

Sumeiri / Hanajira

Sumeiri / Hanajira - Palestinian Bedouin Clan of the Beersheba and Gaza Region

Sumeiri, or the Sumeiri branch of the Hanajira, was one of the principal Palestinian Bedouin clans of the Hanajira tribal grouping. Their encampments and lands extended through the region southeast of Gaza, between Gaza and Deir al-Balah and toward the Beersheba district. They did not constitute a single compact village with one fixed built-up center.

Palestinian tribal sources locate Sumeiri dwellings around Khirbat al-Shaykh Hamuda, Wadi Gaza, and al-Shuwayhi. Their economy combined agriculture with livestock raising, reflecting the mixed pastoral and agricultural character of the surrounding region.

Item	Information
District	Listed among the Hanajira of the Beersheba Subdistrict in the 1922 and 1931 censuses; the Sumeiri land unit was listed under the Gaza Subdistrict in the 1945 Village Statistics and the 1947 administrative schedule
Tribe	Hanajira
Type of Locality	Bedouin and semi-settled clan with several dwelling areas rather than a single nucleated village
Associated Dwelling Areas	Khirbat al-Shaykh Hamuda, Wadi Gaza, and al-Shuwayhi, within the wider Hanajira domain
Population in 1922	1,200 – official Census of Palestine
Population in 1931	772 – official Census of Palestine
Population in 1944/1945	No independent population figure appears for Sumeiri in the 1945 Village Statistics, despite an independent land unit being recorded

Item	Information
Estimated Population in 1948	1,528 according to Salman Abu Sitta's Register – a later estimate, not an official census
Recorded Displacement Date	22 December 1948 according to Salman Abu Sitta's Register
Military Context	Opening of Operation Horev against Egyptian forces in southern Palestine, alongside fighting in the Gaza coastal sector and at Hill 86
Military Unit	Not independently identified at the Sumeiri clan level; the Golani Brigade is not assigned merely because it fought at nearby Hill 86
Total Land Area in 1945	3,833 dunums
Settlements on Clan Land	No specific post-1948 settlement is independently documented in the reviewed sources as having been established specifically on Sumeiri land

Sumeiri within the Hanajira

The Hanajira were one of the major Palestinian Bedouin groupings in the region between Gaza and Beersheba. Their lands extended southeast of Gaza and toward Deir al-Balah, bordered broadly by the Tayaha to the east, the Jabarat to the north, and the Tarabin to the south.

Mandate-period and Palestinian tribal sources commonly identify four principal Hanajira divisions:

- Abu Middein.
- Sumeiri.
- Nuseirat.
- al-Dawahra.

Some tribal traditions associate much of the Hanajira with the Sawarka, whose earlier homeland lay around al-'Arish and Sinai. Such genealogical accounts are best treated as tribal historical traditions rather than official genealogical records.

Leadership and Clan Subdivisions

Salim bin 'Abd Allah bin 'Id al-Sumeiri was one of the prominent shaykhs of the Sumeiri Hanajira during the British Mandate. Tribal-court records identify him among the shaykhs participating in the Beersheba tribal judicial system during the 1920s.

Later Palestinian tribal sources list families and subdivisions associated with Sumeiri including:

- al-Sumeiri.
- Abu Khashan.
- Abu Hajjaj.
- Abu Mandil / al-Manadil.
- al-Salasila.
- Other associated families.

The precise internal classification varies among later tribal sources and is therefore not presented as a fixed official administrative division.

Dwelling Areas

Sumeiri did not have one conventional village center. Palestinian accounts place their dwellings around **Khirbat al-Shaykh Hamuda, Wadi Gaza, and al-Shuwayhi**.

The wider Hanajira domain extended through the area southeast of Gaza, Deir al-Balah, and Wadi Gaza and overlapped with neighboring tribal and agricultural zones.

A single distance from Beersheba or a single elevation would therefore be misleading for the clan as a whole.

Administrative Classification between Beersheba and Gaza

Official Mandate records show an important change in the administrative treatment of Sumeiri.

In the 1922 and 1931 censuses, Sumeiri was enumerated among the **Hanajira tribes of the Beersheba Subdistrict**.

By the 1945 Village Statistics, however, **Sumeiri** appeared as an independent land unit under the **Gaza Subdistrict**.

