

# Al-Ram

## Introduction

In recent memory, al-Ram was thought of as a commercial hub, mainly for the residents of north Jerusalem. This, however, did not last long as Israeli policies of isolation cut off al-Ram from occupied Jerusalem with the Annexation and Expansion Wall, and severed it from its historical and economic contiguity with the Holy City.



## Location and Area

Al-Ram is located seven kilometers north of Jerusalem, originally on 5,598 donums of land. It borders the villages of Jaba to the east, Beit Hanina to the south, Kufr Aqab and Qalandia to the north, and Bir Nabala to the west.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> al-Dabbagh, Mustafa Murad. "Our Country, Palestine." Palestine Remembered, n.d. [al-Ram - القدس - فلسطين في الذاكرة - al-Ram](#).

According to Palestinian Ministry of Local Government statistics, al-Ram includes 5,577 donums, classified as follows: 2,276 donums as Area B, 2,646 donums as Area C, and 655 donums under direct control of the Occupation Municipality in Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

## Origin and History

The roots of al-Ram date to the Roman era, during which it was known as al-Rama, meaning “an elevated place.”<sup>3</sup> In Aramaic, the words *rama* or *ramta* mean a hill or an elevated place, from the root word *roum*, denoting altitude, which is congruous with the village topography.<sup>4</sup>

## Population

The original villagers of al-Ram belong to two main clans: Ghazawnah and Ramiyyeh.

According to statistics from 1931, 262 people lived in al-Ram that year in 51 households.<sup>5</sup> By 1961, the number had reached 769. These numbers reflect the rise in population following the influx of residents from various areas of Jerusalem and Hebron between the mid- and late-20<sup>th</sup> century. It is even said that most Jerusalemites own one house in Jerusalem and another in al-Ram,<sup>6</sup> especially due to its emergence as an urban and commercial suburb of Jerusalem prior to being encircled by the Occupation’s Annexation and Expansion Wall and isolated from Jerusalem.

While many of al-Ram’s original families emigrated to the United States, there are Palestinians from various areas of the West Bank living there today. Its current population as estimated by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics is 24,000 Palestinians,<sup>7</sup> though al-Ram Municipality estimates it at 60,000.<sup>8</sup> This massive discrepancy in figures is due to the fact that many Jerusalemites living in al-Ram abstain from reporting where they actually reside, in fear of the Israeli occupation authorities’ threat to annul their residency under the pretext that they are residing outside the areas controlled by the Occupation Municipality.

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<sup>2</sup> UN-Habitat, and Arab Thought Forum. “Grassroots Mobilization towards Improved Emergency Responsiveness and Slum Upgrading in East Jerusalem: Al-Ram and Dahiyat al-Barid.” Accessed January 14, 2021. [UN-Habitat's new project targets Palestinian Communities in East Jerusalem.](#)

<sup>3</sup> Previous note.

<sup>4</sup> Abu Khdeir, Nasser Al Deen. “The Names of the Villages of Jerusalem, a Linguistic Study Approach.” The united Arab universities literature magazine, n.d. <https://doi.org/http://www.babelwad.com/ar/jerusalem-villages-names>.

<sup>5</sup> Mills, Eric. In *Census of Palestine*, 42. Alexandria: Morris, 1931.

<sup>6</sup> Baldat Al-Ram... Qassamaha Jidar Al-Ihtilal Wa Azzaz Hijrat Sukkaniha. YouTube. AlJazeera, 2017. [بلدة الرام قسّمها جدار الإحتلال وعزز هجرة سكانها](#).

<sup>7</sup> Al-Tajamu'at al-Sukkaniyah fi Muhafathat al-Quds § (2016). <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/Rainbow/Documents/jerusa.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> See note 3.

## Social and Economic Context

Al-Ram's economy historically depended on animal husbandry as a main source of income, with most families grazing livestock and producing dairy products. They also cultivated crops as a main source of food supply, including wheat and barley in the winter and vegetables in the summer.

