

# Qalqilya

## The Guava Capital



By Hamdan Taha

The Palestinian city of Qalqilya is located on the Mediterranean coast, approximately 12 kilometers east of the seashore and 16 kilometers south of Tulkarem. It lies at the juncture of the mountains of Nablus with the coastal plain. Qalqilya was a main station on the Hijazi railway line till 1948. It is surrounded by the villages of Jayus, Azoun, Habla, Jaljulia, Kufr Saba, Meska, and Kufr Jamal. In 1945, Qalqilya comprised 27,910 dunums. The town lost most of its fertile land following the 1949 Armistice Agreements.

The name of the city is identified with Calecailes in the Roman period and Calcelie in the Frankish sources from the early Medieval period. During the Umayyad period, Qalqilya was part of Jund Filastin (one of the military districts of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates), with Ramla as its administrative capital. In the Mamluk period, Qalqilya was part of Jaljulia district. In the early Ottoman administrative system, Qalqilya was part of Nablus Sanjaq, or district, but later on, it was a *nahiyah* (a regional or local type of administrative division that usually consists of a number of villages and/or sometimes smaller towns) of the Tulkarem district of Bani Saab. Qalqilya then was designated as a *nahiyah* of Al-Haram, ascribed to Sayidna Ali (known today as the Israeli city of Herzliya). In 1965, Qalqilya became a center within the district, with Jayus, Habla, Azoun, Nabi Elias, Falama, Kufr Thulth, Ras Atiya, Kuf Abbush, and Kufr Jammal. That year, the city of Qalqilya also became the center of Qalqilya Governorate, which includes 28 villages and habitation areas.

According to archeological surveys, Qalqilya was inhabited in the Bronze Age as well as during the Roman, Byzantine, Early Arab, Crusader, Ayyubid-Mamluk, and Ottoman periods. The earliest settlement is represented by Tell Sofar, located east of the town. The area of Qalqilya is rich in shrines such as the Suraqa Shrine, ascribed to one of Prophet Mohammad's companions, and Maqam Nabi Yamin.

The survival of the city of Qalqilya is close to a miracle after it lost most of its fertile land during the *Nakba* of 1948, and after the construction of the Separation Wall by Israel in 2002. It was a target of several military attacks and continuous siege by Israel.

Qalqilya with its zoo, park, museum, and tourist entertainment facilities is one of the main destinations of domestic tourism in Palestine.

The Qalqilya area boasts Wadi Qana, which is a nature reserve that contains a network of caves. Excavations of one of these caves in 1980 recovered remains from the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods, and the Early Bronze Age. The cave system is spread over five levels with an entrance on the uppermost level. The cave was once used as a burial place, and pottery, flint, stone, ivory, and bone objects have been found there. Neolithic remains that were also found in the cave include pottery vessels from the Yarmukian culture



Photo by Ala Badarneh.

Qalqilya is famed for its agricultural products, which include citrus fruits and vegetables, but most importantly guavas and home-grown flowers. This small town is also home to Palestine's only zoo, which was established in 1986. Despite the Separation Wall, which separates people from their land,

(a Neolithic culture of the ancient Levant). Most of the objects date to the Chalcolithic period and consist of pottery, basalt, metal, bone, ivory jewelry, and human skeletal remains. The most distinctive find from the caves is a collection of copper, electrum, and gold objects. Some were made

# Palestinian Dishes

## Guava

Guavas are usually 4 to 12 centimeters long and round or oval depending on the species. They have a pronounced and typical fragrance, similar to lemon rind but less sharp. The outer skin may be rough, often with a bitter taste, or soft and sweet. Varying between species, the skin can be any thickness and is usually green before maturity; it becomes yellow, maroon, or green when ripe. The pulp inside may be sweet or sour and off-white ("white" guavas) to deep pink ("red" guavas). The seeds in the central pulp vary in number and hardness, depending on species.



Photo by Ala Badarneh.

The (*Masriya*) guava, is produced in the Qalqilya district in an area of 1,500 dunums, which produces 6,000 tons of guava. The production period is from August to October. Qalqilya is considered to be the guava capital of Palestine. Qalqilya farmers boast that guavas are part of the city's heritage and constitute an important source of income.

of almost pure gold and others of electrum with a high ratio of gold to silver. The gold and electrum of Wadi Qana represent the earliest production of this precious metal in Palestine.

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Photo courtesy of ©MahaSaca, Palestinian Heritage Center, Bethlehem, Palestine.

# Palestinian Dresses

## Traditional Dress of Northern Palestine



The photo of these traditional Palestinian dresses was taken on the Sebastiya archaeological site and shows the dresses of Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarem, Tubas, and Qalqilya. The women embroider the chest panel of the white dresses or wear colorful dresses underneath the overcoat. The overcoat can be made of a variety of types of material, frequently the Syrian *sayah*. Women also wear pants embroidered at the ankle. The headdress is made of silk and tied with a green bandana.