# Burayr



## Burayr: A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Gaza District

Burayr was a Palestinian village in the Gaza District, located approximately 18 km northeast of Gaza city on the southern coastal plain, at an average elevation of about 100 metres above sea level. Its inhabitants were displaced during the Nakba and the occupation of Palestine in 1948. The decisive attack was launched by the Palmach's Negev Brigade during the night of 12–13 May 1948 in coordination with Operation Barak.

## Location of Burayr

Burayr was situated on uneven ground on the southern coastal plain. Wadi al-Qa'a crossed the eastern edge of the village.

A major inland highway linking the towns of the coastal plain with Gaza passed east of the village and connected it with localities to the north and south. This route intersected the al-Faluja–al-Majdal highway, which ran east to west approximately 9 km north of Burayr.

## History of Burayr

Burayr has been identified with Buriron, a settlement recorded in Byzantine sources.

In 1596, Burayr was a village in the nahiya of Gaza within the liwa of Gaza, with an estimated population of approximately 1,155. It paid taxes on wheat, barley, fruit, goats, beehives, and other forms of agricultural production.

In 1838, American traveller Edward Robinson described Burayr as a flourishing village and a central point in the plain, noting a large public well equipped with a water wheel. About four decades later, the village was described as large, with a water wheel to the east, a pool to the north, and a garden to the south.

## Architecture and Services in Burayr

The village had a roughly semi-circular layout, although the placement of its houses was irregular. Most houses were built of adobe brick. During the British Mandate period, the built-up area expanded westward toward a slightly higher hill while agricultural land was preserved on the other sides.

The inhabitants of Burayr were Muslim, and a mosque stood at the centre of the village. The central area also contained the marketplace, a clinic, and a grain mill.

Three wells inside the village supplied water for domestic use. Toward the end of

the Mandate period, the villagers also drilled artesian wells.

## Education in Burayr

Two elementary schools were established in Burayr in 1920, one for boys and one for girls. By 1947, the two schools had a combined enrolment of 241 pupils.

## Economic Life in Burayr

The inhabitants worked mainly in rainfed and irrigated agriculture, while some also raised livestock. They cultivated cereals, fruit—particularly citrus, grapes, and figs—and vegetables.

Commercial activity was strengthened by a weekly Wednesday market that attracted residents of neighbouring villages and Bedouin communities.

During the 1940s, the village economy received an additional boost when the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) discovered oil in the vicinity of Burayr and drilled a well approximately one kilometre north of the village.

According to the 1944/45 statistics, 43,319 dunums of Arab land were devoted to cereals, together with 617 dunums classified as Jewish-owned and 9 dunums of public land, for a total cereal area of 43,945 dunums. Another 409 dunums of Arab land were irrigated or used for plantations.

## Land Ownership in Burayr

The total land area of Burayr was 46,184 dunums according to the 1944/45 statistics.

| **Total** | **46,184** |
|---|---|
| **Statistical category** | **Area in dunums** |
| Arab | 44,220 |

| Total | 46,184 |
|---|---|
| **Statistical category** | **Area in dunums** |
| Jewish | 618 |
| Public | 1,346 |

Palestine Remembered presents the corresponding figures in its Arabic table as 44,220 Palestinian dunums, 618 dunums “transferred to Zionists,” and 1,346 dunums of communal land.

## Land Use in Burayr, 1944/45

| Total | 44,220 | 618 | 1,346 | 46,184 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Land use** | **Arab** | **Jewish** | **Public** | **Total** |
| Cereals | 43,319 | 617 | 9 | 43,945 |
| Plantations and irrigable land | 409 | 0 | 0 | 409 |
| Built-up area | 130 | 0 | 0 | 130 |
| Non-cultivable land | 362 | 1 | 1,337 | 1,700 |

A total of 44,354 dunums was classified as cultivated or cultivable: 43,728 Arab, 617 Jewish, and 9 public dunums. Non-cultivable and built-up land together amounted to 1,830 dunums.

Palestine Remembered presents some of these figures differently by incorporating public land into the Palestinian column. This is why it gives 43,328 dunums for cereals rather than separating 43,319 Arab dunums from 9 public dunums.

