

Sarafand al-Kharab



Sarafand al-Kharab – Depopulated Palestinian Village of Ramla

Sarafand al-Kharab, also known as Sarafand al-Sughra, was a Palestinian village in the Ramla Subdistrict and the Lydda administrative district during the British Mandate. It stood on flat land in the central coastal plain approximately 7 kilometers west of Ramla and about 50 meters above sea level.

A spur road linked the village to a highway to the west that intersected the main Ramla-Jaffa road. Sarafand al-'Amar, or Sarafand al-Kubra, was a separate village

to the northeast, and the two localities must be distinguished carefully in demographic and historical records.

Sarafand al-Kharab had 1,040 inhabitants in 1944/45: 930 Muslims and 110 Christians. Its statistical land unit covered 5,503 dunums. Agriculture dominated the economy, particularly citrus cultivation, supported by fertile soil and numerous artesian wells.

The Palestinian population began leaving during April 1948 amid growing fears of attack and the fighting around Ramla and the Jerusalem road. Khalidi places the principal flight on 20 April but states that the village itself may not have come under Israeli occupation until mid-May. Depopulation and military occupation should therefore be treated as distinct stages.

Basic Information

Field	Information
Name	Sarafand al-Kharab
Arabic name	صرفند الخراب
Alternative name	Sarafand al-Sughra
Subdistrict	Ramla
Administrative district	Lydda
Location	Central coastal plain, west of Ramla
Distance from Ramla	Approximately 7 km west
Average elevation	Approximately 50 m above sea level
Palestine Grid	131/149
Population in 1922	385, all Muslims
Population in 1931	974; 971 Arabs and 3 Jews in PalQuest's classification
Houses in 1931	206

Field	Information
Population in 1944/45	1,040: 930 Muslims and 110 Christians
1948 population estimate	1,206 – later estimate, not an official census
Total land area	5,503 dunums
Principal depopulation date	20 April 1948 according to the account used by Khalidi
Probable actual occupation	Mid-May 1948; exact date and direct occupying unit remain uncertain
Military context	Operation Nachshon and fighting around Ramla and the Jerusalem road contributed to displacement, but Nachshon ended before 20 April
Military unit	Giv'ati Brigade in the Operation Nachshon context; the unit that actually entered the village in mid-May is not independently documented
Cause of depopulation	Fear of military attack or of becoming caught in the fighting
Destruction	A large part of the village was destroyed, but multiple houses, a school, a pool, and a pump house survived
Settlements on village lands	Nes Tziyyona, founded before 1948 and later expanded onto village land; Yad Eli'ezer, founded in the early 1950s

Sarafand al-Kharab and Sarafand al-'Amar

Two separate Palestinian villages in the Ramla area carried the name Sarafand.

Sarafand al-Kharab was also known as Sarafand al-Sughra, “the smaller Sarafand,” while Sarafand al-'Amar was known as Sarafand al-Kubra, “the larger Sarafand.”

Sarafand al-'Amar stood northeast of Sarafand al-Kharab.

The distinction is essential because some modern statistical pages confuse figures belonging to the two villages. The often-repeated figure of 862 inhabitants in 1922 belongs to Sarafand al-'Amar, not Sarafand al-Kharab.

Name and Earlier History

Khalidi suggests that the designation al-Kharab, “the ruined,” may reflect the condition of the site in the early nineteenth century.

When Edward Robinson travelled through the area in 1838, he recorded two villages called Sarafand, one inhabited and the other ruined. The ruined locality was probably Sarafand al-Kharab.

The site was repopulated in the late nineteenth century, as indicated by the Survey of Western Palestine maps.

Distinctive architectural remains, including vaults, have also led researchers to identify the site with an unnamed Crusader-period locality.

British-Period Burning

Khalidi records that British forces burned Sarafand al-Kharab in the late 1920s in retaliation following the killing of British soldiers after an incident with villagers.

Many inhabitants were displaced temporarily to neighboring villages, but the community later returned and rebuilt Sarafand al-Kharab.

Palestinian oral traditions preserve differing dates and details for this event.

It should not automatically be conflated with the separately documented December 1918 Surafend incident, which other historical records identify with Sarafand al-'Amar.

Built Environment

After the village was rebuilt, houses were arranged in attached rows.

Some were constructed from mud and straw, while others used cement.

The built-up area covered 33 dunums in the 1944/45 statistics.

The 1931 census recorded 206 occupied houses.

