

Dayr Sunayd



Dayr Sunayd: A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Gaza District

Dayr Sunayd was a depopulated Palestinian village in the Gaza District, located approximately 12 kilometers northeast of Gaza City on Palestine's coastal plain, at an average elevation of about 50 meters above sea level. Its lands extended between Wadi al-'Abd to the north and Wadi al-Hasi to the south.

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Gaza

Item	Information
Distance from district center	12 km northeast of Gaza
Average Elevation	50 m above sea level
Population in 1931	475
Number of Houses in 1931	103
Population in 1944/1945	730
Estimated Population in 1948	About 847 – a later demographic estimate, not an official census
Total Land Area in 1945	6,081 dunams
Attack and Depopulation	The village was bombed from the air at the beginning of Operation Yoav on 15–16 October 1948, according to Morris as cited by Khalidi, and was 'pummeled' again on 21 October, according to the New York Times. Israeli occupation forces probably captured it in late October or early November 1948, when they advanced along the coastal road after the withdrawal of Egyptian forces.
Final Israeli Control	Probably late October or early November 1948; Khalidi states that the date of occupation cannot be specified with certainty, and al-Majdal, the city to the north, was occupied on 4 November 1948
Military Operation	Operation Yoav
Military Unit	The available sources do not identify the unit that occupied the village
Cause of Depopulation	Aerial bombardment followed by the advance of Israeli occupation forces along the coastal road in Operation Yoav; the available sources do not detail how the inhabitants left
Settlements Documented on Village Lands	No Israeli settlements on village lands, according to Khalidi; the settlement of Yad Mordekhay (1943) lies just to the north of village lands

The village occupied an important position beside the coastal highway and had a station on the coastal railway line, providing convenient connections with Gaza to the south and al-Majdal to the north. During the Nakba and the occupation of

Palestine in 1948, Dayr Sunayd was bombed and later occupied by Israeli forces in the course of Operation Yoav. Its Palestinian inhabitants were displaced, and most of the village was subsequently destroyed.

Location of Dayr Sunayd

- Dayr Sunayd was located approximately 12 kilometers northeast of Gaza.
- Its average elevation was about 50 meters above sea level.
- The village stood on Palestine's coastal plain, not far from the Mediterranean coast, between Wadi al-'Abd to the north and Wadi al-Hasi to the south.
- It was situated beside the main coastal highway and had a station on the coastal railway line.
- Its location provided convenient access to Gaza in the south, al-Majdal in the north, and neighboring Palestinian villages.

Origin of the Name Dayr Sunayd

The first part of the village name, “Dayr,” meaning monastery in Arabic, suggests that Christian monks may have lived at the site at some earlier period, although this does not necessarily indicate the presence of a settled Christian community there in later times. “Sunayd” was the name of an Arab tribe.

Dayr Sunayd During the Ottoman Period

In 1596, Dayr Sunayd was a village in the nahiya of Gaza within the liwa' of Gaza. According to Ottoman records cited by Walid Khalidi, it had an estimated population of 66. The inhabitants paid taxes on agricultural products including wheat, barley, and fruit, as well as goats and beehives.

The Built Environment of Dayr Sunayd

In the late nineteenth century, Dayr Sunayd was a medium-sized rectangular village divided into four quarters by two roads intersecting at right angles. Its houses were built of adobe brick, and the village contained wells, gardens, a pond, and a mosque at its center.

By the end of the British Mandate period, construction had expanded westward toward the main coastal highway. According to the 1944/1945 statistics, the built-up area covered approximately 13 dunums.

Population of Dayr Sunayd

Dayr Sunayd had 356 inhabitants in the 1922 census. The population increased to 475 in the 1931 census, when 103 houses were recorded. The Government of Palestine's 1944/1945 statistics recorded a population of 730.

The figures of 847 inhabitants for 1948 and 5,200 refugees for 1998 are later estimates published by Palestine Remembered and are not official Government of Palestine censuses.

