

Jaba

Introduction

Three Palestinian villages carry the name “Jaba.” The Jerusalem village of Jaba is seldom noted in literature, perhaps because the village does not appear to possess any prominent visible markers. Its character, nevertheless, is distinct, a combination of Bedouin and countryside features. There is another village named Jaba in the Jenin Governorate, known for its role in the 1936 Palestinian Great Revolt. Another village by the same name had once existed in Haifa but was uprooted in 1948.

Through this research, we seek to shed light on what has been little-mentioned in literature on the Jerusalem village of Jaba.



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Location and Area

Jaba is located 10 kilometers northeast of the Old City of occupied Jerusalem and covers about 13,400 donums. It is neighbored to the east by Anata and Ein Fara, to the west by al-Ram, to the south by Hizma¹ and to the north by Mikhmas.

In accordance with the Oslo Agreement, most Jaba land, over 12,000 donums, classified as Area C today, with the remaining 740 donums classified as Area B² and home to most of the population.

Origin and History

The name of the village derives from its geographic features, as most studies agree that the name “Jaba” derives from a Semitic root signifying “hill.”³ The village is dated to the Canaanite era, and the Crusaders referred to it by its present-day name.

Population

Jaba is believed to have been a Canaanite city, built towards the end of the Middle Stone Age around 3000 B.C.⁴ It is regarded today as a relatively small village. According to Palestinian historian Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh, 229 people lived in the village in 1922. In 1945 the number reached 350 people, and 1961 statistics indicate the village population to have been 415.⁵ Jaba today is home to about 4,000 people.⁶

The villagers belong to two clans, from which several families branch out:

The Tawam clan includes the Nassar, Canaan and Yousef families.⁷

The Hamayel clan includes the Besharat (the largest family), Salim and A'kkush families.

¹ Al-Dabagh, Mostafa Murad, *Biladuna Filastin (Our Homeland, Palestine)*, available online on *Palestine Remembered*. [جيم قضاء القدس - جيم قضاء القدس](#)

² “Jaba Village Profile”, Applied Research Institute - Jerusalem (ARIJ), 2012. [جيم يشمل التجمع البدوي \(جيم قرية دليل\)](#)

³ Abu Khdeir, Naser al-Din, “The Names of the Villages of Jerusalem: A Linguistics and Semantic Study”, Association of Arab Universities Journal for Arts. Published on Bab el-Wad, December 6, 2016. <http://www.babelwad.com/ar/jerusalem-villages-names>

⁴ Sharab, Muhammad Hassan, *Mu'jan Buldan Filastin (Dictionary of Palestinian Towns and Villages)*. (Amman: al-Ahlia for Publication and Distribution, 1996), 247.

⁵ See note 3.

⁶ According to information provided by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017, [النتائج الأولية للتعديد العام للسكان والمساكن والمنشآت](#)

⁷ According to an interview with mayor and former head of Jaba Village Council Abd al-Karim Muhammad Besharat (born 1953), conducted on December 16, 2019.

Social and Economic Context

The village community resided in *hoash*⁸ arrangements, separated by narrow alleyways leading to small courtyards, which were lined with the entrances of the adjacent homes. Each family lived in a separate *hoash*, containing a house for each member of the family, with a common entrance and doors leading to a spacious courtyard at the end of which is an alleyway to the street. Such a courtyard was called “al-sira.”⁹

Economically, the residents of the village depended on herding livestock and on cultivating their lands on the Jaba plain in the east of the village. Owing to the lack of water (there are no springs in the village), farming activity in Jaba depended mostly on rainfed crops like wheat, barley, lentils, beans and Palestine vetch (used as cow fodder) in winter. In summer, they cultivated chickpea, sesame and white corn. Like other Jerusalem village farmers, they subsisted on the crops that they grew.¹⁰

Jaba began to adopt fruit and vegetable cultivation after 1948 when some families sought refuge there after being expelled from their villages, including Khirbat al-Lawz and al-Haditha (especially the Mighmas family), and introduced crops like okra and tomato.¹¹

Jaba contains several wells, which were the heart of social life in the village, where the women congregated when fetching water for their households. The wells were usually associated with the families (clans) that had dug them. Most prominent among them is the well dug by the Besharat family.

