

# Beit Anan

## Introduction

Known for its lush landscape distinguished by almonds and vineyards, Beit Anan is located 668 meters above sea level on the northwestern periphery of the Jerusalem Governate, overlooking the Palestinian coast and linked to neighboring villages via hill roads. Its distinct location among a range of hills that extends northwards has also contributed to its isolation from the Old City of Jerusalem following the construction of the Annexation and Expansion Wall.



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## Location and Area

Beit Anan is located 16 kilometers northwest of the Old City of occupied Jerusalem. It borders Beit Duqqu to the north, Qatanna to the south, al-Qubeibah to the east and Beit Liqya to the west (Ramallah and al-Bireh Governate). The village covers over 10,000 donums of land.<sup>1</sup>

## Origin and History

The people of Beit Anan relate that their village is named after Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Anan, who arrived from Sinai and settled in the area hundreds of years ago. The village grew, and its families branched out from his bloodline.<sup>2</sup> Naser al-Din Abu Khdeir suggests that Anan is a proper name in the Phoenician, Palmyrene, and Southern Arabic languages, which share a common Semitic root. “An-an” means “clouds,” perhaps suggesting that the village is elevated so as to be touching the clouds. It could also mean “dew and fog,” which befits the location’s topography as well.<sup>3</sup>

## Population

The village is home to 4,200 Palestinians<sup>4</sup> that descend from three clans, each of which branches into four families. The clans are the Rabih clan (the Taha, Hinnawi, al-Sheikh and al-Hindi families); the Jamhour clan (the Issa, al-Haj, Abu Thahab and Salamah families); and the Hamid clan (the Asfour, Hamidah, Matari and Abdul-Jalil families). According to oral history, the village families originate from various areas, such as Dura in Hebron, Gaza, and Khirbat al-Amur village (uprooted in 1948) in the Jerusalem Governate.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Murad al-Dabbagh, Mustafa. *Our Homeland Palestine on Palestine Remembered: بيت عنان قضاء القدس - Bayt l'nan (فلسطين في)* [الذاكرة](#)

<sup>2</sup> According to Beit Anan native Abdul Karim Murshid Rasheed Rabih (born 1936), interviewed on September 5, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Abu Khdeir, Nasser al-Din. “The Etymology of Jerusalem Villages: A Semantic Linguistic Study.” Published in the Journal of the Arab Universities Association for Literature and on Bab al-Wad, December 6, 2016: <http://www.babelwad.com/en/jerusalem-villages-names>

<sup>4</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. “Jerusalem Statistical Yearbook, 2018.” [قائمة الجداول](#)

<sup>5</sup> See note 2.

## Social & Economic Context

Like most Jerusalem villages, Beit Anan historically relied on agriculture and livestock for its livelihood. The village sits among other villages, land plots, and Khirbas (ancient ruins) that make up the vibrant vicinity of Beit Anan and its people. This surrounding area lies within the Ramleh district, which the Occupation forces occupied in 1948, including Khirbat al-Kanissah, Zakariah, Ajanjoul, and parts of Salbit village. Villagers from those areas would spend summers in Beit Anan and winters in their lands in the Ramleh area, which were known for being lush plains planted with wheat, barley, corn, sesame and lentil.

Prior to its occupation in 1967, Beit Anan witnessed a wave of emigration in the 1950s, following the Zionist takeover of Ramleh in 1948. Having lost their lands, farmers were compelled to seek work abroad. The United States of America was the primary destination for most migrants from Beit Anan. According to the 1931 census, around 650 people lived in the village. The number would reach 1,255 by 1961.<sup>6</sup>

In the old village, the historical center of Beit Anan, one can imagine what the village once looked like from the remains of its historical houses, which took the form of traditional residential arrangements called *ahwash* (plural of *hoash*). A single hoash included the homes of a group of related families on a shared plot of land. Beit Anan expanded from the old center to reach its current urbanized state. It is said that the central area, where the village's local council presently stands, included a small square, known as Qaa al-Hoash, that served as a communal space.

Beit Anan relied on a famed spring called Ein Ajab for their drinking water until the late 1970s. Ein Ajab still exists today, in addition to other smaller springs like Ein al-Qaiqaba north of the village and Ein al-Daber between Beit Duqqu and Beit Anan.<sup>7</sup> In case the springs in Beit Anan ran dry, the village elders maintain that alternative water sources existed in Beit Duqqu's Ein Jifna spring and in Qatanna's Ein al-Jamous spring. The task of fetching spring water was associated with the women of the village, who in a familiar sight, would fetch the water for their household's cooking and washing needs. In addition to the al-Meshka well north of the village near the ancient Roman arches, between the late-1950s and the 1960s, the villagers dug wells, which they named after their families.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See note 1.

