

Sharafat

Introduction

Sharafat is a Bani Hasan tribe village in the Jerusalem Governorate. Other such villages include al-Walajah, Battir, al-Malhah, Beit Safafa, al-Jurah, Lifta, Sataf and Khirbet al-loz. The Bani Hasan tribe descends from Hasan bin al-Murtada al-Akbar, a relative of al-Hasan bin al-Hussein. It is believed that the tribe arrived in the Levant during the Ayyubid period, and some among it, settled in Palestine. Salah al-Din granted them large swathes of land, upon which they established villages south and west of Jerusalem.



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Location and Area

Sharafat sits six kilometers southwest of Jerusalem at an altitude of 750 meters above sea level. It is bordered by Beit Safafa and Beit Jala from the east, al-Walajah from the west, al-Malhah from the north, Beit Jala and Bethlehem from the South.¹ The so-called Armistice line drawn after the 1948 war runs across a foothill north of the village, through Wadi al-Nusour (Eagle Valley) and along the Jerusalem-Jaffa railway, with al-Malhah train station nearby and an Israeli shopping mall known as Kenyon Malhah.²

In terms of area, Sharafat is one of the smaller villages of Jerusalem. Some assume it is part of Beit Safafa, but it is in fact a distinct village with its own political and social history. The village covers some 1,962 donums,³ which is why it is considered small, especially when compared to other Jerusalem towns and villages such as Beit Hanina, which stretches over more than 15,000 donums.

Origin and History

The name of the village is believed to stem from its elevated geographic location overlooking the surrounding lands and villages, including al-Malhah and Beit Safafa. Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh notes in *Palestine, Our Homeland*: “It may be derived from [the Arabic word] *al-sharaf*, which denotes all that is elevated above the land and which overlooks its surroundings. A *mushrif* mountain means an elevated mountain.”⁴ The village also overlooks Jerusalem. From the outskirts of the village, one can see well-known landmarks such as the Orthodox Church of Ascension on the Mount of Olives east of the Old City of occupied Jerusalem.

Other historical resources note that the old name of the village was “Kafrat,” then “Shaftrat,” and eventually “Sharafat.”⁵ This may be attributed to the honor associated with the al-Badriyah family, as will be noted further on, as *Sharaf* in Arabic also means “honor.”

¹ [Sharafat](#) on Palestine Remembered. Accessed on November 19, 2017.

² Odetallah, Khaled. “Yaffa- al-Quds: Tarikh Muwjaz Li Sikkat al-Istimar” (Jaffa-Jerusalem: A Brief History of the Colonial Railway). Bab el-Wad. October 17, 2018. <https://bit.ly/30kKNyn>

³ See note 1.

⁴ Al-Dabbagh, Mustafa Murad. “Palestine, Our Homeland.” Palestine Remembered. Accessed on November 19, 2017.

<http://www.palestineremembered.com/Articles/Biladuna-Filistein/Story25925.html>

⁵ Canaan, Taufik. *Al-Awliya wa al-Mazarat Fi Filastin* (Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine). Published by the Palestinian Ministry of Culture. 1998.

Population

According to al-Dabbagh, Sharafat had a population of 130 Palestinians in 1961.⁶ Its low population figures in the 1960s may be attributed to the emigration of many residents following the 1948 war, particularly after the massacre perpetrated in the village in February 1951 by Zionist occupation forces, as will be elaborated below.

Today, Sharafat is home to nearly 2,000 Palestinian residents, 1,500 of whom are native to the village.⁷ The village is also home to families that were uprooted from other villages across Jerusalem and Palestine, including the nearby village of al-Malhah.⁸

Among Sharafat's original families are Mishal, Ayyad, Salah, Awad, Nassar, Battah and Abd al-Nabi.⁹

Among the families from the uprooted village of al-Malhah is the Faraj family, whose son Yehya Faraj was killed by Occupation forces in 2002 during the second Intifada.

