



THE END OF ARAB TIBERIAS: THE ARABS OF TIBERIAS AND THE BATTLE FOR THE CITY IN 1948

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Tiberias was unique among Palestinian mixed cities for its unusually harmonious Arab-Jewish relations, even during such periods of extreme tension as the 1936–39 Arab Revolt. Yet within hours of a brief battle in mid-April 1948, the town's entire Arab population was removed, mostly across the Transjordanian border; making Tiberias a wholly Jewish town overnight. In exploring how this took place, this article focuses on the Arab community's rigid social structure; the leadership's policy of safeguarding intercommunal relations at all costs, heightening local unpreparedness and isolating the town from the rest of Arab Palestine; the growing involvement of the local Jewish community with the Haganah's plans; and the British authorities' virtual abdication of responsibility as they began withdrawing their troops in the last month of the Mandate and as Plan Dalet was launched, engulfing the country in all-out war.

DURING THE MANDATE PERIOD, Tiberias was a center for administrative, social, and commercial services for the northern Jordan Valley and the eastern Galilee. It was also a key communications and transit station: the main road linking the eastern Upper Galilee and the Huleh Valley with the Jordan Valley and the cities of Nazareth and Beisan ran through Tiberias, and the historical trade routes linking southern Syria and northern Transjordan with Palestine passed within five kilometers. The train station on the Haifa–Dara'a line as well as the ancient al-Majama' bridge were located in Samakh, to the south, and to the north was the Banat Ya'qub bridge linking northern Palestine to Damascus.

In short, Tiberias by virtue of its geography had a strategic importance for dominating the Galilee and the adjacent valleys. Its inclusion in the territory allotted to the Jewish state under the 29 November 1947 UN Partition Plan (together with the whole of Eastern Galilee, including Lake Tiberias, Safad, the Hulah Valley, and the Galilee panhandle) was therefore highly significant for the Zionists, because control of the city ensured territorial contiguity and the maintenance of secure transport links between these areas. The town's strategic location was to have profound implications when fighting broke out in spring 1948.

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Tiberias was the first Palestinian city whose Arab population was evacuated in the 1948 war, adversely affecting Arab morale throughout the region.¹ Yet its fate ran entirely counter to Arab expectations. When the UN Partition Plan was announced, the mood among Tiberias's Arabs was described in the memoirs of the community's main leader during the Mandate, Sudqi Tabari, as follows:

The Arabs of Tiberias were sure that the situation in their city was different from other cities, because the two communities—the Arab and the Jewish—had a long history of good neighborly relationships and coexistence. They thought that Tiberias was far from the circle of violence and of war.²

Jewish sources—both local and Haganah officials—also attested to the exceptionally good relations that prevailed between the two communities. Bechor Shitreet, a prominent leader of Tiberias's Jewish community, who later became Israel's minister of minority affairs (1948) and of police (1949–67), describes relations in terms not unlike Tabari's:

Relations between the Jews and Arabs were good, with mutual respect and even ties of friendship and intimacy, because the Arabs did not regard the Jews as strangers, and in general life was quiet and cooperative. The Arabs participated in the joyful celebrations of the Jews and Jews also took part in the joyful celebrations of the Arabs.³

Senior Jewish officials and military commanders viewed Tiberias as different from the other “mixed cities,” and it was not by chance that at the beginning of the war the city was placed, together with Nazareth, at the top of the list of “quiet areas” (as opposed to “warring areas”). These classifications appeared in a January 1948 report on strategy from Moshe Dayan, then a general staff officer for special operations, to the Haganah commander-in-chief, Ya'akov Dori. In the report, Dayan recommends using intensive pressure and harsh attacks to isolate Arab towns and villages in “warring areas,” whereas the residents of “quiet areas” such as Tiberias and Nazareth should be allowed to go about their business normally; according to the report, they should not be “inflamed” unless it served Jewish interests.⁴

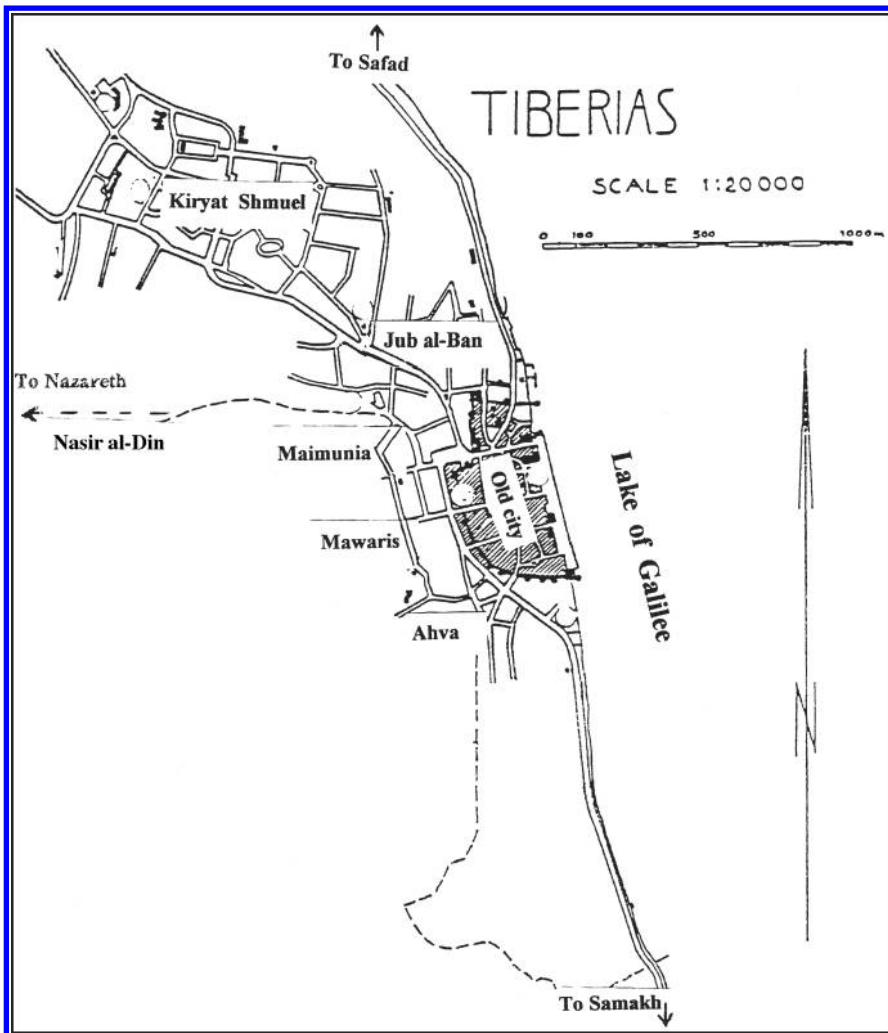
Notwithstanding the recommendations, exactly the opposite actions were taken in the town. Not only was Tiberias the first mixed city from which Arabs were removed, but in contrast with other mixed cities such as Haifa, Jaffa, and Acre (which retained a substantial Arab population), not a single Arab resident remained in Tiberias after the war.

THE COMMUNITY'S SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Tiberias had witnessed profound demographic changes in the decades prior to the war. The population increased markedly at the end of the Ottoman period, with most of the growth occurring in the Jewish community. At the

beginning of the Mandate, the Jews were already the majority, with almost 64 percent of the population (4,427 persons) in the 1922 census. By 1931 their proportion of the population had risen to almost 67 percent (5,381 persons), but by 1945 they had been reduced to 53 percent (6,000 persons).⁵

Most of Tiberias's Arabs lived in the older parts of the city and in the northern Jub al-Ban quarter, where they constituted a clear majority. Most of Tiberias's Jews, on the other hand, lived in the Kiryat Shmuel neighborhood on high ground overlooking the city from the west; this strategic advantage had far-reaching consequences during the battle for the city, making the Arab quarters easy targets. Besides these predominantly Jewish and Arab neighborhoods, there were also mixed neighborhoods such as Mawaris, Ahvah, and Maimunia. (See the map of the city's quarters, below).⁶



A map of the city's quarters, from Y. Yemeni, *Guide to Tiberias and Its Close Environs* (Tiberias: n.p., 1947), p. 3.

As in all Arab and mixed cities in Palestine, the social structure of the Tiberias Arabs since Ottoman times was distinct and well-defined in all spheres of life. The notables occupied the highest social rank, and despite a certain decline in their standing by the end of the Ottoman period and the growth of the middle classes as of the 1930s, they continued to play the leading social and political roles throughout the Mandate. Relative to other Palestinian towns, Tiberias had few notables, and in fact only the Tabari family, which had governed the Arabs of the town unchallenged for more than a century,⁷ could be so classified. The head of the clan was Shaykh Tahir Tabari, who was mufti and *qadi* during the Mandate period. His brother, Nayif, was the strongman in the village hinterland and among the bedouin tribes, and he managed the family domains in the nearby villages. Their cousin, Sudqi Tabari, became head of the town's highest national body, the Arab National Committee, which was set up in 1947 after the partition decision to deal with the Palestinian national movement and with the British and Jewish sides during the critical days of struggle.

