

Bayt 'Itab



The remains of the fortress (left background) and rubble of village houses. (1986) [BAYT TEAM]

Bayt 'Itab - A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Jerusalem Subdistrict

Bayt 'Itab was a Palestinian village in the Jerusalem Subdistrict, situated approximately 17.5 km west of Jerusalem on a high mountain in the western Jerusalem hills, at an average elevation of about 675 meters above sea level.

The village overlooked lower mountain peaks, while its lands extended southwest toward Wadi al-Maghara. Several springs surrounding Bayt 'Itab provided water for drinking and irrigation. A secondary road connected the village with the Bayt Jibrin-Bethlehem road approximately 3 km to the south.

Israeli occupation forces captured Bayt 'Itab on 21 October 1948 during Operation ha-Har, following the end of the second truce. Khalidi's village-specific account does not identify a particular brigade or battalion as the force that physically entered Bayt 'Itab, although Har'el and Etzioni were the principal brigades of the wider offensive.

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Jerusalem
Historical region	al-'Arqub
Distance from Jerusalem	Approximately 17.5 km west
Average elevation	Approximately 675 m above sea level
Population, 1944/45	540
Estimated population, 1948	626
Total land area	8,757 dunums
Date of occupation	21 October 1948
Military operation	Operation ha-Har
Village-specific military unit	Israeli occupation forces participating in Operation ha-Har; the principal village entry does not conclusively identify the assault unit
Confirmed Israeli settlement on village land	Nes Harim, established in 1950

Location and Geography of Bayt 'Itab

Bayt 'Itab stood on a high mountain in the western Jerusalem hills, on a rocky knoll overlooking lower surrounding peaks.

Its lands extended southwest to Wadi al-Maghara. A secondary road linked the village with the Bayt Jibrin–Bethlehem road, which passed approximately three kilometers to the south.

Local roads also linked Bayt 'Itab with neighboring villages in the al-'Arqub region

and with routes toward Jerusalem and Bab al-Wad.

Neighboring Villages

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

- Northwest: Dayr al-Hawa.
- West: Sufla.
- Southwest: Bayt Nattif; some broader local boundary descriptions also include Jarash.
- South: Khirbat al-Tannur.
- Southeast: 'Allar.
- East: Ras Abu 'Ammar.
- Northeast: Dayr al-Shaykh.

These directions describe approximate geographical relationships and are not substitutes for historical cadastral boundary maps.

Name and Historical Forms

Khalidi identifies Bayt 'Itab with the locality called **Enadab** in the fourth-century list of Palestinian towns compiled by Eusebius.

During the Crusader period, the village was known as **Bethahatap**.

Local oral history preserves Bayt 'Itab, with the Arabic pronunciation used by its inhabitants, as the inherited village name.

Ottoman local documentation also refers to Bayt 'Itab al-Fawqa and Bayt 'Itab al-Sufla. Over time, the upper locality retained the name Bayt 'Itab, while the lower locality came to be known as Sufla.

Ancient and Medieval Background

Bayt 'Itab occupied a site with a long historical record. Scholars have associated it

with Byzantine Enadab and the Crusader Bethahatap.

The most prominent surviving historical structure was the ruin of a Crusader-era fortress in the center of the village.

Bayt 'Itab under Ottoman Rule

Later Palestinian research based on Ottoman land and Islamic court documents records Bayt 'Itab al-Fawqa and al-Sufla during the sixteenth century.

A document dated 1553/54 lists household heads and agricultural taxpayers and records taxation on wheat, barley, olives, and fruit trees.

An earlier document from 1538 is also reported to refer to an imam serving a mosque in the village.

The Lahham Family and al-'Arqub

During the nineteenth century, Bayt 'Itab became a center of the influential Lahham family in the al-'Arqub region.

Khalidi states that in the 1850s the family controlled as many as twenty-four villages in the subdistrict.

In 1855, armed conflict broke out between the Lahham family and their Abu Ghawsh rivals, and Bayt 'Itab became the scene of intense fighting.

The later extension of regular Ottoman administrative authority reduced the political and military influence of both families.

Built Form of Bayt 'Itab

Edward Robinson visited Bayt 'Itab in 1838 and described its stone houses as solidly constructed. Some were two storeys high.

By the late nineteenth century, the village stood on a rocky knoll above the surrounding ridge and most houses were built of stone.

The original village plan was circular. Later construction extending southwest along the road toward Sufla gradually gave the built-up area an arc-like shape.

A large cavern approximately eighteen feet wide and six feet high extended beneath some of the village houses.

Population of Bayt 'Itab

The official 1922 Census of Palestine recorded 504 inhabitants in Bayt 'Itab, all Muslims.

By the 1931 census, the population had risen to 606, again all Muslims, living in 187 occupied houses.