Due to geographic proximity, many families from Beit Safafa live in Sharafat, in addition to many families from the lands occupied in 1948, most of whom had moved to Jerusalem for work or study purposes. Over the last decade, many housing units have been built in Sharafat by The Latin Patriarchate.

Social and Economic Context

Historically, economic activity in Sharafat centered on agriculture, including raising livestock. The villagers cultivated olives, wheat and other grains. For irrigation, they relied on Wadi al-Nusour, a dry riverbed that runs north of the village and overflows with water in winter. Villagers also resorted to natural springs in al-Walajah if they needed additional water. In

⁶ Al-Dabbagh, Mustafa Murad. "Palestine, Our Homeland." Palestine Remembered. Accessed on November 19, 2017. <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Articles/Biladuna-Filisteen/Story25925.html>

⁷ According to estimates by Sharafat's mukhtar Ismail Awad in an interview on August 16, 2017.

⁸ In an interview with Sharafat's mukhtar Ismail Awad on August 16, 2017, he noted that Sharafat was not known as a Jerusalem village for many Jerusalemites. It became better known after the construction of the Annexation and Expansion Wall, which isolated occupied Jerusalem's suburbs from its center. This has led people to seek alternative places in which to reside, including Sharafat, which has led to its urbanization.

⁹ Abd al-Nabi is one of the largest families in Sharafat. Mukhtar Ismail Awad notes that most of the family did not leave after the 148 and 1967 wars. As for the Mishal family, it is the smallest; the killing of many of its members in the 1951 massacre pushed some from the family to emigrate.

addition to agriculture, the people of Sharafat have been known to cut stone in quarries and sell it in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas.¹⁰

Prior to the expansion and urbanization of the village, and the influx of families in recent years, the old village was located near al-Badriyah mosque.

Landmarks

Al-Badriyah Mosque

Al-Badriyah mosque sits atop an elevated hill in the center of the village, adjacent to al-Badriyah shrine, after which it was named. The shrine is documented by Mujir al-Din al-Hanbali in his book *Uns al-Jalil Fi Tarikh al-Quds wa al-Khalil* (The glorious history of Jerusalem and Hebron), noting that it was built in the early 14th century by the al-Badriyah dynasty, which had settled in the region. It is believed that many venerable members of the al-Badriyah family were buried there.

According to al-Hanbali, the shrine itself was built by Daoud bin al-Sayed bin Mohammad bin al-Sayed Badr al-Din, whom he describes as “a righteous man of wondrous deeds... Among those deeds: the village of Sharafat was home to some Christians who worked the land, and he, his family and followers were the only Muslims in the village. He sequestered himself in prayer, until God Almighty revealed him. For when they [the Christians] pressed their wine, it turned to vinegar, and some say to water. ‘He is a wizard,’ they said, and they left. This was difficult news to the village landowner, and so, Daoud sent word to him and leased the village, where he built his zawayah and dome, and where he, his family and descendants were buried. He passed away in AH 701.”

The people of Sharafat recall that their ancestors related that the village was inhabited by Christian families who converted to Islam after they witnessed the deeds of a righteous man. Some of them note that there are Christian families by the same name living in nearby villages such as Beit Jala.

¹⁰ According to researcher and Sharafat resident Majd Muhyi al-Din al-Hidmi during a phone interview conducted on November 9, 2020.

The women and men of the village would pray by the shrine to receive blessings and fulfill their wishes. In addition to the shrine, one of the three oaks, al-Badriyah oak, is sanctified by the people of Sharafat. Children played under its shade and men gathered by it during festivals and social occasions.¹¹

Sharafat's Three Oaks

Sharafat is home to three giant oak trees located in the eastern and northern lands of the village. The first oak still stands next to al-Badriyah mosque and shrine. According to oral history, people used to gather around it during celebrations and seasonal festivals, especially given its central location near the mosque and shrine.