Yet despite this well-established social structure, the web of reciprocal relationships linking the population and the traditional city leadership failed utterly in 1948. The centuries-old community was shattered after a few clashes and a brief battle, and the entire Arab population of Tiberias—more than 5,000 persons—was removed, transforming Tiberias overnight into a purely Jewish city. That this dramatic process could be carried out in virtual silence and without effective protest is not easy to explain.

The suddenness of these events begs the question: How and why were the Arabs so easily expelled from Tiberias? And how was it that these cataclysmic changes took place without any instructions from, or the involvement of, the leadership of the Palestinian national movement?

TIBERIAS AND THE PALESTINIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT UP TO 1947

The Arab community in Tiberias was very cautious in its dealings with the Palestinian Arab Executive Committee, which led the Palestinian national movement in the 1920s until the establishment of the all-party Arab Higher Committee (AHC), which succeeded it in 1935 and led the movement until 1948. This tepid involvement with the Palestinian nationalist bodies dates to the very beginning of the Mandate and was adopted in the interest of good relations with the Jewish community. Thus, although Shaykh Tahir, the leader of nationalist activities locally,⁸ was an avid participant in Palestinian congresses and protest petitions, he never took part in active measures such as demonstrations or strikes, let alone violent activities.⁹ During those early years, when the Palestinian Arab Executive Committee criticized Tiberias's Arab community for not doing enough to support the national effort, Shaykh Tahir would respond that in a city with a Jewish majority, where most of the commercial activity was controlled by Jews, demonstrations and strikes by Arabs would be ineffective.¹⁰

The Arabs of Tiberias and their leadership consistently maintained a moderate and independent political line, preserving good relations with their Jewish neighbors even as intercommunal tensions became increasingly acute under

the impact of the Mandate's Jewish National Home policies. This was especially evident during the anti-Jewish riots of 1929 that engulfed most of Palestine: Tiberias, in contrast to the other mixed cities, remained quiet. When the troubles broke out, the leading notables of Tiberias held a meeting at the Tabari family guest house and issued a declaration, posted throughout the city in Hebrew and Arabic, calling for the preservation of the peace. Among the eleven notables who signed were the former mufti, Shaykh 'Abd al-Salam Tabari, Said Muhammad Tabari (the father of Tahir and Nayif), Shaykh Tahir Tabari, and the heads of other local families.¹¹ In writing about the 1929 events, Moshe Sahar, a Jewish community leader in Tiberias who later became its mayor,¹² testified that Shaykh Tahir promised the Jews that no harm would come to them: "As long as I live, not a hair will fall from the heads of the Jews of Tiberias."¹³ Nahum Av, one of the veteran Jews of Tiberias and a senior Haganah representative there, quotes a similar statement during the 1929 riots by Shaykh Tahir's father Said.¹⁴

Tiberias's Jewish community was made up of Sephardim and Ashkenazim. The Sephardim had lived in the town for hundreds of years, preserving their values and maintaining close social ties with the Arab population, even calling themselves Jewish Arabs (*Yahud awlad 'Arab*). The Ashkenazim, on the other hand, were mostly immigrants from Eastern Europe who had settled in the town by the late nineteenth century and who, during the Mandate, came to outnumber the indigenous Jews. Despite the gradual weakening of the Sephardim's status, they continued to hold the leadership positions in the town itself, such as control of the municipality (mayor) and other administrative bodies, while the Ashkenazim controlled the Jewish settlements around the city. Both groups had good relations with the Arabs.¹⁵

Relations between the local Arabs and Jews remained good even during the

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1936–39 Arab rebellion, during which Tiberias's Arab leaders succeeded in maintaining calm, though not without some difficulty. Indeed, the community was faced with an ever-sharpening dilemma: should they respond to the nationalist demands to observe the strike and participate in the rebellion, thereby endangering their good relations with their Jewish neighbors and the British authorities, or should they stick to their traditional policy of moderation and abstain from active protest or resistance?

They opted for the latter course, despite the community's declared identification with the aims of the strike and rebellion. The Arab leaders of Tiberias condemned the assault on the Kiryat Shmuel neighborhood on 2 October 1938, which took the lives of 19 Jews¹⁶; according to Sahar, they adamantly denied any involvement and held that the attackers had come from outside of Tiberias.¹⁷ (Most likely, these were Palestinian guerrillas active in the rural areas of Lower Galilee.) Meanwhile, Sudqi Tabari established and headed a National Committee in Tiberias, but it did not do much.¹⁸ (According to reports by Haganah intelligence, the committee was involved mainly with providing money and supplies.¹⁹)

The policy of wary aloofness from the Palestinian national movement and the careful preservation of peaceful coexistence with their Jewish neighbors worked well until the UN partition decision of 1947. After that, the deteriorating situation country-wide preempted local initiatives. The local leadership lost control over the situation, especially on the Jewish side, where the traditional system of longstanding local relationships could no longer withstand the increasing pressures of outside forces and events.

THE TIBERIAS NATIONAL COMMITTEE IS ESTABLISHED

After the partition resolution, the AHC asked Arab community leaders throughout Palestine to establish national committees in their localities to cope with political developments and form a united front.²⁰ Responding to the call, Sudqi Tabari and a handful of national movement activists organized a mass preparatory meeting on 17 December 1947 that included notables from the town and leaders from the neighboring villages. The organizers of the meeting informed the participants about the decisions of the AHC and instructed the village representatives to set up committees to settle internal disputes and to take charge of finance and supplies. The village committees were to maintain close ties with the leadership of the Tiberias National Committee, preserve discipline, prepare for the defense of their villages, and avoid any aggressive activity or incitement against their Jewish neighbors. The village leaders were also instructed to ask the British authorities for permission to arm several guards in each village and to install telephones there.²¹ The fact that most of the meeting's directives concerned the village representatives may have been an indication of the organizers' desire to stop the internal divisions and clan rivalries that traditionally beset the villages, but it also reflects the ongoing tradition of urban rule over the villages. This was especially true of the Tabari family, which enjoyed significant influence in all the villages of the Jordan Valley and the eastern part of Lower Galilee.

On 20 December 1947 a second meeting was held at the Tabari family guesthouse, this one for the city notables only. After some discussion, ten members were chosen for the Arab National Committee of Tiberias.²² Afterwards, in follow-up to decisions taken at the 17 December meeting, Sudqi Tabari called on the village notables to select representatives for a wider national council to represent both the town and the surrounding region. The village notables responded by nominating twelve representatives for the "Arab National Committee of Tiberias and Its Regional District." Sudqi Tabari was chosen to head it.

The new committee was composed of twenty-two members, ten from Tiberias proper and twelve from the villages. These were listed by Sudqi Tabari in his letter to Haj Amin al-Husayni, chairman of the AHC, on 10 January 1948. Besides Sudqi (chairman), the nine other members from the town were Shaykh Nayif Tabari, Khalil Khartabil, Muhammad Sahtut, Isma'il Qara Shuli, Elias Diab Muslih, Salim Qardahji, Ibrahim Khalil Khartabil, Ahmad Mansur, and Na'im Muhammad Shahin. The twelve members representing the village councils (and

the names of their villages) were Emir Muhammad 'Ajaj ('Arab Mawasi), Ahmad Qasim Rabah (Hitin), Mahmud Tur'ani (Samakh), Mukhtar Yakhluf (Samakh), Fawaz al-'Ali al-Shihabi (Lubiya), Hasan Abu Dhis (Lubiya), Said al-Shami (Kafr Kama), Salih Muhammad Musa (Ghuweir Abu Shusha), 'Abdu 'Ayda (Maghar), Nimr Muhammad Husayn (Maghar), Wasif Sleman Faris (Maghar), and al-Tayb al-Sa'idi (Kafr Sabet). In commenting about the composition of the council, Sudqi emphasized that the members had been selected from among national personalities acceptable to all the inhabitants of the Tiberias city and district.²³

As is clear from the membership list, the Tabari family controlled the committee. Not only was it led by two Tabari clan leaders, Sudqi and Shaykh Nayif, but a number of the non-town members (most of them from the larger villages) were related to the Tabari family. Members of the Khartabil and Sahtut families represented the middle- and upper-class merchant sector, followed by representatives of the Christian community and lower-ranking Arab families. Membership from the outlying areas included a representative of the district's bedouin tribes (the chief of the al-Mawasi tribe), a Circassian from the village of Kafr Kama, and two Druze from the village of Maghar. 'Abdu 'Ayda, a prominent nationalist leader in the region and an old friend and ally of the Tabari family, was also on the committee.

