

Nuseirat / Hanajira

Nuseirat / Hanajira - Palestinian Clan of the Beersheba and Gaza Region

Nuseirat was a Palestinian tribal community associated during the British Mandate with the Hanajira of the Beersheba Subdistrict. By the final Mandate years, however, a defined Nuseirat land and population unit also existed in the Gaza Subdistrict. Its history therefore combines an earlier Bedouin and semi-settled tribal identity with increasing agricultural settlement in the Deir al-Balah and central Gaza region.

The historic Nuseirat clan must be distinguished from Nuseirat refugee camp, which was established after the 1948 War. The camp took the name of the local area but received Palestinian refugees from many different villages and districts and should not be treated as synonymous with the Nuseirat clan.

Item	Information
Tribal Affiliation	Nuseirat - one of the principal Hanajira groups in the Beersheba census classification
Later Administrative Status	Nuseirat appeared as an independent Gaza Subdistrict land unit in the 1945 Village Statistics
Type of Community	Bedouin and semi-settled clan that developed a settled agricultural community in the Gaza region
Associated Areas	Jurat Ghazi, al-Qina, and the Deir al-Balah / 'Ayn al-Daqq area within the broader Hanajira domain
Population in 1931	1,104 - official census figure for Nuseirat within the Hanajira
Population in 1944/1945	1,500 in Sara Roy's reconstruction from Mandate sources; the Village Statistics land table itself leaves the population field blank

Item	Information
Estimated Population in 1948	2,246 according to Salman Abu Sitta's updated Register – a later estimate, not an official census
Recorded Displacement Date	21 December 1948 in Salman Abu Sitta's Register
Military Context	Israeli attack in the Gaza–Hill 86 sector immediately before the opening of Operation Horev on 22 December 1948
Military Unit	No particular brigade or battalion is independently documented at the Nuseirat clan level
Total Land Area in 1945	10,425 dunums
Post-1948 Status of the Land Unit	All 10,425 dunums of the formal Nuseirat unit were incorporated into the Gaza Strip
Israeli Settlements on the Formal Land Unit	None; the complete Nuseirat land unit remained within the Gaza Strip

Nuseirat within the Hanajira

Nuseirat was one of the four principal Hanajira groups recorded during the Mandate period:

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

The wider Hanajira domain extended southeast of Gaza toward Deir al-Balah and the Beersheba region and bordered the territorial zones of the Tayaha, Jabarat, and Tarabin.

Tribal Tradition of Origin

Palestinian tribal accounts preserve a tradition that Nuseirat descended from an ancestor called Nusayr, one of three brothers named Yasin, Nasir, and Nusayr.

According to this tradition, Nusayr eventually moved to southern Palestine, initially settling around 'Ayn al-Daqq near Deir al-Balah. His descendants later entered the Beersheba tribal domain and settled in places including Jurat Ghazi and al-Qina.

The same tradition states that Ottoman administrative intervention eventually placed the Nuseirat among the Hanajira.

This material is presented as inherited tribal history rather than independently verified documentary genealogy.

Subdivisions of the Nuseirat Clan

Palestinian tribal sources identify four principal Nuseirat family groups during the Mandate period:

- al-Masdar.
- al-Kurshan.
- al-Qur'an.
- al-Fuqayriyin.

Later family traditions contain more detailed subdivisions, but the list above is the one most consistently associated with Mandate-era tribal documentation.

Clan Leadership

'Ayish bin Farhan bin Tabash bin Samur al-Masdar is recorded as one of the Nuseirat shaykhs in the early Mandate period.

Later sources state that **Freih al-Masdar** succeeded to the Nuseirat shaykhship around 1940 and became an important tribal figure in the Beersheba–Gaza region before the Nakba.

Encampments and Settlement

Nuseirat did not originally consist of one compact masonry village. The clan was

associated with several places within the wider Hanajira tribal domain.

Tribal accounts mention Jurat Ghazi and al-Qina after the Nuseirat entered the Beersheba region, while their history was also closely connected with Deir al-Balah and 'Ayn al-Da'iq.

Over time, part of the clan became increasingly settled in the central Gaza coastal plain, and Nuseirat eventually appeared as an independent land unit in late-Mandate official statistics.

Administrative Transition from Beersheba to Gaza

The Nuseirat case illustrates the changing administrative and economic character of southern Palestinian tribal communities.

In the 1931 census, Nuseirat was enumerated as a Hanajira group in the Beersheba Subdistrict.

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

This is not necessarily contradictory; it reflects increasing agricultural settlement and the administrative division of the wider Hanajira territorial zone between Gaza and Beersheba.

Population in 1931

The official 1931 Census of Palestine recorded approximately **1,104 Nuseirat**.

This figure must not be confused with the 3,735 total for the four principal Hanajira branches.