The second oak grows within Hoash al-Alami and is still there today, though it is in decline. It is the same oak noted in Serene Husseini's autobiography *Jerusalem Memories*, in which she describes how her grandfather Faidi Musa al-Alami sat in its shade. Villagers also remember their children playing under the same oak.

As for the third oak, barely a trace of it remains. It is located near Wadi al-Nusour to the east of the village. It was uprooted by the Occupation authorities for the expansion of a hiking trail along the Jerusalem-Jaffa railroad.¹²

Khirbat Beit Irzeh

Khirbat Beit Irzeh sits on the southern edge of Sharafat, bordering the village of Beit Jala, and could be reached through Gilo colony. It is situated 832 meters above sea level and contains "cisterns, cemeteries and caves."¹³ Historian Mujireddine al-Hanbali claims that Salah al-Din endowed the lands of Beit Irzeh to a commander in his army named Badr al-Din Mohammad bin Abi al-Qasem al-Hakkari.

¹¹ According to information collected by historian Majd Muhyi al-Din al-Hidmi in 2018.

¹² According to information gathered by researcher and amateur historian Majd Muhyi al-Din al-Hidmi in 2018.

¹³ Al-Dabbagh, Mustafa Murad. "Palestine, Our Homeland." Palestine Remembered. [الولجة، محافظة القدس - بلادنا فلسطين، صفحة 178 - فلسطين في الذاكرة](#)

Hoash al-Alami

In the heart of Sharafat lies Hoash al-Alami over a large plot of land owned by the al-Alami family and originally purchased by Faidi Musa al-Alami prior to his tenure as mayor of Jerusalem between 1906 and 1909, during Ottoman rule.¹⁴



In her book *Jerusalem Memories*, Serene Husseini Shahid tells the story of this hoash and how her grandfather Faidi al-Alami, prior to becoming mayor of Jerusalem had been an employee at the Ottoman Ministry of Finance and in charge of inspecting the countryside and evaluating the quality of crops to determine tax value. During one of his horseback tours in rural Jerusalem, and while ascending a hill between Beit Safafa and Sharafat, he spotted a massive oak tree in the distance. Seeking its cool shade, he headed towards it and was greeted there by some of the villagers.

¹⁴ Faidi Mousa al-Alami (1865–1924) was an employee in the Tax Collection Department in Jerusalem under Ottoman Rule. He then served as mayor of Jerusalem from 1906 until 1909. He was also a Jerusalem representative in the Ottoman Parliament from 1914 until 1918. For more information, visit the [Palestinian Encyclopedia](https://palestineencyclopedia.org/).

On that day, according to his granddaughter Serene, Faidi al-Alami was impressed with the ancient tree, estimated to be over 1,500 years old. He bought it from the owner and bought the surrounding land from the villagers.¹⁵ Faidi al-Alami built a family summer house on this land and planted pine trees around it following the suggestion of his son Mousa al-Alami.^{16,17}

40 donums of the plot were sold to the Latin Patriarchate, which in turn built housing units for its devotees in the area. The young pines and the oak tree near the al-Alami residence remain. A primary school was built and inaugurated in September 2020 on part of this land, and it is administered by the Occupation Municipality in Jerusalem.¹⁸

The al-Alami residence houses Mousa al-Alami Kindergarten and Nursery, run by Hind al-Alami. If you visit the hoash, you will see a number of ancient artefacts and remains, some of which are Roman, including the water wells.

