

Turmus Ayya — A Comprehensive Historical Report

Compiled by Mumen Musa

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Turmus Ayya — A Comprehensive Historical Report

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This report combines two deep-research dossiers into a single comprehensive history of Turmus Ayya: a broad survey spanning the medieval period to the present, and a focused study of the village's medieval (pre-Ottoman) traces. No details from either source have been dropped; the two have been integrated so the narrow Crusader/Mamluk evidence sits inside the broader documentary, archaeological, demographic, and social arc.

Summary

Turmus Ayya, today a Palestinian town in the Ramallah area, is securely documented under recognizably related forms from the medieval period onward, and very likely sits on or near an older settlement zone within the Shiloh valley. The **earliest secure documentary attestation found in this research is the Crusader-period form *Turbasaim* (also *Turbasaym* / *Turbasym*)**, which appears in records connected with St. Gilles/Sinjil and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, alongside a paired neighboring site recorded as **Dere**. By contrast, the commonly repeated identification with the ancient or rabbinic ***Thormasia*** is plausible but not proven; it belongs to the category of scholarly hypothesis rather than documentary certainty. Later scholarship also floated an identification with **Tur Shimon**, but that equation has been challenged on archaeological grounds.

How far back the history reaches, and what the name may mean. The most plausible reading of the town's origins is that its core is genuinely ancient — far older than its first written record. Excavation work in the Shiloh valley suggested that the **central Iron Age I site of the valley may lie exactly where Turmus Ayya stands today**, which would push real human occupation of the locale back roughly three thousand years, even though that is a topographic inference rather than a proven stratigraphic sequence. A richly carved **marble sarcophagus** found beside the village (decorated with Bacchus/Dionysus and the genii of the seasons) anchors a Roman-era funerary horizon in the immediate environs, and the continuous *written* trail then runs from the Crusader charters of 1145 through a Mamluk endowment of 1268–69, Ottoman tax registers, and on into the modern censuses. As for the **name itself**, the most plausible origin is that “Turmus Ayya” descends from an older toponym in the ***Thormasia*** family: local historical writing parses the elements as evoking a “mountain,” grape pulp/pomace, and ruin or desolation — a fittingly agrarian, vine-and-highland image for the place — while scholars

more cautiously treat the link as a strong, attractive hypothesis rather than a settled etymology. The phonetic continuity from Crusader *Turbasaim* to Arabic *ترمسعيا* to modern *Turmus Ayya* is, however, hard to dismiss.

A few details worth flagging. The town is striking for how its deep past and turbulent present sit side by side. It is one of the better-documented villages in central Palestine before 1948, yet it is equally well known today for an exceptionally large **overseas diaspora** — journalistic estimates put more than 80 percent of residents or property-holding families as U.S. citizens or dual nationals, with a further strand of migration to **Latin America (especially Panama)** — whose remittances rebuilt much of the town in large villas. Nineteenth-century surveyors fixed it on the landscape by its **conspicuous white-domed shrine** above a spring-fed, fruit-bearing plain, and the same town now appears in human-rights litigation over settler violence. In other words, Turmus Ayya is a place that turns up at once in Crusader cartularies, a sarcophagus catalog, Ottoman defters, Mandate census tables, folklore collections, and modern court petitions.

The securely attested medieval documentary core is small but unusually revealing. In the Crusader-period sources, the village appears as **Turbasaim / Turbasaym / Turbasym** and its paired neighboring site as **Dere**. These names occur in a **1145** patriarchal settlement over tithes connected to the church at **casale Sancti Egidii** (St. Gilles/Sinjil) and again in **1175** in a settlement restructuring those same rights between the **Abbey of Mount Tabor** and the **Church of the Holy Sepulchre**. A later, non-Crusader but still pre-Ottoman attestation appears in a **Baybars waqf deed of 668 AH / 1268–69 CE**, where the place is listed in Arabic as *ترمسعيا*.

The strongest continuous documentary spine begins with the **Ottoman-period tax reconstruction for 1596**, which reports Turmus Ayya as a Muslim village of **43 households** in the nahiya of Quds, paying taxes on cereals, olives, vines, fruit trees, and livestock/beehives, for a total of **7,200 akçe**, with a substantial share assigned to a waqf. Nineteenth-century travel and survey literature then fixes the village clearly in place: Robinson in 1838 described it as lying on “a low rocky mound in the level valley”; Guérin in 1870 noted ancient cisterns and architectural fragments and estimated roughly **700 inhabitants**; the Palestine Exploration Fund in 1882 described a **moderate-sized village on a low knoll in a fertile plain**, with a spring to the south and a conspicuous white-domed sacred place.

The British Mandate record is especially strong. The **1922 census** gives **707 residents, all Muslim**. The **1931 census** records **185 occupied houses** and **717 residents**, of whom **716 were Muslim and one was a Christian woman**. Official **1945 village statistics** report **960 Muslims** and **17,611 dunams** of land, including **3,665 dunams** of plantations/irrigable land, **7,357 dunams** of cereals, and **54 dunams** classified as built-up. These figures make Turmus Ayya one of the better-documented villages in central Palestine before 1948.