The joint committee was meant to enhance coordination between the urban and rural areas. But in actual fact—as the council protocols show—coordination was minimal, and a united Arab urban-village front had more rhetorical than logistical reality. Indeed, except for the initial meeting to establish the council and another to change its composition (at the initiative of Sudqi Tabari because of rivalries, differences of opinion, and disputes among members), no sustained coordination between the two sectors took place, and, outside of a few incidents, each area was left to its own fate. It appears that the state of mistrust and uncertainty regarding the future and the bitter memories of the revolt of 1936–39 (in which the urban and village dispute reached its peak) prevented cooperation and real unity in the ranks.

From its protocols, it appears that the Tiberias National Committee held nine sessions in all, including its inaugural meeting in December. The last was held just two months later, on 27 February 1948, after which the committee conducted its affairs through informal consultations between its members. Indeed, as the moment of decision approached and the need for a united plan of action became increasingly urgent, evidence of growing divisions became apparent.

The most important organizational decisions were reached at the session on 21 December 1947, held at the home of Sudqi Tabari. Four committees emerged from that meeting, three of which were controlled by the Tabari family:²⁴

- Security Committee, comprising Shaykh Nayif Tabari (chairman), Ibrahim Haj Khalil, Muhammad Sahtut, and Ibrahim Bakir.
- Financial Committee, comprising Sudqi Tabari (chairman), Muhammad Sahtut, Ahmad Mansur, Isma'il Qara Shuli, and Elias Diab Muslih.

- Supplies and Housing Committee, comprising Shehadi Khuri (chairman), Elias Qardahji, Muhammad Said, and Ibrahim Khartabil.
- Medical Services and First Aid Committee, comprising Dr. Rashid Tabari (chairman), Dr. Khalid al-Shami, Jamal Tabari, and Dr. Muhammad Khartabil.

The most significant committee in the context of this study is the Security Committee.

PREPARING FOR DEFENSE

Despite the gravity of the Security Committee's mandate to organize the defense of the city's Arab community, none of those chosen possessed any security background, all being either landowners or merchants. The committee's first task was to recruit young men for guard duty. The objective was to recruit forty,²⁵ but in fact only twenty-four were engaged, each at the salary of 300 mils (one-third of a British pound) per day.²⁶ They were placed along the demarcation lines of the Jewish quarters and in key locations in the Arab neighborhoods, especially the Tiberias Hotel, which commanded the city's northern exit leading to Safad.

As the situation escalated, recruitment became a serious problem, especially given the very small number of fighters with any military experience (acquired with the Ottoman forces, the police force, or the British army, or as participants in the 1936–39 uprising). At a large public assembly on 22 February 1948, the National Committee demanded that all healthy men aged 17 to 40 register within five days at the offices of the Arab Youth Organization.²⁷ The organization had been established in 1947 with the merger of two nationalist youth organizations, al-Najadah and al-Futuwwa, and was supposed to provide young Palestinians with training and military proficiency to counterbalance the Haganah forces, but it failed completely in this.²⁸ Although 257 young men signed up,²⁹ training facilities were totally inadequate, and some of the recruits left even before the fighting broke out. According to Ibrahim al-Shihabi, who participated in the battle for Tiberias in April, "There was no program for training the residents to defend Tiberias, there was no complete coordination between the different armed groups, and there was no discipline among the various members."³⁰

On 2 March 1948, two members of the Tiberias National Committee—the treasurer, Muhammad Sahtut, and the secretary, Isma'il Qara Shuli—resigned. Sahtut gave medical reasons,³¹ while Qara Shuli cited "temporary circumstances,"³² but council documents indicate that questions had been raised about financial irregularities. The National Committee's internal difficulties, coupled with the worsening political situation, forced Shaykh Tahir Tabari, the mufti of the city, to return to Tiberias from Nazareth, where he had been serving as *qadi*. Upon his arrival on 3 March, he assumed control of the National Committee, relegating Sudqi Tabari to the role of deputy. Shaykh Tahir

began a reorganization of the town defenses and after much effort managed to organize about 150 men. With light arms and only one or two mortars, and having little training or military experience, this constituted the official defense force for the Arab community in Tiberias.

There were also problems of discipline. Early on, the National Committee had appointed Kamil Tabari, the brother of Shaykh Tahir and Shaykh Nayif, commander of the Defense Forces of the City of Tiberias. Although he had been an officer in the Ottoman army,³³ he was unable to impose his authority on all the factions in the city, especially the faction of Subhi Shahin, who was clearly far less accommodating with regard to the Jews than the Tabari family.³⁴ Subhi's loyalty was to Haj Amin, but he also seemed to receive instructions and assistance from the Arab League Military Committee in Damascus, which was in charge of the Arab Liberation Army (ALA), a volunteer inter-Arab irregular force. Subhi managed to recruit about thirty fighters.

Indeed, the situation of Subhi Shahin hints at one of the underlying problems of the defense: the problem of differing agendas. According to Yayim Kiryati, who was in charge of the Haganah Information Services in the lower city and who served as an aide-de-camp at the Haganah staff headquarters, Shaykh Nayif Tabari adamantly opposed the entry of armed Arabs from outside the city and prevented some attacks against the city's Jews.³⁵ Thus, when representatives of the ALA met with the Tiberias Arab leadership at Shaykh Nayif's home on 18 March and demanded to be given command over the city, they were firmly rebuffed, and the city leadership insisted that Kamil Tabari remain in charge.³⁶ According to Av, the leaders of the Tabari family initiated a meeting with the leaders of the Jewish community—including Meir Abulaffia, Zion Bahlul, and Hacham Meir Sabagh, veteran leaders of the area's Jewish settlements—and “proposed that both sides maintain good neighborly relationships and try their best to get through the current events safely.”³⁷ The heads of the Arab community remained keen to prevent escalation, and indeed, during the period between January and March, only a few shooting incidents occurred, mainly near the roadblocks around the city. After such incidents, the leaders on both sides would quickly settle matters, and the course of normal life would resume. Kiryati also reports the Jewish side's overall assessment that the Arab leadership wanted calm.³⁸

Relative quiet continued until 8 March 1948, when the first serious incident occurred in the city. It was Thursday morning, and the street market was teeming with Arabs and Jews. According to the testimony of Sahar, who was chairman of the Jewish Situation Committee, a shot was fired from one of the Arab positions. Immediately, fire opened from all positions on both sides, and the city descended into tumult. Ten Jews and twelve Arabs were wounded.³⁹ In an attempt to prevent escalation, Jewish and Arab notables met through the mediation of the British commander of the city, Colonel Anderson. The Jewish side was represented by Sahar, Rabbi Leib Neuberg, and Yitzhak Tajar, while the Arab side was represented by Shaykh Nayif Tabari and Sudqi Tabari. The next day, a cease-fire agreement was signed that came to be known as the Tiberias

Agreement. Its main points were as follows: (a) The citizens will continue with their lives and mutual contacts as usual; (b) the defense forces on both sides will remain in their positions and refrain from any aggravation or clashes; (c) Jews and Arabs can enter freely into all sectors of the city as long as they do not carry arms; and (d) representatives of both sides will maintain contacts to handle any incident.⁴⁰

On 10 March, the day after the agreement was signed, the leaders of both sides marched together down the town's main thoroughfare, Galilee Street, and announced the cease-fire. Sahar says that he was received with peace in all the Arab areas he entered and that Arab women were joyful at seeing their leaders arm in arm with the Jewish leaders.⁴¹ A 17 March intelligence report of the Golani Brigade states that the situation in Tiberias continued to be quiet, with the stores open, street traffic normal, and the train connections at the station in Samakh functioning regularly.⁴²

THE HAGANAH AND THE LOCAL JEWISH COMMUNITY

It appears that the Haganah national command was initially displeased with the Tiberias Agreement. In an 11 March meeting with Haganah National Commander Yisrael Galilee (Hillel), members of the local Jewish community's Situation Committee were criticized for their role in the agreement. Sahar defended their actions, stating that the shooting incident of 8 March had been an accident caused by the Arab leaders' inability to control all their men. He also emphasized that it was the Arabs who asked for the signed cease-fire agreement.⁴³

The Haganah had begun recruiting, arming, and training young men in Tiberias's Jewish community as early as the second decade of the Mandate. But serious organization began only with the outbreak of the Palestinian revolt in 1936 and especially after the Arab attack on the city's Kiryat Shmuel quarter in 1938. At that time, the activities of the Haganah were broadened and its membership increased, while public support for it became wider.

