

'Arab al-Safa



'Arab al-Safa - Depopulated Palestinian Village of Baysan

'Arab al-Safa, also known simply as al-Safa, was a Palestinian village in the Baysan Subdistrict. It lay approximately 7.5 kilometers south of Baysan in the Jordan Valley, at an average elevation of about 225 meters below sea level.

The settlement extended over a broad area south of Masil al-Jizl and Wadi al-Shaykh Mahmud and overlooked the open Jordan Valley toward the Jordan River. A secondary road linked it with the Baysan-Jericho highway approximately five

kilometers to the west, while dirt tracks connected it with neighboring communities near the river.

The population reached 650 in the official 1944/45 statistics. The village statistical land unit covered 12,518 dunums, divided in the Government of Palestine tables among Arab, Jewish, and Public ownership categories.

The inhabitants were displaced on 20 May 1948, about a week after the fall of Baysan. Golani Brigade forces controlled the area. Although some secondary summaries label the event as part of Operation Gideon, that operation formally ended on 15 May; 'Arab al-Safa's depopulation therefore occurred in its immediate aftermath during the continued military consolidation of the Baysan Valley.

Basic Information

Field	Information
Name	'Arab al-Safa
Arabic name	عرب الصفا
Alternative name	al-Safa
Subdistrict	Baysan
Location	South of Baysan in the Jordan Valley near the Jordan River
Distance from Baysan	Approximately 7.5 km
Average elevation	Approximately 225 m below sea level
Palestine Grid	Approximately 200/205
Population in 1922	255, all Muslims; Palestine Remembered displays 225, but the original 1922 census table records 255
Population in 1931	540
Houses in 1931	108
Population in 1944/45	650

Field	Information
1948 population estimate	754 – later estimate, not an official census
Total land area	12,518 dunums
Depopulation date	20 May 1948
Military context	After Operation Gideon, during continued Golani control of the Baysan Valley within the broader Plan Dalet framework
Military unit	Golani Brigade; no village-specific battalion is securely documented
Cause of depopulation	Impact of the fall of Baysan and subsequent military advance through the valley; no independently documented village street battle
Israeli settlements on village lands	None according to Walid Khalidi and PalQuest

Name and Formation of the Settlement

The locality appears in the principal Palestinian sources as 'Arab al-Safa and, in shortened form, al-Safa.

Khalidi does not provide a securely documented linguistic derivation of the name, so no unsupported etymology is adopted.

Like several communities in the Baysan Valley, 'Arab al-Safa originally served as a seasonal Bedouin summer encampment. It later became a permanent settlement as its inhabitants increasingly adopted a sedentary way of life.

Late Ottoman Period

The French traveler Victor Guérin passed through 'Arab al-Safa in the late nineteenth century and recorded several ancient tombs in the area.

This indicates archaeological remains within the village landscape, but Guérin's reference does not securely date the tombs.

They are therefore not assigned to the Roman, Byzantine, or any other specific archaeological period without additional specialist evidence.

Location and Geography

'Arab al-Safa extended over a broad area south of Masil al-Jizl and Wadi al-Shaykh Mahmud and overlooked the open country toward the Jordan River.

A secondary road connected the village with the Baysan-Jericho highway, which passed approximately five kilometers to the west.

Dirt tracks also connected the settlement with neighboring communities near the Jordan River.

Palestinian mapping places Umm 'Ajra to the north, 'Arab al-'Arida to the west, al-Khunayzir to the south, and the Jordan River to the east.

Built Environment

The houses and remaining tents of 'Arab al-Safa were scattered along both sides of the secondary road leading toward the Baysan-Jericho highway.

Many houses were constructed from mud and reeds, reflecting both the environmental conditions of the Baysan Valley and the settlement's Bedouin origins.

The 1931 census recorded 108 houses.