Archaeologically, the evidence points to an important settlement locale in the broader Shiloh valley, but not to a fully resolved ancient-site identification. Survey data indicate sherds from multiple periods at or near the village, and one excavation report on the Shiloh valley suggested that an Iron Age I central site may have lain where the Arab village of Turmus ‘Aiya later stood. Yet another scholar, arguing against the Tur Shimon identification, emphasized that survey at Turmus Ayya itself produced a few sherds from several periods **but none from the Hellenistic period**. A famous **classically decorated marble sarcophagus** was found near the village in 1912 and published in 1913, but easily accessible summaries disagree on its date; the object is best treated as evidence of a Roman or Greco-Roman funerary horizon in the environs rather than as proof of one precise chronology.

On social history, the evidence is more uneven. Accessible local-profile material names at least the **Abu ‘Awwad** and **al-Hamayel** families, but a full archival-grade hamula genealogy from a primary village register could not be recovered in this research. Modern human-rights documentation and litigation also repeatedly mention the **Abu ‘Awwad** family in Turmusaya, suggesting continuity of that lineage name in the town. In the later twentieth century and after 1967, Turmus Ayya became notable for a very large diaspora, especially in the **United States** and also in **Latin America**, with multiple journalistic and advocacy sources estimating that a very high share of residents or property-holding families have U.S. citizenship or dual nationality. Those estimates are persistent but **not official census data**, and should be treated as approximate.

The overall historical conclusion is therefore strong on some points and cautious on others. It is highly secure that Turmus Ayya was a settled village by the Crusader period, an Ottoman tax-paying agricultural community in the sixteenth century, and a well-recorded Mandate-era village with stable demographic growth. It is also highly plausible that the site area was occupied much earlier. What remains uncertain are the exact ancient name behind the modern toponym, the full early genealogy of the town’s major families, and the precise relationship between the village core and nearby archaeological loci such as Ras ad-Deir/Deir el-Fikia and the wider Shiloh settlement complex.

Research frame and matching method

Because the documentary trail spans Arabic, Ottoman, English, French, German, and Latinized Crusader forms, this was treated as a **variant-matching problem**, not a single-name lookup. That is necessary because Mandate officials themselves explicitly wrote that place-name transliteration was difficult and that the transliteration system used in 1931 was already being abandoned while the census tables were still in press. In practical terms, forms that differ only by spacing, apostrophe/ayn marking, French “ou” for /u/, and final **-ayya / -aiya / -aya / -ayyeh** endings were normalized or cross-checked. Indirect references were also searched through

nearby villages and sites such as **Sinjl**, **Ras ad-Deir / Deir el-Fikia**, and **Shiloh / Seilun**, because medieval and archaeological discussions often mention Turmus Ayya relationally rather than as a stand-alone entry.

Source classes were prioritized in this order: **official censuses and statistics**, **primary historical publications and original papers**, **explorer/survey literature**, **archaeological scholarship**, and only then transparent secondary compilations or local profiles where primaries were inaccessible online. This matters especially for Turmus Ayya because some highly repeated claims on the modern internet compress together primary facts, antiquarian conjectures, and local oral etymologies.

Two important categories of false matches were filtered out. First, some search results refer to **Tall al-Turmus** in the Gaza district, which is a different place entirely. Second, many Arabic and Levantine results for **turmus / tourmous / ترمس** refer to **lupini beans**, not the town. Both false-positive families are common enough that they can distort historical searching if not excluded deliberately.

NAME VARIANTS AND MATCHING TABLE

Form	Script or language context	Representative source	Assessment
Turmusa'yya / ترمسعيا	modern Arabic/official locality usage	PCBS 2017 building report and PCBS locality series.	Highest-confidence modern administrative form.
Turmus'ayyeh	modern English transliteration	Later summary citing official/local usage.	High-confidence modern transliteration, but one of several current English spellings.
Turmus 'Aiya / Turmus 'Aya	Mandate and survey English	1931 census; Robinson; PEF indexes.	High-confidence historical English forms.
Tourmous'aya	French archaeological publication	Revue Biblique article title and related art-history references.	High-confidence French scholarly form.
Turmus Aya / Turmus Aja	nineteenth-century German/Ottoman tabulation summaries	Later summaries of Socin/Hartmann/Schick-era listings.	Moderate confidence; reflects older European rendering practice.
Turbasaim / Turbasym	Crusader Latin/Latinized place-name	Röhricht-based nomenclature and regesta references.	High-confidence medieval documentary form, though identification with modern Turmus Ayya remains scholarly interpretation.
Thormasia	Antiquarian / rabbinic-historical identification	PEF combined index and later scholarly summaries.	Conjectural ancient identification, not a secure documentary name for the medieval/modern village.

A practical implication of the table is that **"Turmus Ayya" is best understood as a normalized modern label for a broader family of closely related spellings**, while ***Turbasaim*** and ***Thormasia*** belong to a different evidentiary category: they are historical or hypothesized antecedents, not simply alternate spellings of the same administrative record.

Name, variants, and earliest attestations

The modern village name is not in dispute, but its **origin** is. Local-profile literature preserves a folk-style etymology that derives the place from "**Thormasia**" and breaks it into components associated with "mountain," grape pulp, and ruin/desolation. That explanation is culturally important because it shows how local historical writing in Palestine has attempted to connect present-day villages to deep linguistic layers. But it should not be presented as linguistically settled.

