

Abu Middein / Hanajira

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

Abu Middein was one of the principal clans of the Palestinian Hanajira tribal grouping, whose lands and encampments extended between the Beersheba Subdistrict and Gaza. Its history requires a distinction between the wider Abu Middein clan and the defined Abu Middein land unit that had become part of the Gaza Subdistrict by the final years of the British Mandate.

Abu Middein should therefore not be treated simply as a conventional depopulated village that disappeared in 1948. Part of the clan and some of its encampments were displaced during the military operations of late 1948, while the formal Abu Middein agricultural land unit remained inside what became the Gaza Strip. The name later continued in the Palestinian locality officially known as al-Mughraqa (Abu Middein).

Item	Information
Affiliation	Principal clan of the Hanajira
Historical District	Beersheba in tribal classification; the defined Abu Middein land unit was administratively included in the Gaza Subdistrict by the late Mandate period
Type of Community	Bedouin and semi-settled tribal community with a broad territorial domain, alongside a settled agricultural Abu Middein locality in Gaza
Population in 1931	1,419 – official census figure for the Abu Middein branch of the Hanajira
Population in 1944/1945	Approximately 2,000 for the Abu Middein locality in the Gaza Subdistrict

Item	Information
Estimated Population in 1948	2,887 in Salman Abu Sitta's updated Register – a later estimate, not an official census
Recorded Displacement Date	21 December 1948 in Abu Sitta's updated Register, immediately before the formal opening of Operation Horev
Military Context	Escalation in the Gaza coastal sector, Hill 86 fighting, and the opening of Operation Horev
Military Unit	No specific brigade or battalion is independently documented as the unit that displaced Abu Middein
Total Abu Middein Land Unit in 1945	8,821 dunums
Post-1948 Status of the Land Unit	Sara Roy records all 8,821 dunums of the Abu Middein unit as incorporated into the Gaza Strip

Abu Middein within the Hanajira

The Hanajira were one of the major Palestinian Bedouin groupings occupying the region between Gaza and Beersheba. Mandate and Palestinian tribal sources commonly identify Abu Middein, Sumeiri, al-Dawahra, and Nuseirat among their principal divisions.

Abu Middein was the largest of these groups in the official 1931 census.

Palestinian tribal accounts list families and subdivisions associated with Abu Middein including:

- Abu Middein.
- al-Nabahin.
- al-Badarin.
- al-'Arabayn.
- al-Nu'aymat.
- al-Na'amin.
- al-Nukhaylat.
- Abu Khusa.

Later tribal lists differ in some details, so these are treated as tribal documentation rather than a fixed official administrative classification.

Shaykh Freih Abu Middein

The clan's late Ottoman and Mandate history is closely associated with Shaykh Freih Farhan Abu Middein, one of the most prominent Bedouin leaders of the Beersheba district.

Born in 1871, Freih Abu Middein held several public offices. He represented Beersheba in the British advisory council, became mayor of Beersheba in the early 1920s, and was appointed to the tribal court in 1923.

On 26 March 1932, he was elected shaykh of the Hanajira in the presence of Beersheba district officer 'Arif al-'Arif.

PalQuest records that he owned substantial land and buildings in both Beersheba and Gaza. During the Nakba he left with members of his clan for Gaza and later lived in al-Bureij camp.

Population

Figures for the Abu Middein tribal branch must be distinguished from those for the later settled Abu Middein locality in Gaza.

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
1931	1,419	Official Census of Palestine for Abu Middein within the Hanajira: 782 males and 637 females, all Muslims
1944/1945	2,000	Mandate-period population for the Abu Middein Gaza locality, reproduced by Sara Roy from official sources
1948	2,887	Later estimate in Salman Abu Sitta's updated Register; not an official census

An older edition of Abu Sitta's atlas gives 2,379 rather than 2,887. The present

article uses the later updated Register while noting the difference between editions.

The Hanajira in the 1931 Census

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

The total Hanajira population should therefore not be presented as the population of Abu Middein alone.

Administrative Position between Beersheba and Gaza

Official records reflect a shift in the administrative status of Abu Middein. It originally appeared as a Hanajira tribal group within the Beersheba census framework, while by the final years of the Mandate a defined Abu Middein land and population unit was listed in the Gaza Subdistrict.

This reflected the increasing transition of parts of the Hanajira from pastoral mobility toward agricultural settlement in the coastal plain and central Gaza region.

Later sources therefore sometimes classify Abu Middein under Beersheba as a tribe and sometimes under Gaza as a settled locality. Both classifications describe different aspects of the same historical community.

Land Ownership in 1945

The official Abu Middein land unit in the Gaza Subdistrict covered 8,821 dunums.

Total	8,821
Ownership Category	Area in Dunums
Palestinian	7,080
Transferred to Zionists	0
Communal/Public	1,741

The official Village Statistics use the categories Arab, Jewish, and Public: 7,080 Arab dunums, no Jewish-owned land, and 1,741 public dunums.

Land Use in 1945

Total	8,821
Land Use	Area in Dunums
Citrus	57
Plantations and Irrigable Land	1,630
Cereals	4,301
Total Cultivated / Cultivable Land	5,988
Non-Cultivable Land	2,833

The 2,833 dunums classified as non-cultivable consisted of 1,092 Arab dunums and 1,741 public dunums. All agricultural land in the official 1945 table was recorded under the Arab category.