<sup>7</sup> According to Beit Anan native Elias Hussein Rabih (born 1944), interviewed on February 13, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

The village was self-sufficient in terms of food production for its population and livestock. They planted wheat and barley near vineyards and olive groves. In spring, they cultivated crops like okra, cowpeas and zucchini. Like other Jerusalem villages, Beit Anan exported its crops, especially fruits like grape and plum, to Arab countries. However, the transition of Palestinians to wage labor in construction and other sectors after the occupation of the West Bank in 1967, in addition to the migration of several Beit Anan families to Latin America, particularly Brazil, led to the abandonment of agricultural lands and a severe decline in crop production.<sup>9</sup>

## Education

The earliest efforts at providing education in Beit Anan were associated with the name of the village's founder, as the first kuttab in the village was established in the early 20th century on the premises of the shrine dedicated to Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Anan. Another kuttab was later established in one of the village houses. Abd al-Karim al-Safarini from the village of Safarin<sup>10</sup> was among the first kuttab teachers in the village. In the mid-20th century, upon finishing their basic kuttab education, pupils continued their education at al-Qubeibah Secondary School, which was also the destination for students from other neighboring villages. Subsequently, Beit Anan's present-day high school was built east of the village as an expansion of a former schoolhouse.

The village today has five schools, three of which are administered by the Palestinian Authority (primary, preparatory and secondary schools for boys), and a fourth is a school for girls that is administered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and teaches up to the ninth grade. More recently, Beit Anan Secondary School was established in 2018. Prior to its establishment, female students had to attend al-Qubeibah School or the Umayyad School in Beit Ijza.

## Landmarks

### Khirbahs (archaeological ruins)

As are many Palestinian towns and villages, Beit Anan is home to a number of archaeological ruins. Khirbat al-Jubeiah is located in the southwest of the village, Khirbat Rummana is located on its southern side, and between them lies Khirbat al-Khamis. Additionally, Khirbat al-Masqa<sup>11</sup> is located on the western edge of the village. Other ruins on the western side of the village

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<sup>9</sup> See note 2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> See note 1.

include Khirbat al-Jdeirah, which contains some Roman archaeological remains; Khirbat al-Hammad near Beit Liqya, which contains Byzantine ruins; and Khirbat al-Bureij, which was used as a rest stop on the way between Jerusalem and the coast, and which contains a number of Crusader-era wells and Canaanite caves.<sup>12</sup> To the south, near the village of Khirbat Umm al-Lahm is Khirbat al-Matari (al-Madbasa), which contains Canaanite-era cave dwellings, as well as cemeteries, stairways and Greek- and Byzantine-era walls.

## Religious Landmarks

Similar to other shrines dedicated to *walis* (Muslim saints), which are typically located at elevated sites in Palestinian towns and villages, the shrine of Sidi Omar, or al-Maqam al-Omari, is located atop the hill of Khirbat al-Jubeia in Beit Anan. Also, the village center is home to a shrine dedicated to Sidi Yamine, whose descendants persist today, and by whose name the villagers of Beit Anan still swear.<sup>13</sup> The shrine overlaps with the cemetery of the Abu Khalil and al-Sheikh families, who are said to share the same ancestor.

Also in the center of the village, near the Municipal Council, is the tomb of Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Anan, commonly known as Sheikh Hussein, after whom the village was named. The tomb and shrine contains a stone plaque noting that the man buried there is the forefather of most of the villagers. The shrine also includes a guest room, long used to accommodate strangers and passers-by in need of lodging.

Beit Anan is home to three mosques, including the main mosque, known as Abu Ayyub al-Ansari Mosque, located in the center of the village. Built in the early 1900s, the mosque is a well-known landmark in the old quarters of Beit Anan. Initially consisting of three halls and a minaret, it was renovated and expanded in 1989. In 1999, al-Atqiaa Mosque was built on the western side of the village, followed by al-Sunnah Mosque, built on the eastern side of Beit Anan.

## History of Resistance

As did other towns and villages in Palestine, Beit Anan led many confrontations against British and Zionist colonialism and saw many volunteers enlist in al-Jihad al-Muqaddas (Army of Holy War), in addition to taking part in 1936 revolution. Among the martyrs of 1936 is Mahmoud Khalil Rabih, who fell and was buried in the village of Bani Naim.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Jamhour, Nasser. "Land Use in Beit Anan." Birzeit University.

<sup>13</sup> See note 2.

<sup>14</sup> See note 7.

On July 17, 1948, the villagers of Beit Anan partook in the battle of Khirbat Umm al-Lahem, whose land overlaps with the village. The villagers fought alongside other fighters from al-Qubeibah, Qatanna and Beit Duqqu, in addition to the Jordanian Arab Legion.<sup>15</sup> Two martyrs from Beit Anan, Abdel-Rahman al-Matari and Mohammad Salama al-Hinnawi, gave their lives and were buried in the village cemetery.<sup>16</sup> Previous to that, on January 25, 1948,<sup>17</sup> hundreds of resistance fighters from Beit Anan had risen to defend Beit Surik in what would become known as the Battle of Beit Surik, one of the fiercest efforts at thwarting the Zionist advance towards the Old City of Jerusalem. To hinder the Zionist advance, the fighters made significant efforts to cut off the arms supply routes of the Zionist militias.<sup>18</sup>

Mohammad Hasan Abu Dayya, a comrade of Commander Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini, is among the most prominent fighters from Beit Anan whom the villagers still cherish. He is also known as al-Shaanun (“the feisty one”),<sup>19</sup> a nickname he earned due to his immense energy and his participation in several battles.<sup>20</sup> It is also said that al-Husseini and his comrades had been in Beit Anan when they received news that a Zionist convoy was enroute to Jerusalem via Bab al-Wad, and so, the fighters headed from there to Beit Surik to intercept it.

