

# Biddu

## Introduction

The urban development of Biddu has been spurred by its location at the center of a cluster of seven villages located northwest of occupied Jerusalem and isolated by the Annexation and Expansion Wall: Beit Duqqu, Beit Surik, Beit Ikksa, Qatanna, al-Qbeibeh, Beit Anan and Beit Ijza. Given its central setting, Biddu is home to various public services, including banks, clinics, education centers, shops, in addition to a Palestinian police headquarters, serving the villages northwest of Jerusalem.



## Location and Area

Biddu lies nine kilometers northwest of Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> It is bordered from the east by Beit Ikksa, from the west by al-Qbeibeh, from the north by Beit Ijza, and from the south by Beit Surik. According to Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh, as noted in his book *Our Homeland, Palestine*,<sup>2</sup> the

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<sup>1</sup> "Biddu," on *Palestine Remembered*. [http://www.palestineremembered.com/GeoPoints/Biddu\\_904/ar/index.html](http://www.palestineremembered.com/GeoPoints/Biddu_904/ar/index.html)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

original size of the village is estimated at 5,392 donums, though the residents believe it is slightly larger, reaching 5,442 donums.

## Origin and History

It is believed that the history of Biddu dates to the Roman era. The name “Biddu” is associated with the proliferation of *Budoud*, meaning “olive presses.” Today, only a few olive presses remain, most of the rest having been lost to urban expansion. Naser al-Din Abu Khdeir suggests the origin of the name “Biddu” may be derived from two words: “Beit Dun” or “Adun” meaning “house of the lord/master,” or from “Beit Dod,” meaning “place of the loved one” or “place of the [olive] press.”

## Population

Biddu is inhabited by nearly 9,000 Palestinians today.<sup>3</sup> The families branch out from ten clans, namely: Badwan, Mansour and Abu Eid. These three clans were called al-Batoush and descend from one ancestor. According to oral history, their lineage can be traced to the Arab al-Howeitah tribe from Transjordan. The other clans are Samara, al-Sheikh and al-Dali, who were the first to inhabit the village; Ayyash, originally from al-Hadithah; Hmeidan and Saadeh; and al-Khdour clan, who trace their origins to Jabalia in Gaza.

## Social and Economic Context

Historically, Biddu is associated with the village of Salbit in al-Ramla district, which was uprooted in 1948. Villagers say that Salbit is the sister village of Biddu, and that they owned lands in both, spending summer in mountainous Biddu and winter in low-lying Salbit. They also maintain that they are originally from Salbit, and that they claimed lands in Biddu after Salah al-Din recaptured Jerusalem from the Crusaders.<sup>4</sup>

In his book, *All That Remains*, Walid Khalidi notes: “Salbit stood on a hill of soft limestone on the western edge of Jerusalem-Hebron Mountains. Three kilometers northwest of the village there was a secondary road which linked Salbit to al-Ramla – Jerusalem highway. Dirt roads also connected it to adjacent villages. Its houses, made of mud and stone, were groups around the village center, where the mosque, marketplace, and elementary school were located. The school, built in 1947, had an enrollment of forty-five students. All of the residents of Salbit were Muslims. The quality of the grass in the regions enabled them to raise livestock; they also worked in agriculture, growing mainly rainfed grains. In 1944/45 a total of 4,066 dunums were

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<sup>3</sup> According to information provided by Salim Abu Eid, Mayor of Biddu, in an interview on April 29, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

allocated to cereals; 16 dunums were irrigated or used for orchards. The village obtained its drinking water from a well. The kibbutz of Sha'alvim was established in 1951 on village lands.”<sup>5</sup>

As for Biddu, farmers relied mainly on rainfed crops. Therefore, the change of the seasons affected their agricultural practices, livelihoods and social life, amid a continual effort to achieve food self-sufficiency. For the summer, they cultivated peaches, grapes and tomatoes, among other crops; and in winter, they moved to Salbit to cultivate wheat and barley. People also dried summer fruits and vegetables to preserve them for the winter. A flat area located to the east, facing the village’s entrance was considered a food basket for Biddu. Shared with the residents of al-Jib, the land was planted with various types of crops until the Occupation confiscated it and prevented people from farming there. In addition to agriculture and livestock, some people worked in quarries in the summer in an area known as Jabal al-Sheikh.<sup>6</sup>

Due to water scarcity — as there are no natural springs in the village — the villagers of Biddu relied on rainfed agriculture. They dug and built wells, with each family owning one bearing its name. When rain was scarce, people resorted to the spring in Beit Surik for irrigation, or to one in Beit Ijza for household consumption.

