

Qatanna

Introduction

The people of Qatanna sing a song about their village, which translates as follows:

*A valley where the birds recite a song,
For whose magic the passionate yearn,
And whose notes resemble Paradise,
Dappled shade, fresh fruits, running water,
Wadi Qatanna still glistens incandescently,
This pure earth enriched with the free-born,
You still fly the revolutionary banner,
Calling the revolutionaries to take refuge.¹*



¹ The lyric is written by Ismail Ali al-Hayek Houshiyeh (Abu Anwar), a prominent figure in Qatanna. Born in 1939, he is a retired school principal and is familiar with the history of the village and its folk stories. The lyric was relayed by him in an interview conducted on January 15, 2020.
(Translated by Shayma Nader)

Location and Area

The village of Qatanna is located 18 km northwest of Jerusalem. It is bordered from the north by Beit Anan, south by Abu Ghosh, east by al-Qubeiba and Beit Surik, and west by Beit Thol and Nataf (both uprooted in 1948).

Its original land area is approximately 9,400 donums.² After the Oslo Agreement, 58% of the land of Qatanna was classified as Area C and 42% as Area B, with part of the village area falling within the lands occupied in 1948.³

Origin and History

Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh notes in his book *biladuna Filastin (Our Homeland, Palestine)* that the origin of the name may be from the Semitic root *qatana*, meaning “to be or become small,”⁴ a definition echoed by Nasir al-Din Abu Khdeir in his study *Names of the Villages of Jerusalem*. However, the villagers themselves recount another narrative, associating the name of the village with Wadi al-Qatt, the valley that runs through its land and which is often referred to as Wadi Qatanna. So, it is said that the name of the village derived from *Qatt* and later became *Qatanna*, meaning “we live in Wadi al-Qatt.”⁵ Nasir al-Din Abu Khdeir favors a different explanation, suggesting that the name may be related to two sites in Syria carrying the same name, but with different pronunciations and spellings.⁶

Population

Qatanna is one of the largest villages of northwest Jerusalem in terms of population size, being home to some 12,000 Palestinians.⁷

The history of the present village dates back more than 400 years, when Hassan Ali Nofal, the village's founder, immigrated from Marda in the Nablus District and settled in Wadi al-Qatt. It is said that Hasan Ali Nofal, a descendant of Hussein bin Fatima, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad,⁸ fathered four children, from whom the four families of the village descended: Shamasneh, Taha, al-Faqih and Houshiyah.⁹

Social and Economic Context

Historically, economic activity in Qatanna relied on agriculture, especially the cultivation of olives, figs and grapes. Irrigation of crops was dependent on natural springs in the village,

² Qatanna page on the Palestine Remembered website, [Qatanaa - القدس - فلسطين في الذاكرة](#)

³ Qatanna Guide, Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ), www.arij.org, [قطة بلدة دليل](#)

⁴ Mustafa Murad Al-Dabbagh, *biladuna Filastin (Palestine Our Homeland)*

⁵ Taken from an overview of the village's history and folk stories by Ismail Ali al-Hayek Houshiyeh (Abu Anwar), December 7, 2018.

⁶ Nasir al-Din Abu Khudair, *Names of Jerusalem Villages: A Semantic Linguistic Study*, in *Journal of the Association of Arab Universities for Literature*. Available on the Bab El-Wad website on December 6, 2012.

<http://www.babelwad.com/en/jerusalem-villages-names>

⁷ According to information provided by the Qatanna Municipality, in a meeting with its staff on April 17, 2018.

⁸ The village residents say that the tomb of Hassan is beneath the old village mosque, but there is no confirmed evidence of this.

⁹ According to information provided by the Qatanna Municipality, in a meeting with its staff on April 17, 2018.

including al-Samra, al-Nimr and al-Namus.¹⁰ The villagers eventually dug wells by their homes for personal use.

Like many Palestinians in northwest Jerusalem, the people of Qatanna maintained fertile agricultural land in the village of Khirbat al-Bouira in the Ramleh district, which they regard as a lowland sister village to their own mountain village. They would spend the summer there cultivating grains and legumes such as wheat, corn, lentils, chickpeas, currants and beans, while the mountainous Qatanna area was used for growing crops better suited to higher altitudes.