Hanajira Branch	Population in 1931
Abu Middein	1,419

Hanajira Branch	Population in 1931
Nuseirat	1,104
Sumeiri	772
al-Dawahra	461

The frequently repeated 3,735 figure is therefore a Hanajira total, not the population of Nuseirat alone.

Population in 1944/1945

The Nuseirat row in the 1945 Village Statistics land table does not display a separate population figure.

Sara Roy's Institute for Palestine Studies research, drawing on Mandate statistical sources, gives approximately **1,500 inhabitants** for Nuseirat in 1944/45.

The 1,500 figure is therefore used here with the qualification that it comes from a reconstruction of Mandate population statistics rather than directly from the population cell in the 1945 land-ownership table.

Estimated Population in 1948

Salman Abu Sitta's updated Register gives an estimated **2,246 people** for Nseirat / Hanajreh in 1948.

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

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
1931	1,104	Official Census of Palestine – Nuseirat within the Hanajira
1944/1945	1,500	Sara Roy's reconstruction from Mandate-era sources
1948	2,246	Later estimate in Salman Abu Sitta's Register

Land Ownership in 1945

The formal Nuseirat land unit in the Gaza Subdistrict covered **10,425 dunums**.

Total	10,425
Ownership Category	Area in Dunums
Palestinian	9,913
Transferred to Zionists	0
Communal/Public	512

The official Village Statistics use the categories Arab, Jewish, and Public: 9,913 Arab dunums, no land in the Jewish category, and 512 public dunums.

Land Use in 1945

Total	10,425
Land Use	Area in Dunums
Citrus and Bananas	134
Plantations and Irrigable Land	1,429
Cereals	6,668
Total Cultivable Land	8,231
Non-Cultivable Land	2,194

Of the 6,668 dunums classified as cereal land, 6,667 were in the Arab category and one dunum was public.

Agriculture therefore occupied most of the Nuseirat land unit by the final Mandate years, illustrating the community's increasing transition toward settled cultivation.

Economic Life

Nuseirat combined livestock raising with agriculture. By the final Mandate period,

cereal cultivation, orchards, irrigable land, and citrus production had become important economic activities.

The community's location near Deir al-Balah, Wadi Gaza, and the central coastal plain provided more favorable agricultural conditions than much of the deeper Naqab.

The 1,429 dunums of plantations and irrigable land and the 134 dunums devoted to citrus demonstrate a considerable degree of agricultural settlement before 1948.

Education

Sources on the Hanajira state that a Nuseirat school was established in **1944** approximately five kilometers east of Deir al-Balah.

These sources report three grade levels and approximately 69 pupils.

The figure is retained with caution because an independent Ministry of Education table was not located among the principal sources used for this article.

Nuseirat and Greek Refugees during the Second World War

Before the Nakba, the Nuseirat area was used during the Second World War for a refugee camp housing Greeks who had fled the Dodecanese islands following German occupation.

This wartime refugee camp was distinct from the later Palestinian refugee camp established after 1948.

Historical photographs from 1945 document the Greek refugee camp at Nuseirat, confirming that the geographical name was in use before the creation of today's Palestinian refugee camp.

Nuseirat and the Nakba

The Nuseirat case differs from that of a Palestinian village that was entirely depopulated and whose complete land area passed under Israeli control.

Sara Roy's research on the Gaza Strip records the entire **10,425-dunum Nuseirat land unit** as incorporated into the Gaza Strip after the 1948 War.

The formal Nuseirat locality was therefore not lost to Israel in the same manner as villages lying farther north and east of the postwar Gaza boundary.

This does not mean that the wider Nuseirat tribal community escaped displacement. Salman Abu Sitta's Register records the displacement of Nseirat / Hanajreh from the Beersheba-related portion of their tribal domain during military operations in late December 1948.

Recorded Displacement on 21 December 1948

Salman Abu Sitta records **21 December 1948** for **Nseirat / Hanajreh**, with the note **“Hill 86 - Israeli attack.”**

The chronology requires care because Operation Horev officially began on **22 December 1948**, one day later.

The article therefore does not state that Nuseirat was “occupied during Operation Horev on 21 December.” The more accurate formulation is that its recorded displacement occurred immediately before the formal opening of Horev, within the same military escalation in the Gaza and Hill 86 sector.

Operation Horev and the Military Context

Operation Horev began on 22 December 1948 and continued until 6 January 1949. It was a major Israeli offensive against Egyptian forces in the Naqab and southern Palestine.

Its opening phase included fighting in the sector east of the Gaza coastal road, including Hill 86.

The existence of a major Israeli force at Hill 86, however, is insufficient by itself to identify a particular battalion as the force that displaced the Nuseirat clan.

Why Operation Yoav Is Not Used as the Final Nuseirat Operation

Some later Palestinian databases list Operation Yoav as the military campaign associated with Nuseirat.