The heavier scholarly debate concerns whether Turmus Ayya corresponds to an ancient **Thormasia** known from rabbinic or antiquarian discussion, and whether it might even be connected with **Tur Shimon**. Some modern summaries attribute the **Thormasia** identification to Adolf Neubauer and later note proposals by Michael Avi-Yonah and Shemuel Yeivin linking the site to Tur Shimon. Yet this identification is not universally accepted. Boaz Zissu, in a discussion of Ḥorvat Tura and the identification of Tur Shimon, explicitly noted that survey at Turmus Ayya itself yielded only a few finds from various periods and **none from the Hellenistic period**, which weakens attempts to force a direct Tur Shimon equation at the village proper.

The **earliest secure documentary mention in this research corpus is medieval**. A nomenclature study published by the Palestine Exploration Fund in 1889, using earlier Crusader cartulary material, stated that "**Turbasaim**", found in the Cartulary of the Holy Sepulchre and located near **St. Gilles** (Sinjil), seemed to correspond to modern **Turmus 'Aya**. Röhrich's regesta likewise preserve the medieval forms **Turbasaim / Turbasym** in connection with **Dere** and ecclesiastical ownership. This makes the safest formulation: **the first secure written witness is Crusader-period Turbasaim, while Thormasia is an older identification hypothesis rather than a directly recovered local charter form from Turmus Ayya itself**.

That distinction matters methodologically. If one collapses **Turbasaim**, **Thormasia**, and **Turmus Ayya** into a single unquestioned name-line, the evidentiary quality gets overstated. The stronger reading is more careful: the town is certainly medieval and early modern under closely matching names; it is **possibly** older under a related ancient toponym; and the link between the two is substantial enough to investigate, but not strong enough to state as proven fact.

Medieval traces before the Ottoman period

OVERVIEW OF THE MEDIEVAL EVIDENCE

The strongest single identification in the medieval record is **Turbasaim = Turmus Ayya**. The identification rests on the repeated association with **St. Gilles / Sinjil**, on phonetic continuity between the medieval and later forms, and on later historical-geographical scholarship. The harder

problem is **Dere**. An older proposal identified it with **Deir es-Sudan**, west of Sinjil, but later scholarship has preferred **Khirbet Deir el-Fikia / Ras ad-Deir**, northeast of Turmus Ayya, because that ruin preserves explicit monastic/chapel remains of Crusader character and sits in the right local landscape. **Turbasaim = Turmus Ayya** rates as **high confidence**, and **Dere = Deir el-Fikia / Ras ad-Deir** as **moderate to moderately high confidence**.

The documents do **not** directly name inhabitants of Turbasaim or Dere. What they document directly are **revenues, rights, and institutions**: a church at **St. Gilles / Sinjil**, tithes from **Turbasaim** and **Dere**, and the competing claims of **Mount Tabor** and the **Holy Sepulchre**. Archaeology at **Deir el-Fikia** adds evidence of a **monastery and chapel**, but that ecclesiastical complex is inferred archaeologically rather than explicitly named in the surviving charters. The safest reconstruction, therefore, is that Turmus Ayya and Dere were rural settlements economically tied to the **parish-church center at St. Gilles/Sinjil**, while the ruin at Deir el-Fikia preserves material evidence for a local monastic or chapel site somewhere in the same cluster.

SOURCES AND MANUSCRIPT BASIS

The most important primary source for this dossier is Eugène de Rozière's ***Cartulaire de l'église du Saint-Sépulchre de Jérusalem***, published from **Vatican manuscripts**. Digitized scans are available through **Internet Archive** and **Gallica**, and Röhricht's ***Regesta regni Hierosolymitani*** is available in digitized form through the **MGH Bibliothek**. Those three access points are enough to verify the key 1145 and 1175 notices and to anchor later scholarship in printed primary editions.

For manuscript provenance, the most useful accessible notice is Adolphe Tardif's nineteenth-century review of the cartulary. Tardif explains that the Holy Sepulchre cartulary had circulated in a manuscript brought from the East by **Philippe de Maizières**, later owned by **Paul Pétau**, and that de Rozière succeeded in recovering not only that witness but also a second manuscript of the same period. Tardif also notes that earlier extracts survive in the **Bibliothèque nationale, fonds des cartulaires no. 195** and **collection Duchesne, t. LVI**. The easily accessible online snippets do **not** expose the modern Vatican shelfmarks clearly enough to state them without risk of error, so the printed edition and the archival notices are cited rather than guessing at current call numbers.

For historical geography and archaeology, the indispensable modern references are **Conder and Kitchener's Survey of Western Palestine** and accompanying **Arabic and English Name Lists**, together with later identification work summarized by **Röhricht, Pringle, Finkelstein, Zissu, and Kedar & Pringle**. These sources do not create new medieval attestations, but they

are essential for understanding where **Dere** and **Turbasaim** belong on the ground and why the identification of **Deir el-Fikia / Ras ad-Deir** gained favor over the older **Deir es-Sudan** proposal.

ATTESTED MEDIEVAL MENTIONS

The table below separates **direct medieval attestations** from **closely related contextual evidence**. “Original wording” is kept short where quoted verbatim; longer texts are paraphrased.

