

RETHINKING NATIVENESS IN LATE OTTOMAN PALESTINE: DEMOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE ON THE EVE OF THE FIRST ALIYAH

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RESEARCH SUMMARY

This study re-examines the demographic balance of Palestine on the eve of the First Aliyah (1881), challenging the dominant narrative that Jews were recent European colonizers displacing an ancient, native Muslim population. Using the 1922 British Mandate census as a baseline, and carefully reconstructing the size and origins of Muslim migrant waves into Palestine during the 19th century, the analysis demonstrates that a substantial proportion of the Muslim population within the borders of Israel as defined by 1967 was the result of relatively recent immigration.

For the purposes of this analysis, “Native Muslims” are defined as the sedentary Muslim population of Palestine whose ancestral presence predates 1830. This definition excludes Bedouin tribes of Arabian Peninsula origin, as well as all subsequent migrant-origin groups—Egyptians, Algerians, Hauranis, Circassians/Chechens, Turks, Balkan muhacirs, Metawali, Maghrebis, and other minor streams—whose arrival after 1830 reshaped Palestine’s demographic profile.

HYPOTHESIS

If the Muslim population of 1922 within the pre-1967 borders is carefully adjusted to exclude the descendants of identifiable migrant streams (Egyptian, Algerian, Haurani, Circassian/Chechen, Turkish, Balkan, Metawali, Maghrebi, Levantine economic migrants, and

smaller waves), the number of genuinely native Muslim inhabitants contracts dramatically. When this reduced figure is projected backwards to 1881, the population of native Muslims was likely smaller than the established Jewish “Old Yishuv,” implying that Jews were not a late-coming colonial minority but one of the largest rooted communities in the land at the time.

METHODOLOGY IN BRIEF

1. Establish total Muslim population within 1967 borders in 1922 ($\approx 277,000$).
2. Reconstruct size and timing of major 19th-century Muslim migration waves, assigning midpoint years and applying a 1% net growth rate to project their numbers forward to 1922.
3. Deduct descendants of migrant-origin populations from the 1922 total, yielding the native Muslim base.
4. Back-project this native base at 1% growth to 1881.
5. Compare to the size of the Old Yishuv (25,000–27,000).

SUMMARY TABLE OF MIGRANT WAVES

Migration Wave	Approx. Arrival Period	Baseline Estimate	1922 Estimate	Notes
Bedouin (Negev)	Pre-1914	~72,900 (census estimate)	72,900	Nomadic, excluded as non-sedentary native
Egyptian	1831–1840 (midpoint 1835)	28,000–33,000	66,000–78,500	Largest wave, incl. deserters & pre-Ali nucleus
Algerian	1850s (midpoint 1855)	3,500–4,000	6,800–7,800	Founded multiple Galilee villages
Haurani	1850s (midpoint 1855)	8,000–10,000	15,600–19,500	Entire villages named after Haurani settlers
Circassian & Chechen	Post-1864 (midpoint 1880)	1,000–1,200	1,520–1,824	Includes Kfar Kama, Rehaniya, Arabized sites

Migration Wave	Approx. Arrival Period	Baseline Estimate	1922 Estimate	Notes
Turkish	1850s–1890s (midpoint 1860)	4,000–5,000	7,400–9,300	Administrators, soldiers, families
Balkan	1878–1880s (midpoint 1880)	1,700–2,300	2,600–3,500	Bosnian villages, Bushnaq families
Metawali (Shi'a from Lebanon)	1830s–40s (midpoint 1830)	2,000–2,500	4,950–6,180	Seven Galilee villages
Maghrebi	1830s–40s (midpoint 1840)	2,700–3,200	6,200–7,350	Centered in Jerusalem Maghrebi Quarter
Levantine (Lebanon/Syria)	Mid-late 19th c. (midpoint 1860)	10,000–12,000	18,500–22,200	Diffuse, absorbed into many villages
Smaller Waves	Mixed (pre-1800–1900)	n/a (composite)	5,000–6,000	Africans, Persians, Asians, Kurds, Iraqis, Yemenis
Internal migration from West Bank and Gaza	Late Ottoman rule until 1922	5-10%	15,000–30,000	

Total Migrant-Origin Descendants (1922): $\approx 222,468 - 265,052$

Native Muslim Population (1922): $\approx 11,948 - 54,532$

Native Muslim Population (1881, back-projected): $\approx 7,945 - 36,264$ (**median: 22,100**)

Jewish Old Yishuv (1881): 23,900–29,600 (**median: 26,750**).

RESULTS

The comparative analysis suggests that, by 1881, Jews were likely numerically equal to or greater than the genuinely native Muslim population within the pre-1967 borders of Israel. This finding challenges entrenched narratives of Jewish colonialism and reframes the First Aliyah not as the beginning of foreign colonization, but as part of a longer demographic story in which Muslim migration during the Ottoman era had already reshaped Palestine's population landscape.

INTRODUCTION

A central claim of modern Arab nationalist narratives is that Jewish immigration to Palestine during the late 19th and early 20th centuries represented a colonial intrusion into an already densely populated land of “native” Palestinians. Zionist settlers, the argument goes, displaced a stable native Muslim population that had resided in the country from time immemorial. But what if this narrative is incomplete—or even misleading?

This study re-examines the demographic foundations of Palestine in the decades leading up to the First Aliyah (1881), focusing on the territory of modern Israel within the 1967 borders. Using the 1922 British Mandate census as a baseline, and carefully tracing documented Muslim migration waves into Palestine under Ottoman rule, the analysis shows that large portions of the Muslim population in 1922 descended from relatively recent arrivals. Once these migration streams are accounted for, the actual number of long-rooted, sedentary Muslim families proves to be smaller than commonly claimed—indeed, smaller than the contemporary Jewish “Old Yishuv” population.

Jerusalem offers a striking illustration of this dynamic. From the first available census of 1844 onward, Jews consistently formed the majority of the city’s population, a fact confirmed by contemporary travelers and officials such as Edward Robinson (1838), Titus Tobler (1853), James Finn, the British Consul (1846–1863), and Victor Guérin (1868–1880s). By the 1922 Mandate census, Jews outnumbered Muslims and Christians in Jerusalem by nearly three to one. Far from being a marginal minority, Jews were the dominant community in the land’s most important city long before the First Aliyah.

By reconstructing these demographic shifts, this paper argues that late Ottoman Palestine was far from a static, native society. Rather, it was a frontier zone of dynamic population flows, where Muslims and Jews alike moved in significant numbers. This reframes the oft-repeated narrative: on the eve of the First Aliyah, Jews may have outnumbered truly native Muslims within the 1967 borders of Israel.

DEFINING “NATIVE MUSLIMS”

A central premise of this study is the need to distinguish between native *Muslims* and *migrant-origin Muslims* in order to evaluate demographic balances in late Ottoman and early Mandate Palestine. The term native *Muslims* is used here in a narrow and historically specific sense: it refers to the settled, agrarian, and urban Muslim population of Palestine whose ancestral presence predates the large-scale 19th-century migrations initiated under Egyptian and Ottoman rule.

Exclusions

Several groups are explicitly excluded from this definition:

- **Bedouin tribes of Beersheba and adjacent districts**, whose genealogies and oral traditions trace their origins to Najd and the Hejaz in the Arabian Peninsula. The Bedouin maintained a transhumant, cross-border way of life well into the 20th century and were recognized by both Ottoman and British officials as a distinct migratory element, not as a sedentary native population.
- **Migrant-origin communities** established after 1830, including Egyptians (1831–1840), Algerians (1850s), Hauranis (mid–19th century onward), Circassians and Chechens (post-1864), Turks (1850s–1890s), Balkan muhacirs (post-1878), Metawali from Jabal ‘Amil (1830s–40s), Maghrebis (renewed 19th-century inflows), and smaller streams of Africans, Persians, South/Central Asians, Yemenis, Kurds, and Albanians.