During the 1950s and the years that followed, many Jaba villagers emigrated to the United States in search of work. Philadelphia alone, for instance, is home to 1,500 Jaba natives and descendants.¹²

Most of those waves of emigration, however, took place in the wake of the 1967 War, that is, after the occupation of the village. Many emigrated, and most of them settled in Jordan. According to

⁸ Hoash (plural ahwash): A traditional residential arrangement whereby a group of homes, usually belonging to the same extended family, are built in proximity to one another on a shared plot of land. Hoash may also mean “courtyard.”

⁹ Besharat, Rasim Shaaban, *Jaba al-Ard wa al-Insan (Jaba: Land and People)*. (Jerusalem: al-Bayan al-Haditha Printers, 2004), 129.

¹⁰ See note 7.

¹¹ See note 9.

¹² See note 7.

oral history, the largest Jaba community lives outside of the village itself, mostly in Jordan, followed by the United States, Nicaragua and Brazil.¹³

In terms of cultural heritage, Jaba is associated with its famed son Muhareb al-Thib, who is ingrained in the collective memory and identity of Jaba and of every Palestinian familiar with cultural heritage and the art of *zajal* (strophic Arabic poetry recited in colloquial language). Muharib al-Thib (1914–1995) was the son of Mustafa Nassar, a well-known tribal judge in Palestine. Al-Thib had a penchant for composing poetry at a young age and was proficient at playing the *rababa*. He was deeply affected by the death and burial of four of his brothers abroad. This experience fostered in al-Thib a strong resentment against *ghorba* (a sense of alienation and estrangement while living in a foreign land, especially in the West). This pushed him to compose and recite poetry deploring *ghorba* and calling on the estranged to come back to the homeland.¹⁴

Education

As in many other villages, children learned Arabic, mathematics and religion in *kuttab*s during the late-Ottoman era and the beginning of British colonial rule. The establishment of the Beit Hanina Middle School (later transformed into Dar al-Mualimin teachers' college) had a great impact on the development of Jaba and other neighboring villages. The school was the nearest to the village, albeit six kilometers away, and Jaba students began attending it in the 1940s. They continued to do so until two schools, one for girls and another for boys, were opened in Jaba in the early 1950s.¹⁵ Ismail al-Sheikh from the village of Abasiya was the first teacher to be appointed to the school by the Ministry of Education.¹⁶

Today, there are three schools administered the Palestinian Ministry of Education in the village: Jaba Primary School for Girls and Boys, Jaba Highschool for Girls, and Jaba Highschool for Boys.¹⁷ Some students attend schools in neighboring villages to continue their education, especially in Ramallah, where boys attend al-Umma Highschool, and girls attend al-Ram Highschool.

¹³ See note 9.

¹⁴ Mawsu'at 'Ulamaa Filastin wa A'yaniha (Encyclopedia of Palestinian Scholars and Notables), Part 3, page 355. Prepared and authored by a group of scholars and available at [موسوعة علماء فلسطين وأعيانها](#)

¹⁵ See note 1.

¹⁶ See note 9.

¹⁷ See note 2.

Landmarks

Jaba contains many ancient archaeological landmarks and *khirbahs* (ancient ruins), including:

Khirbat al-Jai: located two kilometers east of the village, it contains remnants of house foundations as well as some **caves** and **cisterns**. Nearby and to the east of al-Jai, lies **Khirbat al-Tinat**.¹⁸ **Khirbat al-Khudeiriyah** lies one kilometer northeast of the village near **al-Maysa Spring**. Further east, in the old village, is **Khirbat al-Saada**, which contains caves and traces of ruined foundations. In addition, three kilometers east of the village is **Khirbat al-Rumiya**, which the people of Jaba refer to as “Tawabin al-Rumiya.”¹⁹

There are also some old houses located in the peripheries of the village, in a 120 donum area regarded as the **old village**. There is an **old cemetery** there, in which, one village elder states, he has never seen anyone buried.

The village has another **cemetery**, which is divided into an eastern, walled and gated side, and a western, open side that is more commonly used.