Date	Source citation	Language	Original wording	Translation	Relevance
1145 Aug. 14	William I, patriarch of Jerusalem , in <i>Cartulaire de l'église du Saint-Sépulchre de Jérusalem</i> , no. 41; summarized by Röhricht, <i>Regesta regni Hierosolymitani</i> , p. 59, no. 234. Printed from Vatican manuscripts.	Latin	" Turbasaim videlicet et Dere "	"namely Turbasaim and Dere"	Patriarch William settles a dispute between Pontius, abbot of Mount Tabor , and Peter, prior of the Holy Sepulchre . The act grants Mount Tabor the church at casale Sancti Egidii together with its offerings and half the tithes of Turbasaim and Dere . This is the earliest secure attestation tying both places to the St. Gilles/Sinjil ecclesiastical center.
1175 Oct. 17	Agreement summarized by Röhricht for Peter, prior of the Holy Sepulchre , and Garinus, abbot of Mount Tabor ; same date also represented in the Holy Sepulchre cartulary as no. 142.	Latin	" Turbasaym et Dere "	"Turbasaym and Dere"	The parties agree that the Holy Sepulchre is to hold the church at St. Gilles with its appurtenances and the half of all tithes from St. Gilles, Turbasaym, and Dere that had earlier been held under the grant of Patriarch William. Important correction: the source is about church rights and tithe rights , not necessarily a wholesale transfer of the villages themselves.
1175 Oct. 17	Reciprocal act of Garinus, abbot of Mount Tabor , summarized by	Latin	" Turbasaim (Turbasym) et Dere "	"Turbasaim (Turbasym) and Dere"	Garinus explicitly states that Mount Tabor returns to the Holy Sepulchre the church of St. Gilles

Date	Source citation	Language	Original wording	Translation	Relevance
	Röhricht on the same page/date cluster.				with its appurtenances and the half tithes of St. Gilles , Turbasaim/Turbasym , and Dere , which Mount Tabor had possessed by grant of Patriarch William. The regesta also notes sale of vineas vero et domos for a sum in bezants, showing that the institution had houses and vineyards in the cluster.
mid-12th century context	Another Holy Sepulchre cartulary act contains witnesses named Otgerius de casali Sancti Egidii and Willelmus de casali Sancti Egidii .	Latin	"Otgerius de casali Sancti Egidii ... Willelmus de casali Sancti Egidii"	"Otgerius of the casale of St. Gilles ... William of the casale of St. Gilles"	Not a direct mention of Turbasaim or Dere, but important contextual evidence that the St. Gilles/Sinjil center had named local residents appearing in Holy Sepulchre documentation. It is the best nearby evidence found for identifiable persons living in the ecclesiastical hub linked to Turbasaim and Dere.
668 AH / 1268–69 CE	Baybars waqf for Nabi Musa , quoted in a scholarly article that cites Kamil al-Asali , Watha'iq Maqdisiyya Tarikhiyya , vol. 3, pp. 119–121.	Arabic	"... ترمسعيّا"	"Tur-musayya ..."	This is the clearest verified pre-Ottoman Arabic attestation of Turmus Ayya traced in this research. It shows that by the late Mamluk-formation moment of the Nabi Musa waqf, the village was already known in recognizably Arabic form and had become

Date	Source citation	Language	Original wording	Translation	Relevance
					part of a major Islamic endowment landscape.

What is striking is how **narrow** the direct attestation base is. In the verifiable material, the Crusader-period documentary mentions do **not** multiply beyond these 1145 and 1175 tithe-and-church notices; later references are largely **regesta**, later historical-geographical identifications, or Mamluk continuity evidence. That does not make the evidence weak, but it does mean that reconstruction must be disciplined and avoid claiming more than the documents actually say.

RECONSTRUCTING THE ECCLESIASTICAL LANDSCAPE

The documentary nucleus

The 1145 act shows the local structure with unusual clarity. The dispute was **not** framed as a quarrel over secular lordship over Turbasaim or Dere. It was framed as a dispute over the **tithes** of **St. Gilles** and its associated villages, with the patriarch awarding Mount Tabor the **church at St. Gilles** and half the tithes of **Turbasaim** and **Dere**. This makes **St. Gilles / Sinjil** the documentary center of the cluster, and **Turbasaim** and **Dere** its economically attached satellites in ecclesiastical terms.

The 1175 settlement is just as important, because it shows that the institutional arrangement was adjusted again a generation later. The Holy Sepulchre and Mount Tabor agreed that the Holy Sepulchre would recover the **church in the casale of St. Gilles** and the **half-tithe rights** in **St. Gilles, Turbasaym/Turbasym, and Dere** that Mount Tabor had held by the earlier patriarchal grant. One reciprocal notice also refers to **houses and vineyards** being sold, which strongly suggests that the ecclesiastical presence in the St. Gilles cluster was not purely abstract or fiscal but included a built landed estate.

This is why the common shorthand that “the three villages were transferred” is too blunt. The documents speak more precisely of the **church of St. Gilles**, its **appurtenances**, and **half the tithes** of the three villages. The safest reading is therefore that what moved institutionally was a package of **ecclesiastical rights and income**, not necessarily full seigneurial title to every plot in all three villages.

Who was there

The surviving acts do **not** name any inhabitant of **Turbasaim** or **Dere** directly. That is an important limitation. The only named human actors in the core documents are ecclesiastics and high witnesses: the patriarch, abbot, prior, bishops, canons, and associated witnesses.

The best local human evidence comes indirectly from the same Holy Sepulchre cartulary, where a witness list includes **Otgerius de casali Sancti Egidii** and **Willelmus de casali Sancti Egidii**. Those names show that the **St. Gilles/Sinjl** center linked to Turbasaim and Dere had people identifiable in the Latin record by origin from the casale. Because the names are rendered in Latin/Frankish form, they at least show a Latin documentary layer around the local center, though they do not tell us whether they were Franks, locally rooted Christians using Latinized names, or simply men written that way by the notary.