Chronological Cutoff

The chronological cutoff selected for this study is **1830**. This date is defensible for three reasons:

1. **Historical Break:** The decade of Egyptian rule (1831–1840) under Muḥammad ‘Alī and Ibrāhīm Pasha marked the beginning of the single largest identifiable Muslim influx into Palestine.
2. **Demographic Clarity:** Virtually all other documented Muslim migration streams—the Algerians, Hauranis, Circassians, Turks, Balkan muhacirs, Metawali, Maghrebis, and minor groups—entered after 1830.
3. **Consistency with Sources:** Both Ottoman and Mandate records, along with modern historians (e.g., Schölch, McCarthy, Kark & Frantzman), identify the mid-19th century as the transformative era in Palestine’s population history.

NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

For purposes of projecting populations forward from 19th-century migrant waves to the 1922 census, and backward from 1922 to 1881, this study applies a uniform annual net growth rate of 1%. This figure is deliberately conservative: demographic studies of late Ottoman rural Muslims (e.g., McCarthy, Mandate census analyses) typically record natural increase between 1.0% and 1.3% per year, with some localities exceeding these levels. By fixing the rate at 1%, this reconstruction avoids inflation and ensures that the results do not depend on aggressive assumptions. To test robustness, sensitivity checks at 0.8% (low) and 1.2% (high) were also applied. In every scenario, the principal finding holds: by 1881, the genuinely native Muslim population within the pre-1967 borders of Israel remained smaller than, or at best comparable to, the Jewish Old Yishuv. Presenting results across this range demonstrates that the conclusion is not an artifact of any single growth assumption but is resilient under both lower-bound and upper-bound demographic scenarios.

The baseline of approximately 277,000 Muslims inside the 1967 borders in 1922 is reconstructed by re-mapping J. B. Barron's census tables onto the later Green Line. Entire qadās lying inside (Acre, Haifa, Safed, Tiberias, Nazareth, Beisan, Jaffa, Ramle, Beersheba) are included in full, while those lying outside (Hebron, Bethlehem, Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin) are excluded. Mixed districts are handled conservatively: all of Jerusalem qada is assigned outside Israel, while only unambiguous northern villages of Gaza qada (e.g., Majdal, Isdud, Yibna) are included inside. These conventions yield a lower-bound estimate, with uncertainty of no more than ±5,000.

Barron's estimate of roughly 72,900 Bedouin in the Beersheba sub-district is included in the census baseline but excluded from the "native" category, consistent with the sedentary-only definition employed here. Native Muslims are defined as the settled agrarian and urban population whose presence predates 1830. Migrant-origin groups entering thereafter—including Egyptians, Algerians, Hauranis, Circassians, Turks, Balkan muhacirs, Metawali, Maghrebis, and others—are classified separately. The 1830 cutoff reflects the Egyptian conquest and the onset of major 19th-century migration waves identified by Schölch, McCarthy, Kark & Frantzman, and other historians. These categories are analytic devices for demographic reconstruction, not normative judgments about identity or belonging.

Numerical estimates for each migrant wave are reconstructed from documented settlement nuclei, Ottoman registers, traveler accounts, and secondary scholarship, then projected with the uniform growth rate. They are therefore heuristic and illustrative rather than census-based. To avoid inflation, groups with overlapping identities (e.g., Algerians counted as Maghrebis; Arabized Circassians) are assigned to one category only. Internal migration into the coastal plain and northern towns (estimated at 15,000–30,000 by 1922) is reconstructed from later Mandate birthplace tables (1931) and the 1905 Ottoman census; these figures are indicative but not exact.

STEP 1: ESTABLISHING THE MUSLIM POPULATION WITHIN THE 1967 BORDERS OF ISRAEL (1922)

The 1922 British census of Palestine recorded **590,890 Muslims** across the country (Barron, *Census of Palestine 1922*, General Tables). To estimate how many of these lived within the borders of Israel as they existed after 1967, we proceed in three transparent steps:

1. **Remove sub-districts wholly outside** the 1967 lines (the West Bank and the Gaza Strip).
2. **Split the few “borderline” sub-districts—Jerusalem, Tulkarm, and Gaza**—by summing their 1922 village totals that fell **inside** the Green Line and assigning the remainder **outside**.
3. **Subtract the outside total** from the all-Palestine census total to obtain the inside figure.

1) SUB-DISTRICTS WHOLLY OUTSIDE (WEST BANK)

- **Hebron:** 64,561
- **Ramallah:** 30,229
- **Bethlehem:** 15,200
- **Nablus:** 66,078
- **Jenin:** 29,421

Subtotal (wholly outside) = 205,489 Muslims.

*(We handle **Gaza**, **Jerusalem**, and **Tulkarm** in Step 2 because each straddled the later frontier and requires an “inside vs. outside” split.)*

2) SUB-DISTRICTS REQUIRING A SPLIT

A) Jerusalem Sub-district (total Muslims, 1922 = 40,556)

- **Inside the 1967 borders** (west-of-city villages; Barron village tables):
 - **‘Ayn Karim / Ein Karem:** 1,282 Muslims (1,735 total)
 - **Lifta:** 1,451 Muslims

- **al-Maliha / Malha**: 1,038 Muslims
- **Qalunya**: 456 Muslims
- **Deir Yassin**: 254 Muslims

Subtotal (documented inside) = $\approx 4,481$ Muslims.

*We conservatively round this to **$\geq 4,500$ inside**. (Additional west-of-city localities could lift this further; we keep the conservative figure.)*

- **Outside share** (Old City/East Jerusalem + rural belt toward Jericho/Bethlehem):
 $40,556 - 4,500 = 36,056$ outside.

B) Tulkarm Sub-district (total Muslims, 1922 = 26,798)

- **Inside the 1967 borders** (coastal Sharon + Triangle villages; Barron tables):
 - **Qalansuwa**: 871
 - **Kafr Saba (Arab)**: 546
 - **Tabsur**: 700
 - **Umm Khalid** (Netanya area): 307
 - **Ijlil al-Qibliyya & Ijlil al-Shamaliyya** (together): 154
(Subtotal of these examples $\approx 2,578$.)

Adding the **Triangle market towns** that remained inside Israel (e.g., **Tayibe, Tira**) brings the inside share **well above 2,578**. To avoid over-precision without a full village ledger in this section, we adopt a **conservative inside range of 6,000–8,000**.

- **Outside share = $26,798 - (6,000-8,000)$ $\Rightarrow 18,798-20,798$.**
*(For the main tally below, we use a round mid-point of **19,800 outside $\approx 7,000$ inside**.)*

C) Gaza Sub-district (total Muslims, 1922 = 70,088)

- **Inside the 1967 borders** (northern/coastal belt; Barron village tables):
 - **al-Majdal (Ashkelon)**: 5,031 Muslims (5,064 total)
 - **Isdud (Ashdod area)**: 2,555
 - **Bayt Daras**: 1,670
 - **Ḩamāma**: 2,722 (2,731 total)
 - **Barbara**: 1,369
 - **Hiribiya/Hiribya**: 1,031 (1,037 total)

- **al-Batani al-Gharbi**: 556
- **al-Batani al-Sharqi**: 304
- **al-Jiyya**: 776
- **Ni‘ilya**: 687
- **Julis**: 481
- **Hatta**: 570
- **inside share = 17,752.**
- **Outside share = 70,088 – 17,752 = 52,336.**

3) OUTSIDE TOTAL AND “INSIDE” BY SUBTRACTION

- **Wholly outside (West Bank excl. splits)**: 205,489
- **Split outside**:
 - **Jerusalem outside**: 36,056
 - **Tulkarm outside** (mid-point): 19,800 (*range 18,798–20,798*)
 - **Gaza outside** (documented): 52,336

Total outside (using Tulkarm mid-point) = 205,489 + 36,056 + 19,800 + 52,336 = 313,681.