In 1945, the estimated population of Khirbat al-Bouira was 190 Palestinians.¹¹ They would ultimately be displaced in 1948 and mostly head for Qatanna, and thus, some families in Qatanna hold UNRWA refugee cards. After depriving the people of their land in al-Bouira, the Occupation army used it as a military training ground.

In the middle of Qatanna lies the old center from which the village originated. The village cemetery and its old mosque are located there, while the rest of the village's landmarks have disappeared as a result of urban expansion.

Landmarks

The village includes several natural and religious landmarks:

Shrines

Throughout the village, one will encounter several shrines or tombs (*maqamat*) dedicated to saints or martyred fighters who were killed in defense of Palestine.¹²

The Maqam of Sheikh Ramadan:¹³ a shrine without a tomb, located in the village cemetery.

The Maqam of Sheikh Abd al-Mahdi:¹⁴ a shrine dedicated to a leader of the 1936 Revolt, a figure remembered by the older generation. He was martyred in Abu Ghosh and buried in Qatanna.

The Maqam of Sheikh Abdullah: this shrine consists of an oak tree, as noted by Palestinian ethnographer Taufik Canaan,¹⁵ similar to the Maqam of Sayyed Ali near the spring in the old center, which also consists of an oak tree.¹⁶

The Maqam of Sheikh Abu Ghazi: mentioned by one of the village elders.

These shrines were all honored by the villagers, often visited by the women, who lit oil lamps and asked for blessings.

¹⁰ Large areas of Qattana were occupied during the Nakba in 1948, including, for example, the lands surrounding Ein al-Namus spring, which are now difficult for people to reach due to the Annexation and Expansion Wall.

¹¹ Qatanna Municipality website, accessed on 18 July 2018, [بلدة قطننة - موقع بلدية قطننة](#)

¹² According to information provided by the Qatanna Municipality, in a meeting with its staff on April 17, 2018.

¹³ Taufik Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, (London: 1927), 22.

¹⁴ Taufik Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, (London: 1927), 303.

¹⁵ Taufik Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, (London: 1927), 70.

¹⁶ According to information provided by Ali al-Hayek Houshiyeh (Abu Anwar), in an interview conducted on January 15, 2020.

Ruins

There are a number of archaeological ruins (*khirbas*) in Qatanna that contain some ancient relics and cisterns, such as Khirbat Beit Shabab, Khirbat Umm al-Lahm and Khirbat al-Kfeira. The latter was noted by Taufik Canaan in his survey of destroyed shrines as a likely site of a saint's tomb.¹⁷

There are also several mosques in the village, most notably the old village mosque, Abu Dhar al-Ghafari Mosque, located in the western part of the old center, in addition to Hamza bin Abd al-Muttalib and al-Kfeira mosques.¹⁸

Wadi al-Qatt

This valley is one of the main natural features of the area, around which the village was founded by Hasan Ali Nofal, and from which, according to local accounts, it derives its name. What also distinguishes it is the abundance of springs, both permanent and seasonal, including al-Bayara, Khirbat Ali al-Hajj (or Khirbat Nataf), al-Namus, al-Balad, al-Samra, and al-Nimr springs.

History of Resistance

It is said that the late Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini, commander of al-Jihad al-Muqaddas (Army of the Holy War), frequented the valley of Qatanna during the 1936 Revolt and camped in one of its caves to evade British occupation forces. Five of his guards and companions were from Qatanna: Ahmad Abd al-Nur Taha, Muhammad Hassan Muhsin Shamasneh, Muhammad Musa al-Hayek Houshiyya, Muhammad Issa Shabab Shamasneh and Ismail Ahmad Ismail Taha.¹⁹

On July 17, 1948, during the Nakba, Khirbat Umm al-Lahim in Qatanna witnessed a battle between Jordanian soldiers and Palestinian resistance fighters on one side, and Zionist forces on the other. The Zionists advanced from Maale HaHamisha colony (established in 1938), with the aim of occupying Qatanna and controlling the Ramallah–Latrun road. However, the Palestinian fighters, supported by Jordanian soldiers, confronted the attacking forces and forced them to withdraw, killing several Zionist combatants in the process. The people of Qatanna also participated in the battle for the nearby village of Beit Surik during the 1948 war.²⁰

With the demarcation of the so-called Armistice line in 1949, large swathes of Qatanna fell under Israeli occupation, while the remaining land (including the center of the village) came under Jordanian rule. According to the Armistice Agreement, Qatanna became a border

¹⁷ Taufik Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, (London: 1927), 10.