By the time the UN partition resolution was passed in 1947, the Haganah was already well organized, with a local staff headquarters in the Kiryat Shmuel neighborhood under the command of Zeev Optik (original name Zelig Optovskiy). Until the end of the war, this headquarters was totally subordinate to the Haganah Central Command in Tel Aviv.⁴⁴ It should be noted that the Haganah presence in Tiberias was quite local in nature, and when hostilities broke out in the region after the partition resolution, forces of the Golani Division, which had been active in the Eastern Galilee arena and in the valleys around Tiberias, moved into the town. The Golani, which included a number of brigades, were of a very different order from the local Haganah forces, with the training, weaponry, and superior fighting capability of an aggressive military force.

Of the various Golani brigades, of especial interest is the Twelfth Brigade (Barak) under the command of Yitzhak Broshi, which had been active in Tiberias and the surrounding region from the start of the hostilities in late

1947. Early on he had introduced a platoon into Tiberias's old Jewish quarter, in the very heart of the Arab quarter, under the command of Avraham Riklin, which apparently stayed put until the Arab city fell. In addition to the local Haganah and the Golani forces from the outside, a Palmach company joined the fighting at the very end.

With specific regard to the 9 March cease-fire agreement, the Haganah's initial skepticism could probably be explained by the fact that any agreement confirming friendly Jewish-Arab relations in the town would not mesh with the Haganah's Plan Dalet. The plan's objective (as stated in its preamble) was "to gain control of the areas of the Hebrew state and defend its borders. It also aims at gaining control of the areas of Jewish settlement and concentration which are located outside the borders."⁴⁵ The conquest of Tiberias figured explicitly in the Plan Dalet strategy. Thus, the official *History of the Haganah* begins the chapter "The Liberation of Tiberias" with the sentence: "When, in accordance with Plan D, the Haganah began to take control over the mixed population cities in the country, the first in line was Tiberias."⁴⁶

Whatever initial misgivings about the cease-fire agreement the Haganah command might have had, there was no attempt to cancel it. Nahum Av writes in his memoirs that the staff of the Barak Brigade and the commanders "did not interfere and intentionally left the contacts with the local Arabs in the hands of the civilian leaders in order to give themselves a free hand to act in accordance with the objective conditions in the field and at the appropriate time."⁴⁷ Indeed, according to Av, "The temporary respite allowed the Haganah forces to organize and prepare for the next battle."⁴⁸

At the same time, it becomes obvious that any Haganah criticism of Tiberias's local Jewish leaders was unjustified, because their involvement in the cease-fire was not meant to hamper eventual military operations. Indeed, in his *Forty Days in the Battle for the Liberation of Tiberias*, Sahar reveals that from the outset the local Jewish leaders had no intention of reaching a long-term, fixed, and final agreement with the Arabs: "When the decisive war begins, the matter will be taken out of local control. It will be necessary to make a decision about control over Tiberias after the British leave. . . . [W]e have not entered into a situation of calm and tranquility, but on the contrary, we have increased our readiness for the decisive moment."⁴⁹ For both the local and the national Jewish leaders, then, the Tiberias Agreement was a temporary and tactical step until the right moment came to take control of the Arab sector of the city.

The premeditation of the military plans for Tiberias, and the tactical nature of the cease-fire, is further borne out by the fact that on 9 March, immediately after the agreement was signed, the process of evacuating the Jews from the Old City began. Sahar notes that the evacuation was carried out with the encouragement and even at the initiative of the Haganah: "It was decided to evacuate all the remaining Jewish residents of the old city. . . . [W]e were afraid that they would

For both the local and national Jewish leaders, the Tiberias Agreement was a tactical step until the right moment came to take control of the Arab sector of the city.

hinder our freedom of action in the old city when the day of battle arrived and we would be forced to take control over this part of the city.”⁵⁰ In March, some 145 families were transferred to the Kiryat Shmuel neighborhood on high ground in the western part of the city, and only a few Jewish families who refused to leave remained behind with the platoon that the Barak Brigade had previously put into the city, which numbered between thirty and forty-five men.⁵¹

In sharp contrast to the coordinated action on the Jewish side, the Arab side continued to be embroiled in internal disputes over opposing strategies. The dominant moderate trend, represented by the Tabari family, continued to support a policy of peace and adherence to the agreement, while Subhi Shahin’s group favored escalation, more than once providing the Jewish side with pretexts to attack the Arabs.

THE BATTLE BEGINS

The lull that followed the signing of the Tiberias Agreement lasted for a month, and an incident occurred on 8 April that marked the beginning of the end of Tiberias’s Arab community. Accounts on the Arab sides are sparse, but according to the Jewish version, shots were fired that morning at a Jewish vehicle, killing the driver outright and wounding a passenger. This was followed by firing on Jewish businesses in the Old City and on Galilee Street during which four more Jews were wounded. As a result of the shooting, a number of local resident Jews as well as others who had come to do their shopping were hemmed into the Old City and had to be extricated by armored car.⁵²

It was only toward noon that the British sent the army and police down to the lower city. According to Optik, the commander of the Haganah forces in Tiberias, the intervention was far from vigorous, with the British army occasionally firing at the positions of both sides in an attempt to enforce quiet. Toward evening, the Jewish forces began to respond.⁵³ Fierce fire was aimed at all Arab positions in Galilee Street, and some Arabs were wounded. Mortar fire also struck Arab centers, mainly in Nablus Street. At the end of the day, eight Jews and eleven Arabs had been killed, and twelve Jews and an unknown number of Arabs had been wounded. Five Arabs and five Jews had been taken prisoner by the other side.⁵⁴

In the absence of detailed reports on the Arab side, it is difficult to determine with certainty who violated the cease-fire or the circumstances of the violation (though the Arabs were in a clear position of inferiority and the continuation of quiet was of vital interest to them). What is certain is that if the agreement was broken by Arabs, it was without the knowledge of their leadership. A 20 April Barak Brigade intelligence report bears this out, stating that the cease-fire violation “did not come as a result of organization and intention by the Arabs, but broke out spontaneously and was not properly exploited by the Arabs.”⁵⁵ The Arab leadership’s continuing desire for peace at that time is confirmed by Yitzhak Shusterman (Shusti), the commander of Company C

in the Barak Brigade, who took part in the clashes. In later testimony on the subject, he noted that “The Arabs of Tiberias were generally interested in quiet and in preserving good relations. The ruling family in the city, the Tabari family, were exceptionally so. But it appears that this time they could not control the *shabab*.”⁵⁶

Exchanges of fire continued sporadically the next day (9 April). According to Optik’s daily report, the Arabs opened fire on the Jewish neighborhoods of Ahvah and Kiryat Shmuel from the hills around the city, and the Jews responded with mortar fire on the Arab centers. That same day, Arab notables appealed through Jewish intermediaries to renew the cease-fire as of 5 P.M. But despite British pressures, the Jews rejected the proposed renewal. Riklin, the commander of the Golani platoon in the Old City, states that the brigade staff headquarters, the army command headquarters of the city, and the Jewish Situation Committee were all in agreement that there should be no return to a state of peace.⁵⁷ Years later, Sahar explained why the Jewish side rejected the cease-fire appeal: With the Mandate due to expire on 15 May, the withdrawal of British troops, and the possibility of invasion by Syria and Transjordan, “We did not want to have an armed Arab rearguard remaining in the old city.”⁵⁸ By an “armed rearguard,” of course, he meant the Arab residents of the city.

Whatever worries Sahar claimed to have felt about the ultimate fate of Tiberias, a review of the course of battle shows clearly that the Jewish forces had the upper hand at every stage. The situation on the Arab side was hopeless, and the Jewish side was well aware of this. Sahar himself writes about the Tiberias Arabs: “Their fighting force was small and weak, and they were not organized or deployed for an emergency situation, so that when they came under siege, as actually occurred during the last ten days between April 8 and 18, their people were unable to go outside their homes.”⁵⁹ The Arabs were not even in control of the neighborhoods where they formed the overwhelming majority: In the Old City, the Arabs being fired upon throughout the battle from the Haganah platoon’s fortified position could neither act against it nor prevent Jewish reinforcements from reaching it by armored bus or via boats across the lake.⁶⁰

Optik’s reports provide an account of the fighting on a daily basis. On 10 April, he wrote, there was continuous firing throughout the day in the neighborhoods of Ahvah and Mawaris, with seven Arabs killed and no casualties on the Jewish side. Despite the shooting, an exchange of prisoners took place that day.⁶¹ The report for the following day cites heavy clashes, with Arab attacks on the Adler Hotel and Jewish positions in the Old City, including mortar fire, and Jewish shelling of Arab areas. Casualties included one Jewish death and scores of Arab wounded; shortages in food supplies, arms, and ammunition were reported on the Arab side.⁶² Also that day (11 April), the Jews alleged that the Arabs had amassed “between 1,000 and 2,500 volunteers, with armored cars and cannons” under the command of one Mustafa Abu Dhis near the village of Lubiya west of Tiberias. To prevent this force from attacking Tiberias, Optik asked the Barak Brigade to block all roads leading to the city.⁶³

