

Huj



18. Huj, Gaza Sub-District, was a town of 810 Palestinian Arabs. All were expelled and the town was erased from the map. Its lands of 21,988 dunums were usurped for a Jewish settlement.

Subdistrict: Gaza Subdistrict

Estimated Palestinian population of Huj in 1948: Approximately 940

Date of occupation and depopulation: 31 May 1948

Military unit: Negev Brigade of the Palmach

Israeli settlements established on Huj's land before 1948: Dorot, established in 1941 on land traditionally belonging to Huj

Israeli settlements established on the village site after 1948: No civilian settlement was established directly over the village centre; an Israeli sheep farm was established at the site,

and Dorot took control of additional village land

Huj was a depopulated Palestinian village located approximately 15 kilometres northeast of Gaza. It stood at the intersection of several secondary roads connecting it with Gaza, Bir al-Sabi', Burayr, Dimra, Hiribya, and al-Majdal. Some modern geographical descriptions place the village approximately 3 kilometres east of the Barbara–Gaza road and about 6 kilometres west of the later Eilat–Ashkelon oil pipeline; the pipeline did not form part of the village's pre-1948 landscape.

The village was situated in a hilly area on the northern edge of the Naqab, with two hills overlooking it from the east and west.

The lands associated with Huj covered a total area of 21,988 dunams. The 1944–1945 statistical unit included both the Palestinian village and the nearby settlement of Dorot.

Boundaries of Huj

Huj was situated among the following Palestinian villages, towns, and localities:

- North: [Simsim](#).
- Northwest: [Najd](#).
- West: Bayt Hanun.
- Southwest: Gaza.
- South: lands inhabited by Palestinian Bedouin communities associated with the Bir al-Sabi' region.
- Southeast: [Kawfakha](#).
- East: al-Jammama.
- Northeast: [Burayr](#).

History and Architecture of Huj

Huj has been identified with the ancient locality of Oga, which appears on the sixth-century Madaba Map. The modern village was established in the early nineteenth century during the administration of Mustafa Bey, governor of Gaza and Yafa from 1818 to 1820. He reportedly offered land without charge and constructed a police station to improve security and encourage residents of Gaza to settle there.

When the American scholar Edward Robinson visited Huj in 1838, he described a village of mud houses with a population of between 200 and 300. By the late nineteenth century, Huj had a rectangular plan and buildings constructed from adobe brick. In the period after 1917, the village initially expanded eastwards and later westwards, preserving the agricultural land east and northeast of its built-up area.

Population Records for Huj

Year	Palestinian population*	Jewish population of Dorot*	Combined statistical total*
1838	Approximately 200–300	—	Approximately 200–300
1922	426	—	426
1931	618	—	618
1945	810	230	1,040
1948	Approximately 940	Not included in the village estimate	Not applicable
Estimated number of Palestinian refugees in 1998	5,770	Not applicable	Not applicable

* The 230 Jewish residents recorded in 1945 lived in Dorot, within the wider administrative unit, and not in the Palestinian village of Huj. The figures for 1948 and 1998 are demographic estimates rather than contemporaneous census counts. Estimates vary between sources.

Land Ownership in Huj

Ownership category	Land area (dunams)*
Palestinian ownership	16,741
Jewish ownership	4,236
Public land	1,011
Total	21,988

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres. The official statistical unit included Dorot.

Land Use in Huj in 1944–1945

Land-use category	Palestinian ownership (dunams)*	Jewish ownership (dunams)*	Public land (dunams)*	Total (dunams)*
Irrigated land and orchards	93	16	0	109
Cereal cultivation	16,236	4,035	0	20,271
Built-up area	34	40	0	74
Cultivable land	16,329	4,051	0	20,380
Uncultivated land	378	145	1,011	1,534

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres. The official statistical unit included Dorot.

Economic Life in Huj

Huj possessed plentiful groundwater. Water for domestic use came from a well approximately 200 feet, or 61 metres, deep inside the village. Other wells were located in the beds of the surrounding wadis.

The villagers cultivated cereals, almonds, and fruit, including grapes, figs, and apricots. In

1944–1945, 16,236 dunams under Palestinian ownership were devoted to cereal cultivation, while 93 dunams were irrigated or used for orchards.

Occupation and Depopulation of Huj

During an Israeli military advance northwards, the Negev Brigade of the Palmach ordered the Palestinian inhabitants of Huj to leave their homes on 31 May 1948. Israeli historian Benny Morris states that the villagers were expelled westwards, after which their property was looted and their houses were demolished with explosives.

Morris notes that several Zionist officials had regarded Huj as a “friendly” village. Nevertheless, the dominant military assessment treated it as unreliable because it lay near the front line with the Egyptian army. The inhabitants were consequently expelled despite their earlier relations with neighbouring settlements.

On 4 August 1948, representatives of Dorot, Nir Am, and Ruhama submitted a complaint to David Ben-Gurion concerning the treatment of the inhabitants of Huj. Ben-Gurion did not directly reverse the expulsion but expressed the hope that the military command would avoid comparable actions and remedy past conduct where possible.

In September 1948, the displaced villagers petitioned the Israeli authorities for permission to return, arguing that the truce was holding and that the area had become quiet. Two Israeli officials supported their case, but military authorities rejected the request on security grounds and out of concern that permitting their return might establish a precedent. Minister of Minority Affairs Bechor Shitrit recommended that they be allowed to return to a location farther inside Israeli-held territory, though not necessarily to Huj itself. The villagers were ultimately prevented from returning.

Israeli Settlements and Facilities on the Land of Huj

Dorot was established in 1941 on land that had traditionally belonged to Huj. After the village’s occupation and depopulation in 1948, Dorot took control of additional portions of its land. No

separate civilian settlement is documented as having been constructed directly over the centre of Huj, although an Israeli sheep farm was established at the village site.

Havat Shikmim, or Sycamore Ranch, was also established on land belonging to Huj and was later purchased by Ariel Sharon in 1972.

Huj Today

Only one dilapidated building remains from Huj. It is a concrete structure with rectangular doors and windows and a flat roof. Its original function is uncertain, and it was later used as an agricultural storehouse.

The remains of a watering trough can also be identified. Sycamore and cactus plants grow along the eastern and western edges of the site, where an Israeli sheep farm was established.

Sources

- [Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question – Huj.](#)
- [Palestine Remembered – Huj.](#)
- [Government of Palestine, Village Statistics, April 1945.](#)
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