History of Resistance

Sharafat witnessed fierce fighting during the 1948 war, as did the surrounding villages, especially Beit Safafa and Sur Baher. A group of Arab volunteers from Yemen, Libya, Sudan and some countries of the Maghreb also participated in the battles. There is a mountain in the village known as Jabal al-Yamani (The Yemeni Mountain), named after a Yemeni volunteer camp. The Egyptian army also took the al-Alami residence as a headquarters. The location of the village was defensively significant, particularly after the establishment of the Zionist occupation state on May 14, 1948. The village had by then already been surrounded with a few Zionist colonies, and a number of Palestinian villages had been occupied by Zionist militias early on. Sharafat thus served as a firing and defensive line during battle. Some accounts note that the people of the village, especially women and children, relocated to Beit Jala and

¹⁵ According to information provided by the mukhtar of Sharafat Ismail Awad, the land area of Hoash al-Alami is approximately 116 dunums. These lands were bought by Faidi al-Alami from the residents of Sharafat and al-Walajah. The information was provided in an interview conducted on August 16, 2017.

¹⁶ Mousa al-Alami studied in the U.K. He worked with the British Mandate authorities as a government lawyer and an advisor to the High Commissioner. He resigned his job after the outbreak of the Great Palestinian Revolt in 1936 and moved to Beirut. He was the first to represent Palestine in the meeting to establish the Arab League in Alexandria in 1944. More information can be found in Jerusalem Memories by Serene Hussein Shahid.

¹⁷ This story is recounted by Serene Hussein Shahid, granddaughter of Faidi al-Alami in her book Jerusalem Memories, under the title "The Oak."

¹⁸ According to the Arabic Education section on the Occupation Municipality's Facebook page. [مدرسة حوار في شرفات ... - قسم المعارف](#)
[العربية - بلدية القدس | فيس بوك](#)

Bethlehem and left the village to the Libyan, Yemeni and Sudanese resistance fighters who were there to protect it alongside the men of the village, who in addition to engaging in battle, dug trenches and built bunkers.¹⁹

Sharafat evaded occupation in the war of 1948, but it became a “frontier village” after the signing of the Rhodes Agreement in 1949. The Armistice line runs through Wadi al-Nusour, east of the village, and within sight, are the colonies of western Jerusalem, in addition to the Jerusalem-Jaffa railway, which the Occupation authorities made sure was within its borders so it could be employed in service of the nascent state.

In the 1950s, Palestinian frontier villages located at the Armistice line fell prey to a campaign of Zionist military attacks that included: home demolition, bombardment, mine-laying, shooting of farmers, etc. The Joint Armistice Commission monitored and investigated 156 Zionist attacks and condemned the occupying state, in addition to documenting 1,625 other attacks. The number of casualties reached 111 martyrs from the Jordanian army and national guard and 504 civilians.²⁰

Sharafat was among those villages attacked during the 1950s in what became known as the Sharafat massacre. Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh describes it in *Palestine, Our Homeland*: “At 3 am on February 7, 1951, three vehicles arrived from occupied Jerusalem at a spot two miles southwest of the city and along the railroad. The vehicles stopped and switched their headlights off. Approximately thirty Jewish men stepped out of the vehicles, crossed the Armistice line along the railroad and climbed the mountain into Sharafat. They surrounded the village mukhtar’s home, planted explosives on its walls and the walls of the adjacent house and detonated the charges. They retreated under covering fire, which targeted the village and everyone in it...”²¹ 11 Palestinians fell during this attack, most of them from the same family.

According to popular accounts, the Occupation forces committed this massacre in retaliation for a *fidai* “infiltration” operation carried out by a number of resistance fighters behind the Armistice line. The Zionist attack targeted the mukhtar’s house because it was the closest house to the line and its lights were on at night. The assumption was made that the fighters

¹⁹ Oraibi, Mohammad. “Siraa al-Fidayeen: al-Fidayoon al Arab Fi Harb Filastin 1948” (The Struggle of the Fidaiyin: Arab Fidaiyin in the Palestine War 1948). Dar al-Salam, Egypt. 2013.

²⁰ Abu Gharbiyeh, Bahjat. The Memoirs of Bahjat Abu Gharbieh: From the Nakba to the Intifada 1949-2000.