## Population of Burayr

Population of Burayr in selected years

| Year | Population | Nature of figure |
|---|---|---|
| 1596 | 1,155 | Estimate derived from Ottoman records |
| 1922 | 1,591 | Official British Mandate census |
| 1931 | 1,894 | Official British Mandate census |
| 1944/45 | 2,740 | Official statistics |
| 1948 | 3,178 | Later estimate published by Palestine Remembered |
| Estimated refugees in 1998 | 19,519 | 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 Burayr

Number of houses in Burayr

| Year | Number of houses | Nature of figure |
|---|---|---|
| 1931 | 414 | Official census figure |
| 1948 | 694 | Later estimate published by Palestine Remembered |
| The 1948 figure is not an official British Mandate census figure. | | |

## Archaeological Sites in Burayr

Burayr was built on an archaeological site where remains of earlier construction were visible. Four additional archaeological sites lay nearby: Khirbat Sha'ratta, Tall al-Mashanaqa, Khirbat al-Marashan, and Khirbat Umm Laqis.

## Attacks on Burayr before its Occupation

Burayr experienced a series of attacks before its final occupation. On 29 January 1948, Zionist forces attacked using five armoured vehicles. According to the Palestinian newspaper *Filastin*, the attack was repulsed without casualties.

Another clash occurred on 14 February when a Jewish convoy passed through Burayr and exchanged fire with the village's defenders before withdrawing. The following day, two villagers were wounded when British troops forcibly removed a barricade at the village entrance.

On 20 April 1948, the military settlement of Beror Chayil was established on a hill less than one mile from Burayr. Walid Khalidi describes this development as the first direct step in the process that preceded the occupation of the village.

## Occupation and Depopulation of Burayr during the Nakba

The decisive assault on Burayr occurred during the night of 12–13 May 1948. The Palmach's Negev Brigade attacked the village in coordination with Operation Barak, which was being conducted by the Giv'ati Brigade.

Operation Barak began on 9 May 1948, and PalQuest lists Burayr among the villages affected by the operation. Both the Giv'ati and Negev brigades participated in the broader operation, whose objectives included expanding military control before the end of the British Mandate and removing Palestinian residents from occupied villages.

Khalidi's entry reports that the *History of the Haganah* described Burayr as having been occupied “in one strike.” This account is mentioned only because it is quoted in the approved Palestinian reference and is not being used here as an independent Israeli source.

As for the precise date, Khalidi and PalQuest place the decisive attack during the night of 12–13 May 1948, while Palestine Remembered lists 12 May as the occupation date.

- Date of attack and occupation: night of 12–13 May 1948; Palestine Remembered specifically lists 12 May.
- Military operation: Operation Barak.
- Unit that directly attacked the village: the Palmach's Negev Brigade.

- Coordinating brigade: Giv'ati Brigade.
- Fate of the population: the Palestinian inhabitants of Burayr were displaced as a result of the military assault and occupation during the Nakba.
- Fate of the village: most structures were destroyed, although rubble, fragments of walls, and traces of some streets remained.

Palestine Remembered states in its summary data that a massacre occurred in Burayr and also contains local accounts concerning deaths during the assault. However, Khalidi's dedicated PalQuest entry does not provide independently documented details or a verified casualty figure for a specific massacre. No casualty number is therefore presented here as an established fact.

## Settlements Established on the Lands of Burayr

Five settlements were established on village lands:

- Beror Chayil: established in 1948, on 20 April, before the final occupation of the village.
- Telamim: established in 1950.
- Heletz: established in 1950.
- Sde David: established in 1955.
- Zohar: established in 1956.

## Burayr Today

According to the field description published by Walid Khalidi in *All That Remains*, scattered cactus plants grew across the village site together with some sycamore and lotus trees. Remains of houses were still visible, including a small section of a cement wall among eucalyptus trees near the entrance of one house, and parts of several village streets could still be identified.

The lands surrounding the village site were under cultivation.

This description derives from field research published in Khalidi's book in 1992. The approved sources used here do not provide a comprehensive and independent contemporary field survey sufficient to verify the exact condition of every part of the Burayr site in 2026.

## Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Burayr
- PalQuest – Operation Barak
- Palestine Remembered – Burayr, Gaza District
- Institute for Palestine Studies – All That Remains, Walid Khalidi