

Subhiyin / al-Azazmeh

Subhiyin / al-Azazmeh - Palestinian Bedouin Clan of the Beersheba Subdistrict

The Subhiyin, also rendered Subhiyyeen, were one of the largest Palestinian Bedouin clans belonging to the al-Azazmeh tribal grouping of the Beersheba Subdistrict. They did not constitute a single nucleated village, but occupied a broad network of encampments and dwelling areas across the central and southern Beersheba region.

The Subhiyin must be distinguished from the similarly named Subayhat. The two appear as separate al-Azazmeh groups in the official Mandate censuses and had distinct population totals, leadership, and historical subdivisions.

Item	Information
District	Beersheba
Tribe	al-Azazmeh
Type of Community	Dispersed Bedouin and semi-settled clan rather than one nucleated village
Historic Dwelling Areas	al-Ruhayba, al-Nahiya, Wadi al-Abyad, Birayn, Subeita, al-Mushrifah, Maqrah Hadaj, al-Dab'i, al-Khalasa, and Burayj al-Saba'
Population in 1922	1,650 – official Mandate estimate in the Census of Palestine
Population in 1931	1,594 – official Census of Palestine
Population in 1944/1945	Approximately 2,672 in late-Mandate data reproduced in Salman Abu Sitta's Atlas
Estimated Population in 1948	3,243 according to Salman Abu Sitta's updated Register – a later estimate, not an official census

Item	Information
Displacement Period	No single documented date; Abu Sitta's Register indicates 1949–1954 and notes that some returned
Recorded Destination	Egypt, represented by the EG code in Abu Sitta's Register, with some members later returning
Military Operation	No single Subhiyin-specific operation is documented; Operation Yoav and the occupation of Beersheba form part of the preceding regional context
Military Unit	No brigade or battalion is independently documented at clan level
Land Area	No independently documented clan-specific total; multi-million-dunum figures concern al-Azazmeh as a whole
Settlements on Clan Land	No specific post-1948 settlement can be reliably assigned without clan-level cadastral boundaries

The Subhiyin within al-Azazmeh

The Subhiyin were one of the ten principal al-Azazmeh clans recorded in historical Palestinian sources.

The traditional list includes the Muhammadiyin, Subhiyin, Subayhat, Zaraba, Farahin, Mas'udiyin, 'Usiyat, Sawakhneh, Mri'at, and Sarahin.

A tribal genealogy recorded by 'Arif al-'Arif associates the Subhiyin with the descendants of Ishtiyya, one of the sons of 'Azzam in the traditional al-Azazmeh genealogy.

This is treated as recorded tribal tradition rather than formal documentary genealogy.

Subhiyin versus Subayhat

The similarity between the names Subhiyin and Subayhat has produced confusion in some modern family lists.

The official 1931 census, however, separates the two clearly:

Clan	Population in 1931
Subhiyin	1,594
Subayhat	226

Population, subdivisions, and other information belonging to one clan should therefore not be transferred to the other.

Clan Leadership

Khalid 'Awad's documentation of the Beersheba tribes identifies the Subhiyin shaykh as:

Salam bin 'Id bin Sulayman bin Krayishan.

Later tribal documentation indicates that the shaykhship continued within the Krayishan family, although the individual officeholder changed over time.

Subdivisions of the Subhiyin

'Umar Rida Kahhala, citing 'Arif al-'Arif, records the following subdivisions:

- Ghurayban / al-Ghuraybat.
- al-Tabayi'a.
- al-'Uqlan.
- al-Tawaqin.
- al-'Anayqa.
- al-Qatafin.
- al-'Uran.
- al-Lawafiya.
- al-Ghuraba.

Some later sources assign several of these names to the Subayhat instead and give alternative lists for the Subhiyin, such as al-Ruqaybat, al-Masaqiya, and al-

Sumran.

Because of this conflict, the present article follows the earlier al-'Arif/Kahhala list while acknowledging that later internal family classifications may differ.

Historic Dwelling Areas

'Arif al-'Arif locates Subhiyin dwellings at:

- al-Ruhayba.
- al-Nahiya.
- Wadi al-Abyad.
- Birayn.
- Subeita.
- al-Mushrifa.
- Maqrah Hadaj.
- al-Dab'i.
- al-Khalasa.
- Burayj al-Saba'.