For the wider rural population, the sources force caution. Broader scholarship on Frankish rural settlement in the kingdom emphasizes interaction with the **indigenous population** and argues that the countryside was not populated solely by transplanted Franks; rather, Frankish rural settlement existed in social relation with local Muslim and Christian populations. That broader pattern makes it plausible that Turbasaim and Dere were worked largely by local Arabic-speaking peasants, but for this specific site cluster that remains an **inference from regional scholarship**, not a directly attested fact.

Which institution existed where

The only ecclesiastical institution **explicitly named in the charters** is the **church at casale Sancti Egidii**, that is, the church at **St. Gilles / Sinjl**. That church first appears under the control of **Mount Tabor** in 1145 and is then recovered by the **Holy Sepulchre** in 1175. This is the documentary backbone of the cluster.

By contrast, the **monastery and chapel** near Turmus Ayya are known from **archaeology**, not from the charters themselves. The Survey of Western Palestine describes **Khurbet Deir el Fikia** as the ruins of “a monastery and chapel,” with masonry that “appears to be Crusading work.” If **Dere** is indeed **Deir el-Fikia / Ras ad-Deir**, then the archaeology would fit a local ecclesiastical installation at or near Dere. But that step remains an identification argument, not a direct documentary statement.

SITE IDENTIFICATIONS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL CORRELATIONS

The name-form evidence is strongest for **Turmus Ayya**. In the Crusader Latin documents the place is **Turbasaim** or **Turbasaym/Turbasym**. In the nineteenth-century Arabic/English name lists it appears in the local Arabic landscape as **Turmus ‘Aya**, and the SWP lists also record **‘Ain Turnnis’Aya**, “the spring of Turmus ‘Aya,” linking the spring explicitly to the village of that name. Conder’s historical-geographical discussion states that “**Turbasaim ... seems to be ... now Turmus ‘Aya.**” Taken together, that is a strong chain of continuity.

For **Dere**, the evidence is more layered and more contested. Conder's 1889 proposal identified **Dere** with **Deir es-Sudan**, west of Sinjil, largely on the strength of the name and the relation to St. Gilles/Sinjil. That was a reasonable first pass, and it deserves to be remembered because it shows that the identification was once open rather than fixed.

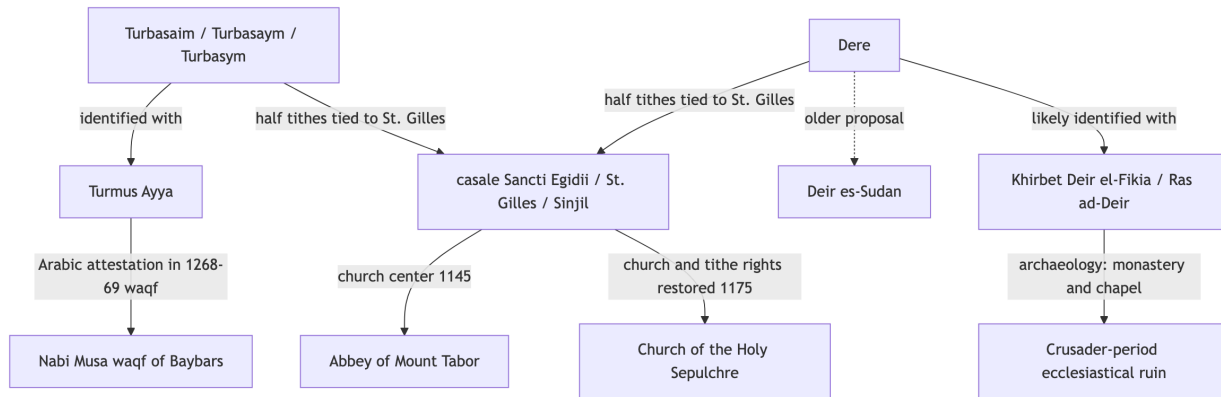
Later scholarship moved away from **Deir es-Sudan** toward **Khirbet Deir el-Fikia / Ras ad-Deir**. The decisive clue is archaeological as much as philological: **Deir el-Fikia** preserves the remains of a **monastery and chapel** with masonry that the SWP regarded as Crusader. Palmer's name list records the place specifically as **Khurbet Deir el Fikia**, glossed as "the ruin of the convent of Fikia." A later scholarly summary by **Kedar and Pringle** reports a map identification of **Casale Dere** with **Kh. Ras ad-Deir**, which is exactly the paired ruin-name now used in modern discussions.

The modern naming history is itself revealing. In the accessible pre-modern naming materials verified, the Arabic list records **Deir el-Fikia**, while **Ras ad-Deir** does not appear in the SWP name list excerpt that could be retrieved. That strongly suggests that **Deir el-Fikia** is the older documented ruin-name in modern survey literature, while **Ras ad-Deir** is either a later microtoponym or a companion topographic label for the same ruin-complex.

The broader topography also fits the later identification well. Zissu's discussion places **Turmus Ayya** on a low hill in the **Shiloh Valley**, while Kedar and Pringle's summary places **Casale Dere / Kh. Ras ad-Deir** in the central highland corridor. That is exactly the kind of clustered rural landscape in which a parish-church center at **St. Gilles/Sinjil** could draw income from neighboring satellite villages.