Agricultural activity in the village depended on rainfed crops. As for water supply, villagers dug wells at their homes in addition to a central well in the village that was used by all, known as Bir al-Asafir.<sup>9</sup>

In the past, the original families of the village lived in adjoining houses in the old center of the village. A courtyard near the old village mosque served as a gathering place for social occasions.<sup>10</sup> However, this residential model gradually began to disintegrate, and people began to reside outside the old center and to build away from it as incomers from the Jerusalem and Hebron districts began to move in.

## Education

Two elementary (boys and girls) schools were founded in al-Ram after 1948, attended by 116 boys and 124 girls in 1966–67.<sup>11</sup>

Today, there is a relatively large number of schools in the village, among which are government and private schools.

One of the most well-known educational institutions in al-Ram today is al-Umma School, a patriotic institution founded by Jerusalemite educator Shukri Harami in western Jerusalem during British colonial rule in 1938. The school continued to operate there until the 1948 Nakba, when the Zionists seized the building. Harami then relocated the school to Jacir Palace in Bethlehem.<sup>12</sup> In 1957, he chose a spot in al-Ram and established al-Umma College. In 1967, the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf (religious endowments) took over the school, saving it from a compelled Israeli curriculum. In 1974, it became a government school and taught the Jordanian curriculum until 2004, when it finally switched to the Palestinian curriculum that is taught there today.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ramiyyeh, Amani, and Husni Ramiyyeh. Ihkili 'An Zamaan - Baldat al-Ram. Other. YouTube. Ali Ramiyyeh, October 13, 2014. [احكيلي عن زمان - بلدة الرام](#).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

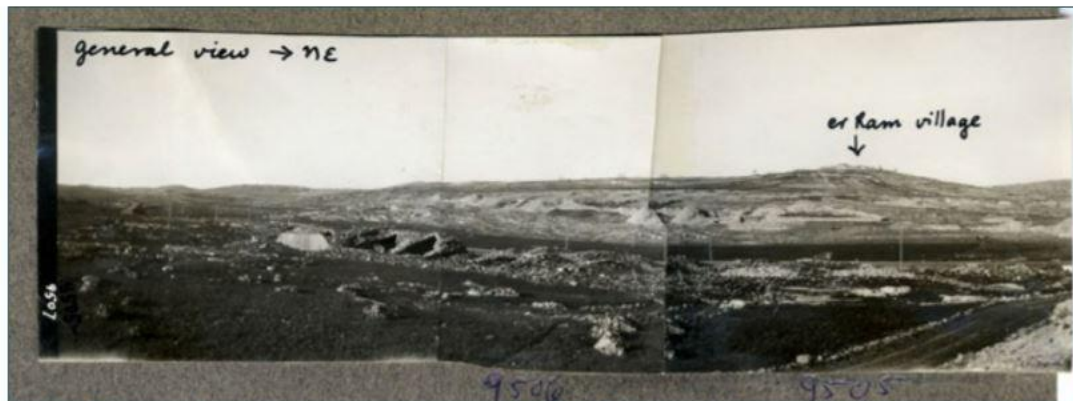
<sup>11</sup> al-Dabbagh, Mustafa Murad. Our Homeland, Palestine. On Palestine Remembered. [الرام - القدس - فلسطين في الذاكرة - al-Ram](#).

<sup>12</sup> The Palestinian Museum Digital Archive (PMDA). "A Student in Al-Ummah College." <https://palarchive.org/item/183706/a-student-in-al-ummah-college/>.

<sup>13</sup> Al Ummah University College website: <https://www.alummah.ps/index.html>.

## Landmarks

There is a number of *khirbahs* (remains / old ruins) in al-Ram, one of which is Khirbat al-Ram, also known as Khan al-Ram. According to Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh, it is an archaeological site that contains a *khan*<sup>14</sup> and rock-cut cisterns.



