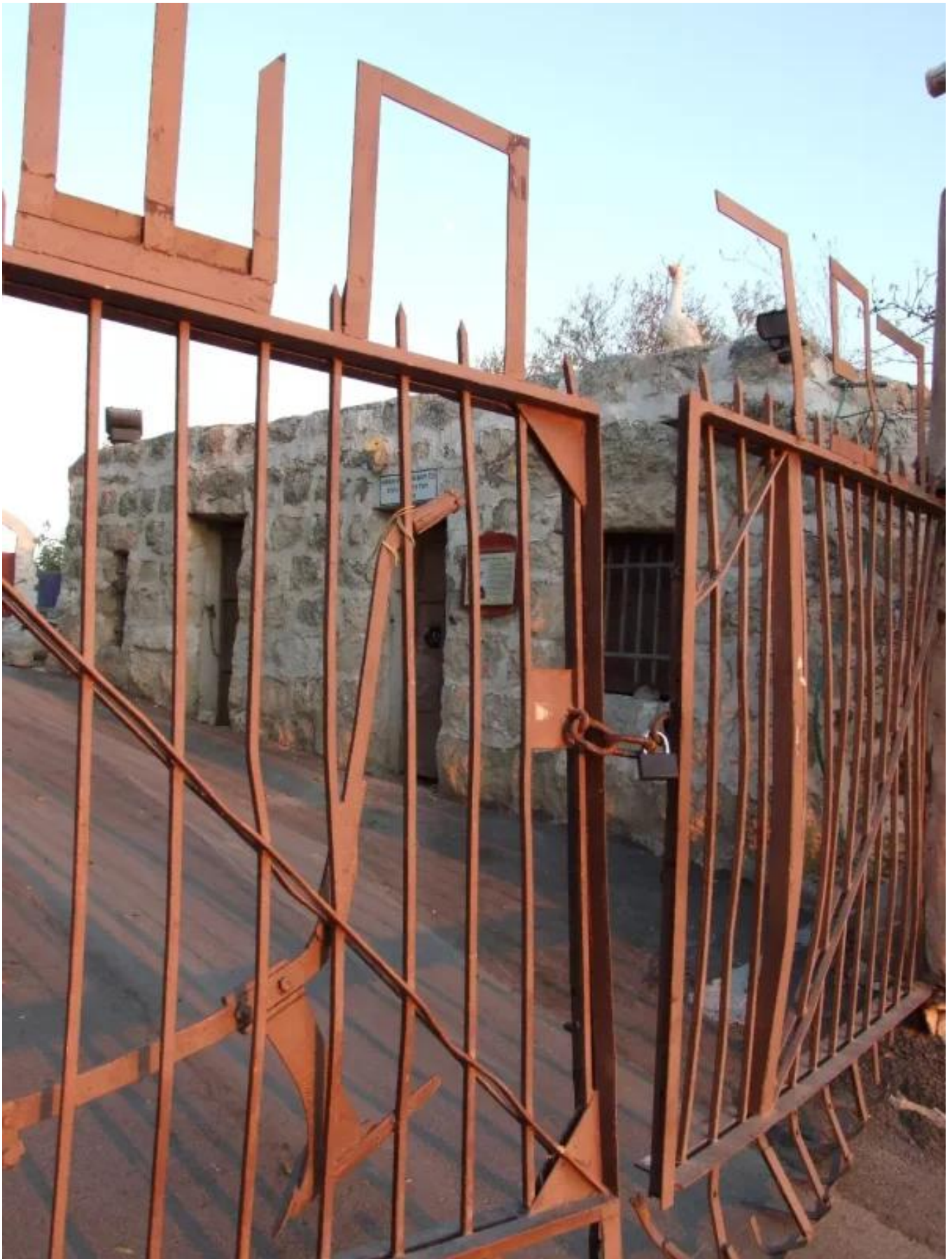


Our Palestine — Depopulated village — Ramla — 18 July 1948

Shilta



Shilta - Depopulated Palestinian Village of the Ramla Subdistrict

Shilta was a Palestinian village in the Ramla Subdistrict, located approximately 15 kilometers east of Ramla on a hard limestone hill at the easternmost edge of the central coastal plain. Its average elevation was approximately 300 meters above sea level.

The village was relatively small. Its stone-and-mud houses stood close together along narrow alleys, and its inhabitants depended principally on rain-fed agriculture and animal husbandry. They cultivated cereals, vegetables, grapes, figs, almonds, and olives.

