

Kawfakha



Kawfakha: A Depopulated Palestinian Village in the Gaza District

Kawfakha was a Palestinian village in the Gaza District, situated on rolling sandy terrain in the northern Negev approximately 19 kilometres east of Gaza, at an average elevation of about 150 metres above sea level. Its population reached 500 in the 1944/1945 statistics. Units of the Palmach's Negev Brigade attacked the village on the night of 27–28 May 1948, after which its Palestinian inhabitants were expelled during the Nakba and the occupation of Palestine in 1948.

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Gaza

Item	Information
Distance from district center	19 km east of Gaza
Average Elevation	150 m above sea level
Population in 1931	317
Number of Houses in 1931	56
Population in 1944/1945	500
Estimated Population in 1948	About 580 – a later demographic estimate, not an official census
Total Land Area in 1945	8,569 dunams
Attack and Depopulation	Units of the Palmach's Negev Brigade attacked the village on the night of 27–28 May 1948, according to Israeli historian Benny Morris as cited by Khalidi, and its inhabitants were driven out even though they had repeatedly offered to surrender in exchange for being allowed to stay.
Final Israeli Control	By 30 May 1948: the village was attacked on the night of 27–28 May, and the New York Times reported in its issue of 30 May that it had fallen together with the neighbouring village of al-Muharraqa; the available sources do not give the exact day of its occupation.
Military Unit	Units of the Palmach's Negev Brigade – according to Benny Morris as cited by Khalidi
Cause of Depopulation	Direct military assault by Israeli occupation forces, followed by the expulsion of the inhabitants despite their offers to surrender in exchange for remaining in their village
Settlements Documented on Village Lands	Nir 'Aqiva, established in 1953 on village lands, southwest of the village site

Location

Kawfakha stood on rolling sandy land in the northern Negev, approximately 19 kilometres east of Gaza and at an average elevation of about 150 metres above sea level.

The village lay along the southern bank of Wadi Abu Shunnar, a tributary of Wadi Hawdaj.

A network of secondary roads connected Kawfakha with the roads running between Gaza and Julis and with the coastal highway.

Palestinian reference maps place Huj roughly northwest of Kawfakha, al-Jammama to the northeast, al-Muharraqa to the southwest, and Bedouin lands of the Beersheba region to the east and southeast.

Foundation of Kawfakha

Kawfakha was a relatively recent Palestinian village. Walid Khalidi and PalQuest state that it was founded in the late nineteenth century by people from Gaza city who moved into the area to cultivate the surrounding lands.

Archaeological remains at Khirbat Kawfakha nevertheless indicate that the site itself had been occupied or used in much earlier historical periods.

Architecture and Public Facilities

The houses of Kawfakha extended along a northwest-southeast axis, giving the village an approximately rectangular layout.

A mosque stood at the centre of the village. It was constructed during the reign of Ottoman Sultan Abd al-Hamid II, between 1876 and 1909.

Kawfakha also had an elementary school and several small shops.

All of the village inhabitants were Muslims.

The built-up area covered approximately 31 dunams in the 1944/1945 statistics.

Population

Kawfakha had 203 inhabitants in the 1922 census.

In the 1931 census, the population increased to 317 people living in 56 houses.

According to the 1944/1945 statistics, the population reached 500.

The estimates of approximately 580 inhabitants in 1948 and 3,562 refugees and descendants in 1998 are later demographic estimates rather than official British Mandate census figures.

Population of Kawfakha

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
1922	203	Official census
1931	317	Official census
1944/1945	500	Government of Palestine statistics
1948	About 580	Later estimate
1998	3,562	Estimate of refugees and their descendants

Number of Houses

The 1931 census recorded 56 houses in Kawfakha.

Later figures for the number of houses immediately before the Nakba are estimates rather than official census figures in the principal reference sources.

Land of Kawfakha

According to the 1944/1945 statistics, Kawfakha had a total land area of 8,569 dunams.

Private Arab ownership amounted to 87 dunams, while 8,482 dunams were classified as public or musha' land. No Jewish-owned land was recorded within the

village's statistical unit.

Total	8,569
Ownership Category	Area in Dunams
Private Arab ownership	87
Jewish ownership	0
Public / musha' land	8,482

Agriculture and Economic Life

Most inhabitants of Kawfakha worked in agriculture and relied on both rainfall and irrigation from wells, cisterns, and reservoirs that collected winter rainwater.

Two wells within the village supplied water for domestic use.

Fruit trees, including apricots, olives, almonds, grapes, and figs, were planted mainly on the northern side of the village, while cereals were grown across the surrounding lands.

According to the 1944/1945 statistics, 7,768 dunams were devoted to cereals, all classified as public or musha' land.

Irrigated and plantation land covered 87 dunams and was privately Arab-owned.

The principal reference sources do not provide a separate acreage for olive trees. Olives were one of several crops grown within the village's orchard land.