Population

Year	Population	Status
1922	255	Official census; all Muslims. Palestine Remembered gives 225, but the original census table records 255
1931	540	Official census in 108 houses; reproduced census data give 536 Muslims and 4 Christians

Year	Population	Status
1944/45	650	Official Mandate-period estimate
1948	754	Later estimate, not an official 1948 census
1998	4,630	Later Palestine Remembered estimate of refugees and descendants

Number of Houses

Year	Houses	Note
1931	108	Official census figure
1948	150	Later Palestine Remembered estimate, not an official house census

Land Ownership, 1944/45

The original Government of Palestine terminology was Arab, Jewish, and Public. Those categories are preserved here rather than silently reinterpreted:

Total	12,518
Ownership Category	Dunums
Arab	7,549
Jewish	2,523
Public	2,446

The figures balance exactly: $7,549 + 2,523 + 2,446 = 12,518$ dunums.

Public land remains a distinct official category and should not be reassigned to either Arab or Jewish private ownership without separate cadastral evidence.

Land Use, 1944/45

Total	7,549	2,523	2,446	12,518
Land Use	Arab	Jewish	Public	Total
Cereals	7,449	2,460	922	10,831
Plantations and irrigable land	0	14	0	14
Citrus and bananas	0	49	0	49
Non-cultivable land	100	0	1,524	1,624

The table balances exactly: $10,831 + 14 + 49 + 1,624 = 12,518$ dunums.

The published PalQuest table does not provide a separate built-up acreage, so no unsupported figure is added.

Correction to a Secondary Land-Use Table

Palestine Remembered's summary table displays 8,371 dunums of cereals under its Palestinian column. This figure combines 7,449 Arab dunums with 922 Public dunums.

Likewise, its displayed 1,624 non-arable dunums combines 100 Arab dunums with 1,524 Public dunums.

This article follows the detailed PalQuest breakdown and preserves the distinction between Arab and Public land.

Economy and Agriculture

Agriculture was the principal livelihood of the inhabitants.

Palestinian cultivated land was concentrated particularly east of the settlement and in the zawr of the Jordan River. Cereals were the dominant crop by acreage.

Vegetables were also cultivated, and palm trees grew near a spring southeast of the village.

The poorer katar soils and nearby marshy areas were unsuitable for cultivation.

Water

Several springs flowed on village land near the Jordan River and supported domestic needs and cultivation.

Wadi al-Shaykh Mahmud and the proximity of the Jordan River were also defining features of the local landscape.

The principal sources reviewed do not securely list the individual names of all village springs, so no unsupported names are added.

Education

No independently documented school, founding date, pupil enrollment, or teacher total was located for 'Arab al-Safa in the principal Palestinian sources reviewed.

No school is therefore asserted without direct evidence.

Religious Buildings

No independently documented mosque or church specific to 'Arab al-Safa immediately before the Nakba was located in the principal sources consulted.

Population religion alone is insufficient to demonstrate the existence of a particular religious building.

Archaeology

Victor Guérin recorded several ancient tombs at 'Arab al-Safa during his nineteenth-century journey through the region.

The reference establishes archaeological remains but does not provide sufficient evidence to date them securely.

The tombs are therefore not assigned to a particular archaeological period without specialist documentation.

Operation Gideon

The Golani Brigade carried out Operation Gideon in the Baysan Valley from 10 to 15 May 1948.

The campaign resulted in the conquest of Baysan and numerous surrounding Palestinian communities and caused major population displacement throughout the valley.

'Arab al-Safa, however, was depopulated on 20 May, five days after Operation Gideon formally ended.

The village's depopulation should therefore be described as taking place in the immediate aftermath of Operation Gideon rather than during the operation itself.

The Fall of Baysan and Its Effect on 'Arab al-Safa

Baysan fell on 12 May 1948 during Operation Gideon.

Khalidi considers the depopulation of 'Arab al-Safa eight days later most likely connected to the military and psychological consequences of the fall of the subdistrict capital and the continued Golani advance through the valley.

