

Dilb (north-west of Ramallah) separated Bani Zaid from that of Bani Harith esh-Shamali in the south, Wadi Natif in the north separated it from Bilad Jama'in. Geographically, Bani Zaid occupied one of the roughest terrains in the mountainous area, the one with the most faults and the steepest slopes. The domain covered a group of hills broken up by a number of narrow and deep valleys and gorges. Unlike the valleys in the Nablus area, wadis in this area are very narrow and hence become water collectors during the winter months. The narrowness of these valleys made them very difficult to cultivate. As a result of this (and perhaps other factors) we do not find any settlements in these valleys. However the hill tops of this sheikhdom are relatively wide; hence it was possible for peasants in this area to settle on them and work the fields around them.

Based on data from the Survey of Western Palestine (1881) and from field trips, I studied the location of the nineteen Bani Zaid villages. Thirteen (65%) are located on hill tops, seven (35%) are located on mountain slopes where flat cultivable parcels are available. None of the Bani Zaid villages are located at the foot of hills or in the valleys.

According to the 1922 census, the Bani Zaid sheikhdom had a total area of 144,571 dunums (one acre is approximately four dunums), and a total population of 6,271. Villages in this sheikhdom varied in their population size and the areas of their land holdings. While the tiny village of Khirbet Jibia had 62 persons, 17 houses and 1,666 dunums of land, the largest was the Christian village of 'Abud (the only Christian village in Bani Zaid sheikhdom) having a population of 754, 215 houses, and 15,000 dunums of land (1922).

The sheikh of the throne village of Deir Ghassaneh (who always belonged to the Barghouthi clan) was also the chief sheikh of Bani Zaid (sheikh en-nahyeh). Although each village had its own sheikh and council of elders that managed its internal and external affairs, the chief sheikh was the tax collector (multazim) for the whole sheikhdom up until the 1890s. As a result of this, he enjoyed tremendous power and wealth. For example, the chief sheikh of Deir Ghassaneh had the power of mobilizing the sheikhdom's army, which was