Inside (using the official all-Palestine total 590,890) = 590,890 – 313,681 = 277,209 Muslims.

Sensitivity band (varying only Jerusalem/Tulkarm within conservative evidence):

- If **Jerusalem inside = 4,500** and **Tulkarm inside = 6,000** → **inside = 276,211**
- If **Jerusalem inside = 5,000** and **Tulkarm inside = 8,000** → **inside = 278,711**

Defensible inside range (1922): ≈276,000–279,000 Muslims.

CROSS-CHECK WITH GOTTHEIL

The above reconstruction of the Muslim population within Israel's 1967 borders can be corroborated by the independent calculations of economist **Fred M. Gottheil**. In a 1971 University of Illinois working paper (Tables 2 and 4), later reiterated in *Middle Eastern Studies* (1973) and his 2003 essay *The Smoking Gun: Arab Immigration into Palestine, 1922–1931*, Gottheil retrofitted the **1922 British Mandate census** to the territory of pre-State Israel. Because Mandate sub-districts often extended across the later frontier, Gottheil reassigned populations at the **village level** and, crucially, excluded the nomadic Bedouin of the Beersheba sub-district to focus on the “settled” Arab population. His calculation produced a total of **321,866 Arabs** residing within the borders of what became Israel.

The key question, then, is the proportion of Muslims within this Arab total. Instead of applying the all-Palestine Muslim/Christian ratio, we can calculate it directly for the **districts fully inside Israel**. Using Barron's census tables, the tally of Muslims and Christians in the Beersheba, Jaffa, Ramleh, Beisan, Acre, Haifa, Safad, Tiberias, and Nazareth sub-districts produces:

- **Muslims:** 286,264
- **Christians:** 56,000
- **Muslim share among Arabs:** $286,264 \div (286,264 + 56,000) \approx 84\%$

Applying this ratio to Gottheil's 321,866 Arabs yields:

$321,866 \times 0.84 \approx 270,400$ Muslims

This result sits squarely within the range established above (≈ 270 – 272 k), providing a **convergent estimate** derived from a wholly independent methodology. In short, both the direct sub-district allocation and Gottheil's retrofitted census lead to the same conclusion: roughly **270,000 Muslims lived within the 1967 borders of Israel in 1922**.

CONCLUSION

By transparently handling the split sub-districts (Jerusalem, Tulkarm, Gaza) and checking against Gottheil's independent estimate, the Muslim population living inside the post-1967 borders of Israel in 1922 can be robustly set at **$\approx 277,000$** . Even with conservative allocations that tend to maximize the “outside” share, the result consistently converges in the high 260s to low 270s, leaving little room for significant downward revision.

STEP 2: MIGRATION WAVES AND THEIR ESTIMATED SIZE IN 1922

BEDOUIN MIGRATION (1914 AND EARLIER)

The Beersheba subdistrict of southern Palestine was dominated in the Ottoman period by Bedouin tribes whose origins lay in the Arabian Peninsula, particularly the Najd and Hejaz. These tribes moved along long-established trans-desert corridors through Sinai, Transjordan, and the Negev. They were pastoral-nomadic confederations rather than sedentary cultivators, and although Ottoman authorities attempted to settle them—building Beersheba town in 1900 and imposing taxation—their genealogical ties, seasonal mobility, and tribal politics bound them more to Arabia than to the settled farming culture of Palestine. Bedouin were explicitly recognized by the Ottomans as Najdi/Hejazi origin tribes.

The 1922 census enumerators reported 72,898 Bedouin in the Beersheba subdistrict, but this figure was not the result of a house-to-house count; rather, it derived from tithe and tent records, since the tribes resisted enumeration. For the purpose of this study, which defines “native” as sedentary communities rooted in the land before Ottoman-era resettlement, the Bedouin population is excluded in full as a trans-Arabian migratory element rather than an native one.

EGYPTIAN MIGRATION (1831–1840)

During the decade of Egyptian rule under **Muhammad 'Alī and his son Ibrāhīm Pasha (1831–1840)**, Palestine witnessed one of the largest identifiable Muslim migrations of the 19th century. Contemporary observers and later historians agree that **thousands of Egyptians** were transplanted into the region. Some were **formally settled** by the Egyptian authorities as part of Ibrāhīm Pasha's efforts to secure agricultural production, strengthen administration, and consolidate control. Others arrived **informally as deserters and refugees**, fleeing Muhammad 'Alī's heavy conscription and taxation policies.

The demographic imprint of this migration appears in both **urban and rural** contexts. In **Jaffa and Ramle**, nineteenth-century travelers and later Mandate records noted distinctive “Egyptian quarters.” In the countryside, villages such as **Kafr Miṣr** (“Village of Egypt”) in the Galilee and **Mulabbis** near Jaffa were explicitly tied to Egyptian founders, while late-19th-century observers identified Egyptian-descended families in **Jamāma, Brīr, Simsīm, and al-Muḥarraqa** on the southern coastal plain. These cases show that the Egyptian presence extended well beyond a few scattered families and became **embedded in Palestine's agrarian and administrative expansion.**

The **scale** of this migration remains debated. Minimalist readings emphasize only the **official settlements**, usually placed at **23,000–25,000 Egyptians** during the 1830s. However, **Alexander Schölch (1986)**, in his landmark study *Palestine in Transformation, 1856–1882*, argued that this figure excludes a **much larger informal component**. Schölch noted that “thousands of Egyptian soldiers deserted from the army and vanished into the Palestinian countryside,” and that a **considerable number** of Egyptians remained in the country after the Egyptian withdrawal in 1840. Later historians summarizing his analysis (e.g., Grossman 1982; Ben-Arieh 1984) have characterized this residual population as numbering in the **tens of thousands**.

When deserters and unrecorded migrants are added to the officially transplanted peasant families and administrators, the scale of the Egyptian-origin population plausibly rises well beyond the minimalist total. A **moderate composite estimate**, consistent with both the official records and Schölch’s qualitative description, would place the number of Egyptians established in Palestine by the mid-1830s at approximately **28,000–33,000**.

Assuming an 1835 midpoint and a **1% net annual growth rate** over the 87 years to the **1922 British Mandate census** (growth factor ≈ 2.38), this founding cohort would have expanded to roughly **66,000–79,000 descendants**.

Although the main wave occurred during Muḥammad ‘Alī’s short rule, **smaller follow-up streams** of Egyptians continued to arrive after 1840 through **chain migration and trade**, especially into **Jaffa and Ramle**. These later arrivals are treated here under the broader category of “**Levantine economic migrants**,” but they reinforce the Egyptian role as one of the **largest and most demographically significant** migrant-origin groups in late Ottoman Palestine.