Operation Yoav ended on 4 November 1948, while Abu Sitta's Nuseirat displacement date is 21 December.

Yoav was an important earlier stage in the transformation of southern Palestine, but the late-December Gaza–Hill 86 fighting provides a much closer chronological context for the recorded Nuseirat displacement.

Occupation and Displacement Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Pre-Nakba Settlement	Until 1948	Nuseirat increasingly transformed from a tribal Hanajira community into a settled agricultural locality in the Deir al-Balah and central Gaza region.
Operation Yoav	15 October – 4 November 1948	Operation Yoav transformed control in southern Palestine but ended more than a month before the Nuseirat displacement date in Abu Sitta's Register.
Recorded Nuseirat Displacement	21 December 1948	Abu Sitta records Nseirat / Hanajreh in the context of Hill 86 and an Israeli attack.
Opening of Operation Horev	22 December 1948	The major Israeli offensive against Egyptian forces in the south formally began.

Stage	Date	Details
Hill 86 Fighting	22-23 December 1948	Major fighting occurred east of the Gaza coastal road during the opening phase of Horev; no independent source establishes the Hill 86 attacking unit as the specific force that displaced Nuseirat.
End of Operation Horev	6 January 1949	The operation ended while the Gaza Strip remained outside Israeli control.

Military Operation and Unit

Most Direct Military Context: The Gaza–Hill 86 attack immediately preceding Operation Horev, followed by Operation Horev itself.

Military Unit: No particular brigade or battalion is independently documented as responsible for displacing the Nuseirat clan.

A unit's participation in the nearby Hill 86 battle should not be converted into a clan-specific attribution without direct evidence.

Cause of Displacement

Abu Sitta records the event in the context of an Israeli military attack during a period of major escalation against Egyptian forces and the Gaza coastal sector.

Many affected Nuseirat families moved toward or remained within the Gaza Strip, where the clan already possessed a settled agricultural land unit.

The most accurate formulation is therefore **the displacement of part of the wider Nuseirat tribal domain into the Gaza Strip**, rather than the total disappearance of Nuseirat as a geographical community.

Destruction

Nuseirat should not be described as a village “completely destroyed in 1948.”

The entire formal 10,425-dunum Nuseirat land unit remained within the Gaza Strip, and the Nuseirat name continued as a Palestinian locality.

Individual encampments or dwellings in the eastern tribal zone may have been evacuated or damaged during fighting, but the sources do not provide a reliable overall destruction percentage for the Nuseirat clan.

Israeli Settlements on Nuseirat Land

No Israeli settlement was established on the formal 1945 Nuseirat land unit because all 10,425 dunums were incorporated into the Gaza Strip after the war.

The usual “post-1948 settlement on village lands” category therefore does not apply in the same way as it does to villages whose lands passed under Israeli control.

The Nuseirat Clan and Nuseirat Refugee Camp

Nuseirat refugee camp was established after the 1948 War in the area bearing the Nuseirat name.

The camp did not consist only of members of the historic Nuseirat clan. It received Palestinian refugees displaced from numerous villages and districts.

The shared name should therefore not be interpreted as indicating that the historic clan and the refugee-camp population are the same community.

Nuseirat Today

The Nuseirat name continued after the Nakba as an existing Palestinian urban locality in the central Gaza Strip, while Nuseirat Camp is separately classified as a refugee camp by Palestinian statistical authorities.

Prewar Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics data treated An Nuseirat and An Nuseirat Camp as distinct localities.

UNRWA recorded 88,204 registered Palestine refugees in Nuseirat Camp as of 2023, explicitly noting that the figure represents registered refugees rather than the actual number physically present in the camp.

These figures predate 2026 and do not constitute a current field assessment of the physical or demographic condition of Nuseirat. This section therefore establishes the historical and administrative continuity of the name without claiming contemporary field verification.

Sources

- [Government of Palestine – Census of Palestine, 1931: Nuseirat / Hanajira](#)
- [Village Statistics 1945 – Gaza Subdistrict: Nuseirat Land Ownership](#)
- [Village Statistics 1945 – Nuseirat Land Use](#)
- [Palestine Remembered – Nuseirat: Land Ownership and Land Use](#)
- [Institute for Palestine Studies – Sara Roy, The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-development](#)
- [Salman Abu Sitta – Register of Depopulated Palestinian Localities: Nuseirat / Hanajreh](#)
- [PalQuest – Operation Horev Against Egyptian Forces, 22 December 1948 – 6 January 1949](#)
- [Palestine Remembered – Hanajira and Nuseirat Tribal Documentation](#)
- [UNRWA – Nuseirat Camp](#)
- [Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics – An Nuseirat and An Nuseirat Camp as Separate Localities](#)