

Al-Shaykh Muwannis



Subdistrict: Jaffa

Estimated population in 1948: approximately 2,239

Date of occupation and depopulation: 30 March 1948

Settlement established before 1948 on land associated with the village: Tel Barukh, now part of Tel Aviv. Sources differ regarding the precise historical boundaries and attribution of this land.

Al-Shaykh Muwannis was a Palestinian village depopulated during the Nakba. It was located in the Jaffa Subdistrict, approximately 8.5 kilometres from the centre of Jaffa, about 2.5

kilometres from the Mediterranean coast, and 800 metres north of the al-'Awja River.

- The village stood on a sandstone hill on the central coastal plain, approximately 2.5 kilometres from the Mediterranean coast and 800 metres north of the al-'Awja River.
- It appears to have been named after a local religious figure, al-Shaykh Muwannis, whose tomb–shrine, or maqam, stood in the village.
 - Its built-up area followed a broadly square layout.
- The villagers initially built their houses from adobe brick. As income from citrus cultivation and exports increased, residents began constructing new houses from stone and cement.
- Al-Shaykh Muwannis had two elementary schools: a boys' school, opened in 1932, and a girls' school, opened in 1943.

Boundaries of al-Shaykh Muwannis

Al-Shaykh Muwannis was bordered by the following villages and geographical features:

- North: [Ijlil al-Qibliyya](#).
- West: the Mediterranean Sea.
- South: [al-Jammasin al-Gharbi](#).
 - Southeast: [Jarisha](#).
- East: [al-Jammasin al-Sharqi](#).
- Northeast: [al-Sawalima](#).



Al-Shaykh Muwannis: A Palestinian Village Depopulated during the Nakba

Land of al-Shaykh Muwannis

The registered lands of al-Shaykh Muwannis covered 15,972 dunams. According to the 1945 Village Statistics, 11,456 dunams were under Palestinian ownership, 3,545 dunams were under Jewish ownership, and 971 dunams were classified as public land. Cultivable land totalled 14,514 dunams, while the village's built-up area covered 41 dunams.

Land Ownership in al-Shaykh Muwannis

Ownership category	Land area (dunams)*
Palestinian ownership	11,456
Jewish ownership	3,545
Public land	971
Total	15,972

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres.

Land Use in al-Shaykh Muwannis in 1945

Land-use category	Palestinian ownership (dunams)*	Jewish ownership (dunams)*	Public land (dunams)*	Total (dunams)*
Citrus and banana cultivation	3,749	690	0	4,439
Irrigated land and orchards	69	18	0	87

Land-use category	Palestinian ownership (dunams)*	Jewish ownership (dunams)*	Public land (dunams)*	Total (dunams)*
Cereal cultivation	7,165	2,803	20	9,988
Built-up area	41	0	0	41
Cultivable land	10,983	3,511	20	14,514
Uncultivated land	432	34	951	1,417

* One dunam equals approximately 1,000 square metres.

Architecture of al-Shaykh Muwannis

The village had a broadly square layout. Its earliest houses were generally built of adobe brick.

As the villagers' income from citrus cultivation and exports increased, residents began constructing newer houses from stone and cement.

Population of al-Shaykh Muwannis

A nineteenth-century estimate recorded approximately 315 inhabitants in 1879. Under the British Mandate, the 1922 census counted 664 residents, all of them Muslims. By the 1931 census, the population had risen to 1,154 people living in 273 houses. The 1945 Village Statistics estimated the population at 1,930 Palestinian Arabs, all recorded as Muslims.

Population Figures for al-Shaykh Muwannis

Year	Population*
1922	664
1931	1,154
1945	1,930

Year	Population*
1948 estimate	Approximately 2,239
Estimated refugee population in 1998	13,749

* The figures for 1922 and 1931 are census results, while the 1945 figure is an official British Mandate estimate. The figures for 1948 and 1998 are later demographic estimates rather than contemporary census counts. Estimates vary between sources.

Number of Houses in al-Shaykh Muwannis

Year	Number of houses
1931	273
1948 estimate	529

* The 1931 figure comes from the British Mandate census. The 1948 figure is a later estimate rather than an official census count.