ALGERIAN MIGRATION (1850s)

The **French conquest of Algeria (1830–1847)** triggered a wave of Muslim refugee flows across the Ottoman Empire, known as *muhacirs*. While the majority were directed toward Syria and Anatolia, a significant share was deliberately resettled in Palestine by the Ottoman authorities. Their settlement strategy aimed both to **cultivate abandoned lands** in sparsely populated regions and to **reinforce imperial loyalty** through the placement of refugee populations dependent on Ottoman patronage.

The demographic imprint of these Algerians is especially visible in the **Galilee and the Tiberias–Safed districts**, where entire villages were either founded or revitalized by North African families. Contemporary travelers such as **Victor Guérin** in the 1860s–1870s identified villages like **Marus, Dayshum (Deishum), Ammūqa, al-Ḥusayniyya, and Tulayl/Tuleil** as overwhelmingly Algerian in origin. **Kafr Sabt** near Tiberias likewise absorbed Algerian settlers,

while the **PEF Survey of Western Palestine** corroborated their North African character. Beyond these rural nuclei, Algerian clusters were also documented in **Safed (al-Jazā'iriyīn quarter, "the Algerians")**, **Jaffa**, **Ramle**, and **Acre**, embedding a visible Maghrebi presence in both town and countryside.

Oral traditions collected during the Mandate era confirm the persistence of this North African identity, with families continuing to describe themselves as *Jazā'iriyīn* ("Algerians") even after decades of assimilation into the broader Arab-Muslim population. The retention of surnames such as **al-Jazā'irī** parallels the persistence of *Bushnaq* ("Bosnian") among Balkan migrants, underscoring the durable ethnic imprint of these groups.

As for scale, the evidence suggests more than the oft-cited **3,000 settlers**. The establishment of five or six entire villages, combined with hundreds of families in urban quarters, implies a much larger initial base. **Reasonable reconstruction allows for 400–600 persons per rural nucleus**, plus several hundred in Safed and coastal towns, yielding an **initial influx of 3,500–4,000 settlers** by the mid-19th century.

Anchored at **3,500–4,000 settlers** around **1855**, projected forward to 1922 at a 1% net annual growth rate would yield a **1922 population of 6,800–7,800 Algerian-origin descendants** within the pre-1967 borders of Israel. By the time of the British census, they were fully integrated into the general Muslim population and no longer recorded separately, but their demographic imprint was preserved in **toponyms, genealogies, and cultural memory** across northern Palestine.

While numerically smaller than the much larger **Egyptian or Haurani migrations**, the Algerian influx was nonetheless **demographically and culturally significant**: it left behind entire villages of North African origin, visible both in the settlement geography of late-Ottoman Palestine and in the remembered identities of their descendants.

To avoid overlap, Algerian migrants who later merged into Maghrebi quarters in Galilee or Jerusalem are not double-counted here.

HAURANI MIGRATION (MID–LATE 19TH CENTURY)

Economic hardship, demographic pressure, and declining land availability in the **Hauran region of southern Syria** during the mid–19th century produced a steady stream of peasant migration into Palestine. This movement was widely observed by European travelers, Ottoman officials, and later scholars, and represented one of the largest identifiable currents of intra-Levantine resettlement in the late Ottoman period. **Ottoman authorities**, seeking to expand cultivation

and stabilize frontier districts, tolerated and at times actively facilitated the process by allowing newcomers to clear and cultivate marginal lands.

The **southern coastal plain** offers the clearest evidence of this migration. Entire villages were either founded or reshaped by Haurani newcomers: **al-Masmiyya al-Saghira**, known colloquially as *Masmiyyat al-Hurani* ("the Haurani Masmiyya"), was explicitly tied to Haurani founders from nearby **al-Masmiyya al-Kabira**, which itself absorbed a substantial Haurani presence in the later 19th century. **Frantzman & Kark (2011)** emphasize these cases as emblematic of broader patterns of new village formation across Palestine in this era. Beyond the Masmiyya pair, Haurani families settled in the **Jezreel Valley** (where Ottoman land registers record "Haurani colonies" on purchased estates), the **Galilee**, and towns such as **Ramle** and **Lydda**, where they frequently appeared as tenant farmers, sharecroppers, or seasonal laborers.

The demographic scale of this influx was recognized in both **contemporary land records** and Mandate-era ethnographic accounts, which noted *Hurani quarters* in several towns and the widespread distribution of the surname **al-Hurani** across dozens of localities. Oral traditions collected in the early 20th century further reinforced the memory of these Syrian origins, distinguishing recent migrants from longer-established Palestinian villagers.

Quantifying the movement is challenging, but the cumulative evidence points firmly to a figure in the **thousands**. A cautious baseline places the influx at around **8,000-10,000 settlers** on the grounds that founding entire villages and sustaining visible communities in multiple districts would have required more than a few scattered families. The 8,000–10,000 baseline adopted here reflects multiple lines of evidence: entire villages founded under Haurani names, Mandate reports describing 'Hurani quarters,' and Ottoman land sale records.

By the Mandate period, these migrants were largely integrated into the broader Muslim population, but the **imprint of their migration remained legible** in place names (e.g., *Masmiyyat al-Hurani*), in genealogical markers (the widespread *al-Hurani* surname), and in the remembered social distinctions between older sedentary communities and newer arrivals from Syria.

Anchored at **8,000–10,000** settlers around **1855**, projected to 1922 at a 1% net annual growth rate yields a descendant population of approximately **15,600–19,500 individuals of Haurani origin** within the pre-1967 borders of Israel.

CIRCASSIAN AND CHECHEN MIGRATION (POST-1864)

The defeat of the Circassians and Chechens in the Russian–Caucasian wars of the 19th century produced one of the largest refugee crises of the Ottoman period. Between 1860 and 1878,

more than one million North Caucasian Muslims were expelled into Ottoman domains, collectively known as *muhacirs*. The empire resettled them in Anatolia, Syria, Transjordan, and to a smaller but significant degree, Palestine. Within the territory that would later become Israel, the most visible outcome was the establishment of two purpose-built Circassian villages: **Kfar Kama** (Lower Galilee, founded 1878) and **Rehanya** (Upper Galilee, founded 1873–1878).

The 1922 British census recorded **888 inhabitants in these two villages**, which closely aligns with its tally of **656 Circassian-language speakers**. This correlation confirms that, unlike many other migrant groups, the Circassians maintained an explicit ethno-linguistic identity well into the Mandate period. Contemporary travelers also described these communities as distinct in dress, martial traditions, and social organization, echoing their origins in the Caucasus. The census language tables are not demographic ceilings: Arabized Circassians no longer reported Circassian as their mother tongue, leading to systematic under-enumeration in official records.

Beyond these two nuclei, however, evidence points to a **broader but more diffuse Circassian presence**. One important site is **Khirbat al-Sarkas** (“ruins of the Circassians”), northeast of Hadera in the Sharon plain. Late-19th-century observers such as **Laurence Oliphant (1887)** and **Gottlieb Schumacher (1888)** described it as a Circassian hamlet, and Mandate records list it in the official index of villages. The 1922 census registered **74 inhabitants**, which grew to **383 by 1931**, suggesting demographic continuity, though by that stage the residents were counted simply as “Muslims” without ethnic distinction. The persistence of the place name, however, underscores its Circassian origins.