The main name variants that matter for research are these: **Turbasaim**, **Turbasaym**, **Turbasym** for Turmus Ayya in Latin documentation; **Dere** in Latin for the paired site; **Turmus 'Aya / Turnnis'Aya** in later survey transliteration; **Khurbet Deir el Fikia** in Arabic survey nomenclature; and **ترمسعيا** in the Mamluk Arabic waqf tradition. The often-cited **Thormasia** belongs to the sphere of later historical-geographical comparison and rabbinic/classical identification, not to the surviving Crusader charters themselves.

A simple relationship diagram, reflecting the documentary and archaeological picture, looks like this:



The diagram is a reconstruction of relationships attested in the 1145 and 1175 acts and in later archaeological identification work; it is not a scale map.

THE LATE MEDIEVAL BRIDGE TO THE MAMLUK PERIOD

The most important pre-Ottoman continuation point after the Crusader evidence is the **Baybars waqf for Nabi Musa**. A modern scholarly article, citing **Kamil al-Asali's edition of historical Jerusalem documents**, quotes the waqf as including villages such as **Turmusayya**, al-Mazra'a al-Sharqiyya, Abu Falah, Sur Baher, and Jericho. The Arabic form **ترمسعيا** is already close to the modern village name.

This matters because it shows that Turmus Ayya did not vanish with the collapse of Frankish control. Instead, by the late thirteenth century it was integrated into a **Mamluk Islamic endowment landscape** centered on **Nabi Musa**, whose first major sponsor is identified as **Sultan Baybars**. In other words, the documentary line runs from a Crusader-era parish-and-tithe network centered on **St. Gilles/Sinjil** to a Mamluk waqf geography centered on **Nabi Musa**. That is a major institutional shift, but also evidence of place-name continuity.

No securely verifiable Mamluk Arabic mention of **Dere**, **Ras ad-Deir**, or **Deir el-Fikia** comparable to the Baybars attestation for Turmus Ayya could be found. That silence is one reason the identification of **Dere** still relies heavily on later historical geography and archaeology. The medieval Arabic continuity is much stronger for **Turmus Ayya** than for its paired site.

Documentary history and demography

The Ottoman–Mandate documentation for Turmus Ayya is unusually good by village standards. The weak point is not the existence of records, but the fact that some sixteenth-century and 1945 materials are easier to access today through scholarly reprints or later summaries than

through a fully searchable original online facsimile. The table below therefore distinguishes between **directly inspected primary records** and **primary-derived summaries**.

SOURCE COMPARISON TABLE

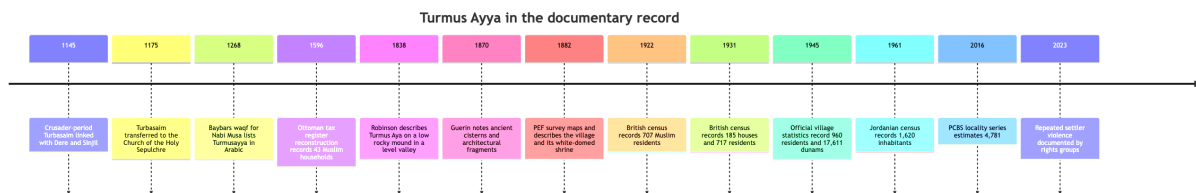
Date	Source	Village form	Key information	Reliability
1145	Crusader cartulary tradition as summarized by Röhrich/PEF nomenclature.	Turbasaim	Half the income of Turbasaim and nearby Dere was granted to the Abbey of Mount Tabor to support the church at Sinjil.	High for existence of the medieval form; moderate for exact identification with modern Turmus Ayya because the equation is scholarly.
1175	Röhrich/Pringle line of citation summarized in later entries.	Turbasaim	Turbasaim, Dere, and Sinjil were transferred to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.	Moderate to high.
1596	Ottoman tax-register reconstruction reported in later scholarly summaries.	Turmus Ayya	43 Muslim households; taxes on wheat, barley, olive trees, vineyards, fruit trees, goats/beehives; total 7,200 akçe; 11/24 to waqf.	Moderate in this research run because reliance was on a scholarly reconstruction rather than a directly opened defter page.
1838	Robinson and Smith, <i>Biblical Researches</i> .	Turmus 'Aya	Village on a low rocky mound in the level valley; on the Jerusalem–Nablus route-zone; province boundary context noted.	High.
1870	Guérin as summarized in later reliable notices.	Turmus Aya	Ancient cisterns, broken garlanded lintel, column fragment; ~700 inhabitants; women fetching water from 'Ain Siloun / 'Ain Sindjel.	Moderate to high.
ca. 1870	Ottoman-village list as transmitted by	Turmus Aya / Turmus Aja	82–88 houses; 301 male inhabitants in one tabulation.	Moderate.

Date	Source	Village form	Key information	Reliability
	Socin/Hartmann summaries.			
1882	PEF, <i>Survey of Western Palestine</i> .	Turmus 'Aya	Low knoll, fertile plain, spring to south, fruit trees, conspicuous white-domed sacred place.	High.
1922	Barron, official census of Palestine.	Turmus Ayya	707 residents, all Muslim.	High , though in this run the exact village line was confirmed through the official census source's PDF listing and consistent secondary citation rather than a parsed line view.
1931	Mills, official census.	Turmus 'Aiya	185 occupied houses; 717 residents; 716 Muslims and one Christian woman.	High.
1945	Official village statistics as preserved in later compilations and map projects.	Turmus 'Aiya	960 Muslims; 17,611 dunams total; 3,665 plantations/irrigable, 7,357 cereals, 54 built-up.	Moderate to high in substance; direct original facsimile was cataloged, but accessible detail here comes through reprint/summary.
1961	Jordanian census as cited in later summaries.	Turmus Ayya	1,620 inhabitants.	Moderate in this run because the original Jordanian table was not inspected directly.
2016–2017	PCBS locality series and later summaries.	Turmus'ayya / Turmus Ayya	2016 population estimate of 4,781; widely repeated 2017 figure of 2,464 in a later summary.	Mixed ; there is a modern counting discrepancy that likely reflects different counting rules or de facto residence.