The 1947 Palestine Gazette administrative schedule likewise listed Sumeiri among Gaza Subdistrict localities while retaining the broader “Hanajira Tribes” as a tribal unit under Beersheba.

This explains why later Palestinian sources variously classify Sumeiri under Beersheba or Gaza: its tribal and earlier census classification was connected with Beersheba, while its defined land unit was administratively attached to Gaza by the final years of the Mandate.

Population of Sumeiri

Population figures for Sumeiri must be separated from totals for the Hanajira as a whole. Several modern pages display 3,735 for 1931 on a Sumeiri page, but that figure represents the combined total of the four principal Hanajira branches.

Year	Population	Nature of Figure and Notes
1922	1,200	Official Census of Palestine: 608 males and 592 females, all Muslims
1931	772	Official Census of Palestine: 431 males and 341 females, all Muslims
1944/1945	No independent population figure	Sumeiri appears as an independent land unit in the Village Statistics, but its population cells are blank

Year	Population	Nature of Figure and Notes
1948	1,528	Later estimate in Salman Abu Sitta's Register; not an official census

Some modern sources round the 1948 estimate to 1,530, but Abu Sitta's Register gives 1,528.

The Hanajira Total in 1931

The official 1931 census recorded the principal Hanajira branches as follows:

Branch	Population
Abu Middein	1,419
Nuseirat	1,104
Sumeiri	772
al-Dawahra	461

The widely reproduced figure of 3,735 is therefore a Hanajira tribal total rather than the population of Sumeiri alone.

Households and Dwellings

The 1931 census does not provide an independent occupied-house figure for Sumeiri in the way it does for settled villages; the house field is blank in the Beersheba tribal table.

Later tribal sources sometimes provide household counts, but in a Bedouin context “house” can refer to a family or tent unit rather than a masonry structure in a compact village. No unsupported housing total is therefore supplied.

Land Ownership in 1945

Although the 1945 table does not provide a population figure for Sumeiri, it records an independent Sumeiri land unit totaling **3,833 dunums**.

Total	3,833
Ownership Category	Area in Dunums
Palestinian	2,572
Transferred to Zionists	0
Communal/Public	1,261

The official Village Statistics use the categories Arab, Jewish, and Public: 2,572 Arab dunums, no land in the Jewish category, and 1,261 public dunums.

Land Use in 1945

Total	3,833
Land Use	Area in Dunums
Plantations and Irrigable Land	1,311
Cereals	1,198
Total Cultivated / Cultivable Land	2,509
Non-Cultivable / Remaining Land	1,324

Approximately two-thirds of the Sumeiri land unit was therefore classified as cultivated or cultivable. No Jewish agricultural use is recorded in the official Sumeiri table.

Economic Life

The Sumeiri Hanajira practiced agriculture alongside livestock raising. The 1945 statistics demonstrate the importance of orchards and irrigable land, which covered 1,311 dunums, in addition to 1,198 dunums used for cereals.

Their location around Wadi Gaza and the central-southern Gaza region placed them in a transitional economic zone where pastoral Bedouin activity overlapped with intensive cultivation in neighboring settled communities.

Water and Public Services

The wider Hanajira settlement pattern was closely connected with Wadi Gaza and local water resources, but the sources reviewed do not provide an independent inventory of Sumeiri wells or water quantities.

Nor is there sufficiently documented evidence for one independent school belonging exclusively to the Sumeiri clan. Tribal institutions and shrines recorded elsewhere in Hanajira territory should not automatically be reassigned specifically to Sumeiri.

Displacement in December 1948

Salman Abu Sitta's Register gives **22 December 1948** as the displacement date for Sumeiri, the same date recorded for several other Hanajira communities.

This date falls well after the end of Operation Yoav and instead coincides exactly with the opening of **Operation Horev** on 22 December 1948.

Operation Horev targeted Egyptian forces in the Naqab and southern Palestine and continued until 6 January 1949. Its opening phase included air, naval, and ground attacks along the Gaza–Khan Yunis sector and the western Naqab.

Operation Horev therefore provides the strongest immediate military context for the recorded displacement of Sumeiri.

Hill 86 and the Military Unit Question

On the night of 22–23 December 1948, fighting began at Hill 86 east of the coastal road in the Gaza sector as part of the opening diversionary phase of Operation Horev.