Each family (a group of families in some cases) owned a *taboon* (clay oven) for making bread, until the first bakery opened in the village between the 1950s and 60s. The bakery was located in an old cave and was called Furn al-Balad (the town oven). Another bakery opened subsequently and was named after a man called Shukri Jumaa.<sup>7</sup>

The center of the village shifted from the residential area of Biddu to an area planted with vineyards and figs called al-Ghars. The new center, which for a long time had been agricultural land protected from urban expansion, is now called Duwwar al-Shuhada (martyrs square). In the 1960s, it was known as al-Muthalath (the triangle), that is, a junction.

## Education

In the past, the children of Biddu attended an elementary school (demolished in 1948) in the Radar area, between their village and Beit Surik. They also attended a school that was shared amongst Biddu, al-Qbeibeh and other neighboring villages, which was called al-Qbeibeh Elementary Union. In 1960, under Jordanian rule, the King Ghazi school was founded and named after king Hussein Bin Abdullah’s cousin. This school included elementary and secondary

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<sup>5</sup> Walid Khaldi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992), 410.

<sup>6</sup> According to information provided by Ahmad Yousef Badwan (b. 1950) from Biddu, in an interview on February 23, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

grades.<sup>8</sup> After the Nakba, the UNRWA opened a primary school for girls, which in 1967, included 182 female students taught by six teachers, and which occasionally received boys as well.<sup>9</sup>

Today, there are three schools for boys in Biddu under the administration of the Palestinian Authority, namely, King Ghazi High School, Biddu Elementary School for Boys, and Biddu Secondary School. There is one UNRWA primary school attended by girls (mentioned above), after which students attend the Umayyad High School in Beit Ijza to continue their education. Lastly, there is one co-ed private primary school called Ahbab al-Rahman.

## Landmarks

In addition to the abandoned old center and its deserted ruins, the village is home to several landmarks, including shrines attributed to holy saints revered by the community, such as Maqam al-Hawis<sup>10</sup> and Maqam al-Talli, the latter named after a righteous man called Ali al-Tallal from al-Khdour family. The shrine is located by the main mosque of the village, Abdullah bin Jabir mosque, near the Khdour and Saadeh families' cemetery called al-Talleh. Additionally, there is Maqam Abu al-Oun, demolished in 1948<sup>11</sup> and noted by historian Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh as having been located in the village center and used as a mosque, in addition to being renovated in 1934.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, there is Maqam al-Sheikh Hamdallah, dedicated to a pious man from al-Sheikh family. It is located on the road to Beit Ikhsa and is surrounded by a low circular fence called al-Huweitah.<sup>13</sup> The shrine is adjacent to the old cemetery (used by all the village clans), where the martyrs of the Jordanian army who fell in the 1948 and 1967 wars were buried.

In addition to the Muslim shrines in Biddu, there is also the Irdjal al-Arbaeen Cave located at the edge of the village. It is also called Hawakir al-jameh (the mosque's backyard). Palestinian ethnographer Taufik Canaan described the cave: "Six steps lead down to Mgharit Irdjal al-Arbaeen of Biddu. The cave is small, somewhat round, with a low roof. During the winter months part of it is full of water. In front of this cave two oaks, an olive and a terebinth grow one beside the other. In their shade the *khatib* (religious head of the village) teaches the children."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh, *Our Homeland, Palestine*. [بدو، محافظة القدس - بلادنا فلسطين، صفحة 97- فلسطين في الذاكرة](#)

<sup>10</sup> There is currently a kindergarten called "Dar al-Iman" at the shrine according to information provided by Ahmad Yousef Badwan (b. 1950) from Biddu, in an interview on February 23, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Canaan, Taufik, *Mohammedan saints and sanctuaries in Palestine*, (London, 1927), 11.

<sup>12</sup> According to information provided by Ahmad Yousef Badwan (b. 1950) from Biddu, in an interview on February 23, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Canaan, Taufik, *Mohammedan saints and sanctuaries in Palestine*, (London, 1927), 55.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 58.