Total	87	8,482	8,569
Type of Use	Private Arab	Public / Musha'	Total
Irrigated and plantation land	87	0	87
Cereals	0	7,768	7,768
Built-up area	0	31	31
Uncultivable land	0	683	683

Archaeology

The village contained archaeological remains known as Khirbat Kawfakha.

The Survey of Western Palestine recorded remains of cisterns, marble columns, a Corinthian capital, mosaic pavements, and pottery at the site.

These remains indicate human activity at the site long before the foundation of the modern village in the late nineteenth century.

The Nakba and the Attack on Kawfakha

Short summary sources differ over the initial date of occupation. Palestine Remembered gives 25 May 1948, while the detailed Walid Khalidi and PalQuest account provides a more specific chronology.

According to this detailed account, **units of the Palmach's Negev Brigade** attacked Kawfakha on the night of **27-28 May 1948**.

A report published by the New York Times on 30 May stated that Kawfakha and neighbouring al-Muharraqa had fallen, indicating that both were under Israeli control by approximately 29 May.

This article therefore uses the night of 27-28 May as the best-documented date of the military assault rather than treating 25 May as the sole definitive occupation date.

Was Kawfakha Occupied During Operation Barak?

The Palestine Remembered summary tentatively associates Kawfakha with Operation Barak.

PalQuest, however, dates Operation Barak primarily to 9-13 May 1948 and lists

numerous affected villages without including Kawfakha.

The detailed Kawfakha account instead dates the attack to 27–28 May and attributes it to the Negev Brigade.

Because of this chronological and documentary discrepancy, this article does not conclusively assign Kawfakha's occupation to Operation Barak. It records the attacking brigade and documented assault date instead.

Occupation and Depopulation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Ground assault	27–28 May 1948	Units of the Palmach's Negev Brigade attacked the village at night, according to Israeli historian Benny Morris as cited by Khalidi.
Final occupation	By 30 May 1948	The New York Times reported in its issue of 30 May 1948 that Kawfakha and the neighbouring village of al-Muharraqa had fallen. The available sources do not give the exact day of the occupation.
Depopulation of the village	Late May 1948	The inhabitants were driven out even though they had repeatedly offered to surrender and accept Jewish rule in exchange for being allowed to stay; the Israeli authorities rejected their request on the grounds that such requests were either insincere or unreliable.
Settlement on village lands	1953	The settlement of Nir 'Aqiva was established on village lands, southwest of the village site.

Displacement of the Inhabitants

The Negev Brigade's assault resulted in the occupation of Kawfakha and the expulsion of its Palestinian population.

PalQuest and Walid Khalidi, transmitting an account by Israeli historian Benny Morris, state that the villagers had previously offered to surrender in exchange for being allowed to remain in their homes, but their request was rejected.

The inhabitants were not permitted to re-establish their community after the occupation, and most of the displaced villagers moved toward the Gaza area.

The Israeli account concerning the villagers' request to remain is cited here only as transmitted through Walid Khalidi and PalQuest and not through direct reliance on the Israeli source.

Local accounts describing earlier armed clashes, the burning of grain threshing floors, and the use of armoured vehicles require additional independent documentation before being treated as conclusively established elements of the military chronology.

Israeli Settlements on Kawfakha's Lands

Nir 'Aqiva

In **1953**, the settlement of Nir 'Aqiva was established on Kawfakha's lands southwest of the village site.

Israeli Settlements on Kawfakha's Lands

Name	Year Established	Relationship to the Village
Nir 'Aqiva	1953	Established on Kawfakha's lands southwest of the village site

Kawfakha After the Nakba

According to the field documentation relied upon by Walid Khalidi, the village mosque was the principal surviving building at the Kawfakha site.

The mosque is a stone structure with arched entrances and windows on all sides, and its roof is topped by three shallow domes.

At the time of field documentation, it was being used as a storehouse for animal fodder and as a horse stable.

Rubble from destroyed houses, cactus plants, and other desert vegetation covered the site, which had been fenced and used as pasture.

A citrus grove stood west of the site, while parts of the surrounding land were cultivated with cereals.

This description reflects the condition of the site during the field documentation relied upon by Walid Khalidi and should not necessarily be interpreted as a comprehensive survey updated to 2026.

Sources

- [PalQuest - Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Kawfakha.](#)
- [PalQuest: Kawfakha.](#)
- [PalQuest: Operation Barak.](#)
- [Palestine Remembered: Kawfakha, Gaza District.](#)
- [Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: Kawfakha*, as reproduced by Palestine Remembered.](#)
- [Sharif Kanaana and Rashad al-Madani, study of the depopulated village of Kawfakha.](#)
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- Government of Palestine, censuses of 1922 and 1931.
- Government of Palestine, Department of Statistics, *Village Statistics*, 1945.