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Ramla
Distance from Ramla	Approximately 15 km east
Average Elevation	Approximately 300 meters
Population in 1931	22
Occupied Houses in 1931	7
Population in 1944/1945	100
Estimated Population in 1948	Approximately 116 - a later estimate, not an official 1948 census
Total Land Area in 1945	5,380 dunums
Attack and Depopulation	Night of 17-18 July 1948; the village was probably depopulated as a result of the attack
Final Israeli Control	Date uncertain; the Yiftach unit that entered Shilta on 18 July withdrew that morning
Military Operation	Operation Dani
Village-Specific Attacking Unit	A company of the First Battalion, Yiftach Brigade

Item	Information
Cause of Displacement	Military assault during the final stage of Operation Dani
Documented Settlements on Village Land	Shilat and Kefar Rut, established in 1977

Location

Shilta stood on a hard limestone hill at the eastern edge of the central coastal plain, where the lowlands begin to rise toward the central Palestinian highlands.

Several trails connected the village with neighboring communities, including Ni'lin, al-Midya, Saffa, Bayt Sira, al-Burj, and Barfiliya.

The village's elevated position gave it a commanding relationship to the surrounding landscape and later became important during the fighting of July 1948.

Historical Background

Walid Khalidi identifies the village site with the Crusader locality known as **Capharscylta**.

When the French traveler Victor Guérin visited in 1874, he described Shilta as consisting of only a few houses. Some incorporated remains of older buildings that had been enclosed by newer walls to make them habitable.

Guérin also recorded the remains of a Crusader-period structure.

The modern Palestinian village therefore occupied a site with archaeological and settlement remains predating its later built environment.

Built Environment

Shilta's houses were constructed largely of stone and mud and stood close

together, separated by narrow alleys.

The Palestine Index Gazetteer classified Shilta as a small hamlet or farm locality.

The official 1931 Census of Palestine recorded seven occupied houses and a population of 22.

Population

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
1931	22	Official Census of Palestine – 13 males and 9 females in 7 occupied houses
1944/1945	100	Government of Palestine Village Statistics
1948	116	Later demographic estimate, not an official census
1998	712	Later estimate of refugees and descendants rather than a comprehensive official census

The 1948 and 1998 figures should not be described as British Mandate census statistics. They are later demographic estimates reproduced in Palestinian documentation.

Land Ownership in 1945

The 1945 Village Statistics recorded a total of **5,380 dunums** for Shilta.

Using the original terminology of the official Mandate table:

Total	5,380
Official Ownership Category	Area in Dunums
Arab	5,379
Jewish	0
Public	1

Almost the entire village land area was therefore classified as Arab in the official

statistics, with no land recorded in the Jewish category.

Land Use in 1945

Total	5,380
Land Use	Area in Dunums
Cereals	2,159
Plantations and Irrigable Land	27
Total Cultivated / Cultivable Land	2,186
Built-up Area	6
Non-Cultivable Land	3,188

Cultivated and cultivable land represented approximately 41 percent of the village total, while built-up and non-cultivable land accounted for about 59 percent.

Economic Life

The inhabitants relied principally on rain-fed agriculture and animal husbandry.

Cereals occupied the largest cultivated area, while residents also grew vegetables and fruit trees including grapes, figs, almonds, and olives.

The rocky character of the surrounding landscape limited agricultural expansion, but more than two thousand dunums were still devoted to cereal cultivation before the Nakba.

Mosque and the Shrine of Shaykh Ahmad al-Shiltawi

A mosque stood at the northern end of Shilta.

Near it was a shrine associated with **Shaykh Ahmad al-Shiltawi**, one of the locally remembered religious landmarks of the village.

Education and Services

Walid Khalidi's principal village entry does not document an independent school in Shilta, and the principal sources used here do not provide sufficient evidence to establish one.

No school name or pupil count is therefore added without direct documentation.

Operation Dani

Shilta's military history in 1948 is tied to the final stage of **Operation Dani**, which ran from 9 to 18 July.

It was the largest Israeli offensive launched during the Ten Days between the First and Second Truces and was carried out in two stages.

The first stage, from 9 to 12 July, focused on Lydda, Ramla, and surrounding localities.

The second stage, from 13 to 18 July, shifted operations toward al-Latrun and the al-Latrun–Ramallah road.

The Attack on Shilta, 17–18 July 1948

During the closing hours of Operation Dani, immediately before the Second Truce, Israeli forces turned from the Lydda–Ramla plain toward al-Latrun.

On the night of 17–18 July, they attempted to cut the al-Latrun–Ramallah road.

After midnight on 18 July, **a company of the First Battalion of the Yiftach Brigade** occupied Shilta.

This is the specifically documented unit that entered the village and should not be confused with all the other brigades participating elsewhere in Operation Dani.

