Subaihat / al-Azazmeh

Subaihat / al-Azazmeh – Palestinian Bedouin Clan of the Beersheba Subdistrict

The Subaihat were a Palestinian Bedouin clan belonging to the al-Azazmeh tribal grouping of the Beersheba Subdistrict. They were not a single nucleated village with one fixed built-up center, but a tribal community living within the broad al-Azazmeh territorial system of the Naqab.

The Subaihat must be carefully distinguished from the similarly named Subhiyin. Mandate records and Palestinian tribal sources treat them as separate al-Azazmeh clans with different populations, subdivisions, and leadership.

Item	Information
District	Beersheba
Tribe	al-Azazmeh
Type of Community	Dispersed Bedouin clan rather than a single nucleated village
Population in 1922	No independently verified Subaihat-specific figure established from the official sources used
Population in 1931	226 – official Census of Palestine
Household Estimate	53 “houses”/households according to 'Arif al-'Arif; not an official occupied-house figure from the 1931 census table
Late-Mandate Population	Approximately 379 in data reproduced by Salman Abu Sitta's Atlas
Estimated Population in 1948	460 according to Salman Abu Sitta's Register – a later estimate, not an official census
Displacement Type	Classified by Abu Sitta as “Relocated by Israelis”

Item	Information
Displacement Date	No single independently documented date is given in the Register
Refuge / Destination	EG – Egypt – appears in Abu Sitta's entry
Military Operation	No independently documented Subaihat-specific operation; Operation Yoav forms part of the wider regional context only
Military Unit	No particular brigade or battalion is independently documented at clan level
Land Area	No independently documented clan-specific total; broad territorial 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 Subaihat within al-Azazmeh

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

The wider grouping also included the Muhammadiyin, Subhiyin, Zaraba, Farahin, Mas'udiyin, 'Usiyat, Sawakhneh, Mri'at, and Sarahin.

Al-Azazmeh territory covered a broad area of central and southern Beersheba Subdistrict, stretching from the Beersheba and Wadi al-Khalil region toward Wadi al-'Araba and the Sinai frontier.

The Subaihat therefore formed part of a broad tribal landscape rather than a bounded village estate.

Subaihat versus Subhiyin

The similarity between the names Subaihat and Subhiyin has led to repeated confusion in later sources, particularly in lists of family subdivisions.

The official 1931 census separates them clearly:

Clan	Population in 1931
Subaihat / Sbihat	226
Subhiyin	1,594

Population figures and subdivisions belonging to one group should therefore not be transferred to the other.

Tribal Tradition of Origin

Palestinian tribal-genealogical accounts connect the Subaihat with the Subaihiyin of Tha'laba and describe them as part of the Arab tribal migrations into southern Palestine.

This is a traditional genealogical account rather than a complete lineage independently established through Mandate administrative documentation.

It is therefore presented as part of tribal memory rather than as conclusively proven ancestry.

Clan Leadership

Khalid 'Awad's documentation of the Beersheba tribal shaykhs identifies the Subaihat shaykh during the Mandate period as:

Salim bin Muslim bin Nassar bin 'Ayada Abu Samra.

Subdivisions of the Subaihat

'Arif al-'Arif, as reproduced by 'Umar Rida Kahhala, lists the following Subaihat subdivisions:

- al-Ruqaybat.
- al-Masaqiya.
- al-Sumran.
- al-Ghuraba.

Some later sources interchange these names with subdivisions attributed to the Subhiyin. The earlier al-'Arif/Kahhala classification is therefore used as the historical baseline.

Territory and Encampments

The principal historical source reviewed does not identify one conventional village center for the Subaihat from which a single distance to Beersheba can be calculated.

The clan operated within the central and southern al-Azazmeh territorial system, organized around grazing grounds, wells, seasonal cultivation, and movement between encampments.

A single coordinate, elevation, or village-center distance would therefore be misleading for the clan as a whole.

Population in 1922

No clearly independent Subaihat entry in the official 1922 census was verified to the standard required for this article.

No 1922 figure is therefore derived from the al-Azazmeh total, later estimates, or assumed population growth.

Population in 1931

The official 1931 Census of Palestine recorded the Subaihat as *Sbihat* under *El Azazma*:

Total	**226**
Category	**Number**
Males	120
Females	106

All were recorded as Muslims.

The official occupied-house field does not provide a separate Subaihat figure.

Household Estimate

'Arif al-'Arif describes the Subaihat as approximately **53 “houses”**, together with the same 120 males and 106 females recorded for the community.

The 53 figure should not be described as an official occupied-house figure from the 1931 census. It belongs to al-'Arif's tribal description.

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

Late-Mandate Population

Salman Abu Sitta's *Atlas of Palestine* reproduces a late-Mandate population figure of approximately **379** for the Subaihat.

This is distinct from the official 1931 census and should be treated as later pre-Nakba statistical data rather than an equivalent new census.

Estimated Population in 1948

Salman Abu Sitta's Register gives an estimated **460 people** for Subaihat / Azazema in 1948.

This is a retrospective demographic estimate rather than an official census conducted in 1948.

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
1922	Not independently verified	No unsupported figure used
1931	226	Official Census of Palestine

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
Late Mandate	379	Pre-Nakba data reproduced in Abu Sitta's Atlas
1948	460	Later estimate in Salman Abu Sitta's Register

Refugees and Descendants

Later Palestine Land Society tables record approximately **258** in one post-Nakba registration category and give an overall estimate of approximately **2,824 refugees and descendants** associated with the Subaihat.

These are later demographic data and must not be confused with the clan's estimated population in 1948.

Land and Property

The Subaihat do not appear in the 1945 Village Statistics as an independent cadastral village unit with a separate land-ownership table.