It appears that a village volunteer force from the surrounding areas actually did coalesce in Lubiya. We learn this from Sudqi Tabari's appeal to the leaders of this force not to attack Tiberias because of his efforts to obtain a cease-fire.⁶⁴ There are no details on the force in Arab sources, but there is no doubt that the figures cited by the Jewish side were wildly exaggerated; had there really been thousands of fighters with cannons, there would have certainly been some record of it. Meanwhile, the contacts between Tabari and the Jewish side led to an exchange of civilian prisoners. But Optik rejected any discussion of a cease-fire and decided that the time had come for an all-out strike at the Arabs in the city.⁶⁵

THE ATTACK ON NASIR AL-DIN VILLAGE

On 12 April, the Haganah attacked Nasir al-Din, a village (population of about 150) that commanded the ridges overlooking Tiberias about one kilometer to the west.⁶⁶ The attack was ostensibly to prevent the arrival of Arab reinforcements to Tiberias, but in fact it was part of the general offensive against the city in accordance with Plan Dalet, which had been launched on 4 April. It was clear to the Golani command that the isolation of the Arabs of Tiberias prior to its conquest necessitated complete control over the roads that led to the city from Nazareth and Lubiya; indeed, in its section on deployment in major cities, Plan Dalet calls for the "occupation and control of all isolated Arab neighborhoods . . . especially those neighborhoods which control the city's exit and entry roads."⁶⁷

The attack was carried out by the Yavniel platoon of the Barak Brigade under the command of Amos Mokadi (Brandstatter), who described it as follows:

The resistance of the Arabs was greater than expected. There was an Arab gang that fought fiercely. The conquest was slightly delayed, and I recall that Zvika Levkov (a lieutenant in the Golani Brigade) was passing by the place and told me that the battle was taking too long. I told him to leave me alone, that I would take the place, and that I had time because I had to be in Tiberias only in the evening. As for the stories about the so-called massacre that was carried out in Nasir al-Din, what happened was that the gang members tried to get away by hiding behind women. My men did not know what to do—whether they should hit the women as well, so I gave an order to shoot whomever tried to escape even if this meant that the women would be hit. Otherwise it would not have been possible to destroy the gang. As a result, a number of women were killed. The Arabs publicized the action and that very night Radio Damascus announced that the Jews had repeated the action at Dayr Yassin. I think that one of the things that broke the Arabs of Tiberias so quickly was that the Arabs

themselves publicized and exaggerated what had happened at Nasir al-Din.⁶⁸

Kiryati relates that “after the action in the area of Nasir al-Din, many villagers were seen going in the direction of the Arab part of Tiberias.”⁶⁹ The arrival of the refugees in Tiberias was a harsh blow to the morale of the Arabs in the city. A Jewish report notes: “The refugees who came from Nasir al-Din after its conquest are creating panic among the Arab population, giving full rein to their oriental imagination.”⁷⁰ Arab sources on the Nasir al-Din events state that immediately after the attack and the killing of twelve villagers, including women and children, the Haganah forces blew up some houses and set the rest on fire and that the villagers who were not injured fled to Tiberias to seek refuge.⁷¹

As soon as news of the battle reached Tiberias, Shaykh Tahir sent an urgent letter to Major-General Hugh C. Stockwell, the British commander of the northern region. In it, he stressed that the Arabs were unable to defend their part of the city: The Jewish side controlled all the key positions and was better organized, better armed, and outnumbered the Arabs, who were running out of food and ammunition. He asked that the army intervene.⁷²

The British response was tepid. The commander of the city, Colonel Anderson, summoned the Jewish representatives and ordered them to remove their forces from the Old City by the next morning, 13 April, and threatened to shell it if they failed to do so.⁷³ The Jews ignored the warning and continued to batter the Arab positions while ferrying more fighters, equipment, and ammunition into the Old City by way of Lake Tiberias. The British backed down from their threat.⁷⁴

The next day (14 April), Stockwell declared a complete curfew on Tiberias⁷⁵ but failed to impose it. The day’s intelligence reports indicate that the Jewish side brought reinforcements and equipment into the Old City and blew up two Arab positions.⁷⁶

On 15 April, the British Army pulled out of the Jub al-Ban Quarter in the northern part of the city, precipitating the immediate departure of the Arab residents now left without protection. According to Jewish reports, that day the Jewish side decided to seize the road to Upper Galilee passing through the Old City, which was still under Arab control. By that time, everything was in place for the final Jewish assault.⁷⁷

THE TAKEOVER OF THE ARAB CITY

The fall of Nasir al-Din had far-reaching consequences for Tiberias, leaving the Arab community under siege and cutting it off from any possibility of outside Arab help. As already mentioned, the Jewish forces participating in the attack were led by the Golani Division’s Barak Brigade under Commander Yitzhak Broshi, Lt. Zvi Levkov, and the commander of Company C, Yitzhak Shusterman.⁷⁸ These were joined by the local Haganah forces under Optik⁷⁹ and, at the very end (17 April), by a Palmach company from the Hagalil Battalion under the command of Reuven Netzer.⁸⁰ These forces, estimated at 400–450

men, were well-equipped with submachine guns, machine guns, and two-inch mortars and were fully supplied from outside the theatre of military operations. In contrast, the Arab side had 180–200 men, for the most part poorly trained, lacking ammunition and supplies, under siege, and divided between two antagonistic commanders, Kamil Tabari and Subhi Shahin.

The final details of the Jewish attack plan were summarized in a report sent from Tiberias to the Barak Brigade on 16 April. The main directives were (a) to clear the area around the exit road to the Upper Galilee; (b) to seize the important Arab stronghold in the Tiberias Hotel that controlled the city's northern exit (i.e., the road leading to the eastern Upper Galilee and Safad); (c) to clear the enemy positions in Jub al-Ban; and (d) to attack and take the Old City.⁸¹

What could be considered the opening salvo of the final stage of the battle took place on 16 April, when the Yavniel platoon attacked a house in the Arab quarter on the basis of intelligence that an "Arab meeting" was to be held there. In that action, fourteen civilians, including children, were killed. In response, the British sent two armored cars into the Arab area under attack, but the next day they were withdrawn, opening the way for the Jewish general offensive the following day.

Thus, at dawn on 17 April, the Golani and Palmach forces attacked the Old City, blowing up Arab homes as they advanced.⁸² Though the British "log of events" notes "heavy firing during night 17/18 Apr in Tiberias,"⁸³ the battle as described by Moshe Sahar was a "mini-war" that did not require the application of much force.⁸⁴ After a brief battle, the Arabs surrendered, and by the evening of 18 April, the Haganah forces reported to the Golani headquarters that there were no longer any Arabs in the Old City: "Tiberias has been cleansed."⁸⁵ Within the space of a few hours, the entire remaining Arab community had been loaded onto buses and transported to the Transjordanian border at Samakh, while a small minority was relocated to Nazareth to the west. Immediately after the evacuation came reports of the looting of Arab property.⁸⁶ The destruction of old Tiberias had begun.

EVACUATION

From all accounts, the evacuation of Arabs from Tiberias was carried out smoothly and with exemplary efficiency. There is little disagreement in the sources about the timing and sequence of events or the orderly character of the operation. According to the British military's log of events,

Conference held morning 18 Apr between leading Jewish and Arab civilians and British mil rep. Arabs agree evac Suk area confirm truce arranged . . . CRAFORCE⁸⁷ arranged escorting evacuees. Operation completed by 181835B without further incident.⁸⁸

The Haganah account does not differ in the essentials, but it does add detail. The report sent from the city to the Barak Brigade states that "After a meeting of

the communal committee with the Governor and the Brigadier, it was decided to facilitate the departure of the Arabs from the city . . . the army has declared a curfew from 2 o'clock until the completion of the Arab evacuation, twenty empty buses have arrived in the city for the evacuation."⁸⁹ Adding the two reports together, a meeting between Jews, Arabs, and the British took place following the Arab surrender; the Arabs agreed to leave the city; a curfew was imposed as of 2 P.M. to facilitate the evacuation by bus convoy; and the operation was completed by 6:35 that evening.