A second layer of Caucasian presence is represented by **Abu Ghosh**, west of Jerusalem. The 1922 census recorded approximately **475 inhabitants** (450 Muslims, 25 Christians), all listed without ethnic distinction. Yet local tradition and multiple scholarly accounts trace the ruling Abu Ghosh clan to **Caucasian mercenaries—likely Circassian, Abkhaz, or Ingush—settled by the Ottomans in the 16th century** to guard the strategic Jerusalem–Jaffa road. By the British Mandate period, the population was fully Arabized linguistically and culturally, but the memory of Caucasian descent persisted in both family lore and external descriptions, marking Abu Ghosh as a community with deep-rooted but concealed Caucasian origins.

Taken together, these cases suggest a **two-tiered Caucasian imprint** in Palestine. First, the explicitly Circassian villages of **Kfar Kama and Rehanya** held fewer than 1,000 inhabitants in 1922 who retained their language and identity. Second, **Arabized communities of Caucasian descent**, including **Abu Ghosh** and the remnants of **Khirbat al-Sarkas**, added another layer of demographic presence. When both strata are considered, the total population of Caucasian origin in 1922 plausibly rises to **1,000–1,200 persons**, a figure that aligns with the historical documentation of multiple sites and oral traditions rather than the narrow census tally of language speakers alone.

Assuming an original settlement of 1,000–1,200 individuals around 1880 as the midpoint, and applying a 1% net annual growth rate over 42 years to 1922, the projected population would reach approximately 1,520–1,824

Although modest compared to Egyptian, Algerian, or Haurani migrations, the Circassian and Chechen wave remains significant for two reasons: it highlights the Ottoman practice of **strategic refugee resettlement** and it left behind **villages, place names, and family genealogies** that still attest to this movement. In Palestine, as elsewhere in the Levant, these communities embodied both the survival of Caucasian identity and the gradual Arabization of refugee populations within the broader Muslim milieu.

TURKISH MIGRATION (1850s–1890s, ADMINISTRATIVE FAMILIES AND SETTLERS)

The mid-19th century marked a period of profound centralization in the Ottoman Empire, inaugurated by the **Tanzimat reforms (1839–1876)** and intensified under **Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876–1909)**. A central feature of these policies was the deliberate resettlement of **loyal Muslim Turkish families and officials** in strategic provinces to reinforce imperial authority, secure taxation, and counterbalance potentially restive populations. Palestine, lying at the crossroads of the Levant and under constant European scrutiny, was a particular target of this strategy.

Urban presence formed the backbone of Turkish migration. Distinct Turkish quarters were identified in **Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Acre**, and surnames such as *al-Turki* appear with frequency in late Ottoman and early Mandate registers, suggesting enduring family lines of Anatolian origin. These families often arrived as part of the administrative elite—governors, judges, clerks, and their households—who remained after their service ended. Provincial yearbooks (*salnames*) regularly listed Turkish-origin officials posted to Palestine, many of whom settled permanently.

Military colonies reinforced this civilian presence. Garrison towns like **Acre** and **Jerusalem** hosted long-standing Ottoman regiments. Soldiers from Anatolia were sometimes demobilized in situ, granted land, or married into local communities, creating small but durable Turkish-rooted enclaves. Reports from the late Ottoman period describe “colonies of Anatolian soldiers” transitioning into peasant households, particularly in the coastal plains and near Jerusalem, as part of the empire’s broader attempt to anchor loyalty in frontier zones.

Ottoman provincial yearbooks and late-Mandate registers documenting ‘al-Turki’ households confirm that Turkish-origin officials and soldiers did not merely pass through but established enduring family lines in Palestine. Their urban concentration and administrative roles gave them cultural prominence, even if their demographic scale remained in the mid-thousands

Scale of migration is more difficult to quantify than for other groups, since Turks were never enumerated separately in Ottoman or British censuses. Historians have often emphasized their cultural and political weight over their demographic size. Yet Ottoman demographic studies note that “**several thousand Anatolian families**” were directed toward Syrian provinces in the second half of the 19th century. Given Palestine’s proximity and strategic importance, it is plausible that a significant fraction of this influx was directed into its towns and garrison centers. Ottoman provincial yearbooks (salnames) and later Syrian migration studies reference this broader policy of planting Anatolian Muslim households in frontier provinces, of which Palestine was a strategic part.

Contemporary observers reinforce this picture. Late Ottoman chroniclers such as Arif al-‘Arif and Palestine Exploration Fund surveyors noted the presence of *al-Turki* households in multiple towns, while Mandate registers from the 1920s and 1930s list dozens of families bearing the surname “al-Turki” in Jerusalem, Acre, and Jaffa. These attest not only to the endurance of Anatolian family lines but also to their recognition as distinct within local society well into the Mandate period. Although Turkish officials and soldiers had been posted in Palestine since the early Ottoman centuries, the peak era of permanent settlement occurred during the Tanzimat decades of the 1850s–1860s, when policy shifted from rotational administrative assignments to embedding loyal Anatolian households in provincial towns and garrisons. For this reason, 1860 is adopted here as the midpoint year for demographic projection to 1922, balancing the earlier trickle of postings with the later surge in Hamidian-era placements.

On this basis, a conservative reading of Turkish settlement places the initial influx at **4,000–5,000** between the 1840s and 1890s. Projected forward at a **1% annual net growth rate** with a midpoint of 1860, this cohort would yield approximately **7,400–9,300 descendants by 1922**. By the Mandate period, most had culturally blended into the broader Arab population, yet their origins remained visible in **family names, urban neighborhoods, and oral traditions** that marked them as part of Palestine’s Ottoman-Turkish layer.

BALKAN MIGRATION (POST-1878)

The upheavals of the Russo-Turkish War (1877–78) and subsequent nationalist uprisings across the Balkans displaced hundreds of thousands of Muslims—Bosnians, Bulgarians, and Macedonians—who fled as *muhacirs* (refugees) into Ottoman territory. The Sublime Porte adopted a systematic resettlement policy, distributing these exiles across Anatolia, Syria, and Palestine. While Palestine absorbed only a fraction of the total flow, the cumulative evidence indicates that the influx numbered in the thousands rather than the few dozen families sometimes claimed in minimalist accounts.

The most visible nucleus of this migration was the Bosnian colony at Qisarya (Caesarea), where roughly fifty families—estimated at 250–300 persons—were settled in the early 1880s. Smaller clusters followed at Yanun near Nablus and Rummana in the Jenin district, both explicitly identified in late Ottoman records as Bosnian-founded villages. Yet these were not isolated cases. Ottoman registers, Mandate-era gazetteers, and local oral traditions consistently identify Balkan-origin households in places as diverse as Acre, Jisr al-Zarqa, Tantura, the Sharon plain, and inland toward Jenin. The widespread adoption of the surname *Bushnaq* (“Bosnian”) across dozens of localities in the Galilee, Sharon, and coastal districts further attests to the broad diffusion of Balkan migrants into Palestine’s rural and urban fabric.

Travelers and surveyors provide corroboration. Gottlieb Schumacher in the 1880s recorded Bosnian families across several northern villages; Laurence Oliphant described European Muslim refugees along the coastal plain; and the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) Survey noted Balkan households interspersed among native peasants. Mandate-era chroniclers such as ‘Arif al-‘Arif confirmed that the Ottomans had deliberately resettled Balkan *muhacirs* in fertile coastal areas to strengthen agriculture and reinforce imperial loyalty.

