

Al-Sanbariyya



Al-Sanbariyya - A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Safad Subdistrict

Al-Sanbariyya was a Palestinian village in the Safad Subdistrict, located approximately 31.5 km northeast of the city of Safad. It stood on gently sloping ground at the northern edge of the al-Hula Plain, at an average elevation of about 150 meters above sea level, close to Wadi Hasibani.

The inhabitants of al-Sanbariyya were displaced during the Nakba and the occupation of Palestine in 1948. Although 1 May 1948 is frequently given as the date on which the village was occupied, Walid Khalidi and PalQuest state that the precise date is unknown and cautiously place its occupation in May 1948, within

the operational area of Operation Yiftach.

Location and Geography of Al-Sanbariyya

Al-Sanbariyya was situated on gently sloping terrain at the northern end of the al-Hula Plain. Its houses had no regular geometric layout and were scattered along the network of roads and tracks linking the village with nearby communities.

Palestine Remembered places al-Zuq al-Fawqani roughly to the northwest, Ghajar to the north, al-Shawka al-Tahta to the east, al-Mansura to the southeast, al-Khisas to the south, and al-Manshiyya to the southwest. The village lands also bordered lands belonging to al-Shawka al-Tahta, al-Zuq al-Fawqani, al-Zuq al-Tahtani, and al-Khisas.

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Safad
Distance from Safad	Approximately 31.5 km northeast
Average elevation	Approximately 150 m above sea level
Physical setting	Northern edge of the al-Hula Plain, near Wadi Hasibani
Total land area, 1944/45	2,532 dunums

Population of Al-Sanbariyya

The official 1931 Census of Palestine recorded 83 inhabitants living in 20 occupied houses. The census table shows that 77 were Muslims and 6 were Christians.

In the 1944/45 statistics, the village population was recorded as 130. Palestine Remembered gives an estimated population of 151 for 1948; this is a later estimate rather than an official census figure. The same source estimates the number of refugees originating from the village at 926 in 1998.

Year	Population	Nature of Figure / Notes
1931	83	Official census; 77 Muslims and 6 Christians

Year	Population	Nature of Figure / Notes
1944/45	130	Official British Mandate statistics
1948	151	Later estimate given by Palestine Remembered, not an official census
1998	926 refugees	Later estimate of refugees and their descendants

Number of Houses

Year	Houses	Nature of Figure
1931	20	Official census
1948	36	Later estimate reported by Palestine Remembered

Land Ownership in Al-Sanbaryyya

The total area of al-Sanbaryyya in the 1944/45 statistics was 2,532 dunums. Palestine Remembered presents the simplified land-ownership categories as follows:

Ownership Category	Area in Dunums
Palestinian	2,284
Transferred to Zionists	198
Communal/Public	50
Total	2,532

The figures correspond to the official categories reproduced by PalQuest: 2,284 dunums classified as Arab land, 198 dunums as Jewish land, and 50 dunums as public land.

Land Use in 1944/45

Use	Arab	Jewish	Public	Total
Cereals	1,739	154	0	1,893
Plantations and irrigable land	539	44	0	583

Use	Arab	Jewish	Public	Total
Non-cultivable land	6	0	50	56
Total	2,284	198	50	2,532

A total of 2,476 dunums, approximately 98 percent of the village lands, were classified as cultivable. The 56 dunums of non-cultivable land should not be attributed entirely to Palestinian ownership: the detailed table identifies 6 dunums as Arab and 50 dunums as public land.

Economic Life in Al-Sanbaryyya

Agriculture formed the basis of the village economy. Cereals occupied the largest share of cultivated land, with 1,893 dunums devoted to cereal production in the land-use table, including 1,739 Arab-owned dunums and 154 Jewish-owned dunums.

Plantations and irrigable land covered another 583 dunums, of which 539 were classified as Arab land and 44 as Jewish land. Walid Khalidi also records that villagers cultivated fruits and vegetables on the northern and southern sides of the village site.

Water

The inhabitants obtained their drinking water from nearby springs. The village was also geographically associated with Wadi Hasibani, and remains of a Roman bridge crossing the wadi were recorded north of the village.