²¹ Al-Dabbagh, Mustafa Murad. “Palestine, Our Homeland.” Palestine Remembered. - [صفحة 177 - لمصطفى مراد النياغ - فلسطين في الذاكرة](#)

had gathered there prior to their infiltration operation. The Mishal family notes that the same house had been demolished during the Great Revolt in 1936 by the British colonial authorities under the pretext that it harbored resistance fighters.²²

No significant events are recounted surrounding the occupation of the village in 1967. Its residents sought refuge in the nearby caves close to Bethlehem for a few days and then returned to their village.²³

Colonization

Colonies and Colonial Roads

The Occupation authorities confiscated 1,980 donums from Beit Safafa and Sharafat,²⁴ 1,530 donums of which were annexed to the colony of Gilo (established in 1971), Har Gilo (1976), and Giv'at HaMatos (1991). The latter seized approximately 285 donums from the two villages.²⁵

Sharafat was also affected by the construction of colonial roads. Dov Bin Yosef Road was constructed in the early 1990s to connect Gilo colony with the center of occupied Jerusalem. The road will also serve as an Israeli light rail route extending from Gilo through Beit Safafa (at the expense of the commercial establishments along its way), and eventually arriving at the Hebrew University.²⁶

Like Beit Safafa, Sharafat was also affected by the construction of Road 4 (designated as Highway 50), and the southern section of the massive Begin Road, opened in 2017. The road connects the north and south of occupied Jerusalem, with Israeli promotions claiming that “you can cross Jerusalem from north to the south without stopping at a single traffic light.”²⁷ The road mainly serves the colonies of northern Jerusalem and the Gush Etzion colonial bloc.

²² This information was gathered during a visit with the Mishal family in Sharafat in January 2019.

²³ According to researcher and Sharafat resident Majd Muhyi al-Din al-Hidmi during a phone interview on November 9, 2020.

²⁴ The villages of Beit Safafa and Sharafat are often referred to simultaneously because they overlap geographically.

²⁵ The Applied Research Institute (ARIJ), “Beit Safafa and Sharafat Village Guide,” (Jerusalem: ARIJ, 2012). [دليل قرية شفا](#)

²⁶ Qawasmi, Hind. “Qitar al-Quds al-Khaff: Ma Tukhfih al-Marhalah al-Thaniya” (Jerusalem’s Light Rail: What the Second Phase Conceals). Mitras. May 25, 2018. <https://bit.ly/3kV7lhk>

²⁷ Many Israeli newspapers titled their articles on the completion of the construction of Road 4 with the following sentence: “to cross Jerusalem without traffic light”, including [Yedioth Ahronoth](#) and [Globes](#).

As these colonial roads link the colonies, they separate Beit Safafa and Sharafat, sever their geographic contiguity and restrict the movement of residents between them.

The “National Park”

Like colonies and colonial roads, “national parks” and nature preserves also seize land from Palestinian towns and villages, albeit under the guise of nature preservation. In Sharafat, the Nahal Refaim National Park (approved in 2013) and declared on land belonging to the villages of al-Walajah and al-Malhah also swallowed nearly 20 donums of Sharafat land.²⁸

Epilogue

Over the last two decades, the village has witnessed some urban expansion and rise in population, as families from surrounding villages like Beit Safafa have moved to Sharafat. The village maintains its rural and agricultural character, with a significant portion of its residents still working in agriculture and in stone quarries. There are several active youth organizations in the village today, including Sharafat Sports Club.

Since the Nakba, Sharafat has endured a series of Zionist attacks. The most recent incident occurred at dawn on January 24, 2020, when a Zionist "Price Tag" gang attacked al-Badriyah mosque and burned its mihrab (prayer niche) and carpets. The gang defaced the mosque walls with graffiti, calling for revenge against Palestinians. The villagers rushed to put out the fire, and the mosque was ultimately repaired and restored.

²⁸ “The Nahal Refaim National Park”, B’tselem. [الحديقة الوطنية ناهل رفائيم / بتسيلم](#)