Whatever differences exist among the various accounts involve issues of "responsibility" and especially the extent of British pressure on the Arabs to leave. Jewish military reports indicate that Arab notables had asked for British protection on the evening of 17 April but that Britain was not prepared to provide it, given its decision to withdraw all its forces from the city, and instead offered to help ensure their safe evacuation.⁹⁰ Later accounts were sharper concerning the British role. Almost a decade after the events, the commander of the Haganah forces noted that "The British commander advised the Arabs to leave the city, and in the end they complied."⁹¹ In another later account, Sahar writes that after the surrender of the Arabs, the British commander of the city informed the Jewish delegation that, as the person responsible for the lives of the citizens, he intended to announce a curfew to remove the Arabs from the city, after which he would transfer control of Tiberias to representatives of the Jewish community. Sahar adds that he had protested the removal of the Arabs and stated his readiness to accept their surrender, affirming that the city's Jewish authorities would be responsible for Arab lives and property. He also says that he offered to meet the Arab leaders to persuade them to remain in Tiberias on the basis of peaceful relations but that the British commander rejected the offer, demanding only that the convoys leaving the city should not be attacked and that Arab property left behind should be protected.⁹²

Arab sources, too, accuse the British of having encouraged the evacuation. In his book *Nakbat Filastin*, the Palestinian historian 'Arif al-'Arif writes that the British exerted intense pressure on the Arabs after their surrender and commanded them to leave the city.⁹³ Sudqi Tabari in his memoirs recalls that the British exerted pressure on the Arabs and advised them to depart.⁹⁴ From the Arab perspective, if the British had wanted to help the Arabs remain in Tiberias, they would have done so.⁹⁵

There seems to be no doubt that the British advised the Arabs to leave. According to a Jewish source, at a certain stage the British had even proposed transferring the Arabs of Tiberias to Safad while relocating the Jews of Safad to Tiberias.⁹⁶ But as of 8 April there had also been an increasingly severe lack of food and water,⁹⁷ and the arrival in the city of refugees from the conquered Nasir al-Din had spread panic in the community, heightening the sense of doom. There had also been shootings and sniping, houses had been blown up, and there were no offers of outside help. The British had not only announced their intention to withdraw their military forces from the city entirely, but actually pulled out of an Arab neighborhood on the very eve of battle, triggering a

first flight of panicked residents. In summary, by 18 April three conditions had been met which, according to an intelligence report of the Barak Brigade, encouraged the Arab departure: (1) the outposts overlooking the city had been conquered; (2) the roadways in and out of the city were under Jewish control; and (3) the Arabs' strategic stronghold located in the Tiberias Hotel had fallen.⁹⁸ In other words, the Arabs were surrounded and closed in and had been left to their fate.

What is clear from a study of the sources is that the evacuation had not resulted from unexpected developments during the battle. Britain greatly facilitated the evacuation, and close coordination with the Jews had been key. Even were this not obvious from a logistical standpoint, Sahar notes the British intention to turn the city over to the Jewish representatives after the "removal" of the Arabs.

Despite later claims of protest at the Arab removal, there is no doubt that the Jewish side actively wanted the Arabs to leave.

Despite Sahar's later claim to have protested the Arab removal, there is no doubt that the Jewish side actively wanted the Arabs to leave: Plan Dalet itself specifically provides for "Mounting operations against enemy population centers located inside or near our defensive system. . . . In the event of resistance, the armed force must be wiped out and *the population must be expelled outside the borders of the state.*"⁹⁹ As mentioned above, when the cease-fire broke down on 8 April, there had been unanimous agreement on the Jewish side, including both the military commands and representatives of the local Jewish community (Sahar, as head of Tiberias' Jewish Situation Committee, would have been party to this agreement), that there should be no return to peace, despite the consensus that the cease-fire violation had been an accident.¹⁰⁰ Sahar's explanation that the Jewish side had rejected the Arab appeal to renew the cease-fire because of its unwillingness to leave an "Arab rearguard" in the city after British withdrawal¹⁰¹ is telling. Moreover, as early as 22 February 1948, even before tensions between the communities had emerged, the possibility of expulsion had been openly raised at a meeting of the Security Committee of the Haganah staff headquarters in Tiberias, and it seemed that evacuation was one of a number of possible scenarios that had been considered even earlier.¹⁰² Covering the aftermath of the anticipated conquest of the city, a letter from the committee to the head of the Haganah national headquarters noted that "the very entry of a sizable and well-equipped Jewish force into the old city would immediately entail its conquest, and then the process would take place of the return of most of the Jews that had left before and the evacuation of the Arabs from it."¹⁰³ Ultimately, when one looks at the whole picture, it becomes clear that however much Britain facilitated the evacuation, the real responsibility lies with the Jewish side.

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to analyze the behavior and decision making of the Arabs of Tiberias from the UN partition decision of November 1947 to their evacuation from their city on 18 April 1948. Examining the social structure of

the town's Arab community, it is apparent that the Tabari family exercised almost complete political control throughout this period, despite nascent social, political, and military currents at odds with the family's strategy. The rigidity of Tiberias's Arab social structure had negative implications for the recruitment of forces and the mobilization of resources, seriously stifling any initiative that might have come from individuals or groups outside the Tabari circle, when the survival of the community was at stake. This lack of initiative and apparent total reliance on the town's leadership—or on sympathetic outside forces—help explain the rapid breakdown of resistance of the Arab civilian population, not only in Tiberias but throughout Palestine.

For Tiberias specifically, the ill effects of the rigid social structure were greatly exacerbated by the complacency engendered by good relations with the Jewish community and the leadership's determination to safeguard these relations at all costs. During the months of uncertainty between February and the end of the Mandate in May 1948, when the situation throughout Palestine was moving swiftly toward its climax, the Arab leaders of the city did everything they could to prevent the escalation. They believed that the agreement they had signed with the local Jewish community was the key to the community's protection and backed it with the full weight of their power, honor, and prestige, while for the Jewish side it was simply a temporary measure to be observed until the moment was ripe for the removal of the Arab population. There is little doubt that the Arab community was to a large extent demobilized by the belief that it would be saved by its record of cooperation and amity with its Jewish neighbors

The leadership's top priority of maintaining good relations with the Jewish community had other consequences. In addition to undermining the sense of urgency for developing an effective defense, it contributed to the serious absence of disciplinary control by the Security Committee. The policy undoubtedly increased the community's isolation from the rest of Palestine, as the leadership opposed any effective links with the AHC. The Tabari aversion to Haj Amin al-Husayni and the AHC, and the Shahin faction's support of it, widened the rift between these two groups locally, adding to the disarray. However inadequate the AHC, the lack of any coordination at a national level did not help Tiberias's situation.

None of these factors, however, is as important as the overwhelming superiority of the Jewish side in terms of troop numbers and armaments, materiel, planning, leadership, and strategic thinking. In Tiberias, the Jewish side was well prepared and organized, imbued with determination, high motivation, and readiness for war. It enjoyed topographical control, could depend upon a strong backbone of Jewish settlements, was united, and remained in close contact and coordination with its high command at all times. The Arabs, on the other hand, were in a defensive posture from the very beginning, beset by internal divisions, a sense of helplessness and demoralization, lack of disciplinary control by the Security Committee, and weak voluntarism and sense of

sacrifice. Their forces were stationed in very few fortified positions, they did not initiate any attack, and in fact did everything to prevent outside Arab forces from entering the city so as to avoid provoking the Jewish side.

The case of Tiberias illuminates the state of near-total helplessness that engulfed the Arab community and their leadership in the months leading up to the Nakba. This quiet community could find no help in the system of good relationships with the Jews, which was unique among mixed population cities in Palestine, and which had become a symbol of coexistence. More than 5,000 members of the community left their city, homes, and all their property behind, becoming the first civilian refugees among the Palestinians, even though their communal experience up until the early months of 1948 likely led them to believe that they would be the last to experience such a catastrophe.