Population of Dayr Sunayd

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
1596	66	Historical figure based on Ottoman records as cited by Walid Khalidi
1922	356	Official census under the British Mandate
1931	475	Official census under the British Mandate
1944/1945	730	Government of Palestine statistics
1948	847	Estimate published by Palestine Remembered
1998	5,200	Estimated refugee population published by Palestine Remembered
Official censuses and statistics should be distinguished from later estimates.		

Number of Houses in Dayr Sunayd

The 1931 census recorded 103 houses in Dayr Sunayd. The figure of 183 houses for 1948 published by Palestine Remembered is a later estimate rather than an official census figure comparable to the 1931 count.

Number of Houses in Dayr Sunayd

Year	Number of Houses	Nature of Figure
1931	103	Official census
1948	183	Estimate published by Palestine Remembered
The 1948 figure is an estimate and was not issued by an official Government of Palestine census.		

Land Ownership in Dayr Sunayd

The total land area recorded for Dayr Sunayd in the 1944/1945 statistics was 6,081 dunums. The Arabic Palestine Remembered table uses the categories “Palestinian,” “Transferred to Zionists,” and “Masha'.” These terms are preserved in the table below to reflect the terminology of that source.

The Government of Palestine statistics, as reproduced by PalQuest, classify the same figures as “Arab,” “Jewish,” and “Public”: 5,089 dunums Arab-owned, 483 dunums Jewish-owned, and 509 dunums of public land.

Total	6,081
Ownership Category	Area in Dunums
Palestinian	5,089
Transferred to Zionists	483
Masha' / Communal	509

Land Use in Dayr Sunayd in 1944/1945

Government of Palestine statistics show that agricultural land in Dayr Sunayd was

used primarily for cereals, orchards, irrigated cultivation, and citrus. It is important to distinguish Arab, Jewish, and public land in these statistics because some later tables combined portions of public land with Palestinian figures.

Total	5,089	483	509	6,081
Land Use	Arab	Jewish	Public	Total
Citrus and Bananas	158	0	0	158
Plantations and Irrigable Land	512	0	0	512
Cereals	4,361	483	19	4,863
Built-up Area	13	0	0	13
Non-Cultivable Land	45	0	490	535

Economic Life in Dayr Sunayd

Agriculture was the principal basis of Dayr Sunayd's economy. Grain fields were concentrated south of the village, while fruit and vegetables were grown to the northeast and northwest.

In 1944/1945, 158 dunums were devoted to citrus and bananas, 512 dunums to plantations and irrigable land, and a total of 4,863 dunums to cereals when Arab, Jewish, and public land are counted together.

Eight wells were drilled in the village to depths ranging from 14 to 30 meters. In addition to agriculture, commerce provided an income for some inhabitants, and several small shops operated in the village.

Education in Dayr Sunayd

A school was opened in Dayr Sunayd in 1945 and enrolled 63 pupils during its first year. The principal sources used here do not provide sufficient documentation to confirm the additional claim found in some accounts that the school had one teacher whose salary was paid by the village.

Dayr Sunayd During the Nakba Before Its Final Occupation

The area around Dayr Sunayd witnessed fighting from the early stages of the Nakba and the occupation of Palestine in 1948. Shortly after 15 May 1948, Egyptian and Israeli forces fought for control of the area and the nearby settlement of Yad Mordekhay.

Walid Khalidi records that Gamal Abdel Nasser, then a junior officer in the Egyptian army, referred in his memoirs to the continuing battle of Dayr Sunayd in May 1948. Egyptian forces succeeded at that stage in maintaining their position in the area after heavy fighting and substantial losses.

The Occupation of Dayr Sunayd and the Displacement of Its Inhabitants During the Nakba

The final occupation of Dayr Sunayd was associated with Operation Yoav, which began on 15 October and ended on 4 November 1948. The operation was intended to break Egyptian lines in southern Palestine and connect Israeli forces in the Negev with forces positioned farther north.