The demographic arc visible from the secure records is one of **long-term village continuity and gradual growth**: 43 households in the sixteenth century; 707 persons in 1922; 717 persons in 1931; 960 in 1945; and 1,620 in 1961. Whatever one concludes about older antiquity, Turmus Ayya was certainly a stable agricultural settlement by the late medieval and early modern periods.

The main modern demographic complication is that recent figures are not perfectly commensurate. A PCBS locality series reproduced on a PCBS page and on Palestine Open Maps gives **4,781 for 2016**, while a later summary citing the **2017 Palestinian census** gives **2,464**. The most likely explanation is a difference between an estimated population series and a stricter de facto census count in a town with substantial seasonal and overseas residence, but that reconciliation could not be verified directly from a primary 2017 population table in the accessible material.

TIMELINE OF KEY ATTESTATIONS



The mapping record also deserves notice. The PEF combined index places **Turmus ‘Aya on Sheet XIV** and separately indexes **‘Ain Turmus ‘Aya**, showing that the village and its spring were embedded in the cartographic knowledge-system of late nineteenth-century survey work. Palestine Open Maps now aggregates that historical cartography and identifies the village as a **Palestinian village in the Ramallah sub-district**, with downloadable map overlays.

Archaeology, landscape, and sacred architecture

Archaeologically, Turmus Ayya sits in a zone that mattered well beyond the village itself: the **Shiloh valley**. One excavation report on nearby Shiloh stated that, whereas the valley had only four Iron Age I sites previously known, later fieldwork suggested **eight sites**, with the central one “probably located where the Arab village of Turmus ‘Ayya stands today.” That is a major clue to the village’s deep topographic importance, even if it is not the same thing as a stratigraphically demonstrated continuous occupation sequence.

At the same time, the archaeological evidence is not uniformly supportive of every historical identification proposed for the site. Zissu's discussion of **Horvat Tura / Tur Shimon** notes that survey at Turmus Ayya produced **a few potsherds from various periods, but none from the Hellenistic period**. That negative result matters because some older scholarship tried to load too much weight onto the name resemblance between Turmus Ayya and proposed ancient identifications. In other words, the archaeology supports long-term occupation in the area, but it also tells us not to overstate what the toponym alone can prove.

The most famous isolated archaeological find from the village environs is the **marble sarcophagus discovered in 1912** and published in 1913. A 1915 archaeological notice states that a richly carved marble sarcophagus had been found at Turmus 'Aya near Shiloh and described by **Jacob E. Spafford of the American Colony**. Later art-historical notices identify it more specifically as a sarcophagus with **Bacchus/Dionysus and the genii of the seasons**. Easily accessible summaries disagree about the date: one English retelling labeled it "2d century B.C." while a later art-history catalog places the "Jahreszeitensarkophag von Tourmous'aya" around **240–250 CE**. The safest conclusion is that the object attests a **classical funerary horizon in the Turmus Ayya area**, but that its precise date should be taken from specialist cataloging rather than early popular restatements.

The village's own built environment was repeatedly noted by nineteenth-century observers. Guérin saw **ancient cisterns** and reused worked stones, while the PEF described a **spring south of the village**, fruit trees, and a **white-domed sacred place** at the foot of the mound. A separate PEF-based notice on the nearby **Ras ad-Deir / Deir el-Fikia** area describes "foundations and heaps of stones" and the ruins of a **monastery and chapel**, with masonry considered "Crusading work"; later summaries identify that locus with the medieval **Dere** mentioned alongside Turbasaim. The implication is that Turmus Ayya should not be studied as an isolated mound but as part of a **micro-landscape of village, shrine, spring, and nearby ecclesiastical ruin-field**.

Lineages, migration, conflict, and historical assessment

The evidence for **family and lineage history** is partial but not absent. An Arabic town profile accessible through search-snippet text states that the inhabitants of Turmus'ayya consist of several families, explicitly naming at least **Abu 'Awwad** and **al-Hamayel**. Because the accessible snippet truncates the list, it cannot responsibly be claimed exhaustive. Still, it is the strongest quasi-official lineage pointer recovered in this run.

That lineage evidence is reinforced, indirectly, by modern documentation. B'Tselem's reporting on settler attacks in Turmusaya names members of the **Abu 'Awwad** family whose cars were torched, and a 2024 Yesh Din petition concerns a military roadblock restricting the movement of an **extended Abu 'Awwad family** in Turmusaya. These are contemporary human-rights and litigation records, not genealogy texts, but they do show the continued salience of the Abu 'Awwad lineage in place-specific documentation.