The number and spread of these locations demonstrate that the Subhiyin were not a conventional single village.

No one coordinate, elevation, or distance from Beersheba can accurately represent the entire clan.

Population in 1922

The 1922 Census of Palestine recorded *Subhiyin* as follows:

Total	1,650
Category	Number
Males	839
Females	811

As with other Beersheba Bedouin groups, the 1922 total requires a methodological qualification: the Mandate administration relied substantially on official estimates, tax records, and information from tribal shaykhs rather than a conventional complete individual enumeration.

Population in 1931

The official 1931 Census of Palestine listed the Subhiyin under *El Azazma*:

Total	1,594
Category	Number
Males	836
Females	758

All were recorded as Muslims.

The official occupied-houses field is blank for the Subhiyin.

Household Estimate

'Arif al-'Arif estimated the Subhiyin at approximately **328 “houses”**.

This is not the official occupied-house figure from the 1931 census but a separate tribal estimate.

In Bedouin usage, “house” may refer to a household or tent unit rather than a permanent masonry dwelling.

Population in 1944/1945

Salman Abu Sitta's *Atlas of Palestine* reproduces a late-Mandate figure of approximately **2,672 people** for the Subhiyin.

This should be distinguished from the formal 1931 census and treated as later pre-Nakba population data rather than an equivalent new census.

Estimated Population in 1948

Salman Abu Sitta's updated Register gives an estimated **3,243 people** for Subhiyeyn / Azzema in 1948.

Some older or secondary tables display 3,234, but the updated Palestine Land Society Register gives 3,243.

This is a retrospective estimate and not an official census conducted in 1948.

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
1922	1,650	Official Mandate estimate
1931	1,594	Official Census of Palestine
1944/1945	2,672	Late-Mandate population data reproduced by Abu Sitta
1948	3,243	Later estimate in Abu Sitta's updated Register

Refugees and Descendants

Abu Sitta's Register gives an estimated **19,916 refugees and descendants in 1998** for the Subhiyin.

This is a later demographic projection rather than a comprehensive official census of all members of the clan.

Land and Property

The 1945 Village Statistics do not provide an independent cadastral Subhiyin unit comparable to the land tables for settled Palestinian villages.

Historical mapping records localities such as:

- Arab es Subhiyin & Mas'udiyin.
- Arab es Subhiyin & Zeraba.

This reflects overlap or adjacency among al-Azazmeh tribal settlement zones.

Abu Sitta's approximately 5.7 million dunums applies to al-Azazmeh as a whole and cannot be reassigned to the Subhiyin alone.

No Palestinian / Transferred to Zionists / Communal-Public ownership table is therefore supplied without independent clan-level cadastral evidence.

Economic Life

The Subhiyin depended largely on pastoralism and the raising of sheep, goats, and camels, as did other al-Azazmeh communities.

Mobility between their numerous dwelling areas was closely connected with rainfall, grazing conditions, and water availability.

Seasonal cereal cultivation was also practiced where conditions allowed, but no independent crop-area table survives for the Subhiyin alone.

Water, Education, and Services

The broad distribution of Subhiyin encampments—from al-Ruhayba and Birayn to al-Khalasa, Subeita, and Wadi al-Abyad—reflects the importance of wells and water routes in their settlement pattern.

The sources reviewed do not provide a comprehensive clan-specific inventory of wells.

Nor is there sufficient evidence for one school serving the entire dispersed clan, so institutions in al-Khalasa or other nearby localities are not automatically described as Subhiyin facilities.

The Subhiyin and the Nakba

The traditional al-Azazmeh territorial system was progressively disrupted during 1948 as military control of the Naqab changed.

Operation Yoav and the occupation of Beersheba in October 1948 were among the most important regional military developments.

Abu Sitta's Register, however, does not assign the Subhiyin a 1948 depopulation date or an Operation Yoav code.

No Operation Yoav date should therefore be presented as the clan's definitive displacement date.

Expulsion toward Egypt, 1949-1954

Abu Sitta's Register places a note of **1949-1954, with some returning** on the Subhiyin entry and records **EG** as the destination/refuge code.

This places their documented dispersal within the broader postwar displacement of al-Azazmeh communities toward Egypt and Sinai.

The evidence therefore points to a process lasting several years rather than one single departure event in 1948.