3. Khirbat er-Ram and er-Ram village (in the background), looking northeast (British Mandate folder, IAA).



4. The corner of the building, looking west (British Mandate folder, IAA).

Located in the south of the village is Khirbat Irha, and next to it is Khirbat Addasah (or al-Adas). Southeast of those is Khirbat Deir al-Salam, in addition to Khirbat Ras al-Taweel, which was documented by al-Dabbagh in his encyclopedia.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Khan: An inn where travelers and commercial convoys would stay, usually consisting of a yard surrounded with high walls and a well in the center. It supplied convoys with water and food and provided sheds and protection for their animals. (translator)

<sup>15</sup> See note 1.

According to Palestinian ethnographer Taufik Canaan, there is a sacred oak tree on the eastern side of al-Ram, one of five trees associated with Maqam al-Badriyah shrine in Sharafat village. Another three oaks are in Sharafat, and one is on the road to al-Malha. As is often the case, the trees are some distance away from the shrine itself. The people of al-Ram traditionally lit lanterns and made wishes near the tree, until it was cut down during the Nakba.<sup>16</sup>

Of the modern landmarks in al-Ram is Faisal al-Husseini International Stadium, located in Dahiyat al-Barid neighborhood southeast of al-Ram. It serves as the official stadium for the Palestinian national football team and was previously part of al-Umma School. In 2008, the stadium was officially opened after being habilitated by FIFA, which laid artificial turf on the pitch and built stands with a 7,000-spectator capacity.<sup>17</sup> The stadium was named in honor of the late Palestinian politician Faisal al-Husseini.

There are also six mosques in al-Ram: Muath bin Jabal, al-Ram Old Mosque, Handala, Muna, Bilal bin Rabah and Anas bin Malik.<sup>18</sup>

## History of Resistance

Al-Ram's resistance during British colonial rule focused on launching attacks against Atarot colony (established in 1910), which was built on land belonging to the neighboring village of Qalandia. Resistance fighters continued to carry out attacks and ambushes against the colony until the war of 1948. In March of that year, a group of al-Jihad al-Muqaddas (Army of the Holy War) fighters, accompanied by two groups from Jenin and Syria, led by Mustafa al-Sibai, positioned themselves in al-Ram and began shelling the quarries east of Atarot colony. They then opened fire on the colony itself and besieged it until the colonists withdrew by night.

Between 1949 and 1967, al-Ram was under Jordanian rule. During that period, the Jordanian army established a military base on village land near Jaba. It ultimately became an Israeli military base after the occupation of 1967.

In the 1967 war, al-Ram was bombarded with shells and missiles, and its residents sought refuge in nearby caves, some of which were near Mikhmas village.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Canaan, Taufik. Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine. (Reprinted from The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society), 35. London, 1927.

<sup>17</sup> "Istad Faisal Al-Husseini Al-Duwali (Mal'ab Al-Ummah Sabiqan)." Palestinian News & Info Agency (WAFA). WAFA, n.d. [استاد فيصل الحسيني الدولي \(ملعب الأمة سابقاً\) | مركز المعلومات الوطني الفلسطيني](#)

<sup>18</sup> Institute of applied research - Jerusalem \ Arij. Guide to Al-Ram. Jerusalem, 2012. <https://bit.ly/2Fzn1ln>.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Umm-Ziyad al-Ramiyyeh, born in 1942, conducted by the Grassroots team on January 1, 2020.

## Colonization

### Annexation and Expansion Wall

Since 2005, the Annexation and Expansion Wall has confined al-Ram from three sides, north, west and east, severing its historical link to the city of Jerusalem. Before the construction of the Wall was completed in 2008, al-Ram had been a lively commercial center that attracted financial and real-estate development due to its location on the main Jerusalem–Ramallah road. The distance from al-Ram to neighboring Bir Nabala, which had also witnessed urban and commercial development, is no more than one kilometer; with the Wall in place, the travel distance between them now totals 21 kilometers.<sup>20</sup>

The isolation of the village from occupied Jerusalem and its besiegement by the wall have led to a crash in commercial activity and the subsequent closure of businesses and shopping centers. Many residents who hold Jerusalem IDs (issued by the Occupation authorities) have also left to seek residence in other areas that have not been cut off from the city by the Wall. Al-Ram has transformed from a lively suburban commercial hub with rural features at the northern entrance of Jerusalem into an isolated, marginalized area that can only be reached through military checkpoints, an area rife with crime and social problems.