Yiftach's Withdrawal from Shilta

By morning, the company concluded that Shilta could not be held because an elevated position controlled by the Arab Legion dominated its position.

The unit therefore withdrew from the village but came under heavy fire during the withdrawal. Khalidi's source records forty-four Israeli soldiers killed.

This episode is important because the Israeli entry into Shilta after midnight on 18 July **was not itself an uninterrupted final occupation**; the attacking unit withdrew that morning.

Depopulation of Shilta

Walid Khalidi concludes that Shilta was probably depopulated as a result of this attack.

18 July 1948 is therefore the clearest date associated with the military assault and probable depopulation, but it should not automatically be treated as the date of permanent Israeli control.

The most clearly supported cause of displacement is **direct military assault during Operation Dani**.

When Did Final Israeli Control Begin?

After the Yiftach company withdrew, Khalidi states that it is not clear when Shilta was occupied again.

He raises the possibility that the village ultimately came under Israeli control through the later armistice arrangements.

The historical sequence therefore requires three separate stages: the temporary Israeli occupation on 18 July, the probable depopulation associated with the attack, and a later final transfer to Israeli control whose exact date is not established.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Beginning of Operation Dani	9 July 1948	A large Israeli offensive began across the Lydda-Ramla region and the Jerusalem corridor.
Second Stage Begins	13 July 1948	Operations increasingly shifted toward al-Latrun and the Ramallah road.
Attack on Shilta	Night of 17–18 July 1948	Yiftach forces moved as part of the attempt to cut the al-Latrun–Ramallah road.
Temporary Occupation	After midnight, 18 July 1948	A company of the First Battalion of the Yiftach Brigade entered and occupied Shilta.
Israeli Withdrawal	Morning of 18 July 1948	The company withdrew under heavy fire after determining that its position was dominated by an elevated Arab Legion position.
Depopulation	Probably during the same episode	Khalidi considers the village likely to have been depopulated as a result of the military assault.
Final Israeli Control	Exact date unknown	The principal source does not establish when the village was reoccupied and suggests that it may ultimately have passed to Israel under armistice arrangements.

Military Operation and Unit

Military Operation: Operation Dani.

Village-Specific Attacking Unit: A company of the First Battalion, Yiftach Brigade.

Other brigades participated in Operation Dani elsewhere on the front, but the principal source specifically identifies the First Battalion of Yiftach in the assault on Shilta.

Cause of Displacement

The most clearly documented cause of Shilta's depopulation was the **military assault conducted during Operation Dani**.

The principal sources do not describe an earlier voluntary or economic departure; they connect the village's depopulation directly with the July 1948 attack.

Extent of Destruction

The original Palestinian built-up center largely disappeared after the Nakba and Shilta no longer survives as the village it was before 1948.

Nevertheless, Khalidi's field description records surviving cactus hedges, wells, trees, and elements of the older agricultural landscape.

No reliable numerical destruction percentage is supplied by the principal source, so an unsupported figure such as 100 percent is not used.

Settlements on Shilta Land

Walid Khalidi and PalQuest document two agricultural settlements established on Shilta land in **1977**:

Settlement	Year Established	Documentation
Shilat	1977	Documented by Khalidi and PalQuest on Shilta village land
Kefar Rut	1977	Documented by Khalidi and PalQuest on Shilta village land

Later Palestinian land documentation also associates parts of the former Shilta land area with subsequent settlement expansion, including Lapid, established in 1996. The core Khalidi/PalQuest village entry, however, specifically names Shilat and Kefar Rut, so they are retained here as the principal directly documented settlements.

Shilta Today

The available description of the site comes primarily from historical field research incorporated into Walid Khalidi's *All That Remains* and should not be interpreted as direct field verification in 2026.

At the time of that documentation, the site was covered by mountain vegetation and long grasses, together with pomegranate, almond, and carob trees.

Some cactus hedges survived and several wells remained visible.

Greenhouses for flower cultivation and newer structures had been built at the site, while Israeli settlement housing had also been constructed on village land.

The original Palestinian village no longer survived as an inhabited community, although elements of its agricultural and water landscape remained visible.

Sources

- [PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Shilta](#)
- [PalQuest – Operation Dani](#)
- [Institute for Palestine Studies – Walid Khalidi, All That Remains](#)
- [Palestine Remembered – Shilta, Ramla District](#)
- [Palestine Remembered – Shilta entry from All That Remains](#)
- [Village Statistics 1945 – Ramle Subdistrict: Shilta Population and Land Ownership](#)
- [Village Statistics 1945 – Ramle Subdistrict: Shilta Agricultural Land Use](#)
- [Village Statistics 1945 – Ramle Subdistrict: Shilta Built-up and Non-Cultivable Land](#)