment.

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Dayr al-Hawa
- PalQuest – Operation Ha-Har
- Palestine Remembered – Dayr al-Hawa, Jerusalem District
- Palestine Remembered – Walid Khalidi's account of Dayr al-Hawa
- Palestinian Villages Encyclopedia – Dayr al-Hawa; supporting Palestinian documentation
- Government of Palestine – Census of Palestine 1922: Dayr al-Hawa, 38 inhabitants
- Institute for Palestine Studies – Walid Khalidi, All That Remains
- PalQuest – All That Remains: Methodology