Occupation and Displacement Chronology

Stage	Period	Details
Pre-Nakba Encampments	Until 1948	The Subhiyin occupied a wide network of areas including al-Ruhayba, al-Nahiya, Wadi al-Abyad, Birayn, Subeita, al-Mushrifa, Maqrah Hadaj, al-Dab'i, al-Khalasa, and Burayj al-Saba'.
Operation Yoav	15 October - 4 November 1948	The operation transformed military control of the Naqab but is not recorded as a Subhiyin-specific displacement operation.
Occupation of Beersheba	21 October 1948	The loss of the district center profoundly affected Bedouin mobility and access to markets, wells, and land.
Expulsion and Movement toward Egypt	1949-1954	Abu Sitta's Register associates this period with the Subhiyin and notes that some returned.

Stage	Period	Details
Military Rule and Bedouin Concentration	1950s	Bedouins who remained or returned faced restrictions on movement, loss of land access, and spatial concentration.

Military Operation and Unit

Military Operation: No single military operation is independently documented as the operation that displaced the Subhiyin.

Operation Yoav and the October 1948 occupation of Beersheba constitute important regional background, but the principal register places the Subhiyin displacement process in the 1949–1954 period instead.

Military Unit: No particular brigade or battalion is independently documented at clan level.

Cause of Displacement

The dispersal of the Subhiyin was connected to the military conquest and political restructuring of the Naqab, the loss of access to traditional grazing lands, wells, and encampments, and subsequent expulsions and relocations affecting Beersheba Bedouins.

Abu Sitta records Egypt as a principal destination and notes that some Subhiyin later returned.

The most supportable description is therefore a **multi-stage displacement and expulsion toward Egypt and Sinai between 1949 and 1954, following the military transformation of the Naqab in 1948.**

Destruction of Encampments

There was no single masonry village called Subhiyin for which a reliable destruction percentage can be calculated.

The clan occupied at least ten major dwelling areas, in addition to locations mapped jointly with the Mas'udiyin and Zaraba.

The sources reviewed do not provide a comprehensive inventory of houses, tents, wells, or other structures destroyed at each site, so no unsupported destruction percentage is supplied.

Settlements on Subhiyin Land

No independent cadastral map has been identified that separates Subhiyin property from the territories of other al-Azazmeh branches in sufficient detail to assign a particular Israeli settlement exclusively to their land.

The existence of settlements and installations in the wider historical al-Azazmeh domain is therefore not enough to identify a specific settlement as standing on Subhiyin land.

Such attribution requires site-by-site comparison of historic locations including al-Ruhayba, al-Nahiya, Wadi al-Abyad, Subeita, al-Khalasa, and the other documented dwelling areas.

Subhiyin / al-Azazmeh Today

The Subhiyin did not disappear as a clan after the Nakba. Abu Sitta's Register indicates movement toward Egypt between 1949 and 1954 with some later returning, while Palestinian accounts of the post-1948 Naqab identify the Subhiyin among al-Azazmeh branches of which some members remained in the region.

The Subhiyin / al-Azazmeh name also continues outside Palestine, including in Jordan, although the principal historical sources used here do not provide one contemporary census covering the entire clan.

There is no single former “Subhiyin village site” to describe today because the clan was historically dispersed across numerous encampments.

A precise assessment of each historic site would require separate cadastral and field investigation. This section is therefore not a comprehensive 2026 demographic or field survey.

Sources

- [Government of Palestine – Census of Palestine, 1922: Subhiyin](#)
- [Government of Palestine – Census of Palestine, 1931: Subhiyin / El Azazma](#)
- ['Arif al-'Arif – Tarikh Bir al-Saba' wa-Qaba'iliha](#)
- ['Umar Rida Kahhala – Mu'jam Qaba'il al-'Arab: Subhiyin, Dwelling Areas and Subdivisions](#)
- [Salman Abu Sitta – Atlas of Palestine 1917–1966: Subhiyeen / Azazema](#)
- [Salman Abu Sitta – Register of Depopulated Palestinian Localities: Subhiyeyn / Azzema](#)
- [Palestine Land Society – The Return Journey: Arab es Subhiyin and Jointly Named Subhiyin Sites](#)
- [Encyclopedia of Palestinian Villages – Subhiyin / al-Azazmeh, citing Khalid 'Awad](#)
- [PalQuest – Operation Yoav, for the wider regional military context](#)