PalQuest lists the Giv'ati, Yiftach, Negev, and Har'el brigades among the Zionist units involved in Operation Yoav. Palestine Remembered specifically identifies the Giv'ati Brigade as the unit that attacked Dayr Sunayd.

Dayr Sunayd came under aerial bombardment at the beginning of Operation Yoav on 15–16 October 1948, according to Walid Khalidi, citing Israeli historian Benny Morris. Khalidi also cites a report in *The New York Times* stating that the village was subjected to heavy bombardment again on 21 October.

The precise date on which the village was occupied cannot be established with certainty. The Dayr Sunayd entry in Walid Khalidi's *All That Remains*, as published by PalQuest, considers it probable that the village was captured in late October or early November 1948, during the Israeli advance along the coastal road following the withdrawal of Egyptian forces.

Palestine Remembered, by contrast, gives 30 October 1948 as the date of occupation. This date is therefore presented as the date given by one source rather than as an undisputed date accepted by all of the references.

The occupation resulted in the displacement of Dayr Sunayd's Palestinian inhabitants during the Nakba. Palestine Remembered describes the depopulation of the village as complete. Most of the village buildings were destroyed, while structures associated with the railway station and bridge survived.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Battle of Dayr Sunayd	Shortly after 15 May – 20 May 1948	Egyptian forces and Israeli occupation forces battled for control of the village and the nearby settlement of Yad Mordekhay shortly after 15 May 1948, and the battle ended in an Egyptian victory, according to the memoirs of Gamal Abdel Nasser as cited by Khalidi. The New York Times quoted the Egyptian Defense Ministry as saying that Egyptian forces entered the village on 20 May 1948, after an aerial, artillery and infantry attack.
Shelling of the village	15–16 October 1948	The village came under aerial bombardment at the beginning of Operation Yoav, which Israeli occupation forces launched against the Egyptian forces as soon as the second truce ended on 15 October, according to Morris as cited by Khalidi.
Renewed shelling of the village	21 October 1948	The New York Times reported that the village was 'pummeled' again.
Final occupation	Probably late October or early November 1948	The date on which the village was occupied cannot be specified with certainty, according to Khalidi. During the final stages of Operation Yoav, at the end of October, Israeli occupation forces advanced along the coastal road after the withdrawal of Egyptian forces and occupied al-Majdal, the city to the north of Dayr Sunayd, on 4 November 1948.

Settlements on the Lands of Dayr Sunayd

Walid Khalidi records no Israeli settlements established on the lands of Dayr Sunayd, and Palestine Remembered likewise states that no settlements were established on village land.

Yad Mordekhay was established in 1943 immediately north of the lands of Dayr Sunayd, but not on the village's own lands.

Claims in some later accounts that settlements named “Dayr Sunayd” or “Ezer” were established on village land have therefore not been included, because they are not supported by the principal sources used here.

The Site of Dayr Sunayd After the Nakba

According to the field description recorded by Walid Khalidi, the surviving features of Dayr Sunayd included a railway bridge, unused portions of the railway track, and three buildings belonging to the former train station.

The stone railway bridge crosses a wadi on four broad arches, while the station buildings were described as abandoned and deteriorating. Cactuses, eucalyptus trees, buckthorn, and other thorny vegetation grew on the site, while the surrounding lands were cultivated.

This description is based on fieldwork conducted for Walid Khalidi's study and should not necessarily be treated as a field survey updated to the present day.

Sources

- [PalQuest - Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Dayr Sunayd](#)
- [PalQuest - Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Operation Yoav](#)
- [Institute for Palestine Studies: Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains*](#)

- [Palestine Remembered: Dayr Sunayd – Gaza District](#)
- [Village Statistics of 1945: Population and Land Ownership in the Gaza Sub-District, based on Government of Palestine statistics](#)
- [Village Statistics of 1945: Land Use in the Gaza Sub-District, based on Government of Palestine statistics](#)
- [Government of Palestine: Census of Palestine, 1931](#)