Population

Year	Population	Status
1922	385	Official census; all Muslims
1931	974	Official census; PalQuest records 971 Arabs and 3 Jews
1944/45	1,040	Official estimate: 930 Muslims and 110 Christians
1948	1,206	Later demographic estimate, not an official census
1998	7,409	Later Palestine Remembered estimate of refugees and descendants

Some Palestine Remembered and Palestinian village-encyclopedia pages display 862 inhabitants for 1922. That figure belongs to Sarafand al-'Amar; the official Sarafand al-Kharab census figure is 385.

Number of Houses

Year	Houses	Note
1931	206	Official census figure
1948	255	Later estimate, not a new official government house census

Land Ownership, 1944/45

The Government of Palestine used the categories Arab, Jewish, and Public. The project terminology is shown below alongside that official classification:

Total	5,503
Ownership Category	Dunums
Palestinian – official “Arab” category	3,545
Transferred to Zionists – official “Jewish” category	1,611

Total	5,503
Ownership Category	Dunums
Public	347

The figures balance exactly: $3,545 + 1,611 + 347 = 5,503$ dunums.

Land Use, 1944/45

Total	3,545	1,611	347	5,503
Land Use	Palestinian	Transferred to Zionists	Public	Total
Citrus and bananas	3,148	1,087	0	4,235
Cereals	268	189	42	499
Plantations and irrigable land	49	15	0	64
Built-up area	33	0	0	33
Non-cultivable land	47	320	305	672

The land-use categories reconcile exactly with the total statistical village area.

Correction to Simplified Land Tables

Some simplified tables display 310 dunums of Palestinian cereal land, but that figure combines 268 Palestinian dunums with 42 Public dunums.

Likewise, the displayed 352 non-arable Palestinian dunums combine 47 Palestinian dunums with 305 Public dunums.

This article therefore keeps Public land as a separate category.

Economy and Agriculture

Agriculture formed the economic base of Sarafand al-Kharab.

The villagers drilled numerous artesian wells that supplied irrigation water, while fertile soil supported intensive cultivation of fruit and vegetables.

Citrus was the principal crop. In 1944/45, 3,148 Palestinian dunums and 1,087 dunums in the official Jewish category were planted with citrus and bananas.

Cereals, orchards, and irrigated crops provided additional agricultural income.

Water and Artesian Wells

Sarafand al-Kharab had abundant groundwater resources.

The villagers drilled numerous artesian wells, which were particularly important for irrigating citrus groves and vegetable plots.

The combination of fertile soil and accessible irrigation water made the village one of the strongly horticultural communities in the Ramla coastal plain.

Education

The villagers established a boys' school in 1920.

It later developed into a full elementary school with approximately 258 pupils in the mid-1940s.

Students also came from Wadi Hunayn, Bir Salim, and al-Nabi Rubin. Pupils from Wadi Hunayn alone represented roughly one quarter of the total enrollment.

A girls' school was established in 1945 and enrolled forty-six girls in its opening year.

Religious Buildings

The 1944/45 population included 930 Muslims and 110 Christians.

However, Khalidi's village profile and PalQuest do not independently document a

specific mosque or church building at Sarafand al-Kharab.

No particular religious structure is therefore inferred from population affiliation alone.

Archaeological Remains

The village site contained older architectural remains, including vaults and traces of former structures.

These remains led researchers to identify Sarafand al-Kharab with an unnamed Crusader-period site.

The Survey of Western Palestine also recorded older structural remains and a stone-and-mortar reservoir or pool in the locality.

These features demonstrate an older history of occupation but do not justify assigning all visible remains to a single archaeological period.

Operation Nachshon and the Military Context

The Haganah conducted Operation Nachshon from 3 to 15 April 1948 using forces that included the Giv'ati and Har'el brigades.

The operation sought to seize and secure villages and positions along the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem road in order to open the route to Jewish traffic.

PalQuest includes Sarafand al-Kharab among the localities affected by Operation Nachshon.

However, the operation's impact on displacement should be distinguished from the village's actual occupation: Nachshon ended on 15 April, Khalidi dates the principal flight to 20 April, and he suggests that the village itself may not have been occupied until mid-May.

Possible Attack on 12 April 1948

A New York Times report cited by Khalidi stated that a Jewish unit struck deep into Arab-held territory and blew up twelve houses near Ramla and two neighboring villages.

Khalidi suggests that Sarafand al-Kharab may have been one of those villages.

The source is explicitly tentative, so this should not be converted into a categorical claim that Sarafand al-Kharab was definitely attacked or occupied on 12 April.

Principal Depopulation - 20 April 1948

Khalidi's account states that the villagers left on **20 April 1948** because they feared a military attack.

The broader atmosphere created by fighting along the Jerusalem road, the Deir Yasin massacre of 9 April, and the advance of Operation Nachshon contributed to insecurity throughout the area.

This article therefore treats 20 April as the **principal depopulation date**, not as a firmly established date of final military occupation.