The 1944/45 Village Statistics recorded 540 Arab Muslim inhabitants.

Palestine Remembered later estimated the population at 626 in 1948 and the number of refugees and their descendants at 3,847 in 1998. These are retrospective estimates rather than official British Mandate census counts.

Year	Population	Nature of Figure / Notes
1838	Approximately 600–700	Edward Robinson's estimate
1875	Approximately 700	Historical estimate
1922	504	Official census; all Muslims
1931	606	Official census; all Muslims
1944/45	540	Official British Mandate statistics
1948	626	Later estimate, not an official census
1998	3,847 refugees	Later estimate of refugees and descendants

Number of Houses

Year	Houses	Nature of Figure
1931	187	Occupied houses recorded in the official census

Year	Houses	Nature of Figure
1948	193	Later Palestine Remembered estimate, not an official census count

Education in Bayt 'Itab

Khalidi's principal village entry does not provide details about education, but later Palestinian local documentation states that Bayt 'Itab had a traditional kuttab before the establishment of a formal school.

According to this local documentation, the school existed before the British Mandate and was expanded in 1921 to provide instruction through the sixth grade.

The school stood west of the village and had a large yard planted with trees and a small library.

These details derive from local Palestinian documentation and oral-history material rather than a formal Mandate Department of Education statistical table.

The Mosque

Bayt 'Itab's inhabitants were Muslims. Local Ottoman documentation reportedly records an imam serving a village mosque as early as the sixteenth century.

Local history also recalls teachers who taught both at the school and in the mosque.

Khalidi's principal entry does not provide a detailed architectural description, so no unsupported claims about the mosque's design or construction chronology have been added.

Land Ownership in Bayt 'Itab

The total land area recorded for Bayt 'Itab in the 1944/45 Village Statistics was 8,757 dunums.

Palestine Remembered presents the simplified ownership categories as follows:

Ownership Category	Area in Dunums
Palestinian	5,447
Transferred to Zionists	0
Communal/Public	3,310
Total	8,757

The official Village Statistics use the original categories Arab and Public: 5,447 dunums were classified as Arab and 3,310 as public land. No land was recorded under the Jewish category.

Local oral accounts refer to wider areas owned or used by Bayt 'Itab families in surrounding localities, but those areas should not be added automatically to the official 8,757-dunum cadastral/statistical total for the village unit.

Land Use in 1944/45

Use	Arab	Public	Total
Cereals	1,400	0	1,400
Plantations and irrigable land	665	0	665
Built-up land	14	0	14
Non-cultivable land	3,368	3,310	6,678
Total	5,447	3,310	8,757

Cultivable land totaled 2,065 dunums, approximately 24 percent of the total area.

Built-up and non-cultivable land totaled 6,692 dunums, approximately 76 percent.

The full 6,678 dunums of non-cultivable land should not be assigned to Palestinian private ownership: 3,368 dunums were Arab and 3,310 were public.

Approximately 116 dunums were planted with olive trees. This was a crop-specific subset of the 665 dunums classified as plantations and irrigable land, not an additional category.

Economic Life

Agriculture and livestock raising formed the principal basis of village life.

Villagers cultivated cereals, olives, grapes, and other fruit trees. They also owned extensive areas on the coastal plain that were used for cereal cultivation.

In 1944/45, 1,400 dunums were allocated to cereals and 665 dunums to plantations and irrigable cultivation.

Some crops were rain-fed, while springs supplied irrigation water for orchards and other cultivation.

During the Mandate, the authorities expropriated some village land to establish a large government-owned woodland.

Water and Springs

Several springs surrounding Bayt 'Itab supplied drinking and irrigation water.

Local Palestinian documentation preserves names including **'Ayn Bir al-Malik**, **'Ayn Bint Nuh**, **'Ayn al-Rummani**, **'Ayn Khirbat al-Tannur**, **'Ayn al-Muna**, **'Ayn al-Khinzir**, **'Ayn al-Balad**, and **'Ayn al-Birka**.

Local oral accounts describe some as perennial, while smaller springs sometimes dried during the summer.

Khalidi's principal entry confirms the general importance of the springs for drinking and irrigation; the individual names come from later local geographical documentation.

Olives, Vineyards, and Orchards

Olive terraces were especially prominent north of the village.

Villagers also cultivated grapevines and other fruit trees on the slopes and in areas where spring water made irrigation possible.

In 1944/45, approximately 116 dunums were planted with olive trees within the broader plantation and irrigable-land category.

The Fortress and Archaeological Heritage

The village center contained the remains of a prominent Crusader-era fortress.

Edward Robinson observed the ruins during his 1838 visit, and the fortress remained one of the most visible features after the destruction of the village.

Bayt 'Itab is also associated with Eusebius's Enadab and the Crusader Bethahatap.