On **oral history and community memory**, the published record is thinner than one would want, but there are meaningful traces. The folktale collection *Speak Bird, Speak Again* includes a tale collected in **Turmus'ayya, district of Ramallah**, and explicitly remarks on the hill-village settlement pattern characteristic of that landscape. Community-curated heritage repositories also preserve attributed photographs and captions, including an image said to show **men in the Dar 'Awwad madafa in 1890**. These materials are valuable for memory history, but they are not equivalent to archival state documentation; the folktale source is dependable as a folklore collection, while the community-image repositories should be used more cautiously unless independently verified.

The town's **late twentieth- and twenty-first-century social history** is inseparable from migration. Multiple media and advocacy sources describe Turmus Ayya as a town with an exceptionally large **U.S.-linked diaspora**, often estimating that **more than 80 percent** of residents or local families hold U.S. citizenship or dual nationality, with additional migration to **Latin America, especially Panama**. Those remittances are widely credited with reshaping the built environment through large villas and seasonal occupancy. These figures should be treated as **journalistic estimates**, not official demography, but the underlying historical pattern of outward migration and return investment is strongly corroborated across sources.

Modern conflict has also become part of the town's documented history. B'Tselem documented multiple **settler attacks in Turmusaya in 2023**, including attacks on private vehicles. Local profiles and later summaries also connect the town to land-loss claims associated with the settlements of **Shilo** and **Mizpe Rahel**, though the underlying land-order files could not be verified directly in this run. The result is that Turmus Ayya's history is not only archival and archaeological; it is also visibly ongoing, with a modern archive of dispossession, legal contestation, and diaspora reshaping the town in real time.

Historically, then, Turmus Ayya is best understood as a **long-lived central-Palestinian agrarian settlement whose documentary clarity increases sharply from the twelfth century onward**, whose name preserves a deep antiquarian problem, and whose present-day profile reflects a combination of local continuity, transnational migration, and violent contemporary pres-

sure. That combination explains why the town appears simultaneously in Crusader cartularies, Ottoman tax summaries, Mandate censuses, archaeological journals, folklore collections, diaspora journalism, and human-rights litigation.

Open questions, evidentiary limits, and research gaps

Several points remain unresolved and should be stated plainly.

First, no directly inspectable online image of the original **Ottoman tahrir page** for Turmus Ayya was recovered; the sixteenth-century data used here come through well-known scholarly reconstruction and later summaries, which are usually reliable but still one step removed from the defter itself.

Second, a directly accessible original for the **1945 Village Statistics** was cataloged but could not be fully parsed in the web tool, so the 1945 land-use figures are grounded here through Hadawi's reprint tradition and later summaries rather than a line-by-line reading of the original government tables.

Third, the town's **family history** remains only partially recovered from accessible sources. The presence of at least the **Abu 'Awwad** and **al-Hamayel** families can be documented in locally grounded material, but not a full hamula map with origins, branch segmentation, or landholding history from primary deed books or court registers.

Fourth, the **ancient-name problem** remains open. The identification of Turmus Ayya with **Thormasia** is old and plausible; the identification with **Tur Shimon** is more contested; and the evidence presently available supports caution rather than a final verdict.

Fifth, some **modern population figures** conflict in accessible sources, likely because of differing definitions of residence in a town with substantial seasonal and expatriate presence. That discrepancy itself is historically meaningful, but it limits precision unless one can inspect the exact PCBS population tables and counting rules side by side.

Sixth, on the **medieval evidence specifically**, the documentary picture can be stated with some firmness but has clear gaps. Before the Ottoman period, the place later known as **Turmus Ayya** is securely attested as **Turbasaim/Turbasaym/Turbasym** in **1145** and **1175**. In both notices it is linked to **Dere** and to the church at **casale Sancti Egidii / St. Gilles / Sinjil**. The ecclesiastical institutions directly in view are the **Abbey of Mount Tabor** and the **Church of the Holy Sepulchre**; the rights in dispute are **church possession, offerings, vineyards, houses, and above all half the tithes** of the associated villages. The archaeological evidence then makes the later and probably correct move of locating **Dere** at **Khirbet Deir el-Fikia / Ras ad-**

Deir, because that ruin preserves a **monastery and chapel** of Crusader character — but this remains an identification, not a medieval document reading, and the older Conder proposal of **Deir es-Sudan** should be treated as an important stage in scholarship rather than the strongest current solution.

Seventh, the question of **who lived there** in the medieval period remains the thinnest part of the record. The surviving core acts do not name residents of Turbasaim or Dere. The best nearby personal evidence comes from named persons “of the casale of St. Gilles” (Otgerius and Willelmus), and the best social reconstruction comes from broader scholarship on Frankish rural settlement, which points to a countryside structured through interaction among Frankish institutions and local Muslim and Christian populations. For Turmus Ayya itself, however, direct prosopographical evidence is still missing.

Finally, the main archival next layer would require checking the **Vatican manuscript witnesses** behind de Rozière’s edition with their current shelfmarks, consulting the **BnF extracts** noted by Tardif (fonds des cartulaires no. 195 and collection Duchesne, t. LVI), and verifying the **Baybars waqf deed** directly in **al-Asali’s** edition or, ideally, in the underlying document tradition. Until that is done, the safest conclusion is that the **pre-Ottoman history of Turmus Ayya is real but thinly documented**: a small rural settlement securely tied to the **St. Gilles/Sinjil ecclesiastical sphere** in the Crusader period, very likely paired with **Dere = Deir el-Fikia/Ras ad-Deir**, and later preserved as ترمسعيا in the Mamluk waqf landscape of **Nabi Musa**.