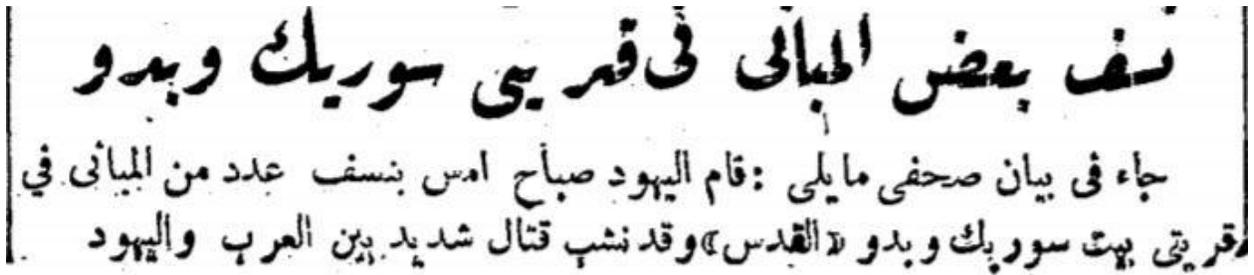
According to oral accounts, the trees surrounding the cave were cut down in 1948 by the Arab Salvation Army when it was stationed in Biddu and had a need for wood, leaving few trees in the process. Currently, there is a school for girls in the vicinity of the cave, an UNRWA clinic and a cemetery.<sup>15</sup>

### Khirbahs (Ruins)

Because of its ancient history, there are many ruins in Biddu that contain tombs and cisterns, such as Khirbat Thiab east of the village, Khirbat Najem in the southwest, and an area known as *Mughur Badd Abu Muammar* near the village of Beit Ijza. In the northwest of the village there is also *Wad Abu Zarour* (Abu Zarour Valley), in which Old Testament-era ruins were found. The valley is now covered with olive groves and fig orchards.<sup>16</sup>

### History of Resistance

Due to its location, Biddu was at the heart of a long struggle over Jerusalem against the Zionist movement. The occupation of Biddu meant control over the northwestern side of the city, and the roads connecting it to Jaffa in the west and Ramallah in the north. The village survived the Nakba in 1948, but it was occupied in 1967, having been a Jordanian frontline. Its cemetery still holds the bodies of 22 Jordanian martyrs who fell in those wars. Biddu's history of resistance is embodied in the sacrifices of the Zahran family: Musa Zahran, a comrade of Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini, was martyred in 1948; his son Mohammad was martyred in 1967, and his grandson Zahran Ibrahim Zahran was martyred in 1998.<sup>17</sup>



Biddu's residents took part in the Battle of Beit Surik in January 1948.<sup>18</sup> In April of the same year, the village was attacked and demolished by the Zionist Palmach militia. Its residents were

<sup>15</sup> According to information provided by Ahmad Yousef Badwan (b. 1950) from Biddu, in an interview on February 23, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> A report published about Zahran Zahran can be viewed at [شاهد: تقرير عن عائلة الشهيد زهران زهران من بلدة بدو شمال غرب القدس](#)

<sup>18</sup> Abu Gharbieh, Bahjat. In the Midst of the Struggle: The Memoirs of Bahjat Abu Gharbieh, 1916-1949. Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1993.

displaced to nearby villages before eventually returning.<sup>19</sup> That same year, the Arab Salvation Army encamped in Biddu, in an area then known as al-Musanada and now called al-Ras, facing al-Shuhada square in the center of the village.<sup>20</sup>

Bahjat Abu Gharbieh, discussing the Battle of al-Qatamon (April – May 1948), notes that after the Zionist forces had taken control of Deir Samaan and al-Qatamon, Commander Ibrahim Abu Dayyeh sought reinforcements to carry out a counterattack on May 2. Although he was injured, he left Beit Safafa hospital and led the resistance fighters. Meanwhile, the Salvation Army's artillery shelled the western neighborhoods of Jerusalem from al-Nabi Samwil and the village of Biddu.<sup>21</sup>

In parallel, another battle took place around the strategically important Radar Mountain in Beit Surik, which overlooks the Jerusalem–Jaffa road and a section of the northwestern ring of Jerusalem. This location had prompted the British occupation forces to establish a radar station and a military camp. The mountain was named after the radar station, having been previously called Batn al-Sayyideh Mountain. The Jordanian army took control of the mountain in 1948, ending a chapter of the struggle in favor of the Arabs<sup>22</sup> and reclaiming this strategic location between Biddu and Abu Ghosh that overlooks the entire northwestern district of Jerusalem. Jordan would maintain control of the location until 1967 and the Israeli occupation of the area.

The 1948 battle began when a Zionist force occupied the mountain and invaded the area, taking control of Beit Iksa and Beit Surik, before marching on towards Biddu and reaching its outskirts. People from the nearby villages assembled and stopped the Zionist advance on the outskirts of Biddu on the night of April 27. By dawn the next day, the third Yarmouk regiment of the Arab Salvation Army, which had reached Biddu three days earlier, had organized its ranks and launched a counterattack on the enemy. This forced the Zionists to withdraw from the locations they had occupied, suffering great losses in the process, estimated at 185 dead and many wounded, in addition to the destruction of three armored vehicles. The Yarmouk regiment also seized some weapons and ammunition. After the end of the battle, al-Qbeibeh and Biddu residents headed for the battlefield to collect the bodies of Jordanian martyrs for burial in the Biddu cemetery.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Abu Gharbieh, Bahjat. *In the Midst of the Struggle: The Memoirs of Bahjat Abu Gharbieh, 1916-1949*. Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1993.