The 13th Battalion of the Golani Brigade attacked the position while other Israeli forces carried out operations elsewhere along the coastal sector.

This does not by itself establish that the 13th Battalion or the Golani Brigade directly displaced the Sumeiri encampments. The Palestinian sources reviewed do not provide a clan-specific military account identifying the exact unit responsible.

Displacement Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Pre-Nakba Dwelling Areas	Until 1948	Sumeiri households were associated with Khirbat al-Shaykh Hamuda, Wadi Gaza, al-Shuwayhi, and the wider Hanajira domain.
Operation Yoav	15 October – 4 November 1948	Operation Yoav transformed military control in southern Palestine but is not the final displacement date recorded for Sumeiri.
Opening of Operation Horev	22 December 1948	A major Israeli offensive against Egyptian forces began in the Naqab and southern coastal sector.
Recorded Displacement of Sumeiri	22 December 1948	This is the date given in Salman Abu Sitta's Register and reproduced by BADIL.
Battle of Hill 86	22–23 December 1948	The 13th Battalion of the Golani Brigade fought at Hill 86 during Operation Horev; this does not independently establish it as the unit that displaced Sumeiri.
End of Operation Horev	6 January 1949	The operation ended without removing Egyptian control from the Gaza Strip.

Military Operation and Unit

Military Operation: Operation Horev is the strongest immediate military context for the recorded 22 December 1948 displacement of Sumeiri.

Military Unit: Not independently identified at the Sumeiri clan level. Several Israeli brigades participated in Operation Horev, and the Golani Brigade attacked Hill 86, but the available sources do not identify a particular unit as the force that

directly displaced the Sumeiri community.

Cause of Displacement

The Sumeiri displacement occurred during the major Israeli offensive that opened with Operation Horev in a zone of Egyptian-Israeli fighting, aerial and naval bombardment, and ground attacks.

The departure of the population is therefore placed in the context of direct military operations and the changing control of areas surrounding their encampments. The available sources do not document the precise departure of each Sumeiri family separately.

Destruction of Dwellings

There was no single compact Sumeiri village for which a reliable percentage of destruction can be calculated. The clan occupied several dwelling areas within the wider Hanajira domain.

The principal sources reviewed do not provide a comprehensive inventory of tents, houses, or structures destroyed during the fighting. This article therefore avoids unsupported statements such as “completely destroyed” or an invented destruction percentage.

Settlements on Sumeiri Land

The sources reviewed do not identify a specific post-1948 Israeli settlement as having been established exclusively on Sumeiri land.

The Hanajira occupied a broad and internally overlapping tribal landscape, while the defined Sumeiri land unit had been administratively attached to the Gaza Subdistrict by the final years of the Mandate.

A settlement-level attribution therefore requires direct cadastral mapping of Sumeiri boundaries rather than proximity alone.

Sumeiri / Hanajira Today

Following the Nakba, most displaced Hanajira families moved into the Gaza Strip, where Sumeiri remained a recognized clan and family name.

There is no single former “Sumeiri village site” comparable to a nucleated depopulated village. The pre-Nakba community occupied several encampment areas, while its historical territory crossed the administrative relationship between Beersheba and Gaza.

A precise contemporary assessment would require matching the 1945 Sumeiri land-unit maps with each documented tribal dwelling area. This section summarizes the historical record and is not a comprehensive field survey of all Sumeiri lands in 2026.

Sources

- [Government of Palestine – Census of Palestine, 1922: Al Smairi / Hanajira](#)
- [Government of Palestine – Census of Palestine, 1931: Sumeiri / El-Hanajira](#)
- [Village Statistics 1945 – Gaza Subdistrict: Sumeiri Land Ownership and Total Area](#)
- [Village Statistics 1945 – Sumeiri Land Use](#)
- [Palestine Remembered – Sumeiri: Land Ownership and Land Use](#)
- [Palestine Remembered – Hanajira and Sumeiri Tribal Documentation](#)
- [Encyclopedia of Palestinian Villages – Sumeiri / Hanajira](#)
- [Salman Abu Sitta – Register of Depopulated Palestinian Localities: Sumeiri / Hanajira](#)
- [BADIL – Haq al-Awda: Register of Depopulated Localities, Sumeiri / Hanajira](#)
- [PalQuest – Operation Horev against Egyptian Forces, 22 December 1948 – 6 January 1949](#)