A few decades ago, it was a hassle to commute from the main road that connected Jerusalem to Ramallah through Beit Hanina due to the constant traffic jam at al-Ram junction, where the entrances of al-Ram and Bir Nabala met at the main road. In contrast, as you travel on this road today, to the east, the Annexation and Expansion Wall blocks out al-Ram behind it, and to the west stands part of the wall separating Bir Nabala from occupied Jerusalem.

Due to the Wall, al-Ram's main entrance, previously on the town's western side on the Jerusalem–Ramallah Road, was effectively relocated to the northern side on the road connecting Ramallah to Highway 60, constructed in the mid-1990s on dozens of donums of al-Ram land.<sup>21</sup> Highway 60 is a vital colonial route that connects the northern West Bank colonies to those in the south, cutting through many Palestinian villages and towns and dozens of donums of seized land.

### Colonies and Military Bases

Prior to the occupation, the Zionist movement took over 315 donums of land from al-Ram to build Neve Yaakov colony (1924). After 1967, Occupation authorities confiscated about 56 donums from al-Ram to construct the Atarot colony Industrial Zone (1970), and 700 donums for the establishment of two nearby military bases: the central military base in the south of

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<sup>20</sup> Institute of applied research - Jerusalem \ Arij. Guide to Al-Ram. Jerusalem, 2012. <https://bit.ly/2Fzn1ln>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



al-Ram,<sup>22</sup> and the previously mentioned Jordanian military base that had been constructed in the 1950s and seized by Israeli occupation forces in 1967.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the colonial policies of fragmentation and isolation that are evident in the current conditions of al-Ram, work began in 2010 on the construction of a shopping center belonging to Israeli business tycoon Rami Levy and was completed in 2019 at what was once known as al-Ram junction.<sup>24</sup> This very location was once the site of vibrant Palestinian commercial activity, only to be suffocated by the Wall and hijacked by Israeli commercial interests, providing the starkest example of the Israeli occupation's crippling policies. The Rami Levy commercial center represents an economic scheme that aims to bolster Israeli supremacy and control over Jerusalem and subdue Jerusalemites through forced assimilation in the Israeli market, in addition to besieging the suburbs and villages of occupied Jerusalem, isolating them from the city and severing their access.

## Epilogue

As previously mentioned, al-Ram's vital location has been crippled by Israeli policies aimed at besieging and isolating the village. The road between Dahiyat al-Barid and Qalandia was once an important commercial artery with a large number of establishments. In 2007, al-Ram was home to over 900 private and civic establishments,<sup>25</sup> most of which have shut down since the construction of the Wall, with commercial concentration shifting from al-Ram to Kufr Aqab.

After the Occupation authorities closed down Palestinian institutions that had operated in the occupied city of Jerusalem in the mid-1990s, especially those affiliated with the Palestine Liberation Organization, the headquarters of these institutions relocated to al-Ram, as it was the closest area to Jerusalem in which they could operate. Of these institutions were the Jerusalem Governorate, Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs, Palestinian *Fatwa* Foundation (Dar al-Iftaa') and a number of NGOs like Faisal Hussein Foundation.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Bsharat, Abd al-Karim. Interview with Abd al-Karim Mohammad Bsharat (born in 1953), former chief of Jaba Village Council, conducted by the Grassroots team on June 17, 2020.

<sup>24</sup> al-Jundi, Aseel. "Markat Isra'iliyah 'ala al-Nasiyah.. 'Damjun' wa-Khtiraqun li Sharqiy al-Quds." Mitras, November 6, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2Mks0OV>.

<sup>25</sup> UN-Habitat, and Arab Thought Forum. "Grassroots Mobilization towards Improved Emergency Responsiveness and Slum Upgrading in East Jerusalem: Al-Ram and Dahiyat al-Barid." Accessed January 14, 2021. [UN-Habitat's new project targets Palestinian Communities in East Jerusalem](#).