Prominent among the old houses in the village is one belonging to the Tawam family, which was recently renovated and used as the **headquarters of the Palestinian Youth Association for Leadership and Rights Activation (PYALARA)**.²⁰

Consisting of 10 domed rooms, the first and largest floor among the old village houses was built by Abd al-Hafith Tawam, then mayor of Jaba and a feudal nobleman. His cousin Badran built the second floor many years later. The house is adjacent, on its western side, to a Roman-era tower. From the eastern side, it overlooks a spacious courtyard that overlooks the Jaba Plain. Today, Highway 60 separates the building from the Jaba Plain, which was seized by the Occupation authorities. The highway is a hazard to the people of the village as they cross it to

¹⁸ See note 9.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Riwaq Center for Architectural Conservation, in collaboration with al- Sharq Center, al-Raqess Theater and the Jerusalem District Electricity Company, conducted a workshop for the recycling of waste produced by the electricity company to manufacture seats for public spaces in Jaba's old village. The workshop targeted architecture and design students as part of a project titled "Lifeline: Reviving the Jerusalem Countryside." The aim of the project was to raise awareness about the importance of recycling and 15 potential uses for it. Nine volunteers participated in the three-day workshop.

and from the village and plain. It is currently being expanded for the benefit of the colonists as will be detailed below.²¹

Among Jaba's religious landmarks is the **Shrine of al-Nabi Yaqoub (Prophet Jacob)** in the old village, near the PYALARA headquarters. The oldest mosque in the village, **al-Atqiyaa Mosque** was built on the shrine's premises. The two other mosques in the village are the **Zeid bin al-Hairtha** and **Othman bin Affan Mosques** located on the southwestern edge of the village.

History of Resistance

During the 1930s and 1940s, Jaba fought British colonial rule and the Zionist movement. Among the most famous events that took place during the 1936 Palestinian Great Revolt was when the British authorities confiscated the official seal of the village mayor, Abd al-Rahman Abd al-Fattah Yousef, claiming he had assisted the rebels.²²

During the Revolt, the village was a haven for resistance fighters. For example, Ahmad Issawi, a comrade of Abd al-Qadi al-Husseini, took refuge in the home of Abd al-Karim Besharat's father to evade capture by the British authorities. Oral history notes that many Jaba natives fought in the Revolt, especially in light of the village's proximity to Mikhmas, home of a faction leader named Yehya Alyan.²³ Among the people of Jaba who fought in the Revolt were Ahmad Abd al-Aziz Besharat and Mohamad Abd al-Fattah Yousef, who fought in the Battle of al-Birah in 1938.²⁴

Towards the end of British colonial rule, some notable incidents took place in Jaba, including the British arrest of Mohamad Abd al-Qadir, a resistance fighter they had caught in the possession of a rifle. The British sentenced Abd al-Qadir to death, but he managed to escape imprisonment in Ramallah and hid at his friend's house in Jaba.²⁵

²¹ Aslan, Hiba "Muassasat Riwaq Tuhyi al-Mabani al-Qadima wa Tun'ish al-Turath al-Maqdisi" ("Riwaq Center Revives Old Buildings and Jerusalem's Heritage"). Al-Jazeera, November 28, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2tegX5>

²² See note 9, 38.

²³ See note 7.

²⁴ See note 9, 40.

²⁵ Ibid.

Jaba and the Nakba

The Zionist militias did not occupy Jaba during the Nakba in 1948, and the village came under Jordanian rule. Many of Jaba's men fought in the 1948 battles, most renowned among them, Mohammad Abd al-Karim Besharat, a relative of Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini who fought in the Battle of Bab al-Wad.²⁶

The village was occupied during **the war of 1967**, and its people remained on their land and welcomed displaced Palestinians from neighboring villages. The Jordanian army had set up a military camp between Jaba and al-Ram, and Jordanian soldiers resided in Jaba due to its proximity to the camp. The oral accounts of the village recall a Jordanian army soldier called Abu Adnan, who was among those martyred in the 1967 War.²⁷

During the first and second Intifadas, like the rest of the neighboring villages and area, Jaba endured searches, night raids and arrests. Among the village martyrs was Mahmoud Ghalib Hamayel, whom the Israeli occupation forces shot and killed in the center of Ramallah in 1994 as he crossed the street.²⁸ Jad Izzat Hamayel was the first martyr to fall during the 2001 Israeli invasion of Ramallah in the Second Intifada. He was killed in March in front of the Rukab Ice Cream store in Ramallah.²⁹