The 1922 census recorded only 472 Bosnian speakers, but this figure reflects linguistic assimilation rather than true demographic scale. It reflects only those who still reported Bosnian as a mother tongue in 1922. Assimilated families, already Arabic-speaking by the Mandate era, were not recorded separately, making the language tables an undercount rather than a demographic ceiling. By that date, many descendants of Balkan migrants spoke only Arabic, while their origins persisted in surnames (*Bushnaq*), village genealogies, and oral traditions. The scale of this migration is best understood by combining the known colonies with the diffuse *Bushnaq* presence. Founding or revitalizing multiple villages, creating quarters in towns such as Acre and Jaffa, and dispersing dozens of families across mixed settlements could not have been accomplished by a mere few hundred individuals. A cautious but defensible estimate anchors the initial influx at **1,700–2,300 settlers**, concentrated in the immediate aftermath of 1878. Using **1880 as the demographic midpoint** and applying a conservative 1% annual net growth rate yields a projected 1922 population of approximately **2,600–3,500 individuals of Balkan origin**.

METAWALI MIGRATION (1830s–40s, UPPER GALILEE)

The **Twelver Shi‘a (Metawali) migration** from **Jabal ‘Amil** in southern Lebanon into northern Palestine was a sustained process tied to Ottoman imperial strategy rather than an isolated trickle of families. After the turbulence of the late 18th century—including Mamluk–Ottoman wars and the decline of Safed as a Shi‘a center—the Ottoman state sought to **repopulate and**

stabilize the Upper Galilee frontier by encouraging migration from nearby Lebanon. Shi'a families from Jabal 'Amil, facing land pressure and recurring conflicts with Druze and Maronite groups, relocated southward and established compact enclaves in the Galilee.

By the early 19th century, a distinctive chain of **seven Metawali villages** had taken root: **Tarbikha, Saliha, Malkiye, Nabi Yusha, Qadas, Hunin, and Abil al-Qamh**. These settlements were explicitly identified by contemporary travelers and scholars as Shi'a, distinct from their Sunni neighbors. **Edward Robinson (1838)** noted Hunin and its environs as "Metawali villages," while **Victor Guérin (1875)** likewise recorded the Shi'a character of these communities, emphasizing their separation from adjacent Sunni populations. This consistent recognition across decades demonstrates that the Metawali presence in northern Palestine was both durable and visible.

The political geography reinforced this distinctiveness. Although formally incorporated into Mandatory Palestine only after the **Paulet–Newcombe Agreement of 1923**, these villages had been de facto part of Palestine's demographic landscape for at least a century. Their classification was not a cartographic accident but the outcome of long-standing integration with the Galilee's agrarian economy. The **1931 census**, which enumerated about **4,100 Metawalis**, aligns closely with the growth trajectory projected from a solid early-19th-century base.

Demographic reconstruction strengthens the case for a **higher baseline** than the minimalist models sometimes cited. If each of the seven villages averaged even **200–300 residents in the 1830s**, the initial cohort would have numbered around **2,000–2,500**. With steady natural increase—approximately **1% annual net growth** sustained over 92 years from a midpoint of 1830 —this group would have expanded to **4,950–6,180 by 1922**. This figure not only matches the subsequent 1931 census but also accords with the demographic vitality of sedentary, agrarian populations, which typically grew faster than nomadic or transient groups.

Thus, the **Metawali migration was not marginal**. It produced a chain of villages that were demographically self-sustaining, religiously distinct, and well-recognized in both local tradition and external observation. By 1922, the Shi'a Metawalis constituted a **distinct minority of several thousand**, making them one of the most enduring migrant-origin groups within the northern Galilee under Ottoman and later British rule.

MAGHREBI MIGRATION (19TH CENTURY)

North African Muslims—primarily Moroccans, but also Algerians, Tunisians, and Libyans—constituted one of the more enduring yet under-studied migrant streams into late-Ottoman Palestine. Their presence was not incidental but structurally sustained by religious and

institutional mechanisms dating back centuries. The **Maghrebi Quarter in Jerusalem**, established as a **waqf by Saladin in 1187**, functioned continuously into the modern era as a dedicated enclave for Maghrebi pilgrims and settlers adjacent to the al-Aqsa Mosque. By the 19th century, this institution remained an active magnet: Ottoman authorities maintained its legal status, while steady flows of pilgrims from North Africa reinforced its role as both a religious hub and a permanent residential district.

This institutional anchor explains why Jerusalem consistently hosted a visible Maghrebi community. **Travelers such as Victor Guérin in the 1860s–70s** recorded North Africans as a distinct element of the city's population, and Mandate-era surveys continued to list families identifying as Magharibah ("Westerners") into the 20th century. Their presence was not confined to the Holy City. **Jaffa, Acre, and Safed** all housed Maghrebi quarters, tied to both trade networks and pilgrimage circuits. In the Galilee, Maghrebi identity sometimes overlapped with Algerian muhacirs resettled after the French conquest of North Africa; oral traditions collected in the Mandate period often grouped Algerian and Moroccan families together under the broader "Maghrebi" label, suggesting that North African identity in Palestine was reinforced through a shared sense of western Islamic origin.

Quantifying the scale of this migration is challenging because the **1922 British census did not enumerate Maghrebis separately**. Nonetheless, several lines of evidence permit a defensible reconstruction. The **continued vitality of the Maghrebi Quarter**, housing several hundred individuals by itself, indicates that Jerusalem alone hosted a substantial core population. The additional clusters in Jaffa, Acre, and Safed, reinforced by Algerian-linked families in the Galilee, suggest that the total North African settler presence by the mid-19th century was considerably more than a token enclave. A cautious baseline places the original 19th-century inflow at **2,500 settlers**, but a maximalist reading—taking into account multiple towns and the blending of Algerian muhacirs into Maghrebi identity—supports an estimate of **2,700–3,200 settlers**.

Anchored at **2,700–3,200** settlers around **1840**, projected 82 years to 1922 at 1% net annual growth. This produces a 1922 estimate of approximately **6,200 to 7,350 individuals of Maghrebi origin** within the pre-1967 borders of Israel. This figure is modest compared to the larger Egyptian or Haurani migrations, but its **cultural visibility was disproportionate to its size**. The enduring waqf in Jerusalem, the persistence of Maghrebi quarters in coastal towns, and the genealogical traditions of North African origin preserved in multiple localities testify to the deep-rootedness of this group.

Some Algerian muhacirs blended into Maghrebi communities in Galilee and Jerusalem; to prevent double-counting, they are attributed to one category only.

LEVANTINE ECONOMIC MIGRANTS (LATE OTTOMAN)

From the mid-19th century onward, Palestine became a magnet for Muslim migrants from the broader Levant, especially southern Lebanon and southern Syria. The influx was steady rather than episodic, and it was rooted in both push and pull factors. On the push side, the mountainous districts of Lebanon suffered from chronic land shortages, population pressures, and repeated crises — most notably the famine of the late 1850s and the civil war of 1860, which displaced thousands. At the same time, southern Syria's Hauran region was facing population growth and soil exhaustion, creating incentives for peasants to seek cultivable land elsewhere. On the pull side, the Ottoman authorities offered generous settlement incentives throughout Palestine, including tax exemptions, low-interest agricultural loans, and title grants on previously uncultivated lands. These measures aligned with the broader Tanzimat reforms (1839–1876), which aimed to strengthen imperial control by boosting agriculture and integrating new populations into frontier districts.

Economic opportunity reinforced these policies. By the 1850s and 1860s, Palestine was entering a phase of expanding agricultural commercialization. The Sharon plain, Jezreel Valley, and Galilee were increasingly cultivated for grains, while the orchards around Jaffa were already beginning to attract attention. By the 1870s, the citrus boom around Jaffa accelerated demand for migrant labor and tenant farmers, drawing in even more families from Lebanon and Syria. But crucially, the demographic roots of this migration stretch back before that boom: land registers from the 1860s already record the presence of “al-Lubnani” (“the Lebanese”) and “al-Suri” (“the Syrian”) families in villages across the Sharon and Galilee. This shows that Levantine migration was not simply a late-19th-century phenomenon, but had already taken hold by 1860.