Education and Services

The principal sources used for this article do not provide sufficiently documented information to establish the existence of a formal school in al-Sanbaryyya, its founding date, or the number of pupils. Such details have therefore not been asserted on the basis of unverified local accounts.

Archaeological Remains

The area surrounding al-Sanbaryyya contained evidence of very early human activity. Walid Khalidi records a prehistoric site more than 100,000 years old a little over one kilometer north of the village, on a terrace approximately 100 meters higher than the village site.

Several cave tombs dating to the end of the third millennium BCE were also identified near the village and on its lands. Archaeologists additionally discovered an inscription on a Roman column referring to the Roman emperor Julian, who lived in the fourth century CE. The column was found immediately north of al-Sanbaryyya, near a Roman bridge over Wadi Hasibani. These discoveries indicate ancient settlement in the surrounding area, although they do not in themselves demonstrate uninterrupted settlement between those periods and the modern Palestinian village.

Occupation and Depopulation of Al-Sanbaryyya in 1948

The precise date on which al-Sanbaryyya was occupied is not known. Palestine Remembered lists 1 May 1948, but Walid Khalidi states more cautiously that the village was probably occupied sometime in May 1948 because it lay within the area targeted by Operation Yiftach in eastern Galilee.

Operation Yiftach ran from 15 April to 25 May 1948 and was conducted within the framework of Plan Dalet to gain control of eastern Galilee before the termination of the British Mandate. Palmach forces carried out the operation, with the Palmach's First Battalion serving as its spearhead.

It is important, however, to distinguish between the First Battalion's general role in Operation Yiftach and the identity of the unit that entered al-Sanbaryyya itself. Palestine Remembered identifies the First Battalion as the attacking unit, while Khalidi's village-specific entry does not independently identify the unit that actually entered the village. The occupation can therefore be securely associated with Operation Yiftach and the Palmach, while the specific assault unit remains less

firmly established.

Item	Information
Date of occupation	Precise date unknown; probably May 1948
Date listed by Palestine Remembered	1 May 1948
Military operation	Operation Yiftach
Duration of operation	15 April – 25 May 1948
Main force	Palmach; its First Battalion spearheaded the operation generally
Village-specific assault unit	Not independently identified in Khalidi's village entry; Palestine Remembered attributes it to the Palmach's First Battalion

Destruction of the Village Houses

Walid Khalidi, citing an Israeli account discussed in his work, reports that later in the summer of 1948 a Jewish National Fund official toured the area and found that a number of houses in al-Sanbariyya were still standing, although they had lost their roofs. Khalidi considered the roofless houses an indication that the village had been directly attacked.

According to the account transmitted by Khalidi, the official instructed the secretariat of the nearby settlement of Ma'yan Barukh to demolish the remaining houses. The proposed demolition was explicitly linked to preventing the villagers from returning and facilitating the acquisition of village lands. The proposal was reportedly accepted immediately and was presumably implemented soon afterward.

Israeli Settlements on and near Al-Sanbariyya's Lands

Ma'yan Barukh: Established in 1947 on al-Sanbariyya's land, immediately north of the village site. This is the settlement clearly identified by Khalidi and PalQuest as having been founded on village land.

Dafna: Established in 1939 approximately 3 km east of al-Sanbariyya. Khalidi describes it as a nearby settlement but does not state that it was founded on al-Sanbariyya's land. It should therefore not be classified as a settlement established on the village lands.

Yuval: Established in 1952 on land belonging to the depopulated Palestinian village of Abil al-Qamh, approximately one kilometer northwest of the al-Sanbariyya site. It was not established on al-Sanbariyya's land.

Al-Sanbariyya Today

According to the field description published by Walid Khalidi in *All That Remains*, the uneven village site was covered with grass and trees, including a number of old olive trees, and no clearly recognizable remains of the original village were visible. The surrounding lands were being cultivated by Israeli farmers.

This description is based on fieldwork conducted before the publication of *All That Remains* in 1992 and should not be treated as a direct field verification of conditions at the site in 2026. Palestine Remembered contains later community documentation whose captions refer to cactus growth and traces of demolished houses, but the dates on which those materials were actually recorded are not sufficiently established to treat them as a comprehensive current survey.

Sources

PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question, “al-Sanbariyya.”

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