Colonization

The Annexation and Expansion Wall is one of the stark marks of colonization in Jaba. Its construction began in 2004, and it now cuts through about two kilometers of Jaba and swallows 322 donums of land, much of it agricultural. The Wall prevents farmers from reaching their own fields, located on the other side and inaccessible without a permit issued by the Israeli Liaison and Coordination Office.³⁰

The Wall also isolates the village from the Old City and the rest of occupied Jerusalem. The Old City was once Jaba's commercial and economic hub and the villagers' main destination for medical and educational services. It was where the village's commercial transactions were made. When the people of Jaba referred to being in the city, they meant the Old City of

²⁶ Ibid, 41.

²⁷ See note 7.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See note 9, 114.

³⁰ See note 2.

Jerusalem. The Wall, however, has severed Jaba's geographic contiguity with urban Jerusalem and has attached it to another city instead: Ramallah, which has now become its nearest hub.

Like many villages, Jaba has endured its share of land seizures that serve Israeli colonial interests, including the construction of colonies on village land and in surrounding areas. The Occupation authorities have seized over 1,600 donums from the village to build the colony of Geva Binyamin (Adam), built in 1984 on the northeastern side of the village, as well as the adjacent Sha'ar Binyamin colony, built in 1991³¹ as an industrial colony in which many of the village youths seek work today. The colonial road known as Highway 60, set up in the mid-1950s, severed the village's links so as to connect the colonies that were built on Jaba land with the Gush Etzion colony. In addition, Route 437, a bypass road used by the colonies, connects Highway 60 with Highway 1.³²

Directly following the occupation of the village in 1967, the Occupation authorities grabbed about 250 donums from Jaba and al-Ram to build a military base exactly where the Jordanian military base had been constructed in the early 1950s (west of Jaba).³³

In 2009, the Occupation authorities established the Jaba Military Checkpoint on about three donums of village land, on the way to al-Ram and 500 meters away from the Jaba roundabout. It is not a permanent checkpoint in the sense that it is not always manned by Occupation soldiers. When it is manned, however, and Palestinians are stopped there for inspection, it causes massive traffic jams to and from Ramallah.³⁴ The soldiers often man the checkpoint and stop Palestinian vehicles so as to decrease congestion at the Jaba roundabout during rush hours, thereby easing the way for settlers commuting from central and northern West Bank colonies towards Jerusalem.³⁵

³¹ See note 6.

³² Al-Halaibeh, Hamza "Mashru' Taqato' Duwar Jaba...Ma Bayn al-Huloul al-Mururiya al-Handasiyyah wa al-Khitat al-Istitaniya" ("The Jaba Junction Roundabout: Between Traffic Engineering Solutions and Colonialist Schemes"). Al-Quds newspaper, published on May 19, 2018. <http://www.alquds.com/articles/1526720082906008600/>

³³ See note 7.

³⁴ See note 2.

³⁵ See note 32.

Epilogue: The village today

The policies of land seizure have led to the decimation of agriculture in Jaba, now reduced to limited areas in which corn and olives are grown.³⁶ The Occupation authorities continue to enforce their policies of erasure and control of land and people. Early in 2019, about 50 olive trees were uprooted, retaining walls were demolished and vast areas of land were bulldozed, under the pretext that they were classified as Area C.³⁷ That was not the first time, nor will it be the last, that the people of Jaba endure such colonialist policies and practices.

Economically, and as a result of the isolation of Jaba and theft of its lands, the villagers have ceased working the land and have tended to work in neighboring colonies. Most of the people in Jaba today, about 75%, do construction labor in the colonies, especially in the Sha'ar Binyamin industrial colony, while relatively few are employed in Ramallah. Due to so many of the residents working in the colonies, there are no large-scale economic or social projects in the village, increasing Jaba's reliance on Ramallah as a commercial and service hub.

³⁶ See note 9, 94.

³⁷ "Iqtala' Ashjar Zaytun bi Qaryat Jaba fi al-Quds" ("Uprooting Olive Trees in Jaba Village in Jerusalem"), Ultra-Filastin, published January 22, 2019, <https://bit.ly/384ozU2>