Name identification alone, however, should not be taken as proof of uninterrupted settlement from the fourth century to the modern period without independent archaeological evidence.

The Lahham-Abu Ghawsh Conflict

In the 1850s Bayt 'Itab was the center of the powerful Lahham family, whose influence extended over many villages of al-'Arqub.

Armed conflict between the Lahham and Abu Ghawsh families broke out in 1855, and Bayt 'Itab became a major scene of fighting.

The expansion of centralized Ottoman administration later reduced the power of both local leadership networks.

Operation ha-Har

Operation ha-Har began on 19 October 1948 and continued through 24 October following the end of the second truce.

Its objective was to widen Israeli-controlled territory in the southern Jerusalem corridor and link it with areas occupied toward the Hebron hills.

The operation complemented Operation Yoav, which was being carried out simultaneously farther south.

PalQuest lists the Har'el, Etzioni, and Giv'ati brigades among the Zionist units associated with Operation ha-Har, while its narrative identifies Har'el and Etzioni as the principal attacking brigades.

Egyptian forces defended several villages in this sector, while Israeli forces sought to avoid drawing the Transjordanian Arab Legion directly into the fighting.

Occupation and Depopulation of Bayt 'Itab

Bayt 'Itab was one of a chain of Palestinian villages in the southern Jerusalem corridor captured during Operation ha-Har.

Khalidi, citing Israeli historian Benny Morris, gives **21 October 1948** as the date of occupation.

Palestine Remembered classifies the cause of depopulation as direct military assault.

Khalidi's village-specific entry does not identify the brigade or battalion that physically entered Bayt 'Itab. It would therefore be unwarranted to assign the village conclusively to Har'el's Sixth Battalion merely because that battalion captured nearby villages such as Jarash and Sufla during the same operation.

The most precise formulation is that **Israeli occupation forces captured Bayt 'Itab on 21 October 1948 during Operation ha-Har, while the village-specific assault unit remains unspecified in the principal source.**

Stage	Date	Details
Beginning of Operation ha-Har	19 October 1948	Offensive begins in the southern Jerusalem corridor after the second truce
Occupation of Bayt 'Itab	21 October 1948	Village captured during Operation ha-Har

Stage	Date	Details
Village-specific assault unit	Not conclusively identified	Har'el, Etzioni, and Giv'ati were associated with the wider operation; the village entry does not name the unit that entered Bayt 'Itab
Cause of depopulation	October 1948	Direct military assault according to Palestine Remembered
End of Operation ha-Har	24 October 1948	End of the offensive after the occupation of a chain of villages southwest of Jerusalem

Israeli Settlements on Bayt 'Itab's Lands

Nes Harim: Established in 1950 on land belonging to Bayt 'Itab, north of the former village site.

Khalidi also identifies Nes Harim as standing on Bayt 'Itab land when discussing neighboring Dayr al-Shaykh.

Some later Palestinian institutional sources list additional settlements in the wider historical land area, but the principal Khalidi/PalQuest village entry clearly confirms Nes Harim; it is therefore the settlement listed here as securely established on Bayt 'Itab's lands.

Bayt 'Itab Today

According to Walid Khalidi's field description in *All That Remains*, large quantities of rubble from the demolished village houses covered the site.

The remains of the Crusader fortress were still prominent. Two cemeteries lay east and west of the former village, and some graves had been disturbed at the time of the survey.

Almond, carob, and olive trees grew on the site and along its lower approaches, while cactus grew on the southern edge.

Part of the surrounding agricultural land was under cultivation.

This account is based on fieldwork conducted before the publication of *All That Remains* in 1992; one of Khalidi's principal site photographs is dated 1986. It therefore should not be treated as direct verification of every feature in 2026.

Palestine Remembered contains later community documentation, including sets of images uploaded in June and July 2025 that depict rubble and remains associated with the village site. Upload dates do not necessarily establish the actual date on which each photograph was taken, and the material does not constitute a comprehensive independent archaeological or architectural survey conducted in 2026.

Sources

- [PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Bayt 'Itab](#)
- [PalQuest – Operation ha-Har](#)
- [Palestine Remembered – Bayt 'Itab, Jerusalem](#)
- [Palestine Remembered – Bayt 'Itab entry from All That Remains](#)
- [Institute for Palestine Studies – Walid Khalidi, All That Remains](#)
- [Government of Palestine – Census of Palestine 1922](#)
- [Birzeit University Repository – Census of Palestine 1931](#)
- [Government of Palestine – Village Statistics 1945: Jerusalem Sub-District, Population and Land Ownership](#)
- [Government of Palestine – Village Statistics 1945: Jerusalem Sub-District, Built-up and Non-Cultivable Land](#)
- [Palestinian Villages Encyclopedia – Bayt 'Itab: local history, education, water sources, and oral documentation](#)