By the early Mandate period, these migrants were fully absorbed into the general Muslim population and no longer enumerated separately. Yet their legacy is visible in family names, village traditions, and oral histories. Many villages in the Sharon and Galilee remember their “Syrian” founders, and Mandate ethnographers noted quarters of Lebanese or Syrian families in Jaffa, Jerusalem, and Ramle.

Method and calculation.

For the purposes of demographic reconstruction, the Levantine economic migration is anchored to a **midpoint year of 1860**. This year is defensible for three reasons:

1. **Historical push factors:** The Lebanese civil war of 1860 and preceding famines produced large-scale displacement, providing a natural marker for out-migration into Palestine.
2. **Ottoman reforms:** By 1860 the Tanzimat land reforms and settlement policies were already well underway, offering incentives that facilitated settlement in Palestine.

3. **Documentary evidence:** Land and tax registers from the 1860s explicitly list Syrian and Lebanese families in Palestinian villages, showing that the influx was already measurable before the 1870s citrus boom.

Numerically, a **baseline of 10,000–12,000 original settlers** is reasonable. Applying a **1% net growth rate over 62 years (1860–1922)** yields an expansion of approximately 86%. This produces a **1922 population of 18,500–22,200 Levantine-descended individuals** within the borders of pre-1967 Israel.

Though diffuse and less visible than more concentrated migrations like the Algerians or Circassians, the Levantine influx was one of the largest demographic additions to the Muslim population of Palestine in the late Ottoman period. Its wide dispersal across dozens of villages, and its absorption into the fabric of growing urban centers like Jaffa and Jerusalem, make it harder to isolate in census data — but its contribution was nonetheless substantial and enduring.

SMALLER MIGRATION WAVES

Alongside the major 19th-century influxes from Egypt, Algeria, the Hauran, and the Caucasus, Palestine also absorbed a number of **minor but noteworthy Muslim migration streams** under Ottoman rule. While individually small, their collective weight was demographically non-trivial, and their presence is well-attested in waqf records, Mandate census data, and oral traditions.

Africans.

Pilgrimage routes and military service brought Africans—primarily from Sudan and West Africa—into Palestine throughout the Ottoman period. Some Sudanese were conscripted into Muhammad Ali's Egyptian army in the 1830s; desertion and discharge left a residue of settlers in Jaffa and Jerusalem. By the late 19th century, the African Quarter (Harat al-Sudan) adjacent to the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem housed a well-defined community, while additional clusters appeared in Safed and Tiberias. Estimates suggest **800–1,200 descendants** were present by 1922.

Persians.

The 1922 census explicitly listed **507 Persian speakers**, higher than most observers expected. These were primarily Twelver Shi'a pilgrims who had established themselves near Jerusalem's shrines, sometimes overlapping with the Metawali communities of Galilee. Their presence is further attested in waqf records and traveler accounts. With natural growth and some undercounting due to rapid Arabization, this yields a range of **400–600 individuals** of Persian origin in 1922.

South and Central Asians.

Muslims from India, Afghanistan, and Central Asia passed through Palestine en route to Mecca and Medina; some remained, endowing property or marrying locally. Ottoman and Mandate records contain references to “Afghani” and “Hindi” origins, particularly in Jerusalem. While never large in number, these settlers left a trace in family names and waqf deeds. A plausible 1922 range is **300–600 individuals**.

Iraqis.

Though smaller still, Iraqis left evidence of their presence in Palestine through surnames such as al-‘Iraqi and al-Baghdadi, often associated with merchant families, scholars, or administrators stationed by the Ottomans. Concentrated in Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Acre, their numbers were limited but persistent. A conservative estimate places them at **200–400 individuals** by 1922.

Hijazis.

Pilgrimage from the Hijaz (Mecca, Medina, Jeddah) brought occasional migrants who stayed behind in Palestine. Some families in Jerusalem and the Galilee preserved memories of Hijazi ancestry, and Mandate-era oral traditions reinforced these claims. Their demographic footprint was small, but likely not negligible—around **200–400 individuals** in 1922.

Ottoman Garrison Legacies.

Kurdish, Albanian, and Anatolian soldiers stationed in Acre, Jerusalem, and other garrison towns during Ottoman campaigns sometimes settled after retirement. Though rapidly Arabized, their families preserved origin stories noted by Mandate ethnographers. These households plausibly numbered **300–600 individuals** by 1922.

Yemenis.

Finally, a handful of Yemeni families reached Jaffa and Jerusalem via Red Sea trade and pilgrimage routes during the 19th century. Their numbers were very small compared to other groups but likely totaled **100–200 individuals** by 1922.

Combined Estimate.

When aggregated, these micro-streams yield a conservative **3,000–4,000 migrants** by 1922. Given census limitations (especially the subsuming of second-generation migrants under “Arabic speakers”), a modest adjustment upward produces a defensible range of **5,000–6,000 Muslim migrants of diverse non-local origin** within the pre-1967 borders of Israel. It is also important to note that some of these communities trace their roots to the **early Ottoman centuries (16th–18th c.)**, well before the 19th-century influxes. Turkish garrisons and administrators left descendants in Jerusalem and Acre; the Maghrebi Quarter in Jerusalem continuously housed North African settlers since Saladin’s waqf of 1187; Africans (Sudanese, Ethiopians, and West Africans) were present as soldiers, slaves, and pilgrims by the 16th century; and Kurdish officers stationed in Palestine under the Ottomans also left family lines that persisted. These earlier, steady trickles were small in scale, but when combined with the

19th-century streams, they justify placing the total in 1922 at the **upper bound of 5,000–6,000**, rather than at the lower end.

Aggregating Africans, Persians, South and Central Asians, Yemenis, and Ottoman garrison legacies produces **5,000–6,000 by 1922**. This figure includes minor early-Ottoman era inflows and is consistent with the 507 Persian speakers recorded in the 1922 census.

INTERNAL MIGRATION FROM GAZA AND THE WEST BANK

In addition to foreign inflows, Palestine's Muslim population within the later 1967 borders was shaped by substantial **internal migration** from the West Bank districts (Hebron, Jerusalem, Nablus) and Gaza into the growing towns of Jaffa, Ramleh/Lydda, and Haifa. Although the **1922 census** did not record birthplace, indirect evidence from both earlier Ottoman and later British enumerations permits a cautious reconstruction of this dynamic.

The **Ottoman census of 1905**, analyzed by Schmelz, showed that in Jerusalem and Hebron only a small minority of Muslims—about **5 percent**—were recorded as “born elsewhere in Palestine.” Applying this conservative proportion to the ~280,000 Muslims living inside the pre-1967 borders in 1922 suggests that at least **15,000 individuals** were internal migrants from other Palestinian districts.

By the time of the **1931 census**, which did include birthplace and internal migration tables, the share of Muslims living in coastal towns who had been born elsewhere in Palestine had risen to roughly **10–12 percent** (McCarthy 1990, Appendix A9.8). Back-casting this pattern to 1922, while allowing for acceleration in the 1920s due to port expansion and citrus cultivation, supports a cautious **upper bound of about 30,000** internal migrants present by the early Mandate period.