## Beit Anan and the Naksa

During the 1957 Tripartite Aggression, many of the village men volunteered and fought under the banner of the Jordanian army. Among the villagers who paid with their lives in that war were the martyrs Mahmoud Jamil Nasser and Othman Ragheb. Many volunteers ultimately settled in Jordan, and the whereabouts of others are unknown to this day.<sup>21</sup> The village was occupied in 1967, and people were forced to flee and take refuge in nearby caves and hills, where they remained for a few days.

Beit Anan’s staunch resistance continued throughout the following years. During the first Intifada, a mass demonstration was organized by the people of Beit Anan and neighboring villages near the settlement on Radar Hill, in which Munir Yousef Abu Dhahab and Fawzi Mefleh Jamhour were martyred. After the first Intifada, in the early 1990s, Occupation forces stormed

<sup>15</sup> According to Sidqi Amin Said (born 1939), former head of al-Qubeibah Village Council, during an interview with Grassroots staff at his home in al-Qubeibah on January 15, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> See note 2.

<sup>17</sup> Abu Gharbieh, Bahjat. In the Midst of the Struggle: The Memoirs of Bahjat Abu Gharbieh, 1916-1949. Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut, 1993, p. 177.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Aref, Aref. The Nakba and the Lost Paradise. Institute for Palestine Studies. P. 86

<sup>19</sup> See note 2.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Shaanun was wounded in the Battle of al-Qastal, but he made a full recovery and subsequently emigrated to the United States of America, where he passed away some years ago.

<sup>21</sup> See note 7.



Beit Anan, erased political slogans that had been scrawled on walls and arrested young male villagers. Enraged by this aggression, the village youths clashed with the soldiers, pelted them with stones and set fire to five of their military jeeps.<sup>22</sup> In retaliation for this incident, a one-month curfew was imposed on Beit Anan, during which many villagers were arrested, and three houses were demolished under the pretext that they were unlicensed.<sup>23</sup>

## Colonization

Constructed in 2004, the Annexation and Expansion Wall compounds the reality of colonization in Beit Anan and starkly embodies the Zionist policies of isolation and exclusion. The Wall traps the village from the west and southwest, cuts across four kilometers of land and swallows about 1,000 donums in the process.<sup>24</sup>

Most of the isolated area includes arable land and pastures owned by the villagers. In addition to barring farmers from reaching their own land, the Wall has severed the village's historical, geographic connection to the Old City of Jerusalem.

The village outskirts overlook the colonies located on the road between Jerusalem and Jaffa, including Modiin and Maccabim, in addition to Route 443, a segregated colonial bypass road. Though there are no colonies in Beit Anan itself,<sup>25</sup> the villagers frequently confront and clash with passing Occupation army patrols.<sup>26</sup>

The incessant Zionist onslaught of land seizure is an integral component of the policies of expansion and isolation, and it continues to escalate, consuming more land and demolishing more homes. The villagers of Beit Anan confront this looming threat of dispossession by utilizing more of the village land area and rebuilding their demolished homes.

## Epilogue: The village today

The Annexation and Expansion Wall and regime of military checkpoints isolate Beit Anan from the Old City of Jerusalem as part of the larger concerted process of severing the villages of Jerusalem from their historical contiguity and economic heart. Beit Anan today is compelled to resort to Ramallah and the neighboring village of Biddu as alternative economic centers.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> "Beit Anan Village Profile," Applied Research Institute - Jerusalem (ARIJ), 2012: [Beit 'Anan Town Profile](#)

<sup>25</sup> See note 2.

<sup>26</sup> See note 7.

Agricultural activity in the village is now limited to small quantities of grape, fig, peach, and easy-to-grow crops, following the villagers' near-collective abandonment of agriculture, in favor of the pursuit of vocation-oriented education or labor in Israeli colonies. In addition, there has been a tendency to pursue higher education, after which public service is sought at Palestinian Authority ministries and institutions in Ramallah.

Moreover, owing to low population figures and to Beit Anan's peripheral location, it has proven difficult to establish commercial or social ventures in the village. One notable example is the Beit Anan Development and Charitable Society, which briefly operated between 1990 and 1999.<sup>27</sup>

The remittances and aid transferred by village expatriates have constituted somewhat of a financial lifeline for the people of Beit Anan. This income is reflected in current plans to construct a sports field for the village school and to establish the A'ed Society to assist university students in completing their education without incurring heavy financial burdens, in addition to holding annual graduation ceremonies. Expatriates have also invested in the maintenance and development of the village infrastructure.

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<sup>27</sup> According to Iyad Elias Rabih from Beit Anan, during a phone interview on May 20, 2020.