NOTES

1. Lt. General G. H. MacMillan, "Narrative of Events from February 1947 until Withdrawal of all British Troops," Liddell Hart Center for Military Archives, Kings College, London [LHCMA], Stockwell 6/251, Part I, 25 April 1948.
2. Memoirs of Sudqi Tabari, in the possession of Mr. Khayr Tabari, grandson of Shaykh Tahir Tabari in Nazareth.
3. "Testimony of Bechor Shitreet," Haganah Archives [HA], File no. 180/8, 26 July 1966. For further information about the Jewish-Arab relationship, see Meir Hildesheimer, *Mituv Tverya* [From the Best of Tiberias], Leaflet no. 7 (1989), p. 53; Yosef Nahmani, "Report on Tiberias," HA, File no. A1/11,F153/80, 28 December 1937; Testimony of Moshe Sahar in *Forty Days in the Battle for the Liberation of Tiberias: Collected Testimony* (Tel Aviv: Department of Defense Publication, 1993), p. 17; Nahum Av (Abu), *The Struggle over Tiberias: The First to be Liberated in the War of Independence* (Tel Aviv: Department of Defense Publication, 1991), p. 20.
4. To Dan (Ya'akov Dori) from Magi (Moshe Dayan), "Questions of Hillel Addressed to the Advisory Council," Israel Defense Forces and Defense Department Archives [IDFDDA], File no. 481/49/36, 8 January 1948.
5. Salnamah Vilayet Beirut, 1900/1318, p. 302. Public Record Office, *Palestine Blue Book*, C.0 821/11. Census of 1922, Census of 1931, p. 125. The number of persons defined as "other" and included with the Christians came to only ten in 1931. Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh, *Biladuna Filastin*, vol. 6, pt. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1973), p. 341.
6. For further information about the structure of the neighborhoods and of Mandatory Tiberias, see Y. Yemini, *Guide to Tiberias and Its Close Environs* (Tiberias: n.p., 1947).
7. On the date of immigration by the Tabari family, see *Asad Rastam Hurub Ibrahim Phasba al-Masri fi Suriya walanadul* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Bulisiya, 1986, 2d printing), pp. 66–67; Salnamah Vilayet Suriya, 1285/1868, pp. 89–90; 1288/1871, p. 79; 1290/1873, p. 91; 'Adil Mana', *'Alam Filastin fi awakhir al-'abd al-'Uthmani (1800–1918)* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1997), p. 243; Av, *The Struggle over Tiberias*, pp. 255–56.
8. Central Zionist Archives, "Tiberias: The Leaders of the Arab National Movement," L4/766/10, 1919.
9. "From Shaykh Tahir and the Notables of Tiberias to the League of Nations," State of Israel Archives [SOIA], File no. F/3/985 (no date). "From Shaykh Tahir to the Mufti of Jerusalem," SOIA, File no. F/3/985, 7 June 1923.
10. "From Shaykh Tahir to the Palestine Executive Committee," SOIA, File no. F/985/3, 13 June 1922.
11. See the Arabic version of the poster in HA, File no. 37/84/1, 28 August 1929; Yosef Nahmani, "Report on Tiberias," HA, File no. A/11/F153, 28 December 1937; "General Notice by the Arab Notables of Tiberias," SOIA, File no. F/987/49, 28 August 1929.

12. For further information about Moshe Sahar, see Av, *The Struggle over Tiberias*, p. 251.
13. See the testimony of Moshe Sahar in Hildesheimer, *Mittu Tverya*, p. 53.
14. Av, *The Struggle over Tiberias*, p. 20.
15. For details regarding the social structure of the Jews of Tiberias at the end of the Ottoman period and during the Mandate period, see Oded Abishar, *The Book of Tiberias* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Keter, 1973), pp. 118–40.
16. For further information on the attack against Kiryat Shmuel, see the report by the British High Commissioner: “From the High Commissioner for Palestine to the Secretary of State for the Colonies,” Public Record Office—Colonial Office, London, C.O733/210/10, 3 October 1938. See also the testimony of Hayim Kiryati, HA, “The Slain in the Riots of 1936–1939,” File no. 80/371/1, 2 September 1990.
17. Testimony of Moshe Sahar in Hildesheimer, *Mittu Tverya*, p. 53.
18. “From the Secretary of the National Committee Isma’il Kara Shuli to Members of the Arab National Committee in Tiberias,” SOIA, File no. F/315/3241, 10 January 1937. In his memoirs, Sudqi Tabari discusses in detail his functions as chairman of the National Committee, and from his words it clearly emerges that his main activities were organizational.
19. “The Tabari Family, the Branches of the Tabari Family and Its Descendants,” SOIA, File no. 220/105, 29 April 1941; “Report from Yaffe through Bin-Nun,” SOIA, File no. 1/105, 8 October 1940; “From Shin,” SOIA, File No. 1/105, 6 November 1941; SOIA, File no. 1/105, 2 January 1941.
20. On the establishment of the National Committees and their functions, see Bayan al-Hout, *al-Qiyadat wal-mu’assasat al-siyasiyya fi Filastin, 1917–1948* (Acre: Dar al-Aswar, 1984), pp. 589–605.
21. “Protocol of the Arab National Committee in Tiberias,” SOIA, File no. F/326/629, Session dated 17 December 1947.
22. “Protocol of the Arab National Committee in Tiberias,” SOIA, File no. F/326/629, Session dated 17 December 1947.
23. “From Sudqi Tabari to Haj Muhammad Amin al-Husayni,” SOIA, File no. F/3293/397, 10 January 1948.
24. “Protocol of the Arab National Committee in Tiberias,” SOIA, File no. F/629/326, Session dated 21 December 1947.
25. “Protocol of the Arab National Committee in Tiberias,” SOIA, File no. F/326/629, Session dated 7 January 1948.
26. “Account of the Guard Payments, 22 December 1947 to 1 January 1948,” SOIA, File no. F/553/324, 31 January 1948.
27. “Appeal by the Arab National Committee to All the Arab Youth of Tiberias,” SOIA, File no. F/553/324, 22 February 1948.
28. On the establishment and activities of the Arab Youth Organization and on the al-Najadah and al-Futuwwa organizations that preceded it, see Hout, *al-Qiyadat*, pp. 508–14.
29. “List of the Young Arabs Who Joined the Arab Youth Organization in Tiberias, between 22–29 February 1948,” SOIA, File no. F/553/324, 29 February 1948.
30. Ibrahim Yahya al-Shihabi, *Tabariya thurat wadikrayat* (Damascus: Dar al-Shajara, 1999), p. 43.
31. “From Ismail Qara Shuli to the National Committee,” SOIA, File no. F/3293/397, 2 March 1948.
32. “From Muhammad Sahtut to the Chairman of the National Committee,” SOIA, File no. F/3293/397, 2 March 1948.
33. Shihabi, *Tabariya*, p. 3.
34. For further information on Subhi Shahin, see Av, *The Struggle over Tiberias*, pp. 144, 257.
35. Hayim Kiryati, HA, File no. 1/371/80, 3 September 1990, pp. 6–7.
36. Tamir Goren, “The War against the Mixed Population Cities in the North of Israel,” in Alon Kadish, ed., *The War of Independence, 1948–1949: Reviewed* (Ramat Efal: Israel Galili Institute and Ministry of Defense Publication, 2004), pt. 2, p. 174.
37. Av, *The Struggle over Tiberias*, p. 93.
38. Kiryati, “The Conquest of Tiberias,” HA, File no. 1/371/80, 10 July 1990, p. 4; Av, *The Struggle over Tiberias*, p. 93.
39. “On the Situation in Tiberias,” IDFDDA, File no. 481/49/36, 23 March 1948, pp. 6–7; “Log of Events,” Sheet no. 36, LHCMA, W.O275/54, Date/Time 93155; *Davar*, 3 May 1968.
40. For further information on the agreement, see the testimony of Moshe

Sahar in *Forty Days*, p. 28; Av, *The Struggle over Tiberias*, pp. 136–38; *Davar*, 3 May 1968; Goren, “The War against the Mixed Population Cities,” p. 175.

41. “On the Situation in Tiberias,” IDFDDA, File no. 481/49/36, 23 March 1948, pp. 4–5. See also Av, *The Struggle over Tiberias*, p. 138.

42. Golani, “Copy of the Daily Information Summary on the District of Kinneret,” 17 March 1948; HA, File no. 128/51/18, 17 March 1948.

43. “On the Situation in Tiberias,” IDFDDA, File no. 481/49/36, 23 March 1948, pp. 6–7; Binyamin Etzioni, ed., *The Way of the Battles of Golani Brigades* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Ma’rakhot, n.d.), pp. 43–74.

44. For details on the structure of the forces that were active in Tiberias, see *Forty Days*, p. 22.

45. Text of Plan Dalet, Appendix B of Walid Khalidi, “Plan Dalet: Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18, no. 1 (Autumn 1988), p. 24. See also Baruch Kimmerling, “The Social Construction of Israel’s ‘National Security,’” in Stuart A. Cohen, ed., *Democratic Societies and Their Armed Forces: Israel in Comparative Context* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), pp. 215–53. Plan D is discussed on pp. 219–21.

46. Yehuda Slotzky, ed., *History of the Haganab: From Struggle to War*, vol. 3, pt. II (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1972), p. 1568.

47. Slotzky, *History of the Haganab*, p. 129.

48. Av, *The Struggle over Tiberias*, p. 147.

49. Testimony of Moshe Sahar in *Forty Days*, p. 29.

50. Testimony of Moshe Sahar in *Forty Days*, p. 30.

51. “On the Situation in Tiberias,” IDFDDA, File no. 481/49/36, 23 March 1948, p. 1. See also “Appeal of the Committee of the Jewish Old City Residents in Tiberias to the Security Committee in the City,” IDFDDA, File no. 481/49/36, 20 February 1948, 2 March 1948. For further information on the platoon that was stationed in the Old City, see the testimony of its commander, Avraham Riklin, in *Forty Days*, pp. 66–70.