<sup>20</sup> According to information provided by Ahmad Yousef Badwan (b. 1950) from Biddu, in an interview on February 23, 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Abu Gharbieh, Bahjat. *In the Midst of the Struggle: The Memoirs of Bahjat Abu Gharbieh, 1916-1949*. Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1993.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Aref, Aref. *Al-Nakba: Nakbat Bayt Al-Maqdis Wal-Firdaws Al-Mafqud (The Catastrophe: The Catastrophe of Jerusalem and the Lost Paradise)*. Institute for Palestine Studies, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> According to information provided by Ahmad Yousef Badwan (b. 1950) from Biddu, in an interview on February 23, 2020.

The Radar Mountain battle resulted in the Arabs regaining control of the Jerusalem–Ramallah highway, preventing Zionist movement on it. The following month, in May 1948, the Zionists resumed their attacks from the ground and air. By June 1948, the Jordanian army had taken upon itself the task of defending the site.<sup>24</sup>

After the occupation of Biddu in the 1967 Naksa, its people sought refuge in nearby caves, particularly in the Hmoud cave outside Beit Ijza. They remained in the cave for two days, then in Beit Ijza for some time before returning to their village. Many would later go to Jordan and some would settle there.<sup>25</sup>

In harmony with the general Palestinian context and in response to the advancement of the Occupation's settler-colonial project, Biddu, like other villages in occupied Jerusalem, has taken part in popular resistance throughout the history of the struggle. In recent history, particularly since the second Intifada, and with the beginning of the construction of the Annexation and Expansion Wall, many protests and demonstrations against the Wall have been organized in the village. These protests often culminate with the Occupation forces attacking people, as happened on February 26, 2004, when Israeli occupation soldiers killed two Palestinian men during a demonstration against the construction of the Wall. Like all Palestinians across the country's towns and villages, the people of Biddu participated in the Jerusalem uprising, during which a woman from the village was martyred in 2015.

## Colonization

Colonization manifests in Biddu in two main forms: The Annexation and Expansion Wall and colonies.

### Annexation and Expansion Wall

The Annexation and Expansion Wall, whose construction began in 2004 and was concluded between 2007 and 2009, stretches for four kilometers over Biddu land. The Wall surrounds the village on three sides: northeast, southeast and southwest.<sup>26</sup>

Like all Palestinian villagers isolated from their agricultural lands by the Wall, people in Biddu require permits from the Occupation authorities to enter and care for their own land. Entry hours are restricted and delays in issuing permits are routine, affecting the crops and their quality.

As for colonies established on Biddu land, the Zionist authorities seized approximately 627 donums and annexed them to Har Adar colony (established in 1986), in addition to 186 donums for Giv'on HaHadasha colony, established in 1977 on a plot called khirbet al-Adas.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "Biddu during the battle in 1948," on Palestine Remembered, [بَيْدُو: بَيْدُو خِلالِ حَرْبِ 48 مَعْرَكَةِ الرَادَارِ - فِلِسْطِينِ فِي الذَّاكِرَةِ](#)

<sup>25</sup> According to information provided by Ahmad Yousef Badwan (b. 1950) from Biddu, in an interview on February 23, 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Biddu Village Guide, The Applied Research Institute (ARIJ), (Jerusalem: ARIJ, 2012). [المحتويات](#)

<sup>27</sup> According to information provided by Ahmad Yousef Badwan (b. 1950) from Biddu, in an interview on February 23, 2020.



## Epilogue

The settler-colonial reality imposed by the Annexation and Expansion Wall and the colonies has produced a state of fragmentation, exclusion and isolation. Biddu is not only excluded from Jerusalem's historically contiguous geography, but it has also lost its geographic connection to the surrounding villages. It has been attached to another city, Ramallah, and its connection to Jerusalem has been limited to a tunnel constructed under a colonial bypass road, Route 443 (built in 1988).

As a result of this reality, Biddu has acquired an important status among the villages of northwest Jerusalem that were similarly isolated by the Annexation and Expansion Wall. Alongside Ramallah, Biddu became a service hub, with bank branches (Bank of Palestine and Arab Bank), companies and shops. Economically, this has helped Biddu's residents open commercial enterprises in the village, in addition to Biddu becoming a transportation hub between its neighboring villages and Ramallah.

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