Economic Life

By the final Mandate years, Abu Middein had undergone substantial agricultural settlement. The 1945 statistics show extensive cereal cultivation, orchards, irrigable land, and limited citrus cultivation.

Cereals covered 4,301 dunums, plantations and irrigable land 1,630 dunums, and citrus 57 dunums.

The clan nevertheless retained elements of its earlier pastoral economy, particularly livestock raising and its links to the broader Hanajira tribal territory.

1948: Why Abu Middein Was Not Simply a Village that Disappeared

The Abu Middein case differs from that of many depopulated Palestinian villages. Sara Roy's Institute for Palestine Studies research records the entire 8,821-dunum Abu Middein land unit as having been incorporated into the Gaza Strip after 1948, with none of that defined unit recorded as lost outside the Strip.

Roy also notes that important portions of the traditional lands of Abu Middein, Nuseirat, and Sumeiri fell within the Gaza Strip, enabling sections of these communities to continue living on lands associated with them.

This does not mean that all Abu Middein families remained in their original encampments. Salman Abu Sitta's Register documents an attack and displacement affecting the Abu Middein / Hanajira tribal population, with displaced members moving into Gaza.

The December 1948 Attack and Displacement

Salman Abu Sitta's updated Register gives **21 December 1948** for Abu Middein / Hanajira and associates the event with **Hill 86** and an Israeli attack.

The date requires careful comparison with the wider chronology. PalQuest dates Operation Horev from **22 December 1948**, while the Battle of Hill 86 was fought on 22–23 December.

The article therefore preserves Abu Sitta's 21 December date but does not collapse it into the formal beginning of Operation Horev. The most accurate formulation is

that the recorded Abu Middein displacement occurred immediately before the formal opening of Horev, during the same escalation of fighting in the Gaza coastal sector.

Displacement Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Increasing Agricultural Settlement	Before 1948	A defined Abu Middein land unit had emerged in the Gaza Subdistrict alongside the wider Hanajira tribal domain.
Recorded Displacement	21 December 1948	Abu Sitta's updated Register records an Israeli attack and associates the event with the Hill 86 sector.
Opening of Operation Horev	22 December 1948	A major Israeli offensive against Egyptian forces in southern Palestine began.
Battle of Hill 86	22-23 December 1948	Fighting took place east of the Gaza coastal road during the opening phase of Operation Horev.
Movement of Clan Members into Gaza	Late 1948 and afterward	Members of Abu Middein moved into the Gaza Strip; PalQuest records Shaykh Freih Abu Middein settling in al-Bureij camp.
Abu Middein Land Unit Remains inside Gaza	After 1948	All 8,821 dunums of the formal Abu Middein land unit were incorporated into the Gaza Strip.

Military Operation and Unit

Military Context: Escalation in the Gaza coastal sector immediately before Operation Horev, followed by the operation itself beginning on 22 December 1948.

Military Unit: The sources reviewed do not independently identify a particular brigade or battalion as the force that displaced the Abu Middein encampments.

The Golani Brigade's participation in the nearby Battle of Hill 86 is not, by itself,

sufficient evidence to identify it as the specific clan-level attacking force.

Cause of Displacement

Abu Sitta classifies the event in the context of an Israeli military attack, during the major escalation against Egyptian positions and the Gaza coastal sector in late December 1948.

Because of the broad territorial character of the clan and the survival of its Gaza land unit, the most accurate description is **the displacement of part of the Abu Middein clan and its encampments into the Gaza Strip**, rather than complete disappearance of Abu Middein as a locality.

Destruction

There is no basis for describing Abu Middein as “completely destroyed.” Its formal Gaza land unit remained within the Gaza Strip and the place-name continued afterward.

Individual encampments or dwellings in the clan's eastern tribal range may have been evacuated or damaged during the fighting, but the available sources do not support a blanket destruction percentage for Abu Middein as a whole.

Israeli Settlements on Abu Middein Land

No Israeli settlement was established on the formal 8,821-dunum Abu Middein land unit recorded in 1945. Sara Roy's study places the entire area within the post-1948 Gaza Strip.

The standard “post-1948 settlement on village lands” category therefore does not apply to Abu Middein in the same way it does to Palestinian villages whose lands came under Israeli control.

Abu Middein Today

The Abu Middein name continued in the Gaza Strip after the Nakba. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics officially lists a locality called **al-Mughraqa (Abu Middein)** in Gaza Governorate.

This spatial continuity does not negate the displacement experienced by part of the Abu Middein clan in 1948. Rather, it reflects a complex outcome in which sections of the tribal domain were affected by military displacement while a principal agricultural land unit remained inside the Gaza Strip.

This section establishes the administrative and historical continuity of the name but is not a direct field assessment of the locality's physical condition in 2026.

Sources

- [PalQuest – Freih Abu Middein](#)
- [Government of Palestine – Census of Palestine, 1931: Abu Middein / Hanajira](#)
- [Palestine Remembered – Abu Middein, Gaza: Land Ownership and Land Use](#)
- [Sami Hadawi – Village Statistics 1945: Abu Middein](#)
- [Institute for Palestine Studies – Sara Roy, The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-development](#)
- [Salman Abu Sitta – Updated Register of Depopulated Localities: Abu Middain / Hanajreh](#)
- [PalQuest – Operation Horev against Egyptian Forces](#)
- [Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics – Locality Guide: al-Mughraqa \(Abu Middein\)](#)
- [Encyclopedia of Palestinian Villages – Abu Middein / Hanajira](#)