52. Optik from Tiberias, “Report on the Events of Thursday, 8 April 1948, in Tiberias,” IDFDDA, File no. 128/51/18, 10 April 1948; From Optik to Barak [Barak

Brigade], Record of a telephone conversation from Tiberias, IDFDDA, File no. 7249/49/111, 8 April 1948; Hayim Kiryati, “Jewish-Arab Relations in Tiberias from the Riots of 1929 till 1948,” HA, File no. 1/371/80, 3 September 1990, p. 7. See also Hayim Kiryati, “The Conquest of Tiberias,” HA, File no. 1/371/80, 10 July 1990, p. 3; *Davar*, 3 May 1968.

53. Some Jewish sources attribute the Jewish response to rumors, sparking an emotional furor, that the person killed that morning was Moshe Sahar.

54. Optik from Tiberias, “Report on the Events of Thursday, 8 April 1948, in Tiberias,” IDFDDA, File no. 1096/49/73, 10 April 1948; “Log of Events,” Sheet no. 36, LHCMA, W.O275/54 Date/Time 91355. It should be noted that according to the British report, the number of dead was less than reported in the Haganah report—six dead and six wounded among the Arabs, and four dead and eight wounded among the Jews.

55. Telegram to the intelligence officer of the Golani Brigade: “Why did the Arabs leave Tiberias?” IDFDDA, File no. 128/51/18, 20 April 1948.

56. “Testimony of Yitzhak Shusterman,” IDFDDA, File no. 943/922/75, 22 March 1957, p. 2.

57. Avraham Riklin in *Forty Days*, p. 67.

58. *Davar*, 3 May 1968.

59. Moshe Sahar in *Forty Days*, p. 23.

60. Optik from Tiberias, “Report on the Events of Friday, 9 April 1948,” IDFDDA, File no. 128/51/18, 10 April 1948; *Davar*, 3 May 1968; Hayim Kiryati, “Ten Days in the Battle for the Liberation of Tiberias,” HA, File no. 1/371/80, p. 2; Avraham Riklin in *Forty Days*, pp. 66–70.

61. Optik from Tiberias, “Report on the Events of Thursday, 8 April 1948 in Tiberias,” IDFDDA, File no. 1096/49/73, 11 April 1948.

62. Optik from Tiberias, “Report on the Events of Thursday, 8 April 1948 in Tiberias,” IDFDDA, File no. 1096/49/73, 11 April 1948. From this and other reports it appears that the Arab side had a three-inch mortar. See also “Telephone Conversation from Ein Gev from Aminadav to Barak,” IDFDDA, File no. 7249/49/111, 11 April 1948.

63. “Record of Telephone Conversation from Optik to Barak,” IDFDDA, File no. 7249/49/111, 11 April 1948.

64. "Record of Telephone Conversation from Golani [Brigade] to Barak," IDFDDA, File No. 7249/49/111, 12 April 1948.
65. Hayim Kiryati, "Ten Days in the Battle for the Liberation of Tiberias," HA, File no. 1/371/80, p. 2.
66. *The History of the War of Independence* (Tel Aviv: Maarachot, 1959), p. 124; Hayim Kiryati, "The Conquest of Tiberias," HA, File no. 1/371/80, 10 July 1990, p. 2.
67. Khalidi, "Plan Dalet," p. 29.
68. "Testimony of Amos Mokadi (Brandstetter)," IDFDDA, File no. 943/922/75, 22 March 1957, pp. 1-2.
69. Kiryati, "Ten Days," p. 1.
70. Telegram to the intelligence officer of the Golani Brigade: "Why did the Arabs leave Tiberias?" IDFDDA, File no. 128/51/18, 20 April 1948.
71. Walid Khalidi, ed., *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992), p. 534; "From the Representative of the Arab Higher Committee for Palestine to the Secretary General of the United Nations," Public Record Office—Colonial Office, London, C.O733/487/2, 26 July 1948; Shihabi, *Tabariya*, pp. 43-44; 'Arif al-'Arif, *Nakbat Filastin wal-firdaws al-mafqud*, vol. 1 (Kfar Kara': Dar al-Huda, 2000), p. 205.
72. "From Shaykh Tahir Tabari, the Mufti of Tiberias, to the Commander of the British Forces in the North," SOIA, File no. F/553/324, 12 April 1948.
73. "Record of Telephone Conversation from Optik to Barak," IDFDDA, File no. F/553/324, 12 April 1948.
74. Telegram to the intelligence officer of the Golani Brigade: "Why did the Arabs leave Tiberias?" HA, File no. 128/51/18, 20 April 1948.
75. "Telephone conversation from Optik to Dan [Biham, aide-de-camp of the Twelfth Brigade]," IDFDDA, File no. 7249/49/111, 14 April 1948; Major General H. C. Stockwell, Curfew Order no. 22, LHCMA, W.O/275/71, 14 April 1948.
76. "Telephone Conversation from Yitzhak [Shusterman] to Barak," IDFDDA, File no. 724/49/111, 14 April 1948.
77. "Telephone Conversation from Zvika [Levkov] to Barak, Golani," IDFDDA, File no. 7249/49/111, 15 April 1948. In another report of the same date, a long list of necessary equipment was presented, including guns, bullets, grenades, and so on.
78. On the structure of the Twelfth Brigade (the Barak Brigade) of the Golani Division, see "Meeting with Nahum Golan, the Brigade Commander during the War of Independence," IDFDDA, File no. 943/922/75, 12 March 1957, p. 4; Hayim Kiryati, "Ten Days," p. 3.
79. Hayim Kiryati, HA, File No. 1/371/80, 1 July 1990.
80. Hayim Kiryati, "Ten Days," p. 3.
81. "Telephone Conversation from Zvika to Barak," IDFDDA, File no. 7249/49/111, 16 April 1948.
82. Zrubebel Gilad, ed., *Sefer haPalmah* [Book of the Palmach], vol. 2 (Tel Aviv: Kibbutz HaMeuhad, 1953), p. 213; Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-1949* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1991), p. 104; Hayim Kiryati, "Ten Days," p. 4; "Log of Events," Sheet no. 80, LHCMA, Public Record Office—War Office, London, 275/54Date/Time 170410.
83. "Log of Events," Sheet no. 91, Serial 405, LHCMA, W. O275/54, Date/Time 201010B.
84. *Davar*, 3 May 1968.
85. "Telephone Conversation from Shimon [Eliezer Goldman, Commander of the Kinneret District] to Golani, Barak Staff," IDFDDA, File no. 7249/49/111, 18 April 1948; "Log of Events," Sheets nos. 70, 80, LHCMA. Public Record Office—War Office, London, W.O 275/54, 18 April 1948.
86. "Telephone Conversation from Golani to Barak," IDFDDA, File no. 7249/49/111, 20 April 1948.
87. A special force of British units operating in the Galilee in the last month of the Mandate.
88. "Log of Events," Sheet no. 91, Serial 405, LHCMA, W. O275/54, Date/Time 201010B.
89. "Telephone Conversation from Shimon to Golani, Barak," IDFDDA, File no. 7249/49/111, 18 April 1948. See the three reports from 14:30 to 17:00.
90. "Telephone Conversation from Shimon to Golani, Barak," IDFDDA, File no. 7249/49/111, 18 April 1948. See the three reports beginning from 14:30 to 17:00.
91. "Testimony of Shusterman," IDFDDA, File no. 943/922/75, 22 March 1957, p. 2.
92. *Davar*, 3 May 1968.
93. 'Arif, *Nakbat Filastin*, p. 205.

94. Memoirs of Sudqi Tabari.
95. *The History of the War of Independence* states regarding the evacuation that the British army “granted them [the Arabs] a final act of magnanimity by evacuating all their population” (p. 125).
96. Goren, “The War on the Mixed Population Cities,” p. 178.
97. See testimony of Haganah commander Ezra Levy in *Forty Days*, p. 62.
98. Telegram to the intelligence officer of the Golani Brigade: “Why did the Arabs leave Tiberias?” HA, File no. 128/51/18, 20 April 1948.
99. Khalidi, “Plan Dalet,” pp. 29–30 (emphasis added).
100. Avraham Riklin in *Forty Days*, p. 67.
101. *Davar*, 3 May 1968.
102. From the Security Committee in Tiberias to the Head of the National Command, “Security in Tiberias,” IDFDDA, File no. 481/49/36, 22 February 1948.
103. From the Security Committee in Tiberias to the Head of the National Command, “Security in Tiberias,” IDFDDA, File no. 481/49/36, 22 February 1948.



View of Tiberias and the Upper Mosque, c. 1935. (*Before Their Diaspora*, Institute for Palestine Studies)