Economic Life in al-Shaykh Muwannis

Agriculture formed the principal basis of the village economy, particularly citrus cultivation and related occupations. In 1944/45, 3,749 dunams under Palestinian ownership were devoted to citrus fruits and bananas, 7,165 dunams were used for cereal cultivation, and 69 dunams were irrigated or planted with orchards.

Across all ownership categories, citrus and banana cultivation covered 4,439 dunams, while cereal cultivation covered 9,988 dunams. Irrigation water was drawn from the al-'Awja River and numerous artesian wells.

Education in al-Shaykh Muwannis

Al-Shaykh Muwannis had two elementary schools: one for boys and another for girls. The boys' school opened in 1932, while the girls' school opened in 1943. Records cited by the Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question indicate that 232 boys were enrolled in 1941 and 56 girls in 1943.

The boys' school acquired 36 dunams of land and an artesian well. It also functioned as a centre for agricultural and vocational training.

Occupation and Depopulation of al-Shaykh Muwannis

Al-Shaykh Muwannis was depopulated during the Nakba, before the end of the British Mandate on 15 May 1948. Its proximity to Tel Aviv, together with that of the neighbouring village of Abu Kishk, exposed the area to military pressure and attacks during the Zionist campaign that preceded Israel's occupation of large parts of Palestine.

The village's depopulation unfolded gradually rather than through a single documented battle.

Village representatives had previously reached a non-aggression arrangement with the Haganah. Nevertheless, on 12 March 1948, members of the Irgun or Lehi abducted five village notables. A contemporary Israeli intelligence report later identified the abduction as an important factor in the flight of Palestinians from al-Shaykh Muwannis and other villages in the central coastal region.

The abducted men were subsequently transferred to the Haganah and returned to the village on 23 March. By that time, however, fear generated by the abduction, together with restrictions on movement, intimidation, looting, and armed attacks, had contributed to the departure of much of the population.

The depopulation continued during the second half of March and was effectively complete by 30 March 1948. This date is therefore commonly recorded as the date of the village's occupation and depopulation.

Palestinian historian 'Arif al-'Arif later noted that Zionist forces had gained control of the coastal

area extending between Haifa and Tel Aviv by the end of the British Mandate. The occupation and depopulation of al-Shaykh Muwannis formed part of the broader displacement of the Palestinian population during the Nakba and Israel's occupation of Palestine.

Al-Shaykh Muwannis Today

A number of houses displaying varied architectural features remained standing after the village's depopulation and were subsequently occupied by Jewish families. One surviving structure is a two-storey cement house with a single-storey annex, rectangular doors and windows, and flat roofs.

Another surviving building is a symmetrical two-storey house divided into two residential units. Its upper floor has two front porches, each framed by five lancet arches.

Other parts of the village were demolished, leaving isolated walls and building debris. The former cemetery became neglected and fenced. The village lands were incorporated into the municipal area of Tel Aviv and were largely covered by urban development and construction.

Tel Aviv University occupies part of the historical village site and its surrounding land.

Sources and References

- Institute for Palestine Studies and PalQuest, [“al-Shaykh Muwannis.”](#) Consulted for the village's location, population, land ownership, land use, educational institutions, economy, depopulation, and remaining structures.
- PalQuest, [“Israeli Intelligence Report on the Depopulation of Palestine, 30 June 1948.”](#) Consulted regarding the effect of the abduction of five village notables on the displacement of Palestinians from al-Shaykh Muwannis and the surrounding area.
- Government of Palestine, Department of Statistics, *Village Statistics, April 1945*. The population, land ownership, and land-use figures are also reproduced in Sami Hadawi, [Village Statistics 1945: A Classification of Land and Area Ownership in](#)

- Government of Palestine, *Census of Palestine, 1922*, and *Census of Palestine, 1931*. These British Mandate records provide the official census figures and the recorded number of occupied houses.
- Marom, Roy, [“Al-Sheikh Muwannis: Transformations in the Arab Countryside between the Mountainous Interior and the City of Jaffa.”](#) *Cathedra*, no. 183, 2023.
- Palestine Remembered, [“al-Shaykh Muwannis, Jaffa Subdistrict.”](#) Consulted for supplementary village documentation and later demographic estimates.