¹⁸ According to information provided by Ali al-Hayek Houshiyyeh (Abu Anwar), in an interview conducted on January 15, 2020.

¹⁹ According to information provided by Ali al-Hayek Houshiyyeh (Abu Anwar), in an interview conducted on July 12, 2018.

²⁰ Please refer to the material on Beit Surik for more information.

village, located between the nascent occupying state and the rest of Palestine under Jordanian rule, and so it remained until the occupation of the rest of the village in 1967. During the 1967 war, many Qatanna villagers took refuge in nearby caves or in other villages around Jerusalem, and they returned at the end of the war.

More recently, during the Jerusalem uprising that broke out in 2015, Qatanna was widely reported on in the media following the killing of five of its young men (all of them friends) during clashes and resistance action that they engaged in against Occupation forces. Among these actions was a stabbing operation carried out by Ahmad Taha on Route 443 (colonial bypass road) near Modiin colony, which resulted in the killing of one settler and the injury of another.

Colonization

The Occupation authorities confiscated 36 donums of an area called Khirbat Beit Shabab in Qatanna for construction within Har Adar colony,²¹ established in 1986 and built mostly on land in the village of Biddu. Har Adar colony can be seen clearly from the nearby homes of Qatanna, which are separated from the colony by the Annexation and Expansion Wall.

Maale HaHamisha colony, which was established in 1938, is built on a part of Qatanna in an area called Karm Hammad.²² From that area, it is possible to see the village of Abu Ghosh, located west of occupied Jerusalem, as well as the famous Yarim hotel in the same colony. The hotel was formerly known as Maale HaHamisha and was famous for hosting Palestinian and Israeli occupation negotiation sessions, which led to the signing of the Oslo Agreement.

²¹ Qatanna Guide, ARIJ Applied Research Institute, www.arij.org [قطة بلدة دليل](#)

²² Saleh Housheyeh, President of the Qatanna Association for Development and Development, in a telephone interview conducted on December 12, 2020.



Observing the landscape, one grasps the proximity of these Palestinian villages and landmarks to one another. It is striking that Qatanna is only a few kilometers away from Abu Ghosh, but that in order to reach Abu Ghosh, one must travel on Highway 1, in the direction of Tel Aviv. Meanwhile, in order to reach Qatanna, one must first go to Ramallah and traverse the maze of Occupation military checkpoints and tunnels that have been built beneath the colonial bypass roads. Two neighboring villages, but each lives a different reality due to colonial policies, making travel between them an entirely different experience for their respective residents.

The Annexation and Expansion Wall

The Annexation and Expansion Wall extends for 3km over the southwestern side of Qatanna.²³ Work on the Wall was completed in 2007, and since then, the village has been cut off from its natural urban links to occupied Jerusalem. Qatanna was annexed to another city, Ramallah, to which it is connected through a network of roads and tunnels. The Wall also separates the village from much of its own land. About 321 dunums have been isolated in the areas located on the “Israeli side” of Wall.

The areas near the Wall often witness confrontations between the village youth and Occupation forces.

²³ Qatanna guide, ARIJ Applied Research Institute, www.arij.org [قطنة بلدة دليل](#)

Epilogue

As with many villages in northwestern occupied Jerusalem, colonial policies have separated the village of Qatanna from its historical and geographical roots in the occupied city of Jerusalem. These policies have led to its annexation to the city of Ramallah, which, along with the neighboring village of Biddu, is the main service hub for the people of Qatanna today. The villagers now either work in Ramallah or in the Zionist colonies adjacent to the village, while a small portion of the village's residents continue to work in agriculture on a small scale.²⁴

Several associations and local initiatives have sprung up in the village, such as the Qatanna Association for Development, established in 2008 as a charitable entity that works to establish and develop agricultural projects. Additionally, there is the Qatanna Sports Club, which works with youth and organizes sporting events.²⁵

²⁴ Saleh Hosheyeh, President of the Qatanna Association for Development and Development in a telephone interview conducted on December 12, 2020

²⁵ Ibid.