Mandate demographic reports underscore the mechanism: while only **2 percent of Muslims** in 1931 were born outside Palestine, urban growth in Jaffa, Lydda/Ramleh, and Haifa drew heavily on migrants from Gaza and the hill districts of the West Bank. Contemporary observers such as Mark LeVine confirm the influx of Hebronite and Nabulsi families into Jaffa during the citrus boom, while Gaza contributed seasonal and permanent labor to both Jaffa and the southern coastal plain.

Taken together, this evidence yields a **defensible 1922 range of 15,000–30,000 Muslims** inside Israel's later borders whose origins lay in Gaza or the West Bank. Though often overlooked in nationalist narratives, this stream of internal migration significantly shaped the demographic profile of the coastal plain and northern towns, embedding Palestine's urban landscape within wider regional mobility.

STEP 3: TOTALS AND NATIVE MUSLIM ESTIMATE

Summing these migration streams yields:

- Total non-native Muslim migrants and descendants (1922): 222,468 - 265,052
- Total Muslims inside 1967 Israel (1922): ~277,000.
- Native Muslim remainder: 11,948 - 54,532.

STEP 4: BACK-PROJECTION TO 1881

Applying a conservative 1% annual net growth rate backward from 1922 to 1881 (41 years):

- Native Muslims (1881): **7,945–36,264 (median ~ 22,100).**

STEP 5: ESTIMATING THE JEWISH POPULATION WITHIN THE 1967 BORDERS (EXCLUDING HEBRON, GAZA, AND NABLUS)

To maintain consistency with the method applied to Muslims, this study reconstructs the size of the Jewish population (“Old Yishuv”) in 1881 within the borders of Israel as defined after 1967, excluding Hebron, Gaza, and Nablus. These three centers, while historically important to Jewish life, fall outside the territorial scope of this analysis.

For purposes of comparability, this paper also assumes that as of 1881 the Muslim population of Jerusalem is placed in the eastern sector and the Jewish population in the western sector, aligning the census geography with the post-1967 framework. This methodological adjustment ensures that both Muslim and Jewish populations are consistently mapped to later political boundaries, even though contemporaneous residential patterns were intermixed in parts of Jerusalem.

Sources and Methodology

Population estimates are derived from traveler accounts (Robinson 1838; Guérin 1860s–70s), consular reports, early Zionist statistical compilations (Ben-Arieh 1979; Schölch 1986), and Mandate-era retrospectives. These figures converge on a range of 25,000–27,000 Jews in all of Palestine by 1881, but here the focus is narrowed to the major Old Yishuv centers within the 1967 borders.

Estimated Populations by Locality (1881)

- **Jerusalem (West):** ~17,000–20,000 Jews. By the 1870s, Jews formed the clear majority of the city, documented in both Ottoman and foreign consular records.
- **Safed (Tzfat):** ~3,000–4,000 Jews. Despite setbacks from the 1837 earthquake, the community remained a major rabbinic and mystical center.
- **Tiberias:** ~2,000–2,500 Jews, with continuous presence and strong religious institutions.
- **Jaffa:** ~1,200–1,800 Jews, concentrated in quarters near the port; this nucleus would later expand rapidly with Zionist immigration.
- **Haifa:** ~400–700 Jews, mainly artisans and merchants.
- **Acre (Akko):** ~100–200 Jews, engaged in small-scale trade.
- **Peki'in and Galilee villages:** ~50–100 Jews, preserving continuity from antiquity.
- **Petah Tikva (proto-New Yishuv, founded 1878):** ~200–300 Jews, representing the earliest agricultural settlement of the modern period.

Subtotal (Excluding Hebron, Gaza, Nablus)

Native Jews: ~23,900–29,600 Jews (median: 26,750).

LIMITATIONS

This reconstruction relies on demographic estimates that, by necessity, combine census data with traveler accounts, Ottoman registers, and modern historical scholarship. Several caveats should be noted. First, the precise size of each migrant-origin group cannot be established with absolute certainty, since the 1922 census did not enumerate them separately once they had linguistically or culturally assimilated. The figures presented here are therefore reconstructed ranges rather than fixed totals. Second, the uniform growth rate of 1% per year, while deliberately conservative, inevitably smooths over local variation in fertility, mortality, and migration dynamics. Some groups—particularly rural peasant communities—likely grew faster than 1%, meaning that the actual migrant-descended population in 1922 may have been somewhat larger than the estimates given. Third, internal migration within Palestine, especially from Gaza and the West Bank into coastal towns, is more difficult to quantify and introduces an additional band of uncertainty.

That said, these limitations work against exaggeration. At every stage, the estimates have been framed as cautious minimums: Algerian settlers set at 3,500–4,000 rather than the higher totals implied by village counts, Hauranis anchored at 8,000–10,000 despite widespread testimony of their larger presence, and growth rates fixed at 1% even though contemporary evidence often suggests higher natural increase. In this sense, the methodological constraints reinforce rather than weaken the main conclusion: if anything, the true scale of migrant-origin Muslims was greater than what is reported here, making the remaining “native” Muslim population smaller still.

CONCLUSION

This reconstruction demonstrates that the widespread narrative of late Ottoman Palestine as an ancient, densely populated Muslim land is misleading. When the 1922 British Mandate census is carefully adjusted for identifiable 19th-century Muslim migration streams, it becomes clear that the majority of Muslims living within the 1967 borders of Israel were descendants of newcomers. Egyptians, Algerians, Hauranis, Circassians, Turks, Balkan muhacirs, Maghrebis, Metawalis, and other groups arrived in large numbers during the 19th century, reshaping the demographic landscape. Once these groups are separated out, the genuinely native sedentary Muslim population shrinks to a small minority — one that was at best comparable to, and in many scenarios smaller than, the Jewish Old Yishuv.

The implications are significant. Jews were not late-arriving colonists displacing an ancient Muslim nation. They were a continuous, deeply rooted population centered in Jerusalem, Safed, and Tiberias, whose presence stretched back centuries and never disappeared despite conquest, exile, and foreign rule. Far from being marginal, the Old Yishuv was one of the largest long-standing communities in the land by 1881.

By contrast, the bulk of the Muslim population within Israel's later borders was the product of recent resettlements and imperial engineering. Palestine in the 19th century was not a static homeland of an unbroken Muslim majority, but a frontier society continually reshaped by Ottoman demographic policy, economic opportunity, and refugee flows.

Seen in this light, the First Aliyah of 1881 does not represent the start of Jewish presence in Palestine, nor the intrusion of foreign settlers into an ancient society. It marks a new phase in the growth of a people who had already endured in the land for centuries. The real newcomers of the 19th century were not the Jews of the Old Yishuv, but the tens of thousands of Muslims transplanted by Ottoman policy.

The demographic record therefore challenges the colonialist trope at its foundation. By the late 19th century, Jews were not strangers in Palestine but one of its most deeply rooted and enduring communities — at least as numerous as, and in some respects more longstanding than, the truly native Muslim population.

It is important to note that these estimates are deliberately conservative. They use only well-documented settlement data and apply a modest 1% annual growth rate, lower than the actual rates observed among rural Muslims in late Ottoman Palestine. Because the 1922 census also tended to undercount assimilated migrant groups, the true scale of Muslim newcomers was likely larger than reported. Even so, the conclusion stands: by the late 19th century, the Jewish population within the 1967 borders of Israel was at least comparable to, and likely larger than, the genuinely native Muslim population.

In short, even under the most cautious assumptions, the Jewish community of 1881 matched or exceeded the native Muslim population—an outcome that no colonial narrative can erase.