When Was Sarafand al-Kharab Actually Occupied?

Khalidi notes that Sarafand al-Kharab may not have come under Israeli control until **mid-May 1948**, approximately when neighboring Sarafand al-'Amar and Bir Salim were occupied.

No exact day is provided.

The chronology should therefore distinguish three stages: military pressure and a possible raid during Operation Nachshon, the principal population flight on 20 April, and probable final occupation in mid-May.

Military Unit

The Giv'ati Brigade is clearly associated with Operation Nachshon and the military pressure surrounding Sarafand al-Kharab during April.

The village-level record does not, however, identify the brigade or battalion that physically entered the village when final control was probably established in mid-May.

The most accurate formulation is therefore: **Giv'ati Brigade in the Operation Nachshon and pre-depopulation military context; the unit responsible for final occupation is not independently documented.**

Cause of Depopulation

Palestine Remembered classifies the cause as fear of attack or fear of becoming caught in the fighting.

This is consistent with Khalidi's account that the villagers departed before final military control was established.

The principal village narrative does not document a collective expulsion order issued after troops entered Sarafand al-Kharab.

The most cautious formulation is therefore: **flight under fear of military attack and of the fighting spreading to the village during the escalating operations around Ramla and the Jerusalem road.**

Destruction

A large portion of Sarafand al-Kharab was demolished after its Palestinian community was displaced.

The village was not completely destroyed.

Khalidi's field survey documented a significant number of surviving houses, no

more than six of which were occupied by Jewish families at the time of his survey.

The village school, a pool, and a pump house also survived.

No independently documented date is provided for the demolition of the other buildings, so depopulation, occupation, and later destruction should remain separate stages.

Ethnic Cleansing in Source Classification

Palestine Remembered classifies Sarafand al-Kharab using the term “complete ethnic cleansing.” The phrase is retained here only as an attributed source classification.

The more specifically documented facts are the villagers' departure under fear of attack and fighting, subsequent Israeli control of the village, the absence of permanent collective Palestinian return, and the destruction of a substantial portion of the built environment.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Date	Event
3 April 1948	Operation Nachshon begins with Giv'ati and Har'el forces participating.
9 April 1948	The Deir Yasin massacre increases fear among Palestinian communities in the wider region.
12 April 1948	A report describes houses blown up near Ramla and two neighboring villages; Khalidi states that Sarafand al-Kharab may have been one of them.
15 April 1948	Operation Nachshon formally ends according to PalQuest.
20 April 1948	Khalidi's principal date for the villagers' flight under fear of attack.
Mid-May 1948	Probable actual Israeli occupation of Sarafand al-Kharab; exact day and village-level unit are not established.

Date	Event
Later period	A large part of the village is demolished, while numerous houses, the school, a pool, and a pump house survive.
Early 1950s	Yad Eli'ezer is established on village land; it later ceases to exist as a separate locality.

Israeli Settlements Established on Sarafand al-Kharab's Lands

Nes Tziyyona was founded in 1882, decades before the Nakba. Khalidi states that many of its later buildings stand on Sarafand al-Kharab's lands. It should therefore be classified as a pre-1948 settlement that expanded onto village land rather than as a settlement founded after the village was depopulated.

Yad Eli'ezer was established on Sarafand al-Kharab's lands in the early 1950s. It later ceased to exist as a separate, distinct locality.

Beit Hanan, founded in 1948 west of the village site, was nearby but **was not established on Sarafand al-Kharab's lands** according to Khalidi.

Sarafand al-Kharab Today

According to the field description used by Walid Khalidi before the publication of *All That Remains* in 1992, a major part of the village had been destroyed, but many houses remained.

No more than six of the surviving houses were occupied by Jewish families, including the former house of Muhammad Darwish.

Most surviving houses had gable roofs and rectangular doors and windows, while one substantial building had two storeys and a sloping roof.

The former village school was still standing and was being used by Israeli pupils.

A pool and pump house in the orchard of Mahmud Yusuf Darwish also remained

intact.

Castor-oil and mulberry trees grew around the village site, while cactus covered the cemetery and surrounding lands were under cultivation.

This description represents historical fieldwork conducted before the publication of Khalidi's book in 1992. It is not a comprehensive direct archaeological or cadastral survey of all former Sarafand al-Kharab lands in 2026.

Sources

- [PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Sarafand al-Kharab](#)
- [PalQuest – Operation Nachshon](#)
- [Palestine Remembered – Sarafand al-Kharab, Ramla Subdistrict](#)
- [Palestinian Villages Encyclopedia – Sarafand al-Kharab](#)
- [Our Palestine – Sarafand al-Kharab, Ramla Subdistrict](#)