Abu Sitta's approximately **5.7 million dunums** refers to the wider al-Azazmeh tribal territory and includes ten principal clans.

It cannot be reassigned to the Subaihat alone.

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

Economic Life

The Subaihat participated in the pastoral economy characteristic of al-Azazmeh, based principally on sheep, goats, camels, and seasonal grazing.

Movement between grazing grounds and wells was strongly influenced by rainfall and drought, producing significant mobility across the al-Azazmeh domain.

Seasonal cereal cultivation was also practiced where conditions permitted, but no independent crop-area statistics survive for the Subaihat alone.

Water, Education, and Services

Water sources and wells were central to the organization of al-Azazmeh encampments, including those of the Subaihat.

The principal sources reviewed do not provide a separate complete inventory of Subaihat wells or public facilities.

Nor is there sufficient documentation for a single independent school serving the entire clan, so institutions in neighboring settlements are not reassigned to the Subaihat without direct evidence.

The Subaihat and the Nakba

The 1948 war fundamentally transformed military and political control of the Naqab, particularly with the autumn offensives and the occupation of Beersheba.

Salman Abu Sitta's Register, however, does not give the Subaihat one specific 1948 displacement date and does not assign them a named military operation.

Operation Yoav should therefore not be presented as a documented “occupation of the Subaihat” merely because it was a major operation in the surrounding Beersheba region.

Relocation of the Subaihat

Abu Sitta's Register explicitly classifies the Subaihat / Azazema as:

“Relocated by Israelis.”

No single date is attached to this relocation, distinguishing the Subaihat case from the depopulation of a compact village during one documented attack.

The code **EG**, indicating Egypt, also appears in the entry, showing that Egypt/Sinai formed part of the post-Nakba displacement geography associated with the clan.

Operation Yoav: Regional Context rather than a Clan-Specific Operation

Operation Yoav began on 15 October 1948 and transformed control across southern Palestine, including the occupation of Beersheba on 21 October.

The Subaihat entry in Abu Sitta's Register, however, contains neither a Yoav operation code nor a dated Yoav depopulation event.

The operation is therefore included only as wider military context rather than as an independently documented Subaihat-specific operation.

Occupation and Displacement Chronology

Stage	Period	Details
Pre-Nakba Life	Until 1948	The Subaihat lived within the broad al-Azazmeh tribal domain, relying on pastoralism, wells, grazing grounds, and seasonal cultivation.
Operation Yoav	15 October – 4 November 1948	The operation transformed military control of the Naqab but is not recorded as a Subaihat-specific displacement operation.
Occupation of Beersheba	21 October 1948	The loss of the district center profoundly affected Bedouin access to markets, grazing land, wells, and routes.
Relocation	After 1948	Abu Sitta classifies the Subaihat among communities relocated by Israeli authorities, without assigning a single date.
Dispersal beyond the Naqab	Postwar period	The EG code in the Register identifies Egypt as part of the clan's refugee or displacement geography.

Military Operation and Unit

Military Operation: No single operation is independently documented as the operation that occupied or displaced the Subaihat.

Operation Yoav and the occupation of Beersheba provide important regional context, but the Subaihat are classified in Abu Sitta's Register under postwar relocation rather than a dated Yoav depopulation event.

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

Cause of Displacement

The dispersal of the Subaihat was linked to the military and political transformation of the Naqab and subsequent policies relocating Beersheba Bedouins away from parts of their original tribal lands.

Abu Sitta explicitly records Israeli relocation, while the Egypt code indicates that part of the clan's displacement geography extended toward Egypt/Sinai.

The most accurate description is therefore **multi-stage forced relocation and dispersal following the change in military control of the Naqab**, rather than one single documented village attack.

Destruction of Encampments

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

The clan belonged to a dispersed Bedouin territorial system, and the available sources do not provide a complete inventory of tents, dwellings, wells, or structures evacuated or demolished.

No unsupported description such as “completely destroyed” or numerical

destruction percentage is therefore used.

Settlements on Subaihat Land

No independent cadastral map defining Subaihat territory against the lands of other al-Azazmeh branches was identified in the principal sources reviewed.

The presence of modern Israeli settlements or installations within the wider historical al-Azazmeh domain is insufficient to establish that a particular settlement stands specifically on Subaihat land.

Any such attribution requires separate historical boundary and property evidence.

Subaihat / al-Azazmeh Today

The Subaihat did not disappear as a tribal community after the Nakba. Abu Sitta's Register records their relocation by Israeli authorities and identifies Egypt as part of their displacement geography.

Later Palestine Land Society data indicates continued dispersal of Subaihat descendants, but it does not constitute one comprehensive contemporary census of the clan.

There is no single former “Subaihat village site” to describe today because the community was historically dispersed rather than nucleated.

A precise reconstruction of the present condition of Subaihat lands would require clan-level historical boundary maps and field investigation. This section is therefore not a comprehensive 2026 demographic or field survey.

Sources

- Government of Palestine – Census of Palestine, 1931: Sbihat / El Azazma
- 'Arif al-'Arif – Tarikh Bir al-Saba' wa-Qaba'iliha
- 'Umar Rida Kahhala – Mu'jam Qaba'il al-'Arab: Subaihat / al-Azazmeh

- Salman Abu Sitta – Atlas of Palestine 1917–1966: Subaihat / Azazema
- Salman Abu Sitta – Register of Depopulated Palestinian Localities: Subaihat / Azazema
- Palestine Land Society – People of the Beersheba District Before and After the Nakba: Subaihat / Azazema
- PalQuest – Operation Yoav, for the wider regional military context
- Encyclopedia of Palestinian Villages – al-Azazmeh Tribal Branches and Shaykhs, citing Khalid 'Awad
- Palestine Remembered – Palestinian Tribes: Subaihat and Tribal-Origin Tradition