This is consistent with Palestine Remembered's classification of the cause as the influence of the fall or exodus of a neighboring town.

Depopulation of 'Arab al-Safa - 20 May 1948

The inhabitants of 'Arab al-Safa left on 20 May 1948.

Khalidi does not document a separate pitched battle inside the village, a house-to-house assault, or a village-specific written expulsion order on that date.

He instead considers the departure most likely a consequence of the fall of Baysan and the continuing military takeover of the valley.

The occupying forces were from the Golani Brigade and were operating within the broader military framework of Plan Dalet.

Military Unit

The Golani Brigade is the military formation directly identified in Khalidi's account of 'Arab al-Safa.

No particular battalion or company is securely identified as the force that entered the village.

This article therefore does not transfer battalion-level attributions from other Baysan villages to 'Arab al-Safa.

Cause of Depopulation

The best-supported explanation is the impact of Baysan's fall and the subsequent Golani military advance through the Baysan Valley.

The available village-level evidence does not establish a separate ground battle at 'Arab al-Safa or prove that all inhabitants were directly expelled in a single action.

The most precise formulation is therefore **depopulation under the impact of Baysan's fall and the subsequent Golani military consolidation of the valley.**

Destruction

The village's built environment subsequently disappeared, and secondary summary tables classify 'Arab al-Safa as completely destroyed.

The principal village account does not provide a precise demolition date or establish that all structures were destroyed on 20 May itself.

The depopulation date and the later destruction of the built environment should therefore be treated as separate historical stages.

Ethnic Cleansing in Source Classification

Palestine Remembered classifies 'Arab al-Safa using the term “complete ethnic cleansing.” The expression is retained here only as an attributed source classification.

The more specifically documented sequence consists of the fall of Baysan, continued military consolidation of the valley, the departure of 'Arab al-Safa's inhabitants on 20 May, the absence of permanent collective return, and the later disappearance of the village's buildings.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Date	Event
10 May 1948	Operation Gideon begins under the Golani Brigade in the Baysan Valley.
12 May 1948	Baysan, the subdistrict capital, falls.
15 May 1948	Operation Gideon formally ends.
15–20 May 1948	Golani forces continue consolidating military control over communities in the Baysan Valley.
20 May 1948	The inhabitants of 'Arab al-Safa are displaced; Khalidi considers this most likely connected with the fall of Baysan and the subsequent military advance.
After 20 May 1948	The village's buildings disappear at a later, undocumented stage.

Israeli Settlements on 'Arab al-Safa's Lands

According to Walid Khalidi and PalQuest, **no Israeli settlement was established on the lands of 'Arab al-Safa itself.**

Tirat Zvi, founded in 1937, lies near the village site to the southwest but stands on land belonging to the Palestinian village of al-Zarra'a.

Sde Eliyahu, established in 1939, lies to the west but was founded on land belonging to 'Arab al-'Arida.

Neither should therefore be listed as a settlement established on 'Arab al-Safa's village lands solely because of geographical proximity.

'Arab al-Safa Today

According to the field description used by Walid Khalidi before the publication of *All That Remains* in 1992, only three palm trees remained at the former village site.

The surrounding land was being cultivated with wheat.

This description constitutes documented historical field evidence from the period before the publication of Khalidi's book rather than a comprehensive direct field survey of the site in 2026.

Later Palestinian mapping and community documentation provide additional geographic material, but no comprehensive recent Palestinian archaeological or cadastral survey was located that would justify replacing Khalidi's field description in full.

Sources

- [PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: 'Arab al-Safa](#)
- [PalQuest – Operation Gideon and its chronology](#)
- [Palestine Remembered – 'Arab al-Safa, Baysan Subdistrict](#)
- [Palestinian Villages Encyclopedia – 'Arab al-Safa / al-Safa](#)
- [Falastinuna – 'Arab al-Safa: population, location, and depopulation](#)
- [Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics – Historical Census Reports](#)
- [Government of Palestine – Census of Palestine 1922](#)